

reversals. Today we call “social tyranny,” Fashion.

Tolerance originally meant being able to **respect** a person while disagreeing with their ideas, beliefs or behaviors. Today it has come to mean **accepting** what your opponent says, believes or does. Thus any person who now expresses an opinion or makes a moral critique which does not fit in with our politically correct culture is deemed to have committed the gravest of sins: being intolerant. But the ability to exercise moral discernment & make critical evaluations is at the heart of genuine religion and the social good. True tolerance is a virtue and should be practiced, both privately and publicly.

The *new tolerance* is closely aligned with moral relativism and the postmodern distrust of truth. But without true truth and moral absolutes, the entire concept of tolerance becomes meaningless.

We can only tolerate something if we do **not** agree with it in the first place. We do **not** tolerate something we like or agree with. But if there is no absolute truth, and moral values are simply subjective preferences, then convictions and beliefs become mere preferences and tastes.

If all beliefs and moral claims are mere matters of choice and preference, then tolerance no longer is necessary. If we accept the postmodern belief that all truth is self-created, then no one has a right to challenge any belief, or make any moral judgment. In which case, we have nothing left to be tolerant of.

Indeed, the belief in “truth as subjectivity” short-circuits discussion and makes genuine social interaction impossible. Tolerance only functions in a setting where real dialogue, debate and intellectual sparring is allowed to take place. The new political relativists argue that believers in God who insist on moral values are being intolerant & exclusive, yet they demand a whole set of their own *moral absolutes*, be it the right to abortion, complete choice in all matters sexual (homosexuality, porn). Thus in their appeal to moral relativism to silence the believers, they make their own appeal to fundamental moral values: tolerance, neutrality, pluralism. They want to have their cake (there are **no** moral absolutes) & eat it too (their *moral values* should be absolutely adhered to).

Moreover, tolerance itself is not an absolute. There are some things that we should **not** tolerate. It is neither tolerant nor civil to stand by while a woman is raped or some crime is being committed. True tolerance means the making of moral judgments and sound evaluations.

Liberating Civility: A comparative study of the history of religions shows that Islam has never been intolerant. On the contrary, Islam has been a great liberating and civilizing force for humanity. It kindled the torch of knowledge and learning. It gave thrust to science and technology. It introduced to man the true concepts of freedom, equality & justice. It teaches man the greatness of love, brotherhood and tolerance. It is none other than the Quran, Allah’s Word, which asks Muslims not to abuse the idols of the infidels. *Respect for other people’s feelings is an article of faith with the Muslims.*

Islam is not a mere religion, a hotch-potch of rites and rituals or a utopian moral philosophy. It is an all-embracing system, a social order, a polity, an economic ideology. Its moral teachings are backed by sanctions which can make them living realities. It has tempered power with virtue and justice with strength so that moral values may become enshrined in the everyday life of the individual and society. Tolerance is one of the fundamental requisites of justice.

The Quran itself refers to general moral imperatives such as mercy, justice, kindness, or goodness. The Quran does not clearly define any of these categories, but presumes a certain amount of moral probity on part of the reader. For instance, the Quran persistently commands Muslims to enjoin the good. The word used for “the good” is *ma’ruf*, which means that which is commonly known to be good. Goodness, in the Quranic discourse, is part of what one may call a lived reality – it is the product of human experience & constructed normative understandings. Similarly, the Quranic term for kindness is *ihسان*, which literally means to beautify or to improve upon. But beautification/improving upon has meaning only in the context of a certain sociological understanding & practice.

The Quranic discourse readily supports an ethic of diversity and tolerance. The Quran not only expects, but even accepts the reality of difference and diversity within human society: “O humankind, God has created you from male and female and made you into diverse nations and tribes **so that you may come to know each other**. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the one who is the most righteous.”

Islam further asks its followers to preach the faith in the best possible way and adopt those means which are good and just and respectable. Islam refuses to attach any worth to the demoniac dictum: “The ends justify the means.” This is what Islam stands for. If this is “intolerance” then a few words from Shakespeare: “What’s in a name? ...That we called a rose, shall by any other name, smell as sweet.”

Tolerance

Conquering Our Divides

If tolerance were easy,
it would **not** be a virtue.

If it were applied,
it would **not** be so
desperately needed.

But if it were unattainable,
it would **not** be,

And it is

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Little ones at play. They screech and scramble, they fight...they make up. They share and withhold. But unless they have been otherwise directed (taught; shown; reinforced), on their own they soon find a settling harmony. Kids ultimately tolerate each other. Born wide-open to the world, experiences gradually narrow them in, nail them down. Storms wax and wane and there is competition and there is struggle. But little ones “find” a natural Islam. Older ones must rediscover it. This is the whole point.

Kids are born unaware of demarcation lines, territorial waters, skin hue, ideology and border troops. There are no borders in childhood. It's the big, wide world around them brilliant and fresh, and the grown-ups who lead, who demonstrate and teach. It's the striving to learn. It's curiosity and experimentation. But then...the world squeezes in. One reads with a smile that can slowly fade into a grimace, of grim battlefields where children are shaped into tolerance. Grim for the intensity of the good intention, the immensity of the need. There are numerous television shows where children are forced to absorb by electronic osmosis, as it were, the message of ethno-racial tolerance.

Big ones in their Islam. The Messenger (p) said: “I was threatened, and I was tortured in the path of Allah as no one had been tortured, and, once, thirty days and nights passed when there was nothing for me and Bilal that a human being could eat...” Calm tolerance.

It's **not** easy being tolerant. A fair, objective, and accepting attitude. Toward all those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality and colour are different from our own. Tolerance that frees us from bigotry; remembers the brotherly, even courageous “live and let live,” controls the momentary blow-up and blow-out; when elbows rub sharply, turfs intrude, usurped rights burn. There are natural born instincts toward acceptance that have been smiled out of us in childhood by loved ones, or pounded and smashed out of us in adulthood by hard knocks. “We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them except with truth, and surely the hour is coming. So forgive, O Muhammad, with a gracious forgiveness.” (15:85)

Humanity is like a child being born on earth every day and Allah teaches us to remember the very earliest days; when the mother is love and the father is respect and the sibling is sharing, and the neighbour is a brother and sister, and the world is a circle of neighbours. “...who restrain their anger, and forgive others. Allah loves such good doers.” (3:134) Tolerance creates the capacity of endurance without repugnance. Allowance. Tolerance “allows” life.

But it's not at all easy being tolerant. Now, when the word itself has lost meaning and been devalued. And abominations fly with easy faces. Tolerance, in secular humanism, is but a mild-flavoured addition to the pastry-shop of transient goodies in the here and now; it is the synonym for “anything goes.” And anything goes has meant, all is gone. And when all went, what was left, except for defenders to man the fort and beat the drum and shutter the window and to welcome intolerance? And so on this troubled planet we have guided missiles and misguided men.

Tolerance today is featherweight in definition and evaporating in fact, since it holds none of the strictures and none of the seriousness invested in it by the Lord. Since it is no longer the weighty remembrance in thought and in deed of the way of Allah and the way of His Messenger. “And because of their breach of the covenant, We cast them away from our mercy and caused their hearts to harden. They change words from their context and forget a part of that whereof they were admonished. You will continue to discover treachery from all except a few of them. Surely Allah loves those who do good deeds.” (5:13)

It's not easy being tolerant. Intolerance spreads like wildfire and the firemen are gasping and panting and cannot keep up. There is tolerance-fatigue as there is compassion-fatigue: we are in burn-out. Willed and offered, like a grim legacy, intolerance perpetuates, inflates and corrodes. Intolerance is not any country's speciality. The exclusive on this story belongs to the world. You can watch it start, small at first, privately, in frowns in front of the children, in willful doses of rigid ungenerosity. A harsh word, a closed door. You can watch it grow in a movement's chosen intellectual posturings, in the herd and pack mentality of unreasoning groups. It is a self-imposed identity. It is the dark side of the moon, the mirror of fear and frustration. Intolerance is a reaction; there is a sure remedy and cure for it, and we carry it inside us. It is the capacity to be tolerant. But a call will be heard one day and it will say:

“Where are those who used to forgive other people? Come forward toward your Lord and receive your rewards. It is for every forgiver to be admitted to Heaven.”

Near the forgivers, stand the tolerant. Not only forget-and-forgive. It is more than that. When deeds deserve punishment, forgive. **But tolerance is a life-encompassing virtue, the basis of all decent human relationships.** It is a choice, not an option. Not reaction, it requires active, conscious effort. Tolerance is not the mask, the tool, the double-edged sword of closure that wounds itself; it is mind, body, and soul of all aperture. Its roots grow from belief in the hereafter. The Prophet (peace) says: “Cultivate detachment to the world and Allah will begin to love you, and cultivate aloofness toward what people possess and the people will begin to love you.”

“Many of the People of the Scripture long to make you disbelievers after your belief, through envy on their own account, after the truth has become manifest unto them. Forgive and be indulgent toward them until Allah gives His Command. Surely Allah is able to do all things.” (2:109) Tolerate even the intolerant. That is the way of the Messenger and it is the proving grounds of our humanity. And it pleases Allah.

Social Malady: Intolerance is a social disease. When society becomes an idol, human beings revert to being the unguided pack of the cave-dwelling rat race; and rats often won, in those days. Some say they still do: the worst instincts ever leading the rules of daily life. Race, intelligence, superiority today pseudo-scientifically linked to genetic inheritance. Yesterday it was brain case size, bumps on the cranium and tongue and lip coordination. This whole approach and “research” stems from the old colonial mentality, the rationalization of white supremacy and chronic intolerance. Islam warns against racial pride. Here pride belongs to righteousness only. Islam believes in equanimity. The ad man says: “Blondes have more fun.” In the Middle Ages, black hair was prized and pale blonds bemoaned their “aesthetic anemia.” Their blond hair was dyed black for the dictates of glamour and beauty. Social tyranny is in constant motion and rolls over deluded humanity in cyclical

Quran 15:85

So

Forgive with a gracious **forgiveness.**