



How to Establish Peace in the Holy Land?

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Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, third from left, planting an olive tree in Jerusalem during a peace conference of all religions in 1995.

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Ten Point Program

Sisters and Brothers,

I am thankful to the organizers of The Peres Centre for Peace for giving me the opportunity to address this world audience. When I received the invitation, I was reluctant to participate, and it was almost certain that I would not be attending this conference. But then a miracle happened. On the night of September 23, 2008 I had a dream in New Delhi. It was a very clear dream. In this dream I saw myself addressing a large audience. At that time, I uttered these words which I wrote down in my diary the same night on waking up. These were the words which I spoke in the dream before the Conference:

‘The Arabs and the Jews both must know that they cannot go on fighting forever. In life, peace is the rule and war is the exception. War is costlier than any other course of action, so both parties must try to find some practical formula for the establishment of peace. Let me just say that the Arabs must accept Israel as a legitimate state by totally abandoning violence against Israel, and Israel must agree to make such territorial adjustment as is acceptable

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to the Arabs. Thus, by accepting the formula of give and take, they can establish peace in the Holy Land. In other words, it is a win/win situation for both.'

The Arab-Israel conflict, perhaps the gravest problem of modern times, poses a constant challenge to peace. I pondered over this matter in the light of Islamic scriptures and I found a relevant tradition of the Prophet of Islam quoted by Abdur Rahman ibn Khaldun with reference to Al-Tabarani. It is as follows:

'The Prophet predicted that a person from the Muslim Ummah would appear and would speak with reference to his Sunnah (tradition). He would fill the earth with justice, at a time when the earth would have been filled with injustice. He would travel to Bait-al Maqdis.'¹

'Earth', in this *hadith* does not refer to the entire globe. Rather it refers to Bait-al-Maqdis, i.e. Palestine. Speaking 'with reference to the Prophet's tradition' means that one who made such a reference would discover guidance on the subject of Palestine in the light of Prophet's teachings, and that he would impart it to others. 'Injustice' here refers to violence and "justice" refers to peace. In this tradition, it is predicted that a time will come when this region will become a zone of violence. At that time, a person from the Muslim Ummah will travel to this place and will tell people of the Prophet's peace formula, which is entirely practicable in this scenario, and how peace can, therefore, be established by applying this formula. This tradition of the Prophet guided me in my attempt to discover the prophetic formula of peace by perusing the Quran and Sunnah.

We learn from a study of the Quran that ideal solution is not possible in any matter. That is why, the right

approach is to find solutions to problems which are at best workable; that is, which may feasibly be put into practice. Keeping this basic principle in view, I have derived from Islamic teachings what I consider to be a practicable solution. I would like to present it at this international conference in the Holy Land in the form of ten points.

The Arab-Israel controversy, which started in 1948, led directly to the total disturbance of peace in the Middle East and indirectly to disturbances all over the world. This 60-year old bloody struggle, far from solving any problems, has created grave, unsolvable problems. Now the time has finally arrived for a reassessment of the whole issue in a purely realistic manner, and for a search for a new strategy which could ensure peace in the region.

Although the name of Islam has repeatedly been invoked in this campaign, there has never been any serious effort made to apply the Islamic formula to this controversial matter. I have studied Islamic scriptures to discover the solution to this problem in the light of Islam.

What I have found from my study of Islam can be summed up thus: the central idea of Islamic planning is that it is based on opportunities rather than on problems.

1. When we study the life of the Prophet of Islam, we find that a controversial matter arose between Prophet and his opponents which was very similar in kind to the Arab-Israel problem in the Holy Land. At that time, in 6AH, the agreement made by the Prophet Muhammad with his opponents was arrived at by his unilateral acceptance of the conditions demanded by the other party. This has been recorded in Islamic history as the Hudaibiyya agreement.

