

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 49
SURAH AL-HUJURAT

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

049

SURAH AL-HUJURAT

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Introduction and Summary

This is the third of the group of three Madinah Surahs, which began with Surah 47. See the Introduction to that Surah.

Its subject matter is the manners to be observed by the members of the rapidly-growing Muslim community, among themselves and towards its Leader. The keyword "Hujurat" (Chambers) occurs in verse 4.

Its date is referred to the Year of Deputations, A.H. 9, when a large number of deputations of all kind visited Madinah to offer their allegiance to Islam.

Summary- A community must show its respect to its Leader in all forms of behaviour; quarrels are unseemly and should be composed; manners spring from morals; and mutual respect and confidence are a duty and a privilege in Islam (49:1-18, and C.223).

C.223 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Respectful behaviour to the Leader, in manner,
Voice, and demeanour, are the bonds and cement
Of an organized community. The whispers
Of rumours should be tested, and selfish impatience
Should be curbed to discipline. All quarrels
Should be composed, if necessary by the force
Of the community, but with perfect
fairness and justice. Ridicule, taunts,
And biting words, should be avoided,
In presence or in absence. Suspicion
And spying are unworthy of men who believe.
all men are descended from one pair:
their honour depends, not on race, but
on righteousness. Faith is not a matter
Of words, but of accepting Allah's Will
And striving in His cause. The coming
Into Islam confers no favours on others,
But it itself a favour and privilege,
A guidance for those who are true and sincere.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقَدَّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ...

1. O ye who believe!

put not yourselves forward before Allah and His Messenger:

C4919. Several shades of meaning are implied:

- do not make yourselves conspicuous in word or deed when in the presence of Allah (e.g. in a Mosque, or at Prayers or religious assemblies):
- do not anticipate in word or deed what your Leader (Allah's Messenger) may say or do;
- do not be impatient, trying to hasten things before the time is ripe, of which the best Judge is Allah, Who speaks through His Messenger. Be reverent in all things, as in the presence of Allah: for He hears and sees all things.
- Look to the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him) for guidance and let nothing else take precedence of them. (R).

...وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (١)

But fear Allah: for Allah is He who hears and knows all things.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَرْفَعُوا أَصْوَاتَكُمْ فَوْقَ صَوْتِ النَّبِيِّ...

2. O ye who believe!

raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet,

C4920. It is bad manners to talk loudly before your Leader. Some ill-mannered people so raise their voices as to drown the voice of their Leader, in conversation or in Council.

...وَلَا تَجْهَرُوا لَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ كَجَهْرِ بَعْضِكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ...

nor speak aloud to him in talk, as ye may speak aloud to one another,

...أَنْ تَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالُكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ (٢)

lest your deeds become vain and ye perceive not.

C4921. Such rudeness may even destroy the value of such services as they may otherwise have been able to render, and all this without their even realising the harm they were doing to the Cause.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَعْضُونَ أَسْوَأَتَهُمْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ امْتَحَنَ
اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ لِلتَّقْوَى...
... اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ لِلتَّقْوَى...

3. Those that lower their voice in the presence of Allah's Messenger, their hearts has Allah tested for piety:

C4922. The essence of good manners arises from the heart. The man who really and sincerely respects his Leader has true piety in his heart, just as the man who does the opposite may undo the work of years by weakening the Leader's authority.

... لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ (٣)

for them is Forgiveness and a great Reward.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِنْ وَرَاءِ الْحُجُرَاتِ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٤)

4. Those who shout out to thee from without the Inner Apartments most of them lack understanding.

C4923. To shout aloud to your Leader from outside his Apartments shows disrespect both for his person, his time, and his engagements. Only ignorant fools would be guilty of such unseemly behaviour. It is more seemly for them to wait and bide their time until he is free to come out and attend to them. But, with the Messenger of Allah, much is forgiven that is due to lack of knowledge and understanding.

In an earthly Court, ignorance of the Law excuseth no man. If a man behaved in that way to the General of an army or the Governor of a Province, not to speak of an earthly King, he would be laid hands on by the Guard, and could never gain the access he desires.

