

Lecture Three

In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, the Creator of all beings, and may peace be with the servant of God, His Messenger, friend, the chosen one, the trustee of His secret and the transmitter of His Message, our lord and prophet, Muhammad and his pure and infallible progeny.

I seek refuge in God from the reviled Satan,

“He forsakes his home in the cause of God, finds in the earth many a refuge, wide and spacious: Should he die as a refugee from home for God and His Messenger, his reward becomes due and sure with God: And God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.” (4/100). who

Among the subjects that the Holy Qur'an paid attention to, as did Islamic jurisprudence, is the question of immigration (hijra). In the opinion of the majority of us, hijra revolves around a special historical incident that took place in the early days of Islam. That event was the migration of the Great Messenger (s.a.w.) and his companions from Mecca to Medina. That event marked the Hijri calendar [For those who want to have some idea of the date according to the Western dating system, a rough guide is to add some 620 years to the Islamic date.].

No doubt this event is very significant because it represents a milestone in the history and development of Islam. However, is the importance of hijra limited to this event?

Do all the references made in the Holy Qur'an to hijra and deeming the muhajirs (migrants) in rank on a par with the mujahideen (fighters), such as ***“Those who believe, and emigrate, and fight for the Faith, in the cause of Allah..” (8:74)***, belong to that particular historical event and that there is left no other signification to be inferred after that event? Is this really the situation with hijra, or is it not, in common with belief and jihad, governed by any particular time or place?

No doubt, there is no way the meaning of hijra (immigration), like jihad and belief, can be confined to what happened in the early days of Islam.

Whatever meaning was attached to hijra in those days, and in the same measure was true of jihad,

makes both general and constant rulings. That is, they are not the exclusive preserve of a particular time or place.

Imam Ali (a.s.) has discussed this topic in Nahjul Balagha (The Path of Eloquence). [A collection of his sermons, letters, and axioms] and said, “Hijra is commensurate with its first meaning.” (al-hijra qa’ima ala haddihal awwal),¹ meaning that hijra is not restricted to a particular time or place. And as the Prophet (s.a.w.) found it necessary to emigrate from Mecca to Medina, his followers must do the same, should circumstances make it necessary for them to emigrate. Our reading of Imam Ali’s statement is that we cannot argue that there are no practical expressions for hijra post the Prophet era.

Now, let us dwell on the definition and significance of hijra. As we have already mentioned, immigration means moving away from home, family and friends in order to preserve one’s faith. What is self-evident is that since this is the definition of the concept, you cannot restrict it to a particular time or space.

This is the Islamic standpoint of hijra. Taking the cue from the definition, it becomes obligatory on the person to flee his place of abode where they may endanger their religious life if they stayed. So, if you are presented with one of two alternatives, in that you either lose your faith, or find somewhere else to practice it freely, Islam obligates his followers to embark on hijra to protect their religion.

In the Holy Qur’an, there is a verse that discusses ‘force majeure’, [or power that cannot be acted or fought against]. Many among our people, who have grown accustomed to doing what is vile, seem to cite this principle as an excuse for their going astray and being overwhelmed by social custom. That is, even though some social norms go against the grain of religion. So, when you take issue with someone and ask them why they do not seem embarrassed by joining in parties where, for example, alcohol is being served and consumed, an act that is unlawful (haraam), their answer comes ready, “Society’s customs push us to do so. There is nothing we can do. Society is afflicted with corruption and deviant practices.”

Indeed, the pretext of “force majeure” has become a scapegoat for many sinners. Islam rejects these reasons, on the whole and in detail. Islam outlines for us clearly defined positions vis-à-vis corrupt societies, making it a religious duty of the Muslim to do his level best to reverse the decadence and degeneration of society and rehabilitate its members to live a moral life in accordance with the path and ideals that have been mapped out by Islam. Nevertheless, should it prove that we are facing an uphill struggle, in that there is no hope in making the profligate society in which we live mend its ways, that we reached a conclusion that our present and future generation might be adversely affected, Islam offers us a way out – immigration to some other place where we can safeguard our religion.

