

Islam and Peace Education

Dr. Mustafa Köylü
Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion of over one billion people in the world today, and its followers are called Muslims. The majority of Muslims live in the large area stretching from Morocco in the west to Bangladesh in the east, in the steppes of central Asia to the north, and the island world of Indonesia to the south (Küng, 1988, 197-198). All Muslims are linked by a simple confession of faith--there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet--together with five basic lifelong obligations and absolute submission to the will of Allah.

ISLAM AND PEACE

It is ironic that Islam today is widely identified internationally with war and militancy (Munro, 1931, 329-343; Khadduri, 1956, 360; Peters, 1979, 3; Arkoun, 1994, 49; Wiele, 2000, 108-111), while the very term Islam is derived from a root word of which one of the basic meanings is peace (Ali, 1413H, 869; Ahsan 2002, 56). In fact, peace is an integral part of the religion of Islam and of the lives of those who accept Islam as a religion. The idea of peace so permeates the daily life of Muslims that whenever Muslims meet and greet each other, they say *Salam alaikum* and *alaikum assalam*, meaning "peace be upon you," and "peace be upon you, too" (Hassan, 1987, 96).

According to the Qur'an, the sacred book of Muslims, *salam* (meaning peace, and of the same root as Islam), is one of the attributes of Allah, as well as the name given to Paradise, the abode reserved for all who obey Allah (59:23). Since Allah is the Source of Peace [*as-Salam*], He invites all human beings to *dar as-Salam*, the abode of peace (Qur'an 10:25). In fact, according to the Qur'an, all human beings are born Muslim and thus in a state of primal peace (7:172). However, the reward of peace is only for those who live in accordance with His will (5:16; 6:127-28; 13:19-24). The Qur'an constantly commands Muslims to work wholly for peace and justice, and condemns all the factors that tend to disturb peace and social order (2:209; 5:9, 65; 7: 56, 74; 11:85; 28:77-78; 29:36). As a result of this understanding, the Qur'an defines members of the Muslim community as "the best of peoples, evolved for human beings, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah" (3:110). Muslims are enjoined to establish "a political order on earth for the sake of creation of an egalitarian and just-moral-social order" (Rahman, 1980, p. 62).

While the Qur'an places great importance on peace, justice and equality, the majority of Muslims today live in poverty, conflict, oppression, injustice, and even war, and are far from meeting their basic human needs (Ahsan, 2002, 61,64). Because of widespread misconceptions about Islam, many of the world's non-Muslims consider Islam to be a religion of backwardness that espouses war and violence, and think of Muslims as terrorists. However, when the Qur'an is examined carefully, it is evident that Islam is a religion of peace, not war (Qutb, 1964, p. 9; Boisard, 1988).

ISLAM AND PEACE EDUCATION

If we define peace education as a "social process through which peace is achieved" (Brock-Utne, 1985, 73; 2000, pp. 133-134) or as "learning intended to prepare the learners to contribute

toward the achievement of peace" (Reardon, 1982, p. 38), and put its purpose as "to create a world of justice, peace and love--to remove whatever breeds oppression, be it personal, structural, or systematic... to build structures that foster unity of people with people and people with God," (Toton, 1985, p. 456; Reardon, 1993, p. 132), we can find some important contributions of Islamic teachings to the field of peace education.

In order to understand the concepts of peace and education for peace, the idea of *jihad*, which is mostly misunderstood in Islam, should be explained (Shalaby, 1977-78, p. 46; Norman, 1993, pp. 146-48; Arkoun, 1994, p. 49). Jihad is a concept that primarily refers to a daily individual-level internal struggle to serve Allah and become a better person. At its most extreme form, jihad can refer to physical combat in the defense of the values of Islam, but this is not its primary meaning. In today's world, the term jihad often invokes images of "holy war" and "terrorism" rather than spiritual betterment. Muslims as well as non-believers would benefit from focusing on jihad as an internal struggle to make the world a better place rather than on acts of violence (Nasr, 1993, p. 475; 1982, pp. 14-19).

