

SUICIDE AND MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

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Traditional qur'anic "proof texts" for the condemnation of suicide.¹

<p>Sura 2 (The Cow) ⁵⁴And remember when Moses said to his people, O people! You have wronged yourselves in taking the calf, so turn (לשוב) to your Creator, and kill yourselves. That is best for you with your Creator. He will relent (לשוב) toward you, for He is the Relenting, the Merciful.²</p>	<p>سورة البقرة وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِاتِّخَادِكُمُ الْعِجَلِ فَتُوبُوا إِلَى بَارِئِكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارِئِكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ [54]</p>
<p>Sura 2 (The Cow) ¹⁹⁵Spend freely in the way of God and do not become thrown by your own hands into destruction. Do good, for God loves those who do good.</p>	<p>سورة البقرة وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ [195]</p>
<p>Sura 4 (The Women) ²⁹O you who believe! Do not consume [i.e. squander] your property among you in vanity, except through trading by mutual consent, and do not kill yourselves (<i>walā taktulū anfusakum</i>),³ for God is compassionate with you.</p>	<p>سورة النساء يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالِكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا [29]</p>
<p>Sura 4 (The Women) ⁶⁶And if We decreed for them: kill yourselves or go forth from your homes!⁴ only few of them would do so, so if they did what they are exhorted to do it would be better for them and much more strengthening.</p>	<p>سورة النساء وَلَوْ أَنَّا كَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَنْ اقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ أَوْ اخْرَجُوا مِن دِيَارِكُمْ مَا فَعَلُوهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ مِّنْهُمْ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ فَعَلُوا مَا يُوعَظُونَ بِهِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ تَثْبِيثًا [66]</p>

¹ See also, Frans Rosenthal, "On Suicide in Islam," *JAOS* 66:3 (1946), 239-259).

² Theologians had difficulty believing that God would command suicide for atonement. Commentators therefore understood this to refer to mutual killing, the killing of the sinners by those Israelites who had no part in the sin, or a kind of spiritual suicide or death through *bākhī`* (see 18:6 below).

³ Probably actually meant, "do not kill one another."

⁴ Which also means "kill one another or force [one another] from your homes." Some commentators see this verse as an exhortation to seek death and therefore martyrdom in war fought in the path of God.

<p>Sura 18 ⁶Or perhaps you will torment yourself [to death?] with self reproach (<i>bākhi` nafsaka</i>) because of their disbelief in this <i>ḥadīth</i>.⁵</p>	<p>سورة الكهف فَلَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَفْسِكَ عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ إِن لَّمَّ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا [6]</p>
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Authoritative Hadīth forbidding suicide.

Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-janā'iz* 82/445-446.

Musaddad related on the authority of transmitters originating in al-ĕaḥḥāk, that the Prophet said, "Whoever swears falsely on a religion other than Islam, then he is as he said. And whoever takes his own life with iron will be punished with it in the fire of Gehenna." Ḥajjāj said on the authority of transmitters originating in Jundab that the Prophet said: "A man once had such wounds that he killed himself, so God said: My slave suddenly killed himself. He is forbidden from the Garden."

Abū al-Yamān related on the authority of transmitters originating in Abū Hurayra that the Prophet said: "Whoever strangles himself [to death] will be strangled [eternally] in the Fire, and whoever stabs himself [to death] will be stabbed [eternally] in the Fire.

The Qur'ān on Reward and Punishment in Relation to War and Fighting

<p>Sura 3 (The Family of Imrān) ¹⁵⁷And what if you be killed or die in the path of God? Forgiveness and mercy from God are better than all that they amass. ¹⁵⁸What if you die or are killed when you are gathered unto God?</p>	<p>سورة آل عمران وَلَئِن قُتِلْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ مُتُّمْ لَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَحْمَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا يَكْتُمُونَ [157] وَلَئِن مُّتُّمْ أَوْ قُتِلْتُمْ لَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُحْشَرُونَ [158]</p>
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<p>Sura 3 (The Family of Imrān) ¹⁶⁹Do not consider those killed in the path of God as dead. On the contrary, they are living with their Lord, who gives them sustenance.</p>	<p>سورة آل عمران وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ [169]</p>
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<p>Sura 4 (The Women) ⁷⁴Let those fight in the path of God who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoever fights in the path of God, whether he be slain or victorious, on him We shall give him a vast reward.</p>	<p>سورة النساء فَلْيُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يَشْرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ وَمَن يُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيُقْتَلْ أَوْ يَغْلِبْ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا [74]</p>
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<p>Sura 9 (Repentance) ¹¹¹God has purchased of the believers their lives and their possessions in that</p>	<p>سورة التوبة إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَىٰ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُم بِأَنَّ</p>
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⁵ Commentators see this as a reference to Muhammad perhaps dying unintentionally as a result of psychic self-torment when his contemporaries would not believe him early on in his career.

