

The Religion of Abraham — 2

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 23 July 2021

وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ ۗ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ۗ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۗ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ۗ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ
عَلَى النَّاسِ ۗ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ
النَّصِيرُ ﴿٤٨﴾

“And strive hard for Allah with due striving. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion — the faith of your father Abraham. He named you Muslims before and in this, that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people; so keep up prayer and give the due charity and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protector; excellent the Protector and excellent the Helper!” — ch. 22, v. 78

As today is only three days after *Eid-ul-Adha*, I will again refer to a verse of the Quran which mentions Abraham. The first sentence of this verse is: “And strive hard for Allah with due striving”. Literally it is: “Do jihad for Allah, the *haqqa jihād* for Him”. The words *haqqa jihādi-hī* mean the jihad which we ought to do for Him, the jihad which is proper and befitting because it is for God. The command here is that we should strive hard for Allah, in other words, strive hard to be close to Him, and as our aim is the highest possible one, the aim of reaching God, it means that the strength of our striving for it must be *according to what is required* for reaching such a great aim.

The jihad mentioned here cannot possibly be the jihad that people commonly imagine jihad to be, i.e., a war or fighting to spread Islam to the unbelievers. Firstly, this chapter of the Quran was revealed before the *hijrah* of Muslims from Makkah to Madinah was complete. A command to Muslims to do jihad while they were still at Makkah could not mean fighting with the unbelievers, but only that they must struggle hard against opposition and persecution and remain committed to following Islam.

Secondly, this verse calls the religion of the Muslims as “the faith of your father Abraham”. In the Quran there is no mention of any war or fighting with arms undertaken by Abraham. The only jihad conducted by Abraham was to continue preaching the message of God, and acting on it, in the face of the severest possible opposition, and to let no worldly possessions, desires or relationships stand in the way of submitting to God.

It should be added though that this chapter was revealed when it was looking likely that Muslims in the near future, after their *Hijrah* to Madinah, would face the prospect of an attack by the army of the Quraish. Up to now, their persecution had been as individuals and they had not faced war as a community. Therefore, this chapter contains the following verse:

“Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And surely Allah is Able to assist them — Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, surely cloisters and churches and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allah will help him who helps Him. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.” (22:39–40)

As can be seen from this, Muslims were allowed only to fight in their self-defence, and fight against only those who had driven them out from their home city for no justifiable cause. The verse also declares that fighting in self-defence against persecutors, for freedom to practise your religion, is essential in order to protect places of worship, and it says that such fighting is allowed in defence of the places of worship of any religion. So this permission given to Muslims to fight is entirely different from the wrong concept of jihad which is in people’s minds.

The statement “He has chosen you” means that God has chosen those who accept the religion of Abraham in its true form to be models of goodness and righteousness in the world. This is mentioned clearly later in this verse. Also, this verse cannot mean that just by calling yourself “Muslims” you become the chosen ones of God. This

verse is the last verse of ch. 22, and in the next chapter, 23, right at the beginning, it lists several qualities which believers should possess. So the very next verse, 23:1, says: “Successful indeed are the believers” and this is followed by several basic qualities: “who are humble in their prayers”, “who act for the sake of purity”, “who are faithful to their trusts and their covenant”, etc.

After saying “He has chosen you”, it is added: “and He has not laid upon you any hardship in religion”. In terms of the beliefs that Muslims are required to hold, Allah has not made their religion too hard to understand and comprehend, and in terms of the deeds Muslims are required to perform, Allah has not made their religion too hard to act upon. In connection with fasting the Quran says: “Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you” (2:185). This applies to all the commands of Islam. This chapter 2 itself contains most of the rules and regulation of Islam, and its last verse, 286, begins: “Allah does not impose on any soul a duty beyond its ability.” And it goes on to teach Muslims to pray that Allah may not impose such hardship on them which they cannot bear.

