

# Ten Truths about Jihad

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*With the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*

## **1. THE ESSENTIAL QUR'ANIC TEACHING ABOUT JIHAD IS THAT IT IS A LIFELONG, NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE FOR GOODNESS, JUSTICE AND TRUTH AGAINST EVIL, INJUSTICE AND FALSEHOOD**

The essential Qur'anic teaching about Jihad is that it is a non-violent struggle for goodness of all kinds, and against evil of all types. This is clear from the following Meccan verses of the Qur'an:

"Struggle in God, as the struggle (*jihad*) deserves ..." (*Pilgrimage* 22:78); and

"Obey not the concealers (of truth), and struggle against them with it (the Qur'an): a great struggle (*jihad*)."  
(*The Criterion* 25:52)

## **2. DURING HIS 13 YEARS' MISSION IN MECCA, THE PROPHET AND HIS FOLLOWERS WERE SUBJECTED TO PERSECUTION, BUT WERE ORDERED TO REMAIN PATIENT & NONVIOLENT**

This is clear from verses such as the following:

"Withhold your hands (from violence in self-defence): establish prayer and give in charity" (*Women* 4:77)

Note that during this time, the Prophet's followers were persecuted, tortured and killed. He himself was the subject of assassination attempts and plots (*Spoils of War* 8:30), but the Muslim response remained peaceful and nonviolent.

## **3. DURING THE PROPHET'S 10-YEAR MISSION IN MEDINA, MILITARY JIHAD IN SELF-DEFENCE WAS EVENTUALLY PERMITTED**

This is clear from Medinan verses such as the following:

"Permission has been given to those who were fought (to fight back), because they have been oppressed ... those who were unjustly expelled from their homes, only for saying: 'Our Lord is God'." (*Pilgrimage* 22:39-40)

"Fight, in the way of God, those who fight you, and transgress not: truly, God does not love transgressors."  
(*The Heifer* 2:190)

## **4. MILITARY JIHAD MAY ONLY BE DECLARED BY A LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY**

An example of such an authority was the Prophet Muhammad, undisputed leader of the city-state of Medina - see the Medina Charter, an agreement between the Prophet and the non-Muslim, largely Jewish, tribes of Medina, for clauses relating to mutual defence of Medina against external aggression.

Several Qur'anic verses that speak of fighting and concluding peace are addressed in the singular to the Prophet, e.g. *Women* 4:84 and *Spoils of War* 8:61. This is because only he, as the legitimate ruler of the city-state of Medina, had the authority to declare a state of war or peace.

Throughout the centuries of Islamic jurisprudence on warfare ethics, the jurists have agreed that only a legitimate authority can declare a state of war or military jihad. In modern times, this means that only legitimate states have the authority to declare a state of war or military jihad: vigilante or non-state actors such as terrorist groups have no Islamic authority whatsoever to issue a call to arms in the name of jihad. This is why we stated in the Muslim Reform Movement Declaration that "we reject violent jihad."

## **5. EVEN THE MOST APPARENTLY-BELLIGERENT VERSES ABOUT JIHAD ARE IN SELF-DEFENCE**

For example, the eighth and ninth surahs or chapters of the Qur'an, *al-Anfal* (*Spoils of War*) and *al-Tawbah* (*Repentance*):

In *Surah al-Anfal*, the command to "Prepare against them your strength to the utmost ..." is followed by the exhortation to accept overtures of peace from the enemy: "If they incline towards peace, then also incline towards it, and trust in God." (*Spoils of War* 8:60-61)

Thus, the preparation of utmost strength is largely a deterrent, to encourage any enemies to sue for peace.

In *Surah al-Tawbah*, the command to "Fight them: God will punish them at your hands ..." was preceded by the cause: "They violated their oaths and ... attacked you first." (*Repentance*, 9:12-15)

Thus, as in *The Heifer* 2:190 and *Pilgrimage* 22:39, fighting was ordered in self-defence. Note that in the Medinan era, the pagan, polytheistic Meccan armies attacked the Muslims in Medina several times, aiming to wipe the latter out, e.g. at the Battles of Uhud and the Trench. Thus, the Prophet and the Muslims in Medina were utterly justified in waging military jihad to protect themselves. The numerous Qur'anic verses dealing with military jihad against the Meccan polytheists must be understood in this context.

Finally, the verse of *jizya* (*Repentance* 9:29) was revealed when the Byzantines and their allies under Emperor Heraclius threatened the northern regions of Islamic Arabia from Syria, resulting in the Tabuk expedition that ended without any fighting.

The *jizya* protection- and poll-tax, the name itself deriving from Persian, was always a political tax, not religious. This is evident in the fact that some Islamic jurists later advised Muslims under the Reconquista in Andalusia to pay *jizya* to their Christian conquerors. Furthermore, the Ottoman Caliph abolished the *jizya* and the associated category of *dhimma* in the mid-19th century CE, with the agreement of his most senior Islamic scholars, recognising that it was no longer relevant to the modern world of the time.

