

Veiling the Attitudes & Hemline¹

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The Qur'an has a vision to create a society, where men and women respect one another and help one another to achieve nearness to Allah³. The Qur'anic teachings of haya⁴ and other 'family values' are intended to save the family structure of the human race where men and women do not need to compromise their dignity, integrity and self-esteem.

The Qur'an considers the unclad human body as a cause of shame – devoid of haya - that must be covered, a perception that relates back to Adam and Eve – Q.07:20, 22, 23. Thus, it instructs both genders to cover themselves and dress up – Q.07:26, whether in public or in private, as a symbol of haya and righteousness. And, in the realm of cause-and-effect, it implies purification of the mind, the attitude and the demeanor. Thus, any talk of haya must begin with the heart, not the hemline, as The Prophet⁵ said:

إِنَّ الْحَيَاءَ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ⁶

The 'Eman' demands the Faithful to obey The Qur'anic Injunctions, and it shall be going against it if one were to argue about how much of these can be 'ignored as not relevant to time and space' as these pertain to 'T-infinity'. The basic message of The Qur'an for haya, inter alia, is based on the premise to avoid drawing attention to oneself, especially those features of human anatomy that are physically attractive, and perhaps enticing, to the opposite gender. This applies for boys and girls, men and women.

Q.40:19 reads – 'He is aware of the infidelity of the eyes, *i.e. intentional and lustful look at the opposite gender that induces evil. And whatever the hearts conceal that induce evil to cause infidelity.*' Thus, placing the burden primarily on girls/ladies without calling for a restraint of boys/men to discipline their lustful appetite shall be contrary to the spirit of The Qur'an which is all about 'Taqwa' – self-righteousness, self-control and self-restraint.

Given that a female body, her bodily movements and even the style, shape and color of her dress may have the propensity to arouse the male carnal impulses, the Divine emphasis is more inclined towards female haya with the intent to guard not only females but also the spiritual virtue of males. Thus, females are advised an extra one step: while leaving the house they are to be dressed in a manner that protects them from being gazed at lustfully. Thus, they shall never fall, nor shall they invite others to fall into sin by wearing a dress that may expose of their 'zeenah'⁷ that should not be exposed.

The 'covering' of the feminine 'zeenah' and 'juyub'⁸ is a divinely ordained solution to the seeming disparities in male and female carnal appetites - Q. 24:31 and 33:59. What constitutes a women's 'zeenah' and what should be the covering for their 'zeenah' and 'juyub' and how should 'khumr'⁹ be defined, has been a subject of long, arduous and sometimes bitter social, political and theological debates. It needs to be noted that the focus of Q.24:31 and Q.33:59 is on the result, *i.e.* avoiding harassment and preserving the respect and dignity – haya - of a Muslim female, when outside her home. Regardless of how these expressions are defined and applied, they may have different implications in different settings; and may actually allow for differing interpretations based on a variety of circumstances.

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² www.quranhighlights.com

³ Whenever the Name 'Allah' appears, read it as: Allah - The Majestic, The Mighty.

⁴ Expression of the Qur'anic Sacred Text (Q.28:25) meaning: modesty and chastity.

⁵ Whenever the expression 'The Prophet' appears, read it as: The Prophet - Allah bless him always with honor.

⁶ Means: Indeed, haya is from Eman. Source: Sunan Abu Dawud, hadith: 4795.

⁷ Also pronounced as 'zeenat' – both mean: beauty, adornment, appealing to the opposite gender, etc.

⁸ Expression of the Qur'anic Sacred Text meaning 'bosoms.'

⁹ Expression of the Qur'anic Sacred Text meaning 'covering.'

The ‘hijab’¹⁰ remains a potent symbol of the female Muslim identity and haya around the world in a myriad of cultures and societies. With this symbol, a female’s bodily space is marked as specifically Muslim and sacred; thus, easing their movement outside their home and correcting a grossly inaccurate impression that the Muslim females do not interact in public space; in fact, they do while preserving a sacred state.

While The Qur’an does not spell out any punishment (hudud)¹¹ for violations of a dress code, it is not correct to set aside any passage of The Qur’anic Injunction for reasons of political, social and cultural expediencies. If we can dismiss Q.24:31 and Q.33:59 so lightly, we can dismiss anything which disagrees with the thinking of our times. A passage, which, on its face value, offers what may even be called moral reasons, is being dismissed as culturally relative and hence obsolete. This is a very dangerous precedent.

I cannot believe that the avoidance of dress code for our girls/ladies is worth the trouble we will get from compromised principles of interpretation. For these reasons and others I think it would be best if our males and females adhere to the dress code just because ‘Symbols’ have a powerful effect on our lives, and it is not correct to treat them with contempt, especially when the symbol in question has been Divinely decreed in The Qur’an. I urge you not to put a ‘question mark’ where Allah has put a ‘full stop.’

