

THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF PEACE AND WAR ACCORDING TO ISLAM

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Few topics seem so pressing as the threat of war. Eager to establish peace and prevent a world-wide conflagration, people want to “do something” as soon as possible. Many of them look to religion with the idea that its help should be enlisted in accomplishing this most urgent of tasks. But religion – if one may speak in generalities – does not acknowledge any principles higher than its own, not even the survival of the human race. Asked to help establish peace, it will do so in its own way or not at all.

In the general Western view, which has certainly not been altered by certain recent events, Islam is one of the most warlike of all religions. Stereotyped opinions and the fact that few people have the patience to delve into the principles and “myths” underlying the surface appearance make the task of bringing out Islam’s actual views on peace and war especially difficult. But only by probing deeply into Islamic ways of looking at things can we hope to understand how Muslims view the current situation. Once we have taken a step towards understanding Islam, perhaps we will find the appropriate language with which to “enlist” its help in establishing true peace in the world.

The aim of the present paper is to clarify the basic Islamic view of peace and war on the assumption that real and effective cooperation with Muslims can only be undertaken after we have reached a genuine understanding of how they perceive the current human situation. We cannot ask followers of Islam to propose “practical” and “concrete” cures for the present crisis unless we first listen with a sympathetic ear to their diagnosis of the disease.

It is important for the reader to realize at the outset that what is being discussed here is the religion of Islam as set down in its fundamental texts, not necessarily the opinions of contemporary Muslims. No Muslim today would claim that the community as a whole lives up to the ideals established by the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s Sunnah. All agree that a distinction must be made between what Islam teaches and what Muslims think and do. At the same time, differences of opinion among present-day Muslims as to what in

fact Islam does teach –especially when it is a question of applying these teachings to the contemporary situation – run deep. Any attempt to sort out these different opinions, even in the limited domain of peace and war, would require a book-length study.²⁸ Hence the present paper deals only with the normative and underlying Islamic principles that are more or less agreed upon by all Muslims, whether or not everyone would express them in the terms employed here. The question of how to deal with the present situation on a practical level will have to be answered by those Muslims who wish to live in accordance with their own tradition.

To discuss the political reality of peace and war within the Islamic context, we need to understand how Islam views these two concepts in a general sense. Peace can be defined as “freedom from war”, while war can be called “a state of hostility, conflict, opposition, or antagonism between mental, physical, social, or other forces” (*cf. Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*). These definitions prove a starting point from which to approach the specifically Islamic way of looking at peace and war as set down in the fundamental source for all Islamic thought and activity, i.e., the Qur’ \AA n which is the Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by means of the angel Gabriel. Once the general Islamic sense of the two terms is clear, we can turn to the specific issue of how traditional and normative Islam would strive to establish peace in the world.

All Islamic thought begins with God, or more specifically, with the “attestation of faith” (*Shah \AA dah*), the statement that “There is no god but God,” which is considered a unique certainty upon which all other truths depend. Hence our initial task is to answer the question, “in the Islamic view, how do peace and war relate to God and to the attestation of faith?”

“Peace” (*al-sal \AA m*) is a name of God. The Qur’ \AA n calls God “Peace” in the passage:

²⁸ For a recent attempt to sort out opinion relating to the political domain cf. R. Peters. *Islam and Colonialism. The Doctrine of Jibad in Modern History*. The Hague: Mouton, 1979.

He is God; there is no god but He. He is King, Holy, Peace, Faithful, Preserver, Mighty, Compeller Sublime, Glory be to God above everything they associate with Him. He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Form-give. To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. He is Mighty, Wise. (59:23)

These few sentences epitomize Islamic theology. More specifically, they express two ideas about God found throughout the holy book: the transcendence of the Divine Reality, and His immanence in created things. “Peace”, for example, fits into the category of the “negative” (*salbâ*) Names of God (also called the Names of “incomparability” [*tanẓîh*]). It signifies that God is free from and infinitely exalted above all defects and imperfection, since these are attributes of the creatures, not the Creator. In himself God knows no “hostility, conflict, opposition, or antagonism. As for God’s immanence, this is expressed by the mention of His creativity, the fact that He is close enough to the creatures – in spite of His transcendence – to shape and form all things. All attributes and qualities found in the world derive from Him; so true is this that “Whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God” (2:115). If “all that is in the heaven and the earth glorifies Him,” this is not only because all things alert us to the fact that he is exalted beyond their imperfections, but also because they tell us that every positive attribute comes from Him. As the Qur’ān constantly reminds us, everything in the universe displays God’s “signs” (﴿آيَات﴾).

Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ship that runs in the sea, ... and the clouds compelled between heaven and earth – surely there are signs for a people who understand. (2:164)

In short, the name “Peace” signifies that no imperfection or conflict is to be found in God. By implication, “There is no god but God” means that “There is no peace but God” and “There is no perfection but God.” Moreover, “everything other than God” (*ma‘ sîwâ Allâh*), which is how Muslim thinkers define the “world” (*al-‘âlam*), is different from God and therefore opposed to Peace in some sense. In other words, everything other than God is imperfect by definition – “all things perish except His Face” (Qur’ān 28:88). True peace belongs to God alone, while any peace possessed by His creatures can only be imperfect and perishing.

