

# Community, Justice, and Jihad: Elements of the Muslim Historical Consciousness

*by Mona Abul-Fadl*

## The Community

Islam is more than a Faith in the heart of every Muslim. It is also a source of identity. The fundamental rites and devotions constituting its 'Pillars' simultaneously confirm the faith of the individual and affirm the bonds of Community. It is this symbiosis of Faith and Community that over time gave rise to a Muslim historical consciousness. From it too stems the predilection for an active social and political involvement on the part of Muslims as groups and individuals.

The elements of this consciousness emanate from an Islamic world-view and they have interacted in various situations and contexts to condition the responses of Muslims throughout history. To explore these elements it is essential to examine three basic concepts: *Umma*, *'Adl*, and *Jihad* or respectively, Community, Justice and the Just Striving. All three concepts are embedded in the matrix of *Tawhid* and are interwoven and integrally related to one another. In their context a Muslim group consciousness has been forged for over a millenium. As such, they justly provide the parameters for understanding Muslim history and forecasting the future of Islam in the world.

## Community/al'Umma: Legacy of Prophethood and Vehicle of Muslim Consciousness

The Community in Islam is a purposeful entity composed of a group, or a *jama'a* whose members, by virtue of a common faith, way of life and sense of

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destiny, have been forged in a common historical consciousness. They are thus endowed with an awareness of a common identity, allegiance, and purpose. The roots of this awareness go back to the advent of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, with the final and perfected Guidance calling people to the exclusive worship of the One God and showing them the Way to this devotion. The struggle in the path of conveying the pure faith to the hearts of men and women and of reforming their ways of thought and habits of conduct in society accordingly constituted the formative groundwork for the emergent *Umma*.

To confirm this new Community in its identity and to bring it into history so as to assume its role among other groups and collectivities, the last ten years of the life of the Prophet (SAAS) – were given to this task. This was the period known in Muslim history as the Madina Era which also marks the beginning of the Muslim Calendar. During this period a comprehensive ethical legal framework for social organisation was steadily established on the basis of Revealed Divine Guidance. Under the leadership and example of the Prophet (SAAS), the *Umma* received its first practical lessons both in the principles of Justice and in persevering to uphold it. The ordeals and the triumphs of this core community in encountering the challenges to its survival came to constitute the first milestones in the Muslim's historical consciousness. By the time the Revelation of the Qur'an was completed, a full-fledged Community had also come of age with its distinctive character, institutions, common historical experiences, memories, and aspirations. When the Prophet (SAAS) died, the worldly leadership of this Community passed to his successors who were chosen among his earliest followers and were also among the first members of the Community. This leadership was an acknowledgement that the *umma* was there to stay as a distinctive historical entity entrusted with a mission that it must continue to safeguard and uphold.

In fact, we can only appreciate the centrality of the Community in Islam and its worldly or temporal aspect by recalling the nature of Prophethood. Throughout the history of Revealed Religion Prophets were the medium for the Divine Message. Prophets were human beings who were chosen by Allah (SWT) for delivering their people from their inequities by showing them the Right Way and their moral accountability. The cornerstone of this Reform was teaching the Pure Faith (*Tawhīd*) and the values and beliefs associated with it and urging people to set up their lives and worldly pursuits accordingly. With the coming of Muhammad (SAAS) the chain of prophethood came to an end – but *not* the Message of Guidance. This Message, or Mission, was now entrusted to a Community that embodied its teachings and upheld the moral, social order based on this Guidance.

The Community was not a Church with an ordained clergy, but was the common believers entrusted with the responsibility of organizing themselves

and choosing their leadership from amongst themselves. As such, they constituted an elect Community privileged in view of their adherence to *Tawhīd* and to its way of life.<sup>1</sup> To the extent that it neglects its injunctions it forfeits its title to the Favours of Allah (SWT) and to His Election. This chosen Community, the *umma*, is unique both in its membership and in its purpose. It is not composed of a specific race, caste, or class, but of whoever has chosen *Tawhīd* for his creed and has by virtue of his *Shahada* pledged his Will in devotion to his Creator and Sustainer and bonded himself in brotherhood to his fellow devotees. This is the meaning of the statement that Islam is a source of identity. In it all other marks of distinction that imply a sense of exclusiveness or an ascribed privilege are dissolved in a brotherhood of the Faith. In one's new allegiance, one also gains a new and common vision and purpose that are all anchored in *Tawhīd*.

Reinforced in its constitutive bond and common direction (*Qibla* and *Wajh* or *itijāh*) the *umma* survives as a distinct and recognizable historical entity among other communities. '*Wajh*' literally means face and '*itijāh*', direction put together they denote orientation. All three terms are mentioned in the *Qur'an in context of the umma*. (2:143-149). Its place and impact in history are not contingent upon its organisational form, although doubtless, as it has learned from its own history, much of this impact and effectiveness depends on its effective leadership and organisation. In this respect too, it is not exempt from the laws that govern history and society.

