

The Islamic Perspective Of The Beard

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Article

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Preface

Islam is a religion that has a culturally diverse composition. Believers belong to many racial and regional groups bound together by essential beliefs and practices. Many of these are clearly indicated and detailed in the source material for Islamic behaviour, the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (S), so that no Muslim doubts the obligation to enact them. The daily prayers, fasting, etc... are regulated for, in general terms, in the Holy Qur'an and, in detail, by the Sunnah. Thus, for instance, all schools of Islamic law believe that something should be recited in the prostration and, although they vary in what should be said, all Muslims recite. It is sufficient for them that this is what the Prophet (S) was seen to do.

However, when the issue is the beard people who accept all manner of acts as cultural beliefs as "Islamic" demand detailed and incontrovertible proof that Allah, the Most Merciful, wished His Holy Prophets and their devoted followers to retain beards. If this cannot be proven, are they truly content to believe in "coincidence"?, a coincidence by which, in the general perception, Muslim men and orthodox people of the Book are differentiated from unbelievers. If the readers doubt the importance of the beard as a means of recognition, I ask them to submit to the following test.

Imagine that you have an urgent question about the religion and that that you have been directed to the room of a scholar. In the room you find two men seated. Both of similar age. Both of similar dress. Both wearing hats. One has a well trimmed beard and the other does not. To which one would you be inclined to address your question?

The following text gives substantial proofs and reasons for the desirability of the beard that conform to both faith and rationality but being a work concerning jurisprudence and Sunnah it does not stress the universality, amongst the Muslim brotherhood, of the beard as a sign of faith, as a symbol of brotherhood. Whatever clothes or customs have been retained by a nation it has become a social norm for the beard to be grown. It was to stress this aspect that I felt obliged to write this short preface and

also as an opportunity to ask the reader to join me in asking Allah, the Most Generous, to reward the author, the translator and their teachers for sharing their knowledge for our benefit. May it, by the grace of The Merciful, be a great reward in this world and the next.

Translator's Foreword

This booklet has been translated for the enlightenment of those who are not, as yet, fully aware of the Islamic rulings concerning the beard. It is in no way whatsoever meant to offend those who do not wear a beard nor should it be used, in any way, as an instrument by those who do wear one to ridicule those who do not.

We as Muslims must realise that non other than Allah, the Exalted, the Mighty, can guide those who may have gone astray. However, it is the solemn duty of the Messengers, the Prophets, the Chosen Infallible leaders and the believers amongst the men and the women to admonish one another, to forbid evil and enjoin good. No one other than those who sincerely love each other will.

This is verified by a narration from our third Imam *al-Husayn b. Ali (as)* where he states:

“One who loves you will indeed guide you and one who hates you will indeed mislead you”

Furthermore, it is the duty of any individual who claims to have accepted the blessed religion of Islam, as his way of life, to make an effort towards realising who his Creator is and the duties he, in turn, has to fulfil for his Creator, based on the pledge he has made in testifying to the fact *that there is no One worthy of worship but Allah*, the Lord of the Universe, the Exalted, the Sublime, to whom is his final return.

He should also realise that on the day of reckoning he will be summoned before his Creator as one who was considered to be from amongst those who believed in Muhammad (S), the leader of the Prophets and the seal of the Messengers and his Infallible progeny (as).

The soul searching questions one should ask oneself before starting to read this booklet, bearing the above in mind, should be:

- Am I deceiving my own soul or am I being sincerely true to it?
- Do I consider myself to be from amongst those who follow the path shown to them by Allah who is their Lord and Master?

The profoundest of all answers can only be attained from within. That is because the soul is from amongst the most trustworthy, truthful and honest companions that one can rely upon in this world for

the sincerest of answers.

This will in-turn lead the individual to have certitude and inner satisfaction. This will ultimately prepare him in this world for the next world from which there is no return.

We sincerely beseech Allah, the Exalted, to show the reality and the truth to all those whom He has created, especially those who believe in His Majesty, His last Messenger Muhammad (S) and his Infallible progeny (as) so that their final objective becomes His contentment with them as His humble servants.

The Four Sources On Which All The Rulings Of Islam Are Based

In the name of The Most High

The most common question usually asked regarding the beard is whether it is permissible to shave it or not. We will try to answer this question based on the four sources upon which our whole religion is based.

