

## Exploring the Concept of Peace and Peace Education as Expounded by Major World Religions, and its Practicability for Global Peace

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### Abstract

Peace is indispensable to the very existence of the human family. It is, therefore, an essential message of nearly all religions of the world. Peace is not just a component of life; rather, it is life in itself. The decade from 2001 to 2010, was declared by the UN as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace. In view of this, the recent developments around the world have posed a serious question as to how can peace be achieved and maintained on the globe.

This research paper is rooted in the philosophy that peace can be achieved and maintained by the process of educating individuals for peace. This paper explores the provision of peace-related concepts in world religions for securing a better tomorrow. Five major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism constituted the sample.

The methodology was analytical approach towards the sacred scriptures of these religions. Points of similarity were highlighted and tabulated as well as opposing stances of the same religions. It was found that nearly all these religions preach the sanctity of human blood as well as of the whole creation; hence peace is to be inculcated in the minds of individuals through education.

**Key Words:** Peace, Peace Education, Religious Harmony, Global Citizenship, International Understanding

### Introduction

The word, 'peace' is from '*pax*' a Latin word meaning a pact, contract, an agreement for the cessation of war or conflict. 'Peace' refers to: a state of harmony; non-violence; the end of conflict; a state of tranquility; and serenity (Dhakal, n.d). Thersea and Gwendolyn (1995) opine that peace is that behavior which inculcates harmony in the peoples' way or pattern of interaction<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the UN efforts to establish peace in the World, the later seems more susceptible to warring situations. Hence, the need of peace end peace

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education is felt around the world. In recent decades peace education has contributed to the establishment of peace by supporting and strengthening peace-promoting overtures<sup>2</sup>.

According to UNESCO (2001), there are three fundamental sources of peace. They are: Inner Peace, Social Peace, and Peace with Nature. In the sphere of inner peace, a person enjoys an inner state of calmness and tranquility, together with the absence of violent or conflicting thoughts. This inner state of the individual paves way or social peace when every member of a society believes in and practically demonstrates justice, international understanding, fair-play, respect for diversity, and global citizenship. The third type of peace i.e., peace with nature simply refers to the attitudes of the individuals to have respect for natural objects, such as: the physical environment, the wild life, the land and waters, the forests and every aspect of the creation.

Statement of the problem: the problem under investigation was to explore peace and peace education related injunctions in the holy scriptures of various religions of the World and to examine the practicability of these injunctions for global peace.

The main objectives of this research paper: The following three objectives were instrumental for this study:

1. To carry out an analysis of the Holy scriptures of some religions of the world from a peace, and peace education perspective.
2. To investigate all religions have something in common with reference to peace.
3. To suggest a practical course of action for the utilization of such religious injunctions for global peace.

Significance of the study: peace is the basic need of Humanity in general. This paper is an attempt to highlight the points of agreement in various religions so that the same can be utilized for maintaining peace in the World. Furthermore, this paper presents some workable solutions for bringing about harmony among the human beings from around the globe.

The study was analytical in nature. As peace and peace promoting injunctions were to be explored in the Holy Scriptures of various religions of the world, so the approach was basically analytical. Population consisted of the whole religions of the world. The sample consisted of four of the major religions of the World, i.e. Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

## **Peace Promoting Injunctions in the Sample Religions**

Many religions are practiced in the world. However, as per the sample of this research paper the detailed analysis is given below.

Peace in Hinduism: As an ancient religion, Hinduism has a large number of its adherence. An estimated number of the adherents of Hinduism are almost 700 million<sup>3</sup>. There is a sort of ‘Trinity Belief’ in Hinduism as is in Christianity, which include the following celestial entities: Lord Brahma, Lord Shiva, and Lord Vishnu. They are supposedly managing the events of the whole creation, as revealed in Patanjali Yoga Sutras-Book1. The basic teachings and religious commandments of Hinduism stand for peace. The typical mantra, ‘Om Santih, Santih, Santih, which means Peace, Peace, Peace, is a routine practice in Hindu religious ceremonies and practices.

