

Khimar, a command not mere choice!

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Topic: Khimar, a command not mere choice!

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Subject: Khimar, a command not mere choice!

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Q. Assalamu alaikum,

I wanted to get clarification on the explanation Sh. Nuh gave on the evidence for hijab. This has been a topic of debate since the hijab ban discussion in France and I'm unclear now on where the requirement comes from.

Sh. Nuh writes:

'There is no other lexical sense in which the word khimar may be construed. The wording of the command, however, and let them drape their headcoverings over their bosoms, sometimes confuses nonspecialists in the sciences of the Qur'an, and in truth, interpreting the Qur'an does sometimes require in-depth knowledge of the historical circumstances in which the various verses were revealed. In this instance, the elliptical form of the divine command is because women at the time of the revelation wore their headcovers tied back behind their necks, as some village women still do in Muslim countries, leaving the front of the neck bare, as well as the opening (Ar. singular jayb, plural juyub, translated as "bosoms" in the above verse) at the top of the dress. The Islamic revelation confirmed the practice of covering the head, understood from the use of the word khimar in the verse, but also explained that the custom of the time was not sufficient and that women were henceforth to tie the headcover in front and let it drape down to conceal the throat and the dress's opening at the top.'

I'm a bit confused about how the wording used in these particular verses are considered to be a command. My earlier understanding of the evidence for hijab was that the specificity of the command came from the hadith in Abu Dawood about the Prophet (AS) pointing out to Asma that only the face and hands should be revealed. Can you please clarify what it is about the wording/grammar in the verses reference above that makes them the evidence for the fard status for hijab? I'm not clear how the word "khimar" in and of itself is used as evidence to say that hijab is required.

A.



In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah. May Allah's peace and blessings shower upon our beloved Messenger.

Dear Sister,

The obligation of hijab is evident when we examine the grammatical structure of this verse.

The verse reads:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا خُذُوا حِجَابًا وَلَا بَرِّجْنَ زِينَتَهُنَّ الَّذِي بَارَأَ مِنْكُمْ

وَمَا كُنَّ بِأَعْيُنِنَا قَبْلَ هَٰذَا ۚ وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَ أَسْمَاءَهُنَّ

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ فَلْيُحْسِنُوا إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكْثِرْنَ مِنَ قَوْلِ الْحَسَنِ

وَالْحَسَنُ مَا يَأْتِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْحَقُّ مَا يَأْتِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ

The translation:

"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..." [Abdullah Yusuf Ali]

The style of the language employed in the verse is very important. Allah Most High begins with the imperative form of the verb "qalla," which means to say or tell. Thus, Allah Most High is commanding the Prophet, peace be upon him, to tell the believing women to take a series of steps:

1. To guard their gaze, which is an important factor in modest interaction;
2. To guard their chastity or sexuality;
3. To conceal their adornment and natural beauty, which scholars have interpreted to mean the whole body except for the face, hands, and (for Hanafis) the feet.
4. And, finally, to emphasize the above point, Allah Ta'ala uses the phrase, "wa-lyadhribna bikhumrihinna ala juyubihinna." The verb "yadhribna" which means "to draw or pull over" appears as a feminine plural, thus going back to the original subject of the verse, the believing women. Most importantly, it starts off with the letter "lam," which is called "lam al-amr." Lam al-amr, when prefixed to a present tense verb, such as "yadhribna," makes the verb an imperative, that is, a command. **It is not understood as a recommendation, but a specific command directly from Allah Most High to His slaves among the believing women.**

Lam al-amr is used in other imperative contexts in the Qur'an. For example, Allah Ta'ala says, "Let the man of means spend according to his means: and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what God has given him..." [Al-Talaq, 65: 7]

The Arabic reads:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا خُذُوا حِجَابًا وَلَا بَرِّجْنَ زِينَتَهُنَّ

وَمَا كُنَّ بِأَعْيُنِنَا قَبْلَ هَٰذَا ۚ وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَ أَسْمَاءَهُنَّ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ فَلْيُحْسِنُوا إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكْثِرْنَ مِنَ قَوْلِ الْحَسَنِ

وَالْحَسَنُ مَا يَأْتِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْحَقُّ مَا يَأْتِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ

Here, Allah Most High is commanding men to spend according to their means in the context of child support for divorced wives.

This is understood to be a command, not a recommendation, since men are required to support their children. The lam of command, or lam al-amr, once again appears prefixed to the present verb, "yunfiq," meaning "to spend." [Qatr al-Nada, Dar al-Asmaa, 96]

To return to the verse in question, **the phrase "wa-lyadhribna bikhumrihinna ala juyubihinna," is a command for women to draw their veils over their bosoms.** Allah Most High did not say, "And tell the believing women to put on their veils," because implicit in the verse is the understanding that women were already expected to veil. However, unlike the practice at the time of leaving the scarf hanging down the back with the neck and cleavage exposed, **Muslim women were to take it one step further and draw the "khimar" or veil over the neck and cleavage area. Those who argue that the Qur'an says nothing about veiling are completely misreading this verse.** Not only does the Qur'anic text make it clear that women are expected to veil, it also dictates the extent of the veiling, i.e., covering the neck and cleavage.

This point is elucidated by reports from Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, and other women of the Sahaba, who immediately implemented this verse by tearing up pieces of cloth and covering their hair and bodies. Al-Bukhari recorded that Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, said: "May Allah have mercy on the women of the early emigrants. When Allah revealed the verse:

[قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا خُذُوا حِجَابًا وَلَا بَرِّجْنَ زِينَتَهُنَّ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ فَلْيُحْسِنُوا إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكْثِرْنَ مِنَ قَوْلِ الْحَسَنِ ۚ وَالْحَسَنُ مَا يَأْتِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْحَقُّ مَا يَأْتِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ]

(and to draw their veils over their bosoms), they tore their aprons and veiled themselves [made khimars] with them." [Tafsir Ibn Kathir]

The actions of the Sahaba, may Allah be pleased with them all, did not indicate that hijab was optional. I find it interesting that hijab was not legislated in stages, as opposed to the ban on intoxicants. When the verses in Surat al-Nur were revealed, the female Sahaba immediately covered themselves. Would that we had a fraction of their iman!

And Allah knows best.

Umm Salah (Zaynab Ansari)

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