

Community Building, Part VIII¹

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ABSTRACT: Having a shared identity that works towards a collective cause is vital for a healthy community, and in doing so, a community must share specific qualities to be successful. This series of papers offers a glimpse into the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad’s efforts to implement it. Character traits such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, and unity were illustrated. The previous article touched upon two topics: 1) our love for God’s creation as that which extends to non-human beings, such as animals, plants, and natural resources, and 2) and the importance of marriage and family life in the formation of a stable Islamic community. This article expands on the concept of peace in Islam—as the term Islam is derived from the Arabic root word *silm* (peace)—and the importance of submission to God as a means to achieving peace for ourselves and the entire society.

One of the qualities of an Islamic community is that it provides a peaceful atmosphere for its members and for outsiders. Even animals and plants would benefit from the peace provided by a Muslim community. In this paper, we will share some reflections on the concept of peace in the Qur’an to discover how important it is for Muslims and how the culture of the Qur’an is a culture of peace. Indeed, the term ‘Islam’ itself comes from the root *silm* which means ‘peace’. Islam is designed to bring about peace for

¹ This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

everyone by inviting people to submit their souls to God, which is called *tasleem*, from the same root *silm*. *Tasleem* means to submit ourselves to God so that we can both achieve internal peace and establish it among the people. For example, Prophet Muhammad said:

المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده

A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hands the Muslims are safe.²

Therefore, no innocent person should feel any danger or threat from a Muslim's words or actions. People should be able to be and feel completely safe in an Islamic environment.

Islamic greeting of peace

In Islamic culture, when we greet each other, we say 'Salām'. For example, we may say 'Salāmun alaykum' or 'Alaykum as-Salām'. These phrases all mean 'peace be with you' and sometimes we add also 'peace be with you and the Mercy of God and His Blessings'- 'Salāmun alaykum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh'. For a Muslim, this greeting of peace is not just a formal greeting like 'Hello' or 'Hi' or their equivalent words in different languages. On the contrary, it is a prayer and at the same time serves as a kind of motto for Muslims which is a very important way of educating people about the importance of establishing a culture of peace.

² *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol. 2, p. 1340 citing from *Kanz al-Ummal*. Shaykh al-Kulayni in *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 234 reports a similar hadith from Imam Baqir:

سليمان بن خالد، عن أبي جعفر (عليه السلام) (قال: قال أبو جعفر (عليه السلام): (يا سليمان أتدري من المسلم؟ قلت: جعلت فداك أنت أعلم، قال: المسلم من سلم المسلمون من لسانه ويده، ثم قال: وتدري من المؤمن؟ قال: قلت: أنت أعلم، قال: [إن] المؤمن من اتهمه المسلمون على أموالهم وأفسههم، والمسلم حرام على المسلم أن يظلمه أو يخذله أو يدفعه دفعة تعنته

Salām: the greeting of the inhabitants of Heaven

In the Qur'an, God talks about the greeting of peace of the inhabitants of Heaven, who when they greet one another they say 'Salāmun 'Alaykum'. Verses 9 and 10 of Surah Yunus are beautiful and profound verses; may God enable us to go and see these beautiful scenes for ourselves, God-willing:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ يَهْدِيهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِإِيمَانِهِمْ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ
الْأَنْهَارُ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ دَعَاؤُهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ
وَأخْرُ دَعَاؤُهُمْ أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their Lord guides them by means of their faith. Streams will run for them in gardens of bliss. Their call therein will be: 'O God! Immaculate are You!' and their greeting therein will be: 'Peace!' and their concluding call: 'All praise belongs to God, the Lord of all the worlds.'

The people of Heaven do *tasbih*, or glorify God, and end their conversations with *hamd*, or praise, exactly like angels do. This is the main speech of the people of heaven. The angels also glorify God and praise Him (2:20). So, angels, as well as the inhabitants of Heaven, glorify (*tasbih*) with praising (*hamd*). Furthermore, when they meet each other they greet each other by saying 'salāmun alaykum' ('peace be unto you') and this salām that the believers (mu'mineen) in Heaven exchange with each other is not just a verbal one; this greeting in Heaven brings us further peace and tranquillity.

