Today I am not going to talk to you about specific instances, either in the Qur’an or in the life of the Prophet that show that Islam is a peaceful religion or that there are paths to peace in Islam. My approach, rather, will be this: I am going to give you what I think is the fundamental Islamic worldview. Please understand that it is my interpretation; I do not hold others bound to it. In Islam we have the freedom of ijtihad, of interpretation. But once we understand this Islamic worldview, then we cannot but understand Islam’s views on peace and the importance, the centrality of peace to Islamic belief.

I begin with a story. In northern Virginia over a year ago a woman was inspired to invite what she called “wise women of the world”—five or six women—I do not know how she chose them, but I was included among them. They came from various religions and parts of the world, including, for example, Isabel Allende, from Latin America, who is a wonderful person. We had come together there for peace, and a movement developed from that encounter called Peace by Peace. In the discussion, which was very close-knit and under very friendly circumstances, we asked each other what are the best values to bring about peace. The western women looked at us and said, “Of course, love.” And the Muslim women, and I should say including Muslim western women, looked at them and said, “Justice.” And the other women looked at us and said, “No, you cannot mean that.” It was not really repulsion, but the word justice was not what they were looking for. And we were taken aback by their reaction, because we thought we had just put forth our highest value.

We asked them, why did they react like that? And their answer was, “If you make justice your highest value, then it will always be an eye for
an eye and a tooth for a tooth and you are going to have a toothless and
eyeless nation. And we were then horrified at that interpretation of jus­
tice. We asked, "Who told you that is what justice means?" We had a
discussion, by the end of which it had become clear that we were using
the same word with two different meanings.

So here I will present the notion of adallah, which is the Arabic and
Quranic word for justice. Once one understands this concept, one begins
to see the importance of peace in the Islamic worldview, because adallah
is a fundamental attribute of God. And as Imam W. Deen Mohammed
recently said, the most important belief for a Muslim is that of tauhid:
belief in a single God, monotheism. God's adallah is not to be understood
in the pedantic sense, where we speak about justice in the courtroom.
God's adallah permeates the universe and exhibits itself on every level.
For example, I would like to point to some statements from the Qur'an,
which tell us that God created the universe itself on the basis of adallah.

In Chapter 55, verses 7-9 the translation says:

And the firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the
balance of justice of adallah in order that you may not trans­
gress due balance. So establish weight with justice, with adal­
lah, and fall not short in the balance.

This one verse extends from universal justice of harmony and bal­
ce to the individual justice, of how one relates to others. We have to
deal with others in due balance in justice. Harmony is a very important
part of the notion of justice, as we shall find out. We will also find out
that it is not only harmony and peace, but that justice itself includes
love and mercy.

In another verse in the Qur'an it says:

We sent aforetime our messengers. But all these messengers, we
sent them with clear signs and sent down with them the book
and the balance [the balance of right and wrong, al-mizan] that
people may stand forth in justice.

The Qur'an says very clearly that if standing forth for justice means
standing against your brother who is an oppressor, you do that. It is very
important to keep the balance of right and wrong, harmony, in the uni­
verse.
If we move from the universe to society, we find that *adallah* is expressed in society in many ways. For example, tithing is a very important manifestation of God's *adallah*. We are all allowed to keep what we earn, but then we have to think of the other and of our neighbor. In another hadid [a saying of the Prophet], a neighbor is defined as someone whose scream you can hear. It is not just your next-door neighbor. One of my friends asked me, in this age of the Internet, when a scream could be heard around the world, is not the world my neighbor? And the answer is yes. The Prophet has so emphasized good relationships and good treatment of the neighbors, that one of the persons who were listening to the Prophet said, "I thought at one point he was going to tell them to leave them some of their inheritance."

In society, we have the notion of tithing, the notion of *sadaqah*—giving alms, which is different from obligatory tithing. To encourage *sadaqah* and tithing, the Qur'an God speaks of the stingy souls. We, by nature, do not like to give away that which we have. We are stingy in our souls, but God says that every *sadaqah* one gives is a loan to God. Give the loan to God and God will give it back to you ten times over. In particular, the Prophet and the Qur'an recommend special treatment for the vulnerable people in society—the orphans in particular, women, and in the days of the revelation, also the slaves. All of these people are vulnerable and so, to create harmony in society, to balance the peace in society, one must address the needs of all these people. No one is an isolated person in society.

I now move to the question of the polity. How is *adallah* expressed in a polity? Here I will begin to speak more specifically because it will take us directly to the issue of peace and the absence of peace or disharmony.

