

Nature as Muslim

A key point that emerges from this overview of the created world as it is conceived in the Qur'an is that nature is semiotic. Everything that exists—heavens, earth, light, darkness, sun, moon, stars, water, animals—is a sign that points beyond itself. Furthermore, it all points in the same direction—toward God. Time and again, the Qur'an repeats the theocentric message that everything was created by God and is controlled by God. Most of nature accepts that situation and does not try to rebel or deny God's authority. Only humanity attempts to wrestle control from God and assert its independence. Nowhere in the Qur'an does it say nature disobeys God's will. That is humanity's doing, and for this reason people must read the signs of creation to learn what true submission is.

Its complete conformance to the divine will has led some scholars to suggest that nature is Muslim. They and others refer to Islam as the religion of nature because the act of submission that is central to the faith is something that nature does naturally. The passages in the Qur'an that speak of creation submitting to God, using words etymologically related to "Muslim" and "Islam," support this idea. Humans are capable of submitting to God's will, and when they do so they are Muslims. But nature can do only God's bidding and nothing else. In this way, it serves as an example for humanity to emulate and strive for.

Angels and Jinn

The Qur'an's cosmology also includes other beings that, while not human, are capable of interacting with humanity. These beings are not part of the physical environment people inhabit as normally conceived, and so they are less relevant for this chapter. But they deserve some brief consideration because they are frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, and they continue to play an important role in Islam. The two main categories of these beings are angels and jinn.

Angels

(Q 35:1; 6:30-34; 7:11; 15:29-30; 2:28-39; 7:10-25; 2:97-98; 66:4; 19:16-26; 6:9; 3:42-51; 32:11; 6:93; 13:23; 6:66; 43:77; 69:17; 89:22)

The Arabic term for an angel is *malak*, a word found thirteen times in the Qur'an. Most angels in the text remain unnamed, but some, like Gabriel and Michael, are identified by name. The primary distinction among them is the number of wings they possess. "Praise be to God, the

Creator of the heavens and earth, who made angels messengers with two, three, four [sets of] wings. He adds to creation as He wishes. God has power over everything" (35:1). This difference in the number of wings is often understood to be a reference to the various functions and responsibilities that angels have. The verse indicates that angels in the Qur'an, like their counterparts in the Bible, are primarily messengers. They often function this way in the text, but they also appear in a number of contexts in which their role as heralds is not to the fore.

The Qur'an teaches that angels were with God when humanity was first created. According to 6:30-34, the angels balk at God's plan to create humans because of the problems that will result, but God shows a special preference for humanity. After creating Adam, God tells him the names of things but does not share this information with the angels. God then asks for the names, and only Adam is able to recite them. When God then commands the angels to bow down before Adam, all but one do so, indicating humanity's superiority over the angels (cf. 7:11; 15:29-30).

The messenger function of angels is found in a number of places in the Qur'an. The most prominent example is Gabriel, who is mentioned three times in the text and is responsible for communicating to Muhammad the revelation that constitutes the Qur'an. One passage, in which he is named twice, identifies him as the agent of revelation and acknowledges the high regard in which angels are held. "Say (Muhammad), 'Who is an enemy of Gabriel? By God's leave he brought it [the Qur'an] down to your heart verifying the previous books as a guide and good news for the faithful. Who is an enemy of God, His angels, His messengers, Gabriel, and Michael? God is truly an enemy of the unbelievers'" (2:97-98; cf. 66:4). This is the only explicit reference to Michael in the Qur'an, but both he and Gabriel are mentioned in other Islamic literature, where they sometimes play prominent roles in key events of Muhammad's life like his night journey to Jerusalem and trip through the seven heavens.

Another scene in which angels play a prominent role as messengers in the Qur'an is when Mary is told she is pregnant and will give birth to Jesus. This story is told in two different places, and the angelic role is slightly different in each. In 3:42-51, a group of angels appears to her to announce that she will bear a child, and they then go on to explain some of the things Jesus will teach and do after he is born. Just prior to this, the angels appear to Zechariah to inform him that he and his wife will also have a son—John, known as the Baptist in Christianity—despite their advanced age.

The Qur'an's most detailed accounts of the creation of humanity are found in 2:28-39 and 7:10-25.

Supra 9:2-8

Nalmer, John. Understanding the Qur'an for Today's Reader. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

The story has a somewhat different form in chapter 19, where the angels are now a single figure—God's spirit in the form of a human being.

the only woman mentioned by name in the entire Qur'an, and chapter 19 is named after her.

He is never described as an angel, but he refers to himself as a "messenger" (*rasūl*). The message he delivers is similar to what Mary is told in chapter 3, and so most commentators understand him to be an angel like those found in the earlier chapter (19:16-26). Supporting this interpretation is a reference in 6:9 to angels appearing in human form.

A third context in which angels are found in the Qur'an is in references to death and the end time. There is an angel of death, who is responsible for delivering each person to God for judgment. "Say, 'The angel of death who is in charge of you will summon you, and then you will be returned to your Lord'" (32:11). Angels will taunt unbelievers, who are punished in the afterlife (6:93), and they will attend to those who are rewarded in paradise (13:23). They stand guard over hell (6:66), and the one who is primarily charged with that task is named Mālik (43:77). At the end time, eight angels will hold up God's throne (69:17), and row upon row of angelic beings will be present for the cataclysmic events that will occur then (89:22).

Jinn

(Q 68:51; 15:6; 37:35-36; 44:14; 52:29; 68:2; 81:22; 6:10; 7:179; 15:27; 55:15;

51:56-58; 6:112, 128; 41:29; 32:13; 11:119; 46:29-31; 18:50a; 2:34; 7:11; 15:31-32;

17:61; 20:116; 38:73-74; 2:30-39; 7:11-25; 20:116-23; 55:33)

Another group of supernatural beings is the *jinn*, from which the English word *genie* comes. *Jinn* are mentioned approximately twenty-five times in the Qur'an, and belief in them among the Arabs predated Islam. They were invisible creatures, sometimes associated with animals or other parts of the natural world, who interacted with humans and influenced their lives in both positive and negative ways. Many of the references to them in the Qur'an are found in the phrase "*jinn* and humans" (or vice versa), showing the close connection between their two spheres of existence even though people are incapable of seeing the *jinn*.

It was believed that *jinn* could possess people and cause them to act erratically, and the word describing an insane or possessed person (*majnūn*) comes from the same Arabic root as *jinn*. Evidence of this belief is found in the Qur'an in a number of places when the people of Mecca believe Muhammad to be insane and possessed by *jinn* because of the message he is preaching: "The unbelievers nearly trip you up with their looks

when they hear the Qur'an. They say, 'He is truly mad [*majnūn*]'" (68:51; cf. 15:6; 37:35-36; 44:14; 52:29; 68:2; 81:22).