The Four Sources Are:

1. ***The Holy Qur'an***: revealed unto Muhammad (S) by Allah, the Exalted, the Wise.
2. ***The Traditions of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) and his progeny (as)***: (these include their sayings, actions and tacit consent)
3. ***Consensus***: as a strict condition the Shi'ite jurists must include at least one authentic narration of an Infallible Imam (as) for it to be considered as a basis from which a revealed ruling can be derived. This differs from the consensus of the other schools of thought in so far as their derived ruling through consensus does not have to be based on the condition mentioned above.
4. ***Intellect***: There is no doubt that all our revealed rulings are derived and based on these four sources. However, as far as morality and human etiquette are concerned, and as far as our subject matter is concerned, what better source can there be than the noble life style of Prophet Muhammad (S) and that of his blessed family (as).

The conclusion that one would reach, after having understood this, would be that the lay person would have to learn and fulfil the basic fundamental rulings of Islam. These rulings are categorised as obligatory (*wajib*), recommended (*mustahab*), prohibited (*haram*), disapproved (*makruh*) and permissible (*mubah*). The validity of all these categories are proven on the basis of the four sources mentioned earlier.

Martyr Baqir al-Sadr (may Allah rest his soul) quotes:

“Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, will ask His servant on the day of reckoning as to whether he was from amongst the learned ones or the ignorant ones; if he claims to be from the learned ones then he will be asked as to why he did not practice what he knew, but if he then replies by saying that he was from amongst the ignorant ones Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, will ask him as to why he did not acquire knowledge so that he could practice what was obligatory for him to perform. (When he is unable to reply to) Allah’s questioning him in this manner, he will be worthy of being punished by Allah because of his ignorance which lead him to being disobedient towards Him.

The Definition Of The Beard

The literal definition refers to the hair which grows on the face naturally (i.e. the sides of the face and the chin).

The Three Aspects Regarding The Beard

1. The beard is a part of the male anatomy which beautifies, gives respectability and adorns the man. *(That is only when it is kept in good trim).*
2. The beard is a natural inherent part of the biological characteristics of the male gender of the human being, its purpose is to differentiate between the male and the female. This very conclusion is also derived by logical reasoning and intellect. We should also bear in mind that the intellect is one of the most important factors which separates the human being from the other animal species.
3. In answer to the supplication made by our grandfather Adam (as), Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, made the growth of the beard an in-built natural feature of the male, a feature which will continue being such till the day of reckoning.

Allamah Majlisi (May Allah have mercy on his soul) quotes in a narration, in Vol 16 of his book *Bihar al-Anwar (Seas of Illuminations)* on the authority of *Ibn Masud* in which the *Holy Prophet of Islam Muhammad (S)* states:

“When Allah, the Blessed, the Merciful, accepted the repentance of Adam (as), Gabriel (as) came to Adam (as) and said, “*May Allah grant you a (long) life and bestow beauty upon you*” Adam (as) then said, “*I understand what you mean by long life, however, I do not understand what you mean by beauty*” [Thus, in thanking Allah, his Lord and Master] he went into prostration and when he raised his head from

it, he made a supplication and said, “O, Allah, Increase in me the beauty [that you have promised me]”, soon after he had made the supplication a beautiful beard appeared on his radiant face. When Gabriel (as) witnessed what had happened, he touched the beard of prophet Adam (as) and said, “This is in response to the supplication you made to your Lord, and it has been granted to you and your male offspring till the day of reckoning”.

It is evident from this narration that the beauty which Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, bestowed upon Adam (as) in the form of a beard would remain for him and his male offspring till the day of reckoning.

The shaving of the beard in general is considered to be from amongst those actions which the Lawgiver (Allah) has indeed considered unlawful. This is to such an extent, that it is regarded a sin by which an individual may be considered worthy of being punished. As far as some of the rulings which the Lawgiver has ordained for His servants, whether they find them difficult to resist or difficult to perform, they are still taken into account as far His pious servants are concerned, the main reason for that is the strong faith His loyal pious servants have with regard to His commands and prohibitions. They know that their Creator, Allah, the All Mighty, the Blessed, the Exalted, knows and does what is best for His humble servants.

