

RED POPPIES and the RED LINE: A NUANCED INTERPRETATION of REMEMBRANCE DAY

Shaykh Saleem Bhimji



Introduction

In Canada, Remembrance Day, which is observed on November 11th, is a solemn day of memorial dedicated to honouring the military personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty during the first two World Wars, as well as subsequent conflicts. It is also about acknowledging those people who continue to serve the Country during times of war and peace. However, most importantly, it is about remembering the horrors of war, those soldiers who were innocently killed, and resolving to create a more peaceful world.

Although we all wish to live in peace and harmony, the sad reality is that conflict has been with us since the time when Qābīl (Cain) killed his brother, Hābīl (Abel). Since then, humanity has been at war with one another.

Knowing the nature of the human being, the Quran speaks about war, and more importantly, the right of sacred defence. For example, in Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), verse 251, the Quran states:

﴿وَلَوْلَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

“And had it not been for Allah’s repelling people, some of them by means of others, the Earth surely would have been wholly corrupted; but Allah is All-Gracious unto the Worlds.”

This verse is a profound reminder about the Divine intervention of Allah ﷻ and the importance of maintaining balance and order in the world – sometimes through force. It signifies that if Allah ﷻ had not permitted one group of people to repel another, then Earth would be prone to corruption and chaos. This Divine guidance is instrumental in preserving harmony on the planet – and sometimes we require war to achieve peace.

This verse also conveys a crucial message about the Divine wisdom underlying armed conflicts and struggles. It suggests that, at times, these struggles serve a higher purpose, such as preventing greater corruption and upheaval. By “using” one group to repel another, Allah ﷻ ensures that equilibrium is maintained, and that society remains on a path of moral and ethical rectitude.

Furthermore, the verse emphasizes the attribute of Grace and Benevolence of Allah ﷻ towards His creations. It underscores that the intervention of Allah ﷻ is an act of mercy and care for the entire world. In times of conflict, this verse encourages believers to trust in the Divine plan of the Almighty ﷻ, recognizing that even amidst apparent discord, there exists a deeper purpose that leads to the betterment of humanity, and the preservation of the integrity of Earth.

In another verse, the Quran presents yet another thought-provoking passage when it comments on one of the philosophies of war where Allah ﷻ says:

﴿الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفَعُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ
وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ﴾

“(As for) those who were unjustly expelled from their homes only because they said: ‘Our Lord (Nurturer) is Allah.’ Had it not been for Allah’s repelling some people through the might of others, the monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which Allah is very often worshipped would have been destroyed. And Allah will certainly help those who help Him (His Cause). Indeed, He is All- Powerful, All-Majestic.” (Quran, Sūrah al-Ḥajj (22), verse 40)

This verse suggests three important subjects - that although were discussed 1,400 years ago - are extremely relevant to the situation we see today in various regions:

1. FORCED EXPULSION: This verse addresses the unjust expulsion of people from their homes – meaning their ancestral lands – due to their faith – something which we are seeing today in front of our very eyes – even though the “main-stream media” is doing all they can to hide the truth from people and misrepresent the facts.

2. EROSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: This verse emphasizes the principle of justice and protection of religious freedom – something which is sadly lacking in many of the self-proclaimed “democracies” and self-appointed bastions of “freedom of speech” which will gladly allow the Quran to be burnt, or Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ to be mocked, however, draw their own “red lines” when it comes to certain countries being critically analyzed or “colourful symbols” being desecrated.

3. CHIPPING AWAY AT RELIGION: Lastly, this verse vividly highlights the consequences of religious persecution, and the significance of the intervention of Allah ﷻ in safeguarding places of worship. The Quran calls on humanity – primarily the Muslims – to safeguard the houses of worship of others, some countries are busy carpet-bombing entire cities, destroying churches and mosques en masse.

Without Divine Intervention, oppressive forces would have destroyed places of worship, including monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques. These places serve as centres of spiritual connection and worship for various religious communities, and their preservation is crucial for the freedom of religious practices, and the peaceful coexistence of diverse faiths.

Lastly, this verse outlines the belief that Allah ﷻ will help those who stand for justice and aid in preserving religious freedoms. It assures that Allah ﷻ – with His limitless Power and Majesty – is the ultimate Protector of the oppressed and those who are unjustly persecuted for their faith.

November 11th: Remember What?

Remembrance Day holds profound significance for many people in Canada: It is not just another day on the calendar; rather, it is a solemn occasion to pause, reflect, and remember.

However, for us as Muslim-Canadians – and just like for many other Canadians, IF we choose to mark this day, then WHAT are we going to remember, or what SHOULD we think about? We are told that Remembrance Day is not just about the past; it MUST also be about our present and our future. We are told that it must be a day which serves as a reminder of our duty to continue working towards peace.

If it is to be about the future, then from my personal perspective, Remembrance Day MUST serve as an occasion to honour the sincere sacrifices of those pious men, women, and children who have perished in ALL global conflicts – those who died for a “just cause” – as outlined in the verses of the Quran which were previously quoted, and many others which are spread throughout the Quran.

Remembrance Day is a day to NEVER FORGET the innocent people who have been displaced by war, or have become refugees; people who have had their land stolen right from under them through “international mandates.”

IF we are to remember the soldiers who gave their lives in wars, then it becomes even more imperative that we, as Muslim-Canadians, NEVER FORGET the millions of innocent men, women, and children who have been mercilessly killed throughout the days – especially in the Muslim-majority regions that have been fraught with brutal wars imposed on them for so long.

As I conclude, we ask Allah ﷻ to allow us to be able to study and understand the Islamic position on war and peace so that we are not deluded by others wanting to impose their interpretation on our religion. We ask Allah ﷻ for the alleviation of suffering of the people in conflict zones around the world – most importantly, the oppressed people of Yemen and Occupied-Palestine.

We close by imploring Allah ﷻ to hasten the return of our 12th Imam and the Saviour of Humanity, Imam al-Hujjah ﷺ so that under his banner, we can see the glorious victory of Islam and its adherents, and the spread of peace and justice for everyone, as well as the downfall of the global powers of arrogance and their supporters.

Shaykh Saleem Bhimji
Az-Zahraa Islamic Academy
sbhimji@azia.ca