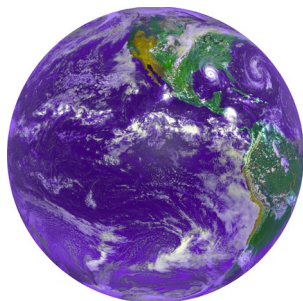


Islam, Peace and Tolerance



Freedom of belief granted to all

Jihad is not war by arms

Muslims taught to live in peace with others

2nd Revised Edition

by

Zahid Aziz



Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K.

*ISLAM,
PEACE AND TOLERANCE*

Islam, Peace and Tolerance

Full freedom of belief recognized

Violence and coercion prohibited

Jihad is not war

Muslims taught to live in peace with others

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Zahid Aziz

Second Revised Edition

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K.

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Preface to the Second Edition

This booklet was compiled to refute the widely prevailing but misconceived notion that Islam is a violent, brutal and intolerant religion, which calls upon its followers to wage war, called *jihad*, against all non-Muslims. It is alleged that Islam prohibits freedom of religion, propagates its message by force, and coerces its followers to remain within its fold by threat of the death penalty. It is said that Islam does not tolerate any criticism of its teachings and urges Muslims to kill anyone who speaks against it.

These misconceptions have aroused a great deal of hostility against Islam in the West, as well as alarm and fear, so much so that the Muslim religion is considered by many of its Western critics to be the gravest threat facing modern civilisation. Unfortunately, some sections of Muslims, by their own intemperate words and actions, are reinforcing exactly this alarming image of Islam. The vast majority of Muslims do not accept these extreme doctrines but have generally not realised the vital need of making strong, sustained efforts to remove these grave slurs from the good name of Islam and its Prophet Muhammad.

This book clarifies the teachings of Islam on the main issues that are raised in these connections. Its arguments and conclusions are based, firstly, on the Holy Quran and, secondly, on the leading books of Hadith, the collections of verified reports of statements and actions of the Prophet Muhammad by his contemporary followers. I have provided full references to the sources and have checked all the quotations given here directly in the original books. Existing translations of the quoted Arabic sources, when available, have been indispensable to me, but I have on occasion varied some of their wording for greater clarity or accuracy.

I have attempted to confront, directly and honestly, the issues and objections involved, without trying to avoid difficult questions, indulge in superficial propaganda, or score debating points.

The perspective of Islam presented in this booklet is based on the writings of two most distinguished Islamic scholars and writers of the first half of the 20th century. They are Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore (d. 1951), well known as the author of an English translation and commentary of the Quran and several other renowned books on Islam, and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (d. 1932), the pioneer Muslim missionary to the West who founded the former Woking Muslim Mission at the Mosque in Woking, Surrey, in England. These luminaries of the Muslim faith had themselves been inspired by that great defender of Islam, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908). Nonetheless, the case argued in this booklet must be judged on its own merits by its conformity with the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

This book was first published in 2007, some of its content being revised versions of articles by me published earlier. In this second edition, I have made additions at various points in the book and also added a further Section 11. Some changes have also been made to the text for clarity. An Index of topics, as well as an Index of references to the Quran, have also been added in this second edition. References to works of Hadith are now presented in an improved way; see the note on p. 98 for explanation.

The first edition of this book was published in view of several catastrophic events that had recently occurred around the world and their tragic consequences. In the ten years since then, those disasters have continued to occur regularly, taking ever worse and hitherto unimaginable forms. This has led not only to the loss of innocent lives of human beings of various countries and religions, but has also been exacerbating bitterness, and poisoning relations, between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. It is hoped that this book will help to bring these communities closer by showing the true teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad.

Zahid Aziz, Dr
December 2016

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1. Prophet Muhammad's life — offering friendship and peace to the world

To understand properly the treatment of the issues that this booklet addresses, it is necessary to know the main points of the life and mission of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. This section aims to provide that information in brief.

The Prophet Muhammad (c. 571– 632 C.E.) was born among a people of no established religion, consisting of different tribes who worshipped tribal idols and other objects, although they believed in a supreme God above their gods. Knowledge and learning were very limited, and no system of justice, rights or law existed in the land, although there were tribal customs and codes. Might was right and moral values in all walks of life were at a low. Exploitation of the weak, slaves and women prevailed. Arabia had largely been untouched by the great civilizations and cultures that passed to its north.

There were a few Jewish tribes and some Christians living in Arabia with claims to civilization, culture and high morals, but by the time of the Prophet Muhammad's advent their condition had also deteriorated and they had little reforming effect upon the Arabs.

The Prophet Muhammad, born in Makkah* in the leading Arab tribe of Quraish, had largely an uneventful life till the age of forty, going about his own business. He was, however, renowned

* Often spelt as Mecca.

for his honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and service to the poor. He felt more and more grieved at the fallen state of society around him. He began to retreat to a cave a few miles outside Makkah for prayer, contemplation and fasting in isolation. He pondered on the meaning of life and how people could be reformed. During his exertions he suddenly received his first revelation and with that his mind was illuminated and he was given a commission from God to be His Prophet. This happened in the year 609 C.E. Great founders of religions before him, Moses, Jesus and Buddha in particular, had subjected themselves to similar rigours before receiving law or teachings or enlightenment from God.

The Holy Prophet's revelations came to him over the next 23 years during the most varied circumstances of his life. It was revealed to him that God is One and He has ever been sending His messengers to the various nations of the world to deliver His guidance, and now God was raising Muhammad as a messenger and prophet just like they were raised. His mission was to present the same basic teachings as they had done, but in a broad, universal sense for the whole of humanity. So God is described at the very beginning of the Quran as "Lord of all the worlds" (1:1), and is not the Lord exclusively of some particular nation. As Lord of all the worlds He sent His guidance to all nations, and Muslims are required to accept, as an article of faith, that the prophets and the Divine books of the earlier religions were sent by that same God. A Muslim accepts Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus and many others as true prophets of God, and as constituting a brotherhood to which the Prophet Muhammad also belongs. Sacred figures of other great religions, such as Krishna, Buddha and Zoroaster, may also be placed in the same category. Whatever may be the views of a Muslim about the modern state of Israel, still he respects and honours the man after whom Israel is named, that is, the prophet Jacob. Muslims also accept the kingdoms of David and Solomon as the kingdoms of the prophets of God.

The second way in which the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad gave universal teachings was by declaring, in these words, that "mankind is a single nation" (2:213). All its races, peoples and religions are treated fairly and justly in God's ordinance. The Quran clearly states:

“O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may have knowledge of one another. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you.” — 49:13

Excellence is not based on race, heredity, colour, language or even religious label, but on integrity and regard for duty. Salvation is also not based on belonging to a chosen nation, or holding some dogmatic belief, or applying some religious label to yourself. The Quran refers to the claims of Jews and of Christians that: “None shall enter the Garden except he who is a Jew, or the Christians” (2:111). It rejects such claims as “vain desires”. It then does *not* go on to say: Not you, but Muslims will enter the Garden. Instead, it says:

“Whoever submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah and he is the doer of good to others, he is the one who has his reward from his Lord.” — 2:112

It means that to whatever extent a person can do this, he receives his salvation accordingly. In another place the Quran tells mankind that:

“... for everyone of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you one religious community, but He wishes to try you in what He has given you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah you will all return, and He will then tell you about your differences.” — 5:48

What different religions should compete in, is in the doing of virtuous deeds, not fighting each other.

His revelation taught that everything should be based on principles of right and wrong, and not on favouritism towards the people of your own religion and injustice against others. Muslims are told:

“Help one another in works of righteousness and goodness, and do not help one another in sin and aggression.” — 5:2

So Muslims must join their fellow Muslims in the doing of good works, but not in committing wrongdoing and injustice out of misguided support for one's co-religionists. This verse also upholds the noble principle of correcting the people of your nation when they are on the wrong path. Muslims are also required to side with those who are truthful and not support those who act dishonestly, regardless of their religion:

“be with the truthful.” — 9:119

“do not plead the cause of the dishonest.” — 4:105

The Prophet Muhammad began his mission by preaching to his kinsfolk at Makkah and its vicinity. A few people accepted him. Opposition to him by his own tribesmen also began to grow, and he and his followers began to be persecuted. The persecution increased and became more intense with the passage of time. Muslims were tortured and butchered. In some places the Prophet was attacked and injured by stoning. At Makkah the Prophet's mission was rather like that of Jesus — a persecuted teacher. Some Muslims even had to seek refuge in Abyssinia, East Africa.

Later, people in the city of Madinah, located just over 200 miles or 360 km to the north of Makkah, started accepting Islam, and the persecuted Muslims of Makkah began to emigrate to Madinah. The Prophet Muhammad, with two closest followers, waited till gradually almost all other Muslims had left Makkah. Then, while his opponents had finalised plans to murder the Prophet in his house, he and his senior-most follower, Abu Bakr, managed to leave Makkah and they hid in a cave a few miles outside while being pursued by their enemy. The lowest point in the history of Islam was reached when their pursuers reached the entrance to that cave. But they turned away, believing that cobwebs at the mouth of the cave indicated that no one could have gone inside. The Prophet Muhammad's escape from the jaws of death represents his “resurrection”, and this event was akin to the “sign of Jonah” prophesied by Jesus, of being in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (Matthew, 12:39–40).

At Madinah, a completely new phase of the Prophet's life began in 622 C.E., after 13 years of his mission at Makkah. He was

now the head of a community as well as a city-state. It was here, over the next ten years, that the teachings of Islam relating to practice, as distinct from faith and doctrine, were revealed. These related both to purely religious functions, such as prayer and fasting, and to all material aspects of human life, such as social institutions, financial dealings, war and peace, state organisation. Like Moses, the Prophet Muhammad became a law-giver.

It was also in this period that the Muslims had to take up arms for the first time. Their enemies from Makkah, of course kinsmen of the Prophet Muhammad, raised an army to attack Madinah. It was then that the Prophet Muhammad received revelation allowing Muslims to fight, but to fight *only* in self-defence against *only* those who attacked them. And in this case fighting was allowed specifically to establish freedom of religion. That first revelation stated:

“Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made ... Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, *cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques* in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down.” — 22:39–40

This shows that the Muslims were fighting for the right of every religion to be practised freely and openly, and that they are required by the Quran to protect places of worship of all faiths.

Each of the three major battles fought was close to Madinah, the last being a siege of Madinah itself, the Muslims being vastly outnumbered in all cases, which shows that Muslims were fighting in sheer self-defence. But their enemy failed every time and gave up in the end. Like David, the Prophet Muhammad fought in battle in person. Eventually, a peace was agreed, and during the time of peace Islam spread very rapidly in Arabia. Two years later, when the people of Makkah violated the peace treaty the Prophet Muhammad marched on Makkah and they had no option but to surrender. He took Makkah almost bloodlessly, eight years after he was forced by the people of that city to leave it.

Upon his victorious entry into Makkah, he addressed the leaders of that city, who had been his enemies, torturers and persecutors, asking:

“What treatment do you expect from me?”

Knowing that he was not vengeful but forgiving, they replied:

“You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother”.

He then announced:

“There will be no reproof against you this day”

There would be no charges, trials or punishments, even for those who had tortured his followers in the most brutal manner. He forgave all his former persecutors. They were free to accept Islam or not.

The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad raised his people morally, spiritually, intellectually, and in terms of culture and civilization, to a height which greatly exceeded anything existing at that time. This was why, after his death, within a century Islam spread over a large part of the then known world, establishing a great civilization of learning and enlightenment. That civilization prospered for a thousand years, until the rise of modern Western civilization.

In the Quran, God describes the role of the Prophet Muhammad in the following words in ch. 21, verse 107:

“We have not sent you but as a mercy to the nations.”

To all nations, races, peoples and religions of the worlds, the Prophet Muhammad is destined to be a *mercy*.

2. Freedom of religion in Islam

It is intended to show here that Islam recognises complete freedom of religion and belief for every human being, and that, consistently with this principle, it does not prescribe any punishment whatsoever for a person who leaves the religion of Islam to adopt some other faith.*

No Compulsion in Religion

The Holy Quran altogether excludes compulsion from the sphere of religion. It lays down in the clearest words:

“There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error.”— 2:256

In fact, the Holy Quran is full of statements showing that belief in this or that religion is a person’s own concern, and that he is given the choice of adopting one way or another. If he accepts the truth, it is for his own good, and that, if he sticks to error, it is to his own detriment. Some quotations to this effect are given below:

1. “The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve.” — 18:29
2. “We have truly shown him (man) the way; he may be thankful or unthankful.” — 76:3

* This Section and Section 4 benefit from the following writings by Maulana Muhammad Ali, and expand upon the material in these sources:

- i. *English Translation of the Holy Quran with commentary* (1951), in particular the section *Liberal View of Other Religions* in the Introduction.
- ii. The book *The Religion of Islam* (1936), chapter *Jihad*.
- iii. *Bayan-ul-Quran*, Urdu commentary of the Holy Quran (1922–1924).

3. "Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord: so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm. And I am not a keeper over you." — 6:104
4. "If you do good, you do good for your own souls. And if you do evil, it is for them." — 17:7

The duty of the Messenger of Allah, and, following him, the duty of every Muslim, is only to deliver the message of truth and no more. This is indicated in the Holy Quran in passages such as the following:

1. "If they accept Islam, then indeed they follow the right way; and if they turn back, your duty (O Prophet) is only to deliver the message." — 3:20; see also 42:48
2. "And obey Allah and obey the Messenger; but if you turn away, the duty of Our Messenger is only to deliver the message clearly." — 64:12; see also 5:92
3. "Say (to people): Obey Allah and obey the Messenger. But if you turn away, he is responsible for the duty imposed on him, and you are responsible for the duty imposed on you. And if you obey him, you go aright. And the Messenger's duty is only to deliver (the message) plainly." — 24:54
4. "O people, the truth has indeed come to you from your Lord; so whoever goes aright, goes aright only for the good of his own soul; and whoever goes astray, goes astray only to its detriment. And I am not a custodian over you." — 10:108
5. "Surely We have revealed to you (O Prophet) the Book with truth for people. So whoever goes aright, it is for the good of his own soul, and whoever goes astray, goes astray only to its detriment. And you are not a custodian over them." — 39:41
6. "We have not appointed you (O Prophet) a keeper over them, and you are not placed in charge of them." — 6:107; see also 42:48

7. “Your duty (O Prophet) is only the delivery of the message, and Ours (God’s) is to call (people) to account.” — 13:40
8. “And your people (O Prophet) call it (the message) a lie while it is the truth. Say (to them): I am not put in charge of you.” — 6:66
9. “And those who keep their duty (i.e., Muslims) are not accountable for them (i.e., the unbelievers) in any way, but their duty is only to remind; perhaps they (the unbelievers) may become devout.” — 6:69
10. “And you (O Prophet) are not one to compel them. So remind by means of the Quran him who fears My warning.” — 50:45

The Quran tells us that it is in the natural order of things that while some people believe, others do not, and no human being can or should apply compulsion to others in this regard. The Holy Prophet Muhammad is told:

“And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Will you then force people till they are believers?” — 10:99

The above verse refers to the deep anxiety felt by the Holy Prophet that people should embrace the message brought by him. Elsewhere his feelings of pain are expressed as follows:

“Then perhaps you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this message.” — 18:6.

“Perhaps you will kill yourself with grief because they do not believe.” — 26:3

As the Holy Prophet was *grieving and sorrowing* over the fallen state of his deniers and their rejection of his message, and *pleading* day and night before God that the Almighty may bring them to the right guidance, he could not even conceive of resorting to coercion to compel them to accept him.

Muslims are also directed in the Quran to be concerned more

about their own reform than about whether others are on the right path, as Allah will be the ultimate Judge of all:

“O you who believe, take care of your (own) souls — he who goes astray cannot harm you when you are on the right way. To Allah you will all return, so He will inform you of what you did.” — 5:105

A passage which recognizes that different people follow different religions is as below. It says to the whole of mankind:

“... for everyone of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you one religious community, but He wishes to try you in what He has given you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah you will all return, and He will then tell you about your differences.” — 5:48

We deal with this passage further in Section 9, p. 72.

Christians pray in Holy Prophet’s mosque

A well-known event that took place a year or so before the death of the Holy Prophet illustrates his strong commitment to the freedom of religion. A large delegation of Christians from Najran, near Yemen, headed by their religious leaders, came to meet him to discuss the doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity. The Holy Prophet lodged them in rooms connected with his mosque. Before the discussion began, the time came for the Christians to hold their prayer. He allowed them to hold their service inside his mosque. Thus they prayed according to their own faith and religious observances, which conflicted with Islam, within that mosque which is one of the holiest places of worship for Muslims. Their discussion is reported in many classical Islamic historical works, biographies of the Holy Prophet and commentaries of the Quran. It is reported:

“...when they came to Medina they came to the apostle’s mosque as he prayed the afternoon prayer... The time of their prayers having come they stood and prayed in the apostle’s mosque, and he said that they were to be left to do so. They prayed towards the east.”¹

Some passages of the Quran on how to preach Islam

1. A verse from the Quran illustrating how Muslims should behave when inviting people to Islam is as follows:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord knows best him who strays from His path, and He knows best those who go aright.” — 16:125

“Wisdom” means to appeal to reason and knowledge, not to exploit people’s prejudice or ignorance. “Goodly exhortation” is to give advice that can make people lead better lives. Arguing in the “best manner” is to both present the best arguments and evidences and to do so in the best behaved, polite manner, showing consideration for the feelings of others.

