

## Surah al-Tahjīm (66)

### 'The Banning'

## سورة التحريم

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of a word derived from the root *al-tahjīm*, meaning 'to prohibit' or 'to ban'. Like the other Madinan surahs it contains matters pertaining to the Islamic order, as well as matters of faith. While Surah al-Tālaq dealt largely with rules concerning women, this surah also explains matters concerning them.

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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**By the name of Allah, ...** We seek help by the name of the God who is the best of helpers to whoever seeks His help. And is there any more worthy from whom to seek help, when He is the Owner of all things?

**... the Compassionate, the Merciful.** He who bestows grace, bounty and beauty, and is able to do whatever He wishes.

**O thou the Prophet, why ban thou what Allah made lawful for thee, reaching for the contentment of thy wives, while Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful? (1)**

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحْرَمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتَ أَزْوَاجِكَ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

**O thou the Prophet, ...** The address is to the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*.

**... why ban thou what Allah made lawful for thee, ...** That is: why swear an oath forbidding thyself from some of that which Allah has made lawful for thee? To forbid oneself the lawful through such an oath is permitted, yet Allah uses this language to explain to the Messenger that his oath was annulled, so as to rebuke his wives 'A'ishah and Hāfṣah, who had annoyed the Messenger to the extent that he swore that which he swore.

It is narrated by Bukhārī in his *Sahih* – considered a standard work and a reference by the sect [known as Sunnis] – that 'A'ishah said: [vol. 3, page 136]

The Prophet used to go to stay with his wife Zaynab bint Jahḥ and while he was staying with her, he used to take honey. So Hāfṣah and myself conspired against her, that when he had been with her we would ask him if he had been eating *maghaḥīf*, which is a gum that has a sweet taste but a foul smell, and we would say that we found him to smell of it . . . He said, "No, though I have taken honey with Zaynab bint Jahḥ, but I will never do so again, and this is an oath." And he asked me not to inform anyone about this.'

**... reaching for the contentment of thy wives, ...** That is: in forbidding thyself you seek to make thy wives pleased with thee. It has already been given concerning some *ayaṭ* that though in places a criticism is directed at the addressee, in fact the censure is being made of others.

**... while Allah is oft-forgiving, ...** He covers up the faults of His servants. The oath (of the prophet) needed to be annulled by higher authority before he could break it, so that people would not wonder at his breaking it. Having made the above oath, the prophet could not eat honey, and this surah was revealed to annul, in part, the oath of the prophet and therefore eating honey on the part of the prophet would not constitute a breaking of an oath.

**... most merciful?** He bestows mercy in addition to forgiveness.

**Allah has ordained for ye the annulment of your oaths. Allah is your Guardian, and He is the Knowing, the Wise. (2)**

قَدْ فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحِلَّةَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَانِكُمْ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢﴾

**Allah has ordained for ye the annulment of your oaths ...** It seems that the addressee is the Messenger, and that the plural is used out of respect, and it has been pointed out earlier that this is quite valid, and is a matter of eloquence. The meaning is that Allah made it obligatory for the Messenger to break his oath and not carry out that which he swore to. He was to take honey, for

it was lawful for him; his oath not to take honey for the sake of pleasing some of his wives was annulled by Allah.

**Allah is your Guardian, ...** Therefore, just as the guardian of a slave – his owner – has the right to annul the oaths of the slave, so too the Prophet’s oath was annulled by Allah.

... **and He is the Knowing, the Wise.** He knows His servant’s interests, and is wise in what He orders and forbids him. Indeed, when the benefit of a thing is known it will be found to accord to His command. Honey was lawful for the Messenger, and that was wise and in his interests.

