

right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Lord is God.' Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques — in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled — would surely have been destroyed. God will most certainly succour him who succours God's cause. God is certainly most Powerful, Almighty. They are those who, if We firmly establish them on earth, attend regularly to their prayers, give in charity, enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong. With God rests the final outcome of all events." (22: 39-41)

These verses had given the Muslims permission to fight those unbelievers who had oppressed them, and they understood them to be a prelude to the institution of jihad, or striving for God's cause, as a religious duty. Further, they realized that because they had been oppressed, they were given permission to fight back and restore justice, after they had been restrained from doing so all the time they were in Makkah. Their instructions then were to "hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your *zakaat*." (4: 77) This restraint had been imposed by God for a purpose He had determined. We may try to discern some of the reasons behind this order.

The first of these reasons is a disciplinary one, aimed at taming the insubordinate and rebellious nature of the early Arab Muslims. They had to learn to be patient and await instructions, rather than act impulsively and recklessly, as they used to do in pre-Islamic days. For the new Muslim community to fulfil its great universal role, the desire for revenge and heedless reaction had to be brought under control, and left to the discretion of a trusted leadership which gave its decisions careful consideration and was duly obeyed — even though to do so would test the Arabs' impatient and impetuous nature.

Such discipline enabled people such as 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and Hamzah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, and other independent and strong personalities among the early Muslims, to show a great deal of patience in the face of the persecution and oppression being inflicted upon their fellow Muslims. They would await Prophet Muhammad's instructions and the commands of the Supreme Authority which had ordered them to "hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your *zakaat*." (4:77) Thus a balance was struck in the consciousness of that pioneering community, between rashness and restraint, impulse and deliberation, passionate reaction and rational compliance.

Another reason for restraining the Muslims from fighting in Makkah was that in Arabian society, rushing to help an oppressed person was highly commendable. Despite their ability to hit back hard, the Muslims showed a large degree of restraint. This was demonstrated during the boycott imposed by the rest of the Quraysh against the Prophet's Hashimite clan in order to force them to withdraw their support and

raised to assume the leadership of humanity in accordance with this order, which derives in its entirety from the comprehensive Islamic concept of the purpose of existence as a whole and of human existence in particular. The Muslim community would lead humanity to ultimate success and to all that is good and noble (khayr), which no man-made order can provide. It would raise mankind to unprecedented moral and material standards. Conversely, no greater harm could be inflicted upon humanity than to deprive it of seeking to attain those levels of nobility, purity, happiness and perfection God wants it to achieve.

It is, therefore, a basic human right to be addressed with the message of Islam. No authority should deny mankind that right and under no circumstances should any obstacles be allowed to prevent that divine message from being delivered.

Having received the message, people have the right to freely accept the religion of Islam, and be under no pressure from any quarter to dissuade or prevent them from taking it up. Those who choose not to accept Islam are expected not to impede its progress. Indeed, they are required to guarantee Islam's freedom of action and to leave the Muslim community a clear road to fulfil its task, free from any threat of aggression.

Those who adopt the religion of Islam also have the right not to be intimidated or subjected to oppression, in any way whatsoever, so that they abandon their faith. No impediments may be placed to turn people away from Islam. The Muslim community, if subjected to any such aggressive designs, has the right to defend itself by force, in order to protect the community's freedom and security. This would further the establishment of God's order on earth and guarantee humanity the opportunity and the right to receive God's message.

It also results in another obligation that the Muslim community must undertake: to oppose any power that would stand in its way and prevent it from conveying the message freely to the public, or would threaten its followers. The Muslim community must pursue this course of jihad, or struggle for God's cause, until all threat of oppression is eliminated and people are free to believe in Islam and practise it. This does not imply any sense of compulsion, but it does mean allowing Islam to prevail in society to the extent that everyone is free to accept it and tell others about it without any fear of persecution or intimidation.

These are the parameters within which the principles of jihad have been laid down. These are the real objectives for which it has been instituted. It has no other purpose and serves no other end.