Submission to the Divine Authority is now increasingly considered as politically incorrect, socially intolerable and culturally obsolete. Pillars of political authority and governance in Pakistan stand on an agenda where The Qur’anic concept of ‘Fahsha’¹² is encouraged and promoted in the guise of ‘New World Order’, ‘Freedom of the Media’,¹³ ‘Empowerment of Women’, and ‘Women Rights,’ etc.

The feminist and women liberation movements and NGOs have created a social environment across the Land of Crescent, Pakistan included, which is very inimical and hostile to haya and family values of Islam. The Symbol of Islamic haya – Hijab - is banned by law in at least half a dozen of countries of The Crescent, and in some others it is ridiculed and mocked. It is one thing to seek more understanding of The Qur’anic Injunction by investigating the cultural situation of the sixth century; while it is quite another to interpret The Qur’an as if it were merely an echo of the sixth-century culture. This is wrong!

It is not my intention to dwell on redefining the role of media and the advertising agencies which have increasingly become an instrument for the spread of vulgarity and obscenity – devoid of all forms of haya. I also do not intend to speak on the institution of political leadership of the country which has continued to demonstrate a criminal negligence to preserving the framework of our religious heritage with respects to its values and ethics as it quietly sinks into sands of secular norms in an Islamic society.

Our TV Talk Shows and entertainment programs are crowded with men and women, anchor persons and participants, who appear to have little regard for our values of haya and norms of morality. Commercial shots exhale massive filth on our kids, around the clock, which is far more destructive than nuclear waste. Shamefully, Pemra sits muted; civil society is in deep slumber.

I would, nevertheless, leave a thought with all those who unwittingly ‘increase their rating,’ promote ‘liberalism’ and provide ‘entertainment’ to a society that takes pride in nourishing its values on Teachings of The Qur’an, as how would they respond to Q.24:19 –

¹⁰ Head covering extending to the neckline, shoulders and below.

¹¹ Like the punishments for adultery, theft, rebellion and anarchy, etc.

¹² Expression of The Qur’anic Sacred Text meaning: vulgarity, adultery, rape and all forms of indecency whether in speech, behavior or dress.

¹³ Print, electronic and social.

Those (*media houses, ngos, organizations and institutions*) who love to propagate Fahishah among The Faithful they shall have a painful suffering in the life of this world as well as in the Life after this life.

Let me endeavor to explore some issues at the grass root/family level where, I guess, we can create an impact. You would agree that interaction among family members is swiftly eroding in favor of the individually-captivating gadgets. Thus, to my regret, family members are becoming family individuals. I have observed a similar phenomenon that seeped deeply into the western society from the 1950's, and now their families do not exist as family units – they are devoid of mutual love, care and compassion.

Disturbed by these patterns, I am proposing a 10-tier approach to inculcate Islamic values in our families and then nourish them. I would start with myself and yourself, as a parent, as head of the family:-

First. It has been said over and over again, and it shall always need to be said – that a parent is a child's first role model. So if we, as parents, enjoy watching television shows that show 'mild nudity' and comment on how attractive certain celebrities are - 'hot', 'cute', 'attractive' - then it shall be difficult to convey the importance of a Muslim being modest. We need to sit down and do an honest assessment of our behavior.

If we catch ourselves falling into these or other examples of immodest behavior, we should seek Allah's forgiveness and resolve to be a modest Muslim. In this day and age, everywhere we turn, it is almost impossible to avoid looking at something vulgar. But if we are conscious and ask Allah to help us, we can do better in this area despite the challenge, thus setting the example our kids need to stick to this virtue.

Second. It is a common experience that mothers usually complain about how a girl had texted her teenage son and he had to text her back. When she would be asked why her son did not ignore the girl's text, the mother would innocently say: 'Well, he is a boy. What do you expect him to do? If a girl is giving him attention, he is going to respond.' I have no doubt if her daughter had done the same to a boy, this mother would have definitely come down hard on her. Drop double standards!

Modest behavior is a requirement for all boys and girls as well as all men and women in Islam (Q.33:35). It is wrong to focus all of our attention solely on our daughters' level of modesty in dress and behavior – haya, while giving our sons free reign to do what they like, whether that is looking the other way if we find out they have been flirting-by-text with a girl at school/college, or looking at pornography online, or talking to a girl with vulgar sign-language.

The standards of haya are a requirement for both genders in Islam, and we must set higher expectations of our sons, as we do of our daughters: to speak, to dress, and to behave modestly.

Third. Television, YouTube videos, Face Book, etc. are all accessible ways to harness great information – and disgraceful stuff too. Monitoring media consumption is absolutely necessary, no matter how busy, tired, or digitally illiterate we think we are as parents. Fix a time – say one or two hours every day - for gadget exposure. Never mistrust kids but keep a close and diligent watch. A pornography habit can be squashed if caught early enough. You can stop an embarrassing video/photo from being up/down loaded by simply being aware of what your child is doing online, and how you can ring-fence it.

