



CHAPTER 24

Al-Nūr: The Light

(REVEALED AT MADĪNAH: 9 sections; 64 verses)

The title of this chapter, *The Light*, is taken from the statement made in sec. 5, where Islām is shown to be the most perfect manifestation of Divine light, which will illumine the East as well as the West. As already pointed out in the last introductory note, the group of the Makkah chapters beginning with the 17th and ending with the 23rd chapter deals with the great and triumphant future of Islām, and hence it is fittingly followed by a Madīnah chapter which promises in the clearest words the establishment of the kingdom of Islām (v. 55).

While showing Islām to be a perfect manifestation of Divine Light, it is added that this light will first illumine the houses in which the Muslims live (v. 36). The home being thus the unit for spreading light throughout the world, this chapter deals specially with the purity of home life and therefore opens with a condemnation of adultery, the canker of the purity of home life. There is another reason, too. This chapter promises the establishment of a Muslim kingdom, and kingdom brings ease and luxury in its train, leading to such social evils as adultery and slander. While the first section deals with adultery in general, the second speaks of a particular case of slander, the slander made against ‘Ā’ishah, the Prophet’s wife. The third section, while pardoning ‘Ā’ishah’s slanderers, deals with the slanderers of women in general. The fourth section deals with the preventive measures which serve as a check upon adulterous intercourse. Then follow three sections dealing with the kindling of Divine light in Muslim hearts and the manifestation of Divine power in establishing the kingdom of Islām. The eighth section again refers to the subject matter of the opening sections by enjoining respect for each other’s privacy, which is calculated to put restraint upon the tongue of slander, and the last section teaches respect for the Prophet’s orders, because his orders related to the welfare of the community.

The whole of this chapter is universally held to be a Madīnah revelation, and it is almost certain that the major portion was revealed about the fifth year of the Hijrah.

SECTION 1: Law relating to Adultery

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 (This is) a chapter which We have revealed and made obligatory and wherein We have revealed clear messages that you may be mindful.

2 The adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them (with) a hundred stripes,^a and let not pity for them detain you from obedience to Allāh, if you believe in Allāh and the Last Day, and let a party of believers witness their chastisement.

3 The adulterer cannot have sexual relations with any but an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress, none can have sexual relations with her but an adulterer or an idolater; and it is forbidden to believers.^a

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سُورَةٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهَا وَفَرَضْنَاهَا وَأَنْزَلْنَا فِيهَا آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١﴾

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا سَرَفٌ فِي دِينِكُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُشْهِدَ عَدَاؤُهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

الزَّانِي لَا يَنْكِحُ إِلَّا زَانِيَةً أَوْ مُشْرِكَةً وَالزَّانِيَةُ لَا يَنْكِحُهَا إِلَّا زَانٍ أَوْ مُشْرِكٌ وَحُرْمٌ ذَلِكَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

2a. Chastity, as a virtue, is not given the first place in modern civilized society, and hence adultery is not considered a sufficiently serious offence to subject the guilty party to any punishment except the payment of damages to the injured husband. The breach of the greatest trust which can be imposed in a man or a woman, the breach which ruins families, destroys household peace, and deprives innocent children of their loving mothers, is not looked upon even as seriously as the breach of trust of a few pounds. Hence the Islamic law seems to be too severe to a Westerner.

The punishment for adultery is here stated to be flogging, *not stoning to death*, which was really prescribed by the Jewish law. The cases of *stoning to death* for adultery by the Prophet's orders relate actually to a Jew and a Jewess in one case (B. 23:61), and others apparently occurred before the revelation of this chapter. That stoning to death was never contemplated by Islām as a punishment for adultery is made clear by 4:25, where it is stated expressly that the punishment for adultery in the case of slave-girls, when they are married, is *half the punishment which is inflicted on free married women*, and stoning to death could not be halved. Besides, the Qur'ān nowhere speaks of stoning as a punishment for adultery, and the report of what 'Umar said is self-contradictory. For a full discussion, see *The Religion of Islām*, ch. Penal Laws of Islam. A few words may be added as to the method of flogging. It aimed more at disgracing the culprit than at torturing him. In the time of the Prophet, and even for some time after him, there was no whip, and flogging was carried out by beating with a stick or with the hand or with shoes. The culprit was not stripped naked, but he was required to take off thick clothes.

