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RELIGION AND PEACE

CHAPTER OUTCOMES

In this chapter, students:

• investigate the understanding of peace in two religious traditions and how their sacred texts inform this understanding

• outline the principal teachings about peace in these same two traditions

• demonstrate how these same two traditions guide the individual in achieving inner peace

• discuss how these same two traditions are contributing to world peace.
INTRODUCTION

NOTE

This whole study is to be completed within two religious traditions. At the end of your investigations of peace in two religious traditions, go to 15.4 No simple answers on page 367.

‘Religion: catalyst for violence or peace’, ‘Fields of blood: religion and the history of violence’, ‘Journal of Religion and Violence’ – these are some of the titles found in the contemporary literature about religion and peace. In the twenty-first century, the words ‘religion’ and ‘peace’ rarely appear in the same sentence. The title of this unit is ‘religion and peace’ and a good place to start is to look at these two words. As has been demonstrated during this course of study, there is no universal way to define religion.

The broad definition of peace that usually first comes to mind is a negative one: we view it as an absence of war. Seeking peace in the modern world, however, is much more complex than simply the cessation of war. A critical element for a culture of peace is social justice – perceptions of injustice lead to discontent, non-cooperation, conflict, civil unrest and war. The political and economic nature of warfare – even in wars with supposedly religious justifications – has become even more pronounced in contemporary history. Some of the issues that seriously threaten global peace are fundamentalism, intolerance and massacres, persecutions on account of faith and ethnicity, disregard for freedom and the destruction of the rights of entire peoples, the plight of refugees and forcibly displaced persons.

Many religious traditions also reflect on the notion of ‘inner’ peace, as is found in the expression ‘to be at peace with oneself’. Do we have to be at peace with ourselves before we can be at peace with others? Is it possible to think and reflect upon peace without talking about war?

Both war and peace are linked to social being, to the living together as a social group, to the belonging to a state or to a particular nation. The biblical myth of the Tower of Babel, common to the three Abrahamic religious traditions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, discussed in this chapter, can give us some insights:

Now the whole world had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there … Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’

Here humans thought they could disregard their differences and unite themselves in speaking the same language and in pronouncing the same words. They thought they could build a common civilisation, identical for all – to eat, drink, play, dress, study and paint the same way; and to dwell in the same houses. But this did not happen, and the Genesis account tells us that:

… the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

The story of Abraham provides a counterpoint to the Tower of Babel – Abraham wanted to unite people by teaching them to preserve their differences.
This chapter addresses how religious traditions understand peace, how they guide individuals to inner peace and how they contribute to world peace. There is also discussion on how the sacred texts inform this understanding while remembering that the sacred texts of religious traditions were written in different cultures and for very different societies—it is always necessary to ‘wrestle with the text’ to be open to hearing it anew.

And the answer to the question ‘Does religion cause violence?’—sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn’t, as with everything else.

‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.’ This is the core teaching Jesus gave to his disciples just hours before his death. Jesus’ peace is not a concept or idea, it is his peace—a covenant made with his blood on the cross and also through his resurrection. And Jesus continues, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid’ (Jn 14:27). Jesus’ peace is a living peace, the peace of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (Jn 14:16) who is the presence of God in the world.

The peace that was announced by Jesus is primarily peace of mind and heart: a state in which there is orderliness in one’s relation to God and to others. So for Christians, peace is more than the absence of war. It does not deny conflict, an intrinsic element of human relationships, but neither does it identify conflict with violence. Peace is what results from actively working towards right relationships between the individual, God and one’s neighbour—the work of peacemaking, which Jesus singled out for blessing (Mt 5:9). Peacemaking is not something optional for Christians.

So, in theory, Christianity is a religion of peace, but in practice there have been periods in history where violence and retribution have assumed greater dominance than peace and peacemaking. When Christians moved outwards from their small communities, they encountered the political realities of empire and then the nation-state and it often became difficult to view Christianity separately from the history of Western civilisation.

IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU READ THROUGH CHAPTER 3 CHRISTIANITY BEFORE BEGINNING THIS UNIT.

PEACE IN THE SACRED TEXTS OF CHRISTIANITY

The Christian understanding of peace is irrevocably tied to earlier Jewish teachings and texts. For example, the notion of peace in the four gospels and other Christian writings is founded on two major Jewish understandings—the fifth commandment and Jewish words used to describe ‘peace’. In recalling the fifth commandment, ‘You shall not kill’ (Ex 20:13; cf. Mt 5:21), Jesus asks for peace of heart and exposes the immorality of murderous anger and hatred. The Jewish words for ‘peace’ were translated into Greek and used in the Christian Scriptures. The main term used for ‘peace’ in the Jewish Scriptures is shalom. It is a Hebrew word that refers to the spiritual and material wellbeing of both
individuals and the religious community as a whole, as a result of fidelity to God’s promises (Judg 6:23).

Peace as shalom is used to indicate peace between nations as opposed to war (1 Kings 5:12). It is also used in combination with other terms, such as ‘peace and security’, ‘peace and prosperity’, ‘peace, truth and faithfulness’ and ‘righteousness that will bring peace’ (see respectively Ps 122:7; Deut 23:6; Esth 9:30; and Isa 32:17).

The language of peace
The Hebrew Scriptures term shalom is an extremely rich and variegated word, fertile with multiple levels of meaning. It certainly connotes more than ‘peace’. At its root it means material wellbeing in relation to bodily health or to the nation enjoying prosperity. Often genuine prophets would condemn false prophets who were inspired by self-interest and not God, as proclaiming ‘peace, peace, when there was no peace’ (Jeremiah 6:14). Always, however, peace was seen as a gift from God and carried with it an expectation of a final condition of unending peace, both on earth and in heaven.

When the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek began in the third century BCE, shalom was translated as eirene. Originally the sense of the term eirene was to denote the absence of disturbance. Later on, when it was translated into Latin, eirene became pax. The Romans’ term pax had a similar meaning, with its understanding as ‘a reciprocal legal relationship between two parties’, and was used in phrases such as ‘treaty of peace’, ‘the conclusion of peace’ and the ‘conditions of peace’ – the Pax Romana.

So when Jerome completed his task (commissioned by Pope Damasus) of translating the four gospels in 384 CE, ‘peace’ had been shalom, eirene and now pax. The various translations of this simple word have, over the centuries, influenced the different Christian approaches to peace and war.

Jesus and peace
At the very beginning of his mission, Jesus announced: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’ (Mk 1:15). He also spoke about the signs of the end of the age in the ‘Olivet discourse’ (Mount of Olives) in Matthew 24, at the end of which he says: ‘[T]his generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place’ (Mt 24:34). These were not unfamiliar words for those who heard him – here was Jesus, a prophet, preparing his fellow Jews for the imminent end of the world. Matthew’s gospel is the most ‘apocalyptic’ of the synoptic gospels.

When the world did not end, when there was no ‘second coming’ and when Christianity spread out from its origins in rural Roman Palestine and was no longer a ‘sect’ of Judaism, it was necessary to recast Jesus’ message for a very different milieu – an urban environment that includes Jewish and gentile converts and Roman citizens. The Christian Scriptures, including the four gospels, build on the Jewish notion of shalom by presenting Jesus as the way to this peace.

Did you know?
Jesus’ greeting of peace, of shalom, is ultimately untranslatable. However, it is intended to communicate the fullness of peace and wholeness permeating every aspect of a person’s life. Christians believe that Jesus makes this shalom possible through his sufferings, death and resurrection.

Peace in the gospels
• Mark contains two short instructions on peace. The first occurs when Jesus unknowingly cures the woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for 12 years. Despite the woman’s fear and trembling, Jesus reassures her: ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’ (Mk 5:34) Later on (Mk 9:50) Jesus encourages his disciples to remain true to their calling and the preaching of the gospel, even in times of hardship: ‘Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.’

• Matthew emphasises the peace that the Twelve Apostles can choose to bestow (or withdraw) through their ministry and preaching of the gospel (Mt 10:11–13). Matthew’s other text on peace is the often misinterpreted one about bringing the sword rather than peace.

• John contains six direct references to peace (Jn 14–20), all of which refer to Jesus’ bestowal of peace on his disciples after his resurrection. The peace that Jesus brings, flowing from his life, death and resurrection, is a peace given by the Holy Spirit that banishes all fear – a peace that cannot be gained from the world.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Jn 14:27

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
Interestingly, in the episode of Jesus’ appearance to Thomas and the 12 (Jn 20:24–29), Jesus’ reassuring words of ‘Peace be with you’ occur in the context of the doubting Thomas feeling the wounds of Jesus’ crucifixion. Peace, suffering, perseverance and faith always exist side by side.

• Compared to the other gospel writers, Luke mentions ‘peace’ by far the greatest number of times. In his 13 references to peace, Luke presents many of the above episodes in a slightly different context. Yet he also highlights that Jesus has been foretold as the one who will guide the believer’s feet into the path of peace (Lk 1:79); that his coming has brought peace to all humankind (Lk 2:14, 29); and that wise disciples gain peace by carrying their crosses and giving up all their possessions (Lk 14:25–33). Jesus is the prince of peace who enters Jerusalem (Lk 19:38) and who weeps over a Jerusalem that has rejected his message of peace (Lk 19:42). Following his appearance on the walk to Emmaus, Jesus once again appears to his disciples in Jerusalem and declares: ‘Peace be with you’ (Lk 24:36). As in the other gospels, this is not a vague, transitory peace, but a peace that ‘startles and terrifies’ the disciples. It is a peace linked to the suffering of the cross, rising from the dead, repentance and forgiveness of sins, and is available to all who desire it.

Nevertheless, the primary orientation of Jesus’ teaching and of the Christian tradition has been towards understanding, finding and making peace, for oneself, for one’s community and for the wider world.

This preference is especially strong in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, where he declares: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God’ (Mt 5:9). But, as Matthew’s Beatitudes make clear, the precondition for becoming a peacemaker is to live out all the remaining Beatitudes – to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, and even to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Mt 5:1–11). For the early Christians, peacemaking also meant a refusal to take part in warfare of any kind. For the first 300 years of Christianity, most followers of Jesus could not reconcile war with Jesus’ words and actions associated with the making of peace.

The early Christian communities and peace

To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom 1:7

Among the early Christian communities, the understanding of peace builds upon ideas already present in the Jewish Scriptures and inspired by the life of Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Christ are clearly the foundation of Christianity’s approach to love, peace and justice. The aim of this section is to explore, and look for patterns in, a range of ‘peace’ texts that emerged from these early Christian communities.

Virtually all the letters in the Christian Scriptures (outside the four gospels) open their greeting with ‘peace’, often paired with ‘grace’ (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; and Gal 1:3). Although ‘peace’ in these writings refers to lack of strife among individuals or nations (Rev 6:4), it is also used to describe order and goodwill within the early Christian communities.

Paul of Tarsus (see pages XXX), who became the great advocate of the risen Jesus, wrote letters to the communities of Christians he had visited and in his greeting, combines a variation of the usual Greek greeting chaire (grace) and the common Jewish greeting shalom (peace); for example, ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 1:7b). For Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus meant that the peace that Christ brought could dwell in him – God was not exclusive, nor only for the righteous and good, but would come and dwell in anyone who turned to him in repentance. This was the good news that is the basis of all Paul’s writings – Jesus is the one sent from God who is identical to the peace sought by many.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us … So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Eph 2:13–14, 17

This set of Christian writings also makes clear that all spiritual blessings, including peace, are from God. God is a God of peace (Rom 15:33; Phil 4:9). The peace that God brings is associated with righteousness, grace, mercy, love, joy and life (Rom 14:17; Phil 1:2). The long-term aim of the Christian is to receive the peace of God (Phil 4:7) or the peace of Christ (Col 3:15). If the Christian mind is focused on the Spirit, this in turn leads to life and peace (Rom 8:6), and the God of hope then fills the Christian with joy and peace (Rom 15:13).

The idea of peace within the community and in the wider world underlies many New Testament teachings. As we shall see, Christian teachings about peace developed with the need to understand how to apply these biblical principles to specific situations in a vastly changing and challenging world.
PRINCIPAL TEACHINGS ABOUT PEACE

The Christian understanding of peace has been developed over centuries of thought and practice. The early Church (the first 300 years) was strongly pacifist (supportive of nonviolence and disarmament), but this began to change in the time of Constantine. The Council of Arles in 314 CE said that to forbid ‘the state the right to go to war was to condemn it to extinction’, and not long after this Christian philosophers began to formulate the doctrine of the ‘just war’.

We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace.

Augustine’s letter to Boniface, Letter 189, 418 CE

The divisions within Christianity brought with them different attitudes to war and peace. The stance of pacifism had its modern origins in the early years of the twentieth century. Its proponents included Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr and Christian Churches such as the Mennonites, Quakers, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Amish.

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) said that peace is ‘not only to enjoy but to do’, and this has always been the principal Christian teaching about peace. The Jewish vision of shalom (Isa 54:10, 65:17–25) implies a call to become peacemakers and build communities of peace. This vision is reinforced in the gospels, with the peace that Christ teaches – pax Christi (Mk 10:42–44; Mt 5:9–10, 44–47).

The doctrine of the ‘just war’

At a time when the mostly Christian Roman Empire was being attacked from the north and the fall of Rome was imminent, Augustine (354–430 CE), one of the great thinkers of the early Church, proposed the idea of a morally just war.