God's Peace follows upon His unity: He is one in every respect, so there is nothing in Himself other than Himself that could oppose or contradict Him. His Self is totally unlike the human self, which is constantly flooded with conflicting thoughts and feelings. Human beings are never wholly at peace with themselves because they are made up of opposing faculties and energies. And this is as it must be, since peace as such belongs only to God, while its opposite – war, that is “hostility, conflict, opposition, and antagonism” – is to some extent intrinsic to everything other than God, to all created things.

If God is absolute Peace, is the world “absolute war”? Certainly not since that would demand strife and conflict so deep and so far reaching that no two things in the universe could exist together in harmony. It would be total chaos if not pure nothingness. Hence the world is only “relative war,” but as such it is also “relative peace”. The world's peace – the harmony and equilibrium that exist among its opposing forces – is, in Qur'anic terms, a “sign” or reflection of God's Absolute Peace. The world is a mixture of opposing forces that may conflict or harmonize depending on the situation. If its relative peace is to be increased, this can only be done by bringing it closer to the Absolute Peace of God.

But is “war” understood as a “state of hostility, conflict, opposition, and antagonism” necessarily bad? No, says Islam, since war in this general sense is inherent to the world, and the world is God's good creation. Hence all conflicts must be working towards God's ends, even if they appear evil in our eyes. In other words, conflicts and opposition may in fact make up the different dimensions of an equilibrium that escapes our view.

It was stated above that God is Peace but not war, since this would demand conflict and opposition within His One Self. But many Muslim theologians provide a much more sophisticated explanation of the divine nature. In fact, they say, conflict and opposition must ultimately derive from God since He created the world and accomplished His aims through all the opposing forces found within it. To understand the theological roots of conflict, we need to turn again to the doctrine of the divine Names.

Though God in Himself is One, He takes on a variety of relationships with His creatures. He is the Life-Giver and Slayer, the Exalter and the

Abaser, the Benefiter and the Harmer, the Forgivee and the Avenger. At any given moment every creature is related to these and other pairs of opposing divine Names. Life has been given to us in this world and before long it will be taken away. We are exalted above some of our fellow creatures in wealth, power, and intelligence, but abased before others. We have received many benefits and suffered many ills. The ontological roots of every situation we experience derive from the divine nature. The fact that we undergo constant change shows that God continuously bestows upon us new relationships with these and other Names. Perfect equilibrium (*I'tidāl*) among the divine Names is found only in God Himself, who is the Coincidence of Opposites (*jam' al-a'īd*). “He is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden” (Qur'ān 57: 3). But the creation of the universe demands that the Names display their opposite properties in unequal proportions, or else the properties would cancel each other out.

Though a certain “disequilibrium” of the divine Names allows the individual things of the world to exist in their infinite variety and constant change, it remains true that the world as a whole – “everything other than God” – represents an equilibrium among all the divine Names. Each name conveys to us a mode in which the Divine Reality establishes relationships between Himself and the creatures. The modes may conflict at any given moment and in any given existent, but the totality of existence represents a harmony of all the different modes, since existence gushes forth from Reality, Sheer Being, just as light comes forth from the sun. If one ray is perceived as green and another as red, this does not contradict the underlying unity of light.

In short, the archetype of peace *in divinis* is the Unity of the Divine Self, while the archetype of war considered as a positive reality is the multiplicity of the divine Names. In God Himself the Names coexist in perfect harmony and equilibrium, since the Names are not different from His Being. The “Forgiver” is God, and the “Vengeful” is also God; the Life-Giver is God, and so also is the Slayer. But the properties of the name reflected in the world display opposition and conflict, since, for example, God as the Forgivee displays Himself differently to His creature than God the Vengeful. Nevertheless, all opposition works within the context of the Divine Unity that gives birth to it. Vision of things as they are in themselves is to see all

things as God's creatures within the context of His one Being. It is to see all the colours of the spectrum as manifestations of the One Light.

It was pointed out that God is the Absolute Peace, while creation is relative peace and relative war. The world displays a certain conflict and strife as a result of the opposition among divine Names such as the Abaser and the Exalter, even though the activities of these two Names go back to the One God. This sort of opposition among the Names might be called "horizontal", since in the long run neither of the opposing Names dominates over the other, while each name manifests the Divine Peace through its harmonious relationship with its opposite on the same level.

