20229 - How to Lower Your Gaze in Islam

the question

My question involves a complicated issue. Here in Canada, there is a lack of morals, people, women especially, wear almost no clothing. My problem is that I cannot stop looking at these so called clothed women. I know that marriage is obligatory upon me, other than moving to a Muslim country (which I cannot do right now), what, if any, advice could you help me in dealing with this problem.

Summary of answer

Some tips on how to lower your gaze: 1- bear in mind the fact that Allah is watching you, 2-seek the help of Allah, 3- avoid places where a person feels he will be exposed to the temptation of looking, 4- do a lot of nafl acts of worship, 5- remember that the earth on which sin is committed will bear witness.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Prohibition to look at non-mahram women

We have said here many times that it is not permissible for one who has no legitimate Shar'i excuse to remain in the non-Muslim lands. This land is filled with disbelief, immorality and sin, and people there deviate from the fitrah (sound innate human nature) with which Allah has created them. One of the immoral actions that are widespread in those countries is immoral and wanton display (tabarruj), whereby women hardly wear anything that covers them, as the questioner has said.

This situation leads to haram things and major sins, including mixing , touching and zina (unlawful

sexual relationships), all of which stem from looking.

Shari`ah came to forbid the ways that lead to immorality, one of which is looking at non-mahram women.

- Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts).” [Al-Nur 24:30]

Imam Ibn Kathir said:

“This is a command from Allah to His believing slaves to lower their gaze and refrain from looking at that which is forbidden to them. So they should not look at anything except that which they are permitted to look at, and they should lower their gaze and refrain from looking at forbidden things. If it so happens that a person’s gaze accidentally falls upon something forbidden, he should quickly avert his gaze.” (Tafsir Ibn Kathi, 3/282)

- Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when you ask (his wives) for anything you want, ask them from behind a screen, that is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.” [Al-Ahzab 33:53]

- It was narrated that Jarir ibn ‘Abd-Allah said: “I asked the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) about a sudden glance, and he commanded me to avert my gaze.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2159)

Al-Nawawi said:

“What is meant by a “sudden glance” is when a person’s glance unintentionally falls upon a non-mahram woman. There is no sin on him for the first glance , but he must avert his gaze immediately. If he averts his gaze immediately there is no sin on him, but if he continues looking, then he will be a sinner, because of this hadith, for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) commanded him to avert his gaze, and Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things).” [Al-Nur 24:30]

Men must lower their gaze and refrain from looking at them in all circumstances, unless that is for a valid Shar`i reason, such as giving testimony, medical treatment, wanting to propose marriage, buying a slave woman, engaging in financial transactions such as buying and selling, etc. In all these cases it is permissible to look as much as is needed, and no more. And Allah knows best.” (Sharh Muslim, 14/139)

How to lower your gaze

There are means which help a person to lower his gaze, and we ask Allah to help you to do them:

1. Bearing in mind the fact that Allah is watching you, that He sees you and is with you (by His knowledge) wherever you go. It may be a secretive glance of which your neighbour is unaware, but Allah knows of it. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah knows the fraud of the eyes, and all that the hearts conceal.” [Ghafir 40:19]

1. Seeking the help of Allah, beseeching Him and calling upon Him (du`a). Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And your Lord said: Invoke Me [i.e. believe in My Oneness (Islamic Monotheism) and ask Me for anything] I will respond to your (invocation).” [Ghafir 40:60]

1. You should know that every blessing you enjoy comes from Allah, and requires that you should give thanks. Part of the gratitude for the blessing of sight means that you should protect it from looking at that which Allah has forbidden. Is there any reward for good, other than good? [al-Rahman 55:60] Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And whatever of blessings and good things you have, it is from Allah.” [Al-Nahl 16:53]

1. Striving with yourself and training yourself to lower your gaze and be patient in doing so, and not giving up. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning:

“As for those who strive hard in Us (Our Cause), We will surely guide them to Our paths (i.e. Allah’s religion — Islamic Monotheism).” [Al-‘Ankabut 29:69]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever seeks to be chaste, Allah will make him chaste, and whoever seeks to be independent of means, Allah will make him independent of means, and whoever strives to be patient, Allah will make him patient…” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1400)

