

Introduction



In our closely interlinked world, peace and prosperity for everyone crucially depends on harmonious relations between communities and countries. Today, countries and communities can no longer afford to live in isolation from each other. Because we are now all now so closely interdependent, peaceful and mutually-beneficial relations between different religious communities have become indispensable. We simply cannot afford to resort to conflict in order to resolve disputes.

Today, the world is crying out for peace. Islam positively encourages Muslims to work for peace and for harmonious relations between them and people belonging to other communities.

Given the serious threat to peace posed by terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, there is an urgent need to articulate and promote a positive, meaningful approach to conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and peace-building. This is what this book seeks to do. Although it touches on all three aspects, its central focus is on the first aspect—conflict-prevention. After all, if conflicts are prevented at the very outset, violence can be done away with. Amicably negotiating differences before they degenerate into a conflict is, this book suggests, the most sensible way for us to handle conflicts.

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Peace is Possible, But only through the Right Way



If your house is on fire, you will immediately get into action to try to put out the flames. Now, there are two ways of doing this. The first way is to act according to the principles that the Creator of this universe has set for dousing a fire. The other way is that, overwhelmed by emotions, you try out some other method, a method of your own making.

You are free to choose either of these two methods. But the results of the two are not the same. God has set pouring water as the method for putting out a fire. You cannot extinguish a fire by pouring petrol on it. If you do that, it will only add to the fire.

The same holds true for other challenges in life. If God has made patience the secret of success in this world of His, you cannot attain success through impatience. If God has made positive action the means to arrive at a particular result, you cannot hope to get there through fiery speeches, angry rhetoric and inflammatory statements. If God has established pragmatism as the

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Avoid Confrontation



The year after the Battle of the Trench, in 628 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad had a dream. At this time, he was in Madinah. In the dream, he saw himself and his Companions visiting the House of God in Makkah. His Companions were very pleased to hear this, for it meant that, after a lapse of six years, they would soon be going to Makkah and visiting the Kabah.

In accordance with this dream, the Prophet set out for Makkah with 1400 of his Companions. When they reached Ghadir Ashtat, they heard that the news of their journey had reached the Quraysh¹. Indignant at the idea of the Muslims visiting the Kabah, they had amassed an army and vowed to prevent the Prophet and his Companions from entering Makkah, although it was contrary to Arab tradition to prevent anyone from visiting the Kabah. The Prophet was acting under divine inspiration: perhaps that is why he remained calm when he heard of the Quraysh's reaction. He learnt from

1 The Quraysh were a powerful tribe that controlled Makkah. The Prophet was born into the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh. When the Prophet began preaching Islam, many members of the Quraysh stiffly opposed him.

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Unilateral Action for Peace



Irrespective of what people might think are the causes of communal riots in India, the fact is that this violence can be ended only when Muslims end their role in it. If they do so, they can make others amenable to ending their role in such violence, too. It is only through such unilateral action that communal violence in the country can be finally stopped. And it is for the Muslims to take this step.

As shown in the previous chapter, at Hudaibiyah the Prophet of Islam agreed to unilateral action and thereby put an end to the violence of the Quraysh. In the same way, Muslims must resort to this sort of unilateral action by completely refusing to engage in any form of violence. But if, on the other hand, they wait for other communities to first stop their violence, they can keep waiting forever.

What should Muslims do to stop communal violence? There is only one answer—and that is, they must not get provoked in the face of provocation. The common cause of all cases of communal violence is that Muslims are unaware of a very important principle—that in life there are certain problems that simply have to be ignored.