The theme then turns to explain another dimension of the affair, in His word:

**And when the Prophet confided unto one of his wives an account, so when she announced it and Allah manifested it for him, he made known some of it and overlooked some. And when he announced it to her she said, ‘Who announced this to thee?’ He said, ‘The Knowing, the Informed, announced it to me.’**  
(3)

وَإِذْ أَسْرَأَ النَّبِيُّ إِلَى بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِ  
وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَفَ بَعْضَهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ فَلَمَّا  
نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ



**And ...** It means: ‘And (or ‘So’) recount, O Messenger,’ the point being, perhaps, to convey something of how the Messenger was irritated by his wives just as he was irritated by others, so as to embarrass them for having vexed him.

... **when the Prophet confided unto one of his wives an account, ...** It refers to his confiding in them that he had forbidden himself honey. ‘one of his wives’ refers to ‘A’ishah, or Hāfṣah. Probably the reason for the Prophet wishing to keep the affair secret was so that people would not go around saying that he had forbidden himself something just to please his wives.

... **so when she announced it ...** It means that the wife disclosed the secret to another woman. It is recorded among the Sunnis that the Prophet informed ‘A’ishah of his oath and ordered her to keep it a secret, but she disobeyed and informed Hāfṣah.

... **and Allah manifested it for him, ...** Allah informed His Prophet of what had transpired between the two women and that his secret had been disclosed.

... **he made known some of it ...** The prophet told ‘A’ishah some of what he knew she had told Hāfṣah. In doing so he wanted to point to her that she had disobeyed him in disclosing his secret.

... **and overlooked some ...** It is an aspect of magnanimous ethics not to remind the sinner of the whole of their sinning, but simply to hint at it so as to reform. Letting such things pass in such circumstances is of the ethics of the great.

... **And when he announced it to her...** That is, when the Messenger informed ‘A’ishah of that which Allah, glory be to Him, had informed him, that she had disclosed his secret to Hāfṣah:

... **she said, ‘Who announced this to thee?...** ‘A’ishah was amazed at how the Prophet knew she had disclosed his secret.

... **he said, ...** That is, the Prophet said in reply:

... **‘The Knowing, the Informed announced it to me.’** ‘The Knowing’ (*al-‘alim*) means He who is knowing of every thing and every affair. ‘The Informed’ (*al-khabir*) emphasises that He is informed of the most minute details of every affair.

The address then turns to deliver a warning to ‘A’ishah and Hāfṣah, for their having drawn up such a plot:

**Whether you two repent unto Allah (or not), for indeed your hearts have swerved. And if you combine against him – then indeed Allah is his Protector, and Gabriel and the virtuous of**

إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ  
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَلِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

*the believers, and the angels after that are in support. (4)*

وَالْمَلٰٓئِكَةُۙ بَعْدَ ذٰلِكَ ظٰهِرٌ ﴿٤﴾

**Whether you two repent unto Allah (or not), ...** That is, whether you two women were to repent for your annoying the Messenger, and for your stratagems against him, or not, it is of no consequence.

**... for indeed your hearts have swerved ...** That is, your hearts had deviated to sin and falsehood, [whereas remorse, and inclining to the truth is a prerequisite for repentance]. 'swerved' is given for *shghat* which means to incline [to falsehood]<sup>1</sup>.

**... And if ye combine against him, ...** That is, if you back up and support each other against the prophet,

**... then verily Allah is his Protector, ...** Then your scheme against him would not harm him, for indeed the Almighty Allah is his supporter and aid, who has taken on Himself his protection, so as to annul any plot or stratagem drawn up against him.

**... and Gabriel ...** Gabriel too is the Messenger's ally, informing him from Allah of what is planned against him.

**... and the virtuous of the believers, ...** By this is meant the 'virtuous believer' as a type; all such believers support the Messenger against the conspiracies and alliances made against him. [According to many hadith by 'virtuous of the believers' it is meant Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali peace be upon him.]<sup>2</sup>

**... and the angels after that are in support.** It means after the support of Allah, and of Gabriel and the virtuous believers, the angels too are behind the Messenger, supporting and backing him up.

