

## Chapter 6: Love, Sexual Discipline and Chastity. Democratic Morality, Love in Personality Growth

That principles of human liberty and democracy should govern morals, too, is both right and correct, as in the case of politics. The intrinsic meaning is that human beings should cope with their inborn instincts and natural desires, in the same way as a just and democratic government does in respect of the masses of people.

Islam treats questions concerning sexual behavior on the same ethical basis as is commonly recognized today in the regulation of political and economic activities. For, individuals are prone to making genuine and willful mistakes in ordering their sexual lives on the basis of their own moral judgment. They may, through misconception, or wantonly, ignore the need for maintaining a democratic concern for morality, in coping with their individual problems, arising in circumstances evidencing lack of any personal restraint and overall chaos.

In principle, any societal regulation of political and economic activities ought to recognize the relevant human instincts and tendencies. For, the aggression instinct and tendency to dominate others can be instrumental in politics. Economic activities may be prompted by a desire to accumulate wealth. Likewise, sexual aptitude can lead to indulgence in lustful activities. However, it is not known why the supporters of the proposed new sexual freedom deem a *laissez faire* policy fit for sexual affairs only, while they seemingly accept the controllability of political and economic activities.

One of the important aspects of sexual ethics concerns the emotion of love. Since the ancient times, the essence of love has been given special attention in philosophy. Ibn Sina (in the Islamic millennium) brought out a treatise on love. Human love has been commonly acknowledged as a wholesome reality, in terms of its all embracing and sublime nature. In literature, especially the poetic, love has not only been eulogized, with a sense of pride (to the extent of proclaiming the superiority of the heart over the mind), but contrasted with lust's debasingly animal-like nature.

Mostly in our literature we find that love has been extolled not only in terms of its Divine connotation, but even in its down-to-earth human emotional context. In either case, there has been no confusion of love with any kind of lust.

In contrast, there have been others, who chose to equate love with a sort of libido, or any persistent metabolic intensity of the sexual instinct. Evidently, they tended to assume that love is rather incapable of sublimation even in Divine terms. They treat love as if it has neither any spiritual origin, nor it is (or ought to be) humane in quality, nor it can be humanitarian in purpose.

Those who treat love as both Divine and human differentiate between the animal-like manifestation and the humane accomplishment of love. The others make no such distinction, so that love and lust become synonymous.

Today, a third category of thinkers has become evident. They believe that all kinds of love are sexually prompted, but gradually the carnal motivation assumes a spiritual or contemplative aspect under specific conditions. To them, love is primarily sexual, with only occasional platonic manifestations. However, this dual or two-fold quality of love is affirmed by them only in terms of its expression, objective and effects. There is no duality in so far as the origin and causation of love are concerned.

With regard to the last category of thinkers mentioned above, it is not a matter of surprise that they believe in a material basis of human spirituality. They see no unsurmountable difficulty in the mutual transformation of the material and spiritual aspects of human behavior. In fact, one of them claims that every spiritual affair has a natural basis and every natural thing has a spiritual extension.<sup>1</sup>

Be that as it may, we need not discuss the above in any great psychological and philosophical depth. We can thus avoid going into the pros and cons of the many ancient and current interpretations of any basis of love. For the time being, it should be enough to suggest that love, in effect, can bring about creativity of the human intellect and spirit, as well as induce artistic and cultural refinements of sociological importance.

The above suggestion is valid, irrespective of whether or not love originates in the sexual instinct, and then becomes capable of expressing itself in physical and also spiritual terms, in an interchangeable manner. Any sublime effect of love is far different from its alleged instinctiveness, or simple animal-like concupiscence, which seeks no more than its physiological gratification.

Love does evidence itself as lust in some circumstances. When lust overtakes human beings, the latter become self-centered, regarding love as a mere tool or means of self gratification. However, when human beings evidence love as a genuine affection, they are no longer self-centered. On the contrary,

their love signifies the most desirable spirit of self-sacrifice.

In other words, individuals in genuine love are capable of overcoming their self-centered motivations for the sake of each other.

