

Surah 66. At-Tahrim

66.1 O Prophet! why holdest thou to be forbidden that which Allah has made lawful to thee? Thou seekest to please thy consorts. But Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful. ^{5529 5530}

66.2 Allah has already ordained for you (O men) the dissolution of your oaths (in some cases): and Allah is your Protector and He is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom. ⁵⁵³¹

66.3 When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his consorts and she then divulged it (to another) and Allah made it known to him he confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part. Then when he told her thereof she said "Who told thee this?" He said "He told me who knows and is well-acquainted (with all things)." ^{5532 5533}

66.4 If ye two turn in repentance to Him your hearts are indeed so inclined; but if ye back up each other against him truly Allah is his Protector and Gabriel and (every) righteous one among those who believe and furthermore the angels will back (him) up. ^{5534 5535}

66.5 It may be if he divorced you (all) that Allah will give him in exchange Consorts better than you who submit (their wills) who believe who are devout who turn to Allah in repentance who worship (in humility) who travel (for faith) and fast previously married or virgins. ^{5536 5537}

66.6 O ye who believe! save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe who flinch not (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah but do (precisely) what they are commanded. ^{5538 5539 5540}

66.7 (They will say) "O ye Unbelievers! make no excuses this day! Ye are being but requited for all that ye did!" ⁵⁵⁴¹

66.8 O ye who believe! turn to Allah with sincere repentance: in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your ills and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow the Day that Allah will not permit to be humiliated the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their Light will run forward before them and by their right hands while they say "Our Lord! perfect our Light for us and grant us Forgiveness; for Thou has power over all things." ^{5542 5543 5544}

66.9 O Prophet! strive hard against the Unbelievers and the Hypocrites and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell an evil refuge (indeed). ⁵⁵⁴⁵

66.10 Allah sets forth for an example to the Unbelievers the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut: they were (respectively) under two of Our righteous servants but they were false to their (husbands) and they profited nothing before Allah on their account but were told: "Enter ye the fire along with (others) that enter!" ^{5546 5547 5548}

66.11 And Allah sets forth as an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh: Behold she said: "O my Lord! build for me in nearness to Thee a mansion in the Garden and save me from Pharaoh and his doings and save me from those that do wrong"; ^{5549 5550}

66.12 And Mary the daughter of `Imran who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her (body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations and was one of the devout (Servants). ^{5551 5552 5553}

Author Comments

5529 - The Prophet's household was not like other households. The Consorts of Purity were expected to hold a higher standard in behaviour and reticence than ordinary women, as they had higher work to

perform. See n. 3706 to xxxiii. 28. But they were human beings after all, and were subject to the weaknesses of their sex, and they sometimes failed. The commentators usually cite the following incident in connection with the revelation of these verses. It is narrated from 'Aisha, the wife of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) by Bukhari, Muslim, Nasai. Abu Dawud and others that the holy Prophet usually visited all his wives daily after 'Asr Prayer. Once it so happened that he stayed longer than usual at the quarters of Zainab bint Jahsh, for she had received from somewhere some honey which the holy Prophet liked very much. "At this", says 'Aisha, "I felt jealous, and Hafsa, Sawda, Safiya, and I agreed among ourselves that when he visits us each of us would tell him that a peculiar odour came from his mouth as a result of what he had eaten, for we knew that he was particularly sensitive to offensive smells". So when his wives hinted at it, he vowed that he would never again use honey. Thereupon these verses were revealed reminding him that he should not declare to himself unlawful that which Allah had made lawful to him. The important point to bear in mind is that he was at once rectified by revelation, which reinforces the fact that the prophets are always under divine protection, and even the slightest lapse on their part is never left uncorrected.

5530 - The tender words of admonition addressed to the Consorts in xxxiii. 28-34 explain the situation far better than any comments can express. If the holy Prophet had been a mere husband in the ordinary sense of the term, he could not have held the balance even between his private feelings and his public duties. But he was not an ordinary husband, and he abandoned his renunciation on his realisation of the higher duties with which he was charged, and which required conciliation with firmness.

5531 - Cf. ii. 224. If your vows prevent you from doing good, or acting rightly, or making peace between persons, you should expiate the vow, but not refrain from your good deed.

5532 - Who these two consorts were, and what was the matter in confidence which was disclosed, we are not expressly told, but the facts mentioned in n. 5529 above will help us to understand this passage. The sacred words imply that the matter was of great importance as to the principle involved, but that the details were not of sufficient importance for permanent record. For the lessons to be drawn, see the notes following.

5533 - The moral we have to draw is manifold. (1) If anything is told us in confidence, especially by one at the head of affairs, we must not divulge it to our closest friend. (2) If such divulgence is made in the most secret whispers, Allah's Plan is such that it will come to light and expose those guilty of breach of confidence. (3) The breach of confidence must inevitably redound to the shame of the guilty party.

5534 - There are further lessons. (4) Both the party betraying confidence and that encouraging the betrayal must purge their conduct by repentance. (5) Frank repentance would be what their hearts and conscience themselves would dictate and they must not resist such amends on account of selfish obstinacy. (6) If they were to resist frank repentance and amends, they are only abetting each other's wrong, and they cannot prevail against all the moral forces which will be ranged on the side of the right.

5535 - Do not forget the dual meaning: immediate, in application to the holy Prophet, and general, being the lesson which we ought all to learn. The holy Prophet could not be injured by any persons doing anything against him even though they might unconsciously put him in great jeopardy: for Allah, the Angel Gabriel (who was the Messenger to him), and the whole Community, would protect him,-to say nothing of the army of angels or hidden spiritual forces that always guarded him. Cf. xxxiii. 56. The general lesson for us is that the good man's protection is that of the moral forces around him; it is divine protection, against which human weakness or folly will have no power.

5536 - From the case of two in verse 4, we now come to the case of all the Consorts generally, in verse 5. Cf. xxxiii. 28-30. Their duties and responsibilities were higher than those of other women, and therefore their failure would also be more serious. This is only hypothetical, in order to show us the virtues expected of them: faith and devotion, worship and service, readiness for travel or hijrat, whether they were young or old, new to married life or otherwise. From them again the more general application follows-to all women in Islam.

5537 - Saihat: literally, those who travel. Here it means those who fast. Note that the spiritual virtues are named in the descending order: submitting their wills (Islam), faith and devotion, turning ever to worship and faith, and performing other rites, or perhaps being content with asceticism. And this applies to all women, maiden girls or women of mature experience who were widows or separated from previous husbands by divorce.

5538 - Note how we have been gradually led up in admonition from two Consorts to all consorts, to all women, to all Believers, and to all men and women. We must carefully guard not only our own conduct, but the conduct of our families, and of all who are near and dear to us. For the issues are most Serious, and the consequences of a fall are most terrible.

5539 - "A Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones." Cf. ii. 24. This is a terrible Fire: not merely like the physical fire which burns wood or charcoal or substances like that, and consumes them. This Fire will have for its fuel men who do wrong and are as hard hearted as stones, or stone Idols as symbolical of all the

unbending Falsehoods in life.

5540 - Cf. lxxiv. 31. We think of the angel nature as gentle and beautiful, but in another aspect perfection includes justice, fidelity, discipline, and the firm execution of duty according to lawful commands. So, in the attributes of Allah Himself, Justice and Mercy, Kindness and Correction are not contradictory but complementary. An earthly ruler will be unkind to his loyal subjects if he does not punish evil-doers.

5541 - 'This is no hardship or injustice imposed on you. It is all but the fruit of your own deeds; the result of your own deliberate choice.'

5542 - The opposition of sex against sex, individual or concerted, having been condemned, we are now exhorted to turn to the Light, and to realise that the good and righteous can retain their integrity even though their mates, in spite of all their example and precept, remain in evil and sin.

5543 - Whatever may have been the faults of the past, unite in good deeds, and abandon petty sectional jealousies, and Allah will remove your difficulties and distresses, and all the evils from which you suffer. Indeed He will grant you the Bliss of Heaven and save you from any humiliation which you may have brought on yourselves by your conduct and on the revered Prophet and Teacher whose name you professed to take.

5544 - See lvii. 12, and n. 5288. The darkness of evil will be dispelled, and the Light of Allah will be realised by them more and more. But even so they will not be content: for they will pray for the least taint of evil to be removed from them, and perfection to be granted to them. In that exalted state they will be within reach of perfection,-not by their own merits, but by the infinite Mercy and Power of Allah.

5545 - See ix. 73, where the same words introduce the argument against the Hypocrites. Here they introduce the argument against wickedness, which, though given the privilege of association with goodness and piety, persisted in wicked deeds, and in favour of those noble souls, which, though tied to wickedness; retained their purity and integrity. Two examples of each kind are given,-of women, as this Sura is mainly concerned with women.

5546 - Read Noah's story in xi. 36-48. Evidently his contemporary world had got so corrupt that it needed a great Flood to purge it. "None of the people will believe except those who have believed already. So grieve no longer over their evil deeds." But there were evil ones in his own family. A foolish and undutiful son is mentioned in xi. 42-46. Poor Noah tried to save him and pray for him as one "of his family"; but the answer came: "he is not of thy family; for his conduct is unrighteous". We might expect such a son to have a mother like him, and here we are told that it was so. Noah's wife was also false to the standards of her husband, and perished in this world and in the Hereafter.

5547 - The wife of Lot has already been mentioned more than once. See xi. 81, and n. 1577; vii. 83, and n. 1051; etc. The world around her was wicked, and she sympathised with and followed that wicked world, rather than her righteous husband. She suffered the fate of her wicked world.

5548 - "Betrayed their husbands": not in sex, but in the vital spiritual matters of truth and conduct. They had the high privilege of the most intimate relationship with the noblest spirits of their age: but if they failed to rise to the height of their dignity, their relationship did not save them. They could not plead that they were the wives of pious husbands. They had to enter Hell like any other wicked women. There is personal responsibility before Allah. One soul cannot claim the merits of another, any more than one pure soul can be injured by association with a corrupt soul. The pure one should keep its purity intact. See the next two examples.

5549 - Traditionally she is known as 'Asiya, one of the four perfect women, the other three being Mary the mother of Jesus, Khadija the wife of the holy Prophet, and Fatima his daughter. Pharaoh is the type of arrogance, godlessness, and wickedness. For his wife to have preserved her Faith, her humility, and her righteousness was indeed a great spiritual triumph. She was probably the same who saved the life of the infant Moses: xxviii. 9.

5550 - Her spiritual vision was directed to Allah, rather than to the worldly grandeur of Pharaoh's court. It is probable that her prayer implies a desire for martyrdom, and it may be that she attained her crown of martyrdom.

5551 - 'Imran was traditionally the name of the father of Mary the mother of Jesus: see n. 375 to iii. 35.

She was one of the purest of women, though the Jews accused her falsely of unchastity: cf. xix. 27-28.

5552 - Cf. xxi. 91. As a virgin she gave birth to Jesus: xix. 16-29. In xxxii. 9, it is said of Adam's progeny, man, that Allah "fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His spirit". In xv. 29, similar words are used with reference to Adam. The virgin birth should not therefore be supposed to imply that Allah was the father of Jesus in the sense in which Greek mythology makes Zeus the father of Apollo by Latona or of Minos by Europa. And yet that is the doctrine to which the Christian idea of "the only begotten Son of God" leads.

5553 - Mary had true faith and testified her faith in the prophet Jesus and in his revelation as well as in the revelations which he came to confirm (and to foreshadow). She was of the company of the Devout of all ages. The fact that Qanitin (devout) is not here in the feminine gender implies that the highest spiritual dignity is independent of sex. And so we close the lesson of this Sura, that while sex is a fact of our physical existence, the sexes should act in harmony and cooperation for in the highest spiritual matters we are all one. "We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples. Verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood and I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me and no other" (xxi. 91-92).

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