

Al-Mujadalah [The Contention]

Madinan Period

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

[1] Allah has surely heard the words of her who contends with you concerning her husband and complains to Allah.¹ Allah hears what both of you say. Verily Allah is All- Hearing, All- Seeing.

[2] Those among you who divorce their wives by declaring them to be their mothers,² such are not their mothers; none are their mothers except those who gave birth to them. Indeed what they say is highly contemptible and false. Verily Allah is Most Pardoning, Most Forgiving.³

1. *These verses were revealed in connection with the problems faced by a lady, Khawlah bint Tha 'labah, whose husband had repudiated the marital tie with her by resorting to **zihar**. Khawlah enquired of the Prophet (peace be on him) what the legal position was in that regard. The reason for the enquiry was that no clear injunction on the issue had until then been sent down by God. The Prophet (peace be on him) declared that conjugal relations had become unlawful for the husband on account of **zihar**. On hearing this, Khawlah wailed and cried, and said that that would bring utter ruin upon her and her children. At the very same moment that she was entreating the Prophet (peace be on him) to suggest some way out of the impasse, God revealed these verses which embody the injunction relevant to the question. (See vv. 2 ff.)*

2. *It was common in Arabia that when a quarrel took place between the spouses, the husband would say to his wife in a fit of rage: "You are to me like my mother's back." This expression meant that sexual intercourse with her would amount to having sexual intercourse with his own mother. Such words are still uttered by ignorant and foolish people who, in the heat of a family quarrel, declare their wife to be like their mother or sister. This means that she ceases to be his wife and becomes like one of those women with whom marriage is unlawful. Such a pronouncement is called **zihar**. In pre-Islamic times, the Arabs considered this to be a form of divorce; in fact it was considered an even more emphatic statement than the simple pronouncement of divorce.*

3. *Such a statement is highly reprehensible and calls for severe punishment of the person who pronounces it. Out of sheer benevolence, however, God abrogated this pre-Islamic law and thus saved people from the devastating consequences of **zihar**. Moreover; God laid down a punishment for those guilty of **zihar** (see vv. 3-4). If we bear in mind the enormity of the guilt, the punishment that is laid down should indeed be considered light.*

[3] Those who declare their wives to be their mothers and thereafter go back on what they have said⁴ shall free a slave before they may touch each other. That is what you are exhorted to do. Allah is fully aware of all your deeds.⁵

[4] And he who does not find a slave (to free), shall fast for two months consecutively before they may touch each other;⁶ and he who is unable to do so shall feed sixty needy people.⁷ All this is in order that you may truly believe in Allah and His Messenger.⁸ These are the bounds set by Allah; and a grievous chastisement awaits the unbelievers.

4. *This can mean either of the following two: (1) if they wish to rescind their previous statement in order to offset its harmful effects, or (2) if they wish to restore the lawfulness of their marital tie with their spouse which had become unlawful because of their declaring their wife was, to them, like their mother.*

5. *It is possible that somebody might resort to **zihar** with his wife without publicly announcing it. He might also resume his conjugal relations with his wife later on without atoning for the sin he had committed (by having resorted to **zihar**). It is stressed here that no matter how hard the person concerned might try to keep all this hidden from the rest of the world, God will doubtlessly know it and it will be impossible for him to escape God's chastisement.*

6. *That is, it is imperative that such a person should fast consecutively for two months before resuming conjugal relations with his wife. It is mandatory that during these two months there should be no interruption in fasting.*

7. *The person concerned is required to feed 60 needy people to their fill twice a day. He, however, has the option to provide them cooked food or uncooked food. Moreover, he may feed 60 people all in one day, or feed one person daily for 60 days.*

8. *Here "believing" signifies believing truthfully and sincerely rather than merely making a formal declaration of faith.*

[5] Verily those who oppose Allah and His Messenger shall be brought low even as those before them were brought low. Surely We have sent down Clear Signs; and a humiliating chastisement awaits the unbelievers;

[6] a chastisement that shall come upon them on the Day when Allah will raise them all to a new life and will inform them of their deeds. Allah has recorded it all while they have forgotten it. Allah is a witness over everything.

[7] Are you not aware⁹ that Allah knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth? Never is there any whispering among three but He is their fourth; nor among five but He is their sixth; nor fewer nor more but He is with them wherever they may be. And then He will tell them on the Day of Judgement all that they have done. Surely Allah knows everything.

