

GATEWAY DOCUMENT 4.5

Jihad

WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO *REsilience*?

Jihad literally means 'effort' in Arabic according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, which gives as its first definition, 'Among Muslims: a war or struggle against unbelievers.' The same dictionary then offers as its second definition, 'greater *jihad* (in Muslim use): the spiritual struggle within oneself against sin.' As derivatives of *jihad* the dictionary gives us '*jihadi*, *jihadist*: a person involved in a jihad, an Islamic militant'.

The problem arises that overwhelmingly when non-Muslims encounter the words *jihad*, or *jihadi* in the media it is to do with those involved in wars, armed struggle or terrorism and that therefore they assume the word refers only to something violent and threatening, whereas to most Muslims the word primarily refers to their efforts to live good, devout lives in service to God and the community.

It is important therefore that it becomes widely understood that *jihad* simply means 'striving', 'struggle' or 'effort', and can be used in a wide range of contexts.

Teaching about the different ways *jihad* may be interpreted can open up this sometimes-contentious issue. It also provides an opportunity for students to explore the concept of an internal struggle for good in the lives of themselves and others.

KEY QUESTIONS

How can this help teachers and students to increase their understanding of contentious issues?

As explained above, for most Muslims, *jihad* is an ongoing personal struggle for integrity and goodness in their own lives. But *jihad* can also refer to military action which, in the early days of Islam, included wars in defence of the nascent Muslim community and to protect it from extermination by the pagan Arab tribes. Later wars sought to extend the Islamic empire and, thereafter, there were wars to protect fellow Muslims or to preserve religious freedom. However, the most widely respected Islamic scholars have always been clear that there are religious constraints on war and these have included prohibitions on killing women, children or non-combatants, and such constraints clearly rule out terrorist action. Nevertheless, a tiny minority of Muslims, often untrained in the religious sciences, have misinterpreted the

Qur'an and Hadith to justify indiscriminate violence against innocent civilians. As a consequence of the actions of a minority of Muslim violent extremists there has been a rise in caricatured stereotyping of Muslims generally, fanning a fear of Muslims or an unjustified prejudice against them (often summed up by the term 'Islamophobia'). So this topic goes to the root of a number of issues: religious authority, misinterpretation of scripture, who should or should not declare war, violence, prejudice, manipulation and polarisation of opinion.

Why is this a contentious topic?

The Qur'an explains *jihad* in these terms, 'Ye strive (your utmost) in the cause of Allah with your property and your persons' (Surah 61: 11).

Monawar Hussain, in the Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme (see *Signposts* below), explains this as follows:

'So the greater Jihād is:

- *To cultivate virtue, such as prayer, sincerity, humility, forgiveness, love, generosity, patience, honesty, loyalty, moderation, self-restraint, discipline, courage, justice, tolerance, wisdom, good speech, gratitude, contentment, etc.*
- *To struggle against one's selfish desires.*
- *To discipline and reform the soul from harmful characteristics, such as forgetfulness of God, anger, deceit, envy, pride, laziness, etc.*
- *Any struggle or effort in the way of God, such as to fast, perform Hajj, to rise at dawn for salāh (prayer), to serve one's parents, community, society, generally to bring about positive change within and without.*
- *A whole discipline was developed by the 'Doctors of the Soul' – the Sūfīs, to cultivate the inner life of the Muslims to achieve the summit of human endeavour – the gnosis of God.*

The lesser jihad relates to the conduct of war. Despite the efforts of violent extremist ideologues, warfare in Islām is not a perpetual state but a means to be employed only as a last resort.'

(see *Signposts to further resources*, Monawar Hussain)

The second aspect of jihad is concerned with the conduct of war. However, violent extremists have distorted the classical understanding of jihad as a just war and have instead usurped the term to justify violence against innocent civilians. The long-running failure to effect a just settlement of the Palestinian question is seen by some Muslims as tantamount to an on-going war against Muslims. For a considerable number of Muslims, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are seen as western occupation of 'Muslim lands'. In all three of these cases jihad has been invoked as a principle to justify taking up arms in defence of Islam and Muslims.

Why is RE relevant to this topic?

In learning about the various possible meanings of *jihad* for Muslims, students will come to understand the impact belief can have on people's actions and ways of life. In particular they can reflect on how a person from any background obtains the strength of purpose to make a morally right choice rather than a wrong one, and to consider *jihad* as embodying that struggle for Muslims.