[The First Source: The Book Of Allah \(Al-Qur'an\)](#)

Allah's words:

And most certainly I (Shaytan) will lead them astray and excite in them vain desires, and bid them that they shall slit the ears of the cattle, and most surely I will bid them so that they shall alter Allah's creation, and whoever takes the Satan for a guardian rather than Allah he indeed shall suffer a manifest loss. (Surah al-Nisa/The Women, 4: 119)

For this verse to be taken into consideration as a basis for proving the unlawfulness of the shaving of the beard, two fundamental aspects have to be taken into account:

1. Proving the fact that the shaving of the beard is in reality considered “*altering the creation of Allah*”.
2. Proving the fact that every “*alteration*” that occurs within the creation is in fact considered unlawful. Except for when the issue of “*alteration*” is superseded by another ruling from amongst the rulings of the Islamic Shariah which are considered exemptions to the rule.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, there is no doubt about the fact that the shaving of the beard is looked upon as bringing about an unnatural alteration with regard to what Allah, the Exalted, has created naturally.

As we mentioned earlier, the appearance of the beard was a specific miraculous event that Allah, the Exalted, ordained. When this is the case, no one has the authority to alter that except Allah, the Exalted, Himself and this can only be achieved by Him issuing another decree which abrogates the former.

The reason for this would be that the beard is considered by Allah a thing of adornment and beauty for His Prophet Adam (as). Moreover, not only a thing of adornment and beauty for Adam (as) but also for his male offspring till the day of reckoning.

Based on this any unnatural alteration to the beard would be considered forbidden and unlawful within the Islamic Shariah, except for when an exemption to the rule supersedes the former ruling.

As for the second aspect, It would be appropriate for one to interpret the part of the verse where “*alter the creation of Allah*” is mentioned to mean every type of alteration.

However, in cases where other rulings, from within the Shariah, exempt what is considered to be part of “*every alteration*” such as, circumcision, trimming of the nails, trimming of the hair of the head, trimming the beard and the moustache, the ruling of alteration will not be applicable here.

Hence, the above mentioned alterations would not be considered as being part of the interpretation of the verse mentioned earlier, but rather, they would be based on the ruling of the exemptions to the rule from within the Shariah.

Summary

The implications of the above mentioned verse apply to “unnatural physical alteration” and not to alteration due to the rulings of exemption. Thus, to consider the likes of tattoos or nail varnish as things that cause unnatural alteration is inappropriate, hence, for one to consider them as acts which are unlawful would also be incorrect.. The reason for this is that the verse implicitly refers to the alteration of the natural physical state and to non other.

In *Tafsir al-Qummi*, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) gives an explanation which refers to the exemptions to the rule.

Allah's words:

“Who is finer in religion than someone who submits himself to Allah while he acts kindly and follows the sect of Abraham, the Upright one? Allah adopted Abraham as a bosom friend”. (Surah al-Nisa/The Women, 4: 125)

The Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) explained that Allah, the Blessed, granted ten things to Abraham (as) (*al-Hanif*) [things that purify], five were for the head and five were for the body.

Those for the head were:

1. *Trimming the moustache*
2. *Wearing the beard*
3. *Trimming the hair of the head*
4. *Brushing the teeth*
5. *Flossing the teeth*

And those for the body were:

1. *Circumcision*
2. *Trimming the nails*
3. *Cleansing the body with water*
4. *Shaving the underarm and pubic hair*
5. *Ceremonial bath (after sexual intercourse etc.)*

These ten things which Allah, the Exalted, granted Abraham (as) were similar to what He granted Prophet Adam (as) in the form of the beard.

The important point we should bear in mind here is, that those things which were granted to Abraham (as) and Adam (as) were not abrogated nor will they be abrogated till the day of reckoning.

This verse is evidence of the fact that whatever Allah, the Exalted, granted Abraham (as) remained so for Prophet Muhammad (S) also. This is the reason why we as Muslims still (try to) adhere to the same practices.

On analysing this narration and many more like it, one may find that some of the actions mentioned in one single narration may be categorised as actions that are recommended, while other actions mentioned in the same narration may be categorised as actions which are obligatory. This is only possible when a jurist refers to many other similar narrations, and after his painstaking research, he

categorises them accordingly.

