

Sura 33: Al- Ahzab (The Confederates)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 8:

1. *Prophet, be conscious of God and do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
2. *And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
3. *And put your trust in God, for God is sufficient as a Guardian.*
4. *God has not made for any man two hearts within him, nor has He made your wives whom you declare unlawful to you by saying, "Be as my mother's back," your mothers, nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. These are only words you utter. God speaks the truth, and He guides people to the (right) Way.*
5. *Call them by (the names of) their fathers. That is more equitable in the sight of God. And if you do not know their fathers - then they are still your brothers in faith and those entrusted to you. And there is no blame on you for the mistakes that you make unintentionally, but (you will only be blamed for) that which your hearts do purposely, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
6. *The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers. Blood-relations among each other have closer personal ties, in the decree of God than (the brotherhood of) the believers and the emigrants. Nevertheless, you should be kind to your friends. This has been written in the Book.*
7. *And remember when We took from the prophets their covenant, as (We did) from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant.*
8. *That He may ask the truthful about their truthfulness. And He has prepared a painful torment for the disbelievers. (33: 1 – 8)*

This Sura establishes certain etiquettes regarding the social life in the nascent Muslim society. It reveals some of the salient features of the Islamic way of life and its foundations. Islam is not only a code of ethics, a book of admonitions, a collection of laws, nor sacred traditions. It is all of this; in addition, Islam is a way of life that is based on the absolute submission to God. Muslims submit to God's decrees and commands. Thus, the first verse in the Sura which organizes the society embodies the command to be conscious of God, "*Prophet, be conscious of God,*" Consciousness of God is the only guarantee that a Muslim will fulfill God's commands. The second command forbade obeying the disbelievers and the hypocrites, "*and do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites. God is Omniscient, Wise.*" The verse also indicates the great pressure that the disbelievers and the hypocrites of Medina did exert on the believers to abandon God's commands in favor of following the disbelievers' and the hypocrites' suggestions and directives. However, the rule remains a standing order valid at all times and in all places. The believers should not be impressed by the seemingly convincing knowledge that the disbelievers may have to the extent that they abandon God's command in favor of this seemingly new and

convincing knowledge. God should remain the only source of knowledge for the believers, because He is Omniscient and Wise. Only He knows what is best for the believers.

The third command, *“And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* God is the only truthful source of commands that are worthy of following. The verse specifically refers to the revelation that came to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from his Lord. God is Totally-Aware of everything we do. The final command was to, *“put your trust in God, for God is sufficient as a Guardian.”* Do not worry whether the disbelievers and the hypocrites agree or disagree with what you do; do not worry about what they scheme; just put your trust in God and He will manage your affairs according to His knowledge and wisdom.

These are the tools that those who actively call to the path of God need: Consciousness of God, following God’s revelation, and putting one’s trust in God (keeping in mind not to obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites.) These commands are concluded by an unequivocal statement, *“God has not made for any man two hearts within him,”* Human beings were created each with a single heart. Therefore, human beings should follow one program, one set of standards, and one understanding of life. Otherwise people will be confused; and they will not be able to maintain a balanced life. This program is the divine project that God commanded that people should adopt as a way of life on earth.

Consequently, *“nor has He made your wives whom you declare unlawful to you by saying, ‘Be as my mother’s back,’ your mothers, nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. These are only words you utter. God speaks the truth; and He guides people to the (right) Way.”* The verse refers to an abusive practice that the Arabs before Islam used to follow. According to this practice a man can declare his wife to be to him as his, *“mother’s back.”* These words render the wife unlawful for the man. However, the woman would not be considered divorced and would not be able to marry another man. Thus, the woman loses her status as a wife but would not be able to get a complete divorce from her husband. This Quranic verse abolished this abusive practice stating that these words do not have the power to change the true natural relationship between a man and his wife.

Another relationship which people cannot invent is the relationship between a man and his adopted son. Adoption does not change the lineage of a person. Men in Arabia before Islam used to adopt sons and treat them as if they were their own biological sons. Adoption replaced the blood relationship. An adopted son assumed the family name of his adopting father and would have the same inheritance rights as the biological sons of the father. Islam abolished this practice and commanded that the lineage of people be respected, *“Call them by (the names of) their fathers. That is more equitable in the sight of God.”* This is the only guarantee against the confusion that would occur if these sons do not know their biological parents. It is also equitable to preserve the inheritance rights of the biological sons. But if these children do not know their biological parents then, *“they are still your brothers in faith and those entrusted to you. And there is no blame on you for the mistakes that you make unintentionally, but (you will only be blamed for) that which your hearts do purposely, and God is All Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* God does not hold people accountable if they make unintentional mistakes.

The next verses abolished the system of brotherhood which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established when the Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina. The purpose of the system was to provide the necessary social and financial support for the migrants. The verse also states that the relationship between the believers and the Prophet (PBUH) supersedes any other relationship, *“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers. Blood-relations among each other have closer personal ties, in the decree of God than (the brotherhood of) the believers and the emigrants. Nevertheless, you should be kind to your friends. This has been written in the Book.”* The Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina left behind their homes, their families, their belongings, their friends, and their memories. They preferred to flee with their newly adopted faith rather than enjoy life in their home town. They gave the true example of the unified Muslim personality which aspires to one value and one value only: the submission to God alone. The expression given in the verse, *“God has not made for any man two hearts within him,”* refers to this personality whose only aspiration is the total submission to God. A similar situation arose in Medina when families were split because some family members became Muslims; while others remained polytheists. The fledgling Muslim society was still in its early stages of development. It was more of a concept than a reality. The common faith became the only recognizable bond between the members of the Muslim society. This bond replaced all other known bonds at that time; including blood and tribal relationships. The Muslims of Medina welcomed their migrant brothers into their hearts, their homes, and shared with them their wealth. The number of migrants was far less than the number of the Muslims of Medina who were willing to host them. The Muslims of Medina competed with each other in hosting the migrants from Mecca. The Prophet (PBUH) established an institution of brotherhood between the Muslims from Mecca (Al-Muhajeroon) and the Muslims from Medina (Al-Ansar). This newly established brotherhood gave the same rights that the blood brotherhood gave; to the extent that those who became brothers according to this pact were allowed to inherit each other. Such a pact was essential in the early days of the Muslim society to help establish the Islamic state which would then have the laws that provide the support for its citizens. Having reached a reasonable stage of development, after the battle of Badr, the Quran revoked this arrangement. Only biological relationships define members of a family.

