

Sura 24: Al-Nur (The Light)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 26:

1. *(Here is) a Sura which We have revealed and enjoined, and wherein We have revealed plain verses, that you may become mindful.*
2. *The adulterer and the adulteress, flog each one of them a hundred stripes. And let not pity for them withhold you from obedience to God, if you believe in God and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their torment.*
3. *The adulterer shall not marry save an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress shall not marry save an adulterer or an idolater, and all that is forbidden for the believers.*
4. *And those who accuse chaste women but do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony; they are indeed transgressors.*
5. *Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); verily, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
6. *As for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves; let each one of them call God to witness, swearing four times by God, that he is telling the truth.*
7. *And the fifth (oath) (should be) that he solemnly invokes the curse of God on himself if he was lying.*
8. *But it would avert the torment for the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by God, that (her husband) is telling a lie;*
9. *And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of God on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth.*
10. *If it were not for God's grace and mercy on you, and that God is Ever-Relenting, Wise, (You would be ruined indeed).*
11. *Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to you; on the contrary it is good for you. To every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a grievous torment.*
12. *Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, "It is an evident falsehood?"*
13. *Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God.*
14. *Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you, in the world and the Hereafter, a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into.*
15. *When you welcomed it with your tongues and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you thought it was a trifle, but it is very great in the sight of God.*
16. *And why you did not, when you heard it, say, "It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory be to God; this is a most serious slander?"*
17. *God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers.*
18. *And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise.*

19. *Those who love that immorality should be spread among those who believe, theirs will be a painful torment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know.*
20. *Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
21. *Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
22. *And let not those who are blessed with grace and abundance of wealth among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to those who migrated in God's way. Let them pardon and forbear. Do you not yearn that God forgive you? God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
23. *Those who slander the chaste, virtuous, believing women (who are) unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have a grievous torment.*
24. *On the day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do.*
25. *On that day, God will pay them their just due, and they will know that God is the evident Truth.*
26. *Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women; such are innocent of that which people say. For them is pardon and a bountiful provision. (24: 1 – 26)*

This Sura is entitled the light. The word light is mentioned as an attribute of God. God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The impact of the light on the hearts and souls is described. It fills the hearts and souls with ethics and values both for the individual as well as the community. This shines the light on the hearts and on life. It connects the hearts to the comprehensive universal light.

The Sura starts with an unequivocal proclamation that it is announcing responsibilities and duties for the community of the believers. The Sura institutes certain ethical behaviors that the community of believers should practice. It starts with a statement that clearly indicates the importance that Quran attaches to ethical behavior and describes how it is deeply rooted in the doctrine of Islam.

The main theme of the Sura is ethical training which is the basis of criminal laws as well as spiritual preparations. These spiritual preparations connect the hearts of the believers with the light of God and allow this light to illuminate the values, norms, and principles that shape the Islamic way of life.

“(Here is) a Sura which We have revealed and enjoined, and wherein We have revealed plain verses, that you may become mindful.” It is a unique beginning. The Sura starts with the word, “enjoined.” It emphasizes the importance of following all the injunctions that are given in the Sura, whether they describe norms of ethical behavior or punishment to be exacted in case of breaking the law. This is followed with a description of the punishment for the crime of adultery, *“The adulterer and the adulteress, flog each one of them a hundred stripes. And let not pity for them withhold you from obedience to God, if you believe in God and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their torment. The adulterer shall not marry save an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress shall not marry save an adulterer or an idolater, and all that is forbidden for the believers.”*

Verse 15 in Sura 4 outlined the punishment for adultery during the early days of Islam, *“If any of your women are guilty of immoral conduct, call to witness four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness to the truth of the allegation, confine them to the houses until death claims them or God ordains some other way for them.”* (4:15)

The punishment for women was to confine them to their houses and rebuke them, while the punishment for men was to rebuke them for committing such crime. Then the punishment was changed as expressed in this Sura. This was the “way,” referred to in the verse (4: 15). Flogging is the punishment for virgin men and women who commit adultery. But those who commit adultery after they have been married are punished by stoning. These punishments are applied to adult, free, and sane Muslim men and women. The punishment by stoning has been confirmed by the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH).

The punishment should be enacted once the conditions are satisfied and the witnesses have given their testimony. No pity should stop the enactment of the prescribed punishment. The punishment should be made in public to become a deterrent for others.

Those who commit adultery are not considered believers when they commit such crime. They are not allowed to marry believing men and women unless they offer sincere repentance and seek God’s forgiveness. The verses show how committing these crimes sever the ties between the culprit and the Muslim community.

The enactment of such severe punishment does not mean that Islam ignores the natural inclinations which drive people to engage in sexual interactions, nor does it want people to suppress their sexual desires. Islam wanted to organize the sexual interactions between men and women within a framework which guarantees healthy families and communities. Relations between men and women should not be solely based on sexual desires. These relations should involve a combination of love and compassion that strengthens the ties between the members of the family. A family should be based on the meeting of two hearts willing to share common aspirations and to struggle together to build a strong unit in the community, producing good citizens.

These severe punishments were enacted in Islam to protect the individual, the family and the community of the evil consequences of such crimes. There are clear consequences of the spread of such crimes. These include the confusion that would plague the lineages of individuals; and the bad psychological impact on the members of the family including the children.

It should be emphasized that the community should establish guarantees which would protect its members from falling into the web of temptation. In addition, these severe punishments can only be enacted after the culprit has been proven guilty without a shred of a doubt. The Sura mentions some of the measures that should be taken to avoid opportunities for temptation.

Punishment is waived whenever there is the slightest doubt regarding the testimony of the witnesses. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “Waive the punishment as much as you can, if there is any doubt. It is better not to punish a criminal than to punish an innocent person.” That is why the punishment can only be enacted if there were four eyewitnesses who were present while the act was being committed; or if the culprit provides voluntary confession. The witnesses should be known for their integrity.

