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The Obligation of Veiling the Face and Hands

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About the Book: This is a complete translation of a small treatise titled “*Wujoob Sitr-ul-Wajhi wal-Kafayn*” of Shaikh Zayd bin Muhammad Al-Madkhalee.

In this small treatise, Shaikh Zayd Al-Madkhalee briefly outlines the textual proofs for the obligation of veiling from the Qur’aan and the Sunnah, accompanying that with logical and customary proofs that strengthen his argument, which was written as a reply to an article allowing the unveiling of a woman’s face.

The issue of a woman being obligated to veil her face or not is something that the scholars of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamaa’ah have differed on from the past up until this present day. So it is from the matters in which differing is permitted and which does not lead to division or splitting.

By presenting this treatise, we hope to provide clarity on the proofs and evidences of those who hold the opinion that a woman is obligated to veil.

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The Treatise

In the Name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

All praise is for Allaah who sent His messengers with the guidance in order to bring the people out from the darkness of polytheism and ignorance and from the causes of destruction. And I bear witness that there is no deity that has the right to be worshipped except Allaah – alone and with no partner – the possessor of blessings, mercy and kindness. He knows best those who have gone astray and those who are guided. And I bear witness that Muhammad is the last of the messengers and the chief of the prophets. O Allaah, send Your peace and blessings on him, his family and his Companions, who upheld beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds, and called to Allaah with wisdom and fair admonition. These are the best of those who are guided and guide others. To Proceed:

Noble readers, what caused me to write this brief treatise on this subject, which circumstances require that a shared effort be made to clarify and explain this issue, was what I observed from the writings of one of the brothers in recent times. The writing related to the subjects of veiling and unveiling and in it the author, may Allaah guide him, clearly and definitively stated that the Islamic Legislation, with all of its guidelines, doesn't command a woman to cover her face and hands in front of male strangers.

So I felt that in this statement there was obvious *fitnah* (mischief) and great danger for the Muslim communities. And therefore, an explanation and clarification was needed in order to make clear the true opinion with regard to this issue, accompanying it with proofs, freeing it from censure, counseling the ummah, aiding the truth and sincerely advising the people. So I say:

A woman uncovering her face and hands in front of male strangers is forbidden and not permissible based on clear-cut and authentic textual, logical and customary evidences.

As for the textual proofs from the Book and the Sunnah, then they are many, and books both old and recent have been dedicated to them, both specific and non-specific. We will mention from these proofs the following:

1. Allaah says:

وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا

“And (tell the believing women) not to display their *zeenah* (adornment) except for that which is apparent from it.” [Surah An-Noor: 31]

This refers to that which is unable to be concealed, such as the outer garment like the *jilbaab*, the veil and so on. Or it may refer to that which becomes exposed from a woman unintentionally, due to some unintended cause, such as a strong wind or due to carrying an object, as well as whatever else a woman is pardoned for, if her face and hands become exposed due to it.

Furthermore, it has been authentically reported on Ibn Mas’ood رضي الله عنه with a chain of narration that bears the highest level of authenticity that what is meant by Allaah’s statement: “...**except for that which is apparent from it**” is the (outer) garment.

2. Allaah says:

يَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلٌّ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ
مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا

رَّحِيمًا

“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women to cast their *jalaabeeb* (pl. of *jilbaab*) over themselves. That will be better, that they should be known, so as not to be bothered.” [Surah Al-Ahzaab: 59]

Ibn Katheer said: “Muhammad bin Sireen said: ‘I asked ‘Ubaydah As-Salmaanee about Allaah’s statement: ‘to cast their *jalaabeeb* over themselves’ so he covered his face and (only) exposed his left eye.”

Ibn Al-Jawzee (*rahimahullaah*) said concerning this ayah: “It means that they must cover their heads and faces so that they may be known as free women. The definition of a *jilbaab* is a loose outer garment, as has been stated by Ibn Qutaybah.”

And Abu Hayaan Al-Andalusee (*rahimahullaah*) said in *Al-Bahr-ul-Muheet*: “It consists of their entire bodies. Or the word *'alayhinna* (over themselves) could mean: (just) their faces, since in the Days of Ignorance, the thing that the women used to expose from themselves was the face.”

Abu Su'ood said: “The *jilbaab* is a garment that is wider than a *khimaar* but less than a *ridaa* (outer-cloak). A woman wraps it upon her head and leaves hanging what falls to her breast. What is meant by the ayah is that they should cover their faces and bodies with it, if they become uncovered due to some reason.”

