

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network  
"CHANNELING OUR INNER JIHAD"  
Rev. Glenn Turner, Small Group, Auburn, Maine  
First Universalist Church Unitarian Universalist, Auburn, ME, Rev. Glenn H. Turner, March  
2015

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

"Something widely quoted by the Muslim 'man on the street' is that the most difficult jihad is the one of the soul. The biggest trouble is not with your enemy but with yourself."  
- Noha Aboulmagd-Foster

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted, for five minutes each, if there is time remaining, additional sharing and responses are welcome.

FOCUS: "CHANNELING OUR INNER JIHAD"

The concept of "Jihad," especially in recent times, conjures up the Muslim struggle against Western influence, a violent and protracted Islamic effort for world dominance. Islam, like Christianity, has fought defensively and offensively against its neighbors and enemies. In both the Bible and the Quran, you can cherry-pick arguments for peace or for violence. Different historical periods in our histories bring out either the best and worst in us, most often both.

There is a Quaker tradition in Christianity which does not believe in any killing. There is an Islamic strand of Muslims dating from the 1800s, Ahmadiyya Islam, that says that "jihad is primarily one's personal inner struggle and should not be used violently for political motives."

Violence is seen as a last resort in protecting one's self or one's religion. An Egyptian born spokesperson for Islam in America translated "jihad" as "struggling or striving." According to Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, and Shaykh Seraj Hendricks, "jihad" is not a violent concept; it refers to our efforts to be good Muslims. They write: "If military jihad is required to protect the faith against others, it can be performed by using anything from legal, diplomatic and economic to political means. If there is not peaceful alternative, Islam also allows the use of force, but there are strict rules of engagement. Innocents -such as women, children, or invalids - must never be harmed - and any peaceful overtures from the enemy must be accepted."

We're going to do two sessions on "Jihad." Tonight, we'll begin by thinking about "Channeling our inner Jihad."

Discussion:

What, for you personally, are the triggers of rage, violent emotions, defensiveness?

What are your likely weak points? Jealousy, envy, anger, mistrust, fear, greed, wanting to get even...?

How do you work with your stress points?

Have there been people you'd like to have done harm to? What was their offense? How did you manage yourself?

What do you learn from your desires to strike out at others?

What do you think about your inner struggle between "behaving yourself" and "behaving others?"

## LIKES AND WISHES

### CLOSING WORDS:

"We are split people. For myself, half of me wishes to sit quietly with legs crossed, letting the things that are beyond my control wash over me. But the other half wants to fight a holy war. Jihad! And certainly we could argue this out in the street, but I think, in the end, your past is not my past and your truth is not my truth and your solution---it is not my solution. So I do not know what it is you would like me to say. Truth and firmness is one suggestion, though there are many people you can ask if that answer does not satisfy. Personally, my hope lies in the last days. The prophet Muhammad---peace be upon Him!---tells us that on the Day of Resurrection everyone will be struck unconscious. Deaf and dumb. No chitchat. Tongueless. And what a bloody relief that will be."

— Zadi Smith, White Teeth

## OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

### Jihad

The literal meaning of Jihad is struggle or effort, and it means much more than holy war.

Muslims use the word Jihad to describe three different kinds of struggle:

- A believer's internal struggle to live out the Muslim faith as well as possible
- The struggle to build a good Muslim society
- Holy war: the struggle to defend Islam, with force if necessary

## SILENT REFLECTION

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### FOCUS: “Jihad Run Amok”

Whether we talk about Islam or Christianity, the same range of human desires, fears, decency or depravity exists. Religious ideology is part and parcel of the language of saints and sinners.

Whether it is the contemporary interpretation of “jihad” that inspires many Muslims in their rage against the West, or the Crusades which justified the West in invading the East, these extreme dynamics are similar. When the “other” is a stranger, it’s easier to demonize him or her. In war, we think in terms of black and white. Even in our own country, when we embrace political or religious ideologies, it becomes easier to distance ourselves from the humanity of people who think differently. We are less likely to consider what it is that we do which contributes to a conflict.

Let’s think about this story:

*An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.*

*“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”*

*The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”*

*The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”*

Discussion: definition of “jihad.”

Jihad can mean an inner struggle to live peacefully within ourselves and the world: feeding the “good” wolf in practicing things like humility, kindness, compassion, and generosity.

Jihad can mean a defense against aggression, protecting one’s being or faith or nation.

Jihad can mean a war against others for personal or social gain or control: feeding the “evil” wolf of superiority, greed, or arrogance.

(There’s no short definition that is satisfactory, adequate, or capable of encompassing the complex history of this concept and how it has been used or misused.)

Questions:

What about the issue of “jihad” interests you?

What might the concepts of “Jihad” suggest about dealing with the seeds of our own aggression?

## **LIKES AND WISHES**

### **CLOSING WORDS:**

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— Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*