Religion and Peace

The understanding of peace in TWO religious traditions

- peace expressed through sacred texts for TWO religious traditions drawn from:
  - Islam: Qur’an and Hadith
  - Judaism: the Prophetic vision of peace on earth

Islam:

The concept of peace

- Islam understands peace as something that can only be found in submission to the will of God.
- In Islam, peace is derived only from a God-centred lifestyle, or siratal mustaqeem, which is achieved by a continual daily path of spiritual obedience.
- This peace has both an immediate, everyday connotation and an eschatological one, where eternal peace will reign supreme in the final goal of human existence, Paradise.
- According to the Qur’an, peace did not always exist on Earth.
  - After Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for having failed the test of obedience, Allah decreed that discord and hostility would exist amongst the nations and human beings would give in to their baser, ‘animal’ selves.
  - Through his compassion and mercy, however, Allah decided to combat human ignorance, as well as prompting of the evil jinn, Shaytan, by sending a number of prophets and teachers into the world, such as Muhammad, who would guide humankind into an understanding of the ways of God.
  - Dutiful obedience to these ways would reinstate peace, or a condition closely resembling it, to the world.

Shariah Law

- The potential for peace on Earth is contained in Shariah Law, an amalgam of ideas from the Qur’an and the Hadith, which reflect the will of God.
- The word, ‘Shariah’ literally means both the ‘path’ and the ‘way to a watering place’ and is therefore considered the correct path towards a peaceful worldly existence.
- Shariah Law focuses on the five principal human rights;
  - Freedom of the mind (freedom of speech and belief)
  - The right to life
  - The right to own personal property
  - The right to reproduce
  - The right to lead a physically and mentally healthy life
- Its emphasis is on the correct execution of justice: “God commands you to give other public trusts to the charge of those having the required qualities and to judge with justice when you judge between people.” (Qur’an 4:58)
- Muslims understand that, where Shariah Law exists, so too does peace.
- Indeed, Muslim scholars point to the era of Muhammad where Shariah Law was applied and where it appears the crime rate was negligible despite the fact there was no police force.
- Western scholars have also recognised the potential for widespread peace contained within Shariah Law, with the historian HG Wells saying, ‘Islam has created a society more free from widespread cruelty and social oppression than any other society had ever been in the world before.’ (The Outline of History)
- Critics of Shariah Law, however, will focus on the idea that this widespread peace may only be in existence because all opposition to Islam will have been eradicated.
- They also point out what they perceive to be the fundamental flaws in Shariah Law, including controversial issues such as the status of women and the extreme nature of punishments meted out for crimes, arguing that true peace cannot be achieved where human rights are in question.

The names of Allah

- As Shariah Law reflects the outworking of God’s wisdom, so too does Islam understand peace as being contained within the very nature of Allah himself.
- The Ninety-Nine names of Allah, the famous list of attributes that constitutes a mental picture of his essence, include many peaceful and peace-loving qualities.
- These include such things as mercy, strength, love and compassion.
- Indeed, one of them is the title ‘the Bringer of Peace’.
- Thus, for adherents to have peace in their lives, they must emulate Allah and submit their lives to his will, or, as Muhammad said, ‘Be conscious of Allah in your heart.’
- A great Qur’anic example of this is Abraham, who obeyed God’s will to sacrifice his son, and was therefore rewarded with, ‘... the praise of later generations. Peace on Abraham!’ (37:110)

The concept of Paradise
- Islam understands that, if an individual has successfully surrendered his/her life to Allah, they will ultimately enjoy eternal peace in heaven, or Paradise.
- As Islam maintains that peace cannot exist without justice however, a Day of Judgement, Youmul qiyamah, must first be endured before entry into Paradise is granted.
- This will be a time when all people must stand in line and wait to have their thoughts and deeds assessed and weighed before Allah, who will then inform the individual of their fate.
- Both the guilty and the innocent must then travel over a bridge spanning the abyss of Hell, with the righteous speeding directly across, and the wicked being flung into the pit below.
- This Hell, or Jahannum, is the exact opposite of Paradise and is a place of prolonged or even permanent punishment and suffering.
- In short, a place where peace is completely absent. As the Qur’an says, ‘Hell shall be their home, a dismal resting place.’ (13:18)
- Paradise, however, is a place where peace reigns supreme.
- As the righteous person enters the gates, angels will welcome them with the greeting ‘Peace be upon you! You have done well! Enter here and dwell within.’ (39:72)
- Once inside, ‘Rivers will run at their feet in the Gardens of Delight. Their prayer will be ‘Glory to You, Lord!’ and their greeting: ‘Peace!’ ‘Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Creation,’ will be the burden of their hymn.’ (Qur’an 10:10)
- Paradise is essentially a restoration of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve lived a blissful, idyllic existence.
- It will be distinguished by peace, safety, perpetual rest and eternal goodwill—‘We shall remove all hatred from their hearts, and they shall recline on couches face to face, nor shall they leave their Paradise.’ (Qur’an 15:48)
- As Muhammad stated in the Hadith, ‘I have prepared for my servants what no eye has ever seen, nor ear heard, nor any human being ever conceived of.’

