

*HIJÂB AL-MAR'AH*  
by  
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While it is clearly desirable for Muslims to apply the *sharî'ah* or Islamic law as completely as possible, some provisions in the law require more immediate application than others. These include the laws of purity (*tahârah*) to ensure the validity of one's salat as well as the rules of the salat itself. One of the requirements of salat for both men and women is modest dress, which is also vitally important because how one dresses is immediately visible to the public and therefore reflects on the Muslim community, including how Muslims are viewed from the outside as well as how they view themselves from within. If a people are to respect themselves, they should wear respectable dress. Women's dress in particular is important in this regard, because of the importance of women in society, because of the onslaught against Muslim woman's dress by some of the public media, and because of the way materialistic society tries to lure the citizen-victims away from modesty and uprightness by urging them to wear provocative and demeaning clothing.

Like other questions about prescriptive practice in Islam, that of women's dress should be approached by considering the Qur'ân, the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAAS), and the legal decisions of the learned scholars of Islam, as well as the appropriate commentaries on each of these. Let us start with the Qur'ân, Allâh's own words and the first source of law, which contains several relevant verses. Sûrah 24 (al-Nûr), verse 31, states:

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only what is apparent,<sup>1</sup> and to draw their veils (*khumurihinna*) over their bosoms (*juyûbihinna*), and not to reveal their adornment except to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigor, or children who know nothing of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn unto Allâh together, O believers, in order that you may succeed.”

This verse must be considered in connection with Sûrah 24 (al-Nûr), verse 60, which states:

“As for those women past childbearing who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they discard their outer clothing (*thiyâb*) as long as they do not dress up to show adornment. That they behave chastely is better for them. Allâh is Hearing, Knowing.”

The third verse that must be considered in connection with the above two is Sûrah

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1) This is interpreted by the very early authority 'Abd Allâh ibn al-'Abbâs (RA), the Prophet's (SAAS) first cousin, as meaning the face and the hands. 'Abd Allâh **Ibn al-'Abbâs**, *Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbâs, al-musammâ Sahîfat 'Alî ibn Abî Talhah 'an Ibn 'Abbâs fî tafsîr al-Qur'ân al-Karîm*, ed. Râshid 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Rajjâl, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thiqâfiyyah, 1414/1993, pp. 371-372.

33 (al-Ahzâb), verse 59, which reads:

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (*jalâbîb*) close around them. That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed. Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful.”

These three verses are the only direct divine commands in the Qur’ân on this subject that are addressed to all Muslim women, but they are usually considered in conjunction with two other verses addressed specifically to the wives of the Prophet (SAAS).<sup>2</sup> The first of these, Sûrah 33 (al-Ahzâb), verse 33, reads in part:

“And stay in your houses. And do not display yourselves according to the display (*tabarruj*) of the Time of Ignorance.”

Likewise is Sûrah 33 (al-Ahzâb), verse 53, which reads in part:

“And when you ask anything of them (the wives of the Prophet (SAAS)), ask it of them from behind a curtain (*hijâb*). That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.”

These five verses and the commentary on them, supported by relevant hadiths, show us the boundaries of what is acceptable according to learned opinion. First, from the apparent meanings of the verses, women are to cover up except when alone or in the presence of those specific persons, mainly relatives, listed in Qur’ân 24:31. This is the case whether they are in their homes or outside in public. Second, women are generally to cover themselves. Their “adornment” mentioned in Qur’ân 24:31 means both natural adornment, meaning their beauty, as well as artificial adornment, such as jewelry.

However, a difference in interpretation arises about the exact limits of the required covering intended by the words “...to display of their adornment only what is apparent...” Some have taken this to mean only what becomes unintentionally apparent by accident. This group allows no part of the woman’s body to be uncovered in public, unless it be an eye to see with.<sup>3</sup> The majority, however, take the verse as meaning that which is normally apparent, according to custom. This is interpreted to mean that the face and hands may be uncovered<sup>4</sup> and the normal voice heard.<sup>5</sup> This position is supported first of all by the fact that the woman *must* uncover her face as part of her *ihram* on her pilgrimage.<sup>6</sup> The famous jurist and philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) specifically

<sup>2</sup>)On the universal applicability of these, see Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muhammad ibn Ahmad **al-Qurtubî**, *al-Jâmi‘ li-ahkâm al-Qur’ân*, Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1408/1988, Vol. XIV, p. 117, 146.

