Jihad in Islam Defense or Agression

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

A- Christianity's Protest Against Islam

Previously we said that one of the points that, in its own view, the world of Christianity considers to be a weak point of Islam is the issue of Islamic jihad, which prompts it to say that Islam is a religion of war, not a religion of peace, while Christianity is a religion of peace. It says that war is totally bad and peace is good, and any religion that is divinely founded must advocate peace which is a good thing, and not advocate war, which is a bad thing.

Until yesterday Christianity looked at things from the angle of morals; morals exclusive to Christianity; morals that have entered the stage of "turning the other cheek;" morals that foster limpidity. But Christianity today has switched positions. It has changed its face. It now looks at things from a different angle, and carries on its propaganda through a different channel, through the channel of essential human rights and the essential human right to freedom.

Through the channel of "war being totally opposed to the right to freedom." To freedom of belief, to freedom of will, to freedom of choice of religion, nationality and other things. But we Muslims look at the issue from both angles, both from the moral angle and the standards of morals, and also from the angle of human rights and the "new" human standards. I stated the answer to this matter in the previous sitting. It is self-evident and clear that what the Christians are saying is not at all valid.

Of course peace is good. There is no doubt about it. And war, for the sake of aggression against other people - people who have no intentions against the aggressor, no intentions against that aggressive society - war for the sake of occupying that unsuspecting nation's lands and of grabbing their property, for the sake of enslaving its people, for the sake of subjecting them to the influence and laws of the aggressors, is undoubtedly bad. That which is bad is transgression and aggression. Aggression is bad.

But all war, on all sides, is not always aggression. War can be aggressive and it can also be a reply to aggression, for sometimes the reply to aggression must be given by force. There are times that force is the only reply that can be given.

Any religion, if it is a complete religion, must have thought about what it will do on that day when it is faced with aggression, or, let us suppose, it is not itself faced with aggression but another people are. It is for such a day that religion must have a law of war, a law of jihad. The Christians say that peace is good, and we agree; peace is good. But what about submission,

humiliation and misery? Are submission, humiliation and misery also good?

If one power is faced with another power and both advocate peace, both of them desire, in today's terms, to live in peaceful coexistence without one power wishing to aggress the other, but both of them willing to live in peace with reciprocal rights and mutual respect, then this is called peace and is good and essential.

There is a time, however, when one group is the aggressor and, on the pretext of war being bad, the other group accepts surrender, which means that the humiliation of having to tolerate aggression becomes imposed upon it. The name of this is not peace. The name of this is willing acceptance of humiliation and misery. Such a submission in the face of force can never be called peace. For example, while you are passing a desert, an armed bandit attacks you suddenly and orders you to "get off your car quickly, raise your hand and give me anything you have."

Here you submit yourself and say to him: "I am an advocate of peace and opposed to war completely. I'll accept anything you order. I give you my money, my luggage and baggage, my car and I'll obey anything you say. Say anything you want and I will give it to you. Because I advocate peace." This is not advocation of peace. This is the acceptance of humiliation. In this case a man must defend his property, his prestige unless he knows that if he wants to defend, his property will be abolished, his blood will be shed and there will be no use in it.

Of course it must be known that sometimes the blood is very effective and fighting is very worthful and it is not that someone's blood be shed at defile and then everything comes to end. No, resistance here is not wise and one must sacrifice one's money and wealth in order to save one's life.

There is a difference between the advocation of peace and the acceptance of humiliation. Islam never gives permission to be humiliated, while at the same time it strongly advocates peace.

What I want to stress is the importance of this issue which Christians and others have used to attack and protest against Islam, claiming it to be Islam's weak point, adding that the life of the Holy Prophet was exactly this: that Islam is a religion of the sword; that Muslims raised the sword over the heads of people and said, "Choose Islam or die;" and that people accepted Islam in order to stay alive. Therefore, I think it is necessary for us to discuss this issue thoroughly and minutely, and we will use not only verses from the Quran, but also confirmed traditions of the Prophet and glimpses from his life. We shall start with the Quranic verses:

B- Unconditional verses about Jihad

I said that some of the Quranic instructions about jihad against kufar (disbelievers) are unconditional, which means they state only this: "O Prophet Fight with the Kufar and the hypocrites." Or, in the case the verse pertaining to which we recited, after a period which is given to the polytheists (four months), if they have not adopted Islam or haven't migrated, then they are to be killed. (Does it mean in the surroundings of Mecca and around the sanctuary or every place? This question (must be discussed later.) Or that verse with which we began our discussion and which is about the People of the Book.

