

Arab Republic of Egypt  
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Center for Islamic Studies and Encyclopedia

# **Peace from an Islamic Standpoint**

**World Peace as Concept and Necessity**

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## Introduction

When we talk about the subject of peace, we are talking about something, which concerns us all. But what actually is peace? We can best think about it by truly seeking it.

Peace always has to be created anew, for without it life would cease. Muslims strive for it as the highest goal, which Islam impresses upon them.

In doing so, they come into conflict with all human beings who pursue other aims. However, their religion obliges them to pursue their goal in a peaceful way. Defense is permissible for them, but not aggression.

According to the Islamic view, peace is at one and the same time an achievement of man and a gift of God. Seen from the human point of view this means that he has to bring his thought and action into harmony, into accord. In this way integrity develops. This is the fertile soil, which enables peace to grow.

Looked at from this angle, peace is, in the final analysis, the goal as well as the fulfillment of human life. As such, it is also a great deal more. It is the salvation of every human being who seeks peace. As far as that goes, it is something, which every human being has to create for himself or herself, namely through his or her devotion to God. Peace, from an Islamic point of view, is an attribute of God. God, says the Qur'an (59, 23), is "the Source of Peace". The Arabic word for peace, *salam*, also means salvation.

As I shall hereafter elaborate in detail, peace is, for every human being who seeks it, both the goal and the path toward that goal. General experience teaches that the human being who bears peace within him can also create peace in

the world around him. This is explained by the Islamic doctrine that, in the last analysis, all human beings are related to one another: they all belong to the huge family of mankind and all share the same line of descent from the first couple. Therefore, he who seeks peace seeks it both for himself and for his fellow human beings. As long as he seeks peace only for himself he will lose his way to the goal of peace. For peace is the way towards the spiritual unity of human beings. They are unable to achieve that on their own. God, who desires the salvation of all human beings, directs them in this. This direction begins with the call to peace. For this call comes from God.

"God", it is written in the Qur'an (10, 25), "doth call to the Home of Peace."

This appeal for peace is directed towards both the individual human being and all human societies. Peace enables an individual human being to achieve tranquillity of soul and human societies to live in concord with one another.

From the Islamic point of view, there is only one God for all individual human beings. This one God desires the salvation of all human beings without any discrimination. He has created them so that they may travel the path of peace to him. This path is straight. He wants human beings to develop their humanity. When God summons human beings to the path of peace, he is summoning them to himself.

The path of peace under the direction promised by God means, according to the teachings of the Qur'an, service to the divine creation which was created for us (cf. Qur'an 45,13). This is the true destiny of mankind, which is why it is only in performing this service that human life acquires meaning and purpose.

However, he who devotes himself to the material things of this world or seeks to rule over them as if they were a goal

in themselves dissipates his strength. He is therefore unable to find any real inner peace. Thus he is also unable to create peace in the world around him. He remains on the surface of life, which quickly passes, and he passes away with it. Even the whole gamut of religious ritual would not be enough, on its own, to save man. Rituals are intended to remind man that he is the shepherd of Creation.

The actual divine service is the devotion with which the shepherd looks after the creatures that are entrusted to his care. Every human being is summoned to be a shepherd in this way within his sphere of responsibility. There is a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, where he speaks about the circles of human responsibility. It reads:

"Everyone of you is a shepherd and responsible for his flock. The head of the government is a shepherd and responsible for his subjects; the man is a shepherd for his family and responsible for the members of his family; and the woman is a shepherdess in her house and answerable for her flock; and the servant is a shepherd as far as the property of his master is concerned and responsible for it."

The word *Islam*, which derives from the same root as the Arabic word for peace, means devotion. It means the devotion of believers to God. Religious belief enables the human being to meet his true responsibility. For in believing he entrusts himself to divine leadership and help. In doing so he is empowered to perform creative acts. Instead of being aggressive and destructive, he becomes peaceful and constructive, because he helps to promote peace.

Islam teaches that the way of peace is straight. Even a short deliberation can give an indication of this.

Every human being who strives for peace can only really do so if he leaves space for it. This means that he has to allow his fellow human beings and the world around him to follow the same goal and that he also has to help them on

their way towards it. If he does not do this, he immediately abandons the path of peace.

As this thought shows, peace is not only the aim, one which, in the final analysis, is common to all human beings and towards which Islam points the way. Peace is, from an Islamic point of view, at the same time also the only way to peace. It is also the only way towards peace for humanity.

