

## Non-Violence and Islam Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Non-violence should never be confused with inaction or passivity. Non-violence is action in the full sense of the word. Rather it is more forceful an action than that of violence. It is a fact that non-violent activism is more powerful and effective than violent activism.

Non-violent activism is not limited in its sphere. It is a course of action which may be followed in all matters.

Whenever individuals, groups or communities are faced with a problem, one way to solve it is by resorting to violence. The better way is to attempt to solve the problem by peaceful means, avoiding violence and confrontation. Peaceful means may take various forms. In fact, it is the nature of the problem which will determine which of these peaceful methods is applicable to the given situation.

Islam is a religion which teaches non-violence. According to the Qur'an, God does not love *fasad*, violence. What is meant here by *fasad* is clearly expressed in verse 205 of the second *Surah*. Basically, *fasad* is that action which results in disruption of the social system, causing huge losses in terms of lives and property.

Conversely, we can say with certainty that God loves non-violence. He abhors violent activity being indulged in human society, as a result of which people have to pay the price with their possessions and lives. This is supported by other statements in the Qur'an. For instance, we are told in the Qur'an that peace is one of God's names (59:23). Those who seek to please God are assured by verse 5 of the sixteenth *surah* that they will be guided by Him to "the paths of peace." Paradise, which is the final destination of the society of God's choice, is referred to in the Qur'an as "the home of peace" (89:30), etc.

The entire spirit of the Qur'an is in consonance with this concept. For instance, the Qur'an attaches great importance to patience. In fact, patience is set above all other Islamic virtues with the exceptional promise of reward beyond measure. (39:10)

Patience implies a peaceful response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. The word *Sabr* exactly expresses the notion of non-violence as it is understood in modern times. That patient action is non-violent action has been clearly expressed in the Qur'an. According to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: God grants to *rifq* (gentleness) what he does not grant to *unf* (violence). (Sunan, Abu Dawood, 4/255)

The word *rifq* has been used in this hadith as an antithesis to *unf*. These terms convey exactly what is meant by violence and non-violence in present times. This hadith clearly indicates the superiority of the non-violent method.

God grants on non-violence what He does not grant to violence is no simple matter. It has very wide and deep implications. It embodies an eternal law of nature. By the very law of nature all bad things are associated with violence, while all good things are associated with non-violence.

Violent activities breed hatred in society, while non-violent activities elicit love. Violence is the way of destruction while non-violence is the way of construction. In an atmosphere of violence, it is enmity which flourishes, while in an atmosphere of non-violence, it is

friendship which flourishes. The method of violence gives way to negative values while the method of non-violence is marked by positive values. The method of violence embroils people in problems, while the method of non-violence leads people to the exploiting of opportunities. In short, violence is death, non-violence is life.

Both the Qur'an and the hadith have attached great importance to *jihad*. What is *jihad*? *Jihad* means struggle, to struggle one's utmost. It must be appreciated at the outset that this word is used for non-violent struggle as opposed to violent struggle. One clear proof of this is the verse of the Qur'an (25:52) which says: Perform *jihad* with this (i.e. the word of the Qur'an) most strenuously.

The Qur'an is not a sword or a gun. It is a book of ideology. In such a case performing *jihad* with the Qur'an would mean an ideological struggle to conquer peoples' hearts and minds through Islam's superior philosophy.

In the light of this verse of the Qur'an, *jihad* in actual fact is another name for peaceful activism or non-violent activism. Where *qital* is violent activism, *jihad* is non-violent activism.

### **Peaceful Beginning**

When the Qur'an began to be revealed, the first verse of the revelation conveyed the injunction: 'Read!' (*Iqra*) (96:1). By perusing this verse we learn about the initiation of Islamic action. It begins from the point where there is hope of continuing the movement along peaceful lines, and not from that point where there are chances of its being marred by violence.

When the command of '*Iqra*' was revealed, there were many options available in Mecca as starting points for a movement. For instance, one possible starting point was to launch a movement to purify the Kabah of the 360 idols installed in it. But, by pursuing such a course the Islamic movement would certainly have had to face a violent reaction from the Quraysh. An alternative starting point could have been an attempt to secure a seat in the Dar-al-Nadwa (Mecca's parliament). At that time almost the whole of Arabia was under the direct or indirect influence of the Roman and Sasanid empires. If the freeing of Arabia from this influence had been made the starting point, this would also have been met with an immediate violent reaction on the part of the Quraysh.

Leaving aside these options, the path followed was that of reading the Qur'an, an activity that could be with certainty continued along peaceful lines: no violent reaction would ensue from engaging in such an activity.