All of you know the story of Adam’s creation, which is mentioned in the Bible. God created Adam from clay and taught Adam the names of creation. But the Qur’an goes on: God summoned the angels and Iblis who had not fallen yet, and ordered them to bow to Adam. The angels, being of a perfect nature, immediately obeyed God's order and they bowed to Adam. But not Iblis; he resented; he refused. Then there is a dialogue between God and Iblis. All who are from the Abrahamic traditions know that our God is all-powerful, all knowing, all good. So God does not need to ask Iblis anything; God knows. The dialogue in the Qur’an is for our own benefit. God asks Iblis, "What prevented you from obeying me?" This is a very important question the way it is
phrased. Iblis replied, “How could I possibly bow to Adam? You created me from fire, and you created him from clay. I am better than he is.” Vanity. Arrogance. Hierarchy of creation is what prevented Iblis from bowing to Adam. By doing that, Iblis violated the supreme will of our monotheistic religion—the will of God. Monotheism means there is only one supreme will. One neither associates equal partners with God, nor associates equal wills with God. In fact, Iblis made his own will superior to that of God because he was more willing to be attached to his own hierarchy than to submit to God. And by doing that, not only did he disobey God, but he fell into the sin of shirk, the denial of God’s complete sovereignty, the opposite of monotheism. Iblis posited his will as superior to that of God by disobeying him and he was cursed. The Qur’an tells us God may forgive any sin, but not that of associating God with partners—that is the notion of shirk.

I was first awakened to the significance of this story by the late Mufti of Lebanon who was visiting the United States, who counseled me to reflect deeply on the dialogue between Iblis and God. Since then, I have also looked in older literature and found in the works of the medieval jurist, al-Ghazali, a couple of lines about it. (Al-Ghazali speaks in very measured terms.) He said to the Muslims: If you have been reading the story as if it is something that has to do with the origins of creation—something that happened in the past—then you are not fully understanding the significance of the story of Iblis. He said that this is a story about today, as well. It is the story of a rich person who thinks he is better than a poor person. It is the story of a white person who thinks he is better than a black or a red person. And it is the story of a free person who thinks he is better than a slave. And I would like to add to that that it’s the story of a man who thinks he’s better than a woman. Because all of these are Iblisi hierarchies. Because in Islam we only submit to one will: the will of God. We all stand equal before God, and when we create hierarchies we begin to fall into vanity, arrogance, conflict and disharmony. In short, we are moving away from justice; we are moving away from peace.

What I have described for you is the basics of what I call satanic logic. Satanic logic is when in a polity, someone says, “I am better than you and I am going to tell you what you are going to do.” Tyranny is satanic logic. Tyranny is moving away from the Islamic concepts of baya and sura; baa being the right of the people in a polity to choose their own leader, the necessity of consent of the people for a state to be just
in the view of Muslims. *Sura* means consultation, and it was revealed to
the Prophet as an order to engage in consultation with the people, even
though he is the Prophet. The *Qur'an* says this is better for their hearts.
In Medina, the very first Muslim city-state, this concept of *sura* was put
into action. Although he was very well received and the women and the
children were singing for him, he did not say: “I am the prophet; I will
lead your state.” To the contrary, people came to the Prophet and they
said, “We give you our *baya*; we want you to be our leader.” They gave
him their vote.

And guess who was the first to give the Prophet their vote. According to the *Qur'an*, a delegation of Arab women came to the
Prophet and said, “We give you our *baya*.” And the Prophet answered
them. He did not say, “Women, go home.” He said, “Let’s talk about the
basis of the *baya*.” He then did this with the men as well. *Sura* is essen­
tial because the consent of the people is based not on individuals, but
on principles: principles that were later articulated in the Charter of
Medina itself. Therefore, when one chooses a leader, you choose him on
the basis of a certain set of principles disclosed. Disclosure becomes very
important to ensure that it is informed *baya*, informed consent.

The *Qur'an* says: “There is no coercion in religion.” In Medina
there were Muslims and there were Jews, and the question was: if you
establish an Islamic state in the zenith of the power of the Prophet and
the power of the Muslims in Medina, what happens to non-Muslims—
and to the Jews in particular? The Charter of Medina basically says, “To
each his own.”

Each group is to be governed by its own religion. No one imposes
anything on another, but they are one people. They stand together.
They are entitled, the Charter says, to each other’s support and succor
so long as they are together—that is, they are still one *ummah*. The
Charter of Medina articulates a dynamic pluralism, which is proud of
religion as opposed to a pluralism that waters down and stamps out reli­
gion. In summary, the question of justice, freedom of thought, and the
ability to express oneself on a secular and a religious basis are part and
parcel of the notion of *adallah*, of the notion of justice in *Qur'an*. That
is not only the Quranic point of view, but also the prophetic message,
to which I shall now turn.

In the Journal of Law and Religion, which it so happens was pub­
lished right after September 11, 2001, there is an article by a kindred
spirit of mine—someone I respect a great deal, named Dr. Jawdat Said,
from Syria. His article is innocuously entitled, “Law, Religion and the Prophetic Method of Social Change.” In this article he describes the prophetic method, which I shall explain here. We know the Iblisi method of coercion, vanity, arrogance and tyranny. What is the method of the prophets? Dr. Said points out that all the prophets came with the same message, from Abraham to Moses to Jesus to Mohammed and many others that I have not named. They all represent a chain of prophecy that bears the same ideas—all of which humans have found ways to distort over time.

