

In the Light of
Sūrah an-Nūr



Compiled by Umm Muhammad

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INTRODUCTION

Sūrah an-Nūr was named for the divine light (*nūr*) reflected in this revelation from Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) and for the enlightening instruction He granted believers in order to purify them from sin and to uplift and strengthen their societies. It was revealed in Madīnah during the sixth year following the *hijrah* and contains sixty-four verses.

Among the principal goals of Islam is the establishment of a high moral standard to serve as a fortress, protecting not only individual Muslims but the entire community. This *sūrah* treats what continues to be the most urgent social problem faced by mankind: the threat to the family and to family life upon which a healthy society is built.

As cultivators of each new generation, women, in particular, have been encouraged to study it with care. `Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb wrote to the people of Kūfah, telling them, "Teach your women *Sūrah an-Nūr*." Within it are clear instructions regarding the social manners to which a believer must adhere in both his public and private life – those such as avoiding gossip and negative assumptions, taking permission before entering, limiting one's gaze, dressing in the proper manner, etc., which, in combination, insure security and protection of the Muslim home and general environment.

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

"Allāh is the patron of those who have believed. He brings them out from darknesses into the light."¹

Legislation is directed specifically to believers, and they are instructed to begin with themselves as an example to all people. That is because only a believer trusting in the wisdom of Allāh will submit willingly to the necessary restrictions, and because the Islamic community is most worthy in Allāh's sight of enjoying the resulting earthly benefits, even before those of the Hereafter. A true believer carries and reflects the light of Allāh in his manners and morals. But ***"he to whom Allāh has not given light – for him there is no light."***²

The *sūrah* mentions some of the penalties which Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*), in His mercy toward society as a whole, has ordered for certain individuals who constitute a threat to that society and to its well-being, in particular, fornicators and slanderers, thus emphasizing the gravity of such crimes. It then outlines the means of avoiding such sins altogether.

The scheming of hypocrites in Madīnah is exposed in several portions of the *sūrah* and utilized to impart valuable lessons to Muslims in every age. The concluding verses warn of the consequences of dissent and disobedience to

¹*Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:257. The light of truth is one, while the darknesses of disbelief, doubt and error are many.

²*Sūrah an-Nūr*, 24:40.

Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) and remind man of his Creator's complete and perfect knowledge of all things, and of the return to Him, when every soul will be confronted with a precise account of its deeds and intentions.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

SŪRAH AN-NŪR

... Āyah 1 ...

سُورَةٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهَا وَفَرَضْنَاهَا وَأَنْزَلْنَا فِيهَا آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ لَّعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١﴾

[This is] a sūrah which We have sent down and made obligatory and revealed therein verses of clear evidence that perhaps you will remember.

Key Words¹

A high degree of excellence or superiority, also a separate entity. Hence, it signifies a chapter of the Qur'ān to which these descriptions apply.	سُورَةٌ
Let down or sent down. When applied to the Qur'ān, it may also mean "revealed."	أَنْزَلَ
Imposed or made obligatory.	فَرَضَ
A sign, or verse of the Qur'ān.	آيَةٌ (آيَات. pl.)
A clarification, evidence or proof.	بَيِّنَةٌ (بَيِّنَات. pl.)
To remember or be reminded.	تَذَكَّرَ

Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*) begins the *sūrah* with an introductory verse declaring that He, and none other, has revealed it and that He has imposed it with all it contains upon every believing Muslim. Obviously, the same can be said for the entire Qur'ān; however, this particular emphasis² is due to the urgency of the *sūrah's* contents, especially its social reforms, which every believer is now under obligation to implement. A reminder that the forthcoming legislation is from the Lord of the worlds, to whom all will return for judgement and account, is sufficient to alert the believer for reception. No other *sūrah* opens in this way.

The word "*faradhnāhā*" ("We have made it obligatory") was explained by

¹For the purpose of simplification Arabic nouns are listed in the indefinite singular form, while verbs appear in the third person past tense, as in dictionaries. Both are divested of pronouns and prepositions attached to them in the original text. Once a word has been listed, it will not appear again under a subsequent verse.

²The pronoun "We" (اِنَّا), denoting Allah's grandeur and majesty, has been repeated in the Arabic text three times.

Mujāhid³ as meaning: "We have made clear therein permission and prohibition, injunction and interdiction, as well as the prescribed legal punishments." Al-Imām al-Bukhārī said, "Whoever recites '*faradh^hnāhā*' should say [to himself], 'made it obligatory upon you and upon those after you.'" Thus, the directives in this *sūrah* are not suggestions or advice that one might accept or reject but are commandments to be obeyed by every Muslim, with ensuing negative consequences for those who fail to do so.

Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) has revealed His legislation in the form of distinct verses (*āyyāt bayyināt*) understandable to all, serving as clear evidence of His will. It is expected that believers will not only heed the *sūrah*'s commands initially but will continue to be reminded by its verses for all time to come.

³A *tābi`ee* scholar and student of Ibn `Abbās.

... Ayah 2 ...

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُم بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ
وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

The female and male fornicator – lash each one of them a hundred lashes, and let not pity for them take you within the religion [i.e., law] of Allāh, if you should believe in Allāh and the Last Day. And let a group of the believers witness their punishment.

Key Words

A person guilty of <i>zinā</i> (زِنَا), unlawful sexual intercourse. Unless specified by context, the term can apply to either an unmarried fornicator or a married adulterer.	زَانِي (m.) زَانِيَةٌ (f.)
To lash or whip.	جَلَدَ، يَجْلِدُ
Compassion, pity, mercy.	رَأْفَةٌ
To believe, have faith.	آمَنَ، يُؤْمِنُ
Day, a period of night and day. <i>Al-yawm al-ākhir</i> : the Last Day, i.e., Day of Resurrection.	يَوْمٌ
Punishment, penalty, infliction, torment.	عَذَابٌ
Group, faction, party.	طَائِفَةٌ
A believer in Islam.	مُؤْمِنٌ (مُؤْمِنُونَ pl.)

Background Information

The Arabic term *zinā* (unlawful sexual intercourse) includes both fornication and adultery, although the latter, being a graver offense, merits a more severe penalty by law. This is due to the fact that the adulterer has access to a lawful (*ḥalāl*) means of gratification within marriage, yet he turns to the unlawful (*ḥarām*), which Allāh declared to be an evil crime. *Zinā* of both types had been considered sinful by religions and many social systems prior to the prophethood of Muḥammad (ﷺ).⁴ All cultures have recognized marriage and the family unit as a vital element in a strong and stable social structure. *Zinā*, on the other hand, wherein individuals put selfish desires above social and moral commitments, weakens and undermines communities and nations.

⁴The pre-Islamic Arabs tended to avoid the stigma attached to temporary relationships by labeling them "marriages." The Prophet (ﷺ) abolished all such practices for Muslims, endorsing only the form of marriage known today.

In *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, a Makkan revelation, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*) prohibited *zinā* and strongly condemned it, saying:

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزِّنَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

"And do not approach zinā. Indeed, it has ever been an immorality and an evil way."⁵

"Approach" refers to practices or situations that could lead one into the sin; therefore, this command is inclusive of any preliminaries as well as the act itself. Later, in Madīnah where the believers had a community of their own, Allāh first revealed temporary legislation (*Sūrah an-Nisā'*, 4:15-16) and finally, in this verse (24:2), declared *zinā* a criminal offense punishable by the state.

The severity of the crime and degree to which it is detested by Allāh is reflected in its harsh legal penalty. Yet, strict conditions make convictions most unlikely, and practically speaking, the prescribed punishment serves mainly as a deterrent to would-be offenders and is rarely carried out. Such legislation, moreover, is only one aspect of a complete system which, in addition to providing prohibitive obstacles in the path of unlawful relationships, strongly encourages and facilitates lawful marriage. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*) did not intend that people commit immoralities and then be punished. Rather, His legislation is meant to prevent the occurrence of crimes at the outset, to purify society and protect its members from evil consequences in this world and the next. To this end the Qur'ān employs a specific methodology:

- 1) It instills in man a sense of responsibility, accountability and fear of Allāh, as well as love for Him and a strong desire to please Him and earn His approval through obedience to Him.
- 2) Muslims are encouraged to marry and assist one another in marrying. A man may take up to four wives as long as he treats them with justice. In cases of confirmed incompatibility or dissatisfaction a wife, as well as a husband, may request separation, enabling each to then seek a more harmonious union.
- 3) The believer, whether married or unmarried, is instructed as to proper dress and behavior at all times as a preventive measure. Privacy is to be respected and compromising situations avoided as a matter of obedience to Allāh.
- 4) Finally, *zinā* is declared a crime whose punishment is severe enough to deter any who might still consider it. There is the additional psychological deterrent of shame, as the penalty is executed publicly. Any due punishment must be carried out only by the Islamic state and not by individuals or groups.
- 5) Conviction is subject to strict conditions which are most difficult to fulfill. It depends upon one of two things:

⁵ *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:32.

a) A repeated and persistent confession by the offender, who must also be proved to be of age, mentally sound, aware of the meaning of *zinā*, aware of the divine prohibition, and must have committed the act knowingly of his own free will. The slightest doubt about any of these matters will prevent acceptance of the confession. In addition, a married adulterer must be a free person (not a slave) who is legally bound in a consummated marriage, and there must be no physical defect in the spouse preventing a normal relationship. Furthermore, people are not encouraged to confess their sins. Rather, they should repent privately and become righteous members of the community thereafter, thus obtaining Allāh's forgiveness and averting disgrace from themselves and their families.

b) In the absence of confession there can be no conviction unless four reliable, male Muslim witnesses known for honesty and righteous conduct testify that they actually saw the act taking place. It is insufficient that the couple was seen together, even if undressed and in an embrace. Witnesses must be unanimous about the time, place and other details; otherwise, the case will be rejected. As an additional precaution, anyone who makes such an accusation outside the framework of these conditions is himself subject to punishment as stated in verse number four.

Thus, it is clear that conviction and subsequent punishment is highly unlikely, and moreover, that any who would commit indecent acts of rebellion against Allāh publicly before witnesses in a Muslim state cannot but be regarded as a contamination and peril to society worthy of elimination.

* * * * *

This particular verse (no. 2) deals with the ruling for convicted unmarried fornicators and not for married adulterers. Punishment of the latter is outlined in the *sunnah*, where the Prophet (ﷺ) upheld legislation already revealed by Allāh in the Torah.⁶ The penalty mentioned in this verse is one hundred lashes for

⁶According to narrations by al-Bukhāri and Muslim, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) was asked by some of the Jews of Madinah to rule in the case of a man and woman who had committed adultery. He (ﷺ) posed the question to them, "What do you find about it in the Torah?" When the Torah was brought and read, the reader covered a portion of it with his hand. 'Abdullāh bin Salām (formerly a Jew himself) ordered him to remove his hand, and there was the mandate for stoning. So the Prophet (ﷺ) had them stoned. In another narration by Muslim, Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) pressed one of the Jewish scholars to speak the truth about the matter, and he said, "We find the punishment for it in our scripture: stoning to death. However, when it became common among our nobles, we would excuse the noble when apprehended but carry it out on the humble person. So we said, 'Let us decide on something that can be carried out on both.' Then we agreed to blackening the face and whipping." Thereupon, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "O Allāh, I will be the first to reinstate Your command, as they have annulled it." 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb related that a "verse of stoning" was also revealed in the Qur'ān and that they used to recite it, but later its recitation was abrogated while the ruling remained. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.)

both the male and female fornicator. A previous revelation in *Sūrah an-Nisā'* had ordered a temporary penalty which was to be abrogated by this one within a short period:

وَالَّتِي يَأْتِيَنَّ الْفَاحِشَةَ مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ فَاسْتَشْهِدُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنْكُمْ ۖ فَإِنْ شَهِدُوا
فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ فِي الْبُيُوتِ حَتَّى يَتَوَفَّيَهُنَّ الْمَوْتُ أَوْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلًا

"Those who commit immorality [i.e., prostitution] of your women – bring against them four witnesses from among you. And if they testify, confine them to houses until death takes them or Allāh ordains for them a way."⁷

Then, when the verses of *Sūrah an-Nūr* were revealed, the Prophet (ﷺ) announced, "Take from me, take from me! Allāh has ordained for them a way. The virgin man and woman: a hundred lashes and exile for a year. And the married man and woman: a hundred lashes and stoning."⁸

Exile has been traditionally left to the discretion of the judge and has not been imposed upon a lone woman. Imprisonment is considered as exile by some jurists. Evidence of the legality of exile is found in the following narration: Two bedouins came to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), and one said, "My son was working for this man and committed *zinā* with his wife. I ransomed my son from him with one hundred sheep and a slave-girl, but I asked those of knowledge and they informed me that my son should endure a hundred lashes and a year's exile and the wife of this man should be stoned." The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, "By the One in whose hand is my soul, I will judge between you by the Book of Allāh, the Exalted: The slave-girl and sheep shall be returned to you, and for your son is a hundred lashes and exile of a year. Go to this man's wife, and if she confesses, stone her."⁹

The word "*fajlidū*" itself defines the nature of the lashing. It limits affliction to the skin (*jild*), excluding deep wounds that could cause prolonged pain or become infected. Other stipulations based upon the *sunnah* have been cited by scholars:

Execution by stoning was ordered by the Prophet (ﷺ) for a man (Mā'iz al-Aslamī) and a woman (al-Ghamidiyyah) at their insistence of guilt and fervent desire to purify themselves, although he tried to dissuade both from confession. Another woman who confessed upon questioning was also stoned (see narration p. 8). These isolated cases are sufficient to establish the *sunnah*. The four rightly-guided caliphs and all Muslim jurists since have confirmed and upheld this ruling.

⁷Sūrah an-Nisā', 4:15.

⁸Narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim. The Prophet (ﷺ) did not have anyone lashed before stoning, and his practice is regarded as stronger evidence of the *sunnah*.

⁹Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The woman confessed and was stoned to death as a convicted adulteress but was not lashed beforehand.

- * The entire body is subject to lashing except the head and private parts, which must be avoided.
- * The lashes should be of medium intensity, neither too harsh nor too mild, i.e., painful but not harmful.
- * A man is made to stand and a woman to sit. The woman is to be completely covered in clothing of a kind that will not come loose and expose her body during the punishment.
- * The lashing may not be done in periods of severe heat or severe cold during the day or night.
- * Those officials who execute punishment should be pious and knowledgeable Muslims, not rude and uneducated people. They must be employees of an Islamic state.

At the same time, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) warns rulers, judges and other officials against changing or reducing the prescribed penalty, which would lessen its deterrent effect. Ibn Katheer pointed out that Allāh has not prohibited the natural pity or sadness people might feel at the plight of a convict – only that sympathy should not move anyone to tamper with what Allāh has ordained. ***"If you should believe in Allāh and the Last Day"*** shows that any who would think to alter Allāh's law cannot be considered true believers. The same applies generally to all divine legislation as well as to the ruling mentioned in this verse. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A *ḥadd* punishment carried out in the land is better for its people than a rainfall of forty mornings."¹⁰ The words ***"in the religion of Allāh"*** point out that the religion, Islam, includes submission to all divine legislation and is not confined only to rites of worship.

The prescribed penalty cannot be avoided once there is a conviction before the legal authority in an Islamic state. Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) advised, "Avert infliction of *ḥadd* punishments among yourselves, for whatever is made known to me becomes obligatory."¹¹ Thus, guilty persons are encouraged to turn back to Allāh in sincere repentance, and Muslims with knowledge of their sin should encourage them to do so rather than exposing themselves to shame and punishment.

A deterrent possibly more effective than physical pain is the disgrace and humiliation caused by publicity. This particular legislation concerning fornication is accompanied by an order that the punishment be witnessed by some of the believers in the community, making it an experience not readily forgotten. Any Muslim whose faith is insufficient to prevent him from

¹⁰ Ibn Mājah, an-Nasā'i and Ibn Ḥibbān – *ṣaḥeeḥ*. *Ḥadd* is a punishment which is stipulated in the Qur'ān. It serves to purify the offender and to warn society by making an example of him to others.

¹¹ Abu Dāwūd, an-Nasā'i and al-Ḥākim – *ḥasan*. Sayyid Quṭb observed that punishment is more compassionate than what awaits a community which allows zinā to spread.

immorality will observe its immediate consequence in a society intolerant of defiance and disobedience to Allāh. In the days when Allāh's law was enforced systematically and justly throughout the Muslim *ummah*, the crimes of theft, murder and *zinā* were extremely rare occurrences.

... Ayah 3 ...

الزَّانِي لَا يَنْكِحُ إِلَّا زَانِيَةً أَوْ مُشْرِكَةً وَالزَّانِيَةُ لَا يَنْكِحُهَا إِلَّا زَانٍ أَوْ مُشْرِكٌ وَحُرِّمَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

The fornicator does not marry except a [female] fornicator or polytheist, and none marries her except a fornicator [or adulterer] or a polytheist. And that has been made unlawful to the believers.

Key Words

To marry or contract a marriage.	نَكَحَ، يَنْكِحُ
A polytheist, or one who associates another being with Allāh in some aspect of divinity.	مُشْرِكٌ (m.) مُشْرِكَةٌ (f.)
To prohibit, make unlawful.	حَرَّمَ (passive: حُرِّمَ)

The rulings revealed in this verse further emphasize that *zinā* can have no place among Muslims and that those who have not repented and given up its practice must be ostracized and excluded from society. It begins with the statement that anyone who has been convicted of *zinā* or admits to it (whether married or unmarried) is not worthy to be the spouse of a believing Muslim, nor is a polytheist, who does not recognize that legislation is the right of Allāh alone or accept His restrictions.¹² According to most scholars, the wording also conveys an injunction: a person who commits *zinā* is not to marry except one of his own kind, or else a polytheist, but not a believer. The final portion of the verse confirms the prohibition, stating clearly that believers are forbidden from *zinā* as well as marriage to those who practice it. The word "*dhālika*" ("that") can refer to both of these. Other verses of the Qur'ān which describe conditions of lawful marriage specify that men and women should enter it being "chaste, neither of those who commit unlawful intercourse randomly, nor of those who take lovers."¹³ Further evidence comes from the following narrations:

- 1) A woman called Umm Mahzūl used to enter illicit relationships stipulating that she would take on financial responsibility for her guest. A man among the Prophet's companions wished to marry her. Then Allāh revealed this verse.¹⁴
- 2) Marthad bin Abī Marthad was a companion who used to help Muslim prisoners escape from their captors in Makkah and then take them to

¹²Permission for Muslim men to marry from the chaste among Christian or Jewish woman (see 5:5) may be due to the fact that these do, in some way, acknowledge divine teachings from their own scriptures, such as the "Ten Commandments." A non-Muslim man, however, may never be given authority over a Muslim woman through marriage, as stated in 60:10.

¹³See 4:24-25 and 5:5.

¹⁴Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i.

Madīnah. There was a woman named `Anāq among the prostitutes of Makkah who had once been a friend of his. He related, "I had promised a man from the Makkan captives that I would take him, so I came and hid in the shadow of a wall on a moonlit night. `Anāq approached and saw a dark form in the shadow below the wall, and when she came near me, she recognized me. She said, 'Marthad?' I said, 'Marthad.' She said, 'Welcome and [we are your] family! Come and spend the night with us tonight.' I said, '`Anāq, Allāh has prohibited *zinā*.' So she shouted, 'O people of the camp! This man is [here] to take your prisoners!' Eight of them chased me and I entered a garden, and finding a cave-like hole, went inside. They came so close that they were standing near my head. They urinated and some of it came on my head, but Allāh prevented them from seeing me. Then they turned back, and I returned to my prisoner and carried him – and he was very heavy – until I arrived at some shrubbery. I untied his ropes and supported him, while he assisted me until I brought him to Madīnah. Then I went to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) and said, 'O Messenger of Allāh, shall I marry `Anāq?' I asked twice, but he did not reply until Allāh revealed the verse ending with '***And that has been made unlawful to the believers.***' Then he said, 'O Marthad, do not marry her.'"

- 3) Al-Imām Aḥmad narrated an authentic *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "There are three to whom Allāh has forbidden Paradise: one addicted to intoxicants, one disobedient to his parents, and one who allows immorality in his wife."
- 4) When an unmarried couple admitted to fornication, Abū Bakr and `Umar ruled that after enduring the prescribed hundred lashes, they were to be married to one another and then exiled for a year.

A principal of *fiqh* states that the unlawful does not make the lawful unlawful. Hence, a majority of scholars have conceded that if a marriage between a Muslim believer and a fornicator should be contracted in spite of the prohibition (perhaps out of unawareness of the latter's status), it would not be invalid, although the negative aspects of such a union are obvious.

