

War & peace, it's in the mind

Islamic scholar and peace advocate MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN and Hindu spiritual guru SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR talk about jihad in the Qur'an and Kurukshetra in the Bhagavad Gita. Sadia Khan, the Maulana's 24-year-old granddaughter, adds a youthful perspective with her questions. The dialogue was moderated by Narayani Ganesh

TOI: What do the Qur'an and the Bhagavad Gita say about violence and conflict resolution in the context of jihad and Kurukshetra?

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan: Let's discuss the misunderstanding of the term jihad. Jihad is an Arabic word that has neither a mysterious meaning nor relation to any sacred duty. Jihad is a simple word; it means to struggle, to strive. Jihad is to achieve a positive goal in life through peaceful means.

The Prophet of Islam has said: "Do jihad against your own desires." That is, doing jihad against yourself. So jihad means to control your desires. Jihad is to discipline your own behaviour. The Qur'an says: "Do jihad with the help of the Qur'an" (25:52). The Qur'an is a book of ideology; it is not a weapon. So doing jihad with the help of the Qur'an means to try to achieve one's goals through an ideological struggle.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar: In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna said to Arjuna: The perpetual enemy of an enlightened person is aghyaan or ignorance and desires. The shatru or enemy is desire. Our own mind behaves as both friend and enemy. When you have control over your mind it is your friend; when you don't have control, the mind is your enemy. The mind is the cause of your bondage and liberation. The mind you have no control over is frustrated and so is self-destructive. That is the mind you need to wage war with before dealing with outer war.

Before getting into outer war Sri Krishna said to Arjuna: There is Daivi Sampath and Asuri Sampath — those that take you to higher evolution and those that take you down — the divine versus the demonic aspects in you.

MWK: You're right. According to the Qur'an every individual must inculcate spirituality in himself to control his desires. You have to win over yourself by seeking guidance in divine knowledge enshrined in the Qur'an. To control one's desires with the help of spirituality is the gist of all religions.

TOI: But isn't the desire to control desires also a desire?

SSRS: Don't you put alum in water to clean the water? After it cleanses the water, the alum dissolves itself. Similarly, one desire of the highest helps overcome lower carnal desires and then dissolves itself.

MWK: The desire to control is a positive desire. We try to discipline our negative desires through positive thoughts. The most important thing is to be positive always.

TOI: How does one reconcile higher spiritual goals like enlightenment with the responsibilities of daily life?

SSRS: Highly regarded spiritual goals should not be thought of as being too highbrow and impractical. And bookish knowledge alone is not enough. You need to also connect to day-to-day life and its responsibilities. You need to have a bigger vision and know also that it is possible to achieve that higher goal with the help of spiritual experiences. For instance we find that children come up with great ideas — but they might suddenly find that their ideas are not working out and that it is difficult to be honest, to speak the truth... they become frustrated. At such times spiritual and religious reinforcement becomes necessary. To close the gap between idealism and practicality, spirituality is necessary. Youth can greatly benefit from spiritual guidance.

MWK: Coming back to the subject of jihad, every aspect of life involves (peaceful) struggle. Islam wants us to always remain positive. This goal can be achieved only through continuous spiritual effort. This is called jihad in Islam. But jihad is different from qital. Jihad is peaceful resolution while qital is to go to war. In Islam, war is permitted in defence alone. No other kind of war is allowed in Islam.

SSRS: I'd like to add one point. There is the chatur upaya or four ways: Sama (tolerance), Dana (forgiveness), Bheda (indifference) and Danda (to wield the stick). When the first three ways fail, one has to be strict to deal with injustice or unrighteousness. All the four upayas are used to discipline children, too, because discipline is absolutely essential in childhood as well as in a larger sense in society. It is not violence, but a stringent method to deal with the necessity of defence and discipline.

MWK: All these are part of peaceful struggle. But qital refers only to war in case of armed aggression from outside. But even in qital you cannot kill non-combatants. Also, in Islam there is no room for guerrilla or proxy warfare or for undeclared war or aggression. At present some Muslims are engaged in violent activities, which they claim to be jihad. But these people belong to non-governmental organisations. In Islam, only the state is allowed to go to war; all non-state warfare is unlawful. Even proxy wars between governments are unlawful.

