What is Jihad?

Jihad means striving against the self to prevent it from committing sins. The mother's Jihad is in her pregnancy by enduring the pregnancy pains. The student's Jihad is in his study. There is also the Jihad of the one who defends his property, honor, and religion. Even perseverance in performing the acts of worship, like fasting and prayer on time, is considered one type of Jihad.

So, the meaning of Jihad is not, as understood by some, killing non-Muslims from among the innocent and peaceful people.

Islam honors life, thus, it is not permissible to fight against the peaceful people and civilians, and it is an obligation to protect properties, children, and women even during wars. Moreover, deformation and mutilation are forbidden as such acts are against the morals of Islam.

{Allah does not forbid you from being kind and just to those who did not fight against you nor did they drive you out of your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who are just. Allah only forbids you from taking as allies those who fought against you on account of your religion, and drove you out of your homes or helped others in driving you out. Whoever takes them as allies, it is they who are the wrongdoers.} [159] Surat al-Mumtahanah: 8-9.

{For this reason We ordained for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or corruption in the land – it is as if he killed all mankind; and whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved the life of all mankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, yet many of them continued to exceed the limits afterwards in the land.} [160] Surat al-Mā’idah: 32.

A non-Muslim is one of the four:

. Musta’man: the one who is granted protection.

{If any of the polytheists asks you for protection, give it to him, so that he may hear the Word of Allah, then escort him to his place of safety; that is because they are a people who do not know.} [161] Surat at-Tawbah: 6.

. Mu‘āhad: the one who is committed to a peace treaty with Muslims.

{But if they break their oaths after making a pledge and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief – whose oaths mean nothing to them – so that they may desist.} [162] Surat at-Tawbah: 12.

. Dhimmi: "Dhimmah" means a covenant, and Dhimmis are non-Muslims who enter into an agreement with Muslims to pay Jizyah (protection tax) and committed to certain conditions in return for maintaining their religion and for being granted safety and protection. It is a small sum of money that is determined according to their ability. It is to be taken only from those who are able to pay, i.e., the free adult men who can fight with the exclusion of women, children, and the insane. "Humbled" means submitting to the divine law. On the contrary, the taxes paid by millions of people today include all individuals and constitute large sums of money in return for having their affairs managed by the country and they must submit to this man-made law.

{Fight those of the People of the Book who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, nor do they consider forbidden what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor adopt the religion of truth [Islam], until they pay the protection tax willingly while they are humbled.} [163] Surat at-Tawbah: 29.

. Muhārib: the one who declares war against Muslims. This person does not respect treaties or covenants and is unworthy of protection. They are those about whom Allah Almighty said:

{Fight them until there is no more persecution and the religion is entirely for Allah; but if they desist, then Allah is All-Seeing of what they do.} [164] Surat al-Anfāl: 39.

The Muhārib (belligerent) category is the only category that we should fight against, and even those, Allah has not commanded us to kill them; rather, fight against them and there is a great difference between the two. The fight here refers to the confrontation in war between two fighters for self-defense, and this is what is stipulated by all the positive laws.

{Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight you, but do not transgress, for Allah does not like transgressors.} [165] Surat al-Baqarah: 190.

We often hear non-Muslim monotheists saying that they did not think there existed any religion on the surface of earth stating that there is no god but Allah. They thought that Muslims worship Muhammad, the Christians worship Jesus, and the Buddhists worship Buddha. They thought that all the religions they could find on earth do not conform to what lies in their hearts.

This stresses the importance of the Islamic conquests that many used to and are still eagerly waiting for. Such conquests aim at conveying the message of Tawhīd (monotheism) only within the limits of "there is no compulsion in religion", by respecting others' sanctities and making sure that they fulfill their commitments towards the country in return for maintaining their religion and providing them with safety and protection, like what happened in the conquest of Egypt, Andalusia, and many others.

Questions and Answers about Islam
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