On the other hand, once someone has repented and corrected himself, he may no longer be regarded as a fornicator, can marry a Muslim, and no reference should be made to the previous sin. Ibn Jarir at-Ṭabarī reported that a man came to `Umar and confided to him that his sister had once been punished for *zinā* but after that she had repented completely, memorized much of the Qur'ān, and become greatly devoted to worship. A man was seeking her in marriage, so should he mention her past? `Umar responded, "You would deliberately go to what Allāh has concealed and expose it?! By Allāh, if you inform anyone about her, I will make an example of you to the people of every city! Marry her [to him] as you would any chaste Muslim woman."

... Ayahs 4-5 ...

وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا
وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٤﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾

Those who accuse chaste women and then do not produce four witnesses – lash them with eighty lashes and do not accept from them testimony ever after, and those are the disobedient. Except the ones who repent thereafter and reform, for indeed, Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.

Key Words

To throw at, shoot, target. In this context, to accuse or hurl an accusation at someone.	رَمَى، يَرْمِي (يَرْمُونَ pl.)
A chaste person, literally: one fortified by morality and reputation.	مُحْصَنٌ (مُحْصَنَاتُ f. pl.)
A witness.	شَاهِدٌ (شُهَدَاءُ pl.)
Testimony.	شَهَادَةٌ
One who departs from the law or from obedience to Allāh.	فَاسِقٌ (فَاسِقُونَ pl.)
To repent or return to obedience to Allāh.	تَابَ (تَابُوا pl.)
To correct, amend, reform.	أَصْلَحَ (أَصْلَحُوا pl.)
Forgiving. An attribute of Allāh.	غَفُورٌ
Merciful. An attribute of Allāh.	رَحِيمٌ

Verse no. 4 contains Allāh's declaration that an accusation of *zinā* without adequate proof will earn the accuser a punishment almost as severe as that for fornication itself. It is intended to eliminate mention of immoral behavior within society, much less the repetition and spread of such reports.¹⁵ It is irrelevant whether the accusation is true or false; without legal evidence it becomes a crime in itself. Although the verse refers to the accused in the feminine gender,¹⁶ scholars are agreed that the ruling also applies in the case of Muslim men who are slandered in the same way. Similarly, there is no difference between a male and female accuser, and both are equal in liability.

¹⁵Because it generates an atmosphere of mistrust within a community as well as the feeling that illicit relationships are commonplace and normal. Even if one should be an eyewitness to *zinā*, he must not publicize it unless he can produce the required number of witnesses who fulfill the conditions cited on page 6 under (b). Otherwise, he himself will be punished. Such an accusation is called "*qadhf*" in legal terminology.

¹⁶Commentators have speculated that women were mentioned because they are more often the victims of such accusations. Others interpret "*muḥṣanāt*" as chaste "souls" (*anfus*), which is feminine in Arabic but can apply to both genders.

A punishable accusation consists of either of the following:

- a) The specification of *zinā*, and nothing less. If the accusation were proved true, the accused would be subject to the prescribed punishment according to law.
- b) The assertion that someone is of illegitimate birth.

Either of these must be stated in clear terms, not vague or undefined suggestion.¹⁷ In addition, the accuser must be an adult, mentally competent and must have made his claim willfully. The accused must be a seemingly upright Muslim,¹⁸ an adult, mentally competent and a free person. All of these conditions must be present for conviction of a slanderer.

The punishment itself is threefold: eighty lashes, rejection of all future testimony by the offender, and his being labeled by Allāh as a *fāsiq* (an immoral or deliberately disobedient person) who cannot be trusted.

Verse no. 5 confirms Allāh's mercy toward the repentant and extends hope to him by excepting him from the aforementioned description and reinstating him as a decent member of society. After having endured the prescribed eighty lashes,¹⁹ one who amends his conduct thereafter, seeking his Lord's forgiveness, has been promised acceptance by Him. All scholars agree that a repentant person will obtain forgiveness and no longer be seen by Allāh as a *fāsiq* and may not be called one by the people. But because Allāh alone knows if a declared repentance is genuine, Ḥanafī scholars maintain that his testimony remains doubtful and that the exception applies only to the description of disobedience. The Shāfi'ī, Mālikī and Ḥanbalī schools, however, regard his testimony as acceptable once again. Some early scholars stipulated that repentance must be accompanied by a public declaration that the accusation was false and that the accused was wronged, thus removing any doubt about him. His testimony could then be accepted. As for the eighty lashes, they have already been carried out and cannot be repealed in any case.²⁰

¹⁷ Lesser or ambiguous accusations, although outside of this category, are considered backbiting or slander, which are in themselves major sins. Every Muslim is under obligation to guard the honor and reputation of his brothers, to cover their faults, and encourage their reform whenever possible.

¹⁸ i.e., one who has not been involved in other crimes or immoralities before. A person known for previous transgressions and a non-Muslim are not normally above suspicion.

¹⁹ *Hadd* punishments serve as expiation for sins and purification for the souls of those who regret their evil deeds and turn back sincerely to Allāh. The unrepentant, however, can expect further punishment in the Hereafter.

²⁰ As is true of all *hadd* punishments, it cannot be averted once there is a legal conviction within an Islamic state.

... Āyahs 6-10 ...

وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ أَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ شُهَدَاءُ إِلَّا أَنْفُسُهُمْ فَشَهَدُوا أَحَدِهِمْ أَرْبَعُ شَهَدَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ
 الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٦﴾ وَالْخَمِيسَةَ أَنْ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْكَذِبِينَ ﴿٧﴾ وَيَدْرُؤُا عَنْهَا الْعَذَابَ أَنْ تَشْهَدَ
 أَرْبَعَ شَهَدَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الْكَذِبِينَ ﴿٨﴾ وَالْخَمِيسَةَ أَنْ غَضَبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٩﴾
 وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

Those who accuse their wives [of adultery] and have no witnesses except themselves – then the witness of one of them shall be four testimonies [swearing] by Allāh that indeed, he is of the truthful. And the fifth [oath] will be that the curse of Allāh be upon him if he should be of the liars. But it will prevent punishment from her if she gives four testimonies [swearing] by Allāh that indeed, he is of the liars. And the fifth [oath] will be that the wrath of Allāh be upon her if he was of the truthful. And if not for the favor of Allāh upon you and His mercy... and because Allāh is Accepting of repentance and Wise.

Key Words

Spouse, mate, husband or wife. In this context the meaning is "wives," as confirmed by the feminine pronouns in verses 8 and 9.	زَوْجٌ (أَزْوَاجَ pl.)
Self, soul, person.	نَفْسٌ (أَنْفُسَ pl.)
Truthful, trustworthy.	صَادِقٌ (صَادِقُونَ pl.)
Curse, literally: removal from Allāh's mercy.	لَعْنَةٌ
Liar, untruthful.	كَاذِبٌ (كَاذِبُونَ pl.)
To avert, prevent.	دَرَأًا، يَدْرَأُ
Anger, wrath.	غَضَبٌ
Favor, grace, bounty.	فَضْلٌ
An attribute of Allāh: Continually Forgiving and Accepting of Repentance	تَوَّابٌ
Wise, knowing, discerning. An attribute of Allāh: All-Wise.	حَكِيمٌ

Following the revelation of verse no. 4, a disturbing question arose among the Prophet's companions concerning a man who comes upon his wife committing adultery. The prospect of such an occurrence was disquieting since a man's honor, lineage and family stability are bound to the morality and chastity of his wife: therefore, he would not normally accuse her unjustly. But at the same time, it would be almost impossible to secure the required witnesses, and

failure to do so would make punishment incumbent upon him as well. Sa'd bin `Ubādah approached the Prophet (ﷺ) and said, "By Allāh, O Messenger of Allāh, indeed I know it is truth and that it is from Allāh. But I was astonished to know that if I were to find an evil wife with a man upon her, I would not be able to touch him or disturb him until I brought four witnesses, and by then he would have satisfied himself and gone!"²¹ In another narration he added, "If I were to find a man with my wife, I would strike him with my sword, and not the flat side!"²²

Shortly after that, an actual case came to the attention of the Prophet (ﷺ). Hilāl bin Umayyah returned from his land one evening and found a man with his wife, witnessing it with his own eyes. But he restrained himself until morning and then went to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), saying, "O Messenger of Allāh, I came back to my wife in the evening and found a man with her, and I saw it with my eyes and heard it with my ears." The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) disliked what he had been told and was greatly distressed by it. The Anṣār gathered before him and said, "Now we are being tested by that of which Sa'd bin `Ubādah spoke. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) will lash Hilāl bin Umayyah and invalidate his testimony among the people." But Hilāl said, "By Allāh, I do expect that Allāh will make for me a way out." And he said, "O Messenger of Allāh, indeed I see how distressed you are by what I have said, but Allāh knows that I am truthful."

There appeared to the Prophet (ﷺ) no way except to order the lashing of Hilāl, but suddenly Allāh sent down revelation upon His Messenger (ﷺ). When the revelation descended on him, they knew it by the darkening of his face, so they left him alone until the revelation was completed. Then he (ﷺ) said, "Good tidings, Hilāl, Allāh has given you a relief and a way out." Hilāl replied, "I had expected that from my Lord."

Then the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, "Send for her [the wife]." So she came and he recited the verses to both of them, warning and reminding them that the punishment of the Hereafter is more severe than that of this world. Hilāl said, "By Allāh, I have told the truth about her." She said, "He lied." So Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Let them invoke the curse between them." Hilāl was then asked to testify, and he swore four oaths that he was of the truthful. When it was time for the fifth, he was told, "O Hilāl, fear Allāh, for the punishment of the world is easier than that of the Hereafter, and this oath is the one which will make it due to you." He said, "Allāh will not punish me for it [in the Hereafter], just as He did not let me be lashed for it," and he swore the fifth oath that the

²¹Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

²²Narrated by Muslim.

curse of Allāh be upon him if he was of the liars. Then the wife was told, "Swear four oaths that he is of the liars," and at the fifth one, "Fear Allāh, for the punishment of this world is easier than that of the Hereafter, and this is the one which will make it due to you." She hesitated awhile and they thought she was about to confess, but then she said, "By Allāh, I will not bring shame upon my people" and went on to swear in the fifth oath that the wrath of Allāh be upon her if he was of the truthful.

So Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) separated them legally and ruled that her child would not be given the name of a father, yet the child could never be accused of illegitimate birth, and any who should accuse her or her child thereafter would incur the *ḥadd* punishment (of eighty lashes). He (ﷺ) further ruled that she was not entitled to food or housing from Hilāl since they were separated by order of law and not divorce. When the child was born, he was seen to closely resemble the man named by Hilāl. Thereupon, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "If it had not been for the oaths sworn according to the Book of Allāh, I would have surely dealt with her."²³

In the version by al-Bukhārī, Hilāl bin Umayyah accused his wife of *zinā* with Shareek bin Saḥmā' so the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Bring proof or take the punishment on your back." Hilāl said, "O Messenger of Allāh, if one of us sees a man on his wife, he should go out looking for proof?! By He who sent you with the truth, I am truthful, and Allāh will save my back from punishment." Then Allāh sent down these verses. When both of them were brought to testify, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Allāh knows that one of you is lying, so will anyone repent?"

This procedure is known as *li`ān* or *mulā`anah*, and is called for when a husband accuses his wife of *zinā* or claims that a child born to her is not his. This differs from an ordinary accusation in that it will affect the future of the entire family, for at very least, one of the spouses has lied about the other in a deliberate and devastating manner. The system provides protection for a husband who witnesses the infidelity of his wife but cannot produce proof, just as it does for a wife falsely accused by an evil husband.²⁴ In a narration by Muslim and others, a man from the Anṣār said, "If a man found another with his wife and spoke, you would lash him; and if he killed, you would execute him; and if he kept quiet, he is quiet while harboring rage." The Prophet (ﷺ) supplicated, "O Allāh, give a decision." So the verses of *li`ān* were revealed, and that same man was tested by them when he and his wife were summoned to take the oaths. Then, before the Prophet (ﷺ) could order their separation, the man said, "If I kept her now, I would have been lying about her" and

²³Details of this report are from al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and others. 'Ikrimah noted that the child later became a governor of Egypt, and he was named after his mother.

²⁴Most scholars are of the opinion that it does not apply when a wife accuses her husband, since such a case is not as clear, i.e., the husband could be legally married to another woman.

immediately divorced her. The Prophet (ﷺ) upheld the separation, and a child born to her after that was attributed to his mother, to inherit from her alone.

The first four oaths serve to avert punishment in this world from the accuser, who testifies to the truth of what he has stated. The fifth one concerns the Hereafter, making Allāh's punishment due to him there if he has been untruthful in his accusation. Similarly, the accused wife can defend herself from false accusation and from punishment in this world by swearing four oaths that he has lied, while the fifth will bring upon her the anger of Allāh and punishment in the Hereafter if she is lying, which would mean that she is also guilty of *zinā*. The difference in degree of sin is reflected in the fifth oath, as a false accusation earns expulsion from Allāh's mercy (*la`nah*) and His indifference to the plight of the offender in the Hereafter, whereas a false oath compounded with the crime of adultery earns the unbearable wrath of Allāh (*ghadhab*) in addition to His punishment.

Li`ān must be carried out before a legal authority and is not valid if done in the home. A wife whose husband is accusing her unjustly also has the right to demand the procedure, after which they will be separated. The separation is permanent, and the parties cannot ever remarry thereafter. Ibn `Umar reported that after a mutual oath-taking the Prophet (ﷺ) said to the couple, "Your account is with Allāh – one of you is a liar." He told the man, "She is no longer yours, and you have no right over her," to which he inquired, "My property [i.e., her *mahr*]?" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "You have no [claim to] property. If you were truthful, it was her right by the consummation of the marriage; and if you lied about her, it is even more distant from you."²⁵

Again, the accusation must be a clear one. If the husband admits to a lie or to uncertainty, he will be punished as any other accuser with eighty lashes; while if the wife admits guilt, she will be stoned according to law. Some scholars consider a refusal by either one to swear the fifth oath as an admission of guilt; however, the wife who does not confess cannot be stoned without the testimony of four witnesses. When the procedure of *li`ān* has been completed by both parties, neither of them may be punished, but permanent separation will be enforced.

On one occasion a husband, without making a direct accusation, expressed doubt by saying, "My wife has given birth to a black boy." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do you have camels?" He said, "Yes." He (ﷺ) asked, "What color are they?" He said, "Red." He (ﷺ) asked, "Is there a dark one among them?" He said, "There are dark ones among them." He (ﷺ) inquired, "And how did that happen to them?" He replied, "Perhaps it is ancestry to which they reverted."

²⁵Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "And perhaps this [boy] is due to ancestry to which he reverted."²⁶ He thus dissuaded the man from suspecting his wife or disowning his child.

Verse 6 suggests that the husband should have actually witnessed the crime itself, so an accusation must not be made on suspicion alone, and its retraction is an admission of uncertainty. During `Umar's caliphate, a man denied responsibility for his wife's pregnancy but later admitted that the child was his. After the birth he again denied paternity of the child. When the case was brought for judgement, `Umar ruled that the child be attributed to the husband, who would receive the prescribed punishment of eighty lashes.

In conclusion, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) reminds mankind that if not for His favor and mercy to them and for the fact that He continually accepts repentance and imposes legislation according to His all-encompassing wisdom, they would suffer much grief and hardship due to their sins and errors. There is a deliberate omission in verse 10 after the first clause, "***And if not for the favor of Allāh upon you and His mercy...***" The listener or reader understands from this that there would be a grave consequence: immediate punishment, destruction by scandals and retributions, or by Allāh's wrath. But all of that is minimized due to the legislation ordained out of His mercy and wisdom.

²⁶Narrated by Muslim.

... Ayahs 11-18 ...

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ لَا تَحْسَبُوهُ شَرًّا لَّكُم بَلْ هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ مَا اكْتَسَبَ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ وَالَّذِي تَوَلَّى كِبْرَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾ لَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ ظَنَّ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بِأَنفُسِهِمْ خَيْرًا وَقَالُوا هَذَا إِفْكٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٢﴾ لَوْلَا جَاءُوا عَلَيْهِ بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَإِذْ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِالشَّهَادَةِ فَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ اللَّهِ هُمْ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِي مَا أَفَضْتُمْ فِيهِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾ إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَتَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ مَا لَيْسَ لَكُم بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَتَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّئًا وَهُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٥﴾ وَلَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُمْ مَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَتَكَلَّمَ بِهَذَا سُبْحَنَكَ هَذَا بَهْتَنٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾ يَعِظُكُمُ اللَّهُ أَنْ تَعُودُوا لِمِثْلِهِ أَبَدًا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَيُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you. Do not think it bad for you; rather, it is good for you. For every person among them is what he has earned from the sin, and he who took upon himself the greater portion thereof – for him is a great punishment. Why, when you heard it, did not the believing men and believing women think good of themselves and say, "This is an obvious falsehood"? Why did they not produce for it four witnesses? And when they do not produce the witnesses, then it is they, in the sight of Allāh, who are the liars. And if it had not been for the favor of Allāh upon you and His mercy in this world and the Hereafter, you would have been touched for that in which you were involved by a great punishment. When you received it with your tongues and spoke with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge and thought it was insignificant while it was, in the sight of Allāh, tremendous. And why, when you heard it, did you not say, "It is not for us to speak of this. Exalted are You, [O Allāh]; this is a great slander"? Allāh warns you against returning to the likes of this, ever, if you should be believers. And Allāh makes clear to you the verses, and Allāh is Knowing and Wise.

Key Words

Lie, falsehood, untruth.	إِفْكٌ
Faction, group, gang.	عُصْبَةٌ
To think, suppose, assume, believe, regard.	حَسِبَ، يَحْسَبُ
Sin, offense, misdeed.	إِثْمٌ
Great, tremendous, of great enormity or severity, grave. Also an attribute of Allāh: Incomparably Great or Grand.	عَظِيمٌ

To say, speak.	قَالَ، يَقُولُ
Clear, obvious, evident, plain.	مُبِينٌ
To enter into, become involved or absorbed in.	أَفَاضَ
To hear.	سَمِعَ
To receive, take, accept.	تَلَقَّى
Tongue.	لِسَانٌ (اللسنة pl.)
Mouth.	فَمٌّ (أفواه pl.)
To speak, talk, converse.	تَكَلَّمَ، يَتَكَلَّمُ
To warn, caution, advise, admonish, appeal to.	وَعَظَ، يَعِظُ
To clarify, show, explain.	بَيَّنَ، يُبَيِّنُ
Knowing, cognizant, aware. An attribute of Allāh: Omniscient.	عَلِيمٌ

Background Information

After the Muslim community had established itself under the leadership of Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) in Madīnah, the balance of power began to shift in its favor. An amazing victory at the Battle of Badr gave the Muslims in Madīnah predominance over the polytheists and Jews. Many of these entered Islam outwardly in order to protect certain of their interests although their hearts remained jealous and hostile. This group, known as the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*), made use of any opportunity to attempt to weaken the new Islamic state from within, hoping that its ascendancy would not be permanent. At the same time, they took care to be seen at prayer in the *masjid*, at meetings with the Prophet (ﷺ), and often appeared on the battlefield in a show of support while engaging in subversive activities on the side.

Following the Battle of the Trench (al-Khandaq), the disbelievers and hypocrites began to realize that the Muslims were succeeding due to deep faith and to their moral superiority, which was also a key factor in attracting new converts to Islam. Hence, they stepped up efforts to undermine the credibility of the religion and particularly the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. Even before the Battle of Badr, the Jews and others had been critical of the change in *qiblah* ordered by Allāh in the Qur'ān,²⁷ declaring that this Prophet could not even make up his mind about the direction of prayer. After the final defensive battle (al-Khandaq) in which the disbelievers were defeated with Allāh's help in spite of the treachery of the hypocrites, they found an occasion to defame the Prophet (ﷺ) when Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta`ālā*) ordered him to marry his cousin, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, after her divorce from Zayd bin Ḥārithah.²⁸ Although Allāh had

²⁷See *Sūrah al-Baqarah*, 2:144-150.

²⁸See *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*, 33:37-40.

previously revealed verses invalidating the practice of adoption and stating clearly that an adopted child could not be considered the same as a begotten one, they continued to spread the word that the Prophet (ﷺ) had married the former wife of his son, which is prohibited in the case of a true son by lineage.²⁹

Another opportunity was afforded by the incident referred to in this *sūrah*. `Abdullāh bin Ubayy, leader of the hypocrites in Madīnah, was hopeful that by spreading rumors and lies about the Prophet's wife `Ā'ishah, both he (ﷺ) and her father, Abū Bakr, would be discredited and their reputation damaged to the extent that the people could no longer look to them for upright leadership. The outcome, however, was not as Ibn Ubayy and his supporters had expected, for Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) intervened and made use of the incident to show the true nature of the believers and that of the hypocrites, to impart a valuable lesson to Muslims, and to ordain legislation that would serve to protect Islamic communities in the future.

