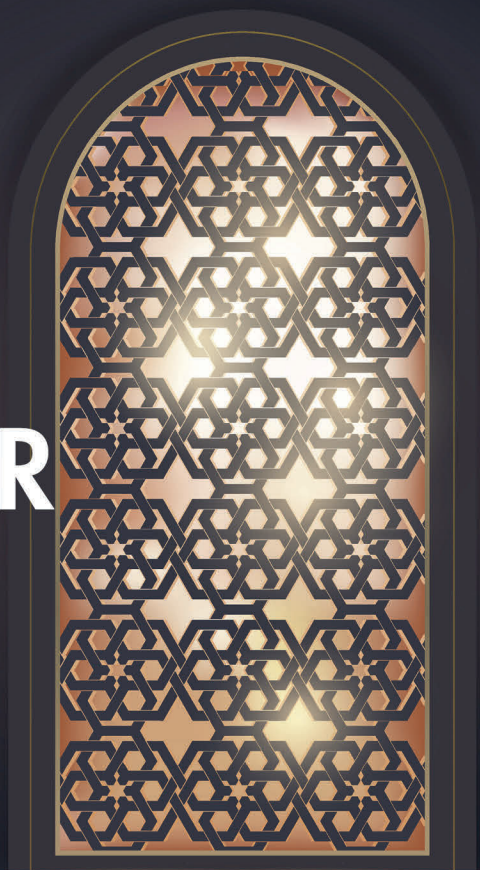


SAMEERA QURESHI, MS OTR

# SOULFUL SEXUAL HEALTH FOR MUSLIMS

A Developmental  
Approach for  
Individuals and  
Clinicians



“In this transformative and groundbreaking book, Sameera Qureshi offers a deeply spiritual, yet practical and comprehensive guide to sexual health in the life of a Muslim. Grounded in the rich Islamic tradition, this book equips readers with valuable tools to center God while navigating their sexual well-being. A true gift to the field, and a must-read for Muslims, clinicians, and anyone seeking a spiritually rooted and holistic approach to sexual health.”

**Amal Killawi, LCSW, *The Family & Youth Institute, USA***

“In this innovative and important book, Sameera Qureshi dialectically unites Islamic traditions of the soul with our contemporary understanding of sexual health. This unification allows the reader to center their soul as a mandatory element for their sexual health, liberating them from the polarizations of repression and permissiveness. An extraordinary work!”

**Waleed Sami, PhD, *assistant professor, Department of Psychology, City College of New York***



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# Soulful Sexual Health for Muslims

This transformative book offers a holistic approach to sexual health for Muslims, rooted in Islamic traditions of the soul. By addressing sexual health as an integrative journey connecting physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, it reframes this aspect of life as a sacred practice aligned with the soul's connection to God.

Introducing the Soulful Sexual Health Model as a framework for navigating sexual health challenges throughout the developmental journey of the soul, Sameera Qureshi integrates Islamic values of compassion, self-accountability, and spiritual alignment into holistic frameworks for sexual health education and support. Chapters explore foundational topics such as anatomy and puberty, empowered abstinence, marital intimacy, and parenting approaches to sexual health. Special sections address challenges like sexual trauma, infertility, and sexual dysfunction, offering practical and faith-centered strategies for healing and growth. This book also provides tailored guidance for professionals supporting Muslims, emphasizing the importance of integrating faith-based frameworks into their practice. Through reflective questions, personal narratives, and practical activities, readers are equipped to embrace sexual health as an essential and sacred part of their journey with God.

Intended for Muslims seeking a holistic understanding of sexual health, as well as educators, therapists, imams, and other professionals who serve Muslim communities, this book bridges the gap between contemporary sexual health needs and Islamic faith-based approaches. It is an invaluable resource for those committed to fostering healing, growth, and spiritual connection in their personal lives and professional work.

**Sameera Qureshi, MS OTR**, is a trauma-informed occupational therapist and founder of Sexual Health for Muslims. She centers Islamic Psychology for therapeutic, educational, and program development frameworks aimed at Muslims and professionals who serve them.



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# Soulful Sexual Health for Muslims

A Developmental Approach for Individuals  
and Clinicians

Sameera Qureshi, MS OTR

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# Glossary of Terms

The following terms appear throughout the book and are defined below. Note that within the chapters, Arabic terms are *italicized* with the English definition appearing in parentheses.

**Allah** The Arabic term for God, used universally by Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians alike to refer to the One Supreme Being, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Throughout this book, “Allah” and “God” are used interchangeably to respect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the audience while maintaining the essence of Islamic theology. The use of “Allah” emphasizes the personal and profound connection Muslims have with their Creator, aligning with the soulful contexts explored in this book.

***akhlaq*** Refers to Islamic ethics or moral character, emphasizing virtues such as kindness, humility, patience, and honesty. Rooted in the Quran and Sunnah, *akhlaq* guides Muslims in cultivating noble character and relationships, which are central to the soulful approaches explored in this book.

***Alhamdulillah*** An Arabic phrase meaning “Praise be to Allah.” It is commonly used by Muslims to express gratitude, contentment, or recognition of Allah’s blessings in all circumstances, whether good or challenging. The phrase reflects a deep sense of thankfulness and acknowledgement of Allah’s sovereignty.

***amanah*** A trust or responsibility entrusted by Allah to humans, emphasizing accountability in life, including in matters of health and sexuality.

***‘awrah*** The parts of the body that must be covered with clothing as per Islamic guidelines for modesty, differing by gender and context.

***barakah*** Blessing or divine grace that brings goodness and abundance, often sought in marriage and daily life.

***Bismillah*** “In the name of Allah.” This phrase is the beginning of the full Islamic invocation *Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Raheem* (“In the name

of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”). It is a phrase of immense spiritual significance in Islam and is used by Muslims to begin almost every task, activity, or recitation, including the Quran. It serves as a reminder of Allah’s presence and guidance in all actions, invoking blessings, protection, and the intention of performing an act for the sake of Allah.

