

INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT *At-Tahrīm*, 66.

This is the tenth and last of the series of short Madinah Sūras which began with S. lvii: see Introduction to that Sūra. The point dealt with here is: how far the turning away from sex or the opposition of one sex against another or a want of harmony between the sexes may injure the higher interests of society.

The date may be taken to be somewhere about A.H. 7.

Summary.—The failings of the weaker sex should not turn away men from normal social life: harmony and mutual confidence should be taught and enforced, and Allah's blessing will descend on the virtuous.

*At-Tahrim, or Holding (something)
to be Forbidden.*

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.*

1. O Prophet! Why
Holdest thou to be forbidden
That which Allah has⁵⁵²⁹
Made lawful to thee,
Thou seekest to please⁵⁵³⁰
Thy consorts? But Allah
Is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتَ
أَزْوَاجِكَ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

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 'Āisha, the wife of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) by Bukhārī, Muslim, Nasa'i. Abu Dawud and others that the holy Prophet usually visited all his wives daily after 'Aṣr 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 'Āisha, "I felt jealous, and I, Ḥafsa, Sawda and Ṣāfiya 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.

2. Allah has already ordained⁵⁵³¹

For you, the expiation
Of your oaths
(In some cases): and Allah
Is your Protector, and He
Is Full of Knowledge
And Wisdom.

قَدْ فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحِلَّةَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ
وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦٦﴾

3. When the Prophet disclosed
A matter in confidence⁵⁵³²

To one of his consorts,
And she then divulged it
(To another), and Allah made it
Known to him, he confirmed⁵⁵³³
Part thereof and passed over
A part. Then when he
Told her thereof, she said,
"Who told thee this?"
He said, "He told me
Who is the Knower, The Aware."

وَإِذَا أَسْرَأْتِنِي إِلَىٰ بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَأَتْ بِهِ
وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَفَ بَعْضُهُ، وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ
فَلَمَّا نَبَأَهَا بِهِ، قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَاكَ هَذَا
قَالَ نَبَأَنِي الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦٧﴾

4. If ye two turn in repentance⁵⁵³⁴

To Allah, your hearts

إِنْ تَوْبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا

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.

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,⁵⁵³⁵
The angels—will back (him) up.

5. It may be, if he
Divorced you (all),⁵⁵³⁶
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 fast,—⁵⁵³⁷
Previously married or virgins.

عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ ﴿٥﴾

عَسَىٰ رَبُّهُ إِنْ طَلَّقَكُنْ أَنْ يُبْدِلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِنْكُنَّ
مُسْلِمَاتٍ مُّؤْمِنَاتٍ قَنَاطَاتٍ تَزِينْنَ لِجَنَّتِ عِيدَاتٍ سَيَّحَتِ
تُزِينْنَ وَأَنْبَكَارًا ﴿٥﴾

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. *Sāihāt*: 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.

6. O ye who believe!⁵⁵³⁸

Save yourselves and your
Families from a Fire
Whose fuel is Men⁵⁵³⁹
And Stones, over which
Are (appointed) angels
Stern (and) severe,⁵⁵⁴⁰
Who flinch not (from
Executing) the Commands
They receive from Allah,
But do (precisely) what
They are commanded.

7. (It will be said)

"O ye Unbelievers!
Makes no excuses
This Day! Ye are being⁵⁵⁴¹
But requited for
All that ye did!"

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا
النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاطٌ شِدَادٌ
لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦﴾

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا الْيَوْمَ إِنَّمَا تُجْرُونَ
مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

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.'

SECTION 2.

8. O ye who believe!⁵⁵⁴²

Turn to Allah

With sincere repentance:

In the hope that

Your Lord will remove⁵⁵⁴³

From you your evil deeds,

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 run⁵⁵⁴⁴

Forward before them

And by their right hands,

While they say, "Our Lord!

Perfect our Light for us,

And grant us Forgiveness:

For Thou hast power

Over all things."

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا
عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ
وَيُدْخِلَكُم جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ
يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا
إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

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.

9. O Prophet! Strive hard⁵⁵⁴⁵

Against the Unbelievers
And the Hypocrites,
And be harsh with them.
Their abode is Hell,—
An evil refuge (indeed).

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ
وَأَعْلَظْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ
وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٩﴾

10. Allah sets forth,

For an example
To the Unbelievers,
The wife of Noah⁵⁵⁴⁶
And the wife of Lūt:⁵⁵⁴⁷
They were (respectively)
Under two of our righteous
Servants but they betrayed
Their (husbands),⁵⁵⁴⁸

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأَتَ نُوحٍ
وَأَمْرَأَتَ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا
صَالِحِينَ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ
شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّاسِخِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

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 Sūra 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 Lūt 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.

And they profited nothing
Before Allah on their account,
But were told: "Enter ye
The Fire along with
(Others) that enter!"

11. And Allah sets forth,
As an example
To those who believe
The wife of Pharaoh:⁵⁵⁴⁹
Behold she said:
"O my Lord! build
For me, in nearness⁵⁵⁵⁰
To Thee, a mansion
In the Garden,
And save me from Pharaoh
And his doings,
And save me from
Those that do wrong";

12. And Mary the daughter⁵⁵⁵¹
Of 'Imrān, who guarded
Her chastity; and We

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

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَتَ فَرجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا

5549. Traditionally she is known as 'Āsiya, one of the four perfect women, the other three being Mary the mother of Jesus, Khadija the wife of the holy Prophet, and Fātima 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. 'Imrān was traditionally the name of the father of Mary the mother of Jesus: see n. 375 to iii. 35. She was herself one of the purest of women, though the Jews accused her falsely of unchastity: cf. xix. 27-28.

Breathed into (her body)⁵⁵⁵²
 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).⁵⁵⁵³

فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا
 وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا مِنَ الْقَنَاتِ ١٢

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 *Qānīn* (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 Sūra, that while sex is a fact of our physical existence, the sexes should act in harmony and co-operation 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).