

### Fast 24: Self-preservation is a duty

- To save and preserve your life is one of the most important teachings of the Quran:

“And spend in the way of Allah and **do not cast yourselves to destruction with your own hands** and do good (to others). Surely Allah loves the doers of good.” (2:195)

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ  
إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٩٥﴾

“And do not kill your own selves. Surely Allah is ever Merciful to you.” (4:29)

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ  
رَحِيمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

In 2:195 the command not to throw yourself to destruction with your own hands may be taken in a general sense, of not doing anything purposely to lose your life. The particular context of this verse is that Muslims were told in 2:190 to “fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you”. For this fight in self-defence, for self-preservation, the spending of money and resources was required; hence the mention here of spending in the way of Allah. Without that spending, Muslims would lose to their enemies and be utterly destroyed. They would be destroying themselves by their inaction, because they would be giving their enemy a free hand to kill them.

The duty of self-preservation is so critical that fighting to save oneself becomes a Muslim’s duty. Of course, in that fight it is possible he might be killed, but it is not certain. But he would be killed by the hands and weapons of the enemy, and not by his own hands. If there is no enemy attacking, and a Muslim’s life is not under threat, then for him to kill himself by means of his own weapon in order to kill innocent people around him, as in a “suicide attack”, is absolutely against Islam and a ghastly and despicable act. To die “in the way of Allah”, it is Allah Who should determine when and how you die, and not you yourself.

- Saving of one’s life has such a high priority that the Quran relieves a Muslim of obligatory duties and prohibitions, if this is necessary to save his life. For example, 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 says:

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

فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْصَصَةٍ غَيْرِ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمِهِ  
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٣﴾

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

فَمِنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ  
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٤٥﴾

- Another example is as follows. To disbelieve after believing is a serious sin, but if a Muslim is threatened by an enemy of Islam that he will be killed unless he renounces Islam, or will 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 willingly and voluntarily:

“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)

مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ  
أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَ  
لَكِنَّ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِانْكَفَارٍ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ  
غَضَبٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾

- If fasting during the month of Ramadan would endanger the life of a Muslim man or woman, young or old, this obligation is suspended. 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. The following incident is reported in Bukhari:

The Messenger of Allah, may peace and the blessings of Allah be on him, was on a journey, and he saw a crowd and a man who was placed under a shade. He said: “What is this?” They said: “He is fasting.” He said: “There is no great virtue in fasting when on journey.”

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي  
سَفَرٍ، فَرَأَى زِحَامًا، وَرَجُلًا قَدْ ظَلَّلَ عَلَيْهِ،  
فَقَالَ “مَا هَذَا”. فَقَالُوا “صَائِمٌ”. فَقَالَ  
“لَيْسَ مِنَ الْبِرِّ الصَّوْمُ فِي السَّفَرِ”

To fast when on a journey is a matter of choice, but this man’s choosing to fast on a journey caused him so much hardship that people had to put him under a shade. Such an observance of Islam is not approved of, which causes hardship, let alone death.

- Islam thus does not allow a Muslim to lose his life in obeying its teachings. Fighting in self-defence is required to save lives that would otherwise be lost. It involves a Muslim risking his life, but his aim and purpose is not to die for certainty. Whether he is killed is decided by Allah.