One translator of the Qur'an, Yusuf Ali, commented on this verse; he says:

A beautiful piece of spiritual melody. They sing and shout with joy, but their joy is in the Glory of God. The greetings they receive and the greetings they give are of peace and

harmony. From first to last, they realise that it is God Who cherished them and made them grow and His Rays are their light.

In another verse on the greetings of the people of Heaven, God says:

Those who have faith and do righteous deeds will be admitted into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them forever by the leave of their Lord. Their greeting therein will be 'Peace!' (14:23)

Greetings of peace from the angels

We now turn our attention to the angels' greetings to one another. The Qur'an tells us that the angels also greet each other by saying 'salām'. There are various types of greetings given by the angels:

a) To people in this world

Firstly, we have some instances in the Qur'an in which the angels greeted some people in this world. In a description of a meeting between Prophet Abraham and the angels, these particular angels met with the Prophet before going to punish the people of Lot; and they also gave Abraham the good tidings of having a child. So God says:

وَلَقَدْ جَاءتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ
جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ خَنِيذٍ

Certainly Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news and said: 'Peace!' 'Peace!' He replied. Presently he brought (for them) a roasted calf. (11:69)

So the angels told Prophet Abraham 'salāmen' which means 'we send you salutations, we send you salām (peace)'. He (a) then replied: 'Salām'.

The books on Arabic rhetoric, *al-Balāghah*, notes that Prophet Abraham greeted them in a better way than they greeted him. When we say ‘salāman’ it stands for a verbal sentence. When we say ‘salāmun’ it stands for a sentence which starts with a noun. This is in line with what the Qur’an says about the fact that whenever we are greeted, we must return the greeting in the same way or in a better way:

وَإِذَا حُيِّتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
حَسِيبًا

When you are greeted with a salute, greet with a better one than it, or return it; indeed Allah takes account of all things.

For example, if we are greeted with ‘salāmun alaykum’, then we should reply with ‘salāmun alaykum’ or ‘alaykum as-salām’ with a recommended addition ‘wa rahmatullah’. If we are greeted with ‘salāmun alaykum wa rahmatullah’, then we must reply with an equally reciprocal ‘salāmun alaykum wa Rahmatullah’. Our salām in reply must not be less than what had been offered to us. It must be the same or more.

So, in this world, the angels came and offered their greetings of peace to Prophet Abraham, and he replied in a better manner.

b) To people after their death

Angels also offer their greetings of peace to some people after their death. When a good person dies, the angels visit them and greet them by saying ‘salām’. Then the worry and fears of that person will go away. Everyone who dies is very much worried.

“—those whom the angels take away while they are pure. They say (to them): ‘Peace be to you! Enter paradise because of what you used to do.’” (16:32)

For the good people who are dying or have already died, and the angels take their souls, angels say to them ‘peace be with you’ and tell them not to worry as a result of their goodness and good actions, and so they can enter Heaven.

Of course, they are talking about the heavenly part of Barzakh because when someone dies, if they have been good, they may go to that heavenly place even during the time between their death and the Day of Resurrection. However, if someone has been bad, they may go to a place which is like Hell and if they are of a status between the two, maybe they will simply be in the state of sleeping. Therefore, in the hadiths we read:

The grave is either a garden of the gardens of Heaven or one of the holes of Hell.

