

The Concept of JIHAD IN ISLAM

The Peaceful Ideological
Struggle in the Path of God

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FOREWORD

The Arabic word ‘jihad’ means ‘peaceful struggle’ in English. And what is meant by this peaceful struggle is basically the dawah effort, as the Quran says: “... so do not yield to those who deny the truth, but strive with the utmost strenuousness through this [that is, Quran, to convey its message to them].” (25:52)

This verse refers to communicating the message of the Quran to people through peaceful efforts. Dawah is essentially an ideological struggle. It is an extensive effort with various demands. It becomes a significant struggle when efforts are made to engage in dawah with all its necessary demands. That is why dawah work is called ‘jihad.’

However, sometimes the word ‘jihad’ is also used in an extended sense to denote war. But this is only an

extended meaning. The commandments and etiquette of jihad and war are different. The actual aim of the jihad of dawah is to transform the other party's thinking, whereas, in contrast, war aims at the extermination of the other party.

A fundamental difference between jihad and war is that jihad is a general commandment in the sense of dawah. The dawah jihad has to be engaged in under all circumstances. The objective of the Jihad of dawah is to convey the message of God to all people. Dawah is a constructive action based on wishing well for others, and this must carry on at all times in every generation. In contrast, jihad in war is a temporary action, engaged only when another country militarily attacks a Muslim country. The responsibility for countering this attack does not lie with individuals. Instead, it is the sole responsibility of an established state that make necessary arrangements for this purpose.

Conditions govern most Islamic acts. In the sense of war, jihad is also subject to certain conditions. Present-day Muslim movements involved in fighting in the name of jihad do not fulfil these conditions. Merely labelling one's actions as jihad does not mean they qualify as Jihad. In this matter, it is essential to refer to Islamic teachings about jihad rather than form

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an opinion based on the actions of certain Muslims. Muslims should be judged in the light of Islamic teachings and not vice versa.

The eternal jihad is the jihad of dawah; to convey the message of God to all mankind in every generation is the eternal jihad. That is why it has been called *jihad-e kabir* or 'great jihad' in the Quran (25:52).

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WHAT IS JIHAD?

Jihad simply means making great efforts or striving for a particular purpose. Jihad is not synonymous with violence. It is a form of worship through which one earns Divine reward.

Jihad is a fact of life. What is called ‘effort’ or ‘struggle’ in English is called ‘jihad’ in Arabic. Jihad is not some mysterious concept. Nor is it synonymous with violence. It simply means making great efforts or striving for a particular purpose.

The root word of jihad is *juhd*, which connotes making much effort for something. According to the famous Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-Arab*, the word *juhd* means utmost effort. *Juhd* and related words appear in different forms to indicate this meaning. For instance, the phrase *jahad al-laban* means, ‘making efforts to take out all the butter’. In Arabic, one says *bazala juhduhu*, that is, ‘He exerted his utmost power or ability.’ Likewise, when we say *jahada ar-rajulu fi kaza ay jadda fihi wa balagha*, it means, ‘The man made every effort and tried his best for the cause.’ The terms jihad and *mujahid* (one who engages in jihad) precisely mean the same. (*Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 3 p. 135)

Striving hard for a particular purpose is something

that all human beings do. It is a human characteristic. There are words in every language to denote such effort, and the word for this in Arabic is 'jihad'. It is the basic meaning of the word 'jihad'.

There is one difference, though, we must note in this regard. The term 'effort' or 'struggle' ordinarily does not connote divine reward or worship. However, these are implied when the term jihad is used in the Islamic context. Thus, jihad refers to a particular effort or struggle, that is also a form of worship and earns Divine reward for the person who engages in it. As the Quran says: *Jahidu fillahi haqqa jihadihi*. (22:78) It means: "Strive for the cause of God as it behoves you to strive for it."

In some situations, the act of jihad or struggle might take the form of facing one's opponents. On such occasions, in terms of usage, and not in the literal sense, jihad can also take on the sense of war. Hence, Imam al-Raghib al-Isfahani, an eleventh-century Muslim scholar of Quranic exegesis and the Arabic language, mentions three types of jihad:

- a. Fighting one's external antagonists.
- b. Fighting Satan.
- c. Fighting one's self.

(*Al-Mufradat fi-Gharib el-Quran*, p. 208)

JIHAD IN THE QURAN

The followers of Islam are commanded to support the Prophet, at the level of sacrifice, in dawah work, or inviting people to God. The phrase 'jihad in the path of God' means the Prophet's dawah mission and not war.

The word 'jihad' or its derivatives have been used in the same sense as in the Arabic lexicon, engaging in great efforts for some purpose. The word 'jihad' appears four times in the Quran, and every time it is used in the sense of effort and struggle, and not directly as a synonym for war.

