

ALI047b - Family Life in Islam

Article 6

Emotional Maturity

A veteran school teacher was certain she would get the upcoming **promotion** to Vice-Principal since she had greater seniority than the other teachers. When the appointment went to a teacher with less experience she was outraged. *"How can you do this to me. I've been teaching school for **twenty** years"* she lamented to the School Board Chairman. With gentle wisdom he responded, *"Dear lady, you haven't been teaching twenty years. You've taught **one** year twenty times."*

Does your maturity match your chronological age? Do you grow a little wiser, a little more mature each year of your life? Or have you just lived one year that many times? To find out if you're growing up or just getting older consider the following measurements of age.

MEASUREMENTS OF AGE

1. Chronological Age

Chronological age is a measurement of the time a person has lived---his or her age in years.

2. Physiological Age

Physiological age refers to the degree to which systems of the body have developed relative to chronological age.

3. Intellectual Age

Intellectual age refers to whether a person's intelligence is below, above, or equal to his chronological age.

4. Social Age

Social age compares social development with chronological age. It asks the question; *"Does this person relate as well socially as he should for his age?"*

5. Emotional Age

Emotional, like social age, compares emotional maturity with chronological age. It asks the question; *"Does this person handle his emotions as well as he should for his age?"*

We have no control over chronological age, and only minimal control over intellectual and physiological age; however, we can choose our social and emotional age. Social and emotional retardation can be remedied with effort. Learning appropriate social skills and developing emotional maturity are choices afforded to every person.

A person may be chronologically mature, but emotionally immature. A person may also be intellectually mature, but emotionally immature. There is no correlation between chronological age, intellectual age, social age, or emotional age. Just because someone is "grown-up" by chronological age doesn't mean they are "grown-up" emotionally.

Chronological maturity and intellectual maturity combined with emotional immaturity is not uncommon and potentially dangerous. A person whose body and mind is adult, but whose emotional development is that of a child can wreak havoc in the lives of others as well as himself.

Your relationships are dependent upon your total emotional development. The best way to understand your relationships is to understand yourself. The single most important task for any person wishing to improve his relationships is to increase his self-esteem and emotional maturity.

A relationship is only as well-adjusted as the two participants. To determine the level of your emotional maturity compare your behavior to the symptoms of emotional immaturity and the characteristics of emotional maturity.

SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONAL IMMATURITY

1. Volatile Emotions

Emotional volatility is indicated by such things as explosive behavior, temper tantrums, low frustration tolerance, responses out of proportion to cause, oversensitivity, inability to take criticism, unreasonable jealousy, unwillingness to forgive, and a capricious fluctuation of moods.

2. Over-Dependence

Healthy human development proceeds from dependence (I need you), to independence (I don't need anyone), to interdependence (we need each other). Over-dependence is indicated by; a) *inappropriate dependence*, e.g. relying on someone when it is preferable to be self-reliant, and b) *too great a degree of dependence for too long*. This includes being too easily influenced, indecisive, and prone to snap judgments. Overly-dependent people fear change preferring accustomed situations and behavior to the uncertainty of change and the challenge of adjustment. Extreme conservatism may even be a symptom.

3. Stimulation Hunger

This includes demanding immediate attention or gratification and being unable to wait for anything. Stimulation hungry people are incapable of deferred gratification, which means putting off present desires in order to gain a future reward. Stimulation hungry people are superficial and live thoughtlessly and impulsively. Their personal loyalty lasts only as long as the usefulness of the relationship. They have superficial values and are too concerned with trivia (their appearance, etc.). Their social and financial lives are chaotic.

4. Egocentricity

Egocentricity is self-centeredness. Its major manifestation is selfishness. It is associated with low self-esteem. Self-centered people have no regard for others, but they also have only slight regard for themselves. An egocentric person is preoccupied with his own feelings and symptoms. He demands constant attention and insists on self-gratifying sympathy, fishes for compliments, and makes unreasonable demands. He is typically overly-competitive, a poor loser, perfectionistic, and refuses to play or work if he can't have his own way.

