

Islam, Peace, and Peacemaking

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Nowadays, we hear, very often in the media and everywhere else different parties who are in search for peace or what is called “Peaceful Resolutions”. Many of these belligerent parties have been in long processes of peace talks, or are still trying to find ways to initiate peace talks. How does Islam perceive peace in general? And what is really the state of peacefulness? Is it one sided? One way oriented? Serving one party on the account of others? Or is it a general and a just peace where everybody enjoys equal rights?

Islam means ‘submission to and acceptance of the will of God’ and has at the same time the meaning Peace derived from the Arabic word “salaam”. Islam, terminologically speaking, is a religion that carries the word “Peace” and is not named after a certain prophet, a god, or a philosopher. Some Orientalist writers have tried very hard during the last two centuries to use in their literature the word “Mohammedanism”, which is a misnomer that even Muslims are not familiar with, in order to classify Islam as a founded religion rather than a revealed one.

In the word “Islam”, many shades of meaning are implied. The word “salaam” translated as “peace”, has a much wider significance. It includes a sense of security, soundness, freedom from defects like in “saleem”, preservation like in “saalem”, deliverance and safety like in “salaama”, salutation with those around us as in “salaam”, resignation with satisfaction and no discontent, and the ordinary meaning of peace, which is freedom from any jarring element.

In fact, for Muslims the relation between submission and peace is a causal one because Submission to Allah in Islam brings peace on different levels beginning with the individual to the whole community, to all the creation of God. Allah says in the Qur’an,

“But God does call to the Home of Peace: He does guide whom He pleases to a Way that is straight” (10:25).

The Qur’an’s message calls to peace and to the elements that guarantee it by laying a foundation of four cornerstones that are respectively: Justice, Tolerance, Respect and Dialogue. Without these four elements peace would be only ink on paper or a shallow concept.

The Muslims’ mission in this world is to call, as God Almighty does, to peace and its cornerstones and to be peacemakers beginning from the individual to the society at large.

Psychological and Spiritual Peace:

First, submission, or Islam, is in fact a psychological and spiritual peace. It is peace of the soul within the person who submits to his, or her, Creator. A few eastern religious ideas and practices were perceived by some Western psychoanalysts as very useful for studies in psychotherapy, such as the disciplines of Yoga and meditation in Buddhism or Hinduism. But very few of these modern scholars have dealt with Islam and tried to study objectively the efficacy of the Islamic psychotherapy, which stems from the principle of peace; peace of the soul and the self.

Sincere submission to God for a Muslim ends all the struggles he, or she, might have either within himself, or herself, or when dealing with others. Therefore, this submission makes a person very peaceful and tolerant. The more a person is sincere and faithful in his, or her, submission to God, the more the feeling of peacefulness is increased and reflected in the character. The genuine Muslim person becomes certain that Allah is watching over him, or her, and therefore, it is implausible that this person would cause any harm or injustice to anyone. The true Muslim establishes peace with His Lord, Allah, first and then builds on this base the determination to be peaceful with the creation of God.

Peace is a reality and not a dream or an illusion; it can happen anywhere and anytime. Islam believes in this reality and urges Muslims to strive at establishing peace. Peace in Islam is considered as one of the great blessings; Allah mentions that one of the blessings he grants the faithful servants is peace and security. He says that He has promised those who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety change their state, after the fear in which they lived, to one of security and peace as we read in the Qur'an (24:55).

Life itself is the embodiment of peace and this is why by nature humans love to live and be surrounded by living beings and feel the manifestations of different elements of nature. In Islam, life is a great blessing in this world and an eternal reward in the Hereafter when it is directed towards pleasing the Creator and life Giver, God Almighty. Life is manifested on two levels: the physical and more importantly the spiritual. Allah says, **“O you who believe! Give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which will give you life; and know that Allah comes in between a man and his heart,¹ and that it is He to Whom you shall (all) be gathered.”** (8:24)

It is crystal clear that the life mentioned here is the life of the heart and the soul. If the heart is empty from the love of, and the dedication to, God it becomes dead even if there is a physical life. The soul, or heart, becomes dead because of the death caused by ignorance and rejection as the commentators of Qur'an said. Our Prophet (S) explained that by saying, **"The parable of a person who remembers his Lord and a person who does not; is like the one of the living and the dead"** (Related by al-Bukhari & Muslim).

According to the language of the Qur'an, humans need to balance between the life of the soul and the life of the body to avoid going to the extremes. Once one of these two lives is neglected on the account of the other, the actions of the person start leading him, or her, astray from what is known in Islam as the "Straight path", the path of those who seek the pleasure of God, the path of righteousness. Allah says, **"But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the Home of the Hereafter, but do not forget your portion in this World. Be good to others, as Allah has been good to you, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief."** (28:77)

A balanced life in Islam is a life where the individual lives a very normal life and remembers His, or Her, Lord constantly or as often as possible.

Remembering God means also remembering the covenants we have made with Him. One of those covenants is to make peace with God and His creation. This is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of strength and determination. We believe that this commitment to peace requires a great strength, power, courage, and tremendous effort. Working for peace through one's commitment to the will of God proves how a person is capable to silence his, or her, own personal desires and to overcome any self-interest. That peace also empowers humans against Satan who tries to control them through lust, greed, desire, and other weaknesses. If a person is trapped in the vicious circle of the self-seeking lust and pleasure, it is difficult for the truth to reach his, or her, heart. The false desires and the absence of contentment do indeed blind and seal the hearts and cover them from receiving the light of God. Lust and desire for pleasure and material things are never satisfied because of the endless greed of humans. They never provide real, long lasting happiness or satisfaction, but ultimately result in suffering and dissatisfaction in their life and in the Hereafter. Self-centeredness and concern only about personal lusts, desires and interests could become fire, which cannot be extinguished by adding fuel to it, but rather by

applying moderation and moral values using something better, which gives life and peace; something like water.

