

## Surah 24. An-Nur

24.1 A SURAH [is this] which We have bestowed from on high, and which We have laid down in plain terms;<sup>1</sup> and in it have We bestowed from on high messages which are clear [in themselves], so that you might keep [them] in mind.

24.2 AS FOR the adulteress and the adulterer<sup>2</sup> - flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion with them keep you from [carrying out] this law of God, if you [truly] believe in God and the Last Day; and let a group of the believers witness their chastisement<sup>3</sup>

24.3 [Both are equally guilty:] the adulterer couples with none other than an adulteress - that is, a woman who accords [to her own lust] a place side by side with God;<sup>4</sup> and with the adulteress couples none other than an adulterer-that is, a man who accords [to his own lust] a place side by side with God: and this is forbidden unto the believers.<sup>5</sup>

24.4 And as for those who accuse chaste women [of adultery],<sup>6</sup> and then are unable to produce four witnesses [in support of their accusation], flog them with eighty stripes;<sup>7</sup> and ever after refuse to accept from them any testimony-since it is they, they that are truly depraved"-

24.5 excepting [from this interdict] only those who afterwards repent and made amends:<sup>8</sup> for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.

24.6 And as for those who accuse their own wives [of adultery], but have no witnesses except themselves, let each of these [accusers] call God four times to witness<sup>9</sup> that he is indeed telling the truth,

24.7 and the fifth time, that God's curse be upon him if he is telling a lie.

24.8 But [as for the wife, all] chastisement shall be averted from her by her calling God four times to witness that he is indeed telling a lie,

24.9 and the fifth [time], that God's curse be upon her if he is telling the truth.<sup>10</sup>

24.10 AND WERE it not for God's favour upon you, [O man,] and His grace, and that God is a wise acceptor of repentance . . . !<sup>11</sup>

24.11 Verily, numerous among you are those who would falsely accuse others of unchastity:<sup>12</sup> [but, O you who are thus wronged,] deem it not a bad thing for you: nay, it is good for you!<sup>13</sup> [As for the slanderers,] unto every one of them [will be accounted] all that he has earned by [thus] sinning; and awesome suffering awaits any of them who takes it upon himself to enhance this [sin]!<sup>14</sup>

24.12 Why do not the believing men and women, whenever such [a rumour] is heard,<sup>15</sup> think the best of one another and say, "This is an obvious falsehood"?

24.13 Why do they not [demand of the accusers]<sup>16</sup> that they] produce four witnesses to prove their allegation?<sup>17</sup> - for, if they do not produce such witnesses, it is those [accusers] who, in the sight of God, are liars indeed!

24.14 And were it not for God's favour upon you, [O men,] and His grace in this world and in the life to come, awesome suffering would indeed have afflicted you<sup>18</sup> in result of all [the calumny] in which you indulge

24.15 when you take it up with your tongues, uttering with your mouths something of which you have no knowledge, and deeming it a light matter whereas in the sight of God it is an awful thing!

24.16 And [once again]: Why do you not say, whenever you hear such [a rumour], "It does not behove us to speak of this, O Thou who art limitless in Thy glory: this is an awesome calumny"?<sup>19</sup>

24.17 God admonishes you [hereby] lest you ever revert to the like of this Isinl. if you are [truly] believers;

24.18 for God makes [His] messages clear unto you-and God is all knowing, wise!

24.19 Verily, as for those who like [to hear] foul slander<sup>20</sup> spread against [any of] those who have attained to faith-grievous suffering awaits them in this world<sup>21</sup> and in the life to come: for God knows [the full truth], whereas you know [it] not.<sup>22</sup>

24.20 And were it not for God's favour upon you and His grace, and that God is compassionate, a dispenser of grace...!<sup>23</sup>

24.21 O YOU who have attained to faith! Follow not Satan's footsteps: for he who follows Satan's footsteps [will find that], behold, he enjoins but deeds of abomination and all that runs counter to reason.<sup>24</sup> And were it not for God's favour upon you and His grace, not one of you would ever have remained pure. For [thus it is:] it is God who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

24.22 Hence, [even if they have been wronged by slander,] let not those of you who have been graced with [God's] favour and ease of life ever become remiss in helping<sup>25</sup> [the erring ones among] their near of kin, and the needy, and those who have forsaken the domain of evil for the sake of God,<sup>26</sup> but let them pardon and forbear. [For,] do you not desire that God should forgive you your sins, seeing that God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace?<sup>27</sup>

24.23 [But,] verily, those who [falsely, and without repentance,<sup>28</sup>] accuse chaste women who may have been unthinkingly careless but have remained true to their faith,<sup>29</sup> shall be rejected [from God's grace] in this world as well as in the life to come: and awesome suffering awaits them

24.24 on the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did!

24.25 On that day will God pay them in full their just due, and they will come to know that God alone is the Ultimate Truth, manifest, and manifesting [the true nature of all that has ever been done].<sup>30</sup>

24.26 [In the nature of things,] corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men, for corrupt women - just as good women are for good men, and good men, for good women. [Since God is aware that] these are innocent of all that evil tongues may impute to them,<sup>31</sup> forgiveness of sins shall be theirs, and a most excellent recompense!<sup>32</sup>

24.27 O YOU who have attained to faith! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and greeted their inmates. This is [enjoyed by you] for your own good, so that you might bear [your mutual rights] in mind.<sup>33</sup>

24.28 Hence, [even] if you find no one within [the house], do not enter it until you are given leave,<sup>34</sup> and if you are told, "Turn back," then turn back. This will be most conducive to your purity; and God has full knowledge of all that you do.

24.29 [On the other hand,] you will incur no sin if you [freely] enter houses not intended for living in but serving a purpose useful to you:<sup>35</sup> but [always remember that] God knows all that you do openly, and all that you would conceal.

