

Recollecting the Spirit of Jihad

by Reza Shah-Kazemi

“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.* (*Sabr jamîl, wa’LIâhu’l-musta’ân*—Qur’an, XII: 18)”

The Emir Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri

If the words quoted above were true in 1860, when the Emir wrote them, they are sadly even truer today. In the aftermath of the earth-shaking events of September 11 many in the West and in the Muslim world are rightly 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 suicide-attacks as having been launched by ‘*mujâhidîn*’, 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 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 'Allahu 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 behoves 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 a false Jihad, what is true Jihad? They should be given an answer. The most important aspect of the answer is of course to be derived from principles, such as those mentioned above, together with their scriptural bases; but such principles, we believe, are much more effective when they are complemented with images, actions, deeds, personalities, and episodes that exemplify the principles in question, 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 false, self-styled warriors of Islam can be more acutely perceived as such in the light cast by true *mujâhidîn*.

There is a rich treasure of principled warfare from which to draw for this purpose in Muslim history. But what must be stressed at the outset is that Muslims go to war only as a last resort, and for strictly defensive purposes; *they neither seek war for its own sake nor do they revel or glory in it—as the Qur'an makes clear: Warfare is prescribed for you, though it is hateful to you* (II:206) When warfare is unavoidable, it must be conducted according to strict principles and in conformity with the spirit of the faith; what follows is a series of scenes, drawn from the tradition of principled warfare in Islam, which might serve as illustrations of this spirit, defined in respect of key Qur'anic verses. For it is one thing to quote Qur'anic verses; quite another to see them embodied in action.

As regards the very idea of principled warfare, 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 and justice. Suffice it to draw attention to his forbearance, mercy, and generosity at the moment of his greatest triumph: the reconquest of Jerusalem on Friday 2nd October, 1187, a memorable day indeed, being 27th of Rajab—the anniversary of the Prophet's *Laylat al-Mi'râj*, 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.”

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 well expressed 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.??

Saladin, though exceptional, was but expressing essentially Islamic principles of conduct, as laid down by the Qur’an and the Prophet. Some fifty years before Saladin’s victory, a telling mass conversion of Christians to Islam took place, as a direct result of the exercise, by unknown ‘Saracens’, of the cardinal Muslim virtue of compassion. A Christian monk, Odo of Deuil, records the following; being openly antagonistic to the Islamic faith, his account is all the more reliable. After being defeated by the Turks in Phrygia in 543/1147, 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 defenceless 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.??

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* (II: 256); 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.* (LXXVI: 8-9)

Mercy, compassion, and forbearance are certainly key aspects of the spirit of Jihad; and, like all the Islamic virtues, they find their source in the conduct,

and in the soul, of the Prophet. Saladin's magnanimity 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 Ubada, to whom the Prophet had given his standard, called out to Abu Sufyan, leader of the Quraysh of Mecca, who knew that there was no chance of resisting this army:

“‘O Abu Sufyan, 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 Abu Sufyan 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.’”

The Quraysh, having full reason to be fearful, given the intensity 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 converted into stalwart Muslims. Relevant here is the verse from the Qur'an: *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.* (XLI: 34)

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 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?”

This honouring of Christian priests, saints, churches and monasteries flows directly from the practice of the Prophet—witness, among other things, the treaty he concluded with the monks of St Catherine’s monastery in Sinai; 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-defence 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. (XXII: 39-40)

The special respect accorded to the most serious devotees among the People of the Book, and by extension, other faith-communities, conforms to the principle inherent in the following affirmations:

“Thou wilt find the nearest of them [the People of the Scripture] in affection to those who believe to be those who say: Verily, we are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and they are not proud. (V: 82)”

66 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.

(III: 113-114) 77

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.* (V: 8)

The principle here established is perfectly exemplified in the conduct of the Emir Abd al-Qadir, leader of the Algerian Muslims in their heroic resistance to French colonial aggression between 1830 and 1847. The French were guilty of the most barbaric crimes in their 'mission civilisatrice'; the Emir responded not with bitter vengefulness and enraged fury but with dispassionate propriety and principled warfare. At a time when the French were indiscriminately massacring entire tribes, when they were offering their soldiers a ten-franc reward for every pair of Arab ears, 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 'civilised' adversaries, by issuing the following edict:

66 Every Arab who has in his possession a Frenchman is bound to treat him well and to conduct him to either the Khalifa 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. 77

When asked what the reward was for a live French soldier, the Emir replied: *eight douros*. When asked what the reward was for a severed French head, the reply was: *twenty-five blows of the baton on the soles of the feet*. Many

in his ranks, including within the council of *khalifas*, were keen to respond in kind to the French atrocities, to 'fight fire with fire'; but the Emir could not be swayed from what he knew was right, and resisted all calls for revenge. Indeed, he set the highest of standards himself in regard to the need to transcend the human desire for revenge. A captured and wounded French soldier who had himself thrice inflicted wounds on the Emir in previous battles was accorded medical treatment and taken care of in exemplary fashion. Such stories and incidents abound in the astonishing story of the Emir's war of national self-defence. 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'. 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.

Perhaps the most relevant story of all for today's context is the Emir's famous defence of the Christians in Damascus in 1860. Now defeated and in exile, the Emir spent his time praying and teaching. 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.* (II: 190)

The Emir's letters proved to no avail. When the Druzes 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.’”

This had no effect upon the mob. In the end, the Emir and his small band of followers sought out the terrified Christians, giving them refuge, first in his

own home, and then, as the numbers grew, in the citadel. It is estimated that 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. As Churchill prosaically puts it:

“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.”