It is noteworthy that immigration could prove sufficient if one moves out from one’s usual place of abode to some other neighborhood. That is, you do need to contemplate moving out from your own hometown or homeland, for that matter. This is particularly true of metropolises like Tehran, for example, where you can find neighborhoods where children can be brought up in an Islamic climate. This is in contrast to

other areas within the same city where you can hardly come across any hint of Islamic life. Families who moved houses to such districts would be confronted with unsavory scenes, let alone the absence of Islamic institutions, such as mosques and seminaries.

It is quite possible that such unbecoming environments might not negatively influence the adult population among us, especially those who have been brought up in Islamic climates and who have become immune to such influences. Nevertheless, what would the consequences for young children be? Those children will open their eyes on climates plagued with deviation and corruption. So, there is a risk that such children will not emerge true young Muslims.

Here, there is a question that begs for an answer. What is the religious duty vis-à-vis this issue? The answer is that in the beginning every effort should be made towards turning those societies into Muslim ones. For example, if there was no mosque in that neighborhood, a real effort should be made to build one. However, the mosque alone is not an end in itself. It should be a hub for religious activity, i.e. in the form of acts of worship, giving lectures, and holding preaching sessions. Whoever discharged their duty in this regard, they will be deemed among the propagators of Islam. However, if we cannot succeed in our mission, what should our religious duty be? At this juncture, Islam orders us to run away from that society that has become accustomed to immoral practices, for we might get caught up in the state of things as they are, if not become part of it. The Qur'anic logic rejects seeing us remorseful, by hiding under the umbrella of 'force majeure', for losing our religion. This has been made manifestly clear by this Qur'anic verse:

“When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls. They say: In what (plight) were ye? They reply: Weak and oppressed were we in the earth. They say: Was it not Allah’s earth spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (from evil)?” (4:97).

The holy verse talks about that group of people, whose records the angel found appalling, not least by doing themselves injustice, asking them: What has happened to you? Why did the records of your deeds become so disgraceful? Since they have nothing of substance to come up with, they resort to the same old excuses: “we were deemed weak in the land”.

They go on to say, “We were living in corrupt societies, where it was not possible for us to know about pristine Islam and what it stands for; we lacked knowledge; there were no teachers of Islam we could turn to,” The angelic answer comes crisp and clear, “Was it not Allah’s earth spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (from evil)?”

You have yourself only to blame, not least for condoning those corrupt climates. Not all the corners of the world were as bad as the environments you allowed yourselves to be hostage to. There were places that were conducive to that which is good and commendable. So, why did not you emigrate to them?

Just to reiterate that Islam attaches great importance to immigration, in the sense of abandoning family and homeland, with a view to preserving one’s religion and practicing it in freedom. According to this

meaning, immigration is a constant law, in that it is not limited to a particular time or place and that it is not confined to the immigrants of the early Islamic era.

However, it seems that some people have gone to extremes in interpreting the meaning and the concept of hijra (immigration) as is mentioned in the above-quoted verse. They argue that the verse has it, “Should he die as a refugee from home for God and His Messenger”. That is, while the verse mentions the point where the hijra takes place, it does not mention the destination where the immigrant intends to go, mentioning instead “God and His Messenger”. They further maintain that the latter is an abstract destination and not material, i.e. it is in the mind and the conscience.

Thus, they conclude that the significance of the word entails that this type of hijra is a notional one in which man exerts himself towards attaining that which is sublime and which brings him closer to God; in other words, it is a journey towards God that does not require actual physical travel away from family and homeland. That is, man could make this journey from the coziness of his home through striving with his tempting self to reaching perfection, not least by keeping up prayer, fast, supplication, and other forms of worship that are capable of bringing him closer to his Creator.

Yet, when the exponents of this brand of interpretation are asked as to the objective of such a journey, they say God and his proximity, for whose purpose man does battle with his own self and tries to cultivate his spiritual life in order to be nearer to God. They, therefore, maintain that there is no need to cover the distances, leaving behind family and home, as, to their mind, the home mentioned in the verse is not the real home; rather, a figurative one, i.e. the abode of the soul and the boundaries of the ego.

To sum up, their interpretation of the verse can be put thus: Whoever breaks free from the bondage of his own inclinations and emigrates to God, his reward would come from Him. This, of course, is a misconception and an erroneous reading of the verse.