<sup>3</sup>)Abû Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jarîr **al-Tabarî**, *Jâmi‘ al-bayân fi tafsîr al-Qur’ân*, Bûlâq: al-Matba‘ah al-Kubrâ al-Amîriyyah, 1323-1328, Vol. XXII, p. 33; Qurtubî, XIV, 156; Taqî al-Dîn Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halîm **Ibn Taymiyyah**, *Fatâwâ al-nisâ’*, ed. by Ahmad al-Sâiyih and al-Sayyid al-Jamîlî, Cairo: Dâr al-Dayyân li-l-Turâth, 1408/1987, pp. 59-64; Muhammad **Ibn ‘Alawî al-Mâlikî** al-Hasanî, *Adab al-Islâm fi nizâm al-usrah*, 2nd ed., Jiddah: Matâbi‘ Sahar, 1401, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup>)Tabarî, XVIII, 93-94; Qurtubî, XII, 152. Al-Tabarî shows that this was the majority position in his own time, citing many authorities, and also makes clear that this was own position as well.

<sup>5</sup>)Most Hanafîs also add the feet to what may be uncovered. Muhammad Amîn **Ibn ‘Âbidîn**, *Hâshiyat radd al-muhtâr*, 3rd ed., Cairo: Mustafâ al-Bâbî al-Halabî, 1404/1984, Vol. I, p. 423.

<sup>6</sup>)Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muhammad ibn Ismâ‘îl **al-Bukhârî**, *Sahîh*, ed. and tr. by Muhammad Muhsin Khân, Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, no date, Vol. II, p. 358 (K. al-hajj, b. mâ yalbasu al-muhrim min al-thiyâb wa-al-ardiyah wa-al-uzur). Explained as uncovering all the face including the lips in Badr al-Dîn **al-‘Aynî**, *‘Umdat al-qâri sharh sahîh al-Bukhârî*, Cairo: Mustafâ al-Bâbî al-Halabî, 1392/1972, Vol. VII, p. 438. This is supported by numerous hadiths which prohibit the women wearing gloves as well as face veils on hajj, in **Abû Dâwûd** al-Sijistânî, *Sunan*, Beirut: Dâr al-Janân and Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thiqâfiyyah, 1409/1988, Vol. I, pp. 566-567 (K. al-manâsik, b. mâ yalbasu al-muhrim); English translation in *Sunan Abu Dawud*, tr. by Ahmad

declares this to be a major reason for allowing the uncovering of the face, for if a woman may uncover her face before what must be many strangers in the pilgrimage when all must be in a maximum state of spiritual concentration, then it must be reasonable for her to do so as well in her ordinary life.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation is supported by the Qur'anic *tafsîrs* of al-Tabarî (d. 310/923) and al-Qurtubî (d. 671/1273), who describe how the women used to let their headcloths dangle behind them, leaving their ears, necks, and upper chests uncovered. The verse instructs them to pull the cloth around to cover their ears, necks, and chests.<sup>8</sup> The face is omitted from this description.

