

Global ethics for social solidarity and harmony

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Abstract

The 21st Century is an era of globalization. It has minimized the demarcation of state boundaries. As a result we are living in the global village which is a result of developed communication. Communication provides an opportunity to people of different faiths to get to know each other better whether they live on the opposite sides of the globe or near each other. A common teaching of all faiths is: "The message of love and peace for each other instead of hatred and violence towards others." While many things divide us; religion and God Almighty unite us. To love and to be loved, to listen and to be listened to, to accept and to be accepted and to give respect and to be respected are natural feelings in the hearts of all men. If we realize this then we will be able to create a barrier-free environment not only for ourselves but also for our coming generations. As a result we will be able to unite people as one to face and solve global challenges such as global warming, poverty, hunger together.

In this paper I will look into Global ethics for social solidarity and harmony in the light of Islam and its primary sources.

Keywords: Global Ethics, Social Solidarity, Harmony, Islam, Al-Quran, Tenderness, Tolerance, Gentleness of speech, humility, Social Service, Righteous Conduct, Global World, Global problems.

Introduction

The 21st Century is an era of globalization. It has minimized the demarcation of state boundaries. As a result we are living in the global village which is a result of developed communication. Communication provides an opportunity to people of different faiths to get to know each other better whether they live on the opposite sides of the globe or near each other. A common teaching of all faiths is: "The message of love and peace for each other instead of hatred and violence towards others." While many things divide us; religion and God Almighty unite us. To love and to be loved, to listen and to be listened to, to accept and to be accepted and to give respect and to be respected are natural feelings in the hearts of all men. If we realize this then we will be able to create a barrier-free environment not only for ourselves but also for our coming generations. As a result we will be able to unite people as one to face and solve global challenges such as global warming, poverty, hunger together. Let me discuss the Global ethics for social solidarity and harmony in the light of Islam and its primary sources.

Tenderness

Tenderness in one's dealings and activities and the readiness to oblige and put others at ease are all virtues of the highest order in the Islamic pattern of morality. Here are two traditions of the Prophet in this regard:

"Hell's fire is forbidden for those who are mild and gentle and who make it easy for others to deal with them."

"God is compassionate and likes compassion in His creatures. He grants more to the kind and the tender-hearted than to those who are harsh and severe."

Self-Restraint

Tolerance, self-restraint, and the ability to control one's temper and overlook what is unpleasant and disagreeable are qualities that Islam wants everyone to cultivate. Believers who possess

these fine moral attributes hold a very high place in the estimation of God.

The Quran mentions the blessed ones who are destined for Paradise:

"Who restrain their anger and pardon their fellow men." (3:134)

The Prophet says: "God will withhold His punishment from one who curbs his anger."

Gentleness of Speech

Gentleness of speech is a great virtue in Islam while rudeness is a sin. The Quran declares:

"Speak kindly to mankind." (2:83)

We have it from the Prophet that "to speak politely is piety and a kind of charity."

"To indulge in intemperate language and in harsh behaviour is to perpetrate an injustice and the home of injustice is Hell."

Humility

Islam wants its followers to practice humility. It does not become a Muslim to be arrogant and vainglorious. Those who practice humility are great in the eyes of God.

In the words of the Quran: "The true servants of God the Most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility. (25:63)

"As for the Home of the Hereafter, We shall give to those who seek neither glory in this world or evil. (28:83)

The Prophet once said: "God will so exalt one who behaves humbly that, ultimately, he will attain the highest rank in Paradise."

Pride is so greatly repugnant to God that the Prophet has warned us against it again and again in such strong words as these: "Whoever has pride in his heart, even of the weight of an atom, shall be cast headlong into Hell by God."

"Whoever has pride in his heart, even of the weight of a mustard seed, shall not enter Paradise."

"Beware of pride! Pride was the sin which first of all ruined the Devil."

Social Service

All the teachings of Islam are based on two basic principles — worship of God and service of men. Without putting both of the principles into practice, there can be no true fulfillment of one's religious duties.

In its followers, Islam inculcates the spirit of love and respect for all human beings. By serving human beings on the one hand, they please their God, and on the other they achieve spiritual progress for themselves.

