

The Message of Hijāb

Written by His Eminence Shaykh, the erudite scholar

Muhammad ibn Sālih al-‘Uthaymīn

May Allah forgive him, his parents, and all Muslims

In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah; we praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge with Allah from the evil of our selves and from our bad deeds. Whoever Allah guides none can lead astray, and whoever Allah leads astray none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah alone, Who has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and messenger, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, his family, his Companions, and those who follow them with righteousness. To proceed, Allah Almighty sent Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) with guidance and with the true religion to bring people from darkness to light - by their Lord's permission - towards the path of the All-Mighty, Praiseworthy. Allah Almighty sent him for the establishment of His worship through full submission and humility, by obeying His commands and avoiding His prohibitions, and giving precedence to it over personal whims and desires. Allah sent him with a perfect noble character, a caller to noble morals by all possible means, and an eradicator of evil morals and a warner against them by all possible means. Hence, the Shariah of Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) is complete from all aspects. It does not require anyone to complete it or organize it, as it is from the One Who is All-Wise and All-Aware, the One Who knows what is suitable for His slaves, and Who is Merciful to them. Modesty is among the noble morals that Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) was sent with and which he considered to be part of faith and one of its branches. No one denies that it is part of the Shariah-based modesty that a woman should be modestly dressed and adopt morals that keep her away from temptations and suspicious situations.

There is no doubt that by covering her face and body, a woman is showing great modesty as it keeps her safe from temptation.

People in this blessed country - the country of revelation, divine message, modesty, and decency - were on the path of integrity in this regard. Women used to go out in their full Hijāb, wearing Abayas and the like, far from intermixing with foreign men. Fortunately, this is still the case in many cities of the Kingdom, praise be to Allah.

However, with all the talk about Hijāb and with all those who do not adhere to it and who see nothing wrong with revealing the face, some people started to be skeptical about Hijāb and about covering the face; whether it is obligatory, recommended, or only something that has to do with customs and traditions and that has no specific ruling of whether it is obligatory or recommended.

So, to remove such doubts and reveal the truth, I decided to write about the ruling of Hijāb, hoping that Allah Almighty will make it a cause for clarifying the truth and will make us among the guided and guiding ones, who see the truth and follow it and see falsehood and avoid it.

Muslims should know that it is obligatory upon a woman to cover herself and her face in the presence of foreign men as indicated by the Book of Allah Almighty, the Sunnah of His Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), and by the sound and coherent analogy.

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Evidence from the Noble Qur'an

Evidence from the Qur'an includes:

First Evidence: Allah Almighty says: {And tell the believing women to lower their gazes and guard their private parts, and not to reveal their adornments except what appears thereof. And let them draw their veils over their chests, and not to reveal their adornments except to their husbands, their fathers, their fathers-in-law, their sons, their stepsons, their brothers, their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, their women, those [bondwomen] owned by their right hands, male attendants who have no [sexual] urge, or children who are still unaware of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet in a way that their hidden adornment is known. And turn to Allah in repentance all together, O believers, that you may be successful.} [Al-Nūr: 31]

This verse indicates the obligation of Hijāb upon a woman in the presence of foreign men due to a number of aspects:

1. Allah Almighty has commanded the believing women to guard their private parts, and this command includes guarding the private parts and adopting all means of doing that. No rational person would doubt that covering the face is one of those means,

because uncovering it is a cause for looking at her, enjoying her beauty, finding pleasure in that, and consequently seeking to contact and reach her.