Why did the Prophet agree to such a pact? It was

because, for him, the real problem was not to make his opponents agree to his conditions. Rather the aim was to open the door to opportunities. What was achieved through this agreement was that the state of war which prevailed in Arabia came to an end. And the door to opportunities was subsequently opened. The result was that the Prophet and his companions were able to spread his mission throughout Arabia and the entire Arab world was revolutionized. This agreement, entered into about 20 years after the Prophet Muhammad had begun his prophetic mission, was so successful in terms of its results that it was referred to in the Quran as a ‘clear victory’.²

This is the basic principle which we learn by studying the sunnah of the Prophet—a principle which should have been followed by the Arab leaders of the present day. What these leaders should now do is refrain from insisting on the other party agreeing to their conditions. Rather they should attach prime importance to what they must do to ensure that peace prevails in this region and how they can in consequence cause opportunities to open up for themselves. The example set by the Prophet provides us with the basic guiding principle which we should adopt in this matter.

2. According to the Bible, the Jews believe that Palestine is for them the ‘promised land’.³ The same notion has been expressed in the Quran. The Quran tells us that the Israelites, who were living in diaspora outside Palestine during the time of the Prophet Moses, were told by Moses that it was God’s command that they should enter the Holy Land. Moses said to his people: ‘O my people! Enter the Holy Land which God has *assigned* to you.’⁴ In this verse of the Quran the words ‘*assigned to you*’ is not a mysterious phrase: indeed, it describes a law of nature. That is, a

community in diaspora enjoys the right to return to its original home. The Biblical term 'promised land' has this very meaning, and the Balfour Declaration (1917) was exactly in accordance with this law of nature, as prescribed in the Quran. In this declaration the Jews in diaspora were given permission to return to Palestine under a limited quota system. The Arab leaders should have accepted this as a legitimate decision. But they refused to accept it and showed their strong reaction to it. This was the beginning of the present Palestinian movement. To my way of thinking, this was a very unwise decision on the part of the Arabs, because this movement proved to be counterproductive.

3. The third point in this connection concerns the course of action which should be followed. We have been given a specific injunction on this point. That is, in all controversial matters, to adopt peaceful method. The Quran tells us: 'Reconciliation is the best.'⁵ That is to say, at the time of controversy, Arab leaders have to adopt a peaceful rather than a violent course of action.

As regards the present situation, the peaceful method was certainly an option in the case of the Palestinian movement. But the Arab leaders have adopted a violent course of action throughout the history of their movement. This is clearly a violation of Islamic principle. Such a movement is destined to yield no positive results, as it is totally against the policy of the Prophet Muhammad.

The policy of the Prophet can be summarized thus: whenever he had to choose between two courses of action, he invariably opted for the easier or the peaceful course of action rather than the harder (violent course of action).⁶

4. The argument of the Arab leaders to justify their

violent movement is that the Jews are their enemies, and that fighting the enemy is but natural. This argument is certainly against the teachings of the Quran. According to the injunction of the Quran, *war can be waged only against an attacker, not against an enemy.*

The following verse of the Quran throws light in this regard:

‘Do a good deed in return for a bad deed and then you will find that your enemy has become your dearest friend.’⁷

According to this verse of the Quran, our enemy is our potential friend. That is why, according to Islamic teaching, what we should do is to turn the potential into the actual through dialogue or peaceful effort, rather than destroy all positive opportunities by unnecessarily waging war.

5. If we point out to the Arab leaders the importance of peace, they will answer, ‘Yes, we want peace, but we want peace with justice.’ This way of thinking is totally unrealistic, for it is a fact that peace does not on its own bring justice. Peace only opens the door to opportunities, and the desired justice is achieved only by availing of those opportunities. We learn this principle from the ultimate outcome of the Hudaibiyya Pact, which I have referred to earlier. It must be remembered that the Prophet Muhammad followed this Hudaibiyya principle throughout his life.