As for television, sitting with kids and watching the programs they do shall not only make you aware of what they are watching, but it shall also make them aware that you are doing so. It is important as well to make sure to comment on what is immodest or inappropriate in these programs so kids know, for instance, that staring at a 'hot' actor or actress or watching them in a 'mild nudity' scenario is wrong, absolutely wrong; totally un-Islamic!

Fourth. You can turn off a television, or power off a computer or a cell phone, but you cannot do either of those for billboards. It seems that in some places, these types of advertising are only increasing, whether it be ads for cosmetics, toiletries, cell phones, or tourist travelling. In these cases, make sure you set the example by looking away from the unavoidable, and saying softly, but loud enough for the kids to hear: ‘Astaghfirullah’¹⁴.

Fifth. This is a key Islamic concept that we learn from childhood, but it needs to be reiterated as kids start becoming mature. Allah is watching us, and He knows if we are surfing and seeing something inappropriate online, texting with someone we should not, or posting things that neither He nor our parents would approve of.

It is also important to emphasize to your kids is that starting from the time a boy or girl hits puberty, actions count for the ‘Akhirah’¹⁵ and they are accountable for them. So while parents may be unaware of any misdeeds, Allah knows all of them. While He is the Forgiving and the Merciful, He shall also hold us accountable.

Sixth. Cultivate the love of and respect for Allah and The Prophet in kids. Tell them, time and again, that The Prophet is our best role model, and his example is the one we must all aspire to. Thus, encourage kids to do the same as The Prophet would do when it comes to morality, ethics, haya and other issues.

- Would The Prophet be flirting by text with a classmate? No!
- How would he respond if someone of the opposite gender asked him to ‘just hang out alone’ or chat online into the late hours of the night? No!
- Would he stare at an attractive person of opposite gender, whether in real life or online? No!

Seventh. While many parents dread having ‘the talk’ about inter/intra-gender issues, it is even more necessary today than ever. Kids are learning earlier about these issues through exposure to the graphic content on internet and television. We also need to discuss Islamic requirements of haya/chastity, namely:

- Lowering the looks at the opposite gender – no lustful gaze (Q.24:30-31).
- Proper dress; what is acceptable and what is not.
- Flirtatious conversations in person or via texting/Facebook.
- How to interact respectfully with parents, grandparents, elders and the opposite gender.
- Respect parents’ privacy at certain times (Q.24:59).
- Manners for visiting friends and relatives (Q.24:61).

Eighth. The Prophet emphasized the role that friends play in affecting a person’s understanding and approach to the faith. It is no different for our boys and girls. Find role models in your own family, family friends and surroundings, who you feel maintain Islamic guidelines of righteousness and if they are the same age as your own kids, encourage their friendship.

Ninth. When it comes to dressing appropriately, many youth feel they can never win. They are always picked on, they think, for wearing clothes that are too this or that. Start trying a different approach. Give them general guidelines and a reasonable budget to work with, tying it to the only condition that is has to be ‘Islamically’ appropriate. Then leave it at that. You may be pleasantly surprised at how well they choose, as well as their level of understanding of what works and what does not.

¹⁴ Expression of The Qur’anic Sacred Text meaning: I seek Allah’s forgiveness. Or, it may be paraphrased as ‘Allah, please pardon me.’

¹⁵ ‘Al-Akhirah’ is an expression of The Qur’anic Sacred Text. It means the Life after this life to commence upon the resurrection sometimes after death in a new dimension of existence that shall involve a detailed process of accountability for our conduct and behavior in this life, and the reward for thereof shall be awarded – paradise for good, hell for bad.

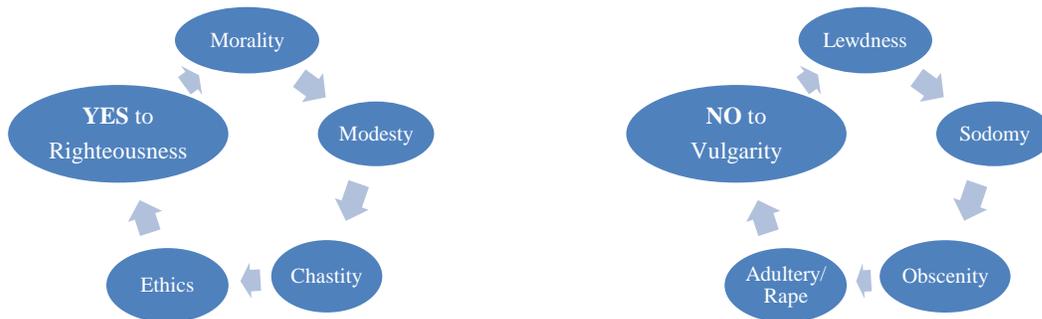
Tenth. A lot of the drama of the teen years happens because boys and girls become more self-absorbed, more self-conscious. A pimple can become the source of embarrassment; a look the ‘wrong way’ can mean a feeling of exclusion from a clique of friends; a regular ‘hello’ from someone of the opposite gender means more than just ‘hi’.

