

Lecture Three: Defence, The Quiddity of Jihad

One of the points that now come into question is the Islamic view of the essence and quiddity of jihad. On this point there is complete agreement amongst researchers; the essence of jihad is defense, meaning that not one of them even suspects jihad, or any kind of fighting, that is motivated by aggression, by lust for the wealth and riches and other resources of the other side, for an aggressor's harnessing of a people's economic or human resources, to be in any way permissible in the view of Islam.

In Islam, fighting based on such motives are types of zulm, types of tyranny and oppression. Jihad is only for the sake of defense, and in truth, it is resistance against transgression, and can certainly be lawful. Of course, there is also the third possibility that one fights not for the sake of aggression, nor in defense of oneself or of a human value, but for the expansion of a human value, and this will be discussed later.

Leaving this point aside, however, we see that in the basic definition of jihad, there is no difference of opinion and all the researchers are agreed that jihad and war must be for the sake of defense. The differences of opinion that do exist are minor ones, and concern the question of what it is that has to be defended.

A- Types of Defense

The opinions of some on this matter are limited. They say that defense means self-defense; that war is lawful for an individual, a tribe or a nation in defense of itself and its life. According to this, if the lives of a people are exposed to danger from another region, then fighting in defense of their lives is lawful for that people. In the same way, if their property is subject to aggression, then from the point of view of human rights, they have the right to defend that property which is their right.

Likewise, if a nation is faced with the aggression of another nation that wants to take possession of its wealth and perhaps carry it away, then that nation has the right to defend its wealth, even by force.

“Al-maqtulu duna ahlihi wa 'iyalihi shahidun.”

Islam tells us that whoever is killed for his property or chastity is a martyr.¹ So, in Islam, defending one's chastity, is like defending one's life and property. In fact it is superior. It is the defense of one's honor. For a nation, to defend its independence, is undeniably lawful.

So when a group wants to take away the independence of a nation and place that nation under its own mandate, if the people of that nation decide to defend themselves and pick up the gun, this action is lawful. It is, in fact, laudable and worthy of admiration.

So, defense of life, defense of wealth, property and lands, defense of independence, defense of chastity, all these are lawful defenses. No one doubts the fact that in these cases, defense is permissible and as we have said, the view that some Christians put forth about religion having to advocate peace and not war, and that war is absolutely bad and peace is absolutely good, has no logical or reasonable basis to support it. Not only is fighting for the sake of defense not wrong, but it is extremely correct in this case to fight and one of the necessities of human life. This is what is meant in the Holy Qur'an when we are told:

« And did not Allah Check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief.» (2:251)

or again:

« Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. » (22:40)

Up to this point all the scholars are more or less in agreement.

B- Human Rights

There exists the question, however, of whether the things we are allowed to defend are only these enumerated, i.e. individual, group and national rights, or whether it is legitimate for us to defend other things as well. Are there other things such that the defense of them is also necessary and obligatory, things that do not pertain merely to the rights of the individual, tribe or nation but pertain literally to the rights of humanity as a whole? If somewhere a right of humanity is somehow encroached upon, is it legitimate to fight it? Is war fought for the sake of humanity lawful or not?

Perhaps someone will ask: "What does fighting for the sake of humanity mean?" "I do not have to fight for any rights except my own personal rights, or, at the most, the rights of my nation." "What have I to do with the rights of humanity?" This mode of thinking, however, is in no way valid.

There exist certain things that are superior to the rights of the individual or nation. These things are more holy and more sacred, and the defense of them in accordance to the human conscience is higher than the defense of individual rights. And these are the sacred values of humanity. In other words, the sacredness of fighting in defense lies not in defending one's self, but in defending "the right." When the cause and criteria is "the right," what difference does it make whether it is an individual right or a general right of humanity? In fact, defense of the rights of humanity is holier, and although no one says so, it is freely admitted in actions.

For example, freedom is reckoned as one of the sacred values of humanity. Freedom is not limited to an individual or a nation.

Now, if it is not our freedom and not the freedom of our country, but freedom in another

corner of the world that pertains to the right of humanity which is being infringed upon, is the defense of that right of humanity, simply for the sake of defending a human right, lawful for us or not? If it is lawful, then defense is not limited to the actual individual whose freedom is in danger, but it is lawful, even obligatory for other individuals and other nations to rush to the aid of freedom, and fight against the negator and repressor of freedom. Now, what is your answer? I do not think anyone has any doubt that the holiest form of jihad and the holiest form of war is that which is fought in defense of humanity and humanity's rights.