Some may think that these stringent requirements may render the punishment impractical. The strategy of Islam to deal with such crimes is both reactive and proactive. Islam provides preventative measures to minimize the occurrence of such acts. These include ethical upbringing

of the individuals, means for the purification of the souls, and building a conscious willingness to follow the injunctions of Islam. Only those who have the audacity of committing such crimes in public would be punished, or those who voluntarily chose to receive the punishment as an act of purification from their sin.

“And those who accuse chaste women but do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony; they are indeed transgressors.” Islam provides stringent measures to protect chaste Muslim women against false accusations that tarnish their reputations and destroy their lives. Islam has decreed a punishment approximately similar to the punishment for the crime of adultery as a deterrent for those who find it easy to attack chaste women without having concrete evidence that supports their accusations. The punishment for the crime of false accusations includes both bodily and psychological punishment. The accusers who are found to be lying are labeled, “transgressors,” and in addition their testimony is not accepted in a court of law until they offer sincere repentance and seek God’s forgiveness, *“Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); verily, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

However, an accusation waged by a husband against his wife is dealt with in a different way, *“As for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves; let each one of them call God to witness, swearing four times by God, that he is telling the truth; and the fifth (oath) (should be) that he solemnly invokes the curse of God on himself if he was lying. But it would avert the torment for the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by God, that (her husband) is telling a lie; and the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of God on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth. If it were not for God’s grace and mercy on you, and that God is Ever-Relenting, Wise, (You would be ruined indeed).”* This process for resolving the conflict between two spouses is suitable for the special relationship between them. If a husband witnesses his wife committing adultery but is unable to produce four witnesses, he should then follow the process described in the above verses. The law gave the wife a way to address this accusation. If she chooses to follow the process, she will escape punishment, though the marriage would end in divorce. Her child would bear her name not her husband’s name. It is God’s grace that He provided equitable ways to resolve such conflicts.

The following verses describe a real event that involved the slander of the Prophet’s (PBUH) wife ‘Aisha (RA), *“Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to you; on the contrary it is good for you. To every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a grievous torment. Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, ‘It is an evident falsehood?’ Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God. Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you, in the world and the Hereafter, a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into. When you welcomed it with your tongues and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you thought it was a trifle but it is very great in the sight of God. And why did you not, when you heard it, say, ‘It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory be to God; this is a most serious slander?’ God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers. And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise. Those who love that immorality should be spread among those who believe, theirs will be a painful torment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know. Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying,*

Giver of Mercy. Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."

The incident of the slander of 'Aisha (RA) was a very painful experience for the Prophet (PBUH), his wife, and the whole community. Doubts destroyed the serenity of the hearts of the Prophet (PBUH), his close friend and father-in-law, and the companion of the Prophet (PBUH) Safwan bin Al Mu'atal (RA) for a whole month. Let us listen to the description of the incident as it was narrated by 'Aisha (RA). Here is the story as narrated by 'Aisha (RA) herself:

Each time the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to go on a trip he used to choose one of his wives to accompany him. The process he followed was to draw a toss between his wives whoever wins the toss would accompany him. On one of these trips, after Hijab has been mandated, it was my turn to accompany the Prophet (PBUH). My camel had a tent for me to sit in. While I was visiting the toilet, the Prophet (PBUH) commanded his army to prepare for the return trip to Medina. On my way back to the place where I left my camel, I found out that I lost my necklace, so I went back to fetch it. In the meantime, the driver of my camel came and drove the camel never realizing that I was not inside my tent on top of the camel. When I came back to the camp I found that the army had left. I decided to stay where I was, thinking that soon they would realize that I am not in my tent on top of the camel and they would come back for me. I was tired so I was overcome by sleep. While I was sleeping Safwan (RA) happened to be passing by and saw me. Safwan (RA) knew who I was. So, he took me on his camel until we caught up with the army. When I reached Medina, I became sick and continued to be sick for about a month. In the meantime, Abdullah bin Salool made up the story slandering me and he circulated the slander among people. People were talking about the slander and all the time I was unaware of what was going on. I was a bit suspicious of the Prophet's (PBUH) behavior. The Prophet (PBUH) was always warm towards me, but during this month I sensed a change in his attitude, but he never mentioned anything. One day, after my recovery I was going to the toilet outside the house with Um Mustah (RA). While we were walking, I heard Um Mustah (RA) cursing her son Mustah. I was deeply concerned that a man who participated in the battle of Badr would be cursed by his mother. I asked her why she was doing this. She said, "Did you not know about the rumor being circulated?" I said, "No, what rumor." She told me about the rumor accusing me of a relationship with Safwan (RA). This was extremely painful, I became ill again and I went home crying. I spent the whole night crying. The Prophet (PBUH) asked Ali bin Taleb (RA) and Usama bin Zaid (RA) for advice. Usama (RA) defended me and attested to my innocence. Ali (RA) on the other hand said to the Prophet (PBUH) that he can always marry another one if he wanted, but he also asked him to ask my servant of my behavior. My servant attested to my innocence.

The Prophet (PBUH) came to enquire about my health, so I asked him to let me go visit my mother, I wanted to ask my mother about the rumor. She confirmed what I heard from Um Mustah (RA). The next day my parents were with me and the Prophet (PBUH) came to see me. He sat on the bed and told me about what was going on, he said, "If you are innocent, God will announce your innocence, but if you were guilty then you should repent. God forgives all sins." I did not know how to answer back. I asked my mother to respond but she did not say anything. I said, "By God, I know that you heard the rumor

and believed it. If I say I am innocent, you will not believe me but if I confess my guilt, while God knows my innocence, you will believe me. I can only say what the father of Joseph said, ‘*Beautiful patience is most befitting, I seek God’s help regarding what you say.*’ (12: 18)”. I was certain of my innocence, but I could not fathom the idea that God would send a revelation to declare my innocence. My best hope was that the Prophet (PBUH) would see in his dream that I am innocent. Suddenly, I realized that the Prophet (PBUH) was in the state of receiving a revelation. When he came around, he was smiling and he said, “‘Aisha, praise your Lord. He declared your innocence.” The Prophet (PBUH) then recited the ten verses in Surat Al-Noor which talked about the slander.

