

The obligation of Jilbaab

Allah says in the Qur'ān: **O Prophet! Say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the faithful to draw their JALABIB close around them; that is better that they will be recognized and not harmed. And God is ever Forgiving, Gentle.** (Surah al-Ahzab (33:59))

The word "jalabib" is the plural of "jilbaab". Clearly, this ayah states a command for Muslim women to wear a garment which Allah, the Most High has called "jilbaab". In case there is any confusion about how the Muslim sister should implement the above verse, the following hadith shows how the sahabiyat (female Companions) implemented the above verse when it was revealed:

Narrated Umm Salama, Umm al-Mu'minin: **When the verse, "That they should draw their jalabib close around them" was revealed, the women of Ansar came out as if they had crows over their heads by wearing jalabib.** (Sunan Abu Dawud Book 32 #4090)

Some of the women remained in seclusion and never went out if they did not own the jilbaab. Narrated Umm Atiyya: *We were ordered to bring out our menstruating women and veiled women to the religious gatherings and invocation of the Muslims on the two Eid festivals. These menstruating women were to keep away from the musalla. A woman asked, "O Messenger of Allah! What about one who does not have a jilbaab?.* He said, **"Let her borrow the jilbaab of her companion".** (Sahih).

If it were permissible for a sister to go outdoors without the jilbaab, why didn't the Prophet (salahu alaihi wa sallam) allow the women to do this? But instead, he told them that they must find the jilbaab to wear, even if they had to borrow one from a friend. The rule is clear: it is disobedience of Allah and His Messenger for a woman to go outdoors if she is not wearing the jilbaab. There is no other meaning from Surah al-Ahzab ayah 59 or from these hadiths.

What do the scholars say about the "jilbaab"?

There are two opinions among the scholars on this matter:

1) That it is a loose outergarment like a coat or cloak. Shaykh Muhammad Nasir ad-Din Albani supports this opinion. He describes the jilbaab as "an outergarment that is thick, not transparent, and covers the clothing under it and conceals the woman's shape".

2) That it is a sheet covering the entire body except for the eyes. Shaykh Abdul-Aziz ibn Baz, former Chief Mufti of Saudi Arabia support the second opinion - see *The Danger of Women at Work* - Shaykh Ibn Baz describes the jilbaab as "covering all of the body except the eyes.

Notice that neither of these opinions define jilbaab as "conservative clothing" or "loose clothing" nor does either opinion mention the shalwar kameez within the definition of jilbaab.

What is the proof that the jilbaab is an outergarment?

There is one thing that all the scholars are agreed on and that is that the jilbaab is an **outergarment**. Their only disagreement is in how much of the body the jilbaab is to cover. How did the scholars derive that the jilbaab is an outergarment? There are two ways to do this. First, they might just look up the definition of the word "jilbaab" in a dictionary of classical Arabic. Second, they might verify for themselves from the Quran that the jilbaab is an outergarment. We can look at both of these sources.

Evidence from the Arabic Language

The definitive dictionary of classical Arabic, Lisan al-Arab by ibn al-Mandhur, provides the following definition, "The jilbaab is the outergarment, mantle, or cloak. It is derived from the word tajalbaba, which means to clothe. Jilbaab is the outer sheet or covering which a woman wraps around her ON TOP OF HER GARMENTS to cover herself from head to toe. It hides her body completely" (Lisan al-Arab)

The dictionary Al-Qamus al-Muhit by Abu Tahir al-Fayruzabadi provides the definition, "The jilbaab...is that which CONCEALS THE CLOTHES like a cover"

The dictionary Al-Sihah by Jawhari provides the definition, "The jilbaab is the cover and some say it is a sheet. Jilbaab has been mentioned in the hadiths with the meaning of sheet, which the woman WRAPPED OVER HER CLOTHES"

The evidence from the Qur'an

The Qur'an provides an exemption for certain women in regard to jilbaab. It reads as follows:

And the elderly women, those who do not have hope of marriage, there is no fault on them that they lay aside (some of) their clothing as long as they are not making a display of their adornment. And that they refrain is better for them. And Allah is the Hearer, the Knower. Surah Nur (24:60)

Elderly women who have no hope of getting married again are allowed to "lay aside (some of) their clothing" - but they are restricted from making a display of their adornment. How can a woman lay aside any part of her clothing without making a display of her body?

The only possible answer is that she is laying aside an extra layer. When she takes off the extra layer, the layer of clothing that she is wearing under it will still cover all of her beauty that must be covered. This is the only way to understand this ayah.

So what is this "extra layer" that Muslim women are wearing? My dear sister, it is the jilbaab! The Muslim woman is commanded by the above verse that when she is around non-mahram men, she must wear an extra layer, an outergarment, over the clothes she is already wearing. This extra layer or outergarment is the jilbaab. The only exception to the rule regarding dress is that elderly women who do not have hope of marriage may leave off the jilbaab as long as they continue to wear other clothing that covers all of their bodies except the face and hands. Surah an-Nur ayah 60 above would not even make sense unless the jilbaab is an extra layer, an outergarment worn over the normal clothes. This is another reason why modest clothing is not enough.

What are the rules for the jilbaab?

The jilbaab should cover everything but the face and the hands and meet the following criteria:

- it is an outergarment; an extra layer; something worn over the normal clothing
- if the khimar (a head covering that come down to the thighs) is *not* worn, the jilbaab must cover from the top of the head down to the feet, but if the khimar is worn, the jilbaab only needs to cover from the shoulders down to the feet.

- this garment must cover down to the ground, covering the ankles and feet.
- this garment must be made of fabric that is thick so that it does not show what is beneath it, and it must be loose so that it does not reveal the contours of what is beneath it.
- it should not resemble the clothing of the disbelievers and it should not be attractive.