However, the relationship between the believers and the Prophet (PBUH) remained the strong relationship envisaged in the statement, *“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers.”* The verse reiterated the status of the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) in the society. The closeness of the Prophet (PBUH) to the believers covers all aspects of life. Muslims should love the Prophet (PBUH) more than anything in the world, including themselves. They should obey his commands. In return, the Prophet (PBUH) is the guardian of all believers. If a Muslim dies while in debt, the Prophet (PBUH) had pledged to pay his debt and if a Muslim dies and leaves behind children with no financial support the Prophet (PBUH) had pledged to support his children. These laws have been established long ago in God’s Book, *“This has been written in the Book.”*

The following verses refer to other things that were written in the Book, *“And remember when We took from the prophets their covenant, as (We did) from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant. That He may ask the truthful about their truthfulness. And He has prepared a painful torment for the disbelievers.”* It

the same covenant that God took from all His Messengers, starting with Noah (PBUH) and ending with Muhammad (PBUH). The verse started by emphasizing the universality of the covenant, “*We took from the prophets their covenant.*” Then it mentioned by name Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) followed by the four messengers who brought the major messages before Islam, “*Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary.*” The Quran calls these messengers, “those who have resolve.” The verse reiterated the strength of the covenant.

Verses 9 to 27:

9. *Believers, remember the blessings of God, (bestowed) on you, when armies came (to attack) you. We sent against them a great wind and armies (of angels) which you could not see. And God is All-Seeing of what you do.*
10. *When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached the throats, and you harbored doubts about God.*
11. *In that situation the believers were tried. They were shaken tremendously.*
12. *And when the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, were saying, “God and His messenger promised us nothing but a delusion.”*
13. *And when a party of them said, “People of Yathrib, you will not be able to stand (against the enemy), therefore go back. And a party of them (even) sought permission of the Prophet, saying, “Our homes are exposed (to the enemy).” But they were not exposed, they only wanted to flee.*
14. *If the enemy had entered from all sides and they had been exhorted to treachery, they would have committed it, and would not have hesitated except a little.*
15. *And verily they had made a covenant with God before that they would not turn their backs (to the foe). An oath to God must be answered for.*
16. *Say, "Running away will not benefit you if you are running away from death or killing; and even if (you do escape), you will be given only a brief enjoyment."*
17. *Say, "Who is it that can protect you from God if He intends harm for you or intends mercy for you." They will not find for themselves besides God any protecting guardian or any helper.*
18. *Verily God knows those among you who hinder and those who say to their brothers, "Come along to us", and they do not come to the battle to fight except for a little.*
19. *They begrudge you any help. And when the fear comes, then you (Muhammad) will see them looking at you with rolling eyes like the one who is being overcome by death. Then, when the fear departs, they scald you with sharp tongues. They resent you any good. These have not believed. Therefore, God rendered their deeds fruitless. And that is easy for God.*
20. *They think that the confederates have not withdrawn; and if the confederates should come (again), they would wish they were in the desert (wandering) among the Bedouins, and seeking news about you (from a safe distance); and if they were in your midst, they would not fight but a little.*
21. *You have indeed an excellent example in the Messenger of God for any who hopes for (the meeting of) God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.*

22. *When the believers saw the confederate forces, they said, "This is what God and his Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger told us what was true." And it only added to their faith and submission.*
23. *Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God. Of them some have fulfilled their vow (till death), and some are still waiting' and they have never changed (their determination) in the least.*
24. *That God may reward the truthful for their truthfulness, and torment the hypocrites if that be His Will, or pardon them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
25. *And God repelled the disbelievers in their rage; they did not gain any advantage. God spared the believers the combat. And God is Strong, Eminent.*
26. *And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some you slew and you made captive some.*
27. *And He made you heirs of their lands, of their houses, of their goods, and of a land which you had not trodden (before). And God has power over all things. (33: 9 – 27)*

This group of verses analyzes the events that accompanied the battle of the Trench. The battle of the Trench took place around the fifth year of Hijra. It was an extremely difficult experience for the Muslims. Before we discuss the text, we would like to explore briefly the events as they have been narrated in the books of Seerah. This way one may be able to realize how different is the style of the narrations used by people and the style of the Quran.

Only a brief summary of the narration which Muhammad Ibn Ishaq has communicated is given here. A group of men representing the Jewish tribes of Bani Al Nadeer and Bani Wael went to the chiefs of the tribe of Quraish. They exhorted them to fight the Muslims in Medina. They promised that they would support them. The chiefs of Quraish asked if the Jews believe that Quraish's faith is better than Islam. The Jews answered affirmatively. This confirmation made the chiefs of Quraish happy. The chiefs of Quraish pledged to wage a war against the Muslims in Medina. In addition to Quraish, the Jewish people were able to recruit the tribes of Ghatffan, Bani Fazzarah, Bani Murrah, and Ashga'.

When the Prophet (PBUH) heard about this he commanded the Muslims to dig a trench around the city of Medina. Muslims worked hard with the Prophet (PBUH) to dig the trench however, the hypocrites dragged their feet in helping them. They would make excuses in order to abstain from participating in the hard work. Muslims who were dedicated took leave from the Messenger of God (PBUH) whenever they needed to run errands for their households, then came back to work hard seeking God's reward. Quraish and its allies arrived at the outskirts of Medina as the Muslims were just about to complete the trench. There were about ten thousand fighters in the forces of the Confederates. The Muslims camped behind the trench; there were about three thousand of them. In the meantime, Hayy bin Akhtab Al-Nadari, one of the people who enticed Quraish against the Muslims, went to K'ab bin Assad, the chief of Bani Quraizah, and convinced him to join the Confederates plot against the Muslims. K'ab then reneged on his agreement with the Messenger of God (PBUH). This put the Muslims in a very difficult position, because now they were besieged. It was a difficult time. The siege continued for almost a month. The Prophet (PBUH) wanted to break the siege by convincing the chiefs of the tribe of Ghatffan to break their agreement with the Confederates and in return they would get a share in the crops of Medina.

The Prophet (PBUH) consulted the chiefs of the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, Sa'ad ibn Moaz (RA) and Sa'ad ibn Ubadah (RA). They asked the Prophet (PBUH) whether this was God's command. The Prophet (PBUH) told them that it was not God's command; it was his idea to break the siege because he felt that the situation is becoming very difficult for the people of Medina. They then both refused this solution. They indicated to the Prophet (PBUH) that the people of Medina are willing to fight to win a victory. God sent a very strong wind and His soldiers and planted fear in the hearts of the Confederates so they left.

