

**Perspective on trimming/
shaving beard**

By

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين و الصلاة و السلام على أشرف المرسلين و بعد:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to share with my respected and learned Imams my opinion and view regarding the issue of beard and its shari'ah ruling.

Before I begin, I would like to bring to your attention as the Chairperson of the Gaborone Management Committee that I received three documents from Ml D. Dawood on Tuesday the 10th of June 2008. One with the title "What Islam says about beard" by Mufti Afzal Elias. The document was downloaded directly from the internet. The second document titled "The beard of a Muslim and its importance" by Shaikh Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Saheb. The last one with the title " What's in a beard", had no author indicated. All these documents are not addressing the disputed issue of whether a person who trims or shave his beard can practise the Imamah. The three documents are tackling the issue of beard in its generality without explaining how the ruling of prohibition (haram) was arrived to and extrapolated from the cited Qur'anic verses and the text of the Hadith. The documents also are the product and the opinion of others and not for theirs. However, I will respond to them in relation to what was disputed specifically and not in general as the three documents indicate. I pray for help from the Almighty Allah for this task.

Let me start with the quoted verses in relation to the subject matter of beards

"O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you." (Quran 4:59)

"O you who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger, and turn not away from him when you hear (him speak)." (Quran 8:20)

"O you who believe! Give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calleth you to that which will give you life; and know that Allah cometh in between a man and his heart, and that it is He to Whom ye shall (all) be gathered."(Quran 8:24)

"You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Final Day, and who remembers Allah." (Quran 33:21)

"What Allah has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships,- belongs to Allah,- to His Messenger and to kindred and orphans, the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not (merely) make a circuit between the wealthy among you. So take what the Messenger gives you, and refrain from what he prohibits you. And fear Allah: for Allah is strict in Punishment." (Quran 59:7)

There is no dispute on the subject matter of the above-mentioned verses. The directives in these verses are clear and open; they are generally addressing the obedience of Rasulu Allah (S.A.W) in its broad understanding and in relation to his mission as Rasulallah (S.A.W).

However, these directives are not addressing the issue of beard, and no way else the issue in discussion is been addressed, Qur'an as a primal source of all our Islamic activities is silent about it.

The second source in Islam is Sunnat of Rasulu Allah (S.A.W). Sunnat constitutes the sayings, the deeds or the approvals of Rasulallah (S.A.W)

According to the science of Usulul-fiqh (The principles of Jurisprudence), sunnat of Rasulu Allah is of three categories.

- 1- **Sunnat dhaatiyyat or personal sunnat. They are known as non-legal Sunnah** (Sunnah ghayr tashri'iyyah)
- 2- **Sunnat Khaasat which are exclusively and peculiar to Rasulu Allah(S.A.W)**
- 3- **Sunnat Mufasirat or interpretive sunnat.** The legal Sunnah (Sunnah tashri'iyya)

In the first category, you have all reported sunnats about the natural activities of Rasulallah (S.A.W) (al-af'aall al-jibilliyah) the deeds and life style of Rasulallah (S.A.W) as a human being. As a human, he had his likes and dislikes, and examples in this area are so many to mention. Like ahadith, which report about the sitting, the eating, the sleeping etc, in this category a Muslim is recommended to emulate Rasulallah (S.A.W) and follow his manners as much as he or she can. But if it is other wise a person is not held accountable or become a sinner, because these activities do not seek to constitute a part of the Shari'ah.

In the second category, you have all reported sunnats about the deeds and practices that are exclusively peculiar and specific to Rasulallah (S.A.W) only. Examples of this category are so many to mention. Like Qur'anic verses or ahadith, which report, that Rasulallah (S.A.W) is permitted to practice swaumul wiswaal (continuous fasting), to perform Salat Dhuhā, Salat Tahajud, marrying above four wives, marriage without a dower, and prohibition of remarriage for the widows of Rasulallah (S.A.W),etc, in this category a Muslim is not recommended to do like Rasulallah (S.A.W). There no one is held accountable or becomes a sinner or fasiq because he / she is not practising what Rasulallah (S.A.W) did. Rasulallah's (S.A.W) example concerning the above-mentioned aspects does not constitute general law.

In the third category, Sunnah tashri'iyya you have all reported sunnat of Rasulallah (S.A.W), which are interpretive and incorporates the rules and principles of Shari'ah and bring the word of Allah Taala to the actual implementation. This kind of sunnat is mandatory and obligatory to every Muslim and Muslimah to adhere and implement. Failing to do so a person becomes sinner and he/she is accountable for his/her action.