In this verse, the Holy Qur’an talks about the two types of hijra (immigration). Here, there is an example of the inimitable style of the Qur’an; the home (house) which the Qur’an mentions in the verse is the physical structure we all know. And yet, it wants to say to us: O you who emigrate from your home! Be it from one neighborhood to another, from one hometown to another, or from one homeland to another, let it be known to you that your objective (final destination) should be God alone. Otherwise, your immigration will not be of any value, even if you travel from one end of the globe to the other, and sacrifice everything in the process, i.e. your home, family and worldly possessions, and were contented with poverty instead.

This is the Qur’anic logic that is corroborated by the Messenger of God (s.a.w.) in this hadith, “Who intended his immigration for God and His Messenger, then it would be deemed so. And yet, whoever embarked on immigration, seeking a financial benefit or a [heart of a] woman he wanted to win, his immigration would be judged by the intended end. ”[2](#)

It looks as though the Prophet (s.a.w.) wanted to say, “I welcome the immigrant who had a covenant

with God that what he did was for His sake. Physical migration of a group of people to the target destination, i.e. Medina, shorn of good and pure intentions that their migration was in His Cause alone, is worthless.” This is true of the concept of jihad, for it is not sufficient for man to brandish his sword and fight the enemies of God. This should go hand in hand with the intent and purpose of seeking the pleasure of God and in His Cause.

It is possible that you find, in the ranks of Muslims, a combatant who shows unparalleled zeal in the battle, and yet if you divulge his secret you would find that his real purpose behind showing that fervor was driven by self-aggrandizement; he sought to gain personal fame, in that he aspired for his picture to be circulated and history sings his praise. Another example is that of him who takes part in the war effort in the hope that they do not get killed, only to enjoy the materialistic privileges, and thus they would score victory on both the tracks, i.e. that of this life and the hereafter.

All these appearances do not count as jihad in the cause of God. Of course, man could win in this world by virtue of jihad, provided that his ultimate end is not securing a place in it.

In one of the battles, some companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) commended the effort of one of the combatants, called Qazman, i.e. how good, brave and sincere he was. The Prophet did not pay attention to such commendations. He used to say, “He is among the inmates of hellfire.” When the news of his death in the battle came to the Prophet, he remarked, “God does whatever He wills.”

Another version of the story of how he was killed reached the prophet. It was reported that he committed suicide. The Prophet said, “I am the Messenger of God!” This is how the story was told: He fought very valiantly, so much so that he killed some seven people among the infidels. Having sustained serious injuries, he managed to stagger as far as the neighborhood of Bani Dhafar.

The Muslims spoke good of his “heroism” and that he would be rewarded. He retorted: I fought only in pursuit of personal fame and in defense of the honor and pride of my kinsmen. Had it not been for that, I would have never joined in the battle. Having, experienced severe pain due to his serious wounds, he reached out for his arrow kit, pulled an arrow and killed himself with it.[3](#)

After the people heard about the fate of Qazman, they realized why the Prophet was not impressed by all the reports about his heroism in the battle. This should reinforce the true meaning of jihad, i.e. it has to be purely in the cause of God. By the same token, immigration (hijra) has to be so. In other words, immigration, in the sense of physically removing oneself from their roots and moving away, should go hand in hand with the intention of moving towards God to achieve His pleasure and be closer to Him. Islam encourages both types of hijra, and the Holy Qur’an mentions them both,

“Should he die as a refugee from home for God and His Messenger”

This verse talks about immigration on two levels, one in body and the other in spirit. The immigrant travels in body from one place to the other, while his spirit departs from the phase of egotism to the

phase of sincere loyalty to God Almighty. A refugee of this type is the one whom God has promised with reward, “His reward becomes due and sure with God.” How profound this description is! God means that the reward of this refugee is far greater than that which the intellect can comprehend; it is far greater than words can explain.

In one of the commentaries on this particular verse, it has been said that a good example of the immigrant meant by the verse is a theology student who leaves behind family and friends and travels to a new place in pursuit of Islamic knowledge and scholarship. The aim of this theology trainee is to attain new levels of learning, so that he becomes better equipped to impart religious knowledge, revive the faith and spread the Word of God, doing away with personal gain, fame, and looking down on others. The said student is deemed an immigrant in the cause of God, so long as his objective behind travel was God, and for the sake of meeting the needs of Islam and Muslims.

