

# **Al-Tahrim** [Prohibition] **Madinan Period**

*In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate*

[1] O Prophet, why do you forbid what Allah has made lawful for you?<sup>1</sup> Is it to please your wives?<sup>2</sup> Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Compassionate.

1. *Although this sentence is couched in the form of a question, it is in fact a statement of disapproval. These words are not said in order to enquire about why the Prophet (peace be on him) acted in the manner described here, but to let him know that God does not approve of his act of making unlawful for himself that which God had made lawful, The Prophet (peace be on him) was, in any case, not an ordinary person. When he made something unlawful for himself, this could influence his followers to regard it as unlawful, or at least as something religiously disapproved, God censures the Prophet (peace be on him) on this account and asks him to refrain from prohibiting for himself whatever God has made lawful. It clearly follows from this that the Prophet (peace be on him) did not have the authority *per se* to declare things of his own accord lawful or unlawful.*

2. *It is evident from this particular event that the Prophet's act of making a lawful thing unlawful was not actuated by desire; instead, he did so in deference to some of his wives' desires. According to authentic traditions, someone had sent honey to one of his wives (viz. Zaynab). The Prophet (peace be on him) being fond of honey then started staying in her house for a longer time than usual, which incited the other wives' jealousy They, therefore, joined hands in creating in him a dislike for honey so much so that he promised to give up its consumption altogether.*

[2] Allah has prescribed for you a way for the absolution of your oaths.<sup>3</sup> Allah is your Guardian. He is All-Knowing, Most Wise.

[3] The Prophet confided something to one of his wives and then she disclosed it (to another); so after Allah revealed to the Prophet (that she had disclosed that secret), he made a part of it known to her and passed over a part of it. And when he told her about this [i.e., that she had disclosed the secret entrusted to her], she asked: "Who informed you of this?" He said: "I was told of it by He Who is All-Knowing, All-Aware."<sup>4</sup>

3. *That is, the Prophet (peace be on him) should free himself of the constraint that he had imposed upon himself by breaking the oath and offering expiation as laid down in **al-Maidah** 5: 89. [The expiation for breaking oaths, as laid down in this verse, is as follows: either to feed ten needy persons with more or less the same food as you are wont to give to your families, or to clothe them, or to set free from bondage the neck of one man; and he who does not find the means to do so shall fast for three days." Ed.]*

4. *No tradition precisely indicates what secret it was that one of the Prophet's wives disclosed to another and which God subsequently revealed to the Prophet (peace be on him). It may be noted, however, that in order to comprehend the purpose for which this verse was revealed, it is not at all important to know what that secret was. The true purpose for which this incident is narrated in the Qur'an is to warn the Prophet's wives, and through them, the wives of responsible Muslims not to be negligent in guarding their secrets. The higher a person's position of responsibility in the community the more dangerous it is that secrets should leak out of his household. Regardless of whether a matter is important or not, once a person becomes careless in guarding his secrets it is likely that he will disclose important matters along with those that are unimportant.*

[4] If the two of you turn in repentance to Allah (that is better for you), for the hearts of both of you have swerved from the Straight Path.<sup>5</sup> But if you support one another against the Prophet, then surely Allah is his Protector; and after that Gabriel and all righteous believers and the angels are all his supporters.<sup>6</sup>

[5] Maybe if he were to divorce you, your Lord might grant him in exchange wives better than you<sup>7</sup> - those who truly submit to Allah, are full of faith, obedient, disposed to repentance, and given to worship and fasting - both previously wedded ones and virgins.

5. *According to a tradition narrated by 'Umar, "both of you" here alludes to 'A'ishah and Hafsa. The meaning of the words "swerved from the Straight Path" is also explained by 'Umar who stated that both these ladies had begun taking a degree of liberty with the Prophet (peace he on him). God did not approve of this and therefore warned them.*

6. *The Prophet's wives were told that if they entered into a league against him they would only hurt themselves because the Prophet (peace be on him) enjoyed God's protection and support. Moreover, Gabriel and God's other angels and also all righteous believers too stood by him. How, then, would their binding together against him be able to cut any ice?*

7. *This shortcoming did not only apply to 'A'ishah and Hafsa but to some of the Prophet's other wives as well. Therefore, after admonishing these two, the other wives are also admonished. Traditions indicate that in those days the Prophet (peace be on him) was so unhappy with his wives that he distanced himself from them for a month which gave rise to the rumour that he had divorced them.*

[6] Believers, guard yourselves and your kindred against a Fire whose fuel is human beings and stones,<sup>8</sup> a Fire held in the charge of fierce and stern angels who never disobey what He has commanded them, and always do what they are bidden.

[7] (It will then be said): "Unbelievers, make no excuses today. You are being recompensed for nothing else but your deeds."

[8] Believers, turn to Allah in sincere repentance; maybe your Lord will expunge your evil deeds and admit you to the Gardens beneath which rivers flow. This will be on the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who have embraced faith and are with him;<sup>9</sup> their light will be running before them and on their right hands, and they will say: "Our Lord, perfect for us our light and forgive us. Surely You have power over everything."

[9] Prophet, strive against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be severe with them. Hell shall be their resort. What a grievous end!

8. *This verse indicates that a person is required, first of all, to strive to guard himself against God's chastisement. Over and above that, he should also do whatever he can, to raise the members of his family who are under his care as righteous people so that they win God's pleasure. But if they are inclined to follow a course that is likely to land them in Hell, he should try, as far as he can, to prevent them from proceeding along that path. As for the words "whose fuel is human beings and stones," they probably signify coal. Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, Muhammad al-Baqir and al-Suddi are all of the opinion that Hell's fuel will be brimstone.*

9. *That is, God will not deprive them of the reward of their good deeds; He will not provide the unbelievers and the hypocrites with an occasion to taunt the believers that they had gained nothing despite their sincere devotion to God. On the contrary, disgrace will be the lot of those who do not believe in and do not obey God.*

[10] Allah has set forth for the unbelievers the parable of the wives of Noah and Lot. They were wedded to two of Our righteous servants, but each acted treacherously with her husband,<sup>10</sup> and their husbands could be of no avail to them against Allah, The two of them were told: "Enter the Fire with all the others who enter it."

[11] Allah has set forth for the believers the parable of Pharaoh's wife. She prayed: "My Lord, build for me a house with You in Paradise and deliver me from Pharaoh and his misdeeds; and deliver me from the iniquitous people."

[12] Allah has also set forth the parable of Mary, the daughter of Imran,<sup>11</sup> who guarded her Chastity,<sup>12</sup> and into whom We breathed of Our Spirit,<sup>13</sup> and who testified to the words of her Lord and His Books. She was among the obedient.<sup>14</sup>

10. *The statement that "each acted treacherously" does not mean, God forbid, that the wives of the Prophets Noah and Lot succumbed to any act of indecency. What is meant is that instead of lending support to the efforts of their husbands - Noah and Lot- to uphold the Truth, they lent support to the opponents of the True Faith.*

11. *It is possible that the name of Mary's father was 'Imran, or that she was called "daughter of 'Imran" because she belonged to 'Imran's family.*

12. *This refutes the Jews' allegation that Jesus' birth was, God forbid, the result of a sin committed by his mother. The Qur'an refutes this charge and calls it "a monstrous calumny". (See **al-Nisa** 4: 156.)*

13. *That is, Mary conceived Jesus without there having been any physical contact between her and any male. It took place simply because God breathed into her womb a spirit from Himself.*

14. *Mary's case is mentioned here to emphasise a point: although God tested her by causing her to become miraculously pregnant, despite her virginity she still exercised great patience and willingly submitted to God's will.*

