

# IS THERE ROOM IN ISLAM FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER MUSLIMS?



This is adapted from the chapter “Sexuality, Diversity, and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims” by Dr. Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle in *Progressive Muslims* (ed. Omid Safi). Dr. Kugle shows that Islam supports many kinds of diversity—and that sexual and gender diversity in particular were acknowledged in the Qur’an and by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).



# PART 1

# UNDERSTANDING

# SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN ISLAM

# 02

## **Some religions seems to view sex as shameful or unclean. Is that true of Islam?**

No. In early Islamic history, sex was seen as a positive part of human life. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) helped people see that spiritual life and sexual life are connected. Early Muslim scholars talked about sex in a very straight-forward way as a normal, positive part of life. Al-Ghazali, a Muslim scholar who lived more than 900 years ago, called sexual pleasure a blessing from God. Even the Qur'an describes heaven as a paradise of a physical kind. Heaven is described as containing "rewards" such as rivers of milk and honey that make it appealing to the senses—including sexual desires.

## **Is sexuality the same as lust?**

No. Sexuality is about a lot more than desire or "lust." Sexuality involves desire, but also includes thoughts, acts, and how one sees oneself and others. It is part of a person's identity. It affects how people relate to each other. It's important to realize, too, that desire itself is not a bad thing in Islam. There is a well-known hadith, or story about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in which the Prophet said "Three things were made beloved to me in this world of yours: women, perfume and prayer." This hadith indicates that sexual desire is something the Prophet cherished and respected.

## **Is sexuality only considered "good" if it is used to create children?**

No. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and early scholars said that “sexual play” is a good thing. In fact, in one hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) said that God rewards people for “sexual play.” The term “sexual play” is not defined in the Qur’an or Hadith. Some people understand it to mean sex acts other than intercourse, which does not necessarily lead to making children, so this indicates that sex is considered good and healthy whether or not it is for the purpose of creating children.

## **So in Islam, is it "anything goes" when it comes to sex?**

No. There are limits. Most of those limits have to do with relationships between people who have sex. The limits don’t have to do with the sex acts themselves, though. For example, in Islam, brothers and sisters cannot marry. There are verses of the Qur’an that specifically mention who can and can not marry. For example, men and women should not have sex if they do not have a known, clear relationship with each other. This limit helps ensure that children will be cared for and supported by both parents. This limit was especially important for women at a time when men had more opportunities to work and earn money. Clear relationships also help both people in a relationship to know what they can expect from each other—what rights and responsibilities they have.

## **Is Islamic Law clear on what is and isn't permissible?**

In some cases—like in the Qur’an verses that say brothers and sisters can not marry—it is clear. In other cases, it is not so clear. Scholars today often talk about Islamic law as if it were always clear and simple. Actually, Islamic law is pretty complex. The law comes from many sources, not just the Qur’an. Some of those sources disagree with each other and most are based on the opinions of human beings. In some cultures, Islamic law follows the teachings of scholars with one viewpoint, while in other cultures, Islamic law may follow different scholars with different views.

## **At the Prophet's time, was sex only permitted between a formally-married husband & wife?**

No. Sex was allowed as part of a number of relationships. Most of these relationships involved a kind of contract, or agreement. Some relationship contracts were formal. A formal marriage would include witnesses and the marriage agreement might be written down and signed. Other relationship contracts were informal—they were understood by the community at the time but might not be written down or include a formal ceremony with witnesses. In the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), sex could be part of informal contract relationships, such as “temporary marriages.” Today, we usually don’t think of marriages and other relationships “contracts,” but many relationships are based on an agreement of some kind. Some relationship agreements are written down and legally tie people together, while others are made orally (by talking).

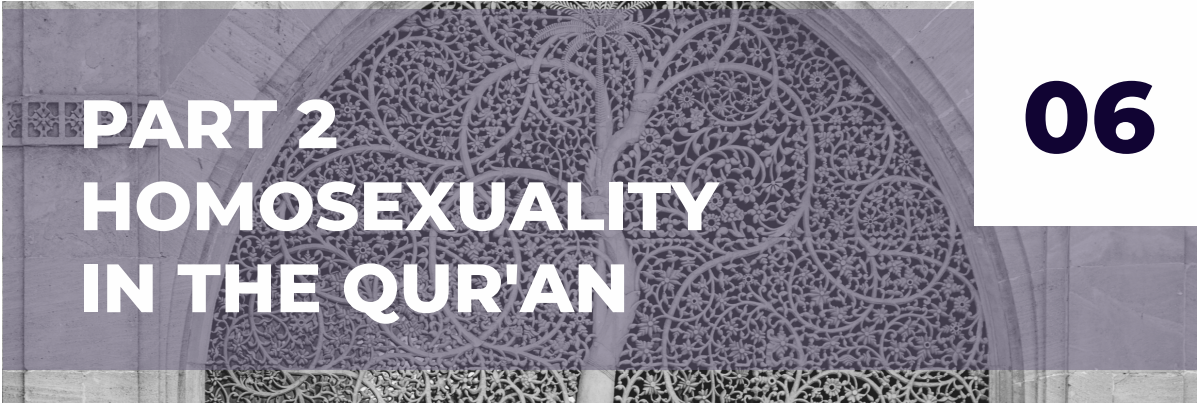
## **Aren't Islamic rules about sex only about relationships between men and women?**