So what is the prophetic method? It is not the method of Cain and Abel. That is the Iblisi logic. The prophetic logic is based on the fact that relations among people are tenable and important, that, in fact, there are ways of communicating that are peaceful and will result in change. The Qur'an is replete with examples of this. In one verse: “A good word is like a goodly tree. It has its roots deep in earth and its branches reach out to the heaven. It bears fruit every single time.” It says that however people treat you, treat them with what is better. If you use the good word with people, then suddenly someone you thought was your fiercest enemy becomes your close friend. That is the way to change people—not through coercion.

What happens when the coercion is circumvented in this way? What do people do? How much is left of the arrogance and the vanity of the tyrants once their power is taken away? The poor people, like Jesus and Mohammed who had no real power, may act freely. Take the example of Moses, who spoke to the Pharaoh with no power to challenge him: his power continues to this day. True power is the power in the service of God, in the service of adallah.

All people of the book are asked to come to a word of equity. Which book? The Torah, the Bible, the Qur'an, these are the revealed books. And there are some other religions that Muslims have also included in this group. We must come together to a word of equity, with fair terms between us; the following verse from the Qur'an illustrates this point. (Please note that in my translations of the Qur'an, there is paraphrasing because the Arabic is the original and it must be consulted; but I paraphrase to make the intention of the verse clearer.)

Say all people of the book, come to a word of equity between us and you that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we take not each other as deities other
than God, and if they then turn back, say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims."

That is all we say. We call each other to a word of equity and not to associate partners with God, not to take each other as deities—which we often do. Not only each other, but we also take things in our society as deities. The dollar, for example, is one of the deities. The root of all evil is that we are not monotheistic in the real sense of religion, in the real sense of belief. We follow other powers. We follow Caesar; we do not submit to God. We have moved away from ta'ahid; we have moved away from the prophetic message.

Here I return to something Imam W. Deen Mohammed of Chicago has mentioned as fundamental in Islam. This is a principle repeated in many ways throughout the Qur'an (if a principle is repetitive, then it is fundamental). The principle says that God created us all of the same spirit or soul. And God made from the soul its mate. So we are now male and female. And then, the verses go in different ways. In one verse it says: "And God put affection, mercy and tranquility between us, male and female." That is the proper relationship: not a power struggle, but one of affection, mercy and harmony and peace at home. But in another instance the verse goes on to say, "God created us from the same spirit into male and female, and of them God created us into nations and tribes."

I always ask my students, could not God have made it easier on us? Could not God have created us all to be of the same sex, the same ethnicity? And then we would not have to fight about gender, about which color is better, which nationality, which ethnicity—we would all be the same. So why did God create us so varied? But the Qur'an does tell us why: "We created you of the same soul into male and female and of them we made nations and tribes so that you would come to know each other, enjoy each other's company." We are created not to kill each other, not to fight each other, and not to rank each other the way Iblis did by thinking he was better than others. The Qur'an goes on to say that the most honored in the sight of God are those who are most righteous. Not the Muslims, not the Christians, not the Jews, not the men, not the women, not the Arabs, not the Americans, but simply the ones who are most righteous. That means any one of us could be, if we are willing to pay the price of being righteous, and these days it is a very high price to pay.
Azizah Al-Hibri

This is the Islamic worldview—the view of Islam, of nations, of tribes, of relationships within the polity. It is based on consent, the word of equity, getting to know each other, and communicating; we do this so that we will have al-mizan, the balance of peace and harmony that makes the just world, in the adallah sense of justice that God has created. That is what we are searching for. And whatever evil we see in the world, if I may dare say, is the result of our indulging in Iblisi logic, satanic logic. Because today we know that very often religion has become the tool of politics. It has become the very Iblisi tool used to put down people and to raise others. And so we need to face our own demons. We need to go back into our own little corners and ask ourselves, whom are we going to follow? Are we truly people of God or are we looking for advantage? The role model for me—aside from the first role model for every Muslim, the prophet Mohammed—is Moses. I have a deep relationship to Moses who is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an often specifically as an immigrant. It is very important to read and learn from the story of Moses, because we are today in a world of Pharaohs, and we have to stand up and speak truth to power. It is a tremendous idea, it is extremely difficult and I continue every day trying to collect my courage to live up to the prophetic messages of Moses, of Jesus, of Mohammed.

I will end my discussion about adallah, harmony and peace in the world, with a paragraph from the article by Jawdat Said mentioned above. Adallah must be sought through the collaboration of the religions, not enmity between them. Said says,

Now is the time for the world to understand their message. The prophets did not come to compete in violent combat. They came to compete in goodness, in making a peaceful, global society in which all humans are equal under the law. The path of monotheism, of peace, is the path toward accomplishing the will of God and the dream of the prophets. Those closest to the Lord are those who serve the people, “just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”