



Have you ever taken note of a drug addict's behaviour and the signs of his addiction? *Bloodshot eyes... Poor sleep pattern and appetite... Irritability and fidgetiness... Depression and weight loss... Being 'completely zoned out'... Items or cash 'disappearing' (stolen) in their vicinity... These are just some of the typical signs.*

Now, think of a gamer hooked onto their PC, Xbox or PlayStation. *Do they not appear to be 'zoned out' and oblivious of their surroundings, spending hours and hours immersed in their fantasy world, leading them to become sleep deprived? Do their eyes not become bloodshot (from staring at the screen for extended periods)? Do they not become irritable and susceptible to mood swings? In many cases, does money not 'disappear' (where children 'borrow' their parents' credit cards for in-game purchases)?*

*It's quite uncanny really, just how similar the signs are, and just as a drug addiction can consume and kill a person, a gaming addiction can do the same – as seen in the incident below:*

Piyawat Harikun spent several nights playing multiplayer battle games at his home in Thailand when it finally took a toll on him. His father entered his bedroom, only to find that he had collapsed and was dead. Medics believe that playing through the night had caused a fatal stroke. His father mentioned, *"I want my son's death to be an example and warning for parents whose children are game*

*addicts... otherwise they could end up like my son."*

Incidents of gamers dying for their addiction are becoming more and more common. However, it's not only the amount of time gaming that affects a person. Rather, the type of game also has a radical effect.

When a person plays a game, he loses himself in a fantasy world where there are no real-world consequences, and the deeper he immerses himself in that fantasy world, the more he loses touch with reality. *Games teach us that life is not just cheap – it's free, as a simple 'restart' reverses your fatal error.* In fact, killing, with visual bloodshed and graphic, gory details, is often the highlight and purpose in a game, *leading the gamer to lose his sense of empathy and value for human life.* After spending days, weeks and months immersed in this world, the gamer is left desensitized, with the definitive lines between right and wrong, and imagination and reality, completely blurred. To understand the consequence of this, consider the following:

- Adam Lanza massacred 27 people. *He first shot his mother, and then drove to a school where he butchered 20 children and 6 adults.* Lanza spent most of his time playing games such as Call of Duty and Gears of War. Apparently, Adam racked up 83,000 kills online, with 22,000 being head shots.
- Devin Moore murdered three police-

men and is believed to have been inspired by the game Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. After his arrest, he made statements such as, *"Life is a video game. You've gotta die sometime."*

- Tyrone Spellman, a 27-year-old man, was playing on his Xbox when his 1-year-old daughter accidentally pulled down the console. *He flew into a fit of rage and beat her on the head five times, resulting in her death.*

These are just three examples of the extent to which games and their addiction can completely corrupt a person's mind, *prompting him to lose the value of life and even stoop to killing his own parents or child.* Furthermore, these are not isolated incidents, as many similar cases have been recorded worldwide. *In essence, gaming is one form of 'digital addiction' which reduces a person to a 'cyber zombie'.* However, as harmful and detrimental as gaming may be, for a person's spiritual, physical and even emotional wellbeing, *it is NOT the only form of digital addiction.*

According to statistics, the average person spends a minimum of 2 hours a day on social media. The general addiction to the smart phone is such that a battery dying or losing reception causes 73% of people to suffer stress and anxiety. This has led to the recognition of a new condition known as 'nomophobia' (no-mobile-phobia). *However, just like drugs and gaming, social media addiction consumes a person and actually increases depression and misery*

Through repeatedly viewing people's 'picture-perfect' lives, one develops FOMO (fear of missing out). When one views his own 'unremarkable' and mediocre life in comparison, **he fails to appreciate the countless bounties he enjoys and falls into depression, feeling that he is missing out and his life just isn't good enough.** Hence, a study by the University of Pennsylvania discovered that decreasing social media usage actually decreases depression and loneliness. **In other words, if you want to be happy, GET OFF SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't, you or your child could end up like Ruby Seal...

Ruby Seal was a 15-year-old girl addicted to Snapchat, spending 8 hours a day on her phone. Eventually, she committed suicide due to depression. Her mother mentioned, "Social media was like a drug to Ruby – she was addicted. The more obsessed she became, the less she engaged with real life. She became withdrawn and isolated on it, always in her room, looking for likes, responses and answers to her problems on her phone from people who could not give them. **It was a place for her to hide from reality while also seeking validation from her peers. It overrode everything else.**"

From this testimony (which is undoubtedly echoed by millions of mothers and others), it is clear that through social media keeping people perpetually connected with the entire world, **they have lost the simple ability to connect with those around them. They are on social media, yet anti-social.** Thus, Facebook's former vice president for user growth said, "I feel tremendous guilt... I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works." It is for this reason that he does not allow his own children to use Facebook, and likewise, the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook (who has no children), does not allow his nephew to use social networks.

