

ISLAM AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF TOLERANCE, JUSTICE, AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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ABSTRACT

Islam is not religion; it is a complete way of life, which respects the mutual rights and justice in all human interactions. Islam believes in dialogue between religions, grounded in reason and evidence, open to effective understanding and unity instead of conf... One of the greatest Islamic teachings is the principle of tolerance. Specifically, that you show respect and kindness to those who, unlike you, do not believe by faith. The life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ offers clear manifestations of compassion, an ethical conduct, mercy and justice towards the Muslims and non-Muslims. So much of Islam's social relevance today is how it promotes shared human values across religions. The teaching of the Prophet ﷺ has always been to bring communities together based on their common ethical foundation, and to divide is never a wise thing to do. This is true, for instance, in the Constitution of Medina when peace and respect for one another, based on all faith background, were the things prioritised. Moreover, because Islam gives us solutions for contemporary themes like poverty, injustice, ignorance, the ethical standards set in the Qur'an and Hadith are our guide to encouraging the resolution of such social affairs. To its followers, Islam also becomes a final revelation to humanity; and it strives them to spread this message of peace, justice and reconciliation on the whole globe. It is more of a mission of active social reform based on ethical behaviour, education and compassionate leadership, over and above intellectual engagement. Muslim societies should lead the way in global peace and cooperation by 1st embracing these principles towards a just, fair and harmonious world for all of mankind.

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INTRODUCTION

Islam is a belief that practises for global peace, it does dialogue with every human being according to reason and evidence. Islam does not encourages making an atmosphere of conflict and hostility. It is based on shared values among religions and constitutes groundwork for unity also upholds diversities. Reconciliation is all about inviting others to together discover shared truths in a non-conflicting nor provocative way. Such a strategic approach, which has been the groundwork of the spread of Islam, has made possible meaningful dialogue, with Islam to become better understood. This is how you reach the final goal of the establishment of dominance of the truth using peaceful means. Today, if we accept the guidance of Prophethood the more we will be able to eradicate the darkness of societal challenges. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ left us with solutions to all these issues from prejudice and ignorance to poverty and oppression. His method outlines a full framework that works to resolve these problems. The mission of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is timeless and universal, thereby making him the Seal of the Prophets. Muslims worldwide must realize and carry on with his mission, practically and intellectually. With this pooled effort, his light shall shed the top of every part of society. According to Islam, whoever has respect for humanity, has the right to Islam, and by Islam, such respect

anyone owe to the entire humanity irrespective of their religion or race. (Schubel, 2023) Sadly, from within the sects there was internal conflict and endless argument and arguing over things that have nothing to do with what it is to be a Muslim in the first place (Moussa,2000), so the broad mindedness and inclusiveness of Islam has been obscured within the minds of those ordinary Muslims who deserve it. The false propaganda of those who have seed with us that Islam is ones who are only respectful of their own and its followers and that the rest are not good enough. It argues that Islam is not religious tolerant and open and pushes Muslims to isolate themselves, to be individualist and to eschew engage with the joys and pains of non-Muslims, even going so far as to describe acts of benevolence as disallowed. And this misconception is based either on profound misunderstanding or deliberate dishonesty. Nevertheless, we must state clearly that Islam does not authorize what modern materialistic civilizations have endorsed, namely, such a non-curbed peace and freedom one can seek for whatever he or she wishes. Such an approach has brought a great moral decay and chaos. An adoption of foreign customs in the guise of inter faith harmony or an atmosphere of immodesty and obscenity only benefit under the guise of interfaith harmony leads to societal disintegration and societal destruction.