World literature is replete with love's many-splendored qualities, including those of a catalyst, teacher and inspirer. From Persian literature, we may quote a verse from Sa'di, as follows:

هر که عشق اندر او کمند انداخت

بمراد ویش به باید ساخت

هر که عاشق نگشت ، مرد نشد

نقره فائق نگشت تا نگداخت

*Whoever falls in love beyond himself,  
yields to love but his own self,  
Whoever loved not, evolved not manfulness,  
Silver unmelted gives not brightfulness.*

Another famous Iranian poet, Hafiz, refers to a nightingale's love of roses and muses as follows:-

بلبل از فیض گل آموخت سخن و نه نبود،

این همه قول و غزل تعبیه در منقارش

*By rose's grace, nightingales do their singing  
All those songs and lyrics so pleasing  
Beyond what their beaks do improvising!*

No doubt, love has been eulogized in many ways, both in the East and West. Yet, there has come to be a difference between the Eastern and Western conceptualization of love. To many Westerners, love can be worthwhile as long as it embodies the sweetness mutually attainable by lovers. Individuals of opposite sex in the West prefer the desirability and enjoyability of living together, in mutual love and comfort, to the constant annoyance and boredom of living as singles. They aim at maximizing enjoyment of life.

In the East, love is regarded as something inexorably desirable in itself. For, it lends an overall perspective to the human personality, while ennobling and inspiring the spirit. No wonder, love has been described as a catalyst, purifier and in similar other ways. Evidently, in all these and other attributes, one can hardly discern any implicit suggestion to the effect that love is no more than an introduction to the sweet union that usually follows it, or to mere feelings of enjoying living together in body and spirit.

Even to some impressionable Easterners, love between prospective spouses may signify something preliminary to their subsequent pleasures of union and living together only. However, even their preliminary experience of being loved by each other can (or ought to) progressively enhance their humaneness. This is not like its becoming something merely conducive to any anticipation of enjoyments from conjugal relations or cohabitation.

In either case, if love is construed as a real introduction to union of man and woman, in terms of becoming one in body and spirit, this is all the more conducive to the wholesomeness of human achievement.

In short, in love, as in several other matters, Westerners and Easterners differ in their intellectual approach. A typical Westerner is often unable to nurture love within any abstract framework that goes beyond any mechanical process of coping with problems of routine living. Eventually, he comes round to distinguishing love from lust, and also to believing in empathy and spiritual harmony, which it is capable of breeding.

Otherwise, love comes to him as a handy natural talent, leading to marriage or cohabitation, according to the social requirements of living. On the other hand, a typical Easterner seeks to cherish love beyond the requirements of routine living.

Had love been sexual in origin, quality and effect, probably it would not have necessitated separate treatment in sexual ethics. Whatever was discussed earlier concerning the pros and cons of sexual ethics would have been rather sufficient. However, love's origin or, at any rate, its psychological quality and social effects can be quite safely construed as independent of the sexual instinct.

Accordingly, morals concerning nurturing of human inclination to love can be treated in a manner distinguishable from that of the sexual instinct. Gratifying the sexual instinct is not the only concomitant of love. For, sexual gratification is not enough to sustain love, which needs psychological contentment, too. Moreover, any denial of love can possibly lead to afflictions, which cannot be remedied by any animal- like gratification of the sexual instinct, assuming that the former is derived from the latter.

Bertrand Russell endorses the need for profound love as follows:

*Those who have never known the deep intimacy and the intense companionship of happy mutual love have missed the best thing that life has to give; unconsciously, if not consciously, they feel this and the resulting disappointment inclines them towards envy, oppression and cruelty.*<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, it is claimed that religion is love's enemy. The usual reasoning behind the claim is based on a situation, where a religion fails to distinguish between love and lust. Thus, the wickedness of lust is ascribed to love, as well. The allegation is not true in the case of Islam.

Yet, it can be relevant to Christianity. Islam does not treat sexual passion as wicked in itself, not to speak of considering its direct or indirect association with love as something bad or undesirable.

Deeply sincere and mutual love between spouses is highly respected in Islam. Islamic teachings commend realization of love on a sound and lasting basis.

