

## Surah al-Mumtahnah (60)

سورة المتحنة

### 'The Examined Woman'

The surah derives its name from the term *famtahinuhunna*, meaning 'examine them (women)'. Like the other Madinan surahs, it is concerned with the Islamic order, along with some points related to the beliefs and faith. As the preceding surah, 'al-Hāshr', concluded on the theme of Allah's positive attributes, in order to forestall man from taking other than Him, the Most High, as Lord, owner and God, so this surah opens on the theme of not taking the enemies of Allah as friends.

The sending down of these verses was prompted by Ḥaṣṣib ibn Abi Balta'ah, who had accepted Islam and migrated to Madinah, while his family remained at Makkah. Fearing that the Messenger was about to attack them, some members of the Quraysh approached Ḥaṣṣib's family and asked them to write to Ḥaṣṣib and ask him to find out whether the Messenger intended to march on Makkah. It was indeed the Messenger's intention to liberate Makkah, and Ḥaṣṣib wrote to his family telling them of the Messenger's intention. He gave the letter to a woman called Sāfiyyah, who hid it in her hair, under her plaids, and departed for Makkah. Then archangel Gabriel (Jabra'īl) came down and informed the Messenger about it, and he in turn sent Ali, *peace be upon him*, and Zubair ibn al-ʿAwwām in search of her. They caught up with her and Ali, *peace be upon him*, demanded the letter from her. She said to him that she had no such letter. So they searched her belongings and found nothing. Zubair thought they had done enough, but Ali said, 'No, by Allah, we shall not belie Allah's Messenger, and Allah's Messenger does not belie Gabriel, and Gabriel does not belie Allah, majestic is His praise. Addressing Sāfiyyah, Imam Ali *peace be upon him* said, By Allah, if you do not manifest the letter, I shall despatch thy head to Allah's Messenger.' Seeing that Amir-al-Mu'minin was in such earnest, she said to him, 'Turn away from me, O Ali, and I will bring it out.'

So she brought the letter out from under her hair, and the Imam took it to the Messenger. He summoned Ḥaṣṣib and said to him, 'O Ḥaṣṣib, what is this?'

Ḥaṣṣib swore in reply that he was not a hypocrite and had not deserted Islam, and he testified to the Unity and the Messengership, and said that his family were in Makkah and they had been treated well by the Quraysh, and so he wanted to reward the Quraysh for their kindness. One of those present rose seeking to behead Ḥaṣṣib, and asked permission from Allah's Messenger to do that, but Ḥaṣṣib beseeched the Messenger and the Messenger forgave him and ordered the man to let Ḥaṣṣib go. The *ayaṭ* then came down warning the Muslims against such a thing happening again.

*By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of Allah ...* We begin in the name of the God to whom belongs the whole of existence, who is deserving of the whole of praise. 'Allah' is the proper name of that Essence – Is there any more deserving than Allah, the Most High, of our beginning in his name? The mention of His name, instead of saying 'In Allah' (or 'By Allah') is due to respect, which makes it necessary to mention the name, rather than mentioning the Essence Itself.

*... the Compassionate, the Merciful.* His mercy embraces all things; He has a particular mercy for the believers, which is why it is said that His name 'the Merciful' (*al-Rahīm*) signifies His special mercy upon the believers.

*O ye who believe, take not My enemies and your enemies as friends, offering them love while they reject the truth that has come to ye, driving out the Messenger and yourselves because ye believe in Allah, your Lord, if ye have gone forth striving in My way and reaching for My contentment. Ye confide unto them in affection, and I am more knowing*

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا لَا تَتَّخِذُوْا عَدُوِّيْ وَعَدُوْكُمْ اَوْلِيَاۡ  
تَلْقَوْنَ اِلَيْهِمْ بِالْمَوَدَّةِ وَقَدْ كَفَرُوْا بِمَا جَاءَكُمْ مِّنَ الْحَقِّ  
مُخْرِجُوْنَ الرَّسُوْلَ وَاِيَّاكُمْ اَنْ تُوْمِنُوْا بِاللّٰهِ رَبِّكُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ  
خَرَجْتُمْ جِهَدًا فِىْ سَبِيْلِىْ وَاَتَّبَعْتُمْ مَّرْضَاتِىْ فَاْتَسُرُّوْنَ اِلَيْهِمْ

