



# ANSWERING JIHAD

*A Better Way Forward*

NABEEL QURESHI

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*

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*Answering Jihad*

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY SISTER.

*Baji, I miss how close we were in our childhood, even playing with your My Little Ponies and hearing you rave about the Backstreet Boys. You are the most loving sister a younger brother could ask for. I pray that your love for people would extend into a love for truth. I am begging God for the day that we can worship him together.*

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# PREFACE

## A BETTER WAY FORWARD

UNTIL VERY RECENTLY, I strongly resisted writing this book. During a conversation with my editor this April, I informed him explicitly that I never wanted to write a book on [jihad](#) because the topic is so charged that even broaching the subject makes one's intentions appear suspect. This was the case even though, because of my Muslim upbringing, I receive hundreds of questions about the peacefulness of American Muslims in light of radical [Islam](#). For the sake of keeping my message and intentions clear, I had decided to answer such questions on an individual basis rather than publishing a book on the matter.

But seven weeks ago, on November 13 of 2015, terrorists launched a coordinated assault on Paris. The West reeled in a way I had not seen since the July 7, 2005, bombings of London a decade before. Jihad had struck close to home once again, and the question of Islam's relationship with peace and violence was at the forefront of the public's mind.

The question was made exponentially more pressing by the reality of nearly 4,600,000 Syrian refugees hoping to find a haven in the West. Compassion urges us to open our doors, but prudence counters that we should think twice. How can we tell the difference between a Syrian refugee fleeing ISIS and a covert operative infiltrating the US on their behalf? While rescuing foreign innocents, might we accidentally endanger our own?

It was in the throes of this deliberation that America experienced its most deadly terrorist attack since September 11, 2001, the San Bernardino shootings on December 2, 2015. Public angst toward Islam skyrocketed to unprecedented heights, beyond even 2001 in my personal estimation. It was during this time that I began to consider the safety of my parents and relatives from potential retaliation. Even my own security crossed my mind, as frustration against radical Islam had reached a fever pitch and anyone who even looked Muslim was prone to feel suspicious eyes.

As the dust settled and it became clear that one of the shooters was an immigrant, US presidential candidate Donald Trump took a stand. He had already suggested that the government keep a database of Syrian refugees, but on December 7 he suggested an even more rigorous measure: a temporary ban on all Muslim immigration. The dilemma of discerning between radical Muslims and peaceful Muslims was cast into the spotlight once more. Many concerned Americans took a stand against Trump's suggestion, including me.

Another concerned American, a professor at Wheaton College, decided to show her solidarity with Muslims by donning a hijab and proclaiming her support for

Muslims who, she said, “worship the same God” as Christians. On December 15, Wheaton placed the professor on administrative leave to consider whether her views were theologically in line with those of the university. The highly polarized public response included statements of approbation and condemnations of bigotry, and many of the voices had neither clarity nor charity.

I spent Christmas Day writing a blog response entitled “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?” an expanded version of which constitutes Question 13 in this book. The feedback I received confirmed a growing suspicion in my mind: There is too much confusion, too much misdirected anger, too much misinformation, too little balance, and too little grace to remain silent any longer.

Most responses I have seen to the present crisis are polarized, either dismissing violent jihad as irrelevant to Islam or asserting that all Muslims should be treated as potential threats. In this book, I hope to clarify both the reality of violent jihad in Islam and a compassionate approach to our Muslim neighbors.

The year 2015 ended with a *USA Today* headline, “The World Is on New Year’s Eve Alert.” I couldn’t help but see the vague and alarming title as emblematic of the whole year. The first news report of 2016 that I read was of a mass shooting in Tel Aviv, the shooter smiling as he shot indiscriminately into a bar, his backpack containing a [Quran](#). This year will be pivotal in American politics, and I do not doubt that polarized opinions will intensify, not least because terrorist attacks may do the same. But there are lives in the balance, and we must respond carefully. I cannot feign impartiality. Ignoring the reality of jihad endangers my nation, while responding with fear endangers my Muslim family.

There is a better way forward, a way that upholds both truth and compassion. I pray that is what you will find in the pages of this book.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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MANY PEOPLE worked together to produce this book at lightning speed, from conception to execution in less than three weeks. In no particular order, I would like to thank Madison Trammel and the Zondervan team for being open to my unorthodox notions of how quickly a book should be published. I would also like to thank my literary agent, Mark Sweeney, for his consistent presence and encouragement. Thanks is also due to Dr. Ravi Zacharias, Sarah Davis, and the RZIM team for their support and enthusiasm.

