

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

UNDERSTANDING THE QURANIC MEANING OF 'JIHAD'

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One of the most hijacked and abused terms of the Quran is 'Jihad'. Extreme renditions which limit its understanding to waging '**holy war**' against non-Muslims have **no basis** in the Quran. Such an understanding has not only received condemnation from Muslim corners but notable Western scholars alike.

'Dr Thomas Irving (d. 2002) was an academic and author originally from Canada who accepted Islam in the 1950s, and produced a translation of the Quran first published in 1985 as 'the first American Version'. In a paper about translating the Quran he writes:

"...In proper translation it does not mean 'holy war' except by extension, but it has been debased by this meaning, which is a journalistic usage." [1]

'Dr. G.W. Leitner a well known scholar of Arabic, Islamic Studies and a linguist writes:

"... when people say that *jihad* means the duty of the Muhammadans to wage war against a non-Muhammadan government or country and call this *jihad* (although it is possible to conceive that under certain circumstances this use of the word might be legitimate), **they really talk nonsense, and cast an undeserved libel on a religion with which they are not acquainted**" [2]

Classical lexicographers capture the original meaning of jihad as an **intense sustained struggle, toil or to diligently strive.**

جهد

1. جَهَدَ, (Ṣ, A, L, &c.), aor. جَاهَدَ, (K,) inf. n. جَهْدٌ, (TA,) *He strove, laboured, or toiled; exerted himself or his power or efforts or endeavours or ability; employed himself vigorously, strenuously, laboriously, diligently, studiously, sedulously, earnestly, or with energy; was diligent, or studious; took pains, or extraordinary pains; (Ṣ, A, L, K;) جَهْدًا in such a thing; (Ṣ;) or جَهْدًا فِي الْأَمْرِ in the affair; (A;) as also اجْتَهَدَ; (A, K;) and so جَاهَدَ, with respect to speech and actions: (L:) or جَهْدًا فِي الْأَمْرِ, aor. and inf. n. as above, he did his utmost, or used his utmost power or efforts or endeavours or ability, in prosecuting the affair:*

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [3]

This primary interpretation is supported by the Quran which in one instance offers a definition of 'Jihad' when contrasted with another term.

004.095

"Not equal are those believers who sit (at home) (Arabic: qa'iduna) other than those that are hurt / afflicted / harmed / disabled (Arabic: darari), and those who strive (Arabic: mujahiduna) in the way of God with their wealth (Arabic: amwalihim) and their persons (Arabic: anfusihim). God has granted a grade higher to those who strive / struggle / toil (Arabic: mujahidina) with their wealth and persons than those who sit (at home). (Arabic: qa'iduna) Unto all God has promised good: But those who strive / struggle / toil, He has preferred them above those who sit (at home) by a great reward"

The Arabic term 'qa'ada' means to wait, to lie in wait, remain still, to abstain, one who sits at home, remains behind, neglects or refrains.

Therefore, the meaning of 'Jihad' when contrasted with 'qa'ada' becomes evident as an immense struggle or toil.

Indeed, one can also struggle in the case of war but such a requirement in the Quran was only demanded in the case of gross oppression and in a specific context.

022:39-40

"Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and most surely God is well able to assist them; Those who have been expelled from their homes

without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is God. And had there not been God's repelling some people by others, certainly there would have been pulled down cloisters and Churches and Synagogues and Mosques in which God's name is much remembered; and surely God will help him who helps His cause; most surely God is Strong, Mighty”

060:008

“**God does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely God loves the doers of justice”**

FINAL THOUGHTS

To assert an understanding of 'jihad' as a holy war against non-Muslims has **no warrant** from the Quran. In its primary Quranic context, 'jihad' means to toil, struggle or to strive and labour in the way of God.

Whether one strives with patience, with their wealth or constantly struggles with their inner self to maintain justice, honour and truth, this would undoubtedly remain part of the Quranic understanding of 'jihad'.

047.031

“**And We shall try you until We make evident those who strive (Arabic: mujahidina) among you and persevere in patience; and We shall test your affairs”**

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REFERENCES

[1] AZIZ. Z, *Islam, Peace and Tolerance*, 10. Views of Eminent Scholars, Page 83, Note 4 quoted: *Islamic Perspectives*, published by the Islamic Foundation, 1979, p.132

Highlights in bold black are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. They have been used for illustrative purposes only.

[2] *Ibid.*, Pages 87-88

[3] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 2, Page 473*

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