Examples of this category are numerous. Ahaadith like: 'Swalluu kama ra aitumuunii uswalli', (Perform salat the way you see me perform it..) ' Khudhuu 'annii manaasikakum', (Learn from me the way to perform Hajj..), punishment of the thief by cutting his or her hand at the wrist, etc.

When you investigate the ahadith reported about the issue in discussion (beard) can be referred to the first category and not to the second or third category, which is of interpretive sunnat or Sunnah tashri'iyya legal sunnat.. Moreover, when you put together the ahadith about the beard in the above-mentioned documents, the result is that, it is like one hadith of Rasulullah (S.A.W) reported by different people using different words and content. While others fall under the reports of swahaba reporting about their practices as far as the issue of beard is concerned.

Let us take one of these ahadith.

Abu 'Umamah reported that: Rasulullah (S.A.W) once came to some old men of Ansar. These men had extremely white beards. Seeing them, Rasulullah (S.A.W) made the following remark: 'O people of Ansar dye your beards in red or golden colour and do not follow the people of the Book'. They said: 'O Rasulullah (S.A.W) the people of the Book do not wear *shalwars* and loin cloths', Rasulullah (S.A.W) said: 'Wear *shalwars* and loin cloths and do not follow the people of the Book'.

They said: 'O Rasulullah (S.A.W) these People of the Book wear neither shoes nor socks (while praying) (Abu Da'ud, Kitabu'l-Salah). At this, Rasulullah (S.A.W) said: 'Wear shoes and socks and do not follow these People of the Book'. They said: 'O Rasulullah (S.A.W) these People of the Book lengthen their moustaches and shave their beards'. At this, Rasulullah (S.A.W) said: 'Clip your moustaches and lengthen your beards and do not follow these People of the Book'. (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hambal, vol. 5 p. 264)

The three documents submitted to me mentioned only the last part of this hadith between Rasulullah (S.A.W) and people of Madina who are known as Al-ansar, the other part of the above Hadith is of no importance to them.

Another point to mention here is that, some ahadith mentioned in these documents even though are talking about beard but the reporters have used different terms like Mushrikin or kuffaar which contradicts the context of Madina. There were no mushriks or kaafirs in Madina. The non Muslims of Madina were known as the people of the book (ahlul Kitaab). The context and circumstances in which the hadith is reported are very important; ignoring them could result in misinterpretation.

Narrated Abu Huraira: Rasulullah (S.A.W) said, "The Jews and the Christians do not dye (their grey hair), so you shall do the opposite of what they do (i.e. dye your grey hair and beards)."

Narrated Nafi: Ibn Umar said, Rasulullah said, 'Do the opposite of what the pagans do. Keep the beards and cut the moustaches short.' Whenever Ibn Umar performed the Hajj or 'Umra, he used to hold his beard with his hand and cut whatever exceeding. Ibn Umar used to cut his moustache so short that the whiteness of his skin (above the upper lip) was visible, and he used to cut (the hair) between his moustache and his beard.

Narrated Thabit: Anas was asked whether Rasulullah (S.A.W) used a hair dye or not. Anas replied, "Rasulu Allah (S.A.W) had no enough grey hair to dye. I could even count the white grey hairs on his beard if I would."

It is clear from the words of these *ahadith* that some Muslims of Madina, the Ansar were following the people of the Book in some of their practices thinking that it was necessary to do so. Besides other things, they thought that it was necessary for them to lengthen the moustache and shave off the beard. Rasulullah (S.A.W) told them that this was not a religious directive. So if they wanted, they could lengthen their beards and clip their moustache instead. Similarly, refraining from dyeing one's beard or hair was not a religious requirement. If they wanted, they could dye their beard or hair as well.

In other words, these *ahadith* are not asking men to grow beard;

They are merely saying that keeping beard and clipping moustache is not a condemned religious practice as certain people are contending. This practice is perfectly allowed in Islam, so as dyeing hair, wearing socks and shoes while praying have not become compulsory directives according to this hadith, keeping beard as an obligatory directive cannot be deduced from the words of this hadith of Rasulullah (S.A.W) as well. One can conclude that, the practice of keeping beard does not belong to the class of obligatory directives. Rather it is a desirable thing, which will not hold a person liable if he does not follow it. Like any other sunnat practices of the first category as I mentioned above.

