

Islam, Nonviolence, and Interfaith Relations

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This chapter will attempt to discern commonalities of perceptions, teaching, and practice as a basis for ongoing dialogue for the promotion of interfaith harmony, human development, and global peace and order. In so doing I will endeavor to distinguish what is distinctly Islamic from what Islam shares with other faiths.

To facilitate discussion, I will consider other faiths in two categories: those that are theistic in belief, and those that are not. Islam shares with the theistic religions a common belief in the origin and purpose of life and in the nature and destiny of the human species. These then are the bases of interfaith relations insofar as the theistic religions are concerned. On the other hand, Buddhism and other nontheistic or agnostic religions have a different understanding of the universe, of the human person, of other forms of life, of birth, death, and after-life, of existence in other spheres or life cycles, and of the whole cosmos itself. Concepts such as creation or eternal human destiny are alien to such religions. However, there is a shared acceptance among all believers, whether theistic or non-theistic, agnostic or atheist, that the human being has innate dignity and value and is worthy of respect.

There is also implicit acknowledgement among all religions of the value of the universe, especially of Planet Earth and the physical environment in which the human species lives and has its being. There is an emerging consciousness of the importance of the environment for the sustenance of human life itself. Thus there is a perception of order, balance, and equilibrium between the human species and the physical environment in which humans have developed. The human person occupies the place of primacy in the physical environment. Based on that primacy all religions

acknowledge a hierarchical order of being and values. Thus the primacy of the human being in the physical universe and the different perceptions and beliefs of his role and relationships provide the starting point of my discussion of Islam and interfaith relations.

HUMAN PERSON, UNITY, AND DIGNITY

The prevailing concepts of human unity and the fundamental equality of all persons are supported by various ideological, scientific, and religious interpretations of reality and of the human species. We in Islam believe that God, the One, has created all human beings. By direct intervention in His own process of creation God brought into being the human species, the original man and woman. God also intervenes in every human creation by infusing a soul into each being. This is the basis of the Qur'anic principle of the unity of humankind. All differences of ethnicity, race, sex, caste, or status are of secondary importance, if any. What is fundamental is that all human beings are created by God and are therefore God's creatures—equal in nature and with equal rights as persons. The differences we observe today are due to many factors, and should not be seen as a permanent impediment to the reconciliation and unity of the human race. It is a function of religion to promote the process of human reconciliation or peace and to foster unity among peoples everywhere.

Not only does Islam believe in the Divine origin of human creation, but also that each human person has a divinely oriented purpose or destiny. All beings are enjoined to strive towards perfection so that they may tend towards union with the All-Perfect One, who is God. Islamic doctrine, therefore, places great emphasis on the righteousness of the soul, and thereby reminds us of the transcendental nature and purpose of human existence. Our earthly existence does not circumscribe the life of the human person. There is an existence beyond our mortal life on earth, an existence which knows no pain, no sorrow, and no death. It is endless existence with the author of life who is the source of all joy, the Perfect One. Our human striving is basically to achieve that end, to return to the source of life, of joy, and of goodness.

Islam, Nonviolence, and Interfaith Relations

But Islam, while sharing with the theistic religions this eschatological vision of life, also affirms with them that earthly existence is a means by which to achieve our common human destiny. The universe, too, is a part of God's creation, and is not to be despised. The striving towards perfection has to be achieved in and through this earthly existence, which has value in itself. Islam teaches that the human being can become divine and that each individual can and should participate in the process of achieving such perfection. Therefore, each individual is of value not only intrinsically but also in relation to his potential and purpose in this world.

Service to humanity is an important aspect of Islamic teaching, which enjoins its adherents to strive to promote the spirit of human fraternity. The Qur'an stresses not only the spirit of self-sacrifice but also exhorts its followers to shun selfishness.

But give them preferences
Over themselves, even though
Poverty was their (own lot).
And those saved from
The covetousness of their own
Souls—they are the ones
That achieve prosperity. (59:9)

The Holy Prophet has said, "You cannot be a true Muslim until you wish for others what you wish for yourself." Another saying is, "The best among men is one who does good to the people." He also said: "Be kind to all living beings, so that God may be kind to you" (all quoted from the hadith collected by Bukhari). *D'awa* in Islam means to practice one's faith, serving as an example to others and uniting Islam.

The Holy Prophet urged us to consider ourselves as humans first. We share a common humanity, which is the basis of our unity. It is *taqwa*—God consciousness—which alone constitutes the basis of one's superiority over the other. *Taqwa* includes solicitude and goodwill towards others.

O Mankind! Revere
Your Guardian Lord
Who created you
From a single Person,

M. Mazzahim Mohideen

Created, of like nature,
His mate, and from them twain
Scattered (like seeds)
Countless men and women (**4:1**)

The most honored of you
In the sight of Allah
Is (he who is) the most
Righteous of you. (**49:13**)

PROPHETS IN HISTORY

The Holy Prophet taught us that all religions in their pristine essence are one, emanating as all of them did from the self-same Divine source. It is an Islamic belief that different prophets were sent at different times to meet the needs of the various times. The basic message of Islam is peace and submission to the Will of God. The Holy Qur'an says

There is no compulsion in religion. (**2: 256**)

It also says

Your religion for you, and mine for me. (**109:6**)

Interpreted in the modern context this informs Muslims that despite our differences on religion, we must understand one another and live in peace and unity. Belief in the Books of God that were revealed before Islam and in the prophets before the Holy Prophet is an article of faith in Islam. The permitting of others to practice their own faith was the principle on which the Holy Prophet preached the Islamic faith. The Holy Prophet of Islam provided the Christians of his time with a Charter to practice their own faith. Islam exhorts Jews, Christians, and others to act according to their creeds.

Muslims are enjoined to believe in all the prophets, irrespective of whether they were named in the Holy Qur'an. Verses **4:164** and **40:78** mention the fact that there were other prophets before Muhammad whose names were not mentioned to him. The Qur'an requires belief in the truth and righteousness of all the prophets and in the revelations vouchsafed to them by God. The

Torah and Injil (Bible) are repeatedly mentioned. There is no compulsion in religion:

Truth stands out Clear from Error. (2:256)

This is the policy of Islam towards other religions. Beliefs revealed in the scriptures to the prophets before Prophet Muhammad are enjoined on Muslims. Twenty-five prophets are named in the Qur'an and references are made to as many as 124,000 unnamed prophets. At the advent of Islam, those who were not adherents of the Islamic faith were referred to as the People of the Book and were admitted and accepted as part of Muslim societies. It was in this context that Muslims, although enjoined to carry the message of Islam to non-Muslims, were warned that there is no compulsion in religion.

FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

In Islam there is no question of one religion versus another. The Holy Prophet Muhammad preached the oneness of God, and in so doing sought to eradicate potential causes of conflict, such as differing perceptions of religion. In Islamic terminology irreligion is referred to as *kufr*. A *kafir* is not a non-Muslim, but one who does not believe in any religion.

Peace at all times should be uppermost in the mind of a Muslim. The Islamic greeting, *assalamu 'alaikum*, means "peace be with you." The response *wa 'alaikum salam* means "peace be also with you." The message of Islam is one of love, goodwill, understanding of others, truth, justice to all, kindness to all creatures created by God, and charity, which are the core values of all religions. Muslims believe that the fountainhead of all religions is the one and universal God. The only additional claim that Muslims make is that with the Holy Prophet Muhammad the message of God came in an expanded and complete form, covering all aspects of life, and that he was the seal of prophethood.

By peace we do not mean just the absence of conflict or tension. Peace has both a personal or internal dimension as well as a social one. An individual is called upon to be at peace with

himself, his desires, his aspirations, and his conscience. He is also called upon to be at peace with those around him, beginning with the members of his own family, his neighborhood, his social community, and his country. God is the source and sustainer of peace—internal as well as social.

There is a misconception that because Islam is a religion based on Divine Revelation provided by a single holy book, it can neither tolerate nor cooperate with the followers of other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity. *This is very far from the truth.* As we have seen, the Qur'an confirms the revelation given to earlier prophets.

