

The Potential for Peacebuilding in Islam Toward an Islamic Concept of Peace

Hisham Soliman

Hisham Soliman is a research assistant at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, and a member of the faculty of Cairo University Faculty of Economics and Political Science.

After some general thoughts about the relationship between religion, conflict, and peace, the focus of this paper narrows to the relationship between Islam and peacebuilding in particular. Foundations for this relationship are laid upon a discussion of the misinterpreted concept of *jihad*. Islamic values and mechanisms are highlighted to further support an argument for an Islamic concept of peace; of particular importance are the capacities in Islam for nonviolence, the concept of justice in Islam, motivations for humanitarian work in Islam and the duty to work for peace. Excerpts from the sacred texts in Islam as well as examples of practical experiences are used to illustrate and support the argument. The article concludes with thoughts about the absence of most of these practices from the lived reality of Muslim societies.

In general, Islam has been at the center of socio-political debates following the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001. A flurry of research, mostly by non-Muslims, has been conducted since then to explore Islam and whether a call for violence is central to this faith. Some Muslim scholars have exerted parallel efforts as well. Most of the latter, however, were primarily apologetic in tone, adopting a defensive posture to counter the perceived attack on their religious identity in the wake of these events. As a result, most research has focused on studying the relationship between Islam and violence, which leaves the relationship between Islam and peace largely unexplored.^[1] Confining the discussion to the relationship between Islam and violence legitimizes, rather than questions, the relationship. Broadening the horizon to include the relationship between Islam and peace is critical, as it has the advantage of shifting the debate on Islam into a dialogue between partners and equals rather than an interrogation in which Muslims feel compelled to defend their faith.

This paper highlights the fact, usually overlooked by most of the literature, that Islam can be employed as a resource to build peace.^[2] Highlighting the peaceful insights of Islam may both improve conditions in Muslim communities over the long term and provide them with a discourse while engaging in a dialogue with the other.

Uncovering the links between Islam and peace is not only important to redrawing the distorted image of Islam in the West, but also in helping peace studies grow as a discipline, a discipline that has been colored mostly by modern Western ideas.^[3] As a field that is not confined in scope to a particular segment of humanity, it is important to diversify the resources of peace studies to cope with the diversity of the target population. With Muslims constituting more than one sixth of the world population and facing many challenges, it would be highly beneficial for scholars and practitioners in the field to become better equipped to deal with the problems Muslims face and to propose creative solutions grounded on Islamic values.

Islam and Peace

The relationship between religion and peace in general is quite controversial. Some scholars, such as Asghar Ali Engineer, argue that Islam as a religion is all peace and does not allow for violence. On a wider scale, Engineer generally rejects drawing any integral relationship between any religion, including Islam, and violence. Rather, he sees violence as a social phenomenon that takes place as a result of certain negative conditions in specific societies where religion may be manipulated as a result.^[4] More generally, other scholars, such as Scott Appleby, argue that although violence may not be integral to religion, religion retains a capacity for violence. This capacity, according to Appleby, results from the ambivalent nature of most of the sacred texts, which, as a result, allows for manipulating their interpretations in a way that can be used to legitimize violence.^[5] What a religion teaches can, therefore, be different from how its followers hold it to be in practice, due to the influence of “self-justifying groups” such as religious or political institutions or cultural traits.^[6] As a result, one cannot easily label a specific religion as either violence-prone or as a catalyst for peace. Rather, most religious interpretations have a capacity for both violence and peace. Against this backdrop, and against the vast literature developed on the relationship between Islam and violence, this paper argues for the necessity of uncovering an Islamic concept of peace, following the guidance that “the text ... morally enrich[es] the

reader, but only if the reader will morally enrich the text.”^[7]

To start with, linguistically, both *Islam* and *Salam/Silm* (“peace”) are derived from the same root in Arabic, *s~l~m* (س ل م). Two words that share the same root in the Arabic language also share a relationship in meaning, that is, they carry the same meaning in essence while referring to different things at face value.^[8] *Salam* was used in the Qur’an^[9] basically to refer to: one of the attributes of *Allah*, or “God” in Arabic, the same as the God of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus;^[10] staying away from the use of violence; greeting people, as well as agreement among people. In the hadiths, *salam* carries some additional meanings, such as security from violence and corruption.^[11]

The meaning of *Islam* then becomes “the peace of spirit that comes from submitting one’s life to the will of God.”

