A Devastating Storm

O you who have faith! Remember Allah's blessings upon you when the hosts came at you, and We sent against them a strong wind, and hosts whom you did not see. And God sees best what you do. [33/10] When they came at you from above and from below you [higher and lower ground], and when the eyes rolled (with fear), and the hearts leapt to the throats, and you entertained misgivings about Allah, [33/11] it was there that the faithful were tested and were shaken severely. (al-Ahzab, 33/9)



The lofty mission of the Prophet (S) was to convey the radiant message of God to mankind and accordingly, two of his celebrated attributes are, "a bringer of glad tidings" (bashir) and "a warner" (nadhir). However, when ignorance reaches its limit and human beings are being deprived of their freedom to decide on and select the correct course of action, and no other choice remains to counter the situation, then the use of armed conflict as a corrective measure becomes legitimate. In the face of an enemy quick to war, the Prophet (S) had to react in a similar manner; indeed, this response is natural and reasonable. Therefore, whenever the disbelievers challenged the Muslims to war and the survival of Islam was threatened, the Prophet (S) would take steps to protect the existence of Divine values within the society and defend Islam. Most of the battles of the Prophet (S) were defensive in nature, and were fought in response to the attack of the enemy. However, because his mission was essentially to convey God's message and to establish His unity, God favoured and assisted His Prophet (S), who was the most distinguished of His creatures. In battle against the enemy, too, the Prophet (S) received God's aid so that he could ably shoulder the task of the guidance of humanity, and to deliver mankind from the grip of polytheism and spiritual pollution, and to convey his universal message to every corner of the world so that he could present new concepts in the shape of a comprehensive program of life. Thus, the principle of conflict and war in Islam is quite different from that in other schools of

thought, because it pursues deeper and humanitarian objectives.

In Islam, resorting to armed conflict is only legitimate in order to liberate mankind in the true sense and to free minds from the captivity of doubt and every shackle that binds humanity.

In the battle of Ahzab which is partly described in the foregoing verses, the situation was such that several groups, comprising of polytheist and Jewish tribes, whose authority was threatened by the message of Islam, had been trying to divert the Prophet (S) from his mission. When all their efforts failed, they resorted to band together to wage war against the Muslims. Their alliance was made at in an environment where tribal allegiances were very strong while Islam was teaching a message that transcended such considerations.

The confederation far outmatched the Muslim army in strength and equipment, and their organized formations presented a strong wall against the forces of Islam. It is recorded that they outnumbered the Muslims three to one, which naturally was an uneven match.

In this battle, which took place around Madina, the Muslim soldiers were in a very difficult situation due to their lack of numbers and means. Matters were proceeding in a manner that it seemed that the bigger and better equipped army was inevitably going to defeat the weaker force. The polytheists were confident that they would easily overrun the Muslim defences, deal them a crippling defeat and destroy the nascent establishment of Islam.

Meanwhile, the hypocrites and fifth-columnists began to direct all their efforts to weaken the morale of the Muslims. They used every means to plot and inflame the situation in an attempt to stop the spread of the pervading influence of Islam, which was threatening their age-old arrogant ways and customs.

It was in these difficult times that the help of God came to the rescue of the Muslims. In the manner described in the verses, God sent two forces to the aid of the believers.

One of these forces was visible and the other invisible; the invisible force could not be seen by either party in the battle, while the visible force was clearly felt by both sides. The invisible force, which the Qur'an mentions, was that of the angels, who aided the Muslims and strengthened their morale, and allowed them to remain steadfast against their enemy. The force whose presence was felt was that of a violent storm, whose devastating effects were clear to the Muslims and the enemy alike. The storm which occurred in the battlefield and at the time of battle, was so unexpected and sudden that it brought disarray in the ranks of the enemy within a few moments, resulting in their defeat.

The Muslims clearly understood and realized with certainty that an invisible army of angels had come to their aid at a critical time when they were hopelessly outnumbered and facing a well-equipped enemy, because they knew that their victory was not an ordinary or foreseeable

outcome; the polytheists had no such belief in angels. As for the visible assistance which was the devastating storm, its effects had been clearly perceived by both sides of the conflict. The army of Islam as well as the forces of the enemy simultaneously witnessed the sudden storm with their own eyes.

Here the Qur'an emphatically declares the storm as the cause of the enemies' defeat and this event has been mentioned as an example of God's special blessing and grace to the Muslim soldiers.

And if such an extraordinary storm, which the idolaters themselves experienced and which brought about their complete defeat had not occurred, they would have certainly reacted angrily to, and openly challenged, the Qur'anic version of events. They would have lost no opportunity to spread propaganda against Islam and the Qur'an and would have declared everywhere that there had been no storm, and this would have been a means to crush the beliefs of the Muslims and negate the claim of the Qur'an.

However, the fact is that after the revelation of the verses, the idolaters and hypocrites who were ever searching for ways to discredit Islam, and would question the verses of the Qur'an at the smallest pretext, remained quiet and gave no alternative explanation for their defeat. This itself is a sign that they acknowledged the truth of the Qur'anic report; that a storm had overwhelmed the army of disbelievers and caused their humiliating defeat; that also, a storm that only raged in the small area where the two armies were arrayed, targeting only their side and laying their army to waste while sparing the other. In the end they had been forced to abandon the field and accede to a weaker foe.