*The theme then turns to belittle their importance, for the Messenger of Allah was free to divorce them, so that their plot would rebound against them, and they would be divorced. For were he to divorce them, he would not remain without a wife, for Allah would marry him to women better than them:*

**Mayhap his Lord, if he divorces ye, will substitute for him wives better than ye: muslims, believers, subservient, penitent, devout, wayfarers, previously married and virgins. (5)**

عَسَىٰ رَبُّهُۥٓ اِنْ طَلَّقَكُنَّ اَنْ يُبَدِّلَهٗٓ اَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِّنْكَنَّ

مُسَاهِمٰتٍ مُّؤْمِنٰتٍ قٰنِنٰتٍ تَنۢبِئُتِ عَنۢ بَدَاۗتِ سَاۡخِاۡتِ

تَيۢبٰتٍ وَّاَبۡكَارًا ﴿٥﴾

**Mayhap...** It is given for *‘asa>* indicating a strong probability.

**... his Lord, if he divorces ye, ...** 'Ye', here, is the feminine plural. It may mean the two of them or it may mean all of them, for narrations mention others besides those two.

**... will substitute for him wives better than ye: ...** It means better in faith and better in respecting the rights of the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family.*

*The type of woman meant is then described, as a criticism of his erring wives:*

**... muslims, ...** It means women whose Islam is complete.

**... believers, ...** Islam is to submit, whereas belief (*imaan*) is a special condition of Islam, as He says, 'The Arabs say, "We believe!" Say: "ye have not believed, rather say 'We have submitted' for belief has not yet entered into your hearts.' [49: 14].

**... subservient, ...** It means women who are obedient to Allah, humble before the Messenger.

<sup>1</sup> The only other occasion the term *shgha* is used in the holy Qur'an, it is also in the context of 'inclination to falsehood'; ﴿So that the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter swerve to it (falsehood) and be content with it and perpetrate what they are perpetrating.﴾ [6:113].

<sup>2</sup> as reported in al-Dur al-Manthur. Other prominent Sunni scholars report many such hadith, which state that by 'virtuous believers' is meant Ali son of Abi-Talib.

... **penitent**, ... It means that they repent of the sins they occasionally commit, and do not persist in them.

... **worshippers**, ... It means that they worship Allah, glory be to Him, over and above that which is obligatory.

... **wayfarers**, ... It is put for *sa>ihħæ*, meaning that they often fast, for the Messenger has said, 'The wayfaring of my community is the fast.' Or it means that they proceed in the command of Allah and His Prophet, like the wayfarer who travels the Earth.

... **previously married and virgins**. This was the condition of the Messenger's wives; some had previously been married, others had not.

The theme then directs itself to humankind as a whole, that they cultivate and discipline their womenfolk. It is said that the obligation of preaching mounts from oneself to the general population, as far as one is able, in five *ayaħ*:

1. *Oneself, in His word:* «... be careful of yourselves, that one who deviates harm ye not, after your being guided.» [5:105].
2. *One's household, in His word:* «... guard yourselves and your folks from a fire..», the following verse
3. *One's kinsmen, in His word:* «And warn your nearest kinsmen.» [26:214].
4. *One's townsmen, in His word:* «... and that they warn their people when they return to them.» [9:123]
5. *Mankind as a whole, in His word:* «And We sent thee not but to the whole of mankind...» [34:28] *considering that the Messenger' is a model; and in His word:* «and that there be a community among ye calling to the good.» [3:104]

***O ye who believe, guard yourselves and your folks from a fire whose fuel is men and stones, over it are angels stern and severe –they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and they do what they are commanded. (6)***

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوًا أَنفُسِكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا  
النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ  
اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

***O ye who believe, guard yourselves and your folks...*** The imperative is in the masculine plural. 'Folks' is put for *ahli*-plural of *ahl*. It means a man's wife or wives, his children, his brothers and suchlike.

... **from a fire...** it means the fire of hell, which has the following characteristics:

... **whose fuel is men and stones**, ... These are its fuel, for their burning strengthens the fire, on account of the greasiness of the former and the hard solidity of the latter.

... **over it are angels stern**; ... It means the fire is in the charge of angels who are rough of heart, and will have mercy on no one.

