

The Concept of Jihad Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Jihad is regularly misconstrued as war, with all its connotations of violence and bloodshed. However, in the Islamic context, and in literal sense, the word *jihad* simply means a struggle—doing one's utmost to further a worthy cause. This is an entirely peaceful struggle, with no overtones even of aggression. The actual Arabic equivalent of war, is *qital*, and even this is meant in a defensive sense.

According to Islamic teachings, *jihad* is of two kinds. One is with the self (*jihad bin nafs*), that is, making the maximum effort to keep control over negative feelings in one's self, for instance, arrogance, jealousy, greed, revenge, anger, etc. The psychological efforts to lead such a life of restraint is what *jihad bin nafs* is about. In social life, it happens time and again that all sorts of base, negative feelings well up within a man, causing him to lead his life succumbing to desires and temptations. The internal effort made in such a situation to overcome the temptations of the self and to continue to lead a life guided by principles is the truly Islamic *jihad bin nafs*.

According to the hadith, a believer is one who wages jihad with himself in the path of obedience to God. That is, at moments when the self (*nafs*), lured by some temptation, desires to deviate from the path of God, he keeps control over it and remains unwaveringly on the divine path. This is his *jihad*—a permanent feature of the life of a believer, continuing day and night, and ending only with death.

The other form of *jihad* is that which is engaged in to propagate the constructive message of Islam. All those who embark upon such a course must first of all study the Qur'an and *sunnah* in a dispassionate and objective manner. No kind of conditioning should be allowed to come in the way of such a study. Only after passing through this intellectual *jihad* will the would-be proponent of Islam be in a position to make a true representation of his religion.

Two conditions have been laid down in the Qur'an for the communication of the teachings of Islam to others—*nasih*, well-wishing and *amin*, trustworthiness. The former appertains to God and the latter to man.

What is meant by *nasih* (well-wishing) is an earnest desire on the part of the teacher for the well-being not just of his immediate interlocutors, but the whole of humanity. This well-wishing should be so steadfast that it remains undiluted even in the face of injustice and oppression. Overlooking people's negative behavior towards him, the teacher should continue to remain their well-wisher.

The element of trustworthiness (*amin*) is important in that it ensures that the Islam God has sent to the world will be presented to the people without deletion, addition or distortion. For instance, if the Islam sent by God is *akhirah* (Hereafter) oriented, it should not become world oriented; if it is spirituality based, it should not become politics based; if it confines jihad to peaceful struggle, it should not become violence based.

Islam asks us to perform *jihad* by means of the Qur'an, calling this 'greater' *jihad*. But it never asks its believers to do the 'greater' jihad by means of the gun. This is a clear proof that *jihad* is, in actual fact, a wholly peaceful activity, carried out through peaceful methods. It has nothing to do with violent activities or violent threats.

Jihad through the Qur'an means striving to the utmost to present the teachings of the Qur'an before the people. That is, presenting the concept of One God as opposed to the concept of many gods; presenting *akhirah*-oriented life as superior to world-oriented life; principle-oriented life as against interest-oriented life; a humanitarian-oriented life as more elevated than a self-oriented life and a duty-oriented life as a categorical imperative taking moral precedence over a rights-oriented life.

Jihad, according to Islam, is not something about which there is any mystery. It is simply a natural requirement of daily living. It is vital both as a concept and as a practice because, while leading his life in this world, man is repeatedly confronted by such circumstances as are likely to derail him from the humanitarian path of the highest order.

These factors sometimes appear within man in the form of negative feelings. This is something to which everyone must remain intellectually alert, so that if for any reason there is some danger of a negative mindset gaining the upperhand, he may consciously and deliberately turn himself to positive thinking. Even if circumstances repeatedly place him in situations which are depressing and demoralizing, he must never on such occasions lose courage or lose sight of noble goals. The re-assertion of his ethical sense is the real *jihad* which he has to wage.

From the Islamic standpoint, intention is all-important. Any undertaking carried out with good intentions will win God's approval, while anything done with bad intentions is bound to be disapproved of and rejected by God. In actual fact, intentions are the sole criteria of good or bad actions in the divine scheme of things.

This truth relates *jihad* to man's entire life and to all of his activities. Whatever man does in this world, be it at home, or in his professional capacity, in family or in social life, his prime imperative must be to carry it out with good intentions and not the reverse. This, however, is no simple matter. In all one's dealings, adhering strictly to the right path requires a continuous struggle. This is a great and unremitting lifelong struggle. And this is what is called *jihad*.

Even if one is engaged in good works, such as the establishment and running of institutions which cater for social welfare or academic needs, or if one is personally engaged in social work or performing some service in the political field, in all such works the element of personal glory has a way of creeping in. Therefore, in all such instances, it is essential that in the individuals concerned there should be a strong tendency to introspection, so that they may keep before them at all times the goal, not of personal glory but the greater glory of God.

It is one's intense inner struggle to make all activities God-oriented which is truly Islamic *jihad*.