There is a Hadīth that states: “The eyes commit fornication and their fornication is looking (at what is forbidden)... and the private part confirms that or denies it.” If covering the face is one of the means of guarding chastity, then it is enjoined, because the means take the same ruling of the ends. 2. Allah Almighty says: {And let them draw their Khimār [veils] over their chests.} [Al-Nūr: 31] Khimār is what a woman covers her head with. So, if a woman is commanded to draw her Khimār over her chest, then she is commanded to cover her face, either because that is implied or by analogy. Moreover, if it is obligatory to cover the neck and chest, therefore covering the face is obligatory for an even stronger reason because it is the main sign of beauty and attraction. Those who seek physical beauty ask about nothing but the face; if it is beautiful, they will not regard anything else to be significant. So, if a woman is said to be beautiful, this will only be interpreted as referring to her beautiful face. Hence, the face is the main sign of beauty. If that is the case, then how could it be understood that this wise Shariah would command covering the neck and chest and permit revealing the face?! 3. Allah Almighty has totally forbidden the exposure of adornment except that which is apparent, i.e. that which one cannot help showing like the outside of one's garment. Hence Allah says: {except what appears thereof} [Al-Nūr: 31] and He did not say: “Except what they show thereof”. Then He again forbids showing the adornment except to those for whom He makes an exception. This indicates that the second adornment mentioned is something other than the first one. The first adornment is the external one which appears to everyone and cannot be hidden. The second adornment is the internal one. If it were permissible to show this internal adornment to everyone, there would be no point in generalization made in the first instance and the exception made in the second one.

4. Allah Almighty grants the woman a concession to show her internal adornment to male attendants and servants who have no sexual desire, and to little boys who have not yet reached the age of desire and are not yet aware of women's private aspects. This indicates two things:

First: Showing the internal adornment to foreign men is not permissible except to these two types of people.

Second: The reason behind this ruling is fear that men may be tempted by the woman and fall in love with her. Undoubtedly, the face is the main sign of beauty and attraction, so concealing it is obligatory, in order that men who have sexual desire should not be attracted and tempted by her.

5. Allah Almighty says: {And let them not stamp their feet in a way that their hidden adornment is known.} [Al-Nūr: 31], i.e. a woman should not stamp her feet so as not to make her hidden adornment, such as the anklets and the like, be known. If a woman is forbidden to stamp her feet lest men should be tempted by what they hear of the sound of her anklets, then what about uncovering her face?! Which is a greater source of temptation: hearing the anklets of a woman about whose beauty a man knows nothing, whether she is young or old, ugly or pretty; or his looking at a beautiful youthful face that attracts him and invites him to look at her? Every man who has any desire for women will know which of the two temptations is greater and worthier of being covered and concealed. Second Evidence: Allah Almighty says: {As for the women of post-menstrual age who have no desire for marriage, there is no blame on them if they put aside their garments without revealing their adornments. But if they modestly refrain from it is better for them. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.} [Al-Nūr: 60]

The evidence in this noble verse is that Allah Almighty states that there is no sin on old women, who have no desire for marriage, to discard their outer garment because men have no desire for them, due to their old age. There is no sin on such old women in that case subject to the condition that their intention in doing so is not to expose their adornment.

Discarding their clothes obviously does not mean that they should remain naked, rather it means discarding the outer garment, which is usually worn over clothes that do not cover that which is mostly

apparent like the face and the hands. So, the clothes which those old women are authorized to discard are the outer garments, which cover their whole bodies.

Making this ruling specific to old women indicates that the ruling is different for young women who still hope to get married. If the ruling of discarding the outer garment applied to all women, there would be no point in singling out old women here.

The words of Allah Almighty: {without revealing their adornments.} [Al-Nūr: 60] offer further proof that full Hijāb is obligatory upon young women who hope to get married, because usually when they uncover their faces, the intention is to expose their adornment and to show off their beauty and make men look at them and admire them, and the like. Those who do that with a different intention are rare, and rulings are not founded on rare cases. Third Evidence: Allah Almighty says: {O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.} [Al-Ahzāb: 59] Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) said: “Allah commanded the believing women, if they go out of their houses for some need, to cover their faces from the top of their heads with their Jilbāb (full-length outer garment), showing only one eye.” The Companion’s commentary is considered evidence, some scholars even said that it takes the same ruling as the report that is directly attributed to the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him).

