

The Use of the Philosophy of Martyrdom within Religious Cults for Acts of Terrorism

“Men reject their prophets and they slay them, but they love their martyrs and honour those whom they have slain.” Fedor Dostoevsky (From Brother Karamajov book 6 Chapter 3)

In the Quran we read that on Judgment Day, God will be just when it comes to ruling between Prophets and Martyrs. Quran 39:69

This is interpreted to mean that some martyrs would stand higher than prophets. But which one of them? Before I go any further, let me emphasize more on the meaning of this saying of Quran, and what it means for an ordinary Muslim? It means that an ordinary Muslim through his actions while he is alive - and with the right kind of death - can change his or her status in front of God and the people, from an ordinary person into someone higher than a prophet.

Martyrdom: the meaning?

Let us first look at the definition of martyr and martyrdom. In the Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions we read: “martyr, literally a witness, from the Greek *martus* meaning ‘witness’. The Christian sense of the term originally applied to those apostles who were eye-witnesses to the life and death of Christ. However, as the Church underwent persecution by the Roman authorities, the term was applied to those who ‘witnessed’ for their faith by knowingly and willingly accepting and undergoing suffering and death¹.

The Islamic use of the term martyr is similar. A martyr is someone who in the words of Ali the fourth Caliph, has forced something hidden to come into the open (from *estezhar*, meaning ‘appeared’. Shariati, Hossein inheritor of Adam page 164,171). He will be witness to an unjust act, to show the tyranny of the rulers, commonly used for those who are killed in a holy war (*jihad*) against unbelievers. In many faiths martyrs are revered, occupying a high place in heaven and acting as heroic figures of inspiration for the faithful.”

Ali Shariati, the modern Shia’s philosopher who inspired millions of young Iranians before the 1979 Iranian revolution, has talked in length, and has written many books, explaining the philosophy of martyrdom. Obviously, I am not able to explain what ever he has said about this single word, but in brief, in his lecture titled ‘Hossein inheritor of Adam’, he defines martyrdom or ***Shahadah*** in the same manner as above. In Arabic or Farsi and I believe in all different languages of Moslems around the word, ***Shahid***, and ***Shahadah*** are from the same root, ***shahed*** or witness. Also the first axiom or principle or condition of being a Moslem is ***Shahadah***, which means every Moslem has to say he or she will be witness that there is no God but God and he or she will be witness that Mohammad is the prophet of God. For any Moslem, the path toward ***Jihad*** and martyrdom starts and ends with these two simple sentences. What these words mean is obvious, easy to say, but very difficult to commit to. A Moslem has to worship only God and nobody else. When you consider that many daily and normal relations between people are, according to Islamic belief, considered as forms of worshiping, you understand that a Moslem is forbidden to worship wealth, power, fame, etc. The second sentence, i.e. witnessing that Mohammad is the prophet

of God, has its consequences as well. It means that you have to believe in the Quran as the word of God and follow it. Also, you should follow the actions of the prophet himself in your daily life. And he or she who gives witness with these words, is not only admitting to them by pronouncing these words, but has to be a witness to their correctness via his or her daily actions and behaviour and eventually with his or her life. And of course those who become witness to these words by becoming **Shahid** or martyr, are securing the highest place for themselves in this world among Moslems and in the afterlife in heaven.

Jason Burke in his book titled *Al – Qaeda*; writes: “On the evening of 10 September, all the hijackers were in position. Each group had a copy of a letter, probably dictated to Abdulaziz al – Omari by Atta. ‘When you board the plane,’ the letter said, ‘remember that this is a battle in the sake of God, which is worth the whole world and all that is in it.’ The hijackers were reminded that, as martyrs, they would be rewarded with paradise: ‘And when zero hour comes, open your chest and welcome death in the cause of God ... And let your last words be: ‘There is no God but God and Mohammed is his messenger²’”

As I mentioned, according to the Quran, not all martyrs are equal, some are higher than others and even higher than prophets; the status of martyrs is so high that they are exempt from certain rituals. For example: according to the common beliefs of Muslims, though everybody, including prophets, when they die, they have to be washed and dressed in clean white sheet, Martyrs do not need these kind of ceremonies, as they have been washed in their blood and their bloodied clothes are as clean as a new white sheet. Again people will not consider them as dead since they will be regarded as being alive in the message that they have revealed through their death, therefore nobody should mourn for them; on the contrary, people should rejoice for their martyrdom and have a happy time.

Different martyrs; different status!

According to Shariati, there are four types of martyr. The first type of martyr are the ones who are on the right path of God, and are witness to the path of God with their behaviour and actions while they are alive; they will be called martyrs when they are killed by the enemies of God. For example, Shariati himself according to many Iranians was killed by the secret police of the Shah in London; therefore many in Iran call him **Shahid Doctor**, as he had a doctorate from Sorbonne University. The second type of martyr are the ones who join Jihad, or holy war, to win but are killed while fighting the enemies of Islam. The famous martyr of this type is **Hamzeh**, uncle of the Prophet who was killed in the Bader war, and his body was mutilated. He is called **Sayed al Shohada**, or master of martyrs. The Third type of martyr according to Shariati are the highest among other types of martyr and they are those who know they will not win and certainly will be killed by the enemy, but still bear witness to their statement of belief and in order to send a message to other Moslems of their time and in the future, they accept suffering and death without any hope for success in their own life time. The greatest symbol of these martyrs is **Hossein**, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, who rejects to **bia’a** with, (or vote for) **Yazid**, the second **Umayyad Caliph**, who was famous for his un-Islamic behaviour and actions. **Hossein**, along with seventy one of his close relatives, was killed by **Yazid** and they all became famously known as the martyrs of **Karbala**. He is also called **Sayed al Shohada**, or master of martyrs and as I mentioned **Shariati** calls him the inheritor of Adam, as according to all **Shia’a** Moslems and many Moslems from other branches of Islam, he is the one who kept the message of all the prophets from Adam to Mohammad alive

and transferred it to later generations. This is why after almost 1300 years he is an inspiration for other Moslems to fight and lose their lives as to become martyrs under his name and his banner, in the way of bearing witness to his message.

