

Islamic Summer Intensive Course 2024

PEACE ON EARTH: Islam, Goodwill, and God's Will

Course Descriptions:

The Ideal of Universal Peace and Justice and the Reality of Postlapsarian Humanity: Holy Wars and Secular Terrorism

Instructor: Shuja Ali Mirza

Duration: 3 sessions

Introduction: Conflict and opposition are endemic to the terrestrial order and postlapsarian humanity—perfect peace being only possible in the celestial realm. It is the descent of Truth from the celestial to the terrestrial in the form of religious tradition and sacred law that directs, limits, and controls the necessary conflicts of this lower world. Firstly, it gives direction and meaning to the conflicts by establishing the ideal of justice. Secondly, it sanctifies the lower and carnal propensities involved in violence by transforming them into instances of self-sacrifice and transcendence. In Islam, divinely sanctioned and delimited violence that is commensurate with justice and forbearance is known as *jihād*. It must be acknowledged that *jihād* based on Truth can never eradicate violence, nor can it bring about absolute peace on earth; but what it can do is to bring about a state of détente and a temporal cessation of hostilities. Now as conflict and evil are perpetual facts of this world, by the same token, the efforts to mitigate them must also be perpetual. This means that if principled *jihād* is stopped, then the result is unprincipled and unfettered violence in the name of falsehood—whether that falsehood is a religious heresy (à la Daesh or Zionism) or a secular “peace” cult (à la Western liberalism). This nefarious result, which currently goes by the name of terrorism, cannot be eradicated by appeals to tolerance and non-violence based on any pluralist agenda “founded” on a relativity of knowledge cum relativity of truth. In fact, any “peace” that is not based in the Absolute, and true religion that derives therefrom is, in reality, a false peace that is tantamount to anarchy and violence that spiral out of control. Only religion can mandate a principled and objective tolerance that can maintain a relative and temporal peace, while using any and all intermittent bouts of controlled violence as a means of chivalric transcendence. The edifice of secular-liberalism only offers the illusion of eternal peace on earth but, lacking all principles, it reveals its true nature by repeated acts of super-terrorism. To oppose such terrorism is a sacred quest holding great salvific value when it is guided by the dictates of intellectuality and revelation. Hence it can be concluded that terrorism can be diminished only to the degree and extent that human society returns to its religious roots and follows the sacred law, both in letter and in spirit.

From Inner Peace to Global Peace

Instructor: Kamil Kazmi

Duration: 3 sessions

Introduction: Understanding the appearance and actual value of ourselves and by association, our actions is crucial in determining whether our apparent actions are on the path of *Ḥaqq* or on the path of *bāṭil*. This exploration examines if our being is based in reality, or if it is merely a construct in our imagination. Genuine change must manifest from within; when an individual changes internally, even the smallest actions reflect this transformation.

When linked to Allah, even the smallest deed, such as removing a stone from the path of worshippers, becomes a significant and enduring act due to its association with Allah. With this lens, we aim to study the effects of inner peace in the stand against oppression and in achievement of the ultimate global peace.

Shuhadā' in Light of Peace

Instructor: Ali Karmali

Duration: 2 sessions

Introduction: The notion of *shahādah* stands as a cornerstone within Islamic theology, imbued with profound sacredness and wielding considerable influence over Muslim cultural ethos throughout time. This discourse endeavours to dissect the intricacies surrounding this venerable concept, particularly its intrinsic sanctity, its manifold purposes, and its consequential ramifications within Islamic cultural paradigms, as well as its role in upholding fundamental human values within the context of peace and justice on earth. Moreover, this examination aspires to elucidate the interconnectedness between *shahādah*, spirituality, and the principle of *فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ*. Culminating the discourse is an analytical exploration of the transformative impact wielded by the paragon of *shahādah*, the *سيد الشهداء*, thereby shedding light on its overarching significance in shaping individual and collective spirituality and faith.

Ummatan Wāḥidah—Jamā‘ah wa Firqah

Instructor: Murtaza Bachoo

Duration: 4 sessions

Introduction: Human beings have been blessed with the power of *‘aql* (intellect) and freewill. It is therefore natural for societies including the followers of the same religion to have disagreements on matters of beliefs and practices. The Qur’ān exhorts the believers towards unity, and itself defines the concepts of community, unity and separation. The Qur’ān also expounds on the causes of disunity through the example of previous nations. Students will have an opportunity to study Qur’ānic concepts and principles around unity and apply them to the contemporary challenges facing the ummah.

Plato - Democracy cum Tyranny Terminus cum the Rule of Anti-Christ

Instructor: Asad Sajjad

Duration: 2 sessions

Introduction: In the Platonic vision, just like for any noetic, that which *is*, is the Supreme Reality, the Absolute. Exclusive to the Platonic vision, this primordial idea is named the Sovereign Good. It is the nature of the Sovereign Good to radiate itself. From another aspect, this radiation is the very play of the ontological entropy. Man, who is intelligence and will, initiates in this ontological entropy, the process of anthropological entropy, whereby by not choosing to rise he chooses to fall. The post-lapsarian man has outshined his predecessors by ushering in the age of Counter-Metaphysics. The geometrical constellation of the post-Edenic man is reflected in the social fabric in the following stages: the rule of the philosopher-king in an aristocracy, which deteriorates into timocracy, followed by oligarchy, subsequently transitioning into democracy then devolving into tyranny, ultimately culminating in the dominion of the anti-Christ.

