**JIHAD**



**5.32**. It is because of this that We ordained for (all humankind, but particularly for) the Children of Israel: He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind; and he who saves a life will be as if he had saved the lives of all humankind. Assuredly, there came to them Our Messengers (one after the other) with clear proofs of the truth (so that they might be revived both individually and as a people). Then (in spite of all this), many of them go on committing excesses on the earth.(1)



**15.99**. And (continue to) worship your Lord until what is certain (death) comes to you.(2)

59. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, in what he reported from his Lord, the Mighty and Majestic. He said, “When the servant comes towards Me a hand-span, I go an arm-length towards him. When he comes towards Me an arm-length, I go a fathom towards him. When he comes towards Me walking, I go towards him running.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Tawhid, 50).(3)

61. Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, reported that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, used to pray at night until his feet became cracked. “I said to him, ‘Why do you do this. O Messenger of Allah, when Allah has forgiven you all your past and future wrong actions?’ He said, ‘Do I not want to be a grateful servant?’” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Tahajjud, 6; Sahih Muslim, Sifatu’l-Munafiqin, 81).(4)

65. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Three things follow a dead person: his family, his property and his actions. Two of them return and one remains with him. His family and property return and his actions remain.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Riqaq, 42; Sahih Muslim, Zuhd, 5).(5)

67. Abu Firas Rabi’a ibn Ka’b al-Aslami, may Allah be pleased with him, the servant of the Messenger of Allah and one of the People of the Suffa, said, “I used to spend the night with the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and I would bring him his wudu (minor ablution) water and whatever he needed. He said, ‘Ask of me.’ I said, ‘I ask you for your friendship in Paradise.’ He said, ‘Something else as well?’ I said, ‘I only want that.’ He said, ‘Help me against your carnal soul by means of a lot of prostration.’” (Sahih Muslim, Salah, 226).(6)

Jihad has the literal meaning of exerting our best and greatest effort to achieve something. It is not the equivalent of war, for which the Arabic word is qital. Jihad has a much wider connotation and embraces every kind of striving in God’s cause. A mujahid is one who is sincerely devoted to his or her cause; who uses all physical, intellectual, and spiritual resources to serve it; who confront any power that stands in its way; and, when necessary, dies for this cause. Jihad in the way of God is our struggle to win God’s good pleasure, to establish His religion’s supremacy, and to make His Word prevail.

A related principle, that of enjoining good and forbidding evil (amr bi al-ma’ruf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar) seeks to convey the message of Islam and establish a model Islamic community. The Qur’an introduces the Islamic community as a model community required to inform humanity of Islam and of how the Prophet lived it: Thus We have made you a community justly balanced, that you might be witnesses for all humanity, and the Messenger may be a witness for you (2:143).

**The Greater and Lesser Jihad.**

There are two aspects of jihad. One is fighting to overcome carnal desires and evil inclinations—the greater jihad. The other is encouraging others to achieve the same objective—the lesser jihad.

The Muslim army was returning to Madina after they had defeated the enemy in a battle, when the Messenger of God said to them: “We are returning from the lesser jihad to the greater one.” When the Companions asked what the greater jihad was, he explained that it was fighting with the carnal self.

The aim of either jihad is that the believer be purified of sins and so attain true humanity. The prophets were sent for this purpose. God says in the Qur’an:

Thus We have sent unto you a Messenger from among you, who recites unto you Our revelations (and makes Our signs known to you), and who purifies you and instructs you in the Book and in the Wisdom, and also instructs you in what you don’t know. (2:151)

Human beings are in some sense like raw minerals to be worked upon by Prophets, who purify and refine them by removing the seal from their hearts and ears, by lifting the veils from their eyes. Enlightened by the Prophets’ message, people can understand the meaning of the laws of nature, which are signs of God’s Existence and Unity, and can penetrate into the subtle reality behind things and events. Only through the guidance of Prophets can we attain the high status expected of us by God.

In addition to teaching the signs, Prophets also instructed their people in the Book and in Wisdom. As the Qur’an was the last Revelation to the Last Prophet, God means the Qur’an when He speaks of the Book, and the Sunna when He speaks of Wisdom. We must therefore follow the Qur’an and the Prophet’s Sunna if we desire to be rightly guided.

