

# **Jihad: Faith, Fanaticism, and the Circles of the Soul**

**By Ruth Rowe**

“In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful...”  
– the Qur'an <sup>1</sup>

“We are not equal. Our dead are in Paradise; your dead are in hell.”  
- the Prophet Muhammad <sup>2</sup>

Islam is a religion that was born into war, into a land of tribal conflict, a land of harsh deserts and little water that shaped the people into warriors. Religion, as a concept unique to humans, is influenced by the humans that birth it and the culture over which it is laid. In Islam, the tribal wars of harsh people became the wars of harsh believers whose tribe was all Islam, and whose enemies were those infidels outside the sacred ummah (the community), the outsiders to an inner tribe whose leader is God and God only. The present sub-conscious conception of the Arab “self” defines the world-view for the Arab-Islamic individual and the overall culture. Thus, the ideals of a religion become ideals colored in the shades of culture, of the ingrained beliefs that govern how things *are*. By recognizing and understanding pre-existing cultural assumptions, the modern conflict of why there is conflict between Islam and the West becomes all the more clear.

## *The Definition of Jihad*

Today, the Arabic word *jihad* (from the root *j-h-d*) is associated in the non-Arabic world with the “holy war” that Islamic fundamentalist organizations fight in their executions of anti-Western terrorism. It is likened to the Christian “crusade,” to a battle of conservative hyper-religious conversion and violence and greed. Such a definition of jihad is not only ethnocentrically inspired (the holy wars of the Christian religion having been fought for, on the whole, entirely different reasons than the holy wars of Islam), but much too simplistic.

Jihad, in actuality, is defined only as “striving” or “struggle.” As such, it is given moral and religious overtones concerning the pursuit of goodness in one’s self and in one’s community (i.e. the world as a whole). Such a pursuit becomes a moral struggle within oneself (the “greater jihad”), and this internal aspect is what is considered the most important part of its definition. As the Prophet Muhammad allegedly said upon returning from a battle, “we return from the little

jihad to the great jihad, the more difficult and crucial effort to conquer the forces of evil in oneself and in one's own society in all the details of daily life.”<sup>3</sup> Being a good person within oneself, balancing the conflicting desires of the soul, submitting to the will of God, and battling against selfishness and egotism in favor of compassion, is what is most essential in the internal jihadic struggle.

However, the aforementioned “little jihad” brings in the Arab-Islamic cultural value of the community as more important than individual (a predominantly “Eastern” conception, as compared to the West that favors individualism to social grouping). The importance of society (the *ummah*) in the jihadic ideal becomes its means of external application and while “militancy is not the essence of jihad,”<sup>4</sup> it plays an integral role within the concept of the “lesser jihad.” The lesser jihad is the often warfare-based conflict with the “outside,” the non-Muslim world (the House of War; even its name is inseparable from the idea of fighting) as a threat before God as a kind of physical representation of immorality. It is undertaken for the sake of purity of the mujahid before God, for the sake of ridding the world of evil (both outside and inside the *ummah*). The lesser jihad is most similar to the modern perception of Islamic-waged “holy war” against the West and, often, fundamentalist leaders emphasize its centrality in the current overall impurity of the world. Today, the lesser jihad has become exclusively a “struggle against idolatry, sexual deviation, plunder, repression, and cruelty,” as Ayatollah Khomeini put it.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, though, jihad is, as just mentioned, the moral striving for goodness in oneself – and, as religiously moral, it becomes obligatory in the path to being a “good person” internally. But, as this struggle becomes morally obligatory, so does its “less important” counterpart, the lesser jihad: defensive warfare for God. And both these interrelated battles are, fundamentally, “at once outward and inward,”<sup>6</sup> a fact that has important implications to modern fundamentalism and the application of both “haram” and “nif,” the two halves of the self, to the modern Western world.

### *Cultural Pre-conceptions of the Soul: the Greater Jihad*

The Arab subconscious conception of the “self” is a dual construct, visually represented by two concentric circles, the inner containing that which is *haram* and the outer ring that which is *nif*. *Haram* is all that is primal, natural, basely wicked (in that is it selfish and egocentric, being the true essence of the ego) and, above all, untouchably sacred. *Haram* is the “inner self,”

the self that is the keeper of one's honor. Encircling, protecting, and at odds with haram is nif. Nif is the civilized, contrived (a façade), consciously moral, and material aspect to the human soul. It is the public self, the representation (but not manifestation) of personal honor. Haram is naturally harmful, while nif is unnaturally (i.e. human-based, fake, separate from the unaffected, untamed world) responsible.