There is no undisputed text which unambiguously states that women must cover their entire bodies including their faces and hands. The translation by Khân of a hadith in al-Bukhârî on Qur'ân 24:31 states, "When Allâh revealed 'They should draw their veils over their necks and bosoms,' they tore their aprons and covered their faces with it." (sic).<sup>9</sup> One will notice first that Khân has "necks and bosoms," whereas translations of the same phrase in the Qur'ân have only "bosoms." In fact, there is only one Arabic word here, *juyûbihinna*, which refers to the opening in the front of their shifts or robes extending downward from the neck. Thus, the translation by Khân is an explanatory expansion of the text.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the translation's phrase "covered their faces" renders only the single Arabic verb *ikhtamarna*, which simply means "to use as a *khimâr* (covering);" the words "their faces" do *not* appear in the Arabic text.<sup>11</sup> Since the word *khumurihinna*, as "their veils," already occurs in Qur'ân 24:31, this hadith and the one following it do not settle the extent of women's veiling, nor do they prove that the face must be covered, because they do not go beyond the Qur'anic text in their description. Furthermore, though these hadiths exemplify the enthusiasm of the Muslim women to do whatever is necessary to follow Allâh's commands, they do not specify that the women's eager action was in response to an interpretation or command given by the Prophet (SAAS) himself, but rather to the meaning of the Qur'anic verse directly.

An additional hadith in Muslim's *Sahîh* containing the word *ikhtamartu* also does not exactly delineate the proper attire for a Muslim woman. In it, 'Ā'ishah goes out at night to follow the Prophet (SAAS) and apparently dressed hurriedly. Siddiqi's translates

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Hasan, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1984, Vol. II, p. 482 (hadiths 1821-1823).

7) Abû al-Walîd Muhammad ibn Ahmad **Ibn Rushd**, *Bidâyat al-mujtahid wa-nihâyat al-muqtasid*, Cairo: Mustafâ al-Bâbî al-Halabî, 1401/1981, Vol. I, p. 115; translated as *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, tr. by I. A. K. Nyazee and M. A. Rauf, Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1995, Vol. I, p. 126.

8) Tabarî, XVIII, 94; Qurtubî, XII, 153.

9) The hadith following it is like it. Bukhârî, VI, 267 (K. al-tafsîr, b. wa-l-yadribna bi-khumurihinna 'alâ juyûbihinna). Similarly in Abû Dâwûd, II, 458-459 (K. al-libâs, b. fî qawl Allâh ta'âlâ yudnîna 'alayhinna min jalâbîbihinna); English translation, III, 1144 (hadiths 4089-4091), relating the women's action both to 24:31 and 33:59.

10) Nevertheless, the neck is generally considered part of what must be covered. Muhammad ibn Ismâ'îl **al-San'ânî**, *Subul al-salâm*, ed. by Muhammad al-Dâlî Baltah, Saydâ and Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyyah, 1412/1992, Vol. I, pp. 312-313, where the *khimâr* of salat does not need to cover the face. However, the same Qur'anic text is extended farther with less justification in Khân's translation of the meaning of the Qur'ân entitled *The Noble Qur'ân*, 12th ed., Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam, 1995, p. 503, to include "their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms." Qurtubî, XII, 153, does not support this explanation.

11) The several mistakes and extensions of meaning in English translations, such as this one, that are cited in this article should put Muslims on guard against relying on English texts alone for proofs; only the Arabic texts are authoritative.

her as reporting, “I covered my head, put on my veil and tightened my waist wrapper” (*ja ‘altu dir ‘î fi ra ‘sî wa-khtamartu wa-taqanna ‘tu izârî*), words which are difficult to understand in Arabic. They might be better rendered, “I put my house dress over my head and covered up and wrapped myself in my waist wrapper.” She appears to have used her house dress (*dir* ‘) as a kind of hood and then wrapped herself from the waist down in the waist wrapper (*izâr*) in order to be completely covered. There is no word “veil” in the Arabic text; only two garments are in question, not three. “Covered up” probably refers only to her adjusting the house dress to cover her hair. The difficulty both the Arabic commentators and the translator have had in explaining what she did might lie in the fact that she was oddly dressed because of her hurry, which her short, clipped phrases are meant to convey. Nothing suggests she covered her face. Also, there is no indication that her dress here is an example of proper covering; rather, she may have fully wrapped up in order not to be recognized.<sup>12</sup>

