229206 - How to deal with love for the opposite sex before marriage

the question

Love and attraction towards the opposite sex before marriage is something that is not under one’s control, but our Lord, may He be glorified, has explained how to deal with it in the verse in which He says (interpretation of the meaning):
“There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women or for what you conceal within yourselves. Allah knows that you will have them in mind. But do not promise them secretly except for saying a proper saying. And do not determine to undertake a marriage contract until the decreed period reaches its end. And know that Allah knows what is within yourselves, so beware of Him. And know that Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing”
[al-Baqarah 2:235].
So the way to deal with it is clear: either to propose or to keep it to oneself until Allah decides concerning this matter. Is this understanding of the verse here correct or not?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

For a man to be attracted to a woman and vice versa is something that Allah has caused to be quite natural in people, so that the human race might be perpetuated and not cease to exist on earth until Allah, may He be exalted, decrees, and so that an atmosphere of comfort and tranquillity may be created within the family.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in

them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought”

[ar-Room 31:21].

So a man is not to be blamed for feeling an attraction towards women.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

There is no blame on one who feels love towards women; rather this is a sign of perfect manhood.

End quote from ad-Daa’ wa’d-Dawaa’ (p. 552).

This means that this inclination is a sound manly characteristic.

It was narrated that Anas said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Women and perfume have been made dear to me, and my comfort is in prayer.” Narrated by an-Nasaa’i (3940); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Sunan an-Nasaa’i (3940).

If a man finds himself attracted to a non-mahram woman outside the framework of marriage, it may be difficult for him to rid his heart of that. Hence Islamic teachings dictate keeping away from anything that could lead to this kind of attraction and taking precautions to prevent it happening in the first place.

Infatuation and attraction do not usually develop in the heart except because of letting one’s gaze wander freely; failing to lower the gaze and refrain from looking at that which is prohibited; and doing that which strengthens this infatuation, such as listening to haraam songs, reading or watching love stories, letting one’s thoughts wander, and letting the infatuation take root, especially if one’s heart is spiritually weak and devoid of remembrance of Allah, may He be exalted.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The steps that lead to infatuation are under one’s control, and what is required is to avoid them.

Looking, harbouring thoughts and exposing oneself to circumstances in which one may fall in love are all voluntary matters (that should be avoided), but once one takes those steps, then what results from that is something that a person has no control over.

It is like the intoxication that results from drinking alcohol: if consuming the intoxicant is something voluntary, what results from it of intoxication becomes beyond one's control. As the means that led to that state was something that the individual chose and was not forced to do, he is not to be excused from what results from it that is not under his control. If the means is haraam, then the intoxicated person is not excused.

No doubt looking repeatedly and dwelling on thoughts is like drinking an intoxicant, so the individual is to be blamed for not keeping away from that which led to this outcome.

End quote from Rawdat al-Muhibbeen (p. 225).

Indeed, in some cases a person may be excused and is not to blame for what arises in his heart of attraction and infatuation. This applies if there was no unlawful action on his part, such as if the attraction comes about as a result of an accidental glance, or if he is married to a woman and loves her, but she does not love him and wants a divorce from him, and ends up divorced, but his heart remains attached to her. In this case he is not to be blamed.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If infatuation occurs due to a cause that is not prohibited, then the individual is not to be blamed, such as one who loves his wife then divorces her, but continues to love her and thinks constantly of her. In that case there is no blame on him.

Similarly, if an accidental glance occurred, then he averted his gaze; love may take root as a result of that, without him wanting it to. But he has to try to resist it and try to avert it by means of something contrary to it. But if he is overwhelmed by that love, then there is no blame on him, provided that he strove hard to ward it off.

End quote from Rawdat al-Muhibbeen (225-226).

Secondly:

When a man finds himself attracted to a specific woman, then the right things to do is propose to her, if that is possible in both shar'i and realistic terms.

One example of that is when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) intervened for Mugheeth and asked Bareerah to go back to him, after she had left him. It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas that the husband of Bareerah was a slave called Mugheeth; [Ibn 'Abbaas said:] it is as if I can see him, following her around and weeping, with tears flowing down to his beard, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to 'Abbaas: "O 'Abbaas, are you not amazed at how much Mugheeth loves Bareerah, and how much Bareerah dislikes Mugheeth?" The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said (to Bareerah): "Why don't you go back to him?" She said: O Messenger of Allah, are you instructing me to do that? He said: "I am only interceding for him." She said: I have no need of him. Saheeh al-Bukhaari (5283).

If he is not able to marry her, then in this case he must turn to Allah, may He be exalted, in order to relieve his distress, and he must be patient and realise that this is a trial and test from Allah, may He be exalted; if he bears it with patience, then he will have a great reward.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If a man is tested with falling in love, yet he maintains his chastity and bears that with patience, then he will be rewarded for fearing Allah.... It is well known on the basis of shar'i evidence that if he refrains from that which is unlawful in terms of looking, speaking and acting, and he conceals it and does not speak of it, so as to avoid saying anything that is prohibited – either by complaining about his problem to people (instead of to Allah), or by uttering indecent speech, or by seeking to reach his beloved in any way – and he is patient in obeying Allah and refraining from disobeying Him, and in putting up with the pain of love in his heart, just as one afflicted by calamity bears the pain of calamity with patience, then he will be one of those who fear Allah and are patient: "Indeed, he who fears Allah and is patient, then indeed, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good" [Yoosuf 12:90].

End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (10/133)

Thirdly:

With regard to the verse quoted in the question, and interpreting it as meaning that the solution for love and attraction to the opposite gender before marriage is either to propose or to conceal the matter until Allah decides concerning it, this verse was actually revealed concerning the rights of the woman who is observing ‘iddah following the death of her husband; it is permissible for one who wants to propose to her to hint at marriage, but not to state his proposal clearly, and it is also permissible for him to think to himself that when her ‘iddah is over, he will propose to her.

We see no reason why the verse cannot also be understood as meaning what you mentioned. If someone feels love in his heart for a woman, then he should propose to her, and if there is any reason why he should not propose to her, then there is no blame on him if he thinks to himself that when the impediment is removed, he will propose to her.

But that is on condition that he does not agree with her to do something unlawful, or do anything unlawful with her, because Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “…except for saying a proper saying”.

So it is not permissible for him to say to her anything that is contrary to the teachings of Islam.

The one who expresses his love and infatuation to the one whom he loves has not spoken in a proper manner; rather he has spoken in an inappropriate manner, and has raised the hope of the other party that he will keep in touch. If he is not able to marry her, then the matter is worse in this case, and as a result of that the Shaytaan will be toying with them; if the door to what is lawful is closed, there is nothing left but what is unlawful!

But if he is able to marry her and wants to marry the girl, then he should make it clear and propose to her through her guardians.

And Allah knows best.