So that place, which is sometimes described as the grave, is a temporary kind of Heaven or Hell.

c) To people entering heaven

Another time that the angels greet people is at the time of their entrance into Heaven. The Qur’an describes this carefully and precisely:

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا
وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ
الَّذِي صَدَقْنَا وَعَدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَبَوْا مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ ۗ فَنِعْمَ
أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ

Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to paradise in throngs. When they reach it and its gates are opened, its keepers will say to them: ‘Peace be to you! You are welcome! Enter it to remain (forever).’ They will say: ‘All praise belongs to God, Who has fulfilled His promise to us and

made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish!’ How excellent is the reward of the workers (of righteousness)! (39:73-74)

God promised the people that if they are pious, He will grant them heaven; once see the fulfilment of that promise, they say ‘alhamdulillah...’ (or ‘praise be to Allah’), in praise of fulfilling His promise, which is undoubtedly the best thing that we can achieve. The events described in the above verses take place at the time of reaching heaven and entering it. When the gates of heaven are opened, the angels tell people, “Peace be with you. Welcome.”

d) To people inside heaven

At the time of death, at the time of entrance into heaven and, as we will now discover, inside Heaven, the angels greet us with peace, if God-willing we are there:

جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ
يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ

...the Gardens of Eden, which they will enter along with whoever is righteous from among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants and the angels will call on them from every door: ‘Peace be to you, for your patience.’ How excellent is the reward of the (ultimate) abode! (13:23-24)

From these verses we discover that believers will enter heaven with their whole family if they have been righteous and that a very fundamental quality that helps good people to go to heaven is patience and so without patience we cannot go to heaven. Imam Sajjad (a) is quoted as saying:

الصبر من الايمان بمنزلة الرأس من الجسد، ولا إيمان لمن لا صبر له

Patience for faith is like a head for a body. The one who lacks patience has no faith.³

It is possible for a body to be alive without certain limbs, but it is impossible to have a living body that does not have a head. So, in the same way, patience is a fundamental necessity for a faith which is alive. Hence, the angels will tell people “Peace be upon you for your patience.”

God sends greetings of peace to His servants

So far we have seen that a) the people of heaven greet each other with peace, b) the angels greet us with peace and, c) in this world, we have the case of Prophet Abraham who was greeted with peace by the angels, d) after our death, e) at the time of our entrance into Heaven and f) also inside Heaven, God Himself also greets people with peace.

For example, God sends peace to Prophet Nuh as a reward for doing good deeds:

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace to Nuh, throughout the nations! Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous. (37:79-80)

In the same Chapter, verses 109 and 110, God says:

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace be to Abraham! Thus do We reward the virtuous. (37:109-110)

³ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 89. There is a similar hadith from Imam Sadiq (a) which says:

الصبر من الأيمان بمنزلة الرأس من الجسد فإذا ذهب الرأس ذهب الجسد كذلك إذا ذهب الصبر ذهب الأيمان

Again, in the same Chapter, verses 120 and 121, God speaks about Prophets Moses and Aaron saying:

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace be to Musa and Haroun! Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous. (37:120-121)

And then, in the same Chapter, about Ale Yaseen, God says:

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِيَّاسِينَ إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Peace be to Iliyas! Thus indeed do we reward the virtuous. (37:131)

Finally, God sends His salām to all the Apostles.

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

Peace be to the apostles! (37:181)

There are verses in Surah Maryam which talk about Prophet Yahya, or John the Baptist. John the Baptist is very special. When Prophet Zakariyyah did not have a child and had become an elderly man, he prayed and prayed for a child, and finally, after an inspiration he had after a meeting with Lady Maryam—when Lady Maryam said the God provides who He wills with sustenance without measure—he prayed again and then God gave him Yahya.

In the Qur'an God says that when he was a child, Yahya was given a mission by God and was asked to be kind with his parents, not to be arrogant, along with other advice. In verse 15 of Surah Maryam (Chapter 19) God says:

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ يَوْمَ وُلِدَ وَيَوْمَ يَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ يُعْتَرَى حَيًّا

*Peace be to him, the day he was born and the day he dies
and the day he is raised alive. (19:15)*

Therefore, at the three most important times in everyone's life, God is giving Prophet Yahya peace. A very important time for us is the day we are born, the beginning of our life in this world. The day we die is also important. If we had the knowledge of our date of death, surely on every application form we would have been asked for both date of birth and date of death. However, since we do not know it, it is not demanded. Nonetheless, when we die is important because it is end of our life, our deadline. And the third is the day we are raised and resurrected. God says "Peace be to Yahya" at all these three times.

