

PEACE & TOLERANCE IN ISLAM



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❧ PREFACE ❧

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❧ INTRODUCTION ❧

The word *Islam* is a comprehensive Arabic term with the triliteral root *sa-li-ma*, which means to be safe and sound, unharmed, unimpaired, intact, safe and secure¹. Derived from the root *sa-li-ma* are the words *salm*, *silm* and *salaam*, which fundamentally mean peace. The word *Islam*, which is the name of the monotheistic religion that claims about 1.2 billion adherents around the world today, is derived from these words. If one analyzes naming conventions, one will conclude that the name of a thing reflects its essence. One of God Almighty's infinite Names as given by Him is *As-Salaam*, which means the "Source of All Peace". And when God Almighty named His final revelation to humanity as *Islam*², it was because this is the goal of the religion: to achieve peace – with oneself through harmonious self-realization, with the rest of God's creation, through the maintenance of the basic attitude of good will, and with God Almighty, through submission to His Design and Will.

Islam is a three-fold phenomenon. It is a strong monotheistic faith. It is a state based on universal brotherhood and finally it is a peaceful way of life, with every activity down to the smallest detail regulated by Quranic prescriptions. Thus Islam is a complete integration of cultural diversity and social ethics. It is because Islam is such a complete faith that by the 13th century, it had achieved its intellectual peak and introduced ethical dimensions of the universe, freedom of mind, and knowledge, which provided light for meaningful action. Islamic philosophy recognizes the amount of envy, recrimination, mutual resentment, belittlement and hatred which separates man from man and therefore gives a moral code and norms of behavior in order to eliminate social ills. It is a morality of unity in diversity of the highest type, where man unites in himself the widest variety, complexity and com-

pleteness of life. One of the meanings of Islam is *surrender* to the will of God: the more we surrender, the more peace we shall have.

The Holy Quran emphasizes:

*"Verily, whoever submits himself entirely to the Will of God, and he is the doer of good to others, he shall have his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such, nor shall he grieve."*³

The word *salaam* is also used in the Islamic greeting on this earth: *As-salaam alaykum*, which means "Peace be upon you". And the greeting Muslims are taught that will be used in Paradise is also "Peace", as revealed in the following verse of the Holy Quran:

*"And those who believed and did good deeds will be admitted into Gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding in it forever, by the command of their Lord; their greeting in it is 'Peace'."*⁴

As Muslims, we believe that God, who we refer to as *Allah* (same semantic root as *Elohim*, one of the principal names by which God Almighty is designated in the Hebrew Scriptures), the one Creator, created all of creation including humanity. Having assigned humanity the responsibility of being vicegerent on earth, Allah Almighty, out of His infinite Mercy, sent Prophets for guiding mankind. As Muslims, we believe in the divine messages of all the Prophets (including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses & Jesus, peace be upon them all) and that this institution of Prophethood was sealed with the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (this Arabic calligraphy reads *sallallahu alayhi wa sallam*, and means "may the prayers and peace of Allah be upon the Holy Prophet ﷺ"). It is a prayer Muslims are commanded to read at every mention of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ). The message of Islam that the Holy Prophet

ﷺ brought affirms all previous and concludes formal divine textual revelations. This message is embodied in the Holy Quran, the Divine Text revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Practices of the Holy Prophet ﷺ (Sunnah). The scholars have said that all of humanity is the Holy Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ community (Ummah) because the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been sent as a Mercy to all the Worlds.⁵

❧ TOLERANCE OF THE "OTHER" ❧

The Islamic tradition teaches us that peace is achieved through tolerance, forgiveness, and responding to evil with good. This is a three-tiered approach that gives the human being opportunities to exercise increasing spiritual efforts.

