

**Islam**  
**and**  
**The Issue of Violence**

**From the Kharijites to ISIS**

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**Had you been severe and harsh-hearted,  
they would have deserted you.**

*Qur'an, sura 3, 159*

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Mercy unto All Creatures</b> .....	6
<b>The Kharijites (Dissenters): The Initiators of the Excommunication of Muslim</b> .....	18
<b>Violence in the Umayyad Period</b> .....	24
<b>The Culture of Violence</b> .....	37
<b>The Islamic Code of Law and Violence</b> .....	47
<b>The Question of the Excommunication of Muslims</b> .....	51
<i>Jihad</i> and Violence.....	57
<b>Answers to Objections</b> .....	60
<b>References</b> .....	72

## Introduction

There have been thinkers who have categorically rejected violence affirming that nothing can excuse the use of violence. For example, towards the end of his life, Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) came to this belief relying on the Christian teachings that are stated in Matthew (5: 39-41):

But I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Tolstoy comments on the biblical teachings as follows

“Resist not evil” means *never* resist, *never* oppose violence; or, in other words, *never* do anything contrary to the law of love. If anyone takes advantage of this disposition and affronts you, bear the affront, and do not, above all, have recourse to violence. (*My Religion*, 9)

Obviously, he accepts the teachings in general and absolute terms and considers them as the only way to redeem humanity. However, it seems clear that a superfluity of forbearance is not always redemptive: in conformity with the literal meanings of the general teachings, one is bound to let oppressors and even criminals go free with impunity. This can be self-defeating since it takes away the rights of the oppressed and eventually promotes violence.

Accordingly, other Western thinkers are opposed to the generality of such teachings and their practicality, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes in his *Social Contracts*: “Christianity is a totally spiritual religion, uniquely concerned with heavenly matters. The Christian’s homeland is not of the world” (IV: viii, 126).

One may even tend to say that Matthew's Gospel either missed the exact context of Jesus' Sermon or reported it exaggeratedly; hence the Gospel did not convey his teachings truthfully. In any case, although extreme forbearance is not socially justifiable, excessive violence is far worse in that it is more destructive to the individual's character and has more harmful impacts on society.

From the Islamic perspective, the principles of mercy and tolerance are of paramount importance since they do not allow violence to take over and become deeply entrenched in Islamic society. This does not mean that all the penal code should be suspended because the just punishment of criminals is in its turn considered as mercy to society; justice and mercy do not negate each other.

In this treatise, with examples from *Qur'an* and Prophet Muhammad's traditions and his attitudes towards friends and foes, we will illustrate that forgiveness, clemency and leniency prevail in Islam which destroys the bases of violence and harshness as the only measures to provide security in society. Here we will also recount how harshly some Islamic sects have behaved towards other Muslims; this will cast light on how the extremists pursue harsh, violent judgments to declare other Muslims as unbelievers. The very fact explains why the Prophet was so anxious about Muslims' future when, in his last pilgrimage to Mecca (the Farewell Pilgrimage), he enjoined them: "O people! Listen to my words for I do not know whether I will ever meet you in this place after this year. O people! Surely, your blood and property are inviolable until you meet your Lord," (Ibn Hishām, vol. 4, 206).

It is so regrettable that some Muslim groups have invented excuses for killing other Muslims by labeling them as unbelievers, and thus they made Islam, the religion of mercy and justice, be depicted for outsiders as a religion of mere violence. Is there any light at the end of this dark tunnel?

## **Mercy unto All Creatures**

Addressing Prophet Muhammad, *Qur'an* says, “We have not sent you but as mercy unto all creatures” (21:107). It should be noted that the Quranic verse does not simply say that he has been sent as mercy to all creatures, but it says that he has NOT been sent BUT as mercy to them, that is to say, his divine mission does not essentially conform to violence as a predominant principle; in his religion, violence is considered accidental and an unfortunate necessity.

Now let's see how this widespread mercy to all people was made manifest in the Prophet's life. To this end, we need first to start with *Qur'an* to learn how emphatically it recommends forgiveness and leniency to the Prophet. Then, we will invoke books of history and biography to illustrate his behaviors towards his friends and foes.

### ***Qur'an* and Leniency**

In *Qur'an*, we read:

It is by the mercy of Allah that you dealt gently with them (i.e. the Prophet's followers). Had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have deserted you. Therefore, pardon (their faults) and ask for (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult with them on the issues; then when you (finally) reach a decision, put your trust in Allah. Allah loves those who put their trust in Him. (3: 159)

One of the important points that the Qur'anic verse implies is that even if a prophet, with his high spiritual position, is harsh and hardhearted, he will be expected to be abandoned by his followers, let alone those who are totally lacking

in such a position and wish to gather people to establish their rule through cruelty and violence. One may ask rhetorically: How long did Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf’s bloody, brutal rule last?<sup>1</sup> “Lasting rule only belongs to Wisdom, neither to a tyrant nor to a man of bloodlust,” as an Arab poet puts it.<sup>2</sup>

The aforesaid Qur’anic verse implies the Prophet’s kindness and mercy towards *the believers*, as another verse rephrases it:

Now a messenger (i.e. the Prophet) has come to you from amongst yourselves; it grieves him to see what distresses you; he is extremely caring for you; to the believers, he is kind and merciful. (9:128)

Yet, *Qur’an* does not restrict the Prophet’s pardon and kindness to his followers; sometimes the holy book does not withhold his forgiveness even from his perfidious enemies as it tells him about the Jews in Medina:

You will not cease to find them, except a few, ever bent on treacheries, but forgive them and spare them from your rebuke for Allah loves those who do good deeds. (5: 13)

Two points should be noted here: Firstly, this Qur’anic verse is part of a chapter (*sura*) which was revealed to the Prophet in Medina towards the end of his life, that is, when he was at the peak of his sovereignty. Secondly, in addition to instructing the Prophet to forgive the Jews, *Qur’an* even instructs him to spare them from his rebuke since the Arabic root *safh* conveys the very meaning, as the noted lexicographer Rāghib Isfahānī in his book *On Odd Qur’anic Words* writes, “*Safh* means to cease to reproach somebody for doing something wrong, and this meaning is more telling than forgiveness (*‘afw*)” (282).

Above and beyond this directive, *Qur’an* at times instructs the Prophet to return people’s misdeeds with good so as to transform their enmity to friendship, as it states:

Good deeds and evil deeds are not equal. Return (the evil ones) with what is better, then you will find the person between whom and you there exists enmity will be as if he were your intimate friend. (41:34)

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1. The translator’s note: Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (661–714) was the most notorious governor who served the Umayyad Caliphate. Ḥajjāj’s tyrannical 20-year rule over Iraq is well known in history.

2. The translator’s note: The line is from a poem by Badawī Al-Jabal (1907–1981), a Syrian contemporary poet.

This Qur'anic instruction is not peculiar to the Prophet, but it is directed to his true followers as well:

For those who patiently preserve, seeking the countenance of their Lord, establish regular prayers, give secretly and openly out of what We have provided them, *and repel evil with good*, there exists glorious destiny in the (eternal) home. (13:22)

*Qur'an* also states:

Let them (i.e. the Muslims) forgive and spare (the guilty people) from rebuke; do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? Allah is oft-forgiving and merciful (24:22).

Similarly, *Qur'an* instructs the Prophet to treat with consideration and consolation the captives who are most likely to have killed Muslim during the war:

O Prophet! Say to those who are captives in your hand: "If Allah finds any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you for Allah is oft-forgiving and merciful" (8: 70).

Ironically, some of these captives were from a tribe who used to torture or kill Muslims in the past.

The Qur'anic verses which state such high standards of humane treatment and virtuous qualities are not limited to the examples mentioned above, but, for our purpose they suffice. Therefore, we proceed to give examples from books of history and biography so as to illustrate the Prophet's graceful treatment of his enemies in particular.

### **The Prophet's Magnanimity**

Subsequent to their victories, the world's radical revolutions have usually been followed by periods of horrifying bloodshed. By studying the histories of the Russian and French revolutions, one can see the full extent of violence and vendetta following their victories. In the Russian revolution, for instance, Tsar Nicholas II, despite his resignation, and his family of the House of Romanov, including his thirteen-year-old son, were all killed by firing squad. Their bodies, then, were doused in sulfuric acid and dumped in a pit (Massie, 3-24).

In the great revolution of Muhammad which reached its triumphant zenith with the conquest of Mecca, it was mostly expected that, in retaliation for the

crimes which had been committed by the idolaters of Quraish against the Muslims and in revenge for the Battle of Uḥud,<sup>3</sup> he should have taken very harsh action against Quraish. That is why, according to Wāqidī's narrative in his book, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (the military campaigns of Prophet Muhammad), Sa'd ibn 'Ubāda of Khazraj, the Muslim army's standard-bearer, as he entered Mecca, shouted: "Today is the day of bloodshed; today inviolability is removed; today Quraish is humiliated by Allah." However, after this news had reached the Prophet, he announced, "Today is the day of mercy; today Allah shows his regard to Quraish." Then, he immediately removed Sa'd from his position as the standard-bearer and gave the standard to Sa'd's son, Qais ibn Sa'd (vol. 2, 821). According to Ṭabarī and Ibn Hishām, he gave the standard to Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (Ibn Hisham, vol. 2, 407; Ṭabarī, vol.2, 56). Afterwards, the Prophet stood by the door of Kaaba addressing Quraish: "O people of Quraish! Allah has taken away from you the arrogance of (Pre-Islamic) ignorance and the proud boast of lineage. Man is from Adam, and Adam is from dust." Then he recited the Qur'anic verse:

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female and made you in nations and tribes so that you know one another. Verily, the most honored of you with Allah is the one who has taqwā (i.e. piety). Allah is omniscient and all-aware. (49:13)

He continued, "O people of Quraish! What do you think that I will do with you?" They replied, "Good, for you are a magnanimous brother and the son of a magnanimous brother." He then said, "Go, for you are all free" (Ṭabarī, vol. 3, 61; Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, 412).

Wāqidī's narration in *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* is as follows:

As the Prophet came upon people who were sitting tightly next to each other around Kaaba, he said, "Praise is due to Allah, who has been sincere in His promise and has given support to His servant. He alone

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3. The translator's note: The Battle of Uḥud was fought between a force from the Muslim community of Medina led by Prophet Muhammad and a force led by Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb from Mecca at the foot of Mount Uḥud on March 23, 625. With a breach of the Prophet's orders by the Muslim archers, who left their assigned posts, the battle was doomed to be a defeat for the outnumbered Muslims, as they incurred greater losses than the Meccans. Yet, the Meccans failed to achieve their strategic aim of destroying the Prophet and his followers.

has vanquished the confederates (of the enemies). What do you say and what do you think (about my demeanor with you)?” The Meccans replied, “We think highly of you for you are a magnanimous brother and the son of a magnanimous brother, coming to power.” Then the Prophet said, “I shall tell you what my brother, Yūsuf (Joseph) said (to his guilty brothers): ‘Today let no blame be on you. May God forgive you. He is the most merciful of those who are merciful’ [Qur’an, 12:92].”

Wāqidī then quotes from the Prophet the very words which have just been mentioned from Ibn Hishām’s *the Biography of the Prophet*.

Is this humane treatment comparable to the violence perpetuated by the world’s revolutionists after their victories? One should ask whether such revolutionists as Lenin and Stalin adopted a merciful approach to their enemies after victory or they ordered mass killings with extreme brutality, transgressing the accepted norms of morality and humanity. Likewise, one should ask whether these so-called Muslims of today who have started killing their Muslim brothers or other innocent people and shelling their cities follow the Prophet or they try to emulate Stalin or even Hitler.

Upon his triumph over the Meccans, the Prophet pardoned even Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, the leader of his enemies, and Waḥshī, the killer of Ḥamza, the Prophet’s uncle. He also pardoned those guilty people who showed remorse for doing their crimes. However, there are only a few people who were executed for their remorseless murders after Mecca’s conquest. One of them was Abdullah ibn Khaṭal, whom the Prophet had sent, along with an assistant from Bani Khuzā’a, to collect alms and annual taxes (*zakāt*). In the course of the trip, Ibn Khaṭal had ordered the other man to prepare some food for him and gone to sleep. But when he had woken up, he had seen the man sleeping. Out of his anger and arrogance, he had killed the sleeping man. Then, he had reneged and joined the polytheists of Mecca, becoming an apostate. To add insult to injury, he had then recited verses abusing the Prophet, and he had had his two songstresses sing the verses whenever his guests would gather with him to drink wine. After Mecca was conquered by the Muslims, he neither came to seek the Prophet’s pardon nor expressed any

regret. Inevitably, he was sentenced to death in retribution for his crime (Wāqidī, vol. 2, 859).

Thus, he was the prophet of mercy who neither desisted from righteousness and justice in his victory nor withheld benevolence from his enemies upon his defeat. As both Qāzī ‘Iyāz Maghribī in his *Kitāb Al-Shifā bi Ta’rīf Huqūq Al-Mustafā* and Muslim in his *Sahīh* cite, when he was injured and had his front teeth broken in the Battle of Uḥud, his companions asked him to curse the Meccan unbelievers and to invoke Allah to punish them, he replied, “I was not sent as a curse but as a mercy” (Qāzī ‘Iyāz, vol. 1, 82; Muslim, vol. 4, 2007). The prophet not only declined to curse them, but, according to Al-Ghazzālī in *Ihyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, he also prayed for them: “O’ Allah! Guide my people for they are ignorant” (vol. 3, 201).

Sharqāwī writes in his *Fath al-Mubdī* that after Thamāma ibn Uthāl, a chieftain of Banu Hanīfa in Al-Yamamah, had come to Medina and embraced Islam, he swore that from then on he would not sell wheat to the people of Mecca unless the Prophet should instruct him to do so. Upon his return to Al-Yamamah, he ordered his people to withhold supplies from the Meccans. The boycott gradually began to have effect and became more and more stringent. Thereupon, they wrote to the Prophet, asking him to instruct Thamāma to resume sending them what they needed. Despite their animosity towards the Prophet, especially in the Battle of Uḥud where they had killed his close companions and injured him, he sent a letter to Thamāma instructing him to lift the boycott and resume supplies to Mecca, and Thamāma did so (vol. 3, 201).

The Prophet forbade the assassination of the adversaries (in Arabic, *‘fatk’* meaning ‘to kill someone by surprise while he or she is unaware of the danger’), as this is explicit in his *hadiths* (i.e. traditions based on reports of the sayings and activities of the Prophet). As the head of the state, if he ordered the execution of someone, it was only because the person either had murdered an innocent Muslim or had incited Arab tribes to war against Muslims, as Ka’b ibn Ashraf did (see

Wāqidī, vol. 1, 184; also see Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, 51, and Ṭabarī, vol. 2, 488), because this was tantamount to the declaration of war on the Muslim state.

Ṭabarī, in his *History* reports that the Prophet said, “Faith exerts restraint on *fatk* (i.e. killing someone by surprise while he or she is unaware of the danger); no believer commits *fatk*” (vol. 5, 363).

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in his *Musnad* reports that once Mu’āwīya ibn Abī Sufyān came from Shām (today Syria) to Medina during his rule and stopped in to see Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, in her house. Since Aisha’s brother, Muhammad ibn Abūbakr, had been killed by Mu’āwīya’s followers, she pointedly asked him, “Are you not alarmed to discover that I have had a man wait in ambush (behind the screen) to kill you by surprise?” Mu’āwīya replied readily, “You never make such an attempt on my life since I have entered a safe house and I heard the Prophet say, ‘Faith exerts restraint on *fatk*; no believer commits *fatk*’ ” (vol. 4, 92).