***bulūgh*** The stage of physical and spiritual maturity, marked by puberty, when a Muslim becomes accountable for their actions.

***dhikr*** Literally meaning “remembrance,” *dhikr* refers to the spiritual practice of remembering Allah through spoken or silent recitation. This can include litanies—repeated phrases such as *SubḥānAllāh* (Glory be to Allah), *Alḥamdulillah* (All praise is due to Allah), and *Allāhu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest). *Dhikr* nurtures presence, calms the heart, and draws the soul closer to Divine awareness, whether done individually or in community.

***dua*** A personal supplication or prayer made directly to Allah. It is a way of turning the heart toward the Divine—whether in times of need, gratitude, or reflection. *Dua* can be spoken in any language, at any time, and is considered a deeply intimate act of connection between a Muslim and God.

***fiqh*** Refers to Islamic jurisprudence, the understanding and application of Islamic laws derived from the Quran and sunnah. *Fiqh* provides practical rulings for daily life, including acts of worship, transactions, and personal conduct, and is a foundational framework in discussions of sexual health and ethics throughout this book.

***fitrah*** The natural disposition or innate purity with which every human being is created, serving as a foundation for spiritual and moral guidance.

**Five Pillars of Islam** The foundational acts of worship and practice in Islam, representing the core framework of a Muslim’s faith and devotion. They include: 1) *Shahadah* (Testimony of Faith)—declaring belief in the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him); 2) *Salah* (Prayer)—performing five daily prayers; 3) *Zakah* (Almsgiving)—giving a portion of one’s wealth to those in need; 4) *Sawm* (Fasting)—abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs from dawn to sunset during Ramadan; and 5) *Hajj* (Pilgrimage)—performing the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime, if physically and financially able.

***futuwwah*** Often translated as “spiritual chivalry,” *futuwwah* refers to a code of ethics in Islamic tradition that emphasizes noble character, selflessness, and service to others. It encourages individuals to prioritize the well-being of others while cultivating inner purity and alignment with Divine values.

- ghadab*** Translated as “anger,” *ghadab* refers to the intense emotional state triggered by feelings of injustice, harm, or frustration. In Islamic teachings, *ghadab* is a natural human emotion, but it must be managed with self-control and wisdom.
- ghusl*** The ritual full-body purification performed in specific circumstances, such as after marital intimacy or menstruation.
- hadith*** Refers to the recorded sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him). Hadiths (the plural form) are a key source of Islamic knowledge, second only to the Quran, and provide practical examples of how to live according to Islamic teachings. In addition to verses from the Quran, hadiths are cited throughout the book.
- hajj*** The major pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca, required once in a lifetime for all Muslims who are physically and financially able. It is performed during the Islamic month of *hajj* (*Dhul-Hijjah*) and includes a series of sacred rites that commemorate the legacy of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his family.
- haya*** Modesty or a sense of shame rooted in faith, guiding behavior and interactions in line with Islamic values.
- hayd*** The Arabic term for menstruation or a woman’s period, referring to the natural cyclical process of uterine bleeding. In Islamic contexts, *hayd* carries both physical and spiritual significance, as it is accompanied by specific rulings related to worship, such as exemptions from prayer (*salah*) and fasting (*sawm*) during this time.
- ibadah*** Acts of worship or devotion to Allah, which include not only formal prayers but also actions like fostering a healthy marital relationship.
- ihsaan*** A term meaning “excellence” or “perfection.” In an Islamic context, it refers to worshipping Allah as if you see Him, and knowing that even if you cannot see Him, He sees you. *Ihsaan* signifies striving for the highest level of sincerity and mindfulness in actions and worship.
- ihtilam*** A term referring to a nocturnal emission or a wet dream. It is a natural occurrence that marks the transition into adulthood in Islamic jurisprudence, signifying the onset of puberty. Following *ihtilam*, a *ghusl* (ritual purification bath) is required to regain a state of ritual purity.
- inshaAllah*** A phrase meaning “If Allah wills.” It is used by Muslims to express hope or intention for something to happen in the future, acknowledging that all outcomes are ultimately subject to Allah’s will and decree.
- jalal*** Majesty or the divine attribute of strength, often associated with traditionally “masculine” qualities of Allah.

- jamal*** Beauty or the divine attribute of gentleness and mercy, often linked with traditionally “feminine” qualities of Allah.
- khushu’*** A state of humility, focus, and mindfulness in worship/prayer, reflecting deep spiritual connection.
- kiraman katibin*** The noble recording angels who document a person’s deeds, emphasizing the importance of self-accountability.
- Maqasid al-Shariah*** Refers to the higher objectives of Islamic law, which aim to preserve and promote human dignity and well-being. These core principles include the protection of faith (*hifz al-deen*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-aql*), lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), and wealth (*hifz al-mal*). Together, they ensure the right to spiritual growth, safeguard human life, encourage education and critical thinking, uphold family and moral relationships, and promote justice in economic matters.
- ma’roof*** A term meaning “that which is good, recognized, or accepted.” In an Islamic context, it refers to actions, behaviors, and practices that are considered virtuous, just, and in accordance with moral and social norms as guided by the Quran and Sunnah. *Ma’roof* emphasizes the importance of fostering goodness and fairness in relationships and societal dealings.
- muhasabah*** A term meaning “self-reckoning” or “self-accountability.” In the Islamic tradition, *muhāsabah* refers to the practice of regularly reflecting on one’s thoughts, actions, intentions, and spiritual state in relation to Allah. *Muhāsabah* invites believers to turn inward with sincerity, compassion, and truthfulness, recognizing both their shortcomings and their striving on the path toward nearness to Allah.
- muwaddah*** A Quranic term often translated as “affection” or “loving kindness.” It refers to a deep, compassionate form of love that is rooted in care, tenderness, and emotional connection. In the context of marriage, *muwaddah* is one of the key foundations of the marital bond, alongside *rahmah* (mercy). It reflects not just romantic love, but a soul-nurturing love that fosters spiritual companionship and mutual support.
- nafs*** The self or soul, often discussed in its different states. Within the Islamic Psychology model presented, the *nafs* refers to observable behaviors.
- nafs al-ammarah*** The commanding self, inclined toward base desires and evil, requiring discipline and refinement.
- nafs al-lawwamah*** The reproaching self, a state of self-awareness and accountability, where the soul begins to recognize and regret its shortcomings.
- nafs al-mutma’innah*** The tranquil self, at peace with itself and aligned with Divine will, representing the highest state of spiritual contentment.

***nikah*** The sacred contract of marriage in Islam, establishing rights and responsibilities between spouses. *Nikah* is often used in the context of the Islamic marriage ceremony as well, officiated by an imam.

**OB/GYN** An abbreviation for Obstetrician-Gynecologist, a medical doctor specializing in women's reproductive health, pregnancy, and childbirth. OB/GYNs provide care related to menstrual health, fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause, as well as addressing gynecological conditions such as hormonal disorders, infections, and reproductive system health.

**Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him)** The final messenger of Allah in Islam, sent to guide humanity with the message of the Quran and to exemplify a life of worship, ethics, and compassion. Muslims add the phrase "Peace and Blessings be Upon Him" after mentioning the Prophet's name as an act of respect and a supplication for blessings upon him, in accordance with Quranic instruction "Indeed, Allah and His angels send blessings upon the Prophet. O you who have believed, ask [Allah to confer] blessing upon him and ask [Allah to grant him] peace" (Quran 33:56).

**Quran** The holy book of Islam, believed to be the word of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) through the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel). The Quran serves as the primary source of guidance for Muslims, encompassing theological, ethical, and legal teachings. Its verses are referenced throughout this book to frame discussions on sexual health within a soulful and Islamic context.

***rahmah*** A term meaning "mercy" or "compassion." In Islam, *rahmah* is a central attribute of Allah, often mentioned in the Quran, such as in the phrase "*Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem*" (The Most Merciful, The Most Compassionate). It represents Allah's boundless mercy and care for all creation. Muslims are encouraged to embody *rahmah* in their actions, reflecting kindness, empathy, and compassion toward others. It is a quality deeply rooted in relationships, community, and worship, aligning with the prophetic example of mercy toward all beings.

***riyadat al-nafs*** Often translated as "disciplining the soul," this term refers to the effort of training and refining one's lower desires and instincts to align with higher spiritual goals. It complements *tazkiyat al-nafs* by emphasizing proactive discipline and intentionality, concepts that are woven into the discussions of self-accountability and empowerment throughout the book.

***sakinah*** A term meaning "tranquility," "peace," or "serenity." In an Islamic context, *sakinah* refers to a deep sense of calm and spiritual comfort that comes from a connection with Allah. It is often used to describe the tranquility found in relationships, particularly within marriage.

**Salafiyya** An Islamic reform movement that seeks to emulate the practices and beliefs of the *Salaf* (the first three generations of Muslims, including the Prophet Muhammad [Peace and Blessings be Upon Him], his companions, and their successors). Salafiyya emphasizes a return to what it considers the pure and unaltered teachings of Islam, rejecting later innovations (*bid'ah*) in religious practices and interpretations. It is often characterized by a focus on strict adherence to the Quran and Sunnah, literalist readings of Islamic texts, and an effort to eliminate cultural or historical influences perceived as deviations from original Islamic teachings. The movement has influenced various Islamic groups and ideologies, ranging from moderate reformists to more rigid interpretations.

**shahadah** The foundational declaration of Islamic belief, affirming that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) is His Messenger. It is the first pillar of Islam and signifies entry into the faith.

**shahwah** Translated as “desire” or “lust,” *shahwah* encompasses a range of human desires, particularly those related to physical and sexual appetite. *Shahwah* is part of the lower-soul, the *nafs al-ammarah*, which single Muslims are tasked with balancing and managing until marriage, when it is channeled into mutually pleasurable sexual intimacy.

**shariah** The comprehensive Islamic system of guidance encompassing law, ethics, and spirituality.

**sunnah** The sunnah is preserved through *ahadith*, which are documented reports of the Prophet’s (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) words, actions, and approvals transmitted by his companions. The *sunnah* complements the Quran by providing context and exemplifying how its teachings were implemented. It is integral to shaping the soulful frameworks and ethical principles explored in this book.

**taharah** A term meaning “purity” or “cleanliness.” In Islamic practice, it refers to both physical and spiritual purification. *Taharah* is essential for acts of worship, such as prayer, and is achieved through specific rituals like *wudu* (ablution) or *ghusl* (ritual bath). It emphasizes the importance of maintaining cleanliness to uphold one’s spiritual and physical well-being in accordance with Islamic teachings.

**tassawuf** Commonly translated as “Sufism” or “Islamic mysticism,” *tassawuf* focuses on the inner, spiritual dimensions of Islam, fostering closeness to Allah through self-purification, mindfulness, and devotion. This term underscores the importance of soul-centered growth and spirituality in the context of sexual health and beyond.

**tawakkul** Trust in Allah while taking necessary action, a principle that applies to navigating life’s challenges, including sexual health.

*tazkiyat al-nafs* Translates to “purification of the soul,” referring to the process of cleansing one’s heart, and thus soul, from spiritual diseases such as arrogance, envy, and heedlessness. It is an integral concept in Islamic spirituality, linked to personal and spiritual growth, and frequently referenced as part of the soul’s journey in this book.

*umrah* Often called the “lesser pilgrimage,” *umrah* can be performed at any time of year and involves a set of rites performed in Mecca. While not obligatory like *hajj*, it is a highly recommended and spiritually uplifting journey that invites closeness to Allah and a break from worldly distractions.

*zina* Illicit sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage, prohibited in Islam to preserve individual and societal well-being.



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# Introduction

## My Soulful Journey

I still remember the moment I finished writing on the whiteboard, my hand trembling slightly as I turned to face the class. 12 curious fifth-grade Muslim girls sat before me, some fidgeting with their pencils, others swinging their legs under their desks. I was their Muslim sexual health teacher—the familiar face they saw in the hallways—and today, I was about to teach them.