We should take some time to reflect on what it means to send peace to a person when he is born, when he dies, and when he is raised. What does it mean? Is it just a formal greeting? Indeed, on the contrary, it is giving a special type of mercy to someone in the name of peace at the three most challenging times in a person's life.

In Surah Naml, (Chapter 27), verse 59, there is another instance in which God gives salām:

قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَىٰ

*Say: 'All praise belongs to God and Peace be to His servants
whom He has chosen'. (27:59)*

Therefore, in this world, God sends salām to the prophets, and in particular to Prophet Noah and Prophet Abraham, Prophets Moses and Aaron, Prophet Yahya, and in general, to all the Apostles (or *mursaleen*). In heaven, God also sends His salām to the people.

In Surah Yaseen, God talks about the people of heaven and how they enjoy themselves in heaven, being there with in pairs with their spouses, enjoying the fruits which are there, with whatever they want being available to them. However, a great blessing, indeed maybe the greatest blessing for them from God in heaven is:

سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ

'Peace!' A watchword from the All Merciful Lord. (36:58)

God emphasises that this is 'qawl', a word, so maybe they hear a voice saying to them: 'Peace from a Lord Who is All Merciful.'

When we come across this, we can hardly imagine it because throughout our lives, up to the very last moment, we are always worried. On the Day of Judgement, we will also be worried. However, when we enter heaven, God-willing, and then we hear God telling us salām, after His angels have told us this, then we will become relaxed and will have absolute tranquillity.

Greeting of peace existed before the advent of Islam

Another thing that we can understand from the Qur'an is that 'salām' was not introduced only after the advent of Islam, or by the Prophet of Islam, and then continued after him. In Surah Taha, on the conversation that Prophets Moses and Aaron had with Pharaoh, God instructs the two prophets how to speak to Pharaoh:

فَأْتِيَاهُ فَقُولَا إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلَا تُعَذِّبْهُمْ قَدْ جِئْنَاكَ بَيِّنَاتٍ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى

*So approach him and say: 'We are the Apostles of your Lord. Let the children of Israel go with us and do not torture them! We certainly bring you a sign from your Lord **and may peace be upon him who follows guidance!**' (20:47)*

In this conversation, they are to offer their peace to Pharaoh if he listens to the message of God.

Prophet Jesus also used salām, and his salām is like the one God sent to Prophet Yahya, but in the case of Prophet Yahya, God says: *“Peace be to him, the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised alive!”* (19:15)

In the case of Prophet Jesus, he sends salutations to himself. In Surah Maryam, we read that when he was just a new-born in the arms of his mother, Lady Maryam, when he said:

قال إني عبد الله آتاني الكتاب وجعلني نبيا وجعلني مباركا أين ما كنت
وأوصاني بالصلاة والزكاة ما دمت حيا وبرا بوالدي ولم يجعلني جبارا
شقيئا والسلام علي يوم ولدت ويوم أموت ويوم أبعث حيا

He said: ‘Indeed I am a servant of God! He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has made me blessed, wherever I may be and enjoined on me to (maintain) the prayer and to (pay) the zakat as long as I live and to be good to my mother and He has not made me self-willed and wretched. Peace is to me the day I was born and the day I die and the day I am raised alive. (19:30-33)

Prophet Jesus sends peace to himself. We saw above that Prophet Moses greeted Pharaoh with a salām, although of course in a conditional way because, he said: “Peace be with the one who follows guidance.” It was an offer given to Pharaoh, which depended on whether he followed guidance or not.