“Showing only one eye” is a concession because of the need to see the way; if there is no need for that, then the eye should not be uncovered.

Jilbāb is the garment worn over the Khimār; it is like the Abaya. Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: “When this verse was revealed, the women of the Ansār (supporters) came out looking as if there were crows on their heads - out of tranquility - wearing black outer garments.”

‘Ubaydah al-Salmāni and others mentioned that the women of the believers used to draw their cloaks all over their bodies from above their heads in such a manner that only their eyes were revealed in order to see the way.

Fourth Evidence: Allah Almighty says: {There is no blame upon women concerning their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or those their right hands possess. And fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Witness over all things.} [Al-Ahzāb: 55] Ibn Kathīr (may Allah have mercy upon him) said: “When Allah commanded women to observe Hijāb in the presence of foreign men, He excluded these relatives as He excluded them in Surat al-Nūr, where He said: {...And not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands...} [Al-Nūr: 31].”

So, these are four pieces of evidence from the Noble Qur’an indicating the obligation upon women to observe full Hijāb in the presence of foreign men, and the first verse indicates that obligation from five aspects.

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Evidence from the Sunnah

Evidence from the Sunnah includes:

First Evidence: The Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) said: “When anyone of you proposes to a woman, there is no sin on him if he looks at her, only if he intends to propose to her, even if she is unaware.” [Narrated by Ahmad] The author of Majma’ Al-Zawā’id said: “Its narrators are Rijāl al-Sahīh (narrators of Hadīths compiled by Al-Bukhari and/or Muslim).” The evidence here lies in the fact that the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) said that there is no sin on the suitor if he looks at the woman he is engaged to, subject to the condition that he looks with the intention of proposing to her. This indicates that the one who is not proposing marriage is, by all means, is sinner if he looks at a foreign woman. The same applies if the suitor looks at the woman for another reason apart from proposing marriage, such as seeking pleasure.

If it is said that the Hadīth does not clearly state what to be looked at and it may mean looking at the chest and the neck,

then the answer will be: As everyone knows, the beautiful face is what the suitor is looking for, and anything else is mostly not intended. So, the suitor looks at the face because it is undoubtedly the epitome of beauty.

Second Evidence: When the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) commanded that women should go out to the place where the Eid prayer was to be offered, they said: "O Messenger of Allah, what if one of us does not have a jilbāb (outer garment)?" He said: "Let her sister lend her a outer garment." [Narrated by Al-Bukhāri, Muslim, and others] This Hadīth proves that the usual practice of the female Companions was not to go out without wearing the outer garment. Hence, they (may Allah be pleased with them) mentioned this impediment to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) when they were commanded to go out to attend Eid prayer. Thereupon, the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) explained to them the solution to this problem, namely sharing their Jilbābs with their sisters, and he did not allow them to go out without a Jilbāb although going out to the place where the Eid prayer would be offered is legitimate and commanded for both men and women. So, if the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) did not allow them to go out without wearing a Jilbāb even for a prescribed purpose, so how can they be permitted to go out without it for unnecessary and unprescribed purposes?! How can they be permitted to go out without it for wandering in the markets, mixing with men, and going for aimless window-shopping?!

The command to wear Jilbāb indicates the obligation of being totally covered, and Allah knows best.

Third Evidence: What was authentically reported from 'Ā'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) in the two Sahīhs that she said: "The Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) used to offer the Fajr prayer, and some believing women, wrapped in their garments, used to attend the Fajr prayer with him. Then, they would return to their homes and no one would recognize them because of the darkness."

She also said: "Had the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) seen what we have seen women doing, he would have forbidden them from going to mosques just as the women of the Children of Israel were forbidden."

A similar report was narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with him).

