

## Surah 66 At-Tahrim (Prohibition) Medina 107

### The Quran's Text & Yusuf Ali's Translation:

يا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ ...

66:1. O Prophet! why holdest thou to be forbidden that which God has made lawful to thee?

[Ali's comments: 5529. The Prophet's household was not like other households. The Consorts of Purity were expected to hold a higher standard in behaviour and reticence than ordinary women, as they had higher work to perform. See n. 3706 to 33:28. **But they were human beings after all, and were subject to the weaknesses** of their sex, and they sometimes failed. The commentators usually cite the following incident in connection with the revelation of these verses. It is narrated from 'Aisha, the wife of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) by Bukhari, Muslim, Nasai. Abu Dawud and others that the holy Prophet usually visited all his wives daily after 'Asr Prayer. Once it so happened that he stayed longer than usual at the quarters of Zaynab bint Jahsh, for she had received from somewhere some honey which the holy Prophet liked very much. "At this", says 'Aisha, "I felt jealous, and Hafsa, Sawda, Safiya, and I agreed among ourselves that when he visits us each of us would tell him that a peculiar odour came from his mouth as a result of what he had eaten, for we knew that he was particularly sensitive to offensive smells". So when his wives hinted at it, **he vowed that he would never again use honey.** Thereupon these verses were revealed reminding him that he

should not declare to himself unlawful that which God had made lawful to him.

The important point to bear in mind is that he was at once rectified by revelation, which reinforces the fact that the prophets are always under divine protection, and even the slightest lapse on their part is never left uncorrected. (R).]

... تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتَ أَزْوَاجِكَ ...

**Thou seekest to please thy consorts.**

[5530. The tender words of admonition addressed to the Consorts in 33:28-34 explain the situation far better than any comments can express. If the holy Prophet had been a mere husband in the ordinary sense of the term, he could not have held the balance even between his private feelings and his public duties. But he was not an ordinary husband, and he abandoned his renunciation on his realisation of the higher duties with which he was charged, and which required conciliation with firmness.]

... وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

**But God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.**

قَدْ فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَحِلَّةَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ ...

**66:2. God has already ordained for you, (O men), the dissolution of your oaths (in some cases):**

[ 5531. Cf. 2:224. If your vows prevent you from doing good, or acting rightly, or making peace between persons, you should expiate the vow, but not refrain from your good deed.]

... وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ ...

and God is your Protector,

... وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢٠)

and He is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom.

وَإِذْ أَسَرَّ النَّبِيُّ إِلَىٰ بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا ... <sup>up</sup>

66: 3. When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his consorts,

[5532. Who these two consorts were, and what was the matter in confidence which was disclosed, we are not expressly told, but the facts mentioned in n. 5529 above will help us to understand this passage. The sacred words imply that the matter was of great importance as to the principle involved, but that the details were not of sufficient importance for permanent record. For the lessons to be drawn, see the notes following.]

... فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِ وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ ...

and she then divulged it (to another), and God made it known to him,

... عَرَّفَ بَعْضَهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَن بَعْضٍ ...

he confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part.

[5533. The moral we have to draw is manifold.

1. If anything is told us in confidence, especially by one at the head of affairs, we must not divulge it to our closest friend.
2. If such divulgence is made in the most secret whispers, God's Plan is such that it will come to light and expose those guilty of breach of confidence.
3. When the whispered version is compared with the true version and the actual facts, it will be found that the whispered version is in great part untrue, due to the misunderstanding and exaggeration inevitable in the circumstances.
4. The breach of confidence must inevitably redound to the shame of the guilty party.

See next note]

... فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا...

Then when he told her thereof, she said, "Who told thee this?"

... قَالَ نَبَّأَنِي الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ (٣)

He said, "He told me who knows and is well-acquainted (with all things)."

إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا ...

66: 4. If ye two turn in repentance to Him, your hearts are indeed so inclined;

[5534. There are further lessons.

