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Tolerance in the Teachings of the Great Prophet (S) and in Liberalism: A Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of tolerance in Islam and the teachings of the holy Prophet (S) in this regard. After examining the semantics of Tasamuh and Tasahul (tolerance), the view of Islam and the teachings of the Prophet (S) will be discussed. Tolerance is herein divided into positive and negative types, with positive tolerance referring to cases that Islam views favorably and negative tolerance referring to the exact opposite.

In précis, Islam neither absolutely validates tolerance nor does it absolutely reject it. Finally, the fundamental differences between the views of Islam and liberalism regarding tolerance will be contrastively analyzed.

Keywords: tolerance, lenience, moderateness, aggression, the holy Prophet (S), liberalism

Introduction

One of the issues to which Western thinkers have devoted meticulous attention is that of tolerance. The prevailing tendency among them is the liberalist view, which advocates tolerance in the extreme. The issue of tolerance has also been dealt with in Islam and in the teachings of the Prophet (S). In this respect, Islam and liberalism have markedly different opinions in both concept and fundamentals.

Considering the popularity of this discourse among Muslim intellectuals and the differences of opinion thereof, a thorough analytic treatment of the issue is inevitable. In addition to referring to the traditions

and narrations of the holy Prophet (S), for the purpose of comprehensiveness, we will cite Quranic verses as well as other narrations.

The historical antecedents of the Western idea of tolerance date back to the 16th and 17th century AD, there being no indications of this thought before that. The Christians of the Middle Ages brooked no adversaries, and Augustine, for example, supported corporeal punishment of dissenters and heretics. This trend continued throughout most of the Middle Ages. The best evidence of the absence of tolerance is the phenomena of the inquisition during this period. Even Luther and Calvin did not believe in tolerance and lenience in the modern sense.

In the 17th century, after enduring through the thirty years' war and the bitter religious hostilities that came to no effect, people became aware that religious altercation was disadvantageous for all parties involved. This resulted in a tendency towards toleration. It is said that John Locke in his Letters Concerning Toleration first propounded the concept of tolerance. Not long after, in the 17th century, the concept of religious toleration came into being. Eventually, in the 19th century, the policy of religious toleration prevailed in most European countries resulting in widespread indifference and apathy towards religion.

Semantics of Tasamuh and Tasahul (Tolerance)

Tasahul, derived from the root Sahl, means 'lenience,' 'acting in a gentle manner,' 'going easy on one another,' and 'unconcern.' Tasamuh comes from the root Samh, denoting 'moderateness,' 'forbearance,' 'leniency,' and 'magnanimity'².

These two words are generally used synonymously. However, bearing in mind the philological roots, there is a subtle difference between Tasamush and Tasahul: Tasamush is not merely moderateness and easygoingness but encompasses moderateness along with forgiveness and magnanimity.

In English, tolerance (from Latin tolerate) is used as the equivalent of the words Tasamush and Tasahul. It is defined as the willingness to accept or tolerate. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary³ cites three meanings for tolerance:

- The willingness to accept or tolerate somebody or something, especially opinions or behavior that you may not agree with, or people who are not like you.
- The ability to suffer something, especially pain, difficult conditions, etc. without being harmed.
- The amount by which the measurement of a value can vary without causing problems.

This word is related with the infinitive 'Tollo' meaning to carry, bear, or allow. It seems that a person who tolerates something bears a load. Therefore, some believe that the closest Arabic/Persian equivalent to tolerance is Hilm, which means to bear unpleasant things though one has power to change the situation.

Terminologically, Tasamush and Tasahul mean intentional and conscious non-interference with or allowance of actions and beliefs that one does not agree with or approve. In other words, it is a kind of patience that a person shows regarding the disagreeable beliefs, behaviors, and words of others.⁴ In view of the above, the following elements are requisites of tolerance:

- The existence of difference of opinion. Hence, harmony in a population with concordant beliefs cannot be termed tolerance.
- Unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Accordingly, tolerance does not mean indifference or apathy nor does it denote acceptance of other beliefs or behaviors.
- Awareness and intention. Therefore, lack of reaction to the beliefs and behaviors of others that results from ignorance or carelessness is not tolerance.
- Power and authority. Thus, acquiescent or helpless moderation is not tolerance.

The opposite of Tasamush and Tasahul is Khushunat (aggression). The word Khushunat means harshness, violence, firmness, forcefulness, and intransigence. Terminologically, it is any action against another that causes fear or distress, or at the very least is not desirable or pleasing for the other party.

This action may be physical such as assault and battery or murder, or it may be mental such as intimidation, insult, humiliation, or even relentless pertinacity regarding a belief or behavior regarding others. The word Ghilzat (coarseness) also has a meaning similar to Khushunat.⁵

Positive and Negative Tolerance in Islam

Though the words Tasamush and Tasahul are not used in religious texts, other words are used in our narrations that can be considered approximate synonyms with these two words, including Rifq (gentleness), Mudara (moderateness), Hilm (forbearance), and Taysir (easygoingness).

Various Quranic verses and narrations indicate that in some cases tolerance is desirable and praiseworthy. We call these instances 'positive tolerance'. In other cases, that we term 'negative tolerance', the act of tolerance is undesirable and unfitting. Here, I shall speak both of instances of positive and negative tolerance.

As previously stated, my main emphasis is upon relevant narrations, the teachings and practice of the holy Prophet (S), and Quranic verses. However, for comprehensiveness of the discourse, I will also discuss other verses and narrations that are tangential to the subject at hand.

Positive Tolerance in Islam

Some instances of positive tolerance in Islam are as follows:

1. Tolerance in Confronting People

Quranic verses and narrations about the gentleness, easygoingness, and moderateness of the holy Prophet (S) and Infallible Imams (a.s.) or others that recommend these matters indicate that individuals must act tolerantly in their encounters with others. Regarding the key to the Prophet's (S) success, the Quran declares:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

It is by Allah's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs (3: 159).

In this verse, in addition to God revealing the holy Prophet's (S) gentleness to the people as his key to success, He commands the Prophet to forgive the mistakes of the people, ask God for their forgiveness, and consult with them in various affairs. All these guidelines reflect the necessity of positive tolerance with people.

The greatest example of the Prophet's (S) forgiveness is the mass forgiveness of the people of Mecca after its conquest. The people of Mecca had had the worst possible attitude, hurled the most terrible of insults, and waged the most aggressive of wars upon the Prophet (S) and his followers. This, however, did not cause the Prophet (S) to digress from the path of Islamic kindness after his victory.

In a narration from the holy Prophet (S), it has been stated:

امرت بمداراة الناس كما امرت بتبليغ الرسالة

I have been commanded to moderation with the people just as I have been commanded to disseminate the Message.⁶ In this narration, moderation with the people has been enumerated as a chief mission of the Prophet (S) on the same lines as promotion of the divine message, indicating its considerable importance. In another narration, he has declared:

ان الله عز و جل لم يبعثني معتافاً ولكن بعثني معلماً و ميسراً

Allah Almighty has not appointed me to coerce the people; rather, He has appointed me as a lenient teacher.⁷ It has also been cited that Gabriel came to the Prophet (S) and said to him: "O Muhammad! Your Lord has sent His Salam and has said: 'Act moderately with My creatures'".⁸

In another narration from the Prophet (S), it is quoted: “Gentleness and moderateness are blessed whereas strictness is accursed.”⁹ Yet a further narration from the Prophet (S) is cited thus: “Whatever moderateness and mildness are applied to, they serve as its ornamentations, and whatever they are taken away from, becomes ugly.”¹⁰

Moreover, the Prophet (S) has stated: “If gentleness and moderateness could be seen with the eyes, there would be no creature more beautiful and magnificent.”¹¹

2. Tolerance in Islamic Law (Tashri’)

God’s mildness in the legislation of religious laws is an additional shining example of religious tolerance. In the Holy Quran, it is stated:

...يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ...

...Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you... (2: 185).

...هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ...

...He has not placed for you any hardship in the religion... (22:78).

It has been cited from the holy Prophet (S) that:

لم يرسلني الله تعالى بالرهبانية ولكن بعثني بالحنيفية السهلة السمحة

Allah Almighty has not appointed me for monastic life; rather, He has appointed me with the Primordial religion, easy and mild.¹² In this narration, the words Samhah and Sahlah have been used which are derived from the same root as Tasamush and Tasahul.

The word Sahl denotes level land in which movement is easy. Samahah means mildness or forgiveness together with magnanimity. Therefore, this narration indicates that Islam is an easy, facile, and merciful religion. Another interpretation is that in Islam there are no arduous laws. In the exegesis of this Hadith, martyr Mutahhari writes:

“In this religion, because it is ‘Sahlah’, no taxing or formidable duties have been mandated. Furthermore, because it is ‘Samhah’ (merciful), whenever a duty becomes entwined with great difficulty and strain that duty is abrogated.”¹³

These Quranic verses and narrations signify that the religion of Islam, i.e. the methodology of the Prophet of Islam (S) and the entirety of God’s teachings bestowed upon the Prophet (S), is founded

upon positive tolerance.

Interestingly, in Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) there are rules such as La Haraj (no hardship); La Dharar (no harm); negation of constraint, ignorance, forgetfulness, and coercion; primacy of acquittal; primacy of legitimacy; primacy of purity; primacy of correctness; the rule of possession (Qa'idah Yad); and Halalness of what is bought on the Muslim market (Sawq Muslimin) all of which are indicative of the leniency and ease of Islamic law. Explanation of these important and effective laws of Islamic jurisprudence is beyond the scope of this discourse.

3. Tolerance in Inviting People to the Religion

Islam's tolerance in inviting people to the religion is another indicator of its religious tolerance. Addressing the Prophet (S), the Holy Quran declares:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and debate with them in a manner that is best (16: 125).

Regarding methods of inviting people to the religion of God, this verse refers to wisdom, good advice, and debate as the best. This shows that other methods of making people religious, such as coercion and force, are unacceptable. It is worthy of note that advice is modified with the adverbial Hasanah (good) and debate is modified with Billati Hia Ahsan (in a manner that is best) which means that in inviting people to the religion, all types of advice or debate are not endorsed.

In numerous Quranic verses addressing the holy Prophet (S), application of force and compulsion in the call to religion has been prohibited. [14](#)

The Prophet of Islam (S) and his successors never used force in their invitation of the people to Islam. They gave the people of conquered territories the option of becoming Muslim or retaining and following the laws of their own religion while accepting the Islamic political administration.

The Infallible Imams created such an open and liberal atmosphere in their debates that other parties plainly spoke and defended their beliefs and opinions without fear. Examples of this may be found in the debates of Imam Sadiq (a.s.) with Ibn Abi Al-Awja, Ibn Muqaffa, and Daysani who were leaders of heresy (Ilhad) and atheism [Zandaqah]. [15](#)

According to Islam, Muslims are duty-bound to insure the safety of unbelievers that come among Muslims to research Islam and to abstain from aggression against them. Addressing the Prophet (S), the Noble Quran states:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّى يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant them asylum until they hear the Word of Allah. Then convey them to their place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know (9:6).

4. Islam's Tolerance in Peaceful Coexistence of Muslims with Followers of Other Religions

Peaceful coexistence is one of the most important human ideals. Islam has laid the foundation of peace and has thus levelled the path to peaceful coexistence. Peace and tranquility constitute the soul of Islam. The word 'Islam' is derived from the root Silm, which subsumes the concepts of health, safety, peace, and tranquility. The Holy Quran instructs its followers to collectively enter peace and Silm:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

O you who have faith! Enter into Silm, all together (2:208).

God commands the Prophet (S) to seize the opportunity if his enemies take up the path of peace and reconciliation and positively respond to their overtures:

وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

وَإِنْ يُرِيدُوا أَنْ يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ اللَّهُ هُوَ الَّذِي أَيَّدَكَ بِنَصْرِهِ وَبِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ

And if they incline toward peace, then you (too) incline toward it, and put your trust in Allah. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing. But if they desire to deceive you, Allah is indeed sufficient for you (8:61-62).

Moreover, the Quran elsewhere directs the Prophet (S) and Muslims in general thus:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ إِلَى قَوْمٍ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ مِيثَاقٌ أَوْ جَاءُوكُمْ حَصِرَتْ صُدُورُهُمْ أَنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ أَوْ يُقَاتِلُوا قَوْمَهُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَسَلَّطَهُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ فَلَقَاتِلُوكُمْ فَإِنْ اعْتَزَلُوكُمْ فَلَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ وَأَلْفَوْا إِلَيْكُمْ السَّلَامَ فَمَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ سَبِيلًا

So if they keep out of your way and do not fight you, and offer you peace, then Allah does not allow you any course (of action) against them (4:90).

Islam's desire for peace is so strong that it informs Muslims that their behavior may bring about a bond of friendship between them and their enemies:

وَلَوْ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ كِتَابًا فِي قِرْطَاسٍ فَلَمَسُوهُ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ لَقَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ

It may be that Allah will bring about affection between you and those with whom you are at enmity, and Allah is all-powerful, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful (60:7).

With the following statement, the Noble Quran has determined peace as a better course of action above and beyond all personal and social relations prevailing between humans:

...وَالصُّلْحُ خَيْرٌ...

...And reconciliation is better... (4: 128).

Islam has introduced the idea of peaceful coexistence among followers of divine religions as a global declaration. By proclaiming the common ground of 'belief in the One God and the negation of polytheism and existence of divinity apart from God', Islam invites everyone to global unity. By God's command, the holy Prophet (S) has also announced to all followers of divine religions to submit to a great monotheistic convergence and unification.^{[16](#)}

The policy of the Prophet of Islam (S) in the negotiation of peace and non-aggression treaties with various followers of divine religions and even polytheists denotes Islam's peaceful spirit and the necessity of peaceful coexistence in Islam. The ten-year armistice the Prophet negotiated with the polytheists of Mecca (i.e. the Hudaibiyyah Truce), in addition to other treaties, are signs of the endeavors of Islam to prevent aggression among humans.

The Quran advises Muslims that as long as their enemies adhere to non-aggression treaties, their pacts are to be respected.^{[17](#)} The performance of the holy Prophet (S) during the Meccan conquest with regard to the polytheists of Mecca and the following slogan bespeak of his peaceful attitude concerning enemies and opponents:

اليوم يوم المرحمه اليوم اعز الله قريشا

Today is a day of mercy; today Allah has honored the Quraysh!