<p>they have the Garden, they fight in the path of God and kill or be killed, a promise binding upon them in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān. Who fulfilled his agreement (<i>`ahdihī</i>) better than God? So rejoice in the bargain that you have made with Him, for that is the mighty bliss (<i>al-fawz al-`azīm</i> -- or, supreme triumph).</p>	<p>هُمْ الْجَنَّةَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ وَعَدًّا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ وَالْقُرْآنِ وَمَنْ أَوْفَى بِعَهْدِهِ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَاسْتَبْشِرُوا بِبَيْعِكُمُ الَّذِي بَايَعْتُمْ بِهِ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ [111]</p>
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<p>Sura 47 (Muhammad) ⁴Therefore, when you meet the unbelievers smite at their necks⁶ until you have thoroughly subdued them, and then bind firmly. Afterward, then either generosity or ransom until war lays down its burdens. That is the way it is. If it had been God's will, He would have been victorious over them, but (God lets you fight?) in order to test you, one against the other. Those who are killed in the way of God, He will not let their deeds be lost. ⁵He will guide them and improve their condition, ⁶And admit them to the Garden that He has made known to them.</p>	<p>سورة محمد فَإِذَا لَقَيْتُمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَضَرْبَ الرِّقَابِ حَتَّى إِذَا أَتَخْتَمُوهُمْ فَشُدُّوا الْوَتَاقَ فَإِمَّا مَنَّا بَعْدُ وَإِمَّا فِدَاءً حَتَّى تَضَعَ الْحَرْبُ أَوْزَارَهَا ذَلِكَ وَلَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ لَانتَصَرَ مِنْهُمْ وَلَكِن لِّيَبْلُوَ بَعْضَكُمْ بِبَعْضٍ وَالَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَلَنْ يُضِلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ [4] سَيَهْدِيهِمْ وَيُصْلِحُ بَالَهُمْ [5] وَيُدْخِلُهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ عَرَفَهَا هُمْ [6]</p>
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⁶ Euphemism for killing.

Reward in the Tradition Literature For Those Engaging In War

Those who engage in sanctified war receive great reward for their involvement. They will gain deserved material spoils and rewards when successful in the campaigns, and if they are killed or even wounded while warring in the path of God, they will be admitted to paradise.⁷ "Any slave [of God] whose feet get covered with dust in the path of God, the Fire will not touch him."⁸ The reward for martyrdom while engaging in war in the path of God is stressed greatly, even if the victim dies while not actually engaged on the battlefield,⁹ and as many as 70 members of one's family who would have been doomed to hellfire will be ensured entry into Paradise because of the intercession of the martyr in the path of God.¹⁰ "The Prophet said: No slave [of God] who dies and has goodness with God wants to return to the world, even if he would have the world and all that is in it, except the martyr, for when he sees the greatness of martyrdom, he will want to return to the world and be killed again."¹¹ Muhammad is also cited as having said, "By the One in Whose hand is my soul, I would love to be killed in the path of God and be resurrected, then be killed and then resurrected, then be killed and then resurrected, then be killed."¹² A well-known idiom teaches that "Paradise lies under the shade of swords."¹³ Angels shade martyred warriors with their wings and all who die in battle automatically enter Paradise.¹⁴

⁷ Bukhārī, *K. al-Jihād* 2.46 (vol. 4, p. 38), 10.59 (vol. 4, p. 46), *K. al-Maghāzī* 16.377-78 (vol. 5, pp. 260-61), *K. al-Tawhīd* 28.549 (vol. 9, p. 413); Abū Dāwūd 2497 (vol. 3, p. 8); Tirmidhī, *K. Faḍā'il al-Jihād* 13.1640-41 (vol. 4, pp. 150-51). etc. The very meaning of Tirmidhī's chapter is "The Book of the Merits of Jihād."

