

# THE DRESS CODE OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women to draw their garment about their bodies. That will be better so that they should be known as free respectable women.”

*Qur'ān, 33:59*



## THE STATUS OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN AND THE HIJĀB IN ISLĀM

In the chaotic and confused times we are living in, many women are turning to Islām due to what they see of its beauty, simplicity and nobility. They wish to serve their Lord and Creator and to worship Him alone, without partners or intercessors and devoid of superstitious practices. So as Muslim women seek to practice their faith, they begin to recognise the importance of modesty and realise the evils of nakedness. Many men take advantage of women and see them as nothing more than sex objects to be exploited. This is not the Islamic vision of women. However, it is a point of concern for Muslims that if a Christian woman, such as a nun, is seen in modest clothing that covers her head and body, then she is viewed as righteous, noble and modest; yet if a Muslim woman is seen in the same type of clothing, she is labelled as extreme or otherwise oppressed by men - even if she wears the veil out of her own free choice! The status of the Muslim woman in Islām is a very noble and lofty one, and she has very great effect on the life of every Muslim. Indeed, the Muslim woman is the initial teacher in the building of a righteous society, providing she follows the guidance from the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition, since adherence to the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition distances every Muslim, male or female, from being misguided in any matter. So in the course of practicing her faith, 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 correct Islamic veil? Much has been written and said in the West about this very important topic. Unfortunately, most of it misses the mark! The Muslim woman is required to veil herself in accordance to the regulations of the Qur'ān and the pure Prophetic Sunnah. In recent times, these requirements have become blurred due to widespread ignorance within Muslim communities. Verdicts are often issued by those who are referred to as 'Muslim scholars'. However these verdicts are often based upon cultural or political biases, not upon the Qur'ān and Prophetic Sunnah. One must also consider the dress code of the believing women in the time of Prophethood as a source of guidance for the Muslim woman in modern times, as the Islamic religion is not confined to a particular era or location; rather the beauty of Islām is for all times, all places and welcomes all people to it. So this small leaflet is designed to enlighten the reader with the conditions of the hijāb based upon textual proofs with the understanding of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

### THE FIRST CONDITION: "TO COVER THE WHOLE OF THE BODY EXCEPT THAT WHICH IS ALLOWED TO BE UNCOVERED"

And this is mentioned in the statement of Allāh, the Most High, "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and protect their private parts from lewd acts and not to show off their beauty except that which is apparent, and to draw their scarves [i.e. the khimār] over themselves and not to reveal their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or the female servants whom they possess, or old male servants who do not possess desire, or small children who have no sense of sexuality. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornments. And all of you beg Allāh to forgive you, O believers, that

you may be successful” (Qur’ān: al-Nūr, 24:31). There is also His statement, “O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women to draw their cloaks (i.e. jilbābs) all over their bodies. That will be better, that they should be known as free respectable women so as not to be annoyed. And Allāh is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (Qur’ān: al-Aḥzāb, 33:59). So in the first verse there is a clear obligation upon the woman to conceal all of her beautification and a forbiddance to reveal anything from her beauty in front of strangers, except for that which appears from her unintentionally or unavoidably, and her outer garment is worn over her normal clothing. And 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 (i.e. the khimār) as has been mentioned by the scholars of the religion and the Arabic language such as Ibn Ḥajr, al-Baghawī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Qurṭubī and others. This is further supported by the statement of the female Companion, Umm ‘Aṭiyah, “The Prophet (ﷺ) commanded us to go out on the days of Fiṭr and Aḍḥá (to the ‘Eīd prayers). 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.’” (Reported by Bukhārī and Muslim). So this narration clearly shows that even if a woman does not have a jilbāb to wear before leaving her house, she should borrow one from a Muslim sister. So there is no doubt wearing a jilbāb for a woman is an obligation established in the Qur’ān and Sunnah. So the woman should be completely covered. However, she is allowed to uncover her face and hands up to her wrist, if she wishes, as has been stated by a great many scholars of early times based upon various narrations of Allāh’s Messenger, though it is better to cover the face and hands. The great scholar al-Albānī stated that the jilbāb can be a one-piece garment or two pieces, so long as it covers the khimār (headscarf) and meets all the conditions of the jilbāb, as stated here.

*“Not from us are the women who take to resembling men nor the men who take to resembling women.”*

Reported by Aḥmad

#### THE SECOND CONDITION: “THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT BE BEAUTIFYING”

This is based upon the statement of Allāh, “and not to show off their beauty...” (Qur’ān: al-Nūr, 24:31). This beauty and adornment is that which would cause men to look towards the believing women with desire. And this is further supported by the statement of Allāh, the Most High, “...and do not display your adornments like in the times of ignorance.” (Qur’ān: al-Aḥzāb, 33:33). The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “...the woman whose husband is absent from her, and he has left her with sufficient worldly provisions and she displays her beauty in his absence, then about them do not ask [due to their sin].” (Reported by al-Ḥākim). Imām al-Dhahabī stated in his book of major sins that from the actions that cause a woman to be cursed is if she was to reveal her beauty such as displaying gold, pearls, or 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.

## THE THIRD CONDITION: "THAT 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 accursed. They will not be admitted to Paradise nor smell its fragrance." (Combined report by al-Tabarānī and Muslim). The great scholar Ibn 'Abd al-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 Ḥafṣah, the daughter of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr, enter upon 'Ā'ishah [the wife of the Prophet], and Ḥafṣah was wearing a thin, transparent scarf; so 'Ā'ishah pulled it off her, and said, 'Do you not know what Allāh revealed in Sūrah al-Nūr?' She then asked for a scarf (khimār) and dressed her with it." The meaning of transparent as far as the jilbāb is concerned is that the colour of the skin underneath or the garments underneath can be seen through it.

