

Interfaith Just Peacemaking  
Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives  
on the New Paradigm of Peace and War

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arson attack by settlers, Froman organized his followers to come to the village with a stack of Qur'ans to replace those that had been destroyed in the fire.<sup>18</sup>

In the United States, one can also find examples of dramatic gestures for the reduction of conflict. For instance, in the 2010 controversy surrounding the construction of a mosque in proximity to the site of the 9/11 attacks, most mainstream Jewish organizations opposed the project. However, a number of Jewish groups came out in support of the construction of the mosque and staged public demonstrations in order to make their views known.<sup>19</sup>

### Muslim Reflection

*Zeki Sarıtoprak*

Our recent history has witnessed the unprecedented devastation of two world wars. The number of people killed in the two world wars of the past century is more than the number of people killed throughout human history. These destructive wars, on one hand, may have led some to claim that there will be an inevitable clash of civilizations. On the other hand, some have said working for justice and peace will prevent future clashes so that catastrophic atrocities should never be seen again. The possibility of another war in this age of nuclear weapons has resulted in an urgent need to unite all possible efforts to make just Peace on Earth. The Qur'an, the example of the Prophet Muhammad, and the practice of Muslims contain many instructions on the promotion of peace and harmony on our planet. One contemporary example of this effort that is particularly applicable to this practice norm of independent initiatives to reduce threat is the example of the Gülen movement and its founder Fethullah Gülen.

### *Qur'anic Support for Independent Initiatives*

The Islamic support for this practice norm is rooted in the principle of peace and harmony that comes from the Qur'anic statement, "Peace is better" (Qur'an 4:128). Although the occasion of this revelation is family dispute, with such a broad statement the Qur'an indicates that in all circumstances peace is preferable. Even in the midst of war, on the battlefield, if there is an opportunity for peace, the Qur'anic injunction is "if the enemy inclines towards peace, you should incline towards it too" (Qur'an 8:61). As the Qur'an speaks of peace it also speaks of justice. Both the Peace (*al-Salam*) and the Just (*al-Adl*) are considered among the most beautiful names of God. And both words are among the most frequently mentioned in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an strongly suggests that one should overcome evil with good and states that one should ward off evil with good deeds. The Qur'an asks, "Do not

incline towards those who practice oppression. Fire may touch you. There is no protector for you other than God and you will not be helped [if you incline toward wrongdoers]. Be steadfast in prayer in the beginning and in the end of the day, and in some part of the night. Surely, good deeds are washing away bad deeds. This is a reminder for the mindful. O Muhammad, have patience. Surely God does not forget to reward those who do good deeds" (Qur'an 11:113-115).

Again the Qur'an praises those who repel evil with good: "Those people will take their reward twice; that is because they had patience and they repelled evil with good and they gave away from what We have given to them" (Qur'an 28:54). Another Qur'anic verse advises that repelling evil with good and beautiful actions eliminates animosity and results in friendship (Qur'an 41:34). Many Muslim scholars who comment on this verse suggest that seeking vengeance is a wrong principle and not compatible with the overall teaching of the Qur'an. Historically speaking there is no record that the Prophet Muhammad ever suggested revenge against those who persecuted him. In fact, the opposite is true; the Prophet forgave the people of Mecca, who tortured him for a period of time at the beginning of his prophethood.

It should be noted that the Prophet Muhammad is the best example for Muslims and the first addressee of the Qur'an. The Qur'an, in the personality of the Prophet, commands people to initiate good actions. For example, one of the early commands of the Qur'an to the Prophet asks him to rise and warn his community patiently (Qur'an 74:1-7). Another verse commands the Prophet to convey the divine message with no fear and no hesitation and grants divine protection for him. The verse says, "O Messenger, convey what is revealed to you from your Lord. If you do not do that it means you do not fulfill your duty. Surely God will protect you from people" (Qur'an 5:67). It can be argued that the entire message of the Qur'an is based on the principle of taking initiatives despite hardships. The verse "For a human being there is nothing except the result of his work" (Qur'an 53:39) praises human beings who are taking initiatives and doing good actions. One interesting figure of the Qur'an, Luqman the Wise (c. 1100 BCE), addresses his son and asks him to initiate beautiful and good actions. In fact, in the personality of Luqman, the Qur'an gives instructions to the entire realm of humanity to follow those principles. Luqman commands his son to do the following:

O my dear son! God will bring all things to light, be they as small as the grain of a mustard seed; be they hidden inside a rock, or the heavens, or the earth. God is the most gracious and the most knowing. O my son, be steadfast in prayer. Enjoin justice and forbid evil and have patience on whatever befalls you. Surely all of that is among greatly meritorious things requiring great resolution to fulfill. My son, do not turn away your face from people. Do not walk on earth arrogantly. Surely

God does not love any arrogant and boaster. Be modest in your walking and lower your voice. Certainly the most repugnant of voices is the braying of the ass. (Qur'an 31:16-19)

In this verse, in order to create a harmony in society, the Qur'an gives instructions through the story of Luqman, including the promotion of righteousness, patience, and merit, as well as the prohibition of negative qualities such as arrogance and boastfulness.