⁸ Bukhārī, *K. al-Jihād* 16:66 (vol. 4, p. 51); Tirmidhī, *K. Faḍā'l al-Jihād* 7.1632 (vol. 4, p. 146).

⁹ Abū Dāwūd, *K. al-Jihād* 2499-2501 (vol. 3, pp. 8-10); al-Nasā'ī, (Cairo: *Dār al-Ḥadīth*, 1987/1407) *K. al-Jihād, bāb man takaffala Allāh liman yujāhid bī sabīl Allāh* (6:16-7), *thawāb man qatala fī sabīl Allāh* (6:25-6), etc. On the other hand, other traditions state that good Muslims will enter Paradise whether or not they actually engage in *jihād* in the path of God: "...Abū Hurayra: The Prophet said: Whoever believes in God and in His Apostle, establishes prayer and fasts on Ramaḍān, it is absolute to God that He cause him to enter the Garden whether he makes *jihād* in the path of God or sits on the land upon which he was born (*jalasa fī arḍihi allatī wulida fīhā*)." (Bukhārī, *K. al-Jihād*, 4.48 [vol. 4, pp. 39-40]).

¹⁰ Abū Dāwūd, 2522 (vol. 3, p. 15).

¹¹ Bukhārī, 6.53 (vol. 4, p. 42); Tirmidhī, *K. Faḍā'l al-Jihād* 13.1640 (vol. 4, p. 151), 25.1661 (vol. 4, p. 160), etc.

¹² Bukhārī, *K. al-Jihād*, 7.54 (vol. 4, p. 42); 119.216 (vol. 4, p. 137).

¹³ Bukhārī, *K. al-Jihād*, 22.73 (vol. 4, p. 55), 112.210 (vol. 4, p. 132-3), 156.266a (vol. 4, pp. 165-6); Muslim *K. al-Jihād wal-Siyar* 6.20/1742 (vol. 3, pp. 1362-3); Abū Dāwūd, 2631 (vol. 3, p. 42); Tirmidhī, *K. Faḍā'l al-Jihād* 23.1659 (vol. 4, p. 159).

¹⁴ Bukhārī, *K. al-Jihād* 20-22.71-3 (vol. 4, pp. 54-5), 28.80 (vol. 4, p. 60); al-Nasa'i, *K. al-Jihād, Darajat al-Mujāhid fī Sabīl Allāh* (6:19-20).

On The Treatment of Non-Combatants

<p>Qur'ān 2:190. Fight in the path of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for God does not love transgressors.</p>	<p>سورة البقرة وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُعَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ [190]</p>
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Cited by some jurists to prevent killing old, sick, women, and other non-combatants.

<p>Qur'ān 9:5. When the sacred months have passed, kill the idolaters wherever you find them, and seize them, beset them, lie in ambush for them everywhere; if they repent and establish the prayers and pay the <i>zakāt</i>, then set them free; God is forgiving, compassionate.</p>	<p>سورة التوبة فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَخْصِرُواهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ [5]</p>
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Shafī`ites and Ibn Hazm base their view that even the old, sick, women, and others may be killed on this verse, which they consider to have abrogated Q.2:190.

From the Ḥadīth

Al-Bukhārī, صحيح البخاري

The Book of Jihad

<p>Volume 4, Book 52, Number 256: Narrated As-Ṣa`b bin Jaththāma: The Prophet passed by me at a place called Al-Abwā' or Waddān, and was asked whether it was permissible to attack the pagan warriors at night with the probability of exposing their women and children to danger. The Prophet replied, "They (i.e. women and children) are from them (i.e. pagans)." I also heard the Prophet saying, "The institution of <i>hima</i>¹⁵ is invalid except for Allah and His Apostle."</p>	<p>2790- حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ حَدَّثَنَا الزُّهْرِيُّ عَنْ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ عَنْ الصَّعْبِ بْنِ جَثَامَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ قَالَ مَرَّ بِي النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِالْأَبْوَاءِ أَوْ بَوْدَانَ وَسُئِلَ عَنْ أَهْلِ الدَّارِ يُبَيِّتُونَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ فَيُصَابُ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ وَذُرَارِيَّتِهِمْ قَالَ هُمْ مِنْهُمْ وَسِعْتُهُ يَثْمُولُ لَا حِمِّي إِلَّا لِلَّهِ وَلِرَسُولِهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ</p>
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<p>Volume 4, Book 52, Number 258: Narrated Ibn `Umar: During some of the raids of God's Apostle a woman was found killed, so</p>	<p>2792 حَدَّثَنَا إِسْحَاقُ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ قَالَ قُلْتُ لِأَبِي أُسَامَةَ حَدَّثَكُمْ عُبَيْدُ اللَّهِ عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ وُجِدَتْ امْرَأَةٌ مَقْتُولَةً فِي بَعْضِ مَعَازِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ</p>
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¹⁵ حِمِّي This is a formal state of protection or sanctuary.