**what ye conceal and what ye manifest. And whosoever of ye who does it – he has definitely strayed from the path's evenness. (1)**

بِالْمُودَّةِ وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ بِمَا أَحْفَيْتُمْ وَمَا أَعْلَنْتُمْ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْهُ  
مِنْكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ﴿١﴾

**O ye who believe, take not My enemies and your enemies as friends, ...** It means that those who oppose Allah by their disbelief and disobedience, and who oppose the believers through mockery and bloodshed and the other forms of enmity, are not to be given friendship and support.

... **offering them love...** They are not to be given love and amity in the way of a lover for the beloved, as Habb behaved towards the people of Makkah who were the enemies of Allah and of the Muslims.

... **while they reject the truth that has come to ye ...** Such enemies disbelieved in Islam and the Qur'an and the Messenger.

... **driving out the Messenger and yourselves ...** ... from your homeland. The Makkans had driven the Messenger and the Muslims from their land, for the reason that:

... **because ye believe in Allah, your Lord ...** Is it normal to befriend those who have driven ye from your homes on account of your believing in Allah?

... **if ye have gone forth striving in My way ...** It means: if ye went out from your homes for the purpose of jihad in the path of Allah.

... **and reaching for My contentment ...** That is, seeking the satisfaction of Allah with yourselves. It means that if the purpose behind leaving your homes and migrating was your seeking the divine satisfaction, then do not befriend those who are the enemies of Allah, and your own enemies, like the people of Makkah.

... **Ye confide unto them in affection, ...** It means that you inform them in secret communication between yourselves and them, out of love and affection.

... **And ...** Do ye suppose that such deeds are hidden from Allah? Never, for ...

... **I am more knowing ...** That is, He knows better than all others, even than yourselves.

... **of what ye conceal and what ye manifest ...** It means the secrets in your affairs and what is apparent in them, for nothing is hidden from Allah, and everything you do shall be required.

... **And whosoever of ye who does it ...** It refers to whoever of the believers maintains such a secret affection.

... **he has definitely strayed from the path's evenness.** He has deviated from the path of truth towards destruction. The path's 'evenness' (*sawa*) means the centre of it.

**If they encountered ye they would be enemies to ye, stretching out their hands and their tongues against ye in evil; and would love it were ye to disbelieve. (2)**

إِنْ يَتَقَفَوْكُمْ يَكُونُوا لَكُمْ أَعْدَاءً وَيَبْسُطُوا إِلَيْكُمْ أَيْدِيَهُمْ  
وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ بِالسُّوءِ وَوَدُّوا لَوْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٢﴾

**If they encountered ye...** It means: were the disbelievers of Makkah to encounter the Muslims in war.

... **they would be enemies to ye, ...** They would assail the Muslims, which is the action of an enemy towards his enemy. The ayah repudiates Habb's idea that the Makkans were friendly towards him, explaining that their show of affection was no more than a show, with no real substance.

... **stretching out their hands and their tongues against ye in evil; ...** That is, against the believers, their hands in enmity and war, their tongues in defamation and abuse. It means that they would not miss any opportunity to harm the Muslims.

... **and would love it were ye to disbelieve.** Those disbelievers would love for the Muslims to disbelieve in Allah as they themselves disbelieved; therefore one's family should not cause one to befriend such disbelievers, for . . .

**Neither your relatives will benefit ye nor your children; on the day of resurrection He shall separate ye. And Allah is an observer of what ye do. (3)**

لَنْ تَنْفَعَكُمْ أَرْحَامُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَفْصَلُ  
بَيْنَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٣﴾

**Neither your relatives will profit ye nor your children; ...** It means that one should not let the protection of family and children become the cause of opposition to Allah and the Messenger through befriending the disbelievers, like Hāshim who, in seeking to protect his family in Makkah, opposed the Messenger by writing to the disbelievers, informing them of the intention of the Messenger to march on Makkah.

