

Al-Albāni on the Niqāb of the Muslim Woman



In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy.

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of all creation, and may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and all his Companions.

The majority of the jurists hold that the ‘awrah of the woman that should be covered in front of non-mahrams is the whole of her body **except for her face and hands**—meaning that the face and the hands are not from the ‘awrah of a woman and she is allowed to uncover them. Shaikh Al-Albāni cited Ibn Abdil-Barr (rahimahullāh) in At-Tamheed (6/364) stating that the whole of the woman is ‘awrah except her face and hands and that this was the saying of the three Imāms and their students, and the saying Al-Awzā’ee and Abu Thawr. He (Ibn Abdil-Barr) said: “This was held by most of the people of knowledge—and they had a consensus that the woman is to uncover her face in the Prayer and when in ihrām... and they had a consensus that she does not pray while wearing the niqāb and that she does not have to wear gloves in the Prayer. And this contains the clearest proof that they (the face and hands) are not from the ‘awrah—and that it is permissible for whoever looks at her to look without suspicion or in a manner that is disliked. As for looking with desire and lust, then it is forbidden to look at her purposefully with desire, even with her clothes on, then how about looking at her uncovered face (i.e. it is even more prohibited)...” Shaikh Al-Albāni (rahimahullā) also said: “And I cite in what follows in the

book from Ibn Rushd that the position of most of the Scholars is that the face of the woman is not ‘awrah; and the like of this has been cited from An-Nawawi, and that is the position of the three Imāms (Abu Hanīfah, Mālik and Ash-Shāfi’ī) and in one narration from Ahmad...” Ibn Qudāmah Al-Maqdisi (rahimahullāh) stated in Al-Mughni (1/637) regarding the prohibition of the woman in ihrām wearing the niqāb and gloves: “If the face and hands were ‘awrah, it would not have been prohibited to cover them. And also due to the fact that there is a need for the face to be uncovered when buying and selling, and the hands uncovered for giving and taking.” Ibn Qudāmah also depended on this view and was firm upon it in his book Al-‘Umdah (p. 66).

Shaikh Al-Albāni shows that the niqāb is not wājib due to what Ibn ‘Abbās (radiyallāhu ‘anhumā) narrated: **“Al-Fadl (his brother) was riding behind Allah’s Messenger (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam) and a woman from the tribe of Khath’am came, and Al-Fadl started looking at her and she started looking at him. The Prophet (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam) turned Al-Fadl’s face away.”** Ibn ‘Abbās said: **“That happened during the Farewell Hajj.”** (Bukhāri nos. 1513, 1855 Muslim no. 1334) The narration also states that she was beautiful and good-looking: **“So Al-Fadl began looking at her and was amazed by her beauty.”** So it is clear from this report that her face was uncovered.

Likewise, the hadeeth where Asmā bint Abī Bakr (radiyallāhu ‘anhumā) entered upon the Messenger of Allah (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam) wearing thin clothes, so the Messenger of Allah (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam) turned himself away from her and said:

يَا أَسْمَاءُ إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْمَحِيضَ لَمْ تَصَلُحْ أَنْ يُرَى مِنْهَا إِلَّا هَذَا وَهَذَا
وَأَشَارَ إِلَى وَجْهِهِ وَكَفَّيْهِ

“O Asmā, when a woman reaches adulthood, it is not correct that anything should be seen of her except this and this — and he pointed to his face and hands.” (Abu Dawood no. 4104, authenticated by Al-Albāni, and before him Al-Bayhaqī in his Sunan, Al-Mundhari in his Targheeb, Adh-Dhahabi in his Tahdheeb and others).

Furthermore, there is the tafseer of the verse wherein Allah, the Most High, stated:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) **and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent...**” (An-Nūr: 31) Shaikh Al-Albāni stated that it is to be understood that the meaning of His saying: “except only that which is apparent” is explained by the saying of the Messenger (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam): **“It is not correct that anything should be seen of her except her face and hands.”** Then Shaikh Al-Albāni stated the names of the numerous Companions who explained that the exception referred to in the Āyah is the face and hands of a woman—he also cited the scholars who authenticated these reported:

1. Ā’ishah (radiyallāhu ‘anhā): Reported by Abdur-Razzāq, Ibn Abi Hātim (Ad-Durr al-Manthoor), Ibn Abi Shaybah, Al-Bayhaqī – declared authentic by Ibn Hazm.

2. Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās (radiyallāhu ‘anhumā): Ibn Abi Shaybah, At-Tahāwi, Al-Bayhaqi, declared authentic by Ibn Hazm – and there are seven chains of narration from him. Ibn ‘Abbās said: **“Not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent’ refers to the hand and face.”** Shaikh Al-Albāni declared the chain of narration to be saheeh. (Jilbāb Al-Mar’ah, p. 59).
3. Abdullah ibn ‘Umar (radiyallāhu ‘anhumā): Ibn Abi Shaybah, declared authentic by Ibn Hazm. Ibn ‘Umar said: **“The adornment which is apparent is the face and hands.”** Shaikh Al-Albāni declared the isnād shaheeh. (Jilbāb Al-Mar’ah, p. 59).
4. Anas ibn Mālik (radiyallāhu ‘anhu): Ibn Mundhir reported it with a connected chain of narration and Al-Bayhaqi in disconnected form.
5. Al-Miswar ibn Makhramah (radiyallāhu ‘anhu): Reported by Ibn Jareer At-Tabaree.