The Prophet also teaches us what we do not know, and so humanity will continue to learn from the Prophet until the Day of Judgment. We learn from him how to purify ourselves of sin. By following his way, many great saints have attained their distinctions as saints. Among them, ‘Ali says that his belief in the pillars of Islam is so firm that even if the veil of the Unseen were lifted, his certainty would not increase. ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani is said to have had insight into the mysteries of the seventh heaven. These and many others, such as Fudayl bin ‘Iyaz, Ibrahim bin Adham, and Bishr al-Khafi might well have been endowed with Prophethood, if God had not already set a seal on Prophethood.

The dark clouds of ignorance have been removed from our intellectual horizon through the guidance of Prophet Muhammad, and many more advances will be made in science and technology as a result of the light he brought from God.

Jihad is the legacy of the Prophets, and Prophethood is the mission of elevating men to God’s favor by purifying them. Jihad is the name given to this prophetic mission, which has the same meaning as bearing witness to the truth. Just as judges listen to witnesses to settle a case, so those who have performed jihad have borne witness to God’s Existence and Unity of God by striving in His way. The Qur’an says: God bears witness that there is no god but He and so do the angels and the people of learning, maintaining justice. There is no god save He, the All-Mighty, the Wise (3:18). Those who have performed jihad will also bear witness to the same truth in the heavenly court, where the case of unbelievers will be settled.

Those who bear witness to God Existence and Unity the remotest parts of the world and preach this truth. This was the duty of the Prophets as stated in the Qur’an, and it should be our duty as well:

…Messengers who brought good news to humanity and who admonished them, so that they might have no argument against God after their coming. God is the All-Mighty and the All-Wise. God Himself bears witness by what He has revealed to you that it has been revealed with His knowledge; and so do the angels. There is no better witness than God. (4:165–66)

God has sent a Prophet to every people, so that every people can have an idea of Prophethood. As the term used to describe the activity of Prophethood, jihad is deeply engraved on the heart of every believer so that he or she feels a profound responsibility for preaching the truth in order to guide others to the Straight Path.

The lesser jihad, usually taken to mean fighting in God’s cause, does not refer only to military struggle. The term is comprehensive, for it includes every action done for God’s sake. Whether speaking or keeping silent, smiling or making a sour face, joining or leaving a meeting, every action taken to ameliorate the lot of humanity, whether by individuals or communities, is included in its meaning.

While the lesser jihad depends on mobilizing all material facilities and is performed in the outer world, the greater jihad means a person’s fighting against his or her carnal soul. These two forms of jihad cannot be separated from each other.

The Messenger of God has taught us how to perform both forms of the jihad. He has established the principles of preaching the truth, which have application until the Day of Judgment. When we scrutinize the way he acted, we shall see that he was very systematic. This is actually another proof of his Prophethood and a wonderful example of following the way of God in behavior.

The believers kept their belief vigorous and active by means of jihad. Just as a tree keeps its leaves as long as it yields fruits, so believers can preserve their vigor as long as they perform jihad. Whenever you encounter a hopeless pessimist, you soon realize that he or she is one who has abandoned jihad. Such people have been deprived of the spirit, and are sunk in pessimism because they have abandoned preaching the truth. Whoever performs jihad unceasingly does not lose his or her enthusiasm and always tries to increase the scope of his or her activities. Every good deed results in a new one, so that believers never become deprived of a good: As for those who strive for us We surely guide them to our path. God is with the good (29:69).

There are as many paths leading to the Straight Path as the number of breaths drawn in creation. Whoever strives for His cause is guided, by God, to one of these paths and is save from going astray. Whoever is guided to His Straight Path by God lives a balanced life. They neither exceed the limits in their human needs and activities or in their worship and other religious observances. Such balance is the sign of true guidance.

All sacrifices made in fighting oppressive unbelievers, no matter how great, only constitute the lesser jihad of striving to discharge religious obligations as perfectly as possible. The greater jihad is much harder to accomplish, since it requires us to fight against our own destructive drives and impulses, such as arrogance, vindictiveness, jealousy, selfishness, self-conceit, and the carnal desires.

Although the person who abandons the lesser jihad is liable to spiritual deterioration, he or she may recover. Everything in the universe praises and glorifies God with each breath and is, accordingly, a sign of God’s Existence and Unity. A person may be guided to the Straight Path through one of these signs. For this reason, it is said that there are as many paths leading to the Straight Path of God as the breaths of all His creatures. A person returning from the lesser jihad is vulnerable to worldly weaknesses. Pride, love of comfort and ease may captivate that person. Thus the Prophet warned us through his Companions by saying, while returning to Madina after a victory: “We are returning from the lesser jihad to the greater.”