According to a *hadith*, you should be Merciful to people on earth and God on high will be merciful to you. In this way Islam links personal salvation to serving others. One can receive God's reward in the Hereafter only if one has done something to alleviate the sufferings of mankind.

According to a *hadith* on Doomsday, God will say to a person, "I was ill, but you did not come to nurse Me." The man will reply, "God, You being the Lord of the universe, how can You be ill?" God will answer, "Such and such servant of Mine was ill. Had you gone there, you would have found Me there with him." Then God will say to another person, "I was hungry, but you did not feed Me." The person will reply, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You go hungry?" God will say, "Such and such of my servants came to you, but you did not feed him. Had you done so, you would have found Me with him." Then God will say to yet another man, "I was thirsty, and you did not give Me water to drink." That person will also say, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You be thirsty?" God will say, "Such and such servant of Mine came to you, but you did not give him water to drink. Had you offered him water, you would have found Me there with him."

From this, we learn the Islamic principle that if someone wants to find God, he shall first have to make himself deserving of this by helping the poor and the needy. This act becomes a means of spiritual progress for him. And there is no doubt about it that it is only those people who have elevated themselves spiritually, who will find God.

This culture of mercy and compassion approved of by God is not limited to human beings, but extends also to the animal world. We must be equally sympathetic to animals. The Hadith gives us many guidelines on how to look after animals and treat them with fairness. These are duties laid down by God. One who is cruel to animals risks depriving himself of God's mercy.

Righteous Conduct

Strong moral fiber is the sum of all personal virtues that guarantee correct and agreeable behaviour in daily social interaction. A person of good character will invariably conform in his behaviour to a strict code of ethics.

What should be the underlying principle of this code of ethics? According to a *hadith* (Prophet's Saying), one should like for others what one likes for oneself, that is, one should treat others just as one would want to be treated by others.

Everyone likes to be treated gently and greeted with pleasing words. So everyone should speak gently to others. Everyone wants his existence to be problem-free, so he should avoid creating problems for others. Everyone wants others to deal with him in a sympathetic and cooperative manner. So what everyone ought to do while dealing with others is to give them his full sympathy and cooperation.

This standard of ethics is very simple and natural. It is so simple that anyone may easily learn it, be he literate or illiterate, able-bodied or disabled, and regardless of his likes and dislikes. This

hadith has given such a criterion for human ethics that no one can find it difficult to understand. In this way Islam has set forth, in the light of everyone's personal experience, what behaviour may be indulged in and what behaviour has to be refrained from.

According to another *hadith*, the best of us is one who is best in moral character. Accordingly, becoming a good human being has nothing ambiguous about it. Its simple formula is that of avoidance of double standards. One who lives his life by this formula is indubitably a person of the highest moral character.

No Extremism

In the fourth chapter of the Quran the following injunction has been given:

"Do not go to excess in your religion." (4:171)

The same point has been made in a *hadith*. The Prophet of Islam observed:

"You should restrain yourselves from committing excesses (*ghulu*) in religion. For it was due to their having gone to extremes in religion that the previous communities were destroyed." (Musnad Ahmad, 1/215, 347)

Ghulu means extremism. The way of extremism is wrong, whatever the circumstances, for it goes against the spirit of religion. Indeed, it is proneness to extremism which at times culminates in war and violence. Those who suffer from extremist tendencies remain dissatisfied with the path of moderation, since this strikes them as being far from the ideal. That is why they so easily incline towards violence, and are ever ready to open hostilities in the name of achieving their objectives.

Moderation, which is the opposite of extremism, is closely interlinked with peace. When people possess the virtue of moderation, they necessarily think in terms of peace and will engage in their struggle in a peaceful manner.

Non-Killing

The Quran states: "If someone kills another person, unless it is in retaliation for someone else or for causing corruption on the earth, it is as if he had murdered all mankind." (5:32)

Murder is a horrendous act. The killing of a human being is permissible only when the danger he poses to social peace has no other remedy. Killing a single person without proven justification is equal to killing all human beings. The difference between the two is only one of degree and not of nature. Killing one human being is just as horrendous as killing all human beings. Such a killing, without proper sanction, appears to be a simple matter. But such an act breaks all traditions of respect for life.

The above verse of the Quran shows the great importance of peace and security in Islam. If someone is unjustly killed, Islam demands that the whole of society should become so greatly agitated over this offence that it should work unitedly towards restoring a state of peace and security. It should be treated as a matter of the greatest of urgency, as if all of humanity were under attack.

Extinguishing the Fire of Violence

The Quran states: "Each time they kindle the fire of war, God extinguishes it." (5:64)

This verse of the Quran shows the creation plan of the Creator for this world — a plan based on the principle of peace. This means that whenever one of two opposing sides is intent on

fuelling the fire of war, the other should attempt to extinguish it by resorting to some peaceful strategy, so that violence may be prevented from spreading. It should never happen that if one side indulges in violence, the other follows suit. The proper and most desirable way of leading one's life in this world is not to counter bombs with bombs, but rather to defuse them. And this should be done at the very outset. If we are imbued with the true spirit of Quranic teaching, we should realize that countering a bomb with another bomb is the way of Satan. On the contrary, the way approved of by God is to neutralize the bomb.

War Only For Defense

The Quran states: "Permission to fight is given to those who are attacked because they have been wronged." (22:39)

This is not just a Quranic injunction aimed at Islamic believers, but rather a statement of international law. The above verse clearly states that war is permissible only when, in order to counter open aggression, it is waged in self-defence. All other forms of war come under the heading of aggression. And aggressors have no lawful place in this world. According to this verse, there is no justification for any war other than a defensive one, when one fights under the compulsion to do so.

According to the Quran, even defensive war can be fought only after making a formal declaration of war has been made, and then only by an established government (18:58). Non-governmental organisations have no right to wage war on any pretext. In view of these teachings, we can safely conclude that according to the laws of war stated in the Quran, all wars, except for a defensive war which has become unavoidable, are unlawful. For instance, guerrilla war, proxy war, undeclared war and aggressive war, all are undoubtedly unlawful in Islam. Peace is something that can be opted for in all circumstances, whereas the decision to wage war should be taken only in times of emergencies for the purpose of defence, when it becomes inevitable, and that too at a time when all peaceful strategies for avoiding confrontation have failed.

As we know, the Quran is a book, an ideological book. It is not a gun or a sword. Therefore, 'jihad' by means of the Quran can only mean conveying the ideas of the Quran to the people.

The above-mentioned verse makes it clear that what is called jihad in Islam entails only the kind of peaceful struggle which has nothing to do with violence. The Arabic word 'jihad' is derived from the root 'juhd' which means to strive, to struggle, that is, to exert oneself to the utmost to achieve one's goal. This is the original meaning of 'jihad' in Arabic.

Interfaith Dialogue

There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.

Dialogue is the best practical expression of peace and harmony. Dialogue does not mean to accept one's religion' but it's essential to foster communal harmony. To combat communal hatred and promote inter-community harmony, people of different faiths must strive to promote a culture of dialogue.

The Quran tells us that the kind of people who can save themselves from loss and achieve a successful life are those "who exhort each other to justice and to fortitude." (103:3)

It is unfortunate that one, who adheres to the path of truth himself, or calls upon people to accept the truth, is almost invariably rejected by the people. The resistance he has to face is very great. At such times what the lover of truth should do is

exercise great patience. He should bear with fortitude all hardships, without trying to hold others responsible for it.

Patience is another name for the non-aggressive method. This means that one who stands up for the truth ought not to counter violence with violence. He must unilaterally adhere to peaceful ways.

Reconciliatory Approach

During the times of the Prophet of Islam, as a result of the aggression of the Quraysh, his opponents, a state of war prevailed between the Quraysh and the Muslims. One of the commandments given in the Quran on this occasion was:

"And if they incline towards peace, you too incline to it, and put your trust in God. Surely, it is He Who is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. And if they intend to deceive you, then surely God is sufficient for you." (8:61-62)

This verse of the Quran shows that peace is desirable in Islam to the greatest possible extent. Even if peace can be established only by incurring risks, this course should unhesitatingly be embarked upon in the way enjoined by the Quran. If reconciliatory offers are made by the antagonists in the course of the war, they should be accepted without delay. Even supposing that there is the fear of some deception being practiced in the making of the offer of peace, this offer should nevertheless be accepted in the hopes that God will always be on the side of the peace lovers and not on that of the deceivers. Another reality that emerges is that, in this world, peace can be established only by those who have great courage. In the present world, problems certainly arise between different groups, for no human situation is ever absolutely ideal. Everyone at some point in his life is faced with injustice and the misappropriation of what belongs to him by right. In these situations, only such individuals can establish peace as can raise above all considerations and disdain all pretexts to engage in violent retaliation. Only the truly courageous can establish peace in this world. Those who are lacking in courage will continue to fight, and will thus never allow the history of the world to be rewritten in terms of blessed peace.

No Confrontation with Enemy

The Prophet of Islam once observed: "Do not wish for confrontation with the enemy, ask for peace from God." This means that if someone has become our enemy, we should not necessarily turn against him and start fighting with him. Despite his enmity, we should opt rather for avoidance of friction, so that conflict is effectively prevented.

'Ask for peace from God' means to adopt the way of peace instead of confrontation and secure God's succour for peaceful activities. A believer should not pray to God thus: "O God, destroy the enemy." Rather his prayer should be: "O God, help me to stay away from the path of violence and confrontation, in spite of the enmity of others, and help me to pursue the journey of my life along the path of peace."

This shows that according to the plan of nature, peace in this world is the general rule, while violence is a temporary necessity. Furthermore, this tells us that if an individual or a group is our enemy, the way of confrontation is not the only way to solve the problem. A better and far more appropriate method is to neutralize enmity through a peaceful strategy. The power of peace is far more effective and far more useful than the power of violence. Peace is the only religion for both man and the universe.

Scholars have rightly defined peace as “the absence of war” However, there are some who hold that peace should necessarily be accompanied by justice. But setting such a condition for the attainment of peace is impractical. For the role of peace is purely to set the stage for us to strive for justice and to work towards other constructive ends.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provides a very clear example in his method of negotiating the Hudaibiyya peace treaty. By unilaterally accepting the conditions of his opponents, he concluded a historic 10-year no-war pact, without apparently receiving justice or his rights. But by means of this peace treaty the Prophet and his companions were enabled to consolidate themselves so thoroughly that they had no need to wage war to attain justice.

The religious viewpoint on this subject is very aptly conveyed in the Qur’an: “God calls to the Home of Peace.”(10:25) This means that according to the creation plan, peace and harmony should prevail in human society. God Himself is Peace (Peace being an attribute of God). He intended this world to be peaceful, and only a peaceful world will be able to receive His blessings.

A peaceful world is like a paradise on earth. It is only in such a world that we can meet and establish contact with God, the Creator of Man and the Universe.

No excuse, therefore, justifies the use of violence, in individual or national life. We must maintain peace unilaterally, for nothing that we desire can be achieved without it.

Although at opposite poles, peace and violence result from human thinking. And if one were to think of the end result, one would never indulge in violence. One should bear in mind that peace is in consonance with humanity, whereas violence means a descent to the animal level. Peaceful minds make for a peaceful world. Man was born in peace. Man must die in peace.

Non-Violence

A study of the Quran and Sunnah (Sayings and Doings of the Prophet) tells us that Islam is a religion which teaches non-violence. According to the Quran, God does not love violence (*fasad*). We learn from the Quran that *fasad* is that action which results in disruption of the social system, causing losses in terms of lives and property. This shows that God loves non-violence. He abhors violent activity being indulged in human society, as a result of which people have to pay the price with their possessions and lives. This is supported by other statements in the Qur’an, for instance, that Peace is one of God’s names (59:23). Those who seek to please God are assured by verse 5 of the sixteenth *surah* that they will be guided by Him to “the paths of peace.” Paradise, which is the final destination of the society of God’s choice, is referred to in the Qur’an as “the home of peace” (89:30), etc.