That said, this is not confined to theology students; rather, it covers the students in other fields, such as medicine and engineering, provided the aim is discharging one’s religious duty, i.e. by way of wajibun kifa’ie (A collective obligation imposed on the Muslim community, and yet if any of its members discharged it, other Muslims become absolved from the responsibility).

For example, a person moves out of his homeland to some other foreign country to train to become a physician out of his feeling the need of society for Muslim doctors and also out of a sense of duty (wajibun kifa’ie). This student is deemed an immigrant in the cause of God, provided that earning His pleasure was his intention, and not worldly gains of this sort or the other, “Should he die as a refugee from home for God and His Messenger, his reward becomes due and sure with God.” So, should they meet their death while in the host town/country, their reward would come from God, and their rank would be close to that of mujahideen (fighters).

As we have already mentioned, the Holy Qur’an speaks about the two types of immigration in the same breath. Now, let us pose this question: When would the person qualify for both the descriptions, i.e. an immigrant and a mujahid at the same time? The answer to this question is that the description is true of the person who takes to immigration in the way of God and whose aim is to come to the rescue of the faith and the spiritual life of society. Thus, such a person would meet the criteria set in this Qur’anic verse,

“Should he die as a refugee from home for God and His Messenger, his reward becomes due and sure with God.”

By the same token such a person would be covered by all the Qur’anic verses that talk about jihad, such as:

“Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): They fight in His Cause, and slay and get slain: A promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an: And who is more faithful to his covenant

than Allah.” (9/111).

Imam Hussain (a.s.) is the best of examples of a muhajir (immigrant)/mujahid (fighter), in that he moved away from his hometown and waged genuine jihad in the cause of God, i.e. in defense of Islam not to undergo deviation and the faith of the Islamic umma (community), lest it should be lost. Moses, son of Imran (a.s.), was another immigrant in the cause of God for he left his country, Egypt, and headed for Medyen. The same goes for Abraham, **“He said: I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me!” (37/99)**. He left his homeland of his own accord. However, what puts Imam Hussain (a.s.) in a different league is that in his immigration, he was both an immigrant and a mujahid (fighter).

The immigrants of the early days of Islam were immigrants per se. That is, before the Divine order of jihad was issued, they were only immigrants. However, after the Divine instruction, the description of “mujahid – fighter” was applied to those of them who took part in jihad.

In a dream, the Messenger of God (s.a.w.) said to his grandson, al-Hussain (a.s.) that God has promised him with a rank that was not going to be achieved only with martyrdom by way of getting slain in His cause”.

En route from Mecca [in present day Saudi Arabia] to Karbala [in Iraq], Imam Hussain [and members of his family and some companions] spent twenty-three days travelling. Before his departure from Mecca, he gave a sermon to the people mentioning in it his immigration and jihad and said, “The similitude of the inevitability of man’s death is that of a necklace worn by a young woman. I therefore yearn to have reunion with my predecessors in the same way Jacob was yearning to be united with [his son] Joseph.”

What the lord of the free wanted to say is that he did not fear death and getting martyred in the cause of God and His religion, and that faith is a source of pride for man in as much as the necklace that adorns a woman’s neck, and that he could not wait to join his predecessors.

The Imam went on to tell them about how he was going to be martyred, “It is better to meet my death, as I have a feeling that I will be torn to pieces by the desert beasts between Nawawees and Karbala.” The Imam (a.s.) moved to another topic to talk about how he, and members of his household had been immersed in God’s love and said, “Seeking our, i.e. the Progeny of the Prophet’s, pleasure is seeking the Pleasure of God.

We forbear His affliction, only to reward us with the recompense of the forbearing. What He loved we love, what He allotted to us, we accepted. Should He have chosen for us safety, we would love it. Yet, should He have afflicted us with hardships and illness, we would accept.

Should He have chosen for us to keep silent, we would oblige. Should He have wanted for us to talk, we would oblige. Should He have chosen for us stillness, we would oblige, and yet, should He have decreed that we should move around, we would oblige.”

