

Martyrdom in Jihad

versus

Suicide Bombing

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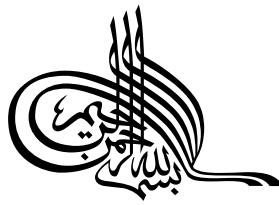
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Contents

Glossary	2
Introduction	3
Suicide versus Martyrdom	4
The Efficacy of Suicide Bombing	7
The Ruling on Suicide Bombings	9
The Ruling on Targeting Non-Combatants	11
Evidences Advanced in Defence of Suicide Bombing	14
Conclusion	22

Glossary

<i>ahl</i>	people; qualified adherents
<i>fatwa</i>	a legal Islamic verdict or ruling
<i>fitra</i>	the natural Islamic disposition of man (and woman)
<i>hadīth</i>	recorded narrations or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>halāl</i>	that which is permissible, lawful in Islam
<i>haram</i>	that which is impermissible, forbidden, unlawful in Islam
<i>īmān</i>	correct belief or faith in Allah, His Angels, His Books, the Prophets, the Hereafter and the Divine Decree
<i>jahiliyya</i>	pre-Islamic ignorance and infidelity
<i>jihād</i>	striving in the cause of Allah
<i>jihādi</i>	one who goes to extremes in the concept of <i>jihād</i> , excessively calls for it, and often holds a distorted idea of it that is more akin to terrorism
<i>khawārij</i>	lit. <i>renegades</i> : the first sect to break away from the main body of Muslims; they were characterised by their excessive <i>takfir</i> and violent rebellions
<i>kufr</i>	disbelief, infidelity
<i>kuffār</i>	non-Muslims, disbelievers
<i>manhaj</i>	methodology
<i>sahīh</i>	authentic – the highest grade of reliability of a <i>hadīth</i>
<i>Salaf</i>	the pious predecessors; the Prophet's Companions and the two immediate generations of Muslims that followed them
<i>salafi</i>	a Muslim who follows the Quran and the <i>Sunna</i> upon the understanding of the <i>Salaf</i>
<i>Shari'a</i>	the Divine Legislation of Islam
<i>Sunna</i>	the inspired practice and example of the Prophet
<i>tagħbiż</i>	a false deity, devil
<i>takfir</i>	to accuse someone of major <i>kufr</i> or disbelief; to eject a Muslim from the fold of Islam
<i>takfirī</i>	one who goes to extremes in performing <i>takfir</i>



Introduction

Martyrdom in the path of Allah is from the greatest of deeds, the reward of which is no less than Paradise. Suicide, on the other hand, is from the most reprehensible of deeds, the reward of which is no less than Hellfire. In the history of Islam, the learned men and women of the faith have never confused the two. It is only with the proliferation of suicide bombing in our time that the clear distinction between suicide and martyrdom has become marred as the former is being justified with the textual support for the latter. The essay entitled, *The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations*, is a famous case in point. Written in defence of the female Chechen suicide bomber, Hawa Barayev, the essay cites many classical Islamic texts, largely, though not exclusively, relating to the battlefield jihad of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions, in an attempt to prove the Islamic legitimacy of suicide bombings. This rebuttal does not seek to argue with those Islamic evidences *per se*, but to point out their complete misrepresentation.

Suicide versus Martyrdom

First, it may be helpful to outline the grievousness of the crime of suicide itself. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who refused to pray over the one who had committed suicide,¹ warned:

Whoever kills himself will certainly be punished in Hellfire, where he shall dwell forever.²

And he ﷺ said:

He who kills himself with anything, Allah will torment him with that in the Hellfire.³

And he ﷺ also said:

Among those before you, there was a man in anguish from his wound. So he took a knife and cut his hands until he bled to death. Allah said: ‘*My servant has hastened the ending of his life, so I forbid the Paradise for him.*’⁴

And Allah said in the Quran:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَّحِيمًا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ عُدُوًّا نَّا وَظُلْمًا
فَسَوْفَ نُصْلِيهِ نَارًا وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا

And do not kill yourselves. (For) surely, Allah is Most Merciful unto you. And whoever commits that through aggression and injustice, We shall cast him into the Fire, and that is easy for Allah.⁵

¹ *Sahib Muslim.*

² *Sahib al-Bukhari* and *Sahib Muslim.*

³ *Sahib Muslim.*

⁴ *Sahib al-Bukhari* and *Sahib Muslim.*

⁵ The Quran, Sura an-Nisā’ [4]:29-30.

وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And do not cause your hands to contribute to your own destruction; but do good. Truly, Allah loves the good-doers.⁶

Perhaps the second most important thing to direct the reader's attention to is the difference between an act of war which involves a suicide (such as a suicide bombing) and an act of war which is apparently suicidal (such is a lone warrior charging the ranks of the enemy in the near-certain knowledge that he will be killed in the process).

No scholar disputes the praiseworthiness of the second type of act. It is only the first type of act, that is, the predetermined, intentional taking of ones own life in a clear act of suicide, which remains a subject of contention.

Speaking of contention, the argument that the term “suicide bombing” is one invented by the “disbelievers” and their “Jew-controlled media” to vilify the “mujahideen”, and should therefore be abandoned, is rather weak and self-defeating.

Suicide bombings themselves are the invention of non-Muslims. For a long while, the only nominally-Muslim groups that utilized the tactic were the heterodoxical Shia, a sect which has innovated an entire calender of rituals commemorating martyrdom. And considering how Shiism is, ultimately, a death cult, the Shia's raising of suicide to the rank of martyrdom is a not unexpected regression. Shiism is, after all, the only Mecca-facing confession which considers self-flagellation an act of Godliness. It is only recently, in the footsteps of the heretical Shia, that some so-called Sunni Muslims have gained infamy for suicide bombing.⁷

⁶ The Quran, Sura al-Baqara [2]:195.

⁷ The actual chronological chain of suicide bombing looks something like this: Japanese Kamikaze (Shintoist) → Tamil Tiger separatists (Marxist Hindu) → Hezbollah, Amal (Rafidhi Shia) → Ba'athists, PKK (Communists) → Islamic Jihad (Palestinian neo-Shia) → HAMAS (Ikhwanī “Sunni” Muslims) → Al-Qaeda (Kharijites - nominally Sunni).

In fact, prior to the suicide bombing of our time, there is no precedent whatsoever in the history of Islam of the Sunni Muslim being praised for willfully taking his or her own life on or off the battlefield – whatever the intention.

The Efficacy of Suicide Bombing

In the long term, suicide bombing proves to be a redundant military tactic at best and wholly counter-productive at worst. And this is due to military-targeted suicide bombing following a law of diminishing returns.

In essence, suicide bombing relies upon the element of surprise and penetration. Once the enemy becomes wise to the tactic, it becomes militarily ineffective. Instead, anyone or anything perceived as a potential threat approaching the perimeter of a military target is fired upon. Many innocent civilians have been killed this way, on the mere suspicion that they were suicide bombers.

Hence the overwhelming majority of suicide attacks are carried out against what are referred to in military parlance as “soft targets”: women shopping in marketplace bazaars, commuters travelling in buses or waiting in bus cues, employees in their offices, and so on. This is certainly the case in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan where the heretical *takfiri* ideology of the bomber makes the blood of innocent Muslim men, women and children worthy of spilling – even while they are worshipping alongside other believers in mosques, or fasting during the sacred month of Ramadan!

As regards US military losses in Iraq, they have almost all been as a consequence of IEDs⁸ and small-arm skirmishes. Incidentally, it was also thanks to losses incurred from remotely-detonated roadside bombs that the Israelis were forced to give up south Lebanon.

Staying with Lebanon, all the fights that were won there against the Jewish state were done so through conventional military means. In 2006, for example, Hezbollah inflicted severe losses on the Israelis without offering a single suicide bombing. It is as if the Shia have abandoned the tactic they once championed after they passed it on to the poor Palestinians!

⁸ IEDs: improvised explosive devices; essentially remotely-detonated or self-detonating roadside bombs.

As for Chechnya, during the First Chechen War of 1994-1996 which the Chechens actually won, suicide bombing was not utilized at all. In the ongoing Second Chechen War since 1999, we have seen a proliferation of suicide bombing, but to an ever-diminishing affect and in an increasingly desperate and futile war.⁹

Also in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Soviet-Afghan war, and during the pre-9/11 Kashmir insurrection, the Muslims won their victories without ever employing suicide bombing.