The basic literature of Hinduism consists of Vedas, Agamas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Tirumurai, and Yoga Sutras. An impartial analysis of these sources reveal that many ‘*mantras*’ are meant for peace. One such quotation in Yajur Veda, goes thus:

*“Let there be peace in Heaven; ... in the atmosphere; ...may the waters and medical herbs bring peace; may planets give peace to all beings; May enlightened persons disseminate peace to all beings; ... and may that peace come to us and remain with us forever.”*

Similarly the following verse is worth mentioning:

*“Come together, talk together; let our minds be in harmony. Common be our prayer... our end, our purpose, our deliberations, our desire, united be our desires, our hearts, and our intentions<sup>4</sup>.”*

Similarly the verse of Tirukural goes thus:

*“All Sufferings recoils on the wrongdoer so those who desire not to suffer refrain from causing others pain” and that “I look upon every one as my friend<sup>5</sup>.”*

Similarly in Gita it has been proclaimed that when someone reaches and realises the truth and reality then:

*“There will be no war and conflict in human world”. Collectivism is beautifully expressed in this line, “May all of us work together ... Let there be no hatred between us. Peace, Peace, Peace<sup>6</sup>”*

## **Peace in Judaism**

Out of Abrahamic religions Judaism is the oldest one. Its sacred book is Old Testament in the Bible, which consists of several books. The content of the Old Testament is rich with peace-related injunctions. Some of the content is presented here:

*“You have fought many wars... you have shed much blood on the earth ...  
But you will have a son who will be a man of Peace<sup>7</sup>.”*

Peace is to be pursued:

*“Turn Form evil; do well; seek peace and pursue it<sup>8</sup>”. Violence is  
abhorable as: “The unfaithful aspire for violence<sup>9</sup>”. And “Lord  
hates... those who love violence<sup>10</sup>”.*

In comparison to weapons, wisdom is emphasized as declared in this  
verse:

*“Wisdom is better than weapons of war<sup>11</sup>”.*

Similarly, other instances are:

*“I am a man of peace<sup>12</sup>” Peace is proclaimed, “A child has been born ...  
and he is named...prince of Peace<sup>13</sup>”*

*“Look! the feet of one...Who proclaims peace? <sup>14</sup>”*

And:

*“One who is to rule in Israel...shall be one (a man) of Peace<sup>15</sup>”. Tools of  
war are to be abolished, “Bow/Sword/battle I will abolish from the land”  
And “May the Lord ... give you peace<sup>16</sup>”.*

### **Peace in Christianity**

The sacred book of Christianity is Bible out of which the New  
Testament is associated with Jesus Christ. There are four books in the New  
Testament. They are: Luke, Mathew, Mark, and John. Some instances of peace  
related content is presented in the following lines:

*“All who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mathew 26:52). And  
peace-making is appreciated, “Blessed are the peace makers,” (Mathew  
5:9). “Peacemakers who sow in peace (actually) raise a harvest (of)  
righteousness” (James 3:18). Similarly, Jesus, the prophet of Allah is  
reported to have proclaimed, “No more of this! Striking with the sword”  
(Luke 55:51). And that “Jesus will guide ... into the path of peace” (Luke 1:79).  
Also “Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath...” (John 18:11).  
Peaceful overtures are held in high esteem. “Be at peace with each other<sup>17</sup>”*

And:

*“Make every effort to do what leads to peace<sup>18</sup>.”*

Similarly, never to be revengeful:

*“Overcome evil with good<sup>19</sup>”. Also “Live at peace with every one<sup>20</sup>”.  
“Do not return evil for evil” (1 Peter 3:8). “Let the peace of Christ  
rule in your heart...<sup>21</sup>”.*

Peace as an attribute of Allah;

*“God is not a god of disorder but of peace<sup>22</sup>.”*

And

*“God has called us to live in Peace”. Similarly, it has been announced, “The  
servant of the Lord must be gentle to all<sup>23</sup>.”*

On another occasion the importance of peace is so highlighted:  
“He preached peace<sup>24</sup>”. And “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and be holy<sup>25</sup>.”