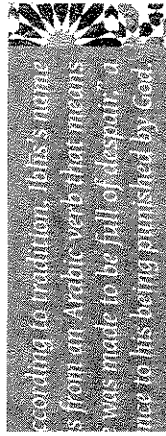
According to the Qur'an, the *jinn* were created by God from fire (6:10; 7:179; 15:27; 55:15), and their main purpose is to acknowledge their creator: "I created *jinn* and humanity only to worship Me. I do not want them to provide for Me or to feed Me. God is the One who provides, the Lord of power, the strong One" (51:56-58). This text reflects the Qur'an's tendency to put the *jinn* in a subordinate position to God in a way that limits the power and abilities they had in the pre-Islamic period. Nonetheless, they are capable of leading people to ruin (6:112, 128; 41:29), and will themselves experience eternal punishment. "If We had wished, We would have given every soul its proper guidance. But My words are true—I will surely fill Hell with *jinn* and people together" (32:13; cf. 11:119).

However, the *jinn* can also guide people in the proper way and remind them to follow God's will. The first fifteen verses of chapter 72, which has the title "The *Jinn*," urge Muhammad to tell his people about a group of *jinn* who hear the Qur'an and immediately express their belief in it. They go on to profess their faith in some of the basic tenets of Islam while acknowledging that not all of their fellow *jinn* have been as receptive to the message of the Qur'an and will consequently suffer in hell for their lack of faith.

This is clearly meant to be a warning to Muhammad's audience to not follow the way of the unbelieving *jinn*. A similar message is conveyed in an abbreviated form in 46:29-31: "We sent a group of *jinn* to you (Muhammad) to listen to the Qur'an. When they were there they said to one another, 'Be quiet!' When it was over they warned their fellow *jinn*. They said, 'Oh our people, we have been listening to a revelation sent down after Moses that validates what came before it and gives guidance to the truth and the straight path. Oh our people, respond to the one who summons you in God's name and believe in Him! He will forgive your sins and will protect you from a painful punishment.'"

The only one of the *jinn* named in the Qur'an is Iblīs, the one mentioned earlier who refused God's command to prostrate before Adam. "When We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam,' they all bowed down except Iblīs. He was one of the *jinn*, and he disobeyed his Lord's command" (18:50a). Iblīs is mentioned eleven times in the Qur'an, and his name derives from the Greek term describing the personification of evil (*diabolos*), from which the English "devil" comes. This is the only time he is identified as one of the *jinn*, as the other references to the scene with Adam simply identify him as an angel (2:34; 7:11; 15:31-32; 17:61; 20:116; 38:73-74).

This has led to much discussion by commentators as to whether Iblis was an angel or one of the *jinn*, without any clear agreement on the matter. He eventually became associated with the figure of Satan in later Islamic thought. The Qur'anic basis for this identification is found in those passages (2:30-39; 7:11-25; 20:116-23) describing human creation and the



According to tradition, Iblis's name is from an Arabic verb that means "to be full of despair" and was made to be full of despair by God, after he refused to bow down to Adam.

garden story that see a shift in the name of Adam's antagonist from Iblis to Satan (*shayṭān*). Some have suggested that his name was changed as a result of his disobedience of God's command to bow down.

As already noted, in its presentation of the *jinn*, the Qur'an describes them in a way that is consistent with how it views all other elements of the created order. They are creatures who are completely dependent upon God for their existence, and they can do nothing but submit themselves to the divine will. In this way, the *jinn* reinforce the theocentric view of creation that permeates the entire Qur'an, and they are a sign of God's supreme power. "Oh company of *jinn* and humanity, if you are able to pass through all the regions of heaven and earth, then pass through. But you cannot pass through without [Our] authority" (55:33).

STOP

Humanity's Place in Creation

(Q 18:37; 35:11; 40:67; 30:20; 3:59; 23:12; 6:2; 7:12, 61; 32:7; 38:71, 76; 55:14; 15:26; 28:33; 22:5; 23:12; 16:4; 36:77; 53:45-46; 76:2; 80:18-19; 24:45; 25:54; 77:20-22; 86:5-7; 24:43-44; 25:47-50; 26:7; 31:10; 18:7; 6:165; 11:7; 71:15-20; 16:12, 65-69, 79; 20:53-54; 25:61-62; 30:30; 30:41; 2:30; 6:165; 27:62; 35:39; 10:24)

The Qur'an's description of human creation has much in common with that found in Genesis 2 in the Bible—God formed Adam and Eve (who is unnamed in the Qur'an) from the earth. The material that is used to create them is identified in several different ways. In some texts, it is referred to as *ṭurāb*, Arabic for "dust" or "soil": "Among His signs is that He created you from dust, and then you became humans who are scattered about" (30:20; cf. 3:59; 18:37; 35:11; 40:67). Elsewhere, humans are created from *ṭīn*, or clay: "We created humanity from a portion of clay" (23:12; cf. 6:2; 7:12, 61; 32:7; 38:71, 76). In still other texts, it is described as dry clay, or *ṣaḥṣaḥ*: "He created humanity out of clay, like pottery" (55:14; cf. 15:26; 28:33). The imagery of the last verse is similar to Genesis 2:7, where the Hebrew verb used to describe Adam's creation can refer to the work of a potter.

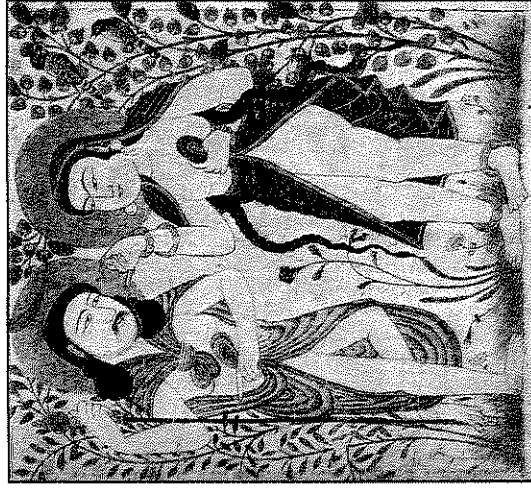


FIGURE 15 Adam and Eve.

Some passages list a sequence of stages of growth that appear to describe the development of the fetus in the womb. "Oh humanity, if you are in doubt regarding the resurrection, [know that] We created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clot, then a lump of flesh, both formed and formless, in order to make it clear to you. We cause what We wish to remain in the womb for a set period, then We bring you out as infants and you attain maturity" (22:5a; cf. 23:12ff). The "drop of fluid" mentioned here is a reference to semen, which is referred to in other passages in the Qur'an (16:4; 36:77; 53:45-46; 76:2; 80:18-19). Elsewhere, the creative material is simply referred to as "water" (*mā'*), which could be another way of referring to semen (24:45; 25:54; 77:20-2; 86:5-7).

