

ISLAM

A Path of Great Struggle

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

Translated and Edited by:

Dr Farida Khanam

Mr Sajid Anwar

Dr Rajat Malhotra

Maulana Farhad Ahmad

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Goodword Books

A-21, Sector 4, Noida-201301, Delhi NCR, India

Tel. +91 120 4131448, Mob. +91 8588822672

email: info@goodwordbooks.com

www.goodwordbooks.com

CPS International

Centre for Peace and Spirituality International

1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi-110 013, India

Mob. +91-9999944119

e-mail: info@cpsglobal.org

www.cpsglobal.org

Center for Peace and Spirituality USA

391 Totten Pond Road,

Suite 402, Waltham MA 02451, USA

Mob. +1 617 960 7156

email: info@cpsusa.net

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Islam

A PATH OF GREAT STRUGGLE

The Quran is the guidance of the Lord of the universe for all human beings. It determines who is truly honoured and who will ultimately fail. It makes clear who is truly successful and who is deprived. In worldly terms, when we use the word success, it means that a person uses the opportunities for progress available to him in society and rises to higher positions. If a person becomes a major businessman, holds a high office, and receives great honours, he is called a successful individual. This means that within the environment, the possible ways to expand trade, the qualities laid down for reaching high positions, and the paths created for acquiring honours were all

crossed by that person, and as a result of his struggle, he attained that elevated position which was possible for him under the law of the time. Success does not mean finding a magical lamp like the one in the story of Aladdin. Rather, success is the result of a person using his abilities and the opportunities available to him along the paths open before him, and ultimately reaching the destination that is meant to be reached through such effort. Success is not a matter of luck or a chance occurrence; it is the natural outcome of right and sustained effort. A thinker expressed this truth in these words:

“To say a capable person cannot succeed is a lie.”

The same applies to success in the afterlife, which is the true destination of human beings. There, all earlier and later people will be gathered before their Lord. On that day, honour and success will be for those who attain God’s pleasure, and humiliation and failure will be for those who fail to attain it. For the first group, there is eternal comfort, and for the

second group, there is eternal punishment. A person who has faith in the Quran and adopts Islam positions himself for the first outcome and strives to avoid the second. But attaining this high position is not easy. It is a great ascent, and only after a long process does a person reach its peak. God's reward is not obtained by chance, as if it were something lying about; rather, like worldly success, it too is the natural result of an intense struggle, granted to a person according to the commandment of God. Success in the Hereafter is essentially the result of passing a long test. By creating human beings, God has placed them in a world filled with false ideas and corrupt tendencies—things from which they must cleanse their hearts and minds. There are many wrong and unlawful paths that they must avoid, and many forces of falsehood that seek to divert them from the path of truth. By staying clear of all these and remaining firm on the right path, they must continue their journey. In short, it is a path full of challenges that one must travel in order to reach one's Lord.

The Prophet of Islam said: “Hellfire is veiled by desires, and Paradise is veiled by hardships.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6487; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2822).

If the reality of Islam has to be expressed in a single word, no word is more suitable than sacrifice. Islam is, in fact, a powerful struggle. It is a continuous process of sacrifice that begins after a person accepts faith and continues until his death. The first sacrifice a person makes is when he gives up his favourite ideas and inner inclinations and accepts the true religion. After this comes the second kind of sacrifice, which is made in the realm of action. In one’s character, dealings, and social and economic life, a person gives up those ways that are displeasing to God and adopts those that are pleasing to Him. Then, after passing through both these stages, he reaches the final stage of testing, where not only forbidden things but, if required, even the lawful things of life must be given up. This sacrifice marks the completion of the test and

serves as a practical demonstration of the commitment of servitude that a person makes to his Lord when he accepts faith.

These three stages, through which a person reaches his Lord and earns His pleasure, are described in the Quran as *iman* (faith in God), *hijrah* (turning away from falsehood), and *jihad* (striving to remain firm on the truth). The Quran stated: Those who have believed and have migrated, and have striven for God's sake with their possessions and persons, stand much higher in God's esteem. It is they who will triumph." (9:20)

In this verse, faith means accepting the truths that have been taught in the Quran, and migration means striving so that the belief which has found a place in a person's heart also becomes practically established and recognized on the earth. In this way, faith, migration, and struggle are not separate things from one another, but successive stages of a single journey.