Of course **Shariati** and other Islamic experts have mentioned the fourth type of martyr, whom he calls living martyrs. The symbol of these martyrs is **Abu Dharr al Ghafari**, who lived and suffered immensely for standing by his principals and his belief in Islam. He was not killed, since nobody dared to kill one of the close associates of the prophet, but he died because of the hardship that he suffered, so he was witness to God's message not by fighting, as he lived during the rule of the fourth rightly guided caliphs, and not by being killed, but by not surrendering himself to the luxury and norms of his time, that he believed were un-Islamic³.

I guess mentioning the case of **Abu Dharr**, is important as it implies that to become martyr, you don't need to be killed, as long as you don't surrender yourself, and are prepared to pay the price for standing by your word and principals, then you can be called martyr. Who is highest? only God knows and that will be decided on Judgement Day.

To understand status of a martyr among Muslims let me give you few examples: **Mohammed Din Mohammed**, tells us the story of a few Arabs during the fighting between the Afghans and the USSR, He says, those Arabs "fought all day, then when I went to relieve them in the evening the Arabs were crying because they wanted to be martyred, They were saying, 'I must have committed some sin for Allah has not chosen me to go to heaven.' I told them that if they wanted to stay... and fight then I wasn't going to stop them. The next day they were killed. Osama said later that he had told them that the trench was their gate to heaven⁴."

Bernard Lewis, tell us another story from 11th century **Assassins**, when a mother member of this group hears that her son has been killed, "she rejoiced, and anointed her eyelids with kohl, and was full of joy; then after a few days her son returned unharmed, and she grieved, and tore her hair and blackened her face⁵."

Why? because the survival of her son meant that he was not worthy of martyrdom, perhaps because of a sin committed by him? But certainly it meant that he had not won the greater Jihad of self-cleansing and had not been accepted by God.

Charles Allen tells us story of the happiness of mothers when they heard of the martyrdom of their sons in 1915 in Jihad of Wahhabi against the British: "Local Women came out singing Pashto battle songs with their pipes and drums... A mother would kiss the forehead of her Shahid (Martyr) son. A sister would cry out of happiness for her shahed brother and the wives would hug their shahed husbands, they would sing to their beloved, 'go, we have handed you over to Allah. Because you are a shahed, go and enjoy paradise. But do not forget us for Allah's sake. Ask Allah that he give the ability to your brothers as well, that they might follow in your footsteps⁶."

Reason behind martyrdom

I understand many of you who don't believe in God, whether as a Christian, Jew or Moslem, are puzzled or confused when you hear that young men and women kill themselves in the name of God and religion. I have seen many western writers describing the reason behind the actions of these people, if not as some kind of madness, but with the intention of going to heaven, where, according to the myths told to the western audience, each martyr can have 72 virgin girls to serve him. In this way, unfortunately, many writers in the west have simplified the reason behind the

actions of these men and women and limited it to madness, or some sort of sexual complex. I assure you if these stories were true and the reason behind actions of these people were as simple as these researchers and writers claim they are, then facing this problem, would be very easy and at least their actions could not have a message and followers. (For example Paul L. Williams describes Heaven as below: “Paradise, particularly for martyrs, is really heaven. It consists of one vast garden, watered by peaceful streams and shaded with spreading fruit trees, Martyrs will be dressed in silk robes and will be served by handsome attendants. They will drink wine (forbidden on Earth) and never suffer a hangover. In addition, every martyr will be granted 72 *houris* (virgins) as reward. These maidens ‘with swelling breasts and modest gaze’ will cater to every desire of the blessed.”⁷

Well I assure you this is nonsense, not true, not at least according to the Islam that many Moslems believe in and majority of those who rightly or wrongly have lost their lives believing that they will be a martyr.

Being prepared to lose your life for a cause or belief or as witness to a truth, might be difficult for some to understand or accept, but certainly it is not strange nor is it a new phenomena and is not restricted to religious people.

When **Achilles** was asked to join the expedition of **Troy**, his mother, **Thetis** warns him that he will be killed in that war. He faces two choices, one having a long happy earthly life, the second dying violently in the war of **Troy**, but becoming a legend in history, and which one did he choose, you know the answer.

Recently perhaps, against the wishes of many Iranians, you have gone and seen the movie called ‘**300**’. Well although this movie outraged all Iranians and even though according to its writer and **Warner Brothers** its producers it is a fantasy and is not true, but there is a true story behind it. The story is, that around 300 **Spartan**, even though they knew they would all be killed, still decided to stand against tens of thousands of the Persian army. They were all killed and became immortal in Greek history. The same story happened when **Alexander** attacked Persia, **Ario Barzan** and a few hundred of his soldiers stood in front of 30 thousand strong army of Alexander and were all killed in that battle. These people knew they would not win, they knew they would be killed, but still willingly chose to stand and fight. Instead of surrendering themselves to the enemy, they accepted being killed, not for heaven and 72 virgins, but for an idea, which in their case was a nationalistic one. Again, from history we have the story of **Spartacus**, who famously said that he wanted to be crucified last in order to suffer the most. Again, he accepted death not for heaven but for a word called freedom. We have another example in Persian mythology; we call it story of **Arash KamanGir**, (**Arash**, who was the best archer). The story says that the Iranian army and the enemy agreed that instead of fighting they would ask Arash to launch an arrow which, wherever it landed, would establish the boundary between the two countries. Knowing he would die, Arash put every last drop of his energy into using his bow and arrow and died in the effort.

As you can see, these kinds of martyrdom are not for winning in the battle, or even winning a place in heaven. It is done for some kind of responsibility toward your people, your country, or your belief, and as a result has a message. These kinds of martyrdom find wings and carry the message of the martyr to different people and even to different time, as Greeks, Persians, Christians, and Moslems after thousands years read the stories of their martyrs and tell these stories to their children and find new incentive to stand up for their countries and stand by their beliefs.

Now let us go back to the idea of the different types of martyr. I am not going to talk about the first and second type of martyrdom since their message is obvious. As I

mentioned, the most important type of martyrdom is the third kind, when a martyr knows that he cannot win but still accepts to fight and die, even perhaps very violently and with a painful death, just in order to send a message to other people even to other countries or perhaps even to other generations.