It is possible, however, to see that the meaning of *khimâr* is wider than “veil” from certain other hadiths. A hadith in Muslim’s *Sahîh* uses the word *khimâr* for men’s attire when it narrates from Bilâl (RA) reports that the Prophet (SAAS) “wiped over the socks (*khuffayn*) and turban” (*khimâr*) when making *wudû’* on occasion.<sup>13</sup> As the explainer of this hadith, Imâm Nawawî, has stated, *khimâr* or “covering” here means ‘*imâmah* or “turban” because it covers the head.<sup>14</sup> It can be deduced from this that “covering the head” (*taghtiyat al-ra’s*) in medieval Arabic can mean covering the top of the head or the hair and not the face, as no one would claim that, because of Bilâl’s tradition here, men are required to cover their faces. Women’s headcoverings are also compared to men’s in a hadith in Abû Dâwûd which narrates from Umm Salamah (RA) that the Prophet (SAAS) came into her room when she was putting on her headcovering (*takhtamiru*, the same verb as in al-Bukhârî’s hadith above) and said to her, “Use one fold, not two.” This is explained by Abû Dâwûd himself as meaning “Do not fold it like the turban of a man. Do not double it up manifolds.”<sup>15</sup> If the way Umm Salamah had tied her headcovering looked like a man’s turban, it cannot have covered her face. Yet here the Prophet (SAAS) only instructs her to not wrap it with more than one turn. He does not admonish her to cover her face.

On the other hand, the root of *kh-m-r* also occurs in a hadith of ‘Â’ishah (RA) in Muslim, where the English translation has “I covered my head with my headdress.”<sup>16</sup>

12) Abû al-Husayn **Muslim** ibn al-Hajjâj al-Qushayrî, *Sahîh*, tr. by Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1990, Vol. II, pp. 461-462, hadith 2127 (K. al-janâ’iz, b. mâ yuqâlu ‘inda dukhûl al-qubûr wa-al-du‘â’ li-ahlihâ); Abû Zakariyyâ Yahyâ ibn Sharaf **al-Nawawî**, *Sahîh Muslim bi-sharh al-Nawawî*, Cairo: al-Matba‘ah al-Misriyyah wa-Maktabatuhâ, no date, Vol. VII, pp. 43-44. Siddiqi’s note 1305 on p. 462 misconstrues the Arabic text, because Gabriel was not annoyed that ‘Â’ishah had gone forth improperly dressed and thus refused to appear to her; rather, he summoned the Prophet (SAAS) alone because ‘Â’ishah had already put on her nightclothes to sleep, and Gabriel did not want to disturb her.

13) Muslim, I, 165, hadith 535 (K. al-tahârah, b. al-mash ‘alâ al-khuffayn wa-muqaddam al-ra’s). This hadith also occurs in the collections of al-Nasâ’î, al-Tirmidhî, Ibn Mâjah, and Ahmad. Wabwah **al-Zuhaylî**, *al-Fiqh al-islâmî wa-adillatuhu*, 3rd ed., Damascus: Dâr al-Fikr, 1409/1989, Vol. I, p. 341.

14) Nawawî, III, 174.

15) Abû Dâwûd, II, 462-463 (K. al-libâs, b. fî al-ikhtimâr); English translation, III, 1147-1148 (hadith 4103).

16) Muslim, IV, 1451, hadith 6673 (K. al-tawbah, b. hadîth al-ifk).

Unfortunately, this translation is wrong, for the Arabic original actually means, “I covered my face with my cloak” (*khammartu wajhî bi-jilbâbî*).<sup>17</sup> Now, this took place when ‘Ā’ishah saw the young Companion Safwân ibn al-Mu‘attil (RA) when she had gone back to look for her lost necklace and been left behind by the Muslim army, and the situation naturally alarmed her, so she reacted by properly covering herself up. But this action does not prove that the face is part of what must be covered generally, for ‘Ā’ishah was only being especially modest here because of the delicate situation she found herself in. However, the text does prove that the words derived from the root *kh-m-r*, while they sometimes do mean covering only the top of the head or the hair and not the face, may indeed also sometimes mean to cover the face. This ambiguity arises because words in any language normally have a considerable variety of meanings, and the word *khimâr* simply means “a covering,” which includes several kinds of coverings.