This instruction is in perfect harmony with the explicit, literal meaning of the Qur’anic verse: “...Therefore, if they withdraw from you, do not fight you, and wish to call a truce with you, Allah has opened NO way for you against them” (4:90). Accordingly, if the adversaries of Islam have no fighting with Muslims, Allah has left no way for Muslims to use violence against them.

Ya’qubī’s *History*, which predates Ṭabarī’s *History*, refers to non-Muslim Arab tribes, such as Banī Mudlaj, Banī Zamra and Banī Dīl, who used to say that they had no fighting with Muslims, addressing the Prophet that “We are neither with you nor against you.” The Prophet prohibited Muslims from fighting them (vol. 2, 73). This prohibition was in accordance with the abovementioned Qur’anic verse.

Therefore, the Muslims would fight only against those who initiated aggression against them, as the *Qur’an* says: “Will you not fight the people who breached their treaties, set out to expel the Prophet, and aggressively confronted you *first*?” (9:13). With all this, whenever the enemy was disposed to peace, the Prophet welcomed it to suggest that his only concern was the defense of his people

and that he was not a warmonger, as *Qur'an* instructs him: “If the enemy shows willingness towards peace, show your willingness towards it and put your trust in Allah. Verily, He is the All-hearing and the Omniscient” (8: 61).

For this reason, we observe in history that the Prophet signed a truce with the idolaters of Mecca at Hudaibīya, and, in accordance with the agreement, he asked the Muslim refugees who fled from Mecca to seek asylum in Medina to return to Mecca (see Ibn Kathīr, vol. 3, 79-80).

However, according to the books of Islamic traditions (*sunan*), when a group had declared war on the Muslim state and the Prophet sent in an army to confront them in a battle, he would advise his army with such words: “Move forward in the name of Allah and by His help and on the path of His Apostle. Do not kill any old men, any children, or any women. Do not betray one another in spoils, but rather bring them together. Put (the issues) right and do good deeds, for Allah loves those who do good deeds” (Abū Dāvūd, vol. 2, 382).

After fighting and winning a victory over the warlike enemy, the Prophet often set the captives free or negotiate with the enemy about the captives' freedom whether in exchange for the Muslim captives or by receiving a ransom for their release, as stated in *Qur'an*: “...until you have completely defeated them. And then bind them as captives whom you either set free as a favor afterwards or let be redeemed, until the war lays down its burdens (i.e. terminates)” (47: 4). The number of the captives who were pardoned and released by the Prophet is so great that space does not permit the citation of all of them. Ibn Hishām cites that only after the battle with Hawāzin, “there were six thousand captives,” (vol. 2, 488), but they were all freed by the Prophet, as the books of history (*tārīkh*) and biography (*sīra*) are unanimous about this (for example, see Wāqidī, vol. 2, 951; Ṭabarī, vol. 3, 87; Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, 489).

The Prophet used to have pity even on animals. Abū Dāvūd in his *Book of Traditions* (*Sunan*) quotes Abdullāh ibn Abbās as saying that the Prophet forbade from inciting animals to fights (as in dogfights and cockfights) (vol. 2, 367). How

could then such a noble character condone war between people? As evidenced earlier by examples from *Qur'an* and history, in Islam, war is considered to be an unfortunate necessity when Muslims find themselves confronted by a warlike enemy.

Some Christian and Jewish orientalist have introduced Islam as a religion of violence and war; it is as if their own religions were far removed from violence. In response to their claim, we should say that the Prophet and his companions, for a period of thirteen years in Mecca, warned people of such false traditions as polytheism, superstitions, and the crime of *wa'd* (i.e. burying female infants alive), calling on them to worship the only God. It was during this period that they experienced considerable harm and torture at the hands of the Meccan idolaters, as some of them, like Sumayya and Yāsir, ‘Ammār’s parents, were killed under torture. The stories of these gruesome tortures are recorded in the earliest book of the Prophet’s biography (*sīra*), i.e. Ibn Ishāq’s *Sīra*, and other books such as Ṭabarī’s *History* (vol. 12, 327) and Ibn Kathīr’s *History (Kāmil al-Tawārīkh)* (vol. 2, 45). Over all this period, neither the Prophet nor his companions drew a sword on the Meccan idolaters, but they only endured the terrible ordeal until a large number of the Muslims were forced to flee Mecca, their hometown. At last, the idolaters decided to kill the Prophet, but the Prophet left his home at night and fled to Yathrib (Medina). However, the Meccan idolaters of Quraish did not cease their animosity towards the Prophet, and they wrote a threatening letter to the people of Medina warning them if they did not kill Muhammad or not banish him, Quraish would proceed to fight them, as ‘Abdurrazzāq Ṣan’ānī has recorded in his early book, *Al-Muṣannaḥ*, the letter which says, “You have sheltered our fellow citizen (Muhammad) in your town, and, among the people of Medina, you are in a majority. We swear to Allah<sup>4</sup> if you do not kill him or not banish him from your

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4. The translator’s note: It is clearly known from the *Qur'an* (e.g. 29:61-5; 39:38) that many Pre-Islamic Arabs believed in Allah as the ‘high god’ superior to the other deities whom they also worshipped. Accordingly, these lesser deities were thought of as intermediaries between men and the supreme god, Allah (39: 3; 10: 18). In some cases (e.g. *Qur'an*, 53:19-26), the deities seem to have

town, we will seek assistance from Arab tribes against you; then we will all storm into your town to kill your militant men and to seize your women for ourselves” (vol. 5, 385).

It was under these circumstances that permission for armed resistance was granted to the Muslims, as *Qur'an* says

Permission (to fight) is given to those believers against whom war is waged since they have been wronged, and Allah is the Omnipotent who aids them with victory; they are those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly for no reason other than that they say, “Our Lord is Allah”...(22:39-40)

Islam’s all battles with Quraish, which concluded with the conquest of Mecca, went through these stages and proved to be defensive in nature. Yet, as we have seen earlier, after his victory over the Meccans, the Prophet condoned their past wrongs and granted an amnesty for his enemies.

The Western legislators have also absolutely sanctioned defensive war as opposed to offensive war. For example, the famous French lawyer and political philosopher, Montesquieu (1689 –1755) writes in his book, *The Spirit of the Laws*:

The life of governments is like that of man. The latter has a right to kill in case of natural defense: the former have a right to wage war for their own preservation. In the case of natural defense I have a right to kill, because my life is in respect to me what the life of my antagonist is to him: in the same manner a state wages war because its preservation is like that of any other being. (bk. X, 155)

On the other hand, the orientalist’s assertion that war is banned in Christianity or Judaism is totally wrong as this is clearly against what their holy books tells us. The Old Testament is explicit about the wars which Abraham and Moses had with their enemies. For example, we read in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Genesis:

And when Abram heard that his brother [i.e. his brother’s son, Lot] was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And

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been regarded angels who were called God’s daughters and could intercede with Allah on behalf of their worshippers (see Montgomery Watt, W. (2009). The Qur’ān and Belief in a “High God”. *Der Islam*, 56(2), pp. 205-211). In his *Literary History of the Arabs*, Reynold A. Nicholson thinks along the same lines: “They [i.e. the Pre-Islamic Arabs] believed vaguely in a supreme God, Allah, and more definitely in his three daughters (al-Lāt, Manāt, and al-'Uzzā) who were venerated all over Arabia and whose *intercession* was graciously accepted by Allah” (p. 135).

he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. (14-16)

We also read in the Numbers (31: 3) about Moses' war against the Midianites: "And Moses spake unto the people, saying, 'Arm some of you unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the Lord of Midian.'"<sup>5</sup> According to the Exodus (17:7-8), when Amalek came to fight Israel in Rephidim, Moses orders Joshua to "choose us out men, and go out, fight against Amalek."

Similarly, Jesus did not have any misgivings about defensive war, as, according to Luke (22:36), he said to his disciples, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Clearly, swords did not do any good except for war or defense, even though his disciples did not have a chance to use them since they were outnumbered by their enemy. Nevertheless, Jesus anticipated fighting between his followers and their close relatives, as he said, according to Matthew (10: 34-36):

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

Neither did the early Christians keep away from war; they called their crusades against Muslims as "holy wars," as Pope Urban II (c. 1042–1099) sanctioned the First Crusade (1095–1099) and encouraged all Christians to take part in it.<sup>6</sup> One may object that Urban II's sanction has nothing to do with Jesus'

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5. According to the very chapter, Moses continues to enjoin his people to kill all Midian male children and women: "Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him" (17). Compare this with the Prophet's command to his army: "Do not kill any old men, any children, or any women" (Abū Dāvūd, vol. 2, 382).

6. The translator's note: The massacre that followed the capture of Jerusalem during the First Crusade has attained particular notoriety. The eyewitness accounts from the crusaders themselves leave little doubt that there was great slaughter: Muslims were indiscriminately killed, and Jews who had taken refuge in their synagogue died when it was burnt down by the Crusaders (e.g. see Tyerman, 157–159).

teachings and it does not bring discredit on Christianity as a religion. Likewise, we argue that those cruel wars which broke out at the hands of Arab or non-Arab leaders in the Muslim world have nothing to do with the Prophet's teachings since he signed a peace treaty even with the belligerent idolaters and he never initiated a war.

## **The Kharijites (Dissenters)**

### **The Initiators of the Excommunication of Muslims**

After the Prophet's decease, disagreements arose among Muslims, but they did not resort to fighting on the pretext of declaring one another non-Muslims or accusing each other of polytheism (*shirk*). The disagreements' main focus was on political issues, but the Muslim leaders warned people of the likely dangers of disunity in the Muslim community (*umma*). With his multiple merits, Imam Ali, in particular, insisted the most on the unity of the Islamic *umma*, as he wrote in his letter: "No one is more eager for the solidarity of Muhammad's *umma* than I am; and I seek God's reward for this endeavor" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, the letter no. 78).

The first dogmatic, violent group that broke up the solidarity of the Islamic *umma* was the Kharijites who declared the other Muslims unbelievers (*kāfir*) or polytheists (*mushrik*). Their inception dates back to a civil war between the Iraqi army (under Imam Ali's leadership) and the Shāmi (Syrian) army (under Mu'āwīya's leadership). The Kharijites initially were members of the Iraqi army, but they later rejected Ali's leadership after he agreed to arbitration with Mu'āwīya. Their separation from Imam Ali's army was under the pretext that Imam Ali, according to them, had given way to man's judgment instead of God's. Although Imam Ali had reluctantly accepted the arbitration at their own insistence but rather with their own threats, they said that they admitted to their fault, but they had repented of what they had done.

In his discussion with the early Kharijites, Imam Ali pointed out that he had resigned himself to the arbitration, as the Kharijites themselves admitted to that, but he had agreed under the condition that the arbiters had to make their rulings based on *Qur'an*, or on the Prophet's traditions, if they did find no mention of the disputed issue in *Qur'an*; however, neither of the two arbiters (i.e. Abū Mūsā 'Ash'arī and 'Amr ibn 'Ās) did base their rulings on *Qur'an* or the Prophet's traditions, but they made their rulings at whim; therefore, their rulings were not sound. Imam Ali's terms and conditions had been stipulated in the contract which Ṭabarī has cited in his *History* (vol. 5, 53).

These statements have been reported by such historians as Ṭabarī, Ya'qūbī, Ibn Athīr, Dīnīvarī, and Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim. For example, Dīnīvarī has cited Imam Ali's words to the Kharijites as follows:

Do you not know that I specified as a condition for the arbiters that they had to make their ruling on the basis of the sacred scripture (i.e. *Qur'an*)? Prior to that, I had notified you that the Damascenes' proposal for arbitration had been deceptive and dishonest. Yet, when you did not accept anything but arbitration, I stipulated a provision that the two arbiters had to accept what *Qur'an* accepts and to deny what *Qur'an* denies. However, they disobeyed the sacred scripture and the Prophet's traditions and acted just as they wished. Thus, we discarded their rulings, and, now, we still hold fast to our original view. (208)

Imam Ali did not content himself with providing them with such a convincing argument, but he also asked them to choose a representative to hold a debate in their presence. They chose Abdullah ibn Kawwā' to be their leading exponent. At the end of the debate, Ibn Kawwā' asked Imam Ali, "Why did you agree with Abū Mūsā's arbitration, while he is an apostate?" Imam asked, "When did Abū Mūsā become an apostate, in your opinion? When I first sent him for arbitration, or when he made his ruling?" Ibn Kawwā' replied, "Of course, when he made his ruling." Then Imam Ali said, "You are saying that when I sent him, he was still a Muslim, but, in your opinion, he became an apostate later." He continued, "If the Prophet had sent a Muslim to unbelievers to preach monotheism and he later became an apostate, calling upon them to worship false gods instead, would the

Prophet have been deserving blame for that?” Ibn Kawwā’ answered in the negative, and Imam concluded, “Then if Abū Mūsā has gone astray, why am I being blamed? Moreover, is it fair that you put people to the sword for what only Abū Mūsā should be blamed?” (Dīnivarī, 309).

According to Muslim historians, a large number of Kharijites (about 8000) backed down after they had heard Imam Ali’s argument. However, a smaller group (about 4000) persisted in declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers and, accordingly, opposed Imam Ali’s rule. However, in response to them, Imam said:

We entitle you to have three rights as long as you are in our company:  
We do not bar you from entering the Mosques to say prayers; we do not deny you your shares from the Treasury (*bait al-māl*) as long as your hands are with ours; and we do not fight against you until you commence fighting against us. (Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 73; Ibn Athīr, vol.3, 335)

This is how the Kharijites were allowed to live freely in Kufa (the center of Imam Ali’s government) and were entitled to have the same rights as the other Muslims used to have. Nonetheless, they kept chanting anti-government slogans and attending the great mosque of Kufa to let out “there is no judgment except by Allah,” while Imam Ali was saying congregational prayers or delivering sermons (Ibn Athīr, vol.3, 334). By this slogan, they meant to refer to the arbitration and to condemn it as heresy and apostasy.

Shams al-Dīn Sarakhsi (d. around 490 A.H./1096), a renowned jurist of the Ḥanafī school, relates in his *Al-Mabsūṭ* that once Kathīr al-Ḥazramī entered the mosque of Kufa and saw five men of the Kharijites saying spiteful things about Imam Ali. He took one of them who had even sworn that he would kill Imam Ali and brought him before Imam and said, “This man swore in my presence that he would kill you.” Imam ordered him to let the man go, but he objected, “How should I let him go after he swore that he would kill you?” Imam said, “Should I punish him for something he has not done yet?!” (vol. 10, 125). Indeed, this was the extent of freedom that the Kharijites enjoyed during Imam Ali’s rule. However, the zealous Kharijites ceased neither to insult Imam nor to declare other

Muslims to be unbelievers despite the fact that Imam Ali and his followers repeatedly had discussions with them about the issue of arbitration, invoking several Qur'anic verses on it.<sup>1</sup>

The Kharijites did not content themselves with verbal, blatant opposition to Imam and the other Muslims, as they took up arms and started killing those who disagreed with them. For example, they killed Abdullah ibn Khabbāb, who was one of the Prophet's companions, and his pregnant wife. What were Abdullah and his wife's offences? They had asked Abdullah some questions about the Prophet's successors (*khulafā*) before they asked him, "What do you say about Ali ibn Abī Tālib (i.e. Imam Ali) before and after the arbitration?" Abdullah's answer to this question caused his death: "Ali is more conscious of God, more observant for his faith, and more insightful than you are." Then, they took Abdullah to a nearby stream with his hands tied behind his back and slew him, letting his blood pour into the stream. They, then, went to his wife and, without questioning, killed her, as the poor woman was crying, "I am a woman; do you not fear Allah?" and they gave no heed to her words (Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 82-83; Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 342). That was clearly against the Prophet's explicit instructions that Muslims must avoid killing women and children of unbelievers even in the state of war- let alone women and children of Muslims in the state of peace- as it is cited in Bukhārī's *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Prophet found a woman killed during one of his battles, and he strictly forbade Muslims from killing women and children (vol. 4, the chapter of "the merit of jihad," 74). However, the Kharijites killed the woman because she probably disagreed with them over the issue of the arbitration. Moreover, it is a real shock to discover that they self-righteously committed such atrocious crimes, considering themselves as true, pious Muslims. To illustrate their distorted view of piety, it suffices to mention that once one of them picked up a date from the foot of a tree and put it in his mouth. His Kharijite friend shouted at him, "How dare

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1. See *Tārīkh al-Jadal* (The History of Polemics) by Muhammad Abū Zuhra, especially the chapter of "Examples of the Kharijites' polemics," p. 141.

you eat a date without the owner's consent?" And he immediately spat it out (Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 82). What is appalling is that they did not allow themselves to eat a dry date without the owner's consent but at the same time they shed innocent blood that is the most inviolable in Islam. That is how Islamic norms and principles became distorted with them so that eating a date without the owner's consent far outweighed human's life.

