

PEACE IN THE QURAN

"God calls to the Home of Peace."
(The Quran, 10:25)

The Teachings of Islam

The very word 'Islam' (from the Arabic *silm*) connotes peace. According to a tradition of the Prophet, 'Peace is Islam' (*Al-Bukhari*). This means that peace is one of the prerequisites of Islam. Similarly, a *Hadith* states: A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people are safe. One of the attributes of God described in the Quran is '*As-Salam*', which means peace and security.' That is to say that God's Being itself is a manifestation of peace. Indeed, God is Peace (*Al-Bukhari*). In the Quran, divine guidance is likened to the paths of peace. (5:16)

According to Islam, Paradise is the ideal human abode, and is thus called the 'Home of Peace.' It is also said that, the people of Paradise will wish peace to one another, indicating that the social culture of the people of Paradise will be based on peace.

The Quran, avers that, 'reconciliation is best' (4:128), and judging by the consequences, the way of peace is far better than that of confrontation. By the Law of Nature, God has decreed that success will be met with only on a reconciliatory path, and not on a confrontational or a violent course of action.

Whenever the Prophet had an option between two courses of action, he always chose the easier (non-confrontational) one. (*Bukhari*)

This means that, violent activism should not be indulged in if peaceful activism is an option. For, peace is the easier course as compared to violence.

For instance, trying to change the status quo in the very first stage of a movement is a hard option, while launching one's activities in the available sphere, without doing so, is an easier option.

Going to war in confrontational situations is a hard option while following a conciliatory course in dealing with one's rival is easier. Countering aggression with aggression is a hard option, while countering aggression with patience and forbearance is an easier option. An agitational course of action is harder than employing a quiet strategy. Adopting a radical method of reformation is harder than that of following a gradual method. Taking emotional, extreme steps, without a thought for their consequences, creates difficulties. While a well-considered method, keeping an eye on the consequences, gives much better results. The policy of confrontation with a ruler is a harder option, while initiating one's action; by sidestepping the ruler in the sphere of education and learning is an easier option. These instances show us the easier and harder options, as demonstrated by the Hadith.

The truth is that peace in Islam is the 'rule', while war is the 'exception'. This is borne out by all the teachings of Islam and the practical life of the Prophet of Islam.

The Example of the Prophet Muhammad

The Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) received his first revelation in 610 A.D. in Makkah. God ordained that he carry out the mission of *Tawheed*.

The house of the Kabah, which was built as the house of monotheism by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael (May peace be upon them), later on became a centre of polytheism with 360 idols in it. The first revelation might well have demanded the purification of the Kabah, which would have given rise to a serious problem. But the first revelation made in the Quran was:

Purify your vestments (74:4).

This means to purify one's moral character. If, in the

first stage, the Prophet had been commanded to purify the Kabah while Makkah was still under the domination of the idolaters, this would have surely precipitated into clash and confrontation. Therefore, according to the command of the first revelation, the Prophet continued to perform his prayers peacefully in the Kabah for a period of 13 years, even though it housed several hundred idols.

Similarly, the Prophet and his companions circumambulated the Kabah on the occasion of Umrah al-Hudaybiyya in 629 AD, while the Kabah still housed 360 idols.

The Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) proceeded thus in order to avoid war and confrontation with the idolaters, and so that the atmosphere of peace should be maintained. The entire life of the Prophet is a practical demonstration of this peace-loving policy. At the time of migration from Makkah, the idolaters were all set to wage war, but the Prophet avoided this by quietly leaving his homeland for Madinah.

The mission of Islam is based on monotheism, its goal being to make people realize the existence of the one and only God and to strive to bring about a revolution in the hearts and minds of individuals in order that they may love God as is His due. And the greatest concern of man should be to fear and worship his Creator (2:165).

Such a mission cannot afford wars and violent confrontations. When a state of war and violence prevails, the normal atmosphere is vitiated and such circumstances as would foster intellectual movements and spiritual reformation cannot be effectively created. It cannot be denied that peaceful circumstances produce a propitious environment for Islam, while violent circumstances, inevitably, result in antagonism towards Islam.

War: A State Action

In Islam, war is not the prerogative of the individual but of an established government. Only an established government can declare war. In other words, individuals can pray on their own, but they cannot wage wars of their own accord. Only when a war is declared by the ruling government, can the public join in and support it, and not before that. Islam does not sanction individual actions on this issue. Therefore, no Non Governmental Organization or NGO can declare a war.

As a general principle, the Quran tells us that, even where an external attack is feared, the common man should not act independently, but should take the matter to the ruler, and then under his guidance take proper counter measures. (4:83).

The Hadith also states that 'the ruler is a shield, fighting is done under him, and security is attained through him.'

This clearly shows that the decision to do battle and its planning are the tasks of an established government. The common man can play his role as need be—under government orders, and not independently.

