

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



## ISLAM & TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK

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“You have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shall love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Jesus Christ: *Matthew 5: 38–44*

The biblical doctrine of “turning the other cheek” is the point of pride for Christians. This doctrine as is known originates from words attributable to the Biblical personality and venerable Prophet Jesus---God’s peace be upon him. Although it is not known to many in light of the violent images of Islam in the media, Islam---believe it or not---also has a doctrine and history of passive resistance similar to that taught by Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible.

This fact should not be a surprise to any Muslim or non-Muslim, since Islam “proper” is nothing more than the final phase in a continuum of divine revelation. Consequently, the teachings of Muhammad and Jesus---God show them mercy and peace ---are similar in many ways by necessity of both law codes coming from one single source.

Martin & Malcolm

A widespread understanding among, perhaps most, indigenous Americans is that one of the major distinctions between Islam and Christianity or atleast the difference between the teachings of Muhammad and Jesus---peace be upon them---is that the former taught his followers to actively resist their oppression by fighting back, while the latter taught his followers to passively resist. Hence, we have the doctrine of “turn the other cheek.” This imagined distinction was even greater highlighted during the civil rights movement when we look at two great men of American history: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Minister Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam.

Martin, like the exemplar of his faith, Jesus Christ, in an attempt to highlight the atrocities committed by the American mainstream (whites) against the African American national population utilized this approach with his followers, endured unwarranted and unimaginable physical and verbal abuse, and eventually would be assassinated, but not before proving his great spiritual strength and winning the sympathy of millions of people nationwide.

Malcolm, on the other hand, especially in his early days of preaching for the Nation of Islam, scoffed at the notion of Martin achieving any true success through this approach. Consequently, he advocated active resistance, retaliation, and “fighting fire with fire” in order to achieve respect, honor, and a dignified existence for all African Americans. In addition, he fundamentally differed with the mission of Dr. King in that Malcolm and the NOI advocated complete segregation from whites while Martin was in favor of complete integration. Eventually, Malcolm’s convictions would be tested until he left the Nation of Islam and started his own mosque and movement.

The point from all of this is that the incidents of the civil rights movement and from these two personalities, one a Christian and the other an admitted Muslim, drew a clear line between an apparently fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. As a result, we see many blacks supporting the mission of Martin and his approach and another section of them supporting the views of Malcolm and the Nation of Islam. As a result, this distinction is very sharp in the hearts and minds of a vast number of Americans.

For many Black American Muslims, turning the other cheek is not a sound Islamic approach to resisting oppression; arguably, due to this early imagined distinction between Islam and Christianity inherited from the period of the civil rights movement. This is the case, in spite of the fact that Malcolm X of this period was speaking as a member of the Nation of Islam, not as a member of the mainstream Islamic tradition.

## Islamic History

That being said, it needs to be understood that anytime it is said of a religion that it is predicated on violence or on passivity, such a conclusion must be premised upon the fundamental teachings of that religion derived from its primary sources. The human social condition does nothing more than accent certain distinct characteristics of a particular religion, since religion as a way of life must necessarily adapt to the circumstances the adherents to that religion confront. Hence, you see a face of Islam during peace, and at times you see a face of Islam during war.

For instance, we find that during the first thirteen years of the Prophet Muhammad’s mission—God’s peace and mercy be upon him—was characterized by passive resistance. As a matter of a fact, it was a religious injunction during this period for an adherent not to defend himself against the abuses of his/her enemies. This was the case until God had provided a sanctuary for the Muslims of Mecca in the city of Medina after which God revealed the following permission for Muslims to fight back:

“To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to fight], because they are wronged; and verily, Allah is Most Powerful for their aid; [They are] those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, [for no cause] except that they say, “Our Lord is Allah.” Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His [cause]; for verily Allah is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might.” (Koran 22: 39-40)

As a matter of fact, fighting was so uncommon during more than the first half of the prophetic mission that many of the Prophet’s followers felt uncomfortable with the idea. The Koran in 2: 216 says,

“Fighting is prescribed upon you, and you dislike it. But it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knows, and you know not.”

Another example is that in the very first major battle the early Muslims had after migrating to Medina, a number of the soldiers were petrified with fear and had no desire to fight. In this regard, the following verses were revealed:

“Just as your Lord ordered you out of your house in truth, even though a party among the believers disliked it, disputing with you concerning the truth after it was made manifest, as if they were being driven to death while they see it. Behold! Allah promised you one of the two parties, that it should be yours: You wished that the one unarmed should be yours, but Allah willed to establish the truth according to His words, and to cut off the roots of the unbelievers; That He might establish truth and prove falsehood false, distasteful though it be to those in guilt.” (Koran 8: 5-8)

## The Prophet of Islam

Perhaps the greatest example of Islam’s consideration of turning a blind eye to offenders is Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam---God’s mercy and peace be upon him. The Koran tells us in more than one verse that “*You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Final Day, and who remembers Allah much.*” (Koran 33: 21) The Koran also says of him, “*We sent you not, but as a mercy for all creatures*” (21: 107), and “*Surely you have sublime morals.*” (68: 4)

In the second major encounter with the pagans of Mecca in the Battle of Uhud, the Prophet---God’s mercy and peace be upon him---suffered injury to his head, face, and a broken tooth. When encouraged by one of his companions to ask God to curse his people, he responded, “I have not been sent as one who damns. Rather, I have been sent as an inviter and a mercy. O Allah! Guide my people for indeed they know not.” In another instance, he said, “O Allah! *Forgive* my people for indeed they know not.”<sup>1</sup>

He showed the utmost restraint against his antagonists among the hypocrites and Jews of Medina to the point that when he was asked whether or not he should order the death of the chief of the hypocrites, he said, “I wish not that it be said that Muhammad kills his companions.”<sup>2</sup> And when the man died, the Prophet prayed over him in spite of the objections of some of his companions.<sup>3</sup>

When he overtook Mecca during the Conquest after 20 years of persecution at the hands of his people, he gathered the captives and said to them, “What do you think that I will do to you?” They said, “You will do to us good! You are a noble brother, the son of noble brother!” He then said to them, “I say to you as my brother, Joseph, said, “There will be no reminder of your injustices and violations.” Go, ye all! For you are free!”<sup>4</sup> Such extraordinary pardon exercised in Islamic history was also demonstrated by Sultan Salah al-Din (Saladin) al-

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Shifa bi Ta’rif Huquq al-Mustafa*: 1/72-73.

<sup>2</sup> See *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*: 4/370, and *Sirah of Ibn Hisham* 2/291

<sup>3</sup> The Koran directs the Prophet---God’s mercy and peace be upon him---concerning the hypocrites, “*Whether you ask for their forgiveness, or not, [their sin is unforgiveable]: if you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, Allah will not forgive them because they have rejected Allah and His messenger, and Allah guides not those who are perversely rebellious*” (9: 80). After the death of the chief hypocrite, ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, the Prophet---mercy and peace on him---saw no decisive prohibition in this verse against praying for hypocrites. This was, firstly, because outwardly the words give him a choice between asking forgiveness or not (Whether you ask for their forgiveness, or not...). Secondly, the verse mentions that God would not forgive even if he was to ask seventy times. His hope was that if he asked more than seventy times, it might be enough to secure forgiveness for Ibn Ubayy in spite of his open and insidious antagonism of the Prophet---mercy and peace on him. His companion, ‘Umar, contested this understanding of the Prophet’s---God’s mercy and peace be upon him. Later, the following verse was revealed confirming ‘Umar’s stance, “*Nor do you ever pray for any of them that dies, nor stand at his grave; for they rejected Allah and His messenger, and died in a state of perverse rebellion*” (9: 84) Refer to *Tafsir of Ibn Kathir*: 2/362.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Shifa bi Ta’rif Huquq al-Mustafa*: 1/74-75. Refer also to the *Tabaqat of Ibn Sa’d*.

Ayyubi during the period of the Crusades when he gave the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem free passage to the nearest European city. This won for Saladin a permanent and lasting mention in European history.

These are just a few examples of the excellent character of the Prophet---mercy and peace upon him, and his turning a blind eye to abuses committed against him and his people.

### The Koran on Yielding the Right to Retaliation

The Koran says in the subject of surrendering one's right to exact vengeance from another, "*Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better: then will he between whom and you was hatred become as it were your friend and intimate.*" (41: 34) So the Koran holds forgiveness, forbearance, restraint, and turning a blind eye to abuses to be the higher ideal of a belief.

It also says, "*Invite [all] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance.*" (16: 125) So arguing in a way that is most gracious is a form of pardon and tolerance legislated by Islam.

The Koran also encourages forgiveness and pardon for the crime of murder. That is, it urges the family members of the victim to forgive the murderer even though it maintains for them the right to demand the murderer's blood in accord with the Mosaic law of equality (qisas).<sup>5</sup> The Koran says, "*O you who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand, and compensate him with handsome gratitude. This is a concession and a mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave chastisement.*" (2: 178)

Finally, in the case of accidental murder, it says, "*Never should a believer kill a believer, except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake it is ordained that he should free a believing slave and pay blood-money to the deceased family, unless they remit it freely.*" (4: 92)<sup>6</sup> These are just a few examples of verses in the Holy Koran that encourage the doctrine of turning the other cheek and yielding one's right to exact justice. There is much more than this that can be presented. This being the case, how can it be justifiably argued that Islam is an evil religion predicated on the complete annihilation of or forced conversion of the infidel?

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<sup>5</sup> Although modern western societies consider punishment for murder to be the right of the society officiated by government, Islam views that punishment is the right of the family of the victim although the established authorities are the enforcers of the particular punishment. This is an important distinction in light of the debates concerning the inhumanity or biased enforcement of the death penalty for the crime of murder. Additionally, it is an important distinction in light of the wide disparity found between the definitions of a life sentence found among the various United States.

<sup>6</sup> The remainder of the verse states, "*If the deceased belonged to a people at war with you, and he was a believer, the freeing of a believing slave [is enough]. If he belonged to a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance, blood-money should be paid to his family, and a believing slave be freed. For those who find this beyond their means, [is prescribed] a fast for two months running: by way of repentance to Allah: for Allah has all knowledge and all wisdom.*" Notice that in the case of the mistaken murder of a person who happens to be from a people who have a mutual alliance with the Muslims, blood money should be paid to them. However, if they are at war with the Muslims, they should not be paid blood money for the death of a Muslim or non-Muslim from their ranks, for the obvious reason of not giving the enemy the means to further wage war against the Muslims. The case of the alliance is one of the clearest proofs that Islam's objective is not to eradicate unbelief from the planet, and that a major aim is to coexist with other peoples. So take note!

## Prophetic Standards

The Prophet Muhammad---God’s mercy and peace be upon him---said in one prophetic tradition, “The strong believer is better and more beloved to God than the weak believer, although there is good in each.”<sup>7</sup>

A man once asked him for counsel and advice, so he told the man, “Don’t become angry.”

In another incident, he asked his companions, “What kind of man do you consider to be the strongest?” They said, “The one who other men cannot overpower.” He (the Prophet) said, “No. He is not that one. Rather, he is one who controls himself when he gets angry.”<sup>8</sup>

These words all point to an encouragement to practice restraint under all circumstances, which includes not retaliating for wrong dealt against one’s person. This is the epitome of restraint.

## The Violent Image of Islam

The question is often asked about the true meaning of the word “Jihad”, and Muslims of varied orientations give different responses. Some say that Jihad means “holy war.” Some say that it means “self defense.” The truth of the matter is that Jihad is a word that means nothing more than “struggle” or “striving.” The generality of its meaning encompasses every form of struggle that the human being undertakes, which would include the armed military struggle under religiously justifiable circumstances and conditions.<sup>9</sup>

It has been suggested by some that Islam does not have a doctrine of turning the other cheek. Consequently, it is impossible for Muslims who rebel, resist, defend, or pre-empt attacks against their enemies to surrender. Rather, the suggestion is that there can only be either victory or death. The implication is also that the only way that Muslims can co-exist with other peoples is by being lords over them reducing them to second class citizens, forcing them to pay an oppressive tribute, or accepting from them nothing else other than conversion or an

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<sup>7</sup> Muslim, Qadar: 24

<sup>8</sup> Muslim, *Kitab al-birr wa l-Silah*: Hadith #2608.

<sup>9</sup> While “Jihad” is a very troublesome word for many non-Muslims and also exploited by many of Islam’s antagonists to promote the idea that Islam is a religion that by its nature has an ultimate aim of universal military conquest and dictatorial control, one must understand that such a peculiar character attached to Islam does not originate with Islam nor does it give a way out for other proselytizing world religions from the same accusation. If Christians take pride in their exemplar, Jesus Christ, God’s peace be upon him, for his restraint, discipline, and tolerance, then Muslims also take pride in him for the same reasons. This is so, although we, Muslims, acknowledge the practicality of Muhammad---mercy and peace upon him---and celebrate him over Jesus in light of the fact that his teachings preserve for the human being the right to defend his or herself or even retaliate if necessary. Such a principle speaks better to the normative human condition. However, we must understand that from a purely Islamic perspective both teachings originate with God, so we only attribute the two respective teachings to the two iconoclasts metaphorically. God is the true origin of the teaching, so both are righteous and truth. The world we live in today is ruled by Christians. Almost all western politicians in most major military and economic powers are of the Christian faith. Even though on the surface we can say that they do not wear it on their chests or that they maintain a clear separation between their beliefs and the policies they introduce in the world, from a rational and realistic perspective, a person’s core beliefs always finds a way to affect his decisions, actions, and behavior. In light of this fact, it would seem a reasonable possibility for Christian politicians to work to spread greater peace and compassion throughout the world, and very few would likely have anything to say about that, since Christians are the “powers that be.” What this further means is that just as Muslims have a major task in challenging themselves and making non-Muslims feel comfortable that we can all co-exist without any fear of deception or treachery, Christians are similarly obliged to prove to the world that the teachings of tolerance, restraint, and turning the other cheek are things that are more than just words written between the covers of their Holy Book. Another way to put it would be that Christianity may need just as much “reform” as many insist Islam needs if we all hope for a better world.

infidel's death.<sup>10</sup> After reflection upon the Koran, prophetic tradition, and Islamic history quite a different picture emerges.

Such antagonists may draw their conclusions from selective citations of Koranic verses, like, "*O Prophet! Rouse the believers to the fight. If there are twenty among you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding.*" (8: 65)

Another verse is, "*Be not weary and faint-hearted, crying for peace, when you are the uppermost: for Allah is with you, and will never put you in loss for your [good] deeds.*" (47: 35)

One observes from these two verses a very clear encouragement to remain firm against the enemy even when one is vastly outnumbered and not to be the first to call to peace when one has the upper hand in a battle. This might give the impression to some that Muslims are being encouraged to be unreasonable to the point of rage that leads to a type of recklessness that culminates in the decimation of the entire population, both of non-Muslims and Muslims, if necessary. That being the case, it would point to a wanton disregard for life and the living.<sup>11</sup> However, since the Koran is an integrated whole, one needs to take things into context with similar verses.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, none of these verses are calling to recklessness and unreasonableness. Rather, they are calling to the employment of all the psychological means necessary to ensure that victory is won. For this reason, the Koran also says, "*But if the enemy incline towards peace, do you [also] incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is the one that hears and knows [all things].*" (8: 61)

It is true that Islam encourages steadfastness while the believers are faced with incredible odds.<sup>13</sup> However, Muslims are also asked to yield to overwhelming odds when it seems that there is no chance for victory against the enemy. Just listen to what Shaykh Al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salam, one of the great Muslim legal scholars says about this:

"So whenever it happens that the enemy is not dealt any injury (nikayah), it is compulsory to yield defeat, due to the [heavy] loss of life that is suffered from standing one's ground, in addition to the fact that it increases the confidence of the unbelievers and debases the people of Islam. So, to stand one's ground in this case becomes a sheer source of detriment (mafsadah) wherein there exists no interest (maslahah)."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> All one has to do is look at the constitution the Prophet---mercy and peace on him---drafted for the Jews of Medina to see that the truth is far from such a claim. He gave the Jews the right to self government. This included their own economy independent from that of the Muslims, no taxes, and in most cases, their own judiciary. The Prophet---mercy and peace on him---acted as judge only when he was asked to or when a dispute occurred between a Jew and a Muslim. In spite of that, he expelled most of them from the city, only as a result of their treachery; not because they were Jews. It would behoove such people making such erroneous claims to simply have a look at one of the drafts of that noble and blessed constitution.

<sup>11</sup> If this were to be proven true beyond a shadow of a doubt, it would justify western hysteria and fears about an Islamic nation possessing weapons of mass destruction.

<sup>12</sup> We, Muslims, do not or should not feel embarrassment at the fact that God has preserved for us the right to defend ourselves in interest of the preservation of our persons and the freedom to practice our religion. It is clearly a sign of God's care that He even advises us on the proper way to conduct a war. I doubt that any military commander would disagree with the strategy of pressuring the enemy to surrender or call to peace when the commander's army clearly has the upper hand. Likewise, he would also not disagree with utilizing any mechanism that would instill confidence in his soldiers to ensure victory. What a beautiful strategy!

<sup>13</sup> The traditional schools of Islamic law agree that whenever the number of enemy combatants is only twice the number of the Muslim army or fewer, it is impermissible to flee from the battle. However, when they are more than twice the number of the Muslim army, many scholars state that it is permissible to flee. The majority of them hold that anytime the number of soldiers present in the Muslim army are at least 12,000 (twelve thousand), it is never permitted to flee the battle regardless of the number of unbelievers they are facing. See *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*: 2/310-311 and *Mudawwanah al-Fiqh al-Maliki adillatihi*: 2/437.

<sup>14</sup> *Qawa'id al-Ahkam fi Masalih al-Anam*: 1/95. Dr. Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Bouti states in *Fiqh al-Sirah*, "For this reason, the overwhelming majority of jurists have agreed that whenever the Muslims are in a condition of weakness in terms of numbers and military capacity to the extent that it is the most likely case that they will be killed without dealing any injury to their enemies whenever they have resolved to fight them, the interest of protecting life is given precedence here, because the corresponding interest---the protection of the religion---is [an] imagined [interest] or negated from being fulfilled." Then, after quoting from Al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam, he says, "I say: The granting of

A contemporary Maliki scholar by the name, 'Abd Al-Rahman al-Ghiryani, says while commenting on a view stating that anytime the Muslims are 12,000 strong, it is impermissible to flee from a battle<sup>15</sup>,

“This applies when the weaponry utilized is of nearly the same strength and effectiveness [as the enemies’]. As for when one hundred [Muslim soldiers] who are unprepared and unarmed meet twice their number of unbelievers who have munitions and arms, there is no obligation to stand one’s ground, because one armed [soldier] is equivalent to ten<sup>16</sup>...Imam al-Haramayn said: “When the Muslims agree that they will not be able to vex [the enemy] in anyway and that they will be killed without dealing any injury to the enemy in an absolute sense, defeat must be yielded to without disagreement between the scholars.” Qarafi said: “And it is reasonable (muttajib) [as an argument]. On this premise, it is possible to divide “fleeing” into [what is] compulsory, forbidden, recommended, disliked, and permissible according to the tokens [of circumstance] pointing to the [preference of preserving acknowledged] interests, to the [tokens indicating] opposition to those [interests], or to the [tokens indicating] that there is preponderance between them (i.e. interests and detriments).<sup>17””18</sup>

We see this rule clearly applied in the Battle of Mu’tah that happened in year 8 after Hegira. During this first major battle against the Byzantines, three of the Prophet’s military commanders fell one after another until Khalid ibn al-Walid was appointed commander by the remaining army. After witnessing the massive numbers of the enemies and that the Muslims would meet certain death, Khalid decided to retreat with his army back to Medina. Upon returning, some of the Muslims scolded the army denouncing them for retreating, but when the Prophet heard the criticisms, he defended Khalid’s decision, and then said, “No! They have not retreated. Rather, they are regrouping to return to the charge!”<sup>19</sup>

In this same context, we find that in the Battle of the Trench in the 5<sup>th</sup> year after Hegira when surrounded by 10,000 enemy combatants in Medina, the Prophet---God’s mercy and peace on him---presented to his companions an option to make an offer to the Clan of Ghatafan to forgo their support of this campaign against them on the condition that they receive 1/3 of the yield of Medina. His companions, after discerning that this was not revelation from God, rejected this option though. This gesture of the Prophet---God’s mercy and peace on him---clearly shows the permissibility of compromise when faced with odds that make one believe that no interest can be achieved in continuing to wage such a war. He wanted to do this for his people, but his people were ready to prove their faith in God.<sup>20</sup>

### Mercy: Islam’s Defining Characteristic

As stated before, it is only circumstantial that we witness the angry face of Islam---or Muslims---in these times of great tribulation and injustice in the world, although it can be argued and established that in most parts of the world God has ensured that Islam maintains its normative smiling face. This normative manifestation of Islam is largely due to the basic and fundamental teachings of our religion. It is God’s image reflected on the human being.

The Holy Koran tells us of God, “*He has inscribed for Himself mercy*” (6:12). The Prophet Muhammad---God’s mercy and peace be upon him---said that God says, “*Verily my mercy has overcome my wrath.*”<sup>21</sup> The Prophet---upon

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precedence to the interest of life is only apparent. Realistically, however, it is in reality an interest of [the protection of] the religion, since the religious interest necessitates in the like of this situation that the souls of the Muslims remain secure so that they can advance and struggle in the other fields [of life] that are open. Otherwise, the loss of their lives is considered a detriment to the religion itself and an opening of an arena before the unbelievers to enter through inlets from which they had been barred from entering.” [p. 59-60]

<sup>15</sup> This understanding comes from a hadith in the Sunan of Abu Dawud #2611 on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas---may Allah be pleased with him, the Prophet---may Allah bless and grant him peace---said, “The best of the Companions are four. The best of military detachments are four hundred. The best of armies is four thousand. And twelve thousand will never be conquered because of paucity of numbers.” Imam Hakim declared it *sahih*, but Abu Dawud states that it is *mursal* (has an undisclosed companion intermediary).

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Taj wa l-Iklil*: 3/353

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Dhakira*: 3/411; *al-Sharh al-Kabir*: 2/178

<sup>18</sup> *Mudawwanah al-Fiqh al-Maliki wa adillatihi*: 2/437-438

<sup>19</sup> *Sirah of Ibn Hisham*: p. 588; *Tirmidhi*: #1716

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: p. 500

<sup>21</sup> Bukhari and Muslim. See Tafsir Ibn Kathir: 2/118

him be mercy and peace----also advised us, “Be the murdered son of Adam, not the murdering one.”<sup>22</sup> Add to this, practically every chapter of the Koran begins with the words, “With the name of God, All-Compassionate, All-Merciful.” What greater proof can there be after that of the importance that Islam places on mercy and restraint?

While we may laud the person who practices restraint and good will toward one who acts niggardly toward him for manifesting an enormous spiritual or even physical strength, the question still remains of the practicality of that in the times we are living in today as a tool to discourage injustice and tyranny. There is no doubt that it is a definite path to God’s satisfaction and forgiveness. It was also an obviously appropriate sacred doctrine for Jesus-- upon him be peace----and his disciples in light of their scanty numbers, and lack of social, religious, and military support, since no trace of God’s word would have been left on the planet had they chosen to duke it out with their persecutors. Human history, however, has shown us time and again that it will always be the extreme minority of people who will succeed in exercising such a degree of restraint, leaving most of us with the dilemma of either accepting oppressive rule or discouraging that oppression by confronting it with the risk of losing our lives.

In this vein, we find that it is the nature of truth that when it confronts falsehood that the natural result is conflict. By truth I mean justice, and falsehood injustice. All the prophets of God came to bring man out of darkness into light, from injustice to justice, and from war to peace. However, the resistance of the rebellious soul to truth and justice is perhaps the greatest obstacle in establishing world peace. This is why we find in the words of Jesus, himself, words that essentially contradict the popular image that he was a conciliatory personality who believed in the preservation of a separation between God’s rule and the rule of man:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” (Matthew 10: 34-36)

However one may interpret these words, the consequence is the same: conflict. Jesus was sent to be a catalyst for conflict, not because it is the job of God’s messengers to instigate or agitate. Rather, their job is to proclaim the truth so that we as God’s subjects will be rightly guided in our beliefs and interactions with one another.

It has become an unchallenged universal in the west that “war is always evil” and that any religion that advocates war for any reason cannot be the true “religion of God.” However, when we look in the scriptures, we find war, and we find God’s instruction in times of war in both the Bible and the Koran. This is not to say that we should encourage war in light of our belief that the Final Day must come. We should not be so foolhardy to think that we are responsible for ushering it in and helping to ensure that it happens. This is the test of Jews, Christians, and Muslims together. Can we learn to distinguish between “prediction and the foretelling of future events” and between the “noble ideals and morals” that are the foundation of our religions? One, we are asked to believe in. The other, we are asked to live up to.

*“O Mankind! We created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other [not that you may despise each other]. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is [he who is] the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted [with all things].”*

(Koran 49: 13)

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<sup>22</sup> Abu Dawud relates the hadith with the wording “Be like the son of Adam” and another reading with “Be like the better of the two sons of Adam.” However, both narrations are weak. Nevertheless, there are other narrations in the same chapter that support the meaning of those reports, and it agrees with sound Koranic principles. Ahmad also narrates it with the words, “Be like the son of Adam.” See also *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*: 3/42