«And fight those who have not faith in God nor in the Hereafter and (who) forbid not what God and His Prophet have forbidden, and who are not committed to the religion of truth.» (9:29).

or another verse: «O Prophet, Fight the kufar (disbelievers) and hypocrites and be stern against them.» (9:73). If we were to pay attention only to this verse, we would say that Islam fully instructs the Muslims to fight against kufar and hypocrites and they (Muslims) must never be in a state of peace with them, that Muslims must fight them, as vehemently as they can. They must fight them. And if we speak like this we will come to believe that the Quran unconditionally tells us to fight the non-Muslims.

I stated, however, that there is a scholastic rule that when both an unconditional and a conditional command exist, i.e. when there is an instruction that in one place is unconditional but in another place has a condition attached, then, according to the ulema, the unconditional must be interpreted as the conditional. The verses I have just recited are unconditional. Other verses exist that are conditional, meaning that they read like this: "O Muslims. Fight against those polytheists for the reason that they are in aggression against you, because they are in a state of war with you, and therefore you definitely have to fight against them."

Thus it becomes clear that where the Quran says: "O Prophet Fight against the kufar and hypocrites," it means that we must fight those kufar and hypocrites who are fighting us and who will continue fighting if we fight them.

C- Conditional Verses

In Suratul-Baqarah, the Quran tells us: «And fight in the path of God with those who are fighting with you and do not transgress, God loves not those who transgress.» (2:190)

O You of Faith. Fight those who are fighting you - i.e. fight them because they are fighting you - but donot violate the limit. What does this mean, not to violate the limit? Not to be the transgressor? Naturallyits obvious meaning is that it is those who are fighting us that we are to fight and not anyone else, and thatit is on the battleground that we are to fight, meaning that we are to fight with a certain group of peopleand that group is the soldiers that the other side

has sent, the men of war whom they prepared for warwith us and who are fighting us These it is we are to fight, and, in everyday language, we are not to turnchicken on the battlefield: we are not to run away. We must cross swords, exchange bullets, and fight. But with people who are not men of war, who are not soldiers, who are not in a state of combat, such as old men, old women - in fact all women, whether they are old or not - and children, we must not interfere and we must not do any of the other things that are counted as transgression. We must not do these things. We must not cut down their trees (i.e. ruin their economic resources.) We must not fill their canals. Such things we must not do. These are all transgressions.

Do not be misled into thinking that if we have to fight with the soldiers of the other side, there is no option but to damage houses, etc. The fact that on such occasions, if such things cannot be avoided, is a separate issue. In Islam, such military operations directed at damaging houses, etc. are forbidden, unless we have no other choice.

Another conditional verse is the one which we talked about from Suratul-Hajj, which in fact consists of five or six consecutive verses and is the first revealed verse on jihad. It says that because the other side has lifted its sword against us, we can do the same.

In another verse of Surah at-Tawba, we are told: «Fight with all the polytheists just as they fight (with all of you.» (9:36

D- Rushing to the Defense of the Oppressed

Before touching this subject and the verses relating to it, a point must be mentioned. I stated that the permission for jihad is subject to some conditions. What conditions? One is that the opposing side is in a state of aggression. Those comprising this side are attacking us, and because they are fighting against us we must fight them. Are the conditions for jihad limited to just this: that the other side wants to fight us? Or are there other factors?

Perhaps the other side does not propose to fight us, but is guilty of a gross injustice towards another group of human beings, and we have it in our power to save those human beings from the clutches of that aggressor. If we do not save them, what we are doing in effect is helping that oppressor's oppression against the oppressed.

We may be in a situation whereby a party has not transgressed against us but has committed some type of injustice against a group from another people, who may be Muslims, or who may be non-Muslims. If they are Muslims - like today's plight of the Palestinians who have been exiled from their homes, whose wealth has been seized, who have been subjected to all kinds of transgression - while, for the moment, the transgressor has no intentions against us, is it

permissible for us in such circumstances to hurry to the help of those oppressed Muslims and deliver them, or is this is not permissible?