Those who believe (in the Qur'an)
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures)
And the Sabians and the Christians—
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness—
On them shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve. (5:69)

The Qur'an accepts the virgin birth of Christ and speaks of Jesus as God's word

which He cast upon Mary, and a spirit from Him. (3:45)

In 1889 Amir 'Ali wrote that there is no difference between Christianity and Islam except for the conception of the sonship of Jesus. The Charter of Religious Freedom preached by Prophet Muhammad gives Christendom on behalf of the world, of Islam, for all times to come "till the end of the world," the freedom and preservation of Christianity. There is nothing strange in this, for after all God sent the Holy Prophet as

a mercy unto all creatures. (21:107)

Muslims draw inspiration from two main sources. One is the Qur'an and the other is the Sunna, or Way of the Prophet, which includes reports of his day-to-day behavior and actions and his tacit approval of things said and done in His presence "The acceptance and understanding of the Prophet's legacy is essential in Islam,

because first its acceptance is enjoined by God in the Qur'an, and second, it supplements and explains the Qur'anic message."

The Qur'an comprises the dogma, a body of narrative, and moral and juridical injunctions. Central to the dogma is the belief that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Apostle and the last of the Prophets. Belief in angels, the Day of Judgment, Paradise and Hell, and in the righteous being rewarded and the wicked being punished is complementary to faith in the One God.

COMMONALITIES WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

The word "Islam" is derived from a root word which means "peace." It literally means "absolute submission to God's will," but it does not imply any idea of totalism. Next to Christianity it is the religion with the second largest number of adherents in the world. It is not a religion formulated by the Prophet Muhammad, but is a summation of all previous religious norms decreed by God through His revelation to all Prophets, including Moses and Jesus Christ. The Christian God and Allah are the same supreme God. The Muslims prefer to use the word "Allah" since the Arabic language is revered by all Muslims, as it was the language in which the Qur'an was revealed.

If you ask a Muslim when Islam began, he would give an unexpected answer. It is as old as time, as old as God's creation, as old as Adam and Abraham and Moses, he would say. Was not Abraham himself a Muslim and his son Ishmael the father of the Arab race? Every person is born a Muslim. This is part of Muslim belief. But if we are to seek what is distinctive in the Islamic religion then we must look first and last to the person, character, and career of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

The Qur'an does not speak of other great world religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, but it explains the existence of other religions when it states: "And if the Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together." The Qur'an also states:

If God had so willed
He would have made you
A single People, but (His)
(Plan is) to test you in what

M. Mazzahim Mohideen

He hath given you: so strive
As in a race in all virtues. (5.48)

God has revealed Himself “at sundry times and in diverse places.” There are several instances in the Qur’an which refer to the mystery of God’s purpose in creating different peoples and nations while always insisting on their unity. According to the Hadith, when the Prophet stood up for a funeral, one of his companions remarked, “It is a funeral of a Jew.” The Prophet replied, “Is it not a soul?” He said, “if you behold a funeral, then stand.” It is known that the first Muezzin who gave the call for congregational prayers was Bilal, an emancipated Negro slave.

Another attitude which Islam shares with other religions is respect for life in its various forms. The Qur’an and the Hadith are explicit in respect for all forms of life. The Qur’an says “and there is not an animal on earth nor flying creature upon wings but is a people like unto yourselves. We have neglected nothing in the book of decrees. Then unto their Lord they will be fathered.” It also says: “Every creature knoweth its prayer and its praise; and God knoweth when they do.” This includes even the sun and the moon and the stars.

A failure to understand the basic principles of Islam would be a failure to appreciate its true spirit. The French proverb “to understand is to forgive” is never truer than in matters concerning religion. Prophet Muhammad Himself never claimed that Islam was a new religion. According to Qur’anic theory Islam has existed since the beginning of the earth and will exist until the Day of Resurrection. From time to time this religion is corrupted. When people have forgotten the principles of the true faith, God in His infinite mercy sends to them a Reformer, a *Rasul* or Messenger, in order that he may point the way and warn the people. Such were Abraham, Ishmael, Moses, and Jesus, the son of Mary. So also was the Prophet Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, who claimed that he was merely a man like others, liable to err in human affairs, but divinely guided and inspired in matters of religion.