It is in order to keep to this path and not go astray upon other paths that Muslims pray every day. Every Muslim turns round five times at the end of his prayers and utters the salutation "Peace be with you!", saluting first the right side of the world and then the left side of the world with the same words. Muslims also greet each other generally in this manner. It is true that one has to make an effort to work for peace and that self-discipline is required. Yet the difficulty of making the necessary exertion is matched by a corresponding human capacity. Islam does not believe that one should demand too much from man. But it teaches that the greater the exertion, the greater the profit which is drawn from it. When peace is seen to be what it really is, namely salvation, how can one not strive to -achieve it? Yet it is also more than that, it is namely the condition of life in our world.

### **I. Peace as the Condition of Life in Our World**

If we look at present-day life, we can see that the problem of peace now preoccupies or at least concerns more or less the whole world. Everyone tends to agree that it is worth striving for and even necessary. Unfortunately, however, the way human beings act is usually anything but peaceful. However, as we have already mentioned, unjust and aggressive action cannot produce peace. Purely theoretical considerations, which are not followed by corresponding action, also cannot

come up with peace. The more we want to analyze what peace is and how it can be attained, the more it seems to elude us. As already mentioned, this is what happens when we do not make the effort to translate our thought into appropriate and feasible action. Yet if we do, we may find, for example, that what seems to be a sacrifice, subsequently yields a profit and enrichment. From an Islamic point of view, if one wishes to develop one's reason, it is necessary for action and thought to be as closely connected as possible.

Yet for this one needs faith. It is written in the Qur'an (26,226) that people without faith, "say what they practice not".

Only independent thought, following the trail of reality, enables man to translate his thinking into action and to behave in accordance with his words. His words follows the deed.

When we talk of peace today - for example, in terms of the conclusion of a peace treaty, peacetime strength, peace process or inner peace - it often proves, if one tries to achieve it, to be rather intangible or fleeting and unstable. For peace requires a balance which is difficult to achieve. The only form in which peace still appears as a constant today is peace as the gift and promise of God.

Islam sees the central human task as being that of gaining the love of God and thus peace. Therefore, when we speak about peace, we come to the question of the development of man, The main obstacle standing in the way of peace today is the problem of the difference between the poor and the rich parts of the world, as far as opportunities of development are concerned. As is recognized almost unanimously today, the problem of peace involves the question of how we can ensure that as many people as possible in all parts of the world have the freedom and thus the chances of development that they need.

Muslims make a contribution to the peace effort in trying to follow the teaching of Islam.

In fact, generally speaking, when we look more closely, the subject of peace, like that of life itself, is inexhaustible. It has something to do with both the unity and the variety of human existence. As an aim, peace unites man's deepest desires and highest strivings. However, with the help of God, it also reveals to each human being his own way to achieve it, which he then has to struggle for to follow through his own personal efforts, in accordance with his talents. The same applies, in a figurative sense, to the various religious, national and cultural communities, and in fact to every community. And today the emerging world community is striving for peace.

As far as the problem of the differences between human communities is concerned, Islam teaches that variety makes unity possible. For this is where man's task lies, which is why in the Qur'an it is written: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other." (49,13).

Above and beyond all differences, the human being who recognizes himself knows himself in other human beings. This enables him to engage in creative work with others, and to be genuinely tolerant and ready to try to understand others. The whole creation reveals itself to anyone who recognizes himself as one of its creatures. He or she sees the various paths followed by human communities as paths towards a goal, which is basically the same. The whole of creation points towards this path. It is a straight path, and yet it is manifold. For it is always being walked on anew. Every generation has to find its own new solutions to the problem of peace. Hope lies in the regeneration of the world, which thus becomes possible. Islam teaches this continuous new

beginning, which is why the new moon, as a symbol of the new beginning, has become the symbol of Islam. As such, considered as a goal, peace has a clearly delineated out-line. Yet when we speak of the way towards it, it often becomes hidden and all too often unrecognizable.

It is due to this fact that people make statements such as 'the unattainable dream of and desire for peace is as old as mankind itself. It can only be striven for in an experimental manner, with varying degrees of success. It cannot be aimed at directly'. Yet that applies to all ideals. This does not make them less worthwhile. For where would we be without them? Or perhaps we should ask more concretely: 'Where are we without them?' All those who place peace beyond our reach as something unattainable for man have not understood the real nature of peace. For, in reality, it is something, which is as necessary for life as the air we need in order to breathe. Without peace, life ceases. This, at any rate, is the situation from the Islamic point of view.

