INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT An-Nūr, 24.

The environmental and social influences which most frequently wreck our moral ideals have to do with sex, and especially with its misuse, whether in the form of unregulated behaviour, of false charges or scandals, or breach of the refined conventions of personal or domestic privacy. Our complete conquest of all pitfalls in such matters enables us to rise to the higher regions of Light and of God-created Nature. This subject is continued in the next Sūra.

As the reprobation of false slanders about women (xxiv. 11-20) is connected with an incident that happened to Ḥadhrat ‘Āisha in A.H. 5-6 that fixes the chronological place of this Madīnah Sūra.

Summary.—Sex offences should be severely punished, but the strictest evidence should be required, and false slanderers are also worthy of punishment. Light talk about women reprobed (xxiv. 1-26).

Privacy should be respected, and the utmost decorum should be observed in dress and manners (xxiv. 27-34).

Parable of Light and Darkness: order and obedience in Nature point to the religious duty of man (xxiv. 35-37).

Domestic manners and manners in public or collective life all contribute to the highest virtues, and are part of our spiritual duties leading up to Allah (xxiv. 58-64).
**An-Nur, or Light.**

_In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful._

1. A Sūra which We Have sent down and
Which We have ordained:
In it have We sent down Clear Signs, in order that Ye may receive admonition.

2. The woman and the man Guilty of fornication,— Flog each of them With a hundred stripes:
Let not compassion move you In their case, in a matter Prescribed by Allah, if ye believe In Allah and the Last Day: And let a party Of the Believers Witness their punishment.

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2953. It must not be thought that the checking of sex offences or of minor improprieties, that relate to sex or privacy, are matters that do not affect spiritual life in the highest degree. These matters are intimately connected with spiritual teaching such as Allah has sent down in this Sūra. The emphasis is on “We”: these things are not mere matters of convenience, but Allah has ordained them for our observance in life.

2954. Zinā includes sexual intercourse between a man and a woman not married to each other. It therefore applies both to adultery (which implies that one or both of the parties are married to a person or persons other than the ones concerned) and to fornication, which, in its strict signification, implies that both parties are unmarried. The law of marriage and divorce is made easy in Islam, so that there may be the less temptation for intercourse outside the well-defined incidents of marriage. This makes for greater self-respect for both man and woman. Other sex offences are also punishable, but this Section applies strictly to Zinā as above defined. Although zinā covers both fornication and adultery, in the opinion of Muslim jurists, the punishment laid down here applies only to un-married persons. As for married persons, their punishment, according to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him), is stoning to death.

2955. Cf. iv. 15, and n. 523.

2956. The punishment should be open, in order to be deterrent.
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;
To the Believers such a thing
Is forbidden.\textsuperscript{2957}

4. And those who launch
A charge against chaste women,
And produce not four witnesses
(To support their allegations).­
Flog them with eighty stripes;
And reject their evidence\textsuperscript{2958}
Ever after: for such men
Are wicked transgressors;­

5. Except those who repent thereafter\textsuperscript{2959}
And mend (their conduct);
For Allah is Oft-Forgiving,
Most Merciful.

\textsuperscript{2957} Islam commands sex purity, for men and for women, at all times,—before marriage, during marriage, and after the dissolution of marriage. Those guilty of illicit practices are shut out of the marriage circle of chaste men and women.

\textsuperscript{2958} The most serious notice is taken of people who put forward slanders or scandalous suggestions about women without adequate evidence. If anything is said against a woman's chastity, it should be supported by evidence twice as strong as would ordinarily be required for business transactions, or even in murder cases. That is, four witnesses would be required instead of two. Failing such preponderating evidence, the slanderer should himself be treated as a wicked transgressor and punished with eighty stripes. Not only would he be subjected to this disgraceful form of punishment, but he would be deprived of the citizen's right of giving evidence in all matters unless he repents and reforms, in which case he can be readmitted to be a competent witness. The verse lays down the punishment for slandering "chaste women", which by consensus of opinion also covers slandering chaste men. Chaste women have been specifically mentioned, according to Commentators, because slandering them is more abhorrent.

\textsuperscript{2959} The punishment of stripes is inflicted in any case for unsupported slander. But the deprivation of the civic right of giving evidence can be cancelled by the man's subsequent conduct, if he repents, shows that he is sorry for what he did, and that he would not in future support by his statement anything for which he has not the fullest evidence. Secular courts do not enforce these principles, as their standards are lower than...
6. And for those who launch
   A charge against their wives,
   And have (in support)
   No evidence but their own.  2961)
   Let one of them
   Testify four times
   By Allah that he is
   Of those who speak
   The Truth.

7. And the fifth (oath)
   (Should be) that he solemnly
   Invokes the curse of Allah
   On himself if he
   Tells a lie.

8. But it would avert
   The punishment from the wife,
   If she bears witness
   Four times (with an oath)
   By Allah, that (her husband)
   Is telling a lie;

   = those which good Muslims set for themselves, but good Muslims must understand and act
   on the underlying principles, which protect the honour of womanhood.

2960. The case of married persons is different from that of outsiders. If one of them
   accuses the other of unchastity, the accusation partly reflects on the accuser as well.
   Moreover, the link which unites married people, even where differences supervene, is sure
   to act as a steadying influence against the concoction of false charges of unchastity
   particularly where divorce is allowed (as in Islam) for reasons other than unchastity.
   Suppose a husband catches a wife in adultery. In the nature of things four witnesses—or
   even one outside witness—would be impossible. Yet after such an experience it is against
   human nature that he can live a normal married life. The matter is then left to the honour
   of the two spouses. If the husband can solemnly swear four times to the fact, and in
   addition invoke a curse on himself if he lies, that is *prima facie* evidence of the wife’s
   guilt. But if the wife swears similarly four times and similarly invokes a curse on herself,
   she is in law acquitted of the guilt. If she does not take this step, the charge is held
   proved and the punishment follows. In either case the marriage is dissolved, as it is
   against human nature that the parties can live together happily after such an incident.
9. And the fifth (oath)
Should be that she solemnly
Invokes the wrath of Allah
On herself if (her accuser)
Is telling the truth.