In this regard, the translation of the first relevant Quranic verse is as follows:

Say, "If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your spouses and your tribe, and the worldly goods which you have acquired, and the commerce which you fear will decline, and the homes you love are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and the struggle for His cause, then wait until God fulfils His decree. God does not guide the disobedient people."
(9:24)

In this verse, followers of Islam are commanded to support the Prophet, at the level of sacrifice, in the

Islamic mission of dawah, or inviting people to God. They must do this even if their interests are affected if they suffer commercial loss and undergo physical hardship. They must be with the Prophet in every situation in this dawah mission. In this verse, the phrase ‘jihad in the path of God’ has been used about the Prophet’s dawah mission and not war.

The word jihad appears in the Quran for the second time in this way:

“...so do not yield to those who deny the truth, but strive with the utmost strenuousness through this [Quran, to convey its message to them].” (25:52)

In this verse, the term jihad refers to the jihad of dawah because there can be no other meaning of engaging in jihad through the Quran.

The term jihad appears for the third time in the Quran in the following verse:

“If you have left your homes to strive for My cause and out of a desire to seek My goodwill.” (60:1)

This verse was revealed a short time before the victory over Makkah.

The Prophet’s journey from Madinah to Makkah in 630 CE was not for war. It was a peaceful march, engaged in obtaining the peaceful results of the

Hudaybiyyah peace treaty. The treaty was signed between Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh of Makkah in the year 628 CE. Along with fourteen hundred companions, the Prophet was journeying to Makkah from Madinah to perform the *Umrah* or the minor pilgrimage. However, when they reached a place called Hudaybiyyah, ten miles from Makkah, the leaders of the Quraysh stopped the Prophet from going forward. To resolve the deadlock, the Prophet entered into negotiations with the Quraysh and unilaterally accepted their conditions. It resulted in a ten-year no-war pact known as the Hudaybiyyah Treaty. Two years after the treaty, when the Prophet and his companions were peacefully marching towards Makkah, a Muslim remarked, “This day is the day of the war”, but the Prophet replied: “This day is the day of mercy.” (*Maghazi al-Waqidi*, Vol. 2, p. 821-822)

In the fourth verse, the word *jihad* appears in this way: “Strive for the cause of God as it behoves you to strive for it.” (22:78)

In this verse, *jihad* means the *jihad* of *dawah*, as is clear from the context in which it appears.

From the verse cited above, we can understand that the word ‘*jihad*’ in each of the four times appears in

the Quran in the sense of effort and struggle, not directly as a synonym for war.

THE TRUE JIHAD

Jihad involves discovering God, attaining God-realisation, and searching for ways to develop closeness with God.

To better understand what jihad is, one must first know that whatever the Muslims are doing today in the name of jihad is not jihad. These are all wars unleashed by communal sentiments wrongly named jihad.

Jihad means peaceful struggle. It is not synonymous with war. However, the word jihad is sometimes used in an extended sense to refer to war. However, in the literal sense, jihad and war, or what is called *qital* in Arabic, are not synonymous terms.

Consider the following Quranic verses and Hadith, sayings of the Prophet of Islam, to appreciate some usages of the term ‘jihad’:

1. The Quran says:

“We will surely guide in Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause.” (29:69)

In this verse, the search for the truth has been called jihad—that is to say, making efforts to discover God, attain God-realisation, and search for ways to develop closeness with God. This jihad has no relation with war or confrontation.

2. In the same way, the Quran speaks of true believers as those who strive with their wealth for the cause of God. It says: “The believers are only those who have faith in God and His Messenger and then doubt not, but strive, hard with their wealth and their persons for the cause of God. Such are the truthful ones.” (49:15)

According to this verse, to spend one’s wealth in God’s path is an act of jihad.

3. Likewise, the Quran says: “...do not yield to those who deny the truth, but strive with the utmost strenuousness using this [Quran, to convey its message to them].” (25:52)

In other words, this is an instruction to engage in peaceful struggle or efforts to spread the teachings of the Quran.

4. Similarly, the Prophet is reported to have said: *Al-mujahidu man jahada nafsahu fi ta’atillah.* (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23967) It means that a *mujahid*

is one who strives against himself for the sake of obeying God.

From this, we learn that fighting against the promptings of oneself and persevering on the path of truth is a jihad. This struggle takes place inside oneself, in the realm of one's psyche, and not on a battlefield in the external world.

5. The Prophet is reported to have said: *Ni'm al-Jihadu al-Hajj*. That is, "The best jihad is Hajj." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2876) Thus we learn that undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage is an act of jihad. The *haji* or the Hajj pilgrim has to make great efforts in performing the Hajj as desired.
6. According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam is reported to have said about serving one's parents: *fafihima fajahid*. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3004) It means, 'Do jihad concerning your parents.' Thus we learn that serving one's parents is an act of jihad.

