

## Jihad and World Peace

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August 27, 2018



People long for a world without war, but expect it can come only when others sort out their problems or when external circumstances change. I'm reminded of a relevant biblical story.

Responding to the Pharisees, Jesus Christ said in Luke 17:20-21, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you." Thus, Jesus challenged them to first seek the Kingdom of God, in other words, to seek peace within themselves.

It is impossible to build lasting peace without looking deep inside ourselves. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." If we want peace in the world we have to start by becoming peaceful ourselves. We have to learn to resolve issues with non-violent methods such as dialogue, persuasion and negotiation.



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Today, many radical Muslims justify their deeds through *jihad*. They believe the only way to make this world a peaceful one is by violently destroying those who do not believe in what they believe. The popular conception of *jihad* held today equates *jihad* with terrorism.

There are, however, two kinds of *jihad* in Islam, and neither can be construed as terrorism.

The Arabic word *jihad* means "struggle" or "striving," which can be interpreted as the struggle to be a better person. Unfortunately, for decades, and especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, many

Westerners perceive *jihad* as a call for Muslims to fight non-Muslims.

First, *jihad* speaks to the universal mission of individual Muslims as well as the Islamic community. This is the spiritual interpretation of *jihad*, in which it is understood to be the Muslim's lifelong process of constantly fighting against the evil nature of his soul. This is the greater *jihad*, or the *jihad kabir*, which never ceases, according to Islam. It is a constant struggle.

The political interpretation of *jihad* is the second, smaller *jihad*, or *jihad sagir*, consisting of military means to defend oneself and the oppressed. This use of military force is understood to be temporary, initiated by specific causes, and able to cease at any time, for instance, when either victory or negotiations ensue. Political *jihad* is legitimately carried out only through the state and not by non-state agents.

Whether *jihad* is the smaller or greater, it is always associated with the universal mission of Islam, which is to establish a society based on unity, equity and peace for humankind. This is why in verse 2:193 of the Quran it is written: "fight them until there is no persecution." This statement means Muslims should fight only when they are oppressed and persecuted. As soon as persecution ceases, Muslims do not need to fight anymore. Moreover, Muhammad only began to fight back after he was persecuted and his life was in danger.

Another Quranic verse, 4:75, states, "and why should ye not fight in the cause of Allah and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed?" Here the Quran encourages Muslims to fight against the abuse of human rights as well as social disturbances and terrorism. Through this verse, it can be asserted that the practice of *jihad* is actually opposed to international terrorism, because *jihad* is opposed to all activities that *create social insecurity and risk*.

There are two words in Islamic tradition that describe all types of terrorist actions, *fasad* and *fitnah*. The two terms imply a deliberate disruption of law and order. One of the major concerns of the Quran is to produce and maintain a socio-political system that will check, control and possibly eliminate all types of *fasad* and *fitnah* (chaos and civil disarray) in order to bring peace and stability, law and order to society. *Fasad* and *fitnah* are seen as terrorist acts and considered to be worse even than murderous acts. The Quran conveys this idea in verse 2:217: "chaos is worse than murderous."

A murderer can be caught and punished by law but his crime and punishment affects the stability and

order of the whole society. When there is chaos, however, there is no more law and there can be no control — chaos leads to the destruction of all society. This is why Islam advocates that the stability of society is very important and valuable.

There are many non-state Islamic groups, such as al-Qaeda, that use violence in the name of *jihad*. Both traditional and modern Islamic scholars agree that such violence and terrorist activities by non-state actors are illegitimate and fall under the categories of *fasad* and *fitnah*.

Nevertheless, it's to be expected that terrorists will use Quranic verses to justify their actions. For instance, it is written in the Quran, verse 2:191, "Kill them wherever you catch them..." Islamic extremists have interpreted this verse to justify their actions but ignored the context in which this statement was given. This verse was intended strictly in the context of self-defense. Historically, Muhammad was compelled to defend the territory of Medina, the first Muslim state, against aggressors. The statement should not be used out of its historical context to justify attack or take revenge.

Similarly, terrorists accuse America of spreading immorality through the dissemination of American culture. They call it a "cultural attack" on the Muslim world and are determined to fight against America through terrorism in order to defend Islamic culture from being perverted. It is true, Muslims must "fight" to protect their lives, property and the freedoms of their people, especially the freedom to worship Allah when that freedom is forcibly attacked. However, Muslims are not permitted to attack innocent people in the name of *jihad*. Any Muslim who goes against this principle and murders civilians is fighting against Islam and the fundamental values of peace which Islam stands for.



Unfortunately, the use of violence can never bring true peace to the winner of the conflict, regardless of the original cause. What happens when we obtain peace through war? The winner celebrates his victory for a period of time and the loser prepares to take revenge when the opportunity arises. The result is that both parties in the conflict will engage in an interminable, vicious battle.

There is a famous saying about this dynamic of violence: "Whoever wants peace must prepare for war." The absence of war is not necessarily peace. A moment of calm does not mean there is genuine peace and security. Peace for a limited time is not true peace either. How then do we obtain true peace? How do we live together in peace and harmony, respecting our differences and resolving conflict in a non-violent way?

In modern times, people like Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Rev. Sun Myung Moon were unwavering practitioners of nonviolence, determined to pursue peace through dialogue, forgiveness and unity. Why is it so difficult for us to follow their example?

It is because their approach to peace and conflict resolution requires that we, ourselves, internalize peace first; it requires a stable spiritual, emotional and mental state; it requires an internal sense of security; and it requires an understanding of who we are regardless of race, culture, ethnicity, and ideology. In short, this approach to peace fosters our sense of universal identity, without necessarily denying or rejecting our unique and relative identities.

Ethicist Richard Rohr, in his 2011 book, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, lays out the seven “C’s” of delusion and the source of most violence. We “compare, compete, conflict, conspire, condemn, cancel out any contrary evidence, and then crucify with impunity.” This pattern is often perceived as sacred and necessary to “make the world safe for democracy” or to “save souls for heaven.”

First we **compare**, thinking the person or group we are dealing with is socially, financially or spiritually inferior so we can treat him or them as we want. When we experience some resistance from their side, we enter into some kind of **competition**, thinking we must have the last word no matter what. When resistance persists, we enter into an open **conflict** by fighting, hurting and destroying, and to justify our deeds we **conspire** with some who side with us so we can normalize the use of violence. Our allies give us the strength to **condemn** our enemies and we believe they deserve to be punished. Next, we **cancel out** contrary evidence by denying any facts that could be in favor of the enemy, and finally we **crucify** the enemy with impunity because we strongly believe the enemy deserves death.

This pattern is constant in personal and group relationships and even on the larger national and cultural level. For example, some radical believers may *compare* and assess their faith as better than others, and so their ministry becomes about *competition* instead of collaboration with other faith traditions. Then, when there is an issue, they may enter into open *conflict* by attacking, judging, blaming, and labeling others as evil or satanic. They may also seek allies with whom to *conspire*, so they can justify as normal what they say about others. They may join their allies to *condemn* and *cancel out* contrary evidence that could support the good points of other faiths. Then they justify war against others, call it “holy war,” and believe those not like themselves deserve the equivalent of *crucifixion*.

In fact, this approach is also the pattern of Muslim terrorists who believe the West is their enemy and *jihad* the only way to deal with the Western world.

The journey to peace through personal transformation begins with fighting the enemy within our souls, to engage in the struggle for personal purity and piety. That is the greatest *jihad* — and the ultimate path to world peace.

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