

# Hijāb

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 4]

## Introduction

**W**e had two conventions in the last two months, one in Toledo and one in Dayton. I disagree with the dress code in evidence in both conventions. In one, the ladies were attired such that one could not see any part of their bodies except their eyes. Okay. *I* could not see them, but could they see *me*? Am *I* not attractive to women? There are a lot of ladies in the street who tell me, “You look nice.” And I say, “Thank you, you made my day!” In the other convention, girls were not in miniskirts but beyond mini – *above* the miniskirts. The dress code swung from one extreme to the other. *We have to use our common sense.* Why don’t we take the middle way and the easy way, and take it step by step. It does not mean that I don’t give credit to those ladies who are nicely attired. I give them credit for being able to do that in this society, but it has its disadvantages.

We are going to talk about hijab. I’ll talk about it with reference to the Qur’an: hijab and every derivative of that word – *hajaba, hijab, wahjub* – as mentioned in the Qur’an, so we can see where we stand. Then, there is a word which, it seems, we have deleted from our dictionary – “*al-‘urf*”. What is *al-‘urf*? *Al-‘urf* means “the tradition that is common among the people”. We have to talk about that. We study *al-‘urf* as one

of the sources of Islamic civil law in Al-Azhar. Another word that the Qur’an mentions tens of times is “*al-mā‘rūf*”. What is *al-mā‘rūf* and what is *al-‘urf*? We need to know the meanings of these terms and analyze them to see where we stand from the point of view of *al-‘urf* as Muslims.

I am going to start this series today. It may take us two or three weeks to talk about every Qur’anic verse which mentions the word “hijab”. What the Qur’an mentions constitutes the law of God about which there can be no argument, but, my opinion, which I will state clearly, could be right or it could be wrong, and it is debatable. I hope that no one will understand my talk during the coming weeks as discrediting those women who choose to wear the hijab, rather the opposite: I give credit to every Muslim woman who is attired that way, especially in the American environment. I consider it heroic if it is worn in the mosque, as well as in the street, and not limited to only some areas; those are the women to whom I give credit, because they expose themselves to a lot of prejudice, discrimination, and staring. My main goal is to clarify customs which we have inherited from our countries. They are originally traditions but have come to be viewed as part of religion, so, we would like to

distinguish between what is religion and what is tradition.

My talk is open for anyone who would like to discuss or argue in a good manner, so, consider it an informal talk. I know that the topic is controversial; some people may support my view, some people may reject it, but, as I say always, I am not imposing my belief or my conviction upon anyone. Everyone is completely free to practice the religion the way he or she believes. I'll analyze every Qur'anic verse which mentions the word "hijab" in the light of the different tafseers,<sup>1</sup> and, at the same time, I am going to talk about the hijab of the Muslim woman, because the hijab is not only for the Muslim woman, but for the Muslim man, as well. When I talk about that, I'll refer you to some books that you can read so you will know that this is not my word, but it is the word of the founders of the schools of thought in Islam who lived in the first century after the Prophet, peace be upon him. Later on, I am going to analyze the dress requirements as mentioned in the sunnah especially in the book of Bukhari. There is a whole chapter in the seventh volume of Bukhari which talks about dress. You will be amazed to know that not a single hadith in that chapter is addressed to women; it is limited to *men*. We will talk about that. What remains, then, are some hadith scattered here and there, that I have gathered together, which inform as to how a woman should dress.

Then I am going to analyze the dress of the woman in the context of history and my own experience, in the context of traditions, and in the light of societal and environmental changes related to time. These will be my ideas which could be right or wrong, but this will be my *ijtehad*.<sup>2</sup>

[TRANSCRIBERS NOTE: IF ALL OF THIS INFORMATION DOES NOT APPEAR IN THE SERIES ON *HIJAB* IT IS BECAUSE I MISSED AT LEAST TWO OR THREE OF THE LECTURES.]

I have noticed William<sup>3</sup> asking his wife, "What is hijab?" It is "Islamic attire" as we understand it, or, Islamically-mandated covering. But this, in fact, is a wrong definition.

In our village back in Egypt, when someone gets married and he is from an aristocratic family, his wife is referred to as being "*makhbiyah*". *Makhbiyah* means "hidden", so it means that people will not see her. That was the practice of high-class, aristocratic families. The poor families, like mine – my mother used even to go to the fields and harvest the wheat

because she is from a very, very low class. But the high-class woman is *makhbiyah*: she will be ensconced within four walls so no human being will see her, and, moreover, although she will be a very young girl of 17 or 18 years, she has to attire in black dresses. Why? Because she is *makhbiyah*! No one should see her! That's history. I used to see this when I was a little kid in the primary school, and this practice was limited to the high-class people.

The women of the middle class are workers. They help their husbands on the farm, and some of them do that even when they are pregnant, and, from time to time, it has been reported that Mrs. so-and-so delivered her child in the field while she was harvesting the wheat. It has happened.

In Egypt, in the city, there was a dress called *milaya*. Nobody here knows about it except, maybe, Mohammad Yusuf.<sup>4</sup> *Milaya* looks like the Pakistani sari, but it is black. Any woman going out into the street in Cairo without a *milaya* would be described in unfavorable terms; she was not considered a good woman. But that, too, is history.