It is reported that Imaam As-Suddee said: “She should cover one of her eyes, her forehead and the other (lower) portion of her face, except one eye.” So based on this, we say:

O brothers in Islaam, look at the statements of the scholars of Tafseer from our pious predecessors, whose eyes Allaah enlightened to see the truth and whose hearts He filled with faith and understanding of their Lord's Book, which He sent down as a guide and a cure. Look at how their statements vary from that of those who call to unveiling, those who have opposed Allaah's precious commandments and merciful guidelines, which strive to maintain the woman's honor, nobility and chastity, by having her veil herself from the eyes of the wolves amongst mankind – those with unfaithful personalities and vile intentions, who love to bask in the forbidden even if it is for just one glance. And there is nothing that they would hold back from giving in order to achieve that, such as beautified speech, lots of money and venturing to spread mischief and misguidance, repeating the words of their poet:

*“We said: Allow me to achieve just one glance
And leave off the (Day of) Recompense. After that, establish it.”*

Furthermore, let us reflect together on the statement of Allaah:

وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسَأَلُوهُنَّ
مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ

“And when you ask them (i.e. Prophet's wives) for something, then ask them from behind a veil (Hijaab). That is purer for your hearts and their hearts.” [Surah Al-Ahzaab: 53]

This is since this ayah guides us to remain far away from those things that cause *fitnah*. And it sends down the preventive and fortified Hijaab so that none of the evil desires of those with diseased hearts and vile lusts, which demolish modesty and bring about bad consequences in this life and the next, can be achieved. Any fair person with common sense will not doubt that the hands and the face are the chief areas of temptation, thus it is an obligation to cover them.

The ayah also indicates that the men and women should keep their hearts pure, and this cannot be achieved except by preventing the means that lead to fornication and shutting down its avenues, the greatest of which is encountering a woman and enjoying a look at her uncovered face, (perhaps) with decorated eyes, arched eyebrows, and dyed fingernails. So fear Allaah O you who call to the unveiling of women, and fear a Day that Allaah has prepared for Recompense, in which He will resurrect those in the graves and bring out what is in the hearts so that it can be judged by the One who is All-Knowing of what is hidden and apparent.

3. It is authentically reported that ‘Aa’ishah covered her face with the khimaar when she heard the voice of Safwaan bin Mu’attal As-Sulamee. And she stated that he used to know her (i.e. how she looked like) before the Hijaab was obligated. This proves that after the ayah of Hijaab was revealed, the women could not be recognized because of the fact that they veiled their faces.

4. It is authentically reported in the *Sunan* as well as other (hadeeth) collections that ‘Aa’ishah (*radyyAllaahu ‘anhaa*) said: “Male horsemen would ride past us while we were in the state of Ihraam with Allaah’s Messenger ﷺ. So when they would come near us, (each) one of us would let her *jilbaab* fall down from the top of her head over her face. When they had passed by, we would uncover (our faces) again.” The only reason they did this was because they knew its religious ruling, which was that the face is ‘*awrah*’ and that it must be covered in front of male strangers.

5. There is also the hadeeth reported in Sunan At-Tirmidhee and other collections from the narration of ‘Abdullaah bin Mas’ood ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said: “**The woman is ‘awrah.**” This is a clear-cut proof that every part of the woman is ‘*awrah*’ (i.e. must be covered) in front of male strangers, whether that includes her face or any other part of her body. In fact her face and hands have the most right to be covered because they are the areas that are sought after by men and the areas of enticement from women.

So based on this, whoever claims that a woman has the right to uncover her face and hands in front of male strangers, then he has steered away from the truth and correctness. If he is from those who are qualified to make investigation and *Ijtihad* (come up with rulings), and he is free from deviations, then he receives the reward for

his *Ijtihad*, and his error is pardoned. However, it is not permissible to follow him in that opinion. But if he is not from this kind of people, then none of his opinions and arguments should be given any regard, because the truth has more right to be followed (than individuals).

The great Imaam, Ahmad bin Hanbal, may Allaah have mercy on him, understood well the afore-mentioned hadeeth of Ibn Mas'ood, as he said: "A woman's fingernail is *'awrah* (i.e. must be covered). So when she goes out from her home, she must not reveal any part of herself, not even her *khuff*, for the *khuff* describes the foot. What is preferred in my opinion, is that she put a button on her sleeve where her hand is so that nothing could be exposed from her."

Many scholars and Imaams throughout the history of time have come up with the same understanding of the hadeeth of Ibn Mas'ood and other similar texts as that of Imaam Ahmad bin Hanbal, that the entire body of a free woman is *'awrah*, without the exception of the face and hands.

As for the logical proof, then from the things about which there is no doubt according to sane and unbiased people is that the *fitnah* involved in a woman unveiling her face and hands is greater than that of her exposing her feet, for which the Prophet ﷺ ordered the women to lengthen the hems of their dresses by a forearm's length so that their feet would not be exposed.