It is noteworthy that the battle of Ahzab, as mentioned earlier, was instigated by a confederation of various tribes from amongst the idolaters and the Jews ; despite this, no one from the ranks of the Jews, idolaters or the hypocrites could present any explanation contrary to the explicit and decisive account mentioned in the Qur'an.

In the years that followed this event, when opponents were constantly searching for ways and means to undermine the beliefs of the Muslims, even prejudiced historians amongst them have not been able to justifiably refute the statement of the Qur'an about what actually transpired that day, and to prove that the devastating storm that the Qur'an mentions as the cause of the chaos in their army and their ultimate unimaginable defeat, never occurred. This itself is a demonstration of the miracle of the Qur'an, which must be pondered upon, and not passed over casually.

If these hostile groups had wanted to move on from their dark past, and to forever put aside their legacy of baseless customs, which was an important cause of their intellectual stagnancy,

and to benefit from the radiance of Divine teachings, this miraculous event which they witnessed with their own eyes was enough.

If they were willing to change, this experience would certainly make them reconsider their deviant beliefs and abandon their defiance and accept the religion which opened for man the doors to personal development, guidance and perfection, and which brought with it the keys to human prosperity. We should also take a look at the verses of Suratu Tawba which state:

يَعْتَذِرُونَ إِلَيْكُمْ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ قُل لاَّ تَعْتَذِرُواْ لَن نُّؤْمِنَ لَكُمْ قَدْ نَبَّأَنَا اللّهُ مِنْ أَخْبَارِكُمْ وَسَيَرَى اللّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَى عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ {94} سَيَحْلِفُونَ بِاللّهِ لَكُمْ إِذَا انقَلَبْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لِتُعْرِضُواْ عَنْهُمْ فَأَعْرِضُواْ عَنْهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ رِجْسٌ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ جَزَاء بِمَا كَانُواْ يَكْسِبُونَ {95} يَحْلِفُونَ لَكُمْ لِتَرْضَوْاْ عَنْهُمْ فَإِن تَرْضَوْاْ عَنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللّهَ لاَ يَرْضَى عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ {96}

They will offer excuses to you when you return to them. Say: Do not make excuses; we will never believe you. Allah has informed us of you state of affairs. Allah and His Apostle will observe your actions, then you shall be returned back to the Knower of the unseen and the seen, then He will inform you of what you used to do. They will swear to you by Allah when you return to them so that you may leave them alone. So do leave them alone. Indeed they are filth and their abode is hell; a recompense for what they used to earn. They will swear to you that you may be reconciled to them; but (even) if you are reconciled to them, indeed Allah is not pleased with the transgressing people. (Tawba, 9/94-96)

In these verses, the Qur'an describes the situation of the hypocrites at the end of the battle of Tabuk, before the return of the Muslim army to Madina and makes the Prophet (S) aware that the hypocrites, who had not participated in the expedition to Tabuk, were planning to turn to the victorious army on their return to Madina, and present excuses to explain their own absence in the war. The verses make clear that their words were only lies and that they would even try to convince the soldiers and deceive the Muslims by swearing false oaths so that they may be not be taken to task for the wrongful conduct that they were guilty of.

The Qur'an also exposes their reasons for swearing these vain oaths and makes the Muslims aware of the facts so that they would be prepared beforehand to respond to the hypocrites and not be taken in by their deception and behave favourably with them.

Therefore, the Muslims were required to respond to the baseless words of the hypocrites by telling them flatly that would not accept their excuses or trust their words, because God, Who is aware of everyone's manifest and hidden secrets, had informed them of their devilish plotting and the trap they had lain to beguile the Muslims.

The Qur'an is essentially telling the warriors that: *"As soon as you return to them they will swear oaths by God that you should overlook their crime, but you should not ignore the gravity of their actions because they are corrupt." (Suratu Tawba, 9/96)*

At this point, two possibilities may be considered. The first is that the hypocrites had become aware of the revelation of the verses about them before the Prophet (S) returned to Madina. If this was the case, they would have certainly acted contrary to the revealed verses when they met the Muslims, i.e., they would have neither made any excuses nor sworn any oaths, thereby scoring a decisive propagandistic blow against the Qur'an, because they were ever-alert for any opportunity to weaken the Muslims. Why then did they not undermine the verses by acting contrary to them and instead do exactly as foretold by the Qur'an?

The other possibility is that the hypocrites were unaware of the revelations of these verses and unknowingly made their excuses and took false oaths. In this case the verses of the Qur'an are a prediction which was completely accurate.

Therefore in both cases, the question remains that other than God, the Almighty - Who is aware of the secrets and inner thoughts of men - who else could have decisively foretold the aberrant actions of the hypocrites, and accurately announce their future words?

Undoubtedly this incident is a miracle of the Qur'an which has not been denied by any opponents of Islam.