

# Photography, Selfies and Picture-making are from the Major Sins Proven by the Authentic Narrations: Heads and Faces on Photos Should be Erased or Removed: That is the Sunnah—Opinions of Men Cannot Override the Revelation

By Abu Khadeejah ‘Abdul-Wāhid.

*All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all creation; may Allah extol the mention of our noble Prophet Muhammad in the highest company of Angels and give him peace and security—and his family, his Companions and all those who follow him correctly until the establishment of the Hour.*

The Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) stated: “Jibrīl (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام) came to me and said: ‘I came to you last night and was prevented from entering only because there were images of men at the door—and there was a decorated curtain in the house with images on it, and there was a dog inside the house. So, order the head on the image

to be removed so that it resembles the form of a tree—order the curtain to be cut up and made into two cushions spread out on which people may sit and order the dog to be turned out.” The Messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did that. The dog was a puppy belonging to Al-Hasan or Al-Husayn (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا) and was under their bench, so he ordered it to be turned out.<sup>1</sup>

Abul-Hayyāj Al-Asadī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) narrated that ‘Alī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said to him, “I am sending you on the same mission as Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) sent me: **Not to leave an image without erasing it, or a grave raised high without levelling it.**”<sup>2</sup>

Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا) narrated that Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “**The image is the head, so if the head is removed, it is no longer an image.**”<sup>3</sup>

**Shaikh Ibn ‘Uthaimīn (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ):** Whoever keeps pictures for memories, or hung up on the wall, or photos in an album or other than that, should tear them up and destroy them because their presence prevents Angels

<sup>1</sup> Tirmidhī no. 2806, Abu Dawūd, no. 4158, graded *sahīh* by Al-Albānī.

<sup>2</sup> Muslim no. 969, An-Nasā’ī no. 2031, Abu Dawūd no. 3218.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Isma‘īlī in his *Mu’jam*, Al-Bayhaqī no. 14580, graded *sahīh* by Al-Albānī.

from entering the home... What is the intent of taking photos of people? If the aim is to keep them as memories—then for that purpose it is harām. And hanging them on walls is harām—and the Angels do not enter a home that has images.<sup>4</sup>

## Photography and Picture Making is from the Major Sins—Imām Adh-Dhahabi

Al-Imām Al-Hāfidh Abu Abdillāh Muhammad bin Ahmad Adh-Dhahabi (d. 748H, رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) mentioned the placing of images of living things on clothing, walls, etc, as the forty-fourth major sin in his tremendous work entitled, “The Major Sins (Al-Kabā’ir).” The following is an abridgement of the chapter: Placing Images of Living Things on Clothing, Walls and so on.

Sa’eed bin Abil-Hasan (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said:

قَالَ كُنْتُ عِنْدَ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا إِذْ أَتَاهُ رَجُلٌ فَقَالَ يَا  
 أَبَا عَبَّاسٍ إِنِّي إِنْسَانٌ إِنَّمَا مَعِيشَتِي مِنْ صَنْعَةِ يَدَيَّ وَإِنِّي أَصْنَعُ  
 هَذِهِ التَّصَاوِيرَ. فَقَالَ ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ لَا أَحَدَّثُكَ إِلَّا مَا سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ

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<sup>4</sup> Summarised from *Fatāwa ‘Ulamā al-Balad al-Harām*, p. 1218, 1221, 1222.

اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ سَمِعْتُهُ يَقُولُ مَنْ صَوَّرَ صُورَةً  
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مُعَذِّبُهُ حَتَّى يَنْفُخَ فِيهَا الرُّوحَ وَكَأَنَّ بِنَافِخِ فِيهَا أَبَدًا  
فَرَبًّا الرَّجُلُ رَبُّوَةً شَدِيدَةً وَأَصْفَرَ وَجْهَهُ. فَقَالَ وَيْحَكَ إِنْ أَبَيْتَ إِلَّا  
أَنْ تَصْنَعَ فَعَلَيْكَ بِهَذَا الشَّجَرِ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَيْسَ فِيهِ رُوحٌ

While I was with Ibn Abbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا), a man came and said, “O Abu ‘Abbās! My sustenance is from my manual profession, and I make these pictures.” Ibn ‘Abbās said, “I will tell you only what I heard from Allah's Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). I heard him saying, “Whoever makes an image will be punished by Allah till he puts a soul (life) into it, and he will never be able to put a soul in it.” Upon hearing this, the man heaved a sigh and his face turned pale. So, Ibn ‘Abbās said to him, “Woe to you! If you insist on making pictures, then I advise you to make pictures of trees and any other object that does not have a soul.” (Bukhāri, no. 2225, Muslim, no. 2110)

And the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَصْنَعُونَ هَذِهِ الصُّورَ يُعَذَّبُونَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُقَالُ لَهُمْ  
أَحْيُوا مَا خَلَقْتُمْ

“Those who make these pictures [of living things] will be punished on the Day of Resurrection, and it will be said to them. ‘Bring to life what you have made.’”

