

personal revenge. He did not mean that, if a wolf should fall upon a flock of sheep and wish to destroy it, the wolf should be encouraged to do so. No, if Christ had known that a wolf had entered the fold and was about to destroy the sheep, most certainly He would have prevented it.

As forgiveness is one of the attributes of the Merciful One, so also justice is one of the attributes of the Lord. The tent of existence is upheld upon the pillar of justice and not upon forgiveness. The continuance of mankind depends upon justice and not upon forgiveness. So if, at present, the law of pardon were practiced in all countries, in a short time the world would be disordered, and the foundations of human life would crumble. For example, if the governments of Europe had not withstood the notorious Attila, he would not have left a single living man.

Some people are like bloodthirsty wolves: if they see no punishment forthcoming, they will kill men merely for pleasure and diversion. - Some Answered Questions #77

Thus He provided a clear and effective solution for the dilemma of trying to apply Christ's teachings to the realities of a dangerous and violent world. As individuals we can pray for peace, seek to unify a divided world, and be, in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "a haven for the distressed", and, "an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression." As individuals we have the advantage of following the path of love. Virtue is our armour, and love is our weapon against evil. This instinctively feels like the highest moral ground.

We are called upon, however, to recognize that fair, legitimate, and equitable governments must follow the path of justice. Governments, like individuals, are imperfect. Self interest, strategic advantage, and expediency are often higher priorities than morality, compassion, and social justice - yet in our darkest hours free nations have come together to fight just wars, and to stand united against repressive, aggressive and expansionary ideologies. The extermination of Jews, or the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in the Balkans could not have been stopped with love alone. It is only regrettable that a united world didn't act sooner to stop these atrocities.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explained a just war this way:

A conquest can be a praiseworthy thing, and there are times when war becomes the powerful basis of peace, and ruin the very means of reconstruction. If, for example, a high-minded sovereign marshals his troops to block the onset of the insurgent and the aggressor, or again, if he takes the field and distinguishes himself in a struggle to unify a divided state and people, if, in brief, he is waging war for a righteous purpose, then this seeming wrath is mercy itself, and this apparent tyranny the very substance of justice and this warfare the cornerstone of peace. (SDC)

Nevertheless, innocent people always suffer terribly in times of war, even when wars are just. It is a deeply troubling reality that many of the soldiers on the Taliban front lines are innocent adolescents, there against their own will.

Even more troubling is the realization that democracies cannot negotiate with suicidal fanatics who target innocent non-combatants. The menace posed by this extreme brand of terrorism is no less threatening than fascism, nazism, or totalitarianism.

The leaders of the democracies engaged in this struggle against terrorism have repeatedly emphasized that this is not a war against Islam, nor is it a war against the Afghan people, nor is it an action which will be only be conducted with force alone. It is clearly an action against international terrorism and an intransigent regime which has knowingly harboured and supported terrorism.

The last military engagement of NATO forces was to end the slaughter and oppression of Muslims in the Balkans in a war against a predominately Christian nation. Clearly Islam is not NATO's enemy. Worship services in Christian churches in the United States or Great Britain don't end with obligatory chants of "death to Islam!"

If NATO and Russia had wanted to declare war upon Islamic countries, as the terrorists and their sympathizers would have Muslims believe, the events of September 11 provided an ideal excuse to unleash an immediate retaliatory attack on the Islamic world of cataclysmic proportions.

Instead, shortly after the attacks tens of thousands of Americans, many of whom had just lost loved ones, filled a sports stadium outside New York and listened reverently and respectfully as American Muslims read passages from the Qu'ran in a interfaith prayer service. As innocent Americans receive letters filled with Anthrax spores, the U.S. President has called upon American children to collect money and mail it to a humanitarian fund established to care for Afghan children. When Taliban targets in Afghanistan are struck, care is taken to minimize not maximize civilian casualties. There is genuine regret, not jubilation when innocent Muslims are inadvertently killed.

The terrorists are using a sinister strategy to distort and radicalize Islam and bring about a war between Muslims and the free democracies of the world. They cloak their ruthless actions as strikes against the enemies of Islam, and any response is then characterized as an attack against Islam. Muslims are then called upon to come to the aid of their brothers and carry out holy war. Using fear tactics and the advantages which free societies afford them, they exploit the media to spread their cause. Extremists are continuously emboldened by unrelenting television coverage of any mob anywhere whipped into a fevered pitch and willing to burn an effigy.

Tony Blair put it this way:

They have no moral inhibition on the slaughter of the innocent. If they could have murdered not 7,000 but 70,000 does anyone doubt they would have done so and rejoiced in it?"

"There is no compromise possible with such people, no meeting of minds, no point of understanding with such terror. Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we must.

Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the UN addressed the General Assembly on October 1, 2001 with these words:

The global reaction to the attacks should give us courage and hope that we can succeed in this fight. The sight of people gathering in cities in every part of the world from every religion to mourn -- and to express solidarity with the people of the United States - proves more eloquently than any words that terrorism is not an issue that divides humanity, but one that unites it. We are in a moral struggle to fight an evil that is anathema to all faiths. Every State and every people has a part to play. This was an attack on humanity, and humanity must respond to it as one.