THE CONCEPT OF JIHAD IN ISLAM

If you are willing to sacrifice your ego completely and surmount all hurdles and face all sorts of difficulties and losses but still remain firmly established on the truth—this is the actual jihad.

As noted earlier, the word ‘jihad’ is derived from the root *juhd*, which means ‘to strive’ or ‘to struggle.’ It denotes the exertion of oneself to the utmost, to the limits of one’s capacity, in some activity or for some purpose. Thus, the Quran says, “And strive for the cause of God as it behoves you to strive for it.” (22:78)

In Arabic, ‘jihad’ actually denotes effort or all-out effort for something. Because fighting one’s enemies is also one form of such effort or striving, it is also referred to as jihad in an extended sense. However, the Arabic word for this is *qital*, not jihad.

Fighting with one’s enemies is something that might happen by chance, and only occasionally. However, jihad is a continuous process that animates every day and night of the true believer’s life. It never ceases. This continuous jihad is the ceaseless effort a believer makes at every moment to abide by and remain

established in God's will in every aspect of his life. Such a person does not let any obstructions affect his life, such as the desires of the self, the allure of gain and personal aggrandisement, the power of culture and the pressure of tradition, the promptings of opportunism, the lust for wealth, and so on. All such things are obstacles in leading a God-oriented life and doing good deeds. Overcoming such obstacles and abiding by the commandments of God is the real jihad, and this is what jihad's primary meaning is.

There are many references to this jihad in the sayings attributed to the Prophet in the books of Hadith. For instance, in the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad, there are several traditions, such as:

1. *Al-mujahid man jahada nafsahu lillahi*

That is, 'A mujahid struggles with his self for the sake of God.' (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23951)

2. *Al-mujahid man jahada nafsahu fi sabilillahi*

That is, 'A mujahid is he who exerts himself for the cause of God.' (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23965)

3. *Al-mujahid man jahada nafsahu fi ta'atillahi.*

That is, 'A mujahid is he who struggles with his self in submission to the will of God.' (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23958)

This present world is a testing ground. It has been fashioned so that human beings are constantly faced with challenging situations that test them. In the course of these tests, people have to face various hurdles. So, for instance, you might face a situation where you are confronted with something, but you feel that acknowledging it might lower your status. You might have something that actually belongs to someone else in your possession, and you feel that returning it to its rightful owner would damage your interests. Alternatively, you think that leading a modest life is tantamount to suppressing your desires and ego. At times, you might think that you would negate yourself if you do not vent feelings of anger and revenge. You might hesitate to uphold justice for fear of losing your popularity. You might feel that if you act in a principled manner instead of selfishly, you might lose certain facilities. And so on.

In this way, you have to suppress or deny your desires on various occasions repeatedly. If you are willing to sacrifice your ego completely and surmount all hurdles and face all sorts of difficulties and losses but still remain firmly established on the truth—this is the actual jihad or the primary meaning of jihad. Those who remain steadfast in this jihad will be eligible for Paradise in the Hereafter.

Jihad is essentially a peaceful struggle. As mentioned earlier, one form of this peaceful struggle is *dawah*, inviting people to God.

The jihad that the Quran (25:52) refers to is not about military action. Instead, it refers to an entirely intellectual and ideological task. In short, it means refuting falsehood and affirming the truth.

In its primary sense, jihad in the form of *qital* or war is another name for peaceful struggle. That is to say, if an enemy challenges someone militarily, even then, one should initially strive, to the utmost extent possible, to respond to this challenge through peaceful means. Peaceful means can be abandoned only when it is no longer possible to use them when war becomes the only option left to respond to war initiated by others.

In this regard, a statement recorded in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and attributed to Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, serves as a guiding principle. According to this report, whenever the Prophet faced two alternatives, he would always opt for the easier one. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3560)

This means that whenever he had to choose between two options, he would always leave the harder option and choose the easier one.

This practice or *Sunnah* of the Prophet applies not only to the routine affairs of life but also to serious matters such as war, which by its very nature is a difficult option. A study of the life of the Prophet reveals that he never initiated war himself. Whenever his opponents sought to entangle him in fighting, he would always adopt some way to try to avoid it and stave off war. He engaged in war only when there remained no other options. Thus, going by the Prophet's method, wars of aggression are forbidden in Islam. Islam allows only for defensive war, and that, too, only when it becomes unavoidable.