1. Avoiding places where a person feels he will be exposed to the temptation of looking, if he can manage to avoid them, such as going to marketplaces or malls, and sitting in the street. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Beware of sitting in the street.” They said, “We have no alternative; that is where we sit and talk.” He said, “If you insist on sitting there, then give the street its rights.” They said, “What are the rights of the street?” He said, “Lowering the gaze and refraining from causing offense…” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 2333; Muslim, 2121)
2. You should realize that you have no choice in this matter, regardless of what the circumstances are and no matter how great the temptation or motive to do evil, and no matter what emotions and overwhelming desires stir in your heart. You must lower your gaze and refrain from looking at haram things in all places and at all times. You cannot use excuses such as the environment being corrupt or justify your mistakes by saying that there is a lot of temptation around. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed into a plain error.” [Al-Ahzab 33:36]

1. Doing a lot of nafl acts of worship, because doing a lot of them whilst also regularly doing obligatory acts of worship is a means of protecting one's physical faculties. According to a hadith qudsi, Allah said: “… and My slave continues to draw close to Me with supererogatory (nafl) works so that I shall love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which

he walks. Were he to ask (something) of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it." (Al-Bukhari, 6137)

2. Remembering that the earth on which sin is committed will bear witness. Allah says:

"That Day it will declare its information (about all that happened over it of good or evil)." [Al-Zalzalah 99:4]

1. Remembering the angels who are recording your deeds. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"But verily, over you (are appointed angels in charge of mankind) to watch you, Kiraman (Honourable) Katibin —writing down (your deeds), They know all that you do." [Al-Infitar 82:10-12]

1. Bearing in mind some of the texts which forbid letting the gaze wander freely, such as the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things)." [Al-Nur 24:30]

1. Avoiding looking unnecessarily, so that you only look at what you need to look at, and you do not let your gaze wander right and left so that it falls upon something the effects and fitnah of which cannot be got rid of quickly.
2. Marriage, which is one of the most effective remedies. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever can afford it, let him get married, for it is more effective in lowering the gaze and in guarding one's chastity. And whoever cannot afford it, let him fast, for it will be a shield for him." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1806; Muslim, 1400)
3. Fasting – because of the hadith quoted above.
4. Doing obligatory acts of worship as Allah has commanded, such as prayer. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Verily, As-Salah (the prayer) prevents from Al-Fahsha (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse) and Al-Munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism, and every kind of evil wicked deed)." [Al-'Ankabut 29:45]

1. Remembering al-hur al-‘in, which will give you a motive to be patient in avoiding that which Allah has forbidden, hoping to get al-hur al-‘in . Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Companions of Equal Age.” [Al-Naba 78:33]

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “… If a woman of the people of Paradise were to look out over the people of this earth, it would light up everything in between and fill it with fragrance, and the veil of her head is better than this world and everything in it.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 2643)

1. Bearing in mind the shortcomings of the one who is looked at and the filth and waste material they carry in their gut.
2. Being ambitious and focusing on nobler things.
3. Checking on yourself from time to time and striving to make yourself lower your gaze whilst realizing that everyone makes mistakes.
4. Thinking of the pain and regret that will result from this looking, and the effects of letting one’s gaze wander.
5. Understanding the benefits of lowering one's gaze, as mentioned above.
6. Bringing up this topic in meetings and gatherings, and explaining its dangers.
7. Advising your relatives, telling them not to wear clothes that attract attention and show their attractions, such as how they dress, wearing bright colours, how they walk, speaking too softly, etc.
8. Warding off passing thoughts and whispers from the Shaytan before they take hold and are acted upon. Whoever lowers his gaze after the first glance will be saved from innumerable problems, but if he keeps looking he cannot be certain that seeds that will be difficult to remove will not be planted in his heart.
9. Being afraid of a bad end, and of feeling regret at the point of death.
10. Keeping company with good people, because you are naturally affected by the characteristics of the people you mix with, and a person will follow the way of his close friend, and a friend will pull you to follow his way.

11. Knowing that the zina of the eye is looking, and that should be sufficient to put you off.

Adapted from an essay entitled Ghadd al-Basar (Lowering the Gaze) by a student of Shari`ah.

And Allah knows best.