10. If it were not
For Allah's grace and mercy
On you, and that Allah
Is Oft-Returning,
Full of Wisdom,—
(Ye would be ruined indeed).^2961

SECTION 2.

11. Those who brought forward^2962
The lie are a body
Among yourselves: think it not
To be an evil to you;
On the contrary it is good^2963
For you: to every man
Among them (will come
The punishment) of the sin

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2961. *Cf.* xxiv. 11-14, and n. 2962, which illustrates the matter by a concrete instance.

2962. The particular incident here referred to occurred on the return from the expedition to the Banū Mustalīq, A.H. 5-6. When the march was ordered, Ḥāfizr Ahāṣa was not in her tent, having gone to search for a valuable necklace she had dropped. As her litter was veiled, it was not noticed that she was not in it, until the army reached the next halt. Meanwhile, finding the camp had gone, she sat down to rest, hoping that some one would come back to fetch her when her absence was noticed. It was night, and she fell asleep. Next morning she was found by Sañwān, a Muhājir, who had been left behind the camp expressly to pick up anything inadvertently left behind. He put her on his camel and brought her, leading the camel on foot. This gave occasion to enemies to raise a malicious scandal. The ringleader among them was the chief of Madīnah Hypocrites, ‘Abūdillah ibn Ubāi, who is referred to in the last clause of this verse. He had other sins and enormities to his debit, and he was left to the punishment of an unrepentant sinner, for he died in that state. The minor tools were given the legal punishment of the law, and after penitence mended their lives. They made good.

2963. It is worse for a scandal to be whispered about with bated breath, than that it should be brought into the light of day and disproved.
That he earned, and to him\textsuperscript{2964}  
Who took on himself the lead  
Among them, will be  
A Chastisement grievous.

12. Why did not the Believers—  
Men and women\textsuperscript{2965}—when ye  
Heard of the affair,—  
Thought well of their people  
And say, “This (charge)  
Is an obvious lie”?  

13. Why did they not bring  
Four witnesses to prove it?\textsuperscript{2966}  
When they have not brought  
The witnesses, such men,  
In the sight of Allah,  
(Stand forth) themselves as liars!

14. Were it not for the grace  
And mercy of Allah on you,  
In this world and the Hereafter,  
A grievous chastisement would have  
Seized you in that ye rushed  
Glibly into this affair.\textsuperscript{2967}

\textsuperscript{2964} The ringleader: see n. 2962 above.

\textsuperscript{2965} Both men and women were involved in spreading the scandal. Their obvious duty was to put the best, not the worst, construction on the acts of one of the “mothers of the Believers”.

\textsuperscript{2966} If any persons took it seriously, it was their duty to search for and produce the evidence, in the absence of which they themselves became guilty of slander.

\textsuperscript{2967} Cf. xxiv. 10 above. It was Allah’s mercy that saved them from many evil consequences, both in this life and in the Hereafter,—in this life, because the Prophet’s wise measures nipped in the bud any incipient estrangement between those nearest and dearest to him, and from a spiritual aspect in that the minor agents in spreading the scandal repented and were forgiven. No doubts and divisions, no mutual distrust, were allowed to remain in their hearts after the whole matter had been cleared up.
15. Behold, ye received it
   On your tongues,
   And said out of your mouths
   Things of which ye had
   No knowledge; and ye thought
   It to be a light matter,
   While it was most serious
   In the sight of Allah. 2968

16. And why did ye not,
    When ye heard it, say?—
    “It is not right of us
    To speak of this:
    Glory to Thee (our Lord) this is
    A most serious slander!” 2969

17. Allah doth admonish you,
    That ye may never repeat
    Such (conduct), if ye
    Are (true) Believers.

18. And Allah makes the Signs
    Plain to you: for Allah
    Is full of knowledge and wisdom.

19. Those who love (to see)
    Scandal circulate
    Among the Believers, will have
    A grievous Chastisement in this life

2968. There are three things here reprobated by way of moral teaching: (1) if others speak an evil word, that is no reason why you should allow it to defile your tongue; (2) if you get a thought or suspicion which is not based on your certain knowledge, do not give it currency by giving it expression; and (3) others may think it is a small matter to speak lightly of something which blasts a person’s character or reputation: in the eyes of Allah it is a most serious matter in any case, but specially when it involves the honour and reputation of pious women.

2969. The right course would have been to stop any further currency of false slanders by ignoring them and at least refusing to help in their circulation. The exclamation "Subhānaka", "Praise to Thee (O Allah)", or "Glory to Allah!" is an exclamation of surprise and disavowal as much as to say, “We do not believe it! And we shall have nothing to do with you, O false slanderers!”
And in the Hereafter: Allah Knows, and ye know not. 2970

20. Were it not for the grace And mercy of Allah on you, And that Allah is Full of kindness and mercy, (Ye would be ruined indeed). 2971

SECTION 3.

21. O ye who believe!
Follow not Satan's footsteps:
If any will follow the footsteps Of Satan, he will (but) command What is indecent and wrong:
And were it not for the grace And mercy of Allah on you, Not one of you would ever Have been pure: but Allah

2970. What mischiefs can be planned by Evil to delude simple folk who mean no harm in their own minds but who by thoughtlessness are deluded step by step to become the instruments of Evil, may not be known to the most instructed of men, but it is all known to Allah. Man should therefore always be on his guard against the traps of Evil, and it is only Allah's grace that can save him.

2971. Note the refrain that comes four times in this passage, "Were it not for the grace and mercy of Allah ...". Each time it has a different application. (1) In xxiv. 10, it was in connection with the accusation of infidelity by the man against his wife, they were both reminded of Allah's mercy and warned against suspicion and untruth. (2) In xxiv. 14, the Believers were told to be wary of false rumours lest they should cause pain and division among themselves: it is Allah's grace that keeps them united. (3) Here is an admonition for the future: there may be conspiracies and snares laid by evil against simple people; it is Allah's grace that protects them. (4) In xxiv. 21, the general warning is directed to the observance of purity in act and in thought, concerning one's self and concerning others: it is only Allah's grace that can keep that purity spotless, for He hears prayers and knows of all the snares that are spread in the path of the good.