* * *

These verses were revealed concerning the matter of the Prophet's wife, `Ā'ishah, when the hypocrites accused her of immorality. Verse no. 11 makes several statements about the incident in question:

First, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) describes it as "*ifk*," or falsehood, which shows His complete rejection of the accusation.

Second, He reveals that those responsible for it were not the obvious enemies among the disbelievers but a group from the Muslims themselves. Of those, there were a few who were merely posing as believers while others were sincere Muslims who, nevertheless, had become careless about their behavior.

Third, in spite of the negative atmosphere generated by this affair and the anguish suffered by those affected directly, it produced both short and long term benefits, and thus was good for the entire Muslim community, including those who had suffered.

Fourth, everyone who had some role in spreading the falsehood had earned a share of the blame. Those who later regretted their error and repented accepted the punishment of this world as expiation for their sin, while the unrepentant who had initiated and encouraged the slander could not but expect the terrible punishment of the Hereafter.

The chief instigator was `Abdullāh bin Ubayy bin Salūl, who composed and spread stories until they filled the minds of some Muslims who then repeated

²⁹In addition, they told tales to the effect that the Prophet had had his eye on her even before her divorce, a lie that is still being repeated by the orientlists today. The verses in *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* and authentic narrations regarding them show that the Prophet (ﷺ) attempted earnestly to avoid this marriage in anticipation of what would be said about it, but in the end he had to submit to the command of Allāh.

them, although there were others who refrained from that. The stressful situation continued for a month until Allāh saw fit to reveal these verses.

Details were reported by ‘Ā’ishah herself in several authentic *ḥadīths*. She related: "I accompanied the Messenger of Allāh on a journey³⁰ and was carried in a *hawdaj* [camel-litter]. On our return, having neared Madīnah, our departure from camp was announced at night. So I got up and distanced myself from the army to relieve myself. Then, as I was returning to my place, I felt my chest and found that my ivory necklace had fallen, so I went back looking for it and the search delayed me. The men carried the *hawdaj* and placed it upon the camel, thinking that I was inside. At that time women were light in weight for there was not much to eat, and I was a young girl so they did not notice the lightness of the *hawdaj* when they lifted it. They drove the camel and marched. I found my necklace after the army had left. When I returned to their campsite, I found it completely empty, so I went to the place I had occupied, assuming that they would miss me and come back for me. But while I was sitting there, my eyes were overcome by sleep.

Ṣafwān bin al-Mu`aṭṭal had remained behind the army and by morning reached the place where we had camped and saw the shadow of someone asleep. When he approached, he recognized me because he had seen me before the order for *ḥijāb*.³¹ I awoke at his exclamation of dismay when he recognized me and covered my face with my cloak. By Allāh, he did not speak another word but made his camel kneel, holding down its foreleg so I could mount it. He then set out, leading the camel that carried me until we caught up with the army after they had halted for rest due to the noon heat.

When we reached Madīnah, I was ill and remained so for a month while people were spreading stories about me. I was not aware of any of it and only felt some uneasiness during my illness because I did not notice from the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) his usual gentle manner. He would only enter, greet us and say, 'How is she?' I was gripped by fever and chills.

After I had recovered somewhat, I went out one night to relieve myself accompanied by Umm Miṣṭah, a cousin of my father. That was before people had outhouses near their homes. As we were returning and had neared my house, she tripped on her skirt and exclaimed, 'Wretched Miṣṭah!' I said to her, 'What a bad thing you have said, insulting a man who was present in the Battle of Badr.' She said, 'My daughter, have you not heard what he said?' I asked, 'What did he say?' So she informed me about the slander, and my illness increased.

At home, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) entered, greeted us and said, 'How is she?'

³⁰The campaign against Bani Muṣṭaliq.

³¹Referring to the portion of 33:53: "And when you ask them [i.e., the Prophet's wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition [ḥijāb]. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts."

So I said, 'Will you permit me to go to my parents?' I wanted to confirm the news from them. He permitted me, so I went to them and said to my mother, 'Why are people saying this?' She said, 'O daughter, be easy on yourself, for seldom is there a pure woman married to a man who loves her except that his other wives make difficulties for her.' I said, 'And people have been talking about it?' I wept the whole night unrelieved by sleep until the morning.

When the revelation was delayed, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) consulted `Alī bin Abī Tālib and Usāmah bin Zayd about whether he should separate from his wife. Usāmah told him, 'She is your wife, and we know only good about her.' But `Alī said, 'Allāh has not restricted you, and there are many other women. However, if you ask the servant, she will give you true information.' So he called her and said, 'O Bareerah, have you seen anything that would make you doubt `Ā'ishah?' She replied, 'By He who has sent you with the truth, I have not seen anything I could say against her except that she is a young girl and sometimes falls asleep over the dough so the goat comes and eats it.'

That day the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) stood on the *minbar* [pulpit] and said, 'Who would justify my action against a man [i.e., `Abdullāh bin Ubayy] who has harmed me through my wife? By Allāh, I have known nothing but good about her, and they have named a man [i.e., Ṣafwān] of whom I have known nothing but good.' The leader of the Aws tribe arose and said, 'I would, O Messenger of Allāh. If he should be from the Aws, we will kill him; and if he is among our brothers from the Khazraj, we will carry out your order.' Then Sa'd bin `Ubādah, the leader of the Khazraj, arose, and he was a good man but was swayed by tribal loyalty. He said, 'You lie; by Allāh, you would not kill him, and you would not be able to kill him! If he was from your people, you would not like him to be killed.' Ḥudhayr got up, replying, 'You lie; by Allāh, we would surely kill him. You are a hypocrite defending a hypocrite!' Anger boiled over between the Aws and Khazraj until they were about to fight, while the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) remained on the *minbar*. He continued calming them until finally they became quiet. And the Messenger of Allāh kept quiet.

I wept all that day without sleeping, and my parents thought my liver would rupture from weeping. While they were sitting with me, a woman from the Anṣār asked permission to enter and I permitted her, so she sat and wept with me. While we were in that state, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) entered, greeted us and sat down. He had not sat near me since the rumors began, and it had been a month that nothing had been revealed to him. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) pronounced the *shahādah* when he sat down, then he said, 'O `Ā'ishah, I have heard such and such about you, so if you are innocent, Allāh will clear you. But if you have committed any sin, seek forgiveness of Allāh and repent to Him, for when a servant admits his sin and repents, Allāh will forgive him.' By the time

he had finished his speech, my tears had dried to the last drop, and I said to my father, 'Answer the Messenger of Allāh for me.' But he said, 'By Allāh, I do not know what to tell the Messenger of Allāh.' Then I said to my mother, 'Answer the Messenger of Allāh.' She said, 'By Allāh, I do not know what to say to him.' Being a young girl who had not learned much of the Qur'ān, I said, 'By Allāh, I know you have heard this talk until it settled in your minds, and you believed it. So if I told you I was innocent – and Allāh knows I am innocent – you will not believe me. And if I confessed to something – while Allāh knows I am innocent of it – you would certainly believe me! So the only example I find for me and you is that of Yūsuf's father when he said, *"So patience is fitting. And Allāh is the one sought for help against what they describe."*'³² Then I turned away and lay down on my mattress.

I knew that I was innocent and that Allāh would confirm my innocence, but I had expected that He would show it to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) in a dream. I never thought that Allāh would reveal words to be recited about a matter I considered too insignificant for that. But the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) had hardly left his seat and no one had yet gone out of the house when Allāh sent it down upon His Prophet. During the revelation his face changed; perspiration would drip from his face even on a winter day from the weight of what had descended upon him. Then it left him, and he was smiling. The first words he said were, 'Good tidings, 'Ā'ishah! Allāh has declared your innocence.' My mother said, 'Get up and go to him.' I said, 'By Allāh, I will not go to him, and I will not praise except Allāh who revealed my innocence.'"³³

After Allāh revealed the verses, Abū Bakr, who had been supporting Miṣṭah due to his poverty and blood relationship, said, "I will not spend on him ever again after what he said about 'Ā'ishah." But then Allāh revealed, *"And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allāh, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allāh should forgive you? And Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful."*³⁴ So Abū Bakr said, "Yes, by Allāh, indeed I would like for Allāh to forgive me," and he returned his expenditure to Miṣṭah, saying, "By Allāh, I will never deprive him of it again."

And 'Ā'ishah said, "Among those that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) asked about me was his wife, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. She said, 'O Messenger of Allāh, I am cautious about my hearing and sight. By Allāh, I have known nothing but good.' She was my rival among the Prophet's wives, but Allāh protected her

³²Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:18.

³³Narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

³⁴Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:22.

because she feared Him. But her sister, Ḥimnah bint Jaḥsh, campaigned on her behalf and was punished among those who were punished."³⁵

Besides Miṣṭaḥ bin Uthāthah and Ḥimnah bint Jaḥsh, another companion, Ḥassān bin Thābit, also received eighty lashes for his part in spreading the accusation. Yet, he was known for loyalty to the Prophet (ﷺ) and had constantly defended him through poetry against the attacks of enemy poets. ʿĀ'ishah held no resentment towards him and showed him hospitality later in life when he had become blind. These three believers had learned a difficult lesson, which was imparted to others as well. But their faith was never questioned, and they bore the consequence of their misdeed willingly. None of the Prophet's wives were involved in this incident, and in fact, it served to confirm the moral excellence of the Prophet (ﷺ), his family, and the majority of close companions, exhibiting their remarkable restraint and forbearance throughout an extremely trying time.

As for ʿAbdullāh bin Ubayy and other hypocrites whose role in the affair was deliberate and malicious, they were hardly mentioned in this discourse, disdained by Allāh and left to face His wrath and punishment in the Hereafter.

In verses 12 and 13 Allāh (*subḥānahu wa taʿālā*) rebukes the believers for allowing themselves to become involved in gossip and transgression, pointing out that instead, they should have behaved as did Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī when his wife said to him, "Have you heard what people are saying about ʿĀ'ishah?" He said, "Yes, and it is a lie. Would you have done that, Umm Ayyūb?" She said, "No, by Allāh, I never would have done it." He said, "ʿĀ'ishah is better than you. And I would not have done it, and Ṣafwān is better than me."³⁶ The question posed is: Why did you believers not assume the best about your society and its members instead of the worst? And especially when the woman in question was the wife of your Prophet (ﷺ). As stated in *Sūrah al-Hujurāt*, "**Indeed, some assumption is sin.**"³⁷ The second question as to why they had not brought four witnesses is a reminder that such an accusation is rejected without adequate proof. In fact, no one had witnessed anything at all, except the return of ʿĀ'ishah by Ṣafwān to her people and her husband openly at midday. They should have realized that this alone was sufficient to eliminate any suspicion. Allāh then declared those who had spread the stories to be liars, which further confirmed her innocence. Additionally, the failure to bring four witnesses made the *ḥadd* punishment due to them by law.

Verse 14 again reminds the believers of Allāh's favor and mercy to them in this world and the next, but here, specifically, in connection with this particular incident. In the worldly life He accepted their repentance and taught them a good lesson, while in the Hereafter He will forgive them because of their faith.

³⁵Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi – *ḥasan*.

³⁶Narrated in Ibn Ishāq's "*Seerah*."

³⁷*Sūrah al-Hujurāt*, 49:12.

Otherwise, their involvement in the affair would have earned them a great punishment in the Hereafter, as it did for `Abdullāh bin Ubayy and those like him. They are not included in this statement, for they had neither faith nor righteous deeds to balance out or lessen the burden of their sin.

Verse 15 describes the state of those who had spread false rumors thoughtlessly, and it applies to gossipers among people in any age, a blunt and fitting portrayal. It is as if the information was not received through the ears into the mind, where it could be analyzed, considered, and then either discarded or mentioned discreetly if necessary. That process was bypassed completely, and it appears as if the tongues had received it directly by the speed with which it was repeated and passed on. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) added emphatically that although the people had not given it due importance, to Him it was a most grave offense. As stated in the *ḥadīth*: "Sufficient it is as sin for a person to speak about everything he hears."³⁸ It would not have been a small matter in any case, so what could be said when the object of abuse was none but the wife of Allāh's Prophet and Messenger (ﷺ)? "And indeed, a man may speak a word without giving it a thought, which angers Allāh and causes him to fall into the Fire deeper than the distance between the heaven and earth."³⁹

Verse 16 adds further emphasis to the rebuke, stating the obvious – what the correct behavior would have been. For a believer, upon hearing such talk, should have kept it to himself, certain that it was untrue and thinking, "Exalted are You, O Allāh, above what they attribute to You by accusing the wife of Your Prophet (ﷺ) of *zinā*!" The following verses (17 and 18) warn against any similar conduct in the future, linking this precaution with faith. For a believer could never repeat such a grave error once he became aware that it angered Allāh. And He (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) has made His legislation clear for all Muslims in every time to come.

³⁸Narrated by Abu Dāwūd and al-Ḥākim – *ṣaḥeeḥ*. A version by Muslim says: "Sufficient is it as a lie for a person to speak about everything he hears."

³⁹Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

... Āyahs 19-20 ...

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ
وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ رءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

Indeed, those who like that immorality should spread among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. And Allāh knows while you do not know. And if it had not been for the favor of Allāh upon you and His mercy... and because Allāh is Kind and Merciful.

Key Words

To spread, pervade, become common, become known or publicized.	شَاعَ، يَشِيعُ
Immorality, and specifically, unlawful sexual intercourse.	فَاحِشَةٌ
Painful.	أَلِيمٌ
To know, have knowledge, be aware.	عَلِمَ، يَعْلَمُ

These two verses conclude those which were revealed in connection with the slander of ‘Ā’ishah. While referring expressly to the ones who had invented it and spread it among the people, verse 19 is general in the sense that it includes anyone and everyone who would like to see Muslims corrupted by immorality and who contributes toward that objective.⁴⁰ Those who actively assist in encouraging *zinā*, publicizing it or making accusations of immoral behavior are deserving of punishment in this world and the next. The fact that Allāh has complete knowledge of all things while man does not should motivate him to continually seek his Lord's guidance and refer all doubtful matters to His legislation. A further suggestion is that although the people may regard such matters as common, unimportant or subject to personal discretion, Allāh alone knows the true extent of their damage to individuals and societies and has imposed His law accordingly. The believer therefore accepts divine instruction and trusts in its benefits.

Verse no. 20 once again points to Allāh's mercy and encourages repentance. He (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) is kind to His servants and merciful to them. Just as He accepted the repentance of the believers who had been drawn into this incident through their own weaknesses, purifying some of them by means of the *ḥadd* penalty, He will forgive any sincerely repenting person. And if not for His favor and mercy, life would have been far more difficult than it is.

⁴⁰In modern times the media has become the most effective means for the propagation of *zinā*. How many Muslims today are in some way involved in the spread of poisonous films, literature or information on the internet without giving it a second thought.

... Ayahs 21-22 ...

﴿ يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ
وَالْمُنكَرِ ۚ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ مَا زَكَا مِنْكُمْ مِّنْ أَحَدٍ أَبَدًا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾ وَلَا يَأْتِلِ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَن يُؤْتُوا أُولَى الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ
اللَّهِ ۚ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا ۗ أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَن يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

O you who have believed, do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān. And whoever follows the footsteps of Shayṭān – indeed, he enjoins immorality and wrongdoing. And if not for the favor of Allāh upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have been pure, ever, but Allāh purifies whom He wills, and Allāh is Hearing and Knowing. And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause of Allāh, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allāh should forgive you? And Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.

Key Words

To follow, pursue, obey.	اتَّبَعَ، يَتَّبِعُ
Step.	خُطْوَةٌ (خُطُوَاتٍ pl.)
To order, command, enjoin, instruct.	أَمَرَ، يَأْمُرُ
To be pure, to increase.	زَكَّى، يُزَكِّي
To purify.	زَكَّى، يُزَكِّي
To will, intend.	شَاءَ، يَشَاءُ
Hearing. An attribute of Allāh: All-Hearing	سَمِيعٌ
Capacity, abundance, wealth, affluence.	سَعَةٌ
Needy, poor, unfortunate.	مَسْكِينٌ (مَسَاكِينِ pl.)
Emigrant.	مُهَاجِرٌ (مُهَاجِرُونَ pl.)

Verse 21 contains a warning to believers against their enemy, Shayṭān, who awaits every opportunity to seduce mankind away from the path of righteousness. It is a command from Allāh to beware of and avoid his attempts to lead them astray.⁴¹ The reason is clarified in a brief and direct manner: Shayṭān suggests only that which is evil, so no good can ever come by following him. His method is to make disobedience seem attractive and justify it to the

⁴¹Similarly, He (subḥānahu wa ta'ālā) ordered in Sūrah Fāṭir: "Indeed, Shayṭān is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy." (35:6)

soul, to make one forget the meeting with his Lord and so react destructively to an immediate impulse of the moment. The verse binds the previous discourse, which describes an actual occurrence in which some had followed the lead of Shayṭān, with the legislation to follow, which provides an effective defense against his strategies.

The "footsteps" of Shayṭān have been explained as his way or method, his suggestions, his deeds, or in general, any innovations in the religion or disobedience to Allāh. A man once told Ibn Mas'ūd, "I have forbidden to myself a certain food [which he named]." Ibn Mas'ūd replied, "That is from the suggestions of Shayṭān. Offer an expiation [*kaffārah*] for your oath and eat." Thus does Shayṭān lead one to alter his religion through additions and innovations, which he might see as good but in reality fall under the category of *munkar* (wrongdoing).⁴² "*Munkar*" is anything disallowed, disapproved of or disliked by Allāh, any forbidden, unacceptable or unbecoming act, while "*fahshā*" includes all of that as well as the meanings of wickedness, abomination or immorality, and specifically the crime of *zinā* and what relates to it.

The verse reminds the believer again of Allāh's favor and mercy, which has been emphasized by four repetitions of this phrase. One understands from it that divine legislation with its guidelines and particular restrictions is not intended to cause difficulty; rather, it is a merciful assistance to man during his stay on earth that helps him to achieve the best of the Hereafter. Moreover, it is beyond man's ability to achieve it on his own. If not for the fact that Allāh has chosen to purify the souls of believers, they could not become pure by themselves. For in addition to the promptings of Shayṭān, a quote from *Sūrah Yūsuf* points out:

إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those [to whom] my Lord has given mercy."⁴³

The Creator's knowledge of good within a soul is the cause for its guidance by Him. He then purifies the soul by enabling its owner to become righteous and perform good deeds. And because Allāh purifies whom He wills, one should have no illusions of superiority over others, for success is due to Allāh alone, and gratitude is due to Him who hears His servants and knows their innermost thoughts.

Once Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'ālā*) had confirmed the innocence of 'Ā'ishah and rebuked the believers for their error and sin, reason and balance among them

⁴²This topic is discussed further under Āyah 63.

⁴³*Sūrah Yūsuf*, 12:53. Anyone honest with himself will admit that without the guidance of Allāh and His warnings of the consequences, one would succumb to many temptations throughout life.

was largely recovered. Allāh accepted the repentance of those who had played a role in the affair and encouraged the believers to pardon and forgive one another, offering His own forgiveness of them as motivation.⁴⁴ Verse 22 was specifically and initially directed toward Abū Bakr, who is described as a virtuous man of means, although the general body of believers is also included, as indicated by use of the plural forms. The object of his anger, Miṣṭah bin Uthāthah, was alluded to by description of him as well, for he was a relative, a needy person, and one who had emigrated for the cause of Allāh; but again, it is a general call for amending relationships with relatives and with other Muslims. Abū Bakr had sworn to cut financial aid to Miṣṭah because of his role in spreading the slander, but upon hearing the verse recited, his heart softened and he said, "Yes, by Allāh, indeed I would like for Allāh to forgive me." He immediately restored the bond of relationship and his former generosity to Miṣṭah, a superb example of how a true believer interacts with the Qur'ān.

⁴⁴Scholars point out that when injustice has been done, pardon of the wrongdoer is not in itself obligatory since a person has the right to exact retribution through the court. However, it is desirable and earns reward from Allāh and forgiveness by Him in the Hereafter, and is thus highly encouraged.

... Ayahs 23-25 ...

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْغَافِلَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ لُعُنُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنَتُهُمْ وَأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ يَوْمَئِذٍ يُوفِّيهِمُ اللَّهُ دِينَهُمُ الْحَقَّ وَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٢٥﴾

Indeed, those who [falsely] accuse chaste, unaware believing women will be cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and they will have a great punishment on a Day their tongues, their hands and their feet will bear witness against them as to what they used to do. That Day, Allāh will pay them in full their true recompense, and they will know that it is Allāh who is the manifest Truth.