The Prophet of Islam followed this principle throughout his life. His policy was that of adopting non-violent methods in preference to violent methods. It is this policy which was referred to by Aishah, the Prophet's wife, in these words: Whenever the Prophet had to opt for one of two ways, he almost always opted for the easier one. (*Fathul Bari* 6/654)

What are the advantages of non-violent activism over violent activism? They are briefly stated as under:

1. According to the Qur'an there are two faculties in every human being which are mutually antipathetic. One is the ego, and the other is the conscience called

respectively *nafs ammara* and *nafs lawwama*. (The Qur'an, 12:53; 75:26) What the violent method invariably does is to awaken the ego which necessarily results in a breakdown of social equilibrium. On the other hand, non-violent activism awakens the conscience. From this results an awakening in people of introspection and self-appraisal. And according to the Qur'an, the miraculous outcome of this is that "he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend." (41:34)

2. A great advantage of the non-violent method is that, by following it, no part of one's time is wasted. The opportunities available in any given situation may then be exploited to the fullest extent—as happened after the no-war pact of Hudaibiya. This peace treaty enabled the energies of the believers to be utilized in peaceful constructive activities instead of being dissipated in a futile armed encounter. One great harm done by violent activism is the breaking of social traditions in the launching of militant movements. Conversely, the great benefit that accrues from non-violent activism is that it can be initiated and prolonged with no damage to tradition.

Generally speaking, attempts to improve or replace existing systems by violent activism are counter-productive. One coup d'état is often the signal for a series of coups and counter-coups, none of which benefit the common man. The truly desirable revolution is that which permits gradual and beneficial changes. And this can be achieved only on the basis of non-violence.

### **Success Through the Non-violence Method**

All the great successes of the first phase of Islam as well as the succeeding periods were achieved by non-violent methods. Listed below are some examples of these successes.

1. Of the 23 year period of prophethood, the initial 13 years were spent by the Prophet in Mecca. The Prophet fully adopted the way of pacifism or non-violence during this time. There were many such issues in Mecca at that time which could have been the subject of clash and confrontation. But, sedulously avoiding all such issues, the Prophet of Islam strictly limited his sphere to peaceful propagation of the word of God. This resulted in *Dawah* work being performed in full force throughout this period. One of the great gains during these 13 years of *dawah* work was the entry into the Islamic fold of men of the highest moral caliber who were responsible for forming the history of Islam, for instance, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali, etc.
2. In Mecca when the Quraysh leaders were set to wage war against the Prophet, even then, instead of opting for the way of reaction and retaliation, what the Prophet did was to secretly migrate to Medina.

Migration, by its very nature, was a clear example of non-violent activism. This peaceful strategy enabled the Prophet and his followers, about two hundred in number, to form a powerful center of Islam in Medina. Had they adopted the path of confrontation instead of peaceful migration, the history of Islam might have been buried right there in Mecca shortly after its inception.

3. After the emigration, his antagonists took the unilateral decision to wage war against him. Consequently such bloody encounters as those of Badr and Uhud took place. Then the Prophet made a 10-year peace treaty known in history as Sulh al-Hudaibiya, by accepting all the conditions of his opponents. This has been called a 'clear victory' in the Qur'an. It is this peace treaty, paving the way for peaceful

constructive activities which ultimately made possible the conquest of Mecca and the whole of Arabia.

4. By the end of the pious caliphate, a bloody encounter took place between the Banu Hashim and the Banu Umayya. This stopped the advance of Islam for a period of ten years. What set this process in motion once again was the voluntary withdrawal of Hasan ibn Ali (d. 50 A.H.) from the battlefield. This was undeniably a practical form of non-violent activism. This peaceful move on the part of Hasan ibn Ali re-opened to Islam the locked doors of progress.
5. During the last days of the Abbasid caliphate Mongol tribes attacked the Muslim world and right from Samarkand to Aleppo destroyed the entire Muslim world. The history of Islam had apparently come to a standstill. At that moment the spirit of dawah work was born within the Muslims. As a result, the majority of the Mongols converted to Islam. And that miracle took place which has been described by an orientalist in these words: "The religion of Muslims has conquered where their arms had failed."
6. Islamic history took a crucial turn when, in the years succeeding the pious caliphate, rot had set in the system of the government, and the caliphate had turned into monarchy. At that juncture, many factors emerged which would result in clash and confrontation between the ruler and the ruled. But, following the guidance of the Prophet, the Muslims totally avoided political confrontation. This history beginning with the Umayyad caliphate, continued for several centuries. This was possible because the *tabieen* (companions of the Prophet's companions) and their succeeding generations, consisting of traditionalists, jurists, ulema, Sufis and other great religious scholars, all scrupulously avoided any clash or confrontation with the rulers.

