

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

HIJAAB

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First and foremost, the Quran does not make use of the word '**Hijaab**' to address the covering of the head or hair.

However, it has been used as follows:

- To signify the veil between the companions of the garden and the companions of the fire (7:46)
- The veil of partition between those who do not believe in the hereafter (17:45)
- The separation / seclusion / screen Mary introduced between herself and her people (19:17)
- In reference to Prophet Solomon ^(pbuh) and in relation to the narrative with regards his horses (38:32)
- To signify the debarring that the transgressors will experience from their Lord on the Day of Judgement (83:15)
- To signify the separation of the Prophet's wives - See section below (33:53)
- The claim of the disbelievers to signify the veil between what they believe and what the Prophet is calling them to (41:5)
- The veil that God uses to speak to mankind (42:51)

Let us take a look at the stipulations and guidance that has been advanced by the Quran with regards to covering with a view to understand the directives better.

The first directive is to the **man** and then to the **woman** in the following context.

024.030

"Say to the **believing men** that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And God is well acquainted with all that they do"

024.031

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their **adornment** (Arabic: Zeenatahunna) except what is apparent of it (*ma zahara minha*) " that they should draw **their headcovers** (Arabic: Bi'khumurihinna) over their **bosoms** (Arabic: Jayubihin) and not to display their adornment (Arabic: Zeenatahunna) except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards God, that ye may attain Bliss"

What should be immediately apparent is the **specific** directive to cover the chest for women. It would be apt here to note some of the Arabic terms in a little more depth.



Illustration - Joseph Islam

Four considerations must be made to understand this verse better with regards to the Arabic terms used. Please note that use has been made of the most reliable and earliest classical Arabic lexicons to understand the terms as understood by the classical scholars.

- (1) What constitutes Zeenatahunna?
- (2) What constitutes Bi'khumurihinna?
- (3) What is the meaning of 'Jayubihinna'?
- (4) What is the meaning of 'Ila ma zahra minha'?

(1) WHAT CONSTITUTES ZEENATAHUNNA?

An understanding of the root word '**ZAY-YA-NUN**' (from zeenatahunna) clearly indicates that this is a reference to make-up, beautifying oneself, adorn to an extent which can become a cause of attraction. The directive is **not** to display **this** beauty and adornment to those other than the people listed in verse 24:31.

which is its original form, (TA,) inf. n. **أَلْبَى**; (Mṣb;) signify the same; (S, MA, Mṣb, K;) *He, or it, adorned, ornamented, decorated, decked, bedecked, garnished, embellished, beautified, or graced, him, or it.* (MA, KL, PṢ: [and the like is indicated in the S and Mṣb and K.])

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

(2) WHAT CONSTITUTES BI'KHUMURIHINNA?

A 'Khumur' (plural) denotes a covering for both men and women (Khimar).

(Please see related article [1] below)

The injunction to draw the 'khimar' with a view to cover the breasts does **not** necessarily relate to the use of the khimar but the focus is to make it clear that a woman's breasts are not included in the concept of 'What may decently be apparent' of her body and therefore should not be displayed.

covering; (Mgh, TA;) a piece of cloth with which a woman covers her head; (Mṣb;) i. q.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

جَمِيع (Mṣb, K) and **جَمِيعٌ**. (K.) — Also A man's turban; because a man covers his head with it in like manner as a woman covers her head with her **حِلْيَة**: when he disposes it in the Arab man-

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

(3) WHAT IS THE MEANING OF JAYUBIHINNA?

The meaning of the word 'Jayubunna' is well known to both modern and classical Arabs. Its root is 'JIM-YA-BA' and has always been used to signify an opening of a shirt or sleeve or a pocket **or the**

bosom, heart or even a place or entrance for a land or country. There is no relationship with women's hair coverage within the meaning of the word.

Arabs often carry things within the bosom of the shirt &c.; and hence the word is now applied by them to *A pocket.] — † The heart; the bosom.* (K.) So in the saying, **هُوَ تَاصٌّحُ الْجَيْبِ** [He is pure, or sincere, of heart or bosom]: (K:) or trusty, trustworthy, or faithful. (S. [See also art. **نَصْحٌ**.]) A poet says,

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [4]

(4) WHAT MAY BE DECENTLY APPARENT (Illa ma zahara minha)

'**Illa ma zahara minha**' is a reference to what a person may openly reveal in accordance with prevailing custom which is decent and not unduly immoral. However, traditional clergy have throughout Islamic history attempted to restrict the definition of 'what may decently be apparent' to a woman's hands, feet and her face, and at times, even commanding full coverage.

However, from analysis, it appears that the meaning of 'illa ma zahara minha' has a much wider purport. It's subtlety and deliberate ambiguity in the Quranic narrative (as God never runs out of words 18:109) seems to allow for all society norms and **sensible judgment** which remains firmly within the ambit of 'human decency'.