2. It is stated beautifully elsewhere:

“And who is better in speech than one *who calls to Allah and does good*, and says: I am surely of those who submit (to Allah)? And good and evil are not alike. *Repel evil by what is better*, when lo! he between whom and you is enmity would be *as if he were a warm friend*. And none is granted it (this quality) but *those who are patient*, and none is granted it but the owner of a mighty good fortune.” — 41:33–35

The way to preach Islam described above is as follows:

- a. By means of speech, not force;
- b. By setting an example yourself of doing good deeds, rather than merely preaching about it;
- c. Returning the evil done to you by your opponents with good. Then will the heart of your opponent turn, and your enemy will become your warm friend.
- d. By exercising patience, which is the only way to achieve success through the above means.

3. Establishing some common ground with others is advised:

“And do not argue with the People of the Book except by what is best, save such of them as act unjustly. But say:

We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.” — 29:46

Acting “unjustly” means stubbornly refusing to accept a truth in the other’s arguments even after realizing it, using unfair and dishonest tactics to prove your point, etc. Engaging in arguments with such people is fruitless. Muslims are here told to start by establishing a common ground, by saying that we accept the scriptures of other religions as having been revelations from God, and that the God Who revealed those is the same Being Who has revealed the Quran.

4. Presenting Islam to others should not lead to any dispute or squabble with others if Muslims adhere to *justice*:

“To this (truth), then, go on inviting, and be steadfast as you are commanded, and do not follow their low desires, and say: I believe in what Allah has revealed of the Book, and I am commanded to do justice between you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will gather us together, and to Him is the eventual coming.” — 42:15

Following “low desires” and not doing justice is to hold the beliefs that, for example, God favours us unjustly against others, that He forgives our wrongs but punishes people of other religions for their similar wrongs, and that He rewards our good deeds but rejects the good deeds of others. Here again, Muslims are required to say to others that Allah is their Lord as He is ours. He judges justly according to deeds, so instead of us squabbling or contending with one another, let each side prove its truth by the goodness of its deeds: “For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds.”

5. The Quran also prohibits Muslims from abusing the deities worshipped by the followers of other religions. It says:

“And if Allah had pleased, they would not have worshipped others (besides God). But We have not appointed you (O Prophet) as a keeper over them, and you are not placed in charge of them. Do not abuse those whom they

call upon (in worship) besides Allah, in case, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance.” — 6:107–108

6. Another verse relevant to this subject is as follows:

“And if you invite them to guidance, they do not hear; and you see them looking towards you, yet they do not see. Hold fast to forgiveness and enjoin goodness and turn away from the ignorant.” — 7:198–199

This directs us that when we have to deal with people who are blindly prejudiced and ignorant, and therefore fail to understand the guidance, we must not give vent to anger, fury and violence against them. We should treat them with forgiveness, do our duty of enjoining simple acts of goodness that everyone recognises as good, and then turn away from them, leaving the matter in the hands of Allah. Two more verses advising Muslims on how to deal with the ignorant, which are in fact self-explanatory, are as follows:

“And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace!” — 25:63

“And when they hear idle talk, they turn aside from it and say: For us are our deeds and for you your deeds. Peace be on you! We do not desire the ignorant.” — 28:55

7. We may supplement the above verses by an incident which shows how a person accepted Islam by merely observing the character of the Holy Prophet. A Jewish scholar who had lent some money to the Prophet Muhammad came to demand it back. The Prophet said: “I have no money that I can give you.” He said: “Muhammad, I will not leave you until you pay me.” The Prophet said: “Then I will stay with you.” So the Prophet remained sitting with him, saying his prayers at that place throughout the rest of the day and the early morning prayer the next day. The Holy Prophet’s Companions threatened the man that they would throw him out, but the Prophet forbade them. They said: “O Messenger of Allah, Can a Jew hold you up?” He replied:

“My Lord has forbidden me to do injustice to one who is under our compact of security, and such other people.”

Note that non-Muslims lived under the Prophet’s protection under a contract which guaranteed them freedom of religion, security and justice. The report of the incident continues as follows.

As the day rose, the Jew suddenly announced his acceptance of Islam by proclaiming the *Kalima* and added: “I swear by Allah that I did what I did only in order to see if the qualities that are recorded in the Torah about the promised prophet are found in you or not. It says: ‘... He will not be abusive in language nor hard-hearted, nor will he shout loudly in the streets, nor will he make foul talk or speak nonsense’ ... Here is my property. You may give any order with regard to it.”²

No punishment for apostasy

It is generally thought that Islam provides a death sentence for those who desert the religion of Islam. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Quran will see that there is not the least ground for such a supposition.

1. Several times the Quran speaks of people going back to unbelief after believing, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. In one place the Quran refers to the war being made upon Muslims by their opponents based in Makkah and says:

“They will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can. And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever — these it is whose works go for nothing in this world and the Hereafter.” — 2:217

This verse clearly speaks of a person as continuing to live after turning away from the religion of Islam until he dies while still an unbeliever. This verse also shows that force was being used *against Muslims* by their enemies to make them leave Islam, rather than being used by Muslims to keep the followers of Islam within its fold.

2. The Quran also says:

“O you who believe, should anyone of you turn back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him.” — 5:54

“Those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in disbelief, their repentance is not accepted, and these are they that go astray.” — 3:90

“Those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them nor guide them in the (right) way.” — 4:137

The last verse above speaks of certain people who switched back and forth between Islam and unbelief. They embraced Islam of their own accord, then left it of their own accord, then came back of their own accord, and finally left it and became confirmed in disbelief. No punishment was applied to them at the hands of the Muslims, nor was any prescribed to be applied. Only God would judge them.

3. The Quran also speaks of a plan of a group of Jews living in Madinah to adopt Islam first and then desert it, thus creating the impression that Islam was not a religion worth having:

“And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe, in the first part of the day, and disbelieve in the latter part of it, perhaps they may turn back.” — 3:72

Such a scheme, to first announce belief in Islam and then renounce it a little later, could never have been conceived by them while living at Madinah, where the Government was Muslim, if apostasy, according to the Quran, had been punishable with death.

4. In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which is a production largely of a number of non-Muslim Western orientalist, it is stated at the beginning of the article *Murtadd* (‘Apostate’) written by Willi Heffening:

“In the Quran, the apostate is threatened with punishment in the next world only; ...”³

Apostasy during war

The misconception that apostasy is to be punished with death seems to have arisen from the fact that people who, after becoming apostates, joined the enemy, were treated as enemies, or that, where an apostate took the life of a Muslim, he was put to death, not for changing his religion, but for committing murder.

The Holy Quran mentions a number of kinds of people who leave the cause of Islam during war (see 4:88–91), and instructs Muslims how to deal with each kind of case. Those who openly join the enemy, with whom the Muslims were at war, and fight against Muslims, should be fought in the same way as the enemy. Some other groups are mentioned in 4:90 as follows:

“those who join a people between whom and you there is an alliance, or who come to you, their hearts shrinking from fighting you or fighting their own people. ... *So if they withdraw from you and do not fight you, and offer you peace, then Allah allows you no way against them.*”

Thus even in case of war, if anyone leaves the Muslim side but joins such non-Muslims with whom Muslims are at peace, or he does not fight at all, Muslims cannot harm him in any way.

Apostasy in Hadith and classical Islamic jurisprudence

The view that apostasy is punishable with death is derived by classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) from various reports in books of Hadith. It should be noted that rulings in the books of jurisprudence are judgments arrived at by human beings and therefore cannot be treated as infallible.

However, even a careful study of Hadith leads to the conclusion that apostasy was not punishable unless combined with other circumstances which called for punishment of offenders, such as their having joined the enemies who had waged war against Muslims. In any event, a Hadith report cannot be used to overturn principles clearly laid down in the Quran. A report such as “Whoever changes his religion, kill him” must be treated subject to the principle that the change must be accompanied by some crime committed against the Muslim community.

The books of *Fiqh* seem to recognise that mere change of religion is not punishable in Islam, but consider that the apostate, by leaving Islam, necessarily places himself in a state of war with the Muslims and thus may be killed as a combatant. On this ground the famous book of jurisprudence, *Hidaya*, rules that a woman apostate cannot be put to death for the reason that she is not able to fight in war against Muslims. It also contains the following statements: "The killing for apostasy is obligatory in order to prevent the mischief of war, and it is not a punishment for the act of unbelief", and: "For mere unbelief does not legalize the killing of a man". The clear error committed by the jurists, by which they have contravened the Holy Quran, is that they consider a Muslim who leaves the religion of Islam as necessarily having joined those who are at war with Muslims.

If the Holy Quran and the practical actions of the Prophet Muhammad are regarded as the supreme authorities for determining the teachings of Islam, then it is undeniable that Islam grants complete freedom to everyone to adopt whatever religion they wish, and does not allow Muslims to apply any punishment whatsoever to someone who leaves Islam.

Finally, it is important to make clear that a person can only leave the religion of Islam by his or her own decision and choice, and not by a determination or judgment made by any other Muslim. A person who claims to be a Muslim, and makes the declaration that "there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger", cannot be expelled from Islam by any other Muslim, nor by any Islamic body, court or state. Islam strictly prohibits the branding of such a person as an unbeliever and apostate. The Prophet Muhammad has called it one of the basic points of faith that if a person is professing Islam by the declaration that "there is no god but Allah" then you "must not call him an unbeliever due to any sin nor expel him from Islam for any (bad) deed".⁴ Thus those rulings and *fatwas* which declare that such and such a Muslim has become an unbeliever and apostate, while he or she professes to be a Muslim, have no authority or legitimacy in Islam.

Freedom of preaching given to other religions

Some Muslims think that while non-Muslims living under Muslim rule are entitled to practise their religions and teach them to their own communities, they should be prohibited from preaching them to Muslims. This view is contradicted by the Quran. Several times where the Quran declares some belief held by others to be wrong, it asks them to present evidence or an authority to support it:

“Bring your proof if you are truthful.” — 2:111, 27:64

“Bring your proof.” — 21:24

“Do you have any knowledge so you would bring it forth to us?” — 6:148

“Then bring your Book, if you are truthful.” — 37:157

“Bring me a Book before this or any relics of knowledge, if you are truthful.” — 46:4

Thus Islamic law cannot ban other religions from arguing for their beliefs when the Quran is requiring them to put forward proof, knowledge and their own books in support of their religions.

It is also well known that the Quran challenges its deniers to produce or create a writing to match the Islamic scripture in terms of its power, truth and eloquence (see 2:23, 10:38, 11:13, 17:88). Clearly, Islam cannot then prohibit them from presenting to Muslims any writing which they consider as equalling or excelling the Quran. How else can they respond to the Quran’s challenge?

Notes on Section 2

¹ *The Life of Muhammad*, Ibn Ishaq’s 8th or 9th century C.E. biography of the Prophet Muhammad translated by Alfred Guillaume, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 271.

² *Mishkat-ul-Masabih*, book: ‘Tribulations’, ch. ‘Morals and habits of the Prophet’ (see v. 3, p. 155 of Urdu translation by Maulana Ābud-ur-Rahman Kandhalvi, or v. 3, p. 141–142 of Urdu translation by Maulana Abdul Hakim Khan Akhtar Shahjahanpuri.)

³ *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, E.J. Brill, vol. vii (1993), p. 635, col. 1 (in first edition see v. 3, p. 736).

⁴ *Abu Dawud*, book 15: ‘Jihad’, h. 2532.

3. Islam's teaching on response to abuse and mockery

According to the religion of Islam, Muslims can only respond to verbal abuse, mockery and lampooning of their faith and its sacred figures in the following forms:

1. Any criticism of Islam, or allegations against it, which underlie the abuse must be refuted and answered by means of words and speech.
2. Apart from answering specific criticism, all possible efforts must be made to present the true and accurate picture of Islam in general. With more enlightenment and less ignorance prevailing about Islam and its Holy Prophet Muhammad, the instances of misunderstanding, abuse, vituperation and mockery will decrease.
3. As regards the offence or hurt that Muslims naturally feel as a result of such abuse, they are taught to respond by:
 - a) bearing the provocation with resolute patience,
 - b) ignoring the abuse,
 - c) separating themselves temporarily from the company of the abusers while the abuse continues,
 - d) exercising forgiveness in view of the ignorance of the abusers.

All this is stated plainly and categorically in the Holy Quran and is evident from the actions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It is not allowed by Islam to respond intemperately with fury and

rage, call for physical retribution and punishment, or threaten or attack anyone with physical violence. It is *entirely false and totally unfounded* to allege that Islam teaches Muslims to murder anyone who verbally abuses their religion, mocks it, or offends their feelings towards their faith.

As a general point, it may first be noted that the Holy Quran itself records the many accusations made against, and the insults heaped upon, the Holy Prophet Muhammad by his opponents during his life (for example, that he was insane, or that he fabricated his revelation), and it answers these charges, but nowhere does it require Muslims to inflict any kind of punishment on the accusers. Moreover, if such abuse or criticism requires to be silenced by force, then why should the Quran itself have quoted so much of it from its opponents' mouths and thereby preserved it forever?

Quran teaches patience in response to verbal abuse

The Holy Quran tells Muslims:

1. "You will certainly hear much abuse from the followers of previous books and from the idol-worshipping people. And if you are patient and keep your duty — this is surely a matter of great resolution." — 3:186
2. "Many of the followers of previous books wish that they could turn you back into disbelievers after you have believed, but you should pardon and forgive." * — 2:109

In connection with these verses, it is recorded in the Hadith collection Bukhari:

"The Messenger of Allah and his Companions used to forgive the idolators and the followers of previous books, as Allah had commanded them, and they used to show patience on hearing hurtful words." ¹

We may consider three more sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad commending patience in the face of verbal abuse:

* For further explanation of verse 2:109, see page 41.

1. “The Muslim who mixes with the people and bears patiently their hurtful words, is better than one who does not mix with people and does not show patience under their abuse.”²

What a noble and wonderful piece of guidance, which is so applicable in the modern world in which people of widely differing faiths and opposing views have to mix and come into contact so much!

2. “No one and no thing has greater patience than Allah upon hearing hurtful words. People call for a son for Him, and He grants them safety and sustenance.”³

This tells us that God Himself sets the highest example of showing patience upon hearing something that is displeasing, in this case that God has a son or progeny. Not only does He display patience and restraint, but He continues to be merciful and generous towards those who utter things He does not like.

3. “Once the Messenger of Allah distributed some battle gains among people. A man of the Ansar said, ‘By Allah! Muhammad, by this division, did not intend to please Allah’. So I (the narrator of this report) came to the Messenger of Allah and informed him about it, whereupon his face changed colour with anger and he said: May Allah bestow His mercy on Moses, for he was hurt with more than this, yet he remained patient.”⁴

More verses from the Quran

Addressing the Holy Prophet, God says in the Quran:

1. “Bear patiently what they say.” — 20:130 and 50:39
2. “And bear patiently what they say and forsake them with a becoming withdrawal.” — 73:10
3. “Obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and disregard their hurtful talk.” — 33:48

In these verses, Muslims are taught to bear their feelings of hurt and anger with patience, and to ignore the abuse.

Politely withdrawing from company of abusers

Muslims are told:

“When you hear Allah’s messages disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse.” — 4:140; see also 6:68.

These two passages deal with the case when the religion is being mocked and derided, as distinct from being only criticised. A Muslim is required to do no more than to withdraw from such a company, and even that only while the mocking continues, and actually to rejoin the same company when they have changed the subject! How far from ordering Muslims to kill such people! Muslims are instructed to part company with them for the duration of their gratuitous abuse but still maintain other aspects of their relationship with those very offenders. Can any teaching be nobler and more uplifting?

Any criticism underlying the abuse must be answered. But the response to any sheer abuse, ridicule or mockery is withdrawal of oneself from the company of the abusers. The following verse, addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, has already been quoted:

“And bear patiently what they say and forsake them with *a becoming withdrawal*.” — 73:10.

The word for “becoming” here means literally ‘beautiful’. The ‘withdrawal’ therefore is to be done in a dignified, well-mannered way, not by descending to their level of misbehaviour and abuse.

Some incidents from the Prophet Muhammad’s life

1. Suhayl ibn Amr was a prominent man among the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad at Makkah. He was a spokesman and skilled orator of the Quraish tribe, and used to employ his oratory in making speeches against the Holy Prophet. He was captured by the Muslims at the battle of Badr and brought before the Holy Prophet. Umar ibn al-Khattab suggested that the following punishment should be applied to him before releasing him:

“O Prophet of God, let me pull out Suhayl’s front teeth so that he would never be able to exercise his oratory against you.”