... **and severe...** They are firm of body and extremely strong, able to do whatever is expected of them.

... **they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them**, ... They will not disobey Allah, glory be to Him, in the commands He gives them to chastise humans by the fire. They will not accept bribes, and they will not give way to sympathy for the disbelievers.

... **and they do what they are commanded**. It means in that which Allah commands them to do. The phrase emphasises the former 'they disobey not'.

As the disbelievers enter the fire, they take to excusing themselves for their previous actions, and so it shall be said to them:

***'O ye who disbelieve, seek not to be excused this day, ye are only being recompensed for what ye***

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا الْيَوْمَ ۗ إِنَّمَا تُجْرُونَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

did.' (7)

تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

Reminded that they disbelieved while they were in the world, they are told that now they are in the fire it is too late for them to repent, and that the fire is the recompense of their works, and that excusing themselves will do them no good.

Now, as the believers have been made knowing of the characteristics of the fire, it is for them to repent of their disobedience while they are still in the world, so that they will not be made to enter it:

*O ye who believe, repent unto Allah in a sincere repentance; maybe your Lord will annul your evils and enter ye into gardens, rivers flowing beneath them, on the day He will not humiliate the Prophet and those who believed with him – their light goes on before them and from their right hands. They say, 'O Lord, complete for us our light and forgive us, indeed Thou are over all things powerful.'* (8)

يَتَّيِبُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ  
رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ  
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ  
ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ  
يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتْمِمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَآغْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ

شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٨﴾

**O ye who believe, repent unto Allah ...** Repent of your disobeying Him, and return to His obedience.

... **in a sincere repentance;** ... Such repentance should be sincerely for His sake. 'sincere', which implies honesty, is put for *nashuh* which in fact means to be 'extremely sincere in giving advice'. Therefore, as an adjective for repentance itself it is figurative; what is meant is that the penitent should be honest and forthcoming in advising and urging himself to repent. When a person is thus 'honest' in repenting, it means that he feels the greatest regret at having defied and disobeyed, and finds the strongest determination not to do such actions in the future, and to carry out the requisites of repentance – the discharge of a lapsed duty (*qadh*), paying the penalties (*kaffarah*) and restoring people's rights, and suchlike.

... **maybe your Lord will annul your evils...** It means that it is likely He will erase the effects of the acts of disobedience, which are called 'evils' (*sayyi'at*) as they do the perpetrator harm.

... **and enter ye into gardens, rivers flowing beneath them,** ... Gardens under whose trees and palaces flow rivers of honey and wine and milk and water.

*The repentant will be placed within the Gardens:*

... **on the day He will not humiliate the Prophet and those who believed with him...** The penitents will not be humiliated by being placed in the fire. The matter is put in this way to encourage us to make ourselves enter into that distinguished company.

... **their light goes on before them and from their right hands ...** There will be a light emanating from their faces and from their right hands – in which they are given their book of deeds – dispelling the darkness of the rising-ground, and when they walk, the light will shine in front of them and to their right.

... **They say, 'O Lord, complete for us our light ...** They ask that their light be made brighter, and continue until the end of the day of resurrection. Or it is their prayer while they are in the world, asking that they be blessed with whatever strengthens their light, and that it persist and not be put out by their disbelieving or committing acts of disobedience.

... **and forgive us, indeed Thou are over all things powerful.'** He is able to complete the believer's light, and able to forgive, and this praise of Allah, glory be to Him, is a part of the believer's supplication, because a supplication that contains praise of Him, glory be to Him, is nearer to acceptance.

*O Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be stern with them. And their abode is hell; and vile is the destination!* (9)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ  
وَمَا لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وِبئسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٩﴾

*O Prophet, strive against the disbelievers...* They are to be struggled against through war and fighting.

... *and the hypocrites* ... They are to be fought with deterrence and prevention.

... *and be stern with them* ... The war and deterrence is to be firm, solid and strict, for tenderness is for those who are going straight and balanced, while those who are deviated need severity for them to be put aright.