### **Peace related content in Islam**

The very word Islam means peace. Not only are this, even in Islamic code, there ninety nine names of Allah one of which is ‘Al-salam’ or simply Peace. Hence peace is an essential attribute of Allah Almighty (Peace in Quran, n.d). Many *Hadith* or Holy sayings of the Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W) reveal that “God is peace”, *Al-Bukhari*, cited in *Peace* in Quran, (n.d ). Similarly another *Hadith goes thus*, “Peace is Islam” as quoted in *Al-Bukhari* (Peace in Quran, n.d). However, the significance of peaceful co-existence can easily be understood from this *Hadith* or Holy Saying of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W):

*“A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people are safe.”*

Islam emphasizes the chastity and character building of its adherents. Such pious individuals will be rewarded with ‘Jannat’ or the Home of Peace (Paradise). The Holy Quran declares: “God calls to the Home of Peace<sup>26</sup>.”

Islam held forgiveness in high esteem as declared in this verse:

*“Reconciliation is best<sup>27</sup>.”*

This was practically demonstrated by the holy Prophet (S.A.W) as reported in al-Bukhari:

*“Whenever the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) had an option to choose between two courses of action, He always chose the easier one, (that which is free from confrontation).”*

Other relevant injunctions in literature reveal Islamic commandments pertaining to war and Peace:

Islam does not believe in aggression hence, its adherents are abstained from being attackers. The followers are allowed to fight with the enemy when the later has committed aggression and that the Muslims should in no way be an aggressor as is evident from this verse:

*“They were the first to attack you<sup>28</sup>.”*

Another outstanding trait of Islam is that it believes in forgiveness and dislikes or abhors vindictiveness:

*“Repeal evil with good<sup>29</sup>.”*

Gentleness is appreciated and encouraged while harshness is devalued:

*“God grants to gentleness what He doesn’t grant to harshness”*

*“Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked because they have been wronged<sup>30</sup>.”*

Announcing a cherished attribute of the Holy Prophet, Quran declares:

*“Mohammad (S.A.W) is Mercy for all mankind<sup>31</sup>.”*

Similarly Islam has been declared as “path of peace”. Furthermore, reconciliation is appreciated as the verse goes thus, “reconciliation is the best policy<sup>32</sup>.”

Furthermore, “Allah dislikes and abhors any disturbance<sup>33</sup>” of the peace. Patience as an Islamic value is so highlighted “Allah is with those who are patient<sup>34</sup>. And “Whenever they kindle the fire of war, Allah puts it out, Aggression is prohibited:

*“And Fight in the way of Allah with those who fight you, but do not be aggressive”<sup>35</sup>. And “So long as they go straight with you, you do go straight with them<sup>36</sup>.”*

The above abstracts from various sacred sources of the four religions of the world manifest that peace has been the fundamental concern of the human family around the globe, hence emphasized by every religion in case of our sampling.

### **Then why wars around the globe..?**

The above-mentioned excerpts from the sacred scriptures of the sampled religions reveal that peace is an essential slogan of all the religions of the world, however, the question arises that if so is the case of religions then why wars around the globe? There can be a number of causes and reasons behind this. One reason of is, no doubt, rooted in theory and practice paradox; where the original spirit of these religions emphasize peace but the adherents of these religions deviate from their cherished religious principles and practice the otherwise—often fighting in the name of peace. Similarly, partly due to misinterpretation of religion, and partly due to religious extremism, coupled with pedantic approach towards every issue confronting the human family, the world peace seems at doldrums even at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—in which pledges of maintaining and retaining peace were taken by the international community.

### **The practicability of peace-related religious injunctions in modern era**

The practicable aspect of peace-related religious injunctions seems more idealistic and far from ground reality. As the very discipline of peace education and all peace related studies tend to be idealistic in nature. However, the only option to move in that direction and if member states of the UN strictly abide by the declarations of this international body then surely positive changes can be brought about in the prevailing narrow mind-set. This idea is somewhat discussed by Montessori, a pioneer in peace studies, who thought that if those who want war are preparing their young for war then why should those who want peace remain idle. The later should also strive for preparing peaceful individuals.