### **The Crime of Killing Children**

‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī writes in his book, *Al-Farq bain al-Firaq* (the differences between sects), about al-Azāriqa, a branch of the Kharijites: “They permitted killing their opponents’ women and children, and they asserted that their children also were unbelievers, doomed to suffer in Hell forever” (102).

It is certain that such extreme, preposterous ideas are in conflict with *Qur’an*, the Prophet’s traditions, and reason. We read in *Qur’an*, “Turn truly your face towards the Faith, (that is,) Allah’s essence of creation on the basis of which He has created mankind” (30:30), as cited in a well-known hadith from the Prophet: “Every newborn is born upon the natural disposition (towards the Faith, i.e. belief in the only God)” (Muslim, vol. 4, 2048).<sup>2</sup> Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal cites in his *Musnad* that after the Prophet forbade Muslims from killing children, some of his companions told him, “But they are the unbelievers’ children.” The Prophet replied, “Are the righteous men among you not the children of unbelievers?” (vol. 3, 435). In brief, when the Prophet forbade Muslims from killing the unbelievers’ children in wartime, as mentioned earlier, how could the children be killed in peacetime?

However, finally, after the Kharijites had started killing innocent people, Imam Ali had to fight against them in the battle of Nahrawān.

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2. The translator’s note: In other words, all Adam’s descendants metaphorically answered their Lord’s question in the affirmative: “Am I not your Lord? They replied: ‘Yes!’ ” (*Qur’an*, 7: 172), that is, all humans have intrinsic tendencies towards belief in the only God.

To understand Imam Ali's leniency- which reminds us of the Prophet's- in the battle against Kharijites, one should have a look into Imam's sermons (*khutbas*) delivered when he encountered their army. In these sermons, Imam Ali did his utmost to cleanse the Kharijites' mindset of those excessive, irrational ideas (see Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 344). Then, he gave "the safety flag" to one of the Prophet's companions, i.e. Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, and he shouted, "Whoever comes under this flag will be safe" (Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 345; Dīnivarī, 210). By doing this, he managed to split another group of the Kharijites off from the rest, as one of the Kharijite chieftains, Farwa ibn Naufīl, along with five hundred horsemen, left the Kharijites' army, saying to his fellows, "I swear I do not know over what we are fighting against Ali. I see fit to withdraw from the battle until I become enlightened as to either fighting against Ali or following him" (Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 346).

Ṭabarī writes in his *History* that when the Kharijites' army lined up against Imam Ali's army, poised to fight, Imam moved toward them and stood in front of their front line calling upon them to cease fighting. Even he repeatedly sent his emissaries to their officers to invite them to stop fighting. However, they turned down his offer and even murdered his emissary (vol. 5, 92). Nevertheless, Imam instructed his army not to fight them until they start fighting (Dīnivarī, 210). Then, the Kharijites shouted, "Judgment belongs only to Allah even though the unbelievers might dislike it," and attacked Imam Ali's army. Another group of them shouted, "Onwards towards the Paradise!" and charged at Imam's army. However, the rebellion was entirely crushed soon, and the Kharijites fell prey to their ignorance and misjudgment. Having defeated them, Imam Ali ordered his followers, "Do not fight the Kharijites after me for the one who seeks the truth but he is mistaken and the one who seeks falsehood and obtained it are not alike" (*Nahj al-Balāgha*, the sermon 61).

## Violence in the Umayyad Period

After ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affwān, the third caliph, was killed, Muslims turned to Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib to take over the caliphate, but he declined and said, “Leave me alone and seek someone else for we are on the cusp of a multifaceted, multicolored state of affairs to which neither hearts will hold fast nor minds stand firm” (Ṭabarī, vol. 4, 434; Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 193; compare this with *Nahj al-Balāgha*, the sermon 92). Yet, Muslims kept insisting on their request and asked, “Do you not observe our circumstances? Do you not see what has become of Islam? Are you not aware of *Fitna* (the civil strife)?” They continued imploring him until he accepted their fealty. Nevertheless, a few of the Prophet’s companions, including S’ad ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, refused to swear fealty to him. When Imam Ali asked S’ad to take an oath of fealty, he replied, “No! Until the majority swear fealty to you, I will not do so, but I swear to God that you will come to no harm from me.” Imam told the others to let S’ad go freely. Then Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, the second caliph’s son, was brought before Imam Ali, and he also said, “Until the majority swear fealty to you, I will not do so.” He was told to introduce someone as his guarantor, but he said that he had none. Then Imam Ali said, “Let him go; I am his guarantor” (Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 191).

Abū Ḥanīfa Dīnivarī writes that Mālīk al-Ashtar, one of Imam Ali’s most loyal companions, told Imam that the fealty to him was the majority’s fealty, and hence whoever refuses it should be imprisoned to become disciplined. Imam Ali

replied, “But I will leave them taking their different views” (143). This is the very meaning of political freedom in Islam.

It is amazing that history bears witness to such great extent of Imam Ali’s leniency and tolerance. By juxtaposing this with what occurred in the Umayyad period, one can notice the marked difference between caliphate and monarchy. Now let us compare Imam Ali’s practice in his rule with Mu’āwīya I’s to realize how violent the Umayyad rule was.

The historians, Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim, Abū Ḥanīfa Dīnivarī, and Sibṭ ibn Jauzī report that during the Battle of Ṣiffīn, Imam Ali noticed a few of his men cursing Mu’āwīya and his soldiers. Imam forbade them from that, and they asked Imam whether they were on the right side, while Mu’āwīya’s army was on the wrong side. Imam replied in the affirmative. They then asked, “Why are you forbidding us from cursing them?” Imam Ali said:

I did not like you being among those who curse. Instead, pray, “Please God protect both sides from bloodshed, establish peace between us, and guide those who are unaware of the truth so that they recognize it and cease to insist on their misjudgment.” (Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim, 103; Dīnivarī, 165; compare this with *Nahj al-Balāgha*, the sermon no. 206)

On the other hand, during his rule, Mu’āwīya ibn Abī Sufyān ordered his subjects to curse Ali. He censured even some of the Prophet’s companions for not cursing Imam Ali. In Muslim’s *Saḥīḥ*, one of the six major *hadith* collections in Sunni Islam, we read:

‘Āmir, S’ad ibn Abī Waqqāṣ’s son, quoted his father as saying that he was brought before Mu’āwīya to answer the charge why he had not cursed Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, a.k.a. Abū Turāb, and S’ad replied, “I never curse him as long as I recall three things the Prophet said about him.” (vol.4, 1871, the chapter of the Companions’ merits)

Although S’ad had refused to swear fealty to Imam Ali, he then reminded Mu’āwīya of “the Hadith of Analogy (*Manzala*),”<sup>1</sup> the Prophet’s words about Ali

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1. The translator’s note: The Prophet took a journey to Tabūk, and he appointed Ali to succeed him in Medina. Ali said to the Prophet: “Do you leave me with the children and the women?” The Prophet replied: “Are you not content to be to me like Aaron to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me?” (Al-Bukhārī, in his *Saḥīḥ*, vol. 6, 3). The *hadith* is known as that of analogy (*Manzala*).

on the eve of the conquest of Khaibar,<sup>2</sup> and the Event of Mubāhala, in which Ali had taken part.<sup>3</sup> Despite this, Mu'āwīya kept giving the order to curse Imam Ali from the pulpits of the congregational mosques, even though some of the Prophet's companions and his wives strongly objected to this practice. Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal relates in his *Musnad* that once Abū Abdullah al-Jadalī came to Umm Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, and she asked him if he knew that the Prophet was being cursed by Muslims. He replied, "God forbid!" She said, "I heard the Prophet say, 'Whosoever curses Ali has cursed me'" (vol. 6, 323).

Moreover, following Mu'āwīya's order, his governors practiced fierce violence to force Muslims to curse Imam Ali. Ṭabarī writes in his *History* that Ziyād ibn Abīh, the governor of Kufa in Mu'āwīya's rule, showed rigid adherence to the order. One day he summoned Saifī ibn Fasīl, one of Imam Ali's devotees, and addressed him, "O God's enemy! What do you say about Abū Turāb (i.e. Imam Ali)?" He replied that he did not know Abū Turāb.<sup>4</sup> Ziyād said, "Do you not know Abū Tālib's son?" Saifī answered, "Yes, I do." Ziyād said, "They are one and the same." Saifī objected, "But he is Abū al-Ḥasan (Ḥasan's father) and Abū al-Ḥusain (Ḥusain's father)." Then Ziyād threatened him to beat him with his staff if he did not curse Imam Ali, but he praised Imam instead. Ziyād started beating him violently, but he continued to admire Imam. Eventually, Ziyād ordered his men to chain him up and send him to prison (vol. 5, 266). Ibn Athīr

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2. The translator's note: The Battle of Khaibar was fought in the year 628 between Muslims and the Jews of Khaibar oasis. On the battle's eve, the Prophet proclaimed, "By God, tomorrow I shall give the banner to a man who loves Allah and His Apostle, whom Allah and His Apostle love. Allah will bestow victory upon him." In the morning, the Prophet called out for Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib to carry the banner.

3. The translator's note: The Event of Mubāhala was a debate between Prophet Muhammad and the Christians of Najrān in which either of the sides was supposed to call God's curse down upon whichever of the two parties was not speaking truthfully. To the Christians' surprise, the Prophet took his closest kindred (Ali, Fātima, Ḥasan and Ḥusain) with him to the debate, and the Christians withdrew.

4. The translator's note: Abū Turāb (literally meaning "the father of dust") is one of Imam Ali's titles. According to some narrations the title was given to him by the Prophet, when he found Ali sleeping while his clothes were covered with dust. In the Umayyad period, the title was used as a derogatory title for Imam Ali.

writes about Ziyād ibn Abīh that “he used to apprehend people on suspicion and punish them in doubt” (vol. 3, 450). The day that he was appointed by Mu’āwīya as the governor of Kufa, he delivered a sermon, which is known as “the defective sermon,”<sup>5</sup> and, in his sermon, he said, “By God, I will punish a friend in his friend’s place... and the innocent in the offender’s place” Then one of the Kharijites who was present there objected, “But the Holy *Qur’an* apprizes us otherwise when it says, ‘No bearer of burdens carries another’s burdens’[53:38] ” Ziyād replied, “We will find no way to what you and your fellows wish except that we spill your blood for that!” (Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 450).

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih writes in his *Al-‘Iqd al-Farīd* (The Unique Necklace) that while Ziyād was delivering a speech, a man asked him, “Who is your father?”<sup>6</sup> Ziyād pointed to the commander of his police and said, “This man will let you know of that.” And the commander stood up and beheaded him (vol. 1, 76).

Another violent figure of Mu’āwīya’s period is Samura ibn Jundab, who used to sit in for Ziyād in Kufa when the latter would go to Basra and, after Ziyād’s death, was appointed by Mu’āwīya as Kufa’s governor for six months before he was dismissed by Mu’āwīya. Ṭabarī quoted him in *The History* as saying, “May Heaven’s curse be on Mu’āwīya! By Allah, if I had obeyed Allah the way that I obeyed Mu’āwīya, He will never punish me” (vol. 5, 291). Ibn Athīr writes that Muhammad ibn Sīrīn, a scholar from Basra, said that in order to please Mu’āwīya, Samura ibn Jundab had killed more than 8000 people, in Ziyād’s absence from Kufa. On his return, Ziyād asked him, “Are you not afraid of having killed innocents among so many people?” He answered, “I would not be afraid if I had to kill another 8000” (vol. 3, 462; also see Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 237). Abū al-Sawwār al-‘Adawī said, “Samura in one morning killed 47 members of my tribe all of whom knew *Qur’an* by heart” (Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 463). Ṭabarī writes in his *History* that

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5. The translator’s note: The sermon is called as such since it did not commence with the praise of God.

6. The translator’s note: Ziyād was of unknown parentage due to his mother’s promiscuity. Therefore, he was called “ibn Abīh” (son of his father) because of his problematic lineage.

Suleimān ibn Muslim al-‘Ijlī quoted his father as saying that once he had seen a man paying his annual tax (*zakat*) to Samura before he entered the Kufa Mosque; then, the man went to the mosque to say his prayers; all of a sudden, one of Samura’s agents came to the mosque and decapitated the man, as he was saying his prayers (vol. 5, 292).

The pretext of these atrocious murders usually was that someone was among Imam Ali’s devotees, dissatisfied with Mu’āwīya’s rule, and/or unwilling to curse Imam Ali. Mu’āwīya and his men thought of violence as a means of everlasting sovereignty; this was the supposition that all ambitious, tyrannical rulers throughout history have incurably held fast to. But one may wonder if the very supposition still appeals to Muslim extremists. In the coming pages, we will explore this in more detail.

Busr ibn Abī Artāt was another example among the Umayyad state’s bloodthirsty, staunch supporters. Mu’āwīya sent him in at the head of 3000 men from Shām (Shaam, today Syria) to Medina, where he met with little resistance. Then, from Medina he went to Mecca and to Yemen, where he slaughtered two innocent children of ‘Ubaidullah ibn ‘Abbās, Imam Ali’s cousin and his agent in Yemen. ‘Ubaidullah had left his two children with a man from Bani Kanāna. As Busr set out to butcher the children, the man from Bani Kanāna said to him, “If you want to kill these two innocent children, you must first kill me.” Busr killed the man and then slaughtered the children to give Mu’āwīya, on his return to Shām, the news of his courage! (See: Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 140). Surprisingly, Busr considered himself a Muslim and apparently had respect for the Prophet since when in Mecca he came across Abū Mūsā Ash’arī, who was afraid that Busr would kill him, Busr reassured him, “I never will cause the Prophet’s companion any harm” (Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 139).

The idea of the killing of children, as a legacy from the Kharijites and the Umayyad period, unfortunately persists in the hard-line, superficial minds of those extremist Muslims who attack schools today. Such a violent behavior is far

removed from the Islamic teachings and closely linked to the temperaments of some primitive tribes in Pre-Islamic Arabia or elsewhere. How can Islam that instructs pity even on animals support such barbarities?

### **“Obligatory” Oath of Fealty to Yazīd**

As demonstrated by historical documents, Imam Ali never forced people into taking oaths of fealty for himself. Mu’āwīya, however, neglected the freedom of choice in swearing fealty to his son Yazīd. Although there still existed people among the Prophet’s family and companions who were much more qualified in terms of piety and statesmanship, Mu’āwīya not only did not leave the Muslim council (*shūrā*) with the task of introducing the new caliph but also imposed on Muslims his will to give the succession to his son, as Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, the second caliph’s son, once told Mu’āwīya that he had turned caliphate into the autocratic rule of Caesar and Khosrow (Ibn Qutaiba, 196).