All these passages agree that humanity comes from the earth and has an intimate relationship with the rest of creation. The Qur'an sometimes portrays this relationship as a dependent one. As already noted, humans depend on other parts of creation for light, warmth, sustenance, transportation, and other necessities of existence. But the Qur'an also encourages people to admire creation and to learn from it. Humans are dependent upon the rest of the world like a student is dependent upon his or her teacher.

Earth is full of many marvelous things that teach lessons to humanity (24:43-44; 25:47-50; 26:7; 31:10). Sometimes these lessons take the form of a test: "We have made everything on the earth an adornment so that We might test them to learn which of them do best" (18:7; cf. 6:165; 11:7). In

context suggests the passage is a reminder that, like men, women enjoy certain rights that are well-known and beyond dispute. In other words, there is equality between men and women when it comes to the rights they have.

But the use of the word *daraja* in reference to men seems to indicate that they are somehow privileged above women, not unlike the way the groups mentioned earlier are ranked above other people. This part of the verse does not specify why this is the case since it does not identify what it is that sets men apart from women. This has sometimes led interpreters to argue that the verse is simply describing the state of things as they are. They understand it to be a blanket statement that expresses God's preference for men over women and therefore an endorsement of male superiority.

To read the verse in this way is to misinterpret it because its wider context has been ignored. According to Amina Wadud-Muhsin and other feminist scholars, the first part of the verse identifies the area in which men have an advantage over women. It and the two verses prior to it describe the process a man must follow when he wishes to dissolve a marriage by pronouncing the decree of divorce. The mention later in the verse of the degree that men have over women is in reference to this practice since women are not permitted to obtain a divorce by pronouncing the decree. For Wadud-Muhsin and others, 2:228 is not issuing a general statement about male superiority over women. It is limiting the man's *daraja* solely to the area of divorce, but even then it is quick to point out that women, like men, enjoy certain rights that are well-known to all and must be granted.

The wider literary context of 2:228 supports this understanding of the verse. It comes at the beginning of a lengthy section (2:226-39) whose primary topic is divorce. It contains many instructions to men about the need to treat women honorably and fairly, and it reminds them repeatedly about the rights women have in the divorce process. The point seems to be that even though men have been granted an advantage in this one area, they are to act responsibly and not abuse it.

Throughout the section are warnings about the need to adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an and not transgress the rules. "Those are God's limits—do not transgress them. Those who transgress God's limits are evildoers" (2:229b; cf. 2:230b, 231b, 232b, 233b, 234b, 235b, 237b). Given the explicit focus on divorce throughout the section, it is clear that the reference to the *daraja* of men in 2:228 is confined to that one area and should not be seen as a broader comment about men and women in general.

Start

Physical Abuse

(Q 4:34; 4:135; 5:8; 2:47, 122; 7:140; 45:16; 2:253; 6:86; 17:55; 27:15; 4:95; 17:70; 4:32-33; 4:7; 33:31, 35; 66:5; 2:238; 3:17; 33:35; 2:116; 30:26; 16:120; 3:43; 66:12; 4:128)

If any text qualifies as "ground zero" in discussions regarding the Qur'an's view of gender, that designation would have to go to 4:34. It is a very important verse that has generated much controversy, not least of all because it appears to give husbands permission to physically abuse their wives. As with other texts discussed in this section, though, a thorough analysis of the verse and its key terms demonstrates that the message of male superiority it is held to espouse is not as certain as it might first appear to be. Nonetheless, this text presents a challenge for those who assert that the Qur'an's essential view of gender is an egalitarian one.

"Husbands are providers [*qawwāmūna*] for their wives, since God has favored [*faḍḍala*] some with more than others and they spend out of their wealth. Good women are devout [*qānītāt*], guarding during the absence [of their husbands] what God would have them guard. If you fear antagonism [*rushūz*] from them, admonish them, then leave them alone in bed, then hit [*idribū*] them. If they obey you, do not mistreat them in any way. God is most high and great." To facilitate analysis of this key verse, it will be divided into two sections. The first part comprises the first two sentences, which explain certain obligations for each party in the relationship between spouses. The second part offers instructions on how to respond to a particular set of circumstances that threaten the stability of the relationship. Key words in each section are at the center of the interpretive debate over the verse's meaning.

The text begins by stating that husbands are supposed to provide for their wives. The Arabic word used to describe this is *qawwāmūna*, which is found in two other verses of the Qur'an. In 4:135, it is used to speak of those who uphold or defend justice, and in 5:8 it describes those who are committed in their faith in God. Looking at these three occurrences, it appears that 4:34 is instructing men to be steadfast as they take care of and protect their wives. They are to provide for them as intently as they seek justice or believe in God. Some interpreters give the word a sense that privileges men over women by suggesting that husbands are to exercise authority over their wives by dominating and controlling them. This is partly due to the use of the preposition *ʿalā* after *qawwāmūna*, which can carry the meaning "over" or "against." But there is nothing in the meaning of the word *qawwāmūna* that requires it have this connotation. The word is used here to remind men of their responsibility to provide for and protect the women in their care.

The first part of the verse speaks of God having a preference when it says that God has preferred, or favored (*faḍḍala*), some over others. This idea is expressed a number of times in the Qur'an, and it is similar to the notion of God raising the rank (*daraja*) of some people that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Other passages that use the verb *faḍḍala* speak of divine preference for the Israelites (2:47, 122; 7:140; 45:16), prophets and/or messengers (2:253; 6:86; 17:55; 27:15), those who strive for the faith (4:95), and humans in general (17:70).

It is important to note, however, that 4:34 is not claiming a universal divine preference for all males, as is sometimes claimed, which would place men in a position of superiority vis-à-vis women. The Arabic of the passage is ambiguous because it can mean, "God has preferred some [males] over others [females]," but it is also grammatically acceptable to read it as, "God has preferred some [males] over others [males]." There are good reasons for opting for the second possibility over the first, and if it is adopted, the verse is making a comment about some males in relation to others rather than discussing males in relation to females.

The first part of this verse states that husbands are *qawwāmūna* over their wives only when they are among the group of men who are singled out by God to play this role. But how is God's preference for them manifested, and does it somehow privilege men over women? The two previous verses help to answer these questions. The beginning of 4:32 anticipates a theme in 4:34 by using the verb *faḍḍala* to indicate that some have received more than others, and the implication is that men and women do not receive the same amount of compensation: "Do not covet that by which God has favored [*faḍḍala*] some of you more than others. To men the portion they have acquired, and to women the portion they have acquired. Ask God for some of His bounty—He has knowledge of everything."

The reason for the disparity between men and women is suggested in 4:33, which mentions the topic of inheritances: "To each person We have designated heirs for what parents and close relatives leave behind. Give their portion also to those to whom you have pledged your hands [in marriage]. God is a witness over everything." As noted in the chapter on family matters, according to the Qur'an, male heirs are entitled to more money than female heirs (4:7). Inheritance is the only area in which a divine preference for men over women is stated in the Qur'an, and this plays a critical role in how 4:34 should be interpreted.