Peace on Earth
- The Hadith also predicts an age of peace and prosperity on Earth under the direct rule of Jesus Christ.
- After defeating the antichrist, or Dajjal, on the battlefield, Jesus will convert Jews and Christians to Islam.
- He will then rule as the spiritual head of a transitional government of peace.
- Unlike the New Testament, however, which predicts that Jesus’ reign will last 1000 years, Muhammad claims it will last 40, or as long as Jesus has yet to live in order to finish his natural lifespan.
- He will spread the teachings of Islam and unsurpassed peace, happiness and safety will fill the Earth.

Judaism:
The concept of peace
- The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, is derived from the root word shin-lamed-mem, meaning completeness, harmony, security and fulfilment—in short, a sense of general well-being and safety.
- The ideal condition of shalom was exemplified in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-2) where human beings lived an idyllic, eternal existence and enjoyed close communion with God until ‘the fall’ in chapter 3, when strife, rebellion and death entered the world.
Much of the Tenakh (Hebrew Bible) is essentially concerned with God’s compassionate efforts at restoring 
shalom, or peace, though it is tenaciously rebuffed by humankind’s continued autonomy and disobedience towards him despite a few notable exceptions such as King Solomon, the prophets and Hezekiah.

Peace is sometimes symbolised in Hebrew thought and literature by the three key images of the Noah’s ark flood story in Genesis 8-9, them being a dove, an olive branch or a rainbow.

This underlines that peace’s very existence is contingent on God’s goodwill towards humankind.

Peace is viewed throughout the Tenakh as something that God either bestows or removes: ‘The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace’ (Numbers 6:26) and ‘There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.’ (Isaiah 57:21)

As demonstrated in the story of Noah’s ark, where humankind’s evil ways have been symbolically ‘washed clean’, peace may only exist when sinful behaviour has been satisfactorily dealt with and a state of purity, or holiness, restored.

The words of the prophets

This is a recurring theme in the many prophetic visions of peace on Earth occurring throughout the Tenakh.

Prophets such as Amos, Micah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah all give expression to the pattern of sin-judgement-tribulation-redemption that characterises Israel’s relationship with God.

Israel is presented as repeatedly breaking God’s covenant by worshipping false gods, practising sexual immorality and mistreating the poor, thereby bringing upon itself his wrath and judgement.

When this occurs for the final time and Israel is destroyed by pagan nations, a tiny remnant of righteous believers will be called together by God in a great and compassionate redemptive act.

This redemption will assume the form of a messianic age, a gathering of the remnant ti the ‘Mountain of the Lord’ under the leadership of a Davidic king, and it is here that we shall see the shalom of Eden permanently restored at last.

Nowhere is this distinctive pattern of events more clearly and eloquently predicted than in the Book of Isaiah.

A prophet from Judah who began his ministry in 740 BC, Isaiah’s writings are considered the most eschatological (looking to the ‘end times’) of the Tenakh.

Taken as a whole (Isaiah is believed by some scholars to have been written by up to three different authors, spanning the reigns of four different kings), much of Isaiah depicts God’s judgement upon pagan nations (chapters 10-24) and upon Israel itself.

The latter is accused of being ‘sinful’, ‘loaded with guilt’, ‘a brood of evildoers’ and ‘given to corruption’ (1:4) and will consequently become ‘desolate’, ‘burned with fire’, ‘stripped by foreigners’ and ‘laid waste’. (1:7)

It is important to note that this punishment is God’s doing, with foreign nations such as Assyria being expressly employed as ‘God’s instrument’. (8:7-8)

Once the punishment of Israel has occurred, however, purification will have been achieved — ‘Jacob’s guilt will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin.’ (27:9)

This will be followed by a consequent change in attitude on Earth towards God: ‘The Lord alone will be exalted in that day, and the idols will totally disappear’ (2:18), and God will show his love and mercy by establishing ‘the mountain of the Lord’s temple.’ (2:2)

This mountain, Mt Zion, is actually Jerusalem, transformed into a refuge towards which ‘… all nations will stream.’ (2:2)

Its most salient characteristic is that God’s word is authoritative and thus peace will reign supreme.

