

Coming In and Out of the Closet



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From The Body

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I knew it was coming: writing about sexuality and LGBT issues. I'd tried to avoid it, addressing this issue in all my previous blogs in the most subtle way ... but finally it was time for Olivia Ford from TheBody.com to ask me if I wanted to write about gay pride. Ouch!

I wrote the first draft but it was nothing more than baffling and made no sense. I was trying to find the words to address what I mistakenly saw as a contradiction to my culture. The question was: How could I defend the LGBT pride without attacking my culture, as if the two seemed in definite quarrel? The result was a blog that could be found only in the memoirs of the Duck.

Part of my will to escape this topic was due to my inability to compromise the spiritual approach that I am trying to give to my brothers and sisters who are suffering from HIV and the case for LGBT pride. I struggled on how to reconcile both issues, and finally came the sign. A CNN story about James Zwerg, and how his parents [rejected him when he decided to join the Civil Rights Movement](#), yet they were the ones who planted in him the seeds for defending the rights of other humans. All the principles and values they taught him were behind his struggle ... yet, they rejected them when they were applied in a way they did not see as applicable. Such an interesting contradiction -- the same source for light is the source for the dark moments.

I identified with Zwerg a lot. The story touched me. I concluded that the general rule of defending all humans regardless of their differences should supersede any historical interpretations to texts that harshly appose the LGBT cause. So here, I am trying to address the issue associated closely with HIV: being gay.

I strongly believe that there are different layers to this issue that vary dramatically in nature and consequences -- homophobia, gay pride and coming out.

Starting with myself, I could be seen by many as a homophobic person. In spite of the fact that my views as to what a gay person could be in society have changed a lot, I still have a problem getting close to gay people. I do not feel comfortable passing by a gay sign or getting involved in gay issues. Is this a clear case of internalized homophobia? The answer is "No" ... this is me trying to avoid getting close to my HIV.

My fear that being openly gay would lead to the conclusion that I am HIV positive -- which is true -- made me distance myself from the gay community in daily life. The fear that once I could be identified as gay, other consequences would follow: Another gay man might show his interest in me and once the moment comes and I disclose my status I get rejection. This is why a homophobic attitude represents an escape strategy for me. You can root this homophobia in a deeper reasoning and motivation and you will see a whole different picture that is related to phobia not of homosexuality, but rather of the stigmatization of HIV that comes as a ready package with homosexuality, marketed efficiently by most societies.

On the other hand, within the circles in which I feel safe enough to reveal my insides, I often have to answer the question: What is it like to be gay in the Middle East? This question -- for me -- is a very simplistic approach to LGBT issues in my region. In fact, it includes latent prejudice that Muslim societies are backwards, when the reality is that LGBT people were historically part of the Muslim civilization. Maybe in the current time the homophobic theme is predominant, but this is due to much more complex reasons.

I hope no one thinks that I am trying to make light of the plight of gay people in specific Muslim countries, who are facing human tragedy due to systematic governmental targeting. I am addressing the civilization's complexion when it comes to the issue of LGBT identity.

Back to my personal issues with sexuality. ... It is an ongoing battle for me to try to stop using the obnoxious tool of homophobia as my safety buffer to keep gay people away. I can see that I am better now. However, many would argue that I need to follow this phase with a coming-out and gay-pride phase if I want to prove my sincerity. Here I strongly object! I believe that I can make the case that gay pride should not be an essential factor in the process. I can accept gayness as nothing less than being straight; however, I do not see why I should see it as more. I do not think I need to wear a pink thong and wave rainbow flags in the gay parade to be at the status of normal and stable mentality. My wish is to be 100 percent honest when I say that I see a person who is gay as just as different as someone who has green eyes.

Gay pride is often associated with making it public. Coming out of the closet seems to be the measure to how stable the person is by stating that he's reached self acceptance. In fact, LGBT persons who live in Muslim communities are doing relatively well mentally, even though some of them are still "in the closet." Interestingly, they have decided another route: to not come out but rather [invite people they trust into their closet](#). It's the "coming in the closet" option -- they decide with whom to share this special thing. They will ask you to explore the secrets inside this closet once they trust you.

Their choice should not be seen as less than the choice to come out of the closet by any means. This smart choice is their way of compromising their wish to preserve their societal values, and yet to practice a normal human behavior of sharing. One must applaud this smart maneuver.

Huge difference lies between staying in a locked closet where no air, no feelings and no emotions can circulate (which makes this closet toxic) and a closet that is big enough even to allow people inside next to the person -- a safe, protected closet. In my case, to fit the elephant of HIV into this tiny closet, I had to replace it with a goat. I am working slowly on replacing the goat with a cute little bunny that makes those who come in my closet want to hold it and play with it with happiness.

You guys are already in my closet. :)

Salam

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