The present-day world situation has made us clearly aware of the necessity of peace. If peace is the central demand of religion, then this message, which is common to all religions, has become a very real necessity for us today. This demand requires that human beings, in peaceful cooperation and mutual tolerance, create chances for everybody, especially the poor and the oppressed, thus creating a peaceful world. In view of the development of our present world society, the standpoint that peace is but a pipe-dream, a fiction which has nothing to do with reality, is no longer sustainable. In the same measure - this much has also become clear - peace is not to be found in a peace process which might proceed quite automatically of its own accord. On the contrary, it is a task, which has to be mastered by all of us together. It has today become clear, at least to all clear-

thinking people with a sense of responsibility that senseless wars, aggression and the desire for expansion, just like passivity and apathy, are increasingly destroying not only our chances of peace, but also the World itself. For this reason we must finally learn to act in accordance with our knowledge and to intervene in this process of destruction, so that we might be able to bring it to a halt.

Today, the whole world is ruled by means of our very highly developed scientific knowledge and technology, and we are always pushing further and further into outer space. Yet at the same time there is a very real danger that the world is slipping from our grasp. For we still know far too little about human beings themselves. Science still has much to investigate in this area. Nevertheless - and this is important - these investigations have to take the right direction. It ought to be a case of emphasizing human reason as a creative inheritance and thus guaranteeing and deepening respect for human life. Experimentation with nature, which has been so successful but which has also destroyed so much life on earth, has increasingly become experimentation with mankind itself. In way the last bastion of nature is being stormed, which contains the possibility of peace among human beings and for the world, for this earth which has almost been exploited to destruction

Man is - in contrast to the rest of nature - a creature that has to create peace if it wants to live. Today we are more or less aware of that fact, yet in thinking about the goal of peace we frequently forget that peace also has to be the way to achieve peace; Everything points to the fact that the lack of peace incur world is threatening to destroy the world completely and that only our united efforts to achieve peace can save it.

The key word for us all here is the word Justice. And with justice we touch upon the word Truth for what is truly just?

Efforts to achieve peace can begin anywhere, even with the attempt to understand the concept of 'peace'. After all, we have a word for peace in all languages. Whether we say peace, *Paix, Friede or Salam*, we mean the same thing. It is the same for us all. Yet it is often almost impossible to discover what this word actually means. The aim of modern technology and science is to comprehend and analyze objects and from that starting position to govern. With these methods they increasingly occupy even language itself. Yet reason, the organ of the spirit in man, seeks more than that. It wants to listen to what is true and lead mankind toward the truth. The human being has to be truthful in this sense, in order to be able to create peace and to be able to create in peace, so that he needs not only the sciences but also religion in order to be able to arrive at the truth, At the very latest, this becomes clear when we want to speak about peace for mankind, because for mankind peace is a vital necessity. In this way we can comprehend the necessity of peace as an object. Yet we still do not have it within our sight. For peace is more than just something which is vitally necessary for us.

The actual state of affairs is really very simple. Through our injustice we make peace more and more impossible. In striving to dominate and exploit others - in the last analysis a pointless activity - we drive peace away.

Unfortunately, even religions are all too often used as a means of dominating others, in order to gain worldly power and prestige for themselves. Has that not been going on too long already? We need religion. But we have to understand it correctly. According to their aims, religions should be instruments of peace and compete with one another in educating people to live in peace. On this head the Qur'an says: 'verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). [...] Only

those are Believers who [...] have striven with their belongings and their persons in the Cause of God: such are the sincere ones." (49,13.15).

Religions should call upon people to compete with one another for good deeds, not for power. Islam teaches that it is the just and merciful acts which lead us to the experience of peace and through which we can further the cause of peace. Purely theoretical analysis, without any corresponding action, cannot help us to find the way to peace.

Contemporary German peace research characterizes peace quite rightly as a fundamentally human problem. Its philosophical importance has only recently become evident. On the other hand, "its status as a principle of thought and action has still received very little attention at all". In the view of German peace research, world peace has become "a condition of life in the age of science and technology".

Already *Kant* says, peace is what humanity should strive for with all its might, since the practical reasons for accepting the rational principles of 'God' and 'Immortality' are stronger than those for doubting them.

## **II. The Islamic Concept of Peace**

Only the language of peace, i.e. a truly just action and the striving towards it, can lead to the rational development of man and to understanding among human beings and productive collaboration between them. It is the only language which is truly understood universally, for it speaks the words of Justice and of its necessary complement, Mercy. And since human beings can never be perfect however hard they may try, they need this complement.