Disputes between nations will be settled peacefully and ‘They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.’ (2:14)

Zion will be a ‘… city of our festivals’, ‘… a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved’ (33:20) and peace will be ‘… your governor and righteousness your ruler.’ (60:17)

Imagery and Isaiah

Isaiah employs many profound images to illustrate this vision of peace on Earth.
In chapter 11, for instance, we observe wolves coexisting with lambs, leopards lying down with goats, calves, lions and yearlings peacefully cohabiting and a small child leading them all. (v.6)
- Infants will play near cobras’ nests and lions will eat straw instead of meat. (v.8)
- Even the topography of Israel will be transformed as the ‘wilderness blossoms’ and ‘bursts into bloom’ and ‘water gushes forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.’ (35:6)
- This utopia will be enjoyed, moreover, by the ‘redeemed’ and the ‘ransomed’ who will ‘enter Zion with singing’, be overtaken by ‘gladness and joy’ and for whom ‘sorrow and sighing will flee away.’ (v.9-10)
- The age of peace, moreover, will be inaugurated and led by a Davidic king, a ‘shoot come up from the stump of Jesse’ (11:1) who will be distinguished from his wisdom, knowledge and understanding.
- In fact, this individual will be called the ‘Prince of Peace’, of whose ‘government and peace there will be no end.’ (9:6-7).
- He will also be known as Immanuel, meaning ‘God is with us’, which is a clear indicator that the perfect situation in Eden, where God and man communed, is effectively being restored in the prophetic vision.
- This Immanuel, moreover, will be born to a virgin, and will eat curds and honey until he knows enough to ‘reject the wrong and choose the right.’ (7:14)
- There are schools of thought within Judaism that believe the prophetic vision of peace on Earth expressed in books such as Isaiah has already been partially realised by the creation of the state of Israel on a single day in May 1948.
- They focus in particular on Isaiah 66:8, which asks, ‘Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment?’
- Others maintain that Isaiah’s vision has an eschatological component, and believe that fulfilment of the prophecy is yet to come, citing such verses as 65:17, ‘Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.’

Inner peace
- The prophetic books such as Isaiah also deal with a kind of inner spiritual peace that is to be had by individuals, making it very clear that such peace is strictly contingent upon obedience to God.
- The Song of Praise in chapter 26 reinforces this with the words ‘You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast’ (v.3), as does chapter 33:17, ‘The fruit of righteousness will be peace.’
- Conversely, however, God will revoke inner peace wherever sin is rife: ‘Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.’ (59:7-8)
- Indeed, the gravity of this premise is illustrated by the fact that one of the hallmarks of the false prophet is his promise of peace in spite of the fact that an individual or community is sinful.
- Jeremiah 23:17, for example, claims ‘Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, “The Lord says ‘You will have peace’”.
- The prophet Ezekiel also warns against false prophets: ‘Because they lead my people astray, saying, “Peace,” when there is no peace.’ (Ezekiel 13:10)
• principal teachings about peace in TWO religious traditions

Islam:
The Qur’an and peace
- Islam places the highest possible emphasis on peace—as we have already seen, the very word ‘Islam’ is an amalgam of the twin concepts of submission and peace.
- In fact, it is reasonable to say that the chief end of the wisdom contained within the Qur’an and Hadith is to bring about peace, both on Earth and in heaven.
- In spite of this, however, many people in today’s society hold the view that Islam is a violent religion that condones acts of terrorism such as those perpetrated on 11 September 2011.
- The Qur’an and Hadith expressly forbid such acts, and most Muslims believe terrorists who commit crimes in the name of Islam have grossly misrepresented their faith by applying a strictly militant interpretation and using holy texts out of context.
- Rather than promote war, the holy writings of Islam actually instruct adherents to seek peaceful resolutions to conflict wherever possible.
- The Qur’an says ‘… if they leave you alone and do not fight with you and offer you peace, then God allows you no way against them.’ (4:90)
- Human beings are instructed to live peaceful, tolerant lives that respect the rights of other races: ‘O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you ....’ (Qur’an 49:13)
- In the Hadith, Muhammad himself says ‘All people are as equal as the teeth of a comb’ and ‘The Muslim is the one whom others are sure no harm will come from his hands and words.’

