

Jihad Akbar of Youth

by Ahmad Chaudhry

1. ^aIn the name of Allāh, the Gracious, the Merciful.

2. Successful indeed are the believers,¹⁹⁷⁸

3. Who are humble¹⁹⁷⁹ in their Prayers,

4. And ^bwho shun all that which is vain,¹⁹⁸⁰

5. And ^cwho are prompt *and* regular in paying the *Zakāt*,¹⁹⁸¹

6. And ^dwho guard their chastity—

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝۱

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۝۲

الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ۝۳

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ ۝۴

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ ۝۵

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَفْوَاجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ ۝۶

IT WAS IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY ARABIA, AS THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) RETURNED FROM BATTLE, THAT HE LAID DOWN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR ALL MUSLIMS TO COME. WARFARE, IN THOSE DAYS, WAS A BRUTAL AND BARBARIC AFFAIR; HAND TO HAND COMBAT, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TORMENT, FIGHTING NOT JUST THE ENEMY BUT THE ELEMENTS AS WELL. THE EFFORTS OF THE EARLY MUSLIMS WERE TO SAVE NOT JUST THEIR OWN LIVES BUT THE FAITH IN ITS EARLY DAYS. AS THESE WARRIORS RETURNED HOME AFTER BATTLE, THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD PROCLAIMED TO THEM, “WE ARE RETURNING FROM THE LESSER JIHAD TO THE JIHAD-E-AKBAR, THE GREATEST JIHAD.” ALL THE STRUGGLES THE COMPANIONS HAD

ENDURED ON THE BATTLEFIELD WERE LESS THAN THE STRUGGLES THEY WOULD FACE IN LIVING THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES. THE PHYSICAL STRUGGLE AGAINST ANOTHER HUMAN ENEMY WOULD BE LESS THAN THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE AGAINST THEIR OWN ENEMY, DEEP WITHIN THEMSELVES.

IT IS THIS PROFOUND STATEMENT THAT I WILL EXPLORE IN THE NEXT FEW MINUTES.

WHAT IS JIHAD AKBAR?, THIS GREATEST STRIVING OR STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SELF. HOW THE YOUTH OF OUR COMMUNITY CAN EMBRACE THIS STRUGGLE IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES AND USE THIS CONCEPT TO FIND HARMONY BETWEEN THEIR FAITH AND THEIR IDENTITY IN THIS CULTURE.

JUST TO BE CLEAR, JIHAD AKBAR, HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH VIOLENCE. IT IS A STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SELF, A STRIVING FOR SELF-PURIFICATION.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) STATED “THE STRONG ONE IS NOT THE ONE WHO OVERCOMES PEOPLE, THE STRONG ONE IS HE WHO OVERCOMES HIS EGO”

THE PROMISED MESSIAH (AS) REITERATED THIS IDEA WHEN HE WROTE: “I HAVE BROUGHT YOU A COMMANDMENT WHICH IS THAT JIHAD WITH THE SWORD HAS BEEN ENDED BUT THE JIHAD OF THE PURIFICATION OF YOUR SPIRITS MUST CONTINUE TO BE WAGED.”

WELL, THE FIRST QUESTION TO ANSWER IS CAN WE MAKE OURSELVES BETTER INDIVIDUALS? CAN WE RAISE OUR MORAL STATE, ARE WE CAPABLE OF CONTROLLING OUR EVIL FEELINGS OF ANGER, HATE, JEALOUSY, FALLING PREY TO OUR PASSIONS WHICH WE KNOW TO BE HARMFUL TO OURSELVES? IS MAN EVEN CAPABLE OF SUCH REFORM?

THE ANSWER ACCORDING TO ISLAM IS A RESOUNDING - YES!

NOT ONLY IS IT POSSIBLE BUT THIS IS THE VERY PURPOSE OF LIFE: TO RAISE OURSELVES FROM THE NATURAL STATE WHICH INCITES TO EVIL INTO A MORAL STATE IN WHICH WE REGULATE OUR UNCONSTRAINED NATURAL DESIRES AND THEN EVEN FURTHER TO A SPIRITUAL STATE WHERE WE TRULY RECOGNIZE OUR CREATOR AND ARE ABLE TO CONVERSE WITH THE DIVINE.

