

The Qur'an

A new translation by
M. A. S. ABDEL HALEEM

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over their property to them. Do not consume it wastefully before they come of age: if the guardian is well off he should abstain from the orphan's property, and if he is poor he should use only what is fair. When you give them their property, call witnesses in; God takes full account of everything you do.

⁷Men shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, and women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, whether the legacy be small or large: this is ordained by God. ⁸If other relatives, orphans, or needy people are present at the distribution, give them something too, and speak kindly to them. ⁹Let those who would fear for the future of their own helpless children, if they were to die, show the same concern [for orphans]; let them be mindful of God and speak out for justice. ¹⁰Those who consume the property of orphans unjustly are actually swallowing fire into their own bellies: they will burn in the blazing Flame.

¹¹Concerning your children, God commands you that a son should have the equivalent share of two daughters. If there are only daughters, two or more should share two-thirds of the inheritance, if one, she should have half. Parents inherit a sixth each if the deceased leaves children; if he leaves no children and his parents are his sole heirs, his mother has a third, unless he has brothers, in which case she has a sixth. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. You cannot know which of your parents or your children is closer to you in benefit: this is a law from God, and He is all knowing, all wise. ¹²You inherit half of what your wives leave, if they have no children; if they have children, you inherit a quarter. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. If you have no children, your wives' share is a quarter; if you have children, your wives get an eighth. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts. If a man or a woman dies leaving no children or parents,^a but a single brother or sister, he or she should take one-sixth of the inheritance; if there are more siblings, they share one-third between them. [In all cases, the distribution comes] after payment of any bequests or debts, with no harm done to anyone: this is a commandment from God, and He is all knowing and benign to all. ¹³These are the bounds

^a This is the most generally accepted meaning of the Arabic word *kalāla*. There are many others.

4. WOMEN

A Medinan sura which takes its title from the many references to women throughout the sura (verses 3-4, 127-30). It gives a number of instructions, urging justice to children and orphans, and mentioning inheritance and marriage laws. The early verses of the sura give rulings on property and inheritance, and so does the verse which concludes the sura. The sura also talks of the tensions between the Muslim community in Medina and some of the People of the Book (verses 44, 61), moving into a general discussion of war: it warns the Muslims to be cautious and to defend the weak and helpless (verses 71-6). Another similar theme is the intrigues of the hypocrites (verses 88-91, 138-46).

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

¹People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it^a created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in whose name you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship.^b God is always watching over you. ²Give orphans their property, do not replace [their] good things with bad, and do not consume their property with your own—a serious crime. ³If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls,^c you may marry whichever [other]^d women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one, or your slave(s);^e that is more likely to make you avoid bias. ⁴Give women their dowry as a gift upon marriage, though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with clear conscience.

⁵Do not entrust your property to the feeble-minded. God has made it a means of support for you: make provision for them from it, clothe them, and address them kindly. ⁶Test orphans until they reach marriageable age; then, if you find they have sound judgement, hand

^a 'From the same essence'. Razi convincingly reached this conclusion based on comparison with many instances when *min anfusihihim* is used in the Qur'an.

^b Literally 'the womb-relationships', i.e. all those to whom you are related. This expression occurs again in 47: 22.

^c In pre-Islamic Arabia, some guardians of orphan girls used to marry them in order to take their property (see 4: 127).

^d This is a widely accepted interpretation.

^e Literally 'what your right hands possess'.

set by God: God will admit those who obey Him and His Messenger to Gardens graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay—that is the supreme triumph! ¹⁴ But those who disobey God and His Messenger and overstep His limits will be consigned by God to the Fire, and there they will stay—a humiliating torment awaits them!