This Islamic principle shows that there is no room for non-state warfare, which is what we generally call guerilla war. A guerilla war is fought by individual organizations, not by the State. As far as the state is concerned, if it wants to wage a defensive war against any country it has first—in obedience to the Quran—to issue a proper declaration. Only then can it wage a lawful war (8:58). In Islam, there is only 'declared' war. Therefore, in accordance with this principle, no proxy war in Islam can be lawful.

Most Islamic actions are governed by certain conditions. The waging of war is also thus subject to

certain principles, one being that, even when a defensive war has been declared by the State, it will be aimed only at the combatants. Targeting non-combatants will be unlawful. The Quran enjoins us not to do battle with those who are not at war. Such people have to be dealt with kindly and equitably. But you are free to do battle with those who are fighting against you. (60:8-9)

If, for instance, a Muslim state is at war with a particular nation, and this war is in conformance with Islamic principles, it should still not permit any destructive activities against non-combatants (civilians), as was done on September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington. Similarly in Islamic war, Muslims are not permitted to commit suicidal bombings in order to destroy the enemy. Strapping explosives on to oneself and hurling oneself upon the civilian settlements of even those with whom one is at war, for the purpose of destroying the enemy, and in the process killing oneself deliberately, is totally un-Islamic. This can in no way be termed '*Shahadah*' (martyrdom). According to Islam we can become martyrs, but we cannot court a martyr's death deliberately.

The Difference between Enemy and Aggressor

Under the scheme of the divine trial of human beings, God has granted man freedom. Due to this freedom, enmities may develop between people (20:123), which sometimes lead them to war. But Islam makes a clear difference between enmity and war.

Believers do not have the right to wage wars against their enemies. What the believers have to do, as regards their enemies, is far from waging war. Their duty is to peacefully convey to them the message of Islam. The Quran gives a clear injunction on this subject:

"And good and evil deeds are not alike. Repel evil with good. And he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend." (41:33-34)

That is to say, Islam believes in turning one's enemy into a friend through peaceful means, instead of declaring him an enemy and then waging war against him.

Islam does give permission to do battle. But such permission is given only in the case of an attack by opponents in spite of the policy of avoidance being followed by the Muslims, thus creating a situation where self-defense is required. The Quran has this to say: "Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked because they have been wronged" (22:38). At another place the Quran gives a valid reason for fighting: "They were the first to attack you" (9:13).

This shows that according to the teachings of Islam, war is to be waged not against the enemy but against the aggressor. If Muslims hold someone to be their enemy, that does not give them the right to attack him. The one and only right given to them is to convey the peaceful message of Islam. Islam permits defensive fighting against violent aggression, but only when all efforts at avoidance and reconciliation have failed. The practical example of the Prophet Muhammad (May peace be upon him) provides an incontrovertible proof of the value of this policy.

The Power of Peace

According to a Hadith, "God grants to gentleness what He does not grant to harshness." That is to say, peaceful activism is distinctly superior to violent activism. There is nothing mysterious about the point made in this Hadith. It is a simple and a well-known fact of life that in a situation of war and violence, feelings of hatred and enmity flare up between the

two sides and, in the process, the existing resources are destroyed. People from both sides get killed and the entire society turns into a jungle of negative feelings. It is quite obvious that in such an atmosphere no constructive and consolidated work can be done. There is nothing to be achieved in war and violence, save death and destruction.

On the contrary, an atmosphere of peace enables normal relations to be established between people. It makes it possible for feelings of love and friendship to prevail. In a favourable atmosphere constructive activities flourish and the existing resources can be used for development or other creative activities. A positive bent of mind will prevail which will help develop academic and intellectual advancement.

The greatest ill effect of war is that it limits human endeavour, whereas the greatest benefit of peace is that, to the ultimate extent, it opens up opportunities for improvement. War, invariably, results in further loss, while peace, invariably, results in further gain. That is why Islam teaches us to avoid war and confrontation at all costs and commands us to establish peace to the greatest possible degree.

Clarification of a Fallacy

There are certain verses in the Quran, which convey injunctions similar to the following: 'Kill them wherever you find them.' (2:191)

Referring to such verses, there are some who attempt to give the impression that Islam is a religion of war and violence. This is totally untrue. Such verses relate, in a restricted sense, to those who have unilaterally attacked the Muslims. The above verse does not convey the general command of Islam.

The truth of the matter is that the Quran was not revealed in the complete form in which it exists today. It was revealed from time to time, according to the

circumstances, over a time span of 23 years. If this is divided into years of war and peace, the period of peace amounts to 20 years, while that of war amounts only to 3 years. The revelations during these 20 peaceful years were the peaceful teachings of Islam as are conveyed in the verses regarding the realization of God, worship, morality, justice, etc.