Heaven or Hell – the meaning of *Jihad*

I remember well, one of the sayings of one of the Mojahedin's martyrs: 'thinking of martyrdom when you can stand and fight and perhaps win, is an opportunistic thought'. Many experts go much further and call this kind of death not martyrdom but suicide, one of the Islamic taboos, a crime which guarantees a place in the bottom of the Hell for those who dare to commit to it. One of the sayings of the prophet **Muhammad** about suicide is as follows: "The Prophet said: 'He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the fire of Hell forever and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself in the fire of Hell.'"⁸

As you see the difference between martyrdom and suicide is the difference between Heaven and Hell. Therefore one might ask how one can be sure that when he dies he would be considered in the eyes of God as a martyr and not as someone who committed suicide.

Many find the answer in the definition of *Jihad* or holy war. They say that if you are killed in the path of *Jihad*, you are martyred, otherwise you have died, or even worse, if you knew that by committing an action that certainly will result in you dying and that action is not part of *Jihad*, then you have committed an act of suicide and the punishment is to remain in Hell forever. Of course this is a general idea found in all the different **Abrahmic** faiths. For example, when **Pop Urban II** in 1095 called for the liberation of the Holy land, he promised the volunteers, remission of their sins. In this way, warriors were victorious whether they won their earthly battles or not. To fall in battle was to die a martyr for the faith and gain immediate access to heaven despite past sins⁹.

Though many expert including **Shariati**, see in the concept of Martyrdom a different idea and responsibility from the concept of *Jihad* and recognize only the second type of Martyrdom, i.e. being killed in a battle related to *Jihad*, still, to separate martyrdom from suicide, one has to know what *Jihad* means. The struggle against **Zulm** (oppression) is jihad, the root of the word is the Arabic *jhd*, meaning effort, struggle, and endeavour or striving. The word *Ijtihad*, the effort to interpret, comes from the same root.

I am sure many of you have heard that Muslims believe in to two forms of *Jihad* or holy war, namely a greater one and a lesser one. **Greater Jihad** in simple words is a jihad against oneself. One **Hadith**, (**Mohammad's** sayings), explains the greater Jihad. He says: "We return from the little jihad to the great jihad, the more difficult and crucial effort to conquer the forces of evil in oneself and in one's own society in all the details of daily life." Later I hope to explain more about greater jihad and how it has been misused within terrorist cults. But let me first start with lesser *jihad*, which has been divided into different forms of *jihad*; a defensive one and an offensive one. Talking about defensive jihad is not very difficult, as all Moslems believe that it is the right of any Moslem to defend the land of Islam against an enemy and occupation. In the **Quran 22-39** we read: "Permission to fight is granted to those who are being persecuted. Since injustice has befallen them, God is certainly able to support them. They were evicted from their homes unjustly, for no reason than saying, 'Our Lord is God'". Therefore it is obvious that not only you are permitted to defend yourself but

defending your homeland from occupation is the responsibility of any Muslim; though, I have to warn you; in Islam we don't have the concept of nationhood. For many Muslims; boundaries created by Europeans during past hundred years do not mean much. Although they might have different passports from different modern countries, when it comes to defending the land of Islam, they feel the same if Muslims are attacked in any part of the Islamic world. Muslims within their community or ummah, have a sense of tribalism. But not in the modern idea of nationalism exported to the east from the west. Among Muslims perhaps only Iranians have a very strong sense of nationalism which is separate from being Muslim, mainly because of their pre Islamic history of which they are very proud and also because of being Shia'a, so not accepting any caliph after Ali, including the Ottoman rulers. Still, even as an Iranian, I can surely say many people from my generation became politicized mainly because of the 1967 Arab- Israeli war and occupation of Jerusalem by the Israelis, even though it had nothing to do with us as Iranians and as a matter of fact our ruler at the time, **Shah** had the best kind of relation with Israel which might explain part of the reason of his downfall.

In short, being Muslim for a Muslim, not only means as it would for a Christian who would also be, for example, British. Therefore it gives them both feelings; perhaps it is almost the same as being a Jew, while it has nothing to do with the race of people. Back to our discussion, almost all Moslems, while some, because of political reservations, might not admit it, believe it is their right to defend the land of Islam if it is attacked or occupied by foreigners and if they do and are killed in this war, they will be martyred. Perhaps understanding this idea, you can realize why many Muslims cannot condemn the struggle of the Palestinians against Israel, and you might understand how wrong it is to brand them as terrorist as Al Qaeda, which many Muslims did agree that they are terrorist, certainly the day after 9/11. The difference is that what is happening in Israel, though killing of women and children and unarmed civilian strictly has been forbidden and condemned by the prophet and four rightly guided Caliphs, still many justify it as the only means available for Palestinians to defend themselves and their homeland, and especially Jerusalem the third holiest place in the Islamic world.

Rules of Jihad;

Muslims generally realize that *Jihad* has its rules and conditions. In the Quran God has emphasized that no one should violate these rules and overrule them. **Abu Baker** the first Caliph after the prophet, referring to the Quran and the prophet's sayings, instructed those who wished to consider themselves Muslim soldiers, 'Do not betray; do not carry grudges; do not deceive; do not kill children; do not kill elderly; do not kill women; do not destroy beehives or burn them; do not cut down fruit bearing trees; do not slaughter sheep, cattle or camels except for food. You will come upon people who spend their lives in monasteries, leave them on what they have dedicated their lives¹⁰ ... Furthermore, **Ali** the fourth Caliph set out more rules to put a stop to killing, including safeguarding POWs. He says: "No one turning his back shall be pursued; No one wounded shall be killed; Who ever throw away his arms is safe." 'Ali had pardoned with goodness. The dead from both sides were buried, only captured arms and animals could be held as war booty¹¹.

But what happened in 9/11 in the USA and then in Spain and in Britain, and now even in Moslem countries, such as; Iraq, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt, is altogether a different phenomenon. To explain that and how the concept of Jihad and Martyrdom has been misused by Al-Qaeda and other Terrorist Cults, I have to talk about two

different concepts, first, the view of different sects of Islam toward aggressive Jihad, and then the use of religion as an ideology within different Cults.