In the general context of religion versus love, there is one point that is often overlooked. This concerns the tendency for mutual opposition between human intellect and love. Some moralists have wrongly overlooked this in indiscriminately excluding love from morality. They only regarded love as blind and capable of overruling the intellect. They believed that love is not amenable to reason, inferring wrongly that it is also least susceptible to conventional and legal, or moral, disciplining. In other words, they saw nothing but anarchic exuberance and rebelliousness in love.

Accordingly, religions or social systems, which based their morality on intellectual considerations alone, were not conducive to any salutary treatment of love. They treated love as something beyond the scope of any recommendation or advice. This is notwithstanding the fact that what is deserving of advice in matters of love can well concern one's modality of response to any casual manifestation of love in extenuating circumstances over which one is supposed to have no control. This is in order to maximize

the sublime and beneficial effects of love, while remaining immune to its harmful consequences, if any.

In the above context, the main question that arises concerns the mutually inclusive relationship of love and chastity. One may ask whether or not love can, in its most positive sense, flourish in any permissive social environments. Or, is it simply a question of whether or not love's meaningfulness is invariably linked with any social preference for chastity, envisaging a certain prosaic status for women?

In his book: *The Pleasures of Philosophy*, Will Durant acknowledged that love was generally agreed to be the most fascinating thing in the course of human life. At the same time, he noted with surprise that very rarely attention was focused on the origin and growth of love, in the relevant multilingual, poetic and philosophical works of most sensational poets and writers on the subject of love.

Will Durant further pointed out that the analytical part of literary and scientific material concerning love was extremely limited. Typical coverage ranged from the ordinary reproduction of protozoa to the self-sacrificing spirit of Dante, or the poetic ecstasies of Petrarch among similar others. In all these efforts, any thorough investigation of the astonishing factuality, the natural origin, the factors in wholesome evolutionary growth and similar other aspects of love were found by him to be missing.

Earlier herein, we have identified three distinct schools of ancient and modern thought concerning the origin and purpose of love, so as to deduce its unique or two-sided interaction with the sexual instinct. We have noted that love, as conceived in the West and the East both, is distinct from lust. Also, it is universally recognized as praiseworthy and respectable, although the relevant conceptualizations differ, as already explained. What remains to be examined now is mainly the question of love in relation to chastity, specially in order to specify the areas and conditions in which they can flourish.

With regard to love and chastity, the relevant social regulations can be either explicit or implicit in moral terms. Where these are explicitly regulated, women may be assigned an elevated position in society, so that they are ordinarily not approachable by men. In the other situation, where love and chastity are implicitly promoted; but not regulated, women's position is subject to the utter tedium of placing themselves at the disposal and protection of their men. One may wonder as to which one of these two sets of conditions are apt to enhance love and chastity.

Incidentally, it is notable that the so called open or permissive societies are *ipso facto* incapable of promoting conditions for any deep and intense love relationships. Their conditions lead to waywardness and wantonness, in the process of seeking transient affairs, if not while indulging in momentary and lustful pleasures. No wonder, women's position in these so called free environments continues to be rather prosaic, while both men and women remain liable to miss heartfelt and genuine mutual love and responsiveness.

Permissive social environments further sensuality and licentiousness. They are not conducive to beneficial love held in esteem by philosophers and sociologists, in terms of its intensely evolved, deeply responsive and unselfish effects. Given appropriate social conditions, love can indeed enable personalities mellowed by it to concentrate individual energies for good purposes, render their perceptions clear and keen, induce empathy towards the beloved, as well as promote genius-like originality and excellence of thoughts and achievements.

Genuine love's wholesome qualities have been commended not only by the ancients, but the modern writers, including some who favored the proposed new sexual freedom. In his magnum opus: *History of Civilization*, Will Durant mentioned about both male homosexual connotation of the traditional Greek depiction of love in their ballads and the heterosexual love episodes of the *Thousand and One Night* fame, dating back to centuries earlier than those of the Middle Ages. He indicated that interest in the oriental stories of natural love grew to an extent more than that in the routine exhortations of the Church towards promoting chastity and virtue.

Furthermore, Will Durant regarded a literary compilation, such as the *Thousand and One Night*, as a possible source of inspiration for the subsequent lyrical compositions abroad. He referred to one usually sarcastic contemporary Western writer's extraordinary remark to the effect that love meant the same to human carnality as life signified to human spirituality.