It is true that any religion can impact society either positively or negatively depending on the content of the religious doctrine, its interpretation and understanding, and its application in real life. This is also true for the religion of Islam. The following points should be considered when we talk about peace and war in Islam.

There are many reasons for Muslims to require good relations with the followers of other faiths, contrary to the views of early Muslim jurists (Parvin and Sommer, 1980, p. 4; Khadduri, 1955, pp. 55-57; Willis, 1967, p. 318) and some contemporary Muslims who divided the world into two territories, *dar al-Islam* (land of peace) and *dar al-harb* (land of war), advocating permanent hostility towards non-Muslims (Qutb, 1990, pp. 50, 62, 102; Faraj, 1986, pp. 159-234).

First of all, although there are some verses in the Qur'an that are biased towards Jews, Christians, and other non-Muslims, (3:28; 60:1; see also 4:139, 144; 5:51; and 9:23) there are also some passages indicating that Muslims may befriend those non-believers who do not oppress Muslims or seek to destroy their faith (Qur'an 60:8). Furthermore, Islamic scriptures allow Muslim men to marry women of the "People of the Book," namely Jews and Christians. This also suggests that closeness between Muslims and non-Muslims is permissible, since married life requires peaceful and affectionate relationships (al-Qaradawi, 1985, 44-45). Second, Muslims are expected to respect the dignity of human beings, regardless of their religion, nationality, or color, for Allah honored human beings in many ways (Qur'an 2:34; 38:72; 95:4). Third, since differences of religion among human beings are a matter of divine decision, it is not the duty of Muslims to call non-believers to account for their disbelief, nor to punish those who go astray for their errors. This world is not a place of judgment, for on the Last Day Allah will requite them (Qur'an 22:68-69; Al-Qaradawi, 1985, 31-32; Talbi, 1992, 465-482).

Fourth, rejecting exclusivity, the Qur'an repeatedly recognizes the existence of good people in other communities--Jews, Christians and Sabians--just as it recognizes the people of faith in Islam. The Qur'an says:

Those who believe [in the Qur'an]. And those who follow the Jewish [scriptures], and the Christians and the Sabians, --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 (Qur'an 2:62 and 5:69).

Thus, the Qur'an accepts the positive values of different religions and communities. It urges Muslims to help each other in good deeds (Qur'an 2:148; and 2:177; 5:2).

Fifth and finally, besides these theological supports with regard to living peacefully with non-Muslims, there are also some other factors that compel Muslims to live peacefully with people of other faiths. Most Muslims understand that the conditions of the world have been changing rapidly, the United Nations has come to into being, and many institutions and organizations have been formed which try to solve disputes through negotiation and by providing opportunities for the exchange of opposing and divergent views (Ghazali, 1982, p. 139).

After elaborating the concepts of war and peace very briefly in Islam, we can ask the following fundamental questions regarding education for peace: Is it possible to stop fighting wars and live peacefully with others? Is it possible to create a just and humane society where everyone can have a chance to live in dignity and have his or her basic needs met?

When we look at the thoughts of scholars and philosophers on this issue, we see that some of them are very optimistic about stopping wars from happening altogether (Russell, 1961, 51; Reardon, 1993, 46-47), while others are less so (Freire, 1970, p. 43, 146; Ibn Khaldun, 1981, pp. 223-224; Haddad & Khashan, 2002, p. 817). It can be concluded that educating for peace is not impossible, but neither is it easy. There will always be some people who want to manipulate the poor and misuse or abuse available resources to promote their own welfare. This is true at both the national and international levels.

OBSTACLES TO PEACE EDUCATION

When examining the issue of peace education in Muslim countries, it is evident that there are some basic obstacles against it. The first obstacle centers on theological misunderstandings about human responsibility, and the second involves the educational model employed by Muslim countries.

