

THE HIJĀB OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN PIETY, MODESTY AND SELF-RESPECT

In the chaotic and confused times we live in, many women are turning to Islām due to its beauty, simplicity and nobility. They wish to serve their Creator and to worship Him alone, without partners or intercessors and devoid of superstitious practices. So, as Muslim women practice their faith, they recognise the importance of modesty and realise the evils of immodesty. Islam forbids the mistreatment of women and commands men to respect them, and to not seek fornication, but instead to pursue marriage and fidelity. Muslim women, therefore, cover themselves for good reason—and they should not be criticised for that. If a Christian nun wears modest clothing that conceals her head and body she is viewed as righteous and modest—yet if a Muslim woman is seen in the same kind of clothing, she is labelled as an extremist, backward and oppressed by men. So, the status of women in Islām is noble and lofty—and the influence of a strong pious woman is immense in the lives of other Muslims. She is an important teacher in the building of a righteous society if she follows the teachings of the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Way (*Sunnah*). So, the Muslim woman knows that she must cover herself as an act of obedience to her Creator. But to what extent? And what are the conditions of the *Hijāb*? Much has been written and said in the West about this very important topic, unfortunately most of it is incorrect. The Muslim woman is required to cover herself according to the teachings of the Qur’ān and [authentic] *Sunnah*. In recent times, these requirements have become blurred due to widespread ignorance amongst Muslims. Verdicts are often issued by the unlearned people based on cultural or political biases, not the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*. We should understand that the dress-code of believing women in the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) is the same for women in every age as Islam is not confined to a particular era or location—rather it is for all times, all places, and welcomes all people to its beauty. So, this small article is designed to enlighten the reader about the *hijāb* (and its conditions) according to the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, with the understanding of the Prophet’s Companions (رضي الله عنهم).

The First Condition “SHE SHOULD COVER THE WHOLE OF THE BODY EXCEPT THAT WHICH IS ALLOWED TO BE UNCOVERED”

And this is mentioned in the statement of Allāh (سُبْحَانَكَ وَبِحَمْدِكَ), “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and protect themselves from fornication and not to show off their beautification except that which is apparent, and to draw their scarves (*khimār*) over themselves and not to reveal their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband’s fathers, their sons, their husband’s sons, their brothers or their brother’s sons, or their sister’s sons, or their womenfolk...” (An-

Nūr 24:31) And Allāh (سُبْحَانَكَ وَبِحَمْدِكَ) said, “O Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters and the believing women to draw their cloaks (*jilbābs*) over their bodies. That is better [for them] so that they are recognised as respectable women and they are not harassed or harmed. And Allāh is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Al-Ahzāb 33:59) In the first verse there is a clear obligation upon the woman to conceal all of her beautification and a prohibition of revealing anything of her beauty in front of strangers, except for that which appears from her normally (such as her face and hands) and her outer garment is worn over her normal clothing. As for the meaning of the word *Jilbāb*, then it is defined as a large sheet or cloth that covers the woman’s garments as well as her head scarf (*khimār*) as has been mentioned by the scholars of the Religion and Arabic language such as Ibn Hajr, Al-Baghawī, Ibn Hazm, Al-Qurtubī and others. This is further supported by the statement of the female Companion, Umm ‘Attiyah (رضي الله عنها), “The Prophet (ﷺ), commanded us to go out on the ‘Eid days of *Fitr* and *Adhā*. So I said, ‘O Allāh’s Messenger! If one of us does not have a *jilbāb*?’ He replied, ‘Let her wear the *jilbāb* of her sister.’” (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim) This narration shows that a woman should borrow a *jilbāb* if she does not have one—and that she should be covered properly when leaving her home and in the presence of unrelated men. She is, however, allowed to uncover her face and hands up to her wrist [if she wishes] as has been reported from Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) though to cover them is more rewardable. Imām Al-Albānī (رحمته الله) and other scholars have stated that the *jilbāb* can be a one piece garment or two so long as it covers the headscarf and meets the conditions as we’ve stated here.



