

Inner Peace as “the Right Way” to Outer Peace

Shahram Pazouki*

“Their peace and their war (turn) on a phantasy”

Maulana Rumi

Abstract

As the title of paper “Inner Peace as the ‘Right Way’ (*ḥirāt al-mustaqīm*) to Outer Peace” indicates what I intend to clarify is that, although religions can help us to establish world peace, the primary peace upon which all real peace depends is inner peace: it is peace with God and His whole creation (*khalq*). Thus, within the Islamic context, to discuss the political and legal realities of peace and war, we first need to understand how Islam views these concepts in a general sense: namely, both the inner and outer peace. Once the general Islamic sense of the two terms is clear, we can turn to the specific issue of how traditional and normative Islam would strive to establish peace in today's world.

Keywords: Inner peace, Outer peace, Jihad, *Salām*, Sufism.

I. Introduction

It is important to note at the outset that what is being discussed here is the religion of Islam as set down in its fundamental texts, not necessarily the opinions of certain contemporary Muslims.

In a comprehensive view, Islam comprises an outer and an inner aspect, namely, a Divine law (*shari'ah*) and a spiritual way (*ṭariqah*) each of which literally means “a way towards God”. The *shari'ah* addresses the domain of action, and not intentions and spirituality which are the domain of the *ṭariqah*. The fact that Islam, in contrast with Christianity, has both a Divine law of itself

* Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy
shpazouki@hotmail.com

similar to Talmudic law in Judaism and a spiritual way as is found in Christianity is something that should be taken into consideration in gaining a true vision of Islam.

Islam, in fact, being based on the Divine Unity in all its different aspects has never distinguished between the spiritual and temporal or religious and profane in any domain. It has envisaged a total way of life. It, therefore, envisages not only the saint but also the ordinary person with all his/her strength and weakness. For this reason it has been falsely accused of being worldly or being the religion of the sword and war.

II. War and Peace

Perhaps no subject in Islam has been so controversial and discussed in the West as the concept of *jihad* translated as “Holy War”. Islam has generally been considered the religion of war and the prophet of Islam has been regarded as the prophet of the sword. However, the translation of the word “*jihād*” as “Holy War” is defective in principle, and even incorrect from a certain viewpoint. The terminology of Holy War for the first time was used in European medieval times for the description of the crusades and crusaders. The word *jihad* comes from the Arabic root “*jahd*” meaning “struggle”, a comprehensive struggle covering all aspects of Islamic life. Accordingly, the phrase “in the path of Allah” (في سبيل الله) often follows it. The whole of Islam is *jihad* in the way of God to meet God, and so any action taken with this intention such as studying, teaching, house holding is *jihad*. However, from the *shari'ah* perspective, and only in the legal context of the word, *jihad* means “war”.

In Islam, after the migration (*hijrah*) of the prophet from Mecca to Medina, because of the establishment of the governance by the Prophet, special rules and regulations were established for the administration of the newly established religious city (*Madinah*). It was reasonable that for the defense of this city in the face of enemies and aggressors, rules of war were also established. It is inevitable that in Christianity, in which governance was not an issue at the beginning, civil laws including defensive rules were not necessary and so were non-existent. In fact, the moment Christianity became the religion of a civilization and an empire; it had to take the sword and fight in order to subsist. It had to choose between remaining the religion of monks or of a civilization which brought with it the responsibility of having to rule and fight wars. In a realistic view, war was actually unavoidable and Islam, rather than leaving it aside as if it did not exist, limited it by accepting it and providing religious

regulation for it. However, that does not mean that *jihad* in the meaning of “war” is one of the main pillars of Islam. As it has been practiced after the Prophet of Islam, the waging of war by Muslims was not permitted by many Sunni or Shiite scholars and they considered it obligatory only at the time and in circumstances of defense for the Muslim community.