The most coherent of statements in this regard are those of Imam Ali (a.s.), the most illustrious disciple of the Prophet (S), in the Nahj Al-Balaghah:

“Never reject a peace proposal from the enemy that involves the satisfaction of God since the ease of warriors and the peace of mind and security of the country are ensured in peace...If a pact is agreed upon between you and your enemy or you have granted them your protection, be loyal to your pledge, be reliable in what you have taken on, and make your soul a shield for your covenant since there is no divine obligation on the same level as faithfulness to promises; all people of the world, with all their differences, are unanimous in this opinion. Therefore, never be an oath-breaker, never betray your pledge, and never deceive your enemy. After precautionary measures and making certain about a treaty, do not seek excuses. Let not difficulties of a covenant you have entered into, for which God has made you duty-bound, lead you to break an oath.”¹⁸

5. Tolerance in Governance and Administration

Some Quranic verses and numerous narrations indicate that conditions for success in administration and leadership include magnanimity as well as moderateness, easygoingness, and gentleness with the people. Therefore, the holy Prophet (S) and noble Imam Ali (a.s.) have advised their governors to observe these important principles.

In verse 159 of Surah Ale Imran, the key to the Prophet’s (S) success as the leader and head of government of the religious community was his gentleness and tact. In a narration, it is cited:

آلة الرئاسة سعة الصدر

A tool of leadership is magnanimity.¹⁹ When the holy Prophet (S) appointed Mu’adh Ibn Jabal as governor of Yemen, part of his recommendations was as follows:

عليك بالرفق و العفو في غير ترك الحقّ

I advise you to gentleness (with the people) and forgiveness in cases that do not involve the violation of a right (or truth).²⁰ The Prophet (S) also instructed him thus:

يسرّ و لاتعسرّ، يشرّ و لاتنفّر

Go easy and do not be strict, give glad tidings [and make (people) happy], and do not cause displeasure.²¹ Islam even stresses upon Imams of congregational prayer to go easy on the people in prayers.

In a letter to Malik Ashtar, Imam Ali (a.s.) declares: “When you hold group prayer for the people do not cause hate in people by prolonging it since there are some among them that are ailing or feeble. When the Prophet (S) dispatched me to Yemen, I asked him how I should pray with the people. He answered;

Pray within the limits of the most weak among them and be kind to the faithful”.[22](#)

Throughout the following letter, Imam Ali (a.s.) accentuates gentleness, moderateness, and kindness above all else:

Give your heart to the people in the form of love, warmth, kindness, and grace. Do not be like a vampiric predator that sets great store by devouring them, as they are your siblings in faith or (at least) are similar to you in genesis. People stray from the path and become afflicted by blights. Either intentionally or unintentionally they perform certain deeds (that they should not). Treat them with magnanimity and forbearance just as you hope God treats you with magnanimity and forbearance.[23](#)

Elsewhere he instructs one of his governors thus: “Ask God for help in what you intend to do and integrate strictness with mildness. Wherever moderateness and gentleness are more appropriate, employ them and only resort to strictness when there is no other way. Be humble before the people. In attention, in gaze, and in gesture treat the people equally.”[24](#)

6. Islam’s Requirement for Tolerance as a Moral Virtue

Many narrations have emphasized the profound importance of moderateness, mildness, forgiveness, reprieve, and restraining one’s anger regarding the people as well as the importance of obscuring faults and the illicitness of revealing them. All this is representative of the recommendation of Islam with respect to tolerance in dealing with others.

The following has been cited from the Prophet of God (S): “Shall I notify you of the most beautiful behaviors in this world and the next? They include forgiving a person who has mistreated you, keeping in touch with relatives that have cut off relations, performing good deeds for a person who has wronged you, and giving benefactions to a person who has deprived you.”[25](#)

It has also been narrated that: “Possession of the attributes of gentleness and moderateness with people is possession of faith.”[26](#) The following has been quoted of Imam Ali (a.s.): “Whenever you overcome your enemy, let forgiveness be your gratitude (to God) for the blessing of power.”[27](#)

In a narration from the holy Prophet (S), it is stated: “Do not be on the lookout for the mistakes of others. Whoever seeks out the mistakes of their brothers and sisters in faith, God shall be reciprocally in search of the former’s mistakes. And one whose mistakes God seeks out, He will disgrace even if at home.”[28](#)

He has also declared: “For those who reveal wrongful deeds, it is as if they had performed those deeds themselves, and persons who intend to disgrace someone by revealing their mistakes will perform that mistake themselves before they die.”[29](#)

7. God’s Tolerance in Reward and Punishment

All Quranic verses and narrations regarding forgiveness, clemency, mercy, and those that convey that

God is accepting of repentance mark the tolerance of God, i.e. His mildness, lenience, forgiveness, and indulgence, concerning sinners and wrongdoers. Likewise, intercession in the Hereafter, which is the greatest manifestation of God's forgiveness, also denotes this truth. Here, I shall only present one verse:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Say (that Allah declares,) 'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins' (39:53).

In similar fashion, Quranic verses and narrations regarding God's double or inflated rewards for the good deeds of His servants signifies this truth as well. For example, it has been stated in the Quran:

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلُهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

Whoever brings virtue shall receive ten times its like; but whoever brings vice shall not be requited except with its like, and they will not be wronged (6: 160).

Moreover, the Quran draws an analogy between donating charity for God and a grain that grows seven offshoots each with one hundred seeds. Then the Quran states:

...وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ...

...Allah enhances manifoldly for whomever He wishes... (2:261).

In addition, in Surah Qadr it is stated that good deeds performed on the Night of Qadr have been proclaimed to be better than those of one thousand months.[30](#)

Resoluteness and Firmness in Islam

The opposites of Tasamush and Tasahul are usually considered to be Qati'iyat (resoluteness), Salabat (firmness), Sarsakhti (obstinacy), and Khushunat (aggressiveness). After enumerating instances of positive tolerance in Islam, it is now apt that I point out occasions where Islam considers resoluteness, firmness, and inflexibility to be desirable. In fact, such cases may be considered negative tolerance. In other words, tolerance in these cases is undesirable and deplorable.

1. Resoluteness in Imparting the Divine Message

The prophets had unparalleled resolve in carrying out their divine commissions. They withstood the direst threats and schemes and the most alluring bribes without bending in the slightest. The Quran

names numerous prophets including Noah, Abraham, Lot, Shu'ayb (the father-in-law of Moses), Hud, Salih, Moses, Jesus, and the Prophet of Islam who stood like mountains and carried out their missions without submitting to any deals.³¹ Martyr Mutahhari considered unparalleled resolve to be one of the characteristics of divine prophets.