## THE FOURTH CONDITION: "THAT THE JILBĀB SHOULD BE WIDE AND NOT TIGHT SO AS TO REVEAL THE SHAPE OF THE BODY"

And the reason for this is that the purpose of the outdoor garment of the woman is to prevent temptation and arousal of desires, and this will not be achieved except by a wide spacious garment. So even if the beauty underneath cannot be seen because the garment has fulfilled the previous condition, it must also fulfil this important condition whereby the shape and size of the body parts of the woman are not described, such as her breasts and waist, due to the tightness of the jilbāb. For indeed if the jilbāb is tight, then its objective is lost! The noble Companion Usāmah ibn Zayd said, "Allāh's Messenger gave me a dense Coptic cloth to wear which he was given as a gift from Diḥyah al-Kalbī. So I dressed my wife with it. So the Messenger said, 'Why have you not worn that Coptic garment?' I replied, 'I clothed my wife with it.' So he said, 'Command her to wear a garment underneath it, for I fear it will reveal the size of her bones [i.e. her body parts].'" (Reported by Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī).

## THE FIFTH CONDITION: "THAT THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT BE SCENTED AND PERFUMED"

There are many narrations from Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) that forbid women from leaving their homes whilst perfumed. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Any woman who perfumes herself and passes amongst the people so that they may smell her scent, has [resembled] a fornicator." (Reported by al-Nasā'ī, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Tirmidhī). Zaynab al-Thaqafiyah stated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "If any of you women leave to go to the mosque, do not approach scented perfume." (Reported by Muslim). A woman passed by Abū Hurayrah, 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 perfumed yourself for it?" She replied, "Yes." So he said, "Then return back 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

*“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 it will be set ablaze.”*

Reported by Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah

*Continued...*

mosque smelling of perfume up until she returns to her home and takes a bath [to remove its fragrance].” (Reported by al-Bayhaqī). So these textual proofs should be sufficient warning with regard to this serious affair.

### **THE SIXTH CONDITION: “THAT THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT RESEMBLE THE CLOTHING OF MEN”**

This condition is based upon extensive authentic narrations forbidding women from resembling men and from men resembling women. Abū Hurayrah stated, “Allāh’s Messenger cursed the man that wears the clothing of the woman and the woman that wears the clothing of the man.” (Reported Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim). And ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr said that he heard Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) say, “Not from us are the women who take to resembling men nor the men who take to resembling women.” (Reported by Aḥmad). Ibn ‘Abbās stated, “The Prophet (ﷺ) cursed the men who take to the effeminate behaviour of women and cursed the women who take to the manly behaviour of men.” (Reported by al-Bukhārī and Abū Dāwūd). And this refers to taking on the behaviour that is specific to the opposite sex, such as utilising the types of beautification, jewellery and clothing etc.

### **THE SEVENTH CONDITION: “THAT THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT RESEMBLE THE CLOTHING OF THE UNBELIEVERS”**

The texts of the Qur’ān and Sunnah establish for the Muslims that they have their own identity that must 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, “Differ from the people of the Scripture...”, “Differ from the Jews...”, “Differ from the unbelievers...”, “Whoever imitates a people is from them.” (Reported by al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Hibbān, Abū Dāwūd and others). So he would command the people to differ from the non-Muslims in many issues such as growing the beard, trimming the

moustache, praying in shoes, etc. Additionally, Allāh's Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said, "You will follow the ways of those who came before you, handspan by handspan and cubit length by cubit length so much so that if they enter into a lizard's burrow, you would surely enter it!" So it was said, "Do you mean the Jews and Christians?" He said, "Who else?" (Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim). This in no way entails an isolationsist approach or cutting off. The Muslims are encouraged to interact with society around them whilst maintaining their faith and moral character.

## THE EIGHTH CONDITION: "THAT THE JILBĀB SHOULD NOT BE OSTENTATIOUS OR SEEKING FAME OR REPUTE"

The Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) 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 it will be set ablaze." (Reported by Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah). Shaykh al-Albānī mentioned that this refers to any clothing which is worn intending to stand out amongst the people, whether it be clothing which is costly which one may wear to show off and boast regarding this world and its adornment, or clothing which is lowly or simple and worn to manifest abstinence and for displaying a righteous act with the purpose of impressing others. Ibn al-Athīr stated that it means making something manifest. And the intent here is that the clothing is such that it makes one stand out amongst the people due to its colour being different from the colour of their clothing, so the people look towards such a person, so he displays self importance such that it causes amazement and pride (See Nayl al-Awtār, 94/2). When asked regarding the various colours of jilbāb that the wives of the Prophet wore, Shaykh 'Ubayd al-Jābirī stated that the intent behind that which is mentioned in those narrations is not colours that turn one's attention - so one should not envision that the Mothers of the Believers and their sisters from amongst the Companions or their successors used to wear jilbābs or khimārs so as to turn the attention of unrelated men towards them.

END

Sources: "Jilbāb al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fī-al-Kitāb wa-al-Sunnah" by Shaykh al-Albānī; Madīnah Dawrah (AH 1428) of Shaykh 'Ubayd al-Jābirī. This article was compiled by Abū Khadījah 'Abd al-Wāḥid.

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