The Christian theory of the just war began with Augustine and, although he did not lay out the conditions necessary for a war to be just, it is from his work The City of God that the phrase originates:

But, say they, the wise man will wage just wars. As if he would not all the rather lament the necessity of just wars, if he remembers that he is a man; for if they were not just he would not wage them, and would therefore be delivered from all wars.

St Augustine, The City of God, Book XIX, Ch. 7

Nine hundred years later, Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 CE) used the authority of Augustine’s arguments to lay out the conditions under which a war could be just.

There are two parts to the theory of ‘just war’:  
• Jus ad bellum – the conditions under which the use of military force is justified  
• Jus in bello – how to conduct a war in an ethical manner.

The just war theory attempts to reconcile three things:  
• Taking human life is seriously wrong.  
• States have a duty to defend their citizens and defend justice.  
• Protecting innocent human life and defending important moral values sometimes requires willingness to use force and violence.

The just war theory really has no biblical basis to its elements. It is premised on the belief that war is undesirable but sometimes may be necessary to prevent a greater evil. These elements are that the war in question must:  
• have a just cause and not be a matter of retribution  
• be used as a last resort  
• be waged by a legitimate authority.
Christian pacifism

Christians have a long history of refusing to take part in war.

- Within the Christian tradition, the almost universal commitment to pacifism and nonviolence lasted almost three centuries.
- Christians resisted early Roman laws requiring them to renounce their faith, and many were executed for this.
- For the first three centuries, Christians almost universally refused to serve in the Roman army. Again, many were executed for this.

Groups of Christians embraced nonviolence during and after the Reformation. Some, such as the Anabaptists, would not take part in government because they didn’t want to be associated in any way with the exercise of violence. The Quakers, however, were often directly involved in the politics of the day.

May we look upon our treasures, and the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try whether the seeds of war have any nourishment in these our possessions.

John Woolman, Quaker, eighteenth century

There are different sorts of pacifism; for example, selective pacifism where the opposition is to a particular war or to wars involving weapons of mass destruction. During a war, many pacifists will refuse to fight, but some will take part in activities that seek to reduce the harm of war – by driving ambulances. Other pacifists will refuse to take part in any activity that might support the war.

Today many Christians are pacifists of various types, ranging from peace activists to those who need a great deal to convince them that war is justified. The Christian argument for pacifism is based on the example that Jesus sets Christians through his life and on his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and other passages.

A different response

The church in the East developed a different approach. The East did not seek to deal with just war themes such as the correct conditions for entering war, and the correct conduct of war on the basis of the possibility of the existence of a ‘just war’, precisely because it did not hold to such a view of war. The East treated it as a necessary evil; for example, the 13th Canon of St Basil (c. 330–378) struggles to free killing during war from the ethical judgement of being equivalent to murder, while concurrently refusing to call the act good or just.

The Quakers – Society of Friends

The Quakers’ basic theological principle is that there is the potential for good and for evil within every person – that the battle between good and evil is raging within everyone. So Quakers cannot claim that there is absolute surety within their community.

They also cannot see the worldly people, government and authorities as irredeemably sinful, because they believe that everybody is on the path towards greater virtue and greater knowledge of God.

The Quakers’ hope, embodied in the phrase ‘everybody has that of God within them’, is that even the government and authorities can be led towards a better relationship with God; for the Quakers, this means nonviolence. This opens up to them the possibility that, eventually, even the political system can be imbued with nonviolence.

Quakers hold to a ‘Testimony to Peace’ and refuse to participate in war as combatants.
The development of Christian teachings on peace

The massive development of technologically sophisticated ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and the ‘undeclared’ wars in, for example, Vietnam (1955–75) and, more recently, Iraq (2003–11) have seen a dramatic rethinking of Christian teachings on peace. Today, it is rarely that one hears the word ‘peace’ without the addition of ‘justice’.

Without justice and love, peace will always be a great illusion.

Hélder Câmara (d. 1999), Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Brazil

While there are strong pacifist elements in Christianity, it has accepted that war is inevitable and has sought to provide moral guidance in dealing with conflict.
ACHIEVING INNER PEACE

Inner peace is central to the teachings of Christianity. It is achieved by right living, which is not simply a matter of following the rules or ‘imitating Christ’. To find peace, one must develop a relationship that is central to God. This can be achieved through both personal and communal prayer. Inner peace is not inward-looking nor selfish – Christians have the example of Jesus’ ministry, which conveys a sense of balance between prayer and contemplation on one hand and active service on the other.

That peace is impossible without forgiveness is strongly underlined in Christianity. Forgiveness is the inner dynamic of Christian peace, because one must first allow God to forgive them, and sometimes this is hard, but this is the start of the Christian journey.

Relationships with other people are often linked with one’s individual relationship with God:

Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

1 John 2:10–11

In other words, to achieve world peace, one needs to be at peace with oneself, which means being at peace with God and with one’s neighbour.

CONTRIBUTING TO WORLD PEACE

Peace must always be the aim: peace pursued and protected in all circumstances. Let us not repeat the past, a past of violence and destruction. Let us embark upon the steep and difficult path of peace, the only path that befits human dignity, the only path that leads to the true fulfillment of the human destiny, the only path to a future in which equity, justice and solidarity are realities and not just distant dreams.

Pope John Paul II, speaking at Hiroshima, 25 February 1981

Christianity makes significant contributions to world peace in many different ways – public statements by church leaders, international and local programs of action and the actions of individuals. Today, when the phenomenon of violence has become increasingly complex, the Christian Churches have been challenged to work together for peace through ecumenical bodies, such as the World Council of Churches, and interfaith initiatives, such as Religions for Peace and the Centre for Christian–Muslim Relations.

There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.

Catholic theologian Hans Küng at the opening of the Exhibit on World’s Religions at Santa Clara University, 2005

The Uniting Church invites Christians to commit themselves to the Way of Just Peace. It embodies a fundamental shift in approach from the emphases of the ‘just war’ theory to an emphasis on ‘just peace’ – namely, peace through justice.

The church is called to be a place of peacemaking. Especially in the Lord’s Supper, our liturgical traditions illustrate how God’s peace calls us to share peace with each other and with the world. When the church is grounded in God’s peace it can then be an agent of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures. The Way of Just Peace requires both movement towards the goal and commitment to the journey. Pursuing peace involves working to eliminate violence including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion. Non-violent resistance is central to the Way of Just Peace.

Uniting Church in Australia, ‘Peacemaking and the Uniting Church’, June 2012
RESPOND
How does this type of activity contribute to world peace?

1. Is it necessary to achieve some sort of inner peace before one can work for world peace? Propose reasons for or against to support your response.

2. How important is dialogue as a means of achieving world peace? Research and provide recent examples of interfaith dialogue.