Key Words

Unaware, inattentive.	غَافِلٌ (f. pl. غَافِلَات)
Hand, forearm.	يَدٌ (pl. أَيْدِي)
Foot, leg.	رِجْلٌ (pl. أَرْجُل)
To complete, fulfill, give a full share.	وَفَّى، يُوفِّي
Repayment, recompense, compensation.	دَيْنٌ
Truth, reality, right. An attribute of Allāh.	حَقٌّ

These verses deal with people who slander intentionally with the aim of dishonoring the innocent. There are three opinions regarding the chaste, unaware believing women mentioned here:

- 1) That the description applies to the Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah alone, as she was unaware of what was being said about her during the month of her illness
- 2) That it indicates any of the Prophet's wives, because in contrast to Verse 4 (which is obviously general), no mention is made in this verse of repentance for those who slander, meaning that the sin is greater in this case
- 3) That it is unlimited and includes all chaste Muslim women⁴⁵ – Ibn Katheer prefers this view, supporting it with the *ḥadīth*: "Avoid the seven great sins⁴⁶ – associating anything with Allāh, magic, killing the soul that Allāh prohibited except by right,⁴⁷ consuming interest, consuming the property of an orphan, fleeing from the battlefield, and accusing chaste, unaware believing women."⁴⁸

⁴⁵Scholars include males among the victims as well. See footnote 16.

⁴⁶*Al-mawbiqāt*, meaning literally: the sins that destroy or ruin a person or cause him to perish.

⁴⁷The right of law, i.e., a legal execution carried out by the state or during *jihād* in the cause of Allāh.

⁴⁸Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

All of the viewpoints include ‘Ā’ishah in the description, and hence, there is a consensus that anyone who should insult or accuse her after the revelation of these verses has contradicted and opposed the Qur’ān, and this renders him an unbeliever.

The consequence of deliberate slander is expulsion from Allāh's mercy in this life and the next as well as a great punishment at the time of Judgement, when the hands and feet of the wicked, as well as their tongues, will testify to the nature of their deeds. In addition to verses from the Qur’ān,⁴⁹ there are authentic *ḥadīths* which confirm the fact that their bodies will expose them on the Day of Judgement by speaking the truth about them – their hands, feet, hearing, sight and skins.

That day the evildoers will meet the justice they thought they could escape. Allāh, the Exalted, will judge them precisely and perfectly and then compensate them accordingly. While the believers will receive good far in excess of their righteousness, the disbelievers and hypocrites will only be punished to the extent of each evil deed, but account will be taken of its nature and severity, the attitude and intent behind it, and the degree of damage caused to society and to every individual affected by it directly or indirectly up until the Hour of Resurrection. Thus, Allāh will give each criminal a full and complete payment for whatever he had earned, making him certain beyond any doubt that He (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) is the absolute and true reality, whose justice is true and absolute.

⁴⁹See Sūrah Ya Seen. 36:65 and Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:20-23.

... Ayah 26 ...

الْحَيِّثُ لِلْحَيِّثِينَ وَالْحَيِّثُونَ لِلْحَيِّثَاتِ وَالطَّيِّبُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ لِلطَّيِّبَاتِ أَؤَلِيكَ مَبْرُوءَاتٌ
مِمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

Evil women are for evil men, and evil men are for evil women. And good women are for good men, and good men are for good women. Those are declared innocent of what they [i.e., slanderers] say. For them is forgiveness and noble provision.

Key Words

Evil, wicked, corrupt.	حَبِيبٌ (f. pl. حَبِيبَاتٍ, m. pl. حَبِيبُونَ)
Good, pure.	طَيِّبٌ (f. pl. طَيِّبَاتٍ, m. pl. طَيِّبُونَ)
Cleared, declared innocent, acquitted.	مُبْرَأٌ (pl. مُبْرَأُونَ)
Forgiveness, pardon.	مَغْفِرَةٌ
Provision, sustenance, wealth, blessing.	رِزْقٌ
Noble, generous, precious.	كَرِيمٌ

One concludes from this verse that because Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) was the best and purest of men, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) would never have married him to a corrupt woman. And since Allāh had made `Ā'ishah the Prophet's wife, she could not have been except good and pure; for if she had been otherwise, she would have neither been suitable for him by law nor by divine decree.

A second interpretation is that "*al-khabīthāt*" and "*aṭ-ṭayyibāt*" refer to *kalimāt* (words). Ibn `Abbās explained, "Evil words of speech are for evil men [i.e., applicable to them or most suitable for them], and evil men are themselves worthy of evil words. And good words are suitable for good men, and good men are worthy of good words. This was revealed concerning `Ā'ishah." So what the hypocrites attributed to her was true of themselves, while she is deserving of praise and disassociation from any kind of immorality. And generally, this is true of every righteous believer. Therefore, Allāh said, "**Those are declared innocent,**" i.e., cleared of all false accusations and suspicion as to their conduct. And He (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) added that they will obtain forgiveness of lesser sins as compensation for what they suffered of injustice in the world and a noble provision in the gardens of Paradise, which is also a promise that `Ā'ishah will be among its inhabitants. When she was on the verge of death, Ibn `Abbās visited her and said, "Be reassured, for you are the wife of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), and he loved you and married no virgin other than you. And the declaration of your innocence descended from heaven..."

... Āyahs 27-29 ...

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّىٰ تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَجِدُوا فِيهَا أَحَدًا فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا حَتَّىٰ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ قِيلَ لَكُمُ ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا ۚ هُوَ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ مَسْكُونَةٍ فِيهَا مَتَعٌ لَّكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

O you who have believed, do not enter houses other than your own houses until you ascertain welcome and greet their inhabitants. That is best for you; perhaps you will remember. And if you do not find anyone therein, do not enter them until permission has been given you. And if you are told, "Go back," then go back; it is purer for you. And Allāh is Knowing of what you do. There is no blame upon you for entering houses not inhabited in which there is convenience for you. And Allāh knows what you reveal and what you conceal.

Key Words

To enter.	دَخَلَ، يَدْخُلُ
House, building, room.	بَيْتٌ (بُيُوتٍ pl.)
To greet with the words: <i>As-salāmu `alaykum</i> .	سَلَّمَ، يُسَلِّمُ
People, family, household.	أَهْلٌ
To allow, permit.	أَذِنَ، يَأْذِنُ (يُؤْذَنُ passive)
To go back, return, come again.	رَجَعَ، يَرْجِعُ
To do, act, work, practice, make.	عَمِلَ، يَعْمَلُ
Blame, sin.	جُنَاحٌ
Lived in, occupied, inhabited.	مَسْكُونٌ
To show, display or reveal.	أَبَدَى، يُبْدِي
To hide, cover or conceal.	كَتَمَ، يَكْتُمُ

This section begins a series of instructions classified under the obligatory injunctions of the *sūrah* and revealed as a protective fortress for the believer. They are a practical illustration of Allāh's all-encompassing mercy and particular care for His believing servants. For He wishes to keep them pure with the least amount of psychological difficulty by closing avenues to sin well before one's arrival at a point of irresistible temptation. Divine legislation not only safeguards the obedient servant from the promptings of his own soul and of Shayṭān but also protects his reputation by insuring that he is never found in a

situation which might be interpreted by others as suspicious or questionable. The following rulings deal with social interaction between individuals, among family members, and within the wider scope of community associations. They are addressed to believers alone, while the non-believers who refuse Allāh's guidance are left to their own devices to earn whatever is due to them in the Hereafter.

Among the manners and morals taught by Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) is respect for privacy. The verses make clear that it is *ḥarām* (unlawful) to enter a home without permission.⁵⁰ In pre-Islamic times, when intending a visit, a person used to enter a house without warning, simply announcing his presence once he was inside. The intrusion was often embarrassing to the inhabitants, who were perhaps occupied, involved in private matters or in bed. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) changed all that by making it obligatory to receive permission before entering any home other than one's own. In reality, the word "*tasta'nisū*" goes beyond "*tasta'dhinū*," meaning to seek permission. It indicates making certain of the willingness of the residents to receive someone at that particular time and of their welcome for the specific guest, and excludes a reluctant permission given under pressure or out of shyness to refuse. Although the obligation is at least one request or announcement, the *sunnah* directs that permission may be sought three times: the first time that the people may hear, the second that they may prepare themselves, and the third that they will either grant permission or decline.⁵¹ It was reported by Ibn Abī Ḥātim that a woman from the Anṣār said to the Prophet (ﷺ), "O Messenger of Allāh, I am sometimes in my house in a state that I would not like anyone to see me, even my father or my son. There is a man from my family who keeps entering when I am in that state." Then Allāh revealed these verses.

Once, Abū Mūsā al-Ash`arī asked permission of `Umar three times but heard no response, so he left. `Umar said, "Did you not hear the voice of Abū Mūsā? Permit him to enter." But they found that he had gone, so they went after him. When he returned, `Umar said, "Did you find it hard to be kept waiting at my door?" He replied, "I asked permission three times, but it was not given to me; and I heard the Prophet of Allāh (ﷺ) say, 'When one of you asks permission three times and is not permitted, he should go back.'" `Umar said, "Either bring me evidence for that or I will strike you painfully." So he went to a group of the Anṣār and told them what `Umar had said. Then Abū Sa`eed al-Khudrī accompanied him and informed `Umar, who said, "Was there a *ḥadīth*

⁵⁰ Obviously, there is an exception for emergencies when entrance may be imperative to save lives or property, as dire necessity makes lawful what is normally unlawful.

⁵¹ Contemporary scholars have pointed out that the verse includes all methods of ascertaining welcome, for example, by telephone or other means of communication. Thus, a person can avoid arriving at an inconvenient time and make an appointment accordingly. However, the same rulings apply here, i.e., one should respect the wishes of the resident and not insist on disturbing him when for some reason he may be reluctant or receive visitors or to converse.

unknown to me? I must have been kept from it by transactions in the markets."⁵² This was the example of the Prophet (ﷺ), who, when after greeting and not hearing a reply from Sa'd bin `Ubādah, turned away. Sa'd followed him, saying, "I answered you but did not let you hear so that I could get more greetings from you and more blessings." Then he took him into his house.⁵³

When Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) approached someone's door, he would stand at its right or its left and say, "*As-salāmu `alaykum, as-salāmu `alaykum!*"⁵⁴ And he (ﷺ) taught a man who came to his door by telling him, "Move aside this way or that way, for seeking permission is on account of sight."⁵⁵ The reason was because at that time doorways were not covered by screens or curtains, so someone standing directly opposite the entrance could see into the house. The Prophet (ﷺ) forbade peeking into houses, saying, "If a person should look in at you without permission and you struck him with a pebble, putting out his eye, there would be no blame upon you."⁵⁶

Anyone seeking to enter a house should clearly identify himself. Jābir reported, "I came to the Prophet (ﷺ) about a debt my father had incurred and knocked at the entrance. He said, 'Who is it?' and I said, 'Me.' I heard him saying, 'Me, me!' as if he disliked it."⁵⁷ Ibn Katheer explained that Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) disliked it because everyone calls himself "me" and it gives no indication of his identity by which he will be welcomed or refused.

Unauthorized intrusion into another's property or recognized territory is a transgression against his right. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) leaves no doubt about the proper conduct when permission is not received: one should not persist beyond three times, standing there, shouting or knocking at the door, but leave and return on another occasion, for either the person is not at home or he is not prepared to receive guests. Hence, Allāh emphasizes that compliance is better and purer for everyone, both the occupants of homes and visitors. An outright refusal, as indicated by the words "go back" or a similar expression, must be respected and accepted graciously. Qatādah quoted one of the Muhājirūn as saying, "When I understood this verse, I would ask permission to visit one of my brothers, and upon refusal I would return pleased [for having obeyed Allāh] and expecting reward."⁵⁸

`Aṭā' bin Abī Rabāḥ related that he heard Ibn `Abbās say, "There are three

⁵² Narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁵³ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and an-Nasā'i.

⁵⁴ Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁵⁵ Narrated by Abū Dāwūd.

⁵⁶ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁵⁷ Al-Bukhāri, Muslim and others.

⁵⁸ Those who feel hurt, insulted or angry upon receiving an apology or postponement should take heed from this example and remember that for the benefit of all, obedience to Allāh must take precedence over personal preferences and demands.

verses that the people have rejected: Allāh said, '*Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allāh is the most pious of you,*'⁵⁹ but they say that the most noble of them are those with the grandest houses. And the people have rejected all the proper manners [referring to these verses, 27 and 28]." `Aṭā' said, "So I inquired, 'Should I ask permission of my orphan sisters under my guardianship in the same house?' He said, 'Yes.' I repeated it to him, expecting that he would allow me, but he refused and said, 'Would you like to see one of them undressed?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Then ask permission.' Then I consulted him again, and he said, 'Would you like to obey Allāh?!' "

`Abdullāh bin Mas`ūd instructed, "Be sure to take permission from your mothers." Someone asked, "Should a man ask permission of his wife?" He said, "No." But this was understood to mean it is not obligatory; however, it is preferable to let her know of his arrival. His own wife, Zaynab, said, "When `Abdullāh came home after some matter, he would pause at the door and cough or raise his voice, not liking to burst in and see anything displeasing." Al-Imām Aḥmad said, "When a man enters his house, it is preferable for him to make a sound or shuffle his shoes." The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) told a man not to burst in on his family at night unexpectedly, one narration adding, "so as not to frighten them."⁶⁰ And he advised those returning from a journey to send word before entering the city, giving the women time to prepare for their husbands.⁶¹

Finally, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) excepts from the aforementioned prohibition those houses or buildings which are not occupied by anyone in particular, permitting entrance to them according to need. They include places considered to be public, such as hotels, rest houses, or buildings in which one has stored property or has business, such as a shop or warehouse. "*Matā`*" refers to provisions, possessions or convenience, such as rest or shelter. The verse concludes with a reminder that Allāh is aware of all that is done openly and secretly, as well as the motive behind it, and will judge every matter accordingly.

⁵⁹Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:13.

⁶⁰Narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim.

⁶¹As related by Muslim.

... Ayahs 30-31 ...

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۚ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ خُمُرَهُنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۚ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنَىٰ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرَ أُولَىٰ الْإِرَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوْ الْطِفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ ۚ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ ۚ وَتَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allāh is Acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment [i.e., beauty] except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess [i.e., slaves], or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And repent to Allāh, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.

Key Words

To lower, reduce, avert.	غَضٌّ، يَغُضُّ
Vision, eyesight, gaze.	بَصَرٌ (أَبْصَارٌ pl.)
To guard, protect, preserve.	حَفِظَ، يَحْفَظُ
Opening, genital organ, private part.	فَرْجٌ (فُرُوجٌ pl.)
Acquainted, familiar, having expert knowledge. An attribute of Allāh: All-Acquainted, All-Knowing, All-Aware.	خَبِيرٌ
Adornment, beauty.	زِينَةٌ
To appear, be visible.	ظَهَرَ، يَظْهَرُ
Headcover, head wrapper.	خِمَارٌ (خُمُرٌ pl.)
Husband.	بَعْلٌ (بُعُولٌ pl.)
Father, grandfather.	أَبٌ (آبَاءٌ pl.)
Son, grandson.	ابنٌ (أَبْنَاءٌ pl.)
Brother or half-brother.	أَخٌ (إِخْوَانٌ pl.)
Sister or half-sister.	أَخْتٌ (أَخَوَاتٌ pl.)

Plural of امرأة : women, adult females.	نِسَاءٌ
To own, possess.	مَالِكٌ، يَمْلِكُ
Right, right hand.	يَمِينٌ (أَيْمَانٌ pl.)
Man, adult male.	رَجُلٌ (رِجَالٌ pl.)
Child, children.	طِفْلٌ
What is normally covered, hidden or kept private.	عَوْرَةٌ (عَوْرَاتٌ pl.)

After directing the believers to avoid intrusion into homes with their eyes as well as their bodies, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) orders His Prophet (ﷺ) to teach them to limit their gazes at other times as well. The particle "*min*," meaning "from" or "of," indicates that one is to restrain not all, but a portion of his vision, i.e., to avoid what is unlawful to look at, wherever he may be.⁶² The second instruction, to guard the private parts, is related to the first in that gazing generates desire which can ultimately lead to an unlawful relationship. By mention of the first and the final transgression, the intermediate process is understood. Guarding the private parts has been explained as not only protecting them from *zinā* but also from being seen by others, as confirmed in the *ḥadīth*: "Let not a man look at the private area of another man, and let not a woman look at the private area of another woman."⁶³

Someone asked Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) about what is seen unexpectedly and unintentionally. He told him to turn his eyes away.⁶⁴ And he (ﷺ) said to `Alī, "Do not follow up one glance with another, for the first is [excused] for you, but the second is not."⁶⁵ In another *ḥadīth* he (ﷺ) warned, "Beware of sitting along the roads." When a man said, "O Messenger of Allāh, we have to sit on them in order to converse," he allowed, "If you must, then give the road its right: lowering the gaze, refraining from abuse, replying to greetings, ordering what is right, and forbidding what is wrong."⁶⁶

The verse concludes with a reminder that this observance is purer for the believers and that Allāh is aware of all actions, not the least of which is the glance of an eye.

The same order is repeated in respect to believing women, except that an additional provision is made due to their need for a greater degree of privacy and

⁶²A direct gaze is permitted in specific instances, such as when marriage is intended or out of necessity for identification or medical treatment.

⁶³Narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim.

⁶⁴Narrated by Aḥmad, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi.

⁶⁵Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi.

⁶⁶Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.

protection. This, along with verse 59 of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb*,⁶⁷ revealed prior to it, defines the Muslim woman's dress code. In this *sūrah* Allāh has stipulated that a woman's *zeenah* (that which adorns her) should not be exposed or displayed.⁶⁸ A concession is granted for what appears normally or out of necessity and is difficult or impossible to conceal. Ibn Mas'ūd described this as being the outer garment or cloak and what it cannot conceal, such as the woman's height or the hem of her dress and footwear. Ibn 'Abbās explained it as the face and hands. The rulings of later scholars, including those of the four well-known schools of thought, are based upon these two interpretations, to which they add further evidences from both the *ḥadīth* and what is known of the actual practice of women at the time of revelation. It is universally accepted that the woman's entire body⁶⁹ must be covered before men, excepting the husband and close relatives (*maḥram*) specifically mentioned in the verse and in the *sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ). No particular mode or manner of covering is essential as long as the following conditions are met:

- 1) The clothing must cover the whole body other than what is exempted by the words "except that which [necessarily] appears thereof."
- 2) It must be wide and loose enough to conceal body shape and curvature. Allāh's command to draw the large head wrapper (*khimār*) over the chest (literally, the frontal opening of a garment) insures that its folds will conceal the breast area, neck and shoulders as well as the head and hair. The clothing should also hang loosely over the hips. When the Prophet (ﷺ) gave a piece of cloth to Usāmah bin Zayd, who in turn gave it to his wife, he (ﷺ) said, "Tell her to use a thick lining under it, as I fear it could reveal the size of her bones."⁷⁰
- 3) The cloth must be thick enough as not to reveal the skin color beneath it

⁶⁷"O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down upon themselves part of their outer garments." (33:59) The outer cloak or *jilbāb* (pl. *jalābeeb*) was described as a sheet-like garment which rests on the top of the head and extends to the ground. "*Yudneena 'alayhinna*" conveys the meaning of lowering and drawing together, insuring complete covering. Verse 53 of the same *sūrah*, known as "*Āyat al-Hijāb*" (the Verse of Screen or Partition) refers specifically to the Prophet's wives, although Muslim women have traditionally sought Allāh's approval by following their example.

⁶⁸This includes both natural beauty, such as that of the body and hair, and that by which women decorate themselves of clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, etc. Some scholars have included the face, its being the main point of focus in any human body.

⁶⁹The pious scholars of previous generations tended to minimize their differences over whether or not the face and hands are included. It has become an issue only in modern times, with disagreements exaggerated as a result of new efforts to define the Muslim woman's role in a changing society. Yet, it can easily be conceded that if the face and hands are to be covered generally, there are cases of necessity in which it is allowable to uncover parts of them. And if it is permissible to expose them, then in a very restricted manner, i.e., without makeup and under circumstances where one is certain to avoid problems.

⁷⁰Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī.

or the shape of the body. The Prophet (ﷺ) cursed women of later generations who would be dressed yet undressed.⁷¹

4) The clothing should not be *zeenah* (adornment) in itself, as that is supposed to be concealed. The outer garment should be of a plain appearance without conspicuous decorations on it which attract attention.