There are different stages of development of the same condition, which have been given separate titles only to distinguish them. In today's discussion, I will briefly explain all three of them.

Faith

(*IMAN*)

First, consider *Iman* (faith). It is the decision to take part in that great trial whose beginning is a verbal declaration and whose ultimate end is that a person remains steadfast upon it even to the point of dedicating his life. It is a covenant that a servant makes with his Lord, pledging that he will remain loyal to Him throughout his life. Faith is the state that arises from a correct and sincere awareness of reality. When a person, through reflection and deep thought, comes to realize that there is an infinite power behind this astonishing universe; when he accepts the Messenger of God and willingly submits to all his decisions, when his heart cries out that this magnificent plan of creation is not without purpose but that a day will surely come

when all human beings of the past and the future will be gathered and called to account, then the sum of these inner states is what we call faith.

The true spirit of faith is trust. This trust relates to a Being whom we cannot see with our eyes, and this is why the idea of certainty comes into it. In the same way, believing in God along with all His attributes necessarily means fearing His displeasure and being concerned about saving oneself from His punishment; this is why piety and fear must accompany faith. Thus, if we bring together three words to explain the Quranic concept of faith—certainty, trust, and fear—we come very close to its true essence. In its true essence, *iman* is total trust in God and His Messenger, arising from complete conviction. And fear of God is that inner awareness which compels a person to make obedience to Him binding upon himself, even without any external force such as police or military authority.

Certainty, which is the first component of faith, is not something imported from outside; rather, it is a living awareness of a truth hidden within human

nature itself. When a person reflects on the universe, observes the teachings of the Messenger, and listens attentively to the voice rising from within, all three appear as one and the same. It feels as though a single message is being broadcast at the same moment from three different places. The truth conveyed by God's Messenger seems perfectly in harmony with the entire universe, and the inner voice of a human being fully confirms it. Whatever he reads in the Divine Book, he sees the same reflection in the earth and the sky, and whatever he reads and sees is accepted by his nature as smoothly as an object placed into a compartment made exactly to its size. However, this state of conviction does not arise on its own. Just as every potential within human nature becomes active only when it is nurtured and developed, in the same way, the secrets of the universe are revealed to a believer only when he fully devotes himself to their discovery. Likewise, the contents of a book become clear and beneficial only when a person studies it deeply and draws out its meaning. In the same way, this certainty is attained

only when a person applies his willpower toward it. Although it is the clearest reality of the universe, God's law for this world is that a person receives only that for which he has made an effort.

Faith's second component is "trust". The study of one's own self and of the universe tells a person, on the one hand, that there is a great Creator and Manager who is the real cause behind all the events of this vast system. At the same time, and exactly at that moment, it gives rise to two other powerful realizations. One is the realization of one's complete helplessness, and the other is the realization of God's boundless favours. A person sees that his existence depends on countless things, yet he cannot create even one of them by himself. He is born as a weak child and comes to an end with the frailties of old age. He stands on a planet that is suspended in space, where even a slight disturbance in its balance would be enough to destroy him. He finds himself surrounded by a vast universe over which he has no control. In such conditions, his own existence begins to appear utterly powerless and

insignificant to him. On the other hand, he sees that everything he needed has been provided for him. He has been given a body that sees, hears, speaks, and thinks, and its faculties function continuously, like a self-operating system, to sustain him. He observes that all the forces of the earth and the heavens are working in perfect harmony for his benefit. His very existence begins to appear to him as a living blessing of God. A deep sense of gratitude wells up within him, and he becomes filled with a deep sense of thankfulness. This experience compels him to declare that Being as his everything who has made all these arrangements for him. The first realization gives him firm conviction of his total helplessness. He feels strongly that there must be a higher power to support him, and the second realization appears as an answer to this need. The same reflection that makes him feel an inner emptiness also turns into a power that fills that emptiness.

