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Lecture 1: Islam, Religion of Peace

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The name Islam and the Arabic word for peace, *salam*, both come from the same root, *salima* which indicates peace. So we may say that Islam and peace are twins. This peace and tranquility pervades the whole structure of Islam.

The Muslims greet each other by saying *salamun 'alaykum* peace be on you). It is a much better way of the old *an'im sabahan* or the modern *'l-kahyr* (Good morning). The ritual prayer of on Islam ends on peace, when the Muslims say: *as-salamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh* (Peace be on you, and mercy and blessings of Allah). In Islam one of the names of God is *Salam*; many Muslims address Him in these words after every prayer:

***Allahumma anta 's-salam wa minka 's-salam wa ilayka ya'udu 's-salam* (*O Allah! You are Peace; from You originates peace and to You it returns.*)**

That is why the final abode which Allah has provided for the believers, and to which He invites them, is called *daru 's-salam* (the abode of peace). The Qur'an says:

***They shall have the abode of peace with their Lord.* (*6:127*)**

***And Allah invites to the abode of peace.* (*10:25*).**

***And when they shall reach that final destination, they shall be greeted by the angels in these words: Peace be on you, because you were patient; how excellent is then the issue of the abode.* (*13:24*).**

Peace Based on Justice

If we want to study Islamic peace, we shall have to do so in the framework of the overall Islamic ideology. Islam is, in a manner of speaking, a single entity. We should not look at any Islamic concept in isolation; we must have the whole structure in view.

We may describe the whole Islamic ideology in one word: Justice. God has laid the foundation of Islam on justice. Justice has been defined as “putting a thing in its rightful place”. A judge does justice when he awards or restores a disputed item to its rightful owner.

This brings us to the concept of peace. When every thing is kept in its rightful place, when every member knows not only his rights but also his duties towards others, then peace reigns in society; and the society works smoothly like a well-balanced watch. It is what we call balance, harmony and equilibrium.

Man as a Member of Society

Man in his life comes into contact with countless persons, groups and things; his relationship with some is amiable; with some others, antagonistic. Whatever the case, he has to base all his contacts, all his dealings, on justice — thus ensuring peace and happiness in society.

But before that, he has to do justice to his own self, his own soul, and to all the powers and faculties which God has bestowed upon him. Unless and until he maintains a balance between his desire and anger, he cannot do justice to others.

Desire and Anger

There are two characteristics which man shares with animals. They are “desire” and “anger”. He is attracted to what he thinks is useful and beneficial to him; he wants to obtain or keep the things which give him pleasure and joy; he wants to remain near those people whom he loves. All these feelings are manifestations of the desire. Led by this factor, man is attracted towards food and drink, sleep and recreation; it is this factor that creates bond of love between parents and children, between husband and wife, between brothers and sisters, and between two relatives or friends. It is because of desire that man strives to achieve excellence in various fields of knowledge and arts; or to seek authority and power.

Anger is opposite of desire. Fear and courage are two manifestations of anger. It is because of this faculty that man repulses or tries to remove whatever he thinks would be harmful to him or whatever displeases him.

Man shares these faculties with animals, A cow welcomes green grass and runs away from a lion. If these were the only characteristic of man, there would have been no difference between man and cow. But God has bestowed upon man another especial faculty which distinguishes him from the animal world, and that is “Reason”. In Arabic language, reason is called *'aql* which literally means, a tie, a restraint.

It is reason that puts restraint on our desire and anger. Reason is the rope that keeps these two faculties confined within permissible limits. You see, desire and anger both are essential for mankind’s safety of and continuity of human race. But they must remain on a middle course.

They should not be unnecessarily crushed, nor should they be left unfettered. They should be properly channeled, in order that they could achieve the goals for which they were created. This could be done only when desire and anger both are under the complete control of reason and divine law: in this way we would remain on the middle course, in the right direction. This medium path is called *i'tidal* in Arabic; *i'tidal* is a derivative of *'adl* — justice.

In this way, when man gives predominance to reason, and reason maintains the and on the middle path, keeping harmony and equilibrium between all his faculties and characteristic, man's psyche in peace with itself.

If, on the other hand, there is any deficiency in any of these faculties or if either exceeds the limit, then man loses his equilibrium, and becomes unjust to himself, and as a result inflicts injustice to other members of the society.

The equilibrium between various psychological traits creates inner peace, which in its turn brings peace in society. Of course, it is easier said than done. Our traditions say that this medium way of life, this middle path, is thinner than, hair, sharper than sword and hotter than fire. To proceed on this path without stumbling, without deviation, one needs God's help. Thus we finally come to the concept of peace with God. “From You originates peace, and to You it returns.”