When the Algerians were at war with the French colonialists, a group of Europeans helped them in the war - either in the form of actually fighting alongside the Algerians, or in other ways. Do you think that only the fighting of the Algerians was lawful because their rights were transgressed, and that the people who came from the farthest corners of Europe to take part in the battle to help the Algerian nation were no more than oppressors and aggressors, who should have been told: "Stop your interference, what business is it of yours?"

No one has transgressed your rights, why are you fighting here?" Or is it that the jihad of such people was holier than the jihad of the Algerians, because the Algerians were defending the cause of their own rights, while the cause of the others was more ethical and more sacred than that of the Algerians. Obviously what holds valid is the second assumption.

Freedom lovers - both those who are in reality freedom lovers, and those who only pretend to be - have earned general respect: a respect from the different nations, due to their having presented themselves as defenders of human rights, not the defenders of their own individual rights or the rights of their own nation or even their own continent.

If they were ever to go beyond the use of the tongue, the pen, their letters, and lectures, and actually go to the battlefield and fight, for the Palestinians for example, or the Viet Cong, then the world would consider them to be even more holy. It would not attack them saying: "Why are you interfering? It is none of your business. No one is interfering in your affairs."

The world considers war, whenever it is for the sake of defense, to be holy. If it is in self-defense, it is holy. If it is for the defense of one's nation, it is more holy, for the cause has grown from a personal one to a national one, and the individual is not simply defending himself but is also defending the other individuals that make up his society. And if the defense shifts from a national to a humanitarian cause, it again becomes a degree more holy.

C- The Minor Dispute

Here then is the nature of the dispute about jihad; not a major dispute but a minor one. The dispute is not about whether jihad is only lawful in defense or is also lawful for defense. The dispute is over the definition of defense. This minor dispute is about whether the meaning of defense is limited to whether the defense of humanity can be contained in a broader category that also includes self-defense, and within that category, the defense of one's nation.

Some say, and they are right, that the defense of humanity is also a legitimate defense. Thus, the cause of those who rise to "command that which is recognized and forbid what is rejected" is a holy one. It is possible that someone's actual being is not transgressed; he

may even be highly respected and all the facilities of life may be available to him, and the same may apply to the material rights of his nation.

But, from the point of view of human ideals, a basic human right is being transgressed. Meaning that within his society, although neither the material rights of that society nor his own individual rights have been transgressed, there yet exists a task awaiting to be performed in the best interest of humanity. Namely, when good and evil exist in society, the former must be enjoined and fashioned into the social order while the latter must be uprooted.

Now, under these conditions, if such a person sees that the good, the recognized, the accepted, has been relegated to the place of the bad and rejected, and that the rejected has taken the place of the recognized, and he stands up for the sake of commanding what is recognized and prohibiting what is rejected, then what is he defending? Is he defending his own personal rights? No. Is he defending the rights, i.e. the material rights, of his individual society?

Again, the answer is no. His defense is not related to material rights. What he is defending is a spiritual right that belongs to no single person or nation. He is defending a spiritual right related to all the world's human beings. Are we to condemn the jihad of that man, or are we to consider it sacred? Obviously, we are to consider it sacred, for it is in the defense of a right of humanity.

On the question of freedom, you see today that the very people who are combating freedom, in order to give themselves an air of respectability, claim to be the defenders of freedom. This is so because they know that defense of freedom is tacitly understood as being sacred. If they were really fighting for the defense of freedom, this would be valid, but they are falsely attributing their transgressions to the defense of freedom. Yet even in this is their acknowledgment of the fact that the rights of humanity are worthy of defense, and that war for the sake of those rights is legitimate and beneficial.

D- Tawhid: A Personal Right or a General Right?

Now, an important matter must be looked at about tawhid, "La ilaha illallah" ("There is no god but (except) God (Allah))." Does tawhid pertain to the rights of humanity, or to the rights of the individual? Here it is possible for a Muslim to say that tawhid does not pertain to the rights of humanity but pertains only to the affairs of the individual, or at most, to the internal affairs of a nation; that he himself can be "muwahid,"² he has the choice of being "muwahid" if he wants to be, or a mushrak (polytheist), if he wants to be, and now that he has become muwahid, no one has the right to trouble him for it; it is his personal right, and, if someone else becomes a mushrik, then that is the right of that person.

