The Concept of Peace in the Old Testament and Islam

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Most people love peace and long to live in a realm of tranquility, safety, prosperity and justice. The problem is that our world has not had plenty of any of these. The "Shire" can only be imagined. Sin has distorted God's designed rest (*shabath*), and we now live in a world on the brink of World War III, a war that would be disastrous for most of the earth's population.[1] Is there a solution to this problem? Where can peace be found? Or better yet, how can peace be achieved so that humans may again enjoy the *shabbath* rest of God?

In this essay I will attempt to give an answer to these questions from both the Old Testament perspective, and from the teachings found in Islam. More specifically, I will try to define the Old Testament concept of peace (*shalom*) and compare it with the concept of peace as found in the Islamic world. Since I write as a Christian, my analysis of peace in Islam is clearly coming from the "outside." This analysis will rely on the Quran and the Hadith, but I will pay special attention to current interpretations and discussions of this concept in the Islamic world.[2] My hope is thatthis study will help us understand our common beliefs and desires, but also our differences.

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1. References to a possible war have been spotted in the press in the confrontations between Iran, Israel and the United States. See for example the warning of President Bush about a possible War World III if Iran acquired nuclear weapons at http://foxnews.com/story/0,2933,303097,00.html (accessed on January 20, 2008).

The Concept of Peace in the Old Testament

The principal noun used for peace in the Old Testament is shalom. It is a term that is very well known not only in Israel, but also in the Christian world and beyond. The root of the word is common in many Semitic languages. It is found in Akkadian (*s/salamu* - to be hale, whole, complete), Arabic (*salima* - to be healthy, safe; to keep peace), Ugarit, Phoenician, Aramaic and even Ethiopic.[3] It seems that the Akkadian word "comes closest to the core meaning of the root which points to the "notions of wholeness, health, and completeness."[4] In the Old Testament, the noun *shalom* is most often associated with the meaning of the verb "to be complete, sound," and thus it is associated with "the state of wholeness or fulfillment."[5]

The Pentateuch

The first time this lemma is found in the Bible is in the promise of God to Abraham: *"As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age."* Unlike his offspring who will be sojourners in a land not belonging to them, and who will be oppressed for four hundred years, Abraham will have a peaceful end, free from oppression. This word specifically occurs twice in Genesis when referring to absence of strife (26:29 and 31), and it is clear that the noun is used a few times as a greeting (29:6, 43:27 and 28). As a greeting it is usually associated with the noun "wlfare"[6] and the verb "to be well." The following example from Genesis 43:27-28 illustrates this usage:[7]

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2. It is well known that it is wrong to speak about Islam as if it was a uniform and well-defined religion. Islam is a "many splintered thing." Thus, as it will be clear from the discussion below, I cannot offer one interpretation of this concept from Islam. It is clear that the concept of peace in the Islam of Osama bin Laden (for example) is different than that of many (and perhaps most) Muslims in the rest of the world. See the discussion below.

3. For more details about the word in cognate languages see K & B, and BDB.

4. See P. J. Nell, "~lv" in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by W. VanGemeren, vol. 4 (Paternoster, 1997), 130.

5. Ibid.

And he inquired about their <u>welfare</u> and said, "Is your father <u>well</u>, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" They said, "Your servant our father is <u>well</u>; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves.

In Genesis 28:21 the word clearly carries the meaning of "safety." Thus, Jacob asks God to help him return to his father's house in peace or "safety." In this context, it is clear that Jacob is asking God to protect him from harm during his travels to and back. The same meaning is evident in Exodus 4:18 where Jethro allows Moses to return back to his brothers "in *shalom*" (safety).

Joseph's brothers (because he was loved more by their father) could not speak to him with *shalom* (37:4). It seems that they could not speak to him 'peacefully' or in a friendly manner.[8] In contrast, when Joseph's brothers came to him in Egypt, and were afraid because they were brought to his house and their money was back in their sacks, Joseph calms them by saying: "… *shalom* to you, do not be afraid"[9] (43:23). The expression is clearly intended to comfort the disturbed brothers and help them regain their "peace." In 44:17, Joseph wants to send his brothers back "in peace" (*l-shalom*), and to keep only the one who is guilty of stealing his cup.

A more unusual use is found in Genesis 41:16. The larger context for this use is necessary for interpretation (41:15-16):

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh <u>a favorable answer</u>."[10]

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6. This meaning is also found in Genesis 37:14 where Joseph is sent to inquire about the "welfare" of his brothers and the flocks.

7. The underlined words translate the Hebrew *shalom*. The translation is from ESV. Note that "is your father well?" can simply be translated "How is your father?" See also Exodus 18:7

8. See the JPS: "…they could not speak a friendly word to him."

9. Note the NIV: "It's all right…Don't be afraid."

From the context of this passage (which is given only partially above), Joseph seems to promise to Pharaoh that the answer (interpretation) which God will give to him will calm him down. In Genesis 41:8, it is clear that Pharaoh was troubled by the dream that he had, which no one could interpret. Perhaps in this case the answer of *shalom* should be understood as bringing "inner peace" and "satisfaction."

