

## ‘The Pleading Woman’

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *tujadiluka*, meaning ‘she pleads with thee’, from the root *mujadalah*, ‘pleading’. Like the other Madinan surahs, it addresses the social order, alongside matters of faith. Whereas the preceding surah, *al-Hâdið*, concluded on the theme of His profusion, glory be to Him, so this surah opens on the theme of an instance of Allah’s profusion, namely His response to the wishes of a lady who came to the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*<sup>1</sup>, complaining of a situation concerning her husband, and seeking that he give her a release from the difficulty in which she found herself. He therefore clarified the practical ruling.

*By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

***In the name of Allah ...*** We begin with the name of the Allah, who is deserving of all praise and all glorifications – for in beginning by His name we observe His right to be preferred before all others, as befits His magnificence.

***... the Compassionate, the Merciful*** He who bestows from His mercy upon every person and everything, for as it is said, ‘He gives to those who ask, and He gives to those who ask not and know Him not – in tenderness from Him and mercy.’

***Allah has indeed heard the word of she who pleaded with thee about her husband and complained to Allah; and Allah hears your conversation, indeed Allah is hearing, seeing. (1)***

قَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّتِي تُجَادِلُكَ فِي زَوْجِهَا وَتَشْتَكِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ خَائِرٌ كَمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١﴾

***Allah has indeed heard the word of she who pleaded with thee about her husband and complained to Allah; ...*** her state and what has befallen upon her. The name of the lady was Khawlah; her husband’s name was Aws ibn Sâmit.

***... and Allah hears your conversation, ...*** The pronoun ‘your’ in ‘your conversation’ is the twin-plural, so that it means the conversation of the Messenger and the lady who appealed to him.

***... indeed Allah is hearing, seeing ...*** This implies, here, that the two were being watched and listened to by Allah, glory be to Him.

It is stated in *Majma‘ al-Bayân*<sup>2</sup>, briefly, that the verse or portent (ayah in Arabic) was sent down concerning a lady of the Anshâr<sup>3</sup>, of tribe of Khazraj. Her name was Khawlah, and she was good looking, and her husband was Aws ibn Sâmit. Seeing her in prostration during her prayer, when she had come away from the prayer, her husband wanted her but she rejected him. He became angry with her, and as he was a hasty, reckless man, he said to her, ‘You are like my mother’s back to me (*anti-‘alayya ka dhahri ummi*)!’ He then regretted having said this, since for the pagan Arabs it was a formula of divorce (called *dhihaḥ*. *dhihaḥ* is a derivative of *dhahr* meaning the back.). He said to her that he supposed she was now forbidden for him. She replied that he shouldn’t say that, but that he should go to Allah’s Messenger and ask him. He said that he found himself too ashamed to ask him about it, so she said to him that he should bid her to ask him. ‘Ask him,’ he said.

So she went to the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*, and complained to him that her husband was Aws ibn Sâmit, that he had married her when she had been young and wealthy with property and kinfolk, and that he had consumed her wealth and taken her youth, separated her from her family and now that she was old he had pronounced the ‘mother’s back’ formula to leave her. Then she said that her husband regretted what he had said, and was there any way they could get back together again?

The Messenger of Allah said, ‘I see only that you are banned for him’.

She said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, by Him who sent down the Book upon thee, he did not say the divorce; and he is the father of my children and the dearest of all people to me!’

So he said, ‘I see only that you are banned for him, and in your case I am not instructed otherwise.’ At this she began to pray, saying, ‘I complain to Allah of my loss, my need and the severity of my condition! O Allah, send

<sup>1</sup> *shllallah ‘alayhi wa ahlih*, meaning may Allah bless him and his pure family. It is a mark of piety and devotion to use this salutation when mentioning the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. His ‘family’ are his cousin and son-in-law Ali (who was appointed by Allah as his first successor), his daughter Lady Fatima al-Zahra, their sons Hasan and Husayn, and the nine impeccable Imams who are all the descendents of Husayn. In the Holy Qur’an – [33: 33] – the ‘family’ is referred to as the Ahl al-Bayt.

<sup>2</sup> It is a commentary on the holy Qur’an, by Tâbrasi, d. 548H/1153CE.

<sup>3</sup> Literally it means supporters, i.e. the Muslims of Medina who supported the migrants (Muhajerin) from Makkah.

down upon the tongue of Thy Messenger!’ This was the first instance of *dhīḥaḥ* in Islam. Then she said, ‘Consider my case, may Allah make me your sacrifice.’

