

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 66
SURAH AT-TAHRIM

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

www.quran.live

HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

066

SURAH AT-TAHRIM

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Introduction and Summary

This is the tenth and last of the series of short Madinah Surahs which began with Surah 57; see Introduction to that Surah. The point dealt with here is: how far the turning away from sex or the opposition of one sex against another or a want of harmony between the sexes may injure the higher interests of society.

The date may be taken to be somewhere about A.H. 7.

Summary- The failings of the weaker sex should not turn away men from normal social life: harmony and mutual confidence should be taught and enforced, and Allah's blessing will descend

on the virtuous even if their lot is cast with the wicked (66:1-12, and C.245).

C.245 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*The relations between the sexes are embittered
By misunderstandings and conflicts that produce
Unhappiness and misery, personal and social.
Harmony and confidence are due between
The sexes, not disgust or isolation, which may
Please some but cause injustice to others.
Respect each other's confidence, and if
You fail, repent and make amends.
The good man seeks virtue for himself
And his family. If Evil is yoked to Good,
It must take the fruit of its own deeds;
The worldly tie will profit naught;
But Good should firmly make a stand
And will be saved, for Allah doth care
For all His true devoted Servants.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ ...

1. O Prophet!

why holdest thou to be forbidden that which Allah has made lawful to thee?

C5529. The Prophet's household was not like other households. The Consorts of Purity were expected to hold a higher standard in behaviour and reticence than ordinary women, as they had higher work to perform. See n. 3706 to 33:28.

But they were human beings after all, and were subject to the weaknesses of their sex, and they sometimes failed. The commentators usually cite the following incident in connection with the revelation of these verses.

It is narrated from 'Aisha, the wife of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) by Bukhari, Muslim, Nasai. Abu Dawud and others that the holy Prophet usually visited all his wives daily after 'Asr Prayer. Once it so happened that he stayed longer than usual at the quarters of Zaynab bint Jahsh, for she had received from somewhere some honey which the holy Prophet liked very much. "At this", says 'Aisha, "I felt jealous, and Hafsa, Sawda, Safiya, and I agreed among ourselves that when he visits us each of us would tell him that a peculiar odour came from his mouth as a result of what he had eaten, for we knew that he was particularly sensitive to offensive smells".

So when his wives hinted at it, he vowed that he would never again use honey. Thereupon these verses were revealed reminding him that he should not declare to himself unlawful that which Allah had made lawful to him.

The important point to bear in mind is that he was at once rectified by revelation, which reinforces the fact that the prophets are always under divine protection, and even the slightest lapse on their part is never left uncorrected. (R).

... تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتَ أَزْوَاجِكَ ...

Thou seekest to please thy consorts.

C5530. The tender words of admonition addressed to the Consorts in 33:28-34 explain the situation far better than any comments can express. If the holy Prophet had been a mere husband in the ordinary sense of the term, he could not have held the balance even between his private feelings and his public duties. But he was not an ordinary husband, and he abandoned his renunciation on his realisation of the higher duties with which he was charged, and which required conciliation with firmness.

... وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (١)

But Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

فَدُفِرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحْلَةً أَيْمَانِكُمْ ...

2. Allah has already ordained for you, (O men), the dissolution of your oaths (in some cases):

C5531. Cf. 2:224.

If your vows prevent you from doing good, or acting rightly, or making peace between persons, you should expiate the vow, but not refrain from your good deed.

... وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ ...

and Allah is your Protector,

... وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢)

and He is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom.

وَإِذْ أَسْرَأَ النَّبِيُّ إِلَى بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا ...

3. When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his consorts,

C5532. Who these two consorts were, and what was the matter in confidence which was disclosed, we are not expressly told, but the facts mentioned in [n. 5529](#) above will help us to understand this passage. The sacred words imply that the matter was of great importance as to the principle involved, but that the details were not of sufficient importance for permanent record. For the lessons to be drawn, see the notes following.

... فَلَمَّا نَبَأَتْ بِهِ وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ ...

and she then divulged it (to another), and Allah made it known to him,

... عَرَفَ بَعْضَهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنِ بَعْضِ ...

he confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part.

C5533. The moral we have to draw is manifold.

1. If anything is told us in confidence, especially by one at the head of affairs, we must not divulge it to our closest friend.
2. If such divulgence is made in the most secret whispers, Allah's Plan is such that it will come to light and expose those guilty of breach of confidence.
3. When the whispered version is compared with the true version and the actual facts, it will be found that the whispered version is in great part untrue, due to the misunderstanding and exaggeration inevitable in the circumstances.
4. The breach of confidence must inevitably redound to the shame of the guilty party.

See next note

... فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا ...

Then when he told her thereof, she said, "Who told thee this?"

... قَالَ نَبَّأَنِي الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ (٣)

He said, "He told me who knows and is well-acquainted (with all things)."

... إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا ...

4. If ye two turn in repentance to Him, your hearts are indeed so inclined;

C5534. There are further lessons.