In Exodus 18 (verse 23) we also find shalom as conveying the meaning of "satisfaction," and perhaps also "rest." Jethro advises Moses not to wear himself and the people out by being the only judge. If he will share the load with others (and God so commands), Moses will be able to stand the strain and "the people will go home *satisfied* (NIV)."[11] It seems from the context that the people will be more rested (they will not have to sit around the whole day to wait for their turn), and they will be satisfied because justice will be done in their case.

In the book of Leviticus we find shalom only once (26:6). For the first time, we find here the promise of the Lord to give peace to his people in the Promised Land, but only if they obey his commandments. This is one of the promised blessings as a response to obedience. In this context the term clearly refers to a place where the Israelites can dwell in safety.[12] They do not have to be afraid of wild animals or the sword (26:5b-8):

> A*nd you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely.*
> *I will give <u>peace</u> in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase*

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10. Literally: "God will answer *'eth-shalom*" (where 'eth is the direct object marker.) The JPS translates, "God will see to Pharaoh's welfare." N. Sarna points out that the meaning of this expression is unclear. Perhaps Joseph believes that Pharaoh "will receive a dream interpretation from God that will entirely satisfy" him. See N. Sarna, Genesis, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 283.

11. Literally: *b-shalom* (in/with peace).

12. Notice the close proximity of the noun betach (safety, confidence, trust). The translation of the verses is from ESV, and the rendering of *shalom* is underlined.

ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.

It seems that in this context shalom does not necessarily means absence of war, but rather that even if there is war (sword), it will not happen "in the land," but perhaps outside in the way of routing scared enemies.[13] The land will have safety, because the obedient people of God will be so much stronger. Another valid interpretation would understand the shalom in the land as being the ideal, while in cases when that is not possible and there is war, the sword (war) will be heavily in favor of Israel. The person which disobeys God (thus breaking God's covenant) fools himself if he thinks that there will be shalom (safety/peace) for him.[14]

Despite the fact that the exact term shalom is found only once in Leviticus, it is worth mentioning the importance of these "peace offerings"(zeᵒbaH šülämîm). The term is closely connected to the root šlm and it is important to recognize that these offerings may give us "insight in what is required to establish peace with God."[15] Thus Porter points out that the first emphasis in the Old Testament for the term peace "focuses on the sacrificial law as a means of making peace with God. Peaceful relations between humans, important as they may be, are not nearly so important as peace with God."[16] The lesson for the people of Israel and for us is to make us aware about the "coostliness of peace. Peace is not simply an empty wish; it is the result of a process that, in this instance, exacts the high cost of life."[17]

An important occurrence of this term is in the blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6:24-26. Here the concept of *shalom* is clearly connected to the blessing of God, his presence and grace. The person on whom God looks

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13. But see the contrast between *shalom* and war in Ecclesiastes 3:8, "… [there is] a time for war, and a time for *shalom.*"

14. See Deuteronomy 29:18 for the case of the man whose heart is turning away from the Lord, but still predicts shalom while walking in the "stubbornness" of his heart. See also Psalm 119:6.

15. S. Porter, "Peace," in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, CD-ROM (Inter-Varsity Press, 2000).

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

with favor, is protected and blessed, and he can enjoy the peace of God. Aaron should bless the people of Israel and put the name of God on them:

> *The LORD bless you and keep you;*
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> *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*
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> *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you <u>peace</u>.*

The most theologically charged use in the Pentateuch is found in Numbers 25:12. Here the Lord makes "a covenant of peace" with the priest Phineas because of Phineas' zeal in killing two sinners who defiled Israel. The exact term is found four times in the Old Testament[18] and it seems that in this context the covenant should be understood as "promissory." In Ezekiel this is the "promissory covenant of God given to his restored people as an eternal blessing and salvation."[19]

In the book of Deuteronomy most of the uses of the term are in the context of real or possible conflict with other nations (see 2:26, 20:10-11, and 23:7). In chapter 20, God lays down some "rules of engagement" for the people of Israel concerning the cities that are far away from the Promised Land. Terms of peace should be offered to the cities before any siege. Only if this offer of shalom is not accepted, are the Israelites allowed to besiege the city and punish the adult males. Because the Ammonites and the Moabites were not helpful to the Israelites on their way from the land of Egypt, the Israelites should not "seek their peace (*shalom*) or prosperity" (23:7).

The Historical Books

In the historical books we find the same meanings for shalom as

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18. See also Ezekiel 27:26 and 34:25-26.

19. Nell, "~lv,"131-32.

20. For this usage (as a contrast to war/conflict) see Judges 4:17, 8:9, 11:31, 21:13. For peace between nations (as absence of war) see 2 Samuel 17:3.

21. See Judges 18:6; 1 Samuel 20:13, 21, 42; 2 Samuel 3:21-23, 15:9, 27 etc.

22. The greeting is associated with welfare/wellness/health. Sometimes it can simply be translated: *"are you all right?"* See Judges 18:15, 19:20; 1 Samuel 1:17, 10:4, 17:18, 25:5-6;

established in the use of the term in the Pentateuch. Thus we find treaties of peace made with people (Joshua 9:15), and the state of shalom that is supposed to follow after war.[20] The expression "to go in safety" or to be "safe" is also found,[21] and the term continues to be used as a greeting.[22]   A few uses are worth analyzing in more detail.