The first sentence of 4:34 is referring in part to inheritances when it explains what makes some men *qawwāmūna* over women. "Husbands are providers [*qawwāmūna*] for their wives, since God has favored [*faḍḍala*] some with more than others and they spend out of their wealth." Not all

men receive inheritances, but those who do must use some of that money to support the women who are dependent upon them. This is the reason why men receive more inheritance than women, who are permitted to keep their inheritance for themselves. Men who do not support their wives from their means are not *qawwāmūna* over them, so the text is not saying that men, as a group, are superior to women. Neither is the verse implying that women are incapable of providing for themselves. It is simply stating that women are normally not expected or required to be the breadwinners and provide for the family.

Some scholars, like Amina Wadud-Muhsin, have argued that this verse also acknowledges the woman's role in childbearing and perpetuating the human race. It places additional responsibilities on the man to provide for her so that she is not further burdened by being required to find the means to support herself, thereby giving each spouse certain obligations and duties.

Another key term in the first part of 4:34 is *qānītāt*, an adjective that describes women and is translated here as "devout." It is sometimes rendered as "obedient," and some have suggested that this word stresses the deference wives are to show to their husbands, but there is no support for this interpretation. In a few other texts, the word is used to describe women (33:31, 35; 66:5), and elsewhere the context suggests that it is used in reference to men (2:238; 3:17; 33:35). In a couple of passages, it is stated that everything on earth and in heaven, presumably including the non-human elements of creation, is *qānīt* (2:116; 30:26).

In every one of these texts, the obedience being described is directed toward God, not to another person. It is therefore an expression of one's humility and submission to God rather than an indication of one person's deference to another. This is clearly seen in the passages that mention the only two individuals who are said to be *qānīt* in the Qur'an. One is Abraham, the quintessential monotheist and model for all believers: "Abraham was truly an example, devout [*qānīt*] to God and upright in faith. He was not an idolater" (16:120).

The other is Mary the mother of Jesus, who is told by the angels who announce the birth of her son that she is to express her obedience to God by bowing down: "Mary, be devout [*uqnūtī*] to your Lord, prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down" (3:43; cf. 66:12). This usage, which understands *qānīt* to be a form of obedient reverence toward God, is reflected in the other passages mentioned above that contain the word. It is therefore a term that describes the piety a woman should possess, and it does not support the idea that God wants wives to obey their husbands in all matters.

The second half of 4:34 is the more controversial part of the verse, and two words in particular have been at the heart of the debate over what the passage means. “If you fear antagonism [*nushūz*] from them, admonish them, then leave them alone in bed, then hit [*iqḍibū*] them. If they obey you, do not mistreat them in any way. God is most high and great.” After the description of the ideal relationship that should exist between spouses, this section offers guidance on what to do if the stability of the marriage is threatened. In fact, though, this hypothetical scenario is outlined in a one-sided way since it is directed to the man and discusses only a case that presents the woman as the blameworthy party.

The term that describes the woman’s offense is *nushūz*, which can be translated as “haughtiness,” “disloyalty,” “antagonism,” and the like. It is sometimes understood to be a uniquely feminine trait and therefore a description of a cause of marital disharmony that is found only on the disobedient wife’s part. But to take this position is to ignore the fact that the word is found later in the same chapter to speak about a husband who disrupts the relationship between spouses. “If a wife fears antagonism [*nushūz*] or rejection from her husband, neither of them will be blamed if they can reconcile, for harmony is best. Pettiness is present in the human soul, but if you work toward good and are mindful of God He is truly aware of what you do” (4:128). The husband, too, can be guilty of engaging in *nushūz*, and so it is a mistake to consider it to be a quality that is found only among women.

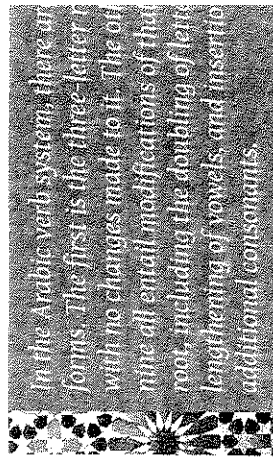
While each member of the couple is capable of violating the relationship by committing the same offense, the Qur’an offers different counsel on how to deal with the matter, depending on whether the offending party is the man or the woman. The reference to *nushūz* on the man’s part in 4:128 leads to a discussion of a “peaceful settlement” between the couple that, in light of the literary context of the surrounding verses, is best understood to be a reference to divorce and the dissolution of the marriage. If such is the outcome, the text assures the couple that neither of them will be at fault. But this does not appear to reflect the facts of the case, since it is the husband’s *nushūz* that set in motion the end of the marriage.

The way the Qur’an addresses *nushūz* on the part of the woman is quite different. It calls for increasingly harsh measures against her, and it does not speak of the option of a peaceful settlement through divorce or other means. The different approaches to handling the situation are likely due to the originating context of the Qur’an, and they reflect a time and place in which issues of gender and social status were perceived in a way different from our own.

The Qur’an lists three responses for the husband whose wife has engaged in *nushūz*, with each successive one to be implemented only if the previous one does not work. The first is verbal in nature, as the man is instructed to admonish or warn the woman about the damage she is causing to their relationship. If this fails, the man is to refrain from sexual relations with her (literally, “forsake them in bed”). In both these scenarios, the hoped-for outcome is reconciliation between the man and woman or an amicable separation, and in this sense the verse is similar to 4:128, which urges the couple to seek a peaceful settlement.

The third response has been the subject of much controversy because it employs the verb *ḍaraba*, whose primary meaning is “to hit, strike.” There have been two main ways of addressing the Qur’an’s apparent approval of domestic violence in this verse. The first is to accept it at face value, but to interpret it in a way that softens its initial harshness. This is done primarily by arguing that the text is calling for a very light slap or tap rather than the use of extreme physical force.

Some have even suggested that the hit should be symbolic rather than an actual strike. Those who opt for this interpretation often point out that the verse uses the first form of the Arabic verb (*ḍaraba*) rather than



the second form (*ḍaraba*), which intensifies the meaning and describes a harsh physical beating or repeated blows. In this reading, the passage is actually trying to reduce domestic violence by limiting it and presenting it as only a last resort after all other measures have been exhausted. In other words, it is restricting spousal abuse rather than giving permission for it.

The other way of understanding the verb is to say that it has an entirely different meaning that has nothing to do with physical violence. Arabic is a very rich language whose words often have multiple meanings that are not semantically close to one another, and that is the case with *ḍaraba*. Among its possible other meanings are “to set an example” and “to go on a journey,” and it is sometimes suggested that one of these alternatives is really what the text is calling for. With the first, the man is being advised to somehow use the situation as an example for the couple to learn from, and with the second the passage is calling for some physical distance between them to allow for a cooling-off period in the relationship.