... **on the day of resurrection He shall separate ye ...** He shall place the faith-folk in the garden, and the disbelief-folk and disobedience into the fire. Therefore do not commit those deeds that lead to the fire.

... **And Allah is an observer of what ye do.** Since Allah sees everything we do, there is no point in doing what will lead to His anger and punishments.

**Indeed, there was for ye a fine example in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people: 'Indeed we renounce ye and what ye worship instead of Allah. We disbelieve in ye, and between us and ye enmity and hatred have appeared, forever, until ye believe in Allah alone', except the word of Abraham to his father: 'I shall seek forgiveness for thee, and I have no right upon Allah for thee'. 'Our Lord! Upon Thee we rely; to Thee we turn; and unto Thee is the destiny.'** (4)

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ  
قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَّاءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ  
كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا  
حَتَّىٰ تُوْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدَهُ ۗ إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ  
لَا سَعْفِرَنَّ لَكَ وَمَا أَمْلِكُ لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۗ رَبَّنَا  
عَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنْتَبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٢٦﴾

**Indeed ye have had a good example in Abraham and those with him ...** It means that we should take Abraham, *peace be upon him*, and those who believed with him, as an example according to which we should model our own behaviour in cutting ourselves off from the disbelievers.

... **when they said to their people: 'Indeed we renounce ye and what ye worship instead of Allah ...** They said to the disbelievers that they were having nothing to do with them or with the idols which they built and worshipped. They meant that they saw them as nonsense and not as gods at all, but as their enemies, although there is no real enmity between a human being and lifeless substance.

... **We disbelieve in ye, ...** It means that they told their people that they repudiated their path. Or it may be that this was an address to the idols, which were spoken of as intelligent beings so as to maintain a unity of expression between the believers' speech and that of the disbelievers, who thought of the idols as having reason and perception.

... **and between us and ye enmity and hatred have appeared, ...** 'Hatred' is given for *al-baghdā*, which intensifies the enmity ('*adawah*') and leads to it being internalised.

... **forever, until ye believe in Allah alone',** They declared themselves the enemies of the polytheists for as long as they continued in disbelief, until they believed in Allah and gave up the worship of idols.

... **except the word of Abraham ...** That is: model yourselves upon the example set by Abraham, except in what he said to his father, for that was before Allah the glorified had made such a thing forbidden.

... **to his father:** ... That is, to his guardian who was his father's brother, Azar, who had raised him.

**"I shall seek forgiveness for thee** ... Abraham said this because he had promised him that he would seek forgiveness for him, but when it became clear for him that he was an enemy of Allah, he renounced him. It is not suitable for a Muslim to model himself upon that, seeking forgiveness for a disbeliever.<sup>1</sup>

Yet it is possible that the exception refers to the phrase '*And indeed we renounce ye...*' Then, the meaning would be that they said to the disbelievers that they renounced them, except Abraham who had promised his uncle that he would seek forgiveness for him, before it became clear that he was Allah's enemy; at which point he said to his uncle:

... **and I have no right upon Allah for thee**" ... Abraham, *peace be upon him*, was telling his uncle that whatever Allah wished to do to him, it would be done, and he could in no way prevent Allah's punishment of him.

*Then Abraham and those who believed in him said:*

... **Our Lord! Upon Thee we rely;** ... They had placed all their affairs in His hands.

... **to Thee we turn;** ... It means that they return to Him in their affairs, for since man is the creation of Allah, glory be to Him, it is as if he is from Him, and when he obeys Him it is as if he is returning to Him – an instance of conveying a spiritual reality in physical terms.

... **and unto Thee is the destiny.** It means that they realised the end of their affairs was with Allah, glory be to Him, and that upon the day of resurrection they return to His reckoning and requital.

