

The Jihad ... The Authentic Holy War*

by

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Abstract: this article is a précis on the Jihad or “Holy War” in Islam, with important observations and a reflection on freedom as a fundamental value that opens the door to genuinely constructive, peace-making dialogue, apart from religious and pharisaical dictums of Civil Law.

Keywords: Inter-religious Dialogue, jihad, violence, freedom of expression.

HOW CAN ONE RESPOND TO A TEAR, to someone in tears, whether of an elderly person, an adult or of a child? How can one respond to pain, to death occasioned by the misinterpretation of the word of God? And where is that answer? Does it dwell in the interior when it seems that your knowledge can provide them with an answer? /when they come to you for knowledge, transfers an answer

At this time as a student of the five great religions, particularly those known as the Religions of the Book (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), I must say that I have no answer, and my hands tremble as I write that the search for knowledge and the study of the holy books found me ignorant before the word, weak before the necessity of peace and lacking in spiritual means to offer security and protection to the human being. As a believer, I admit I am lost in dogmas and studies that have closed God in a book, in temples, in mosques, in synagogues, imprisoned Him while the human being fights to enrich himself, and above all to be able to proclaim an absolute truth, although this is, for him, inexistent, because the absolute truth is built through the rectitude of each individual in the world.

Throughout the history of humanity, men and women with power have disposed of life and its resources to conquer the earth, mine minerals, petrol, kill animals for ivory, skins, disposed of and subjugated hundreds of different peoples in order to dominate the land, extract its wealth, exploit water. They have killed and pressed men and women into their service as slaves, trampling on their dignity. However of all the above crimes, the worst is: to kill, destroy, dominate others in the name of God, shouting that this is the word and will of God, by whatever name He is called, affirming that God speaks through a book that such be so.

However, apart from this fundamentalism there are those who do not believe in God, have no religion, who act in a violent way killing, torturing, people who profess a belief. In this way, violence in the name of God spreads not only through religious fundamentalism that preaches an absolute truth on the one hand, but derides the spirituality or belief of others. Analyzing this in a logical way, neither party is in the right, neither has the right to threaten the other, although each contender claims to have the fundamental, absolute truth: either God exists as a single truth or there is no single truth. God *is*, the One who *is*, as the words mean, and some want this to be so, but there is the One who is not, and some hope in this. However whichever the choice, it must be a personal matter, without judging or hurting other people.

This absolute truth about God has been reconstructed in various ways in the history of mankind. This is why a large percentage of historical events had their foundation in the struggle to dominate

in the name of God. I shall give a terrible example that covers both points: the massacre of the writers of "Charlie Hebdo", an assault that was attributed to the *Jihâd* or *Yihad*, the appointed guardians of the faith. This is a senseless, incomprehensible, act to kill another in the name of God! This act is punishable, but, what happens within the society that only analyses this aspect? Isn't it equally terrible that a group of people attack believers and enrich themselves by damaging the spirituality of another? Is this not an act of violence? Can one call this freedom of expression when one knowingly causes harm to another person? Neither point is justifiable; both act in a violent way, breaking inner harmony.

Freedom, a fundamental value in the life of a human being, is the value that demands the most responsibility, because freedom enables us to see and to meet another person in his/her entirety. These words of Voltaire are appropriate: "I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend with my life your right to express it". This totally corresponds to the Golden Rule of religions: "Love your neighbour as yourself." These two phrases of reason and of faith require the same thing. Each act of ours should take into account the peace and quiet of the other, because in this way one will uphold ethics, which protect dignity, and not laws and dogmas that really enslave us. Indeed there have been civil laws and religious dogmas which – based on false justice that is corruptible -, have separated us from the ethical concept of dignity and distorted concepts and words. An example is the misnomer: *Jihâd* or "holy war" that has caused so much harm, not only to society but to one of the most beautiful religions, such as Islam.

Let us retrace a little history.

In 1970, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, a group which started in 1928, gained strength after the death of Al Sadat, president of that country, in an effort to overthrow the Egyptian regime and to create an Islamic State through violent acts, qualified as terrorism. The majority of these acts were committed in the name of Allah, meaning of God.

