

Jihad is Imperative to Muslims

Mohammad Fadel

Whenever an American Muslim is discussing his faith with a non-Muslim, with the possible exception of polygamy, no other subject causes more apprehension than the issue of jihad. This discomfort is usually caused by two facts: 1) In the Western world jihad has an extremely negative connotation, often being incorrectly translated as "holy war," and conjuring up images of blood-thirsty Arabs riding out of the desert on camels ruthlessly killing everyone in sight, 2) the Muslim's ignorance of what jihad is and its significance to the Islamic world view. It is natural, therefore, in the face of such determined opposition to jihad and the believer's lack of understanding of it, that he would suffer from a certain amount of skittishness vis-a-vis jihad, and he would attempt to dodge the question. *Inshallah*, we will try to explain the meaning of jihad, explain its importance, and attempt to understand how we, as American Muslims should, and to what extent, practice jihad in our daily lives.

First, one must understand that jihad is not holy war, but, rather, is more accurately translated as "struggle." Because jihad means Struggle in the larger sense, violent struggle is only one aspect of jihad. The most important classifications of jihad are the Greater Struggle and the Lesser Struggle. Surprisingly (at least to one who believes jihad is "Holy War") the Greater Struggle is that struggle each individual fights within himself against his sinful desires.

The lesser jihad, then, is the actual military/political struggle. The lesser jihad, however, is not only limited to physical fighting; rather, it is divided into three levels—jihad of the heart, jihad of the tongue, and, finally, jihad of the sword. Jihad of the heart means that when one sees evil, he recognizes it is evil and wishes he could change it; jihad of the tongue goes one step further, since the believer is speaking out against a bad situation; jihad of the sword is the actual taking up of arms against the evil situation, with the intention of changing it.

It is clear from the Qur'an that jihad is very important in Islam, and the rewards of jihad are immense. Anyone killed in jihad is rewarded with Paradise.

The Qur'an states:

"Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding that with their Lord they have provision: Jubilant (are they) because of that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of his bounty, rejoicing for the sake of those left behind: that there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve. They rejoice because of favour from Allah and kindness, and that Allah wasteth not the wages of the believers."—Imran vs.

169-71 (Yusuf Ali Trans.).

Moreover, a believer who participates in jihad is superior to a believer who does not:

"Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a (disabling) hurt, are not on equality with those who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives. Allah hath conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a rank above the sedentary. Unto each Allah hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary."—Al-Nisa'a, v. 95 (Yusuf Ali Trans.)

"You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah."—Imran, v. 110 (Yusuf Ali Trans.).

Why does Islam place such an emphasis on jihad? I believe it can be explained by this *ayah*:

"You are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah."—Imran, v. 110 (Yusuf Ali Trans.).

It is clear that without enjoining the right and forbidding the evil, Muslims would not be the best community. Without jihad, then, Muslims cannot be the best community because jihad is the enjoining of the right and the prohibition of the wrong. Some people interpret this verse so as to limit its scope to personal morality; however, if the Prophet (pbuh) said that a Muslim cannot sleep at night with his neighbor hungry, how can he possibly go to sleep when his neighbor is being threatened with bodily harm, without even helping him?

How does this affect us in America? *Alhumdulillah*, we enjoy freedoms in the United States which permit us to practice jihad of the tongue to our utmost ability. Because we have this freedom, it is our responsibility to take advantage of this freedom for the cause of justice in the world. In general, one can speak out on any just cause and that is jihad.

At this time in history, however, we Muslims are confronted by the overwhelming presence of Israel and America's blind obedience to it. Some of us may question the wisdom of classifying the struggle with Israel as the most pressing problem facing the American Muslim community.

However, the current situation in the Middle

East threatens the continued existence of a visible Muslim community in the U.S., especially as the media continues to identify terrorism and fanaticism with Arabs and the Muslims exclusively. This media stereotyping has already led to vandalism of mosques across the country and the bombing of Arab-Americans. Moreover, as things deteriorate in the Middle East and more anti-American violence occurs, there will be more anti-Muslim violence in the U.S. During last year's TWA hijacking, for example, people were openly calling for the U.S. government to put Muslims in detention camps! Such sentiments can only increase as the situation worsens.

Beyond the undeniable justice of the Palestinian cause, there is the Israeli threat to Islam at large. The Israelis occupy Masjid-al-Aqsa, the third holiest shrine in Islam. Moreover, this occupation is a threat to Masjid-al-Aqsa's continued existence.

As Muslims, we have a duty to help liberate Palestine, but what can we do to bring this about? First, we have a duty to become knowledgeable in the history of the conflict, and America's role in the conflict. If we do not base our position on fact, then we will come across as emotional and fanatical. Secondly, when we see something biased printed in the newspaper, we should immediately respond in the form of a letter to the editor. We should write letters to our Congressman and to the President informing him of our opinions.

The second most important issue facing the Islamic world is the continued Russian invasion of Afghanistan. We should not forget that thousands of Afghans have been killed and millions made homeless. We should concentrate our efforts on supporting both the refugees and the mujahideen.

We have shown that jihad is a duty for all able Muslims, whether it is with the heart, tongue, or through fighting. We have attempted to show that we have a responsibility to promote the Palestinian cause for three main reasons: 1) It is in the self-interest of our community's survival, 2) to protect important Islamic sites, 3) the Palestinian cause is just and Muslims must support justice. It is imperative that we do something now, for it may be too late in a few years. ■

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