The French Consul, 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 *mujâhidîn*, who indiscriminately portray the West as the enemy tout court, and perpetrate correspondingly illegitimate acts against 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.* (LX: 8)

It is interesting to note that another great warrior of Islam, Imam Shamil of Dagestan, hero of the wars against Russian imperialism, wrote a letter to the Emir, when he heard of his defence 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:

“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, *who shall do him wrong, who shall lay on him any charge beyond his means, and finally who shall deprive him of anything without his own consent, it is I who will be his accuser in the day of judgement.*'”

While the Emir fought French colonialism militarily, in the following century another great Sufi master in Algeria, Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi, chose to resist with a peaceful strategy, but one which pertained no less to Jihad, in the principal 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 as the *jihâd al-nafs*, the war against the soul. The priority thus accorded to inward, spiritual effort over all outward endeavours 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. This spiritual and moral struggle is what truly articulates the 'spirit of Jihad'; everything else flows by way of consequence from this inner refusal to allow the lower elements of the soul from dominating the will, the intelligence and the personality of the individual.

Though this spiritual struggle is incumbent upon all Muslims, few in fact give it its proper due, and conduct it as if it were really 'greater' than outward activities. One contemporary Sufi master vividly contrasts the kind of inner warfare that characterises 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 (ashâb al-yamîn)* and *the foremost (al-sâbiqûn)* (LVI: 8-10):

﴿﴾ 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 ... ﴿﴾

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'. No action can be compared with this remembrance (*dhikr*), which the Qur'an refers to as 'greater' or 'greatest' (*akbar*): *Recite that which hath been revealed to thee of the Scripture and observe the prayer. Truly prayer preserveth from lewdness and iniquity; but the remembrance of God is greater* (XXIX: 45). In many sayings of the Prophet, this remembrance is given primacy over all other practices; the following saying is particularly relevant in the present context. The Prophet asked his companions: 'Shall I not tell you about the best and purest of your works for your Lord, and the

most exalted of them in degree, and the work which is better for you than silver and gold, and better for you than encountering your enemy, with you striking their necks and them striking your necks?' Upon being asked what this thing is, he replied: 'The constant remembrance of God'.

In this light, the strategy of the Shaykh al-Alawi 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 Ali al-Jamal:

“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.”

The Shaykh al-Alawi concentrated on this love of the Friend, and on 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*, to hundreds of thousands of Muslims whose piety was deepened in ways that are immeasurable. 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, inasmuch as the underlying aim of the French '*mission civilisatrice*' in Algeria was to forge the Algerian personality in the image of French culture. 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 battle-field, he was never for a moment distracted from his remembrance of the 'Friend'. The advice of Mulay Ali not to 'engage in war with the enemy concerns above all the inner dimension: not to fight the demon that is within oneself on its own terms, using one's own limited resources, but to defeat it by means of the remembrance of God'. Although capable of being expressed on the social plane in terms of

overt disavowal of military or political activity, it is also perfectly compatible with an activist stance, such as that adopted by the Emir. There is no contradiction here, only a shift of emphasis, the underlying principle remaining the same. It is only when outward efforts eclipse, marginalise or deny the inner struggle that this underlying principle is absent.

The Emir fought without bitterness and rage; 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. One finds expressed here a supreme example of the contemplative warrior, engaging the enemy without attachment, that is, acting without being bound in any way by the fruits of action. One may suspect us of romanticising somewhat, and of overstating the Emir's capacity to deal with the exigencies of a brutal war whilst simultaneously plumbing the depths of contemplative experience; it is therefore useful to present the following account, 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 Ayn Madi in 1838, Roche was traumatised by the fighting and killing, and sought out the Emir; entering his tent, he pleaded with the Emir to help him.

““ 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.””

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.”

This remarkable combination of roles—warrior and saint, preacher and judge—recalls perhaps the greatest model of all Muslim *mujâhidîn*, Ali ibn Abi Talib, son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, the fourth Caliph of Islam and first Shi'i Imam, unrivalled hero of all the early battles of Islam. His importance in the Islamic firmament can be gauged from the following sayings of the Prophet: 'I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate'. He also said, in a hadith bearing the highest degree of authenticity (*mutawâtir*): 'For whoever has me as his master (*mawlâ*), Ali is his master.' And the Prophet referred to Ali as having the same rank in relation to him as Aaron had in relation to Moses, except that Ali was not a prophet. This paragon of spiritual wisdom and impeccable 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 Bagavad-Gita teaches.”

One of the great lessons of principled warfare, of 'fighting in the path of God', imparted by Ali was immortalised by Rumi in his poetic rendering of the famous incident in which Ali 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 Ali'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 *Mathnawi*, 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 (VIII: 17). The last part of the verse refers to the throwing by the Prophet 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 Ali, 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.

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?"

The true warrior of Islam smites the neck of his own anger with the sword of forbearance; 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.

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, 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. This sacred norm stood out clearly for all to see, buttressed by the values and institutions of traditional Muslim society. It can still be discerned today, through the clouds of passion and despite the distorting prisms of ideology.

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 mujâhidîn 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 Centre. 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 figure-head 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]. (LXXXV: 4-5) 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. (II: 154)

Finally, let it be noted that, while it is indeed true that the martyr is promised Paradise, the real martyr (*shahîd*) is one whose death truly bears 'witness' (*shahâda*) 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 the 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. (VI: 162)*