I must also acknowledge and thank David Cook, Sean Oliver-Dee, Richard Shumack, Daniel Brubaker, and Lincoln Loo for reading the book and providing me with their invaluable feedback. Also, almost everything I have written is in some way related to Mark Mittelberg, and I am once again indebted to him for his hand in this book.

Finally, I would like to thank my indomitable bride, Michelle, for being so patient with me as I had to be absent at the spur of the moment to fulfill this vision. I would be nowhere without you, my love.

## FURTHER READING AND INDEBTEDNESS

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THIS BOOK is not intended as a comprehensive treatment of jihad, but simply as a primer that will clarify certain questions and point to a better way forward. It focuses on the historical roots of Islam more than other valid areas of exploration. Some important topics that are not covered in this book include the developments in jihad theology during the classical and colonial eras among Muslims, for example, as well as details on political motives for specific groups of radical Muslims and an exploration of Islamic eschatology.

For those who wish to learn more about jihad, including the subfields I mention above, I strongly recommend the work of David Cook, an Islamic studies professor at Rice University under whose tutelage I had the privilege of learning for a short season. Many of my thoughts about jihad have been shaped by his research, and much of what you find in this book has been distilled from his 2005 publication, *Understanding Jihad*. That book has been recently updated and addresses the subject of jihad proper with great depth and erudition, though by virtue of its scholastic precision it is perhaps less personal and less accessible than this book, which is aimed at a broader audience.

# INTRODUCTION

## UNDERSTANDING JIHAD AND OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBORS

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, was an earthquake in my life, the first in a series of tectonic shifts that ultimately changed me forever.

At the time I was an eighteen-year-old American Muslim, proud of being both American and Muslim. My family had taught me to love my country, and not just by their words. My father lived this teaching by serving in the US Navy throughout my childhood, starting as a seaman and retiring as a lieutenant commander. His time serving his country, combined with the years an uncle served in the US Army and another uncle served in the US Air Force, added up to the better part of a century. Growing up, I was surrounded by Muslims who loved and served America.

But our allegiance was to God and country; we were Muslim, first and foremost. As with Americans of other religious backgrounds, our faith was in no way exclusive of our devotion to our nation. According to my parents' teaching, it was Islam that commanded me to love and serve my country. Islam taught me to defend the oppressed, to stand up for the rights of women and children, to shun the desires of the flesh, to seek the pleasure of God, and to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. By my teenage years I enthusiastically proclaimed Islam to all who would listen, and I usually started by informing them of a teaching that was knit into the fiber of my beliefs: Islam is a religion of peace.

On September 11, I was confronted for the first time with the stark reality of jihad. It was not as if I had never heard of jihad before; I certainly had, but I knew it as a defensive effort buried deep in the pages of Islamic history. That is how our imams alluded to jihad, and we never questioned it. As American Muslims we rarely, if ever, thought about jihad.

When the twin towers fell, the eyes of the nation turned to American Muslims for an explanation. I sincerely believe September 11 was a greater shock for American Muslims like my family than for the average American. Not only did we newly perceive our lack of security from jihadists, as did everyone else, we also faced a latent threat of retaliation from would-be vigilantes. It felt as if we were hemmed in on all sides. In the midst of this, while mourning our fallen compatriots and considering our own security, we had to defend the faith we knew and loved. We had to assure everyone that Islam was a religion of peace, just as we had always known. I remember hearing a slogan at my mosque that I shared with many: "The terrorists who hijacked the planes on September 11 also hijacked Islam."

Many Americans proved understanding and received our responses graciously.

They joined us in denouncing terrorists, asserting that they were not representative of Islam. Others, including friends at my university, were not so compliant. They pushed back, pointing to the violence in Islamic history. Given the prevalence of warfare throughout the history of Islam, they asked how I could argue that Islam was a religion of peace.

In that defensive posture, discussing the matter with people who appeared unfriendly to my faith, it was a knee-jerk reaction for me to say whatever I could to defend Islam. But when I was alone with my thoughts, I could ask myself honestly: What does Islam really teach about jihad? Is Islam really a religion of peace?

I began to investigate the Quran and the traditions of Muhammad's life, and to my genuine surprise, I found the pages of Islamic history dripping with violence. How could I reconcile this with what I had always been taught about Islam? When I asked teachers in the Muslim community for help, they usually rationalized the violence as necessary or dismissed the historicity of the accounts. At first I followed their reasoning, but after hearing the same explanations for dozens if not hundreds of accounts, I began to realize that these were facile responses. Their explanations were similar to my own knee-jerk responses to non-Muslims who questioned Islam. Of course, I understood why they were doing it. We truly believed Islam was a religion of peace, and we were interpreting the data to fit what we knew to be true.

But was it true? After years of investigation, I had to face the reality. There is a great deal of violence in Islam, even in the very foundations of the faith, and it is not all defensive. Quite to the contrary, if the traditions about the prophet of Islam are in any way reliable, then Islam glorifies violent jihad arguably more than any other action a Muslim can take.

This conclusion led me to a three-pronged fork in the road. Either I could become an apostate and leave Islam, grow apathetic and ignore the prophet, or become "radicalized" and obey him. The alternative of simply disregarding Muhammad's teachings and continuing as a devout Muslim was not an option in my mind, nor is it for most Muslims, since to be Muslim is to submit to Allah and to follow Muhammad. Apostasy, apathy, or radicalization; those were my choices.

## **FROM MY STORY TO MUSLIMS TODAY**

My experience of Islam is, of course, my own, but my continued interactions with hundreds of Muslims have confirmed for me that my experience as an American Muslim is not far from the norm. Perhaps my parents were more devout than most, my family more patriotic, my sect more explicitly peaceful, but by and large I see my own former thoughts and convictions in the devout American Muslims I encounter today.

In addition, the present climate in America is more than ever reminiscent of the days and months following September 11. The public at large is questioning whether Islam is a religion of peace, just like before, and I regularly encounter Muslims who are providing the same defenses and explanations that I provided after September 11.

I do not doubt, therefore, that Muslims who investigate the history of Islam from the primary sources are concluding, as I did, that the foundations of Islam are violent. Such Muslims are faced with the same choices I faced: apostasy, apathy, or

radicalization. For them, radicalization is not just a paranoid hypothetical, but a potential reality.

Thousands of Muslims raised in the West have become *mujahideen*, fighters with various jihad groups, even though the battles are often centered in Middle Eastern countries. Presently, twice as many British Muslims fight for ISIS than for Britain's armed forces, leaving their peaceful Muslim families grieving. This includes young women, such as the tragic case of the three girls from Bethnal Green in London.

Countless Muslim families are shocked and bewildered at how their peaceful children or siblings become radicalized and commit mass murder. Four examples that come to mind immediately are the Boston Marathon bombers' mother, a brother of one of the *mujahideen* in the Paris massacre, the brother-in-law of the San Bernardino shooters, and the family of the shooter in Tel Aviv. Watching televised reactions of these family members has been heartwrenching.

But the families ought not be so bewildered. There is a consistent thread running through each and every example of such radicalization. The radicalized Muslims were explicitly introduced to violent traditions of early Islam, they became convinced of their authenticity, and they intentionally chose to follow them. Whether or not this is always the defining factor for radicalization should not cloud the fact that it is a universal factor. There is no need to remain bewildered when *mujahideen* themselves often tell us their reasons for becoming radicalized. If we would listen carefully to what they have to say, we would find this to be true without exception.

Of course, there is a reason why both Muslims and non-Muslims might want to avoid the elephant in the room. Acknowledging violence built into the foundations of Islam could lead people to see Islam as a necessarily violent religion, and by uncritical extension, it might lead people to see all Muslims as inherently or latently violent people. We must boldly assert that these are false and dangerous conclusions, but that does not mean we ought to close our eyes to a common impetus for radicalization. Until we diagnose and respond to the actual causes of radicalization, we will continue to lose the sons and daughters of peaceful Muslim parents to terrorism.

## **EIGHTEEN QUESTIONS**

Just as September 11 was a pivotal juncture in my life and ultimately led me to study the primary sources of Islamic history, so this is a watershed moment for many Muslims who are presently wrestling with the path they will take. Some may very well choose jihad. If we care about these young men and women and the peaceful Muslim families that will be left distraught in the wake of their radicalization, to say nothing of the thousands of innocents whose lives they may take in the name of jihad, it is critical that we carefully and thoughtfully engage jihad with both truth and compassion. We cannot close our eyes or indulge in wishful thinking.