Muhammad and peace
- Muhammad, indeed, was a politically moderate, compassionate individual who showed great mercy even for his enemies.
- Although frequently confronted by militant opponents who desired the complete extermination of Muslims, he never initiated aggression and was only in battle for the sum total of one-and-a-half days of a 23 year mission.
- Muhammad frequently signed peace treaties with his adversaries, often to the detriment and disapproval of his followers, such as the Treaty of Hudaybiya, and the general amnesty afforded Mecca when it fell (peacefully) to the Muslims.
- This was despite the fact that the same people had persecuted Muhammad and his followers for over 20 years.
- Although the Qur’an does discuss war, this is primarily in order to regulate, rather than condone it.
- There are only three justifications for engaging in war: self defence; liberation from oppressive regimes; and the removal of governments that prohibit the free practice of Islam.
- Of course, these justifications allow scope for interpretation and this is why individuals and renegade groups are never authorised to initiate war in Islam.
- War may only be waged after a period of consultation, known as shura, in which all the representatives of the government take part.
- Violent and warlike activities by individuals or vigilante-style groups, such as armed terrorists, are therefore never legitimised by Islamic law.
- The Hadith of Muhammad expressly prohibits the killing of non-combatants and the harming of women, children, animals and the innocent.
- Says the Qur’an concerning this, ‘If you kill a like unjustly it is as if you killed all life.’ (5:32)
- Suicide bombing is equally outlawed, with the Hadith stating ‘Whoever kills himself with a weapon will have that weapon in his hand, and will kill himself forever in the fire of Hell.’

The concept of jihad
- Jihad is another Islamic concept that has been misconstrued and received negative feedback in the western world, with the popular understanding being ‘holy war’ and a religious rationale for violence.
- Indeed, *jihad* literally means to struggle or strive for a particular cause and is therefore a rather generic term that can be applied to any challenge an adherent may face in the course of submitting their life to Allah.

- The particular Qur’anic verse that has been used to justify the notion of ‘holy war’ is 9:5: ‘When the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them and take them and confine them and lie in wait for them at the very place of ambush.’

- This verse, however, continues with the words, ‘... but if they repent and perform prescribed prayers (salat) and giver charitable alms (zakat) then let them go their way, for God is Oft-Forgiving and Most Merciful.’

- It applies, moreover, to a very specific era in Islamic history when Muslims had been subject to persecution and terrorism by a number of recalcitrant tribes.

- Moderate Muslims understand, therefore, that it was not intended to provide a blanket justification for acts of war, although various radical elements within Islam may have chosen to interpret it this way.

The will of Allah
- Islam teaches that inner peace may only be found through complete obedience to God’s will, which is primarily achieved by adherence to a prescribed set of guidelines for living.
- These guidelines ultimately direct the faithful believer towards the third and final stage of the soul’s development—the ‘contented’ or ‘restful’ self.
- Having moved through stages of ‘animal’ self and ‘accusing’ self, the contented self denotes a state of inner being where, by much effort and contemplation, spiritual peace and tranquility reign supreme.
- This represents the fulfilment of an individual’s inner potential in Islam, the natural progression of their soul.
- As the Qur’an states, ‘I swear by the glow of sunset, by the night and what it covers, by the full moon, you will progress from stage to stage.’ (84:16-9)

Judaism:
Commandments of peace
- Judaism teaches that peace is highly valued and something to be sought after at all times.
- This is largely because the imitation of God’s righteous and compassionate nature is something required of all observant Jews; indeed, it is one of the 613 mitzvot referred to by Moses Maimonides (Sefer ha Mitzvot, Mitzvot Aseh 8).
- Maimonides based this stipulation on Deuteronomy 28:9 which requires Jews to ‘walk in his ways’ and Leviticus 19:2, which states ‘You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.’
- It is also based on correct observation of the so-called ‘Golden Rule’, Leviticus 19:18, which commands ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’
- According to Rabbi Akiva, who lived in about 100 AD, this is the greatest principle of the Torah.
- All branches of Judaism, moreover, believe that every human life is sacred, based on the creation account in Genesis 1:27, which records humankind as being made in ‘God’s image’.
- As Genesis 9:6 says, ‘Whoever sheds the blood of a human being by human beings shall his blood be shed, for in the divine image did God make humanity.’
- The rabbis elaborated on this point, claiming, ‘When one destroys a single individual, it is as if that person destroyed the whole world.’ (Sanhedrin 4:5)

‘Obligatory’ and ‘discretionary’ war
- The pursuit of peace, therefore, is one of Judaism’s highest values and war is to be avoided wherever possible.
- It is not, however, expressly forbidden. In fact, there are two situations where Judaism teaches the permissibility of war.
- One of these is obligatory war (*Milhemet Mitzvah*), which includes commandments to fight, such as those in biblical times, and defensive war, where the nation of Israel is under threat.
- The other kind of permissible war is called discretionary war (*Milhemet Reshut*) and includes war where the enlargement of Israel’s borders is deemed to be necessary for the nation’s survival.
- The Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court of 71 judges, only allows discretionary war after a period of intense consultation and debate.
- Judaism is adamant that all avenues for peace must be exhausted before war is declared.
This stance is based on Deuteronomy 20:10-12 which declares, ‘When you approach a city to do battle with it you should call to it in peace. If they respond in peace and they open the city to you, all the people in the city shall pay taxes to you and be subservient. And if they do not make peace with you, you shall wage war with them and you may besiege them.’