Indeed, as observed by Will Durant, many began to wonder how the abstraction of human sensuality into the most sensible love can be explained. People became curious about the intellectual and similar other factors that transform an animal-like instinctive hunger, such as evidenced at times by human concupiscence, into serene and tender love. The curiosity revolved around the point as to how the carnal passion might become the spiritual compassion.

Will Durant further probed into any introspective sublimation of carnal desires and the consequent platonic imaginings about a beloved in various intellectual contexts. He raised a question as to whether or not the aforesaid sublimation was the conspicuous outcome of the growth of civilization, involving progressively late marriages!

He apparently believed that an answer to the question he posed might lie in a human tendency. He pointed out that whatever one sought and did not find could become dear and extraordinarily valuable. Thus, appreciation of beauty could vary with the intensity of desire. And, desire would tend to intensify when inhibited and to diminish when satisfied.

Will Durant referred to William James contention that female modesty was not instinctive, but inculcated by successive generations of women, out of fear that any behavior to the contrary would attract undesirable interest or contempt of others. He pointed out that shameless women could not be of any

sustained interest to men. Only women who refrained from any exuberant gaiety and who abstained from either inviting or conceding male attention were best oriented to attracting men.

According to Will Durant, any exposure of the intimate parts of the human body, from their normal state of concealment, might not evoke more than casual interest on the part of viewers. In any case, it would seldom lead to any instant arousal of carnal desire. For, even young men would prefer modesty in young women. In doing so, they might not necessarily comprehend that the delicateness of female reserve could be indicative of a high degree of tactful reaction, as well as tenderness.

Furthermore, modesty in women might be capable of endearing them to men and awakening mutual love, in anticipation of any subsequent consummation. Thus, men could be prompted to enhance their capabilities and resolution towards significant achievements, by drawing on their otherwise dormant life-oriented energies.

At the same time, Will Durant mentioned the fact that modern young women would seem to be only too willing to discard conventional morality, as if it were some old clothes that went out of fashion. He observed that these women could be audacious not only in displaying themselves, but in their sartorial tastes. Consequently, diminished masculine imaginability concerning female appeal was specified by him to be the only adverse effect of the radical change in the women's outlook and behavior. He opined that, had it not been for men's residual imaginability, perhaps there would have remained no visualization of female beauty.

As for Bertrand Russell's romantic love, we may quote his own words as follows:

*"The essential of romantic love is that it regards the beloved object as very difficult to possess and as very precious . ... The belief in the immense value of the lady is a psychological effect of the difficulty of obtaining her, and I think it may be laid down that when a man has no difficulty in obtaining a woman, his feeling towards her does not take the form of romantic love."* 3

Then, Bertrand Russell says:

*"From the point of view of the arts, it is certainly regrettable when women are too accessible; what is most to be desired is that they should be difficult but not impossible of access . ... In a state of complete freedom, on the other hand, a man capable of great love poetry is likely to have so much success through his charm that he will seldom have need of his best imaginative efforts in order to achieve a conquest."* 4

Furthermore, he mentions in another context as follows:–

*"Among modern emancipated people, love in the serious sense with which we are concerned is suffering a new danger. When people no longer feel any moral barrier against sexual intercourse on every occasion when even a trivial impulse inclines to it, they get into the habit of dissociating sex from serious emotion and from feelings of affection; they may even come to associate it with feelings of hatred."*<sup>5</sup>

- 
1. Will Durant, *The Pleasures of Philosophy*, Simon and Schuster, Inc, New York
  2. Bertrand Russell: *Marriage and Morals*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London. Paperbacks Ed. 1976, p. 84
  3. Bertrand Russell: *Marriage and Morals*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London. Paperbacks Ed. 1976, p. 49.
  4. Bertrand Russell: *Marriage and Morals*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London. Paperbacks Ed. 1976, p. 53–54.
  5. Bertrand Russell: *Marriage and Morals*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London. Paperbacks Ed. 1976, p. 38.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/sexual-ethics-islam-and-western-world-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/chapter-6-love-sexual-discipline>