



Is it haram to wear jeans that reach below the ankles ?

written by Kevin Abdullah Karim
islamic-answers.com

The Arabic word *isbaal* refers to the practice of dragging one's clothing garments. Various authentic narrations discuss this practice. Imam Bukhari in his famous work "Sahih Bukhari" narrates that the Prophet said: "...Whoever *trails* his lower garment [izar] out of pride, Allaah will not even look at him on the Day of Resurrection..." [al-Bukhari, no. 3465]. Jabir ibn Sulaym in addition narrated that the Prophet said to him: "...Lift up you lower garment to the middle of your shank, and if you don't wish to, then to the ankles [but not below their upper part]. Beware the *trailing* of the lower garment [izar], for it is arrogance, and Allah does not like arrogance.." [see: Silsilat Al-Ahadeeth as-Saheehah , no.1109 and 1352 ; al-Tirmidhi, no. 2722]. Ibn Hajar notes that what is highlighted in these narrations is : "...the specific meaning of *dragging* the garment behind .." [Fath al-Bari].

In another narration the Prophet said: "...The part of the lower garment [izar] that falls below the ankles is in the fire..." [al-Bukhari, no. 5341]. Earlier we mentioned that the Prophet did not allow Muslims to trail their garments [on the ground], since it is a kind of arrogance. For this reason he clarified that "...the part of the lower garment that falls below the ankles is in the fire..". Ibn Hajar comments on this narration: "...letting down the garment supposes *dragging* it behind oneself, and dragging it behind oneself supposes *arrogance*.." [Fath al-Bari]. It should be noted that the Prophet in various narrations specifically mentioned the problem of pride in the context of letting one's robes drag below the ankles. Al-Bukhari reported under the title "Dragging One's Garment Without Arrogance," that the Prophet said: "...On the Day of Judgment, Allah will not look at him who drags his robe [behind him] out of pride." [upon hearing this] Abu Bakr said, "O Messenger of Allah, my waistcloth slips down if I do not pay attention to it." The Prophet replied: "You are not one of those who do it out of pride" [Sahih al-Bukhari 5784]. It is easy to conclude from this that the Prophet's interdict against allowing one's clothes to fall below the ankles is primarily intended to counter the *pomp* and *flamboyancy* in regards to attire that were characteristic of Arab aristocracy at that time. ¹ In the Prophet's time, everyone wore the same cloth – upper cloth and lower cloth [izar]. It was custom for the Arabs at that time to raise their *izar* [lower garment] so it wouldn't become dirty. Everyone did it except those who had a lot of wealth and wanted to show others

1: Pre-Islamic poets frequently describe the dragging of one's garments along the ground. The poet 'Amr b. Qami'a bemoaning his lost youth recalls the times "...When I trailed my *rayt* and *mirts* to the nearest wine-merchants and shook my curly locks.." [Georg W. Freytag, *Hamasa Carmina*, vol I, pt 2 (Typis Reisi Arabicis in Focicina Baadeni: Bonn, 1828) , p. 504]. The poet Ta'abbata Sharran juxtaposes the easy-going manner of the warrior when he went about "...among his tribe with trailing garment and flowing dark hair.." with his demeanor when he went out to battle [Ibid. p. 383]. These two poems from the pre-islamic era clearly proof that people used to drag their lower garments [izar] in order to show-off ! This fact is also confirmed in another source, in which the next words are narrated from Al- Sa'ib ibn Tammam: "...I was the son of a Qayl (the title of some legendary Pre-Islamic princes of Yemen) , and used to drag the hem of my robe *in pride*, to pine for a lady with a mole on her cheek , to wrap myself in the garment of *splendor* and *haughtiness* , to revel in the meadow of ease and riotous living and, between Najd and al-Hujun, to seek guidance in matters of love, until the hand of death smote my father, and our reign came to and end.." [source: "Al-Maqāmāt al-luzūmiyah", trans. by James T. Monroe (Brill, 2002) , p. 132]

that they had a lot of money. Meaning that if their garment would get dirty or ripped because of its dragging, they could go out and buy another one due to their massive amount of wealth. The prophetic saying "...those that drag their lower garment out of pride..." is clearly a reference to these people. ² In other words those who dressed their garments below the ankles, or dragged their garments along the ground at the time of the Prophet, clearly distinguished themselves from the general masses by their clothing style. For this reason this practice was a kind of showing-off. In this historical context said the Prophet: "...Beware of wearing one's *izar* below the ankles, because this is a kind of *showing-off*, and Allah does not love *showing-off*.." [al-Tirmidhi 2722]. Therefore we conclude that *isbaal* with the *type of clothes* that were worn by the Arabs at the time of the Prophet obviously represented or signified arrogant behaviour, since it was a custom for the Arabs at that time to let their ancient traditional garments hang a little bit below the knees [in order to prevent that their garments would become *dirty*, and because fabric was very *expensive* at that time]. Those Arabs who dragged their garments on the ground, distinguished themselves from the general masses by their clothing style, and so their behaviour represented or signified pride or arrogance !

