

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Fitnah of Selfie-Amazement

By Abū al-Ḥasan Mālik Ādam al-Akhḍar

SELF-AMAZEMENT, a person's need to be at the center of attention and discussion, love of fame, and showing off (*Riya*) are from the greatest of trials to befall the children of Ādam. They are also from the deceptions of *Shayṭān*, and *Shayṭān* only promises delusion. We find in the narration collected by *Imām* Muslim (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) on the authority of Abū Hurayrah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ):

((بَيْنَمَا رَجُلٌ يَتَبَخَّطِرُ، يَمْشِي فِي بُرْدِيهِ قَدْ أَعْجَبَتْهُ نَفْسُهُ، فَخَسَفَ اللَّهُ بِهِ الْأَرْضَ، فَهُوَ يَتَجَلَّجَلُ فِيهَا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ))

“While a man was strutting haughtily in his garments, amazed with himself, Allāh caused the earth to swallow him up, and he will continue to sink into the earth until the Day of Resurrection.”¹

Another wording mentions that the man was preoccupied with combing his hair. Al-Qurṭubī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said: “This self-indulgence is when a person looks at himself with amazement, forgetting the blessing of Allāh.”² There are a number of narrations in the authentic *Sunnah* that condemn—and certainly remedy—such preoccupation. *Imām* al-Tirmidhī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) compiled his book *al-Shamā'il*, illustrating for the reader the character and characteristics of Allāh's Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ): matters pertaining to his dress, his food, his humility, his physical features, *et cetera*. And in relation to his physical features, al-Tirmidhī pens the chapter: “What has been Related Concerning the Prophet's Haircare.” In it he collects the narration of 'Abd Allāh b. Mughaffal (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) who said:

((نَهَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنِ التَّرْجُلِ إِلَّا غَبًّا))

“Allāh's Messenger prohibited the combing of the hair, unless it is done occasionally.”³

Regarding the interpretation of this narration, al-Manāwī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) states: “What is intended in the prohibition is constant attention and focus upon it, because this is excessiveness in beautification.”⁴

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (no. 2088)

² See *Tarḥ al-Tathrīb fī Sharḥ al-Taqrīb* (8/169)

³ Authenticated by *Shaykh* al-Albānī in *Mukhtaṣir al-Shamā'il al-Tirmidhī* (p. 37)

⁴ *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* (no. 9377)

We learn from this narration—as well as the narration of the man swallowed by the earth—that incessantly combing or brushing the hair is a sign of self-indulgence and haughtiness and must be avoided by the believer. One, of course, should not understand from this that the *Sunnah* calls to neglecting one’s appearance, as the scholars have clarified that disregard of one’s appearance is from foulness. Thus, the believer remains upon the middle course described in the aforementioned Ḥadīth of ‘Abd Allāh b. Mughaffal.

In addition to this, self-amazement can cause a person to reject the truth, resulting in their destruction. The Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: ((ثَلَاثٌ مُنْجِيَاتٌ وَثَلَاثٌ مُهْلِكَاتٌ... وَأَمَّا الْمُهْلِكَاتُ: فَهَوَى مُتَّبِعٌ وَشُحٌّ مُطَاعٌ وَإِعْجَابُ الْمَرْءِ بِنَفْسِهِ وَهِيَ أَشَدُّهُنَّ))

Abū Hurayrah related that the Messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “Three things save, and three things destroy... As for the three things that destroy, they are the greed that is obeyed, the desires that are followed, and the person amazed with himself, and it is the worst of them.”

Thus, we ask Allāh (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) to save us from such delusion and what leads to it. And perhaps from the greatest causes, and manifestations, of self-amazement in these times is the phenomenon known as the “selfie.” We do not intend in any way that the idea of the selfie is novel. Rather, it is rooted in the kinds of self-portraits artists, painters and sculptors have rendered of themselves for many centuries. However, with the advent of technology: the digital camera and smart phone, coupled with the access to the Internet and the overarching shadow of social media, the selfie has spread to the four directions of the earth. This is what our *Shaykh* Muqbil b. Ḥādī al-Wādī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ), the *Muḥaddith* of the land of Yemen, alluded to in his statement: “And from those *fitan* (trials) that the Muslims have been tested with are pictures, for indeed there is not a home absent of them. Rather, it has reached even the Bedouins in the valley and on the mountain top.”⁵ Consider the fact that the *Shaykh* died in 2001, well before the social media and picture sharing explosion. How much more accurate are his words in the era of Instagram, the camera phone, and the selfie stick? This is nothing less than love of fame and being seen. It was *Shaykh* al-Albānī who constantly stated: “The love of fame will break one's back.” And the *Salaf* understood the dangers of fame and desiring it. *Al-Ḥāfiẓ* Al-Dhahabī relates in *Siyar* that Imām Aḥmad (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said: “I desire to be in the mountain paths of Makkah, so that I would not be known.”⁶ Contrarily, we read that when Khaṭīb Al-Baghdādī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) authored his book *Tarīkh Baghdād*, a man asked if Khaṭīb had mentioned him from the reliable narrators or the unreliable narrators. It was said that he did not mention him at all. The man replied: “If only he had mentioned me, even among the liars.”⁷

