1200 - Evidence Prohibiting of Mixing of Men and Women

the question

My husband and I wanted to know if it were permissable to take Arabic classes at a college where the classes are mixed (men-women). We understand that there is no mixing between the sexes, but confused about the definition of "mixing". Please tell us what is permissable, what is not and give proof

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The meeting together, mixing, and intermingling of men and women in one place, the crowding of them together, and the revealing and exposure of women to men are prohibited by the Law of Islam (Shari'ah). These acts are prohibited because they are among the causes for fitnah (temptation or trial which implies evil consequences), the arousing of desires, and the committing of indecency and wrongdoing.

Among the many proofs of prohibition of the meeting and mixing of men and women in the Quran and Sunnah are:

Verse No. 53 of Surat al-Ahzab, or the Confederates (Interpretation of the meaning); "...for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs..."

In explaining this Verse, Ibn Kathir (May Allah have mercy on him) said: "Meaning, as I forbade you to enter their rooms, I forbid you to look at them at all. If one wants to take something from them, one should do so without looking at them. If one wants to ask a woman for something, the same has to be done from behind a screen."

The Prophet (May peace and blessings be upon him) enforced separation of men and women even at Allah’s most revered and preferred place, the mosque. This was accomplished via the separation of the women’s rows from the men’s; men were asked to stay in the mosque after completion of the obligatory prayer so that women will have enough time to leave the mosque; and, a special door was assigned to women. Evidence of the foregoing are:

Umm Salamah (May Allah be pleased with her) said that after Allah’s Messenger (May peace and blessings be upon him) said "as-Salamu ‘Alaykum wa Rahmatullah’ twice announcing the end of prayer, women would stand up and leave. He would stay for a while before leaving. Ibn Shihab said that he thought that the staying of the Prophet (May peace and blessings be upon him) was in order for the women to be able to leave before the men who wanted to depart." Narrated by al-Bukhari under No. 793.

Abu Dawood under No. 876 narrates the same hadith in Kitab al-Salaat under the title "Insiraaf an-Nisaa’ Qabl al-Rijaal min al-Salaah" (Departure of Women before Men after the Prayer). Ibn ‘Umar said that Allah’s Messenger (May peace and blessings be upon him) said: "We should leave this door (of the mosque) for women." Naafi’ said: "Ibn ‘Umar never again entered through that door until he died." Narrated by Abu Dawood under No. 484 in "Kitab as-Salah" under the Chapter entitled: "at-Tashdid fi Thalik".

Abu Hurayrah said that the Prophet (May peace and blessings be upon him) said: ""The best of the men’s rows is the first and the worst is the last, and the best of the women’s rows is the last and the worst in the first." Narrated by Muslim under No. 664.

This is the greatest evidence that the Law of Islam (Shari'ah) forbids meeting and mixing of men and women. The farther the men are from the women’s rows, the better, and vice versa.

If these procedures and precautions were prescribed and adhered to in a mosque, which is a pure place of worship where people are as far away as they ever are from the arousal of desire and temptation, then no doubt the same procedures need to be followed even more rigorously at other places.

Abu Usayd al-Ansari narrated that he heard Allah's Messenger (May peace and blessings be upon him) say to the women on his way out of the mosque when he saw men and women mixing together on their way home:
'Give way (i.e., walk to the sides) as it is not appropriate for you to walk in the middle the road.'
Thereafter, women would walk so close to the wall that their dresses would get caught on it.
Narrated by Abu Dawood in "Kitab al-Adab min Sunanihi, Chapter: Mashyu an-Nisa Ma' ar-Rijal fi at-Tariq."We know that the intermingling, mixing and crowding together of men and women is part of today's unavoidable yet regrettable affliction in most places, such as markets, hospitals, colleges, etc., but:

· We will not willfully choose or accept mixing and crowding, particularly in religious classes and council meetings in Islamic Centers.

· We take precautions to avoid meeting and mixing of men and women as much as possible while at the same time achieving desired goals and objectives. This result can be achieved by designating separate places assigned for men and women, using different doors for each, utilizing modern means of communication such as microphones, video recorders etc., and expediting efforts to have enough female teachers to teach women, etc.

· We show fear of Allah as much as we can by not looking at members of the opposite sex and by applying self-restraint.
There follow some of the results of a study on mixing undertaken by some Muslim social science researchers.

When we put the following question: What is the Islamic ruling on mixing as far as you know? The results were as follows:

76% of respondents said "It is not permitted."

12% said, “It is permitted” – but moral, religious, etc. restrictions apply…

12% said, “I don’t know.”

Which would you choose?