5) It should not resemble clothing usually worn by the opposite sex. Styles may vary with time and location, but among Muslims there remains a clear distinction between the appearances of males and females. The Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned that Allāh has cursed the man who dresses like a woman and the woman who dresses like a man.⁷²

6) It should not resemble the dress which is particular to the non-believers, for the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever imitates a people is one of them."⁷³

7) It should not be clothing of distinction or reputation, i.e., that by which a person is individually known. This includes what is markedly unusual when compared with other Muslims in a particular environment, the excessively ostentatious worn out of pride and the excessively shabby worn to give an impression of indifference to the world. Both of these reflect a kind of vanity which is improper in Islam. The Prophet (ﷺ) warned, "Whoever wears a dress of fame – Allāh will clothe him in a similar dress on the Day of Resurrection and then set it afire." One narration says, "...Allāh will clothe him in a dress of humiliation."⁷⁴

It must be pointed out that with the exception of the first condition, all of the aforementioned applies to the male Muslim's clothing as well.⁷⁵ Men should also dress modestly according to recognized norms, avoiding clothing which is eccentric, which resembles that of females, or that by which the non-believers distinguish themselves. When someone asked Ibn `Umar what garments he should wear, he was told, "Those that will neither invite the scorn of the weak-minded [because they are unattractive] nor the blame of the wise [because of extravagance]."

The verse conveys to the believing women Allāh's concern for their honor and reputation, and hence His instruction to avoid the careless dress and behavior of the pre-Islamic period and of the non-believers. According to Ibn Katheer, it was revealed when Asmā' bint Marthad, a woman who received female guests in a palm garden of hers, observed them wearing unfastened cloaks so that their ankles, chests and the ends of their hair appeared. She

⁷¹In a *ḥadith* narrated by Muslim.

⁷²Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Ḥākim – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷³Narrated by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁷⁴Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'i and Ibn Mājah – *ḥasan*.

⁷⁵The *'awrah*, or private area of men (from the navel to the knees) must be covered in the same way with loose and sufficiently heavy material.

remarked, "How unsightly this is!" Then Allāh sent down: **"And tell the believing women..."**

Al-Bukhārī reports 'Ā'ishah as saying, "May Allāh have mercy upon the emigrant women [Muhājirāt]. As soon as Allāh revealed, **'...and [let them] wrap their headcovers over their chests,'** they tore off the edge of their waist wrappers and wrapped their heads with it." And she said, "By Allāh, I have not seen better or more believing in the Book of Allāh than the women of the Anṣār. When *Sūrah an-Nūr* was revealed with **'...and [let them] wrap their headcovers over their chests,'** their men returned to them reciting what Allāh had revealed for them therein; a man would recite it to his wife, daughter, sister and every relative. There was no woman among them but that she took her extra waist wrapper and wound it tightly around her head out of faith and belief in what Allāh had sent down of His Book. By morning they were [praying] behind the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) wrapped up [appearing] as if there were crows on their heads."⁷⁶

After a repetition of **"and not expose their adornment"** to emphasize the prohibition, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*) in His divine wisdom and precision exempted women from the ruling's observance before specific categories of people:

- 1) The husband and *maḥram* relatives, i.e., those to whom marriage is permanently prohibited⁷⁷ – Most of these are named in the verse. A few, however, are included by mention in the *sunnah*, such as the brothers of both parents (uncles) and the daughter's husband. Also included are those who are related comparably by nursing, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Prohibited [for marriage] due to breastfeeding is what is prohibited due to blood

⁷⁶Due to knots or the dark color of the cloth. (Related by Abū Dāwūd.) By mentioning the immediate compliance of the *ṣaḥābi* women, 'Ā'ishah was illustrating the correct and appropriate response of every sincere believer to Allāh's injunctions as soon as he/she is aware of them. Dr. Jamal Badawi has written: "To some, the subject of the Muslim woman's dress may seem trivial. The *shari'ah*, however, assigns it moral, social and legal dimensions. A basic requirement of the true believer, according to the Qur'ān [33:36], is making one's opinions and inclinations subservient to what Allāh and His Messenger have determined. Placing one's personal opinions, feelings or inclinations above or at the same level as the commandments of Allāh is the ultimate of human pride and vanity. This means in effect that a mortal is responding to Allāh's guidance by saying, 'O my Creator, Your law is Your opinion. I have my own opinion and I know best what is good for me.' This attitude is befitting for unbelievers and hypocrites, but not for a believer no matter how imperfect one may be in implementing Islam in one's life." (*The Muslim Woman's Dress*, p. 3.)

⁷⁷Wherever "fathers" are mentioned, it includes grandfathers, great grandfathers, etc., as far back as they exist, and "sons" includes grandsons, great grandsons, etc., as far down as they exist. The uncle's son (cousin) is not a *maḥram* relative since marriage to him is not prohibited. Neither is the sister's husband or the husband's brother and uncle.

relationship."⁷⁸ A complete list of relatives to whom marriage is forbidden is given in *Sūrah an-Nisā'*, verses 22 and 23.

2) Her associates among women – This does not indicate all women in general, rather, those who are trusted members of her circle. It has been given two interpretations:

a) Muslim women, who are aware of the Prophet's order: "Let no woman associate with another woman and describe her to her husband as though he was looking at her."⁷⁹ or,

b) Those women with whom she is familiar, such as members of the household, relatives and servants who are of upright moral character, whether Muslims or non-Muslims

3) Slaves possessed by her as property, regardless of religion⁸⁰

4) Those attendants who, due to an abnormal mental or physical condition, are devoid of sexual desire – However, in narrations by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) told his wife, Umm Salamah, not to admit a certain eunuch who, in spite of his condition, showed an interest in women.

5) Children (young boys) who are yet unattracted to women and do not usually distinguish between the plain and the beautiful – Most scholars put the limit of childhood at ten to twelve years – well before puberty.

The believing woman's modesty is reflected not only in her dress but in her movements and behavior. Thus, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) prohibited the pre-Islamic practice of attracting attention by letting the sound of ornaments be heard. And complimenting this is the prohibition of a woman's using perfume in the presence of non-*maḥram* men. Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "When a woman perfumes herself and passes an assembly, she is so-and-so," meaning a fornicator.⁸¹ And Abū Hurayrah related that he encountered a woman whose scent was noticeable so he said to her, "O servant of the Compeller (al-Jabbār), have you come from the *masjid*?" She said, "Yes." He said, "Indeed, I heard my beloved Abul-Qāsim (ﷺ) say, 'Allāh will not accept the prayer of a woman who perfumed herself for this *masjid* until she goes back and washes herself as she would for sexual impurity.'"⁸²

And in conclusion, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) addresses all Muslims directly, both male and female, with an order to repent from past sin committed out of ignorance, adhering, hereafter, to the legislation which He has sent down to them as a mercy and protection for themselves and their societies. For in so doing lies success in this world and salvation in the Hereafter.

⁷⁸Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁷⁹Narrated by Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī.

⁸⁰Obviously, this does not include hired workers, such as male house servants or drivers.

⁸¹Narrated by Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi – *ṣaḥeeḥ*. She has been described as such because she draws attention to herself in a way which invites *zinā*.

⁸²Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah.

... Ayahs 32-34 ...

وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ ۚ إِنْ يَكُونُوا فُقَرَاءَ يُغْنِهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَلْيَسْتَعْفِفِ الَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ نِكَاحًا حَتَّىٰ يُغْنِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُوا كِتَابَ مِمَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ فَكَاتِبُوهُمْ إِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ فِيهِمْ خَيْرًا ۖ وَآتُوهُمْ مِّنْ مَّالِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي آتَاكُمْ ۚ وَلَا تَكْرِهُوا فَتِيَّتَكُمْ عَلَى الْبِغَاءِ ۚ إِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ تَحْصِنًا لَّا تَجِدُوا عَرْضَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۚ وَمَنْ يُكْرِهْهُنَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِكْرَاهِهِنَّ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ آيَاتٍ مُّبَيِّنَاتٍ وَمَثَلًا لِّمَنِ الَّذِينَ حَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

And marry the unmarried among you and the righteous among your male slaves and female slaves. If they should be poor, Allāh will enrich them from His bounty, and Allāh is all-Encompassing and Knowing. But let them who find not [the means for] marriage abstain [from sexual relations] until Allāh enriches them from His bounty. And those who seek a contract [for emancipation] from among whom your right hands possess – then make a contract with them if you know there is goodness within them and give them from the wealth of Allāh which He has given you. And do not compel your slave girls to prostitution, if they desire chastity, to seek [thereby] the temporary interests of worldly life. And if someone should compel them, then indeed, Allāh is [to them], after their compulsion, Forgiving and Merciful. And We have certainly sent down to you distinct verses and examples from those who passed on before you and an admonition for those who fear Allāh.

Key Words

(Refer to v. 3)	أَنْكِحُوا
A single, unmarried person.	أَيِّمٌ (أَيَّامَى pl.)
Good, fit, righteous.	صَالِحٌ (صَالِحُونَ pl.)
Slave. (m.)	عَبْدٌ (عِبَاد pl.)
Slave. (f.)	أَمَةٌ (إِمَاء pl.)
Poor, impoverished.	فَقِيرٌ (فُقَرَاء pl.)
Refrain, abstain, refuse, avoid.	اسْتَعْفَفَ، يَسْتَعْفِفُ
To enrich, make self-sufficient.	أَغْنَى، يُغْنِي
To desire, seek, endeavor.	ابْتَغَى، يَبْتَغِي
A writing or something written. Specifically here, a contract for the emancipation of a slave drawn up by agreement between the slave and his owner.	كِتَابٌ
To force, compel.	أَكْرَاهَ، يُكْرِهُ

Protection, chastity. (see مُحْصَنٌ, p. 15)	تَحَصَّنَ
Example, parable, similarity, comparison.	مَثَلٌ
Admonition, warning, counsel.	مَوْعِظَةٌ

In the preceding verses Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) prohibited and warned against *zinā*, imposing specific legislation to close the avenues of approach to it in addition to severe deterrent punishments for convicted violators. Verse 32 provides the necessary balance with a strong promotion of lawful marriage. Muslims are ordered by Allāh to cooperate in the arrangement of marriages, although several authentic *ḥadīths* make it clear that no one may be compelled to marry against his or her will. Thus, jurists take the imperative verb "*ankiḥū*" as a recommendation rather than a command, the object being that unmarried people (whether virgin, divorced or widowed) should be assisted to find a suitable mate, and doing so for them in obedience to Allāh will be rewarded by Him.

In the case of slaves such assistance is restricted to the righteous among them. The reason given by commentators is that full responsibility for the consequences of a slave's marriage falls upon the owner; therefore, he is not required to aid those who are ill-mannered or known to be less than upright.

Then Allāh gives additional encouragement to any who might be reluctant to marry from fear of financial difficulty by affirming that He is the one who provides and enriches according to His knowledge and will. Many of the *ṣaḥābah* understood it as a promise that Allāh would make self-sufficient those who married in order to preserve their chastity. `Umar and Ibn `Abbās advised, "Seek provision through marriage." And Abū Bakr is quoted as saying, "Obey Allāh in what He ordered about marriage, and He will produce for you what He promised of sufficiency." Another interpretation of the verse suggests that one should not consider marriage an economic risk because Allāh's provision is given or withheld independently of a person's decision to marry or not to marry. Enrichment (although Allāh knows best) might be as stated in the *ḥadīth*: "There are three having the right to be helped by Allāh – the fighter in the cause of Allāh, the slave who wishes to purchase his freedom, and the one seeking marriage to keep chaste,"⁸³ meaning that *ṣadaqah* and *zakāh* may be used to help a poor person marry when he is unable financially.

The beginning of verse 33 again emphasizes that *zinā* and its preliminaries are not an option for an unmarried Muslim. Those who find not the desire, means or opportunity for marriage at a particular time are ordered to keep themselves away from *zinā* and from tempting environments until the time when Allāh eases the way for them to marry. Restraint and patience are required until then, and the Prophet (ﷺ) directed, "O company of youths, whoever of you is able to marry should marry, for it is more restricting for the gaze and protecting

⁸³Narrated by Aḥmad, an-Nasā'i and at-Tirmidhi, who graded it – *ḥasan ṣaḥeeḥ*.

for the private part; and whoever is not able to marry should fast, for it is similar to castration."⁸⁴

The second section of the verse encourages *mukātabah*, or the drawing up of an agreement by which a slave can earn freedom from his master in return for a set price or for particular services rendered.⁸⁵ Like any other business agreement, such a contract must be honored by law. But the option is left to an owner whether or not to enter into the contact, for it is based upon his knowledge of the slave's "*khayr*," meaning "good" in the general sense, while also indicating the specific qualifications of means, ability and upright character. Once contracted, the owner must not only provide sufficient opportunities for the slave to earn his freedom as agreed but is further ordered by Allāh to assist him financially toward his goal, reminding the master that he is merely a trustee for wealth belonging in reality to Allāh, the Exalted, and as such is expected to administer it as directed by Him. Thus, many righteous owners would forego a large portion of the slave's debt, enabling him to obtain freedom in a shorter period of time.

The third part of the verse also deals with the treatment and rights of slaves, specifically females, who had previously been exploited for bringing their owners large sums of money through prostitution and for the entertainment of guests. Children born as a result were added to the master's company of slaves, thereby increasing his wealth. Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) prohibited Muslims from this practice, for the slave woman, as any member of the community, was expected to guard her chastity, restricting herself to her owner or to her husband if married.

An immediate cause for the revelation of this legislation which further

⁸⁴i.e., suppressing sexual desire. (Narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.) The unmarried are advised to fill their time with serious work, study or other *ḥalāl* diversions until the opportunity for marriage arises. There is no license for pre-marital relationships in the meantime, and patience earns an unlimited reward (see 39:10).

⁸⁵In His all-encompassing knowledge and wisdom, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) did not abolish slavery outright, as He did intoxicants. At the time of the Qur'ān's revelation the economy of every civilization on earth was based on and dependent upon a system of slavery. Not only would the new Islamic community have been put at a great disadvantage by the immediate emancipation of all slaves, but the slaves themselves would have been unprepared for release into society without homes or means of support. Mercifully, Allāh made the freeing of slaves a gradual transition. Manumission by the state and by individual Muslims was declared a righteous deed greatly rewarded in the Hereafter. The Qur'ān stated that *zakāh* funds were to be used for the purchase of slaves to be freed (see 9:60), and freeing a slave is cited as expiation for the breaking of an oath and for particular sins and errors. Thousands of slaves requested and were granted contracts of *mukātabah* during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his successors. At the same time Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) repeatedly emphasized good treatment of the slaves who remained, harshly rebuking those owners who transgressed. Only under Islam did the slave enjoy a unique position as a member of the household and community worthy of respect.

contributed to the purification of society was the distress of a slave girl owned by the hypocrite `Abdullāh bin Ubayy. He was reported to have owned six exceptionally beautiful girls, who were for him a source of income and children. One of these, named Mu`ādhah, had accepted Islam and was of good character, so she refused to obey her master when he ordered her to accommodate certain men. `Abdullāh beat her savagely in an attempt to compel her, but she went to Abū Bakr and complained, who in turn mentioned it to the Prophet (ﷺ). When Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) ordered that she be taken from him,⁸⁶ Ibn Ubayy shouted, "Who will support us against Muḥammad who seizes our property?" Then Allāh sent down these words.

Additionally, in several authentic narrations the Prophet (ﷺ) declared the wages of prostitution to be evil, unclean and unlawful to Muslims. And finally, the verse confirms that one who is forced against his/her will to something sinful will not be held responsible and that those who repent from past sins committed in ignorance are forgiven by Allāh.

The statement of verse 34, although concluding the previous discourse, is not limited to its content but describes the Qur'ān in entirety. "*Āyyāt*" (verses), referring to rulings and ordinances, and particularly those in this *sūrah*, also carries its original meaning of "signs," for in fact, every verse is a sign from Allāh to mankind. "*Mathal*" (example or comparison) is explained as information about former peoples with illustrations of consequences: the results of faith and obedience to Allāh and the results of disbelief and rebellion. "*Maw'ithah*" is the lesson or recommendation derived from it, which will be heeded by those who have *taqwā*, i.e., consciousness of Allāh and fear of displeasing Him. Similarly, `Alī bin Abī Tālib, describing the Qur'ān, said, "In it are rulings for what [occurs] among you, information of what was before you, disclosure of what will be after you, and it is decisive, not amusement. Whoever among tyrants abandons it [i.e., its rulings] will be broken by Allāh, and whoever seeks guidance elsewhere will be misguided by Allāh." This theme is developed further in the following section.

⁸⁶Showing that one can lose his right to ownership for mistreating a slave.

... Ayah 35 ...

﴿ اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ۚ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ ۚ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۚ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ ۗ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَلَ لِلنَّاسِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

Allāh is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp; the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly star, lit from [oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow, even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allāh guides to His light whom He wills. And Allāh presents examples for the people, and Allāh is Knowing of all things.

Key Words

Light, illumination.	نُورٌ
Sky, heaven (pl. heavens).	سَمَاءٌ (pl. سَمَآوَات)
Earth.	أَرْضٌ
Burning wick, lamp.	مِصْبَاحٌ
Tree, shrub.	شَجَرَةٌ
Blessed.	مُبَارَكٌ
To almost be, be on the point of or about to.	كَأَدَّ، يَكَادُ
To illuminate, light up.	أَضَاءَ، يُضِيءُ
Fire.	نَارٌ
To guide, direct, lead.	هَدَى، يَهْدِي
Thing, anything in existence.	شَيْءٌ

In this *sūrah* Allāh *ta`ālā* imparts to all believers His wise instruction and clear legislation, enlightening them as to correct morals and manners and illuminating for them the way to His acceptance and pleasure as well as their own salvation. Dispelling the darknesses of blind habit and ignorance, He (*subhānahu wa ta`ālā*) effectively treats various diseases afflicting corrupt societies in order to purify those who would conscientiously apply His prescription and follow the path illuminated by the Creator of mankind.

Verse 35 is known as "*Āyat an-Nūr*" (the Verse of Light). Therein Allāh describes Himself as light in the absolute sense, the Light which is the source of all light, all illumination, visibility and vision. In their explanations and commentaries some of the *ṣaḥābah* and their students offered such statements

as: Allāh is the illuminator of the heavens and earth; He illuminated the heavens with bright stars and the earth with laws and rulings when He sent noble prophets. There is no day and night for Allāh; the light of the heavens and earth (and in another version: of His Throne) is the light of His countenance. All existence would be in darkness, but Allāh illuminated it by making truth appear. Allāh is the guide of all within the heavens and the earth. His light is guidance.

Thus, they and later scholars understood, in addition to the literal meanings of light and brightness, certain allegorical aspects in keeping with the comprehensiveness and perfection of divine attributes. Ibn al-Qayyim wrote: "Allāh named Himself 'Light' and made His Book a light and His Messenger (ﷺ) a light, and He concealed Himself from His creation with light." When Abū Dharr asked the Prophet (ﷺ) if he had seen his Lord during his ascent (*mi`rāj*), he replied, "There was [only] light, so how could I see Him?"⁸⁷ In another *ḥadīth* he (ﷺ) said, "His screen is light."⁸⁸ And among his supplications was: "O Allāh, to You is due all praise. You are the Light of the heavens and the earth and whoever is within them."⁸⁹ Although the light of Allāh is unlike anything imaginable by mankind, a comparison is presented in order to give a limited measure of understanding to an unlimited concept.

After mention of Himself, Allāh, the Exalted, continues with an illustration of how His light is reflected in the heart of a believing servant. The Qur'ānic description was explained thus by some of the Prophet's companions and their followers:⁹⁰

"The example of His light" refers to the light of Allāh, or His guidance in the heart of a believer. Also acceptable is the meaning: "his light," i.e., the believer's light, placed in his heart by Allāh.

"Is like a niche" – The Qur'ānic description is inclusive of that indentation in a wall wherein a lamp is placed or hung because it contains and reflects the light, increasing its brightness.

"Within which is a lamp" – The niche holds and supports the lamp or its essence; literally, the burning flame of its wick, which gives out a shimmering radiance.

"The lamp is within glass." It shines through a pure, transparent material which neither obstructs nor filters out any of its brilliance but only adds to

⁸⁷ Narrated by Muslim.

⁸⁸ Narrated by Muslim.

⁸⁹ As related by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁹⁰ Interpretations are not limited to those above. However, one should observe caution toward the great number of later commentaries on this subject, some of them by persons pretending a knowledge of the unseen, who describe the "mystic light" in poetic phrases founded on vivid imagination and deviant belief. Other speculations based upon modern scientific findings have gained popularity more recently. But none of these should be considered authoritative, for the essence of the matter is known to Allāh alone, and whatever of it He chose to reveal was revealed to His Messenger (ﷺ) and no one else.

its beauty. The glass is compared to the believer's heart within which shines the light of Allāh, not confined within itself but spreading to illuminate the way for others as well.