But there is a second kind of opposition among the Names that might be called "vertical". In the present context, this means that certain Names display the Divine Peace, while their opposites bring about opposition and conflict. For example, God is both "Merciful" and "Wrathful". Though at first sight it might appear that these two Names stand on the same level, in fact, as the Prophet reported, "God's Mercy precedes [i.e., has priority over] His Wrath". Mercy is prior to Wrath because Mercy represents the divine nature itself, while Wrath is an attribute that God assumes only in relationship to certain creatures. In other words, God is Merciful toward all creatures and Wrathful only toward some. In the last analysis His Wrath must be considered an extension of His Mercy, just as a father's anger toward his child displays his love. The constantly repeated Qur'anic formula. "In the Name of God, the Merciful (*al-raĀmĀn*), the "Compassionate (*al-raĀĀm*), "expresses the priority of Mercy (*rahmah*) in the divine nature. (Note that Merciful and Compassionate both derive from the word *raĀmah*)

Names and attributes of God connected to Mercy represent God as He is in Himself, while Names and attributes connected to Wrath represent specific attitudes that God assumes in relation to certain creatures for special reasons. Mercy is closely allied to such divine attributes as unity, beneficence, bounty, guidance, forgiveness, and equilibrium, while Wrath is allied to multiplicity, harm, error, vengeance, and deviation. The eschatological fruit of Mercy is paradise (i.e., nearness to God), while that of Wrath is hell (i.e., distance from Him). In the cosmos, Mercy is made manifest by the prophets, who express the divine name the Guide (*al-badā*), while Wrath does not work on the same level. That which manifests Wrath is made manifest by Satan

and his attendant demons, who express the divine name the Misguider (*al-mu'īl*). Note that in Islam Satan is the ape of the Prophets, not of God: all things in existence, even the negative and dispersive tendencies, come under the sway of the Divine Unity.²⁹

The vertical opposition between Mercy and Wrath is fundamentally different from the horizontal opposition between, for example, the Life-Giver and the Slayer. In the case of horizontal opposition, all creatures and activities that manifest it remain at the same “distance” from God; the two opposing Names bring into existence of kind of “yin-yang” relationship between forces in the world, an opposition which is in fact a complementarity, since both forces work toward the same end. But Mercy and Wrath do not work on the same level. That which manifests Mercy is “closer” to God than that which manifests Wrath. If a being moves from Mercy to Wrath, it leaves unity and harmony and enters into multiplicity and disequilibrium. If it moves in the other direction, it travels away from conflict into harmony. In other words, “Peace “ or freedom from conflict lies at the centre of a circle; the centre is God Himself, while the circumference is as near to chaos as can be imagined. All creatures are situated on the radii. If they move centripetally, they travel closer to Peace, Unity, Bounty, Forgiveness, and Mercy; if they move centrifugally, they journey toward war, dispersion, harm, vengeance, and wrath.

The horizontal conflict among the Names is taken into account in the verse repeated several times in the Qur'ān, “Everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies God” (24: 1, 57: 1, 61: 1, etc.) This means that all creatures work in harmony toward the end for which they were created, even though a certain strife and opposition can be perceived on every level of created existence. But a second kind of conflict, peculiar to human beings, derives from the vertical opposition between Mercy and Wrath. It is alluded to in the Qur'ān verse:

²⁹ This in no way negates human responsibility for evil, as most Muslim theologians have taken pains to demonstrate Cf. for example, the doctrine of *kasb* according to the Ash'arites (H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 663-716).

Have you not seen how to God bow down all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and many of mankind? (Qur'«n 22: 18).

Not all of human beings bow to God. Those who do not bow have turned away from Mercy and Guidance and embraced wrath and error. In other words, they have rejected the purpose for which they were brought into the world, a purpose explained in the verse.

I have no created jinn and mankind except to worship Me [or “to serve Me] (Qur'«n 51: 56).

The first kind of war and conflict is inherent to the universe; it is willed by God because it displays the opposing qualities of His Names. It results from the divine command that brings all creatures into existence: “His only command to a thing, when He desires it, is to say to it ‘Be!, and it is” (Qur'«n 36: 82). All conflicts and wars derive from this “engendering command” (*al-amr al-takwânâ*), simply manifest the diverse possibilities of existence latent within the Divine Creativity.

But God has created human beings in his own image, giving them freedom to choose between good and evil. Since He has given freedom only to mankind (and the *jinn*³⁰), He directs at them alone a different kind of command: “He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the right religion, but most men know not” (Qur'«n 12: 40). This “prescriptive command” (*al-amr al-taklâfâ*) differs totally from the engendering command in that it can be disobeyed by those toward whom it is directed. The creatures cannot disobey God when He says. “Be!”, since this engendering command determines their existence and their nature. If horizontal conflict arises as a result of the engendering command – if lions devour lambs and waves smash against the shore – this only shows that hostility, opposition, antagonism, and “war” are inherent to the created world. But human beings can choose to ignore the prescriptive command, and as a result a new kind of

³⁰ *Jinn* are beings made of fire, while angels are made of light and human beings are made of clay. *Jinn* are semi-spiritual and semi-corporeal, just as fire is neither pure light nor pure clay. They were given free will by God and therefore can disobey His commands like mankind. Iblis or Satan was one of the *jinn*, which explains why he was able to disobey God. But the angels cannot disobey Him, since they always “act as He commands” (Qur'«n 21: 27)

conflict arises in existence, a vertical conflict between the creatures and the guidance desired for them by their Creator.