The third element of faith is “fear”. This fear is not something separate from the first two elements of faith, certainty and trust; rather, it is their natural

result and their completion. On the one hand, a person sees God, who is a treasure of justice and wisdom. On the other hand, when he looks at the universe, his heart cries out that such a vast creative plan can never be without purpose. Then, when he looks at human beings living on the earth, among whom there are oppressors and the oppressed, the good and the bad, he becomes certain that a Day of Accountability must come, where the truthful will be rewarded for their truthfulness and the evil for their evil. Trust in the Lord of the Worlds itself becomes the foundation of fear of the Lord of the Worlds. This fear of God is not like the fear that arises in a person's heart after seeing something frightening. In reality, it is a feeling that cannot be properly expressed by any single word. It is a mixed state of extreme hope and extreme apprehension, in which a person can never decide which of the two should take precedence. It is the highest sense of considering oneself as nothing despite having done everything, a state in which

a person remembers only his responsibilities and completely forgets his rights. It is a station of love and fear in which a person runs toward the very One he fears, from whom he senses the danger of loss and from whom he also hopes to gain. It is an anxiety that is entirely peace, and a peace that is entirely anxiety.

These are the three prominent aspects of faith. Faith, in reality, is the name of the state that arises from fear of God, complete trust in Him, and full certainty about Him. The person who believes in God Most High, in His principles and His commands, hands over everything to Him, and becomes content with all His decisions, is a believer. Faith is guidance and light for the intellect, and purity and cleanliness for the heart. Therefore, it influences both intellect and will together and dominates all thoughts and actions. In the language of the Quran, a believer is the person who is a sincere and loyal servant of God and enters a covenant of obedience to His commands with all the states of certainty and trust.

Migration

(HIJRAH)

Now consider *hijrah* (migration)¹. It means to leave, to sever ties; generally, migration

1 Al-Raghib Al-Isfahani, an eleventh-century Muslim scholar of Quranic exegesis and the Arabic language, writes in his book “*Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Quran*” that the words *hajr* and *hijr* mean a person’s separation from others, whether this separation is physical, verbal, or emotional. God says: *Wahjuroohunna fil madaaji’* (4:34), meaning leave your wives alone in their beds. Here, the reference is to physical separation. And *Inna qawmi ittakhadhu haadha al-Qur’ana mahjooran* (25:30), meaning my people did indeed discard the Quran. Here, emotional separation, or both emotional and verbal separation, is meant. And *Wahjurhum hajran jameelan* (73:10), meaning and ignore them politely. In this case, all three forms of separation may be intended.

is understood as synonymous with leaving one's homeland. Certainly, the word migration is used in a specific sense for precisely this event. But no event can be understood by separating it from its background. The reality is that this leaving of the homeland that

Hijrah essentially means leaving others and cutting off ties with them, as God says: *Wallazeena haajaroo wa jaahadoo* (2:218), meaning those who migrated, and have striven for God's cause. And *Lil fuqara' al-muhajireena alladhina ukhrijoo min diyarihim wa amwalihim* (59:8), meaning, it is for the poor refugees who were driven from their homes and possessions. And *Wa man yakhruj min baytihi muhajiran ila Allahi wa rasoolihi* (4:100), meaning: Those who leave home for the cause of God and His Messenger. And *Fala tattakhidhu minhum awliyaa hatta yuhaajiroo fee sabeelillah* (4:89), meaning: Do not take them as your allies until they emigrate in the way of God. In these verses, the meaning is clearly leaving the land of disbelief and moving to the land of Islam, as people migrated from *Makkah* to *Madinah*. Scholars have also said that *hijrah* includes abandoning the desires of the self and avoiding bad character and wrongdoing.

occurs in a believer's life is not an accidental incident; rather, it is the culmination of a long history. It is a process that begins in the believer's life from the very first day and ultimately reaches the stage of leaving one's surroundings. By the grace of God, the truth becomes clear to a person, and he begins to make others aware of it. Becoming the bearer of a new voice against the times, he virtually announces that he has abandoned submission to the prevailing environment and has decided to carve out a path for himself against the age. This is the beginning of migration. When a person resolves to abandon an illegitimate way of life and adopt a legitimate one, a continuous struggle begins thereafter in which he must leave many old things behind and adopt many new ones, sever ties with many of his own people and form bonds with many who were previously strangers. From within to without, he must abandon countless cherished things and instead accept other things that are unpleasant. Thus, as soon as faith is embraced, the believer's life begins a process of migration in which many old

things are left behind to adopt a new mode of conduct. When a person undertakes such a migration himself, he begins to make others aware of the same path. As a result, some people support him, while others oppose him. In this way, two completely opposing groups begin to emerge in the environment, one of which clings to what the other group seeks to abandon.