3a. The word *nakaha* signifies sometimes *coitus* or *coitus without marriage*, as also *marriage without coitus* (LL). I adopt the first significance here and the meaning in this case is clear, the idolater or the idolatress being mentioned along with the adulterer or

4 And those who accuse free women and bring not four witnesses, flog them (with) eighty stripes and never accept their evidence, and these are the transgressors^a—

5 Except those who afterwards repent and act aright; surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.

6 And those who accuse their wives and have no witnesses except themselves,^a let one of them testify four times, bearing Allāh to witness, that he is of those who speak the truth.

7 And the fifth (time) that the curse of Allāh be on him, if he is of those who lie.

8 And it shall avert the chastisement from her, if she testify four times, bearing Allāh to witness, that he is of those who lie.

9 And the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allāh to be on her, if he is of those who speak the truth.

10 And were it not for Allāh's grace upon you and His mercy — and that Allāh is Oft-returning (to mercy) Wise!

وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ
يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ
تِسْعِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ
شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٤﴾
إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ
وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾
وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ أَرْوَاجَهُمْ وَلَمْ
يَكُنْ لَهُمْ شُهَدَاءُ إِلَّا أَنفُسُهُمْ
فَشَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ أَرْبَعُ شَهَدَاتٍ
بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٦﴾

وَالْخَامِسَةَ أَنَّ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ
إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٧﴾
وَيَدْرَأُ عَنْهَا الْعَذَابَ أَنْ تَشْهَدَ
أَرْبَعَةَ شَهَدَاتٍ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ
الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٨﴾
وَالْعَامِسَةَ أَنَّ غَضَبَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا
إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٩﴾

وَلَوْ لَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَرَحْمَتُهُ وَآَنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

the adulteress, on account of the low standard of morality among the idolaters. Taking the second significance, the verse places one guilty of adultery under a kind of interdict in Muslim society.

4a. This is an effectual restraint against slander and gossip, which so often bring disaster upon the heads of innocent women. Unless there is the clearest evidence of adultery against a woman, the slanderer is himself to be punished.

6a. The ordinance relates to the case of husbands who accuse their wives of adultery and have no evidence; see a case reported in B. 68:30. In such a case divorce is effected, the husband not being punishable for the accusation, though he cannot produce witnesses, and the wife not being punishable for adultery, if she denies the charge in the manner stated. Compare Num. 5:11–31. The same procedure would be adopted in a reverse case.

SECTION 2: 'Ā'ishah's Slanderers

11 Surely they who concocted the lie are a party from among you.^a Deem it not an evil to you. Nay, it is good for you. For every man of them is what he has earned of sin; and as for him among them who took upon himself the main part thereof, he shall have a grievous punishment.^b

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ
مِّنْكُمْ لَا تَحْسَبُوهُ شَرًّا لَّكُم بَلْ
هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ
مَا أَكْتَسَبَ مِنَ الْإِثْمِ وَالَّذِي تَوَلَّى
كِبْرَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَهُ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ①

12 Why did not the believing men and the believing women, when you heard it, think well of their own people, and say: This is an evident falsehood?^a

لَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ ظَنَّ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ
وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَأَنْفُسِهِنَّ خَيْرًا لِّأَوْلِيَائِهِنَّ
هَذَا إِفْكٌ مُّبِينٌ ②

13 Why did they not bring four witnesses of it? So, as they have not brought witnesses, they are liars in the sight of Allāh.^a

لَوْلَا جَاءُوا عَلَيْهِ بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ
فَإِذْ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِالشَّهَادَةِ فَالسُّبْحَانَ
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُمْ الْكَاذِبُونَ ③

11a. The incident referred to in this section took place when the Prophet, accompanied by his wife 'Ā'ishah, was returning from the expedition against the Banī Muṣṭaliq in the fifth year of the Hijrah. 'Ā'ishah had gone out on a private occasion, but, when she returned, she perceived that she had lost her necklace, and went back to search for it. In her absence the attendants, supposing her to be in her *howdah*, started while it was yet dark. When she returned, finding the camel and the men gone, she sat down there and was brought to Madinah by Ṣafwān, who was coming in the rear. Some mischievous persons from among the hypocrites spread false reports, slandering her, and some of the Muslims also associated themselves with the slander. 'Ā'ishah's innocence was at length established by this revelation (B. 52:15). Those who had taken part in the accusation were punished, according to one ḥadīth (IM. 20:13). This is the grievous punishment referred to in the concluding words of the verse.

