

## Surah al-Munafiqun (63)

سورة المنافقون

### 'The Hypocrites'

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *munafiqun*, meaning 'hypocrites'. Like the other Madinan surahs it contains matters pertaining to the Islamic order, as well as to matters of faith. Whereas Surah al-Jumu'ah concluded on the topic of the Messenger being left standing, an action most closely fitting the hypocrites, this surah begins with an account about the hypocrites that took place during one of the Messenger's expeditions.

It is narrated that the surah was sent down concerning events during the expedition to the Bani Mustaliq, in the fifth year of the Hijrah. The Messenger had gone out with it, and on the return journey stopped at a well, at which the water was scant. Anas ibn Sayyaf, allied to the Anshaf, and Jahjah ibn Sa'id al-Ghaffari, the hired servant of 'Umar, arrived at the well together, and fell into an argument. Jahjah hit the face of Anas, causing it to bleed. Anas called out the men of Khazraj, a group of the Anshaf (meaning the Supporters) while Jahjah called out the Quraysh, the Muhajerin (meaning the Migrants) and men armed themselves till it seemed there would be bloodshed. Hearing the cry, 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy [who came to be known as the Chief Hypocrite] asked what it was about. On being informed, he fell into a terrible rage. Then he said, 'I was dreading such a thing happening. I did not think that I would hear the like of this without being able to do anything about it.' Then he turned to his fellows and said, 'This is what you have done! You have settled them (Muhajerin) in your homes, you have shared with them your property, you have protected them with your lives, and you have bared your chests for war, till your women have become widows and your children have become orphans. Had you driven them out they would be the dependents of others and not of you.'

Then he said, 'If and when we return to Madinah the mighty will drive out the weak.' By this he meant that he and his kind would drive out the Messenger of Allah and the believers. Amongst the group was Zayd ibn Arqam, a young boy. The Messenger was resting under a tree with a number of Anshaf and Muhajerin. Zayd came and told him what 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy had said. The Messenger asked the boy if perhaps he had imagined it. The boy swore that he had not. So he asked him if perhaps Ibn Ubayy was angry with him. The boy swore that he was not. He asked him if he had embarrassed him. The boy swore that he had not. At that the Messenger called for his riding-camel, mounted it and called for the people to do the same. They wondered at it, for he was not wont to ride at that time of day. The people mounted up and soon Sa'ad ibn 'Ubadah caught up with him, and after exchanging greetings, he said, 'You are not used to riding at such a time?' So replied he, 'Have you not heard what your companion said?'

They said, 'And what companion have we other than thee, O Messenger of Allah.'

He said, 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy; he thinks that on the return to Madinah the grand will drive out the abject.'

They said, 'O Messenger of Allah, it is you and your companions who are the grand, and it is he and his companions who are the abject.'

The Messenger journeyed the whole of that day without talking to anyone. The Khazraj turned on 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy and blamed him for what he had said. He swore that he did not say it. So they told him to come with them to the Messenger, so that they could apologise, but he arrogantly turned his face. Night descended and still the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*, journeyed, breaking only for the prayer. He journeyed all that night until the following day he finally halted. As soon as his men descended, they collapsed onto the ground in exhaustion. Then 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy came to the Messenger and he swore that he had not said that, and that 'there is no god but Allah, and that you are the Messenger of Allah; and Zayd has lied about me.'

In response, the Messenger remained silent. The Khazraj turned on Zayd ibn Arqam, blaming him for lying about their chief, 'Abdullah. As the Messenger rode off again, Zayd rode alongside him, saying, 'O Allah, indeed Thou know that I have not lied about 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy.' They had not gone far when the condition of receiving revelation (*wahy*) came upon the Messenger to the extent that the weight of it was making his camel about to kneel. When it was over, sweat was

pouring from his brow. Then told Zayd ibn Arqam ‘O lad, you spoke the truth, and your heart remembered; and Allah has sent down concerning that which you said a revelation.’

As soon as they set down, his companions gathered round him, and he recited to them Surah al-Munafiqun, and thus Allah exposed ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy.

The son of ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy then came to Allah’s Messenger and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, if you have decided on his death, then order me to do it, so that it will be me who brings you his head; for by Allah, the Aws and the Khazraj know that I am the most righteous son to my father, and I fear that if you order someone other than me and he kills him, then my spirit will not let me look at the killer of my father, and then I would kill a believer for a disbeliever, and I will enter the fire.’