Historically, the *umma* has always been associated with its political expression in the "State." The latter, however, has little in common with the Sovereign Territorial Entity or the modern Nation-State which is solely of European provenance. Sovereignty in Islam belongs only to Allah (SWT). The State itself exists only as the representative of the group or the Community; its agents are chosen among the members of the Community simply as instruments of the collectivity, i.e. as executives for the *Jamā'a* who are thereby charged with implementing the Just Order prescribed by the *Shari'ah*. *Shūra* (taking counsel), *Ijtihād* (systemic intellectual effort) and *Ijmā'* (consensus) are working values that underlie the spirit of implementing the *Shari'ah* and assure its continued vitality and relevance in meeting the needs of the Organized Community. In this way, leadership and political power are instrumental for fully realizing the potential of the Community in Islam. In view of their origin, nature and purpose, however, they result in a distinctive institution that historically has been known as the "Caliphate" (*al Khilāfa*).

Originally, the term *khalīfa* was applied to denote the successor of the Prophet (SAAS) as one who is entrusted by the Community, or the *Jama'a*, to oversee its common direction and to regulate its worldly affairs in the light of the Recorded Guidance and the example of the Prophet (SAAS). The Caliphate, by extension, became the institution upholding the Just Order ex-

emplified in the *Sharī'ah* and symbolizing the unity of direction of the *umma*. Hence, it came to stand for the unity of the *umma* and the immutability of an Order of Justice historically associated with that *umma* as heir to a divine heritage and mission.<sup>2</sup>

While the Caliphate as such remained synonymous with the Islamic State in the historical consciousness of the *umma*, Muslims came to experience various forms of government that fell short of the ideal, and political power was frequently abused. But the restraining impact of the *Sharī'ah* and the pervasiveness of a commonly held ethos, which bound rulers and ruled to the belief-system of the *umma*, were generally effective in setting limits to such abuse. The fact that the hub of personal and social/public life in the *umma*, was regulated in accordance with the *Sharī'ah* and was subject to an autonomous jurisdiction or court system, mitigated the consequences of arbitrariness or abuse in the "Executive." Interestingly, there are other terms (like *mulk*, or dominion and *sultan* or kingship and power) which are used in the Muslim tradition of learning and inquiry to designate political power as a conceptually neutral term that refers to a universal historical and sociological phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> For the *umma*/Muslim Community an Islamic Order, with which the connotation of *al-Khilāfa* remains associated, has never lapsed as a realizable ideal that should be sought and reinstated. Its recovery, under whatever form or name, is seen as a token of the rehabilitation of the worldly affairs of the Community and as an affirmation of Justice in Society.

Meanwhile, the *umma* expanded and came to include diverse peoples, races and tongues. Despite such growth and variety, it did not disintegrate or lose its character. *Tawhīd* welded the groups and individuals together, while their resulting observance of a common code of life structured this unity. Long after its first moment, the common consciousness of the Muslims as a group continued to be moulded by a long history during which time they continued to identify themselves with the Original Community built by the Prophet (SAAS). What consistently sustained this sense of identity was the spread and perpetuation of the instruments of socialisation together with the pervasiveness of the ethical-social code. Both sets of institutions were firmly anchored in the original Islamic Sources: the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet. They continued to feed and inspire a tradition of scholarship and a cultural heritage which became the "commonwealth" of successive generations.

Political power circulated among diverse elements in the *umma*. Dynasties of varying fortunes rose and fell and alliances were made and broken. As far as the members of the *umma* were concerned, the stage was unfolding within a common arena that was familiar as *Dar-al-Islam*, the House of Islam.<sup>4</sup> Its moments of glory as well as those of peril, when the Islamic heritage and Order were threatened by an outside invasion or local turmoil, came to be et-

ched in the group consciousness regardless of geography or territorial location. They were added to those moments of the formative phase to enrich the collective memory of the *umma*. This sense of common destiny was the natural sequel to the bond of *Tawhīd* and the allegiance that flows from it as it is transferred from the level of the individual Muslim conscience to that of the group.

Ultimately, however, while the *umma* maintains its distinctiveness, its state of health and its fate remain bound to the state of its members as individuals and groups. The notion of personal responsibility in Islam as well as its scope render every Muslim accountable for the Whole. In effect, the practical example of the first generation of Muslims set the tone in this respect. Its members were brought up in the school of the Prophet (SAAS) and they were trained in teachings and precepts that continue to inspire and cultivate an effective social conscience whenever they are seriously invoked.

“You are all, each and everyone of you, entrusted with a charge and you are all, each and everyone of you responsible for that charge.” **In their solidarity:** “The believers are to one another like a solid edifice (reinforcing one another), each binding the part to the whole” **The material bond is complemented by a spirituality:** “The example of the believers in their love compassion and concern for one another is in the likeness of a (live) body where each and every member in it is alerted to a state of feverish solicitude the moment one of its members is afflicted.” **The moral fibre of this body must be unbreakable:** “Should my *umma* ever fear to openly denounce the Unjust (and face up to it) then it is fated to extinction.” **There is no room for indifference:** “The example of the one who commits a transgression and the one who is its victim may be compared to (the fate) of a group aboard a ship. Some were on the top and others were below. When those who were below – tiring of climbing on deck with their buckets to haul water – got an idea: it was to bore a hole in their cabins below and obtain their water without bothering their deck inmates. In this case, if those above left those below free to pursue their ways, then surely all would perish; whereas if they checked them, then they along with all the others would be saved.” In this kind of Community there is no escaping one’s responsibility for oneself and for the whole to which one belongs.” Every Muslim is posted on a vigil to the Day of Judgement.”<sup>5</sup>