24.30 TELL the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity.<sup>36</sup> this will be most conducive to their purity- [and,] verily, God is aware of all that they do.

24.31 And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof,<sup>37</sup> hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms.<sup>38</sup> And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire,<sup>39</sup> or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness; and let them not swing their legs [in walking] so as to draw attention to their hidden charms.<sup>40</sup> And [always], O you believers-all of you-turn unto God in repentance, so that you might attain to a happy state!<sup>41</sup>

24.32 AND [you ought to] marry the single from among you<sup>42</sup> as well as such of your male and female slaves as are fit [for marriage].<sup>43</sup> If they [whom you intend to marry] are poor, [let this not deter you;] God will grant them sufficiency out of His bounty - for God is infinite [in His mercy], all-knowing.

24.33 And as for those who are unable to marry,<sup>44</sup> let them live in continence until God grants them sufficiency out of his bounty. And any of one those whom you rightfully possess<sup>45</sup> desire [to obtain] a deed of freedom, write it out for them if you are aware of any good in them:<sup>46</sup> and give them [their share] of the wealth of God which He has given you.<sup>47</sup> And do not, in order to gain<sup>48</sup> some of the fleeting pleasures of this worldly life, coerce your [slave] maidens into whoredom if they happen to be desirous of marriage,<sup>49</sup>

and if anyone should coerce them, then, verily, after they have been compelled [to submit in their helplessness], God will be much-forgiving. a dispenser of grace!

24.34 AND, INDEED, from on high have We bestowed upon you messages clearly showing the truth, and [many] a lesson from [the stories of] those who have passed away before you, and [many] an admonition to the God conscious

24.35 God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is, as it were,<sup>50</sup> that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star:<sup>51</sup> [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree -an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west<sup>52</sup> - the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light!<sup>53</sup> God guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided];<sup>54</sup> and [to this end] God propounds parables unto men, since God [alone] has full knowledge of all things.<sup>55</sup>

24.36 IN THE HOUSES [of worship] which God has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them,<sup>56</sup> there [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening-

24.37 people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain<sup>57</sup> can divert from the remembrance of God, and from constancy in prayer, and from charity:<sup>58</sup> [people] who are filled with fear [at the thought] of the Day on which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed,

24.38 [and who only hope] that God may reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did, and give them, out of His bounty, more [than they deserve]: for, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckon-ing.

24.39 But as for those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water - until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing:<sup>59</sup> instead, he finds [that] God [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full-for God is swift in reckoning!

24.40 Or [else, their deeds<sup>60</sup> are] like the depths of darkness upon an abysmal sea, made yet more dark by wave billowing over wave, with [black] clouds above it all: depths of darkness, layer upon layer<sup>61</sup> [so that] when one holds up his hand, he can hardly see it: for he to whom God gives no light, no light whatever has he!

24.41 ART THOU NOT aware that it is God whose limit-less glory all [creatures] that are in the heavens and on earth extol, even the birds as they spread out their wings?<sup>62</sup> Each [of them] knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him; and God has full knowledge of all that they do:

24.42 for, God's is the dominion over the heavens and the earth, and with God is all journeys' end.

24.43 Art thou not aware that it is God who causes the clouds to move onward, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until thou canst see rain come forth from their midst? And He it is who sends down from the skies, by degrees, mountainous masses [of clouds] charged with hail, striking therewith whomever He wills and averting it from whomever He wills, [the while] the flash of His lightning well-nigh deprives [men of their] sight!

24.44 It is God who causes night and day to alter-nate: in this [too], behold, there is surely a lesson for all who have eyes to see!

24.45 And it is God who has created all animals out of water;<sup>63</sup> and [He has willed that] among them are such as crawl on their bellies, and such as walk on two legs, and such as walk on four. God creates what He wills: for, verily, God has the power to will anything.

24.46 INDEED. from on high have We bestowed messages clearly showing the truth; but God guides onto a straight way [only] him that wills [to be guided].<sup>64</sup>

24.47 For, [many are] they [who] say, "We believe in God and in the Apostle, and we pay heed!" - but then, some of them turn away after this [assertion]: and these are by no means [true] believers.

24.48 And [so it is that] whenever they are summoned unto God and His Apostle in order that [the divine writ] might judge between them,<sup>65</sup> lo! some of them turn away;

24.49 but if the truth happens to be to their liking, they are quite willing to accept it!<sup>66</sup>

24.50 Is there disease in their hearts? Or have they begun to doubt [that this is a divine writ]? Or do they fear that God and His Apostle might deal unjustly with them?<sup>67</sup> Nay, it is [but] they, they who are doing wrong [to themselves]!

24.51 The only response of believers, whenever they are summoned unto God and His Apostle in order that [the divine writ] might judge between them, can be no other than,<sup>68</sup> "We have heard, and we pay heed!" - and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state:

24.52 for, they who pay heed unto God and His Apostle, and stand in awe of God and are conscious of Him, it is they, they who shall triumph [in the end]!

24.53 Now [as for those half-hearted ones,] they do swear by God with their most solemn oaths that if thou [O Apostle] shouldst ever bid them to do so, they would most certainly go forth [and sacrifice themselves].<sup>69</sup> Say: "Swear not! Reasonable compliance [with God's message is all that is required of you].<sup>70</sup> Verily, God is aware of all that you do!"

24.54 Say: "Pay heed unto God, and pay heed unto the Apostle." And if you turn away [from the Apostle, know that] he will have to answer only for whatever he has been charged with, and you, for what you have been charged with; but if you pay heed unto him, you will be on the right way. Withal, the Apostle is not bound to do more than clearly deliver the message [entrust-ed to him].

