

Sura 66: Al-Tahrim (Prohibition)

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

Verses 1 to 12:

1. *Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
2. *God has already ordained for you, the dissolution of your oaths. And God is your Patron, and He is Omniscient, Wise.*
3. *When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives, and she then divulged it (to another), and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and ignored a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, "Who told you this?" He said, "The Omniscient, the Totally Aware told me."*
4. *Would you two turn in repentance to God, for your hearts have swerved; but if you back up each other against him, truly God is his Patron, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers, and furthermore, the angels will back (him) up.*
5. *It may happen that his Lord, if he divorces you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive (to God), believing, pious, penitent, devoutly obedient, inclined to fasting, widows and virgins.*
6. *Believers, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe; they do not disobey God in what He commands them, and they do what they are commanded."*
7. *Disbelievers, do not make any excuses today. You are only being recompensed for that which you did."*
8. *Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your sinful deeds and admit you into gardens underneath which rivers flow, on the day when God will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right hands; they will say, "Our Lord, perfect our light for us, and forgive us. You have the power to do everything."*
9. *Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their refuge is Hell, a wretched destination.*
10. *God sets forth, an example of the disbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut. They were under two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them and they (the husbands) availed them nothing against God and it was said (to them), "Enter the Fire along with those who are entering."*
11. *And God sets forth, an example of the believers, the wife of Pharaoh. She said, "My Lord, build for me, in nearness to You, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoers."*
12. *And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Books and was one of the devoutly obedient (servants). (66: 1-12)*

This Sura portrays some of the scenes of the daily life of the Prophet (PBUH) in connection with his wives. It describes some of the dynamics of the interaction between the Prophet (PBUH) and his wives. The incident that the Sura alludes to, must have happened after the wedding of the Prophet (PBUH) to Zainab bint Jahsh (RA).

“Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. God has already ordained for you, the dissolution of your oaths. And God is your Patron, and He is Omniscient, Wise. When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives, and she then divulged it (to another), and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and ignored a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, “Who told you this?” He said, “The Omniscient, the Totally Aware told me.” Would you two turn in repentance to God, for your hearts have swerved; but if you back up each other against him, truly God is his Patron, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers, and furthermore, the angels will back (him) up. It may happen that his Lord, if he divorces you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive (to God), believing, pious, penitent, devoutly obedient, inclined to fasting, widows and virgins.” It was narrated that the Prophet’s (PBUH) wife Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) used to offer the Prophet (PBUH) honey when he visited her. Aisha (RA) and Hafsa (RA) became jealous and schemed together. They agreed that one of them who would be visited by the Prophet (PBUH) would make a casual remark about the Prophet’s (PBUH) smell. She would say casually that the Prophet (PBUH) smelled as if he ate Maghafeer (a kind of gum that has a delicious taste but has a bad smell.) When the Prophet (PBUH) heard this comment he said, *“No, I did not eat Maghafeer. But I ate honey from Zainab bint Jahsh. I will not do that again, but this is between you and me. So do not tell anybody.”* The Quran blamed the Prophet (PBUH) for vowing not to eat honey, which is a lawful food. *“Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives.”*

The wife of the Prophet (PBUH) who told him that he smelled like Maghafeer told her partner in the conspiracy about the Prophet’s (PBUH) response. The Prophet (PBUH) was apprised of the matter by God. So, he mentioned it briefly to his wife who was surprised. How could the Prophet (PBUH) know about this conspiracy? She asked him, *“Who told you this?”* and he answered, *“The Omniscient, the Totally Aware told me.”* As a result of this episode and because of other interactions between the wives of the Prophet (PBUH), he decided to go into seclusion and stay away from his wives for a period of one month. He was even on the verge of divorcing them. Then these verses were revealed. These verses calmed and comforted the Prophet (PBUH) and he resumed his marital life with his wives.

The Sura starts with a verse that mildly and kindly rebuked the Prophet (PBUH), *“Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. God has already ordained for you, the dissolution of your oaths. And God is your Patron, and He is Omniscient, Wise.”* The verse states a fundamental principle. It is not reasonable to deprive oneself of the benefit of something that God has decreed to be lawful just to please someone else. However, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. God provided a solution for breaking vows which do not achieve a good end. When someone vows to abstain from doing a good thing, then it is better to dissolve one’s commitment to that vow. The way to dissolve one’s commitment to this kind of oath has been described. God is your Patron; He helps you in the time of difficulty and He is Omniscient, Wise. He knows what is best for you. So do not make what He has forbidden lawful and do not forbid that which He made lawful.

The verses then continue to allude to the story without details, *“When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives, and she then divulged it (to another),”* The verse refers to an amazing time in the history; a time when the communication lines were open between heaven and earth. God told the Prophet (PBUH) what transpired and the Prophet (PBUH) made

his wife aware that he knew what she and her partner in the conspiracy are up to, *“and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and ignored a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, “Who told you this?” He said, “The Omniscient, the Totally Aware told me.”* The Quran then addressed the two wives, *“Would you two turn in repentance to God, for your hearts have swerved; but if you back up each other against him, truly God is his Patron, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers, and furthermore, the angels will back (him) up.”* They have been called upon to repent sincerely to God. The conflict must have taken its toll on the Prophet (PBUH). God comforted him by pronouncing the support of Himself, Gabriel, the angels, and the righteous from among the believers. Then the choices that God had made available for His Messenger (PBUH) were announced, *“It may happen that his Lord, if he divorces you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive (to God), believing, pious, penitent, devoutly obedient, inclined to fasting, widows and virgins.”* These are the desired traits in the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives. So, they should strive to acquire them. It is also a warning against engaging in such conspiracies. These verses achieved the desired result and the Prophet’s (PBUH) marital life continued smoothly afterwards.

“Believers, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe; they do not disobey God in what He commands them, and they do what they are commanded.” The believer has a great responsibility towards his family. He is responsible for protecting both himself and his family from the punishment of the Fire. It is a huge and fearful fire that uses stones as fuel, and it is managed by stern and fierce angels who obey God’s commands. On that day the disbelievers will try to make excuses, but it will be said to them, *“Do not make any excuses today. You are only being recompensed for that which you did.”*

But how can one save himself and his family from this fire, *“Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your sinful deeds and admit you into gardens underneath which rivers flow, on the day when God will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right hands; they will say, ‘Our Lord, perfect our light for us, and forgive us. You have the power to do everything.’”* The road to salvation is a sincere repentance that starts with regretting the sins that have been committed and ends by doing good deeds and obeying God. This will lead to forgiveness of sins and to being blessed with the acquisition of light from God. On that day the believers will pray God, *“Our Lord, perfect our light for us, and forgive us. You have the power to do everything.”*

The lesson we glean from these verses is that the believer is responsible for guiding his family as well as guiding himself. Islam is a religion of the family. The family is the building block of society. The building blocks have to be strong for the building to be strong. So, if we want to build a strong society, we have to start by building strong families. Building a strong family is a shared responsibility between the father and the mother, not the father's alone. The Quran has been revealed for both men and women in the society, and they should work together to build generations of believers.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to take suitable measures to protect the Muslim society, *“Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their refuge is Hell, a wretched destination.”* This statement has great significance. The Muslims need to take suitable measures to protect the society from those who attack it from

within and from without. The disbelievers are the external enemy, and the hypocrites are the internal enemy. They should be dealt with harshly by the believers in this life and God will punish them in the Hereafter.

The last part of this Sura deals with examples of disbelieving women who were closely associated with prophets and believing women who were closely associated with disbelievers, *“God sets forth, an example of the disbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut. They were under two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them and they (the husbands) availed them nothing against God and it was said (to them), ‘Enter the Fire along with those who are entering.’ And God sets forth, an example of the believers, the wife of Pharaoh. She said, ‘My Lord, build for me, in nearness to You, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoers.’”* The wives of Prophets Noah (PBUH) and Lut (PBUH) did not believe in the message that their husbands brought and followed those who rejected their guidance. The wife of Pharaoh was a believing woman. The message that the verses convey is that belief is an individual responsibility. A prophet will not be able to defend his closest family member in front of God if they choose to disbelieve. On the other hand, the wife of Pharaoh chose to believe even though she was living in the midst of a disbelieving environment. She disowned Pharaoh and his evil deeds. She gave the highest example of sacrificing all the pleasures of life for the sake of her faith.

Another example of piety and devotion is given by Mary the daughter of Imran, *“And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Books and was one of the devoutly obedient (servants).”* Mary was a pure and chaste woman. She believed in the truthfulness of God's words and His books.

The mention of the wife of Pharaoh in conjunction with Mary shows the high rank that God has bestowed on her. These are two excellent role models for all believing women.