Jihad and different sects of Islam

View of different sects of Islam toward aggressive Jihad; Jihad outside of Islamic land, and Jihad against a Muslim ruler:

When it comes to different sects of Islam, I have to say that many orientalist feel they are expert enough to divide Muslims as they wish. Some divide the world of Islam into two different sects, Sunni and Shia'a. Some, inspired by the rise of fundamentalism within Christianity and in the USA, have used the same term, in my view wrongly, to describe some Muslims. In 'Civil Democratic Islam by Cheryl Benard published by National security research division of RAND, Muslims have been divided according to their position toward democracy into four groups: "Fundamentalists, Traditionalists, Modernists, and Secularists" While in reality Muslims are not divided because of their belief in God or the prophet or the Quran or even much of sayings of the prophet, but according to their type of Jurisprudence, this is why in Islam we don't have priests as **mediator** between man and God; but '**Fagieh**' or Jurists or '**Olma**' experts in religion. In this respect, there are many more different sects within Islam, some say 72 different sect; while five most important ones are **Hanafi, Malki, Shafai, Shia'a and Hanbali**. When it comes to aggressive Jihad, Jihad in outside of land of Islam or Jihad against a Muslim ruler; the first four sects of Islam agree that it has stopped or ended with either the martyrdom of **Imam Ali**, the fourth rightly guided Caliph, or the killing of the last **Abbasid** Caliph by Mongols, or some believe by the end of the Ottoman Caliphate. Anyhow, what is important is that all except the **Hanbali** sect believe these kinds of **Jihad** in the absence of a **just Caliph**, are forbidden, and we have to wait for **Mahdi**, or **Jesus** to come and order believers to rise up against infidels and unjust rulers. Even **Ahmad bin Hanbal**, the ninth century jurist who gave his name to the most restrictive sect of Islam, with the fewest followers, took the same view as others toward Jihad. In 1258 the Mongols overthrew the historic caliphate of Baghdad and went on to make the lands of the Middle East part of Great Khans Empire. One of the many caught up in this conquest was a **Hanbali** jurist named **Sheikh IBN Taymiyya**, born in what is now Syria in 1263. He declared himself qualified to be a **Mujtahid**, the one who can rule on new ideas in Islam including a new definition for Jihad.

Ibn Taymiyya, declared the Prophet's division of jihad to be inauthentic, on the grounds that it contradicted the words of God as set down in the Quran, (**Quran; 2-193 and 8-39**) **Ibn Taymiyya** defined jihad in strictly literal terms; as unrelenting struggle against all who stood in the way of Islam's destiny. He also divided the world into two different camps, **Dar al Islam**, and **Dar al Harb**, land of peace and Moslems, and land of war, where infidels live and Moslems should fight with them and defeat them all. "**Ibn Taymiyya** classified the enemies of Islam into four distinct groups, infidels such as Christians, with whom it was permissible to make peace agreements and share meals, whose women Muslims might marry and whose lives might be spared after they had surrendered or taken prisoner; second, those Muslims who had reverted to infidel habits, with whom no peace could be made and who must be fought if they refused to return to the fold; third, those who declared themselves Muslims but were not carrying out Islam's rituals properly, and were therefore to be killed without mercy; lastly, those who rejected Islam while still claiming to belong to it, and were thus deserving of no mercy under any circumstances¹²."

Ibn Taymiyya's intolerant ideology was widely condemned in his own lifetime. He was frequently in trouble with the religious authorities, imprisoned on several occasions and branded a heretic. His theology has never found a place in the Moslem mainstream. But it was never forgotten and it continued to attract radical Moslems in different part of Islamic countries, the most famous one was the Arab named **Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab**, born in Nejd of Arabia soon after the beginning of the eighteenth century 1701.

I am afraid I do not have enough time to talk about history of **Wahabism**; the only thing that I have to mention is that soon **Abd al Wahhab** recruited **Muhammad Ibn al Saud, Emir** of the main tribe of **Nejd**, and jointly they conquered all the different tribes of **Nejd**. And later with the help of the British, the second generation of **Al Saud** and **Wahhabists** fought against the Othmanian Empire, and captured all Arabia to create today's **Saudi Arabia** with the official religion of **Wahabism**, sometime called **Salafid**. **Abd al Wahhab**, rejected all innovation (**Bidat**) and declared there to be one interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, he rejected all different sects of Islam and called their followers unbelievers and blasphemers, Now you realize how it is possible for Al Qaeda members to kill so many Muslims in Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, etc without the slightest regret, as in their view they are not Muslim as they don't follow their brand of Islam. According to **Abd al Wahhab** there was only one course of action open to those who regard themselves as true Muslims. They had first to swear absolute loyalty to their religious leader, secondly, to follow his teaching in every respect; thirdly, to join him in armed jihad against all apostates, blasphemers and unbelievers; and fourthly, to hate those same apostates, blasphemers and unbelievers. In return they were promised the protection of God and the love and companionship of their fellow believers, and were assured an immediate ascent to heaven should they die as martyrs while striving for Islam? There was no other path to salvation.

Some might like to describe **Wahhabists** as fundamentalist, but I agree more with Charles Allen that they are more the new **Puritans** or Moslem **Protestants** than fundamentalists, they, even as **Luther** and **Calvin**, accepted some sort of separation between church and state. Allen writes: "Although **Al-Wahhab's** main targets were the **Sufis** and the **Shia's**; many of the most popular practices of **Sunni** Islam were also condemned as innovations or reversions to paganism. They included a host of expressions of religious devotion that had developed over the centuries ... At this time, many everyday habits were also declared sinful, among them smoking tobacco or hashish, dancing, playing music, fortune telling, dressing in silks, wearing talismans. Shaving the beard, wearing robes that failed to show the ankle ... much else besides was declared un-Islamic. But the parallels with Puritanism go only so far. According to the Wahhabi code, the moment a Muslim deviated from Al-Wahhab's interpretation of monotheism he became an unbeliever – and the moment he became an unbeliever his or her life and goods became forfeit. 'Any doubt or hesitation', states the book of Unity, (*Kittab al Tawhid*), deprives a man of immunity of his property and his life'."¹³