5. Both the party betraying confidence and that encouraging the betrayal must purge their conduct by repentance.
6. Frank repentance would be what their hearts and conscience themselves would dictate and they must not resist such amends on account of selfish obstinacy.
7. If they were to resist frank repentance and amends, they are only abetting each other's wrong, and they cannot prevail against all the moral forces which will be ranged on the side of the right.]

... وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ...

but if ye back up each other against him, truly God is his Protector, and Gabriel, and (every) righteous one among those who believe --

وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾

and furthermore, the angels -- will back (him) up.

[5535. Do not forget the dual meaning: immediate, in application to the holy Prophet, and general, being the lesson which we ought all to learn. The holy Prophet could not be injured by any persons doing anything against him even though

they might unconsciously put him in great jeopardy: for God, the Angel Gabriel (who was the Messenger to him), and the whole Community, would protect him,-to say nothing of the army of angels or hidden spiritual forces that always guarded him. Cf. 33:56. The general lesson for us is that the good man's protection is that of the moral forces around him; it is divine protection, against which human weakness or folly will have no power.]

عَسَى رَبُّهُ إِنْ طَلَّقَنَّ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِّنْكَ... up

**66: 5. It may be, if he divorced you (all), that God will give him in exchange Consorts better than you –**

[ **5536**. From the case of two in verse 4, we now come to the case of all the Consorts generally, in verse 5. Cf. 33:28-30. Their duties and responsibilities were higher than those of other women, and therefore their failure would also be more serious. This is only hypothetical, in order to show us the virtues expected of them: faith and devotion, worship and service, readiness for travel or Hijrah, whether they were young or old, now to married life or otherwise. From them again the more general application follows-to all women in Islam.]

... مُسْلِمَاتٍ مُّؤْمِنَاتٍ قَانِتَاتٍ تَائِبَاتٍ عَابِدَاتٍ سَائِحَاتٍ ...

**who submit (their wills), who believe, who are devout, who turn to God in repentance, who worship (in humility), who travel (for faith) and fast –**

[5537. **Saihat:** literally, those who travel. Here it means those who fast. Note that the spiritual virtues are named in the descending order: submitting their wills (Islam), faith and devotion, turning ever to worship and faith, and performing other rites, or perhaps being content with asceticism- And this applies to all women, maiden girls or women of mature experience who were widows or separated from previous husbands by divorce.]

... تَيِّبَاتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا (٥)

previously married or virgins.

### Muhammad Asad's Translation:

66:1 O PROPHET! Why dost thou, out of a desire to please [one or another of] thy wives, impose [on thyself] a prohibition of something that God has made lawful to thee? 1 But God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace:

(66:2) God has already enjoined upon you [O believers] the breaking and expiation of [such of] your oaths [as may run counter to what is right and just]: 2 for, God is your Lord Supreme, and He alone is all-knowing, truly wise.

66:3 (3) And lo! 3 [It so happened that] the Prophet told something in confidence to one of his wives; and when she thereupon divulged it, and God made this known to him, he acquainted [others] with some of it and passed over some of it. 4 And as soon as he let her know it, she asked, "Who has told thee this?" 5 - [to which] he replied, "The All-Knowing, the All-Aware has told me."

[Asad's Comments - 1 There are **several essentially conflicting** - and, therefore, **in their aggregate, not very trustworthy reports** as to the exact reason or reasons why, at some time **during the second half of the Medina period, the Prophet declared on oath that for one month he would have no intercourse with any of his wives**. Still, while the exact reason cannot be established with certainty, it is sufficiently clear from the above-mentioned ahadith that this emotional, temporary renunciation of marital life was caused by a display of mutual jealousy among some of the Prophet's wives. In any case, the purport of the above Qur'anic allusion to this incident is not biographical but, rather, intended to bring out a moral lesson applicable to all human situations: **namely, the inadmissibility of regarding as forbidden (haram) anything that God has made lawful (halal)**, even if such an attitude happens to be motivated by the desire to please another person or other persons. Apart from this, it serves to illustrate the fact - **repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an - that the Prophet was but a human being, and therefore subject to human emotions and even liable to**



**commit an occasional mistake** (which in his case, however, was invariably pointed out to him, and thus rectified, through divine revelation).