The Messenger of Allah replied, ‘No, we will be good companions to him for thee, as long as he is with us.’

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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

***By the name of Allah, ...*** We seek help through the name of the Allah, that He be an aid to us in our needs.

***... the Compassionate, the Merciful.*** He whose mercy embraces all things; that He may grace us with mercy and solve our problems in the world and in the hereafter.

***When the hypocrites come to thee, they say, ‘We testify that indeed thou are the Messenger of Allah.’ And Allah knows that indeed thou are His messenger, and Allah testifies that indeed the hypocrites are liars. (1)***

إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ قَالُوا نَشْهَدُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّكَ لَرَسُولُهُ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَكَاذِبُونَ.



***When the hypocrites come to thee...*** It means ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy; it has earlier been given that the plural is used to stand for the genus or type, while indicating an individual. In such cases the plural is used to show that the ruling applying to the subject also applies to whoever has those qualities in common with that subject. In the same way, the singular can also be used to denote genus or type, for the individuality is shed and what remains is the generic meaning true of every individual. The hypocrite is him who is internally a disbeliever, while outwardly showing himself to be a believer.

***... they say, ‘We testify that indeed thou are the Messenger of Allah ...*** The hypocrites said in his presence that such was their belief at heart, and not merely a verbal declaration.

***... And Allah knows that indeed thou are His messenger, ...*** This phrase comes in the Qur’an to pave the way for the following line, so as not to give the idea that Allah, glory be to Him, denies His Messenger’s messengership by refuting the hypocrites.

***... and Allah testifies that indeed the hypocrites are liars.*** They lied in their claim that they believed in the Messenger’s messengership from the depth of their hearts. The truth was that their belief was limited to their tongues, while their hearts remained in disbelief and opposition.

***They take their oaths as a shield, thus bar from the path of Allah. It is indeed evil what they do. (2)***

اتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِيَّاهُمْ سَاءَ مَا

كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

***They take their oaths as a shield, ...*** Their oaths were nothing more than a shield to ward off any trouble from the Messenger and the Muslims.

***... thus bar from the path of Allah ...*** By their clinging to disbelief internally and their making false oaths, they barred the people from the path of Allah – the path of His religion and of His rewards. So, by their hypocrisy they kept themselves in the ranks of the Muslims, while secretly spreading dissension, and dissuading the people from correct faith.

... ***It is indeed evil what they do.*** Their action of manifesting faith while remaining disbelievers inside, and so barring (the people) from the path of Allah, glory be to Him, was a most evil thing to do.

***That is because they believed and then they disbelieved, so their hearts became thus en-natured, and so they understand not. (3)***

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا فَطُبِعَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٤﴾

***That is because they believed and then they disbelieved, ...*** Their hypocrisy was on account of their professing belief on their tongues, and then disbelieving at heart. The nature of those who stray is such that on seeing some good they rush towards it in sincerity, but when they see some difficulties along with the benefits, they falter, and although they apparently remain in agreement – with regret – and at heart they withdraw in preference to their perceived interests.

... ***so their hearts became en-natured, ...*** As they accustom themselves to disbelief and take on the attributes that result in their hearts or souls become regulated by those qualities, and this becomes the character trait of such individuals. Allah, glory be to Him, created the human soul (*nafs*) in this way, [in that when the human follows a trend he would adapt it as his disposition]. For this adaptation was on account of their hypocrisy. ‘Hearts’ (*qulub*) means ‘souls’ (*anfus*).

... ***and so they understand not.*** They do not understand the reality of faith and of guardfulness and piety, for their souls are diverted; for when a person is diverted he sees the good as ugly and the ugly as good.

***And when thou see them, their persons impress thee; and if they speak, thou listen to their words. They are like propped-up timbers; they reckon every outcry is against them. They are the enemy, so beware of them; may Allah kill them! How deviated they are! (4)***

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّكُمْ كَخَشْبٍ مُّسْنَدَةٍ تَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صِخْرَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرهُمْ قَاتِلْهُمْ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٥﴾

***And when thou see them...*** The address, in the singular, is to the Messenger, or simply to any individual listener.

... ***their persons impress thee; ...*** They are of fine appearance; handsome and well-turned out.