Another hadith relates how some women believers used to attend *salât al-fajr* “covered with their veiling sheets” (*mutalaffi ‘ât fî murûtihinna*). Here again, it is not specified that they covered their faces, though that might be deduced from the words “they would return to their homes unrecognized,”<sup>18</sup> which somewhat echoes the words of Qur’ân 33:59, where, however, “they may be recognized and not annoyed.” This is usually taken to mean that they may be recognized as Muslim women from their dress but not as particular individuals, which would harmonize the meanings of the verse and the hadith. Again, the fact that the women of al-Madînah wrapped up for *salât al-fajr* is not necessarily an indication that all women must do the same in all situations when they go out, especially as it describes their behavior rather than the Prophet’s command.

It is clear, however, that this last hadith and many others at least emphasize the importance of women covering their heads when they go out. Abû Dâwûd reports a hadith that on the revelation of Qur’ân 33:59, “the women of the Ansâr came out as if they had crows over their heads by wearing outer garments.”<sup>19</sup> This produces a picture of a black headcloth or outer cloak such as can be found in traditional dress in many Muslim countries.

There are, moreover, hadiths which specifically permit the uncovering of the face and hands. One of these is cited by Abû Dâwûd, who reports the Prophet as saying, “‘O Asmâ’, when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this,’ and he pointed to her face and hands.” Unfortunately, this is called a *mursal* tradition by Abû Dâwûd, which means that it is missing one of its links of transmission, but that does not necessarily mean that it is false.<sup>20</sup> Also, its existence indicates the practice of those who transmitted it, who include

17) Nawawî, XVII, 105. The same hadith occurs also in al-Bukhârî twice, and Khân’s translations there are better; he renders the exact same Arabic words as “I veiled my face with my head cover” and “I covered my face with my garment,” thus giving two different translations for the very same Arabic words. However, a *jilbâb* is not merely a “head cover,” and it can also be more specifically rendered than the vague word “garment.” Bukhârî, V, 320-321 (K. al-maghâzî, b. hadîth al-ifk), VI, 249-250 (K. al-tafsîr, b. law lâ idh sami ‘tumûhu ...).

18) Bukhârî, I, 225-226 (K. al-salah, b. fî kam tusallî al-mar’ah fî thiyâb). ‘Aynî, III, 329-331, reports that this hadith is found in all the six most accepted books of hadith.

19) Abû Dâwûd, II, 459 (K. al-libâs, b. fî qawl Allâh ta‘âlâ yudnîna ‘alayhinna min jalâbîbihinna); English translation, III, 1144 (hadith 4090).

20) Abû Dâwûd, II, 460 (K. al-libâs, b. fî mâ tubdî al-mar’ah min zînatihâ); English translation, III, 1144-

the noble and respected Qatâdah (d. 117/735), the Iraqi scholar.<sup>21</sup> Many other traditions with the same or a similar meaning are cited by al-Tabarî, who says that there is a consensus that the face and hands need not be covered.<sup>22</sup>