Given the fall of the human race and mankind's subsequent "forgetfulness" (*ghaflah*) of God, this kind of war may be inherent to the human situation, but it works counter to the divine purpose for mankind, which is "worship" or "service" of God. It removes human beings ever farther from their own Centre, which is Mercy and Peace, and hence it calls down upon them God's Wrath; in other words, it takes them ever closer to the circumference, which is dispersion, multiplicity, deviation, and disequilibrium.³¹

When God created human beings, He made them His vicegerents or representatives (*khalāfah*) on earth (Qur'«n 2:30). The human vicegerency, called by the Qur'«n the "Trust" that no other creature was able to carry (33: 72), means that human disobedience results in evil consequences not only for those individuals who turn away from God but also for the whole of creation, over which mankind was given power (cf. the repeated Qur'«nic declaration that all things were "subjected" [*taskhār*] to human beings, e.g., 14: 32-33; 31: 20; 45: 12-13). Conflict and war between mankind and God results in the corruption and ruin of the earth itself. The closer human beings stand to Divine Mercy, the more they are put into harmony with the Divine Peace. When they are at peace with God, they fulfil their functions as vicegerents and therefore govern and control the earth in a manner that brings all creatures under the sway of God's Peace. But if people move toward the periphery of existence – toward the circumference which is war and conflict – they fail to control the earth in the manner set down themselves, they call it down upon their own wards as well, that is, the creatures of the natural world.³²

These ideas are expressed clearly in the Qur'«n doctrine of the "corruption" (*fasād*) of the earth. According to the Qur'«n, God told the

³¹ In the final analysis Satan's rebellion and human disobedience also play a positive role in the divine plan, but most Muslim authorities have not considered it opportune to emphasize this fact, since the unbelievers cannot avoid the negative consequences of God's Wrath.

³² In the Islamic view, this is the root of the "ecological crisis." See Chittick, "God Surrounds All Things': An Islamic Perspective on the Environment", *The World and I*, I/6, June 1986, pp. 671-678.

angels, “I am setting in the earth a vicegerent.” They replied, “What, wilt Thou set therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?” (2: 30). “Working corruption in the earth” is a possibility reserved for human beings, since only they can turn against the Divine Mercy and their own natures by disobeying the prescriptive command, that is, by refusing to serve and worship God. The Qur’^{an} employs various forms of the word “corruption” fifty times, and in every case where actual corruption is envisaged it results from human activity. In short, “Corruption has become manifest on the land and in the sea through what men’s hands have earned, so that He may let them taste some part of what they have done. Haply they may return [to Him]” Qur’^{an} 30:41).

God allows corruption to appear because human beings have been given the free will to choose their own destinies; at the same time it can serve to remind them of their responsibility toward Him as His vicegerents. “Repentance” or “turning toward God” is seen as corruption’s only remedy; to repair the ill results of disobedience, people must once again follow the religion that God has sent down for them.

Obedience, through which human beings can carry the Trust, depends upon right faith and practice, which in the Islamic view can be defined as the “profession of God’s Unity” (*tawh  d*) on all levels – in the heart, mind, soul, and body. God’s One Reality is the source of peace and harmony, while obedience to Him roots out corruption from the earth. The connection between the Divine Unity and the disappearance of corruption is clearly expressed in the verse, “Why, were there gods in earth and heaven other than God, earth and heaven would surely be corrupted” (Qur’^{an} 21: 22).

Human disobedience and the resulting corruption in the earth grow up out of the failure to affirm God’s Unity, also called the “association of other divinities with God” (*shirk*), the only sin that cannot be forgiven (Qur’^{an} 4: 48, 116). This erroneous introduction of multiplicity into the Single Source and Centre leads to disequilibrium and dispersion – or an encounter with the full force of the Divine Wrath – since the “association” or “idol-worshipper” (*musrik*) in effect negates any possibility of linking himself with the Centre; he cannot possibly achieve peace, which depends upon contact and harmony with Unity, so he remains in conflict and war. More often than not the false

divinity that a person “associates” with God is self-will, ego-centric desires, or “caprice” (*hawā*). In the words of the Qur’ān:

Have you seen him who has taken his caprice to be his god? (Qur’ān 25: 43, 45: 23).

Who is further astray than he who follows his caprice without Guidance from God? (Qur’ān 28: 5).

Once people begin to obey their own whims and desires instead of following God’s revealed guidance, they are acting “as if there were gods in earth and heaven other God”. The result can only be the earth’s corruption, the dissolution of the kingdom over which they were made vicegerents. Hence the Qur’ān says,

Had the Real (*al-ʿĀqq*) followed their caprices the heavens and the earth and whosoever is in them would have been corrupted (Qur’ān 23: 71).

Only God’s Mercy keeps the universe intact despite people’s rejection of the Divine Command and their eager attempts to embrace His Wrath.