The Holy Prophet replied without hesitation:

“Certainly not. I will not mutilate anyone, for God would mutilate me even though I am His Prophet.”

The Holy Prophet also made this prediction about Suhayl: “Perhaps one day he will say something which will make you happy.” Some six years later when Makkah fell to the Muslims, the Holy Prophet declared a pardon for all his former enemies including Suhayl. Deeply moved by this compassionate treatment, Suhayl embraced Islam. Two years later when the Holy Prophet died and the Muslims were plunged into confusion and uncertainty, then just as in Madinah Abu Bakr made a speech that restored their faith and composure, likewise in Makkah it fell to Suhayl to make a similar speech that reinforced the confidence of the Muslims of that city too that Islam would continue to exist despite the Holy Prophet’s death. Thus was fulfilled the Holy Prophet’s prophecy that the man who was making speeches attacking Islam would one day make a speech that would bring Muslims great joy.⁵

2. Once when the Holy Prophet divided some wealth among his followers, a man accused him to his face of being unfair and insulted him by telling him: “Fear God, O Muhammad.” After the man had left, a Muslim asked the Holy Prophet’s permission to go and kill him. The Holy Prophet refused to allow it and actually tried to find some good in the man by saying:

“Perhaps he says his prayers.”

That Muslim replied:

“There are many people who pray, but what they say with their tongues is not what is in their hearts.”

He meant that the man might not be a Muslim at heart. The Holy Prophet replied:

“I have not been commanded by God to look inside people’s hearts or cut open their insides.”⁶

3. Once some Jews accosted the Holy Prophet Muhammad by distorting the greeting *as-salāmu ‘alaikum* (“peace be upon you”)

and saying it as *as-sāmu 'alaikum*, which means “death be upon you”. His wife Aishah retorted: “And upon you be death and curse”. The Holy Prophet told her:

“Be calm, Aishah, Allah loves that one should be kind and lenient in all matters”,

or according to another version he said:

“Be calm, Aishah. You should be kind and lenient, and beware of using harsh and bad language.”⁷

The Holy Prophet added that he had heard their greeting and had given them a sufficient reply by simply saying: “and upon you too”. Thus the utmost extent of the retaliation, far from being to attack them physically, was not even to repeat the same curse against them but to reply that whatever they wished him, he wished them the same.

4. Once there were four men who spread an accusation of immoral conduct against the Holy Prophet’s wife Aishah. Their allegation was ultimately proved to be false. One of them, called Mistah, who was poor, used to receive financial assistance from Aishah’s father, Abu Bakr (the foremost follower of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and later the first Caliph of Islam). After this incident, Abu Bakr swore never again to help Mistah. The following verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet on this occasion:

“Let not the possessors of grace and means among you swear against giving to the near relatives and the poor and those who had to flee in Allah’s way. Pardon and overlook. Do you not love that Allah should forgive you?” — 24:22

Hearing this, Abu Bakr exclaimed:

“Indeed, I certainly love that Allah should forgive me.”

He then resumed providing assistance to Mistah, as before.⁸

This allegation was not made against just an ordinary Muslim woman, but the wife of the Holy Prophet, striking at the holy household at the centre of the religion of Islam, which was required to be a model of purity for all Muslims. In view of this, the

forgiveness taught in the above verse, and put into practice by Abu Bakr, the greatest of Muslims after the Holy Prophet, becomes all the more generous and magnanimous.

In incidents number (1) and (2) above, the Holy Prophet Muhammad *protected* from any harm those who had insulted and abused him. In number (2), *he did not even want to think ill* of his slanderer. In incident number (4), he received revelation from God asking Muslims *not only to pardon* a man who had slandered his wife with an accusation of immoral conduct but also *to continue providing financial help* to him. Obeying this, Abu Bakr continued to financially assist a man who had defamed his daughter. One cannot imagine that anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, faced with such a situation, in the past times or now, would forgive the false accuser, let alone continue to help him financially.

5. There was a quarrel between a Jew and a Muslim after a Jew swore by God in these words: “by Him Who gave Moses superiority over all human beings!” The Muslim slapped him on the face and said: “You say, ‘By Him Who gave Moses superiority over all human beings,’ while the Prophet (Muhammad) is present amongst us!” One report of this incident continues:

“The Jew went to the Prophet and said: O Abu-l-Qasim! I am under the assurance and contract of security, so what right does so-and-so have to slap me? The Prophet asked the other: Why have you slapped him? He told him the whole story. The Prophet became angry, till anger appeared on his face, and said: Do not give superiority to any prophet amongst Allah’s Prophets.”⁹

According to another report of this incident, the Holy Prophet said to the Muslim: “Do not give me superiority over Moses.”¹⁰

The Holy Prophet Muhammad thus disapproved of Muslims quarrelling with followers of other faiths to say that he is superior to their prophets. It is noteworthy here that a Jew took his complaint against a Muslim to the Holy Prophet, even though the Muslim was defending the Prophet’s status in this dispute. The Jew, living under the contract of security given by the Holy Prophet, was confident that the Holy Prophet would do justice.

The Holy Prophet did not applaud the Muslim's impulsive action nor did he praise him for standing up for him. Instead, he told the Muslim to refrain from trying to prove his superiority over Moses.

Notes on Section 3

- ¹ *Bukhari*, book 65: 'Commentary on the Quran', h. 4566.
- ² *Tirmidhi*, book 37: 'Description of the Day of Judgment', h. 2507 (MDS edition, book 35). *Ibn Majah*, book 36: 'Tribulations', h. 4032.
- ³ *Bukhari*, book 78: 'Good Manners' (*al-Adab*), h. 6099.
- ⁴ *Bukhari*, book 78: 'Good Manners', h. 6059.
- ⁵ (i) Muhammad Husein Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, ch. The Great Battle of Badr, p. 239 of the 8th edition's translation, 1983.
(ii) *The Life of Muhammad*, Ibn Ishaq's biography of the Prophet Muhammad translated by Alfred Guillaume, p. 312 and pp. 794–795.
- ⁶ *Bukhari*, book 64: 'Expeditions', h. 4351; see also book 60: 'Prophets', h. 3344.
- ⁷ *Bukhari*, book 78: 'Good Manners', h. 6030, h. 6024.
- ⁸ *Bukhari*, book 52: 'Witnesses', h. 2661.
- ⁹ *Bukhari*, book 60: 'Prophets', h. 3414.
- ¹⁰ *Bukhari*, book 44: 'Quarrels', h. 2411.

4. When is war allowed?

War permitted in self-defence only

Muslims are allowed in certain circumstances to wage war. Every student of Islamic history knows that the Prophet Muhammad and his companions were subjected to the severest persecution, as Islam began to gain ground at Makkah; over a hundred of them fled to Abyssinia, but persecution at home grew still more relentless. Ultimately, the Muslims along with the Holy Prophet had to take refuge in Madinah, but they were not left alone even there, and the sword was taken up by the enemy to annihilate Islam and the Muslims. It was at that juncture that the Quran permitted them to fight:

“Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And Allah is able to assist them — those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah.” — 22:39–40

Thus the object of allowing the Muslims to fight was not to compel the unbelievers to accept Islam, for it was against all the broad principles in which they had hitherto been brought up. No, it was to establish religious freedom, to stop all religious persecution, to protect the houses of worship of *all religions*, mosques among them. The above passage continues as follows:

“And if Allah did not repel some people by others, then cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down.” — 22:40

Thus Muslims are permitted to undertake war not only to stop their own persecution and to save their own mosques, but to save churches and synagogues as well; in fact, to establish perfect religious freedom. They are allowed to fight only those who fight against them:

“And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not love the aggressors.” — 2:190

This is not only our translation, that of a Muslim. Even two well-known translations of the Quran by Christians in Britain, that of George Sale of the 18th century and of J.M. Rodwell of the 19th century, whose authors display strong bias against Islam and accuse it of having spread by the sword, are nonetheless compelled to translate this verse as follows:

“And fight for the religion of God against those who fight against you, but transgress not by attacking them first, for God loveth not the transgressors.” — Sale.

“And fight for the cause of God against those who fight against you: but commit not the injustice of attacking them first: God loveth not such injustice.” — Rodwell.

Muslims were ordered to stop fighting if and when their opponents ceased carrying out their persecution:

“But if they desist, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is only for Allah. But if they desist, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressors.” — 2:192–193

“Say to those who disbelieve, if they desist, that which is past will be forgiven them; ... And fight them until there is no more persecution, and all religions are for Allah. But if they desist, then surely Allah is seer of what they do.” — 8:38–39

There should be no persecution on the score of religion and everyone must be at liberty to hold any belief he likes. The words *religion is only for Allah* or *all religions are for Allah* in the above

passages carry the significance that religion is a matter between man and his God, a matter of conscience, in which nobody has a right to interfere. Note that in each of the two quotations above, the condition that if “they desist” then Muslims must not fight them is stressed by being mentioned *twice* — once *before* and once *after* the command to “fight them”.

That the Muslims were reluctant to fight, and not keen and enthusiastic about it, is also described in the Quran:

“Fighting is prescribed for you, though it is disliked by you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is bad for you.” — 2:216.

It was, thus, a matter of unavoidable necessity, and not any pleasure, for Muslims to engage in fighting.

The circumstances that led to the Muslims fighting in battle are also indicated in the promise given to them by God as follows:

“So those who emigrated and were driven forth from their homes and persecuted in My way and who fought and were slain, I shall truly remove their evil and make them enter Gardens wherein flow rivers — a reward from Allah.” — 3:195

They were first forced to migrate, driven from their homes and persecuted for their faith. It was after that, that as a continuation of their tribulations, they had to fight in battles, in which many lost their lives. Similarly, the plans of the enemies against the Prophet are mentioned in connection with why Muslims had to fight:

“And when those who disbelieved devised plans against you (O Prophet) that they might take you captive or kill you or expel you...” — 8:30

Another verse that sheds light on why the Muslims had to fight, and also clarifies the meaning of fighting *in the way of Allah*, addresses the believers as follows:

“And what reason have you not to fight in the way of Allah, and of the weak among the men and the women

and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and grant us from Yourself a friend, and grant us from Yourself a helper!”
— 4:75

So, fighting *in the way of* Allah was fighting *in the way of* the weak and helpless men, women and children who were praying to God to be saved from the oppressors of their town, Makkah.

Peace to be preferred

If the enemy offered peace, Muslims were to accept it:

“And if they incline to peace, you must also incline to it, and trust in Allah. ... And if they intend to deceive you, then surely Allah is sufficient for you.” — 8:61–62

Even if the enemy intends deceit by his offer of peace, it should still be accepted by trusting in God. The Holy Prophet made treaties of peace with his enemies; one such treaty brought about the famous truce of Hudaibiyah, the terms of which were disadvantageous to the Muslims. According to the terms of this treaty “if an unbeliever, being converted to Islam, went over to the Muslims, he was to be returned, but if a Muslim went over to the unbelievers, he was not to be given back to the Muslims”. This clause of the treaty cuts at the root of all allegations of the use of force by the Holy Prophet.

Offering security to enemy who wishes to learn about Islam

During a state of war with the Arab idolaters, the Holy Quran directed Muslims:

“If anyone of the idolaters seek your protection, protect him till he hears the word of Allah, then convey him to his place of safety. This is because they are a people who have no knowledge.” — 9:6

The explanation of this verse as given in a classical Arabic commentary of the Quran, written over a thousand years ago, is as follows:

“ ‘Then convey him to his place of safety’ means return him, after he has heard the word of Allah, if he refuses to

accept Islam and is not admonished by the word of God that is read to him, to his place of safety, that is to say, to a place where he is safe from you and your followers, until he reaches his abode and joins his people, the idolaters.” (*Tafsir Ibn Jarir*)

George Sale, mentioned above, who produced the first English translation of the Quran directly from Arabic in the 18th century, and was a hostile critic of Islam, explains the meaning of this verse as follows in his footnote on this verse:

“You shall give him a safe conduct that he may return home again securely in case he shall not think fit to embrace Muhammadanism.”

What greater tolerance could there be than this, that an enemy soldier, on his request, is to be granted protection while he learns about Islam, and if he chooses not to accept it, Muslims must conduct him securely to his place of origin, where he is *safe from Muslims* and rejoins the very enemies whom the Muslims are fighting!

No change from tolerance in later revelations

It is claimed by some that the teachings outlined above, allowing war only in self-defence, were superseded by revelations of a later period in the Quran which command Muslims to wage aggressive war against all those who do not accept Islam. However, it is a well-known fact of history that the Holy Prophet Muhammad exercised complete forgiveness towards his enemies when he conquered Makkah almost bloodlessly, without requiring them to embrace Islam, and this happened in the 21st year of his 23-year mission. This shows that the teachings of Islam about fighting only those who first fight against Muslims, and allowing freedom of religion, did not change in the least.

In support of the claim of a later change in teachings, a text of the Quran is often presented as follows:

“Kill the idolaters wherever you find them” — 9:5.

A mere glance at the context shows that it is an *absolute distortion* to suggest that this instructs Muslims to kill non-Muslims any-

where and everywhere. These verses at the beginning of chapter 9 give notice to *certain* idolatrous tribes that the Muslims would no longer be bound by the agreements of peace with them as these tribes had repeatedly violated the same agreements. The previous two verses state:

“...Allah is free from liability to the idolaters, and so is His Messenger. ... Except those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement, then they have not failed you in anything and have not backed up anyone against you; so fulfil their agreement to the end of their term. Surely Allah loves those who keep their duty.” — 9:3–4.

It is perfectly clear from this exception that only those idolatrous tribes were to be attacked who had failed to fulfil their side of the peace agreement with the Muslims. In subsequent verses their misconduct is explicitly mentioned:

“They respect neither ties of relationship nor covenant in case of a believer. ... If they break their oaths after their agreement and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief — surely their oaths are nothing — so that they may desist. Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first?” — 9:10–13.

They had attacked the Muslims first, and then having made agreements not to attack them again, they broke their oaths repeatedly. This was the only reason why the Quran now declared that the Muslims were no longer bound by those same agreements and issued a notice of war against these tribes. Only a few verses later Muslims are instructed:

“And fight the idolaters all together as they fight you all together.” — 9:36

This clearly refers to fighting in self-defence. Then in 9:40 Muslims are told that if they do not help the Prophet, still Allah will help him as He did when he was fleeing from Makkah to Madinah with just one man with him, being pursued by their murderous enemy. This shows that *even now* the Holy Prophet did not

believe he needed any armed force for success, just as he did not when he was almost alone in the face of the enemy.

Turning back to verse 9:5, its first half reads as follows:

“So when the sacred months have passed, kill the idolaters wherever you find them and take them captive and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush.”
— 9:5

This is quite obviously a notice of war against those particular tribes. It speaks of the actions that are allowed against *enemy soldiers in a state of war*, that some of them are killed in battle while others are taken prisoner. It is *the most grotesque distortion* to represent this as a general order to arbitrarily kill any non-Muslims or to wage unconditional war upon them. The expression to “kill” the enemy “wherever you find them” has also been used in the earlier revelation which specifically restricts war to fighting in self-defence only. It is stated:

“And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not love the aggressors. And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out...” — 2:190–191

Here there is no doubt that “wherever you find them” means wherever you find *those who have started a war against you*. It has the same meaning in the later revelation in chapter 9.

Another point showing that there is no change in the later teachings is the close proximity, in the arrangement of the Quran, of the “earlier” and the “later” verses. A so-called earlier teaching is in chapter 8, verse 61, quoted above: “And if they incline to peace, you must also incline to it.” Now chapter 9, verse 5, containing the words “kill the idolaters wherever you find them”, occurs a mere nineteen verse later. In fact, chapter 9 has been considered to be joined to chapter 8 because it does not begin with the customary opening verse “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful”. Our critics’ standpoint implies that the Quran is giving diametrically opposite teachings within a space of 19 verses, within almost the same chapter. At least no Muslim can

accept this implication, especially when it is stated in the Quran:

“Will they not then ponder on the Quran? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy.” — 4:82

The second half of verse 9:5 then reads:

“But if they repent and keep up prayer and pay the due charity, then leave their way free. Surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

Islam instructed that if those who had been fighting against Muslims decided to embrace the faith of Islam then all hostilities against them were to cease and they were not to be punished for any harm they had previously done to Muslims in battle. This was a time when people generally were accepting Islam freely throughout Arabia, and therefore if anyone among the enemy soldiers did so, he was no longer to be treated as an enemy and his past actions were to be forgiven.

The next verse, 9:6, has been quoted earlier (see page 34), saying that Muslims must offer security to an enemy who wishes to learn about Islam, and then conduct him safely back to his people if he chooses not to accept it. This clearly shows that Islam was not being spread by threatening to kill non-Muslims but by guaranteeing their safety to study it.