As Bahá'ís we find ourselves in a particularly difficult situation, we are mediators, facilitators of understanding, masters of the process of consultation, and champions of unity. Now, as I see it, we are in a situation in which we have to take a firm stand, without alienating Muslims. We are fully aware of the long-term implications of what we need to accomplish:

Religious fanaticism and hatred are a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench. The Hand of Divine power can, alone, deliver mankind from this desolating affliction. - Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Bahá'u'lláh: A Statement

Our natural inclination is to seek a peaceful, rational, negotiated solution without violence or confrontation. We will be called upon to share the stage with other faiths to pray for peace and a cessation of the violence. We should be cognizant of the fact that many Muslims have been swayed by the terrorists' strategy which portrays innocent Muslims as the victims of a war against Islam. If we share the stage with those who espouse that message and then read passages from the Bahá'í writings dealing exclusively with peace, this could be misconstrued as a tacit condemnation of the effort to combat terrorism.

Now that weapons grade Anthrax has been sent to American governmental officials, there should be no doubt that this is not about an eye for an eye, nor is it about retaliation for the sake of avenging a wrong. The limbs of humanity are beginning to quake and we are in a struggle for our survival. My suggestion to those who take part in any multifaith programs would be to concentrate on Bahá'í teachings relating to prejudice, bigotry, fanaticism, as well as prayers for mankind, unity and justice. The passage cited above dealing with society's treatment of murders is particularly helpful for Christians trying to sort through their emotions in these difficult times.

Just as Hitler had to be stopped, this mass suicide cult which masquerades as Islam has to be stopped. As long as the coalition against terror is acting within the scope of the United Nations Charter I view this as mankind's response to an evil which threatens our peace and survival. Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision on an international treaty goes further than the UN Charter, the goal of both is the same:

"To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the

peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace." - Article I of the UN Charter

'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly envisioned a united response to threats to the common good and recognized that nations must collectively take active measures to thwart them:

"The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure." - (Secret of Divine Civilization)

Humanity's most powerful tools for overcoming terrorism are unity and justice. We have a particularly important role to play in wresting the revelation of Muhammad from those who have distorted and perverted His message.

We should avoid the trap of engaging in a discussion of the injustices which justify terrorism - there is simply no justification for intentionally killing innocent non-combatants. Instead, in these troubled times let us work with Muslims to raise money for legitimate Afghan relief organizations, and ask Muslims to join us in supporting the victims of terrorist attacks, not only in America, but also families of victims in Kenya, or Christian children recently made orphans in Nigeria when their parents were massacred by rioting Muslims.

We must be willing to reach out to Muslim colleagues and neighbors and gently encourage them to distance themselves from terrorism and sympathy for terrorist activities. The Qu'ran can be an effective tool in this endeavor, because it calls upon Muslims to do good and to be steadfast in justice. According to the Qu'ran, a Muslim must observe justice, even if it requires him to testify against his own parents.

"O ye who believe! be ye steadfast in justice, witnessing before God though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kindred, be it rich or poor, for God is nearer akin than either."

Speak to Muslims of spiritual questions, ask them how terrorism can be carried out in the name of God in light of these teachings from Muhammad from the Hadith:

"The greatest enemies of God are those who are entered into Islam, and do acts of infidelity, and who, without cause, shed the blood of man."

"All God's creatures are His family; and he is the most beloved of God who doeth most good to God's creatures."

"Shall I not inform you of a better act than fasting, alms and prayer? Making

peace between one another: enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots."

"Kindness is the mark of faith, and whoever hath not kindness hath not faith."

Mention that the Qu'ran explicitly prohibits suicide, especially if it results in injustice:

Do not destroy yourselves. God is merciful to you, but he that does that through wickedness and injustice shall be burned in fire. That is easy enough for God.

Be aware that the Qu'ran prohibits attacking non-combatants, and military action is supposed to be defensive in character. Thus an unprovoked attack upon civilians done in the name of God and Muhammad should be an abomination to a true follower of the Qu'ran.

When injustices are mentioned, recall that Muslims are called upon to forgive, discuss the dangers of allowing oneself to slip into a victimization mentality. Those who see themselves as victims, be they Muslims, Jews, or Christians, have great difficulty in overcoming anger and making peace. It is a major part of the cycle of violence. Again from the Qu'ran:

"Those who control their anger and are forgiving toward mankind; God loveth the good."

We can dispel the notion that the Taliban's actions represent "pure" Islam by simply quoting from the Qu'ran:

"There is no compulsion in religion..."

"O ye folk! verily, we have created you of male and female, and made you races and tribes that ye may know each other. Verily, the most honourable of you in the sight of God is the most pious of you; verily, God is knowing, aware!"

"He who doeth evil shall be recompensed therewith, and shall not find for him beside God a patron, or a help. But he who doeth good works,- be it male or female,- and believes, they shall enter into Paradise, and they shall not be wronged a jot. Who has a better religion than he who resigns his face to God."

We should not lose sight of the fact that the Taliban and terrorist organizations work together in drug trade to further their aims. Afghanistan is the world's biggest producer and distributor of hard drugs -75 percent of the world's raw opium. Around 46,000 tons of opium were produced in Afghanistan in 1999. Can any objective Muslim consider that as being in harmony with the teachings of Muhammad?

Again in this regard it is instructive for Bahá'ís to recall what 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote about opium:

"O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned. It is, however, mandatory that the use of opium be prevented by any means whatsoever, that perchance the

human race may be delivered from this most powerful of plagues."

Finally, let us all recall that the way to deal with terrorism on an individual basis is found in the 23rd Psalm:

"I will fear no evil: for thou art with me"

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