3. Demonstrate how Christianity can guide the individual to achieve inner peace and at the same time provide direction on how to develop peace in the world.

4. Construct a mind map to draw together all the material in this section.

EXTENSION
Go to four of the weblinks for this chapter and investigate how Christians are contributing to world peace. Clarify some of the issues raised about the understanding of peace in the Christian tradition.
In today’s media coverage, one would rarely see the words ‘Islam’ and ‘peace’ in the same discussion, yet there is much in the history of Islam that demonstrates a preference for peace over war. But, like all religious traditions, the message of the founder can get lost in the zeal for political power – the ‘religion’ can be used as a political tool and so the religion becomes the politics. In common with all religions, justice and peace are integral parts of Islamic teachings, and the actions of some Muslims should not be confused with the religion itself.

The vast majority of Muslims, nationally and internationally, don’t support terrorist organisations or their extreme views. However, there are people in all religions who take it further than others. Radicalisation is not a new trend. With or without the internet, it has been present in all religions throughout history.

Anooshe Aisha Mushtaq, Canberra-based adviser on Islamic radicalisation, 2015

Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God extinguishes it. They strive to create disorder on earth and God loves not those who create disorder.

Surat al-Ma’ida 5:64

Muhammad’s approach to the ethics of war and peace, however, was quite different from that of pre-Islamic Arabia. Indeed, there are verses in the Qur’an that suggest that part of the reason many of the Prophet’s contemporaries hesitated to follow him was their fear that they would lose the support of their tribes and allies and thus be open to attack.

They say: ‘If we accept your guidance, we shall be driven from our land.’

Surat al-Qasas 28:57

Likewise, other verses clearly indicated that a state of war was the existing norm for seventh-century Arabia. For example:

Those whom the people warned, ‘Your enemies have mustered a great force against you: fear them.

Surat al-Imran 3:173

Do they not see that we have established a safe haven (in the Great Mosque) while people all around them were being snatched away?

Surat al-Ankabut 29:67

One of the most consistent Qur’anic criticisms of the early Muslims is their unwillingness to fight – the need to overcome this unwillingness explains in large part the eloquence and urgency of the injunctions to fight:

Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it.

Surat al-Baqara 2:216

The early Muslims had a deep sense of divided loyalties between Islam and the old order, at the centre of which were tribal alliances. It was not fighting in general that they had trouble accepting – after all, it was the normative state – but fighting against their own kin. What the Qur’an was revealing in the verses in which believers
Although it is very clear that Muhammad personally conducted several key campaigns after the battle of Badr, the combined evidence of the sources indicates that he remained a reluctant warrior. On several occasions, he urged the use of nonviolent means or sought an early end to hostilities, often in the face of stiff opposition from his companions. At the same time, in the light of the Qur’anic revelations, he seems to have accepted unavoidable fighting in defence of what he saw as Muslim interests. The essence of his approach to war can be found in this *hadith* of *Sahih al-Bukhari*:

> O people! Do not wish to meet the enemy, and ask God for safety, but when you face the enemy, be patient, and remember that Paradise is under the shade of swords.

*al-Bukhari 2861*

These verses were revealed during the 10 years Muhammad spent in Medina (622–632 CE) when the Muslims became a coherent community. During these years, the young Muslim community at Medina was surrounded by a range of groups who were hostile to Muhammad’s message of Islam.

They also point to some interesting positions about decisions to engage in conflict. Given favourable conditions (*Surat al-Anfal* 8:65), Muslims could, by virtue of their faith, win against odds of 10 to one – in the battle of Badr (2 AH/624 CE), Muslim forces defeated the much larger Meccan army. The battle of al-Khandaq (5 AH/627 CE) would appear to support the position in *Surat al-Anfal* 8:66 – Muslims were confronted by a much stronger force and elected to fortify their city by digging a trench around Medina, and thus avoided military confrontation with their aggressors.

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*al-Bukhari 2861*

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Neither the Qur'an nor *hadith* uses the term *jihad* for fighting and combat in the name of Allah; *qital* is the word for fighting, while *harb* is the word for war.

The early community

After Muhammad’s death in 11 AH/632 CE, the leadership of the Islamic community passed on to his successors, the four ‘rightly guided’ caliphs. Within about 20 years after Muhammad’s death, Islam laid claim to the remains of the Byzantine and Persian empires in Persia, Syria–Palestine, Iraq and Egypt.

This territorial expansion did not mean forcible conversion of the conquered peoples. Abu Bakr, the first caliph, gave these rules to an army he was sending into battle – all rules that have their basis in the Qur’an:

- Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path.
- You must not mutilate dead bodies.
- Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged person.
- Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful.
- Slay not any of the enemy’s flock, save for your food.
- You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone.

When the armies of the second ‘rightly guided’ caliph defeated the Byzantine armies at the Battle of Yarmouk (south of Damascus) in 16 AH/638 CE, ‘Umar, before entering Jerusalem, made a covenant with the Jews, pledging protection of their religious freedom. In 19 AH/641 CE the Christian Patriarch of Egypt invited the Muslims to help free Egypt from the Romans.
DID YOU KNOW?
Non-Muslims paid higher taxes and therefore non-conversion operated to the financial advantage of the state. The rules of jihad stipulated that non-Muslims remained free to practise their religion upon payment of jizya, a poll tax from which priests and the poor were exempt. In exchange for this payment, they were freed from military service and the Muslim state had to protect them from outside attack.

DID YOU KNOW?
In the thirteenth century, when the non-Muslim Mongols had taken possession of Baghdad, their ruler is said to have assembled the religious scholars of the city and posed a loaded question to them: according to their law, which alternative is preferable, the disbelieving ruler who is just or the Muslim ruler who is unjust? After moments of anguished reflection, one well-known scholar took the lead by signing his name to the response, ‘the disbelieving ruler who is just’. Others are said to have followed suit in endorsing this answer.

Before Muhammad, the Arabian peninsula was characterised by an overall ‘state of war’. What Muhammad’s mission did was to alter how the various groups and individuals identified; the ‘rightly guided’ caliphs codified rules for battle based on Qur’anic verses. Even with the expansion of the Muslim world, Islamic scholars of the early decades of the fourth Islamic century/tenth century CE continued to reflect this ‘state of war’ thinking: aggression was necessary to provide for the security and freedom of Muslims in a world that kept them under constant threat.

... whenever we are placed beyond the reach of the enemy and the outlying districts of the Muslim lands are secured and the gaps in their fortifications filled the obligation to wage jihad falls from the rest of the Muslims.

Ibn Rushd al-Kabir (the elder) (d. 520 AH/1126 CE)

This ‘state of war’ thinking was not restricted to Muslims – not only was peace not the prevailing medieval order, it was part of the medieval ‘unimaginable’.