This division of commands into different categories is a natural one and is found in all religious books. For instance, the Gita, the holy book of the Hindus, pertains to wisdom and moral values. Yet along with this is the exhortation of Krishna to Arjun, encouraging him to fight. (3:30) This does not mean that believers in the Gita should wage wars all the time. Gandhiji, after all, derived his philosophy of non-violence from the same Gita. The exhortation to wage war in the Gita applies only to exceptional cases where circumstances leave no choice. But for general day-to-day existence it gives the same peaceful commands as derived from it by Mahatma Gandhi.

Similarly, Jesus Christ said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew, Chapter 10)

It would not be right to conclude that the religion preached by Christ was one of war and violence, for such utterances relate purely to particular occasions. So far as general life is concerned, Christ taught peaceful values, such as the building up of a good character, loving each other, helping the poor and needy, etc.

The same is true of the Quran. When the Prophet of Islam emigrated from Mecca to Medina, the idolatrous tribes were aggressive towards him. But the Prophet always averted their attacks by the exercise of patience and the strategy of avoidance. However on certain occasions no other options existed, save that of retaliation. Therefore, he had to do battle on certain occasions. It was these circumstances, which

occasioned those revelations relating to war. These commands, being specific to certain circumstances, had no general application. They were not meant to be valid for all time to come. That is why; the permanent status of the Prophet has been termed a 'mercy for all mankind.' (21:107)

Islam is a religion of peace in the fullest sense of the word. The Qur'an calls its way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy (4:128), and states that God abhors any disturbance of the peace (2:205). We can say that:

"It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that prima facie it stands rejected. The fact that violence is not sustainable, in the present world, is sufficient indication that violence, as a principle, is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam. Islam claims to be an eternal religion and, as such, could never afford to uphold any principle, which could not stand up to the test of time. Any attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts, therefore, to casting doubt upon the very eternity of the Islamic religion. Islamic terrorism is a contradiction in terms, much like 'pacifist' terrorism. And the truth of the matter is that, all the teachings of Islam are based, directly or indirectly, on the principle of peace."

For more information, please contact:

CPs International

Centre for Peace and Spirituality

1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi - 110 013

Tel. 0091-11-2435 8729/4102 7332

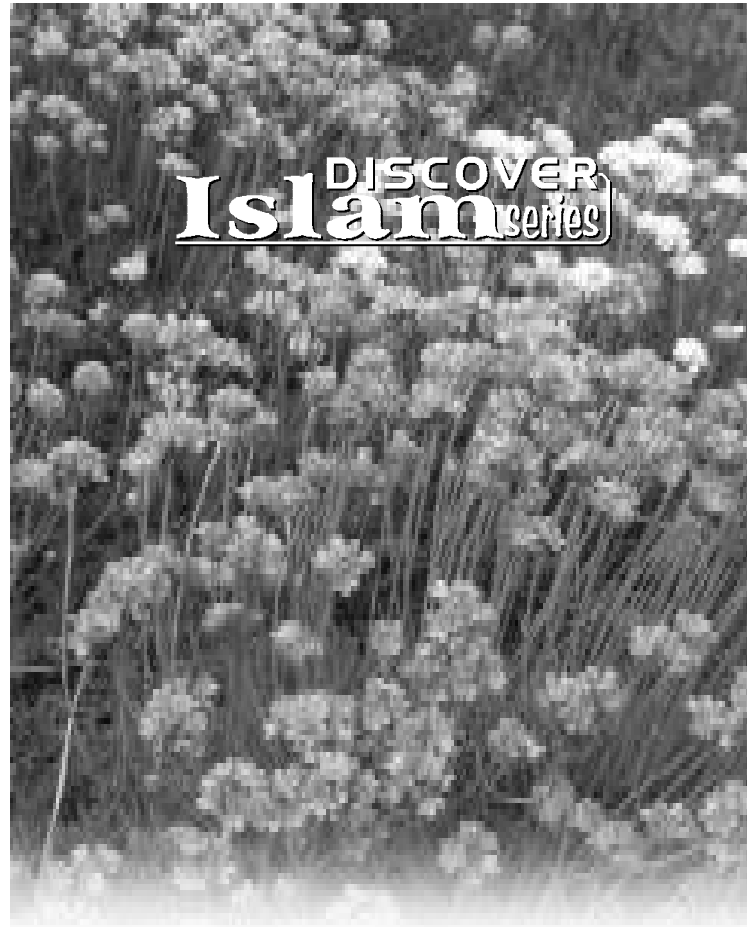
Mob. 91-9810319241, Fax: 0091-11-2435 7333

email: info@cpsglobal.org

visit us at: www.cpsglobal.org

www.goodwordbooks.com

ID-2



Peace in the Quran

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

CPs International
Centre for Peace and Spirituality