"The glass as if it were a pearly star" – The light emanating from it is pure and clear, distinct for all to see.

"[The lamp is] lit from a blessed olive tree," i.e., its fuel is the oil of such a tree. The olive tree is a source of many benefits to man in its fruit, oil, wood, shade, etc.; hence, its description as "blessed."

"Neither of the east nor of the west" – The tree is one occupying a central position in an elevated orchard, unshaded by mountains, walls or other trees. It is known that a tree exposed to the sun the entire day produces oil which is purer and of higher quality than one partially shaded in the morning or the afternoon. Some early commentators suggested that it is a tree without direction, meaning that it is not of this world, but Allāh knows best.

"Whose oil would almost glow, even if untouched by fire" – Due to its utmost purity, the oil itself glistens, so one can imagine how it would be when ignited by fire. Ibn `Abbās asked Ka`b al-Aḥbār about these words and was told, "Muḥammad (ﷺ) is obvious to the people even if he had not said he was a prophet."

"Light upon light" – All the elements of pure, bright light have been combined: a reflecting niche, a burning lamp, a transparent globe, and the purest fuel. The oil and fire coming together produce a light that neither one does alone; the same applies to the glow of faith when ignited by the Qur'ān.

The verse is concluded by a reminder that **"Allāh guides to His light whom He wills,"** and as the Arabic words additionally express, "whoever wills [to be guided]." For the Qur'ān shows consistently that Allāh has willed a free choice for individuals and that ultimate guidance or misguidance is dependent upon the attitudes of that person toward what is before him – whether he will open his eyes, see the light, and pursue it further or close his eyes and blindly turn away. This is illustrated in numerous stories and parables throughout the Qur'ān and in examples offered by Allāh, such as the ones in these verses. **"And Allāh is Knowing of all things,"** specifically, here, of who is deserving of His light and guidance.

... Ayahs 36-38 ...

فِي بُيُوتٍ أُذِنَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ تَرْفَعَ وَيُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا أَسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ ﴿٣٦﴾ رِجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَالْأَبْصَارُ ﴿٣٧﴾ لِيَجْزِيَهمُ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

[Such lamps are] in houses which Allāh has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned therein. Exalting Him within them in the morning and the evenings are men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allāh and performance of prayer and giving of zakāh. They fear a Day in which the hearts and eyes will turn about – that Allāh may reward them according to the best of what they did and increase them from His bounty. And Allāh gives provision to whom He wills without account.

Key Words

To raise, erect, build. Also to honor.	رَفَعَ، يَرْفَعُ (تُرْفَعُ) (f. passive)
To mention, remember.	ذَكَرَ، يَذْكُرُ (يُذَكَّرُ) (passive)
To declare above and free from any imperfection or to say "Subhān Allāh." To exalt, praise, glorify.	سَبَّحَ، يُسَبِّحُ
To distract or divert.	لَهَى، يُلْهِي
Heart, mind, perception.	قَلْبٌ (قُلُوب) (pl.)
To compensate, recompense, reward.	جَزَى، يَجْزِي
To increase, augment, expand.	زَادَ، يَزِيدُ
To provide for, give sustenance or wealth.	رَزَقَ، يَرْزُقُ
Account, reckoning, settlement.	حَسَابٌ

After His example of light reflected in the heart, Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta`ālā*) goes on to describe what can be noticed in a believer as a result of his inner enlightenment. The initial mention of "houses" (which most interpret as *masjids*) connects the two portrayals, for it is within them that lamps burn brightly and worshippers gather, and, according to the Prophet (ﷺ), they are the spots on earth most loved by Allāh.⁹¹ "Houses of Allāh" in which He is praised and worshipped are the subject of a number of *ḥadīths*, as the Messenger (ﷺ) encouraged the building, maintaining, cleaning and scenting of *masjids* and prohibited uncleanness and improper behavior or speech therein. And he (ﷺ) stressed that the five obligatory prayers should be performed by men in the

⁹¹As narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim.

masjid whenever possible, while the woman's prayer is preferable at home.

Not allowing worldly occupations to distance him from his Lord, the true believer is always in readiness to respond to the call for prayer, unwilling to forego the greater benefits of the Hereafter for a temporary earthly gain.⁹² Abū Dardā' explained, "I have established myself on this stairway, buying and selling and making a daily profit of 300 *dīnārs*, while attending prayer every day in the *masjid*. I am not saying that it is not *ḥalāl* [to pray here], but I would like to be of those that Allāh described as '**men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allāh.**'" From the days of the Prophet (ﷺ), the people of Madīnah could be observed engrossed in transactions and trade, weighing and measuring, but as soon as the *adhān* was heard, they would put down their scales, cover their merchandise with a cloth, and proceed to the *masjid* for congregational prayer as Allāh had ordered them. As in many places throughout the Qur'ān, *zakāh* has been mentioned in conjunction with prayer, reminding the Muslim that his obligation to Allāh includes an obligation to His servants as well.

Belief in the Last Day, the Day of Resurrection, is among the main pillars of faith. Whoever contemplates the terrible events of that Day as described in the Qur'ān cannot but be filled with the apprehension and fear which motivates him to seek refuge in Allāh's mercy by becoming worthy of it in His sight. The believer hastens to obey and worship Allāh in the hope and expectation that he will then be made safe and secure from its terrors by the Sovereign of that Day. So the result of his care and effort is that Allāh will forgive and overlook his minor sins and reward that servant as if all his deeds were as good as the best of them. Then He will increase the reward even further out of His boundless generosity. The Creator and Sustainer of creation provides for each of His servants in this world and the next according to His perfect knowledge and will, and then grants those who have earned His approval the greatest reward in Paradise.

⁹²The Muslim believer is not one who renounces the world, nor is his worship confined to the *masjid*. Rather, he worships Allāh in the *masjid* and outside of it through careful obedience to Him in every matter, whether at home with his family, working at his trade or profession, or conducting his business. Yet, his heart is attached to the "houses of Allāh."

... Ayahs 39-40 ...

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَلُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّيَهُ حِسَابَهُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٣٩﴾ أَوْ كَظُلُمَاتٍ فِي خَرِّ لُجِّيٍّ يَغْشَاهُ مَوْجٌ مِّنْ فَوْقِهِ مَوْجٌ مِّنْ فَوْقِهِ سَحَابٌ ۚ ظُلُمَاتٌ بَعْضُهَا فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ إِذَا أَخْرَجَ يَدُهُ لَمْ يَكَدْ يَرَاهَا ۚ وَمَن لَّمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِن نُّورٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

And those who disbelieved – their deeds are like a mirage in lowlands which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allāh before him, and He will pay him in full his due; and Allāh is swift in account. Or like darkneses within an unfathomable sea, covered by waves over which are waves over which are clouds – darkneses, one upon another. When one puts out his hand, he can hardly see it. And he to whom Allāh has not granted light – for him there is no light.

Key Words

To deny or refuse belief, to be ungrateful.	كَفَرٌ
Work, deeds.	عَمَلٌ (أَعْمَالُ pl.)
Mirage, illusion.	سَرَابٌ
(Refer to v. 11)	حَسِبَ، يَحْسَبُ
Water, liquid.	مَاءٌ
Darkness.	ظُلُمَةٌ (ظُلُمَاتُ pl.)
To cover, descend upon, envelop, conceal.	غَشِيَ، يَغْشَى
Waves (a series of waves).	مَوْجٌ
Clouds (a collection of clouds).	سَحَابٌ
A part or portion, some, one of.	بَعْضٌ
To make, create, effect, put, set.	جَعَلَ، يَجْعَلُ

Each of these two verses contains analogy to a particular kind of disbelief, in contrast to true belief acquired from Allāh. The first describes deviation from the truth as an illusion. Not only is Allāh's light rejected and another path preferred, but it is propagated willfully by people claiming and expecting reward in the Hereafter for their ostentatious deeds and kindnesses. But since they refuse Allāh's guidance and disobey Him, He will not accept their deeds no

matter how virtuous they appear to people on earth.⁹³ After death the advocates of falsehood and error will find that, in fact, their good works and charities were of no benefit to their souls, for they were not accompanied by a sincere intention to obey and please their Lord; otherwise, they would have followed what He ordained through His last Messenger (ﷺ). Thus, their expectations are likened to a desert mirage which disappears as one draws near enough to discover its reality. Not only will their deeds be shown as worthless, but they will be called to account for their conceit, hypocrisy and both the obvious and unapparent sins committed while they pretended integrity and righteousness.

The second scene⁹⁴ portrays the blind follower who obeys and imitates his leader without understanding or questioning and prefers the ease of letting others make his decisions. This verse, in contrast to no. 35, has been called "*Āyat ath-Thalām*" (the Verse of Darkness) and describes the darkneses of ignorance, prejudice and complacency, compounded one upon another. A person in such a state, covered by layers of darkness, cannot see, much less follow Allāh's light, although the description suggests that deep inside he holds a subconscious knowledge that has essentially been suppressed. The conclusion returns to the point that Allāh alone is the source of all light and enlightenment and that it cannot be obtained except from Him. The Prophet (ﷺ) used to supplicate when going to the *masjid*, "O Allāh, put in my heart light and in my vision light and in my hearing light, on my right light and on my left light, above me light and below me light, before me light and behind me light, and intensify my light."⁹⁵

⁹³In *Sūrah al-Furqān* (25:23) Allāh said: "And We will approach what they have done of deeds and make them as dust dispersed."

⁹⁴It was not until submarines could descend deeper than 50 meters that men learned about the darkness of the oceans. At lesser depths divers could still see what was before them. Marine scientists explain that as light enters sea water, it breaks down into its component colors. Red is absorbed at a depth of 30 to 50 meters. Then orange and yellow are absorbed, followed by green and violet at about 100 meters. The last color to be absorbed is blue at a depth of 200 meters. Thus, the sea becomes progressively darker as one descends, until there is total darkness. It was also discovered that the sea is not calm under its surface waves but that currents run deep in layers, one below another. (*Self-Evident Miracles of the Holy Qur'ān*, pp. 94-95.)

⁹⁵Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

... Ayahs 41-42 ...

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالطَّيْرِ صَفَّتِ كُلُّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ
عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٤١﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٢﴾

Do you not see that Allāh is praised by whoever is within the heavens and the earth and [by] the birds with wings spread? Each has known his [means of] prayer and praise, and Allāh is Knowing of what they do. And to Allāh belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and to Allāh is the destination.

Key Words

(Refer to v. 36)	سَبَّحَ، يُسَبِّحُ
Bird, flock of birds.	طَيْرٌ
(Refer to v. 19)	عَلِمَ
Dominion, sovereignty, kingdom.	مُلْكٌ
Destination, end, outcome.	مَصِيرٌ

In spite of the prevalence of disbelief among mankind, Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'ālā*) comforts His Prophet (ﷺ) and every believer with the reminder that he shares the company of all those who worship and praise their Lord day and night throughout the universe. The angels, the animals, birds, insects, plants, indeed all of creation, worships Allāh. As He stated in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ ۚ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ
تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

"The seven heavens and the earth and those within them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allāh] with praise of Him, but you do not understand their exalting [of Him]."⁹⁶

Every creature obeys its Creator and submits to His command. Each has a specific method which is part of its nature. Thus, verse 41 concludes with the information that every one of them instinctively knows how to worship Allāh in its own way and that He is cognizant of that and acknowledges their praise of Him.

Man, too, has been directed how to obey and worship Allāh. It is only the arrogant disbelievers who refuse and oppose their Lord, but they will surely be

⁹⁶Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:44.

overcome. This is confirmed by the mention of Allāh's complete sovereignty over His creation. If He wills to allow those men some time upon earth in which to reconsider and repent while they prefer to use it instead to increase in sin, they will not escape that Day when they must face the all-powerful Sovereign and pay the price of their futile rebellion.

... Ayahs 43-44 ...

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَامًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنْ
السَّمَاءِ مِنْ جِبَالٍ فِيهَا مِنْ بَرَدٍ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَصْرِفُهُ عَنِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ يَكَادُ سَنَا بَرْقِهِ يَذْهَبُ
بِالْأَبْصَرِ ﴿٤٣﴾ يُقَلِّبُ اللَّهُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لَأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ ﴿٤٤﴾

Do you not see that Allāh drives clouds? Then He brings them together; then He makes them into a mass, and you see the rain emerge from within it. And He sends down from the sky mountains [of clouds] within which is hail, and He strikes with it whom He wills and averts it from whom He wills. The flash of its lightening almost takes away the eyesight. Allāh alternates the night and the day. Indeed in that is a lesson for those who have vision.

Key Words

To see, notice, perceive, consider.	رَأَى، يَرَى
To compile, join, put together.	أَلَّفَ، يُؤَلِّفُ
To come out, exit, emerge, go forth.	خَرَجَ، يَخْرُجُ
Mountain.	جَبَلٌ (جِبَال pl.)
To strike, hit, touch, afflict.	أَصَابَ، يُصِيبُ
To divert, avert, shift away from.	صَرَفَ، يَصْرِفُ
Nighttime.	لَيْلٌ
Daylight hours.	نَهَارٌ
Consideration, lesson, warning.	عِبْرَةٌ

Many amazing aspects of nature reflecting the Creator's power and limitless ability are taken for granted by man because of their familiarity to him and regularity of occurrence. Therefore, they are described in the Qur'ān in such a way as to give a new perspective and open one's eyes to the fact that all of this is the predetermined work of Allāh and that it has a purpose. Man is prompted to observe such phenomena as if for the first time, to reassess and contemplate what lies behind it all. A few examples are mentioned within these verses.

The first is the distribution of life sustaining water over the earth. It is Allāh who established the cycle of precipitation and causes vapor rising from the seas and other bodies of water to collect in a thin layer of clouds spreading over wide areas. These are swept along by His command until they gather at a particular location forming massive heaps. As vapor condenses, it falls from within the

raincloud. Other clouds, appearing as lofty mountains,⁹⁷ descend toward the earth heavily laden with frozen droplets which are released as Allāh wills, wherever He wills. According to His plan, this may be a trial or penalty for some and a mercy and blessing to others. Lightning, discharged between the clouds or between clouds and the earth, is thus a source of both fear and hope, as stated in *Sūrah ar-Rūm*.⁹⁸

Another regular occurrence, the precise and consistent succession of night and day, is again attributed directly to Allāh, for it is one of His great favors taken for granted by inhabitants of the earth. One can imagine how life might be if periods of daylight and darkness were not alternated at suitable intervals:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ مَنْ إِلَهُ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ
أَفَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ. قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَمَةِ مَنْ إِلَهُ غَيْرُ
اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ تَسْكُنُونَ فِيهِ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

"Say, 'Have you considered – if Allāh should make for you the night continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allāh could bring you light? Then will you not hear?' Say, 'Have you considered – if Allāh should make for you the day continuous until the Day of Resurrection, what deity other than Allāh could bring you a night in which you might rest? Then will you not see?'"⁹⁹

But Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) regulates the length of each throughout the seasons to afford the best and most expedient natural environment. By His will all of the countless and precise conditions necessary to sustain life on earth are maintained. This is easily ascertained by those observers who apply their inner vision as well.

⁹⁷Once man became able to fly through and above cloud formations, he could see their similarity to mountain structures. Another discovery was that condensed water falls from inside the cloud, momentarily leaving empty spaces therein, as alluded to by the Arabic expression, *khilāl*.

⁹⁸*Sūrah ar-Rūm*, 30:24. See also 13:12-13.

⁹⁹*Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:71-72.

... Ayahs 45-46 ...

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِّن مَّاءٍ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ بَطْنِهِ ۚ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ رِجْلَيْنِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ أَرْبَعٍ ۚ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤٥﴾ لَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَا ءَايَاتٍ مُّبَيِّنَاتٍ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

And Allāh has created every [moving] creature from water. And of them are those that move on their bellies, and of them are those that walk on two legs, and of them are those that walk on four. Allāh creates what He wills. Indeed, Allāh is over all things competent. We have surely sent down distinct verses. And Allāh guides whom He wills to a straight path.

Key Words

To create, make, originate.	خَلَقَ، يَخْلُقُ
Living and moving creature, animal, beast.	دَابَّةٌ
Walk, proceed, move.	مَشَى، يَمْشِي
Belly, stomach, underside, inside.	بَطْنٌ
Able, capable, competent.	قَدِيرٌ

In the Arabian desert more than 1400 years ago, Allāh, the Exalted, revealed to His Messenger (ﷺ) that the source of life is water. Not only animals and humans, as mentioned in this verse, but **"We made from water every living thing."**¹⁰⁰ The reminder of Allāh's creative ability and of the innumerable forms of life existing by His will upon the land and in the seas is further emphasized by the statement that He creates what He wills, be it living creatures, lifeless objects, galaxies, tiny particles and their components – all things and forces known to man and unknown to him. So everything in existence was willed by the all-Wise Creator, and whatever does not exist or occur was not willed by Him to be. Similarly, whatever He wills to create or recreate for the life of the Hereafter is true and cannot be denied. Hence, the conclusion that Allāh is able and competent to do as He wills and has power over all things. He merely commands, "Be," and it is.

Verse 46 summarizes all that has preceded. For Allāh, the Exalted, sent down this Qur'ān to mankind containing numerous signs, evidences, examples and precise legislation. He directs those of intellect and insight – the human race – to reflect upon it and understand it. Then He repeats the comprehensive statement that 1) He guides whom He wills, i.e., whomever He knows to be

¹⁰⁰Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:30.

worthy of guidance, and 2) He guides him who wills, i.e., whoever wills to be guided to truth, those who desire guidance, accept it, act upon it, and seek further enlightenment. It is they who will find a direct path to Allāh illuminated by His light.

... Ayahs 47-52 ...

وَيَقُولُونَ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَبِالرَّسُولِ وَأَطَعْنَا ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّى فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُم مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَمَا أُولَئِكَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾
وَإِذَا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ يَأْتُوا إِلَيْهِ
مُذْعِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ أَفَى قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ أَمْ ارْتَابُوا أَمْ تَخَافُونَ أَنْ تَحِيفَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَرَسُولُهُ ۚ بَلْ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾ إِنَّمَا كَانَ قَوْلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذَا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ يَقُولُوا سَمِعْنَا
وَأَطَعْنَا ۚ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥١﴾ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَتَخْشَ اللَّهَ وَيَتَّقْهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

But they [i.e., the hypocrites] say, "We have believed in Allāh and in the Messenger, and we obey." Then a party of them turns away after that, and those are not believers. And when they are called to Allāh and His Messenger to judge between them, at once a party of them is averse. But if the right is theirs, they come to him in prompt obedience. Is there disease in their hearts? Or have they doubted? Or do they fear that Allāh will be unjust to them, or His Messenger? Rather, it is they who are the unjust. The only statement of the [true] believers when they are called to Allāh and His Messenger to judge between them is that they say, "We hear and obey." And those are the successful. And whoever obeys Allāh and His Messenger and fears Allāh and is conscious of Him – it is those who are the attainers.

Key Words

Messenger, envoy. Here, referring to the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ).	رَسُولٌ
To obey, submit, yield.	أَطَاعَ، يُطِيعُ
To turn one's back, turn away. Also, to turn toward, take upon oneself an affair.	تَوَلَّى، يَتَوَلَّى
Party, faction, company.	فَرِيقٌ
To rule, judge, give a verdict or decision.	حَكَمَ، يَحْكُمُ
One who avoids, shuns, is averse to something.	مُعْرِضٌ (مُعْرِضُونَ)
Immediately and willingly obedient, conceding, submissive.	مُذْعِنٌ (pl. مُذْعِنُونَ)
Illness, disease, ailment.	مَرَضٌ
To doubt, be suspicious, have misgivings.	ارْتَابَ، يَرْتَابُ
Unjust, transgressor, wrongdoer.	ظَالِمٌ (pl. ظَالِمُونَ)
Successful, prosperous, fortunate.	مُفْلِحٌ (pl. مُفْلِحُونَ)
Attainer of what is desired, triumphant, victorious.	فَائِزٌ (pl. فَائِزُونَ)

In spite of the clear evidences given by Allāh to His Messenger (ﷺ), there remained in Madīnah some who preferred to ignore truth and right for the pursuit of worldly interests. Although angered and frustrated by new legislation that interfered with some of their personal advantages and limited their authority, they dared not oppose it openly, considering the increasing ascendancy of the Islamic state. Hypocrisy was often evident in their conduct, however; a prime example being the slander incident recorded earlier in this *sūrah*. Further exposure of their attitudes and behavior toward the Prophet (ﷺ) is given here. The wording suggests that it applies to hypocrites of every age and can be readily observed in many who claim to be Muslims.