It is interesting to find that even among the *Kuffār* are those who recognize the vanity, and, perhaps, psychopathy of the selfie, until some of their researchers suggest that selfies are a

⁵ *Ḥukm Taṣwīr Dhawāt al-Arwāḥ* (p. 7)

⁶ *Al-Siyar* (11/216)

⁷ *Al-Siyar* (18/381)

sign of narcissism⁸. Studies they argue demonstrate “that both narcissism and self-objectification were associated with spending more time on social networking sites, and with more photo-editing. Posting numerous selfies was related to both higher narcissism and psychopathy.”⁹ It is important to note here that we are in no way in need of such studies to tell us that which we see clearly in the Book and Authentic *Sunnah*, and sayings of the scholars: love of fame will break a person’s back. Therefore, one should reflect and ask himself or herself what it says about a person who spends hours on end of her days—days on end of her life—applying makeup, doing her hair, prepping her sunglasses and attire, only to stand before a mirror (or use a selfie stick) to photograph herself in a number of positions and post hundreds of pictures of herself on social media. We’ll leave the noble reader to answer the question for himself or herself.

And then what of our beloved sisters who now indulge in the “Niqabi selfie?” Is not one of the wisdoms of the *niqāb* and *ḥijāb* to deflect and avert the eyes of the people? The *Muḥaddith* of this era, Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Albānī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ), makes this point in his book *Ḥijāb al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah*, where he mentions that one of the conditions of the Muslim woman’s dress is that it should not be an adornment in and of itself. He states, after mentioning the verse in *Surah al-Nūr*:

﴿وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ﴾

“...and not to show off their adornment.” [*al-Nūr* 24:31] This includes their outer garment if it is adorned, attracting the attention of men.”¹⁰ And what does posting a selfie say—even in *niqāb*—other than “look at me,” in effect attracting the attention of men. This, no doubt, contradicts the very purpose of the *ḥijāb*, and Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) knows best. The author of *Nihāyah al-Muḥtāj* writes: “The preponderant position is that it is impermissible to look at the woman wearing *niqāb*, displaying nothing other than her eyes and what surrounds them.” He goes on to say:

((فكم في المهاجر من خناجر))

“And how much are the eyes like daggers.”¹¹

⁸ Narcissism is an “inordinate fascination with oneself; excessive self-love and vanity.” It comes from the Greek myth of Narcissus. The myth states that Narcissus was extremely handsome and was desired by many, but due to his vanity, he rejected his suitors. Once, walking by a lake, he decided to drink from its waters, seeing his reflection in the lake, he fell in love with himself and drowned in his futile effort to possess the one true love of his life: himself.

⁹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/close-encounters/201501/are-selfies-sign-narcissism-and-psychopathy>

¹⁰ *Ḥijāb al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah* (p. 119)

¹¹ *Nihāyah al-Muḥtāj* (6/188)

This along with the fact that the “niqabi selfie” is oft-times accompanied by the beautification of the eyes with mascara, eye shadow and the likes. A questioner asked *Shaykh* Bin Bāz (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) about the permissibility of a woman applying *kuhl* to her eyes. He answered:

It is permissible for a woman to beautify her eyes with *kuhl* around other women, her husband, or her unmarriageable male relatives. As for in front of marriageable men, it is not permissible for her to uncover her face or her eyes, lined with *kuhl*; this is due to the statement of Allāh:

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسَأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ﴾

“And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts.” [*al-Aḥzāb* 33:53]

There is no harm in wearing the *burqa*’, from which one or both eyes appear, but without being lined with *kuhl* before marriageable men.¹²

What’s more, the *fitnah* of selfies has not only captured the otherwise mundane daily activities of eating, dressing, and riding in cars; nay, even going to sleep and waking; activities that should instead be preceded by supplication and *dhikr*. But what is even more reprehensible than that are selfies of worship. For how many are the images that can be seen on social media of people praying¹³, breaking fast at an *Iftār*, presenting checks in charity, sitting in the masjid during the *Jumu’ah* sermon, performing *Hajj* and ‘*Umrah*, et cetera on social media? Concerning this, *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-‘Abbād (حفظه الله) stated:

When the Prophet reached the *Miqāt*, he would say: “O Allāh, make this *Hajj* without *Riya* (showing off) and without trying to be heard of.” This supplication is said at the *Miqāt*. And after making this supplication, it is followed by action and striving against the soul. But now at the *Miqāt*, many of the people are taking pictures as mementos. They take pictures on *Ṭawāf*, *Arafāt*, and while throwing at the *Jamrat*. It is as though the only purpose of this trip is to take pictures and it is not worship which they desire to see on the Day of Judgement as a great reward with Allāh. And when they return home, they say: “Come look at me. This is me on *Arafāt*. This is me on *Muzdalifah*. And we have seen some of the people when they are ready to take a picture, they raise their hands in the appearance of humility, fear, and tranquility. And then after the picture is snapped, they drop their hands. Were these hands raised for Allāh? No, by Allāh; these hands were raised only for the picture, and the picture was only taken to

