

# What is the 'Hijab'?

Hijab is referred to by various names, including 'veil' or 'headscarf'. There are various styles of hijab that are also referred to by different names (such as niqab, chador, etc.). In many cases, the wearing of a headscarf is often accompanied by the wearing of loose-fitting, non-revealing clothing, also referred to as hijab. While hijab is commonly associated with women, Muslim men also sometimes wear a head covering as a means of showing modesty. Additionally, Christian and Jewish women in some traditions wear a headscarf as a cultural practice or commitment to modesty or piety, though it is not called 'hijab' in these traditions.



Photo: Cyclones, Todd Drake: *Esse Quam Videri Muslim Self Portraits*

# Why do Women wear Hijab?

Muslim women choose to wear the hijab or other coverings for a variety of reasons. Some women wear the hijab because they believe that God has instructed women to wear it as a sign of modesty. For these women, wearing hijab is a personal choice that is made after puberty and is intended to reflect their personal devotion to God.

While some Muslim women do not perceive the hijab to be obligatory to their faith, other Muslim women wear the hijab as a means of visibly expressing their Muslim identity. In the United States, especially since 9/11, the hijab is perceived to be synonymous with Islam. Some Muslim women choose to wear the hijab to declare their Islamic identity and provide witness of their faith.

While most Muslim women wear the hijab for religious reasons, there are other Arab or Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab as an expression of their cultural identity. By wearing the hijab, Muslim women hope to communicate their political and social association with their country of origin.



Photo: *Haute Hijab*, January 2013

Like the women who choose to wear the hijab, those who choose not to wear the hijab do so for a variety of reasons. Some Muslim women believe that although the principles of modesty are clearly outlined in the Qu'ran, they perceive the wearing of the headscarf as a cultural interpretation of these scriptures. These women sometimes believe that the values shown by the wearing of the headscarf can be achieved in other ways. They might choose to focus on their internal and spiritual relationship with God and their actions.

While some women might choose not to wear the hijab, most Muslim women agree that it is a woman's choice whether or not she wears the hijab.

Source:

Amer, Sahar. *What is the Hijab and Why do Women Wear it?* (n.d.). Retrieved September 1, 2015 from <http://arabsinamerica.unc.edu/identity/veiling/>.

# Different Veiling Styles

Veiling can refer to both the head covering traditionally worn by some Muslim women and modest Islamic styles of dress in general. The 'hijab' has different legal and cultural statuses in various countries. In addition, there are many different ways to style the hijab, scarf, or veiling depending on the country or region of the world. Read below for information about a few different styles:

Hijab



The hijab refers to both the head-covering traditionally worn by some Muslim women and modest Islamic styles of dress in general. The word 'hijab' is often associated with the style most commonly worn in the West; a square scarf that covers the head and neck but leaves the face clear.

Niqab



The niqab is a veil for the face that covers the nose and mouth, but leaves the area around the eyes clear. However, it may be worn with a separate eye veil. It is worn with an accompanying headscarf.

Burka



The burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover their bodies when in public. The burqa covers the entire face and body, leaving a small mesh screen through which the woman can see through.

Al-Amira



Al-Amira or "Princess" Hijab is a two-piece veil. It consists of a close fitting cap, usually made from cotton or polyester, and an accompanying tube-like scarf.

Shayla



The shayla is a long, rectangular scarf popular in the Gulf region. It is wrapped around the head and tucked or pinned in place at the shoulders.

Khimar



The khimar is a long, cape-like scarf that is wrapped around the head and hangs down to just above the waist. It covers the hair, neck and shoulders completely, but leaves the face clear.

Chador



The chador is a long cloak that covers a woman's entire body. Like the khimar, the chador wraps around the head, but instead of hanging just to the middle of back, the chador drapes to a woman's feet.

#### Sources:

Amer, Sahar. *What are the various kinds of hijab?* (n.d.). Retrieved September 1, 2015 from <http://arabsinamerica.unc.edu/identity/veiling/>.

In graphics: Muslim Veils. (No author listed). (n.d.). BBC News. Retrieved September 6, 2015 from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/pop\\_ups/05/europe\\_muslim\\_veils/html/2.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/05/europe_muslim_veils/html/2.stm).



# Variations of the Burqa

Women in the United Arab Emirates or other Gulf countries wear the burqa in various and interesting ways, different from the Afghani version. Unlike the Afghan burqa, a garment which covers a woman from head-to-toe, the Gulf burqa, one the oldest items of dress in the region, only partially covers a women's forehead and upper lip in a horizontal "H" shape. Below shows an illustration of the different types of masks that can be worn in this variation of the burqa.



These days, the wearing of a burqa is a dying practice, usually found among the older generation. Depending on the country, the mask can be as intricate or as simple as one would like.

Gulf Burqa



Afghan Burqa



Photos (left): Know Your Veils, *Huffington Post* | (right): Naeem Azizian, *The Lovely Planet*

#### Sources:

Al Hameli, Asmaa. History Project: the burqa. (December 2014). The National UAE. Retrieved September 17, 2015 from: <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/history-project/20141201/history-project-the-burqa>

Neschetna, Maria. Burqa: Styles and Fashions. Digital. (2014). Retrieved September 6, 2015 from <http://neschetna.com/project/burqa/>.



# Muslim Veiling around the World

There are hundreds of ways to tie a head scarf. Hijab does not have a *strict* style in each country; however the way it is worn is largely influenced by a country's culture(s). Below is an infographic of the various styles of the headscarf that are common in a particular country.



Photo: Islamic Headscarf 101, *Perfectly Modest*