If gaming and social media are two major culprits responsible for digital addiction, which is subtly destroying lives, **then movies and show series are no less addictive.** How many people start browsing YouTube videos, and before they know it, a whole hour or more has passed? **How many people watch an episode of their favourite series, but can't stop at one episode** (as the cliff hanger ending leaves them craving more), and so continue

watching until its way past their bed time? **How many people are self-professed addicts of binge-watching Bollywood movies?**

We must realize and understand that this is NOT a 'harmless hobby'. **It is an addiction and obsession that produces similar harms and ill-effects to gaming and drugs.** One may be in his home, but the screen transports him to places in which he would never set foot – such as a church, temple and casino. He 'passively participates' in actions he would never normally contemplate such as murder, rape, drug-ging, partying, hijacking, etc. **Even worse is the fact that these vile evils are glorified and made to seem attractive on the screen.** Obviously, repeated exposure to such filth must certainly corrupt a person's mind! **Hence, there are multitudes of cases where people were inspired by a movie or show series to**



**crimes, acts of violence and even murders.** Just one example is that of 20-year-old Brittney Jade Dwyer who murdered her own grandfather, 81-year-old Robert Whitwell, by stabbing him in the chest and neck. Her motivation for this heartless murder was a TV series known as "American Horror Story".

Finally, novels, blogs and other mediums of literature are also substances of addiction. With some people spending hours reading on a daily basis, the sheer amount that is read and the frequency with which it is read completely influences and reshapes the mind. In fact, reading is such a powerful tool that it can take just one book or article to completely corrupt a person. One well known example of this is the book 'Catcher in the Rye' (which was or still is included in the school syllabus). It has inspired the murder of at least three

people and the attempted murder of a fourth. In one case, the perpetrator was even carrying the book at the time of the murder!

Another famous example is that of a 41-year-old woman who **demanding a divorce after her husband refused to re-enact scenes from the infamous and filthy Fifty Shades novels with her.** To state it plainly – the books had possessed her to the point where she was determined to terminate her marriage to indulge in perverted behaviour!

As we can see, addiction to gaming, videos, social media and novels/literature is extremely detrimental to a person's physical, social, mental and emotional wellbeing. **However, when it is said that every person is 'addicted' to something, then what should we be 'addicted' to? The answer – we need to become addicted to the love of Allah Ta'ala.**

It was 'addiction' to His love that caused the Sahaabah (radhiyallahu 'anhum) to remain awake the entire night, finding 'ecstasy' in his worship. It was this same 'addiction' that caused them to spend all their money in the path of Allah Ta'ala. It was this same 'addiction' which made their eyes bloodshot, as they cried to Him in du'aa. It was the very same 'addiction' that caused them to be oblivious of their surroundings as they performed salaah. It was also this 'addiction' that caused their bodies to become thin as they continued to fast, day after day, and caused them to fall into sadness when they displeased Allah Ta'ala.

**Their bloodshot eyes, sleepless nights, thin bodies, sadness, spending money and every other action was also due to being consumed by an 'addiction' – the addiction of Allah Ta'ala's love.** When a person shuns sins, exerts himself in righteousness and calls out to Allah Ta'ala in du'aa, then Allah Ta'ala allows him to taste the true sweetness of His love which is more 'addictive' than any substance, hobby or obsession. **However, this 'addiction' is such that it bears no ill-repercussions, but rather takes one on a journey of ecstasy to Jannah.**

*May Allah Ta'ala make us all addicts of His divine love, aameen.*



Have you ever heard of 'love at first sight?' Have you ever wondered whether there is actually such a thing?

Well, let me tell you my story, and then you can decide for yourself!

When I was in high school, I was like most other girls – primarily interested in fashion and friends, and perpetually glued to my phone. But, as many boys as I may have chatted to, I never really 'fell in love' or dated any of them. I may have had the freedom of a phone, but I never had the freedom of going out of the house unsupervised, so obviously... a boyfriend was out of the question.

All that changed when I went to university. I was now away from family in another city, living in a flat with a friend and enjoying a newfound freedom that quite frankly felt refreshing. Being the 'dutiful' daughter that I was, I phoned home and checked in with my parents most nights, but I never told them where I was going, who I was hanging out with or what I was up to.

Anyway, let's cut to the chase. One night, when I was at a friend's house for a braai, HE walked in – the one who would become my significant other, my heartthrob, the flame of my life. In stereotypical fashion (imagine it in slow-mo if you want), our eyes met across the crowded room, and time itself seemed to come to a standstill, so that it was only the two of us that existed in that magical moment.