The opposite of *Fasād* “corruption” is *ʿĀlā* “soundness, rightness, goodness, wholeness, wholesomeness, holiness”. The Arabic term most commonly used for peace among nations is *ʿĀlā*, a word derived from the same root and closely connected in meaning. The literal sense of *ʿĀlā* is to set things right or to make things good, sound, and whole. To establish *ʿĀlā* in a conflict is to bring about a reconciliation between the opposing parties. The Qur’ān employs the word in a single instance, in the sense of reconciliation between husband and wife (4: 128). More importantly, the Qur’ān employs the term *ʿĀlā* and the adjectival form *salī* in more than 120 instances to refer to an ideal activity or situation which human beings must strive to achieve. “Wholesome works” (*ʿamal salīh or salībat*) is the Qur’ān term for that activity which brings human beings into harmony with the divine command. In other words, it is the activity which erases corruption and establishes peace.

Obey not the commandment of the prodigal, who work corruption in the earth and fail to make things wholesome (Qur’ān 26: 152).

Or again, the Qur'ān quotes Moses' words to his brother Aaron:

Be my successor among my people, and make things wholesome; do not follow the way of the workers of corruption! (Qur'ān 7: 142).

The expression, “Those who have faith and perform wholesome works”, employed in the Qur'ān fifty-three times, has become a set phrase referring to good Muslims.

Thorough wholesome works the faithful are able to overcome corruption and dispersion and move toward peace, harmony, and wholeness. This “vertical” movement toward God is referred to in the Qur'ānic verse, “To Him good words go up, and the wholesome work – He uplifts it” (35: 10). In short, those who move toward God's Mercy and avoid His Wrath, who strive to achieve His Peace and avoid conflict with Him, will reach nearness to Him and Paradise.

Surely those who have faith, and those of the Jewry, the Sabaeans, and the Christians, whosoever has faith in God and the Last Day and performs wholesome works – no fear shall be upon them, neither shall they sorrow. (Qur'ān 5: 69).

Whosoever, male or female, does a wholesome deed, having faith, We shall assuredly give them to live a goodly life. (Qur'ān 16: 97).

I [God] am All-forgiving to him who repents, has faith, does wholesome deeds, and follows guidance (Qur'ān 20: 82).

Though a certain opposition and strife is inherent to existence, the world remains in relative equilibrium so long as human beings attempt to carry out their duties as God's vicegerents upon the earth by performing wholesome works. These duties are summarized by the term *islām*, which means literally “submission”, that is, to the Will of God, or to His command. Since there are two commands, there are two kinds of submission: On the one hand all things submit to the engendering command. In other words, all things in the universe are “submitters” or “muslims” through their created natures. That is why everything in the heavens and the earth sings God's praises. On the other hand only those human beings who submit themselves to the prescriptive command can be called “muslims” in the more specific sense of

having submitted their own wills to God's Will. (The Qur'«n does not limit this term to the followers of Islam, since for example, it applies it to Abraham and the apostles of Jesus [13: 67, 5:111].)

The word *isl«m* derives from the same root as *sak«m*, "peace". The literal sense of the term is to become free or safe from something, or to gain peace in respect to it, The implication is that through submitting one's will to God's Will, one gains safety from error, deviation, and corruption. One is integrated into the Divine Unity and hence put into harmony with the opposing yet complementary properties of the Divine Names. One has faith and performs wholesome works, which provide a remedy for the corruption that has taken place in the land and the sea at the hands of those human beings who have not carried the Trust. Hence submission to God brings about peace in the sense of *sak«m* and *ÁulÁ*: In the first sense, one gains the Peace of God, and in the second one gains a wholesome and peaceful relationship with al His creatures, a relationship through which the created world is put into correct equilibrium with its Divine Source.

In order to understand the Islamic idea of peace (*ÁulÁ*) in the world, we need a clear conception of the preliminary peace (*sak«m*) which must be established between human beings and God. In the Qur'«nic view, peace with God necessitates "war" against all tendencies that tend to dispersion and disequilibrium. It demands a movement towards the Centre—Mercy and Peace – and an active opposition against all forces that draw away the Centre. In other words, to be at peace with God is to be at war with error and caprice, which are the tendencies within ourselves which try to draw us away from Him.

But "peace" is not necessarily good, since itself the word merely defines a relationship among various forces. We have to ask about the nature of those forces. Peace cannot be good if it means harmony and equilibrium with dispersion, whether of the inward kind, which the Qur'«n calls "caprice," or the outward kind, which it calls "this world" (*al-duny«*). "Satan" personifies both the inward and the outward dispersive movements, since he works in the world as well as in ourselves.

Nor is "war" necessarily good, since in fact most people fight not against dispersive tendencies but along with them. In other words, most people

follow the natural movement of “this world”, the “path of least resistance” that draws them away from the Centre. The Qur’ \`n refers to them as “those who have gone astray” (*al- \`i llun*) if not “those toward whom God is Wrathful” (*al-maghdubun ‘alayhim*), whom it also calls God’s “enemies” (*a’d \`*).

It is important to note that “peace with this world” is not the same as “peace with creation. In fact, the two are diametrically opposed. To live in peace with this world (*al-duny \`*) is to be in harmony with those tendencies in the created world which take human beings away from God, while to live in peace with creation (*al-k \` halq*) is to act as God’s vicegerent on the basis of having been integrated into the Divine Unity and Peace; it is to contribute towards bringing all creatures under the sway of equilibrium and harmony.

