

(221) *“Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters) until they believe.”* In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) prohibits the believers from marrying idolatresses, whether they be from the idol worshippers or from the people of the Book. *“A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman even though she allure you.”* i.e. No matter how much an unbelieving women may please you, you should prefer a slave women who does not worship idols. *“Nor marry (your daughters) to unbelievers until they believe. A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever even though he allure you.”* Similarly Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims not to marry their daughters to unbelieving men and that a Muslim slave is better than an idolator, even if he is a wealthy person and pleases you greatly. *“Unbelievers do (but) call you to the fire.”* The reason why the Muslims have been prohibited from marrying idolators is that they invite you to the fire of hell i.e. their love might make you love this life more than the Hereafter. *“But Allah (SWT) beckons by His grace to the Paradise and forgiveness.”* i.e. If you follow Allah’s (SWT) commandments and do not commit what He has prohibited then He will forgive your sins and will admit you to the Paradise by His grace. Further Allah (SWT) said: *“and makes His Signs clear to mankind, that they may celebrate His praise.”* i.e. He makes plain His revelations to mankind, so that they may be mindful.

(222) *“They ask you concerning women's courses. Say: it is discomfort, so keep away from women in their courses and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves you may approach them in the manner Allah (SWT) has ordained for you.”* Menstruation is a purifying process for a women and Muslims have been commanded not to go near their wives until they get purified. Once they are clean and purified Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims to approach their wives in only the manner ordained by Him i.e.

avoiding impurity and filth in sexual relations. And Allah (SWT) says: *“For Allah (SWT) loves those who turn to Him constantly and cleanse and purify themselves.”* i.e. who repent for their sins and avoid sexual immorality.

(223) *“Your wives are as a tillage unto you, so approach your tillage when or how you will.”* This *ayah* explains the previous *ayah* where Allah (SWT) says that approach your wives only in the manner ordained by Him and keep in mind that women are a field for her husband, who sows the seed in order to reap the harvest. Therefore, he should not cultivate it in a wasteful or unnatural way. *“But do some good act for your souls beforehand and fear Allah”* Doing good works for your souls means acting with the Hereafter in mind and our highest spiritual goal should be the hope to meet Allah (SWT) on the Day of Resurrection. We should be aware of the fact that in addition to this temporary life, there is also an eternal side to it that we should be striving for. *“And bear in mind that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter) and give (these) good tidings to those who believe.”*

(224) *“Do not use Allah's name in your oaths as an excuse to prevent you from dealing justly, guarding against evil and making peace between people.”* Allah (SWT) prohibits the believers not to make an oath in His name as an excuse for not doing the right thing or refraining from guarding against evil or making peace between two parties. And keep in mind that *“Allah hears and knows everything.”*

(225) *“Allah (SWT) will not call you to account for thoughtlessness in your oaths but for the intention in your hearts.”* i.e. Allah (SWT) will not hold anyone accountable for unintentional oaths, but He will call them to account for the vows made deliberately. There is neither an expiation for such an oath nor is there any punishment for them. *“and He is Oft-Forgiving Most Forbearing.”* i.e. He forgives the mistakes of His servants made unintentionally.

(226) *“For those who take an oath for abstention from their wives a waiting for four months is ordained.”* Such a separation between husband and wife is called ‘*Ila*’ where a husband vows not to sleep with his wife for a certain period. But *Qur’an* ignores such oaths concerning disassociation with wives and gives four months for reconsideration and reconciliation. *“If then they return Allah (SWT) is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”* i.e. if they return to their wives within the prescribed four months then Allah (SWT) will forgive them.

(227) *“But if their intention is firm for divorce (then know that), Allah hears and knows everything.”* i.e. Fear Allah (SWT) and do not divorce your wives for unjustifiable reasons, for He knows everything.

(228) *“Divorced women shall wait (keeping themselves from marriage) for three monthly periods.”* This *ayah* describes the *iddah* (waiting period) of a divorced woman. She is required to keep herself in waiting for three menstrual periods, before she can remarry if she wishes. *“nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah (SWT) has created in their wombs if they have faith in Allah (SWT) and the Last Day.”* i.e. if the woman finds out that she is pregnant then it is not lawful for her to hide that from her husband nor she should hide the knowledge of her menstruation cycles. And Allah (SWT) warns them not to conceal the truth in order to act according to their own desires. *“And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period if they wish for reconciliation.”* i.e. the door of reconciliation remains open. If the husband wants to take the wife back before the expiry of *iddah* (waiting period), he can do so. *“And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable.”* This *ayah* states that a women also has certain rights over her husband as he has rights over her. A woman should take care of her husband’s property in his absence, look after the house and the children and should also take care of her appearance which pleases her husband.