There are good reasons why modern readers of the Qur’an should not consult 4:34 for guidance on marital relations. In the first place, because

this verse is ambiguous and its meaning is unclear, particularly regarding the word *ḍaraba*, it should not be used as a norm for how spouses should relate to one another. The passage can mean more than one thing, and that vagueness cautions against choosing one meaning as the correct one to the exclusion of others.

Another issue that lessens the relevance of 4:34 for today's readers is the difference in context between our own day and that of the text's original audience. Modern notions of what marriage is and how spouses should relate to one another differ significantly from seventh-century Arabia, where women were subjugated to men and physical abuse was permitted. Marriages of subjugation are becoming a thing of the past, and so this text does not speak to our circumstances. If we take *ḍaraba* to have its basic meaning of "to hit," we must understand the verse as an attempt to limit and control violent behavior in a context in which a man's physical abuse of a woman was tolerated. Because such behavior is unacceptable today, the text should not serve as a guide for us.

Put another way, 4:34 is one of those context-specific texts mentioned earlier that should not be universally applied to later times and places. Unfortunately, as many feminist scholars have pointed out, that is not the way the text is usually understood. The exegetical writings found in the *tafsīr* tradition have formulated and passed down interpretations of the verse that reinforce stereotypes about male superiority and perpetuate the oppression of women in many places. Because the views of the exegetes have become canonized over time and form the basis of many Islamic laws and attitudes, views that highlight the egalitarian nature of the Qur'an's message on gender or that point out the ambiguities in the text have often been downplayed or ignored.

The Veil

(Q 7:46; 17:45; 19:17; 38:32; 41:5; 42:51; 33:53; 33:59; 24:31; 21:91; 33:35; 33:5; 66:12)

How Muslim women should dress is one of the most frequently discussed topics related to Islam in the modern world. Stories that treat various aspects of the issue are regularly covered by the media in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world where Muslims are in the minority. These debates have also taken place in Muslim-majority countries, where some of the religious and cultural dimensions of women's dress have been discussed and dissected. Much of the controversy has surrounded the wearing of a veil, often referred to by its Arabic term *ḥijāb*. Non-Muslims

often assume that the practice of donning a veil is something that can be traced to the Qur'an, but that is not the case. In fact, the Qur'an has surprisingly little to say about the subject of women's dress.

The word *ḥijāb* is found seven times in the Qur'an, and in none of those cases does it refer to an article of clothing that is meant to cover some part of a woman's (or a man's) body. It comes from an Arabic root whose primary meanings are "to screen," "to seclude," and "to cover." All of the references to *ḥijāb* in the Qur'an describe a barrier or partition that is meant to form a separation between those on one side and those on the other. An example is seen in 7:46, which speaks of a barrier that separates those in heaven from those in hell. "Between the two groups is a barrier [*ḥijāb*], with men on the heights recognizing them by their marks. They call out to those in the garden, 'Peace be with you!' They do not enter, but they long to" (cf. 17:45; 19:17; 38:32; 41:5; 42:51).

Another text in which it is used is 33:53, discussed in the previous chapter in reference to Muhammad's family, where the word *ḥijāb* is sometimes wrongly associated with women's dress: "Oh believers, do not enter the Prophet's dwellings for a meal unless you are given permission to do so, and do not linger there until it is ready. When you are invited, enter. After you have eaten, depart. Do not stay to engage in idle chatter, for that bothers the Prophet. He is embarrassed to ask you to leave, but God is not embarrassed by the truth. When you ask them [Muhammad's wives] for something, ask from behind a curtain [*ḥijāb*]. That is purer for your hearts and theirs. You should not trouble God's Messenger, and you should not ever marry his wives after him. That would be a great offense before God." This verse is one of the rare times the Qur'an discusses some aspect of the Prophet Muhammad's personal life in some detail. The mention of a *ḥijāb* is in reference to a partition or screen behind which Muslims were to stand when they spoke to Muhammad's wives, and is not speaking about something the women were wearing on their bodies.

The two primary texts in the Qur'an that discuss women's clothing are 33:59 and 24:31. The first is directed to Muhammad and puts forth a general guideline for how female members of the Islamic *umma* should dress. "Oh Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to have their outer garments [*jilbāb*] hang low over them. That way, they will be recognized and not be harassed. God is forgiving and merciful." The word used for the garment referred to is *jilbāb*, and this is the only place it is mentioned in the Qur'an. It is generally understood to be a loose-fitting article of clothing that covers the upper part of the body, including the neck and bosom, as a type of cloak.

Mahmoud Ayoub, "Nearest in Amity: Christians in the Qur'an and Contemporary Exegetical Tradition," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 2 (1997): 145–64.

Basit Bilal Koshul, "The Qur'anic Self, the Biblical Other and the Contemporary Islam–West Encounter," in *Scripture, Reason, and the Contemporary Islam–West Encounter*, ed. Basit Bilal Koshul and Steven Kepnes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 9–38.

Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Start

5

Jihād

A Complex Term: Jihād in the Qur'an: The Two Forms of Jihād: Usama bin Ladin's Jihād and Use of the Qur'an

Is there another Arabic word associated with Islamic practice that has a more central place in the non-Muslim lexicon than *jihād*? Probably not. It is frequently mentioned in forms of discourse as diverse as scholarly analysis, media reports, talk radio, and everyday conversations. You would be hard-pressed to find an educated, well-informed non-Muslim living in the West today who would not be able to offer a definition of *jihād*.

Such familiarity was not always the case, and if one had to choose a moment when the word *jihād* fully entered the vocabulary and consciousness of non-Muslims it would have to be September 11, 2001. A quick survey of media sources supports that claim. According to a search of the 1,970 American newspapers listed at the NewsBank website, in the eight years prior to 9/11, just over 20,000 articles were published that contained the word *jihād*. In the eight years after 9/11, that number spiked to more than 90,000.

A Complex Term

Because of its close connection with the events of 9/11, many non-Muslims, especially in the West, associate *jihād* with violence and bloodshed, but it is a more complex term than the vast majority of them think it is. A common translation of the word, often reinforced by media coverage, is “holy war.” In fact, the phrase “holy war” never appears a single time in the Qur’an. When it is equated with *jihād*, the result is a distortion of the true meaning of a term that is central to the Qur’an and is at the very heart of Muslim faith and practice. It is therefore an ironic fact that one of the Arabic words best known by people who do not speak the language is also one of the most misunderstood.

This chapter examines the use of the word *jihād* in the Qur’an to explain why it should not be understood one-dimensionally as referring solely to violent behavior. It comes from the Arabic root *jahada*, which carries the basic meaning of putting forth great effort to achieve a goal. The aim of that effort can be anything at all. It might be something tangible, or it could be something abstract and theoretical. This can be seen in relation to another word that comes from this root and is an important concept in Islamic law. *Jihād* refers to the ability to exercise the power of reason to arrive at a legal opinion. In this case a word from the root *jahada* describes the mental effort that one puts forth in order to formulate a rational position on a matter.