As a commentator of the Qur'an, the Prophet of Islam, in one of his famous sayings says, "Anyone who establishes a good tradition will get reward of all those who follow the tradition without decreasing anything from their reward. Similarly, anyone who establishes a bad tradition will get his burden and the burden of those who follow that tradition without decreasing anything from their burden."<sup>20</sup>

The famous story of the two sons of Adam, Cain and Abel, is given as an example of this. Cain kills Abel and thereby establishes a bad tradition, the tradition of murder. Therefore, according to this prophetic tradition, throughout history until the end of time when anyone commits murder, due to Cain's evil initiative a full burden of murdering falls on Cain without any decrease in the burden of the murderer. The Islamic principle of "the one who initiates some good or bad traditions is as if he or she does it" is rooted in the above-mentioned saying of the Prophet. Again, a part of initiating the idea of good is related to the Prophet's saying on two individuals with animosity toward one another. The Prophet suggests that the best of them is the one who starts with a greeting of peace. The Prophet states, "It is not allowed for a man to abandon his brother more than three nights in a way that they meet and one turns to one direction and the other turns to the other direction. The best of both is the one who starts with a greeting of peace."<sup>21</sup>

One of the principles of the Qur'an is to bring an end to conflicts and to make all efforts to de-escalate tensions and possible clashes. In early Islam when the Prophet was persecuted by idol worshippers of Mecca, he preferred migration to clashing with his opponents. Following the teaching of the Qur'an and the way of the Prophet, Muslims throughout history anxiously practiced this principle. An example from recent history is the case of a prominent Islamic scholar in Turkey, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1878-1960), who protected Armenian children during World War I and de-escalated conflict between Muslims and Armenians. In response to this gesture, Armenians also protected Muslim children. Nursi's initiative saved the lives of thousands of children. A more contemporary example is the practice that Fethullah Giden followed when Israeli soldiers attacked a Turkish ship carrying aid to Gaza on May 31, 2010. While eight Turkish activists were killed and tensions in the country were high, which

could have caused a wave of revenge on all Jews in the country, Gülen advocated for calmness and expressed his condolences to the families of the victims but also criticized the leadership of the aid flotilla because they did not get proper permission from the Israeli authorities. This public criticism and invitation to calmness de-escalated the tension in the country, and in fact many demonstrations stopped after this public statement. This action serves as an example of taking an initiative to de-escalate conflicts between majorities and minorities, or between two states.

### *The Example of the Gülen Movement*

The Gülen movement started in the beginning of the 1970s as a small group and with only a humble contribution from the community. Fethullah Gülen, an official preacher appointed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey, was a humble but passionate member of this governmental religious institution. Even at the very beginning of his preaching, his way of addressing the issues was remarkably different from that of the regular preachers. He was not only a preacher at the mosque, but an active member of his community as well. Therefore hundreds of community problems came to him, and he would wisely solve these problems. Like many great founders, Gülen did not intend to establish a movement and even today when people relate this particular movement to his name, he rejects the association and says that this is a community of volunteers of which he is only a member. He repeatedly states that people mistakenly relate this movement to him. In the past three decades the movement has become a large and influential community that promotes initiatives such as education, health, relief aid, and interfaith dialog, which contribute greatly to the building of peace both in Turkey and around the world. The movement remained peaceful during the time of conflicts in the country and in fact worked ardently to prevent young people from involvement in the armed conflict between the leftists and the nationalists in the 1970s, which caused the military coup of September 12, 1980.

The movement follows the principle stated in the saying of the Prophet, "A Muslim is the one from whose hands and whose tongue believers are safe."<sup>22</sup> The movement has used this saying of the Prophet as a reference for its behaviors and educational system. One can argue that through this understanding the movement is able to form a generation of character, and probably this understanding is the secret of the movement's success throughout the world. As indicated in Gülen's writings, the movement uses the love-force, or *sadya-graha*, because love is the essence of his teachings. If we use the genre of the contemporary world and make a parable of weapons, for Gülen and for his movement there is no weapon greater than love. Love cannot be defeated. This

is evident in his definition of religion: "Religion is the title of a deep relationship and love towards all creation in His [God's] name."<sup>23</sup> Love and compassion are considered the foundation of the teaching of the Gülen movement. Without these two components a Just Peace cannot be achieved thoroughly. Gülen says, "Close the doors of greed, abhorrence, and hatred. Otherwise, they may be a small seed, but by opening the door they could grow and become a huge tree of evil."<sup>24</sup> If this door is not closed and the seeds of hatred grow, the social environment will be ready for Samuel Huntington's idea of the alleged "clash of civilizations."<sup>25</sup> As a Sunni Muslim scholar Gülen showed a great openness to Shites, known as Alavis in Turkey. He strongly emphasized dialog and understanding among the two groups and particularly encouraged the government to give more freedom to the Alavis, which will eventually contribute to the building of peace between Sunnis and Alavis.

