

Body Scanning at Airports

All praise is due to Allaah, who guides us to understand and accept the truth and may Allaah's peace and blessings be upon His last Prophet Muhammad, his family and all his Companions.

The total body scanning that has recently commenced at some UK airports is an issue many people are uncomfortable with. People are not sure as to whether it should or should not be done. Muslims especially are worried, but strangely their leaders who claim to be their representatives are silent on this matter. Therefore, the following is an advice for everyone who gives importance to basic human rights and in particular for the Muslims

The status of Man:

Allaah, the most high, has privileged man over others of his creations, as Allaah says:

And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Tayyibāt (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preference. (Al-Israa 17.70)

Addressing the mankind Allaah says:

And Allaah has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favour and kindness from Him. Verily, in it are signs for a people who think deeply. (Al-Jathiah 45.13)

And there are many other verses in the Quraan informing us about the honour the creator has given to man, making him superior and different to all other creations.

Difference between man and other creations:

The superiority and honour that Allaah has given to man is seen in many things, for example;

- Man's intellectual superiority over others, enabling him to do things which others are unable to do, such as learning the various sciences and applying this knowledge for technological development.
- Submission of other creations for man, including the sun as a source of heat and electricity, the moon as a source of light, the stars as navigational tools and the earth for farming and building places for residence.
- Man's ability to reason and being able to distinguish between right and wrong, between health and sickness and between what is beneficial and harmful etc.

All of the above qualities, however, can be attributed to other living creations even though these may be of a much lesser degree compared to man.

But two attributes of man are unique and not given to any other creation:

- a. Speech.
- b. Covering the body with a garment or dress.

Both of these qualities have immense importance though covering/clothing one's body is more important than speech.

Importance of covering the body:

Covering one's body with a garment has three main purposes:

1. To protect the body from harmful elements, as Allaah says:
"And (Allaah) has made for you garments to protect you from the heat (and cold), and coats of mail (armour) to protect you from your (mutual) violence." Al-Nahl 16.81
2. To beautify oneself, as in the following verse:
"O Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover yourselves (screen your private parts) and as an adornment; and the raiment of righteousness, that is better. Such are among the Ayāt (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allāh, that they may remember (i.e. leave falsehood and follow truth)." Al-A'araaf 7.26
3. To cover what is most private, as in the above verse and the verse following it:
"O Children of Adam! Let not Shaitān (Satan) deceive you, as he got your parents [Adam and Hawwā' (Eve)] out of Paradise, stripping them of their raiments, to show them their private parts. Verily, he and Qabīluhu (his soldiers from the jinn or his tribe) see you from where you cannot see them. Verily, We made the Shayātīn (devils) Auliyā' (protectors and helpers) for those who believe not." Al-A'araaf 7.27

In Islaam, the first two purposes are only recommended that people would fulfil according to their needs, abilities and liking. The third purpose, however, is an obligation, as uncovering what is private in public is obscene and every obscenity is unlawful in Islaam as Allaah says:

"Say: the things that my Lord hath indeed forbidden are: indecent deeds, whether open or secret; Sins and trespasses against truth or reason; Assigning of partners to Allah, for which he hath given no authority; And saying things about Allah of which ye have no knowledge." Al-A'araaf 7.33

Covering the private area of the body and its importance is connected with an instinctual characteristic of human beings (i.e. Shame or Shyness) which does not require any book or law, rather everyone recognises this by default. Islaam places a great emphasis on shyness.

The word Hayaa, which means shyness in Arabic, is in fact taken from the word Hayaah which means life, so, shyness is life. Hayaa or shyness is unique to man. In many narrations, Allaah's Prophet, Muhammad (may peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), mentioned the importance of shyness, for example:

'Belief has seventy three sections the highest is saying "no one is worthy of worship except Allaah", the lowest is removing a harmful thing from the path, and shyness is also one the branch of belief.'

'Shyness brings nothing in a person except good.'

'Shyness and belief are complimentary to each other when one goes the other follows.'

When man liberates himself from what is natural, intellectual and religious for him (i.e. the need for covering the privacy of his body), by either uncovering his own body or looking at another's, he becomes like an animal and a follower of Shaytaan (devil) as illustrated in the above mentioned verses of Quraan.

To uncover others and see them naked without any proven necessity is also clearly a breach of basic human rights recognised by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The scholars of Islaam consider looking at the private parts of even a dead body unlawful, let alone a living person. Therefore, defending the sacredness of one's private parts is obligatory on a Muslim.

There may, however, be a case of necessity in exceptional circumstance but necessity must be determined to be real and not assumed.

Is there a case of necessity?

Without any doubt the answer is no, for the following reasons;

1. To this date, there has not been a confirmed case of explosives being carried in clothing other than the recent one on an American flight, the reliability of which is yet to be fully established to make a case of necessity.
2. Body scanning has been used on American and other airports with a huge cost and high failure rate.
3. No aircraft has ever been destroyed by someone carrying explosives in his clothing.
4. As for the recent case that took place on an American flight, the American president himself, accepted the responsibility of his intelligence agency in that they possessed all the information and yet failed to take the right action in time. This clearly shows that intelligence is sufficient and far superior as a tool to prevent this kind of incident than a need to see people naked on mere suspicion.

In addition to the above, we all know that it will be both difficult and impractical to scan every individual passing through large busy airports hence people will need to be profiled and only those suspected by airport staff will be scanned.

In the present circumstances, it is obvious that the most likely target of this profiling would be Muslims. If the Muslims are profiled for this purpose then this would only serve to increase hostility among Muslims against government policies which is no doubt very unhealthy for the whole society.

It is therefore advisable for everyone, especially Muslims, to speak out against this breach of privacy, for the government to withdraw it from airports and for them to use alternative methods.

Taking legal action on this or boycotting the use of airports with body scanning are other options to consider.

We ask Allaah the Most High to help and guide us to do all that He is pleased with and His Peace and blessings be upon His last Prophet Muhammad.

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