The Companions of the Prophet were fearless on the battlefields, and as sincere and humble as dervishes in worshipping God. Those victorious warriors used to spend most of their nights praying to God. Once, when night fell during battle, two of them took turns in standing guard. One rested while the other prayed. Having become aware of the situation, the enemy shot a shower of arrows at him. He was hit and bled profusely, but did not abandon his prayer. When he finished his devotions, he woke his friend, who asked him in amazement why he had not done so sooner. He replied: “I was reciting Surat al-Kahf, and I did not wish the deep pleasure I found in this prayer to be interrupted.”

The Companions went into a trance-like state of ecstasy when in prayer, and would recite the Qur’an as if it were being revealed directly to them. Thus, they did not feel the pain caused by arrows which penetrated their bodies. Jihad, in its lesser and greater aspects, found complete expression in them.

The Prophet combined these two aspects of jihad in the most perfect way in his own person. He displayed monumental courage on the battlefields. ‘Ali, one of the most courageous figures of Islam, confesses that the Companions took shelter behind the Prophet at the most critical moments of fighting. To give an example, when the Muslim army experienced a reverse and began to scatter in the first phase of the Battle of Hunayn, the Prophet urged his horse toward the enemy lines and shouted to his retreating soldiers: “I am a Prophet, I do not lie! I am the grandson of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, I do not lie!”

**Jihad’s Stages and Main Principles**

The first Revelation to The Messenger was the command: Read! This command, coming at a time when there was nothing readily available to read, meant that believers should use their intellectual and spiritual faculties to discern God’s acts in the universe and His laws related to its creation and operation. Through such discernment, believers seek to purify themselves and their minds of all ignorance-based superstitions and to acquire true knowledge through observation and contemplation.

We are not composed only of our minds. God has endowed us with many faculties, each of which needs satisfaction. So while feeding our minds with the Divine signs in the universe, we seek to cleanse our hearts of sin. We live a balanced life in awareness of Divine supervision, and continuously seek His forgiveness. In this way, we eventually conquer our desire for forbidden things and, through prayer, ask God to enable us to do good deeds.

Thus Read! signifies action. For The Messenger, who already was absolutely pure in spirit and devoid of superstition, it meant that it was time to start his mission as a Messenger of God. He was to recite the Revelation in public and instruct people about His signs. By doing this, he would purify their minds of superstitions carried over from the Age of Ignorance, and their hearts of sin. He would enlighten them, intellectually and spiritually, by instructing them in the Revealed Book of God (the Qur’an) and His Created Book (the universe): We have sent among you, of yourselves, a Messenger who recites Our signs to you, purifies you, and instructs you in the Book and in the Wisdom, and also instructs you in what you don’t know (2:151).

After he received this first revelation, The Messenger returned home in great agitation. He was sleeping wrapped in a cloak, enwrapped by his people’s suffering and this heavy responsibility, when God commanded him: O enwrapped one, keep vigil the night long, save a little (a half of it, or diminish or add a little), and chant the Qur’an in measure, for We shall charge you with a weighty word (73:1-5).

The short period between the first revelation and the spreading of the Message, a period marked by such verses as those mentioned above, was a preliminary stage for The Messenger. He had to prepare himself to convey the Qur’an by keeping long night vigils and reciting the Qur’an in measure.

In addition to conveying the Message, jihad, as discussed above, entails the believers’ struggles with their carnal selves to build a genuine spiritual character, one overflowing with belief and inflamed with love. These two dimensions of jihad continue until the believer dies (the individual sphere) and until the Last Day (the collective sphere). Therefore, soon after this verse was revealed, The Messenger received the following revelation: O enshrouded one, arise and warn! Magnify your Master, purify your robes, and flee defilement! Do not show favor, seeking worldly gain! For the sake of your Master, be patient! (74:1-7).

These revelations ordered the Prophet to begin preaching Islam. He started with his family members and nearest relatives and, after Warn your tribe of nearest kindred (26:214) was revealed, spread this call throughout his tribe. His subsequent public preaching was met with derision, threats, torture, enticing bribes if he would stop, and boycott.