The evidence in this Hadīth is clear from two aspects:

1. Hijāb and concealment were the common practice of the female Companions, who were the best of generations, the most honorable in the sight of Allah, and the most perfect in terms of morals, manners, faith, and deeds. They are the role models who, along with those who follow them with righteousness, have won the pleasure of Allah as Allah Almighty said: {And the first forerunners [in faith] among the Emigrants and the Supporters and those who followed them with righteousness - Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him, and He has prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the great success.} [Al-Tawbah: 100] If that was the practice of the female Companions, then how could we deviate from that way, which secures the pleasure of Allah Almighty if followed with righteousness?! Allah Almighty said: {And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers - We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hellfire, which is an evil destination.} [Al-Nisā': 115] 2. 'Ā'ishah, Mother of the Believers, and 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with both of them) – who were both known for their knowledge, understanding, and deep insight into the religion of Allah, and for their sincere advice to the slaves of Allah – said that if the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) had seen from women what they had both seen, he would have prevented them from going to mosques. This was during the preferred generations; when things did not change much than the way they were during the lifetime of the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), yet it could cause preventing women from going to mosques. How about our time, almost thirteen centuries later, when things have changed a lot, modesty has declined, and religion has weakened in the hearts of many people?!

'Ā'ishah and Ibn Mas'ūd (may Allah be pleased with both of them) understood the implication of the perfect texts of Shariah indicating that whatever leads to something warned of should be prohibited.

Fourth Evidence: The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Whoever trails his garment out of vanity, Allah will not look at him on the Day of Judgment." Umm Salamah asked: 'Then what should women do with their hems?' He replied: 'They might lower them a handspan.' She said: 'Then their feet will be uncovered.' He said: 'Let them lower them a cubit but not more than that.'"

This Hadīth indicates that women must cover their feet and that this was something well known among the female Companions (may Allah be pleased with them). The feet are undoubtedly a lesser source of temptation than the face and hands, so a warning concerning something that is less serious is a warning about what is more serious and to which the ruling applies more.

It is against the wisdom of Shariah to enjoin covering something that is lesser source of temptation and allow uncovering something that is greater source of temptation. This is a contradiction that cannot be attributed to the wisdom of Allah or to His Law.

Fifth Evidence: The Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "If any of you (women) has a slave, and he enters into an agreement to purchase his freedom and can pay the full price, then let her veil herself from him." [Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dāwūd, Al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Mājah; Al-Tirmidhi classified it as Sahīh (authentic)]

This Hadīth proves that it is permissible for a woman to reveal her face in front of her slave as long as he is in her possession. However, if he becomes free, it is obligatory upon her to conceal herself from him because he has become a foreign man. This indicates the obligation of observing full Hijāb in the presence of a foreign man.

Sixth Evidence: 'Ā'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported: "Riders would pass by us when we were in the state of Ihrām (ritual state of consecration) with the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him). When they came near us, we would let down our Jilbāb from our heads over our faces, and when they moved on, we would uncover our faces." [Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dāwūd, and Ibn Mājah] Her words: "When they came near us, we would let down our Jilbāb from our heads over our faces" indicate that it is obligatory to cover the face, because what is prescribed in Ihrām is to uncover it. If there was no strong reason to prevent uncovering it, it would be obligatory to leave it uncovered. In other words, women are obliged to uncover their faces during Ihrām according to the majority of scholars, and nothing can override something that is obligatory except something else that is obligatory as well. So, if it were not obligatory to observe full Hijāb and cover the face in the presence of foreign men, there would be no valid reason to leave the obligation of keeping it uncovered in Ihrām. It was authentically reported in the two Sahīhs and elsewhere that a woman in the state of Ihrām is forbidden to wear the Niqāb (face veil) and gloves.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy upon him) said: "This is one of the things proving that Niqāb and gloves were known to be worn by women who were not in the state of Ihrām, the thing that implies the fact that they used to cover their faces and hands."