If you had the choice between working in a mixed workplace and working in another where there was no mixing, which would you choose?

The responses to this question were as follows:

76% would choose the workplace where there was no mixing.

9% preferred the mixed workplace.

15% would accept any workplace which suited their specialties, regardless of whether it was mixed or not.

Very embarrassing

Have any embarrassing situations ever happened to you because of mixing?

Among the embarrassing moments mentioned by respondents in this study were the following:

I was at work one day, and I went into one department where one of my female colleagues who wears hijaab had taken off her hijaab in front of her female colleagues. My entrance took her by surprise and I was very embarrassed as a result.

I had to do an experiment in the lab at university, but I was absent on the day of the experiment. I had to go to the lab on the following day, and I found myself the only male among a group of female students, in addition to a female teacher and a female lab technician. I was very embarrassed and felt very awkward with all those female eyes glaring at me.

I was trying to take a feminine towel out of one of the drawers when I was surprised by a male colleague standing behind me, who wanted to take something from his own private drawer. He

noticed that I was embarrassed and he left the room quickly to avoid my embarrassment.

It so happened that one of the girls at the university bumped into me when turning a corner in a crowded corridor. She was walking quickly, going to one of the lectures. As a result of this collision, she lost her balance, and I caught her in my arms, as if I was embracing her. You can imagine how embarrassed I and this girl felt in front of a group of careless young people.

One of my female colleagues fell on the stairs in the university and her clothes fell open in an extremely embarrassing fashion. She landed upside down and could not help herself; the young men standing nearby had no option but to cover her and help her to get up.

I work in a company and I went in to give some papers to my boss. When I was going out, my boss called me back. I turned around and saw him with his face turned away. I was waiting for him to ask me for a file or for more papers, and I was surprised by his hesitancy. I turned away to the left side of his office, pretending to be busy with something, and he spoke to me at the same time. I thought that this boss would say anything except what he actually said, which was to point out that my garment was stained with menstrual blood. Can the earth open up and swallow a human being at the moment of making sincere supplication? For I prayed that the earth would open up and swallow me.

Victims of mixing… True stories

Lost hope

Umm Muhammad, a mature woman over the age of 40, tells her story.

I lived a life of modest means with my husband. There was never any closeness and harmony, and my husband did not have the kind of strong personality that a woman would hope for, but his good nature made me overlook the fact that I was the one who was responsible for most of the decision making in the family.

My husband often used to mention the name of his friend and business partner, and he would talk about him in my presence, and I often used to meet with him in his office which was originally part

of our apartment. This went on for many years, until circumstances led to us exchanging visits with this person and his family. These family visits were repeated and because of his close friendship with my husband, we did not notice how the number of visits increased and how many hours a single visit would last. He often used to come on his own to sit with us, me and my husband, for long visits. My husband’s trust in him knew no bounds, and as days passed I got to know this person very well, and saw how wonderful and decent he was. I began to feel a strong attraction towards this man, and at the same time I began to sense that the feeling was mutual.

Things took a strange turn after that, when I realized that this man was the kind of person I had always dreamed about. Why had he come along now, after all these years? The more this man’s status increased in my eyes, the more my husband’s status diminished. It was as if I had needed to see the beauty of his character in order to discover how ugly my husband’s character was.

The matter between this person and myself did not go beyond these persistent thoughts which were occupying my mind night and day. Neither he nor I ever voiced what we felt in our hearts… until today. Yet despite that my life is over and my husband is little more than a weak man with no self-esteem. I hate him and I do not know how all this hatred towards him started to boil over. I wonder how I put up with him all these years, bearing all these burdens by myself, facing life’s problems on my own.

Things got so bad that I asked him for a divorce, and he divorced me at my request. After that he became a broken man. Even worse than that is that after my marriage was wrecked and my children and husband were devastated, problems arose in this man's family. His wife, with her feminine intuition, realized what had been going on in his heart of hearts, and his life became hell. She was overwhelmed with jealousy to the extent that one night she left her house at 2 a.m. and came to attack my house, screaming, weeping and hurling accusations. His marriage was also about to collapse.

I admit that the lovely gatherings which we used to enjoy gave us the opportunity to get to know one another at a time that was not appropriate at this stage in our lives.

His marriage has been wrecked and so has mine. I have lost everything, and now I know that my circumstances and his will not permit us to take any positive step towards coming together. Now I am more miserable than I have ever been, and I am looking for illusionary happiness and lost hopes.

Tit-for-tat

Umm Ahmad tells us:

My husband had a group of married friends, and because of our close friendship with them, we used to get together with them once a week in one of our houses, to enjoy an evening of chat.

