

Fast 29: Jihād — When is war allowed for Muslims?

- After the Muslims reached Madinah, the Quraish at Makkah planned to attack and destroy them as a community or force them out of Islam. Therefore the Quran gave Muslims permission to repel the attacks, as follows:

“Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And surely 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. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, surely cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down.” (22:39–40)

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ ﴿١٩﴾ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ
دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ۗ وَلَوْ
لَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفُتَّتِ
صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا
اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا ۗ

This permission was given to a people, i.e. Muslims, upon whom war was made by their enemies, and it was not a permission to make war against others in general but only against those who made war on them, and the reason is stated plainly “because they are oppressed” and have been expelled from their homes “without a just cause”.

- There could be no war holier than the one which was needed as much for the religious liberty of Muslims as for the principle of religious liberty itself, as much to save mosques as to save cloisters and synagogues and churches. If there had ever been a just cause for war in this world, it was for the war that had been permitted to Muslims. And undoubtedly war with such pure motives was a *jihād*, a struggle carried on simply with the object that truth may be allowed to exist and that freedom of conscience may be maintained.
- The second verse, in chronological order, giving to Muslims permission to fight runs as follows:

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

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا
تَعْتَدُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿١٩٠﴾

The condition is plainly laid down here that Muslims shall not be the first to attack. They had to fight — it had now become a duty — but only against those who fought against them; aggression was expressly prohibited. And this fighting in self-defence is called fighting “in the way of Allah” (*fī sabīl-illāh*) because fighting in defence is the most noble and just of all causes.

- Muslims were not fighting to force Islam on others; rather they were being fought by their opponents to force them to renounce Islam. The Quran says:

“And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can.” (2:217)

وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّى يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَنْ
دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا^ط

- It is sometimes alleged that towards the end of the Holy Prophet’s life the condition of fighting only in self-defence was removed by the later revelations in the Quran in chapter 9 and Muslims were told to attack all non-Muslims wherever they may be. This view is entirely wrong. In fact, Muslims were told that they could revoke agreements of peace made with those people who themselves violated those treaties. It is clearly stated that the following are exempt from this declaration of war:

“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.” (9:4)

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ
يَنْقُصُوا شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَحَدًا
فَاتِمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمْ^ط إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٩﴾

The people to be fought against are described in the following words:

“Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first?” (9:13)

أَلَا تَقَاتِلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَرَبُوا
بِأَخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَءُوكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ^ط

- Even though Muslims were allowed to fight their opponents by war, as above, the Holy Prophet was told in the Quran to accept peace in the middle of war if the enemy wanted peace:

“And if they incline to peace, you must incline to it also, and trust in Allah. Surely He is the Hearer, the

وَأِنْ جَانَحُوا إِلَيْكُمْ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ
عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿١١﴾ وَ

Knower. And if they intend to deceive you — then surely Allah is sufficient for you.” (8:61–62)

إِنْ يُرِيدُوا أَنْ يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ اللَّهُ^ط

It should be noted that peace is here recommended even though the enemy’s sincerity may be doubtful. The Holy Prophet was so prone to make peace that, whenever the enemy showed the least desire towards it, such as on the occasion of the Hudaibiyah truce, he did not hesitate to accept it.

- The following verses, revealed shortly before the conquest of Makkah, settle conclusively why Muslims fought and against whom they are allowed to fight:

“It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those of them whom you hold as enemies. And Allah is Powerful; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. **Allah does not forbid you**, with regard to 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** with regard to 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.” (60:8–9)

عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ عَادَيْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَاللَّهُ قَدِيرٌ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٨﴾ لَا يَنْهَى اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٩﴾ إِنَّمَا يَنْهَى اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

This passage begins by prophesying that **friendship** will be established between Muslims and their enemies. Then it describes the **normal situation**, which is that Muslims will be dealing with people “who do not fight you for religion, nor drive you forth from your homes”. Towards such people, Muslims have a friendly attitude, marked by kindness and justice. Then comes the **exceptional, less common situation**, of dealing with people “who fight you for religion, and drive you forth from your homes and help (others) in your expulsion”. It is with such people, while their hostile behaviour continues, that friendship is not allowed to Muslims.