In order to give a bare introduction to some of the basic Qur’ \`n ic ideas concerning peace and war, we will outline here two kinds of peace and two kind of war:

1. Peace with God.
2. Peace with caprice and this world.
3. War for God’s sake.
4. War against God.

1. **Peace with God.** Strictly speaking, peace belongs to God alone. But nearness to God, however envisaged, results in harmony with Him and therefore, relative peace. Hence the Qur’ \`n refers to Paradise as the Abode of Peace (6: 127, 10: 25). The Muslim greeting, “Peace be upon you”, is the formula of welcome by which the angels accept the blessed into Paradise, and there the blessed exchange it among themselves (Qur’ \`n : 7: 46, 10: 10, 13: 24, 14: 23, etc.). This may be interpreted to mean, “May you and your religion be free from defects and imperfections”, or, more simply “May Peace, God, be with you.” To achieve peace in this world and the next, people must follow God’s guidance, which will take them back to the luminous Centre, far from the shadows of dispersion and error.

There has come to you from God a Light and a Book Manifest, whereby God guides whosoever follows His good pleasure in the ways of Peace; He brings them forth from the shadows into the Light by His leave; and He guides them to a Straight Path, (Qur’ \`n : 5: 16).

The Straight Path is the path of Islam, that is, submission to God’s Will and obedience to His prescriptive command.

Obey God, and obey the Messenger; ... if you obey the Messenger, you will be guided. (Qur'ān: 24: 54)

Whose obeys God and His Messenger, He will admit him into gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever; that is the might triumph. (Qur'ān: 4: 13)

The faithful ... obey God and His Messenger. Those, upon them God will have Mercy. (Qur'ān (9: 71).

God ever guides those who have faith to a Straight Path. (Qur'ān 22: 54)

Those who have been guided to God and who have reached peace with Him are called His “friends”. “Surely God’s friends, no fear shall be upon them, neither shall they sorrow” (Qur'ān 10: 62). Their hearts are “at rest” with God, or more specifically, with His “remembrance” (*dhikr*).

God wrought this not, save as good tidings, and that your hearts might be at rest; victory comes only from God. (Qur'ān 8: 10)

In God’s remembrance are at rest the hearts of those who have faith and do wholesome deeds. (Qur'ān 13: 28)

O, soul at rest with God, return to thy Lord, well-pleased well pleasing! (Qur'ān 89: 28)

When God is pleased with His servants, they also are pleased with Him; this is a “mighty triumph” (Qur'ān 5: 119, 9: 100, 58: 22).

2. **Peace with caprice and this world.** If a person is at peace with this lower world, he or she is one of the unbelievers, who have made their own caprice into a god. Paradise is the Abode of Peace, while life in this world is “naught but a sport and a diversion; surely the Last Abode is better for those who are god-fearing” (6: 32). One cannot take the rectification of this world’s situation as one’s goal, since this world in itself, considered independently of the God who gives it subsistence, has no stability or permanence.

The likeness of this life is as water that We send down out of heaven, the plants of the earth, whereof men and cattle eat, mingle with it, till, when the earth has taken on its glitter and has decked itself fair, and its inhabitants think they have power over it, our command comes upon it by night or day, and We make it stubble, as though yesterday it flourished not (Qur'ān 10: 24).

The unbelievers see nothing but this world and their own egocentric desires; they are heedless of God (*ghaflah*), never remembering Him. The faithful are at rest with Him and pleased with Him, while the unbelievers are pleased with this world:

Surely those who look not to encounter Us and are well-pleased with the present life and are at rest in it, and those who are heedless of Our signs, those, their refuge is the Fire. (Qur'«n 10: 7).

The “submission” of such people is to their own lower selves: “The evildoers follow their own caprices, without knowledge They have not helpers” (Qur'«n 30: 29)

3. **War for God's sake.** “peace with God” is a goal that the faithful must strive to reach, not their actual situation. It cannot be actualized if they take a passive stance toward existence, that is, if they accept their own situation as good and desirable. Peace can only come from obedience toward God and submission to His command. Hence, it demands great activity. Human beings must apply God's commands and prohibitions to every dimension of life. The basic practice that Islam requires of all its followers are known as the Five Pillars: the attestation of Divine Unity (*shah«da*), the daily prayers, paying the alms tax, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and making the pilgrimage to Makkah. But these and the other rules and regulations set down in the Shari'ah or Divine Law are only the outward shell of Islam; the full enactment of Islam's requirements demands also the perfection of virtue (*ihs«n*) through the actualization of the human theomorphic nature (*ta'allub*). In other words, to be “Muslims” in the true and full sense, people must dedicate themselves to God on every level of their existence; this is the only way that *taw««d* or the “profession of God's Unity” can be realized. God's Oneness demands that human beings conform to His nature not only in their deeds and activities but also in their hearts, minds, and souls. People must strive to gain nearness to God not only through wholesome works, which eliminate corruption and establish peace in the outside world, but also through the perfection of the inside world of their own souls.