Similarly a husband has the responsibility to spend on her food and clothing and taking care of her in all other affairs. That is why Allah (SWT) says: *“but men have a degree (of advantage) over them.”* i.e. men are protectors and maintainers of women, therefore, they are given a degree of advantage over women physically and by means provided to them, as Allah (SWT) says: *“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah (SWT) has given the one more strength than the other and because they support them from their means...”*<sup>1</sup> *“and Allah (SWT) is Exalted in Power Wise.”* i.e. Allah (SWT) is Mighty and all His decisions and orders are based on wisdom which may be not evident to us.

(229) *“A divorce is only permissible twice.”* Before the advent of Islam one of the horrible practices of the Arab society was pronouncing the divorce as many times as a husband would wish. He would divorce his wife repeatedly and then take her back whenever he wished. This *ayah* put an end to this cruel practice and Allah (SWT) made the divorce thrice, where the husband is allowed to take her back after the first and the second divorce within the *iddah* (waiting period) but as soon as he divorces her for the third time his wife is separated from him permanently. *“after that the parties should either hold together on equitable terms or separate with kindness.”* i.e. If a husband decides to take his wife back after the first or the second divorce then he can do so within the *iddah*, but if the divorce becomes final then he should let her go in kindness. *“It is not lawful for you (men) to take back any of your gifts (from your wives) except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah (SWT).”* i.e. after a husband divorces his wife he is not allowed to take anything from the *Mahr* (dowry) or from the gifts he has given to his wife. *“If you fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah (SWT), there is no blame on either of them if she gives something for her freedom.”* This is known as *Khula* in Islamic law i.e. if a wife dislikes her husband and cannot live with him

then she is allowed to free herself from the marriage by giving up her *Mahr* totally or partially and the husband will have to accept that and divorce his wife. *“These are the limits ordained by Allah (SWT), so do not transgress them. If any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah (SWT) such persons wrong themselves.”* The limits set by Allah (SWT) are the rulings and commandments set by Him. This *ayah* is also used to prove that pronouncing three divorces in one go are not allowed in Islam, and the Prophet (SAW) very severely denounced this practice.<sup>2</sup>

(230) *“So if a husband divorces his wife (irrevocably) he cannot after that remarry her until after she has married another husband and he has divorced her. In that case there is no blame on either of them if they reunite provided they feel that they can keep the limits ordained by Allah (SWT).”* This *ayah* means that if a person divorces his wife for the third time then he cannot take her back and the decision will be irrevocable. Then if she marries another man who after having consummating the marriage divorces her in normal circumstances and not only for the reason so that she can marry her ex-husband,<sup>3</sup> then it is allowed for her to marry her first husband provided that they can live together honorably. *“Such are the limits ordained by Allah (SWT) which He makes plain to those who understand.”* i.e. it is incumbent on a believer to act according to the commandments given by Allah (SWT). These are the bounds by Allah (SWT) that must not be transgressed.

(231) *“When you divorce women and they fulfill the term of their Iddah, either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms, but do not take them back to injure them or to take undue advantage.”* This *ayah* states that it is not lawful for a person to reunite with his wife within the *iddah* simply to harass her or punish her. So if a person really intends to take her back then he should do it with kindness and in a way that is better for both of them. Otherwise he should let her go in a graceful manner. *“If anyone does that He*

*wrongs his own soul*" i.e. he will be responsible for the consequences if he defies Allah's (SWT) commandments. Further Allah (SWT) says: *"Do not treat Allah's (SWT) Signs as a jest but solemnly rehearse Allah's (SWT) favors on you and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom for your instruction"* i.e. Allah (SWT) has given you the Book and Wisdom for your guidance, therefore, it does not behove you to make a mockery of Allah's (SWT) revelations or to defy His prescribed laws. *"And fear Allah (SWT) and know that Allah (SWT) is well acquainted with all things."* i.e. Allah (SWT) warns you to be mindful of the of the fact that He is the knower of all things.

(232) *"When you divorce women and they fulfill the term of their Iddah, do not prevent them from marrying their husbands if they mutually agree on equitable terms."* This ayah warns the Wali (guardian) and the relatives of a women not to prevent her from remarrying her husband who had divorced her once or twice but could not reunite with her within the waiting period, provided they can live on honorable terms with each other. *"This instruction is for all amongst you who believe in Allah (SWT) and the Last Day."* i.e. only a believer follows Allah's (SWT) commandments because if he does not believe in Allah (SWT) and does not fear His judgment, he will not be inclined to heed admonishment. And Allah (SWT) says: *"This is more virtuous and chaste for you and Allah (SWT) knows whereas you do not know."* i.e. obeying Allah's (SWT) commandments is the most cleaner and purer way.

(233) *"The mothers shall breast-feed their offspring for two whole years if the father wishes the breast-feeding to be completed."* In this ayah Allah (SWT) commands all the mothers to suckle their child only for two years and not beyond that period. *"The reasonable cost of their maintenance and clothing will be the responsibility of the child's father."* i.e. it is the responsibility of the father to provide the mother and his child with reasonable clothing and food according to his means. *"No one should be charged with more than they can afford. Neither a mother*

*should be made to suffer on account of her child nor a father on account of his child. The father's heirs are under the same obligation."* i.e. each must fulfill his part in the fostering of the child and both of them should not be burdened with more than their capability. *"But if with mutual agreement they both decide to wean the child there is no blame on them. If you decide to have a foster-mother for your offspring there is no blame on you provided you pay what you have promised to pay in an honorable manner."* There should be a mutual consent in whether they decide to wean the child or the father assumes the custody of the child and brings in a foster-mother for his offspring. In any case the father should kindly give the mother her expenses for the care and suckling of the child. *"Fear Allah (SWT) and beware that Allah (SWT) observes your actions."* i.e. Follow His commandments and do not commit what he has prohibited and be mindful of the fact that He sees all what you do.

(234) *"As for those of you who die and leave widows behind, let them abstain from marriage for four months and ten days."* This is the prescribed *iddah* for a widow including the cases where the marriage was not consummated. But in case a widow is pregnant then her *iddah* goes upto the time of delivery of her child, whether it is just after the death of her husband or several months after that. *"When they have reached the end of this period, there is no blame on you for what they do for themselves in a decent manner. Allah (SWT) is aware of what you do."* i.e. when her waiting period ends then there is no offence for her if she adorns herself and accepts proposals for marriage in an honorable manner, and does whatever she chooses for herself, provided that it is lawful.

(235) *"There is no blame on you if you make an offer of betrothal or hold it in your hearts."* Allah (SWT) has allowed for a person to make an indirect proposal of marriage to a widow, within her waiting period or conceal it in his heart until her *iddah* ends. *"Allah (SWT) knows that you remember them in your*

*hearts, but do not make a secret contract with them except in terms honorable nor resolve on the tie of marriage till the term prescribed is fulfilled.”* i.e. do not make any promises or secret arrangements for marriage with her within the waiting period but it is allowed to make a decent insinuation like saying that ‘I desire you for marriage’ or informing her guardian of his intentions of marrying her. *“And know that Allah (SWT) knows what is in your hearts and take heed of Him.”* i.e. do not think anything bad about them. *“and know that Allah (SWT) is Oft Forgiving Most Forbearing.”* This means that Allah (SWT) will not let those who follow His commandments despair of His mercy.

(236) *“There is no blame on you if you divorce women before the marriage is consummated or the dowry is settled.”* Allah (SWT) has allowed for a husband to divorce his wife before consummating the marriage or the payment of the dowry. *“Pay them something anyhow, the rich man according to his means and poor according to his, a reasonable amount in all fairness.”* i.e. there should be some compensation for the women after the marital relation has been broken and the husband should give provision for the divorced woman, according to his means, whether he is rich or poor. And Allah (SWT) says: *“This is an obligation on the righteous people.”* i.e. on those people who are keen to earn Allah’s (SWT) pleasure by following His commandments.

(237) *“And if you divorce them before consummation but after the fixation of a dower for them then pay half of the dower unless they remit it.”* i.e. Allah (SWT) has ordained for a husband who divorces his wife before the marriage is consummated but after the fixation of the dowry, to give his wife half of the dowry unless she wants to waive it in favor of her former husband. *“Or it is remitted by him in whose hands is the marriage tie.”* i.e. if the husband wants to pay the dowry in full instead of giving half of it. *“and the remission (of the man's half) is the nearest to righteousness.”* It refers to the husband giving up his half of the dowry and paying the woman in full. *“And do not forget*



*liberality between yourselves.*" i.e. do not forget to show kindness to each other. *"For Allah (SWT) sees well all that you do."* Allah (SWT) is watching His servants and He will reward them according to their deeds.