It may be added here that the tongue of gossip has never spared even the most virtuous women. Another case of a virtuous woman being thus defamed is that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, about whom the Jews talked similar slander. The addition of the words — *deem it not an evil to you: nay, it is good for you* — aims at bringing solace to such aggrieved people, seeing that even the most virtuous of women could not escape the tongue of slander.

11b. He who took the main part thereof upon himself is said to be 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the chief of the hypocrites (B. 64:36), because he concocted the lie and circulated the false report.

12a. There was not a *single witness*, nor any circumstance that could lend colour to the false story.

13a. Severe as the punishment for adultery is in Islām, the evidence of four witnesses is required to establish the guilt; see v. 4. The allegation of a Christian annotator that this requirement of the law was simply to shield 'Ā'ishah is a baseless conjecture in

14 And were it not for Allāh's grace upon you and His mercy in this world and the Hereafter, a grievous chastisement would certainly have touched you on account of the talk you indulged in.

15 When you received it on your tongues and spoke with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge, and you deemed it a trifle, while with Allāh it was serious.

16 And why did you not, when you heard it, say: It befits us not to talk of it. Glory be to Thee! This is a great calumny.

17 Allāh admonishes you that you return not to the like of it ever again, if you are believers.

18 And Allāh makes clear to you the messages; and Allāh is Knowing, Wise.

19 Those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, for them is a grievous chastisement in this world and the Hereafter. And Allāh knows, while you know not.

20 And were it not for Allāh's grace upon you and His mercy^a— and that Allāh is Compassionate, Merciful.

وَلَوْ لَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ
فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ لَمَسَّكُمْ فِي مَا
أَفَضْتُمْ فِيهِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٤﴾

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِالسِّنِّينَ وَتَقُولُونَ
بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ مَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ
وَتَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّئًا ۗ وَهُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٥﴾

وَلَوْ لَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُمْ مَا يَكُونُ
لَنَا أَنْ نَتَكَلَّمَ بِهَذَا ۗ سُبْحَانَكَ هَذَا
بُهْتَانٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٦﴾

يَعِظُكُمُ اللَّهُ أَنْ تَعُودُوا لِمِثْلِهِ أَبَدًا
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

وَيُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ ط وَاللَّهُ
عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ
فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ۗ
فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ط وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ
وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

وَلَوْ لَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ
وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَرُورٌ سَرِيمٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

view of the fact that in her case there was not a single witness. Why should the Prophet then have required four witnesses? The fact is that while the Qur'ān takes a very serious view of the crimes against chastity, it also makes criminal the circulation of false reports affecting a woman's chastity. Thus even a lighter accusation in connection with the misconduct of women required the evidence of four witnesses; see 4:15, which was admittedly revealed earlier.

20a. The same words in the next verse are followed by the statement, *not one of you would ever have been pure.*

SECTION 3: Slanderers of Women

21 O you who believe, follow not the footsteps of the devil. And whoever follows the footsteps of the devil, surely he commands indecency and evil. And were it not for Allāh's grace on you and His mercy, not one of you would ever have been pure, but Allāh purifies whom He pleases. And Allāh is Hearing, Knowing.^a

22 And let not possessors of grace and abundance among you swear against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allāh's way; and pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allāh should forgive you? And Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.^a

23 Surely those who accuse chaste believing women, unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and for them is a grievous chastisement,^a

24 On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet bear witness against them as to what they did,^a

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَكَوَلَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحِمَتْهُ مَا تَزَكَّى مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَحَدٌ أَبَدًا ۗ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾

وَلَا يَأْتِلْ أَوْلُوا الْفُضُلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا ۗ أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْغَافِلَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ لُعُنُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنُهُمْ وَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَمْرُؤُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

21a. This passage shows that the companions of the Holy Prophet were purified from sins by Allāh's grace.