Relations of friendship with non-Muslims

It is sometimes asserted that the Quran forbids relations of friendship with followers of other religions. The fact is that, wherever there is prohibition against making friends with other people, it relates only to the people who were at war with the Muslims, and this is plainly stated in the Quran:

“It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those of them whom you hold as enemies. ... Allah does not forbid you as regards those who do not fight you for religion, nor drive you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly. Surely Allah loves the doers of justice. Allah forbids you only as regards those who fight you for religion,

and drive you forth from your homes and help (others) in your expulsion, that you make friends of them; and whoever makes friends of them, these are the wrongdoers.” — 60:7–9.

This passage lays down as the general principle that Muslims were forbidden to have friendship *only* with those who made war upon them on account of their religion. Moreover, the opening words hold out the hope that in future there might be friendship between Muslims and those who were currently their enemies.

Critics of Islam often cite the following passage from the Quran as forbidding friendship with followers of other faiths:

“O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends.” — 5:51

What “friendship” this refers to is very clear from the context. The words immediately following in the same verse are:

“They are friends of each other.” — 5:51

The Jews and the Christians mentioned here were allied with the Arab idolaters in their wars against the Muslims and were themselves *not friends* of the Muslims in the first place. The next verse sheds further light on what is meant:

“But you see those (Muslims) whose hearts are weak, hastening towards them, saying: We are afraid in case a calamity should befall us.” — 5:52

Some weak-hearted Muslims sought help from Jews and Christians as they feared being defeated in war by the Arab idolaters, while God had promised Muslims eventual victory. It is the making of this kind of friendship that is not allowed, which is based on seeking support from less hostile people out of the fear of a more hostile enemy and therefore showing weakness of faith in one’s own cause.

Only six verses later the Quran makes clear what kind of Jews and Christians are being referred to in 5:51, with whom Muslims must not be friendly:

“O you who believe, do not take for friends those *who*

take your religion as a mockery and a sport, from among those who were given the Book before you and the disbelievers; ... And when you call to prayer they take it as a mockery and a sport.” — 5:57–58

Certain other passages occurring both before and after 5:51 show conclusively that this verse does not at all teach Muslims to show lack of friendship towards Jews and Christians. Our critics need only look three verses earlier at 5:48, from which we have also quoted in other sections of this book. There they would read the following words addressing followers of all religions:

“... for everyone of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you one religious community, but He wishes to try you in what He has given you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah you will all return, and He will then tell you about your differences.” — 5:48

This advises followers of various religions, including Muslims, to try to excel and outdo the other religious communities in the doing of good deeds, since the true aim of the law and the way of every religion is the doing of good by its adherents. This instruction is plainly inconsistent with, and opposite to, the attitude that Muslims cannot have friendship with members of other faiths.

Only a little further on after the controversial 5:51 we read:

“Surely those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the Christians — whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good — they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.” — 5:69

This places Muslims, Jews and Christians in the same category as regards belief, that they all believe in God and the Day of Judgment, and it promises that true faith in these two precepts leads to salvation.

Further on, after mentioning that the most stern of those who show enmity towards Muslims are the Jews and the Arab idolaters, it is added:

“You will find the nearest in friendship to the believers to

be those who say: We are Christians. That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not proud.” — 5:82

As Christians are called here “the nearest in friendship” to Muslims, the earlier verse 5:51 cannot possibly be generalized to mean that Muslims must not take any Christians as friends.

As regards the Jews, previous verses in the same chapter 5 relate their history to the effect that God had made a covenant with them which they later violated by neglecting the teachings of the Torah (5:12). The Torah had been revealed “having guidance and light” (5:44). However, as a result of their going against the teachings God had given them, it is stated:

“You will always discover treachery in them except for a few of them — *so pardon them and forgive*. Surely Allah loves those who do good to others.” — 5:13

How could the Quran be teaching Muslims *not to be friendly* with any Jews while at the same time, in the same chapter, instructing Muslims *to pardon and forgive* even such of the Jews as are treacherous towards them!

The verse quoted above is not the only one telling Muslims to forgive Jews and Christians. Elsewhere we read:

“Many of the people of the Book wish that they could turn you back into disbelievers after you have believed, out of envy from themselves, after truth has become manifest to them. *But pardon and forgive*, till Allah bring about His command.” — 2:109

The words “till Allah bring about His command” prophesied that Islam would be successful during their own lifetimes and they would in the end have to give up their efforts to turn Muslims back to unbelief as these would have proved futile.

There are other places where the Quran speaks of good people among Jews and Christians:

“They are not all alike. Of the People of the Book there is an upright party who recite Allah’s messages in the

night-time and they adore (Him). They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and they enjoin good and forbid evil and vie one with another in good deeds. And those are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they will not be denied it.” — 3:113–115

“And among the People of the Book is he who, if you entrust him with a heap of wealth, would pay it back to you; and among them is he who, if you entrust him with a penny, would not pay it back to you, unless you kept on demanding it.” — 3:75

“And of Moses’ people is a party who guide with truth, and therewith they do justice.” — 7:159

“And We divided them in the earth into parties — some of them are righteous and some of them are otherwise.” — 7:168

Muslims must admire, honour and respect such good Jews and Christians, far from refusing to be friends with them.

At one place the Quran invites Jews and Christians to the basic, shared underlying belief in the oneness of God and to put it into practice. It says:

“Say: O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but God and that we shall not take anything as partner with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides God. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness, we are Muslims.” — 3:64

This is nothing other than a *friendly* call, inviting Jews and Christians closer to Islam while still adhering to their own religions. If they reject it, Muslims just say: “We are Muslims”.

Last, but not least, the Quran expressly allows Muslims to have close social relations with followers of earlier revealed religions, in particular Jews and Christians. This permission is given in verse 5 of the same chapter 5 in which the much misrepresented verse 51 occurs (i.e., “O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends.”). We read:

“And the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And so are the chaste from among the believing women and the chaste from among those who have been given the Book before you, when you give them their bridal-dues, taking (them) in marriage, not fornicating nor taking them for lovers in secret.” — 5:5

The first part, relating to food, *facilitates* social mixing. Some religions forbade their followers from eating with members of other faiths. This verse allows Muslims to eat food prepared and offered by followers of other revealed faiths, in particular Jews or Christians, if that food is otherwise lawful for Muslims to consume. And Muslims can offer their own food to people of other faiths, such as they would wish to consume. Thus Muslims can be both guests of and hosts to Jews, Christians and followers of other religions. How can the Quran then have forbidden friendship with them?

The second part says quite plainly that just as a Muslim man would marry a chaste Muslim woman, similarly he can marry a woman following the Jewish or Christian faiths in particular, who abides by the same standards of morality and chastity as those which Muslim women are expected to uphold. No human relationship in the world is more loving, friendly and intimate than that of husband and wife, and this is expressly and explicitly allowed by the Quran between a Muslim man and a Jewish or Christian woman.

Incidentally, this verse affirms that among Jews and Christians too there are women who conform to the same moral code of chastity and purity that Muslim women abide by.

It can, therefore, be seen that far from prohibiting Muslims from having relations of friendship with Jews and Christians, or members of other faiths, the Quran has in fact removed religious barriers that would hinder such relations.

5. What is *Jihad*?

The Arabic word *jihad* means striving or exerting yourself to the utmost against something disapproved. It does not as such mean war or fighting by means of arms. No doubt an armed conflict could also be described as a *jihad*, but that usage would be similar to applying the word ‘struggle’ in English to a war. To determine what is considered as *jihad* in the teachings of Islam, we need to examine the usage of this word in the Quran.

In such a broad sense is the word *jihad* used in the Quran that it is applied to the striving carried out by those opposed to Islam to make Muslims worship other beings and things than the One God:

“And We have enjoined on man goodness to his parents. But if they strive with you to ascribe partners to Me, of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them.” — 29:8 and see also 31:15

The Arabic word translated as ‘strive’ here indicates the act of *jihad*. This use shows that, firstly, *jihad* does not mean war, as no war is being waged here, and secondly that even the opponents of the Muslims are spoken of as undertaking a *jihad* against the Muslims!

In the Quran we find that the *jihad*, or striving, that it requires Muslims to conduct is of the following kinds:

1. Striving to attain nearness to God by improving yourself morally and spiritually and overcoming your bad desires;
2. Sticking to Islam under difficult circumstances, such as when facing persecution, by showing perseverance and patience in conditions of suffering;

3. Striving to take the message of Islam to others, by devoting your time, energy and money for this work;
4. Fighting, or helping to fight, in battle in the defence of the Muslims community, *under the conditions* in which Islam allows Muslims to fight a war by military means.

Jihad to attain nearness to God

This is mentioned in the following verse:

“And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide them in Our ways. And Allah is surely with the doers of good.” — 29:69

The word translated as “strive hard” indicates the act of doing *jihad* in the original Arabic. The meaning is clearly striving hard to bring about your moral and spiritual improvement. It may be noted that a synonym of *jihad* is the word *mujahida*, which is applied to religious exertions such as fasting.

The two verses given below indicate the same *jihad*, where again the word “strive” is used to translate the act of *jihad*:

“And strive hard for Allah with due striving. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion ... so keep up prayer and pay the due charity and hold fast to Allah.” — 22:78

“And whoever strives hard, strives for himself. Surely Allah is Self-sufficient, above need of His creatures.” — 29:6

These verses were revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad while he was living under persecution at Makkah, and therefore the command here to do *jihad* cannot refer to fighting. In case of the first verse, the form of striving is indicated as by prayer, giving in charity and holding fast to God.

Jihad of patience and endurance

This is indicated in the following verse:

“Then surely your Lord, to those who flee after they are persecuted, then strive hard and are patient, surely your Lord after that is Protecting, Merciful.” — 16:110

This verse was revealed while the Holy Prophet was still resident at Makkah, before Muslims had been commanded to fight in battle, while they had started to emigrate to Madinah. Their striving hard or *jihad* was to bear all this hardship with patience, and did not mean fighting.

A *jihad* of this kind is also indicated in a well-known Hadith report, according to which the Holy Prophet Muhammad said:

“The most excellent *jihad* is to say a word of truth before an unjust ruler.”¹

Here, speaking the truth for a noble purpose, when it requires great courage to do so, is called *jihad*, indeed the most excellent *jihad*, by the Holy Prophet of Islam.

Jihad of propagating the message of Islam

The *jihad* of the verse 16:110, quoted above, includes propagating the message of Islam, because it was for this also that the Muslims were being persecuted. This verse requires them to persevere in the *jihad* of preaching and be patient as to the results.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad is commanded:

“And if We pleased, We could raise a warner in every town. So do not obey the disbelievers, and strive against them a mighty striving with it.” — 25:51–52

The mighty or great striving, the great *jihad* (*jihad kabir* in Arabic) mentioned here, is the mission of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to spread the truth *with the Quran*, which is what the words “*with it*” refer to. This is also the duty of every Muslim as the great *jihad*. This verse, again, was revealed during the Makkan phase of the Holy Prophet’s life and therefore the command in it to “strive a mighty striving”, which mentions *jihad* twice, cannot possibly refer to undertaking any armed conflict.

There are also verses revealed much later at Madinah in which *jihad* cannot mean fighting by arms. For example:

“O Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be firm against them.” — 9:73; 66:9

The hypocrites were a group who were outwardly a part of the Muslim community but at critical junctures they deserted the cause of Islam and showed insincerity of faith. No war was ever undertaken against them. The striving hard or *jihad* against them were the efforts to convince them of the truth of Islam. The same form of ‘striving’ also applies in case of the disbelievers mentioned here. More than ten English translations of the Quran render the meaning of doing *jihad* in these two verses as “strive hard”, and not as “fight” or “wage war”.

For another example of verses revealed at Madinah where *jihad* cannot mean fighting, we refer to chapter 61, verse 11:

“You should believe in Allah and His Messenger, *and strive hard in Allah’s way* with your wealth and your lives. That is better for you, if you but knew!”

Three verses later it is stated:

“O you who believe, be helpers (in the cause) of Allah, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples: Who are my helpers in the cause of Allah? The disciples said: We are helpers (in the cause) of Allah.” — 61:14

The striving hard, or *jihad*, of verse 11 is explained in this verse 14 as making yourselves helpers in the cause of Allah in the manner in which the disciples of Jesus responded to his call to be helpers in the Divine cause. The disciples of Jesus, whether according to Islamic or Christian sources, were not asked to fight in any battle with weapons. They helped the cause of truth by propagating his message in the face of persecution and the utmost difficulties.

Jihad of war

The Quran also speaks of *jihad* by fighting, as for example:

“Go forth, light and heavy, and strive hard in Allah’s way with your wealth and your lives.” — 9:41

“And when a chapter is revealed, saying, Believe in Allah and strive hard along with His Messenger, the wealthy among them ask permission of you (O Prophet)

and say: Leave us behind, that we may be with those who sit at home. ... But the Messenger and those who believe with him strive hard with their property and their persons.” — 9:86, 88

There are instances reported in Hadith where, when certain Muslims expressed the desire to join a *jihad* of fighting, the Holy Prophet told them that their *jihad* was to perform some other duty entirely unrelated to fighting. For example:

“Aishah (wife of the Holy Prophet) asked: Messenger of Allah, we consider *jihad* to be the most excellent of all deeds. Should we not then engage in *jihad*? He said: The most excellent *jihad* is the properly-performed *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Makkah).”²

“A man came to the Prophet and asked his permission for *jihad*. He asked: Are your parents alive? The man said, Yes. He said: Then do *jihad* in their way.”³

The words “do *jihad* in their way” can only mean, and are understood by everyone as meaning, “exert yourself in the service of your parents”. The Holy Prophet here has *not* presented the Pilgrimage or service of parents as a metaphorical or lesser alternative for people unable to take part in a “real” *jihad*. He has described these works as the actual *jihad* on their part.

A very illuminating incident is recorded in Hadith, of a time some sixty years after the death of the Holy Prophet, when there was a rebellion of some Muslims led by Ibn Zubair against the Muslim government of the time. Abdullah ibn Umar, one of the greatest authorities on the Quran and son of the second Caliph Umar, was urged by some to join this rebellion as they considered it as *jihad*. It is reported:

“A man came to Ibn Umar and said: Why is it that one year you go for the *Hajj* and one year you go for the *Umra* (a lesser form of the Pilgrimage), and yet you have discarded *jihad* in the way of God? You know how much God has encouraged *jihad*? Ibn Umar said: My nephew, Islam is based on five things: Belief in God and His

Messenger, five prayers, fasting in Ramadan, giving *zakaat*, and the Pilgrimage to the House of God.

The man said: Do you not hear what God has said in His Book, ... 'so fight them till there is an end to the mischief'. Ibn Umar said: 'We acted on this in the time of the Holy Prophet. At that time, Muslims were few, and a man (who accepted Islam) used to face persecution for his religion — they would kill him or punish him. But then the followers of Islam multiplied in number, and there was no mischief left'." ⁴

Thus Ibn Umar refused to recognize that this armed conflict, regarded as *jihad* by many Muslims, was at all a *jihad* that a Muslim must join, even though it is generally regarded as a just cause against a caliph who was a usurper of that position. As his reference to the five pillars of Islam shows, Ibn Umar did not consider it a duty in Islam to join that so-called *jihad*.

Conditions for a *jihad* by arms

For a war to be a *jihad* in Islamic terms, it must fulfil the conditions specified in the Quran. We have already seen in Section 4, '*When is war allowed?*', the circumstances in which wars are permissible in Islam. It must be a war of self-defence and self-preservation by an entire Muslim community which is being persecuted for its religion. Only the government of a state or the leadership of a community can call upon Muslims to engage in such *jihad*. There must be negotiations to avoid war and establish peace, if possible. In battle, the clear instructions of Holy Prophet Muhammad must be followed, who strictly forbade the killing of the non-combatants and the defenceless among the enemy such as women, children, old people, and even those only doing labouring work for the enemy soldiers, not being fighters themselves.⁵ Again, the Holy Prophet's example must be followed in the proper and humane treatment of any captured prisoners of war, who must eventually be freed to rejoin their people. As the Quran says:

“...then, when you have overcome them, make (them) prisoners, and afterwards (set them free) as a favour or for ransom till the war lay down its burdens.” — 47:4

There is no legitimacy at all in Islam for fringe, secretive, self-styled 'Islamic' groups to declare a *jihad* of war in the first place. Then to conduct their so-called *jihad* by acts such as indiscriminate violent attacks on the general, unsuspecting public, and kidnapping people and holding them as hostage, is simply abhorrent to the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Notes on Section 5

¹ *Abu Dawud*, book 39: 'Battles' (*Malahim*), h. 4344 (MDS edition, book 36). *Ibn Majah*, book 36: 'Tribulations', h. 4011. *Nasa'i*, book 39: *Bai'ah*, h. 4209 (MDS edition, h. 4214).

² *Bukhari*, book 25: 'Pilgrimage', h. 1520.

³ *Bukhari*, book 56: *Jihad*, h. 3004.

⁴ *Bukhari*, book 65: 'Commentary on the Quran', h. 4513–4515.

⁵ *Bukhari*, book 56: *Jihad*, h. 3014, h. 3015.

Muslim, book 32: *Jihad*, ch. 8, h. 1744a, 1744b (MDS edition, h. 4547, h. 4548).

