

Islam and Peace

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Vidyajyoti College of Theology I September 5, 2014

I would like to begin by stating that it is important to distinguish between Islam and Muslims. You must judge Muslims in the light of Islamic teachings and not vice versa.

Peace is integral to the religion of Islam. All Islamic teachings are based, directly or indirectly, on the principle of peace. The very word Islam is derived from the Arabic root word 'silm', which means peace.

I would like to give some references from the Quran and Hadith, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, that relate to peace. Of the various names or attributes of God mentioned in the Quran one is as-Salam, which means 'Peace' or the 'The Source of Peace.' God's guidance is referred to in the Quran as the 'ways of peace' (5:16). Paradise, which according to Islam is the ideal abode for human beings, is described in the Quran as the 'Home of Peace' (10:25). The Quran also states that the inhabitants of paradise will greet each other saying, 'Peace! Peace!' This means that the culture of paradise will be a culture of peace. It is obvious that one who takes to violence in this world cannot ever find place in the 'Home of Peace' in the hereafter. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have declared that a Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people are safe. He is also known to advised his followers said, 'Do not wish for confrontation with your opponent. Instead always ask for peace from God.'

The truth is that Islam lays supreme importance to peace because the goal of Islam is to spread the word of God to all mankind. According to Islamic tradition, God sent His prophets in all ages to convey the truth to human beings. The mission of the Prophet Muhammad was therefore ideological in nature. A mission that invites people to the path of God cannot be carried on in the midst of violent confrontation. This is because war or violence destroys the atmosphere essential for reforming people's thinking. Therefore, it can be said that peaceful conditions promote an atmosphere which is favourable to the mission of Islam whereas violent conditions produce an atmosphere that is unfavourable to Islam.

A study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad shows that he adhered to the peaceful method throughout his prophetic career. The Prophet began his mission in 610 AD in Mecca and he continued to peacefully preach the message of Islam to the people of Mecca for a period of thirteen years. Here, he faced opposition from those who felt that their supremacy was threatened by his message of monotheism. The Prophet and his small number of followers were subjected to persecution which became severe with time. Attempts to assassinate the Prophet forced him to migrate in 622 AD to the town of Medina. In Medina, the Prophet carried on with the peaceful preaching of the message of Islam but his opponents could not tolerate the growing number of his followers and they therefore launched an armed struggle against the Muslims. A state of war existed during this period. Obviously, in a climate of

war, there is no possibility left for positive and constructive activities.

In the sixth year of his migration, the Prophet entered into negotiations with his opponents. Upon his insistence, a ten-year no war pact was signed between the Prophet and his opponents. This agreement was secured by the Prophet's unilateral acceptance of the conditions of his opponents. This treaty is known in history as the Hudaybiya peace treaty, named after the place where it was signed. The Prophet acted in this way so that war and confrontation with his opponents could be avoided and peace could be maintained. This agreement brought an end to the state of war that had existed between the Muslims and their opponents.

The positive consequence of bringing hostilities to an end was that the Muslims were no longer required to waste their resources in war and were free to use them entirely on constructive activities instead. Peace created an atmosphere which contributed to free movement of people and there was open interaction between them. More and more people came to know of the message of Islam and they began to enter its fold. History tells us that within two years of the signing of the Hudaybiya peace treaty, the number of the followers of Islam increased manifold. Thus, this shows the role of peace in the propagation of Islam.

The lesson that we learn from the life of the Prophet is to avoid confrontation, and avail of the opportunities. No constructive work can be accomplished in the absence of a peaceful environment. Whether it is economic progress, social welfare, spiritual development, even worship, can be performed only in peaceful conditions. This is why Islam stresses the avoidance of war and confrontation. It commands its followers to establish peace at all costs. This is expressed in a verse of the Quran which states, ‘Reconciliation is best.’

I would like to conclude by saying that in Islam peace is the greatest good because peace is essential to all human progress.