Any single nation in its laws can choose one of the following three positions: One is that it chooses tawhid and adopts it as the official religion and officially rejects any other religion. Another is that a form of shirk, of polytheism is established as the official religion, and the other is that the nation allows freedom of worship whereby one can choose whatever religion or creed one desires.

If tawhid is embodied in the law of a nation then it is one of the rights of that nation and if not, it is not one of its rights. This is one way of looking at things. There is another view, however, which regards tawhid as being like freedom and pertaining to the rights of humanity.

When discussing freedom we said the right of freedom is not simply the right of the individual to be free from threats from any quarter, for it is possible it may be threatened by the very individual. So, if a people fight for tawhid to combat shirk (polytheism), their fight is motivated by defense, not by subjugation, tyranny and transgression. This, then, is the nature of the minor difference in question.

Even amongst the learned of Islam there are two views. According to some of them, tawhid pertains to the general rights of humanity. Then, fighting for the sake of tawhid is lawful, for it is the defense of a human right and is like fighting for another nation's freedom. Another group argues that tawhid pertains to individual rights and perhaps to national rights, but has nothing to do with the rights of humanity. Accordingly, no one has the right to trouble anyone else for the sake of tawhid.

Which of the two views is correct?

I intend to state my own view on this subject. But before doing so, I would like to speak about another issue, and perhaps on reaching a conclusion, the two issues will be seen as a single one. The point is that some affairs may be accepted under duress, i.e. accepted under compulsion, whereas some others as per their nature, must be freely selected.

Imagine an individual becomes infected with a deadly disease and has to accept taking an injection. In such a case, the infected individual can be forced to take the injection. If he refuses it, others can come and his hands and feet can be forcefully tied so that he takes it. If he continues to resist, the injection can be administered while he is unconscious. This scenario is acceptable under duress.

The acceptance of other things, however, cannot be forced through compulsion, for other than by free choice, there is no way they can be accepted. Among such things we find the purification of the self, for example, and the refinement of one's behavior. If we want to refine people so that they come to recognize and accept virtues as virtues and evils as evils and refrain from faulty human behavior so that they eventually reject falsehood and embrace the truth, we cannot do so by the whip; we cannot do so by force.

With a whip, it is possible to prevent someone from stealing, but it is not effective in making an honest individual out of someone. For if such things were possible, then, for example, if the self of a person was in need of purification and his personal behavior was sadly lacking in good morals and ethics, a hundred lashes meted to him would make of that person somebody with good morals and ethics.

Instead of a good education, the teachers would simply use the whip and say: "So that this person throughout his life, always tells the truth and finds lies repulsive, he is to be given a hundred lashes, and thereafter he will never tell a lie." The same thing applies to love. Can one force a person to love another by the whip? Love and affection cannot be forced upon someone. No forces in the world, even if taken together, cannot force love upon somebody nor take away his love for somebody.

Having made clear this point, I wish to say that faith, regardless of whether it is a basic right of humanity or not, is, by its very nature, not something that can be imposed by force. If we want to create faith, we should know that it is not possible to create it by force. Faith means belief and inclination. Faith means being attracted to and accepting a set of beliefs, and attraction to a belief calls for two conditions. One condition is that the matter must accord with the intellect: this is the scientific aspect of faith.

The other is the emotional aspect; the human heart should be attracted to faith. Neither of these comes within the realm of force. Not the first condition, because thinking is subject to logic - if it is desired that a child be taught the solution of a mathematical problem, he must be taught in a logical way so that he finds credence in it. He cannot be taught by the whip. His intellect will not accept a matter through force, and beating. The same applies to the second condition, the emotional quality that stimulates inclination, attraction and sentiment.

According to this, there is a huge difference between tawhid as a right of humanity and things other than tawhid, such as freedom. Freedom is something that can be imposed on a people by force, because transgression and oppression can be prevented by force. But living freely and the freedom-loving spirit cannot be imposed by force. It is not possible to force a person to accept a belief or to forcibly create faith in a certain thing within his heart. This is the meaning of "La ikraha fid-din. Qat-tabayanar-rushdo min al-ghayy," meaning there is no compulsion in religion.

When the Qur'an says that there is no compulsion in religion, it does not mean that, though it is possible for religion to be imposed by force, we must not impose it and must leave people to adopt any religion they want. No. What the Qur'an is saying is that religion cannot possibly be imposed.

That which can be imposed under compulsion is not religion. To the Bedouin Arabs, who had recently accepted Islam without having perceived the nature of its essence and without Islam having influenced their hearts, who were claiming to have "faith," the Qur'an gave this reply:

« The desert Arabs say, "We believe." Say, "Ye have no faith; but ye (only)say, 'We have submitted our wills to Allah,' For not yet has Faith entered your hearts.» (49:14)

In Qur'anic terms, "the desert Arabs" refers to the Bedouin desert nomads. The nomads came to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (May Allah's blessings be upon him and his noble Household) claiming to have faith. The Holy Prophet was instructed to tell them that they did not have true belief. Only that when they had said they had become Muslims, i.e. had made the verbal declaration, had done that which entitled them to be superficially rated as Muslims, had recited "La ilaha illallah, Muhammadan rasulullah," could they avail themselves of the same rights that belong to a Muslim. The Prophet was to tell them, however, that that which is called faith had not yet entered their hearts.

«... For not yet has Faith entered your hearts..» (49:14)

This tells us that faith is related to the heart.

Another factor that supports our claim is that Islam does not permit taqleed (imitation) in the fundamental beliefs of religion and counts independent research as essential. The fundamental beliefs of religion are of course related to belief and faith. So it becomes clear that, in Islam, faith is a product of free thought. The faith and belief which Islam calls for cannot be acquired through non-free thoughts subject to "taqleed," force and compulsion.

So now we realize the two views of the Islamic researchers to be quite close. One group argues that tawhid pertains to the universal rights of humanity and as it is undeniably legitimate to defend the rights of humanity, so it is legitimate to defend tawhid and fight

against others for its sake. The other group claims that there is absolutely no legitimate way that tawhid can be defended, and, if a nation is polytheistic, we are not permitted to fight it on that account.

Now, the proximity of both views lies in the fact that, even if we consider tawhid to be a human right, we cannot fight another nation to impose the belief in tawhid upon them. This is because, as we have seen, by the very nature of its essence, tawhid is not something that can be imposed. There is another point also. If we reckon tawhid as a right of humanity and if we see that it is in the best interests of humanity and if tawhid demands, then it is possible for us to fight a nation of polytheists. But, we cannot fight them to impose tawhid and faith, for we know that tawhid and faith cannot be imposed.

We can, however, fight the polytheists in order to uproot evil from their society. Ridding a society of evil, polytheistic beliefs is one thing, while imposing the belief of tawhid is another.

According to the view of those who consider tawhid to pertain to the rights of the individual or at most to the rights of a nation, this is not permissible. The predominant line of thought in the West, which has also penetrated the ranks of us Muslims, is exactly this.

The Europeans regard issues such as tawhid as personal issues unimportant to life, and perceive it as more or less a custom from which each nation has the right to choose. On this basis, it is held that even for the sake of uprooting evil, no one has the right to combat polytheism, because polytheism is not iniquity, and tawhid is a purely personal issue.

If, on the other hand, we consider tawhid to be a universal issue, one pertaining to the rights of humanity and one of the conditions for humanity's general welfare and prosperity, then we see it as permissible to commence war with the mushrikin for the sake of the demands and defense of tawhid. Such war is justifiable in order to uproot corruption, even though war for the sake of imposing the tawhidic³ belief is itself not permissible.

Here we are entering upon a different issue, namely whether fighting for the freedom of the "call" is permissible or not. What does it mean - fighting for the freedom of the call? It means that we must have the freedom to propagate a certain faith and belief to any nation. Not the generally current propagation which aims solely at propaganda, but propagation in the sense that we just explained. Nothing more.

And now, whether we consider freedom to be a universal human right, or tawhid to be so, or both of them to be universal human rights, to do this is definitely lawful. Now, if a barrier arises against our calls, like some power, say, presenting itself as an obstacle, denying us permission, saying that we will impair the mind of its nation - and we know that most governments consider as impairing all thinking which may encourage the people to revolt against them - if such a regime sets itself up as a barrier to the call of truth, is it permissible to fight against it until it falls and the barrier against the call broken down, or is this not permissible?

Yes, this is also permissible. This would be for the cause of defense. This would be one of those jihads, the actual nature of which is defense.

E- The Measure of Rights - Individual and Universal

So far we have seen that the essence of jihad is defense. There is now just one issue that

remains, which is whether, in our view, tawhid pertains to the universal rights of humanity, or to the personal rights of an individual, or at the most, to the rights of a nation. What we have to do is look at the criteria for personal rights, universal rights of humanity and see what they are. In some things human beings are all the same, while in some other, they are different.