It was during this period that peaceful dawah work was started in various countries and the disciplines of hadith, fiqh and other Islamic sciences came into existence on a large scale after a long period of great ideological struggle. All the precious books which adorn our libraries, all the classical literature of Islam are the result of these peaceful activities.

For instance, the hadith as a source of shariah is second only to the Qur'an in Islam. These traditions now exist in the form of printed books. These books are so precious that, without them, it would not have been possible to develop Islam into a complete system as it exists today. During the Umayyads and Abbasids, when the political system had begun to deteriorate, where were these tens of thousands of traditions. All of them existed in the memory of the religious scholars, whose names are mentioned in the books as chains in the link of authorities who have handed this legacy down to us. Had they adopted the principle of violent activism and clashed with the 'oppressive' rulers, they would all have been slaughtered by them and the entire legacy of traditions instead of finding a place on the pages of books, would have been buried along with them in the graveyards. It is by the miracle of having adopted non-violence instead of violence that the precious sources of our traditions have survived in book form and, till today, adorn our libraries.

### **Political Revolt Unlawful**

Despite the blatant perversion in the Muslim rulers after the pious caliphate, the Muslim ulema did not lead an insurrection against these corrupt individuals. For about a period of one thousand years they remained detached in this matter and continued to engage all their efforts in non-material fields. This was not a matter of accident but in obedience to the injunctions of the shariah.

As we know, in the books of hadith detailed traditions have been set down in the chapters titled 'kitabul fitan'. The Prophet of Islam observed in plain words that in later times perversions would set in the rulers, they would become tyrannical and unjust, but that Muslims should not wield their swords against them. They should rather move to the mountains with their goats and camels.

By 'goats and camels' are meant the opportunities in non-political fields which exist, even when the political institutions are corrupted. This injunction given by the Prophet meant that the Muslims should avail of such opportunities by avoiding clash and confrontation in the political field. In short, by ignoring the political problem, they should avail of the non-political opportunities.

These injunctions of the Prophet of Islam were so clear that the Muslim ulema of later times formed a consensus to make insurrection against the rulers unlawful.

Imam An-Nawawi, commenting upon some traditions as set forth by Sahih Muslim (*Kitab Al-Imarah*) observes: "You should not come into conflict with the rulers in matters of their power. Even if you find them going against express Islamic injunctions, you should attempt to make the truth clear to them solely through words of wisdom and advice. So far as revolt and war against them in order to unseat them is concerned, that is totally unlawful according to the consensus of the ulema, even when the rulers are *zalim and fasiq* (tyrants and evil)." (Sahih Muslim, Bisharh An-Nawawi, 12/229)

This command of the Prophet, as clearly expressed above, was based on extremely important considerations. In actual fact, in the early phase of Islam (as well as in the later phase) *dawah* and reform works had to be performed, without which the history of Islam would not have been complete. If the ulema of the Muslim community had tried to pose a threat to the political institutions, certainly all this constructive work would have been left undone. That is why the Prophet of Islam expressly prohibited any clash with political institutions. This avoidance of strife guaranteed that non-political constructive work would continue to be performed without any break.

In every society there are always two systems side by side, one political and the other non-political. The latter is established through various non-political institutions. According to the scheme of Islam, non-political institutions established at the social level have always to remain stable. In this way there is a continuing endeavor—even when the political institutions have become corrupt, or keep changing—to keep Islam firmly established at the level of the non-political system.

### **The Command of War in Islam**

It is a fact that certain verses in the Qur'an convey the command to do battle (*qital*) (22:39). What the special circumstances are which justify the issuance of and compliance with this command we learn from our study of the Qur'an.

1. The first point to be noted is that aggression or the launching of an offensive by the believers is not totally forbidden. It is permissible, but with certain provisos. We are clearly commanded in the Qur'an: Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, *but do not be aggressive.* (2:190)
2. Only defensive war is permitted in Islam. Such a war is one in which aggression is committed by some other party so that the believers have to fight in self-defense.

Initiating hostility is not permitted for Muslims. The Qur'an says: "They were the first to attack you." (9:13)

Furthermore, even in the case of the offensive being launched by an opposing group, the believers are not supposed to retaliate immediately. Rather in the beginning all efforts are to be made to avert war, and only when avoidance has become impossible is battle to be resorted to inevitably in defense.

3. According to the Qur'an there was one form of war which was time-bound strictly in relation to its purpose. This was to put an end to *fitna* 'Fight against them until *fitna* is no more.' (2:193) In this verse *fitna* signifies that coercive system which had reached the extremes of religious persecution. In ancient times this coercive political system prevailed all over the world. This absolutism had closed all the doors of progress, both spiritual and material. At that time God commanded the believers to break this coercive system in order to usher in freedom, so that all doors of spiritual and material progress might be opened to man.