In Judges 6 after the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, Gideon realizes that it was the Lord (vv. 22-24) and is understandably afraid:

Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said,
"Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face."
But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."
Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD is Peace. [23]
To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

The message of the Lord in this context seems to be more than a simple greeting; (cf. Judges 19:20) it is intended to calm and help Gideon to regain his inner peace. As a response to this appearance of the Lord, Gideon builds an altar which is simply named: *Yahweh/Jehovah Shalom.* This is the first time in the Old Testament that the concept of Shalom is so closely associated with the Name of the Lord. Interestingly enough, the Lord asks Gideon to do a series of things that will disturb not only the peace of the people around him and the enemies of Israel, but also Gideon's own peace. He is asked to destroy the altar of Baal and also to fight against the Midianites. Both of these requests endanger his life. These are situations in which he most certainly needed the peace of the Lord and peace with the Lord. The altar stands as a witness of a Lord who can give peace to his servants, even if their ministry will cause strife and opposition.

In a dramatic incident, when Ahimaaz comes to bring news to David about the battle against Absalom and his troops, Ahimaaz calls to the king and says only one word: *shalom.*[24] After that he bows down and gives a

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Esther 2:11 etc.

23. In Hebrew it is *YHWH Shalom.* That peace comes from the Lord is also supported by 1 Kings 2:33, Psalm 122:6 etc.

24. See 2 Samuel 18:28-33. The NIV translates: "All is well."

positive message that God "has delivered up the men who lifted their hands" (NIV) against King David. However, even though there seems to be *shalom* on the outside (the conflict is over), there does not seem to be *shalom* inside David until he finds out about his son Absalom. The king asks twice if there is *shalom* with Absalom (1 Samuel 18:29 and 32). And when he finds out that his son is dead, the king is shaken and weeps (v. 33). Even though there was peace (absence of strife) in Israel, there was clearly a lack of *shalom* (inner peace) in the heart of David because of the death of his son. Since his son was not safe (since he had no *shalom*), the king was not satisfied himself.

The Writings[25]

In the Writings (*Ketuvim*) we find the concept of *shalom* associated clearly with righteousness and with wisdom. Thus in the book of Job, Eliphaz (one of the wise) says that the wicked's *shalom* (peace and tranquility) is only temporary, and will be taken away (5:20-21):

> *The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, thorough all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in <u>prosperity</u> his destroyer shall come upon him.*

The ESV and KJV translate shalom here as "prosperity," but the LXX translates: *"…just when he seems to be at <u>peace</u>, his overthrow will come."* Of course, the connection between righteousness and shalom is contested by Job who sees the wicked as living on with their houses having shalom from fear (being safe from fear).[26] The association with fear (Hebrew *pachad*) is

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25. Here I am focusing especially on the Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job) and Psalms.

26. Job 21:9: "Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them (ESV)." See also the same dilemma in Psalm 73:3. The psalmist temporarily stumbles when he sees the shalom of the wicked.

27. If the young student does not forget and keeps the teachings of his/her teacher (father?), he will have shalom. See Proverbs 3:1-2. In this context *shalom* is associated with

also found in the discourse of Bildad. He recognizes that "dominion and fear" are with God who is the one that can bring shalom (peace) in His high places.

The Book of Proverbs associates the concept of shalom with wisdom and obedience to the more experienced and wise.[27] The young student is also encouraged to desire and plan for shalom so that he or she may have joy (12:20). The following verse makes the connection between wisdom and peace obvious (3:17): "Her [wisdom's] ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her ways/paths are *shalom*." It seems that in this book the concept of *shalom* is again larger than absence of strife or war; it includes prosperity, a long life, and tranquility. It is associated with the "blessed life."

In the Book of Psalms we have the following important associations of the concept of *shalom*.[28] Despite obvious opposition, the godly who trust in the Lord are filled with joy, and they can sleep in shalom (4:8).[29] Thus, there is safety and tranquility in the home and heart of such a person. The connection between the Lord and *shalom* is also evident in psalm 29 (verse 11), where this is found as a result of the Lord's blessing.

In Psalm 34:15 (English v. 14), the father (or sage) urges his children to turn away from evil and to do good. Part of this doing good is the search and pursuit of *shalom*. Thus, we see that there is something that can be done for shalom. While it is God who grants it, there must also be an active seeking on the one who desires it.[30] This is in agreement with what we found out in Proverbs.

While there will always be enemies who will not "speak *shalom*" (Psalm 35:20), the psalmist can be comforted by the fact that the Lord delights in the

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long life.

28. In this book the term shalom is found in greater numbers (27 times) than in any of the other poetical books. There are only 3 occurrences in Proverbs and 4 in Job. The term seems also to be popular with Isaiah (26 times) and Jeremiah (29 times). See the discussion below. All the numbers are from a search on the lemma of shalom using Bible Works 7.0.

29. See also Psalm 55:18 (Hebrew 19). When many are arrayed against the psalmist, the one who can deliver and bring *shalom* is God.

30. See the contrast with those seek and speak for peace in Psalm 35:20.

shalom of his servant (Psalm 35:27). In this context, the term shalom again seems to be much broader than the English "peace." It must refer to the general well-being[31] of the person who puts his trust in God. It is a great comfort to know that the Lord delights in the well-being of his servants.