The entire spirit of the Qur’an is in consonance with this concept. For instance, the Qur’an attaches great importance to patience. In fact, patience is set above all other Islamic virtues -- with the exceptional promise of reward beyond measure. (39:10)

Patience implies a peaceful response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. The word *sabr* exactly expresses the notion of non-violence as it is understood in modern times. That patient action is non-violent action has been clearly expressed in the Qur’an. According to one tradition, the Prophet Muhammad observed: God grants to *rifq* (gentleness)

what he does not grant to *unf* (violence). (Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, 4/255)

The word *rifq* has been used in this *hadith* as an antithesis to *unf*. These terms convey exactly what is meant by violence and non-violence in present times. This *hadith* clearly indicates the superiority of the non-violent method.

God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence. This has very wide and deep implications, embodying an eternal law of nature. By the very law of nature all bad things are associated with violence, while all good things are associated with non-violence.

Violent activities breed hatred in society, while non-violent activities elicit love. Violence is the way of destruction while non-violence is the way of construction. In an atmosphere of violence, it is enmity which flourishes, while in an atmosphere of non-violence, it is friendship which flourishes. The method of violence gives way to negative values while the method of non-violence is marked by positive values. The method of violence embroils people in problems, while the method of non-violence leads people to the exploiting of opportunities. In short, violence is death, non-violence is life.

A Peaceful Struggle Hudaibiya Model

A study of the Quran and Seerah (life of the Prophet) tells us that the actual goal of Islam has been, from beginning to end, to change people’s hearts. But in accordance with the creation plan, everyone has been given total freedom. It was as a result of this freedom that certain people turned against the Prophet of Islam; some even went to the extent of taking up arms in order to put an end to his mission by force. It was in situations such as these that the Prophet and his companions had to resort to arms, temporarily, in self-defence. In this context, it would be correct to say that peace in Islam is the rule rather than the exception.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) lived on this earth for 23 years after receiving prophethood. During these 23 years, the Quran was revealed at intervals and according to the circumstances. If this period is divided up under the headings of war and peace, we will find that one part of the Quran, covering a span of twenty years, relates to peaceful teachings on the subjects of faith, worship, ethics, justice, humanity, etc., whereas the verses relating to war were revealed during a period of only three years, when the believers were faced with armed aggression.

There are 114 chapters in the Quran, containing 6,666 verses in all. There are hardly 40 verses which relate directly or indirectly to war. This means that the verses dealing with war represent barely 0.6 per cent of the entire text.

One important aspect of Islam as regards its peace-loving policy is that it differentiates between the enemy and the aggressor.

According to the teachings of Islam, if a group unilaterally attacks, thus opening hostilities, war can, as a matter of necessity, be waged in self-defence. The Quran states: “Permission to fight is given to those who are attacked.” (22:39) But so far as engaging in combat with the enemy is concerned, the Quran does not allow military action just on account of enmity. There is a verse in the Quran which gives clear guidance in this regard: “And good and evil are not alike. Requite evil with what is best. Then truly he between whom and you there was enmity will become your dearest friend.” (41:34)

These verses teach us not to regard our enemies as objects of everlasting hostility, for a potential friend could be hiding in the guise of an enemy. Discover this friend and turn the potential into the actual. Then you will have no cause for complaint.

It is clear that there are two ways of settling an issue—one violent and one peaceful. When we compare the two, we find that in any controversial matter, opting for violence is the harder course while opting for non-violence is the easier. The general rule in Islam is that whenever there is any controversy, we have to choose to tread the path of peace rather than that of violence. In present times when freedom has been accepted as an irrevocable right of man, peaceful methods should invariably be adopted.

It would be appropriate to add here that, during the life of the Prophet, if certain wars of a limited duration took place; such engagement only reflected the conditions of those times. The wars that took place in the first half of the seventh century are explainable in terms of it being an age of religious coercion and religious persecution. The atmosphere of religious tolerance that prevails today was not to be found in those times, so that the opponents of monotheism, by initiating hostilities, forced the Prophet to fight. Today, religious tolerance has become an established right of every individual and every group. That is why the question of going to war to secure religious rights should simply never arise.

Constructive Islamic activities are possible only in a peaceful and normal atmosphere. The importance of peace in Islam is, therefore, so great that we are commanded to ensure peace by bearing with all kinds of unpleasant situations.