He has stated: "Because prophets discern themselves to be 'appointed' and do not have the least amount of doubt about their mission, its necessity, and its worthwhileness, they promote and support their message with such resolve for which no likeness can be found. In the first years of his appointment, when the number of Muslims might not yet have surpassed ten, in a meeting recorded in history as the Day of Warning (Yawm Al-Indhar), the holy Prophet (S) gathered the notables of Bani Hashim and presented his message to them. With clarity and resolution, he declared: My religion will suffuse the world and your happiness is conditional upon accepting and upholding my invitation....In response to the request of the Quraysh, stating that they would appoint him as their king, wed him to their most beautiful girl, and make him the most wealthy person among them on the condition that he abandon his pronouncements, he said: I swear to God, if they place the sun in one hand and the moon in my other, I will never give up my invitation."³²

2. Resoluteness in the Campaign against Wrongdoing and Announcement of Truth

Quranic verses and narrations indicate that in the proclamation of truth and struggle against wrongdoing, especially in the case that a wrongful act might become part of the public culture, one must not be flexible. A shining example of this is the Prophet's (S) steadfast struggle against manifestations of unbelief and idolatry. When the polytheists of Mecca despaired at dissuading the Prophet because of his singular firmness of purpose, they proposed that each party assume flexibility and nonchalance regarding the religion of the other and abstain from attacking each other's beliefs.

The Holy Quran announced to the Prophet (S):

﴿فَلَا تُطِيعُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ﴾

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ

So do not obey the deniers, who are eager that you should be pliable, so that they may be pliable [towards you] (68:8-9).

The polytheists of Mecca asked the Prophet (S) to accompany them in worshipping their idols so that they would accompany the Prophet of Islam in worshipping Almighty God. In response, God revealed Surah Kafirun where He declared to the Prophet:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ

﴿لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

﴿وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

﴿وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ

﴿وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

﴿لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

Say, 'O faithless ones! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship; nor will I worship what you have worshiped; nor will you worship what I worship. To you your religion and to me my religion.' (109: 1-6)

Elsewhere, addressing the Prophet (S), the Quran has pronounced:

﴿وَلَوْ لَا أَن تَبْتَئِنَّاكَ لَقَدْ كِدْتَ تَرْكَنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا

﴿إِذَا لَأَنقَنَّاكَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ الْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا

Had We not fortified you, certainly you might have inclined toward them a bit. Then We would have surely made you taste a double [punishment] in this life and a double [punishment] after death, and then you would have not found for yourself any helper against Us (17:74-75).

As well, He proclaims to the Prophet (S) and his companions:

﴿قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ وَمَا أَمْلِكُ لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ رَبَّنَا عَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنَبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

There is certainly a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those who were with him, when they

said to their own people, 'Indeed we repudiate you and whatever you worship besides Allah. We disavow you, and between you and us there has appeared enmity and hate forever, unless you come to have faith in Allah alone' (60:4).

The stories of Abraham and the Prophet of Islam regarding the breaking of idols are clear examples of the resoluteness of the prophets. In the Nahj Al-Balaghah, it is written:

أَمَّا يَقِيمُ أَمْرَ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ مِنْ لَا يَصْنَعُ وَلَا يَضَارِعُ وَلَا يَتَّبِعُ الْمَطَامِعَ

Only he upholds the command of God who does not make mutual concessions, does not conform (for conforming's sake), and does not follow desires.³³

3. Resoluteness in Conveying Religious Teachings and Struggling against Distortion, Innovation, and Obscuration in the Religion

The crucial mission of religious scholars and leaders, who are in truth guards of the religious bounds, must brook not the least amount of flexibility or nonchalance with regard to safeguarding the reality of the religion and battling innovation, distortion, allegorical explanation, and false interpretations.

A narration from the holy Prophet (S) cites: "When innovation appears in my Ummah, it is the responsibility of cognizant and learned individuals to reveal their knowledge. If they do not, the damnation of God be upon them."³⁴

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) has declared: "Do not associate with innovators."³⁵ It is cited of Imam Ali (a.s.) that: "Whosoever goes to an innovator and shows them respect has surely endeavoured to destroy Islam."³⁶ Regarding promoters of religion, the Quran states:

الَّذِينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رِسَالَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَخْشَوْنَهُ وَلَا يَخْشَوْنَ أَحَدًا إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ حَسِيبًا

They are those who deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah (33:39).

Concerning this issue, martyr Mutahhari has written: "There is a matter that I must explain, the matter of tolerance...Does the Quran reject it completely? I must answer that there are two different issues here. The first one the Quran rejects so completely that it does not even give prophets permission for its effectuation let alone others. This type is compromise in the area of policy and thought; that is, in modern terms, ideology. For instance, one might say: 'You dispense with some of your beliefs and, reciprocally, we will forgo some of our beliefs.' It is impossible for a righteous religion to allow such compromise with the enemy. No compromise is acceptable even in a minor recommended (Mustahabb) or undesirable Makruh act much less an obligatory or forbidden act. Whatever is a part of divine

revelation, even the slightest of recommended or undesirable actions, is uncompromisable. Indeed! There is, on the other hand, another issue in which compromise and forgiveness is tolerable. This issue relates to actions, not policies and ideology; it is a kind of tactic. For instance, one might decide to temporarily postpone or advance the execution of a particular action. The Quran has not taken this option away from the Prophet.”[37](#)

4. Resoluteness of the Government in Safeguarding the Rights of the People, Establishing Justice, and Campaigning against Oppression

The Holy Quran introduces one of the most important aims of the appointment of messengers and the revelation of scripture to be establishing social justice and struggling against oppression.[38](#)

Imam Ali (a.s.) has declared that the most important reasons for which he accepted rule after 25 years of withdrawal were to establish justice, fight against oppression, and defend the oppressed.[39](#) After he assumed the office of the caliphate, with singular resolve, he commanded that the wealth that had been wrongly given to various persons from the Muslim treasury (Bayt Al-Mal) be retrieved and restored to the treasury.[40](#)

His plan was to divide the public wealth equally among Muslims. In the face of the supposed well-wishers that advised the Imam against this measure, he announced: “Do you instruct me to seek victory for myself by oppressing those over whom I have become ruler? By God, for as long as I live and night and day endure and the stars rise and set one after another, I will never do such a thing. If this wealth was my own personal property I would share it out equally let alone now that this wealth belongs to God and pertains to all people.”[41](#)

The Imam’s resolve in safeguarding public wealth was so great that he withstood his brother Aqil’s repeated appeals to be given a greater portion from the treasury due to his extreme need and turned his brother’s hope into despair.[42](#)

In a letter to one of his commanders, he wrote thus: “Fear God and return the property of these people. If you do not and God gives me the power to do so, I will perform my duty to God regarding you and with this sword, with which I have struck no one save that they entered Hell, I will strike you. By God, if Hasan and Husayn (his sons) had done this they would receive no favoritism from me and they would not sway my resolve until I had retrieved the rights they had misappropriated and had repelled their wrongful oppressions.”[43](#)

Regarding the administration of rights and justice, Imam Ali (a.s.) has declared: “The commandments of God may only be carried out by those who are uncompromising and unbiased, and do not follow their desires.”[44](#)

The holy Prophet (S) dispatched Noble Ali (a.s.) to Yemen to invite the people to Islam. On his way back, he collected some fine silks from the people of Najran by way of the tax specified in the treaty of

the Day of Mubahilah (mutual cursing) and then went on to Medina. On the way, he was informed that the Prophet had set out for Mecca to take part in Hajj, so he handed the command of the soldiers over to one of the officers and hastened toward Mecca.