In Psalm 37, which can be classified as a wisdom/didactic psalm, there is a clear connection between the meek and upright with shalom. Just as the Lord delights in the *shalom* of his servants, so the meek delights in "abundant peace." While the connection between an upright life and shalom is more explicit in the prophets, these verses (11 and 37) also support this (ESV):

> But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace…
> Mark the blameless and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of <u>peace.</u>

The connection is even more unmistakable in Psalm 72 (where the psalmist seems to refer prophetically to the Messianic king). Where righteousness and its fruits are present, even nature will participate in the shalom (prosperity). And this shalom will be abundant (Psalm 72:2-3, 7 - ESV):[32]

> He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.
> The mountains will bring <u>shalom</u> to the people, the hills the fruits of righteousness…
> In his days may the righteous flourish, and <u>shalom</u> abound, till the moon be no more!

Just as in the Pentateuch, disobedience and breaking of the covenant drive away shalom and bring God's displeasure, so does (more specifically) sin: "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no shalom in my flesh because of my sin." In this context, the idea of health (ESV) and well-being is dominant. When sin disrupts the relationship with God, there can be no *shalom.*

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31. Note the following translations of shalom in this context: welfare (ESV), prosperity (KJV), well-being (NIV).
32. Abundant peace is also found with those of love the Law of the Lord (Psalm 119:165).

The connection between righteousness and *shalom* is beautifully continued and presented in Psalm 85. In the midst of God's anger and displeasure with people (who need to be revived), an appeal is made to the Lord's chesed (steadfast love) for salvation. This salvation is then connected with shalom and with righteousness (vv. 7-10). While the sinful people do not deserve God's *shalom*, those who fear the Lord can hope in the presence of His glory, a presence that brings righteousness and *shalom* together:

> *Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.*[8] *Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak <u>peace</u> to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.* [9] *Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and <u>peace</u> kiss each other.*

In the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134), the peaceful psalmist (man of shalom) is surrounded by those who hate peace (Psalm 120), so he urges prayer for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6-7), and wishes the peace of Israel (Psalms 125[33] and 128). The last occurrence of *shalom* in the Psalter (147:14) again gives due credit to God as the one who "makes peace" and satisfies with "the finest of the wheat." Again, in this last reference there is a strong connection between *shalom* and prosperity.

The Prophets

Isaiah and Jeremiah are the prophets who used this term (*shalom*) the most.[34] In the Prophets, Porter finds the second Old Testament emphasis for this term.[35] It is found in the earliest prophets and shows that despite the fact that God provided sacrifices for the obtainment of peace, "the people

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33. Here the connection between the righteous and *shalom* is also clearly made.
34. See note 25.
35. Porter, ibid.
36. Ibid.

had no peace, either in the land or with God."[36]

There is a need for a Redeemer to embody peace and to bring this peace to the people of God. This is found in the coming of the Prince of Peace (*sar shalom*) in Isaiah 9:6 (verse 5 in Hebrew), and continues in the Messianic hymn from chapter 11.[37] In chapter 9 the Prince of Peace both resembles God and is also depicted in human terms; "he will grow in power, sit upon the throne of David and establish an eternal kingdom (Is. 9:7)."[38]

In the Prophets we find again, just as in Psalms,[39] a strong relationship between righteousness and *shalom.* Isaiah 48:18 is explicit in its observation that "peace and righteousness flow from observance of Yahweh's commands and can be seen as his blessing."[40] Notice again the desire of God that his people enjoy peace: "Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea (ESV)." The prophets clearly proclaim the need for a new "world order," a new kingdom where *shalom* rules and righteousness is restored: "I will make your governor *shalom* (peace) and righteousness your ruler."

Conclusions

It is clear from this brief survey of the term shalom, that the term is not simply referring to absence of strife and war, but has a broader meaning. The most essential peace in the Old Testament is that between man and God, and that is not possible without sacrifices and obedience to God's rule. God is the only one who can confer *shalom* (peace, wellness and prosperity) on his people and who even delights to do that. But for that to

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37. Of course the lack of war between nations (the nations "will beat their swords into plowshares") is found already in Micah 4 and Isaiah 2. In Isaiah 11 we also find peace between humans and animals. In verse 6 the "wolf shall dwell with the lamb...and a little child shall lead them (ESV)."

38. Porter, ibid.

39. See especially the discussion on Psalm 85 above. This section relies on the analysis of Nell, "Peace," 132.

happen, human beings must live in submission and trust to *Yhwh shalom*, and they must actively pursue it. Throughout their history, the people of Israel have failed to live in such a way as to delight God and to enjoy his *shalom*. However, hope remains in the coming eternal kingdom of the Prince of Peace who will unite in his living and ruling, both *shalom* and righteousness. There can be no *shalom* without righteousness, the two must "kiss" each other.

The Concept of Peace in Islam

To describe the concept of peace in Islam is more difficult, because we are dealing with a religion, not only with a text like the Old Testament. One can proceed in at least three ways: 1) examine the Islamic texts, specifically the Koran and the Hadith[41] which deal with the concept of peace, 2) rely on the analysis of this term from Islamic sources, or 3) a combination of the two. Since I am not an expert in the interpretation of the Koran, I will rely mostly on Islamic interpretations of the Koran on this issue or the second approach. I believe that this approach is also more objective for Muslims, because I cannot be accused of only rely on my biased Christian interpretation.

