

## **Tolerance and Its limits**

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Tolerance, the great religious and ethical value for which we desperately in need during these distinguishing historic moments in the history of our nation and perhaps in the history of the world. Now, all parties in Arab and Muslim worlds must focus on supreme national interest through tolerance with others, and giving up bigotry for an idea, a principle, or a doctrine in which they believe, and all parties and fanatics must realize that truth comes with many aspects, and the one aspect around which they strongly gather, seeing it as absolute truth, is not at least the whole truth. Thus, they have to listen to the other point of view, perhaps in this way problems would

be solved, or at least it would be a way for convergence or coexistence. In tolerance and acceptance of coexistence with others, irrespective of their opinions or beliefs, lie true citizenship, and the true faith in multilateralism, in which Allah formed us and makes it a basis for human life, whether political or social, economic or creative.

Our civilization encourages us to adopt this great value. humanity major; Advocates of civilization called for tolerance since the days of Ptah Hotep, in the twenty seventh century before Christ, who urged his son to carefully listen to others because he may find wisdom even among "mill workers". Also, Indian philosophies in the Far East, and

Christianity in the Middle East, call for tolerance and non-violence and not to respond to harm with harm.

Islam is clear in adopting this great Islamic value. Quran speaks in many places about the virtue of tolerance:

"Then whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve" (Cave – 18)

"To you be your religion, and to me my religion" (Al-Kafiroon, 6)

"There is no compulsion in religion" (Cow, 256)

Quran stated the true nature of relationship between humans:

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allāh is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa. Verily, Allāh is All-Knowing,

All-Aware." (Al-Hujraat, 13).

Also:

"And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one Ummah [nation or community (following one religion only i.e. Islām)], but they will not cease to disagree" (Hud, 118)

Tolerance in Quran is tantamount and companion to forgiveness, and the word "forgiveness" was mentioned thirty-five times in the Holy Quran, being one of the attributes of Allah, his Prophet, and Muslims:

"But Allāh, indeed, has forgiven them" (Al-Imran, 155)

"Allāh has forgiven what is past" (Al-Maeda, 95)

"The recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof, but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is with Allāh." (Ash-Shura, 40)

"Let them pardon and forgive." (Fussilat, 34)  
(An-Noor, 22)

"But if you pardon (them) and overlook, and forgive (their faults), then verily, Allâh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (At-Taghaboun, 14)

Tolerance and forgiveness are a clear call to kindness to others and to treat them well, despite their enmity:

"And give glad tidings (O Muhammad) to the Muhsinûn (doers of good)." (Al-Hajj, 37)

"And verily, Allâh is with the Muhsinûn (good doers)." (Al-Ankaboot, 69)

"Repel (the evil) with one which is better (i.e. Allâh orders the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly), then verily! he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend."

"And argue not with the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islâmic Monotheism with His Verses)" (Al-Ankaboot, 46)

"and speak good to people [i.e. enjoin righteousness and forbid evil, and say the truth about Muhammad Peace be upon him ]" (Cow, 83)

Our Prophet, peace be upon him, summarized all of that in his Sunnah: "I was sent to teach people tolerant Islam". Thus, the backbone of religion, in the eyes of the Holy Prophet, is tolerance, compassion, and ease. Caliphs, scholars, Sufis, and philosophers played parts to strengthen this great Islamic value and to practice it; Imam Al-Shafei eloquently said: "I hold my opinion to

be right, recognizing that it may be wrong and I hold yours to be wrong, recognizing that it may be right". So, what we are seeing nowadays on the Arab and Islamic scene as examples of extremism, intolerance and chauvinism is not Islam!! Some who take Islam as the reason for their blind fanaticism and their hatred toward their society and other societies are in fact foreigner to this tolerant nature of Islam, and of course they are not advocates of Islam. They are dangerous to Islam and a bad example of the faith that they claim, and they far from understand the truth of Islam and its principles which seeks to embrace all human beings without discrimination, without exclusion.

Western civilization calls, since the dawn of its history in Greece, for tolerance as one of the core values of democracy. Pericles

funeral oration offers the finest and most powerful image of tolerance:

"... nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty..."