At the same time, we must be careful not to slide down the slippery slope of assuming every Muslim is a threat. Of the thousands of Muslims I have known in my personal life, only one has become radicalized to the point of explicitly supporting violence, and none have actually undertaken violent jihad. It is wrong to paint all Muslims with the same brush; we need to see them as individuals, the vast majority of

whom just wish to live life, take care of their families, and peacefully honor God.

I do not claim to have all the answers, especially answers regarding public policy, but there is certainly a first step in responding well to radical Islam, whether individually or collectively. We must understand it for what it is. To that end, I will respond in the pages ahead to eighteen questions people most commonly ask me about jihad. These questions explore the origins of jihad, the nature of jihad today, and the phenomenon of jihad in Judeo-Christian context. After answering these questions, I will conclude by proposing a response to jihad, in my view the best way forward.

## **FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY**

In my response to the questions that follow, I am not suggesting that my interpretation of Islam is the only correct one, nor that those who practice Islam as a religion of peace are doing so illegitimately. My goal is more modest. I simply aim to uncover the violence that suffuses the foundations of Islam, which are the Quran and the traditions of Muhammad's life, and to demonstrate that a return to these foundations can yield violent results.

In other words, I am not arguing against the legitimacy of an Islam that moves away from its foundations, whether organically through centuries of tradition and jurisprudence or synthetically through an intentional re-envisioning of Islam by progressive Muslim thought leaders. But as long as Islam is practiced in a way that calls Muslims to return to its foundations, violence will follow.

There are certainly additional factors that can motivate Muslims towards radical Islam, whether personal factors such as a search for identity or political factors such as a response to governmental oppression. Whatever the additional factors might be, however, the foundations and history of the religion do more than simply enable the use of violence for Islamic dominance; they command it.

Nevertheless, most Muslims in the world are not violent people, despite their desire to intentionally and genuinely follow Islam. That is why I hope to also explain their perspectives, so we can understand our Muslim neighbors and show them the love and compassion that all people deserve, devoid of fear and mistrust.

Finally, it behooves me to mention that I am a Christian who left Islam after investigating the foundations of Islam and Christianity. This subject matter is deeply personal to me, and I do not pretend to be unbiased, especially since all people are biased to varying degrees. That said, in this book I am trying to be as objective as I can be in presenting the information about jihad without judgment. I try to keep explicit Christian views out of the discussion, although a few certainly come through in the eighteenth Question and in the conclusion. I ask your pardon, but I really do feel that the Christian teaching of loving one's enemies, even in the face of death, might perhaps be the most powerful answer to jihad at our disposal today. Not only does it allow us to counter jihad, it also enables us to treat Muslims with the utmost dignity: as image bearers of God.

Part 1

## THE ORIGINS OF JIHAD



## Question 1

# WHAT IS ISLAM?

THERE ARE PRESENTLY 1.6 billion Muslims globally, making Islam the world's second largest religion, and there are probably as many answers to the question "What is Islam?" as there are adherents. The many individual expressions of the faith are valid experiences that give us insight into the lived reality of Islam. For that reason, it will be useful to start by sharing my personal experience of Islam while I was still a Muslim.

### **MY EXPERIENCE OF ISLAM AS AN AMERICAN MUSLIM**

People often speak of religion in terms of beliefs and practices, and many introductions to Islam focus on the basic beliefs of Muslims, as represented by the Six Articles of Faith, and the mandatory practices of the Five Pillars of Islam. Yet that approach seems too distant and aloof to describe my experience as a Muslim. Islam was my identity, my culture, my worldview, my pride, even my *raison d'être*. For me, Islam was more than just a religion; it was my entire way of life.

This passionate, comprehensive embrace of Islam was not unusual in my childhood environment. My great-grandparents were Muslim missionaries to Uganda, my grandparents were Muslim missionaries to Indonesia, my great-uncle was one of the earliest Muslim missionaries to the United States, and my uncle built one of the first mosques in the United States. While these relatives are idiosyncratic to my story, the convictions of my parents are reflective of many devout American Muslims. They were wholly dedicated to raising me as a pious Muslim child in what they perceived to be a morally permissive Western context.