The shari'a length of beard according to the three documents:

All three documents agree about the shari'a length of the beard that should not be less than a fist length, but they could not provide any reported hadith from Rasulullah (S.A.W) to support their position. Shaikh Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Sahib mention in his booklet entitled "The beard of Muslim and its importance page 9" the practice of 'Ibn Umar (R.A) who used to hold his beard with his clasped fist (hand), and that hair which was longer, he cut off'. And said: 'it is obvious from this, that Rasulullah (S.A.W) cut his beard in length and breadth in this manner'. Maulana is basing his judgment on the assumption that Rasulullah (S.A.W) did the same without proving with the actual report of hadith. Rasulullah (S.A.W) never cut his beard as Maulana mentioned, Rasulullah (S.A.W) only trimmed His moustaches as mentioned in the ahadith. Like wise Rasulullah (S.A.W) never dyed his beard or hair even though he recommended that gray hair or beard can be dyed with red or golden colour. Thabit (R.A) reported that : Anas (R.A) was asked whether Rasulullah (S.A.W) used a hair dye or not. Anas

replied, "Rasulullah (S.A.W) had no enough grey hair to dye. I could even count the white grey hairs on his beard if I would."

The general ruling of prohibition cannot be based on the assumption.

Shaikh Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Sahib mentioned on the same page 9 that, ' **Sayyidina Umar and Abu Hurairah (R.A) did the same....it is also related that Sayyidina Umar (R.A) did this to another person**'.

Mufti Afzal Elias mentioned in his internet article on page 2 that '**It is forbidden (haraam) for a man to cut off another's beard**'. How do we reconcile this contradiction? Maulana Zakariyya confirms that one can cut or trim the beard of another person as Umar (R.A) did. Mufti Elias regards this practice haram.

Another question, which may be asked, is that, are all commands in Qur'an or Sunnat mean obligation?

What is a command first in Arabic?

A command proper (*amr*) is defined as a verbal demand to do something issued from a position of superiority over who is inferior.

Command in Arabic can mean supplication (du'a) which is a demand from an inferior to one who is superior, all our daily du'as are in the form of command which in actual sense mean supplication.

Verbal command can mean permissibility: Allah says in Suratil al-A'raf 7:31 " Kuluu wa sh'rabuu", ('eat and drink'), in Suratul al-Maidah 5:2 " Wa idhaa halaltum fas'twaaduu" (And 'only' after your pilgrimage is over are you free to hunt) and Suratul al-Jumu'ah 62:10 " Fan'tashiruu fil ardh" ('scatter or spread in the land') after performing Friday prayer etc. These indications are all in the imperative form but in all cases the purpose is to render these activities permissible only.

Verbal command can mean recommendation: Allah says in Suratil al-Baqarah2:282 " When you give or take a loan for fixed period, reduce it into writing" the indication which occurs in the following statement of the same verse " And if one of you deposit a thing on trust let the trustee [faithfully] discharge his trust" and " Whenever you enter a contract of sale , let it be witnessed and let neither the scribe nor the witness suffer harm" this concludes that the command here implies a recommendation (nadb) only. Read *Muhammad Hashim Kamal, Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence page 140*.

If this is a case with the commands in relation to Qur'an, what about commands in relation to the Sunnat? The command in the ahadith of beard mentioned above fall under this specification.

Views of some scholars on the aspect of beard

Muhammad Hashim Kamal, in his book entitled '*Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*' page 52.

"For instance the Prophet (P.B.U.H) kept his beard at certain length and trimmed his moustache. The majority of ulema have viewed this not as a mere observance of the familiar usage at the time but as an example for the believers to follow. Others have held the opposite view by saying that it was a part of the social practice of the Arabs which was designed to prevent resemblance to the Jews and some non-Arabs who used to shave the beard and grow the moustache. Such practices were in other words, a part of the current usage and basically optional. Similarly, it is known that the Prophet (P.B.U.H) use to go to the 'id prayers (salat al-'id) by one route and return from the mosque by a different route, and that Prophet (P.B.U.H) at times performed the Hajj pilgrimage while riding a camel. The Shafi'i jurists are inclined to prefer the commendable (man'duub) in such acts to mere permissibility whereas the Hanafis consider them as merely permissible, or mubaah". Muhammad Hashim Kamal himself is of the Hanafi school of thought.