Is it forbidden to wear modern jeans below the ankles ?

In today's time, [almost] *everyone* is wearing their jeans in a fashion in which a portion of it goes underneath the ankle; whether they are Muslim or not. Does that constitute a sin [as some conservative scholars claim] ? Earlier we already pointed out that the prophet disliked to see Muslims wear their *izar* [lower garment] below the ankles, since it was a custom for the Arabs at that time to let their ancient traditional garments hang a little bit below the knees [in order to prevent that their garments would become dirty, and because fabric was very expensive at that time]. In other words the Prophet did not allow Muslims to dress in a way that would conflict with the general custom of the people in his time. Departing from custom often makes the doer of it suspected of seeking notoriety or fame, and the robe of notoriety does not benefit any Muslim [since Allah does not like arrogance and the act of showing off]. Therefore we conclude that *isbaal* [as discussed by the Prophet] refers to the lengthening of the garments beyond what the people [of various cultures and times] are accustomed to. This view is supported in the next classical source:

Ibn Battaal said: 'as for the *Isbaal* of the '*Imamah* [turban] , then it means hanging the '*Adhabah* more than what the people are accustomed to'. And the elongation of the sleeves beyond what the people are accustomed to is *Isbaal*. And it was reported that the judge 'Iyaadh reported from the then scholars that they hated *whatever would go beyond the people's customs regarding the length and /or width* of the garment ³

If the elongation of the sleeves beyond what the people are accustomed to is *isbaal*, then equally can we say that *isbaal* of the *izar* [lower garment] refers to the lengthening of the lower garment beyond what the people are accustomed to ! ⁴ Ibn Hajar also reported that al-Hafiz al-Iraqi said:

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- ²: In other words those Arabs who practised *isbaal* with their *izar* [lower garment] in the time of the Holy Prophet clearly distinguished themselves from the *general masses* by their *clothing style*. [since it was a custom for the Arabs at that time to let their lower garments hang a little bit below the knees , in order to prevent that their garments would become *dirty*]. Therefore those who did the opposite of this practice looked as people who tried to show off or liked to distinguish themselves from others by their clothing style. For this reason the Holy Prophet said : "...Beware of wearing one's *izar* below the ankles, because this is a kind of *showing-off*, and Allah does not love *showing-off*.." [See: Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Hadith nr. 2722]
 - ³: Awnul-Ma'bood 9/120
 - ⁴: In the time of the Holy Prophet it was a custom for the Arabs to let their lower garments hang a little bit below the knees. Therefore the Prophet instructed his followers not to let their *izar* hang below the ankles.

Ibn Hajar wrote: The issue of lengthening the cuffs of shirts, tops etc... being made forbidden is also such that requires further reflection. What seems clear is that if the length is such that it exceeds the habitual practice as is the practice of some people of *hijaaz* then this would be forbidden...Our sheikh [al-Hafiz al-Iraqi] has said in his commentary of Tirmidhi if the length is such that it *hits* the ground then without doubt this would be haraam. He also said if the verdict of prohibition was to be passed on a length exceeding the habitual practice then this too will *not* be considered far fetched. However the practice of lengthening the cuffs *has become a custom* and it has become a distinguishing mark for various people through which they are recognized, thus if the practice of lengthening is based on pride then there is no doubt in its prohibition, whereas, *if it's merely a customary practice* then there will be no prohibition in it as long as it doesn't exceed the prescribed limit [i.e. as long as the clothes do not *touch* the ground] [4](#)

In today's time it has become a custom for people to wear their jeans in a fashion in which a portion of it goes underneath the ankle; whether they are Muslim or not. In other words people today do not dress like this in order to show-off or to look arrogant, but simply wear their jeans in this style because it has become a general custom. In addition it is important to note that this fashion has never been associated or viewed by people as an act that represents arrogance or pride behaviour in a person ! Since *isbaal* refers to the lengthening of the garments beyond what the people [of various cultures and times] are accustomed to, it is *wrong* to say that Muslims who wear their jeans or other modern pants in a fashion in which a [little] portion of it goes underneath the ankle, are guilty of a major sin or arrogant behaviour. Those conservative scholars of today who argue that every Muslim must roll up his *jeans* or *sport pants* above the ankles are taking things a bit too far.