This difference does not arise merely from the fact that one group criticizes another and declares its conduct to be wrong. Rather, it goes beyond that and develops into a practical struggle between the two. Human society is a single whole in which no individual can carve out a separate path for himself, isolated from others. By nature, the human being is social. All his needs are fulfilled through mutual cooperation. Therefore, in many situations, he has to live according to the ideas of others.

For this reason, when a person decides to adopt a path that goes against the prevailing trend of the time, this decision inevitably leads to a clash with those

whose system he is living under. Human society may be likened to a network in which all individuals are interconnected like links in a chain. If one link is pulled apart, it disturbs the entire network. In this way, a continuing conflict begins, which becomes more and more pronounced with each passing day, and at every step, resistance arises between the two sides. This struggle ultimately reaches a point where society refuses to accept the people of truth. At that stage, those who stand for truth decide to leave that settlement peacefully and move to another part of the land. This is the final and most extreme form of migration.

This migration does not simply mean leaving one place and going to another. In its true sense, it means abandoning falsehood and adopting the path of truth. It is to leave the wrong ways and choose the path of God. That is why, in the Quran and Hadith, the migration of believers is called *Hijrah* to God, meaning migration toward God. Why is this so? Obviously, these people do not leave the earth and go to the sky; they continue

to live in this same world. The reason for using this expression is that this act of leaving happens because of devotion to God. To migrate toward God means to abandon whatever stands in the way of God, whatever becomes an obstacle in moving toward Him. This is the foundation of a God-centered life. Until a person is ready for this migration, he cannot fulfill the demands of faith. Only the one who is prepared for this sacrifice can succeed in making his life an Islamic life. When he sees that thoughts and tendencies are growing within him that go against God's will, he removes them completely. If he is involved in wrongful actions, he abandons them forever. If a relationship is preventing someone from openly turning toward religion, he bids farewell to that relationship. If maintaining a certain standard of living prevents him from playing his part in the work of the faith, he should give up that standard of living. If fulfilling the demands of religion puts material prosperity at risk, he accepts that risk.

If dedicating himself to the service of religion makes his own and his children's future appear dark, he moves forward without worrying about it. In short, whenever a person finds himself in a situation where on the one side, God is calling him, and on the other side, some other demand is pulling him, leaving those other demands and moving toward God is what is called *Hijrah* to God.

This migration has many stages and countless forms. However, to understand its reality, we can divide it into two major headings. One is abandoning unlawful and forbidden things, and the other is abandoning things that are not, in themselves, necessarily avoidable. Yet because of adopting the religion, such stages arise that a believer is required to give these up as well.

The first kind of migration includes the entire list of thoughts and actions that God the Exalted has declared forbidden and worthy of abandonment. Every person is born into a particular environment. By environment

is meant a specific structure of history, traditions, customs, and ways of life. It is a system of ideas and actions that casts its shadow over all aspects of life. Just as there is an invisible layer of air surrounding the globe of the earth in which we are all immersed, in the same way, every person is born immersed in the environment of their time. Within it, they grow and develop; the ideas and traditions of the environment become embedded in every vein of their being, and often it becomes difficult for them even to think against them. When the truth becomes clear to a person, the first step he must take is to abandon the customs and beliefs he had accepted merely by imitation. He must examine himself and remove all the wrong influences he has absorbed from his environment. Within every person there is a self that seeks only pleasure. For this self, the criterion of liking or disliking something is not whether it is right or wrong, good or bad. Rather, its only standard is whether it appeals to him and brings him benefit.

