

STRIVING IN THE PATH OF GOD: FETHULLAH GÜLEN'S VIEWS ON *JIHAD*

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Abstract

Jihad (‘struggle’, ‘striving’) in the Qur’an and *Sunnah* is a term with multiple inflections. The reiterated Qur’anic phrase *al-jihad fi sabil Allah* (‘striving in the path of God’) allows for that striving to be accomplished in myriad ways. After surveying a range of exegeses of relevant Qur’anic verses and early hadith works, the paper shows how fully Fethullah Gülen’s emphasis on jihad as a means of personal, moral, spiritual and social renewal and transformation is in line with the earliest meanings found in exegetical and hadith works. Such a traditional, historical understanding runs counter to recent, polemical assertions that jihad is a monovalent term requiring unremitting armed combat against non-Muslims. The paper demonstrates that contemporary Muslim thinkers like Gülen, who offer a more expansive and multi-faceted reading of what it means to ‘strive in the path of God’, are harking back to earlier, and thus more historically authentic, understandings of jihad and its moral purview.

The Arabic term *jihad* has primarily come to mean “armed struggle/combat” and is frequently translated into English as “holy war.” And yet a close scrutiny of the occurrence of this term in the Qur’an and early *hadith* literature in particular demonstrates that this exclusive understanding of the term cannot be supported for the formative period of Islam. In the Qur’an the phrase “*fi sabil Allah*,” meaning “in the path of God” or “for the sake of God,” is frequently conjoined to *al-jihad*. The full Arabic expression “*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*” means “striving/struggling in the path of God” in the broadest sense. In the supporting *hadith* and exegetical literature, this human struggle for the noblest purpose – that is, to win God’s approval– is manifested in multiple ways.

This paper will discuss the multiple meanings of *jihad* as evident in the Qur'an, exegeses, and *hadith* literature, particularly from the early period. After having established the broad range of meanings assigned to *jihad* in these sources, I will then proceed to discuss Fethullah Gülen's understanding of *jihad* and its relevance for contemporary Muslims. It will be argued that his understanding of *jihad* replicates the polyvalence of this term in Qur'an and *hadith* literature and that his emphasis on both its spiritual and physical dimensions is timely and relevant today, especially in the wake of the appropriation of this term as a relentlessly militant activity by contemporary extremist groups.

***Jihad* in the Qur'an**

According to the Qur'an, human beings should be constantly engaged in the basic moral endeavor of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (Qur'an 3:104, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112, etc.). The "struggle" implicit in the application of this precept is *jihad*, properly and plainly speaking, and the endeavor is both individual and collective. The means for carrying out this struggle vary according to circumstances, and the Qur'an frequently refers to those who "strive with their wealth and their selves" (*jahadu bi-amwalihim wa-anfusihim*; for e.g., Qur'an 8:72) and exhorts believers to continue to struggle in this manner throughout their lives (cf. Qur'an 9:20). This specific Qur'anic locution thus semantically and interpretively allows *jihad* to be carried out in many ways: through the performance of charity, expenditure of one's wealth for licit purposes, waging a spiritual struggle against the base desires of the carnal self, and verbal and physical, including armed, resistance to social and other forms of injustice.

Actual fighting or armed combat as one aspect of *jihad* is designated by the specific Qur'anic term *qital*. *Qital* is a component of *jihad* in specific situations. *Harb* is the Arabic word for war in general. The Qur'an employs the term *harb* four times: to refer to illegitimate wars fought by those who wish to spread corruption on earth (5:64); to the thick of battle between believers and non-believers (8:57; 47:4); and, in one instance, to the possibility of war waged by God and His prophet against those who would continue to practice usury (2:279).¹ This term is never conjoined to the phrase "in the path of God" and has no bearing on the concept of *jihad*.

The cultivation of patience or patient forbearance, in Arabic termed *sabr*, is also an important aspect of *jihad*, as clearly evident from the Qur'an. During the period known as the Meccan period (that is, between roughly 610-622 of the Common Era), the Muslims were not given permission by the Qur'an to physically retaliate against the pagan Meccans who persecuted them for their faith. Verses revealed in this period counsel the Muslims rather to steadfastly endure the hostility of the Meccans. While recognizing the right to self-defense for those who are wronged, the Qur'an maintains in this early period that to bear patiently the wrong-doing of others and to forgive those who cause them harm is the superior course of action in resisting evil. Three significant verses (42:40-43) reveal this highly significant, non-combative dimension of struggling against wrong-doing (and, therefore, of *jihad*) in this early phase of Muhammad's prophetic career. These verses state:

The requital of evil is an evil similar to it: hence, whoever pardons and makes peace, his reward rests with God—for indeed, He does not love evil-doers.

¹ These are the only instances when the word *harb* is employed in the Qur'an, and, therefore, hardly a common Qur'anic usage as Reuven Firestone maintains in his *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (Oxford, 1999), 140, n. 23.

Yet surely, as for those who defend themselves after having been wronged— no blame whatever attaches to them: blame attaches but to those who oppress people and behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right; for them is grievous suffering in store!

But if one is patient in adversity and forgives, this is indeed the best resolution of affairs.

In Qur'anic discourse, patience is thus an important component and a manifestation of the *jihad* of the righteous; quietist and activist resistance to wrong-doing are equally valorized. For example, one Qur'anic verse thus (16:110) states “As for those who after persecution fled their homes and strove actively (*jahadu*) and were patient (*sabaru*) to the last, your Lord will be forgiving and merciful to them on the day when every soul will come pleading for itself. Another (47:31) states, “We shall put you to the test until We know the active strivers (*al-mujahidin*) and the quietly forbearing (*al-sabirin*) among you.” Quietist, non-violent struggle is not the same as passivity, however, which when displayed in the face of grave oppression and injustice, is clearly marked as immoral in the Qur'anic view. “Those who are passive” (Ar. *al-Qa'idun* in Arabic) earn divine rebuke in the Qur'an (4:95).

The conscious inculcation of patience and forbearance is an act of great religious merit for the believer. Thus, Qur'an 39:10 states that “those who are patient will be given their reward without measure;” and Qur'an 25:75 states “They will be awarded the high place [in heaven] for what they bore in patience ... abiding there forever.” It should be stressed that no other activity or quality is described in the Qur'an as meeting with divine approval to the same extent.

***Jihad* in the *Hadith* Literature**

The variegated meanings of the broad term *jihad* as spiritual, moral, and physical struggle find considerable reflection in *hadith* compilations from the eighth century of the Common Era onwards. It is true that the *hadith* literature contains many prophetic and non-prophetic reports in praise of the combative *jihad*, undertaken with the right intention and for a just cause. The individual who perishes on the battlefield under such conditions is considered to be a martyr and promised generous rewards in the next world for his heroic self-sacrifice. Thus one of the best known reports on the issue of compensation in the hereafter for the military martyr is recorded by Muslim and Ibn Maja (d. 886) in their two authoritative *hadith* collections which states that all the sins of the martyr will be forgiven except for his debt.²

Taken in isolation, however, such reports convey the erroneous notion that no other aspect of *jihad* is valorized in the *hadith* literature. This would be patently untrue; a number of reports contained in various *hadith* compilations underscore various dimensions of *jihad* and martyrdom other than the military. Thus a report attributed to the late seventh century scholar al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), recorded by 'Abd al-Razzaq (d. 827) in his early *hadith* collection known as *al-Musannaf*, quotes al-Hasan as saying, “There is nothing more arduous or exacting (*ajhad*) for a man than the money which he spends honestly or for a right cause and the prayer that he says deep in the middle of the night.”³ Al-Hasan's use of the Arabic superlative *ajhad* related etymologically to the term *jihad*, stresses the greater moral excellence of basic, non-militant personal acts of piety. Advocacy of the superiority of the spiritual struggle is reflected in another prophetic statement found in the relatively early authoritative *hadith* works of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855) and al-Tirmidhi (d. 892), which states, “One who

2 See A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden, 1936-69), 2:165.

3 Abd al-Razzaq, *al-Musannaf*, ed. Habib al-Rahman al-A'zami (Beirut, 1970-72), 11:105.

strives against his own self is a *mujahid*, that is, carries out *jihad*.⁴ A report recorded in the famous standard compilation of *hadith* by Muslim b. Hajjaj (d. 875) similarly emphasizes the internal, spiritual aspect of striving for God; it affirms, “Whoever strives (*jahada*) with his heart is a believer.”⁵ Reports such as these highlight the general signification of *jihad* as striving to better oneself morally and spiritually. Therefore, the emphasis is on spiritual acts of self-purification and on charity and prayer.

In tandem with these multiple inflections of *jihad*, *hadith* collections also record various meanings of the term *shahid*. Thus the early, eighth century *hadith* work titled *al-Muwatta’* of Malik b. Anas (d. 795, the eponymous founder of the Sunni Maliki school of law), records that the Prophet identified seven kinds of martyrs, in addition to those who died from fighting on the battlefield. Thus, “He who dies as a victim of an epidemic is a martyr; he who dies from drowning is a martyr; he who dies from pleurisy is a martyr; he who dies from diarrhoea is a martyr; he who dies by [being burned in] fire is a martyr; he who dies by being struck by a dilapidated wall falling is a martyr; and the woman who dies in childbed is a martyr.”⁶ This report and the one cited above assigns martyrdom to the believer who suffers a painful death from a variety of debilitating illnesses, from a difficult labor in the case of women, or from falling victim to an unfortunate accident, such as being crushed to death by a falling wall, in addition to falling on the battlefield.

Other reports proclaim that those practicing the virtues of veracity and patience and showing compassion for the disadvantaged are equivalent in moral status to those who undertake the combative *jihad*. Three of the most authoritative Sunni *hadith* compilers —al-Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875), and al-Tirmidhi (d. 892)— report that the Prophet declared that “the one who helps widows and the poor are like fighters in the path of God.”⁷ A report recorded by the pious, ascetic scholar Ibn Abi ‘l-Dunya (d. 894) states, “A statement affirming the truth (*al-qawl bi’l-haqq*) and patience in abiding by it is equivalent to the deeds of the martyrs.”⁸ Such non-combative acts of courage – for example, on speaking the truth even at the cost of imperiling one’s life or facing other negative consequences – as well as simple acts of charity are important manifestations of striving in the path of God. All these meanings are consistent with the famous prophetic *hadith* which describes the various means of carrying out *jihad*: by the hand, by the tongue, and by intent (that is, silently with the heart).⁹ Another perhaps equally well-known *hadith* quotes the Prophet as remarking on his return from a military campaign, “We have returned from the lesser *jihad* (sc. physical, external struggle) to the greater *jihad* (sc. spiritual, internal struggle).”¹⁰ This later *hadith* underscores the two principal modes of carrying out *jihad* and a hierarchical ordering of their merits, with the internal, spiritual struggle valued more than the external, physical one.

4 Wensinck, *Concordance*, 1:389.

5 *Ibid.*, 5:455.

6 Malik b. Anas, *Al-Muwatta’*, ed. Bashshar ‘Awad Ma’ruf and Mahmud Muhammad Khalil (Beirut, 1994), 1:366-67.

7 Wensinck, *Concordance*, 1:389.

8 *Ibid.*, 116.

9 This is a *hadith* reported by Muslim and included by al-Nawawi in his *Forty Hadith*, tr. Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cambridge, U.K., 1997), 110.

10 This *hadith*, which appears to have emanated from Sufi circles, is recorded by al-Ghazali, “The book of invocation,” *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*, translated by Kojiro Nakamura as *Ghazali on Prayer* (Tokyo, 1975), 167. For further attestations of this *hadith*, see further John Renard, “Al-Jihad al-Akbar: Notes on a Theme in Islamic Spirituality,” *Muslim World* 78 (1988): 225-42.

Striving to acquire knowledge is another highly laudatory aspect of *jihad*. Al-Tirmidhi (d. 892) records the following report in his authoritative collection of *hadith*: “Whoever departs in the pursuit of knowledge is in the path of God (*fi sabil Allah*) until he returns.”¹¹ Accordingly, one who died while engaged in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge was considered a martyr. Thus a report emanating from the two Companions Abu Hurayra and Abu Dharr quotes the Prophet as saying, “When death overtakes the seeker of knowledge while he is so engaged, then he dies a martyr.”¹² The high moral valence assigned to knowledge in the Qur’an, which is the ultimate criterion distinguishing the believer from the unbeliever,¹³ is unambiguously signaled in this report. But more importantly, within the competing discourses regarding the purview of *jihad* and martyrdom, it is a valuable proof-text which underscores the self-sacrifice and effort inherent in intellectual and rational pursuits, and thus their religiously meritorious nature.

Later ethical and mystical literature composed by Sufi authors after the fourth/tenth century would further emphasize these spiritual and non-combative aspects of *jihad*, but it is important to recognize that these aspects find considerable emphasis in various sources already from the first three centuries of Islam and do not constitute a later development, as some have polemically asserted in recent times.¹⁴

Fethullah Gülen’s Views on *Jihad*, Peacemaking, and Violence

M. Fethullah Gülen’s views on *jihad* and peaceful co-existence of different faith and cultural communities are strongly grounded in Qur’anic and sunnaic perspectives and represent a mimetic continuity with them. As a practitioner of *tasawwuf*, he emphasizes the importance of the greater internal *jihad* without disavowing the necessity of the lesser external *jihad* in specific situations. Thus in his explication of the distinction between these two forms of struggling in the path of God, Gülen says:

The internal struggle (the greater *jihad*) is the effort to attain one’s essence; the external struggle (the lesser *jihad*) is the process of enabling someone else to attain his or her essence. The first is based on overcoming obstacles between oneself and one’s essence, and the soul’s reaching knowledge, and eventually divine knowledge, divine love, and spiritual bliss. The second is based on removing obstacles between people and faith so that people can choose freely between belief and unbelief.¹⁵

The effort to attain one’s essence, as Gülen puts it, is therefore a perennial one and the greater *jihad* is waged daily by the individual to fight against one’s carnal self (*nafs*) which, unchecked, prompts to wrong-doing. The acquisition of knowledge which leads to love for God and one’s fellow beings is an important part of this process of self-realization, as Gülen emphasizes.¹⁶ As we recall, the Qur’an and *hadith* stress the pursuit of knowledge as part of the overall human struggle to achieve their full potential on earth.

11 Cited by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Fadl al-‘ilm wa-l-‘ulama’*, ed. Salih Ahmad al-Shami (Beirut, 2001), 99.

12 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jami’ bayan al-‘ilm wa-fadlihi*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hamid Muhammad al-Sa’dani (Beirut, 2000), 49; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Fadl al-‘ilm*, 100.

13 Thus the Qur’an (39:9) asks, “Are those who know and those who do not know to be reckoned the same?” The Qur’an further describes knowledge as a great bounty from God bestowed upon His prophets and their followers through time (2:151-52; 4:113; 5:110;12:22; 28:14, etc.).

14 See, for example, David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley, 2005).

15 M. Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love & Tolerance* (Somerset, New Jersey, 2004), 171.

16 *Ibid.*

Gülen's definition of the lesser or external *jihad* as "the process of enabling someone else to attain his or her essence" is rather unique and worthy of note. As he explains further,

The lesser *jihad* is not restricted to battlefronts, for this would narrow its horizon considerably. In fact, the lesser *jihad* has such a broad meaning and application that sometimes a word or silence, a frown, or a smile, leaving or entering an assembly – in short, everything done for God's sake – and regulating love and anger according to His approval is included. In this way, all efforts made to reform society and people are part of *jihad*, as is every effort made for your family, relatives, neighbors, and region.¹⁷

The lesser *jihad*, in Gülen's understanding, has important social and, one may add, global dimensions and challenges those who would primarily construe it as a military endeavor in defense of Islam. Every human act undertaken with noble intentions which redounds to the benefit of society and promotes the common good, leading to a genuine transformation of society, is part of the external *jihad*. The external *jihad* must therefore be waged alongside the internal *jihad* to achieve a desired balance, for Gülen says, "If one is missing, the balance is destroyed."¹⁸

Such a holistic view of what it means to struggle constantly in the path of God is fully consonant with the wide-ranging Qur'anic and sunnaic conceptions of *al-jihad fi sabil Allah*. As we mentioned earlier, the Qur'an's insistence that the individual strive with his or her self and wealth in the way of God allows for this striving to be accomplished in myriad ways. The multiple meanings of the phrase *fi sabil Allah* ("in the way of God") is clear from a noteworthy report recorded in 'Abd al-Razzaq's *Musannaf*, which relates that a number of the Companions were sitting with the Prophet when a man from the tribe of Quraysh, apparently a pagan and of muscular build, came into view. Some of those gathered exclaimed, "How strong this man looks! If only he would expend his strength in the way of God!" The Prophet asked, "Do you think only someone who is killed [sc. in battle] is engaged in the way of God?" He continued, "Whoever goes out in the world seeking licit work to support his family he is on the path of God; whoever goes out in the world seeking licit work to support himself, he is on the path of God. Whoever goes out seeking worldly increase (*al-takathur*) has embarked, however, on the way of the devil" (*fa-huwa fi sabil al-shaytan*).¹⁹ This report contains a clear rebuttal of those who would understand "striving in the way of God" in a limited, military sense. This range of meanings is to be expected since the daily struggle of the individual to live his or her life "in the way of God" infuses even the most humdrum of licit activities with moral and spiritual significance and thus meeting with divine approval.

Gülen's understanding of *jihad* as also including the struggle to ensure the religious freedom of people to believe as they please is particularly noteworthy. Such a view seems less unexpected when compared to the Qur'anic perspective on religious freedom and the freedom of human choice in this critical matter. The facile translation of *jihad* into English as "holy war," as is common in some scholarly and non-scholarly discourses today, has conveyed to many that *jihad* is the instrument for achieving the religious and political hegemony of Muslims over others. Such an understanding constitutes in fact a gross misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the term's Qur'anic usage. The term "holy war" primarily implies a battle waged in the name of God to effect the forcible conversion of non-believers, and often

17 Ibid., 172.

18 Ibid.

19 'Abd al-Razzaq, *Musannaf*, 5:272.

a “total, no-holds barred war” intended to annihilate the enemy,²⁰ both of which objectives are doctrinally unacceptable in Islam. Qur’an 2:256 states categorically that “There is no compulsion in religion;” while another verse (10:99) asks, “As for you, will you force men to become believers?” With regard to righteous conduct during war (*jus in bello*), the Qur’an prohibits initiation of aggression against the enemy (2:190) and resorting to unjust behavior prompted by anger and desire for revenge (5:8).²¹ There is no scriptural warrant, therefore, for waging war (or employing other means) to compel non-Muslims to accept Islam.

Furthermore, an important constellation of verses in the Qur’an indicate that the combative or lesser *jihad* may be undertaken in the defense of all peoples, Muslim and non-Muslim, who face injustice and especially on behalf of those who are persecuted for their religious belief. These verses (Qur’an 22:39-40), which have formed the basis for the formulation of an Islamic ethics on war and peace, state:

Permission is given to those who fight because they have been oppressed, and God is able to help them. These are they who have been wrongfully expelled from their homes merely for saying ‘God is our Lord.’ If God had not restrained some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which God’s name is mentioned frequently would have been destroyed. Indeed God comes to the aid of those who come to His aid; verily He is powerful and mighty.

There is widespread consensus among the exegetes that these were the first verses to be revealed granting Muslims permission to fight in the Medinan period. The specific historical reason given for resorting to physical combat at this specific juncture is the wrongful expulsion of Meccan Muslims from their homes by the pagan Meccans for no other reason than their avowal of belief in one God. Furthermore, the Qur’an asserts, if people were not allowed to defend themselves against aggressive wrong-doers, all houses of worship – it is worthy of note that Islam is not the only religion indicated here – would be destroyed and thus the word of God extinguished. These verses therefore clearly suggest that Muslims may resort to defensive combat even on behalf of non-Muslims who are persecuted for their faith, reminding Muslims that their fellowship extends to righteous people of all faith communities, not just their own.

Early Qur’an exegetes recognized the ecumenical thrust of these verses, although a number of later exegetes from after the ninth century read them in a more particularist way. In his exegesis of Qur’an 22:39-40, the early Umayyad exegete Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 767) says that permission was given to Muslims to fight in the way of God because the Meccan unbelievers were persecuting them and as a consequence God lifted the prohibition against fighting that had existed for the first thirteen years after the beginning of the Prophet Muhammad’s mission. The verse explains the nature of this persecution. It consisted of the Muslims being expelled from their homes, and that a segment of the Muslims were physically tortured and others were verbally abused, so that they eventually had to escape from Mecca to Medina. The pagan Meccans had treated the believers in this way only because of their belief in God and affirmation of His oneness. If God had not constrained the unbelievers in this way

20 For various definitions of holy war, see, for example, Ronald Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (Nashville and New York, 1960), 158; the collection of essays in *The Holy War*, ed. T. P. Murphy (Columbus, Ohio, 1976); and Cross, *Crescent, and Sword: the Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Tradition*, ed. James Turner Johnson and John Kelsay (New York, 1990).

21 The later juridical literature developed these Qur’anic notions further and enumerated a list of proscribed actions during combat, including the killing of non-combatants, the chopping down of trees, etc.; see Khalid Abou el Fadl, “The Rules of Killing at War; an Inquiry into Classical Sources,” *Muslim World* 89 (1999): 144-57.

through the agency of the Muslims, Muqatil comments, then they would have prevailed over the believers. Subsequently the monasteries of the monks, the churches of the Christians, the synagogues of the Jews and the mosques of the Muslims would have been destroyed. All these religious groups (*al-milal*), comments Muqatil, mention the name of God profusely in their places of worship and God defends these places of worship through the Muslims.²² Similar views are recorded by other exegetes, such as al-Tabari²³ and al-Wahidi.²⁴

Given this interpretive trajectory, Gülen's understanding of the external *jihād* to include the struggle to guarantee an individual's freedom to believe as he or she pleases is reflective of the Qur'an's own concern for the protection of this basic human right.

The high valuation in the Qur'an and *hadith* of *sabr* or patient forbearance as an important component of *jihād*, as we stressed earlier, also finds strong reflection in Gülen's writings. Gülen identifies five categories of patience, which are:

enduring difficulties associated with being a true servant of God or steadfastness in performing regular acts of worship; resisting temptations of the carnal self and Satan to commit sins; enduring heavenly or earthly calamities, which includes resignation to Divine decrees; being steadfast in following the right path and not allowing worldly attractions to cause deviation; and showing no haste in realizing hopes or plans that require a certain length of time to achieve.²⁵

According to this comprehensive definition of patience, it is clearly the single most important component of the internal or greater *jihād* whose inculcation transforms ordinary human beings into God's true friends and worshipers. As a Sufi, he invokes the concept of the final station (*maqam*) or point in one's life to which only "those believers who are the most advanced in belief, spirituality, nearness to God, and who guide others to the truth" attain.²⁶ "Patience," Gülen affirms, "is an essential characteristic" of these believers during their journey towards God.²⁷

Through the patient endurance of all the setbacks and misfortunes in one's life, the individual achieves knowledge of his or her true essence, which as we recall, was described by Gülen as the primary purpose of the greater *jihād*. Each individual must be repeatedly "sieved" or "distilled," he says, in order to develop one's fullest human potential.²⁸ He borrows evocative imagery from the well-known Sufi poet Jaleddin Rumi (d. 1273) to describe this process of evolution and maturation. In reference to the growth of a grain of wheat from a seed into a loaf of bread which humans may consume for their sustenance, Rumi remarked that "it must be kneaded, baked in an oven, and, finally, chewed by teeth, sent into the stomach, and digested." The process of moral maturity is a long and arduous one and only the patient successfully endure it through the constant waging of the spiritual *jihād* against "one's carnal desires and the impulses of one's temperament."²⁹