He reached the Prophet near Mecca whereby, after conversing with the Prophet, he was commanded to return to his forces and bring them to Mecca. When he got back to his troops, he saw that they had divided the silk cloth among themselves to use them as pilgrim's garb for Hajj. Noble Ali was deeply angered at this act of his deputy and commanded that all the fabric be returned and packed. Some became upset about this decisive command and expressed their anger about Ali's (a.s.) behavior to the Prophet (S) when they reached him. He replied:

ارفعوا السنتكم عن علي فإنه خشن في ذات الله عز و جلّ غير مداهن في دينه

Stop your tongues from speaking ill of Ali for he is strict in the path of God Almighty and does not compromise in His religion.[45](#)

The strict decrees in Islam about insurrectionists [Muharib], those who create corruption on Earth [Mufsid Fil-Ardh], thieves, bandits, fornicators, and those who falsely accuse others of fornication indicate the decisiveness of Islam in maintaining public security and safeguarding the rights of the general public.[46](#)

5. Resoluteness of the Government in Executing Divinely Decreed Punishment (Hudud/Hadd Ilahi)

Regarding divinely decreed punishment or Hadd, two distinct issues must be clarified: substantiation and execution. Islam is lenient regarding the substantiation of the necessity of punishment. In other words, it intends that to the extent possible no Hadd be established. Therefore, firstly, Islam has specified difficult conditions for the establishment of Hadd.

For instance, for the substantiation of fornication and its Hadd the testimony of four just individuals is necessary, such that if the group of four is incomplete not only will the necessity of the Hadd of fornication remain unsubstantiated, but the Hadd for slander of fornication [Qadhaf] will be executed upon the insufficient witnesses.

Moreover, for the Hadd of theft, other conditions have been stipulated in addition to the testimony of two just witnesses. Secondly, with the slightest of doubt the Hadd is dropped. The rule of Hadd are dropped in cases of doubt' [Al-Hudud Tadra' Bish-Shubuhah] has been ratified by all jurisprudents.

Thirdly, not only does Islam not advise sinners to confess to crimes relating to the rights of God (vis-à-vis the rights of people) but rather it advises them not to confess. Furthermore, as opposed to advising us to endeavor in proving the perpetration of sins, Islam forbids us from seeking out and revealing the

mistakes of others.

On the other hand, in the execution of divinely determined punishment after substantiation, Islam is adamant and brooks no flexibility or nonchalance. Concerning execution of the Hadd for fornication the Quran declares:

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابُهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

As for the fornicatress and the fornicator, strike each of them a hundred lashes, and let not pity for them overcome you in Allah's law, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day, and let their punishment be witnessed by a group of the faithful (24:2).

In some narrations about the execution of divine punishment it has been cited that some persons went to the Prophet (S) or noble Ali (a.s.) to intercede on the behalf of the offenders but were ignored.⁴⁷ Many narrations indicate that we should not be affected by sentiments in the implementation of divine punishment and through negligence, underpin the foundations of corruption in the society.

6. Resoluteness against the Subversive Enemies of Islam and Muslims

Describing the Islamic Ummah, the Holy Quran states:

...أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ ...

...are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves... (48:29).

The Holy Quran likens a Muslim to a seed that sprouts from under the earth, gradually develops, grows to have a robust trunk, standing firm on its own, and incites the anger of the unbelievers with his strength and firmness.⁴⁸ About enemies that violate treaties or incite sedition, the Quran declares:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَقِفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِّنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوكُمُ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
حَتَّى يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed Allah does not like transgressors. And kill them wherever you confront them, and expel them from where they expelled you, for faithlessness is graver than killing. But do not fight them near the Holy Mosque

unless they fight you therein; but if they fight you, kill them; such is the requital of the faithless (2: 190–191).

In addition, it states:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

O Prophet! Wage Jihad against the faithless and the hypocrites, and be severe with them (9:73).

The severe conduct of the holy Prophet (S) with the Jews of Bani Qurayzah, after they violated their treaty mentioned in the Quran in verses 26 and 27 of Surah Ahzab, and also with the Jews of Bani Nazir, after their trickery and breach of treaty, are indicative of Islam's decisive, harsh, and inflexible treatment of conspirators and pledge-breakers.[49](#)

The Holy Quran strictly forbids friendly relations with the enemies of Islam and reproaches hypocrites who endeavor to establish relations with them.

ا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِّنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

You will not find a people believing in Allah and the Last Day endearing those who oppose Allah and His Apostle even though they were their own parents, or children, or brothers, or kinsfolk (58:22).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ...

O you who have faith! Do not take My enemy and your enemy for friends... (60: 1).

لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً وَيُحَذِّرُكُمُ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ

The faithful should not take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful, and whoever does that Allah will have nothing to do with them (3:28).

The Quran plainly informs that the hearts of unbelievers and the enemies of Islam permeate with hate for Muslims. For this reason, it rebukes some Muslims for their naiveté in trusting and establishing strong friendly relations with them.[50](#)

7. Resoluteness in Eschewal of the Leadership of Unbelievers over Muslims

The Holy Quran has declared the leadership or supervision of unbelievers over Muslims to be forbidden and has made submittal to them Haram. It has also condemned having affection for unbelievers and seeking greatness through friendly relations with them:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ بِكُمْ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فَتْحٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ قَالُوا أَلَمْ نَكُنْ مَعَكُمْ وَإِنْ كَانَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نَصِيبٌ قَالُوا أَلَمْ نَسْتَحِذْ
عَلَيْكُمْ وَنَمْنَعُكُمْ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَنْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ سَبِيلًا

Allah will never provide the faithless any way [to prevail] over the faithful (4: 141).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَطِيعُوا فَرِيقًا مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ يَرُدُّوكُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ كَافِرِينَ

O you who have faith, if you obey some of those who were given the Book, they will turn you back, after your faith, into faithless ones (3: 100).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَطِيعُوا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ

O you who have faith! If you obey the faithless, they will turn you back on your heels, and you will become losers (3: 149).

الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلْيَبْتَغُونَ عِنْدَهُمُ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا

Those who take the faithless for allies instead of the faithful, do they seek honor with them? [If so,] indeed all honor belongs to Allah (4: 139).

The Quran forbids Muslims from giving secret information to unbelievers that can cause their domination:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةً مِنْ دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ خَبَالًا وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَمَا تُخْفِي
صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

O you who have faith! Do not take your confidants from others than yourselves; they will spare nothing to ruin you. They are eager to see you in distress. Hatred has already shown itself from their mouths, and what their breasts hide [within] is yet worse (3: 118).

According to the above, neither is tolerance absolutely approved nor is harshness absolutely

condemned; rather, each is acceptable in its own circumstances. Where tolerance is acceptable harshness is deplorable and where harshness is acceptable tolerance is deplorable. A religion that does not embody tolerance is faulty and inhumane. Likewise, a religion that utterly condemns harshness, aggressiveness, and resoluteness is weak and impracticable.

Tolerance in Islam and Liberalism

There are major differences between tolerance in the Islamic culture and in liberalism. Thus, by accepting the existence of positive tolerance in Islam as explained, we cannot conclude that Islam uses the same approach as liberalism. In order to prevent any kind of paralogism, misunderstanding or misuse, these differences must be pointed out.