Mustah who spread the rumor about ‘Aisha (RA) was Abu Bakr’s (RA) cousin. Abu Bakr (RA) used to help Mustah (RA) financially as a form of charity. Abu Bakr (RA) decided that he would stop helping Mustah (RA) as he used to do before the incident. But then a verse was revealed which made Abu Bakr (RA) change his mind, “*And let not those who are blessed with grace and abundance of wealth among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to those who migrated in God’s way. Let them pardon and forbear. Do you not yearn that God forgive you? God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*” (24:22)

For a whole month the Prophet (PBUH) and his wife, Abu Bakr (RA) and his wife, Safwan (RA), and indeed the whole Muslim community suffered through this horrible experience. The young, pure, and innocent ‘Aisha (RA) was slandered and her reputation has been tarnished. She felt the pain of being falsely accused and was horrified at the thought that the Prophet (PBUH) had doubts about her innocence. Her parents suffered with her. Safwan (RA), a companion of the Prophet (PBUH) was deeply hurt by the accusations launched against him. The whole episode continued for a whole month before the decisive verses declaring ‘Aisha’s (RA) innocence was revealed. The slander was aimed at hurting both ‘Aisha (RA) and the Prophet (PBUH). The rumors were meant to undermine the Prophet (PBUH), his message, and his leadership. It was planned and executed by a group of people, “*Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to you; on the contrary it is good for you.*” It was a gang of people led by Abdullah bin Salool the leader of the hypocrites. The gang included few Muslims who were deceived by the hypocrites, e.g. Hamna bint Jahsh, Hassan bin Thabet, and Mustah bin Athatha. The verse indicated the enormity of the conspiracy but reassured the believers that it was in fact good for them. It was good because it exposed those who were scheming against Islam; those who were bent on hurting the Prophet (PBUH) and his wives. It was also good because it alerted the believers to the dire consequences of slandering people. Slandering people has a grievous impact on the falsely accused and on the whole community. This incident provided the opportunity to state the standards for the proper Islamic behavior in times of trials. The pains that the Prophet (PBUH), his wife, and indeed the whole Muslim community suffered were the price that had to be paid to pass safely through this trial. Those who fabricated and propagated the lie will be punished, each according to his/her share in the crime. Abdullah bin Salool who twisted the facts, fabricated the lie, and worked hard to propagate it will have the greatest share of the punishment.

“*Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, ‘It is an evident falsehood?’*” The verse describes the proper Islamic behavior when faced with such trials. The believers should have consulted their hearts and listened to their gut feelings. They would have reached the conclusion that it was a lie. They should have known that the wife of their Prophet (PBUH), the chaste daughter of the Prophet’s (PBUH) close friend, could not have committed such indecency. There are stories that were

narrated indicating that this was exactly the reaction of some Muslims e.g. Abu Ayoub Al-Ansari (RA).

This verse and the following one describe the proper process to handle rumors that slander people. The process consists of two steps. The first step requires believers to reflect on the accusation and to give the accused the benefit of the doubt. The second step is to assume the innocence of the accused until proven guilty on the basis of hard and concrete evidence. A rigorous methodology in investigating the evidence should be followed, *“Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God.”* A heinous accusation such as this should be proven beyond a shred of a doubt before a verdict is reached; four eyewitnesses should come forward to substantiate the accusation. If the person who has launched the accusation is unable to produce four eyewitnesses to substantiate his claim, then he is considered a liar. The believers did not follow this process when the accusation was launched against ‘Aisha (RA). The verses warn the believers not to commit such a mistake again, *“Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you, in the world and the Hereafter, a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into.”*

The verses go on to describe the details of the believers’ disgraceful reaction to the accusations, *“When you welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you thought it was a trifle but it is very great in the sight of God.”* The verse describes how the rumors take a life of their own when people repeat what they heard without verifying its veracity. People repeat false accusations, not realizing the damage that they are causing. Their reaction should have been to shun those who were spreading the rumors, *“And why you did not, when you heard it, say, ‘It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory be to God; this is a most serious slander?’”* The verses end with an admonition and a warning, *“God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers. And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise.”*

The verses continue to describe the impact of the reckless behavior of those who spread rumors which slander chaste women on the community. Such behavior promotes instability, desensitizes the community to indecent acts, and strips the community of its decent values. These people will be punished, *“Those who love that immorality should be spread among those who believe, theirs will be a painful torment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know.”*

Then a reminder was issued to remind the believers of the mercy and grace of God, *“Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.”* *“Believers, do not follow in Satan’s footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* The verse warns that the reckless behavior of those who spread rumors has been instigated by Satan. The believers were then warned not to succumb to the temptation of Satan.

“Those who slander the chaste, virtuous, believing women (who are) unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have a grievous torment. On the day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do. On that day, God will pay them their just due, and they will know that God is the evident Truth.” The verse points to the enormity of the sin committed by those who slander chaste believing women by juxtaposing their evil intent against the innocence of these virtuous women. They will be

cursed. Their tongues, their hands, and their feet will testify against them on the Day of Judgment. They will then receive their due share of the punishment.