22a. It is agreed on the basis of most trustworthy reports that this verse was revealed in connection with the action of Abū Bakr, who had sworn not to allow maintenance to one of his relatives named Miṣṭah, who had taken part in spreading the false reports against 'Ā'ishah. After inflicting the legal punishment on the culprits the Prophet was required to bear them no ill-will, and to hide no rancour in his breast even towards the slanderers of his wife. Revelation even required his companions to be kind and forgiving to them. Abū Bakr is spoken of here as *one possessing grace and abundance* (B. 65:xxiv, 13), the former of these words referring to his moral and spiritual superiority and the latter to abundance in wealth.

23a. This refers to those who continue to spread evil reports concerning chaste women, the gossip-mongers in every society.

24a. The evidence of the members of the body is sometimes witnessed in this very life against the doers of evil, in the consequences of the evil done. On the day of

25 On that day Allāh will pay back to them in full their just reward, and they will know that Allāh, He is the Evident Truth.

يَوْمَئِذٍ يُؤْتِيهِمُ اللَّهُ دِينَهُمُ الْحَقَّ
وَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٢٥﴾

26 Unclean things are for unclean ones and unclean ones are for unclean things, and good things are for good ones and good ones are for good things; these are free from what they say. For them is forgiveness and an honourable sustenance.^a

الْخَبِيثَاتُ لِلْخَبِيثِينَ وَالْخَبِيثُونَ
لِلْخَبِيثَاتِ ۖ وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَ
الطَّيِّبُونَ لِلطَّيِّبَاتِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ مُبَرَّءُونَ
مِمَّا يَقُولُونَ ۗ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ ۖ وَرِزْقٌ
كَرِيمٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

SECTION 4: Preventive Measures

27 O you who believe, enter not houses other than your own houses, until you have asked permission and saluted their inmates. This is better for you that you may be mindful.^a

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا
غَيْرَ بِيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَكُلُّوا
عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا ۗ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

28 But if you find no one therein, enter them not, until permission is given to you; and if it is said to you, Go back, then go back; this is purer for you. And Allāh is Knower of what you do.

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا فِيهَا أَحَدًا فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا
حَتَّىٰ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ ۗ وَإِنْ قِيلَ لَكُمْ
ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا ۗ هُوَ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ ۗ
وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

29 It is no sin for you to enter uninhabited houses wherein you have your necessities. And Allāh knows what you do openly and what you hide.

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا
غَيْرَ مَسْكُونَةٍ فِيهَا مَتَاعٌ ۗ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ
يَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Resurrection the consequences of the evil deeds will assume a palpable form, as is also indicated in the paying back in full of the just rewards in the next verse, and thus bear witness to the evil done. This highly developed idea of the Resurrection did not exist before the Holy Qur'ān.

26a. The meaning of this whole passage is made clear by the concluding words, i.e., nothing impure can be attributed to the pure ones, and they are free from what the impure ones say.

27a. The Arabs entered houses without permission. The law revealed in this verse lays down the basis of domestic peace and security needed for an advanced society. The law is a clear testimony of the great trust which Muslims have in their womenfolk. It is also a preventive measure against slander.

30 Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allāh is Aware of what they do.^a

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ
وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ۝

31 And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof.^a And let them wear their head-coverings over their

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ
وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ
زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ
بِحُرُوفِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ
زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ

30a. Men are enjoined to lower their gaze, just as women are enjoined to do in the next verse. This injunction is given as a preventive against an evil which deals a death-blow to all pure social relations, viz., the evil of fornication. The Qur'ān does not only forbid an evil, but also points out the way, by walking in which man may be able to eschew it. Both men and women are required to keep their eyes cast down, so that when they meet each other, neither should men stare at women nor women at men. In a society in which women never appeared in public, the injunction to men to lower their gaze would be meaningless; and the similar injunction to women given in the next verse, if they never left the compounds of their houses, would be absurd.