In 583 AH/1187 CE Salah al-Din (Saladin) recaptured Jerusalem from the Christians. Although a number of Muslim holy places had been violated, Salah al-Din prohibited acts of vengeance, and his army was so disciplined that there were no deaths or violent acts after the city surrendered. The residents were taken prisoner, but their ransom was set at a token amount.

Centuries later, in 1492, Jews fleeing from the Spanish reconquista would find refuge in the Ottoman Empire and establish flourishing communities there.
As discussed earlier, many verses of the Qur’an deal with warfare – this was a fledgling Muslim community in a hostile environment – but it is the inner peace that comes by surrendering to the will of Allah that is the constant theme. In fact, the word *islam* itself is derived from the root *slm*, which are the root letters for peace.

Significantly, the Qur’an calls upon Muslims, ‘Come, all of you, into complete peace and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Surely he is your open enemy’ (*Surat* 2:208). And in *Surat* 14:23, ‘And those who believe and do good are made to enter Gardens [al-Janna or Paradise], beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them by their Lord’s permission; their greeting therein is, Peace!’ The world can become like al-Janna only if there is peace in the world and Allah says, ‘Enter it [al-Janna] in peace and justice’ (*Surat* 15:46). Thus, the main attributes of Paradise for which all Muslims aspire are peace and justice.

From its very beginnings, Islam emphasised peace as a fundamental value. Islam means establishing peace in society as well as achieving inner peace by surrendering to the will of Allah, and there are repeated references to the concept of peace in the Qur’an and *hadith*. While Muslims believe that Allah desires peace and created humankind for that purpose, they also acknowledge that humans can have a tendency towards aggression, violence and greed. So for a human being, there will always be an internal struggle (*jihad*) against evil temptations, a struggle to do Allah’s will every day of their lives. It is this internal struggle that is referred to as the ‘greater’ *jihad*. The ‘lesser’ *jihad* is the struggle against external evils – a war fought is the last resort after all peaceful attempts have failed. The concept of *jihad* is a notion that Westerners often misunderstand and a concept that is often abused by some Muslims for political purposes.

When *jihad* becomes relevant is when it becomes an argument over offensive and defensive wars, and authoritarian rulers will always claim a defensive war. *Jihad* is supposed to run through all aspects of a Muslim’s life, as it is the Muslim’s duty in the world to do good and prevent harm and evil in every way. Of course, this can entail the use of force when peaceful means are not successful, but *jihad* does not necessarily involve waging war.

**PRINCIPAL TEACHINGS ABOUT PEACE**

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Islamic law and the language of war and peace

During the first two centuries or so after the death of the Prophet, what became the collections of hadith literature constituted the most authentic representation of what Allah intended. By the third Islamic century/ninth century CE, scholars began to organise themselves into interpretative communities or schools of law which emerged as the exclusive repository of legal authority. From then on, any interpretations to be sanctioned and recognised as authoritative or ‘orthodox’ had to come through one of these schools. It was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the introduction of Western political, legal and educational institutions into Muslim countries, that this monopoly over authoritative legal interpretation was challenged.

The question today is: how are the sacred texts of Islam to be read – in a literal way or in a dynamic way? The answer from two men of very different backgrounds is: in a dynamic way.

In his Risale-i Nur, a 6000-page commentary on the Qur’an, Said Nursi (1876–1960), a Kurdish theologian, explained that the Qur’an addresses all people in every age in accordance with the degree of their understanding and development – ‘it has a face that looks to each age’.

In his commentary In the Shade of the Qur’an, Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) says:

> "The legal rules of Islam are, and always will be, subject to certain dynamism in accordance with the Islamic approach. And it is not possible to understand the texts of scripture in isolation from this reality. Indeed, there is a fundamental difference between reading the verses of scripture as if they existed in a vacuum and reading them in their dynamic context in accordance with the Islamic approach."

In a more recent work (1997), Saudi scholar ‘Adil Qutah expands on this topic:

> "It is obvious that any leader (Imam) of any school of law, nay, any independent jurist (mujtahid), period, can only devise rulings for his particular time and place. It is impossible for him to extract rulings for all times and places. Rather, the most that he can do is lay down general precepts, universal rules and basic principles on the basis of which his followers and descendants can proceed (to extract rulings)."

Jihad in the modern world

Much of contemporary writing on attitudes to peace in Islam focuses on the understanding of jihad. The concept of jihad has had different interpretations and different uses in the history of Muslim thought and politics.

> "If jihad is a historical concept and process, it could be comprehended in the light of its historical memory and its significance and context. This memory reveals the paradoxes of the difference between doctrine and its application in real life. It also helps to explain how the image of Islam and Muslims has been distorted not only by Western misunderstanding but, also, mainly by Muslims themselves."

Dr Nadia Mahmoud Mostafa, Professor of International Relations at Cairo University, Egypt, in the March 2003 paper ‘How to comprehend jihad’

DID YOU KNOW?

When the classical jurists and scholars were seeking to define the Islamic position about war, they thought of Muslims as a powerful established society able to wage war against the sources of threat. At the same time, Christian philosophers and theologians were evolving their ‘just war’ theories. In both cases, they could be overly selective in their interpretation and there was a divergence in opinions about whether they were at ‘war or peace’.

The Islamic terms Dar al-Islam (domain of peace) and Dar al-Harb (domain of war) are often used in today’s media as proof of Islam’s inherent hostility towards the West – that the only ‘domain of peace’ is those countries where Muslims live under Islamic law. This is contradicted by the notable Shaf’i scholar al-Mawardi (d.450 AH/1058 CE), who says:

> "If a Muslim is able to declare his Islam openly and living therein (in a land dominated by non-Muslims), it is better for him to do so […] because by this it becomes Dar al-Islam."

Jihad is the active expression of the Islamic commitment, responsibility and sense of duty wherever it is required in practical life. To interpret jihad only as offensive or defensive war is to misunderstand the meaning of the word and philosophy behind it. It is equally wrong to assume that jihad is a ‘holy war’ in the Western sense. To interpret the basis of Muslim relations...
with non-Muslims as war or peace is to misunderstand the meaning of Islam and the historic conditions that led to its definition. Islam invites people to Islam – Da’wa – it does not coerce them.

**FIGURE 15.2.4** Muslim women run for peace in Manila. This fun run was in support of a draft agreement (2012) to end a 40-year conflict in the Catholic Philippines’ mainly Muslim south. The agreement calls for the establishment of a new autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao by 2016.

**RESPOND**

How does an activity such as this relate to the Muslim understanding of *jihad*?

1. ‘*Jihad* is supposed to run through all aspects of a Muslim’s life.’ In your own words, define *jihad*.

2. Outline the principal Islamic teachings about peace and demonstrate how these are informed by the Qur’an and hadith.

**ACHIEVING INNER PEACE**

In Islam, the concept of peace is twofold. Firstly, to be at peace with God and therefore with oneself; then, secondly, to be at peace with the rest of the world. As has been demonstrated in previous sections, being at peace with God means to give oneself fully and completely to God and to enter into a covenant of peace with Him by praying, fasting, performing the *Hajj* and all of the other spiritual practices of Islam. It is through ‘submitting’ to God, that one finds inner peace.

Inner peace is the source of all peace. Islam believes it is imperative that the individual human be at peace with themselves before the goal of universal peace may be realised. The obligatory prayers (*salat*) are at the heart of Muslim practice and provide Muslims with opportunities for direct communion with God five times a day, and so help them to avoid too much attachment to non-essential things.

> We open our hearts and first and foremost through prayer. Prayer is the key means by which we pursue our path or way on a daily basis.

*Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, 2010*

Inner peace is developed by submission to Allah and is expressed in one’s relationships with one’s family and the community and society, and it is put into practice through the five pillars of faith (see pages XXX–XX).

**CONTRIBUTING TO WORLD PEACE**

Islam the religion, Muslim politics, *jihad* as a ‘holy war’ – what a confusion of interests! But despite all this confusion, there are millions of Muslims for whom Islam is a deeply spiritual experience and has nothing to do with politics or violence or the use of Islam for one’s interests. The first priority for Muslims in Australia and globally is dialogue and education – within the Muslim communities and with other faith communities and the world community.

**FIGURE 15.2.5** The Imam and the Pastor – Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye are religious leaders who live in Kaduna, a city in northern Nigeria. In 1995, Ashafa and Wuye formed the Interfaith Mediation Centre, a religious grassroots organisation that has successfully mediated between Christians and Muslims throughout Nigeria.

*It is necessary to develop a new vision of *jihad*.*

Outline discussion points for a debate on this topic.
Interfaith dialogue is about acceptance and not tolerance… it’s not about compromising, but creating a space for the others to be what they want to be in the world… where each is a unique person, with a unique culture, with a unique belief system, with unique traditions.

Pastor James Wuye and Imam Ashafa in Australia, 2008

Recent developments in Burma have brought the world’s attention to the ongoing conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims in South and South-East Asia. The conflicts stem from specific regional issues and politics. In March 2015, a high-level summit of Buddhist and Muslim leaders was held in Indonesia with the title Overcoming extremism and advancing peace with justice. One of the points in the final statement, ‘Shared Values and Commitments’, reads:

We reject the abuse of our religions in support of discrimination and violence. Buddhism and Islam have been misused by some for their own political purposes to fuel prejudice and stereotyping and to incite discrimination and violence. We categorically reject such abuse and pledge to counter extremist religious interpretations and actions with our authentic primary narratives of peace.

A Muslim cannot be a terrorist

Islamic law defines terrorism as publicly directed violence against which the reasonable citizen, Muslim or non-Muslim, is unable to take safe-keeping measures.

A Muslim cannot be a terrorist; a terrorist cannot be a Muslim.

Turkish Muslim scholar M. Fethullah Gulen (b. 1941)

Suicide bombing is an extremely disturbing and totally unprecedented phenomenon [in Islam]. No one in the fourteen centuries of Islam has included it in the meaning of martyrdom or jihad. It is wrong to violate innocent life whatever the rest of the argument may be.

Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Chairman International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies in Malaysia, 2008

As Australian Muslims, we categorically state that we condemn and denounce any action related to terrorism that cannot be justified by any religious teaching or common ethics, no matter what aim or objective it serves. In the name of Islam, we feel ashamed and afraid of these people who claim to be Muslims. No Muslim, who has a basic knowledge about the fundamental teachings of Islam, would support such an act. In our time, some nations around the world that are battling with constant conflicts and wars are the victims of a global struggle for self-interest. There is no place for Islam in these bloody and dirty conflicts which aim to serve only the interests of certain ideologies that wish to use Islam as a tool for propaganda.

Affinity Intercultural Foundation, 2009

Those many Muslim organisations working towards ‘advancing peace with justice’ see education, dialogue and acceptance as the instruments of peace at every level of this work. Some of the organisations are specifically Muslim, others are interfaith and some are community based. Some examples of these are:

- Affinity Intercultural Foundation
- Coalition of Women for Peace
- Muslim Peace Fellowship
- Regional Interfaith Organisation
- United Muslim Women Association
- World Assembly of Muslim Youth.

1 How would you explain what ‘inner peace’ means for Muslims?
2 Is it necessary to achieve some sort of inner peace before one can work for world peace? Give reasons to support your response.
3 Demonstrate how Islam can guide the individual to achieve inner peace and provide direction on how to develop peace in the world.
4 Discuss how Muslims are contributing to world peace in a specific situation or region.
5 Construct a mind map to draw together all the material in this section.

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Affinity Intercultural Foundation, 2009

1 Give three reasons to explain the importance of dialogue as a means of achieving world peace.
2 Outline reasons why it is important to educate non-Muslim Australians about Islam.
3 Investigate two Australian interfaith organisations/groups. Write a summary of some of their comments about the dialogue and describe some of their initiatives.
The seeking after peace is reflected strongly in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, who saw that in the days to come the Lord would judge between the nations, and the nations would ‘beat their swords into ploughshares’:

… and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Isa 2:4

The theme of peace and justice is also strongly mirrored in the prophet Micah. What God requires of the faithful is for them ‘to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God’ (Mic 6:8).

The prophet Amos, writing in the eighth century BCE, warned against the evil and corruption of the age. He foretold that actions of social injustice would be punished by God and that the only way to peace was to seek the Lord.

The city that marched out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which marched out a hundred shall have ten left. For thus says the L ORD to the house of Israel: Seek me and live.

Am 5:3–4

Other sacred texts about peace

The Torah, the most sacred part of the Hebrew Scriptures, illuminates God’s covenant with Abraham, a promise, that ‘I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you’ (Gen 12:2). Abraham was charged with the responsibility to teach ‘his children and his household after him to keep the way of the L ORD by doing righteousness and justice’ (Gen 18:19). After Abraham, Moses commanded his people to observe the Torah diligently, and in doing so, other nations would see them as ‘a wise and discerning people’ (Deut 4:6).

The Torah makes it clear that the Jew is not to bear a grudge, and must ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev 19:18). For early Judaism, when the Torah spoke of neighbour, it meant one’s fellow Jew. But a mitzvah (commandment) a little later in the same chapter of Leviticus indicates that to do what is right and just extends to the way one treats the foreigner:
When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Lev 19:33–34

The same chapter of Micah that calls the believer to ‘walk humbly with your God’ recalls that God had sent to the people redeemers in the persons of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. The sages refer particularly to Aaron as a model of the peacemaker: ‘He loved peace and pursued peace, and passed through the entire camp of Israel and promoted peace between a man and his wife, and between a man and his neighbour’ (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 19a).

The ultimate deliverer of peace is, of course, God, and the Hebrew Scripture is replete with God’s acts of loving kindness towards his people. Made in God’s image (Gen 1:27), the people are called upon to walk after God (Deut 13:5). The Babylonian Talmud book Sotah (14b) explains exactly what that means for the Jew:

What means the text: ‘You shall walk after the LORD your God?’ (Deut. 13:5) is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the Shekhinah; for has it not been said, ‘for the LORD, thy God is a devouring fire?’ (Deut. 4:24). But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, as he clothes the naked …

Ps 85:8–12

Some Talmudic sayings on peace

But the whole of the Law is also for the purpose of promoting peace, as it is written, Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. (Prov 3:17)

Gittin 59b

Be among the disciples of Aaron: love peace and pursue peace; love all fellow creatures, and bring them near to the Torah. (Hillel)

Pirkei Avot 1:12

The world is sustained by three things: by justice, by truth, and by peace. (Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel)

Pirkei Avot 1:18

May the One who makes peace in the heavens let peace descend on all of us and all of Israel, and let us say: Amen.

From the Birkat HaMazon, Grace After Meals

To walk after the attributes of the Holy One is essentially to fulfil the requirements of the halachah: ‘You must diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his decrees, and his statutes that he has commanded you’ (Deut 6:17). The very next verse of Deuteronomy entreats the faithful Jew to go one further: ‘Do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD.’

A person who acts in this way at all times is considered a Chasid — a saintly person.

The prophetic vision of peace in Judaism constantly returns to the theme of sin and redemption. When the people turn away from God, they will be punished. In turning to God and being righteous to their neighbour, they will be fruitful and assured of God’s salvation.

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

Ps 85:8–12

PRINCIPAL TEACHINGS ABOUT PEACE

Social justice and social order is an important principle of Jewish ethical teaching, captured in the Jewish call to tikhnun olam, ‘repair the world’.

Through tikhnun olam, Jews join in God’s divine purpose of establishing social order through the living out of the mizvot of the Torah. In modern Judaism, tikhnun olam finds expression most readily in gemilut chasadim, deeds of loving kindness, and the teaching to love one’s neighbour.

Upon three things the world stands: The Torah; the worship of God; the bestowal of loving kindness.

Simon the Just, Pirkei Avot 1.2

It needs to be borne in mind that the idea of who is one’s neighbour has changed over time. In its beginnings, Judaism contended with life in a world surrounded by foreign powers — with people whose customs, beliefs and values were different from their own. In early Judaism,
one’s neighbour was narrowly defined. The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the consequent Diaspora, however, saw the need for more regular day-to-day dealings with gentiles. The writings of the sages reflect this. The desire for good relations with non-Jews saw the teaching of gemilut chasadim extended. In the Babylonian tractate Nazir (61a), the sages seek to extend the meaning of ‘one’s fellow’. It asks, ‘Does the mention of Israel always exclude Gentiles?’ So when Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 records that Adam was ‘created single, to teach you that the destruction of any person’s life is tantamount to destroying a whole world’, it is a reference to all human beings, not just Jews.

Many Talmudic references develop the concept of gemilut chasadim into a clear charter of social justice, as is seen in many religions. What is particularly Jewish about gemilut chasadim is the call to less tangible acts, over and above the physical acts of charity: praying for the sick and the unfortunate, giving good advice, and working for reconciliation between those who have fallen out. The sages also point out that it is the right intentions of gemilut chasadim that are the measure of its worth. Apparent loving kindness given just to boost one’s own ego is of little worth at all.

The greatest hero is he who makes his enemy his friend.

Avot de-Rabbi Natan 23

There are numerous references in the Talmudic literature specifically to gemilut chasadim towards gentiles. Two important points should be noted. Firstly, unlike much of the Talmud, where the opinion of one sage is pitted against the view of another, passages concerning gemilut chasadim towards gentiles begin with ‘our sages taught’, indicating an ancient root and strong agreement about the teaching. Secondly, a frequent justification given in the text for the teaching is ‘for the sake of peace’. Talmudic teaching on gemilut chasadim is proof of the potential power of religious teaching to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of peoples of different backgrounds and beliefs.

To act ‘for the sake of peace’ is, in fact, a common epithet in Judaism. The ordinary Jewish greeting, ‘Shalom’, is a prayer for peace. One can tell a ‘white lie’ for the sake of peace (Shabbat 10b). Torah is studied for its own sake or ‘for the sake of peace’ (Yebamoth 65b).

In summary, the principal teachings about peace in Judaism are: to love one’s neighbour; to hold steadfastly to God’s commandments, which will ensure a just society and social order; and to realise that there are times when to act for the sake of peace takes priority over and above other considerations.

ACHIEVING INNER PEACE

Judaism teaches that without inner peace a person is torn; without communal peace, people are isolated; without global peace, the world is fractured and shalom remains an unrealised ideal.

As has been noted in the previous sections on teachings about peace and sacred texts, the whole of Jewish life is a struggle to adhere to the commandments of the halachah. A core commandment of the halachah is to do deeds of loving kindness – and the outcome of such living is peace and justice. In their daily lives, Jews work towards a personal peace through living out their faith.
The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

Isa 32:17

In the daily prayers recited by devout Jews, the believer asks God to grant ‘peace, goodness and blessing; life, grace and kindness; justice and mercy’.

At the end of the Amidah prayer recited at the synagogue service, the petitioner asks that ‘the One who makes peace in the heavens bring peace to us and to all of Israel (and all of humanity)’. When the Torah is returned to the Ark in the synagogue, the prayer that says ‘Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace’ is recited. In these prayers can be seen the Jewish tradition’s guidance for the individual in their search for inner peace.

No religion is an island; there is no monopoly on holiness … we share the kinship of humanity, the capacity for compassion. God’s spirit rests upon all, Jew or Gentile, man or woman, in consonance with their deeds. There is no truth without humility. There can be disagreement without disrespect. Should we hope for each other’s failure? Or should we pray for each other’s welfare? Have we not all one God? Are we not all God’s children? The hand of God is extended to all who seek God. Let our deeds reflect that we share the image of God.

From the writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972)

For the observant Jew, the search for inner peace is at one with the desire to live out the mitzvot, particularly those commandments that contribute to a world of order and justice. Inner peace is a necessary precursor to the human desire to seek peace in the world.

**REVIEW**

1. What do Jews mean by ‘inner peace’ and how do they achieve this?
2. Use this book’s index to find all the references to halachah (see ‘halachah’ as a sub-entry of ‘Judaism’). Read these references and evaluate the relationship between halachah and the search for inner peace.

**EXTENSION**

Using the Internet and/or other resources, investigate the life of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Distinguish the elements of his peace activism that relate clearly to his Jewish roots.

**CONTRIBUTING TO WORLD PEACE**

Contemporary Jewish writing on peace is often controversial. It is most powerfully influenced by the memory of the Holocaust. It is not possible to understand Jewish writing on peace without appreciating the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish life and thought.

SEE CHAPTER 14, PAGE XXX, FOR MORE ON THE HOLOCAUST.

Jewish responses to the Holocaust

On issues of war and peace, the Holocaust holds the greatest significance in modern Jewish consciousness. In remembering the Holocaust today, Jews ‘feel’ that they were there, at Auschwitz. They are transformed in time and place; this transforming element makes the Holocaust a deeply religious event for modern Jews. To exist as a Jew, to survive and prosper beyond Hitler, is to deny Hitler a posthumous victory.

Along with many others, Jewish author and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel sees the importance of preserving the memory of the Holocaust as a means of ensuring the future dignity of the Jewish people, and the way to peace.

Nothing provokes so much horror and opposition within the Jewish tradition as war. Our abhorrence of war is reflected in the paucity of our literature of warfare. After all, God created the Torah to do away with iniquity, to do away with war. Warriors fare poorly in the Talmud: Judas Maccabeus is not even mentioned; Bar-Kochba is cited, but negatively. David, a great warrior and conqueror, is not permitted to build the Temple; it is his son Solomon, a man of peace, who constructs God’s dwelling place. Of course some wars may have been necessary or inevitable, but none was ever regarded as holy. For us, a holy war is a contradiction in terms. War dehumanises, war diminishes, war debases all those who wage it. The Talmud says, *Talmidei hukhamim shemarbin shalom baolam* (It is the wise men who will bring about peace). Perhaps because wise men remember best …

Elie Wiesel in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, 11 December 1986

Some Jews argue that an emphasis on the Holocaust in Jewish thought leads to the danger of making it the foundation of Jewish life. But Jews live today despite the Holocaust, not because of it.
Jews of all persuasions acknowledge the importance of the modern State of Israel as a symbol of Jewish resilience and post-Holocaust survival. Any criticism of Israel runs the risk of being seen as disloyal to the memory of those who died in the death camps. One cannot understand the dilemmas of those agitating for peace in the Middle East without understanding these historical factors.

All Jews prescribe to the principle of pursuing peace, although there is vigorous debate about the best means of achieving this amid the controversies that surround Israel and the Middle East peace process.

The opposite of love is not hate but indifference. The opposite of faith is not arrogance but indifference; The opposite of art is not ugliness but indifference. And the opposite to both peace and war – indifference to hunger and persecution.

Elie Wiesel

Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam – Oasis of Peace

In 1972, on a barren hill off the Jerusalem highway, halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Bruno Hassar and a few families began an experiment in peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens.
There are literally dozens of Jewish organisations that have as their central objective to work for a more just, peaceful and equitable world. A key focus, naturally, is a call for peace in Israel and the Palestinian territories, but social justice organisations also pay heed to local issues. They are the expressions of Jewish individuals, banded together, who feel that faithfulness to the halachah calls them to speak out against injustice that they see in the world.

When establishing Stand Up, our aim was to create within the Australian Jewish community a recognisable organisation that could provide a collective response to important humanitarian issues in the non-Jewish world.

Dr Arnold Shmerling, Co-Founder of Stand Up

1. Prepare a discussion outline for Elie Wiesel’s idea that peace can only be achieved if all human beings are given dignity and justice.
2. Using one of the written sources other than the sacred texts in this section, explain how the source develops the understanding of peace in the Jewish tradition.
3. Construct a mind map to draw together all the material in this section.

1. Go to the weblinks for page XXX to find out more about the Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam – Oasis of Peace. Critically analyse its effectiveness as an instrument of peace.
2. Go to the weblinks for page XXX to find and read Gush Shalom’s ‘Truth Against Truth’ document. Discuss the degree to which Jewish religious views on peace can contribute to lasting peace in Israel.
3. Reflecting on your response to the previous task, how important is dialogue as a means of achieving world peace?
15.4 NO SIMPLE ANSWERS

The understanding of peace in the major religious traditions began with laying down rules for how their adherents live in peace with one another. Then the questions arose about how to (or could they) live a peaceful coexistence with those who did not ‘belong’. These questions continue to this day, and the histories of the traditions continue to colour many of their understandings of what peace means.

Any study of ‘religion and peace’ probably leads to more questions than answers. Is it possible for religion to have the answer in today’s complex world? And whose religion are we talking about? Is there a ‘clash of civilisations’? And what is civilisation? And whose ‘civilisation’ is it? These are some very difficult questions with no simple answers.

Finally, peace is woven out of rich and interconnecting relationships between people and their shared history. Where wars have been an important part of our history, whether frontier wars with Indigenous people, as in Australia, or wars with other nations, the building of peace will depend on the shared acknowledgment of that conflict and its consequences for later Australians.

Andrew Hamilton, *Eureka Street*, 23 September 2015

**FIGURE 15.4.1** Some of the participants (including Australian Sr Trish Madigan OP) at the 6th Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Semarang, Indonesia, 2012, with the theme ‘Strengthening Collaborative Communities to Promote Regional Peace and Security: Interfaith in Action’.

**RESPOND**

Explain the role ‘regional peace and security’ plays towards achieving global peace.

1. Discuss how the two religious traditions you have studied are contributing to world peace in a specific situation.
2. Does Studies of Religion have a role in contributing to peace at the local, national and regional level? Discuss.

1. Return to the mind map you constructed at the beginning of this chapter (page XXX). What would you add to it, having investigated the understanding of peace in two religious traditions?
2. Check your list of key terms, concepts and ideas from this chapter and ensure that it is clear and complete.
SECTION IV

Studies of Religion II only to answer this question.

Allow about 35 minutes for this section.

QUESTION 1 (20 MARKS)

War is born inside a person’s heart. People must construct a fortress of peace within their hearts.

With reference to the above statement, assess how TWO religious traditions guide adherents to inner peace.

QUESTION 2 (20 MARKS)

Just Peace may be comprehended as a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary, World Council of Churches, 2011

With reference to the above extract, explain how the principal teachings about peace in ONE religious tradition contribute to world peace.

QUESTION 3 (20 MARKS)

The essence of every religion is real peace and harmony.

Assess how this statement refers to the core teachings about peace in TWO religious traditions with specific reference to the sacred text in each tradition.

QUESTION 4 (20 MARKS)

... we must continue to pray for peace and to act for peace in whatever way we can. We must continue to speak for peace and to live the way of peace; to inspire others, we must continue to think of peace and know that peace is possible.

The Peace Pilgrim

With close reference to the above quotation, analyse the role of TWO religious traditions in achieving peace.