2972. See last note.
Doth purify whom He pleases.\textsuperscript{2973} 
And Allah is One Who 
Hears and knows (all things).

22. Let not those among you 
Who are endued with grace 
And amplitude of means\textsuperscript{2974} 
Resolve by oath against helping 
Their kinsmen, those in want, 
And those who have left 
Their homes in Allah’s cause: 
Let them forgive and overlook, 
Do you not wish 
That Allah should forgive you? 
For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, 
Most Merciful.

23. Those who slander chaste, 
Indiscreet and believing women\textsuperscript{2975} 
Are cursed in this life 
And in the Hereafter: 
For them is a grievous Chastisement-

\textsuperscript{2973} Spotless purity in thought, word, and deed, includes the disposition to put the best construction on the motives of others, so that we ascribe no evil motive to the seeming indiscretions of virtuous people. Such a high standard can only come by the grace of Allah, Who hears all prayers and knows all the temptations to which human nature is subject. His Will and Plan make both for spiritual protection and spiritual peace, and we must place ourselves trustingly in His hands.

\textsuperscript{2974} The immediate reference was to Ḥadhrat Abū Bakr, the father of Ḥadhrat ‘Āisha. He was blessed both with spiritual grace from Allah and with ample means, which he always used in the service of Islam and of Muslims. One of the slanderers of Ḥadhrat ‘Āisha turned out to be Mistah, a cousin of Ḥadhrat Abū Bakr, whom he had been in the habit of supporting. Naturally Ḥadhrat Abū Bakr wished to stop that aid, but according to the highest standards of Muslim ethics he was asked to forgive and forget, which he did, with the happiest results to the peace and unity of the Muslim community. But the general application holds good for all time. A generous patron should not, in personal anger, withdraw his support even for serious faults if the delinquent repents and mends his ways. If Allah forgives us, who are we to refuse forgiveness to our fellows?

\textsuperscript{2975} Good women are sometimes indiscreet because they think of no evil. But even such innocent indiscretion lands them, and those who hold them dear, in difficulties. Such was the case with Ḥadhrat ‘Āisha, who was in extreme pain and anguish for a whole month because of the slanders spread about her. Her husband and her father were also =
S.24, A.24-26

24. On the Day when their tongues, Their hands, and their feet Will bear witness against them\(^{2976}\) As to their actions.

25. On that Day Allah Will pay them back (All) their just dues, And they will realise That Allah is The (very) Truth, That makes all things manifest.\(^{2977}\)

26. Women impure are for men impure, And men impure for women impure, And women of purity Are for men of purity, And men of purity Are for women of purity: These are innocent of All what people say:\(^{2978}\) For them there is forgiveness, And a provision honourable.\(^{2979}\)

= placed in a most awkward predicament, considering their position and the great work in which they were engaged. But unprincipled people, who start false slanders, and their unthinking tools who help in spreading such slanders, are guilty of the gravest spiritual offence, and their worst punishment is the deprivation of Allah’s grace, which is the meaning of a state of Curse.

\(^{2976}\). Our own limbs and faculties are the strongest witnesses against us if we misuse them for evil deeds instead of using them for the good deeds for which they were given to us.

\(^{2977}\). All that we thought of hiding will be clear as day before Allah’s Judgment Seat, because He is the very essence of Truth and Reality. He is the true Light (xxiv. 35), of which all physical light is merely a type or reflection.

\(^{2978}\). The pure consort with the pure, and the impure with the impure. If the impure, out of the impurity of their thoughts, or imaginations, impute any evil to the pure, the pure are not affected by it, but they should avoid all occasions for random talk.

\(^{2979}\). Forgiveness for any indiscretion which they may have innocently committed, and spiritual provision or protection against the assaults of Evil. It is also meant that the more the satans attempt to defame or slander them, the more triumphantly will they be vindicated and provided with the physical and moral good which will advance their real life.
SECTION 4.

27. O ye who believe!
Enter not houses other than
Your own, until ye have
Asked permission and saluted
Those in them: that is
Best for you, in order that
Ye may heed (what is seemly). 2980

28. If ye find no one
In the house, enter not
Until permission is given
To you: if ye are asked
To go back, go back:
That makes for greater purity
For yourselves: and Allah
Knows well all that ye do.

29. It is no fault on your part
To enter houses not used
For living in, which serve
Some (other) use for you. 2982

2980. The conventions of propriety and privacy are essential to a refined life of
goodness and purity. The English saying that an Englishman’s home is his castle, suggests
a certain amount of exclusiveness and defiance. The Muslim principle of asking respectful
permission and exchanging salutations ensures privacy without exclusiveness, and
friendliness without undue familiarity.

2981. That is, if no one replies; there may be people in the house not in a
presentable state. Or, even if the house is empty, you have no right to enter it until you
obtain the owner’s permission, wherever he may be. The fact of your not receiving a reply
does not entitle you to enter without permission. You should wait, or knock twice or
three times, and withdraw in case no permission is received. If you are actually asked
to withdraw, as the inmates are not in a condition to receive you, you should a fortiori
withdraw, either for a time, or altogether, as the inmates may wish you to do. Even if
they are your friends, you have no right to take them by surprise or enter against their
wishes. Your own purity of life and conduct as well as of motives is thus tested.

2982. The rule about dwelling-houses is strict, because privacy is precious, and
essential to a refined, decent, and well-ordered life. Such a rule of course does not apply
to houses used for other useful purposes, such as an inn or caravanserai, or a shop, or =
And Allah has knowledge
Of what ye reveal
And what ye conceal.

30. Say to the believing men
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard\(^{2983}\)
Their modesty: that will make
For greater purity for them:
And Allah is well acquainted
With all that they do.