From an Islamic point of view, we do not choose peace; rather, peace chooses us. Yet we can decide to follow the path toward peace, decide to act justly. Justice, in the eyes of

Islam, is one of the attributes of God. The religious history of mankind clearly demonstrates how this is to be understood.

According to the teaching of the Qur'an, man was created for Paradise, the Garden of Peace. Yet he had to leave it because he did not obey God. Even today, when we spend some time in a peaceful place, we compare it with paradise. Paradise is not lost. The divine revelations show the way back to this place of all-embracing harmony to all those who seek the path. This is the path, which the sincere man follows. He is God's representative on earth

God calls human beings to the place of peace. He helps them along the path if they have faith in him. Whoever sets out upon the path of God receives from him his *sakina*, which means the tranquillity of his presence (Qur'an 9,26.40). This *sakina*, peace in the heart of the believer, strengthens him in his faith. Thus it becomes possible for him to make greater efforts towards justice and peace. "It is He Who sent down Tranquillity", says the Qur'an (48,4) "into the hearts of the Believers, that they may add Faith to their Faith."

Throughout the history of mankind, all the various written statements on the subject of peace have taught that it is a spiritual talent, which is acquired through personal effort. It is something with which individual people or human communities, or whole nations or cultures are endowed.

From an Islamic point of view, religion has always, ever since the very beginning of humanity, been the act of man surrendering to God, i.e. Islam (Qur'an 3,19).

One common characteristic of peace that emerges from all these statements is that it tends to be more difficult to achieve with worldly privileges than without them. In the last analysis, the question of peace decides what a human being is.

Islam teaches man that the source of peace is to be found not outside of himself but primarily within him. It teaches him to strive for independence and a critical attitude in his thinking. In this way he develops his intelligence. This is the divine spirit with which man was endowed upon being created (Qur'an 15,29) and it exists in potential form in every human being. It is this which makes it possible for him to decide to seek peace and, furthermore, to create peace. If we think about our experiences in an intelligent way and critically examine them, we see that peace cannot be found in the external world. However, as soon as we experience the world and ourselves not as a simple material fact but as Creation, then the world of peace opens up to us. Material possession of the whole world could not, on its own, lead to peace. Peace is something which, from an Islamic point of view, is actually lived by the human being, or as the Qur'an puts it: "[...] in heaven is your Sustenance, as (also) that which ye are promised." (51,22).

For, after all, one might well ask: what does man live from? just as the earth needs rain in order to bring forth fruit, the human being needs peace in order to live, peace which comes to him from above, if he gives it the chance to do so. From a Qur'anic standpoint man lives through the peace of heaven. This is just as true, says the Qur'an (51,23), as the fact "that ye can speak".

In actual fact, human language is what has long distinguished man as an exceptional being in creation. This fact is not at all as self-evident as we might perhaps think it is, simply because we are so accustomed to speech. Like reason itself, language can convey certainty about the existence of the truth.

Convinced of the truth, man recognizes everywhere in the world as well as within himself the divine signs of which the Qur'an speaks (51,20-22 etc.). For God speaks to the human

beings who are ready to listen to him. Through his words, which cannot be limited (Qur'an 18,109), he leads people along the path which leads to him and thus to their actual home, to peace.

Yet the Qur'an also stresses the fact that it is by no means enough to listen. One must also develop one's own power of reason and use it independently. Only by using his freedom in this way can man arrive at the decisive perceptions possible through his intelligence. This enables him to act in a conscious, responsible, and thus creative manner.

Which is why the famous Islamic thinker *Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali* says:

"Only he who owns fire can warm himself with it, not he who has simply heard of it." If we choose peace as a goal, the reality of peace itself, then the way to peace opens up to us

### **III. The Islamic Path to Peace**

For a long stretch of the path to peace man is led through many trials and temptations. The human being is confronted with evil and [...] good" (temptations) (Qur'an 21,35). One has to face these trials with patience and by continuing to strive for Truth. Then they make the human being stronger.

The love of the creator for his creation and especially for human beings is revealed in human beings who follow the path to peace. Like divine signs, we can discover the traces of peace everywhere in the world. The witnesses of peace appear wherever the various cultures of mankind have formed human societies. The roots of these cultures were the religions and that is why these cultures were able to establish order in their societies.

The Qur'an teaches that the creation arose already ordered. It also indicates how the creation is conceived from both its beginning and its end. Within this creation man has a

very special position. In contrast with the rest of creation, every human being is free to decide whether to fill this position or to reject it.