But your god is One God: submit then your wills to Him (in *Islam*): and give thou the good news to those who humble themselves. To those whose hearts when *Allah* is mentioned, are filled with fear, who show patient perseverance over their afflictions, keep up regular prayer, and spend (in charity) out of what We (*Allah*) have bestowed upon them. (22:34-35)^[12]

Consequently, “[after] adding the prefix MU to the root SLM,” the meaning of the term *Muslim* becomes “... the one who has found peace of spirit in submitting his life to the will of God.”^[13]

Thus, the message of *Islam* is said to be one of peace for all humanity, as in Ayah 2:208, which says, “O ye who believe! Enter into *Silm* whole-heartedly,” where *silm* was used to refer to *Islam*. That is why Engineer argues that this is an explicit invitation in sacred scripture for adopting peace as the path of believers.^[14] This comes into line with the belief that humans were created originally in a state of harmony and peace.^[15] Peace will also be the state of true believers in their final destination in the hereafter, *Dar-Al-Salam* (“House of Peace,” referring to paradise).^[16]

But *Allah* doth call to the Home of Peace: He doth guide whom He pleaseth to a way that is straight. (10:25)

The message of *Islam*, seen as a universal one, targets all human beings as *khalifat-o-Allah*

or vicegerents of Allah on this earth, to worship Him and to prosper the earth and establish coexistent communities (*isti'maar*).^[17] Consequently, the origins of Islam can be traced back to the existence of the first of human beings, Adam, who was the first to submit and pray to Allah. In the same context, Islam is seen as a continuation of the preceding divine messages, notably those that came with Moses and Jesus.^[18]

The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah—that which We have sent by inspiration to thee—and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. (42:13)

Accordingly, Islam adopts a plural understanding of who is a believer. By presenting itself as a continuation of the previous Holy messages revealed through the apostles of Allah to humans, Islam incorporates them as part of the belief and faith:^[19] “Then sent We our messengers in succession” (23:44).

Those who deny Allah and His messengers, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His messengers, saying: “We believe in some but reject others”: And (those who) wish to take a course midway, They are in truth (equally) unbelievers. (4:150-151)

That is, according to the teachings of Islam, Allah revealed His message to people on earth in stages, each building upon the previous one, with Islam the final one. And given that the Qur'an acknowledges that it does not present an exhaustive survey of all messengers who preceded the prophet Mohamed, anyone who claims himself to be a believer in Allah (God) and who does good and refrains from doing evil is perceived as part of the community of believers.

We did aforetime send messengers before thee: of them there are some whose story We have related to thee, and some whose story We have not related to thee. It was not (possible) for any messenger to bring a sign except by the leave of Allah: but when the Command of Allah issued, the matter was decided in truth and justice, and there perished, there and then those who stood on Falsehoods. (40:78)

And,

[Any] who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2:62)

No one is entitled to question the *Iman* (the authenticity of faith) of the followers of other faiths but Allah on the Day of Judgment.^[20]

If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. (5:48)

This, according to Muslim thinker Jawdat Saeed, creates a foundation for togetherness and oneness in fate among all humans regardless of their religious affiliation, rather than sectarianism and ethno-centrism.^[21] In other words, the universal message of Islam implies that there should be equal concern and care for the whole universe and not a sectarian approach to peace and justice that pays attention to the interests of a particular group only.

What follows will uncover some of the components of an Islamic concept of peace. The discussion will start by tackling the controversial meaning of the concept of *jihad* and how it relates to peace. A related topic is the Islamic understanding of nonviolence. Though these terms are seen as mutually exclusive, “nonviolence” has much resonance in both the teachings of Islam and the practices of some Muslims. The notions of justice and compassion and their relationship—or what is currently known as restorative justice—will then be presented as a primary component of this concept. My argument in this respect is that Islam, by integrating compassion (*rahma* or “forgiveness”)^[22] into the framework of its mechanisms of justice, creates a wide space for peace and reconciliation in the community. Principles for humanitarian work and the duty to work for peace will be highlighted as well, representing the motivation for concrete action for peace in Islam.