The principle of brotherhood, which Islam has made real, is one of its greatest glories. All religions have taught brotherhood in various ways, but no religion in history can claim to have made brotherhood as real and natural in everyday life. At this point one is

reminded of the wars amongst Muslim nations in the world today, which challenge the edifice on which Islam stands. As with other religions, so with Islam: what matters is what we do, not what we profess to be. In his last sermon the Prophet told his people that excellence consisted only in deed. Pride of color or race was condemned. The Arab is not superior to the non-Arab. We are all sons of Adam, and Adam was made of clay. Verily all Muslims are brothers. He said, "If a deformed Abyssinian slave holds authority over you and leads you according to the Book of God, hear him and obey him." Nowhere has the true spirit of Islam been so tersely summarized as in this last speech of the last Prophet of Islam.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ISLAM

Islam is not a religion for a recluse. It is social in dimension. Its adherents live in society and are required to live peacefully among others. A Muslim must live a full life. We must be in the world, but not of it. In other words, our values should not be worldly, material, or ephemeral. A Muslim must have a transcendental vision of the world and of human existence. However, this does not mean that the earthly condition of human existence is irrelevant. On the contrary, Muslims are obliged to seek to build and develop the social community and social environment, not to ignore it. Social conditions influence individuals, their thinking, and acting. Subhuman conditions and inhuman relationships distort the concept of human dignity and the fundamental equality of all people. We must, therefore, seek to improve and develop the social conditions of human existence.

Islam disavows coercion, constraint, or imposition. The right way has indeed become distinct from error (2:256). According to its own claim Islam is a *din-al-fitrah*, or religio-naturalis. By that understanding religion is but part and parcel of human nature, inborn and needing only to be awakened. Thus we in Islam are encouraged to work for an interreligious brotherhood of the followers of all faiths. However, Islam rejects both irreligion and polytheism. The Holy Prophet was against the ideology of "believing in nothing and daring everything," which he considered dangerous. A Muslim is enjoined to foster the factors that make for

unity rather than seek to identify differences. Islam does not attempt to make religion a bone of contention, nor does it seek to build fences of religious exclusivity. Rather it seeks to build bridges of understanding.

Islam is also a religion of hope. The Holy Qur'an says: "Don't be despondent and don't despair of the mercy and blessings of God whose mercy is all pervading." Allah is the source of a Muslim's hope, for Allah is Infinite Being and Infinite Power. It is the certainty of a Divine Providence that sustains all humanity and is the basis of our hope. In communicating with the Divine, human beings are reminded of their humanity, their common condition of frailty, of mutual need, and of dependence on one another. We realize how dependent we are and that in unity and solidarity lies our strength.

In Islam the channels of communion are called *ibadat*. These are prayer, fasting, tax for the poor, charity in thought, and belief in the One, Unique, and Universal God of all. *Ibadat* is to be practiced without distinction or discrimination, for self-elevation or perfection through spiritual, physical, moral, and material practice.

The Qur'an also refers to *muamalat*, which means one's dealings with human society. Much emphasis is given to this aspect and it is said that God will not forgive a defaulter unless the person or the persons whom he had wronged forgave him. Obligations to one's neighbor are matters of paramount importance. The Holy Qur'an is explicit in stating that one who is dearest to his fellow men is dearest to God. It is an Article of Faith in Islam that we are answerable to God for our deeds—good or bad. Islam enjoins one to regard social welfare as important as one's own welfare.

Islam has also sought to assimilate other counsel, without compromising its principles, its basic concepts, and its Articles of Faith. However, this does not mean it is syncretic. It has not diluted its beliefs, but is open to the values of other religions and other societies, provided they are not contrary to its own values. This absence of rigidity enables Muslim society to maintain an equilibrium between the essential requirements of Islam and those of modern complex societies.

UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAM

Islam, Nonviolence, and Interfaith Relations

As we have seen, Islam is a religion which enhances the insights and values that have been preached by all the prophets inspired by God, some explicitly and others implicitly, in different ages and different countries.