Abu Dawud, book 15: *Jihad*, h. 2668, h. 2669, h. 2672.

Tirmidhi, book 21: 'Military Expeditions of the Messenger of Allah', h. 1569 (MDS edition, book 19).

6. Martyrdom

What is martyrdom in Islam?

The word for ‘martyr’ in Islamic literature is *shaheed*. This word in fact means ‘witness’ and is used commonly in the Holy Quran as meaning a witness to something. God is repeatedly called a *shaheed*, as in “Allah is witness of what you do” (3:98) and “Allah is sufficient as a witness between us and you” (10:29). The Holy Prophet Muhammad is called a “witness” upon his followers, and Muslims are called “witnesses” or bearers of witness to all mankind (2:143), i.e. bearers of truth. Every prophet, including Jesus, is referred to as a witness over his followers (4:41, 5:117). The same word is used for witnesses in contracts and civil matters (2:282, 4:135).

Similarly, the word for martyrdom is *shahada*, but it is used in the Quran only as meaning testimony of any kind or something that is obvious and seen, as in “do not conceal testimony” (2:283), “our testimony is truer than the testimony of these two” (5:107), and the statement which occurs several times about God that “He is the knower of the unseen and the seen (*shahada*)” (6:73). This word as meaning testimony is also famously applied to the act of testifying to become a Muslim, and even in English one hears the expression “making the *shahada*” when referring to this act.

These words are applied to martyrs and martyrdom because the life and death of a martyr is a testimony to the truth of Islam. But who is a martyr? Just as *jihad* is not synonymous with war, a Muslim can be a *shaheed* without being killed in any connection with a battle. It is reported in Hadith:

“The Messenger of Allah asked (his Companions): Whom

do you consider to be a martyr among you? They said: Messenger of Allah, one who is slain in the way of Allah is a martyr. He said: Then the martyrs of my people will be few in number. They asked: Messenger of Allah, who are they? He said: One who is slain in the way of Allah is a martyr, one who dies in the way of Allah is a martyr, one who dies of plague is a martyr, one who dies of cholera is a martyr.”¹

Anyone dying in any manner while working sincerely in the service of Islam is thus a martyr or *shaheed*. On the other hand, a Muslim just by being killed in a battle is not necessarily a martyr. According to the Holy Prophet, on the Day of Judgment a man considered to be a *shaheed* could be judged by Allah as follows:

“Allah will say: What did you do? He will say: I fought for You until I died as a martyr. Allah will say: You have told a lie. You fought that you might be called a brave warrior. And you were called so. Orders will be passed against him and he will be dragged with his face downward and cast into hell.”²

It is clear from this that while a Muslim may consider that a certain act would earn him martyrdom yet he may find himself condemned by God in the Hereafter for making a false claim and punished for it.

Similarly, a man asked the Holy Prophet: “If I am killed in the way of Allah, do you think my sins will be forgiven?”. The Holy Prophet replied, at first, that his sins would be forgiven provided that he was patient and sincere, and fought facing the enemy without turning back, but then the Holy Prophet added: “except (the sin of) leaving a debt”.³ It looks as if he owed a debt, and the Holy Prophet reminded him that if he went to fight, without discharging the obligation of repaying his debt, and is killed, his neglect of this duty will not be forgiven by Allah.

The fact is that martyrdom in Islam is a spiritual rank in the life after death and no one can be sure that if he died while engaged in a certain work God would bestow this rank upon him. What we can be sure of, however, is that this rank cannot be

attained by acting against the teachings of Islam, even though the deceased may have believed he was engaged in a struggle in support of Islam. What must be further emphasised is that a martyr is one who dies *as a result of someone else's action against him* which he resists as far as possible, or *due to circumstances entirely beyond his control*. It has been mentioned in the Hadith report quoted above that a Muslim who dies of cholera or the plague is a martyr. But, quite obviously, it is completely against the very basic teachings of Islam for a Muslim deliberately to seek to catch these diseases in order to die as a martyr! Indeed, a Muslim should take all measures to avoid falling a victim to them. But if he should happen to fall ill unintentionally and die while serving Islam he will earn a high place in the hereafter.

Similarly, a Muslim killed in battle must be killed by the action of his enemy, while he is repelling that opponent, or due to some other external cause *beyond the scope of his control and planning*, as one of the conditions to be a martyr.

Suicide is a sin in Islam, and self-preservation is a duty

The committing of suicide is a very serious sin according to the clear teachings of Islam. The Holy Quran instructs:

“Do not cast yourselves to destruction by your own hands.”
— 2:195

“Do not kill yourselves.” — 4:29

In Hadith reports, committing suicide is strongly condemned by the Prophet Muhammad who said:

“... whoever commits suicide with something, will be punished with the same thing in the hell-fire.”⁴

In *Sahih Muslim*, there is a chapter entitled *Abandoning of funeral prayer for him who committed suicide* in which it is reported that the Holy Prophet Muhammad personally refused to say the funeral prayer for a deceased who had killed himself.⁵ In Muslim countries, attempted suicide has always been a criminal offence and a person guilty of it would face legal penalties.

Self-preservation and saving of one's life is the most basic

human instinct. Actions to save one's life are regarded in the Quran as matters of such high priority that it allows a Muslim to set aside certain obligatory duties and prohibitions, if necessary, to save his life. We give some details of this below.

1. Where the Quran prohibits the eating of certain things, including the meat of the pig, it allows their consumption if it becomes unavoidably necessary in order to save one's life. In two verses, after mentioning the prohibited foods it is stated:

“But whoever is compelled by hunger, not inclining wilfully to sin, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” 5:3

“But whoever is compelled, not desiring nor exceeding the limit, then surely your Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.”
— 6:145

Nowhere does the Quran say that if a Muslim invites certain death upon himself rather than make use of a prohibited food to save his life then he is some kind of a martyr.

2. A Muslim who denies his faith under duress and coercion in order to save his life, while believing in Islam in his heart, is excluded from condemnation in the Quran:

“Whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief — *not he who is compelled while his heart is content with faith*, but he who opens the heart for disbelief — on them is the wrath of Allah, and for them is a grievous punishment (in the hereafter).” — 16:106

Thus if a Muslim is threatened by an enemy of Islam that he will be killed unless he renounces Islam, or face some other dire consequences, the Quran allows him to save his life by making merely an outward renunciation, even though it would constitute a grave sin to make the same denial voluntarily.

3. If fasting during the month of Ramadan would endanger the life of a Muslim man or woman, young or old, this obligation is suspended. Again, to knowingly cause injury to oneself, in order to carry out the duty of fasting, is not any kind of a good or meritorious deed in Islam.

4. It is well known that the obligation of going to perform the Pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*) does not apply to anyone whose life would be in danger for any reason by undertaking the visit.

Finally, as explained earlier in this book, even the taking up of arms to fight, by risking one's life, is only allowed by Islam in order to *save and preserve life* as the alternative would be to face certain death and destruction. For instance, verses 22:39–40 have been quoted in Section 4 of this book (see page 31) which allow Muslims to fight if war has been made upon them, and they are required to *repel* their enemies in order to *save* all places of worship from destruction. By repelling their enemy the Muslims saved their own lives, not committed suicide.

Virgins in heaven as reward for martyrs

The misconceived notion that a Muslim male who dies as a martyr is rewarded in the hereafter with seventy-two virgins has brought Islam into disrepute and ridicule, and proved a source of much amusement and mockery for those unaware of the teachings of Islam regarding the hereafter. In this booklet we cannot enter into a detailed discussion of the Islamic concept of paradise or the garden of the next life but the following key points are necessary to know.

Firstly, the rewards of the hereafter are not the material things that we enjoy in this physical world. The life after death is in a world that cannot even be conceived by the human mind in this life, and human beings there will have an entirely different existence that cannot be known here. The Holy Quran says:

“We have ordained death among you and We are not to be overcome, that We may change your state and make you grow into what you do not know.” — 56:60–61.

Other English translations phrase the second part of this quotation as “changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being anew in a manner as yet unknown to you” (Muhammad Asad), “producing you again in a form which ye know not” (Rodwell), and “that We may transfigure you and make you what you know not” (Pickthall).

The enjoyments in the gardens of the hereafter are of an unknown nature in this world, as the Quran says:

“No soul knows what refreshment of the eyes is hidden for them: a reward for what they did.” — 32:17

This is why the description of the garden of the hereafter is called a parable, as in: “A parable of the garden which is promised to those who keep their duty” (13:35 and 47:15).

Secondly, the Quran has made it abundantly clear no less than eight times that men and women are equally entitled to the rewards of the heavenly life. It says:

“And whoever does good deeds, *whether male or female*, and is a believer — these will enter the Garden ...” — 4:124

“Allah has promised to the believers, men and women, Gardens, in which flow rivers, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of perpetual abode. And greatest of all is Allah’s goodly pleasure. That is the grand achievement.” — 9:72

“Gardens of perpetuity, which they enter along with those who do good from among their fathers *and their wives* and their offspring...” — 13:23

“O My servants, ... Those who believed in Our messages and submitted (to Us): Enter the Garden, *you and your wives*, being made happy. ... in there is what their souls yearn for and the eyes delight in, and in them you will abide.” — 43:68–71

“On that day you will see the believers, *men and women*, their light gleaming before them and on their right hand. Good news for you this day! Gardens in which flow rivers, to abide in them.” — 57:12

Thus the women among the believers will have the same rewards and enjoyments as the men of the believers.

Thirdly, all these rewards are manifestations of the good qualities shown and good deeds done by a person in this life,

which are unfolded before him or her. For example, the “light gleaming before them and on their right hand” (57:12) is not a physical lamp of this world, but a representation of their light of faith. In one place in the Quran we read:

“And those who believe and do good are made to enter Gardens, in which flow rivers, abiding in them by their Lord’s permission. Their greeting therein is, Peace! Do you not see how Allah sets forth a *parable of a good word as a good tree*, whose root is firm and whose branches are high, yielding its fruit in every season by the permission of its Lord? ... And the parable of an evil word is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth’s surface; it has no stability.” — 14:23–26

After mentioning the gardens of the next life, a good word is compared to a good tree, ever bearing fruit. Therefore, the trees of the gardens of the hereafter are a person’s good deeds done in this life which appear as trees that bear fruit, just as his good deeds bore fruit.

Likewise, the “beautiful maidens” of the next life are not as women of this world with whom men will have sexual relations. They are the good qualities shown in this life, such as honesty, purity of character, charity, integrity and faith that are manifested in this form. These maidens are called “pure companions” (2:25, 3:15, 4:57) because they are the appearance of the pure qualities that were one’s companions in this life.

In fact, in verse 3:15 the desirability of the “pure companions” is clearly differentiated from the sexual desire for women in this life. Verse 3:14 refers to the attractiveness of the material desires of this world as follows:

“The love of desires is made attractive to people — *of women* and sons and hoarded treasures of gold and silver and well-bred horses and cattle and crop produce. This is the provision of the life of this world. And with Allah is the good goal of life.” — 3:14

The next verse then says:

“Shall I tell you of *what is better than these*? For those who guard against evil are gardens with their Lord, in which rivers flow, to abide in them, *and pure companions* and Allah’s goodly pleasure.” — 3:15

It is clearly obvious from these passages that while sexual desire for women is a craving and a necessity for this material world, better and superior than this is to strive to acquire the qualities that become our “pure companions” in the next world. This repudiates the very idea that we should wish for our physical desires of this world to be satisfied, as a reward, in the next world.

In many recent articles, published on websites and elsewhere, a saying of the Prophet Muhammad from Tirmidhi is quoted, often by way of ridicule and mockery, according to which a man in paradise will have 72 “wives” (what these articles refer to as the 72 virgins).⁶ But in the same collection of Tirmidhi we find, only a little later, the following report:

“Faith has seventy and something gates, the least of which is to remove from the road a harmful thing and the highest is to say ‘There is no god but Allah’.”⁷

It is the “seventy and something” constituents of faith, two of which are specified here (the highest and the least, while another one often mentioned in such reports is modesty), which, for those who possess them in this life, become represented in the next life as “maidens”.

There is also another explanation of the concept of “virgins” in the next world, based on the following verses of the Quran which refer to some of the rewards to be found there:

“Surely We have created them (as) a (new) creation, so We have made them virgins, loving, equals in age...” — 56:35–37.

The pronoun “them”, occurring twice here, is in the feminine. A commonly-accepted meaning is that this refers to the believing women. They will be raised in the next life in a new form of creation corresponding to their purity of character in this world, and thus it is said: We have made them virgins. This interpretation is

also supported by an explanation of these verses reported from the Holy Prophet Muhammad, in a collection by Tirmidhi known as *Shama'il*:

“An old woman came to the Prophet and said: Messenger of Allah, pray to Allah that I will enter paradise. He said jokingly: Mother of so-and-so, no old women will enter paradise. The old woman went away crying, so the Prophet said: Tell her that she will not enter paradise as an old woman, for Allah says: Surely We have created them (as) a (new) creation, so We have made them virgins.”⁸

Their resurrection as “virgins” is only a spiritual representation of the purity with which they led their lives in this world. There is no question of sexual relations in the next life as that life is not physical life which requires such relations. The word for “equals in age” in the above passage can also signify that they are similar in their good qualities to the believing men.

It may be noted that the term “virgin” has been used in the Bible as a symbolism. The nation of Israel is called a “virgin” in many places (for example, Jeremiah, ch. 31, Amos, ch. 5). The Gospel of Matthew contains the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which Jesus begins to relate as follows: “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins” (ch. 25, v. 1). Obviously, virgin girls for men’s pleasure are not meant here.

Notes on Section 6

¹ *Muslim*, book 33: ‘Government’, h. 1915a (MDS edition, h. 4941).

² *Muslim*, book 33: ‘Government’, h. 1905a (MDS edition, h. 4923).

³ *Muslim*, book 33: ‘Government’, h. 1885a (MDS edition, h. 4880).

⁴ *Bukhari*, book 83: ‘Oaths and vows’, h. 6652.

⁵ *Muslim*, book 11: ‘Prayer — Funerals’, h. 978 (MDS edition, h. 2262).

⁶ *Tirmidhi*, book 38: ‘Description of Paradise’, h. 2562 (MDS edition, book 36).

⁷ *Tirmidhi*, book 40: ‘Faith’, h. 2614 (MDS edition, book 38).

⁸ *Shama'il Tirmidhi*, ch. 35: ‘Joking of the Messenger of Allah’, report 239.

7. Muslim anger

Islam urges self-control of anger

The subject of Muslim “anger” at the injustices suffered by fellow-Muslims elsewhere in the world is often in the forefront of news and discussion. This anger is said to foment extremist groups who vent their rage and frustration by wanton violence with disregard for taking lives of innocent people. If indeed anger is fanning these actions, then the most important question for a Muslim to examine is, what are the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet Muhammad on how to behave when one is angry. In the Holy Quran the believers are instructed as follows:

“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden, as wide as the heavens and the earth; it is prepared for those who keep their duty, those who give in charity in ease as well as in adversity and *those who suppress anger and pardon people*. And Allah loves the doers of good to others.” — 3:133–134.

The words translated as “those who suppress anger and pardon people” (*al-kāzimīn al-ghaiṣ wal-‘afīn ‘an-in-nās*) mean literally: “suppressors of anger and pardoners of people”, and the word used for “people” here means mankind in general. This, then, is how Muslims ought to appear in the world, as suppressors of their anger and pardoners of mankind. As the beginning of this passage tells Muslims to rush to seek forgiveness from God, these words indicate that to gain that forgiveness we must suppress our rage against others, forgive them and in fact do good to them. Have we not done things which would make God angry; so do we want Him to display His anger towards us? If not, then we must similarly restrain our anger towards those who have wronged us.

This passage teaches three degrees of response towards those who have wronged us, and we should rise to the level that is most effective in the circumstances. The least which is required is for us to restrain our anger, and that is the minimum that we must do. Any reaction based on anger is bound to be excessive and unjust, and damaging even to the aggrieved party. Therefore, our response must be *limited* to being proportionate and rational. Beyond suppressing anger, we may forgive those who wrong us rather than seek their punishment, if that would make them recognise their injustices and mend their ways. Finally, we may even proceed to returning good for evil, again if it would turn them away from their wrongdoing.

According to this passage, *the way to heaven is only through suppressing your anger and forgiving other people.*

In another place, describing the good qualities that believers ought to strive for, the Quran says:

“... and whenever they are angry they forgive. ... And those who, when great wrong afflicts them, defend themselves. And the recompense of evil is punishment like it; but whoever forgives and amends, his reward is with Allah. ... And whoever is patient and forgives — that surely is an affair of great resolution.” — 42:37–43.

This also teaches that there can be absolutely no reprisals fuelled by anger, even in the face of “great wrong”. The utmost action can only be “like” or proportionate to the evil, but forgiveness is here recommended three times, including as an antidote to anger. The word translated here as “amends” in the phrase “whoever forgives and amends” is rendered in various translations of the Quran as “makes reconciliation”, “puts things right”, “makes peace” or “is reconciled”.