In Makka, The Messenger never resorted to or allowed retaliation. Islam came not to spread trouble or cause dissention, but, in the words of Amir ibn Rabi’, to bring people out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of belief, to free them from serving that which is not God so that they can serve the One True God, and to elevate them from the pits of the Earth to the heights of Heaven.

As Islam literally means peace, salvation, and submission, it obviously came to establish peace. This is established first in our inner worlds, so that we are at peace with God and natural environment, and then throughout the world and the universe. Peace and order are fundamental in Islam, which seeks to spread in a peaceful personal and collective atmosphere. It refrains from resorting to force as much as possible, never approves of injustice, and forbids bloodshed: Whoever kills someone, other than in retaliation for murder or corruption on the Earth, in effect has killed humanity; whoever saves a life in effect has saved humanity (5:32).

Coming to eradicate injustice and corruption, and to “unite” the Earth with the Heavens in peace and harmony, Islam calls people with wisdom and fair exhortation. It does not resort to force until the defenders of their corrupt order, which is rooted in injustice, oppression, self-interest, exploitation, and usurpation of others’ rights, seek to prevent its preaching in peaceful ways and to suppress it. Thus, force is allowed in the following cases:

• If unbelievers, polytheists, or those who cause trouble and corruption actively resist the preaching of Islam and prevent others from listening to its message. As Islam is a Divine religion seeking to secure human well-being and happiness in both worlds, it has the right to present itself. If this is not allowed, theoretically, its opponents are given three alternatives: accept Islam, allow its preaching in peaceful ways, or admit its rule. If they reject these alternatives, force is allowed.

However, there is an important point to mention. In order to use force, there must be an Islamic state. It was allowed only after the Prophet emigrated to Madina and established an independent state, for the Muslims had been wronged. The verses revealed to give this permission explain the Islamic view of just war:

(Fighting is) permitted to those who are fought against, because they have been wronged. God is able to give them victory. Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: “Our Master is God.” For had it not been for God’s repelling some people by means of others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, wherein the Name of God is much mentioned, would have been pulled down. God helps one who helps Him [His religion]. God is All-Strong, All-Mighty. Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay zakat and enjoin the good and forbid the evil. And God’s is the sequel of events. (22:39-41)

It is clear from these verses and from history that Islam resorts to force only to defend itself and establish freedom of belief. Under Muslim rule, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and adherents of other religions are free to practice their religion. Even many Western historians and writers have agreed that Christians and Jews experienced the most prosperous and happiest period of their history under Muslim rule.

• Islam, being the true religion revealed by God, never approves of injustice. As declared in: We have written (decreed) in the Psalms after the Torah (and remind once more in the Qur’an) that My righteous servants will inherit the Earth. (21:105), God’s righteous servants must submit the Earth to His rule, which depends on absolute justice and worship of the One God. They also are obliged to strive until persecution, as well as any worship of and obedience to false deities and unjust tyrants, is ended. Thus Muslims are to fight for the feeble and oppressed:

How should you not fight for the cause of God and of the feeble and oppressed men and women and children, who cry: “Our Master! Bring us out of this town whose people are oppressors! Give us from Your presence some protecting friend! Give us from Your presence some defender!” (4:75)

**Conclusion**

We must consider jihad in its entirety. Those who say one thing and then do another cause nothing but trouble in the ranks of Muslims. Since they cannot discipline themselves and overcome self-regard, ostentation, and the desire to dominate, they bring only disharmony to the cause of Islam. On the other hand, those who live in almost total seclusion and try to attain some high spiritual station without working to promote the truth reduce Islam to mere mysticism, like certain aspects of yoga. Such people argue that a Muslim’s foremost duty is to acquire spiritual maturity so as to be saved from Hell. What they fail to realize is that those who regard themselves as safe from Hell are deceived, for God decrees that we should continue to serve Him as long as we live (15:99).

Thus we can say that jihad is a balance of internal and external strife. Reaching spiritual perfection and helping others do so are points of consideration. Attaining internal perfection is the greater jihad; helping others attain it is the lesser jihad. When you separate one from the other, jihad is no longer jihad. Indolence is born from one and anarchy from the other. However, we expect one Muhammadan spirit to be born. As is always the case, this is possible only by following and conforming to God’s Messenger. How happy are those who search for a way to salvation for others as much as they do for themselves. And how happy are those who remember to save themselves while saving others.(7)

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**(7)\* This article has been published separately in The Fountain’s January-March 2002 volume and thus is not contained in the book.**