The characteristic of a hypocrite is that he says what he does not mean and pretends something other than his true intent. Although many tongues proclaim belief and obedience, some will prove themselves false by subsequent evasion and refusal to comply. For this reason Allāh has concluded, "***And those are not believers.***"¹⁰¹

During his lifetime, disputes and matters of controversy were referred directly to the Prophet (ﷺ), and every believing Muslim sought and accepted his judgement, knowing that he ruled according to what Allāh revealed to him and that obedience to the Messenger (ﷺ) is in fact obedience to Allāh.¹⁰² These verses were revealed in relation to particular persons who, when seeking their right, came eagerly to the Prophet (ﷺ), certain that his fair and just judgement would favor them. But if they wished to perpetuate an injustice or obtain the right of another, they would say, "Let us consult someone else" and decline to appear or to comply, showing arrogance and aversion. Thus, even their obedience was not due to any conviction that it was right and binding upon them but merely because it served their own interests and inclinations.

The description is not limited to the hypocrites of that time, however, but is applicable to any who profess Islam and then turn their backs on the rulings of Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ). A general principle upheld by judges in cases of contention is that a party who refuses response after being summoned to an Islamic court is considered guilty. Additionally, scholars have pointed out that it includes those who reject guidance from the *sunnah*, preferring and persisting instead in innovations and other unlawful practices within the Islamic community.

In verse 50 Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'ālā*) states that there can only be three reasons for such behavior: 1) disease (i.e., hypocrisy and disbelief) in the heart, 2) doubt about the validity or suitability of the religion, or 3) fear of injustice from Allāh or His Messenger (ﷺ). In reality, all of these or any one of them alone constitutes disbelief. Allāh knows well the condition of those people and declares, "***Rather, it is they who are the unjust.***" Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ) are free of and disassociated from whatever they might suppose or imagine of inequity.

¹⁰¹ Refer also to *Sūrah an-Nisā'*, verses 59-61 and 64-65.

¹⁰² As stated in *Sūrah an-Nisā'*, 4:80.

In contrast once again, the proper response of a true believer when called to heed the words of Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ) is compliance and submission, which is reflected in the words, "***We hear and obey.***" Such persons are described as successful in their endeavor to earn the approval of Allāh. Further, those who constantly obey Allāh and His Messenger (ﷺ) and are fearful of their Lord's displeasure with past offenses, consequently repenting and being most conscious of Him thereafter – those are described as winners, i.e., attainers of everything good in this life and the next.

... Ayahs 53-54 ...

﴿ وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَئِنْ أَمَرْتَهُمْ لَيَخْرُجُنَّ ۚ قُلْ لَا تُقْسِمُوا طَاعَةٌ مَعْرُوفَةٌ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴾ قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْهِ مَا حُمِّلَ وَعَلَيْكُمْ مَا حُمِّلْتُمْ ۚ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوهُ تَهْتَدُوا ۚ وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٥٤﴾

And they swear by Allāh their strongest oaths that if you ordered them, they would go forth. Say, "Do not swear. [Such] obedience is known. Indeed, Allāh is Acquainted with what you do." Say, "Obey Allāh and obey the Messenger. But if you turn away – then upon him is only that with which he has been charged, and upon you is that with which you have been charged. And if you obey him, you will be rightly guided. And there is not upon the Messenger except the [responsibility for] clear notification."

Key Words

To swear, take an oath.	أَقْسَمَ، يُقْسِمُ
Oath, pledge.	يَمِينٌ (أَيْمَان. pl.)
Obedience, compliance, a righteous deed.	طَاعَةٌ
Known, recognized, understood.	مَعْرُوفٌ
To burden, impose upon, charge, make responsible.	حَمَلَ (حُمِّلَ passive)
Announcement, communication, notification, message, proclamation, information conveyed.	بَلَاغٌ

Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) continues to inform His Prophet (ﷺ) about the manner of the hypocrites in dealing with Islam. For after their aversion to the Prophet's judgement was exposed, they hastened to him swearing by Allāh that if they were ordered to leave their families, homes and properties and go out to fight for the cause of Allāh, they would certainly do so. But Allāh was well aware that they had no intention of joining the believers in *jihād*, even when it became a matter of urgency and obligation upon every man in the community, so He revealed to His Messenger (ﷺ) that their exhibition of loyalty was to be rejected as false.

The habitual liar is much given to swearing to the truth of what he says, as if he is aware that he will not be easily believed. In swearing by Allāh the lie is compounded and the sin increased. But oblivious to consequences of the Hereafter, the hypocrite seeks only his immediate advantage.¹⁰³ Thus, the

¹⁰³ The Prophet (ﷺ) enumerated three signs of a hypocrite: "When he speaks he lies, when he promises he breaks it, and when he is entrusted he betrays." (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Prophet (ﷺ) was directed to tell them, **"Do not swear,"** for if they were sincere, they would have been obedient to every order. In explaining the words, **"Obedience is known,"** early commentators said: Obedience is known by prompt execution of the order and is observable. It is proven rather than sworn. And the obedience claimed by the hypocrites is known to be a lie, merely words without deeds and oaths that are broken. Allāh is completely familiar with their ways and schemes, their cowardice and ambition, and has warned His believing servants of their deception.

To them and to all people is addressed verse 54. It is first, a command to obey Allāh and the Messenger (ﷺ). Second, it is a proof that obedience to the Prophet (ﷺ) is obligatory as well as obedience to Allāh, and that in addition to the Qur'ān, the authentic *sunnah* is a primary source of legislation. About His Messenger (ﷺ), Allāh said:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنْ أَهْوَىٰ إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

"And he does not speak from his own inclination; it is not but a revelation revealed."¹⁰⁴

Therefore, a *ḥadīth* whose authenticity has been established cannot be ignored. Third, it states certain facts: Refusal will not harm Allāh or the Prophet (ﷺ). Nor will the Prophet (ﷺ) be held responsible for anyone's refusal. His duty is clearly defined – the convey what Allāh revealed, and in fact, that trust was fulfilled completely by him to the satisfaction of his Lord. Men, however, will be answerable for all that was conveyed to them by the Prophet (ﷺ) from Allāh – their acceptance of it and fulfillment of its requirements. Rejection brings harm to oneself alone, while beneficial guidance is obtained by all who obey; they will find themselves upon a straight path leading to the pleasure of Allāh. And finally, there is a second emphatic affirmation that the Messenger (ﷺ) was simply that – a messenger, who was charged with delivery of Allāh's message in a distinct manner. His *sunnah* is the embodiment of that message and clarification for all time to come. It is up to man how he will receive it, and each individual will ultimately be judged accordingly and with full justice upon return to the Creator.

¹⁰⁴Sūrah an-Najm, 53:3-4.

... Ayah 55 ...

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا ۚ يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا ۚ وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

Allāh has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that – then those are the [defiantly] disobedient.

Key Words

To promise.	وَعَدَ، يَعِدُ
A good, righteous deed or work.	صَالِحَةٌ (صَالِحَاتِ (pl.
To give authority to, appoint as a successor.	اسْتَخْلَفَ، يَسْتَخْلِفُ
To make strong, establish firmly.	مَكَّنَ، يُمَكِّنُ
To sanction, approve of, be pleased or satisfied with, prefer over others.	ارْتَضَىٰ، يَرْضَىٰ
To exchange, substitute, change, alter.	بَدَّلَ، يُبَدِّلُ
Fear, anxiety, apprehension.	خَوْفٌ
Safety, security, peace.	أَمْنٌ
To worship, serve and obey, deify.	عَبَدَ، يَعْبُدُ
To make or consider someone (or something) a partner, associate or equal.	أَشْرَكَ، يُشْرِكُ

Although these words are a promise directly to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) and his followers, scholars affirm that it applies to future generations as well, providing those Muslims fulfill the stated conditions: true belief, righteous conduct, and worship free of all shades of *shirk*.¹⁰⁵ Ibn Katheer (who died in 774 H) pointed out that Allāh, the Exalted, did accomplish this for the believers when, even during the Prophet's lifetime, Islam became dominant in Makkah

¹⁰⁵ Abul-A'la Mawdūdī wrote in his commentary: "Those who lack these qualities and pay mere lip service to Islam are neither worthy of this promise nor are its addressees. Therefore, they should entertain no hope of having any share in it."

and all Arabia, including the lands of Yemen and Bahrain. The *jizyah* tax was paid by Jews and Christians to the north, while treaties were made with the emperor of Rome, the ruler of Egypt, and the kings of Oman and Abyssinia. Then, under the short rule of Abū Bakr, Islam penetrated well into those areas, and their conquest was completed under his successor, `Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb. During the time of `Uthmān, Islam spread to the far east and in Africa, westward to the sea, and later into parts of Europe. He added that this favor was, no doubt, Allāh's blessing due to their determination to collect and preserve the Qur'ān.

The blessing was not obtained for that reason alone, but generally, because the Islamic state had met the requirements stated in this verse. Peoples under the rule of oppressive governments looked with longing to the justice of Islam and often aided the Muslims in liberating their cities. After experiencing that justice first hand, most accepted the religion wholeheartedly, becoming among its strongest defenders. In addition, the exemplary conduct shown by Muslim tradesmen and others who ventured into lands far beyond those which saw military activity served as the best propagator of Islam, and entire populations converted within a relatively brief period. Once, the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) had said, "Indeed, Allāh showed me the land, and I saw its eastern and western portions. The rule of my ummah will reach what I was shown of it."¹⁰⁶

The *ṣaḥābī*, al-Barā' bin `Āzib, observed, "This verse was revealed while we were in a state of great fear." The Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions remained under persecution in Makkah for nearly thirteen years, quietly inviting people to the worship of Allāh alone. While enduring continuous threats and abuse, they had not yet been given permission to defend themselves. After their emigration to Madīnah, Allāh ordered them to fight. During this period they were in a state of high alert at all times. Finally, a man said, "O Messenger of Allāh, are we to remain fearful like this forever? Will there not come a day when we will be safe and can put away our weapons?" To this, he (ﷺ) replied that they would not have to endure much longer until a man among them could sit in a great assembly wherein there would not be a single sword. Then this verse was sent down, and Allāh gave victory to His Prophet (ﷺ) over the Arabian peninsula, so they became secure and laid down their arms. After the Messenger's death they continued thus throughout the caliphates of Abū Bakr, `Umar and `Uthmān¹⁰⁷ until the nation fell into civil strife and men changed their attitudes. So Allāh

¹⁰⁶Narrated by Aḥmad, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd.

¹⁰⁷The Prophet (ﷺ) foretold, "The caliphate after me within my *ummah* will be for thirty years. Then there will be kingship after that." (Narrated by Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.) This was the period of the four rightly-guided rulers, Abū Bakr, `Umar, `Uthmān and `Ali. Some include the short term of al-ḥasan bin `Alī, who, although initially supported by a large faction of Muslims, realized that insistence upon his right to rule would bring further strife and bloodshed to the already divided *ummah*. He conceded authority to Mu'āwiyah bin Abi Sufyān at the beginning of the year 41 H.

changed their condition¹⁰⁸ and fear returned to them.

Although he had not yet experienced the promised security, the Prophet (ﷺ) warned of dangers to one's religion and the temptation toward hypocrisy at that time: "Give good tidings to this *ummah* of ease, ascendancy, prosperity, victory and stability in the land. But any of them who does the work of the Hereafter for worldly gain will not have a share in the Hereafter."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, their defeat of the decadent Persian empire and other victories eventually brought the Muslim state extensive wealth, as the Prophet (ﷺ) had promised `Adiyy bin Hātim when he once complained of its poverty. In fact, there came a time when no poor could be found to accept *zakāh* funds, so they were returned to the treasury (*bayt al-māl*).

The meaning of "succession" here is not as in *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (v. 30), where "*khalīfah*" indicates a successor in the general sense, i.e., human beings replacing one another naturally, generation after generation. Allāh's promise to the Muslims is one of honor and entails a trust deserved only by the trustworthy: the responsibility of being His agents, of establishing truth and justice, of upholding His law, and representing the best of Islam both publicly and privately. Non-believers, hypocrites and deviators, who will not hesitate to abuse power and authority, are obviously excluded from such a trust.

The conditions for fulfillment of this promise are additionally evident from a threat suggested in the Arabic text against those who do not continue to live up to the requirements and Allāh's description of them as "*fasiqūn*," i.e., rebellious violators deserving of His anger. The word "*kafara*," usually denoting denial of faith and ingratitude toward Allāh, is used in the verse to indicate disobedience as contrasted with worship, whose true and comprehensive definition includes devout obedience in everything ordained. Ibn Katheer observed that the validity of this principle is illustrated in actual historical occurrences. For when the Prophet's companions were the most upright of people, most adherent to *tawḥeed*, most conscientious and obedient to their Lord, Allāh gave them victory. When they strove to spread Allāh's light to every corner of the earth, He supported and aided them so that they governed many lands and peoples. But when their successors neglected some of Allāh's commands, their domination lessened accordingly.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ According to the principle stated in the Qur'ān: "That is because Allāh would not change a favor which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves." (*Sūrah al-Anfāl*, 8:53) A similar meaning is expressed in 13:11. The verses show that whenever a majority of Muslims fear Allāh, obey Him and become virtuous, they can obtain the promised status. In spite of increasing corruption in government circles during the Omayyad and Abbasine periods, the spread of Islam continued as long as ordinary Muslims still reflected a high standard of ethics and morals, largely unaffected by the shortcomings of their rulers. But when love of the world infected society as a whole, the decline of authority and influence became evident and ultimately led to military and psychological defeat. Yet, the promise of Allāh remains for the Muslim nation that would become worthy by sincere dedication, selflessness and sacrifice for His cause.

¹⁰⁹ Narrated by Aḥmad – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

¹¹⁰ Although the further decline and present state of our *ummah* provides additional proof of this fact,

... Ayahs 56-57 ...

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾ لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَأْوَهُمُ النَّارُ وَلَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٥٧﴾

And establish prayer and give zakāh and obey the Messenger that you may receive mercy. Never think that the disbelievers are causing failure [to Allāh] upon the earth. Their refuge will be the Fire, and how wretched the destination.

Key Words

To establish a practice, maintain it regularly, perform it correctly and precisely.	أَقَامَ، يُقِيمُ
To give or show mercy to, have mercy upon.	رَحِمَ، يَرْحَمُ (يُرْحَمُ) (passive)
Someone (or something) that prevents, makes something impossible, causes failure.	مُعْجِزٌ (مُعْجِزُونَ pl.)
Habitation, retreat, refuge, shelter.	مَأْوَى

These two short verses link the previous discourse with that to follow. The first of them orders all Muslims to be worthy of Allāh's support and His mercy by observing His right to be worshipped through regular prayer and the right of His poor and weak servants to be aided, and by being obedient to the Prophet (ﷺ), following his directives and his *sunnah*. Allāh's command to obey the Messenger (ﷺ) is explained by His words "**He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allāh,**"¹¹¹ and emphasizes the importance of the Prophet's teachings.

The word "*la`alla*," expressing hope and expectation, takes on a sense of certainty and promise when coming from Allāh, the Exalted, for there is no doubt that He will do whatever He wills. Hence, the believer who obeys the three commands in this verse can be sure of obtaining Allāh's mercy.

The second verse is reassurance addressed directly to the Prophet (ﷺ), who had suffered much at the hands of the disbelievers and hypocrites and was saddened by their rebellion against Allāh. Through him it reaches every believer. It states that despite their best plots and strategies, the evildoers will never be able to obstruct Allāh's plan, nor will they escape His punishment in the end, for He is al-Jabbār, al-Qahhār, al-Qādir,¹¹² far exalted above whatever they presume.

its lesson remains for future generations, who may yet benefit from it if Allāh wills.

¹¹¹ *Sūrah an-Nisā'*, 4:80. Both these verses clearly refute misguided claims that if one follows the Qur'ān, he has no need for the *ḥadīth*. The believer is ordered in the Qur'ān itself to obey the Prophet (ﷺ), whose teachings comprise the *sunnah*.

¹¹² The Compeller, the Prevailing, the Perfect in ability – three attributes of Allāh *ta`ālā*.

... Ayahs 58-59 ...

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لِيَسْتَأْذِنَكُمْ الَّذِينَ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَبْلُغُوا الْحُلُمَ مِنْكُمْ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ مِّن قَبْلِ صَلَاةِ الْفَجْرِ وَحِينَ تَضَعُونَ ثِيَابَكُمْ مِّنَ الظَّهِيرَةِ وَمِن بَعْدِ صَلَاةِ الْعِشَاءِ ثَلَاثُ عَوَرَاتٍ لَّكُمْ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا عَلَيْهِمْ جُنَاحٌ بَعْدَهُنَّ طَوَفُوتٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٨﴾ وَإِذَا بَلَغَ الْأَطْفَالُ مِنْكُمُ الْحُلُمَ فَلْيَسْتَأْذِنُوا كَمَا اسْتَأْذَنَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَاتِهِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

O you who have believed, let those whom your right hands possess and those who have not reached puberty among you ask permission of you at three times: before the dawn prayer and when you put aside your garments [for rest] at noon and after the evening prayer. These are three times of privacy for you. There is no blame upon you nor upon them beyond these [periods], for they continually circulate among you – some of you among others. Thus does Allāh make clear to you the verses, and Allāh is Knowing and Wise. And when the children among you reach puberty, let them ask permission [at all times] as those before them have done. Thus does Allāh make clear to you His verses; and Allāh is Knowing and Wise.

Key Words

To seek or ask permission.	اسْتَأْذَنَ، يَسْتَأْذِنُ
(Refer to v. 31)	مَلَكَ، يَمْلِكُ (الْيَمِينُ)
(Refer to v. 31) Here also: times of undress.	عَوْرَةٌ (عَوَرَاتٌ pl.)
To reach, arrive at, attain.	بَلَغَ، يَبْلُغُ
Sexual maturity, puberty.	حُلُمٌ
Dawn, daybreak.	فَجْرٌ
To put down, lay aside.	وَضَعَ، يَضَعُ
Garment, clothing.	ثَوْبٌ (ثِيَابٌ pl.)
Noon, midday, midday heat.	ظَهِيرَةٌ
Evening, disappearance of twilight.	عِشَاءٌ
(Refer to v. 18)	بَيِّنَ، يُبَيِّنُ
(Refer to v. 31)	طِفْلٌ (أَطْفَالٌ pl.)

These verses deal with privacy within the home among its residents. Believers have already been commanded (in v. 27) to seek permission before entering the house of another, and here, the comfort and security of the home is completed with a complimentary ruling requiring members of the household to be considerate and respect private areas, the bedroom in particular. The virtue of modesty, initially implanted through divine ordinances, was in the course of time to become custom and habit – a part of the Muslim's character. A few commentators have suggested that the verses were revealed in order to teach, promote and encourage good manners, whereas the majority of scholars consider the orders contained in them as obligations about which individuals will be held accountable. This view is supported by the first verse of the *sūrah*.

It is understood from the context that adult family members should wait for permission before entering private areas at all times, but that the slave and young child are exceptions due to particular circumstances. Yet, at the three times of privacy when people may be partially undressed, asleep or enjoying intimacy, even those are to observe caution. Teaching them to do so is the responsibility of the head of the household. Ibn `Abbās related, "In the early years of Islam, Muslims who had houses could not afford the luxury of curtains and partitions, so Allāh ordered the servants and children to ask permission at those three times. Later, Allāh provided for them, and they obtained curtains and partitions which served in place of that." It does not mean, however, that the verses were abrogated, for permission is still required for entering.¹¹³

Whenever a child attains puberty,¹¹⁴ he is considered an adult and must ask permission at all times, as do those who matured before him. The rulings in these verses apply to both sexes, whether among children, slaves, *maḥram* relatives or others. Both verses end with a reminder that out of His knowledge and wisdom, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) has made clear the legislation contained in them, a further evidence that they were not abrogated with the availability of curtains and doors.

¹¹³ Children should be taught that when parents retire to their private quarters, they are not to be disturbed unnecessarily. The lesson may be reinforced by temporarily locking the door. In fact, every Muslim is under obligation to take precaution at times of rest and undress.

¹¹⁴ Physical maturity is confirmed by the onset of menstruation in females and nocturnal emissions in males. Fifteen years has been designated by many scholars as the age of maturity in the absence of these signs.

... Ayah 60 ...