Jihad: A Tradition of Peace in Islam

Most religious traditions define peace in modern literature as “positive peace” (i.e., the presence of harmonious social relationships) or “negative peace” (i.e. the mere absence of war). Starting with the latter, Islam draws limits on the unjustified use of force in an endeavor to create societies where violence is absent under the normal conditions. On the

other hand, the concept of positive peace in Islam comes through the configuration of a just society, which is ordered so that peace eventually prevails.^[23] These two understandings of negative and positive peace, with greater value placed on the second, are always present in the teachings of the Qur'an and the hadiths of the prophet. It is the assignment of true believers to search for justice peacefully through jihad, the Arabic word for "struggle."^[24]

There are many verses in the Qur'an that prefer peace to war and forgiveness to hatred.^[25] This is evidenced by the fact that only some 60 verses out of 6,246 verses in the Qur'an deal with the rules of war and militarized jihad, while the rest deal with faith and moral issues.^[26] However, the state of underdevelopment in which most of the Muslim world lives, following an extended period of oppressive colonialism, produced both ignorance and totalitarianism, which create the ideal setting for the rise of violence, violence that hijacked the Islamic concept of jihad.^[27] "Military jihad" then became the label of jihad in Islam.^[28]

One of the foundations of jihad in Islam is the hadith that says, "Jihad is the peak of Islam,"^[29] which is usually misinterpreted as a call for violence in Islam. In fact, the aim of the Hadith is to signify the importance of the spiritual struggle to establish justice and to build peace on this earth as a message of Islam. Al-Farabi (874-950), a renowned Muslim philosopher, maintained a clear distinction between "war" and "jihad" in his writings. War is only one form of jihad, which refers to military action. The true essence of jihad for al-Farabi is the internal struggle within one's soul between the forces of reason, on the one hand, and one's desires on the other, with the aim of the first to control or moderate the second so that virtue may prevail.^[30] In other words, it can be said that there are two general forms of jihad: the "greater jihad," which is the inward effort to confront our lower nature; and the "lesser jihad," which has to do with the outward effort to fight injustices using military means.^[31] It becomes important, however, for those who decide to engage themselves in the lesser jihad to first win the greater jihad themselves.^[32] This is because peace with the inner self gained through the greater jihad would reflect itself externally in peace with other human beings and other creatures on this earth (ecological peace).^[33] Hence, it can be argued that spiritual jihad is the basic form of jihad,^[34] making "jihad ... mercy, not a sword; and justice, not violence."^[35]

More important is that the jihad for justice is grounded on the moral concept of responsibility to Allah. That is, before undertaking any action, each and every human being

should pay attention to whether or not he or she is compliant with the orders of Allah.^[36] It is reported that the prophet was once asked, “What is the best of Islam? He replied: jihad. And what is the best jihad? He replied: the *hijrah* (migration). Then he was asked what is the best hijra? He said from evil to good, or hijra to Allah, which is a life-long struggle.”^[37] Thus, if peace is the core message of Islam, and spiritual jihad is the way Muslims profess their faith, jihad then becomes the way Muslims work for peace. Therefore, jihad can be generally used to refer to peacemaking, and the Mujahid, the one who undertakes the mission of jihad, is a peacemaker.^[38]

Greater jihad can take one of at least three forms. One is *jihad an-nafs* (spiritual Jihad), which is an internal struggle against the lower nature of the human soul so as to do good and avoid evil. Another is *word jihad*, which is through the giving of *Nasi’ha* (advice) and preaching against evil and injustice to all members of the community. It was reported that the Prophet recommended this form when the nasi’ha is directed to a tyrant ruler to urge him or her to stop injustices. A third form of jihad is the *non-forceful jihad*, nonviolent collective action geared toward fixing social problems, which will be investigated in more detail below.^[39] Other forms include the struggle to learn, gain and disseminate knowledge^[40] as well as to respect the structure of the family and to take care of the elders.^[41] In fact, Islam has an intrinsic call for learning (Gordon 2002, 38), evidenced by the fact that the first ayah revealed from the Qur’an was, “Proclaim! [or read!] in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created” (96:1).