¹⁵ If any of your women commit a lewd act, call four witnesses from among you, then, if they testify to their guilt, keep the women at home until death comes to them or until God gives them another way out. ¹⁶ If two men commit a lewd act, punish them both; if they repent and mend their ways, leave them alone—God is always ready to accept repentance, He is full of mercy. ¹⁷ But God only undertakes to accept repentance from those who do evil out of ignorance and soon afterwards repent: these are the ones God will forgive, He is all knowing, all wise. ¹⁸ It is not true repentance when people continue to do evil until death confronts them and then say, 'Now I repent,' nor when they die as disbelievers: We have prepared a painful torment for these.

¹⁹ You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, ⁶ nor should you treat your wives harshly, hoping to take back some of the dowry you gave them, unless they are guilty of something clearly outrageous. Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind: if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which God has put much good. ²⁰ If you wish to replace one wife with another, do not take any of her dowry back, even if you have given her a great amount of gold. ²¹ How could you take it when this is unjust and a blatant sin? How could you take it when you have lain with each other and they have taken a solemn pledge from you?

²² Do not marry women that your fathers married—with the exception of what is past—this is indeed a shameful thing to do, loathsome and leading to evil. ²³ You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, the daughters of brothers and daughters of sisters, your milk-mothers and milk-sisters, ⁶ your wives' mothers, the stepdaughters in your

^a Through another regulation, or marriage, or any other way. See also end of 65: 2, which uses nearly identical words.

^b In pre-Islamic Arabia, if a man died leaving a widow, her stepson or another man of his family could inherit her.

^c Islam regards women who breastfeed other people's infants as their 'milk-mothers', not merely 'wet nurses'.

care—those born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, if you have not consummated the marriage, then you will not be blamed—wives of your begotten sons, two sisters simultaneously—with the exception of what is past: God is most forgiving and merciful—²⁴ women already married, other than your slaves: ^a God has ordained all this for you. Other women are lawful to you, so long as you seek them in marriage, with gifts from your property, looking for wedlock rather than fornication. If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their dowry—this is obligatory—though if you should choose mutually, after fulfilling this obligation, to do otherwise [with the dowry], you will not be blamed: God is all knowing and all wise.

²⁵ If any of you does not have the means to marry a believing free woman, then marry a believing slave—God knows best [the depth of] your faith: you are [all] part of the same family. ^b So marry them with their people's consent and their proper dowries. [Make them] married women, not adulteresses or lovers. If they commit adultery when they are married, their punishment will be half that of free women. Only those of you who fear that they will sin should marry slaves; it is better for you to practise self-restraint. God is most forgiving and merciful, ²⁶ He wishes to make His laws clear to you and guide you to the righteous ways of those who went before you. He wishes to turn towards you in mercy—He is all knowing, all wise—²⁷ He wishes to turn towards you, but those who follow their lusts want you to go far astray. ²⁸ God wishes to lighten your burden; man was created weak.

²⁹ You who believe, do not wrongfully consume each other's wealth but trade by mutual consent. Do not kill each other, for God is merciful to you. ³⁰ If any of you does these things, out of hostility and injustice, We shall make him suffer Fire: that is easy for God. ³¹ But if you avoid the great sins you have been forbidden, We shall wipe out your minor misdeeds and let you in through the entrance of honour. ³² Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others—men have the portion they have earned ^c and women their

^a Slave women were often unclaimed war captives, who would not be in a position to dissolve any previous marriage. An owner was not permitted to touch a slave woman whose husband was with her (Abu Hanifa, in Razi).

^b Literally 'you are from one another'.

^c The preposition *min* here is taken to have an explanatory rather than a partitive function, which would render the translation 'some of what they have earned'.

portion—you should rather ask God for some of His bounty: He has full knowledge of everything. ³³ We have appointed heirs for everything that parents and close relatives leave behind, including those to whom you have pledged your hands [in marriage], so give them their share: God is witness to everything.

³⁴ Husbands should take full care of their wives, with [the bounty] God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what God would have them guard in their husbands' absence. If you fear high-handedness³⁵ from your wives, remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them. If they obey you, you have no right to act against them: God is most high and great. ³⁵ If you [believers] fear that a couple may break up, appoint one arbiter from his family and one from hers. Then, if the couple want to put things right, God will bring about a reconciliation between them: He is all knowing, all aware.

³⁶ Worship God; join nothing with Him. Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far, to travellers in need, and to your slaves. God does not like arrogant, boastful people, ³⁷ who are miserly and order other people to be the same, hiding the bounty God has given them. We have prepared a humiliating torment for such ungrateful people. ³⁸ [Nor does He like Him or the Last Day. Whoever has Satan as his companion has an evil companion! ³⁹ What harm would it do them to believe in God and the Last Day, and give charitably from the sustenance God has given them? God knows them well. ⁴⁰ He does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of a speck of dust: He doubles any good deed and gives a tremendous reward of His own. ⁴¹ What will they do when We bring a witness from each community, with you [Muhammad] as a witness against these people? ⁴² On that day, those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Prophet will wish that the earth could swallow them up: they will not be able to hide anything from God.

^a The verb *nashaza* from which *nashaz* is derived means 'to become high', 'to rise'. See also verse 128, where the same word is applied to husbands. It applies to a situation where one partner assumes superiority to the other and behaves accordingly.

^b See Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran*, 46–54.

5. THE FEAST

The title relates to food, and a central theme of this Medinan sura is the regulation of lawful and unlawful food, obedience to which is part of the pledge between God and the believers (verses 1-5, 87-108). Part of the sura concerns hunting for food during the pilgrimage and respect for the rites of pilgrimage. God had also taken pledges from the Jews and Christians and the section between verses 13 and 86 deals with what these two communities did to their pledges, and with their relationships with the Muslims. The passage from verse 109 to the end deals with the afterlife and the verdict of the messengers on the behaviour of their respective communities. Jesus, in particular, is given prominence here: mention is made of the feast for which his disciples asked him to pray to God, which gives the sura its title, and of his renunciation of any claim to divinity.

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

¹You who believe, fulfil your obligations.^a Livestock animals are lawful as food for you, with the exception of what is about to be announced. You are forbidden to kill game while you are on pilgrimage—God commands what He will,² so, you who believe, do not violate the sanctity of God's rites, the Sacred Month, the offerings, their garlands, nor those going to the Sacred House to seek the bounty and pleasure of their Lord—but when you have completed the rites of pilgrimage you may hunt. Do not let your hatred for the people who barred you from the Sacred Mosque induce you to break the law: help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be mindful of God, for His punishment is severe.

³You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; anything strangled, victim of a violent blow or a fall, gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you still slaughter it [in the correct manner]; or anything sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares [of meat] by drawing marked arrows^b—a heinous

^a Obligations consequent on accepting the faith, including its dietary prohibitions. See verse 7, 'pledge'.

^b A pagan Arab custom. Arrows were also used to make other decisions, as in drawing lots, to determine the will of the idols (see verse 90).

practice—the disbelievers have already lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them: fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion *islam*: total devotion to God; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no intention of doing wrong, then God is most forgiving and merciful.

⁴They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, 'All good things are lawful for you.' [This includes] what you have taught your birds and beasts of prey to catch, teaching them as God has taught you, so eat what they catch for you, but first pronounce God's name over it. Be mindful of God: He is swift to take account.

⁵Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste, believing, women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their dowries and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.

⁶You who believe, when you are about to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if required,^a wash your whole body. If any of you is sick or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and can find no water, then take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you: He only wishes to cleanse you and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful.^b ⁷So remember God's blessing on you and the pledge with which you were bound when you said, 'We hear and we obey.' Be mindful of God: God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart.

⁸You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from

^a i.e. after sexual intercourse or discharging semen.

^b 'Perfecting the blessing' is seen in instructing believers to avoid what is unclean in food and to wash before worship. This is also noted in 4: 43, where there is an instruction to wash before the prayer following an instruction to keep away from the pollution of the immoral acts mentioned in the preceding verses.

justice, but adhere to justice, for that is closer to awareness of God. Be mindful of God: God is well aware of all that you do. ⁹God has promised forgiveness and a rich reward to those who have faith and do good works; ¹⁰those who reject faith and deny Our revelations will inhabit the blazing Fire.

¹¹You who believe, remember God's blessing on you when a certain people were about to raise their hands against you and He restrained them. Be mindful of God: let the believers put their trust in Him.

¹²God took a pledge from the Children of Israel. We appointed twelve leaders among them, and God said, 'I am with you: if you keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan,^a I will wipe out your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. After this [pledge] any of you who ignore it will be far from the right path.' ¹³But they broke their pledge, so We distanced them [from Us] and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of [revealed] words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember: you [Prophet] will always find treachery in all but a few of them. Overlook this and pardon them—God loves those who do good. ¹⁴We also took a pledge from those who say, 'We are Christians,' but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection when God will tell them what they have done.

¹⁵People of the Book, Our Messenger has come to make clear to you much of what you have kept hidden of the Scripture and to overlook much [you have done]. A light has now come to you from God, and a Scripture making things clear,^b with which God guides those who follow what pleases Him to the ways of peace, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path. ¹⁷Those who say, 'God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,' are defying the truth. Say, 'If it had been God's will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth? Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to God: He creates whatever He will^c and has power over everything.'

^a God repays what is given for His sake, many times over. The Qur'an uses this figure of speech in many instances. See, for example, 57: 18; 64: 17.

^b Including his creation of Jesus without a father (3: 47 and 59).

¹⁸The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones.' Say, 'Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: all journeys lead to Him.' ¹⁹People of the Book, Our Messenger comes to you now, after a break in the sequence of messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, 'No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.' So someone has come to you to give you good news and warn you: God has the power to do all things.

²⁰Moses said to his people, 'My people, remember God's blessing on you: how He raised prophets among you and appointed kings for you and gave you what he had not given to any other people.' ²¹My people, go into the holy land which God has ordained for you—do not turn back or you will be the losers.' ²²They said, 'Moses, there is a fearsome people in this land. We will not go there until they leave. If they leave, then we will enter.' ²³Yet two men whom God had blessed among those who were afraid said, 'Go in to them through the gate and when you go in you will overcome them. If you are true believers, put your trust in God.' ²⁴They said, 'Moses, we will never enter while they are still there, so you and your Lord go in and fight, and we will stay here.' ²⁵He said, 'Lord, I have authority over no one except myself and my brother: judge between the two of us and these disobedient people.' ²⁶God said, 'The land is forbidden to them and for forty years they will wander the earth aimlessly. Do not grieve over those who disobey.'

²⁷[Prophet], tell them the truth about the story of Adam's two sons: each of them offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one and not the other. One said, 'I will kill you,' but the other said, 'God only accepts the sacrifice of those who are mindful of Him—' ²⁸if you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of all worlds, ²⁹and I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire: such is the evildoers' reward.' ³⁰But his soul prompted him to kill his brother: he killed him and became one of the losers. ³¹God sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse and he said, 'Woe is me! Could I not have been like this raven and covered up my brother's body?'—he was filled with

remorse. ³²On account of [his deed], We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person—unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land—it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land. ³³Those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, ^a or banishment from the land: a disgrace for them in this world, and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter, ³⁴unless they repent before you overpower them: in that case bear in mind that God is forgiving and merciful.

³⁵You who believe, be mindful of God, seek ways to come closer to Him and strive for His cause, so that you may prosper. ³⁶If the disbelievers possessed all that is in the earth and twice as much again and offered it to ransom themselves from torment on the Day of Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them: they will have a painful torment. ³⁷They will wish to come out of the Fire but they will be unable to do so: theirs will be a lasting torment.

³⁸Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are male or female, as punishment for what they have done—a deterrent from God: God is almighty and wise. ³⁹But if anyone repents after his wrongdoing and makes amends, God will accept his repentance: God is most forgiving, most merciful. ⁴⁰Do you [Prophet] not know that control of the heavens and earth belongs solely to God? He punishes whoever He will and forgives whoever He will: God has power over everything.

⁴¹Messenger, do not be grieved by those who race to surpass one another in disbelief—those who say with their mouths, 'We believe,' but have no faith in their hearts and the Jews who listen eagerly to lies and to those who have not even met you, who distort the meanings of [revealed] words and say [to each other], 'If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware!' ^b—if God intends

^a Left hand and right foot or vice versa.

^b According to most interpreters, this refers to a case where an eminent Jewish man and woman committed adultery. The Jewish community did not want to apply the biblical penalty of stoning, so they sent representatives to the Prophet to ask for a ruling, saying, 'If he orders you to apply lashing accept it, but if he orders stoning, do not accept it' (Razi).

some people to be so misguided, you will be powerless against God on their behalf. These are the ones whose hearts God does not intend to cleanse—a disgrace for them in this world, and then a heavy punishment in the Hereafter—⁴² they listen eagerly to lies and consume what is unlawful. If they come to you [Prophet] for judgement, you can either judge between them, or decline—if you decline, they will not harm you in any way, but if you do judge between them, judge justly: God loves the just—⁴³ but why do they come to you for judgement when they have the Torah with God's judgement, and even then still turn away? These are not believers. ⁴⁴ We revealed the Torah with guidance and light, and the prophets, who had submitted to God, [and] the rabbis and the scholars all judged according to it for the Jews in accordance with that part of God's Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve, and to which they were witnesses. So [Children of Israel] do not fear people, fear Me; do not barter away My messages for a small price; those who do not judge according to what God has sent down are rejecting [God's teachings]. ⁴⁵ In the Torah We prescribed for them a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, an equal wound for a wound: if anyone forgoes this out of charity, it will serve as atonement for his bad deeds. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are doing grave wrong.

⁴⁶ We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah already revealed—a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God. ⁴⁷ So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down in it. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are lawbreakers.

⁴⁸ We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about. ⁴⁹ So [Prophet] judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims,

and take good care that they do not tempt you away from any of what God has sent down to you. If they turn away, remember that God intends to punish them for some of the sins they have committed: a great many people are lawbreakers—⁵⁰ do they want judgement according to the time of pagan ignorance? Is there any better judge than God for those of firm faith?

⁵¹ You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: ^a they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them—God does not guide such wrongdoers—⁵² yet you [Prophet] will see the perverse at heart rushing to them for protection, saying, 'We are afraid fortune may turn against us.' But God may well bring about a triumph or some other event of His own making: then they will rue the secrets they harboured in their hearts, ⁵³ and the believers will say, 'Are these the men who swore by God using their strongest oaths that they were with you? All they did was in vain and they have lost everything.'

⁵⁴ You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, ^b God will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach. Such is God's favour. He grants it to whoever He will. God has endless bounty and knowledge. ⁵⁵ Your true allies are God, His Messenger, and the believers—those who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow down in worship. ⁵⁶ Those who turn for protection to God, His Messenger, and the believers are God's party: God's party is sure to triumph.

⁵⁷ You who believe, do not take as allies those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it—whether people who were given the Scripture before you, or disbelievers—and be mindful of God if you are true believers. ⁵⁸ When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make fun of it: this is because they are people who do not reason. ⁵⁹ Say [Prophet], 'People of the Book, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, in what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent before us, while most of you are disobedient?' ⁶⁰ Say, 'Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than [the one you wish upon] us? Those God

^a i.e. those who are against the Muslim camp, as is clear from the following verses, up to 59. 'Do not turn to them as allies in preference to the Muslims' (see 4: 144).

^b What is intended in this context is 'by taking them as allies'.