If the above instances from the *Hadīth* of the Prophet (SAAS) are taken together with the injunctions of the Qur’an in this respect, a characteristic Community Profile emerges. “You are the best of Communities set forth for humankind, (because) you enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong and you believe in Allah” In the light of its responsibilities, the *Ummatic* Community is expected to dispose of the means to enable it to measure up to its charge (22:41) It is thus called upon to be effective force in history capable of supporting the Good wherever it finds it and countering the currents of corruption and evil wherever they may be at work. “And thus have We made of you an *umma wassat* (a Median Community), so that you may be witnesses upon

humankind, and We have rendered the Prophet a witness upon you.” The *umma* is here described as a Median Community in view of its calling to mediate Justice among nations. By setting the balance of history in favor of Justice and by weighting the balance of history in favor of Justice it is assigned an affirmative responsibility designated as an act of ‘watching over’ mankind.

The *Umma* constitutes the collective or group frame of reference within which the historical consciousness of the Muslims has evolved. The other elements of this consciousness are conceivable within its parameters along a means-end spectrum. Justice lies at the heart of a core of integrally related social values which together, are embedded in the bedrock of *Tawhīd*.

At the means end of the spectrum lies the duty of *Jihad* as the crowning expression of the ethos of *infāq*, which is the inclination to give rather than take in life. An *Umma* sound in its foundations, possessed of a clear vision of its purpose and calling, is empowered with the means to live up to its divinely set standards and to realize them in time. This authority draws on a reserve of inculcated values that orients Muslims to assume their responsibility. The historical consciousness of the Community is thereby wedded to a social conscience which begins with the responsibility of the Muslim toward his family and neighborhood and extends to encompass his fellowship in humanity at large.

In this perspective, wherever the values that impinge on the freedom and dignity of the individual or the community are threatened, Justice itself is seen to be at stake and the Muslim is duty bound to be in the forefront of their defense. Transferred to the collectivity, this commitment to Justice is equated to assuming the burden of “bearing Witness unto nations” – as the *ummatic* profile illustrates. Where the Community falls short of its ideal, whether by neglecting its standards or defaulting in the means, the ideal and the commitment will still continue on the personal or individual level and will find their expression in varying levels and spheres of affirmative action. To understand this logic, a closer look at the concept of justice and at the nature of the commitment to it may well be in order.

## Justice: The Goal and Propeller of Muslim Consciousness

The centrality of Justice in the Muslim historical consciousness flows from its place in the Muslim historical community. Both in its constitutive principle and in its goal-orientation or purposiveness, the *ummat-alTawhīd* contains the core value of Justice as a constituent in the one case and as a component in the other. Emanating from *Tawhīd*, Justice (*al’Adl*) as much as Truth (*al’haqq*), are themselves Divine Attributes, expressions of the *Asma alhusna* (Attributes of Perfection) that *ought* to be reflected in the Righteous Order.

Bridging the gap between the Is and the Ought in a given historical situation falls upon the Islamic Community, which is given to these principles by virtue of its constitution and direction. The nature of the relationship between the personal and the collective in Islam underlies the dynamics of this task. While the burden of the historical responsibility falls on the *umma* as a whole, the Muslim is not released of his share of it. His accountability remains a personal one, but, unlike the collectivity, its verdict transcends history. The failure of the *umma* is paid for in history, while the struggle of the individual Muslim is not contingent on its historical outcome and its recompense is meted out in handsome measure on the Day of Judgement.

Conversely put, the pursuit of Justice is a duty incumbent on the collectivity and as such it ought to be discharged by its entrusted agents, or the organs of the Community. Failing that the resistance of oppression and the checking of injustice becomes a personal responsibility incumbent on every able Muslim, man or woman. This position has been formalized in the Muslim Jurisprudence where the scope and limits of the Muslim's obligations are meticulously defined and elaborated.<sup>6</sup> It distinguishes two categories, the collective duties and the personal duties, respectively, *fard kifāya* and *fard 'ain*. The distinction is not based solely on the nature of the duty in question, but also takes into account the extent to which it is observed in society at a given moment. If a collective obligation dischargable on behalf of the majority by an entrusted minority is abused or neglected then this obligation reverts to the majority. As such it becomes a *fard 'ain*, a personal responsibility. Consistent with the Muslim's social conscience, the commitment to justice cannot be abandoned on the pretext of a slack, degenerate, or powerless Organization. Wherever *Tawhīd* inspires the heart, its ideals continue to motivate a pattern of devotion that includes a commitment to Justice for the love of Allah and the Good.

In a conscience saturated with *Taqwa*, it is the devotion itself that counts, i.e., the endeavor to bring about justice and not its immediate results. Ultimately, the Muslim knows that the yields will not be lost and that the reward for his endeavor are assured. To him, it is the Ultimate Court of Appeal that counts and in its judgement lies a justice that can be matched by no other. With this conviction and assurance, there are always Muslims, acting as individuals and groups, who are prepared to defy countless odds and take it upon themselves to right a wrong or take a stand against a rampant form of oppression. Perhaps the most single outstanding example of this stance in contemporary times is embodied in the heroic stance of the Afghan mujahidīn whose resistance to the formidable power of the Soviets over the past seven years has assumed legendary proportions. The turn of the Resistance in South Lebanon against the Israeli Occupation and in the face of the threat of yet another annexation is another case in point. Brutalities are not the preserve of

foreign troops or of invading forces alone, and oppression can be practised by one's own people as in the case of *'Alawite* Syria where the ruling oligarchy nearly wiped a historical city out of existence in its attempt to eradicate its opponents. In these examples and many others one recurrently encounters the spectacle of strongly motivated individuals and groups set on a course that is doomed by all worldly standards. In every case, they are prompted by an un-failing faith in the justice of their Cause and in the justice of their Lord.