As for the narration wherein Ibn ‘Abbās is reported to have said: “Allah has commanded that when the believing women leave their houses for a need that they should cover their faces... and to uncover only one eye.” Then Shaikh Al-Albāni established that the narration is weak. (See Jilbāb Al-Mar’atil-Muslimah, p. 88)

As for the two verses, firstly:

وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ۗ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ

“And when you ask them (his wives) for anything you want, ask them from behind a hijāb (screen), that is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.” (Al-Ahzāb 33:53)

And secondly, His saying (the Most):

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ ۗ ذَلِكُمْ أَذْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

“O Prophet! Tell your wives, your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their jilbābs (cloaks) over their bodies. That is better so that they should be known as respectable women and not be harassed. And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Al-Ahzāb 33:59)

People sometimes confuse the two and assume that drawing the jilbāb around oneself includes covering the face and hands. Shaikhul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah stated in Al-Fatāwā (15/447): **“The verse about the jilbāb refers to the outer garment that is worn when leaving the home. And the verse about the hijāb (being screened) refers to speaking [to the women] while in the homes.”**

As for the verse of the khimār, wherein Allah stated:

وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ

“And let them draw their khimārs over their heads, shoulders and bosoms (juyūb).” (An-Nūr: 31) So, what is referred to here is the same as what is stated in the hadeeth of the Prophet (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam):

لَا يَقْبَلُ اللَّهُ صَلَاةَ حَائِضٍ إِلَّا بِخِمَارٍ

“Allah does not accept the prayer of a woman who has reached puberty unless she wears a khimār.” (Abu Dawūd, 641 and authenticated by Al-Albāni). It is known from the discussion above that a woman is to uncover her face in Prayer, therefore the definition of the khimār excludes the face. And it is not known that any of the scholars made it obligatory for a woman to cover her face in prayer! Furthermore, the scholars such as Ibn Katheer, At-Tabari, Al-Baghawi, Ibn Atheer, Ibn Hazm and Ibn Hajr have stated that the khimār is for covering the head, whether for the man or the woman (and not the face). (See Radd Al-Mufhim, page 19). Furthermore, Al-Baghawī (died 516AH) stated, “The term *juyūb* (singular: *jayb*) in this verse refers to their chests, hair, necks and ears.” (3/289)—and not the face.

Shaikh Al-Albāni (rahimahullāh) did not deny the recommendation of the Sharī’ah for the niqāb, he only said that the Sharī’ah does not obligate it. He stated in Ar-Radd Al-Mufhim: “I do not deny the Sharī’ah legislation of the niqāb.” He also said concerning the hadeeth of Asmā bint Abi Bakr: “I have affirmed many times that the covering of the face of the woman is better [and I say this] in opposition to those who fabricated lies against us...” (Ar-Radd Al-Mufhim, pp. 109-110)

In his tremendous work *Jilbāb Al-Mar’atil-Muslimah* (p. 104-108), the Shaikh said: “There are many shaikhs today who hold that the face of the woman is ‘awrah and that it is not allowed for her to uncover it, indeed it is harām to uncover it. And that which has preceded is sufficient as a response to them. Then there is another group on the other side who say that to cover the face is an innovation and exaggeration in the religion! This news has reached us from some adherents to the Sunnah living in some towns of Lebanon. It is to these brothers and others that I direct the following words: It should be known that covering the face and hands has an origin in the Sunnah and it was something well known in the time of the Prophet (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam) as he indicated in his saying: **“The woman in ihrām is not to wear the niqāb nor gloves.”** (Bukhāri 4/42 and others) Shaikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah stated in *Tafseer Suratin-Nūr* (p. 56): “This proves that the niqāb and the gloves were well-known to the women who were not in ihrām, and this shows that they would cover their faces and hands.” And the texts are many that prove that the womenfolk of the Prophet (salallāhu ‘alaihi wasallam) would wear the hijāb and even cover their faces.” Then Shaikh Al-Albani cites at least eight authentic ahādeeth to prove the point that the niqāb is from the Sunnah—from Bukhāri, Muslim, Ahmad, Ibn Jareer, Ibn Sa’ad, Abu Dawūd and others.

In conclusion: “It is established that the face of the woman is not ‘awrah that is obligated to be covered. That was the view (madhhab) of the majority of the scholars just as Ibn Rushd stated in *Al-Bidāyah* (1/89). And from them also was Abu Hanīfah, Mālik, Ash-Shāfi’ee and in a narration of Ahmad as cited in *Al-Majmū’* (3/169). It was reported by At-Tahāwī in *Sharhul-Ma’āni* (2/9) from the two companions of Abu Hanifah also. And this view was asserted firmly as being correct in *Al-Muhimmāt* which is from the books of the Shāfi’iyyah just as Shaikh Sharbīni mentioned in *Al-Iqnā’* (2/110). However, this position is predicated on the fact that there should be nothing of beautification and adornment on the face or the hands of the woman due to the saying of Allah: وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ **“and not to show off their adornment”** (An-Nūr: 31)—otherwise they are obligated to conceal their beautification. And this is

especially so in these times when women are put to trial concerning the beautification of their faces (with make-up, etc), and likewise, their hands with various types of adornments and colours regarding which no Muslim has any doubts concerning—indeed any person with intellect and a sense of jealousy does not doubt its prohibition. As for Kohl (antimony) for the eyes and dye for the hands (khidāb), then they do not fall into this prohibition as they are exceptions to the āyah.” (See Jilbāb Al-Mar’atil-Muslimah, p.89 of Al-Imām Al-Albāni)

As for what is worn by women from make-up such as eye-shadow, eye-liner, beautifying and decorative colours, blusher, lipstick, lip-gloss, nail varnish, false eye-lashes, etc., then all of this is prohibited for a woman to wear in front of non-mahram men with her hands and face uncovered. All of this clearly opposes the verse: **“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent...”** (An-Nūr: 31) And what is apparent is her face and hands, free from beautifications and adornments.

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