After the failure of Arab nationalism under **Gamal Nasser** in Egypt, after 1967 humiliating defeat of Arabs by Israel, we witnessed the rise of Islamic movements mainly inspired by Wahabism. Though it might not be exactly the same, **Sayyid Qutb**, an influential member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the so called 'father of the new Wahhabi movements', in his most influential work, *Milestones*, maintained that all Christians and Jews are destined for hell. But his fiercest polemics were directed against Muslims who did not abide by the teaching of the faith (**Salafi** –the righteous

ancestors), almost all Muslim rulers had to be resisted and overthrown. Furthermore, using terms used by the Quran for naming Arabs before Islam as **Jahillyya** (ignorant); **Qutb** said, ‘a vanguard must march through the vast ocean of **Jahillyya** which encompasses the whole world. Unless they separate themselves from the influence of the **Jahillyya**, they too will be contaminated and unable to follow the true path followed by the **Salaf**. ‘We must free ourselves from the clutches of the **Jahillyya** society¹⁴.’

This is another justification for an **Al –Qaeda’s** member to show no hesitation in killing fellow Muslims as well as Christians and Jews, as, they believe the majority of Muslims have lost the path of **Salafi** and have changed into unbelievers, or **Kafir**, and therefore deserve to be killed as other unbelievers.

To understand the rise of Wahabism which is now called Salafism, in India and now in Pakistan and Afghanistan and, I am afraid, in Europe, I have to mention another classmate of **Abd al Wahhab** who was called **Shah Waliullah of Delhi**. Born in 1703, no body knows for sure whether these two had been friends of one another while studying in Medina or not, but what is sure is that the same idea as Wahabism was introduced into India by Shah Waliullah, which resulted in many uprisings against the British both there and in Afghanistan. Later **Syed Ahmad of Rae Bareli** (1786-1831) unified the idea of Abd al Wahhab with Shah Waliullah which, in Pakistan and India and Afghanistan, is now referred to as followers of **Deo Bandis**. **Deo Bandis** were formed in the mid nineteenth century in reaction to the challenge posed by British power and Hindu demographic superiority over Indian Muslims. In this they follow the pattern of revivalist and reformist movements within Islam reacting to external threats. **Medressas**, or religious schools, were recognized in imitation of European educational institutions. They were staffed by paid teachers or mullahs who ran classes offering a sequential curriculum. The students mostly joining these **Medressas** from age five, were know as **Taliban**, a plural of an Arabic word **Talib**, meaning seekers of knowledge or students. In 1879 there were only 12 **Deobandi Medressas** in whole India and Afghanistan. By 1967 the number of Medressas reached 9,000 across south Asia. Then, thanks to the war against the USSR, help from the CIA and the petrol dollars of the Saudis and a number of teachers sent from Saudi to Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Indonesia, the number of Medressas built and the number of Taliban educated by these schools rose sharply. By 1988 nearly 400,000 boys and young men were being educated by **Deobandi** in Pakistan alone¹⁵.

Cult and Terrorism:

If we note that Deobandi Mullahs believed in changing the situation from below and not above, meaning concentrating on educating young children, instead of struggling for power from above. Also that Wahhabists mullahs somehow separated religion from government by realising the Emir or king as the head of an executive branch of government and limiting their own share of government only to ministries of Education, Justice, and Hajj, we face a new question, and that is, how Al-Qaeda, and Taliban in Afghanistan became so politicised and how they were able to justify their Terrorist actions not only in countries under occupation by non Muslims, but expanding that into non Islamic land, such as the UK and USA, and also Muslim lands ruled by Moslems such as Egypt or Algeria or Morocco or recently even Nigeria, ...? How could they persuade their followers to ignore all Islamic norms and limits, and do whatever they were asked to?

The answer to these questions doesn't lie in understanding Islam or the different sects of Islam, but the relation between Cults and Terrorism.

Religious cults are not a new phenomena; their history goes back perhaps to the beginning of the history of mankind. The history of cults within Islam and the use of Terrorism within this concept, perhaps go back to the group called **Kharijites**, with their first victim, the Fourth rightly guided Caliphate, **Ali** who was killed while he was praying. **Kharijites** were perhaps the first Cult like organisation within Islam who believed they could change things from above by assassination and violent uprisings against the rulers of their time; they were responsible for many terrorist acts during 7th to 11th century. They are probably also the first organisation within Moslems who changed Islam into an **Ideology** and used it in justifying their own actions. The second most famous violent or terrorist cult within Islam was famously known as **Assassins**. **Assassins** have a fascinating history and many books have been written about them; I don't intend to go through them, though one important phenomenon about Assassins which is related to the title of this speech is the suicide attacks they committed. Therefore we might even be able to call **Assassins** the initiator of the modern suicide operations of Terrorist Cults; **Bernard Lewis** writes: "In 1192 the daggers of the **Assassins**, which had already struck down a number of Muslim princes and officers, found their first Crusader victim. **Conrad of Montferrat**, King of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. This murder made a profound impression among the Crusaders, and most of the chroniclers of the Third Crusades have something to say about the dreaded sectaries, their strange beliefs, their terrible methods, and their redoubtable chief, 'I shall now relate things about this elder', says the German chronicler **Arnold of Lubeck**, 'which appear ridiculous, but which are attested to me by the evidence of reliable witnesses. This Old Man (*Pir* - Guru of Assassins) has by his witchcraft (which nowadays we might call manipulation of mind or brainwashing) so bemused the men of his country, that they neither worship nor believe in any God but himself. Likewise he entices them in a strange manner with such hopes and with promises of such pleasures with eternal enjoyment that they prefer rather to die than to live. Many of them even, when standing on a high wall, will jump off at his nod or command, and, shattering their skulls, die a miserable death. The most blessed, so he affirms, are those who shed the blood of men and in revenge for such deeds themselves suffer death. When therefore any of them have chosen to die in this way, murdering someone by craft and then themselves dying so blessedly in revenge for him, he himself hands them knives which are so to speak, consecrated to this affair, and then intoxicates them with such a potion that they are plunged into ecstasy and oblivion, displays to them by his magic certain fantastic dreams, full of pleasures and delights, or rather of trumpery, and promises them eternal possession of these things in reward for such deeds"¹⁶

