

Sūrah 66: at-Tahreem

Period of Revelation

In connection with the incident of Tahreem (prohibition) referred to in this Sūrah, the traditions mention two wives of the Prophet. There are differing narrations about the cause of revelation, but it seems the most authentic narrations allude to the incident surrounding the Prophet prohibiting of honey for himself.

Theme and Topics

This is a very important Sūrah in which light has been thrown on some questions of grave significance with reference to some incidents concerning the wives of the Prophet. First, that the powers to prescribe the bounds of the lawful and the unlawful, the permissible and the forbidden, are entirely and absolutely in the hand of God and nothing has been delegated even to the Prophet of God himself, not to speak of any other man. The Prophet as such can declare something lawful or unlawful only if he receives an inspiration from God to do so whether that inspiration is embodied in the Qur'ān, or imparted to him secretly. However, even the Prophet is not authorized to declare anything made permissible by God unlawful by himself, much less to say of another man.

Second, that in any society the position of a Prophet is very delicate. A minor incident experienced by an ordinary man in his life may not be of any consequence, but it assumes the status of law when experienced by a Prophet. That is why the lives of the Prophets have been kept under close supervision by God so that none of their acts, not even a most trivial one, may deviate from Divine Will. Whenever such an act has emanated from a Prophet, it was rectified and rectified immediately so that the Islāmic law and its principles should reach the people in their absolute purity not only through the Divine Book but also through the excellent example of the Prophet, and they should include nothing which may be in disagreement with Divine Will.

Thirdly, and this automatically follows from the above mentioned point, that when the Prophet was checked on a minor thing, which was not only corrected but also recorded, it gives us complete satisfaction that whatever actions and commands and instructions we now find in the pure life of the Prophet concerning which there is nothing on record in the nature of criticism or correction from God, they are wholly based on truth, are in complete conformity with Divine Will and we can draw guidance from them with full confidence and peace of mind.

The fourth thing that we learn from this discourse is that about the Messenger himself, whose reverence and respect God Himself has enjoined as a necessary part of the Faith of His servants, it has been stated in this Sūrah that once during his sacred life he made a thing declared lawful by God unlawful for himself only to please his wives; then God has severely reproofed for their errors those very wives of the Prophet, whom He Himself has declared as mothers of the faithful and worthy of the highest esteem and honour by them. Then, this criticism of the Prophet and the administration of the warning to the wives also has not been made secretly but included in the Book, which the entire Ummah (nation of Muslims) has to read and recite forever. Obviously, neither the intention of making mention of it in the Book of God was, nor it could be, that God wanted to degrade His Messenger and the mothers of the faithful in the eyes of the believers; and this also is obvious that no Muslim has lost respect for them, in his heart after reading this Sūrah of the Qur'ān. Now, there cannot be any other reason of mentioning this thing in the Qur'ān than that God wants to acquaint the believers with the correct manner of reverence for their great personalities. The Prophet is a Prophet, not God, that he may commit no error. Respect of the Prophet has not been enjoined because he is infallible, but because he is a perfect representative of Divine Will, and God has not permitted any of his errors to pass by unnoticed. This gives us the satisfaction that the noble pattern of life left by the Prophet wholly and fully represents the will of God. Likewise, the Companions of the wives of the Prophet, were human, not angels or supermen. They could commit mistakes. Whatever ranks they achieved became possible only because the

guidance given by God and the training imparted by God's Messenger had molded them into the finest models. Whatever esteem and reverence they deserve is on this very basis and not on the presumption that they were infallible. For this reason, whenever in the sacred lifetime of the Prophet, the Companions or wives happened to commit an error due to human weakness, they were checked. Some of their errors were corrected by the Prophet, as has been mentioned at many places in the Hadith; some other errors were mentioned in the Qur'an and God Himself corrected them so that the Muslims might not form any exaggerated notion of the respect and reverence of their elders and great men, which might raise them from humanity to the position of gods and goddesses. If one studies the Qur'an carefully, one will see instances of this one after the other.

