

# ABRAHAMIC FAITHS PEACEMAKING INITIATIVE

American Clergy And Religious Activists Who Advocate Peacemaking

## Peacemaking from the Heart of Islam – Excerpts & Discussion Questions

*In the Name of God Who is Compassionate and Merciful*

### **Excerpt A:**

“Peace in Islam does not mean the absence of war, but the absence of oppression, corruption, injustice and tyranny. Islam considers that real peace can only be attained when justice prevails... The *ibadat*, Islam’s mandated acts of worship, include praying, fasting, giving alms and performing *hajj* pilgrimage; these are central to Islam. These *ibadat*, according to the Qur’an, lead to inner peace, *sakinat al-qalb*; inner peace and spiritual solace, in turn, are the very foundation stones of ethical conduct. Thus the Qur’an says of God, “He it is who sent down inner peace into the hearts of the believers that they might add faith to their faith” (48:4).”

**For all:** *What is the relationship of “inner peace” to justice and peace in relation to others?*

### **Excerpt B:**

The fundamental premise of the Qur’an is *tawheed*, the oneness of God from which follows the unity of all humans with one another and with nature... The Qur’an asserts that God breathed His Spirit in every human being; this makes every human life sacred. Hence any wanton act of destruction of human life, whether self-inflicted or perpetuated on others, is strictly prohibited. We cannot love and revere all-merciful God by destroying His creation. A person who does kill another will be lost to God’s guidance in this life and denied entry to Paradise in the Afterlife... The value of one life is equivalent to an entire world; to kill another person is to kill one’s own brother or sister

because all human beings are the progeny of Adam. “And do not destroy one another: for, behold, God is indeed a dispenser of grace unto you” (Qur’an 4:29). This can be interpreted as a prohibition against suicide as well as murder; do not kill yourself because you are God’s creation, and do not kill other humans who, like yourself, are God’s creations. Life is a divinely granted trust, and humans are charged as *khalifas*, caretakers, and trustees of *tawheed*, God’s oneness, so that we are obligated to treat all life with the utmost sanctity. Humans are given the gift of life with the admonition that they live it as moral beings. With free will and the independence to make choices, humans are given responsibility and are accountable for the consequences of our actions.

***For all:*** What are some other contexts in which the principles of *tawheed* and humans as *khalifas* might also be expressed?

What is suggested by the authors’ assertion that the same verse prohibits both murder and suicide?

***For Muslims:*** How does the charge to be a *khalifa* coincide with or differ from American values?

***For Jews and Christians:*** Does your tradition charge you to be a “caretaker and trustee” of God’s oneness?

Does your faith as clearly state that “humans are given responsibility and are accountable for the consequences of our actions”?

**Excerpt C:**

“The worst creatures in God’s eye are those who are (willfully) deaf and dumb, who do not use reason” (Qur’an 8:22). There is no priesthood or religious hierarchy in Islam; there are only scholars and community leaders, and the Qur’an is a living document that speaks to all people at all times. It lays out in broad strokes moral and ethical guidelines

for human beings; it is not a legal document or a book of law. Contemporary Muslims must understand the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Seerah* [accounts of the Prophet's life as example] in the context of the Prophet Mohammad's time, while we simultaneously study and interpret those teachings in relevant ways to authentically and practically guide our lives today. For this reason, Muslims are required to pursue reason, inquiry, and knowledge – a process known in Islam as *ijtihad* – so that we are able to understand and promote justice, equality and peace. The Qur'an positively invites interpretation and contextualizing. "We have sent down unto You the Message; that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may think and reflect" (Qur'an 16:44)... Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must cease to be willfully deaf and dumb to contemporary context; we must be willing and eager to apply the reason and knowledge of our age to help best understand the will of God as revealed in the Qur'an.