Help your boys and girls find ‘good’ ways to keep busy - with the same gender. That is important. While sports can be a good option, explore some productive ways to spend time and develop skills. Encourage them to accompany you to the Masjid; have them attached to Islamic forums/institutions for week-end learning and inter action within the same age-group; motivate them with some material incentives.

I am reminded of a quotation by The Prophet - ‘Tie your camel, then, put your trust in Allah!’ telling a bedouin who was about to leave his only source of transportation to roam free. It is the same with parenting. We can and must take the steps necessary to accomplish our goals, but ultimately, it is Allah Who knows and sees all things, and He makes all things possible. After we have done at least some of the above, let us turn to Allah for keeping us and our kids on the right track.

I would like to stick the following writing in bold and illustration below somewhere in the house where all can be reminded, almost all the time:

Righteousness and haya means to have a good conscience, to be shy to commit any wrong, to feel remorse for doing any wrong - this attitude brings us close to Allah, to His Mercy and His Compassion.



It is a common experience in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and other places that girls/ladies wearing ‘hijab’ experience harassment, humiliation and discrimination – at the social level as well as at work. This is an unworthy attitude. Consider Q.33:59 which entails the Divine Decree to ensure respect for feminine modesty and avoidance of harassment:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ¹⁶

In emerging situations where girls/ladies are harassed because of their ‘hijab’, would it be prudent to argue that let them compromise on ‘hijab’ and avoid harassment, i.e. reversing the scenario when this Ayah was revealed? Are The Qur’anic Injunctions subject to change with circumstances?

¹⁶ Paraphrasing of The Qur’anic Sacred Text: O Prophet! Direct your wives, and your daughters, as well as the female believers that they should let down their outer garments over themselves *when outside their homes and/or when with men whom they are not forbidden to marry*. This is more fitting and respectable so that they are recognized as decent women, and are not to be harassed by evil eyes.

The Qur'an of the sixth century contained a radically progressive version of the Divine Injunctions over The Torah, a fifteenth century BC Scripture. This covered the whole gamut of societal and social aspects of human life and behavior. The Qur'an, within its own text, allows considerable flexibility in almost all matters, whether pertaining to worship or human life and welfare. Let us pick up a few illustrations:-

- The Prayers, five times every day, are mandatory to be performed with Wudu as set out in Q.05:06. However, if water is not available, despite efforts to find it, then 'flexibility' is allowed by way of Tayammum in the same Ayah. It also applies to situations where taking a bath becomes obligatory, but in the absence of water, 'tayammum' is considered as proxy for water.
- The Fasting during the month of Ramadan is mandatory – Q. 02:183. However, if one cannot Fast for reasons of old age, illness, medical emergency, etc., the 'flexibility' is allowed vide Q.02:184 and Q.02:196.
- The Hajj is mandatory – Q.02:196; however, it allows a set of 'flexibilities' linked to one's personal circumstances – Q.02:194 and 02:203, namely 'shaving the head,' 'nahr' and 'stay in Mina.' And even during the Hajj, there are times when the hujjaj move all together, at the same time, and in the same space. This has given rise to serious issues affecting welfare and safety of the hujjaj. Thus, one of the components of Hajj - 'nahr' - has been 'compromised' where actual physical presence of the hujjaj has been dispensed with; and, it is also quite probable that physical presence for 'rami' may also be done away with.
- The Divine Decree is explicit about the law of retribution in case of murder – Q.02:178-179, and it also makes itself equally clear on exercising a set of 'flexibilities.' Similarly, the faithful are prohibited from consuming the meat of dead animals and the swine, their products and derivatives – Q.02:173. However, it provides 'flexibility' within itself and suspends prohibition to save human life.
- History tells us that even in matters of criminal offences where punishment (hudud) is divinely decreed, flexibility was exercised to defer the implementation until special circumstances ceased. Punishment for theft is a case in point, which was suspended by Caliph 'Umar bin Al-Kattab (636-645) during the time of famine. Later, the Umayyeds (661-750) 'softened' the punishment to flogging.

Moving on the same wave-length, and endeavoring to save our girls/ladies from the agony of harassment and mockery in the emerging secular social and work environment, a consensus needs to be developed on compromising the requirement of the 'head covering.' I should go for this!

Let us seek guidance from Allah as to what is right for us and for our girls/ladies in His Sight as He is The All-Wise, Full of Wisdom.