5. Both the party betraying confidence and that encouraging the betrayal must purge their conduct by repentance.
6. Frank repentance would be what their hearts and conscience themselves would dictate and they must not resist such amends on account of selfish obstinacy.
7. If they were to resist frank repentance and amends, they are only abetting each other's wrong, and they cannot prevail against all the moral forces which will be ranged on the side of the right.

... وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيْلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ...

but if ye back up each other against him, truly Allah is his Protector, and Gabriel, and (every) righteous one among those who believe --

وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ (٤)

and furthermore, the angels -- will back (him) up.

C5535. Do not forget the dual meaning:

immediate, in application to the holy Prophet, and general, being the lesson which we ought all to learn. The holy Prophet could not be injured by any persons doing anything against him even though they might unconsciously put him in great jeopardy: for Allah, the Angel Gabriel (who was the Messenger to him), and the whole Community, would protect him,-to say nothing of the army of angels or hidden spiritual forces that always guarded him.

Cf. 33:56.

The general lesson for us is that the good man's protection is that of the moral forces around him; it is divine protection, against which human weakness or folly will have no power.

عَسَى رَبُّهُ إِنْ طَلَّقَكُنَّ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِّنْكَ ...

5. It may be, if he divorced you (all), that Allah will give him in exchange Consorts better than you --

C5536. From the case of two in verse 4, we now come to the case of all the Consorts generally, in verse 5.

Cf. 33:28-30.

Their duties and responsibilities were higher than those of other women, and therefore their failure would also be more serious. This is only hypothetical, in order to show us the virtues expected of them: faith and devotion, worship and service, readiness for travel or Hijrah, whether they were young or old, now to married life or otherwise. From them again the more general application follows-to all women in Islam.

... مُسْلِمَاتٍ مُّؤْمِنَاتٍ قَائِمَاتٍ تَائِبَاتٍ عَابِدَاتٍ سَائِحَاتٍ ...

who submit (their wills), who believe, who are devout, who turn to Allah in repentance, who worship (in humility), who travel (for faith) and fast --

C5537. Saihat: literally, those who travel. Here it means those who fast.

Note that the spiritual virtues are named in the descending order: submitting their wills (Islam), faith and devotion, turning ever to worship and faith, and performing other rites, or perhaps being content with asceticism- And this applies to all women, maiden girls or women of mature experience who were widows or separated from previous husbands by divorce.

... تَيِّبَاتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا (٥)

previously married or virgins.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ...

6. O ye who believe!

C5538. Note how we have been gradually led up in admonition from two Consorts to all consorts, to all women, to all Believers, and to all men and women. We must carefully guard not only our own conduct, but the conduct of our families, and of all who are near and dear to us. For the issues are most serious, and the consequences of a fall are most terrible.

... فُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ ...

save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones,

C5539. "A Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones."

Cf. 2:24.

This is a terrible Fire: not merely like the physical fire which burns wood or charcoal or substances like that, and consumes them. This Fire will have for its fuel men who do wrong and are as hard hearted as stones, or stone Idols as symbolical of all the unbending Falsehoods in life.

...عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ ...

over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe,

C5540. Cf. 74:31.

We think of the angel nature as gentle and beautiful, but in another aspect perfection includes justice, fidelity, discipline, and the firm execution Of duty according to lawful commands. So, in the attributes of Allah Himself, Justice and Mercy, Kindness and Correction are not contradictory but complementary. An earthly ruler will be unkind to his loyal subjects if he does not punish evil-doers.

... لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ (٦)

who flinch not (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah, but do (precisely) what they are commanded.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا الْيَوْمَ ...

7. (They will say), "O ye Unbelievers!
make no excuses this day!

إِنَّمَا تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٧)

Ye are being but requited for all that ye did!"

C5541. 'This is no hardship or injustice imposed on you. It is all but the fruit of your own deeds; the result of your own deliberate choice.'

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ...

8. O ye who believe!

C5542. The opposition of sex against sex, individual or concerted, having been condemned, we are now exhorted to turn to the Light, and to realise that the good and righteous can retain their integrity even though their mates, in spite of all their example and precept, remain in evil and sin.

...تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً تَصُوحًا عَسَى رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ ...

turn to Allah with sincere repentance: in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your ills

C5543. Whatever may have been the faults of the past, unite in good deeds, and abandon petty sectional jealousies, and Allah will remove your difficulties and distresses, and all the evils from which you suffer. Indeed He will grant you the Bliss of Heaven and save you from any humiliation which you may have brought on yourselves by your conduct and on the revered Prophet and Teacher whose name you professed to take.

... وَيُدْخِلْكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ...

and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow --

... يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ ...

the Day that Allah will not permit to be humiliated the Prophet and those who believe with him.

... نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَى بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ ...

Their Light will run forward before them and by their right hands,

C5544. See 57:12, and n. 5288.

The darkness of evil will be dispelled, and the Light of Allah will be realized by them more and more. But even so they will not be content: for they will pray for the least taint of evil to be removed from them, and perfection to be granted to them.