These are six pieces of evidence from the Sunnah that prove it is obligatory upon a woman to cover herself and her face from foreign men, add to this the four pieces of evidence from the Qur'an, so the total would be ten pieces of evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

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Evidence by Analogy

Eleventh Evidence ¹: Sound and coherent analogy that is brought by this perfect Shariah. It is all about acknowledging and encouraging benefits and their means, and denouncing evil and blocking the means that lead to it. So, whatever is of pure or preponderant benefit is commanded either as an obligation or a recommendation. On the other hand, whatever is of pure or preponderant evil is forbidden as a prohibition or as being disliked.

¹ Ten pieces of evidence have been previously mentioned: four from the Noble Qur'an and six from the honorable Sunnah.

If we ponder on the act of a woman revealing her face in the presence of foreign men, we will find that such an act entails much harm, and even if it is of any benefit, it is insignificant when compared to the harm involved. Examples of the harm caused:

1. By unveiling her face, a woman may be tempted to do things that would make her face look more beautiful and attractive, which is one of the greatest causes of evil and corruption.
2. The decline of a woman's modesty, which is part of faith and part of her nature. Women used to be set as an example of modesty as people used to say: "shyer than a virgin in her seclusion". Decline of a woman's modesty is a deficiency in her faith and a change in her sound nature.
3. Men may be tempted by her, especially if she is beautiful and she flirts, laughs, and jokes, like the case of many of those who are unveiled, as the saying goes: "A glance, then a greeting, then a talk, followed by an appointment, then a meeting". The devil flows in man like blood does. It happens a lot that talk and laughter would lead a man and a woman to be attracted to each other, consequently leading to evil that cannot be avoided.
4. Mixing of men and women; if a woman thinks herself equal to men in uncovering her face and going around unveiled, she will not be modest and will not feel too shy to mix with men. This entails a great deal of temptation and widespread corruption.

One day, when the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) came out of the mosque and saw men mingling with women in the street he said to the women: "Draw back, for you must not walk in the middle of the road; keep to the sides of the road." Then the women used to keep so close to the walls that their garments would stick to the walls. This was mentioned by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary on the verse where Allah Almighty says: {And tell the believing women to lower their gazes...} [Al-Nūr: 31] Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy upon him) stated that it is obligatory upon a woman to conceal herself from foreign men. He said in his last printed Fatwas (p.110, part 2) from Al-Fiqh and (22) from Al-Majmū': "As a matter of fact, Allah Almighty has made adornment of two types: apparent and hidden. A woman is permitted to show her apparent adornment to men other than her husband and her Mahrams (unmarriageable relatives). Before the revelation of the verse of Hijāb, women used to go out without wearing Jilbāb, hence, men would see their faces and hands, which were permitted to be shown at that time. Then, when Allah revealed the verse of Hijāb by saying: {O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments...} [Al-Ahzāb: 59], women were concealed from men."

Then he said: "Jilbāb is the wrap, which Ibn Mas'ūd and others call Ridā', while common people call it Izār. It is the full-length outer garment that covers a woman's head and the rest of her body. If women are commanded to wear Jilbāb so as not to be known, which refers to covering the face or covering the face with a Niqāb (face cover), then the face and hands are from the adornment that they are instructed not to show to foreign men, who are allowed only to look at the outer garments. So, Ibn Mas'ūd mentioned the last of the two commands, while Ibn 'Abbās mentioned the first of the two commands.

the opposite of that is the face, along with the hands and the feet, as a woman is not allowed to expose these to foreign men according to the most correct of the two opinions, unlike how things were before the abrogation, rather she must not expose anything except her clothes."

On (p.117-118) of the mentioned part: "As for her face, hands, and feet, a woman is forbidden from showing them to foreign men, but she is not forbidden from showing them to women or to her Mahrams."

On (p.152) of this part he said: "It is important to know that the Legislator here has two purposes:

First: The difference between men and women.

Second: The covering of women."

These are the words of Shaykh al-Islam, as for what other Muslim jurists from the companions of Imam Ahmad said, I shall mention the opinion of the later ones from among them.