Such events can only be understood in the context of the nature of the commitment to Justice and of its connection with *Tawhīd*. What distinguished this commitment among Muslims – for after all it is a universal commitment ingrained in the nature of human creation, or *fitra* – is the fact and belief that worldly justice is rooted in a transcendental justice and that the commitment to its pursuit in the Here-and-Now is the corollary to a conviction in its redemption in the Hereafter. Throughout Muslim history this conviction has had its practical social implication for the conduct of individuals and groups. In every case, however, the scope and limitations of this commitment are a function of the given situation at hand. It is only in extreme situations, where the alternatives to righting a wrong and checking an injustice are totally denied, that the pursuit of Justice comes to be equated with the sacrifice of one's earthly life. Only then is the ethos of *infāq*, which is the warp and woof of the cohesive *umma* at every level of its social organization, transformed into an embattled jihad as its climax or ultimate expression.

If the baffled observer fails to grasp the integrality of justice to the Muslim sensibility and to appreciate the cluster of attitudes in which it is embedded, an entire dimension of contemporary political reality in Muslim societies will continue to elude understanding. A non-Muslim observer will throw up his hands in despair and, more ominously, react in consternation, not necessarily because of an inherent "senselessness" in a given situation, but as an expression of his own frustration in failing to see the meaning of it all. The ambiguity and the absence of meaning are to be found in the reader, and no amount of detail and information can help to induce comprehension if the constraint lies in a mental/psychological blockage. This is a comment on the banalities and dangers attendant on a prevailing tradition of political analysis that focuses on considerations of power and stability while ignoring the substantive dimensions of both. Such analysis moreover computes the detail and the events but stops short of ascertaining the causes and the results. It is ultimately hampered in its understanding and calls for an appreciation of the substance of Islamic Justice.

Contrary to revolutionary ideals that are often sought but rarely defined, Islamic Justice is no vague, essentially diffused or elusive ideal. Any illusion about the arbitrariness of its pursuit should be dispelled. The Just Order is pursued as a definable quest. Its details and workings may well vary from one

historical setting to another and from generation to generation so as to accommodate the variables inherent in the changing human condition. The fundamentals and contours of this Order, however, remain essentially constant and serve as milestones and guides in the perpetual challenge of organizing human societies.

This permanence and stability is plausible in view of the fact that worldly Justice is derived from Divine Justice and the fact that the Just Social Order is anchored in the matrix of *Tawhīd*. Indeed, the relative only assumes its meaning and direction when it is related to a standing order of Right and Truth where the Source is transcendental and the scope and reach are imminent in Creation. This is of the essence of Justice and the Just Order. In the perspective of *Tawhīd* moreover, the latter is more than plausible; it is fully capable of substantiation in the light of the divinely prescribed ethical – legal code known as the *sharī'ah*. Its realizability is in fact assured in view of historical precedent.

Simply stated, Islamic Justice is not utopia. Nor are the tracts of jurists abstract gropings to regulate society in a world of formalities. Islamic Jurisprudence is embedded in that transcendental value-system which enables it to meet the needs of change in society from a position of strength; ideally, it is in a position to lead and instruct such change, not simply to react and keep with it. Furthermore, the standards that inform the legal code also give rise to the great social movements that mobilize the potentials for change and reform in society. In the *sharī'ah* any tensions between the legal and the moral are resolved because both are derived from an epistemological and morphological order that integrates the inner and the outer life. Consequently, the legal draws its binding force from its appeal and its relevance to the inner order, while the moral has its concrete consequences for social conduct. Both are integral to the Just order (*al 'adl*) which is an Order of Right (*Al Haqq*). The external parameters of this Society are set by the *sharī'ah*, or the Law, and they constitute the *Hudūd*, literally the bounds of socio-legality which must not be transgressed. Beyond that, and within such bounds, the substance and the fibre of social morality is drawn from a pervasive ethos rooted in *Tawhīd* and cultivating the pursuit of righteousness.

Accordingly, Muslims are urged to join together in protesting all forms of tyranny (*Dhulm*) and oppression (*baghi* and *tughian*) in the name of a Just Order. The principles of the latter have been systematically elaborated in the great works of Islamic Jurisprudence. The basis for this elaboration is found in the Recorded Guidance of the Qur'an and in the example of the Sunna of the Prophet (SAAS). As the first Islamic Society in Madina was modelled on these sources, it has continued to this day to inspire movements and individuals in their search for a Just and Righteous Order.

To many Muslims today it would seem that an effective check against the

humiliation, corruption, and oppression in their respective societies can be found only in a comprehensive code that is at once legal and moral. The *sharī'a* alone seems to qualify for these needs. Objectively, only a system stemming from the metaphysics of Tawhīd can be immune to the bias inherent in the human/social condition. While the pursuit of Justice will generally tend to fall short of the ideal, the system which incorporates its principles and sets the premises for the practice should not. In the *sharī'a* Justice meets its absolute standards because it is derived from Tawhīd, i.e. from the Absolute. The relative aspect is left to its pursuit. Conversely, where Muslims are in a majority, it is only nature to expect the *sharī'a* to be the only effective social code for that society for it is the only code persons subscribing to Tawhīd can relate to and accept.