**'Our Lord! Make us not a tribulation for those who disbelieve; and forgive us, our Lord, indeed Thou are the Mighty, the Wise.'** (5)

رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ  
الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

**'Our Lord, make us not a tribulation for those who disbelieve;** ... Disbelievers are tested by their disbelief and their persecution of the believers, and disobedience. When a believer is made a trial or test for the disbeliever, the believer is persecuted, and sometimes cannot stand it. It means that they did not wish to be dominated by the disbelievers, for they would persecute them and they would not be able to bear it.

... **and forgive us,** ... They sought the concealment and erasure of their faults.

... **our Lord, indeed Thou are the Mighty,** ... He is indomitable in His authority.

... **the Wise.'** All His works are on the basis of wisdom and goodness. Perhaps this prayer is to teach the Muslims how to call on Allah, glory be to Him.

**Indeed, ye have had in them a good model – for whosoever is hoping in Allah and the last day. And whosoever turns away – indeed Allah is the Self-Sufficient, the Lauded.** (6)

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيهِمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ  
وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٦﴾

**Indeed, ye have had in them a good model** ... The believers at the time of the revelation had a good model to imitate in the persons of Abraham and his followers, with regard to their actions and their cutting themselves off from the disbelievers. It is repeated so as to convey the following:

... **for whosoever hopes in Allah and the final day** ... The good model is only for those who hope for the reward of Allah and the last day. As for those who deny that, there is no point to them

<sup>1</sup> One of the requirements of *istighfar* or 'seeking forgiveness' is that the individual concerned regrets his offence or wrong doing, for if one insists on his wrong doing then the seeking of forgiveness, either by the individual or by proxy, is meaningless.

modelling themselves upon one who believed in Allah. This stresses the connection between faith and imitation.

... **And whosoever turns away** ... That is, fails to take Abraham as a model, but takes the disbelievers as friends.

... **indeed Allah is the Self-Sufficient**, ... He is in need of no person or deed, and free from want.

... **the Lauded**. His being lauded is an attribute of His essence; therefore He needs no obedience from anyone, nor any praise. Therefore, he who turns away harms only himself; Allah, glory be to Him, is not harmed, as He is absolutely free from want.

*And if you, the believers, wished to be friendly with the Makkans on account of your ties and previous connections, it is likely that Allah would prepare the means of them being guided, so that friendships with them would be allowed:*

**Maybe Allah will set affection between ye and those of them ye hold as your enemies; Allah is powerful, and Allah is forgiving, merciful. (7)**

عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ عَادَيْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَوْدَّةً  
وَاللَّهُ قَدِيرٌ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

**Maybe Allah will set affection between ye and those of them ye hold as your enemies; ...** It means that Allah would bring about affection between ye and the disbelievers of Makkah through accepting Islam.

... **Allah is powerful**, ... He could bring that about.

... **and Allah is forgiving**, ... He is forgiving of the friendships maintained while the Makkans were in disbelief.

... **merciful**. He bestows His grace and mercy, over and above His forgiveness and pardon.

*Since the content of these ayaat has been the prohibition of friendly relations with every disbeliever, an exception is now made:*

**Allah does not forbid ye from those who have not fought ye over the religion, and have not driven ye from your habitations – from being kind to them and acting justly towards them; indeed Allah loves the just. (8)**

لَا يَنْهَى اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ  
يُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
حُبُّ الْمَقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨﴾

Allah, glory be to Him, does not prevent the believers from bearing affection towards those disbelievers who do not fight them on account of their being religious and do not drive them from their homes. In other words, from their being friendly with peaceful disbelievers.

... **from being kind to them and acting justly towards them; ...** It means that Allah does not forbid the believers from being kindly and just with those mentioned, where the kindness and justice is mutual. It is said that the Muslims sought the Messenger's command regarding relations with their disbelieving relatives. And it is said that Qutaylah bint 'Abd al-'Aziz turned a disbelieving woman from her house as she was visiting her daughter Asma' with gifts, and so the ayah came down:

... **indeed Allah loves the just**. He loves those who are just in their affairs.

