
PEACE AND PACIFISM; REFLECTIONS FROM HEBREW BIBLE, THE GOSPLES AND THE HOLY QUR'AN (A Descriptive and Textual study)

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ABSTRACT

It is vividly clear that the teachings of Peace exist in all texts of the sacred books of different World religions. No religion in its Holy books does teach or promote violence, cruelty and tyranny whatsoever. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels and the Holy Qur'an educate their adherents how to build Shalūm and Slām (peace) culture and how to portray the nonviolent approaches in numerous ways to build peace. The meaning of Shalūm; peace is richly significant both for Jews and Christians. To them it is the cure for disintegration, inner division, and imbalance in lives. In Islam, the word 'Islām' itself comes from the same root as Slām(peace).

The article aims at exploring the verses of events which promote theological tolerance and investigate the verses promoting humanistic circles from tri-religions. It expands the thinking canvas of religious commentators by presenting a tri-textual picture of 'Peace'. The paper starts with establishing the conceptual background of the subject matter, elaborates veneration for mankind and human blood, self-control during unfavorable circumstances and Peace inspirational personalities like Hadrat Ibrāhim/Abraham (A.S), Isāc/Ishmael (A.S), Hadrat 'Isā (A.S) and Hadrat Muhammad (S.A.W) whose entire life depicts as peace promoter. The paper ends up by searching common scriptural grounds and suggesting that 'Peace' should be established both individually and collectively.

Introduction:

1.2. The Hebrew Bible on Initialization of Peace/ *Shalūm*

The Hebrew Scriptures⁽¹⁾/Old Testament uses a familiar but significant word, *Shalūm*. In its purest sense *Shalūm* means *peace*. The connotation is positive. When someone says *Shalūm or Peace unto you*, it means, “I hope you have all the highest goodness.” There is a Biblical foundation of establishing Peace culture among the humanity. There were twelve sons of Jacob. The tribe of Joseph was further divided into two tribes of *Ephraim* and *Manasseh*. That made thirteen tribes. This tribe wasn’t allowed to participate in war. Even it was not counted in the army of Israel. God made a divine covenant with this tribe—a covenant of life and peace.⁽²⁾ It was the tribe of Levi – the tribe of priests. God specifically commanded Hadrat Mūsa (A.S) not to count the Levites in the census of the army. Instead, the Levites were the incharge of God’s work.

In looking further at the tribe of Levi, we find that God had made a covenant with the tribe of Levi—a covenant of life and peace and in the verses 4-6 God says, “You will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue, says the Lord Almighty. My covenant was with him, a covenant of Life and Peace.⁽³⁾ The Levites were to be active in the promotion of life and peace.

A series of verses on the subject matter is scattered among the whole *Torah*. It would exceed the limits of the topic if we collect and elaborate all minor and major incidents along with their historical contexts. So we are quoting here the most relevant verses those also draw a thorough picture.

1.3. Verses from the Hebrew Bible

Shalum/peace is one of the underlying principles of the *Torah*

- 1) “Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are shalom ('peace').”⁽⁴⁾
- 2) “Peace, peace to the distant and the close”⁽⁵⁾
- 3) “Seek peace and pursue it”⁽⁶⁾
- 4) “Great peace to those who love Your Torah”⁽¹⁾

(1) The Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, forming the covenant between God and the Jewish people that is the foundation and Bible of Judaism while constituting for Christians the Old Testament. Also called Hebrew Bible. Also called Tanakh (initial letters of the Hebrew names t(ôrâ), n(əbî'im),k(ətûbôt).

Read more at <http://www.yourdictionary.com/hebrew-scriptures#m0zJjE8AjxA8HRg8.99>

(2) Malachi 2:1-8. New Revised Standard version, retrieved on June 12, 2008 from <http://church-of-christ.org/bibles.html>

(3) Ibid, 4-6.

(4) Proverbs 3:17.

(5) Isaiah 57:19.

(6) Psalms 34:15.

- 5) "Peace upon Israel" ⁽²⁾
- 6) "And I shall place peace upon the land"⁽³⁾
- 7) "Behold I give him my covenant of peace" ⁽⁴⁾
- 8) The Priestly Blessings ends with: "May God lift up his face onto you and give you peace"⁽⁵⁾
- 9) The Ten Commandments; four out of ten highlights how to live peacefully like; "You shall not murder", "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor", "You shall not covet your neighbor's house", "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."⁽⁶⁾

1.4. Respect for Mankind and Human blood

Jewish Law requires its adherents to violate almost all prohibitions in order to save human life. Saving lives is required in almost all situations because Judaism places a fundamental emphasis on human life. We find many verses in the Old Testament about humans are Godlike. For example, according to the Book of Genesis, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them".⁽⁷⁾ Its idea of man's creation on the image of God leads to the argument that man's life means existence of God and his death defaces the image of God.