Deep down in my heart I was never really comfortable with the atmosphere in which we would have dinner, sweets, snacks and drinks of juice accompanied by waves of laughter because of the jokes and chit-chats that often went beyond the bounds of good manners.

In the name of friendship, the barriers were lifted and every now and then one would hear suppressed laughter between a woman and the husband of another woman. The jokes were too much, dealing – with no sense of shyness –with sensitive topics such as sex and women's private matters. This was usual and was even accepted and regarded as desirable.

Although I indulged in these things along with them, my conscience made me feel guilty. Then the day came when it became quite clear just how ugly and filthy this atmosphere was.

The telephone rang, and I heard the voice of one of the friends in this group. I said hello to him and apologized that my husband was not home. He replied that he knew that, and that he was calling to speak to me! After he suggested starting a relationship with me, I got very angry and spoke harshly to him and cursed him. All he could do was laugh and say, "Don't try and show these good manners to me; go and check on your husband's good manners and see what he is doing…" I was devastated by what he said, but I pulled myself together and said to myself, this person is only trying to cause the break up of your marriage. But he succeeded in planting the seeds of doubt concerning my husband.

Shortly after that, the major disaster struck. I discovered that my husband was cheating on me with another woman. It was the matter of life or death as far as I was concerned. I found my husband out and I confronted him, saying: “You are not the only one who can have a relationship. I have received a similar proposition.” And I told him all about his friend. He was stunned and absolutely shocked. (I said:) “If you want me to respond in kind to your relationship with that woman, then this is for that, tit-for-tat.” This was a huge slap in the face for him. He knew that I did not intend to do that in reality, but he realized the great disaster that had befallen our lives and the immoral atmosphere in which we were living. I suffered a great deal until my husband finally left that loose woman with whom he was having a relationship, as he admitted to me. Yes, he left her and came back to his family and children, but how can I ever feel the same towards him as I used to? Who will restore respect for him in my heart? This huge wound in my heart is still bleeding out of regret and rage at that filthy atmosphere; it still bears testimony to the fact that what they call innocent get-togethers are in reality anything but innocent. My heart still begs for mercy from the Lord of Glory.

Intelligence can also be a temptation (fitnah)

‘Abd al-Fattaah says:

I work as the head of department in one of the big companies. For a long time I admired one of my female colleagues, not for her beauty, but for her serious attitude towards her work, her intelligence and her excellent achievements – in addition to the fact that she was a decent and modest person who focused only on her work. This admiration turned into attachment, and I am a married man who fears Allah and never misses any obligatory prayer. I expressed my feelings to her and she rebuffed me. She is married and has children as well. She sees no reason why I should have any kind of relationship with her, whether it be friendship, as work colleagues or based on admiration… etc. Evil thoughts come to me sometimes, and deep down I wish that her husband would divorce her so that I could get her.

I started to put pressure on her at work and put her down in front of my bosses. Perhaps this was a form of revenge on my part, but she accepted it with good manners and did not complain or

comment. She works and works; her performance speaks of her quality, and she knows this well. The more she resisted me, the stronger my infatuation grew.

I am not a person who is easily tempted by women, because I fear Allah and I do not overstep the mark with them and go beyond what is required by my work. But this woman attracted me. What is the solution?… I do not know.

Baby ducks know how to swim

N.A.A., a nineteen-year-old girl, tells us:

At that time I was a little girl. My innocent eyes watched those evening get-togethers when family friends would meet in the house. What I remember is that I could only see one man, who was my father. I watched him as he moved about the room, how his glances would devour the women present, looking at their thighs and chests, admiring this one's eyes, that one's hair, the other's hips. My poor mother had no choice but to take care of these get-togethers. She was a very simple lady.

Among the women present there was one woman who would deliberately try to attract my father's attention, sometimes by coming close to him, and sometimes by making enticing movements. I would watch this with concern, whilst my mother was busy in the kitchen for the sake of her guests.

These gatherings stopped suddenly and I tried, young as I was, to understand and make sense of what had happened, but I could not.

What I remember was that my mother collapsed completely at that time, and she could not stand to hear my father's name mentioned in the house. I used to hear mysterious words whispered by the adults around me: "Betrayal… bedroom… she saw them with her own eyes… despicable woman… in a very shameful position…" etc. These were the key words which only the adults could understand.