On the board were the words “Gender Education,” and as I smiled nervously at their expectant faces, I had no idea that this moment would shape the trajectory of my career.

This memory from 2011 marked the start of my journey at the intersections of Islam and sexual health with Muslims. By then, I had already completed my Master’s in Occupational Therapy in 2007 and transitioned into a school-based role. In 2008, I joined a mental health promotion and prevention team serving Islamic schools and Muslim-populated charter schools in Calgary, Canada. For the first time, my personal faith and professional work collided in a way that challenged and inspired me.

As project coordinator for the mental health initiative, I worked alongside social workers, supporting schools that were grappling with the complexities of Islamic perspectives on sensitive topics like sexual and mental health. Many schools avoided these discussions altogether or postponed them until the last week of school, hoping the topic would quietly fade into the summer holidays. But I saw this as an opportunity—a door waiting to be opened.

I pushed it wide open—and I haven’t looked back since.

Over the years, my work has evolved. I’ve taken on roles as a school therapist, community educator, and nonprofit leader, focusing on sexual violence prevention and addressing the gaps Muslims face in sexual health education. I’ve trained on college campuses, in mosques, and with community organizations across North America and internationally. Each experience has deepened my understanding of how to integrate Islamic

## 2 *Soulful Sexual Health for Muslims*

perspectives with sexual health education, highlighting the importance of addressing this vital topic in a way that honors both faith and well-being.

### **A Soulful Turn**

In December 2019, I walked out of the Reviving the Islamic Spirit (RIS) Conference in Toronto feeling like my professional world had been turned upside down. At the time, I was working with a Muslim-led nonprofit in the United States, focusing on sexual health education and violence prevention. With over ten years of experience in this field, my work felt fulfilling—yet, after one transformative three-hour lecture, I realized a vital piece of the puzzle had been missing.

That missing piece was the soul.

Up until that point, my work relied on two primary approaches: “top-down” and “equivalency.” The top-down approach involved integrating Islamic perspectives into existing secular sexual health concepts, like teaching Islamic guidelines about menstruation to fifth-grade girls, adapted from mainstream curricula. The equivalency approach sought to draw parallels between secular and Islamic frameworks, such as stating, “Islam also centers sexual pleasure, for example, within marriage.” While functional and effective in some ways, these approaches lacked the essence of Islam—the soul.

This realization marked a turning point. I recognized the need for a bottom-up approach to sexual health for Muslims—one that *begins* with the soul as its foundation. For Muslims, the soul is the lens through which we view the world and the essence of our purpose in this life. Sexual health, I realized, cannot be meaningfully framed, addressed, or discussed without anchoring it in this soulful foundation.

For the next six months after the conference, I immersed myself in works by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars—Imam al-Ghazali, Malik Badri, Laleh Bakhtiar (may Allah elevate their souls)—alongside present-day scholars and teachers. Their insights reshaped my understanding of the soul as the center of all health: sexual, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Inspired and invigorated, I resigned from my nonprofit role and launched my own initiative in September 2020 and called it *Sexual Health for Muslims*. Through social media and a dedicated website, I began sharing soul-centered Islamic sexual health content. What started as a modest experiment quickly gained traction, with my audience growing rapidly and increased demand for educational content, trainings, and therapy services.

Around this time, I discovered Islamic Psychology through a serendipitous series of events (i.e. signs from God) that led me to Cambridge Muslim

College. In 2021, I joined the inaugural cohort of their Postgraduate Diploma in Islamic Psychology. This program deepened my understanding of the interconnectedness of the soul and all aspects of our health while transforming my approach as a therapist and educator. It reinforced the importance of centering the soul—not just in my work, but in every aspect of life.

This book is the culmination of that journey. It represents my commitment to rediscovering sexual health as a sacred, soulful responsibility rooted in the timeless traditions of Islam.

### **A New Mission**

The soul-centered framework has reshaped not only my professional practice but also my own journey. I've learned that as a soulful professional, I can only guide others as far as I've gone myself. This realization led me to prioritize my own healing, heart purification, and inner connection to Allah. Gone are the days of believing that my worth as a Muslim was tied to how much I could support and empower others. Now, the soul is at the center—not just of my work, but of my existence.

Through this soulful lens, I've seen how Islamic Psychology transforms clients' relationships with their inner wounds. I've seen parents step out from behind shame to hold developmentally appropriate conversations about sexual health with their children. I've held space for Muslim men and women who, through tears, realize that childhood wounds underlie their sexual health struggles—and who feel hopeful that healing is possible, because Allah is with them. Because sexual health issues are ultimately caused by wounds on the heart that require healing. And for Muslims, healing requires an inward journey within the soul, with the main purpose being to actualize the spiritual potential contained within us.

### **What This Book Offers: A Cumulative Journey of Soulful Sexual Health**

This book is a comprehensive, soulful exploration of sexual health across the lifespan of a Muslim, contextualizing it not only for this world but also for the Hereafter. At its core, it bridges theory with practice, encouraging both individuals and professionals to approach sexual health through the lens of compassionate self-accountability. Rooted in Islamic teachings, this book serves as an invitation to embark on a soulful journey—one that integrates sexual health into our relationship with Allah.

Drawing on over 16 years of professional, educational, and personal experience, this work synthesizes insights from my roles as an educator, therapist, and speaker, alongside my studies in Islamic Psychology and my

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reflective journey as a Muslim navigating these deeply personal and complex topics. It integrates classical Islamic teachings, contemporary research, and the lived realities of individuals and communities I've had the privilege of working with, offering a resource that is both spiritually resonant and practically applicable.

Readers often ask, "Where can I exactly find what you're sharing?" While references are included throughout, the frameworks and approaches presented here extend beyond any single source. They reflect the cumulative knowledge Allah has allowed me to gain through education, practice, and deep commitment to this field. This book bridges gaps that many Muslims experience, providing clarity, comfort, and courage for navigating sexual health in a soulful and holistic way.