In his earlier life, a person develops many interests and engagements which, though wrong, are pleasing to his self. At the same time, he neglects and abandons many responsibilities which, though morally necessary, do not appeal to him. Therefore, when a person embraces faith, they must set in motion a continuous process of breaking down and rebuilding their life. Many things that were extremely dear to them in their previous life are left behind forever, and many things toward which they felt aversion, in which they had no interest, must be brought into their life.

In this way, after accepting faith, a continuous effort begins to abandon wrong emotions, Wrong relationships, and wrong actions. In every aspect of life, one must remain alert and actively avoid wrong ways. This is an ongoing struggle that continues until the final moment of life. This is the first and initial form of migration: a process of purifying oneself from past habits and resolving never to return to them again. This form of migration is indicated in

one of the earliest chapters of the Quran revealed at the beginning of prophethood: “shun uncleanness.” (74:5). That is, migrate away from impurity.

It means that one should abandon all evils of thought and action. This is what the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, clarified in the following words:

“The emigrant is the one who abandons what God has forbidden” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 10).

This is one aspect of migration toward God, in which a person must abandon all unlawful things. In order to become aligned with God’s will, one has to purify oneself of everything that goes against His will. Its second aspect is that in which a person is compelled to sacrifice even his lawful interests in the path of God. This is because Islam assigns a task so great that after it, there remains no opportunity for anything else. One’s attention turns away from the self and becomes wholly devoted to Islam. That is why it is said that in this world, the believer has only responsibilities and

no rights. Whatever rights he has are with God, and it is there that he will receive them.

Accepting Islam does not simply mean adopting it in one's personal life. It also requires a person to strive to make others aware of it. This dual demand of the faith does not merely double our responsibility; it makes it profoundly demanding. Living by the faith in one's personal life, even to the extent possible, is not an easy task. It means using one's freedom and will in the right direction in a world full of temptations. It is to remain free, yet willingly submit oneself to God's discipline, and to stay committed until the final moment of life. But there is another demand of the faith: to convey God's message to others. This is an even greater responsibility. It is a demanding and exhausting task that calls for all of a person's strength and everything he has. If he devotes his time and energy to other pursuits at the expense of steadfastness in faith and conveying the truth, he falls short of fulfilling his primary duty.

When a person accepts the faith in this sense, he immediately realizes that playing his part in this mission means he can hardly afford to engage in anything else. He finds no option but to reduce his personal needs to the bare minimum. He must bury his worldly desires once and for all, and remain as little occupied with himself as possible so that he may render maximum service to the truth. He is compelled to devote whatever time remains, after meeting his essential needs, to the cause of bearing witness to the faith.

In other words, if a person wishes to adopt Islam in his individual life, he may be considered religious simply by abstaining from what is forbidden. But to convey Islam to others, he must pass through a path of immense patience. Without this, even the proper beginning of this work is not possible, let alone bringing it to completion.

In the first case, a person is responsible only for himself, but in the second, he becomes responsible

for conveying the message of truth to all people. This greatly increases his commitments and challenges. It requires him to develop a deep and unwavering conviction in the truth of Islam so that he may become its messenger. He must acquire a detailed understanding of Islam in order to present it clearly to others. He must prepare reasoned responses to the false ideas and beliefs that have distanced people from God, so that they may be inclined toward the truth. He must reach out to each individual and, with genuine well-wishing, explain the message in a peaceful manner, according to their psychology, circumstances, and level of understanding. He must become a model of the highest moral character and avoid living by double standards, so that his conduct does not contradict his claim, but instead stands as a witness to its truth. In short, there is a vast list of responsibilities that demands great sacrifice. Once a believer commits himself to fulfilling such a duty, little room remains for him to take interest in anything else.