If he accepts it, then he declares himself ready to exercise the rights and obligations which go with it. In leading his life, he is responsible to God. His freedom increases, when he acts in a responsible manner and decreases, when he acts in an unscrupulous way. Freedom of course does not mean choosing something arbitrarily. For freedom would then have no purpose. Through making intelligent decisions, and with the help of his freedom, man can arrive at the highest place within the Creation. He can become the vicegerent of God. Yet if he makes the wrong decision, he may fall very far indeed, even to that place where peace no longer exists.

In the Qur'an it is written that one should turn with one's own inner self to the religion created by God (cf. 30,30-32). The true religion is to affirm Creation and oneself as part of that Creation. Pure faith is faith in a God of all mankind. The Creation was created by him and lives through him.

Human beings were created so that they could get to know one another (Qur'an 49,13). He who recognizes himself as a creature of God can be just towards his fellow men. For he can love them like himself. In this way he creates peace both within himself and around him.

The secret of justice is that God, in his Mercy, perfects it where it needs to be perfected on account of man's weakness. In this way peace arises.

God, who is infinitely greater than man, creates peace. Peace rests on his justice. As it is written in the traditions of the Prophet, God forbade himself injustice, which is why he also forbids it to man.

The Islamic concept of justice cannot lead to simple legalism, for in its complementary mercy it serves at the same time to keep the way to peace open for others. This

means that, under certain circumstances, man has to give even his enemies the chance of peace, namely, in the case where they show themselves ready to make peace, which is why it is written in the Qur'an (8,61): "But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in God."

Yet even then, when the enemy shows no willingness to make peace and when it becomes necessary to fight in defense of our rights, one must still be careful to make no moral transgressions. For the way of peace allows only thoroughly moral behavior. "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors." (Qur'an 2,190).

This is why the Prophet Muhammad reminded his troops of their piety before every battle, forbidding them to massacre, to mishandle or to kill the defenseless, for example the aged, women or children. He forbade every form of inhumanity, even towards prisoners.

Yet the fight against the enemy does not end with the war of defense. The highest aim of Muslims is to fight against the enmity within the enemy. For peace, once it has been found, is sought more and more. In this way a commitment to peace becomes increasingly possible. Muslims therefore also plead that God does not make them a temptation for the enemy (cf. Qur'an 60,5). For it is of course, as we all know, unfortunately true that people who tend toward peace often become the object of the aggression and complexes of violent people, if they do not protect themselves from the latter.

Yet Muslims are offered by their religion the hope of never giving up. Their hope is that they will reach the homeland of peace. "[...]Truly God is Free of all [...] It may be that God will grant love (and friendship) between you and those whom ye (now) hold as enemies. For God has power

(over all things) ; And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (60,6 f.).

Muslims are allowed to be quite tolerant towards all men regardless their faith. The Qur'an (60,8) says, "God 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 God loveth those who are just."

In this verse Tolerance is raised to the position of the sister of Justice. Since Tolerance is the fruit of Mercy which represents the other side of Justice. Justice is a necessity, for Justice wants man to develop well and supports him in doing so.

The Islamic concept of justice emphasizes the importance of active involvement, since this is the only way towards real peace. Yet this involvement is always linked to the awareness of the fact that peace is only to gained with the help of God. Man needs Cod's leadership on his way towards peace.

On this straight path towards peace there is one valid principle which allows man's contribution to the establishment of peace. It might called the principle of moving 'from the inside to the outside' Usually called human freedom. Peace cannot be imposed from outside. It starts within a man and through the exemplary behavior of this man it has an effect on the world around him and within his sphere of responsibility and influence.

There are limits to the will to peace, but no limits to Justice. It is unjust to make friends with enemies who seek to destroy us. It is unjust towards ourselves and also supports the injustice of our enemies. Would we be doing them a favor if we supported them in their injustice? That is why the Qur'an (60,9) says: 'God only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from

turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong."

It depends on us, whether we want to have peace or not. If we want to have peace, then we have to avoid every intolerance. For this destroys peace and leads people astray to inhuman behavior.

It is true that peace, if it is to be attained, demands a great deal of us and perhaps even more. It demands our whole commitment. Only that enable us to avoid demanding too much from other people or other groups of people, so that they collapse under our demands and thus become our victims. As the German writer Heinrich Boll once expressed it: "How peacefully a person or even a nation or a group behaves, depends on what one demands of him."

This thoughtful writer also once asked himself: "To whom does the earth actually belong? If it is created, whom is it created for?" From the Islamic point of view, too, it was created for all human beings without exception.

