

From the Spirituality of Jihad to the Ideology of Jihadism¹

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*As for those who exert themselves in Us,
We surely guide them unto our pathways
(Qur'an 29:69)*

The principle expressed in this verse is indispensable for a correct understanding of the nature of jihad (holy exertion) in Islam; and it helps to establish a clear criterion by which the deviation of jihadist ideology can be gauged. The exertion or effort in question has to be *in* God, and not just *for* God; in other words, it must be conducted within a divine framework and thus be in harmony with all the spiritual and ethical qualities that pertain to that framework; only on this condition will God *guide* the mujahideen along the appropriate paths, whether the exertion in question be conducted in the realm of outward warfare, moral and social endeavor, intellectual and scholarly effort, or, at its most profound, spiritual struggle against that greatest enemy, one's own congenital egotism. In this conception of jihad, the end does not justify the means; on the contrary, the means must be in total conformity with the end: if one's struggle is truly *for* God, it must be conducted *in* God—both the means and the end should be defined by divine principles, thus encompassed and inspired by the divine presence. The employment of vile means betrays the fact that the end in view is far from divine; instead of struggling *for* God and *in* God, the goal of any jihad in which the murder of innocents is deemed legitimate cannot be divinely inspired; even if decked out in the trappings of Islamic vocabulary, it can only emerge as a product of a thoroughly un-Islamic jihadist ideology.

In this light, it is wholly understandable that, in the aftermath of the brutal attacks of September 11, many in the West and in the Muslim world are appalled by the fact that the mass-murder perpetrated on that day is being hailed by some Muslims as an act of jihad. Only the most deluded souls could regard the attacks as having been launched by “mujahideen,” striking a blow in the name of Islam against “legitimate targets” in the heartland of “the enemy.” Despite its evident falsity, the image of Islam conveyed by this disfiguration of Islamic principles is not easily dislodged from the popular imagination in the West. There is an unhealthy and dangerous convergence of perception between, on

the one hand, those—albeit a tiny minority—in the Muslim world who see the attacks as part of a necessary anti-western jihad, and, on the other, those in the West—unfortunately, not such a tiny minority—who likewise see the attacks as the logical expression of an inherently militant religious tradition, one that is irrevocably opposed to the West.

Although of the utmost importance in principle, it appears to matter little in practice that Muslim scholars have pointed out that the terror attacks are totally devoid of any legitimacy in terms of Islamic law (*shari‘a*) and morality. The relevant legal principles—that jihad can only be proclaimed by the most authoritative scholar of jurisprudence in the land in question; that there were no grounds for waging a jihad in the given situation; that, even within a legitimate jihad, the use of fire as a weapon is prohibited; that the inviolability of non-combatants is always to be strictly observed; that suicide is prohibited in Islam—these principles, and others, have been properly stressed by the appropriate *shari‘a* experts; and they have been duly amplified by leaders and statesmen in the Muslim world and the West. Nonetheless, here in the West, the abiding image of “Islamic jihad” seems to be determined not so much by legal niceties as by images and stereotypes, in particular, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the potent juxtaposition of two scenes: the apocalyptic carnage at “Ground Zero”—where the Twin Towers used to stand; and mobs of enraged Muslims bellowing anti-Western slogans to the refrain of “*Allāhu akbar*.”

In such a situation, where the traditional spirit of Islam, and of the meaning, role, and significance of jihad within it, is being distorted beyond recognition, it behooves all those who stand opposed both to media stereotypes of jihadism and to those misguided fanatics who provide the material for the stereotypes, to denounce in the strongest possible terms all forms of terrorism that masquerade as jihad. Many, though, will understandably be asking the question: if this is not jihad, then what is true jihad? They should be given an answer.²

Islamic Principles and Muslim Practice

Whilst it would be a relatively straightforward task to cite traditional Islamic principles which reveal the totally un-Islamic nature of this ideology of “jihadism,” we believe that a critique on this plane of principle will be much more effective if it is complemented with images, actions, deeds, personalities, and episodes that exemplify the principles in question, thereby putting flesh and blood on the bare bones of theory. For the salience of intellectual argument, especially in the domain being considered here, is immeasurably deepened through corroboration by historically recorded cases where the spirit of authentic jihad is vividly enacted, and the pretensions of the self-styled warriors of Islam can be more acutely perceived in the light cast by true mujahideen.

There is a rich treasure of chivalry from which to draw for this purpose in Muslim history. What follows is a series of scenes drawn from this tradition which might serve as illustrations of key Qur’anic and prophetic values which pertain to principled warfare. For it is one thing to quote Qur’anic verses—quite another to see them embodied in action.

As regards the virtue of chivalry itself, it is no exaggeration to say that, throughout the Middle Ages, the very name Saladin was a byword for chivalry, and this remains to some extent true even to this day. The contemporary chronicles—by Muslims and Christians alike—that describe his campaigns and his consistent fidelity to the most noble principles of dignified warfare speak volumes. Again and again, often in the face of treachery by his adversaries, Saladin responded with magnanimity. Suffice it to draw attention to his forbearance, mercy, and generosity at the moment of his greatest triumph: the reconquest of Jerusalem on Friday, October 2, 1187, a memorable day indeed, being the 27th of Rajab—the anniversary of the Prophet’s *laylat al-mi‘rāj*, his ascent through the heavens from Jerusalem itself. After detailing many acts of kindness and charity, the Christian chronicler Ernoul writes:

Then I shall tell you of the great courtesy which Saladin showed to the wives and daughters of knights, who had fled to Jerusalem when their lords were killed or made prisoners in battle. When these ladies were ransomed and had come forth from Jerusalem, they assembled and went before Saladin crying mercy. When Saladin saw them he asked who they were and what they sought. And it was told him that they were the dames and damsels of knights who had been taken or killed in battle. Then he asked what they wished, and they answered for God’s sake have pity on them; for the husbands of some were in prison, and of others were dead, and they had lost their lands, and in the name of God let him counsel and help them. When Saladin saw them weeping he had great compassion for them, and wept himself for pity. And he bade the ladies whose husbands were alive to tell him where they were captives, and as soon as he could go to the prisons he would set them free. And all were released wherever they were found. After that he commanded that to the dames and damsels whose lords were dead there should be handsomely distributed from his own treasure, to some more and others less, according to their estate. And he gave them so much that they gave praise to God and published abroad the kindness and honour which Saladin had done to them.³

Saladin’s magnanimity at this defining moment of history will always be contrasted with the barbaric sacking of the city and indiscriminate murder of its inhabitants by the Christian Crusaders in 1099. His lesson of mercy has been immortalized in the words of his biographer, Stanley Lane-Poole:

One recalls the savage conquest by the first Crusaders in 1099, when Godfrey and Tancred rode through streets choked with the dead and the dying, when defenceless Moslems were tortured, burnt, and shot down in cold blood on the towers and roof of the Temple, when the blood of wanton massacre defiled the honour of Christendom and stained the scene where once the gospel of love and mercy had been preached. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” was a forgotten beatitude when the Christians made shambles of the Holy City. Fortunate were the merciless, for they obtained mercy at the hands of the Moslem Sultan.... If the taking of Jerusalem were the only fact known about Saladin, it were

enough to prove him the most chivalrous and great-hearted conqueror of his own, and perhaps of any, age.⁴

Saladin, though exceptional, was but expressing essentially Islamic principles of conduct, as laid down by the Qur'an and the Prophet ﷺ. These principles of conduct were exemplified in another telling incident which occurred some fifty years before Saladin's victory: a mass conversion of Christians to Islam took place, as a direct result of the exercise of the cardinal Muslim virtue of compassion. A Christian monk, Odo of Deuil, has bequeathed to history a valuable record of the event; being openly antagonistic to the Islamic faith, his account is all the more reliable. After being defeated by the Turks in Phrygia in 543 AH/1147 CE, the remnants of Louis VII's army, together with a few thousand pilgrims, reached the port of Attalia. The sick, the wounded, and the pilgrims had to be left behind by Louis, who gave his Greek allies 500 marks to take care of these people until reinforcements arrived. The Greeks stole away with the money, abandoning the pilgrims and the wounded to the ravages of starvation and disease, and fully expecting those who survived to be finished off by the Turks. However, when the Turks arrived and saw the plight of the defenseless pilgrims, they took pity on them, fed and watered them, and tended to their needs. This act of compassion resulted in the wholesale conversion of the pilgrims to Islam. Odo comments:

Avoiding their co-religionists who had been so cruel to them, they went in safety among the infidels who had compassion upon them.... Oh kindness more cruel than all treachery! They gave them bread but robbed them of their faith, though it is certain that, contented with the services they [the Muslims] performed, they compelled no one among them to renounce his religion.⁵

The last point is crucial in respect of two key Islamic principles: that no one is ever to be forced into converting to Islam; and that virtue must be exercised with no expectation of reward. On the one hand, "*There is no compulsion in religion*";⁶ and on the other, the righteous are those "*who feed, for love of Him, the needy, the orphan, the captive, [saying] we feed you only for the sake of God; we desire neither reward nor thanks from you.*"⁷