Justice above hatred

The Quran instructs Muslims:

“Do not let hatred of a people — because they hindered you from the Sacred Mosque — incite you to transgress.”
— 5:2

“O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and do not let hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is aware of what you do.” — 5:8

There may be understandable reasons that make one feel hatred and anger towards another people, but these verses teach Muslims unequivocally that they must not let such feelings provoke them to commit acts of excess and transgression of moral and legal limits. Not only must they refrain from wrongdoing out of hatred against another people, but what is more, they must strictly adhere to treating them with equity and justice. This is emphasised here as part of the Muslims’ basic duty to God, from Whom our actions cannot be hidden.

Hadith on anger

There are several statements reported from the Holy Prophet Muhammad in all the leading books of Hadith strongly cautioning people against acting out of anger. For example:

1. “A man said to the Prophet, ‘Give me some advice.’ The Prophet said, ‘Do not become angry and furious’. The man asked (the same) again and again, and the Prophet said in each case, ‘Do not become angry and furious’.”¹
2. “A judge should not judge between two persons while he is in an angry mood.”²
3. “The strong man is not the one who can wrestle well but the strong man is one who can control himself when he is enraged.”³
4. “Anger is from Satan, and Satan is created from fire. Only water can put out fire, so when any of you is angry, he should perform his ablution.”⁴
5. “He who withholds his anger, Allah will withhold His punishment from him on the Day of Judgment.”⁵

One of his statements relating specifically to war in this context is as follows:

“A man came to the Prophet and asked: ‘O Messenger of Allah, What kind of fighting is in the way of Allah? For some of us fight because of being enraged and angry and some for the sake of one’s pride and haughtiness’. The Prophet ... said: ‘He who fights so that the word of Allah should be uppermost, he fights in the way of Allah’.”⁶

Thus, fighting out of anger is not fighting in the way of Allah. Note that the only fighting allowed in Islam is fighting in self-defence. Therefore, fighting “so that the word of Allah should be uppermost” means fighting to repel the enemy, who has the aggressive object of destroying Islam and the Muslims, and to make the cause of Islam prevail over their aims.

Notes on Section 7:

¹ *Bukhari*, book 78: ‘Good Manners’, h. 6116.

² *Bukhari*, book 93: ‘Judgments’, h. 7158.

³ *Muslim*, book 45: ‘Virtue, ties of kinship and good manners’, h. 2609a (MDS edition, h. 6643).

⁴ *Abu Dawud*, book 43: ‘Good Manners’, h. 4784 (MDS edition, book 40).

⁵ *Mishkat-ul-Masabih*, book: ‘Good Manners’, ch. ‘Anger and Pride’ (see v. 2, p. 551 of Urdu translation by Maulana Ābud-ur-Rahman Kandhalvi, or v. 2, p. 481 of Urdu translation by Maulana Abdul Hakim Khan Akhtar Shahjahanpuri.)

⁶ *Bukhari*, book 3: ‘Knowledge’, h. 123.

8. The Bible and war

In the previous sections, a clarification of Islamic teachings has been presented in order to refute various objections and correct common misrepresentations and distortions. Here we refer to certain passages in the Bible about war, which should be of concern to the Western critics of Islam since most of them regard it as their religious scripture. Even those who do not accept it as their authority nonetheless must admit that it holds a position of importance in the Judeo-Christian Western civilization probably unequalled by any other book.

God of war in the Bible

Moses and the Israelite people sang:*

“I will sing to the Lord, For He has triumphed gloriously!
... *The Lord is a man of war*; The Lord is His name.” —
Exodus, 15:1, 3.

It appears that being war-like is a most primary attribute of God, being mentioned next to His name. If any such words depicting God as “a man of war” had appeared in the Quran, our critics would have been repeating them again and again.

It is promised and stated several times over that God Himself fights in war for the followers of the Bible:

“You must not fear them (i.e., other nations), for the Lord your God Himself fights for you” — Deuteronomy, 3:22

“Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with

* All Biblical quotations given here are from the New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” — Deuteronomy, 20:3–4

“One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.” — Joshua, 23:10

Law of war in the Bible

The Israelites were commanded by God as follows on how to deal with a defeated enemy:

“When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then *all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you*. Now if the city will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when the Lord your God delivers it into your hands, *you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword*. But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, *all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself*; and you shall eat the enemies’ plunder which the Lord your God gives you. Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, *you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them*: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you...” — Deuteronomy, 20:10–17

Thus if a city “very far from you” does not surrender but fights, then after its defeat all its men must be executed, and its women and children taken into slavery. However, in case of the cities that “God gives you as an inheritance”, the punishment is even more stern and everyone “that breathes” must be killed.

Instances of conduct of war in the Bible

The war by the Israelites against the Midianites is described thus:

“So Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Arm some of yourselves for war, and let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for the Lord on Midian. ... And they warred against the Midianites, just as the Lord commanded Moses, and *they killed all the males*. ... And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. They also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts. And they took all the spoil and all the booty—of man and beast.” — Numbers, 31:3, 7, 9–11.

But when they brought back the captives and the booty, Moses was displeased that they had let the women and children live:

“And Moses said to them: “Have you kept all the women alive? ... *Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately*. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately.” — Numbers, 31:15, 17–18.

The book of Joshua records several instances in which, under the leadership of this great general, the Israelite army killed all the inhabitants of the various cities that they captured. After the well-known tumbling down of the walls of Jericho Joshua’s army took the following action:

“And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.” — Joshua, 6:21.

Next, moving from Jericho to Ai:

“And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it

with the edge of the sword. So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand — all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day.” — Joshua, 8:24–28

In Joshua chapter 10, verses 28 to 39 list the taking of seven cities, one after another, by Joshua and in each case words such as the following are used to describe their fate: “He utterly destroyed them — all the people who were in it. He let none remain” (v. 28) and “utterly destroyed all the people who were in it. He left none remaining” (v. 39). In conclusion it is stated:

“... he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded.” — Joshua, 10: 40.

In chapter 11 of Joshua, it is written about more cities:

“And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock, the children of Israel took as booty for themselves; but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they left none breathing. As the Lord had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses.” — Joshua, 11:14–15

All this slaughter is said to be at the commandment of the Lord.

The prophet Samuel told Saul, whom he had appointed King of Israel:

“The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. ... Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, *and do not spare them. But kill*

both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” — 1 Samuel 15:1, 3

Of the great king David it is recorded:

“Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel...” — 1 Samuel 27:9

Jesus’ statements on peace

Surprisingly, even Jesus said:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” — Matthew, 10:34

“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ... Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.” — Luke 12:49, 51

No doubt these statements can be interpreted in a different way rather than as a threat to wage war. But if such words occurred in the Quran, the critics of Islam would very likely seize upon them as evidence of war-like teachings.

Story of Samson and resemblance to 9/11

The story of Samson, the Israelite hero of colossal strength, occurring in the Bible in the book of Judges (chs. 13–16), is well known, particularly due to the award-winning Hollywood film *Samson and Delilah* made in 1949. According to the Bible Samson performed his various astonishing feats of strength against the Philistines, the enemies of the Israelites, after “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him”^{*}. That is to say, he was acting with the support and inspiration of God. Eventually he was captured by the Philistines, who blinded and imprisoned him, and used him for amusement in public performance shows. The final act in the story of Samson is described thus:

^{*} Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14

“Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. ... So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, ‘Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them.’ Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there — about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed. Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, ‘O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!’ And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines!’ And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.” — Judges, 16:23–30

This incident bears similarity to the suicide attacks of the present day, most notably to the atrocity of September 11th, 2001 in New York. In a planned act, Samson brought down a high structure with the intention of crushing and killing the general public who were gathered in and around it, knowing that by his action he would be killing himself along with them. He carried it out in the name of God, believing that God was giving him strength to do it. Even the number of people killed, which would be “about three thousand”, is akin to the number killed in 9/11, and in fact in terms of the much smaller populations of those days Samson’s act constituted a much greater killing.

Such an act committed today by some misguided Muslim, and that too against the place of worship of another religion, would be quite rightly condemned. It would be both un-Islamic and inhuman. On the other hand, Samson is a hero of the Bible, a “judge” of the book of Judges, whose story has been treated with

sympathy by millions in the West who watched the Oscar-winning film about his exploits.

The purpose of this Section has not been to attack or misrepresent the Bible, the scripture of the Jewish and Christian religions. Our aim is to make the Western critics of Islam ponder on their own religious traditions while they seek to find material with which to portray Islam as a religion of war and violence.

9. Muslims living with others

The teachings of Islam provide a three-fold basis, namely, philosophical, legal and moral, for Muslims to live peaceably with non-Muslims, whether it is Muslim individuals and communities living in non-Muslim countries, or Muslim states existing in the world community of countries.

Philosophical basis

From the philosophical or ideological point of view, the Quran declares right at its outset, in chapter 1, verse 1, that Allah is the “Lord of the worlds”. The word for “Lord”, *rabb*, indicates one who provides all the needs for your growth and development. Allah is not the Lord of any one nation, race or religion. He provided the means of physical sustenance and development for all, irrespective of nation and religion. Likewise, according to Islam, He raised His messengers with guidance among all nations. He is as much the Lord of a non-Muslim, or of even an enemy of the Muslims, as He is the Lord of a Muslim.

Similarly, the last short chapter of six verses of the Quran is also a prayer which begins as follows:

“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind.” — 114:1–3

Moreover, directly addressing all mankind, the Quran tells them that God created humanity as a single nation, from a single source, to live in a house with the same floor beneath their feet, i.e., the earth, under the same sky. It says:

“O human beings, serve your Lord Who created you and those before you, so that you may guard against evil, Who made the earth a resting-place for you and the heaven a

structure, and sends down rain from the clouds then brings forth with it fruits for your sustenance.” — 2:21–22

All human beings are equally the creation of God, and so also their ancestors, and they share the same living space, atmosphere and resources. Their service is due to this Creator, and not due by one nation to another. Another verse, again addressing all humanity and not just believers in Islam, says:

“O human beings, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being (or essence) and created its mate of the same (kind), and spread from these two many men and women. And keep your duty to Allah, by Whom you demand (your rights) from one another, and to the ties of relationship.” — 4:1

The reference here need not be to creation from one original pair of humans, Adam and Eve. The meaning is that all men and women originate from one source, and it is from a male and female pair that the human race spreads. The closing words emphasise the duty *to the ties of relationship*, and those are not just ties to one’s family, tribe or nation, but clearly extend to all mankind since the verse has told us that the whole of humanity comes from the same source.

That mankind is one nation or *ummah* is plainly stated:

“Mankind is a single nation (*ummah*). So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people concerning that in which they differed.” — 2:213

“And mankind is but a single nation, then they disagree.” — 10:19

It is a single nation, whose members differ and disagree in views. But that difference can be put to good use as well:

“... for everyone of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you one religious community, but He wishes to try you in what

He has given you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah you will all return, and He will then tell you about your differences.” — 5:48

It is taught here that as all religions preach the doing of good, their followers should try to outdo each other in virtuous deeds. The differences between us in doctrine will always remain, as long as we are on earth, and only after death do we find out who was right and who was wrong. There need be no dispute between religions. Muslims must say to others:

“Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will gather us together, and to Him is the eventual coming.” — 42:15

“Do you dispute with us about Allah, and He is our Lord and your Lord, and for us are our deeds and for you your deeds; and we are sincere to Him?” — 2:139

All human nature is the same and is unchangeable, as the Quran says:

“... the nature made by Allah in which He has created human beings. There is no altering Allah’s creation.” — 30:30

The natural differences between nations and peoples are not indicators of their superiority or inferiority in relation to one another, but are phenomena that must be studied to increase human knowledge and understanding:

“And of His (God’s) signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for those who have knowledge.” — 30:22

“O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may have knowledge of one another. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you.”
— 49:13

Thus, the teachings of the Quran that Allah is the Lord of all mankind, that mankind is one nation, that messengers of God were raised among all nations, and that Muslims must believe in all these messengers just as they believe in the Prophet Muhammad, provide the philosophical and ideological basis for Muslims to live in peace and harmony with others.

We may illustrate the practical effect of these precepts by referring to some incidents from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

“A funeral procession passed in front of us and the Prophet stood up and we too stood up. We said, Messenger of Allah, this is the funeral procession of a Jew. He said, Whenever you see a funeral procession, you should stand up.”

“Sahl bin Hunaif and Qais bin Sad were sitting in the city of Al-Qadisiyya. A funeral procession passed in front of them and they stood up. They were told that the funeral procession was of an inhabitant of that land, a non-believer living under Muslim rule. They said: A funeral procession passed in front of the Prophet and he stood up. When he was told that it was the coffin of a Jew, he said, ‘Is it not a human soul?’ ”¹

As a further example, the Prophet Muhammad had a Jewish wife named Safiyyah and once one of his Arab wives, Hafsa, derogatorily called her “daughter of a Jew”. When the Prophet heard of this, he said to Safiyyah that she should have replied by saying:

“How can you be better than me when my husband is Muhammad, my father is Aaron, and my uncle is Moses.”²

The Holy Prophet then reprimanded Hafsa by telling her: “Fear God”. Hafsa was daughter of the highly-distinguished Umar, the second senior-most follower of the Prophet, and she belonged to the same tribe as the Holy Prophet. But the Prophet here indicates that while Hafsa was related to one prophet, Safiyyah was not only his wife but had, in addition, the prophet Aaron as a father

and the prophet Moses as a paternal uncle due to her Jewish descent. In Muslim belief she was connected to at least three prophets. This is the retort she should have given, the Holy Prophet advised her, to those proud Arabs who styled her as daughter of a Jew and boasted about themselves being from among the relatives of the Prophet himself.

Legal basis

The basis within the law of Islam upon which Muslims can live in peace and harmony among others is provided by the following simple but important injunction:

“O you who believe, fulfil the obligations.” — 5:1

The word translated as “obligations” (plural *‘uqūd*, singular *‘aqd*) includes all covenants, contracts, agreements, treaties etc. Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, where they are free to pray, go to mosques and call themselves Muslims, are in a covenant with the legal authorities to obey the law of the land.

Fulfilment of all kinds of obligations entered into is considered in the Quran to be a basic quality of Muslims, as fundamental as belief in God and the duty of prayer. Included in the chief qualities of Muslims is the following:

“those who are faithful to their trusts and covenant, and those who guard their prayers” — 23:8–9

“Righteous is one who believes in Allah ... and the fulfillers of their covenant when they make a covenant” — 2:177

They will be held accountable by God for their covenants:

“Fulfil the covenant; surely (the fulfilment of) the covenant will be enquired into” — 17:34.

When Muslims entrust the affairs of government to those who would rule them, in other words by some form of election, be it in a Muslim or a non-Muslim country, the instructions of the Quran in this matter are these:

“Allah commands you to make over trusts (i.e., positions

of trust) to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice.” — 4:58

Worthiness and fitness to hold trust must be the criterion in deciding whom to elect to power. The rulers must be such as judge justly between *all* people, and if any Muslims are in that position of authority they must also judge between all justly.

Secular or non-Muslim rule

Chapter 12 of the Holy Quran is entitled *Joseph* and is devoted almost entirely to the story of that well-known prophet of the Bible. It is accepted that histories of earlier prophets given in the Quran are meant as examples of model behaviour for Muslims. Joseph was preaching and following the monotheistic religion of his great-grandfather, Abraham, while living in Egypt under a Pharaoh and a government which did not follow those religious doctrines. It is exactly akin to a Muslim living in a predominantly non-Muslim country today.

After he interpreted a dream of the king of Egypt as meaning that there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, Joseph was appointed, at his own suggestion, the treasurer of the state by the king. He was “dignified and trusted” by the rulers and was a “good keeper” of the treasury (12:54–55). It appears from the account in chapter 12 that that kingdom of unbelievers had very high standards of law and justice. When Joseph’s brothers visited Egypt, to get their measure of corn during the famine, Joseph wished to retain his brother Benjamin while the others returned to their homeland. But, says the Quran:

“He could not take his brother in the king’s law, unless Allah pleased.” — 12:76

The law of the land did not allow Joseph to keep Benjamin in Egypt. So he abided by that law of immigration, neither breaking it nor using his official position to get special treatment. (The words “unless Allah pleased” refer to the circumstance that it so happened that the missing royal measuring cup was discovered in Benjamin’s bag and he was detained for theft, thus remaining in Egypt.)

The lesson taught in this chapter is that a true Muslim, indeed one who preaches the doctrines of Islam, may also be a faithful servant of a non-Muslim state, contributing loyally to its moral and economic well-being, involving himself in the state organisation at the highest level and scrupulously observing its laws. This story also illustrates that a non-Muslim state can be adhering to highly commendable standards of law and justice, which are an example for Muslims to follow.

Moral basis

The basis provided by the moral teachings of Islam for Muslims to live in peace, harmony and friendship with non-Muslims is evident from a verse which lists the basic duties of a Muslim:

“And serve Allah, and ascribe no partner to Him, and be good to the parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbour of (your) kin and the alien neighbour, and the companion in a journey and the traveller and those under your care and control.” — 4:36

This verse expressly includes the “alien neighbour” among those to whom we must be good, placing them in the same list as one’s parents, relations and the neighbour of one’s own people. The “alien” neighbour may be of another race, country or religion. In fact, any of the people mentioned here (parents, relatives, orphans etc.) could be non-Muslims, to whom a Muslim must be good. “Being good” towards someone is a positive action, over and above simply not harming them.

