

True meaning of 'jihad' has been lost

BY

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Linguistically, the word "Jihad" in the Arabic language literally means to do the best and to give effort to the best of ones ability. Its grassroots meaning requires doing any act with strong attention (mind) and intention (heart).

All of this effort is for one purpose: to strive to serve God. Muslims use the word to describe the strong effort to challenge anything that has been unjust. For example, all efforts to achieve and to maintain real peace would be called jihad. Seeking beneficial knowledge is also a part of jihad, as is helping the poor, comforting the sick and, in general, behaving in a way that glorifies God (Allah). It does not stand for terrorism, as portrayed by the media. In fact, the true meaning is quite the opposite.

It is a cardinal Islamic virtue because Islam's aim is to purify the inner and outer person or community, and to deal with society in an equitable manner where poor and vulnerable people are treated with full respect. Unfortunately, the word jihad has been corrupted and misused, not only by some Muslims, but also by Westerners. "Holy war" carries a negative connotation. There is no justification for criminal acts committed in the name of God. Like anything powerful even a word jihad can be used to justify good or evil. National best-selling author Karen Armstrong, in her latest book, "The Battle for God" notes that jihad should be translated as struggle or effort, rather than as a "Holy war," as Westerners often incorrectly assume.

Instead, jihad has a more encompassing meaning on all fronts: spiritual, political, social, personal, military and economic. Instead of seeing "jihad" only as a political term, we must view it in this larger context. In classical Islamic literature, jihad has two parts: the great jihad, which is a spiritual duty borne by every Muslims, and the minor jihad, which may be fulfilled by others. The great jihad is the one in which individuals struggle to correct their heart and minds against base desired and sinful inclinations within themselves. This is the jihad of the soul, and the one we focus on here. The minor jihad deals with evil outside the self. If each person were to purify himself from the inside using the great jihad, there would be little need for the minor jihad. If you struggle first in your heart, then the outer struggle will be smoother. There are four levels of the great jihad in the classical sense:

1-seeking knowledge: without knowledge, ignorance prevails, and ignorance hinders moral behavior.

2- Action: practicing what you know until it become part of you.

3- Responsibility: once you have the knowledge and you have lived by it, you must send the message out in a sincere manner. You need to share the goodness.

4- Patience: seeking, acting, being responsible all require patience throughout our lives. All the prophets throughout history have struggle with their inner and outer responsibilities . called upon by God to spread the word, they were often reluctant messengers. But the concept of jihad, was always at work, and the prophets worked at their mission because they were guidance by God.