

Tafseer Al-Baqarah (2: 233-235)

From the Book, Introduction to the Tafseer of the Quran,
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Khalil Abu Al-Rashtah:

﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنَمِّىَ الرِّضَاعَةَ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَلَدِهِ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تَسْتَرْضِعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ (233) وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ (234) وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا عَرَّضْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْتُمْتُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ سَتَذْكُرُونَهُنَّ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُوَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّا أَنْ تَقُولُوا قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا وَلَا تَعْرِمُوا عُقْدَةَ النِّكَاحِ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْكِتَابَ أَجَلَهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاخْذَرُوهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ (235)﴾

“Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]. Upon the father is the mothers' provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable. No person is charged with more than his capacity. No mother should be harmed through her child, and no father through his child. And upon the [father's] heir is [a duty] like that [of the father]. And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them. And if you wish to have your children nursed by a substitute, there is no blame upon you as long as you give payment according to what is acceptable. And fear Allah and know that Allah is Seeing of what you do.” (233). And those who are taken in death amongst you and leave wives behind - they, [the wives, shall] wait four months and ten [nights]. And when they have fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you (guardians) for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner. And Allah is [fully] Acquainted with what you do. (234). There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women or for what you conceal within yourselves. Allah knows that you will have them in mind. But do not promise them secretly except for saying a proper saying. And do not determine to undertake a marriage contract until the decreed period reaches its end. And know that Allah knows what is within yourselves, so beware of Him. And know that Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing. (235)”

Allah (swt) clarifies the following in these verses:

1- When a woman is divorced, whilst she has an infant at the age of breastfeeding, the father of the infant must provide maintenance for breastfeeding the infant, by providing food and clothing to the mother, during the breastfeeding period. That is, he must provide her wages during the breastfeeding period, which is two complete years, if the father wants to complete the breastfeeding period.

The father has to provide maintenance to the mother of the child in proportion to his ability. If the father becomes absent, i.e. deceased, his heirs take over the maintenance for the breastfeeding.

It is not appropriate to harm the mother, regarding her child, by preventing her from breastfeeding the child if she wants to, or by preventing her from seeing the child. Similarly, it

is prohibited to harm the father, over his child, just as it is prohibited to prevent the mother of the child from breastfeeding, particularly when the child is in need of her.

Also, there is no sin for the parents to stop breastfeeding, by weaning, the child before two years, if both the parents mutually consult and agree on that.

Similarly, there is no sin for the father to seek another woman for breastfeeding his child, if there is a legitimate excuse for not continuing feeding with the mother of his child. And in such a situation, the father can receive his child from the mother, after paying her the wage for breastfeeding his child, and then he can handover his child to another woman to breastfeed him, after the new wet-nurses have received the wage of breastfeeding.

Then, Allah (swt) concludes the verse by reminding the two parents about piety, so that they would be compassionate with their child, without causing harm to the child's upbringing or causing harm to one another. Nothing is concealed from Allah (swt) in terms of what they do. Allah (swt) will reward both of them with what they deserve, ﴿وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ﴾

“And know that Allah is Seeing of what you do.”

The saying ﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ﴾ **“Mothers may breastfeed their children.”** It is information (khabr) in the sense of request, i.e. it is a request (Talab) for divorced mothers to breastfeed their children. This request is in the sense of recommendation, i.e. *mandub*, as there is no indication (qareena) to oblige mothers over that. Nevertheless, a mother is the most entitled person for custodianship (hadana) of her child, as long as she does not marry another man. This is because the verse addresses mothers to breastfeed from the beginning.

The word ﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ﴾ **“And Mothers”** is a general word that includes all mothers. However, this word is particular for the divorced mothers alone, excluding the wives, i.e. the non-divorced mothers. This is due to the following two reasons:

a) This verse comes after the verses of Talaq (divorce) and thus the context indicates that: what is intended by the word ‘mothers (الوالدات)’ is the divorced, breastfeeding women. Thus the father, the ex-husband, must pay them wages.

b) The verse stipulates to provide sustenance and clothing for the sake of breastfeeding: as He (swt) says ﴿وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾ **“Upon the father is the mothers' provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable.”** This is mentioned after the saying, ﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ﴾ **“Mothers may breastfeed their children.”** This means that what is intended is the divorced, breastfeeding women, as providing sustenance and clothing to wives is obliged upon the husband, for the sake of marriage and not for the sake of breastfeeding. Since the nature of the verse links the sustenance and clothing to the breastfeeding, this means that the mother is not under the guardianship of the husband, as a married wife.

Accordingly, the verse clarifies that it is amongst the rights of divorced, breastfeeding women to receive wages, for breastfeeding their children.

As for the saying, ﴿وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ﴾ **“Upon the father (mawlud) is (the mothers' provision and their clothing),”** it indicates that the lineage of a child belongs to the father and not to the mother.

Also, the utterance of the words, ﴿الْوَالِدَاتُ﴾ **“mothers”** and ﴿الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ﴾ **“the father”** implies the reconciliation of the parents and the arousal of their sympathies, to take care of and have concern about the child, without harming each other.

The saying ﴿وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ﴾ **“And upon the [father's] heir is [a duty] like that [of the father].”** i.e. it is upon the heir to pay the wages of breastfeeding, if the father dies, whilst he does not have enough wealth sufficient for the known needs of the child, and to pay his mother. Here, the word heir is a general word, that includes all the heirs.

The saying, ﴿لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَالِدِهِ﴾ **“No mother should be harmed through her child, and no father through his child.”** Here the word المضارة “harming one another” is of the verb form مفاعلة (Mufa’ala), with the meaning of harm. Thus, the father must not cause harm to the mother because of the child, by reducing the sustenance and clothing for her, or taking the infant from her, whilst she wants to breastfeed the infant. The mother must not cause harm to the father because of the child, by demanding more clothing and sustenance than he could not bear or by saying, “I need the child to be breastfed by another woman,” in order to cause harm to the father, after the child has bonded with her.

This prohibition is decisive as the word (المضارة) “causing harm to one another” is an understood description, that bestows decisiveness. That is, the verse provides the prohibition of harming one another. The letter (ب) in the word ‘بُولَدِهَا’ **“through her child”**, and in the word ‘بُولَدِهِ’ **“through his child,”** is a causative (سببية / sababiyya) morpheme i.e. for the reason of the child.

The saying: ﴿فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا﴾ **“And if they both desire weaning, through mutual consent, from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them”.** i.e. if both the parents want to wean the child, before two years, as mentioned previously in the verse, ﴿حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُتِمَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ﴾ **“two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]”.** It is an indication that neither parent can resolve to wean the child, without the consent of the other.

The saying, ﴿فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا﴾ **“there is no blame upon either of them”** i.e. There is no sin upon them. In other, it is permissible (mubah) for them to do that.

The saying: ﴿وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ نَسْتَرْضِعُوْا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾ **“And if you wish to have your children nursed by a substitute, there is no blame upon you, as long as you give payment according to what is acceptable.”.** After clarifying the complete breastfeeding period, which is two years, He (swt) says: ﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُتِمَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ﴾ **“Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period].”** Allah (swt) clarifies the consultation of the spouses about weaning the child, as He (swt) says ﴿فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا﴾ **“And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them.”** Here, the mother may refuse to complete the breastfeeding, for two years. So there may not be a mutual consent between the spouses, where the father wants to complete the breastfeeding of the child for two years, whilst the mother refuses that for some reason. In such a situation, Allah (swt) mentions that there is no sin upon the father to seek breastfeeding of his child, from another breastfeeding woman.

The saying: ﴿إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾ **“as long as you gave according to what is acceptable”** i.e. as long as you give what you have agreed to give to the breastfeeding women as a wage, in proportion to what is acceptable to other breastfeeding women. The word ﴿آتَيْتُمْ﴾ **“You gave”** is in the past tense, indicating two matters:

First: this wage is attached to them from the first day of breastfeeding.

Second: The implicit meaning indicates the preference of paying the wages of a breastfeeding woman, at the beginning.

So, give wages to the mothers for the first period of breastfeeding, which they have breastfed to the children. Be kind to them, and to the like of them, in terms of giving wages, then give the same wages to the new breastfeeding woman, according to what is acceptable, in such a situation.

The saying: ﴿تَسْتَرْضِعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ﴾ “(if you wish) to seek breastfeeding for your children” i.e. (تسترضعوا لأولادكم) “if you seek breastfeeding to your children” i.e. the preposition ‘ل’ added to the word ‘your children’ in Arabic, where the Preposition (Jaar) is removed, just as the saying of Allah (swt): ﴿وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ﴾ “But if they give by measure to them” [TMQ 83:3] i.e. كالوا لهم “if they give by measure to them.” Again, the Jaar is removed here.

2. In the second verse, Allah (swt) clarifies that the waiting period (iddah) of a woman, whose husband is deceased, is four months and ten days. During that period, it is prohibited for a woman to prepare for marriage, by wearing beautiful dresses or perfumes or similar. Instead, she should live a mourning life in her home, as the Prophet (saw) said, ﴿لَا يَحِلُّ لِمَرْأَةٍ﴾ “It is not lawful for a woman who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgment to mourn for the deceased for more than three days, except for her husband whose mourning period is four months and ten days.” [Bukhari: 1201, 4918, Muslim: 273]. If the waiting period is over, then there is no sin upon her or upon her guardians, if she lives a regular life, just as any woman lives in her private and public with kindness, leading a life within the bounds of Shariah.

Then, Allah (swt) concludes the noble verse by saying that He (swt) is acquainted with what we do, being aware of that and rewarding for that, as He (swt) says: ﴿وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ﴾ “And Allah is [fully] Acquainted with what you do.”

The saying, ﴿وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ﴾ “And those who are taken in death amongst you” i.e. the ones whose souls were taken. The word التوفي “al-Tawaffa” in Arabic means ‘holding.’ It is said, توفيت مالي من فلان واستوفيته منه which means ‘someone took my money and grabbed it’ i.e. ‘he grabbed it and took away from me.’ It means the word can be understood only by its indication, whether it means the soul is taken away, or wealth is taken away, or taken away during the sleep, without the soul, as Allah (swt) says, ﴿هُوَ الَّذِي يُتَوَفَّاكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا جَرَحْتُمْ بِالنَّهَارِ ثُمَّ﴾ “And it is He who takes your souls by night and knows what you have committed by day. Then He revives you therein that a specified term may be fulfilled.” [TMQ 6:60]. The soul can be taken away from the alive body, regardless of whether the person is awake or sleeping, as happened with Isa (as), as Allah (swt) says, ﴿إِذْ﴾ “[Remember] when Allah said, “O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve...” [TMQ 3:55] Thus, Allah (swt) saved him from them the people of Isra’l) who tried to kill him. He (swt) raised Isa (as) alive. He (swt) will send him back to the world, at a particular time, as mentioned in the sahih hadiths.

The saying, ﴿يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بَأَنْفُسِهِنَّ﴾ “They shall await (themselves)”, i.e. they wait without marrying i.e. their iddah period is ﴿أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا﴾ “four months and ten (days).” The number is made in the masculine form (تذكير masculinization), which includes the counts of nights. Arabs used to include nights, when count is in the masculine form, as the day begins with the occurrence of the night. Accordingly, they don’t make feminine (تأنيث feminization) in the like of it, for the counts that include the days. Instead they include nights, such that they would say, (أصبحتنا عشراً من شهر رمضان) “we have attained the tenth of Ramadan month” as said

by Al-Fa'ra, although fasting occurs only during the days. This is in most of their sayings, as Allah (swt) says, ﴿إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا عَشْرًا﴾ **“You remained not but ten.”** [TMQ 20:103] i.e. ten nights.

All the women, who lost their husbands, make Idda for a period of four months and ten nights, except those who are pregnant. Their iddah period is until they give birth, as Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَالَّذِينَ يَتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا﴾ **“And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind - they, [the wives, shall] wait four months and ten [nights].”** This verse is general. And the verse ﴿وَأُولَاتُ الْأَحْمَالِ أَجَلُهُنَّ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ﴾ **“And for those who are pregnant, their term (waiting period) is until they give birth.”** [TMQ 65:4], it is a specific verse that particularizes (khaas) the general verse.

The saying, ﴿فَإِذَا بَلَغَ أَجَلُهُنَّ﴾ **“And when they have reached their term”**, i.e. when they complete their iddah period.

The saying, ﴿فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ﴾ **“There is no sin upon you”** i.e. upon you, O guardians!

The saying, ﴿فِيْمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ﴾ **“for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner”** i.e. for what they do, in terms of what have been prevented from doing, during the iddah period. They can live a normal life like any other woman, living in the midst of the Sharia limits, in terms of wearing beautiful garments or scents and other matters, after the completion of the Iddah period.

3. In the third verse, Allah (swt) clarifies another ruling related to the deceased husband of a wife, which is the permissibility of allusion (التعريض / Ta'reed), during the iddah period, with a desire to marry her, after the completion of the Iddah period. Likewise, there is no sin upon the one who keeps in his mind to propose to the woman, whose husband has died, so that he may marry her after the waiting period.

Allusion is to say a word that suggest, from a clear statement to the implicit statement. Thus allusion is originally an inclination to speak about his approach or to allude. On the other hand, it is when you mention in front of the woman during her iddah period, who lost her husband, that you want to marry her, by saying that 'you are looking for a righteous woman to marry' or like you mention your best character that 'you do not oppress, if you would marry her and others'. What you have mentioned here is correct, however, it is a means of conveying the concept i.e. conveying what you are silent about, which is your desire to marry her. Likewise, it is prohibited to explicitly mention marrying a woman, whose husband has died. However, it is permissible to allude, as we have clarified above, or to keep it to himself until the Iddah period ends.

Then Allah (swt) clarifies that He (swt) knows that the one who seeks marriage will not remain patient, by not disclosing his desire to marry her. So Allah (swt) chastens them on how they should mention their desire, by alluding, and He (swt) prohibits them (men) from giving explicit promises of marrying the women. Also, He (swt) prohibits them from taking explicit actions to contract the marriage, in advance to conclude the marriage, after the completion of the waiting period. Instead, it is permissible for him only to allude as clarified by Allah (swt).

Then Allah (swt) concludes the noble verse by warning of violating the commands of Allah in that. Allah (swt) knows the treachery of the eyes, and what the breasts conceal. Allah (swt) says ﴿وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ﴾ **“And know that Allah knows what is within yourselves, so beware of Him.”** There is a threat in this for those who expose what they do not conceal, whilst thinking that Allah (swt) does not know their secrets, and their secret counsels.

Despite that, Allah (swt) is forgiving the one who retreats from his mistake, and He (swt) is All-Forbearing, Who does not rush to punish the one who deserves it, as long as he retreats and repents and does the righteous deeds. ﴿وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ﴾ **“And know that Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.”**

The saying, ﴿وَلَكِنْ لَا تُوَاعِدُوهُمْ سِرًّا﴾ **“But do not promise them secretly”** i.e. do not promise them during the Iddah period, about your determination to marry them. The word (السر) “secret” here is the desire of marriage, i.e. intercourse, as Ibn Abbas (ra) narrates, ﴿إِلَّا أَنْ﴾ **“Except for saying a proper saying,”** it is an (Istisna’ Munqati’). It is a munqati’ type of exceptive expression, where exception is not amongst the same kind. That is, except what you say as a proper saying, is a saying mentioned, at the beginning of the verse, which is the allusion for marriage, without explicitly announcing it, as we have explained above.

The saying, ﴿وَلَا تَعْرَمُوا عُقْدَةَ النِّكَاحِ﴾ **“And do not determine to undertake a marriage contract”** i.e. do not take decisive actions to marry them, such as declared advancements (مقدمات معلنة), such as buying marriage items or preparing for marriage, once the Iddah period ends. This is because the determination of action, precedes it.

Accordingly, Allah (swt) has prohibited two matters upon men,

- a) Explicit declaration of marrying them, during the iddah period.
- b) Also, advance preparations to contract the marriage, explicitly during the Iddah period.

It is clear that prohibition of the advancement of a thing, is a prohibition of the thing itself, in an eloquent manner, which indicates that contracting a marriage, during the Iddah period is a major sin, in Islam, and its contract is invalid.

The saying, ﴿حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْكِتَابُ أَجَلَهُ﴾ **“until the decreed period reaches its end”** i.e. until the Iddah period ends.

Author’s Notes:

Allusion resembles the metaphor (Kinaya) except that the difference is, the explicit meaning in metaphor (Kinaya) is not the real meaning, However, it does not mean that it is unintentional. As for the allusion, here, the explicit meaning is the same as the real meaning. However, what is intended by the allusion is to denote the implicit meaning. For example, we can say metaphorically, فلانة أو فلان نؤوم الضحى, which literally means “so and so sleeps at the dawn” and metaphorically means a lazy person. However, the explicit meaning is not the real meaning. The person may or may not sleep at dawn. Instead, what is intended by the statement is to denote that the person is spoiled or lazy. Similarly, the saying كثير الرماد “a lot of ashes” metaphorically means generosity. The person who is generous may not ignite the fire to create more ashes. As for the allusion, it mentions the correct matter of the real meaning, as you are saying to her, ‘I am looking for a righteous woman and you also actually want to marry.’ What is intended by the saying is to inform that you wish to marry her.