163219 - What is the ruling on looking at the faces of hijabi women?

the question

I live in an area where there are a lot of hijabi women, and out of necessity I have to speak to one of them from time to time. Can I look at their faces when speaking to them, or is averting the gaze obligatory even if they are wearing hijab?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Allah, may He be exalted, has commanded men to avert their gaze from that which is haraam and is not permissible for them to look at. One of the things that is forbidden to them is looking at women who are not their mahrams, just as the same command is also addressed to women, to avert their gaze from that which Allah, may He be exalted, has forbidden. One of the things that is forbidden to women is to look at men who are not their mahrams. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Tell the believing men to avert their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do.

And tell the believing women to avert their gaze and guard their private parts…”

[an-Noor 24:30-31].

It is permissible to look at a non-mahram woman when there is a need to do so, which includes looking at her when buying and selling, giving testimony, giving or receiving medical treatment, and proposing marriage. As for looking with desire, that is forbidden according to scholarly consensus.

See the cases in which it is permissible to look at a non-mahram woman in the answer to question

no. 2198.

The questioner did not mention the reason why he needs to look at hijabi women in his city. If what he meant was any of the reasons that we have mentioned which make it permissible to look, then there is nothing wrong with that, so long as he looks only as much as is necessary and does not go beyond that, because the basic principle is that he should avert his gaze, as mentioned in the verses quoted above.

If he wants to look at them because he is simply talking to them without there being any of the cases of necessity that we have mentioned above, or similar reasons, then he is clearly enjoined to also avert his gaze from the one who is speaking to him, especially if she is young and there is no guarantee that there will be no temptation; in fact temptation and its causes are widespread.

See the answer to question no. 114196 for further explanation. Among other things, we said there:

With regard to a hijabi woman who uncovers her face only – despite the fact that she is going against the more correct shar'i ruling which dictates that it is obligatory for a woman to cover her face – when there is a need for a man to deal with her for the purpose of buying, selling, helping, teaching, medical treatment, testimony, proposing marriage and so on, it is permissible to look at her face as much as is necessary, on condition that that is not accompanied by desire and there is no fear that he will be tempted…. End quote.

And Allah knows best.