That was my moment of 'love at first sight', and though I didn't know, it was the beginning of a lifelong journey. We met, chatted, flirted, exchanged numbers, and soon enough, we were an item. Day by day and night by night, I fell deeper and deeper in love, until I was so deep that I was drowning. At this point, you become so infatuated with the object of your love that you can't even imagine a world in which they don't exist.

Our love, however, was not to be without its challenges. I came from a relatively conservative, traditional home. Ok, I admit that my parents had certain un-Islamic ideas, like sending me to study, even though they were sitting on millions and I would never have needed to earn a living. But, by-and-large, my family was a respectable one that had never been plagued by a

serious scandal before. Until I came along...

You see, the boy I had so 'inconsiderately' chosen to fall in love with didn't match my family's idea of the ideal boy for me. In fact, he wasn't even deemed acceptable, and he may as well have been a serial-killer or mass-murderer for all they cared (they certainly treated him as such anyway)! They didn't approve of his dressing, the way he spoke, the family he came from, the car he drove or his choice of career. In fact, they were so hostile and negative that they found fault with EVERYTHING to do with him, even absurdly managing to fault his phone number!

"All 'serious' Muslims have 786 numbers, you know," my dad pronounced proudly, as if this 'achievement' was somehow a sign of saintliness. "But your boy, his number ends in 5462616!" he declared, as if pronouncing a guilty verdict. "So... What's wrong with his number?" I asked, fighting the urge to roll my eyes. "It has three sixes in it! Everyone knows that 666 is the number of Satanists!" dad concluded.

You get the picture don't you? To say that I was fighting an uphill battle in trying to marry this boy would be an understatement. The reality is that I had lost the battle before it even started – I lost it when I fell in love.

My dad once berated and chastised me, complaining and asking, "Why can't you just marry who we tell you, huh? Why you gotta be so difficult?" "Dad," I reasoned. "You sent me to university, throwing me into the 'deep end' of the world. Obviously I would learn to swim on my own! If you wanted me to stay dry, you should've kept me out of the water!" My father had no answer to counter this reasoning, and this was one of the few occasions in his life when he was truly lost for words. He was forced to accept the stark reality – university teaches you a lot more than you enrol for!

One night, in utter desperation, my father called a senior 'Aalim home to speak to me and try to get me to see reason. I sat in a separate room while he addressed me through the closed door, telling me that losing my parents' blessings would pave the way for unhappiness in life, etc. Blah blah he went, going on for himself. Why did he even think I was interested in what he had to say?

See, my father himself always had it in for these Moulanas and never afforded them much respect, disregarding the long years of their studies and calling them uneducated. So, I was never raised to take them seriously or hold them in esteem. Now, when my father ran to these same Moulanas in his hour of need, I found the whole situation quite hypocritical and laughable.

Eventually, against the wishes, advice, instructions, orders and even threats of all and sundry, I went ahead and married him anyway. What else was I to do? After all, my heart knew no other love but his love. How could I even imagine spending the rest of my life living with another man? "I cannot live a lie; I need to be true to my heart!" I reasoned. I was so blinded by the brainwashing of romance movies, novels and blogs, where love always prevails over all else, that at the naïve age of twenty-two, I made my choice, failing to foresee the far-reaching repercussions that would rock my world.

At first, my family alienated me and cut me off. In the face of this opposition, I would seek consolation through comparing myself to Shakespeare's Juliet and my husband to Romeo, conveniently forgetting that they died in misery and never rode off into the sunset to enjoy a 'happily ever after'.

Gradually though, bit-by-bit, my family came around a bit and warmed up slightly. However, all was not to be forgiven and forgotten. The wounds of the heart take time to heal – if they ever heal at all that is. So although I was allowed to mix with my family again, there was always this feeling and sense that some cold, unresolved issue stood between us, silent yet stubborn in its refusal to leave.

After the dust settled and the first year passed, Allah Ta'ala blessed me with a child. My little baby was the apple of my eye and cheer of my heart. I devoted all my time and energy to her, and expected my husband to do the same. After all, he was the father! Surely he would welcome her into his world with the same enthusiasm and love as me! Or would he???

I say this with a heavy heart... he was not father material and never would be. Worse still, he never even tried or pretended to be a good father. When our child arrived and I

began to give her attention, **he took it for granted that he didn't need to spend time at home.** He casually assumed that with a child in my life to occupy me, I wouldn't miss him or even mind that he was never at home.