The author of Al-Muntaha said: "It is prohibited for the eunuch and the man whose penis is cut off to look at a foreign woman."

In another place in Al-Iqnā', the author said: "It is not permissible to look at a free foreign woman purposely, and it is prohibited to look at her hair."

In Matn Al-Dalīl, the author said: "Looking is divided into eight sections:

First: A mature man - even if he is castrated - looking at a foreign adult woman without a need; it is not permissible for him to look at anything of her including her hair."

As for the Shāfi'i scholars, they said: "If the gaze is out of desire or there is fear of temptation, then it is unanimously forbidden. On the other hand, if the gaze is devoid of desire and there is no fear of temptation, then there are two opinions in this regard that were reported in Sharh Al-Iqnā', where the author said: 'The correct opinion is that it is forbidden as mentioned in Al-Minhāj.' The Imam reported the agreement of Muslims on preventing women from going out in public with their faces uncovered, and that the gaze most likely leads to temptation and stimulates desire; Allah Almighty said: {Tell the believing men to lower their gaze...} [Al-Nūr: 30] Elimination of means that lead to unfavorable results befits the merits of Shariah."

Allah Almighty said: {Tell the believing men to lower their gaze...} [Al-Nūr: 30]

Elimination of means that lead to unfavorable results befits the merits of Shariah."

In Nayl Al-Awtār, explanation of Al-Muntaqa, the author reported the agreement of Muslims on the prohibition of women from going in public with their faces revealed, especially when there are many dissolute men.

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Evidence of Those Believing in the Permissibility of Exposing the face

Those who deem it permissible to look at the face and the hands of a foreign woman rely on no evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah, as far as I know, except the following:

First: Allah Almighty said: {...And not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof...} [Al-Nūr: 31]; Ibn 'Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) said: "It refers to her face, hands, and the ring." This was reported by Al-A'mash on the authority of Sa'īd ibn Jubayr. The interpretation of the Companion stands as supporting evidence, as mentioned above. Second: The Hadīth narrated by Abu Dāwūd in his Sunan on the authority of 'Ā'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her): "Asmā' bint Abu Bakr entered upon the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) turned his face away from her and said: 'O Asmā', when a woman reaches the age of puberty, nothing should be seen of her except this and this', and he pointed to his face and hands." Third: The Hadīth narrated by Al-Bukhārī and others on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) that his brother, Al-Fadl, was riding behind the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) during the Farewell Hajj when a woman from the tribe of Khath'am came and Al-Fadl started looking at her and she started looking at him. The Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) turned Al-Fadl's face to the other side. So, this proves that the woman was not covering her face. Fourth: The Hadīth narrated by Al-Bukhārī and others on the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) about the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) leading people in Eid Prayer: "Then he preached people and admonished them. After that, he walked on till he came to the women and preached and admonished them and said to them: 'O assembly of women, give alms, for you constitute the majority of Hell firewood.' A woman, having a dark spot on the cheek, stood up..." If that woman's face had been covered, it would not have been known that she had a dark spot on her cheek.

Allah Almighty said: {...And not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof...} [Al-Nūr: 31];

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The Hadīth narrated by Abu Dāwūd in his Sunan on the authority of ‘Ā’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her): “Asmā’ bint Abu Bakr entered upon the Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) turned his face away from her and said: ‘O Asmā’, when a woman reaches the age of puberty, nothing should be seen of her except this and this’, and he pointed to his face and hands.”

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If that woman’s face had been covered, it would not have been known that she had a dark spot on her cheek.

This is what I know of the evidence that could be used as a proof of the permissibility of revealing a woman’s face in the presence of foreign men.