This does not neglect that the search for a just social order occasionally involves the use of military force for either its realization or its sustenance, defined here as the lesser jihad (*jihad al-qital*): “To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid” (22:39). This last type, erroneously depicted in Western media and most academic discourse as “holy war,” is considered a “hated necessity.”^[42] It is a necessity in order to bring a state of injustice, such as oppression or prohibition from the practice of religion, to an end:

Fighting (*qital*) is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not. (2:216)

Nevertheless, it is hated because it results in destruction of human lives, which are all

equally sacred to Allah, the “Creator.” This leaves no room for anyone to transgress against any of his or her fellow creatures, including not only human beings but also the ecology as well.^[43] This is because human life is sacred, as are the resources that support it.^[44]

Destruction or corruption (*fasad*) of the earth and its resources is seen as the worst of evils; rather, their development should be pursued in a just, compassionate manner.^[45] That is why war is not permissible for its own sake, that is, to transgress or to terrorize:^[46] “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors” (2:190).

The use of force in these cases can be justified only if: 1) the aim is a just cause; 2) no other means but war is available; 3) the war is conducted under the legitimate authority in the society (these constitute what is technically known as *jus ad bellum*, the justification for the war); and 4) the war is governed by the values of Islam (these constitute what is technically known as *jus in bello*, conduct during the war). This last criterion requires minimal use of force, prohibition of non-discriminatory killing, and maintaining the sanctity of the lives of non-warriors.^[47] Given the increasing lethality of modern weapon systems, military jihad becomes more and more restricted. In addition, *jus in bello* does not allow fights against those who either have a peace treaty or are in the process of negotiating one with Muslims.^[48] Thus, even when a war has to be waged, the rules that govern it minimize its destructive effects. The Qur’an, henceforth, orders the resort to peace once proposed by the other side:^[49] “But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things)” (8:61).

In addition, there is a call in Islam to use the principle of deterrence, which guides Muslims to stay away from war. In the ayah cited below, it is one of the duties of the Muslim *ummah* (community) to be always at the ready to deter its neighbors from transgression. And since Muslims are prohibited to transgress, the negative meaning of peace (the absence of war) therefore materializes.

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly. (8:60)

In other words, peace is always displayed as the recommended state of life in the Qur'an, and its absence is portrayed negatively, except in the few cases qital is allowed as a temporary condition.^[50] Since war is one way through which *fasad* (environmental destruction) takes place, it cannot be asserted as the way of true believers.^[51] And those who transgress or initiate war in a way that contradicts the teachings mentioned above are sinful in Islam and are punished by the authorities for committing the crime of *hiraba* (equivalent to terrorism).^[52] This is another way in which the emphasis is placed upon limiting the use of jihad-al-qital. As a strict exception, it does not become the norm.^[53] The norm should be a never ending spiritual struggle, both within the self and with other creatures in the universe. Consequently, the principles mentioned hereafter can be considered as forms of the greater jihad for the cause of peace and justice in Islam.

Roots and Practices of Nonviolence in Islam

Generally speaking, opponents of nonviolence reject it as a form of passivity. This, however, is untrue, because nonviolence is a positive action using force that is not military in nature.^[54] Nonviolence is very effective in terms of its capacity to coerce a challenged group by noncooperation and protest in a disciplined manner, complicating the functions of the group's normal systems.^[55] In addition, nonviolence, compared to using armed force, reflects participation and inclusivity. Instead of a small part of the community working on behalf of all, the entire community collectively makes decisions within a framework of a nonviolent movement.^[56] In Islam, as explained earlier, considering that the ultimate goal of the existence of humans on earth is to prosper through the creation of communities that interact peacefully, the way for accomplishing this is primarily through nonviolence. Once communities engage in violence, they will end up destroying the earth, themselves included, which contradicts the message of Islam.^[57]

As a religion, Islam can be used to empower people for nonviolent action as part of its wide definition of jihad. These can be found in the moral-ethical and spiritual attitudes Islam requires its followers to abide by, among which are courage, discipline, unity of purpose.