- Civilians and non-combatants, moreover, must be given every opportunity to escape the fighting.
- Moses Maimonides says regarding this, ‘Joshua, before he entered the Land of Israel, sent three letters to its inhabitants. The first one said that those wishing to flee should flee. The second one said that those wishing to make peace should make peace. The third letter said that those who want a war should prepare to fight a war.’ (Kingship 6:5)

**Contemporary Israel**

- In the contemporary state of Israel, there is much debate and controversy about the application of the principles of the Torah and other Jewish texts to situations that appear to threaten its peaceful existence.
- The scope of interpretation is wide and range from extreme Zionist views that wholly justify militant action in defence of Israel, to the more conservative beliefs of some Orthodox Jews who believe such militancy is not sanctioned by God.
- Indeed, Orthodox organisations such as Torahtrue are fundamentally opposed to the existence of the state of Israel, believing it is an apostasy and counter to the prophetic vision of peace God has in store for the Earth.
- They believe that many modern Zionists have falsely applied the principles of the Torah and other writings to provide a religious rationale for the creation and ongoing existence of the state of Israel.
- Despite the wide variety of opinion, however, the consensus is generally that peace and a minimum of human loss are the ultimate objectives.
- A statement of principles for Reform Judaism encapsulates this hopeful and optimistic outlook, saying ‘We continue to have faith that, in spite of the unspeakable evils committed against our people and the sufferings endured by others, the partnership of God and humanity will ultimately prevail.’

**Faithfulness to God**

- Judaism teaches that, in order for the individual to live peacefully, he/she must be faithful to God.
- There are many instances in the Tenakh where this is made clear, including Proverbs 16:7: ‘When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he causes his enemies to live at peace with him’, and ‘Those who walk uprightly enter into peace.’ (Isaiah 57:2)
- This means that the individual must undertake the necessary mitzvot (sacred obligations), such as public and private prayer, study, observance of holy days and performance of good deeds if he/she wants to receive blessings of peace from God.
- Conversely, evil behaviour will cause God to revoke peace from the individual’s life.
- Says God, via the prophet Isaiah, ‘There is no peace for the wicked’ (48:22) and (in regard to evil people), ‘The way of peace they do not know.’ (59:8).
the contribution of TWO religious traditions to peace in the context of:
- the individual: means of achieving inner peace
- the world: means of achieving world peace

Islam

The individual: means of achieving inner peace:

The Five Pillars of Islam
- Islam has especially definitive and effective methods for guiding the individual towards realising inner peace—they must surrender their lives and their will to Allah and be prepared to observe the daily and yearly requirements known as the Five Pillars of Islam.
- Obedience to the Five Pillars helps ensure the individual’s inner peace in several ways.
- The most obvious of these is the adherent’s assurance that they are discharging the obligations required of them so that one day they might enjoy eternal peace and happiness in Paradise.
- For instance, the Qur’an says regarding salat, ‘Seek help with steadfastness and prayer—though this is hard indeed for anyone but the humble, who know that they will meet their Lord and unto Him they will return.’ (2:45)

Taqwa, qadr and sabr
- The more immediate benefits, however, involve the concepts of taqwa, qadr and sabr.
- The Five Pillars are designed to ensure that adherents have God uppermost in mind throughout the course of their daily lives.
- There are no stretches, for instance, where God may be forgotten and relegated to the background of a believer’s existence.
- Rather, every day is a struggle, or jihad, to pursue obedience and to see that the Five Pillars are correctly observed.
- This ongoing struggle naturally helps ensure that Muhammad’s injunction to ‘Be conscious of Allah in your heart’ (taqwa) is always satisfied.
- Indeed, the higher the level of taqwa in a person’s heart, the closer they are to God, and therefore also to peace, one of God’s key attributes.
- The more taqwa an adherent holds in his/her heart, moreover, the easier it will be for them to submit cooperatively and humbly to the notion of qadr, the concept of God’s measurement of how we respond to the vicissitudes of life.
- Adherents are expected to trust Allah with peace and resignation in spite of any fate that might befall them.
- Sabr, which means patience and perseverance in the face of life’s challenges, is the outward demonstration of this inner peace.
- Says the Qur’an, ‘No disaster can come on the Earth, or on yourselves, that isn’t already recorded by us in a book, and that is indeed easy for Allah. Remember that so you don’t despair over what you have lost or brag about that you have gained ....’ (57:22-23)
- An oft-quoted story illustrating the peace which qadr can bring to the life of a Muslim is that of Abu Hanifa, the famous Muslim scholar.
- When a messenger informed him that all of his belongings had been lost at sea, Hanifa responded with the words ‘Praise God’.
- When the messenger returned to deliver the message that the earlier information had been wrong, and that Hanifa’s possessions were indeed intact, he repeated the words ‘Praise God’.
- This is to demonstrate that inner peace is to be found through trusting God in both good and bad situations.