A self-centered person does not see himself realistically, does not take responsibility for his own mistakes or deficiencies, is unable to constructively criticize himself, and is insensitive to the feelings of others. Only emotionally mature people can experience true empathy, and empathy is a prime requirement for successful relationships.

Are you emotionally mature?

CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONAL MATURITY

1. The Ability to Give and Receive Love

Emotional maturity fosters a sense of security which permits vulnerability. A mature person can show his vulnerability by expressing love and accepting expressions of love from those who love him. An immature person is unduly concerned with signs of "weakness" and has difficulty showing and accepting love. The egocentricity of immaturity will allow the acceptance of love, but fails to recognize the needs of others to receive love. They'll take it, but they won't give it.

2. The Ability to Face Reality and Deal with it

The immature avoid facing reality. Overdue bills, interpersonal problems, indeed any difficulties which demand character and integrity are avoided and even denied by the immature. Mature people eagerly face reality knowing the quickest way to solve a problem is to deal with it promptly. A person's level of maturity can be directly related to the degree to which they *face* their problems, or *avoid* their problems. Mature people confront their problems, immature people avoid their problems.

3. Just as Interested in Giving as Receiving

A mature person's sense of personal security permits him to consider the needs of others and give from his personal resources, whether money, time, or effort, to enhance the quality of life of those he loves. They are also able to allow others to give to them. Balance and maturity go hand in hand. Immaturity is indicated by being willing to give, but unwilling to receive; or willing to receive, but unwilling to give.

4. The Capacity to Relate Positively to Life Experiences

A mature person views life experiences as learning experiences and when they are positive he enjoys and revels in life. When they are negative he accepts personal responsibility and is confident he can learn from them to improve his life. When things do not go well he looks for an opportunity to succeed. The immature person curses the rain while a mature person sells umbrellas.

5. The Ability to Learn from Experience

The ability to face reality and to relate positively to life experiences derive from the ability to learn from experience. Immature people do not learn from experience, whether the experience is positive or negative. They act as if there is no relationship between how they act and the consequences that occur to them. They view good or bad experiences as being caused by luck, or fate. They do not accept personal responsibility.

6. The Ability to Accept Frustration

When things don't go as anticipated the immature person stamps his feet, holds his breath, and bemoans his fate. The mature person considers using another approach or going another direction and moves on with his life.

7. The Ability to Handle Hostility Constructively

When frustrated, the immature person looks for someone to blame. The mature person looks for a solution. Immature people attack people; mature people attack problems. The mature person uses his anger as an energy source and, when frustrated, redoubles his efforts to find solutions to his problems.

8. Relative Freedom from Tension Symptoms

Immature people feel unloved, avoid reality, are pessimistic about life, get angry easily, attack the people closest to them when frustrated --- no wonder they are constantly anxious. The mature person's mature approach to life imbues him with a relaxed confidence in his ability to get what he wants from life.

TO GROW MORE EMOTIONALLY MATURE...

Work on self-understanding and self-acceptance. Seek insight by asking significant others to provide candid feedback about your behavior. Then be objective---see yourself as others see you. Avoid defensiveness, it will prevent you from being the best you you are capable of being. Face reality and deal with it, don't avoid it.

Practice unselfish behavior. Actually experiment with it and notice how it feels and how others react to you. Compare the difference with how others react to your selfishness. You'll prefer unselfishness. It might even be said that giving to others is "altruistic selfishness" because the person who gives is benefited more than the person who receives.

Do not dominate others. Cooperate with others and seek "win-win" solutions to conflicts. If a solution to a problem isn't good for both parties to the relationship it won't be good for the relationship. In a successful relationship neither partner can be a winner if both aren't winners. Only the relationship should be the winner.

Be willing to change your social contacts. Avoid people and situations which bring out the worst in you. Instead, expose yourself to people and situations which bring out the best in you.

Finally,

Search for a meaning in life which is bigger than you. It should give you a perspective of the majestic scope of life, not the narrow and limiting perspective of mere self-interest. It should provide goals for you to strive for; for in struggle we build the "character muscles" that give us inner strength and make life meaningful. The ultimate test of your sense of meaning of life is this: does it enhance and enrich, not only your life, but the lives of others? If it does, you'll find a rich satisfaction, available only to the emotionally mature.