9. *From here Onwards (vv. 7-10), the hypocrites are censured for the attitude they adopted in the Muslim society. Although they appeared to be a part of the Muslim collective entity, they had secretly formed a group of their own apart from the community of believers. Whenever the Muslims saw them, they would find them conferring among themselves in hushed tones. It is in the course of these secret deliberations that they came up with ideas as to how to sow*

discord and spread panic in the ranks of Muslims. In order to accomplish this, they contrived ever-new schemes and invented as well as disseminated all kinds of mischievous rumours.

[8] Have you not seen those who were forbidden to whisper and yet they engaged in what they had been forbidden? They secretly converse among themselves concerning sin and transgression and disobedience to the Messenger. And when they come to you, they greet you in a manner that Allah does not greet you,¹⁰ and say to themselves: "Why does Allah not chastise us for these utterances of ours?" Hell it is that shall suffice them, and in it will they burn. How woeful is their destination!

[9] Believers, when you converse in secrecy, let that not be concerning sin and transgression and disobedience to the Messenger; rather, converse concerning virtue and piety. And fear Allah to Whom all of you shall be mustered.

10. This practice was common among the Jews and the hypocrites. According to a number of traditions, some Jews came to the Prophet (peace be on him) and said: "Al-Sam 'alayka ya Abd al-Qasim." They pronounced these words in such a way that people might be led to think that they were pronouncing the well-known greeting: "al-salam 'alayka." But in fact they used the word sam which means death, instead of using the word Salam which means peace. (The actual meaning of the greeting they used: "Al-Sam 'alayka: ..." was: "Death be upon you.")

[10] Whispering is an act of Satan, one that aims at causing grief to the believers; yet without Allah's leave no harm can be caused to them. So in Allah should the believers put all their trust.

[11] Believers, when you are told: "Make room for one another in your assemblies," then make room; Allah will bestow amplitude on you.¹¹ And when it is said: "Rise up," then rise up; ¹² Allah will raise to high ranks those of you who believe and are endowed with knowledge. Allah is well aware of all that you do.

[12] Believers, when you come to the Messenger for private consultation, offer some charity before your consultation with him.¹³ That is better for you and more conducive to purity. But if you find nothing to offer in charity then know that Allah is Most Merciful, Most Compassionate.

11. One of the rules of decent behaviour which God and His Messenger (peace be on him) had taught the Muslims was that when any newcomer arrives, those sitting in an assembly should show deference to him and squeeze themselves a bit to make room for him. On the other hand, newcomers were required to act with grace and were asked not to forcefully press their way into any assembly nor should they try to occupy other's seats and thus make them leave the assembly.

12. That is, when people are asked to disperse, they should indeed get up and leave rather than keep sitting.

13. *'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas mentioned the reason which led to the promulgation of this injunction. According to him, it was promulgated because people had begun to request the Prophet (peace be on him) to grant them private audiences a little too frequently and without any genuine reason.*

[13] Are you afraid that you will have to offer charity when you hold private conversation with the Prophet? But if you are unable to do so and Allah pardons you, then establish Prayer and pay **Zakah**, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah is well aware of all that you do.¹⁴

[14] Do you not see those who took for friends a people whom Allah is wroth with? They neither belong to you nor you to them. They swear to a falsehood, and they do so knowingly.

[15] Allah has prepared for them a grievous chastisement. Indeed, evil are the acts in which they are engaged.

[16] They have taken their oaths as a shield by means of which they hinder people from the Way of Allah. Theirs shall be a humiliating chastisement.

[17] Neither their possessions nor their offspring will be of any avail to them against Allah. They are the people of the Fire; therein they shall abide.

[18] On the Day when Allah will raise them all from the dead they will swear before Him as they swear before you today, thinking that this will avail them, Behold, they are utter liars.

[19] Satan has gained mastery over them and has made them neglect remembering Allah. They are the party of Satan. Behold, the party of Satan will be the losers.

14. *This is the second injunction that was revealed sometime after the first one. The second injunction abrogated the first injunction which had made it mandatory to give some form of charity before a private audience with the Prophet (peace be on him). There is disagreement, however, as regards how long the first injunction remained in force. Qatadah says that it remained in force for less than a day after which it was abrogated. On the other hand, Muqatil ibn Hayyan says that it remained in force for ten days, which is the longest period mentioned in any tradition.*

[20] Verily those who oppose Allah and His Messenger will be among the most abject beings.

[21] Allah has written: "Surely I will prevail; I and My Messengers." Verily Allah is Most Strong, Most Mighty.

[22] You shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day befriending those who oppose Allah and His Messenger even though they be their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred. He has inscribed faith in their hearts and has strengthened them with a spirit from Him, and He shall make them enter Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Therein they shall abide. Allah is well-pleased with them, and they are well-pleased with Him. They belong to Allah's party. Verily Allah's party shall prosper.