The learned scholar Shehzad Saleem who is the Director of Al-Mawrid, Institute of Islamic Sciences (51-K, Model Town, Lahore, Pakistan) says, "Keeping a beard is a desirable act for men. The Prophets of Allah kept beards and expressed their liking for it since this is from among the norms of human nature. It is an expression of manliness and as such a sign, which distinguishes men from women. **However, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) did not regard keeping beards as part of the Islamic Shari'ah. Also, it is not compulsory for men to keep a beard.** This view also conforms to the Shafite jurists (See Dr *Wahbah al-Zahili, Fiqhu'l-Islami wa Adillatuhu*, vol. 1, p. 308.) and to many scholars of *Hadith* including *Qadi 'Ayad*" (See *Nawawi, Sharah Sahih Muslim*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, [Beirut: *Daru'l-Ahya al-Turath al-'Arabi*, 1972], p. 151) who regard shaving the beard as *makruh* (undesirable). (While defining *makruh Abu Zuhrah* says: The jurists say that the perpetrator of *makruh* is not to be condemned while a person who desists from it is praiseworthy. (*Abu Zuhrah, Usulu'l-Fiqh*, 1st ed., [Cairo: *Daru'l-Fikr al-'Arabi*, 1958], p. 41).

Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi

"We see that there are three views on shaving the beard. First, shaving beard is prohibited. This is the view of Ibn Taimyiah. Second: it is *Makruh* (reprehensible), that is 'Iyad's view. The Third view is that there is no problem in shaving the beard. This view is held by many contemporary scholars.

It seems to me that the closest of these three views is the one that deems shaving beard as *Makruh*. As the stated reason for growing the beard is to be different from the non-believers, it is similar to the matter of dyeing gray hair in order to be distinct from the Jews and Christians; it is known that some of the Companions of the Prophet did not dye their gray hair, signifying that it was commendable rather than obligatory. Similarly, **growing the beard may be regarded as commendable but not obligatory**, and, accordingly, shaving it would be classified as *Makruh* rather than *Haram*. It is true that none of the Companions was known to have shaved his beard. Perhaps there was no need to shave, and perhaps growing the beard was a custom among them."

Another question which may be asked is that, is keeping beard or lengthening it a condition for the acceptance of one's salat or for performing Imamah?

Qur'an is silent on the issue, neither Qur'an mentioned in its directives that one needs to keep or to lengthen his beard for his salat to be accepted. Neither Qur'an mentioned that for some one to become Imam he should grow long beard.

It is apparent from the Ahaadith mentioned above that Rasulullah (S.A.W) did not mention anything related to this question. The beard as a condition for the Imamah is a new development in Islamic thought. It was not an issue during the life of Rasulullah (S.A.W) or after the demise of Rasulullah (S.A.W). Rasulullah (S.A.W) neither insulted nor abused people by calling them fusaq (evil doers) who are equal to adulterers, imbibers of alcohol and so on.

None of the Imam of the four schools of thought stated or included growing or lengthening the beard as a condition of Imamah. Here is the hadith of Rasulullah (S.A.W) on which the four Imams based their views.

Abu Mas'ud al-Badri (R.A) reported that, Rasulullah (S.A.W) said: "The one of you who is most versed in the Book of Allah (Qur'an) should act as Imam for the people; if all are equal in recitation, then he should lead the people one who is earliest of them to emigrate (to Madina); if all emigrated at the same time, then the oldest of them should lead them. No man should lead another in prayer in his house or where the latter has authority; or sit in his place of honour without his permission". Recorded by Ibin Maajah in his book known as *Sunan Ibin Maajah*. Hadith 93 page 92 volume 2. See also *Sunan Abu Dawud*, hadith 582 page 153, volume 1.

The views of the four prominent Imams, under the heading;

The right person qualifies for Imamat.

