

Freedom of Religion, Tolerance, and harmony with other people

As taught by Islam

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Features of this interpretation

- Presenting Islam as tolerant, peaceful, harmonious towards others, etc. must be done
 - **not** because it suits the situation that we face
 - **not** for opportunistic reasons or expediency
 - **not** inconsistently (being tolerant only when you like)
 - **not** superficially (e.g., just saying Islam means ‘peace’).

Principles rooted in Islam

- This tolerant interpretation must be:
 - Based on **permanent** principles of Islam, **substantiated** by the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's example.
- The Extremist ideology cannot be countered by saying it is against modern or Western values. Much more effective to show that it is against the teachings of Islam.

Other requirements

- Those who support a tolerant interpretation must apply it **consistently everywhere**. When they present this tolerant picture in America and Europe, they must also call for the same to be applied in the Muslim world.
- The tolerant interpretation must be able to refute and defeat the arguments used by the critics of Islam and the Muslim extremists to portray Islam as intolerant and violent.

What our leader declared in 1929

- “The causes of the early Islamic wars have been greatly misunderstood in the classical Islamic history books. These were compiled when the rule of Islam had been established, and the mentality of the Muslims had become that of ruling nations who do not consider it wrong to treat other nations unjustly. Due to this mentality, such stories [i.e., portraying Islam as violent, intolerant] found their way into Islamic history books.” — Maulana Muhammad Ali

... Continued

- “It seems to please us to say that we have such love for our Prophet that we are prepared to kill anyone who utters abuse against him. But I believe that there are many such *deeply-entrenched notions* among Muslims for which we need to *read the Quran again*. Sometimes we need to leave the later explanations of the Quran and *read the Quran itself*. Just think: What impression are we giving to others by holding such a belief?”

1. Freedom of Religion

- In Islam there is:
 - Complete freedom of religion and belief for every human being,
 - and no punishment, to be applied by the state or any person, to someone who leaves the religion of Islam.

The Quran quoted

- “There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error.” — 2:256

- “The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe and let him who please disbelieve.”
— 18:29

No Muslim can compel anyone

- The duty of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and, following him, the duty of every Muslim, is only to *deliver* the message of truth:
 - “...if they turn back, your duty (O Prophet) is *only to deliver* the message.” — 3:20
 - “Your duty (O Prophet) is *only the delivery* of the message, and Ours (God’s) is to call (people) to account.” — 13:40
 - “And you (O Prophet) *are not one to compel them*. So remind by means of the Quran him who fears My warning.” — 50:45

Diversity of belief recognised

- “And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. *Will you then force people* till they are believers?” — 10:99
- It is how God has created mankind, that there are different belief systems in the world. No man or group can impose uniformity of belief.

Diversity of belief

– “... for everyone of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you (i.e., all mankind) one religious community, but He wishes to try you in what He has given you. *So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah you will all return*, and then He will inform you about your differences (i.e., as to who was right or wrong).” — 5:48

- It is *in the natural order of things* that people belong to different religions.
- As all religions preach the doing of good, their followers should try *to outdo each other in virtuous deeds*. The differences in doctrine will always remain.

Apostasy (leaving Islam)

- Several times the Quran speaks of people going back to unbelief after believing in Islam, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. For example:
 - “O you who believe, should anyone of you turn back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him.” — 5:54

Apostasy

- In one place the Quran refers to the war being made upon Muslims by their opponents and says:
 - “They will not cease fighting you until *they turn you back from your religion, if they can*. And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he *dies* while an unbeliever — these it is whose works go for nothing in this world and the Hereafter.” — 2:217

Apostasy

- This verse clearly speaks of a person as continuing to live after turning away from the religion of Islam until he dies while still an unbeliever.
- This verse also shows that force was being used *against Muslims* by their enemies to make them leave Islam, rather than being used by Muslims to keep the followers of Islam within its fold.

2. Response to abuse and ridicule

- Any criticism of Islam must be answered by means of *words and speech only*. The Quran teaches that when Muslims feel offended by people who abuse and ridicule Islam, they should deal with *their hurt feelings* by:
 - remaining patient under provocation,
 - ignoring the abuse,
 - forgiving the ignorant.

The Quran quoted

- “You will certainly hear *much abuse* from the followers of previous books and from the idol-worshipping people. And *if you are patient* and keep your duty — this is surely a matter of great resolution.” — 3:186
- “And *bear patiently* what they say and forsake them with a becoming withdrawal.” — 73:10
- “*Bear patiently* what they say.” — 20:130 and 50:39

The Quran quoted

- “*disregard* their hurtful talk.” — 33:48
- “When you hear Allah’s messages disbelieved in and mocked at, *do not sit with them* until they enter into some other discourse.” — 4:140; see also 6:68.

Withdrawing from company of abusers

- The last quotation above shows that when Islam is being *mocked and derided*, as distinct from being only criticised, a Muslim is required to do no more than to withdraw from such a company.
- Even that withdrawal is temporary, while the mocking continues.
- The Muslim may re-join the same company when the conversation has changed to some other subject!