24.55 God has promised those of you who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds that, of a certainty, He will cause them to accede to power on earth,<sup>71</sup> even as He caused [some of] those who lived before them to accede to it; and that, of a certainty, He will firmly establish for them the religion which He has been pleased to bestow on them;<sup>72</sup> and that, of a certainty, He will cause their erstwhile state of fear to be replaced by a sense of security<sup>73</sup> - [Iseeine that] they worship Me [alone], not ascribing divine powers to aught beside Me.<sup>74</sup> But all who, after [having understood] this, choose to deny the truth - it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!

24.56 Hence, [O believers,] be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues,<sup>75</sup> and pay heed unto the Apostle, so that you might be graced with God's mercy.

24.57 [And] think not that those who are bent on denying the truth can elude [their final reckoning even if they remain unscathed] on earth:<sup>76</sup> the fire is their goal [in the life to come] - and vile indeed is such a journey's end!

24.58 O YOU who have attained to faith!<sup>77</sup> At three times [of day], let [even] those whom you rightfully possess,<sup>78</sup> as well as those from among you who have not yet attained to puberty,<sup>79</sup> ask leave of you [before intruding upon your privacy]: before the prayer of daybreak, and whenever you lay aside your garments in the middle of the day, and after the prayer of nightfall:<sup>80</sup> the three occasions on which your naked-ness is likely to be bared.<sup>81</sup> Beyond these [occasions], neither you nor they will incur any sin if they move [freely] about you, attending to [the needs of] one another. In this way God makes clear unto you His mes-sages: for God is all-knowing, wise!

24.59 Yet when the children among you attain to puberty, let them ask leave of you [at all times], even as those [who have reached maturity] before them have been enjoined to ask it.<sup>82</sup>

24.60 AND<sup>83</sup> [know that] women advanced in years, who no longer feel any sexual desire,<sup>84</sup> incur no sin if they discard their [outer] garments, provided they do not aim at a showy display of [their] charms. But [even so,] it is better for them to abstain [from this]: and God is all-hearing, all-knowing.

24.61 [ALL OF YOU, O believers, are brethren.<sup>85</sup> hence,] no blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for accepting charity from the hale], and neither to your-selves for eating [whatever is offered to you by others, whether it be food obtained] from your [children's] houses,<sup>86</sup> or your fathers' houses, or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or [houses] the keys whereof are in your charge,<sup>87</sup> or [the house] of any of your friends; nor will you incur any sin by eating in company or separately. But whenever you enter [any of these] houses, greet one another with a blessed, goodly greeting, as enjoined by God. In this way God makes clear unto you His messages, so that you might [learn to] use your reason.

24.62 [TRUE] BELIEVERS are only they who have attained to faith in God and His Apostle, and who, whenever they are [engaged] with him upon a matter of concern to the whole community,<sup>88</sup> do not depart [from whatever has been decided upon] unless they have sought [and obtained] his leave.<sup>89</sup> Verily, those who [do not abstain from the agreed-upon action unless they] ask leave of thee - it is [only] they who [truly] believe in God and His Apostle! Hence, when they ask leave of thee for some [valid] reason of their own, grant thou this leave to whomsoever of them thou choose [to grant it],<sup>90</sup> and ask God to forgive them: for, behold, God is much -forgiving a dispenser of grace!<sup>91</sup>

24.63 DO NOT regard the Apostle's summons to you<sup>92</sup> [in the same light] as a summons of one of you to another: God is indeed aware of those of you who would withdraw surreptitiously: so let those who would go against His bidding beware, lest a [bitter] trial befall them [in this world] or grievous suffering befall them [in the life to come].

24.64 Oh, verily, unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: well does He know where you stand and at what you aim!<sup>93</sup> And one Day, all [who have ever lived] will be brought back unto Him, and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing [in life]: for, God has full knowledge of everything.

## Author Comments

1 - I.e., "the injunctions whereof We have made self-evident by virtue of their wording": thus, according to Bukhari (Kitab at-Tafsir), ~Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas explains the expression faradnaha in this context (cf. Fath al-Bari VIII, 361). The same explanation, also on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas is advanced by Tabari. It would seem that the special stress on God's having laid down this surah "in plain terms" is connected with the gravity of the injunctions spelt out in the sequence: in other words, it implies a solemn warning against any attempt at widening or re-defining those injunctions by means of deductions, inferences or any other considerations unconnected with the plain wording of the Qur'an.

2 - The term zina signifies voluntary sexual intercourse between a man and a woman not married to one another, irrespective of whether one or both of them are married to other persons or not: hence, it does not - in contrast with the usage prevalent in most Western languages - differentiate between the concepts of "adultery" (i.e., sexual intercourse of a married man with a woman other than his wife, or of a married woman with a man other than her husband) and "fornication" (i.e., sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons). For the sake of simplicity I am rendering zina throughout as "adultery", and the person guilty of it as "adulterer" or "adulteress", respectively.

3 - The number of those to be present has been deliberately left unspecified, thus indicating that while the punishment must be given publicity, it need not be made a "public spectacle".

4 - The term mushrik (fem. mushrikah), which normally signifies a person who associates in his or her mind all manner of imaginary deities or forces with God, or who believes that any created being has a share in His qualities or powers, is here evidently used in the widest metaphorical sense of this term, denoting one who accords to his or her desires a supremacy which is due to God alone, and thus blasphemes against the principles of ethics and morality enjoined by Him. The particle aw (lit., "or") which connects the word mushrikah with the preceding word zaniyah ("adulteress") has in this context - as well as in the next clause, where both these terms appear in their masculine form - an amplifying, explanatory

value equivalent to the expression "in other words" or "that is", similar to the use of this particle in [23:6](#). For a further elucidation of the above passage, see next note.

