Peace and Non-violence in Islam

Sufia Khan

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There is no doubt that peace is of utmost importance to human civilization because it is peace alone that holds the key to all kinds of progress and development. Without peace, no development is possible at all. Absence of peace has the potential of undoing the progress that mankind has made so far.

Peace holds great importance in all religious traditions of the world. However, people have mistakenly come to think of Islam as an exception in this regard. It is held that Islam is a religion that sanctions violence. This is because some extremist Muslims are engaged in acts of violence in the name of their religion. However, this notion about Islam is not at all true.

The Quran upholds the principles of peace, tolerance and patience. It states, *as-sulh ho khayr* (reconciliation is the best). (4:128) At another place, the Quran states: 'Do good deed in return for bad deed, and you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend.' (41:34) God's guidance is referred to in the Quran as the 'ways of peace' (5:16). Paradise is described in the Quran as the 'Home of Peace' (10:25). It also states that whoever killed a human being without just cause shall be regarded as having killed all mankind. (5:32) The Quran lays utmost importance on the virtue of patience. There are about 110 verses of the Quran which contain the word patience or *sabr*. The Quran seeks to instill in the believers that one should not react negatively to negative situations but rather one should exercise patience and give a well-considered response to every situation. The Quran goes to the extent of saying that success depends upon patience alone (3:200). All these verses show that the Quran promotes the culture of peace and tolerance among its followers.

The Prophet Muhammad followed these very teachings of the Quran throughout his missionary life. The Quran describes the Prophet as 'a mercy to all mankind' (21:107). The Prophet's mission was to bring about the spiritual awakening of man. His mission can be summed up in these words of the Quran: *kunu rabbaniyin*, that is, to become God-oriented in one's speech, actions, and thoughts (3:79). Such a mission requires an intellectual revolution and not a political revolution.

But as a preacher of the ideology of monotheism in a land where polytheism held sway, many people became his opponents. Initially, his opponents resorted to persecution in order to prevent him from spreading his message but the Prophet exercised patience and advised his followers to do the same. When it became impossible to continue preaching in Mecca, he along with his followers quietly migrated to Medina. But, even in Medina, the Prophet's opponents did not let them live in peace and launched attacks

on them. The Prophet and his followers were compelled to engage in defensive battles with their opponents. However, the Prophet always tried to manage the situation so that he participated in no more than three battles, and these too rightly qualify as skirmishes because each of these lasted for not more than half a day.

Towards this goal of avoiding confrontation, the Prophet entered into negotiations with his opponents and, through a unilateral acceptance of the one-sided conditions of his opponents, secured a ten-year no-war pact with them. This peace treaty restored peace and normalcy within Arabia. This was a practical demonstration of the Quranic principle – as-*sulh ho khayr*. Why is *sulh* or reconciliation the best? It is best in terms of the result it yields. Reconciliation establishes peace and peace opens the door to all kinds of opportunities, by availing of which we can achieve the desired goal. It was through peaceful missionary work that Islam gained acceptance among numerous Arab tribes and eventually the whole of Arabia came under the fold of Islam. Therefore, it can be said that the secret of the Prophet Muhammad's extraordinary success in spreading monotheism in Arabia lay not only in the strength of his ideology, but also in the entirely peaceful methods which he adopted.

It is true that the Quran refers to war in some of its verses, but these relate to defensive war only. Launching an offensive against another group is absolutely unlawful in Islam, and so are all other kinds of war such as proxy war and guerilla war. The Quranic principle of war is stated in this verse, 'Permission to fight is granted to those who are attacked.' (22:39)

If the Quran promotes the culture of peace, and the Prophet Muhammad pursued a policy of peace and non-confrontation in his life, the question arises as to why Muslims have taken to violence and terrorism in the present age. The truth is that their actions are inspired by Muslim political history and not by a deep study of the Quran and the Hadith. In the colonial period, Western nations established their dominance in Asia and Africa where earlier Muslim empires had stood. This made Muslims all over the world become negative against Western nations. They came to regard Western nations as "tyrants" and "usurpers". UNESCO dictum states, 'Wars begin in the minds of men'. So it is Muslims' negative mentality that has led them to violence. They use the name of Islam and religious terms such as 'jihad' to seek justification for their actions and to gain the support of the Muslim masses. However, despite almost a 100-years of bloody wars, Muslims have achieved no positive gain. Rather, whatever they already had has been lost by them. Thus, what Muslims are required to do now is to undertake a reassessment of their actions as well as their goal. They must entirely abandon violence and take to peaceful methods to achieve their goal.

I would like to end with a quote by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan. He argues, 'The fact that violence is not sustainable in the present world is sufficient indication that violence as a principle is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam. Islam claims to be an eternal religion, and, as such, could never afford to uphold any principle which could

not stand up to the test of time. Any attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts therefore to casting doubt upon the very eternity of the Islamic religion. The truth is that all the teachings of Islam are based directly or indirectly on the principle of peace.'