¹² <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/node/2211>

¹³ It has reached us that some even use selfie timer apps to capture such moments. We ask Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) for pardon.

show off to the people. And when some of them return home, they make photo albums.¹⁴

And as if the evils of self-amazement and showing off (*Riya*), and loving fame are not enough, selfies also fall under the general prohibition of taking pictures of animate beings. Abū Zubayr said that he heard Jābir (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) state:

((النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ نَهَى عَنِ الصُّورِ فِي الْبَيْتِ، وَنَهَى الرَّجُلَ أَنْ يَصْنَعَ ذَلِكَ، وَأَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَمَرَ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ زَمَنَ الْفَتْحِ، وَهُوَ بِالْبَطْحَاءِ، أَنْ يَأْتِيَ الْكَعْبَةَ فَيَمْحُو كُلَّ صُورَةٍ فِيهَا، وَلَمْ يَدْخُلِ الْبَيْتَ حَتَّى مَحَيْتُ كُلَّ صُورَةٍ فِيهِ))

“The Messenger of Allāh prohibited the display of pictures in the House and prohibited people to make them; he commanded ‘Umar to go to the *Ka‘bah* and obliterate every picture in it, and [the Prophet] did not enter the House until every image in it was effaced.”¹⁵

Our *Shaykh* Muqbil b. Hādī al-Wadī’ said concerning this narration and similar wordings: “You find in these evidences the general prohibition of images, whether three dimensional or one dimensional, because he stated: ‘...every image in it was effaced.’ And effacement is not done with that which is three dimensional, as it is instead broken.”¹⁶

Also, Saīd b. Abū al-Ḥasan related:

عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ أَبِي الْحَسَنِ، قَالَ: جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، فَقَالَ: إِنِّي رَجُلٌ أُصَوِّرُ هَذِهِ الصُّورَ، فَأُفْتِنِي فِيهَا، فَقَالَ لَهُ: اذْنُ مَيِّ، فَدَنَا مِنْهُ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: اذْنُ مَيِّ، فَدَنَا حَتَّى وَضَعَ يَدَهُ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ، قَالَ: أَنْبَيْتُكَ بِمَا سَمِعْتُ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: ((كُلُّ مُصَوِّرٍ فِي النَّارِ، يَجْعَلُ لَهُ، بِكُلِّ صُورَةٍ صَوَّرَهَا، نَفْسًا فَتَعَذِّبُهُ فِي جَهَنَّمَ)) وَقَالَ: ((إِنْ كُنْتُ لَا بُدَّ فَأَعْلَا، فَاصْنَعِ الشَّجَرَ وَمَا لَا نَفْسَ لَهُ))

“A man came to Ibn ‘Abbās and said: ‘My livelihood comes solely from my hands, and I make these pictures. Can you give me a ruling concerning them?’ Ibn ‘Abbās told him, ‘Come closer,’ so the man came closer. ‘Closer,’ he repeated, and the man did so, until he put his hand on the man’s head and said: ‘I shall tell you what I heard from the Prophet. I heard the Messenger of Allāh say: ‘Every image-maker will be in the fire, where a being will

¹⁴ See <https://twitter.com/MTWSNC/status/512270499872006144>, translated and summarized by our brother Rasheed Barbee—may Allāh preserve him.

¹⁵ The *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad (3/383)

¹⁶ *Hukm Taṣwīr Dhawāt al-Arwāḥ* (p. 15)

be set upon him to torment him in Hell for each picture he made.’ Ibn ‘Abbās then said: ‘So if you must, draw trees and things without animate life in them.’”¹⁷

And Al-Naḍr b. Anas b. Mālik stated: “I was sitting with Ibn ‘Abbās, and he began to give religious verdicts, and he did not say they were the statements of Allāh’s Messenger until a man said to him: ‘I am the painter of these pictures.’ Ibn ‘Abbās said: ‘I heard Allāh’s Messenger say: He who painted pictures in this life will be compelled to breathe life into them on the Day of Resurrection, but he will not be able to breathe life [into them].” And myriad other narrations prohibiting taking pictures of animate life, too many to cite in these few pages.¹⁸

In conclusion, I remind myself first and my brothers and sisters from the Muslims that shyness is from faith, and that humility is from the Prophet’s (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) noble qualities. Let us be equally mindful of the threats of punishment found in the aforementioned texts, and repent to Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) from every sin and transgression. May we act upon the command of the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) to efface every image of animate life, removing them from our camera phones and social media accounts, as we see the Companions effacing images at the Prophet’s (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) behest. Lastly, we ask Allāh, al-Bāri, al-Muṣawwir, to bless us with correct understanding and implementation of the Book and *Sunnah*. Indeed Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ) has power over all things.



¹⁷ Collected by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (no. 2110)

¹⁸ This, of course, includes selfie avatars on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, *et cetera*.