The Second Condition “THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT BE BEAUTIFYING”

This is based upon the statement of Allāh, “and not to show off their beautification...” (An-Nūr 24:31). Beautification is that which would entice men to look at the women with desire. This is further supported by the statement of Allāh “...and do not display your adornments as [you would] in the times of ignorance.” (Al-Ahzāb 33:33). The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

“The woman who’s husband is absent from her, and he has left her with sufficient provisions yet she displays her beauty in his absence—about them (i.e., their sin) do not ask!” (Al-Hākīm in *Al-Mustadrak*). Imām Adh-Dhahabī (رحمته الله) stated in his book, *The Major Sins*, that from the actions that cause a woman to be cursed: if she was to reveal her beauty such as displaying gold and pearls, or to perfume herself when leaving her home. It is, however, permissible for a woman to utilise other than black or white as the colour of her *jilbāb*, so long as that is the norm amongst the pious women of *Sunnah* in her land.

The Third Condition “THE JILBĀB SHOULD BE THICK AND NOT TRANSPARENT”

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “There will be in the latter part of my nation women who will be dressed yet naked. Their heads will resemble the humps of camels. Curse them, for indeed they are cursed—they will not be admitted to Paradise nor smell its fragrance.” (Combined report by *At-Tabarānī* and *Muslim*). Imām Ibn ‘Abdul-Barr stated that this refers to the garment that is thin and shows the body and does not conceal it, so she is dressed in name, but naked in reality. In a narration reported by Al-Bukhārī, Ibn Sa’d and Al-Bayhaqī it is stated authentically that Umm ‘Alqamah said, “I saw Hafsah, the daughter of Abdur-Rahmān Ibn Abī Bakr, enter upon ‘Ā’ishah (the wife of the Prophet) and she was wearing a thin, transparent scarf—so ‘Ā’ishah pulled it off her, and said, ‘Do you not know what Allāh revealed in Surah An-Noor?’ She then asked for a *khimār* and dressed her with it.” Transparent means that the colour of the skin underneath or the garments underneath can be seen.

The Fourth Condition “THE JILBĀB SHOULD BE WIDE AND NOT TIGHT SO AS TO REVEAL THE SHAPE OF THE BODY”

The purpose of the outdoor garment of the woman is to prevent temptation and arousal of desires in men, and this will not be achieved except by a wide spacious garment. This is an important condition whereby the contours of the woman are not described such as her breasts and waist due to the tightness of the *jilbāb*. If the *jilbāb* is tight, then its objective is lost! The noble Companion Usāmah Ibn Zaid said, “Allāh’s Messenger gave me a dense Coptic cloth to wear which he was given as a gift from Dihyah Al-Kalbī, so I dressed my wife with it. The Messenger said, ‘Why have you not worn that Coptic garment?’ I replied, ‘I clothed my wife with it.’ He (ﷺ) said, ‘Command her to wear a garment underneath it, for I fear it will reveal the size of her bodily parts.’” (Ahmad and Al-Bayhaqī).

The Fifth Condition

“THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT BE SCENTED”

There are many narrations from Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) that prohibit women from leaving their homes whilst perfumed. For example, he (ﷺ) said, “Any woman who perfumes herself and passes amongst the men so that they may smell her scent, has [resembled] a fornicator.” (An-Nasā’ī, Abu Dāwūd, At-Tirmidhī). He (ﷺ) also said, “If any of you women leave out to go to the mosque, do not approach scented perfume.” (Muslim). Once a woman passed by Abu Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) smelling of perfume, so he said to her, “O female slave of the Exalted, are you going to the mosque?” She replied, “Yes.” He said, “And you have perfumed yourself for it?” She replied, “Yes.” So he said, “Then return back home and take a bath, for indeed I heard Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) say, ‘Allāh will not accept the prayer of a woman who leaves for the Mosque smelling of perfume up until she returns to her home and takes a bath.’” (Al-Bayhaqī). These textual proofs should be a sufficient warning with regard to this affair—and this also applies to women who leave home wearing make-up.

