

And strive in God's way as you ought to strive. He has chosen you, and has not imposed any difficulties on your way of life; it is the way of your father, Abraham. It is He (God) who named you Muslims, both before (this) and in this (the Qur'an); that the Messenger be a witness to you and you be a witness to humankind. So establish the regular prayer and give the obligatory charity, and hold fast to God – He is your Guardian. The best Guardian and the best Helper." (Qur'an 22:78)

JIHAD:

STRIVING FOR PEACE



Discover Islam

Jihad is a beautiful, yet greatly misunderstood, Islamic concept. The Arabic word "Jihad" is derived from the root word "Jahada" which means "to strive" – to struggle, to strain, to exert, to endeavor, to persevere and to defend are all different terms used to describe Jihad.

God states in the Muslim holy book, the *Qur'an*:

"O you who believe! Shall I show you a trade that will save you from a great punishment? You should believe in God and His messenger, and you should strive (to the best of your ability) in the way of God, with your possessions and yourself. That is better for you, if only you knew."
(Qur'an 61:10-11)



Is Jihad "Holy War?"

No. Definitely not. Jihad should never be confused with Holy War – an idea that does not have a place in Islam. The concept of Holy War does not exist anywhere in the Qur'an, nor is it found in classical Islamic teaching. It is a foreign concept introduced by the Crusaders who waged "Holy War" against the Muslim "infidels" in the Holy Land.

Contrary to popular opinion, Jihad is not a means of forcing Islam on others. It should never be viewed as an expansionist, proselytizing movement. However, historically, and even in today's times, some Muslims have taken it as such. This distortion of the virtuous concept of Jihad is in total contradiction to authentic Islamic teachings.

Jihad is the noble effort of improving oneself, one's family and community, one's nation and the world at large. Jihad is the struggle that a mother undergoes during pregnancy, childbirth, and the raising of her child; it is years of hard work that a student puts towards a good education; it is the sacrifice that a firefighter makes when risking his own life to save another; and it is the courage that a soldier has on the battlefield in the defense of his life, his country, his freedom and his beliefs.



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Why is Islam often misunderstood?

In today's turbulent world, Islam is often on the front page — mostly for the wrong reasons. Islam means peace; yet some have taken this peaceful way of life and hijacked it into a violent way, and distorted their ideology for personal and political gains. Seeing a faith through explosive world events, and judging it by the actions of a misguided few, is the primary reason why Islam is often misunderstood.



Istanbul, Turkey — where East meets West.

Islam is sometimes intentionally misrepresented. Some politicians, religious leaders and media have found an ideal scapegoat in Islam. By associating Islam with the inhumane acts of a handful, they have been successful in driving larger numbers of people to vote for them; to donate towards their ministries; and to read their newspapers, watch their television programs and listen to their radio shows.

Over 2.5 million pilgrims from all over the world — different races, nationalities and cultures — come together for the largest annual gathering for peace: the Hajj (pilgrimage) in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

Islam and other Faiths

The Qur'an states unequivocally:

"There is no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clearly from falsehood..."
(Qur'an 2:256)

Freedom of conscience is an essential tenet of Islam. Truth can only be seen if it is not clouded by coercion. As such, protection of the rights of non-Muslims is an intrinsic part of Islamic law.

History provides many examples of Muslims' respect towards other faiths. For instance, prior to the Spanish Inquisition, Jews and Christians lived and prospered in Spain for centuries under Muslim rule. Another well known example is when Omar, the second Muslim leader after Prophet Muhammad, entered Jerusalem. He refused to pray inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. He was concerned that some overzealous Muslim in the future might destroy the Church and build a Mosque in his honor.

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

"Beware on the Day of Judgment, I shall, myself, be the accuser against him who wrongs a non-Muslim citizen (of a Muslim State) or lays on him a responsibility greater than he can bear, or deprives him of anything that belongs to him."



The Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, Saudi Arabia

However, with an increasing number of Muslims speaking out against this falsehood, the true and peaceful nature of Islam is becoming more evident. Muslims are standing up against terrorism, against the persecution and killing of innocent people, and against those who perpetrate such injustice in the name of any faith.

The very word "Islam" is rooted in the Arabic word for peace. A fifth of the world's population is reclaiming this peace as their chosen way of life.



Jerusalem — the city where all three faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, come together.



The St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt: one of the many churches and monasteries that have been protected and preserved under Muslim rule for centuries.



What does Islam say about War?

Islam permits fighting in self-defense, in defense of one's faith, or on the part of those whose basic rights have been violated. It lays down strict rules of combat that include prohibitions against harming civilians and against destroying crops, trees and livestock. Terrorism; indiscriminate killing through means like suicide bombings, and weapons of mass destruction; torture and humiliation as tactics of war; and mutilation and disrespect of the dead are all totally forbidden in Islam.

Fighting is only permitted after all non-violent means have been exhausted. As Muslims see it, injustice would be triumphant in the world if good people were not prepared to fight for a righteous cause.

God says in the Qur'an:
"Permission (to defend) has been granted to those who are being fought against; that they have been oppressed. Verily, God has the power to help them. Those who were unjustly expelled from their homes for no other reason than their saying: 'God is our Lord.' If God were not to repel some human beings through others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is mentioned, would have certainly been destroyed. God will definitely help those who will help Him. Verily, God is Immensely Strong, Mighty." (Qur'an 22:39-40)

HOW DOES ISLAM GUARANTEE HUMAN RIGHTS?

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ
مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ
شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
أَتْقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

According to the Qur'an, God has created all of humankind equal, and has given each the right to pursue their own destiny. The life, honor and property of all people in a Muslim society are considered sacred, whether the person is Muslim or not. Racism, sexism and prejudice of any sort are unacceptable in Islam. The Qur'an speaks of human equality in the following terms:

"O humankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware."
(Qur'an 49:13)

The right to life is the most basic of human rights; the Qur'an equates the unjust killing of a single person to killing all of humankind: *"And whoever kills a soul, should be as though he has killed all of humankind."*
(Qur'an 5:32)

Dealing equitably and protecting the rights of every individual is the cornerstone of a Muslim society. God further states in the Qur'an: *"O you who believe! Stand up firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not hatred of a people incite you to act inequitably; act justly, that is nearer to piety, and be conscious of (your duty to) God; surely God is aware of all that you do."*
(Qur'an 5:8)