A possible cue to understand this phrase is verse 24:60 where by deduction, a younger believing woman is expected to maintain an outer garment covering (thobe) when in unfamiliar company. The classical definition of a woman's thobe as an outer garment is understood to provide coverage of the arms and legs, leaving exposed the feet, hands, face, head and neck. Please see section '**'COVERAGE OF THE ARMS AND LEGS'** below. Bedecking the hair in public (beautifying oneself to an extent which can become a cause of attraction) also needs to be carefully considered under the broad Arabic term 'zeenat'.

THE HIJAB (PARTITION) IS ONLY A DIRECTIVE FOR THE PROPHET'S WIVES

(i) The Prophet's wives are not like other women

033.32-33

"O wives of the Prophet! **you are not like any other of the women;** If you will be on your guard, then be not soft in (your) speech, less he in whose heart is a disease yearn; and speak a good word. And stay in your houses and do not display your finery like the displaying of the ignorance of old; and keep up prayer, and pay the poor-rate, and obey God and His Messenger. God only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying"

(ii) Prophet's wives have the potential to receive twice the punishment of normal wives

033.030

"O wives of the prophet! whoever of you commits an open indecency, the punishment shall be **increased to her doubly;** and this is easy for God"

(iii) Prophet's wives have the potential to receive twice the reward of normal wives

033.031

"But any of you that is devout in the service of God and His Messenger, and works righteousness, **to her We shall grant her reward twice:** and We have prepared for her a generous sustenance"

- Note: It is clear from the above narrative that by virtue of being the wife of a Prophet does not make her automatically righteous. From the Quran it is clear that both Noah's and Lot's wives were NOT righteous (66:10), however Pharaoh's wife was indeed righteous (66:11).

(Please see related article [2] below)

(iv) They cannot re-marry

033.053

"....Nor is it right for you that you should annoy God's Messenger, or that you should marry his widows after him at any time. Truly such a thing is in God's sight an enormity"

(v) The Prophet's wives are like the mothers of the believers

This is an elective spiritual relationship of the highest degree, the wives of the prophets are to be seen in a similar spiritual relationship or capacity as one's own mother. The respect and kindness offered to them must also be of a similar status.

Having established the principle that the wives of the Prophet were **not** like other women, it becomes obvious that the directive to screen (Hijaab) is **only** a directive to the Prophet's wives and given the text.

033.053

“O you who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses,- until leave is given you for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation: but when you are invited, enter; and when you have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such (behaviour) annoys the Prophet: he is ashamed to dismiss you, but God is not ashamed (to tell you) the truth. And when you ask (his ladies) for anything you want, **ask them from behind a partition (Arabic: Hijaab)**: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs. Nor is it right for you that you should annoy God's Messenger, or that you should marry his widows after him at any time. Truly such a thing is in God's sight an enormity”

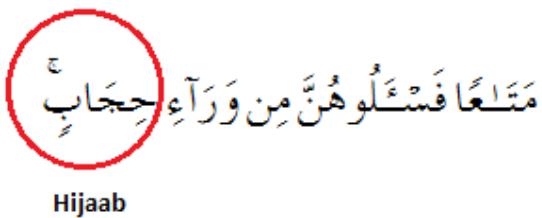


Illustration - Joseph Islam

As can be seen, the above verse regarding 'Hijaab' is **not** a reference to the hair and the 'screening' **only** applies to the Prophet's wives. When directives are intended to include other women, apart from the prophet's wives, the Quran clearly addresses them. This can be seen in the next verse (33:59).

WEAR A 'JILBAB' BUT BE RECOGNIZABLE

033.059

“O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should bring down (Arabic: Yudnina) over them their outer garment (Arabic: jalabibihin): that is most convenient, that they should be recognized (Arabic: Yu'rafna) and not given trouble. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

يَأَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَاَرْوَحُكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءٌ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يُدْنِينَ حَلَبِبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ

Yu'rafna

Jalabibihin

Yudnina

Illustration - Joseph Islam

Firstly, it is important to note that the purpose of wearing an outer garment (jalbab) is to provide an extra layer of modesty so that women are not harassed in any way. However, women should also remain discernable (**Arabic: Yurafna**). A full body coverage which covers the face would clearly contradict the requirement of being **recognized, known or discernable (Yurafna)**.

Secondly, many commentators give many differing and often unnecessarily elaborate renderings of what constitutes a 'Jalbab' (from Jalabibihinna). The primary signification of this term has usually applied to a woman's outer wrapping garment. However, this term is **metaphorically** applied to all manner of other kinds of garments, which include shirts, wide garments, khimar, full body cover etc.