The Ontological Imperative of Mercy

Mercy, compassion, and forbearance are certainly key aspects of the authentic spirit of jihad; it is not simply a question of fierceness in war, it is much more about knowing when fighting is unavoidable, how the fight is to be conducted, and to exercise, whenever possible, the virtues of mercy and gentleness. The following verses are relevant in this regard:

*Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you.*⁸

*Muhammad is the messenger of God; and those with him are fierce against the disbelievers, and merciful amongst themselves.*⁹

*And fight in the way of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression. God loveth not the aggressors.*¹⁰

The Prophet ﷺ is told in the Qur'an, "*It was by the mercy of God that thou wast lenient to them; if thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from around thee.*"¹¹

Repeatedly in the Qur'an, one is brought back to the overriding imperative of manifesting mercy and compassion wherever possible. This is a principle that relates not so much to legalism or sentimentality as to the deepest nature of things; for, in the Islamic perspective, compassion is the very essence of the Real. A famous saying of the Prophet ﷺ tells us that, written on the very Throne of God are the words, "My mercy takes precedence over My Wrath." Mercy and compassion (*rahma*) express the fundamental nature of God. Therefore nothing can escape from divine mercy: "*My compassion encompasses all things.*"¹² The name of God, *ar-Rahmān*, is coterminous with Allah: "*Call upon Allah or call upon ar-Rahmān.*"¹³ The divine creative force is, again and again in the Qur'an, identified with *ar-Rahmān*; and the principle of revelation itself, likewise, is identified with this same divine quality. The chapter of the Qur'an named *ar-Rahmān* begins thus: "*Ar-Rahmān, taught the Qur'an, created man.*"¹⁴

This "ontological imperative" of mercy must always be borne in mind when considering any issue connected with warfare in Islam. The examples of merciful magnanimity which we observe throughout the tradition of Muslim chivalry are not only to be seen as instances of individual virtue, but also and above all, as natural fruits of this ontological imperative; and no one manifested this imperative so fully as the Prophet ﷺ himself. Indeed, Saladin's magnanimity at Jerusalem can be seen as an echo of the Prophet's conduct at his conquest of Mecca. As the huge Muslim army approached Mecca in triumphal procession, a Muslim leader, Sa'd ibn 'Ubāda, to whom the Prophet ﷺ had given his standard, called out to Abū Sufyān, leader of the Quraysh of Mecca, who knew that there was no chance of resisting this army:

"O Abū Sufyān, this is the day of slaughter! The day when the inviolable shall be violated! The day of God's abasement of Quraysh." ... "O Messenger of God," cried Abū Sufyān when he came within earshot, "hast thou commanded the slaying of thy people?"—and he repeated to him what Sa'd had said. "I adjure thee by God," he added, "on behalf of thy people, for thou art of all men the greatest in filial piety, the most merciful, the most beneficent." "This is the day of mercy," said the Prophet, "the day on which God hath exalted Quraysh."¹⁵

The Quraysh, having full reason to be fearful, given the intensity—and the barbarity—of their persecution of the early Muslims, and their continuing hostility and warfare against them after the enforced migration of the Muslims to Medina, were granted a general amnesty; many erstwhile enemies were thereby converted into stalwart Muslims. This noble conduct embodied the spirit of the following verse: "*The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then lo! He, between whom and thee there was enmity [will become] as though he were a bosom friend.*"¹⁶

The principle of no compulsion in religion was referred to above. It is to be noted that, contrary to the still prevalent misconception that Islam was spread by the sword, the military campaigns and conquests of the Muslim armies were, on the whole, carried out in such an exemplary manner that the conquered peoples became attracted by the religion which so impressively disciplined its armies, and whose adherents so scrupulously respected the principle of freedom of worship. Paradoxically, the very freedom and respect given by the Muslim conquerors to believers of different faith-communities intensified the

process of conversion to Islam. Arnold's classic work, *The Preaching of Islam*, remains one of the best refutations of the idea that Islam was spread by forcible conversion. His comprehensive account of the spread of Islam in all the major regions of what is now the Muslim world demonstrates beyond doubt that the growth and spread of the religion was of an essentially peaceful nature, the two most important factors in accounting for conversion to Islam being Sufism and trade. The mystic and the merchant, in other words, were the most successful "missionaries" of Islam.

One telling document cited in his work sheds light on the nature of the mass conversion of one group, the Christians of the Persian province of Khurasan, and may be taken as indicative of the conditions under which Christians, and non-Muslims in general, converted to Islam. This is the letter of the Nestorian Patriarch, Isho-yabh III to Simeon, Metropolitan of Rev-Ardashir, Primate of Persia:

Alas, alas! Out of so many thousands who bore the name of Christians, not even one single victim was consecrated unto God by the shedding of his blood for the true faith.... [The Arabs] attack not the Christian faith, but on the contrary, they favour our religion, do honour to our priests and the saints of our Lord and confer benefits on churches and monasteries. Why then have your people of Merv abandoned their faith for the sake of these Arabs?¹⁷

This honoring of Christian priests, saints, churches, and monasteries flows directly from the practice of the Prophet ﷺ—witness, among other things, the treaty he concluded with the monks of St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai,¹⁸ and the permission given by the Christians of Najran to perform their liturgy in the holiest place in Medina, the Prophet's own mosque;¹⁹ and it is likewise rooted in clear verses relating to the inviolability of all places wherein the name of God is oft-invoked. Indeed, in the verse giving permission to the Muslims to begin to fight back in self-defense against the Meccans, the need to protect all such places of worship, and not just mosques, is tied to the reason for the necessity of warfare:

*Permission [to fight] is given to those who are being fought, for they have been wronged, and surely God is able to give them victory; those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, "Our Lord is God." Had God not driven back some by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques—wherein the name of God is oft-invoked—would assuredly have been destroyed.*²⁰

Islam and the People of the Book: Tolerance or Terrorism?

The long and well-authenticated tradition of tolerance in Islam springs directly from the spirit of this and many other verses of similar import. We observe one of the most striking historical expressions of this tradition of tolerance—striking in the contrast it provides with the intolerance that so frequently characterized the Christian tradition—in the fate of Spanish Jewry under Islamic rule. Before looking at this particular case, we should note that, in general terms, active, systematic persecution of Jews and Christians is virtually unknown under Muslim rule. It is important to stress this fact in the strongest

possible terms in the present context, and to debunk the pernicious lie that is circulating in our times—the lie that there is in Islam an inherent, deep-rooted, theologically sanctioned hostility to Judaism. One must not regard the present anger on the part of most Muslims against the policies of the state of Israel as being some kind of atavistic resurgence of a putative anti-Semitism ingrained in the Islamic view of the world. Today, it is the extremists on both sides of the tragic conflict in Palestine who share an interest in promoting this myth of an intrinsically and eternally anti-Jewish Islam; it is of the utmost importance to show the falsity of this notion.

One should also add here that it is not just the “moderates” on both sides who come together, for the sake of peace and justice, in opposing this false characterization of Muslim-Jewish relations; it is also the lovers of traditional, orthodox Judaism that come together, from all religions, to denounce, for the sake of veracity, that deviation from Judaism which Zionism is. Thus we find such groups as the Naturai Karta—traditional Jews opposed to Zionism on irrefutable theological grounds—joining hands with Muslim human rights groups to defend the legitimate rights of the Palestinians against the injustices perpetrated against them in the Holy Land. One must take care to distinguish, therefore, not only between Judaism and Zionism but also between legitimate opposition to particular policies of the state of Israel—policies that reflect and embody Zionist aspirations in different degrees—and illegitimate “jihad” against Jews or Westerners simply on account of the fact that they are Jews or Westerners. The first expresses a legitimate grievance; the second makes of this grievance the pretext for terrorism.

As regards the refutation of the myth that Muslim-Jewish relations have traditionally been antagonistic and oppressive, a cursory perusal of the historical record suffices. Even so fierce a critic of Islam as Bernard Lewis cannot but confirm the facts of history as regards the true character of Muslim-Jewish relations until recent times. In his book, *The Jews of Islam*, he writes that even though there was a certain level of discrimination against Jews and Christians under Muslim rule,

Persecution, that is to say, violent and active repression, was rare and atypical. Jews and Christians under Muslim rule were not normally called upon to suffer martyrdom for their faith. They were not often obliged to make the choice, which confronted Muslims and Jews in reconquered Spain, between exile, apostasy and death. They were not subject to any major territorial or occupational restrictions, such as were the common lot of Jews in premodern Europe.²¹

He then adds the important point that this pattern of tolerance continued to characterize the nature of Muslim rule vis-à-vis Jews and Christians until modern times, with very minor exceptions.

It is not out of place to note here that the phenomenon of anti-Semitism has absolutely nothing to do with Islam. It was, as ‘Abdallāh Schleifer notes, “Church Triumphant”—that is, the Byzantine Church triumphed over the Roman Empire and founded its new capital in Constantinople in the fourth century—it was this Church that was to “unleash upon the world the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. For if we are to differentiate between the vicissitudes which any minority community may endure, and a

‘principled’ and systematic hostility, then one can boldly state, with the consensus of modern historians, that anti-Semitism originated as a Christian phenomenon.”²²

The story of anti-Semitism in Europe—the violent episodes of what today would be labelled ethnic cleansing—is too well-known to need repeating here. But it should be borne in mind that at the same time as the Christian West was indulging in periodic anti-Jewish pogroms, the Jews were experiencing what some Jewish historians themselves have termed a kind of golden age under Muslim rule. As Erwin Rosenthal writes, “The Talmudic age apart, there is perhaps no more formative and positive time in our long and chequered history than that under the empire of Islam.”²³

One particularly rich episode in this golden period was experienced by the Jews of Muslim Spain. As has been abundantly attested by historical records, the Jews enjoyed not just freedom from oppression but also an extraordinary revival of cultural, religious, theological, and mystical creativity. As Titus Burckhardt writes, “The greatest beneficiaries of Islamic rule were the Jews, for in Spain (*sephārād* in Hebrew) they enjoyed their finest intellectual flowering since their dispersal from Palestine to foreign lands.”²⁴ Such great Jewish luminaries as Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol wrote their philosophical works in Arabic and were fully “at home” in Muslim Spain.²⁵ With the expulsion, murder, or forced conversion of all Muslims and Jews following the *reconquista* of Spain—brought to completion with the fall of Granada in 1492—it was to the Ottomans that the exiled Jews turned for refuge and protection. They were welcomed in Muslim lands throughout North Africa, joining the settled and prosperous Jewish communities already there, while also establishing new Jewish communities.

It was at this time also that Jews were suffering intense persecution in central Europe; they likewise looked to the Muslim Ottomans for refuge. Many Jews fleeing from this persecution would have received letters like the following, from Rabbi Isaac Tzarfati, who reached the Ottomans just before their capture of Constantinople in 1453. This is what he replied to those Jews of central Europe who were calling out for help:

Listen, my brethren, to the counsel I will give you. I too was born in Germany and studied Torah with the German rabbis. I was driven out of my native country and came to the Turkish land, which is blessed by God and filled with all good things. Here I found rest and happiness.... Here in the land of the Turks we have nothing to complain of. We are not oppressed with heavy taxes, and our commerce is free and unhindered.... Every one of us lives in peace and freedom. Here the Jew is not compelled to wear a yellow hat as a badge of shame, as is the case in Germany, where even wealth and great fortune are a curse for the Jew because he therewith arouses jealousy among the Christians.... Arise, my brethren, gird up your loins, collect your forces, and come to us. Here you will be free of your enemies, here you will find rest.²⁶

Given the fact that so much of today’s jihadist propaganda is directed against the Jews, it is important to stress that this tolerance of the Jews under Muslim rule is one expression of an underlying theological harmony between the two religions—a harmony that is conspicuously absent when one compares Christian and Jewish theology. Islam was never considered the messianic fulfilment of Judaism, as was Christianity; it was put

forward as a restoration of that primordial Abrahamic faith of which both Judaism and Christianity were alike expressions. Islam calls adherents of both faiths back to that pristine monotheism; far from rejecting their prophets, the Qur'an asserts that all the prophets came with one and the same message, and that therefore there should be no distinction made between any of the prophets:

*Say: We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us, and that which is revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was given unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have submitted.*²⁷

The consequences of this acceptance of the pre-Qur'anic scriptures were far-reaching as regards theological relations between Muslims and Jews. As the Jewish scholar Mark Cohen notes, "Rabbinic exegesis of the Bible—so repugnant to Christian theologians—bothered Muslim clerics only insofar as it distorted pristine Abrahamic monotheism. Thus the Islamic polemic against the rabbis was much less virulent and had far less serious repercussions. The Talmud was burned in Paris, not in Cairo or Baghdad."²⁸

Therefore, the refusal of the Jews to follow the *shar'īa* was not a challenge to Islamic belief; this was in contrast to the Jewish rejection of Christ as Messiah, which not only challenged a cardinal tenet of Christian dogma, it also deeply insulted Christian faith and sensibility. Whereas in Christendom, the Jews were reviled as the killers of Jesus, in Islam, the Jews were "protected" (as *dhimmi*s) by the very law (*shar'īa*) that they refused to follow for themselves. To quote Cohen again,

More secure than their brethren in the Christian West, the Jews of Islam took a correspondingly more conciliatory view of their masters. In Europe, the Jews nurtured a pronounced hatred for the Christians, whom they considered to be idolators, subject to the anti-pagan discriminatory provisions of the ancient Mishnah.... The Jews of Islam had a markedly different attitude towards the religion of their masters. Staunch Muslim opposition to polytheism convinced Jewish thinkers like Maimonides of Islam's unimpeachable monotheism. This essentially 'tolerant' view of Islam echoed Islam's own respect for the Jewish 'people of the Book.'²⁹

In presenting this argument, one is not trying to "score points" for Islam against Christianity, nor simply to apportion blame for the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, nor to argue that there is an inherent and insuperable antagonism between Christianity and Judaism. Rather, the aim in making these points is to demonstrate the irony as well as the falsity of the claim that Islam is inherently anti-Jewish. Both theology and history point in the opposite direction: there is a profound affinity between the two faiths, both in theory and in practice. If there are theological problems that need to be resolved, and a history of intolerance to exorcise, the onus falls much more on Christianity than Islam. For Jews found sanctuary and dignity in Islam, not persecution; fleeing to the Muslim world from the not infrequent campaigns of Christian persecution, they were met with tolerance and respect. It is this that must be stressed in any discussion of the historical and theological background to contemporary Jewish-Muslim relations, given the grave challenges to these

relations posed by the propaganda of the extremists on both sides, that is, the jihadists and the Islamophobes.

The tolerance extended by Islam to the People of the Book (and, indeed, all believers, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians) should be seen, again, not as arising only out of a sense of virtue or justice or expediency on the part of the majority of the rulers and dynasties throughout Muslim history—and thus as some kind of interesting historical prefiguration of modern, secular tolerance; rather, the fact that this phenomenon of Muslim tolerance is so clearly defined must be seen as organically connected to the spirit of the Qur’anic revelation, a spirit grasped in depth by traditional Muslims, and deliberately ignored or subverted by modern jihadists. This spirit is well expressed in the following verses:

*Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and performeth virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve.*³⁰

*Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelations of God in the watches of the night, falling prostrate. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie with one another in good works. These are of the righteous. And whatever good they do, they will not be denied it; and God knows the pious.*³¹

The great tragedy of the current conflict in Palestine is that this Qur’anic spirit of tolerance, understanding, and justice is being subverted by the obnoxious propaganda of jihadists who attempt to justify, in Islamic terms, suicide-bomb missions aimed at civilians. Not only does this give ready ammunition to those who see Islam as an inherently intolerant and violent religion, as the source of terrorism, as the real enemy, it also poisons all of those authentic means of expressing grievance, of redressing wrongs, and of resisting oppression, that are available in the juridical and ethical framework of Islam, means which harmonize with and express the spirit of the Islamic revelation.

Not an Eye for an Eye: The Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir

The life-blood of terrorism is hatred; and this hatred is often in turn the disfigured expression of grievance—a grievance that may be legitimate. In the present day, few doubt that the on-going injustices in Palestine and other parts of the Muslim world give rise to legitimate grievances; but there is nothing in Islam that justifies the killing or injuring of civilians, nor of perpetrating any excess as a result of hatred, even if that hatred is based on legitimate grievances. The pursuit of justice must be conducted in accordance with justice; the means should not undermine the end: “*O ye who believe, be upright for God, witnesses in justice; and let not hatred of a people cause you to be unjust. Be just—that is closer to piety.*”³²

It would be profitable to dwell at some length at one of the most important figures of recent history, the Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir, leader of the Algerian Muslims in their heroic resistance to French colonial aggression between 1830 and 1847. For his conduct is a perfect exemplification of the principle enshrined in this verse, and, in general, he stands forth as a powerful antidote to many of the most insidious poisons afflicting the body

politic of the Muslim world in our times. For his response to a truly despicable enemy—if ever there were one—was never tainted with the hint of injustice; on the contrary, his impeccable conduct in the face of treachery, deceit, and unspeakable cruelty put his “civilized” adversaries to shame. His enemy, the French, who initiated imperialistic aggression against the Muslims of Algeria, were guilty of the most horrific crimes in their “mission civilisatrice,” crimes that were in fact acknowledged as such by the architects of this mission, but justified by them on account of the absolute necessity of imparting “civilization” to the Arabs. This was an end which justified any means, even, ironically, the most savage. Bopichon, author of two books on Algeria in the 1840s, states the underlying ethos of the French colonial enterprise as follows:

Little does it matter that France in her political conduct goes beyond the limits of common morality at times; the essential thing is that she establish a lasting colony, and that as a consequence, she will bring European civilization to these barbarous countries; when a project which is to the advantage of all humanity is to be carried out, the shortest path is the best. Now, it is certain that the shortest path is terror....³³

Terrorism well describes the policy carried out by the French. Testimonies abound as to the atrocities perpetrated by French forces. An evidently remorseful, if not traumatized, Count d’Hérison recounts in his book *La chasse à l’homme (Hunting the man)* that “we would bring back a barrel full of ears harvested, pair by pair, from prisoners, friends or foes,” inflicting on them “unbelievable cruelties.” The ears of Arabs were worth ten francs a pair, “and their women remained a perfect prey.”³⁴ Official French reports eventually registered with shame these monstrous acts. A Government Inquiry Commission report of 1883 frankly admitted:

We massacred people carrying [French] passes, on a suspicion we slit the throats of entire populations who were later on proven to be innocent; we tried men famous for their holiness in the land, venerated men, because they had enough courage to come and meet our rage in order to intercede on behalf of their unfortunate fellow countrymen; there were men to sentence them and civilized men to have them executed.³⁵

How did the Emir respond to such unbridled savagery? Not with bitter vengeance and enraged fury but with dispassionate propriety and principled warfare. At a time when the French were mutilating Arab prisoners, wiping out whole tribes, burning men, women, and children alive; and when severed Arab heads were regarded as trophies of war—the Emir manifested his magnanimity, his unflinching adherence to Islamic principle, and his refusal to stoop to the level of his “civilized” adversaries, by issuing the following edict:

Every Arab who captures alive a French soldier will receive as reward eight douros.... Every Arab who has in his possession a Frenchman is bound to treat him well and to conduct him to either the Khalifa [Caliph] or the Emir himself, as soon as possible. In cases where the prisoner complains of ill treatment, the Arab will have no right to any reward.³⁶

When asked what the reward was for a severed French head, the Emir replied, twenty-five blows of the baton on the soles of the feet. One understands why General

Bugeaud, Governor-General of Algeria, referred to the Emir not only as “a man of genius whom history should place alongside Jugurtha,” but also as “a kind of prophet, the hope of all fervent Muslims.”³⁷ When he was finally defeated and brought to France, before being exiled to Damascus, the Emir received hundreds of French admirers who had heard of his bravery and his nobility; the visitors by whom he was most deeply touched, though, were French officers who came to thank him for the treatment they received at his hands when they were his prisoners in Algeria.³⁸

One should note carefully the extraordinary care shown by the Emir for his French prisoners. Not only did he ensure that they were protected against violent reprisals on the part of outraged tribesmen seeking to avenge loved ones who had been brutally killed by the French, he also manifested concern for their spiritual well-being: a Christian priest was invited by him to minister to the religious needs of his prisoners. In a letter to Dupuch, Bishop of Algeria, with whom he had entered into negotiations regarding prisoners generally, he wrote, “Send a priest to my camp, he will lack nothing.”³⁹ Likewise, as regards female prisoners, he exercised the most sensitive treatment, having them placed under the protective care of his mother, lodging them in a tent permanently guarded against any would-be molesters.⁴⁰ It is hardly surprising that some of these prisoners of war embraced Islam, while others, once they were freed, sought to remain with the Emir and serve under him.⁴¹

The Emir’s humane treatment of French prisoners was kept secret from the French forces; had it leaked out, the result would have been devastating for the morale of the French forces, who had been told that they were fighting a war for the sake of civilization, and that their adversaries were barbarians. As Colonel Gery confided in the Bishop of Algeria, “We are obliged to try as hard as we can to hide these things [the treatment accorded French prisoners by the Emir] from our soldiers. For if they so much as suspected such things, they would not hasten with such fury against Abd el-Kader.”⁴² Over one hundred years before the signing of the Geneva Conventions, the Emir demonstrated the meaning not only of the rights of prisoners of war but also of the innate and inalienable dignity of the human being, whatever his or her religion.

Also highly relevant to our theme is the Emir’s famous defense of the Christians in Damascus in 1860. Now defeated and in exile, the Emir spent his time in prayer, contemplation, and instruction in the finer points of the faith. When civil war broke out between the Druzes and the Christians in Lebanon, the Emir heard that there were signs of an impending attack on the Christians of Damascus. He wrote letters to all the Druze shaykhs, requesting them not to “make offensive movements against a place with the inhabitants of which you have never before been at enmity.” Here, we have an expression of the cardinal principle of warfare in Islam—never to initiate hostilities: “*And fight in the way of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression. God loveth not the aggressors.*”⁴³

The Emir’s letters proved to no avail. When the Druzes—whose numbers were now swelled by members of the Damascus mob—were approaching the Christian quarters of the city, the Emir confronted them, urging them to observe the rules of religion and of human justice.

“What,” they shouted, “you, the great slayer of Christians, are you come out to prevent us from slaying them in our turn? Away!”

“If I slew the Christians,” he shouted in reply, “it was ever in accordance with our law—the Christians who had declared war against me, and were arrayed in arms against our faith.”⁴⁴

This had no effect upon the mob. As the Turkish authorities stood by, either unable or unwilling to intervene, the Christian quarters were mercilessly attacked, and many Christians were killed. The Emir and his band of Maghrebi followers sought out the terrified Christians, giving them refuge in the Emir’s home. News of this spread, and on the morning of the 10th of July, an angry crowd gathered outside the Emir’s house, demanding that he hand over the Christians. Alone, he went out to confront them, and fearlessly addressed them thus:

O my brothers, your conduct is impious.... How low have you fallen, for I see Muslims covering themselves with the blood of women and children? Has God not said: “*He who killeth a single soul ... it is as if he hath killed the whole of humanity?*”[Qur’an 5:32] Has he not also said, “*There is no compulsion in religion, the right way is clearly distinguished from error?*”[Qur’an 2:256]

This only enraged the mob further. The leaders of the crowd replied to him, “O holy warrior! We do not need your advice.... Why are you interfering in our affairs? You, who used to fight the Christians, how can you oppose our avenging their insults? Disbeliever, deliver up those you have hidden in your house; otherwise we will strike you with the same punishment we have meted out to the disbelievers: we will reunite you with your brothers.”

Further words were exchanged, the Emir retorting, “I did not fight ‘Christians’; I fought the aggressors who called themselves Christians.”

The anger of the mob increased, and, at this point, the tone of the Emir changed, his eyes flashed with anger, and he sensed the possibility of battle for the first time since he had left Algeria. He hurled one last warning to the crowd, saying that the Christians were his hosts, and that for as long as one of his valiant Maghrebi soldiers lived, the Christians would not be handed over. Then, addressing his own men, he said, “And you, my Maghrebis, may your hearts rejoice, for I call God to witness: we are going to fight for a cause as holy as that for which we fought before!” The mob dispersed and fled in fear....⁴⁵

One should note carefully the words of the Emir to his own men, preparing them to lay down their lives for the Christians: he says that this act of defense is as holy as the war we fought to defend our homes and families against the French colonialists in Algeria. One fights for what is right, not only for “our” rights, whether as individuals or as members of a family, tribe, or even religion: the principles of the religion take priority over those who call themselves “Muslim,” and these principles apply in all circumstances, and most urgently when such people act unjustly. His action, together with the fact that he calls God to witness, must be seen as a graphic response to, and thus commentary upon, the call made in the following verse from the Qur’an: “*O ye who believe! Stand up for justice, as witnesses to God, even against your own souls, or your parents or your kin, whether rich or poor, for God protecteth both. Follow not passion lest ye deviate....*”⁴⁶

The Emir then sent two hundred of his men to various parts of the Christian quarters to find as many Christians as they could. He also offered fifty piastres to anyone

who brought to him a Christian alive. His mission continued thus for five days and nights, during which he neither slept nor rested. As the numbers swelled to several thousand, the Emir escorted them all to the citadel of the city. It is estimated that in the end, no less than fifteen thousand Christians were saved by the Emir in this action; and it is important to note that in this number were included all the ambassadors and consuls of the European powers together with their families. As Charles Henry Churchill, his biographer, prosaically puts it, just a few years after the event,

All the representatives of the Christian powers then residing in Damascus, without one single exception, had owed their lives to him. Strange and unparalleled destiny! An Arab had thrown his guardian aegis over the outraged majesty of Europe. A descendant of the Prophet had sheltered and protected the Spouse of Christ.⁴⁷

The Emir received the highest possible medals and honors from all the leading western powers. The French Consul himself, representative of the state that was still very much in the process of colonizing the Emir's homeland, owed his life to the Emir; for this true warrior of Islam, there was no bitterness, resentment, or revenge, only the duty to protect the innocent, and all the People of the Book who lived peacefully within the lands of Islam. It is difficult to conceive of a greater contrast between the Emir's conduct and the present self-styled "mujahideen," who indiscriminately portray the West as the enemy *tout court*, and perpetrate correspondingly unjust acts against innocent westerners. The Emir's action exemplifies well the Qur'anic verse: "*God forbiddeth you not from dealing kindly and justly with those who fought not against you on account of your religion, nor drove you out of your homes. Truly God loveth those who are just.*"⁴⁸