Unfortunately, Islam is a "many splintered thing"[42] and there is no such thing as one Islamic view on peace. There are at least two views on peace, a non-violent and acceptable one, and a militant and dangerous one. The latter one was on display on September 11, 2001, and is associated with Osama bin-Laden.[43] The more peaceful one is exemplified by Shiite religious

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40. Ibid.

41. This is a term that refers to the oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of Muhammad (the prophet of Islam). It is well known that in Islam the most important source for authority is the Koran. This is followed by the Sunnah of the Prophet preserved in the *hadiths* (traditions), and by the approved practice of the community *(ijma)*. The *Ijtihad* deals with judgment on issues not found in the Koran. The Sharia is the body of laws which govern the Islamic state.

42. See J.Beverly,"Islam a Religion of Peace?"

http://christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/jauary7/1.32.html (accessed December 13, 2007).

authority Imam Muhammad Shirazi, and the more militant view is represented by Sayyid Qutb.[44] In this essay I will limit my presentation to these two views.

It is appropriate first to notice that the word for peace in Islam is a cognate of the Hebrew word shalom. Thus, Muslims greet each other with *salam* alekum, which literally means "peace to you," just as many modern Israelis greet each other with *shalom mah shlomka*. The noun comes from the verb salima, and it can have the following meanings depending on the context: to be safe and sound, secure, to preserve, to keep the peace, make one's peace, to surrender.[45] The noun *salam* can have the following meanings: soundness, well-being, peace, peacefulness, safety, and security.[46] Thus, it is clear from these dictionary definitions that the meaning of the noun *salam* comes very close that of *shalom* in the Old Testament.

The word *salam* is frequently found in greetings in the Koran. Notice the greeting in Paradise: "Those who believe and did the right, will be admitted to the gardens with rivers flowing by, where they will abide by the leave of their Lord, with 'Peace' as their salutation."[47] In this usage, the parallel with the Old Testament is obvious, and there are also parallels with the greetings of Jesus and that of many Christians today.[49]

Another parallel that is already visible in the dictionary definition has to

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43. Notice the useful analysis of Beverly (ibid.) about the "three distinct interpretations of the events of September 11." In the first interpretation "the terrorist acts do not represent Islam" because (as president George W. Bush put it) "Islam is a religion of peace." The people who did this are a "small group of deranged militants" etc. In the second interpretation a "darker side" of Islam is brought forth. In this view there is a less optimistic and positive view of Islam. This is a "paranoid Islam, which blames outsiders, 'infidels' for most of the problems of Muslim societies and which is presently the fastest growing version in the world. The third view believes that September 11 represents the true Islam.

44. Sayyid Qutb is usually considered the "man whose ideas would shape Al Qaeda." See Paul Berman, "The Philosopher of Islamic Terror," New York Times Magazine (March 23, 2003) and J. L. Esposito, *Unholy War* (Oxford, 2002), 56-51. He was executed in 1966 by the Egyptian government, and was the leading intellectual of the Muslim Brotherhood. See Sayyid Qutb, *Islam and Universal Peace* (American Trust Publications, 1993), ix-xii.

do with the range of the word. It is more that an absence of strife. Thus, Sayyid Qutb divides his book on *Islam and Universal Peace*[50] in several sections: The Islamic Concept of Peace, Peace of Conscience, Peace at Home, Peace in Society, Peace through Law, and World Peace. It is evident from this division that peace in his version of Islam is not limited to a lack of strife or war, but has other dimensions as well.

Sayyid Qutb reminds us that Islam is a "comprehensive religion" which "fully covers the issue of universal peace treating it as an attainable ideal which should be an integral part of life and which ought to dominate all fields of human activity."[51] In his concept of peace, there must be freedom, justice and security for all people. Thus, "peace cannot be established by abstaining from war when there is oppression, corruption, despotism and denial of God's supremacy."[52] The sequence for achieving peace goes from the individual's conscience, to his family, followed by the community and then proceeds to international relations.

In this sequence "Islam requires that there be peace between the individual and his Creator, between the individual and his conscience, and between him and his community."[53] Only when these preliminary stages have been completed should one proceed to attaining peace between one state and another. Thus, to achieve world peace one must follow these stages.

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45. See J. M. Cowan ed., *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Spoken Language Services, 1994), 495-96. Notice that these are only some of the most common of the possible meanings. Just as in Hebrew (and other Semitic languages) the meaning of the verb varies with the stem.

46. Ibid. Note that one name for Paradise is dar-assl_m (lit. The Place of Peace).

47. Q 14:23. The greeting is found in many other places: 33:44, 36:58 (again in Paradise), 37:79, 109, 120, 130, 181, 51:25 etc.

48. Notice the teachings and greetings of Jesus in Luke 10:5, 24:36, John 20:19 etc.

49. The Christians in Romania still greet each other with "Pace," which simply means peace.

50. See note 44 for the full reference.

51. Qutb, *Islam and Universal Peace*, 15. This whole section is based on Qutb's work.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

It seems to me that most Muslims would not have any major disagreements with this sequence. We all agree that man has to make peace with God first, then proceed to peace with himself, peace at home, and then in society and beyond. The question is, how does one achieve this? More important, how does one cross from peace in the family to peace within the community and the world?