As for the customary proof, then every fair and balanced person knows that in most cases, the area of desire from a woman according to men is the face. This is not negated by the fact that he can be enticed by other parts of her, such as even her voice. In fact, a woman's voice is considered as part of her adornment, as is stated in Surah An-Noor, where Allaah says:

وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ

"And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide from their adornment." [Surah An-Noor: 31]

So when this point becomes clear and understood, it is obligatory for the one who professes that it is permissible for a woman to uncover her face and hands in front of male strangers to fear his Lord and to recant from this verdict. And he should seek guidance from the experts in the religious sciences, i.e. those who tread upon the way of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah and who have the correct understanding of the objectives and goals of this noble Religion in declaring things lawful and forbidden, as

well as who have knowledge of the means for rectification and corruption and the aspect of preventing the means.

May Allaah have mercy on Ibn Al-Qayyim when he said: “From the characteristics of a skilled doctor is that he is experienced with and aware of the sicknesses and remedies of the hearts and souls. This is a tremendous foundation in curing the bodies, for indeed, the influence that the heart and the soul has on the body and its natural state is something that has been witnessed. So if a doctor is aware of the diseases and cures of the heart and soul, he becomes a complete doctor. And if he is not aware of these things, even though he may be highly proficient in curing the physical aspects and conditions of the body, he is only half a doctor. Furthermore, every doctor that does not cure his sick patient by examining his heart and soul and strengthening him by (ordering him towards) doing good deeds and having righteousness and accepting Allaah and the final abode, then he is not a doctor at all, rather he is just a deficient practitioner.”

In summary: A free woman has no choice but to abide by the legislated garments, of which from its foundations is wearing the *niqaab* (veil) over the face and the *qafaazaan* (gloves) over the hands, or whatever else takes their place and fulfils their duties. This is to be done whenever she mixes with male strangers, especially in these times in which good people are few and evil people are many. Furthermore, everyone that calls to the unveiling of a woman’s face and hands uses as an excuse that which has not been permitted in the Religion. So therefore he has instituted a bad way (*sunnah*), and he will carry its sins and the sins of all those who act on it, and it will not increase their sins in the least. And whomever Allaah forgives, He replaces his evil deeds with good deeds.

I feel that it is good to attach two important things to this advice, as well as an authentic story, which contains an admonition we all should reflect on.

First: A clarification of the rulings that can be derived from the evidences on Hijaab, and they are as follows:

1. The obligation of the legislated Hijaab is definite and binding on all of the believing women, there being no room for lenience or negotiation with regard to abolishing it or belittling its status and its significance.
2. A clarification that the Prophet’s chaste wives and noble daughters serve as the best examples and most outstanding role models for all Muslim women when it comes to implementing the issue of Hijaab.

3. The prescribed Hijaab is that which covers a woman's adornment, garments and all of her body, which includes the face and the hands.
4. The obligation of wearing the Hijaab on the Muslim woman consists of honoring her status, raising her rank, and protecting her dignity and personality. In fact it protects the whole society from the avenues of mischief and corruption appearing in it and the spreading of vile acts amongst its people and inhabitants.
5. A severe warning to the Muslim woman against her wearing that which will make the eyes of men look towards her or which will make their hearts incline to her or which will incite the causes of mischief. Such enticements include wearing perfumes and cosmetics. However she is permitted to wear these when she is in the presence of her husband or her male guardians according to the limits of the noble Religion.
6. There is nothing wrong with children, young boys and whoever else falls under their ruling, to enter into a woman's presence due to the lack of there occurring any *fitnah* or danger from them, as is apparent from the Qur'aan.
7. The obligation of repenting to Allaah in general and to seek forgiveness for falling short of abiding by the Hijaab in particular, hoping for Allaah's Contentment and Mercy, and desiring to attain success in both this world and the next life, acting on Allaah's statement:

وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“And turn in repentance to Allaah, all of you, O believers, in order that you may be successful.” [Surah An-Noor: 31]

Second: An explanation of the conditions required for the Hijaab to fulfill its religious objective. Below is a list of the Hijaab's necessary conditions:

1. The Hijaab must cover a woman's entire body, based on Allaah's statement: **“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women to cast their *jalaabeeb* over themselves (i.e. their bodies).”** [33:59] You have already come to know from what we have written previously that the *jilbaab* is a long garment that is ample enough to cover the entire body and that the meaning of the word *idnaa* (to cast) is **“to lower”** and **“to let down”** as was stated previously.