Whether you are a parent, grandparent, or someone seeking to better understand your own sexual health, I invite you to approach this book with an open heart. Every step you take toward healing and growth is a step toward Allah, guided always by His mercy and wisdom.

### **The Soul Is at the Center**

At its core, this book is anchored in a soulful lens that prioritizes compassion, self-accountability, and spiritual growth. Compassion is emphasized as a starting point—for oneself and for others—particularly when navigating the sensitive and often stigmatized topics related to sexual health. Self-accountability encourages readers to reflect deeply on their own actions and intentions, aligning them with their faith and values. Spiritual growth serves as the ultimate goal, reminding readers that every challenge and triumph in sexual health is part of their journey back to Allah.

The integration of physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions is central to this book's approach. Sexual health is not treated as a standalone topic but as part of the larger tapestry of a Muslim's life. Whether addressing abstinence, marital intimacy, or sexual health challenges, the book invites readers to see their experiences through a holistic, soul-centered perspective that nurtures both their faith and well-being.

This multifaceted approach ensures that the book is not only a guide for personal growth but also a resource for building deeper connections—with oneself, with others, and ultimately, with Allah.

### **Approaches Used in the Book**

This book is grounded in a bottom-up approach, which means the soul is the starting point and guiding framework for understanding and addressing sexual health. In every chapter, the soul is the lens through which sexual

health is framed, emphasizing its connection to our ultimate purpose as Muslims: worshipping Allah and growing closer to Him. This perspective ensures that every aspect of sexual health—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—is explored holistically, aligning with Islamic teachings and the journey of the soul.

While this book prioritizes the bottom-up approach, it also acknowledges the continued relevance of top-down and equivalency approaches. Top-down methods, such as infusing Islamic perspectives into secular sexual health concepts, provide practical entry points for educators and professionals. Similarly, the equivalency approach, which draws parallels between Islamic values and contemporary frameworks, helps bridge gaps for Muslims navigating both Islamic and secular contexts. However, these methods alone often fall short of addressing the deeper spiritual needs of Muslims. By centering the soul, this book offers a more integrated, transformative approach that goes beyond surface-level solutions.

### The Soulful Structure of the Book: A Developmental Journey

This book is thoughtfully structured to guide readers through a developmental journey (i.e. from birth to death), with the soul as the foundation. Each chapter builds upon the one before, weaving together Islamic teachings, ethical principles, and spiritual practices. From foundational chapters that introduce soulful sexual health, to those addressing specific challenges like abstinence, marital intimacy, and parenting, the content reflects the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

You will see a timeline image at the beginning of each chapter to show the stage of the soul's journey that the chapter pertains to. As you read through the book, you will notice that the moon symbol will follow your journey through the soul's main developmental stages: Birth, Spiritual Accountability, Spiritual Maturity, Spiritual Legacy, and the Hereafter.

The book's structure also reflects a commitment to both practicality and reflection. Each chapter includes questions, strategies, and actionable steps alongside thought-provoking questions for personal growth. For professionals, the book offers a deeper understanding of how to integrate Islamic

## The Journey of the Soul



values into their work, making it a valuable resource for therapists, educators, and community leaders.

### **A Soulful Integration of Islamic Traditions and Teachings**

Throughout the book, Islamic theology, ethics, and spirituality are seamlessly woven into the content. Quranic verses, Prophetic traditions, and Islamic ethical principles serve as foundational elements, providing guidance and inspiration for navigating sexual health in a way that aligns with the teachings of Islam. For example, concepts like purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), compassion (*rahmah*), and self-accountability (*muhasabah*) are explored as essential values in developing a soulful relationship with one's sexual health. The book also addresses common misconceptions about Islam and sexual health, offering clarity on topics such as the permissibility of sexual pleasure within marriage and the spiritual significance of empowered abstinence. By grounding these discussions in Islamic teachings, the book affirms that sexual health is not separate from faith but an integral part of the Muslim's journey toward Allah.

This book ultimately bridges Islamic teachings with evidence-based practices, ensuring that its guidance is both spiritually resonant and scientifically sound. Drawing on contemporary research in sexual health, psychology, and medicine, the book provides readers with a well-rounded understanding of key topics, from sexual development to reproductive health. For example, scientific insights into sexual response are paired with Islamic perspectives on marital sexual intimacy. This integration reassures readers that Islam and science are not in conflict but can work together to promote holistic well-being. Professionals will find this approach invaluable for applying both faith-based and clinical knowledge in their work.

### **Soulful Elements of the Book**

This book is written with a gentle, compassionate tone, with the understanding that challenges related to sexual health are natural and deeply personal. The intention is not to judge or criticize but to offer soulful tools that foster healing, growth, and connection with Allah. Rather than striving for perfection, I invite you to see this journey as one of progress and discovery. Struggles with sexual health, like all areas of life, are opportunities to realign with our Creator and cultivate self-compassion.

As you read through the chapters, you will notice that “God” and “Allah” are used interchangeably to reflect the diverse language preferences of Muslim audiences. Additionally, Arabic terms such as *qalb* (heart) are sometimes introduced in Arabic first, followed by their English translation, while in other instances, the English term appears first. This variation

is intentional and aims to provide a balance between linguistic authenticity and accessibility for readers.

At the beginning of each chapter, you will find narratives that share personal and professional reflections on the chapter's topic. These narratives, presented in italics, offer a personal lens into the themes and ideas explored in the book, providing a deeper connection to the material and encouraging readers to reflect on their own experiences. Throughout a few chapters, you will also notice that case studies are presented, which have been created from a compilation of common issues arising within my therapy practice. The names used within the case studies were selected randomly.