Religious Foundations of Qiyām and Peace in the Way of God

Instructor: Mohammad Sadegh Amin Din

Duration: 3 sessions

Introduction: This course deals with the religious foundations of *qiyām* (lit. “standing”) and peace and in the way of God by using the teachings found in the Holy Qur’ān and Shi’a sources such as the *Nahj al-balāghah*. The conditions and requirements for the realization of resistance and peace will be examined as it pleases God. It is hoped that through these sessions, participants will be able to become familiar with the importance, religious foundations, conditions, and factors of standing in the way of God based on the verses of the Qur’an. It is also hoped that they will become acquainted with the concept and principles of peace, as well as the conditions and requirements for achieving peace in the world based on the *Nahj al-balāghah*

The Good is from God: God's Will, the Nature of Evil, and our Goodly Response

Instructor: Rizwan Rashid

Duration: 3 sessions

Introduction:

مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ

“Whatever good befalls you is from Allah; and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself” (4:79)

The doctrine of *tawhīd*, when it comes to God’s Creatorship, requires us to trace all that exists to God, for there is nothing that exists “outside” of Him. Moreover, the diversity of the creative order and the intricacies that we witness within it, naturally evoke a sense of awe within us and the appreciation of the powerful and subtle Living intelligence that has sourced it all. We cannot help but call that creation “good”. Yet within the human order, we also find plagues and epidemics, war and destruction, and all forms of atrocities—aspects that we would clearly label as “evil”. What then is the relationship between the instances of evil we find around us and the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Creator of all that is Good.

In this course, we will first investigate God’s will and the idea of the good. We will then look at the nature of evil in relation to God and in relation to human beings. We will discuss the reasons that humans intentionally or inadvertently commit atrocities and whether one can talk about the “banality of evil”. Finally, we will end with the goodly response in the face of evil expected of believers by the All-Good.

Stillness of the Soul in the Midst of Commotion

Instructor: Assad Dharsi

Duration: 3 sessions

Introduction: The Almighty has created the human being with utmost potential—to embody empowering calmness in the vortex of a storm. The Holy Qur’ān elucidates various states of the human soul hinting at a tranquil state, meanwhile being in the constant struggle of managing temporal pulls and spiritual aspirations. The concept of *ibtilā’* is one such strategy.

How the human manages these through a coherent vision, a discerning will, and a practical wisdom will be the question for exploration in this course.

Understanding Religious Violence

Instructor: Sadek Ismail

Duration: 2 sessions

Introduction: This course explores why we often link religion with violence. We will uncover how historical events and influential thinkers from Europe and America have shaped this perception. By studying academic theories, historical conflicts like the “wars of religion,” and Supreme Court decisions, students will unravel why these ideas persist. We will discuss how labeling certain practices as “religious” has been used to exclude them, justify Western actions, and create stereotypes about non-Western cultures. By challenging these ideas and exploring how religion and politics are intertwined, students will gain new insights into violence in society and its impact on global relations today.

Peace Activism and Cancel Culture

Instructor: Ibrahim Janabi

Duration: 2 sessions

Introduction: Cancel culture has had a long development and has a strong interplay with activism. These forces have changed the dynamics and behaviour of large organisations and for employees. How do we navigate the negative effects of cancel culture while maintaining a commitment to peace activism?

God’s Will on Earth: Predestination and Freewill

Instructor: Muhammad Mahdi Kassamali

Duration: 2 sessions

Introduction: In the early centuries after the Hijrah, Muslims were divided into different understandings on the matter of predestination and freewill. There was the Ash‘arī school of thought, that considered man's freewill to be an affront to the power of an omnipotent Lord, and the Mu‘tazili school that considered predestination to be irreconcilable with Allah's justice. Both groups relied on certain verses of the Noble Qur‘ān to prove their viewpoint, while interpreting other verses in a way that suited them. This course will start with a brief overview of the historical origins and theological viewpoints of these two schools of thought and how they compare with the school of the Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them. Thereafter, the course will conclude with how the correct understanding of this matter should lead one to live a balanced life of servitude, striving hard to obey Allah in all aspects of life, while at the same time, completely relying on Him alone.

Shifting Paradigms: From Result-Oriented to Duty-Oriented

Instructor: Zeshum Ahmad

Duration: 1 session

Introduction:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزِدُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيْمَانِهِمْ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

“It is He who sent down composure into the hearts of the faithful that they might enhance their faith. To Allah belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise.” (48:4)

Most of our lives, we are indoctrinated to gauge our successes based on the material results of our efforts. Success in studies is measured in grades; success in a job is measured in pay raises and promotions; success in family life is measured in a house with a white picket fence, and perhaps with the success of one’s children—producing another generational iteration of the paradigm. The goal of this course is to deconstruct the falsity of this paradigm, and demonstrate how concentrating on the real goal (i.e. proximity with Allah swt), creates a paradigm of duty-oriented decision making during our lives in the material world. Perhaps the starkest examples of the ramification of this paradigm shift can be seen in social movements, where not only are the strategies adopted changed, but also the psychological and spiritual effects of one’s actions greatly differ for the individual.

Ethics and Conditions of War and Peace Treaties in Islam

Instructor: Salaam Al-Attar

Duration: 1 session

Introduction: Islam provides a wholistic framework by which a Muslim can live a life of tawhīd, under all life circumstances. This framework is reinforced by a robust set of principles and laws that delineate boundaries of what is considered acceptable versus forbidden in the eyes of God. In the same way that there are conditions and laws that govern the Muslims' conduct in a state of peace, there are also rules and conditions they ought to abide by to enter and/or engage in a state of war, as per the holy Qur’ān and the traditions of the Infallibles (‘a). Here, we aim to shed light upon some of these conditions, taking lesson from key historical events from the time of the Prophet (s) and the Imams thereafter.