All seen as fundamental to the success of a nonviolent action.^[58] Some scholars, such as Chaiwat Satha-Anand, interpreted the five pillars of Islam^[59] in terms of nonviolence. Witness to God (*Shahada*) is an implied expression of noncompliance to any power that contradicts the teaching of Islam and the rules of Islamic Law, creating room for civil disobedience. Prayers (*salat*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*) are performed in congregations. They are a portrait for equality among human beings. They also create a mental image of people gathering in the same place, which facilitates the mobilization of their collective power, crucial for nonviolence.^[60] Given that the performance of these rituals is seen as a form of jihad to Allah, they imply discipline and commitment.^[61]

Another foundation for nonviolence in Islam is proposed by Jawdat Saeed who sees in the story of Cain murdering Abel out of jealousy and hatred a great example on the necessity to use nonviolence. Saeed argues that the Qur'an showed in this story that there are two paths humans can pursue during their lives on this earth—the violent one represented by Cain the killer, and the nonviolent one symbolized by Abel the victim. With the Qur'an criminalizing the violent path, it becomes obvious that the path of the faithful should be that of nonviolence.^[62]

An interesting application of nonviolence can be found in the notion of *hijrah*, the physical migration or withdrawal from the lands where there are injustices to other places where people can enjoy their freedoms.

When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say: "In what (plight) were ye?" They reply: "Weak and oppressed were we in the earth." They say: "Was not the earth of Allah spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (From evil)?" Such men will find their abode in Hell, What an evil refuge! He who forsakes his home in the cause of Allah, finds in the earth many a refuge, wide and spacious." (4:97; 100)

The migrants are rewarded for doing this. "To those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression, We will assuredly give a goodly home in this world; but truly the reward of the Hereafter will be greater. If they only realized (this)" (16: 41).

Two prominent incidents of hijra took place in the early days of Islam. In the first, some Muslims migrated to Abyssinia from Mecca in the seventh century where they found safe

refuge with the Christian King, Najashi, in 615 CE. In the second, the prophet and most of the early Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina^[63] in 622 CE after enduring a decade of atrocious treatment by the Pagans of Mecca.^[64] Hence, instead of repaying violence for violence, early Muslims managed to find other ways to remain true to their faith even if this led to migration, which sets the example for contemporary Muslims as well.

A more recent experience of nonviolence by Muslims can be found in the distinguished example of the Khuda-I Khidmatgar Movement (1929- 1949) founded by the Pashtun leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890- 1988). The movement's main goal was raising awareness among community members, of the necessity of renouncing violence. Incidents of violence, mutual retaliation and extermination of possible competing leaders prevailed in the cruel mountainous frontier community. The British Army, controlling this then-Indian community, formed troops entirely of Pashtuns, known for their fierce valor in battle. But Khan's movement aimed at educating people in the effectiveness of nonviolent strikes and sit-ins in the battle against the oppressive local rulers who connived with the foreign colonizer.^[65]

The movement had nearly 100,000 members. Each one was tested to determine the strength of his or her belief in the movement's principle of nonviolence and resolve not to resort to violence under any circumstances. Members, men and women equally, used to spend two hours each day to serve their communities. Khan believed nonviolence is supported by patience, calling it the weapon of the Prophet, strong enough that no police or army can stand against it. His focus on the centrality of the values of tolerance, amnesty, sacredness of human life and dignity in the teachings of the Prophet manifested his vision for confronting the outbreak of violence in his community, which he saw as the result of ignorance. He believed that jihad should be against those who carry the swords.^[66] Notably, Khan managed to convince many community members of the necessity to change their current situation, which intensified his movement's impact on reshaping social relationships.^[67]

Notions of Compassion and Forgiveness in Justice in Islam

The relationship between justice and peace in Islam is foundational. Engineer sees justice as

the essence of peace in Islam. Peace in Islam is achieved through limiting the greed of people that motivates them to transgress the rights of their fellow human beings.^[68] Rashied Omar highlights the understanding of justice in Islam, pointing to a justice-compassion typology in which both are viewed as ways to alleviate human suffering and build peace. In order for peace, then, to materialize, there should be a balance of both values, if not a dominance of compassion over justice.^[69] This justice-compassion relationship manifests itself again in terms of the principle of *ist'imar* mentioned above. To keep humans committed to the goal of prospering on earth, they are held accountable for their actions (albeit in a just, merciful, manner)—particularly for acts of transgression on the rights of others.^[70] Humans are presumably struggling all the time to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. Justice should not, therefore, be applied crudely to them for the sake of retribution. Instead, they should be encouraged to learn from their mistakes, which cannot be done except through a framework of compassion.^[71] That is evidenced by the fact that only thirty ayahs in the Qur'an, out of more than 6,000, deal with crimes and punishment.^[72]

