

# *Islam as a Religion of Peace*

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## **Peace Defined**

Peace means freedom from and avoidance of war or conflict. It also means preventing people from quarrelling or fighting. This realization has come because of the understanding that human values and human rights cannot be restored unless measures are taken to redress the grievances of the people in a peaceful manner. This is essential for cultivating harmony and friendship in the society. It also means freedom from public disturbance or disorder, and absence of mental conflict. In other words, it also means a state or position in which man and the society live in a complete undisturbed state of mind, clam, quiet and tranquillity.<sup>1</sup>

## **Peace as a Means of Social, Political and International Harmony**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge, a strong realization has emerged that humanity is in much more need of social, political and international harmony. This has posed a challenge to the national states to help harmonize the objectives and interests of various social, ethnic, religious and sectarian groups with a view to evolving common human values. The retention of local identity should pose no impediment to the cultivation of harmony amongst

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1. For details see David L. Sills (ed.) *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (Macmillan: The Macmillan Co. & The Free Press, 1968), Vol.II, pp.487-96.

various groups, as part of an integrated national culture of the people as a whole living in a particular country.<sup>2</sup>

With the establishment of the nation-state, close relationship between people living in one state with those living in others has become the need of the hour, and the scientific and technological advancement has made it possible to develop this kind of close relationship. Such relationship would obviously lead to developing common international culture and this represents the prime need of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

This, however, is not possible without internal peace in each country and without all the ethnic or sectarian groups living therein shunning hatred or jealousy towards each other.<sup>4</sup> They should approach each other with a sense of co-operation and sympathy. For this purpose it is important that each one of them should have the desire to understand each other's problems and needs. If the problems are solved and the needs are adequately met, a sense of contentment and collaboration would prevail not only among various groups living in one state, but also in inter-state relationship.

It is for the establishment of freedom, peace and justice in the world that the United Nations Organization came into being in 1945. The UN framed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, to further its aims and the objects.<sup>5</sup> In 1966 the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights

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2 Judson R. Landis, *Sociology, Concepts and Characteristics* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Co.) 1971, pp.39-40.

3 Also see Scott G. McNall, *The Sociological Experience*, Second Edition (Boston: Little, Bsoon and Co.) 1971, pp.59-63; Maris Hiltunen Biesanz and John Biesanz, *Introduction to Sociology* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.) 1973; and *Aspects of Sociology* (Boston: Beacon Press, Frankfurt Institute for Social Research) 1972, pp.89-95; M. Iqbal Chaudhry, *Sociology* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers), 1977, pp.83-127.

4. For details of prejudices, its causes and cures see Bassy E. Collins, *Social Psychology: Social Influence, Attitude Change, Group Processes and Prejudices* (Reeding Addison Wesley Publishing Co) 1970, pp.246-96.

5. Zafrullah Khan, *Human Rights* (Karachi: Pakistan Law House), 2001, pp.243-50. Also see M.G. Chitkara, *Human Rights in Pakistan* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation), 1997, and Parveen Shaukat Ali, *Human Rights in Islam* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers), 1980.

was framed.<sup>6</sup> All these international institutions under the UN umbrella are working to resolve international disputes in a fair and judicial manner. If some of the big powers try to act arbitrarily the world would soon be engulfed in another world war which can be most destructive to human civilization.

### **Peace is from God**

According to Islamic terminology, God is total Peace.<sup>7</sup> So the man is desired by Him to ask for Peace from Him. Peace also means to live in Security. It is God Almighty who can provide man peace and security. "...Allah sent down His peace upon him [Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)]."<sup>8</sup> Muslims are even enjoined that if your enemy has inclined towards peace, you should also incline towards peace.<sup>9</sup> While dealing with each other, men in general have also been ordained to be steadfast in patience.<sup>10</sup> Only those people who remain peaceful and patient, according to the law of nature enunciated in the Holy Quran, will ultimately succeed. This is because peace is "a blessing from the Lord Most Merciful."<sup>11</sup> It is only God who "Sent down Tranquillity (and peace) to them."<sup>12</sup>

### **Various Religions on Benefits of Peace**

Various religions have emphasized the benefit of peace in different ways. This is because of the belief that peace is a state of mind by which an individual appears to be satisfied and contented in the environment he lives. While meeting his/her demands he/she contributes towards making the other human beings live in a peaceful manner. This is only possible if each social group is conscious of the rights and obligations not only of themselves but of the others, sharing the problems together and enjoying the facilities which the nature had provided them. All the prophets

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6. *Ibid.*, pp.293-313.

7. *The Holy Quran*, trans. & Commentary by A. Yusuf Ali, (Maryland: Amna Corporation, 1983). For the purpose of English translation of the verses of Holy Quran I have mainly relied on this translation.

