

Sura 58: Al-Mujadila (She who Disputes)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 22:

1. *God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and complains to God. And God hears your dialogue. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*
2. *Those of you who legally estrange their wives (saying to them you are like the back of my mother -Zihar) they are not their mothers. None can be their mothers except those who gave birth to them. And they indeed utter an ill word and a lie. And God is Effacer of Sins, Giver of Mercy.*
3. *Those of you who estrange their wives by equating them with their mothers, then wish to go back on the words they uttered, (the penalty) in this case (is) the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. This is what you have been exhorted to do; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
4. *But whoever does not have the means, let him fast for two successive months before they touch each other; as for him who is not able, let him feed sixty needy persons; that is in order that you may have faith in God and His Messenger, and these are God's limits, and the disbelievers shall have a painful torment.*
5. *Those who controvert God and His Messenger will be abased as those before them were abased; and We have sent down clear verses, and for the disbelievers is humiliating torment.*
6. *On the day that God will raise them all up and inform them of what they did. God has kept account of it while they forgot it. And God is Witness over all things.*
7. *Do you not see that God knows (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret counsel between three, but He makes the fourth among them; nor between five but He makes the sixth; nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wherever they may be. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, He will inform them of what they did. God knows all things.*
8. *Do you not see those who were forbidden from engaging in secret counsels yet they revert to that which they were forbidden (to do)? And they hold secret counsels among themselves to commit sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger. And when they come to you they greet you with a greeting which God does not use to greet you, and say within themselves, "Why does not God torment us for what we say?" Hell will suffice for them; in which they will burn; a wretched destination.*
9. *Believers, when you hold secret counsels, do not do it for committing sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger; but do it for righteousness and piety; and be conscious of God, to Whom you shall be gathered.*
10. *Secret counsels are only (inspired) by Satan, in order that he may cause grief to the believers; but he cannot harm them in the least, except as God permits; and in God let the believers put their trust.*
11. *Believers, when you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room; God will make (ample) room for you. And when you are told to rise up, rise up. God will raise up those of you who believe and who have knowledge to higher ranks. And God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*

12. *Believers, when you consult the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That is better and purer for you. But if you do not have the means, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
13. *Were you reluctant to give in charity before your consultation? So when you do not do it and God has accepted your repentance, then establish prayer and pay the poor-dues and obey God and His Messenger; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
14. *Do you not see those who befriend people with whom God is angry? They are neither of you nor of them, and they swear a false oath knowingly.*
15. *God has prepared for them a severe torment. Evil indeed are their deeds.*
16. *They made their oaths to serve as a cover and they averted people from the path of God; therefore, they shall have humiliating torment.*
17. *Their wealth and their children will avail them nothing against God. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein forever.*
18. *On the day when God will raise them up all together, they will swear to Him as they (now) swear to you, and they will fancy that they have some standing. They are indeed liars.*
19. *Satan has overcome them, so he made them forget the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. Indeed, those of the party of Satan are the losers.*
20. *Those who controvert God and His messenger, they will be among the most abased.*
21. *God has decreed that, "It is I and My messengers who must prevail." God is Strong, Eminent.*
22. *You will not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who controvert God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). God will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. Indeed, those in the party of God are the successful. (58: 1 – 22)*

This Sura and most of the Suras in this part of the Quran narrate some of the events that occurred during the early years of the formation of the Muslim community in Medina. The Suras include directions, guidelines, and commands which played a major role in training the fledgling society to play the role which God assigned them to perform on this earth. This nation was trained to lead an Islamic way of life and to become a model for such a way of life for the whole world. It is a humongous role that requires a long and arduous training program.

The Sura starts with an amazing example of the connection between heaven and earth. The example shows the way the Quran dealt with matters of everyday life to rectify people's crooked behavior and mistakes, "*God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and complains to God. And God hears your dialogue. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*" This is an example which shows how heaven interfered to resolve a dispute that engulfed a simple poor family and to render God's verdict. God heard the voice of the woman who was arguing with the Prophet (PBUH) and complaining to God; while 'Aisha (RA), who was sitting in the adjacent room at the time, was not able to hear what the woman was saying. The verses paint an image which fills the heart with the feelings of God's nearness, mercy, and kindness.