The Second Source: The Tradition (Al-Sunnah)

Jababah al-Walibiyah states in *al-Kafi*: “I once saw the *Commander of the faithful, Ali (as)* strolling in the courtyard with a two pronged staff and he was striking the fishmongers with it, who were selling fish which were unlawful to eat. And at the same time he was saying to them: *O’ Fishmongers¹, you are similar to those who were from amongst the Banu Israil who were transformed (into apes), and similar to those who used to shave their beards and lengthen their moustaches from amongst the soldiers of Banu Marwan (who transgressed in the land).*

There is no doubt in that the narration is pointing to the shaving of the beard as being unlawful, the reasoning for this is that the people being reprimanded by the Commander of the faithful, Ali (as) in such a strong manner only points to the fact that an unlawful act was being committed, and it was the solemn duty of the Imam of the time to forbid such evil and enjoin good.

By scrutinising this narration we understand that if the actions of the people who were being reprimanded were not unlawful, then there is no doubt that their actions would at least be considered actions which were disapproved of, however, for one to be transformed (into apes) by the wrath of Allah, the Mighty, for performing actions which are disapproved of does not make sense. Thus, it is inevitable that an action such as that which has been cited in the narration (i.e. the shaving of the beard) can only be regarded as an action which is unlawful and not an action which is merely disapproved of.

In the book *al-Ja’fariyat* a narration of *the Holy Prophet (S)* has been quoted in which the Prophet (S) states:

“The shaving of the beard is indeed considered an unjust action, may the curse of Allah befall those who are unjust”.

Thus, if the shaving of the beard is considered an “injustice” and its subject deserving to be cursed by Allah, the Mighty, then this would indeed point to the fact that Allah, the Mighty, is displeased with the person who commits an injustice, so much so that he becomes deserving of His wrath. This would not in any way whatsoever contradict logic. The other fact is that we do not find any verdict, of any jurist which considers an unjust action to be lawful.

Hence, if the shaving of the beard is compared to an action which is unjust, then it is clear that the shaving of the beard, based on the narration of the Holy Prophet (S), is indeed unlawful.

al-Saduq sites a narration of the *Holy Prophet (S)* in which he states: “Trim your moustaches and let your beards grow and do not emulate the Jews”

This narration is considered authentic by the Shi’ah and the Sunni schools of thought. Based on one of the principles of the science of jurisprudence (*Usul al-Fiqh*), the indication of a sentence with the imperative construction (*al-Amr*) usually implies that an action is obligatory and the prohibitive construction (*al-Nahy*) of a sentence usually implies that an action is unlawful.

This is especially the case when the action in question refers to the emulation of the enemies of Islam, i.e. the Jews and the infidels. Thus, the result which a jurist may derive based on this would be that the shaving of the beard or letting it grow to the extent that the Jews let it grow to, would certainly be considered unlawful and the trimming of the moustache would be considered an action which was recommended².

In the book *al-Muntaqa* the following has been reported: “*Chosroe* (Kasra the king of Persia) once sent two of his ambassadors to the Holy Prophet (S). When they approached him, he looked at their moustaches and saw that they were very lengthy and they had no beards, thus, he turned to them and said:

“Woe, be to you regarding what you have performed” (i.e. having shaved their beards). They said: “Our master commanded us to do this”, the Holy Prophet (S) then said: “My Master, the Blessed, the Exalted, commanded me to wear my beard and trim my moustache”.

It is clearly understood from this narration that Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, commanded His Prophet (S) to wear a beard.

Allah, the Mighty, the Wise, mentions the authority of the utterances of His Prophet Muhammad (S) in the Qur’an as:

“Whatever the Messenger gives you, accept it and from whatever he forbids you (from doing) keep back” (Surah al-Hashr/The Banishment, 59:7)

It is reported in *Bihar al-Anwar* in the chapter concerning the beard (*Kitab al-Mahasin*) in which *Imam Musa b. Ja’far, al-Kazim (as)* was asked: “Is it recommended to wear the beard?” he said: “Yes”, then he was asked: “Is it permissible for one to shave one’s beard?”, *Imam (as)* replied: “It is permissible to shave the sides of the face where the beard grows, however, to shave the front (chin) is not permissible”³.

The Third Source: Consensus (Al-Ijma')

Both the Shi'ah and the Sunni schools of thought agree that the verdict derived through consensus with regards to the shaving of the beard being unlawful is well founded.