Ibn Athīr writes in his *History* that Mu’āwīya designated guards to stand up above the heads of the four men who were opposed to Yazīd’s rule, that is, Ḥusain ibn Ali (the Prophet’s grandson), Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, Abdullah ibn Zubair, and Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abūbakr, and he specified that the guards had to behead any of them who would utter a word during his speech. Mu’āwīya then ascended the pulpit and pointed to those four men, addressing people: “These four are most respected people who have given consent to Yazīd’s rule and have sworn fealty to him. O people! Swear fealty to Yazīd in the name of Allah!” (vol. 3, 511). The consequences of this coercion most terribly came to the fore during Yazīd’s three-and-half-year rule: In the first year, Ḥusain ibn Ali and his companions were martyred and his family was held in captivity by Yazīd’s order; in the second year, during the Event of Ḥarrah, Yazīd ordered the massacre of people of Medina, the place of the Prophet’s sanctuary, and his army looted the city for three consecutive days and committed heinous crimes such as rape and killing infants; and, in the third year, Yazīd’s army employed catapults to bombard with stones Mecca, where Abdullah ibn Zubair had sought asylum to, and, consequently, burned the

Kaaba down. These three crimes are among the most abhorrent crimes in the history of Islam, figuring prominently in the lists of Umayyad crimes, even though a group of narrow-minded Muslims do not still cease to defend the Umayyads despite these historical facts. For example, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a book entitled *Yazīd ibn Mu'āwīya, The Slandered Caliph* (by Hazzā' ibn 'Id al-Shimrī) has been published to give an embellished account of what happened in Yazīd's rule. While, according to Ibn Taimīyya, Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, the imam of Ḥanbalites, gives the fatwa as to the refusal of any hadith (i.e. a report of the sayings or actions of the Prophet) from Yazīd, it is not clear why a group who consider themselves as Ḥanbalites in Islamic law still defend Yazīd so avidly. Ibn Taimīyya writes, "Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal was asked whether it was allowed to write any hadith from Yazīd. He answered, 'No! No, due to the prominence of hadith! Was Yazīd not the one who did what he did in Ḥarrah?' "(133).

What exactly did Yazīd's army do during the Event of Ḥarrah in Medina? Ahmad ibn Abī Ya'qūb, a. k. a. Ya'qūbī, whose *History* predates Ṭabarī's, affirms that after Medina's people had refused to swear fealty to Yazīd, he sent in Muslim ibn 'Uqba at the head of 3000 soldiers to Medina. The troops fought the people of Medina, defeated them and entered the city. Ya'qūbī writes:

Few people remained alive in Medina; Muslim ibn 'Uqba let the sanctuary of the Prophet (i.e. Medina) be desecrated by his soldiers (that is, he allowed them to rape women) so that medians of Medina would give birth to children whose fathers could not be identified. Then he forced the remaining people to swear fealty to Yazīd and to be his servants. (vol. 2, 250)

By juxtaposing this with Imam Ali's instructions to his troops at the beginning of every battle, one can find a yawning gap between the Umayyad attitude and the Islamic one. According to Ibn Kathīr in his *History*, Imam Ali used to instruct his soldiers as follows:

Do not fight them unless they start fighting since, by God's grace, you have the advantage of having a cogent argument, and your refusal to start fighting them is another argument to your advantage. Then, when you defeat them, do not kill the fugitive or the injured, and do not expose their private parts (in order to humiliate them), and do not

mutilate any corpses, and, when you reach their dwellings, do not trespass on their inner sanctum, do not enter their homes, and do not take anything from them. Do not inflame their women no matter how harshly they insult your honor or curse your commanders and your good men since women are fragile in their constitution and soul. (vol. 3, 293)

Imam Ali, who had been reared and taught by the Prophet, disapproved of the idea of violence, but the Umayyads endorsed it. Thus, no one is entitled to attribute violence to Islam, and, as a result, if they do so, they have viewed Islam with the distorted outlook of Mu'āwīya and Yazīd and their agents.

Shockingly, history bears witness to the fact that sometimes criminals consider their inhumane actions as good deeds and even boast of them, relying upon false ideas they have in mind. In fact, the Qur'anic verse applies to them: "...the evil of his conduct is made embellished so that he sees it as a good deed" (35:8). For example, on his deathbed shortly after the tragic event of Ḥarrah, Muslim ibn 'Uqba said, "O God if you should punish me for what I did in Ḥarrah with complete obedience to your caliph Yazīd, then I am wretched!" (Ya'qūbī, vol. 2, 251). He presumed that his obedience to Yazīd would spare him the retribution for his crimes. This false idea arose from a common misconception that a group of Muslims have still had to the effect that whoever manages to gain political dominance through any means must be obeyed since "might is right." Notwithstanding, *Qur'an* clearly specifies: "Do not obey the command of those who contravene (the divine law), who spread wrong (*fasād*) in the land and make no correction" (26:151-152).

### **The Leniency of Mu'āwīya II and Marwān's Violence**

Yazīd's rule lasted only three and half years, and his son, Mu'āwīya ibn Yazīd, a. k. a. Mu'āwīya II, succeeded him as the third Umayyad caliph. Surprisingly, he openly denounced his father Yazīd and condemned his crimes. Ya'qūbī writes in his *History* that Mu'āwīya II delivered a speech after his ascension:

In his speech, Mu'āwīya ibn Yazīd said, "My grandfather, Mu'āwīya ibn Abū Sufyān, vied for authority with someone who was more deserving of it in terms of being close to the Prophet and being the first

convert to Islam; he was the Prophet's cousin and the father of the Prophet's grandchildren... Before his death, my grandfather appointed as his successor my father who was not worthy of acclaim. My father was indulged in all his caprices... But his days were numbered, and he went to his grave as he was a captive to his sins." Then he burst into tears and said, "My father killed the Prophet's kin, desecrated Medina and burned the Kaaba down. I am not to take up the task of ruling over you. I will leave it up to you to decide. By God, if worldly kingdom is a prize, we have had a good portion of it, and if it is a loss, the House of Abū Sufyān has had enough of it!" (vol. 2, 254)

Marwān ibn Ḥakam succeeded Mu'āwīya II, who abdicated in 684.<sup>7</sup> As the advisor of late 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, the third caliph, Marwān was a notoriously short-tempered person who is believed to have provided one of the motivations behind 'Uthmān's murder whereby the Islamic world was plunged into civil strife. Every time, through Ali ibn Abī Tālib's mediation, Egyptian malcontents negotiated a political settlement with 'Uthman, Marwān's influence on the caliph disrupted the process of reconciliation: Marwān dissuaded 'Uthmān from showing empathy with the people, and then he himself spoke to them harshly on the caliph's behalf so that they became much more displeased with the caliph. Here is an example of what Marwān said to the malcontents as reported in Ṭabarī's and Ibn Athīr's *Histories*: "What is your business?! It seems as if you have gathered here for plunder. Down with you! ... You have come to take away our dominion. Go away from us!" (Ṭabarī, vol. 4, 362; Ibn Athīr, vol. 3, 165).

By juxtaposing this reaction with that of the Prophet to discontented people, one can understand the meaning of the Qur'anic verse: "It was by the mercy of Allah that you (i.e. Prophet Muhammad) dealt so leniently with them" (3: 159).

According to the historians Ibn Hishām and Wāqidī, after the Prophet had managed to repel Hawāzin's attack,<sup>8</sup> he pardoned the Hawāzin captives and

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7. The translator's note: Marwān's rule was a power shift from the descendants of Abū Sufyān to those of Ḥakam (the "Marwānids").

8. The translator's note: Shortly after Mecca's conquest, the Muslims learned that Hawāzin, the tribe living a few miles to the southeast of Mecca, had mobilized its forces and was marching against the Muslims in Mecca. Together with his followers, who had helped him in the conquest of Mecca, and new converts to Islam from Mecca, the Prophet departed from Mecca to fight against Hawāzin in Hunain.

released all of them. Then, the Prophet allotted the spoils of the battle, but he first gave the noblemen of Quraish and the Bedouin Arab tribes their shares in order to make them more inclined to Islam. When the Prophet gave remarkable shares to them, some people from Anṣār<sup>9</sup> objected to him. The Prophet gathered all of them and, after glorifying God, said to them:

“O community of Anṣār, what is this talk I hear about you? What is the grudge you have harbored in your hearts against me? Did I not come to you when you were going astray and God guided you? Were you not needy and then made rich by God? Were you not enemies and did not God reconcile your hearts?” They answered, “Yes indeed, God and His Apostle are gracious and kind.” He said, “Why do you not answer me, o Anṣār?!” They said, “What should we have answered you, o Apostle of God? Kindness and graciousness belong to God and His Apostle.” He said, “Now then, if you had wished, you could have said- and you would have spoken the truth and have been accepted as truthful- ‘You came to us when your message was rejected [by Quraish] and we believed in you; you were forsaken and we assisted you; you were expelled and we sheltered you; you were needy and we comforted you; O Anṣār, those people should take away sheep and camels while you go back to your home with the Apostle of God. By Him, in whose hand the soul of Muhammad is, were it not for the Migration (*hijra*), I would be one of the Anṣār myself. If all people went one way and the Anṣār another one, I would take the way of the Anṣār. O God, have mercy on the Anṣār, their sons and their sons’ sons.”

The narrator concludes, “The people wept until their tears ran down their beards and said that they were pleased with the Apostle of God as their share” (Ibn Hishām, vol. 4, 123; Wāqidī, vol. 2, 957).

Let’s compare this kind-hearted attitude with Marwān’s harshness and draw the dividing line between Islam and the Umayyad and Marwānid modes of politics.

Marwān always bore hostility towards the Prophet’s household. In the battle of Ṣiffīn, he was on Mu’āwīya’s side, and, in Mu’āwīya’s rule, he was appointed as the governor of Medina. Al-Suyūṭī writes in his *History of the Caliphs* that

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9. The translator’s note: Anṣār is an Islamic term for Medina’s local inhabitants who took Prophet Muhammad and his followers (the *Muhājirūn*) into their homes after they had escaped from Mecca.

Marwān used to curse Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib in all his Friday sermons from the pulpit of the Medina mosque, while Ḥasan ibn Ali (i.e. Imam Ali's son) was present there (190), and he kept doing this until he was removed from his position. After Mu'āwīya's death Walīd ibn 'Utba the governor of Medina summoned Ḥusain ibn Ali to take an oath of fealty to Yazīd. Ḥusain went there, but refused to swear an oath of fealty to Yazīd. Marwān, who was present at the meeting, said to Walīd, "Do not let Ḥusain leave you till he swears the oath, or else cut off his head!" Ḥusain snapped angrily at him, "O son of Zarqā'!<sup>10</sup> Will you dare to kill me or will he do? Verily you have lied and have sinned." Saying this, Ḥusain ibn Ali went outside (Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 340; Ibn Athīr, vol. 4, 15).

'Abd al-Malik became caliph after the death of his father Marwān in 685. He then appointed one of his most cruel generals and administrators, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, as his right hand. About this ferocious, bloodthirsty man, the Umayyad caliph, 'Umar ibn Abdul-'Azīz ('Umar II) said later, "If every nation was to call in its most vicious man and we (i.e. the Umayyads) called in al-Ḥajjāj, we would beat off the challenge!" According to Ibn Athīr, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf killed as many as 120,000 people for the sake of the Umayyad cause (vol. 4, 586).

In fact, 'Abd al-Malik himself had the upper hand (over al-Ḥajjāj) when it came to ferocity and violence. In the beginning of his rule, he had agreed that he would be succeeded by Yazīd ibn Mu'āwīya's two sons, Khālīd and Abdullah, one after the other, but later he changed his mind and wanted his son al-Walīd to succeed him. When Khālīd and Abdullah came to his deathbed, he asked them if they liked him nullifying the allegiance to al-Walīd for their sake. After both of them answered in the negative, 'Abd al-Malik said, "Had you said otherwise, I would have given the order to kill you right away." And he died on the very day (Dīnīvarī, 225).

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10. The translator's note: By calling him 'the son of Zarqā'', Ḥusain ibn Ali hinted at Marwān's ignoble descent.

Could these brutal, violent rulers be the true successors to the Prophet who is called “mercy unto all creatures” in *Qur’an*? Were they the true successors to the one who said, “Allah is not merciful to those who do not show mercy to people” (Tirmidhī, vol. 3, 216)? He is the one who said, “Sometimes I rise to say (congregational) prayers and I intend to prolong it, but then I hear a child crying, and I shorten my prayers thinking of the distress of the child’s mother (who says her prayers behind me)” (Bukhārī, hadith no. 707).

Are we as Muslims allowed to overlook the Islamic moral codes both in *Qur’an* and in the Prophet’s modes of behavior to follow such violent people as the Kharijites and al-Ḥajjāj, or to view Islam from the distorted perspectives of such atrocious rulers as Yazīd, Marwān and ‘Abd al-Malik? In that case, have we not distanced ourselves from the true Islam, being disloyal to it?

### **Islam and Persians**

Contrary to the Islamic teachings which say race is not the criterion for man’s superiority, the Umayyad rulers used to give priority to Arabs over non-Arabs, as though they had forgotten the Qur’anic verse, “Surely, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is the most righteous” (49: 13). The Umayyads called Muslim Persians (Iranians) as al-Mawālī (second-class citizens) and were openly contemptuous of them, while the Arabs held most of the upper echelons of government, notwithstanding the fact that the Prophet in his last pilgrimage to Mecca (Farewell Pilgrimage) had said, “There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab or for a non-Arab over an Arab except by righteousness” (Ya’qūbī, vol. 2, 110).

Moreover, according to Muslim in his *Saḥīḥ*, the Prophet put his hand on Salmān al-Fārisī (i.e. the Persian) and said, “If faith were at (the place of) al-Thuraiyyā (Pleiades, that is, an inaccessible place), some men from these people (i.e. Persians) would attain it” (vol. 4, 1973; and also see Ṭabarī’s commentary on the Friday Sura, verse 3, in his *Tafsīr*). The Prophet also said, “Salmān is one of us, Ahl al-Bait (the Prophet’s family)” (al-Manāwī, see under the alphabetic letter

‘*sīn*’), when in the Battle of the Confederates (al-Aḥzāb), every group of the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār repeated, “Salmān is one of us; Salmān is one of us” (Ibn Ḥamza al-Dimashqī, vol. 2, 368).

As to Zoroastrians, the Prophet instructed Muslims to treat them like people of the book (i.e. adherents of the Abrahamic religions), not as pagans or idolaters. We read in one of the earliest collections of hadith, *al-Muwattaʿa*’ by Mālik ibn Anas that Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad al-Ṣādiq narrated from his father that ‘Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph, once had said, “I do not know how to treat Zoroastrians,” and one of the Prophet’s companions, Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Auf, had stood up and said, “I heard the Prophet say, ‘Treat them as you treat people of the book’ ” (vol. 1, 207).

Not for nothing did Persians embrace Islam crowd after crowd. Had they seen nothing but violence and harshness in Islam, they would never have relinquished the religion of their fathers to embrace it. We should keep in mind that early Muslims refused to destroy fire-temples, the centers of Zoroastrian rituals, in Persia (Iran): “Three centuries after the Arab conquest, fire-temples still existed in almost every Persian province” (Browne, 206).<sup>11</sup> The 10-century Muslim geographer, Istakhrī reported in his *al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*, “Zoroastrian scriptures, fire-temples and rituals still exist in Fārs Province (in the southern Iran) and there are not so many Zoroastrians in other provinces as in Fars where Zoroastrianism prevails” (121).

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11. The translator’s note: There is little disagreement among modern scholars about the idea that Persians’ conversion to Islam took place slowly over a period of four centuries or more. In fact, a more challenging criticism argued that the conversion took place at even slower pace (Bulliet, 31).