CENTRAL TO THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF SELF-REFORMATION IS HOPE. YES, HOPE. THIS IS A TOPIC WE HAVE HEARD MUCH ABOUT IN THE PAST YEAR, AN IDEA WHICH HELPED ELECT A PRESIDENT.

BUT HOPE IS NOT A NEW CONCEPT.

HAZRAT MIRZA BASHIRUDIN MAHMOOD AHMAD (RA) WROTE:

“THE PROMISED MESSIAH (AS) EMPHASIZED THAT THE BASIS OF FAITH IS HOPE AND ANTICIPATION..... THE HEART OF A BELIEVER IS FULL OF HOPE.”

[WAY OF THE SEEKERS]

THE OPTIMISM EXPRESSED BY ISLAM IS UNEQUIVOCAL. HOWEVER, THIS MESSAGE IS SOMETIMES BLURRED, AS THE YOUTH ARE INSTRUCTED THROUGH FEAR RATHER THAN HOPE. THE EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON FEARING GOD, FOR IF SOMETHING IS DONE WRONG A GREAT PUNISHMENT WILL FOLLOW. THIS IS A COMPLETELY RATIONAL APPROACH AT TIMES, BUT IF THE CONCEPT OF FEARING GOD IS NOT PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD, THIS METHOD REPELS RATHER THAN ATTRACTS A YOUNG PERSON TO FAITH.

OUR SECOND KHALIFA WRITES: “WE SHOULD ALSO BE VERY WATCHFUL ABOUT FEAR. IT MUST NEVER EXCEED HOPE WHICH SHOULD OUTWEIGH FEAR..... IN THE HEART OF THE FAITHFUL, HOPE SHOULD, THEREFORE DOMINATE OVER FEAR.” [WAY OF THE SEEKERS]

THE PROMISED MESSIAH (AS) IN INSPIRATIONAL WORDS TO EVERY PERSON WHO HAS ERRED WRITES : “ Think not you are sinners. Will your prayers be heard? Do not think like this. Man makes mistakes, but a time comes when he is able to overpower his sinning self. This power to overpower the sinning self is also built into the nature of man. Do not feel defeated because you have been involved in sin. Sin is like a stain on the surface of a piece of cloth. It can be washed away. Your habits, your dispositions may be dominated ever so much by your passions. Pray to God weeping, crying. He will not let your prayers go waste. He is full of compassion.” (Badr 1907)

WITH HOPE AS THE FOUNDATION, ONE CAN START BUILDING THE ROAD OF SELF-REFORMATION.

THE NEXT STEP OF BUILDING THIS ROAD IS TO FIND OUT WHERE WE ARE, WHERE WE STAND.

HERE ANOTHER VERY IMPORTANT ISLAMIC CONCEPT COMES INTO PLAY, THAT OF SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-EXAMINATION. IF ONE IS TO FIGHT AGAINST THE ENEMY WITHIN, THE AGE OLD SAYING APPLIES “KNOW YOUR ENEMY AND KNOW YOURSELF AND IN A HUNDRED BATTLES YOU WILL NEVER

BE DEFEATED”. THE ENEMY WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HERE IS THE EGO. SELF-REFLECTION ALLOWS US TO UNDERSTAND OUR EGO AND THE WEAKNESSES DERIVED FROM IT.

OUR PRESENT KHALIFA ADMONISHED RECENTLY: “WE NEED TO SELF-REFLECT AND ANALYZE OURSELVES RATHER THAN BE PRYING AND JUDGMENTAL ABOUT OTHERS. SELF-REFLECTION IS WHAT WILL PLEASE OUR LORD, IT IS WHAT WILL DISPEL MALICE AND IT IS WHAT WILL ESTABLISH MORAL MIRACLES.”

SELF-REFLECTION IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS. A PROCESS PERFORMED CONSCIOUSLY AND ON A REGULAR BASIS. WHERE WE ANALYZE OUR ACTIONS OF THE DAY OR THE WEEK, THINKING ABOUT OUR INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS, PICKING UP ON BEHAVIORS WHICH TROUBLE OUR CONSCIENCE, AND CRITICALLY ANALYZING ALL OUR INTENTIONS.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) “WOULD SPEND DAYS AND NIGHTS IN MEDITATION AND IN SELF-EXAMINATION, REFLECTING ON THE PROBLEMS THAT TROUBLED HIM.” [ISLAM - ITS MEANING FOR MODER MAN]. HERE WAS THE MAN BESTOWED BY WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING BEYOND THAT OF ANY OTHER MAN, YET SELF-REFLECTION WAS HIS NATURAL INCLINATION, ESPECIALLY IN HIS YOUTH.

