

Peace is message of all major religions

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Contrary to a popular characterization of Islam as a violent religion, peace is at the center of its teaching. The term "Islam" has the same linguistic root as the word "salam" (peace).

Ramadan teaches Muslims to realize Islam's most fundamental message of peace because Ramadan fasting lays out a structure for economic justice. During the daytime for the whole month of Ramadan, Muslims are required to refrain from consuming foods, beverages or other things that could break their fast. In addition to teaching Muslims patience, discipline and other virtues, fasting provides the experience of tasting the difficulties of the disadvantaged.

Muslims conclude their fasting season by distributing part of their wealth to those in need. The institution of "zakah" or almsgiving of money or property is intended to contribute to peacemaking. It embodies Islam's concerns for social issues, such as poverty and economic imbalance, which reside at the center of the spiral of violence in various communities.

One might argue that Islam is only a bunch of rituals and beliefs. What really matters is what we find on the ground. The fact that many Muslims worldwide fight among themselves or against other (religious) communities tells us that Islam is a violent religion. One may also argue that there are passages in the Quran and prophetic traditions, the two most important sources of Islam, that advocate or at least permit the act of violence.

It is true that Muslims have a lot to do to realize Islam's ideals; this is also true of other communities regarding their ideals. We can also respond that we can at least make a pedagogical distinction between the ideal Islam, whose spirit is to be found in the Quran, and some followers of the religion. Thus, we can clearly see the difference between Christianity and some Christians who engaged in the Crusades or Irish conflicts; between Judaism and some Jews who justify their violent acts against Palestinians; or between Buddhism and some Buddhists in Asian countries who at times support violence.

Regarding the second criticism, we can easily find passages in the scriptures of various religions that justify intolerance and violence. However, only by putting the texts into their specific contexts can we do justice to those scriptures.

In our multicultural world, Muslims cannot realize this message of peace without the help of others. Non-Muslims may understandably say, "Who cares about Islam's message?" However, this is the message of the values of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and any sane worldview. So the promotion of this message is paramount to them all.

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