At that the revelation came down upon the Messenger, and he told her to summon her husband. Then the Messenger recited to him ‘Allah has heard...’ until the completion of the *ayah*. Then he asked him if he had the means to free a neck, meaning a slave. [This is the requirement to restore the relationship, as stated in the third verse here.] The man said that such would mean the end of his wealth, and that slaves were expensive. So the Prophet asked him whether he could fast for two months consecutively. The man replied, ‘By Allah, if I don’t eat three meals my eyes become dim and I fear that I will become dim-sighted.’ So the Messenger of Allah asked if he could feed sixty paupers. He replied that he could not, ‘unless you help me in that, O Allah’s Messenger!’ So the Prophet said that he would assist him to the amount of fifteen *saʿ* [of wheat], and that he would pray for blessings for him. And so he helped him to that amount. [One *saʿ* is three *modd*, and one *modd* is equivalent to approximately three quarters of one kilogram. Thus fifteen *saʿ* is approximately 34 kilogram. ‘Feeding sixty paupers’ means each pauper must be given at least one *modd* of wheat.]

Now He explains, glory be to Him, the censure of *dhīḥaḥ*, in His word:

**Those of ye who declare their wives “as their mother’s back”; they are not their mothers. Indeed their mothers are but those who gave birth to them. Indeed they say a dishonourable word, and a perfidy. And Allah is indeed oft-pardoning, oft-forgiving. (2)**

الَّذِينَ يُظَاهِرُونَ مِنْكُمْ مِمَّن نَسَأَ بِهِمْ مَا هِيَ. أُمَّهَاتِهِمْ إِنَّمَا هُنَّ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ  
إِلَّا الَّتِي وَلَدْتُهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَقُولُونَ مُنْكَرًا مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَزُورًا وَإِنَّ  
اللَّهَ لَعَفُوفٌ غَفُورٌ ﴿٢﴾

**Those of ye who declare their wives “as their mother’s back” ...** “declaring one’s wife as one’s mother’s back” is given for *dhīḥaḥ*, which is the declaration made by the husband to his wife, ‘You are like my mother’s back to me!’ Pronouncing this phrase meant irrevocable divorce for the pre-Islamic Arabs. Its meaning is that just as one’s mother’s back is forbidden for a man, so too his wife has now become forbidden to him. Islam endorsed the saying of this expression to be a cause of a man’s wife becoming forbidden to him, *with* the conditions that apply to divorce, like the presence of two just witnesses, and so on. Yet this manner of divorce is forbidden, and Islam requires the return to the wife through paying a penance.

... **they are not their mothers** ... The mere saying of such a word does not turn a man’s wife into his mother.

... **Indeed their mothers are but those who gave birth to them;** ... The mothers of the men who declare *dhīḥaḥ* are those who gave birth to them. For there is no maternal reality or relationship between the declarer [of *dhīḥaḥ*] and the target of the declaration [his wife].

... **And they say a dishonourable word,** ... Likening one’s wife to one’s mother is dishonourable [disrespectful to the wife]; it has no substance in reality and no place in the Law, and is therefore invalid.

... **and a perfidy** ... It is a breach of truth, a lie, as that which has no substance in reality and no place in the Law, is obviously false. Nevertheless, he who says it should not despair of the pardon of Allah and His grace, as the doors of repentance are always open:

... **And Allah indeed is oft-pardoning, oft-forgiving.** He is oft-pardoning of the disobedient, and forgiving of their sins. ‘Oft-Pardoning’ is given for *afuww*, ‘forgiving’ for *ghafur*. The difference is that to pardon is to abstain from imposing a punishment, without this necessitating concealment of the sin so that it does not become apparent, like the governments that sometimes pardon criminals, although their crimes remain on the records; whereas forgiveness includes the concealment of the disobedience, so that it is erased from His lists, glory be to Him.

The theme now turns to clarify the objective ruling, and what that entails:

**And those who declare their wives “as their mother’s back” and then retract what they have said, should free a neck before they touch each other. That is what ye are admonished with, and Allah is informed of what ye do. (3)**

وَالَّذِينَ يُظَاهِرُونَ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا قَالُوا فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مِنْ  
قَبْلِ أَنْ يَتَمَاسَا ذَاكُمُ تُوعَظُونَ بِهِ. وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٣﴾

**And those who declare their wives “as their mother’s back” and then retract what they have said,** ... Those who declare *dhīḥaḥ* against their wives and then wish to restore relations with their wives and rescind their word that caused the prohibition:

... **should free a neck...** In order for them to enjoy sexual intercourse with their wives, they must set free a possessed slave. A slave is called ‘a neck’, as an instance of a whole being known by a part.

... **before they touch each other...** ‘touch’ is a reference to sexual acts, as these are forbidden before the freeing of a slave.

... **This is what ye are admonished with, ...** ‘This’ means the obligation of setting free, which we are ‘admonished with’. An ‘admonishment’ (*wa’dh*), is a warning of an action the consequence of which is punishment; failure to set free and then to engage in intimacy would lead to punishment, as it is disobedience.

... **and Allah is informed of what ye do.** He knows, glory be to Him, whenever intimacy is engaged in without making the penance, and therefore it is for us not to commit that which brings punishment.