One notices that the Quranic style in the narrative ignores irrelevant details like names of people and focuses instead on their characters and modes of behavior. The narrative ignores the minute details of the events and focuses on lessons and values to be gleaned from the events; such lessons and values that should continue to be a source of inspiration for Muslims one generation after another. The beauty of the Quranic narrative and its ability to present the event in a dynamic form makes it suitable for all times. It becomes an effective tool in teaching one generation after another.

The verses narrating the story of the battle of the Trench start by reminding the believers of God's blessings. It is God who repelled the army of the Confederates. The following verse summarizes the whole story, "*Believers, remember the blessings of God, (bestowed) on you, when armies came (to attack) you. We sent against them a great wind and armies (of angels) which you could not see. And God is All-Seeing of what you do.*" The subsequent verses give a detailed account of the events, "*When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached the throats, and you harbored doubts about God. In that situation the believers were tried. They were shaken tremendously. And when the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, were saying, 'God and His messenger promised us nothing but a delusion.' And when a party of them said, 'People of Yathrib, you will not be able to stand (against the enemy), therefore go back.' And a party of them (even) sought permission of the Prophet, saying, 'Our homes are exposed (to the enemy).' But they were not exposed, they only wanted to flee.*" The verses detail the panic that engulfed the Muslims. They were besieged from all sides. The verses describe the danger that surrounded the Muslims, "*When they came upon you from above you and from below you.*" Then they describe the fear in the hearts of people, "*when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached the throats.*" Then they describe the mindset of people when they started to entertain doubts about God. The situation is summed in one sentence, "*the believers were tried. They were shaken tremendously.*" The Muslims were not only worried about the armies of Quraish and its allies but they realized that their back was exposed. They expected the Jewish tribes to attack them at any minute from behind. The test uncovered the hypocrites and they started throwing doubts in the hearts of others and enticing them into abandoning the ranks of the Muslim army, "*People of Yathrib, you will not be able to stand (against the enemy), therefore go back.*" They wanted to flee the battle asking the Prophet (PBUH) to excuse them saying, "*Our homes are exposed (to the enemy).*" But the Quran exposed them stating that their homes were not exposed, they simply wanted to flee.

Their mindset was described by the following verse which indicated their vulnerability and their readiness to defect from the ranks of the Muslims. They only needed the slightest push to turn against the Muslims, "*If the enemy had entered from all sides and they had been exhorted to*

treachery, they would have committed it, and would not have hesitated except a little.” This is in spite of the fact that they were tested before and they made a solemn oath to God they will not falter again, *“And verily they had made a covenant with God before that they would not turn their backs (to the foe). An oath to God must be answered for.”* This verse refers to the people of Bani Harethah who were about to fail the test before the battle of Uhud and they made a solemn vow to God they would not renege on their vow again but they forgot their vow.

The Quran then reminded them of a basic fact: no one can escape death, *“Say, ‘Running away will not benefit you if you are running away from death or killing; and even if (you do escape), you will be given only a brief enjoyment.’ Say, ‘Who is it that can protect you from God if He intends harm for you or intends mercy for you.’ They will not find for themselves besides God any protecting guardian or any helper.”* God controls all events in the life of His creatures. Death is an inevitable fact of life. People will meet their death at prescribed times that no one can change. It is then more befitting for believers to submit to God, obey Him, and fulfill their covenant with Him.

The verses continue to reiterate the fact that God knew about those who were trying to frustrate the believers. They did not want to fight and they wanted the believers to join them, *“Verily God knows those among you who hinder and those who say to their brothers, ‘Come along to us’, and they do not come to the battle to fight except for a little.”* Not only they did not want to fight and prevented others from fighting, but they also were reluctant to offer support in any form whether financial or moral, *“They begrudge you any help.”* The signs of panic became obvious on their faces when they encountered a difficult situation, *“And when the fear comes, then you (Muhammad) will see them looking at you with rolling eyes like the one who is being overcome by death.”* But when they feel secure they become vocal, *“Then, when the fear departs, they scald you with sharp tongues.”* They were stingy. They never offered any help, *“They resent you any good.”* These were all signs of disbelief, *“These have not believed. Therefore, God rendered their deeds fruitless. And that is easy for God.”* God will render their deeds worthless.

They thought that the Confederates were still there, so they trembled of fear and they refused to believe that the Confederates have gone already, *“They think that the confederates have not withdrawn;”* But if the Confederates come back then they wish they were not among the Medina dwellers, *“and if the confederates should come (again), they would wish they were in the desert (wandering) among the Bedouins, and seeking news about you (from a safe distance); and if they were in your midst, they would not fight but a little.”*

The theme changes to deal with the bright picture of the believers. The verses start with the bright picture of the Prophet (PBUH), *“You have indeed an excellent example in the Messenger of God for any who hopes for (the meeting of) God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.”* The Prophet (PBUH) gave the best example of a leader during the battle. He gave lessons in effective leadership that the believers should learn from and use him as their role model. The Prophet (PBUH) was working side by side with the believers, using his axe and hauling dust. He joined the believers in their simple songs that they used to sing to make the

work easy for themselves. He was there to help when the task was difficult for the rest of them. Salman Al Farsi (RA) said, "I was digging the trench one day and I came across a very hard rock. I was not able to break it. The Prophet (PBUH) saw me and came to help. He raised his axe and struck the rock three times. Each time he struck the rock, a light came from the place at which the axe hit the rock. Then the hard rock was broken into pieces. I asked the Prophet (PBUH) about the light that I saw. He said, 'The first light showed me that God will give me control over Yemen, the second showed me that God will give me control over Syria and Maghreb, and the last light showed me that God will give me control over the orient.'"