However, *jihad* has also a more profound meaning which is taken into serious consideration in Islamic Sufism. In order not to let the spiritual genuine truth of *jihād* be forgotten,¹ the Prophet in response to one of the Muslims, who had been returning from the war, said: “You have come back from the *lesser jihād*, and the *greater jihād* is incumbent upon you”. That person asked: “What is the *greater jihad*?” the Prophet said: “War against bodily desires and temptations”.² From an Islamic spiritual perspective, as the Prophet said, the main enemy of Man is his carnal self. Genuine *jihād* or *greater jihad* is to kill this inner enemy. If a Muslim does not overcome this inward enemy, the outward *jihād* or *jihād* in the *shari‘ah* sense is of no use, because it does not lead a person to the Truth. The *greater jihad* is *jihad* in its *tariqah* sense. Contrary to the lesser *jihād*, it is incumbent on believers at all times and in all places.

III. Inner Peace (*Salām*)

At any rate, the main goal of Islam is to reach peace and this peace has its own process. As far as *shari‘ah* is concerned, peace means peace (صلح) with others, as the Qur’an says: “Peace is better for you” (Qur’an, 4:128). <الصُّلْحُ خَيْرٌ> and in *tariqah*, it is interpreted as “*salām*”. *Salām* is a very delicate and precise term, which contains a broad sense and has been used in different ways and dimensions in an Islamic context, so that it cannot easily be translated. *Salām* comes from the root of “*silm*” meaning tranquility and peace and security, whether inward or outward. Islam, which is the name of the Mohammadan religion, comes from the same root *Salām* (سلام).

As the Prophet said, “Muslim is the one from whose hands and tongue other Muslims are safe.”³ Whenever Muslims meet each other they use the same term to welcome and greet each other. They say “*As-salām*” and its saying is advisable. God in the Qur’an invites men to the “House of *Salām* and says: <والله>

¹ In Sufism, even the famous sword of Imam Ali, the distinguished companion of the Prophet in almost all wars called as *Dhulfaqār*, has a spiritual significance. *Dhulfaqār* means having two edges. Symbolically, one edge refers to remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and the other refers to meditation (*fikr*).

² This *hadith* (prophetic saying) is referred to in many Şufi classic texts, for example, *Ihyā al-‘Awlām al-Dīn* by Ghazali.

³ This *hadith* is recorded in many narrative sources, such as *Şahḥ al-Buchārī*, book of the faith, No.10.

يدعوا الي دارالسلام< In another verse in the *Qur'an*, God says: “anyone not entering the *Silm*, follows Satan”:

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطَوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ»⁴

According to the same verse, only the followers of *Silm* are faithful. In addition to all these, one of the names of God is “*Salām*”, but not war. God is the real peace and tranquility. Contrary to what is commonly said in the West, the God of Islam before and prior to being forceful, is compassionate, merciful, peaceful and “*salām*”. And Muslim prior to all other divine names at the beginning of every work calls him *Compassionate and Merciful* and God says in the *Qur'an* that He has prescribed for Himself mercy.⁵

Therefore, *jihad* and “*salām*” in Islām, which are for the most part used for war and peace, contain a much more comprehensive definition in comparison with a simple war between people and nations. They include both outward and inward aspects.

That is why we see that in Islamic spirituality the whole struggle of the believer in the path of gaining *Salām* is *Jihad* and anyone who is killed in this way is considered a martyr (*Shahīd*). However, a true *shahīd* is not one who is killed for any reason whatsoever. Literally, the word *shahīd* (martyr) comes from the root شَهِدَ meaning witnessing (*shahīda*).

In the same manner, the Greek root of the word martyr (*martous*), has the same meaning. Due to killing one's Satanic desires, a *Shahīd* (martyr) is the witness who has reached the highest station of seeing God. Only this peaceful soul goes back to God, whether in this life or the other. As the *Qur'an* says: Oh, you, the peaceful soul go back to your God, while you are satisfied with Him, and He is satisfied with you.”

«يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ. ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً»⁶

In this regard, life and death have also another meaning. If the Prophet said “die before you (naturally) die”, he did not mean to kill yourself or you are authorized to kill the others under the name of Islam. He spoke of death of carnal and satanic desires that can appear even in religious guise.

Generally speaking, in Islam, with regard to its combination of outward and inward aspects of religion, or *shari'ah* and *tariqah*, the laws are set both for individuals and in connection with the others and with the Islamic community. For example for social administration and governance the *Qur'an* says:

⁴ “Oh those who believe enter into the peace all of you and do not follow the temptation of the Satan” (*Qur'an*, 2:208).

⁵ *Qur'an*, 6:12.

⁶ *Qur'an*, 89:27-28.

«فَمَنْ اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ»⁷

“And one who attacked you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you”. In a different verse the Qur’an says:

«وَالكَافِرِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ»⁸

“Those who quell anger and those who forgive people and God likes benevolents”.

According to this verse, in response to any violence any one does to you, there are three stages before punishment. The first one is to quell one's anger; the second, which is higher than the first, is to forgive, and the third, and highest, stage is that in response to his hostility and bad action, one does good to those at whose hands one has suffered mistreatment. The important point is that God says that He likes only those who do good (محسنين), that is, those of the highest degree.

In this respect, to do good is in harmony with the golden rule of Christianity that, in the face of a bad action, one should do good and be kind. As is obvious, in *shari‘ah* and the administration of society, the social laws of governments are based on the lowest status, namely, reciprocation (مقابله بمثل); but in *tariqah*, the highest status is the status of doing good in the face of bad actions, and all these in Islam have been recommended. In any case, the highest recommendation is doing good to people. However, the realization of the status of benevolence is based upon traveling God's path and attaining inward peace (*salām*). From this viewpoint the Prophet is quoted as saying: “Benevolence (الاحسان) is that you worship God to the degree that you can see him”,⁹ that is, to have insight whereby your spiritual eye opens up and sees the Truth as it is. Only those who have this vision can accordingly practice benevolence.

IV. Concluding remarks

Against this backdrop, the conclusion reached is as follows: from an Islamic viewpoint, outward peace is truly attained whenever inward peace, or *salām*, is attained. If we look at the history of Islam deeply, we see that, in cases where Muslim rulers have compelled non-Muslims to Islam by force, some might have converted to Islam outwardly, but Islam has not won their hearts and minds and so they have not truly become faithful, and sometimes, after the removal of forceful obstacles, they might even return to their ancestors’ religion. This fact

⁷ Qur’an, 2:194.

⁸ Qur’an, 3:132-4.

⁹ This famous *hadith* is recorded in many early authorized sources. See: *Al-Mu‘jam al-Mufahras*, ed. By Wensinck, vol.1, p.467.

can explain that the Muslim rulers such as Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (d.1030) or Nader Shah Afshar (d.1747) invaded India apparently under the name of Islamic *jihād*, but their cutting sword could not convert the hearts of anybody to Islam; rather, the great mystics and Sufi Sheikhs such as Hojviri (d.1071) or Shah Nimatullah Wali (d. 1431) or Mir Seyyed Ali Hamedani (d.1384), within a small period of time and without any military force, could convert thousands of Indians to Islam, because they were themselves at the high status of *salām* or inward peace.

In many cases the spiritual attraction of Islam encouraged aggressive tribes who had won military victories to become dominated by the spirituality of the defeated nations. A valuable example of this is the aggression of the Mongols in Iran: they slaughtered people and plundered from whomever they captured but, before long, all the Mongol rulers, one after another, converted to Islam because of Islamic spirituality (Sufism). The great Muslim Sufi mystic, Rumi, calls this spiritual killing, “killing without sword”.¹⁰ In this manner, in a position of strength and not weakness, the following verse was revealed to the Prophet in Medina: “There is no compulsion in Islam”.¹¹ This verse was an answer to those Muslims of Medina who wanted to force their children to convert from Judaism or Christianity to Islam.