Morality is something we all share and one common value among all religions. (Wainwright, 2013) All faiths recognise principles such as truthfulness, integrity, chastity, trustworthiness, mutual love, respect for relationships, empathy, and prohibiting prejudice and oppression of others. These values are universally condemned and any behaviour that is not in keeping with these values is universally condemned. Islam has its own methodology and framework in seeking to bring ethical behaviour in the society. Islam lets morality be helped but within its set principles. By permitting followers of all the religions to live according to their personal laws in their private lives and leaving them free at the same time with its final and comprehensive system, it is. Such a balanced approach isn't just indicative of the extent of Islamic teachings or its zeal for harmony, justice and the ethical upliftment of people but also of the total commitment of Islam.

Islam is a universal advocate of global peace. It engages with everyone on the basis of reason and evidence, even challenging its opponents to present their proofs, as highlighted in the divine command:

"Say, 'Bring forth your proof if you are truthful.'" (Quran, 2:111)

This foundational principle establishes Islam as a faith that invites dialogue grounded in truth, knowledge, and reasoning. It seeks to create an atmosphere of peace and constructive dialogue, as opposed to conflict and hostility. The blessed life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exemplifies the harmonious integration of truth, steadfastness, and high moral character with a positive and reconciliatory approach, all aimed at the dominance of divine guidance.

The challenges faced by the world at large, and specifically by our nation, can be addressed by the teachings and example set by the Prophet ﷺ. His life is multi-dimensional, and his universal model provides solutions to contemporary issues by laying down the foundational principles needed for their resolution. The human capacity for reconciliation can pave the way to solving even the most complex problems. With sincerity, determination, and effort, obstacles can be overcome, no matter how insurmountable they may seem.

Today, the world is ensnared by moral decay and a decline in character and conduct. Unless this moral downfall is addressed, achieving peace and tranquillity—whether within homes or across nations—will remain a distant dream. As the Prophet ﷺ stated:

"The most complete in faith among the believers is the one with the best character." (Al-Shaybani, 1991)

This prophetic wisdom underscores that true faith is inseparable from noble character, and reclaiming moral excellence is the cornerstone of achieving a harmonious society and world.

It can be inferred that the elevation of faith is inherently tied to the elevation of moral character. To encourage the development of good character and conduct, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized this principle in another way, saying:

"There is nothing heavier on the scale than good character. Indeed, a believer, through good character, attains the rank of those who fast and pray regularly." (Al-Sajistani, 2015)

In today's world, if we base our dialogues and interactions on the foundation of good character, many of the world's major problems can be resolved. Similarly, understanding and wisdom are divine gifts. Those blessed with such virtues become sources of goodness and benefit in society. Delving into the

depths of complex issues and resolving them with intelligence is a divine favor. The Prophet ﷺ said:

"The greatness of a person lies in their piety, their dignity lies in their intellect, and their Honor lies in their good character."

(Abu Muhammad, n.d.)

This profound approach to valuing intellect and wisdom was evident when the Prophet ﷺ acknowledged and encouraged a companion for displaying wisdom. He said to the companion:

"Indeed, you have two qualities that Allah loves: forbearance and patience." (Al-Qushayri, 1956)

With the use of such wisdom and insight, many differences can be resolved in the modern era, fostering positive and dialogue-oriented minds in society. Often, disagreements are mere misunderstandings that can be reconciled through prioritization or harmonization, thereby preventing discord and promoting unity.

Whether it is the universal system of existence or the moral and practical reform of human beings, everything rests on the foundation of justice. Without justice, the world becomes a domain of oppression and tyranny. The Qur'an emphasizes that the path to righteousness is through justice:

"Be just; that is closer to righteousness."

(Quran, 5: 8)

The life of the Prophet ﷺ was a perfect reflection of absolute justice. To promote justice, it is vital to cultivate a culture of reconciliation and mutual understanding. The less rights are violated, the stronger the atmosphere of justice becomes. The Prophet ﷺ stated:

"Forgive each other for offenses that do not reach the level of legal punishment, but if such an offense reaches me, I will enforce the prescribed penalty." (Al-Sunan Abi Dawood, 2008)

In this subtle guidance, the Prophet ﷺ beautifully combined justice and reconciliation. By fostering a spirit of mutual forgiveness, a culture of tolerance and forbearance is nurtured, eliminating tension and restlessness in society. This balance between justice and compassion offers a roadmap for creating a harmonious and peaceful community.

