

Jihad

INTRODUCTION

Jihad

The literal meaning of Jihad is struggle or effort, and it means much more than holy war. Muslims use the word Jihad to describe three different kinds of struggle:

- A believer's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as well as possible
- The struggle to build a good Muslim society
- Holy war: the struggle to defend Islam, with force if necessary

Many modern writers claim that the main meaning of Jihad is the internal spiritual struggle, and this is accepted by many Muslims.

However there are so many references to Jihad as a military struggle in Islamic writings that it is incorrect to claim that the interpretation of Jihad as holy war is wrong.

Jihad and the Prophet

The internal Jihad is the one that the Prophet (pbuh) is said to have called the greater Jihad.

But the quotation in which the Prophet says this is regarded as coming from an unreliable source by some scholars. They regard the use of Jihad to mean holy war as the more important.

The internal Jihad

Learning the Quran by heart is considered engaging in Greater Jihad

The phrase internal Jihad or greater Jihad refers to the efforts of a believer to live their Muslim faith as well as possible.

All religious people want to live their lives in the way that will please their God.

So Muslims make a great effort to live as Allah has instructed them; following the rules of the faith, being devoted to Allah, doing everything they can to help other people.

For most people, living God's way is quite a struggle. God sets high standards, and believers have to fight with their own selfish desires to live up to them, no matter how much they love God.

The five Pillars of Islam as Jihad

The five Pillars of Islam form an exercise of Jihad in this sense, since a Muslim gets closer to Allah by performing them.

Other ways in which a Muslim engages in the 'greater Jihad' could include:

- Learning the Quran by heart, or engage in other religious study.
- Overcoming things such as anger, greed, hatred, pride, or malice.
- Giving up smoking.
- Cleaning the floor of the mosque.
- Taking part in Muslim community activities.
- Working for social justice.
- Forgiving someone who has hurt them.

The Greater Jihad controversy

The Prophet is said to have called the internal Jihad the "greater Jihad".

On his return from a battle, the Prophet said: "We are finished with the lesser jihad; now we are starting the greater jihad." He explained to his followers that fighting against an outer enemy is the lesser jihad and fighting against one's self is the greater jihad (holy war).

This quotation is regarded as unreliable by some scholars. They regard the use of jihad as meaning 'holy war' as the more important.

However the quotation has been very influential among some Muslims, particularly Sufis.

Holy war

When Muslims, or their faith or territory are under attack, Islam permits (some say directs) the believer to wage military war to protect them.

However Islamic (shariah) law sets very strict rules for the conduct of such a war. In recent years the most common meaning of Jihad has been Holy War. And there is a long tradition of Jihad being used to mean a military struggle to benefit Islam.

The overwhelming majority of classical theologians, jurists, and traditionalists [i.e. Hadith experts] ... understood the obligation of jihad in a military sense.

What can justify Jihad?

There are a number of reasons, but the Quran is clear that self-defense is always the underlying cause.

- Self-defense
- Strengthening Islam
- Protecting the freedom of Muslims to practice their faith
- Protecting Muslims against oppression, which could include overthrowing a tyrannical ruler
- Punishing an enemy who breaks an oath
- Putting right a wrong

What a Jihad is not?

A war is not a Jihad if the intention is to:

- Force people to convert to Islam
- Conquer other nations to colonize them
- Take territory for economic gain
- Settle disputes
- Demonstrate a leader's power

Although the Prophet engaged in military action on a number of occasions, these were battles to survive, rather than conquest, and took place at a time when fighting between tribes was common.

The rules of Jihad

In recent years the most common meaning of Jihad has been Holy War. A military Jihad has to obey very strict rules in order to be legitimate.

- The opponent must always have started the fighting.
- It must not be fought to gain territory.
- It must be launched by a religious leader.
- It must be fought to bring about good - something that Allah will approve of.
- Every other way of solving the problem must be tried before resorting to war.
- Innocent people should not be killed.
- Women, children, or old people should not be killed or hurt.
- Women must not be raped.
- Enemies must be treated with justice.
- Wounded enemy soldiers must be treated in exactly the same way as one's own soldiers
- The war must stop as soon as the enemy asks for peace.
- Property must not be damaged.
- Poisoning wells is forbidden. The modern analogy would be chemical or biological warfare.

The Quran on Jihad

The Quran has many passages about fighting. Some of them advocate peace, while some are very warlike. The Bible, the Jewish and Christian scripture, shows a similar variety of attitudes to war.

Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors.

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged;- and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid.

Therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not, and (instead) send you (Guarantees of) peace, then Allah Hath opened no way for you (to war against them).

But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things).

Struggle in the way of Allah(Jihad):

The term "Jihad" in Arabic signifies striving or exertion. In the realm of religion, it represents the struggle against one's inner evils or striving for the sake of Islam and the Muslim community. This includes armed struggle to protect Islam if it faces threats, spreading belief in Allah, or working toward the moral upliftment of Islamic society. Jurists delineate four ways a believer might fulfill their Jihad obligation: through the heart, tongue, hands, or the sword. The first involves combating evil, deemed by the Prophet as the greater Jihad. The second and third entail supporting right and correcting wrong.

The fourth is akin to warfare, fighting non-believers and enemies of the faith. Believers are required to sacrifice wealth and lives in the service of Allah. Jihad encompasses the use of all resources to establish the Islamic way of life. Initially, it involves self-control, struggling against internal desires to establish righteousness and eliminate evil.

It demands the utilization of all mental and material resources. Ultimately, it might necessitate sacrificing one's life for Islam's cause. Jihad isn't exclusively warfare; it can be achieved through peaceful means. Early revelations emphasized persuasion, focusing on the salvation of souls rather than compelling conversion. However, later revelations did express Jihad in terms of strife and, in certain verses, equated it with war and fighting. In the face of severe persecution in Mecca, Muslims were compelled to migrate to Medina, enduring years of oppression. Initially, the Prophet refrained from retaliation, preaching patience.

The Quran sanctioned war only when Muslims suffered injustice, were forced from their homes, and migrated without cause ("And when those who have wronged will see the punishment, it will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved." 22:39-40).

The Quran emphasizes restraint in warfare, cautioning against transgression and insisting on the cessation of hostilities when persecution ends ("Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. For Allah loveth not transgressors." 2:190, "And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression." 2:193).

Jihad isn't aimed at conversion; it seeks to halt aggression, protect Islam's mission, and defend religious freedom. Poll-tax (Jizya) symbolizes submission and a contribution toward the state's burdens, not payment for preserving life or religion. While Jihad is significant, it's not among the five pillars of Islam. Unlike individual duties like prayer or fasting, Jihad, unless Muslims face immediate attack, is a collective obligation. If some fulfill this duty, it ceases to be obligatory on others, yet the entire community falls into error if Jihad is ignored collectively.

Preceding Jihad is an invitation to Islam, adhered to by the Prophet and his successors. Islam's objective in war isn't victory or acquiring property; it's fulfilling a duty—Jihad. Muslims are urged to limit destruction and horror, avoid savage practices, and end hostilities upon the cessation of persecution. Islam emphasizes the humanitarian conduct of war, advocating minimum harm to life and property. Ceasing hostilities upon the enemy's cessation of fighting and minimizing damage are emphasized. In Islam, brutal practices like mutilating the dead or torturing prisoners of war are strictly prohibited.