Jihād in the Qur’an

(Q 9:24; 22:77–78; 25:48–52; 60:1)

Non-Muslims are often surprised to learn that the word *jihād* appears only four times in the entire text of the Qur’an. Despite that relatively limited usage, however, an analysis of those four occurrences gives a sense of the breadth and range of meanings the term has while supporting the contention that it should not be too quickly identified with violence.

It is first found in the Qur’an in 9:24: “Say (Muhammad), ‘If your parents, children, siblings, spouses, families, the wealth you have accumulated, the business that you fear will falter, and the dwellings that please you are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and the struggle [*jihād*] in His cause, then wait until God brings about His punishment.’ God does

not guide transgressors.” In this verse, *jihād* is something that is expected of all Muslims, and it is a mark of the true believer. In language reminiscent of that used by Jesus in certain Gospel passages in the New Testament, the text says that if one wishes to truly follow God’s will one must not be overly attached to the people and things one loves. Such attachment becomes an obstacle to *jihād*, striving or struggling “in God’s cause.” The verse does not explain how exactly *jihād* is to be undertaken, but there is nothing in it that associates it explicitly with violence.

The second mention is in 22:77–78: “Oh believers, bow down, prostrate, and worship your Lord. Do good deeds so that you might have success. Strive in God’s way with a striving [*jihād*] worthy of Him. He chose you and he put no difficulty on you in faith—the faith of your father Abraham. He called you Muslims earlier and in this [the Qur’an] so that the Messenger can be a witness for you and that you can be witnesses for all humanity. So engage in prayer, pay the alms, and take refuge in God. He is your protector—the best protector and helper.” This passage contains a series of exhortations meant to encourage Muslims to express their faith outwardly. In the beginning, they are commanded to perform the actions that are associated with their prayer ritual—bowing and prostrating—and at the end, they are reminded to pray and give alms, two of the five pillars of Islam.

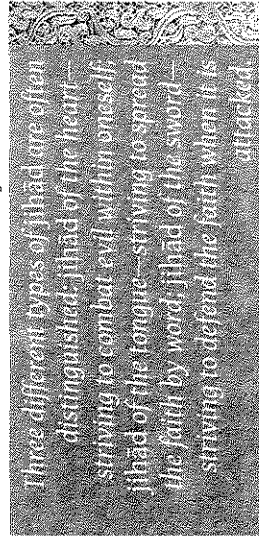
The verse also contains two statements of a more general nature urging good deeds and devotion to God. In the midst of this summons to action is another command—strive a striving (*jihād*) worthy of God. The call to *jihād* is found within a section that encourages Muslims to engage in actions that are required of all members of their faith. In other words, the effort they are asked to put forth here is simply meant to ensure that they follow the dictates of their faith. Once again, the verse lacks any explicit reference to violence.

The third occurrence of *jihād* is found in 25:52, which can be properly understood only within its larger literary context: “God is the one who sends the winds announcing the good news of His Mercy. We send down from the heavens pure water to revive a dead land with it. We give it as a drink to the many animals and people We have created. We have explained this to people so that they might be reminded, but most only continue to be ungrateful. If We had desired, We would have sent to every town a warner. Do not listen (Muhammad) to the unbelievers, but strive a great striving [*jihād*] against them with this [Qur’an]” (25:48–52). In this case, too, the word *jihād* does not carry a violent connotation. The verses

The five pillars of Islam: profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

prior to and after this section speak of the many things God has done for humanity, and yet many people fail to recognize them. Muhammad is told to engage in a *jihād* by being the warmer to people that they have never had. The “weapon” or instrument he is to use in his striving is the Qur’an, containing the record of what God has done for humanity. In this way, Muhammad is being asked to engage in what is sometimes referred to as a “*jihād* of the tongue.”

The fourth and final reference to *jihād* in the Qur’an is in 60:1: “Oh believers, do not take My enemies and yours as your allies, being their friends when they have denied the truth that has come to you and have driven out the Messenger and you



because you believe in God, your Lord. If you go forth with a striving [*jihād*] for My path seeking My pleasure, can you secretly be their friends? I am aware of everything you hide and everything you reveal. Any of you who do this have strayed from the right path.” This chapter comes from the Medinan period, and according to tradition the verse was revealed when a Muslim betrayed the Islamic community by telling his friends and family back in Mecca that Muhammad was preparing a return to their city and warned them to take the necessary precautions.

In this context, the term *jihād* describes the commitment necessary to remain faithful to the divine will and win God’s approval. As with the first verse mentioned above (9:24), this sometimes entails reorienting one’s life so that personal relationships and everyday concerns do not get in the way of one’s obligations to God. The word *jihād* is used to describe the intense effort that must be put forth to remain true to the teachings of the faith, referred to here as “the right path.”

Not one of the four occurrences of *jihād* in the Qur’an explicitly endorses violence, and it would be difficult to argue that such a sense is implicitly found in these verses. In each case, *jihād* describes the inner resolve a true believer must possess that allows him or her to remain faithful. It is a mindset one must adopt in order to meet and overcome the challenges and temptations one confronts from many quarters. Those potential obstacles are named or alluded to in each passage. They could be family members, wealth, or possessions that compete for one’s attention and allegiance (9:24; 60:1), or they might come in the form of unbelievers who cause one to forget that God is the supreme authority throughout creation (25:52). The primary purpose of *jihād* is summed up well in 22:78,

where it enables one to express outwardly one’s Muslim identity through prayer, almsgiving, and good works.

If all the references to *jihād* in the Qur’an are peaceful, where does its association with violence come from? In the Qur’an, there are other words that come from the root *jahada*, approximately forty in all, and some of them speak of another type of striving that is more aggressive. These passages recognize that, at times, the forces and challenges that confronted the early Muslim community were such serious physical threats that the only recourse was to respond in kind. To not do so would have been to risk annihilation.

Here, as always, is it essential that the historical context be kept in mind. These are passages directed to a growing and expanding community that sometimes met opposition from those who sought to stifle or suffocate it. Sometimes the threat was of a physical type rather than spiritual. In those instances, the concept of *jihād*, in the sense of striving or struggling, was used to describe the appropriate response to attempts to harm or destroy the *umma*. It is a type of effort that threatened minority groups must sometimes exert to guarantee their future survival.

Nonviolent *Jihād*

(Q 16:110; 29:69; 49:15; 49:13)

Some of the other texts that use words derived from the Arabic root *jahada* are similar to the ones just mentioned because they do not require that a violent sense be given to them. They are simply calling Muslims to strive to do God’s will. An example of this is seen in 16:110: “To those who strive [*jihādā*] and persevere when they flee their homes after persecution your Lord is forgiving and merciful.” This passage advises those who have been persecuted not to launch a counterattack but to relocate to another place that is safer for them. In other words, the verse is implicitly rejecting a violent response in favor of a nonviolent one. This passive reading of the text is supported by the larger literary context as well. The verses prior to this one are critical of those who do not believe in God’s revelation as found in the Qur’an, and they say that these people will be punished. But the passage does not ask Muslims to attack the unbelievers or act aggressively toward them. It rather states that their punishment will come from God in the afterlife, when they will be judged and found wanting because they refused to believe the message of the Qur’an.