31a. To guard the relations between males and females and to check a too free intermingling of men and women, the Qur'ān now lays down another injunction in addition to that which requires both sexes to lower their gaze when they meet each other. It requires women in particular not to display their adornment. There is a difference of opinion as to what *zīnat* means. According to some it includes the beauty of the body, while according to others it is exclusively applied to external adornments. The use of the same word in the concluding portion of the verse, *let them not strike their feet so that the zīnat that they hide may be known*, clearly supports the latter view, as the only adornment that can be known by the striking of the feet consists of external ornaments. But even taking the first view, there is a clear exception here, *illā mā zahara min-hā* — *except what appears thereof* or *except that which it is customary and natural to uncover*. Now in the first place it must be remembered that what is prohibited is the *display* of beauty, as elsewhere expressly indicated by the word *taburriju*: “And display not (your beauty) like the displaying of the ignorance of yore” (33:33). As to what parts of the body the woman is required to cover and what she may uncover the following summary of the earlier views relating to this exception given by IJ should suffice: (1) it means the adornment of dress or the clothes that a woman wears; in other words, she is not required to cover the clothes she wears; (2) it means the adornment which the woman is not required to cover, such as collyrium, rings, bracelets and her face; (3) the exception relates to a woman's clothing and her face. After relating these opinions, IJ adds: *The most correct opinion is that the exception relates to the face and hands*. As an argument corroborating this opinion he says that, when praying, the woman is not required to keep her face and hands covered — hands up to the elbow — while she is required to cover the rest of the body. According to Ḥadīth, the Prophet himself is reported to have told Asmā, his wife 'Ā'ishah's sister, when she appeared before him in thin clothes, through which parts of her body could be seen: “O Asmā, when woman attains her puberty it is not proper that any part of her body should be seen except this, and he pointed to his face and hands” (AD. 31:30). This settles conclusively that Islām never enjoined the veil or covering of the face.

bosoms.^b And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or guileless male servants,^c or the children who know not women's nakedness. And let them not strike their feet so that the adornment that they hide may be known. And turn to Allāh all, O believers, so that you may be successful.

بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءَ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ
 أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي
 أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ
 أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّبِيعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْأَرْبَابَةِ
 مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوْ الْوَالِدِينَ الَّذِينَ لَمْ
 يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضُرُّونَ
 بِأَسْرَجِلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ
 وَتَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ
 لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

32 And marry those among you who are single, and those who are fit among your male slaves and your

وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ
 مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ إِن يَكُونُوا

31b. Before Islām women used to appear in public with their breasts partly uncovered. The *khimār* (pl. *khumr*) means a *head-covering*, and women were thus required to cover their breasts with a part of their head-covering. The head-covering as worn in the East conceals the arms, the neck and the bosom, as also the ornaments worn in the ears or on the neck or over the bosom, and the covering over of these parts is what is required here by the addition of the words *over their bosoms*.

31c. By *their women*, some commentators understand *Muslim women*, but it is a fact that women of other faiths mingled with believing women in the time of the Prophet, and therefore *all women* are meant. I think the word *their* has been added only to indicate all such women who come in contact with them, or women who are on the same social level with them. *Those whom their right hands possess* include male and female slaves. Next to slaves are mentioned *tābi'in*, or *those who follow*, from *tabi'a*, *he followed*. Servants are here called followers because they follow the master. To this is added the qualifying phrase *ghairi uli-l-irbati*, which is ordinarily translated as meaning *not having need (of women)*. But *irb* really means *cunning* or *guile* or *deceit* or *wickedness* or *mischievousness* (LL), *need* being only its secondary significance when the *need* leads to *cunning*, the proper word for *need* being *arab*. Therefore some take these words as meaning *idiots* or persons deficient in intellect (LL). But while an idiot is not necessarily free from sexual impulse, he is certainly unfit for service. According to Mujāhid these words mean *people for whom their belly is their sole concern and about whom it is not feared that they will mislead women* — *la yuhimmu-hū illā baṭnu-hū wa lā yukhāfu 'ala-l-nisā'i* (B. 65:24). This is really what is meant. In these words, *ghairi uli-l-irbati*, are spoken of male servants, who take up service only as a means of living and not with the mischievous intention of getting intimacy in the house. It should be noted that women are nowhere forbidden to employ male servants or to appear before them. What this verse prevents is only display of female beauty except to those most nearly related to women, and this is a preventive measure against the spread of loose ideas of morality, and a step to help restraint of sexual passions, which is all that the Holy Qur'ān aims at.

female slaves. If they are needy, Allāh will make them free from want out of His grace. And Allāh is Ample-giving, Knowing.^a