The story of the slander ends with a statement expressing the choices that people make on the basis of their various dispositions, “*Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women; such are innocent of that which people say. For them is pardon and a bountiful provision.*”

Verses 27 to 34:

27. *Believers, do not enter houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them. That is best for you, in order that you may become mindful.*
28. *And if you find no one in the house, do not enter until permission is given to you; and if you are asked to go back, go back. That makes for greater purity for yourselves; and God knows well all that you do.*
29. *It is not a sin that you enter uninhabited houses wherein there is benefit for you. God knows the things you do openly, and the things you conceal.*
30. *Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.*
31. *And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who have no sexual desire, or children who are not aware of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed.*
32. *And marry off those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, God will make them free from want out of His grace; and God is Vast, Omniscient.*
33. *And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste until God enriches them by His grace. And those of your slaves who seek a contract (of emancipation), contract them if you are aware of their goodness; and bestow upon them of the wealth of God, which He has bestowed upon you. Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that you may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, when they themselves wish to remain chaste. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
34. *And verily We have sent down to you clear revelations and examples of those who passed away before you. This is an exhortation to those who are conscious of God. (24: 27 – 34)*

God made the home a sanctuary for its inhabitants to relax, enjoy their privacy, and feel secure. No one is allowed to intrude in people's homes without permission. This can only happen when the visitors respect the rule that it is the inhabitants' right to decide when to receive visitors. This rule was not respected by the Arabs before Islam. Such a practice constituted a violation of the privacy of people in their homes. It put the inhabitants of a house in awkward and embarrassing

situations. The verses describe the measures stated by the Quran to guarantee the preservation of the home's sanctity and the respect for the privacy of people in their homes. Visitors should seek permission first and wait until permission has been granted before they enter. If the inhabitants are not home or they refuse to grant permission, then the visitor should turn back without any bad feeling for being refused, *"Believers, do not enter houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them. That is best for you, in order that you to become mindful. And if you find no one in the house, do not enter until permission is given to you; and if you are asked to go back, go back. That makes for greater purity for yourselves; and God knows well all that you do."*

However, these restrictions do not apply to public places, *"It is not a sin that you enter uninhabited houses wherein there is benefit for you. God knows the things you do openly, and the things you conceal."*

The previous verses dealt with the etiquette of respecting people's privacy in their homes. The following verses address the etiquette of the encounters between males and females. Islam pays special attention to maintaining ethical relationships among the members of the community. Etiquette aims at minimizing the opportunity for situations where sexual desires are excited. Society aims at creating a decorous environment for the encounter between the sexes. Islam uses preventive measures to ensure that such a decorous environment is maintained. The following verses state some of the measures that the Quran provided to achieve such a decorous environment *"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do."* Men should lower their gaze and guard their chastity. This provides a framework for male behavior in the presence of women. The framework aims at minimizing the chances of temptation that may open the door to sin. Lowering the gaze and guarding chastity require a degree of self-discipline. This self-discipline is motivated by the fact that, *"That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do."*

Women are also directed to, *"lower their gaze and guard their chastity."* Women by nature like to display their beauty. Islam does not attempt to suppress this natural behavior. However, such behavior if left uncontrolled will produce a society in which chaotic sexual interactions predominate. Islam aims at channeling this behavior to be expressed in a family environment. Thus women are directed, *"to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who have no sexual desire, or children who are not aware of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed."* Women are allowed to show their faces and hands; but they should cover bosoms.

When this verse was revealed, believing women did not hesitate to conform to these norms immediately. It is narrated by 'Aisha (RA) that as soon as this verse was revealed, the women of Medina hastened to adopt the dress code which the verse described. This etiquette elevated the standards for the appreciation of beauty for Muslims. It made them appreciate the difference between decency and the pure physical attraction to the other sex. However, the dress code can be relaxed when fear of temptation is unwarranted. Thus, the dress code can be relaxed in the presence of, *"fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male*

attendants who have no sexual desire, or children who are not aware of women's nakedness." Women were also directed to avoid intentional gestures which may provoke men's sexual desires, *"And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment."* The verse ends with a reminder to the believers, *"And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed."*

Islam considers that marriage is the normal way for satisfying natural sexual needs for men and women. Thus, Islam urges those who can afford it to get married, *"And marry off those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, God will make them free from want out of His grace; and God is Vast, Omniscient."* Usually, financial means are an obstacle in the way of getting married for many people. Islam directs the Muslim community to come to the aid of those who would like to get married but are unable financially to get married. Most of the scholars have indicated that this is not an obligatory duty for the community to undertake but it is a recommendation. It should be pointed out here that Islam mandates social justice. The Islamic economic and social systems are tailored so that a decent life is guaranteed for each and every citizen in the state. However, since there can still be people who cannot afford the financial burden of marriage, the verse directs the Muslim state to help those people in getting married. Poverty should not be an obstacle preventing people who want to get married to do so. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, "God pledged to help three kinds of people: the person who strives in the way of God, a slave who needs money to buy his/her freedom, and a single man or woman who needs help to get married."

However, Muslims are directed to guard their chastity until they are able to get married, *"And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste until God enriches them by His grace."* Islam inherited a universal slavery system. Islam could not have abolished this system unilaterally. In addition, Islam recognized that social changes cannot be achieved instantaneously. Thus, Islam adopted a gradual plan that led to the abolishment of slavery. One step in this plan was to allow a slave to buy his/her freedom, *"And those of your slaves who seek a contract (of emancipation), contract them if you are aware of their goodness; and bestow upon them of the wealth of God, which He has bestowed upon you."* Once the contract between the slave and his/her master has been signed, everything that the slave earned became his/her own money. The money that the slave earned would then be used to buy his/her freedom. The slave was also eligible for receiving poor-dues from the state. The word "goodness" in the verse means that the slave is a Muslim and he/she is able to earn their living once they became free persons.