When the British occupied and colonized Egypt, the local people in the colonial administration got "advanced" a little bit so they started to wear European dress. Also, as a result of the women's movement in Egypt, there appeared some women who were university graduates wearing European dresses, and calling for the emancipation of women which meant *looking* like the Europeans, because the Europeans were considered advanced and so it was felt that they had to look like them. *Even today* we have people who support this idea. But this, of course, is going in the wrong direction. Have we ever said that we would like to emulate the Europeans in technology? In inventions? In manufacturing aeroplanes? In manufacturing cars? In advancing in technological know-how? No! We always like to imitate Europeans in the dress of women only. So, a time came when you walked in the streets of Cairo and it looked like Washington DC. Now the situation is going in reverse again. The women in Egypt have started to go back to the old ways. You know, I still have a suit I purchased 20 years ago. That suit is finished with a cuff here – at the ankle.<sup>5</sup> Then, they promoted the suit a little bit and removed the cuff. The cuff is back in fashion this year. So that suit became new again! I need not buy any new one! Today, if you go through the streets

<sup>1</sup> Qur'anic exegeses

<sup>2</sup> A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

<sup>3</sup> An American convert to Islam sitting in the audience

<sup>4</sup> An Egyptian friend of Imam's

<sup>5</sup> Imam is pointing to the end of his pant leg

## Hijāb. Introduction

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of Cairo, you find young girls attired in dresses which are not mini and not maxi, but something in between, which makes them look modest. And they call this “Islamic dress”. *Isay there is no Islamic dress*. There is no such thing. There is no uniform that Islam says you have to wear. What Islam is requiring is a covering – doesn’t matter what you cover with. But to say that a certain type of *gallabiya*<sup>6</sup> represents the Islamic dress is wrong. It is true that the word “*gallabiya*” is mentioned in the Qur’an but what *type* of *gallabiya* is meant by that? The *gallabiya* in Kuwait is different from the *gallabiya* in Egypt, and so on.

Some people in the Indo-Pakistani area consider the sari as the “Islamic dress” because it wraps around all the body, even though, sometimes, it is showing the spare tire!<sup>7</sup> Some others say, no, the shalwar and kamees is the best, and, believe me, I like that. It’s good. It’s good; it is a true cover and the wind has nothing to do with it, while the *gallabiya*, if the wind picks up, it is a trouble. We have come to a mix-up, in the sense that *all the Qur’anic verses* which mention the word “hijab” have no reference to dress. And Brother Jamal Badawi<sup>8</sup> said the same thing last week: none of the Qur’anic verses that mention the word have any reference to dress. But all of us, from different countries, came with certain traditions and so the Egyptians think that *their* dress is the Islamic one; the Saudis say, no, they are the people of the Ka’bah so *their* dress is the Islamic one while the rest are going to Hell; the Pakistanis think theirs is the best and *they* are the real Muslims while those Arabs have no Islam at all! You hear this sometimes! We are mixing traditions with religion.

Religion gives us general rules. The rule is you have to cover certain parts of the body. It does not matter if you are wearing Pakistani, Egyptian, or Japanese clothes. It doesn’t matter. The objective is to cover certain parts of the body in a way which will not draw unwanted attention or staring, or arouse carnal desire. This directive is not limited to women only but applies to men, too. There is hijab for men also. Do you know that, according to Imam Shafi’i School and the

Imam Maliki School, the dress or the *awra*<sup>9</sup> of a man, in the presence of women who are foreign (non-mahram<sup>10</sup>) to him, *is all his body except his face and hands?* In the summer, because of the heat, you see our brothers coming here in shorts and they say, “O, for a man its okay, no problem.” And they concentrate mainly on that “devilish woman” who will be the cause of their going to hell; she “misled Adam before” and, they say, she will take them all to hell, too. But the Qur’anic verses that talk about “lowering the gaze” are directed to the man first before they are directed to the woman; they advise the man first. There must be a reason for that.

Hijab is an Arabic word taken from the verb *hajaba*. *Hajaba* means “hide” or “cover” and *hajaba* sometimes could mean “preventing”. On the subject of inheritance in Islam, there is a whole chapter called *Al Hajb*. *Al Hajb* means “prevention” or “preventing”. The *hajb*, as used in the context of inheritance, could be total *hajb* or partial *hajb*. For example, when my estate is distributed after my death, if I have no children, my brother has a share in the estate, but if I have a child, my brother gets nothing. So, they say, the son *hajaba al akh* which means, the son “prevented the brother” from having a share in the inheritance. That is the total *hajb*. On the other hand, if a husband dies, the wife inherits one-quarter of his estate, if he has no children. If he has children, then the wife inherits one-eighth. And the same goes for the husband: if his wife dies and she has children, he inherits one-quarter; if she has no children, he inherits one-half. And this of course is stipulated very clearly in the inheritance verses in Chapter An-Nisā.<sup>11</sup> These are examples of partial *hajb*. This section of Islamic jurisprudence is called *Al Hajb* because it prevents someone from inheriting totally or partially.

There is a chapter in the Qur’an called Sura Al-A’raf.<sup>12</sup> A’raf is considered to be a place between Heaven and Hell. Some ulama<sup>13</sup> say that those people who have led good lives will go to Heaven and the sinners will end up in Hell, but, what about the people in between? What about the ones who have strayed from the straight path but are not hardened sinners, and there is a balance between their good deeds and

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<sup>6</sup> The ankle length robe traditionally worn by Arab men and women

<sup>7</sup> The “spare tire” is an expression used in the Indo-Pakistan area to describe the girdle of flesh that is exposed at the waist level particularly in obese women

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.alimprogram.com/scholars/badawi.shtml> for information on his education and biography

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<sup>9</sup> The parts of the body that are required, by Islam, to be kept covered by clothing.

<sup>10</sup> The women who fall in the category prohibited for him to marry

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 4

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 7

<sup>13</sup> Scholars

their bad deeds? These ulama say such people will be assigned to the area where there is no Heaven and no Hell and this area is called Al-A'rāf. That is the explanation of some ulama who have written tafseer of the Qur'an. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“And between the two there will be a *hijab* [barrier]. And there will be persons who in life were endowed with the faculty of discernment between right and wrong, recognizing each by its mark. And they will call out to the inmates of Paradise, ‘Peace be upon you!’ – not having entered it themselves, but longing for it. And whenever their eyes are turned towards the inmates of the fire, they will cry: ‘O our Sustainer! Place us not among the people who have been guilty of evildoing’” [7:46-47].