The writings of Plato take the style of multilateral conversations to express the spirit of pluralism of opinions and tolerance among their owners, including Plato himself. He revived the Sophists'

views although he severely criticized them, reflecting his belief that truth has many aspects. He even criticized his former views in "Parmenides" to confirm that all ideas are subject to criticism and development, even if have previously presented them as proven facts!

From Plato to John Locke, author of the first book about tolerance, to Voltaire, who rightly said: "Tolerance is inherent in our human being. We are all a product of weakness; we are all fragile and inclined to error. So, let's mutually tolerate each other". This is what philosophers of the Enlightenment in the modern era called for. Whitehead sees a need to spread the spirit of tolerance at an international level, by facilitating travel around the world and by shortening spatial and temporal distances between peoples, thus helping them to

recognize that other nations with different traditions are not hostile nations, but merely "gifts of God." He sees tolerance as a duty that should be adopted by every sane man to instill fertility in contemporary work, and to establish the possibilities of broader evolution in the future.

In his book "Theory of Justice", John Rawls says that society based on justice must be tolerant and, accordingly, must tolerate fanatics otherwise it will turn in this case to an intolerant and unfair society. But this tolerance with fanatics should be to the extent that does not pose a danger to a society based on tolerance and social institutions.

Perhaps Rawls' opinion is the answer to a question posed by Karl Popper in his book, "The Open Society and Its Enemies": Should a society based on tolerance allow intolerance? And what if tolerating an act would

destroy the society?! Our tolerance that we call for is not unlimited and is not in being endlessly lenient, but should be conditional on maintaining the safety of community and cohesion of its institutions. If being a fanatic for an idea or a belief will generate hatred toward society and its institutions, and drives followers to act aggressively towards other people and institutions of society, then it will be meaningless. Tolerance should be with a person who adopts a fanatical idea, whatsoever, but without turning into a factor of destructive behavior toward others and society. What Popper and Whitehead, as well as Rawls, want to assert is: Tolerance may be the root for original fanatic doctrine! If this happens, we should confront it first with thought and dialogue to prevent this radical doctrine from turning into a destruction tool against the whole society and its institutions. But the difficult question here is: What if dialogues and attempts at persuasion with thought and logic

proved useless?!

To answer this question, I say: In spite of the fact that tolerance is a great human and religious value for which most of religious beliefs and ethical systems in different cultures called, but it should be conditional by abiding laws governing freedom in society; tolerance and forgiveness do not mean that we are not to face intellectual and ideological fanaticism which threatens the lives of human beings and their cultural achievements. We have suffered in Egypt, when our good and peaceful people, and on top of them some political elites, were deceived and voted, after the revolution of January 25, 2011, for the group that presented itself as Islam and raised glamorous slogans such as "Islam is the solution" and "We bring the good for Egypt". After that, Egyptians found themselves victims to exclusion and severe intolerance from people who gave priority to interests of their community over the interests of society. Thus, a

revolution bursted against them on June 30, 2013, and Egyptians discovered the other aggressive face of this group, which turns out that it is their real doctrine. This appeared in their armed demonstrations during which they threatened that if they did not return their regime they will burn the whole country! They were not content with aggressive verbal speech, but they started to exercise hostilities against people and burnt its institutions in the capital and various cities and provincial capitals. They do not admit that these hostile practices to Egypt, which they burn and terrorize its people, are acts to their homeland and those people they threaten are the same people who voted for them a year ago, granting them confidence and opportunity to rule the country!! They missed the peaceful nature of Egypt and its people, who adopted over its long history a type of moderate religiosity, and asserted tolerant Islam through Al-Azhar, and

always reject any form of extremism and intolerance. People won the battle with a peaceful revolution and with the support of their army, which is an integral part of the Egyptian national fabric.

Perhaps the lesson we learn from the Egyptian experience is that tolerance, leniency and renouncing fanaticism are values that should be adopted by individuals and communities with holders of free scalable views that can be amendment if they are proved wrong, not with fanatics who refuse dialogue and coexistence with others. Thus, tolerance should be with everyone believing in dialogue and has the ability to coexist with others and to accept pluralism, not with arrogant fanatics who refuse to coexist peacefully with others.

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