We have to consider this. Since the disastrous consequences of the arms race have been recognized and disarmament has finally begun after the end of the Cold War, one ought to try to prevent an arms race from occurring anywhere in the world again. For have we not recognized that the earth's reserves have already been used up too much in this way? Does this not also overtax the earth's peace reservoir? If we want to promote human rights and development at one end of the earth, we ought not to neglect the other end of the earth, in the Third World.

Islam teaches that the earth was created for all human beings, regardless of their race, their creed or their sex. The gift of Creation is there for all human beings, so that they can enjoy, honor and care for it. In this way they develop as persons. All people have a right to this self-development. And whoever tries to hinder one part of the human race from

exercising its rights and from developing, hinders himself in the same way in his own self-development. Islam teaches human rights and also the performance of duties and thus freedom as a way to becoming a person, which is why, in his religion, the Muslim should not submit to an authority or power other than that of the Creator. The Creator however allows him to grow as a human being, to practice humanity and thus choose to follow the way of peacefulness.

Only religion makes this possible. The way to peace is distorted by this world if one does not want to look out beyond it. Moreover, the world takes prisoner whoever submits to the world. Islam, however; teaches the freedom of man and his creative potential not as a way of salvation itself. It teaches that the human being attains freedom and gains his creative abilities through inner peace. Inner peace makes it possible for a man to avoid becoming dogmatically rigid in his conceptions. Instead, he makes an effort to be independent in his thought and actions. This mean being open and truly tolerant towards the world.

Instead of regarding one's own world as absolute and wanting to dog- matically fix what are claimed to be entirely different characteristics of worlds, cultures or even religions, one should try to focus on the constant change taking place within these worlds. Every generation brings people into the world, who in their thought and actions practically represent a new beginning. It is for this reason that mother and child have long been the symbol of the new beginning in the thought of many peoples. People are neither responsible for what their ancestors did, nor can they be praised for it. Yet they need the chance to be able to contribute something positive themselves. As far as that goes, they are - if we allow them to be so - the hope of this world. At all events, it is our task to educate them to become so. This needs an effort towards objective thought, which does not let itself be

influenced by prejudice.

Islam, as it is the intention of these reflections to show not only presents no obstacle on the path to world peace, but is, if correctly understood and lived, a religion which expressly calls for peace in the world and also requires that one dedicates oneself to it totally in order to achieve it. Furthermore, it teaches the way to attain it. Muslims want peace. The Islamic world sees the roots of its culture in Islam. This culture was a leading power in the world for many centuries and provided the west itself with many decisive impulses. The goal of the Islamic world is to take root in its religion. For it alone teaches how to find the way to peace and to humanity, which modern ideologies certainly promised but were unable to show. The peace which Islam gives its believers is experienced as a living power deriving from God himself. This becomes clear in the fact that it allows people to grow and helps them to become responsible people. The world thus becomes the place where man becomes man.

Instead of finally becoming exhausted with the lack of success of all his efforts and despairing at the injustice which he has experienced in this world, man should turn to his Creator and serve him, in this world. Yet God compels no-one to make this decision. He wants man to turn to him of his own free will. In so doing man thus also turns to peace.

It is true that the path can be very long. There are no short-cuts. Yet from the Islamic point of view it is the only way. This fact also becomes clear from the idea of the Creation. According to Islamic teaching, the world is not subject to arbitrariness and constraint, but to the order of the Creator's plans. If we travel the path of peace, we help to set up the original order of creation. From this point of view the order of the world and its peace are in our hands.

The family of mankind is now required to turn away as

one from the threat of all dangers and to work for peace. As far as the role of religions is concerned, they should see their task in creating world peace. Peace is the love of God, his justice and Mercy. What else do they strive for? Therefore, if we all try to make a contribution to world peace, we are making a contribution to a just order of the world. For in an intelligent and just world-order, peace simply arises within the world.

The main problem in our developing world society is the question of how we can exercise power without violence. For since we are now all sitting in the same boat, so to speak, every act of violence hits back at us sooner or later.

According to one tradition, the Prophet Muhammad, too, spoke about the fact that mankind has to develop some kind of communal solidarity if it is not to be destroyed. In one parable he describes how all mankind finds itself in one boat. After all, the earth carries them as if in a ship through space. As if it were a vision, he demonstrates the threat to mankind in the degrading division of humanity into the people in the upper part of the ship and the people in the lower part of the ship. The people on the lower deck eventually become tired of always having to fetch the water from the upper deck. So they decide to bore a hole in the bottom of the ship, in order to get water from there. In doing so they of course endanger the whole ship. The Prophet proposes that the people above help the people below, in order to prevent them from destroying the ship. Otherwise they will all be lost. The hole in the ship reminds us of the hole in the ozone layer, which is threatening our world now.