Central in the Islamic worldview is the belief that the will of God is primary in all that occurs in human affairs and its history. However, the two terms *qada* (the doctrine of divine decree) and *wa'l qadar* (predestination) have been confused, misused, and abused by some of those in power throughout Islamic history. Although the Qur'an includes the idea of predestination in terms of fate and even one's salvation (6:2, 125; 3:154; 16:93; 30:37; 57:22; 63:11), it also places great importance on human responsibility and free will (4:70-80; 6:107; 10:99; 13:11; 18:29; 99:7-8; Watt, 1984; Majid, 1991; Saeed, 1994, pp.108, 131, 140). In fact, a close examination of the Qur'anic teaching precludes absolute fatalism. Rahman argued, "To advocate that the Qur'an suggests absolute determinism of human behavior, denying an individual free choice, is not only to deny almost the entire content of the Qur'an, but also to undercut its very basis" (1980, p. 20). Contrary to the absolute determinism of human behavior, the Qur'an requires balanced individual and social responsibility. The Qur'an makes it abundantly clear that human creation is not in vain but is purposeful (3:191; 21:16-17; 23:115).

Furthermore, the Qur'an demands not only individual responsibility but also communal or social responsibility. As a matter of fact, Islam is not established on the basis of individualism, but on the basis of the group (*jama'at*). Thinking of other members of the community is one of the main objectives of Islam. Because of this, in their daily prayers Muslims call upon Allah at least seventeen times: "Show us the straight way." It is us, not me, which is repeated in the daily prayers of Muslims (Abdullah, 1982, 127-128; Qur'an 1:6). Therefore, when the Qur'an describes the Islamic community as the best society that has evolved for human beings (Qur'an

3:110), its goodness and supremacy depends upon the mission that Muslims must perform towards non-believers. More importantly, this prescription for enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is the duty not only of individual Muslims but also of the state itself, meaning those who are in power (Qur'an 22:41).

Another theological source of injustice and tyranny in the Muslim world is the common belief that one must obey those in authority, whatever they might do (Lewis, 1991, 91-116). The following verse has been used as a tool by tyrannical rulers throughout Islamic history and even today: "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you" (Qur'an 4:59). As a result of this understanding, for hundreds of years, Muslims have been taught that they were created to serve God by obeying those in authority over them and by enduring with patience whatever God willed for them. Muslim masses have patiently endured the grinding poverty and oppression imposed on them by those in authority (Hassan, 1992, p. 449).

The second important obstacle for peace education in Muslim countries is the model of their educational systems. For the most part, the teacher-student relationship is based on lectures and, in the words of Paulo Freire, educational systems in Muslim countries embody the banking concept of education. According to Freire, this model attempts to conceal certain facts that explain the true aims of human beings in the world. It resists dialogue and treats students as objects of assistance. It inhibits creativity, and domesticates the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world (Freire, 1970, p. 58).

Although there are no widespread subjects or courses teaching peace education in Muslim countries (Hassan, 1987, p. 90) its principle concepts are actually found in the main sources of Islam, and peace education was emphasized in the First, Second, and Third World Conferences on Islamic Education, held in Mecca in 1977, in Islamabad in 1980, and in Dacca in 1981, respectively. Peace and justice were central themes in the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights prepared by the Islamic Council of Europe in 1980 (al-Attas, 1979, pp. 158-59 ; Ashraf, 1985, pp. 84, 111, 116, 124-25; Arkoun, 1994, p. 106). As a result of these conferences on Islamic education, some Muslim countries began to include some objectives of peace education in their educational plans (Daud, 1989, 102).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if Muslim peoples around the world want to live in dignity and prevent injustice, tyranny, and other social evils, personal responsibility must be taken at the level of the individual. Beginning with correct understandings of war, peace, destiny and human responsibility, Muslims worldwide must examine the underlying reasons for their material poverty, not based on external forces or in God, but within themselves. Allah says in the Qur'an: "Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Qur'an 13:11). At this point, peace education may be a useful tool for achieving this broad aim. In fact, "Educating for peace is one of the most compelling ethical imperatives for all persons who believe in the 'transcendent' dimension of human life" (Hassan, 1987, 91).

The purpose of peace education within the Muslim world should be to cultivate the consciousness of students regarding social, economic and political problems facing the Muslim community, informed understandings of Islamic jihad, religious freedom and tolerance, productive relationships with non-Muslims internationally, and individual and social responsibility based on the Qur'an and authentic Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.

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