31. And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard\(^{2984}\)
Their modesty: that they
Should not display their
Beauty and ornaments\(^{2985}\) except
What (ordinarily) appear
Thereof; that they should
Draw their veils over
Their bosoms and not display

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= a warehouse. But even here, of course, implied permission from the owner is necessary as a matter of common-sense. The question in this passage is that of refined privacy, not that of rights of ownership.

2983. The rule of modesty applies to men as well as women. A brazen stare by a man at a woman (or even at a man) is a breach of refined manners. Where sex is concerned, modesty is not only “good form”: it is not only to guard the weaker sex, but also to guard the spiritual good of the stronger sex.

2984. The need for modesty is the same in both men and women. But on account of the differentiation of the sexes in nature, temperaments, and social life, a greater amount of privacy is required for women than for men, especially in the matter of dress and the uncovering of the bosom.

2985. Zinat means both natural beauty and artificial ornaments. I think both are implied here, but chiefly the former. The woman is asked not to make a display of her figure except to the following classes of people: (1) her husband, (2) her near relatives whom a certain amount of negligé is permissible; (3) her women, (4) slaves, male and female, as they would be in constant attendance; but this item would now be blank, with the abolition of slavery; (5) men who are free from sexual desire and who usually frequent the houses; and (6) infants or small children before they get a sense of sex. Cf. also xxxiii. 59.
Their beauty except To their husbands, their fathers, Their husbands' fathers, their sons, Their husbands' sons, Their brothers or their brothers' sons, Or their sisters' sons, Or their women, or the slaves Whom their right hands Possess, or male attendants Free of sexual desires. Or small children who Have no carnal knowledge of women;

And that they Should not strike their feet In order to draw attention To their hidden ornaments. 2986
And 0 ye Believers! Turn ye all together Towards Allah in repentance that ye May be successful. 2987

32. Marry those among you Who are single, 2988 and The virtuous ones among Your slaves, male or female: If they are in poverty,

2986. It is one of the tricks of showy or unchaste women to tinkle their ankle ornaments, to draw attention to themselves.

2987. While all these details of the purity and good form of domestic life are being brought to our attention, we are clearly reminded that the chief object we should hold in view is our spiritual welfare. All our brief life on this earth is a probation, and we must make our individual, domestic, and social life all contribute to our holiness, so that we can get the real success and bliss which is the aim of our spiritual endeavour.

2988. The subject of sex ethics and manners brings us to the subject of marriage. “Single” (ayāmā, plural of Aiyim) here means any one not in the bond of wedlock, whether unmarried or lawfully divorced, or widowed.
Allah will give them
Means out of His grace:
For Allah is Ample-giving,\(^{2989}\)
And He knoweth all things.

33. Let those who find not
The wherewithal for marriage
Keep themselves chaste, until
Allah gives them means\(^{2990}\)
Out of His grace.
And if any of your slaves
Ask for a deed in writing
(For emancipation)
Give them such a deed\(^{2991}\)
If ye know any good
In them; yea, give them
Something yourselves
Out of the means which
Allah has given to you.
But force not your maids\(^{2992}\)

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2989. Cf. v. 57. Allah's mercy is for all: it is not confined to a class or grade of people.

2990. A Muslim marriage requires some sort of a dower for the wife. If the man cannot afford that, he must wait and keep himself chaste. It is no excuse for him to say that he must satisfy his natural cravings within or outside marriage. It must be within marriage.

2991. The law of slavery in the legal sense of the term is now obsolete. While it had any meaning, Islam made the slave's lot as easy as possible. A slave, male or female, could ask for conditional manumission by a written deed fixing the amount required for manumission and allowing the slave meanwhile to earn money by lawful means. Such a deed was not to be refused if the request was genuine and the slave had character. Not only that, but the master is directed to help with money out of his own resources in order to enable the slave to earn his or her own liberty.

2992. Where slavery was legal, what is now called the “white slave traffic” was carried on by wicked people like ‘Abdullāh ibn Ubai, the Hypocrite leader at Madinah. This is absolutely condemned. While modern nations have abolished ordinary slavery, the “White Slave Traffic” is still a big social problem in individual States. Here it is absolutely condemned. No more despicable trade can be imagined.
To prostitution when they desire Chastity, in order that ye May make a gain In the goods of this life. But if anyone compels them, Yet, after such compulsion, Is Allah Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (to them).

34. We have already sent down To you verses making things Clear, an illustration from (the story Of) people who passed away Before you, and an admonition For those who fear (Allah).

SECTION 5.

35. Allah is the Light Of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light Is as if there were a Niche And within it a Lamp:

2993. I have translated “in” (literally, “if”) by “when” because this is not a conditional clause but an explanatory clause, explaining the meaning of “force”. “Forcing” a person necessarily means that it is against the wish or inclination of the person forced. Even if they were to give a formal consent, it is not valid.

2994. The poor unfortunate girls, who are victims of such a nefarious trade, will yet find mercy from Allah, whose bounties extend to all His creatures.

2995. This prepares the way for the magnificent Verse of Light that follows, and its sublime meaning.

2996. Embedded within certain directions concerning a refined domestic and social life, comes this glorious parable of light, which contains layer upon layer of transcendent truth about spiritual mysteries. No notes can do adequate justice to its full meaning. Volumes have been written on this subject. In these notes I propose to explain the simplest meaning of this passage.

2997. The physical light is but a reflection of the true Light in the world of Reality, and that true Light is Allah. We can only think of Allah in terms of our phenomenal experience, and in the phenomenal world, light is the purest thing we know, but physical =
The Lamp enclosed in Glass: 2998
The glass as it were
A brilliant star: 2999
Lit from a blessed Tree, 3000
An Olive, neither of the East
Nor of the West, 3001

Light has drawbacks incidental to its physical nature: e.g. (1) it is dependent upon some source external to itself; (2) it is a passing phenomenon; if we take it to be a form of motion or energy it is unstable, like all physical phenomena; (3) it is dependent on space and time; its speed is 186,000 miles per second, and there are stars whose light takes thousands of years before it reaches the earth. The perfect Light of Allah is free from any such defects.

2998. The first three points in the Parable centre round the symbols of the Niche, the Lamp, and the Glass. (1) The Niche (Mishkār) is the little shallow recess in the wall of an Eastern house, fairly high from the ground, in which a light (before the days of electricity) was usually placed. Its height enabled it to diffuse the light in the room and minimised the shadows. The background of the wall and the sides of the niche helped to throw the light well into the room, and if the wall was white-washed, it also acted as a reflector: the opening in front made the way for the light. So with the spiritual Light; it is placed high, above worldly things; it has a niche or habitation of its own, in Revelation and other Signs of Allah; its access to men is by a special Way, open to all, yet closed to those who refuse its rays. (2) The Lamp is the core of the spiritual Truth, which is the real illumination; the Niche is nothing without it; the Niche is actually made for it. (3) The Glass is the transparent medium through which the Light passes. On the one hand, it protects the light from moths and other forms of low life and from gusts of wind, and on the other, it transmits the light through a medium which is made up of and akin to the grosser substances of the earth (such as sand, soda, potash, etc.), so arranged as to admit the subtle to the gross by its transparency. So the spiritual Truth has to be filtered through human language or human intelligence to make it intelligible to mankind.

2999. The glass by itself does not shine. But when the light comes into it, it shines like a brilliant star. So men of God, who preach Allah’s Truth, are themselves illuminated by Allah’s Light and become the illuminating media through which that Light spreads and permeates human life.

3000. The olive tree is not a very impressive tree in its outward appearance. Its leaves have a dull greenish-brown colour, and in size it is inconspicuous. But its oil is used in sacred ceremonies and forms a wholesome ingredient of food. The fruit has a specially fine flavour. Cf. n. 2880 to xxiii. 20. For the illuminating quality of its oil, see n. 3002 below.

3001. This Olive is not localised. It is neither of the East nor of the West. It is universal, for such is Allah’s Light. As applied to the olive, there is also a more literal meaning, which can be allegorised in a different way. An olive tree with an eastern aspect =
Whose Oil is well-nigh Luminous,
Though fire scarce touched it:\(^{3002}\)
Light upon Light!
Allah doth guide Whom He will
To His Light:\(^{3303}\)
Allah doth set forth Parables For men: and Allah
Doth know all things.

36. (Lit is such a Light)\(^{3004}\)
In houses, which Allah
Hath permitted to be raised\(^{3005}\)
To honour; for the celebration,
In them, of His name:

= gets only the rays of the morning sun; one with a western aspect, only the rays of the western sun. In the northern hemisphere the south aspect will give the sun’s rays a great part of the day, while a north aspect will shut them out altogether, and vice versa in the southern hemisphere. But a tree in the open plain or on a hill will get perpetual sunshine by day; it will be more mature, and the fruit and oil will be of superior quality. So Allah’s light is not localised or immature: it is perfect and universal.

3002. Pure olive oil is beautiful in colour, consistency, and illuminating power. The world has tried all kinds of illuminants, and for economic reasons or convenience, one replaces another. But for coolness, comfort to the eyes, and steadiness, vegetable oils are superior to electricity, mineral oils, and animal oils. And among vegetable oils, olive oil takes a high place and deserves its sacred associations. Its purity is almost like light itself: you may suppose it to be almost light before it is lit. So with spiritual Truth: it illuminates the mind and understanding imperceptibly, almost before the human mind and heart have been consciously touched by it.

3003. Glorious, illimitable Light, which cannot be described or measured. And there are grades and grades of it, passing transcendentally into regions of spiritual height, which man’s imagination can scarcely conceive of. The topmost pinnacle is the true prototypal Light, the real Light, of which all others were reflections, the Light of Allah.

3004. The punctuation of the Arabic text makes it necessary to carry back the adverbial clause “in houses”, to something in the last verse, say “Lit from a blessed Tree”,–the intervening clauses being treated as parenthetical.

3005. That is, in all places of pure worship; but some Commentators understand special Mosques, such as the Ka’ba in Makkah or Mosques in Madinah or Jerusalem; for these are specially held in honour.
In them is He glorified
In the mornings and
In the evenings, (again and
again),—\(^{3006}\)

37. By men whom neither
Trade nor sale
Can divert from the
Remembrance\(^ {3007}\)
Of Allah, nor from regular Prayer,
Nor from paying zakat
Their (only) fear is
For the Day when
Hearts and eyes
Will be turned about,—\(^ {3008}\)

38. That Allah may reward them
According to the best\(^ {3009}\)
Of their deeds, and add
Even more for them
Out of His Grace:
For Allah doth provide
For those whom He will,
Without measure.

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\(^{3006}\). *In the evenings*: the Arabic word is Āsāl, a plural of a plural, to imply emphasis: I have rendered that shade of meaning by adding the words “again and again”.

\(^{3007}\). “Remembrance of Allah” is wider than Prayer: it includes silent contemplation, and active service of Allah and His creatures. The regular Prayers and regular Charity are the social acts performed through the organised community.

\(^{3008}\). Some renderings suggest the effects of terror on the Day of Judgment. But here we are considering the case of the righteous, whose “fear” of Allah is akin to love and reverence and who (as the next verse shows) hope for the best reward from Allah. But the world they will meet will be a wholly changed world.

\(^{3009}\). The best of the righteous do not deserve the reward that they get: all their faults are forgiven, and only their best actions are considered in the reward that they get. Nay, more! Out of the unbounded Grace of Allah even more is added to them. For in giving rewards, Allah’s bounty is boundless.
39. But the Unbelievers,—
Their deeds are like a mirage\textsuperscript{3010}
In sandy deserts, which
The man parched with thirst
Mistakes for water; until
When he comes up to it,
He finds it to be nothing;\textsuperscript{3011}
But he finds Allah\textsuperscript{3012}
There, and Allah
Will pay him his account:
And Allah is swift
In taking account.

40. Or (the Unbelievers’ state)
Is like the depths of darkness
In a vast deep ocean,
Overwhelmed with billow
Topped by billow,
Topped by (dark) clouds;\textsuperscript{3013}
Depths of darkness, one\textsuperscript{3014}

\textsuperscript{3010}. We have had various metaphors to give us an idea of the beneficent Light of Allah. Now we have contrasted metaphors to enable us to see those who deny or refuse that Light, and are overwhelmed in utter darkness. The Light (of Allah) is an absolute Reality, and is mentioned first, and the souls that follow that Light are a reflected reality and are mentioned after the Light. On the other hand the Darkness is not a reality in itself, but a negation of reality; the reflected existences that refuse the Light are mentioned, and then their state, which is Unreality. Two metaphors are given: a mirage, in this verse, and the depths of darkness in the sea, in the next.

\textsuperscript{3011}. The mirage, of which I have seen several instances in the Arabian deserts and in Egypt, is a strange phenomenon of illusion. It is a trick of our vision. In the language of our Parable, it rejects the Light which shows us the Truth, and deceives us with Falsehood. A lonely traveller in a desert, nearly dying of thirst, sees a broad sheet of water. He goes in that direction, lured on and on, but finds nothing at all. He dies in protracted agony.

\textsuperscript{3012}. The rebel against Allah finds himself like the man deluded by a mirage. The Truth which he rejected is always with him. The mirage which he accepted leads to his destruction.

\textsuperscript{3013}. What a graphic picture of darkness in the depths of the Ocean, wave upon wave, and on top of all, dense dark clouds! There is so little light even in ordinary depths of the Ocean that fishes which live there lose their eyes as useless organs.

\textsuperscript{3014}. A contrast to “Light upon Light” in xxiv. 35 above.
Above another: if a man
Stretches out his hand,
He can hardly see it!
For any to whom Allah
Giveth not light,
There is no light!\footnote{3015}

SECTION 6.

41. Seest thou not that it is
Allah Whose praises all beings
In the heavens and on earth\footnote{3016}
Do celebrate, and the birds
(of the air) with wings\footnote{3017}
Outspread? Each one knows
Its own (mode of) prayer
And praise. And Allah
Knows well all that they do.

42. Yea, to Allah belongs
The dominion of the heavens
And the earth; and to Allah
Is the return.\footnote{3018}

43. Seest thou not that Allah
Makes the clouds move
Gently, then joins them
Together, then makes them

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\footnote{3015}{The true source of Light in the world of Reality is Allah, and anyone who cuts himself off from that Light is in utter darkness indeed, for it is the negation of the only true Light, and not merely relative darkness, like that which we see, say, in the shadows of moonlight.}

\footnote{3016}{Cf. xxi. 19-20.}

\footnote{3017}{All denizens of the heavens, such as angels, all denizens of the earth (including the waters) such as man, animals, insects, fishes, etc., and all denizens of the air, such as birds, celebrate the praises of Allah. Each has his own mode of prayer and praise. It is not necessarily with words, for language (as we know it) is peculiar to man. But actions and other modes of self-expression recognise and declare the Glory of Allah.}

\footnote{3018}{To Him we belong; and to Him we shall return. Not only we, but all Creation, proclaims this in the whole world.}
Into a heap?—then wilt thou
See rain issue forth
From their midst. And He
Sends down from the sky
Mountain masses (of clouds)
Wherein is hail: He strikes
Therewith whom He pleases
And He turns it away
From whom He pleases.
The vivid flash of its lightning
Well-nigh blinds the sight.

44. It is Allah Who alternates
The Night and the Day:
Verily in these things
Is an instructive example
For those who have vision!

45. And Allah has created
Every animal from water:
Of them there are some
That creep on their bellies;
Some that walk on two legs:

3019. Artists, or lovers of nature, or observers of clouds will appreciate this
description of cloud effects—thin clouds floating about in fantastic shapes, joining
together and taking body and substance, then emerging as heavy clouds heaped up, which condense
and pour forth their rain. Then the heavy dark clouds in the upper regions, that bring
hail,—how distinct and yet how similar! They are truly like mountain masses! And when
the hailstones fall, how local their area! It hits some localities and leaves free others
almost interlaced! And the lightning—how blinding flashes come from thunderous clouds!
In this Book of Nature can we not see the hand of the powerful and beneficent Allah?

3020. His power, wisdom, and goodness are shown no less in the regular phenomena
of nature like the succession of Day and Night, than in the seasonal or seemingly irregular
movements of clouds and rain and hail and lightning. Those who have the spiritual vision
can read this Book of Allah with delight and instruction.

3021. Cf. xxi. 30, n. 2691. Protoplasm is the basis of all living matter, and “the vital
power of protoplasm seems to depend on the constant presence of water”.

- 1021 -
And some that walk on four.\textsuperscript{3022}

Allah creates what He wills;\textsuperscript{3023}

For verily Allah has power
Over all things.

46. We have indeed sent down
Signs that make things manifest:
And Allah guides whom He wills
To a Way that is straight.

47. They\textsuperscript{3024} say, “We believe
In Allah and in the Messenger,
And we obey”: but
Even after that, some of them
Turn away: they are not
(Really) Believers.

48. When they are summoned
To Allah and His Messenger,
In order that he may judge
Between them, behold, some
Of them decline (to come).

49. But if the right is\textsuperscript{3025}
On their side, they come
To him with all submission.

\textsuperscript{3022} The creeping things include worms and lowly forms of animal life as well as reptiles (like snakes), centipedes, spiders, and insects. Where these have legs they are small, and the description of creeping or crawling is more applicable to them than that of walking. Fishes and sea-animals generally cannot be said to walk: their swimming is like “creeping on their bellies”. Two-legged animals include birds and man. Most of the mammals walk on four legs. This includes the whole of the animal world.

