

## THE VEIL IN ISLAM

By Dr. Gibril F. Haddad

as appeared in The Muslim Magazine Fall 1999 issue.

"O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness. These are some of Allah's signs, that they may take heed." [7:26]

Today we find the Muslim community most divided on one subject: the veil or *hijab*. Despite the clear rulings of *Sharia* on this subject, many people claim that the order for women to cover all but their faces and hands is not found in Islam.

In this brief treatment, we will cite proofs from the source texts of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) from which the obligation of veiling is derived.

The Arabic word for "veiling" is *hijab*. Lexically it means "cover", and in Islam it means two things:

Woman's clothing such as the head-to-toe garment specifically called *jilbab* and *khimar*.

Separation of the places where men and women respectively congregate.

Obligation of *Hijab* as Stated in Qur'an

*"O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (jalabib) close round them (when they go abroad)..." (33:59)*

Ibn Rushd in *Bidaya al-Mujtahid* (1:83) said that this verse has been adduced as proof that no part of a woman's body should be evident to those who are not among the prohibited degrees of relationship (*mahram*) or her husband. Al-Qurtubi in his commentary on the verse said that the *jilbab* is the cloak that conceals all of the body including the head.

*"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms..." (24:31)*  
"...only that which is apparent" applies to women's face and hands.

*"... And when you ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a veil. . ." (33:53)* Al-Qurtubi said in commentary of this verse: "The consensus of Muslims is that the genitals and backside constitute nakedness for men and women, as well as all of woman except her face and hands, but some disagreed about the latter two." This means the consensus of Muslims included them in the definition of her nakedness based on verse 33:59 and the hadith cited below.

Obligation of *Hijab* as Stated in Hadith

Among proofs for the veil in the Sunna are the following authentic *hadiths* (traditional reports) of the Prophet – (s):

"Ayesha (r) reported that Asma' the daughter of Abu Bakr (r) came to the Messenger of Allah (s) while wearing thin clothing. He approached her and said: 'O Asma'! When a girl reaches the menstrual age, it is not proper that anything should remain exposed except this and this. He pointed to the face and hands." [Abu Dawud]

Ibn Qudama in *al-Mughni* (1:349) explained that showing the face and hands are a specific dispensation within the general meaning of the hadith "All of the woman's body is considered her nakedness [to those outside the *mahram* relationship or her husband]." (*al-mar'atu `awra*)

`Ayesha (r) said: "I used to enter the room where the Messenger of Allah (s) and my father (Abu Bakr) were later buried in without having my garment on me, saying it is only my husband and my father. But when 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab (r) was later buried in (the same place), I did not enter the room except that I had my garment on being shy from 'Umar."

The Prophet's specification to Umm Salama that women should also cover their feet in prayer, narrated in the *Sunan*. This included the feet into the definition of her legal nakedness. "Women who are clothed but (at the same time) naked, turning their heads sideways this way and that like the humps of the camel, shall never enter Paradise nor even smell its fragrance."

The jurists have divided woman's nakedness into two categories:

- Lesser nakedness (*`awra mukhaffafa*): the face, hands, head, neck, forearms, feet, torso and back.
- Greater nakedness (*`awra mughallaza*): all of her body except the above parts.

`Ayesha's (ra) strictness on the question is a well known saying, "When a woman reaches puberty she must cover whatever her mother and grandmother must cover." A woman's covering (*al-khimar*) is defined by `Ayesha as "nothing short of what covers both the hair and skin." (*innama al-khimaru ma wara al-sha`r wa al-bashar*).

## **Covering the Face**

The khimar (pl. *khumur*) actually refers to the head covering, so that a better translation of 24:31 would be: "*and to draw their headcovers (khumurihinna) over their bosoms...*"(24:31)

It is essential to understand the two interpretations of the command to "draw their headcovers over" among the women of the Companions and the generation that immediately succeeded them, on which are based the two views of the Four Schools, namely, cover everything or expose only the face and hands:

Some women drew from the top down, some from the sides and over. The result for the first category was to cover the face, while the second category left the face uncovered according to one's own discretion.

Following are two hadiths that illustrate the use of the *khimar* (face-veil) applied by women Companions of the verse quoted above.

Abu Hurayra gave the following account of his mother's conversion: I came to the Prophet - Allah bless and greet him -- weeping one day and said: "O Messenger of Allah, I have been inviting my mother to Islam and she has been refusing. Today I asked her again, and she said something about you which I hated to hear. Ask Allah to guide Abu Hurayra's mother!" Whereupon the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- said: "O Allah! Guide Abu Hurayra's mother." Then I returned home cheered up by the Prophet's -- Allah bless and greet him -- supplication. When I arrived at the door of the house I found it closed. Hearing my footsteps, my mother said: "Abu Hurayra, do not come in yet." I could hear the sound of water. She washed herself and wore her robe (*dir'*) and headcover (*khim ٲr*) then she opened the door and said: "Abu Hurayra! I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's servant and messenger!" I returned at once to the Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him --, weeping for joy, and said to him: "O Messenger of Allah, good news! Allah has answered your request and guided my mother!" He glorified and praised Allah, thanking Him and saying good things. I said: "O Messenger of Allah! Ask Allah that He make me and my mother beloved to his believing servants and that He make them beloved to us." The Prophet -- Allah bless and greet him -- said: "O Allah! Make Your little servant (here meaning Abu Hurayra) and his mother beloved to Your believing servants, and make the believers beloved to the two of them." Not one believer is brought into existence who hears about me without seeing me except he loves me.

Ayesha said: "By Allah, I never saw any women better than the women of the Ansar (i.e. the women of Madina) or stronger in their confirmation of Allah's Book! When Sura al-Nur was revealed -- "*and to draw their 'khumur' over their bosoms*" (24:31) -- their men went back to them reciting to them what Allah had revealed to them, each man reciting it to his wife, daughter, sister, and relative. Not one woman among them remained except she got up on the spot, tore up her waist-wrap and covered herself from head-to-toe (*i`jtajarat*) with it. They prayed the very next dawn prayer covered from head to toe (*mu`tajirat*)."

And Allah knows best.

*Dr. Haddad has authored and co-authored more than 12 books on Islamic jurisprudence and is currently completing his dissertation in Damascus. This article appears as a courtesy of [The Muslim Magazine](#). All rights reserved by The Muslim Magazine.*