(238) *"Guard your Salah."* Allah (SWT) has made it obligatory for all the Muslims to perform the five daily prayers<sup>4</sup> in its fixed times. This is an extremely important tenet of Islam and has been enjoined with great emphasis both in the Holy *Qur'an* and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). According to one of his sayings, it is the borderline between a Muslim and a non-believer. *"especially the middle Salah."* The word *'Wusta'* means both middle and excellent. Thus *Salat al-Wusta* means the middle prayer as well as an excellent prayer. According to the majority of scholars the middle prayer (*Salat al-Wusta*) referred in this *ayah* is the *Asr* prayer. *"and stand up with true devotion to Allah (SWT)."* i.e. in humility and humbleness with full concentration and presence of mind.

(239) *"If you are in danger, pray on foot or while riding."* This is known as *salat al-Khawf* (Fear prayer). If there is intense fear while traveling or when one is in a battle or combat then if the time of prayer comes, it is lawful for him to perform salah standing on foot or riding and praying only one rak'ah behind the Prophet (SAW) whether facing the *Qiblah* or otherwise.<sup>5</sup> *"and when you are safe, remember Allah in the manner that He has taught you which you did not know before."* i.e. say the prayer as Allah (SWT) has taught you through His Prophet (SAW).

(240) *"Those of you who die and leave widows should bequeath for them a year's maintenance without causing them to leave their homes, but if they leave the residence on their own there is no blame on you for what they chose for themselves in a fair way. Allah (SWT) is Mighty, Wise."*<sup>6</sup> In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) commands the husband to bequeath maintenance for his wife (other than what a widow inherits) for

a year after his death and she should be allowed to remain in his house for that period. Or if she wants she is allowed to leave the house after her waiting period (i.e. four months and ten days) is over.

(241) *“Reasonable provisions must also be made for divorced women. That is an obligation upon those who fear Allah (SWT).”*

(242) *“Thus does Allah (SWT) makes clear His Signs to you, in order that you may understand.”*

This is an extra grant to every divorced woman in addition to the dowry, whether the marriage was consummated or not.

From here we again return to the subject of Jihad. As mentioned earlier, this surah was revealed just before the Battle of *Badr* and the Muslims in *Madinah* who were expelled from *Makkah* were again and again asking the Prophet (SAW) to permit them to fight but when they were commanded to fight, some of them became reluctant and began to lose heart. So Allah (SWT) mentions the following incidents from the history of the Israelites to encourage them and to exhort them to do Jihad.

(243) *“Did you not see those who abandoned their homes though they were thousands (in number) for fear of death. Allah (SWT) said to them: “Die.” Then He restored them to life. For Allah (SWT) is full of bounty to mankind but most of them are ungrateful.”*

There is a difference of opinion amongst scholars as to whom this *ayah* refers. In *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, it is said that these were a group of people who lived in some city in the time of the *Children of Israel* who fled their homes out of fear of the plague thinking that their flight would save them from death but death caught them up under Allah’s (SWT) command and they all died in a brief time. Later on they were raised again to life when their Prophet Ezekiel (AS) supplicated for them.<sup>7</sup> Whereas, Syed Abul A’la Mawdudi in his exegesis of the *Qur’an* gives an allegorical explanation for

this *ayah*. He says, this *ayah* refers to the exodus of the *Children of Israel* when they left Egypt in large numbers. Then Allah (SWT) commanded Prophet Moses (AS) to order them to fight and get back their holy land but they showed cowardice and refused to fight. Therefore, Allah (SWT) as a punishment let them wander in the desert for forty years till one full generation of Israelites died and replaced by a new generation brought up in the tough conditions of the desert life. Then Allah (SWT) gave them victory over their enemies and they conquered Philistine. Their former condition is described as death in this *ayah* and their later development as the restoration of life.<sup>8</sup>

(244) *"Fight in the way of Allah"* In this *ayah* the believers are commanded to fight for the cause of Allah (SWT) and not to abandon Jihad. *"and know that Allah (SWT) hears and knows all things"*

(245) *"Who will grant Allah (SWT) a goodly loan which Allah (SWT) will increase many fold."* Goodly Loan signifies whatever one gives selflessly and it is given only for the pleasure of Allah (SWT). This *ayah* encourages Muslims to spend in the cause of Allah (SWT), whether it is for the propagation of Allah's (SWT) *Deen*, Islamic education or for Jihad. And Allah (SWT) says that for those who will give goodly loan to Him, He will repay them many times over provided that they gave the loan only for His pleasure.

*"Allah (SWT) alone can decrease and increase wealth"* i.e. Allah (SWT) is the Sustainer and to restrict or increase the means of subsistence is exclusively in His hands. *"and to Him you all shall return"*

(246) *"Have you not reflected on what the leaders of the children of Israel demanded from one of their Prophets after the death of Moses (AS). "Appoint for us a king," they said, "and we will fight in the cause of Allah (SWT)."* The Prophet replied: *"What if you refuse to fight when you are ordered to do so."* They replied, *"How could we refuse to fight in*

*the cause of Allah (SWT), while we along with our children were driven out of our homes." But when, on their demand, they were ordered to fight, all refused except a few of them. Allah (SWT) knows the evildoers."* After the Israelites left Egypt they remained on the straight path for a while but after that they started making innovations in the religion, neglecting the law and even took to idolatry. Prophets were sent to them by Allah (SWT) one after the other, but they neglected them and rejected them. Then the time came when there was no Prophet between them and because of their evil and disobedience, Allah (SWT) made their enemies overwhelm them, who captured many of them and took possession of a vast area including Egypt and Palestine. Then they prayed to Allah (SWT) to send a Prophet amongst them. Therefore Allah (SWT) appointed Samuel (AS) to be their Prophet. The Israelites then asked Samuel (AS) to appoint a king from them so that they could wage Jihad against their enemies and take back their land. But when Allah (SWT) appointed for them a King they refused to fight and only some of them kept their promise. This particular incident in this *ayah* has been mentioned here to fore-warn the Muslims in *Madinah* who were also making similar demands of allowing them to fight the *Quraysh* of *Makkah*, so that they can return back to their home land. Allah (SWT) warns them not to be like the Israelites who broke their promise and abandoned Jihad.

(247) *"Their Prophet told them: "Allah (SWT) has appointed Saul <sup>9</sup> to be your king." They replied: "How can he be our king when some of us are more deserving than him. Besides he is not rich." The Prophet said: "Allah (SWT) has chosen him to rule over you and blessed him with knowledge and stature.""* As mentioned in the previous *ayah*, the Israelites asked Samuel (AS) to supplicate his Lord to appoint a king for them so that they could fight under his command. Allah (SWT) appointed Saul to be their king whom He had given knowledge and physical strength. But the *Children of Israel* refused to accept Saul as

their leader as they said that he was not among the descendents of the house of the kings nor he was a wealthy person and belonged to a poor family. Though Saul was not rich but Allah (SWT) says He chose him because He had given him more knowledge, strength and patience than others. And *“Allah (SWT) grants kingship to whom He pleases”* i.e. Because of His infinite knowledge and Wisdom, He knows who deserves to be the king and who does not. *“And Allah (SWT) is All-Embracing and All-Knowing.”*

(248) *“Furthermore, their Prophet said to them: "The sign of his appointment as a king is that there will come to you the Tabut (Ark of the covenant) in which there is tranquility from your Lord and relics which the family of Moses (AS) and the family of Aaron (AS) left behind, and that Ark will be carried by the angels.””* The *Tabut* (Ark of the covenant) was considered very sacred by the Israelites which contained remnants of the Tablets given to Moses (AS), his staff and the original copy of *Torah* written under the guidance of Moses (AS). It was so divinely blessed that whenever carried by the *Israelites* into the battlefield, Allah (SWT) rescued them from their enemies and thus gave them tranquility and peace of mind. When their enemies attacked them, they also took the *Tabut* with them along with the original *Torah*. Afterwards Prophet Samuel (AS) said to the Israelites that Allah (SWT) will give back to you the *Tabut* as a sign of the appointment of Saul as their king and it is said that the Allah (SWT) commanded the angels to carry the *Tabut* to the *Israelites*. That is why Allah (SWT) says: *“Surely therein is a sign for you if you are true believers.”*

### Foot Notes

[1] Surah An-Nisa (4) : 34.

[2] See Tafsir Ibn Kathir in his explanation of Al-Baqarah ayah 229 , Tuhfat Al-Ahwadhi 4 : 363 and Towards understanding the Qur'an by Syed Abu A'la Mawdudi in explanation of this ayah..

[3] This ill-practice is known as *Halalah*, where a woman marries another man only to make her eligible for her ex-husband . If she then marries her first husband then their marriage will be void and null and it will be considered as an act of adultery.

[4] Namely Fajr (the morning prayer), Dhuhur (when sun starts declining), Asr (the middle or the afternoon prayer), Maghrib (evening), and Isha (night).

[5] Al-Muwatta 1 : 184, Sahih Muslim 1 : 478, 479, Abu Dawud 2 : 40, At-Tabari 5 :247.

[6] According to the majority of the scholars this ayah is abrogated by the ayah 234 of this surah and ayah 12 of surah nisa (4). See Tafsir Ibn Kathir.

[7] For details see Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Al-Baqarah (2) : 243.

[8] Towards Understanding the Qur'an by Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi., pg : 186, published by The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, United Kingdom.

[9] The first king of Israel, called *Talut* in the *Qur'an* on account of his height and strength.