When man is considered God's reflection in the light of above verses, then his life, body and blood would be honorable. When, for a Jew, blood loses its honor and he plans to shed human life? The Book of Genesis presents a clear cut rule regarding human blood. If someone intends to shed blood, O. Testaments rule is a tit for tat situation; meaning blood for blood same as the Islamic system of *Qisās*. And It does not legitimate blood shed as it says:

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed."⁽⁸⁾

(1) Psalms 119:165.

(2) Psalms 128:6.

(3) Leviticus 26:6.

(4) Numbers 25:12.

(5) Numbers 6:24–26.

(6) Exodus, 20.

(7) Genesis, 1:27.

(8) Genesis, 9:6.

1.5. Rejection of Violence and offering peace before war

Judaism's religious texts overwhelmingly recommend kindness and peace,⁽¹⁾ and the Hebrew Bible contains the well-known commandment in Ten Commandments to "love thy neighbor as thyself". In fact, the love of peace and the pursuit of peace is one of the key principles in Jewish law. While Jewish tradition permits waging war and killing in certain cases.⁽²⁾ However, the requirement is that one always seeks a just peace before waging war.

Peace prevails over all Judaic phases, even before attacking. The Jews are commanded to offer terms of peace, as the Torah states, "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it."⁽³⁾ The book of Isaiah emphasizes the need to be peaceful "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."⁽⁴⁾

They are directed what method to take in dealing with the cities of war like, "They must not make a crash upon any of their neighbours till they had first given them fair notice, by a public manifesto stating the ground of their quarrel with them. In dealing with the worst of enemies, the laws of justice and honor must be observed and as the sword must never be taken in hand without cause. Even to the proclamation of war must be subjoined a tender of peace, if they would accept it upon reasonable terms. The Jewish writers say that upon condition that they renounce idolatry, worship the God of Israel, as proselytes of the gate that were not circumcised, pay to their new masters a yearly tribute, and submit to their government. On these terms the process of war should be stayed, and their conquerors, upon this submission, were to be their protectors."⁽⁵⁾

If the suggestions of peace were not accepted, they must advance to push on the war and let those know that if they reject the offer and take not the advantage of it within the limited time, the war would be the last solution.

1.6. Hebrew Prophets; Inspiration of peace

The Holy Bible has three famous personalities of Hadart Ibrāhim, Ishāc/Ishmael, and Hadart Musā (A.S) as a model of Peace and all have three different stories like Hadart

(1) Reuven Firestone, "Judaism on Violence and Reconciliation: An examination of key sources" in *Beyond violence: religious sources of social transformation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Fordham University Press, 2004), pp: 77-81.

(2) Michael J. Broyde, *Fighting the War and the Peace: Battlefield Ethics, Peace Talks, Treaties, and Pacifism in the Jewish Tradition*, 1998, p. 1.

(3) Deuteronomy, 20:10.

(4) Isaiah, 2:4

(5) Matthew Henry (1706), *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Christian classics Ethereal Library (CCEL), CD-ROM, 2000.

Ibrāhim (A.S) was cast into a lime kiln facing troubles by the rulers. He didn't resist, kept quiet and saved from the fire by divine grace. As a reward for this act of faith in one God, he was promised many offspring "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them."⁽¹⁾

The tradition was continued by Hadrat Isāc (A.S) (1313 BCE), who was headed to be sacrificed by his father.⁽²⁾ This is the Jewish perspective while Islamic perspective is Hadrat Ishmael (A.S).⁽³⁾ They set role models for the whole world especially to the preachers that how to respond in tough, unfavorable and crucial situations.

Once Hadrat Musā (A.S) saw a Jew hitting another in Egypt, He said to him the *rasha* (evil one), why do you hit your fellow!?"⁽⁴⁾ one learns that whoever hits his fellow, is called a *rasha*.

2. The New Testament on building Peace/ *Shalūm*

There is a conceptual commonality between the O.T. & N.T. The concept of peace through the Levites is only a peek through the door. There is a wealth of new insights for both the traditions to discover. Like there is an insight in the O.T. that God says to the Levi that my covenant of Peace with Levi may continue.⁽⁵⁾ The Christians believe that here God is saying that this covenant of peace is to continue to the priesthood of Believers-the Christian.

Likewise the *Shalūm* is accepted by Christians. *Shalom* is one of the essential contents of the theological message of both the traditions. In New Testament, we find a specific greeting used sixteen times: "Grace and Peace to you from God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."⁽⁶⁾ This Biblical theme is also found at several other locations and these are those notable verses.

- 1) "Blessed are the peacemakers"⁽⁷⁾
- 2) "Seek peace and pursue it"⁽⁸⁾
- 3) "One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is peace".⁽⁹⁾
- 4) "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."⁽¹⁰⁾

(1) Genesis, 15:5.

(2) Genesis, 22:2.

(3) al-Sāffāt, 102.

(4) Exodus 2:13.

(5) Malachi 4:6

(6) 1 Corinthians 1:3

(7) Matthew. 5:9

(8) 1 Pet. 3:11

(9) Galatians 5:22.

(10) John 14:27

N.T also continues with three other theological concepts those are our subjects of study.

1. The same level of respect for Mankind,
2. the same level of veneration for human blood
3. and the same nature of rejection violence

has been continued and adopted by the Christians as faith. So it seems odd to repeat all those references. So we jump to the next part of the concept.

2.1. Biblical Prophets; Inspiration of peace

Most people think peace as an attempt to get away from problems. That's why people seek peace through alcohol, drugs, or other forms of entertainment. People today are living in a form of existential shock. This is a commentary on the difficulty of modern man. The Bible tells us why people don't know peace. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick."⁽¹⁾ And "There is no peace for the sick."⁽²⁾ When man's heart is badly sick so he cannot find peace.

In fact, Jesus Christ is perceived throughout the New Testament as the distributor of peace. In Acts, Peter says, "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ."⁽³⁾ The Holy Spirit is the Giver of this peace, and He dispenses it as a gift. Galatians says one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is peace.⁽⁴⁾ Perfect peace comes when our focus is off the problem, off the trouble, and constantly on Christ.

2.2. To be peaceful in trails and sufferings

The Biblical concept of peace does not focus on the lack of trouble. Biblical peace is detached to circumstances all around and to what occurs outside. You may be in the middle of difficult situations and still have Biblical peace. To understand the situation, we need to pose few examples.

- When Jesus appeared before Pilate, He was so calm, so quiet, so controlled, and so peaceful that Pilate said, "Do you not know that I have the authority to release you, and I have authority to crucify you?" Jesus replied, "You would have no authority over me, unless it had been given you from above."⁽⁵⁾ That's the kind of peace Jesus is talking about and gives to disciples. It is the true bravery and trust.

(1) Jeremiah 17:9.

(2) Isaiah 48:22.

(3) Acts 10:36.

(4) Galatians 5:22.

(5) John 19:10-11.

- The Christians believe that the most complete discussion on peace in the N.T comes from the Jesus on the night before He died in suffering. He knew what He was facing. Even though He still took time to relief His cohorts with the message of peace.
- “Paul said he could be satisfied in any situation and he demonstrated that he had peace even in the jail at Philippi. where he sang and remained confident that God was being kind to him. Then when the opportunity came, he communicated God's goodness to the Philippian jailer, and brought him and his family to salvation.”⁽¹⁾

2.3. Old Testament's guidelines for Preachers

Bible is underlining peace promoting steps. Peace can overcome only by respecting other's religion, creeds, ideas and blood like Jesus says,

“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you”.⁽²⁾

There are many characteristics to be adopted by a preacher. Jesus Christ draws a picture of a peace promoter in the following lines;

“And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”⁽³⁾

“True preachers don't love this universe. They do for the hereafter. It means that they do not hate each other because of color or caste difference. They live with love and peace. Anyone who hates his brother is like a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”⁽⁴⁾

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as

(1) Ibid

(2) Matthew. 5:44.

(3) 2 Timothy, 2:24-26.

(4) 1 John, 3:15-16.

yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”⁽¹⁾

The Holy Qur’ān on building “Peace”

Islām is nothing if not the religion of peace. Every Muslim’s greetings to his brother is *Assalamu ‘Alaikum*; ‘peace be upon you.’ A Muslim’s first duty is to confirm peace where he lives, not only for himself but for others as well. He should risk his life for this moral cause. He is ordered to fight for religious freedom and the protection of all worship places-Mosques, Churches, Synagogues...etc.

A true Muslim’s life after death shall be perfect peace, for the Salvation is nothing but achievement of complete peace. Paradise is the ‘the house of peace- *Dār al-Salām*. The Holy Qur’ān says, “And ‘peace’ be their greeting therein.”⁽²⁾ Paradise is peace. “No frivolity will they hear therein, nor any taint of ill, only the saying “Peace! Peace”⁽³⁾ Even Allah calls the non-believers to embrace Islam announcing Islam a house of peace “But Allah doth call to the home of peace”⁽⁴⁾