One Qur'«nic term that describes human efforts to realize *taw«bid* on all levels is *jihad*, which means literally “to struggle, to strive”. This term commonly refers to the most outward and obvious kind of struggle, the war against the unbelievers on the field of battle. In this sense it has often been translated as “holy war”, an expression that is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons, not least being the fact that it conjures up a stereotyped picture in

the minds of most Westerners.³³ The term *jihad* has been used in Islamic history for practically any war fought by a Muslim king, whatever the motives for engaging in the war might have been. To suggest that these motives have always been considered “holy” is to ignore the fact that in many cases religious authorities did not consider these wars valid, since Islamic law lays down stringent rules that must be followed before *jihad* can be undertaken; moreover kings rarely consulted with those religious authorities who might put the objective standards of the Law before the subjective interests of the kingdom. “Holy war” can be a satisfactory translation of *jihad* only in the deepest and most inward sense of the term, that is, the struggle against God’s enemies within the soul in the effort to attain human perfection and sanctity. In the present context we will translate the term in its literal sense as “struggle” in order to bring out its broad implications.

The Qur’ān employs the word *jihad* and its derivatives thirty-five times, often with obvious reference to specific historical situations and the outward fight (*qit’āl*) against the unbelievers who were opposed to the early Muslim community. But several verses have a clear significance transcending specific events, e.g., “Struggle for God as is His due” (22: 78). In explaining the

³³ On *Jihad* cf. M. Khaddury, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, chapter 7; and Peters, *Islam and Colonialism*. Peters’ summary of Western stereotype (pp. 4-5) is worth quoting: “The Islamic doctrine of jihad has always appealed to Western imagination. The image of the dreadful Turk, clad in a long robe and brandishing his scimitar, ready to slaughter any infidel that might come his way and would refuse to be converted to the religion of Mahomet, has been a stereotype in Western literature for a long time. Nowadays this image has been replaced by that of the Arab ‘terrorist’ in battledress, armed with a Kalashnikov gun and prepared to murder in cold blood innocent Jewish and Christian women and children. The assumption underlying these stereotypes is that Moslems, often loosely called Arabs, are innately bloodthirsty and inimical towards persons of a different persuasion, and that owing to their religion, which allegedly preaches intolerance, fanaticism and continuous warfare against unbelievers. This view of Islam and Moslems, which developed in the Middle Ages, acquired new life and vigour in the era of European imperialism. Moslems were depicted as backward, fanatic and bellicose, in order to justify colonial expansion with the argument that it served the spread of civilization, which the French called *mission civilisatrice*. At the same time, this offered a convenient pretext for use of force against the indigenous population, for behind the outward appearance of submissiveness of the colonized Moslems, the colonizers saw the continuous danger of rebelliousness lurking, nourished by the idea of jihad and waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself”.

meaning of this verse the commentators distinguish between the outward and inward struggles and cite the saying of the Prophet when he came back and from the Battle of Tabuk in 631, one year before his death: “I have returned from the Lesser Struggle to the Greater Struggle”, that is, from the struggle against the unbelievers to the struggle against caprice and the lower soul. The same sources cite a saying ‘Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law, according to which struggle is of three kinds: with the hand (i. e., the sword), according to which struggle is of three kinds: with the hand (i. e., the sword), the tongue (by “commanding good and forbidding evil”, cf. Qur’ \AA n 3: 110, 9: 71, etc.) and the heart (by remembering God).³⁴ Most authorities agree that the inward and greater struggle takes precedence over the outward and lesser struggle, since the inward struggle is incumbent upon the faithful at all times and in all places, while the outward struggle depends upon circumstances; generations or centuries may pass before the authorities of the Law are able to agree on an instance in which the outward struggle may be fought.

The Law or Shari‘ah deals only with the domain of action, not with intentions and spirituality, which are the domain of the inward struggle. Those authorities who specialized in the inward and spiritual domain usually described the greater struggle in terms of the transformation of the should to be achieved through spiritual practice, referring to it by the term *mujahadah*, which is a different form of the term jihad.³⁵ Hence the distinction between the outward and inward kinds of struggle came to be reflected in these two forms of a single word; the authorities who speak about one or the other refer to the same Qur’ \AA nic verses and prophetic sayings to prove their points. Thus for example, the great al-Ghazali (d. 1111) hardly mentions *jihad* in his four volume masterpiece *L’ \AA ya’ ‘ul \AA m al-d \AA n* except to show that the inward struggle is more fundamental to the religious life than the outward struggle; but he refers to *mujahada* in detail.³⁶

In short, the way to God is to struggle against oneself and against those who are opposed to Him.

³⁴ Cf. Maybudi, *Kashf al-asrar*, ed. A. A. Hikmat, Tehran, VI, p. 405; III, p. 213; also Baydawl, *Tafsir*, on Qur’ \AA n 22:78.