Say ye: "We believe
In Allah, and the revelation
Given to us, and to Abraham,
Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob,
And the tribes, and that given
To Moses and Jesus, and that given
To (all) Prophets from their Lord:
We make no difference
Between one and another of them. (2:136)

Before the revelation of the Holy Qur'an some nations and people claimed Divine origin for their beliefs but denied such origin to the creeds of other nations or people. This could be interpreted to mean that God did not provide His guidance to other people and nations. The concept of a "chosen people" and its exclusiveness has caused dissension and discord among God's creatures. Islam does not subscribe to this concept, for it teaches that God has not made any invidious distinction between different peoples. The Qur'an commences with the words of glorification and thanksgiving to God, the Creator and Provider of the whole Universe. The words used here are so general that they include all the different peoples in different ages and different parts of the world. This verse clearly indicates that the Qur'an does not accept the belief in a special covenant of God with a particular people to the exclusion of all others. Perhaps the concept of a chosen people and of a special revelation is open to a different interpretation, other than to suggest exclusivity or privilege. In all humility one should strive to understand the concept as perceived in the Jewish and Christian traditions before pronouncing judgment on it.

Be that as it may, the Qur'anic verse teaches a Muslim to believe that not only does the Creator and Provider of the whole Universe give the means of physical growth equally to all on earth, but also He provides them with the means of spiritual development. This noble teaching assures all people of the certainty of God's sustenance and providence. All people comprise a fraternity of

dependent beings, under the universal fatherhood of God, destroying that narrowness of mind which separates brother from brother.

There is another dimension of interfaith relations which deserves close examination. God as the Creator is also the Lord of history. He was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. He revealed Himself in all ages to different peoples in diverse ways. He was the unknown God of the animist—the personification of power as symbolized in the elements. He was a personal God whose assistance had to be invoked, his intercession begged, who had to be propitiated, worshipped, adored, and glorified. He has been perceived in a multitude of ways by millions of people. And God chose to guide people in every age through prophets, sages, and teachers. In some cases the Divine as the source of inspiration was explicit, while at others it remained implicit. But the teachings of the various preachers of religions were not preserved in their original purity. The passage of time and the lack of efficient means of preserving such teachings led to human interpolations and incorrect interpretations. The very language in which the teachings were proclaimed was liable to constant change, and so they became open to different interpretations. Later generations found it difficult to know the original message and meaning. As time went on, new situations arose in human affairs, calling for a new order of things.

Each age and emerging circumstances produced prophets who sought to lead their society authentically. Prophecy is more than social criticism. Underlying a Prophet's critique is a world vision that is basically moral. The Qur'an says:

To every people (was sent) a Messenger. (10:47)

And there never was
A people without a warner
Having lived among them. (35:24)

The Qur'an repeatedly teaches that in every age a prophet has been raised in every nation. This great truth was revealed to an unlearned Arab who did not even know what nations existed and what scriptures they possessed. Such a teaching is the basis for the universality of the Divine message to all mankind. Humanity will

always be under the deepest obligation to the Holy Prophet of Islam for enunciating this principle.

FUNDAMENTALISM

We move now from the sphere of Islamic teaching and belief to that of practice. An aspect of religious practice that has led to some discord is what has come to be called “Islamic fundamentalism.” Among Muslims one does not speak of Orthodox Islam, Modern Islam, or Fundamental Islam. The term “fundamentalism” is mistakenly applied to Islam by non-Muslims in general, and in the modern world it bears a political connotation as well. One is made to believe that “fundamental Islam” does not permit interfaith relations and tries to insulate itself from other religions. The perception of “Islamic fundamentalism” is held by persons with a background one might term “secular Christianity.” This in no way implies any lack of respect for Christianity. All it means is that some Christians seek to emphasize the secular or horizontal dimension of Christianity, namely, that while religion can admit no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, it must incarnate itself in the secular world. In other words, religion is not otherworldly. The kingdom of God begins on earth. This view of Christianity is different from the fundamentalist position that the scriptures must be understood literally, that the vertical dimension of Christianity is more important, and that the world is fraught with evil and therefore one has to guard against its dangers. It is a narrow, restrictive understanding of Christianity which would seek to protect its members within the confines of a ghetto. In this way religion is regarded as a private matter.

The Qur‘an makes it clear that religion cannot confine itself to one segment of human life, nor can it choose to abstain from exercising any decisive influence over everyday life. Religion is not a private matter for each individual. The moral dimension of human activity—be it political, social, or economic—is the concern of religion. Moral issues affect the relations not only between individuals but also among groups, communities, and nations. It must be emphasized that Islam is a total and integral code and way

of life and is concerned with every aspect of human well-being, whether religious, economic, social, or political.

