

Fast 30: Jihād — Freedom of religion in Islam

- This topic comes under *jihād* because of the misconception that *jihād* in Islam consists of waging war against non-believers to convert them to Islam. Islam recognizes **complete freedom of religion and belief for every human being**, and does **not** prescribe any punishment to be inflicted in this world upon a person who leaves the religion of Islam to adopt some other faith. The Quran declares:

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

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۗ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ
الْغَيِّ ۗ

“And say: The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve.” (18:29)

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۗ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِرْ وَمَنْ
شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ ۗ

- The Quran teaches that the duty of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and, following him, the duty of every Muslim, is only to *deliver* the message of truth:

“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)

فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا ۗ وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا
عَلَيْكَ الْبَلْغُ ۗ

“...your duty (O Prophet) is only the delivery, and Ours (God’s) is to call (people) to account.” (13:40)

... فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلْغُ وَعَلَيْنَا الْحِسَابُ

“...and you (O Prophet) are not one to compel them. So remind by means of the Quran him who fears My warning.” (50:45)

... وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِجَبَّارٍ ۗ فَذَكِّرْ بِالْقُرْآنِ
مَنْ يَخَافُ وَعِيدِ ۗ

- The Quran further says 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:

“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)

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ
جَمِيعًا ۗ أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا
مُؤْمِنِينَ ۗ

“... for everyone of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you (i.e., all mankind) 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 then He will inform you about your differences (i.e., as to who was right or wrong).” (5:48)

... بِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا ۗ وَ
 لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ
 لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ
 إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا
 كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

It is taught in the last verse quoted above 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 alive, and only after death do we find out who was right and who was wrong. There need be no dispute between religions.

- Again, the Holy Prophet is instructed to convey the message to the non-believers:

“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)

اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ ۖ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلكُمْ
 أَعْمَالُكُمْ ۖ لَا حِجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۗ اللَّهُ
 يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا ۗ وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٥﴾

- **So-called Apostasy:** Several times the Quran speaks of people going back to unbelief after believing in Islam, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. What it says is, for example:

“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)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ
 دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ ۗ

- In one place the Quran, referring to the war being made upon Muslims by their opponents based in Makkah, says:

“They will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can. And whoever of

وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّى يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَنْ
 دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا ۗ وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ

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)

عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ
أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
النَّارِ ۗ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

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.

- There is, thus, no punishment whatsoever to be inflicted by any Muslim law, state or body, or by any individual Muslim, on someone who leaves the religion of Islam. It is also important to make clear that a person can only leave the religion of Islam **by his or her own decision, choice and declaration**, and not by a determination or judgment made by any other Muslim.
- The Quran nowhere speaks of someone who becomes an apostate **by implication**. Apostasy consists in the expression of unbelief or in the plain denial of Islam by a person. **It cannot be assumed** about a person who professes Islam that he has become an apostate because he expresses an opinion or does an act which, in the view of a Muslim scholar, is un-Islamic. Abuse of a prophet or disrespect towards the Quran are very often made false excuses for treating a Muslim as an apostate, though he may avow in the strongest terms that he is a believer in the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet.