

Islam 101
Transcript of Part 4
Jihad
The Branches of Islam: Sunnis, Shiis, and Sufis

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So we got those Five Pillars, and we seem to be missing something: namely that [*jihad*]; that's not one of the five pillars. That's not something that all Muslims are required to do.

There are some Muslim scholars, activists, militants, who are trying to make jihad some sort of unofficial sixth pillar. But jihad itself does not mean holy war. It's really about striving and struggle and effort and Muslims will talk about this inner/greater jihad versus the outer/lesser jihad. And the most important jihad is the one within yourself to live a righteous life, to be a pious person, to live by the teachings of the Qur'an.

The outer or lesser jihad is one that is only supposed to be engaged in defense of the Muslim community, but it doesn't have to be through the use of violence. Feeling bad about something in your heart and being concerned about social issues is also a method of engaging jihad. Writing—articles, op-ed pieces, bringing attention—writing a blog would be another method of this outer jihad. Jihad of the tongue, speaking out, providing education for people about what the faith tradition actually teaches.

And then you have jihad of the hand, it can be of the sword, but there's also this idea that you personally get involved and get your hands dirty in fixing whatever it is that is wrong with injustice. Perhaps one of the most important things that certain parties need to be reminded of with respect to jihad, is that the whole purpose—if you are fighting this as a violent, militant activity—is that your goal is to end the conflict. Your goal is to end the fighting. It's not to annihilate the enemy from the face of the Earth. Your goal is to establish a treaty relationship.

That's what Prophet Muhammad did, and that's really what the goal is supposed to be. Treaties can be established for any period of time. Typically, they're for ten years. They're always renewable. Just because ten years is up, doesn't mean that it has to be over. It's still possible to have a relationship.

There are some Muslims who are really trying to reclaim jihad and its true meaning from the militants. So they're engaged in what some of them call jihad [ARABIC], civilian jihad. This is actually a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #MyJihad, where people are invited to

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explain what they understand their personal striving or effort to be, and what they're trying to do to make the world a better place.

We hear a lot in the news about Sunnis and Shiis and occasionally, about Sufis. I'll give you a very broad definition of what the differences are. Muhammad was a human being. Human beings die, and when he died, that left the community in a real quandary: who was going to lead the community after his death and in what capacity? He was supposed to be the last of the prophets.

And so the majority, the Sunnis, decided that the appropriate model would be to choose a successor called a caliphate. And this person's job was to serve as a political leader. This person was not necessarily a hereditary descendant of Muhammad—one of them was, the fourth caliph, but the first three were not. The job of the caliph was to serve as this political leader. He was expected to continue to engage in consultation with the community and to lead the community forward.

Sunnis refer to the first four caliphs as the Rightly Guided Caliphs. These were people who had been Muhammad's close companions, and therefore it was felt that they were the people who could best answer WWMD, *What would Muhammad do?*, because they knew him and they had spent time with him. So they had a certain level of knowledge and interaction with him that was unique to that time period.

After that last caliph, unfortunately you moved to a different generation that heard other people's memories but didn't have those memories personally. And I should mention that being a caliph was kind of a dangerous job because three of them got assassinated. So there were issues and concerns about the appropriate leadership in the aftermath.

Shiis, on the other hand—and they constitute the minority. Sorry, this map is a little bit fuzzy, but I wanted to give you an idea of what the percentages of Sunnis and Shiis look like. Shiis believe that the appropriate leader for the community had to be a male descendant of the prophet. And the reason for that was belief that Muhammad passed on special knowledge and ability for interpreting the Qur'an to his male descendants.

It got a little cagey in the early days, because Muhammad did not have any sons who survived infancy; he had a couple who died as babies. And so the imamate passed to his cousin, his male cousin, who was his closest male relative who also happened to be his son-in-law because he was married to his daughter, Fatima. Happily, they had two sons, Hasan and Husayn. And so you had direct male descendants after that point.

May sound odd to us to think about first cousin marriage, that does remain the norm in some places in the Middle East, and the Gulf countries in particular, which are also working to address the reality that they also have the highest level of genetic disorders in the world because of that marriage pattern.

Shiis ran into a bit of a problem with the imams because the branches divided depending on how many they recognized. Some recognized five, some recognized seven, some recognized 12. Regardless of the number, at some point there was no longer an imam on Earth.

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The Twelvers are the largest group. They believe that the twelfth imam did not die, but went into this sort of mystical occultation and that he will come back at the end of time to defeat the antichrist, the *dajjal*, it's called in Arabic, and to co-rule with, guess who? Jesus, for 1,000 years of peace and justice.

And so Shiis historically have tended to be politically rather fatalistic, waiting for this return of the imam as the moment when they might finally expect some kind of social justice. That changed in the 1970s in Lebanon with Imam Musa al-Sadr, who encouraged them to take a more activist approach. So just as often times as we have in Christianity folks who seem to believe that God is not going to send Jesus back for the second time unless we hurry up and do something to create the conditions to make that happen, there are some Muslims who also believe that they have some kind of responsibility to create certain conditions that would make it possible for God to take that kind of action.

Sufis, very briefly, represent the mystical tradition in Islam. So these tend to be people who are more focused on spirituality, generally speaking, than they are on doctrine, per se. They have been responsible for much of the creative production in Islam because one uses creative and artistic methods to try to connect spiritually with the divine. So the use of music, dance, poetry, chanting of particular prayers or phrases, the idea is to open this connection with the divine. Not just for yourself, but also then so that you can pass this along to other human beings, to kind of be this connection between heaven and Earth.

I often hear in the news, that there are two kinds of Muslims: there are the bad Muslims we don't like, and those are the terrorist, jihadi, Wahhabi, Salafi, nasty, ISIS type people that nobody likes because they're very politicized and have very rigid understanding of doctrine. And then we have the Sufis on the other hand, who are always portrayed as being tolerant and peaceful and loving and compassionate and wonderful. And I simply have to shatter that stereotype by telling you that that's not always been the case.

If you look at the 19th century anti-colonial movements throughout North Africa and Southeast Asia, they were largely led by leaders of Sufi orders because they had the popular connections, they had the network of lodges to go to, and they were financially independent from the state. So they had resources that were available to them that allowed them to very effectively fight against colonial regimes.

Probably the most famous case being in Algeria. It took the French 32 very bloody years to conquer Algeria because of Emir Abdelkader. If you ever read through some of the diplomatic cables, Wikileaks from the 19th century, you will find these examples of frustration with these Sufi leaders. So they're not always peaceful, happy, loving folks. We have to be very careful about these binary presentations.