5 - Some of the commentators understand this passage in the sense of an injunction: "The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or a mushrikah; and as for the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or a mushrik." This interpretation is objectionable on several counts: firstly, the Qur'an does not ever countenance the marriage of a believer, however great a sin he or she may have committed, with an unbeliever (in the most pejorative sense of this term) secondly, it is a fundamental principle of Islamic Law that once a crime has been expiated by the transgressor's undergoing the ordained legal punishment (in this case, a hundred stripes), it must be regarded, insofar as the society is concerned, as atoned for and done with; and, lastly, the construction of the above passage is clearly that of a statement of fact (Razi), and cannot be interpreted as an injunction. On the other hand, since adultery is an illicit sexual union, the verb *yankihu*, which appears twice in this passage, cannot have the customary, specific meaning of "he marries" but must, rather, be understood in its general sense - applicable to both lawful and unlawful sexual intercourse - namely, "he couples with". It is in this sense that the great commentator Abu Muslim (as quoted by Razi) explains the above verse, which stresses the fact that both partners are equally guilty inasmuch as they commit their sin consciously - implying that neither of them can excuse himself or herself on the ground of having been merely "seduced".

6 - The term *muhsanat* denotes literally "women who are fortified [against unchastity]", i.e., by marriage and or faith and self-respect, implying that, from a legal point of view, every woman must be considered chaste unless a conclusive proof to the contrary is produced. (This passage relates to women other than the accuser's own wife, for in the latter case - as shown in verses {6-9} - the law of evidence and the consequences are different.

7 - By obvious implication, this injunction applies also to cases where a woman accuses a man of illicit sexual intercourse, and is subsequently unable to prove her accusation legally. The severity of the punishment to be meted out in such cases, as well as the requirement of four witnesses - instead of the two that Islamic Law regards as sufficient in all other criminal and civil suits - is based on the imperative necessity of preventing slander and off-hand accusations. As laid down in several authentic sayings of the Prophet, the evidence of the four witnesses must be direct, and not merely circumstantial: in other words, it is not sufficient for them to have witnessed a situation which made it evident that sexual intercourse was taking or had taken place: they must have witnessed the sexual act as such, and must be able to prove this to the entire satisfaction of the judicial authority (Razi, summing up the views of the greatest exponents of Islamic Law). Since such a complete evidence is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain, it is obvious that the purpose of the above Qur'anic injunction is to preclude, in practice, all third-party accusations relating to illicit sexual intercourse - for, "man has been created weak" ({4: 28}) - and to make a proof of adultery dependent on a voluntary, faith-inspired confession of the guilty parties themselves.

8 - I.e., who publicly withdraw their accusation after having suffered the punishment of flogging - which, being a legal right of the wrongly accused person, cannot be obviated by mere repentance and admission of guilt. Thus, the above-mentioned exemption relates only to the interdict on giving testimony and not to the punishment by flogging.

9 - Lit., "then the testimony of any of these shall be four testimonies [or "solemn affirmations"] before God".

10 - Thus, the husband's accusation is to be regarded as proven if the wife refuses to take an oath to the contrary, and disproved if she solemnly sets her word against his. Inasmuch as this procedure, which is called li'an ("oath of condemnation"), leaves the question of guilt legally undecided, both parties are absolved of all the legal consequences otherwise attending upon adultery - resp. an unproven accusation of adultery - the only consequence being a mandatory divorce.

11 - This sentence, which introduces the section dealing with the condemnation of all unfounded or unproven accusations of unchastity - as well as the similar sentence which closes it in verse {20} - is deliberately left incomplete, leaving it to man to imagine what would have happened to individual lives and to society if God had not ordained all the above-mentioned legal and moral safeguards against possibly false accusations, or if He had made a proof of adultery dependent on mere circumstantial evidence. This idea is further elaborated in verses {1-15}.

12 - Lit., "those who brought forth the lie (al-iffk, here denoting a false accusation of unchastity) are a numerous group ('usbah) among you". The term 'usbah signifies any group of people, of indeterminate number, banded together for a particular purpose (Taj al-'Arus).-According to all the commentators, the passage comprising verses {11-20} relates to an incident which occurred on the Prophet's return from the campaign against the tribe of Mustaliq in the year 5 H. The Prophet's wife 'A'ishah, who had accompanied him on that expedition, was inadvertently left behind when the Muslims struck camp before dawn. After having spent several hours alone, she was found by one of the Prophet's Companions, who led her to the next halting-place of the army. This incident gave rise to malicious insinuations of misconduct on the part of 'A'ishah; but these rumours were short-lived, and her innocence was established beyond all doubt. - As is the case with all Qur'anic allusions to historical events, this one, too, is primarily meant to bring out an ethical proposition valid for all times and all social circumstances: and this is the reason why the grammatical construction of the above passage is such that the past-tense verbs occurring in verses {11-16} can be - and, I believe, should be - understood as denoting the present tense.

13 - I.e., in the sight of God: for, the unhappiness caused by unjust persecution confers - as does every undeserved and patiently borne suffering - a spiritual merit on the person thus afflicted. Cf. the saying of the Prophet, quoted by Bukhari and Muslim: "Whenever a believer is stricken with any hardship, or pain, or anxiety, or sorrow, or harm, or distress - even if it be a thorn that has hurt him - God redeems thereby some of his failings."

14 - I.e., by stressing, in a legally and morally inadmissible manner, certain "circumstantial" details or aspects of the case in order to make the slanderous, unfounded allegation more believable.

15 - Lit., "whenever you hear it" - the pronoun "you" indicating here the community as a whole.

