

## Be a Soldier of Truth

Life is an endless and multi-tiered confrontation between good and evil. It is a battleground in every sense of the word. Almighty Allah says that He created life and death "to put you to the test and see which of you is most virtuous in your deeds" (al-Mulk, 2). As such, this life is the only opportunity to secure the pleasure and blessings of the Creator and the bliss of the Hereafter.

Man is the main protagonist in such a state of affairs. He is the most restive, fretful and anxious being. That is why sometimes, with proper guidance and virtue on-board, man can be like an angel, but at other times, without proper guidance and virtue, he can be worse than devil. He can be the worst and most dangerous animal.

As Aristotle once said, without virtue, man is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the worst with regard to lust and gluttony.

Mark Twain also said that "of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel. He is the only one that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing it." Hence a Latin proverb "Homo homini lupus", which means "A man is a wolf to another man." Both Sigmund Freud and Thomas Hobbes - among others - subscribed to the message of the maxim.

At any rate, life is what life is and what its Creator wanted it to be. It is not what we ineptly perceive, or as a result of our fantasies would like it to be.

Life is an objective reality. It is not simply a subjective state existing in the "mind of the perceiver".

Just like beauty, which is also a dimension of objective reality, and which is not a subjective state present only in the "eye of the beholder". Beauty is what beauty is, regardless of what people might feel and say about it.

We do not - and cannot - live life according to our own limited will and foolish fancies, but according to the infinite will and wise plan of the Creator and Sustainer of life. Life is so beautiful, meaningful and consequential for the former scenario to be the case. Only such as have lost clarity and a sense of purpose and direction, and have allowed their pride and self-centredness to take over instead, can entertain such an incongruous proposition.

Today in the age of globalization and internet when all sorts of corruption and mischief have spread throughout the land, sea, air and space, when Islamophobes dominate the world and public opinion, and when there is so much rule and power concentrated in the wrong hands, which are constantly being used for wrong ends - to be a Muslim, live and defend Islam, is a unique challenge.

Moreover, this is a time when, ironically in the name of progress, civilization and modernity, man kills more of his own kind, destroys more ecosystems, and causes more species to go extinct than any other animal on earth.

Intellectual, spiritual and moral anarchies also reign supreme. Agnosticism, atheism, nihilism and hedonism are the rules of the day. To be sceptical, immoral, faithless and ignorant as regards truth and virtue, is championed as a form of self-worth and integrity. In addition, faith, certainty and righteousness, and their people, are persistently challenged, disparaged and put on endless ontological trial.

Perhaps Nietzsche summed up the sentiment best when he declared that "God is dead." According to him, this life of ours is a largely meaningless business of suffering and striving, driven along by an irrational force that we can call will. Thus, in this purposeless world we should live our lives to the fullest, and get everything we can out of it. It is a never ending vain struggle where only the fittest survives.

In short, this is a time - and Almighty Allah knows best - about which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) warned that: Islam will revert to being strange as it began (so give glad tidings to the strangers); following true Islam will be like grasping a hot coal; true knowledge will be taken away (will vanish) and ignorance will prevail; deceit will be widespread to the point where people will believe liars but disbelieve those who tell the truth, and will trust those who are treacherous but distrust those who are trustworthy; the power and authority will be in the hands of incompetent individuals; intoxicants will be consumed in great quantities; immorality will be prevalent and common; and bloodshed will increase. At the same time, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) highlighted all these as the signs and portents of the end of time and the Day of Judgment.

The problems are so many and so overwhelming that one who is still guided and would like to contribute something for the benefit of Islam, Muslims and the whole world, often tends to lose focus and resoluteness. Yet, his will and even hope are put at stake. Struggling for inspiration and drive, one starts wondering what exactly he can do and whether his small contributions will be of any benefit whatsoever. One wonders how his few drops of goodness can even compare with an ocean of organized and institutionalized malevolence and sin. Before he even starts, such a person wants to give up.

The above attitude is wrong because of the following.

Islam is intentions and efforts, rather than results, oriented. That is fair, because the former is in our hands, whereas the latter is not. It will be unjust to burden a person with that which is beyond his ability and control. It is thus Allah's rule that He does not burden people beyond what they can bear.

In essence, we do not have to change anything. We should only keep trying. We need to take care of ourselves most importantly, that is, of what is precisely under our jurisdiction, and then try of what is possible around us. Allah takes care of the rest, which is beyond us but never escapes His ever-present attention and guardianship.

Our duty is to live and die with knowledge and certitude, responsibly and with honour and dignity. We should always try to be assets, not liabilities. If we cannot be useful and productive, we should not make the situation more difficult.

Furthermore, in the on-going confrontations between good and evil, we do not have to be generals, leaders, or commanders. Being just soldiers of truth - outwardly even anonymous ones - is good enough. Allah knows about everyone, his efforts and contributions, and He knows the extent of everyone's sincerity and purity of his intentions as well as goals. Nothing will be underestimated or wasted. What is important is to participate sincerely, and not to be among those who do nothing, are indecisive and lethargic, and demotivate and weaken others. In Islam, generally, quality takes precedence over quantity, and substance over form.

For example, we hear that the participants in the battle of Badr procured the most remarkable status with Allah, for it was the first and most decisive battle in Islam. However, out of fewer than 400 Muslims who participated, we do not know - or hardly do - many of them. They were simple and little known soldiers and companions of

the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Nonetheless, they were Badr participants, about whom the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Perhaps Allah looked upon the people of Badr and said: 'Do what you wish, for I have forgiven you'" (al-Bukhari and Muslim).

The same could be said about a great many members of all the subsequent historic battles and their martyrs, such as the battles of Uhud, Khandaq, *Fath* or conquest of Makkah, Hunayn, Yarmuk, Qadisiyyah, Constantinople, etc. Many persons were virtually unknown and undistinguished. Nevertheless, they were fighters for the sake of Allah and on His path (soldiers of truth), as a result of which they were granted greatest rewards and highest stations in Paradise.

This is because we are supposed to do things not for people, and not even for ourselves, but for Allah Who is *al-Shakur*, which means the Most Appreciative, the Grateful, the Recognizer and the Rewarder of good, Who multiplies our good deeds and abundantly rewards for yet the slightest good that we do.

In this manner, a person may be unknown or unappreciated on earth, but is highly esteemed and recompensed in the spiritual kingdom. Those who possess this outlook cannot be ensnared by Satan whose primary objective is to dishonour and degrade people and discourage them from doing good. Satan lies in wait and tries to convince people that they are useless and contemptible. Instilling apathy, despondency, pessimism and uncertainty in the minds and hearts of people, without doubt, is Satan's most potent weapon.