This mission was undertaken and brought to a successful conclusion at the internal level within Arabia during the life of the Prophet. Later, during the pious caliphate, the Sasanid and Byzantine empires were dismantled with special divine succor. Consequently, intellectual oppression at the international level was replaced by intellectual freedom.

In this connection those traditions are worth noting which are enshrined in Sahih al-Bukhari. When, after the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, political conflict ensued between Abdullah ibn Zubayr and the Umayyads, Abdullah ibn Umar, the seniormost companion of the Prophet held himself aloof from the battle. People approached him and, quoting the verse of *qital-e-fitna*, asked him why he was not joining in the battle. Abdullah ibn Umar replied that '*fitna*' as mentioned in the Qur'an did not refer to political infighting, but rather to the religious coercive system, that had already been put to an end by them. (Fathul Bari, 8/60)

From this we learn that the war against *fitna* was a war of limited duration, meant to be engaged in only until its specific purpose had been served.

Invoking the Quranic exhortation to do battle against *fitna* in order to validate acts of war which had quite other aims was improper. This verse could be cited only if the same state of affairs as existed at the time of its revelation, were to prevail once again.

The biographers of the Prophet of Islam have put the number of *Ghazwa* (battle) at more than 80. This gives the impression that the Prophet of Islam in his 23-year prophetic career waged about four battles in a year. But this impression is entirely baseless. The truth is that the Prophet of Islam in his entire prophetic life, engaged in war only on three occasions. All the other incidents described as *Ghazwa* were in actual fact examples of avoidance of war and not instances of involvement in battle.

For instance, in the books of seerah, the incident of Al-Ahzab is called a *Ghazwa* (battle), whereas the truth is that on this occasion the armed tribes of Arabia, twelve thousand in number, reached the borders of Medina with all intentions of waging war, but the Prophet and his companions dug a deep trench between them, thus successfully preventing a battle from taking place. The same is the case with all the other incidents called *Ghazwa*. The opponents of the Prophet repeatedly tried to get him embroiled in war, but on all such occasions, he managed to resort to some such strategy as averted the war, thus defusing the situation.

There were only three instances of Muslims really entering the field of battle—Badr, Uhud and Hunayn. But the events tell us that on all these occasions, war had become inevitable, so that the Prophet was compelled to encounter the aggressors in self-defense. Furthermore, these battles lasted only for half a day, each beginning from noon and ending with the setting of the sun. Thus it would be proper to say that the Prophet in his entire life span had actively engaged in war for a total of a day and a half. That is to say, the Prophet had observed the principle of non-violence throughout his 23-year prophetic career, except for one and a half days.

The Islamic method, being based totally on the principle of non-violence, it is unlawful for believers to initiate hostilities. Except in cases where self-defense has become inevitable, the Qur'an in no circumstance gives permission for violence.

### **The Modern Age and Non-Violence**

The greatest problem facing Islam today is, as I see it, that Muslims have almost totally forgotten the *sunnah* (Prophet's way) of non-violence. In latter times when the Ottoman and Mughal empires disintegrated and problems like those besetting Palestine have had to be confronted by the faithful, Muslims all over the world have fallen a prey to negative reaction on a colossal scale; they have failed to remember that the policy of Islam is not that of violence but of non-violence. It is the result of this deviation, that despite almost a 100-years of bloody wars, Muslims have achieved no positive gain. Rather whatever they already had has been lost by them.

According to Imam Malik, later generations of this Ummah (Muslim community) settled matters at issue in the same way that earlier generations had done, i.e. non-violent methods. Similarly, Muslims of modern times must likewise resort only to non-violent methods. Just as no gain could accrue from violent methods earlier, no gain can accrue from violent methods today.

The state of affairs of Muslims in modern times resembles that which prevailed at the time of Hudaibiya. Today once again — only on a far larger scale — this *hamiyat al-jahiliya* prejudices prevailing in pre-Islamic Arabia (48:28) is being displayed by the other party. In the first phase of Islam its solution lay in Muslims sedulously avoiding an equivalent display of prejudice, and in holding firmly *kalema at-taqwa* they became entitled to the succor of God and were granted a clear victory (48:26).

At the time of the Hudaibiya peace treaty, the Quraysh, who had secured the leadership of Arabia, were bent on waging war. The Kaaba was in their possession. They had expelled the Prophet and his companions from their home town. They had taken possession of Muslims' homes and other properties, and spared no effort in disseminating negative propaganda against Islam.