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There is a short treatise *Risalatu 'l-Huquq*[1] (The Charter of Rights), written by our 4th Imam, 'Ali Zaynul' Abidin (peace be upon him), the great-grandson of the Prophet (upon whom be peace). In this booklet, the Imam has divided the things and persons (with whom man comes into contact, with whom he deals) into fifty categories. It begins with the rights of God on man; then the rights of man's soul on himself; then rights of various powers and organs of his body, like eyes, ears, hands and feet.

Then come the rights of the mother, father and children; of husband and wife; of other relatives. Then it proceeds to the rights of neighbours, friends, teachers, students, employer and employee; the rights of an advisor, of one whom you advise, creditors and debtors. It goes on until it reaches to the rights of your adversary on you. It is a gem of Islamic ethics, and it may be adopted even by non-Muslim scholars of ethics – if one has the will to do so.

Before going ahead, I should mention an important principle of Islamic ideology, and that is the inter-relation of Islamic Law and Islamic Ethics. Islamic Laws teach the minimum a person is required to do, and transgression of which entails sin and is sometimes considered a crime. Islamic Ethics takes a man from that starting point to the highest peak of spiritual perfection.

If a man is sick and weak, he first needs treatment to cure his disease; after that he needs special regimen of diet, exercise and tonics to restore his body, to bring him to the peak of his health and strength. The same principle applies in the spiritual field. Islamic Laws keep man free from ills of sin and crime, while Islamic Ethics show him the way to noble spiritual perfection and strength. From Islam's point of view, it is not enough to merely ordain some basic laws to protect the believers from sins, and leave them at that. A weak patient, even when cured of a disease is an easy target of further attacks unless his strength is restored. Nor has Islam merely exhorted its followers to strive to reach high moral standards, without prescribing some rules to prevent them from negative influences. Of what use will be tonics if the body is riddled with debilitating diseases. Thus Islamic Laws and Islamic Ethics are inter-linked; they are different stages of the same spiritual journey, Islam knows that the spiritual level of all people is not the same. Therefore, it has chosen for us the highest ethical and spiritual ideals, and exhorted us to strive hard to reach the summit; at the same time it has laid down minimum requirements which one cannot transgress except by exposing himself to spiritual peril.

Many Orientalists who are generally oblivious or even ignorant of this inter-relation of the Islamic Laws and Islamic Ethics, take it upon themselves to pronounce judgement on Islam, unfavourably comparing its Laws (i.e. the minimum requirements) with “the highest ethical standpoints” of Christianity; and then pontificating that Islamic “moral teachings” have “shortcomings”.2

Now I would like to mention a few of the rights that others have on us— in other words, our duties towards others.

Let us begin with the beginning of it all; i.e. God. Islam by its very definition is submission to Allah. A Muslim should forget his ego or self; he should submerge his thoughts and actions to the will of Allah. That is the “just” relationship between the Creator and the created. Some of us obey Allah's commands because they are afraid of the hell — this is the lowest level; and, according to 'Ali (as.), it is like the obedience of slaves. Others worship Allah in the hope of going to the paradise —it is a bit higher, and the above-mentioned tradition of 'Ali (a.s.) equates it with traders' mentality. But the ideal worship and obedience is that which springs and emanates from the love of Allah.

When man reaches that stage, then he is neither afraid of the hell nor cares for the paradise. His whole being is immersed into the love of Allah. Of course, it does not make him oblivious of his shortcomings and he feels apprehension — not of hell but of Allah's displeasure. At the same time he remains confident and optimistic, because he knows Allah is Merciful. Neither his hope exceeds his fear, nor does his fear exceed his hope. These well-balanced feelings create equilibrium, tranquility and peace in his inner self, or as they say, in his heart.

It will not be out of place to quote here a short paragraph from a well-known supplication, called Du'a' Kumayl. It is a long invocation, regularly recited by many Muslims every week. It was taught by ' Ali (a.s.) to his companion, Kumayl ibn Ziyad. In this supplication, the reciter, after confessing his sins and transgressions, asks Allah for His forgiveness and pardon. Then he expresses his hope that Allah would not punish him, because He, being the Creator, knows that His servant's body cannot endure even this world's transient pains; so how can it endure next world's punishment. Then comes the part in which the servant asks his Lord:

Therefore, my Lord if You will subject me to the penalties in company of Your enemies, and cast me with them, and keep me away from Your friends and those and who will be near to you, then, my God! My Lord! My Master! Suppose I may patiently bear Your punishment, but how can I calmly accept being kept away from You? And suppose I may patiently endure the scorching fire, yet how can I resign myself to the denial of Your mercy?

Here we find the love and fear of Allah radiating from every sentence. And this is the Islamic ideal of

man's relation with God, where the servant loves only God and fear only denial of God's favour.

After this, Islam has very clearly demarcated mutual rights and duties of family members and other relatives.

The above-mentioned *Risalatu 'l-Huquq* says about the rights of the father: "It is the right of your father to realize that he is your root and you are his branch; and that without him you would have been non-existent. Therefore, whenever you find in yourself anything likeable, remember that your father is the basic means of that gift [of Allah] to you. And be thankful to Allah and grateful to your father accordingly."

About the mother it says: "It is the right of your mother that you should appreciate that she carried you as nobody carries anyone, fed you the fruits of her heart which nobody feeds anyone, protected you [during the pregnancy] with her ears, eyes, hands, legs, hairs, limbs [in short] with her whole being, gladly, cheerfully and carefully; suffering patiently all the worries, pain, difficulties and sorrows till the hand of God removed you from her and brought you into this world.

"Then she was most happy feeding you, forgetting her own hunger; clothing you, even if she herself had no clothes; giving you milk and water, not caring for her own thirst; keeping you in the shade, even if she had to suffer from the heat of the sun; giving you ever comfort with her own hardships; lulling you to sleep while keeping herself awake..." Allah joins parents' obedience to His worship and thankfulness in three places in the Qur'an, implying that if a servant was obedient and thankful to Allah, but did not do good to his parents, Allah would not accept His worship from that servant. Allah says in the Qur'an:

And worship Allah and join not any partner with Him ad do good to the parents... (***4:36***)

And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents... (***17:23***)

Be thankful to Me and to your parents... (***31:14***)

It will not be out of place to mention that in Islam the rights of the mother are greater than the rights of the father. But the scope of time prevents me from going into further details.

Then the *Risalah* has laid down the neighbours' rights on each other. Here too the minimum rights have been given as follows:

"It is the right of your neighbour to safeguard [his interest] in his absence, and respect him in his presence, and to help and assist him in both situations. Do not look for his [hidden] shame and do not

dig into his affairs to know his disgrace. And if you come to know it inadvertently without looking for it, then you should become an impregnable castle to [hide] what you have learned and a thick cover for it, so much so that if spears penetrated into your heart to detect it, they could not touch it. Do not eavesdrop on him when he is not on guard. Do not leave him in hardship and do not envy him in his comfort. Forgive his faults and forgo his slips. And if he behaves with you disgracefully you should not forget your forbearance, but deal with him peacefully. Be his shield against the tongue of abuse and protect him from the treachery of those who pose as sincere to him [but are not]. And live with him a graceful life."

And the highest standard of the neighbour's rights is shown in a tradition of the Prophet (s.a.w.) who has said: "Gabriel kept advising me to be generous to the neighbour, until I thought that probably Allah would prescribe for him a share in inheritance."

The *Risalah* says about wealth: "It is the right of the wealth that you should not obtain it except by lawful means, and do not spend it but in lawful ways. And, when the wealth is from Allah [as all wealth is] do not use it but to [reach] Allah and to make it a way of Allah..."

This is the minimum which, if neglected, would put man in perdition. Its high point is reached when man sacrifices his own needs for the sake of others, gives preference to others even when he himself is in need of it. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"and they prefer others over themselves even though poverty be their portion." (***59:9***)

Leaving all other categories aside, 1 would like to briefly mention the rights of some adversaries from that Charter:

Right of a claimant in a law-suit: "...If his claim against you is correct then do not try to break his argument and do not labour to refute his claim, instead, you should be your own adversary in his favour, and be the judge against yourself, and be his witness for his claim without any need of other witnesses, because it is the duty imposed upon you by Allah.

"If his claim is wrong, then deal with him gently and put the fear [of Allah] in his heart and adjure him by his religion and dull his wrath against you by reminding him of Allah..."

And what are your rights on him? He is addressed in these words: Rights of a defendant: "If your claim against him is correct, then talk with him benevolently in describing that claim, because the sound of a claim itself is harsh enough [so do not add to it the rudeness of your language too]; and explain your arguments gently; give him time, make your talk clear, and deal with him kindly...."

If both parties of a conflict follow these rules, no dispute can ruin the society's peace.

Then the Imam mentions the “Rights of One who was unjust to you”. He writes:

“…If he did knowingly and intentionally then forgiveness is more suitable for you. Because it will weed out the enmity between you two. And further, there are many people like him in this world, and if is better to deal with them with good grace…”

As I mentioned before, these are the minimum rights which cannot be violated. Rut the same Imam has guided us to the peak of the moral standard in another place. In one of his famous invocations, called *Makarimu 'l-akhlaq* (The Noble Virtues), Imam Zaynul' Abidin prays to Allah:

“O Allah! Send blessings on Muhammad and his progeny; and help me so that I wish well to him who works secretly against me; and treat him with kindness who forsakes me; and reward him generously who harms and injures me; and perform all my obligations to him who violates the ties of kinship; and in return speak well of him who backbites me; and that I be thankful for good and overlook evil.”

If a society is based on such a foundation, then obviously it will be a heaven of peace. As everyone's rights and duties will be clearly demarcated, it will leave no room for friction and strife. When man has established peace with his Creator, within his own soul and body, with his family and relatives, with his neighbours and friends, and even with his adversaries, then surely PEACE will reign over the world. And it will not be a peace imposed by some outside forces, but a peace which will spring from people's inner selves, from the collective character of the society.

Keeping these moral values in their true perspective, man can change this world into a better world, where human dignity would prevail, universal brotherhood would flourish, and lasting peace would reign.

Questions & Answers

1st Question

You have said that mothers have more rights on children than the fathers have. Is it mentioned in the Qur’an or the traditions?

Answer: It is based partly on the Qur’an and partly on the traditions. In the Qur’an where Allah has apportioned shares of inheritance of a deceased, He has allotted one-sixth of the estate to the father and one-third to the mother. It is the only occasion where a woman has been given twice the share of a man.

As for tradition, Hakim ibn Hizam asked the Holy Prophet: “O Messenger of Allah! Whom should I do good to?” The Holy Prophet said: “Your mother,” He asked: “Then who?” The Holy Prophet again said: “Your mother” He again asked: “Then who?” The Holy Prophet again said: “Your mother”. He asked the fourth time: “Then who?” Then the Holy Prophet said: “Your father.”

It is from this tradition that the Muslim scholars have inferred that the mother's right are three times greater than those of the father.

2nd Question

You have said that Allah will not accept His own worship from a child who is not obedient to his parents. What if the parents are unbelievers?

Answer: The reply is clearly given in the Qur'anic verse, a sentence of which I had quoted in my speech, It says:

“Be thankful to Me, and to thy parents; to Me is the homecoming. But if they strive with you to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them; yet bear them company in this life with fairness...”(***31: 14-15***).

3rd Question

How can you justify the permission of jihad in the light of what you have said about Islam being a religion of peace?

Answer: This question needs somewhat detailed reply. But I'll try to make it as brief as possible. Let me tell you at the outset that Islam does not want to exterminate wrong-doers; it only wants to remove the wrong. Evil deeds are like disease. They need treatment and every doctor wants to cure the ailments with medicines as far as possible. But sometimes the ailment reaches a stage where no medicine can do any good; he feels that surgical operation is necessary if the life of the patient is to be saved. Then he decides, not happily but reluctantly, to amputate one or more limbs of the patient. It may cause severest pain for the time being; but it is not torture, it is mercy.

Likewise, suppose that this humanity is a compact body, some of its parts become infected with spiritual

disease and every medicine of sympathetic persuasion and rational pleading has failed. And there is a danger that their infection is causing and inflicting hardships upon other parts, and the spiritual doctor, I mean the Prophet or the Imam who is guided by Allah, is confident that now the surgical operation is essential to save other parts of mankind from trouble. Then, and only then, he will order a holy-war; and then also it will be limited to that part which is most necessary to remove.

Moreover, even if you feel that there is necessity of a surgical operation you will never entrust this most dangerous task to an unauthorized person. It will be a very foolish and irresponsible action. You can never be satisfied that the operation is essential unless a qualified doctor tells you so. Therefore, according to Shi'ah Ithna 'Ashari law, a war cannot be started unless specifically authorized by the Prophet or the Imam himself, and that also to the limits prescribed by that Representative of Allah. After all, life is a creation of Allah and it should not be destroyed unless it has been authorized to do so by a Representative of Allah. Accordingly, the holy-war is forbidden for the Shi'ah Ithna 'Asharis during the period when our Imam is in occultation. This is our law about the holy-war. Self-defence is permitted at any time, but to start it is forbidden without specific authority of the Prophet or the Imams.

1. Risalatu 'l-Huquq was translated by me some twenty years ago and was published in Pakistan; its new edition has recently been published in Canada.
2. See, for example, G. Margoliouth's introduction to J. M. Rodwell's translation of The Koran (London: Everyman's Library, 1974) p. viii.

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