8. Holy Quran, IX: 40.

9. VIII: 61.

10. XI: 115.

11. XXXVI: 58.

12. XLVIII: 18.

who came to humanity were given the job of establishing peace in society and among the states. While all the religions are unified with the conceptual unity of working for the benefit of human values, their methodology to realize them is somewhat different. So far as Islam is concerned, the very word "Islam", means submission and peace with a sense of establishing harmonious relations among all the individuals of the society.<sup>13</sup> That is why when a man professing the faith of Islam meets the other he greets him with the phrase "Peace on you" (*Salamun 'Alaikum*).<sup>14</sup> The greatest quality of Heaven in which the righteous will be admitted, according to Islam, will be a life in peace,<sup>15</sup> and greatest virtue which God will bestow on humanity in the Heavens will be His order to live in Peace for ever.<sup>16</sup> In Islam peace also means to live in tranquillity, and for this the Quran uses the word "*Sakinah*". This tranquillity or "*Sakinah*" has been considered by God as one of His greatest favours which He showered on the apostles and the believers.<sup>17</sup> The word "*Sakinah*" not only means peace and tranquillity, but also security and calmness.<sup>18</sup>

At various other places in the Holy Quran the importance of peace not only for Muslims but for all the human beings, irrespective of their creed, religion, sect or ethnicity, has been emphasized. There could not be any justice without realization of peace. For the maintenance of peace a number of steps, both by the state and society, are required to be taken. The state is required not only to discourage crime, but also to frame laws and regulations for awarding punishment according to various categories of crimes.<sup>19</sup> Until the criminals are not adequately punished according to the nature of their crime, peace in the state and society cannot be

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13. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam*, (London: Christophers, 1961), pp.137-38.

14. VII: 46.

15. XIV: 23.

16. XXXVI: 58.

17. IX: 26.

18. *Ibid.*

19. For details of law as given by different religions, see the article on "Law" in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (New York: T&T Clark), 1971, No.VII, pp.805-88.

established. This is an essential pre-requisite for the establishment of peace in society.

### **Unity of Mankind**

As compared to most of the religions of the world, Islam not only preaches but vigorously pleads the case for global unity of Mankind. There are two ways for realization of this goal — i) By suppressing cultural values of local cultures, or by maintaining the cultural, sectarian, ethical and social values of each one of the local nations. Islam goes for the second option which is rightly recognized by the UNESCO policy for Unity of Mankind. The other aspect promoted by Islam is that it is only the righteous who can create such a unity. The righteous are those who think positively. The unrighteous people with negative approach in society cannot achieve this unity. The Quran has termed that “only the righteous people shall inherit this globe.”<sup>20</sup>

By reading certain verses of the Holy Quran, one is convinced that God wants to unify the whole world under one kind of administrative pattern. This administration and control is to be maintained by the right people, not the bad ones. In this regard these verses are worth remembering: “Mankind is but one single nation and God sent Messengers (to them) to give them glad tidings and warnings.”<sup>21</sup> At another place it is commanded: “Mankind is but one Nation.”<sup>22</sup> The purpose of the creation of mankind into various nations and tribes is to be taken as not more than recognition or point of reference of a particular nation as explained in this verse: “O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, And made you into Nations and Tribes so that you may recognize each other.”<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion it can be said that Peace is very important aspect of human cultural value without which no other benefit can be enjoyed by the society. This aspect is basically the antithesis of hatred, terrorism and the war which are enemies of humanity. As discussed before, while it is the duty of every individual in a

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20 XX: 105.

21 II: 213.

22 X: 19.

23 XLIX: 13.

society to maintain peace, it is all the more the responsibility of the government of every state to take special care to help maintain law and order, so that peace and security prevails.

If the aforementioned verses from the Holy Quran are kept in mind, an entirely new perspective of Islam about global unity of mankind on peaceful pattern emerges. This is different from extremists' approach who preach hatred, and enmity and intolerance towards the non-Muslims. In the Holy Quran there are two ways of addressing the human groups. When the Muslims are addressed, they are addressed as believers, but when the man is addressed it means irrespective of his/her faith, creed, caste, region, colour, or position. He is addressed as Man (*Al-Nās*) which means the international human beings or the global humanity. This implies that these values are of international character.

Islam goes further than this. It believes that the Holy Christ was not hanged. He was uplifted into Heavens alive. As it is the law of nature that every human being is to taste death, so the Holy Christ will come back from the Heavens alive on the Palestinian or Israeli lands. The most important concept in this regard is that he will establish peace in the whole world. The establishment of unipolar world is a pointer towards realization of this fact.