Viewing in this perspective, it is a fact that religion still has strong appeal to the human mind. Majority of the world population profess religion in one way or the other. Then almost every religion preaches peace and universal brotherhood, some to a relatively lesser degree others to a greater degree.

It is therefore, pertinent to mention here that the essential message of peace as expounded by various religions may be disseminated to the human family so as to bring about global awareness about the need and importance of peace. Partly justice and fair-play in international issues can guarantee peace on the globe. Similarly at personal level as well as at national and international level peaceful attitudes will pave way for the creation of a safe global community. As per the declaration of the UN a culture of peace is the one where values, attitudes, and behaviors are governed by tolerance, justice, freedom of thought, fair-play, respect for life and diversity coupled with rejection of violence.

The Hague Appeal for Justice and Non-violence explicitly declares that to achieve a culture of peace the member states of the UN must resort to inculcate the three fundamental components of peace among the citizens. These components are: knowledge, skill, and attitudes. Understanding of warring and conflicting situations, together with conflict-resolution skills and peaceful attitudes may be inculcated among the people through formal, informal, and non-formal modes of education. Inhabitants of this blue planet need to understand global issues and to find feasible solutions to conflicts from personal, local, national and international level. This can be achieved through the process of peace education as envisaged by international bodies<sup>37</sup>.

In such a situation belief system always play a fundamental role in any religion. Societal norms, values, and behaviors patterns are usually rooted in the belief system of that that community. This aspect is beautifully summarized by a peace scholar, Boulding (2000) who thinks that the creation of a culture of global peace is subject to justice, equitable distribution of natural resources, respect for human rights and diversity, and caring attitude.

A culture of peace and harmony can be achieved when the masses are made aware of the glorious injunctions of their respective religions as well as of 'the other religions'. Religious harmony is the clarion of the day if citizens of the World are to survive as humans. Respect for peace-related commands in the religions be followed. In this respect, Peace education, no doubt, is an essential tool for achieving this grand human value of mutual co-existence.

### **Possible Strategies**

The following measures when adopted can expedite the efforts to create a culture of peace and can minimize the incidents of conflicts and wars:

- Awareness about peace and respect for diversity as well as respect for peace-related commands in the religions be incorporated in formal and non-formal mode of education.
- Peace education may be started in the educative process by the UN-member states.
- Necessary measures may be taken for strengthening social peace various societies around the globe.
- Educational institutions should strive to promote religious harmony and attitudes pertaining to peaceful co-existence among students, teachers, and supporting staff.
- Teaching staff and students need to be endowed with conflict resolution skills and peace-building process.
- Peace-promoting literature may be disseminated to all educational institutions.
- Peace-loving NGOs may be encouraged for their activities.
- Peace scholars, researchers and writers may be encouraged by respective quarters.

### **Summary**

As per the analysis above, it can safely be summarized that peace is a fundamental message of almost every religion. Though religion is often misused for achieving vested interests, but this does not mean that religion itself is detrimental to the peace-making process. In this research it was found that there are ample evidences that the cause of peace is pursued in each of the sample religions. Every religion demands its adherents to strive for peace. The question is, then why wars in the name of religion? the answer is very simple that there is no fault with religion rather the misuse of religion creates misconceptions which need to be eradicated from the mind of humanity in general. Religion has positive contribution in this context and it is up to the global community to foster peaceful attitudes among the masses.

### **Conclusion**

Peace is a significant aspect of all the sample religions that is, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A number of sacred injunctions in the Holy Scriptures of these religions strongly support the establishment of peace and have explicitly appreciated peace- promoting overtures. In face of the prevailing situation in the 21<sup>st</sup> C. It is high time to inculcate religious

harmony among the citizens of the member states of the UN. Such emergency task may be carried out through various means, one being peace education as an academic approach together with social peace through media. As all the sampled religions emphasize peace, therefore, peace can be achieved and maintained through the process of peace education. This will help create a ‘Culture of Peace’—a slogan of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—as per UN prerogative. For this purpose, peace related text in the Holy Books may be made part of the curricula, in the respective areas, through integrated as well as subject-based approach. This will be, at least, one of the ways that ensures a peaceful tomorrow.

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