

THE CONCEPT OF ENFORCING BELIEF

There are specific and obvious facts that need to be considered when we deal with the question of how belief can be acquired. Specifically, can belief be acquired under duress as a result of a religious war? Is it reasonable to expect people to change their beliefs by force?

In Islam, belief is born out of conviction. It is the certitude in the heart of the believer concerning the truth of his/her belief. This belief should be reflected in the deeds of a person. Deeds include rituals, acts of worship, and other acts of obedience to the creator. The acts of obedience are an expression of submission to God. However, if the heart is void of belief, then the acts of obedience become superficial transactions void of meaning.

Belief is then an internal process that fills the heart with certitude. This internal process cannot be monitored by external observers. It is reasonable to expect that belief can only be acquired through a process of genuine persuasion and convincing. We may be able to force a person to perform certain acts, but we cannot force a person to believe

in something that the person has no faith in. Attempting to force people into faith will produce hypocrites not believers. This is why the Quran instructed the Prophet (pbuh) that the only way to call people to Islam is through wisdom and beautiful admonition: “[Prophet], invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. And debate with them in the most excellent way, for your Lord knows best who strayed from His way and who is rightly guided.” [16:125]. This verse outlines different ways to deal with different types of people. Rational argument may be used to address more abstract thinkers, while people driven by spiritual experience may be influenced by charismatic orators whose words resonate with their own feelings and emotions. Varying combinations of these approaches can be used to address others according to what, for these individuals, leads to understanding.

The fact that the verse outlines only these approaches for calling to faith clearly indicates that forcing people to believe is not acceptable. This has been unequivocally stated in the verse: “*There shall be no compulsion in faith.*” [2:256] This verse establishes the principle that freedom of conscience should be the only route to acquiring belief and in no circumstance should force be used to impose faith on people. We have already argued that belief is not even possible through compulsion. These verses now indicate that it is not permissible to coerce the outward expression of faith. God has power that men do not, but even he does not choose to force anyone to believe: “*Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you*

[Prophet] compel people to believe?" [10:99] The Quran emphasizes that the Prophet's mission is to remind people not to be domineering over them: "So [Prophet] warn them: your only task is to give warning, you are not there to control them." [88:21-22]

Abdo (1972) commented on this unequivocal statement as follows: "This verse defines the mission of the Prophet (pbuh). The mission is to remind people of what they have forgotten about the creator. The prophet's mission is not to force people to believe in God, nor to be a keeper over them. He should not act in a domineering way. No external power can change what is in man's heart." Two facts can be gleaned from Imam Abdo's treatise

Wars that were waged in the past to convert people by force had nothing to do with the faith under whose banner they were waged. These wars were actually motivated by **political ambitions**. Faith cannot be established in the hearts of **people** by force and as such no war should be described as "religious." The objectives of religion cannot be achieved through the application of force. Imam Abdo (1972) says: "Belief constitutes the essence and the foundation of religion, it is acquired through voluntary submission. Faith can only be acquired by persuasion not by force. Therefore, the verse "there shall be no compulsion in faith" establishes a fundamental principle in Islam. It states clearly that no one should be forced into Islam and, equally, that no Muslim should be forced to abandon Islam."

Struggle (Ar. Jihad) in the way of God is a more

comprehensive concept than fighting for the sake of God because “struggle” means exerting oneself and persevering in adversity. The fighting component of Jihad is neither an essential component of the foundation of Islam nor it is a part and parcel of the essence of Islam and its objectives. Fighting is not a way to proselytize people to Islam and it was never intended to be a way for acquiring belief. Muslims consider fighting a means to defend themselves, protect their lives, and preserve their beliefs. It is also a tool to oppose tyranny and overcome oppression. The argument advanced by some that Islam was spread by the sword and that fighting is one of the objectives of Islam is false. Quran provides an unequivocal rebuttal of this false argument.