⁹ Essentially, what we have in Chechnya now is a fratricidal war between “mujahideen” and “former mujahideen”; a war whose allegiances have reverted back to tribal and sectarian affiliations. Both sides accusing the other of apostasy in order to justify the bloodshed, much like the *fitna* of post-Soviet Afghanistan.

The Ruling on Suicide Bombing

As to the permissibility of suicide bombings as a tactic of jihad specifically, Islam's most learned scholars have reached a consensus of sorts. The overwhelming majority of senior orthodox Sunni scholars, such as Shaykh Ibn Uthaymīn, hold suicide bombing to be *harām* (i.e. forbidden) in absolute terms because the tactic rests upon something which is itself *harām* in absolute terms (i.e. suicide). Ibn Uthaymīn said:

As for what some people do regarding activities of suicide, tying explosives to themselves and then approaching non-Muslims and detonating them amongst them, then this is a case of suicide; and Allah's refuge is sought. So whoever commits suicide then he will be considered eternally to Hell-Fire, remaining there forever, as occurs in the *hadīth* of the Prophet, saying:

*“And whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, then the iron weapon will remain in his hand, and he will continuously stab himself in his belly with it in the Fire of Hell eternally, forever and ever.”*¹⁰ ¹¹

Hence, Shaykh Abdul-Muhsin al-Abbād, the author of *With which Intellect and Religion Can Suicide Bombings and Destruction be Considered Jihad?!*, feels no imperative to judge suicide bombings on a case-by-case basis: as far as he is concerned, suicide can never be permissible in any application or intention.

Shaykh al-Albāni is the most notable exception amongst the orthodox Sunni scholars to have permitted so-called martyrdom operations under certain circumstances and prerequisites. However, because those prerequisites are absent – most notably, a single temporal Islamic authority or *Khalifa* over all the Muslims

¹⁰ Reported by al-Bukhārī, no. 5778 and Muslim, no. 109.

¹¹ Ibn Uthaymīn in *Sharh Riyādh-us-Sālihīn* (1/124).

who can way up the military merits of such an act and exploit its potential benefits – Albāni also held suicide bombing to be *harām* in this day and age.¹²

We say suicide operations, now, in the present times, all of them are without legislation and all of them are forbidden. It could be the person who commits it could fall into the category of those who remain in Hellfire forever, or it could be that he does not remain in the Hellfire forever... We know how fighting was in the past, with swords, spears (and the like). And this fighting, in those days would resemble (an act of) suicide. For example, when you get one soldier facing several soldiers from the enemy army of idolaters and he attacks them from the right and the left... and there is little chance of him surviving this. We say about this, that in one way it is allowed and in another it is not allowed... if the Islamic Ruler or the Caliph of the Muslims permits. Because, the leader of the Muslims has to take into account the welfare of his people. The *Khilāfa* of the Muslims should try to understand the situation as best of possible. He would understand when it is required for one hundred Muslim soldiers to fight one thousand of the polytheists... and less than that and more than that and he calculates how many of them will perish, i.e. tens of them will die etc., but he will know the end result will be victory for the Muslims.¹³

In other words, not only did Shaykh al-Albāni agree with other Sunni scholars on the prohibition of suicide bombings, he also considered apparently suicidal acts as evidenced in the *ahādīth* to be impermissible unless specifically sanctioned by the ruler of all Muslims. Thus, although Albāni did not hold martyrdom operations to be *harām* in absolute terms, he did hold them *harām* in *relative* terms.

¹² It was due to the same consideration – the absence of the *Khilāfa* – that al-Albāni also held that obligatory (i.e. *fard 'ayn*) jihad does not exist today and those who declare it or claim to wage it do so without legitimate Islamic authority.

¹³ *Al-Fatāwa al-Muhima fi Tafsir-il-Ummah*, p. 76.

The Ruling on Targeting Non-Combatants

Regardless of which informed opinion a person takes on suicide bombing, what is indisputable is that Islam unequivocally forbids the targeting of non-combatants during times of war or peace. An act of violence, suicidal or otherwise, against innocent or otherwise peaceful men, women and children is, simply, terrorism.

