

The Hidden Pearls

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اللؤلؤ المكنون



THE HIDDEN PEARLS

Pearls, beautiful manifestations of Allah's design and creation are born and found in the depths of the ocean within the protection of an oyster shell. Many divers risk their lives to attain these jewels, their shine unmarred, hidden away from human touch and sight. There are lessons in nature for heedful eyes. Have we ever wondered why pearls, the purest and whitest of natural jewels are not found floating on the surface of the ocean for all to see? Have we pondered why all beautiful things are hidden, the pomegranate seeds in their peel, white coconut in a coarse shell, diamonds in a mine? And The Most Beautiful Being beyond our imagination, Allah ﷻ. Among His best creation, the human being, Allah ﷻ chose this honour for a woman in order to preserve, protect and purify her beauty and to make it eternal in paradise.

However, in recent times this great honour bestowed on a woman is now being looked down upon. A symbol of dignity for centuries, it is now being called a symbol of humiliation and imprisonment. Above all people have gone to the extent of saying that this ordainment is not there in the Qur'an. So let us see what Islam says about *Hijāb*.

A number of words have been used in the Qur'an to explain the dress code and conduct expected from a Muslim woman. *Hijāb* is not only a covering or outer garb but also the kind of conduct and intention that should accompany it. Yet the presence of only a good intention is not sufficient without any action to verify that intention. You can perhaps vouch for your own purity of thought which is an act also disliked by Allah ﷻ because no one can

claim to be free from sin but how can you vouch for the intentions of the hundreds of men you choose to walk amongst? Intention is important but not sufficient by itself for repeatedly Allah ﷻ says: 'those who believed and performed good actions...' Hence, actions must accompany intention and in the following ayahs, Allah ﷻ has stated certain specific actions that He wishes us to do.

1- Surah Al-Nūr: 31 states, "And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women."

The word '*Khumur*' (plural of *khimar*) is used for a head cover in Arabic. Alcohol is also called *khamr* because it overcomes or covers up the senses of a person. Before Islam, women would tuck this head dress behind their ears and throw its ends over their shoulders to leave their ears, necks and bosoms uncovered. So it is clearly ordained here to extend the head dress (or scarf or *dupatta*) over the bosoms so they serve their actual purpose of covering a woman's attraction.

Then women are explicitly told about the people before whom they may reveal their adornment. It is vital to pause here and think,

what was the need of mentioning every *mahram* by name if there was going to be no difference in the woman's attire before them and everyone else?

Not only the clothes but even the manner of walking should not be provocative or such that it draws attention to the women. "And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed." (Al-Nūr: 31)

We, on the contrary, act against these commands and then expect Allah to forgive us.

Men and women are both being asked to lower their gaze, not because the face is uncovered or covered but also to avoid eye contact or avoid seeing any *haram* (unlawful) thing that can open the door to many vices. Eyes are windows to the soul and betray many an emotion; therefore controlling their unbridled usage was one of the steps to prevent unlawful relationships. *Hijāb* was another step in the same direction.

We need to then think about how the Qur'an and Sunnah, which are full of wisdom, could command the covering of the head and bosom, the lowering of certain gazes and a dignified walk, but allow the face to remain uncovered? The face is where the main attraction of a woman lies. It is on the beautification of her face that the woman spends thousands of rupees, the face that attracts men and the face that is used in advertisements to promote many products.

2- Surah Al-Aḥzāb: 53, it is clearly stated that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ are not allowed to remarry and if male strangers have any important thing to ask for, they should do so from behind a partition. Allah ﷻ says:

“...that is purer for your hearts and their hearts...” Hence certain actions are necessary to preserve the purity of the heart. Allah ﷻ is our Creator and is closer to us than our jugular vein. He knows the thoughts that arise in us even before we can realize them. He knows better what precautions and rules to make to save humanity from disaster.

Despite being Mothers of the faithful and role models for us, the wives of the Prophet ﷺ had been given strict rules of conduct and attire. If these pious ladies have been ordered thus, where should we place ourselves?

3- Surah Al-Aḥzāb: 59, Allah ﷻ ordains, “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 ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”

The word '*jilbāb*' refers to an outer garment to be worn over the clothes when going out of the house. Beyond the security of the house, this dress will hide a Muslim woman's adornment (face, body, clothes make over and jewellery) and also act as a mark of distinction to prevent any wrong advances. Here, it is not the face that is meant to be a mark of recognition for any individual, because this meaning would be inconsistent with the context and meaning of the ayah. Rather it is this attire that will help a woman be recognized as a Muslim about whom no evil hopes can be harboured.