For Qutb, and Islam,[54] peace of conscience comes simply from confession of sins and repentance. This is based on the mercy of God who does not need "the suffering and the crucifixion of a god to absolve human quilt… It is enough for anybody who wants to repent to appeal directly to God [there is no need for a priest or a confessional], admit his sin and declare his intention not to commit it again."[55] Since Islam emphasizes God's mercy and not man's guilt, sinners do not need to continue to suffer from anxiety once they confess their sins and repent. Peace of conscience is possible in this way. The Koran clearly states (Q 39:53): "O creatures of God, those of you who have acted against your own interests should not be disheartened of the mercy of God. Surely God forgives sins. He is all-forgiving and merciful."[56]

Qutb proceeds to say that "Islam is careful not to burden the individual with more than he can tolerate," and then admits that "anger and bitterness are natural feelings" which cannot be obliterated, but must be controlled. Islam brings peace in man's hearts by making men trust in God's merciful guidance and care. Of course, to achieve this peace the individual must sincerely wish it.[57]

Peace at home and in society can be achieved by obeying certain codes of conduct and laws. Under this section, Qutb discusses the importance of chastity before marriage, the very powerful urges of sex which must be

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54. So far, the sequence of Qutb seems to be accepted by most branches of Islam. The differences are on how these steps (especially the last one) can be achieved.

55. Qutb, *Islam and Universal Peace*, 21.

56. See also Q 12:87, 3:14-17, 7:19-23 etc.

57. Qutb, ibid., 23-29.

58. Qutb, *Islam and Universal Peace*, 43.

59. Ibid., 45.

controlled, and polygamy which is a "safety valve" against lust. The mutual aid of the extended family should help to establish the "mutual confidence and collective security of all."[58] In society peace is possible only when the social life is governed by Islamic laws as commanded by God.[59]

The most controversial section, one in which Qutb comes into direct conflict with the more "moderate" Muslims, is the section on world peace. Qutb believes that world peace is only possible through force and war. Even though in Islam "peace is the rule," one should resort to war to achieve the following:

> *To uphold the realm of God on earth, so that complete submission*
> *of men would be exclusively to Him.*
> *To eliminate oppression, extortion, and injustice by instituting the*
> *Word of God…*[60]

There is no doubt from Qutb's writings that he believes in a *jihad* for the cause of God.[61] This jihad allows, at times, the use of force and violence. He justifies his theories from the examples of the Prophet and his followers, and from the texts in the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet. In his analysis, there was a time when even the Prophet and his followers accepted to fight against the polytheists. The development of fighting and war is described as follows:[62]

> *God held back Muslims from fighting in Mecca and in the early period of their*
> *migration to Medina, and told them, "restrain your hands, and establish regular*

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60. Ibid., 12.

61. See especially his presentation in Milestones (Mother Mosque Foundation), 53-76. He relies in this section on the treatment of Ibn Qayyim (who was a famous early Sunni commentator of the Koran). Note that jihad is usually understood to be of two kinds: the greater jihad as the struggle to lead a good Muslim life, and the lesser jihad as the fight to spread the message of Islam. See the chapter on *jihad* by Esposito, Unholy War, 26-70.

62. Qutb, *Milestones*, 64. He bases himself especially on Q 3:74-76 and 9:29-32. For the infamous "Sword Verse" (Ayat al-Sayf) see Q 9:5:"…slay the idolaters wherever you find them…" For a Christian explanation of this verse see www.answering-islam.org.uk.

prayers, and pay Zakat". Next, they were permitted to fight: "permission to fight is given to those against whom war is made, because they are oppressed, and God is able to help them. These are the people who were expelled from their homes without cause. The next stage came when the Muslims were commanded to fight those who fight them... and finally, war was declared against all polytheists...

Thus, according to the explanation given by Ibn Qayyim, the Muslims were first restrained from fighting; then they were permitted to fight; then they were commanded to fight against aggressors; and finally they were commanded to fight against all the polytheists.

Thus, in the view of Sayyid Qutb, which is based on Ibn Qayyim, there is such a thing as a legitimate war of aggression, there is a command "to fight against all the polytheists." In this scheme, to achieve universal peace one must fight. In his words, "Islam has the right to take the initiative... this is God's religion and it is for the whole world. It has the right to destroy all obstacles in the form of institutions and traditions which limit man's freedom of choice."[63] It is the duty of Islam to remove, by force if necessary, any obstacle that exists in the path of the law of God (Shari'ah). An option for an Islamic revolution remains "violent revolution, the use of violence and terrorism to overthrow established ("un-Islamic") governments..."[64] It is clear that in the spread of Islam, preaching is not enough.[65] In certain situations it

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63. Ibid., 75. See also Qutb, Islam and Universal Peace, 12.

64. Esposito, *Unholy War*, 61.

65. Qutb, *Milestones*, 58: "The establishing of the dominion of God on earth..., and the bringing about the enforcement of the Divine Law (Shari'ah) and the abolition of man-made laws ¬cannot be achieved only through preaching." (The emphasis is mine).