When the Bishop of Algiers, Louis Pavy, commended the Emir's actions, the latter replied, "The good that we did to the Christians was what we were obliged to do, out of fidelity to Islamic law and out of respect for the rights of humanity. For all creatures are the family of God, and those most beloved of God are those who are most beneficial to his family." Then follows this passage which is clearly rooted in the universality of the Qur'anic message and the "ontological imperative" of mercy that is its ineluctable concomitant. The practical import of this universality and this mercy is expressed dramatically by the courage of the Emir in his unwavering fidelity to these principles; these are not mere words but ultimate spiritual values, for which one must be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice if necessary:

All the religions brought by the prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, rest upon two principles: the exaltation of God Most High, and compassion for His creatures. Apart from these two principles, there are but ramifications, the divergences of which are without importance. And the law of Muhammad is, among all doctrines, that which shows itself most attached to, and most respectful of, compassion and mercy. But those who belong to the religion of Muhammad have caused it to deviate. That is why God has caused them to lose their way. The recompense has been of the same nature as the fault.⁴⁹

What we are given here is a concise and irrefutable diagnosis of the contemporary malaise within the Islamic world: since the compassion that is so central to this great

religion has been subordinated to anger and bitterness, the mercy of God has been withdrawn from those “who have caused it to deviate.” This is in accordance with the well-known saying of the Prophet ﷺ: “He who shows no mercy will not have mercy shown him” (*man lam yarḥam, lam yurḥam*), as well as with this verse of the Qur’an: “*In their hearts is a disease, so God increased their disease.*”⁵⁰ This disease of hard-heartedness needs to be accurately diagnosed; and, if we are to take seriously the greatest warriors of our recent past, a key ingredient of the remedy is universal compassion.

It is interesting to note that another great warrior of Islam, Imam Shamīl of Dagestan, hero of the wars against Russian imperialism,⁵¹ wrote a letter to the Emir when he heard of his defense of the Christians. He praised the Emir for his noble act, thanking God that there were still Muslims who behaved according to the spiritual ideals of Islam:

Know that when my ear was struck with that which is detestable to hear, and odious to human nature—I allude to the recent events in Damascus concerning the Muslims and the Christians, in which the former pursued a path unworthy of the followers of Islam ... a veil was cast over my soul... I cried to myself: Corruption has appeared on the earth and at sea, because of what men’s hands have wrought [Qur’an 30:41]. I was astonished at the blindness of the functionaries who have plunged into such excesses, forgetful of the words of the Prophet, peace be upon him, “Whoever shall be unjust towards a tributary,⁵² whoever shall do him wrong, whoever shall deprive him of anything without his own consent, it is I who will be the accuser on the day of judgement.” Ah, what sublime words! But when I was informed that you have sheltered the tributaries beneath the wings of goodness and compassion; that you had opposed the men who militated against the will of God Most High..., I praised you as God Most High will praise you on the day when neither their wealth nor their children avail [Qur’an 3:10]. In reality, you have put into practice the words of the great apostle of God Most High, bearing witness to compassion for His humble creatures, and you have set up a barrier against those who would reject his great example. May God preserve us from those who transgress His laws!⁵³

In response to this letter the Emir wrote the following, which expresses so well the situation prevailing to an even more parlous degree in our own times:

When we think how few men of real religion there are, how small the number of defenders and champions of the truth—when one sees ignorant persons imagining that the principle of Islam is hardness, severity, extravagance and barbarity—it is time to repeat these words: “Patience is beautiful, and God is the source of all succour.” (*Ṣabr jamīl, wa’Llāhu’l-musta‘ān.*)(Qur’an 12:18)⁵⁴

The patience and compassion advocated by these warriors is far from sentimental defeatism, nor is it simply making a virtue out of a necessity. It stems from the very values that motivated them to fight against aggression in the first place, values embedded in the subtle spirit of Islam—values of rigor combined with gentleness, strength and compassion, resolution and resignation, all such complementary qualities being rooted in the polarity within the divine nature itself: *jalāl* (majesty) and *jamāl* (beauty).⁵⁵ If a warrior deprived of

his *jalālī* qualities loses his virility, one who smothers his *jamālī* qualities loses his humanity. Let us also bear in mind that within the Sufi tradition, to which both the Emir and Imam Shamīl belonged, spiritual realization cannot but result in compassionate radiance. Realization of the Absolute is, inescapably, radiation of mercy, since as we noted above, mercy and compassion are of the essence of the Real.⁵⁶ If compassion in the fullest sense thus flows from realization, this realization itself is the fruit of victory in the “greater jihad,” to which we now turn.

The Greater Jihad

While the Emir fought French colonialism militarily, in the following century, another great Sufi master in Algeria, Shaykh Aḥmad al-‘Alawī, chose to resist with a peaceful strategy, but one which pertained no less to jihad, in the principial sense of the term. One has to remember that the literal meaning of the word “jihad” is effort or struggle, and that the greater jihad was defined by the Prophet ﷺ as the *jihād an-naḥs* (the war against the soul). The priority thus accorded to inward, spiritual effort over all outward endeavors must never be lost sight of in any discussion of jihad. Physical fighting is the “lesser” jihad and only has meaning in the context of that unremitting combat against inner vices, the devil within, that has been called the greater jihad.

One contemporary Sufi master vividly contrasts the kind of inner warfare that characterizes the true “warriors of the spirit” from the mass of ordinary believers. He does so in connection with the Qur’anic distinction, within the category of those who are saved in the Hereafter, between the companions of the right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) and the foremost (*as-sābiqūn*):⁵⁷

Every Muslim is at war with the devil. As regards those of the right, however, this warfare is desultory and intermittent, with many armistices and many compromises. Moreover the devil is aware that as fallen men they are already to a certain extent within his grasp, and having by definition no faith in the Divine Mercy, he cannot foresee that they will escape from his clutches in the life to come. But as regards the foremost, he feels them actually throwing off his domination in the present, and they even carry the war into his territory. The result is a terrible retaliation....⁵⁸

The individual’s moral and spiritual effort in this inner struggle is a necessary but not sufficient condition for victory; only by means of heaven-sent weapons can the war be won: sacred rites, meditations, incantations, invocations—all of which are summed up in the term “remembrance of God.” In this light, the strategy of the Shaykh al-‘Alawī can be better appreciated. It was to put first things first, concentrating on the “one thing needful” and leaving the rest in God’s hands. It might be seen, extrinsically, as an application, on the plane of society, of the following esoteric principle, enunciated by one of his spiritual forbears, Mulay ‘Alī al-Jamāl: “The true way to hurt the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend; on the other hand, if you engage in war with the enemy, he will have obtained what he wanted from you, and at the same time you will have lost the opportunity of loving the Friend.”⁵⁹

The Shaykh al-^ʿAlawī concentrated on this love of the Friend, and of all those values connected to this imperative of remembrance, doing so to the exclusion of other, more overt forms of resistance, military and political, against the French. The Shaykh’s spiritual radiance extended not just to a few disciples but, through his many *muqaddams* (spiritual representatives), to hundreds of thousands of Muslims whose piety was deepened in ways that are immeasurable.⁶⁰ The Shaykh was not directly concerned with political means of liberating his land from the yoke of French rule, for this was but a secondary aspect of the situation: the underlying aim of the French “mission civilisatrice” in Algeria was to forge the Algerian personality in the image of French culture;⁶¹ so, in the measure that one perceives that the real danger of colonialism was cultural and psychological rather than just territorial and political, the spiritual indomitability of the Shaykh and his many followers assumes the dimensions of a signal victory. The French could make no inroads into a mentality that remained inextricably rooted in the spiritual tradition of Islam.

