



The Path of Peace

By Imam Muhammad Magid with Samuel Ross

A glance to the evening news or morning paper reveals a world beset by chaos: famine and war, crime and environmental catastrophe. In such times as these, we are called to reach ever deeper within to ask, “What can we as Muslims offer to humanity?” If we are true to our religion, we will heed its call not only to surrender but also to be a source – indeed a beacon – of peace. For the Arabic root of the word ‘islam’ connotes not only surrender, but also wholeness, health, peace, and security.

Muslim scholars have identified at least three avenues through which we can pursue the quest for peace. The first is within; the second, with our fellow human beings; and the third, with the whole of creation. But just as ripples in a pond all begin from a single point, so too must our own efforts. Our path to peace must begin with the purification of our own hearts. “God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (Qur’an 13:11).

In the Qur’an, God Almighty draws our attention to the harmonious balance in which He has created the universe: “Blessed be...He Who created the seven heavens in harmony: No lack of proportion will thou see in the Creation of the Most Gracious” (67:1-3). He links this eternal balance to that which is within: “On the earth are signs for those of sure faith, as also in your own selves. Will you not then see?” (51:20-21). Our hearts can only be at peace if they mirror the harmonious balance of the universe. For just as an ecosystem becomes dysfunctional if its predators outnumber prey, if animals cannot find water, or if plants cannot reach light, so too will we become dysfunctional if our physical, spiritual, emotional, or intellectual needs are neglected or not integrated into one another. As Muslims we are called to pursue a unity of self, mirroring the divine Oneness. For example, a Muslim may submit to God intellectually but not physically, or interact with his family physically but not emotionally. In doing so, he fails to achieve balance, and his hearts loses the beautiful harmony that is his birthright.

There are many things we can do to restore a sense of peace to our hearts. If we have neglected or partitioned aspects of ourselves, we must tend to and reintegrate them. If our connection with God has become frayed, we can strengthen it through remembrance of Him and observance of His commands and prohibitions. As God says in the Qur’an, “Peace is on him who follows the guidance” (20:47). We must constantly strive to be patient, for those in Heaven will greet one another, “Peace be onto you because you were patient, how excellent is the final

home” (13:24). We must also seek to cleanse our hearts of hatred, jealousies, and anger.

Like the guiding light of a lighthouse, tranquil hearts radiate peace to all those around them. The Prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) commanded us to radiate peace to the very horizons of humanity, to people of every race, religion, and class. In a hadith that specifies neither Muslim nor non-Muslim, he said, “Verily none of you truly believes until you love for your fellow human what you love for yourself.”

The first place we can spread peace is with our families. All of us by virtue of our kinship bonds are engaged in sacred trusts of peace with our spouses, siblings, children, and parents. Indeed the word for house in Arabic, ‘sahn’, is related to the word sakina or tranquility. It is imperative therefore that we honor our trusts by seeking to always protect one another, let alone expose one another to harm. Our homes should be places of refuge from the verbal, emotional and physical trials of the world.

As parents, we must seek to equip our children with the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual resources they need to weather the world’s storms. In practical terms, this can mean monitoring what they watch with their eyes, what they hear with their ears, and where they go with their feet. According to statistics, the average child by the end of grade school will have seen more than eight thousand murders on television from just three to four hours of television per day. Psychological studies have further shown a link between exposure to simulated violence and aggressive behavior. It is imperative that we take a stand that murder is not entertainment in our households. As the Prophet (salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) taught, “If one murders a human being it is as if he murdered all mankind.”

We can also advocate for peace with our tongues. Imam Abu Zakaria Mohiuddin Yahya Nawawi (631-659H), one of our greatest scholars, said that when Muslims extend the greeting of peace, they should do so loudly. Let us take his advice figuratively and make our greeting of “Peace be upon you” heard around the world. In our masjid and schools, let us not tolerate anyone who calls for violence or conflict. In our city streets, let us call upon governments to end unjust practices that terrorize civilians. Our role models in doing so should be the prophets who called for justice, promoted peace, and gave voice to the voiceless.

Furthermore, our demeanor must communicate that we will never be a source of harm. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr reported that the Prophet said, “The true believer is one from whom humanity is saved from his tongue and his hand.” Is humanity safe from our tongues and our hands? Conversely, this hadith also suggests that one cannot claim to be a devoted Muslim if others do not feel protected in our presence. Do others feel safe in our presence?

Third, we can advocate for peace in our environment. During the past two centuries mankind has cause untold damage to the ecosystem, upsetting the

harmonious balance in which God created the planet. Whole species have gone extinct, rain forests destroyed, fisheries depleted, and the world's oceans filled with toxins. As Muslims, we must strive to restore this balance by seizing upon our rich tradition of environmentalism and lifting the green banner of Islam. In a sound hadith, the Prophet taught, "All creatures are like a family of God; and He loves the most those who are the most beneficent to His family".¹

The message of Islam is a message peace. In just 23 years, the warring tribes of Arabia, once overcome with mutual hostility, were purified of their hatred and brought together under the banner of Islam. The pilgrimage to Mecca today continues to serve as a beacon of peace to the world. Where else can so many human beings from such diverse backgrounds congregate with so few police and so much love? Let us strive to extend our greeting of peace to the furthest horizons. May God make us among those who reside in the House of Peace, where the greeting is "Peace! Peace!" Ameen.

We look forward to incorporating your feedback and questions into our future columns. Please send all correspondence to: foodforthespirit@isna.net. Please also visit us at our website where you can download this and previous columns at: <http://www.isna.net/foodforthespirit>

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Below are some exercises we can use to help promote peace. Please feel free to cut them out and use them in your home, car, office, etc.

- ☪ Reach out to our neighbors in the spirit of brotherhood. Invite them into our homes and manifest Islam through our kindness to them.
- ☪ Advocate for peace in our family, masjid, school, and community. Take a stand against violence in all forms and shapes.
- ☪ Become involved in helping those in need.
- ☪ Resolve a dispute with someone we love. Forgive them and follow with an act of kindness toward them.
- ☪ Use the Prophet's du'a with contemplation, "O God, you are the source of peace, and from you comes peace. All glory to be You for You are full of majesty and honor."

¹ Hadith Mishkat, 3:1392.