الأحق بالإمامة

<p>1 - The Hanafis said:</p> <p>If a number of men get together for Salat (prayer) the most learned of its rules and principles is offered first option of Imamat, then the one who gives a good recital of Qur'an, then the pious, then the older person in Islam, then the most elderly person, then the well behaved person, then the most handsome person, then the person from a noble family, then the clean/smart person, if all are equal in the abovementioned aspects then you choose between them through the draw.</p>	<p>1- قال الحنفية:</p> <p>إذا اجتمع عديد من الرجال للصلاة قدم الأعم بأحكامها، ثم الأقرأ، فالأورع، فالأقدم إسلاما، فالأكبر سنا، فالأحسن خلقا، فالأجمل و جهأ، فالأشرف نسبا، فالأنظف ثوبا، فإن استوا في ذلك أقرع بينهم.</p>
<p>2 - The Malikis said:</p> <p>If a number of men get together for Salat (prayer) the leader or his deputy is offered first option of Imamat, then the Imam of the masjid, then Rabbul Bait, then most learned of the salat rules and its principles, then the learned of Hadeeth, then the one who gives a good recital of Qur'an, then the pious, then the older person in Islam, then the person from a noble family, then the best behaved person, then the clean/smart person, if all are equal in the abovementioned aspects, then you choose between them through the draw.</p>	<p>1- قال المالكية:</p> <p>إذا اجتمع عديد من الرجال للصلاة يقدم السلطان أو نائبه، ثم إمام المسجد و رب المنزل، ثم الأعم بأحكام الصلاة، فالأعلم بالحديث، فالأعدل، فالأقرأ، فالأعبد، فالأقدم إسلاما، فالأرقى نسبا، فالأحسن خلقا، فالأحسن لباسا، فإن استوا في ذلك أقرع بينهم.</p>
<p>3 - The Hanabilas said:</p> <p>If a number of men get together for Salat (prayer), the most learned in Fiqh who recites Qur'an well with Tajweed, is offered first option of Imamat, then who recites Qur'an well with its Tajweed rules only, then the learned of the salat rules and its principles, then who can recite and does not know the Fiqh of Salat, then elderly person, then the person from a noble family, then the old in Hijrah, then the pious and religious. If all are equal in the abovementioned then you choose between them through the draw.</p>	<p>1- قال الحنابلة:</p> <p>إذا اجتمع عديد من الرجال للصلاة يقدم الأفقه الأجود قراءة، ثم الأجود قراءة فقط، ثم الأحفظ لأحكام الصلاة، ثم قارئ لا يعلم فقه الصلاة، ثم الأكبر سنا، فالأشرف نسبا، فالأقدم هجرة، فالأنقى، فالأورع، ومع التساوي فالقرعة.</p>
<p>4 - The Shafis said:</p> <p>If a number of men get together for Salat (prayer) the leader is offered first option of Imamat, then the Imam of the masjid, then the most learned in Fiqh, then one who recites Qur'an well, then the pious and religious, then the old in Hijrah, then the well spoken, then the elderly person, then the person with a noble characters, then the clean person, in cloth, body or physical, the person with beautiful voice, then the person with good appearance, then the married person, if all are equal in the abovementioned then you choose between them through the draw.</p>	<p>1- قال الشافعية:</p> <p>إذا اجتمع عديد من الرجال للصلاة يقدم الوالي، ثم إمام المسجد، ثم الأفقه، فالأقرأ، فالأزهد، فالأورع، فالأقدم هجرة، فالألسن، فالأفضل نسبا، ثم الأكبر سنا، فالأحسن سيرة، فالأنظف ثوبا و بدنا و صنعة، فالأحسن صوتا، فالأحسن صورة، فالمتزوج، فإن تساوا فالقرعة.</p>

Muhammad Jawaad Mughniya, al-Fiqh 'ala al-Madhahib al-Khamsati (Fiqh according to the five Madhab) page 137-138.

Sayyid Sabiq, Fiqh al-Sunnat page 235-236.

It is very surprisingly to hear in our days that a person who shaves his beard cannot act as Imam in Islam. This was not the case with the four Imams as demonstrated in their views above. They could not forget to mention in their conditions things like beautiful face, handsomeness and smartness, but they forgot to mention the beard and its length.

A practical example is that where the followers of Shafi'i school of thought like in Cape Town, East and central Africa and in Egypt the Ulama, the Imams, and even the common people do not keep beard on the length of one fist as mentioned earlier. Does this mean that the Ulama there are ignorant or decided to contradict the views of their Imam?

Another example is that of North Africa and West Africa where the Maliki school of thought is predominantly practiced do not keep beard according to the prescription of one fist length too. Does this also mean that the Ulama there are ignorant or decided to contradict the views of their Imam?

In conclusion, we need to respect, accept, appreciate and tolerate one another opinion and view. Let us learn to work together instead of creating unnecessary differences that at the end can cause divisions in the community.

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