Other ulama disagree with the explanation given above and maintain that Al-A'rāf is a sort of a fence between Heaven and Hell. I don't know if it is a chainlink fence, or made of wood or what, God knows, but they call it “fence”. And, in this fence there is a door. Those ulama who endorse the idea of the fence quote the Qur'anic verse: “On that Day shall the hypocrites, both men and women, speak thus unto those who have attained to faith: ‘Wait for us! Let us have a ray of light from your light!’ But they will be told: ‘Turn back, and seek a light of your own!’ And thereupon a *hijab* [or fence] will be raised between them and the believers, with a gate in it: Within it will be grace and mercy, and against the outside thereof, suffering.”<sup>14</sup> This is another interpretation. Who is right and who is wrong? God knows! That is the challenge of the Qur'an. The main idea, here, is that the word “hijab”

occurs in these verses and it does not mean dress; it means something which hides one thing from another: it could be a fence or, according to the other opinion, it could be a group of people interposed between the people of Heaven and the people of Hell.

The next verse which is somewhat long says: [Imam recites in Arabic. The translation is:]

“O you who believe! Do not enter the Prophet's dwellings unless you are given leave; and when invited to a meal, do not come so early as to wait for it to be readied: But whenever you are invited, enter at the proper time; and when you have partaken of the meal, disperse without lingering for the sake of mere talk: that, behold, might give offense to the Prophet, and yet he might feel shy of asking you to leave: but God is not shy of teaching you what is right. And as for the Prophet's wives, whenever you ask them for anything that you need, ask them from behind a *hijab* [screen]: this will but deepen the purity of your hearts and theirs. Moreover, it does not behoove you to give offense to God's Messenger – just as it would not behoove you ever to marry his widows after he has passed away: That, verily, would be an enormity in the sight of God” [33:53]. This verse is very important with regard to the topic we are currently discussing, so I am going to elaborate on it next week. As I said before, we have all of October to talk about that topic, and I will allocate one Sunday, afterwards, for questions and arguments; anyone wants to argue with me – to quarrel – bring your pistol with you; I don't mind. We have to understand, appreciate, and be aware.

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<sup>14</sup> 57:13

## Hijāb

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 2 of 4]

### Qur'ānic Verses Containing the Word "Hijab"

Someone once said: "Are you coming for prayer? You should not pray because the Qur'an says: **فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّي** "Woe to those who pray." Why?

Because he chose to read one part of that verse only. If he had completed the verse it gives you the full meaning:

**فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُوْنَ**

Woe to those who are supposed to perform their prayer but they neglect it." He quotes only that half of the verse which serves his purpose.

When it comes to the word "hijab" in the verse we quoted last week, the Qur'an says, "Ask them from behind a *hijab* [screen]." But it does not serve our purpose not knowing the context in which that verse<sup>15</sup> was revealed, and for this reason, for a proper understanding, the verse needs to be taken from the beginning.

The Arabs – especially at the time of the Prophet – were not known for politeness. If one of them came to your house, he would just push the door and enter. It was the habit of the Arabs, at that time, to push the door of the Prophet's house and enter where his wives were. And you know, there was no bell to ring, at that time, there was no telephone to call before your arrival, so they just barged into the house. Maybe there was a woman sleeping, maybe there was a woman in her nightdress, or maybe a woman in a state of undress. Moreover,

these guests would sit around and wait until the food was cooked, and after they finished eating, they would sit and tell stories to each other, enjoying their time. The Prophet was hurt but he was shy to ask them to leave. *Fa*,<sup>16</sup> the Qur'anic verse came originally to teach the people how to behave, especially in the house of the Prophet.

We find a similar situation being addressed in the Qur'an in another chapter. When the Arab Bedouins used to call upon the Prophet, they would go behind his private apartments and shout: "Muhammad! Come out for us!" Huh – that language! Impoliteness!! So the Qur'an came to say, Muhammad, those who are calling you from behind your rooms, most of them cannot *think*; they have no brain. If they were patient enough until you came out to them, it would be better for them. When we put all these verses together, it gives us an insight into the character of the Arab Bedouin, at that time, and that is why the Qur'an was teaching them manners. Chapter Nūr<sup>17</sup> says, don't enter houses other than your own unless you have permission and you greet the people with '*Assalam-u-Alaykum*'. And if you are told not to come in, then, don't go in and don't take it as an offense, because, maybe, the situation at the house is not suitable to receive guests. So the Qur'an was teaching the people the day-to-day

<sup>15</sup> 33:53

<sup>16</sup> A connecting letter in Arabic language, that connects a previous idea with a following idea, and can be translated as "then" or "so" depending on the context

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 24

behavior and politeness.

To continue with our verse [33:53] which says, O you who believe, don't enter the house of the Prophet unless you have been given permission, or you have been invited to come for lunch or dinner, and do not come so early as to wait until it is cooked; when you are finished eating your meal disperse; don't spend the night sitting around in the house of the Prophet telling stories and enjoying yourselves. Why? Because it is distressing to the Prophet. Perhaps, he has some other affairs, some other business to do, but he is shy to tell you to leave his house. If you ask the wives of the Prophet for something – some tools, some dishes, some utensils – ask them from behind a *hijab*, a cover, a wall, a curtain, anything between you and them, while you are in their house: this is better for your hearts and for their hearts. It is not appropriate that you hurt the Prophet of Allah.

So, the word *hijab* has nothing to do with dress in that Qur'anic verse. We'll come to the dress, later.

The verse continues to say, it is not appropriate for you to hurt the Prophet of God *and*

وَلَا أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرُوا أَرْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ

Look at this point! It means, "It does not behoove you to give offense to God's Messenger – just as it would not behoove you ever to marry his widows after he has passed away." This Qur'anic verse prohibited the marriage of the believers to the wives of the Prophet, after his death, and that is special to the Prophet. Why? Because the Prophet's wives were called, in the Qur'an, "The Mothers of the Believers". How can one marry his mother?