The verses then describe the behavior of the confident believers in the face of danger, "*When the believers saw the confederate forces, they said, 'This is what God and his Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger told us what was true.' And it only added to their faith and submission.*" These were ordinary human beings facing a severe test. The experience that they have been through shook them but they did not panic because they had a strong link with God. They were fully aware of the laws of God that manage the events of life. They were confident in the promise that God made of an eminent victory. They understood and believed in God's words, "*Or do you think that you shall enter paradise without such trials as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will the help of God come?' Verily, the help of God is always near.*" (2:214) They have been tested and shaken so God's victory must be near. Therefore, their response was, "*This is what God and his Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger told us what was true.*" They were ordinary human beings. There are limits for the endurance of human beings. They felt, they suffered, they feared, and they panicked. However, they held tight to the most trustworthy bond with God. This kept them safe and secure. The bond with God nurtured the hope in their hearts and prevented any feeling of despair to creep into their hearts. We too are human beings like them. We may have met difficult situations where we felt that we were being tested. We may have felt weak or became impatient. This is normal. There is no need to despair and think we have failed the test. But we then have to remember that we should hold tight to the most trustworthy bond with God, because this bond is the only assurance and the only security against failure. This bond will enable us to stand up, face the difficulty, and move forward. This bond is what shaped the first generation of Muslims and kept them true to their covenant with God, "*Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God. Of them some have fulfilled their vow (till death), and some are still waiting and they have never changed (their determination) in the least.*"

The following verse explains the rationale behind the tests to which the believers will be subjected to, "*That God may reward the truthful for their truthfulness, and torment the hypocrites if that be His Will, or pardon them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*" These trials are not random events. They follow a well devised plan that leads to predetermined outputs. They represent a magnificent expression of God's mercy, "*God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*"

Then came the final ending which the believers were waiting for, *“And God repelled the disbelievers in their rage; they did not gain any advantage. God spared the believers the combat. And God is Strong, Eminent.”* God’s punishment was not inflicted only on the Confederates from Quraish, but it was also extended to the Jewish tribe which sided with them, *“And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some you slew and you made captive some. And He made you heirs of their lands, of their houses, of their goods, and of a land which you had not trodden (before). And God has power over all things.”*

It is appropriate to describe briefly the history of the Muslim- Jewish relationship in Medina. One of the first tasks that the Prophet (PBUH) completed upon his arrival to Medina was to conclude an agreement between the Muslims and the Jews. One of the main stipulations of the agreement was that the Muslims will provide protection for the Jews and in return the Jews would not enter into alliances with the enemies of Muslims nor harm the Muslims in any way. But soon after that the Jewish tribes felt that the spread of the new religion will diminish their status in Medina. They always maintained a higher status over the polytheists by virtue of the fact that they were the followers of a monotheistic religion. They also felt threatened by the unification of the Arabs of Medina under the leadership of the Messenger of God (PBUH). Another fear that they entertained was the threat posed by the increasing number of Jews who chose to convert to Islam. They received a major blow when a prominent rabbi and scholar by the name of Abdullah bin Sallam chose to adopt Islam. This incident signaled the start of an undeclared war by the Jews on Muslims. Several incidents of treacherous behavior by the tribes resulted in their expulsion from Medina. The last incident was when Banu Quraizah entered in an alliance with the Confederates against the Muslims.

Verses 28 to 35:

28. *Prophet, say to your wives, “If you desire this worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will make provision for you and I will give you a kindly release.*
29. *But if you seek God and His Messenger, and the home of the Hereafter, verily God has prepared for the doers of good among you an immense reward.*
30. *Wives of the Prophet, whosoever of you commits manifest immorality, she will get double the torment; and this is easy for God.*
31. *And whosoever of you remains obedient to God and His Messenger and does good, We shall give her reward twice over; and We have prepared for her an honorable provision.*
32. *Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you remain conscious of God, then do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease would aspire (to you), but speak in an appropriate manner.*
33. *And abide in your homes. Do not display your finery as they used to do in the time of ignorance. Establish prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey God and His Messenger. God only wishes to remove uncleanness far from you, people of the household, and cleanse you thoroughly.*
34. *And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the revelations of God and His Wisdom. Indeed, God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.*

35. *For Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, perseverant men and perseverant women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in God's praise- God has prepared forgiveness and great reward. (33: 28 – 35)*

The following verses, except for the last verse, outline a framework for the code of conduct to be followed by the wives of the Prophet (PBUH). The last verse addresses all Muslims. Early in this Sura, the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) were given the title of, “*the mothers of the believers.*” This is a highly respected status which entailed certain responsibilities. The following verses outline some of these responsibilities, “*Prophet, say to your wives, ‘If you desire this worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will make provision for you and I will give you a kindly release. But if you seek God and His Messenger, and the home of the Hereafter, verily God has prepared for the doers of good among you an immense reward.’*” It was the Prophet’s (PBUH) conscious choice to live an austere life. This did not change even after the state became wealthy. It has been said that a month would pass without having a fire lit in his house, a euphemism for not having a cooked meal. He used to give away his share of the spoils of war in charity. His faith did not compel him to do that but it was his choice. He did not ask anyone else of his companions to follow his example. He also pointed out that Islam does not prohibit reasonable enjoyment. However, his wives did not share this conviction. They had, as any normal human being would have, interest in a more comfortable life. They suggested that the Prophet (PBUH) should increase their monthly allowance so that they would be able to enjoy a more comfortable life. The Prophet (PBUH) was not pleased with their request. He wanted his wives to seek the reward of the Hereafter rather than to busy themselves with the pleasures of this life.

The Prophet (PBUH) was saddened by his wives’ request to the extent that he went into seclusion and did not want to meet any of his companions. One-day Abu Bakr (RA) came to the Prophet’s (PBUH) house, he found people sitting by the door because no one was given permission to see the Prophet (PBUH). He asked for permission but he was denied. He sat there waiting. Then Umar (RA) came and sought permission and likewise he was denied. Later both Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) were given permission. They came into the house and saw that the Prophet (PBUH) was in the company of his wives. The Prophet (PBUH) looked sad. Umar (RA) wanted to cheer him up so he said to the Prophet (PBUH), “*If my wife came asking for more money, I would kill her.*” The Prophet (PBUH) then laughed and said, “*My wives are asking for a bigger allowance.*” Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) wanted to rebuke and discipline their daughters ‘Aisha (RA) and Hafssah (RA) respectively, but the Prophet (PBUH) commanded them to leave his wives alone. The Prophet’s (PBUH) wives then said that they would not ask the Prophet (PBUH) for that which he does not have. The above mentioned verses were then revealed. The Prophet (PBUH) started with ‘Aisha (RA) and asked her to decide what she wanted. He asked her to consult with her parents, but she refused to consult with her parents, she said that she had reached a decision already: she had chosen the life with the Prophet (PBUH). ‘Aisha (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) not tell his other wives with her decision before he had heard their choices, but he said, “I was sent as a teacher, to treat people kindly, and

not to treat them harshly. I will tell anyone of them if they asked about the choice you made.”