The world: means of achieving world peace:

Initiatives by the World Council for Muslim Interfaith Relations (WCMIR)
- The council has been working at an international and local level to implement a number of programs.
- These include peace building in targeted conflict areas; eradicating poverty; implementing health and welfare for children; youth leadership; peace education; social and economic justice; and women’s empowerment programs.
- The council has recently developed papers on Islam and human rights; Islam and pluralism; Islam and democracy; Islam and women’s rights; Islam and the use of force; the freedom of religion and conversion.
WCMIR’s statement to the Muslim world is ‘Over and above their duty to the Global Muslim community, Muslims also have a duty to the whole human race, which, due to the mutual hatred, divisions and the accumulation of wealth by a few persons, is moving fast towards self-destruction.’

Council on American-Islamic Relations
- Founded in 1994, this is the largest Muslim civil liberties organisation in America and works to promote a positive image of Islam.
- Its vision is to be a ‘leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding’.
- Its officials have publicly stated that CAIR embraces religious pluralism and repudiates the misuse of Islam to ‘falsely justify violence or intolerance’.

Fethullah Gulen
- Fethullah Gulen is an Islamic scholar and peace activist and the mentor of a movement (Initiatives for peace in the contemporary world) that has inspired many Turkish (and other) Muslims to be involved in charitable and educational activities.
- The movement is considered to be one of the most influential and effective Muslim peace movements this century.
- It encourages intercultural dialogue and understanding so as to promote harmony and cooperation between different faiths and cultures.
- The major themes are peaceful Muslim-non Muslim coexistence in a secular context; inclusiveness and integration; necessity for dialogue; the positive role of non-denominational education; the state of east-west, north-south relations; balancing reason and faith; understanding the benefits of democracy and basic values in civility and citizenship.

Interfaith dialogue
- The Alexandria Process is an initiative that brings together senior Muslims, Jews and Christians to work together for peace in the Holy Land and to continue interfaith dialogue.
- The statement announcing the initiative declared that ‘The murder of innocents in the name of God is a desecration of his holy name.’
- The Muslim Peace Conference held in Cairo in 2017 brought together Muslim and Christian leaders, including Pope Francis, to call for peace and denounce terrorism in the name of religion.
- The Grand Imam of Cairo’s Al-Azhar University, Dr Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, called on militant extremists to stop using religion to justify their goals and to incite religious hatred and violence.
- He stated ‘Neither Islam nor Christianity nor Judaism are religions of terrorism, and terror acts perpetrated in their names are far from their core values.’
- Jaber Taee, Egypt’s deputy minister for Islamic Endowments, reinforced this message by claiming that extremist groups advance their agendas by using Islamic verses out of context.
- Meanwhile, many Islamic leaders and communities worldwide engage in interfaith measures to publicly denounce acts of terrorism.
- An example is the visit in 2017 by 200 imams to the scene of the London Bridge terror attack where they stood side by side with Jewish and Christian leaders.
- The imams, holding posters adorned with messages such as ‘ISIS is the enemy of Islam’ also made public statements such as that by Qari Asim, an imam at the Makka Mosque in Leeds, stating ‘We are standing up to say this is not acceptable—this is a complete distortion of our faith. The path they may be considering following is not a path to paradise—terrorists are criminals, simple as that.’
- The Parents’ Circle—Families’ Forum (PCFF) is an ongoing joint Israeli-Palestinian organisation of over 600 families created in 1965 to provide support to families who have lost a member to the ongoing conflict.
- As they state on their website ‘the process of reconciliation between nations is a prerequisite to achieving a sustainable peace.’
- The Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue was founded in California in 1992 to organise one-to-one, face-to-face conflict resolution.
- Still active in 2019, the group continues to meet and is looked to globally by educators, activists and trainers, including the US Department of State, for its methods and facilitation guidelines.
Cooperative schools and living projects
- The Jewish-Arab centre for Peace at Givat-Haviva in central Israel is run by both Muslim and Jewish staff, and offers a broad range of educational programs aimed at promoting peace and coexistence.
- Over 15,000 students are trained annually.
- Neve Shalom/Wahat El Salam (‘Oasis of Peace’ in Hebrew and Arabic) is a village of Jews and Arabs within Israel, living cooperatively since 1970.
- The village’s schools are open to surrounding villages and its ‘School for Peace’ has trained 35,000 Arabs and Jews in peace-making skills.
- The village also offers humanitarian aid to West Bank and Gaza Palestinians.
- The Hope Flowers School is a Palestinian school near Bethlehem that adds peace education to the standard curriculum and offers counselling to families traumatised by violence.
- It had exchanges with Israeli schools until Intifada outlawed them.
- Jewish volunteers teach students about Judaism.
- Ta’ayush (Arabic for ‘life in common’) is a group of Arab and Jewish volunteers who perform daily tasks of solidarity with West Bank and Gaza Palestinians such as organising convoys to bring food and supplies to Arab villages.