Only through solidarity of action can peace be saved for the world. This, at least, is what Islam teaches, which teaches mankind the highest values. Only in this way can one solve that problem which is today known as the social question. The question is already being asked in the Qur'an:

"And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? - men, women, and children [...]" (4,75). The Qur'an makes it very clear that whoever does not do that, whoever behaves indifferently and impassively towards his fellow-men and thus despises their dignity as human beings is without doubt on the wrong path. He belongs, as the Qur'an puts it, to "those straying in Evil" (26,224). In the final analysis, such people despise not only the rights of their fellow human beings, but also their own rights. One of the characteristics of justice is that not only every human being needs it and seeks it, but it also needs and seeks human beings in a certain way. Justice needs man to act on its behalf and then it is also there for him.

Islam summons man to this active commitment to justice. The human being who entrusts himself to the leadership of God will of course be led by him. Yet this man should, as the representative of God, use the reason given to him by God to think and act within the prescribed general guidelines. We have to look after the Creation, which has been given to us, if we do not want to lose it.

Our responsibility is in the first place to our fellow-human beings. For every human being is important for humanity, which is why the Qur'an says that when we murder another human being it is as if we had murdered the whole of mankind (5,35). For in this way we have extinguished humanity. On the other hand, if we keep another human being alive, we have kept the whole of mankind alive. If we think about the unique value of every human life in this way, we arrive at exactly that attitude which peace requires from mankind. For in this case we can see that our fellow human being is just as important to us as we are to ourselves.

In allowing us to be free, God made us responsible for ourselves, thus giving us the responsibility for our fellow

human beings and our environment as well. For we are all part of one Creation in the same way. This means that no artificial idealistic varnishing of reality is required from us. On the contrary, what is required is a realistic and vigorous attitude to life. The precondition for this is that we have our feet firmly on the ground of reality. And it is exactly that of which the Qur'an speaks, when it says: "If ye will aid (the cause of) God, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly." (47,7). The lever with which man can, if he wants to, change the world and make it a juster place is the rational will to peace, which itself creates peace.

There are various levels of committed action in the cause of justice and parallel to them are the levels of the strength of faith expressed in it. One tradition of the Prophet Muhammad says that "whenever one of you sees something evil, he should change it with his hand. If he is unable to do that, then he should do so with his tongue (with words); if he cannot do that, then with his heart (with his intentions). Yet the last is the weakest form of faith ."

And evil, i.e. iniquitous acts are described in another tradition as "that which disturbs your soul and of which you do not want other people to know."

There is a still higher level of faith than the avoidance of evil. The greatest happiness belongs to those who can reply to the evil which is done unto them with good and who can thus make a friend of an enemy: "Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal Repel (Evil) with what is better: Then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint, - none but persons of the greatest good fortune." (Qur'an 41.34-33). And in another place in the Qur'an it is written: "On no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear." (2,286).

God requires humaneness from man, a behaviour which corresponds to his dignity. That entails a great deal. It means, for example, that one does what one says. One must keep to one's word once it has been given. Thus contracts with non-Muslims must in all circumstances also be fulfilled. Justice is impartial. If, for example, Muslims ask other Muslims for support in their wars, help must be given "except against a people with whom ye have a treaty of mutual alliance. And (remember) God seeth all that ye do." (8,72).

In general, the humaneness called for by Islam consists in the fact that, in principle, one respects every human being. In this connection it is said that the Prophet Muhammad once stood up when a funeral procession was passing in order to pay his respects to the deceased. When somebody told him that the deceased was a Jew, he answered: "Is he not a human soul? When you see a funeral procession you should always stand up."

Every act of peace, even the smallest, helps, for it is a praise of the Creation, a 'yes' is said to it. Which is why the Prophet Muhammad said:

"Do not despise even the smallest deed, even if it consists in meeting your brother (your fellows) with a friendly countenance."

A friendly face comes from an open and peaceful heart, which is far removed from arrogance. "God has told me", said the Prophet Muhammad on another occasion, 'that you should be humble, that none of you should raise himself above the others and none should treat the others unjustly."