16 - This interpolation is necessary in view of the fact that the believers spoken of in the preceding verse are blamed, not for making the false accusation, but for not giving it the lie.

17 - Lit., "in support thereof" ('alayhi).

18 - Sc., "yourselves and your whole society". With this and the next verse the discourse returns to, and elaborates, the idea touched upon in verse {10} and explained in note [11].

19 - The interjection subhanaka ("O Thou who art limitless in Thy glory") stresses here the believer's moral duty to bethink himself of God whenever he is tempted to listen to, or to repeat, a calumny (since every such rumour must be considered a calumny unless its truth is legally proved).

20 - The term fahishah signifies anything that is morally reprehensible or abominable: hence, "immoral conduct" in the widest sense of this expression. In the above context it refers to unfounded or unproven allegations of immoral conduct, in other words, "foul slander".



21 - I.e., the legal punishment as stipulated in verse {4} of this surah.

22 - This Qur~anic warning against slander and, by obvious implication, against any attempt at seeking out other people's faults finds a clear echo in several well-authenticated sayings of the Prophet: "Beware of all guesswork [about one another], for, behold, all [such] guesswork is most deceptive (akdhab al-hadith); and do not spy upon one another, and do not try to bare [other people's] failings" (Muwatta'; almost identical versions of this Tradition have been quoted by Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Da'ud); "Do not hurt those who have surrendered themselves to God (al-muslimin), and do not impute evil to them, and do not try to uncover their nakedness [i.e., their faults]: for, behold, if anyone tries to uncover his brother's nakedness, God will uncover his own nakedness [on the Day of Judgment]" (Tirmidhi); and, "Never does a believer draw a veil over the nakedness of another believer without God's drawing a veil over his own nakedness on Resurrection Day" (Bukhari). All these injunctions have received their seal, as it were, in the Qur~anic exhortation: "Avoid most guesswork [about one another] - for, behold, some of [such] guesswork is [in itself] a sin" ([49:12](#)).

23 - See verse {10} of this surah and the corresponding note [11].

24 - In this context, the term al-munkar has apparently the same meaning as in [16:90](#) (explained in the corresponding note [109]) since, as the sequence shows, it clearly relates to the unreasonable self-righteousness of so many people who "follow Satan's footsteps" by imputing moral failings to others and forgetting that it is only due to God's grace that man, in his inborn weakness, can ever remain pure.

25 - Or: "Swear that [henceforth] they would not help [lit., "give to"] .. .", etc. Both these meanings - "he swore [that]" and "he became remiss [in]" - are attributable to the verb ala, which appears in the above sentence in the form ya'tal. My rendering is based on the interpretation given to this verb by the great philologist Abu Ubayd al-Qasim al-Harawi (cf. Lane I, 84).

26 - For an explanation of this rendering of the designation al-muhajirun (or, in other places, alladhina hajarun). see surah {2}, note [203].

27 - It is generally assumed that this verse refers to Abu Bakr, who swore that he would never again help his poor relative, the muhajir Mistah (whom he used to support until then) after the latter had taken part in slandering Abu Bakr's daughter, 'A'ishah (see note [12] above). There is no doubt that this assumption of the commentators is well-founded, but there is also no doubt that the ethical purport of the above verse is timeless and, therefore, independent of the fact or facts with which it appears to be historically linked. (This view finds additional support in the use of the plural form throughout the above passage.) The call to "pardon and forbear" is fully consonant with the Qur'anic principle of countering evil with good (see [13:22](#) and the corresponding note [44]).

28 - According to Razi, the absence of repentance is incontrovertibly implied in the condemnation expressed in the sequence, since the Qur'an makes it clear in many places that God always accepts a sinner's sincere repentance.

29 - Lit., "chaste, unmindful [or "careless"] believing women", i.e., virtuous women who thoughtlessly expose themselves to situations on which a slanderous construction may be put.

30 - Regarding the double meaning ("manifest" and "manifesting") inherent in the adjective mubin, see note [2] on [12:1](#); for my rendering of God's attribute al-haqq as "the Ultimate Truth", see note [99] on [20:114](#). In this particular instance, the active form of mubin ("manifesting") apparently relates to God's revelation, on Judgement Day, of the true nature of man's actions and, thus, of the enormity of the sin to which this passage refers.

31 - Lit., "innocent of all that they [i.e., the slanderers] may say".

32 - See note [5] on [8:4](#). The reference, in this context, to God's "forgiveness of sins" (maghfirah) is obviously meant to stress the innate weakness of man's nature, which makes him prone to sinning, however good and pure he may be (cf. [4:28](#)).

33 - This categorical prohibition connects with the preceding passages inasmuch as it serves as an

additional protection of individuals against possible slander. In its wider purport, it postulates the inviolability of each person's home and private life. (For the socio-political implications of this principle, see *State and Government in Islam*, pp. 84 ff.)

34 - I.e., by the rightful owner or caretaker.

35 - Lit., "uninhabited houses wherein there are things of use (mata') for you". In the consensus of all the authorities, including the Companions of the Prophet, this relates to buildings or premises of a more or less public nature, like inns, shops, administrative offices, public baths, etc., as well as to ancient ruins.

36 - Lit., "to restrain [something] of their gaze and to guard their private parts". The latter expression may be understood both in the literal sense of "covering one's private parts" - i.e., modesty in dress - as well as in the metonymical sense of "restraining one's sexual urges", i.e., restricting them to what is lawful, namely, marital intercourse (cf. {23:5-6}). The rendering adopted by me in this instance allows for both interpretations. The "lowering of one's gaze", too, relates both to physical and to emotional modesty (Razi).