This is the second kind of migration. That is, setting aside the demands of one's own self in order to fulfill the demands of religion. When there is a clash between the needs of religion and personal needs, when the work of religion asks from you all your time and all your abilities, when religion requires that you leave behind your comfort, your ease, and even your close family members and move forward for its sake, then you should sacrifice everything for it, and there should be nothing whose attachment becomes an obstacle in your path toward religion. This is the reality that is stated in the following verse. After mentioning the high ranks of the believer, the migrant, and the one who strives in the path of God, it is said:

“Say, “If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your spouses and your tribe, and the worldly goods which you have acquired, and the commerce which you fear will decline, and the homes you love are dearer to you than

God and His Messenger and the struggle for His cause, then wait until God fulfills His decree. God does not guide the disobedient people.”
(Quran, 9:24)

In this verse, all the things that are mentioned are, in themselves, lawful, and none of them is inherently forbidden. Yet the believers are told to leave all of them behind and move toward God, and those who do not do so are declared to be *fasiq*, that is, breakers of their covenant. God had made this demand of our predecessors, the noble Companions (*Sahaba*), who entered into a covenant with their Lord through the Final Prophet, committing themselves to devote all their strength to the cause of upholding God’s word. When twenty years had passed since this pledge, and they had consistently proven through sustained sacrifice that they were ready to give up everything for the sake of the faith, then, after their return from the journey of Tabuk in 9 AH, God declared the

acceptance of their efforts in the following words:

“God has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth in return for the Garden. They fight for the cause of God and they kill and are killed. It is a promise binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran, and who is truer to his promise than God? Rejoice then in the bargain you have made. That is the supreme achievement.” (Quran, 9:111)

This migration—or, in other words, the willingness to sacrifice legitimate interests for a higher purpose—is both a test of a person’s devotion to God and the means by which God’s religion continues to flourish on this earth. Those who step forward to take part in this work, yet want to secure their position in the world first and only then turn to the concerns of the Hereafter; who are not prepared to lower their standard of living; who are unwilling to risk their children’s future; who are not ready to sacrifice their

worldly desires and ambitions; who do not consider reducing their material engagements in order to devote more time to the service of the faith, but instead are constantly looking for greater opportunities to meet their rising expenses—such people lack the resolve required for this path. In short, people who do not have the courage to give preference to tomorrow's gain over today's gain have never established the religion in history. And as long as this earth and sky remain, this task will never be accomplished by such people in the future either.

Strive or Struggle

(JIHAD)

Now, let us understand *jihad*. *Jihad* means to exert one's utmost effort for a cause, to strive so hard that a person becomes exhausted. Like migration, this *jihad* is not the name of a temporary action but a process that relates to one's entire life. *Jihad* is not limited to the battlefield. In a believer's life, *jihad* begins as soon as one accepts faith and continues until the very end of life.

In a society where truth is suppressed, the struggle for truth becomes an ongoing form of *jihad* in a believer's life. This effort and inner striving continue within the believer at all times—expressed as patience and hope in times of hardship, and as gratitude and humility in

moments of ease. This process remains a constant part of a believer's life until the very end.

The real nature of *jihad* is to strive to one's utmost to walk on the path of God. In the Quran, God's religion has been called "*najd*," which means a high place, and following this religion has been compared to climbing upward. (Quran, 90:10-11) From this example, we can understand the true reality of *jihad*. There are only two ways to live in this world: one according to the desires of the self, and the other according to the will of God. One is an irresponsible way of living, and the other is a responsible one. The first path is easy, while the second is difficult. In the first case, one moves downward; in the second, one moves upward.

If you leave a vehicle on a slope, it will roll down on its own without any effort. But if you want to drive the same vehicle uphill, it requires continuous effort. Without sustained effort, no one can take a vehicle from the bottom to the top. When a person makes this

kind of effort—going against one’s desires in order to move toward God—that is what we call *jihad*.

When a person decides that he will live his life according to the will of God, he immediately realizes that there are two powerful forces that strongly block this intention. On one side is a person’s own self, and on the other is taghut. By the self is meant the inner impulse that constantly seeks pleasure and comfort. It looks for ease at all times. It desires status and superiority. It does not pause to consider what should or should not be done; rather, it moves in whatever direction it feels inclined. This impulse drives a person to do whatever satisfies these desires and to avoid anything that might restrain or challenge them. By taghut is meant the corrupt environment that surrounds a person in the form of misguided customs and social norms, exerting pressure on them. The external forces behind these customs create resistance both directly and indirectly. Indirectly, they shape a situation in which a person feels they have no choice

but to conform and become part of it, as though they cannot survive otherwise. Directly, because in such an environment, rejecting wrong practices and choosing to follow the truth is seen as a challenge to these forces. As a result, those who rise with such a mission face strong opposition, as these forces use all their power to stop them.