Jihad in Islam is pursued to protect the faith against outside attacks as well as internal strife. Its aim is the preservation of the Islamic way of life, establishing it as a force to be respected and reckoned with in the world. Anyone who willingly wishes to

Part 2 Surah 2 Al-Baqarah Verses 190-195

Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. Indeed, God does not love aggressors. (190) Slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away; for oppression is even worse than killing. Do not fight them near the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there first. Should they fight you, then kill them. Such is the reward of the unbelievers. (191) But if they desist, know that God is much-Forgiving, Merciful. (192) Fight them until there is no more oppression, and submission is made to God alone. If they desist, let there be no hostility except against the wrongdoers. (193) A sacred month for a sacred month; for just retribution also applies to the violation of sanctity. If anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you. Have fear of God, and be sure that God is with those who are Godfearing. (194) Give generously for the cause of God and do not with your own hands throw yourselves to ruin. Persevere in doing good, for God loves those who do good. (195)

The First Order to Fight

This is followed with a statement on fighting in general, and on fighting around the Sacred Mosque in Makkah and during the sacred months in particular. Then follows an urgent call to spend of one's personal wealth for the promotion of God's cause, an activity which is closely related to the fundamental Islamic duty of jihad, or struggle for God's cause:

Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. Indeed, God does not love aggressors. (190) Slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away; for oppression is even worse than killing. Do not fight them near the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there first. Should they fight you, then kill them. Such is the reward of the unbelievers. (191) But if they desist, know that God is much-Forgiving, Merciful. (192) Fight them until there is no more oppression, and submission is made to God alone. If they desist, let there be no hostility except against the wrongdoers. (193) A sacred month for a sacred month; for just retribution also applies to the violation of sanctity. If anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you. Have fear of God, and be sure that God is with those who are Godfearing. (194) Give generously for the cause of God and do not with your own hands throw yourselves to ruin. Persevere in doing good, for God loves those who do good. (195)

Some reports indicate that these were the first verses on the subject of fighting to be revealed. They were preceded only by verses 39-41 of Surah 22: "Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged. Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory. These are the ones who have been driven from their homelands against all

protection of the Prophet and his followers. When this persecution, which lasted for three years, became unbearable, their re-awakened sense of justice caused some non-Muslim Arabs to break ranks and end the boycott. It seems from a study of the Prophet's history at this time that, in adopting this policy of passive resistance, the Muslim leadership in Makkah was aware of the crucial role played by social and tribal factors.

This is strongly borne out by the fact that the Muslim leadership had no wish to unleash internecine feuds within the Makkah clans. Muslim converts fell victim to moral and physical torture and abuse to force them to renounce their new faith, even at the hands of members of their own families. These were self-appointed tormentors, with no central authority directing their battles against the Muslims. Had the Muslims been allowed to hit back, fighting would have broken out in every Makkah household, and blood would have been shed in every family. That would have made Islam, in the eyes of Arabian society, seem a divisive religion, advocating strife and destruction within Arab clans.

After the Hijrah, or emigration to Madinah, however, the Muslims emerged as an independent community, prepared to face up to the Makkah leadership which was actively recruiting fighters and organizing military expeditions against it. The situation had changed; instead of individual persecutors targeting individual victims, a collective and deliberate campaign was being organized.

To these reasons one may add the fact that the Muslims in Makkah were a dangerously exposed minority. Had they engaged the unbelievers in armed conflict as an organized group, they would have faced total annihilation. God's will was that they should first gather in a safe place before He granted them permission to go into battle.

However, the rules governing fighting were issued gradually, as and when the need arose, and as dictated by the needs of the development of Islam, first within Arabia and later outside it as well.

The present verses contain some of those rules which were relevant to that stage of development of the community, when hostility was just beginning to set in between the Muslim and non-Muslim camps. These rules also represent part of the permanent code that has come to govern war in Islam generally. They have undergone slight modifications, given at a later stage in Surah 9.

It might well be useful at this point to give a general synopsis of the concept of jihad in Islam, which can form the basis for the interpretation and understanding of Qur'anic statements on fighting and war.

Islam represents the final and complete version of faith, revealed as the basis of a universal and comprehensive human order on earth. The Muslim community was

The Ethics of War

Here is a selection of these principles and conventions, as laid down by the Prophet Muhammad and outlined in the instructions of some of his Companions. They clearly reveal the nature of the Islamic approach to a just war, hitherto unknown to human society.