37 - My interpolation of the word "decently" reflects the interpretation of the phrase *illa ma zahara minha* by several of the earliest Islamic scholars, and particularly by Al-Qiffal (quoted by Razi), as "that which a human being may openly show in accordance with prevailing custom (*al-'adah al-jariyah*)". Although the traditional exponents of Islamic Law have for centuries been inclined to restrict the definition of "what may [decently] be apparent" to a woman's face, hands and feet- and sometimes even less than that - we may safely assume that the meaning of *illa ma zahara minha* is much wider, and that the deliberate vagueness of this phrase is meant to allow for all the time-bound changes that are necessary for man's moral and social growth. The pivotal clause in the above injunction is the demand, addressed in identical terms to men as well as to women, to "lower their gaze and be mindful of their chastity": and this determines the extent of what, at any given time, may legitimately - i.e., in consonance with the Qur'anic principles of social morality - be considered "decent" or "indecent" in a person's outward appearance.

38 - The noun *khimar* (of which *khumur* is the plural) denotes the head-covering customarily used by Arabian women before and after the advent of Islam. According to most of the classical commentators, it was worn in pre-Islamic times more or less as an ornament and was let down loosely over the wearer's back; and since, in accordance with the fashion prevalent at the time, the upper part of a woman's tunic had a wide opening in the front, her breasts were left bare. Hence, the injunction to cover the bosom by means of a *khimar* (a term so familiar to the contemporaries of the Prophet) does not necessarily relate to

the use of khimar as such but is, rather, meant to make it clear that a woman's breasts are not included in the concept of "what may decently be apparent" of her body and should not, therefore, be displayed.

39 - I.e., very old men. The preceding phrase "those whom they rightfully possess" (lit., "whom their right hands possess") denotes slaves; but see also note [78].

40 - Lit., "so that those of their charms which they keep hidden may become known". The phrase yadribna bi-arfulhinna is idiomatically similar to the phrase daraba bi-yadayhi mishyatihi, "he swung his arms in walking" (quoted in this context in Taj al-'Arus). and alludes to a deliberately provocative gait.

41 - The implication of this general call to repentance is that since "man has been created weak" ([4:28](#)), no one is ever free of faults and temptations - so much so that even the Prophet used to say, "Verily, I turn unto Him in repentance a hundred times every day" (Ibn Hanbal, Bukhari and Bayhaqi, all of them on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn'Umar).

42 - I.e., from among the free members of the community, as is evident from the subsequent juxtaposition with slaves. (As most of the classical commentators point out, this is not an injunction but a recommendation to the community as a whole: hence my interpolation of the words "you ought to".) The term ayyim - of which ayama is the plural - signifies a person of either sex who has no spouse, irrespective of whether he or she has never been married or is divorced or widowed. Thus, the above verse expresses the idea - reiterated in many authentic sayings of the Prophet - that, from both the ethical and the social points of view, the married state is infinitely preferable to celibacy.

43 - The term as-salihin connotes here both moral and physical fitness for marriage: i.e., the attainment of bodily and mental maturity as well as mutual affection between the man and the woman concerned. As in [4:25](#), the above verse rules out all forms of concubinage and postulates marriage as the only basis of lawful sexual relations between a man and his female slave.

44 - I.e., because of poverty, or because they cannot find a suitable mate, or for any other personal reason.

45 - Lit., "whom your right hands possess", i.e., male or female slaves.

46 - The noun kitab is, in this context, an equivalent of kitabah or makatabah (lit., "mutual agreement in writing"), a juridical term signifying a "deed of freedom" or "of manumission" executed on the basis of an agreement between a slave and his or her owner, to the effect that the slave undertakes to purchase his or her freedom for an equitable sum of money payable in instalments before or after the manumission, or, alternatively, by rendering a clearly specified service or services to his or her owner. With this end in view, the slave is legally entitled to engage in any legitimate, gainful work or to obtain the necessary sum of money by any other lawful means (e.g., through a loan or a gift from a third person). In view of the imperative form of the verb katibuhum ("write it out for them"), the deed of manumission cannot be refused by the owner, the only pre-condition being an evidence - to be established, if necessary, by an unbiased arbiter or arbiters - of the slave's good character and ability to fulfil his or her contractual obligations. The stipulation that such a deed of manumission may not be refused, and the establishment of precise juridical directives to this end, clearly indicates that Islamic Law has from its very beginning aimed at an abolition of slavery as a social institution, and that its prohibition in modern times constitutes no more than a final implementation of that aim. (See also next note, as well as note [146] on [2:177](#).)

47 - According to all the authorities, this relates (a) to a moral obligation on the part of the owner to promote the slave's efforts to obtain the necessary revenues by helping him or her to achieve an independent economic status and/or by remitting part of the agreed - upon compensation, and (b) to the obligation of the state treasury (bayt al-mal) to finance the freeing of slaves in accordance with the Qur'anic principle - enunciated in [9:60](#) - that the revenues obtained through the obligatory tax called zakah are to be utilized, among other purposes, "for the freeing of human beings from bondage" (fi 'r-riqab, an expression explained in surah {2}, note [146]). Hence, Zamakhshari holds that the above clause is addressed not merely to persons owning slaves but to the community as a whole. - The expression "the wealth of God" contains an allusion to the principle that "God has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return" ({9: 111}) - implying that all of man's possessions are vested in God, and that man is entitled to no more than their usufruct.

48 - Lit., "so that you might seek out" or "endeavour to attain to".

49 - Lit., "if they desire protection against unchastity (tahassun)", i.e., through marriage (cf. the expression muhsanat as used in [4:24](#)). Most of the classical commentators are of the opinion that the term fatayat ("maidens") denotes here "slave girls": an assumption which is fully warranted by the context. Hence, the above verse reiterates the prohibition of concubinage by explicitly describing it as "whoredom" (bigah').