Social and Political Peace:

Islam is a social and political peace because submission to Allah means for a society a total rejection of corruption, wrong-doing, and deviant and harmful behaviors. Commitment to peace with God and His creation leads to unity, love, harmony, dialogue and respect for others. An ideal society is what human beings have been dreaming of since even before Plato's 'Republic' or Augustine's 'Eternal City of God'. With Muhammad (P.b.u.h), the ideal society was constituted of faithful followers called "Companions", who submitted to the Message in obedience to God and His Prophet and Messenger (P.b.u.h.).

The organization of that society started from basic requirements such as the brotherhood between all Muslims. Peace was declared verbally in every daily encounter of two individuals or more. Salutation – As-Salaamu Alaikum!- in its verbal form means "Peace be upon you!" Allah says in the Qur'an:

"Salute each other a greeting of blessing and purity as from Allah" (24:61).

And He also says:

"When a courteous greeting is offered to you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or at least of equal courtesy. Allah takes careful account of all things." (4:86)

The Prophet (P.b.u.h) was once asked:

"Which is the best Islam?" He (S) replied: **"You feed the hungry and you say Salaam to those you know and those you don't know."** (Related by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

He (P.b.u.h) also said: **"You won't enter Paradise unless you believe, and you won't believe unless you love each other. Do you want me to show you something that if you do it you will love each other? Say Salaam to each other- Send messages of peace to each other-"** (Related by Muslim)

Even Prophet Ibrahim (P.b.u.h), who declared himself as a Muslim, used to say “Salaam”. Allah says about Ibrahim: **“When they entered his place they said “Peace” and he said “Peace” (11:69)**

Thus, expressing peace verbally is very important in Islam because it unifies people and makes them feel totally secure among themselves. This enactment of salutation in Islam on a daily basis and in every encounter of two people or more is indeed a renewal of commitment to peacefulness and a reminder of one another of the rights and duties implied by the statement: “As-Salaamu alaikum!” meaning “Peace be upon you!”

That is why peace is translated into physical actions, which cannot be achieved unless there is sincere submission and commitment – Islamic faith is belief and conviction in the heart, verbal declaration with the tongue, and action. A true Muslim, or submitter, is the one who promotes peace rather than enmity, violence, disrespect and hatred. The Prophet Muhammad (P.b.u.h.) said: **“The Muslim is the one who avoids harming others with his hand and his tongue” (al-Bukhari and Muslim)⁵. In another narration⁶, he added, “and the believer is the one that people are safe from him in regards of their lives and properties” (at-Tirmidhi, an-Nassa’i, and Ahmad)**

This means that any verbal or physical action, which results in harm, offense, and violence, is contradictory to true submission, unless it is a matter of a necessary self-defense in reaction against an outside aggression, as it will be elucidated later. Peace is the general principle even in war. Allah (swt) says in the Qur’an:

“But, if the enemy inclines towards peace, you have to incline towards peace and trust in Allah, for Allah is the One who hears and knows” (8:61).

The Qur’an teaches while Muslims must always be ready to fight intellectually or even physically for a just cause if it was forced upon them, even in the midst of the fight they must always be ready for peace if there is any inclination towards peace by the other side. There is no merit merely in a fight by itself. It should be a goal not for itself, but to establish the reign of peace, justice, and righteousness.

The Prophet (S) always taught his disciples that peace and justice are the principles. Every Muslim should live and walk with principles. He stressed that principles should at all times take

precedence over the personal interests whether dealing with Muslims or non-Muslims. During his life – before and after Islam was established – he constantly praised the **“Confederacy of the Fudul.”** It was the decision of the leaders of the tribe of Quraysh in Makkah during the Pre-Islamic times to assemble in one house and to make a covenant binding themselves by a solemn agreement that if they found anyone, whether a Makkan or an outsider, had been wronged they would take his part against the aggressor and make sure that the stolen property was restored to him, or her. Prophet Muhammad (S) once said, **“I witnessed in the house of Abdullah ibn Jud’aan a covenant, which I would not exchange for any number of fine camels: If I were invited to take part in it during Islam I should do so.”**

To spread the message of peace is the role and mission of every Muslim. Even when Muslims won wars and battles, they didn’t execute and torture the captives, nor rape their women and molest their children, as it happened and continues happening today in the case of many warring parties. Muslims were required to be peaceful towards them and treat them in a humanitarian manner, granting them rights ordained in the Islamic law. History witnesses that Muslims under genuine Islamic leadership always treated their prisoners and captive kindly even before the famous Geneva Convention act. Allah says in the Qur’an,

“O Prophet! Say to those who are captives in your hands: “If Allah finds any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you, for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” (8:70).

Thus, the purpose of Muslims, or true submitters, is to invite people to God’s Grace and Mercy not to exterminate them for the sake of revenge. Any creation of God is not cheap in Islamic teachings let alone Human life. Every human being deserves dignity, respect, and the right to live in God’s world. No one deserves to be killed unjustly. All humans are equal in terms of their rights and obligations that are related to their necessities of life.