A similar point is made in 29:69, where a section that levels criticism at unbelievers for their lack of faith is followed by a verse about Muslims. It does not urge them to assail those who reject Islam because they will be judged by God after death. Those who engage in *jihād* are held up as a

model to be followed because they will be rewarded in this life and beyond. There is no element of violence in the text at all. “As for those who strive [jihadū] in Our cause, We will guide them on Our paths. Truly, God is with those who do good.”

A final example of a nonviolent use of a word related to *jihād* is seen in 49:15. What makes this one noteworthy is that it is found two verses after an important text that is discussed in the chapter on relations with non-Muslims. According to 49:13, the diversity found within creation is a gift from God that is meant to encourage learning and mutual understanding: “Oh humanity, We created you male and female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might know one another. The most honorable of you before God are the ones who are most pious. Truly, God knows and is aware.” This is a remarkable statement that celebrates differences among people and calls them to live in harmony and peace.

The verse right after it speaks of the Arabs of the desert, sometimes called the bedouin, whose faith is not yet mature since they have not submitted to God and the message Muhammad has brought to them. This is followed in 49:15 by a description of the qualities possessed by those with authentic faith: “Believers are those who believe in God and His Messenger, show no doubt, and struggle [jihadū] with their possessions and their lives in God’s way. They are the sincere ones.” These two groups of people—the desert Arabs and the true believers—personify the different races and tribes mentioned in 49:13 that are meant to recognize and learn from one another. Coming so closely on the heels of a call for coexistence, there is no way that the allusion to *jihād* can be interpreted as an endorsement of violence.

Violent Jihād

(Q 2:218; 2:216-17; 9:14-16; 9:38-41; 9:31-84)

There are other texts in which words etymologically related to *jihād* do describe violent activity. This is usually found in passages that advocate war, including some discussed in the chapter on violence. An example is 2:218, which comes right after a brief section that says fighting is sometimes required of Muslims even though they dislike it and that it is permissible to engage in warfare during the prohibited month if it is a defensive response to an attack (2:216-17). This is followed by a description of those who will be rewarded: “Those who have believed and those who have migrated and striven [jihadū] for God’s cause are the ones who can hope for God’s mercy. God is forgiving and merciful.” As elsewhere, this verse recommends that people strive to do God’s will, but this time it is found in a context that makes several references to fighting and killing.

This juxtaposition suggests that, under the right circumstances, like when one acts in self-defense, *jihād* can take a more aggressive form.

This understanding of *jihād* is found a number of times in chapter 9, which has the title “Repentance.” Warfare is a theme in several sections of this *sūra*, and striving or struggling is often mentioned in them. Speaking of people who violate their oaths and seek to remove the Prophet Muhammad from their midst, verses 14-16 state, “Fight them, for God will punish them at your hands. He will humiliate them, and give you victory over them. He will heal the breasts of believers and remove the fury from their hearts, for God turns to whomever He wishes. God is knowing and wise. Do you think you will be left alone without God knowing which of you will strive [jihadū] and take no supporters other than God, His Messenger, and fellow believers? God is aware of what you do.” Here, too, the plain sense of the text seems to be that *jihād* can be an armed struggle when the community is under attack.

The association with violence and warfare is more explicit a bit later in chapter 9, when the people are chastised for not fighting and are warned of the consequences if they continue to refuse to engage the enemy: “Oh believers, when you are told, ‘Go forth and fight in God’s way,’ why are you weighed down to the ground? Do you prefer the life of the world over the hereafter? The pleasure of the life of the world is little compared to the hereafter. If you do not go forth and fight, God will severely punish you and replace you with others. But you are not able to harm God in any way—God has power over everything. If you do not assist him (Muhammad), remember that God helped him previously when the unbelievers drove him out. Two of them were in the cave and he said to his companion, ‘Do not be troubled, God is with us.’ Then God sent down His peace upon him, assisted him with armies you did not see, and humbled the word of the unbelievers. God’s word is highest, for God is powerful and wise. Go forth, lightly or heavily armed, and struggle [jihadū] in God’s way with your possessions and your lives. That is best for you, if only you knew” (9:38-41).

A direct link is established in this text between striving, or *jihād*, and doing battle with the enemy. An interesting feature of this passage is that it cites an episode from Muhammad’s life as a way to inspire the

According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was able to leave Mecca and make the hijra through a clever ruse by having his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, take his place in bed. His enemies among the Meccans assumed Muhammad was still sleeping while he and Abu Bakr fled to Yathrib, later known as Medina.

community and convince them to fight. Commentators agree that this is a reference to the Prophet's experience during the *hijra*. As he and his companion Abu Bakr were making their journey to Medina from Mecca, they stopped to rest in a cave, where Muhammad expressed his confidence that God would come to their assistance. This historical reference is directed toward Muslims who are hesitant to do battle—whether they are fearful or outnumbered, they must be like Muhammad and trust that God is on their side.

As seen in the passage just discussed, the Qur'an sometimes uses the verb "to go out" as a way of expressing in a literal way what those who answer the call to battle must do. They leave their homes and familiar surroundings in order to respond to the command to meet the enemy and defend the community. Verbs that convey the opposite sense are used in 9:81-83 to describe those who do not heed the call—they are the ones who "remain behind" or "sit at home." These homebodies are viewed pejoratively in the Qur'an because they put themselves before the needs of the community and are the personification of a selfish person: "Those who were left behind were glad to remain back when God's Messenger set out. They despised having to strive [*mujāhidū*] with their possessions and their lives in God's way. They said, 'Do not go forth in this heat.' Say (Muhammad), 'The fire of hell is hotter!' If only they understood. Let them laugh a little bit now; they will weep much in payment for what they have done. Therefore, if God brings you [Muhammad] back to a group of them and they ask permission to go forth [in battle], tell them, 'You will never go out with me to fight an enemy. You preferred to remain back the first time, so continue to remain with those who stay behind.'"

THE MUJĀHIDĪN

(Q 4:95; 47:31; 47:20-30; 47:32, 34)

Another term the Qur'an uses to identify a group of people is worth mentioning because it has appeared frequently in the media since the 1980s. The *mujāhidīn* first achieved notoriety in Afghanistan when they fought against forces from the Soviet Union and the Afghan government. When the Soviets withdrew from the conflict in the late 1980s, the *mujāhidīn* continued to fight among themselves and against government troops, and one of the people who helped to support and finance their efforts was Usama bin Ladin. The term *mujāhidīn*, sometimes spelled *mujāhideen*, came to be applied to other paramilitary groups throughout the world that banded together under a militant Islamist ideology. It is the plural form of the word *mujāhid*, which means "one who struggles."