Once, when news reached the Prophet ﷺ that children had been killed in a battle, he exclaimed: “*What is with some people that the killing today caused them to go so far as to kill children?!*” Someone answered: “*O Messenger of Allah! They are but children of polytheists!*” The Prophet ﷺ replied:

Nay! Verily, the best of you are children of polytheists. Do not kill children! (I say again,) do not kill children! For every soul is born upon a natural (Islamic) disposition (innocent, monotheistic and good) – until its tongue speaks on its behalf... ¹⁴

Also, when the Prophet ﷺ once passed an idolatress who had fallen during a battle, he denounced her killing, insisting that the woman was not one against whom war was to be fought.¹⁵

Abu Bakr ؓ, the Prophet’s closest friend, father-in-law and immediate temporal successor, admonished the Muslim army with the following words:

Halt, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to trees, nor burn them, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy’s flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone.

¹⁴ *Musnad Ahmad*.

¹⁵ *Sahib al-Bukhari* and *Sahib Muslim*.

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الدِّينِ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ
أَن تَبْرُوْهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion, nor drove you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.¹⁶

These Islamic precepts which extol the sanctity of human life...

النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ

life, which Allah has made sacred¹⁷

...are flagrantly violated by to the most vociferous proponents of suicide bombing such as al-Qaeda and other takfiri-jihadis, who almost exclusively encourage and justify the murder of non-combatants, regardless of their religion, age or gender.

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُ قَسْوَةً وَإِنَّ مِنَ
الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَنَفَّجِرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقَّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا
لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

Then your hearts became hardened after that, like stones or even harder. For indeed there are stones from which rivers burst forth, and there are some of them that split open and water comes out, and there are some of them that fall down for fear of Allah. And Allah is not unaware of what you do.¹⁸

Although the most audacious and spectacular of all terrorist atrocities occurred in North America on September 11, 2001, an arguably more abhorrent and sadistic outrage was executed in the North Caucasus on September 1, 2001.

¹⁶ The Quran, Sura al-Mumtahina [60]:8.

¹⁷ The Quran, Sura al-An‘ām [6]:151.

¹⁸ The Quran, Sura al-Baqara [2]:74.

The horrific suicidal siege of Beslan School Number One in North Ossetia resulted in the death of over 330 hostages, including 186 children, many if not most of them Muslim.

وَمَنْ يَقْتُلْ مُؤْمِنًا مُتَعَمِّدًا فَجَزَاؤُهُ جَهَنَّمُ خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَغَضِيبُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَلَعْنَةُ
وَأَعْدَدَ لَهُ عَذَابًا عَظِيمًا

And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him.¹⁹

The Beslan outrage was a decidedly wicked crime as it was simultaneously mass murder, a targeting of the innocent, a misplacement of responsibility, a debasing of the institute of jihad, a blight upon the already damaged image of Islam and a propaganda gift for its enemies.

Granted, the child victims of Beslan account for but a fraction of the many thousands of Chechen children killed during the Russo-Chechen wars, and it may well be the case that those who perpetrated the Beslan siege were brutalised relatives of some of those slaughtered children or, as the late Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov described them: *‘Madmen driven out of their senses by Russian acts of brutality.’*²⁰ But, regardless, the act was and remains an intolerable cruelty against innocents and an abomination against Islam.

¹⁹ The Quran, Sura an-Nisā’ [4]:93.

²⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/459302.stm>

Evidences Advanced in Defence of Suicide Bombing

All of the evidences cited in *The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations* to justify suicide bombing by way of analogy are rather tenuous. To quote a few such narrations of the Prophet ﷺ related to battlefield jihad:

By (Allah) in Whose Hand is my soul! I have surely wished to be killed in the path of Allah, then brought to life, then killed [again], then brought to life, then killed!²¹

Our Sustainer (Allah) marvels at two men: a man who stirs from his bed to pray and a man who fights in Allah's Cause, his companions are defeated and he realizes what awaits him in defeat and what awaits him in returning [to combat], but he returns [to combat nevertheless] until his blood is spilled. Allah says: "Look at My servant who went back [to combat] hopeful and anxious for what is with Me, until his blood was spilled."²²

Among the best of lives for people is a man who clasps the reins of his horse in the path of Allah, rushing on its back; whenever he hears a cry [of battle] or advancement towards the enemy, he hurries to it, seeking death and being slain with eagerness.²³

Mu‘ādh ibn ‘Afra ﷺ asked Allah’s Messenger ﷺ: “What makes Allah laugh (with approval) at His slave?” The Prophet ﷺ replied: “His (the slave’s) immersing himself into the enemy without armour.” Mu‘ādh ﷺ then took off his armour and fought until he was killed.²⁴

²¹ *Sahih al-Bukhārī*, *Sahih Muslim* and others.