Despite the above conclusion, some conservative scholars in our time still argue that it is forbidden for Muslims to wear their jeans a little bit below the ankles, since some classical jurists were of the opinion that the *saraweel* ["ancient" trousers] should not hang below the ankles. However the conservative scholars who quote these classical jurists fail to mention the important fact that the *saraweel* ["ancient" trousers] used to be ankle or calf-length in most societies. One source states:

Ankle to calf-length trousers, wide or narrow, with seamed or wrapped legs were part of the costume of the ancient Chinese, Mongols, Sythians, Phrygians, and *Persians*. The Sarmatians, the Dakerians, and the Lydians presumably adopted them, after 700 B.C.E., from the Persians... The Celts, Germanic peoples and the Sarmatians were the first to wear the *truss*, a sort of linen undergarment, in the late Bronze and Iron Ages. *Thigh-high* and *ankle-length* trousers, sometimes luxuriously woven and artistically sewn out of fabric and leather, are documented as being worn by men and occasionally women of northern tribes. [5](#)

The above source confirms that the Persians used to wear ankle to calf-length trousers. This is an important fact, since we read in the next source that trousers in Arabia were *introduced* from Persia:

Trousers were not part of the original dress of the Arabs, and they remain alien in Arabia to the present day. They were, however, known from very early times and were apparently introduced from Persia ... [6](#)

4: Ibn Hajar, "Fathul-Baari" , Vol. 10, p. 274

5: Valerie Steele, "Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion" , Vol. 3 , [Charles Scribner's Sons , 2004] , p. 339

6: See: Bernard Lewis, "Islam: The Religion and the People" [Wharton School Publishing , 2008] , p. 129

In another source we read:

Trousers are not originally an Arab garment, but were introduced , probably from Persia. From quite early times, other people have copied the thing and the name from the Persians and it almost looks as if Persia were the original home of the trousers.. The ..Latin “sarabala” ...and the Arabic “sirwal” [saraweel is the plural of sirwal] are all derived from old Persian *zarawaro* ...The Arab grammarians retained a memory of the Persian origin of the word . .. When the word entered Arabic .. is not exactly known ⁷

In other words we can safely say that in ancient times it was a custom for the people in the Middle East and Persia to dress themselves with ankle to calf-length trousers [the *saraweel*]. Therefore those people who used to let their *saraweel* hang below the ankles, distinguished themselves from the general masses and custom, and looked as people who tried to show-off. In the light of these given facts one can understand why we read in the works of some classical jurists that the *saraweel* [ancient pants] should not hang below the ankles. However to claim or argue that these comments made by classical jurists show or demonstrate that jeans or other modern trousers should not come below the ankles is wrong, since the *clothes* and *customs* of today are completely different then the clothes and customs of their time. And as we earlier pointed out, *isbaal* [as discussed in the narrations of the Prophet] refers to the lengthening of the garments beyond what the people are accustomed to. Departing from custom often makes the doer of it suspected of seeking notoriety or fame, and the robe of notoriety does not befit any Muslim , since Allah does not like showing off ! It is only when we take the trouble to study the Islamic teachings in their context that we can truly appreciate the wisdom and rationale behind them. For this reason the Holy Qur’an exhorts the faithful to reason and think and avoid the thoughtless behavior of pagans who simply follow the customs and conventions of their forefathers without critically examining their utility or benefit.

Conclusion

Muslims today who wear ancient traditional Arab garments [like the *izar* / *lungi*] should not let their clothes hang low below their ankles or drag behind them on the ground while walking, since this practice from ancient times was done by the Arabs in order to show off . Sad enough, such customs still persist among the rich and famous today as we see with Arab royalty and others who often drag their flowing robes on the ground while walking [in order to show off] . Therefore it is not permissible for a Muslim to let his *izar* hang low below his ankles , since this practice represents pride and arrogant behaviour, and goes against the general custom of raising up the *izar* [in order to prevent that the loose garment trails on the ground and becomes dirty or ripped because of it] .

As for modern trousers, like jeans, we conclude that Muslims are permitted to wear them in a fashion in which a [little] portion of it goes underneath the ankle. In today’s time it has become a custom for people to wear their jeans in this fashion ; whether they are Muslim or not. In other words people today do not dress like this in order to show-off or to look arrogant, but simply wear their jeans in this style because it has become a general custom. In addition it is important to note that this fashion has never been associated or viewed by people as an act that represents arrogance or pride behaviour ! Since *isbaal* refers to the lengthening of the garments beyond what the people [of various cultures and times] are accustomed to, it is *wrong* to say that Muslims who wear their jeans or other modern pants in a fashion in which a [little] portion of it goes underneath the ankle, are guilty of a major sin or arrogant behaviour. Those conservative scholars of today who argue that every male must roll up his jeans or sport pants above the ankles are taking things a bit too far.

⁷: E.J. Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936, Vol. VII [Brill ; New ed 1993] , M. Th. Houtsma, p. 451