**Allah only forbids ye from those who have fought ye over the religion and driven ye from your habitations and supported your expulsion – that ye befriend them; and whosoever befriends them – those, they are the wrongful. (9)**

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَى اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ  
وَأَخْرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ  
تَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

The believers are only prevented from being friendly towards those who fight them on account of their having the religion, and drive them from their homes in Makkah and elsewhere, and support

and cooperate with each other in the believers' expulsion. Any believers who take them as friends wrong themselves by disobeying Allah and the Messenger.

As the topic has been affection for the disbelievers, the theme now turns to mention some related laws, concerning women:

***O ye who believe, when migrating believeresses come to ye, examine them – Allah is more knowing of their faith. Then, if ye know them to be believeresses, do not return them to the disbelievers; neither they are lawful for those, and nor those are lawful for them; and give to those what they had dispensed. And there is no blame upon ye that ye marry them when ye have given them their dowries. And do not adhere to the ties with the disbelieving women. And ask for what ye have dispensed, and those can ask for what they had dispensed. There for ye is the rule of Allah. He arbitrates between you; and Allah is knowing, wise. (10)***

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا اِذَا جَآءَكُمُ الْمُؤْمِنٰتُ مِهْجِرٰتٍ  
فَاَمْتَحِنُوْهُنَّ ۗ اَللّٰهُ اَعْلَمُ بِاِيْمٰنِهِنَّۙ فَاِنْ عَلِمْتُمُوهُنَّ  
مُؤْمِنٰتٍ فَلَا تَرْجِعُوْهُنَّ اِلَى الْكُفٰرِ لَا هُنَّ حِلٌّ لَّهُمْ وَلَا  
هُمۡ يَحِلُّوْنَ لَهُنَّ وَاَتُوْهُنَّ مَّا اَنْفَقُوْا وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ اَنْ  
تَنْكِحُوْهُنَّ اِذَا ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ اُجُوْرَهُنَّ وَلَا تُمْسِكُوْا بِعِصَمِ  
الْكُوفِرِ وَاَنْفَقُوْا مَّا اَنْفَقْتُمْ وَلَيْسَ لَكُمْ اَنْفِقُوْا ذٰلِكُمْ  
حُكْمُ اللّٰهِ يَتَّخِذُ بَيْنَكُمْ وَاَللّٰهُ عَلِيْمٌ حَكِيْمٌ ﴿۱۰﴾

***O ye who believe, when migrating believeresses come to ye, examine them ...*** The ayah is about women who migrate from the realm of disbelief to the realm of Islam. They were to be questioned until it was clear that they were sincere in their faith and their migration. In *al-Sūfi* it is narrated from al-Qummi>that when a woman joined the Muslims from the disbelievers, she would be tested by swearing by Allah that she was not motivated by anger with her husband or love for one of the Muslims, but that she was motivated by Islam. Having made such an oath her Islam would be accepted as genuine.

***... Allah is more knowing of their faith ...*** He knows better than anyone whether they are indeed believers or not.

***... Then, if ye know them to be believeresses, do not return them to the disbelievers; ...*** Once it was clear through their swearing an oath and the other indications that they were sincere in their faith, they were not to be returned to the realm of disbelief.

***... neither they are lawful for those, and nor those are lawful for them ...*** Believing women are not lawful for the disbelievers, and a disbeliever will be punished in the hereafter for touching a Muslim woman (i.e. for being in wedlock with her and having sexual relation with her). Once a woman becomes a Muslim her husband, if a disbeliever, becomes as a stranger to her (and she would not be considered being married to him).

***... and give to those what they had dispensed, ...*** It means that when the Muslims kept the wives of disbelievers amongst them, they were to return to their disbelieving husbands what they had spent in marrying them, i.e. the *mahr* or dowry, which is the gift that is given by the bridegroom to the bride when they marry. The wife would return to her disbelieving husband the dowry he had given her, and then she would be married by a Muslim.

***... and there is no blame upon ye that ye marry them when ye have given them their dowry ...*** As for their previous marriage contracts with disbelievers, such marriages are annulled by their accepting Islam, in accordance to the details given in jurisprudence. In short, their lawfulness for the Muslims is conditional upon a new marriage-contract and their being provided a dowry.

***... And do not adhere to the ties with the disbelieving women, ...*** Muslims are not to marry disbelieving women. 'Ties' (*isam*) means marriage contracts, since through the marriage contract each spouse is bound to the other. So, just as it is not lawful to take a disbelieving woman as wife, so it is not lawful for a man who enters Islam to remain married when his wife remains a disbeliever, as per the details given in Islamic jurisprudence. And just as a Muslim

woman may not be married to a disbeliever, so too a Muslim man may not be married to a disbelieving woman.

... **and ask for what ye have dispensed, and those can ask for what they had dispensed** ... There was to be a reciprocity between the two parties: were a Muslim woman to go over to the disbelievers her husband was to seek from them the return of the *mahr* he had spent on her, just as when a disbelieving woman joined the Muslims he too could ask for the return of her *mahr*.

... **There for ye is the rule of Allah** ... The address is to the believers.

... **He arbitrates between ye;** ... That is, the foregone is the ruling He establishes between the believers and the disbelievers.

... **and Allah is knowing,** ... He knows what is in man's best interests.

... **wise.** His wisdom is the basis for His commands and prohibitions. Therefore, the foregone rulings accord to goodness and wisdom.

It is said that a clause of the peace treaty of Hūdaybiyyah was that anyone fleeing to the other side would be handed over to the party from which he had fled, so that if a man was to flee from the disbelievers to the Muslims they would return him, and vice-versa. But the treaty did not mention women. After the treaty had been concluded, Subay<sup>c</sup>ah bint al-Hārth came as a Muslim to the Messenger of Allah. Then her husband came seeking her return, but he was a disbeliever. When he asked the Messenger that she be handed over, these *ayaṭ* came down.

**And if any of your wives desert ye to the disbelievers, and then ye follow it up, give those whose wives have gone the like of what they dispensed. And be guardful of Allah, in whom ye are believers. (11)**

وَإِنْ فَاتَكُمْ شَيْءٌ مِّنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ إِلَى الْكُفَّارِ فَعَاقِبْتُمْ فَانْتُوا  
الَّذِينَ ذَهَبَتْ أَزْوَاجُهُمْ مِّثْلَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ  
الَّذِي أَنْتُمْ بِهِءِ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

**And if any of your wives desert ye to the disbelievers, and then ye follow it up, give those whose wives have gone the like of what they dispensed** ... The meaning is that were a Muslim woman to apostatise and go over to the disbelievers, and then the disbelievers were to refuse to pay the Muslim husband the *mahr* or dowry of the woman who had joined the disbelievers, and if the believers were to fight against the disbelievers and gain from them spoils-of-war (spoils-of-war is one of the meanings of <sup>c</sup>*uqba* which is the name for *fa* <sup>c</sup>*aqabtum* given as 'follow up'), then the Muslims should give to the husband the like of the *dowry* he had given her. In other words, if a wife fled to the disbelievers and then they refused to return her *mahr* to the husband, then the Imam (or leader) of the Muslims was to give the amount of her dowry to her husband from the spoils of war.

... **And be guardful of Allah,** ... That is, fear His punishments and do not disobey His commands by denying the husband the dowry when his wife had fled to the disbelievers and they refused to return the *dowry*.

...**in whom ye are believers'** For guardfulness (*taqwa*) is among the requisites of faith.

It is narrated that after the previous *ayah* came down, the believers did as they were commanded and returned to the disbelievers the dowry of any woman who left them to join the Muslims, but that the disbelievers refused to do likewise, and so this *ayah* was sent down.

It is narrated from the Imams al-Baqir and al-Sādiq, *peace be upon them*, that on being asked the meaning of the phrase in this *ayah* 'and then ye follow it up' (*fa* <sup>c</sup>*aqabtum*), the Imams are reported to have said that when a man's wife goes [to the disbelievers] and then he 'follows it up' and takes another woman as wife, the *Imam* (i.e. leader of the Muslims) is to give him the *mahr* or dowry of the woman who had gone.

The author's verdict: My view is that whichever meaning we take, it seems that it is for the *Imam* [i.e. presiding leader of the Muslims] to give a Muslim man the dowry he gave to his wife who subsequently flees to the disbelievers, whether he wishes to marry again or not, and whether or not any 'spoils of war' are gained. Allah knows best.

***O thou the Prophet, when the believeresses come to thee pledging allegiance that they not partner***

***anything unto Allah, and steal not, and fornicate not, and kill not their children, and not make a claim they have forged about that between their arms and their legs, and not disobey thee in aught honourable, so take their allegiance, and seek forgiveness for them from Allah; indeed Allah is forgiving, merciful. (12)***

يَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ يُبَايِعَنَّكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ لَا  
يُشْرَكَنَّ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَسْرِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ  
أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأْتِينَ بِبُهْتَانٍ يَفْتَرِينَهُ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِنَّ  
وَأَرْجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا يَعْصِيَنَّكَ فِي مَعْرُوفٍ فَبَايِعَهُنَّ  
وَأَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُنَّ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

***O Messenger, when believeresses come to thee ...*** It means women who come to the Messenger wishing to become believers; they are termed 'believeresses' (*mu'minat*) out of courtesy.

***... pledging allegiance ...*** The Messenger would take the allegiance of women by placing his hand in a bowl of water, removing it, and then the woman would place her hand in the bowl and make the oath. 'Allegiance' (*bay'ah*) means selling all one has to Allah and the Messenger, just as He says, 'Indeed Allah purchases from the believers their souls and their property'.

***... that they not partner anything unto Allah ...*** That is, they would recognise the divine oneness and not assume any partner with Him.

***... and steal not ...*** Neither from their husbands nor from anyone else.

***... and fornicate not ...*** with other men, regardless of whether they (the women) were married or not.

***... and kill not their children ...*** They will not terminate their pregnancies, not bury their newborn alive, and not kill them in any other way.

***... and not make a claim they have forged about that between their arms and their legs ...*** They will not lie about their babies, claiming falsely that their husband is the father when they have fornicated and the husband is not the father! A child is born between the legs and is suckled between the arms. This is in addition to the prohibition of fornication and adultery that preceded. It seems this was common during the period of ignorance.

***... and not disobey thee in aught honourable, ...*** It means the obligations of prayer, zakaat and the good things they are commanded to do. Everything the Messenger commanded was honourable; the word is used to encourage compliance.

***... so take their allegiance, ...*** With these conditions their Islam is acceptable and theirs is the garden and the rewards in return for their allegiance.

***... and seek forgiveness for them from Allah; ...*** It means in regard to the wrongs they had previously committed.

***... indeed Allah is forgiving, merciful.*** He forgives and above that, He bestows His mercy and His bounty.

*Finally, the theme turns to that with which it began, the prohibition of friendly relations with the enemies of Islam, for which purpose the surah came down:*

***O ye who believe, befriend not a people upon whom Allah is wrathful; they despair of the hereafter just as the disbelievers despair of the companions of the graves. (13)***

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَوَلَّوْا قَوْمًا غَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ قَدْ  
بَيَّسُوا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ كَمَا بَيَّسَ الْكُفَّارُ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ الْقُبُورِ



***O ye who believe, befriend not a people upon whom Allah is wrathful; ...*** It is narrated that this ayah came down about some of the Muslims who were poor and associated with the Jews, so as to be given some of their harvest, [as the Jews of Madinah were farmers].

... ***they despair of the hereafter*** ... They had no faith in it, and did not hold themselves accountable.

... ***just as the disbelievers despair of the companions of the graves.***' That is, they deny that those in the graves will be returned to life. So the Jews and the disbelievers were equal in having no faith in the hereafter, though the former made a false, deceitful show of believing in it.