

# WHAT'S IN A BEARD?

**A brief article on the importance of  
keeping a beard with answers to some  
common misconceptions in the light of  
qur'aan and hadith**

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## بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

### WHATS IN A BEARD?

The position that Islam has, or will have, in the world has a great deal to do with how the Muslims look at it, and to what extent they practice on its teachings. There was a time when Islam was running through every vein in a Muslim's body, and his actions were a living portrait of the glory and beauty of Islam, so the flag of Islam fluttering proudly in the sky, lifted by the winds of success. The non-Muslims could not dare to question Islamic concepts, because living examples of Islamic perfection were in front of them. When the spirit of Islam started drifting away from the hearts of the Muslims, their bodies were no longer inclined to take all measures, undergo all hardships to practice their flawless religion. The new place for Islam was not a strong firm heart, but a dark, dusty corner in the human mind. It would no longer be nurtured and cared for, upheld and protected by the warmth of love and devotion, but would now be probed and dissected by the cold, merciless and unfeeling instruments of intellect, theory and logic. It was no longer a deep feeling, a faith or way of life, but had become a set of rules, a doctrine or constitution like the ones made by man, to be amended and abridged at will.

Where did we go wrong? The answer is simple. We left the pattern of life of our dear Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) who spent his days and nights, his sweat and blood, trying to teach us, and turned to what others had to offer. If we want our respect, dignity and position of honor back, we must revert to that same pattern. This is why the subject of the noble practices of Rasulullah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) Sunnah, holds so much weight. This article has been compiled as a reminder of one of the very important Sunnahs – the beard. We hope that the readers will not only read it carefully, but will make a concerned effort to convey the information to others.

## SOME COMMON EXCUSES

Allah Ta'ala prefers people who sin and admit their mistakes, over those who do good deeds and behave in a conceited manner. Its unfortunate that today we disobey Allah and instead of admitting it, find some sort of excuse to justify our misdeeds, even if it means criticizing the Shariah or inventing our own guidelines for what is important in Islam and what isn't. Below are some common excuses and reasons people use to explain why they don't keep a beard. If you examine these with an objective, Islamic mind you will see how weak and baseless they really are. The purpose of this article is not to condemn anyone or label anyone under a certain category but, when we say 'Islamic awareness' it means Islamic awareness in its entirety, not just what seems appealing. And that is what we are trying to do, so that each Muslim can at least know what is expected from him. The ability to practice comes from Allah.

1. One argument that is commonly heard is that the Qur'an is silent on the issue of the beard. To answer this we ask, "Where in the Qur'an does it say that we are only supposed to act on what is in the Qur'an, and reject the teachings of Rasulullah (ﷺ)?"

The Qur'an very clearly states:

*'Obey Allah and the Prophet (ﷺ)' (Quraan)*

There are many commandments that are necessary for us to fulfill, but are not mentioned in the Qur'an. Take for example the number of Raka'ts in each Salaat. They have been explained to us by Rasulullah (ﷺ), yet there is no objection on the authenticity and importance of the matter. To acceptance Rasulullah's (ﷺ) instructions and

reject others on the basis that they are not found in the Qur'an amounts to mocking his flawless teachings.

2. Some people forsake keeping a beard, claiming that the reformation of the heart and purification of the soul is their first priority. They argue that it doesn't matter if one doesn't keep a beard, so long as the heart is clean.

This type of reason is a symptom of one's misunderstanding (or ignorance) of the basic Islamic fundamentals and concepts. The heart that is actually pure will lead it's beholder to complete obedience of Allah and his Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). It defies logic to think that one can have a heart free of all corruptive elements and at the same time sin persistently, not wanting to adopt the noble appearance of the Holy Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). Everyone will agree that a 'pure' heart will definitely contain the love of Allah. Allah says that if you love me, you must follow the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). If you do so, your love for Allah will prove true, and *only* then will Allah love you in return.

*"Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you..." (Quraan)*

Therefore, it should be correct to say that love for Allah and the disobedience of his Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) are two opposite things, and can never be in a person's heart at the same time.

3. There is another claim that shaving is only a minor sin.

First of all, since intentionally omitting an obligatory commandment is a major sin, and growing a beard is obligatory (as you will see ahead), it is wrong to say that shaving is a minor sin. It should be known that repetitively and persistently committing minor sins is itself a major sin. That means that for each minute that this act continues, the sin will keep accumulating and will become more weightier than major acts of disobedience, as these latter sins do not progressively increase after the act is over.

4. Some say that Rasulullah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) kept a beard merely because it was an Arabic custom in those days. Since shaving is now regarded as the norm and the fashionable thing to do, if the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was present with us, he would do the same. (May Allah forgive the Muslims who utter such foolish words, and may he give them the opportunity to repent before they die.)

The Arabs, amongst other things, used to bury their daughters alive, answer the call of nature in public, braid their beards, perform Tawaaf naked around Ka'bah and indulge in gambling and drinking wine. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) shunned these acts and strictly prohibited his followers from them. However, amongst his teachings is that keeping a beard is an act of Islam, a sign of Muslims, and he ordered the believers to grow their beards in opposition to the non-believers who were accustomed to cutting their beards.

خالفوا المشركين اعفوا اللحى واحفوا الشوارب

“Oppose the pagans! Grow you beards long and trim your mustaches.”

5. There is yet another group of people who, despite knowing the unlawfulness of shaving their beard, claim that if they

were to keep beards would lose esteem in the eyes of the people and no longer be looked at in the same way.

Before we respond, we should explain to these idealists what the true meaning of respect, dignity and honor is. We will mention that if someone only likes a person when they make their appearance in a certain way and despises them otherwise that's not really liking the person. It's just getting them to look a certain way that appeals to them, the same goes for respect. Respect is not gained on the material attributes an individual possesses, but is due to the abstract qualities within.

Secondly, Allah Ta'ala has clearly stated that the non-Muslims will never be satisfied with us until we get caught up in trying to please them – that we lose our own senses, moral values, and eventually become one of them. If that is what we yearn, then we are opening ourselves up to the wrath and displeasure of Allah.

ولن ترضى عنك اليهود والنصارى حتى تتبع ملتهم

Thirdly, if we are looking to earn respect in the eyes of non-Muslims, or expecting to get respect because of them, we are in great deception. How is it possible to get respect from something or someone that Allah has made devoid of?

أَيَّتَغُونَ عَنْهُمْ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمْعًا (النساء)

وَاللَّهُ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ (المُنافِقُونَ)

How true are the words from Hazrat Umar (رضى الله تعالى عنه)

كُنَّا أَذِلَّ النَّاسِ فَأَعَزَّنَا اللَّهُ بِالْإِسْلَامِ فَمَهْمَا نَطْلُبُ الْعِزَّةَ بِغَيْرِ مَا أَعْزَنَا اللَّهُ بِهِ أَذِلَّنَا اللَّهُ

‘We were the most degraded people, but Allah gave respect through Islam. If we were to seek respect through a median other than that which Allah has bestowed us with respect, he would surely hurl us into the pits of disgrace.’

These were just a few general answers to the questions usually raised regarding this issue.

### THE BEARD – AN OBLIGATION

To justify the permissibility of shaving the beard by saying that it is ‘merely’ a Sunnah and shrug it off with unimportance is not correct. It should be clear that when we say “the beard is a Sunnah”, it revolves around the fact that it was one of the many noble practices of Rasulullah (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) didn’t just keep a beard, he also ordered the Muslims to grow them, and showed his anger and displeasure to those who shaved in his time. All the Sahaabah (رضى الله تعالى عنهم), Tabi’een and the righteous Khulafa meticulously observed this practice. All these elements serve to prove that it is obligatory (Waajib) for a Muslim to keep a beard. This fact alone is enough for someone to accept that the growing of a beard is a commandment and must be fulfilled. However, for the benefit of our fellow Muslims and as a reference, we will list some facts.

من قطرة الإسلام اخذ الشارب وإعفاء اللحى فان الجوس تعفى شواربها وتحفى لحاها  
فخالفوهم جذواشوا ربكم واعفواالحاكم (ابن حبان حكم اللحية في الإسلام)

“From among the natural practices of Islam is the trimming of the mustache and fully growing the beard. The fire-worshippers grow their mustaches long and cut their beards. Do the opposite: trim mustaches and let your beards grow long.”

For those individuals who think there may be the proverbial difference of opinion among the scholars' on this matter, the following facts are noted.