In Jewish tradition, they say ‘shalom’ in Hebrew, which is like the Arabic ‘salām’. Both come from the same grammatical root. In particular, there is

an article in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*,⁴ in which an orientalist named Goldziher in which he says that research shows that salām has been used in different traditions much before Islam. Goldziher says that ‘salām’ was already used as a greeting before Islam and that the corresponding Hebrew and Aramaic expressions, which go back to Old Testament usage, were also used as greetings amongst the Jews and Christians. He also refers to inscriptions which are from the Nabataean people in which they also have something from the same root *sil̄m*. He says that in North Western Arabia and in the Sinai Peninsula, people used a greeting like ‘salām’ in their own language. Therefore, with the evidence we have from the Qur’an, salām had existed before the advent of Islam as it was taught by the prophets (a) to humanity.

Salām is a prayer rather than a mere greeting

The abovementioned verses show that ‘salām’ is not just a greeting; more than anything else, ‘salām’ is a prayer, a word of supplication (*du‘ā*). For this reason, we can even say salām to ourselves as we say in daily ritual prayers, ‘Peace be upon us and the righteous servants of God’ (*as-salāmu ‘alaynā wa ‘alā ‘ibādillāh as-sālihīn*). If it was just greeting for others, then we could not use it to greet ourselves. By ‘greeting ourselves’ we mean that we are requesting God to send peace to us.

‘Salām’ is asking God to give peace to someone

This leads to another important idea. When we say salām to each other, we may think we are simply offering peace to someone, and they in return are offering peace to us. However, ‘salām’ means that we request God to provide

⁴ Published by the University of Leiden

the other person with peace. If we look at Ziyarah Ashura, we can find the reason for this when we say:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَعَلَى الْأَزْوَاجِ الَّتِي حَلَّتْ بِفِنَائِكَ

Peace be to you, O Imam Husayn and to all the people who have sacrificed their lives for your sake.

عَلَيْكَ مِنِّي سَلَامٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ

From me to you is the peace which comes from God.

This means that although it is ‘salāmullah’—peace which comes from God—our role is that we request God to give this salām to Imam Husayn.

This is the same as when we recite a ‘salawāt’, or a salutation on Prophet Muhammad and his progeny.⁵ When we send salutation to the Prophet we are indeed asking God to send it to the Prophet. Therefore, in the same way, by giving salām, we are asking God to send peace to someone who is present or absent or even to ourselves. Furthermore, since this ‘salām’ comes from God, it can continue to be given even after we said it and even after we have died. As we read in Ziyarah Ashura:

عَلَيْكَ مِنِّي سَلَامٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَبَدًا مَا بَقِيَتْ وَبَقِيَ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ

I ask God to send peace to you as long as I remain and as long as the day and night remain.

This means that we are asking for this salām to continue as long as this world continues and so we say ‘salām’ and then even after we die, this salām continues. This demonstrates the great depths of salām. More than anything

⁵ When someone asks us to send a salawāt to the Prophet we say, “Oh God send peace and blessings on Muhammad and the Household of Muhammad!”

else, salām is a request from God, and if it comes from God, it is also an answer from God.

Reason for emphasis on peace

There are important questions to be asked regarding the overall emphasis in Islam on peace, on the necessity of directing our relationships based on peace and on achieving peace in our hearts.

To answer this, we need to reflect on how people can achieve happiness and salvation. God created us in a way that we have great ambitions and expectations for perfection, that nothing can satisfy us except God Himself. For example, a parent tests their child by telling the child they are going to hide somewhere, and the child must come and find them. However, they help the child by giving him or her a description to use as clues. In this description, they mention all the characteristics that match only the parent. The child then goes everywhere, meeting many people along the way. From a distance they may think that someone is their parent but when they get nearer, the child realises that person is not their parent, and so they must continue to search until they reach their goal.

The same thing happens with us. God has given us an innate image of Himself in our heart regarding His qualities, such as Absolute Beauty, Absolute Goodness, Absolute Purity, Absolute Mercy, and Absolute Compassion. Then He asks us to come and find Him. So we go and try different things. Some people think that God is to be found in money and wealth because it gives them absolute power, absolute satisfaction, and absolute beauty in a worldly sense. So, they strive to become rich, but still do not feel satisfied and at peace. Other people think power and position is the absolute good. So, we human beings try everything, but we never become satisfied and at peace because the innate image that we have of God

will not match anything other than He Himself. Therefore, we must continue our search until we find the Real God.