To further elucidate the place of the *sharī'ah* for the Just Society in Muslim perceptions an analogy may be drawn from another area of the historical experience of the *Umma*. In the arts of Islam, in the geometric and the floral patterns of its arabesques, there is that pervasive motif that relates form to content in such a way as to achieve the ideal of Concord. Islamic architecture too is concerned with conceiving a functional structure which at the same time authentically reflects the spirit of the Community in the principles and ideals of its Faith. So it is with society at large. In the architectonics of the Just Order the same concern with consistency and coherence prevails. It becomes urgent to reconcile the outer forms of the Community manifest in its legal order with the inner dimension of a public ethos modeled in its own spirituality and identity. Any attempt to impose an order not sustained by its moral underpinnings constitutes an incongruity, or a deviation that is justly deemed by its victims to be a transgression against the Just Order. Likewise, to ignore or neglect the need for developing the institutions in society in accordance with its prevailing innate beliefs and ethical premises is ultimately damaging both to morale and to social organization alike. It perpetuates an unwarranted dualism or split in society which stunts the Community and offends its sense of identity.

Throughout much of the Muslim World to day there prevails a sense of Wrong induced by what is seen as a flagrant violation of Justice. What in Art may be judged as 'ugly' for violating standards of beauty, becomes outrageous in Society for transgressing on the bounds of righteousness. In view of its comprehensive nature moreover, *Tawhīd*-sprung from morality, makes that which impinges on the sense of right and wrong in society ultimately an impingement on its formal system of Justice too. Questions of legitimacy and legality are inseparable. Here the analogy between Art and Society comes to an end.

A justice that cannot be brought about in the face of persistent recalcitrance and abuse would indeed be a lame Justice. It is then reduced to a

vain refuge for the helpless and a banner for hypocrisy. In the context of a Muslim world-view it has no place. The hall-mark of the Muslim is a sincerity (*Ikhlas*) born of the pure devotion to Allah in *Taqwa*. The meaning of life is sought in this devotion and service and the trials and tribulations in the process are a test of his *Ikhlas*. The dedication to procuring the means of assuring the Just Order is itself a measure of the dedication of this Order. It is doubly enjoined, first, upon the Community as a measure of self-defense to uphold the ideals for which it stands, and second, upon Muslims acting individually or as groups in the same dual capacity.

In the world-view of Islam, the means are sanctified for they partake of the same Just Order to which they contribute and of which they are a part. Here there is no room for a dispensation where the ends justify the means. In view of their Source, the standards of Good and Right are universal and immutable, and they apply as such to both means and ends. There is nothing innately evil – or good – about “power” (*alSultan*), for example; to the extent that it is indispensable for bringing about Justice it is “good” and “right” and in its exercise it must accordingly subscribe to a hierarchy of values. Throughout their history, Muslims could not afford to be indifferent to power without imperiling the balance of their fate and forfeiting their prescribed responsibility as a “*khair-umma*” (= the best of nations).

### **Jihad: The Actualization of the Muslim Consciousness - Means to Self - Realization.**

It is in this perspective that jihad has been ingrained in the historical consciousness of Muslims. To the extent that it provides the means of the Community for fulfilling its purpose and realizing Justice, its underlying logic and thrust enshrine the same principles that permeate this consciousness. The following summary sequence of ideas should therefore serve as a convenient point of recapitulation. At the same time they highlight the premises for jihad as the third basic concept of Islamic sociopolitical thought and action.

- (1) An affirmative action-oriented attitude to life is the norm.
- (2) In this orientation, values and sanctions are as a rule absolute. Commitment is beyond compromise because it is drawn from the initial pledge of devotion in the *Shahada*.
- (3) The nature of accountability is ultimately individual and personal. Temporally, however it has its historical consequences for the Community.
- (4) In view of his *khilāfa*, or vicegerency, man is charged with enjoining what is Right and rectifying what is Wrong. Setting up the Just Order in this world is not only possible and desirable, but it is positive-

ly a duty and a responsibility which exacts its accountability.

(5) Change is a function of the person's will and resolution. Change in Society is basically a function of change in morality. Hence, social regeneration, i.e. external or outer reform is rooted which affects the heart (*alNafs*) and the mind (*al 'Aql*) in its perceptions and ways of thought.

(6) The righteous life is contingent on the righteous society. All moral strivings in Muslim Society are bound to have their social consequences. A good Muslim does not realize himself in the hermitage but in society. The good society is not born out of a state of mystical elation, but in the process of historical realization.

(7) Throughout, life is perceived as a continuum with reward and retribution distributed along the line. Divine or Absolute Justice is meted out in recompense only in the Hereafter. So the Muslim strives in this world with his eyes set on the Hereafter. He is sustained through all his ordeals and in the face of the setbacks he encounters by his unshakeable trust in the Justice of the Almighty and in the Truth of His Promise.