Throughout the book, you will notice boxes that highlight several topics, including key definitions, myth busting, commonly asked questions, and nuanced considerations that are crucial for the topics being discussed. You will also notice images throughout the chapters, some of which encourage writing and reflecting to integrate the content. Tables are provided for key concepts, some of which have spaces for your own reflections. To deepen your connection with the material, I encourage you to actively engage with the reflections, prompts, and insights provided in each chapter. Consider journaling your thoughts, jotting down key takeaways, or discussing what resonates with a trusted friend, spouse, or family member. This reflective practice can help you uncover new insights and apply what you've learned to your own journey.

Wherever possible, take moments to pause and reflect. These pauses are not interruptions but opportunities for your heart and mind to process and grow.

To support readers in fully engaging with the content of this book, a Glossary of Terms and Additional Readings have been included. The glossary provides definitions of commonly used Arabic terms that appear throughout the book, ensuring that readers of all backgrounds can connect with and understand the concepts discussed. These terms reflect key Islamic teachings, rituals, and principles that are integral to the soulful sexual health framework presented here. The additional readings list offers a curated selection of books and online resources for those who wish to deepen their knowledge or explore specific topics in greater detail.

### **Considerations for Reading and Using the Book**

As you engage with this book, it's important to approach its content with openness and reflection. This work is not merely an informational manual but an invitation to embark on a deeply personal and spiritual journey, centering your connection to Allah and your own soul's development. Sexual health is often misunderstood or compartmentalized, yet it intersects with every dimension of our well-being—emotional, physical, and spiritual.

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Recognizing this interconnectedness is crucial for embracing the holistic approach presented here, including the following considerations.

### *Our Unique Destiny and Timeline*

Allah has a unique plan and timeline for every soul, making each journey distinct and incomparable to others. This understanding invites us to embrace compassion—not only toward ourselves but also toward others—reflecting a Prophetic virtue that fosters understanding and kindness in our interactions. While the chapters in this book are presented in a soulful developmental order, it is essential to *remember that life as a Muslim is rarely linear*. Marriage, for instance, can occur at any age, if it is destined for us, including during the later stages of life during our spiritual legacy years. Divorce, too, can occur at different points along our journey. Parenthood—whether through biological means or adoption—may occur at or after spiritual maturity or before.

Not all of us are destined to marry, stay married, marry once, marry when we're young, or raise children. These realities underscore the truth that there is no single timeline for the soulful life stages explored in this book. Each of our journeys reflects a unique and Divinely guided path, unfolding according to Allah's wisdom.

Furthermore, Allah has gifted each of us with a unique spiritual, emotional, physical, and sexual capacity. For example, many Muslims navigate mental health challenges or illnesses; acute and chronic physical conditions; and a variety of learning or neurodevelopmental needs. Readers are encouraged to keep their individual capacities in mind, understanding that Allah only expects from us what aligns with our God-given abilities. This perspective fosters self-compassion and helps us approach life's challenges with patience and gratitude, knowing that our path is uniquely tailored by the wisdom and mercy of Allah. This perspective encourages us to approach both ourselves and others with patience, compassion, and gratitude for the individualized nature of our spiritual journey.

### *Centering the Soul: Fitrah as Our Identity*

A key emphasis of this book is the centrality of the soul—your *fitrah*, the pure and innate nature created by Allah, which carries the capacity to turn toward Him, embody noble character, and return to a state of spiritual alignment and nearness. Regardless of individual circumstances, the soul's journey toward God in this life is a common theme uniting all Muslims. It is this shared foundation that forms the basis of this work, guiding the discussions and frameworks presented throughout.

This book is grounded in traditional Islamic texts and perspectives, and the language and examples reflect heteronormative contexts, aligning with the normative Muslim spaces where much of my professional experience has been rooted. While this focus underpins the frameworks presented, I also want to acknowledge the diversity within Muslim communities and the unique experiences of individuals that often remain unaddressed in public forums. For instance, some Muslims may experience same-sex attraction but choose not to act on or identify through these feelings, while others in same-sex relationships may seek soulful guidance to realign their lives with their religious values. Readers may find resonance with different aspects of this book depending on their personal, cultural, or spiritual contexts, as it aims to provide compassionate insights while remaining rooted in Islamic principles.

For those navigating conversations on LGBTQ+ topics, chapter 7 offers a section with soulful frameworks for parents and educators to approach these discussions compassionately and thoughtfully. Additionally, chapter 4 provides insights into empowered abstinence, framing it as an intentional, soulfully grounded practice. Together, these chapters aim to provide tools for fostering understanding within the spiritual framework of *fitrah* and the values of Islam, ensuring that the guidance shared remains rooted in compassion and relevance for all.

### *Navigating Sensitivities*

Some topics in this book may feel challenging or uncomfortable, especially for readers who have experienced trauma or carry cultural and personal stigmas around sexual health. Rather than avoiding discomfort, I invite you to engage with it in a way that fosters self-awareness and growth. When you feel activated or unsettled, pause. Place the book down, take deep breaths, and ground yourself in the present moment using your senses. This practice can help you reconnect with your body and emotions without judgment.

There's no rush to move through these chapters. Give yourself the time and space you need to process what arises. If you find certain sections particularly overwhelming, consider seeking the support of a trusted professional or someone who can hold space for your reflections. Remember, discomfort is often a sign of growth and approaching it with compassion and intentionality can lead to meaningful transformation.

Ultimately, this book is here to support you—not only in learning but in navigating your unique journey with soulful sexual health. Read it in a way that feels meaningful to you, trusting that your path will unfold as it's meant to.

## Your Journey Through the Book

This book is designed to meet you where you are and has been written for individuals (and couples!) at any stage of life who want to integrate faith, spirituality, and practical tools into their understanding of sexual health.

I encourage you to approach this book with a reflective heart and an open mind. Allow space for personal growth, connection, and, most importantly, compassion toward yourself. Sexual health is a deeply personal and often sensitive topic, but it's also an integral part of your spiritual and emotional well-being. As you read, you may find certain chapters resonate with your current stage of life or specific challenges. Some sections may feel particularly relevant now, while others might become more meaningful later.