We should be comfortable with Imam Abdo’s conclusion that fighting in itself is not integral to the foundation of Islam. Fighting is not part and parcel of the Islamic way of life. Fighting is a political tool that is necessary for the protection of the freedom of conscience. This statement is in agreement with the well known tradition in which the pillars (rituals), the creed (Ar. Aqueeda), and the way to attain excellence (Ar. Ihsan) in Islam were explained by the Prophet (pbuh). The pillars of Islam are five: the testament that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is His messenger; establishing prayers; paying poor dues; fasting the month of Ramadan; and performing pilgrimage by those who are able (Ibn Taymiyah, 1962). It is clear that neither Jihad nor fighting is listed as one of the rituals of Islam. The creed of Islam consists of a set of six beliefs: the belief in God, in the Angels, in the revealed books, in the

messengers of God, in the Day of Judgment, and in destiny. Similarly, there is no reference to Jihad or fighting in these six components. The way to attain excellence (Ar. Ihsan) in Islam is embodied in the prophetic tradition: “you should serve God as if you are able to see Him, because if you are unable to see Him, He certainly sees you.” This also does not have any reference to Jihad or fighting.

The foundation of faith in Islam consists of three components: God, Prophet-hood, and the Day of Judgment, these also do not include any reference to Jihad or fighting. It is thus clear, that Islam’s approach to the issues of jihad and fighting has been clearly formulated. Belief is an internal matter of the heart. It provides certitude to the believer. No external force can control it. Faith can only be acquired through persuasion using wisdom and a convincing argument or experience. There should be no compulsion in religion. Therefore, no fight or war can be described as religious. War is a necessary mean for self-defense against aggression, protection against persecution, and upholding the right of freedom of conscience.

There are those who try to overburden themselves and stretch the meaning of verses beyond their logical interpretation to convince lay people that fighting is integral to Islam (Albanna, 1992). They refer to the verse: “*Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it. And it may well be that you dislike something while it is good for you, and it may well be that you like something while it is bad for you: God knows and you do not.*” [2:216]. They argue that this verse uses the verb “ordained” which has been used by the Quran

in connection with other obligatory duties that a Muslim has to do and are integral to the Islamic way of life, as can be seen in the verse about fasting: *"You who believe! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you may remain conscious of God"* [2:183]. Their conclusion is that the use of the verb "ordained" indicates that fighting must be a component of the foundation of Islam. However, this argument is weak and can be easily refuted. The Quran used the verb "ordained" in connection with issues which are not integral to the foundations of the Islamic way of life. It has used the same verb in connection with issues that are not even mandatory. An example of this is the verse for retribution. Retribution has been ordained in the Quran, however, nobody said that it is part and parcel of the foundation of Islam. *"You who believe! Just retribution is ordained for you in cases of murder: the free man for the free man, the slave for the slave, the female for the female. But if the culprit is pardoned by his aggrieved brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and restitution to his fellow-man shall be made in a good way. This is an alleviation from your Lord and an act of mercy. If anyone then exceeds these limits, grievous suffering awaits him."* [2:178]

Leaving a will has been ordained in the Quran: *"It is ordained, when death approaches any of you, and he is leaving behind any wealth to make bequests in favor of his parents and next of kin, in accordance to what is fair- a duty incumbent on all who are conscious of God."* [2:180] However, it is not part and parcel of the foundation of Islam. God has ordained the protection of the rights of widows:

“They ask you [Prophet] for a ruling regarding women. Say, ‘God Himself gives you a ruling regarding them. You already have what has been recited to you in the Scripture about orphan girls [in your charge] from whom you withhold which has been ordained for them [of their inheritance] and whom you wish to marry, and also regarding helpless children- God instructs you to treat orphans fairly: He is well aware of whatever good you do.” [4:127].

Thus, the use of the verb “ordained” does not justify the argument that fighting is a part and parcel of the foundation of Islam. Fighting is a tool for the protection of people, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience. Although, fighting as a tool may be considered part and parcel of the Islamic way of life, it cannot have the status of being an integral part and parcel of the foundation of this way of life. It is certainly true that Imam Abdo’s words reflect the nature of Jihad in Islam: “It is neither part and parcel of the essence of the religion nor one of its objectives. It is not mandated for its own sake but it is a political tool that is essential for the protection of the Islamic way of life and its adherents.”