C4923a. Al Hujurat: "the Inner Apartments" or "The Chambers."

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ صَبَرُوا حَتَّى تَخْرُجَ إِلَيْهِمْ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ

رَحِيمٌ (٥)

5. If only they had patience until thou couldst come out to them, it would be best for them: but Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا...

6. O ye who believe!

if a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth,

C4924. All tittle-tattle or reports-especially if emanating from persons you do not know-are to be tested, and the truth ascertained. If they were believed and passed on, much harm may be done, of which you may have cause afterwards to repent heartily. Scandal or slander of all kinds is here condemned.

That about women is specially denounced: 24: 11-20; 23-26

...أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ (٦)

lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ لَعَنِتُمْ...

7. And know that among you is Allah's Messenger: were he, in many matters, to follow your (wishes), ye would certainly fall into misfortune:

C4925. The messenger of Allah, if he consults his friends and associates, should not be expected to follow their advice in all matters. The judgment and responsibility are his: he sees farther than the rest, and he is not swayed by personal feeling as others may be. (R).

...وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ...

but Allah has endeared the Faith to you, and has made it beautiful in your hearts,

C4926. Fortunate indeed was the generation among whom the Prophet of Allah walked in his daily life. His example was inspiring. Their inner Faith was dear to them; it was a thing to be proud of in their innermost hearts; and they loved discipline, obedience, and righteousness. No wonder all their other disadvantages were neutralized, and they went from strength to

strength. Nothing but the Grace of Allah could have brought about such a result.

...وَكْرَهَ إِلَيْكُمْ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ...

and He has made hateful to you unbelief, wickedness, and rebellion:

...أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الرَّاشِدُونَ (٧)

such indeed are those who walk in righteousness --

فَضْلًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَنِعْمَةً وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ (٨)

8. A grace and favor from Allah;
and Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom.

وَأِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا...

9. If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel make ye peace between them:

C4927. Individual quarrels are easier to compose than group quarrels, or, in the modern world, national quarrels. But the collective community of Islam should be supreme over groups or nations. It would be expected to act justly and try to compose the quarrel, for peace is better than fighting.

But if one party is determined to be the aggressor, the whole force of the community is brought to bear on it. The essential condition of course is that there should be perfect fairness and justice and respect for the highest principles; for Islam takes account of every just and legitimate interest without separating spiritual from temporal matters.

The League of Nations failed because these essentials were absent and today the United Nations fails for the same reason. (R).

...فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّى تَفِيءَ

إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ...

but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah;

...فَإِنْ فَاءَتْ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا...

but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair:

...إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ (٩)

for Allah loves those who are fair (and just).

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ ...

10. The believers are but a single Brotherhood:

C4928. The enforcement of the Muslim Brotherhood is the greatest social ideal of Islam. On it was based the Prophet's Sermon at his last pilgrimage, and Islam cannot be completely realized until this ideal is achieved.

... فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ...

So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers:

... وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (١٠)

And fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy.

Section 2

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِّنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ...

11. O ye who believe!

let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former):

C4929. Mutual ridicule ceases to be fun when there is arrogance or selfishness or malice behind it. We may laugh with people, to share in the happiness of life: we

must never laugh at people in contempt or ridicule. In many things they may be better than ourselves!

...وَلَا نِسَاءَ مِّنْ نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ...

Nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former):

...وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْألقَابِ...

nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames:

C4930. Defamation may consist in speaking ill of others by the spoken or written word, or in acting in such a way as to suggest a charge against some person whom we are not in a position to judge.

A cutting, biting remark or taunt of sarcasm is included in the word **lamaza**.

An offensive nickname may amount to defamation, but in any case there is no point in using offensive nicknames, or names that suggest some real or fancied defect. They ill accord with the serious purpose which Muslims should have in life. For example, even if a man is lame, it is wrong to address him as "O lame one!" It causes him pain, and it is bad manners. So in the case of the rude remark, "the black man".

...يُنْسِ الْأَسْمَ الْفُسُوقِ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ...

Ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed:

...وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَنْبَأْ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ (١١)

And those who do not desist are (Indeed) doing wrong.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ...

12. O ye who believe! avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin:

C4931. Most kinds of suspicion are baseless and to be avoided, and some are crimes in themselves: for they do cruel injustice to innocent men and women.

...وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا ...

and spy not on each other,

Spying, or enquiring too curiously into other people's affairs, means either idle curiosity, and is therefore futile, or suspicion carried a stage further, which almost amounts to sin.

... وَلَا يَغْتَبَّ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا ...

nor speak ill of each other behind their backs.

Back-biting also is a brood of the same genus. It may be either futile but all the same mischievous, or it may be poisoned with malice, in which case it is a sin added to sin.

... أَيْحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا ...

Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?

C4932. No one would like even to think of such an abomination as eating the flesh of his brother. But when the brother is dead, and the flesh is carrion, abomination is added to abomination. In the same way we are asked to refrain from hurting people's feelings when they are present; how much worse is it when we say things, true or false, when they are absent!

... فَكْرَهُنُّمُوهُ وَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ...

Nay, ye would abhor it... But fear Allah:

... إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَحِيمٌ (١٢)

for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا ...

13. O mankind!

We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other).

C4933. This is addressed to all mankind and not only to the Muslim brotherhood, though it is understood that in a perfected world the two would be synonymous. As it is, mankind is descended from one pair of parents. Their tribes, races, and nations are convenient labels by which we may know certain differing characteristics. Before Allah they are all one, and he gets most honour who is most righteous.

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (١٣)

Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.

And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا...

14. The desert Arabs say, "We believe."

C4934. The desert Arabs were somewhat shaky in their faith. Their hearts and minds were petty, and they thought of petty things, while Islam requires the complete submission of one's being to Allah. See next verse.

Some of the failings of the desert Arabs are described in 48:11-15. But the reference here is said to be to the Banu Asad, who came to profess Islam in order to get charity during a famine.

...قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ...

Say,

"Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say, 'We have submitted our wills to Allah.'

C4935. 'This is what ye ought to prove if your faith has any meaning, but ye only say it with your tongues.'

For not yet has Faith entered your hearts.

...وَأِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ

غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (١٤)

But if ye obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not belittle aught of your deeds:

for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ...

15. Only those are Believers who have believed in Allah and His Messenger,

...ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ...

and have never since doubted, but have striven with their belongings and their persons in the Cause of Allah:

...أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ (١٥)

Such are the sincere ones.

فَلْ أُنْعَلْمُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ...

16. Say:

"What! Will ye instruct Allah about your Religion?"

C4936. 'You say (or perhaps even think) that you are Muslims, but where are the fruits of your Faith? Allah knows the innermost motives and secrets of your heart, and you cannot deceive Him by attaching a certain label to yourselves'. Alas! that this answer to the desert Arabs is true of so many others in our own times!

...وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ (١٦)

but Allah knows all that is in the heavens and on earth:

He has full knowledge of all things.

يَمُنُونَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا...

17. They impress on thee as favor that they have embraced Islam.

C4937. Islam in itself is a precious privilege. By accepting it we confer no favour on its preacher or on

any community. If the acceptance is from the heart, it is a great favour done to those who accept, that the Light of Allah has entered their hearts and they have received guidance.

...قُلْ لَّا تَمُنُّوا عَلَيَّ إِسْلَامَكُم...

Say,

"Count not your Islam as a favor upon me:

...بَلِ اللّٰهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (١٧)

Nay,

Allah has conferred a favor upon you that He has guided you to the Faith, if ye be true and sincere.

إِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...

18. "Verily Allah knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth:

C4938. This does not mean that we should seek petty motives in newcomers into the House of Islam, That would indeed be harbouring suspicions or allowing curiosity to spy out motives, which would be a crime under [49:12](#). We should be true, sincere, and devoted ourselves, and leave the case of others to Allah, from Whose eyes nothing is hidden.

...وَاللّٰهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ (١٨)

and Allah sees well all that ye do."