Also, it cannot be ignored that a large proportion of the ‘*ulamâ*’ of Islam in Muslim history have not required the veiling of the face and hands. A recent example of this position is the *fatwâ* of Shaykh Jâd al-Haqq ‘Alî Jâd al-Haqq (d. 1416/1996), the late *mufî* of Egypt and shaykh of al-Azhar issued in 1401/1981.<sup>23</sup> This is likewise the position of the Deobandi tradition of India and Pakistan, as represented by Shaykh al-Islâm Shabbîr Ahmad ‘Uthmânî (d. 1368/1949), writing in the 1350s/1930s.<sup>24</sup> This position is confirmed across the schools of law by Shaykh Wahbah al-Zuhaylî of Syria in his huge *fiqh* commentary, where he shows that the Hanafî and Mâlikî schools do not regard the face and hands as being private parts (‘*awrah*’) that require covering, while the Shâfi‘îs allow them to be uncovered if necessary even for work. Only the Hanbalîs exclude that, and even they allow it in certain dire necessities like medical treatment.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it is not permissible to insist that women must cover their faces and hands in addition to the rest of their bodies in order to be good Muslims. No person or group may deny the legitimacy of the uncovering of the woman’s face and hands and say that it is not part of Islam. Such denials, which are based only on the interpretation of texts, not on the texts’s obvious meanings, cannot be legitimately forced on the other Muslims who have other interpretations which are based on deep knowledge as well. It is not possible to reject as illegitimate a position that has the support of a majority of scholars. Except in matters of basic belief (‘*aqidah*’) where there must be agreement, anyone who insists that his way alone is right, that there is no other interpretation, and that anyone who disagrees is not a Muslim, instead distances himself from proper Muslim behavior by such insistence. Therefore, the properly-delimited minimum *hijâb* for the Muslim woman outside the house is to cover her body, other than her face and her hands, with modest

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1145 (hadith 4092). On p. 1145 in footnote 3523, the English translator Shaykh Ahmad Hasan comments “In modern times some scholars have prohibited to unveil the face out of precaution,” suggesting that covering the face was not the original practice.

21) Qatâdah b. Di‘âmah al-Sadûsî was an important early transmitter of tradition from al-Basrah. Al-Bukhârî frequently transmits from him, so that his trustworthiness is high. Ahmad ibn ‘Alî **Ibn Hajar** al-‘Asqalânî, *Tahdhîb al-tahdhîb*, Hyderabad: Dâ‘irat al-Ma‘ârif al-Nizâmiyyah, 1326, Vol. VIII, pp. 351-356. The transmitter Sa‘îd ibn Bashîr, who is also in the chain of transmitters, has been considered acceptable by many but was criticized as weak by the Hanbalîs. Ibn Hajar, IV, 8-10.

22) Tabarî, XVIII, 93-94.

23) *al-Fatâwâ al-islâmiyyah min Dâr al-Iftâ’ al-Misriyyah*, Cairo: Wizârat al-Awqâf and al-Majlis al-A‘lâ li-l-Shu‘ûn al-Islâmiyyah, 1403/1983, Vol. X, pp. 3542-3547 (*fatwâ* no. 1294).

24) Shabbîr Ahmad **Usmani**, *The Noble Qur’an: Tafseer-E-Usmani*, tr. by Mohammad Ashfaq Ahmad, New Delhi: Idara Isha‘at-e-Diniyat (P) Ltd., 1992, vol. II, p. 1571.

25) Zuhaylî, I, 584-594. However, later Mâlikî *fiqh*, while permitting the woman to uncover her face and hands before Muslims, did not permit it before non-Muslim men. Ahmad **al-Dardîr**, *al-Sharh al-saghîr*, with commentary of al-Sâwî, Cairo: Dâr al-Ma‘ârif, 1392, vol. I, p. 289; Muhammad ‘Arafah **al-Dusûqî**, *Hâshiyat al-Dusûqî ‘alâ al-sharh al-kabîr*, Cairo: ‘Isâ al-Bâbî al-Halabî, no date, vol. I, p. 214. See also Noah Ha Mim **Keller**, *The Reliance of the Traveller*, Dubai: Modern Printing Press, 1991, pp. 512-515 (m2.3-2.11), says a majority require face veiling outside the home in m2.3, but in m2.11 points out some situations in which even Shâfi‘îs acknowledge the legitimacy of uncovering the face and hands. The position of al-Shâfi‘î himself is that the face and hands are not ‘*awrah*’ and may be uncovered. Muhammad ibn Idrîs **al-Shâfi‘î**, *al-Umm*, Dâr al-Ma‘rifah, Vol. VIII, p. 264.

clothing that is not tight fitting and does not bring out or closely reveal her shape.