\textsuperscript{3023} In Allah’s Will and Plan, the variety of forms and habits among animals is adapted to their various modes of life and stages of biological development.

\textsuperscript{3024} The Hypocrites, far from profiting from Allah’s Light and Revelation, or declaring their open hostility, play fast and loose according to their selfish worldly aims.

\textsuperscript{3025} The Hypocrites only wanted to go to the judge who they thought was likely to give judgment in their favour. If their case was incontestable, and justice was on their side, they readily came to the Prophet, knowing that he was just and would judge in their favour, even against his own adherents. But if they had done wrong, an impartial judge was not to their taste. They would rather go to some one who would tip the balance in their favour! This form of selfishness and iniquity was not confined to the Hypocrites of Madinah. It is common in all ages, and should be suppressed.
50. Is it that there is
A disease in their hearts?
Or do they doubt,
Or are they in fear,
That Allah and His Messenger
Will deal unjustly with them?
Nay, it is they themselves
Who do wrong. 3026

SECTION 7.

51. The answer of the Believers,
When summoned to Allah
And His Messenger, in order
That he may judge between them,
Is no other than this:
They say, "We hear and we
obey". 3027

It is such as these
That will prosper. 3028

52. It is such as obey
Allah and His Messenger,
And fear Allah and do
Right, that will triumph.

53. They swear their strongest oaths
By Allah that, if only thou
Wouldst command them, they

---

3026. The real fact is that their conscience smites them. They know their own
iniquity, and do not wish to go before a just judge who would be open to no influence
and would be sure to give a righteous decree.

3027. Cf. ii. 285. Contrast with it the attitude of the Unbelievers or Hypocrites, who
say aloud, "we hear", but intend in their hearts to disobey (ii. 93).

3028. True happiness, whether here or in the Hereafter, is not to be attained by
fraud or duplicity: it is the privilege of those who listen attentively to good counsel and
carry it out in their lives.
Would leave (their homes).  
Say: "Swear ye not;  
Obedience is (more) reasonable;  
Verily, Allah is well acquainted  
With all that ye do."

54. Say: "Obey Allah, and obey  
The Messenger: but if ye turn  
Away, he is only responsible  
For the duty placed on him  
And ye for that placed  
On you. If ye obey him,  
Ye shall be on right guidance.  
The Messenger's duty is only  
To preach the clear (Message)".  

55. Allah has promised, to those  
Among you who believe  
And work righteous deeds, that  
Will, of a surety, grant them  
In the land, inheritance  
(Of power), as He granted it  

---  

3029. Some people, especially hypocrites, give hyperbolic assurances, as did the Madinah Hypocrites to the holy Prophet, that they would do any bidding, even to the forsaking of their hearths and homes. To this they are ready to swear their strongest oaths, which mean nothing. They are asked to spare their oaths, and quietly do at least such unheroic duties as they are asked to do in every-day life. Idle words are not of the least value. Allah will judge by your actions, and He knows all, whether it is open or secret.  

3030. 'If you disobey Allah's commands as explained by His Prophet, you are not going to be forced. The Prophet's mission is to train your will and explain clearly all the implications of your conduct. The responsibility for your conduct rests entirely on yourselves.  

3031. Three things are promised here, to those who have Faith and obey Allah's Law: (1) that they will inherit power and authority in the land, not for any selfish purposes of theirs nor by way of favouritism, but in order that they may maintain Allah's Law; (2) that the Religion of Right, which Allah has chosen for them, will be openly established, and will suppress all wrong and oppression; (3) that the righteous will live in peace and security, instead of having to suffer persecution, or leave their hearths and homes for the cause of Allah, or practise the rites of their Faith in secret.
To those before them; that
He will establish in authority
Their religion—the one
Which He has chosen for them;
And that He will change
(Their state), after the fear\(^{3032}\)
In which they (lived), to one
Of security and peace:
‘They will worship Me (alone)
And not associate aught with Me.’
If any do reject Faith
After this, they are
Rebellious and wicked.

56. So establish regular Prayer
And give zakat
And obey the Messenger;
That ye may receive mercy.

57. Never think thou
That the Unbelievers
Can escape
In the earth
Their abode is the Fire,—
And it is indeed
An evil refuge!

\(^{3032}\). If this verse was revealed about the time of the Battle of the Ditch (\textit{Khandaq}),
also called the Battle of the Confederates (\textit{Ahzâb}), A.H. 4-5, we can imagine the comfort it gave to the Muslims who were besieged in Madinah by a force ten times their number. The Muslims then lived in a state of great suspense and danger, and under arms for days on end. (See xxxiii. 9-20). The security and authority they were promised came to them subsequently in abundant measures.
SECTION 8.

58. O ye who believe! Let those whom your right hands Possess, and the (children) among you Who have not come of age Ask your permission (before They come to your presence), On three occasions: before Morning prayer; the while Ye doff your clothes For the noonday heat; And after the late-night prayer: These are your three times Of undress: outside those times It is not wrong for you Or for them to move about Attending to each other: Thus does Allah make clear The Signs to you: for Allah Is full of knowledge and wisdom.

3033. We now come to rules of decorum within the family circle in refined society. Servants and children have rather more freedom of access, as they come and go at all hours, and there is less ceremony with them. But even in their case there are limitations. During the night, before morning prayer, i.e., before dawn, they must discreetly ask for permission before they enter, partly because they must not unnecessarily disturb people asleep, and partly because the people are then undressed. The same applies to the time for the midday siesta, and again to the time after night prayers, when people usually undress and turn in to sleep. For grown-ups the rule is stricter: they must ask permission to come in at all times (xxiv. 59).

3034. This would mean slaves in a regime of slavery.

3035. I have translated “come of age” euphemistically for “attain the age of puberty”.

3036. It is a mark of refinement for ladies and gentlemen not to be slipshod or vulgarly familiar, in dress, manners, or speech; and Islam aims at making every Muslim man or woman, however humble in station, a refined gentleman or lady, so that he or she can climb the ladder of spiritual development with humble confidence in Allah, and with the co-operation of his brothers and sisters in Islam. The principles here laid down =
59. But when the children among youCome of age, let them (also)Ask for permission, as do thoseBefore them:Thus does Allah make clearHis Signs to you: for AllahIs full of knowledge and wisdom.

60. Such elderly women as arePast the prospect of marriage,-There is no blame on themIf they lay asideTheir (outer) garments, providedThey make not a wanton displayOf their beauty: butIt is best for themTo be modest: and AllahIs One Who sees and knows

= apply, if they are interpreted with due elasticity, even if social and domestic habits change, with changes in climate or in racial and personal habits. Punctilious self-respect and respect for others, in small things as well as great, are the key-notes in these simple rules of etiquette.

3037. Children among you: i.e., in your house, not necessarily your own children. All in the house, including the stranger within your gate, must conform to these wholesome rules.

3038. Those before them, i.e., those who have already been mentioned in the previous verse. It is suggested that each generation as it grows up should follow the wholesome traditions of its predecessors. While they were children, they behaved like children: when they grow up, they must behave like grown-ups.

3039. The refrain connects up this verse with the last verse, whose meaning is completed here. The slight variation ("His Signs" here, against "the Signs" there) shows that this verse is more personal, as referring to children who have now become responsible men and women.

3040. For elderly women in the home the rules of dress and decorum are not so exacting as for younger women, but they are also enjoined to study modesty, both because it is good in itself, and as an example to the younger people.

3041. Another example of a refrain: see n. 3039 above. Verses 58 and 59 were closer connected: their refrain was practically identical. This verse, though ancillary, is less closely connected: its refrain comes in like a half-note in a melody.
61. It is no fault in the blind
Nor in one born lame, nor
In one afflicted with illness, 3042
Nor in yourselves, that ye
Should eat in your own houses,
Or those of your fathers,
Or your mothers, or your brothers,
Or your sisters, or your father's
brothers
Or your father's sisters,
Or your mother's brothers,
Or your mother's sisters,
Or in houses of which
The keys are in your possession,
Or in the house of a sincere
Friend of yours: there is
No blame on you, whether
Ye eat in company or
Separately. But if ye
Enter houses, salute each other—
A greeting of blessing
And purity as from Allah. 3043

3042. There were various Arab superstitions and fancies which are combated and rejected here. (1) The blind, or the halt, or those afflicted with serious disease were supposed to be objects of divine displeasure, and as such not fit to be associated with us in meals in our houses: we are not to entertain such a thought, as we are not judges of the causes of people's misfortunes, which deserve our sympathy and kindness. (2) It was considered unbecoming to take meals in the houses of near relatives: this taboo is not approved. (3) A similar superstition about houses in our possession but not in our actual occupation is disapproved. (4) If people think they should not fall under obligation to casual friends, that does not apply to a sincere friend, in whose company a meal is not to be rejected, but welcomed. (5) If people make a superstition either that they should always eat separately, or that they must always eat in company, as some people weary of their own company think, either of them is wrong. Man is free and should regulate his life according to needs and circumstances.

3043. The shades of meaning in Salām are explained in n. 2512 to xix. 62. Here, we were first told that we might accept hospitality and good fellowship in each other's houses. Now we are told what spirit should animate us in doing so. It should not be a spirit only of self-satisfaction in a worldly sense. It should rather be a spirit of good-will in the highest spiritual sense of the term—purity of motives and purity of life, as in the sight of Allah.
Thus does Allah make clear The Signs to you: that ye May understand. 3044

SECTION 9.

62. Only those are Believers, Who believe in Allah and His Messenger: when they are With him on a matter Requiring collective action, 3045 They do not depart until They have asked for his leave; Those who ask for the leave Are those who believe in Allah And His Messenger; so when They ask for thy leave, For some business of their, Give leave to those of them Whom thou wilt, 3046 and ask Allah for their forgiveness; 3047 For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

3044. See notes 3039 and 3041 above. The refrain comes again, in a different form, closing the argument from a different point of view.

3045. Matter requiring collective action: anything that affects the Community as a whole: Jumu’a and ‘Id prayers are periodical occasions of this kind, but what is meant here is, I think, joint consultations with a view to joint undertakings, such as a Jihād, or some kind of organisation in peace.

3046. That is, those to whom, in the exercise of your impartial discretion, you think it expedient to give leave. “Will”, unless the context shows otherwise, means “right will”, not a will without any definite principle behind it.

3047. In important matters of general consultation, even though leave of absence is given on sufficient excuse, it implies some defect in duty on the part of the person to whom the leave is given, and therefore the need of forgiveness from Him to Whom we owe duty in a perfect measure.
63. Deem not the summons
Of the Messenger among yourselves
Like the summons of one:3048
Of you to another: Allah
Doth know those of you
Who slip away under shelter
Of some excuse: then
Let those beware who
Withstand the Messenger’s order,
Lest some trial befall them,3049
Or a grievous Chastisement
Be inflicted on them.

64. Be quite sure that
To Allah doth belong
Whatever is in the heavens
And on earth. Well doth He
Know what ye are intent upon:3050
And the day they will be
Brought back to Him, He
Will tell them the truth
Of what they did:3051
For Allah doth know
All things.

3048. Three significations are possible. One is that adopted in the Translation, which agrees with the view of most Commentators. Another would be: ‘Do not think that the prayer of the Prophet of Allah is like your ordinary requests to another: the Prophet’s prayer will be about serious matters and will be accepted by Allah’. A third interpretation would be: ‘Do not address the Prophet familiarly as you would address one another: use proper terms of respect for him.’

3049. The “trial” is understood to be some misfortune in this life, and the “grievous Penalty” to be the punishment in the Hereafter.

3050. The condition or position you are in, the motives which actuate you, and the ends you have in view.

3051. Things misunderstood or maligned, falsely praised or held in honour, or fraudulently shown to be good when they are evil—everything will be revealed in its true light on the Day of final Judgment.