**So whosoever finds it not, then a fast for two consecutive months before they touch each other. So whosoever is unable, then feeding sixty paupers – that is for ye to believe in Allah and His Messenger. And those are Allah’s boundaries, and for the disbelievers is a painful chastisement. (4)**

فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ شَهْرَيْنِ مُتَتَابِعَيْنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَتَمَاسَا ۖ فَمَنْ لَمْ  
يَسْتَطِعْ فَاِطْعَامُ سِتِّينَ مَسْكِينًا ۚ ذَلِكَ لِتُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۗ وَتِلْكَ  
حُدُودُ اللَّهِ ۗ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

**So whosoever finds it not, then a fast for two consecutive months before they touch each other ...** He who declares *dhihar* against his wife and then wishes to return, but is unable to free a slave, either because his wealth is insufficient, or simply because there are no slaves, then his penance is that he fasts for two months consecutively. This means that he must fast every day for two months, without any intervening days on which he does not fast, before he and his wife can be intimate with each other.

... **So whosoever is unable, then feeding sixty paupers ...** And if he who declares *dhihar* against his wife and wishes to return but can neither free a slave nor fast for two months, then it is for him to feed sixty paupers, satisfying them until they are full, or, for example, by giving to each of them at least one *modd* of wheat [one *modd* is equivalent to approximately three quarters of one kilogram].

... **that ...** It means the legislation of the penance for the husband who wishes to return after having made the *dhihar* declaration.

... **is for ye to believe in Allah and His Messenger; ...** This means that the purpose of this legislation is for faith to penetrate into the hearts, for the penetration of faith is only accomplished through the repeated performance of the duties. The obligations rouse the heart, and strengthen its properties.

... **These are Allah’s boundaries ...** These penances are Allah’s boundaries. ‘Boundaries’ is given for *hjudud*, meaning the limits of faith as established by Allah, glory be to Him. The believer should not depart from these limits through disobedience, just as one should not leave one’s city limits in the direction of an enemy.

... **and for the disbelievers is a painful chastisement.** Those who deny Allah’s boundaries and renounce them, have a painful chastisement before them.

**Verily, those who contravene Allah and His Messenger, will be subdued as those before them were subdued. And indeed We have sent down clarifying signs; And for the disbelievers is an abasing chastisement. (5)**

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحَادُّونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ كُتِبُوا كَمَا كُتِبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۗ وَقَدْ  
أَنْزَلْنَا آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ ۗ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿٥﴾

**Verily those who contravene Allah and His Messenger, ...** It means those who fail to implement their commands.

... **will be subdued as those before them were subdued ...** Their humiliation shall be like the humiliation of the preceding generations of disbelievers and polytheists, to be achieved by the victory of Islam over them in the world, and their chastisement in the hereafter.

... **And indeed We have sent down the clarifying signs; ...** It means the signs and proofs. They are clear in themselves and clarify the principles of faith and the rules of the Law, so that no one can excuse himself by claiming that he did not know.

... **and for the disbelievers is an abasing chastisement.** Those who disbelieve in the signs will be abased and humiliated by the chastisement.

The day of the debasing chastisement is:

**The day Allah raises them, all together, and then He informs them of what they have done – Allah has kept count of it while they have forgotten it; and Allah is over all things a witness. (6)**

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا عَمِلُوا ۗ أَحْصَاهُ اللَّهُ وَنَسُوهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ  
عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٦﴾

**The day Allah raises them, all together, and then He informs them of what they have done ...** 'Raises' is given for *yab'ath*; it means bringing to life and raising. None shall be missed that day; there is no escape for anyone from His face, glory be to Him. Allah shall inform them of all they have done, every single act [or offence] they have committed would be read out prior to their punishment, so that they shall know for what they are being punished, and will not be able to say that their punishment is wrongful.

... **Allah has kept count of it** ... Allah, glory be to Him, counts and records everything.

... **while they have forgotten it**; ... Man normally forgets the actions he has performed.

... **and Allah is over all things a witness**. He is present and witnesses everything a person does, and He commands His angels to record it, so that each is paid back in full on the day of resurrection.

**Have thou not seen that Allah knows whatever in the skies and whatever in the earth? There is no huddle of three but that He is the fourth of them, nor five but that He is the sixth of them, and nor less than that and nor more, but that He is with them wherever they may be. Thereupon on the day of resurrection He will inform them of what they did. Indeed Allah is over all things knowing. (7)**

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَا يَكُونُ  
مِنْ حِجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا آدْنَى  
مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرَ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا  
عَمِلُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

**Have thou not seen ...** This term means 'have thou not realised', as vision is sometimes by the eye and sometimes by the heart. The addressee is the Messenger and any intellectual.

... **that Allah knows whatever in the skies and whatever in the earth?**... Nothing remains hidden from Him, glory be to Him; therefore, how is it that He could be unaware of the actions of the stubborn deniers and the disbelievers? The question form is for a definite assertion, along the lines of His word, 'He informs them of what they did' and 'Allah is over all things a witness.'

