

An-Nisa

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

Surah *An-Nisa* is a *Madinan* surah. It comprises of different discourses revealed on different occasions between the third and the fourth year after *Hijrah*. This surah forms a pair with surah *Al-Maida*. It has 24 *rukus* and 176 *ayat*.

All the discourses of this surah can be divided into three sections according to its subjects. The first set of the sections addresses the former Muslim *Ummah* i.e. the *Children of Israel*, who along with the hypocrites were opposing Prophet's (SAW) mission of reforming the society. In these sections their incorrect religious concepts, immorality, and evil actions are criticized to prepare the ground for inviting them to the right way i.e. Islam. The second is a general address to all Muslims and guidelines are being given where the importance of having a high moral character in building a strong Islamic community is emphasized. Therefore, guidelines are provided for social, political and economic reforms such as the laws of inheritance, the status of women in a society and instructions on how to unite and prepare themselves for defense against the opposition and be the torchbearers of Islam. They are also taught what kind of relations they should have with their Lord and with their fellow human beings. The remaining sections deal with the enemies within Islam i.e. the hypocrites. The hypocrites cause the most harm to Islam for they claim to be Muslims, they claim to aid and support Islam, whereas in reality they are its enemies seeking to destroy it from within, covertly spreading their corruption and ignorance. In this surah Allah (SWT) has criticized them and made clear for the Muslims, the characteristics and features which develop into hypocrisy. He has unveiled their beliefs, their qualities, and made their goals clear so that the believers can be aware of them and deal with them appropriately.

(1) "O mankind! Have *Taqwa* of your Lord" The Arabic word *Taqwa* cannot be translated as a single word in other languages. It means to guard oneself against wrongdoing and evil and abandon those things which can earn Allah's (SWT)

displeasure. It is also explained as to be '*conscious of Allah*' or to have '*fear of Allah*' i.e. being mindful of Allah's (SWT) punishment. *"Who created you from a single soul, and from him He created his mate, and from them both He created many men and women."* This *ayah* describes the creation of Adam (AS) and Eve. Allah (SWT) created the whole human race from a single being, Adam (AS), then He created Eve, his wife, from his left rib. Then Allah (SWT) created many men and women from them with different sizes, shapes, characteristics and colors and spread them over the earth as tribes and nations. This is as Allah (SWT) said in another *ayah*: *"O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another.."*¹

This *ayah* according to some scholars also gives way to the concept of the theory of evolution that the physical body of a human being is evolved from a single *Nafs*, which in modern terms may mean a single unicellular organism i.e. the first form of life on this planet. These life-forms then went through innumerable changes and higher and more complex organisms were evolved from these simpler ones. When this process of biological evolution reached its final form of a man, Allah (SWT) endowed him with its spiritual soul and thus first human being, Adam (AS) was created.² *"And have Taqwa of Allah (SWT) through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and revere the wombs."* i.e. always be mindful of your Lord whom you invoke when you conduct businesses and transactions with each other e.g. people say, '*I ask you by Allah (SWT)*' or '*Please forgive me in the name of Allah (SWT)*' etc. And do not cut the relations of the womb i.e. kinship, but keep and respect them. Kinship is one of the most important social institutions in Islam. One who maintains good ties with his kindred earns Allah's (SWT) mercy, affluence and deliverance from distress, along with that they become very attached, affectionate, cooperative and helpful to each other which envelops the whole atmosphere of the family in both adversity and prosperity. On the other hand severance of kinship ties melts away all these benefits and develops a discord among relatives." *"Surely, Allah (SWT) is always watching over you."* i.e. He sees all your actions and He knows everything you do.

(2) *"And give unto orphans their property and do not exchange bad things for good ones; and devour not their substance (by adding it) to your substance."* This *ayah* gives a few instructions on handling the properties of the orphans. Allah (SWT) instructs a

guardian to return the rightful property of the orphans when they reach the age of adolescence and do not exchange your worthless things for their valuable things. And do not add their property in yours, and keep them separate so that you do not eat up both. *"Surely, this is a great sin."* i.e. it is a major sin in sight of Allah (SWT).

(3) *"And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or that your right hands possess."* Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims not to marry female orphans under one's care without giving dowry to them and if he fears that he cannot do justice to her then he should not marry her but marry other women. With reference to this *ayah* Bukhari recorded that Aisha (RA) said: *"A man was taking care of a female orphan and he married her, although he did not desire to marry her. That girl's money was mixed with his, and he was keeping her portion from her, Afterwards this ayah was revealed about his case."*³ On the other hand Allah (SWT) permits a person to marry other women two, three or even four in the sense that he may have this number of wives at one time and it is not permissible for him to have more than four. Also there are some conditions attached to the plural marriage of a man in Islam. One of the conditions for the plural marriage is just treatment. If a man fears that if he marries more than once, he will not be able to treat his wives justly, then it is forbidden for him to have more wives. This means, that he should treat his wives equally in terms of spending, clothing, spending the night with them and other material things that are under his control. But as far as justice in terms of love is concerned then the husband is not held accountable for that, and that is not required of him because he has no control over that. This is what Allah (SWT) says in the following *ayah*: *"You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire"*⁴ In addition, Allah (SWT) has also permitted a man to have sexual relations with their slave girls (concubines), other than their wives. *"That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice."* so that you may not deviate from the right path.

(4) *"And give to the women their dowry with a good heart, but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it, and enjoy it without fear of any harm."* Allah (SWT) commands the believers to pay the women they marry, their dowry willingly. But if his wife remits all or any part of the dowry with a good heart then it is permissible for the husband to accept it and enjoy it as Allah (SWT) has made it lawful for him.

(5) *"And give not unto the foolish your property which Allah (SWT) has made a means of support for you, but feed and clothe them therewith, and speak to them words of kindness and justice."* This ruling applies for those who are young and cannot make wise decisions and also for those who suffer from insanity and abnormal behavior. Thus Allah (SWT) prohibits the family or the caretaker from giving such persons their properties but they should arrange for the provision of their necessities of life and they should treat them gently and with kind words.

(6) *"And try orphans until they reach the age of marriage; if then you find sound judgment in them, release their property to them"* This *ayah* states that when orphans reach the age of puberty, the caretakers should test them in their intelligence and faith as to know whether they are capable enough to look after their wealth and properties. If they are, then Allah (SWT) commands the caretakers to return their wealth and properties to them. *"But consume it not wastefully, and hastily fearing that they should grow up"* i.e. do not consume their property wastefully and hastily in fear that they will demand their right when they grow up. *"And whoever amongst guardians is rich, he should take no wages, but if he is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable."* i.e. Allah (SWT) permits the caretakers of orphans to eat from the orphans money if they are poor themselves but they should take only that much as may be required for his necessities and not for luxuries or extravagance. *"And when you release their property to them, take witness in their presence"* i.e. return the properties of the orphans in the presence of witnesses so that the orphans do not deny receiving the money. But if there are no witnesses then know that: *"And Allah (SWT) is All-Sufficient in taking account."* i.e. He is sufficient as a witness as He knows everything.

(7) *“There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether, the property be small or large - a legal share.”* Before the advent of Islam, men were given the share from inheritance but would deprive wives, daughters and sisters of it. But Allah (SWT) revealed the law of inheritance, a land-mark in social reforms, to ensure that both, men and women are given their right of inheritance left by their parents or relatives. These are the laws ordained by Allah (SWT) and they are to be implemented whether it be a small or large property. The laws of inheritance will further be elaborated in detail when the two *ayat* of inheritance (4:11,12) are explained.

(8) *“And when the relatives and the orphans and the poor are present at the time of division, give them out of the property, and speak to them words of kindness and justice.”* Allah (SWT) commands His servants that if at the time of the division of inheritance, the orphans or their poor relatives are present who do not have any share in the inheritance then they should give them a share from the inheritance and be kind to them.

(9) *“And let those have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So let them fear Allah (SWT) and speak right words.”* In this ayah Allah (SWT) states that those of you who are near death and have to divide an estate, they should also include in it a share for the orphans with fear in their minds that how anxious would they be if they also left a helpless family behind and no one wants to take care of them. Therefore be generous and kind and treat orphans fairly just as you would have treated your own sons and daughters.

(10) *“Verily, those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, they eat up only a fire into their bellies, and they will be burnt in the blazing Fire!”* i.e. whoever consumes orphan’s property unjustly, they will surely burn in Hell fire which will fill their bellies on the *Day of Judgment*.

(11) *“Allah commands you as regards your children (inheritance); to the male, a portion equal to that of two females; if (there are) only daughters, two or more, their share is two thirds of the inheritance; if only one, her share is half. For parents, a sixth share of inheritance to each if the*

deceased left children; if no children, and the parents are the (only) heirs, the mother has a third; if the deceased left brothers or (sisters), the mother has a sixth. (The distribution in all cases is) after the payment of legacies he may have bequeathed or debts. You know not which of them, whether your parents or your children, are nearest to you in benefit, (these fixed shares) are ordained by Allah. And Allah is Ever All-Knower, All-Wise.” In this, the following and the last *ayah*, the principles of inheritance law are explained. Their precise knowledge is derived from Prophet’s (SAW) practice (*hadiths*) and his Companions (RA) and from the interpretation of these *ayat*. Allah (SWT) commands His servants to be just in regard to their children and enjoins upon them that they divide their estate according to the laws revealed by Him. But before the division of the estate the debts and legacies are first paid. Then the *ayah* states that the portion of a male is twice that of a female. But if there are only daughters, two or more then their share will be two-third from the inheritance and one-eighth will go to wife of the deceased and the remaining to his relatives as stated in the following *hadith* recorded by Ahmad from Jabir bin Abdullah (RA) that he said: “The wife of Sa’d bin Ar-Rabi came to Allah’s Messenger (SAW) and said to him, “O Allah’s Messenger (SAW)! These are the two daughters of Sa’d bin Ar-Rabi (RA), who was killed as a martyr at Uhud. Their uncle took their money and did not leave anything for them. They will not be married unless they have money.” The Messenger (SAW) said, “Allah will decide on this matter.” The *ayah* about the inheritance was later revealed and the Messenger of Allah (SAW) sent word to their uncle commanding him, “Give two-thirds (of Sa’d’s (RA) money) to Sa’d’s (RA) two daughters and one eighth for their mother, and whatever is left is yours.”⁵ And if there is only one daughter then her share from the inheritance is half of the estate and the other half distributed among parents and relatives with each parent getting a one-sixth share of the inheritance as it is in other cases when the deceased has children. But if the parents are the only heirs then the mother of the deceased gets one-third while the father gets the remaining two-thirds of the property. If the deceased left any brothers and sisters then the share of the mother will be reduced to one-sixth instead of one-third and the father gets the rest. This is because the father is responsible for the upbringing and marriage of the brothers and sisters of the deceased while the mother is not required to spend any money on them. Afterwards Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims not to

follow the ways of ignorance when they would deprive the parents and wives from the inheritance but strictly follow the divine laws ordained by Him since they do not know who is more beneficial to them, their parents or their children. But Allah (SWT) knows who deserves what share as He knows everything.

(12) *"In that which your wives leave, your share is a half if they have no child; but if they leave a child, you get a fourth of that which they leave after payment of legacies that they may have bequeathed or debts. In that which you leave, their (your wives) share is a fourth if you leave no child; but if you leave a child, they get an eighth of that which you leave after payment of legacies that you may have bequeathed or debts. If the man or woman whose inheritance is in question has left neither ascendants nor descendants, but has left a brother or a sister, each one of the two gets a sixth; but if more than two, they share in a third; after payment of legacies he (or she) may have bequeathed or debts, so that no loss is caused (to anyone). This is a Commandment from Allah (SWT)"* This *ayah* mentions the laws of inheritance regarding the husband or a wife of the deceased. If the wife of a person dies and did not leave behind any children then he gets half of the estate and if she left a child then he gets one-fourth of it. Similarly if man dies and has left no children then his wife will get one-fourth but if he left any children then she will get one-eighth of his estate. And all these laws, as we mentioned earlier, are only applicable after the debts and legacies have been paid. Further the *ayah* states that if a man or a women dies and is left in *Kalalah* i.e. a person who has no child or parents, then if they have a brother or a sister, each one of them gets a sixth but if they are more than one then they will share one-third of the estate left by the deceased, after the payment of debts and legacies. Then Allah (SWT) commands the Muslims that they should implement the will and testament justly without doing any harm or injustice to the heirs. *"And Allah (SWT) is Ever All-Knowing, Most Forbearing."* i.e. no one can escape the consequences of a breach in His commandments, as He knows everything. And He is also mentioned as being Most-Forbearing for the fact that His laws are most lenient towards His servants and not harsh at all.

(13) *"These are the limits (set by) Allah (SWT)"* This is a stern warning to those who do not follow the laws of inheritance prescribed by Allah (SWT). *"And whosoever obeys*

Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW), will be admitted to Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise), to abide therein, and that will be a supreme achievement." i.e. those who obey Allah's (SWT) commandments and follow His Messenger (SAW) regarding the inheritance and other laws, then they will surely enter Paradise after their death, which is indeed a great achievement.

(14) "And whosoever disobeys Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW), and transgresses His limits, He will cast him into the Fire, to abide therein; and he shall have a disgraceful torment."

On the other hand those who do not abide by the laws ordained by Allah (SWT) and follow His Messenger (SAW) then Allah (SWT) says that their abode is Hellfire and they shall live therein forever in humiliation.

Foot Notes

[1] Surah Al-Hujurat (49) : 13.

[2] Cf. "Qur'an and Human Evolution" by Dr. Ahmed Afzaal. First published in "The Qur'anic Horizons", July-September 1996, Volume 1.

[3] Fath Al-Bari 8: 87.

[4] Surah An-Nisa (4) : 129.

[5] Musnad Ahmed 3 :352.