جَلْبَابٌ (S, A, Mgh, Msb, K, &c.) and **جَلْبَابٌ** ;
(K;) the latter mentioned as an ex. of form by
Sb, and thought by Seer to be syn. with the
former, but not explained by any one except the
author of the K; masc. and fem.; (TA;) **A**
[woman's outer wrapping garment called] **مَلْحَفَةٌ**:
(S:) or this is its primary signification; but it is
metaphorically applied to other kinds of garments:
(El-Khafajee, TA:) **or** a shirt, (K, TA,) abso-
lutely: **or** one that envelopes the whole body:
(TA:) and a wide garment for a woman, less
than the **مَلْحَافَةٌ**: **or** one with which a woman
covers over her other garments, like the **مَلْحَافَةٌ**:
or the [kind of head-covering called] **خِمَارٌ**: (K:)
so in the M: (TA:) **or** a garment wider than
the **خِمَارٌ**, but less than the **رِدَاءٌ**, (Mgh, L, Msb,)
with which a woman covers her head and bosom:
(L:) **or** a garment shorter, but wider, than the

The Arabic phrase '**Yudnina alayhinna**' has been used in conjunction with '**jalabibihinna**'. '**Yudnina**' comes from the verb '**adna**' which **primarily** means to draw something closer or to bring near, which in the context of 33:59 would be a reference to the garb. Some translators argue an implication of '**letting down**', or '**drawing lower**' of the garb which would imply the '**jilbab**' to be draped over the body towards the feet rather than a covering of the hair. However, it is to be appreciated that this is **not** a literal translation but one better understood as an interpretation.

In summary, the above verse 33:59 simply connects and confirms the directive in Surah Nur (24) verse 31 regarding covering to remain modest.

COVERAGE OF THE ARMS AND LEGS

There is a clear expectation from the Quran that women will have their arms and legs covered by the wearing of a **suitable garment**. A '**thobe**' was a garb of the classical Arabs (and worn today) which provided such a coverage. The Arabic word '**thobe**' is singular of the word '**thiyaab**' and means something that is worn as a garment. It can be a normal garment and an outer garment. (11:5; 24:58). A '**thobe**' is primarily a garment or robe worn by men but when applied to women (classically), it is usually referred to **as a long gown reaching to the feet with wide sleeves**. It is usually worn over other garments when it applies to women.

ثوب *A garment, (M, Mgh, Msb, K,) [or piece of cloth or stuff,] that is worn by men, composed of linen, cotton, wool, fur, **جَلْبَب** [q. v.], (Mgh, Msb,) silk, or the like ; (Msb;) but [properly] not what is cut out of several pieces, such as the shirt, and trousers, or drawers, &c. ; (Mgh;)*

[also a garment worn by women and girls over the shift; (see **أَصْدَة**;) app., as in the present day, **a long gown, reaching to the feet, with very wide sleeves** :] pl. **ثِيَابٌ** [the pl. of mult.] (T, S, M, A, Mgh, Msb,

In verse 24:60, we clearly note that an older woman is permitted to **remove** this 'thobe' without wanton display of their beauty. This cannot refer to her normal garments as if this were to be removed she would be left exposed.

Hence, there is an inherent expectation that younger women will continue to wear an outer garment such as a 'thobe' that covers their arms and legs up to their feet.

024.060

"Such elderly women as are past the prospect of marriage, there is no blame on them if they lay aside their (outer) garments (**Arabic: Thiyabunna**), provided they do not display their beauty / adornment. But it is best for them to modestly refrain: and God is One Who sees and knows all things"



Illustration - Joseph Islam

Today, it is still a reference to a type of long draping garment worn by many Arabs, especially men (thobe, dishdash etc).

For a deeper look at the relationship between the two Arabic terms 'thobe' and 'jilbab', **please see article [3] below** which provides comprehensive lexicon references and an illustration.

THE GARMENT OF PIETY IS THE BEST GARMENT

Having discussed some of the technical aspects of the terms and their usage one must not lose sight of the overarching directive of the message and the Quran's philosophy at core. That is, that the **garment of purity** is most important. Piety radiates from one's heart and one's garments are of no use if the heart is not pure.

007.026

"O ye Children of Adam! We have bestowed clothing upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness,- that is the best. Such are among the Signs of God, that they may receive admonition!"

FINAL THOUGHTS

The above discussion should facilitate a better understanding of the Quran's directives. **There is no specific reference to covering of the hair** and the Arabic word 'Hijaab' has never been used to signify nor even insinuate this. However, if an individual feels that their particular covering lends to better modesty (including hair and face covering) and with respect to prevailing customs, then this is their prerogative. One needs to be careful however not to override the Quran's injunctions with a view to favour or seek overtly liberalist positions and also not to present overtly repressive directives when they are not decreed by scripture.

However, one can argue that **bedecking the hair** in public (beautifying oneself to an extent which can become a cause of attraction) needs to be carefully considered under the broad Arabic term 'zeenat'. This is indeed a subjective area and I remain non committal to define 'zeenat' as I do not see any reason to when the Quran has not explicitly done so. Many may feel that such bedecking would fall under the scope of 'zeenat'. If so, the directive is **not** to display **this** beauty and adornment to those other than the people listed in verse 24:31. (See section 1)

The basic directives have been clearly laid out by the Quran with regards to what is expected and this should be understood and **not** transgressed.

Related Articles:

- (1) [A Deeper Look at the Word 'Khimar'](#)
- (2) [Appeal to Righteousness Based on Lineage, Relationship, Companionship and Proximity](#)
- (3) [Thobe & Jilbab](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 3, Page 1279

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] Ibid., Volume 2, Page 809

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., Pages 492-93

[5] Ibid. Page 440