Not necessarily. The Qur’an gives rules for relationships between men and women, but it doesn’t set rules for same-sex (gay or lesbian) relationships. That doesn’t mean it forbids relationships between people of the same sex. There were a number of reasons why Islamic law focused on relationships between men and women. For one thing, Muslim jurists saw straight, or heterosexual, relationships as the major concern because they led to pregnancy. Same-sex couples may have or raise children but, for them, having children is not an accidental side-effect of having sex. The early Muslim jurists wanted to avoid situations where a child was born without the support a father could bring. At that time, men earned the most income and few women had substantial income of their own. Because of inequality between men and women, having a man in the family helped the family financially and socially. Another reason Islamic jurists talked a lot about straight relationships is that they were trying to address the needs of most people. Since most people are straight (or heterosexual), their needs were the primary concern of scholars. That does not mean that other sexual identities don’t exist. It also doesn’t mean that other sexual identities are forbidden just because they are not mentioned.

## **Why is sex such a hot topic among Muslims in today's world?**

There are two main reasons why sex is such a “hot” topic. Rules about sex and gender can be used to keep men in positions of power over women. Rules about sexual relationships are often bent to benefit men, rather than staying true to the rule as it is in the Qur’an. For example, in many Islamic cultures, when women have sex with men before marriage it brings shame on them and their families. No similar shame is brought on a man’s family if he has sex before marriage. The Qur’an doesn’t make any distinction between the sin of the two people involved, though. When the rule is bent to bring more shame and harsh punishments on women, it means women have a lot to lose if they have sex before marriage, while men do not face the same risks. The rule works to control women, but it allows men to do what they wish.

Another reason sex is a “hot” topic among Muslims has to do with politics. Many Islamic countries were colonized by non-Muslim European countries. The colonial rulers replaced Islamic legal systems with European laws. Even after the colonial rulers left, many Muslims felt as if their way of life was threatened. Some Muslims who immigrate to the U.S. or other western countries also fear that their culture will be lost in their new country. When people feel threatened and fearful, they often try to keep control over whatever they can. Limiting sex and women’s rights can seem like easy ways to feel more “in control.”



## PART 2 HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE QUR'AN

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### **Does the Qur'an talk about sexuality?**

Not exactly. Sexuality is a modern concept. The Qur'an refers to sex acts. The Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) and early scholars also talked about sexual acts and desire. However, classical scholars did not talk about the difference between sexual acts and identity.

### **Is there a difference between sex and sexuality?**

Yes—and it is an important difference. “Sex” refers to sex acts. “Sexuality” has to do with feelings of desire and the way a person relates to other people, as well as sex acts. So sex may be part of sexuality—but sexuality is much more than sex. For example, sometimes a man has desire for other men, but does not have sex with men. His sexuality includes his desire for men, even if his behavior does not include sex with men.

### **Could sexual diversity be a part of God's plan?**

Yes. The Qur'an celebrates diversity. The Qur'an says that variety in human appearance, culture, language and even religion was created by God's divine wisdom. In the Qur'an, Surat al-Rum (Qur'an 30:22) says God has created human beings with different *alwan*, a word that can mean both “colors” and “tastes.” Human beings certainly have different tastes in many things—including sexuality. It seems clear sexual diversity must also be a type of human diversity that was created by God's divine wisdom.

## **Does the Qur'an specifically mention sexual diversity?**

Yes. Surat al-Nur (Qur'an 24:31-24:33) specifically mentions "men who are not in need of women." These "men who are not in need of women" might have been gay or asexual, but by definition they were not heterosexual men. They are not judged or condemned anywhere in the Qur'an.

## **Does Islam say anything specifically about homosexuality?**

No. First of all, we can not say "Islam says..." or "the Islamic law says..." because only people speak. Islam itself can not say anything. So where can we look for answers? We can look in the Qur'an, which is the basis of Islam. The Qur'an does not even mention the word "homosexuality," though. It does not refer to gays, lesbians, or bisexuals. In fact, scholars had to come up with a term for homosexuality in Arabic. They came up with *al-shudhudh al-jinsi*, a phrase that means "sexually rare or unusual." If the Qur'an mentioned homosexuality by name, scholars would have simply used that term.

## **Did the Prophet (PBUH) know of any kinds of sexual or gender diversity?**

Yes. There were men in Arab society at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who fit the Qur'an's description of "men who are not in need of women." A detailed study of early Islamic literature also showed that the Prophet (PBUH) accepted men called *mukhanath*. *Mukhanath* were men who were seen as "acting like women"—they might be considered transgender today or they might have been gay men whose sexual orientation was seen as making them "like women." The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) seemed to recognize these men were different from others. His wife, Umm Salama, had a *mukhanath* friend named Hit. Unlike other men, Hit was allowed to enter both men's space and women's space—Muhammad (PBUH) even trusted the *mukhanath* enough to let him enter the private women's space of the Prophet's (PBUH) household.

## **Did the Prophet ever punish anyone for homosexuality or homosexual acts?**

No. After the Prophet (PBUH) died, his companions discussed whether to punish a person for homosexuality. If the Prophet (PBUH) had ever done so, his companions would have simply referred to his decision. Since they didn't know what to do, we know that the Prophet (PBUH) gave them no example to follow. In the case of Hit, Umm Salama's friend, the Prophet (PBUH) did "punish" him in a way, but not for his sexuality. The Prophet (PBUH) found out that Hit described a woman's body to a man—which they could do because they entered women's and men's spaces. At that point, the Prophet (PBUH) told his wife not to allow Hit into the women's quarters anymore. However, Muhammad (PBUH) did not criticize Hit for his identity, only for not respecting the privacy of women.

## **Doesn't the Quran say homosexuality is unnatural?**

No. Using words like "natural" and "unnatural" as ways to describe sexuality is something started by European Christians. When today's Muslims use this argument to say homosexuality is against Islam, they are actually borrowing ideas from European Christians. The conclusion that homosexuality is "unnatural" isn't based on anything in the Qur'an.

## **Are there words used in the Qu'ran to talk about sexual behavior that is not allowed?**

Yes, there are a few: *Fahisha* is a word that is used to mean "doing something that is not allowed" or "transgression." *Fahisha* can mean something that is sexual or something that is not sexual.

*Zina* is the only word used in the Qur'an for a transgression that is definitely sexual. *Zina* means "adultery."

The words *fisq* or *fusuq* mean "corruption." They are used to describe the state of mind of someone who is doing something that is not allowed—in other words, someone who is committing *fahisha*.



## **Are there words used in the Qu'ran to talk about sexual behavior that is not allowed? II**

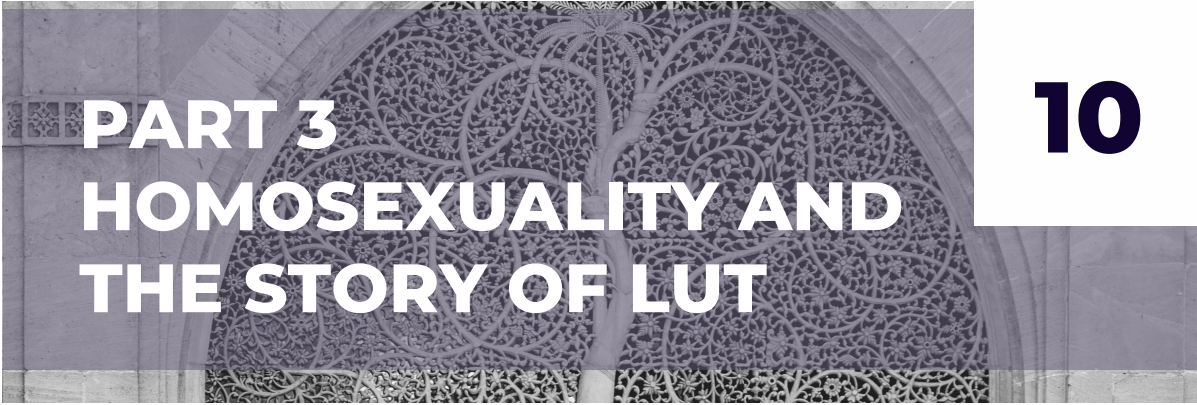
Some scholars try to connect *fahisha*, *fisq*, and homosexuality. However this connection is not clear from the Qur'an. Some scholars also try to connect *zina* and homosexual acts, by saying homosexuality is like adultery. The problem is that this connection does not exist in the Qur'an—the Qur'an simply does not say that! Human jurists are the ones who say there is a connection.

## **The Qur'an only talks about heterosexual relationships. Doesn't that mean that everyone should be heterosexual?**

Not necessarily. The Qur'an assumes that heterosexuality is the most common kind of sexuality and discusses heterosexual relationships in some detail. However, just because something is unusual doesn't mean it is wrong.

For example:

- The Qur'an refers to people who are intersex—those with signs of being both male and female. This is not a common condition, but it does exist. The Qur'an does not say this condition is “wrong.” The Qur'an offers some guidance for how to treat intersex people in society, but there are many things it does not mention—including their sexuality.
- The Qur'an also refers to “men who have no need of women”—people we might call “gay” or “asexual” today. Yet the Qur'an does not condemn them.



## PART 3 HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE STORY OF LUT

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### **Wasn't the story of the Prophet Lut (PBUH) clearly about sexuality?**

Not exactly. The story of the Prophet Lut (PBUH) —called “Lot” in English— can be read and understood in different ways.

### **Isn't there only one way to read the Qur'an?**

No. There are several ways to read the Qur'an.

For example:

- People can read literally: reading word for word, using exact definitions.
- People can read semantically: thinking about a word's meaning in the sentence and in other places in the Qur'an.
- People also can read thematically: finding the meaning of a whole passage by looking at how it relates to themes in the Qur'an.

### **Why not just read the Qur'an literally?**

Reading the Qur'an literally is not as simple as it sounds. It can lead to misunderstanding the whole text or specific passage and sometimes it is just confusing.

## Why not just read the Qur'an literally? II

For example, in English, the word “hot” can mean:

- something or someone has a high temperature (“The stove is hot!”)
- something or someone is popular (“The new game is hot this year.”)
- someone is attractive (“I think that actor is hot!”)
- something or someone is causing disagreement or strong feelings (“The status of women in Islam is a hot topic among Muslims.”)