When a person moves toward God, he encounters countless obstacles at every step, from within himself to the world outside, from his inner thoughts to the realm of action. At times, they must accept hardship instead of comfort; at other times, they must struggle to break away from prevailing social trends and accept beliefs that may be unpopular at the societal level; at times he must force himself to be content with a meager gain rather than piles of unlawful profit that come his way; at times he must strive to be satisfied with obscurity and humiliation instead of honour and fame; at times he must consent to being deprived of his legitimate rights and real interests. In short,

two different paths lie open before him, and he has complete freedom to go whichever way he chooses. On the one side, everything the world has to offer appears to be available; on the other hand, apparently nothing seems to be gained. His lower self urges him to take the easy path. External forces place their full weight upon him to push him in that direction. Yet despite all this resistance, he abandons the easy and pleasurable path and pulls himself toward the difficult one. This very struggle is called *jihad*.

Some say that bringing about a political revolution is Islam's true objective. Others say it is not an objective but a means. The truth, however, is that it is the outcome of a continuous process. When the faith that arises in the heart expresses itself in righteous action and begins to spread through society, the culmination of that process is what is called an Islamic revolution. It is not something artificial; it emerges naturally as the result of a living process. If sincere and upright individuals exist within a society who actively convey

the truth, then the environment of wrongdoing is gradually weakened, and goodness comes to prevail.

Jihad means removing every challenge that arises in the course of living by one's faith. Since these obstacles come both from within and from outside, a person engaged in *jihad* sometimes struggles against their own self, and at other times works to overcome the challenges of the external world. At times, one must fight one's own desires; at other times, one must critique and confront wrong practices; and at times, one must practically address the challenges that stand in the way of truth.

The Prophet of Islam said: "Strive against your desires just as you strive against your enemies." (*Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Quran*, p. 208)

Raghib al-Isfahani, in light of the Prophetic teachings, said: "Striving is carried out both by the hand and by the tongue." (*Al-Mufradat*, root 'j-h-d')

However, in its true essence, *jihad* is not merely the name of an outward act. Rather, it refers to a particular inner state—a quality of striving through which a person works to overcome the challenges that arise in the path of truth. The outward forms are only expressions of this inner state; they are not, in themselves, the essence of *jihad*.

A person works day and night to write a high-level book on Islam. Outwardly, this appears to be a form of *jihad*. But if his purpose is to gain fame from the book or to earn money, then his action has no value. In the terminology of the Quran, he does not deserve to have his action called *jihad*. On the other hand, while doing a good deed, a wrong thought passes through someone's heart, and he trembles at the idea that this may ruin everything he has done. Tears flow from his eyes, and he cries out without control, O God, do not hand me over to Satan, otherwise I will be destroyed. This is *jihad*.

This point does not apply only to *jihad*; the same holds true for other forms of worship as well. In religion, the acts that are prescribed are not valued merely for their outward form, but for their inner reality. The merits associated with certain forms of remembrance and prayer, the obligations attached to acts of worship, and the importance given to certain moral qualities and actions—so much so that, without them, even a claim to faith is not considered valid—all of this is meant to show what a God-oriented life looks like, not to define God-consciousness by outward forms alone.

What God truly seeks is not that a person merely recites a few words of praise, performs specific rituals in the name of prayer, fasting, or pilgrimage, gives a fixed portion of their wealth to the poor, or conveys His message through speech and writing. No doubt, these are essential practices that form the necessary framework of a God-oriented life, and whenever faith takes shape in human life, it does so

through these very forms—no other structure has been prescribed by God.

But beyond these outward expressions, the real thing that God seeks from people—the quality that makes a person worthy of His mercy—is an inner state of the heart in which a person's thoughts and feelings are fully aligned with God's will. They come to love what God loves and to dislike what God dislikes. They oppose whatever goes against God's will, and for whatever is dear to God, they are ready to sacrifice even their last possession.

