

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ خُطُوَاتِ  
 الشَّيْطَانِ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ  
 وَرَحْمَتُهُ مَا زَكَا مِنْكُمْ مِّنْ أَحَدٍ أَبَدًا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَاءُ  
 وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾

*Al-Nour (The Light) 24:21*

**O You Who Believe!**

- Follow not Satan's footsteps.
- If any will follow the footsteps of Satan.
- He will (but) command what is shameful and wrong.
- And were it not for the grace and mercy of Allah on you.
- Not one of you would ever have been pure.
- But Allah does purify whom He pleases.
- And Allah is One Who hears and knows (all things).

**Commentary**

Allamah Tabatabai (AR)

2:208 – 2:210

These three verses, together with the four that follow them, guide us as how to preserve religious unity in human society: To enter into total submission, to limit oneself to the word spoken by Allah and to that deed whose path is shown by Allah. They declare that religious unity was never disintegrated, nor was the happiness of both worlds turned into misery with disaster visited upon the territory of a people, except when they left submission, manipulated the signs of Allah by altering them and putting them into the wrong place. This had happened to the children of Israel and other people, and will surely happen to this ummah also. But in the end Allah promises them His help, Surely the help of Allah is near.

Again, as the hearers are already believers, the submission called for means total submission to Allah after believing in Him. Hence the word *wholly* in the translation. It follows that believers must submit all their affairs to Allah, they should not decide themselves what was good for them and what was not, they should not prepare or select any path for themselves without the guidance of Allah and His Apostle.

They must remember that no people were destroyed except that they followed their own views and desires, and talked without true knowledge; and no people forfeited the right of life and happiness except that they became disunited.

It is clear from the above that following the footsteps of Satan does not mean following him in all the falsehood which he invites to, because a believer cannot follow Satan in all satanic schemes. Rather, it means to follow him in the matters of religion. Satan furnishes some paths of untruth with the signposts of truth; in this way, he puts into religion what is not from religion. Thus, a believer is deceived into following that path without realizing his error.

One way of becoming aware of such an interpolation is to find out whether Allah and His Apostle have ever mentioned it in their teachings of the religion.

The context and words of the verses also show what has been explained above. "Footsteps" are found in a trodden path. The believer is proceeding on that path; therefore, it must be the path of true religion. But Satan has put his marks thereon. So, the footsteps of Satan should refer to Satanic ways within the highway of true faith. The believer is obliged to enter into submission. Therefore, wherever he proceeds without wholly submitting himself to Allah and His Apostle, it must be in the footsteps of Satan. If he goes on to that path, he is following Satan's footsteps.

This verse is similar to some others. For example: O men! Eat of what is in the earth lawful and good, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; surely he is to you an open enemy. He only enjoins you evil and indecency, and that you should say against Allah what you do not know (2:168-169); O you who believe! Do not follow the footsteps of Satan; and whoever follows the footsteps of Satan, then surely he enjoins indecency and evil. (24:21); Eat of what Allah has given you and do not follow the footsteps of Satan, then surely he enjoins indecency and evil. (24:21); Eat of what Allah has given you and do not follow the footsteps of Satan; surely he is your open enemy. (6:142).

The difference between the verse under discussion and those quoted above is that this verse addresses the group as a whole, as it contains the word kaffatan (all, wholly, but those other verses are general. Accordingly, this verse implies the same meaning as the verses, And hold fast by the cord of Allah all together and be not divided. (3:103); And surely this My path is straight one, so follow it; and do not follow the (other) ways, for they will scatter you from His path. (6:153).

The verse implies that Islam guarantees that it contains all kind of laws and knowledge which are needed by the human beings for their welfare and good.