Appeals and declarations
- The Geneva Spiritual Appeal of 1999 was attended by Muslims and other representatives of religions and addressed the religious causes of human suffering.
- The appeal asked political and religious organisations/leaders to ensure that religious faiths do no use religion to justify future violence.
- The Muslim Prayer for Peace and Religious Tolerance, Lahore, Pakistan, aimed to guide humanity ‘to the right path by removing the menaces of every kind of terrorism, corruption, bribery, tyranny, crime, evil etc.’
- The Muslim-Christian Initiative on Nuclear Weapons Danger is a joint initiative between the Islamic Society of North America and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship of America.
- It believes in the sanctity of human life and the protection of the environment, and denounces nuclear, chemical and biological weapons as indiscriminately destructive.
Judaism

The individual: means of achieving inner peace:

Inner peace and God
- Judaism is unequivocal in regard to guiding the individual towards achieving inner peace, affirming repeatedly that it is only attained through obedience to God.
- There are many examples in the Tenakh expressing this view, such as Isaiah 32:18: ‘The fruit of righteousness will be peace … the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places.’
- Thus, faithful observance of the necessary mitzvot (613 sacred commandments) is positively required in order for the individual to enjoy God's peace.
- Conversely, sinful behaviour will result in its absence: “There is no peace,” says the Lord, “for the wicked.” (Isaiah 48:22)
- This view is poetically expanded in Israel's Wisdom Literature, notably the Book of Ecclesiastes.
- It commences with a general denunciation of everything that humankind holds dear, because 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.' (1:9)
- It goes on to specifically dismiss human wisdom (1:14), pleasures (2:1), toil (2:17), advancement (4:14) and riches (5:8-17) as all meaningless.
- This is because ultimately a common destiny, death, awaits everybody.
- As God's plans are inscrutable we should all therefore enjoy life: 'eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart.' (9:7)
- Anxiety and troubles, moreover, should be ‘banished’ and ‘cast off.’ (11:10)
- This is because the only thing that is of any real consequence in our lives is 'the conclusion of the matter .... Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.' (12:13)

The Book of Job
- Judaism also teaches that inner peace may be found through an unconditional surrender to God's inscrutable ways, which is the central theme of the Book of Job.
- One of the key premises of the book is the assumption by Job and his friends that a God-fearing, virtuous life will be automatically rewarded with peace and prosperity—indeed, as we have seen, there are many biblical passages precisely to that effect.
- However, the key players in the story quickly learn that they cannot fully grasp the depths of God's wisdom and acts, with the consequent shattering of their previously held, somewhat simplistic, theological views.
- Job is only reconciled to God and his former peace restored when he humbly admits ‘Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.' (42:3)

Prayer and inner peace
- Jewish tradition also promotes frequent prayer (it is actually a mitzvah) as a means for the individual to achieve inner peace.
- The Psalms, in particular, give us a clear demonstration of the wide scope of prayer subjects and styles permitted by Judaism.
- Alongside the more formal ‘sanctuary’ prayers (e.g. 24:7-10), there are personal prayers for pardon (51), protection (57), healing (6) and vindication (109), to name just a few.
- The Psalms show us that, within Judaism, individuals are encouraged to appeal directly to God at all times, without the requirement of a mediator, especially in times of personal turmoil and need.
- Psalm 88, for example, is a cry for help from an individual who implores God to ‘turn your ear to my cry ... for my soul is full of trouble.' (v.2-3)
- Meditation upon the Scriptures is also an important way to achieve and maintain inner peace as it assists the believer in staying in touch with the thoughts of God at all times.
- As Psalm 119:165 says, ‘Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.’
- Equally important is simply trusting in God and being mindful to him at all times: ‘You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.' (Isaiah 26:3)
The world: means of achieving world peace:

