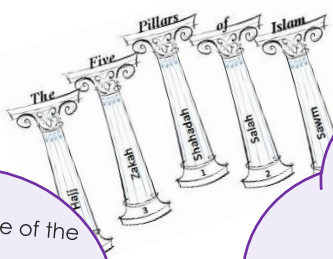


WHAT IS JIHAD?



Jihad is the struggle to live according to God's laws. It is one of the most misunderstood words in Islam, because to many people 'jihad' means 'holy war', but in fact it has a deeper meaning than this. Jihad actually means 'directed struggle'. This can mean striving to serve God, making an effort to live a moral life or actively trying to live in peace.

The greater jihad and the lesser jihad

Muslims make a distinction between the greater jihad (the personal struggle for right) and the lesser jihad (the desire to remove evil from society). It is the duty of all Muslims to try to remove evil from society, but you can only fight for justice in the world when you have truly removed the evil from your own life.

Prophet Muhammad said that the supreme jihad is against oneself.

STRUGGLE

MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) speaks on behalf of British Muslims. They have strongly condemned the actions of IS, saying they are horrified by the group's "twisted message" and barbarous behaviour. The #notinmyname hashtag has been widely used to make it clear that IS does not represent the view of British Muslims.



JIHAD IN THE WORLD TODAY

Today, most Muslims agree that a holy war can only be called against an aggressor that threatens Islam. Some Islamic extremist groups argue that the attack on the World Trade Centre (the Twin Towers) in New York, on September 11 2001, commanded by Osama Bin Laden, was an act of jihad. However, moderate Muslims reject this idea, arguing that this attack was an aggressive act, which targeted innocent civilians and so fails the test set by the Qur'an.

The rise of jihadist groups: There are a number of groups who have labelled themselves as jihadists in recent years (for example, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Islamic State/Daesh). They are prepared to use violence in order to create an Islamic State that would be governed in accordance with Islamic (Shari'ah) law. Western governments regard these groups as terrorist organisations and moderate Muslims reject this form of extreme Islam.



Jihad must never be aggressive

The Qur'an lays down the condition that the Muslims must not be the first to attack; a war of aggression is prohibited. However, if it can be agreed that a war is a 'jihad', then it is a duty to fight back, but only against those who are attacking you, never to kill civilians.

Who can declare jihad?

Muslim law is clear that jihad can only be declared by a Muslim leader who is holy and pure and who has the support of the whole Muslim community. Some Muslim communities do believe their leaders are able to declare jihad. However many Muslims today say that it is difficult to see how these conditions for jihad could be met, because there is no one, indisputable Muslim ruler who would be eligible to declare it.

NO AGGRESSION

THE GREATER JIHAD

The greater jihad is a spiritual struggle with oneself. It is the desire and commitment to live the perfect Muslim life. This includes performing the Five Pillars with devotion, practising the path set out by Muhammad, seeking justice and fairness for all and rising above one's own greed and selfishness.

The need to control desires

Islam teaches that Muslims need to control their own desires and behaviour, to follow the Five Pillars and live a life that is pleasing to God. This will ensure that when the last day comes, and they are brought to judgement by God, they will be worthy to receive God's favour and thus to enter paradise.

Respect for the beliefs of others

The Qur'an encourages Muslims to be tolerant and respectful towards the beliefs of others. 'To you be your religion, and to me mine' (109:6) Muslims should live in peace and harmony in society, celebrating differences and obeying the law.



The battle against laziness

There is a prayer of Prophet Muhammad which says: "God, I seek thy protection against helplessness and laziness, and against cowardice...and miserliness." This describes the greater jihad. It is the commitment to make the effort to be a better person and live as God has instructed.



The greater jihad is the spiritual fight against the tendency to be lazy: to get up for prayers before dawn, to only eat food that is halal (permitted), to show kindness and generosity towards other people.

Encourage what is right

The Qur'an urges Muslims to 'encourage what is right (ma'ruf), and forbid what is wrong' (3:104). This process is partly about removing evil from yourself, but also about making the world a better place. Prophet Muhammad says, "Whoever amongst you sees an evil, he must change it with his hand. If he is not able to do so, then with his tongue. And if he is not able to do so, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of faith." (Hadith)

THE TIME IS ALWAYS RIGHT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.



There are certain circumstances in which Islam accepts that force needs to be used, but only ever in self defence. While the greater jihad is the personal struggle against sin, the lesser jihad or holy war is the struggle to remove evil from society. This involves the whole community, rather than the individual, and there are strict rules for the use of force in jihad. "To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight, because they are wronged."

(Qur'an 22:39)



THE LESSER JIHAD

The origin of lesser jihad

The concept of lesser jihad arose during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, when he gave his faithful followers authorisation to fight. Muhammad's enemies in Makkah planned to wipe out all the Muslims and do they believed that there was no choice but to engage in conflict. "Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, God is competent to give them victory." (Qur'an 22:39)

This passage records the permission given by God for the Muslims to defend themselves against their enemies. Some argue that war with such a pure motive (to establish the principles of religious freedom) is a true jihad.

"Fight in the way of God whose who fight against you but do not transgress. Indeed, God does not like transgressors." (Qur'an 2:190)

"The greatest jihad is to battle your own soul, to fight the evil within yourself" - Prophet Muhammad