One example of this avoidance of armed confrontation is that of the signing of the Hudaibiya peace treaty. When a pitched battle seemed imminent between the Prophet of Islam and his opponents, the Prophet successfully defused the situation by the initiation of peace negotiations which continued for two weeks. During these negotiations, which took place at Hudaibiya near Mecca, the Prophet of Islam found the other party clinging obstinately to its demands. Therefore, the Prophet unilaterally accepted all the conditions of the enemy in order to arrive at a peaceful conclusion.

The purpose of this pact was to end tensions between the two parties and to maintain a normal atmosphere in order that the work of peaceful reconstruction might be performed - the actual goal of the mission of Islam. Immediately after the conclusion of the Hudaibiya peace treaty, the atmosphere did return to normal and all the constructive activities of Islam were resumed in full force.

The present world is so structured that conflicts inevitably occur between individuals. 'On such occasions, Islam tells us not to allow the conflict to escalate to the point of a violent confrontation. The Quran calls this a policy of patience and avoidance. As a permanent principle, it says: "Reconciliation is best."(4: 128) That is, at the time of mutual conflict reconciliation should be resorted to in order to end the conflict. This is for the simple reason that, by adopting the path of conciliation, we can find opportunities to prevent our energy from being wasted in confrontational actions and to devote all this energy to constructive activities. It is this advantage of a conciliatory course which the Prophet of Islam recommended to his followers thus: "You should not desire confrontation with the enemy; you should ask God for peace."

There is a verse in the Quran that says: "Whenever they kindle the fire of war, Allah puts it out:"

It was in this spirit of Islam that when the Prophet came into power in Medina he did not start waging war in order to force people to surrender to him. Instead, he negotiated with tribes all over Arabia and ultimately brought about unity among them with a series of peace treaties.

If we make an in-depth study of the teachings of Islam we find that Islam wants to root out all those factors which lead to war. Why is a war waged? There are two main causes. One, to attempt to annihilate the enemy. Second, to attempt to gain political power. In the achievement of either of these goals, there is no justification in Islam

With regard to the enemy, Islam teaches us to try to eliminate enmity -- not the enemy.

According to the Quran, no enemy is everlastingly hostile. For in every enemy there lies a potential friend. Therefore, what the believer ought to do is to reach out through unilateral good behaviour to the man hidden within. By requiring good for evil, he should convert this enemy into a friend.

The Prophet of Islam taught people by reciting verses of the Quran which said: 'Read in the name of your Lord...' and other such verses which were peaceful teachings, being non-militant in nature and ethical in value. He taught people how to pray, and to practice patience and tolerance even in the face of oppression, and thus avoid conflict.

He was a role model in that he showed that it was possible for a human being to work for the well-being of others without any ill-feeling, in spite of highly provocative circumstances.

All the tasks performed by the Prophet throughout his life were marked by the greatness which comes from always choosing a non-violent course of action. Setting this kind of example formed the greater part for the Prophet's actual mission. And so far as war and violence are concerned, the jurists have characterized them as not being for the sake of Islam but as being contingent upon exceptional circumstances.

Conclusion

Peace is a necessity of global society if harmony is to be maintained. Humans are connected by all the possible means. It may be the compassion, language, understanding, striving for better living or even under the minute scale of genome and Chromosomes. We are all connected. So are our emotions and our fears. When peaceful conditions prevail in a society all activities take place in their proper form. But if the atmosphere of peace is disturbed, the normal functioning of society is disrupted. Peace and harmony is, therefore, a basic requirement of man, that it is crucial to maintain it in all situations. Without peace there can be neither development nor progress. No excuse whatsoever justifies the use of violence, in individual or national life. Regardless of how unfavourable circumstances might be, an environment of peace is indispensable. We must maintain peace unilaterally, or face annihilation. The only way to maintain global peace and solidarity is by educating people in the ethics of solidarity. This is corroborated from the life of the Prophet of Islam who taught the importance of education with the goal of maintaining social harmony and solidarity. The Islamic principles given in the present article will go a long way in ensuring global ethics for social solidarity and harmony.

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