**This was when the really dark, depressing period of my life started, as my marriage began to crumble apart.** What else could be expected, when he was always away and never home to stay? First it was gym excuses, then meetings, then get-togethers with friends. **I would be left wondering what role I now occupied in this man's life, as he seemed to have no interest in me anymore!**

As time passed, he began to stay out later and later, *sometimes not even returning home at all!* Then, I began to see the telltale signs of drug use which I had so frequently observed in students on campus. **Initially, I told myself that it was just a passing phase, and he'd soon see the error of his ways. But that was just wishful thinking...**

I tried to help him, but he refused to accept my help or even communicate with me in any meaningful way. I feared questioning him on his whereabouts or pressurizing him in any way as I did not want him to lash out at me with a divorce. **You see, when you turn your back on family for a boy, then all you have is the boy. If he turns his back on you, you will have NOBODY to turn to. You will be all alone, with no supportive shoulder to cry on, no compassionate parents – NO ONE.** The boy is all you'll have, and if he was a mistake then well, that's what you'll have to live with – *for the rest of your life.*

Before I married him, we dated for a good few years. We spent hours and hours texting each other, went everywhere together and were practically inseparable. **I was pretty confident that I knew him as well as I knew myself and I easily envisioned myself living out my days with him, happily ever after.**

Yet here we are now, in a complete and total mess and on the brink of a marital breakdown.

I often wondered to myself, *"What made him change?"* Why was he no longer the same caring, sensitive and loving man to whom I had given my hand in marriage? **Then it hit me, with the blunt force of a speeding train... he had never changed at all. Rather, this is who he REALLY was all along.**

Please, allow me a chance to explain. It's taken me all these years of learning the 'hard way' to finally reach this conclusion and gain this perspective, and I'm sharing it with you for free, so show some apprecia-

tion and value my words.

Dating is a relationship built on romance, excitement, love and passion. It's all about the hearts and roses, the hand-in-hand strolls down the promenade, the love emojis and all the other gooey stuff. **The focal point of dating is the romance and excitement, and every encounter or communication revolves around the same.** *After the date is over, each returns to their home to resume their normal lives.*

Marriage, on the other hand, is a different ballgame altogether. **Marriage is based on the foundation of commitment and responsibility – commitment to each other and the responsibility of fulfilling each other's rights.** This commitment and responsibility does not remain for just the duration of a date – *it continues for 24 hours a day and remains until death.* Marriage transcends the glitter and glamour of applying lipstick and eyeliner before a date, and extends to seeing your spouse at their worst,



when they wake up with a 'bed head', stumble to the bathroom and try to brush the 'morning breath' from their mouth.

Likewise, when they are nauseous and throw up, or feel sick and lie in bed, or feel down and depressed, there will be no romance found. **Rather, it is at times like these that the commitment, sense of responsibility and 'true love' of the spouse will be seen.** Trust me, at times like these, you won't want the best dressed, or most handsome, or most 'loaded' (richest), or most fun and exciting husband at your side. You'll want a man who embodies the sunnah spirit of caring, compassion and commitment, someone who'll wipe your tears, rub your head and bring you soup in bed.

**Now ask yourself, "If a boy makes a good date, how does it mean that he has what it takes to make a good husband?"** In dating, the

occasions almost never arise for his 'husbandly' and 'fatherly' qualities to be proven, and so dating is a poor gauge of good character and qualities.

To cut a long story short, I never truly knew my husband, and when I did, I wished I didn't. When you are young, and you are raised in a sheltered environment, where you are seldom called to account for your misdemeanours, or made to 'face the music', then you grow up with a false confidence and the wrong impression that 'nothing can really go wrong'. **You fail to realize that even at the tender age of twelve, you can make a bad choice for which you'll pay dearly until you die (think of teenage pregnancies).**

This was what happened to me – I deliberately ignored, nay I spurned my parents' advice and rejected their love and well-wishes. Lacking any wisdom or foresight of my own, I made a terrible decision from which there was no coming back

**At this point, my husband was a drug addict drowning in denial, but what were my options?** While life with him was a misery, I couldn't exactly walk out either. *Walk out and go where?* Returning to my father's home would entail hearing the words "I told you so" until the day I died, and remarrying into a good home, especially when you have a child, is extremely difficult. **I was between a rock and a hard place, but who would pity me when I had myself made the choice that led me here?**

I wish I could tell you that things somehow worked out – *but that would be a lie as it didn't.* **Love at first sight is based on emotion – and emotions change and shift as rapidly as the weather.** Love based on the pure union of nikaah, without pre-marital relationships, is love based on the sunnah, Islamic way. **It will draw barakah (blessings) and the couple will enjoy the divine assistance of Allah Ta'ala and the company of the angels.** This love is based on intelligence, commitment, responsibility, parents' blessings and most importantly – *the way of Islam.*

Love at first sight is a fallacy – it's love with each and every sight, until you die, that counts. **Whatever you do, don't make the mistake that I did – IT'S NOT WORTH IT.** After the sun of excitement fades and the night of reality sets in, you'll be left alone in darkness. **I threw my future and happiness away and suffer the consequences every day.** Rather than pity me – pity yourself and don't follow in my footsteps. *May Allah Ta'ala guide you, aameen.*