



RELIGIOUS ACCEPTANCE AND HARMONY IN ISLAM

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Islam preaches total social harmony which includes religious harmony that the whole world needs. Despite our age of information, geographical unification of countries and internationalisation of learning and economics, the world badly requires a strong movement to dispel aggression in the name of race and creed. Islam provides an excellent model implemented by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and proved of its practicality.

What the world needs today-perhaps more than anything else- is an acceptable formula for the attainment of religious harmony. This being currently one of the most important topics under discussion, I shall attempt to present here, in brief, the Islamic viewpoint.

Let us begin with a verse of the Qur'an which reads:

He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the world to come he will be one of the lost (3:85).

In the opinion of certain interpreters, this verse implies that salvation according to Islam is destined exclusively for Muslims. Islam thus appears to uphold the superiority of the Muslim community. But this is an out-of-context interpretation and is certainly not correct

Let us take another verse of the Qur'an which serves as an explanation of the above-quoted verse. It states that:

Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabeans-whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right-shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret (2:62).

This verse rues out the concept of community superiority for any given group: even Muslims have been bracketed here along with other religious groups. The content of this

verse makes it very clear that salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the individual's own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No man or woman can earn his or her salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group. Salvation will be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Allah epitomises religious tolerance in Qur'an in a nutshell: "*Lankum deenukunm wa liya deen- Your religion is for you and my religion for me (109:6)*". This need to be adopted worldwide as a slogan. There need to be no restraints on preaching faith by appealing to reason. The Holy Qur'an says: "*Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way*" (16:125).

Coercion is rejected by Islam. Al Qur'an says: "*La ilkrahafiddeen-There is no compulsion in religion*" (2:256) Says Holy Qur'an: "*Would you compel people that they should become believers?*" (10:99 & 13:40). For belief (iman) is something concerned with intellect and soul and not with physical body. On compulsion one may outwardly declare belief but the heart may reject it; in fact compulsion tends to prejudice the heart permanently even against plainest of truths, such as Allah and his Messenger (PBHU) had given expounded. Besides, the accountability for unbelief (Kufr) is on the unbeliever, not on Muslims-guarantees Allah (6:108)

Allah ordained religious freedom and tolerance and His Prophet (PBHU) implemented and preached it. Allah tells believers: "*Do not insult what they call gods that are other than Allah*". Prophet (PBUH) promised the Christians of Najran not to harm their crosses or idols. He even allowed Christian delegates from Najran to pray in his mosque at Al Madina.

Beyond tolerance, Islam supports harmony with other religions. In the edict he issued in Hijri5, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave full protection to Christians of conquered territories in all religious, spiritual, social, cultural, economic and legal matters; he had warned that anyone who went against the provisions was an accursed offender on Islam. Non-Muslim citizens were treated as equals of Muslims. In fact it was incumbent on the Governments to protect their life and property so much so that they were exempt from military service.

An English translation of a document is presented below for reference to understand the Prophet's (PBUH) magnanimity & Tolerance towards communal harmony and safety and security of other faiths.

“This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them. Verily I, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them.”

No compulsion is to be on them.

Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries no one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslim houses.

Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate.

No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. Muslims are to fight for them.

If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval.

She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray.

Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the last day (end of the world).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) set wonderful examples for us to follow. He stood up when funeral procession of a Jew passed. When asked by companions why he stood up for a Jew's funeral? Prophet (PBUH) replied, all human are equal in nature and it is our duty to pay respect to the departed soul.

Zayd, Jewish slave boy was presented to Prophet (PBUH). He treated him as if he was his son and set him free. Zayd refused to join his parents and remained with the Prophet (PBUH) and converted to Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) proposed and got him married to one of his close relatives, a free women to Zayd.

From the life of Prophet it is understood that he is to attend feast of people of other faiths, visit their sick and welcome the delegation and honour them thus setting wonderful example to the world community, The Muslims of that also followed the good example of Holy Prophet (PBUH) and they associated with non-Muslims in peace and concord and feeling of agreement. Christians and Jews neighbour the Muslims and exchanged the

visits and gifts with them and they separated only in the places of worship. One of the children of Ibn Abbas a reputed companion of Prophet once slaughtered a male sheep. His father told him not to forget giving some of its flesh to the neighbour who was a Jew and repeated his request until son asked ‘‘How often ou request this?’’ The father replied The Prophet makes a special recommendation of neighbours that one fears they might claim the right to inherit. Through Ibn Abbas’s neighbour was a Jew, he made it a point to take of him as he did to his other neighbours thus to prove Islam’s refusal of differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Caliphas of Islamic ruling also cited a certain example for the significance of the free exercise of religious belief. Citing an example Umar Ibn Hattab, the second Calipha of Islamic ruling, who one made his persons at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem when it was time for prayer. He did not pray there, lest people should take the place as a mosque and offend the Christians of Jerusalem.

Another important aspect of Islam is that it does not advocate belief in the many-ness years of reality; on the contrary, it stresses reality is one, not many. That is why, in describing monotheism, the Qur’an states:

That is God, your true Lord. What is the besides the truth, but error? How then can you turn away? (10:32)

This verse makes it clear that monotheism (i.e. belief in one Lord being the creator, Sustainer and object of worship) is the only truth. All other paths lead one way away from, rather than towards, the truth. The fact that certain religious thinkers believe in the many-ness of reality is of no concern to Islam. With oneness and its ideal, it cannot accept many-ness even as a hypothesis.

Both of the above points-(a) the oneness of Absolute Reality, and (b)

Prerogative of the true believer in this oneness- form a major part of Islamic ideal. Just being born into a certain group or community or associating oneself with others of similar persuasion does not entitle one to salvation, be one a Muslim or a Non-Muslim.

In general Islam put a people on equal status in common rights. A Jew once made a complaint against Ali Ibn Abuthalib (who is fondly and respectfully called as Abu Hassan by the companions) to Calipha Umar (May Allah and his Holy Prophet be pleased with him). Ali (May Allah and his Prophet be pleased with Him) was Prophets cousin and son-in-law and nominee for Caliphate. When Ali stood in the presence of Umar, the latter

looked at him and said “Stand up Abu Hassan, and sit in front of your opponent”. Ali did what he was told, with signs of agitation and dissatisfaction on his face. After the settlement of the dispute the Caliph Umar asked “Tell me respected Ali, did you find it loathsome to sit in front of your opponent” Ali immediately replied “No, but I didn’t like you not treating us on equal terms. When you called me as Abu Hassan”. What Ali meant was that Abu Hassan the nick name expressed was commendation of love and respect for the one addressed which was not necessary during settlement of dispute and Judgement given by Caliph.

From the above it is understood almighty and his Holy Prophet (PBUH) have repeatedly observed and declared to the masses that all the people of the world of descendants of single soul of Adam regardless of their present faiths. Their God is only One- Almighty. Their posterity will discover the original true path of Islam and join it in waves. Therefore we shall not keep Islam to ourselves but should convey the Right Beliefs in a beautiful manner as God and his Prophet (PBUH) commanded. It has been preaching and practising true religious harmony and it even helped to settle disputes among followers of other religions. Acceptance and Communal harmony are integral and inseparable parts of Islam. The foundation of Islam is based upon the dignity of the human beings. The Quran honours mankind as a vicegerent on earth and all are equal in creation.

References:

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