

***In the Name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful***

**I**n Islam, both men and women are told to dress and behave modestly:

***Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do.***  
[Qur'an 24:30]

***O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons; this will be more proper, that they may be recognized and not annoyed. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.***  
[Qur'an 33:59]

Neither sex should be allowed to exploit its own physical features for selfish gain, nor allow others to manipulate their sexuality. One of the most common questions today, asked by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is: "Why do Muslim women cover their heads?" The answer is very simple - Muslim women observe hijab because Allah has told them to do so:

The Qur'an teaches that men and women are equal, that individuals should not be judged according to gender, beauty, wealth, or privilege. The only thing that makes one person better than another is her or his level of God consciousness.

***"Allah hath promised to Believers - men and women - Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the Good Pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity."*** [Qur'an 9:72]

Nonetheless, people have a difficult time understanding why a woman that may be university-educated would cover herself. Women in the western world are taught from early childhood that their worth is proportional to their attractiveness. They grow up feeling compelled to pursue abstract notions of beauty, half realizing that such a pursuit is futile. When women reject this form of oppression, they face ridicule and contempt. Whether it is women who refuse to wear makeup or to shave their legs, or to expose their bodies, society, both men and women, have trouble dealing with them. In the Western world, the hijab has come to symbolize either forced silence or radical, unconscionable militancy. Actually, it's neither. It is simply a woman's assertion that judgment of her physical person is to play no role whatsoever in social interaction. Wearing the hijab has given her freedom from constant attention to her physical self. Because her appearance is not subjected to public scrutiny, her beauty, or perhaps lack of it, has been removed from the realm of what can legitimately be discussed. No one knows whether her hair looks as if she just stepped out of a salon, whether or not she can pinch an inch, or even if she has unsightly stretch marks. And because no one knows, no one cares. Feeling that one has to meet the impossible male standards of beauty is tiring and often humiliating. Most women in the western world spend their entire teen-age years trying to do this. They become borderline bulimic and spent a lot of money they don't have on potions and lotions in hopes of becoming the next Cindy Crawford. The definition of beauty is ever-changing; waifish is good, waifish is bad, athletic is good — sorry, athletic is bad. Narrow hips? Great. Narrow hips? Too bad.

Women are not going to achieve equality with the right to bear their breasts in public, as some people would like to have you believe. That would only make women party to society's own objectification. True equality will be had only in Islam, where women don't need to display themselves to get attention and don't need to defend their decision to keep their bodies to themselves.

Muslims believe that their sole purpose in life is the worship of God alone, according to His instructions, as revealed in the Holy Qur'an, and through the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

***"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss."***

[Qur'an 24:31]

As such, wearing the hijab is an act of obedience to God and, hence, forms the primary basis for women to wear the hijab.

Modest clothing and hijab are precautions to avoid social violations. The following verses of the Qur'an highlight that this is not limited to women only.

***"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands..."*** (Qur'an 24:30-31)

According to Jabir ibn Abdullah, when he asked the Prophet (peace be upon him), about a man's gaze falling inadvertently on a strange woman, the Prophet replied, ***"Turn your eyes away"*** (Muslim). In another tradition, the Prophet (peace be upon him) chided for looking again at a woman – he said, ***"the second glance is from Satan."***

So, contrary to popular belief, Muslim and non-Muslim, hijab is not worn for men; to keep their illicit desires in check – that is their own responsibility, as the above verse and Prophetic sayings show. Rather, Muslim women wear it for God and their own selves. Islam is a religion of moderation and of balance between extremes. Therefore, it does not expect women alone to uphold society's morality and uprightness. Rather, Islam asks men and women mutually to strive to create a healthy social environment where children may grow with positive, beautiful, constructive and practical values and concepts.

In fact, for many women hijab is a constant reminder that they should not have to design their lives and bodies for men. The concept of modesty and hijab in Islam is holistic, and encompasses both men and women. The ultimate goal is to maintain societal stability and to please God.

Since Muslim women are more conspicuous because of their appearance, it is easier for people to

associate them with the warped images they see in the print and broadcast media. Hence, stereotypes are perpetuated and Muslim women often seem "mysterious" to those not acquainted with the religious meanings of hijab. This aura of "mystery" cannot be removed until their lifestyles, beliefs and thought-systems are genuinely explored. And, this cannot be achieved until one is not afraid respectfully to approach Muslim women – or men for that matter. So, the next time you see a Muslim, stop and talk to them – you'll feel, God-Willing, as if you're entering a different world, the world of Islam: full of humility, piety, and of course, modesty!

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# UNVEILING THE TRUTH

"O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed..." (Qur'an 33:59).