Lest this approach be regarded as a prescription for unconditional quietism, one should note that the great warrior, the Emir himself, would have had no difficulty whatsoever in asserting its validity: for even while outwardly engaging with the enemy on the battlefield, he was never for a moment distracted from his remembrance of the “Friend.” It was without bitterness and rage that he fought; and this explains the absence of any resentment towards the French when he was defeated by them, submitting to the manifest will of God with the same contemplative resignation with which he went into battle with them in the first place. If one suspects this account is romanticizing or that it overstates the Emir’s capacity to deal with the exigencies of a brutal war whilst simultaneously plumbing the depths of contemplative experience, the following account is useful; it is written by a Frenchman, Léon Roche, who entered the inner circle of the Emir’s entourage by pretending to have converted to Islam. During the siege of ^ʿAyn Mādī in 1838, Roche was traumatized by the fighting and killing, and he sought out the Emir; entering his tent, he pleaded with the Emir to help him. He later wrote about what happened:

He calmed me and had me drink an infusion of schiehh (a kind of absynthe common in the desert). He supported my head, which I could no longer hold up, on one of his knees. He was squatting in the Arab fashion. I was stretched out at his side. He placed his hands on my head, from which he had removed the haik and the chechias, and under this gentle touch I soon fell asleep. I awoke well into the night. I opened my eyes and felt revived. The smoky wick of an Arab lamp barely lit the vast tent of the amir. He was standing three steps away from me. He thought I was asleep. His two arms were raised to the height of his head, fully displaying his milky white bernous and haik which fell in superb folds. His beautiful blue eyes, lined with black lashes, were raised. His lips, slightly open, seemed to be still reciting a prayer but nevertheless were motionless. He had come to an ecstatic state. His aspirations towards heaven were such that he seemed no longer to touch the earth. I had on occasion been granted the honor of sleeping in Abd al-Kader’s tent and I had seen him in prayer and been struck by his mystical transports, but on this night he represented for me

the most striking image of faith. Thus must the great saints of Christianity have prayed.⁶²

From this account, one sees that the following “official” description of the Emir, given as the conclusion to a pamphlet defining army regulations in 1839, was not simply pious propaganda:

Il Hadj Abdel Kader cares not for this world, and withdraws from it as much as his avocations permit.... He rises in the middle of the night to recommend his own soul and the souls of his followers to God. His chief pleasure is in praying to God with fasting, that his sins may be forgiven.... When he administers justice, he hears complaints with the greatest patience.... When he preaches, his words bring tears to all eyes, and melt the hardest hearts.⁶³

This remarkable combination of roles—warrior and saint, preacher and judge—recalls perhaps the greatest model of all Muslim mujahideen, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. This paragon of wisdom and virtue stands forth as the most compelling holy warrior in the Islamic tradition. As Frithjof Schuon puts it, “Ali appears above all as the ‘Solar Hero,’ he is the ‘Lion’ of God; he personifies the combination of physical heroism on the field of battle with a sanctity wholly detached from the things of the world; he is the personification of the wisdom, both impassive and combative, which the Bhagavad-Gita teaches.”⁶⁴

One of the great lessons of principled warfare, of “fighting in the path of God,” imparted by ‘Alī was immortalized by Rumi in his poetic rendering of the famous incident in which ‘Alī sheathed his sword instead of finishing off his defeated enemy, who had spat at him in a last gesture of defiance. Although the immediate spiritual significance of the action is clearly ‘Alī’s refusal to kill on the basis of personal anger—the warrior must be detached from self, and fight wholly for God—it is also given a deeper metaphysical meaning by Rumi. In his *Mathnawī*, Rumi turns the incident into a sublime commentary on the Qur’anic verse, “*Ye slew them not, but God slew them. And thou (Muhammad) didst not throw when thou threwest, but God threw.*”⁶⁵ The last part of the verse refers to the throwing by the Prophet ﷺ of a handful of dust in the direction of the enemy before a battle. But the verse as a whole alludes to the reality that the true, ontological agent of all actions is God Himself; man’s actions are good only if he is conscious of this, and insofar as he is effaced in this consciousness. Rumi puts the following words into the mouth of ‘Alī, who replies to the question of the baffled, defeated warrior on the ground, “Why did you not kill me?”:

He said, “I am wielding the sword for God’s sake, I am the servant of God,
I am not under the command of the body.

I am the Lion of God, I am not the lion of my passion: my deed bears
witness to my religion.

In war I am (manifesting the truth of) thou didst not throw when thou
threwest: I am (but) as the sword, and the wielder is the (Divine) Sun.

I have removed the baggage of self out of the way, I have deemed (what is)
other than God to be non-existence.

I am a shadow, the Sun is my lord; I am the chamberlain, I am not the curtain (which prevents approach) to Him.

I am filled with the pearls of union, like a (jewelled) sword: in battle I make (men) living, not slain.⁶⁶

Blood does not cover the sheen of my sword: how should the wind sweep away my clouds?

I am not a straw, I am a mountain of forbearance and patience and justice: how should the fierce wind carry off the mountain?"⁶⁷

The true warrior of Islam smites the neck of his own anger with the sword of forbearance;⁶⁸ the false warrior strikes at the neck of his enemy with the sword of his own unbridled ego. For the first, the spirit of Islam determines jihad; for the second, bitter anger, masquerading as jihad, determines Islam. The contrast between the two could hardly be clearer.

Let us also note in connection with the irresistible example of 'Alī's combination of heroism and sanctity, the crucial connection he establishes between victory in the inner war against the enemy within, on the one hand, and the principle of compassion, on the other. This emerges from the metaphor given by 'Alī for the battle that is waged in the soul, and for the soul: the intellect, he says, is the leader of the forces of *ar-Raḥmān* (the Compassionate); *al-hawā* (whim, caprice, desire) commands the forces of *ash-shayṭān* (the devil); the soul itself is between them, undergoing the attraction of both (*mutajādhība baynahumā*). The soul "enters into the domain of whichever of the two will triumph."⁶⁹

The soul's fundamental energy is not to be destroyed but converted and redirected, away from the transient objects of individualistic desire, and away from "*ash-Shayṭān*," (Satan) towards the one, true object, that expressed by "*ar-Raḥmān*." It is compassion and mercy that prevail against the enemy, at whatever level, and this compassion is perceived by the intellect in its normative state; it is when the intellect is clouded by whim and caprice that this compassion is replaced by passion, bitterness, and rage. The enemy is thus fought on its own debased terms instead of on the higher ground of principle: instead of remembering the "Friend," one gives the enemy the satisfaction of victory through the very means employed in the battle. One is no longer fighting *for* God because one is no longer fighting *in* God.

Finally, let us note the following sayings of 'Alī that help to underline the priority which must be accorded to the spiritual struggle over the outward material one:

- Struggling against the soul through knowledge—such is the mark of the intellect.
- The strongest people are those who are strongest against their own souls.
- Truly, one who fights his own soul, in obedience to God and desisting from sinning against Him, has the rank of the righteous martyr in God's eyes.
- The ultimate battle is that of a man against his own soul.
- He who knows his soul fights it.
- No jihad is more excellent than the jihad of the soul.⁷⁰

The episodes recounted here as illustrations of authentic jihad should be seen not as representing some unattainably sublime ideal but as expressive of the sacred norm in the Islamic tradition of warfare; this norm may not always have been applied in practice—one can always find deviations and transgressions—but it was continuously upheld in principle, and, more often than not, gave rise to the kind of chivalry, heroism, and nobility of which we have offered a few of the more striking and famous examples here. The sacred norm of chivalric warfare in Islam stood out clearly for all to see, buttressed by the values and institutions of traditional Muslim society. It can still be discerned today, for those who look hard enough, through the hazy clouds of passion and ideology.

It is far from coincidental that both the Emir and Imam Shamīl—not to mention other noble warriors who resisted the imperialist aggression of the West, such as ‘Umar Mukhtār in Libya, the Mahdī in Sudan, ‘Uthmān dan Fodio in Nigeria—were affiliated to Sufism. No one need claim that Sufism encompasses Islamic spirituality in an exclusive manner; but no one can deny that the spiritual values of Islam have been traditionally cultivated and brought to fruition most effectively and most beautifully by the Sufis. And it is these spiritual values that infuse ethical norms—in whatever domain—with vivifying grace, the grace without which the acts of heroism and nobility surveyed here are scarcely conceivable. Sufism did not invent the spiritual values of Islam; it merely sought to give life to them, from generation to generation. An important definition of ṭaṣawwuf is quoted by ‘Alī al-Hujwīrī (d.456/1063) in his *Kashf al-mahjūb (Disclosure of the Veiled)*, one of the most important early manuals of classical Sufism: “Today, Sufism is a name without a reality; formerly it was a reality without a name.”⁷¹ In other words, the values proper to Sufism are deemed to have been present at the time of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, where their reality was lived rather than named. After giving us this definition, al-Hujwīrī adds that those who deny Sufism are in fact denying the “whole sacred law of the Apostle and his praised qualities.”⁷²

Now, it might seem surprising to assert that a denial of Sufism is tantamount to a denial of the whole sacred law; but the stress here should be on the word “whole.” For, if Islam is reduced to merely a mechanical observation of outward rules, then it is not a religion in the full sense; or, it is a religion without inner life: hence we find the great al-Ghazālī naming his magnum opus *Revival of the sciences of religion*; and, it is clear from his writings that the spiritual values proper to Sufism provide this inner life of religion.

It is also the Sufis, traditionally, who have most deeply assimilated the universality proper to the Qur’anic message. It is no surprise, then, that those most steeped in Sufism were the ones most sensitive to the sanctity of human life, to the innate holiness of the human being, whatever his or her religion; nor is it a surprise that those most hostile to Sufism are those who demonstrate the most appalling disregard for the inviolability of human life. It is becoming increasingly obvious to intelligent observers of the Muslim world that those most inclined to violence are members of deviant *takfīrī*⁷³ offshoots of various radical movements that are not only purely “ideological” but also most hostile to Sufism and to many of the values held most sacred within the spiritual tradition of Islam.