It is reported in Bukhari that the Holy Prophet Muhammad said: “The religion that is most liked by Allah is that which is moderate and is easy (in its observance).” The word for “moderation” here means avoidance of the opposite extremes of falling short of duty or being excessive in it, and it applies to both deeds and faith. He also said: “Religion is easy, and whoever exerts himself too much in religion it overpowers him; so act aright and keep to the mean and be of good cheer and ask for (Divine) help in the morning and in the evening and during a part of the night.” In other words, certainly devote a part of your time to worship and attending to religious duties, showing moderation between your religious and worldly duties, and be a happy person instead of over-burdening yourself in carrying out religious duties.

The verse we are discussing then describes the religion which Muslims follow as “the faith of your father Abraham”. In the Bible, Abraham is mentioned as father of the Jews and father of the Christians. Therefore Muslims take the same man as their father whom Jews and Christians take as their father, and Muslims are said here to

follow his faith. The message of Islam is: Let us turn to the faith of the one whom we all call our father, and look at its fundamentals, and that should be our religion.

Then the verse says: “He named you Muslims before and in this...”. In the Quran (i.e., “in this”) the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad are called as “Muslims”. They say to the People of the Book: “Bear witness that we are Muslims” (3:64). The Holy Prophet himself is commanded to declare: “I am the first of the Muslims” (6:163). He was the first to receive revelation from God and to acknowledge its truth, and then he invited others to embrace the same and become Muslims. Similarly, the Quran has given a name to the religion that it is teaching: “I have chosen for you Islam as a religion” (5:3). The name Islam also occurs in other verses, for example, 3:19 and 61:7.

If you look at names of religions generally, you find that they were not given any name originally at the time when they came into the world. They were given their present names later on, and usually **not** by the followers themselves but by other people. A religion is often named after its founder or after the race or country of the people among whom the religion originated. So we have names such as Christian, Jew or Judaism, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. The name “Christian”, for example, only came into existence long after the time of Jesus. Following the same pattern of naming, people in English-speaking countries for many centuries used the word “Muhammadan” to mean “Muslim” and “Muhammadanism” to mean Islam. It was assumed by these people, who were of course not familiar with Islam, that like other religions Islam too should be called by the name of its Founder.

However, Allah in His revelation to the Holy Prophet Muhammad gave his religion a significant and meaningful name. If anyone looks at the meaning of the words “Islam” and “Muslim”, it gives them an idea of its basic teaching; that of submitting to God.

The above verse says: “He named you Muslims **before** and in this [i.e. in the Quran]...”. The Quran elsewhere tells us that the concept of submitting to God was taught by earlier prophets **before** the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Regarding Abraham,

it records that Abraham and Ishmael, while re-building the Kabah, prayed as follows: “Our Lord, and make **us both submissive to You**, and (raise) from our offspring, **a nation submissive to You**” (2:128). The word for “submissive” here is “Muslim”. And after “Muslim” the words “to You” are added here. Shortly after this verse, the Quran says about Abraham: “When his Lord said to him, Submit, he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds. And the same did Abraham command his sons, and (so did) Jacob: My sons, surely Allah has chosen for you (this) religion, so do not die except as submitting ones (Muslim). Or were you witnesses when death visited Jacob, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We shall serve your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, one God only, and to Him do we submit” (2:131–133). So this teaching of “submission” to God was passed down through the generations.

However, the earlier prophets did not make this word as the name of their religion as a proper noun. It was when Islam came in its perfect and final form, and came to testify to the Divine origin of all earlier religions, that this name Islam was chosen as the title of the religion.

The verse goes on to say “that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people”. The Holy Prophet bore witness to the people around him that his revelation was from God. He was a personal and eye-witness of this fact and he proved the truth of his evidence to people, so that they also became convinced that the message of Islam is from God. But it is added here that his followers must then act as witnesses to other people, to people of other nations of that time and to people of latter times. Muslims must bear witness to others that Islam is the true religion just as the Holy Prophet bore witness to them of the truth of Islam.

May Allah enable us to take the truth of Islam to the world, *Ameen!*

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُفِّرْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-