To make things even more complicated, meanings can change over time. Many years from now, someone might read the sentence “I think that actor is hot” and assume the actor had a high body temperature! Since the words “homosexuality” and “homosexual” do not appear in the Qur’an at all, we must read the Qur’an in a different way if we want to find out what the Qur’an can tell us about homosexuality. If we insist on reading the Qur’an literally, we can only say “The word ‘homosexuality’ doesn’t appear in the Qur’an, then the Qur’an says nothing about the subject.”

## How is a semantic reading different?

A semantic reading looks at the word in context. Above, we saw how a word can mean different things in different contexts. Even when a word means the same thing in different contexts, the overall meaning can be different. In the following examples “hot” always means “has a high temperature”—but in each case the relative meaning is very different.

- a hot cup of coffee -> good
- a hot bowl of ice cream -> not good
- a hot bath for an adult -> refreshing
- a hot bath for a baby -> dangerous

A semantic reading of the Qur’an lets the reader look at the meanings of words as they are used in the Qur’an. The reader then can look at how those words are used in other places in the Qur’an. From this, the reader can tell more about whether the words refer to sexual acts and whether the words are used to mean something good or something bad.

## What is different about a thematic reading?

Thematic readings let readers think about the bigger picture of what they are reading. It lets readers consider the time and place of the stories in the Qur'an, as well as other circumstances. Thematic reading is not a "new" way to read the Qur'an. It is actually something that Muslims do automatically when reading some parts of the Qur'an.

Classical stories of the Prophets, called Qisas al-Anbiya, also contain thematic readings. These stories are not exact records of the Prophets' lives. They are not intended to be read as fact. Instead, they were written to make sense of the Qur'an's short references to the lives of the Prophets. Without knowing the whole story, the short references in the Qur'an may not make much sense. The Qisas al-Anbiya try to fill in the blanks so that the Qur'an references make sense.

## Do semantic and thematic readings reveal anything about why the people of Lut were punished by God?

Yes. In the story, the Prophet Lut (PBUH) first advised the people of the city of Sodom to follow God's path, but they ignored him. Later, the men of Sodom threatened to rape Lut's male visitors, who were angels disguised as men. God then punished the entire city of Sodom for rejecting their Prophet (Lut) and for "transgressions."

Some scholars interpret the "transgressions" in the story of Lut to refer to male homosexuality. Yet the word "transgressions" in the Qur'an can mean something sexual or something non-sexual. Men were not the only ones punished in the destruction of Sodom. According to the Qur'an, the whole city was destroyed. Lut's wife is specifically mentioned. Were Lut's wife, other women and the children of Sodom punished for male homosexuality? That does not seem to be a reasonable conclusion.

A thematic reading of the story of Lut can be found in the Qisas al-Anbiya (classical stories of the Prophets). A story written by the scholar Muhammad ibn Abdallah Al-Kisa'i puts the strange behavior of the men of the city of Sodom in a context that makes sense.

## **Do semantic and thematic readings reveal anything about why the people of Lut were punished by God? II**

Al-Kisa'i suggests that the people of Sodom had taken to showing their city's dominance by raping strangers. They were showing that they could take what they wanted from others. In that way, people became afraid to raid the city. This showed aggressiveness, stinginess, and greed—all things that would justify their punishment. A thematic reading also tells us that the story's main purpose was to show that people had rejected their prophets in the past, as some rejected Muhammad (PBUH) during his lifetime, and how those who rejected prophets were punished. This is clear from the context of the story of Lut, which is placed among other stories with the same theme.

## **Was the behavior of the men of Sodom an expression of sexual desire?**

No. The Qu'ran says that the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with the visiting angels by force. This is an example of rape, not an example of sexual desire. Rape is about power. It is used to coerce, control or punish the victim.

## **Is there any other reason to think this is the correct way to understand the story of Lut?**

Yes. In two hadith—or stories of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)—there is support for this understanding of the story of Lut. In one, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asked the archangel Jibra'il (Gabriel) why and how the people of Lut were destroyed. Jibra'il responded that they did not clean themselves after using the bathroom or having sex, they did not share their food, and they were covetous (wanting things that belonged to others) and stingy. In another hadith, someone asked the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about the penalty for stinginess and the Prophet (PBUH) told the story of the people of Lut.

## Based on this reading, what should Muslims take as the lesson of the story of Lut?

Based on this reading, the story of Lut can instruct Muslims to:

- follow the example set by the Prophet Lut (PBUH) of hospitality, generosity and protection of people who are vulnerable, such as travelers.
- avoid stinginess and greed.
- condemn rape—and speak out against any use of sexual acts to coerce or control.
- uphold and respect relationships based on consent, fairness, mutual support and love for one another.

## Is it right to treat homosexuality as a hadd crime in Islam?

First, we must establish what a *hadd* crime is. A *hadd* crime is one where the person:

- Breaks a rule that is clearly described in the Qur'an
- Has a clear punishment.

For example, the Qur'an mentions adultery and gives a clear punishment for it. The only *hadd* crimes are: murder, highway robbery, theft, adultery and false accusation of adultery.