On the other hand, “fundamentalism” has also been understood to mean a restrictive interpretation of scripture and teaching and a preoccupation with the preceptual aspect of religion, ignoring the moral dimension of human activity unless there is explicit applicable reference in scripture to the ethics of the situation. The fundamentalist’s understanding of religion is different from the creative response of religion to specific situations and human predicaments. Fundamentalism lays store by the letter of the law or precept, ignoring its spirit.

There is still another understanding of the expression “fundamentalism,” which represents both an individual and collective effort of believers to look afresh at the teachings of the Qur’an in order to ensure that its pristine character is preserved. At this point one must condemn the actions of certain Muslim political leaders who have taken advantage of and abused their positions and employed certain strategies to achieve their own political ends by misquoting the Qur’an or the sayings of the Holy Prophet. They have contributed to turmoil in the world. Islam has always had an integral set of values, completely self-sufficient, with only one standard of truth, commanding the believer to live an integral and authentic life, accepting nothing but what is harmonious and directly relevant to the way of life indicated in the Qur’an. It is a perception of life in its totality.

History can recall the efforts of Lenin when he coined the term “Islamic socialism” to capture the imagination of the peoples of the nine Muslim provinces of Russia and bring those people under the influence of his own ideology. To Russians then Islamic fundamentalism may have a different dimension. Islam stresses that moral and spiritual development must accompany advancement in science, industry, economy and other beneficial aspects of life. Islam seeks to promote psychological and spiritual unity in which men and women are all brothers and sisters of one large family, irrespective of differences of language, place of origin, ethnicity, or race. The social system in Islam depends for its protection and progress on the individual himself, on personal discipline and adherence to individual conscience rather than on coercion or direction by any external power. For a Muslim this system is

basically sacred and belongs to the Supreme Authority—God—to whom man submits in love, obedience, and loyalty.

A believer's first duty is spiritual. He must recognize that material power and gain may be a means to his advancement, but in any case he must accord primacy to the spiritual. Islam flourished among societies and nations with diverse cultures and histories during the past fourteen centuries and continues to grow and influence humankind in the civilized world. Modernization or development is not perceived as antithetical to Islam, provided its values are not at variance with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. Islam is open and receptive to all that is good and conducive to the progress of man in all aspects of life, respects the values of all religions, and is opposed only to the irreligious.

JIHAD

Another aspect of Islamic thought that is misunderstood by non-Muslims is *jihad*. Many think that *jihad* means only a religious war waged in the path of God, according to rules and instructions laid down in the *shari'a*. This is very far from the truth. Rather whatever endeavor is made at any particular time for the preaching and propagation of Islam and the moral and spiritual correction and guidance of humankind is the *jihad* of that age. It is well known that the Holy Prophet remained in Mecca for about thirteen years after the mantle of apostleship had fallen upon him. During this period the *jihad* of the Holy Prophet and his companions consisted of adhering steadfastly to the faith, in spite of the terrible persecution meted to them by their enemies, and in doing all that lay in their power to spread the Divine Message of Islam and to morally and spiritually reform those who lived around them.

The word *jihad* is derived from *jahadun*, meaning exertion or striving. Technically it means exerting one's power in repelling the enemy to the extent of one's ability, whether by word or by deed. It also means a war undertaken for a just cause and for the defence of Islam. The Holy Qur'an uses the word in various ways:

And those who strive
In Our (Cause)—We will
Certainly guide them

M. Mazzahim Mohideen

In Our Paths,
For verily Allah
Is with those
Who do right. (29:69)

And if any strive (with might
And main), they do so
For their own souls. (29:6)

And strive in His cause
As ye ought to strive
(With sincerity and under discipline). (22:78)

Although *jihad* clearly has many different uses, some European writers have twisted it, limiting it to cases of holy war.