In other words, this framework of compassion and justice finds its roots in the concept of *maslahat-al-umma*, or the collective interest of the community. It is in the interest of the community and all its members to reintegrate the transgressors and wrongdoers through forgiveness; it is in everyone's interest to restore or maintain the smooth interaction between victim and offender. Offenders should not be isolated or alienated from the community, as this would hurt both them and the community in the long run.^[73] This understanding of the role of compassion and forgiveness in justice in Islam resembles that of restorative justice in the modern Western discourse, which aims to repair broken social relationships between offenders, victims, and their communities in order to establish “lasting peace through integration instead of lasting hurt.”^[74] This is evidenced by the fact that one of the words for justice in Arabic, *qist*, connotes “right relationship.” That is, when injustices take place, fixing them means restoring right relationships.^[75]

Restorative justice is usually seen as a counterpart of, and for some complementary to, retributive justice. Under retributive justice, punishment by the governing authorities is applied for the wrongdoing committed by a member of the community commensurate to the damage he or she caused to the social order through predetermined rules. In most cases, victims' voices are not listened to during the process, which also does not pay close

attention to the social context of the crime. The offender and the victim are usually set apart as having no direct relationship in the justice process, which results in the alienation of the offender.^[76] Instead of formulating crime as “breaking the law,” it is defined within the restorative justice approach as “harm inflicted on the community and some of its members,” negatively affecting their relationships. Humans, in their capacity as community members, become the focus of and actors in the justice process. Repairing the damaged relationships and restoring individuals is the desired outcome. Offenders are made to realize the offense committed against the victim and are encouraged to take accountability for it so as to repair the harm instead of merely accepting punishment for the crime. And it is in repairing this relationship that the community at large will benefit.^[77] Victims are also heard when they have the opportunity to explain how they were harmed. In addition, restorative justice, through placing the crime in a social context, helps prevent its recurrence in the future by addressing its social roots, which becomes the responsibility of the society at large.^[78]

That said there is no parallel debate on retributive and restorative justice in Islamic discourse, except for one that took place between the Mu'tazili school of thought^[79] and the mainstream legal (*fiqhi*) discourse in Islam. The Mu'tazilites were very legalistic in their perspective on justice, based on a literal interpretation of the ayah that says, “Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it” (99:7-8). That is why they argued that justice in Islam is retributive rather than restorative. Human beings are rational and are, thus, either rewarded for their good deeds or punished for their wrong doings with no place for forgiveness, as each and every individual is responsible for his or her own rational behavior.^[80] In opposition, a famous religious scholar, Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), criticized this perspective and argued that in addition to retribution, compassion occupies a prominent place in the justice process. Consequently, it is important while believing that Allah is *Al-'Adil* (Just), judging and giving each of us our due, Allah is also *Al-Rahman* (Merciful).^[81] Ibn Taymiyya supported his argument with some of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (570-632), such as: “*Al Rahimoon* (Compassionates) receive mercy from Al-Rahman, show mercy to those on earth, you will receive mercy from Heaven” (i.e. from Allah). The prophet also confirmed the same meaning in a negative way when he said: “Those who do not show mercy will not receive it.”

The ability to forgive is one way in which compassion, and therefore restoration, manifests

itself in the Islamic mechanism of justice. The Qur'an records that one of the basic instructions to Muhammad is, "Hold to forgiveness; command what is right" (7:199), making forgiveness the core of the message of his prophethood. It is true that people can ask for punishment for those who offend them and there is no blame for them in a retributive manner; however, it is also stated that the highest reward goes to those who, even when they are justifiably angry, can forgive, as forgiveness yields a reward from Allah.

Those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and, when they are angry even then forgive." (42:37)

If a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah. (42:40).

Most importantly in this context is that forgiveness is seen as an act of courageous will: "But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs" (42:43).