To say that this order was for the olden days when such a need for security existed is a farce because are we implying that the time of Prophet ﷺ was worse than the corrupt and crime-ridden society of today? Are women more secure from threats to their person and honour today? Are cases of rape and sexual

Harassment not on the rise in all parts of the world? Has the human nature changed with time? The answers are clear.

The word '*ala*' (upon) signifies that this cloak must be hung from above a person so as to cover the face, body and clothes and not hung from the shoulders, etc. The form and design of the *jilbāb* is not mentioned but rather left up to the conditions of each country or environment.

The Qur'an cannot be completely understood without *aḥādīth* and we must see how the initial and foremost recipients of this Divine Message acted upon it. We see that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ and the *ṣahābiyāt* (female companions of Prophet ﷺ) had no hesitation in covering their faces and bodies when such an order came from their Lord. Aisha (ra) relates in context to the incident of slander against her: “I kept sitting there and dozed off. Meanwhile a man, Safwan bin Muattal Aslami came to the place and saw me sleeping. He recognized me immediately because he had seen me before the commandment for hijab came. He recited '*Inna lillāhi wa inna ilaihi rāji'ūn*'. So I woke up and covered my face with my *jilbāb*.” [Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī]

Though the word 'face' or '*naqab*' may not be mentioned in the Qur'an in context to *ḥijāb*, but it is mentioned in *aḥādīth* (like the ḥadīth about not wearing *naqab* during Ḥajj). The test may be to see who submits to Allah ﷻ commands as well as the Messenger's ﷺ Sunnah.

An exception to this ruling is when a man wishes to see the woman he is going to marry. This is allowed and recommended and this special permission shows that it is not possible to see the woman otherwise.

Old women who have no desire or produce no

desire for marriage in others have been allowed to shed their outer clothes, which proves that the wearing of *jilbāb* is necessary for young, marriageable women. Even for the elderly, Allah ﷻ says, “...but to modestly refrain [from that] is better for them...” (Al-Nūr: 60)

As far as leaving the face uncovered during Ḥajj (or *ṣalah*) is concerned, this is not necessarily applicable for the rest of our activities. Acts of worship, in specific circumstances, have special requirements that are not practised otherwise. We do not wear the *Iḥrām* (2 sheets of cloth) in our daily life, nor do we observe the various restrictions of *Iḥrām* except on the occasion of Hajj, we do not abstain from food or intercourse everyday from dawn till dusk like we do in Ramadan. So how can we make an exceptional act like uncovering the face a rule for the rest of our life or activities?

On the other hand, the command to abstain from using *naqab* (sewn cloth for covering face) during Hajj proves the fact that it is necessary otherwise, or there would have been no need to stop women from wearing it on Ḥajj. In fact it is not forbidden to cover the face with an unsown cloth for women on Ḥajj. Aisha (ra) narrates, “Men on camels used to pass by us while we were with the Prophet saw in the state of *Iḥram*. We would cover our faces with our *jilbāb* when they passed by us and then uncover them again when they leave.” (Sunan Abū Dawūd, Sunan Ibn Mājah)

This attire is not a hindrance but rather a blessing for the Muslim woman. If an entire nation can go around wearing masks to save themselves from catching the SARS disease, why can't Muslim women do so to save themselves from other kinds of social ills? If a surgeon can perform the most delicate of tasks covered from head to toe, wearing a mask, why must a cloth obstruct a Muslim woman's sight,

hearing or breathing? *Ḥijāb* is not a means of blackening the faces of women and reducing them to mere objects, rather it is the culture of obscenity that is making women mere objects of attraction and a feast for the eyes.

Does keeping a pearl within a cover or a diamond in a safe place decrease its worth? Rather it increases it. It is when the woman's outer appearance is hidden from public display that her inner qualities of intellect, wisdom and knowledge shine through.

Whenever the women of Jannah are mentioned in the Qur'an, their quality of being hidden and preserved is also mentioned which further enhances their beauty. They have been called *Azwājūn Muṭṭahharatun* (purified wives) and *Lulu-al-Maknoon* (Hidden Pearls). Allah ﷻ says: “And with them will be women limiting [their] glances, with large, [beautiful] eyes, As if they were [delicate] eggs, well-protected.” (Al-Sāffāt: 48-49)

If we desire to be amongst the women in the gardens of Paradise, we will have to develop these qualities within ourselves from this world onwards to become one of the Hidden Pearls.

For more information about this topic, listen to the audio lecture:

“Libaas o Hijab”

by

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