The Object of *Jihad*

To those against whom
War is made, permission
Is given (to fight), because
They are wronged—and verily,
Allah is most powerful
For their aid—
(They are) those who have
Been expelled from their homes
In defiance of right—
(For no cause) except
That they say, “Our Lord
Is Allah.” Did not Allah
Check one set of people
By means of another
There would surely have been
Pulled down monasteries, churches,
Synagogues, and mosques, in which
The name of Allah is commemorated
In abundant measure. Allah will
Certainly aid those who
Aid His cause. (22:39–40)

The object of *jihad* is self-defence, which is also a natural law with all animals; the object is not propagation of the faith. The Holy Qur'an strictly prohibited conversion by force, saying

There is no compulsion in religion. (2:256).

Jihad is Holy war in the sense that had there been no war, then no religious liberty, no justice, and no house of God, irrespective of caste and creed, would have been saved. This magnanimous pronouncement of the object of war in protecting the holy places of all faiths is nowhere found in the world except in Islam. For absence of good motive in war, the world is now in utter chaos, and imperialistic and bureaucratic tendencies have cropped up to an amazing extent. All the wars undertaken by the Prophet and his companions were of the specified type. In another verse the Qur'an discusses the object of war in unmistakable terms:

Fight in the cause of Allah
Those who fight you
But do not transgress limits. (2:190)

This verse also warns Muslims not to be excessive in killing, avoiding the killing of women, children, and the old. In the midst of an actual fight the Holy Prophet prayed in the field of Badr: "O Allah! I beseech Thee to fulfill Thy covenant and Thy promise. O Allah! If Thou wilt, Thou will be worshipped no more."

Against Whom to Fight?

The fight must be against aggressors who create disturbance in the world and destroy the houses of God of all faiths. However, Islam prohibits fighting with those who do not take an aggressive part or who are under any treaty with Muslims on payment of a *jizya* tax, which is a token of submission to Muslim rule. The Qur'an recites:

(But the treaties are) not dissolved
With those Pagans with whom
Ye have entered into alliance
And who have not subsequently
Foiled you in aught,
Nor sided anyone against you.
So fulfil your engagements
With them to the end
Of their term: For Allah
Loveth the righteous. (9:4)

M. Mazzahim Mohideen

If one amongst the Pagans,
Asks thee for asylum,
Grant it to him,
So that he may hear the Word
Of Allah; and then escort him
To where he can be secure,
That is because they are
Men without knowledge. (9:6)

Allah forbids you not,
With regard to those who
Fight you not for (your) Faith
Nor drive you out
Of your homes
From dealing kindly and justly
With them: For Allah loveth
Those who are just. (60:8)

Merits of *Jihad*

In the eyes of Islam *jihad* is one of the chief meritorious acts. It is the best source of earning merit, but as mentioned it should be undertaken with the intention of self-defence. If it does not have that motive, then it is devoid of all merit. According to the Hadith, “He who fights for chivalry, heroism, fame of worldly gain acquires no merit and the aggressor is doomed to eternal perdition. . . . *Jihad* is the best action of a Muslim. . . . A great reward has been promised for supplying even arms and ammunition to the warriors.”

There are innumerable traditions relating to the merits of *jihad*. The Hadith include such sayings as: “Merit acquired in *jihad* is no less than what is earned in praying and fasting. . . . Fire will not touch a foot which trod the path of Allah. . . . All the sins of a martyr will be forgiven except debt. . . . The doors of paradise are under the shade of swords. . . . Paradise is guaranteed for martyrs. . . . A coin spent in the way of Allah brings innumerable blessings.”

For these rewards, the Holy Prophet wished that he should die several times in holy war and be brought back to life several times for holy war.

Spiritual *Jihad*

“The greatest *Jihad*,” says the Holy Prophet, “is the fight against one’s own evil passions,” because the enemies of the soul are working secretly to undermine the more vital qualities of man. The great tussle which ensues in the mind between good and the evil forces is called the greatest fight. There are two propensities in a man—bestly and angelic. Man is an animal, and like other animals has the propensities of an animal. He also has a soul, from Allah, and therefore he also has propensities for good deeds. At the age of discretion, one tries to prevail over the other. The struggle of the soul to gain the upper hand over the animal nature is called the greatest fight or *jihad*.

To devote oneself to the noble task of guiding and educating the ignorant and to spend time and money, sacrificing comfort, is *jihad* in the *divine estimation*. In the present time this animates the tasks before every religious person.