Two external representative examples of the relationship between haram and nif are those of the Kaaba at Mecca and the male/female dichotomy in much of the Arab-Islamic world. As haram is taboo (too sacred), it must be surrounded, protected, *veiled* by nif. The Kaaba is the cloth-covered cube that houses a sacred stone. The stone's sanctity is so strong that it must be hidden; likewise, haram is perceived to be feminine and nif masculine. Thus, the haram withheld by women in a female/male relationship (daughter-father, wife-husband, etc.) must be covered and protected and controlled by the nif-manifestation that is the man. The woman becomes the ultra-sacred; she becomes a taboo, primal creature that holds the honor of the man.

Of course, being in contrast, there is inevitable conflict between these two self-halves. The negative aspect of haram is that it attempts "the conquest of [the] immortal soul by the carnal soul or passions"<sup>7</sup> while nif lacks the inherent honor and sacred-ness (it carries an innate sense of false-ness as it is, in a way, merely a façade) of that which is haram. In essence, neither is the 'good' half nor the 'bad' half: "it is necessary to remember that Islam bases itself upon the idea of establishing *equilibrium* within the being of man, as well as in the human society where he functions and fulfils the goals of his earthly life."<sup>8</sup> This struggle for balance between the potentially complimentary self-ideas of haram and nif, when combined with the religion of Islam, becomes the greater jihad. It is the striving for equilibrium, for moral goodness, for both sanctity and social responsibility.

This jihad is, quite simply, the war between true self and responsibility; it is a war between the pure, sacred, primal interior and the public, fallible, honor-driven (good?) but not innately honorable exterior. It's an internal war for balance between the self and public morality, and, ultimately, it all comes down to what it means to be "good"... it is at once a defense of the sacred *haram* and a dismissal of it as wicked. This internal struggle – this internal struggle between the culturally constructed self is then mixed with the ideals of Islam and its jihad that exalts martyrdom and self-sacrifice above all else as the path to Paradise and Allah.

*Under the Shadow of Swords: History and the Lesser Jihad*

“Islam grew with blood.”  
-Ayatollah Khomeini<sup>9</sup>

“Jihad... [is] an external struggle against evil.”  
- David Zeidan<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the Iraqi-Iranian War in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein declared Iraqi victory and built a monument in Baghdad commemorating the occasion and honoring the thousands of Iraqi soldiers who had died in battle. The monument towered over a central plaza, consisting of two forearms (based on those of Hussein, himself) holding two curved Arabian scimitars cast of the metal of the swords carried by Iraqis in battle. The swords arc over the stone-paved plaza below, the base of each arm emerging from a mountain of battle-green helmets taken from the bodies of fallen Iranians.

It is alleged that the Prophet Muhammad said to his warriors, “know that Paradise is under the shade of swords.”<sup>11</sup> When fighting in defense of the faith of Islam, all those martyrs will be welcomed into Paradise, as they died fighting for God. This quote is hauntingly similar to the monument in Baghdad, which was, itself, a monument of victory in war. And yet, Saddam Hussein was the blatantly secularist (of Ba’athist ideology) dictator of Iraq, despised by fundamentalist groups viewing secularism and its rule-by-man as unholy and an example of apostasy against Islam. The monument is a reflection of the pervasive sense of Islamic faith in the Middle East, the apparent naturalness it has in everyday life. No doubt Saddam built the monument and created a veritable, physical shadow below swords to illicit rapport and support from his people – however, his method (using religion) is illustrative of the underlying strength of the ummah and its prevalence even in the allegedly “secularist” Arab world.

The strength of the Islamic community and Islam’s primacy in the lives of its believers is one of the reasons it’s been so given to popular fundamentalism – fundamentalists play to the ideals of early Islam, and these values are often shared by much of the ummah itself. The idea of Paradise acquired through death in warfare (and it’s very important to note that only through dying is one granted entrance to heaven; unlike the Crusades, for example, its not the fighting that’s important, but the *dying*), is not such a foreign concept to the Arab-Muslim, whose cultural

and religious roots are non-pacifistic and emphasizing the tribal ideal of unselfish death for one's people.

Islam itself was founded in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century in Saudi Arabia by the charismatic and intelligent merchant-soldier, Muhammad, who was revered as the final Prophet of Allah (Arabic for "God"). At the religion's core are the five pillars: the *shahada* proclaiming the one-ness of God; routine prayer (*salat*); alms-giving to the poor (*zakat*); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (*saum*); pilgrimage to the Kaaba at Mecca during one's lifetime if at all possible (the *hajj*). It was a religion that emphasized the community, the family, charity, and a green, honeyed, luxuriant Paradise so at odds with the harsh sands of the deserts around Mecca and Medina. Islam was also never a religion to preach compassion through pacifism – its warriors were those justified by a religious purity through bloodshed (their own) against the threat of an infidel world. The original Muslims were tribal warriors who, above all, followed their leader.

The first year of the Islamic calendar is 622 C.E. of the Western/ Christian one; in that year, Muhammad and his loyal followers were banished from the city of Mecca, making the hijra (alternately, hegira) to Medina as a new tribe united by faith. Later, feeling threatened by Islam, the pagan Meccans formed an army of a 1000 men to attack the few Muslims at Medina. This battle was the first physical manifestation of the "fight mentality" of the Arabian culture of that time and how it becomes a huge influence on Islam. Only 313 strong, the Muslim army met the Meccans armed with few actual weapons; however, they came with Muhammad's words of sure victory as assured by God. And indeed, the Muslims won that battle and many after it, backed by their warrior Prophet and the belief in having God at their backs and Paradise ahead of them if they were to die.

Muhammad, in these battles, preached of the glory of martyrdom. Dying for God became a kind of ideal pinnacle of the outcome of warfare. Alternately, those unwilling to fight for fear of death are considered poor Muslims before God, as Paradise is so much better than the earthly realm,<sup>12</sup> as was recorded in the Qur'an. Pacifism was never favored instead of war, and Islam was birthed with a spirit of battle and the ideal bloodshed for faith. The ideals of martyrdom, of self-sacrifice and general warrior fanaticism and faith in the tribe became ingrained as part of the Golden Age, the time of true Islam. Islamic compassion was something reserved only for the ummah, mercy not a thing separate from killing, and with these Arabic

ideals of tribal warfare this Islamic society spread widely in the years following the hijra and Muhammad's death.

Fundamentalism is often a response to a social sense of loss in terms of religious purity or "real-ness". In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyya was the first Islamic scholar to propose jihad against apostasy and the purification of the corruption of Islam. At the time, the Islamic Empire was governed by the Mongol conquerors, who were themselves Islamic (having converted). In the eyes of Ibn Taymiyya, the Empire of the Islamic Mongols was corrupt and unwanted; his philosophy was the first that craved a return to the Golden Age of Islam (the Prophet Muhammad's era Islam). In their corruption, the Mongol rulers were apostates, and Ibn Taymiyya's jihad against their "apostasy" is almost a means to be able to invoke war against fellow Muslims, something forbidden in the Qur'an. The allowing of Muslim-Muslim fighting by the accusation of apostasy is a major philosophical turning point in the history of Islamic thought and future religious fundamentalist movements. Ibn Taymiyya's work also represents a refusal to have religion beneath the power of a state (which at that time had been secular), an integral attitude among Muslims today concerning apostate rulers. Ibn Taymiyya placed jihad among the five pillars of Islam: "by asserting that jihad against apostates within the realm of Islam is justified... he planted a seed of revolutionary violence in the heart of Islamic thought." <sup>13</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya's work influenced Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of Wahhabiism in the 1700s. Al-Wahhab preached the rejection of anything non-Islam in a religiously conservative response to the perceived corruptions of Islam under Ottoman rule. He stressed purity in the practice of Islam, horrified at its "disintegration" into immorality. His rules included a return to the exact following of the five pillars of the faith, abstaining from liquor and general sexuality and carnality, and placing strict regulations on the actions and freedoms of women. Al-Wahhab engaged in the iconoclasm of statues of Islamic "saints" and other kind of things he believed to be idolatrous (shirk), reminiscent of the Prophet Muhammad's conquest of Mecca and his destroying of the pagan statues in the Kaaba. Al-Wahhab's ideals were adopted by the al-Saud tribe of central Arabia, unifying his fundamentalist ideals with the warrior ferocity of the traditional Arabian tribe.

Later, alternately, in response to the imperial and pervasive power of the West and the slow degenerate fall of the Turkish Empire during the 16<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was an

interesting re-emphasis by Muslims of the greater jihad. As one could not fight such Western power easily, popular jihad became the “struggle against [the] evil impulses”<sup>14</sup> that were introduced and emphasized by the growth of the European West. It was a kind of “domestication of jihad,”<sup>15</sup> a reinterpretation of Islam in light of Western ideals. It was an out-growth of new interpretive justifications of the acceptance of infidel power and, often, a seemingly necessary assimilation of its ideals. This passive acceptance and convenient, even, adoption of Western law in place of shari’a, of Western values in place of Qur’anic ones was, in the view of more fundamentalist Muslims, very bad. To reject the word of God for the word of man (especially un-believers) was akin to apostasy or even shirk.

Coupled with the perceived decay of Islamic morality by Western values was the overall sense of Arab-Islamic cultural humiliation before the grandiosity of the Western world, before its dominance. Where were the medieval Europeans marveling in awe at the gates of Cordoba in Spain? Where was the great Muslim Empire of Suleyman? Or, perhaps more importantly, *of Muhammad*? Humiliation and a sense of shame arose as Western ideals appeared to “work” in the world, and Arab ones didn’t, as Arab ones appeared to become “backwards.” Humiliation arose with the colonialism, the imperialism, the attempts of cultural and religious conversion and general Western ethnocentrism – and humiliation and shame, fundamentally, causes a clinging to what’s left of pride, of *honor*.

Thus was born the fundamentalist, defensive jihad. It is the fanatical desire to drive out the infidel, the creature of the “House of War” that approaches and encroaches upon the ummah. It is the desire to drive out the “impure” (hearkening to a need for a restoration of morality and, interestingly, the greater jihad of the dichotomy of the self) and to not embrace of the infidel’s ways as congruent with the Qur’an. These ideals are fuel for a jihad to restore *honor*, to become moral again. This re-emphasis on the lesser jihad creates a re-emphasis on warfare, on bloodshed as a means of purity and sinless-ness before God. Jihad becomes a war against the non-believer as a way to be pure, to go to Paradise – it is not about killing the non-believer, by *dying* while fighting for God. It becomes a thing of faith-driven, literal self-sacrifice.

War Against the Modern Jahiliyya

“Honorable people prefer to die than to live in humiliation.”

– Sheikh Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi<sup>16</sup>

There is a general belief (want to believe?) in the West (and by the East in their reassurances to the West) that the modern Islamic fundamentalist movements are perversions of a “true” lesser jihad, one that never sanctions the killing of “innocents” or would engage in so-called terrorist activities against the non-Muslim and Muslim worlds. In fact, this assumption – that which assumes modern jihadic movements are twisted immoral groups of violent men that like to set car bombs off for nothing other than themselves – is to ignore the goals of these groups altogether. To declare these groups immoral is to judge by a different set of morality codes and/or to simply turn a blind eye to those codes held by the fundamentalists.

There is a sense in the Arabic world, at least from the point of view of fundamentalists, of being saturated with and suffocated by the jahili society, with the impure, un-Islamic (or, at least, not *truly* Islamic) world – Muslims can’t even see the true path as they are so blinded by the modern jahiliyya.<sup>17</sup> Terrorist activities are viewed as defensive activities against the great, tempting, blinding impurity that is the West. And such a defense is, importantly, a defense of a way of life, not of a “homeland;” according to Sayyid Qutb, a celebrated modern Islamic scholar, “homeland” is irrelevant.<sup>18</sup> What is threatened is not a land, but a culture, a people.

Qutb believed, “the goal of jihad is to free people from enslavement to other men.”<sup>19</sup> Like Ibn Taymiyya, he rejects rule by man as illegitimate. Rule by man is by Islamic definition secularist; non-secularist governments should rule according to shari’a, according to God and it is God that is the ultimate sovereign, not any man. And, of course, secularist governments are (being men holding false, almost idolatrous power) ruled by apostates if they claim to be Muslim. The West values such secularism and therefore values apostasy and the abandonment as God’s one-ness and power. Western values, in this case, are in stark opposition to Islamic ones and are viewed, therefore, as polluting to modern society. They are “wrong.”

Western cultures and countries, by trying to “Westernize” the Middle East, in fact further the sense of suffocation by the modern jahiliyya. In Muhammad’s day, the jahiliyya was the pagan society that dominated the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam; it was the army that Muhammad fought against for Mecca, those whose icons were destroyed by Islamic military power. Western dominance and the introduction of Western freedoms and ideals are viewed as a

kind of enslavement by infidels; Arab liberals (apostates, most likely, from the fundamentalist viewpoint) embrace these values as modern and success-making and “good” for society. But to the conservative Muslim Arabs, “these freedoms are imported;”<sup>20</sup> they are non-Muslim, non-true and therefore wrong. Thus, modern jihad becomes a revolt against these Western freedoms. Ayatollah Khomeini declared that such so-called freedoms will “culminate in corruption... the fragmentation of the nation [in his case, Iran], the dissolution of the state... bring[ing] the youth to indifference.”<sup>21</sup>

The modern lesser jihad is often, today, viewed by fundamentalists as a religious obligation, something that must be participated in by all “true” Muslims. In a way, as it rebels against the “freedoms” of the West, the jahili society, it is in itself a kind of freedom in the Islamic sense. And when it too is freedom, the war between so-called terrorists and the West becomes something so much more than angry men rejecting modernity but angry *freedom-fighters* as defined by the Islamic faith. And when they want for freedom from another’s values is coupled with a sense of shame as caused by the apparent dominance of this “other,” the result is explosive. Religious, self-righteous fervor becomes coupled with a need to restore pride and honor.

One of the current expressions of fanatical Islamic fundamentalist fervor is that of the suicide attack. Men and women strap bombs to themselves and explode outside of Israeli cafes. Hijackers crash Western airliners into American skyscrapers. Guerilla suicide attacks occurred during America’s involvement in the Lebanese-Israeli-Syrian wars, men driving trucks loaded with explosives to destroy military installations. Such warfare is not understood by the West as it de-emphasizes the importance of the *individual*, as it is dying willingly, by one’s own hand, for a cause (such actions are not valued in actuality, really, in the West where individualism and killed-by-the-enemy heroism is valued; a similar incomprehension occurred with the Japanese *kamikaze* attacks during WWII). The acts are viewed as crazy, as brain-washed, and/or as bloodthirsty terrorism. What much of the Western world fails or doesn’t want to realize is that the mentality of the suicide bomber, the hijacker, is one, fundamentally, of fanatical *faith*.

Suicide is not sanctioned in Islam; in fact, to kill oneself is sinful. However, there is a clear distinction between killing oneself suicidally and killing oneself as a martyr for God. Martyrdom was first glorified by Muhammad, as mentioned previously, in the desert battles for Mecca. To die in battle for one’s faith is a guaranteed ticket to Paradise. Typically, ideally,

these martyrs are men (the one woman suicide bomber in Israel was alternately praised as a mujahid or condemned as non-female by fellow fundamentalists). Here there is a parallel with women dying in childbirth, an act that is the only other example of an adult going straight to Paradise upon earthly death.<sup>22</sup> The ideal of martyrdom lies in the role of “man,” in therefore doing what is right and honorable (similarly, to die in childbirth is equivalent as it is the role of “woman” as creator and mother – she, too, dies being honorable as *woman*). The “rightness” of a man’s sacrifice – in battle for God and in battle only – is idealized as something that should take precedence over all other ideals. God (and, by association, God’s promise of Paradise) must come first, always. As Ayatollah Khomeini said, “We do not fear giving martyrs... our lives are not worthy;”<sup>23</sup> after all, the afterlife is so much more wonderful than earthly life and so therefore there is no reason to fear.

The suicide bombings in Israel by Palestinian fundamentalists are the most prevalent forms of “honorable suicide” or Islam-defined martyrdom. As written in the Qur’an, it is good to be kind and equitable to one’s non-Muslim neighbors, given they do not persecute one based on one’s religion or drive the Muslims from their homes; however, if *persecution* and *banishment* occur, fighting is justified and valued, even, before God.<sup>24</sup> In the Palestinian mujahid there is a sense of modern humiliation, having been ousted – banished - from their lands and holy places by European infidels (initially). With humiliation comes a need to restore honor: “He [the Palestinian, in this case] is *forced* into legitimate defense of *soul, honor, and land*.”<sup>25</sup> The Palestinian suicide bomber is forced or, perhaps, obligated by faith to “defend [his] land and [his] sanctities”<sup>26</sup> against this influx of the impure jahili society, against the shame that comes with being pushed from homes by a people representative of that which is the dominating West. Such sanctities that need defense could literally be such holy places as the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem or other sacred sites in Israeli-held cities and lands. Also, such sanctities could be representative of a larger value: that of the ummah, that of the right and true-ness of Islamic society and its place in the modern world... a place that is threatened by the West. Suicide becomes martyrdom when those dying are those defending their sacred things, their haram. They become those dying, in the fundamentalist’s eye, justifiably and justly for God.

Perhaps the most infamous and powerful Islamic fundamentalist group today engaging in their lesser jihad against the West is the organization al-Qaeda, headed by the charismatic Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, al-Qaeda executed a terrorist attack on

the World Trade Center in New York City, some of its loyal members flying airplanes into the twin towers and felling them. This dramatic and violent event shocked and horrified much the Western world, symbolizing not only the threat of al-Qaeda, but also its power and ability to touch the seemingly infallible super-power of the United States.

Following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, there was a sense that people wanted to believe that religion was just something these terrorists wrapped themselves in to have an excuse to be violent and “evil.” American President George W. Bush declared this the case repeatedly, reassuring, as it were, that Islam had nothing to do with the attacks and his war against terrorism had nothing to do with Islam as the terrorists themselves had nothing to do with it. Of course, this could be no farther from the truth. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the creation and existence of Al-Qaeda have everything to do with religion, with Islam (which, of course, does *not* mean that every Muslim is therefore responsible, only that their faith is as legitimate as the terrorists’).

Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon relate the fanatical faithfulness of terrorists quite well and quite eloquently: “The attack against America on September 11<sup>th</sup> was an act of consummate devotion... it was to humiliate [the West]... to please Him [God] by reasserting His primacy. It was an act of cosmic war... mass killing was an act of redemption.”<sup>27</sup> The plane crashes and subsequent fall of the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup> had nothing (ideally) to do with blood-thirst, with any sort of politics outside of the fundamentalists’ dream to have a society ruled solely by God... it was a battle for God. It was, to use metaphor, the man-led felling of Babel, of towers representing a society that focused too much on the power of themselves and too little on the power of God.<sup>28</sup> And thus, these attacks had everything to do with faith. They concerned an absolute belief in a God who would hopefully open the gates to Paradise for those who died as martyrs flying those Western airliners into those Western towers, defending his name against the irreverence and profane egotism of the West.

### Terrorist Jihad and the Soul-dichotomy

Muslims, perhaps stemming from a deeper Arab-cultural root, are those who surrender to power – and this power is and must be God, no other, as stated in their shahada and in their belief in the sinfulness of shirk and apostasy. Even their form of prayer, forehead pressed against the ground, is one of prostration, one of submission – as opposed to the upright, hands-together,

closed eyes cast up towards heaven, Western-Christian prayer. This submissive mentality is not only reflected in their faithfulness to God, but also in their tendency, perhaps, to be revolutionary – not in an individual rights sense – for holy leaders, for men who are as faithful as they are. They easily follow – and they do it for God: “to be a believer means to submit.”<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this mentality plays into the ability of terrorist leaders to garner the devotion of their men, a devotion that is so seemingly fanatical that death is a minor irrelevance before God and before the gates of Paradise.

The culture of the West is one that glorifies the power of the *individual man*, lacking the soul-dichotomy and a submissive mentality to an all-encompassing God. There is democracy, rule by individuals by secularist means; capitalism lies flush against the culturally innate ideal of individual selfishness and the value of the single man. This Western culture lies in stark opposition to the Muslim *ummah*, the inner, haram “House of Islam,” and the jihadic ideal of striving against egotism. In terms of government, Muslims are those ruled by dictatorship, by absolute power – and that dictator, ideally, is God. There is no separation between state and religion – selfishness is irrelevant and immoral as it would indicate a separation between the man and the community, a distinction of the individual in contrast to what should be the totalitarian power of God. An excellent and indicative example of the lack of separation between “politics” and God are Osama bin Laden’s fatwas against the United States. They, political documents by definition, are written as if being spoken to God. These declarations of war are written like prayers.<sup>30</sup>

At the root of it all, the conflict between the West and fundamentalist Islam is a problem of hegemony, really – who has the ultimate power? Who is dominant? Who must submit, prostrate themselves? Man or God as represented on earth through religion and piety? Man’s words, represented by Western laws, or the words of God, as written in the Qur’an, expressed by shari’a? In these questions lies the incongruence, the incompatibility of two cultures that contain a difference on a fundamental level. The world becomes split in two. The dichotomy of the self is applied to society: haram vs. nif; inside vs. outside; the House of Islam vs. the House of War.

There is a connection between responsibility (nif; male) and Islam. There is a whole mentality of the Islamic male’s (traditionally) responsibility to gain honor. Contemporarily, the Islamic male of the ummah has been dishonored historically by the West, by the jahili society; thus, such honor must be restored. There is a sense that the ummah should be curtailed off,

veiled from the West, protected. Islamic traditional society (as governed by Arabic tradition and, importantly, the Qur'an) feels threatened by the West; there is a want for privacy, for the retention of the interior ummah as private and sacred and untouchable, unaffected by Western, public profanity. Like the Kaaba, like women, the sacred ummah must be hidden and protected from evil. Thus, the lesser jihad against the West becomes a kind of response for a lack of such metaphorical veiling.

In terms of the Islamic martyrs, they are dying for God in defense of their society, their ideals. By protecting such their dying becomes a defense of haram, really, a defense of their inner honor and self/soul as represented in their society, the ummah. They protect their sanctities; they react defensively out of humiliation and shame in losing honor. However, in a way, based on the dichotomy of the soul metaphor, the West is both the polluting, tempting, primal sphere fought against by the righteous warriors of Islam, but also something "outside," something threatening the holy, sacred, forbidden heart that is Islam and the ummah. This heart, that which is haram, is that which is the keeper of honor in their culture, in their society. The struggle would seem to go both ways, the hatred hypocritical in that the construction of purity is skewed and warped- something that no doubt causes intellectual confusion and a sudden, fervent desire by the mujahid to simply grab onto something – fundamental faith, for example – and fight blindly for it. Also, there is a sense among the mujahideen that they are in fact attempting to redeem themselves by participating in the lesser jihad, perhaps because they too were once seduced by or felt the seductive power of the West; their violent rejection of it becomes a declaration of faith and casting aside of sinfulness.

Typically, it is the Islamic male fighting (or, at least, the Arab-Islamic masculine ideal), therefore making him not only defend his honor, in a way, but fight against the temptations of the primal, feminine self as expressed in the West. After all, Satan – evil – is written to be more of a tempter than anything else. And the temptations of the West, as just previously stated, are powerful and seductive. Therefore, the internal, personal striving and struggle for morality and equilibrium between haram and nif is super-imposed externally as a striving and struggle for morality between the Islamic man for his sacred faith and the selfishness and immorality of the West. "He," the mujahid, is fighting for and against haram – and this conflict is the inner conflict faced daily within oneself. It is the conflict for goodness, the conflict to destroy evil

within oneself, within the ummah, within the world, and embrace that which is holy, pure, Godly.

Upon this super-imposition, the inner haram becomes the ummah in all its sanctity and, in part, the infidel world with its ability to be sinful. However, most importantly, it is the association of the West with a threat to the ummah's haram that is ultimately feared, that is defended against most fervently. Osama bin Laden, himself, wrote in his fatwa against the United States, "Our Lord, we ask you to secure the release... [of] the Ummah from... imprisonment."<sup>31</sup> The "inside" is imprisoned by the West, that which is haram is imprisoned, threatened by the infidels. Thus, it must be defended. It must be protected by the mujahedeen, the men, the representations of nif (which encircles and veils and protects the taboo sanctity of haram, as stated earlier).

Beyond this cultural threat, however, there is also the overlaying of Islam. Suddenly, this struggle for the protection of a society becomes justified by religion, and the society becomes the faith, and warfare becomes transcendental. Death in battle becomes martyrdom. The struggle for goodness becomes a struggle for Paradise and the goodness as proscribed by God. The culmination is a fanatical holy war of mujahedeen fighting for themselves, for their faith, for their honor and that which is sacred. The West becomes evil, a representation of all that is offensive to God, all that is an affront to his power and absolute authority over mankind. It becomes a threat to that which is sacred, that which is sacred to a warrior desert people who are backed by a religion that's as rejecting of pacifism in light of a threat and can be interpreted as Arabic-culture-based as they are: "there is no room for bargaining over the sacred. Believer and infidel are separated by an unbridgeable chasm"<sup>32</sup> Pacifism is irrelevant, as is death, and Paradise is found through bloodshed for God. Morality and goodness are found through the battle between the circles of the soul, between the ultra-sacred and the man-made façade that protects it, two things forever separated by laws of holiness and purity. And, ultimately, there can be no compromise.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dawood, at the start of every Qur'anic surah

<sup>2</sup> Akbar, 24; alleged words of the Prophet to a pagan leader on the battlefield of Uhud

<sup>3</sup> Williams, 128; from a quote from Karen Amrstrong's *Muhammad*

- <sup>4</sup> Rashid, 2
- <sup>5</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 29; from a translation of Ayatollah Khomeini's *Islam is Not a Religion of Pacifists*, 1942; he completely authorized fighting as the only means to accomplish the cited goals, claiming Islam is not and never was a religion supporting pacifism
- <sup>6</sup> Nasr, 29
- <sup>7</sup> Nasr, 29
- <sup>8</sup> Nasr, 28, my emphasis; in relation to understanding the spiritual significance of jihad
- <sup>9</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 32; from Iranian Islamist leader Ayatollah Khomeini's speech at the Feyziyeh Theological School on August 24, 1979
- <sup>10</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 21; from David Zeidan's *The Islamist View of Life as a Perennial Battle*, quoted from a passage concerning fundamentalism
- <sup>11</sup> Akbar, 1; from the quoted narration of Abdullah bin Abi Aufa from the *Book of Jihad* in Sahih al Bukhari
- <sup>12</sup> Dawood, 137; from the Qur'anic surah 9, "Repentance"
- <sup>13</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 50
- <sup>14</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 54
- <sup>15</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 54
- <sup>16</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 36; from Sheikh Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi's (head of Al-Azhar University in Cairo and a noted *moderate* cleric, interestingly) *Suicide Operations are a Legitimate Defense*, 1997
- <sup>17</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 30; from Islamist theorist Sayyid Qutb's *Paving the Way*, an essay from his book, *Milestones*, 1955 (translated 1993)
- <sup>18</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 29-30, from Sayyid Qutb's *Paving the Way*
- <sup>19</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 21; from David Zeidan's *The Islamist View of Life as a Perennial Battle*, quoted from a passage analyzing the view of Sayyid Qutb
- <sup>20</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 35; from Ayatollah Khomeini's radio broadcast in Tehran *On the Nature of the Islamic State*, 1979
- <sup>21</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 34; from Ayatollah Khomeini's speech at the Feyziyeh Theological School
- <sup>22</sup> Delany, 67-68
- <sup>23</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 33; from Ayatollah Khomeini's speech at the Feyziyeh Theological School
- <sup>24</sup> Dawood, 390; from the Qur'anic surah 60, "She Who is Tested"
- <sup>25</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 36, my emphasis; from Sheikh Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi's *Suicide Operations are a Legitimate Defense*
- <sup>26</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 36; from Sheikh Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi's *Suicide Operations are a Legitimate Defense*
- <sup>27</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 39-40
- <sup>28</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 36-37; they proposed the Babel metaphor, likening the Twin Towers and "the civilization they represent [to be] an unforgivable challenge to the sovereignty of heaven."
- <sup>29</sup> Williams, 86; quoted from an interview with Jamar al Fafa, a member of the National Islamic Front
- <sup>30</sup> Williams, 129-31; in reference to bin Laden's 1996 fatwa, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques"
- <sup>31</sup> Williams, 130; quoted from Osama bin Laden's 1996 fatwa, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques"
- <sup>32</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 152

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Post-script, March 2004

I have been asked a few times, in light of my research into the Islamic concept of jihad and Arabic culture, what I would propose for a “road for peace” (or whatever the greater political powers are calling it these days). I think a lot of the time people desire and seek a one-shot solution to all types of problems, whether personal or world-oriented. We want a miracle, something true and good and right; however, human beings and their problems are too complex and multi-layered to simply be absolved with the wave of a socio-political magic wand. And with all our expectations of rightness we immediately blind ourselves – how can we attempt to “save” a people, create safe, “just” countries, and liberate a world when we still harbor our hypocrisies and stereotypes? When our proclaimed enemies do so as well? We can’t and we never will – not unless everyone becomes a moral clone of everyone else, something I can’t envision ever happening. People have free will; they are free to choose their faiths and their moralities and that which they feel is just and good to die for. I believe that to achieve any measure of peace, there must first come understanding, acceptance, and the realization that differences do not make one people less human, less right (for the humanity of a person distills, philosophically, to their “goodness” in the end) than another people.

In the West's current conflict with fundamentalist Islamic groups, both sides have battle cries fairly oozing moral proclamations and calls-to-arms. Among the fundamentalist groups, the West is depraved and too-proud before God – we are not only infidels, but we are less than that, almost. We become so “outside” that violent acts against us are justified. Alternately, in the West, Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda are painted as bloodthirsty madmen killing babies, bearded and hateful and wrong. They become “terrorists,” their objective merely fear and monstrosity and nothing of substance – they wrap themselves in religion out of corruption, of hypocrisy. However, to themselves, these sides are wholly justified – we fight a war of protection, of liberation, and they, perhaps ironically, do the same thing.

Is one side right and one wrong? Are the “innocents” killed in the World Trade Center or in the café bombings in Israel different than the thousands of children who starved in Iraq during the economic sanctions? Such questions are ultimately irrelevant as they attempt to not only answer subjectively, but they also force the dehumanization of the “wrong” side. They attempt to create a hierarchy based on ideals and moralities of *one* culture onto another one for people that are, fundamentally, the *same*. We are *all* human... but we do and always will think differently, believe differently, and value and honor different things.

It is this dehumanization of the enemy that I believe causes the most hatred and justifies so many of the wars in the world today. When one does not understand someone else's motives and especially when one disagrees with them, there is conflict. In a war, we construct an elaborate propagandist image of the “bad guy,” the villain, the wretched, immoral, wicked thing whose death would not be murder. Do we murder animals? To kill the enemy is not immoral or wrong (in the sense that killing is often perceived as such) because it is justified, good, just. I believe that the dehumanization of the enemy is a method of rationalization, for one freely admits that the man one is machine-gunning is human... the “right” killing of the bad guy becomes the killing of another human being. Of course, governments and leaders so often create propaganda that demeans the enemy as it is so much easier to convince the populace of the righteousness of a war and the casualties that will result.

In all honesty, I don't know how we should handle the many situations in the Middle East that stem from this clash of cultures, their humiliation and our Western power, their pride. I don't know what government to recommend, what freedoms to give, how many troops we should leave behind, how we should “bring peace.” However, I do believe that the first step in coming

up with a solution is to recognize the humanity of the enemy. We cannot (and they cannot) continue to create these simple, easy, childish images of an ultimate bad guy toward which to hurl our bombs. Rather, we must realize that we are all just as human as one another. We must try to look at it from another point of view, and while we don't have to agree with what we see, we should at least recognize the equality of a differing viewpoint to our own. I think we (and especially our political leaders) need to understand the people they are fighting and not coerce the enemy into a blood-soaked submission. We might conquer our enemies and even defeat them and "liberate them"... but if mutual ignorance and hatred persist, there will never be peace.