The concept of tolerance comes into play when one is dealing with the "other", something or someone different. The Holy Quran offers guidance in this matter:

*"O mankind! We have indeed created you from one man and one woman, and have made you into various nations and tribes so that you may know one another; indeed the more honorable among you, in the sight of Allah, is one who is more pious among you; indeed Allah is All Knowing, All Aware."*⁶

This verse is very clear that the diversity in creation is inherent and by Divine Design and that it's purpose is to interact, to get to know one another, to learn from one another, to be a part of the global picture. The many different cultures that exist in the world today are a blessing. What a boring world it would be if we were all the same! It is this interaction, that allows for increased understanding and enrichment that contributes towards the promotion of peace between various

communities.

Within the religion of Islam, there is much room for scholarly interpretation, which is what gave rise to four authentic jurisprudential schools of thought and forty spiritual schools of thought that make up the rich fabric of the Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition. The Holy Quran says:

"There is no compulsion in religion."

And the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

"The differences of opinion amongst my Ummah (Community) are a blessing."

One of the great luminaries of the Islamic intellectual tradition, Imam Shaf'i (d. 820 CE, may Allah Almighty be pleased with him) would say on a given issue: "I am right with the possibility of being wrong, and you are wrong with the possibility of being right." This is reflective of the attitude that the early community, who lived with the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, adopted. It is also the attitude of the later generations who follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, when dealing with differences. This is far from the modern day polemics that people engage in where more attention is paid to "who is right" versus "what is right".

Islam stresses co-existence. The Holy Quran clearly tells Muslims to protect the Christian church, the Jewish synagogue, and places of worship of all other peoples as much as they defend their mosques⁸. This is clear evidence of the emphasis that Islam has laid on tolerance and co-existence with other religions and civilizations. Islam also exhorts its followers to ensure the protection of all educational, charity and cultural centers of other civilizations. It may be deduced that the NGO's working in the field of education, health and social welfare also fall in this category. One can also refer to the word *Sawamiah* used in verse 40 of Chapter *Al-Hajj*,

which stipulates that all kinds of establishments of other civilizations must be protected.

Whenever Christian scholars came to the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for a dialog, the Holy Prophet ﷺ arranged their stay in *Masjid-e-Nabawi* (The Holy Prophet's ﷺ mosque in the city of Medina). On such occasions, the Holy Prophet ﷺ not only held talks there, but also allowed the Christians to perform their religious rituals within the mosque.

In order to keep alive the spirit and teaching of the Holy Quran, the most significant charter of tolerance was granted by the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the Christians in the 9th year of *Hijra*. It reads:

“To the Christians of the Nijran and neighboring territories, the security of Allah Almighty and the pledge of His Prophet ﷺ are extended for their lives, their religion, and their property – to the present as well as the absent and others besides; there shall be no interference in (the practice) of their faith of their bishopric, nor any monk from his monastery, nor any priest from his priesthood and they shall continue to enjoy everything great and small as heretofore; no image or cross shall be destroyed; they shall not practice the rights of blood vengeance as in the days of ignorance; no tithes shall be levied from them; nor shall they be required to furnish provision for the troops.”⁹

We may also recall the diction of the Holy Prophet ﷺ shortly before passing on to the Divine Realm:

*“Observe scrupulously the non-Muslim subjects.”*¹⁰

Another saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is:

"Whoever oppresses the non-Muslim subjects, I shall be their advocate [of the non-Muslim subject] on the Day of Resurrection (against the oppressing Muslims)."¹¹

On the occasion of the farewell pilgrimage, the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exhorted the believers:

"You are all born of Adam and Adam was made out of clay. An Arab has no superiority over the non-Arab. Neither does a white man enjoy superiority over a black man, nor a black man over a white man except by piety. Remember that your lives and properties are sacred and inviolable among one another."¹²

Equality in the matter of justice applies to members of all faiths. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ stressed about taking care of minorities in an Islamic state:

"Their property is like our property and their blood is like our blood."¹³

Therefore it can be seen that Islam provides equal protection to members of other faiths. Islam inculcates the love of God's creatures in general and of the human family in particular, as corroborated by the following statement:

"The best of you is he who is best to God's family (i.e. humanity)"¹⁴

The Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that Islam regards Muslims as one fraternity, inside which it affirms the existence of the Islamic brotherhood, wherein all distinctions of caste, creed, tribe, color, language, and territory are suspended and obliterated, and which has been allotted the function of acting as the servant of and the torchbearers of Divine Guidance for the larger human brotherhood.