50 - The particle ka ("as if" or "as it were") prefixed to a noun is called kaf at-tashbih ("the letter kaf pointing to a resemblance [of one thing to another]" or "indicating a metaphor"). In the above context it alludes to the impossibility of defining God even by means of a metaphor or a parable - for, since "there is nothing like unto Him" ([42:11](#)), there is also "nothing that could be compared with Him" ([112:4](#)). Hence, the parable of "the light of God" is not meant to express His reality - which is inconceivable to any created being and, therefore, inexpressible in any human language - but only to allude to the illumination which He, who is the Ultimate Truth, bestows upon the mind and the feelings of all who are willing to be guided. Tabari, Baghawi and Ibn Kathir quote Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud as saying in this context: "It is the parable of His light in the heart of a believer."

51 - The "lamp" is the revelation which God grants to His prophets and which is reflected in the believer's heart - the "niche" of the above parable (Ubayy ibn Ka'b, as quoted by Tabari) - after being received and consciously grasped by his reason ("the glass [shining brightly] like a radiant star"): for it is through reason alone that true faith can find its way into the heart of man.

52 - It would seem that this is an allusion to the organic continuity of all divine revelation which, starting like a tree from one "root" or proposition - the statement of God's existence and uniqueness - grows steadily throughout man's spiritual history, branching out into a splendid variety of religious experience, thus endlessly widening the range of man's perception of the truth. The association of this concept with the olive-tree apparently arises from the fact that this particular kind of tree is characteristic of the lands in which most of the prophetic precursors of the Qur'anic message lived, namely, the lands to the east of the mediterranean: but since all true revelation flows from the Infinite Being, it is "neither of the east nor of the west" - and especially so the revelation of the Qur'an, which, being addressed to all mankind, is universal in its goal as well.

53 - The essence of the Qur'anic message is described elsewhere as "clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth" (cf. note [2] on [12:1](#)); and it is, I believe, this aspect of the Qur'an that the above sentence alludes to. Its message gives light because it proceeds from God; but it "would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it": i.e., even though one may be unaware that it has been "touched by the fire" of divine revelation, its inner consistency, truth and wisdom ought to be self-evident to anyone who approaches it in the light of his reason and without prejudice.

54 - Although most of the commentators read the above phrase in the sense of "God guides unto His light whomever He wills", Zamakhshari gives it the sense adopted in my rendering (both being syntactically permissible).

55 - I.e., because of their complexity, certain truths can be conveyed to man only by means of parables or allegories: see notes [5] and [8] on [3:7](#).

56 - Lit., "and [ordained] that His name ...", etc.: implying, as the sequence shows, that the spiritual purpose of those houses of worship is fulfilled only by some, and not all, of the people who are wont to congregate in them out of habit.

57 - Lit., "bargaining" or "selling" or "buying and selling" (bay') - a metonym for anything that might bring worldly gain.

58 - For this rendering of the term zakah, see surah {2}, note [34].

59 - I.e., he is bound to realize on Judgment Day that all his supposedly "good" deeds have been rendered worthless by his deliberate refusal to listen to the voice of truth (Zamakhshari and Razi).

60 - I.e., their bad deeds, as contrasted with their good deeds, which in the preceding verse have been likened to a mirage.

61 - Lit., "one above another".

62 - Cf. [17:44](#) and the corresponding note [53].

63 - See note [39] on [21:30](#). The term dabbah denotes every corporeal being endowed with both life and spontaneous movement; hence, in its widest sense, it comprises the entire animal world, including man.

64 - Or: "God guides whomever He wills onto a straight way". The rendering adopted by me in this instance seems preferable in view of the preceding, intensive stress on the evidence, forthcoming from all nature, of God's creative, planning activity and the appeal to "all who have eyes to see" to let themselves be guided by this overwhelming evidence.

65 - I.e., in order that the divine writ - which is implied in the preceding expression "God and His Apostle" - might determine their ethical values and, consequently, their social behaviour.

66 - Lit., "if the truth happens to be with them, they come to it willingly": cf. {4:60-61} and the corresponding notes, especially note [80].

67 - I.e., by depriving them of what they choose to regard as "legitimate" liberties and enjoyments, or by supposedly preventing them from "keeping up with the times". As in verses {47} and {48} (as well as in verse {51} below) the expression "God and His Apostle" is here a synonym for the divine writ revealed to the Apostle.

68 - Lit., "The only saying of the believers... is that they say" - i.e., without any mental reservation. The term qawl (lit., "saying") has here the sense of a genuine spiritual "response" in contrast to the mere lip-service alluded to in verse {47} above.

69 - This is an allusion to the ephemeral, self-deceiving enthusiasms of the half-hearted and their supposed readiness for "self-sacrifice", contrasting with their obvious reluctance to live up to the message of the Qur'an in their day-to-day concerns.



70 - This elliptic phrase alludes to the principle - repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an- that God does not burden man with more than he can easily bear.

71 - Lit., "cause them to be successors on earth"-i.e., enable them to achieve, in their turn power and security and, thus, the capability to satisfy their worldly needs. This Qur'anic reference to God's "promise" contains an oblique allusion to the God-willed natural law which invariably makes the rise and fall of nations dependent on their moral qualities.

72 - Cf. [5:3](#)-*"I have willed that self-surrender unto Me (al-islam) shall be your religion". Its "firm establishment" (tamkin) relates to the strengthening of the believers' faith as well as to the growth of its moral influence in the world.*

73 - Lit., "exchange for them, after their fear [or "danger"], security". It is to be noted that the term *amn* signifies not merely outward, physical security but also - and, indeed, originally - "freedom from fear" (Taj al-'Arus). hence, the above clause implies not only a promise of communal security after an initial period of weakness and danger (which, as history tells us, overshadows the beginnings of every genuine religious movement), but also the promise of an individual sense of inner security - that absence of all fear of the Unknown which characterizes a true believer. (See next note.)