Given this state of affairs, there were only two options before the believers. One was to attempt to put an end to tyranny and launch an outright war on the other party in the name of securing their rights. The result of such a move would certainly have been further loss in terms of lives and property.

The second option was to remain patient in the face of immediate loss, be it political or material, and, in spite of the losses avail of whatever opportunities are already available. The Prophet of Islam and his companions chose this second course. The result was that in

just a few years time the entire history of Arabia was altered for the better by an Islamic revolution.

The same state of affairs is widespread in modern times. Although today Muslims have suffered great losses, political and material, at the hands of other nations, there still exist a great number of opportunities only for self-betterment and for *dawah* work on a far larger scale. If availed of wisely, we can rewrite the history of Islam in magnificent terms.

### **The Manifestation of Religion**

The aim of the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in the seventh century is stated in the Qur'an to be *izhar-e-deen*. (*Izhar* in Arabic means dominance/ascendancy. Here *izhar-e-deen* signifies intellectual and ideological dominance, not political dominance. This means that in intellectual and ideological respects, God's religion assumes ascendancy over all other ideologies and religions.)

*Izhar-e-deen* was not an incident of short duration, but an ongoing assertion of the eternal dominance of Islam. Its implication was that in the world of ideology, such a revolution would be brought about as would establish the supremacy of Islam forever. Its purpose was to unravel all the veils of superstition which clouded human judgement, and to lay bare the scientific proofs hidden in nature, so that the truth of monotheism could be brought to light for all humanity. As the Qur'an puts it, '*They desire to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths: but Allah seeks only to perfect His light, however much the infidels may abhor it.*' (9:32, 33)

Granting ideological ascendancy to God's religion was a matter of considerable complexity, amounting to the writing of history afresh. For although God's unassailable truth had always existed, it had become obscured by false and misguided ideas, because thinking, the arts and learning in general, had all become fettered by superstition and idolatry. This had led to a veil being thrown over true religion, which was the only proper vehicle for God's truth. The coercive systems of the monarchies which prevailed all over the world at that time were responsible for perpetuating this state of affairs, for any intellectual freedom, particularly the freedom of religion, would have been a challenge to their supreme authority. Under such systems, there could be only such social development as suited individual rulers, and there could be no scientific development whatsoever.

Systems of governance which depended on religious persecution had, therefore, to be overthrown, so that a propitious atmosphere could be created for the performance of *dawah* of the true religion. This was carried into effect with resounding success by the Prophet and his companions, and all arguments were rallied in support of God's true religion, so that all other religions would be divested of their former influence. This abolition of oppressive systems and the freeing of people's minds from superstition naturally led to free scientific inquiry, a process which Islam has continued to foster over the centuries without interruption, and which has culminated in the unparalleled scientific achievements of the present day.

The technological advance which have been made possible by this scientific revolution have in turn provided Islam with an improved means of propagating Islam, namely modern communications. By making use of the media, those engaged in *dawah* work can spread the word of God much further and much faster than ever before. According to a hadith, a time was to come when God's word would enter all the homes in the world. (*Musnad*, Ahmad). This was indirectly a prediction of the advent of our modern age of communications.

In ancient times, the study of religion could be done only as something sacred and as a matter of dogma. That is why established and unestablished religions had not, academically been distinguished from one another. In modern times, thanks to the influence of the scientific revolution, the study of religions can be done as objectively and as critically as any other matter which comes under scientific scrutiny. Such critical study has proved, purely academically, that historically there is only one reliable religion, and that is Islam. All other religions are lacking in this historical credibility. Prior to this, the dayees of Islam could resort only to traditional arguments in support of their faith, but it has become possible to measure up Islamic realities by the highest standards of human knowledge and to establish its authenticity by purely logical arguments. Indeed, in latter times, the sciences themselves have borne out the divine truths of Islam.

Yet, despite modern developments, our own times are constantly regarded as being fraught with problems for Islam. Muslims, lacking in understanding and awareness, forget that the modern age has never ceased to be the age of Islam. They fail to appreciate that Islam's potential remains undiminished, and that it is for believers to convert that potential into an immediate reality. They should take into account the fact that, in the wake of the scientific revolution, which is itself the direct outcome of the Islamic revolution, it has become possible to begin a serious and beneficial dialogue between Islam and non-Islam, the result of which will necessarily be in favor of Islam. Now, this being so, the need of the hour is for Muslims to put an end unilaterally to all violent activities against *madu* (addressee) nations, so that a normal, amicable relationship may be allowed to grow between *dayee* and *madu*.

