WHICH IS BETTER: MARTYRDOM OR VICTORY?

An anşârı and a muhâjir[1] sat down discussing the book of Allah and the verses of jihad. They sat down encouraging each other to carry on jihad in the path of Allah.

They recited the verse: {Say, "Do you await for us except one of the two best things [i.e., martyrdom or victory] while we await for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself or at our hands? So wait; indeed we, along with you, are waiting"} [9: 52].

The muhâjir stopped at {...the two best things} so the anşârı told him: it is either victory or martyrdom.

The muhâjir asked: Victory or martyrdom?

The anşârı said: Yes, victory or martyrdom.

The muhâjir asked: Which is better for the mujahid, victory or martyrdom?

The anşârı said: My brother, didn’t you hear the verse: {And they are] those who, if We give them authority in the land, establish prayer and give zakah and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. And to Allah belongs the outcome of [all] matters} [22: 41]? Being established in the land only occurs after victory against the enemies of religion.
The muhājir said: That is true my brother but Allah says: \textit{O you who have believed, shall I guide you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?} \textit{[It is that] you believe in Allah and His Messenger and do jihad in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is best for you, if you should know. He will forgive for you your sins and admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence. That is the great attainment. And [you will obtain] another [favor] that you love - victory from Allah and an imminent conquest; and give good tidings to the believers} \[61: 10-13\].

So after Allah showed the pleasures He has prepared for the believers and called that the “great victory,” He said “and another:” \textit{victory from Allah and an imminent conquest}. So Allah called it “another.”

The anşārī said: My brother, victory means defeating the enemies of religion and then ruling according to shari’ah.

The muhājir said: Isn't martyrdom a victory for principles?

The anşārī said: Let’s go back to the Book of Allah and find an answer to this question.

The muhājir said: Yes, let's go back. Allah says: \textit{And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day} \[4: 59\].

The anşārī said: My brother, Allah had created Adam عليه السلام and had him come down to this earth instructing him to build it. Adam and his progeny lived for ten centuries following the
religion of Allah and then things changed and people disbelieved. Allah sent messengers and the first of them was Noah عليه السلام. Allah ordered him to teach people the oneness of Allah. Noah عليه السلام remained among them for hundreds of years but only a few believed. When he saw that there was no good in his people, he prayed to Allah to destroy them and Allah sent the flood that drowned all the disbelievers while the believers were saved. With every messenger, Allah would give him and his followers victory while the disbelievers were destroyed.

Allah says: {And Our word [i.e., decree] has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers, [that] indeed, they would be those given victory} [37: 171-172].

Allah punished the people of ‘Aād, Thamūd, the people of the Aykah, the people of Lot, and then Pharaoh was destroyed and Allah gave victory to Moses عليه السلام and the Children of Israel. Allah did not destroy the disbelievers after Pharaoh but made their punishment by the hands of the believers whom he instructed to fight jihad as Allah says: {Fight them; Allah will punish them by your hands and will disgrace them and give you victory over them and satisfy the breasts [i.e., desires] of a believing people} [9: 14].

The muhājir said: This does not necessarily mean that victory is better than martyrdom for the mujahid. It is such a high status for a human being to give his life, which is the most valuable thing to him, for the sake of Allah. Allah has purchased their souls and wealth in exchange for paradise. Allah says: {Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise} [9: 111].

And we shouldn’t forget the ḥadīth of the Messenger of Allah صلی الله عليه وسلم when he said: "Nations have been presented to me and I have seen a prophet with a small band of followers, a prophet with one or two followers, and a prophet with no followers at all."[2]
There were prophets who were killed by their people, so can a Muslim say they have not achieved victory? They did achieve victory because their principles and what they stood for achieved victory. If all the mujahidin are killed to the last man in the path of Allah, that would not be considered a defeat because they have done their part and Allah would, with no doubt, give victory to His religion, and the blood of the martyrs would revive the ones after them.