In the above context it is easy to understand how jihad, for a devout Muslim, can become a code of life. Its corollary, as mentioned earlier, is *in-faq* and its ultimate expression is in *Istishhad*. With this in mind, let us briefly probe into the assumptions of jihad. As a compound concept, jihad denotes the striving in the way of Allah. It entails putting up with hardship in patience and fortitude on the one hand and persevering in the Cause of Justice and Truth on the other. In this sense, jihad is contingent on a set of attitudes and orientations subsumed under a willingness to give of all that one values, starting with one's wealth and ending with oneself. That willingness to expend is an expression of a readiness to part with all that is near and dear in this world for the love of Allah (SWT). In the *Hadith* it is said that the believer is not truly a believer unless and until his love for Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAAS) is greater than his love for himself. [Sahih Muslim & Bukhari]

The corollary to this attitude is a deliberate and conscious orientation to the Hereafter in all one's actions. This orientation transcends but does not neglect the Here-and-Now, where the norm of communal solidarity further tests the believer's resolve to measure up to the injunction to "love for his brother what he loves for himself." This capacity to live up to the standards of selfless *infaq* calls for a scale of values and priorities that clearly gives precedence to the Unseen and enduring over the tangible and ephemeral. Nothing short of an unwavering faith in Allah and an unremitting trust in His Promise, in Truth, could inculcate such a scale. Not surprisingly, the belief in *alGhaib* (the unseen) is the Crown and Pillar of *Imān*. Seen in this light, the Pillars of the Faith are all means to an end (as well as devotions in their own right): they all

prepare the Muslim for this role of jihad and they nurture the Community, which can provide the human context and support for this purpose of the Just Striving.

Furthermore, in postulating the willingness to give without flinching, jihad sets the tone for the individual and the Community. If sincerity or *ikhlas* is the hallmark for the one, righteousness is the brand for the other. The manifest destination of the human vicegerency on Earth is to expend of one's energies, faculties, and the resources placed at one's command by Allah, in *Taskhir* so as to establish a civilisation in this world that incorporates the two basic elements of what is Right, namely, Truth and Justice. This constitutes the legitimate objective of the Just Striving. Even where jihad may appear to come to no immediate fruition, Muslims are still pledged to the effort which is seen as a winning investment all the same. As was the case with the commitment to Justice, their commitment here to an ideal of sacrifice remains unabated. Here too, their logic is inscrutable for it is rooted in an implacable faith nurtured in the metaphysics of Tawhīd. The fruits they miss in this world they know they will reap all the more in the Next World (*alAkhira*). And here comparisons crumble to the advantage of the latter: However rich the harvest of this world, be it in the success of civilizations and empires, it is a harvest that is inevitably subject of shriveling, rot, and decomposition; not so the enduring harvest of the Hereafter.

What the brilliant historian of our times, Arnold Toynbee, missed when he wrote about the phenomenal expansion of Islam at its inception, was the ethos of dedication that inspired and accompanied the rise of the Community and the Faith. Worldly glory was not the end of the "Warriors of Allah" when they set out on their conquests bent on achieving one of the two "glorious ends," victory or *shahada* (= being slain in the way of Allah). It was the pleasure and the favor of Allah which they sought. It was in striving for this intangible end that they came by worldly success – which was in turn seen as a manifest sign, a "downpayment" on the promise of God to those who submit their will to His Will and commit all they value in His Way.

The frame of mind of the devoted Muslim bred and fed on the ethics of Tawhīd is to cherish that which is beyond material measure. In undertaking jihad, it is *wajh'Allah*, the Countenance of Allah, which one seeks; and in earning the pleasure and favor of one's Master and Cherisher of the Worlds, one's self-satisfaction and inner contentment are assured. The serene and contented self, *al Nafs al Rādiya al Mardiya*, and the self which has found its innermost sense of peace, *al Nafs al Mutma'inna* are anchored in that infinite and unassailable source from which they draw. It is *Redā'Allah* which constitutes the ultimate goal and prize in the devotee's arduous pursuits. This theme aptly invites a few closing remarks on the subject of *istishhad*.

## Istishhad: A Code of Affirmation

If *jihad* is a prescription for the Muslim's worldly life then *istishhad*, which is the reflexive form of "*shahada*," is best described as the code for defeating or circumventing death.<sup>7</sup> *Istishhad* is the voluntary act of submitting one's life unto its very end in the pursuit of the pleasure of Allah. Simply, it is dying, or being slain in the active pursuit of fulfilling Allah's Will on earth. It is the ultimate attestation of one's commitment to an unswerving devotion in His Service. While normally the run of a Muslim's life is full of opportunities for devoted self-exertion in the ways of righteousness by giving of his time, wealth, and effort, it is only rarely that he will be called upon to attest to his devotion by giving up life itself. There will, however, always be those situations where the only scope for self-exertion in the Cause of Righteousness and Allah is in staking one's life. Sometimes, merely upholding a Word of Truth in the face of a tyrant will be an invitation to persecution and prosecution.<sup>8</sup> At other times, the only recourse to checking repression and defending Justice and Right is to rally to the battlefield and prepare for martyrdom. "Permission (to fight) is given to those against whom war is wrongfully waged – and verily Allah has indeed the power to succour them – those who have been driven from their homes against all right for no other reason than their saying 'Our Sustainer is Allah'..." (22:39,40). Such is an injunction that compellingly resounds in the heart and soul of every Muslim who has taken to heart the lessons of the Qur'an and the Sunna. "And how could you refuse to fight in the cause of Allah and of the utterly helpless men and women and children who are crying 'O, our Sustainer, lead us forth (to freedom) out of this land whose people are oppressors, and raise for us out of Thy grace, a protector, and raise for us out of Thy grace, one who will bring us succour,' " (4:75). To those who have been initiated in the Qur'anic code of Honour and Dignity, affirming and reinforcing an innate code inherent in human creation by virtue of *fitra*, such appeals goad the Muslim social conscience whenever and wherever it is confronted with the spectre of destitution. Where there is no established authority to speak up for this conscience and to effectively organize for enacting its will, individuals and groups will not fail to fall back on their own resources however limited or even pathetic they might be.

