

Secrets to

Self Esteem

Rebuilding the YOU that
Allah created you to be

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Introduction

Many common issues keep raising their ugly heads within our community and I have been compelled to write the *Secrets to...* series of books in a bid to enable us to move forward and overcome the common pitfalls that can needlessly destroy marriages and families.

With Allah's permission, the first book, *Secrets to Successful Marriage*, has provided validation as well as practical solutions for many husbands and wives, for over ten years, becoming one of the bestselling Muslim marriage guides on the market. My second book, *Secrets to Surviving In-Laws*, which deals with the much neglected issue of in-law relationships, takes a look at in-law dynamics from different perspectives, providing a balanced way forward for all members of the family. The third book, *Secrets to Successful Families*, covers more complex marital and family issues in detail. Many of the sources of tension and attitudes in marriage have a back story and root cause. This book addresses the common issues in marriages and digs deeper to find those root causes in order to effect lasting solutions. One of the chapters in the book is dedicated to self-esteem.

That is because self-esteem is at the heart of the whole matter of family – the family we originated from, the family we have created through marriage and the way in which we parent our children and how they will go on to be as spouses and parents.

Our behaviour stems from our self-esteem levels and that affects our relationships.

Increasingly in my 40-year-long career as an Islamic psychotherapist, counsellor, and life coach at Sukoon Healing, I have come to see that there is a need for a whole book devoted to the subject of self-esteem as it is the one common denominator in the various relationship breakdowns that I see in my counselling practice.

Therefore, this fourth book in the series, *Secrets to Self-Esteem*, and its companion journal, *Secrets to Successful Habits*, has arisen out of an understanding that if we are to repair families – relationships with parents, siblings, children and the wider community at every level in order to have a healthy Ummah – then we each need to start with repairing ourselves on an individual level.

How do we begin to do that? First of all, we need to realise what a huge impact our self-esteem has on the quality and success of our own lives and relationships, and so the first chapter of this book starts with addressing that.

Each of the next sections that follow:

- ▶ **Your Voice**
- ▶ **Your Self-belief**
- ▶ **Your Responsibility**
- ▶ **Your Relationship with Allah**

provide the tools needed to build your self-esteem across all areas of your life to help you become your most secure, rooted and balanced self.

As an Islamic counsellor, it is not my job to issue *fatwas* (rulings) or to advise on the matters of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). However, through speaking with scholars and people of

knowledge, and also my own study of Islam, I do include some basic Islamic advice. All Qur'anic translations in this book are taken from Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley's translation – *The Noble Qur'an: A New Rendering of its Meaning in English* or M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's *The Qur'an: A New Translation*.

We know that, ultimately, everything is in Allah's hands and only comes about by His permission. So if I had to give just one piece of advice, it would be this: Self-esteem goes hand in hand with having a strong connection with Allah, so keep being mindful of Allah as your focus at all times. Doing just that will accomplish much. I pray that what you read in the coming pages will be of benefit to you and that Allah accepts it from me.

Your Responsibility to Yourself

It is easy to get carried away and fulfil the responsibilities you have towards others, while minimising the responsibility you have to yourself. Reflect on the following words which are part of a longer hadith narrated by Abu Juhaifa رضي الله عنه where Salman al-Farsi رضي الله عنه said to Abu ad-Darda رضي الله عنه:

Your Lord has a right on you; and your soul has a right on you; and your family has a right on you; so you should give the rights of all those who have a right on you. (Bukhari)

Note the wording of the hadith: it is just as much a right that you look after yourself as it is that you fulfil the rights of others, and in fact this is the right that is mentioned first after the rights of Allah. You are not less important than anyone else.

Case Study

Responsibility: One of the most transformative clients I had was an unmarried 32-year-old lady named Parveen, although she looked much older than her years. She lived with her mother and took care of all her needs, day and night every day without a break. She didn't have her own social life or hobbies and she had become very isolated and withdrawn. She came to me because she was feeling increasingly anxious.

Effect: When I asked Parveen why she didn't take a break, she said she would feel guilty if she didn't look after her mother to the best of her ability as it was a Qur'anic command to do good to your parents.

I explained to her that while it is essential that we do our best for our parents in their old age, to consider the hadith about your soul having a right over you. I asked her to get a care assessment and have some respite from care for a few hours each week. I encouraged her to start a hobby and to take care of herself by tracking her self-care habits in a journal to bring the focus back to her.

Solution: After a few months, I saw Parveen looking so much fresher. In that time she had completed a watercolour class, and she had started a small home business selling her own watercolour greeting cards. With a small amount of time away from her mother each week, she was able to care for her in a much more mindful way, while also having her own purpose.

Create Space for Yourself

If you are beginning to feel overwhelmed, or particularly stretched, here are some phrases that you can use to communicate your need for time and space to your family, friends or colleagues:

- ▶ I wish I could help, but [such-and-such] is now taking up all my time this afternoon. Would these alternative times (*list days or times that are more manageable for you*) work? I will be able to help you/give you the time you need then, insha'Allah.
- ▶ I am glad you feel comfortable speaking with me about this. I just need a little time to process what you've shared with me. Can we please pick this conversation up another time (*make it soon*)? I want to make sure I am there for you in the best way, and don't want to rush our discussion.

- ▶ Thank you for reaching out/thinking of me/checking on me. Don't worry, I am not being distant. I am just taking some time out for myself/to rest because I've not been feeling my best lately. I'll be back in the swing of things soon, insha'Allah, and look forward to our time together.
- ▶ I'm planning to switch off for [this duration], but you can of course contact me if it's really urgent, insha'Allah.
- ▶ I know I said yes, but I had not clearly considered the other things I had going on at that time. This is something I will learn from. Is there another way I could help instead (*offer your own suggestion that would be manageable for you*), as I know you've put so much effort into this?
- ▶ I know I promised you my time, and you have been looking forward to doing [such-and-such] with me, but I am really not feeling my best today. Let's rearrange for an alternative time, so that we can have a much nicer time together, when I am in much better health/spirits, insha'Allah.
- ▶ Although our plan was that I do [such-and-such] this week, I am feeling really drained at the moment, and would benefit from readjusting our plan, and prioritising certain tasks over others, so that I am able to give the task my full attention/my best for you. (*Either pick a manageable time yourself, or get them to pick, if it's something that impacts them.*)
- ▶ I know you are tired/frustrated. I am as well. Why don't we share one thing that we are both finding difficult today, and one thing we really need from each other right now, that would help make our day a little easier?