

Why Do Muslim Women Cover?

Muslim Women cover in order to fulfil an obligation from Allah (swt), and that is to cover all that is considered awrah (parts of the body that are not supposed to be exposed to others) and to leave exposed all that is allowed to be apparent, which the scholars of Islam agree are the face and hands of a woman. Women should be in hijab whilst in the presence of non-mahram (the non-related and also those Allah (swt) has forbidden from amongst the relatives whom are not allowed to see the Awrah).

In Islam when a command is linked to punishment either on earth or the hereafter it is ranked as: Wajib (obligatory) to do or Haram (forbidden) to do or leave out. The Sharia'h (Islamic Law) has stipulated that the hijab is wajib. The severity of leaving it out is linked to punishment in the hellfire. The Messenger (saw) said,

"...scantly dressed women, who go astray and makes others go astray; they will not enter Paradise nor smell its fragrance, although it can be smelled from afar." [At-Tabarani] [Muslim]

"Scantly dressed women" are those who wear clothing which reveals more than it conceals, opening the path to a host of evils.

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an,

"Say to the believers to lower the gaze and to protect and cover their awrah, [Surah An Nur 24:30]

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (face and hands), and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. necks and bosoms, etc.) [Surah An Nur 24:31]

The above verses highlight the following main points:

- To lower the gaze
- To cover the awrah all except hands and face.
- To guard chastity
- Special reference to ensure chest area is covered

Hence the purpose of wearing the hijab is purely to obey Allah (swt).

Hijab is obliged from the age of puberty; an age when the ulema (scholars) say children, are accountable for their actions, therefore should practice wearing it before then. Children must be made fully aware of the purpose of hijab. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

"Allah does not accept the prayer of a female who has reached the age of puberty except if she is wearing a head covering (khimar)." [al-Tirmidhi] [Musnad Ahmad] [Sunan Abu Dawud] and [Ibn Majah]

The exemption age is at menopause. Allah (swt) says,

And as for women past child-bearing who do not expect marriage, it is no sin upon them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show their adornment. But to refrain is better for them. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower [Surah al-Nur 24:60]

* How to Start Wearing the Hijab?

Submit first to Allah's command, conviction will follow. So be brave and put on the hijab. The longer it is left the longer in sin. Have a role model in the Sahabiyat (ra). Be proud of it as it is part of Islam and do not let anyone ridicule Islam by allowing them to spread mischief about it. Be sincere to the hijab.

* In Summary

The command to cover is one that should not be taken lightly. The fact is in Islam anyone who does not fulfil an obligatory act is sinful and liable for punishment of Allah (swt) in whichever manner He chooses. The Messenger (saw) has elaborated many times the correct manner of covering as well as the consequences or erring. That is why the Sahabiyat (female companions) are best example to follow in this issue, as they were present in the time of the Messenger (saw) and the closest to understanding the revelation. This treatise has in no way covered the topic of Hijab in its totality.

'Al Hijab' The Veil

"Say to the believers to lower the gaze and to protect and cover their awrah,

[Surah An Nur 24:30]

The hijab (veil) is the most striking and apparent symbol of a Muslimah (Muslim Woman). Hijab is an Arabic word which is commonly known as the covering or veil. It describes the Muslimah's outer garment. It is one of the vital issues for the Muslimah and often comes under scrutiny and attack from people whom are ignorant to its purpose in Islam.

Al Awrah

The Awrah is that portion of a person's body that must be covered at all times from other people.

The Messenger (saw) who said to the companion Asma (ra),

"O Asma when a woman reaches puberty no part of her body should be exposed except this" (pointing to his hands and face)

Awrah is divided into two main portions:

- 1 **Hard Awrah:** every part of the body except the face and hands (only the husband can see the hard awrah)
- 2 **Soft Awrah:** every part of the body except from chest down to the knees (only the mahram can see the soft awrah)

Mahram is the male blood relative stipulated by Islam. The List can be derived from [Surah al-Nur Verse 31] for the main people allowed to see the awrah to certain extents:

Husband, father, father in law, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers, their nephews, other Muslimahs, female slaves, old male servants lacking vigour, small children with no sense of sex

Muslimahs are obliged to cover the awrah from all non-mahram.

The Correct Manner of Covering

Throughout the History of Islam it is apparent that the believing women wore Hijab. The wives (rah) of the Prophet (saw) all covered to the fullest extent and it has been reported that once the command to cover was revealed they were only seen in public behind a box like curtain around them and away from their body.

The sahabiyat (female companions) of the Prophet (saw) also covered but differently and it is this form of covering that has been obliged upon the rest of the Muslim Women.

The fact is whatever is worn must fulfil the divine requirements for covering. Scanning all the evidences and also Following the customs of covering since the time of Rasulullah (saw) it is commonly practiced to this day that the hijab has specific form and conditions. In general the hijab may be of the 2 form:

- **One piece:** which is a sheet fitting loosely around the entire body. This is common in Afghanistan and Somalia
- **Two or three piece:** this consists of a Khimar (headscarf) and Jilbab (over garment) which can be as a one or two piece

Glossary of terms:

- **Khimar:** Scarf covering the head (including ears), hair, neck & bosom
- **Jilbab:** Outer garment which covers the body hiding the form
- **Jalabib:** (aka Burkha) worn as one piece from head to toe
- **Niqab:** Veil covering the face. Some do not cover the eyes

The hijab should also be thick & opaque, loose fitting, not dazzling & bright coloured or perfumed thus not to draw attention. It should be to differentiate the Muslimah from the non-Muslims and also from men.