Now, such vehement opposition to the spiritual values of the tradition cannot but entail a desacralization of religion at its core; and this, inevitably, goes hand in hand with a rejection of the sacredness of other traditions. The political vilification of the religious

“other” is all the more easily accomplished in a climate where the integrity of the sacred within one’s own tradition has already been undermined. From attacking the sacred within oneself, it is but a short step to destroying the religious other. One who has become insensitive to the sacred within one’s own tradition is unlikely, to put it mildly, to be respectful of the religious other. Sufis, such as those we have presented here, on the contrary, are keenly aware not just of the intrinsic holiness of the religious other but also of the sacred manifestations within the religion of the other. The Emir, upon being confronted by the Church of Madeleine, uttered these words: “When I first began my struggle with the French I thought they were a people without religion.... Such churches as these would soon convince me of my error.”⁷⁴

What we are witnessing today is the result of a long process of desacralization that has been working itself out within the body politic of the Muslim world: self-righteousness masquerading as virtue, sanctimoniousness replacing sanctity, sacrilege taking the place of religion—such is the spectacle that unfolds as Islam is being reduced from a way of salvation to the pretext for a this-worldly, political ideology with a religious façade. This reductionism is most apparent in that tiny minority of political extremists who claim to represent the Muslim *umma* (community), but who manifest only the most violent consequences of the spiritual decline within the *umma*. However, it should be stressed that the reason why the extremists act in the name of the religion is that the majority of Muslims are still “religious,” to whatever degree. In other words, the extremists’ recourse to religious vocabulary in the effort to legitimize jihadist ideology is itself a testimony to the continuing salience of religion in the Muslim world.

The body politic of the Muslim world has indeed been infected by a poison which is now running riot within it; but it is also receiving, from without, violent assaults which are further weakening the body in its effort to eliminate the poison. What Muslims need to do is to diagnose the poison and show that the tendency to resort to terrorism is a poison afflicting Islam; it is not a product of the *essence* of Islam. To make such a diagnosis is part of the battle against terrorism—indeed, the real “war on terror” is being fought on this field, between Muslims themselves. The greatest warriors in this battle are those who fight intellectually to reclaim Islam, to revive its deepest and most noble ideals, in whose light the extent of the deviation currently being paraded as “Islamic” can be clearly seen. But the efforts of those Muslims struggling intellectually for authentic Islam, and doing so *in* God, are certainly not helped by the demonization of Islam in the West nor by the policies that exacerbate, even if inadvertently, that demonization process, and thus further alienate moderate Muslims all over the globe. Such policies only make the poison more virulent and further weaken the antibodies.

For example, Khaled Abou El-Fadl—one of the most effective and scholarly voices in America calling for tolerance within Islam, and rejecting all forms of violence, doing so on the basis of the juristic tradition itself—has been labelled a traitor by many unthinking Muslims. They say that at a time when Muslims are being slaughtered all over the world (Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine, Xinjiang, Iraq, etc.), to speak of the need for Muslims to be tolerant is not only a bad joke, it is turning a blind eye to the intolerance of the West, and thus acquiescing in the tyranny of the West. To this, Abou El-Fadl replies bravely that tolerance is at the heart of the Islamic ethical tradition and that “If the Muslims’ response

... is to become alienated from their religious morality, then Muslims have lost something that is far more important than the political struggle—they have lost their moral grounding.”⁷⁵

Those who have indeed lost their moral grounding, and who consequently resort to violence in the name of Islam, can only do so on the prior basis of having already reduced the sacred essence of the religion to its outer forms. Such a reduction from the essence to the form—paradoxically but inevitably—impoverishes all forms; for, deprived of the vivifying sap of their sacred roots, forms wither away—or else collapse in on themselves in violent self-destruction: enter the suicide bomber.

The Emir bewailed the paucity of “champions of truth” in his time; in our own time, we are confronted with an even more grotesque spectacle: the champions of authentic jihad being blown to pieces by suicide-bombers claiming to be martyrs for the faith. One of the truly great mujahideen in the war against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Massoud, fell victim to a treacherous attack by two fellow Muslims, in what was evidently the first stage of the operation that destroyed the World Trade Center. It was a strategic imperative for the planners of the operation to rid the land of its most charismatic leader: a hero who could credibly be used by the West as a figurehead for the revenge attack on Afghanistan that was provoked, anticipated, and hoped for, by the terrorists. But, politics aside, the reason why Massoud was so popular was precisely his fidelity to the values of noble warfare in Islam; and it was this very fidelity to that tradition that made him a dangerous enemy of the terrorists—more dangerous, it may be said, than that more abstract enemy, the West. To present the indiscriminate murder of western civilians as jihad, the values of true jihad needed to be dead and buried.

The murder of Massoud was thus doubly symbolic: he embodied the traditional spirit of jihad that needed to be destroyed by those who wished to assume its ruptured mantle; and it was only through suicide—subverting one’s own soul—that this destruction, or rather, this apparent destruction, could be perpetrated. The destruction is only apparent in that, on the one hand,

*They destroy [but] themselves, they who would ready a pit of fire fiercely burning
[for all who have attained to faith].*⁷⁶

And on the other hand:

*Say not of those who are slain in the path of God: They are dead. Nay, they are
alive, though ye perceive not.*⁷⁷

Let it also be noted that, while it is indeed true that the martyr (*ash-shahīd*) is promised Paradise, the true *shahīd* is one whose death bears witness (*shahāda*) to the truth of God. It is consciousness of the truth that must animate and articulate the spirit of one who “fights in the Path of God”; fighting for any cause other than the truth cannot be called a “jihad,” just as one who dies fighting in such a cause cannot be called a “martyr.” Only he is a martyr who can say with utter sincerity, “*Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for God, Lord of all creation.*” (6:162)

- ¹ This is an expanded version of an article entitled “Recollecting the Spirit of *Jihād*,” in *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition*, ed. Joseph Lumbard (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004).
- ² One of the best answers to this question is contained in the series of essays on jihad by S.‘Abdallah Schleifer. He mounts an excellent critique of the political reduction of jihad, using as his basis “traditional Islamic consciousness,” and including, as a case-study of jihad conducted according to this consciousness, the little known *mujāhid* in the struggle against the colonization of Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Qassām. This case-study forms part 1 of the series, which was published in *Islamic Quarterly* 23, no.2 (1979). Part 2 of the series is “*Jihād* and Traditional Islamic Consciousness,” *Islamic Quarterly* 27, no.4 (1983). Part 3 is in *Islamic Quarterly* 28, no.1 (1984); part 4 is in *Islamic Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1984); and part 5 is in *Islamic Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1984). For an important rebuttal of the false conception of jihad as aggressive and perpetual warfare, see also Zaid Shakir, “Jihad is Not Perpetual Warfare,” in *Seasons—Semiannual of Zaytuna Institute* 1, no.2 (Autumn-Winter 2003–2004): 53–64.
- ³ Quoted in Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Beirut: Khayats Oriental Reprints, 1964), 232–3. (Originally published in London, 1898.) It is not irrelevant to note here that, as Titus Burckhardt says, the Christian “knightly attitude towards women is Islamic in origin.” See his *Moorish Culture in Spain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), 93. Simonde de Sismondi, writing in the early nineteenth century, asserts that Arabic literature was the source of “that tenderness and delicacy of sentiment and that reverential awe of women ... which have operated so powerfully on our chivalrous feelings.” *Histoire de la littérature du Midi de l’Europe*, quoted in R. Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 20.
- ⁴ Lane-Poole, *Saladin*, 233–4.
- ⁵ Quoted in Thomas Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (London: Luzak, 1935), 88–9.
- ⁶ Qur’an 2:256.
- ⁷ Qur’an 76:8–9.
- ⁸ Qur’an 2:216.
- ⁹ Qur’an 48:29.
- ¹⁰ Qur’an 2:190.
- ¹¹ Qur’an 3:159.
- ¹² Qur’an 7:156 (emphasis added).
- ¹³ Qur’an 17:10.
- ¹⁴ Qur’an 55:1–3.
- ¹⁵ Martin Lings, *Muhammad—His Life According to the Earliest Sources* (London: ITS and George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 297–8.
- ¹⁶ Qur’an 41:34.
- ¹⁷ Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, 81–2.
- ¹⁸ A copy of the document is displayed to this day in the monastery, which is the oldest continually inhabited monastery in Christendom. See J. Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai* (London: Orbis, 1985), 18–19.
- ¹⁹ See A. Guillaume, trans. *The Life of Muhammad—A Translation of Ibn Ishāq’s Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 270–77.
- ²⁰ Qur’an 22:39–40.
- ²¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8.
- ²² S.A. Schleifer, “Jews and Muslims—A Hidden History,” in *The Spirit of Palestine* (Barcelona: Zed, 1994), 2.
- ²³ Quoted in Schleifer, “Jews and Muslims,” 5.
- ²⁴ Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture*, 27–28.
- ²⁵ Despite the fact that Maimonides suffered at the hands of the al-Mohhads, during a rare episode of persecution in Muslim Spain, the next stage of his career—as physician to Saladin—manifested his continuing loyalty to Muslim rule.
- ²⁶ Quoted in Schleifer, “Jews and Muslims,” 8.
- ²⁷ Qur’an 3:84.
- ²⁸ Mark Cohen, “Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,” in *Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (1986): 135.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Qur'an 2:62.

