

Simona

Simona Afifi, 44, Program Manager & University Instructor, Egyptian

“I was born and raised in Egypt, and I finished my degree over there. I came to the United States in 2000. At that time, I was a fresh graduate looking for a job, and I had always been certain to be in so much control. I lost my dad when I was very young, so I was always sure to be in control of my education, my finances, everything. At that time, religion was not a focus in my life at all; as a teenager, of course, I had my doubts, my questions like everybody else. I even had anger sometimes, but in my early 20s, when I came to America, I actually began to have a clearer mind – less stress. I started to think about the religion and read more Qur’an, and the religion clicked with me, like, 'Okay, there’s God.' I didn't think of the hijab or anything until almost seven, eight years later. I was around 27 years old.

Islam was never the focus, until I gave birth to my first boy. At that point, I learned that I’m not in control of anything. Suddenly, I felt curious, but also that the answer was clear: I got saved so many times. I'm not in control. Somebody else was driving. I began to put on the hijab as a reminder of my religion and to know more about it. When I started to wear it, I started to love it. I wanted a daily reminder of my spirituality, and to clarify my identity: 'Look I’m a Muslim woman who’s very proud and successful in my career. I'm more than [just] a hijabi.'

Wearing the hijab is the opposite of complicated. By wearing it, I feel closer to Allah this way. The hijab is simple; it doesn’t call for a complex calling. I feel at peace wearing it. It’s peaceful, that’s all. That’s the only reason I’m willing to wear it: no great wisdom, no logic, nothing. But, it didn’t start like that; it went through a few rounds.

I think we wear the hijab because we’re meant to be invisible, not to be on the spot. We’re representing the religion, because if we make a mistake, we feel that it puts us on the spot all the time inside of our minds. Sometimes it is inside our mind. I’ll feel like everybody's looking, [but in reality], nobody's looking. It's okay. I'm lucky to be living in California, where there is a lot of diversity, a lot of open minds for sure. I haven’t had a tough experience, but I like to also [approach everything positively]. Maybe if somebody is being mean, that person is just having a tough day. I’ll always try to smile, be kind to them. Maybe it'll make it easier, [both for them and for me], because stereotyping is real. If they get out of this mentality and learn about other cultures and traditions, I'm sure this could change.

As a hijabi, [I can do it all]. I wish people knew that we take it off with relatives and friends, that we can still go to the beach and swim, that we exercise, hike. On a more serious note, I wish that people were more open to learning and accepting different perspectives. It's great to have more of an open mind and to be tolerant and accepting of different points of views, different sets of beliefs than [what we’re used to].”