Assassins who were active in the whole Middle East during 11th to 13th centuries; during the occupation of Iran by Turks, in order to force their volunteers for suicide operations, and so as not to think about anything but their goal and objectives, used to castrate the volunteers. One of those suicide attackers of the eleventh century explains why castration was necessary for him to be prepared for martyrdom: Shirzad says: "the most difficult job done by man during his life time, is to overcome his sexual desire, this is why it is called the great Jihad; if one can overcome this desire, he is able to do anything. There are many who can endure many tortures, but are weak when it comes to sexual desire and will break at this point. This is why to love martyrdom, we should reject life and it's most joyful act sex"¹⁷.

Interestingly, the Mojahedin, the organization that I was a member of for almost seventeen years, had almost the same idea about the relation between sex and preparation for dying or becoming a martyr. They were not castrating us as it is not practical in modern day to castrate thousands of young men; instead they forced their followers; men and women alike, into celibacy. In a single day, the guru or leader of the organization asked us, all of us except himself, to divorce our spouses and forget about sex as long as we are alive. This order was given with the pretext that this was necessary for overthrowing Iranian Regime and for materialization of his rule over the Iranian people. We did as he said and all of us, in a single day, decided to forget about sex, emotions and feelings toward our families, as long as we are alive.

Jason Burke in his book titled *Al Qaeda* writes about **Qutb** co-founder of the Muslim Brotherhood: “Qutb remained celibate for the rest of his life - like Jamal al Din Afghani, who threatened to castrate himself when it was suggested he should marry, and Mohammed Atta -¹⁸”.

Obviously if you can forget about one natural instinct, i.e. sex, then it shouldn't be so difficult to be able to forget about the other one, preservation of life.

How could Assassins accept castration and dying so easily and willingly and how could Mojahedin's members including myself accept forgetting about love, emotion, and sex, has nothing to do with religion Islam or otherwise; but lies in understanding of how cults work and act.

Aims and objectives of Cults:

Within almost all cults, members are introduced to three different aims and goals; first ideological or philosophical; a reason for existence, life, an objective of creation of life and mankind, and the aim of history and evolution.

Second is the political aim and objective, which, one might say, in the case of political, terrorist cults, such as Assassins, Al-Qaeda or Mojahedin, is igniting the attraction of a person towards a cult. Though I have to emphasize that this is not always the case as different people might be attracted toward a cult through other incentives such as ideological or personal goals.

Third is the personal aim, which for many who are attracted into a religious cult, could be martyrdom. Or victory in self cleansing or, as Muslims call it, the great Jihad.

Greater Jihad in the service of the lesser one:

Therefore, martyrdom is not only a **means** or a way of reaching your **goal**, it is your personal aim and desire as well. Here comes the twist within religious cults, the **great Jihad**, while it is the great one, will be in the service of the lesser one. Let me remind you again of the sayings of Prophet Mohammad who, when he finished lesser Jihad, announced that now the great Jihad, i.e. fighting against evils within yourself, starts. Contrary to this saying, we see and hear in cults, that, while they don't deny the existence of **great Jihad**, they say that to be prepared for Jihad against oppressors, Imperialism, the enemy, and reaching your final personal goal of martyrdom, and being worthy of it, you have to go through great Jihad, and cleanse yourself from the evils of modern society or as Qutb used to say the evils of **Jahillyya**. Hence, the action commonly known as brainwashing within a cult, finds a new name, and a very important one, as great Jihad. To fathom this twist, one might recall the following saying about **Ali** the fourth rightly guided caliph, who in the battlefield had to choose between greater and lesser jihad and he chose the former. They say: "Ali was fighting with an enemy who spat on him; Ali took his sword and did not strike him. When the

war ended, the companions asked him why he did not strike that person, so he said: 'when he spat on me, I was afraid to strike him out of egoistic revenge for myself, so I pulled my sword out. I wanted this to be for the sake of God.'

How can you go through greater Jihad or cleanse yourself from wrong teachings of the society. In all different cults the first things they teach you is that you were wrong, all your wants, desires, hopes, understandings, even emotions, and feelings and your logic were all wrong, a product of the manipulation of your mind by society or Jahillyya; to be worthy of reaching those three goals you have to cleanse yourself from your past. How? By sacrificing - which starts from simple material ownership to your personal emotions and relations, to your love life and eventually your life.

Cults: Ideology; organization; Guru.

How can cults separate you from your feelings, emotions, natural instincts, understanding, your past and eventually yourself. Sometimes this is called brainwashing or, as we read from somebody who witnessed the actions of members of Assassins, as the effect of some kind of narcotic. The answer lies in understanding how cults work:

I believe any cult has three characteristics, one is its ideology, the second is the organisation, and the third is the guru or leader. Modern cults from Christian ones such as **Branch of Dravidian sect**, followers of **David Koresh**, to Moslem ones such as Mojahedin of Iran or Al-Qaeda, or even the peaceful Buddhist ones, in order to be called a cult have to have these three elements; which I believe, because of their structure and form of behaviour, what they have in common among themselves is more important and crucial, than what they have in common with their fellow ordinary Christians or Moslems or Buddhists. The first element that all cults have to have, is some kind of ideology, which unfortunately many confuse it with the religion with the same name and the same rituals, such as Islam or Christianity; while the main difference is that religion is in the service of man and society, while in the case of ideology, it is the opposite, i.e. man and society are in the service of ideology. While ideology, itself claims that it is in the service of higher good of whole human beings, existence, history or God.

This is why in religion; the life of even one human being or further, any being, is so precious, as the Quran says, killing of a human beings unjustly is like killing a nation. While in ideology the lives of thousands and even millions can be spared without any hesitation. As matter of fact when it comes to cults, either one like Assassins from Middle Ages or modern one like Mojahedin of Iran or Al-Qaeda, life is the most worthless commodity, whether the life of the prey of terrorism or the life of a member of a cult. Both are some sort of means in the service of aims of the cult. In Paul Amir's Lord of Elumut, we read that all Assassins had to have piece of essence of opium under their tongue to swallow after killing their victim, Mojahedin members too, had to have a capsule of Cyanide under their tongue to break it and kill themselves if they were facing arrest by the authorities.