## **A Great Opportunity**

1. Since direct argument cannot be applied to religious beliefs pertaining to the unseen world, these can be supported only by indirect or inferential argument. Educated people had therefore come to believe that religious realities belonged only to the domain of dogma, and that they were not academic or scientific realities. But after the breaking up of the atom the science of logic has undergone a change, and it has been accepted that inferential argument too, in its nature, is as valid and reliable as direct argument. It has subsequently become possible for religious realities to be established on an academic level, i.e. exactly on the same level as material or non-religious theories.

2. In ancient times when man observed the world, it appeared to him that in nature there existed things which were very different from one another. This observation of appearance produced the mentality of idolatry. People began to think that in view of the great diversity of things in existence, their Creator too would perforce take many and varied shapes. But scientific study has shown that this variety is only that of appearance. Otherwise, all things in nature are different expressions of the same matter. In this way *shirk*(idolatry) came to be seen as an intellectually untenable practice, while monotheism gained the solid support of logic.

3. According to a statement of the Qur'an, the signs of God lay hidden in the earth and the heavens. The study of science has made it manifest to all men that the universe is a great storehouse of divine arguments. *"We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the Truth."* (41:53)

4. After the new discoveries of science, many such things have come to the knowledge of man as have rendered it possible to prove with new arguments those events which are of important religious significance. For instance, carbon 14 dating has made it possible to determine the exact age of the mummy of Ramses II, thereby providing scientific proof for

the statement of the Qur'an that the body of Pharaoh was saved by God, so that it might become "a sign to all posterity." (10:92)

### **Islam in the Present Age**

Now the question arises as to whether an Islam which teaches non-violence can be of relevance in the present age, and assume a superior position once again in new situations.

The answer is entirely in the positive. The truth is that Islam's being a peaceful religion shows that it is an eternal religion. Had it been a religion of violence, it would not have been eternal. For in modern times, the way of violence has been totally rejected by contemporary thinking. Now only that system is worthy of consideration and acceptance the teachings of which are based on peace and non-violence.

Modern thinking, for example, has rejected communism. One of the major reasons was that communism had to be sustained by violence. And under no circumstances is violence acceptable to the modern mind. Nazism and Fascism too have been rejected on similar grounds. Modern man, therefore, disapproves of religious and non-religious extremism, because they lead man, willy nilly, to violence.

But Islam is a religion of nature. It has held violence as inadmissible from the outset. Islam has been an upholder of peace, not violence, from day one.

In the past, Islam played a great role in the development of humanity, as a result of which human history entered a new age of progress and development. The time has come today for Islam to play a great constructive role, leading human history once again into a new age of progress.

What is called scientific or technical progress is the result of the discovery of some of the great secrets of nature. But if nature and its mysteries have always existed in our world, why has there been such a long delay in their discovery? Why could not the scientific advancement of the last few hundred years have been made thousands of years ago? The reason was that in ancient times scientific inquiry was anathema to men of religion, to the point where religious persecution had become an inseparable obstacle to the progress of science. Since ancient times, religion and science (divine knowledge and human knowledge) were linked with one another. What Islam did was separate religion (which had become, in essence, a set of irrational beliefs) from scientific research and investigation. For instance, eclipses of the sun and moon had been linked with human destiny. The Prophet of Islam declared that eclipses had nothing to do with the lot of human beings. These were astronomical events, not events pertaining to the fate of mankind. (*Fathul Bari*, 2/611)

The incident of the pollination of dates is recorded in the books of hadith. The Prophet of Islam observed that in worldly matters such as these, "you should act according to your experience, as you know these matters better." (*Sahih Muslim Bi Sharh An-Nawawi*, 15/117) This meant delinking religion and science from one another. In this way scientific research acquired an atmosphere of freedom for its functioning. For the first time in human history science (human knowledge) could be developed freely without the intervention of religion. And advancing gradually, culminated in the attainment of the modern age.

But, today man is again facing an even greater problem. That is, despite the extraordinary progress made in the field of science and technology, human beings are confronted with the problem of not knowing the limit of freedom.

Modern man aspired to freedom as the highest good, but once having reached this goal, he was unable to set reasonable limits to freedom. In consequence, unrestrained freedom descended into anarchy and lawlessness. This is the actual cause of many of the problems which are emerging in modern times in western society. Now man requires an ideology which delimits his freedom, drawing the line between desirable and undesirable freedom. And it is only Islam which can provide him with such an ideology.

Now is the time for this ideology to be presented to man, who is ready and waiting to accept it.