RE can also counter negative and unfair stereotyping of Muslims by making sure that, when Islam is studied, adequate attention is given (a) to the range of interpretations of doctrines such as *jihad* and (b) to Muslim diversity in terms of ethnic and cultural background, and sectarian difference (and it must be understood that the terms *Sunni* and *Shi'a* both incorporate a huge diversity of belief and practice¹, including diverse Sufi orders). There is considerable anxiety about terrorism and extremism in the UK. At the same time, media coverage perpetuates myths and stokes up stereotyping. Muslims are sometimes portrayed as religious fanatics and terrorists who are a direct threat to western democracy.

What classroom challenges might arise in RE?

The international context and perceived conflict between Islam and the West make this topic likely to generate differences of opinion in the classroom. Muslim pupils may share some of the sense of grievance in the wider Islamic world, which arises from what is seen as illegitimate western policy in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Equally, there may be students who sympathise with BNP or English Defence League views that Islam is culturally alien and that *jihad*, as armed struggle for justice, is a manifestation of this.

How can teachers address such challenges?

A number of key principles are important here.

- First, it is important to engage with the issue of *jihad* rather than to avoid it. Considering with pupils the range of possible interpretations of *jihad* will be easier if the teacher takes an exploratory approach.
- Sharing the complexity of the issue with students can help them distinguish between different forms and understandings of *jihad*. Although it may be difficult for all students to understand some of the nuances of this, they may at least realise it is more complex than first meets the eye. If the school has a good relationship with a well-informed member of

¹ Traditionally Sunni Muslims have been adherents of one of four *madh'habs* or schools of law. The Scholar-Jurists of the earliest generations developed a sophisticated methodology for the derivation of the Islamic Law from its sources – Qur'an, Hadith, Qiyas (Analogical Reasoning) and Ijma (Scholarly consensus). Some other Sunni Muslims describe themselves as *Salafi*. Salafism has its roots in the 18th/19th century and rejects the mainstream Sunni schools of Law claiming thereby to return to the pristine teachings of 7th century Islam. There are divisions and sub-divisions of Shi'a Islam where even within the major grouping, Ithna-Asheri (followers of twelve Imams), adherents look to different religious leaders (Grand Ayatollahs) for rulings on disputed questions.

the local Muslim community, this might be a good time to invite them to take part in the class's work.

- In the relatively safe environment of a classroom, it is possible to challenge and question attitudes in such a way that students feel respected and accepted, not misunderstood or rejected². It is always worth, where possible, working with parents and the local community on curriculum issues. In this case it may be particularly worthwhile to develop or make use of a working partnership. This may both avoid misunderstandings and harness allies.

NEXT STEPS

Signposts for further reading

Aslan, Reza (2005) *No god but God*, Random House

Bonner, M (2006) *Jihad in Islamic history: doctrines and practice*, Princeton University Press

Signposts for further resources

Striving in life: striving in Islam. How easy is it to be good? David Rose, NATRE, in RE Today, Spring 2009 issue. Set of pupil activities for 13 – 15 year olds on the 'greater jihad'.

Hussain, Monawar, *Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme*, on

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tna/+/teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/13111/ompep.pdf

Detailed and very helpful section on greater and lesser jihad including Qur'anic texts and hadith.

Richardson, Robin (2004) *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action*, Trentham Books and the Uniting Britain Trust

Dr Muhammed Tahir-ul-Qadri; Fatwa on Terrorism: factsheet;

<http://www.fatwaonterrorism.com/>

Signposts for further action

Counter Islamophobia by taking steps to establish/improve the school's relationship with local Muslims and their communities, including parents as well as religious professionals. Consider ways of involving parents from the full range of community backgrounds in a school-based activity for the shared benefit of all in the community, or beyond it.

If your school has only a small number of Muslim families in the catchment area or local community, investigate the possibility of setting up a schools linking initiative with a school in an area with a bigger Muslim population.

² *Transforming RE*, the Ofsted 'long report' on RE published in June 2010, identified as one of the reasons students felt RE was a valuable subject was the opportunity it gives them to explore controversial topics in a safe environment.

APPENDIX

Religion and Violence

It is not unusual to hear the judgement that were it not for religion the world would be a much more peaceful place. It is certainly not difficult to find supporting evidence from both the present and past history, and from every country and continent. But that is not the whole story.