The universality of His knowledge is then emphasised in that it encompasses even the secrets a person confides to another person in confidence:

... **There is no huddle of three but that He is the fourth of them, ...** 'Huddle' is given for *najwa* meaning a confidential discussion or discourse between two or more people in seclusion from the rest of humankind. **'He is the fourth of them'** in the sense that He hears everything they say.

... **nor five but that He is the sixth of them, ...** And He hears all they say.

... **and nor less than that...** This means a confidential discussion or huddle between two persons.

... **and nor more, ...** That is, more than five of them huddled in confidential discussion.

... **but that He is with them wherever they may be ...** His knowledge accompanies them wherever they are in the earth, or beyond that.

... **Thereupon on the day of resurrection He will inform them of what they did ...** On the day of resurrection He shall have them informed of all they did in their life on earth, so as to requite them for their deeds. That is because the rewards and punishments are subsequent to their being informed, as an honour for those to be rewarded, and to humiliate those to be punished.

... **Indeed Allah is over all things knowing.** He knows all things and nothing remains from Him hidden.

**Have thou not looked to those who were forbidden from huddling? They then return to that from which they were forbidden; and they huddle together for sin and enmity and disobedience to the Messenger. And when they come to thee, they greet thee with a greeting by which Allah never greeted thee, saying among themselves, 'Why does Allah not chastise us for what we say?' Hell suffices them! They shall burn in it; atrocious is the destination! (8)**

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ نُهُوا عَنِ النَّجْوَى ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا نُهُوا عَنْهُ  
وَيَتَنَجَّجُونَ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّجْوَى وَمَعْصِيَتِ الرَّسُولِ وَإِذَا جَاءُوكَ  
حَيَّوْكَ بِمَا لَمْ يُحَيِّكَ بِهِ اللَّهُ وَيَقُولُونَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَوْلَا يُعَذِّبُنَا اللَّهُ  
بِمَا نَقُولُ حَسْبُنَا جَهَنَّمُ يَصَلُونَهَا فَلْيَنْتَسِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٨﴾

**Have thou not looked to those who were forbidden from huddling?** It is recorded from Ibn 'Abbas that the ayah or portent came down concerning some Jews and hypocrites. They used to gather together in a huddle discussing matters and would wink between themselves at the believers, and would say that they could only see them being

defeated or afflicted or killed by the raiders of their kin and brethren who had departed the city. This troubled the believers, and they complained to the Messenger of Allah. He forbade them from doing this, but they did not refrain, and so the ayah came down.

... **They then return to that from which they were forbidden;** ... That is, they did not refrain from that which they were forbidden from doing.

... **and they huddle together for sin...** Some of them encouraging others towards sinfulness.

... **and enmity...** That is, in enmity against the people and in aversion to the truth.

... **and disobedience to the Messenger** ... Some of them recommending others to disobey the Messenger.

**And when they come to thee,** ... That is, to the Messenger.

... **they greet thee with a greeting by which Allah never greeted thee,** ... It means that they greeted him with a greeting that appeared pleasant, but which was in reality an ugly word. The Jews would greet the Messenger by the word, 'al-Sam<sup>ʿ</sup>alaika', meaning death be upon thee (al-sam means 'death'), whereas the impression they gave was that they had said al-Salam<sup>ʿ</sup>alaika, which is "peace be upon thee". Others would use the phrases of the pre-Islamic era of ignorance, namely an<sup>ʿ</sup>ama sabah<sup>an</sup> (good morning) or an<sup>ʿ</sup>ama masa<sup>ʿ</sup>an (good evening). The Messenger forbade this, and said, 'Allah has substituted better than this for us; the saying of the folk of paradise is al-Salam<sup>ʿ</sup>alaikum', meaning peace be upon you. The introductory 'Have thou not looked to' therefore affords the sense of outraged censure, and means 'Why do they do such a thing?'

... **saying among themselves,** ... That is, the Jews and hypocrites would say, some of them to others, or within their breasts,

... **'Why does Allah not chastise us for what we say?'**... Their position was that if Muhammad was really a Messenger, then why did Allah not send upon them a chastisement; and His not doing so thus constituted a proof that he was not a Messenger.

... **Hell suffices them! They shall burn in it; and atrocious is the destination!** This comes in answer to their objection. The hell into which they shall be hurled on the day of resurrection is sufficient punishment for them. As for their not being chastised in the world, Allah does not punish every sinner in the world, for otherwise none would be left on the face of the earth.

**O ye who believe, when ye huddle, huddle not for sin, enmity and disobedience to the Messenger. But huddle for righteousness and guardfulness; and be guardful of Allah unto whom ye will be gathered. (9)**

يَتَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا تَنَجَّيْتُمْ فَلَا تَتَنَجَّجُوا بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ  
وَمَعْصِيَةِ الرَّسُولِ وَتَنَجَّجُوا بِالْبِرِّ وَالْتَّقْوَىٰ وَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي إِلَيْهِ  
تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

**O ye who believe, when ye huddle,** ... It means 'when some of ye enter into a huddle or confidential grouping with others'.