This is why I believe the biggest mistake of the west including western intellectuals is to characterise cults by the name of their ideology rather than being a cult; naming them Moslem or Christian instead of isolating them from mainstream Muslims, makes them one of them, and sometimes, even, as symbolic or representative of their community.

The second element is the organization of a cult, which I am afraid, contrary to common belief is not a complex one but a simple one. This is why, when you attack them and you think that you have destroyed them, on the contrary, what have you

done is you have broken it into smaller organisations so that each one of them can then grow into another adult and big cult like organisation. As Jason Burke says; after destruction of Al – Qaeda bases in Afghanistan, now we are facing many fragmented organisations all under auxiliary umbrella of Al – Qaeda; that makes it much harder to fight.

The third element is the guru, leader, emir, or what ever you wish to call him or her. Again, contrary to common belief, while the guru in a cult is very important, they are not irreplaceable; it means the system of hierarchy within the organisation of a cult can guarantee the replacement of a guru if he or she is killed or dies of natural causes. Therefore who he or she is, is not as important as that he or she exists and can exist. Now as an example; Al-Qaeda, was a small cult in Sudan or Afghanistan, with an unknown cult leader called Bin Laden; now thanks to US and British foreign policy, it has become a source of attraction for all those Muslims who might justly be unhappy with the foreign policy of America toward Middle East issues; and certainly most Wahhabis in Pakistan and Arab countries. So, to face them, instead of facing a small cult, now one has to face millions if not tens of millions of Muslims. Bin Laden, perhaps, has become the most famous person in the whole world; creating a branch of Al-Qaeda in any country has become as easy as ‘copy and paste’ in computing; and all these small cult like organizations can grow like mushroom and have an umbrella organization - sometimes without any physical connection - called Al-Qaeda, with a common leader who, for now is Bin Laden, but can be changed in the case of his death, without much turbulence.

Martyrdom as an asset for a cult:

As I mentioned; within Muslim cults, action taken to change the character of new advocates has found new name; i.e. the Greater Jihad which is in the service of Martyrdom, which itself is in the service of lesser jihad. Therefore, within a cult, somebody is worthy of Martyrdom if he or she has gone through Greater Jihad and has cleansed himself or herself from the evils of modern society. And if they become martyred, it will be symbol of their success in their Greater Jihad worthy of celebration.

Martyrdom for the majority of people from different faiths and nationalities might be an honour, an example of people standing by their values and principals; and perhaps for some the promise of heaven. Some even might believe that their martyred friend or relative, as has been promised by some mullahs, can take seventy of their family and friends to heaven with themselves. But for a cult like **Assassins** in 11th century or **Al-Qaeda** or **Mojahedin of Iran**, martyrs are the **greatest assets of all**. They gain legitimacy for their goals and the rightness of their path by the number of their martyrs and how brave they were or how horribly they were killed. Let me remind you that Shahed or Martyr comes from the word meaning ‘to witness’, therefore martyrs of a cult are witness to the values, goals, and means of that cult; with their blood they carry the message of the cult. This is why their names, their stories, their message, are nowadays recorded on video and DVDs or are posted on internet sites as the most priceless belongings of a cult. They have to record these names and wills of the martyrs and print them in high quality papers not only as to safeguard their capital but also as a new incentive for new recruiters. Paul Emir and Bernard Lewis mention in their books about Assassins; how important the list of names of martyrs was for that organisation¹⁹ and in modern day Iran we can see the Mojahedin’s list of martyrs as their flag of glory and honour. Azzam, perhaps the spiritual leader of Bin Laden, wrote an address to one of their martyrs: “everything in your soul used to speak that

you were the next to be a martyr. There were your brothers who shared with you the pains of the path of sacrifice, the sweat and blood, under the shower of bullets and the thunder of cannons, to awaken an umma whose depths was filled by weakness. I sensed in my depths that you would be a Shahid. O Yahya! Your fragrant blood began to flow and not a single person that touched your body or perfumed themselves with drops of your blood remained without the smell of musk filling their noses. You refused to let the Muslims' honour be violated, their support reduced or their victory be trampled on. You did not sit by patiently while the Muslims were being humiliated ... rather you advanced to Allah, steadfast.'

Azzam quoted what he said was Senyor's last letter to his family: 'Despite the airplane, the tanks, and the shelling day and night, and the intense cold and the hunger, I am happy and peaceful, because I feel that I am doing the most beloved acts to Allah, and Allah rewards those who act. This Jihad is the only way that man can present to Allah acts which please him and to return to this Umma its full honour.'²⁰ Why martyrs are so important? Mojahedin's leader says it all by few words to his enemy: 'for any person you take from us and make him or her Shahid; he or she will be replaced by hundred if not thousand.'

Suicide bombers:

Although one might say that the modern history of suicide attacks started with the Japanese Kamikazes. But I think the new phenomenon called suicide bombers started with the Mojahedin's suicide attacks against Iranian authorities during 1980's. Let me read part of the will of one of them mentioned in the publication of MKO 19th of June 1982, Gohar AdabAvaz. She killed the Friday Prayer Imam of Shiraz after praying with a few others who were present there. She writes in her will, "I don't think my life belongs to me, it belongs to God and the people and the Mojahedin organization. If a new path can be opened with my life, then I will be very happy that I be small token in this path. I have chosen this path knowingly, and am waiting that moment of martyrdom, impatiently."

Let me conclude that the use of the rich philosophy of martyrdom within a cult has given new meaning to martyrdom; it has changed it into new tools for materialization of the goals of the cult.

For example in 2003 when the co-leader of the Mojahedin; Maryam Rajavi was arrested for few days in France, eleven members of the organization set themselves on fire in front of the French embassies in several countries and two of them, one in London, were killed as a result.