In the pre-Islamic society masters used to act as pimps for their slave girls. Islam abolished this practice, *"Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that you may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, when they themselves wish to remain chaste. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* These were clear verses that have been revealed as an admonition, *"And verily We have sent down to you clear revelations and examples of those who passed away before you. This is an exhortation to those who are conscious of God."*

Verses 35 to 45:

35. *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His light is as a niche wherein there is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. God guides to His light whom He pleases. And God sets forth parables for men, and God is Cognizant of all things.*
36. *In houses which God has permitted to be exalted and in which His name may be remembered, and He is glorified in the mornings and the evenings,*
37. *By men who are not beguiled neither by commerce nor profit from the remembrance of God and establishing prayer and paying the poor-due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned;*
38. *That God may reward them according to the best of their deeds and add even more for them out of His Grace. God does provide for those whom He wills, without measure.*
39. *But the disbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water till he comes to it and finds it nothing, but finds God before him, Who will pay him his due; and God is swift in reckoning.*
40. *Or as darkness on a vast, abysmal sea; there covers it a wave, above which is a wave, above which is a cloud, layer upon layer of darkness. When he holds out his hand, he can barely see it. And he for whom God does not give light, for him there is no light.*
41. *Do you not see that God is glorified by all those who are in the heavens and the earth; and the birds with expanded wings? Each (of them) has known its (means of) prayer and glorifying (Him), and God is Cognizant of what they do.*
42. *And to God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and to God is the destination.*
43. *Did you not see how God drives along the clouds, then gathers them, then makes them layers, and you see the rain comes forth from between them; He sends down from the heaven mountains wherein is hail, and smites there with whom He wills, and averts it from whom He wills. The flashing of His lightning almost takes away the eyesight.*
44. *God turns over the night and the day; most surely there is a lesson in this for those who can see.*
45. *And God has created every animal from water. Some creep on their bellies, some walk on two legs; and some walk on four. God creates what He wills for verily God has power over all things. (24: 35 – 45)*

“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.” This is a statement that one can almost see its effect in a light that engulfs the whole universe and creeps into the heart illuminating it. This is a light that removes the darkness thus rendering the hearts transparent and the souls free, floating in a sea of light. This is the light which forms the essence of the heavens and earth and from which they derive their existence. It is an overwhelming image beyond human imagination. The Quran tries to explain this using a parable that makes it easy for humans to understand, *“The likeness of His light is as a niche wherein there is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light.”* The parable uses the example of the niche, with which everyone is familiar, to describe the process of illuminating the limitless bounds of the heavens and the earth. The lamp which illuminates this niche is like a shining star, it gets its oil from a blessed tree. The oil of the tree is

unique, it has a glowing nature, it glitters even before it is lit. This light is the light of guidance, *“God guides to His light whom He pleases. And God sets forth parables for men, and God is Cognizant of all things.”*

Those who are guided by this light can be found in, *“In houses which God has permitted to be exalted and in which His name may be remembered, and He is glorified in the mornings and the evenings.”* These are, *“By men who are not beguiled neither by commerce nor profit from the remembrance of God and establishing prayer and paying the poor-due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned; that God may reward them according to the best of their deeds and add even more for them out of His Grace. God does provide for those whom He wills, without measure.”* The verse suggests a correspondence between the lamp which spreads its light through the niche and the hearts that are illuminated by God’s light.

God has decreed that His name should be mentioned in these houses. This decree elevated these houses and made them exalted. These houses became exalted because in them are people who continuously raise their voices by the remembrance of God. Nothing of the activities of this worldly life can lure them away from praying to God. They fulfill the duties which God has mandated them to do. However, they are anxious; their hearts are filled with fear and hope, seeking God’s pleasure and reward. God will provide for them without measure.

On the other hand, *“the disbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water till he comes to it and finds it nothing, but finds God before him, Who will pay him his due; and God is swift in reckoning. Or as darkness on a vast, abysmal sea; there covers it a wave, above which is a wave, above which is a cloud, layer upon layer of darkness. When he holds out his hand he can barely see it. And he for whom God does not give light, for him there is no light.”* Two images are given to describe the hopelessness of the disbelievers. One image describes their deeds as a mirage in a desert. A thirsty person in a desert who sees a mirage runs towards it thinking that he will get a drink to quench his thirst but instead he finds God there waiting for him to give him his due recompense. What a horrifying experience! In the second image we see how darkness closes on a person. The verse paints an image of a person engulfed within waves layered one on top of the other, topped by a dark cloud that covers them all. It is an image of complete darkness to the extent that a person would not be able to see his own hand. This is the darkness of disbelief. God’s light brings guidance to the heart and depth to the insight.

Humankind is not alone in this universe. God’s creatures fill the universe around the human race. God’s creatures have different forms, different shapes, and different natures but they all share one thing. They all praise God, *“Do you not see that God is glorified by all those who are in the heavens and the earth; and the birds with expanded wings? Each (of them) has known its (means of) prayer and glorifying (Him), and God is Cognizant of what they do.”* God knows what they do. The verse points to the fact that each of God’s creatures has a specific method to sing the praise of God. God understands their languages. It is incumbent on humankind to join the rest of God’s creatures in singing the praise of God, because the ultimate abode is with God, *“And to God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and to God is the destination.”* God is the only refuge, no one can be protected from His wrath to him is the final destination, and no one will be able to escape this destiny.

“Did you not see how God drives along the clouds, then gathers them, then makes them layers, and you see the rain comes forth from between them; He sends down from the heaven mountains

wherein is hail, and smites there with whom He wills, and averts it from whom He wills. The flashing of His lightning almost takes away the eyesight.” A detailed scene is being presented to alert the hearts to think and reflect on the creation of God. God’s hand moves the clouds and then gathers them together. When the clouds become heavy with water, the rain comes down. The description of clouds as mountains can be clearly seen from a plane flying above the clouds. God controls the movement of the clouds and when and where rain will come down.