Here I would like to show you how Islam is played with, sometimes, and how when the Qur'an is interpreted by some to suit themselves, problems arise. In the Arab Gulf area, nowadays, if any Amir<sup>18</sup> marries and divorces his wife, then no one can dare marry her. Why? "Because he is the imam<sup>19</sup> of the country!" In some cases, even a girl of 16 will be married to an old sheikh 60 or 70 years old, and, as soon as she gets pregnant, he divorces her, because he has to look for someone new. And that girl cannot remarry. And when it comes to some religious authorities of Islam who would like to ingratiate themselves to that Amir, they support him by saying: "He is the leader, the imam, and, and..." and they quote this particular

verse to justify his behavior: "It does not behoove you to give offense to God's Messenger – just as it would not behoove you ever to marry his widows after he has passed away." So this is how Islam is played with sometimes.<sup>20</sup>

If we come to the Qur'anic verse in Chapter Al-Ahzāb, number 59, it says, O Prophet, say to your wives and to your daughters and to the women believers to make their *gallabiya* longer. Why? That will be a sign to show the people that they are free women, they are believers, so no one will hurt them in the street.

If we go back to the different tafseers with regard to this verse we can see that a certain behavior was prevalent at the time these tafseers were written, and that behavior still prevails in the Muslim countries, although you don't see it happening in the western countries. In Egypt, from where I came, we have the Main Street in Cairo which they call *Sitta wa'Shreen Youlio*. Any woman walking down that street will get bumped by 700 men with their shoulders. And the comments will range all the way from "You look beautiful", "What nice legs", "What a nice waist", "What this, and that!" From the time she leaves her home, until she comes back home, that is how she is going to find her outing in the street. In Saudi Arabia there is a difference: they don't talk, and they don't bump shoulders, like the Egyptians, but, if you look at their eyes when there is a woman walking in the street, their gaze is so penetrating as if their eyes are like scud missiles! And you find the same behavior in the rest of the Gulf area. I don't know... This is a problem in the entire Muslim world. I have seen it in Libya, in Morocco, and, in Casablanca, it is even worse. And it looks to me like this is a habit since a long time in the Muslim countries, whereas you don't see this happening in the western countries.

The tafseers say that the women used to go out at night, and even at that time they were not safe from the talk of the men, and the molestation of the men. The men especially picked on the women who were slaves. If a man would meet a woman in the street, he would try to hurt her by word or by action, assuming that she was a slave woman. The books of tafseer say that this Qur'anic verse came to tell them to lengthen their dress [*gallabiya*] so that the long dress will distinguish the believers and the free women from the slave

<sup>18</sup> The ruler

<sup>19</sup> The head of state.

<sup>20</sup> The Prophet was the ruler and head of state, so the Amirs and rulers of the Gulf States now consider this Qur'anic verse to be applicable to them.

## Qur'anic Verses Containing the Word "Hijab"

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women. Therefore, the long dress, here, was prescribed as a remedy for an existing situation. This does not mean that I am saying you should wear miniskirts and expose yourself! I am coming later to the dress which Islam recommends.

The word "hijab" also occurs in Chapter Sād, verse number 32, which says: "These bounties of God occupied me from mentioning the name of God **حَتَّى تَوَارَتْ بِالْحِجَابِ** until the sun disappeared behind a *hijab*." It means the sun disappeared below the horizon [*hijab*]; it has set. This verse is referring to Sayyidna Sulayman. We know that the bounties of God bestowed on Prophet Sulayman were very great. Sulayman loved horses. We love horses, nowadays, also, but for the wrong reasons: we use them to gamble. We go to the horse races, spend everything in our pockets, and come back with depleted pockets! But Sulayman loved horses as a method of transportation and for their grace and beauty. Sulayman was admiring his horses and enjoying them and he forgot his habit of *zikr* (what we call *tasbeeh*<sup>21</sup>) until the sun set. These bounties of God occupied him from mentioning the name of God **حَتَّى تَوَارَتْ بِالْحِجَابِ** until the sun disappeared under the *hijab* of the earth.

When Muhammad would read the Qur'an for the *kuffar* of Makkah they used to say: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Our hearts are veiled from whatever thou callest us to, O Muhammad, and in our ears is deafness, and between us and thee is a *hijab* – a cover on our eyes – so we don't see the truth which you are preaching. Do, then, whatever thou wilt, whereas, behold, we shall do as we have always done" [41:5].

The word "hijab" in that verse is not even a material thing. It is something immaterial. In effect, the *kuffar* are saying, Muhammad, we don't even like to see your face; there is something covering you up, there is some wall between us and you so we cannot see you, we don't *like* to see you, we are not ready to listen to you, we are not ready to comprehend what you are talking about. And why did the Qur'an select to mention the sight, the hearing, and the heart? This is because these three organs assimilate and formulate knowledge. Nowadays, the teachers in the schools use overhead projectors and videos to aid in teaching the kids. Why? Because when children hear and see at the same time, they comprehend

better. When they hear only, like we used to in the past, then, only the faculty of hearing is used in acquiring knowledge, and the assimilation of that knowledge is not as effective; moreover, it will be forgotten more easily and in a shorter time. But using the three faculties together will result in the highest type of learning and education. So the *kuffar* are saying to Muhammad that they are not ready to learn from him at all.

The word "hijab" is used to indicate a cover over the eyes, which prevents them from seeing the truth though they can see other objects. It is obvious that, here, in this context, the *hijab* is an abstract concept. That verse leads me to have my own interpretation of "hijab" – a "hijab" which we lack nowadays.

We need many kinds of *hijab*. We need a *hijab* on our eyes so we don't see the prohibited, a *hijab* on our ears so we don't listen to the prohibited, and a *hijab* on our hearts so it will make it unable to comprehend what is prohibited. Let us apply this to ourselves and see where we stand.