BUT THE PROCESS OF SELF-EXAMINATION IS NOT EASY, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE ARE YOUNG AND WHEN OUR EGO HAS AN ARROGANCE, AS WELL AS, A FRAGILITY TO IT. WE DO NOT LIKE TO ADMIT OUR MISTAKES, EVEN TO OURSELVES. IT MAKES US FEEL WEAK. BUT THE TRUTH IS, TO BECOME STRONGER WE MUST SQUARELY CONFRONT OUR OWN WEAKNESSES.

AND HERE ANOTHER TEACHING GREATLY EMPHASIZED IN ISLAM CAN HELP US

2. Successful indeed are the believers, 1978

3. Who are humble¹⁹⁷⁹ in their Prayers,

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الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ﴿٣﴾

PROGRESS ON THE ROAD OF SELF-REFORMATION. AND THAT IS THE QUALITY OF HUMBLENESS AND HUMILITY.

AS I RECITED FROM THE QURAN IN THE BEGINNING:

AND AGAIN THE QURAN STATES:

Call on your Lord with humility and in private, for Allah loves not those who transgress beyond bounds. (AL-ARAF 7:55)

THE PROMISED MESSIAH STATES: “A GREAT NUMBER OF WEAKNESSES LIE

DORMANT IN MAN BUT THE BASEST WEAKNESS IS ARROGANCE. NO ONE

WOULD HAVE BEEN A NON-BELIEVER IF THERE HAD BEEN NO ARROGANCE.

THEREFORE, MAKE YOURSELF HUMBLE OF HEART AND SERVE YOUR FELLOW

BEINGS WITH LOVE.”

IT IS TRUE, AS RELATED IN THE QURAN, IBLIS REJECTED FOLLOWING THE COMMAND OF ALLAH OUT OF ARROGANCE, THINKING HE WAS TOO GOOD TO SUBMIT BEFORE ADAM. HOWEVER, A SIMILAR ARROGANCE IS SOMETIMES SEEN WITHIN OURSELVES. OUT OF PRIDE, WE REJECT TRUTH.

GROWING UP IN A WESTERN SOCIETY WE ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO THIS TYPE OF ARROGANCE. WE LIVE IN A COUNTRY THAT IS THE ONLY SUPERPOWER IN THE WORLD. THE MATERIALISTIC PROGRESS WE SEE ALL AROUND US MAY LEAD SOME TO THINK THIS PROGRESS LEADS TO A MONOPOLY ON ALL PROGRESS, INCLUDING MORAL AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS. THAT HOW CAN A TEACHING FROM 1400 YEARS AGO BE RELEVANT FOR US TODAY?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION CAN ONLY BE DERIVED THROUGH YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE. THE SUPERFICIAL AND TRANSITORY PLEASURES THAT THIS SOCIETY IS SO GOOD AT PROVIDING WILL NEVER LEAD TO THE PROFOUND AND LASTING HAPPINESS AND CONTENTMENT THAT THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM CAN BRING. IT IS THROUGH JIHAD-E-AKBAR, THIS CONSTANT VIGILANCE AGAINST OUR OWN EVILS, THAT WE CAN PROGRESS TO TRUE CONTENTMENT.