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Answer to These Pieces of Evidence

There is no contradiction between these pieces of evidence and the ones previously mentioned, which prove the obligation of covering the face, for two reasons:

1. The evidence supporting the obligation of covering the face changes the original state, whereas the evidence supporting the permissibility of exposing the face maintains the original state. According to the scholars of Usūl al-Fiqh (fundamentals of Islamic Jurisprudence), what changes the original state is given precedence. This is because maintaining the original state is the basic rule, however, if an evidence is found that is different from the original state, then it indicates that the original ruling has been altered and changed. Hence, we say that what is different from the original state has extra knowledge and it is a proof of the change of the original ruling, and the one establishing a ruling is given precedence over the one negating.

Hence, we say that what is different from the original state has extra knowledge and it is a proof of the change of the original ruling, and the one establishing a ruling is given precedence over the one negating.

This is the overall established view, even if all pieces of evidence are equal in terms of veracity and indication.

2. if we ponder on the evidence of the permissibility of exposing the face, we will find that it is not equivalent to the evidence of prohibition, and this will be clear by discussing each one of them as follows:

1. The interpretation of Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) has three aspects:

First: He was probably referring to the first of the two commands, i.e. the state existing before the revelation of the verse of Hijāb, as mentioned by Shaykh al-Islam in the quote that we reported earlier.

Second: He was probably referring to the adornment that is forbidden to be exposed, as mentioned by Ibn Kathīr in his Tafsīr.

These two probabilities are supported by the interpretation of Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him) of the verse where Allah Almighty said: {O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves their outer garments.} [Al-Ahzāb: 59], as mentioned earlier in the third evidence from the Qur’an.

Third: If we do not concede that his intention was one of these two probabilities, then his interpretation cannot stand as supporting evidence except if it is not opposed by another Companion. If it was opposed by another Companion, then the preponderant view is what is supported by other evidence. Ibn Mas‘ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) opposed the interpretation of Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him and his father); as he interpreted {except that which [necessarily] appears thereof } [Al-Nūr: 31] as the garment and clothes, and what could not be covered. So, it became necessary to weigh up what is more correct and to act upon what is given preponderance of both interpretations.

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2. The Hadīth of ‘Ā’ishah is weak for two reasons:

First: The disconnection (of the chain of narrators) between ‘Ā’ishah and Khālid ibn Durayk, who narrated the Hadīth on her authority. Abu Dāwūd himself stated that the Hadīth is defective as he said: “Khālid ibn Durayk never heard from ‘Ā’ishah.” It was also deemed defective by Abu Hātim al-Rāzi.

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Second: Sa‘īd ibn Bashīr al-Nasri, a resident of Damascus, is in its chain of narrators. He was left by Ibn Mahdī, and was deemed weak by Ahmad, Ibn Ma‘īn, Ibn al-Madīni, and Al-Nasā‘i.

Thereupon, the Hadīth is considered weak and does not counter the earlier authentic Hadīths, which prove the obligation of observing full Hijāb.

Moreover, Asmā’ bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her and her father) was twenty-seven years old at the time of the Prophet’s emigration, i.e. she was too old to enter upon the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) while wearing thin clothes that depict anything of her body other than her face and hands, and Allah knows best.

Even if we assume that it is an authentic Hadīth, it is to be interpreted as referring to the time before Hijāb, because the texts of Hijāb represent a change in the original state, so they are given precedence over the original state.

3. The Hadīth of Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) includes no evidence on the permissibility of looking at a foreign woman; because the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) did not allow Al-Fadl to continue looking, instead he turned his face away to the other side. That is why Al-Nawawi mentioned in Sharh Sahīh Muslim that among the benefits of this Hadīth is the prohibition of looking at foreign women. Al-Hāfizh ibn Hajar said in Fat-h Al-Bāri about the benefits of this Hadīth: “It indicates the prohibition of looking at foreign women and the

command of lowering the gaze.” ‘Iyād said: “Some claimed that it is not obligatory except when temptation is feared, but for me the act of the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) turning the face of Al-Fadl is stronger than words”, as mentioned in Al-Riwāyah.

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but for me the act of the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) turning the face of Al-Fadl is stronger than words”, as mentioned in Al-Riwāyah.