The Qur'an says about man: "Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips and shown him the two highways of good and evil?"<sup>22</sup> This has a meaning: two hands, two legs, two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, but when it comes to the tongue – only *ONE*. Imagine if man had two tongues! The world will turn upside down! And note that *everything* mentioned above has no *hijab* over it *except* the tongue. It is enclosed here [Imam is pointing to his tightly compressed lips]. It reminds me of the Lebanese barber who came to this country not knowing a word of English. His client was sitting in the chair and he was shaving his face. It was summer; the client was drowsy, so he dozed off to sleep; as his lower jaw dropped, his mouth became open. The barber could not continue with shaving his face in that position. He wanted to ask his client politely to close his mouth or something like that, but not knowing the language, he blurted out: "Will you please shut up!"

So, in fact, there is a "hijab" only on the tongue, because it is very dangerous. The tongue has destroyed cities and countries and that's why God placed it in a "pocket", to be kept closed, sometimes. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "The Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand others are safe." But that's what we lack – a *hijab* on our tongues. This hadith stresses the dangers of the slanderous tongue.

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<sup>21</sup> Glorification of God

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<sup>22</sup> 90: 8-10

# Hijāb

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 3 of 4]

## The Requirements of Islam with Regard to Dress

It seems to me when God created man and divided the provisions, everyone refused to accept his share of money: everyone wants more! But when God divided the brain, everyone accepted his share, and everyone thinks he knows everything and the rest are deficient in their mental capabilities! After I finish talking about the word “hijab” in the Qur’ān, and hijab as a dress as mentioned in Bukhari, and my personal *ijtihad* based upon my inferences from Islamic history, I will allocate one whole hour for questions and answers and arguments and debates, because I am not in a position, in this mosque, to dictate to the public what to do, and what not to do. We have to be convinced of what we should do. If you do it from your heart, it’s very good, but don’t accuse others of doing less. Don’t say I am a good Muslim and you are a kafir. If you feel that you are a good Muslim, it is a relationship between you and God, so keep it to yourself, and don’t condemn others because that hurts and creates some hard feelings.

Another verse<sup>23</sup> in the Qur’ān that contains the word “hijab” talks about the methods by which God communicates

with his messengers on earth. It mentions three methods:

1. Sending a messenger to His messengers on earth to reveal what God wants to reveal. This is called *wahy* or revelation which is, normally, specially reserved for prophets and the very, very, very righteous people – the *al-Awliyā*. The revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet through the Angel Gabriel is an example of this method of communication between God and His messengers.
2. Inspiration – called in Arabic, “*ilhām*”. Inspiration could come while the person is sleeping, as in a dream. An example of this, in the Qur’ān, is the dream that the Prophet Yusuf<sup>24</sup> had, and that dream was eventually fulfilled.
3. **مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ** – “from behind a hijab” – a curtain, or a cover, or a wall, or whatever you want to call it – some form of barrier that prevents the human being from seeing God. A human being cannot see God. The Qur’ān says, “No human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human vision...”<sup>25</sup> We know this from the

<sup>23</sup> 42:51

<sup>24</sup> Joseph

<sup>25</sup> 6:103



## The Requirements of Islam with Regard to Dress

incident on the Mount of Sinai when Moses talked to God and asked God if he could see Him. God said it was impossible for Him to be seen, but Moses could look upon the mountain and if the mountain remained in its place, then, he will see Him. When God revealed Himself, the mountain was destroyed and Moses fainted.

So, God talked to Moses from behind a hijab and the word “hijab” mentioned here indicates that Moses did not see God. Another example of God communicating with his messenger from behind a hijab is the conversation of Muhammad with his God during the night of Isrā’; Muhammad did not see God.

The word “hijab” is also mentioned in Chapter Al-Isrā’ verse 45. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“But thus it is: whenever thou recitest the Qur’ān, We place a *hijab* between thee and those who will not believe in the life to come...” This means the hijab is something which will make the people, who deny the life after death, unable to comprehend, or to listen, or to learn. It is an immaterial thing.

Sura Maryam, verse 17 says: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Mary kept herself in seclusion [*hijaban*] from them [her family], whereupon We sent unto her Our Angel of Revelation, who appeared to her in the shape of a well-made, handsome man.” Here hijab is, again, not anything concrete but it means that Maryam went away from the village where she used to live, so no one would see her; no one would bother her. That is the meaning of “hijab” in Chapter Maryam.

[TRANSCRIBER’S NOTE: I MISSED THE NEXT TWO LECTURES DETAILING HIJAB AS A DRESS ACCORDING TO THE FOUR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT.]

With regard to dress, what does Islam want us to do? Islam recommends “*tahseen*”. *Tahseen* means “solidifying”. It also means “perfection”. It means make that woman solid, like a rock, perfect her faith as much as possible so that she can stand up against every evil. But if we imprison a woman in a room, then, we are merely *escaping* from the devil. She will be very weak. If, on the other hand, you bring her up with *tahseen* she will be aware of right and wrong, she will have a strong inner conviction, and she will learn to voluntarily reject the wrong; she will fight the devil rather than escape from the devil. You could put her together with 20 devils and she will fight them by means of that something implanted in her head

and in her heart – that is Islam. Hafiz Ibrahim<sup>26</sup> wrote a very good poem about that. He says a man and a woman complement each other. Men alone cannot build a society, and women alone cannot build a society. The building of a strong society requires the two because they complement each other. *Tarbīyat* is needed to accomplish this exceedingly important task of building a strong society. *Tarbīyat* means *education*, but *tarbīyat* and education are not synonymous. *Tarbīyat* is not education, as we normally understand it; *tarbīyat* is *more* than education. The word *tarbīyat* is taken from *yrabbi* which means, “To make him grow up”: to make the *brain* of that person grow up with his body. You could nourish the body alone, and you could nourish the body *and* the brain. What we fail to accomplish is the *two together* in our children – our future generations – boys as well as girls. We arm our children with *tarbīyat* as we send them forth into the world of evil.

The word *awra* means the parts of the body that are to be covered, whether male or female. The ulama from every school of thought are in agreement that the *awra* of a man is from his naval up to his knees. That’s for prayer, which means, therefore, that there is *awra* in prayer and there is *awra* outside of prayer. All the Muslim scholars are in agreement that the *awra* of a woman is all her body except her face and hands. The hadith quoted by all of them, i.e. Imam Abu Haneefa, Imam Shafi’i, Maliki, and Hanbali, in support of this, is that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to Asma bint Abu Bakr: “When a girl reaches adulthood, she should not uncover any part of her body except this and this” and he pointed to his face and his hands. Some ulama added the feet. So the woman can uncover her hands, face, and feet.

Imam Malik made it a little bit easier by saying that he divided the *awra* into two sections: one is the strong *awra* or what they call the *awra mughallaza* and the other is *awra mukhaffafa*. He defined the *awra mughallaza* as “From her upper chest to her knee.”<sup>27</sup> The *awra mughallaza* must be covered, otherwise her prayer will not be correct, but she could pray with uncovered hair; with uncovered top of the chest, with uncovered arms and with uncovered neck, and with her dress up to her knee. This is according to Imam Malik, but he still considered it *preferable* that she cover rather than opt for the relaxed definition.

<sup>26</sup> An Egyptian poet.

<sup>27</sup> Imam put his hand horizontally just above the level of the breasts by way of demonstration

Some of the Muslim schools of thought say that the *awra* for the free woman is her face, hands and feet, while the *awra* for the slave woman is exactly like the *awra* of the man except they added her belly and her back to just *below* the breasts. This means that the *awra* of the slave woman does not include her breasts. That's the opinion of some ulama. Personally, I disagree with the opinion that the breasts of the slave woman are not *awra*. A slave woman could be more beautiful than a free woman!

Then, we find some opinions scattered here and there in the Islamic Fiqh. For example, there is the opinion of Imam Shafi'i who had a very novel idea and which we have never heard of, and none of the ulama will ever talk about it. Imam Shafi'i says, "The *awra* of a man, in the presence of a foreign woman, is all his body except his face and his hands." Has anyone ever talked about this as being the *awra* of a man? *In the presence of a foreign woman – the woman who is not moharram for him – only his face and his hands should show.* So when you read the books of Fiqh in depth you find some ideas and opinions scattered here and there.

I don't know how many of you attended the lecture at Toledo University, three days ago, of a most learned shaykh from Syria. He said, we have varieties of Muslim schools of thought and you are free to select whichever one you want. There is no right and no wrong among them. And if you would like to quote one school of thought today and another school of thought tomorrow you are still okay; you can do that. Therefore, we find, when we study Islam in depth, that there is a strict interpretation and there is a lenient interpretation, and it is left for the conviction of the Muslim and his choice. *La*

*ilkrāhā fiddīn* – no enforcement to follow a certain way. It is your prerogative. As laypeople who are not specialists in the field of religion, we have the tendency to imitate either some ulama or some school of thought. But, if we have the ability for ijtehad, and we are learned in an area to make ijtehad, then, we have to make ijtehad.

Now I have talked about hijab from the aspect of the major schools of thought. And I have analyzed every Qur'ānic verse which mentions the word "hijab". But, to be fair, I have to talk about hijab from one more aspect: hijab as it is described in the strictest of all the schools of thought. This school of thought is actually describing traditions but they cloak those traditions as religion to suit themselves, to the extent that, there are some ahadith mentioned in Bukhari that, according to this school are "weak", and they don't use them because those ahadith do not support their interpretation of "hijab" since, according to them, those ahadith show some leniency.

This paper<sup>28</sup> is the opinion of the school of thought called the Salafi School of Thought. I am going to be reading and translating it for you. This paper is in Arabic and it is about hijab. It is entitled "A Gift for the Muslim Woman". On reading it you find that they interpret the hijab in a different way, and they use the Qur'ānic verses which have nothing to do with dress to support what they are saying. Moreover, any hadith in Bukhari which shows even a little bit of leniency by their standards is considered a weak hadith and is not quoted. To be fair, I am going, *insha'allah*, to talk about that paper next week line by line. It represents the Salafi School of Thought.

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<sup>28</sup> Imam is holding up a paper

# Hijāb

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 4 of 4]

## The Requirements of Hijab According to the Salafi School of Thought Questions and Answers

**A**s I said to you in the beginning, I am not here to impose my opinion on anybody. I am discussing the strict as well as the lenient interpretations according to the Muslim schools of thought. It is up to you to follow whichever one you like. I'll never label so-and-so as a good Muslim or so-and-so as *kafir*. I don't believe in that: everyone has a relationship with God and there is only one Judge – God is the only Judge. A man cannot judge other men, and I leave the decision for you: follow whichever opinion suits you. It is your business, not mine.

The first item this paper mentions is that it is prohibited for the woman to drive a car. They have found a little hadith somewhere – I don't know where, or what book – which, according to them, prohibits a woman from “driving”<sup>29</sup> a camel. And, if it is prohibited to “drive” a camel, then, by extension, she is prohibited from driving a car. Imagine! Our women cannot drive a car, while American women are flying B-52's and bombing Iraq.

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<sup>29</sup> The Prophet's wives rode on camels; that is well known. But the distinction between “riding a camel” and “driving a camel” is that, in the latter case, the woman herself has control of the reins.

The second item in this paper is the hijab. It says that a woman should not wear a colored dress; it should not be shiny or shimmering; it should not be flashy because that would attract the attention of men to the woman.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, I ask, where is the verse from the Qur'ān that is addressed to the men, “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze”? Should not the men lower their gaze when a woman is passing by? Why are we always asking the women to do everything, even though the Qur'ān requires the men, also, to observe certain rules?

The third item is a requirement of the hijab concerning its fabric: the dress should not be made of such flimsy material that the body shows clearly underneath. A hadith is quoted here: “At the end of time, there will be women who are dressed but naked at the same time.”