BUT JUST LIKE ANY LOFTY GOAL, THE GOAL OF CHANGING AND IMPROVING ONESELF REQUIRES PATIENCE AND DISCIPLINE. BY DISCIPLINE, I DO NOT MEAN AN EXTERNAL DISCIPLINE OF A PARENT TO A CHILD OR TEACHER TO A STUDENT. I SPEAK OF AN INTERNAL DISCIPLINE, A DISCIPLINE OF THE MIND WHICH TRANSMITS THROUGH TO YOUR ACTIONS. DISCIPLINE IS WHEN YOU ARE LACKING MOTIVATION TO DO SOMETHING BUT YOU DO IT ANYWAY. YOU PUT ASIDE EXCUSES AND FOCUS ON THE DESIRE OF BETTERING YOURSELF FOR THE SAKE OF GOD AND YOU PRESS FORWARD. DISCIPLINE IS FOCUSING ON YOUR GOAL AND NOT LETTING TRIVIAL DISTRACTIONS SWAY YOU FROM YOUR PATH. IT IS DISCIPLINE AND STEADFASTNESS WHICH ALLOWS YOU IN THE EARLY STAGES OF YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY, WHEN PRAYING FIVE TIMES A DAY MAY SEEM TEDIOUS OR READING THE QURAN MAY NOT INSPIRE YOU OR THE ADVICE OF A LEARNED ONE MAY NOT MAKE COMPLETE SENSE. AT THESE TIMES, IT IS VERY EASY TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE ULTIMATE GOAL AND MAKE EXCUSES FOR WHY SOMETHING CANNOT BE DONE RIGHT NOW, BUT DISCIPLINE, YOUR OWN INTERNAL DISCIPLINE, CAN KEEP YOU GOING EVEN WHEN MOTIVATION IS LACKING.

A CLOSELY RELATED MATTER TO DISCIPLINE IS FAITH. IF THE YOUTH OF OUR COMMUNITY ARE TO TRULY EMBRACE THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM AND NOT JUST PERFORM ITS RITUALS TO PLEASE OTHERS, THEN THEY HAVE TO UTILIZE FAITH TO START THEIR OWN PERSONAL SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. AND

AGAIN, FAITH IS A CONCEPT CONTINUALLY UNDER ATTACK BY WESTERN SOCIETY. THIS IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT CONCEPT TO UNDERSTAND. THE YOUTH OF THE WEST ARE TAUGHT TO QUESTION EVERYTHING, TO EXPOSE ALL INCONSTANCIES, TO MISTRUST ANY UNPROVEN STATEMENT. NOW THIS IS A GREAT WAY OF THINKING IF YOU ARE BUILDING A PLANE OR ERECTING A NUCLEAR POWER PLANT. YOU WOULDN'T WANT ANYTHING LEFT TO CHANGE OR RISK LIFE ON UNPROVEN THEORIES. A BASELINE SKEPTICISM MAY BE VERY HELPFUL IN SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION BUT WOULD LEAD ONE TO ABANDON ANY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY WORTH TAKING RIGHT AT THE ONSET. THE PROMISED MESSIAH HAS SO BEAUTIFULLY EXPLAINED THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH TO THOSE OF US WHO HAVE GROWN UP IN THIS SOCIETY:

“The main principle followed by the Prophets is that faith proves fruitful only if the unseen is accepted as unseen, and the self-evident testimony of physical senses and absolute mathematical proof is not insisted upon inasmuch as all spiritual merit and worthiness of nearness to the Divine depends upon righteousness, and he alone possesses true righteousness who safeguards himself against the extremes of investigation, multiple denials, and testing every little detail, and is prepared to accept a way that appears safer and preferable to other ways as the truth, out of a sense of precaution. This is faith, and this is what helps open the door of Divine grace and becomes the means of acquiring good fortune here and in the hereafter. When a person establishes himself firmly on

faith and then seeks to foster his knowledge through prayer, worship, reflection and observation, God Almighty Himself becomes his Guardian, and, taking him by the hand, leads him from the stage of faith to that of *'Ain-ul-Yaqin* [certainty by sight.] But all this is achieved only through steadfastness, striving, effort and purification of the ego. [Surmah Chashm-e-Arya, Ruhani Khaza'in, vol. 2, pp. 83-88, footnote]

FOR THE FIRST 15 MINUTES, I HAVE NOT SPOKEN ABOUT THE SPECIFIC DAY TO DAY CHALLENGES FACED BY OUR YOUTH LIVING IN THIS SOCIETY, FOR THERE ARE MANY. THIS DIALOGUE NEEDS TO TAKE PLACE BETWEEN EVERY PARENT AND CHILD AND AMONG THE YOUTH OF OUR COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, THE OVERARCHING QUALITIES WHICH I HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT: HOPE, SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-EXAMINATION, HUMBLENESS AND HUMILITY, AN INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND A TRUE CONCEPT OF FAITH. ALL THESE ARE HARDER TO INSTILL IN OUR YOUTH THAN GIVING THEM A LIST OF THINGS TO DO AND A LIST OF THINGS NOT TO DO. ALL THESE HELP SHOW THE BEAUTY OF ISLAM AND DRAW A YOUNG ONE TO EXPLORE ITS TEACHINGS IN MORE DETAIL.