Side by side with the code of conduct meant to be observed within the circle of the Islamic brotherhood, Islam also gives a definite code of human love, which relates to the dealings of Muslims with the larger human society. In this regard, the Holy Quran says:

*"The believers are brothers to each other; therefore make peace between your two brothers and fear Allah, so that you may gain mercy."*¹⁵

The Dutch orientalist Snouck Hurgronje observes:

*"The ideal of a league of Human Races has been approached by Islam more nearly than by any other ideology, for the league of Nations founded on Muhammad's religion takes the principle of equality of all human races so seriously as to put other communities to shame."*¹⁶

H.G. Wells says:

*"Islam created a society more free from widespread cruelty and social oppression than any society that has ever been in the world before."*¹⁷

❧ TOLERANCE OF BEING WRONGED ❧

The other realm where tolerance comes into play is when one is wronged by another. If a person is wronged, he or she has five options:

1. Retaliate in a greater intensity than what was inflicted upon them: This is of the days of ignorance and is completely prohibited in Islam. For example, someone slaps someone and they turn around and break the other per-

son's bones.

2. Seek retribution in the intensity that was inflicted upon them: Although this is allowed, it comes with very strict guidelines and is at the lowest level. This is the concept of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.
3. Tolerate the wrong action with patience: This is where one ignores, overlooks, and bears the pain of being wronged and is the first stage towards fostering peace in society.
4. Forgive the wrongdoer: This is the second stage where the person wronged forgives the wrongdoer and harbors no grudges against that person.
5. Respond to the wrong action with goodness: This is the highest level, which is explained in spiritual metaphors like the fruit laden tree, that when it is beaten (i.e. shaken) it responds by giving fruit. This is the behavior that was always exemplified in the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and what Muslims are always urged to do. The Holy Prophet ﷺ said:

"I was raised amongst you to perfect your-character."

The Holy Prophet ﷺ practically illustrated the concepts of forgiveness and overlooking known as *'afw* (tolerance) in the Arabic language, and responding to evil with good. If one has been oppressed or received an injury from someone or has been backbitten or one's family has been hurt or has been caused some type of physical or mental pain, but despite all these, the person chooses to rise to the high human moral ground and practice good manners and keeping ethics in the forefront, dismisses all the pain and for the contentment of Allah Almighty, forgives that person, such an action is called tolerance. If one studies the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, one will realize that the Holy Prophet's ﷺ entire life was spent teaching that one must never take revenge against anyone, never call anyone bad, never transgress anyone's rights, and

never oppress anyone. If one studies the Holy Quran, it is very clear that the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the teachings of the Quran have fostered a society of tolerance, forgiveness and returning evil with good.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was a consummate exemplar of this philosophy. The Holy Prophet's ﷺ life is recorded in the history books to learn about, reflect upon and adopt. If one studies these books, one will realize that despite all the tremendous hardships and resistance that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was faced with by family and others, the Holy Prophet ﷺ always displayed the highest moral ground of returning evil with good, which is what eventually won the hearts of the resisters. It is narrated in the books of Islamic *Seerah* (i.e. the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ) that there was a Jewish neighbor of the Holy Prophet ﷺ who out of her ignorance, used to throw foul things on Holy Prophet ﷺ everyday. Far from retaliating, the Holy Prophet ﷺ bore her actions with patience and forgave her. Then, one day she did not commit this action. A few days went by in this way. The Holy Prophet ﷺ, worried, went to this lady's house and found her ill in bed, and asked about her health. She was so moved and touched by the Holy Prophet's ﷺ kindness that she declared: *"There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."*