## The Culture of Violence

Thus far, we have pointed out examples of violent conduct that were mainly committed by the Kharijites and the Umayyads in the Islamic world. Although the subsequent Islamic dynasties sometimes followed Umayyad examples, the description of those atrocities is beyond the scope of this book. However, of greater importance is the culture of violence that has made its way to the judicial and theological systems of some Islamic schools, causing irreparable damage to the Islamic Ummah. In fact, this constitutes the underlying cause for violent behaviors among Muslim extremists. In this culture of violence, there are harsh rulings (*fatwas*) issued against those people who are outside the Islamic faith as well as those who are within Islam. For instance, the Muslim scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (1445-1505) in his scathing book, *Ṣaun al-Manṭiq wa-l-Kalām 'an Fann al-Manṭiq wa-l-Kalām* (the Protection of Reasoning and Speech from Logic and Theology), criticizes Muslim theologians for their efforts to persuade non-Muslims into embracing Islam by means of powerful rational arguments, while, based on his supposition, this is not the Islamic dealings with non-Muslims:

The Islamic ruling on non-Muslims is simple: they are asked to embrace Islam; if they refuse and ask for a respite, they are not given any. They must either embrace Islam, pay *jizya* (per capita tax) or be killed. (172)

By making these claims, al-Suyūfī attributes coercion and violence to Islam, while on the contrary the *Qur'an* explicitly rejects such claims:

If one of the pagans asks you for protection, give it to him so that he can hear the Word of Allah; then take him to a place where he feels safe. That is because they are people who do not know. (*Qur'an*, 9:6)

This Qur'anic verse, from Tauba (Repentance) Sura belonging to the last years of the Medinite Period, talks about a non-Muslim who is confronted by Muslims in a battle and asks them for a reprieve to come to them and hear the Word of God. The Qur'anic verse instructs Muslims to grant him a reprieve and protect him so that he can listen to the *Qur'an*; then they must escort him back to safety instead of killing him or forcing him to pay *jizya*! The Qur'anic verse especially made no mention of his conversion to Islam since if he had embraced Islam, Muslims would not have needed to escort him back to his safe place anymore, and he would have lived among Muslims in Medina. Much to our surprise, al-Suyūṭī violates his previous ruling on non-Muslims, when he comments on this Qur'anic verse in his exegesis of the *Qur'an*, saying “‘Take him to a place where he feels safe’ means take him to his people, if he does not embrace Islam, so that he can reflect on his state of affairs” (*Tafsīr al-Jalālain*, vol. 1, 159).<sup>1</sup>

The question arises how far this view is at odds with what al-Suyūṭī has previously stated in his *Ṣaun al-Mantiq wa-l-Kalām*. His previous view seems to be in conformity to the Kharijites' approach, as it is reported that “they asked whoever they met about the arbitration; if he or she expressed his/her aversion to the arbiters, they let him/her go, but if he/she refused to do so, they killed him/her immediately” (Dīnivarī, 206).

Basically, the expectation that everyone who is called on to embrace Islam must reject his/her own faith and accept Islam instantly is beyond most people's capabilities, and the *Qur'an* repeatedly states that God imposes on no one beyond his/her capabilities: “On no one does Allah place a burden greater than he can bear” (2: 286), as evidenced by a number of the Prophet's companions who were warmly welcomed to Islam by the Prophet, after they had been deliberating on this

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1. Interestingly, the Qur'anic verse concludes that the reason behind this Islamic manner towards those non-Muslims is “they are people who do not know.” This implies that those people should be provided with knowledge, freedom and security since they are uninformed about Islam.

at an unhurried pace. More interestingly, the Chapter 9 of the *Qur'an* gives a four-month respite to the idolaters who breached the terms of their agreement with Muslims and, during the Ḥudaibiyya Treaty,<sup>2</sup> had repeatedly met Muslims and listened to the message of Islam: “Go freely in the land for four months” (*Qur'an*, 9:2).<sup>3</sup>

Al-Suyūfī lived mostly in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but his ruling on non-Muslims is not unprecedented. He himself ascribed the ruling to Abul al-‘Abbās ibn Suraij,<sup>4</sup> a 9th-century scholar from Shāfi’ī school of law:

Abul al-‘Abbās ibn Suraij is reported to have said, “if a man comes to us asking us to let him consider carefully the various religions in order to accept what he finds to be true and to reject what he finds to be false, we will not let him do so, or rather will coerce him into embracing Islam, and if he refuses, we are obliged to kill him.” (Al-Suyūfī, 172-3)

The report may be an authentic one; that is to say Ibn Suraij may have issued such a ruling. However, the idea about those who attempt to follow the best way is expressed the other way round in the *Qur'an*:

The good news to my servants who listen to the word and follow the best of it: Those are the ones whom Allah has guided, and those the ones endowed with understanding. (39: 17-18).

To accomplish what this Qur’anic verse requires one should be given plenty of space to search and find out what is the best.

One of the main problems with such views as Ibn Suraij’s is that they require the unquestioning acceptance of the foundations of the Islamic faith,<sup>5</sup> while the *Qur'an* denounces the unquestioning acceptance of the forefathers and the great

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2. The translator’s note: The Treaty of Ḥudaibiyya was a pivotal treaty between the Prophet, representing the Muslims in Medina, and the Quraish of Mecca in March 628. It helped to decrease tension between the two sides for a couple of years. The treaty was violated with an attack by a Quraish-allied tribe on a Muslim tribe.

3. The translator’s note: Some Muslim exegetes believe that these four months are “the Forbidden (four) Months,” per year (see *Qur'an* 9: 5), when fighting is strictly prohibited by Islamic law—e.g. See Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, 243.

4. The translator’s note: For more information about Abul al-‘Abbās ibn Suraij see: Melchert, Ch.. *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law: 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* Chapter V, 88ff.

5. The translator’s note: The foundations of the Islamic faith (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*) are a set of essential beliefs in Islam that every Muslim needs to believe in; otherwise, he is not considered a Muslim.

leaders' religion as the wrong tradition which polytheists and idolaters used to follow:

When it is said to them, "Follow what Allah has revealed," they say "No! We shall follow the ways of our fathers." (2: 170)

No, they say: "We found our fathers following a certain religion and we follow their footsteps." (43: 22)

Another problem is that the scholars who have such views tend to ignore a number of clear, explicit Qur'anic verses, saying instead "Our pious predecessors held such views, and we are their followers." In a manner of speaking, they are willing to receive their beliefs from those esteemed characters, not from the holy *Qur'an*. Moreover, one may become startled at finding that not every pious predecessor held such views. For example, in the early Islamic period, the eminent Islamic figure Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib had allowed some hesitant people to consider carefully whether or not he was right in the Ṣiffīn Battle against Mu'āwīya, before they decided to side with or against him. Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim wrote in his book, *The Event of Ṣiffīn*:

Some close friends of Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd (the Prophet's companion) came to Ali and said, "We will accompany you but not enter your army; rather, we will camp separately to monitor carefully the situation between your troops and the Syrians. If we see one side is engaged in an unlawful or unfair act, we will fight against that side." Ali welcomed them and said, "This is the profound understanding of the religion and the proper knowledge of the tradition. Whoever is not pleased with it will be a faithless oppressor." (115)

When Imam Ali gave the people permission to deliberate on whether to participate in *jihad* which is one of the Islamic obligations (*Furū' al-Dīn*), why are people not given permission to ponder on the foundations of the Islamic faith?

### **The Issue of *Jizya***

Regarding *jizya* to which Al-Suyūṭī referred, it should be noted that *jizya* is a per capita yearly tax paid by certain non-Muslim subjects who permanently reside in Muslim lands to the Islamic state in return for their support and protection. This tax is roughly similar to *zakāt*, a tax paid by Muslims to the Islamic state, though this is an Islamic obligation; hence, non-Muslim subjects are not asked to pay

*zakāt*. Muslim scholars have written numerous books on *jizya*, like *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma* (rulings on non-Muslim subjects) by Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya, in which the rules and conditions for *jizya* are discussed in detail.

In the old book *Al-Kharāj* by Qāzi Abū Yūsuf (735or739-798),<sup>6</sup> it is written that *jizya* must be paid only by men, not by women or children. Moreover, the poor, the handicapped, the unemployed, monks and hermits, elders, and the insane are exempted from *jizya* (Qāzi Abū Yūsuf, 131). Those who pay *jizya* are not required to enlist and go to wars.<sup>7</sup> The renowned orientalist Thomas W. Arnold reports all this in his book *The Preaching of Islam* and adds:

This tax was not imposed on the Christians, as some would have us think, as a penalty for their refusal to accept the Muslim faith, but was paid by them in common with the other *dhimmīs* or non-Muslim subjects whose religion precluded them from serving in the army, in return for the protection secured for them by the arms of the Musulmans. (55)

Thus, Muslim states collected *jizya* from their non-Muslim subjects *on condition that* they could provide those subjects with security and protection, as this condition was clearly recognized by the early Muslims. For example, in the reign of the Caliph ‘Umar, the Emperor Heraclius raised an enormous army to drive back the Muslim forces. In consequence, Muslims had to concentrate all their energies on the impending encounter. Then,

The Arab general, Abū ‘Ubaydah accordingly wrote to the governors of the conquered cities of Syria, ordering them to pay back all *jizya* that had been collected from the cities, and wrote to the people, saying, “We give you back the money that we took from you, as we have received news that a strong force is advancing against us. The agreement between us was that we should protect you, and as this is not now in our power, we return all that we took. But if we are victorious, we shall consider ourselves bound to you by the old terms of our agreement.” (Arnold, 55-56)

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6. The translator’s note: He served as the chief judge (*qadī al-quḍāt*) during the reign of Harūn al-Rashīd.

7. The translator’s note: However, non-Muslim subjects who chose to join military service were exempted from *jizya*.

## **Violent Dealings with Other Muslim Sects**

Apart from Al-Suyūṭī's ruling on non-Muslims, by looking through the books written about the Islamic sects, we sometimes come across some harsh, extreme views which are truly far removed from Islamic tolerance and objective impartiality. For instance, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, an Ash'arī scholar of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, in his *Al-Farq bain al-Firaq* (The Differences between the Sects), which is widely known equally among Muslim scholars and Western orientalists, has dealt with other Islamic sects in a prejudiced harsh manner that is difficult to believe. His views, for example, about various Islamic sects, such as the Mu'tazila, the Zaidīyya and the Imāmīyya, are that the Islamic funeral prayers cannot be said for their dead, that the prayers cannot be said behind them (i.e. in congregational prayers), that their slaughtered animals cannot be eaten, that they cannot marry a Sunni woman and no Sunni man can marry any woman of them ('Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, 33). However, according to the *Qur'an*, most of the limitations are placed only on idolaters and unbelievers: no prayer is allowed for their dead (*Qur'an*, 9:84); their slaughtered animals cannot be eaten (*Qur'an*, 6:121); their men or women cannot be married to Muslims (*Qur'an*, 2:221). However, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī has extended the application of the rulings, which are limited to idolaters and unbelievers, to Muslims!

Ironically, the Mu'tazila are usually considered to be Sunnis, and they are in agreement with Sunnis even in the issue of "imamate," and their disagreement with Ash'arī Sunnis is limited to a few theological issues such as the divine attributes. How could they then be separated from Sunnis because of these issues, which are not addressed in *Qur'an* or the Prophet's traditions?

That is why Abū Hāmid Ghazzālī, who had taught Ash'arī theology at Nizāmīyya School in Baghdad for years, criticized in his book, *Faiṣal al-Tafrīqa bain al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa* (The Point of Separation between Islam and Apostasy), those Ash'arī Sunnis who went too far against the Mu'tazila:

Why does the Ash'arī speak so harshly against the Mu'tazila for their negation of attributes that are extrinsic to the divine essence, while they do believe in Allah the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, and they only disagree with the Ash'arī over the issue that Allah is the Omniscient and the Omnipotent by His essence not by attributes extrinsic to His essence? (132)

Similarly, how could Shiites be separated from Muslims simply because they consider Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib to be superior to the other companions of the Prophet and the most deserving of succession to the Prophet? Did Sunni historians and biographers themselves not quote Abū Bakr Siddīq (the Truthful) as saying at the beginning of his caliphate, “O’ people, I am appointed as your leader, though I am not the best of you”? (e.g. see Ibn Hishām, vol. 4, 256; Ṭabarī, vol. 3, 223). Indeed, the Ghulāt or the Extremists<sup>8</sup> are still the exception, not the rule. One should not view all the Shia the same as the Ghulāt and should not issue a harsh ruling on all. It should be noted that the legacy of hatred and prejudice from the past tends to lead the present-day mindset astray and does not let Muslims come together for solidarity, as we see in the contemporary Muslim world.

In the books on Islamic sects, another form of cultural violence has occasionally come to the fore, that is to say making excuses for criminals on the pretext that they practiced *ijtihād*.<sup>9</sup> For example, Ibn Ḥazm, the famous Sunni theologian and jurist of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, has occasionally used this strategy in his book, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥal* (The Separator of Religions, Heresies, and Sects). He wrote about Abul ‘Ādīya, who killed ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, the great companion of the Prophet, as follows

‘Ammār- may God be pleased with him- was killed by Abul ‘Ādīya ibn Yasār ibn Sabu’ al-Dailamī who was present at the Pledge of al-Riḍwān... Abul ‘Ādīya- may God be pleased with him- was a *mujtahid* versed in the act of interpretation; he was mistaken about

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8. The translator’s note: Ghulāt or the Extremists are some minority Shiite groups who went to extremes either by ascribing divine characteristics to figures of Islamic history or by holding beliefs that deviate from mainstream Shiite theology.

9. The translator’s note: *Ijtihād* is the process of deriving the law of the sharī’ah about any given (legal) issue by independent systematic reasoning even when the *Qur’an* and Sunnah are not explicit about the issue. An Islamic scholar who is qualified to practice *ijtihād* is called a *mujtahid*.

‘Ammār and did wrong to him, but he deserves only one reward from God [on the grounds that a *mujtahid* deserves a reward from God, even though he is wrong]. (vol. 4, 161)

However, according to a well-known hadith,<sup>10</sup> the Prophet had said to ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, “a group of wrongdoers (offenders) will kill you.” Sunni scholars considered this hadith as clear evidence of Muhammad’s prophecy since ‘Ammār was killed by Mu’āwīya’s soldiers in the Battle of Şiffīn, as Ibn Ḥajar al-Haithamī said in his *Al-Şawā’iq al-Muḥriqa*, “This is a prophecy from the one who was truthful and trustworthy (PBUH)” (355).

It is puzzling that someone like Ibn Ḥazm equates the killing of ‘Ammār with practicing *ijtihād* and declares his murderer to be deserving of divine reward. Isn’t this a clear example of “*ijtihād* against the literal meaning of the text”? A *mujtahid* is someone who applies himself to inferring the instructions mainly from the *Qur’an* and the traditions of the Prophet rather than standing against the Prophet’s explicit, unmistakable word of warning. The Prophet’s word about ‘Ammār had spread as far as Syria, so when the Syrians in Mu’āwīya’s army heard the news of ‘Ammār’s murder, they became hesitant and anxious. According to Ṭabarī in his *History*, when Mu’āwīya saw that considerable anxiety among his men, he had to have recourse to a fallacious argument, saying, “Did we kill ‘Ammār?! Nay! ‘Ammār was killed by the one who had brought him to the war” (vol. 5, 41).<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ḥazm counted Abul ‘Ādīya as one of those who made the Pledge of al-Riḍwān<sup>12</sup> in order to exonerate him [on the grounds that the *Qur’an* expressed divine satisfaction with those who made the Pledge], but he looks as if he did not notice what has come at the end of the Qur’anic verse: “Anyone who breaks his pledge

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10. The translator’s note: For example, see *Al-Şaḥīḥ* by Muslim, hadith no. 7506 and *Al-Şaḥīḥ* by Bukhārī, vol. 1, 121, hadith no. 447.