The ideal in the Muslim ethos of martyrdom is an active ideal. The renunciation of the joys and pleasures of this life in favor of the promise to come is not an act of self-denial, nor is it a deliberate self-infliction of hardship and suffering for itself. There is nothing to suggest a hellenistic asceticism, or a Christian or Hindu mysticism in the choice of the Muslim *mujahid*. His renunciation of this world is not in negation of this world. Rather, this renunciation is simultaneously an act of denunciation and an act of affirmation: a denunciation of immorality and injustice and an affirmation of the necessity and the possibility of setting things in the way of Justice and Right. Here again, it is

action and not meditation that is emphasized. The virtuous life is the righteous life and righteousness is not a given state of grace, but it is a way of life that calls for striving and pursuit. A human being is born into an active role from the very start. He is a born 'doer.' But the *homo faber* in Islam has his roots in the *homo sapiens*, whereby knowledge is taken to incorporate faith; and indeed, the link is integral, not assumed. (30:56) Both, however, the *homo faber* and the *homo sapiens*, are rooted in the ideal of the integrated and the whole human being who constitutes the *homo concord*.

It follows that Islamically, the most congenial system or order of governance, is that which assures the basic freedoms of expression and life. It affords the Muslim the maximum opportunity for self-fulfillment through devoting his divinely given life, talents, and resources to the benefit of a humane and a flourishing civilization. In such a society, the Muslim's jihad is an indisputable asset and source of strength for it will make of him a member more willing to make inputs to society than to take output from it. It will also make of him a reliable support and an advocate to be reckoned with on the side of the Good and the Right and the Just against the inevitable, undermining forces that are at work in all societies. Conversely, the least congenial social system or government from the Muslim point of view is that which flouts human values and denies the basic freedoms of expression and action. In this setting the opportunities for self-affirmation in the cause of Right and Goodness are reduced to the marginal. Instead of self-exertion in the task of constructive edification in a just civic order, the Muslim will be engaged in strife to attain and defend these basic rights. His energies and resources will be spent in resisting and combatting the forces of evil and oppression. His jihad life-span is more likely to be brutish and short and to exact its price in terms of human affliction, suffering and deprivation. Nonetheless, the devoted Muslim will gladly pay the toll of self-exertion in the circumstances and, in the process, he will draw on an incorruptible and inexhaustible fund for his moral fortitude and endurance. In the circumstances too, it will make him anticipate the *shahāda* of *istishhad* as an honor to be coveted and an aspiration to be fulfilled.

On this note we may conclude with two observations on *Shahāda* as the alpha and the omega of the Muslim historical consciousness. First, as shown above, *istishhad* is the natural sequel to the ethic of the Just Striving, and in this sense, it constitutes the crowning and consummation of the ideal of jihad. The Qur'an teaches that this ultimate act of renouncing life is nothing short of an assurance of its conservation, a definite confirmation of its blissful immortality. [2:154; 3:169-171 & 157; 22:58, 59]. The second point calls for a reflection on the affinity between the original act of faith subsumed under the *Shahāda* and *istishhad*, which is also referred to as *Shahāda*. The *Shaheed* is one who lays down his life in this latter act of *Shahāda*. In fact, all these terms

relate to an act of bearing witness. The relationship is not accidental. In the first *Shahāda*, the believer is self-pledged by way of an uttered profession to the total surrender in devotion to the Will of Allah. It is his testimony of recognition and acknowledgement of his Creator and Sustainer. In the ultimate *Shahāda*, the Muslim comes to confirm his original pledge by way of an irrevocable act of faith and will. In the first *Shahāda*, the pledge was to live up to a commitment, in the ultimate *Shahāda* the Muslim has proved truthful to his pledge. As the *shahid* (the one who bears witness) becomes a *shahīd* (a martyr in the way of Allah) there is an inflexion of the verb whereby the original witness and testimony is intensified. The *shahīd* has literally borne witness upon himself of the truthfulness of his original intent, or *niyya*, unto the very end. This glorious affinity is made explicit in the Qur'an:

“Among the believers are men who have been true to their Covenant with Allah: and among them are such that have already redeemed their pledge by death, and such as yet await its fulfillment without having changed (their resolve) in the least.” [33:23]

“... and (this) to the end that Allah might mark out those who have attained to faith, and choose from among you such as (with their lives) bear witness to the truth...” [3:140]

In the faith of the Muslim and in his way of life, the primal act of piety converges with the ultimate act of piety. A *Shahāda* borne and fulfilled is the climax of *Tawhīd*. It also sets the parameters and illuminates the trajectory of a historical consciousness that ultimately transcends its own temporality.