After the fall of communism (1991), much of the world was and still is, faced with an ideological vacuum. This vacuum can be filled by Islam alone. In the present world the developed countries have become economic or military superpowers, but the place is vacant for an ideological superpower, and that, potentially belongs to Islam. There is only one obstacle in converting a great potential into a reality in favor of Islam. And that is the repeated recourse to violence by Muslim movements in modern times. Such action has presented Islam before the world in the guise of a violent religion. For this reason the man of today shies away from Islam. He fails to study Islam objectively. If this barrier could be removed and Islam once again brought before the world as a non-violent religion, or as a peaceful social system, then once again humanity would accept it, recognizing it to be the voice of its own nature.

Modern man is in need of a new religion or a new system, based on peace. It should be free from superstitious beliefs, and should provide the answers to deep psychological questions, on our flawed existence. Its principles should not clash with scientific realities, and it should be supported by a victorious history.

Today no religion but Islam can lay such positive claims to acceptance, for it is Islam and Islam alone which fulfills all these conditions. Individually, there are many men and women today who, after having studied Islam, have acknowledged these unique qualities in Islam. Some have acknowledged them in theory while others have gone ahead and accepted Islam in practice.

### **Dawah Activism**

Islamic activism in respect of its method is based on non-violence and in respect of its target is based on *dawah*. *Dawah*, in fact, is another name for a peaceful struggle for the propagation of Islam. It would be true to say that Islamic activism in fact is dawah activism.

The task of *dawah* is no simple one. It enjoys the status of a key factor. If this task is fully performed, all other objectives will be automatically achieved. Here are certain references from the Qur'an in this connection.

1. Through *dawah* the believers receive God's protection against the mischief of the opponents.
2. Through *dawah* even the direst of enemies turns into a dearest friend. (41:34)

3. *Dawah* proves Islam's ideological superiority. And without doubt nothing is greater than the superiority of ideology. (10:32)
4. Through *dawah* a positive mentality is inculcated within the ummah. This is called 'honest counsel' in the Qur'an. (7:68)
5. The mission of *dawah* is performed by human beings but the conducive conditions for it are provided by God. Just as the farming is to be done by the farmer while the rains come from God. In modern times favorable conditions have been fully provided to man. Now the believers' duty is to refrain from expending their energies in futile activities. They must exert their entire energy in *dawah* work. All the best results will ensue from this act.
6. The Prophet of Islam along with about two hundred of his companions left Mecca when the Meccan leaders had made it impossible for them to stay there. The Meccans had even decided to kill the Prophet. But the first speech the Prophet made on reaching Medina had no taste of bitterness, neither did it contain any mention of vengeance or violence against the Quraysh.

On reaching Medina first priority was given to the task of entering into peace treaties with the tribes in and around Medina, for instance with the Banu Khuza'a, etc. According to their pact neither would they fight against the Muslims nor would the Muslims fight against them. Most of the tribes in Arabia joined in these truce agreements. But the Quraysh did not desist from aggression, and even engaged in certain military forays against the Muslims. But, finally, in the sixth year of Hijrah, the Prophet succeeded in making a peace treaty with the Quraysh as well at a place called Hudaibiya, albeit on acceptance of all the conditions laid down by the Quraysh.

### **Muslims Displaced**

It is an incontrovertible fact that Muslims have not been able to join the mainstream in modern times. At all places and in every department they are leading their lives as if driven into a corner. This is undoubtedly an extremely critical problem, for it has relegated Muslims to second class positions all over the world.

To me, the greatest reason for this is the violent attitude of the Muslims. Today's Muslims are easily provoked and become violent at anything which is against their way of thinking, or even not to their liking. It is true that not all Muslims become involved in acts of violence. Yet all Muslims would be regarded involved in this matter. This is because that section, of Muslims—in fact, the majority—who are not personally involved, neither disown those members of their community who are engaged in violence, nor even condemn them. In such a case, according to the Islamic shariah itself if the involved Muslims are directly responsible, the uninvolved Muslims are also indirectly responsible.

It is Muslims' religious and secular leaders who are actually responsible for this violent approach on the part of Muslims today. In modern times when Muslims have had to undergo the experience of defeat, almost all the religious, secular scholars (*ulama*) and intellectuals follow one single line, that of awakening the spirit of jihad (in the sense of *qital*) among Muslims. The entire Muslim world reverberates with such slogans as '*Jihad* is our way and *Jihad* is the only solution to our problems!'

The entire world has witnessed a great number of large and small movements in violent response to the problems faced by Muslims. If you go to Palestine, you will hear the youth singing a song no doubt taught to them by their elders:

*Let's make war, let's make war, For war is the way to success.*

In modern times the violent approach of our ulema, intellectuals, and leaders of movements, is the sole reason for the present violent mentality among Muslims all over the world. It is as a result of this mentality that, if anyone writes a book against Islam, Muslims are prepared to kill the writer. If any procession raises anti-Muslim slogans, Muslims start stoning the procession instead of killing the evil by observing silence, which, as Umar Faruq advocated, would be the best strategy in this case. If there is any monetary or territorial controversy with any nation, they immediately take up arms against it, rather than adopt a peaceful strategy to solve the problem.