11. According to Mu’āwīya’s fallacious argument, the Prophet would have killed all his companions who were martyred in the wars!

12. The translator’s note: The Pledge of al-Riḍwān was a renewed pledge of some companions of the Prophet which occurred near Mecca prior to the Hudaibīyya Treaty. The *Qur’an* (48:10, 18) refers to this event.

breaks it to the harm of his own soul” (48:10). Therefore, the Qur’anic verse never guaranteed all those who made the Pledge infallibility or permanent forgiveness.

Things went from bad to worse when Ibn Ḥazm attempted to exonerate the murderer of Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib by calling Ibn Muljam a *mujtahid* who deserved reward from God. In his book, *Al-Muḥallā* on Islamic law, Ibn Ḥazm wrote:

There is no disagreement between any members of the Islamic Nation (*Ummah*) that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam did kill Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib- may God be pleased with him- for he thought he was doing the right thing based on his interpretation and application of *ijtihād*. (vol. 7, 484)

First of all, it should be noted that independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) is unsound and false whenever it contradicts an explicit, unmistakable piece of evidence from the *Qur’an* or the Sunnah. Both Shiite and Sunni authorities (even Ibn Ḥazm himself<sup>13</sup>) are unanimous about the fact that the Prophet said to Ali, “No one loves you but the believer, and no one dislikes you but the hypocrite.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the Prophet prayed for Ali in the event of Ghadīr Khumm, “O’ Allah, be a supporter of whoever supports him (Ali) and an enemy of whoever opposes him.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, with such explicit pieces of evidence, the hostility towards Ali to the point of his murder is a clear example of unsound, false *ijtihād*.

Secondly, Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, the imam of Ḥanbalites, in his *Musnad* reports that the Prophet said to Ali and ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, “Shall I inform you of two men who are the most wretched among people?” They replied, “Yes, O’ Apostle of God.” The Prophet said, “The first was the one of Thamūd who hamstrung the she-camel,<sup>16</sup> and the second is the man who will strike you in the head with a

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13. Ibn Ḥazim. *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 4, 148.

14. The translator’s note: For example see: *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by Muslim, vol. 1, 60, no. 152; *Al-Sunan* by Ibn Māja, no. 114; *Al-Sunan* by Al-Tirmidhī, no. 3736; *Al-Sunan* by Al-Nasā’ī, vol. 8, 115; and *Al-Musnad* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, vol. 1, 84.

15. The translator’s note: For example see: *Al-Sunan Al-Kubrā* by Al-Nasā’ī, nos. 8092 and 8410; and *Al-Musnad* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, vol. 4, 368 & 372.

16. The translator’s note: This refers to the she-camel which the Prophet Ṣālih brought to Thamūd (people of ancient Arabia) as a sign when they desired a miracle to confirm the truth of the message Ṣālih was preaching. In return, the people were required to let her graze in the land. That was a trial to see if the greedy would let the camel graze peacefully or they would slay her. However, they hamstrung the she-camel and slew her (See *Qur’an*, 7:73-79).

sword and let your blood moisten your beard” (Vol. 4, 263). With this in mind, how could one claim Ibn Muljam as a *mujtahid* who deserves a reward for his evil crime?!

Thirdly, in the hadith from the Prophet,<sup>17</sup> *ijtihad* means reasoning capacity that a judge may have to apply to complicated legal proceedings in a court of Islamic law in the event he has done his best to discover the truth, but he has mistakenly failed to do so; therefore, since he has done his utmost to carry out his duty, he will deserve a reward from God. However, this case and the case of the killings of ‘Ammār and Ali are worlds apart since the Islamic law explicitly considers their murderers to be guilty of serious offences.

Finally, not everyone is qualified to be in the position of a *mujtahid*. How could Ibn Muljam and Abul ‘Ādīya be allowed to spill blood on the pretext that they were interpreting *mujtahids*, according to Ibn Ḥazm, while they were not jurists, scholars, or judges? By this fabricated excuse for such sinister crimes, everybody would allow himself unlimited license in the exercise of his power at whim to the extent that no government could tolerate such utter chaos, let alone the Muslim state.

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17. The hadith is as follows: “If a judge practices *ijtihad* to make a judgment and he is right, he will deserve two rewards; however, if he practices *ijtihad* to make a judgment and he was wrong, he will deserve only one reward” (*Al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by Bukhārī, vol. 9, 123). The Arabic word “al-ḥākim” in the hadith means a judge specifically.

## The Islamic Code of Law and Violence

The Islamic law is generally associated with leniency and ease as the *Qur'an* explicitly says, “He (Allah) has imposed no hardships on you in the religion” (22:78), and also says, “Allah intends you to be at ease, and He does not intend you to be put in difficulty” (2:185), or “Allah does intend to lighten your burdens” (4: 28).

The Prophet also said, “I was designated to preach a lenient monotheistic religion,”<sup>1</sup> or said, “This religion is built on a firm base, so move through it gently not to spoil the worship of Allah to His servants.”<sup>2</sup> When the Prophet sent his companions to preaching expeditions, he used to say to them, “Be lenient, and do not be harsh; give glad tidings to people and do not repel them.”<sup>3</sup> He also said, “You (Muslims) are a nation that is obliged to stay lenient.”<sup>4</sup> Whenever the Prophet assigned people a task, he took their capabilities into account, saying, “Whenever I instruct you to perform a task, undertake it as much as you are capable of it.”<sup>5</sup>

The Prophet variously declared his religion to be easy and lenient. For example, he said, “My people (*Ummah*) are excused for their oversights and forgetfulness and for what they are coerced into.” In a narrative, the Prophet said to a woman coerced into fornication, “God has forgiven you,” as the *Qur'an*

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1. Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-jāmi' Al-Ṣaghīr fī Al-Aḥādīth Al-Bashīr Al-Nadhīr*, vol. 1, Chapter al-Bā'

2. Ibid. vol. 2, 477

3. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by Bukhārī, vol. 1, 27.

4. Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 5, 32.

5. Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-jāmi' Al-Ṣaghīr fī Al-Aḥādīth Al-Bashīr Al-Nadhīr*, vol. 4, 173.

specifies, “If anyone coerces them (into prostitution), Allah is forgiving and merciful after they were coerced” (24:33). According to Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, the punishment of perpetrators by *ta’zīr*<sup>6</sup> is not necessary, and the ruler can spare them from the punishment, based on the hadith from the Prophet: “Excuse the members of the (Muslim) faith for their faults unless in the case of the *ḥadd*.”<sup>7</sup> The Prophet also gave emphatic instructions to Muslims for tolerance towards religious minorities and non-Muslim subjects, as he said, “Whoever persecutes a non-Muslim subject, does him any harm, obliges him to do what is beyond his capabilities, or takes anything from him without his consent will be confronted by me on the Day of Judgment.”<sup>8</sup>

Generally speaking, Islam lays particular stress on protecting people’s lives, honor, reputation and possessions. The *Qur’an* and the Sunnah do not allow Muslims to treat unfairly at all. Nevertheless, we sometimes come across some bizarre rulings (*fatwas*) in the books of Islamic law. Here only two examples are cited:

Ibn Ḥazm in his *Al-Muḥllā* gives such a ruling:

If someone digs a hole in the ground and covers it, then tells someone else to walk over it, and he falls in it, whether he is aware of it or not, there is no blame either on the person orders him to walk over the hole or on the one who digs the hole, because they do not force him to walk and they are not the agents of his death, but he himself is the agent by his free will. (vol. 8, 11)

This violent ruling (*fatwa*) is diametrically opposed to the legal Islamic principle on the basis of the well-known hadith from the Prophet: “No harm shall

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6. The translator’s note: The classical Islamic legal system does not have the same category for criminal acts as seen in modern law (such as felony, misdemeanor, and violation). Instead, there are three major types of punishment under Islamic penal code: *ḥadd*, *qiṣāṣ* and *ta’zīr*. *Ḥadd* is a kind of punishment that is stated in the *Qur’an* and/or the Sunnah. *Qiṣāṣ* and *diyya* are the second category of punishment, where Sharia specifies equal retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*) or monetary compensation (*diyya*). *Ta’zīr* refers to an offence mentioned in the *Quran* and/or the Sunnah, but neither the *Quran* nor the Sunnah specify any punishment for it. In *ta’zīr* cases, the punishment is at the discretion of the ruler or the judge.

7. Abū Dāvūd, *Al-Sunan*, the book of *ḥudūd*. No. 4377; Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 6, 247.

8. Abū Dāvūd, *Al-Sunan*, the book of *kharāj*, vol. 3, 108.

be inflicted or reciprocated in Islam.”<sup>9</sup> Ibn Ḥazm’s cruel ruling underestimates the harshness of the killing of people though inhumane ploys.<sup>10</sup>

We now discuss another example of harshness in the legal rulings from Sunni jurists. Again, in his book *Al-Muḥllā*, Ibn Ḥazm quotes Imam Mālik ibn Anas as saying, “Whoever curses Abū Bakr or ‘Umar must be flogged” (vol. 11, 415). To add fuel to the fire, some ruled that the person who has cursed Abū Bakr or ‘Umar must be executed, as Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, in his *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ascribes this ruling to some Sunni scholars (vol. 7, 38).

No one can deny that swearing provokes enmity between people and arouses hostility in society, especially when it is heartbreakingly directed at important figures who are highly respected by groups of people. The *Qur’an*, therefore, forbids swearing even at the idolaters’ idols: “Do not use rude words to those whom they call upon other than Allah, lest they unknowingly use rude words about Allah out of their hostility” (6: 108). The Prophet also instructs Muslims not to swear at anyone (Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 5, 63). He regards swearing at a Muslim as a sin (Al- Bukhārī, *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, 81). He also forbids cursing even the dead (Al- Bukhārī, *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, 129). Nevertheless, the *Qur’an* makes no mention of the punishment for swearing except that it says, “The recompense for an evil deed (injury) is an evil deed (injury) equal to it; but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation will receive his reward from Allah” (42:40). Moreover, in the Sunnah, there is not a shred of evidence to support flogging or death sentence for someone who cursed one of the Prophet’s companions, but their responses to cursing was either to overlook the insult or to return it at most. For example, when one of the Kharijites cursed Imam Ali,

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9. The translator’s note: For example, see Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta’a*, the hadith no. 1429; Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 1, 255.

10. Even more outrageous is what Ibn Ḥazm said following his cruel ruling: “There is no difference between this case and the case of a person who deceives someone into thinking, for example, a road is safe, while it is not... If he goes along the road and he is killed or robbed... The person who has deceived the other takes no blame or retribution for the other’s blood or possessions; the deceiver is not the agent of the other’s loss because he has not forced the other.” (*Al-Muḥllā*, vol. 8, 11-12)

saying, “May God kill this unbeliever. How prudent he is!” Ali’s companions rose to attack him, but Imam Ali said, “Calm down! An insult can only be responded either with an insult or with overlooking the fault”<sup>11</sup> This statement actually rephrases the Qur’anic verse cited above.

The prophet’s companions sometimes became angry and swore at one another, but no one flogged or killed them for that, as evidenced by a narrative in *Al-Musnad* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal:

A man swore at Abū Bakr, while the Prophet was sitting there. The Prophet was amazed by Abū Bakr’s patience and pleased with it as he smiled. However, the man went too far until Abū Bakr lost his temper and returned some of his insults. The Prophet became annoyed and left... (vol. 2, 436)

Accordingly, there is no legal basis for the ruling that everyone who curses Abū Bakr or ‘Umar must be flogged or killed, though it is absolutely unacceptable to insult them, as Imam Ali was quoted as saying about them, “They had both led exemplary lives and dealt justly with the Ummah.”<sup>12</sup>

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11. *Nahj al-Balāgha*, the chapter of *hikam* (aphorisms), no. 420.

12. Naṣr ibn Muzāḥm al-Minqarī, *Waq’a al-Şiffīn* (The Event of Şiffīn), 210.

## The Question of the Excommunication of Muslims

The issue of excommunication (*takfir* or declaring someone as a *kāfir*, that is, an unbeliever) is closely associated with violence in the Muslim world, and some Islamic sects have carried it to extremes. Of course, any ideological issue that is taken to extremes and leads to acts of violence will sink to oblivion and, since it is incompatible with human nature, it will be abandoned. An example of this in the Muslim world can be found with the Kharijites who were divided into different subgroups, and, because of their extremism, a majority of them were doomed to extinction. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī wrote in his book, *Al-Farq bain al-Firaq*: “The Kharijites’ views diverged until they were divided into twenty subgroups. Each subgroup declares the others as *kāfirs* (unbelievers)”(40). Of the twenty subgroups, only one has survived, that is, the Ibādites (*al- Ibādiyya*) who are less harsh than the others and are found in Oman and North Africa now.

Most of the extremist Muslim sects have not set any criteria for declaring someone as a *kāfir*, but once someone disagrees with them in a number of issues, they immediately set out to declare him as a *kāfir*. Some Muslim scholars have attempted to set criteria for making a distinction between Islam and *kufir* (unbelief). For example, at the opening of his concise, useful book on this subject, *Faiṣal al-Tafriqa bain al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa*, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī wrote, “A group claimed that any deviation as little as possible from the Ash’arī School amounts to *kufir* (unbelief)” (127). Then he disputed this extreme view by saying,

“In conformity with this view, Abū Bakr Bāqilānī (the great Ash’ari scholar) must be declared as a *kāfir* since he disagreed with Abul Ḥasan Ash’arī on the divine attribute of timelessness; Bāqilānī considered it to be an essential divine attribute, whereas Ash’arī thought of it as an attribute extrinsic to the divine essence.” Then, al-Ghazzālī generalized his argument saying, “Disagreement with the other Islamic schools such as the Mu’tazila and the Ḥanbalis does not lead to *kufir* (unbelief).” Finally, he concludes, “*Kufir* arises only when one opposes the Prophet” (133). To explain this, we should note that Islam is built on basic beliefs such as monotheism (*tawhīd*), prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and resurrection (*ma’ād* or *ba’th*) (not in their details). As a Muslim, one cannot deny or misinterpret such basic beliefs that both the *Qur’an* and the Sunnah are explicit about. However, there are some other Islamic matters that have not explicitly been dealt with as the basic concepts and precepts of the Muslim faith, but Muslims hold diverse views about these “secondary” Islamic matters, and everyone may firmly think he/she is right about them. Therefore, if people who do believe in those basic beliefs of the Muslim faith disagree with one another over these “secondary” matters, they could not be declared as unbelievers because they do not intend to oppose the Prophet and his mission, even though they may be wrong in their views. Accordingly, al-Ghazzālī considers the criterion for *kufir* to be refusal to acknowledge the Prophet rather than the misconception of the Prophet’s words or the *Qur’an*. Thus, al-Ghazzālī concludes: “If you wish to know the definition of *kufir*...I will say that *kufir* is refusal to acknowledge the Prophet as the Apostle of God in anything he brought (from God)” (134).

To illustrate the point, some examples are given here. As a Muslim, no one can dispute that the *Qur’an* is the message from God and the revelation to Prophet Muhammad, but the interpretation of some puzzling Qur’anic verses, known as *mutashābihāt*, is open to dispute. Another example is the Night Journey (*al-Isrā’*) of the Prophet from Masjid al-Ḥarām (Mecca) to Masjid al-Aqṣā (“the farthest mosque,” most probably in Jerusalem); as a Muslim, no one can deny the very

Night Journey since the *Qur'an* explicitly mentions it, but the question whether the journey was a spiritual one or a physical one is open to dispute among Muslims, and disagreement over it does not involve declaring either side of the dispute as *kāfirs*. Furthermore, the disagreements among Muslim over caliphate after the Prophet's death do not require calling some Muslim sects as *kāfirs* as long as the disagreements have not entailed the refusal to acknowledge the Prophet as the Apostle of God, even though some sects may be wrong in their claims on caliphate.