“God turns over the night and the day; most surely there is a lesson in this for those who can see.” The perpetual alternation of day and night remind us of the perfect laws that govern the universe. Such a scene should awaken the heedless hearts to sense the beauty of God’s creation. The Quran tries to revive our ability to reflect on these phenomena which are signs of God’s power. It is a blessing of God to be able to appreciate these beautiful phenomena. This appreciation enhances our bond with the universe. This bond is part of God’s plan for us to live in harmony with the rest of His creation.

“And God has created every animal from water. Some creep on their bellies, some walk on two legs; and some walk on four. God creates what He wills for verily God has power over all things.” The verse makes a very powerful assertion. It confirms the oneness of the origin of life for all living creatures. We will not argue about the scientific content of this statement. We simply agree with the Quranic statement that all the diverse creatures were created from water, *“God creates what He wills for verily God has power over all things.”*

Verses 46 to 57:

46. *We have indeed sent down clear revelations. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.*
47. *And they say, “We believe in God and the Messenger, and we obey;” then after that a party of them turns away. Such are not believers;*
48. *When they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, a party of them turns aside.*
49. *But if the right is on their side, they come to him in prompt obedience.*
50. *Is there a disease in their hearts, or have they doubts, or do they fear that God and His Messenger should wrong them in judgment? No, such are the wrongdoers.*
51. *The answer of the believers, when they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than to say, “We hear and we obey;” those are the successful.*
52. *Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, fears God, and remains conscious of Him is indeed the achiever (of triumph).*
53. *They swear their strongest oaths by God that, if only you would command them, they would go forth. Say, “Do not swear; (such) obedience is known;” verily, God is Totally Aware of all that you do.*
54. *Say, “Obey God, and obey the Messenger.” But if they turn away, he is only responsible for the duty with which he has been discharged, and upon you is that with which you have been discharged. If you obey him, you shall be rightly guided. The Messenger's duty is only to convey the (Message) clearly.*
55. *God has promised, those among you who believe and do good deeds, that He will certainly make them to succeed (the present rulers) on the earth as He caused those who*

were before them to succeed (others); and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them and will substitute their state of fear with a sense of security. They worship Me. They do not associate partners with Me. Those who disbelieve henceforth are the transgressors.

56. *So establish prayer and pay the poor-due and obey the Messenger, that haply you may receive mercy.*

57. *Do not ever think that the disbelievers are going to frustrate (God's Plan) on earth. Their refuge is Fire, and it is indeed an evil destination. (24: 46 – 57)*

“We have indeed sent down clear revelations. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.” God’s revelations are indeed clear. They open up the door for God’s light for His servants, and they lead the way to the springs of guidance. They identify what is good and what is bad. They delineate the Islamic way of life, and they establish clearly God’s rulings concerning all the daily affairs of people. It is God who has the absolute control over who will be guided and who will be left to go astray, *“God guides whom He wills to a straight path.”* However, God has established a way that leads to guidance. Those who follow that way will receive, by the will of God, guidance and those who refuse to follow the way, will be left to go astray.

The hypocrites say, *“We believe in God and the Messenger, and we obey;”* but these were merely words that were not reflected on their deeds. Their deeds gave them away and showed that they do not really believe in what they say; *“a party of them turns away. Such are not believers;”* True faith is what rests deep in one’s heart and is reflected on one’s deeds. The Islamic project aims at translating the deep feeling of faith in the believer’s heart into a plan of action that controls one’s behavior. The plan of action which is rooted in the believer’s faith becomes the way of life that a Muslim leads. Those whose actions do not reflect their words are not true believers. The sign of their bad faith is that *“When they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, a party of them turns aside. But if the right is on their side, they come to him in prompt obedience.”* They knew that God and His Messenger (PBUH) will always judge fairly, but they were not interested in justice. They were only interested in winning, lawfully or unlawfully. That is why they always avoided seeking the Messenger’s ruling to decide their affairs. However, when they were certain that the Messenger (PBUH) will rule in their favor, they would hasten to seek his judgment.

The verses illustrate a classical example of the behavior of the hypocrites. Although they do not believe, they lack the courage to state their position in public; their behavior, however, betrays their disbelief. Certainly, accepting the decrees of God and His Messenger (PBUH) is a sign of true belief. Those who do not accept the decrees of God and His Messenger (PBUH) must have a disease in their hearts, *“Is there a disease in their hearts?”* The statement is posed in a question form. Indeed, only those who have a disease in their hearts would refuse the rulings of God and His Messenger (PBUH). The verse continues to wonder, *“or have they doubts?”* Do they really have doubts about God’s decrees? Are they not certain that these were God’s decrees? The verse continues to question their behavior using a third question, *“or do they fear that God and His Messenger should wrong them in judgment?”* Are they afraid that God would rule unfairly? Do they not know that God will only rule with justice?

God’s rulings are examples of the absolute justice. God is the Creator of the whole human race. He will not take the side of one party of His creation against others. God’s decrees are made to

establish justice for all His creations. Manmade laws are always flawed. They tend to favor one group over another. Those who refuse God's law are certainly, "*wrongdoers*."

The believers are never hesitant in their obedience to God and His Messenger (PBUH), "*The answer of the believers, when they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than to say, 'We hear and we obey;'*" those are the successful." They have complete trust in God's justice, and they submit fully to His rulings. Therefore, they will be successful. They have entrusted their affairs to God and He will not let them down. God knows best where their interests lie and He will judge among them according to His knowledge and with justice. Human knowledge is less than complete and human justice is less than perfect; very often human justice is blurred by human whims and desires.