On the other hand, it is equally unacceptable to deny the veiling of the face for those who wish to carry it out. If a woman wishes to veil her face and her hands, she should not be reproached for it. Rather, one must remember that all of the schools of law are agreed that if the woman's unveiled appearance is likely to cause *fitnah*, meaning sexual temptation, from either her or from men, then she should veil completely; if her appearance is still likely to cause *fitnah* even if she is fully covered from head to toe, then she should not go out at all, unless it is absolutely necessary.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is not the case that the full veiling is never a part of Islam at all, as some might think. It was the position of a certain number of classical scholars, as I have said above. In fact, before the European invasion of the Muslim countries in the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Muslim women were usually fully covered when they went outside, if they could afford it.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, even the Hanafî scholar al-‘Aynî (d. 855/1451) stated that although women were permitted to go out to masjids to worship, “It is disliked (*yukrahu*) for all women, whether old or young, to go out to the masjids for salat in view of the widespread appearance of corruption and the general presence of disorder (*fitnah*).”<sup>28</sup> This position is also confirmed by the modern Hanafî scholar Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahîm Lajpûrî of India, who adds that if women go out, they should not try to dress attractively,<sup>29</sup> because the purpose of their attraction is not for public consumption. Were they to dress for the public, it would be a humiliation for them. The woman preserves her dignity by not feeling she has to compete with her sisters for male public attention. This is why in many Muslim countries Muslim women wear beautiful clothes underneath, but throw over themselves the enveloping black cape called a *jilbâb* which is mentioned in Qur’ân 33:59, as translated above.

Also, it needs to be remembered that even if women may go out without covering their faces and hands, it is not permissible for men to gaze at women other than their wives, nor should women gaze at men other than their husbands.<sup>30</sup> Rather, one should avert one’s gaze as much as possible.<sup>31</sup> The authority for this is the clear statement of Allâh in Qur’ân 24:30-31:

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! Allâh is aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest ....”

In this time, when we are trying to practice Islam in America as completely as possible, it is no doubt practical to take a moderate position on the issue of *hijâb*. After

26)Qurtubî, XII, 152; Ibn ‘Abidîn, I, 423; Zuhaylî, I, 585.

27)Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, Written in Egypt during the Years 1833-1835*, The Hague and London: East-West Publications, and Cairo: Livres de France, 1978, pp. 52-59, 161, 172, 175-180, 192-193.

28)‘Aynî, III, 334. However, a modern *fatwâ* of al-Azhar from the *muftî* Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majîd Salîm of 1360/1942 emphasizes the permissibility or even the preferability of women attending masjid if it improves their *dîn*, such as to hear preaching or instruction there. *al-Fatâwâ al-islâmiyyah*, I, 74-76 (*fatwâ* no. 17).

29)Abdu’r Rahîm Qadri Lajpuri, *Fatawa-e-Rahimiyyah*, tr. by M. F. Quraishi, Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 1992, Vol. I, pp. 25-32. So much for people who think that Hanafîs are always the liberals!

30)Qurtubî, XII, 151.

31)It is not always possible, because sometimes one will need to see what the other person is saying. This is especially true, for example, in a court.

all, throughout Muslim history, embracing Islam has always been a first step and more Islamization has come later. Because of the structure of modern society, which forces people to stay at home very little, Muslim women in America will need to go out. But this need has to be balanced with the fact that we are trying to be a community of repentant Muslims who need mental quiet in order to reconstruct our lives in the midst of a rather materialistic culture, and that an important part of that reconstruction is rebuilding a warm home environment. In this situation, it would be well for us to remember the purposes of the law, which are to get us closer to Allâh and to prevent moral degradation and deviance from the standards that Allâh has decreed. While the *hijâb* by itself is an outward manifestation of repentance and piety, we should be reminded by it to avoid the kind of behavior that leads us away from sincerity to Islam. If it takes a stricter adherence to and application of the law to keep ourselves on the path of sincerity to Allâh, so be it.

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