By meeting this correct criterion, a lot of Muslims' intellectual conflicts do not lead to hostility and excommunication and more tolerance towards each other can be shown. On the other hand, having a reckless disregard for the criterion has been led to violent confrontation between Muslims. By having a glimpse into the books written on Muslim sects, one finds out that the Muslim *Ummah* has sometimes appeared deeply split on trivial issues.

In our present-day world, those who have been slaughtering their Muslim brothers and sisters are far removed from meeting this correct criterion since they have used Muslim's disagreements over issues that are not fundamental to the Muslim faith to bring about war, massacre and destruction. They do not seem to appreciate the magnitude of the terrible sin they are committing; "O me! If only my people knew (what they should know)." What legitimate, plausible excuses have they found for killing Muslims who are sometimes even Sunnis?! Aren't they alarmed to hear the Qur'anic verse: "If anyone kills a believer intentionally, his penalty is Hell where he will remain (forever)" (4:93)?

They may respond that all the Muslims who are not willing to pledge allegiance with their leader (*imām*) are *mahdūr al-dam*, that is, they must be killed without legal process. In response to this unfounded claim, one should ask them, "How can your *imām*'s legitimate prerogative be proved? If any Muslim group from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iraq is supposed to pledge allegiance with a leader, without the consent of the other Muslims of the world, and takes up arms against

the other Muslims, is this not equal to turmoil and tyranny? Moreover, in Sunnis' view, caliphate or Imamate is legitimately established only through a council of Muslims' representatives (*shūrā*) and a majority of Muslims' allegiance to the Caliph or the Imam. However, did Muslims' representatives attend your so-called *shūrā*? And then, did a majority of Muslims pledge allegiance to your Imam, as in the Rightly Guided Caliphate of the first four caliphs?"

Therefore, the self-proclaimed caliphate does not meet necessary and sufficient conditions of the true Islamic state. Yet, they slaughter people, plunder their possessions and destroy their houses in the name of religion! Aren't these unlawful acts of violence considered "wrong-doing in the land" (*fasād fī al-arz*)? They call themselves Sunnis but actually follow the footsteps of the Kharijites who are opposed to Sunni Islam. Have they never seen the hadiths in their *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ* and other authoritative hadith books about the Kharijites?<sup>1</sup>

They are responsible for the fact that many people in the world are regarding Islam with suspicion and distrust. Their acts of violence have unjustly brought into question the magnanimity of the Prophet who said, "Be lenient, and do not be harsh; give glad tidings to people and do not repel them."<sup>2</sup> They are responsible before the next generation of Muslims who will have to preach about a religion that seems so violent to other people. One really wonders under with pretexts they have accepted such heavy responsibilities. Granted, they managed to conquer an expanse of land, but will their trading this world for the hereafter prove profitable? "Low was the price for which they did sell their souls, if they but knew" (*Qur'an*, 2:102).

There is a lot of literature on forbidding Muslims from declaring groundlessly others as *kāfirs* in the authoritative books of hadith so that the Sunni scholar Ibn Daqīq al-ʿĪd wrote in his *Iḥkām al-Aḥkām fī Sharḥ 'Umda Al-Aḥkām*:

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1. For example, see *Al-Tājj al-Jāmi' li al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, vol. 5, the chapter 3 (on the Kharijites and Dissenters), 311ff.

2. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ* by Bukhārī, vol. 1, 27.

Everyone is highly warned against declaring one of Muslims as a *kāfir*, whereas he/she was not a *kāfir*. This is a vortex of grave danger where a host of Muslim theologians and those who belong to the Sunnites and *Ahl al-Hadith* has become baffled because their views diverged, and, consequently, they have declared their opponents as *kāfirs*. (vol. 4, 76)

Indeed, it is not a trivial matter to declare other Muslims as *kāfirs* as evidenced by what both Shiite and Sunnite authoritative books of hadith quoted from Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib as saying about his militant adversaries, “They are our Muslim brothers who have done an act of aggression against us” (Abdullah ibn Ja’far Al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-Isnād*, 45; and also see: Ibn Abī Shaiba, *Al-Muṣannaf fī al-Aḥādīth wa al-Āthār*, vol. 15, 332). This is the judgment of Ali, the leader of the faithful people (*Amīr al-Mu’minīn*) and the Prophet’s successor, about his warlike opponents. He also said to the Kharijites:

We entitle you to have three rights as long as you are in our company: We do not bar you from entering the Mosques to say prayers; we do not deny you your shares from the Treasury (*bait al-māl*) as long as your hands are with ours; and we do not fight against you until you commence fighting against us. (Ṭabarī, vol. 5, 73; Ibn Athīr, vol.3, 335)

Imam Ali knew well that the Kharijites had deviated from the true path of Islam, but he still regarded them as Muslims and respected their religious and social rights. Accordingly, one really wonders why the present-day extremist sects do not respect the other Muslims’ rights, for example, by assaulting schoolgirls and killing them in the name of Salafism merely because they have attended modern schools. Let us suppose, only for the sake of argument, that studying modern sciences is forbidden to Muslim girls, but is death penalty for any forbidden act in Islam, especially when the schoolgirls are not aware of the alleged forbiddance?! Aren’t those people who commit these atrocious crimes in the name of Salafism considered heretics?

Moreover, for a Muslim, acquaintance with physics, chemistry, biology etc is knowledge about the divine laws of nature which are the manifestation of God’s will (*sunnat Allah*). Is the knowledge of *sunnat Allah* considered to be *kufir*

(unbelief) and punished by death?! On the contrary, those who call themselves *muftis* or *mujtahids* and give such cruel rulings invent lies. “Who does more wrong than the one who fabricates a lie against Allah to lead people astray without knowledge?” (*Qur’an*, 6:144)

Again, let us suppose that the schoolgirls committed a Major Sin (*kabīra*) by studying modern sciences. But the ruling that “everyone who commits a Major Sin is declared as a non-Muslim and is punished by death unless he/she does penance” is peculiar to the Kharijites, and it is not a Sunnite *fatwa* (ruling) at all. The Kharijites told Imam Ali that everyone who committed a Major Sin had to be declared as a *kāfir*. Ali argued, “The Prophet sometimes had to punish a person who had committed homicide. Then, the Prophet let the murderer’s family inherit him after his execution.”<sup>3</sup> How did the Prophet do so, given that if the murderer had become a *kāfir* by committing the Major Sin, his Muslim family would not have received the inheritance, according to the *shariah* (Islamic laws)? The Kharijites had nothing to answer, but they obstinately did not change their mind. The question arises if the present-day extremists belong to Kharijites.

To return to our early argument, no one can be declared as a *kāfir* unless he/she does not acknowledge the Prophet as the Apostle of God or he/she exalts the Prophet to the status of divinity as he said to his companions, “Do not exceed bounds in praising me as the Christians have done in praising the son of Mary; I am but the Lord’s servant; call me God’s servant and his apostle” (al-Bukhārī, *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 204; Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 1, 23). Of course, anyone who ascribes divine characteristics to God’s servants or worships them cannot be considered a Muslim.

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3. See *Nahj al-Balāgha*, the sermon 127.

## Jihad and Violence

It seems that the most significant part of the Muslim faith that is closely associated with violence is *jihad* which is sometimes misunderstood only as physical fighting against enemies. *Jihad* literally means “endeavor,” “struggle” or “striving” as evidenced by the *Qur’an*: “But if they (your parents) *strive* to make you worship other than Me partners of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them; yet, behave gracefully towards them in this worldly life ...”(31:15), or “Whoever *strives* hard, he/she *strives* only for himself/herself; indeed, Allah is absolutely free of all needs from all the creation” (29:6). In the latter Qur’anic verse, *jihad* means a struggle or striving for one’s spiritual or moral improvement, but a number of the exegetes have interpreted it as fighting against enemies (e. g. see Ṭabarī’s commentary on the Qur’anic verse in his *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*). However, this interpretation sounds far-fetched since the Qur’anic verse is from the Chapter 29 (*Sura Al-‘Ankabut*), which is among the Meccan chapters which were revealed earlier to the Prophet in Mecca, where fighting against enemies was out of the question. Therefore, *jihad* was then a struggle or striving by a Muslim for his/her moral or spiritual improvement and for preaching Islam as well as standing fast against persecution by Meccan idolaters.

Nevertheless, the Muslim exegetes are unanimous in interpreting *jihad* as cultural, moral endeavor in a Qur’anic verse from the chapter 25 (*Sura al-Furqān*): “Thus, do not obey the unbelievers, but strive against them to the utmost

with *it*” (25: 52). Here the pronoun “it” refers to the *Qur’an*, as Ṭabarī rephrases the verse as “strive against them to the utmost with the *Qur’an*” (See his commentary on the Qur’anic verse in *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*). Another Muslim exegete, Ṭabrisī, has a good point about the Qur’anic verse: “It implies that the greatest, most magnificent *jihād* is theologians’ strivings for dispelling doubts introduced by the skeptics and the opponents of the faith” (See his commentary on the Qur’anic verse in his *Majma’ al-Bayān*).

Accordingly, we can infer that cultural *jihād* takes priority over military *jihād*. This can also be verified by the Prophet’s biography (*sīra*); he had preached Islam in Mecca for years before his enemies intensified his companions’ persecution<sup>4</sup> and attempted to kill him. Then he had to migrate to Medina and to defend the Muslims, as evidenced by the *Qur’an* besides the history:

Permission (to fight) is given to those believers against whom war is waged *since they have been wronged*, and Allah is the Omnipotent who aids them with victory; they are those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly for no reason other than that they say, “Our Lord is Allah”... (22:39-40)

We can conclude that Muslims’ obligation first and foremost is cultural *jihād*, that is, preaching and enlightening, but if their adversaries start violence and war against them to impede the pursuit of God’s path, the Muslims will be allowed to defend themselves. Yet, whenever the enemy calls on them to make peace, they must accept as evidenced by the Prophet’s conduct in the Ḥudaibīyya Treaty and the *Qur’an*’s explicit instructions: “But if the enemy shows willingness towards peace, show willingness towards peace and trust in Allah” (8:61). Thus, military *jihād* should only be used as a last resort to defend against aggression.

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4. Ibn Hishām wrote in *Al-Sīra*, “Every tribe (in Mecca and its suburb) seized their members who had embraced Islam. They subjected the Muslims to excruciating torture with confinement, beating, hunger and thirst during the heat of the day in Mecca.”(vol. 1, 317). Also see Ṭabarī, *Al-Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 327; Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī Al-Tārīkh*, vol.2, 45. The *Qur’an* also refers to the persecution of the early Muslims: “Those who have left their homes and been driven out from there (Mecca) and persecuted to My cause...” (3:195); “...Those who migrated after trials and persecution...” (16: 110).

However, nowadays those who do not have any persuasive argument and cannot challenge the contemporary culture have taken up arms in the name of Islamic *jihad* to kill, assassinate, or kidnap innocent people and to destroy the countries' infrastructures whereas the Prophet had been preaching Islam and enlightening people by means of persuasive argument for years before he had to fight against oppressors and invaders, as the *Qur'an* instructed him: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and appropriate guidance, and reason with them in the most gracious way" (16:125).

In his book *the Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, Thomas Arnold closes his second chapter with words that tend towards a common conclusion:

Thus, from the very beginning Islam bears the stamp of a missionary religion that seeks to win the hearts of men, to convert them and persuade them to enter the brotherhood of the faithful. (41)

Therefore, from the Islamic point of view, war is an inescapable, unfortunate option that Muslims have to resort to in order to thwart invasion or oppression, as the *Qur'an* says about the rationale behind war, "If Allah had not restrained some men by others, the land would have been full of wrong-doing (*fasād*)" (2:251). Consequently, if war deviates from the course prescribed above, it will itself cause great damage, as seen in most wars throughout the world's history.

## Answers to Objections

There are opponents who has raised objections to Islam and accused it as an ideology that teaches violence to its adherents. Here we are going to answer some of the most common objections:

- Many Muslim leaders have denied the charge of terrorism leveled against Islam and made a distinction between Islam and some Muslims' acts of violence in the same way as Christianity has nothing to do with indisputable cruelty of Christian crusaders. However, some skeptics have argued that unlike Christianity whose prophet neither waged war on his enemies nor promoted violence, Islam is a religion of sword since the Prophet Muhammad himself waged battles against non-Muslims and promoted violence against them.

First of all, it should be noted that according to Matthew (10:34), Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Then Jesus anticipated fighting between his followers and their close relatives saying, "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (10:36). Since the enmity could escalate into fighting, Jesus referred to "sword" as a symbol of war. But why was Jesus himself never involved in a war against his enemies? That was because he then had no combative army in almost the same way as the Prophet Muhammad did not fight against his enemies when he and his followers were tormented in Mecca but other than that the Prophet Muhammad managed to escape

unharméd to Medina by God's grace whereas Jesus, according to Christians, was arrested before he had a chance to escape from his enemies. But the assertion that Jesus was even opposed to defensive war seems to be unfounded since, according to Luke (22:36), he said to his disciples, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Clearly, swords did not do any good except for war or defense, even though his disciples did not have a chance to use them since they were outnumbered by their enemy. We also read in the Old Testament about Moses' wars against the Midianites (Numbers, 31: 3) and Amalek (Exodus, 17:7-8). Can a Christian claim Moses was not God's prophet because he fought against his enemies?

Moreover, we saw in the previous chapters that until the enemy persecuted the Prophet Muhammad and his followers, forced them to leave their hometown and attempted to murder the Prophet, he had not fought against them. According to al-Wāqidī in *Al-Maghāzī*, Sallām ibn Mishkam, a Jewish leader, said about the Prophet, "Unless you collar this man [that is, force him into war], he won't fight; By God, this is an admirable attitude" (vol. 1, 531). And when the Prophet decided to defend against those who had declared war on the Muslims and sent in an army to confront them in a battle, he used to advise his army with such words: "Move forward in the name of Allah and by His help and on the path of His Apostle. Do not kill any old men, any children, or any women. Do not betray one another in spoils, but rather bring them together. Put (the issues) right and do good deeds, for Allah loves those who do good deeds" (Abū Dāvūd, vol. 2, 382). By juxtaposing this with what the Bible cited about the wars that Moses had waged on his enemies, one can clearly discern whether Islam was a violent religion or not.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cf. the description of Moses' war against the Midianites, according to the Old Testament: "And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and *they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian ... And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones*, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and

The other assertion that Islam is a religion of sword since the Prophet Muhammad himself waged battles against non-Muslims and promoted violence against them also proves ill-founded. First of all, by studying the history of Islam, one finds out that shortly after his migrating to Medina, the Prophet, who wished to coexist peacefully with the Jews of Medina, signed a treaty with them, known as the Charter of Medina.<sup>2</sup> According to this treaty which Ibn Hishām cited in his *Al-Sīra al-Nabawīyya*, “The Jews have their own religion, and so do their allies (*mawālī*) except those who act unjustly and disloyally”(vol. 1, 501). The treaty also specifies

The Jews must bear their own expenses (in war) and the Muslims bear their own expenses. If anyone attacks anyone who is a party to this Pact (*al-Ṣaḥīfa*), the other must come to his help. They (parties to this Pact) must seek mutual advice and consultation. Loyalty gives protection against treachery.

