

Chapter 13: Jihad, Religious and Spiritual Struggle in the Way of God

More than 1,000 million Muslims in different parts of the world unitedly celebrated the beginning of the 15th century of the actualization of the prophetic mission of the Holy Prophet of Islam.

This celebration was held to glorify the great day when the Prophet hoisted the flag of peace and brotherhood and laid the foundations of universal peace and peaceful co-existence; just as Almighty God has said to the Prophet,

'...And We have not sent you but as a blessing to the worlds' (21: 107).

Islam has best resolved the racial and class differences that are the causes of most wars, conflicts, and disastrous events, whereas the so-called civilized world of today is deeply involved in bloody wars and ruinous conflicts and each day the world's murderous statesmen and super criminals find a new pretext under which to fan the flames of war.

Islam's care for peace and justice is so great that in the Qur'an, the followers of the Book, the Jews and the Christians, have been explicitly urged to adopt unity and harmony in the moving expression,

'Say: O followers of the Book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but God and (that) we shall not associate aught with Him...' (3:74).

When the Muslims migrated to Medina and the flag of victory was hoisted over their heads, numerous peace proposals were offered to the Prophet by his opponents and he welcomed them. An undeniable testimony to this fact was his peace agreements with several Jewish tribes that were concluded in the first year of the Hijra. 1

The Purpose Of Jihad

Islam is a dynamic, comprehensive school that aims at the rectification of the social and economic systems of the world in a special manner.

Unlike the beliefs of the ancient Romans, the Jews, and the Nazis, Islam is not restricted to a certain community or a certain race, but is for all human beings and aims at human prosperity and salvation. This divine faith requires all Muslims, guided by the holy precepts and instructions of Islam, to endeavour to rescue the oppressed masses, to establish peace and justice, and to acquaint the unaware people of the whole world with Islam and Islamic rules and regulations.

The combatants of Islam do not intend to gain control of a land or overthrow an oppressive rule to replace it with a similar rule through jihad. Rather, jihad is a pure humanitarian struggle fulfilled in God's way and for human evolution and the rescue of the oppressed people. This struggle culminates in the elimination of all sedition and in the establishment of peace and prosperity.

This great undertaking and the dynamic precepts of Islam put an end to the negligence and degradation of large groups of people, just as they end the oppressive rule and tyrannical lordship of those who live in luxury at the expense of the poor and the defenseless.

Human nature urges that the corrupt members of society be destroyed like weeds so the way may be paved for human salvation and prosperity and so the oppressed may be released from the tyranny of the oppressor. Humanitarian, justice loving, and noble people adhere to this holy struggle and embark upon it.

God's Words

'And were it not for Gods repelling some men with others, the earth would certainly be in a state of disorder, but God is gracious to the creatures' (2:251).

In the theory of Islamic law, war is not an end in itself, but it is regarded as the final means of hindering tyranny and aggression and paving the way towards salvation for mankind.

Once the spokesman for the Arab Muslims said to Rostam Farrokhzad, the Iranian military commander, 'God has assigned us to lead the people who worship other people into worship of the unique, peerless, One God, to urge them to leave a degrading life for a nobly one and to rescue them from the torments of false religions Through Islamic justice. We will let go of the land of any people who accept our invitation to Islam and will go back to our own land.' 2

Did Islam Prevail By The Force Of The Sword?

As a matter of fact, through jihad, the Muslims have mainly meant to establish connections with the people who are under the oppressive rule of tyrants, so the oppressed masses would become acquainted with Islamic rules and precepts and so they would comprehend the glory and genuineness of independence and salvation. The Muslims are well aware of the fact that the oppressed masses will most willingly accept Islam as the best divine faith if Islam is correctly explained to them.

In fighting the infidels, the Muslims did not force people to become Muslims but gave them the choice to retain their own faith provided they submitted to the conditions of peace. In return, the Islamic government would protect them.