Tom Spender, in new shoppers, writes about one of those who set himself on fire in London but survived. He writes:" Hamid, 21, of Lanacre Avenue, Grahame Park, was one of several Iranians across Europe to register the most extreme of protests at the arrest in France of about 160 members of the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI) - including the group's leader Maryam Rajavi.... What followed stunned the Western world. Images of men and women silhouetted in flames on the streets of London and Paris dominated the television news. One Iranian in London, Neda Hassani, a 26-year-old Canadian computer science student, later died of her burns. Another woman in Paris also died." When Hamid is asked why did he set himself on fire? He replies:" "I wanted to shock the world. Injustices are committed all over the world but most of them are not reported well." And when he asked if he regret? He replies:" It was definitely worth it. I have not for one second thought that I shouldn't have done it."

If they can set themselves on fire over the arrest of their leader, what can stop them from using martyrdom as a means for any end?



Self burning of a Mojahedin's member in Paris after arrest of Maryam Rajavi. 2003



Self burning of another member of Mojahedin in Paris 2003



A scene from ceremony of signing an oath with Mojahedin's leader in Iraq.



Another scene from ceremony of signing an oath with Mojahedin's leader in Iraq.

Cults and new meaning for old ideas

Modern Cults have given new meaning not only to martyrdom but Jihad, both greater and lesser. They have superseded the religious conditions put on these terms, such as conditions put on Jihad or who is an enemy. According to the cult's definition there is no grey area, either others are with you or are against you. Al Qaeda, and Wahabism divides the world between **Dar al Islam** and **Dar al Harb**, and the Mojahedin of Iran divide all Iranians between followers of themselves and followers of the Iranian Regime, either you are with them, or with the enemy. If you are with them and are killed you will be martyred and go to heaven, and if you are not with them, then you are with the enemy and if you are killed it is just, and you will go to hell. Therefore, as we could see during the eighties in Iran, they did not show any hesitation in killing anybody who was not with them. And during the past decade, we have seen Al Qaeda not showing any hesitation in killing anybody including masses of Muslims in any country. This kind of justification for killing, this new definition of Jihad, this use of great Jihad for brainwashing devotees into committing any action that the guru or cult asks them to do, is not part of any religion including Islam; and only can be understand and characterized within structure of a cult.

Finally you might ask how we can face them. To answer this question we have to go back to the definition of martyrdom and Shahed, which is witness. Shahed is wasted if it does not carry a message, if it is not witness to the correctness of an idea or belief. Unfortunately we can see that Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair while they were pretending that they are fighting them, were the first advocates of Al Qaeda, as the Iranian regime was the first advocates of the Mojahedin by calling all their opposition members of Al Qaeda or Mojahedin, bringing them out of isolation, giving them weight that they didn't have, and giving them the means to spread their message to the masses, and making them the vanguard of the just demands of people under repression. President Bush called Al Qaeda, Islamic fascists, what more valuable present could be given to them? They are a cult. Confusing them with the religion of Islam means making them heroes to one billion Moslems. Do not forget that as a result of western propaganda for Al Qaeda, in the year 2001 the most popular name for male new born in the world's Muslim community after Mohammad was Osama²¹.

To equal the actions of Al Qaeda with the actions of Palestinians in Israel is the second mistake. We might condemn killing of civilians in Israel and argue with Palestinians about the correctness of their action, but we should not equate their actions with what Al Qaeda did in 9/11 or 7/7 or what it is doing now, every day in Iraq, killing innocent civilian with their suicide attacks and bombs. The third mistake was Iraq and now the position of the west toward Iran, which gives the best justification to the Wahabies and Salafies all around the word that they are right, that the clash of civilizations is real and the world has been divided between Dar Al Islam and Dar al Harb and people are divided between those who are with us and against us, which by the way the same words was announced by president Bush as well. Muslims see and remember the west's double standards, particularly by the US toward Muslims and non Muslims; comparing the occupation of Arab lands by Israel for almost forty years, with the attack of Saddam Hussein on Kuwait, and now comparing a nuclear armed Israel, which is not a member of the NPT, with Iran, which is a member of the NPT, which wants to enrich uranium for, as it claims, the peaceful production of energy.

To conclude we have to separate terrorist cults from mainstream Muslims and never never call them Moslem, as they are not. Second we have to find a solution for the political problems in the Middle East which are political feeding ground for terrorist cults, namely problems of Palestine and Iraq. Thirdly, we should support democracy in all Islamic countries and not only in those which are not considered as friends of west. Do not forget many of the terrorists of 9/11 or 7/7 and ... Did not come from or trained and educated in Syria or Iran but from countries known as close friends of the west, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

¹ (Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions p326)

² Archives at www.ict.org.il/documents/ originally translated by the Los Angeles Times.

³ (The Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad by Barnaby Rogerson page 274).

⁴ (Al Qaeda by Jason Burke page 81)

⁵ (Assassins page 105 Bernard Lewis)

⁶ (God's Terrorists, page 266 Charles Allen)

⁷ (Al Qaeda, Brotherhood of Terror by Paul L. Williams page 34)

⁸ (**Sahih Bukhari, Hadith** 2445, 2446)

⁹ (The Islamic Threat by John Esposito page39)

¹⁰ (Heirs of the prophet Muhammad by Barnaby Rogerson page 162)

¹¹ (Heirs of the prophet Muhammad by Barnaby Rogerson Page 298)

¹² (God's Terrorists by Charles Allen Page 46, 47)

¹³ (God's Terrorists by Charles Allen page 56)

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- ¹⁴ (Al – Qaeda Jason Burke 54, 55 – Qutb Milestones p 16)
- ¹⁵ (Al – Qaeda Jason Burke page 93)
- ¹⁶ (Bernard Lewis The Assassins page 4 and 5 – chronicon, iv, 16, ed. Wattenbach, 178-179)
- ¹⁷ (Paul Emir, Lord of Elumut)
- ¹⁸ (Al-Qaeda Page 52)
- ¹⁹ (Assassins Bernard Lewis Page 48)
- ²⁰ (Al-Qaeda by Jason Burke page 74, 75)
- ²¹ (Al-Qaeda Paul Williams's page 125)