³¹ Qur'an 3:113–14.

³² Qur'an 5:8.

³³ Cited in W.B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954–68* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1969), 4.

³⁴ See Roger Garaudy, *Un dialogue pour les civilisations* (Paris: Denoël, 1977), 54–65, for this and many other official accounts of such atrocities. This is cited from Rashid Messaoudi, “Algerian-French Relations, 1830–1991” in *Algeria—Revolution Revisited*, ed. Reza Shah-Kazemi (London: Islamic World Report, 1997), 6–46.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁶ See Mohamed Chérif Sahli, *Abdelkader—Le Chevalier de la Foi* (Algiers: Entreprise algérienne de presse, 1967), 131–2. See also our essay “From Sufism to Terrorism: The Distortion of Islam in the Political Culture of Algeria,” in *Algeria—Revolution Revisited*, 160–92 where several of these points were first made.

³⁷ Cited in Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Spiritual Writings of Amir ‘Abd al-Kader* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 2. This selection of texts from the Emir’s *Mawāqif* reveals well the other side of the Emir: his inner spiritual life, lived out as a master of Sufism. In this work, the Emir comments on Qur’anic verses and hadith, as well as upon Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings, doing so from a rigorously esoteric perspective. Indeed, the Emir was designated as the *wārith al-‘ulūm al-akbariyya*, inheritor of the Akbari sciences, those sciences pertaining to the Shaykh al-Akbar (the greatest master), Ibn al-‘Arabī. See pages 20–24 for this little known aspect of the Emir’s function.

³⁸ See Charles Henry Churchill, *The Life of Abdel Kader* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), 295.

³⁹ Cited by Benamar Aïd, “Le Geste de l’Emir: prisonniers de guerre” in *Itinéraires—Revue semestrielle éditée par la Fondation Emir Abdelkader* 6 (2003): 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴² Cited by the Comte de Cirvy in his work, “Napoleon III et Abd el-Kader”; see “Document: Un portrait de l’Emir par le Comte de Cirvy (1853)” in *Itinéraires* 5 (2001): 11.

⁴³ Qur’an 2:190; see the important treatise by the late Shaykh of al-Azhar, Maḥmūd Shaltūt, in which jihad in Islam is defined in entirely defensive terms. The treatise, *Al-Qur’ān wa’l-qitāl*, was published in Cairo in 1948, and presented in translation by Peters under the title “A Modernist Interpretation of *Jihad*: Mahmud Shaltut’s Treatise, *Koran and Fighting*” in his book, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 59–101.

⁴⁴ Churchill, *Life*, 314.

⁴⁵ This incident is recorded in Boualem Bessaïeh, “Abdelkader à Damas et le sauvetage de douze mille chrétiens,” in *Itinéraires* 6 (2003): 90.

⁴⁶ Qur’an 4:135.

⁴⁷ Churchill, *Life*, 318.

⁴⁸ Qur’an 60:8.

⁴⁹ Cited by Mgr. Henri Teissier (Bishop of Algeria) in “Le sens du dialogue inter-religions,” *Itinéraires* 6 (2003): 47.

⁵⁰ Qur’an 2:10.

⁵¹ Like the Emir, Imam Shamīl was regarded with awe not only by his own followers but also by the Russians; when he was finally defeated and taken to Russia, he was fêted as a hero. Although occasionally embroidered with romanticism, Lesley Blanch’s *Sabres of Paradise* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1960) conveys well the heroic aspect of Shamīl’s resistance. For a more scholarly account, see Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994). On Chechnya, see our own *Crisis in Chechnia—Russian Imperialism, Chechen Nationalism and Militant Sufism* (London: Islamic World Report, 1995), which offers an overview of the Chechen quest for independence from the eighteenth century through to the war of the mid-1990s, with a particular stress on the role of the Sufi brotherhoods in this quest.

⁵² That is, a *dhimmi*, a non-Muslim who enjoys the *dhimma*, or “protection” of the Muslim state.

⁵³ Cited by Bessaïeh, “Abdelkader à Damas,” 91–2 (translation modified). See also Churchill, *Life*, 321–2.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Churchill, *Life*, 323.

⁵⁵ One of the key aims of the educational system outlined in Plato's *Republic* is to teach the "guardians" of the state how to be stern against enemies and at the same time gentle towards their own people (as noted above, the Muslims are described as *fierce against the disbelievers, and merciful amongst themselves*). It is for this reason that such arts as music are taught alongside the martial disciplines. Warriors such as the Emir and Imam Shamīl perfected this combination of roles, thanks to the intrinsically balanced virtues proper to the spirit of Islam. In modern warfare, by contrast, fighting an "enemy" seems to be impossible without an ideology which dehumanizes and demonizes him, whence the continuing atrocities in our "post-enlightenment" age.

⁵⁶ We have developed this theme further in the essay "Selfhood and Compassion: Jesus in the Qur'an—An Akbarī Perspective," in *The Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 29 (2001).

⁵⁷ See Qur'an 56:8–10.

⁵⁸ Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, *The Book of Certainty* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 80. See also the essay by S.H. Nasr, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihād," chapter 1 of *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1987); and also the section of this book which is entitled "Traditional Islam and Modernism," which remains an important principal critique of modernist and extremist thought in Islam.

⁵⁹ Quoted by the Shaykh al-ʿArabī ad-Darqāwī, founder of the Darqāwī branch of the Shādhiliyya Sufi order. See *Letters of a Sufi Master*, trans. Titus Burckhardt (Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1969), 9.

⁶⁰ See the essay by Omar Benaissa "Sufism in the Colonial Period" in *Algeria: Revolution Revisited*, ed. R. Shah-Kazemi (London: Islamic World Report, 1997), 47–68, for details of this religious influence of the tariqa of the Shaykh on Algerian society.

⁶¹ Alexis de Tocqueville bitterly criticized the assimilationist policy of his government in Algeria. In a parliamentary report of 1847 he wrote that "We should not at present push them along the path of our own European civilization, but in their own.... We have cut down the number of charities [i.e. religious *waqf* institutions], let schools fall into ruin, closed the colleges [i.e. *madrasas*] ... the recruitment of the men of religion and of the [*Sharʿīa*] law has ceased. We have, in other words, made Muslim society far more miserable, disorganized, barbaric, and ignorant than ever it was before it knew us." Quoted in Charles-Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria*, trans. Michael Brett (London: Hurst, 1991), 21.

⁶² Léon Roche, *Dix Ans à travers l'Islam* (Paris: 1904), p.140–1. Cited in M. Chodkiewicz, *Spiritual Writings*, 4.

⁶³ Cited in Churchill, *Life*, 137–8.

⁶⁴ Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival, 1976), 101. Schuon also referred to ʿAlī as the "representative par excellence of Islamic esotericism." See *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), 59.

⁶⁵ Qur'an 8:17.

⁶⁶ Cf. the following verse in the Bhagavad-Gīta: "Who thinks that he can be a slayer, who thinks that he is slain, both these have no [right] knowledge: He slays not, is not slain." *Hindu Scriptures*, trans. R.C. Zaehner (London: Dent, 1966), 256.

⁶⁷ *The Mathnawi of Jalālūddīn Rūmī*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1926), book 1, p. 205, lines 3787–3794. The parentheses are inserted by Nicholson. See Schleifer's comments on Rūmī's account of this episode in "Jihād and Traditional Islamic Consciousness," 197–9.

⁶⁸ As Rūmī says, continuing ʿAlī's discourse; see book 1, p. 207, line 3800.

⁶⁹ Cited by ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Āmidī in his compilation of sayings of Imam ʿAlī, *Ghurar al-ḥikam* (Qom: Ansariyan Publications, 2000), 2:951, no.9. Cf. "The intellect and passion are opposites; the intellect is strengthened by knowledge, passion by caprice. The soul is between them, pulled by both. Whichever triumphs, has the *nafs* on its side." (Ibid., no. 10)

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:208–11, nos. 20, 17, 8, 23, 26, 28. In our forthcoming publication, *Justice and Remembrance—Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ʿAlī* (London: IB Tauris, 2005), we develop these themes in the context of "the spirit of the intellect" in ʿAlī's perspective.

⁷¹ ʿAlī al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-Mahjūb—The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. R.A Nicholson (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1992), 44.

⁷² Ibid., p. 44.

⁷³ Those given to performing *takfīr*, i.e. the declaration that someone is a *kāfir* (disbeliever)

⁷⁴ Churchill, *Life*, 295.

⁷⁵ Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 98.

⁷⁶ Qur'an 85:4–5. We follow Muhammad Asad's translation of these elliptical verses. See *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 942.

⁷⁷ Qur'an 2:154.