(Bukhāri, no. 5951, Muslim, no. 2108)

Ā'ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا) narrated that Allah's Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) returned from a journey and I had placed a curtain of mine that had pictures on it over a part of my living quarters. When Allah's Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saw it, he tore it and was angry. Then he said,

أَشَدُّ النَّاسِ عَذَابًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ الَّذِينَ يُضَاهُونَ بِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ

“The people who will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection will be those who try to compete with Allah's creation [by making images].” So, we turned that torn cloth into one or two cushions. (Bukhāri, no. 5954, Muslim, no. 2107)

Abu Hurayrah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) narrated that Allah's Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

يَخْرُجُ عُنُقٌ مِنَ النَّارِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَهُ عَيْنَانِ تُبْصِرَانِ وَأُذُنَانِ تَسْمَعَانِ وَلِسَانٌ يُنْطِقُ يَقُولُ إِنِّي وَكَلْتُ بِثَلَاثَةٍ بِكُلِّ جَبَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ وَبِكُلِّ مَنْ دَعَا مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَبِالْمُصَوِّرِينَ

“Some of the Fire will come out in the form a neck on the Day of Judgment. It will have two eyes which can see, two ears which can hear, and a tongue which can speak. It will say: ‘I have been left in charge of three: Every obstinate tyrant, everyone who called upon a god besides Allah, and the makers of images [of living

**things].”** (At-Tirmidhi, no. 2574, declared *saheeh* by Al-Albāni)

Abu Zur’ah said: I entered a house in Madinah with Abu Hurairah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ), and he saw a man making pictures [of living creature] at the top of the house. Abu Hurairah said: I heard Allah's Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) saying that Allah said,

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذَهَبَ يَخْلُقُ كَخَلْقِي فَلْيَخْلُقُوا حَبَّةً وَلْيَخْلُقُوا  
ذَرَّةً

**“Who would be more unjust than the one who tries to create the like of My creatures? Let them create a grain, let them create a corn or a gnat.”** (Bukhari, no. 5953, Muslim, no. 2111)

It is authentically reported from the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) that he invoked Allah’s curse of the makers of images. (Bukhāri, no 2086)

Fatwa of *Al-Lajnah Ad-Dā’imah* (no. 1953): “There is no doubt that images (and making images) of anything that has a soul is *harām*—indeed it is from the major sins. And this is due to what has been narrated of the severe threat of punishment in the texts of the Sunnah—and because images are in imitation of Allah’s creation of living creatures. And because imagery is a pathway to *fitnah* (tribulations), and a path to

polytheism in many cases. The sin encompasses the one who make the image, the one who has it made for him and the one who helps it to be made because they have all cooperated in the sin. And Allah has forbidden that in His saying: ‘*And do not cooperate in sin and transgression.*’ (Al-Mā'idah: 2)”

Fatwa of *Al-Lajnah Ad-Dā'imah* (no. 1978):

“Photography of living beings, whether humans or animals, and storing these images is *harām*. Indeed, it is from the major sins due to what is recorded concerning this matter in the authentic narrations that mention the severe threat and painful punishment for the picture-makers and the one who possesses these images. And also due to the fact that picture-making seeks to imitate the living creatures of Allah. Likewise, because picture-making can be a path to polytheism such as pictures of leaders and righteous men. Or they are a gateway to *fitnah* (tribulations) such images of beautiful women, actors and actresses, or of scantily-clad or naked women.”

Fatwa of *Al-Lajnah Ad-Dā'imah* (no. 2036): “The origin concerning images and picture-making of creatures that have a soul, whether humans or the rest of the animals, is that it is *harām* (impermissible). This prohibition applies to statues, figures, images drawn on paper, cloth, walls, etc, and it applies to photographs.

And this is due to what is established in the authentic narrations that state this prohibition and threaten the doer with severe punishment. Also, because it is gateway to worship and devotion to other than Allah, by placing it in front of people, or showing humility to it, and seeking nearness to it, and venerated the picture to a position that is not befitting except for Allah, the Most High. Picture-making (of living creatures) entails competing with the creation of Allah. Some images are a pathway to *fitan* (tribulations) such as images of actresses, scantily-clad and naked women, and those who are referred to as beauty queens and so on.” Then the scholars continue to say: “As for objects which do not have a soul such as trees, oceans, mountains, etc, then it is allowed to make images of them just as Ibn

‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا) stated—and it is not known that any of the Sahābah prohibited that. And due to what is understood from the Messenger’s (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) speech in the narrations that threaten punishment such as: **‘Bring to life what you have made.’** And his saying, **‘He will be compelled to blow a soul (life) into it (the image), and he will not be able.’**”

Finally, the prohibition includes every type of image, picture, sculpture, statue whether it is made, sold, displayed, commissioned, whether made out of wood or stone, whether for decorating the home, or on a rug,

or in a car, or on billboards and adverts, or mannequins for clothing upon which garments are placed—all of this is competing with the creation of Allah, is not legislated and success is with Allah.

(See *Al-Jawāb Al-Mufeed Fī Ahkāmīyat-Tasweer* of Al-Imām Abdul-‘Azeez Ibn Bāz (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ), *l’lān an-Nakeer ‘alā maftūneen bit-Tasweer* of Shaikh Hamūd at-Tuwaijiri, *Ābāb Az-Zifāf* (pp. 192-194) of Al-Imām Al-Albāni (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) who refuted those who allow photography of living things that has become so prevalent in these times).

I ask Allah to guide the Muslims to His obedience in this era of social media; in a time where the call of the sinners is to encourage the youth to post selfies and photographs of themselves for the world to see, in order to broadcast and display themselves. All these are traits that oppose the humble manners and behaviour of the Prophets and Messengers.

*And all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all creation; may Allah extol the mention of our noble Prophet Muhammad in the highest company of Angels and give him peace and security—and his family, his Companions and all those who follow him correctly until the establishment of the Hour.*

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