What this meant in essence was a constant remembrance of Allah and the teachings of Muhammad throughout my day, from waking to sleeping. Literally. Upon waking I was taught to recite an Arabic prayer thanking Allah for giving me life; when lying down to sleep I prayed another prayer, affirming that my living and dying were in the name of Allah. Ceremonial washings and memorized prayers filled my daily routine. My parents even taught me a standard prayer to pray on every occasion for which there was no other scripted prayer.

In addition to acts of ceremonial devotion, there were dozens of legal commandments intended to protect the community and glorify Allah. Men were forbidden to wear silk or gold, women were required to maintain modesty and veil themselves accordingly, and all Muslims were prohibited from usury and interest in their monetary transactions. Some commands functioned as identity markers for our Muslim community, such as the proscription of pork and alcohol and the mandate to fast during [Ramadan](#).

Community was, of course, incredibly important for us as minorities. The majority of Americans did not understand us and we felt it all the time, whether it be in the innocuous mispronouncing of our names or the suspicious sideward glances at my mother's and sister's *burqas*. The mosque served as a haven where we could gather with others who experienced life in the same way we did. Grievances from foreign lands were often laid to rest within our American Muslim community, as our local mosque was open to *Sunni* and *Shia*, *Sufi* and *Ahmadi*, Indian and Pakistani, rich and poor, black and white. Of course, my parents maintained stronger ties with those of our particular sect and heritage, but as a member of the American Muslim community we were focused on affirming Muslim unity and identity. The mosque was our outpost where we could gather as one and pursue God together.

More importantly to me than all of this, Islam taught me to lower my gaze before women, to refrain from lust and other desires of the flesh, to respond to temptation by fasting, to consider the less fortunate and oppressed, to restrain myself from anger, to always tell the truth, to honor my parents and elders, and to follow countless other virtuous morals that we often saw lacking in the amoral world around us.

Through it all, what drove us ideologically were Allah and the prophet of Islam. God, in his mercy, had sent guidance to mankind time and again, though man in his ignorance had rejected the messengers of Allah. Ultimately, Allah sent his chief messenger, Muhammad, to guide people as the perfect exemplar. Unparalleled in wisdom, character, and spiritual devotion, Muhammad led the new Muslim community from ignorance, through oppression, and into glorious victory for the sake of Allah. Since Muhammad was the perfect exemplar, we followed his practices as best we could.

That was why we lived how we lived. We were following Muhammad, our paragon and perfect prophet. Whatever Muhammad did or said, we were to aspire to the same for the sake of following and glorifying Allah. That was my experience of Islam, and it taught me to live a moral life and to pursue the pleasure of God. By and large, this is the experience of the average devout American Muslim today.

## **SO WHAT IS ISLAM?**

But is Islam simply what Muslims experience, or is it something more? The sociologically inclined might say that Islam is simply the sum experience of all Muslims, but I would disagree, as would most Muslims. Islam is an entity beyond its people. Even if there were no one to experience it, we could still talk about Islam. Islam exists beyond experience.

In my opinion, religions ought to be defined by the identifying characteristics that distinguished the earliest community from all others. For Islam, this boils down to exclusive worship of Allah and obedience to Muhammad. This understanding is verified by the *shahada*, the proclamation that every Muslim must recite in order to become Muslim: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger." Even the prophet of Islam taught that this was sufficient to make one a Muslim.

There is much more to the religion of Islam, but at its core are the teachings of Muhammad and the worship of no other god than the one he proclaimed, Allah. These

teachings are contained within Muslim scripture, the Quran, and in isolated traditions of Muhammad, often referred to collectively as [hadith](#).

## **DEMOGRAPHICS AND DENOMINATIONS**

Yet Muslims interpret Muhammad's teachings very differently, often along partisan lines of authoritative interpreters and cultural boundaries. That is why, in very broad strokes, Shia Islam looks different from Sunni Islam, why Bosnian Islam looks different from Saudi Islam, why folk Islam in the outlands of Yemen looks different from scholarly Islam in the halls of Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

Although the core of Islam is centered on the person of Muhammad in seventh century Arabia, the expression of Islam reflects local customs. That is one reason why it is important to remember that Islam is not primarily a religion of Arabs. The country with the most Muslims in the world is Indonesia, followed by Pakistan, India, and then Bangladesh. None of those nations are Arab, and local customs manage to find their way into Islamic expression.