SSRS: I totally agree with you — the two big epics of India, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, had wars as prominent features but they are called "Dharma Yuddha" — where righteousness reigns. The parties fight till sunset, and after that they visit each other's camps to enquire about each other's welfare. These wars were not waged in an

inhumane manner; they kept virtues and values intact. When Rama fells Ravana in the battle, he tells his brother Lakshmana: "Go, learn from Ravana." And when Lakshmana goes to Ravana to learn as a pupil, Ravana gives profound knowledge to him. Thus wars were fought because of inevitable reasons and to uphold righteousness and defend the people.

MWK: In Islam, there is no war against injustice. The problem of injustice must be resolved only through peaceful means. The only exception in this regard is when a country is attacked. Then, it can wage war in self-defence.

Sadia to SSRS: You say that youngsters have grand goals but they soon find themselves facing frustration and that spirituality could help them achieve their goals. Could you explain how?

SSRS: Spirituality gives you strength; it helps you become more enthusiastic; it increases your energy levels and gives you a broader understanding of life. You would be able to face conflicts and resolve problems peacefully. Spiritual guidance could give you broader vision, more hope and faith and enforce the importance of service to others. When you serve others, your problems appear small and you can handle them better. It will help you to cope better with setbacks.

“Isn't the desire to control desires also a desire? How different is spiritual guidance from psychiatric counselling?”

Sadia: OK, so how different would that be from going to a psychiatrist?

SSRS: Well, psychiatry might be a modern version of what was once only spiritual counselling. However, spirituality would possibly do more than help you resolve your current problem since it promotes the importance of service and looks beyond the situation at hand. Psychiatric counselling, in the process of helping you recollect and remember past anger — maybe anger at parents, friends or the system — in order to overcome it, might end up making you even more angry! Or, at best it could provide you temporary relief, but the soul remains dry. Spirituality, on the other hand, nourishes you from deep within.

Sadia: Dada, what would you say?

MWK: I'm not an expert on psychiatry but as far as my knowledge goes, psychiatry is an external discipline, just like other disciplines, while spirituality deals with your inner capacity. So when you try to unfold your inner potential you become spiritual. Perhaps this is the difference between internal and external healing.