These are the demands of Islam, and our eternal future depends on whether we fulfill them or fail to do so. A person who has come to know this reality that there is one God of this world, and who has also believed in the fact that a great Day of Judgment in the Hereafter is surely going to come, when the entire human race is made to stand in the court of God, his desire can be nothing other than that on that terrifying Day of

Judgment, when he stands before the Lord of the universe, God Almighty should say about him that this is My servant who remained loyal to Me in the life of the world. But it is obvious that this position cannot be achieved by mere desire alone. Worldly governments grant a certificate of loyalty only when a person fulfills the prescribed conditions of the state. Then how can God—the Ruler of all rulers, who is absolutely uncompromising about His sovereignty and does not tolerate even the slightest sharing in His divinity—accept anything less, will He be pleased merely by a wish in the heart or a movement of the tongue, and grant someone the honour of loyalty just because he wants it, whether or not he has practically made his loyalty exclusive to Him. The truth is that, like all other forms of loyalty, the desire to become loyal to God also demands a great struggle. In worldly institutions, a person's importance is recognized only when he devotes his best abilities to them. A shop reveals its possibilities of profit to someone only when

a man gives everything he has to it. In the eyes of governments, a person is considered worthy of trust and respect only when they live as a fully loyal citizen. In the same way, in the sight of God, the status of true devotion is granted only to one who completely surrenders to the One God. Just as worldly authorities do not tolerate divided loyalty, God too does not accept any form of associating partners with Him.

Keep this reality before you, and then imagine the Day when you and I, and all those who came before and after us, will be gathered before God—when all voices will fall silent before the Lord of all. On that Day, a person will forget everyone but themselves, even their closest friends and dearest relatives. Only truth will carry weight, and everything else will have lost its value. It will be the Day when a person will regret, wishing they had spent their entire life preparing for it.

This will be the Day of Decision. Between us and that Day lies only death—the death whose timing

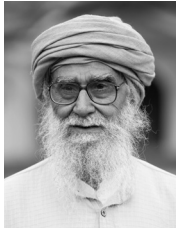
no one knows. Every moment we live today will have consequences that we will face for countless years to come. Each one of us is moving toward an end where there will be either eternal comfort or eternal suffering.

Life is like a slope down which all people are moving rapidly. Every passing moment brings us closer to the final outcome that awaits each of us. We have only a few days of life—days whose consequences will not be limited to millions or billions of years, but will extend into eternity. Its comfort will be beyond measure, and its suffering unbearably painful.

Every time the sun sets, it reduces your life by another day—this life, which is your only opportunity to prepare for the Day to come. Our life is like that of a seller of ice, whose stock melts away with every passing moment. Their success lies in selling their goods before time runs out; otherwise, in the end, nothing will remain, and they will leave empty-handed.

Strive or Struggle (*Jihad*)

So before death separates us from this world—where action is possible—and takes us to the next, where there is no action but only results, we must decide how to use our abilities and energies wisely. One day, we will all stand before the Creator of the universe. Blessed are those who reach their Lord having given their all for the sake of truth in this world, for they will be the first to receive His attention.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925–2021), an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader, and ambassador of peace, was internationally recognized for his seminal contributions to world peace. The Government of India posthumously honored him with the Padma Vibhushan in 2021 for his contributions to spirituality. Maulana authored over 200 books exploring Islam’s spiritual wisdom, the Prophet’s nonviolent approach, Islam’s relationship with modernity, and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran and his commentary on the Quran are widely appreciated for their simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. In 2001, he founded the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International in New Delhi to promote a culture of peace and to share the spiritual message of Islam worldwide. Today, the CPS International network continues to carry this legacy forward.

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Islam is a path of great striving—a continuous journey of sacrifice that begins the moment a person embraces faith and endures until life’s final breath. The first sacrifice is inward: relinquishing cherished ideas and personal inclinations in order to accept the truth. The second unfolds in action, as one strives to live by that truth. Thus, the believer’s life becomes an ongoing struggle—intellectual and practical—carried forward until one completes their appointed span and departs from this world of trial.

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