

Covering — the limits of dress

What must be covered, in front of whom, and the three qualities that make a covering actually cover.



★ Clothing is a favour

وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ

“We sent down clothing to conceal your private parts, and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness — that is best.”

Qur'an 7:26

★ The gaze comes first

Men are addressed before women: lower the gaze, guard the private parts. Dress is the second half of a modesty that starts in the eyes.

Qur'an 24:30-31

★ The khimar over the chest

وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ

“And let them draw their headcovers over their chests” — the covering of the head brought down over the neck and the opening of the dress.

Qur'an 24:31

★ The jilbab outside

“Tell your wives, your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves their outer garments.”

Qur'an 33:59

★ A man's ‘aurah

From the navel to the knee, in front of everyone. In prayer, the shoulders are covered as well.

Sahih al-Bukhari 359 · Sunan at-Tirmidhi, Kitab al-Adab · hasan

★ A woman's ‘aurah

Before men who are not mahram: the whole body. The majority, Shafi‘is among them, except the face and the hands.

Qur'an 24:31 · an-Nawawi, al-Majmu‘

★ Before mahram, and in prayer

Before mahram and other Muslim women the limits are easier. In prayer she covers all but the face and the hands.

Qur'an 24:31 · an-Nawawi, al-Majmu‘

★ What makes a covering cover

Thick enough not to show through, loose enough not to draw the shape, and not an imitation of the dress of the other sex.

Sahih al-Bukhari 5885 · Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Libas

★ For men: silk, gold, the hem

“Whoever wears silk in this world will not wear it in the Hereafter.” Gold likewise. And no garment trailing below the ankle out of pride.

Sahih al-Bukhari 5832 · 5787