I grew up and came to understand, and I bore a grudge against all men. All of them were

treacherous. My mother was a broken woman and accused every woman who came to us of being a man-snatcher who wanted to make my father fall into her trap. My father hasn't changed. He is still practising his favourite hobby of chasing women, but now he does it outside the home. Now I am nineteen years old and I know lots of young men. I feel great pleasure in taking revenge on them, because every one of them is an exact copy of my father. I tempt them and entice them, without letting them get anywhere near me. They follow me in gatherings and in the marketplaces because of my movements and deliberate gestures. Sometimes my phone never stops ringing and I feel proud of what I do to avenge the sex of Hawwa' and my mother. But sometimes I feel so miserable and such a failure that it almost chokes me. My life is shadowed by a huge dark cloud, and its name is my father.

Before it is too late

S.N.A. tells of her experience:

I never imagined that my work circumstances would force me to be in contact with the opposite sex (men), but this in fact is what happened…

In the beginning, I used to cover and screen myself from men by wearing niqaab (face-veil), but some of the sisters advised me that this dress was attracting more attention to my presence, and it would be better for me to take off the niqaab, especially since my eyes were somewhat attractive. So I removed the cover from my face, thinking that this was better. But by continuing to mix with my colleagues, I discovered that I was the odd one out because of my antisocial attitude and my insistence on not joining in the conversation and chatting with others. Everyone was wary of this "lone-wolf" woman (as they saw me), and this is what was stated clearly by one person who affirmed that he would not want to deal with such a snooty and stand-offish character. But I knew that I was the opposite, in fact, and I decided that I would not oppress myself and put myself in a difficult position with my colleagues. So I started to join in their chats and exchanges of anecdotes, and they all discovered that I could speak eloquently and persuasively, and that I could influence others. I could also speak in a manner that was determined yet at the same time was attractive to some of my colleagues. It was not long before I noticed some changes in the expression of my

direct supervisor; with some embarrassment, he was enjoying the way I spoke and moved, and he would deliberately bring up topics in the conversation where I would see that hateful look in his eyes. I do not deny the fact that I started to entertain some thoughts about this man. I found it astonishing that a man could fall so easily into the trap of a woman who was religiously committed, so how must it be in the case of women who adorn themselves and invite men to commit immoral actions? In fact, I did not think of him in any way which went beyond the bounds of sharee'ah, but he did occupy a space in my thoughts for quite some time. But soon my self-respect made me reject the idea of being a source of enjoyment for this man in any way, shape or form, even if it was only psychological in nature, and I stopped getting involved in any kind of work that would force me to sit alone with him. In the end, I reached the following conclusions:

1- Attraction between the sexes can occur in any circumstances, no matter how much men and women may deny that. The attraction may start within the bounds of sharee'ah and end up going beyond those bounds.

Even if a person protects himself (by marriage), he is not safe from the snares of the Shaytaan.

3- Even though a person may be able to guarantee himself and he works with the opposite sex within reasonable limits, he cannot guarantee the feelings of the other party.

Finally, there is nothing good in mixing and it does not bear fruit as they claim. On the contrary, it corrupts sound thinking.

What now?

We may ask, what comes next, after this discussion on the matter of mixing?

It's about time for us to recognize that no matter how we try to beautify the issue of mixing and take the matter lightly, its consequences are bound to catch up with us, and the harm it causes will have disastrous results for our families. Sound common sense refuses to accept that mixing is a healthy atmosphere for human relations. This is the sound common sense which made most of the people included in this survey (76%) prefer working in a non-mixed environment. The same

percentage (76%) said that mixing is not permitted according to the sharee'ah. What makes us sit up and take notice is not this honourable percentage – which indicates the purity of our Islamic society and the cleanness of its members' hearts – but the small number who said that mixing is permitted; they number 12%. This group, with no exceptions, said that mixing is permitted but within the limits set by religion, custom ('urf), traditions, good manners, conscience, modesty, covering and other worthy values which, in their opinion, keep mixing within proper limits.

We ask them: is the mixing which we see nowadays in our universities, market-places, work-places and family and social gatherings, taking place within the limits referred to above? Or are these places filled with transgressions in terms of clothing, speech, interactions and behaviour? We see wanton displays of adornment (tabarruj), not proper covering; we see fitnah (temptations) and dubious relationships, with no good manners and no conscience and no covering. We can conclude that the kind of mixing that is happening nowadays is unacceptable even to those who approve of mixing in a clean atmosphere.

It's about time for us to recognize that mixing provides a fertile breeding-ground for social poisons to invade and take over our society without anyone ever realizing that it is mixing which is the cause. Mixing is the prime element in this silent fitnah, in the shade of which betrayals erupt, homes are wrecked and hearts are broken.

We ask Allah to keep us safe and sound, and to reform our society. May Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad.