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Surah An-Nur

The Light · Madani · 64 ayat — reflections on surah 24
of the Qur'an

QURAN

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CONTENTS

Surah An-Nur

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|----------|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | The surah in brief | What it is, when it came, what it sets out to do |
| 2 | Why it was revealed | 4 occasions from the authentic collections |
| 3 | Its themes | 5 threads running through the surah |
| 4 | Key verses | 4 passages, with a reflection on each |
| 5 | Reading it closely | 4 sections |
| 6 | Carrying it | 4 things to take from it |
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النور — An-Nur, "The Light". Surah 24 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 64 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/24/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Legislation to purify Muslim society: guarding chastity, exposing the slander against Aishah, laying down rules of modesty, seeking permission, and lowering the gaze, all crowned by the Light Verse likening God's guidance to radiant light.

An-Nur legislates the protection of honor and society: the penalty for unlawful intimacy, the grave sin of slandering chaste believers, and the deliverance of Aisha from the false accusation (the ifk) with a firm warning to those who spread it (24:11-20). It commands lowering the gaze and guarding modesty for men and women, sets the etiquette of seeking permission before entering homes, and promises the believers succession and security on earth if they worship God alone (24:55). At its center stands the Verse of Light (24:35), an image of God's guidance kindled in a receptive heart. Al-Qurtubi observes that the surah weaves law, manners, and the luminous parable into one lesson: a pure society begins with pure hearts and guarded tongues.

OCCASIONS OF REVELATION

Why it was revealed

These are the occasions (asbāb al-nuzūl) that the authentic collections narrate for verses of this surah. An occasion explains a verse; it does not limit its meaning.

Qur'an 24:6-9

Hilal ibn Umaiyā accused his wife of adultery with Sharik ibn Sahma' and had no witnesses; the Prophet told him to bring proof or receive the lashes. Hilal swore he was truthful and that Allah would reveal what would save him, and Gabriel came down with the verses on husbands who accuse their wives.

"Then Gabriel came down and revealed to him:-- 'As for those who accuse their wives...' (24.6-9)"

Ibn 'Abbas · Sahih al-Bukhari 4747

Qur'an 24:6-9

A man ('Uwaimir al-'Ajlanī in the fuller chains) asked what a man who finds another man with his wife should do. Allah revealed the ruling of mula'ana about their case, and the couple performed it before the Prophet.

"So Allah revealed concerning their case what is mentioned of the order of Mula'ana."

Sahl ibn Sa'd · Sahih al-Bukhari 4746

Qur'an 24:11-20

Returning from an expedition, 'A'isha was left behind while looking for a lost necklace and was brought back by Safwan ibn al-Mu'attal, and 'Abdullah ibn Ubai led a slander against her. She fell ill for a month while it spread. Revelation came to the Prophet while he was sitting with her, before anyone had left the house, and Allah revealed the ten verses declaring her innocence.

"So Allah revealed: "Verily! They who spread the Slander are a gang among you. Think it not...." (24.11-20)."

'A'isha · Sahih al-Bukhari 4750

Qur'an 24:22

Abu Bakr had supported his poor relative Mistah ibn Uthatha, who took part in the slander. Abu Bakr swore he would never provide for him again, and Allah revealed the verse telling the wealthy not to swear against helping their kin; Abu Bakr resumed his support.

"By Allah, I will never provide for Mistah anything after what he has said about Aisha". So Allah revealed"

'A'isha · Sahih al-Bukhari 4750

TWO

Its themes

- Guarding honor and chastity
- The slander (ifk) and its lesson
- Modesty and lowered gaze
- The Verse of Light
- Promise of succession

THREE

Key verses

Those who brought forward the lie are a body among yourselves: think it not to be an evil to you; On the contrary it is good for you: to every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a penalty grievous.

Qur'an 24:11

The false rumor against Aisha is called 'good for you' — Ibn Kathir explains the trial exposed the sincere from the malicious and brought down Qur'an vindicating the innocent forever.

Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity: these are not affected by what people say: for them there is forgiveness, and a provision honourable.

Qur'an 24:26

'Corrupt words are for corrupt people, and good words for good people' — the mufasssirun read this as God's defense of the pure against the tongues of the wicked.