The reason for this as far as both schools of thought are concerned is that "*consensus*" is considered a source by which a jurist may give a ruling concerning an Islamic issue.

Consensus is relied upon as one of the sources when a verdict regarding an issue cannot be derived through any other available source. However, one main difference between the consensus of the Shi'ah and the Sunni schools of thought is that, as far as the Shi'ah are concerned, it is necessary for them to have at least one tradition of an Infallible Imam (as) as an integral part of the consensus for it to be considered a valid source for the derivation of an Islamic ruling. Nevertheless this is not the case as far as the Sunni school of thought is concerned.

Shaykh al-Baha'iy, al-Damad and Kashif al-Ghita' are grand Shi'ite jurists, who have given rulings to the unlawfulness of the shaving of the beard, based on consensus, in their books *al-I'tiqadat and Resalah al-Shar' al-Muqadas*.

The Fourth Source: The Intellect (Al-'Aql)

There are several logically derived views that point to the fact that shaving the beard is unlawful, However, we are only going to present a few of them herein.

· When Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, first created the human being, He granted him and his male offspring the beard as a result of his supplication to Him. The reason for this was that through the appearance of a beard on the face, there would be a clear distinction between the male and the female offspring of Adam (as) till the day of reckoning.

This is verified by our sixth Imam, *Imam al-Sadiq (as)* in one of his narratives in which he states:

"From amongst the laws of the Lord of the Universe was that He granted the male gender from amongst the humans a beard so that there may be a difference (in appearance) between them".

And in another of his narration's *Imam al-Sadiq (as)* states: *"If the hair (on the mans face) were not to grow within a specific given period, would the male not remain in a state like that of the young immature boy and a female?, And as a result of this, the male would not command any respect nor esteem".*

Ibn Sina in his book *al-Qanun* states: “Indeed the benefits of the beard being specifically associated to the male and not the female points to the fact that, respect, male beauty and esteem are required by the male more than the female”⁴.

The above statement confirms the discussion mentioned earlier concerning Adam (as) and the supplication he made to Allah, the Exalted, His Lord and Master.

· Intellect dictates that every potential harm should be averted instantly. The result being that the aversion of harm would be considered an act which would come under the category of the obligatory rulings in the rulings of Islamic law. This ruling would fundamentally be based on the intellect. This, then would be considered a source by which an answer to our question could be derived.

We see that when the leader of the Prophets, doctors and wise men, Muhammad (S) forbade the Muslims (or rather the hypocrites who claimed that they were Muslims) from performing certain acts which Allah considered unlawful within the fold of Islam, many sarcastic questions were raised as to why a particular action was unlawful, and even after satisfactory explanations were given the individuals still disobeyed the commands of Allah, the Exalted.

However, if one were to read the Qur'an, one would see that Allah, the Exalted, clarifies the state regarding the utterances of prophet Muhammad (S):

“And whatever the Messenger gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, indeed Allah is severe in retributing (evil)” (Surah al-Hashr/The Banishment, 59:7)

And in another verse Allah, the Exalted, states:

“He does not speak from his own desire but it is revealed upon him” (Surah al-Najm/The Star, 53:3-4)

Most learned scholars of the West agree to the fact that the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (S) was the great man of his era and in character, a perfect example of a compassionate individual for all times to come.

It is proven that all heavenly rulings are not issued forth without having inherent infinite wisdom within them, thus, one should understand that it is only after Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, knows about the inherent infinite wisdom, intellect and goodness which may be inherent within a ruling, that He finally conveys it to His humble servants through His Prophets and Messengers (May Allah bless them all).

¹. The fish mongers had shaved their beards and were only wearing long moustaches

2. This is the author's opinion. In our opinion, the issue is not really emulating an enemy so much but rather being distinguished as Muslims from others, regardless of whether they are enemies or not. – DILP Content Approval Committee.
3. There are numerous other narrations concerning the unlawfulness of the shaving of the beard. Whoever wishes to refer to them should refer to: "Wasail al-Shi'ah" in which matters regarding the unlawfulness of the shaving of the beard will become clearer
4. Or rather (in Islam's opinion), both men and women are deserving of respect and esteem but a man's physical beauty and his commanding respect from others is added to by wearing a beard. – DILP Content Approval Committee.

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[Islam](#) [8]

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