In life, one is constantly faced with the problem of choosing between two options: peaceful means, on the one hand, and violent means, on the other. The accounts of the Prophet's life tell us that always, and in every matter, he shunned violence and adopted peaceful methods. His whole life was a successful model of this principle. Here are some instances that illustrate this point:

1. Soon after being appointed as a prophet, the Prophet of Islam was faced with choosing between the two options mentioned above—peaceful and violent methods. As a prophet, his mission was to end polytheism and establish monotheism. The

Kabah in Makkah was established as a centre of *Tawheed*, but three hundred and sixty idols had been installed therein when the Prophet Muhammad received prophethood. Hence, one might think that the Prophet should first have been instructed in the Quran to purify the Kabah of idols and remake it as a centre of *Tawheed*, and only then work for the mission of *Tawheed*. However, had he started his work in this way, it would have been tantamount to warring with the Quraysh of Makkah, who enjoyed leadership among the Arabs precisely because they had become the custodians of the Kabah.

History tells us that at this stage, the Prophet completely abstained from practically purifying the Kabah of idols and limited himself only to the ideological dawah of *Tawheed*. It was, thus, an early example set by the Prophet of choosing a peaceful method over a violent one.

2. Firmly abiding by this peaceful principle, the Prophet carried on his preaching work in Makkah for thirteen years. However, despite this, the Quraysh turned into his fierce opponents, so much so that their leaders plotted to kill him. Accordingly, they armed themselves with swords and surrounded his house.

This was, in effect, an open challenge to war issued to the Prophet and his companions. However, following God's guidance, the Prophet decided to avoid armed confrontation. Thus, in the silence of the night, he left Makkah and secretly travelled to Madinah. This incident is known in Islamic history as the *Hijrah*.

The *Hijrah* exemplifies a peaceful method instead of a violent one.

3. The 'Battle of the Trench', also known as the Battle of Ahzab, is another illustration of this *Sunnah* of the Prophet. On this occasion, many of the Prophet's opponents from different tribes assembled and marched towards Madinah to attack the city. It was an open challenge to war on their part. However, to avoid war, the Prophet arranged for a trench to be dug around the town. This served as a buffer against the attackers. Thus, the army of the Quraysh, having spent just a few days on the other side of the trench, turned back in retreat.

Digging this trench, too, was an example of the Prophet's choosing a peaceful option instead of a violent one.

4. The Treaty of Hudaibiyah is also an example of this policy of the Prophet. The Prophet and his companions wanted to enter Makkah and perform the *Umrah* or minor pilgrimage, but they were stopped by the leaders of Makkah at a place called Hudaibiyah and were told to go back to Madinah. The Quraysh said that they would not allow them to enter Makkah at any cost.

This was, in other words, a challenge to war on the part of the Quraysh. Had the Prophet proceeded towards Makkah by his plan of performing the *Umrah*, it was inevitable that armed confrontation with the Quraysh would have broken out. However, he ended his journey at Hudaibiyah. There, he entered into a peace treaty with the Quraysh by unilaterally accepting all their conditions, and then he returned to Madinah.

This is yet another clear example of the Prophet choosing a peaceful method over a violent one.

5. This same *Sunnah* or practice of the Prophet was also exemplified in the victory over Makkah. On this occasion, he was accompanied by ten thousand devoted companions. They could undoubtedly have successfully fought the Quraysh. However,

instead of using force, the Prophet chose to give a demonstration of force. He did not set out with this ten-thousand-strong army by announcing and then fighting the Quraysh and capturing Makkah. Instead, what he did was that he made preparations for the journey in complete secrecy and travelled along with his companions to Makkah and silently entered the town. His entry into Makkah was so sudden that the Quraysh could not make any preparations against him, so Makkah was won over without any bloody confrontation.

This, too, is an example of the Prophet's choice of a peaceful, over a violent, method.

These examples prove that in ordinary conditions as well as in extreme emergencies, the Prophet adopted the principle of peace instead of war. All his successes are practical examples of this very *Sunnah* of peace.

As indicated above, peace is the general commandment in Islam, while war is only a rare exception, to be resorted to only when it becomes an unavoidable compulsion. If we keep this principle in mind and survey the world today, we will find that the modern age is entirely different from the world of ancient times in this regard. In the past, violent methods were a common or general practice, while adopting

peaceful methods was challenging. However, today the situation has completely changed. In today's world, violent methods have become completely undesirable and unacceptable. In contrast, peaceful methods are now the only acceptable option. Moreover, today, peaceful methods enjoy solid intellectual and practical support, making them extremely powerful and effective.

These supports for peaceful methods are very many—for instance, the right to express one's views, the possibilities of widely disseminating one's views using modern means of communications, employing the power of the electronic media, the internet and social media in one's favour, and so on. These modern transformations have made peaceful methods both much more popular and, at the same time, much more effective options.