Certainly this too is permissible. In fact it is obligatory. It would not be a case of commencing hostilities, it would be rushing to the defense of the oppressed especially if they are Muslims, to deliver them from the clutches of oppression.

But if the tyrannized person or party is not a Muslim, then the tyranny can be of two types. There is a time when the oppressor has positioned a people in a vacuum and blocks the call of Islam. Islam gives itself the right to spread its message throughout the world, but this depends upon there being the freedom for it to spread.

Imagine some government that says to the Muslims who are delivering the call of Islam to a nation: "You have no right to say what you are saying. We do not allow it." In these circumstances it is not permissible for us to fight with that nation, with those people who are blameless and unaware. But is it permissible for us to fight against that corrupt regime which props itself up with a putrid ideology that it uses like a chain around the necks of the people to imprison them in a blind alley,

isolated from the call of truth; a regime which acts as a barrier against that call? Is it permissible for us to fight that regime so as to remove that obstacle? Or, in real terms, is it permissible for us to fight against that prison of epression or not? In the view of Islam this is also permissible for this itself would be a form of uprising against zulm, against injustice and oppression. It may be that the mazlum, the wronged, the ppressed, are not aware of the nature of the injustice and have not sought for help, but in fact there is no need for them to request it. The seeking of help is another issue; assuming that the oppressed seek help from us, is it permissible or obligatory for us to help them? Even if they do not apply for help, is it still permissible for us to help them, or even obligatory? The answer is that it is not necessary for them to seek our help. The simple fact that the oppressed are oppressed, that an oppressive regime has erected a wall, a barrier, for its own well-being, preventing a nation from becoming aware of the Call wherein lies the prosperity and happiness of that nation, the Call which if they hear and become aware of, they are sure to accept; prompts Islam to say that we can break .that barrier which, between it and those people, exists in the form of a repressive government

E- Wars of Early Islam

Many of the wars of Early Islam were fought for this very reason. The Muslims who went to war used to say that they had no fight with the peoples of the world, and that they were fighting governments in order to rescue peoples from the misery and slavery, imposed on them by

those governments. When Rustam, the pre-Islamic champion of Persia asked those Muslims what was their goal, they replied: "To change the worship of worshippers from the worship of those who worship to the worship of God." - "Our aim is to free these creatures of God, these people whom, by your tricks and violence, you have placed under the yoke of slavery and bondage to your own selves. We are going to deliver them from the yoke of bondage to you. We are going to set them free, make them the devotees of God the Sublime, the devotees of their Creator; not the devotees of what is created by Him just as they themselves are."

In the letters that the Holy Prophet of Islam wrote to the People of the Book he particularly used to include this Quranic verse: «Say: O You of the Book, come to an expression that is equal between us and you, that we worship none except God, and associate nothing with Him, and that some of us do not take others as our Lord.» (3:64)

which instructed the Prophet to invite the People of the Book (those same people about whom the instructions of jihad were revealed) to accept an expression, an expression that was the same in respect to them as it is in respect to us. It does not say that they are to accept an expression that is for our benefit and related only to us. It says that they are to accept the expression that is the same for all and the concern of all.

If, for example, we say to a people: "Come, O people, accept our language," then those people have the right to say: "Why? We ourselves have a language, why should we come and accept yours?" Or we might say: "Come and accept our special habits and customs," and they may say: "Why should we accept your habits and customs? We have our own." But if we say: "Come and accept this thing that is not ours and not yours, but is everyone's; God is the God of us all, so accept Him," this relates no more only to us. When we say: "Worship He Who is both our Creator and your Creator, rather He Who is the Creator of all," then this is the same for them as it is for us.

The Quran says: «Come to an expression that is equal between us and you.» (3:64)

Only God, the Creator of us all is to be worshipped. And another expression that is supremely, profitable both for us and for them is: «And that some of us do not take others as our Lords» (3:64)

Which means that the social order of master and servant is canceled, and the order of equality between human beings is established. This verse reveals that if we fight, we fight for a thing that is the same in regards to all mankind. Having stated this, we can now say that one of the conditions which the unconditional verse can be subjected to is that if a people are bearing the oppression of a certain group, it becomes permissible for us to fight to free those people.

