

111940 - Elderly woman uncovering her face before non-mahrams

the question

Is it permissible for an elderly woman to uncover her face before men who are not her mahrams?.

Detailed answer

Yes, Allaah has permitted elderly women to uncover their faces before non-mahram men, but that is subject to the condition that they do not uncover anything of their adornment that may be a cause of fitnah, so they should not wear attractive or fancy clothes or put any cosmetics on their faces to beautify them.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And as for women past childbearing who do not expect wedlock, it is no sin on them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show their adornment. But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them. And Allaah is All.Hearer, All.Knower”

[al-Noor 24:60].

Abu Bakr al-Jassaas (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: With regard to the words of Allaah, “women past childbearing who do not expect wedlock” [al-Noor 24:60], Ibn Mas’ood and Mujaahid said: Women past childbearing who do not expect wedlock are those who do not want it, and their outer garments are their jilbabs.

Then he said: There is no dispute that the hair of an elderly woman is ‘awrah and it is not permissible for a non-mahram to look at it, as is the case with the hair of a young woman. If she prays with her head uncovered, then like a young woman (in the same situation), her prayer is invalid. So it cannot be that the meaning is that she may take off her head covering in the presence of a non-mahram man. Rather it is permitted for an elderly woman to take off her outer garment in the presence of men, after she has covered her head, and it is permitted for her

to uncover her face and hands, because she is not desirable. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them” [al-Noor 24:60]. So He has permitted her to take off her jilbab, but He says that refraining by not taking off her garment before men is better for her. End quote.

Ahkaam al-Qur’aan (3/485).

Ibn al-‘Arabi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

This is mentioned only for women past childbearing age, in exclusion to others, because they are no longer desirable, but refraining by keeping the full covering is better than doing that which is permitted to them, namely taking off their outer garments. End quote.

Ahkaam al-Qur’aan (3/419).

Al-Sa’di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said (p. 670):

Women who are past childbearing are those who no longer have any interest in intimacy and desire, “women past childbearing who do not expect wedlock” [al-Noor 24:60], i.e., they do not hope to get married and they are not wanted in marriage, because they have grown old and are not desirable. “it is no sin on them” i.e., there is no blame on them, “if they discard their (outer) clothing” i.e., outer garments such as the khimaar and so on, concerning which Allaah says “and to draw their veils all over Juyoobihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)” [al-Noor 24:31]. It is permissible for these women to uncover their faces, because there is no fear of temptation. And because allowing them to take off their outer garment may be taken as meaning that they are allowed to adorn themselves, the matter is clarified by the words: “in such a way as not to show their adornment” i.e., without showing their adornment to people, by beautifying the outer garment or striking their ground with their feet so as to let people know about their hidden adornments, because the mere fact that a female is wearing adornments, even if she covers them, and even if she is not desirable, is a cause of fitnah which causes the one who looks at it to fall into sin. “But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them” [al-Noor 24:60]. End quote.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked:

Is it permissible for a woman of advanced years, such as 70 or 90 years old, to uncover her face before her non-mahram relatives?

He replied:

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And as for women past childbearing who do not expect wedlock, it is no sin on them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show their adornment. But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them. And Allaah is All-Hearer, All-Knower”

[al-Noor 24:60].

Women past childbearing are elderly women who are not desired in marriage and who do not put on adornment. There is no sin on them if they uncover their faces before non-mahrams, but for them to observe hijab is better and is more on the safe side, because Allaah says “But to refrain (i.e. not to discard their outer clothing) is better for them” [al-Noor 24:60]. And in some cases seeing them may cause fitnah because of their beautiful appearance even if they are old and not wearing adornment. But if they are wearing adornment, it is not permissible for them to refrain from observing hijab. Adornment includes beautifying the face with kohl and the like. And Allaah is the source of strength. End quote.

Fataawa al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah (1/424).

And Allaah knows best.