Another practical example can be given from an educational institution that was established by admirers of the Gülen movement. Father Thomas Michel, former executive secretary for the Office of Interreligious and Ecumenical Affairs, speaks of his visit to this institution in the southern Philippines in 1995. A sign caught his attention: "The Philippine-Turkish School of Tolerance." He then visited the school and found out that it contributed to a peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Christian students.<sup>26</sup> These examples of Gülen's educational institutions that contribute to peaceful coexistence can be found in Northern Iraq, the Balkans, and Nigeria.

In conclusion, the overall teaching of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet strongly encourage the building of peace, the prevention of conflict, and the de-escalating of tensions. Taking reference from the holy sources of Islam, a considerable number of civic, social, and religious movements and initiatives in the Muslim world have contributed to the building of peace. There is no doubt that one of the greatest of these initiatives, the Gülen movement, which grew so rapidly in the span of 40 years, promises a great hope for the future of peace on our planet.

### Conclusion

The concept of independent initiatives in international relations came from a psychologist, Charles Osgood, but it is echoed in Christian and Muslim thought and scripture. As Robert Eisen points out, this is less the case with the Jewish scriptures regarding conflicts with other nations. As with all three traditions, however, using Just Peace norms today may involve generalizing from the sacred text and its injunction to individuals to the political level. Just Peacemaking does involve pushing forward on new initiatives in interfaith perspective, while using sacred texts to inform the direction and provide guidance for new work.

## Notes

1. Charles E. Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).
2. Doug Hosreiter, "Neighbors in the Bosnian Tragedy," in *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking*, ed. Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman Herr (Watertown, ON: Herald Press, 1998), 105–6, 109.
3. Ibid., 117.
4. See, for example, the National Council of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983), par. 204–6; United Methodist Council of Bishops, *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace* (Nashville, TN: Graded Press, 1986), 77; Susan Thistlethwaite, ed., *A Just Peace Church* (New York: United Church Press, 1986), 75, 136–37, 142–43; 216th General Assembly of Presbyterian Church USA, *Resolution on Violence, Religion, and Terrorism* (Louisville, KY: Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, 2004), 6, 29.
5. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
6. New Revised Standard Version.
7. See also Ezekiel 36:22–28.
8. See Glen Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 89–98.
9. At least some pacifist Christians might argue that this logic also entails a commitment to nonviolence as the highest expression of trust in God, choosing to bless others (even enemies) and to promote recognition of human dignity.
10. See James Burke's reflections in chapter 1 of this book.
11. Midrash *Aggadah*, ed. Solomon Ruber (Vienna: A. Fanto, 1894) on Exodus 23:5. See also Midrash *Lekach Tov* (Jerusalem: Zichron Aharon, 2006) on the same verse.
12. Reuven Kimelman, "Non-Violence in the Talmud," *Judaism* 17 (1968): 318–19; Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of Religions, Violence and Peacemaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178.
13. See the comments of Nahum Sarna on Genesis 33:11 in his commentary on Genesis in *The JPS Commentary on the Torah: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 230; and Jon D. Levenson's comments on the same verse in his commentary on Genesis in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68–69.
14. I would like to thank my brother, Daniel Eisen, for inspiring these insights on Esau's actions.
15. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 110a.
16. See, for instance, the remarks of Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan in *Sefer Hafeiz Hayyim: Shenit ha-Leshon* (Jerusalem: Merkaz ha-Sefer, 1999), *Sha'ar ha-Zehin*, ch. 17, p. 68. See also the discussion of Daniel Z. Feldman, *The Right and the Good*.

- Halablah and Human Relations* (Brooklyn: Yashar Books, 2005), ch. 4, especially p. 42, who notes several other figures who cite this source for its moral lesson as peacemaking.
17. Information about RHR can be found on their Web site: <http://www.rhr.org.il>.
  18. The Global Oneness Project, "Rabbi Menachem Froman," <http://www.globalonenessproject.org/interviewce/rabbi-menachem-froman>.
  19. See, for instance, the demonstration led by the Shalom Center in "Voz Is Neias? Manhattan, NY: Jewish Leaders Rally in Support of WTC Mosque." August 5, 2010. <http://www.vozinistas.com/61619/2010/08/05/manhattan-ny-jewish-leaders-rally-in-support-of-wtc-mosque>.
  20. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* 15, in Abu Isa Muhammad bin Isa bin Sawra al-Tirmidhi, *al-jami' al-Sahih*, ed. Ibrahim Arwa Awad (Cairo: Maktabah Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1975).
  21. *Sahih al-Bukhari, Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 62.
  22. *Sahih al-Bukhari, Inan*, 4, *Riqaq*, 26.
  23. Fethullah Gülen, *Oku Veya Yolda ki İhtikar* (A Criteria or Roadsigns) (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları, 2001), 27.
  24. Ibid.
  25. Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).
  26. Thomas Michel, "Fethullah Gülen as Educator," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 69–84.