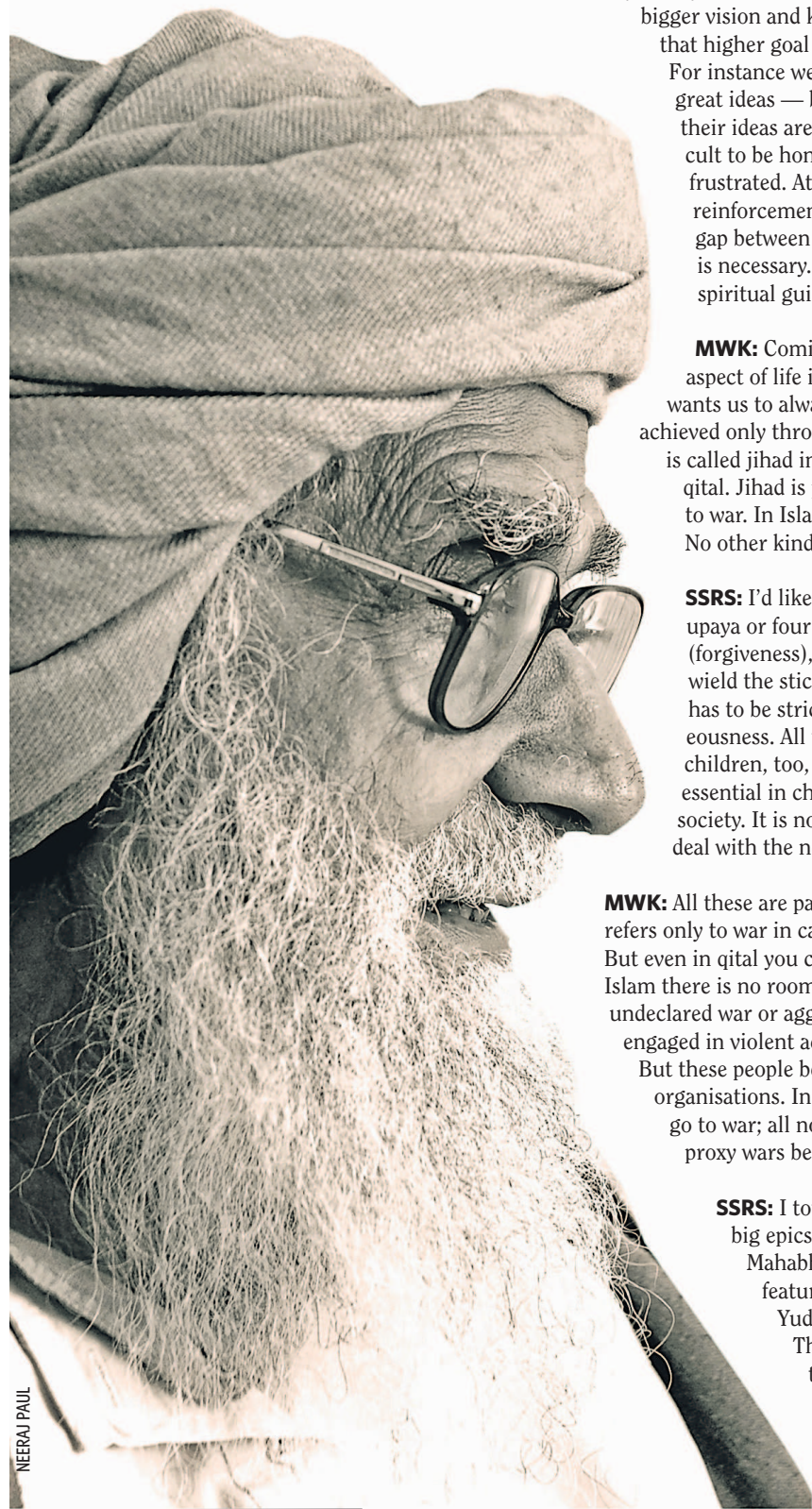
TOI: In Islam, God is perceived as being formless whereas in the Hindu tradition, there is a whole pantheon of gods in human and other forms. There is the concept of ishta devta.

SSRS: God can be adored in all forms. He is also formless. Ishwara is Satchitananda. He is chaitanya, consciousness, beyond name and form but he can be adored in 1,000 names and 1,000 forms. However, whatever devta you choose, your chant says divinity is beyond form as well as it represents form: One in All and All in One. When propitiating Ganesha, the chant says: "You are Rudra, You are Shiva, You are Vishnu, You are Devi..." So in one form you see all aspects but for purpose of celebration you

might choose a particular name and form for convenience. Many aspects of the Divine are forgotten, so these are ways to remember them. You cannot understand Vedic rituals without understanding Vedanta, the ultimate knowledge. Maulanaji?

MWK: There are two different concepts of God: the impersonal God and the personal god. The impersonal God is a philosophical concept of God, which has become a part of different religious traditions. Some Sufis have also adopted this concept of God, in the name of Wahdat al-Wajud. The concept of a personal god is called Tauhid. That is, there is no God but One God — "La Ilaha Illa Allah." Most philosophers were believers. In Islam, the Creator and the created are two different entities. In monism, both are one and the same.

SSRS: God is considered Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. There is Purusha and Prakriti, personal and impersonal. The Ashtada prakriti are: Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ahankar or ego. Personal form is important for ishta devta but that's also the One universal God, the Devta. The Vedic concept is of saakaar and niraakaar, that we are a combination of form and formlessness — the body has form, the mind is formless. The universe is a form of the Divinity. Yet the universe itself is not God. But Divinity also is part of the universe. It lives in it and comes out of it as well. In the Bhagavad Gita chapter 9, Sri Krishna says: "The whole of this universe is permeated by Me as unmanifest Divinity, like ice by water and all beings dwell on the idea within Me. But, really speaking, I am not present in them." This is pretty much in tune with quantum physics.



AQUA AURA

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Say 'aquamarine' and the waves roll in, heady with the promise of 'seas unsailed and shores unhailed'. Aquamarine is the colour of adventure, surprise and delight. It stimulates, it excites, and it's cool. It invokes sky, ocean and earth.

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It is the colour of adventure, surprise and delight. It invokes sky, ocean and earth

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