13993 - Do Physical Appearances Really Matter?

the question

I would like to ask a question that is a common problem among many of us. How does Allah look at physical beauty? How is it discussed in Hadith and Quran? Many people favor some of their children over others just because of light skin color or eye color. How does the Quran view this?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Physical beauty is not considered to be a measure of virtue among people in Islam; rather the standard on which distinctions are made is taqwa (piety, fear of Allah). Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):
“O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa [i.e. he is one of the Muttaqoon (the pious)]. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware”
[al-Hujuraat 49:13]
Hence sharee’ah (divine law) came to correct our outlook which is usually based on outward appearances. There are many ahaadeeth (Prophetic narrations)on this topic, including the following:
It was narrated in al-Saheeh that Abu Hurayrah said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘Allah does not look at your appearance or your wealth, but He looks at your hearts and your deeds.’” (Narrated by Muslim, al-Birr wa’l-Silah, 4651).
It was narrated that Abu Dharr said: “I exchanged words with another man, whose mother was a non-Arab. I insulted his mother, and he mentioned that to the Prophet (peace and blessings of

Allah be upon him). He said to me, ‘Did you trade insults with so and so?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Did you insult his mother?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘You are a man in whom is jaahiliyyah (ignorance)…’” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, al-Adab, 5590; Muslim, al-Eemaan, 3140). According to another report: “…I said to him, ‘O son of a black woman’,” and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “In you there is jaahiliyyah” – i.e., one of the characteristics of jaahiliyyah.

It was narrated that Sahl ibn Sa’d al-Saa’idi said: “A man passed by the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and he asked a man who was sitting with him, ‘What do you think of this man?’ He said, ‘He is one of the nobility. By Allah, if he proposes marriage he deserves to get married and if he intercedes, his intercession deserves to be accepted.’ The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said nothing. Then another man passed by, and the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked, ‘What do you think of this man?’ He said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, he is one of the poor Muslims. If he proposes marriage he does not deserve to get married, if he intercedes his intercession does not deserve to be accepted and if he speaks he does not deserve to be heard.’ The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘This one (the second man) is better than an earthful of (men like) that one (the first man).’” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, al-Riqaaq, 5966).

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “People should stop boasting about their forefathers who have died, for they are no more than the fuel of Hell, or they will be more insignificant before Allah than the dung beetle which rolls up dung with its nose. Allah has taken away your jaahili arrogance and pride in your ancestors; rather man is either a believer who fears Allah or an immoral person who is doomed. All of them are the sons of Adam and Adam was created from dust.” (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, al-Manaaqib, 3890; classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi, no. 3100).

All these ahaadeeth indicate that which we have mentioned above, which is that one’s appearance and colour should not be the basis of one’s feeling proud, distinguished, superior or of high status, and that the Muslim should get close to those who are pious and righteous.

It was narrated that ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas said: “I heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saying out loud, not quietly: ‘…Rather my friends are Allah and the righteous believers…’” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, al-Adab, 5531; Muslim, al-Eemaan, 316).

With regard to dealing with one’s children, it is obligatory to treat them fairly and not to prefer some of them over others, even if one of them honours his father more than another. So how about if the distinction is based on the colour of the child’s skin or the colour of his eyes? This is a serious matter and it is a grave wrongdoing. Parents have to fear Allah when dealing with their children and treat them fairly. It says in the hadeeth whose authenticity is agreed upon, which was narrated from al-Nu’maan ibn Basheer that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Fear Allah and treat your children fairly.” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2398; Muslim, 3055). This kind of favouritism generates envy and hatred between the children. We ask Allah to keep us safe and sound. And Allah knows best. May Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad.