

The Ruling on Covering the Face

All praises be to Allaah, Lord and Sustainer of the worlds, and may the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and upon his family and companions.

Allaah, the most high, created us and sent Islaam for the guidance and testing people to see who perform best, as Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah says:

"He has created death and life that He may test you which of you is best in deed. And He is the AllMighty, the OftForgiving ;" [Al-Mulk:2]

It is only for this reason that Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah laid down commands and prohibitions. The hijab of a Muslim lady is one of those commands that was understood well and practiced by the earlier Muslims including the companions of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and those who followed them with sincerity and honesty. The correct understanding regarding hijab is that the covering of the face is obligatory as we shall insha-Allaah see from the following evidences.

Evidence from the Quraan

Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah revealed the order of hijab in His Book as Allaah says:

"O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their Jalabeeb over them." [Al-Ahzaab:59]

One of the reasons for the difference of opinion regarding covering of the face relates to how one interprets the above aayah. This makes it important for one to understand the correct method of interpreting the Quraan first.

Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah revealed the Quraan as a guide and healing for people who wish to earn the pleasure of Allaah in this life and be able to enter paradise in the hereafter, Allaah says :

"This is the Book (the Qur'ân), whereof there is no doubt, a guidance to those who are Al-Muttaqûn (pious and righteous)." [Al-Baqarah:2]

And He says:

"Say: It (the Qur'ân) is for those who believe , a guide and a healing. And as for those who disbelieve, there is heaviness (deafness) in their ears, and it is blindness for them. They are those who are called from a place far away (so they neither listen nor understand)." [Fussilat:44]

And He says:

Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah not only revealed the Quraan to Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) but He also taught him its correct interpretation and understanding so that he conveys it to others rather than leaving this matter for every individual to use his own understanding. Allaah says:

"He it is (Allaah) Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His Verses, purifying them (from the filth of disbelief and polytheism), and

teaching them the Book (this Qur'ân, Islâmîc laws and Islâmîc jurisprudence) and Al Hikmah (AsSunnah: legal ways, orders, acts of worship, etc. of Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). And verily, they had been before in mainfest error.” [Al-Jumu'ah:2]

So any Muslim who wants to understand the Quraan has to refer it to how the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained it and how his companions understood and practiced it. No one is allowed to interpret the Quraan by his own understanding as Allaah says:

“And follow not (i.e., say not, or do not or witness not, etc.) that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed! The hearing, and the sight, and the heart, of each of those you will be questioned (by Allâh).” [Al-Israa:36]

And He says:

“Say (O Muhammad) that my Lord has indeed forbidden, AlFawâhish (every kind of unlawful shameful acts.) whether committed openly or secretly, sins (of all kinds) , and unrighteous oppression,joining partners (in worship) with Allâh for which He has given no authority and saying things about Allâh of which you have no knowledge.” [Al-a'raaf:33]

Therefore it is forbidden to speak about an aayah of Quraan by one's own understanding, rather one must see what the the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said about the aayah or how his companions understood it.

Now, going back to the aayah of hijab mentioned above, the word “Jalabeeb” is used in this aayah which is the pleural of Jilbaab. If this word is understood correctly than the ruling of hijab will insha-Allaah become clear.

The companions of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) including ‘Aa’ishah, Ibn Abbass, Ibn Umar, Ibn Masood (may Allaah be pleased with them all) and others were unanimous in defining this word, they all said, ***“this is a large cloth which is wrapped round so as to cover the whole body except the eyes”*** (see Ibn-Katheer, Al-Qurtubi, Al-Tabari.)

Therefore a sincere Muslim who only wants to please Allaah would understand that the aayah includes covering of the face.

Evidence from the Sunnah

1. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said

“the woman is awrah (what is to be covered)” (Al-Tirmidhi)

So he meant a woman is to cover all of herself, and of course that includes the face.

2. Abu Dawood (4101) narrated that Umm Salamah said: ***“When the words ‘to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies ’ [al-Ahzaab 33:59] were revealed, the women of the Ansaar went out looking as if there were crows on their heads because of the covering .”***

3. Al- Bukhaari narrated that ‘Aa’ishah said: ***“May Allaah have mercy on the first Muhaajir women. When Allaah revealed the words ‘and to draw their veils all over Juyoobihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)’ they tore their aprons and covered their faces with them.”***

4. It was proven in *al-Saheehayn* and elsewhere that a woman in ihraam is forbidden to wear the niqaab (face veil) and gloves.

This indicates that the niqaab and gloves were known among women who were not in ihraam, and implies that they covered their faces and hands.

5. It was narrated that 'Aa'ishah said: *"The riders used to pass by us when we were with the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in ihraam. When they came near us we would lower our jilbaabs from our heads over our faces, and when they had passed by we would uncover our faces."* (Narrated by Abu Dawood, 1562.)

If it were not obligatory to cover the face in the presence of non-mahram men, they would not have done what they did knowing that The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ordered to uncover the face in ihraam.