²² Narrated by Ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ in *Musnad Ahmad* (6/22).

²³ Narrated from Abu Hurayra ﷺ in *Sahih Muslim*.

²⁴ Ibn Abi Shayba in his *Musannaf* (5/338).

Analysis

What should be immediately apparent from the afore-mentioned *ahādīth* is that they all clearly extol the virtue of the *mujahid* fighting the enemy until he is killed by them. Pay attention here: the narrations are praising the one who fights until he is killed by his enemy – not the one who kills himself in order to fight the enemy. Hence, the saying of Allah (which the suicidists have clearly misunderstood):

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اشْتَرَى مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَيَقْتُلُونَ وَيُقْتَلُونَ

Verily, Allah has purchased from the believers their selves and their wealth, in return for Heaven being theirs. They fight in the path of Allah and they kill and are killed.²⁵

That is: “**They kill (the enemy) and are killed (by the enemy).**” In order for this verse to justify suicide bombing, as the essay writers mistakenly argue, it would have to mean: “**They kill (the enemy) and are killed (by themselves).**”

So the battlefield martyr, according to the divinely-revealed texts and consensus of the jurists, is the one who fights and then dies by *other* than his own hand. The only exception to this is the case of the one who kills himself accidentally. Such a person may still be considered a martyr if his intention was not to die by his own hand, but to continue to fight until the enemy kills him.

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِلِينَ

And fight in Allah’s Cause those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits (of the Sharia). Truly, Allah loves not the transgressors.²⁶

²⁵ The Quran, Sura at-Tawba [9]:111.

²⁶ The Quran, Sura al-Baqara [2]:190.

The People of the Ditch

By their own admission, the strongest evidence the takfīri-jihadi apologists present for the justification of suicide bombing is the *hadīth*, recorded in *Sahīh Muslim*, about the boy from the People of the Ditch, from the *tafsīr* of *Sūra al-Burūj*. Suhayb رضي الله عنه reported that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said:

There lived a king before you and he had a (court) magician. As he (the magician) grew old, he said to the king: *'I have grown old. Send some young boy to me so that I should teach him magic.'* The king sent to him a young man so that he should train him (in magic). And on his way to the magician, the youth found a monk sitting there. The youth listened to the monk's talk and was impressed by it. It became his habit that on his way to the magician he met the monk and set there and he came to the magician (late). The magician beat him because of delay. He made a complaint of that to the monk and he said to him: *'When you feel afraid of the magician, say: Members of my family had detained me. And when you feel afraid of your family you should say: The magician had detained me.'* It so happened that there came a huge beast (of prey) and it blocked the way of the people, and he (the young boy) said: *'I will come to know today whether the magician is superior or the monk is superior.'* He picked up a stone and said: *'O Allah, if the affair of the monk is dearer to Thee than the affair of the magician, cause death to this animal, so that the people should be able to move about freely.'* He threw that stone towards it and killed it and the people began to move about (on the path freely). He (the young man) then came to that monk and informed him and the monk said: *'Son, today you are superior to me. Your affair has come to a stage where I find that you would be soon put to a trial, and in case you are put to a trial, do not give my clue.'* The youth began to treat the blind and those suffering from leprosy and he in fact began to cure people from (all kinds) of illness.