This has important implications for allowing forgiving people to think of what they do not as cowardice but as confirmation of their strength as human beings. It is vital that forgiveness is seen and felt as an empowering act. Islam, thus, has this characteristic of keeping the final decision to forgive or to avenge in the hands of the victim while encouraging the victim at the same time to keep the wider interest of the community in mind and not to be solely self-centered. This is because the infringements of the rights of people (*huquq an-nas*) cannot be forgiven except by the victims themselves, neither by Allah nor by the *Qadi* (judge).^[82] Emphasizing the involvement of the actor in the process, the institution of arbitration cannot act on behalf of the victims on its own. It, rather, plays its role in transforming retributive aspects of justice into restorative ones by stressing the importance of forgiveness and reminding the victims of alternatives available to them and then letting them decide.^[83]

Tools for Humanitarian Work in Islam

This is another domain where jihad for peace and helping the poor and the needy manifests itself. Islam is generally believed to be a call for action inspired by its beliefs and the consideration that humans are social beings; Islam is, in other words, more than a mere

practice of rituals.^[84] The principle of “doing good and preventing evil” is thought of as the sixth pillar of Islam, due to the huge emphasis it got in the teachings of the prophet. It is important as well to convey that Islam is not just about negative action by staying away from evil; equally important is the undertaking of some positive action to do good and prohibit evil.^[85] There are even penalties for those who do not undertake activities to help those at the bottom of the social pyramid, as in the hadith that says, “If a person dies of hunger in a community, then all the residents of that community have put themselves outside Allah’s and the Prophet’s protection.”^[86] Consequently it is a duty upon each and every Muslim to provide assistance, which is not confined to financial help, to those who need it.

In fact, one of the principles that inspire humanitarian work is also one of the pillars of the faith, *Zakat* (alms). It is held as mandatory on each and every capable Muslim to provide a certain portion of his or her net wealth every year to the poor and the needy.^[87]

It is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; ... Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing. (2:177)

And in their wealth and possessions (was remembered) the right of the (needy). (51:19).

Zakat is, thus, not just an act of good will on the part of the wealthy and the well off; but it becomes a social right of the poor in this wealth. It redistributes wealth in the community so as to decrease societal tensions that result from income gaps.^[88]

Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer. (9:60)

In this sense, *Zakat* aims at creating some sort of social justice and welfare system as well as helping people overcome their attachment to the pleasures of life.^[89]

There is another basis, however voluntary, for acting in the social domain for the cause of Allah—*sadaqah* or “charity.” The Arabic root of the word, *s-d-q* (ص د ق), refers to proving one’s faith in a manner that not only has to do with one’s relationship to Allah, but also one’s relationship to people. In other words, doing the *sadaqah*, beyond the mandatory alms, is recommended and encompasses every good action a Muslim undertakes to help his community.^[90] *Sadaqah*, here known as *kaffara*, is also recommended as one way in which Muslims can wipe out their pitfalls (*syie’at*) and to seek Allah’s forgiveness. In this regard, the prophet was reported to have said, “Alms (referring to *sadaqah*) extinguish sins exactly as water extinguishes fire.”^[91]

A special form of *sadaqah* is the practice of *waqf Khairi* (endowments or charitable trusts) that were developed in the early days of Islam by religious scholars for the aim of serving the general interests of the Muslim community, motivated by a reward from Allah. *Waqf* is a *sadaqah* that “transcends time,”^[92] inspired by the Prophet’s hadith: “When a man dies his works stop bringing him a reward with the exception of three actions.” These *awqaf* (plural of *waqf*) vary from financial grants to the provision of religious, educational, and other social service institutions that are dedicated by a member of the community (*waqif*), become public property, and are administered by trustees (*waliy*) appointed or elected to run it as decided by the *qadi* (judge) to whom they become accountable.^[93]

Islam, Human Rights and the Duty to Work for Peace

A loose set of international laws governing human rights based on the United Nations convention, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), and other specialized treaties, has been growing into a substantial code of basic human rights.^[94] In 1984, a major step was taken in this regard by issuing a declaration by the United Nations General Assembly on the right of humans to peace as a framework to enjoy and practice other codified human rights, echoing earlier human rights treaties and mechanisms.^[95] This declaration, however, was not legally binding on UN member countries; albeit, the extensive efforts over the last two decades by several organizations, such as UNESCO and many nongovernmental organizations, to develop and disseminate the ideas of a culture of peace with tolerance and nonviolence as its main pillars, are making it possible to talk about a human right to peace.^[96] Nevertheless, the international human rights community, mostly Western in outlook, is primarily concerned with political, cultural and economic rights, with

little attention to the notion of duty as a tool by which respect and protection of these rights will be realized.