However this concept which means "effort" has been stretched and its meaning distorted. The *Yihâd* or Jihad is a *Tasawwuf* concept in Islamic mysticism called "Sufism", based on man's interior effort on the path to God.

The *Jihâd* or holy war is a war the human being conducts against the inner self that leads a person to confront his/her own self-centredness. It is written that one day the Prophet (salvation and peace be upon him), said:

We have returned from a small war but we are headed toward the major war. Then someone asked, "What is that major war?". To which he replied: it is the greatest war that each one must undertake against his/her own ego.

Thus, as Shaykh Khaled noted: "The great holy war is not intended to extend the faith of Islam like the mandate of a tyrant. The great Jihâd (*Al jihad al-akbar*), the jihâd of the soul, goes back to man's origin".

Once the human being became aware of everything he had received from God, intelligence and knowledge that enabled him to understand his own responsibility and his ignorance before the universe to which he felt united, he concluded that he had the power to decide his own destiny, to choose between good and evil. This is the logic of the Islamic Jihâd in which one recognises that

this great holy war, is nothing other than the struggle of man against himself, against his ego. This is why Sufism says: "One must shape life with one's hands, but without ever letting it penetrate the heart, because one's hands can be washed, but not the heart".

But. What is Sufism?

When one asks a Sufi Master about the *Tasawwuf*, he would usually respond in the following manner: "What you have in your head, drop. What you have in your hands, offer him; what has to happen, do not avoid".

These beautiful words show us that Islam is a religion which endeavours to combine the spirituality of man and woman with their humanity through the donation and commitment to the other. Thus, those who condemn Islam and those who practice it completely misunderstand its real meaning, and wound thousands of people through their ignorance by spreading violence through their words, that - needless to say -, condemn Islam from its origin.

Islam does not condemn any religion from its heart; on the contrary it regards Abraham, the Father of the Jewish and the Christian peoples, as its forbear, and Jesus as the second greatest prophet. According to the Muslim Tradition it is written that: "Jesus was the divine One speaking as the Divine; the divine soul revealed to our word."

The mystical path of Islam is a path of brotherhood, which has been distorted by an extremist group. However this misinterpretation cannot lead us to condemn thousands of Muslims who really live or try to live in this way.

Mohammed's words (salvation and peace be upon him) touch man and woman's intrinsic right to live in knowledge and freedom with each other. This may be read in a *Hadith* or saying of the Prophet: "Speak to the people in such a way that they can understand". That is to say: with simple words and deeds that are more effective than teaching.

Shajj Khaled Bentounés, a Sufi master, explains: "The religious dogmas have stripped man of all his interior references, of his spirituality; religion has become an ideology, an instrument to manipulate the masses".

A religion cannot and must not be an ideology nor a doctrine because it then leads to killing and enslavement.

By means of the *Yihâd* Islamic Mysticism invites one to undertake radical renewal by assailing one's own ego (oneself), but never a creature; never by aggressive actions against society. The *Yihâd* teaches one how to vanquish and overcome oneself day by day in this struggle. Thus, life expands in intensity, because, as taught by Sufism: "Whoever is generous does himself an immense good because it increases his own *joie de vivre*. The way Islam teaches is to dismantle the master in order to reveal God in every human being".

Islam does not condemn woman, on the contrary, it exalts her to the point of her being considered the female aspect of God, because she bears in her womb the gift of creation. As regards the apparel imposed on woman the words of the Prophet (peace and salvation be upon him) have been misconstrued. He said: "God contemplates neither your appearance nor your actions, but looks into your heart."

Islam is based on peace of heart, because a believer should not separate faith from action, since every act entails a duty and responsibility to the other.

Islam does not condemn any religion, but on the contrary, exalts the great prophets called and sent as "messengers"/*Rasûl*, to people. Thus, it is believed that each prophet sent contributes a new aspect of the message; indeed a different message.