The Sixth Condition

“IT SHOULD NOT RESEMBLE THE CLOTHING OF MEN”

Allāh forbids women from resembling men and from men resembling women. Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) said, “Allāh’s Messenger cursed the man that wears the clothing of women and the woman that wears the clothing of men.” (Abu Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah and Al-Hākim). Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) said, “Not from us are the women who take to resembling men and nor the men that take to resembling women.” (Ahmad in *Al-Musnad*). Ibn Abbās stated, “The Prophet (ﷺ) cursed men who take to the effeminate behaviour of women and cursed the women who take to the manly behaviour of men.” (Al-Bukhārī and Abu Dāwūd).

The Seventh Condition

“HER JILBĀB SHOULD NOT RESEMBLE THE CLOTHING OF THE UNBELIEVERS”

Islam gives the Muslims their own unique identity that is to be preserved. The Islamic legislation, therefore, forbids the believers from resembling the unbelievers in that which is specific for them in their worship, their celebrations and clothing. This is an important principle in Islām that has been abandoned in these times, so much so that much of the Islamic heritage is being lost as the generations go by—and this is due to the large number of Muslims blindly following non-Islamic cultural practices. In this regard, there are many authentic narrations from the Prophet (ﷺ), such as his saying, “Differ from the Jews and Christians...”, “Differ from the Magians...”, “Differ from the unbelievers and pagans...”,

“Whoever imitates a people is from them.” (At-Tirmidhī, Ibn Hibbān, Abu Dāwūd and others). So, he would command the Muslims to differ from non-Muslims in many things such as the days of celebration, clothing, growing the beard, the prayer, etc. In warning, Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) said, “You will follow the ways of those who came before you, hand-span by hand-span and cubit-length by cubit-length so much so that if they enter into a lizard’s hole, you will surely enter it!” So it was said, “Do you mean the Jews and Christians?” He said, “Who else?” (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim). This in no way entails an isolationist approach or cutting off from the larger society— Muslims are encouraged to interact with society around them, however, they are to maintain their faith, distinctive identity, and moral character.

The Eighth Condition

“THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT BE OSTENTATIOUS OR SEEKING TO SHOW-OFF & IMPRESS”

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Whoever wears clothing seeking to stand out and seeking fame in this world, Allāh will dress him with clothing of humiliation on the Day of Resurrection, then they will be set ablaze.” (Abu Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah). Imām Al-Albānī (رحمته الله) explained that this refers to any clothing which is worn intending to stand out amongst the people, whether it be [deliberately] expensive clothing seeking to show off and boast regarding worldly possessions and adornments, or clothing which is lowly or simple and worn to show-off abstinence (fake *zuhd*) and pious behaviour to impress others! Ibn Al-Athīr (رحمته الله) commented that it means making something manifest, and the intent here is that the clothing is such that it makes one stand out amongst the believers due to its unique and distinct colour, so the people look at him he displays self-importance, amazement and pride (See *Naylul-Awtār* 2/94). When asked regarding the various colours of *jilbāb* worn by the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ), the noble scholar, ‘Ubaid Al-Jābirī (رحمته الله) stated that the intent is not colours that turn one’s attention, i.e., draw the eyes of men. One should not envision that the Mothers of the Believers and their sisters from amongst the Companions (رضي الله عنهم) or their Successors used to wear *jilbābs* or *khimārs* so as to turn the attention of unrelated men towards them. (*Maktabah Salafiyyah Madinah Dawrah* 1428H)

Authored by Abu Khadeejah ‘Abdul-Wāhid.

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THE DRESS CODE & COVERING OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN

HIJĀB

جلباب المرأة المسلمة

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(Qur’ān, *Al-Ahzāb* 33:59)



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