## Why do some scholars say homosexuality is a hadd crime?

They are drawing an analogy between *zina* (or adultery) and homosexuality between men. However, this analogy is not clear. [More about this topic can be found in Dr. Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle's book *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims*.

## **Does homosexuality meet the requirements of a hadd crime?**

No. When scholars say that it's a *hadd* crime to be homosexual, they reduce homosexuality to “anal sex between men.” However, being gay, lesbian or bisexual isn't a sexual act—it's a sexual identity. Not all gay, people have “anal sex between men”. Some may not have sex at all. Lesbians and bisexual women also do not have “anal sex between men”. At the same time, it is not even true that anal sex between men is a *hadd* crime. The first requirement for being a *hadd* crime is that the rule must be specifically mentioned in the Qur'an—and anal sex between men is not mentioned in the Qur'an. Nor does it meet the second requirement because there is no clear punishment that is spelled out.

## **Do major schools of Islamic thought agree about whether anal sex between men is a hadd crime?**

No. Several schools of Islamic thought do say that it is a *hadd* crime, but Hanafi and Zahiri jurists do not. Hanafis do say that anal sex between men is immoral, yet they insist it is not a *hadd* crime. In fact, the Hanafi jurist Al-Jassas cites two hadith that say that it is injustice and oppression to apply a *hadd* punishment to something that is not a *hadd* crime.

## **In schools of thought that say homosexuality is a hadd crime, what punishment do they believe is correct?**

Stoning, because of the analogy made between homosexuality & adultery.

## **Was this punishment used by the Prophet (PBUH)?**

No. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) never described homosexuality as a crime and he never punished anyone for being gay, lesbian or bisexual.



## PART 4 EVOLVING ISLAMIC THINKING ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

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### **What has led Muslims to believe that homosexuality is wrong?**

There are a number of possible reasons.

- Some people feel that homosexuality is wrong because of a personal prejudice. If someone is heterosexual and only knows heterosexual people, he or she may feel that it is the only natural way to be. Without knowing any gay, lesbian or bisexual people, they may prejudge—or show prejudice—against homosexuality.
- Prejudice against homosexuality also may come from sexism. (There's more about this, below.)
- Some people believe that homosexuality didn't exist in Islamic countries until Europeans and Americans brought it there. They feel it is a kind of corruption that came from outside Islamic culture.
- Belief that homosexuality is wrong can come from trying to read the Qur'an very literally, as in the story of the Prophet Lut (PBUH).
- Some people feel that homosexuality is wrong because early Muslim scholars concluded it was. Later scholars often simply referred back to those same rulings. In that way, conclusions made centuries ago by human scholars are reinforced and continue to be followed as if they were God's absolute truth.

Some of these issues have already been addressed and others are discussed below.



## **Why does sexism make people believe it is wrong to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual?**

Sexism leads people to believe men should act certain ways and women should act certain ways. These different rules for men and women keep men in power over women, something that is easy to see in some traditional families. A sexist view of being gay sees men as “weak” if they have relationships with other men, who are considered their equals, instead of with women, who are considered inferior. At the same time, lesbians may be seen as “too powerful” and “too independent” because they are not dependent on a man.

## **Was homosexuality introduced to Islamic cultures by Europeans and Americans?**

No. Records show that sexual diversity existed in Islamic civilizations from the earliest times. In fact, for a long time Christians in Europe used this against Muslims, calling them “permissive” (meaning “too liberal”) and “sodomitical” (meaning “homosexual”). This was one of the reasons Christians were determined to reconquer Spain when it was under Muslim rule. If anything, what Europeans introduced into Islamic cultures was homophobia (fear or hatred of homosexuality) and the belief that there is something “unnatural” about being gay, lesbian or bisexual.

## **Isn't Islamic law the word of God?**

No. It was constructed by early Muslims and based on the Qur'an, hadith (stories from the life of the Prophet) and the decisions of the early caliphs, or rulers. Islamic law also is based on culture norms, secular (non-religious) laws, and patriarchal ideas that existed before Islam and continue through to the present day.

To learn more about the basis of Islamic law, read the Literary Zikr article [“Is Islamic Family Law today really based on Shari’a?”](#) adapted from the work of Dr. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im.

## **Isn't Islamic law something that never changes?**

No! Consider these examples:

- Muslims once assumed the Qur'an demanded that Muslims be ruled by a monarch, even though it does not say so in the Qur'an.
- Muslims once thought that slavery was part of Islam, even though the Qur'an emphasized freeing slaves.
- Many Muslims have assumed that women were inferior to men, despite the Qur'an's verses that empower women.

In each case, Islamic law has evolved, in many places.

## **Can Islam accept homosexuality?**

Yes. In Islam, there is a solid basis for respect and acceptance of diversity—including sexual diversity. Although historically many Muslim law-makers forbade homosexual acts, it is important to remember that Islamic law is not the word of God. Islamic law is the result of reasoning by law-makers, so the law is made by human beings. That doesn't mean Islamic law is not important for Muslims, but it does mean that it is not a perfect reflection of what God wants for human beings.

Many Muslims do not accept homosexuality because of prejudice or sexism—and many jurists share these views. As a result, it is important to continue to re-examine the shari'ah to better understand the true meaning of the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). By re-examining the principles of shari'ah, scholars—along with other believers—can help recover its original purpose: to protect civil liberties, promote human rights and help people lead more ethical lives.