The fourth requirement: the dress should be very loose fitting, meaning that it should not be tight like those skintight pantaloons of nowadays, or the blouses that show the waist. The dress of the woman should not be so tight that it shows her outline clearly. What is being required is that the

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<sup>30</sup> Imam reads, from the paper, in Arabic. Each subsequent item is read out in Arabic, too.

dress should not show the parts of the body such that the chest, the back, the waist, and the other parts of the body are not separately distinguishable. It should be very loose fitting. That is a requirement of the hijab.

The fifth requirement: the dress should not be similar to the dress of the men. The Salafi quote a hadith wherein the Prophet cursed those men who dressed like women, and those women who dressed like men. It looks like, in this respect, all America will be cursed now!

[Imam reads the next requirement in Arabic] it seems to me, it means, that “the dress of the *kafir* – al *kāfirāth*<sup>31</sup> – should not be worn”. I don’t know what is meant by *al kāfirāth*, or what type of dress that signifies, because we, the men, are all attired exactly like George Bush! So we are in hell already, or, going there on a jet flight! This also means that nearly all the Muslim women are falling in this category because the designs are coming from Paris. I have visited the designer shops in Zamalik,<sup>32</sup> in Cairo, and found 90 percent of them are working on “Islamic dresses”. So one of the requirements of hijab is that “The dress should not be similar to the dress of the kuffar.” They say that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “Anyone who is similar to these people will be one of them.”

[Imam reads in Arabic, then explains] It is preferable that young girls, especially very young girls, be encouraged to wear long dresses in their childhood so that this will become a habit for them when they grow older.

The eighth and last requirement is that it should not be a “dress for success” which is ostentatious, but, on the other hand, the dress should, also, not indicate that the person does not care for this world.

Islam is the religion of the middle way. There are many Qur’ānic verses recommending the middle way. So, in the same manner, the author of the paper is recommending that one should not dress in a manner that would imply that the wearer is above his fellow human beings, nor dress in a manner that would show disregard for people or for *this* life, because mainly Islam is the religion for the two worlds. The

most frequently quoted verse in this regard is [Imam quotes in Arabic]: “Seek instead, by means of what God has granted thee, the good of the life to come, without forgetting, withal, thine own rightful share in this world.”<sup>33</sup>

Now I have talked about hijab from the Fiqh books and what Abu Haneefa said, what Imam Shafi’i said, what Maliki said, and what Hanbali said. And, today, we read what the Salafi are saying. I have examined the opinions of the people on the far right, and the people on the far left. As I mentioned before, Imam Malik’s opinion is that if a woman prays with uncovered head, uncovered top of the chest, uncovered arms, and uncovered legs, up to the knees, her prayer is correct. This will show you the difference between the leniency here, and the strictness of the Salafi. The choice now is yours. If you would like to be Salafi, enjoy yourself; if you would like to follow Abu Haneefa, have fun. If you would like to follow Ja’fari, it is your right. No one is right and no one is wrong. Everyone made his own ijtehad and it is left up to you to practice the way you like.

I promised at the start of this topic that you are not going to be a captive audience, especially when we deal with controversial topics like this. I have explained to you the ideas of the ulama from every school of thought and the choice is yours to select. Where I have given my personal opinion I have said that it could be right or wrong, and it is open for discussion and argument in a civilized manner as befits Islam. Anyone has questions, or concerns, that I did not talk about is welcome to express them. If anyone wants to argue a point he is welcome to argue it. If anyone would like to ask a question or seek clarification for something, we’ll discuss it together. In this Islamic Center, there is no obligation on the community to follow the imam. No. In relation to Islam, if you have an idea that is better, then oppose the imam, and oppose any ‘*alim*’<sup>34</sup> on earth, because all of us are human beings and all of us are liable to make mistakes. So, *insha’allah*, next Sunday is allocated for questions and answers. Read about that topic and come prepared to ask your questions, *insha’allah*.

## Questions and Answers

The topic of hijab that we have talked about in the last few weeks is one of those controversial topics which is discussed

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<sup>31</sup> *Kāfirāth* is the plural of *kafirah*, and *kafirah* is the feminine gender

while *kafir* is the male gender. It means: “the Muslim women should not wear the dress of al-kafirath” (the disbelievers)

<sup>32</sup> A high-class shopping area. The Parisian designs are adapted to become “Islamic dresses”

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<sup>33</sup> 28:77

<sup>34</sup> Scholar

among Muslims everywhere. And, as I said to you before, when it comes to explanation of vague or unclear Qur'ānic verses or sayings of the Prophet, you cannot say this is right and this is wrong; everyone is right in his own way and that is the basis on which the schools of thought were established. Tolerance, inherent in Islam, permits everyone to practice Islam the way he thinks is best, and, more importantly, no man can judge man; that is the difference between Islam and many other faiths – that man cannot judge man. So, you cannot say that, as a Muslim, I am going to Heaven and the Christian or the Jew is going to hell. You cannot say that. You also cannot judge on face value or on appearance, because, when you think of it from the point of view of reason, you may find a Muslim who has nothing to show for his Islam except his profession of *La- ilaha illallah Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah*,<sup>35</sup> while all his actions and behavior are anti-Islam. There are some other people who may not believe in Muhammad as the Prophet of God, like the Christians or the Jews, but when you look at their actions they are Islamic actions, and here you will be perplexed, but, here, that very important and basic principle in Islam applies: The Judge is God. No man can judge a man. The reason is that belief is mainly in the heart and no one can see what is in the heart – no one but God – before whom man is accountable. You see the appearance only, and the appearance is not a criterion for judgment. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, “God does not consider your shapes or your looks, but He considers your hearts and your actions.”