6. One of the principles of Islam is that action should always be result-oriented and not just entered into purely for the sake of action per se. That action is not Islamic action which fails to produce the desired result. The Prophet observed: ‘A true Muslim is one who abandons such actions as yield no result.’⁸

That is, ideally, Islamic action is result-oriented action. According to this tradition of the Prophet, the Arab movement does not measure up to this Islamic criterion, as we all know that this movement has been going on fruitlessly for the last sixty years. Huge sacrifices have been made without any positive results and great harm has been done to the Palestinian cause.

In such a situation, it has now become essential to make a reappraisal of this movement in a purely realistic way.

7. The Palestinian movement, having reached its final stage, has assumed intensely negative proportions, i.e. suicide bombing. This suicide bombing does not take place on a battlefield. It is carried out in public places and all the people who die are innocent men, women and children. This kind of suicide bombing is totally against the teachings of Islam. According to the Quran, 'the killing of one person is like killing all mankind.'⁹ In suicide bombing, it is the innocent who die, and killing innocent people in the eyes of God is such a heinous crime that killing one person in this way is akin to killing all human beings.

On this point, it would be appropriate to say that the Palestinian movement, having reached this last stage, has so totally deviated from the path of Islam that it can never be held deserving of divine succour.

8. One of the teachings of Islam is to try to find a common ground while dealing with the other party. This command has been given in the Quran in chapter no. 3: 'Say: O People of the Book, come to a word (*kalimah*) which is common between us and you, that we shall worship none but God.'¹⁰

The command given in this verse relates to common ground of a religious nature. But the history of Islam tells

us that Muslims extended this principle also to secular common ground. We find this example in the later history of Muslims in Baghdad, Cairo and Spain. Here Muslims and Jews worked in conjunction with each other, their common ground extended particularly to the secular field, that is, the translation of books on medicine, philosophy and scientific research — a great contribution to the then existing knowledge.¹¹

In the present situation, the Arab leaders can adhere to this principle of finding common ground in Palestine as well. This common ground extends particularly to the fields of scientific education, agriculture and horticulture, etc. In this way the interaction between Muslims and Jews could yield great positive results.

9. The Arab leaders want to establish their rule throughout the whole of Palestine, just as in the past. But this concept is based on anachronistic thinking. In ancient monarchical times, the concept of political rule was that a single individual held sway without sharing power with others. But in the age of modern democracy, the concept of power sharing is prevalent all over the world. With this new concept, it should be entirely possible for the Arab leaders to participate in the political system on the principle of democratic sharing, without exercising any independent rule of their own. This is a new opportunity which the Palestinian Arabs can avail of in the full sense, should they opt for a peaceful course of action.

A perfect kind of example exists for this kind of power sharing. In chapter 12 of the Quran, we learn that an idolatrous king ruled Egypt during Joseph's time. Joseph accepted a ministerial post under his kingship and continued to hold this post for a long time. This was an

example of power sharing which has been approved of by the Quran.

10. I have learnt from my study of the Quran that in controversial matters the method of Islam is not to stage protests and lodge complaints against the opposition. The method of complaint and protest has no foundation in Islam. Indeed, the Quran tells us, 'And whatever affliction happens to you, it is because of what your hands have earned.'¹² According to this teaching of the Quran, the right way for us is to reassess our problems in an unbiased and unemotional way rather than futilely continuing a campaign of protest and complaint against the other party. The secret of success in life lies in constructive work and not in protest. The prophetic formula may be summed up in these words: Ignore the problems and avail the opportunities.

I should like to add one more point in connection with the statement, recently reported in the media, made by the interim Prime Minister of Israel. This statement perhaps throws light on the present trend among the Israeli people in that it reflects, to the best of my knowledge, not just the workings of an individual mind, but also the thinking of the majority of the Israelis, who have begun to be more accommodative in their approach. In view of such a statement having been made, I can say with confidence that the time has now come to bring about peace in this region by adopting the more realistic approach which I have outlined in my speech.