## Notes

1. For an authoritative, concise and comprehensive account of this aspect see *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (by the late Shahid, Isma'il Raji alFaruqi). Another perceptive analysis of the social and political implications of *Tawhid* relevant to our presentation here is the essay by M. N. Siddiqi, “Tawhid: the concept and the process” in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi*, edited by K. Ahmad and Z. I. Ansari (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1979/1980).

2. The formal abrogation of the Caliphate in 1924 has left the region groping for alternatives since to fill the void it created at the hub of the Muslim eco-sphere. The introduction of the nation-state system structured around a basically unstable core of misconceived entities has produced a ‘Middle East’ in a state of endemic crisis and turmoil. This has been attributed by some to a ‘genetic’ praetorian proclivity (e.g. Amos Perlmutter) and by others to the disruptions caused by the mobilization-modernization syndrome (e.g. D. Lerner, L. Binder, C. Leiden and J. Bill, Michael Hudson). The root of the malaise has rarely been addressed. At the practical political level, attempts at regional and international organization among Muslims continue, as with the creation of the League of Arab States, the institution of Muslim Summity and the

variants of the Muslim World Congress. Such attempts have proved to be poor surrogates for any effective power organization and have essentially served more as devices for deflecting the frustrations and aspirations of Muslim public opinion.

3. The celebrated Introduction to the 'universal history', *kitab al'ibar* by Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 C.E.) provides an excellent source for locating such concepts. See the *Muqaddima*, Bk. 3. There are two reasons why this source is so adequate for this purpose: first, it comes in a long line of Muslim scholarship, of which it is an integral part, and second, its author was consciously engaged in a pathbreaking task of laying the foundations of a new science focusing on the study of Human Civilization or, *al'umran albashari*.

4. For a pioneering work on the study of international relations in Islam see the forthcoming publication by 'Abdul Hamid 'AbūSulaymān, *The Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Direction for Islamic Thought and Methodology* - originally, a doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Pennsylvania in 1973. To date, there is little to match it in its field.

5. The style, thrust and force of the traditions show a fund of practical and tested wisdom bequeathed by the Prophet (SAAS) to subsequent generations of believers instructing them in the ways and means of community-building. It is not surprising that some of the best scholarship has been expended in the preservation and authentication of this heritage. The examples selected in the passage cited are taken from the collections of Bukhari, Musnad Ahmad and alTirmidhi.

6. Jurisprudence occupies pride of place in the traditional Islamic sciences. Some of the masterpieces where the principles are meticulously spelt out and creatively articulated continue to be found in the works of the 'middle period' with Fakhrudin alRazi (d. 606 AH), al-Shatibi (d. 790 AH) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 AH) Because the sciences of Islamic Jurisprudence, *fiqh* and *usul*, were so central in the Islamic epistemological scheme, the works in this field constitute a vast corpus that is rich and varied and it spans the length of Islamic history. Orientalist scholarship hardly does justice to this tradition, notwithstanding some valuable contributions made in drawing attention to the sources. The work of Henri Laoust on Ibn Taymiyya's doctrines is noteworthy for going beyond the narrow legalistic approaches to the subject of *fiqh*. Underlying the latter is a misinterpretation of essence, where *fiqh* is arbitrarily defined by and confined to the Western concept of Law. A corrective to this attitude may be found in the work of Muhammad Fazlur-Rahman Ansari, *The Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Society* (Karachi, 1977) esp. vol. 2, where the legal code is discussed in its ethical context. What is needed is more work on the original sources by a new generation of Muslim scholars. The trend in the Arabic repertoire is promising with new laboriously edited and commented editions becoming accessible thanks to the efforts of *turath* experts like Muhammad Draz and Taha Jabir al'Alwani. For contemporary studies on originals, a recent and little known study on the *Muwafaqat* of alShatibi by M. K. Mas'ud deserves to be mentioned. *Islamic Legal Philosophy - A Study of Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's Life and Thought* a Publication of the Islamic Research Institute Islamabad, No. 36 (Islamabad, Pakistan, 1977)

7. Historical and doctrinal factors have transformed *istishhad* into a veritable cult of martyrdom among Shi'i Muslims. Recent writings on the subject by authorities, advocate and scholars explain this. See examples in alMuttahiri, *The Martyr* (Tehran, 1980), Ali Shari'ati, *Martyrdom: arise and bear witness* (trans., Tehran, 1981) and Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: a study of the devotional aspects of Ashura in Twelve Shi'ism* (the Hague: Mouton, 1978). Meanwhile, jihad has been addressed in mainstream Shi'i *fiqh* as a fundamental pillar of the faith. This conspicuous emphasis however should not blind us to the centrality and effective appeal of these ideals to the Muslim conscience at large - a fact which underlies the consistent hostility or wariness with which all Islamic movements are regarded by *status quo* Powers and Regimes in the Muslim world today.

8. "A word of truth administered to an unjust ruler is the noblest form of jihad" or, another version, "An admonishment of Justice in the face of a wilful tyrant is a most commendable form of jihad". Significantly, this is one of the most frequented and effective motifs in mobilizing opposition, or in activating an otherwise passive audience against the ruling oligarchies in the Muslim world. Jalaluddin alSuyuti (d. 911 AH) in his *magnum opus* on *Hadith: alFath alkabir* mentions 3 different chains of transmission for this tradition and refers to six sources: alNasai, *Musnad* Ahmad, alBaihaqi, alTabarani, Ibn Maja and alKhatib.