The contradistinction between Islam and liberalism with regard to tolerance prevails both in concept and in fundamentals. In concept, the differences are as follows. First, Islam does not approve tolerance in an absolute manner but considers it as undesirable and unreasonable in some cases.

In such situations, Islam sees the acceptance of tolerance to be a sign of weakness and superficiality of that ideology. This contrasts with liberalism in that it utterly sanctions and even requires tolerance in all areas or at the very least in the areas of religion, culture, and morals. Additionally, liberalism holds aggression and harshness to be undesirable, illogical, and immoral.

Second, in Islam, the meaning of tolerance is related with gentleness, moderateness, kindness, patience, and reconciliation. To state matters differently, though a unitary, discoverable truth exists, Islam has advised tolerance because people's capacities differ and the same cannot be expected of everyone, because in some cases application of tolerance can have valuable, constructive effects upon the other party not to mention that exercising aggression and intolerance causes more detrimental and unsavory consequences than tolerance.

However, in liberalism the logic behind tolerance is either that there is no truth, truth and error being illusionary or mentally posited and customary; or that if truth and falsehood do indeed exist, due to their being metaphorical and ambiguous, they are given to divergent readings and no one can claim to have correctly discovered them; or that due to the multifarious nature of truth each person can only discover a part of it, therefore, everyone holds only a partial share of the truth [that remains unconnected to the whole or total truth].

Finally, it is argued in the liberal paradigm that even if there exists a singular fathomable truth, the concept of truth and falsehood is not important enough to warrant moral alignment along the lines of "us" and "them" leading to discrimination and aggression.

As previously stated, Islam and liberalism also have differing views concerning the fundamentals of tolerance. Tolerance in liberalism is under the influence of relativity of knowledge, pluralism, humanism,

and secularism. However, tolerance in Islam derives from the expediency of moderation, going easy on God's servants, and concord. Clearly, there is much difference between these fundamentals.

Fundamentals of Tolerance in Liberalism

As I have pointed out, liberalistic tolerance is based upon specific fundamentals. Here, I shall first concisely describe these fundamentals and then critically assess them.

1. Relativity of Knowledge

One of the principal rudiments of tolerance in liberalism is belief in the relativity of knowledge. Prevalence of skepticism in the West, dominance of positivism (or empiricism), anti-rationalism, Kant's theory of phenomenology, and materialism as well as the rejection of intuitive and pure intellectual knowledge lead to the acceptance of epistemological nihilism among Western thinkers.

According to this thought, humans cannot consider knowledge to have realistic and discoverable value. In other words, all human endeavors to fathom truth are in vain. Furthermore, according to this ideology, it is not fitting to give the name of knowledge to religious and moral statements. Since they do not reveal truths or realities, one cannot debate their verity or falsehood.

Religious, moral, and cultural concepts are subjective and mentally posited; they may be signifiers of human sentiments, emotions and desires or might be products of social conventions. Therefore, in this area discourse about truth and falsehood or right and wrong is improper and futile. As a result, making assessments or judgements about these matters or speaking about the superiority of a religion, moral framework, or cultural system is pointless and illogical.

As per liberalism, there is no room for aggression, firmness, or resoluteness because these concepts stem from the fountainhead of certitude, absolutism, and belief in the possibility of realizing truth and falsehood. When certitude is uprooted, relativism is substituted for absolutism, and there are no means to apprehend truth or falsehood, clearly aggression and firmness are illogical approaches.

Where there is no way to assess opinions, cultures, and moral systems, there is certainly no place for persons to believe in their own primacy or to insist upon their own righteousness and the wickedness of others so that they may then resort to aggression. Thus, the only recourse is collective tolerance, and everyone must refrain from encroaching on one another.

As cited by Saada-Gendron (1999: 119–120) to paraphrase Walters: "The instability of humankind and the narrowness of the scope of our knowledge force us to accept uncertain beliefs. There is nothing beyond the very limited truths that we humans can attain save beliefs, factions, and a series of doubts and errors. Wrongness of religion is natural because religion originates from the limited nature of our minds and from this derives the proper meaning of tolerance. On the other hand, fanaticism leads to disease as it denotes believing that one's opinion is the only truth and taking up arms to defend it. It is

clear that we must all show tolerance owing to the fact that we are all inadequate, naive, and subject to error and change. Can a reed that has been blown into the mud demand of a neighboring reed laying the other way, “Be like me or I’ll order you uprooted and burnt!” Since tolerance is mutual, it goes hand in hand with forgiveness.”

2. Pluralism

Another fundamental of tolerance in liberalism is belief in pluralism. Pluralism may be considered in various areas. In politics, pluralism means recognizing different opinions, views, and parties. Pluralists in the political arena believe that the political flow is administrated from a multi-channelled source without which the political system is unacceptable.

In the area of morals and cultures, pluralism means recognizing different cultural and moral systems. This implies that there is no difference between various systems in the development of humankind and the society.

Religious pluralism may be divided into two categories: religion per se and understanding religion. Pluralism in religion per se means that the various religions are different paths to a singular truth. Each person sees the truth from their own perspective and understands it differently. In other words, every religion can equally lead its followers to happiness, salvation, and truth. According to John Hick, one cannot give one religion a rating that cannot be given to all others.

In the understanding of religion, pluralism denotes that all construals of religion must be equally recognized. One cannot consider a single interpretation of religion to be true and all the rest wrong. A person cannot even consider one interpretation of religion to be closer to the intent of the religion than other readings. Since the texts of religion are silent and we continually make use of our expectations, questions, and assumptions in our understanding and since our expectations, questions, and assumptions are different, it is certain that our interpretation of religious texts will be different.

Tolerance is a necessity for pluralistic tendencies. This is because when all views, cultures, moral and political systems, religions, and interpretations of religion enjoy an equal share of truth, no place remains for dispute, disunity, hostility, or aggression.

To paraphrase Walters⁵¹ in a treatise written on tolerance: “When differences are so widespread that borderlines no longer exist between groups but between individuals, we are witness to a pervasive polyculture. This polyculture would not only necessitate tolerance among groups but among individuals as well. The amalgamation of individuals with different identities making up the postmodern society is indicative of a new world polyculturalism that requires a special kind of tolerance in the tension between individualism and collectivism.”

Nigel⁵² proposes liberal tolerance by establishing a type of higher-level neutrality in order to resolve the struggle between people and groups. Nigel is of the opinion that this neutrality will lead us to believe that

all lifestyles possess equal value.

3. Humanism

A further fundamental of tolerance as per liberalism is humanism. Humanism may be considered the very soul of Western culture. In this culture, the human being is the criterion for all things. The human is supreme no matter what it is compared with. Human beings are creators of values and are the standard against which truth is measured. In this view, humans and their carnal desires enjoy primacy.

Basically, humans are visceral creatures. This conveys that their instincts and desires not their reason and intellect, nor God or invisible powers rules them. The human intellect is merely a tool for procuring that which is called for by the instincts and desires. Therefore they do not assent to the existence of any intellectuality beyond instrumental reason. The result of this anthropological view is that a line must be crossed through all differences, all ideological, theoretical, and moral tendencies, and all religious alignments.[53](#)

In the wording of some writers, the humanity of humans is superior to their beliefs, faiths, and morals and no one may be reproached for having a specific belief or behavior. Hence, it could be said that tolerance is a product of liberalistic anthropology.[54](#)

4. Secularism

One other fundamental of tolerance in liberalism is belief in secularism. Secularism is desecralisation of politics, government, and everything that relates to human social and worldly life and prevention of the interference of religion and sanctities in these areas. In a simplistic description, secularism is the dissociation of religion from politics, government, and social life.