As mentioned earlier, the Prophet's *Sunnah* or practice was that when peaceful methods are available, these methods alone must be used for the Islamic movement, and violent struggle should be abandoned. In today's context, because of the vast transformations that have taken place, peaceful methods are now available and, based on the supporting factors mentioned above, they have become much more effective. It can be safely

said, without any fear of exaggeration, that today, violent methods have not only become difficult but that they are also utterly useless in practical terms. In contrast, peaceful methods are far easier to adopt and very effective.

No longer is the peaceful method a question of choosing between two possible options—peaceful versus violent. Instead, the peaceful method is now the only practically possible and result-oriented option. Thus, it is correct to say that violent methods must now be abandoned in practice. In the language of the *Shariah*, they should be regarded as *mansukh* or abrogated. The followers of Islam are now left, at the practical level, with only one method to adopt—and that, without any doubt whatsoever, is the peaceful method, unless such changes take place in prevailing conditions that once again change the rules that apply in this regard.

In the past, violent methods were used occasionally, but these were only a choice compelled by the age conditions in which the Prophet lived. However, since no longer does any such compulsion exist due to changes in the age, the choice of violent methods must now be considered unnecessary and not in consonance with the Prophet's *Sunnah*. In the

changed conditions of today, only peaceful methods must be used.

An instructive example from recent times in this regard is the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Because of the changes our times have witnessed that are referred to here, Mahatma Gandhi could engage in a full-fledged peaceful political struggle and succeed. Moreover, all of this happened by adhering, from start to end, to non-violent methods and peaceful activism.

According to a well-known principle of *fiqh* or jurisprudence, rules can or should be modified to suit the change of time and place. This accepted principle of *fiqh* demands that when times have changed, one must, if need be, seek the re-application of *Shariah* commandments per the prevailing conditions. This *fiqh* principle applies as much to the issues of war as it does to many other matters. It, too, demands that violent methods should now be abandoned and peaceful methods alone are considered legitimate according to the *Shariah*.

CONTEMPORARY SELF-STYLED JIHADI MOVEMENTS

The violent activities presently engaged in by Muslims in the name of jihad are wholly illegitimate in Islam. A guerilla war is illegitimate in Islam as it is conducted by non-governmental actors and not an established government. Moreover, proxy war being engaged in by a government without making an open declaration of hostilities is also not legitimate in Islam.

Today, in many countries across the world, Muslims are engaged in violent movements in the name of jihad. However, it is a fact that no movement can become a jihad simply because its flag-bearers give it that name. An action can be considered an Islamic jihad only when it completely fulfils Islam's conditions for jihad. Without these conditions of jihad being fulfilled, a movement cannot be a jihad. Instead, such jihad is condemned in the Quran as *fasad*, or corruption and chaos. Those engaged in such violent activities will not receive the rewards decreed for those who participate in true jihad. Instead, they will deserve only punishment rather than reward.

In several of my books, I have discussed in considerable detail the various conditions for jihad in the sense of

qital or war. Here, I wish to clarify just one point. Moreover, it is that jihad in the sense of war does not have the same status as individual actions such as prayer and fasting. Instead, it is an action that has wholly to do with the state.

In the sense of war, this status of jihad is very clearly explained in the Quran and Hadith. For instance, the Quran (4:83) ordains that if an atmosphere of fear is created because of an enemy, people should not launch action against it on their own. Instead, they should turn to those in authority—that is, people in charge of the government, so that the latter can adequately understand the situation and take appropriate and necessary steps.

The Quran tells us that in the event of fear (a situation of war), it is not permissible for members of the general public to act independently. They can only leave the matter with the rulers and assist the latter in their actions.

According to a Hadith report in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2957, the Prophet has declared that the leader is a shield; war is undertaken under his leadership, and protection is procured through him. We learn that military defence must always be

conducted under the Ruler's leadership. The general Muslim public must obey their rulers in this regard. Lending them their support, they must help them in their efforts.

This issue is one on which there is a consensus among the *fuqaha* or scholars of Muslim jurisprudence. Perhaps no noted scholar of Muslim jurisprudence has any objection to it. According to the unanimous consensus of the *fuqaha*, only an established government can declare war. Alternatively, as it is said in Arabic, *ar-raheelu lil-imam*, that is to say, the declaration of war is the sole prerogative of the Ruler. (*Al-Mughnī*, Vol. 9, p. 202) Non-governmental actors, including groups and individual members of the general public, do not have the right to make such a declaration.

An organised struggle is of utmost importance in the war. Only an established state can engage in such an organised action. That is why only states can engage in war. It is not legitimate for members of the public to initiate war.

In numerous countries, Muslims are engaged in violent confrontation. However, almost without exception, these are not Islamic jihads, but, instead,

what is called *fasad*, or anarchy. None of these so-called jihads has been launched by an established government. All of them have been launched and are being carried out by what in today's parlance is called non-governmental organisations. If some of their so-called jihadi activities enjoy the support of some Muslim government, this support is being provided in a clandestine and undeclared manner. According to *Shariah*, a Muslim government has the right to engage in jihad only if it openly and explicitly announces this. According to Islam, it is unlawful for a Muslim government to engage in war without an open declaration.