Thus, although early Muslim armies did take part in expansionist campaigns, at least partly motivated by the war stratagem that 'Offence is the best form of defence', Muslim authorities, both political and religious, have recognised for at least two centuries that this kind of military jihad has no place in the modern world that is governed by treaties, peace agreements and international collaboration.

## **6. MILITARY JIHAD WAS ALSO LEGISLATED TO PROTECT & PROMOTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

This is clear from the following Qur'anic verse:

"Permission has been given to those who were fought (to fight back), because they have been oppressed ... those who were unjustly expelled from their homes, only for saying: 'Our Lord is God'.

And were God not to check some people by means of others, then monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, where God's name is mentioned often, would surely be demolished." (Pilgrimage 22:39-40)

Thus, military Jihad was also legislated to protect the religious freedom of Muslims, Jews and Christians, according to the explicit text of the Qur'an. Muhammad bin Qasim, the 8th-century CE Muslim commander who first brought Islam to India, extended this religious protection to Zoroastrian and Hindu temples.

Note that this religious protection also originally extended to the idolatrous polytheists of Mecca and Medina - the latter were included in the Medina Charter, and both were covered by the Qur'anic dictum, "To you, your religion: to me, my religion." (The Concealers of Truth, 109:6) It was only when the Meccan polytheists refused to be peaceful and violently persecuted the Muslims, attempting genocide, that they were fought. Even then, the Hdaybiya peace treaty was concluded with them later.

## **7. MILITARY JIHAD WAS ALWAYS CONDITIONED BY STRONG ETHICAL RESTRICTIONS**

Numerous hadiths speak of the obligation of avoiding the killing of women, children, old people, peasants, monks and others in war - in the 7th-century CE, these were advanced, civilised teachings. Further hadiths forbid the chopping down of trees, burning of orchards or poisoning wells or other water supplies as part of war tactics. These teachings may be seen as Islamic forerunners of modern warfare ethics, such as the Geneva Conventions, that are also Islamic in spirit and must be seen as binding upon Muslims worldwide.

The 12th-13th century CE Andalusian philosopher and jurist, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), in his short 'Book of Jihad', part of his *Bidayat al-Mujtahid* (available in English as '*The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*'), discusses ten issues related to the philosophy and ethics of war or military jihad. Thus, Islam has a long tradition of warfare ethics.

## **8. TO REITERATE, JIHAD IS A STRUGGLE FOR GOOD AGAINST EVIL**

This may take many forms: *jihad bil-mal* is charitable spending; *jihad bil-lisan* is speaking truth or goodness against evil and injustice. Thus, all forms of social, intellectual and political struggle with noble aims are a type of jihad, in traditional Islamic terminology. An example of this is the hadith or Prophet's teaching, "The best jihad is to speak a word of truth before a tyrant ruler."

However, this teaching does not privilege so-called 'Islamic political parties' or Islamist groups that wrongly claim to monopolise interpretations of Islam in the social and political realms.

Jihad is a universal struggle for good against evil. The verse, "Struggle in God, as the struggle (jihad) deserves ..." (Pilgrimage 22:78) also includes the teachings, "... This is the path of your father Abraham ... Establish prayer, give charity and hold to God: He is your Protector ..."

## **9. THE OUTER JIHAD IS ALWAYS UNDERPINNED BY INNER JIHAD**

Inner jihad or *jihad al-nafs* (struggle against the self's base desires) has always been understood as a prerequisite for taking part in the outer jihad, or struggle for goodness and truth in the world.

This is reflected in the Qur'anic promise of heaven to whoever fears standing before God and "forbids their self from base desires" (*The Snatchers* 79:40-41). Furthermore, a hadith states, "The true *mujahid* (holy warrior) is the one who struggles against their own self for the sake of God."

Ibrahim bin Abi Ablah, an early ascetic of Islam, once remarked after a military expedition, "We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad," i.e. from the lesser, military jihad to the greater jihad of lifelong struggle against evil. This teaching was also attributed to the Prophet himself and widely favoured by the Sufis, who were keen to preserve the spiritual dimensions of Islam during the early centuries of astonishing Islamic military conquests and worldly success.

## **10. JIHAD TODAY**

As shown above, Islamic teachings about jihad are essentially spiritual and non-violent. All charitable efforts or struggles by Muslims today for goodness, truth and justice against evil and injustice may be termed jihad. For example, the Prophet termed "struggling to help widows and orphans" and "struggling to serve elderly parents" as types of jihad.

Armed or military jihad is the strict preserve of legitimate authority such as modern nation-states engaging in ethical warfare: this is why the Muslim Reform Movement firmly rejects 'violent jihad' carried out by non-state actors or vigilante groups such as terrorist organisations.

What we really need is a jihad for universal human rights, dignity, equality, peace and justice, tempered by the mercy and compassion that are the essential spirit of Islam and the Qur'an.

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