... **do not huddle for sin and enmity and disobedience to the Messenger.** It means that they should not do as the Jews and hypocrites did, as given.

... **But huddle for righteousness...** Instead they should confidentially advise each other to do good, like one advising the other to dispense in the way of Allah.

... **and guardfulness;** ... Like one advising another against disobedience and towards obedience, by which means they protect themselves against the chastisement of Allah.

... **and be guardful of Allah,** ... That is, fear His punishments.

... **unto whom ye will be gathered.** That is, all are to be gathered unto His reckoning and recompense following the rising and the life of the hereafter.

**Indeed huddling is from the satan, to grieve those who believe; but it is not harmful to them at all, save with the permission of Allah; and upon Allah should the believers rely. (10)**

إِنَّمَا النَّجْوَىٰ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ لِيَحْزُونَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَلَيْسَ بِضَارِّهِمْ  
شَيْئًا إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

**Indeed huddling is from the satan,** ... That is, only the huddling that the disbelievers and the hypocrites engage in is of the satanic actions, under his direction, for he whispers into the hearts of his followers to do it, . . .

... **to grieve those who believe;** ... by making them (the believers) suspect that they were confiding some grievous news about them, or were arranging a plot, or were mocking the believers, or suchlike.

... **but it is not harmful to them at all,** ... Their secret conferences were of no harm to the believers at all, but were nothing but vain pretension.

... **save with the permission of Allah;** ... Allah was knowing of their confidential huddles; had it accorded to His wisdom for there to have been no intervention between them and the plots they hatched in their huddles, then it would have harmed them. But when Allah, glory be to Him, wished the believers not to be harmed, He intervened between them and what they were arranging in their huddles. Therefore, it is necessary for the believers to concentrate upon Allah with entreaties to ward off from themselves the plots of the disbelievers and the hypocrites.

... **and upon Allah should the believers rely.** That is, it is for them to entrust their affairs Him, glory be to Him, for what a fine protector He is!

Now that the theme has dealt with this matter of etiquette for public gatherings and assemblies, which it entered after the discussion of the lady who debated with the Messenger over her husband's declaration of *dhihar* to her, which itself took place in public and concerns the rules of gatherings, the theme turns to another etiquette governing public gatherings, in His word:

**O ye who believe, when it is said to ye to make room in assemblies, make room; Allah will make room for ye. And when it is said 'Stand up', so stand up; Allah will elevate those of ye who believe and those given knowledge, in degrees. And Allah of what ye do is informed. (11)**

يَتَأَيُّبُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا  
يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا  
مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

**O ye who believe, when it is said to ye...** And it makes no difference who says it.

... **to make room in your assemblies,** ... It means that they should gather themselves so that the space be expanded to fit others.

... **then make room; Allah will make room for ye** ... That is, He will make matters wide and easy for ye. It could also read that, He will give you expansive dwellings in the garden of paradise. It is related that the early Muslims used to compete to attend assemblies in the presence of Allah's Messenger, and when they saw others come to the assembly many would be niggardly about making room for others.

... **And when it is said 'Stand up'...** It means 'when they were asked to stand so as to let others sit'.

... **stand up;** ... They were to rise up and let others sit in their places. It is said that the cause of this [ayah] coming down was that the Messenger used to honour the veterans of Badr. That day (the day of the verse's revelation) the people had taken their places sitting around the Messenger and when some veterans of Badr came they did not make room for them. So the Messenger said to some of those sitting that they should stand so that the veterans of Badr could sit. They stood, but their disaffection stood out on their faces and the hypocrites sought to take advantage of the matter, saying to those who had stood, 'Is that the justice of the Messenger, that he asks ye to stand so that others may occupy your places?' And so the ayah came down.

... **Allah will elevate those of ye who believe and those given knowledge, in degrees** ... The reference to belief means belief that is correct and from the core. Their being raised in degrees is in the world and the hereafter. Their implementing the Messenger's command was the cause of their being raised in the world and in the hereafter. There is a good conformity between their standing from the gathering, and their degrees being raised. The degrees, given for *daraja*, accord to the level of faith and knowledge.

... **And Allah of what ye do is informed.** He is informed and knowing, and requites according to all that we do.

The thread now turns to explain another aspect of the etiquette of sitting in company with the Messenger in such a way that it indicates that these etiquettes are general. We have stated that such *aya* came down to cast light upon general rules and practices, even though they had no objective embodiment after the death of the Messenger and of those who were directly related to these *aya*.