'Abdullah ibn 'Umar reports that when, in one of the battles, the Prophet was told that a woman was found among those killed, he immediately ordered that women and children should not be killed during combat. [Related by Malik, al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi]

Abu Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying: "When you fight, avoid striking your opponent in the face." [Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Abu Hurayrah reports that the Prophet sent him with an expedition instructing them to burn two men from the Quraysh he had named, but as they were about to depart the Prophet said: "I have ordered you to burn these two people, but only God may punish with fire. If you capture them, just kill them." [Related by al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi]

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud quotes the Prophet as saying: "True believers are those who strictly observe their moral code when they kill." [Related by Abu Dawud]

'Abdullah ibn Yazid al-Ansari reports that the Prophet has strictly forbidden looting and the mutilation of dead bodies. [Related by al-Bukhari]

Ibn Ya'la reports that on one expedition, the leader, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khalid ibn al-Walid, was brought four enemy fighters. He ordered that they be tied and put to death slowly. When Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, a close Companion of the Prophet, heard of this, he said: "I heard the Prophet forbid slow killing. I swear by God that I would not inflict slow death even on a chicken." When 'Abd al-Rahman heard this he immediately sought to free four slaves in compensation. [Related by Abu Dawud] We may add here that freeing a slave is part of the prescribed compensation for accidental killing.

Al-Harith ibn Muslim ibn al-Harith quotes his father as saying that the Prophet sent him with others on an expedition. As they approached their target he hurried his horse and reached the village ahead of the rest of the expedition. He said that the inhabitants gave him a noisy reception and that he told them that if they were to declare their acceptance of Islam they would be spared and their safety would be assured. They followed his advice declaring their acceptance of Islam. Some of his Companions reproached him for what he did, saying that he had deprived them of the spoils of war. But when they returned and the Prophet learnt of what had happened, he commended him for his action and said: "God Almighty has given you such and such reward for every one of them." [Related by Abu Dawud]

Suppression of religious freedom can be imposed by threats and the direct use of force. But it can also be practised through the imposition of corrupt or totalitarian regimes and oppressive social systems that deprave the masses, drive them away from God's path, and encourage and force them to reject the divine faith and break away from it. The best example to illustrate this is Communism, which banned religious instruction, openly advocated atheism, legislated for prostitution and drinking, promoted vice and discouraged virtue almost to the point of direct compulsion.

The Islamic view of freedom of belief assigns it a great status as a social and human value, and stems from the Islamic view of the ultimate purpose of life and of the whole of human existence: the worship of God in its widest sense which encompasses all constructive human activity. Freedom of belief is man's most precious right in this world, and ought to be cherished and protected. Any infringement of this right, direct or indirect, must be fought even if one has to kill for it. This is borne out by the significant term used in the Qur'an, which is "slay them [rather than 'fight them'] wherever you may find them". This signifies that, if you have to, you may resort to any means to slay those who infringe upon your right of freedom of belief, while heeding those other Islamic principles mentioned earlier.

Violation of Sanctities

The other restriction is that no fighting was allowed within the vicinity of the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, which God, in response to the Prophet Abraham's prayers, had declared a safe haven and an inviolable house of peace. However, those who desecrate the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque and commit aggression against Muslims there must be fought and should not be spared. Their vile actions and their persecution of Muslims, committed as they are within the vicinity of the Sacred Mosque, can only be rewarded with severe punishment.

"But if they desist, know that God is much-Forgiving, Merciful." (192) To earn God's forgiveness and mercy, they should not simply desist from waging war against the Muslims and trying to force them to abandon their faith. They would be required to renounce their denial of God and their rejection of His Message. The most they can expect in return for refraining from attacking the Muslims and persecuting them would be a truce, but that would not be sufficient to merit God's forgiveness and mercy. The unbelievers are, therefore, invited and encouraged to believe so that they may enjoy God's mercy and forgiveness.

What a commendable gesture! Islam spares its staunchest enemies punishment and retribution, and instead offers them forgiveness and mercy in return for the simple act of joining the ranks of the believers. That would absolve them of all their previous misdemeanours, and cancel out the damage and the atrocities they had

enter the fold of Islam should have no fear of being prevented from doing so and should not have to suffer for making that choice.

This is the true jihad, as recognized and endorsed by Islam. Those who take part in it are richly rewarded and rank among the noblest of believers, and those who give their lives in doing so are the true martyrs.

Jihad: When and Against Whom?

The present passage addresses the situation of the Muslim community in Madinah as it was in confrontation with the pagan Arabs of the Quraysh. Those unbelievers had persecuted the Muslims for their religious beliefs, drove them out of their homes and were trying hard to turn them away from their faith. It also lays down the fundamental rules of jihad in Islam.