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.

Qur'an 24:30

Believing men are told to lower their gaze before women are — al-Sa'di notes modesty is a shared duty that begins with restraining one's own eyes.

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.

Qur'an 24:35

'God is the light of the heavens and the earth' — classical tafsir sees the niche, lamp, and glass as the guidance God places in the heart of the believer, light upon light.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Surah an-Nur is Madani, revealed into the living body of the new Muslim community at a moment when its social fabric was being tested. Its most famous occasion is the incident of the slander (hadith al-ifk), when hypocrites and some careless believers spread a lie against 'A'ishah, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, after she was inadvertently left behind by the caravan. For nearly a month the accusation hung over the household of the Prophet ﷺ and over the whole community, until the verses of exoneration descended (24:11-26). The surah gathers around that event a body of legislation on chastity, accusation, evidence, and the guarding of the eyes and the home.

But it would be a mistake to read an-Nur only as a book of rules. Its name comes from the luminous verse at its centre — "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35) — and light is the surah's governing image. A community is being taught how to keep its inner and outer life pure, so that the light of guidance can dwell in it. The mood moves between severity and tenderness: firm limits (hudud) for those who assault the honour of others, and then, again and again, the reminder that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful, that He desires to lighten your burden, that He does not wish hardship for you. It is a surah about protecting light — the light of faith, of a clean heart, of a home where scandal cannot breed.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens with an unusual emphasis: "A surah which We have sent down and made obligatory" (24:1). From the first breath it announces that what follows carries the weight of law. It moves straight to the punishment for zina and then to the crime of qadhf — accusing a chaste person of unchastity without producing four witnesses (24:2–5). The one who slanders and cannot prove it is himself flogged and his testimony rejected forever. Notice the order: the Qur'an protects sexual purity and, in the very next breath, protects reputation, so that the law against immorality cannot become a weapon of defamation.

Then comes the case of the spouse who accuses his own wife with no other witness — the li'an procedure (24:6–10) — a merciful mechanism that resolves the matter through solemn oaths before Allah rather than public ruin. Immediately after, the surah turns to the ifk itself (24:11–26). Here its tone becomes searching and pastoral. It rebukes the believers for not thinking well of their own: "Why, when you heard it, did the believing men and women not think good of themselves?" (24:12). Why did you not demand the four witnesses? Why did you repeat with your tongues what you had no knowledge of, treating as trivial what is enormous with Allah (24:15)? The passage names the mechanism of scandal — hearing, believing, repeating — and cuts it at every joint. It warns that those who love that indecency should spread among the believers will have a painful punishment (24:19), and it ends by promising the pure the forgiveness and noble provision of their Lord (24:26).

From the wound of one household the surah widens into the etiquette of every household (24:27–34): do not enter homes that are not your own until you have asked leave and greeted their people; lower your gaze, guard your chastity; the commands to believing men and then believing women about modest dress and the drawing of the khimar; the encouragement to marry, to help the unmarried and the righteous among slaves to marry, and the prohibition of forcing slave-women into prostitution. Privacy, the gaze, dress, and marriage are woven together as one protective system around the community's purity.

At the structural and spiritual centre stands the Verse of Light (24:35–40). Allah's light is likened to a niche holding a lamp within glass like a shining star, kindled from a blessed olive tree neither of the east nor the west, whose oil would almost glow without fire — light upon light. This light is found in houses Allah has permitted to be raised and where His name is remembered, by men whom neither trade nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah (24:36–37). Set against it is the counter-image: the deeds of the disbelievers are like a mirage in a desert that the thirsty man takes for water, or like layered darkneses in a fathomless sea, wave upon wave, cloud above — darkness so total that a man can barely see his own hand (24:39–40). Light and its remembrance stand against illusion and drowning darkness.