## Important Terms in Islam

**Islam:** A monotheistic religion, which teaches that only one God exists. It originated in the Arabian city of Mecca around 610 CE. Muslims see Islam as following from the same monotheistic tradition as Judaism and Christianity. The three religions together are sometimes called Abrahamic faiths, because they trace their history back to the Biblical figure, Abraham(PBUH). According to a 2009 study by the Pew Research Center, Islam is followed by 23% of the world population—over 1.5 billion people.

**Islamic:** An adjective that refers to things—not people—connected to the religion of Islam. For example, we may talk about Islamic history, an Islamic nation, or Islamic art. When referring to people who follow the religion of Islam, we use the adjective “Muslim.”

**Islamic Law:** A legal system that is based on shari’ah. Shari’ah drew from the Qur’an, hadith and decisions made by early rulers of Islam. It provided Muslims with guidance in many areas of life. However, Muslim rulers wanted a way to make shari’ah into law. To do that, they had to create fixed rules out of the flexible guidance of shari’ah. The result was Islamic law. However, there is not just one Islamic law. Since Islamic law was created by people, there are different versions of Islamic law based on different Islamic schools of thought.

**Muslim:** Someone who believes in only one god (God, or Allah) and believes that Muhammad (PBUH) was a messenger, or prophet, of God. In practice, it also means someone who calls him- or herself a Muslim. The plural of Muslim is Muslims.

## Important Terms in Islam cont.

**PBUH:** PBUH stands for “peace be upon him.” The Arabic equivalent (“SAWS”) is sometimes used instead. These phrases are used by Muslims after the name of any prophet, as a way of showing honor and respect.

**Qur’an:** The holy book of Muslims. It is sometimes also written “Koran.” The Qur’an is written in poetic form in Arabic. It contains 114 chapters, which vary in length from 3 verses to 286 verses. Muslims believe that the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) in a series of divine revelations between 610 CE and 632 CE. During his lifetime, Muslims memorized all the verses of the Qur’an and began writing them down. After Muhammad(PBUH) died, his followers put the verses of the Qur’an together in one book, in the order they are in now.

**Shari’ah:** Comes from the Arabic for “way” or “path”. Shari’ah is not a legal system, although the word is often used to mean “Islamic law.” Shari’ah is the entire way of life in Islam, as people understand it according to traditional, early interpretations.

**Sodom:** According the Qur’an, the Prophet Lut (PBUH) was sent as a prophet to the people of Sodom. When they did not heed Lut’s warnings, the city was destroyed.

**Islamic Schools of Thought:** Or madhab—are based on the works of early scholars. In the Sunni (SUE-nee) tradition, these include the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali schools of thought. In the Shi’a (SHE-ah) tradition, the most notable is the Jafari school of thought. Other schools of thought exist, such as Ismaili, Zaidi, Ahmedi, and numerous Sufi (SUE-fee) groups. The plural of madhab (MATH-hab, with TH like “than”) is madhahib (math-ah-HEEB).

**Hanafi School of Thought:** Was founded by Abu Hanifa an-Nu’man ibn Thābit (699-767 CE) in Iraq and was one of the first schools of thought to develop and most widespread. It was officially supported by the Abbasid Caliphate earlier; and the Ottoman Empire more recently. The Hanafi school puts the greatest emphasis on reason. It is primarily followed in Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Syrian, Balkan states, Cyprus, Jordan, Sudan, Israel and Palestine, Egypt, the Indian Subcontinent, and Afghanistan.

## Important Terms in Islam cont.

**Zahiri School of Thought:** Founded by Da'ud ibn Khalaf, also known as Da'ud al-Zahiri (died 883 CE). Da'ud ibn Khalaf was known as al-Zahiri (which derives from the word "literal") because of his focus on the literal meaning of the Qur'an. Persecution by both Sunnis and Shi'as led to the near disappearance of this school of thought. The modern Salafi school of thought has been influenced by the Zahiri school.

## Important Figures in Islam

**Al-Ghazali:** Abu-Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali, also referred to as Imam Al-Ghazali, was an early Muslim theologian, jurist and philosopher who lived from 1058 to 1111 CE in Tus, a city in modern day Iran.

**Al-Kisa'i:** Muhammad ibn Abdallah Al-Kisa'i is believed to have lived in the 12th or 13th century. He wrote some of the most famous Qisas al-Anbiya (stories of the Prophets).

**God:** Muslims believe in one God, who created the world and everything in it—the same God in whom Jews and Christians believe. In Arabic, the word for God is Allah (uh-LA) and it is used by both Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians.

**Jibra'il:** In Islam, Jibra'il (Jib-ra-EEL, or Gabriel in English) is an archangel who communicates God's messages to prophets. Muslims believe that Jibra'il appeared to the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) and instructed him to teach others about Islam.

**Prophet Lut (PBUH):** Muslims believe that Lut (PBUH) —called Lot in English—was a prophet in the time of Ibrahim (Abraham). His story is told or mentioned in a number of places in the Qur'an.

**Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):** the founder of Islam. Muslims believe he was a prophet and messenger of God, following in a long line of prophets dating back to the Biblical figures Noah (PBUH), Abraham (PBUH) and Moses (PBUH). He was born in Mecca and lived roughly between 570 and 632 CE. Initially a merchant, he began receiving divine revelations at the age of 40. To escape persecution, he and his early followers emigrated to the nearby city of Yathrib, which was renamed Medina.

## Important Figures in Islam cont.

**Umm Salama:** Born Hind al Makhzumia, Umm Salama was a wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She and her first husband were among the early converts to Islam.

## Sex & Related Terms

**Sex:** Sex has several meanings.

- Sex refers to any kind of sexual activity, such as vaginal, oral, anal or manual sex. It can include sexual activity between people of the same gender or people of different genders.
- Sex can refer to someone's biological sex—in other words, whether a person is “male,” “female” or “intersex.”
- Sex is often used interchangeably with gender, in which case it refers to whether someone is a “man” or “woman.”

**Sexuality:** has to do with feelings of desire and the way a person relates to other people, as well as actual sex acts.

**Lust:** Sometimes people refer to any kind of desire or want as “lust.” According to Merriam Webster's dictionary, though, “lust” means an “intense or unbridled sexual desire.” So “lust” isn't just any desire—it's more like desire that is out of control.

**Rape:** Rape refers to sex that occurs by force or by threat of injury. Rape may include any kind of sex, such as vaginal, anal, oral or manual (by hand). It can occur between members of different genders (such as men raping women) or between members of the same gender (such as men raping men or women raping women). Both victims and perpetrators of rape may be of any gender (women or men). Victims and perpetrators may be cisgender (in other words, they may identify as the gender they were assigned at birth) or transgender (in other words, they may identify as a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth).

## Gender & Related Terms

**Gender:** refers to a person's identity as a “man” or “woman.” Gender also may include identity as something different, such as “genderqueer” or “third gender.”

## Gender & Related Terms Cont.

**Cisgender:** an adjective that refers to people who identify with their biological sex at birth or the gender they were assigned. Most people are cisgender. Cisgender is the opposite of transgender. Cisgender people may be straight, bisexual, gay or lesbian.

**Intersex:** An adjective that refers to people who are born with physical traits (such as genitals) or chromosomes that are difficult to identify as clearly male or female. It is estimated that intersex conditions occur in around 1% of births. Usually, intersex children are assigned to one gender (“boy” or “girl”) shortly after birth. If an intersex person decides that the gender he or she was assigned at birth was wrong or that the genders “boy” and “girl” do not reflect who they are, they may also identify as transgender. The outdated term for intersex is hermaphrodite. This term is considered inaccurate because it means “having both sexes,” which is not necessarily true. There are at least 16 different intersex conditions, some of which are not physically visible and can only be determined by looking at the person’s chromosomes. Some intersex children are subjected to surgery to bring their physical traits closer to what is typical for their assigned gender. However, most of these surgeries are medically unnecessary and often irreversible. They do not take into account how the child will identify their gender when they are older. At this time, surgery of this kind is controversial in many places, including the United States. Intersex people may be straight, bisexual, gay or lesbian.

**Mukhanath:** A word used during the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) lifetime for males who were seen as “acting like women.” They may have been males who did not see themselves as men, in which case they would be considered transgender today. They also may have been men whose behavior, appearance or sexuality made them seem different from other men and more like women. They may have been what people would consider gay, today. It is problematic to try to apply today’s labels to people from a different time, though. A mukhanath’s understanding of his sexuality or gender may have been different from how people understand those things today.

## Gender & Related Terms Cont.

**Transgender:** an adjective that refers to people who do not identify with their biological sex at birth or the gender they were assigned—in other words, they are not the gender everyone assumed they were when they were born. The word transgender is often used as an “umbrella” term to include people who identify with the opposite gender—for example, a person assigned the gender girl or woman at birth but identifies as a man, or vice versa—as well as people who feel that neither “girl/woman,” nor “boy/man” is the right label for them. Transgender people usually dress, act and prefer to be called by the gender with which they identify. For example, a person who was born male but identifies as a woman will prefer to be called by a female name, referred to as “she,” and will dress and act like a woman. Transgender people may be straight, bisexual, gay or lesbian.

## Sexual Orientation & Related Terms

**Sexual Orientation:** refers to a pattern of enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. In other words, sexual orientation describes who a person is attracted to. Various labels describing sexual orientation include lesbian, bisexual, gay, and straight.

**Asexual:** A person who does not experience sexual attraction.

**Bisexual:** refers to a person who is sexually attracted to people of the same gender and other genders, or towards people regardless of gender. It may be used as an adjective or a noun.

**Heterosexual:** an adjective used to refer to people who are attracted to people of the opposite gender (whether cisgender or transgender). Heterosexual men are attracted to women. Heterosexual women are attracted to men. It is more common in casual conversation to refer to heterosexual people as “straight.”

**Homosexuality:** refers to desire for sexual intimacy with a member of the same gender (whether cisgender or transgender). Some may experience homosexual desire but not act on it. When someone has sex with a member of the same gender without experiencing any desire to do so—as when someone is raped—that is not an example of homosexuality.