The previous verse spoke of accepting God's rulings. The following verse speaks of being obedient to God in all matters, "*Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, fears God, and remains conscious of Him is indeed the achiever (of triumph)*." The verse indicates that those who obey God in all aspects of their lives are indeed the victorious. They do whatever God commands them to do and abstain from that which they are forbidden to do. They are continuously conscious of God in all their deeds. They will be victorious in this life as well as in the Hereafter. This is God's promise and God always keeps His promise.

Those who are obedient to God in all affairs have reached a higher status in their belief. Only those whose hearts have been illuminated by God's light can reach such state. Those who reach such a state are blessed by God's honor. They cannot force themselves to be obedient to mortals like them who command them to follow rules that have not been sanctioned by God and His Messenger (PBUH). They only obey what God has decreed.

After this short talk about obedience, the verses return to discuss the behavior of the hypocrites, "*They swear their strongest oaths by God that, if only you would command them, they would go forth. Say, 'Do not swear; (such) obedience is known;'*" verily, God is Totally Aware of all that you do." The hypocrites took the strongest oath to assure the Prophet (PBUH) that they would fight with him, if and when he commands them to do so. God knew that they were lying. The verse is telling them, there is no need to take an oath because God knows what kind of obedience they expressed to the Messenger (PBUH). This is not the kind of obedience that God desires, God desires sincere obedience. He commands His Messenger to convey this message, "*Say, 'Obey God, and obey the Messenger.'*" But if they turn away, he is only responsible for the duty with which he has been discharged, and upon you is that with which you have been discharged. If you obey him, you shall be rightly guided. The Messenger's duty is only to convey the (Message) clearly." The task of the Messenger (PBUH) is to deliver the message; their task is to offer sincere obedience. If they follow the Messenger's advice, then they will be rightly guided but if they turn away then they should suffer the consequences.

"God has promised, those among you who believe and do good deeds, that He will certainly make them to succeed (the present rulers) on the earth as He caused those who were before them to succeed (others); and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them and will substitute their state of fear with a sense of security. They worship Me. They do not associate partners with Me. Those who disbelieve henceforth, they are the transgressors." This is God's promise which He made to those who believe and do good deeds from among the followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). God promised to make them the

heirs of power on earth and to establish their religion, the religion that He desired for them. What is the essence of this belief? And what is the meaning of being heirs? The essence of true belief is to completely submit to God in all matters of life. True belief controls and guides all human activities. It rests deep in the heart and is reflected on each and every human activity. It overcomes human whims and desires and aligns them to the guidance brought by the Messenger of God (PBUH). It is a state that permeates the whole being of the believer and controls his/her emotions, senses, movements, and behavior. This state defines a complete way of life. This way of life prepares the believers to undertake the great responsibility, the responsibility of being vicegerents on earth. What is the nature of this responsibility?

It is the responsibility to rule, control and govern, using all of this for the benefit of humankind. It is the responsibility to build and reform not to destroy and abuse. It is the responsibility to implement the way of life that God has decreed for humankind. This is the promise that God made to those who believe and do good deeds. He promised to empower them to undertake this responsibility, establish justice on earth, and lead humanity to the perfection that God has ordained for them. This explanation of the meaning of the promise mentioned in the verse is confirmed by the statement, *“that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them.”* God promised to empower them so that they practice the religion which He approved for them. This religion promotes goodness and fairness; it demands that they rise above their carnal desires and whims; it commands that they establish a good life on earth; and it commands them to make use of all the resources that God made available for them, all of this is carried out for the sole purpose of seeking God’s approval. And *“will substitute their state of fear with a sense of security.”* It has been narrated by Al-Rabei’ bin Anas (RA) that, “When the command came down to the believers to fight back those who fight them, the believers became apprehensive. They would keep their weapons close by day and night. One of the companions asked the Messenger (PBUH) how long this state will continue? He said, ‘Very soon, one of you will enjoy sitting in a large gathering without having to carry weapons.’ Then God revealed this verse and Islam spread in the whole Arabian Peninsula and the Muslims enjoyed the safety that God promised in this verse.” God’s promise will only be fulfilled if the Muslims fulfill the condition stipulated in the verse, *“They worship Me. They do not associate partners with Me.”* This condition has to be observed before God’s promise is fulfilled. The next verse reminds the believers of this condition, *“So establish prayer and pay the poor-due and obey the Messenger, that haply you may receive mercy. Do not ever think that the disbelievers are going to frustrate (God’s Plan) on earth. Their refuge is the Fire, and it is indeed an evil destination.”* These are the elements of the preparation: connecting with God through prayer, overcoming avarice through paying the poor-dues, obeying the Messenger by accepting his rulings, and implementing God’s law in each and every situation. Once these conditions have been fulfilled the believers need not worry about the might of the disbelievers because they will never be able to frustrate God’s plan.

Verses 58 to 64:

58. *Believers, let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you who have not reached puberty, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): before the Dawn prayer, and when you put off your clothes at midday, and after the evening prayer; these are three times of privacy for you. It is neither a sin for*

- you nor for them, besides these times, that some of you go round about (waiting) upon others. Thus, does God make clear to you the revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
59. *But when the children among you reach puberty, let them (also) ask for permission, as those before them used to ask. Thus, God makes clear His revelations for you; God is Omniscient, Wise.*
60. *As for women, past child-bearing age who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show adornment. But to refrain is better for them; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
61. *No blame is there upon the blind, nor any blame upon the lame, nor any blame upon the sick, nor on yourselves, if you eat from your 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 fathers' brothers, or the houses of your fathers' sisters, or the houses of your mothers' brothers, or the houses of your mothers' sisters, or (from that) whereof you hold the keys, or (from the house) of a friend. No sin shall it be for you whether you eat together or separately. But when you enter houses, salute one another with a greeting from God, blessed and good. Thus, God makes clear His revelations for you that haply you may understand.*
62. *The true believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, they do not leave until they have asked his permission. Those who ask your permission, those are they who believe in God and His Messenger. So, if they ask your permission to attend to some of their affair, give permission to whom you will, and ask God to forgive them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
63. *Make not (your) calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. God knows those of you who slip away, hiding themselves. And let those who conspire to evade his orders beware lest grief or painful torment befall them.*
64. *Verily, to God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knows your condition. And (He knows) the Day when they are returned to Him so that He may inform them of what they did. God is Cognizant of all things. (24: 58 – 64)*

