

Peace and Security

(part 1 of 3): Peace with God



The Relationship between Islam and “Peace” (*Salaam*)

Perhaps the best way to begin a discussion of the relationship between Islam and peace and security is to deal with a statement that is heard often these days: “Islam means peace.” If the one making this statement means that the actual meaning of the word “Islam” is “peace,” then this is definitely wrong. It is true that the word Islam and the Arabic word for peace (*salaam*) both come from the same root. This

demonstrates that there is going to be a relationship between the two. It is vitally important to understand what that relationship is and how that relationship occurs.

The word “Islam” is the verbal noun of the verb *aslama*. This verb is defined as, “He resigned or submitted himself.” When used with respect to God, it means, “He became submissive to God.”^[1] Thus, Islam is about an individual recognizing who his Lord is and recognizing that his attitude toward his Lord and Creator should be one of submission and worship.

This understanding of what the word Islam means is vital for understanding the relationship between Islam and peace. Islam, the submission to God, is what leads to true peace. True peace—both internally and externally—can only be the result of the correct implementation of Islam. Of course, what is meant here is not simply peace as in “an absence of a state of war.” Peace means much more than that. One can be free of war yet still suffer from anxiety or despair and lack peace. Here, it is referring to a complete sense of peace. Islam brings about a complete tranquility and peace of mind that is the result of realizing that one is believing and acting in accord with the guidance of one’s Creator. This internal peace can then spread to the family, the community, the society and the world as a whole.^[2] It is a special form of tranquility that can only be produced by the proper belief in God. Hence, God says:

“Indeed, there has come to you from God a Light and a clear Book wherewith God guides all those who seek His Good Pleasure to ways of peace, and He brings them out of darkness by His Will unto light and guides them to a Straight Way” (Quran 5:15-16)

In fact, God is calling humans to the abode of eternal peace:

“God calls to the home of peace (Paradise) and guides whom He wills to a Straight Path” (Quran 10:25)

For those who follow this path, their ultimate reward will be the abode of peace:

“For them will be the home of peace (Paradise) with their Lord” (Quran 6:127)

In sum, it is not correct to say, “Islam means peace,” but certainly true peace comes only via Islam.

How Islam Brings About Peace

True and complete peace can only be had when the individuals themselves achieve internal peace. This results from Islam or the true submission to God alone. This is the only way of life consistent with the nature of human beings. In fact, this is what can be called the “true life.” Thus, God says:

“O you who believe! Answer God (by obeying Him) and (His) Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life...” (Quran 8:24)

Knowing God is what can bring about true contentment in the soul. If the individual does not know his Creator, his soul will always be yearning for something that is missing in his life. He will always be agitated and confused. If and when he seeks things other than God—even things which he believes is his “god”—he will eventually end up in despair when he realizes that all of the things that he seeks after are not the one Being that his heart is yearning for.

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote:

You must know that a human’s^[3] need for God—that he worship Him and not associate any partner with Him—is a need concerning which there is no comparison that one can make an analogy to. In some matters, it resembles the need of the body for food and drink. However, there are many differences between the two.

The reality of a human being is in his heart and soul. These cannot be prosperous except through [their relation] with God, concerning whom there

is no other god. There is[, for example,] no tranquility in this world except in His remembrance. Verily, man is proceeding toward his Lord and he shall meet Him. He must definitely meet Him. There is no true goodness for him except in meeting Him.^[4] If the human experiences any pleasure or happiness other than in God, that joy and happiness will not endure. It will move from one nature to another or from one person to another. The person will enjoy it at one time or only some of the time. In fact, sometimes the thing he enjoys and gets pleasure from does not bring him pleasure or enjoyment. Sometimes it even hurts him when it comes to him. And he is even more harmed by that. But his God is definitely always with him under every circumstance and at all times. Wherever he is, He is with him [by His knowledge and aid]...

If someone worships anything other than God—even if he loves it and attains some love in this world and some form of pleasure from that—[that false worship] will destroy the person in a way greater than the harmful displeasure that comes to a person who ate poison...

You must know that if anyone loves something other than for the sake of God, then that beloved thing will definitely be a cause of harm and punishment... If somebody loves something other than for the sake of God, that thing will harm him whether it is with him or he is without it...^[5]

All of the wealth and the goods of this world will not be able to bring the human such true internal contentment. Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said:

“True richness is not via much property and belongings but true richness is in self-contentment.”^[6]

Another hadith states:

“True richness is the richness of the heart. True poverty is the poverty of the heart.”^[7]

Once an individual is at peace with himself and free of any internal agitations, he can then enter into truly peaceful relations with others. He will have no reason to feel resentment towards the rest of the world—those whom he may blame for his lack of internal peace. In fact, since his goal is that of the Hereafter, he has no reason even to feel envy or rage towards others concerning what they have received in this world—while envy and rage strike at the very root of peaceful relations towards others.

Footnotes:

[1] E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), vol.1, p. 1413.

[2] On this point, one can read Sayyed Qutb, *Islam and Universal Peace* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1977), *passim*.

[3] The word ibn Taimiya used was *abd* (servant or slave); however, its inference is every human being.

[4] This is because the soul, by its ingrained nature, yearns for its meeting with its Creator.

[5] Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo*, vol. 1, pp. 24-29.

[6] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[7] Recorded by ibn Hibbaan. According to al-Albaani, it is authentic. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer*, #7816.

(part 2 of 3): Society

His freedom of internal agitation should definitely, therefore, affect how he interacts with those around him. This starts with those closest to him in his family and extends to his neighbors and others in the community, eventually extending to all of humankind as a whole. Thus, Islam establishes an entire social structure in which people interact with others, based on relationships, rights and obligations, in ways that bring about a peaceful coexistence. Children recognize the rights of their parents upon them while parents recognize their roles towards their children. Husbands and wives come together not as competitors but as partners cooperating to produce a home filled with peace and love. Indeed, God points to this relationship that He has created as a great sign:

“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect.” (Quran 30:21)

Thus, God has laid down stringent laws that protect the sanctity of the home, such as the laws concerning adultery, fornication and slander. The reason is that the home is truly the foundation for the society as a whole. If there is no peace in the home, one can hardly expect that people will exit their home in a troubled state and be peaceful, fulfilling members of society.

Since the guidance of Islam covers not only what is traditionally known as “law” but also ethical behavior and conduct, Islam provides detailed guidance for the manner in which members of a society should interact with one another. There is a great emphasis on mutual respect, with each member of society realizing that he is part of a larger unity entailing rights and obligations. This mutual feeling

produces a society that is filled with peace, wherein each individual looks after the welfare and needs of the other members of society.

Thus, when Islam is enacted, the individual finds peace all around him, from within himself and throughout the entire society. In fact, even world peace can only truly come about when there is justice. In recent years, more and more people have realized this fact and emphasize, “There is No Peace Without Justice.” (Justice is often a slogan used when going to war but it is usually not more than that, a slogan.) But there can be no true justice or peace until people raise themselves above national or ethnic economic or political interests. There can be no true justice or peace as long as people still believe that they can go to war against others simply for their own economic interests, such as, for example, in order to exploit the natural resources that are on somebody else’s land. True justice can only occur when people dedicate themselves to God, applying His guidance while removing their egos and desires from their decisions.

In the Hereafter, of course, it will only be through believing in God and following His guidance that one will achieve eternal peace. Again, God makes it very clear that this is what He is actually calling the humans to:

“God calls to the home of peace (Paradise) and guides whom He wills to a Straight Path.” (Quran 10:25)

Before leaving this question of peace, there is a very important question but maybe its complete discussion is beyond the scope of this article: Can someone have true internal peace when the life he is living in this life does not give him any clue to how he will fare in the Hereafter, or if there is a complete disconnect between the two or if there even seems to be some contradiction between the two. For example, capitalism, socialism and democracy all promise to provide something in this world yet, in reality, they can provide nothing to the individual with respect to the Hereafter. Hence, they leave a void in the individual’s life that will prevent him from ever finding true peace. The result is that the individual may try to dichotomize his life: being secular with respect to this world while having some form of spiritual belief concerning the Hereafter. But how can he even know if his secular pursuits are compatible with what his spiritual teachings are telling him will happen in the Hereafter. Does he have to make himself schizophrenic? Even worse, what if the spiritual teachings he believes actually point to the fact that his worldly life is wrong, such as when his spiritual teachings tell him that the flesh and this world are evil and so forth. How can individuals of this nature ever find true peace in themselves?

How Islam Brings About Security

Security can be considered a corollary to the issue of peace. The factors that bring about peace contribute to the establishment of security.

However, probably the first thing that comes to people's mind when they think of security has to do with laws. Laws are definitely important for security as they lay down the parameters of acceptable behavior. In fact, Islam is a religion that not only provides general principles for life but also provides detailed laws. These laws further bring about peace and security. Peace and security will undoubtedly be the goal of any society. However, God is the only one who has the knowledge of this creation to be able to determine laws that can bring about peace and security. As for humans, they are always guessing. One can point to the example of the death penalty (capital punishment). The death penalty is arguably one of the greatest deterrents for major crimes. However, the European Union has completely banned it. In the United States, the masses keep swaying back and forth, never quite sure as to whether it is a good thing or not. In reality, they will never be able to be certain. This is because they will never be able to put humans in a laboratory experiment and determine whether the death penalty is more positive than negative. Hence, they will always be guessing. Even the European Union that is completely against it is actually completely against it based on nothing but conjecture. On the other hand, one of the main goals of Islamic law is the preservation and continuance of life. As part of that goal, the law of retribution and the death penalty are part of Islamic law. These laws are not meant simply for the sake of punishment. Such laws are actually meant to protect life, as God says:

“And there is (a saving of) life for you in the Law of Equality in punishment, O men of understanding, that you may become the pious” (Quran 2:179)

This statement is coming from the only one who could possibly make such a statement and who alone knows the reality. Thus, by turning away from God's guidance, humans will always be groping and it does not, therefore, seem likely that they will ever be able to advise a complete social system on their own that could truly produce peace and security. Thus, Islam, the religion of the Creator, is the only way of life that can ensure security.

(part 3 of 3): God Consciousness

In reality, though, laws alone cannot bring about peace and security. This leads to another very important factor that sets Islam apart from all human attempts at peace and security. The first and most important factor that contributes to security has to do not with laws but with what is in the hearts of the people. The ultimate goal of Islamic law is to establish, strengthen and support the faith in individuals and in the community as a whole. As discussed above, this faith brings peace into the heart, which immediately curtails violent feelings towards others. Furthermore, part of this faith is the implanting of *taqwa* (God-consciousness) into the hearts of the individuals. As noted above, this faith

and *taqwa* brings him peace but it also restrains his actions. He must behave only within a set of general principles and one of the goals of those principles is the establishment of peace and security. If he is disgruntled, for example, he understands that he does not have the right to go to his workplace and start shooting at everyone in sight, as has happened on more than one occasion in the United States in recent years. So there are limits to his behavior that ensure security and peace.

There is actually a very important point that underlines the person's entire outlook on life which again results in security and peace. This faith and *taqwa* provides a purpose to one's life and an understanding of being a noble creator with a goal in life. This life is not meaningless. It is not the result of some random combining of matter. Similarly, humans are not simply descendant from other animals. This understanding in itself has a profound effect on the individuals' actions. This author has had personal experience working in prisons in the United States. Upon asking numerous inmates why they committed their crimes, the response was invariably, "Why not?" The only question to them was whether they could get away with an act and not get caught. There was no question of any responsibility towards a Creator or any sense of purpose in this life. Indeed, one cannot argue much against their way of thinking if one is foolish enough to believe that this existence is purposeless and by mere chance.

Not only, though, is there a restraint on one's actions via faith and *taqwa* but there is developed a corresponding desire to do what is good. On this point, one can take the famous example of the prohibition of alcohol in the United States enacted in 1919. This law was passed as a result of widespread drunkenness as well as increases in crime and violence. Even though people could see the wisdom of the law and believed in the law—and that is why the law was actually passed—many of them did not have anything in their hearts that would lead them to obey the law. When there is belief in God's laws and *taqwa*, the situation is very different. There develops a hatred in the heart for the act that is banned. The believer recognizes that the act in itself is evil and, even worse, it is displeasing to his Lord. Thus, the believer restrains himself to the best of his ability from such illegal acts. And, since the enactment of God's laws results in security, this end result is met.

What further contributes to the implementation of God's laws that ensure security is that stress that Islam puts on the spirit of community. In recent years in the United States, as a reaction to the lack of peace and security, many communities developed what is known as "neighborhood watches." This is where the neighbors look after one another and keep an eye on things. The goal is not simply to spot breaches of peace and security but to make the people realize that they are part of a community and that they should be concerned with what is happening to the others in their neighborhood. Of course, what they develop

cannot compare to the kind of community spirit and brotherhood that is developed within Islam. The reality is that some people are weak and they can be easily swayed by desires or by other evil people. They need people that they can lean on to keep them on the Straight Path and help them overcome their weaknesses. Thus, the spirit of brotherhood in Islam is permeated by the obligation to look after one another, encourage one another to do good and prevent one another from doing evil. Thus, God says:

“The believers, men and women, are *aulyaa* (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another, they enjoining what is good and eradicate what is evil...” (Quran 9:71)

The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said:

“The believer with respect to another believer is like a building, one portion strengthening the other.”^[1]

This relationship between the individual members of society, like the spirit behind the Neighborhood Watch programs, further brings about peace and security for the individuals of society.

Islam takes care of both this life and the Hereafter. In fact, it ties the two together. One can argue that it is only through this intimate relationship that true peace and security are going to be achieved. Guidance must come from God—and can only come from God—to know what are the beliefs, laws and steps that will provide peace and security. Via Islam, the individual can find internal peace. That can allow him to be at peace with others. At the same time, he has the steps and laws he needs to ensure peace and security for the society at large.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari and Saheeh Muslim.*