¹⁶ According to David Cook, see also al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), IV, p. 26 (nos. 3014-15); Abū Dāwūd, III, pp. 53-54 (nos. 2668-72); and Mālik b. Anās, *al-Muwattā* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), p. 278 (no. 980) goes even further and states that even if women are participating on the battlefield they are still not to be harmed.

Allah's Apostle forbade the killing of women and children. ¹⁶	صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَنهَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ قَتْلِ النِّسَاءِ وَالصِّبْيَانِ
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Al-Imām Mālik

الموطأ

Book of Jihad: Chapter: Prohibition of Killing Women & Children in Battles

956 or 8. `Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ka`b reported that the Apostle of Allah (PBUH) prohibited those people who killed Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayiq from killing women and children. One of them said: The wife of Ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayiq shouted out and disclosed our presence and I raised my sword but, remembering the command of the Apostle of Allah (PBUH), restrained myself. Had it not been so, we would have rid of her also.	856 حَدَّثَنِي يَحْيَى عَنْ مَالِكٍ عَنْ ابْنِ شِهَابٍ عَنْ ابْنِ لَكْعَبِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ قَالَ حَسِبْتُ أَنَّهُ قَالَ قَالَ عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ كَعْبٍ أَنَّهُ قَالَ نَهَى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الَّذِينَ قَتَلُوا ابْنَ أَبِي الْحَقِيقِ عَنْ قَتْلِ النِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ قَالَ فَكَانَ رَجُلٌ مِنْهُمْ يَقُولُ بَرَحْتُ بِنَا امْرَأَةَ ابْنِ أَبِي الْحَقِيقِ بِالصِّبْيَانِ فَأَرْفَعُ السِّيفَ عَلَيْهَا ثُمَّ أَذْكَرُ نَهَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَأَكْفُفُ وَلَوْلَا ذَلِكَ اسْتَرْحَنَّا مِنْهَا
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958 or 10 Yaḥyā b. Sa`īd reported that when Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq sent an army to Syria, he went on foot with Yazīd b. Abū Sufyān who was the commander of the quarter of the forces. Yazīd said to Abū Bakr: Either you mount up or I shall dismount. Abū Bakr replied: Neither you will dismount nor will I ride. I consider these steps to be a virtue in the path of Allah. Then he said to him: You will find some people who imagine they have devoted their lives to Allah, leave them to their work; you will find some people who shave their heads in the middle, ¹⁷ strike them with your swords. I instruct you in ten matters: Do not kill women or children, nor the old and infirm; do not cut fruit-bearing trees; do not destroy any town; do not cut the gums of sheep or camels except for purposes of eating; do not burn date-trees nor submerge them; do not steal from booty and do not be cowardly.	858 حَدَّثَنِي عَنْ مَالِكٍ عَنْ يَحْيَى بْنِ سَعِيدٍ أَنَّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقَ بَعَثَ جَيْشًا إِلَى الشَّامِ فَخَرَجَ بِمَشِيٍّ مَعَ يَزِيدِ بْنِ أَبِي سُفْيَانَ وَكَانَ أَمِيرَ رُجْعٍ مِنْ تِلْكَ الْأَرْبَاعِ فَرَزَعُمَا أَنَّ يَزِيدَ قَالَ لِأَبِي بَكْرٍ إِمَّا أَنْ تَرْكَبَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ أَنْزِلَ فَقَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ مَا أَنْتَ بِنَازِلٍ وَمَا أَنَا بِرَاكِبٍ إِلَيَّ أَحْتَسِبُ خُطَايَ هَذِهِ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ إِنَّكَ سَتَجِدُ قَوْمًا زَعَمُوا أَنَّهُمْ حَبَسُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ لِلَّهِ فَذَرَهُمْ وَمَا زَعَمُوا أَنَّهُمْ حَبَسُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ لَهُ وَسَتَجِدُ قَوْمًا فَحَصُوا عَنْ أَوْسَاطِ رُءُوسِهِمْ مِنَ الشَّعْرِ فَاضْرِبْ مَا فَحَصُوا عَنْهُ بِالسِّيفِ وَإِنِّي مُوصِيكَ بِعَشْرٍ لَا تَقْتُلَنَّ امْرَأَةً وَلَا صَبِيًّا وَلَا كَبِيرًا هَرِمًا وَلَا تَقْطَعَنَّ شَجَرًا مُثْمِرًا وَلَا تُحْرَبَنَّ عَامِرًا وَلَا تَعْقِرَنَّ شَاةً وَلَا بَعِيرًا إِلَّا لِمَا كَلَهُ وَلَا تُحْرِقَنَّ نَخْلًا وَلَا تُعْرِقَنَّهَ وَلَا تَغْلُلْ وَلَا تَجْبُنْ
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¹⁷ Commentators identify these people with Zoroastrian priests.