Imam Muslim, al-Tirmithi and others narrated the story of the people of the trench. In that story there is the young man who was studying from the sorcerer and priest and ended up following the priest. When the king wanted to kill the young man, the young man said to the king: you will not be able to kill me until you say when you strike me: "In the name of Allah, the Lord of the boy." When the king did so, the boy was killed but the people who witnessed his death became believers and said: "We believe in the Lord of the boy."

Allah made the death of the boy a reason behind the belief of the people. So can we say that the boy did not achieve victory? Not at all. He was victorious because his call to the people won and the masses became believers. Therefore the mujahid should have the intention of wanting to become a martyr. He should desire martyrdom whether he is a leader or a follower, regardless of his position, and should not concern himself with victory because victory is from Allah and He gives it to His servants when He wishes.

**The anşārī said:** Then what is the benefit of preparing for the enemy if all what one should desire is to die in the path of Allah?

**The muhājir replied:** I do not mean that we should leave preparation aside, because preparation is, in fact, a duty and an obligation on the mujahidin. Allah says: *(And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy)* [8: 60].
But the mujahid should be taught these meanings like the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم taught his companions.

**The anşārî said:** Please show me some examples from the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم.

**The muhājir said:** I will.

**First:** When the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم took the pledge from the anşār, they asked 'what should we pledge?' He said: "You pledge to listen and obey whether you are in a state of activeness or otherwise, and to spend from your wealth whether you are wealthy or poor, and to enjoin good and forbid evil, and to speak out for Allah, and not fear the blame of the blamers, and to give me support if I come to you and to protect me like you protect your selves and your wives and your children. In exchange you will receive paradise."

The Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم in exchange to what he asked from the anşār did not promise them anything of this world. He only promised them paradise and paradise only comes after death. So would you want to die a natural death or die as a martyr?

**Second:** Allah had promised His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم in the battle of Badr victory against either the caravan or the army. Allah says: {

`[Remember, O believers], when Allah promised you one of the two groups - that it would be yours} [8: 7].`

When the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم saw the angels before the battle, he told his companions: “Move forward towards paradise whose width is like the heavens and earth.” He did not say: Move forward towards victory even though Allah has promised them with victory.
So the mujahid should be trained to love martyrdom, paradise and the pleasure of Allah but victory is something from Allah. He gives it to whomever He wills. The companions of the Messenger of Allah understood these meanings and were brought up on them. When Abu Bakr was sending the armies he would say: "Seek death for life would be given to you."

And Khalid ibn al-Waleed would send letters to the leaders of the Persians and threaten them by saying: "From Khalid ibn al-Waleed to the leaders of the Persians, peace be upon those who follow the guidance. Praise be to Allah who has stripped you of your kingdom, weakened you, divided you, and taken away from you the service that was given to you. Accept my terms and pay the jizyah, otherwise, in the name of Allah whom there is no one worthy of worship other than Him, I will attack you with men who love death just like you love life."

That is how the companions of the Messenger of Allah were. They loved death in the path of Allah so Allah gave them victory in this world. Therefore the love of martyrdom in the path of Allah, even though it is a great achievement in itself, is also a gate towards victory in this life, because who can face a people who love death like others who love life?

**The anšārī said:** In the name of Allah I did not know the big difference between the two goods mentioned in the verse and I just realized that martyrdom is greater than victory, in fact, it is victory in itself.

**The muhājir said:** Our role model Muhammad desired the station of martyrdom for himself even though he is the greatest of mankind.

He said: "In the name of the One whom my soul is in His hands, I wish to fight in the path of Allah and be killed and then fight and be killed and then fight and be killed."[3]
So who among us would want anything different to what the greatest of mankind صلی الله علیه وسلم desired for himself three times, even though he is the owner of the highest status in paradise?

O Allah grant us martyrdom and take from our blood, wealth and time until You are pleased.

The anşārī said: Āmīn.

Footnotes:

[1] A muhājir is one who emigrates for the sake of Allah for his religion. An anşārī is the one who helps the muhājir settle in that land.


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