In this viewpoint, religion, on the assumption that the basic idea of religion is even accepted, consists of a series of teachings that only relate to the areas of worship, spirituality, and otherworldly life, not to worldly and social affairs. Liberalism claims that by adhering to secularism, one of the important factors for aggression, i.e. the differences between followers of various religions or differing readings of a single religion, is eradicated.

That is to say, in view of the variety of religions and the sundry of religious interpretations, entry of religion into the worldly life of people and the political and governmental arenas (whether in matters of legitimacy, policymaking, or implementation) is an important factor in the aggression of followers of various religions towards one another as well as towards opponents of religion.

Therefore, liberalism maintains that by believing in secularism, the foundation will be laid for religious tolerance.

Critique of the Fundamentals of Liberalistic Tolerance

Here, I will succinctly review the fundamentals of tolerance in liberalism, but first I must note that none of these fundamentals is acceptable according to Islam. In the view of Islam, right and wrong, truth and untruth are real. They can be discovered and attained. Self-evident principles and innate, real values leave no room for delusions of the relativity of knowledge or of values.

In the view of Islam, in all eras and all times the true religion, the Straight Path, the way to salvation, is one. In the manner, among differing and contradicting interpretations, there is just one correct one, which may be realized using specific methods.

In the view of Islam, Islam is a comprehensive religion that deals with both the people's otherworldly needs as well as their needs in this world. Religion exists to grant happiness both in this world and beyond. In truth, the people's happiness in the Hereafter is not separate from their worldly happiness.

In the view of Islam, everything revolves around God. He is the source of all perfection and beauty. Hence, the perfection and happiness of humans rests upon awareness of, nearness to, and reliance upon Him.

Critique of the Relativity of Knowledge

First, the foremost fault of the relativity of human knowledge is that of self-inclusion or self-subversion, which holds this theory by the throat, strangling it. If all human knowledge is relative and no absolute knowledge exists, this theory itself would also be relative. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as an absolute item of knowledge.

If there are no such things as truth and untruth, speaking about the truth of this theory and the untruth of opposing theories is illogical. If evaluation of differing views is impossible, there is also no way to evaluate or prefer the theory of the relativity of knowledge to incompatible theories. If due to the relativity of knowledge all knowledge is in doubt and not certain, perforce the theory of the relativity of knowledge is also dubious.

If we are to keep away from firmness, resoluteness, and inflexibility, then we must necessarily avoid speaking resolutely about relativity of knowledge. Therefore, we should altogether refrain from any kind of opinion. This is in contradiction with the theory of liberalism, which opines with absolute decisiveness about its "principles".

Interestingly, in their philosophical theorizing and speculation on rights, relativists, who regard all principles about 'truth', 'morality', and 'rights' to be doubtful, disallow doubt or even enquiries about their philosophical and human rights fundamentals. They speak of worldwide standards of human rights, global charters, and discovery of liberal human rights.

In these global standards, these discovered rights are discussed as absolute, unconditional assertions. This is a great enigma that must be solved by the 'Party of Sceptics and Relativists' in the 'Parliament of Knowledge'!

Second, the truth is that tolerance cannot be achieved using the ladder of relativity. Quite the opposite, advocates of aggression can legitimize their aggressiveness using this theory since it can be asked: If all knowledge is relative, then by what logic can we consider aggression to be a general, absolute evil? If there is no clear, arbitral truth beyond individual taste or understanding and if everyone has the right to their own personal interpretations and preferences without there being any absolute criterion for judgement, we must give aggressive and despotic persons the right to utilize their own interpretation.

Thus, relativism justifies violence and tyranny. If one considers all criteria to be unwarranted and non-inclusive and regards no view to be provable, and if one does not even consider the most basic rules of knowledge and morality to be acceptable believing in no self-evident, constant, and necessary essence, then what 'truth' is it that aggression might crush under its feet?

What benefit does this fluid truth have for humanity that anyone can claim or debunk and no one can claim or debunk at the same time? What is this natural right and human privacy spoken of that is in danger from aggression?

Third, by diminishing truths and moral values in the minds of people, self-serving human instincts enter the scene like unleashed wild beasts. To explain, with the denial of all truths and moral values, human instincts are left unbound. As a result, without any philosophical or moral enquiries, in order to satisfy these instincts people resort to aggression and by doing that, sow the seeds of thousands of other belligerent acts by other people.

The reality of the Western liberalist world is a testament to this truth. Why are the relativistic liberal societies of today among the most violent and unsafe human societies in the modern world, displaying sustained aggression both against themselves and against others? Has the relativist paradigm not institutionalized aggression in the contemporary world?

Indeed, a regime that considers itself only responsible for the welfare of citizens and does not recognize morality, the order of truth and falsehood, and the system of spiritual happiness and adversity as criteria of communal life can have no other fate.

Radical emphasis upon relativity of all humane and moral principles and all social structures changes the map of morality and truth into something mercurial. This is negation of morality, which can have no end but aggression.[55](#)

Critique of Pluralism

First, the claim of pluralism lacks any grounds and it contradicts rational requisites and axioms as well. In many cases, there are contradictions between the claims and beliefs of religions. To judge any one of these religions to be true would necessitate a contradiction, which is at odds with axiomatic reason. For instance, how can one postulate that the Islamic Tawhid (i.e. monotheism), the Christian Trinity, and the Zoroastrian duality are all true?

Likewise, how can one say that the beliefs of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims that, respectively, Moses (a.s.), Jesus (a.s.), and Muhammad (S) are prophets of, are all true? Alternatively, how can the Christian belief that Jesus (a.s.) is the son of God and the emphasis of Muslims that he is not the son of God both be true? Or, how can the account of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (a.s.) believed by Christians and its rejection by Muslims both be true?

How can the Protestant belief that deems salvation to lie in faith in Jesus and his sacrifice and the Catholic belief that considers, in addition to faith, carrying out special rituals such as baptism to be necessary for salvation both be true?

Second, an important criticism of this theory is self-inclusion. In explanation, if all views and theories are dependent upon the characteristic and spiritual mold of individuals, then this view is included in this principle as well; that is, these views and theories are subject to the mental, spiritual, and personality frameworks of each respective person and cannot represent actual truth. Thus, in this respect there is no difference between this theory and opposing ones.

Third, this theory necessitates acceptance of relativity of knowledge or skepticism. This same criticism has also been levelled at Kant's theory. The criticism directed against pluralism is more severe than that made against the theory of Kant because he posited that a priori forms are the same for all intellects saying that all humans perceive world objects using the same forms.