2 See 2:224 and the corresponding note 212, which shows that in certain circumstances **an oath should be broken and then atoned for: hence the above phrase, "God has enjoined upon you the breaking and expiation"** (with the term tahillah comprising both these concepts). 3 See surah 2, note 21 .

4 Lit., "he turned aside from [or "avoided"] some of it". **There is no reliable Tradition as to the subject of that confidential information.** Some of the early commentators, however, connect it with the Prophet's veiled prediction that Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab would succeed him as leaders of the Muslim community; the recipient of the information is said to have been Hafsa, the daughter of Umar, and the one to whom she disclosed it, A'ishah, the daughter of Abu Bakr (Baghawi, on the authority of Ibn Abbas and Al-Kalbi; also Zamakhshari). If this interpretation is correct, it would explain why the Prophet "acquainted [others] with some of it and passed over some of it": for, once his confidential prediction had been divulged, he saw no point in withholding it any longer from the community; nevertheless, he alluded to it in deliberately vague terms - possibly in order not to give to the succession of Abu Bakr and Umar the appearance of all "apostolic sanction" **but to leave it, rather to a free decision of the community** in pursuance of the Qur'anic principle **amruhum shura baynahum** (see 42:38).

5 I.e., that she had broken the Prophet's confidence. ]

66:4 [Say, O Prophet: 6 ] "Would that you two turn unto God in repentance, for the hearts of both of you have swerved [from what is right]! 7 And if you uphold each other against him [who is God's message-bearer, know that] God Himself is his Protector, and [that,] therefore, 8 Gabriel, and all the righteous among the believers and all the [other] angels will come to his aid."

66:5 [O wives of the Prophet!] Were he to divorce [any of] you, God might well give him in your stead spouses better than you - women who surrender themselves unto God, who truly believe, devoutly obey His will, turn [unto Him] in repentance [whenever they have sinned] worship [Him alone] and go on and on [seeking His goodly acceptance]' - be they women previously married or virgins. 10

[ 6 Although in the sequence the Prophet is referred to in the third person, it is obvious that it is he who is commanded through revelation to speak thus to his wives Hafsa and A'ishah (see note 4); hence my above interpolation.

7 Referring to Hafsa, who betrayed the Prophet's confidence, and to A'ishah, who by listening contributed to this betrayal (see note 4 above).

8 Lit., "after that", i.e., in consequence of the fact that God Himself protects him.

9 For this rendering of the expression sa'ihat, see note 147 on 9:1 12, where the same expression occurs in the masculine gender relating to both men and women.

10 I.e., like the actual wives of the Prophet, **one of whom (A'ishah) was a virgin when she married him, one (Zaynab bint Jahsh) had been divorced, while the others were widows.** This allusion, together with the fact that the Prophet did not divorce any of his wives, as well as the purely hypothetical formulation of this passage, shows that it is meant to be an indirect admonition to the Prophet's wives, who, despite their occasional shortcomings - unavoidable in human beings - did possess the virtues referred to above. On a wider plane, it seems to be an admonition to all believers, men and women alike: and this explains the subsequent change in the discourse. ]

### **Edip Yuksel's Translation**

**66:0** In the name of God, the Gracious, the Compassionate.

**66:1** O you prophet, why do you prohibit what **God** has made lawful for you, seeking to please your wives? **God** is Forgiver, Compassionate.

**66:2** **God** has already given the law, regarding the cancellation of oaths. **God** is your Lord, and He is the Knowledgeable, the Wise.\*

### ***Spreading the Words of the Prophet***

**66:3** When the prophet disclosed a *hadith* to some of his wives, then one of them spread it, and **God** revealed it to him, he recognized part of it and

denied part. So when he informed her, she said, "Who informed you of this?" He said, "I was informed by the Knowledgeable, the Ever-aware."\*

**66:4** If the two of you repent to **God**, then your hearts have listened. But if you band together against him, then **God** is his master. Gabriel, the righteous of those who acknowledge, and the angels are his supporters.\*

**66:5** It may be that he would divorce you, then his Lord will substitute other wives in your place who are better than you; peacefully surrendering, acknowledging, devout, repentant, serving, active in their societies, responsive, and foremost ones.\*

**[Yuksel's comments - 066:002** God is the only *mawla* (lord and master) of people. See 2:286.

**066:003** The **word *hadith* (word, utterance) occurs twice in the Quran in connection with Muhammad. One is here; the other is at 33:53.** Here the sharing or reporting of the *hadith* heard from Muhammad is criticized and in verse 33:53, listening to the *hadith* of Muhammad is criticized. Knowing that polytheists would create other authorities besides His word and call them *hadith*, *sunna* and *ijma*, God convicted those words. See 33:38; 45:6.

**066:004** This verse has been generally mistranslated in traditional translations, since they include angels and believers to be Muhammad's *mawla* (lord/patron/master). There is only one *mawla*, and it is none other than God. See 2:286.

**066:005** Traditional translations mistranslate the last three adjectives used here to describe Muslim women. They distort their meaning as “fasters, widows and virgins.” When the issue is about women, somehow, the meaning of the Quranic words passes through rapid mutations. For instance, we know that the Sunni and Shiite scholars who could not beat cows and examples found it convenient and fair to beat women (see 4:34). Those of us who have rejected other religious sources besides the Quran are still struggling to clean our minds from these innovations that even have sneaked into the Arabic language long after the revelation of the Quran. There is, in fact, nothing whatsoever about fasting, widows and virgins in this verse. We are rediscovering and relearning the Quran.

The third word from the end of the verse, **SaYiHat, which we have translated as "active in their societies" simply means to travel or move around for a cause.** About two century after the revelation of the Quran, **when the rights of women were one by one were taken through all-male enterprises called hadith, ijti had and tafseer, Muslim communities found themselves thinking and living like the enemies of Islam in the Days of Ignorance.** The misogynistic mind of orthodox commentators and translators simply could not fathom the notion of a Muslim woman traveling around alone to do anything – and so they pretended that the word in question was not *SaYaHa*, but *SsaWM* – fasting! Socially active women were indeed more difficult to control than the women who would fast in their homes; they were even less costly, since they would eat less. For the usage of the verb form of the root, see 9:2. The word *SaYaHa* has nothing to do with fasting; the Quran consistently uses the word *SaWaMa* for fasting (2:183-196; 4:92; 5:89,90; 19:26; 33:35; 58:4).

The second word from the end is *THaYiBat*, which means “those who return, or those who are responsive”. Various derivatives of the same root are used to mean “reward” or “refuge” or “cloths”. For instance, see 2:125; 3:195. The Arabic words for widow are *ARMiLa* or *AYaMa*. The Quran uses *AYaMa* for widow or single; see: 24:32.

The last word of this verse, *aBKaR*, which means those who are "young," "early risers" or "foremost," has traditionally, and implausibly, been interpreted as "virgins" in this passage. The resulting distorted meaning of the verse supports a sectarian teaching that justifies a man marrying more than one virgin. The Arabic word for virgin is *BaTuL* or *ADRa*.

This false interpretation has become so popular that it is apparently now considered beyond any challenge. Excluding Edip Yuksel's Turkish translation, *Mesaj*; published in 1999, we have not seen any published translation that does not duplicate this centuries-old error. For a comparative discussion of this verse, see the Sample Comparisons section in the Introduction.]