

Islam And Nonviolence

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Article

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The program of Islam for the prevention of violence and avoidance of war, injustice, and oppression is one that operates on many different dimensions: spiritual, moral, social, cultural, economic, and political. As divine guidance for humanity, it is announced in the Qur'an that Islam has been established to bring peace and fraternal relations in place of enmity:

“Hold fast all together to Allah’s cord, and do not be divided into sects. And remember Allah’s blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, from whence He saved you.” (Qur’an 3: 103).

There is much to reflect upon in this verse. It tells us that enmity brought the pagan Arabs near to damnation, and that they were saved by God when, by His blessings, their enmity was replaced by brotherhood. However, the teachings of Islam with regard to peace should not be seen as primarily concerned with a cessation of hostilities, for they go much deeper and encompass all the areas of human life.

We can divide the program of Islam to bring peace into three main phases: (1) peace with God; (2) peace within the community; and (3) peace with others. Of these, the first is most important, because when people are able to succeed in making peace with God, their intra- and inter-communal relations will also become peaceful.

Phase 1: The Inner Peace of Iman

Islamic teachings are to be found in the Qur'an and hadiths, in ethics and *'irfan* and in *'ilm al-nafs* regarding the inner causes of haram violence, anger, hatred and jealousy, and methods for controlling them.

[Phase 2: The Peace in Community of Islam](#)

The examples of the Prophet and of his Ahlul Bayt provide ample resources to examine cases in which violent conflict threatened the Muslim community from within or plunged it into civil strife. These cases need to be reviewed in order to understand the measures that were proposed by the divine guides to avert or end such internal strife.

[Phase 3: Ihsan, Promoting Peace as a Muslim Neighbor](#)

In the third phase, we should consider relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. This phase can be divided into four sorts of cases:

- (1) Muslim minorities in non-Muslim lands, the paradigm of which is to be found in the group of Muslims sent by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) to Ethiopia to avoid persecution;
- (2) Muslim relations with non-Muslim minorities living among them (the paradigm for which is the protection offered by the Prophet for the Peoples of the Book);
- (3) Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims under different governments (the paradigm of which is to be found in the treaty agreements offered by the Prophet to many non-Muslim tribes and states); and finally,
- (4) Relations of Muslims to non-Muslims among whom there are conflicts.

According to a narration attributed to Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him), when asked whether Muslims could sell weapons to non-Muslims who were at war with one another, he replied that armor and shields could be sold to them, but not weapons with which they could kill one another.

Governing all of these aspects or phases of Islamic teaching about peace is the central precept that one should cause no harm. This precept features prominently as one of the five most important principles of jurisprudence by which divine law is discerned on the basis of its sources. If an action is considered to cause harm, this should be considered as reason to consider the action forbidden, unless there is overriding reason to the contrary.

Beyond the prescriptions and prohibitions of the law, however, Islam invites us to go far beyond not doing harm and to offer active aid and benefit.

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