It begins with the precise instruction that Muslims should fight those who had been fighting them and to meet with force any attacks against them by anyone, without committing aggression. "Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. Indeed, God does not love aggressors." (190)

The aims of war in Islam are clearly defined right at the outset: "Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you..." Fighting should, therefore, be undertaken for the sake of God, and for no other purpose that may be defined by human desires or motivations. War should not be pursued for glory or dominance, nor for material aggrandisement, nor to gain new markets or control raw materials. It should not be pursued to give one class, race or nation of people dominance over another. Fighting in Islam must be undertaken only to promote the aims defined by Islam: to make God's word supreme in the world, to establish His order, and to protect the believers against persecution, coercion, corruption, and all efforts to force them to betray their faith or abandon it. According to Islam, all other types of war are unjust, and those who take part in them should expect no rewards or blessings from God.

Having defined the objective, the verses also define the limits of war: "... but do not commit aggression. Indeed, God does not love aggressors." (190) 'Aggression' implies attacks on non-combatants and peaceful, unarmed civilians who pose no threat to Muslims or to their community as a whole. This includes women, children, the elderly, and those devoted to religious activity, such as priests and monks, of all religious and ideological persuasions. Aggression also entails exceeding the moral and ethical limits set by Islam for fighting a just war. These limits outlaw the atrocities perpetrated in wars outside Islam, past and present. Such atrocities are totally repugnant to Muslims and can never be sanctioned or committed by people who honour and fear God.

Buraydah reports: "Whenever God's Messenger appointed a commander to lead an expedition or an army, he would urge him to fear God and to show kindness towards his fellow Muslims. He would then instruct him as follows: "Proceed to fight in God's name and for His cause. Fight those who deny God. Take the initiative but do not commit any acts of treachery, do not mutilate your victims, and do not kill any children." [Related by Muslim, Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi]

Malik quotes Abu Bakr as saying in his farewell address to one of his armies: "You will come across people who claim to have devoted themselves to the service of God, so leave them to their claim. Do not kill any women, children or elderly people."

Such is the code that governs war in Islam, and such are its objectives, which derive directly from the Qur'anic statement: "Fight for the cause of God those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression. Indeed, God does not love aggressors." (190)

The Muslims were well aware that they would not prevail as a result of their numerical strength or superior armament; they were hopelessly deficient on both counts. The main secret of their victory lay in their faith in, and obedience to, God, and the support they received from Him. To ignore God's commands and the Prophet's instructions would have deprived them of the only force that could ensure their victory. These principles had to be strictly observed, even with those enemies who had persecuted them and inflicted unspeakable atrocities on them. Even though at one point the Prophet, overcome by rage, had ordered that two Qurayshi men be a, put to death by burning, he immediately retracted that order, because only God punishes with fire.

The surah goes on to reaffirm the rightness of war against those who had subjected the Muslims to campaigns of terror and persecution, and driven them out of their homeland. The Muslims were urged to confront their enemies and kill them wherever they happen to be, except within the vicinity of the Sacred Mosque in Makkah unless their enemies were to attack them there first. Those orders would stand unless the unbelievers accepted Islam, in which case it was forbidden to fight them, regardless of any killings or atrocities they might have perpetrated against Muslims earlier.

"Slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away; for oppression is even worse than killing. Do not fight them near the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you there first. Should they fight you, then kill them. Such is the reward of the unbelievers. (191) But if they desist, know that God is much-Forgiving, Merciful. (192)"

Forced religious conversion is the worst violation of a most inviolable human right. It is, therefore, a much more heinous offence than murder, regardless of the form that coercion takes or how it is exerted.

It is only when the aggression or the persecution ceases or is eliminated that fighting must come to an end. *"If they desist, let there be no hostility except against the wrongdoers."*¹ (193)

Having ruled on fighting during the sacred months, the surah now gives the ruling on fighting in the vicinity of the Sacred Mosque in Makkah. *"A sacred month for a sacred month: for just retribution also applies to the violation of sanctity. If anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you. Have fear of God, and be sure that God is with those who are God-fearing."* (194)

Those who violate the sacred months cannot expect guarantees of peace and immunity from attack during it. God had declared the Sacred Mosque a safe haven and a place of peace, and designated the sacred months a time of truce and security. During these months no blood shall be shed, all sacred places and property shall be immune, and the safety of every living thing is guaranteed. Those who are bent on infringing this peace must not escape unpunished. The Muslims are instructed to retaliate in a measured way and within the limits dictated by the type and extent of the initial aggression. *"If anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you."* (194)

There should be no excessive retribution. Muslims are here left to their own conscience and their consciousness of God. They realize that their own victory depends on God's help and support, and are therefore reminded that God is on the side of those who fear Him — a supremely effective safeguard.