Islam is a religion that serves as a benchmark for intellectual and practical comparison with all other faiths. Its holy book, the Quran, is free from any flaws and stands as a definitive truth, described as

"a book about which there is no doubt". (Quran, 2:2)

It also validates the core messages of previous scriptures, as stated:

"Confirming that which was revealed before it". (Quran, 2:89)

The Quran is protected from any falsehood, declared as:

"Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or behind it". (Quran, 41:42)

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the bearer of this sacred scripture, is characterized by his sublime moral conduct.

Despite its firm stance on truth and falsehood, Islam teaches respect and reconciliation with other religions. It promotes tolerance to the extent that it rejects all forms of coercion, as emphasized in the Quran:

"There is no compulsion in religion". (Quran, 2: 256)

This approach of respecting other religions is based on several key principles, outlined below:

SAFEGUARDING THE LIFE AND PROPERTY OF AHL AL-KITAB

Islam promotes tolerance towards other religions and does not exclude non-Muslims from its compassion. The first example of dealing with non-Muslim citizens during the Prophetic era was with the Christians of Najran. The rights granted to them by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ serve as unparalleled examples of tolerance and reconciliation. He ﷺ instructed the following to be written:

"For the people of Najran and its surrounding areas, their lives, their religion, their lands, their property, their present and absent members, their caravans, and their representatives are under the protection of Allah and Muhammad, the Prophet and Messenger of Allah. No changes will be made to their current state, and none of their rights will be infringed upon. No priest will be removed from their priesthood, no monk from their monastic life, and no caretaker from their responsibilities. Whatever they possess, whether little or much, shall remain in their hands. They will not be subjected to undue burdens, nor will any act of pre-Islamic vengeance be taken against them. They will neither be forcibly gathered nor subjected to unjust taxation." (Al-Baladhuri, 1956)

The Prophet ﷺ continued:

"This covenant is guaranteed by Allah and His Messenger ﷺ until Allah decrees otherwise. As long as they remain well-wishers of Muslims and adhere to the agreed terms, they will not be forced into anything oppressive or unjust."
(Hamidullah, 1941)

This is a testimony to Islam's adherence to protect the rights, lives and properties of those whom it holds or stations in its care. Such an agreement represents a wonderful, and extraordinary, example of humanity and reconciliation in the history of interreligious relations. It is showing how Islamic teachings are flexible and spread peace and coexistence between different types of believers.

FOSTERING AN ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL RESPECT

It is essential to foster an atmosphere where tolerance and respect take precedence over hostility and verbal abuse. Mutual respect should serve as the foundation for constructive dialogue. The Qur'an emphasizes respect for the scholars of previous religions:

"This is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant." (Quran, 5:82)

Islam not only advocates for respect towards religious figures but also extends complete protection to the places of worship and symbols of other religions. Even Western historians agree that under the caliphate's rule, Christian communities enjoyed significant religious freedom. Historical records show that when Jews faced oppression in Europe, they sought refuge in Muslim lands, where they lived in harmony. In Andalusia, both Jews and Christians were granted full rights.

This inclusive attitude is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Throughout history, Muslims have refrained from targeting the religious figures, symbols, or places of worship of any community. Unfortunately, recent years have seen a troubling trend where certain extremist elements have repeatedly disrespected the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This persistent and reprehensible behavior, coupled with global media campaigns aimed at mocking Islam, highlights the urgent need for teaching the lessons of tolerance and mutual respect to followers of other faiths as well.