When a companion of the king who had gone blind heard about him, he came to him with numerous gifts and said: *“If you cure me all these things collected together here would be yours.”* The youth said: *“I myself do not cure anyone. It is Allah Who cures and if you affirm faith in Allah, I shall also supplicate Allah to cure you.”*

The king's companion affirmed his faith in Allah and Allah cured him. He came to the king and sat by his side as he used to sit before. The king said to him: *“Who restored your eyesight?”* He said: *“My Lord.”* Whereupon the king said: *“It means that your Lord is One besides me?”* He said: *“My Lord and your Lord is Allah.”* So the king took hold of him and tormented him till he gave a clue of that boy. The young man was thus summoned and the king said to him: *“O boy, it has been conveyed to me that you have become so much proficient in your magic that you cure the blind and those suffering from leprosy and you do such and such things.”* Whereupon the boy said: *“I do not cure anyone; it is Allah Who cures.”* The king took hold of him and began to torment him until he gave a clue of the monk. The monk was thus summoned and it was said to him: *“You should turn back from your religion.”* He, however, refused to do so. The king then ordered for a saw to be brought, placed it in the middle of the monk's head and sawed it into parts till they fell down. Then the courtier of the king was brought and it was said to him: *“Turn back from your religion.”* He refused to do so, and the saw was placed in the midst of his head and it was parted till it fell down. Then, the young boy was brought and it was said to him: *“Turn back from your religion.”* He refused to do so and he was handed over to a group of his courtiers and it was said to them: *“Take him to such and such mountain; make him climb up that mountain and when you reach its top (ask him to renounce his faith) but if he refuses to do so, then throw him (down the mountain).”* So they took him and made him climb up the mountain and he said: *“O Allah, save me from them (in any way) Thou likest,”* and the mountain began to quake and they all fell down and that person came walking to the king. The king asked: *“What has happened to your companions?”* He said: *“Allah has saved me from them.”*

The king again handed the boy to his courtiers and said: “*Take him and carry him in a small boat and when you reach the middle of the ocean (ask him to renounce) his religion, but if he does not renounce his religion throw him (into the water).*”

So they took him and he said: “*O Allah, save me from them and what they want to do.*” It was quite soon that the boat turned over and they were drowned and he came walking to the king, and the king said to him: “*What has happened to your companions?*” He said: “*Allah has saved me from them,*” and he said to the king: “*You cannot kill me until you do what I ask you to do.*” And he said: “*What is that?*” He said: “*You should gather people in a plain and hang me by the trunk (of a tree). Then take hold of an arrow from the quiver and say: In the name of Allah, the Lord of the worlds'; then shoot an arrow. If you do that, then you would be able to kill me.*” So the king called the people in an open plain and tied the boy to the trunk of a tree, then he took hold of an arrow from his quiver and then placed the arrow in the bow and then said: “*In the name of Allah, the Lord of the young boy*”; he then shot an arrow and it hit his temple. The boy placed his hands upon the temple where the arrow had hit him and died. The people said: “*We affirm our faith in the Lord of this young man, we affirm our faith in the Lord of this young man, we affirm our faith in the Lord of this young man.*” The courtiers came to the king and it was said to him: “*Do you see that Allah has actually done what you aimed at averting? They (the people) have affirmed their faith in the Lord.*” The king commanded ditches to be dug at important points in the path. When these ditches were dug, and the fire was lit in them it was said (to the people): “*He who would not turn back from his (boy's) religion would be thrown in the fire*” or it would be said to them to jump in that ditch. (The people courted death but did not renounce religion) till a woman came with her child and she felt hesitant in jumping into the fire and the child said to her: “*O mother, endure (this ordeal) for it is the Truth.*”²⁷

²⁷ *Sahib Muslim* (42/7148).

In relation to this story, Allah revealed:

قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأَخْدُودِ النَّارُ ذَاتُ الْوَقُودِ إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

Cursed were the people of the ditch. Fire (they) supplied (abundantly) with fuel – when they sat by it and witnessed what they were doing against the believers. They had nothing against them, except that they believed in Allah, the All-Mighty, Worthy of all Praise!²⁸

Analysis

The *hadīth* recounts the steadfastness and sacrifice of the believers of old before the coming of Islam, and how through miracles from Allah, the martyrdom of one young believer at the hands of a tyrant caused the onlookers to enter into true faith and also attain martyrdom. Allah inspired the boy with steadfastness in the face of death just as He inspired the baby to speak miraculously and encourage its mother with the same.