Islam does not divide its followers into two distinct categories of clergy and laity. Therefore, in the absence of a clerical order, it imposes on every Muslim the obligation to understand the message and practice the teaching of Islam as best one can, and to convey by precept and example to all those groping in the dark the message of Islam—the message of light, which is the message of divine guidance, love, and mercy. A Muslim’s love for good and truth imposes upon him the duty to cultivate love for His creation. A Muslim’s expression of love for truth does not involve being only truthful to oneself, to do that which is right and to shun that which is evil in respect to oneself, but also to disseminate the message of Truth, to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, as taught by the Holy Qur’an.

A Muslim’s interpretation of *jihad* begins as a soul-searching exercise. It involves ridding oneself of *nafs ‘ammara* [animal instincts], developing *nafs lawwana* [the sixth sense—tranquility] and human nature, and seeking to know oneself—*mutma‘inna* [understand yourself and achieve *insan kamil*—the spiritual plane]. One knows then that to God all human life is precious and God is not for the chosen few. God is the Lord of the World.

That if anyone slew
A person—unless it be
For murder or for spreading

M. Mazzahim Mohideen

Mischief in the land—
It would be as if
He slew the whole people:
And if anyone saved a life
It would be as if he saved
The life of the whole people. (5:32)

The Holy Prophet of Islam said, “Mankind is the family of God. The dearest among men with God is one who is good to his family.” He also said, “The whole earth is made a Mosque for me and the pure. . . . Be kind to all living beings so that God may be kind to you. God is never kind to a person who is not kind to the people.”

The Prophet also said that “a Muslim who lives in the midst of society and bears with patience the afflictions that come to him, is better than the one who shuns society and cannot bear any wrong done to him.”

Three things are enjoined upon the faithful:

- (a) To help others, even when one is economically hard-pressed;
- (b) To pray ardently for the peace of all mankind; and
- (c) To administer justice to oneself and treat all justly.

A Hadith confirms that on one occasion the Holy Prophet offered a mosque to Christian priests to offer up their prayers.

ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

Two further matters of Islamic jurisprudence that we need to understand are the morality of violence as a form of punishment and the concept of a just war.

The history of Islamic law can be divided into four distinct periods. The first period began with the *hijrah* of the Holy Prophet to Medina and ended with his demise. The second period commenced with the date of his death and the foundation of different schools of jurisprudence. It covers the period of the companions of the Prophet and their successors who compiled, interpreted and extended the law through collective deliberation. The third period refers to the successful study of law and religion

during which time the four schools of Sunni were established. Since then there has been no further independent approach and evaluation of the law. Jurists have simply worked within the limits of the four schools, developing the work of their founders. This fourth period may be regarded as not yet having come to an end. The laws attempt to preserve the sanctity and dignity of human life and its concern for justice.

According to Islamic jurisprudence rights are of two kinds. First, are the rights of God (society) and second are the rights of people as individuals. Punishment is divided into two classes—*hadd* and *ta'zir*. In *hadd* the measure has been specifically apportioned. In the case of *ta'zir*, the court has the discretion to measure and form which punishment is to be imposed. *Hadd* is most difficult to impose and its instances are very few, according to recorded history.

Law is prescribed for the protection of society. The social legislation of Islam aims at a state of affairs in which every man, woman, and child has enough to eat and wear, an adequate home, equal opportunities and facilities for education and medical care. Comprehensive social security schemes have been handed down in many Qur'anic verses and have been simplified by the Holy Prophet and the Caliphs. It is against this background that punishment is meted out. *Hadd* is a form of deterrent punishment that is meant to be imposed only when man behaves like an animal.

In regard to just war, I would refer to *Al-Hadith*, Vol. II, by Al-Haj Maulana Fazhul Karim.

Islam preaches the brotherhood of man. The Muslim brotherhood is a community within the wider brotherhood of those who subscribe to the belief in the existence of the One God and the accountability of man on the Last Day. This brotherhood does not countenance either a superior or an inferior caste, nor does it believe in a fatalistic approach. Each man will reap what he has sown. Man must work out his own salvation. He cannot hope for anything for which he has not striven.