

Islamic Expansion through Jihād: The Evidence of the Sunnah

In the foregoing chapters I have attempted to give a brief but complete outline of the Islamic theory of jihād, that is, the injunctions of Allah and his Prophet regarding the subject. However, no part of Islamic theory is supposed to be complete without a description of the Prophet's own actions in terms to those injunctions. In fact, these actions in their totality are the Sunnah properly so called, the mere injunctions even from the Prophet's mouth being only a part of it. To a devout Muslim, the Prophet's actions and sayings rather than revelations from Allah supply the model of excellence which he is expected to emulate throughout his life-span. The Prophet is the best ruler, the best parent, the best husband, and, by the same token, the best mujāhid. To round off the theory of jihād, a discussion of his own jihāds is, therefore, essential.

Adding up the evidence of the Koran and the Hadis, a complete jihād is seen to have no less than five distinct objectives: (1) Forcible spreading of Islam. (2) Destruction of the kafir population against which the jihād is mounted. (3) Imposition of jizyah on the defeated infidels. (4) The wresting of war booty in the form of material property. (5) The enslavement of the female and child population of the vanquished kafir enemy. The last two items, indeed, do not count as two, but are aspects of the self-same ghanîmah. It is for clarity that they are mentioned separately. In this chapter I will concentrate on the first objective of jihād, namely, the spread of Islam through jihād as illustrated in the Prophet's own career.

This spreading of Islam through jihād again has

two sides: to force the vanquished infidels into professing Islam, and to destroy their places as well as symbols of worship. The Koranic injunctions, in so far as they refer to forcible spread of Islam, have already been quoted. The reader should particularly refer to verses 9/5, 8/39, 2/193. The relevant Sunnah is best described in *The Life of Mahomet* by Sir William Muir by comparing and collating the early biographical data from Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, Al-Wāqidî, Ibn Sa'd and At-Tabarî.¹ The Prophet's Sunnah regarding the spread of Islam by means of jihād is described in these works in great detail.

According to Muir, the Prophet never made a concerted effort for the spread of Islam in Arabia before the conquest of Mecca (January, 630 AD). He was content to keep together the band of his followers in Medina and with their help wage incessant war against the Koreish of Mecca and other Arab tribes, so as to add to his resources and build a well-equipped military machine. The moment he felt strong enough, he swooped down on Mecca and gained what was for all practical purposes a bloodless victory. The Meccans professed Islam, intimidated as they were by the display of his strength and also because of the unwritten agreement he had reached earlier with the Meccan leader, Abu Sufyan. Muir has given a graphic description of this agreement.

According to him, the Prophet, with an army of 10,000, was proceeding towards Mecca in extreme secrecy when a small reconnoitring party of the Koreish, headed by Abu Sufyan, fell in with Al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, issuing forth from the latter's encampment. Al-Abbas wanted to save Mecca from destruction. He persuaded Abu Sufyan to accompany him to the Prophet and seek quarter from him. This was in the evening prior to the surrender of Mecca. Next morning, Al-Abbas took Abu Sufyan to the Prophet. What took place is best described in Muir's language:

Out upon thee Abu Sufyan! exclaimed Mohammad as the Koreishite chief drew near; hast thou not discovered that there is no God save the Lord alone? Noble and generous Sire! Had there been any God beside, verily he had been of some avail to me. And dost thou not acknowledge that I am the Prophet of the Lord? questioned Mohammad. Noble Sire! As to this thing there is yet in my heart some hesitancy. Woe is thee! exclaimed Al-Abbas; it is no time for hesitancy, this. Believe and testify forthwith the creed of Islam, or else thy neck shall be in danger!

This description by Muir makes it clear that Abu Sufyan professed Islam under duress - to save his neck from danger. Most of the Meccans followed him in the same course and obviously under the same predicament. Muir has praised the Prophet's extreme generosity in letting off the Koreish so easily, and abstaining from bloodshed and plunder. But he has not concealed the fact that the conversion of the Koreish was effected by terror, by an apprehension relating to the safety of their necks.

It must be admitted that the generosity of the Prophet extended even beyond sparing the life and property of the Koreish. He did not compel each and every Meccan to profess Islam at once, nor threw out anyone who would persist in infidelity for some time yet. They were even allowed to worship at the Ka bah, the so-called Inviolable Place of Worship. He got the idols in the Ka bah destroyed on the very first day of his entry into Mecca, but retained much of the pre-Islamic ritual. This facilitated for some more time the continuance of pre-Islamic worship by the as yet unconverted Koreishites, without encountering opposition from the Prophet's followers.

That opposition came about a year later (631 AD) on the occasion of the first independent pilgrimage to the Ka bah by the Prophet's followers from Medina. At first the Prophet had sent Abu Bakr as the leader of this pilgrimage. But after the latter had already proceeded some distance, the Prophet despatched Ali (his cousin as well as son-in-law) with a set of newly received Revelations from Allah. They were the so-called Immunity Verses. By means of these, Allah gave to himself and his Prophet immunity from the responsibility for tolerating those Meccans and other Arabs who had been persisting in infidelity even after the conquest of Mecca. The Sûrah Taubah of the Koran contains these Immunity Verses, the sûrah itself bearing the alternative title, Barâ ah (immunity). Allah declared:

Freedom from obligation from Allah and His Messenger towards those of the idolaters with whom ye made treaty.

Travel [O idolaters] freely in the land for four months, and know that ye cannot escape Allah and Allah will confound the disbelievers.

And a proclamation from Allah and His Messenger to all men on the day of the Greater Pilgrimage that Allah is free from obligation to idolaters and (so is) His Messenger (K 9/1-3).

It is on this occasion that the liberty to kill the idolaters (kill them whenever you find them, K 9/5) was proclaimed and the doors of the Ka bah were closed for all time to come to non-Muslims. As the proclamation from Allah clearly states, the unbelievers (of Arabia and not of Mecca alone) were given only four months' time to forswear their ancestral religion and profess Islam. Clearly this was a direct outcome of the conquest of Mecca although delayed after the day of victory for about a year. This, therefore, must be reckoned the supreme example of how jihād is utilised for the forcible spread of Islam. Every practice of the Prophet is canonical Sunnah to the believer, and as binding as the verses of the Koran. It is for this reason that with Muslims, jihād became the supreme instrument for propagating Islam and its spread by peaceful means always remained secondary. The ordinance which was originally intended for Arab idolaters, came to be recognised in due course as including idolaters anywhere and everywhere.

Footnotes:

1 Ibn Ishāq (85 A.H - 151 A.H); Ibn Hishām (d. 218 A.H); Al-Wāqidī (130 A.H-207 A.H); Ibn Sa'd (d. 230 A.H); At-Tabarī (d. 310 A.H).