In the peace agreement of Hudaibiyah, 3 the Holy Prophet of Islam undertook that no Muslim would shelter any of the infidel Makkans even if they became Muslims before or at the time of seeking refuge with the Muslims in Medina and would return them to Makkah, and he stood by his promise. 4 If the Holy Prophet had wished, he could have taken the same promise from his enemies that if a person left Islam and sought refuge with the infidels of Makkah, he would be returned to Medina.

When Makkah was conquered by the Prophet and his followers, he gave the Quraysh freedom of choice. He did not force anybody to adopt Islam. He wanted them to become Muslims as a result of their true understanding of Islam and of their own free will, not by force. He ordered the Muslims not to kill anybody in Makkah except for a few who were constantly causing trouble for the Muslims. 5

When the infidels asked him for refuge, he would give them refuge and the opportunity to study Islam and then to submit to it freely. For instance, Safwan ibn Umayyah fled to Jeddah when Makkah was conquered by the Muslims. When some people asked the Holy Prophet for refuge on his behalf, he sent his turban for him as a sign of refuge to give him immunity on returning to Makkah.

Safwan returned from Jeddah and asked the Prophet to give him a respite of two months. He agreed to his request and gave him a respite of four months. And Safwan accompanied the Holy Prophet of Islam to Hunayn and Ta'if and finally discarded infidelity and submitted to Islam of his own free will." 6

Conclusion

We conclude that in Islam, the sword is resorted to only in dealing with those who have realized the truth and yet fight it and thus try to hinder others from achieving salvation, and that force is applied to banish tyranny, to release the oppressed, and to create favourable conditions for human progress and evolution.

The sincere and loyal faith of the Muslims at the beginning of Islam and their resistance to all torture and hardship are themselves the best testimonies to the fact that Islam was not promoted by force. History

bears witness to this reality: that the Muslims at the beginning of Islam were so devoted to their faith that they persevered in it through their struggles no matter what torture and torment the infidels inflicted upon them. Many of them even left their homeland and migrated to other places.

The Ethiopian Bilal was among those who took the lead in accepting Islam. Abu Jahl made him lie on the burning hot pebbles, placed a heavy stone on him, the torture of which is, needless to say, beyond endurance. When the faithful Bilal was being tormented, Abu Jahl shouted at him, 'Disbelieve in Muhammad's God. Discard Islam.' But Bilal just repeated, 'The One. The One', meaning God is the One, and 'I worship the One God'. In fact Bilal, as well as many other faithful Muslims at the beginning of Islam, suffered a great deal from the enemies of Islam who had aimed most obstinately at the destruction of Islam.

All of them tolerated all the pains and torture and did not leave their faith even for a single moment. We see therefore very clearly how the accusation that Islam prevailed by force and by the law of the sword is false and far from the truth.

Having found no weak point in Islam, the opponents of this divine religion obviously resorted to such accusations to stain Islam, unaware of the fact that Islam prevails because it is the most supreme divine faith, perfectly compatible with human nature. It gives shelter to the oppressed, deprived masses and presents solutions to all problems facing human beings, whether they be in the material, spiritual, emotional, educational, or political realms.

A Frenchman has written, 'Islam easily prevailed, and this should be rated as one of the special characteristics of Islam. Islam persists forever wherever Muslims step'.⁸

Another Christian writer has written: 'The commercial and cultural contacts beyond the borders of Islam have by far been more effective in the expansion and promotion of the Islamic world than have been military conquests'.⁹

1. A'lam Alwari, p.69.

2. Tarikhi Tabari, Vol. 5, p.2271.

3. Bihar ul-Amwar, Vol. 20, p.350.

4. Ibid., p.362.

5. A'lam Alwari, p.110.

6. Kamil, Vol. 2, pp.248-249.

7. Usud ul-Ghabih, Vol. 1, p.206.

8. Tamadduni Islam wa Arab, p.807.

9. Jang wa sulh dar Islam, translated by Sayyid Ghulam Riza Sa'idi, p.345.

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