Also here, among those towards whom a Muslim must show goodness, are “the companion in a journey and the traveller”. Therefore, even to harm fellow passengers in the least, let alone to kill them by use of explosives or by crashing aircraft, is *directly opposite to the very fundamentals of Islam and a clear violation of its most basic principles*.

There are several sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad emphasising duty towards one’s neighbour:

“(The angel) Gabriel continued to exhort me regarding (good treatment of) the neighbour, so much so that I

thought he would make him an heir (of mine).”

“The Prophet said: ‘By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!’ It was said: ‘Who is that, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said: That person whose neighbour is not safe from his evil.”

“Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbour ...”

“Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should honour his neighbour ...”³

In the Hadith collection *Sahih Muslim*, sayings of the Holy Prophet regarding the neighbour are included in the *Book of Faith*, which contains reports about the basic doctrines and practices that a person must accept in order to be a Muslim:

“The Prophet said: None of you has faith until he loves for his brother — or he said ‘for his neighbour’ — what he loves for himself.”⁴

As in the verse of the Quran quoted above (4:36), there is no distinction made here between a neighbour of one’s own people, race or religion, and a neighbour belonging to a different nation and religion.

By adhering to these clear and emphatic teachings, Muslims, whether as individuals, communities or nations, can live in peace and harmony with their non-Muslim neighbours who dwell on the same earth. Besides being neighbours, they are also, in terms of the verse 4:36 quoted above, “companions in a journey”, both in the journey of the earth in its orbit in space as well as in the journey of life.

Notes on Section 9

¹ *Bukhari*, book 23: ‘Funerals’, h. 1311–1313.

² *Tirmidhi*, book 49: ‘Virtues’ (*Manaqib*), h. 3892 (MDS edition, book 46).

³ The four reports here are in *Bukhari*, book 78: ‘Good Manners’, h. 6014–6016, 6018, 6019.

⁴ *Muslim*, book 1: ‘Faith’, h. 45a, 45b (MDS edition, h. 170, 171).

10. Views of eminent scholars

A question may be asked whether the key points presented in the foregoing pages* are accepted only by some small groups of ec-centric Muslims or if they have a wider acknowledgement among Muslims. Here a distinction must be drawn between the serious religious scholars of Islam, who study this religion objectively and independently, and what might be called the populist clerics who seek to keep the masses trapped in ignorance and bigotry in order to exercise a hold over them. The independent-minded scholars have always tended to hold similar views to those expressed in this booklet.

We present below the writings of nine eminent scholars of Islam of modern times, including four well-known translators of the Holy Quran into English and two non-Muslims.

1. Abdullah Yusuf Ali

Yusuf Ali's English translation of the Quran with commentary, first published in 1934, is perhaps the best known English translation of the Quran. Below we quote from some of his notes:¹

“Compulsion is incompatible with religion: because (1) religion depends upon faith and will, and these would be meaningless if induced by force.” — note 300 on verse 2:256

“... men of Faith must not be impatient or angry if they have to contend against Unfaith, and most important of all, they must

* These key points are that Islam allows complete freedom to people in adopting whichever religion they wish, that *jihad* does not mean ‘holy war’ and that only wars of self-defence, and not of aggression, are permitted in Islam.

guard against the temptation of forcing Faith, i.e., imposing it on others by physical compulsion, or any other forms of compulsion such as social pressure, or inducements held out by wealth or position, or other adventitious advantages. Forced faith is no faith.” — note 1480 on verse 10:99

“Mere brutal fighting is opposed to the whole spirit of *Jihad*, while the sincere scholar’s pen or preacher’s voice or wealthy man’s contributions may be the most valuable forms of *Jihad*.” — note 1270 on verse 9:20

“War is only permissible in self-defence, and under well-defined limits. When undertaken, it must be pushed with vigour, but not relentlessly, but only to restore peace and freedom for the worship of God. In any case strict limits must not be transgressed: women, children, old and infirm men should not be molested, nor trees and crops cut down, nor peace withheld when the enemy comes to terms.” — note 204 on verse 2:190

“In general, it may be said that Islam is the religion of peace, goodwill, mutual understanding, and good faith. But it will not acquiesce in wrong-doing, and its men will hold their lives cheap in defence of honour, justice, and the religion which they hold sacred. Their ideal is that of heroic virtue combined with unselfish gentleness and tenderness...” — note 205 on verse 2:191

“At the same time Muslims are commanded to exercise self-restraint as much as possible. Force is a dangerous weapon. It may have to be used for self-defence or self-preservation, but we must always remember that self-restraint is pleasing in the eyes of God. Even when we are fighting, it should be for a principle, not out of passion.” — note 210 on verse 2:194

2. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall

Pickthall was an English novelist who embraced Islam in 1917, gave lectures and sermons on Islam, and published a translation of the Quran in December 1930. His translation also is among the best known ones. Earlier in 1919, he delivered a speech or sermon in London, published under the title *Tolerance*,² in which he said as follows:

“Religious tolerance is of the very essence of Islam. The Quran enjoins it, and Muhammad in his life as Prophet and as ruler showed how it should be practised both in war and peace. He it was who first announced in terms which no one can misconstrue that Allah rewards the good of every creed and nation, not according to what they believe, ... but according to what they do, the effort which they make to help humanity. We Muslims — God forgive us! — who have the sacred words of mercy and of toleration always before us, have often in our history fallen into great intolerance. But let nobody suppose that, when we do so, we are following the great example of Muhammad, or the precepts of our Faith. No; when we do so, we lose sight of that example. No; when we do so, we belie our faith.

“Now please to disabuse your mind of the impression, ... that Muhammad was fanatical or harsh in war, or ever in his life played the aggressor. For twelve years he was patient under cruel persecutions, although at any time he could have raised a faction to protect him from among the idolaters themselves. He bade his followers retire from Mecca, and he himself eventually retired to a place, of which the people were more favourable to him; desiring peace. It was only when his enemies were on the road with a great army, meaning to hound him out of that retreat and make an end of the community, that he proclaimed to his disciples the command to fight. ... They had tried to wreck Islam by warfare, murder, persecution, treachery. And yet Muhammad, when he conquered Mecca, pardoned them. Never was such mercy witnessed in the world before. ...

“As for the Jews and Christians and all those who worship the One God and look to the Day of Judgment — though their priests and rabbis have obscured the truth with vain imaginings, they are simply Muslims who have gone astray. Such of them as do good works, and are not persecutors, are counted on a par with Muslims. The Prophet extended the most perfect tolerance to Jews and Christians, and those religions have at all times been allowed in Muslim lands. Those Jews and Christians who attacked the Prophet or betrayed him, he opposed or punished as the case might be; but that did not impair his toleration of their faith ... But the Prophet and the early Muslims, though assailed on all hands, and

threatened with destruction, never wavered from religious tolerance. In their wars against the Christians they respected churches, monasteries, and religious persons, and never forced the conquered folk to change their faith. And this has been the law of El Islam throughout the centuries, though Muslims have occasionally fallen short of it.”

3. Muhammad Asad

By birth a Jew by the name of Leopold Weiss who grew up in Austria, Muhammad Asad (1900–1992) converted to Islam in 1926. His English translation of the Quran with detailed commentary, *The Message of the Quran*, again well-known, was published in 1980. Extracts from his footnotes are given below:

“On the strength of the above categorical prohibition of coercion in anything that pertains to faith or religion, all Islamic jurists, without any exception, hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin: a verdict which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of ‘conversion or the sword’.” — note 249 on verse 2:256

“Consequently, *jihad* denotes ‘striving in the cause of God’ in the widest sense of this expression: that is to say, it applies not merely to physical warfare but to any righteous struggle in the moral sense as well; thus, for instance, the Prophet described man’s struggle against his own passions and weaknesses as the ‘greatest *jihad*’.” — note 122 on verse 4:95

“This and the following verses lay down unequivocally that only self-defence (in the widest sense of the word) makes war permissible for Muslims. ... The defensive character of a fight ‘in God’s cause’ ... is moreover self-evident in the reference to ‘those who wage war against you’, and has been still further clarified in 22:39 — ‘permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged’ ... That this early, fundamental principle of self-defence as the only possible justification of war has been maintained throughout the Quran is evident from 60:8, as well as from the concluding sentence of 4:91, both of which

belong to a later period than the above verse.” — note 167 on verse 2:190

“Thus, although the believers are enjoined to fight back whenever they are attacked, the concluding words of the above verse make it clear that they must, when fighting, abstain from all atrocities, including the killing of non-combatants.” — note 172 on verse 2:194

“In accordance with the injunctions, ‘if they incline to peace, incline thou to it as well’ (8:61), and ‘if they desist [from fighting], then all hostility shall cease’ (2:193), the believers are obliged to make peace with an enemy who makes it clear that he wants to come to an equitable understanding; similarly, they must show every consideration to individual persons from among the enemies who do not actively participate in the hostilities.” — note 105 on verse 4:86

4. T.B. Irving

Dr Thomas Irving (d. 2002) was an academic and author originally from Canada who accepted Islam in the 1950s, and produced a translation of the Quran first published in 1985 as ‘the first American version’. In a paper about translating the Quran he writes:

“One more point might be mentioned: *Jihad* or the spiritual ‘struggle’ or ‘striving’ is not one of the Five Pillars of Islam. In proper translation it does not mean ‘holy war’ except by extension, but it has been debased by this meaning, which is a journalistic usage.”³

5. Maulvi Chiragh Ali

In 1885 Maulvi Chiragh Ali published from Hyderabad Deccan, India, a comprehensive work in English entitled *A Critical Exposition of the Popular Jihad*.⁴ At the outset, he writes as follows:

“In publishing this work, my chief object is to remove the general and erroneous impression from the minds of European and Christian writers regarding Islam, that Mohammad waged wars of conquest, extirpation, as well as of proselytizing against the Koreish, other Arab tribes, the Jews, and Christians; that he held the Koran in one hand and the scimitar in the other, and

compelled people to believe in his mission. I have endeavoured in this book, I believe on sufficient grounds, to show that neither the wars of Mohammad were offensive, nor did he in any way use force or compulsion in the matter of belief. All the wars of Mohammad were defensive.” — p. i

Later he quotes a British author as making the allegation that “the one common duty laid upon the Faithful is to be the agents of God’s vengeance on those who believe not”, and writes in reply:

“Mohammad did not wage war against the Koreish and the Jews because they did not believe in his mission, nor because he was to be the instrument of God’s vengeance on them; on the contrary, he said: ‘The truth is from your Lord, let him then who will, believe; and let him who will, be an unbeliever’ [18:29]. ‘Let there be no compulsion in religion’ [2:256]. ... Even during active hostilities, those who did not believe were allowed to come and hear the preaching, and were then conveyed to their place of safety [9:6].” — p. 42

“...Mohammad merely took up arms in the instances of self-preservation. Had he neglected to defend himself after his settlement at Medina against the continued attacks of the Koreish and their allies, he with his followers would, in all probability, have been exterminated. They fought in defence of their lives as well as their moral and religious liberties.

“In this sense the contest might be called a religious war, as the hostilities were commenced on religious grounds. Because the Koreish persecuted the Moslems, and expelled them for the reason that they had forsaken the religion of their forefathers, i.e., idolatry, and embraced the faith of Islam, the worship of One True God; but it was never a religious war in the sense of attacking the unbelievers aggressively to impose his own religion forcibly on them.” — p. 43

The author devotes an Appendix of 30 pages to a study of the meaning of the word *jihad* as used in the Quran, in which he refers to standard dictionaries of classical Arabic and refutes the wrong translation of this word by Western writers as “war”. He writes:

“It is only a post-classical and technical meaning of *Jihad* to use the word as signifying fighting against an enemy.” — p. 164

“It is admitted by all lexicologists, commentators and jurists that *Jihad* in classical Arabic means to labour, strive earnestly, and that the change of its meaning or the technical signification occurred only in the post-classical period, i.e., long after the publication of the Koran.” — p. 170

“*Jihad* does not mean the waging of war. ... I believe that I have clearly shown by means of a careful comparison between the translators and commentators and the original passages in the Koran, that the word *Jahd* or *Jihad* in the classical Arabic and as used in the Koran does not mean waging war or fighting, but only to do one’s utmost and to exert, labour or toil. ... I do not mean to contend that the Koran does not contain injunctions to fight or wage war. There are many verses enjoining the Prophet’s followers to prosecute a defensive war, but not one of aggression.” — p. 192

6. Sir Muhammad Iqbal

Iqbal, the great national hero of Pakistan, and world-renowned poet and philosopher of Islam, stated in a letter written in Urdu:

“The critic is wrong in saying that ‘Iqbal supports war in this progressive age’. I do not support war, nor can any Muslim do so in view of the clear limits set by the Shariah. According to the teaching of the Quran, there can only be two forms of *jihad* or war: defensive and corrective. In the first case, that is, when Muslims are persecuted and driven out of their homes, they are allowed, not ordered, to take up the sword.

“The second case, in which *jihad* is obligatory, is given in 49:9 [in the Holy Quran]. Reading those verses carefully you will realize that what was referred to by Sir Samuel Hoare as ‘collective security’ at the meeting of the League of Nations, the Quran has explained the principle of the same with simplicity and eloquence. ... Besides the two kinds of war mentioned above, I know of no other war. To wage war to satisfy territorial greed is prohibited in Islam. By this reasoning, it is also forbidden to raise the sword for the propagation of the faith.”⁵

7. Chief Justice S.A. Rahman

Dr S.A. Rahman, a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the 1960s, wrote a book entitled *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam*, reprinted recently.⁶ This work of 140 pages consists of a comprehensive discussion of the issue of apostasy as treated by the Quran, the Hadith, their classical and modern translations and commentaries, other writings on Islam old and new, and the earliest Muslim jurists. We quote below the author's comments and conclusions:

"In matters concerning the individual conscience, the Quran places no fetters on free choice." — p. 13

"Duress or coercion in matters of belief does not enter into the composition of the social system envisaged by the Quran. Clear guidance in a truly humanitarian spirit of tolerance is given to the Muslims in this field in several verses which recognise the existence of a pluralistic milieu..." — p. 15

"Guidance for the good life is furnished [by the Quran] but not at the cost of suppression of human dignity. Vistas of a future life in which the fruits of action in the present life are to be harvested are also held up before the thinking individual, but the existential choice is left up to the individual himself. No reward can be earned by action motivated by coercion ... Islam to be Islam must be accepted absolutely voluntarily by a free person." — p. 31

"A principle that stands out conspicuously in the socio-political dispensation of the Book of God is epitomised in the noble words: 'There is no compulsion in religion'. This principle finds endorsement in several other verses of the Quran, which manifestly tolerate, though they disapprove of, divergences from the Straight Path. ... Man is free to choose between truth and falsehood and the Prophet's function is to convey the message, exemplify it in his own life and to leave the rest to God — he is no warder over men to compel them to adopt particular beliefs. Liberty of conscience is thus a value of good life itself and must be kept in view when studying the incidents and effects of Hadith reports, the practice during the Rightly-Guided Caliphate or the

opinions of Doctors of Law which must not depart from the letter or the spirit of God's Word." — p. 130

"Our study of the relevant Quranic verses establishes that the punishment for apostasy is postponed to the Hereafter, in the same way as that for original disbelief. There is absolutely no mention in the Quran of mundane punishment for defection from the faith by a believer ... He should, however, be free to profess and propagate the faith of his choice, so long as he keeps within the bounds of law and morality, and to enjoy all other rights as a peaceful citizen of the State, in common with his Muslim co-citizens." — pp. 130–131

8. Dr G.W. Leitner

Although not a Muslim, Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (d. 1899) was an academic, linguist and scholar of Arabic and Islam, being well known as the man who built the mosque at Woking (in Surrey, England), in 1889. In a paper on *Jihad* published in his *Asiatic Quarterly Review*, for October 1886, he has expressed similar views to those already quoted above.⁷ While trying to avoid repetition we reproduce some of his other observations of interest:

"... when people say that *jihad* means the duty of the Muhammadans to wage war against a non-Muhammadan government or country and call this *jihad* (although it is possible to conceive that under certain circumstances this use of the word might be legitimate), they really talk nonsense, and cast an undeserved libel on a religion with which they are not acquainted."