The Quran came to establish the true values that people should adopt in their lives. The behavior of the Prophet (PBUH) and his family should exemplify these values. The wives of the Prophet (PBUH) vowed not to request the Prophet (PBUH) for anything that was not within his means. However, the Quran came down to establish a much more basic principle for the Muslim society. This is the principle of valuing the reward of the Hereafter over the pleasure of this worldly life. The wives chose the nearness of God and His Messenger (PBUH) over the pleasures of this life.

This event clarifies in the Muslim mind the correct priorities of Islam. It removes any hesitation that may confuse the choice of Muslims when asked to choose between God and His Messenger (PBUH), on one side, and the pleasures of the worldly life on the other side. The event also helps us to understand the personalities of the Prophet (PBUH), his wives, and his companions. They were all human beings; they had feelings, emotions, and desires but they were able to purify these feelings and desires from their lowly aspects. They trained their feelings and desires to seek God’s pleasures. The Prophet (PBUH) understood the natural inclinations in his wives’ request. He was not happy about it but he refused to suppress it by force as Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) wanted to do. He wanted his wives to learn how to control their desires so he waited until the ultimate lesson came from God.

“Wives of the Prophet, whosoever of you commits manifest immorality, she will get double the torment; and this is easy for God. And whosoever of you remains obedient to God and His messenger and does good, We shall give her reward twice over; and We have prepared for her an honorable provision.” The wives of the Prophet (PBUH) were given an esteemed status. The status came with its responsibilities and reward. As “mothers of the believers,” they should be careful in dealing with people, *“Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you remain conscious of God, then do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease would aspire (to you), but speak in appropriate manner. And stay in your homes. Do not display your finery as they used to do in the time of ignorance. Establish prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey God and His messenger. God only wishes to remove uncleanness far from you, people of the household, and cleanse you thoroughly. And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the revelations of God and His Wisdom. Indeed, God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.”* The status of women in the Arabian society at the time of the advent of Islam, like in many of the contemporaneous societies, was quite low. Women were treated as a tool for pleasure. The loose family structure and the chaos that shaped the sexual relations in the society contributed even more to the degradation of women. Islam came to change this and to raise the status of women. The relationship between the two sexes is a way to provide tranquility and affection between them. Islam provided rules to organize the society and to strengthen the family institution, hence the address to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) regarding their personal behavior. These instructions were meant to purify the wives. So what are the steps that they should follow to achieve purity?

To start with, the Quran makes the wives aware of their distinct status among the believing women, *“Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women, if you remain conscious of God,”* The verse states that the supreme honor given to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) is

granted on the condition that they remain conscious of God. This honor was not granted only because of their relationship to the Prophet (PBUH) but because they have fulfilled the responsibility attached to that status. This is a distinguishing feature of Islam. There is no room for nepotism in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) declared this principle when he addressed his clan saying, “I cannot protect you against God.”

Then it follows by outlining the proper etiquette for speaking with people, “*do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease would aspire (to you), but speak in appropriate manner.*” This verse was addressed to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) who enjoyed a distinct status which would provide them immunity against any form of temptation or assault. However, this verse outlines the etiquette that should be followed by all believing women at all times and places. It is an etiquette which eliminates beyond doubt the chances for any form of temptation.

Then the verse provided a kind reminder for the wives, “*And abide in your homes.*” The Arabic word which has been translated here as “abide,” actually gives the connotation of stability. The verse was a reminder that they should consider the house as their base of operation. It is the norm to remain at home and the exception is to go outside to run errands. Islam made it obligatory on the husband to provide for his family, so that the wife can focus on providing a comfortable, stable, and safe environment for her children at home.

The following verse deals with the way women should be dressed when they go out, “*Do not display your finery as they used to do in the time of ignorance.*” The verse commands women to dress modestly; they should also look modest. It describes immodesty as a remnant of the time of ignorance to emphasize its bad consequences.

Then a command is issued to perform the acts of worship, “*Establish prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey God and His Messenger.*” Rituals are a means for elevating the spirituality, purifying the heart, and strengthening the connection with God. Islam brings together the rituals, the behavior, the ethics, and the laws that govern life under the umbrella of faith. This serves to provide a consistent and harmonious way of life. Rituals also provide a basis and support for the behavior of the believer. The recipe described above is the recipe to achieve the prescribed goal, “*God only wishes to remove uncleanness far from you, people of the household, and cleanse you thoroughly.*”

The verse does not specify which household giving the impression that there is a single household that is worthy of these commands and this goal. The verse also refers to the special status that the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) had by stating that it is God’s desire that they would be cleansed and purified. The last part of the verse gives them an undertaking that they should fulfill, “*And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the revelations of God and His Wisdom.*”

The verses continued to elaborate on the means to achieve cleanliness and purification for all the believers, “*For Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, perseverant men and perseverant women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and*

fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in God's praise- God has prepared forgiveness and great reward."

The word Muslim means the one who submits. A believer is a person who believes in the truthfulness of the faith. The two words are closely linked together. They are two faces for a single coin. Submission is the epitome of accepting the faith because true belief leads to submission. Devotion is the voluntary obedience that comes with submission and belief. Devotion emanates from an inner feeling not from an external influence. Truthfulness is an intrinsic trait of Muslims. The Quran says, "*It is those who do not believe in God's revelations that forge falsehood.*" (16: 105) Those who lie are not members of the nation of Islam. Perseverance is an essential trait for each Muslim, to be able to fight back the temptation and to fulfill the undertakings of faith. A Muslim should persevere in adversity and when calamities strike. Humility in religion softens the heart and is obtained through standing in awe in front of God. Those who give charity have been successful in purifying their inner self of greed and stinginess. Giving charity is an expression of gratitude to God and awareness of the collective responsibility of the members of the society. The verse implies that fasting is a trait which indicates that the reference here is to fasting which has become a habit for the believer. It teaches the believer self-discipline. Guarding one's chastity is a testimony for the strong control over the person's lowly desires. Remembrance of God is the link that connects the human being to God. It allows the heart to shine with the light of guidance and reminds the believer to hold tight to the most trustworthy link.

Those who enjoy these traits are promised a great reward, "*God has prepared forgiveness and great reward.*"

The verse intentionally mentions women and men side by side in this verse to highlight their equal worth in the sight of God.