After that, he declared that he was intent on emigrating in the way of God, calling on the people to join him, if they had resolved that they were doing it for God, provided that they were prepared for jihad and sacrificing their blood for His cause, "Those of you who have reached a conclusion that they are going to sacrifice themselves for our cause, making their mind up that they will reunite with God, let them join us, as I am determined to set forth tomorrow morning, God willing!"

In the beginning huge crowds accompanied the convoy of Imam Hussain (a.s.), among whom some who were still reluctant to accept the statement of the Imam about what would be in store for him and his companions, and that there was still hope that they would scrape through.

On the way through his journey, other groups of people joined him. As he had made it clear to everyone that whoever chose to accompany him in his fateful journey should be ready for the ultimate sacrifice and the hope to meet with one's Lord, he did not want in his company any of the fainthearted, who were not ready for martyrdom.

Accordingly, he used to remind everybody who was with him, on different occasions and stages of the journey, as to the gigantic task ahead. This was with the aim of winnowing the wheat from the chaff, giving the chance for those who were not up to the responsibility to melt away. In so doing, the Imam had wanted to ensure that those who would remain with him to the end were those whose hearts God had tried with true faith, so much so that they submit to His Will, come what may.

When it reached the crunch, none stuck it out with him other than a band of loyal companions among the true believers, to whose bravery and integrity he had these words of praise, "I do not know of any companions who are more superior to mine."

This testimony of the Imam means that he was trying to say to his companions: If I were given an option to choose between you and the companions of the Prophet in the battle of Badr, I would have chosen you over them. Were I given a choice between you and the companions of Ali in the battle of Siffeen, I would have preferred you to them. You are the lords, and the crowns over the heads, of all martyrs.

On the eve of the tenth of Muharram [62 AH, 680 CE] Imam Hussain (a.s.) gave permission to his companions to leave him under the cover of darkness, saying to them, "I think our appointment with those (the enemy) is tomorrow. So, I give you leave to go away, having no liability on you. Darkness is spreading and engulfing you; so, why do you not make use of it and slip away.

And let each one of you take a man of my household with them. May God compensate you with the best of rewards. Scatter among the masses and in the towns. Indeed, the enemy is after me; thus, if they were successful in getting me, they would forget about you. Bring to mind the killing of Muslim [bin Aqeel, his cousin, and emissary to Kufa], which would be sufficient. Please leave."

This was the last test the Imam put the loyalty and truthfulness of his companions through. He absolved them from the covenant of allegiance they made with him; he set them free from their religious

obligation, in that it was incumbent on them to be on his side in the war.

However, they all refused to accede to his request, insisting that they preferred to die defending him. The first to declare that position was his brother al-Abbas, who said, "May God let us not ever witness that!" These were reassuring words for Imam Hussain for they demonstrated the fact that they shared his aim, vision, belief and determination. At that juncture, Imam Hussain (a.s.), once again made clear to them as to what he was expecting to happen come tomorrow, "Tomorrow, I will be killed, so will you. No one will be spared, even al-Qassim and Abdullah, the infant."

On the tenth of Muharram, Imam Hussain (a.s.) awarded his comrades in arms medals and honor whose memory would not go away. In the dying moments of the battle of Karbala and the last throws of his life, after almost all male members of his family alongside his companions were martyred, the Imam stood, amid the multitudes of the enemy, turning his eyes around, only to see that there was neither a supporter nor a helper, apart from the grisly sight of dead bodies strewn all over the battlefield. At that point in time, he was reported as saying something like this: I do not see on this ground a living person except those mutilated bodies, in reference to the dead bodies of his companions.

Thus, the Imam considered those dead bodies the truly living beings that were worthy of his cry for help, thus, "O heroes of Safa! And knights of war! Rise from your sleep, O sons of the honorable ones! Fend off the thugs from encroaching upon the noble ladies among the Progeny of the Prophet." That cry for help was made after the enemy attacked and ransacked the tents where members of Imam Hussain's family, mostly women, were sheltering. And yet, the Imam responded to his own call for help and apologized for them on their behalf, "How could they answer, when they were turned into headless corpses."

¹. Nahjul Balagha, Beirut new revised edition, catalogued by Dr. Subhi as-Saleh, Sermon No. 189.

². al-Bukhari Authentic Compendia of Hadith, p.22, vol. 1.

³. Ibn Hisham's Prophetic Biography, vol. 2, p. 88.

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