Al-Shaybānī, *siyar* (from Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybani's Siyar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1966), 75-77.

Whenever God's Messenger sent forth an army or a detachment, he charged its commander personally to fear God, the Most High, and he enjoined the Muslims who were with him to do good. He said:

Fight in the name of God and in the path of God. Fight the *mukaffirūn*. Do not cheat or commit treachery, and do not mutilate anyone or kill children. Whenever you meet the *mushrikūn*, invite them to accept Islam. If they do, accept it and let them alone...

Al-Shaybānī, *siyar*, 109

I asked [Abū Ḥanīfa]: If the Muslims besieged a city and its people positioned behind the walls shielded themselves with Muslim children, would it be permissible for the Muslim fighters to attack them with arrows and hurling machines?

He replied: Yes, but the warriors should aim at the inhabitants of the territory of war and not the Muslim children...

I asked: If the Muslim warriors attack with hurling machines and arrows, flood cities with water or burn them with fire, thereby killing Muslim children or men, or enemy women, old men, blind, crippled, or lunatic persons,¹⁸ would the warriors be liable for blood money or acts of expiation?

He replied: They would be liable neither for blood money nor for acts of expiation...

MEMRI

Special Dispatch Series - No. 971

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Sheikh Al-Qaradhawi and, Other Islamic Scholars Debate Suicide Operations in a Counter-Terrorism Conference Held in Sharm Al-Sheikh

The following are excerpts from a panel discussion at the counter-terrorism conference of religious scholars at Sharm Al-Sheikh, Egypt. The discussion aired on Iqra TV on August 22, 2005. (To view this clip, visit: <http://memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=822>.)

Dr. Muhammad Rafat 'Othman, Egyptian professor of Islamic law: "According to another opinion, a person who blows himself up is committing suicide. This opinion is based on sources that categorically forbid self-killing. The Koran says: 'Do not kill yourself, surely Allah is ever merciful to you.' There are also such sources in the Sunna and in the general consensus of scholars. No text in Islamic religious law permits a person to kill himself. Even in the case of Jihad, which is the pinnacle of religious duties, Islam does not permit a person to kill himself.

"What Islamic religious law does permit is for a person to wage Jihad, facing one of two options – victory or martyrdom. He may risk being killed by someone else, but may not kill himself."

[...]

Sheikh Yousuf Al-Qaradhawi: "Dr. Said Ramadhan [Al-Bouti] stressed the legitimacy of defense, saying it is a legitimate right in Palestine and Iraq. I think that saying it is a legitimate right is not enough, because a right is something that can be relinquished. It is a duty. All scholars say that defending an occupied homeland is an individual duty applying to every Muslim. Reducing this duty to a 'right,' which can be relinquished, is a kind of depreciation.

¹⁸ These are all within the category of enemy non-combatants according to Abū Ḥanīfa. Scholars did not agree on this or on liability and expiation, as well as on many other rules of war, but there was a general consensus on many issues.

"We must stress this point, and emphasize that it is the rights of those defending their homeland. It is not only a right, but also their duty. I am amazed by what Dr. Muhammad Rafat 'Othman said.