33 And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste, until Allāh makes them free from want out of His grace.^a And those of your slaves who ask for a writing (of freedom), give them the writing, if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of Allāh which He has given you.^b And compel not your slave-

فَقَرَأَ يُغْنِيهِمْ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ
وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

وَلْيَسْتَعْفِفِ الَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ نِكَاحًا
حَتَّى يُغْنِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَالَّذِينَ
يَبْتَغُونَ الْكِتَابَ مِمَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ
فَكَارِبُوهُمْ إِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ فِيهِمْ خَيْرًا ۗ
وَإِنْ تُوهُمْ مِنْ مَالِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي آتَيْنَاكُمْ
وَلَا تُكْرَهُوا فَتْيَتَكُمْ عَلَى الْبِعَاءِ إِنْ

32a. The Holy Qur’ān looks upon the married state as the normal state, and hence it enjoins that, so far as is possible, those who are single should be married. It also requires both male and female slaves to be kept in a state of marriage. The keeping of concubines or unmarried slave-girls is clearly inconsistent with this. As a religion Islām is against celibacy, and considers parenthood to be the duty of every human being. In the civilized society of today most persons refuse to accept the responsibilities of parenthood, offering as an excuse the insufficiency of means to support a family. The Qur’ān disposes of this false excuse in the simple words, *if they are needy, Allāh will make them free from want out of His grace.*

The Holy Prophet, too, laid stress on Muslim men and women living in a married state. Thus he is reported to have said: “He who is able to marry should marry. For it keeps the gaze low and guards chastity; and he who cannot should take to fasting (occasionally), for it will have a castrating effect on him” (B. 30:10). On another occasion he said, addressing some young men who talked of fasting in the day-time and keeping awake during the night, and keeping away from marriage: “I keep fast and I break it, and I pray and I sleep, and I am married, so whoever inclines to any other way than my sunnah, he is not of me” (B. 67:1). According to one ḥadīth, the man who marries perfects half his religion (Msh. 13:1, iii). Celibacy is expressly forbidden (B. 67:8).

33a. The words translated as *those who cannot find a match* may also mean *those who cannot find the means to marry*. Marriage thus becomes an obligatory institution in Islām, only those being excused who cannot find a match or who lack the means to marry. Marriage, in fact, affords the surest guarantee for the betterment of the moral tone of society.

33b. The word *kitāb*, translated *writing*, as used here, stands for *mukātabah*, which is an infinitive noun of *kātaba*, signifying *he (a slave) made a written (or other) contract with him (his master), that he (the former) should pay a certain sum as the price of himself, and on the payment thereof be free (LL); also he (a master) made such a contract with him (his slave)*. It was called a *kitāb* (or writing) because of the obligation which the master imposed on himself. The money was paid in two or more instalments. Thus every possible facility was afforded to the slave to earn his freedom. Though the practice of the master making such a contract with the slave prevailed before the advent of Islām, the important reform introduced by Islām was that, when a slave desired such a contract to be made, the master could not refuse it. Twelve centuries before any attempt was made by any individual or community to legislate for the liberty of slaves, a dweller in

girls to prostitution when they desire to keep chaste, in order to seek the frail goods of this world's life. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.^c

34 And certainly We have sent to you clear messages and a description of those who passed away before you, and an admonition to those who guard against evil.

أَرَدْنَ تَحَضُّنًا لِيَبْتَغُوا عَرَصَ الْحَيَاةِ
الدُّنْيَا وَمَنْ يُكْرِهْنَهُنَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مِنْ
بَعْدِ إِكْرَاهِهِنَّ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ آيَاتٍ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ وَ
مَثَلًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِن قَبْلِكُمْ
وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

SECTION 5: Manifestation of Divine Light

35 Allāh is the light of the heavens and the earth. A likeness of His light is as a pillar on which is a lamp — the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as it were a brightly shining star — lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof gives light, though fire touch it not — light upon light.^a Allāh guides to His light whom He pleases. And Allāh sets forth parables for men, and Allāh is Knower of all things —

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ
نُورِهِ كَمِثْلِ شَوْكَةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ
فِي رُجَاةٍ طَلْحُهَا كَوَكَبٌ
دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُّبَارَكَةٍ
زَيْتُونَةٍ لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ
يَبْكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَكُلَّمْ تَمَسَّهُ
نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ
لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

the Arabian desert had laid down this noble institution, that, if a slave asked for a writing of freedom, he was not only to be given that writing by the master, but he was also to be provided with money to purchase his freedom, the only condition being *if you know any good in them*, i.e., if he is fit for work and able to earn his livelihood. And, in addition, the duty was imposed upon the State of spending a part of the collection of the poor-rate for this object, as stated in 9:60.