66. This is a tax that non-Muslims must pay

67. I am relying on his book War, *Peace & Non-Violence: An Islamic Perspective* (Fountain Books, 2001). For a similar peaceful presentation of Islam see Ahmed Zaoui, "Peace in Islam: History, Precept and Practice," http:///www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0509/500344.htm (accessed January 24, 2008). The article is based on a lecture given at University of Auckland on September 21, 2005. He argues that Mohammed was a peace-maker and Islam accepts only defensive wars (force can be used only in self-defense). To achieve peace one must achieve first inner peace (God is the source of peace, see Q 8:53), and

has to be accompanied by force. The People of the Book, which includes Christians and Jews, are allowed to keep their religion as long as they are subdued and pay *Jizyah*.[66]

Of course this militant form of Islam is not accepted by many Muslims today. These other Muslims also appeal to the Koran and the traditions to support their points, but their interpretations and conclusions are very different than those of Sayyid Qutb and his followers. For a brief example of what I call a more moderate view, it is also a more peaceful view of Islam; I will summarize the writing of Imam Muhammad Shirazi.[67]

Shirazi starts by pointing out that "war is the worst thing known to mankind," it is an "illness," and should be entered only as a last resort.[68] According to his interpretation of the texts, the Prophet "did not instigate a single war, but rather made war only in self-defense,"[69] and he also strove to keep the amount of killing and prisoners "to a bare minimum."[70] The *Jizyah*, the tax collected from unbelievers, should be collected from unbelievers, which includes Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, who are living as "the people of *dhimma*."[71]

A comprehensive peace is possible only if we "transfer the weapons making factories into those of peaceful motives,"[72] and we eliminate the roots of war. "The roots of war are human deprivation, which brings about revolution against the group causing this deprivation. The causes of deprivation are colonialism, exploitation, and despotism in government, in economics, or in science and education."[73]

Despite the more moderate and "enlightened" approach of Shirazi, he does not give up on the idea of "the advancement of Islam," but he hopes

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then proceed to dialogue and education. Terrorism is "a sham and a disgrace."

68. Shirazi, *War, Peace & Non-Violence,* 5-6.

69. Ibid., 6.

70. Ibid., 9.

71. The simplest way to describe the "people of the *dhimma*" is as second class citizens. See Q 9:29.

72. Shirazi, ibid., 15.

73. Ibid., 16-17.

that this expansion will take place through peace, just as Mohammed progressed "through peace that he adopted as a mantra."[74] He also suggests the following steps "to establish a government for the millions of Muslims on the earth:"[75] follow the peaceful way of the Prophets and the Imams which include forgiveness, kindness, humility, patience, seek peaceful interaction among the members of the Islamic movement itself, strive to be a human being, seek free and fair elections annually or biennially, and instill peace on and instruct self. The Muslim should instill peace in himself every morning, noon, and afternoon, at sunset and in the evening through the "obligatory prayers that he repeats in every prayer: *'Peace be upon you O Prophet…, Peace be upon yourself O[76] righteous servants of Allah…'*"

Conclusions

It is clear that these two Islamic views on peace overlap, but they also have some significant differences. They both understand that peace is more than just the lack of strife or war, and they understand the importance of seeking inner peace. They would probably agree with the following definition of peace by Abdul-Aziz Said as:[77]

> *… the condition of order defined by the presence of such core Islamic values as justice, equity, human dignity, cultural coexistence, and ecological stability, and not merely by an absence of direct violence.*

However, they differ on the concept of the spreading of their faith. Qutb is clearly more militant and justifies the use of force to bring the universal peace of Islam on other civilizations. Shirazi believes in a spread of the faith

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74. Ibid., 69-70.

75. Ibid., 78.

76. Shirazi, *War, Peace & Non-Violence*, 95 and 69-96.

77. Cited in Zaoui, "Peace in Islam," ibid.

78. Of course there are people to the right of Qutb, and people to the left of Shirazi (who would probably be against the tax being imposed on "unbelievers)."

79. Notice the interesting observation of Zaoui ("Peace in Islam, ibid.) concerning his

solely through peaceful means, just as the Prophets and the Imams did in the past. These are two ways to interpret the Koran and the Hadith, and most Muslims are gravitating in and around one of these two camps.[78]

The important and relevant questions are: Which is the accurate view? More specifically, which is the view that comes the closest to "Koranic Islam"? Is there such a thing, or is every interpreter left to his own devices?[79] The is no question that today many doubt the peaceful interpretation of Shirazi (and Zaoui) as it is applied to the Prophet, his followers, and the violent passages in the Koran. There is no doubt that many people believe that Islam is a religion of "pieces," and not of peace.[80] Which is the truth?

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to present the Old Testament and the Islamic views on peace in a careful and sensitive way. It is clear that there are many agreements between the Old Testament concept of shalom and the Islamic *salam*. They both mean more that absence of strife. They both can mean wholeness and well-being, and they both can be found only where there is justice. The problem is that there are differences in how justice is defined, and there are differences on how this peace should be achieved. In the Old Testament vision, especially under the Prince of Peace, there is only one class of citizens. In Koranic Islam, even in its more moderate versions, the "unbelievers," which include Christians and Jews, partake in a "justice"

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address on Peace in Islam: "Like any text, the Qu'ran is susceptible to many different interpretations. None of these interpretations are necessarily authoritative because there is no clergy in Islam. What I will be advancing is a particular interpretation of the Qu'ran that is informed by the text, its context, and subsequent jurisprudence."