Now there are two other verses that I wish to recite, the first one of which is a verse from

Suratul-Anfal: «And fight with them until there is no chaos, and religion is wholly for God.» (8:39)

What is the meaning of this? It means that we are to fight with those who create chaos amongst us and who want to cause us Muslims to relinquish our religion. With these we are to fight until the chaos they cause has been eliminated. This is itself a condition. A further condition is contained in verse 75 from Surah an-Nisa: «And why is it that you do not fight in the way of God and the way of the mustazafin of men, women, and children.» (4:75) O Muslims why are you not fighting in the way of God and in the way of those who are helpless. Men, women and children who are helpless in distress; why do you not fight for them? ?Why do you not fight to save them

F- Interpreting the Unconditional as the Conditional

These five verses that we have spoken about have shown us that, if the instructions of Islam about jihad given in some places are unconditional, in other places they are conditional, and in .the terms of the scholars, the unconditional must be interpreted as the conditional

G- No Compulsion in Religion

In the Quran we have a group of verses which specify that religion is to be accepted freely and cannot be forced upon someone and this confirms what we have been saying namely that in Islam no one can be coerced, be told either to become Muslims or die. These verses illuminate those unconditional verses in a different way.

One is a part of Ayatul-kursi (2:255-257) and is well-known; «La ikraha fid-din. Qat-tabayanar-rushdo min al-ghayy.» «There is no compulsion in religion, for the truth has been made manifest from the false» (2:255)

Which means that we must explain clearly the right path to people; its own reality, is manifest. There is no place for the use of compulsion in religion, no one must be obliged to accept the religion of Islam. This verse is explicit in its meaning. In the Quranic commentaries it is written that an Ansari who had previously been a polytheist had two sons who had converted to Christianity. These two sons had become fascinated by Christianity and very devoted to it, but their father was now a Muslim and upset that his sons had become Christians. He went to the Holy Prophet and said to him: "Rasula-lah! What can I do to these sons of mine who have become Christians? Whatever I have tried, still they do not accept Islam. Do you give me permission to force them to leave their religion and become Muslims?" The

Prophet said: "No. La ikraha fid-din, there is no compulsion in religion."

About the circumstances in which this verse was revealed, it is also written that there were two tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, who were living in Medina, and who were the original inhabitants of Medina. At the dawn of Islam they were living there together with several large Jewish tribes who had come to Medina at a later period. One was the tribe, Bani Nazil, and another was the Bani Qoraizeh, while there was yet another large tribe of Jews that lived on the fringes of the city.

The Jews, having Judaism as their religion and having also a holy book, came to be more or less considered as the learned of that society, while, amongst the original inhabitants of Medina, who were polytheists and generally illiterate, there had newly come into existence a small group also able to read and write. The Jews, as a result of their superior culture and the wide dimension of their thoughts, exercised quite an influence on this group.

Thus, despite the fact that the religion of the Aws and Khazraj was different from that of the Jews, nevertheless they allowed themselves to be influenced by Jewish ideas. As a result, they would sometimes send their children to the Jews to be educated, and while they were among the Jews, the children would once in a while renounce their pagan religion of polytheism and convert to Judaism. Thus, when the Holy Prophet entered Medina, a group of these boys from that city were being trained by the Jews and had chosen for themselves the Jewish religion, which some of them chose not to renounce.

The parents of these children became Muslims, yet the children did not give up their new religion Judaism. And when it was settled that the Jews should leave Medina (as a punishment for the chaos they had instigated), those children also left with their fellow Jews. Their fathers came to the Holy Prophet asking him for permission for them to separate their children from the Jews, to force them to relinquish Judaism and to become Muslims; permission which the Holy Prophet did not give. They said: "O Rasula-lah! Allow us to force them to leave their religion and embrace Islam." The Holy Prophet told them: "No. Now that they have chosen to go with the Jews, let them go with them." And the commentators say that it was then that the verse: «La ikraha fid-din. Qat-tabayanar-rushdo min al-ghayy» (2:255) was revealed.