No one will be disloyal to his ally. (Ibn Hishām, vol. 1, 501)

This binding treaty has been cited in the authoritative books of hadith and history. Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Ṣaḥīḥs*, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāvūd, Nasa’ī, Ibn Māja, and Dārimī in their *Sunans*, and Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal in his *Musnad* have cited it, and Ibn S’ad (in his *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*), Ṭabarī, Balādhurī and al-Miqrīzī in their *Histories* have reported sections from it. The treaty indicates the Prophet’s dedication to honoring non-Muslims’ rights, and only the Jews’ violation of the treaty undermined the peaceful relationship between them and the Muslims. After the Jews saw the Prophet’s increasing influence, they dreaded the prospect of his power and entered secret alliance with the Meccan idolaters; they even told the

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all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire... And Moses said unto them, have ye saved all the women alive?... Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children [(little girls)], that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves (Numbers, 31: 7-18).

2. The translator’s note: The Charter of Medina serves as the precedent for the coexistence of Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, it stated that Muslims and Jews constituted one political entity with Medina as their center; both of them were to offer reciprocal respect and tolerance for the two religion. Jews were permitted to live in peace and to practice their own religion (for its full text see: <http://www.constitution.org/cons/medina/macharter.htm>)

idolaters that idolatry was better than Islam, as the *Qur'an* discloses their disloyalty to the Muslims,

Have you not taken a look at those who were given a portion of the Book (the Torah)? They... tell the unbelievers that they are better guided in the right way than the believers. (4:51).

Even the famous Jewish orientalist, Israel Wolfensohn wrote in his *History of Jews in Arab Countries*, “The Jews were duty-bound to avoid such a flagrant blunder that they said openly before Quraish’s headmen that worshipping the idols was better than the Islamic monotheism” (142). Thus, the Muslims’ relations with the Jews of Medina became strained. Yet, in the chapter 5 (*Sūra al-Mā’ida*) of the *Qur'an* (which revealed to the Prophet towards the end of his life), the Prophet is advised to forgive the Jews’ wrongdoings: “...You will not cease to find them, except a few, ever bent on treacheries, but forgive them and spare them from your rebuke for Allah loves those who do good deeds. (5: 13)

As to Christians, in the chapter 5 (*Sūra al-Mā’ida*) of the *Qur'an*, we read,

You will find the nearest in love to the believers those who say, “We are Christians,” because among them are men devoted to learning (ecclesiastics) and men who have given up the worldly life (monks), and they are not haughty (5: 82).

The Prophet also signed a peace treaty with the Christians of Najrān who had withdrawn from *Mubāhala*<sup>3</sup> (Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, 162).

Again, in the chapter 5 of the *Qur'an*, Muslims are given permission to come to visit the people of the book (like Christians and Jews), to eat their food or to ask for their virtuous women’ hands in marriage:

The food of the people of the book is lawfully fit (*hilla*) for you, and your food is lawfully fit for them. Chaste women

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3. The translator’s note: The Event of Mubāhala was a debate between the Prophet Muhammad and the Christians of Najrān in which either of the sides was supposed to call God’s curse down upon whichever of the two parties was not speaking truthfully. To the Christians’ surprise, the Prophet took his closest kindred (Ali, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusain) with him to the debate, and the Christians withdrew.

who are believers and chaste women of the people of the book are lawful for you in marriage”(5:5).

Even more interestingly, according to the *Qur’an*, even unbelievers who do not fight against Muslims and do not expel them from their homeland should be treated fairly and well by Muslims:

Allah does not forbid you to act justly and kindly with those who do not fight against you over your faith and do not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those practice justice. Allah forbids you only from friendship with those who fight against you over your faith and drive you out of your homes or support others in driving you out (60:8-9).

Yet, some skeptics still cite some Qur’anic verses to conclude that Islam promotes violence against non-Muslims. Let us mention one of the most cited verses in this regard:

And fight against them until there is no more persecution (*fitna*), and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except towards those practice oppression. (2:193)

Firstly, it should be noted that the Arabic word *fitna* in the Qur’anic verse means ‘persecuting’ the Muslims to relinquish their faith, as clearly understood from the following verses: “...They keep fighting against you until they turn you back from your faith, if they can...” (2:217). Secondly, as Muslim exegetes have said about the historical context in which the Qur’anic verse was revealed, unbelievers of Quraish were still striving to coerce the Muslims into polytheism. Accordingly, the Qur’anic verse ordered the Muslims to defend themselves against those who persecuted and fought them only because of their devotion to their religion. Moreover, the verse also instructed the Muslims to stop fighting whenever their enemy ceased to fight against them. How could the Qur’anic verse promote violence against non-Muslims?!

- Some Muslim extremists may object to the notion that all the Prophet’s battles were defensive. They may say that the Prophet sometimes

had pre-emptive attacks on his enemies as in the Battle of Badr.<sup>4</sup> In response to this objection, we should note that by searching for the root causes of the Prophet's battles, one clearly finds out that they are all defensive in various forms including self-defense, the defense of the oppressed, or the defense of human rights, such as the right of religious freedom. For example, the Battle of Badr was preceded by a period in which the Muslims were persecuted by Quraish in Mecca to the point where some of them, like Sumaiyya and Yasir, were killed after days of excruciating torture. In addition, after the Muslims left Mecca to escape being persecuted, Quraish appropriated their houses and properties. Therefore, some of the Muslims who migrated to Medina had become absolutely destitute, as the *Qur'an* bears testimony to this: "To those needy emigrants who were taken away from their homes and possessions..." (59:8); "Those who migrated and expelled from their homes and suffered to My cause..." (3:195).<sup>5</sup> Then the Muslims who lived in Medina received the news that a caravan belonging to heads of Quraish who had already seized the Muslims' properties was returning from Syria. Thus, they attempted to intercept the caravan to take their stolen properties back in fact. However, they were faced with an army raised by Quraish of Mecca to protect the caravan. Although the Muslims were hopelessly outnumbered, they did not withdraw and, with divine intervention, they won the battle. Therefore, the Muslims' battle against idolaters of Mecca occurred after they had been persecuted, killed and robbed of their possessions. Can this war be

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4. The translator's note: The Battle of Badr (624/2 AH) was a key battle after the advent of the Islamic state in Medina and a turning point in the Prophet's struggle with his opponents of Quraish. The Muslims won a decisive victory in this battle.

5. The translator's note: Even after the Muslims' migration to Medina, Quraish never ceased to spite them. According to Ibn Kathir in his *Stories of the Prophets*: "Towards the second year of the *hijra* [(the migration to Medina)], the idolaters of Mecca began a series of hostile acts against the Muslims of Medina. They sent men in parties to commit depredations on the fruit trees of the Muslims of Medina and to carry away their flocks." (162)

considered anything but a defensive battle? The *Qur'an* clearly specifies that God defended the Muslims against their enemy in this battle:

Allah *defends* those who believe; verily, Allah does not love any disloyal ingrate. Permission (to fight) is given to those believers against whom war is waged since they have been wronged, and Allah is the Omnipotent who aids them with victory; they are those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly for no reason other than that they say, "Our Lord is Allah"...(22:38-40)

- In order to justify their acts of violence, Muslim extremists claim that today, preaching the Muslim faith requires military *jihad*. They seem totally unaware of the fact that violent acts towards people without a prior attempt to enlighten them is more of coercion and falsehood than *jihad* because cultural *jihad* takes priority over military *jihad*, as shown in the previous chapter. Al-Wāqidī in his *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* reports that when the Prophet wished to send Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib at the head of a group of Muslims to Yemen, Ali asked him, "How do I deal with the people?" The Prophet replied:

When you alight in their courtyard (i.e. homeland), do not fight them until they fight you; if they attack you, do not fight them until they kill one of you. Even if they kill one of you, do not fight them but spare them to show them your forbearance. Say to them, "Will you say that there is but one God?" And if they say, "Yes," say, "Will you pray?" And if they say, "Yes," say, "Will you take from your property and give charity to you poor?" And if they say, "Yes," do not ask them for anything else. By God, if He guides a man by your hand, it is better for you than whatever the sun rises or sets on. (vol. 2, 79)

Instead of killing other peoples and the conquest of their lands, this is the cause that Muslims should devote themselves to in their encounter with those peoples. Whoever is willing to listen to the message of the Prophet must comply with his instructions. This must be Muslims' dealings with unbelievers, let alone other Muslims. However, today we notice extremists killing Muslim men, women and children in the name of Islam under the pretext that "we set out to revive Islam and establish *jihad*"!

The *Qur'an* says about militant unbelievers who fought against Muslims: "...Therefore, if they withdraw from you, do not fight you, and wish to call a truce with you, Allah has opened NO way for you against them" (4:90). This must be Muslims' way to deal with unbelievers who wish to call a truce with them, let alone other Muslims who are members of the same religion.

- To our surprise, we sometimes hear some extremists claim that those Qur'anic verses which advise Muslims to treat other people with compassion and forgiveness had all been revealed in Mecca, and the other Qur'anic verses which speak of aggression towards unbelievers were revealed in Medina and, hence, rendered the former Qur'anic verses obsolete. In response to their skepticism, we should firstly say that this false idea results from an example of incomplete induction, that is, overgeneralization based on a very limited number of particular instances; there are Qur'anic verses that were revealed in Medina, but they still instructed Muslims to treat both other Muslims and non-Muslims with compassion and forgiveness. For example, in the chapters 24 and 5 (*Sura al-Nūr* and *Sura al-Mā'ida*) which were revealed in Medina according to all the Muslim exegetes, we read about Muslims and non-Muslims respectively: "... Let them forgive and overlook" (24:22) and "... But forgive them (the Jews) and spare them from your rebuke for Allah loves those who do good deeds (5: 13).

Secondly, given that Muslims regard the Prophet as a paragon of virtue (See *Qur'an*, 33:21) he was full of compassion and forgiveness towards the non-Muslims in Medina let alone the Muslims. For instance, we have cited his gracious attitudes towards the Hawāzin captives who were all released.

Thirdly, compassion and forgiveness are among moral virtues, and moral virtues do not become obsolete since the ultimate purpose of faith is to attain the virtues, as the Prophet said, "I was designated to perfect the

moral virtues” (Al-Baihaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 10, 323; also see Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 2, 331; Mālik, *Al-Muwattʿ*, vol. 2, 211).

In fact, such excuses for committing acts of violence come from twisted minds not from the authoritative Islamic sources.

- Some extremists claim that they comply with what the *Qurʿan* instructs them to do: “Kill the polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) whenever you find them...” (9:5). One wonders how they totally ignore the previous Qurʿanic verse from the same chapter: “(The treaties are) not given up with those polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) who have fully honored their treaties with you and helped none against you...” (9:4). Again, in the same chapter, it says, “How can there be a treaty before Allah and His apostle with the polytheists (*al-mushrikīn*) except those with whom you made a treaty near the Sacred Mosque? As long as they remain true to you, remain true to them...”(9:7). Consequently, the polytheists were grouped into two categories according to their commitment to their treaties with the Muslims: those who breached the terms of their peace treaty with the Muslims and those who kept their pledge and respected their treaty with the Muslims. According to the *Qurʿan*, it is only permitted to fight the first group, that is, those who breached their treaty with the Muslims through inflicting serious harm on them, as again in the same chapter, it says, “Will you not fight the people who breached their treaties, set out to expel the Prophet, and aggressively confronted you *first*?” (9:13). It is shocking that these extremists who call themselves adherents of the *Qurʿan* have drawn too general a conclusion from a single Qurʿanic verse showing a complete disregard of its context. Aren’t they reading their aggressive tendencies into what the holy *Qurʿan* says in order to misrepresent the truth?

- They sometimes assert that they are acting on the basis of a hadith from the Prophet quoted by Abū Huraira:

I was assigned to fight *the* people until they say, “There is no god except Allah.” If they say that, their blood and wealth are protected from me save by the rights of Islam. Their reckoning will be with Allah. (Al-Bukhārī, vol.4, 58)

The answer is that “the people” in this hadith does not mean all people, but it signifies only the militant polytheists (who engaged in a war against Muslims) for obvious reasons: Firstly, Christians who do not testify that there is no god except Allah because of their belief in the Trinity are excluded from the statement quoted above since, based on the *Qur’an* (9:29), Christian subjects and other people of the book are allowed to practice their own religions in an Islamic state as long as they pay *jizya* (a per capita tax).<sup>6</sup> Secondly, according to the *Qur’an* (9:4&7), polytheists (*mushrikīn*) who sign peace treaties with Muslims are also excluded from the statement. Thirdly, the word “people” (*al-nās*) sometimes means all people and sometimes means a specific group of people as in this Qur’anic verse: “Those to whom *the people* said, ‘*The people* have gathered against you, so be fearful of them!’...” (3:173). Clearly, “the people” in both places refers to two different and specific groups of people. For the above reasons, “the people” in the hadith does not include all people, but it means only the militant polytheists.

Moreover, the extremist groups are usually at war against those who say, “There is no god except Allah;” therefore, in actual fact, the aforesaid hadith is against them!

- The extremist groups maintain that the world is divided into two politically distinct zones: *dār al-Islam* (literally, “the abode of Islam”) and *dār al-kufr* (literally, “the abode of unbelief). In their opinion, Muslims live in *dār al-Islam*, and they are at war with those in *dār al-kufr*. However, they have left out *dār al-hudna* (literally, “the abode of truce”) and *dār al-ṣulḥ* (literally, “the abode of peace”) in their division. *Dār al-hudna*

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6. See the chapter “Culture of Violence” where *jizya* was explained in more detail.

includes the lands of non-believers who have agreed to call a truce with Muslims, and *dār al-ṣulḥ* includes the territories of non-believers that have a treaty of non-aggression or peace with Muslims. The Prophet, for example, signed a peace treaty with the polytheists at Ḥudaibīyya, and, as long as they did not breach the treaty, he fully respected it. Today many non-Muslim countries are in peace with Muslims not declaring war on them, and Muslim students are freely studying in these countries. However, the extremists mobilize their terrorists and suicide bombers to attack civilians of those countries. It is shocking that some of the victims are often among children and women given that the Prophet strictly forbade Muslims from killing them even in wartime.

- At times, they cite the acts of violence that some of the Prophet’s companions committed and consider them as their paragons, whereas the paragon of every Muslim is the Prophet whom the *Qur’an* has called “mercy unto all creatures.” The reference point against which Muslims’ behaviors must be evaluated is the Prophet’s conduct rather than others’, as the *Qur’an* says, “In the Messenger of God, you have a model of excellence for one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day...” (33:21). The Prophet used to denounce some of his companions’ violent conduct. For instance, after the famous companion Khālīd ibn Walīd, despite all his services to Islam, had harshly treated Banī Jadhīma Tribe, the Prophet lifted his hands and said three times, “O God, I dissociate myself from what Khālīd has done” (Ibn Hishām, vol. 4, 67; Ibn S’ad, vol. 2, 107). Then he sent Ali to Banī Jadhīma to compensate them for their loss. Therefore, acts of violence even by those who are considered to be among the Prophet’s companions cannot be legitimate excuses to follow suit, or rather, we must sometimes dissociate ourselves from their acts. This is a rule that we must live by while studying all incidents in the history of Islam.

In conclusion, it should be noted that such violent groups as the Kharijites and ISIS, who have been criticized in this book, regrettably, split away from the Sunnites. That is why we have not addressed the issue of violence in other Islamic sects such as the Ismā'īliyya whose history witnessed an increase in religious intolerance. Incidentally, the moderate groups of the Sunnites, particularly their scholars, are strongly opposed to the criminal offences committed by such groups as the Kharijites and ISIS.<sup>7</sup>

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7. The translator's note: Any comments or suggestions about the English translation will be greatly appreciated; please send them to [s.tabatabai@outlook.com](mailto:s.tabatabai@outlook.com)

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