

Clarification on the ‘Awrah and the Covering of Women in the Presence of Other Women and Mahrams – Shaykh ibn Uthaymeen

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By Our Sh. Muhammad bin Salih Al-‘Uthaymeen (rahimahullaah)

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All Praise is due to Allaah, and may the salaah and salaam be on Prophet Muhammad, his household, the noble companions and those who follow them until the Day of Resurrection.

Our Shaykh, Muhammad ibn Saalih al-‘Uthaymeen (rahimahullaah), was asked:

“There is a phenomenon with some women, wearing short and tight dresses which expose their features and dresses without sleeves exposing the chest and back, appearing almost naked. When we advise them, they say that they do not wear such clothes except in the presence of other women and that the ‘awrah [1] of the woman in front of other women is from the navel to the knee. What is the ruling regarding this, and what is the ruling regarding wearing these types of clothes in front of mahrams [2]? May Allaah (subhannahu wa ta’ala) reward you abundantly on behalf of the Muslims and Muslimat and magnify your reward.”

He (rahimahullaah) answered:

The answer for this is to say that it is authentically narrated [by Abu Huraira, radiallaahu ‘anhu] that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said: “*Two are the types amongst the denizens of Hell whom I have never seen, the one possessing whips like the tail of an ox, and they flog people with them. (The second one) women kasiyatun ‘aariyaat: who would be naked in spite of their being dressed, who are seduced (to wrong paths) and seduce others with their hair high like humps. These women would not get into Paradise, and they would not perceive its odor, although its fragrance can be perceived from such and such distance (from a great distance).*” [Reported by Muslim, hadith no. 6840; see also hadith no. 5310]

The people of knowledge interpreted the phrase kasiyatun ‘aariyaat (dressed but naked)” as those women who put on tight, short, or light clothes that do not shield what is underneath.

In addition, Shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah mentioned that the clothes of women in their homes at the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) covered what is between the ankle and the palm; when they would leave for the market, it is known that the women of the companions used to wear overflowing dresses that were so long that the lower end of the dress would drag on the earth. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) made it permissible for them to lower the end of their garment to extend to an arm’s span, without exceeding that. However, what became unclear to some women of the saying of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم), “*No man should look at the ‘awrah of another man, and no woman should look at the ‘awrah of another woman.*” [Reported by Muslim, hadith no. 338] and of ‘awrah of the woman with respect to other women being from her navel to her knee led them to the [false] conclusion that this indicates that it is permissible to wear short clothes. However, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) did not say, “The dress of a woman is between the navel and the knee, ” such that it would be taken as an evidence. On the contrary, he said, “no woman

should look at the 'awrah of another woman." Therefore, he forbade the one who looks because the one who wears overflowing clothes may accidentally uncover her private parts because of a need or for some other reason.

Similarly, when the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said, "No man should look at the 'awrah of another man," did the companions then wear izar (waist garments) from the navel to the knee or pants from the navel to the knee? Is it now sound for a woman to go out and meet other women having on nothing except that which shields the area from the navel to the knee? No one says this; this is not the case, except with the women of the kufar. So those women who understood otherwise from this hadith are incorrect. The hadith's meaning is obvious and apparent. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) did not say, "The dress of a woman is between the navel and the knee." So women should fear Allaah (subhannahu wa ta'ala) and assume shyness and bashfulness, which is from the characteristics of the woman; this is from iman (faith) as the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said, "Modesty is a branch of faith" [Reported by Muslim, hadith no. 56] Likewise, we know the parable: **"More bashful than a woman kept in her private quarter."**

Not even the women of the pre-Islamic era [Jahilliyah] used to shield only that which was between the navel and the knee; this was not even the case with men in that time. Do these women want the Muslim woman to be in a worse situation than the women of Jahilliyah?

In summary, the dress is something and looking at the 'awrah is something else. The legal dress of the woman in front of other women should cover that which is between the ankle and the palm. However, if the woman needs to tuck up her dress for work or something else, then she may tuck it all the way to the knee. Similarly, if she needs to roll up her sleeves all the way to the shoulder, then she may do so as needed only. However, to make this her normal dress then it is not allowed, and the hadith does not indicate this under any circumstances. That is why the address was to the one looking, not the one being looked at, and the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) mentioned absolutely nothing about the dress. He did not say, "The dress of a woman is between the navel and the knee," such that this would constitute a pretext for the misunderstanding by those women.

With respect to looking by mahrams, then the ruling is the same as looking of a woman at a woman, meaning it is permissible for the woman to uncover in front of her mahrams that which she uncovers in front of other women, namely the head, neck, feet, hands, arms, shins, and so forth. But she must not make her dress short.

[1] 'Awrah: The private parts that must be covered.

[2] Mahaarim pl. of mahram a husband and a woman's male siblings who are not lawful for her to marry.

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This is the answer of our Shaykh (rahimahullaah) concerning this question, which is often raised by many sisters. I ask Allaah (subhannahu wa ta'ala) to make it a benefit for all of us. All Praise is due to Allaah, and may the salaah and salaam be on Prophet Muhammad, his household, the noble companions and those who follow them until the Day of Resurrection.

Saleh As-Saleh

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