The dispute which is the subject of this Sura is about an old tradition that the Arabs used to practice before Islam. It is an unfair and abusive tradition. Up until the occurrence of this incident, there was no Islamic ruling regarding this tradition. Before Islam when a man got very angry at his wife, he would say to her, *"You are like the back of my mother."* Once he uttered these words the wife becomes legally estranged from her husband, however, she would not be considered divorced. So, the wife lives in a state of limbo. Normal marital relationship between the couple becomes forbidden but in the meantime she was not considered a divorcee. She cannot lead the life of a married woman nor can she leave her husband and remarry again. This was one of the kinds of abuse which women suffered before Islam. Khawlah bint Tha'labah (RA) was married to Awas ibn Al-Samet (RA). Awas (RA) grew old and became impatient and irritable. One day, he became angry with his wife and said to her, *"You are like the back of my mother."* He then went to meet with his friends, came after a while, and wanted to have sex with his wife. She pushed him away. She said, *"I would not have sex with you until God and His Messenger (PBUH) settle this matter between us."* He tried hard to get to her but she was able to push him away and she went to ask the Prophet (PBUH) for God's verdict regarding this situation. She complained to the Prophet (PBUH) about what her husband had done. At that time there was no rule in Islam regarding this situation. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"Khawlah, your husband is an elderly person so be conscious of God regarding him."* The argument continued until the verses outlining the penalty for committing this sin were revealed.

"Those of you who legally estrange their wives (saying to them you are like the back of my mother -Zihar) they are not their mothers. None can be their mothers except those who gave birth to them. And they indeed utter an ill word and a lie. And God is Effacer of Sins, Giver of Mercy." This verse deals with the root of the problem. Words uttered by an angry husband do not change the reality which God created: the wife cannot become a mother simply by uttering these words. A mother is the one who gave birth to the person. These are evil words. God will forgive the sins that were committed before this verdict was issued.

The process for redressing the wrong committed is then outlined, *"Those of you who estrange their wives by equating them with their mothers, then wish to go back on the words they uttered, (the penalty) in this case (is) the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. This is what you have been exhorted to do; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do."*

The first act of expiation is to free a slave. God made acts of expiation for sins an element in the scheme of freeing those who were enslaved. Acts of expiation are a way to remind people to abstain from committing this wrong. Another incentive for abstaining from sin is to remember that God is Totally-Aware of what we do. However, for those who do not have the means to free a slave then, *"let him fast for two successive months before they touch each other; as for him who is not able, let him feed sixty needy persons; that is in order that you may have faith in God and His Messenger, and these are God's limits, and the disbelievers shall have a painful torment."* Applying God's commands and injunctions in matters of daily life is an expression of the submission to God and the obedience of His Messenger (PBUH). Those who transgress the boundaries set by God's commands are considered among the disbelievers. They will suffer a painful punishment.

Ending the previous verse by the statement, *"and the disbelievers shall have a painful torment,"* leads to the following verse which mentions those who controvert God and His Messenger (PBUH), *"Those who controvert God and His Messenger will be abased as those before them were abased; and We have sent down clear verses, and for the disbelievers is humiliating*

torment.” Those who controvert God and His Messenger (PBUH) will be abased exactly as people from the previous generations who committed the same sin were abased. God has explained this in clear verses revealed to His Prophet (PBUH). This was their punishment in this life; in the Hereafter, they will be accountable for what they did, *“On the day that God will raise them all up and inform them of what they did. God has kept account of it while they forgot it. And God is Witness over all things.”* They may have forgotten what they did, but it will be all kept in record.

“Do you not see that God knows (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret counsel between three, but He makes the fourth among them; nor between five but He makes the sixth; nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wherever they may be. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, He will inform them of what they did. God knows all things.” The verse reiterates the comprehensiveness and universality of God’s knowledge. He knows what is in the heavens and on earth, and He also knows what is in the hearts of people. The statement touches the hearts of the believers. Its implications make the hearts tremble. It evokes the warm and secure feelings of being always in the presence of God. On the other hand, it warns that God knows all that is being said in secret. Nothing can be hidden from God. God knows everything.

“Do you not see those who were forbidden from engaging in secret counsels yet they revert to that which they were forbidden (to do)? And they hold secret counsels among themselves to commit sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger. And when they come to you they greet you with a greeting which God does not use to greet you, and say within themselves, “Why does not God torment us for what we say?” Hell will suffice for them; in which they will burn; a wretched destination.” The verse shows that the Messenger’s (PBUH) plan in dealing with the hypocrites was to advise them to abide by goodness and righteousness in their behavior. However, they continued to conspire with some of the Jewish tribes against the Muslims. They even would greet the Prophet (PBUH) with a twisted tongue in a subtle way to denigrate the Prophet (PBUH). They were saying to themselves that had Muhammad (PBUH) been a true prophet, God would have punished them for their abuse. The verse reiterated God’s knowledge of everything to send a message to the hypocrites that God is aware of their conspiracy. God has decreed that their destination will be Hell fire.