Jihad requires money as much as it requires men. In those early days of Islam, fighters would provide their own fighting equipment, their own transport and their own food. They received no remuneration for their work, and freely offered their own possessions as well as their lives. This can only happen when the political, social and economic system in society is based on faith. The community would not need to appropriate funds to defend itself against internal or external enemies. Leaders and soldiers volunteer their efforts and their possessions to defend the faith and the community.

However, some of the less well-to-do Muslims who were keen to join the fighting but could not provide their own means of transport would go to the Prophet pleading to be taken to the battlefield. The Qur'an tells us that when the Prophet did not have the necessary transportation or equipment to give them: *"They turned away with tears in their eyes, sad that they did not have the means to contribute."* (9: 92)

¹ This ruling was later amended by verses in the first passage of Surah 9, which instructed the Muslims to liberate the whole of the Arabian Peninsula from idolatry and paganism. This was a necessary measure to give Islam a solid and secure base in Arabia. Muslims would thus be safe from any rearward attack as they moved to face the hostile powers of the Byzantines to the north and the Persians to the east.

wrought against the Muslims. The aim of war in Islam is to let people be free to uphold Islam and practise it, and never find themselves, by virtue of either direct force or the type of social, political or economic system they live under, compelled to renounce it. The growth and spread of Islam must not be hampered or restricted, and the Muslim community must be allowed the means to defend itself and deter its enemies from taking advantage of it. No one who wishes to adopt Islam should feel threatened. If such threats are made, the Muslim community is collectively obliged to do all it can to eliminate that threat and secure the success of Islam.

"Fight them until there is no more oppression, and submission is made to God alone. If they desist, let there be no hostility except against the wrongdoers." (193) These statements were revealed to deal with a specific situation in Arabia, when the pagan Arabs were persecuting an incipient Muslim community and stifling the spread of Islam. Nevertheless, they remain valid, and jihad is incumbent on Muslims until the end of time. Whenever a tyrant or an oppressive power emerges and prevents people from upholding Islam or seeks to prevent them from knowing about it, the Muslim community must rise against it and secure for all the right of freedom to know the truth, listen to it, and have the choice to accept it freely.

It is clear how severely these verses condemn oppression. It is considered a more repugnant evil than murder. This emphasis makes it clear that Islam views this matter most gravely. It establishes another crucial universal principle, heralding a rebirth of mankind, according to which man's value is determined by his faith. Man's life is always outweighed by his religious beliefs.

This principle also identifies the true enemies of humanity in this world. They are those who persecute believers and inflict suffering on a Muslim for no reason other than his being a Muslim. They are those who stand between mankind and God's truth and guidance. It is these that Muslims are obliged to fight and destroy *"until there is no more oppression, and submission is made to God alone."* (193)

This fundamental Islamic principle remains as valid today as it was when these verses were revealed. Islam remains a target for attack and vilification from various quarters. Muslims everywhere continue to be victims of aggression, oppression and religious intolerance as individuals and groups and, in some cases, as whole communities. All victims of oppression and aggression have the right and duty to defend themselves and seek to destroy their enemies, in fulfilment of this great Islamic principle which marked a rebirth of humanity.

For this reason, we find numerous exhortations in the Qur'an and the sunnah urging financial contribution, whenever necessary, to the war effort. The call to jihad is almost always accompanied by a call to contribute materially and financially.

The passage goes as far as describing the reluctance to contribute financially as folly leading to self-destruction. It says: *"Give generously for the cause of God and do not with your own hands throw yourselves to ruin. Persevere in doing good, for God loves those who do good."* (195) Miserliness and greed are indeed a form of self-destruction for the individual as well as for society as a whole. They result in deprivation and weakness of the whole community, especially one whose affairs are dependent on voluntary, self-motivated contributions.

The Qur'an goes on to recommend even a higher state of excellence: *"Persevere in doing good, for God loves those who do good"* (195) The Arabic term used here is *ihسان*, whose Islamic connotations are difficult to convey in translation. It is the highest level of altruism and self-denial. The Prophet Muhammad defines it as: *"worshipping God as if you see Him with your own eyes; for, though you cannot see Him, He certainly sees you"*. [Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim] Once this stage of piety is reached, one will become a consummate devotee, utterly obedient to God in everything; and all one's resources, energies and life will be entirely dedicated to God Almighty.

This closing comment is a befitting end for a passage dealing with fighting and giving for God's cause. It urges believers to aspire to the level of *ihسان*, the highest grade of religious excellence.