The history books detail the treatment of the Holy Prophet ﷺ by the community in Mecca when they were brought the blessing of the message of Islam. In the early years, majority of the Meccans were against the Holy Prophet ﷺ. They inflicted much pain, performed numerous open transgressions and oppressions against the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the Companions (known as *Sahaba*, i.e. those early Muslims who saw the Holy Prophet ﷺ). They had been boycotted to the point that no one was allowed to trade with them and hunger reached such heights that the early Muslims had to tie stones

to their stomachs to suppress the hunger pangs. When the early Muslims went to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and showed they had tied one stone to their stomach, the Holy Prophet ﷺ showed them the two stones tied to the Holy Prophet's ﷺ Blessed Stomach, teaching them the patience and forbearance that is needed whenever one is engaged in doing what is right.

The atrocities of the rejecters of the message of Islam reached their heights when they exiled the Muslims out of the Holy Prophet's ﷺ birth town, Mecca. However, when the tides turned and the Muslims were granted clear victory over those who didn't accept the message, and returned to Mecca (recorded in the history books at *Fath Mecca*), during their entry into the blessed city, the Holy Prophet ﷺ and His Companions did not display any signs of revenge. No one was killed, no transgressions were committed, no women or children were harmed, no old enmities were brought out. Instead, the Holy Prophet ﷺ announced a general amnesty in Mecca. It is important to keep in mind that the atrocities and transgressions that the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the *Sahaba* had been subjected to by the disbelievers of this city were not trivial. They harmed the Holy Prophet ﷺ during prayer, threw foul things, placed false accusations, and eventually the Holy Prophet ﷺ left the city of Mecca. However, when the Holy Prophet ﷺ came back to hometown Mecca, the magnanimity displayed at this momentous and historic juncture of tolerance and forgiveness by the Holy Prophet ﷺ is a shining example in history for the modern world to learn from and implement, if we are to resolve some of the rife that plagues our societies today.

Another heart moving example of the Holy Prophet's ﷺ tolerance, forgiveness, and returning evil with good was the incident at Taif where the Holy Prophet ﷺ attempted to take

refuge when the Meccans had impudently exiled the Muslims. Far from providing refuge, the inhabitants of Taif treated the Best of creation ﷺ in an even worse manner, setting their young boys to throw stones. The Holy Prophet's ﷺ Blessed Feet were injured to the point that the Blessed Sandals were filled with blood and the Blessed Skin was separating with it. At this point, the angel Gabriel (peace be upon him) came to the Holy Prophet ﷺ saying that he could crush these people if the Holy Prophet ﷺ so commanded. However, the Holy Prophet ﷺ having the full power and authority to make this happen, instead, chose to forgive these transgressors and said, *"I sense the fragrance of belief from their generations."* And the Holy Prophet ﷺ prayed for them.

This is why it is said in the Holy Quran:

"Forgive the mistakes of people and adopt the trait of overlooking."

In other words, if someone has transgressed against one's rights, or oppressed one, or committed a bad deed against one, then the high moral ground is to ignore these and not hold any hatred or grudge against them and then talk well with them. The reason for this is that if one harbors bad feelings against that person, or has the desire to take revenge, then by nature, hatred gives birth to hatred. Islam has provided the single method to eliminate hatred: forgive one another, do not take revenge, and display kindness amongst Muslims, as well as members of other faiths and communities, be that you are living in those societies or that they are your neighbor. Whenever you think of them, think well of them. In Islam, the neighbor has immense rights. Islam teaches that:

*"The person from whose evil a neighbor is not safe, such a person is not a Muslim, whether he is a disbeliever or a believer."*¹⁸

It is narrated from Hazrat Ibn-e-Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said:

“One must tolerate the mistakes of other people 70 times everyday.”¹⁹

No matter where the Muslim resides they must keep the message of Islam in their minds and reflect that that Holy Prophet’s ﷺ entire life’s philosophy was that of forgiveness and overlooking and this is the reason that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said in the Blessed *Hadeeth* (saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ) that:

“The Merciful has mercy on the merciful. O people! Have mercy on the people on the earth and the Merciful of the skies will have mercy on you.”