Verses 36 to 48:

36. *It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger to have any option about their decision. Indeed, whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, he has indeed gone far astray.*
37. *And when you said to him on whom God has conferred blessings and you have conferred blessings, "Keep your wife to yourself, and remain conscious of God." And you concealed in your mind that which God was to bring to light, and you feared people whereas God has more right to be feared. So when Zayd had performed that necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no blame on the believers with respect to the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them. The commandment of God must be fulfilled.*
38. *There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which God has ordained for him. That was God's way with those who have gone before; and the command of God is an absolute decree.*

39. *(It is the practice of those) who delivered the messages of God, and fear Him, and fear none but God. And sufficient is God as a Reckoner.*
40. *Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the seal of the prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things.*
41. *Believers, remember God often,*
42. *And glorify Him morning and evening.*
43. *It is He who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of darkness into light. And He is ever Merciful to the believers.*
44. *Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be "Peace." And He has prepared for them a generous reward.*
45. *Prophet, truly We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.*
46. *And as one who invites to God, by His leave, and as a lamp spreading light.*
47. *Give the glad tidings to the believers that they shall have from God a great bounty.*
48. *And do not obey (the behests) of the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Disregard their annoyances, and put your trust in God. God is sufficient as a Guardian. (33: 36 – 48)*

“It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger to have any option about their decision. Indeed, whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, he has indeed gone far astray.” It has been narrated that this verse was revealed to deal with circumstances surrounding the marriage of Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) to Zayd bin Harethah (RA). Zayd (RA) was the Prophet’s (PBUH) slave. The Prophet (PBUH) set him free and adopted him to be his son. The Arabian society at that time looked down upon freed slaves and did not give them the same status as free people. The Prophet (PBUH) wanted to remove this stigma from the freed slaves so he requested his cousin Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) to marry Zayd (RA). Zainab (RA) did not want to marry Zayd (RA) but when this verse was revealed she obeyed the Prophet’s request and agreed to be wedded to Zayd (RA). However, the verse stated a fundamental principle that the believers should pay heed to. This principle is that the believers have no choice but to obey the commands of God and His Messenger (PBUH). This is the meaning of true submission to God. God’s choice for the believer is the most appropriate choice; He knows what is best for His servants. In the meantime, true submission to God does not mean we should not be active in our lives. Believers should work hard and try to exploit all the means under their control to achieve their goals. The early Muslims were able to achieve a remarkable balance between hard work and submission to God. This was one of the main ingredients of success that the early Muslims were able to achieve.

“And when you said to him on whom God has conferred blessings and you have conferred blessings, ‘Keep your wife to yourself, and remain conscious of God.’ And you concealed in your mind that which God was to bring to light, and you feared people whereas God has more right to be feared. So when Zayd had performed that necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no blame on the believers with respect to the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them. The commandment of God must be fulfilled. There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which God has ordained for him. That was God’s way with those who have gone before; and the command of God is an absolute decree. (It is the practice of those) who delivered the messages of God, and fear Him, and fear none but God. And

sufficient is God as a Reckoner. Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the seal of the prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things.” The Quranic decree nullified the system of adoption that was being practiced by the Arabs before Islam as was mentioned earlier. The adoption system used by the Arabs, was an old tradition that was deeply entrenched in their psyche; its consequences could not be easily removed by a single verse. God gave His Messenger (PBUH) the responsibility to remove these consequences by marrying the divorcee of Zayd (RA) whom he adopted as a son before. God inspired His Messenger (PBUH) with the plan. Zayd will eventually divorce his wife and then the Prophet (PBUH) will marry her in order to remove the remnants of the old system of adoption. However, the Prophet (PBUH) felt awkward about telling Zayd (RA) about the plan; he knew that God will make it known sooner or later so he wanted to delay telling Zayd as much as he could. When Zayd (RA) came to complain about the difficulties that his marriage was facing; and he expressed his desire to end the marriage; the Prophet (PBUH) response was, *“Keep your wife to yourself, and remain conscious of God.”* God then revealed the verse, *“And you concealed in your mind that which God was to bring to light, and you feared people whereas God has more right to be feared. So when Zayd had performed that necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no blame on the believers with respect to the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them.”* That was the command for the Prophet (PBUH) to marry his cousin, Zainab (RA). This was God’s decree and God’s decree is absolute. He made this decree so that, *“There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which God has ordained for him.”* This is God’s way which does not change, *“That was God’s way with those who have gone before; and the command of God is an absolute decree.”* It is the same way that was followed by those who were sent before Muhammad (PBUH), *“(It is the practice of those) who delivered the messages of God, and fear Him, and fear none but God.”* No messenger should worry about what the people will say. They should deliver God’s message as He wanted it to be delivered. God will hold them accountable, *“And sufficient is God as a Reckoner.”* Then the fact that Zayd (RA) should not be treated as the Prophet (PBUH) biological son is reiterated, *“Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the seal of the prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things.”* God knows well what is best for people.

“Believers, remember God often,” This is a reminder for the believers to remember God often. Remembrance of God is not merely uttering words but it is a tool to connect the heart with God. Many traditions indicate that remembrance of God means establishing prayers. However, remembrance of God is a more comprehensive term than performing prayers. It encompasses every way that the servants of God use to keep their hearts connected to God. Times for remembrance are then mentioned, *“And glorify Him morning and evening.”* Then the verses remind the servants of God of the bounties He bestowed on them, *“He it is who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of darkness into light. And He is ever Merciful to the believers.”* They will be safe and secure when they meet Him and, *“Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be, ‘Peace.’ And He has prepared for them a generous reward.”*

The verses then describe the Prophet’s (PBUH) task, *“Prophet, truly We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.”* The Prophet (PBUH) is a witness who will testify for the deeds of the believers. He was also asked to bring the believers glad tidings of the

generous reward that awaits them; and to warn those who did not heed God's guidance of the punishment that awaits them. He also has been given the responsibility to invite people to God's path, "*And as one who invites to God by, His leave,*" Because he was calling people to guidance he was, "*a lamp spreading light.*" The verses reiterate his duty to bring glad tidings to the believers, "*Give the glad tidings to the believers that they shall have from God a great bounty,*" as an expression of the bounty of God that He bestowed on the believers. This part of the Sura ends by reiterating the command that was issued to the Prophet (PBUH) early in the Sura, "*And do not obey (the behests) of the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Disregard their annoyances, and put your trust in God. God is sufficient as a Guardian.*"

Verses 49 to 62:

49. *Believers, when you marry believing women, and then divorce them before you have touched them, there is no waiting period that you should reckon. So provide for them and release them honorably.*
50. *Prophet, We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have paid their dowers; and those whom your right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to you; and the daughters of your paternal uncles and aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Mecca) with you; and any believing woman if she offers herself (in marriage) to the Prophet, if the Prophet wishes to wed her; this is only for you, and not for the believers (at large). We know what We ordained for them regarding their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess. This is so that you may be free from blame, for God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
51. *You can defer whom you will of them and receive whom you will, and whomsoever you desire of those whom you have set aside (temporarily), there is no blame for you (to receive her again); that is better; that they may be comforted and do not grieve, and may all be pleased with what you give them. God knows what is in your hearts; and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.*
52. *It is not lawful for you (to marry any more) women after this, nor to exchange them for (other) wives, even if their beauty were to please you, except any your right hand should possess. God is All-Observant over everything.*
53. *Believers, do not enter the Prophet's houses, unless you have been granted permission for a meal; and do not wait for its preparation. And if you were invited then enter; and when you have taken your meal, disperse and do not linger for conversation. Such (behavior) used to annoy the Prophet and He would be shy of (asking) you (to leave), but God is not shy of the truth. And when you ask (his wives), for anything you want, you should ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him, ever. That would be a grievous thing in the sight of God.*
54. *Whether you reveal a thing or conceal it, verily God has full knowledge of everything.*
55. *There is no blame on them (if they appear) before their fathers or their sons, their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the (slaves) whom their right hands possess. Be conscious of God; for God is ever Witness over all things.*

56. *God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. Believers, send your blessings on him, and salute him with the greeting of peace.*
57. *Those who malign God and His Messenger, God has cursed them in the world and in the Hereafter, and prepared for them a humiliating torment.*
58. *And those who malign the believing men and the believing women undeservedly, they bear the guilt of slander and manifest sin.*
59. *Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons; so that they may be recognized and they would not be annoyed. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
60. *If the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, and those who spread rumors in the city do not desist, We shall verily incite you against them, then they will be your neighbors in it only for a short while.*
61. *They will be cursed, wherever they were found, they will be seized and slain completely.*
62. *That was the way of God in the case of those who passed away before. You will not find any change in God's way. (33: 49 – 62)*

“Believers, when you marry believing women, and then divorce them before you have touched them, there is no waiting period that you should reckon. So provide for them and release them honorably.” This is a ruling which complements the ruling given in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2) regarding women who are divorced before the marriage has been consummated. In Surat Al-Baqarah it was stated that they deserve to keep half the wedding gift which was agreed upon in the marriage contract. If the wedding gift was not specified, then the husband should give an appropriate gift according to his means. The present verse states the ruling regarding the waiting period that the wife should wait for before she can get married to another man. The ruling is that there is no waiting period in case the marriage has not been consummated. Then the husbands should provide for them as was mentioned in Surat Al-Baqarah and they should release them honorably.

The following verse explains the special license given to the Prophet (PBUH) in regard to marriage. It specifies the women that the Prophet (PBUH) was allowed to wed, even if they were more than four wives, *“Prophet, We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have paid their dowers; and those whom your right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to you; and the daughters of your paternal uncles and aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Mecca) with you; and any believing woman if she offers herself (in marriage) to the Prophet, if the Prophet wishes to wed her; this is only for you, and not for the believers (at large). We know what We ordained for them regarding their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess. This is so that you may be free from blame, for God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* Those included the wives that he married according to the marriage rules of Islam, the slave girls which he received from the spoils of war, any of his paternal or maternal cousins who immigrated with him to Medina, and women who would give themselves to him without a marriage gift. There are contradictory narrations about whether the Prophet (PBUH) married any of those who had given themselves to him. The most probable narration indicates that he did not marry any of them but asked his companions to marry them.

At that time the Prophet (PBUH) had nine wives. There was a special circumstance regarding how he married each one. ‘Aisha and Hafsa (RA) were the daughters of the Prophet’s (PBUH) companions, Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA). Um Habibah bint Abi Sufian (RA), Um Salamah (RA), Saudah bint Zayd (RA), and Zainab bint Khazimah (RA) were elderly women who had lost their husbands and the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to honor them. Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) whose marriage story was told earlier. Juwairiah bint Al-Harith (RA) and Saffiyah bint Huyay (RA) were captives of war and the Prophet (PBUH) freed them and took them as wives to honor the two tribes that they belonged to. The verse came down to give the Prophet (PBUH) an exception after the number of allowable wives was limited to four wives in Surat Al-Nisaa (Chapter 4).

The Prophet (PBUH) was given the choice, *“You can defer whom you will of them and receive whom you will, and whomsoever you desire of those whom you have set aside (temporarily), there is no blame for you (to receive her again); that is better; that they may be comforted and do not grieve, and may all be pleased with what you give them. God knows what is in your hearts; and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.”*

Then came down the decree that prohibited him to marry anyone else other than those who were married to him at that time, *“It is not lawful for you (to marry any more) women after this, nor to exchange them for (other) wives, even if their beauty were to please you, except any your right hand should possess. God is All-Observant over everything.”* ‘Aisha (RA) suggested that this prohibition was lifted before the death of the Prophet (PBUH) but he chose not to avail himself of the license given to him.

The following verse established the etiquette that the Muslims should follow when they visited the Prophet’s (PBUH) house; it also outlined the way they should treat the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives, *“Believers, do not enter the Prophet’s houses, unless you have been granted permission for a meal; and do not wait for its preparation. And if you were invited then enter; and when you have taken your meal, disperse and do not linger for conversation. Such (behavior) used to annoy the Prophet and He would be shy of (asking) you (to leave), but God is not shy of the truth. And when you ask (his wives), for anything you want, you should ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him, ever. That would be a grievous thing in the sight of God.”* The Arabs before Islam were not accustomed to seeking permission before they enter a house. Some people used to go to the Prophet’s (PBUH) house and when they notice that there was a meal being cooked they would wait until the meal was done so that they share the meal, even if they were not invited. They also used to stay late after they have eaten to talk to the Prophet (PBUH). This used to annoy the Prophet (PBUH) but he did not want to hurt the people’s feelings. This verse came to set the etiquette for these visits. People should seek permission before they go into the Prophet’s (PBUH) house. If they find a meal being cooked they should not wait around for the meal to be done. If they were invited to the meal, then they should leave soon after they have finished their meal. If they want to ask one of the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives a question, the wife should answer the question while she is sitting behind a screen. This is purer for the hearts of the believers and the hearts of the wives. In addition, the believers should not hurt the Prophet (PBUH) in any way; and they were not allowed to marry

the Prophet's (PBUH) wives after his death. Those who contemplated breaking these rules have committed a grievous sin, *"That would be a grievous thing in the sight of God."* People should realize that they cannot hide anything from God, *"Whether you reveal a thing or conceal it, verily God has full knowledge of everything."*