ISLAM ALSO GIVES US A MOST POWERFUL TOOL IN WINNING THIS JIHAD-E-AKBAR. AND THAT IS SALAT. THE PROMISED MESSIAH WRITES REGARDING SALAT: "The prayer which produces a sweetness and a zeal for more of worship and which strikes a communication with God and is offered in all humility brings about a

change in the life of a man. And this change is instantaneously perceived by the one who prays like this. This change makes him realize that he is not what he was before.”

(Malfoozat vol. 6, pg. 378)

BY SALAT, IT IS NOT MEANT JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS, THOUGH ONE MAY HAVE TO DO THIS UNTIL A REAL PASSION FOR SALAT DEVELOPS.

SALAT HELPS IN ALL THE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS WHICH WE HAVE THROUGHOUT THE DAY. ANGER IS ELIMINATED AS WE SLOWLY AND CALMLY PERFORM THE PRAYERS FOCUSING ON OUR CREATOR AND NOT ON THE PETTY THINGS THAT BRING ABOUT ANGER. JEALOUSY FINDS NO ROOT AS WE STAND BEFORE THE BESTOWER OF ALL THINGS. DECIET AND LYING ARE WARDED OFF AS WE SPEAK BEFORE THE ALL-KNOWING. HOPELESSNESS IS ELIMINATED BY PRAYING WITH CERTAINTY BEFORE THE THE GRACIOUS AND EVER MERCIFUL. PATIENCE IS DEVELOPED AS WE SLOW DOWN THE PACE OF OUR HURRIED LIVES. DISCIPLINE IS FOSTERED AS WE MAKE TIME FOR SALAT EVEN IN OUR BUSIEST SCHEDULES. THE CURE FOR SO MANY EVILS IS THROUGH SALAT.

THE TASK OF JIHAD-E-AKBAR IS NOT AN EASY ONE. ESPECIALLY, IF ONE TRIES TO DO IT COMPLETELY BY ONESELF. BUT WE ARE NOT ALONE. WE ARE PART OF THIS COMMUNITY. THE YOUTH OF OUR COMMUNITY HAVE AN ORGANIZATION DEVOTED JUST FOR THEM: MAJLIS KHUDDAM-UL-AHMADIYYA.

AN ORGANIZATION FILLED WITH YOUTH, ENGAGED IN THE SAME STRUGGLE AS YOURSELF. A SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATION, WHERE YOU CAN FIND LIKE MINDED INDIVIDUALS, STRIVING FOR THEIR OWN SELF-REFORMATION. UTILIZING THEIR TALENTS, GIVING OF THEIR TIME. THE ACT OF VOLUNTEERISM IN THE END BENEFITS THE VOLUNTEER THE MOST. BECOME ENGAGED TO YOUR FULLEST IN MAJLIS KHUDDAM-UL-AHMADIYYA AND IN THE END IT WILL BENEFIT YOU THE MOST.

IN CONCLUSION, OUR KHALIFA IN A SERMON THREE WEEKS AGO, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE YOUTH STATED: "THIS IS THE AGE WHEN ONE IS CAPABLE OF DOING ONE'S BEST, HOWEVER, THIS IS ALSO THE TIME WHEN NAFSE AMMARA (THE SELF THAT INCITES TO EVIL) ATTACKS ONE MOST FREQUENTLY".

I FINISH WITH THE WORDS THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) AT THE EXPEDITION TO TABUK: "HE WHO REPRESSES ANGER, ALLAH REWARDS HIM. HE WHO FACES MISFORTUNES WITH PERSEVERANCE, ALLAH COMPENSATES HIM. HE WHO ACTS ONLY FOR FAME AND REPUTATION, ALLAH DISGRACES HIM. HE WHO SHOWS PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE, ALLAH GIVES HIM A DOUBLE REWARD."

MAY ALLAH HELP THE YOUTH OF OUR COMMUNITY AND ALL OF US TO
EMBRACE THE CHALLENGES OF JIHAD AKBAR AND LIVE OUR LIVES
RIGHTEOUSLY. INSHALLAH!