If this *Hadeeth* is studied, it is clear that the ones who are living in society, whether they are relatives or acquaintances, or strangers, Muslims or not, it is incumbent upon one to present oneself to them with kindness, and to have a gentle demeanor with people, and not be harsh. If one has the authority and ability to take revenge against someone, one must forgo that power. Instead one must say, “You have transgressed. I forgive you in the Name of Allah Almighty and His Messenger ﷺ.” This is an immense message and action that once someone starts this practice of kindness, mercy, affection, and forgiveness, a balance or power is established in the society. People are impressed by one’s character. Good manners are not that one transgresses against people and coerces them into being on one’s side. Good manners are that without oppression and transgression one deals with others with mercy and affection. This is the message of the Holy Quran. It is narrated from Hazrat Rafi bin Khays (may Allah be pleased with him) that:

“Dealing with good manners is a source of blessings and dealing with bad manners is a

source for lack of them."

And it must be kept in mind that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has always emphasized to bring people as close to one another as possible, and to not pay attention to their harshness and bad qualities. The Noble *Hadeeth* says:

"The person who has been granted gentleness he has been granted a large portion of the blessings of this world and the next. And the one who has been barred from the quality of mercy, he has been barred from the goodness of both worlds."

These actions will be accepted as good deeds in the Hereafter as well. From amongst the good deeds that a person does, the greatest good deed is, not exercising the power of revenge, despite possessing the complete ability to do so, purely for the contentment of Allah Almighty. One must think that all the people of the world are our own and are the children of Adam ﷺ and that one must not take revenge against anyone but must deal with all with forgiveness and overlooking. This is the message of Islam and the success of this life and the Hereafter.

❧ THE MODERN MUSLIM PARADOX ❧

The reality, however, of the present Muslim world appears to be very far from the ideal possibilities given the religious teachings of Islam. What in Islam used to be progress and movement, generosity and the drive to self-sacrifice, has among the present day Muslims distorted into narrow mindedness and selfishness. The primary reason for the decay of the Muslims consists in the fact that they have gradually ceased to follow the teachings of Islam in spirit. Our society was built from the very outset on this. Therefore a weaken-

ing of the fundament has necessarily weakened the cultural structure.

Unfortunately, some modern members of this faith, primarily on the basis of ignorance, which has led to their exploitation, perform actions completely antithetical to the spirit of the Islamic tradition, maligning the name of Islam. They forget the teachings of the Holy Quran, which says that whoever killed one person has killed everyone, as the following verse of the Holy Quran expounds, which applies to everyone:

*"For this reason; We decreed for the Descendants of Israel that whoever kills a human being except in lieu of killing or causing turmoil in the earth, so it shall be as if he had killed all mankind; and whoever saves the life of one person, is as if he had saved the life of all mankind; and undoubtedly Our Noble Messengers came to them with clear proofs - then after this indeed many of them are oppressors in the earth."*²⁰

It is true that Muslims today are the victim of much oppression and suffering. However Islam does not permit the fomenting of rampant violence. Although Islam believes in the struggle for justice to alleviate oppression, it does not permit illegal means to do so, that harm innocent people. Islam's rules for combat are extremely strict and are initiated under very stringent conditions. No woman, elderly, or child is to be harmed, no plant or animal life to be injured. Nowhere does Islam teach bloodshed, intimidation and repression.