2. The garment must be thick, not thin and transparent. This is since the objective of the Hijaab, which is to veil a woman's entire body and her hidden and apparent adornment, cannot be achieved with a thin garment. Therefore, that which a great amount of covered women wear today, which they call the *'abaa'ah* (cloak) or the *malaa'ah* (mantle), but which are transparent and describe the skin, such that the onlooker can see what lies beneath the garment, is not considered a legitimate Hijaab since it only brings about an increase in her ability to entice (men) with her attractive and alluring features. And yet they only wear it so that it could be said: "They are wearing Hijaab." So we seek Allaah's refuge from deception, the harm of which only falls on those who love and are infatuated with it.

3. The Hijaab must not be a source of decoration in itself, such as by it being colorful and flashy, causing eyes to turn towards it and hearts to be diseased (with temptation). We explained previously the meaning of Allaah's saying: **"And (tell the believing women) not to display their *zeenah* (adornment) except for that which is apparent from it."** [24:31] So since it is this way, then every Hijaab that does not prevent the display of one's adornment in front of male-strangers, is not a valid Hijaab.

4. It must be ample and loose, since a tight garment outlines the body and reveals it in front of male strangers. So it goes against the objective that is sought after from the obligation of Hijaab. Furthermore, from the various types of tight clothes is that which is called pants, since it does not properly cover what it goes over. On top of that, it describes and outlines the body, as well as resembling the dress of men, and the Prophet ﷺ cursed: **"The man who wears a woman's garment and the woman who wears a man's garment."** [Reported by Abu Dawood and An-Nasaa'ee]

5. It is also required for the Hijaab not to be perfumed, since fragrances cause men's desires to be incited and for them to be tempted, against their wills. So a woman who does this carries the sin of her action as well as the sin of those who respond to her active call to this type of fornication. It is reported in a hadeeth collected by the Sunan compilers and others that the Prophet ﷺ said: **"Indeed, when a woman perfumes herself and then passes by a gathering, she is such and such"** – meaning a fornicator. And in another narration, he ﷺ said: **"Verily, when a woman perfumes herself and then passes by a group of people such that they can smell her scent, she is a fornicator."**

These, O Muslim brothers and sisters, are the conditions required for the Hijaab to achieve its intended objective. So we must fear Allaah and be dutiful to Him by obeying what He has commanded and abstaining from what He has forbidden, and by following His Messenger ﷺ, for indeed this brings success in both this life and the next.

As for the story that contains admonition and reflection in it, then it is that which is reported in the biography of ‘Ubayd bin ‘Ameer Al-Makkee in the “*Thiqaat*” of Al-‘Ijlee, who said: “There used to be a beautiful woman in Makkah who was married. One day she looked at herself in the mirror and said to her husband: ‘Do you think there is anyone that can look at this face and not be enticed by it?’ He said: ‘Yes.’ So she enquired: ‘Who?’ He said: “Ubayd bin ‘Ameer.’ So she said: ‘Grant me permission so that I may go entice him.’ He said: ‘I give you permission.’ So she went to see him and asked him for a fatwa (religious verdict). So he went with her to a part of Al-Masjid Al-Haraam and sat in privacy with her. Then she uncovered her face, so that it looked like half of a moon. So he said to her: ‘O slave of Allaah, fear Allaah!’”

The author of *Al-Hilyah* mentioned this story from “*Ath-Thiqaat*” of Al-‘Ijlee in his biography of ‘Ubayd bin ‘Ameer Al-Makkee. Al-Albaanee also mentioned it in his book on Hijaab using it as a proof for the *niqaab* (face-veil).

The point of benefit that we can derive from this great noble scholar’s rebuking of that woman when she uncovered her face in front of him is that: The Taabi’een used to hold that a woman uncovering herself by unveiling her face in front of male strangers was a serious crime, which needed to be changed and great efforts needed to be made to terminate it. In fact, the matter should be this way, for indeed a person that looks at a woman’s face and hands, i.e. a woman he is prohibited from looking at, is enjoying the area of the body with the greatest temptation and the most severe in danger.

Won’t those who rule that a woman is permitted to uncover her face and hands in front of male-strangers bear this in mind, especially since most of the males in our time have had their hearts and minds overpowered by forbidden temptations, and so they have been affected by the diseases of doubts and desires? And the blind followers from among the men and women, who use words and actions to call to the uncovering of the private parts and to the looking at faces of prostitutes, seeking to cause temptation that only brings about misfortune and misguidance – they must fear Allaah.

This is what I wanted to clarify and explain as a reminder and insight for everyone that desires the truth, loves virtue, hates falsehood, and despises vice. And my success is with Allaah alone. May the peace and blessings be on our Prophet Muhammad, his family and Companions.