وَالْقَوَاعِدُ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ الَّتِي لَا يَرْجُونَ نِكَاحًا فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ ثِيَابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَبَرِّجَاتٍ بِزِينَةٍ وَأَنْ يَسْتَعْفِفْنَ خَيْرٌ لَهُنَّ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

And women of post-menstrual age who have no desire for marriage – there is no blame upon them for putting aside their outer garments, but not displaying adornment. But to modestly refrain is better for them. And Allāh is Hearing and Knowing.

Key Words

A sedentary or inactive woman, one past the age of childbearing.	قَاعِدٌ (قَوَاعِدُ pl.)
To expect, hope for, desire.	رَجَاءٌ، يَرْجُو (يَرْجُونَ f. pl.)
Marriage, or a contract of marriage.	نِكَاحٌ
One who makes himself noticeable or conspicuous, one who displays himself. Here, women who show their beauty or adornment before non- <i>maḥram</i> men.	مُتَبَرِّجٌ (مُتَبَرِّجَاتُ f. pl.)

To those elderly women who are no longer attractive nor attracted to men, Allāh has given permission for a degree of relaxation in their manner of dress as an alleviation from difficulty. A number of early and later scholars have ruled that such a woman may also travel without a husband or *maḥram* relative. They explained "**putting aside the garment**" as meaning the outer garment, or *jilbāb*, which conceals lighter clothing worn at home. This was further clarified by such statements as: "She may remove her cloak and appear in a long dress and headcover." When asked whether the aged women could show dyes and ornaments, 'Ā'ishah is quoted as saying, "O company of women, it is the same for all of you. Allāh has permitted you to beautify yourselves without displaying, that is, it is not allowed that anyone see of you that which is forbidden."¹¹⁵

Thus, conditions, as stated in the verse, are that the woman be well past the age of childbearing, that she has no desire for men, would not be expected to attract them, and that she does not entertain any wish to display herself or appear attractive; otherwise, she will not qualify for this allowance. Her decision must be based upon the knowledge that Allāh is aware of the most intimate thoughts and feelings.

Because an older woman may suffer from weakness of body, illness or disability of some kind, the verse provides facilitation. Yet, despite

¹¹⁵Meaning their bodies and decorative ornaments. Related by Ibn Abi Ḥatīm.

permissibility, Allāh has concluded with advice that whenever possible, it is better to refrain out of modesty. Several commentators have remarked that if this is the case for elderly women, what can be inferred regarding younger ones?

... Ayah 61 ...

لَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَعْمَى حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَنْ تَأْكُلُوا مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ آبَائِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ إِخْوَانِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخَوَاتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَعْمَامِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ عَمَّاتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخْوَالِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ خَالَاتِكُمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتُمْ مَفَاتِحَهُ أَوْ صَدِيقِكُمْ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَأْكُلُوا جَمِيعًا أَوْ أَشْتَاتًا فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُمْ بُيُوتًا فَسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ تَحِيَّةٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ مُبَرَكَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

There is not upon the blind [any] restriction nor upon the lame restriction nor upon the ill restriction nor upon yourselves in eating from your own houses or the houses of your fathers or the houses of your mothers or the houses of your brothers or the houses of your sisters or the houses of your father's brothers or the houses of your father's sisters or the houses of your mother's brothers or the houses of your mother's sisters or [from houses] whose keys you possess or [in the house] of your friend. There is no blame upon you whether you eat together or separately. But when you enter houses, give greetings of peace to one another – a greeting from Allāh, blessed and good. Thus does Allāh make clear to you the verses that you may understand.

Key Words

Restriction, impediment, feeling of guilt or embarrassment, sin.	حَرَجٌ
(Refer to v. 6)	أَنْفُسٌ
To eat, consume.	أَكَلَ، يَأْكُلُ
(Refer to v. 27)	بُيُوتٌ
(Refer to v. 30)	آبَاءٌ - إِخْوَانٌ - أَخَوَاتٌ
Mother, grandmother.	أُمٌّ (أُمَّهَاتٌ pl.)
Paternal uncle, father's brother.	عَمٌّ (أَعْمَامٌ pl.)
Paternal aunt, father's sister.	عَمَّةٌ (عَمَّاتٌ pl.)
Maternal uncle, mother's brother.	خَالَ (أَخْوَالٌ pl.)
Maternal aunt, mother's sister.	خَالَةٌ (خَالَاتٌ pl.)
Friend, sincere and trustworthy companion.	صَدِيقٌ
(Refer to v. 29)	جُنَاحٌ
(Refer to v. 31)	جَمِيعًا
Separated, dispersed.	أَشْتَاتًا

(Refer to v. 27)	دَخَلَ، يَدْخُلُ
(Refer to v. 27)	سَلَّمَ، يُسَلِّمُ
Greeting, salutation.	تَحِيَّةٌ
(Refer to v. 35)	مُبَارَكٌ
(Refer to v. 26)	طَيِّبٌ
(Refer to v. 18)	بَيِّنٌ، يُبَيِّنُ
To use reason, be sensible or intelligent, comprehend.	عَقَلَ، يَعْقِلُ

At the outset of the verse Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) reassures His believing servants that there is no problem in the handicapped and disabled joining others for meals. Initially it appears that the verse aimed at eliminating disdain of such people, common in the pre-Islamic period. This is certainly true, for arrogance is detested by Allāh,¹¹⁶ and the Prophet (ﷺ) warned against it in numerous *ḥadīths*.¹¹⁷ However, it was a different issue which preceded this revelation – one that arose due to the piety of the companions and their sensitivity toward one another. When Allāh commanded, **"O you who have believed, do not consume one another's property unjustly,"**¹¹⁸ people became extremely cautious, for food was considered a most valued property. Because the blind could not see what was before him, he might be deprived of favored portions. The cripple might not be able to eat fast enough to take his due share, and the sick person, similarly, due to lack of appetite. To avoid the slightest injustice to a handicapped person, they began to keep his food separate, fearing to share it with him. So Allāh revealed the first part of this verse as an alleviation for all.

The second part came as a response to the reluctance of visitors in someone's absence to accept food offered by his wife, child or servant. It gives a general permission, not only to relatives, but to slaves, hired workers, caretakers and close friends to eat according to need and custom from Muslim homes whether the owner is present or not.

The list of houses begins with one's own, serving to demonstrate that just as one may eat freely in his own house, he may do so as well in those whose mention follows. The house of the son and daughter has not been cited separately since it was generally understood and acknowledged that children, their achievements and properties are attributed to the parents and that **"your houses"** includes those of your children. Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "You and

¹¹⁶As stated in several verses of the Qur'ān, among them: 17:37-38, 28:83, 31:18-19 and 40:35.

¹¹⁷Such as: "Whoever has in his heart an atom's weight of pride will not enter Paradise." He (ﷺ) explained it by saying, "Pride is in the disregard of right and looking down upon people." (Narrated by Muslim and at-Tirmidhi.)

¹¹⁸Sūrah an-Nisā', 4:29.

your wealth belong to your father. Your children are among the best of your acquisitions, so you may consume from the acquisitions of your children."¹¹⁹ For the adult child who is now the head of his own household, it is not only a matter of deference out of respect, but reflects an obligation toward parents who may no longer be self-sufficient in later years. Scholars have added that the mention of "**your houses**," which might seem the most obvious place in which one may eat, serves three functions: to include the houses of children, to specify that whatever food is found in the place of residence is permitted to all of its residents, and to affirm that food brought or prepared by any of the residents, and not the owner alone, is also included in the permission.

The list of houses that follows has been cited by the Ḥanafī and Ḥanbalī scholars as proof of the obligation of relatives to support and maintain one another. Those "**whose keys you possess**" states clearly the right of a servant or caretaker to satisfy his hunger from the property in the absence of the owner, who must not refuse him permission.¹²⁰ ʿĀ'ishah reported that when some of the Muslims accompanied the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) on various campaigns, they would leave their keys with a slave or caretaker and say, "We allow you to consume whatever you need." But they would say, "It is not lawful for us to eat, for they permitted us unwillingly out of necessity, and we are trustworthy." So Allāh revealed, "**or those whose keys you possess.**" The words have further been interpreted to mean that anyone put in charge of another's property has this right, and it includes those who care for orphans and disabled people, as well as their possessions.

Finally, the friend has been mentioned, meaning the intimate, sincere friend who is trusted completely with one's family and property. Other acquaintances are to be treated with the honor and respect due to guests, although their right is more restricted. The close friend (*ṣadeeq*) is one who would protect his friend's property, respect his wishes, and avoid causing him any hardship or distress. Some commentators have pointed out that the chosen friend is often more beloved and trustworthy than the relative. Hence, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'ālā*) gave him equal status in this ruling to encourage and maintain such relationships among the believers, about whom He said, "**The believers are but brothers.**"¹²¹

The third part of the verse was revealed to invalidate one of the pre-Islamic customs which held no benefit to society. The Arabs had always been known for their generosity, although it was often a matter of pride and ostentation. Certain of the tribes considered it humiliating to eat alone – to the extent that a

¹¹⁹Narrated by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

¹²⁰This is not a license to remove provisions from the property, which would amount to theft. Yet, if someone should steal from any of the houses mentioned above, his hand would not be cut under the law because of doubtful circumstances and the permission given to enter. A judge might decide another penalty, however, in such a case, especially when it is deemed necessary to deter others from similar conduct.

¹²¹Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:10.

man might drive his sheep while enduring hunger for an entire day until he found someone with whom to share his food and drink. Another report mentioned a tribe that disliked eating in company, so its members took their meals individually at a distance from one another. All such restrictions were lifted with Allāh's words: ***"There is no blame upon you whether you eat together or separately."*** It is known, however, that the Prophet (ﷺ) preferred meals in company and said, "Eat together and do not separate, for blessing is with the group."¹²²

In conclusion, the verse orders every Muslim, when entering the houses of others, to greet the occupants with the greeting of peace ordained by Allāh, *"As-salāmu `alaykum."* ***"Houses"*** may also include mosques or other places of assembly, as mentioned in relation to previous verses. And Allāh uses the word *"anfusikum"* (yourselves) rather than "one another," describing the Muslim community as one body. The greeting of peace is a supplication for other Muslims as well as a pledge that they will not be harmed. Scholars add that this order makes it unlawful to replace the greeting with one used by the non-Muslims.¹²³ The verse's rulings are again confirmed and emphasized by the reminder that Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) has made them clear and understandable.

¹²² Narrated by Ibn Mājah – *ḥasan*.

¹²³ Such as "Welcome" or "Good day," although there is no harm in adding these or similar expressions after the *salām*.

... Ayah 62 ...

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَإِذَا كَانُوا مَعَهُ عَلَىٰ أَمْرٍ جَامِعٍ لَّمْ يَذْهَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَسْتَأْذِنُوهُ
 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَأْذِنُونَكَ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۖ فَإِذَا أَسْتَأْذَنُوكَ لِبَعْضِ شَأْنِهِمْ فَأَذِنَ لِمَن
 شِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

The believers are only those who believe in Allāh and His Messenger and, when they are with him on a matter of common interest, do not depart until they have asked his permission. Indeed, those who ask your permission, [O Muḥammad] – those are the ones who believe in Allāh and His Messenger. So when they ask your permission due to something of their affairs, then give permission to whom you will among them and ask forgiveness for them of Allāh. Indeed, Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.

Key Words

(Refer to v. 2)	مُؤْمِنٌ
(Refer to v. 2)	أَمَنَ
(Refer to v. 47)	رَسُولٌ
Matter, issue, thing, affair, concern.	أَمْرٌ (أُمُورٌ pl.)
Comprehensive, general, common, communal.	جَامِعٌ
To go, leave, depart.	ذَهَبَ، يَذْهَبُ
(Refer to v. 58-59)	اسْتَأْذَنَ
Matter, affair, business, condition, situation.	شَأْنٌ
(Refer to v. 28)	أَذِنَ
To seek or ask forgiveness.	اسْتَغْفَرَ، يَسْتَغْفِرُ

The verse begins with a description of true believers as opposed to the hypocrites who, despite their declaration of loyalty, sought out any excuse to avoid obligations. It also suggests that the proper conduct for a Muslim includes asking permission to leave as well as to enter, and greeting others, as directed by Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) when he said, "When one of you arrives at a meeting, he should greet with *salām*; and when he intends to go, he should greet with *salām*, for the former is not more of a right than the latter."¹²⁴

The discipline practiced by the *ṣaḥābah* is given as an example and instruction for the *ummah* in general. When summoned by the Prophet (ﷺ) for any important matter, they would not leave without permission and would not

¹²⁴Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

request permission without genuine need. Hence, in an assembly called by the *imām* for a collective cause during war or peace (and scholars have included the call for prayer in congregation), it is considered sinful and unlawful to excuse oneself prematurely without a valid, acceptable reason.

Then there is a directive to the Prophet (ﷺ) and whoever will succeed him as leader of the Muslim *ummah* to use his discretion in granting or refusing leave according to circumstances, weighing the urgency of an individual need against that of the matter at hand. He is further directed to ask Allāh's forgiveness for those believers who have sought permission out of a possible error in judgement without blameworthy intent, for He (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) is merciful and forgiving of them.

... Ayah 63 ...

لَا تَجْعَلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعَاءِ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضًا ۚ قَدْ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ يَتَسَلَّلُونَ مِنْكُمْ لِوَاذًا ۚ
فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٣﴾

Do not make [your] calling of the Messenger among yourselves like the call of one of you to another. Allāh already knows those of you who slip away, concealed by others. So let those beware who dissent from his order, lest fitnah strike them or a painful punishment.

Key Words

(Refer to v. 40)	جَعَلَ، يَجْعَلُ
Call, cry, summons, supplication.	دُعَاءُ
(Refer to v. 40)	بَعْضُ
To withdraw secretly, slip away, escape.	تَسَلَّلَ، يَتَسَلَّلُ
To be cautious, beware, be on guard.	حَذَرَ، يَحْذَرُ
To be at variance with, oppose, disobey, to be different from, diverge from, dissent.	خَالَفَ، يُخَالِفُ
Order, command, instruction.	أَمْرٌ (أَوْ أَمْرٌ pl.)
(Refer to v. 43)	أَصَابَ، يُصِيبُ
Trial, affliction, dissension, civil strife, oppression, seduction, disbelief.	فِتْنَةٌ
(Refer to v. 19)	أَلِيمٌ

The Prophet (ﷺ) was chosen and honored by Allāh, the Exalted, and given a distinct place among mankind. In this sūrah, Muslims were directed to acknowledge this fact by showing due respect when addressing him. Ibn `Abbās reported that people would call out to Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ), saying, "O Muḥammad!" "O Abul-Qāsim!" or "O Ibn `Abdullāh!" as they were used to calling one another by name. With the revelation of this verse they politely confined themselves thereafter to "O Prophet of Allāh" or "Messenger of Allāh."

A second interpretation of the same words is this: Do not consider the summons or the supplication of the Prophet (ﷺ) like that of any other man. His call is to be obeyed because he speaks on behalf of Allāh. And his supplication will surely be answered by Allāh, therefore, all people should beware of causing him to supplicate against them. This was directed particularly to the hypocrites who, as the verse states, did not hesitate to quietly depart from meetings called by the Prophet (ﷺ) or from the Friday *khuṭbah* once they had been seen and

counted among those present. This they did by either signaling a request for permission, which was granted, or by sitting in the back rows and slipping out concealed by those in front of them. In spite of the care they took to leave unnoticed, Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta`ālā*) was well aware of their conduct.

Allāh is aware, as well, that not everyone proclaiming Islam is sincere, and not everyone will accept the guidance He sent through His Messenger (ﷺ). Hence, He gives a final warning to any who might be complacent and satisfied with an accustomed way of life, unwilling to fully implement the Prophet's teachings: "So let those beware who dissent from his order..."¹²⁵ Scholars have described them as people who are at variance with his *sunnah*, his way, method or law, either by direct opposition to it or by failure to conform to it publicly or privately while preferring some other way.

Similarly, the Prophet (ﷺ) declared in authentic narrations by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, "Whoever performs a deed not according to our practice – it is rejected." The *ḥadīth* refers not to worldly practices but to religious acts of worship and those dealings among people specifically outlined in the Qur'ān or *sunnah*. It means that neither the methods of other religions nor innovations within Islam will be accepted by Allāh since He has completed and perfected the religion¹²⁶ and made His last Messenger its teacher and the example to be followed by all Muslims until the Day of Resurrection.¹²⁷ Therefore, the advocacy of any other way is unlawful. From this scholars conclude that there are two conditions for the acceptability of any deed ordained by Allāh: 1) sincere intent to do it for the approval of Allāh alone, and 2) correct methodology, i.e., that it be carried out precisely as instructed or demonstrated by His Prophet (ﷺ).

Those who deviate from the way of Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) are warned of two consequences: *fitnah* and painful punishment. Both of them may be realized in this world and the next as well, but many commentators have considered the painful punishment to be that of the Hereafter, while *fitnah* strikes primarily during the worldly life in the form of trials, temptations, afflictions or a heart stricken with disbelief and hypocrisy. It may also include wars and civil strife, or the spread of crime and corruption, injustice and tyranny.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once foretold the advent of such penalties in a future time. He addressed those who had emigrated from Makkah for the cause of Islam, saying, "O company of Muhājirūn, [there will be] five afflictions, and I seek refuge in Allāh from your experiencing them:

* *Zinā* will not appear among a people to the extent that they publicize it but

¹²⁵ Additional meanings are: "from his matter" or "affair," i.e., his teaching, religion or way of life.

¹²⁶ As stated in 5:3.

¹²⁷ Refer to 33:21.

that painful diseases will spread among them which were not known to their predecessors,

- * They will not decrease the weight and measure which is due but that they will be seized with poverty, hardship and oppressive rulers,
- * They will not withhold the *zakāh* due on their wealth but that they will be deprived of water from the sky, and if not for the animals, they would not receive any rain,
- * They will not break the covenant of Allāh and His Messenger but than an enemy from another people will be given power over them and will seize some of what was in their hands,
- * And as long as their leaders do not rule by the Book of Allāh, civil wars will be induced among them."¹²⁸

¹²⁸Narrated by Ibn Mājah and al-Hākim – *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

... Ayah 64 ...

أَلَا إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ قَدْ يَعْلَمُ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَيَوْمَ يُرْجَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٤﴾

Unquestionably, to Allāh belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth. Already He knows upon what [position] you stand and [knows] the Day they will be returned to Him and He will inform them of what they have done. And Allāh is Knowing of all things.

Key Words

(Refer to v. 35)	سَمَاءٌ (سَمَآوَاتٍ pl.)
(Refer to v. 35)	أَرْضٌ
(Refer to v. 2)	يَوْمٌ
(Refer to v. 28)	رَجَعَ، يَرْجَعُ (يُرْجَعُ passive)
To inform, notify, disclose, indicate.	نَبَأَ، يُنَبِّئُ
(Refer to v. 28)	عَمِلَ، يَعْمَلُ
(Refer to v. 35)	شَيْءٌ

The *sūrah* concludes by turning the heart and mind back to Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, owner and sustainer of all existence, governor and rightful legislator for each of His beings and knower of all things. Mention of His perfect awareness of every human attitude and response to this revelation followed by that of the ultimate return to Allāh fills the believer with a sense of responsibility accompanied by optimism, while warning the rebel and hypocrite that freedom is temporary and justice is inevitable.

"The Day they will be returned to Him" is the object of an unspecified verb which may be estimated according to either of two valid interpretations:

- 1) "[He knows] the Day...", based upon the preceding verb, with "and" connecting both portions of the sentence. It affirms that knowledge of that Day, its time, occurrences and realities, is attributed to Allāh, from whom nothing is hidden.
- 2) "[Beware] the Day...", based upon the warning directed to those who would oppose or neglect Allāh's legislation.

Most fearful of that Day for himself and others, `Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb advised, "Bring yourselves to account before you are brought to account."

It is the Day of Resurrection, when the sky will break apart, the stars will scatter, and the seas explode, when the earth is shaken with its final convulsion and discharges its burdens, when it is replaced by another earth, and the heavens as well...¹²⁹ ***"To your Lord, that Day, is the destination."***¹³⁰

It is the Day of Judgement and Recompense, when every soul will find what it has done of good before it and what it has done of evil, when man will remember that for which he strove, when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness, when those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger (ﷺ) will wish they were covered by the earth, when whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it...¹³¹

That Day every soul will have been returned, willingly or unwillingly, to its Creator to be confronted with the truth of all it accomplished and attempted during the worldly life. And justice will prevail, for Allāh is Knowing of all things.

والحمد لله رب العالمين

¹²⁹Refer to 82:1-3, 99:1-2 and 14:48.

¹³⁰Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:12.

¹³¹Refer to 3:30, 79:35, 5:119, 4:42 and 99:7-8.

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