#### **IV. World Peace and Islam**

If we summarize our reflections about peace, we may say that from an Islamic point of view, peace can be represented

in the form of three interlocking circles. The first circle, the peace which a human being has within himself, is made possible by the second circle: peace with God in his faith. Both make the third circle possible: peace with his fellow human beings and the environment. All three circles of peace influence one another. For according to Islamic doctrine, faith is kept by the person who acts in an impartially correct way, i.e. one who seeks peace with the world around him. The idea of world peace implies that all the nations of the world should have the chance to live in peace and thus to work together to create peace.

Muslims, too, see the necessity of world peace and would like to work towards it, so that it might come about. If we should succeed in preventing certain groups, religions or peoples from becoming the victims of aggression and expansionism, then the first step towards world peace will have been taken.

In other words, the condition for world peace is that every human being on earth is granted the right to his life, his religion, his property, to the freedom to use his intelligence and to the protection of his family.

We can learn to grasp the value of peace, if we take a lesson from history and see that wars are unable to solve any problems. They can only create new problems; at best, they can delay the solution of problems in a costly way, although they can perhaps also make the solution of some problems impossible forever. For this reason; the hate and complexes of earlier ages should not be reactivated over and over again. Instead, one should decide to follow some strategy of positive thinking which finds constructive solutions.

Today we are faced with new generations and new worlds, which are neither responsible for the injustices of earlier times, nor deserving of praise for the positive achievements of previous generations. What they need from us is for us to

not deny them the chance to build a fruitful life. Time after time, new peaceful solutions have to be found for new situations.

The Islamic world too needs the chance to be able to become active for peace, both inside and outside of it, and it is prepared to work together with all the powers of peace in the world. Basically, Islam recognizes all revelatory religions (cf. Qur'an 42, 13 etc.) and can therefore live in co-existence with other religions. It is also prepared to work together for peace with them, if it is given the chance.

Islam, too, takes the view that peace can be secured through the free self-development of human beings and nations and wishes such self-determination for all peoples. Many efforts are being made from all sides towards peaceful solutions of the world's problems. Yet the credibility and ability to inspire confidence in the existing international peace institutions will remain considerably impaired, if they cannot demonstrate that they are seeking an impartial justice. There is certainly an international law, but it should not only be proclaimed, but also practiced.

Yet one has to admit that generally, almost everywhere in the world, this is unfortunately not the case. The law should not just be on the side of the wealthy countries. If it is, then that should be explainable. Only in such a way can one distinguish it from the law of the jungle, where strength, but not justice, triumphs. The complicated nature of the world peace problems cannot on the one hand be ignored, yet on the other it will in the end become insoluble, if one does not at least make a visible attempt to solve the problems in an impartial and just way. For example, on the basis of the present state of world politics, every war of aggression, regardless of who is responsible for it should be made impossible or be punished. The same goes

for wars of expansion into so-called occupied areas  
The violation of human rights all over the world should be forbidden as a matter of principle and in cases where it occurs punished. Rich and poor countries should be subject to international law in the same way. Islam also teaches that the guarantee of international human rights is the basis for peace. The basic rights demanded by Islam for every human being are: his right to life, to religion, to his own use of his intelligence, to his family and to his property.

From an Islamic point of view all religions should be seen as and practiced as that which they are intended to be: languages and instruments of peace, which should work together with all peaceful powers in the world.

As a way to peace, Islam teaches not only to get the benefits of human rights but, in connection with this, also the consciousness of responsibility in exercising general human duties.

From a quite general point of view, every human being who looks on while crimes are being committed against humanity, for example genocide, without at least protesting about the fact is, according to Islam, an accomplice to the crime. In this way, world peace becomes impossible. Religions should work together for peace instead of fighting one another.

I would therefore greatly welcome it if we could make the effort to extend the scope of this conference about world peace to a constant international action for world peace. The first basic principle should be to strive for credibility and trustworthiness in all efforts for world peace. In working together for world peace one should try to involve not only specialist scholars, politicians and representatives of the religions, but also for example Nobel prizewinners, experts from the media and well-known writers. At present there is talk of extending the World Security Council. So that Muslims also have a chance to work towards world peace, I would propose that they receive a permanent place in the world Security Council. They should be represented by an Islamic country, which is chosen by all the other Islamic countries. The Muslims represent one-fifth of the world's population. They thus have the right to be able to speak for themselves.

Instead of looking for monocausal explanations for the problems of the Islamic world and blaming Islam for them, one should make a more detailed examination. The Islamic world shares many of its problems with the rest of the world. At any rate, as my talk has tried to show, Islam is a religion which strives for peace and promotes peace.

All nations of the world must be able to contribute to world peace, if it is to come about.