The fifth thing that has been explicitly mentioned in this Sūrah is that God's Religion is absolutely fair and just. It has for every person just that of which he becomes worthy on the basis of his faith and works. No relationship or connection even with the most righteous person can be beneficial for him in any way and no relationship or connection with the most evil and wicked person can be harmful for him in any way. In this connection three kinds of women have been cited as examples before the wives in particular. One example is of the wives of the Prophets Noah and Lot, who, if they had believed and cooperated with their illustrious husbands, would have occupied the same rank and position in the Muslim community which is enjoyed by the wives of the Prophet Muhammad. But since they were disbelievers, their being the wives of the Prophets did not help them and they fell into Hell. The second example is of the wife of Pharaoh, who in spite of being the wife of a staunch enemy of God believed and chose a path of action separate from that followed by the Pharaoh's people, and her being the wife of a staunch disbeliever did not cause her any harm, and God made her worthy of Paradise. The third example is of Maryam (Mary) who attained to the high rank because she submitted to the severe test to which God had decided to put her. Apart from Mary no other chaste and righteous girl in the world ever has been put to such a hard test that in spite of being unmarried, she might have been made pregnant miraculously by God's command and informed what service her Lord willed to take from her. When Mary accepted this decision, and agreed to bear, like a true believer, everything that she inevitably had to bear in order to fulfill God's will, then did God exalt her to the noble rank of Sayyidatu an-nisa' fil-Jannah: "Leader of the women in Paradise" (Musnad Ahmad).

Besides, another truth that we learn from this Sūrah is that the Prophet did not receive from God only that knowledge which is included and recorded in the Qur'an, but he was given information about other things also by revelation, which has not been recorded in the Qur'an. Its clear proof is verse 3 of this Sūrah. In it we are told that the Prophet confided a secret to one of his wives, and she told it to another. God informed the Prophet of this secret. Then, when the Prophet warned his particular wife on the mistake of disclosure and she said: "Who told you this?" He replied: "I was informed by the Knowing, the Acquainted."

Sūrah 66: at-Tahreem¹⁵⁸⁰

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. O Prophet, why do you prohibit [yourself from] what God has made lawful for you, seeking the approval of your wives? And God is Forgiving and Merciful.
2. God has already ordained for you [Muslims] the dissolution of your oaths.¹⁵⁸¹ And God is your protector, and He is the Knowing, the Wise.
3. And [remember] when the Prophet confided to one of his wives a statement; and when she informed [another] of it and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and ignored a part. And when he informed her about it, she said, "Who told you this?" He said, "I was informed by the Knowing, the Acquainted."
4. If you two [wives] repent to God, [it is best], for your hearts have deviated. But if you cooperate against him - then indeed God is his protector, and Gabriel and the righteous of the believers and the angels, moreover, are [his] assistants.
5. Perhaps his Lord, if he divorced you [all], would substitute for him wives better than you - submitting [to God], believing, devoutly obedient, repentant, worshipping, and traveling¹⁵⁸² - [ones] previously married and virgins.
6. O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey God in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.
7. O you who have disbelieved, make no excuses that Day. You will only be recompensed for what you used to do.
8. O you who have believed, repent to God with sincere repentance. Perhaps¹⁵⁸³ your Lord will remove from you your misdeeds and admit you into gardens beneath which rivers flow [on] the Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believed with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right; they will say, "Our Lord, perfect for us our light and forgive us. Indeed, You are over all things competent."
9. O Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be harsh upon them. And their refuge is Hell, and wretched is the destination.
10. God presents an example of those who disbelieved: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants but betrayed them,¹⁵⁸⁴ so they [i.e., those prophets] did not avail them from God at all, and it was said, "Enter the Fire with those who enter."
11. And God presents an example of those who believed: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, "My Lord, build for me near You a house in Paradise and save

¹⁵⁸⁰ *At-Tahreem*: Prohibition.

¹⁵⁸¹ By means of a *kaffārah* (expiation). This is required when one is unable to fulfill an oath or when one has taken an oath which would not be pleasing to God. See 5:89.

¹⁵⁸² Emigrating for the cause of God.

¹⁵⁸³ i.e., it is expected or promised.

¹⁵⁸⁴ In the matter of religion.

me from Pharaoh and his deeds and save me from the wrongdoing people.”

12. And [the example of] Mary, the daughter of ‘Imrān, who guarded her chastity, so We blew into [her garment] through Our angel [i.e., Gabriel], and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was of the devoutly obedient.