In my concluding remarks, I would like to say a few words about war and peace in the present situation of the world. In modern times, based on the new definition of Man and the world, a new situation has been created in which the definitions of war and peace have been substantially changed. Of course, there has always been war and tribes and countries have attacked other lands for different reasons and conquered them through war and hostility. However, these wars were adventitious and the main goal was mostly peace, and war was a deviation from peace. But now, for some two hundred years, war has taken on a new meaning, because the domineering personality of humans that want to build the world the way they will and represent it. They have forgotten to live in peace with the whole world.

What lies behind this hegemonic policy is not blackmailing or receiving booty or adding new territories to the old territory. Rather, it is the will to power. It is part of the project of the modernization of the world by the forceful

¹⁰ Maulana Rumi attributed this killing to Imam Ali and, while addressing him, says:

بازگو دانم که این اسرار هوست/زانکه بی شمشیر کشتن کار اوست

“Tell me I know that this is of the mysteries of Him (God). Because killing without sword is of His works” (*Mathnavi*, Nicholson's edition and translation, 1: 3747).

¹¹ Qur'an 2:256.

power of technology and politics; the same thing which has been established in recent decades as globalization. In this project, the main aim is war, conquest and hegemony. So, if the word of peace comes between it, it is merely a condition of not-war. This peace is not a genuine peace since it is only a temporary strategic removal of hostility and enmity. Therefore, before long, the conditions of war will again prevail. In the present critical circumstances of our world, policy makers regard themselves as responsible for establishing peace because the definition they make of peace is only outward peace and is based on political concepts, and so they usually consider solutions to peace to be political.

Based on their political analyses, their perception of war and peace in religions lacks the due consideration of the spiritual and metaphysical reality of religions and it is without taking into consideration all aspects of religions in their totality. At the same time, the situation of adherents of religions toward the question of war and peace is strange and difficult. On the one hand, a group of the believers interpret their religion ideologically in accordance with the modern secular world, in which the genuine holy essence of religion is negated and what remains is a set of canon laws with strict and rigid rules. According to this understanding, religion is reduced to the manifesto of a political party and is subject to political aims, while the faithful are the affiliated members of that party wishing to fulfil the slogans of that party. For them, the essence of religion is a political practice for the materialization of objectives that are only apparently religious, so what is emphasized is to push others to accept their own religion even if it is achievable through aggression and war.

According to this interpretation of religion, war is given a high priority and war should principally be waged against whatever is contrary to one's understanding of religion, so that one's religion can be revived and superficial objectives realized. This is the same interpretation as what is now called "religious fundamentalism", and obvious examples of it can easily be found in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The fundamentalist understanding of war and peace, though apparently different from a politico- religious point of view, is ultimately the same and in the same direction. However, at least in the case of Islam, it has a single general defect: because of the world propaganda against it, every effort is made to introduce Islam to the world on the basis of this interpretation, as if it were a religion only arising from war and in the direction of war. This effort has been particularly intensified after 11 September 2001.

There is, however, another understanding of religion focusing on the spiritual essence of religion, according to which the main and inherent message of religions is to achieve inward peace, or *salām*, and then to realize this in the outward world. This goal is attainable only through spiritual *jihād*.

If this inward peace is found, we can say that there is hope for mankind to reach outward peace. Otherwise, although political policies and international laws may in the short term prevent war, they cannot establish real peace. This peace and *salām* cannot be found if mankind is still negligent of the divine truth of its being. Otherwise, it would be an illusion of peace. Thus, Maulana Rumi says: “Their peace and their war (turn) on a phantasy.”²¹

In other words, we can only achieve real peace in the world when we first find it within ourselves. This peace already necessitates the peace with God and the world of His creatures. At this point the religions of the world could help man to overcome his negligence of the *salām* in the modern world. It is at this point that we could see that the God of Islam invites all mankind to enter the house of peace (*salām*), and says: (والله يدعو الي دار السلام). “And Allah invites to the abode of *salām*”.³¹ And peace and *salām* be with you.

<والسلام عليكم>

¹² *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*, ed. and trans. by Reynold A. Nicholson, (1:71).
¹³ Qur’an, 10:25.