Safeguarding the Sanctity of Places of Worship Across Diverse Religious Traditions

Islam emphasizes the protection of religious places of worship and prohibits the desecration of their sacred symbols. This ensures that doors to interfaith understanding remain open. The Qur'an explicitly mentions the importance of safeguarding such places:

"Had Allah not repelled some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques—where Allah's name is much remembered—would have been demolished." (Quran 22: 40)

In the interpretation of this verse, Islamic scholars explain that without divine commands for jihad to counter oppressors, the sanctity of religious sites would have been violated by idolaters. They would have destroyed churches, synagogues, and other places of worship belonging to various faiths. (Al-Nasafi, 2018)

Mufti Muhammad Shafi elaborates in *Ma'ariful Qur'an*:

"This verse means that without the commands of warfare against oppressors, no religion would have a safe haven in any era. During Moses' time, synagogues would have been destroyed; during Jesus' time, churches and monasteries would have been demolished; and during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), mosques would have been levelled." (Shafi, 2009)

The terms used in the Qur'an—*monasteries*, *churches*, and *synagogues* refer to specific places of worship for Christians and Jews, while *mosques* are the places of worship for Muslims. (Shafi, 2009)

The protection of all religious places reflects divine wisdom, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding them as long as they do not become centres of corruption. This protection underscores Islam's message of tolerance and reconciliation. It demonstrates how Islam accommodates diversity and encourages harmonious coexistence, even with those who hold opposing beliefs. This spirit of inclusivity and respect for others should be a lesson for all faiths, promoting a world built on understanding and collaboration.

A CALL FOR UNITY BASED ON SHARED FOUNDATIONS

Islam encourages focusing on shared truths and avoiding unnecessary disputes, as such debates often yield no fruitful outcomes. Instead, it calls for unity by emphasizing commonalities among faiths. This invitation is articulated in the Quran:

"O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you—that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah." (Quran, 3:64)

In *Ma'ariful Quran*, Mufti Muhammad Shafi explains this verse by highlighting an essential principle of preaching:

"This verse establishes an important rule for delivering invitations to faith: if one wishes to invite a group with differing beliefs, the approach should focus on common ground where agreement is possible. For instance, when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ invited the Roman Emperor Heraclius to Islam, he did so by emphasizing a shared belief—monotheism." (Shafi, n.d.)

This principle forms the basis of reconciliation: inviting others to shared values without provoking hostility. It fosters an environment conducive to peaceful dialogue, ensuring that the message is conveyed effectively. Such an approach facilitates understanding, paves the way for constructive dialogue, and opens multiple avenues for reconciliation.

THE REVERENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND PROMINENT RELIGIOUS FIGURES

The exemplary conduct of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasizes the importance of respecting humanity and fostering an atmosphere of reverence for the leaders of other religions. Islam's teachings regarding non-Muslims are unparalleled and unmatched by any other faith. Muslims, adhering to these teachings, have established a rich tradition of goodwill and kindness toward non-Muslims. Historians unanimously agree that there is no evidence in Islamic history where non-Muslims faced religious persecution at the hands of Muslim rulers. Islam obligates its followers to respect the sacred places and religious figures of others. It advocates neutrality and justice in interactions with people of other faiths. Islam also advises avoiding contentious topics that could lead to conflict, instead emphasizing shared values to build harmony. This principle is clearly stated in the Quran:

"Do not insult those they invoke besides Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge." (Quran, 6: 108)

Mufti Muhammad Shafi explains this verse in his *Ma'ariful Quran*:

"An action that is permissible in itself, or even praiseworthy, becomes prohibited if it results in harm or leads others into sin. Insulting false gods, such as idols, might be permissible and even virtuous from the perspective of faith. However, if doing so provokes people to insult Allah, the Most Glorious, then those who initiate such insults are held accountable. Therefore, the Quran prohibits even permissible actions if they cause greater harm." (Shafi, n.d.)