6. Al- Bukhaari narrated that 'Aa'ishah said, while narrating the incidence of slander on her: *"when Safwaan bin al-Muattal saw me sleeping, he recognised me because he had seen me before the order of hijaab"*, then she also said that when she woke up (realising the presence of a non-mahram man) she covered her face with her jilbab .

Logical Evidence

Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah says:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their shame and not to show their adornment except only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils all over their Juyoob (bodies) and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husband's sons, or their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women, or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small children who have no sense of feminine awrah. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allâh to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful. [An-Noor:31]

The three things mentioned in this aayah i.e. Lowering of the gaze, protecting the chastity and hiding the adornment are connected with each other and it is the exposing of the adornment and not lowering the gaze that primarily lead to corruption of chastity and immorality because if the adornment is covered then there is nothing for the gaze to look at.

Adornment is of two kinds; Natural and Artificial.

The natural adornment, most apparent of which is the face of a woman, because it is the most important part of her beauty by which a man is attracted to her.

The artificial adornment is her clothes, jewellery and makeup etc.

Logic dictates that because the face is the most important part of a woman's beauty, it must be covered.

Now we shall discuss some of the arguments used by those who say that covering of the face is not obligatory.

They often use the Hadith reported by Abu Dawud that 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) narrated that Asma bint Abu Bakr entered upon the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), whilst she was wearing a thin dress. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned his face away from her and said: *"O Asma! When a lady reaches her puberty nothing of her should be shown except this and this"* and he pointed towards the face and hands.

There are 2 problems with this narration:

- The person who reported this from 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) is Khalid bin Duraik, about whom Abu Dawud (who is the only narrator of this Hadith) said: ***"Khalid bin Duraik never met 'Aa'ishah"***. So this is a mursal (a Hadith reported by a chain of narrators in which the companion is missing) report and cannot be taken as an evidence.
- Among the narrators of this Hadith is Sa'eed bin Basheer, who has been declared weak by Abu Dawud, Ibn Mo'een, Ibn al-Madeeni, al-Hakim, Ahmad and an-Nasa'i.

It is also well known that Asma was a very pious lady and it would not be expected of her to wear thin clothing as mentioned in the above narration. In addition, an authentic report is narrated from Asma, herself in which she said: ***"We used to cover our faces from men"***. (Al-Hakim and Ibn Khuzayma, authenticated by Imam azh-Zhahabi.)

Another common argument is quoting the narrations when a lady spoke to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) asking some questions while her face was uncovered. What is ignored here is the fact that these narrations are from the time of Hajj and as we have mentioned above, a lady is required to uncover her face during Hajj, therefore this also does not form an evidence against the covering of the face.

These evidences are sufficient for any fair minded person to understand what is obligatory. Not being able to do something is different from changing the ruling for ones own need.

As with many issues, when people argue about something they make it doubtful and difficult for themselves as the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

"People are not misguided after being on the guidance until they argue."

As opposed to these, the ones who obey are the ones for whom Allaah says:

"Those who listen to the Word and follow the best thereof those are (the ones) whom Allâh has guided and those are people of understanding ." [Al-Zumar:18]

If a Muslim woman's husband asks her to cover her face because this is an order from Allaah Subhanahu-wa-Ta'alaah, she does not have the right to refuse this and if she does, then she violates two rights; the right of Allaah and right of her husband.

However, as for every obligation in Islam, one is required to do to his/her best ability as Allaah says: ***"So keep your duty to Allâh and fear Him as much as you can;"*** [Al-Taghabun:16]

If a woman finds it truly difficult to cover her face, then we hope insha-Allaah, Allaah will forgive her for her good intention and the difficulty she is faced with. She should try in that case to please Allaah and her husband in other affairs so as to compensate for her shortcoming and at the same time she should also keep trying to strengthen her faith as this is one of the two main reasons for a Muslim woman not covering her face.

Muslim women who do not cover their face are usually either ignorant of the ruling or lack in the strength of their faith. Learning about the rulings with sincerity and honesty and strengthening one's belief in Allaah is therefore very important.

If covering the face poses hardship on a woman then facing hardship and difficulty in obeying what Allaah has commanded is the very nature and the essence of a Muslim's life in this world as he/she hopes for paradise in hereafter. Allah, the most glorified, has decided that he will test people to see who among them want to achieve that aim, so calamities, troubles and difficulties that come on us in this life are a means by which Allaah tests His submitting slaves, as He says;

"Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: We believe, and will not be tested. And We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allâh will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars," [Al-Ankaboot:2,3]

And Allah says:

"Or think you that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, When (will come) the Help of Allâh? Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allâh is near!" [Al-Baqarah:214]

And of course facing difficulties in obeying the commands of Allaah in our social affairs such as covering of face for women has no comparison to what Muslims faced in previous times such as in the time of the the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) .

We ask Allaah to show us the truth as truth and enable us to follow it, and to show us falsehood as false and enable us to avoid it and peace and blessings of Allaah be upon his last prophet.