

QA young sister has asked: Where does it say in the Qur'an/hadith that tattoos/piercings are unIslamic?

ABismillaahi walhamdulillaahi wassalaatu wassalaamu 'alaa rasoolillaahi

Let us first clarify one basic point: The Qur-aan is the Book of guidance to help people achieve the goals that Allaah SWT has set for them. It is not a comprehensive and exhaustive compilation of rules regarding do's and don'ts.

The Qur-aan enunciates the goals people should strive to achieve and provides values and principles which guide people to make the right decisions and choices to achieve those goals. It only gives the pronouncements on major issues where even a little deviation may cause significant problems in the society, defeat the goals Islam wants to achieve and about which human beings, if not specifically guided, usually tend to make the wrong decisions.

To provide further guidance in making the right decisions that will lead to the attainment of the Islamic objectives in accordance of the values and principles given by the Qur-aan, Allaah SWT sent a Messenger to practically demonstrate how to attain those objectives, live by those values and apply those principles to practical situations in life. For that purpose, Allaah revealed to him and equipped him with Wisdom to enable him to do these things in the best manner. Thus the Sunnah of the Prophet provides more details, practical guidance and insight into what is appropriate behaviour and what is not. The provisions of both the Qur-aan and Sunnah are supreme in that they take precedence over any and every opinion that deviates from them, whether it is your own or that of any other human being.

Muslims must make all decisions in life, and set their priorities by aligning them to the Islamic goals Allaah has set for us, in accordance with the values and principles the Qur-aan has taught and the practices (Sunnah) of the Prophet. To be able to do so, naturally, every Muslim must have a clear understanding of the Islamic goals, principles and values enunciated by the Qur-aan as well as the capability to understand and capture the wisdom of the Sunnah. Taken together, the whole package of understanding is called "understanding of deen" or "Tafaquh fiddeen". Some Muslims specialized in this understanding and compiled detailed pronouncements of do's and don'ts to guide average Muslims who may not have full understanding of the deen. Those compilations are called Fiqh (understanding).

So, the answer to your question, or any other question that comes to your mind about what is right and what is wrong, may come from any one or all of the Qur-aan, the Sunnah and the Fiqh – unless you have already mastered the understanding of the goals, principles and values given by the Qur-aan and their practical applications in the Sunnah, and hence can make your own decisions on their basis.

Needless to say that, if not the whole package, every Muslim must at least have a clear

understanding of the goals, values and principle enunciated by the Qur-aan for us. If we do not know what our goal is, what is the probability of us reaching it?

If you do not have a clear picture or vision in your mind about your Islamic goals, you should start by reading my book "Adopting Islamic Paradigms".

One of the goals Islam has mandated for us is personal excellence -- a Muslim must be the best in morals, ethics, words, manners, dealings and interactions. One of the principles the Qur-aan emphasizes is to practice Ma'roof (what is considered to be respectable, decent and noble) and to stay away from Munkar (what is considered to be undesirable, bad or indecent). **A principle we learn from Sunnah is that the physical body must be respected, appreciated and maintained as given to us, not manipulated, disfigured, re-configured or tampered with for any reasons other than health.**

Another principle we learn from Sunnah is that clothes, appearance and fashion must clearly distinguish males and females from each other. They should not dress or appear like each other. For that reason, males are not allowed certain things; jewellery being one of them; except for one silver ring such as a wedding band.

The discussion so far was from a general perspective. Living in a society, we cannot make decisions in isolation of our loved ones. Children (irrespective of their age) must respect the preferences and views of their parents, unless the parent's opinion or preference is in violation of the Qur-aan and Sunnah. Similarly, views and preferences of the spouses must be respected. This deference to parents and spouses becomes more important in matters of appearance and fashion. People pay attention to appearance and fashion only for the sake of others – to look "cool", nice or appealing to them. Who of these "others" can be more important than your parents, spouse and family?

So far, I have answered your question in general terms. This is to enable you to make your own decisions not only on this issue but other issues that you may face. To answer your question specifically, here are a few points:

Neither tattooing nor body piercing are in line with our goal of excellence in conduct;

The Prophet has specifically decreed against tattooing.

Body piercing, as currently practised, is Munkar, not Ma'roof. Just look at the kind of people who indulge in it.

For girls, minimal piercing like ear and nose will be acceptable. But even while considering this minimal piercing, the Islamic principles of maintaining the body as given, principle of cleanliness and purity (tahaarah) and principle of hayaa (modesty) must be observed; parents' and spouse's opinion must be respected. Another important thing to remember is that one should not make a decision about their body that may not be easily reversible and that they may regret in future.

I hope these comments help you in making the right decisions about your body and

appearances.

Wassalaam,
Ayub Hamid
Oct 1, 2004