In addition, no two Muslims are exactly alike, and that is another reason why the expression of Islam is so varied. My sister and I were raised in the same sect (see [appendix D](#)) by the same parents, but her practice and interpretation of Islam looks very different from how mine looked. Her leanings were far more Western and pluralist than were mine. I was more interested in learning about Muhammad and his teachings than she was, while she was more interested in American pop culture than I was.

## **MUSLIMS ARE NOT ISLAM**

Especially because of the great diversity of Islamic expression, it bears repeating that Islam is not Muslims, and Muslims are not Islam. Though Muslims are adherents of Islam, and Islam is the worldview of Muslims, the two are not the same, as many uncritically believe.

On one end of the spectrum, many assume that if the Quran teaches something then all Muslims believe it. That is false. Many Muslims have not heard of a given teaching, some might interpret it differently, and others may frankly do their best to ignore it. For example, even if we were to demonstrate through careful hermeneutics that the Quranic injunction to beat disobedient wives (4:34) is meant to apply to all Muslims today, it would still have zero bearing in my family. My father would never beat my mother.

On the other end of the spectrum, criticism of Islam is often taken to be criticism of Muslims. That is equally false. One can criticize the Quranic command to beat disobedient wives without criticizing Muslims. The accusation of Islamophobia, discussed in Question 12, often fails at this point. Islam is not Muslims, and one can criticize Islam while affirming and loving Muslims.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus Islam is defined by obedience to Muhammad's teachings and worship of no other

god but the one he proclaimed, Allah. Although there are as many as 1.6 billion expressions of Islam in the world, Muslims are not themselves Islam. In my experience as an American Muslim, there was absolutely no emphasis placed on violence, but a great deal of emphasis placed on morality, legality, community, and spirituality. For me and all the American Muslims I knew, Islam was a religion of peace with God and peace with man.

But my experience of Islam is not the only one, and it cannot define Islam. For other Muslims, violence is a part of their expression of Islam, but their experience is no more definitive than mine was.

To answer whether Islam truly is a religion of peace, we must consider what Islam teaches, not just what Muslims practice.

## Question 2

# IS ISLAM “A RELIGION OF PEACE”?

SINCE I WAS BORN, I was taught by imams and my family that Islam is “a religion of peace.” What is surprising, in retrospect, is that this popular slogan may not have been around much earlier than that.

### THE MEANING OF THE WORD *ISLAM*

Mark Durie, a research scholar of linguistics and Islam at Melbourne School of Theology, informs us in an article for the *Independent Journal*, “Islam was first called ‘the religion of peace’ as late as 1930, in the title of a book published in India. . . . The phrase was slow to take off, but by the 1970s it was appearing more and more frequently in the writings of Muslims for western audiences.”

Whether or not one agrees that the slogan first appeared in the twentieth century, it is beyond dispute that the Quran never says, “Islam is the religion of peace,” nor do the traditions of Muhammad.

This common misconception may stem from another, the oft-repeated assertion that *Islam* means “peace.” It does not. The Arabic word *Islam* means “surrender,” though it is related to the word for peace, *salaam*. Durie sheds light on the nature of the relationship and the origin of the word *Islam*: “The word Islam is based upon a military metaphor. Derived from *aslama*, ‘surrender,’ its primary meaning is to make oneself safe (*salama*) through surrender. In its original meaning, a Muslim was someone who surrendered in warfare.”

In our Islamic community, we were taught that the “surrender” of Islam was a submission of one’s will and life to God, which I would argue is noble and does not connote violence. But to contend that the word *Islam* signifies peace in the absence of violence is incorrect. *Islam* signifies a peace after violence, or under the threat of it.

According to Islamic tradition, that is how Muhammad himself used the word. His warning to neighboring tribes is famous: *Aslim taslam*, “If you surrender, you will have peace.” It was a play on words, as *aslim* also connotes becoming Muslim: “If you convert, you will have safety through surrender.”

So the word *Islam* refers to the peace that comes from surrender. Peaceful Muslim communities today present that imagery as a spiritual peace with Allah, but records of Muhammad’s life indicate that the notion of submission was also used in military contexts.