The case for human rights in Islam in fact is compelling, as human rights are a mechanism to secure the dignity of all human beings and other creatures.^[97] However, Islam's approach to human rights is not fully on terms with its Western counterpart. For example, between east and west there is no inclusive list of what exactly are the human rights. At the same time, both paradigms share the same inspired goal—the improvement of the way in which humans lead their lives on this earth.^[98] Rights in Islam in general are codified in a categorical manner that expands to include the rights necessary for the perfection of one's self, reason, life, family and property.^[99] These rights are to be enjoyed by each and every human being, regardless of differences, all being the sons of Adam, the creatures of Allah:^[100]

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. (49:13)

Nevertheless, the idea of rights (*huquq*) in Islam combines with its counterpart, duties (*wagibat*). Hence, in order to enjoy our rights, we have to undertake parallel duties or responsibilities.^[101] This emphasis on responsibilities stems from seeing human beings as part of a social setting in which they do not live alone.^[102] Thus, it should be emphasized that enjoying rights implies the undertaking of some duties in a community of relationships, where relationships cannot be one-sided.^[103] This web of relationships among diverse creatures of Allah is, therefore, the framework within which human rights and responsibilities are observed by each and every one.^[104] Being followers of “a faith of peace,” Muslims are required as well to act peace through showing mercy and forgiveness for their fellow human beings and the environment.^[105] As has been highlighted above, it is important to acknowledge the right of people to live in peace for the sake of perfecting their selves—reason and life, family and property. Then, it follows that a duty to work for peace arises and becomes binding on each and every Muslim. In other words, it is important for Muslims in their jihad for the perfection of their souls and lives, not only to incorporate their right to live in peace, but also to acknowledge their duty for its realization.

Concluding Thoughts

These insights on the work for peace in Islam, of course, are not exclusive by any means. They are, rather, suggestive. It is an invitation for the creativity of Muslims to transform the world in which they live into a more just, peaceful, and energetic one. It follows that the principles and values outlined above are not exclusive or separate from each other. They do interact and may even collapse onto each other. For example, these components can all fit together under the title of the greater jihad, as it is the motivation of all good work in Islam. They are also not peculiar to Islam alone, but they lie at its intersection with many of the great value systems present in our world.

That being said, however, most of these are theoretical principles that unfortunately lack genuine application in many contemporary Muslim societies.^[106] While Muslims struggle all the time to excel in their attempts to follow in the path of Allah, the way in which they interpret His laws is still bound in social, historical and political realities.^[107] The absence of peace in Muslim communities is the outcome of the oppressive conditions under which they have lived over the last two centuries, especially conditions of colonization, underdevelopment and authoritarian rule.^[108] In addition, the religious institution is usually co-opted by the political institution, which leads to an interpretation of religious teachings that protects the interests of these institutions, even if they contradict the intended message of the sacred text.^[109] With a lack of alternatives and a widespread state of frustration among many members of their communities, extremism finds a fertile ground to grow and intolerance becomes the norm.^[110] Jihad is seen primarily through the carrying of arms, next to which spiritual strife is considered secondary. Retributive justice gets excessive emphasis, while compassion diminishes.^[111]

Nevertheless, it is always crucial to recall that the absence of these—and other—theoretical principles from practice does not mean they do not exist. It is important for Muslims, therefore, to try to move beyond the narrow understanding of their religion, toward a wider one, where the whole universe becomes the center of attention,^[112] and to go beyond the mere performance of rituals of the faith to live by its ethics and spirit.^[113] It is of supreme importance for Muslims to engage in such values in order to improve their conditions, dependent on their own intellect and motivated by their own faith. It is Muslims who, when

deviating from peace—the path of Islam—should work hard to return back to it.^[114] If they do not hold firm to the basics of their beliefs, their doctrine will not count for much.^[115] This is because it is according to their actions that the image of Islam is constructed. “Allah does not change a people’s lot unless they change what is in their hearts” (13:11).

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