

Jihad

Jihad is commonly understood to mean a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty, or a crusade for a matter of principle or belief. But the true meaning of jihad is the holy war between a man's lower nature and higher self.

This is the real message in all of the world's great religions, not just Islam, namely that one should purify oneself, build character, embrace the true principles of one's faith, evolve in consciousness, and achieve communion with the God within. In order to do this one needs to recognize the difference and distinction between the lower nature and the higher self, recognize that one is living through the lower nature, and work toward embracing higher consciousness, through purification, self-discipline, and self-mastery.

The discipline required or encouraged by the Qur'an is an effective starting point for many adherents. But one must also embrace the struggle, and overcome the lower nature. This is why "modern" culture and secular worldliness are deemed as threats, because they tend to lead one away from the spiritual self and keep one mired in materialism, the lower senses, and ego, all of which ultimately have to be overcome.

Guidance concerning this "holy war" can be found in all the major scriptures of all the world's genuine religions. In the Bhagavad Gita it is the struggle of Arjuna the warrior. In the Bible it is the struggle between good and evil, where "good" means the higher self and "evil" means the lower nature. In the Qur'an it is called jihad.

Jihad proper has absolutely nothing to do with religious war or conflict between people or cultures or faiths or races, except that as one truly embraces jihad one is no longer in conflict with others, in part because one rises above such outer conflicts, and in part because one is focused on the inner struggle. The problem is that the language of the Qur'an, like the language of the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible, can be interpreted literally and wrongly, when it is really the language of "warfare" that should be applied to one's own inner struggle.

Religious leaders who are more spiritual than religious, who realize the deeper meaning of scripture, realize this and teach this, but religious leaders who are not so enlightened misinterpret and misunderstand and thereby mislead others regarding jihad.

Most Islamists recognize the existence of both a greater jihad and a lesser jihad, but confuse which is which. To true Islamists the greater jihad is the struggle within, while the lesser jihad is the struggle with others. But to many fundamentalists, these are reversed. Those who argue about these distinctions are not really focused on jihad proper. Those who are focused on jihad proper do not argue and do not embrace violence in any form. They simply embrace the inner struggle.

In some sense there are at least five common forms of jihad. There is jihad by the sword or armed fighting in the way of God, which of course is not in the way of God at all. There is jihad by the hand, which refers to the struggle between good and evil in the world, properly meaning advancing the cause of human health and welfare. There is jihad by the pen and knowledge and jihad by the tongue, which refer to the struggle of good against evil through studying the scriptures and preaching in some form or another (but not properly through proselytizing or imposition of beliefs). And there is the greater jihad, the jihad of the heart and soul.