Similarly, Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, in his explanation of this verse, states:

"Exposing the flaws or weaknesses of a religion's beliefs or practices through logical and respectful critique is entirely different from using offensive or derogatory language against their leaders or deities. The Quran never permits such disrespectful behaviour, even for polemical purposes." (Uthmani, 2000)

In essence, Islam's primary objective is to replace hostility with an environment of constructive dialogue. As explained in *Zia-ul-Quran*:

"This verse aims to train Islamic preachers to deliver the message of Islam with dignity and respect. They are instructed not to insult the false gods of the polytheists, lest it provokes them to blaspheme against the One True God in retaliation." (Al-Azhari Peer, 2020)

Islam thus prioritizes fostering respectful and peaceful discussions over confrontation, creating pathways for mutual understanding and reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

One of the many great things about Islam is it honoring and respecting all of the other religions. Muslims not only accept other faith but also believe in their validity, so they reject none. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ believed strongly in the principles of coexistence and of respect between different members of the ummah. Meaning of this is the establishment of *Hilf al-Fudul*, a historic pact to protect the weak and oppressed at all time, no regard

for religion, tribe or lineage. This was a agreement made before the Prophethood and show that even in a pluralistic society this shows the importance of mutual collaboration. In a united stance against injustice and wrongdoing, it brought together polytheists, atheists and monotheists. The Prophet ﷺ had later expressed his continued appreciation towards such agreements and if the like pact would be proposed during his Prophethood, he would have joined this pact with great alacrity. Another exemplary model of harmony and religious tolerance is The Charter of Medina. It allowed people to live and practice their faith how they wanted. This shows that none of religions want to divide or hate; all want to help them build humanity. In other words, the Prophet's ﷺ handling in pluralistic societies of Makkah and Medina of non-Muslim continue to be a timeless model to follow to succeed and be excellent in all areas of life. Unfortunately, many Muslim societies, for that matter, don't value any of that. And that when they do appreciate it, they fail to practice it.

The conclusion itself was that the Prophet ﷺ was sent to 'complete' noble character, indicating how 'humankind' reached success through the availability of 'noble character.' And this is a remarkable instance of that in the story of Thumamah the fierce enemy of Islam who was brought before the Prophet ﷺ. But despite his enmity, forgave him without punishment, wherein Thumamah embraced Islam. Likewise, his Prophet's ﷺ kind and forgiving treatment of such polytheists as Ikrimah, Safwan ibn Umayyah and Abu Sufyan converted so many polytheists to Islam. This is why today Muslims need to look to the life of the Prophet ﷺ for guidance and his qualities of compassion, tolerance and generosity. We can bring forth this breadth of vision by living his blessed character by embodying its principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Everyone should promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. when it comes to building respect and understanding through dialogue between different religious communities' dialogue based on reason and evidence. Shared values and beliefs are important things to concentrate on for peaceful coexistence.
- A second line of action is to promote tolerance and compassion. We should try to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, for example, by fostering kindness and understanding when confronting the thoughts of those with whom we disagree. This will minimize the conflicts of the society and bring about the atmosphere of unity more than division.
- We also need to stress on common principles prevalent in different religions. This will help us develop greater alliance based on respect, with stronger cohesion in our societies and greater knowledge of our shared human values.
- We should also follow the way of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in solving social problems. That Islam's comprehensive solutions to poverty, injustice and ignorance are hardly a given is beyond dispute. If we study it and apply it, we can help root out these problems in our communities and help solve them.
- Another important recommendation would be to convince of the moral and the ethical conduct. Islam, however, has a high moral standard in the relations with all persons, non-Muslims included. Justice, honesty and fairness are all things that we can practice towards which we can also alleviate peaceful and just societies in which ethical values govern our behavior.
- It's also important to use education to social reform. Education is a way that will fight ignorance and bigotry. In promoting intellectual and educational values taught by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, we can help cut through social ills and help people understand and empathise more with others from different communities.
- Finally, Muslims all around the world should realize their global duty. Engaging in the work of the last Prophet is their duty, being his followers, to spread his message of peace, justice and reconciliation. This is a practical, rather than an intellectual engagement, mission because Muslims unite one with another to embody the teachings of Islam not only in their societies but throughout the world.

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