**For all:** *Why is there so often the perception of a schism between faith and reason in contemporary America?*

*How can people of faith attempt to heal that schism?*

*What is the relationship between knowledge and justice?*

**For Muslims:** *Is your community adequately fulfilling the requirement of *ijtihad*? If so, what are the practical implications in a contemporary context? If not, what more could be done?*

**For Jews and Christians:** *Is "reason, inquiry and knowledge" equally valued in your tradition?*

*How would your faith be different if there were no ordained clergy or central religious institutions, as in Islam?*

**Excerpt D:**

"...[A] Muslim cannot commit an act of aggression; killing the innocent, the sick, the elderly, monks, priests, or non-combatants is forbidden, *haram*. Also, wanton

destruction of land, forests, trees and animals is specifically forbidden. The Qur'an clearly spells out God's distaste for destruction in verse 2:205: "But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man's] tilth and progeny: and God does not love corruption." It is therefore impossible to justify modern warfare, which cannot be waged without "collateral damage" to innocents and which utilizes weaponry that cannot distinguish between willing fighters and everyone else... "Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors" (2:190). War is the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law of *Shariah*. "If they seek peace, then you seek peace. And trust in God for He is the One that hears and knows all things" (2:193)... Quranic verses that appear to condone war in an aggressive, uncompromising and murderous tone [see 2:190-193 and 8:15-16] were largely revealed in the context of specific threats leveled at the early Muslim community... By reading these verses in the context of the time in which they were revealed and in relation to other verses which repeat the central mandate of the interdependence of justice and mercy, it becomes clear how discordant expressions condoning violence are with the Prophet's overarching message of mercy, compassion and tolerance."

**For all:** *How do these limited conditions for war apply to modern warfare, especially given the Quranic exhortation "do not transgress limits"? Given the vastly different natures of ancient and modern warfare, how can we abide by these limits today?*

**For Muslims:** *How does the historical context of the Quranic verses cited above affect the way they are understood and acted upon by contemporary Muslims?*

**For Jews and Christians:** *Does your faith put stringent limits on warfare?*

*How do you relate to the Quranic teaching quoted above, “God does not love transgressors?”*

**Excerpt E:**

*Rahmah*, mercy, is...the primary mission of Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him). “We sent you [Mohammad] not, but as a Mercy for all creatures” (21:107). *Rahmah* is also the word most frequently uttered by Muslims in the liturgy of daily life. The saturation of the *Seerah*, of the Qur’an, and of the liturgical verses with the word “*rahmah*” indicates how deeply and completely the life of a Muslim should be informed with the quality of compassionate mercy. Furthermore, God is the Forgiver. As the Qur’an teaches in verse 24:22, “Hence, [even if they have been wronged by slander,] let not those of you who have been graced with [God’s] favor and ease of life ever become remiss in helping [the erring ones] among their near of kin, and the needy, and those who have forsaken the domain of evil of the sake of God, but let them pardon and forbear, [for] do you not desire that God should forgive you *your* sins, seeing that God is much forgiving, a dispenser of Grace?” Retaliation may be human, but forgiving is divine. Retaliation results in giving release to one’s anger, but forgiving results in mastering one’s rage, and such self-mastery is described as a great virtue by the Qur’an... The concept of mercy is tightly bound with that of forgiveness as we see in the Qur’an and the *Seerah*. Mohammad’s example of forgiving his Meccan enemies after the lifelong enmity and abuse he suffered at their hands remains a guiding light for the Muslims... Because of this demand for justice and mercy, the Qur’an mandates peaceful resolution of conflicts: “...but since good and evil cannot be equal, repel evil with [the best conduct]: and notice how someone who is separated from you because of enmity will become like your close

friend. Yet only those who have self-control will attain it; only the very luckiest will achieve it” (41:34-35).

***For all:*** What is the benefit of “mastering one’s rage”? How does that relate to the relationship between justice and peace?

What does it mean that “only the very luckiest will achieve it”?

Are there any accounts from the American narrative that illustrate the value of forgiveness? Is mercy an American value?

***For Jews and Christians:*** Does your faith also teach that “retaliation may be human, but forgiving is divine”?

What examples from your own tradition’s narrative stand out as examples of great forgiveness?