## Sexual Orientation & Related Terms Cont.

**Homosexual:** an adjective used to describe a person who is attracted to others of the same gender (whether cisgender or transgender). It applies both to men, who may also be called “gay,” and to women, who may also be called “lesbian.” In the United States, homosexual is considered a more formal and scientific term for same-sex attraction. It is preferable to use words like “gay” and “lesbian” in casual communication. Some people find the term homosexual offensive because it was originally used to describe attraction to the same sex as a mental illness or disease.

**Gay:** usually an adjective that refers to men who are sexually attracted to other men (including cisgender men and transgender men). Sometimes it is also used to refer to any person who is primarily attracted to members of the same gender, though a woman might prefer to be called lesbian. It is a synonym for “homosexual,” but is more acceptable in casual conversation. As an adjective, one might use it to say “a gay man.” It is sometimes used as a plural noun to refer to gay (and lesbian) people as a group, as in “Gays marched in a parade.” It is not correct to use it as a singular noun (“a gay” or “the gay”).

**Lesbian:** refers to women who are sexually attracted to other women (including cisgender women and transgender women). It may be used as an adjective or a noun, as in “a lesbian woman wrote the book” or “a lesbian wrote the book.”

**Straight:** an adjective used to refer to people who are heterosexual.

## Different Ways of Reading Texts

**Semantically:** Reading something semantically involves looking at individual words, but considering more than just their literal definitions. Semantics includes the culturally understood meanings of words.

**Thematically:** Involves looking at the themes in a piece of writing, rather than just the individual words. Themes can include ideas, such as “prayer,” or places, such as “the city of Mecca”. Themes can also refer to types of narratives, like “stories of battles.” Whether they are ideas, images, places or types of narrative, themes are structures within a piece of writing that have deeper meaning than the meanings of the individual words used.

## Different Ways of Reading Texts Cont.

An example where Muslims read the Qur'an thematically: The Qur'an tells the story of Moses' conflict with the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Hebrews were slaves in Egypt at the time of Moses' birth. In the story, Moses demanded that Pharaoh free his people. The verses tell the story in a very simple way as a story of a combat: there was a good side and a bad side, oppressed slaves against a powerful ruler and his followers. If people were to read only these verses and take them literally, they might conclude that Egyptians are evil and they might learn to hate all Egyptians. Yet the Qur'an praises the Pharaoh's wife for helping Moses and for being righteous. It also praises other Egyptians who disagreed with the Pharaoh. A thematic reading lets the reader put this story together with other stories in the Qur'an that are about oppressive rulers to see that the lesson of this story is not "Egyptians are bad" but rather "oppression is bad." A simple reading of the story of Moses might also lead to the conclusion "all rulers oppress people." This could lead people to resist all authority. Yet a thematic reading helps the reader to see that it is not the ruler's power that causes oppression, because rulers can use their power in just, fair ways. Instead, the reader can see that oppression comes from the misuse of power.

### Other Terms

**CE:** stands for Common Era. It is used with the Gregorian (Christian) calendar. CE is a secular term used instead of AD, which stands for Anno Domini and means "The Year of Our Lord", a Christian-based reference to the birth of Jesus (PBUH).

**Coerce:** to make someone do something by putting so much pressure on them that they have little choice.

**Colonization:** European powers—especially Britain, France, and the Netherlands—had control of nearly all countries where Muslims are the majority of the population today. The exceptions were Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. In these three countries, there was strong colonial influence, but there was no military conquest or occupation. The period of European colonialism started as early in the 1700s in some places, such as Indonesia (colonized by the Netherlands) and India (colonized by Britain). However, colonialism had the greatest effect during the 1800s and early 1900s.

## Other Terms Cont.

**Monarch:** a ruler whose right to rule is hereditary—in other words, it is inherited within a family. A ruling monarch may be called a king, queen, prince, caliph, emir or another title. Traditionally, monarchies had few limits on their power. Today, some monarchies are very powerful while others are limited, sharing power with elected representatives.

**Patriarchy/Patriarchal:** a common system of organizing society that puts the majority of power in the hands of men, makes women and children dependent on men and establishes inheritance laws that follow the male line. Patriarchal is an adjective that is used to describe any society that is organized as a patriarchy. Patriarchal also can describe ideas, beliefs or other systems that privilege (give advantage) or give power to men.

**Permissive:** an adjective that means a person or group is not very strict about rules or has rules that allow people to follow their desires. It is usually used in a negative way and implies that the speaker does not approve of the other person or group's treatment of rules.

**Prejudice:** usually refers to a negative belief a person or people holds about another person or group, based on a judgement made unfairly or without enough information. For example, a negative belief about an entire group of people is a prejudice because it involves a judgement made about all the people in the group without knowing enough about each one to make that judgement.

**Sexism:** a form of discrimination based on a person's sex or gender.

**Slavery:** slavery is mentioned in the Qur'an but the Qur'an does not promote slavery. In fact, it demands humane treatment of slaves and emphasizes freeing slaves. However, it does give some rules relating to slaves because slavery was a real part of society at the time the Qur'an was written. The slavery that existed in the Prophet's (PBUH) day was very different from the more recent slavery of Africans by European nations and the US. Slaves in the time of the Prophet (PBUH) were prisoners of war, who had to earn their freedom and might be freed if the political situation changed. They had rights and were treated as human beings—however, they were human beings at the bottom of the social "ladder."



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