... *And their abode is hell; and atrocious is the destination!* What a place to be heading for, since it is a place of punishment and chastisement.

The theme now turns to coin some likenesses for the wives of the Messenger, explaining that the best husband cannot benefit his wife when she deviates, just as a corrupt husband does not harm his wife when she is straight, guided by the obedience of Allah and His Messenger and not driven by the desires of disobedience:

*Allah coins an example for those who have disbelieved: the woman of Noah and the woman of Lot; they were under two of our virtuous servants but they betrayed them, and so they enriched them not against Allah. And it was said: 'Enter into the fire along with those entering.'* (10)

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأَتِ نُوحٍ وَامْرَأَتِ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحَيْنِ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّاخِلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

*Allah coins an example for those who have disbelieved...* So as to explain that the best virtue of spouses will not benefit their partners.

... *the woman of Noah (Nuh) and the woman of Lot (Luṭ); they were under* ... It means under the supervision of:

... *two of our virtuous servants* ... Noah and Lot, *peace be upon them*, who were Allah's Messengers, and who could be more virtuous than that?

... *but they betrayed them*, ... They betrayed them in religion, for they were hypocrites who troubled and vexed their husbands.

... *and so they enriched them not against Allah*, ... Noah and Lot, *peace be upon them*, did not benefit those women against the chastisement of Allah in the slightest way, by reducing it, not even a part of it.

... *and it was said...* That is, to those two women when they died.

... *'Enter into the fire along with those entering.'* Despite the fact that they were wives of Messengers, they still faced the chastisement of the fire. In this is a clear allusion to 'A'ishah and Hafṣah, who vexed the Prophet.

*And Allah coins an example for those who believe: Pharaoh's woman, when she said, 'My Lord, build for me a house by Thee in the garden, and rescue me from the Pharaoh and his work, and rescue me from the wrongful people.'* (11)

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأَتِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١١﴾

*And Allah coins a metaphor for those who have believed:* ... This is to show that faith benefits the believer even when under the control of the most disbelieving of people.

... **Pharaoh's woman**, ... Asyah daughter of Muzahim, who believed in Moses while her husband claimed to be Lord of the worlds, saying that he was the Most High Lord.

... **when she said**, ... In her prayers to Allah.

... “**My Lord, build for me a house by Thee in the garden**, ...” Thus she expressed her lack of all hope in the world, and that she worked not for its sake.

... **and rescue me from the Pharaoh and his work, and rescue me from the wrongful people.**” i.e. the followers and entourage of Pharaoh. And Allah answered her prayer, for He received her and placed her inside the gardens of paradise, and the works of her husband did her no harm.

*And now Allah, glory be to Him, recounts for the believers the example of a woman who was not harmed by what people said of her, for she was pure and noble. Thus He shows that the actions of others and their evil words have no effect whatsoever on those who believe, when they are believing and virtuous:*

**And Mary daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, and so We blew into it of Our spirit; and she confirmed the words of her Lord and His books, and was among the subservient.**  
(12)

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنفَخْنَا فِيهِ  
مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا  
الْقِنِينَ

**And...** It means that Allah coins the example of:

... **Mary daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity** ... Thus the ayah belies God's enemies the Jews, who said about her what is more true and more appropriate of themselves.

... **and so We blew into it of Our spirit**; ... The spirit is said to be of Allah, as a mark of honour, just as the Ka'bah is the 'House of Allah'. As a result Jesus, *peace be upon him*, was conceived. And it was Gabriel, *peace be upon him*, who blew into the body of Mary, by His order, glory be to Him.

... **and she confirmed the words of her Lord and His books**, ... It means that she followed the teachings revealed to the Prophets, in beliefs and practices.

... **and was among the subservient**. She lived among the devotees of the temple of Jerusalem. So if a woman has a husband she should strive to be like the Pharaoh's wife; and if she is without husband then like Mary the Truthful, *peace be upon her*.