Making peace among mankind is equated to virtuosity and piety in the following verse of the Holy Quran:

*"And do not make Allah a target of your oaths, by pledging against being virtuous and pious, and against making peace among mankind; and Allah is All Hearing, All Knowing."*²¹

Also, making peace is highly encouraged as in the following verse:

*"And if they incline towards peace, you too lean towards it, and trust Allah; indeed He only is the All Hearing, the All Knowing."*²²

❧ CONCLUSION ❧

Peace will come to us as the fruit of love bestowed on others, when we have learned to rise above our own little world by opening a window into other people's worlds. In the ultimate analysis, the logical requirement of this era of Globalization would be a uniform, practicable and equitable global social order. It must afford material and spiritual progress; generate freedom, justice and equality before law. With the world striving to become a global village, Muslims will have to discover higher norms of social values by developing the universal spirit and co-operation towards others, with reference to the underlying values and ideals rather than in terms of classical and traditional implementation. The individual consciousness of the people in a community has to grow into a joint social order.

It can therefore be seen that the teachings of Islam are humane in their origin and its tenets culminate in doing service to humanity at large. Islam teaches to derive strength from dialog not from power. If the true understanding of the Holy Quran is effectively spread, a broadminded, liberal, tolerant human society can be charted out.

We pray that human beings can reach within themselves and touch their true essence and use it to connect with the rest of humanity in a way that fosters peace and enrichment for all.
Aamin.



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About IECRC

IECRC is a non-profit, non-political organization, devoted to providing academic and spiritual resources to diverse religious and cultural groups. IECRC was established in 2002 and is based in Fremont, California. As a community service organization, it is based on the model of the centuries old Islamic tradition of bringing peace and harmony to society by addressing the essential needs of people regardless of their cast, creed, color or religion.

IECRC's long-term vision is to insha Allah (God willing) establish a world-class, vibrant and dynamic university that provides a forum for those seeking to quench the thirst of the heart and mind in the merger of ancient and modern knowledge and sciences in order to provide solutions to issues of our contemporary times with the goal of promoting peace, brotherhood and the betterment of humanity at large.

In order to achieve this vision, IECRC has several short term plans which are divided into the areas of education (both children and adult), culture, research and counseling.

EDUCATION: IECRC would like to insha Allah establish a low-cost, affordable full-time school for children ages 5 – 15 years where the young minds will be taught both traditional Islamic as well as modern knowledges. They will also be oriented in Islamic *adab* (etiquette). *This requires a school building or a piece of land where one can be built.*

CULTURE: IECRC would like to promote Islamic culture within the Muslim community and to bring Islamic cultural awareness to other faith communities. *This goal requires a community center with an auditorium.*

RESEARCH: IECRC intends to insha Allah establish a comprehensive library with a collection of Islamic books including rare ones in original sources, publish a quarterly Islamic Social Sciences Research Journal, and invite scholars of high caliber from around the world on a tenure basis. *These goals require a physical facility for the library, a printing press for efficient publishing of journals and books and a guest house to lodge visiting scholars.*

COUNSELING: IECRC would like to expand its already existing services of spiritual healing and counseling. Topics covered would be in the areas of Family Affairs (Marriage – *Nikah*, Divorce – *Talaq*, etc.), Individual Counseling (Depression, Anxiety, etc.), Legal Aid & Medical Camps. *The above goals require a physical facility for the counseling center that can lodge patients seeking help from far away places.*

We invite your feedback, help and support!

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Prof. Dr. Mohammad Ahmed Qadri is the Founding Director of IECRC, Northern California. Dr. Qadri is a renowned scholar from Pakistan who taught at colleges there as well as the University of Karachi, Pakistan for over 20 years. He has expertise both in modern education as well as traditional Islamic sciences having completed the Dars-e-Nizami: an 18 year traditional Islamic course from Pakistan and has studied with scholars from Al-Azhar University, Cairo.

Dr. Qadri's goal at the IECRC is to foster and promote the light and love of our beloved Master, Prophet Muhammad (prayers and peace of Allah Almighty be upon Him) and carry on the legacy of the Saints of our tradition of unconditional service to humanity.



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