In that exalted state they will be within reach of perfection, -not by their own merits, but by the infinite Mercy and Power of Allah.

... يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتِمِّمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا ...

while they say,

"Our Lord! perfect our Light for us, and grant us Forgiveness;

... إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ" (٨)

for Thou has power over all things."

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ ...

9. O Prophet!

strive hard against the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be firm against them.

C5545. See 9:73, where the same words introduce the argument against the Hypocrites. Here they introduce the argument against wickedness, which, though given the privilege of association with goodness and piety, persisted in wicked deeds, and in favour of those noble souls, which, though tied to wickedness; retained their purity and integrity. Two examples of each kind are given,-of women, as this Surah is mainly concerned with women.

وَمَا أَوْلَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ (٩)

Their abode is Hell -- an evil refuge (indeed).

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأةَ نُوحٍ وَاِمْرَأةَ لُوطٍ ...

10. Allah sets forth, for an example to the Unbelievers, the **wife of Noah** and the **wife of Lut**:

C5546. Read Noah's story in 11:36-48.

Evidently his contemporary world had got so corrupt that it needed a great Flood to purge it. "None of the people will believe except those who have believed already. So grieve no longer over their evil deeds."

But there were evil ones in his own family. A foolish and undutiful son is mentioned in 11:42-46. Poor Noah tried to save him and pray for him as one "of his family"; but the answer came: "he is not of thy family; for his conduct is unrighteous". We might expect such a son to have a mother like him, and here we are told that it was so.

Noah's wife was also false to the standards of her husband, and perished in this world and in the Hereafter.

C5547. The wife of Lot has already been mentioned more than once. See 11:81, and n. 1577; 7:83, and n. 1051; etc.

The world around her was wicked, and she sympathized with and followed that wicked world, rather than her righteous husband. She suffered the fate of her wicked world.

... كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحِينَ ...

they were (respectively) under two of Our righteous servants,

... فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا ...

but they were false to their (husbands), and they profited nothing before Allah on their account,

C5548. "Betrayed their husbands": not in sex, but in the vital spiritual matters of truth and conduct. They had the high privilege of the most intimate relationship with the noblest spirits of their age: but if they failed to rise to the height of their dignity, their relationship did not save them. They could not plead that they were the wives of pious husbands. They had to enter Hell like any other wicked women. There is personal responsibility before Allah. One soul cannot claim the merits of another, any more than one pure soul can be injured by association with a corrupt soul. The pure one should keep its purity intact. See the next two examples.

... وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّٰخِلِينَ (١٠)

but were told:

"Enter ye the fire along with (others) that enter!"

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأةَ فِرْعَوْنَ ...

11. And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh:

C5549. Traditionally she is known as 'Asiya, one of the four perfect women, the other three being

- Mary the mother of Jesus,
- Khadija the wife of the holy Prophet, and
- Fatima his daughter.

Pharaoh is the type of arrogance, godlessness, and wickedness. For his wife to have preserved her Faith, her

humility, and her righteousness was indeed a great spirit triumph. She was probably the same who saved the life of the infant Moses: 28:9.

... إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ ...

Behold, she said: "O my Lord! build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden,

C5550. Her spiritual vision was directed to Allah, rather than to the worldly grandeur of Pharaoh's court. It is probable that her prayer implies a desire for martyrdom, and it may be that she attained her crown of martyrdom.

... وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ ...

and save me from Pharaoh and his doings,

... وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (١١)

and save me from those that do wrong;"

... وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا ...

12. And Mary the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity;

C5551. 'Imran was traditionally the name of the father of Mary the mother of Jesus: see n. 375 to 3:35. She was one of the purest of women, though the Jews accused her falsely of unchastity:

Cf. 19:27-28.

... فَنفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا ...

and We breathed into her (body) of Our spirit;

C5552. Cf. 21:91.

As a virgin she gave birth to Jesus: 19:16-29.

In 32:9, it is said of Adam's progeny, man, that Allah "fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His spirit".

In 15:29, similar words are used with reference to Adam.

The virgin birth should not therefore be supposed to imply that Allah was the father of Jesus in the sense in

which Greek mythology makes Zeus the father of Apollo by Latona or of Minos by Europa.

And yet that is the doctrine to which the Christian idea of "the only begotten Son of God" leads.

... وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُنْتِ مِنَ الْقَائِمِينَ (١٢)

and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (Servants).

C5553. Mary had true faith and testified her faith in the prophet Jesus and in his revelation as well as in the revelations which he came to confirm (and to foreshadow). She was of the company of the Devout of all ages. The fact that **Qanitin** (devout) is not here in the feminine gender implies that the highest spiritual dignity is independent of sex.

And so we close the lesson of this Surah, that while sex is a fact of our physical existence, the sexes should act in harmony and cooperation for in the highest spiritual matters we are all one. "We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples. Verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood and I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me and no other" (21:91-92).