In the Shafi'ee book, *Al-Lubab*, Imam Ibn Ar-Rifaah says that Imaam Shafi'ee in his book, *Kitaab-ul-Umm*, has clearly stated that shaving the beard is Haraam.

The Maliki School of thought, as expressed in *Kitabul Ibaadah* and *Al-Lihya-fil Islam*, says that to shave the beard is Haraam and to trim it in such a way that it changes ones natural and facial features is also haram. Sheikh-ul Islam Ibn Taimiyyah has also given the verdict of shaving the beard being Haraam, and has further listed all the Ahadith in which we have been commanded to oppose the actions of non-Muslims. He then comments that Shari'ah orders us to oppose them and if we adopt their appearances it will create the kind of love and friendship for them which is prohibited and which we should be trying to avoid.

Allama Qurtubi states that shaving the beard, pulling the hair out and shortening it are all not permissible.

Imam Ibn Hazam Zaniri has quoted a consensus of the Ulama that to cut the mustache and lengthen the beard is Fardh.

The author of *Manhal*, in his commentary of *Abu Dawood* says:

فلذلك كان حلق اللحية محرما عن أعصاة المسلمين المجتهدين إبي حنيفة ومالك والشافعي وأحمد وغيرهم

"Therefore, to shave the beard is haram according to the Muslim jurists Abu Hanifa, Maalik, Shafi'ee, Ahmed and others".

The author of *Durr Mukhtar* states:

*"None of the scholars have declared it (shaving the beard) as permissible."*

This is sufficient in proving a consensus of all the scholars of Deen, from the time of the Sahaabah (رضى الله تعالى عنه) to the present day, on the obligation of keeping a beard. Now that we know it is



Wajib, we should study the details of the length of the beard as determined by the Shari'ah.

## HOW LONG?

Some individuals accept the concept of the beard, but form their own conclusions regarding the length, based on their own research. This is not an appropriate way to look at Shari'ah. Just as it is necessary to consult Ulama in matters pertaining to worship, marital affairs and beliefs, it is also imperative to refer to them for guidance in matters of Sunnah practices. Otherwise we will not be able to practice the Deen as a whole. We will end up taking what seems appropriate to us and discarding whatever we dislike. This will result in a direct breach of Allah's orders.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً

“O believers! Enter into Islam completely”

There is a common misconception that the requirement for an Islamic beard is that it must be visible from forty feet. If the beard fits this description it is in perfect order and there is no set length for the beard in the Shari'ah. This view is no more than a combination of speculation and presumption based on opinion and has nothing to do with Islamic principles or any reliable source of information. The Shari'ah has determined that the beard is one fist. How one fist? First of all, let us look at the words. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) used to tell the Ummah to grow their beards. Imam Nawawi states the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) used four terms, at various occasions for this purpose.

وقروا ، اوفروا ، اعفوا ، ارخوا

All of them mean “to fully elongate, lengthen”. The last word ارخوا means to unreservedly expand the length of something.

Once a disciple of Khabab (رضو الله تعالى عنه) asked him how the Sahaabah (رضي الله تعالى عنهم) knew that Rasulallah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) used to be reciting Quran in Zuhr and Asar prayers. He replied “By observing the movement of the blessed *beard* (not chin) of Rasulallah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) we could tell that he was reciting.” In a Hadith of Tirmizi it is related, “Rasulallah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) had a very thick beard.” Ibn Jawzi has reported from Ali (رضو الله تعالى عنه) that Rasulallah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) had a fully grown beard.

Whenever the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) ordered us to do something, his own actions defined the method of that act. This is the case in all matters of Deen, and the beard is no exception. For more details we look at how the Sahaabah (رضي الله تعالى عنهم) emulated his actions, because they had seen him and had directly learned from him. Imam Bukhari (رحمة الله عليه وسلم) has relied on the actions of the Sahaabah (رضي الله تعالى عنهم) as a yardstick to gauge and define the sayings and practices of Rasulallah (صلى الله عليه وسلم). Ibn Umar (رضي الله تعالى عنه), for example, was known for his care in strictly following the Sunnah. Imam Bukhari (رحمة الله عليه وسلم) states:

كان ابن عمر إذا حج أو اعتمر قبض على لحية فما فضل قطع

“When Ibn Umar performed Hajj or Umrah, he used to hold his beard with his clasped fist, and cut the hair exceeding it.”