33c. It is related that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites, kept slave-girls for prostitution (Rz). Prostitution, which seems to have prevailed before the advent of Islām in Arabia, is condemned here. But this curse has obtained an incredible prevalence in the whole of Christendom, and is legalized in many countries of Europe as a *necessary evil*, while in others it is openly connived at.

35a. *Nūr* (light) is that which manifests hidden things, and Allāh is called here the light of the heavens and the earth, because He has manifested them and brought them into existence. *Mishkāt* means a *niche*, but Mjd explains it as meaning ‘*amūd* or *pillar*’ (LL).

In the parable that follows, Islām is represented as a likeness of the Divine light, a light placed high on a pillar so as to illuminate the whole world; a light guarded by being placed in a glass, so that no puff of wind can put it out; a light so resplendent that the

36 (It is) in houses which Allāh has permitted to be exalted and His name to be remembered therein.^a Therein do glorify Him, in the mornings and the evenings,

فِي بُيُوتٍ إِذْنُ اللَّهِ أَنْ تُرْفَعَنَّ وَيُذَكَّرَ
فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ
وَ الْأَصَالِ ۝

37 Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of Allāh and the keeping up of prayer and the paying of the poor-rate — they fear a day in which the hearts and the eyes will turn about,^a

رِجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ
عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَ إِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَ إِيْتَاءِ
الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ
الْقُلُوبُ وَ الْأَبْصَارُ ۝

38 That Allāh may give them the best reward for what they did, and give them more out of His grace. And Allāh provides without measure for whom He pleases.

لِيَجْزِيََهُمُ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ مَا عَمِلُوا وَ يَزِيدَهُمُ
مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۝ وَ اللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ
بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ۝

glass itself in which it is placed is as a brilliant star. It should be noted that the religion of Islām is repeatedly spoken of as *Divine light* in the Holy Qur'an: "They desire to put out *the light of Allāh* with their mouths, but Allāh will allow nothing save the perfection of *His light*, though the disbelievers are averse" (9:32; 61:8). Hence it is of Islām that the parable of Divine light speaks. The *blessed olive*, from which that light is lit, and which stands here for a symbol of Islām, as the fig stands for a symbol of Judaism (see 95:3a), belongs neither to the East nor to the West. Even so is Islām, which must give light to both the East and the West, and which, therefore, does not specially belong to either of them. The reference seems to be to the welding together of the East and the West in Islām, a prophecy which is now approaching its fulfilment in the awakening of the West to the truth of the principles of Islām.

The parable becomes clearer if the word *nūr* (*light*) be taken to refer to the Holy Prophet. The Prophet was by nature gifted with the highest qualifications. Even before he received Divine revelation, his life was a life of purity and devoted to the service of humanity. Light emanated from him even before the light from on High came to him in the form of Divine revelation, so that when revelation came to him it was *light upon light*.

36a. The Divine light spoken of in the last verse is here stated as being met with in certain houses, the distinctive mark of those houses being that the name of Allāh is remembered in them, thus showing that these houses are the houses of Muslims, and the light is therefore the light of Islām. These houses, we are further told, though humble now, will be *exalted*. And the exaltation of the humble huts of the Arab dwellers of the desert to royal palaces is a fact of history.

37a. A further description of these houses makes the reference still more clear. In these houses Allāh is glorified in the morning and the evening, and therefore these can be the houses of no other than Muslims, because the keeping up of prayer and the paying of the poor-rate is the distinguishing characteristic of Islām. The opposition to his light, and the end of that opposition, are described in the two concluding verses of the section. The turning about of the hearts and the eyes means either that they will be transformed in the new life or that they will be in a state of commotion by reason of fear. The verse that follows lends support to the first significance.