**O ye who believe, when ye huddle with the Messenger, then before your huddling advance some charity; that is better for ye and purer, but if ye find not, then indeed Allah is forgiving, merciful. (12)**

يَتَأَيُّبُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا نَجَّيْتُمُ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدِمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَوَّلِكُمْ  
صَدَقَةٌ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ فَإِن لَّمْ تَجِدُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

**O ye who believe, when ye huddle with the Messenger, ...** That is, when ye wish to confide something in his ear, for the verb form can have the meaning of wishing or intending, as in this verse and in the verses ‘Allah wishes to remove abomination from ye...’ and ‘Allah wishes for ye ease.’

**... then before your huddling advance some charity; ...** The command is that before engaging the Messenger in private conversation, they should give something in charity. The nobles – by their own standards – used to come to the Messenger and engage him in private discourse about trifling matters, so as to manifest their distinction, and indeed, this practice continues in the present day. They wished to display to the people that the Messenger listened to their words and sought their views. This ayah came as a deterrent to them while at the same time this command is an honouring of the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*, a benefit for the poor, a means of preventing excessive questioning, and a means of discerning the sincere from the hypocrite, the lover of the hereafter from the lover of the world. When this ayah was heard most of the confidential questioning ceased, with the exception of Imam Ali *peace be upon him*<sup>4</sup>, who changed a dinar into ten dirhams and gave a dirham in charity each time he intended to engage the Messenger in private conversation, until the ten were dispensed.

**... that is better for ye...** The giving of charity before entering into private conversation with the Messenger is better for the believers, as it earns them a reward, meets the obligation, proves the virtue of generosity, and honours the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*.

**... and purer, ...** It is purer because charity purifies the spirit of vices and deviation.

**... but if ye find not, ...** That is, if ye find nothing to give in charity before engaging the Messenger in private conversation.

**... then indeed Allah is forgiving, ...** He will conceal the believer’s not giving charity as commanded.

**... merciful.** That is, He is merciful to the believers and does not expect them to give in charity when they have nothing to give, as it was permitted for them to huddle with the Messenger without giving charity. Therefore His concealing was by His not making the giving of charity obligatory, so that it was not a sin to huddle without giving charity; and therefore there is no place for the objection ‘why does “forgiving” occur here, when essentially there is no sin to be forgiven?’

Now, when the ayah was sent down none came forward to discuss privately with the Messenger but the Imam [Ali], as stated, and so Allah lifted the ruling in His word:

**Are ye worried about advancing charities before your huddle? Now that ye have not done so and Allah has turned to ye, then establish the prayer, pay the zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger; and Allah is informed of what ye do. (13)**

ءَأَشْفَقْتُمْ أَنْ تُقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ جَوْنِكُمْ صَدَقْتُمْ فَإِذَا لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا  
وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ  
وَرَسُولَهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

**Are ye worried...** That is, worried by poverty.

**... about advancing charities before your huddle?...** It means before they huddle with the Messenger. ‘Charities’ comes in the plural on account of how there are many instances of it, covering many individuals, so that each individual was to give charity. The question form is to convey indignation, meaning ‘how is it ye leave aside this virtue for fear of poverty, when ye know that the charity is not defined, and that a little of it suffices?!’

**... Now since ye have not done so ...** It means when charity is not given, and when huddling is left aside in miserly aversion to dispensing.

**... and Allah has turned to ye, ...** It means that He pardons their shortcomings with regard to this virtue.

**... then ...** This indicates that they should continue to implement the rest of the commands of Islam, for the present ruling has been lifted from them, so that thereafter there was no reason for them not to huddle with the Messenger without giving charity.

**... establish the prayer, pay the zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger; ...** It means to obey them in all their other commands.

<sup>4</sup> *alayhis-salam*, or *peace be upon him*. It is a mark of piety and devotion to use this salutation when mentioning the name of one of the prophets or the one of the impeccable Imams from the household of the Holy Prophet (the Ahl al-Bayt).

... **and Allah is informed of what ye do.** He sees and is informed of all; therefore it is for us not to disobey His commands and render ourselves deserving of punishment.

Amir-al-Mu'minin<sup>5</sup> (meaning Commander of the Believers), Imam Ali, *peace be upon him*, has said that there is an ayah to which none acted before him and to which none acted after him: '**O ye who believe, when ye huddle with the Messenger . . .** He said, 'I had one dinar and so I changed it for ten dirhams, and then whenever I wished to huddle with the Messenger I preceded it with a dirham.'

His word '**Are ye worried ...**' does not run counter to their being no cases of abrogation within the sacred Qur'an, for apparently the order of preceding huddling with charity as conveyed in the previous ayah, was a test similar to the vision of Abraham (Ibrahim), *peace be upon him*, [37:100-107] so as to manifest the distinction of Imam Ali, *peace be upon him* – so say the deniers of abrogation.