Human beings differ in so many ways that no two persons are exactly the same in every detail. Just as there are no two persons having the same physical characteristics, so there are no two persons with the same spiritual characteristics. Universal rights concern the command demands and needs of all human beings, and the universal interest in this. Freedom means the absence of obstacles against the flowering of the individual's natural potentials, and relates to all of humanity.

Freedom for me has exactly the same value as it has for you. It has the same value for you as it has for others. Between you and me, however, there exist many differences, and these pertain to the "personality," because they are personal differences. Just as color and physique differ among human beings, so too do personalities differ. I may like clothes of a certain color, while you like those of a different color. I may like to live in one town, while you prefer another one. I may arrange and decorate my home in one way, while you choose a different way. I may select one subject for study, while you select another.

These are all personal issues, for which, no one can be bothered. Thus no one has the right to compel someone to marry a particular person, for marriage is a personal issue and in choosing a marriage partner, everyone has his own taste to suit. Islam says that no one must be compelled in choosing his or her partner because this choice is one's personal right. The Europeans who say that no one must be bothered for the sake of tawhid or faith, say so because they think that these two concepts are amongst the personal concerns of the individual, are issues of the personality, individual matters of taste. To them, religion is something which brings entertainment to all human beings.

In their view, it is like art; one person likes Hafiz, another likes Sa'adi, another likes Maulavi, another likes Khayam, another Ferdowsi⁴ and no one must bother the one who likes Sa'adi saying: "Why do you like Sa'adi? I like Hafiz. You also have to like Hafiz." To them religion is just this. One person chooses Islam, while another chooses Christianity, another chooses Zoroastrianism, while yet another, cannot be bothered about any of them.

No one must be troubled. Religion in the view of these Europeans is not related to the core of life, to the path of human life. This is their basic supposition, and between their line of thought and ours, there exists a world of difference. Religions like their own religions must be as they say, but to us, religion means the "siratul-mustaqim," the "straight path" of humanity. Being indifferent to religion means being indifferent to the straight path, to the real path of progress, of humanity.

We say that tawhid is the pillar of well-being, prosperity and happiness of mankind, and is not merely the personal concern of the individual or the sole concern of this or that group. Accordingly, the truth lies with those who believe tawhid pertains to the rights of humanity. If, at the same time, we say that war for the imposition of tawhid is not permissible, it is not because tawhid pertains to those affairs which must not be defended and not to humanity's general rights. Rather, it is because the very nature of tawhid does not allow it to be imposed, as the Qur'an confirms: "la ikraha fid-din."

F- Freedom of Thought or Freedom of Belief

Another point which should be stressed here is that there exists a difference between “freedom of thought” and “freedom of belief.” Human beings are endowed with the faculty of thought which enables them to make decisions on the basis of thought, logic and reason. But belief entails a strong tie to the object of belief. And, by the way, numerous are the beliefs that are not based on thought, but are sheer imitation, a result of upbringing and habits, and which even molest human freedom. What we say, looking at things from the point of view of freedom, is that what mankind must have, is freedom of thought.

Yet there are some beliefs which are not in the least degree rooted in thought. They have their root in the mere dormancy and stagnation of the spirit, handed down from generation to generation; they are the essence of bondage, so that war fought for the sake of eliminating such beliefs is war fought for the freedom of humanity, not war fought against it. If a man prays for his needs to a self-made idol, then, in the words of the Qur’an, that man is lower than an animal.

This means that the act of this man is not based at all on thought. A little bit of thinking would not allow him to engage in such an act. What he does is merely a reflection of the stagnation and dormancy which have appeared in his heart and in his soul, and which are rooted in blind imitation. This person must be forcibly freed from the internal chains which shackle him, to enable him to think. So, those who recommend the freedom of imitation and apparent freedoms which in fact enchain the soul’s freedom of belief are in error. What we advocate, in accordance to the verse “la ikraha fid-din,” is the freedom of thought.

1. “Shahid,” i.e. martyr, one of the highest stations a Muslim can attain. The statement is a tradition of the Holy Prophet.
2. A “Muwahid” is a person who accepts the reality of Tawhid.
3. “Tawhidic,” which the translator has noticed in English texts, seems to be an anglicized noun from the Arabic word “tawhid” and meaning, pertaining to tawhid.
4. All notable Muslim poets.

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