

Fast 25: Jihad (1)

- We begin by considering the following extremely well-known, fundamental saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Bukhari near the beginning of his collection (book 2, hadith 1):

“Islam is based on five things — testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, keeping up prayer, giving in charity (*Zakat*), the Pilgrimage (*hajj*), and fasting in Ramadan.”

بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ: شَهَادَةٌ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامُ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءُ الزَّكَاةِ، وَالْحَجِّ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ.

If someone wanted to know exactly what constitutes any of these five pillars, the answer is easy to give, exactly and precisely. The testifying, the prayer, the charity (i.e. *zakat*), the pilgrimage and fasting in Ramadan, as required by Islam for a Muslim to perform, can all be defined and described as to how they are performed.

If, however, someone wanted to know what constitutes jihad, there is no way at all of describing this act! In prayer, for example, we must adopt certain postures and utter certain phrases, or at the Pilgrimage there are certain rites to be performed. If you don't perform them, you have not said the prescribed prayer or performed the Pilgrimage. But how exactly one carries out “jihad” is not defined anywhere in Islam.

The reason is that jihad is **not any practice in itself**, but it is the **effort** involved in carrying out a duty. It is just like telling someone to “work hard”. When you are studying you work hard in a different way from working hard as a manual labourer.

- According to the Quran, an idol-worshipper can be conducting jihad against a Muslim!

“And We have enjoined on man goodness to his parents. But if they strive (*jāhadā*) to make you set up partners with Me, of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them.” (29:8, see also 31:15)

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا

The meaning of enjoining or making it a duty on *all people* to do good to their parents is that this desire has been placed in human nature; it is not just a command originating with Islam.

In the Holy Prophet's time, many people who became Muslims had parents who were non-Muslims, and in fact idol-worshippers. So the Quran says here that if your parents make strenuous efforts to make you worship things other than God then do not obey your parents in that regard. Such a situation could arise today as well for someone who embraces Islam. In the two verses cited above, the parents are said by Allah to be conducting a jihad "to make you set up partners with Me". Therefore, jihad means any struggle, striving or making of effort, whoever may be doing it.

Incidentally, in 31:15 it says: "...do not obey them, and keep kindly company with them in this world". The Quran requires a Muslim to keep kindly company with his parents, and do good to them, even if they are doing their best to turn him away from Islam. He simply has to refuse to do their bidding in this matter. We see today that those converts to Islam who join extremist groups cut themselves off from their non-Muslim parents and other relations. This is a violation of the teachings of Islam.

Here is a true story. When Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din was propagating Islam in this country (England) a hundred years ago from his Woking Muslim Mission, once a young woman whose father was an atheist expressed interest in embracing Islam. Khwaja sahib asked her to get her father's permission. She said: "I have freedom to change my religion." Khwaja sahib said: "That is true but Islam teaches respect for the father, and it is respect that you ask his permission."

The young woman went and asked her father for permission. He was astonished why she was asking his permission, and asked her who told her to get his permission. She said: "My spiritual guide." Khwaja sahib then sent her a message to say that her father should be present when she recites the Kalima. When the father arrived for that occasion, the Muslim prayer was just starting. He joined the congregation and followed them in the postures of prayer. When the girl and her father reached home, she was furious with him and said: "You, being an atheist, spoiled our prayer by joining it. Our spiritual leader is too polite to say anything, someone else in his place would have scolded you."

So the father went to see Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din to apologise for spoiling the prayer. Khwaja sahib said: "No need to apologise. You can join us for prayer every day." He then invited the father and his whole family to a meal in celebration of the girl's acceptance of Islam. The father came and he particularly enjoyed the Indian sweet rice (*zarda*) which was served. So Khwaja sahib gave him more to take home with him. He was deeply impressed by this Muslim hospitality, and decided to study Islam further. Gradually, the whole family embraced Islam.

Comparing with the situation today, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din also didn't like Western

foreign policy towards Muslim countries and their military invasions in his time. In fact, he published some articles against these. But he didn't engage in any violent activity under the name of jihad. The jihad he conducted — which was truly a jihad — was by means of presenting Islam and treating others according to the real Islamic values.