

Al-Saff [Battle Formation] **Madinan Period**

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

[1] All that is in the heavens and all that is on earth extols Allah's glory. He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise.

[2] Believers, why do you profess that which you do not practise?

[3] It is most loathsome in the sight of Allah that you should profess what you do not practise.

[4] Allah indeed loves those who fight in His Way as though they are a solid wall cemented with molten lead.¹

[5] And call to mind when Moses said to his people: "O my people, why do you torment me when you know well that I am Allah's Messenger to you?"² So when they deviated, Allah made their hearts deviant. Allah does not direct the evil-doers to the Right Way.³

1. This elucidates two things. First, that God is truly pleased only with those believers who are ready to fight and risk their lives in His Way. Second that the army of believers whom God loves is possessed of three qualities: (1) It should fight with full consciousness that it is fighting in God's cause alone. (2) It should fight as a well-organised and well-arrayed force rather than as a disorganised and undisciplined mob. (3) It should be possessed of full unity in its ranks and be like "a solid wall cemented with molten lead" against the enemy.

2. This is said as a warning to the Muslims lest they behave towards their Prophet (peace be on him) in the manner the Israelites had behaved towards their Prophets. For if they did so, they would inevitably meet the same fate that overtook the Israelites.

3. God does not direct to the Straight Way those who are bent upon following crooked ways. Nor does He forcibly dignify those who are intent upon disobeying Him by enabling them to embrace true guidance and tread the path of righteousness.

[6] And call to mind when Jesus, son of Mary, said: "O Children of Israel, I am Allah's Messenger to you,⁴ I verify the Torah which has come before me, and I give you the glad tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, his name being Ahmad."⁵ Yet when he came to them with Clear Signs they said: "This is sheer trickery."⁶

[7] Who would be more unjust than he who invents a lie about Allah⁷ the while he is being called to Islam?⁸ Allah does not direct such evil-doing folk to the Right Way.

4. This refers to the second instance of Israel's disobedience. The first instance belongs to the early period of their glory; whereas the second belongs to a time that marks the end of that period whereafter they were overtaken by God's enduring scourge. The main purpose of

narrating these instances is to warn the Muslims against the dire consequences of behaving in the manner the Israelites had behaved.

5. This refers to an unambiguous prediction by Jesus (peace be on him) regarding the coming of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). We have elaborately substantiated this prediction elsewhere. See my comments on this verse in *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (Lahore: Idarah-i Tarjuman al-Qur'an, 1971), II edition, Vol. 5, *al-Saff*: n. 8, pp, 461-476.

6. The actual word used is **sihr** which signifies, in the present context, trickery and fraud rather than magic or sorcery. It may be noted that in the Arabic literary usage the meaning of the word **sihr** is not confined to magic. The use of this word in the sense of deceit is also well-established. The verse, therefore, means that when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), whose coming had been foretold by Jesus, did indeed come, his claim to prophethood was denounced as sheer fraud and deception by the Israelites and the followers of the Prophet Jesus ('peace be on him).

7. In other words, it is highly iniquitous to give the lie to the claim made by a Prophet who had been so designated by God and to dismiss God's revelation to him as his own contrivance.

8. In the first place, it is outrageously unjust to declare a true Prophet to be an imposter. But it is even more monstrous to hurl abuses and slanders at a true Prophet who calls people to worship and obey God, and then to resort to such ignoble means as lies, false accusations and slander to thwart his Mission.

[8] They seek to extinguish Allah's light (by blowing) with their mouths, but Allah shall spread His light in all its fullness, howsoever the unbelievers may abhor this.

[9] He it is Who has sent forth the Messenger with the Guidance and the True Religion that He may make it prevail over all religion, however those that associate aught with Allah in His Divinity might dislike this.

[10] Believers, shall I direct you to a commerce⁹ that will deliver you from a grievous chastisement?

9. "Commerce" represents a venture wherein a person employs his wealth, time, effort, intelligence and ability to obtain profit. It is in consideration of this that faith and **jihad** are here called "commerce". The point that is being made here is that only when a person devotes all his possessions to God's cause will he be able to obtain the profit that is mentioned hereinafter.

[11] Have faith in Allah and His Messenger and strive in the Way of Allah with your possessions and your lives. That is better for you if you only knew.

[12] He will forgive you your sins and will admit you to Gardens beneath which rivers flow. He will lodge you in excellent mansions in the Gardens of eternity. That is the supreme triumph.

[13] He will also grant you the other favour that you desire: help from Allah and a victory that will come soon. Give glad tidings of this to the believers.

[14] Believers, become Allah's helpers, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples: "Who is my helper in (calling people) to Allah?" The disciples had responded by saying: "We are Allah's helpers." Then a section of the Children of Israel believed and a section rejected the call. Thereafter We aided the believers against their enemies, and they prevailed.¹⁰

10. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are Jews. As for those who believe in him, they are Christians as well as Muslims. God first made the Christians prevail against the Jews, and later that Muslims too prevailed against them. Thus, those who disbelieve in Jesus (peace be on him) were overcome by both Christians and Muslims. The purpose of mentioning this fact is to deliver a message of assurance to the Muslims that in the same manner that Muslims and believers in Jesus Christ (peace be on him) had triumphed over those who disbelieved in him in the past, so will the believers in the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) triumph over those who would disbelieve in him.