If it is said: Then why did the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) not order the woman to cover her face?

The answer will be: Apparently, the woman was in the state of Ihrām, hence, she had to uncover her face as long as no foreign men were looking at her, or may be the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) ordered her after that. The fact that his order was not reported does not mean that he did not order her.

Muslim and Abu Dāwūd narrated on the authority of Jarīr ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Bajali (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: “I asked the Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) about the accidental glance (at a woman) and he said: ‘Turn your eyes away.’” Or he said: “So he ordered me to turn my eyes away.”

4. The Hadīth of Jābir did not mention when that occurred, so either the woman was of post-menstrual age, when women have no desire for marriage, so she was permitted to uncover her face, which does not mean that covering the face is not obligatory upon others, or this was before the revelation of the verse of Hijāb, which is in Surat al-Ahzāb revealed in the fifth or sixth year of Hijrah, while the Eid prayer was legislated in the third year of Hijrah.

Please note that we have spoken about this in detail only because people need to be aware of the ruling of this significant social issue, which was addressed by many of those who advocate uncovering the face, and who, thus, did not research it or examine it duly. It is a must, however, for every researcher to seek justice and fairness and not to speak before learning. Every researcher must regard the contradicting pieces of evidence as if he is a judge between two opponents, examining with the eye of justice and ruling by knowledge. He should not sway towards one of the two sides without weighing what is more correct, instead, he should examine the evidence from all aspects. His belief in one of the two opinions should not lead him to exaggerate in proving its arguments and neglect the evidence of his opponent. That is why scholars said that a researcher must seek evidence before having a conviction; so that his conviction is based on evidence, not the other way round. This is because the one whose conviction precedes the evidence might be prompted to refute the texts that are against his conviction, or distort them if he was unable to refute them. We have all seen the damage caused when conviction precedes the evidence; wherein one deems weak Hadīths authentic, or regards authentic texts as an indication of something that they do not actually indicate only to establish his opinion and defend it. I read an article where the writer stated that covering the face is not obligatory. He used as a supporting evidence the Hadīth of ‘Ā’ishah which was narrated by Abu Dāwūd about the story of Asmā’ bint Abu Bakr when she entered upon the Prophet (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) and he said to her: “When a woman reaches the age of puberty, nothing should be seen of her except this and this – and he pointed to his face and hands.” The writer claimed that it is an authentic Hadīth narrated by Al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and that scholars unanimously agree on its authenticity. However, this is not true, for how could they agree on its being authentic when Abu Dāwūd himself, its narrator, deems it defective for being Mursal (a Hadīth with a chain of narrators that does not include a Companion of the Prophet) and Imam Ahmad and other prominent scholars of Hadīth said one of its narrators was weak?! As a matter of fact, bigotry and ignorance lead to affliction and ruin.

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Ibn al-Qayyim said:

“There are two garments, if worn, one remains naked.

They lead one to affliction and humiliation.

The first garment is ignorance, above which is
the garment of bigotry, and both are the worst garments.

On the other hand, fairness is the splendid garment

that could ever be worn.”

Writers and authors should beware of negligence in seeking and examining evidence. They should not hasten to write words without knowledge so as not to be among those about whom Allah said:{...Then who is more unjust than one who fabricates lies about Allah to mislead the people by [something] other than knowledge? Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.} [Al-An’ām: 144]They should not combine between negligence in seeking evidence and belying what is proven by evidence, so as not to be adding to the evil committed and be included in the words of Allah Almighty Who said:{So who is more unjust than one who lies about Allah and denies the truth when it has come to him? Is there not in Hell a residence for the disbelievers?} [Al-Zumar: 32]May Allah show us the truth and help us follow it,and show us falsehood and help us avoid it,and may He guide us to the straight path; Verily He is the Bestower of Good and the Most Generous, and may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, Companions, and all of his followers.

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Penned by:

Muhammad ibn Sālih al-'Uthaymīn

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