The same is narrated about Hazrat Umar (رضي الله تعالى عنه) and Hazrat Abu Hurairah (رضي الله تعالى عنه). This narration is also quoted in Imam Mohammed's *Kitabul Athaar*. No doubt remains that the Sahaabah (رضي الله تعالى عنهم) used to grow their beards quite long during the year, and trim them back to one fist's length after hajj

or Umrah. The beard of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) himself was so thick that it covered his upper chest in length and width.

Based on the evidence and facts from Hadith we can determine the real definition of the beard in the Shari'ah. The scholars of Deen have unanimously come to the same conclusions mentioned previously.

Allama ibn Hummam in his famous book *Fathul Qadeer* states:

“To trim the beard when it is less than one fist in length, like some westerners do, is the way of the hermaphrodites, and none of the scholars have declared it permissible.”

The decision most accepted by the Shafi'ee scholars is to leave the beard as it is when it exceeds one fist's length. This is the ruling of the Hanafis as well. With the addition that if it is longer than one fist, it is desirable that it be cut back to the fist length. The Maaliki scholars also say that if the beard grows exceptionally long, it should be trimmed down to one fist. Although a great deal can be written on this subject, it is the writer's humble opinion that the information provided is sufficient for anyone desiring some general knowledge on the topic and willing to practice upon it.

Even though cutting the beard is a practice of non-Muslims, you may be surprised to know that there are some distinguished individuals amongst them who disagree with the concept. Below are the excerpts of a thesis written by an American, Dr. Charles Homer.

“A correspondent has asked me to invent some sort of electronically operated needle, to reduce the time wasted daily on shaving. I do not understand why people dread and tremble at the thought of having a beard. People grow hair on their heads, so why do they regard it as incorrect, defective and unacceptable to

have hair on their face? When the hair fails to grow on the head, then baldness is regarded as a defect, and a cause of shame. Every effort is made to hide it. Yet, it is surprising that a man will daily remove hair from his face, depriving himself from that which is a most evident sign of manhood, without a bit of shame.

“the beard and mustache give the human being's face strength of manhood, a steadfast character, individual integrity and exclusive identity. His survival and safety too are tied to this brave appearance. These are the only hair that differentiate the males from the females. The hair in all the other parts of the body are common between the male and female. Women, deep in their consciences, are more appreciative of men with beards and mustaches. Profoundly, they prefer a male with a beard to the ones without this manly facial feature.

“Outwardly it would appear that they dislike the beard and mustache. The only reason for this is that they have bound themselves to follow unrealistic friends and the latest fashion in dress and, unfortunately, these days the beard and mustache are out of fashion. A little bit of hair before the nostrils and the mouth acts as a filter against harmful dust and germs entering the nose and the mouth. A lengthy and thick beard protect the throat from colds.

“A person with a beard has never forsaken his wife. A person with a beard always upholds the honor of the beard that is demanded from him. It gives him that prestige and position that is befitting only for males.

“How unreal it is, that a full grown adult desires that his face appears like that of a child. God had created the beard and the mustache for the male adult to adorn his face with them. Whoever

laughs and mocks at those with beards is in act laughing and mocking Jesus, because Jesus had a beard.”

Dr Homer's statement speaks for itself and needs no explanation, but his concluding words are a real eye-opener for us Muslims. After nineteen centuries have passed he still honours his Prophet Hazrat Isa (Alayhis Salaam) so much that he classifies that person who laughs at the beard as having directly insulted Hazrat Isa (Alayhis Salaam), because it was his noble practice to keep a beard. For the Muslims who claim to have true love for Rasulullah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) but fall short of following in his footsteps, it is time to face up to the reality and to accept their responsibilities. We ask Allah to forgive us all our shortcomings in obeying Him and His Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and to ask Him to grant us the ability to truly repent for our mistakes and live a life that pleases Him.

Ref: *The Beard of A Muslim and its importance, Shaikh Zakaria* (رحمة الله عليه)

*The Beard: A Hallmark of Imaan, Mufti Ashiq Ilahi* (رحمة الله عليه)