The violent activities presently engaged in by Muslims in the name of Jihad in various parts of the world are of two types: guerilla war and proxy war. Both of these are, without any doubt, wholly illegitimate in Islam. A guerilla war is illegitimate in Islam because it is conducted by non-governmental actors and not an established government. Moreover, proxy war is illegitimate because a government engages in it without making an open declaration of hostilities, which is not legitimate in Islam.

THREE TYPES OF JIHAD

Jihad is a peaceful struggle to remain steadfast on the path that is pleasing to God, to convey the message of God to all of mankind and, in an extended sense, to face antagonists, which was a peaceful one in the past, and remains now as well.

Islamic jihad, when properly understood, is a constructive and continuous action or process. It continues uninterrupted throughout the life of a true believer. It has three aspects:

1. *Jihad-e-Nafs*: This is the struggle against one's negative feelings and improper desires and persevering to remain steadfast on the path that is pleasing to God.
2. *Jihad-e-Dawah*: This is the struggle to convey the message of God to all of mankind and to make utmost effort for this cause with feelings of compassion and well-wishing for all. It is an exalted task, and so it is called *jihad-e-kabir* or 'great jihad' in the Quran (25:52).
3. *Jihad in the Face of Antagonists*: In the past, this jihad was a peaceful one, which remains relevant till today.

In this sense, jihad is a peaceful struggle, not a violent one.

There are numerous similar verses in the Quran and Hadith reports that tell us that the act of jihad is a peaceful action. It is a form of struggle for a Divine task conducted within peaceful limits. Then, the correct translation of jihad would be ‘peaceful struggle’.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEACE

If peace is established unilaterally for the sake of peace, numerous opportunities can be opened up, which, when availed of peacefully, can lead to justice. An individual or group can secure justice only when it recognises available opportunities and wisely avails them.

The Quran says: “... reconciliation is best.” (4:128)

What is reconciliation? It is another name for the results of peace. Where there is reconciliation, there is peace. Where there is no reconciliation, there is no peace. In this sense, then, it can be said that in Islam, peace is the *summum bonum* or the greatest good.

Generally, people think that justice is fundamental. However, justice is merely a concept or notion. The real question is how this concept should be turned

into a reality. There is only one way for this—and that is through peace. If peace is established, numerous opportunities can be opened up, leading to justice when availed of peacefully. An individual or group can secure justice only when it recognises available opportunities and wisely avails them.

Across the world today, there are people engaged in violent conflicts to secure justice. However, all of them have failed to get the justice they seek. There is only one reason for this—and that is because their methods are wrong. The method you use to get what you want is of utmost importance in this world. Even if your goal or purpose is good, you cannot achieve it if you adopt the wrong method. This is a universal rule, and no individual or group is an exception as far as this is concerned.

A group or community that seeks justice must first establish peace. Peace is so important that it must be established at any cost. It can never be established on a bilateral basis. Instead, it is always based on exercising unilateral patience. There is simply no other way to establish peace.

The scheme of nature is based on opportunities. Nature provides us with plenty of opportunities. An atmosphere of hate and violence closes off these

opportunities. Hate and violence act as trapdoors. To avail of the many opportunities that nature provides us, we must first end hate and violence to seal these trapdoors. Moreover, when this happens, we are deluged with a flood of all sorts of opportunities that we can avail of to achieve our goals.

These opportunities can help us in both the secular and the religious spheres. They can enable us to engage in efforts to advance educationally and economically. We can also avail these opportunities for religious purposes—to invite people to God. Engaging in this dawah work, we can become eligible for Divine reward.

The ‘Beautification’ of Violence

Satan portrays wrong actions in seemingly beautiful words. By falling prey to Satan’s beautification, people take to violence. Shunning resultless action, one must seek God’s forgiveness and abandon the path of violence.

Violence is in every sense a destructive action. The whole of human history is a testimony that no individual or group has ever secured any positive success through violence. Whenever an individual or group has taken to violence, it has only met with

destruction and not with any real benefit or progress. However, despite this, why is it that some people routinely resort to violence? it is because of what is called ‘Satanic beautification’. The Quran (15:39) tells us that Satan has a particular method—of portraying a wrong action in seemingly beautiful words. Satan gives strife the name of ‘reform’. In this way, he influences people’s minds. He entangles them in the false belief that whatever they are doing is not violence but, rather, a holy jihad. It is the path to martyrdom that will take them straight to Heaven, he tells them.

Falling prey in this way to Satanic beautification, people take to violence. They engage in wrong actions, and Satan deludes them into believing that they are engaged in good works.