Historians of religion would not agree that religions are fundamentally violent. They would be much more likely to point out that the promotion of peace is a common religious duty, that where use of violence is sanctioned, it is hedged about with many qualifications and that uninhibited warring is a religious aberration. Nevertheless, the record is complex.

One way of illustrating the complexity is through the use of the following headings for different attitudes to war and peace:

Pacifists

This attitude is opposed to any activity that involves any degree of harm or hurt to others. It is found within the Christian tradition, where its advocates would claim that they are imitating the example of Jesus. In the twentieth century, in connection with both 1st and 2nd World Wars, international law came to recognise the human right to be a 'conscientious objector', and people from other backgrounds (both religious and non-religious) identified themselves as pacifists. Indian religious traditions, dating back to the teachings of Mahavira and the Buddha, have a recurrent commitment to the principle of *ahimsa* or non-harming. In its Jain form, this is extended to apply not only to all humanity, but to all other life forms as well. Violence is utterly wrong, even to counter violence being wielded by others.

Non-violent activists

This attitude is against acts of physical violence against other human beings, but will be more ready actively to intervene non-violently in self-defence or to prevent the harming of others. Perhaps the best-known examples are the *satyagrahis*, following the lead of Gandhi marching in active opposition to taxes on salt and later against British rule in India. Less well known is the example of Ghaffar Khan in the 1920s and 30s among the Pathan tribes of the North West Frontier with an Islamic equivalent non-violent political movement, and politically active in Pakistan till his death in 1988. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Greenham Common peace camp, with their mixtures of Christian, humanist and feminist leadership have provided other examples of this stance. A distinctive characteristic of those pursuing NVA is their readiness to be imaginatively inventive of every conceivable way of powerfully putting pressure on opponents in a non-violent way (e.g. demonstrations, 'sick-ins', hunger strikes, and mock funerals). Non-violent activists believe that whilst violence is wrong, it is right actively to make challenging interventions against its use.

Just warriors

This attitude, whilst endeavouring to avoid violence, prefers to use it than to allow innocent human beings to be hurt or killed. Its most coherent formulation in the context of Western Christianity emerged in the writings of Ambrose and Augustine as Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire. It was further developed in medieval Christendom by the likes of Aquinas and Gratian, eventually forming the basis of international law. Criteria were developed which were intended to identify when it was right to go to war and how that war should be conducted. Thus, the cause should be to defend damaged innocence, every peaceful alternative should first have been exhausted, and there should be reasonable prospect of success. During the war, civilians and children should be safeguarded, prisoners respected, and weapon effects proportionate. Comparable checks are found in Muslim hadith. Another manifestation of this attitude is the almost universal provision not only for armed defence forces but of police to sustain civic order. The Hindu tradition is no exception in this regard. Alongside the special prizing of ahimsa, the kshatriya caste grouping has this defence of society as its central responsibility. And without damage to his Buddhist integrity, the Dalai Lama is commonly accompanied by an armed escort.

Holy warriors

This attitude believes that the cause it is pursuing is so totally right that anything or anybody that opposes it can and should be eliminated. It is dramatically articulated in verses found in Jewish Torah and history writings relating to alien city dwellers and false prophets; they become as it were a 'burnt offering' to God. It is picked up in language used in Christian propaganda to justify pogroms against Jews, and was in turn taken further in the pseudo-religious ideology of Nazism with its systematic attempt to exterminate all Jews. In the present century, the Lord's Resistance Movement/Army found in northern Uganda (and parts of Sudan, DR Congo and the Central African Republic) engages in a literalistic distortion of biblical language to help justify its shocking human rights violations.

The crusading language used in the Middle Ages by some Christians against Muslims in justification of violence used to repossess Jerusalem is mirrored in the militaristic version of *jihad* deployed to spread the faith. In both cases it contrasts sharply with the mainstream traditions of each faith. In Islam, theologians commonly stress that *jihad* is primarily a striving for a transformation like that which brings fruitfulness where once there was desert. In Christianity, many believe this language to be more truly lived out in the activities of the Salvation Army, fighting with food and warmth against dereliction and despair.

The force of believing

What is clear in this summary overview is that violence is a recurrent feature of the human condition and that what people most deeply believe affects how they will deal with it. They will often be prepared to use different degrees of violence to defend those deepest beliefs or

even promote them. How they decide about the limits of appropriate violence will largely be determined by what they themselves believe and why.