The final movement returns to the created world and to the community's discipline (24:41–64). The birds with wings outspread and everything in the heavens glorify Allah; the clouds, the rain, the alternation of night and day, the varieties of

creatures walking on their bellies, on two legs, on four — all are signs (24:41–45). Then the surah tests the believers against the hypocrites: the true believer, when called to Allah and His Messenger to judge between them, says "We hear and we obey" (24:51), while the hypocrite turns away. It gives the great promise of *istikhlaf* — that Allah will grant the believers who do righteous deeds succession and security in the land, and establish for them their religion (24:55). It closes with the intimate manners of the household — the times of privacy when servants and children should seek permission (24:58–59), concessions for the elderly and the disabled, the courtesy of greeting when entering houses — and a final call to the discipline of the Prophet's ﷺ gatherings: do not treat his summons as you treat one another's, and beware of slipping away unnoticed (24:62–64). The surah that began by protecting honour ends by binding the community to obedience and mutual courtesy.

The major themes, in depth

The first great theme is the sanctity of honour and the sin of the tongue. An-Nur treats a person's reputation as something almost as inviolable as their life. The Qur'an sets an extraordinarily high bar of proof — four eyewitnesses — precisely because it does not want the community trafficking in accusations. When the standard is not met, the accuser, not the accused, is punished. The *ifk* passage then anatomises how a lie travels: it enters through a rumour, is nourished by our willingness to believe the worst, and is spread by tongues that repeat "what they have no knowledge of." The Qur'an calls each stage to account and teaches the believer's proper reflex —

husn al-zann, thinking well of one's brothers and sisters, and the simple discipline of saying, "This is a manifest lie" (24:16) when we have no proof. The lesson lands on all of us: to carry a rumour is to participate in the crime.

The second theme is purity as a whole way of life — a system, not a single rule. The surah does not merely forbid zina; it dismantles the road that leads to it. Lowering the gaze, seeking permission before entering homes, the modesty of dress, the encouragement to marry and to make marriage easy, the guarding of times of privacy within the house itself — these form an integrated ecology of chastity. The classical scholars read 24:30–31 as a matched pair: men are addressed first and identically, so that the burden of modesty is shared, not laid on women alone. The aim is a community in which desire is met through the lawful door of marriage and shielded from the unlawful one, and in which even the family's inner life has its protected thresholds.

The third theme, and the surah's heart, is divine light and its indwelling. The Verse of Light is not decorative; it answers the question the whole surah raises. Why keep the community pure? Because purity is the vessel in which Allah's guidance can burn like that lamp. The scholars offered layered readings of the parable — the niche as the believer's breast, the lamp as faith or the Qur'an, the glass as the heart, the blessed tree as revelation itself, "light upon light" as guidance built upon innate disposition (fitrah). Whatever the precise mapping, the point is that this light dwells in "houses Allah has permitted to be raised" and in hearts kept undistracted by trade and sale. The mirage and the ocean-darkness that follow show the alternative with terrible

clarity: a life without this light is either a chasing after illusions that vanish when you reach them, or a drowning in darknesses so layered that you cannot find your own hand. The surah frames the entire moral project — chastity, honesty, obedience — as the guarding of a flame.

Points of reflection

An-Nur asks the believer to become a guardian of other people's honour. In an age when a rumour can circle the earth in seconds, the surah's discipline is startlingly relevant: refuse to be a link in the chain, demand evidence, and default to thinking well of your fellow believers. To forward what you cannot verify, the surah teaches, is to treat as small a thing that is enormous before Allah.

It calls us to see modesty not as a cage but as a garden wall — the protection that lets something precious grow. The gaze, the home's thresholds, the way we dress and marry, are not arbitrary restrictions but the architecture of a life in which the light of 24:35 can settle. The believer is invited to build such a house: literally a home, and inwardly a heart, where Allah's name is remembered morning and evening and where nothing shameful is allowed to take root.

Finally, the surah ties purity to power. Its promise of *istikhlaf* (24:55) tells the community that establishment in the land is not won by numbers or cunning but granted to those who believe, do righteous deeds, worship Allah alone, and obey. The road to honour among nations runs through honour within homes. An-Nur leaves the reader with a single coherent vision: keep the light clean, and Allah will let it shine.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Refuse to carry a rumor; God vindicated the innocent and shamed the spreaders.
2. Modesty is required of men before it is asked of women.
3. A believer's heart is a lamp meant to hold God's guiding light.
4. Empowerment on earth is promised to those who worship God alone and shun idols.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, al-Sa'di, al-Tabari. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.