This *hadīth* is the same proof al-Qaeda's chief ideologue, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has publicly used to encourage suicide bombing. The *hadīth* was also used by the Saudi *takfiri* cleric, Shaykh Sulaymān bin Nāsir al-Alwān, as an evidence for so-called martyrdom operations.²⁹ Yet, this *hadīth* is the flimsiest of supports for such an act, and for the following reasons:

- 1) The whole episode of the People of the Ditch is inadmissible as an evidence for the rules of jihad because it is from a previous sharia of pre-Islamic times. The sharia of Muhammad abrogates all that went before it.

²⁸ The Quran, Sura al-Burūj [85]:4-8.

²⁹ In his treatise entitled, 'Ala inna nasr-Allahi qareeb, published in October 28, 2001.

2) If a person on death row is given a choice: death by firing squad, lethal injection, hanging or the electric chair, and chooses one, do we say he took his own life or that he simply chose his preferred method of execution? This is the case here. The boy did not kill himself by his own hand. He merely chose his preferred method of execution. Either way, the king was going to kill the boy. So, to outwit the king and have the people believe in Allah, the boy told the king that he could only be killed by an arrow fired in God's holy name.

3) The certainty with which the boy knew that he would die only by an arrow fired in God's name could not have come to him except through divine inspiration. Such direct inspiration from Allah ended with the death of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Anyone today who claims to know the precise method and moment of his death is claiming to have received inspiration from Allah or to have come to possess knowledge of the unseen by some other means. Either way, the claim is an act of apostasy.

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ

And with Him (Allah alone) are the keys to the unseen. None knows them but He.³⁰

4) If the lessons to be learnt from this story are related to jihad, then they are of a very different kind of jihad than those which have been recounted in the classical Islamic texts. Not only did the martyrs in the story not kill themselves, but they never once tried to fight back, harm or kill their enemy. The story, therefore, serves as more of a lesson for the *jihad of the self* than it does the *jihad of the sword*.

5) The martyrdom of the boy lead to an immediate and everlasting benefit as the people looking on embraced Islam. Suicide bombings cannot boast anything even remotely approaching such a desirable outcome. Quite the contrary, suicide attacks almost always result in brutal reprisals and collective punishments for the

³⁰ The Quran, Sura al-An‘ām [6]:59.

wider civilian populous alongside an exponential increase in Islamophobic sentiment; all of which contravenes the Islamic principle: *fighting evil itself becomes evil if, as a consequence, it leads to more harm*. As Shaykh Ibn Uthaymīn continues in his *fatwa*:

So if he (the suicide bomber) kills himself along with ten or a hundred or two hundred other people, then Islam will not benefit by that, since the people will not accept Islam, contrary to the story of the boy. Rather, it will likely make the enemy more determined, and this action will provoke (even greater) malice and bitterness in his heart to an extent that he may seek to destroy the Muslims even more, as is what is found from the practice of the (Israeli) Jews with the people of Palestine. So when one of the Palestinians dies by such (suicide) bombings and kills six or seven people, they (the Israelis) take sixty or more people in retaliation. So this does not produce any benefit for the Muslims and nor does it benefit those amongst whose ranks the bombs are detonated.³¹

وَاتَّقُواْ فِتْنَةً لَاْ تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً وَاعْلَمُواْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

And beware the affliction which affects not in particular those of you who do wrong (but may also harm innocents). And know that Allah is strict in punishment.³²

In short, the justification of suicide bombing through the *hadīth* of the People of the Ditch is from the weakest of extrapolations, is made by those with no solid grounding in the scholastic sciences of Islam, and is regurgitated only in the cyber-literature of suicide bombing apologists.

³¹ Ibn Uthaymīn in *Sharh Riyādh-us-Sālihīn* (1/124).

³² The Quran, Sura al-A‘arāf [8]:25.

Conclusion

There are many other things we could say regards suicide bombing, such as how many of those who sign up to blow themselves up are often complete basket cases who are exploited by their more cunning (if not cowardly) commanders; with many so-called human bombs often displaying advanced signs of psychosis and schizophrenia, erratic or abnormal behavior, and even flagrant violations of the sharia in the build-up to their self-sacrifice. But that's another story. Suffice to say: whether or not one sincerely believes suicide bombing is justified in Islam, the evidences presented in the essay, *The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations*, certainly do not prove it.