*In keeping with the preceding matter of huddling, the theme now turns to explain the matter of honouring secrets, and not exposing them to the enemy:*

**Have thou not looked to those who befriend a people against whom Allah is angry? They are not of ye and not of them; and they swear in falsehood, knowingly. (14)**

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ تَوَلَّوْا قَوْمًا غَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مَا هُمْ مِنْكُمْ وَلَا مِنْهُمْ وَيَحْلِفُونَ عَلَى الْكَذِبِ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

**Have thou not looked...** The address is to the Messenger, and/or to every listener.

... **to those who befriend a people against whom Allah is angry?** 'a people' means the disbelievers. In *Majma' al-Bayan*, it is reported that the reference is to a party of hypocrites who befriended the Jews and revealed to them the believers' secrets.

... **They are not of ye and not of them;** ... Those hypocrites were members neither of the community of the believers, nor of the community of the disbelievers, but were forever dithering between the two parties.

... **and they swear in falsehood, knowingly.** When criticised for their hypocrisy they would swear falsely that they were not hypocrites and were not revealing secrets to the disbelievers. And they did this knowing that their oaths were false and that they were indeed hypocrites.

**Allah has prepared for them a severe chastisement; indeed, evil is what they do! (15)**

أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا إِنَّهُمْ سَاءَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

**Allah has prepared for them a severe chastisement;** ... It means for the hypocrites – in the form of shame and disgrace in the world, and punishment and the fire in the hereafter.

... **indeed, evil is what they do!** In reference to their hypocrisy and befriending the enemies of Allah.

**They take their oaths as a shield and then bar from the way of Allah; so theirs is an abasing chastisement. (16)**

اتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿١٦﴾

**They take their oaths as a shield...** It means that the hypocrites who swore those oaths did so to protect and shield themselves from censure and blame whenever their hypocrisy manifested.

... **and then bar from the way of Allah;** ... It means that they prevented themselves, and also those of the people weak in faith, from the path that leads to His being content with them.

... **so theirs is an abasing chastisement.** Humiliation and degradation is the reward of their hypocrisy.

**Neither their wealth and nor their children shall ever repel from them anything (that is) from Allah; they are companions of the fire; they are in it eternal: (17)**

لَنْ تُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

**Neither their wealth and nor their children shall ever repel from them anything (that is) from Allah ...** Neither the wealth they had amassed nor the sons they had to succeed them were of the slightest benefit to them against the fury of Allah and His punishments. None of the chastisement of Allah against them can be deflected.

... **they are companions of the fire;** ... Those hypocrites are bound to the fire like one companion sticks to another.

... **they are in it eternal.** They are there forever.

It is related that the verses came down about a hypocrite who would assemble with the Jews, and take from them hypocritically. When the Messenger was informed of it he forbade him, but he said to the Messenger that he was

<sup>5</sup> On instructions from Almighty Allah, the Prophet Muhammad granted the title 'Amir al-Mu'minin' exclusively to Imam Ali.

only learning from them the description of him (the Messenger) from the Torah. He swore this falsely in order to conceal the truth of what he had been doing. But the revelation humiliated him and manifested the truth.

*The hypocrites will be companions of the fire on*

***The day Allah raises them altogether and they swear to Him as they swore to ye, and they reckon that they are on to something. But no! Indeed, they are the ones who are the liars! (18)***

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيَحْلِفُونَ لَهُ كَمَا تَحْلِفُونَ لَكُمْ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ أَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْكَاذِبُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

***The day Allah raises them...*** They will be brought to life after their deaths for the account and recompense.

... ***altogether...*** It is given for *jami'an*, emphasising that none shall be overlooked, and none can imagine that he shall escape, for in the world it is normal for some people through lack of information or forgetfulness not to be covered by some general law or suchlike.

... ***and they shall swear to Him...*** It means that in the next world they shall swear to Allah, glory be to Him, that they were believers in the world.

... ***as they swore to ye, ...*** That is, while supposing that Allah is not knowing of everything about them, and that they could dupe Him about their lying simply by swearing an oath.

... ***and they reckon that they are on to something ...*** It means that they shall suppose that their false oath will be effective for them, just as it was effective in the world.

***But no! Indeed, they are the ones who are the liars!*** They are false both in their words and their oaths; their false oath shall not benefit them there, rather they shall be known as liars and deceivers. 'they are the ones' is given for *hum*, which is used for emphasis, and to distinguish them from amongst others.

***The devil has over-powered them and has made them forget the remembrance of Allah. Those are the faction of the devil. Yea! Indeed, the faction of the devil are the losers. (19)***

أَسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ حِزْبُ الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَّا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

***The devil has over-powered them and has made them forget the remembrance of Allah...*** The devil has overcome and possessed those hypocrites, and made them forget the remembrance of Allah – and in remembering Him not, they fear Him not, and therefore they would not be taken out of hypocrisy and disobedience.

... ***Those are the faction of the devil ...*** They are his group, his followers.