³⁵ Both *Jihad* and *mujahada* are *ma‘ \AA dars* or verbal nouns representing the third form of the Arabic Verb. Either may be used to refer to the “struggle” that the Qur’ \AA n usually mentions in verbal form.

³⁶ E.g. *L’ \AA ya’ ‘ul \AA m al-d \AA n*, Cairo, 1309/1939, III, pp. 42, 57.

Obey not the unbelievers, but struggle against them mightily (Qur'«n 25: 52)
Whosoever struggles, struggles only for his own soul; surely God is independent of all the worlds (Qur'«n 29: 6)

Like "Struggle", the word "fight" is used frequently in the Qur'«n and is interpreted in both an outward and inward sense.

So let them who sell the present life for the next world fight in the way of God ... Those who have faith fight in the way of God, and the unbelievers fight in the idols' way. Fight you therefore against the friends of Satan. (4: 74-76).

The aim of the inward warfare is to attain peace with God, while the aim of the outward warfare is to rectify the corruption worked in the earth by those who have failed to live up to their responsibilities as God's vicegerents. Only then can relative peace and harmony be established among the contending forces of this world. The Qur'«n makes this point in retelling the Story of David and Goliath:

And they routed them, by the leave of God. David slew Goliath and God gave him the kingship and Wisdom, and He taught him such as He willed. Had God not driven back the people, some by means of others, the earth had surely been corrupted; but God is bounteous unto all the worlds" (2: 251; et. 5: 33)

The faithful are at peace with God, and with the friends of God, but at war with His enemies;

Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are hard again the unbelievers, merciful to one another (Qur'«n 48: 29).

Oh you have faith, whosoever of you turns from his religion, God will assuredly bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble towards the faithful, disdainful toward the unbelievers, men who struggle in the way of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproach (Qur'«n 5: 54).

4. **War against God.** War against God, like struggling in God's path, may be outward or inward. The outward war takes place with the sword, the inward with the heart. In both cases those who fight this war have been overcome by unbelief (*kufr*— literally, "Ingratitude") and disobedience toward God's prescriptive command. The unbelievers consider God their enemy (2: 98, 8: 60, 9: 114), and their recompense is the Fire (41: 28). The faithful struggle in the path of God, while the unbelievers strive to prevent others from entering this path. "Surely those who disbelieve and bar from the way of God have gone astray into far error" (4: 167; cf. 9: 34, 11: 19, 16: 88, etc.

They have taken up the work of Satan, who “desires to precipitate enmity and hatred among you ... and to bar you from the remembrance of God and from prayer” (5: 91)

This first survey of Qur’anic imagery could be extended indefinitely by further quotations from the Qur’an, the Hadith, and Islamic literature in general. But our conclusion would be the same: Islam considers peace in God as the goal of human life, while war against His enemies –in particular against the caprice of the human soul– is the only way to achieve this peace. But people cannot have peace at the present moment as long as they remain distant from God. To be with Him– and thus to become fully human – they have to struggle against everything that turns them away from their duties as His vicegerents. Only the greatest human beings – the prophets and those men and women who have attained to God’s good pleasure and proximity already in this life– have attained peace with God, their hearts being “at rest” with Him. But this inward peace does not contradict outward effort and strife, as the life of the Prophet Muhammad proves. Long after he had won the inward and greater struggle, he had to continue with the lesser struggle. Moreover, he never for a moment gave up the outward forms of the greater struggle, e.g., prayer, fasting, and other duties incumbent upon all Muslims. That is why the Muslim authorities point out that *jihad/mujahada* remains the lot of human beings as long as they continue to exist within the domain where God has prescribed (*taklâf*) religious duties for them, that is, as long as they live in this world. Full and total peace will not be achieved until they reach the Abode of Peace, which cannot be found on this plane of existence.

War and strife accompany human beings in the present world because they and all created things are evanescent and perishing. The changing nature of all creatures brings about opposition and conflict. To make the most of this conflict people must put themselves in harmony with Peace, the Divine Reality. In function of Peace they can struggle to bring relative harmony into the world by performing wholesome works and thereby eliminating “corruption”. As long as people want to remain human, they are forced to engage in the greater and inward struggle. If they do not carry the Trust they will enter into the ranks of the ungrateful and irresponsible infidels, and “their refuge will be the Fire”.

That the world is full of war and strife is a sign of God's Mercy, which always precedes His Wrath. War and conflict remind human beings that God alone is Peace. If people want peace, they must struggle in the way of God, not in the way of their own desires, no matter how grand may be their vision of a "better society" or a "happier world". They cannot escape turmoil by seeking to overcome it on its own level; the more they try to do so, the more it will engulf them. The history of the world during the past 200 years is all the proof this statement needs.

Islam offers no simple method of establishing peace on earth; the causes of the enormous social disequilibriums that face us throughout the world are built into the presuppositions upon which modern culture and contemporary life-styles are based. To solve the "problem of Islam" that faces us in the Middle East today, we have to solve the "problem of the human race" that faces us wherever we look, especially inside our own hearts. We cannot achieve real peace in the Middle East or anywhere else until we find it in ourselves.