“Believers, let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you who have not reached puberty, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): before the Dawn prayer, and when you put off your clothes at midday, and after the evening prayer; these are three times of privacy for you. It is neither a sin for you nor for them, besides these times, that some of you go round about (waiting) upon others. Thus, does God make clear to you the revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise.” Earlier verses detailed the etiquette of entering the homes of others, and this verse delineates the etiquette for seeking permission inside the home. Those whom your right hands possess and the children who have not yet reached the age of puberty are allowed to enter the private quarters at any time except for three periods during the day. These are the periods when people may be dressed in a way that reveals parts of their bodies which they do not want others to see. These periods are the times before Dawn prayer, during the noon naps, and after the evening prayer. These are times for privacy. Quran teaches us to respect the privacy of people. Seeing adult family members at these times of privacy may have adverse effects on the children or the servants. Outside these times children and servants are allowed to move around the house freely. This etiquette combines the ease of living and the respect of privacy. When the children reach the age of puberty then they should ask for permission at all times according to the general rule which has been mentioned before,

“But when the children among you reach puberty, let them (also) ask for permission, as those before them used to ask. Thus, God makes clear His revelations for you.” God is Omniscient, Wise. He knows the inner feelings of people and knows what is best for them.

In previous verses, women were commanded to cover their adornment so that to avoid being seductive. The following verse provides an exemption from the general rule for women who are no longer interested in marriage. These women have more liberty in putting off their outer garments without revealing their private body parts, *“As for women, past child-bearing age who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show adornment. But to refrain is better for them.”* However, it is better for them to be decently dressed all the time. *“God is All-Hearing, Omniscient;”* God hears everything and knows the inner thoughts of people.

The following verse deals with the etiquette of the relationships between family members and friends, *“No blame is there upon the blind, nor any blame upon the lame, nor any blame upon the sick, nor on yourselves, if you eat from your 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 fathers' brothers, or the houses of your fathers' sisters, or the houses of your mothers' brothers, or the houses of your mothers' sisters, or (from that) whereof you hold the keys, or (from the house) of a friend. No sin shall it be for you whether you eat together or separately. But when you enter houses, salute one another with a greeting from God, blessed and good. Thus, God makes clear His revelations for you that haply you may understand.”* It has been narrated that before the revelation of this verse, people used to go visit and eat without seeking permission. Then the verse, *“Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly,”* (2: 188) was revealed which made the believers feel awkward about visiting each other and eating at each other's homes. The present verse was then revealed to explain the etiquette of visiting and eating at each other's homes.

This verse delineates a legal rule. We notice how the words were chosen carefully, precisely, and concisely to convey accurately the rules to be followed. It states that we are allowed to eat, *“from your houses,”* this includes the houses of the spouses and the sons and daughters. Then the allowed houses are mentioned in succession. The reason behind specifying that people can eat together or separately is that before Islam people used to refrain from eating separately. So the verse came down to remove that restriction. People should salute each other when they enter these houses. Salutation enhances the bond between people.

The verses move on to delineate the etiquette of dealing with the Messenger of God (PBUH), *“The true believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, they do not leave until they have asked his permission. Those who ask your permission, those are they who believe in God and His Messenger. So, if they ask your permission to attend to some of their affair, give permission to whom you will, and ask God to forgive them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Make not (your) calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. God knows those of you who slip away, hiding themselves. And let those who conspire to evade his orders beware lest grief or painful torment befall them. Verily to God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knows your condition. And (He knows) the Day when they are returned to Him so that He may inform them of what they did. God is Cognizant of all things.”* It has been narrated that when the idolaters of Quraish mobilized the Arabian tribes to attack the Muslims in Medina, it was suggested that the best strategy for defense is to dig a trench around Medina. That is why this

battle was called the battle of the Trench. While digging, the hypocrites would slip off without permission to avoid participating in the hard work. On the other hand, the believers would only go to attend their most urgent errands after they had asked the permission of the Prophet (PBUH). These verses came to describe this situation and to delineate the etiquette of the relationship between the leader and the group. It starts by stating the conditions that a true believer must meet, *“The true believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, they do not leave until they have asked his permission.”* They believe in God and His Messenger and that belief is reflected on their deeds. They only leave to attend to the most urgent need, and they ask Messenger’s (PBUH) permission before they leave. The Quran gives the Messenger (PBUH) the liberty to give or withhold his approval of permission depending on the perceived need. The verse exhorts the believers to seek permission only for the most urgent need and commands the Prophet (PBUH) to seek God’s forgiveness for those who have to leave. The verse exhorts the believers to address their Prophet (PBUH) respectfully and to use a language different from that which they use to address each other.

The verses then turn to warn the hypocrites who sneak away in a stealthy way thinking that no one has seen them, but they should realize that God sees everything. It is a dire warning for those who do not follow the commands of the Prophet (PBUH), *“And let those who conspire to evade his orders beware lest grief or painful torment befall them.”* They will be afflicted by painful doom in this life and in the Hereafter.

The Sura ends on a note of reminding people that God knows everything, *“Verily, to God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knows your condition. And (He knows) the Day when they are returned to Him so that He may inform them of what they did. God is Cognizant of all things.”* The believers are reminded to remain conscious of God and to maintain strong links to Him. This is the only way to salvation.