This book is not meant to be rushed through; it's a companion for your journey. If a chapter stirs something within you, pause and take the time to reflect. Come back to it when you're ready. Revisit chapters as you move through different stages of life, as they are designed to grow with you.

While the chapters build upon one another in a developmental progression, this book is flexible enough to meet various needs. You can read it sequentially for a comprehensive understanding or dive into specific chapters based on your interests or circumstances.

- **Professionals:** Chapter 13 provides tools and insights for those supporting Muslim clients.
- **Parents:** Chapter 7 equips you with strategies for soulfully guiding your children's sexual health education.
- **Couples:** Chapters on marital intimacy (chapter 6) and the search for a spouse (chapter 5) offer practical and soulful perspectives.
- **Individuals:** Foundational chapters on sexual health (chapter 3), empowered abstinence (chapter 4), and overcoming challenges (chapters 10 and 11) provide guidance tailored to personal growth.

As you read, I encourage you to approach the book with an open heart and a willingness to explore your relationship with sexual health through the lens of Islam. Reflect on how the soulful frameworks presented here resonate with your personal journey and allow them to inspire growth in alignment with your values and connection to Allah.

Ultimately, this book is a companion for your journey—a resource to support you in understanding, reflecting on, and nurturing the sacred trust of your sexual health, inseparable from your spiritual self.

On this note, *Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Raheem* (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). Let's begin!

# 1 Contextualizing Islam and the Soul

*We cannot address soulful sexual health for Muslims without first starting with the foundations of the Islamic tradition. So often, I've seen religion and sexual health pulled apart and viewed as irreconcilable—or even worse, that religion has negative impacts on sexual health. While there are many reasons for this disconnect—both globally and within our families and communities—I in good faith cannot ignore Islamic contexts. Each workshop or conference presentation I've ever given—whether in Muslim or mainstream spaces—starts with a section on Islam. Whether we were born Muslim or converted to Islam later in life, we all need to unlearn and relearn about Islam to some degree. Some Muslims refer to this as “taking your shahadah” (i.e. testimony of faith) in adulthood, which is a conscious turning toward enhancing our knowledge about Islam to become closer to God. And since no aspect of life as a Muslim can be understood without a holistic framework of the soul, it is here that we start our soulful sexual health journey.*

## The Journey of the Soul



### Introduction

This chapter marks the official beginning of our journey into soulful sexual health for Muslims! The term “soulful” is intentional, as this chapter will

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explore how Islam and the frameworks of the soul are deeply intertwined. Yet, many Muslims—and non-Muslims—have varying degrees of exposure to accurate and holistic understandings of Islam. If you were to ask the average person about Islam, responses might range from mentions of rituals like fasting, prayer, or the pilgrimage to Mecca, to perceptions of Islam as a set of rules or restrictions. Discussions about Muslims often touch on God but rarely offer a comprehensive view of the spiritual depth that defines the Islamic tradition.

When it comes to the soul, many Muslims might associate it primarily with the Afterlife or link it vaguely to their spirituality and connection with God. However, these perspectives often lack the depth needed to fully integrate the soul into one's worldview—including sexual health. That's why this book exists: to bridge this gap and provide a holistic understanding of soulful sexual health considering Islamic teachings.

This chapter lays the foundation for what's to come. To explore sexual health from a soulful perspective, we must first understand the soul within the Islamic tradition. I invite you to use this chapter as an opportunity for deep self-reflection, which is something you'll be encouraged to do throughout this book. Many of us have been shaped by Islamic education framed in overly simplistic or fear-based narratives. Here, we'll begin the work of unlearning those limiting perspectives and replacing them with an integrative, soul-based understanding of Islam—especially as we address the shame and fear that often surround sexual health.

Let's start this journey by returning to the roots of Islam. Together, we'll explore a brief history of the religion, key historical developments that have shaped Muslim identity, and finally, the Islamic framework of the soul. Before we dive in, though, I invite you to pause and reflect: What do you already know about Islam, and how might this knowledge shape your journey ahead?

### **Reflection Questions**

What do you currently know about Islam's origins and its connection to other Abrahamic religions? How might this shape your understanding of Islam's place in the broader religious context?

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When you think about the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him), what aspects of his life and teachings come to mind? How do these perceptions influence your view of Islam as a faith and practice?

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Have you encountered any misconceptions or myths about Islam, either in your own learning or through societal narratives? How have these shaped your understanding of the faith?

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### **At the Beginning: Islam's Birth in the 7th Century**

Contrary to common perceptions, Islam is not an isolated or standalone religion. As the final Abrahamic tradition, it is deeply rooted in the legacy of the Prophet Abraham, following in the footsteps of Judaism and Christianity. These three faiths, collectively known as the Abrahamic religions, share far more in common than is often recognized. For the purposes of this chapter—and this book—our focus will remain on Islam.

Islam's origins trace back to the 7th century in the Arabian Peninsula, a region marked by tribal societies and polytheistic practices. The foundation of Islam was laid through the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him), who was born in Mecca around 570 CE into the respected Quraysh tribe. Known for his integrity and wisdom, the Prophet (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) earned the title al-Amin (The Trustworthy) among his people. At the age of 40, during one of his retreats in the Cave of Hira, he received the first revelation from the angel Gabriel. These revelations, continuing over 23 years, became the Quran, Islam's holy book. The central message was monotheism, justice, and moral uprightness, urging Meccans to abandon idolatry and embrace the worship of one God, Allah.

As the number of Muhammad's followers grew, so did resistance from Meccan leaders who viewed this new faith as a challenge to their social and economic systems, alongside their worship of idols. This opposition led to the pivotal event of the Hijra in 622 CE, when Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) and his followers migrated to Yathrib, later

renamed Medina. This migration marked the beginning of the Islamic calendar and the establishment of the first Islamic state. In Medina, Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) served as both spiritual and political leader, uniting diverse tribes under the principles of Islam. It was here that key Islamic practices, including the Five Pillars of Islam, took shape to guide Muslims in their faith and daily lives.