The word appears four times in the Qur'an, and three of those occurrences are in 4:95, where they are favorably compared to those who stay at home: "The believers who remain at home, except for those with an incapacity, are not on the same level as those who commit their possessions and themselves to striving in God's way [*mujāhidīn*]. God has raised the latter [*mujāhidīn*] to a degree above those who remain at home. God has promised good things for all, but those who strive [*mujāhidīn*] are favored with a great reward over those who remain at home." References to those who "stay at home" in the Qur'an are typically found in texts that relate to war, and it is a way of criticizing those who refuse to go out to defend the community. That appears to be the case in this verse, where an exception is made for those who are incapacitated and therefore excused from military service. The triple mention of *mujāhidīn* here therefore refers to those engaged in armed combat.

This is also the case with the other reference to *mujāhidīn* in 47:31: "We will test you until we know which of you strive [*mujāhidīn*] and persevere. We will put to the test your record of accomplishment." When read in isolation, it is impossible to know whether this verse is using *mujāhidīn* in a violent or a nonviolent sense, but when we take into account the wider literary context, it is clear that the former is meant. The verses prior to it (vv. 20-30) speak disparagingly of those who accept only certain parts of the Qur'an while rejecting others, and the example it gives describes those Muslims who become fainthearted and fearful when they are commanded by God to fight their enemies. The verses immediately after 47:31 outline their offenses and warn of what will happen to them for their lack of faith. Among the things they are guilty of is blocking others from God's path (vv. 32, 34).

GOD'S PATH

(Q 2:218; 9:41, 81; 49:15; 47:32-34)

The Arabic term for "God's path" is *sabīl allāh*. Following and staying on God's path is a central theme throughout the Qur'an, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that this summarizes very well the essence and goal of Islam. This path is, in a sense, another way of speaking about God's will—if you remain on the path, you are doing what God wants you to do.

In some passages, the way to follow God's path is to accept the teachings and engage in the practices that are required of all Muslims. Elsewhere, the path is realized through more violent means, as when it is stated that one must fight or struggle "in God's path." Examples of this have already been seen in texts mentioned earlier (2:218; 9:41, 81; 49:15).

References to “God’s path,” therefore, are sometimes found in passages that permit or endorse violent behavior. A further example of this is seen in 47:32-34, discussed above. Those who are “blocking others from God’s path” are in all likelihood harming the rest of the community through their unwillingness to make war. The text does not describe the exact circumstances, but a number of scenarios are possible. It might be that a sufficiently large number of people were rejecting the command to fight, which depleted the ranks of the military and made victory difficult or impossible. Or it could be that those refusing to fight were convincing others to do the same, and the number of available warriors was dwindling to a dangerously low level. Whatever the case, the very fact that the Qur’an devotes a significant amount of space to the issue indicates that this was a serious concern that reflects difference of opinion and disagreement within the early community on the matter of going to war.

All four references to *mujāhidīn*, then, are somehow related to warfare. Keeping in mind that rather limited usage, it might be said that the Qur’anic evidence supports the association commonly made in the modern day between *mujāhidīn* and violence. But it must be kept in mind

The term “God’s path” (*sabīl allāh*) is found more than seventy times in the Qur’an.

that engaging in *jihād* does not always entail physical violence or harm to others. The first set of texts discussed earlier in this chapter describes a form of striving and struggle that is directed inward as people attempt to overcome and control the forces and inclinations that might prevent them from following God’s path. Such people might also be called *mujāhidīn*, even if they are not defined as such explicitly in the Qur’an.

The Two Forms of Jihād

This examination of the term’s use in the Qur’an shows that there are different manifestations of *jihād*. The presence of verses that support both a violent and a nonviolent meaning for the word is why Muslims commonly make a distinction between what they refer to as the “greater *jihād*” and the “lesser *jihād*.” The greater *jihād* refers to the ongoing struggle one must engage in to remain faithful and avoid the ever-present temptations to go astray that are a part of life. These enticements to sin can take many forms—internal and external, material and spiritual, personal and impersonal—and so a person must be mindful and alert to put forth the required effort to stay on the correct path.

The lesser *jihād* refers to those rare moments when the struggle is a physical one and Muslims are permitted to engage in violent activity. But

the Qur’an and the subsequent Islamic law that emerged in part from it make it clear that the conditions for such aggression are carefully prescribed. It should only be a defensive response to a direct attack, and it must be carried out in a legal and appropriate manner. Extremists like Usama bin Ladin have sometimes presented a distorted sense of what constitutes a legitimate attack in order to justify violence done in the name of Islam that has been rejected by the overwhelming majority of Muslims. This is a topic that will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The four sources of Islamic law: the Qur’an, the *hadīth*, *analogical*, and *consensus of the community*.

The distinction between lesser and greater *jihād* has roots that stretch back to the early period of the Islamic community. An often-cited *hadīth* has the Prophet Muhammad coming home from war with his followers when he tells them, “We have now returned from the lesser *jihād* to take up the greater *jihād*.” This brief statement gets right at the heart of the multidimensional nature of this important Muslim concept. While it may allow violence under certain conditions, it is the nonviolent form of *jihād* that is “greater.” For Muslims, it is the confrontation with oneself in the effort to live a faithful life, and not the confrontation with the enemy, that is the primary battle.

STOP

Terms Related to Jihād

(Q 2:61; 3:112; 5:30; 28:19; 60:12; 4:90; 60:9; 4:76; 73:20; 2:217; 4:77; 33:25; 47:20; 8:65; 30:3; 37:116; 54:10; 48:1, 18, 27; 57:10; 61:13; 5:33; 9:107; 2:279; 5:64; 8:57; 47:4)

In addition to *jihād*, a number of other terms are used in the Qur’an to describe military engagement. The most frequent are those that come from the Arabic root *q-t-l*, which is found approximately 170 times in the text. About one-half of those occurrences are in the first form of the verb (*qatala*), which has the meaning “to kill” (2:61; 3:112; 5:30; 28:19; 60:12). Another fifty examples come from the third form of the verb (*qātala*), a form that carries a reciprocal sense and is usually translated “to fight” (4:90; 60:9; 4:76; 73:20). A common word for the act of fighting is the related term *qīāl*, found 13 times in the Qur’an (2:217; 4:77; 33:25; 47:20). Another rather large collection of words related to warfare come from the root *gh-l-b*, “to defeat, subdue, overcome,” which is cited approximately 30 times in the text (8:65; 30:3; 37:116; 54:10).

The root *f-t-h* usually means “to open,” but in some passages it describes victory or success in battle (48:1, 18, 27; 57:10; 61:13). This usage was continued after Muhammad’s death when Islam began to spread throughout the world and words from the root were used to talk about