80. Notice for example the case when Abdul Raoulf from Afghanistan converted to Christianity. Senior Muslim clerics demanded that he be executed, "warning that if the government caves in to Western pressure and frees him, they will incite people 'to pull him into pieces.'" See the article of Michelle Malkin, "The Religion of Pieces," http:/michellemalkin.com/2006/03/24/the-religion-of-pieces (accessed January 24, 2008). Of course, there are other instances of this phenomenon.

81. There is more to this than taxes and humiliation. To my knowledge there is no Muslim

in which they are humbled and have to pay additional taxes (Q 9:29).[81]

Both the Old Testament and Islam agree that God is the only one who can bless a nation or an individual with peace.[82] They also agree that it is everyone's duty to seek first peace with God which ultimately leads to peace with self. Again - the paths on how peace with God is achieved are different. In both Christianity and Old Testament religion, some sacrifice is necessary for the establishment of peace between man and God. In Islam, a simple confession of sins and repentance seems to be enough. Islam has no place for "peace offerings," and has even less place for the Cross of Christ.

Both the Old Testament and Islam seek and desire a universal peace, but they disagree on how to get there. In fact, the Old Testament does not believe that we will ever get there until the coming of the Prince of Peace. In my readings of both Sayyid Qutb and Shirazi, I am amazed at the optimistic view of the human nature that they display. Even though they recognize the much needed help of God necessary for one's "reformation," they both seem to hold the idealistic and unrealistic view that "peace on earth" is achievable through largely human means. If we just use enough preaching and force, when necessary, to open the whole world to Shari'ia Law (Qutb) or forgive and spread Islam through peaceful words, actions, and writings, things will be better.

Are things really going to be better if Shari'ah is imposed on people of different faiths who love their freedoms even if their freedoms are "wrong"? Is there real justice in a society where you can't change, and therefore choose, your religion for fear of being "torn to pieces"? Or are these views and attitudes only those of the militant and fanatic few? I surely hope so, but the evidence seems to point in a different direction.

It seems that the Muslims "are in a struggle for the soul of Islam,"[83] The

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country in the world at this point in which Christianity is not restricted in one way or another (building of new churches, witnessing, etc.). The fact that even a secular Muslim country as Turkey opposes its citizens to change their religion (because it insults "Turkishness") speaks volumes about the justice and freedom of religion available in Muslim countries.

82. The New Testament teaching is that peace comes from Jesus (see John 14:27). This is an inner peace that cannot be disturbed by persecution, oppressions, and lack of justice.

question is: which side will prevail? I pray that the peaceful side will. Because we all want *shalom/salam*: peace with God, peace with the self, and peace with one another, even if we disagree on how to get there and on what this should be based on.

In Christianity, if not in the Old Testament, from "the beginning Christians were taught both by percept and practice to distinguish between God and Caesar and between the duties owed to each of the two. Muslims received no such instruction."[84] Thus in Islam there is no separation between "church and state." The laws of the state and the Laws of God (Shari'a) must coincide. Thus, a law is imposed on people which was not voted for and defined by themselves, but one which is defined by Islamic laws. Are these laws just enough, especially for women, foreigners, and the weak, to make salam possible? Or will it tear people to "pieces" inside and out?

Both Islam and Christianity are universal and expansionistic religions. Because of this they will come in conflict. What form will this conflict take? Unlike Qutb in relation to Islam, the majority of Christians believe that they must spread their faith only through preaching, without any type of force. It is not their primary purpose to change governments and institutions, but rather to bring the peace of Christ in the hearts of human beings. Complete shalom, especially external shalom, and righteousness are possible only at the coming of the Prince of Peace, who is Jesus Christ.

I conclude this article on a pessimistic note, but I offer hope. It is not possible for one to have peace with oneself if there is no peace with God. Peace with God is only possible through sacrifice. More specifically, we are reconciled to God through the blood and the Cross of Christ.[85] As long as a nation or religion denies and despises the Cross of Christ, peace cannot exist among its adherents, among its faithful, and beyond. Perhaps the reason

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83. Beverly, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace," ibid.

84. B. Lewis, *What Went Wrong* (Oxford, 2002), 103.

85. See Ephesians 2:13ff.

86. For a convincing and detached opinion of a (disinterested?) secular humanist, see the observation of S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*

that Islam has "bloody borders,"[86] is because it is the only major religion that specifically rejects and "belittles Jesus Christ."[87] Real lasting peace can only be spread through just and peaceful means, by persuading others with words. We should always "be ready to die, but never to kill, for the sake of commending Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died for sinners and rose again as the Lord of the universe"[88] and Prince of Peace. May God grant us and to our Muslim friends his joyful and enduring *shalom*.

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(Simon & Schuster, 1998), 254-58. He brings overwhelming and solid evidence that "Islam has bloody borders."

87. J. Piper, "How Christians Should Respond to Muslim Outrage at the Pope's Regensburg Message About Violence and Reason," www.desiringgod.org (accessed on January 24, 2008). The last part of my conclusion is based on this article.

88. Ibid.

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Abbreviations

Q   Al-Qur'an, A Contemporary Translation of Ahmed Ali, Princeton University Press, 1993.

BDB   Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.) - *Hebrew-English Lexicon*

ESV   *English Standard Version*

JPS   *Jewish Publication Society* (1985)

K&B   Koehler, L. and W. Baumgartner (eds.) - *Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon.*

NIV   *New International Version*