"This has nothing to do with suicide. This man does not want to commit suicide, but rather to cause great damage to the enemy, and this is the only method he can use to cause such damage. Since this method did not exist in the past, we cannot find rulings about it in the ancient jurisprudence. We may find rulings about plunging into the [ranks of the] enemy and risking one's life, even in cases of certain death – so be it. The truth is that we should refrain from raising this issue, because doubting it is like joining the Zionists and Americans in condemning our brothers in Hamas, the Jihad, the Islamic factions, and the resistance factions in Iraq. It is as if we are joining them.

"We all condemn violence or terrorism, although, to tell the truth, I personally don't like the word 'terrorism.' I always say 'violence.' I have written a book called *Islam and Violence*. But since this word is so widespread, I use it. We all condemn the [terrorist] operations. We condemned them before we came to this conference. We condemned the bombings in London, Madrid, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Egypt. We condemned them as individuals and as institutions. This is something everyone agrees on. We cannot say we pat these misguided boys on the back, but we do want to listen to them. They have gone astray, so we want to treat them in a way that will set them straight, and bring them closer to us. We don't want to be like prosecutors, demanding their execution. We want to treat them the way clerics treat their students, the way fathers treat their sons." [...]

Professor 'Abla Kahlawi, Al-Azhar University, Egypt: "We must be united in condemning this behavior, this terrorism or violence – call it what you will. We must declare loud and clear that resisting the aggression, and resisting the enemy is a legitimate right, and that a fighter who risks his life has that right. When he perishes along with his enemy, this is a resounding cry of truth, through which the martyr declares: 'This was mine and it has been plundered – let the whole world see.' This is how a Muslim should act when he defends what is his, and I don't accept anything else." [...]

Iraqi Cleric Ahmad Al-Qubeisi: "Does any Islamic government have the right to prevent individuals from resisting the occupiers? This is what happens. There are young people who thought it was bad that the Americans were occupying the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Afghanistan, and so on. So they started the resistance, which might have been exaggerated, but this was an operational error. In principle, these are people who are trying to drive out the occupier, which is deemed legitimate by all earthly and divine laws. People are in dispute over the methods. Listen to what happens worldwide – things you may have forgotten: The officer who killed 400 children in the Bahr Al-Baqr elementary school in Egypt many years ago – they said he was depressed, and pardoned him. [...]

"The arch-killer who murdered, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque many years ago in the days of [Israeli prime minister] Yitzhak Rabin, 38 people in the middle of prayer – they said he was depressed, and was pardoned. [...]

"The pilot who dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and killed 700,000 got a medal. Rustum and the Americans killed 700 prisoners in an Afghan prison – no one demanded they be held accountable. My question is: Why can't you show some mercy and say that these *mujahideen* are depressed, and pardon them? Thank you."

Sudanese Minister of Religious Endowments 'Issam Ahmad Al-Bashir: "The *mujahideen* are not depressed. Their faces shine."

Al-Qubeisi: " But you are accusing them of heresy, here. If you had to choose between depression and heresy, which would you choose?" [...]

Saudi scholar Abd Al-Muhsen Al-'Abikan: "The suicide operations that are called 'martyrdom operations' are forbidden by Islamic law. Those who carry them out, committing suicide, cannot be called martyrs, and their actions cannot be called martyrdom. It was forbidden even in cases of Jihad by a number of prominent Muslim scholars." [...]

Memri

April 1, 2001 **Special Dispatch No.3728**

In an article in the Saudi daily Al-Riyadh, Sheikh 'Adel Al-Kalbani, a former Imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, [\[1\]](#) condemns preachers who exploit the despair and frustration of young Muslims by filling their heads with stories about the Virgins of Paradise in order to lure them into jihad. Al-Kalbani emphasizes that putting on an

explosive belt and exploding oneself among others is not an act of martyrdom, but rather an act of suicide, which will certainly not be rewarded with Paradise. He also stresses that there are many other ways to gain Paradise apart from sacrificing one's life, such as by leading a pious life and honoring one's parents. The following are excerpts from the article:

When the Heart of a Young Man Fills with Yearning for the Virgins, It Is Easy for Him to Don an Explosive Belt

"Sometimes, young people [see] the scarf or the pretty legs of a young woman and go [completely] mad. They think only of her and believe they cannot live without her... And if they find no other way to meet [a young woman], they hasten their own death, because clamorous preachers and imams have convinced them that martyrdom is the bride-price [they must pay for the Virgins of Paradise], and that death is the only option... [Why] wait when the only thing separating you from the pleasure [of the Virgins] is death? Moreover, [these preachers tell them:] if you are martyred, the pain of death will be no more than a pinprick, and then you will immediately find yourselves in the arms [of the Virgins].