... ***Yea! Indeed, the faction of the devil, they are the losers.*** They lose both their world and their hereafter: their world departs and in the hereafter they have but the fire.

*The theme now turns from the hypocrites to all who oppose Allah and His Messenger:*

***Indeed those who contravene Allah and His Messenger, those are among the most abject. (20)***

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحَادُّونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْأَذَلِّينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

***Indeed those who contravene Allah and His Messenger, ...*** It means those who transgress His limits in opposition.

... ***those are among the most abject.*** None is more degraded and abased than them, neither in the world nor in the hereafter. So those opponents during the time of the Messenger or after that are included among them. They were more humiliated and debased than the disobedient believers, and more humiliated and debased than the disbelievers who do not oppose Allah and His Messenger.

*Do those opponents think that their efforts will lead to their success, and to the failure of Islam? Never, for certainly:*

***Allah has written that 'I and My Messengers shall definitely overcome'; indeed Allah is Strong, Mighty. (21)***

كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لِلَّهِ لَا غَلْبَةَ أَنَا وَرُسُلِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٢١﴾

***Allah has written...*** He has written it upon the 'Protected Tablet' (*lawh'al-mahfudh*).

... ***that 'I and My Messengers shall definitely overcome,' ...*** It means that Allah and His Messengers shall certainly prevail against all opponents. And the world has proven the truth of this word, for those leading the world, even in these wrongful days, are the Messengers – Moses (Musa), *peace be upon him*, Jesus ('Isa), *peace be upon him*, and Muhammad, *may Allah bless him and his family*. Their followers are more than half the world's population, and their values are to some extent maintained throughout the world.

... **indeed Allah is Strong, Mighty.** He is strong and able to make His Messengers victorious; grand and dominant in His authority. It is not possible for anyone to dominate him or dominate His Messengers.

It is narrated that when the Muslims saw the areas over which Allah gave them victory, they said that Allah would give them to conquer Rome and Persia. The hypocrites asked whether they supposed that Rome and Persia were like the villages and towns the Muslims had conquered. Then Allah sent down this ayah.

*The theme then turns to explain the duty of the believers with regard to the disbelievers, and that they should not befriend them, no matter who they are, unlike those hypocrites who befriended the disbelievers:*

**Thou shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day befriending anyone who contravenes Allah and His Messenger, even if they are their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kinfolk. Those – He has written faith in their hearts and has aided them with a spirit from Him. And He enters them into gardens under which rivers flow, in them eternal. Allah is content with them and they are content with Him. Those are the faction of Allah. Yea! Indeed, the faction of Allah are the thrivers. (22)**

لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُمْ بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

**Thou shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the last day ...** It means with true, correct belief.

... **befriending anyone who contravenes Allah and His Messenger, ...** It means that friendship with the disbelievers cannot co-exist with faith; so whoever is a friend to the disbelievers is not a believer, even though he may manifest faith. It is said that the ayah was sent down concerning one Hatib, who wrote to the Makkans informing them of the Messenger's setting out to conquer them, after the Messenger had forbidden them from giving out such information. When the matter was discovered, he excused himself by saying that his family were in Makkah, and that he wanted to make a favour for them in the city, so that should things go against the Muslims they would respect his influence and not harm his wife and family. The Messenger forgave him. (see Surah al-Mumtahanah, # 60).

... **even if they are their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kinfolk.** It means even if those who oppose Allah and His Messenger are the believers' fathers, sons, brothers or kinfolk, the believers will not be in friendship with them. Thus disbelief cuts the believer's relationship to the disbeliever, though some forms of connection remain necessary, when the disbeliever is a believer's father or suchlike, as He says in His word about parents, 'So if the two (parents) strive that thou partner with Me that of which thou have no knowledge, obey them not, but be companionable to them in the world with honour.' Spider (29): 9.

**Those – He has written faith in their hearts ...** Those believers who do not befriend the disbelievers – Allah has fixed faith in their hearts by the hidden graces, as He sees them being in the path of the truth.

... **and has aided them with a spirit from Him ...** It means a spirit from His direction. The committed believer finds within himself a strong spirit that binds him to the observance of the commands of Allah, glory be to Him, such that however strong the causes of disbelief may become, it is never enough to budge him.

... **He enters them into gardens under which rivers flow, ...** In the hereafter, they are placed in gardens under the trees and palaces of which rivers of honey and wine and milk and water flow.

... **in them eternal.** They remain in those gardens forever.

... **Allah is content with them...** He knows their firmly-embedded faith and their performing the virtuous deeds.

... **and they are content with Him.** They are content with the distinctions and faith while in the world, and the gardens in the hereafter.

... **Those are the faction of Allah ...** Those believers as described are the faction and the followers of Allah, glory be to Him, as opposed to 'the faction of the devil'.

... **Yea! Indeed the faction of Allah are the thrivers.** It is these believers who thrive with the good of the world and the salvation and felicity of the hereafter.