"When some people applied to Muhammad for permission to join in a holy war against those who were oppressing Muhammadans, he replied to them, "Your true *jihad* is in endeavouring to serve your parents." The Koran, when using the word *jihad*, seems preferentially to use it for war with sin: *Whoever wages jihad in morality We will show him the true way*. Elsewhere (25:52), the Koran exhorts us to fight infidels with the "great *jihad*", the sword of the spirit and the arguments of the Muhammadan Bible. In the traditions regarding the sayings and doings of the Prophet, a band of holy warriors is returning cheerfully from a victorious war with infidels to the peace of their

homes and the tranquil observation of their faith. In passing the Prophet, they exclaim: 'We have returned from the small *jihad*, the war with the aggressors on the Muhammadan faith, to the great *jihad*, the war with sin.' ”

“No violence is to be used in religious matters, although the popular impression is that this is the very essence of Muhammadanism. The second chapter of the Koran distinctly lays down, *Let there be no violence in religion* (2:256). This passage was particularly directed to some of Muhammad’s first proselytes, who, having sons who had been brought up in idolatry or Judaism, wished to compel them to embrace Muhammadanism. Indeed, even when the mothers of non-Muhammadan children wanted to take them away from their believing relatives, Muhammad prevented every attempt to retain them.”

“It is, on the contrary, distinctly laid down in the chapter called *The Pilgrimage*, that the object of *jihad* is to protect mosques, churches, synagogues, and monasteries from destruction (22:40), and we have yet to learn the name of the Christian crusader whose object it was to protect mosques or synagogues. Of course, when the Arabs were driven from Spain, to which they had brought their industry and learning, by Ferdinand and Isabella, and were driven into opposition to Christians, the modern meaning of *jihad* as hostility to Christianity was naturally accentuated. Indeed, *jihad* is so essentially an *effort* for the protection of Muhammadanism against assault, that the Muhammadan generals were distinctly commanded not to attack any place in which the Muhammadan call to prayer could be performed or in which a single Muhammadan could live unmolested as a witness to the faith.”

9. Sir T.W. Arnold

There is a renowned scholarly historical research work entitled *The Preaching of Islam — A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, of some 460 pages, by the British, Christian orientalist Sir Thomas Arnold.⁸ He writes in the Introduction:

“In the hours of its political degradation, Islam has achieved some of its most brilliant spiritual conquests: on two great histori-

cal occasions, infidel barbarians have set their feet on the necks of the followers of the Prophet ... and in each case the conquerors have accepted the religion of the conquered. Unaided also by the temporal power, Muslim missionaries have carried their faith into Central Africa, China and the East India Islands.” — p. 2

So very far from Islam spreading by force, even those unbelieving nations which defeated and ruled over the Muslims in later Islamic history eventually embraced Islam, as Arnold shows.

Then quoting earlier verses of the Quran revealed at Makkah which tell Muslims to preach Islam by argument, he writes:

“Similar injunctions are found also in the Medinite Surahs, delivered at a time when Muhammad was at the head of a large army and at the height of his power.” — p. 3–4

There was, thus, no difference in the teachings of Islam in the later verses of the Quran from the earlier ones as regards preaching the faith peacefully by argument. Arnold goes on to write:

“...the Prophet himself stands at the head of a long series of Muslim missionaries *who have won an entrance for their faith into the hearts of unbelievers*. Moreover, it is not in the cruelties of the persecutor or the fury of the fanatic that we should look for the evidences of the missionary spirit of Islam, any more than in the exploits of *that mythical personage, the Muslim warrior with sword in one hand and Quran in the other* — but in the quiet, unobtrusive labours of the preacher and the trader who have carried their faith into every quarter of the globe. Such peaceful methods of preaching and persuasion were not adopted, as some would have us believe, only when political circumstances made force and violence impossible or impolitic, but were most strictly enjoined in numerous passages of the Quran, as follows.” — p. 4–5 (italics ours)

The author illustrates this by quoting ten verses from the Quran which belong to the earlier period. He then writes:

“Such precepts are not confined to the Meccan Surahs, but are found in abundance also in those delivered at Medina, as follows.” — p. 6

Here Arnold quotes seven verses of the later period, for example, “there is no compulsion in religion” (2:256) and “obey God and obey the Messenger; but if you turn away, the duty of Our Messenger is only to deliver the message clearly” (64:12). Thus he disposes of the mistaken notion that verses revealed during the later stages of the Holy Prophet’s mission taught intolerance and use of violence to spread Islam.

Speaking of the mass conversions to Islam after the conquest of Makkah by the Holy Prophet, Arnold writes:

“Among those who came in after the fall of Mecca were some of the most bitter persecutors of Muhammad in the earlier days of his mission, to whom his noble forbearance and forgiveness now gave a place in the brotherhood of Islam.” — p. 38

“The Arab tribes were thus impelled to give in their submission to the Prophet, not merely as the head of the strongest military force in Arabia, but as the exponent of a theory of social life that was making all others weak and ineffective. Muhammad had succeeded in introducing into the anarchical society of his time a sentiment of national unity, a consciousness of rights and duties towards one another such as the Arabs had not felt before.” — p. 40–41

Arnold then states the object of his book:

“Thus, from the very beginning, Islam bears the stamp of a missionary religion that *seeks to win the hearts of men*, to convert them and *persuade them* to enter the brotherhood of the faithful; and as it was in the beginning, so has it continued to be up to the present day, as will be the object of the following pages to show.” — p. 44 (Italics ours)

Moving on to the conversion of Christian tribes to Islam during and shortly after the Holy Prophet’s time, Arnold expresses this view:

“That force was not the determining factor in these conversions may be judged from the amicable relations that existed between the Christian and the Muslim Arabs. Muhammad himself had entered into treaty with several Christian tribes, promising

them his protection and guaranteeing them the free exercise of their religion and to their clergy undisturbed enjoyment of their old rights and authority. A similar bond of friendship united his followers with their fellow-countrymen of the older faith, many of whom voluntarily came forward to assist the Muslims in their military expeditions..." — p. 47–48

"From the examples given above of the toleration extended towards the Christian Arabs by the victorious Muslims of the first century of the Hijrah and continued by succeeding generations, we may surely infer that *those Christians tribes that did embrace Islam, did so of their own choice and free will.*" — p. 51–52 (italics ours)

In his conclusion, Arnold writes:

"...on the whole, unbelievers have enjoyed under Muhammadan rule a measure of toleration, the like of which is not to be found in Europe until quite modern times. Forcible conversion was forbidden, in accordance with the precepts of the Quran... The very existence of so many Christian sects and communities in countries that have been for centuries under Muhammadan rule is an abiding testimony to the toleration they have enjoyed, and shows that the persecutions they have from time to time been called upon to endure at the hands of bigots and fanatics, have been excited by some special and local circumstances rather than inspired by a settled principle of intolerance. ... *But such oppression is wholly without the sanction of Muhammadan law, either religious or civil.* The passages in the Quran that forbid forced conversion and enjoin preaching as the sole legitimate method of spreading the faith have already been quoted above ... and the same doctrine is upheld by the decisions of the Muhammadan doctors." — p. 420–421 (italics ours)

"... it would have been easy for any of the powerful rulers of Islam to have utterly rooted out their Christian subjects or banished them from their dominions, as the Spaniards did the Moors, or the English the Jews for nearly four centuries. ... The muftis [Muslim religious experts] who turned the minds of their masters from such a cruel practice, did so as the exponents of Muslim law and Muslim tolerance." — p. 422–423

Notes on Section 10

- ¹ Translation of the Quran with Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali; edition used here published by the Amana Corp., U.S.A., 1983.
- ² *The Islamic Review*, March 1919, see pages 90–95.
- ³ *Islamic Perspectives*, published by the Islamic Foundation, England, 1979, p. 132.
- ⁴ *A Critical Exposition of the Popular Jihad*, reprinted by Karimsons, Karachi, Pakistan, 1977. The author's name in the original book is spelt as Moulavi Cherágh Ali.
- ⁵ *Iqbal Nama*, Part I, Collected Letters of Dr Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Lahore, 1945, pp. 203–204.
- ⁶ *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam* by Justice S.A. Rahman, edition used here reprinted by Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, India, 2006.
- ⁷ The entire paper *Jihad* by Dr G.W. Leitner may be read at the following website link: www.wokingmuslim.org/pers/leitner/jihad.htm
- ⁸ *The Preaching of Islam — A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* by Sir T.W. Arnold; quotations here are from the second edition (Constable & Co., London 1913).

Sir Thomas Walker Arnold (1864–1930), after studying at Cambridge, served as teacher and professor of philosophy in famous colleges in India, and from 1921 till his death was Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He was an eminent Christian scholar of Arabic and Persian, and of Islamic cultural history.

11. How religious intolerance arose among Muslims

A question needing consideration is how notions of intolerance, which are in fact contrary to the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad, spread among Muslims. How did such beliefs take hold, for example, that a person who insults the Holy Prophet must be sentenced to death, that a Muslim who leaves the religion of Islam must suffer the death penalty, and that non-Muslims living under Muslim rule are to be denied freedom of religion? This question was touched upon as long ago as 1929 by Maulana Muhammad Ali in one of his Friday sermons in Lahore, at the Lahore Ahmadiyya central mosque. He begins as follows:

“A man has written a book on the spread of Islam. At the end of the book he has made five or six points to create the impression that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was a harsh and cruel man who promptly had any person murdered for uttering a word of abuse or insult about him. He has listed several events of this kind, for which he has given references to works of *seerat* (early biographies of the Holy Prophet).”

We may add here that the book mentioned by the Maulana was *The Expansion of Islam* by W. Wilson Cash, published in 1928. The Maulana wrote a reply to the allegations contained in a four-page Appendix of Cash’s book, and published it in the same year as a booklet entitled *Alleged Atrocities of the Prophet*. Later Maulana Muhammad Ali incorporated his reply as a chapter in the second edition of his book *Muhammad, The Prophet*.

Below we give, in translation from Urdu, the relevant portion of this sermon:

“Difference between biographies and Hadith

The fact is that in books of *seerat* all kinds of reports have been gathered, without much investigation. Whatever an author found related in reports, he incorporated it in his book of biography (*seerat*) without question. The great difference between books of Hadith and books of biography is that the compilers of Hadith accepted reports very cautiously. Nonetheless, despite even this care, some matter is found in Hadith which is in conflict with the Holy Quran. When reports were included in books of biography no such care was taken. Therefore, it is not unexpected that such matter would find its way in those books. As the Holy Prophet has directed that we must reject whatever is contrary to the Holy Quran, we must treat such reports with the highest caution.

The Quran and reports

However much I have pondered over this question, I have only been led to conclude that such actions have not the least connection with the Holy Prophet. When we think over the Holy Quran we clearly find that the Holy Prophet’s character was far above taking actions of this kind. In fact, it is only the Quran which establishes us on the right standpoint. Reports have been infiltrated by the opinions and conjectures of the narrators themselves. Whatever someone understood about an event, he related it according to his own interpretation. This applies especially to the causes of the early Islamic wars, which have been greatly misunderstood. These reports were compiled in an age when the rule of Islam had been established, and the mentality of the Muslims had become the same as that of ruling nations who do not consider it wrong at all to treat other nations unjustly. Due to this mentality, such stories found their way into these reports.

Standpoint of the Quran

All this is corrected by the Quran. It says: “Do not say *Rā’i-nā* and say *Unzur-nā*” (2:104). What is the difference? It says about it elsewhere: “Some of those who are Jews alter words from their places and say, ‘We have heard and we disobey’; and (they say), ‘Hear’, without being made to hear, and (they

say), *Rā'i-nā*, distorting with their tongues and slandering religion" (4:46). They used to distort *rā'i-nā*, which means "listen to us", and say it as *ra'ina* which means "he is foolish" or stupid.¹ Obviously, they said it to the face of the Holy Prophet. According to some Hadith reports, they addressed him by distorting the greeting *as-salāmu 'alaikum* to *as-sāmu 'alaim-kum*.² Their saying "Allah is poor and we are rich" (the Quran, 3:181) is also quoted. In addition, their mocking and verbal abuse is mentioned, as well as all kinds of offensive language, which is declared in the Quran above as "slandering religion". However, the Holy Prophet never, in any way, punished those uttering such insults.

It is also stated in the Quran: "And you will certainly hear from those who have been given the Book before you and from the idolaters much abuse" (3:186). It is clearly told here that Muslims will have to bear much verbal abuse. And what is the command as to what they should do about it? It is as follows: "And if you are patient and keep your duty, surely this is an affair of great resolution" (3:186). Here, along with the command to show patience, there is the command to adhere to *taqwa* or "keep your duty". It means that not only should you bear the abuse, and not reply by abusing others, but by your response you should show that you have the best moral conduct and manners. These are said here to be matters of "great resolution".

The Holy Prophet's response to abusers

You are aware that the notion is generally prevalent among Muslims that whoever uses foul language against the Holy Prophet Muhammad should be killed. I have investigated this belief and I find it to be contrary to the Quran. The Quran has clearly ordered that one must adhere to patience and righteous conduct in response to verbal abuse and offence. There are incidents from the life of the Holy Prophet showing that he

¹ *Translator's Note:* Muslims are told in 2:104 to say *unzur-nā*, meaning "wait for us", which cannot be distorted into an insult as *rā'i-nā* was.

² Meaning "death be upon you". For details see p. 27–28 of this book.

never took the kind of action which is attributed to him. There is the incident of Abdullah ibn Ubayy who said to Muslims during an expedition: "If we return to Madinah, the honourable ones will surely drive out the degraded ones from there." Despite this, the Holy Prophet did not punish him in any way.³

Damaging consequences of believing in killing abusers

On the face of it, it is a pleasing idea that we have such strong feeling for our Prophet that we are prepared to kill anyone who utters abuse against him. But I believe that there are many deeply-entrenched notions for which we need to read the Quran again and afresh. Sometimes we need to leave the commentaries of the Quran and read the Quran itself. We need to consider: What impression are we giving to others by holding such a notion? From one angle it is the display of such a strong sense of honour that the abuser is to be killed. However, from another angle it makes non-Muslims detest and hate Islam, instead of admiring it, and consider it a religion of barbarity. Reflect on this point: if a great man faces an objection from someone, or hears from someone words derogatory to his high dignity, should we expect him to display his fine morals by responding with mildness or to pick up a weapon to kill the accuser? The teaching of the Quran is, in fact, that upon being hurt by an opponent we must show patience and tolerance. Islam does not teach that if someone hurls verbal abuse, his head should be struck off forthwith.

Response to verbal abuse

What Muslims have lost today is the capacity of toleration. The controversies that arise among them all the time on minor

³ *Tirmidhi*, book 47: 'Commentary on the Quran', h. 3315 (MDS edition, book 44). *Translator's Note*: By "honourable ones" he meant the hypocrites led by him and by "degraded ones" he meant Muslims and the Holy Prophet himself; see the Quran, 63:8. The report continues: "Umar said: O Messenger of Allah, allow me to strike off the neck of this hypocrite, The Prophet said: Leave him; so people should not say 'Muhammad kills his Companions'."

matters take place because Muslims have lost the ability to bear differences. In fact, it befits a Muslim to bear differences of opinion, and to tolerate the hurt and pain that he feels. This is the praise-worthy quality. It is not greatness to react to verbal abuse by immediately responding in the same coin. Greatness lies in showing patience. Therefore, you must tolerate differences of opinion and be patient on receiving verbal abuse and feeling hurt. It is this which will make you great, and not becoming furious and replying to bad language with similar abusive words.”⁴

⁴ Sermon delivered 22 March 1929, published in Lahore Ahmadiyya Urdu journal *Paigham Sulh*, 24 March 1929. See the collected sermons *Khutbaat Muhammad Ali*, v. 7, p. 159–162.

References

Hadith collections

1. In references in this book to the “six most authentic collections” of Hadith (*Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah* and *Nasa’i*), the number denoted by *h* is the number of the hadith at the online resource www.sunnah.com which is labelled in that resource as “Reference”.
2. These references can also be located in the printed editions of these Hadith collections, with English translation, published by Maktaba Dar-us-Salam of Riyadh. In some cases the numbering of books or the numbering of hadith reports in these editions differs from that at www.sunnah.com. In such a case we have indicated this difference in parenthesis after the reference, with the words “MDS edition”.
3. Note that translations of hadith reports as given in this book may be differently worded from the translations in the sources mentioned above.

Quran quotations

Given on the next page is a list of verses of the Quran, by chapter and verse, which are discussed in this book, and the page numbers on which they occur. When a verse number is followed by a dash, as in 2:190–, it indicates that the quotation extends to verses beyond this verse, on some or all of the pages mentioned.

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About this book

- Does Islam *really teach* that Muslims must fight a *jihad* by weapons and arms to subdue all others on earth?
- Does it *really forbid* freedom of religion to followers of other faiths and to Muslims themselves?
- Does it *really tell* Muslims to attack and even kill anyone who, they think, has insulted their religion and abused their Prophet Muhammad?
- Does Islam *really allow* the killing of the general public by any kind of attack, suicide or otherwise?

No, Islam does not! It actually teaches the ***opposite***.

This book proves from the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad that the answer to each of these questions is a clear, emphatic and resounding: ***No!***

On the contrary —

- Islam teaches Muslims **to live in peace with all others** in the world, tolerating religious differences.
- It recognises for everyone the **freedom to believe in and practise whatever religion they wish**.
- It requires Muslims to show **self-restraint and patience** in the face of verbal abuse of their religion.
- It **deplores** any kind of violent attack on the general public of any country, innocently going about their daily business.

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