[Some one from the audience asks, “What is *Al Khimār*?” Imam quotes the verse from Chapter Nūr which contains the word *al khimār*. The English translation of this verse is:]

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms in public beyond what may decently be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings (*al khimār*) over their bosoms. . . .”<sup>36</sup>

The English translation of this word is “scarf” or “veil” and it means, “To make their scarves come to their chests.” The Salafi school of thought interprets this verse to mean that, if you are going to let the *khimār* come from the head down to the chest, it has to come over, and thereby cover the face to reach the chest; they interpret it to mean that the woman

should not only cover her face, but also cover her eyes, except for one eye *if* it is necessary to see her way. As I said last week, the hadith which is very widely quoted is the one where the Prophet said to Asma bint AbuBakr: “When a girl reaches adulthood, she should not uncover any part of her body except this and this” and he pointed to his face and his hands. However, the ulama in Saudi Arabia now say this hadith is *daef*<sup>37</sup> and should not be quoted, because, according to their interpretation, the woman should not only cover her face, but, also, cover her eyes except for one eye *if* it is necessary to see her way. Next question.

[Transcriber’s note: I could not discern the questioner’s words. “Ridqa” is the Arabic version of Rebekah (as spelled in the Bible). The reference is in Genesis 24:65 in which the word “veil” is used in the English version of the Old Testament. Imam is quoting “*burqaw*” which is the word used in the Arabic version of the Old Testament. Imam responds:]

Good question. Hijab originally is not an Islamic practice. It existed before Islam. If you read the Old Testament there is a verse about Ridqa who drew her “*burqaw*” over herself when she confronted Ishāq.<sup>38</sup> *Burqaw* means “a cover”. This indicates that this type of veil, or hijab, as we call it, existed even before the advent of Islam. From the Old Testament we know that Jewish women used to be covered. The Christians used it, also, and I have seen, thirty years ago, the nuns would be completely covered, but, lately, they have started to uncover themselves a little bit. And, I said at the start, if you remember, that the veil was, traditionally speaking, used by the women of the aristocratic families whereas the working women went about with uncovered faces and hands and feet; they used to go barefoot. That was the tradition, but things have changed now; nowadays, the aristocratic girls in Egypt wear miniskirts. So the hijab, or veil, is not restricted to Islam only. It existed even before Islam. Next question. [Nobody had further questions from the audience. Imam proceeds.]

Brother Asad Hawari requested that we answer some questions which he has written in this letter related to the topic we were talking about. [Imam reads the Arabic letter.] Just to tell you what the question is about: he says, you have dealt with all the Qur'ānic verses which mentioned the word hijab, and proved that the word hijab, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, has no relationship to dress, but when you talked about the *awra* of the

<sup>35</sup> There is no God but one God and Muhammad is His messenger

<sup>36</sup> 24:31

<sup>37</sup> Weak

<sup>38</sup> Isaac

man and the woman, be that she is free or slave, you mentioned the opinions of the four Muslim schools of thought. We don't know on what those Muslim scholars based their opinions; how they decided what they decided, since you have proved that the word "hijab" in the Qur'ān is not related to dress. And, assuming that the ulama of the past have talked about the *awra* for the man and the woman, be they free or slave, is that determination applicable for us today, or was that fatwa related to their time? Nowadays, we are in a different situation, especially in regards to the fact that the past ulama have made special reference to the *awra* of the slave woman, whereas the Qur'ān and Islam fought slavery by every means to abolish it.

I will explain this briefly. We have, in the Qur'ān, verses which are very clear-cut; there is no argument about them and no schools of thought debating them. The debate ensues about the Qur'ānic verses that are vague. Some people try to explain such verses by means of other Qur'ānic verses which are related to them. Others try to explain them by applying the hadith or sunnah of the Prophet. When there is no applicable Qur'ānic verse or sunnah, *ijtehad* or *qiyas* (analogy) is used to arrive at an explanation. An example of *qiyas*, as a source of Islam, is the following: we know that liquor is *harām*.<sup>39</sup> But liquor, as we know it, is made of grapes. If, however, you drink fermented milk and it alters your mental processes in the same way as liquor does, then, in that respect, the ulama have said that the milk is equal to liquor and it is *harām*. This is *qiyas* which they consider as a source of Islamic Law. The fourth source of Islamic Law is the consensus of the ulama, known as *ijtehad*.<sup>40</sup>

In the last few centuries, *ijtehad* stopped. This has led to the backwardness of the Muslims because they have stopped using their brain. The brain is the biggest *na'ima*<sup>41</sup> God created for man, and by which He distinguished him from the

other creations. But the Muslims are not using it any more. As a result, wherever you go in the Muslim world, you find that we are downtrodden. Why? Because we look to the past and we never look to the future. We look to the old books and we have stopped using our brains to try to establish new thoughts and opinions based upon the life and the circumstances in which we are living now.

So, the Muslim scholars of the past decided what they decided, and based their opinions regarding that topic, on these four sources: the Qur'an, the sunnah, the *qiyas* and *ijtehad*.

When I was a student in Al-Azhar in the early years<sup>42</sup> there was one question occupying the minds of all the people living in Al Azhar: "Can the woman work, or should she stay at home? Is her work *harām* or *halāl*?" This was debated in the classrooms, in the streets, in the newspapers, and in the mass media; that question was occupying the minds of all Egyptians. And, at that time, the majority was of the opinion that the woman should be confined within four walls; her job is to care for children, period. No argument. And I am sure that this thinking was prevalent in other Muslim societies, and is still current in some, even now. What does this mean? It means that, if we are to follow this opinion, we are cutting out half our society and not using it. Woman is half of the society, and while the whole world now is basing its advancement and progress upon production, we have put 50% of our manpower out of work. Why? Because "Islam prohibited it." That is why we are depending upon others for everything from the needle to the airplane; we import everything from outside, *Alhamdulillah*, until this day. Today we may be assembling some things in our countries, but we don't manufacture them. And the reason behind all this, when we analyze it, can be traced to one word, which, in the question of Brother Asad, is "*awra*."

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<sup>39</sup> Unlawful/prohibited

<sup>40</sup> A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

<sup>41</sup> Bounty

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<sup>42</sup> This would be around 1950