74 - I.e., the believer's freedom from fear is a direct outcome of his intellectual and emotional refusal to attribute to anyone or anything but God the power to shape his destiny.

75 - The specific mention of the "purifying dues" (*az-zakah*) in this context is meant to stress the element of unselfishness as an integral aspect of true faith. According to Zamakhshari, the above verse connects with, and concludes, verse {54}.

76 - For an explanation of the above sentence and the words interpolated by me, see note [39] on a similar phrase in [11:20](#).

77 - In pursuance of the Qur'anic principle that the social and individual - as well as the spiritual and material-aspects of human life form one indivisible whole and cannot, therefore, be dealt with independently of one another, the discourse returns to the consideration of some of the rules of healthy social behaviour enunciated in the earlier parts of this surah. The following passage takes up and elaborates the theme of the individual's right to privacy, already touched upon in verses {27-29} above.

78 - Lit., "whom your right hands possess" - a phrase which, primarily and as a rule, denotes male and female slaves. Since, however, the institution of slavery is envisaged in the Qur'an as a mere historic phenomenon that must in time be abolished (cf. notes [46] and [47] on verse {33} of this surah, as well as note [146] on [2:177](#)), the above expression may also be understood as referring, in general, to one's close dependents and to domestic servants of either sex. Alternatively, the phrase *ma malakat aymanukum* may denote, in this context, "those whom you rightfully possess through wedlock", i.e., wives and husbands (cf. [4:24](#) and the corresponding note [26]).

79 - I.e., all children, irrespective of whether they are related to one or not.

80 - The term *zahirah* (lit., "midday" or, occasionally, "heat of midday"), which occurs in the Qur'an only in this one instance, may have been used metonymically in the sense of "day-time" as contrasted with the time after the prayer of nightfall and before the prayer of daybreak: hence my tentative rendering as "middle of the day".

81 - Lit., "three [periods] of nakedness (*thalath 'awrat*) for you". This phrase is to be understood both literally and figuratively. Primarily, the term *'awrah* signifies those parts of a mature person's body which cannot in decency be exposed to any but one's wife or husband or, in case of illness, one's physician. In its tropical sense, it is also used to denote spiritual "nakedness", as well as situations and circumstances in which a person is entitled to absolute privacy. The number "three" used twice in this context is not, of course, enumerative or exclusive, but is obviously meant to stress the recurrent nature of the occasions on which even the most familiar members of the household, including husbands, wives and children, must respect that privacy.

82 - Lit., "have asked it": a reference to the injunction laid down in verses {27-28} above. My interpolation,

between brackets, of the phrase "who have reached maturity" is based on Zamakhshari's interpretation of the words "those before them".

83 - This conjunction is, I believe, meant to indicate that the verse which it introduces is connected with certain previously revealed passages, namely, verse {31} above and [33:59](#), both of which allude to the principle of modesty to be observed by Muslim women in the matter of dress: hence, it must be regarded as a separate "section".

84 - Lit., "who do not desire [or "hope for"] sexual intercourse" - the latter evidently being the meaning of nikah in this context. Although this noun, as well as the verb from which it is derived, is almost always used in the Qur'an in the sense of "marriage" or "marrying", there are undoubtedly exceptions from this general rule: for instance, the manner in which the verbal form yankihu is used in verse {3} of this surah (see the corresponding note [5] above). These exceptions confirm the view held by some philologists of great renown, e.g., Al-Jawhar' or Al-Azhari (the latter quoted in the Lisan al-'Arab), to the effect that "in the speech of the Arabs, the original meaning of nikah is sexual intercourse (al-wat')".

85 - The whole of verse {61} is construed in so highly elliptic a form that disagreements as to its purport have always been unavoidable. However, if all the explanations offered by the early commentators are taken into consideration, we find that their common denominator is the view that the innermost purport of this passage is a stress on the brotherhood of all believers, expressed in a call to mutual charity, compassion and good-fellowship and, hence, the avoidance of all unnecessary formalities in their mutual relations.

86 - In the consensus of all the authorities, the expression "your houses" implies in this context also "your children's houses", since all that belongs to a person may be said to belong, morally, to his parents as well.

87 - I.e., "for which you are responsible".

88 - Lit., "a uniting [or "collective"] matter" (amr jami'). The personal pronoun in "with him" relates to the Apostle and, by analogy, to every legitimate leader (imam) of the Muslim community acting in accordance

with the spirit of the Qur'an and the Prophet's life-example.

89 - I.e., his permission to abstain, for valid reasons, from participating in a course of action or a policy agreed upon by the majority of the community ('amma ijta'ma'u lahu min al-amr: Tabari). In a logical development of this principle we arrive at something like the concept of a "loyal opposition", which implies the possibility of dissent on a particular point of communal or state policy combined with absolute loyalty to the common cause. (But see also note [91].)

90 - I.e., after weighing the reasons advanced by the individual or the individuals concerned against the interests of the society as a whole.

91 - The statement that "God is much-forgiving" obviously implies that an avoidance of "asking leave" to abstain from participation in an agreed-upon course of action is, under all circumstances, morally preferable (Zamakhshari).

92 - I.e., his summons to God's message in general, spoken of in verses {46-54} above, as well as to a particular course of communal action, referred to in verse {62}. Alternatively, "the Apostle's summons" may, in this context, be synonymous with the Qur'an itself.

93 - Lit., "well does He know upon what you are": i.e., "what your beliefs are and what moral principles govern your attitudes and actions".

[View Page](#)

Source : *Alim.org-Asad Translation-Surah 24*