Finally, Gülen warns against the phenomenon of arbitrary violence and aggression against civilians, that is terrorism, which has no place in Islam and which militates against its very foundational tenets of reverence for human life and for all of God's creation. In an article

22 Muqatil, Tafsir, 3:130.

23 Al-Tabari, Tafsir, 9:161-64.

24 Al-Wahidi, Wasit, 3:272-73.

25 M. Fethullah Gülen, Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism (Fairfax, Virginia, 1999), 100.

26 Ibid., 102.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 103.

29 Ibid., 100.

that he wrote for the *Turkish Daily News* a few days after the horrific events of September 11, 2001 titled “Real Muslims Cannot Be Terrorists,” Gülen lamented the deplorable hijacking of Islam by terrorists who claimed to be Muslims and acting out of religious conviction. He counseled that “One should seek Islam through its own sources and in its own representatives throughout history; not through the actions of a tiny minority that misrepresent it.”³⁰

Gülen is outraged by the current nihilistic disregard of terrorists for the strict rules in classical Islamic jurisprudence which mandate, for example, the formal declaration of a legitimate *jihad* by the state or government and humane conduct during its undertaking. He attributes this alarming state of affairs to a general breakdown in moral, holistic education in Muslim-majority societies today and the rise of a self-serving attitude even among, he says, “ordinary Muslims who live Islam as it suits them.” He sorrowfully remarks further that “in the countries [where] Muslims live, some religious leaders and immature Muslims have no other weapon to hand than their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam; they use this to engage people in struggles that serve their own purposes.”³¹ The violence that such unscrupulous and unselfish behavior may eventually induce may be combated by reforming and strengthening educational systems in the Islamic world so as to emphasize Qur’anic values of compassion and mercy for others.

The antidote to hatemongering and exclusion, Gülen stresses, is the cultivation of the qualities of forgiveness and tolerance enjoined in the Qur’an. He focuses our attention on Qur’an 3:134, which describes righteous people as, “Those who spend benevolently during ease and straitened circumstances, and those who restrain their anger and pardon people; and God loves those who do good to others.” Gülen comments that this verse clearly counsels believers to behave with restraint and civility and forgive their adversaries, even in the face of great provocation, and not to resort to hostile behavior.³² The Prophet Muhammad exemplified such behavior in his daily interactions with people. The external *jihad* that he carried out in his life, Gülen comments, was “an armed struggle ... tied to special conditions,” and “was the kind of struggle that is sometimes necessary to carry out in order to protect such values as life, property, religion, children, homeland, and honor.”³³ Fighting in the path of God under such highly restricted conditions can never degenerate into the unprincipled and relentlessly hostile acts of terrorism perpetrated by today’s extremists.

Conclusion

Even this brief survey cogently demonstrates that Fethullah Gülen’s views of *jihad* and its role in our lives is fundamentally shaped by the Qur’anic and sunnaic definitions of this critical term. *Jihad* in the path of God is the perennial human struggle against internal and external enemies in order to be fully human, and as such, defines the very essence of human life and experience. Against the debasement of this concept by militants in the name of Islam, Gülen and many others like him, have steadfastly held to the Qur’anic vision of striving with our selves and our resources, material and spiritual, to constantly better ourselves and the world around us as exemplifying *jihad*. Such views deserve greater amplification and need to be more widely disseminated. I am truly glad to be part of this public forum which is making a valuable contribution to this end.

30 Reprinted in Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization*, 179-83.

31 From an interview Gülen gave to Nuriye Akman, published in *Zaman* between March 22-April 1, 2004.

32 Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization*, 182.

33 *Ibid.*, 178.