Teachings of the Prophet

- “The Muslim who *mixes with the people and bears patiently their hurtful words*, is better than the one who does not mix with people and does not show patience in response to their abuse.”
- “No one and no thing has greater patience than Allah upon hearing hurtful words.”

Actions of the Prophet

- An opponent of the Prophet used to make speeches against him. He was captured in a battle. A Muslim suggested pulling out his teeth as punishment. The Prophet said:
 - “*Certainly not.* I will not mutilate anyone, for God would mutilate me even though I am His Prophet.”

Actions of the Prophet

- A man made an accusation against the Prophet to his face. A Muslim was outraged and asked permission to kill him. The Prophet refused. The Muslim said: That man is only a Muslim for show and is not a true Muslim at heart. The Prophet replied:
 - “God has not commanded me to look inside people’s hearts” to find out what is in there.

The Quran on Anger

- Muslims are taught to restrain and control their anger. The Quran describes Muslims as:
 - “those who *restrain their anger and pardon people*” — 3:134.
 - “whenever they are angry they forgive” — 42:37

The Prophet on Anger

- The Prophet said:
 - “The strong man is not the one who can fight well but the strong man is one who can control himself when he is enraged.”
 - “A judge should not judge between two persons while he is in an angry mood.”
 - “He who withholds his anger, Allah will withhold His punishment from him on the Day of Judgment.”

3. War

- Islam allowed war for establishing freedom of religion **of all faiths** and protection of **all places of worship**:
 - “Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. ... And if Allah did not repel some people by others, then *cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques* in which Allah’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down.” — 22:39–40

Defensive war and peace

- Muslims are only allowed to wage war in their self-defence and not for aggression:
 - “And fight in the way of Allah *against those who fight against you* but do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not love the aggressors.
- Offer of peace by the enemy must be accepted:
 - “And if they incline to peace, then you must incline to it, and trust in Allah. ... And if they intend to deceive you, then surely Allah is sufficient for you.” — 8:61–62

Last word on war

- The above teachings were in force till the end of the Prophet's life. The last word on this subject was:
 - “So as long as they are true to you [i.e. agreements made with you], be true to them. Surely Allah loves those who keep their duty.” — 9:7
 - “Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, *and they attacked you first?*” — 9: 13

4. Jihad

- The word *jihad* does not primarily mean war but *striving* to improve oneself morally and spiritually or striving to propagate the message of Islam. The Quran uses the word *jihad* as follows:

Jihad in the Quran

- “And those who *strive hard* for Us, We shall certainly guide them in Our ways. And Allah is surely with the doers of good.” — 29:69
- In this verse the word translated as “strive hard” is the act of doing *jihad* in the original Arabic. The meaning is clearly that of striving hard to bring about your moral and spiritual improvement.

Jihad *by* the Quran

- “So do not obey the disbelievers, and *strive* against them a mighty *striving* with it (i.e. with the Quran).” — 25:52
- The mighty or great striving, the great *jihad* (*jihad kabir* in Arabic) mentioned here, is the mission of the Prophet Muhammad to spread the truth *with the Quran*, which is what the words “*with it*” refer to. This is also the duty of all Muslims as their great *jihad*.

Jihad by non-Muslims *against* Islam!

- In the Quran the word *jihad* is used even for the efforts of *opponents of Islam* to turn Muslims away from Islam!
 - “And We have enjoined on man goodness to his parents. But if *they strive* with you to ascribe partners to Me [e.g., idols], of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them.” — 29:8 and see also 31:15
 - The Arabic for “strive” here is *jihad*.

Jihad according to the Prophet

- “The most excellent *jihad* is *to say a word of truth* before an unjust ruler.”
- “The most excellent *jihad* is the properly-performed *Hajj* (Pilgrimage).”
- “A man came to the Prophet and asked his permission for *jihad*. He asked: Are your parents alive? The man said, Yes. He said: *Then do jihad in their way.*”

Jihad in the way of parents means to serve them.

Two reasons for not undertaking Jihad of fighting

- Sixty years after the Prophet's death, one of his Companions, Ibn Umar, was asked by one group of Muslims to join a *jihad* of fighting against the Muslim government of the time. He refused and said:

Two reasons for not fighting jihad

- “Islam is based on five things: Belief in God and His messenger, five prayers, fasting in Ramadan, giving charity, and the Pilgrimage.”
- “We fought in the Prophet’s time because Muslims were few and anyone who accepted Islam was persecuted — they would kill him or punish him. But then the followers of Islam multiplied in number, and there was no mischief left.”

5. Muslims living with others

- The teachings of Islam provide a three-fold basis, namely,
 - philosophical,
 - legal, and
 - moral,

for Muslims to live peaceably with non-Muslims, whether it is Muslim individuals and communities living in non-Muslim countries, or Muslim states existing in the world community of countries.

5.1: Philosophical basis

- Allah is described at the opening of the Quran as:
 - “Lord of the worlds”
i.e., the Sustainer and Provider of *all* nations, *not* of Muslims only.
- And at the end of the Quran, Allah is called:
 - “the Lord of *mankind*, the king of *mankind*, the god of *mankind*.”
 - Mankind is all human beings.

Quran addresses all mankind

- Directly addressing all mankind, the Quran tells them:
 - “O human beings, serve your Lord *Who created you and those before you*, so that you may guard against evil, Who made the earth a resting-place for you and the heaven a structure, and sends down rain from the clouds then brings forth with it fruits for your sustenance.” — 2:21–22

Explanation

- This verse says that all human beings are equally the creation of God, and so were also their ancestors, and they share the same living space, atmosphere and resources.
- Their service is due to this Creator, and not due by one nation to another.

Diversity

- “And of His (God’s) signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and *the diversity of your tongues and colours*. Surely there are signs in this for those who have knowledge.” — 30:22
- “*O mankind*, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families *that you may have knowledge of one another*. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you.” — 49:13

Differences

- These verses indicate that the natural differences of nations and peoples are not indicators of their superiority or inferiority in relation to one another, but are phenomena that must be studied to increase human knowledge and understanding.

Attitude towards others

- According to the Quran, there need be no dispute between religions. Muslims must say to others:
 - “Allah is *our Lord and your Lord*. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is *no contention* between us and you. Allah will gather us together, and to Him is the eventual coming.”
 - 42:15

5.2: Legal basis

- The basis within the law of Islam upon which Muslims can live in peace and harmony among other peoples is provided by the following injunction:
 - “O you who believe, fulfil the *obligations*.” — 5:1

The word translated as “obligations” includes all covenants, contracts, agreements, treaties etc.

Covenant with others

- Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, where they are free to pray, to go to mosques and to call themselves Muslims, are *in a covenant with the rulers to obey the law of the land*.
 - The Quran stresses fulfilment of covenants:
 - “Righteous is one who believes in Allah ... and the fulfillers of their covenant when they make a covenant” — 2:177
 - “Fulfil the covenant; surely (the fulfilment of) the covenant will be enquired into (by God)” — 17:34

Prophet Joseph serves non-believing state

- According to Chapter 12 of the Quran, the prophet Joseph was preaching and practising the monotheistic religion of his forefather, Abraham, while living in Egypt under a Pharaoh and a government which did not follow his religion.
- He was appointed the treasurer of the state by the king. He was “dignified and trusted” by the rulers and was a “good keeper” of the treasury (12:54–55).

Lesson in Joseph's story

- The lesson taught in the story of Joseph in the Quran is that a true Muslim, indeed one who also preaches Islam, may also be *a faithful servant of a non-Muslim state*:
 - contributing loyally to both its moral and economic well-being
 - involving himself in the state organisation at the highest level
 - scrupulously observing its laws.

5.3: Moral basis

- The basis provided by the moral teachings of Islam for Muslims to live in peace, harmony and friendship with non-Muslims is evident from the following verse which lists *the basic duties of a Muslim*:

“Be good to the alien neighbour”

- “And serve Allah, and ascribe no partner to Him, and be good to the parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbour of (your) kin *and the alien neighbour*, and the companion in a journey and the traveller and those under your care and control.” — 4:36

The “alien neighbour” (as opposed to neighbour of kin) is of another race, country or religion.

The “alien” neighbour is like you

- Among those to whom we must be good, the “alien neighbour” is placed in the same list as one’s parents, relations and the neighbour of one’s own people.
- “Being good” towards someone is a positive action, over and above simply not harming them.

Prophet Muhammad on neighbours

- “The Prophet said: *‘By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!’* It was said: ‘Who is that, O Messenger of Allah?’ He said: *‘That person whose neighbour is not safe from his evil.’*”
- “Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should honour his neighbour.”

Incidents illustrating behaviour towards others

- “A funeral procession passed in front of the Prophet and he stood up [in respect]. When he was told that it was the coffin of a Jew, he said, *‘Is it not a human soul?’*”

Settling a religious dispute

- A Muslim and a Jew once had a quarrel about *who was the most superior human being of all time*: Moses or Muhammad? The Muslim slapped the Jew for saying it was Moses. The Jew took the case to the Prophet Muhammad.
- When the Holy Prophet heard from the Muslim what had happened, he told him:
 - “Don’t give me superiority over Moses.”

Fellow travellers

- Muslims are required to be good to:
 - “*the companion in a journey and the traveller*” —
4:36
- Therefore, for a Muslim even to harm his fellow passengers or other travellers in the least, let alone try to kill them, is contrary to the very fundamentals of Islam and a clear violation of its basic principles.

All human beings are neighbours, and in a journey together

- In terms of the above verse (4:36), *people of other religions are neighbours of Muslims*, dwelling on the same earth.
- They are also the Muslims' "companions in a journey":
 - the journey of the earth in space
 - the journey of life.

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