

The Concept of Hijab

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Jan 15, 2016

A question came up to me last weekend from a young lady after a lecture I gave on God's ultimate Grace and Understanding and how it is difficult to comprehend everything on how the divine Mercy extends to everything and everyone as God the Most Merciful says, "**My Mercy extends to all things...**" (7:156). No one has the right to play God and judge people. All of us are in need of His mercy and Grace and we should never make assumptions and judgments about people based on our limited knowledge and our narrow-minded views. There is a lot to learn in life and God works in many mysterious ways in our lives without us understanding. The young lady's question was about hijab and why it is exclusively for women not for men. Of course we have heard this question many times and many spoke about this topic. Rather than going through the details of the question and the answer, at the request of this very young lady I am sharing some of the points I mentioned in my answer that she said she never heard or read before although she said she did read a significant number of books and articles on the topic.

Hijab in Islam is more of a concept than just a simple scarf on a head. It is not exclusive to women only but it is also for men as well. The word hijab means protection, barrier, veil and modesty. It was meant to create an environment where different genders could interact with each other safely with respect and without seduction, enticement and abuse of each other's

natural sexual weaknesses. An environment where one's behavior is controlled in the same way the banning of alcohol and intoxicants is meant to ensure that people act in a normal way and do not endanger others and do not infringe in others' rights and privacy.

In addition to that, Hijab must be manifested and practiced at three levels:

(a) **Verbal Hijab:** the way we talk, control our tongues by avoiding lies and only speaking the truth and also by avoiding bad language and speaking decently and respectfully to others.

(b) **Physical Hijab:** Dressing up modestly for both genders as Allah calls it "*Libass al-Taqwa*" when He says: **[O Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover yourselves (screen your private parts) and as an adornment, and the raiment of righteousness, that is better. Such are among the signs/revelations of Allâh that they may remember.]** (7:26)

A dress that reflects God consciousness, social responsibility, decency and professionalism if it is a work environment. It does not have to be specifically Arabic or from the Middle East to be valid but it can be from any culture in the world including Japan, China, India and America. The fact that most of the Hijab styles that are sold in the market are from a specific area does not mean that's how Hijab should look like. Decency and modesty are global concepts and not only exclusively Arabic or South Asian.

(c) **Ethical Hijab:** The mannerism we display and high morals and ethics we display with etiquette (*adab*). Islam is all about *Akhlaq* (mannerism). Individuals who wear a physical hijab while using a bad language or act with a bad behavior display only a bad image of Islam. Hijab is not a mere dress or look but rather a combination of mannerism, professionalism, piety, self-

restraint and respect. Hijab comes with a big responsibility and speaks of Islam and what it stands for. However, we should all keep in mind that Muslims are also human beings and it is in our human nature not to be perfect. The fear of not being able to uphold the abovementioned values and principles should not hinder us from upholding to the Hijab concept at all levels. We cannot be perfect but we can try to achieve excellence in every walk of life.

Whether males or females, we are all required to maintain these values in spite of the fact that it is becoming more and more difficult to do that. We have to admit that these days Hijab has become a very difficult thing especially for women but with difficulty come great rewards.

May Allah enable us to balance between things in this life and may He make it easy for many sisters who wear the veil and have been the target of Islamophobia, slurs and bad looks in the streets. Let us educate people about what Hijab stands for instead of being looked at as a symbol of oppression and ill treatment of women.