

Part 3: Healing Our Bodies (Continued)

Most women are highly concerned about the way they look, and most are dissatisfied with what they see in the mirror. They desire to be thin and then even thinner, with a perfectly toned body and no sagging skin. They want fair, glowing skin with no facial hair, wrinkles, spots or blemishes. They dream of big eyes and long, flowing hair that bounces when they walk. They want to look 20 when they are 40, and like the perfectly manicured models in digitally-filtered advertisements, while themselves struggling to meet the demands of their young families and fulfilling tedious household responsibilities.

The root of this concern is that **women continue to be valued for their outer appearances more than what is inside them**, perhaps now more than ever before. The color of their skin and their dress size is given greater importance than their intellectual capabilities, individual talents and skills, their spirituality and piety, their kindness and generosity, their hard work and achievements. This concern has turned into an **obsession in the ages of selfies**, where many women are frequently taking and analysing closeups of themselves, and **in the age of social media**, where they are able to compare their pictures with those put up by others.

How is this harmful for us?

This obsession with physical appearance, and the external and internal pressure to conform to unachievable standards, compromises women's physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being in many ways:

- **Low self-esteem and inferiority complex**, as women feel inadequate and inferior in comparison with others because of what they perceive as physical imperfections, regardless of their other qualities or achievements.
- **Lack of confidence**, resulting from this low-self esteem and inferiority complex.
- **Insecurity**, as unmarried women fear that they will never get married because they are not beautiful enough, and married women live in constant fear that their husbands will be attracted to other women, and may even abandon them.
- **Stress**, resulting from this fear, and from worrying about the way they look.
- **Ungratefulness**, as what they lack in terms of looks seems to outweigh the other innumerable blessings in their lives.
- **Jealousy**, towards those who they consider better-looking or don't have weight issues.

- **Abandoning what is truly important**, as women focus on looking good at the expense of studies, pursuing interests, advancing spiritually, or fulfilling responsibilities.
- **Wastage of time**, spent in taking and analysing selfies, applying makeup and styling hair, then taking more selfies and applying filters to them and putting them up for others to admire, then checking back frequently for likes and comments! Also in browsing through social media, and the Internet for information on how to improve their appearance.
- **Wastage of money**, on expensive cosmetics and skin and hair care products, laser, botox and other costly treatments, or weight-loss aids and packages.
- **Physical harm**, caused by chemical-laden cosmetics and skin and hair products, artificial weight-loss aids, or invasive beauty-enhancing treatments. Also, women weaken themselves physically, create all kinds of hormone imbalances in their bodies, and lay the foundations of serious health problems by following fad diets and uninformed dieting.
- **Frustration and hopelessness**, as their efforts do not yield the results they had hoped for, or had been promised to them.
- **Depression**, which may even result in suicidal thoughts for some women.

How do we break this self-destructive cycle?

- **Understand that perfection lies with Allah ﷻ alone.** We are humans who were created imperfect and will remain imperfect, and we must accept our imperfections because that is the way Allah ﷻ created us.
- **Remember that what is truly important** is how we end up in the Hereafter, and physical appearances are of no value there, for the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah ﷻ does not look at your appearances nor your wealth, but rather He looks at your hearts and your deeds.”
- **Know that looking good does not guarantee happiness**, for there are many beautiful people who are miserable inside. We need to focus on real sources of happiness and satisfaction, and if our appearance is making us unhappy, we need to change our perceptions rather than obsess about changing the way we look.
- **Look at those less fortunate than yourself**, for no matter how bad your acne, you are more fortunate than one who cannot see, and she still more fortunate than the one who lies in the hospital, dying of cancer.
- **Fix your intentions** behind making changes in your physical appearance. Being a healthy weight is surely recommended for optimum productivity, but not to impress others and get compliments. The right intentions can prevent us from overdoing our efforts, and can in fact make them a means of reward for us in the Hereafter.
- **Know that our efforts to look better can actually have the opposite effect**, e.g. the use of harsh chemicals on our skin, or drastic diets. Even stress and depression result in hormonal imbalances that result in weight gain and cause acne etc. On the other hand, if we are eating, drinking, and sleeping well, and are physically active and relaxed (as discussed in our last post), our internal health will reflect on our skin, and losing excess weight will be a pleasant side effect of living a holistically healthy lifestyle. **Our focus must be on *being healthy*, and looking good will follow naturally.**