... ***and if they speak, thou listen to their words ...*** Whenever they speak, and on whatever subject, they speak well, in fine style and pleasantly, so that the listener pays attention. Yet despite their fine appearance and pleasant speech,

... ***They are like propped-up timbers, ...*** That is, they are coreless, empty and without the qualities of excellence and virtue, and are like hollow pieces of wood that cannot stand up on their own, and so need to be supported by a wall or such like, before they will stand up straight. The wood that has its core consumed by termites tends to be rotten inside, even if on the outside it appears good, and it cannot stand up and cannot bear any weight. The hypocrites are the same way: they have the appearance of goodness, but it has no inner reality.

... ***they reckon every outcry is against them ...*** They are cowardly and their hearts are empty of the virtues of faith. Whereas the believer’s heart is fixed and firm in a crisis, the hypocrite is constantly afraid that his inner reality will be discovered and he will be exposed and humiliated. Therefore, whenever any crisis occurs the hypocrite fears that he will be caught up in it and his inner reality be discovered and disgraced. A crisis or calamity is called an ‘outcry’ (*shyħħ*) as a crisis always raises an outcry; it is an instance of the cause being known as the effect.

... ***They are the enemy, ...*** That is, they were the Messenger’s single most dangerous enemy, and their enmity was total. The disbeliever’s appearance does not belie his evil, but the hypocrite is hidden within the Muslim community by his profession of belief, and is not seen and not recognised for what he really is, until he commits some act of corruption and causes difficulties.

... ***so beware of them; ...*** The address is in the singular. The Messenger was to be wary of the hypocrites mixing among the Muslims and learning their secrets, for then they would learn of

their strengths and weaknesses, and thus they are more dangerous than the external enemy, and more able to harm and cause corruption.

... **may Allah kill them!** ... It is a prayer, an invocation, against them to the effect that Allah kills them. It is to give the Muslims confidence and relieve them from anxiety and paranoia.

... **How deviated they are!** An exclamation: after the clarity of all the proofs, still they remain so deviated, so astray.

**And when it is said to them, 'Come, Allah's Messenger will seek forgiveness for ye,' they wrench their heads away, and thou see them barring; and they are arrogant. (5)**

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا يَسْتَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ لَوَّأُ رُءُوسَهُمْ  
وَرَأَيْتَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٥﴾

When anyone asked them to come and seek that the Messenger ask forgiveness for the sins they had committed, they would jerk their heads away from the speaker in arrogance and pride. And anyone watching could see them preventing themselves from the path of truth. The signs of their arrogance and their feeling that they were in no need of the Messenger's seeking forgiveness for them would be manifest in their appearance.

**Even it is for them whether thou seek forgiveness for them or thou seek not forgiveness for them – Allah will never forgive them; indeed Allah guides not the perverse people. (6)**

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَنْ يَغْفِرَ  
اللَّهُ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٦﴾

**Even it is for them whether thou seek forgiveness for them or thou seek not forgiveness for them – Allah will never forgive them; ...** Whether the Messenger was to seek forgiveness for the hypocrites or not, would make no difference to them, for seeking forgiveness only benefits the believer, and not the hypocrite. Allah will never forgive them because at heart they are disbelievers.

... **indeed Allah guides not...** It means with His hidden graces.

... **the perverse people.** It means those who have departed from obedience to Allah through their hypocrisy and dissension.

**It is them who say, 'Dispense not on those alongside the Messenger of Allah, until they scatter' – while Allah's are the treasures of the heavens and the earth! But the hypocrites understand not. (7)**

هُمُ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ لَا تُنْفِقُوا عَلَيَّ مِنْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ  
حَتَّىٰ يَنْفَضُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ خَزَائِنُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَكِنَّ  
الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٧﴾

**It is them who say, 'Dispense not on those alongside the Messenger of Allah, until they scatter'**

... The hypocrites used to say to each other that they should not give to or help the needy believers, so that they would leave the Messenger and disperse. He, glory be to Him, comments on this their attitude in His word:

... **while Allah's are the treasures of the heavens and the earth!** ... It is from these treasures that He pours forth upon those around the Messenger, **may Allah bless him and his family.** Those hypocrites imagined that the treasures of provision, wealth and sustenance were in their hands, and that if they were to withhold them from the believers they would disperse. They were ignorant of the fact that the sun, the earth, water and air that are the sources of all wealth, are entirely in the hand of Allah, exalted be He, and that He pours forth liberally from them upon His believers through trade and agriculture and suchlike; and that therefore the hypocrites' withholding anything from those around the Messenger would not cause them to scatter.

