

307344 - Why Women Are Required to Cover Their Heads in Salah and Men Aren't

the question

Why does the Quran state that women are required to cover their heads in order to have their prayers accepted by Allah but men are not required to do so?

Detailed answer

Firstly, the basic principle is that the rulings apply equally to men and women, as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said about women: "They are counterparts to men." Reported by Al-Bazzar in his Musnad (6418), and authenticated by Shaykh Al-Albani in "As-Silsilah As-Sahihah" (2863).

Ibn Al-Arabi Al-Maliki said in "Al-Masalik" (2/423): "It has been narrated that 'women are counterparts to men,' meaning that their creation is the same, and the rulings for them in Shari`ah are equal." End quote.

This is a matter upon which there is scholarly consensus, as Al-Rajraji stated in "Raf` Al-Niqab `An Tanqih Ash-Shihab" (3/217): "Consensus has been reached that women and men are equal in legal obligations, except for what is indicated by evidence."

Secondly, of the rulings where women differ from men is the obligation for a woman to cover her head during Salah; as a condition for the validity of the prayer is to cover the `Awrah with something that does not describe the skin; as Allah Almighty says (translation of the meaning): {O children of Adam, take your adornment at every mosque} [Al-A`raf/31].

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Allah does not accept the prayer of a menstruating woman except with a headscarf (khimar)." Reported by Abu Dawud (627), At-Tirmidhi (375), Ibn Majah (655), and authenticated by Al-Albani in "Al-'Irwa'" (196).

There is no disagreement among the scholars regarding the obligation for a woman to cover her head, both inside and outside of the prayer.

Ibn Al-Qattan Al-Fasi said in his book: "Al-Iqna` fi Masa'il Al-Ijma`": "It is obligatory for a woman to cover her entire body except for her face, and if she does so, her prayer is valid by consensus.

And they unanimously agreed that a free adult woman must cover her head when she prays.

And they unanimously agreed that if she prays with her entire head uncovered, she must repeat the prayer." End quote (1/121-122).

Thirdly, in reality, the difference here is not between the rulings for women in prayer and the rulings for men in prayer, but rather the prayer here and the covering of the `Awrah in it is an extension of the distinction made by Allah, the Exalted, between the clothing of women and the clothing of men. Generally, in all situations, whether in prayer or otherwise, a man is not required to cover his head, and a woman, in all her situations, whether in prayer or otherwise, is not permitted to uncover her head except in front of her Mahrams (non-marriageable kin).

Allah, the Exalted, has chosen the attire for the Muslim man and woman in prayer, such that it is in a form of complete adornment and dignity, as Allah loves from His servant and female servant.

This choice for the prayer indicates that Allah loves the Hijab for women, even when she is alone before Him, the Exalted, unseen by anyone, and that it is not a ruling related only to the gaze of men, but rather it is attire that Allah loves, to the extent that He chose it for a woman to wear when standing before Allah.

The distinction between the two types of clothing here, where a woman covers her head and a man is not required to do so, is also an extension of the natural difference between men and women. The attribute of modesty in a man differs from that in a woman, due to

the difference in their nature and creation. A woman is created with adornment, having a nature that differs in her attractiveness and allure from that of a man. Therefore, Shari`ah has distinguished between men and women in clothing, in going out with perfume, and in the requirement of a Mahram for travel, all of which are differences arising from the difference in creation, and Shari`ah's concern for the protection of women in a manner that corresponds with the attention she attracts, and the potential danger that such attention may bring to her. In addition to what we have already mentioned, the Hijab itself is something that Allah loves and sees in it modesty and dignity that befit a Muslim woman to exhibit before Him, the Exalted, and this is not required of a man due to the difference in his nature and creation. The differentiation in rulings, commands, and prohibitions based on the difference in nature and creation is something that sound reason supports, and people often practice in their worldly affairs and social lives. The true religion has established and practiced it.

And Allah knows best.