The spread of Islam during the Prophet's (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) lifetime involved peaceful propagation as well as defensive battles, particularly against the Quraysh of Mecca. After years of conflict and strategic alliances, Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) returned triumphantly to Mecca in 630 CE. The Kaaba, a cube-shaped structure in Mecca believed to have been built by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail as a house of monotheistic worship, was cleansed of its idols and reestablished as the central place of worship for Muslims. By the time of the Prophet's (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) passing in 632 CE, Islam had firmly taken root in the Arabian Peninsula, paving the way for its rapid expansion beyond. His successors, the caliphs, continued spreading Islam's teachings, profoundly shaping history and the lives of millions.

With this brief history of Islam in mind, I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on any myths or misconceptions about Islam you may have internalized. Use the box below as a guide for this reflection. This process of unlearning and relearning is central to the journey of this book and is needed to understand who Muslims are in the 21st century.

### **Myth Busting: Islam 101**

#### **Myth: Islam oppresses women.**

**Fact:** Islam granted women rights in the 7th century that were revolutionary for the time, including the right to own property, inherit wealth, seek education, and engage in business. The Quran emphasizes equality in spiritual and moral responsibility: "Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer—those will enter Paradise" (Quran 4:124). Cultural oppression often stems from patriarchal traditions, not Islamic teachings.

#### **Myth: Muslims worship a different God than Christians and Jews.**

**Fact:** Muslims worship the same monotheistic God of Abraham, referred to as Allah, meaning "God" in Arabic. Arab Christians also use the term "Allah." Islam honors previous revelations and highly respects prophets like Moses and Jesus (Peace be Upon Them).

**Myth: Islam is a religion of rules and restrictions.**

**Fact:** Islam is a balance of theology, ethics, and spirituality, a harmony explored in chapter 2. At its core, Islam encourages Muslims to trust and surrender to the Divine wisdom embedded in its rulings, transcending mere intellectual knowledge. It is not a religion of dogmatic rules and behaviors, but a way of life rooted in a journey toward God. Islam’s guidelines aim to foster a deep spiritual connection, inner peace, and societal harmony. Practices like prayer, fasting, and charity nurture mindfulness, gratitude, and empathy. These guidelines are not restrictions but pathways to a balanced and soulfully purposeful life, aligning believers with the Divine will while enabling them to navigate the world with clarity and fulfillment.

**Who Are Muslims in the 21st Century?**

When the term “Muslim” is mentioned, the stereotype of a light-skinned Arab often comes to mind. This misconception—fueled by popular media—fails to reflect the reality of Muslims as one of the most ethnically diverse religious groups in the world.

Globally, the Muslim population is expected to grow from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030, representing nearly 26% of the world’s population (Pew Research Center, 2011). Muslims live in every corner of the world, with 79 countries projected to have over a million Muslim inhabitants by 2030. While regions such as Europe and North America will see a growing share of this population, most Muslims remain in Asia and Africa, representing a wide array of ethnicities, cultures, and languages.

In addition to ethnic diversity, Muslims vary greatly in their practice of Islam. Popular media often categorizes Muslims into simplistic “conservative” or “progressive” monoliths, but their observance reflects a dynamic spectrum of personal and cultural interpretation. This diversity in practice mirrors the ways Islam spread globally from its birth in the 7th century. It also hints at how Muslims today engage with—or remain unaware of—holistic Islamic perspectives on the soul.

Despite these differences, a unifying thread among Muslims is their relationship with God. At its core, Islam is about striving to submit to God’s will and preparing for the eternal life of the Hereafter. Submission is symbolized in the daily obligatory prayers, where Muslims bow their foreheads—home to the complex frontal lobe of the brain—to the ground

in humility. This act embodies the choice that defines humanity: the free will to follow God's commandments and actively strive to refine the soul.

For Muslims, life is a Divine gift accompanied by responsibilities, including the call to actualize their spiritual potential. This requires continuous effort to work on the soul, moving beyond the “what” of faith to understanding the deeper “why” and “how.” Yet, many Muslims lack awareness of Islam's deeper soul-based frameworks, a gap that is often rooted in and shaped by historical forces like colonization, which reshaped Islamic education and practice worldwide. It is to this critical topic of colonization and its impact on Muslims' understanding of Islam that we now turn.

### Colonization's Impact on the Soulful Islamic Tradition

Many Muslims today have limited exposure to Islam's soul-centered traditions, a gap shaped significantly by colonization. Colonization systematically dominated Muslim societies, introducing foreign frameworks that disrupted authentic Islamic spiritual traditions. This process fostered rigid, patriarchal interpretations of Islam, often prioritizing cultural or societal/secular norms over the religion's inherently compassionate principles, especially in matters of sexual health and relationships.

Historically, Islam provided holistic guidance on sexuality, encouraging open, respectful discussions. For example, *hadiths* narrate the Prophet Muhammad's (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) advice on intimacy, emphasizing compassion and foreplay in marital relations. For instance, he advised, “One of you should not fulfill one's [sexual] need from one's wife like an animal; rather, there should be between them foreplay of kissing and words” (Musnad al-Firdaws, 2/55). Yet, colonization shifted this openness to silence, rendering sex a taboo subject in many Muslim communities.

Medieval Christian views, contrasting with Islam's sex-positive stance, labeled Islamic teachings as “barbaric.” Thinkers like St. Augustine framed sexual pleasure as sinful, shaping Western societies and influencing colonized Muslim regions. The Enlightenment further marginalized spirituality, fragmenting the integration of the mind, body, and soul—hallmarks of Islamic traditions. Colonization deepened this fragmentation, with pivotal moments such as the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt and the fall of the Ottoman Empire leading to European domination of Muslim lands.

Islamic leaders and civilizations responded in three ways:

1. **Returning to Fundamentals:** The rise of Salafiyya movements emphasized a return to the practices of the early Muslim community, advocating for strict interpretations of Islamic texts. This approach often led to the implementation of legalistic measures, including mandatory dress codes and restrictions on women's mobility (Khan, 2019).