... **But the hypocrites understand not.** It means that they do not understand that the treasures of the heavens and the earth are in the hand of Allah, exalted be He.

**They say, 'Truly if we return to Madinah, the mightier will surely drive out of it the weaker.'**

يَقُولُونَ لَئِنْ رَجَعْنَا إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ لَيُخْرِجَنَّ الْأَعَزُّ مِنهَا

**Indeed the might is Allah's, and His Messenger's and the believers'! But the hypocrites know not. (8)**

الْأَذَلَّ وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَنْ يَكُنَّ  
الْمُنَافِقِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨﴾

**They say, 'Truly if we return to Madinah, the mightier will surely drive out of it the weaker.'** ... The hypocrites claimed that the mightier, by whom they meant themselves, would drive out from the city the weaker, by whom they meant the Messenger and his companions. **They are refuted in His word:**

... **Indeed the might is Allah's, ...** And indeed He is with the believers.

... **and His Messenger's...** through Allah giving him power.

... **and the believers'!**... Through their holding fast to Islam, which brings them the happiness of the world and the hereafter, and honour, dignity and might in both of them.

... **But the hypocrites know not.** Rather, they imagined that the superiority was theirs, simply because they had a few supporters among the hypocrites, and a little wealth. And experience was to show the proof, for it was Ibn Ubayy, the abject, who came to the grand, the Messenger seeking pardon for what he had perpetrated.

Now, since the topic has been hypocrisy, the inner reality of disbelief and the outer show of faith, the theme now turns to remind the Muslims not to act according to the ethical standard of the hypocrites, by turning to the world and away from the hereafter:

**O ye who believe, your wealth should not, and nor should your offspring, divert ye from the remembrance of Allah; and whosoever does that, then they surely are the losers. (9)**

يَتَأْتِيَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ ءَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَن  
ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ؕ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخٰسِرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

**O ye who believe, your wealth should not, and nor should your offspring, divert ye from the remembrance of Allah;** ... It means that we are not to let our wealth and children preoccupy ourselves from the remembrance of Allah, causing us to fail to observe His rights in them, and to fail to be present for the prayer and the other obligations, all out of our being too busy with our financial and family affairs.

... **and whosoever does that, then they surely are the losers.** Those who let themselves be diverted by matters of finance and family from the remembrance of Allah bring ruin to themselves, for they have no salvation in the hereafter from the chastisement.

**And dispense from what We have provisioned ye, before death comes to one of ye, so he says, 'My Lord, if only Thou would delay me until a short while, then I would give in charity and be among the virtuous.'** (10)

وَأَنْفِقُوا مِن مَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ  
الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ  
فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُن مِّنَ الصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

**And dispense from what We provide ye, ...** It means obey the injunctions concerning the *khums*, the *zakaat*, and the *salaat*; though it might be more general and apply equally to giving in charity from knowledge, influence and power, as well as from wealth.

... **before death comes to one of ye, ...** It means before one sees the signs or causes of death in oneself.

... **so he says, 'My Lord, if only Thou would delay me until a short while, ...** When a person sees that he is about to die, he says: 'Lord! If only Thou would let me stay some more in the world, if only for a little while, I will certainly reform myself.'

... **then I would give in charity ...** He promises to give charity and purify his wealth and dispense it in the path of Allah.

... **and I would be among the virtuous.**' He promises to pray and fast and perform hajj and pour himself into obedience to the divine commands.

*But does his request benefit him? Certainly not:*

**And Allah never delays a soul once its term has come; and Allah is informed of what ye do.**

(11)

وَلَنْ يُؤَخِّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهَا وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا

تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١١﴾

**And Allah never delays a soul once its term has come; ...** Once a person's term has come, such pleadings do not persuade Allah to let them stay in the world over and above their determined term. After that, there is no further opportunity to act virtuously with one's body or to righteously dispense one's wealth.

... **and Allah is informed of what ye do.** O man, so do not commit that which will lead ye to the chastisement and to the punishments.