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you agreed upon, on an equitable basis. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well all that you do.

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This appears in the form of a statement but what is meant is a command; it refers to what happens anyway, so there is no need to issue instructions that ﴿Mothers may breastfeed their children for two whole years﴾. Because the word translated here as “year” may mean an entire year or most of a year, Allah stipulates that it should be two whole or complete years.

﴿for those who wish to complete the full term of breastfeeding﴾. Then when the two years of breastfeeding are over, breastfeeding is complete; after that the milk becomes like any other food. Hence breastfeeding after two years does not count with regard to creating the mahram relationship between the breastfeeding woman and the infant.

From this verse, and from the verse in which Allah (ﷻ) says:

﴿...and his bearing and weaning take thirty months...﴾ (al-Aḥqāf 46: 15)

– it is understood that the minimum length of pregnancy is six months, at which stage a child may be born.

﴿It is the obligation of the one to whom the child belongs﴾ that is, the father

﴿to provide food and clothing for them [the mothers] on an equitable basis﴾. This is applicable whether she is still married to him or is divorced; the father has to give her maintenance by spending on her and clothing her; that is her payment for breastfeeding.

This indicates that if she is still married to him, she is not entitled to any payment other than maintenance and clothing, each one according to his means. Hence Allah (ﷻ) says: ﴿No soul should have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear﴾. So a poor man should not be forced to spend like a rich man, and the one who cannot afford to pay maintenance should not be forced to do so until he can afford it.