There is only one way to save oneself from this ‘Satanic beautification’—and that is, to judge one’s actions in terms of their results. One should realise that violent actions that lead to destruction and that destroy available opportunities are a result of Satan’s ‘beautification’. One must, therefore, implore God for His forgiveness and abandon this path.

Violence in itself is entirely undesirable. It can never bring about any reform. It only works to inflict more

damage. It always emerges from hate and enmity. We must cleanse our minds of hate and enmity, and then Satan will not be able to exercise control over us.

NO REACTION IN ISLAM

The philosophy of reaction is entirely unnatural. Instead of reacting violently, taking stock of the prevailing situation, and being guided by a positive mindset, the Islamic method is to plan one's course of action in a constructive manner geared to producing positive results.

If you ask people who are engaged in violence, whether as individuals or as members of groups, why are they involved in destructive activities, they will answer that their violence is a 'natural reaction'. If an individual or group is oppressed or denied justice, they will say a reaction is bound to be. Moreover, they will explain in so reacting that they might even go to the extent of taking to arms and even suicide-bombing. They will argue that their violence will end only when oppression and injustice of the other party ceases. Otherwise, they will contend that their

reaction will stop only when the other party stops its action first. There is no use preaching only to them to give up violence unilaterally.

This philosophy of reaction is entirely unnatural. The fundamental error of such people is that they had adopted the wrong criterion for their actions. The proper criterion here is to evaluate an action as to the results that emerge from it. Right action produces beneficial results for those who engage in it. Hence an action that does not produce beneficial results must be given up.

Actions can either produce beneficial results or prove to be counter-productive for those who engage in them. There is no third alternative. The best form of action is one that produces positive results. An action that does not produce such results only further magnifies the problem. Moreover, magnifying one's problem is not something a wise person wants to do. Emotionally reacting to something, including someone else's actions, is not the proper response. The proper response is to take stock of the prevailing situation, and guided by a positive mindset, to plan one's course of action in a manner geared to producing positive results. Instead of reacting

through confrontation and violence, one should respond constructively. It is the proper Islamic approach and method.

THE LESSER AND THE GREATER JIHAD

Defensive jihad under an established state—*qital*—is temporary. In contrast, *jihad-e-nafs* against oneself, to make God one's focus and not deviate from the straight path, is a permanent, intellectual struggle that one continues throughout one's life.

According to a Hadith, when the Prophet and his Companions returned to Madinah from a battle, the Prophet said: *raja'na min al-jihad il-asghar ila al-jihad il-akbar*. That is, "We have returned from a lesser jihad towards a greater jihad." (*Kanzul Ummal*, Hadith No. 11260) In other words, it was an announcement that the believers had come back from temporary jihad to permanent jihad. In an extended sense, temporary jihad means defensive jihad, whose necessity might occasionally arise. By permanent jihad is meant spiritual jihad, which continues non-stop in every person's life.

This point is narrated in another Hadith report in this way: *jahidu ahwa'ukum kama tujahiduna a'da'ukum*. That is, "Do jihad with your desires as you do jihad with your opponents." (*Tafsir al-Raghib*, Vol. 1, p. 502)

In Islam, fighting against one's enemy is a highly temporary act, whose need arises when someone has attacked a Muslim state. This is a defensive jihad, and only some trained people participate in it, not the entire Muslim community. In contrast to this, jihad against one's *nafs* or self is something that pertains to an individual and goes on throughout the life of a true believer.

For instance, it is an act of merit that when a Muslim meets someone, he greets him with the phrase *Assalamu Alaikum*, which means 'peace be upon you.' According to a Hadith, these words are so lofty that one who greets another in this way is given the good tidings of Paradise. (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 54) However, in this world, where we live and many other people, we repeatedly face bitter experiences. On account of this, every person develops complaints against and negative feelings for others, which he nurses in his heart. In such a situation, only a person who has already purified his heart of all negative emotions and is genuinely concerned for the well-being of others

can genuinely wish *Assalamu Alaikum* to someone else. This task is challenging. It requires the enormous efforts that are termed as ‘jihad’.

There is a tradition, recorded in the *Sahih Muslim*, according to which the Prophet said: *Alhamdulillah tamla ul-mizan*. This means, “The word *Alhamdulillah* (Thanks be to God) fills up the scale.” (*Sunan an-Nasa’i*, Hadith No. 9924)

On the Day of Judgment, one’s good deeds and evil deeds will be weighed on the scale set up by God. According to the tradition mentioned above, the scale will be filled up for a person who says *Alhamdulillah*. That is, his good deeds will outweigh his evil deeds.