This violent mentality of Muslims is responsible for having alienated them from their neighbors everywhere. Their conduct clearly shows that they no longer cherish the ideal of universal brotherhood. Everywhere they are looked upon with aversion and dread. One can even see notices on walls which say 'Beware of Muslims', instead of 'Beware of dogs.' And if these words are not inscribed on walls, they are certainly inscribed on the hearts and minds of the people. The resulting dissociation has left Muslims a backward group in modern times. Even in advanced countries like America they remain backward as a community in comparison with other immigrant groups.

The only way to alleviate the tragic plight of Muslims is to bring them back to non-violent Islam, by helping to understand that their violent version of Islam is not the true one.

As soon as Muslims take to the path of non-violent Islam, they will be able to become equal partners with other communities. They will have joined the universal mainstream, and will consequently be able to participate in all activities, in all institutions. People instead of dreading them, will welcome them. They will become a part of the universal brotherhood. Their issues will be looked upon with justice. Their equal partnership will be certain in all institutions ranging from the social to the educational.

Peaceful interaction will give Muslims the kind of intellectual stimulation and variety of experience which they must have if they are to tread the path of progress.

Interaction will also facilitate the task of *dawah* on a large scale. The natural result of this vast interaction of Muslims and non-Muslims will be that everywhere dialogue on Islam will be started, formally as well as informally. In modern times, because of the extremist and violent attitude of Muslims, serious dialogue between Islam and non-Islam has almost come to an end. Now when peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims takes place in a normal atmosphere, serious dialogue will ensue on its own. The beginning of serious dialogue between Islam and non-Islam is, without doubt, a very great success from the point of view of *dawah*.

The Qur'an describes Sulh Al-Hudaybiya, in the early period of Islam as a 'clear victory'. It was a 'clear victory' in the sense that it established peace between the believers in *tawhid* and believers in *shirk*, thus making it possible for a serious dialogue to be held between the two on religious matters.

In modern times if Muslims abandon the path of violence and fully adopt the path of non-violence, this will be for Muslims like reviving the sunnah of Hudaybiya. And they will start receiving those great benefits which Islam and Muslims had gained after the event of Hudaybiya in the first phase.

## **Peace and Justice**

One great problem for Muslims is that peace does not necessarily guarantee them justice. This has caused Muslims to become violent and to neglect opportunities for *dawah*. In modern times Muslims want a peace which brings them justice. But according to the law of nature, this kind of peace can never be achieved, that is why Muslims the world over are in a state of physical and mental unrest. Distressed in their minds, they have become violent in their thinking and in their actions.

The truth is that peace does not automatically produce justice. Peace in actual fact simply opens up opportunities for the achievement of justice. At the time of Hudaibiya the Prophet of Islam had not found justice. He had achieved peace but only by delinking it from justice. The Prophet had made this peace not to exact justice but to receive the opportunities. And great opportunities for *dawah* action did open up with the establishment of peace. The Prophet exploited these opportunities in full measure. Therefore, in just a few years' time the Prophet not only ensured justice, but set Islam upon a much more solid footing.

The Muslims of the present day have to understand this secret of nature. Only then will it be possible for them first to find peace, then ultimately their desired goal of justice.

## **Conclusion**

In October 1997, I met a 36-year old European, Leon Zippo Hayes, who was born in the city of Christchurch in New Zealand. After having studied Islam, he has changed his religion. His Islamic name is Khalilur Rahman. Passing through Muslim countries he is going to perform Hajj by land.

During the conversation he said that in modern times Muslims are engaged in bloody war at many places, at some places with others and at other places among themselves. This had led him (like many others) to conclude that perhaps Islam was a religion of violence. Later, he studied the Qur'an with the help of translations, and when he reached this verse in the Qur'an: '*Whoever killed a human being should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind (5:32)*,' he said that he was so moved that he could not believe that it was in the Qur'an. This incident is broadly indicative of the thinking of non-Muslims on Islam. On seeing the actions of Muslims, people today find it hard to believe that Islam may be a religion of peace. But if Muslims stop engaging in violent activities and give people the opportunity to appreciate Islam in its original form, then certainly a great number of people would realise as they never had before that Islam was a peaceful religion and they would rush to it, saying that it was exactly the religion which their souls had been seeking all along.

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