It is a piece of good news that what I have offered as a suggestion in the light of the Quran, the Arab and Israeli leaders are mentally prepared to accept it, according to the news reported in the media.¹³

Conclusion

Just as it is a fact that world peace is the greatest need of our time, it is also a fact that world peace cannot be achieved without the establishment of peace in Palestine. I believe that the time has come for the prediction of the Prophet to come true about the establishment of peace in Palestine and, in consequence, in the rest of the world.

Inspired by this tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, I wanted to discover the formula for peace in the light of the Islamic scriptures. This study brought me to the conclusion that according to the Quran the master principle in controversial matters is that of reconciliation (*sulh*).¹⁴ It means that peaceful settlement is the best. However, peaceful settlement is not an easy task. It requires great wisdom, the spirit of give and take, unbiased thinking, a realistic approach, and well wishing towards all mankind.

Guided by this Quranic spirit, I discovered the first pointer, in the form of the law of diaspora. This law is mentioned in this verse of the Quran, 'O my people! Enter the holy land which God has assigned to you.'¹⁵ The 'promised land' in the Bible, is called the 'assigned land' in the Quran. According to this law, any community living in diaspora enjoys the natural right to return to its original homeland. The Balfour plan, implemented in 1948, expressed exactly the same principle. But the refusal of the Arab leaders to accept it has resulted in a bloody conflict between the two groups. Now the time has finally come for a reassessment to be made by both of the parties. The Arab leaders — abandoning all kinds of violence — must accept Israel as a legitimate state, while Israel must make some kind of territorial adjustment which would be acceptable to the Arabs.

The Arabs regard the Jews as their enemies and are fighting with them. But the Quran tells us that the enemy is our potential friend. This potential friendship, therefore, has to be turned into a reality.

Thus, according to the Quranic principle, what is required in such a case is enmity management, rather than fighting.

The Arabs say that they want peace, and they want peace with justice. But they must know that justice is not a part of peace. Justice can be achieved only through one's own efforts. Peace only opens the door of opportunities, and by availing of these opportunities, one can achieve the desired justice.

A practical example of this policy in the life of the Prophet is found in the form of the Hudaibiyya agreement. It was an agreement meant to ensure peace. To finalize this agreement, the Prophet accepted all the conditions laid down by the opposite party. This peace agreement opened up all kinds of opportunities, and by availing of these opportunities, the Prophet was able to achieve everything he wanted to achieve.

In Islam, peace is the summum bonum. Therefore, Muslims must adopt a peaceful course of action, rather than a violent course of action. According to this principle, suicide bombing is quite unacceptable in the Islamic scheme of things.

Islam advocates result-oriented action. Any action that fails to yield a positive result is against the spirit of Islam.

The Quran advocates seeking a common ground between the two parties. Such common ground can be found in both the religious and the secular fields.

In the present situation, the Arabs and the Jews can both make progress by adopting this piece of wisdom. They can work together in the fields of education, agriculture, horticulture, etc. In this way, they can channelize their energies towards construction, instead of destruction.

Now we are living in an age of democracy — a system of power-sharing. By adopting this system, the Arabs and Jews in this region can become political partners on an equal basis. This would be a win-win situation for both the parties. And there can be no better situation than this.

Notes:

- 1 Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, p. 317.
- 2 The Quran, 48:1.
- 3 Deuteronomy 1:8.
- 4 The Quran, 5:21.
- 5 The Quran, 4:128.
- 6 *Fathul-Bari*, 6/654.
- 7 The Quran, 41:34.
- 8 Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 12.
- 9 The Quran, 5:32.
- 10 The Quran, 3:64.
- 11 For details, see *The History of the Arabs*, by Philip K. Hitti.
- 12 The Quran, 42:30.
- 13 *The Hindu Daily*, New Delhi, September 30, 2008.
- 14 The Quran, 4:128.
15. The Quran, 5:21.

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