3.1. Dignity of mankind

According to Islam, man is the best creation of the Creator. The Qur’ān reveals that man is the handiwork of Allah and “He created man on his own pattern.”⁽⁵⁾ In the explanation of this verse Abdullāh Yusuf Ali writes “as turned out from the creative hand of God, man is innocent, pure, true, free, inclined to right and virtue, and endowed with true understanding about his own position in the universe and about God’s goodness, wisdom and power.”⁽⁶⁾ Another verse has the same meaning, *Whom I have created with my hands (power)*.⁽⁷⁾

So the ultimate result of being vicegerent should to promote peace, prosperity, love, tolerance and humbleness. A Muslim should modify bad deeds into good deeds by suitable and affordable way so this world may become a paradise to live. There comes a burden of responsibilities upon man’s shoulders. He should live in peace, respect others and venerate the blood of humanity. By doing this Allāh will bless him with a great blessing because human blood obtains much importance in its social rights as Qur’ān narrates;

(1) Matthew 22:36-40

(2) Yunus, 10: 10.

(3) al-Waqi’ah, 56: 25.

(4) Yunus, 10: 25.

(5) Rūm, 30:30.

(6) The Holy Qur’an, translation and commentary, Abdullāh Yusuf Ali (Islamabad: Dawah Academy, 1990), p: 754.

(7) Sād, 38:75.

“If any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.”⁽¹⁾

3.2. To be Peaceful in trails and sufferings

How to react during critical circumstances? To find the answer of this question when one goes across the whole Holy Qur’an one stays at the variety of verses. These verses were revealed on the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at different occasions in his life of 23 years. A keen study of these verses exposes a grand contextual and situational arrangement in the revelation. The teachings have been identified in three progressive stages;

1. non-confrontation
2. Jihād within the ancient structures
3. the command to fight unbelievers.

The Prophet (PBUH) and His companions faced great resistance from the tribes of Makkāh. A number of Muslims were slaves and they had to suffer unbearable cruelty from their non-believer masters. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) never thought of revenge and adopted non-confronting way. In this critical situation Allah commanded Him (PBUH) to adopt non-confronting way. It is said in many verses as follows;

“Turn aside from those who join gods with Allah.”⁽²⁾

“Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.”⁽³⁾

The non-confronting act is practically found in the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) because of these Qur’anic commands. As a result of such teachings, we find His life full of sufferings from non-believers. As he hated Jihād for a long time, we can conclude his (PBUH) pacifist strategy regarding Jihād as follows;

1- He was never willing for encounter with the enemy. He also taught to be pacifist to his companions. Hadrat Abdullāh Bin Abi Aufā (may Allah be pleased with hi) is reported to have said

“That the messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) addressed! People! Do not wish the encounter with the enemy, and, if you met them then be patient and know that the Paradise is under the shadows of swords.”⁽¹⁾

(1) al-Mā'idah, 55:32.

(2) al-An'am, 6:106.

(3) an-Nahl, 16:125.

2- He was resorting to the Peace when he was presented to it, in spite of that this peace was seeming in the Muslims eye sometimes the detraction of their rights, as can be witnessed in the *Treaty of Hudaibiyāh*. Its detail can be recited in Surah al-Fath, verse NO. 48.

3- He was avoiding the extravagance in the killing of Opponents. One of the great witnesses is the conquest of Makkāh in Ramadān 8th Hijrah.

It is true that the war with Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) turned into mercy because He saved the humanity direct and indirect from many of the bad leaders; Abu Jahl, Hayy ibn Akhtāb and Abdullah Bin Ubāi Bin Sālul and showed the high manners to the Muslims until in the severest battle fields. So they moved from the idolatry to the worship of one Allāh, from the fabulous rituals to Prayer, Fasting, Zakāt and the Hajj Pilgrimage.

3.3. Conclusion

Allāh/Yāhweh/God in all His Scriptures describes himself along with his messengers and angles as the guarantors of world peace and commanding His creation to be peaceful but the people acting on their behalf have made every possible effort to destroy peace. Can we- the Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Atheists ...etc forget our so-called confronting interpretations and come jointly rather than using religious or nati0nalistic labels to declare our anger and serve the political agenda of the power elite. And for this Holy purpose we need to give up our vested interests in the name of humanity alone and extract light of peace from the Holiest Scriptures of this universe and the Model personalities like Hadrat Ibrāhim, Hadrat Isāc, Ismāil, Hadrat Isā and Hadrat Muhammad (S.A.W).



(1) Bukhāri, Muhammad bin Ismā īl, al-Jām -as- sahīh, Sahīh al-Bukhāri, Kitābul Jihād was-siyar, hadith no.2966 (Riyadh: Dār as-salām, 1999), Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, al-Jām -as- sahīh, Sahīh al-Muslim, Kitābul Jihād was-siyar, hadith no.4542 (Riyadh: Dār as-salām, 1999).