### A Discussion on Traditions

'Abdu 'r-Rahman says: I asked Abu 'Abdillah about a man who vowed to slaughter his child. He said:

That is from the footsteps of the Satan.  
(at-Tahdhib)

Mansfir ibn Hazim said: Abu 'Abdillah (AS) said to me: 'Have not you heard about Tariq? Verily, Tariq was a cattle- dealer in Madina. He came to Abu Ja'far and said: "O Abu Ja'far! I have taken an oath by divorce (of my wives), emancipation (of my slaves) and vow." Thereupon, (Abu Ja'far, a.s.) said to Him:

O Tariq! verily this is from the footsteps of the Satan.

Abu Ja'far (AS) said:

Every oath taken in the name of other than Allah, is from the footsteps of the Satan.  
(al-Ayyashi)

as-Sadiq (AS) said:

When a man takes oath for not doing a thing, while what he has sworn against, its doing is better than its leaving, then he should do that which is better; and there is no penalty on him; surely it (i.e., such oath) is only from the footsteps of the Satan.  
(al-Kafi)

*The author says*

The traditions, as you see, interpret the footsteps of the Satan as the deeds supposed to bring one nearer to Allah, while in fact they are not so, because the shari'ah does not recognize them, as we have explained above. Of course, as for the divorce, etc. (mentioned in the second tradition), there is an additional reason for the invalidity of such oaths; and that is making it conditional on some contingency in future; and it is against the principle of immediate and unconditional effecting of such transactions. (It is a topic of jurisprudence.) Oath in the name of other than Allah refers to an oath which has no validity in the shari'ah, and to swearing by what Allah has not sworn by and to which He has given no excellence.

Al-Baqir (AS) said about the words of Allah, *And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out...:*

That is, their likeness when you call them to the faith is like the caller who calls out to the cattle which understands nothing other than hearing a voice.

The traditions, as you see, interpret the footsteps of the Satan as the deeds supposed to bring one nearer to Allah, while in fact they are not so, because the shari'ah does not recognize them as we have explained above. Of course, as for the divorce, etc. (mentioned in the second tradition), there is an additional reason for the invalidity of such oaths; and that is making it conditional on some contingency in future; and it is against the principle of immediate and unconditional effecting of such transactions. (It is a topic of jurisprudence.) Oath in the name of other than Allah refers to an oath which has no validity in the shari'ah, and to swearing by what Allah has not sworn by and to which He has given no excellence.

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

The particular incident referred to here occurred on the return from the defensive expedition of the Bani Mustaliq in 5-6 Hijra. At one of the halts, A-isha, the Holy Prophet's wife, withdrew from the camp to cleanse herself in the nearby desert. There she lost her necklace. As it was dark there she took time to discover it. In the meantime the march was ordered. As her litter was veiled, it was not noticed that she was not in it. When she returned to the camp, she could do nothing but wait. She fell asleep.

Next morning she was found by Safwan who had been left behind to pick up anything inadvertently left behind. He put her on his camel and brought her, leading the camel on foot. This episode furnished some malicious enemies of the Holy Prophet, particularly the hypocrites, with an opportunity to raise a scandalous storm in order to hurt the feelings of the Holy Prophet. The ringleader among them was the chief of the Madina hypocrites, Abdullah ibn Ubay. Mistah, her uncle, also helped him. Ibn Ubay is referred to as the man who "took on himself the lead among them" to spread the scandal.

Ali ibn abi Talib knew that it was an obvious lie (as said in verse 12), concocted to hurt the Holy Prophet, so he asked Burayrah, the maid of A-isha, to tell the mischief-makers the truth about her mistress. On Burayrah's report the scandal was diffused.

For verse 13 refer to the commentary of verse 4.

Mistah was a sahabi (companion) of the Holy Prophet but because of his role in the incident he was punished by the Holy Prophet. It shows that every sahabi was not righteous. According to Allah's law (indallah) four witnesses have to be produced even if the accusation is true.

People may think it is an insignificant matter to speak lightly of something which damages a person's character or reputation, but with Allah it is a most serious matter in all cases, particularly when it involves the honour and reputation of pious men and women.