Then the text details who can speak to the wives face to face, *"There is no blame on them (if they appear) before their fathers or their sons, their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the (slaves) whom their right hands possess. Be conscious of God; for God is ever Witness over all things."* These are the relatives who are allowed to see the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) without a veil. This verse was specific to the Prophet's (PBUH) wives but was later generalized to include all believing women in Surat Al-Noor (Chapter 24). The command is strengthened by the command to remain conscious of God and then reminding them that God is, *"Witness over all things."*

The next verse outlines the special status that the Prophet (PBUH) had, *"God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. Believers, send your blessings on him, and salute him with the greeting of peace."* God's blessings are accrued when God praised His Messenger among the Higher Host. The blessing of the angels is accrued when they pray God for the Messenger (PBUH). God honors the believers by including them with Him and the angels in sending the blessings on the Prophet (PBUH). Then a warning is issued to those who try to hurt the Prophet (PBUH), *"Those who malign God and His Messenger, God has cursed them in the world and in the Hereafter, and prepared for them a humiliating torment."* The verses continue to warn against hurting the believers, *"And those who malign the believing men and the believing women undeservedly, they bear the guilt of slander and manifest sin."* This indicates that there were people in Medina at that time who were hurting the believers, scheming against them, and spreading rumors about them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was told to command his wives and the rest of the believing women to cover their bodies, their heads, and to close the opening of the dress at the chest, *"Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons; so that they may be recognized and they would not be annoyed. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* This dress code was specific for Muslim women and would differentiate them from other women. This worked as a deterrent so that Muslim women would not be annoyed.

The following verses warned the hypocrites who were scheming against the believers. The warning promised a punishment for the hypocrites if they do not desist, *"If the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, and those who spread rumors in the city do not desist, We shall verily incite you against them, then they will be your neighbors in it only for a short while. They will be cursed, wherever they were found, they will be seized and slain completely. That was the way of God in the case of those who passed away before. You will not find any change in God's way. (33: 49 – 62)*

Verses 63 to 73:

63. *People ask you about the Hour. Say, "God alone has knowledge of it." How could you know about it? Perhaps the Hour is near.*
64. *Verily God has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a blazing Fire.*
65. *Abiding therein forever and they will find no protecting guardian or a helper.*
66. *The Day that their faces will be turned about in the Fire; they will say, "If only we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger."*
67. *And they would say, "Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our dignitaries, and they led us away from the path.*
68. *Lord, give them double torment and curse them with a very great curse."*
69. *Believers, do not be like those who maligned Moses, but God cleared him of the (calumnies) they had uttered; and he was well esteemed in God's sight.*
70. *Believers, be conscious of God, and (always) say words straight to the point.*
71. *He will make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins. He whosoever obeys God and His Messenger has already attained the highest achievement.*
72. *We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof; but humankind undertook it; he was indeed unjust and ignorant.*
73. *So God will torment the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and idolatrous men and idolatrous women. But God will pardon the believing men and the believing women, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. (33: 63 – 73)*

"People ask you about the Hour. Say, 'God alone has knowledge of it.' How could you know about it? Perhaps the Hour is near." The Quran discussed extensively the coming of the Last Day and the horrifying scenes that will accompany it. It was natural that the Prophet (PBUH) would be often asked about when the Last Day will occur. The Hour is part of the unseen that only God knows about. God kept the time of the Hour hidden from people for a reason. Those who are conscious of God will endeavor to be always ready for it whenever it comes. Those who are heedless of God's guidance are simply deceiving themselves.

Since they were asking about the Hour, it is then appropriate to describe some of its scenes, *"Verily God has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a blazing Fire. Abiding therein forever and they will find no protecting guardian or a helper."* The disbelievers will remain in the blazing Fire for a long time; only God knows how long it will be. There will be neither a protector nor a helper. They will suffer in this blazing Fire, *"The Day that their faces will be turned about in the Fire."* They will regret missing the opportunity that was given to them in life, *"they will say, 'If only we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger.'* Then they will curse those who led them astray, *"And they would say, 'Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our dignitaries, and they led us away from the path. Lord, give them double torment and curse them with a very great curse.'"*

It seems that the marriage of the Prophet (PBUH) to Zainab (RA), which was meant to change one of the well-established traditions of the pre Islamic Arabia, created a great deal of controversy. The hypocrites took advantage of the event to attack Islam by surreptitiously criticizing Islamic practices, maligning the Prophet (PBUH), and spreading sedition. It seems that some of the believers lent an ear to the rumors that the hypocrites were spreading. The following verse warned these believers not to engage in talks that malign the Prophet (PBUH), *“Believers, do not be like those who maligned Moses, but God cleared him of the (calumnies) they had uttered; and he was well esteemed in God's sight.”* The verse does not give any detail about how Moses (PBUH) was maligned, but the main focus of the verse was to warn the believers not to fall in the trap that was set by the hypocrites to malign the Prophet (PBUH). The example of Moses (PBUH) was given to show that God will support His messengers and clear them from any false accusations. The verse then commanded the believers to be critical of what they hear, *“Believers, be conscious of God, and (always) say words straight to the point.”* They should think carefully of the words they utter; and only speak a good word that leads to a good deed. Those who heed this command will be rewarded, *“He will make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins. He whosoever obeys God and His Messenger has already attained the highest achievement.”* The reward will be the achievement of great success. Obeying God in itself is a great achievement. It puts the believer on the straight path which leads to the ultimate happiness in this life and in the Hereafter.

It is a great bounty from God that He considers the human weakness and the gravity of the responsibility that humankind pledged to undertake, *“We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof; but humankind undertook it; he was indeed unjust and ignorant.”* The tiny, weak creature has accepted the undertaking that the mighty heavens, earth, and mountains declined to undertake. It is a great responsibility and it is a great risk. That is why humankind is described as, *“unjust and ignorant.”* Humankind was given the determination and the awareness, and he accepted the challenge. This is the honor that God bestowed on humankind. Humankind will be tested and the reward will be given according to the deeds. However, God’s mercy is boundless because He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy, *“So God will torment the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and idolatrous men and idolatrous women. But God will pardon the believing men and the believing women, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*