

Is Peace Normative in Islam?

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The centrality of peace in Islam is manifested by its nomenclature: *Islām* signifies *peace*, and then also in the daily greeting of Muslims: “*as-salām alaykum / peace be upon you.*” AS-SALĀM is also one of God’s Most Excellent Names (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*); while God praises those who act with humility and peace: “the servants of The All-Merciful are those who walk the earth with humility, and when the ignorant address them, they reply: *peace!*” (*al-Furqān* 25:63). On the other hand, instigators of violence and war are condemned: “Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God extinguishes it. They strive to create disorder on earth and God loves not those who create disorder” (*al-Mā’idah* 5:64). Moreover, Muslims are directed not to decline the offer of peace whenever an opportunity arises to end a conflict: “If they (your opponents) then incline to peace, you should likewise incline to it, and trust in God” (*al-Anfāl* 8:61). Peace is the ideal which Muslims must strive to achieve, just as they beseech God to grant them peace (*Yūnus* 10:25). Furthermore, peace is a distinctive reward the believers will enjoy in Paradise, for the Foremost in faith reside there with God’s pleasure where “they salute one another with ‘Peace’,” and “they shall hear therein no vain or sinful talk – only the saying, ‘Peace! Peace!’ ” (*Yūnus* 10:10; & *al-Wāqī’ah* 56:25–26).

Justice must be enacted and evil be fought through proportionate effort and sincere struggle (*jihād*). Yet Muslims are normally enjoined to be kind to everyone at all times: “Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, injustice and rebellion” (*al-Naḥl* 16:90).

Mercy (*raḥmah*) and forgiveness (*‘afwa*) rank high in the Islamic order of values: God, the Prophet, and the Qur’an all associate themselves intimately with *raḥmah*: al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm (Most Compassionate, Most Merciful) are the two most favored of God’s Excellent Names, coming at the head of the 114 chapters of the Qur’an. And He declared that “My mercy engulfs everything and extends beyond all things” (*al-A‘rāf* 7:156). The Qur’an portrays itself as a mercy to the believers (10:57), and the Prophet Muhammad as “a mercy to

the world” (*al-Anbiyā’* 21:107). In a renowned hadith the Prophet declared: “One who does not show mercy to people, God will not be merciful toward him,”¹ and in another, that “people are God’s children, and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His children kindly.”²

The Qur’an enjoins believers: to “keep to forgiveness, enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant” (*al-A’rāf* 7:199). Thus if someone annoys one out of ignorance, it is better not to confront but to turn away and forgive. Muslims are also instructed to “repel evil (not with evil) but with something better –namely, with forgiveness and amnesty” (*al-Mu’minūn* 23:96). God also promises ample reward for those who “forgive even when they are angry” (*al-Shūrā* 42:37).

Of the twenty-three year period of his mission, the Prophet spent the initial thirteen in Mecca conducting his campaign with pacifism and nonviolence. There were numerous instances of provocation and persecution, but he always prayed: “Forgive them Lord, for they know not what they do.” When the Prophet entered Mecca with his followers, he set an exemplary record of forgiveness toward the Meccans who had bitterly fought him for many years. When several of his followers asked him to invoke the wrath of God upon Meccans because of their persecution of Muslims, his reply was: “I have not been sent to curse anyone but to be compassionate to all.”³

Islam upholds a basic belief in the unity of mankind, the supreme love of the Creator, and unconditional bestowal of dignity on “the children of Adam.” Muslims are accountable for all their actions, and bear an obligation to be compassionate and forgiving. Finally, mankind’s designation as God’s vicegerents in the earth imposes upon them the trust to ensure harmony with other living beings and eliminate grounds of strife and conflict. Hence peace, not war, is God’s true purpose in creation and the normative principle of Islam.

¹ Khaṭīb al-Tabrizī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh*, vol.III, hadith no. 4678.

² Khaṭīb al-Tabrizī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh*, vol.II, hadith no. 2724.

³ *Ibid.*