Dissemination of scandalous news and gossip is a wide-spread social evil. In modern times it is carried out through books and magazines.

For thorough purification see commentary of Ahzab: 33 and for partial purification verse 26 of this surah.

Verse 22 (And let not those of you who possess grace and abundance swear against giving to the near of kin and the poor and those who have fled in Allah's way, and they should pardon and turn away. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.) refers to Abu Bakr, the father of A-isha, and Mistah, his cousin. Abu Bakr was given ample means by Allah. He used to support Mistah, but after this incident he withdrew his help. According to the highest standards of Islamic ethics, as said in this verse, a truly generous patron should not, in personal anger, withdraw his support even from a delinquent if he is in need. The general application holds good for all time. Those who desire that Allah should forgive their faults must be forgiving and merciful in their dealings with men who have wronged them.

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

The Arabic word /khtuwat/ is the plural form of the word /khtwat/ that means 'step'. The Holy Qur'an has used the phrase /khtuwatis shaytan/ ('the footsteps of the Satan') when it is the matter of calumny and lust, in order to indicate that Satan encourages man step by step to do some sins.

Though these verses do not follow the subject of 'ifk, they complete the content of that matter. It is a warning for all believers that evil thought and deeds sometimes penetrate gradually and invisibly. If they are not controlled and hindered in their first steps, man will get alerted when the die is cast. Thus when the first temptations of spreading lewdness or any sin get manifest, they must be immediately withstood, so that defilement does not get prevalent.

In the first verse, addressing the believers, it says: "*O you who believe! Do not follow the steps of the Satan. And whoever follows the steps of the Satan, then verily he commands indecency and wrong, .....*"

If 'Shaytan' is interpreted into the vast meaning of the word, as any 'ruinous, felonious, cunning creature', the extensiveness of this warning in all dimensions of life becomes clear.

A pure and faithful man can never be all of a sudden involved in corruption, but it is done step by step.

*First step:*

Hobnobbing and getting familiar with wicked persons.

*Second step:*

Attending their parties.

*Third step:*

Thought of sin.

*Fourth step:*

Committing questionable examples and errors.

*Fifth step:*

Committing lesser sins.

Finally he will do the worst sins and he is just like a person on whom an offender's yoke is laid and the offender leads him to precipice step by step, so that he falls down and will be ruined. Yes, these are 'the footsteps of the Satan.'

Then the verse refers to one of the most important Divine favors and blessings which are bestowed on man in the path of guidance. It says: "..... *Had it not been Allah's Grace and His Mercy on you, not one of you would have ever been pure. But Allah purifies whom He pleases; and Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.*"

Undoubtedly, Divine grace and bless rescue men from defilements, sins and deviations, because He has conferred, on one hand, the gift of intellect and, on the other hand, the grace of the existence of the Prophet (S) and ordinances that have been sent down by revelation. Moreover, His special help, and supernatural aid that cover deserving, receptive, and apt men are the most important factors of purification and cleanness.

The Qur'anic holy phrase /manyasa/, as we have said repeatedly, does not mean unreasonable will and desire, but Allah does not do any guidance and does not confer any grace, unless attempt and exertion is carried out by servants. One who has decided to go this path and tries, Allah will hold his hands, saves him from devil's temptations and so leads him to the destination.

In other words, Divine grace and bless has sometime religious aspect, that he has come forth through mission of prophets, revelation of heavenly books, legalization of ordinances, glad tidings and warnings. And it is sometime genetic or inherent, that comes forth through Divine spiritual helps. The verses in question (out of indication of the sentence 'man yasha') mostly concern the second section.

Meanwhile, we must pay attention that the words 'Zakat' and 'Tazkiyah' originally mean 'to grow' and 'to cause to grow', but in most cases they have been applied in the sense of: 'to become clean' and 'to clean something'. They may have one root, because no growth and development occurs when evils and corruptions are not got rid of.