It seems that there were some Muslims who did not yet fully embrace the Islamic behavior and they used to get together to have secret confabulations. The following verse rebuked them for doing this, *“Believers, when you hold secret counsels, do not do it for committing sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger; but do it for righteousness and piety; and be conscious of God, to Whom you shall be gathered.”* The verse still addressed these Muslims with the endearing term, “Believers,” to teach them the proper etiquette of dealing with matters that need to be discussed. Their aim should be to hold these discussions in an atmosphere which is conducive to righteousness and piety. They should remember that they will be accountable to God.

Secret confabulation is motivated by Satan and creates suspicion and doubt. This is Satan’s way to create animosity and disunity among Muslims, however Satan cannot harm anybody except by the leave of God, *“Secret counsels are only (inspired) by Satan, in order that he may cause grief to the believers; but he cannot harm them in the least, except as God permits; and in God let the believers put their trust.”* The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“If you were a group of three people then no two of you should hold secret counsel leaving the third person out*

of the conversation.” This is the proper etiquette. However, sometimes it would be beneficial to hold secret consultations, if holding such consultation in public would cause harm to certain people.

Another lesson in the etiquette of general meetings is given, *“Believers, when you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room; God will make (ample) room for you. And when you are told to rise up, rise up. God will raise up those of you who believe and who have knowledge to higher ranks. And God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* The verse exhorts Muslims to welcome those who come late to the meeting and to make room for them so they can sit and participate in the meeting. God promises those who make room for their brothers a greater reward from Himself. Those who obey the Prophet (PBUH) when he commands them to leave are promised a greater reward, *“God will raise up those of you who believe and who have knowledge to higher ranks.”* The lesson is that faith teaches tolerance and knowledge teaches obedience.

“Believers, when you consult the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That is better and purer for you. But if you do not have the means, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.” It was narrated that Imam Ali (RA) practiced this command. He used to pay a charity each time he wanted to consult with the Prophet (PBUH). However, some Muslims found this practice onerous. So, the verse came to remove this obligation, *“Were you reluctant to give in charity before your consultation? So when you do not do it and God has accepted your repentance, then establish prayer and pay the poor-dues and obey God and His Messenger; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* These verses provide lessons that teach the Muslims the proper etiquette.

The narrative turns to the hypocrites to warn them not to conspire with the Jewish tribes, *“Do you not see those who befriend people with whom God is angry? They are neither of you nor of them, and they swear a false oath knowingly.”* The strong condemnation of the hypocrites gives an indication of the grave danger they posed to the Muslim community in Medina. They superficially accepted Islam as a cover for their surreptitious activities to harm Muslims. But they will get their proper punishment, *“God has prepared for them a severe torment. Evil indeed are their deeds. They made their oaths to serve as a cover and they averted people from the path of God; therefore, they shall have humiliating torment. Their wealth and their children will avail them nothing against God. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein forever.”* They will be humiliated on the Day of Judgment. They will swear to God, but God knows that they are liars, *“On the day when God will raise them up all together, they will swear to Him as they (now) swear to you, and they will fancy that they have some standing. They are indeed liars.”* Satan has overcome them and they came under his control, therefore they lost everything, *“Satan has overcome them, so he made them forget the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. Indeed, those of the party of Satan are the losers.”*

The hypocrites thought the support of the Jewish tribes will strengthen their status in Medina. They forgot that it is God who provides the true and genuine support, *“Those who controvert God and His messenger, they will be among the most abased. God has decreed that, ‘It is I and My messengers who must prevail.’ God is Strong, Eminent.”* This is the ultimate truth that will prevail; God and His Messengers must prevail. The believers may suffer and may be persecuted but ultimately they will be victors.

The following verse states a fundamental truth: only the love of God and His Messenger (PBUH) should fill the heart of a believer, *“You will not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who controvert God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). God will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. Indeed, those in the party of God are the successful.”* A believing heart cannot entertain two kinds of love at the same time. One cannot love God and in the meantime love those who oppose God. It is one or the other; even if those who oppose God were, *“their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred.”* God has established faith in the hearts of those who love God and His Messenger (PBUH). He will be pleased with them and they will be pleased with Him. They are the members of the party of God. They are the successful ones.