International Peace Organisations

- Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, is an organisation of American Jews committed to Israel's well-being through the achievement of a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- It seeks to generate further dialogue within the American Jewish community so as to direct US foreign policy towards the realisation of a ‘just peace’.
- The Israeli-Palestinian Confederation includes Jews, Muslims and Christians to help facilitate mechanisms for Israelis and Palestinians to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- They also have a detailed plan for the creation of a confederate government of Palestinians/Israelis that would benefit both sides.
- Jews for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (JIPF) is a group founded in Sweden in 1982 for Swedish Jews who want to make a positive contribution towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict.
- Gush Shalom (meaning the ‘peace bloc’) is a left-wing politically unaffiliated activist group founded in 1993.
- It objects to the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and provides support for resistance efforts.

Interfaith dialogue

- The Tikkun Community (tikkun olam means ‘repair or renew the world’) is an organisation which provides a Jewish, interfaith and secular voice ‘to heal and transform the world’.
- Tikkun provides a platform for young writers and established thinkers and academics to posit new and radical ideas.
- It also has a community action and activist arm, the Network of Spiritual progressives, building a social change movement.
- The Parents’ Circle—Families’ Forum (PCFF) is an ongoing joint Israeli-Palestinian organisation of over 600 families created in 1965 to provide support to families who have lost a member to the ongoing conflict.
- As they state on their website ‘the process of reconciliation between nations is a prerequisite to achieving a sustainable peace.’
- One of their initiatives in the Hello Peace! free telephone service for Israelis and Palestinians to speak with someone ‘on the other side’.
- Since its inception in 2000, the phone service has facilitated well over one million calls.
- The Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue was founded in California in 1992 to organise one-to-one, face-to-face conflict resolution.
- Still active in 2019, the group continues to meet and is looked to globally by educators, activists and trainers, including the US Department of State, for its methods and facilitation guidelines.
- The Interfaith Encounter Association promotes the peaceful coexistence of Jews, Muslims and other faiths in Israel and the Middle East through interfaith dialogue and study.
- The Sulha Peace Project brings together thousands of Middle Eastern Jews, Muslims and Christians for a traditional reconciliation ceremony involving prayer, study, music and stories.
- The Alexandria Process is an initiative that brings together senior Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious leaders to promote a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to continue interfaith dialogue.
- Hamidrasha is centre for interfaith study and fellowship between Jews, Muslims and Christians.
- The American Jewish Committee (AJC) has worked since 1985 to foster tolerance and enhance cooperation between Jews and Muslims.
- The Children of Abraham seeks to build an international network of Jewish and Muslim youth on six continents via a photographic exploration of the various communities and by candid online dialogue.
- Many Jewish organisations across the world are also heavily involved in their respective nations’ interfaith commitments.
- For example, in Australia, Jews belong to the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews, which started in 2003.
- This functions to provide opportunities for these groups to build harmony and understanding, and to clarify contentious issues.
- The Dialogue regularly updates its vision, including as recently as January 2019, in which the three religions talked about the commonality of the ‘golden rule’ to their respective faiths.
- The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) is also a member of the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO).
- This brings Muslims, Jews, Bahá’ís, Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus together to see that all religious communities receive social justice and equity.
- Australian Jewish representatives also attend international interfaith talks such as the sixth Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Semarang, Indonesia, in 2012.

**Cooperative living projects and schools**
- *Neve Shalom/Wahat El Salam* (‘Oasis of Peace’ in Hebrew and Arabic) is a village of Jews and Arabs within Israel, living cooperatively since 1970.
- The village’s schools are open to surrounding villages and its ‘School for Peace’ has trained 35,000 Arabs and Jews in peace-making skills.
- The village also gives assistance to various humanitarian projects.
- The Jewish-Arab Centre for Peace at Givat Haviva (Israel) was founded in 1963 and is one of the oldest and most significant institutions in its field.
- It trains 15,000 students annually in peace and coexistence skills and has undertaken dozens of Jewish-Islamic projects with the common goal of democracy and citizens’ rights in Israel.

**Human rights initiatives**
- Rabbis for Human Rights is an organisation opposing restrictions on Palestinian freedom of movement.
- It also provides legal assistance in the event of house demolition and assists in the production and sale of Palestinian olive oil.
- Seeking Peace, Pursuing Justice is a program formed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, an arm of American Reform Judaism.
- It seeks to undertake public dialogue on the most pressing issues facing Israel today, including the status of Arab citizens and issues of inequality and discrimination.