Another famous verse is: «And call to the way of your Lord (Rabb) with the judgment and beautiful admonitions, and dispute with them with that which is beautiful...» (16:125)

Invite people to the path of your Rabba. With what? With force of sword? No. With beautiful admonitions and advice. «And dispute with them with that which is beautiful... » (16:125)

With those who dispute with us, we must also dispute, beautifully. This verse has introduced

clearly the way for Islam to be embraced. In another verse we are told: «The truth is from your Rabba, so whoever has the will so he must reject...» (18:29) Whoever wants to believe will believe, and whoever wants to be a kafir will be a kafir. So this verse has also stated that faith and rejection, iman and kufr, can only be chosen by oneself, they cannot be forced upon one by others. So Islam does not say that others must be forced into Islam; that if they become Muslims, well and good, and if they do not, they are to be killed, that the choice is theirs. Islam says that whoever wants to believe will believe, and whoever does not want to, will not.

There is also this verse: «And if your Rabb willed all the earth would have believed, in total, will you then compel them to be believers.» (10:99) The verse is addressed to the Prophet. The Holy Prophet really loved the people and wanted them to be true believers. The Quran says that the use of force in the matter of belief is meaningless. If force was valid, God Himself, with His own Power of creation would have made believers of all the people, but belief is a thing that people must choose for themselves. God with all His Powers of creation and compulsion has not forced mankind to be true believers and has given them the free will to choose. Thus, for the same reason the Prophet also was to let them choose for themselves. He whose heart has the desire will become a good believer, and he whose heart does not want to, will not.

Another verse addressed to the Prophet says: «Seemingly you will grieve yourself to death that they do not become good believers.» (26: 3) «O Prophet! it is as if you intend to kill yourself because they have not believed as if you want to destroy yourself. Do not be so full of grief for their sakes. We, with Our Power of Creation and Might, if we wanted to force the people to belief we could easily have done so. If we willed it, we could send down the sky a sign to overshadow their neck, for them to be submissive» (26:4)

Here God says that if He wanted to send down from the sky a sign, an affliction, and tell the people that they must either become true believers or be destroyed by that affliction, all the people under compulsion would become believers, but He does not do so because He wants the people to choose for themselves.

These verses further clarify the idea of jihad in Islam and make clear that jihad in Islam is not that which some self-interested parties have said it is. These verses clarify that Islam's aim is not compulsion; that it does not command Muslims to raise the sword over the head of whoever is not a Muslim and offer the simple choice of Islam or death; that this is not the purpose of jihad.

H- Peace

There is another group of verses occurring in the Quran which are also worth mentioning. On

the whole, Islam gives much importance to the issue of peace. In one verse, it is explicitly defined: «Was-solho Khayro» (Peace is better) (4: 128) Though, as we have said, peace is not the same as violence, misery and submission to an oppressor. In another verse we are told: «O you who have found faith, enter peace wholly.» (2:208)

But more illuminating still is this one: «And if they incline to peace, then you incline to it, and trust in God» (8:61) Here the Prophet is told that if the opponents advocate peace, if they make sincere efforts for peace, he too should make peace. If they sincerely desire peace, he too is to desire peace. These verses clearly show that the soul of Islam is the soul of peace. In another verse which is in Surah an-Nisa, the Prophet is also told: «So if they withdraw from you, have not fought with you, and have put forward peace to you, then God has not placed a path for you against them.» (4:90)

"O Prophet, if they have withdrawn from war, and have not fought against you, and have made a manifestation of peace, have said that they are ready to make peace with you, then God does not give you permission to advance any further and fight them."

In the same surah, it is further stated, this time about the hypocrites: «And if they flee, then seize them and slay them wherever you find them, and take them not as your dear ones, nor as helpers. Except those who connect themselves to a people between whom and you there is a bond, or who come to you with their hearts hindered from fighting with you or from fighting their people.» (4:89-90)

If the hypocrites who are fighting us run away, they are to be taken and killed wherever they are, they are not to be taken as friends; we are not to accept help from them, except from those who have a treaty with people with whom we have a treaty, and who are ready to come to an agreement with us. These we are not to kill and with those who are tired of fighting, we are also not to fight.

Thus we have looked at four series of verses. One series consisted of those verses that tell us unconditionally to fight, so if we had ears and heard only these and not the others, it would be possible for us to think that Islam is a religion of war. The second series consist of verses that give the order to fight but with certain conditions; conditions such as the opposing side being in a state of war with us, or a mass of Muslims or non-Muslims having been placed under the heels of a group from amongst themselves which has trampled on their freedom and rights. The third series of verses make it perfectly clear to us that the call of Islam is not sounded with any force of arms. And in the fourth group Islam decisively announces its love of peace.