Noah, considered to be the Saviour of mankind, is the symbol of the one who saves. Abraham, who is revered as the friend of God, embodies the highest level of friendship with God. He is the symbol of the friendship between the divinity and humankind. Moses embodies the divine word, because he sought truth and knowledge, which he represents. Jesus is called "the Soul of God" because he embodies the Holy Spirit at the highest level". Therefore, it is said: "Jesus did not write or enact laws because everything was directed by the Spirit, whereas men are more attached to culture". This is still happening putting it before the dignity of the human being whose words and laws are regularly misinterpreted.

I maintain that: a religion that perceived the great men of Judaism and Christianity in this way cannot be against them; on the contrary, it is a religion that exalts them. The Prophet (peace and salvation be upon him) said: "No one is superior to the other; you are all equal, like the teeth of a comb."

In the first place, it is a mistake to judge Islam based on the terrorist actions of a group of men, called *jihâdistas*/Jihadists, who are seeking to impose their ideas, not those of the prophet, thereby damaging the beautiful meaning of this concept.

The *Yihâd* is a spiritual war with two aspects:

1. Through the inner struggle against one's own egoism.
2. A struggle society undertakes to eliminate poverty and the economic crises.

These ideals are very far from entailing death and weapons with which they are associated today.

A genuine *Jihâdist*/Jihadist is someone who fights within him/herself in order to serve humanity in a social capacity, eliminating day-by-day any inner craving for wealth and power which prompt man or woman to subjugate or damage their fellows. Armed with the weapon of love alone, he/she must only fight to overcome dishonesty masked by manipulated justice.

True justice must be based on and safeguard the dignity of every human being, and not protect laws or dogmas, because nothing is more valuable than the dignity enshrined in the life of a human being.

Islam upholds an ethic devoted to the human being regardless of ethnicity or religion. The words of the Prophet (peace and salvation be upon him) are as follows:

"Help your oppressed brother or the oppressor" - to which his companions replied: "We understand well that we have to help the oppressed. But: How can one help the oppressor?". Then he said to them, "by staying his hand, preventing him from doing evil".

With these words written on paper it is impossible to respond to thousands of tears shed because of fundamentalism whether religious and/or political, or to the spiritual rupture created on account of

discrimination. Clearly words cannot heal the heart, nor can the thousands of people killed, because they did not profess a religion, return to life; nor can they bolster the dignity of believers, victims of racism due to their faith.

However, I believe that every word linked to Silence invites reflection. We need to learn a little about a religion as beautiful as Islam, and to extend a helping hand to our Muslim brothers and sisters; avoiding making critical judgements without a deep knowledge of this religion. The corrupt media, manipulated by major powers, disseminates misinformation. Together with extremist groups they sow hatred, discrimination and violence against those who profess with faith and criterion this religion.

Difference enhances the human being in the wonderful experience of being a single reality, among thousands of different realities, through time. Whether he exalts his belief, or unbelief, he entrusts himself in faith to a God or in rejecting him; depending on the values he accords to religion, science, technology, reason. Whatever path a person takes, a dual path is created with the other/s, because each step builds up the world. At the same time it lays a foundation for those who will come after them. That is why one takes one step at a time, because each step symbolizes and teaches us that in order to reach a goal people need the support of others. If one person makes a false step the other falls; each step forward one takes the other does too.

The *Jihâd* invites every human being to accept, to appreciate, to take care of the other, to get rid of one's own selfishness. It is an open door to freedom that leads people to take care of each other in every action, regardless of whether the person/people is/are known or not; regardless of whether or not we share their belief/s and ideologies.

We must not forget that today our knowledge of the *Jihâd* is a distortion of its real meaning. This misinterpretation leads to extremism on both sides; to discrimination against the other for belonging to a religion of which one does not have a clear knowledge.

I will conclude with the following story.

Râbi'a, a saint of Islam, went out of the city carrying a bucket of water in one hand and in the other a bundle of firewood. Along the way she met one of the great masters, who asked her where she was going? She replied: "With the bucket of water I will extinguish Hell, and with the firewood I will burn Paradise, in order that no one on earth worship God for fear of Hell or desire to go to Paradise. I just want everyone to worship God for love of God".