This is no simple matter. To genuinely say *Alhamdulillah* requires a great intellectual effort. To say *Alhamdulillah* is to express gratitude for God’s blessings. Man receives these blessings in various forms all the time. Every person receives them without any effort on his part. People generally become habituated to them, because of which they do not consciously recognise them as blessings.

To genuinely say *Alhamdulillah* requires one to engage in an intellectual jihad in such a situation. An individual has to bring his powers of thinking into

action and bring what is in the subconscious into the conscious mind. He needs to give a new direction to his feelings. He needs to struggle as a *mujahid* or engage in jihad to awaken his intellectual powers. Only after this can he utter such words to fill up the scale on the Day of Judgment.

Human beings have various desires and mental states, such as greed, superiority complex, scorn, impatience, anger, revenge, etc. Often, people remain dominated by these negative states. In addition to this, they get deeply attached to certain things—for example, wealth, fame, their children, and so on.

People oscillate between negative and positive emotions, hate and love. These emotions shape their thinking. Consciously or otherwise, they mould their lives according to these emotions. Given this, it is undoubtedly an act of jihad for someone to continuously make God the focus of their attention and not deviate from the straight path. The challenging task is called in the Hadith as *jihad-e nafs*, or jihad against oneself. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 23958)

CONCLUSION

The root word of jihad is '*juhd*', which connotes making much effort. What is called 'effort' or 'struggle' in English is called 'jihad' in Arabic. Jihad simply means making great efforts or striving for a noble purpose. The two permanent or eternal forms of jihad are *jihad-e-nafs* and *jihad-e-dawah*. *Jihad-e-nafs* means striving against one's negative feelings to remain steadfast on the path that is pleasing to God. *Jihad-e-dawah* is to make utmost effort to convey the message of God to all of humankind with compassion and well-wishing.

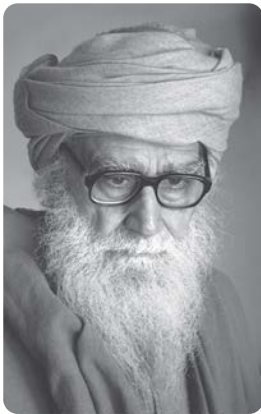
Jihad is not synonymous with violence and war. Fighting one's enemies is also a form of striving; it is also referred to as jihad in an extended sense. The actual Arabic word for war is *qital* and not jihad. Moreover, *qital* does not have the same position as individual actions such as prayer and fasting. Instead, *qital* in defence is a form of military action that is wholly the responsibility of the state. The state has to defend the nation when the need arises. War in defence must always be conducted under a ruler's leadership. The general Muslim public is only responsible for obeying their rulers in this regard. Lending them their support, they must help them in their efforts. It is illegitimate for individuals to initiate war.

In present times, certain Muslims are engaged in a violent confrontations in numerous countries. However, almost without exception, these are not Islamic jihads, but, instead, what is called fasad, or anarchy. They are a form of guerrilla war that is illegitimate in Islam because it is conducted by non-governmental actors rather than an established government.

A fundamental difference between jihad and *qital* is that Jihad in dawah is a general commandment, while jihad in war is a temporary action. The dawah jihad has to be engaged in and under all circumstances. The objective of the jihad of dawah is to convey the message of God to all people in every generation. As jihad of dawah is a continuous struggle, it has been called *jihad-e-kabir* or 'great jihad' in the Quran (25:52).

The Islamic mission of dawah, or inviting people to God, is called jihad as it has to be undertaken at the cost of sacrifice by suffering loss and hardship and suppressing one's ego. In every situation, one must continue the prophetic dawah mission. That is why it has been called 'jihad in the path of God'. (9:24) By engaging in dawah work, one can become eligible for Divine reward.

The author explains that jihad is not synonymous with war or violence in the book. It means to make great efforts for a noble purpose. *Jihad-e-nafs* is to strive against one's negative feelings to remain steadfast on the path that is pleasing to God. *Jihad-e-dawah* is an ideological struggle to convey the message of God to all of mankind with feelings of compassion and well-wishing. In the extended sense of war (*qital*), jihad is a temporary action engaged in under an established state when another country militarily attacks a Muslim country. As it is illegitimate for individuals to initiate war, Muslims' violent activism is not Islamic jihads but fasad or anarchy. Jihad of dawah to convey the message of God to all humanity in every generation is the eternal jihad. That is why it has been called *jihad-e-kabir* or 'great jihad' in the Quran (25:52).



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual guide and an Ambassador of Peace. Having received international recognition for his work, the Maulana authored over 200 books and recorded thousands of lectures giving the rational interpretation of Islamic concepts, prophetic wisdom and the spiritual meaning of Quran and Islam in the contemporary style. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and in contemporary style. He founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International* in 2001 to re-engineer the minds of people towards God-oriented living and present Islam in the modern idiom based as it is on peace, non-violence and spirituality.

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