This search becomes especially important for people who have wealthy and affluent lifestyles because the poor and those who face difficulties still think and hope that becoming rich will solve their problems. However, people who have a comfortable life are the first to acknowledge that it is not enough. Therefore, many people commit suicide in modern societies in which people are affluent. The people who are poor normally do not commit suicide even if they are not very religious because they always must struggle, and they have no time to think about more philosophical questions about the meaning of life etc. For them, finding a piece of bread makes their life meaningful. However, a person who is affluent and has everything they need, then finds that their life is still not meaningful because whatever they have does not match the innate image of God that they have in their hearts. Unless they find God, they will not be satisfied and at peace.

Remembrance of God brings peace and tranquillity

The only way for us to achieve peace and tranquillity is to remember God:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

-those who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God. Look! The hearts find rest in God's remembrance. (13:28)

Also, in Surah Al-Inshiqāq (Chapter 84), verse 6, God says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

*O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously
and you will encounter Him. (84:6)*

So we are struggling and working hard to meet our Lord; it will be too late if we meet Him only on the Day of Judgement. Everyone will meet Him then, but there are those who will meet Him whilst He is pleased with them, and on the other hand there are those who will meet God while He is not pleased with them. So, we must prepare ourselves for meeting God, for *liqā'ullāh*. A human being can only have peace and tranquillity when he is connected to God.

In one of his whispered prayers, Imam Sajjad says:

Nothing will cool my burning thirst but reaching You.
Nothing can quench my ardour but meeting You, damp my
yearning but gazing upon Your Face, settle my settling place
without closeness to You.⁶

Therefore, there is a thirst for God which is burning in us and nothing can cool it except reaching God and it is only when we reach God that we will feel satisfied. Thus, from a Qur'anic point of view, man's yearning for peace is indeed man's yearning for God. We are looking for peace because we are looking for God. Interestingly, according to the Qur'an, one of the Names of God is 'Salām' meaning 'Peace'. In Surah al-Hashr, a list of some of the Names of God is mentioned:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيَّبُ الْعَزِيزُ
الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

*He is God-there is no god except Him-the Sovereign, the
All-Holy, the All-Benign (Peace), the Securer, the All-*

⁶ A compilation of the Imam's supplications called *Al Sahifah Al-Sajjadiyyah*, or the *Psalms of Islam* translated by William Chittick

Conserver, the All-Mighty, the Compeller, the All-Magnanimous. Clear is God of any partners they may ascribe (to Him). (59:23)

So God is 'Peace', (*al-Salām*) and the 'Giver of Safety' (*al-Mu'min*), which means He gives us *amn*, safety and security; hence, with God we can have security. A community with God will have security just as a person with God will have security.

Therefore, if we want real, enduring, and stable peace in our hearts and in our community, we must improve our relationship with God the Almighty. We must obey Him, and then God Himself will show us the ways of peace. Indeed, one of the things that the Qur'an does is to show us the ways of peace:

يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى
النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darknesses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path. (5:16)

Conclusion

For Muslims, everything is related to peace and indeed, as we mentioned at the beginning, the word *Islam* comes from the Arabic root word '*silim*' which means 'peace'. God is Peace, the Qur'an shows the ways of peace and heaven is also the 'abode of peace.' By submitting ourselves to God, we can achieve peace for both ourselves and the whole society. Our understanding and practice of peace must be much more than the mere absence of tension, conflict, and war; and includes avoiding and not allowing anything that might possibly lead to anything that threatens people's safety and security.

May God lead us towards complete and perfect peace in our hearts and in our communities. May God enable us to experience the peace of being connected to Him, the peace of being able to feel His Presence, and that He is happy and pleased with us.