"When the heart [of the young man] fills with yearning, and the desperate reality of his life overwhelms him, it is very easy for him to put an explosive belt around his waist, and even to shove the dynamite up his ass, as long as the goal is a lofty one, the prize is a Virgin [of Paradise], and the price is so low. The poor wretch does not realize that the price he is offering for his [heavenly] bride – namely his life, which he is ending by exploding a bomb and killing himself and others around him – will not necessarily be accepted, because those who marry the Virgins of Paradise must meet certain conditions. The first of these is that [the candidate] did not end his life in order to escape from a state of fatal despair... According to Islam, that is suicide.

"Lest anyone get on a high horse and accuse me of ignoring what is said in the Koran and the Sunna regarding the 'fair ones with wide, lovely eyes, like hidden pearls' [Koran 56:22-23], I hereby declare that I am well aware [of this verse], and that I yearn for [these virgins] myself and hope to attain them at all times. But I wish to point out that one who is crazy [with lust for them] has failed to read [some of the other Koranic] verses, for example... 'But [only] the sincere servants of Allah [will attain Paradise. Koran 37:40]'... [One who ignores these verses] does not know the qualities of [these sincere servants of Allah] and does not behave like them."

Some of the Worst Human Devils are Those Who Pretend to Preach Religion, but in Effect are Only Turning Our Youth into Cannon-Fodder

"One of the basic facts that [such a person] ignores is the true [purpose] of his existence: He was created to worship [Allah], to [establish] the Caliphate, and to spread the message [of Islam]... not in order to become a victim of a moment of despair, or in order to spill his blood for the sake of inventors of theories. [These theorists] pursue earthly goals they [can] attain only by spilling his blood and the blood of others like him whom they deceive, causing them to marry the darkness of death, imprisonment, and disobedience to their parents, or to [live their lives] in constant flight, hiding in caves and on mountaintops.

"Some of the worst human devils are those who pretend to engage in *da'wa* and jihad and to promote religion, and [thereby] control the minds of our youth – [but] not in order to provide them with knowledge, fill them with passion for our noble [Muslim] nation and its *da'wa*, or make them vehicles of culture and progress who

can rival [our enemies] in technology and innovation. [Instead, their goal is] to send them to the front line of the war, to become cannon fodder..."

One Must Live for Allah Before One Can Die for Him

"Reducing the pleasures of Paradise to [the privilege of] attaining the Virgins is a grave mistake. The point to be emphasized is that one must win Allah's favor, and one must focus [on the fact that] one will have the privilege of seeing the face of God in Paradise. This [loftiest] estate can be attained only through great effort and patience, through charity and grace, and through [true] *da'wa*, jihad, and learning. In other words, one must live for Allah before one can die for Him.

"It is not the case that only those who die for the sake of Allah attain the Virgins. If this were so, only few would be granted this privilege. [But the fact is that] not one or two deeds, but many deeds, confer [the reward of] the Virgins, for it is said: 'Verily for the righteous there will be a fulfillment of desires, gardens enclosed, and grapevines, and voluptuous women of equal age' [Koran 78:31-33]. That is, one who fears Allah is also awarded the Virgins of Paradise. But one who unlawfully kills a person whom Islam forbids to kill – is he a God-fearing man?..."

"[Moreover], a Muslim must worship Allah for many reasons, not only out of lust for the Virgins of Paradise. Islam is a system through which Allah meant to improve mankind, and [one cannot improve oneself] by hastening one's death in order to embrace the Virgins. Besides, they will reject a spouse filled with despair and frustration who fled [the hardships of] life..."

"The admittance test for entering Paradise is not one's [willingness] to don [an explosive belt] and press the button. The greatest test is [described] in religious texts that are eternal, irrevocable, and uncontroversial... One example will suffice... [According to a *hadith*], a man once approached the Prophet and told him he had come from afar to join the jihad. The Prophet asked him: 'Is your mother alive?' The man answered: 'Yes'. The Prophet said: 'Stay with her, for Paradise is under her feet.' Many of those [young people] leave their parents to weep and worry about their [fate]. If they [really] want to find Paradise, it is there [beside their parents]."

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Al-Kalbani was dismissed from this post after he accused Shi'ite clerics of heresy.