On the other hand, pluralists believe that there are as many mental forms as the number of persons in existence and that each person perceives phenomena and truths corresponding with their individual mental forms. Therefore, not only is there difference between our perceptions and reality but also between the perceptions of different individuals. On this account, there are as many differing perceptions of the external reality as there are human beings. This means not increased relativity or skepticism but absolute ignorance.[56](#)

Critique of Humanism

First, the idea of humanism in Western liberalism, denying the primacy of God as found in religions, finds its origins in the pride, selfishness, and alienation of modern man that resulted upon his achieving considerable "knowledge" and advanced technology, discovering the "causes" of natural phenomena,

and the prevalence of belief in the primacy of matter.

Of course, what were deemed to be the irrational teachings in the Bible about man and the hostility of the Church to scientists in the Middle Ages on account of their scientific innovations on the pretext of heresy, are also factors that have contributed to this viewpoint.

These factors gradually brought about the mindset in Western people that there is no longer any need for the presence of God either in the natural world or in human life. The humans of today feel that they have reached mature self-sufficiency and are no longer like the children of yesterday who had to hope for an invisible hand to reach out and do something.

Modern humans believe they have achieved the key to solving all problems and can resolve all their difficulties by themselves. No longer is it necessary to worry about performing tasks set by God or heeding His rights upon us. Instead we must worry about our own rights, human rights. No longer must we define humans as responsible creatures but as rightful creatures.

Rather than fretting over fulfilling God-given duties, we must concern ourselves with asserting our inalienable human rights. Therefore, as noted, humanism in the West derives its basis from the pride, neglect, and rebelliousness of humans as well as inimical religious ideology and the misbehavior of religious authorities while no positive basis that is founded in reason or logic may be found for this belief.

Second, even though liberalism speaks considerably of the primacy of man, it unfortunately does not present a clear description of humanity. What manner of human sits in sovereignty and is served by all things? For which human are the sun, moon, clouds, and wind in action to serve? What are the criteria of humanity? What parameters elevate humans over mere animals?

How can humans deprived of belief, faith, and morality be the greatest of all creatures and masters of the universe?! Are humans merely instinctive creatures? Does our humanity derive from our form or our character? Are humans the noblest of all creatures and liege of the cosmos because they can control everything using technology and armaments? Does the humanity of humans, as some Western thinkers have said, come from their power and force?

Third, with this portrayal of humanity and attachment of primacy to the instincts and carnal desires of humans, we not only have not obstructed the path to bellicosity but have opened the doors to the predominance of militancy and added fuel to the fire. If we consider humans to be instinctive creatures; grant primacy to their carnal instincts; eliminate thought, belief, and morality under the pretence of human superiority over faith and ethics; and allow unchecked satisfaction of instincts without any ideological or moral limits, we have certainly laid the foundation for caprice, carnal excess and utilization of aggression to achieve such aims. Aggression is the spawn of unbridled instincts.

Fourth, though Islam has a God-centred view about the world of existence, this view does not run counter to the primacy of humans over all other creatures. In this view, humans are the vicegerents of

God, are blessed with His spirit, have been bowed to by the angels, bear the divine charge, and enjoy nobility and virtue. In this view, not only does God not see humans as rivals but also introduces them as His surrogates and asks some of the noblest of His creations, i.e. angels, to confess their smallness before them and their appointment as His vicegerents.

God spurned Satan due to his insolence regarding this command, even though he had a laudable history before God and in the Heavens, and condemned him to eternal damnation. In the Islamic view, not only is God not worried about human acquisition of knowledge and wisdom, He has also taught humans the Names (or concepts according to some interpretations) and presents this comprehension as the criterion for human vicegerency in an encounter with the angels.

In this view, God has created everything in service to humankind. In return, humans can attain nearness to God and thus exert their will to appropriate and subdue all worldly phenomena.

Critique of Secularism

Secularism is based upon specific epistemological, ontological, and anthropological fundamentals that are essentially different from religious epistemology, ontology, and anthropology. The definitions presented by secularism about humankind, the world, human life, human rights, as well as their benefits, detriments, expedencies, corruptions, happiness, and wretchedness are very different from those presented by religion. Therefore, we can never welcome secularism with a religion-centred ideology.

Religious ideologies are insistent upon having an active presence in all areas of human life. They do not deprive humans of their presence in the most esoteric of spiritual and intellectual areas nor do they consent to their absence from the most basic and mundane matters of life. However, secularism in fact means obscuring religion from all scenes of life whether personal, social, theoretical, or practical.

Secularism signifies rejection of the interference of invisible, holy, or supernatural entities in human life. This means that God, religion, and invisible phenomena do not exist or, if they do, they do not have the right to influence or interfere in any aspects, whether theoretical or practical, of human life.

In truth, just as religion attempts to organize human life in all areas of thought, morality, and society, secularism also seeks to manage human life but in a manner that the presence of God, religion, and holy issues not be felt in any area and that humans get used to handling their affairs in the absence of these matters.

Hence, if humans desire science, philosophy, art, literature, education, technology, marriage, family, work, production, distribution, consumption, social organizations, government, etc. they must seek them all out in the pavilion of secularism and in the absence of God and religion.

We could say that secularism is itself an ideology, the ideology of refusing the interference of sanctities, divinity, and the supernatural in all areas of human life. Therefore, a secular society or government is

ideological just like a religious society or government. Actually, even though it seems that secularism desires to eliminate any kind of ideology from the government and society, it is underhandedly working towards establishing itself as the comprehensive, universal ideology for human life. Despite the fact that secularism advises everyone to tolerance and flexibility, it has never practiced them itself.

Even though secularism invites the world to pluralism, it does not recognize any other ideology than itself. It can even be said about liberalist societies that whenever there is any mismatch between secularism and other liberalistic principles such as freedom, democracy, tolerance or pluralism, secularism always wins out and the rest must fall back to the extent necessary in favor of secularism.

Conclusion

The outcome of this paper is that tolerance means going easy, magnanimity, and moderateness. Tolerance is desirable in encounters with people, in invitation to the religion, in peaceful coexistence with followers of other religions, and in government and administration. God also advocates tolerance in His divine laws as well as in reward and punishment to the extent that is expedient.

On the other hand, tolerance in effectuation of the divine mission; communication of the heavenly message; announcing the truth; struggling against falsehood, distortion, and innovation in religion; defending the rights of the people; establishing justice; battling oppression, oppressors, and religious sedition; executing divine punishment; and shunning the dominance of unbelievers over Muslims are all inappropriate and unacceptable.

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[2.](#) See: Mu'in, 1981, vol. 1, p. 1078; Firuzabadi, vol. 3, p. 583; and Dehkhoda, 1964:668

[3.](#) Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1998–99:1258)

[4.](#) See: Saada-Gendron, 1999:17

[5.](#) See: Dihkhuda, Mu'in, and Al-Munjid

[6.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah 2000:580

[7.](#) Musnad Hanbal, vol. 5, p. 79.

[8.](#) Kulayni, 1986, vol. 4, p. 354.

[9.](#) Ibid., p. 359.

[10.](#) Ibid.

[11.](#) Ibid., p. 363.

[12.](#) Kulayni, vol. 5, p. 493.

[13.](#) Mutahhari, 1999, vol. 2, p. 241.

[14.](#) Quran; Baqarah 2:256, An'am 6:35, Yunus 10:108, and Shu'ara' 26:3

[15.](#) Kulayni, vol. 1, pp. 72–82.

[16.](#) Quran; Ale Imran 3:64

- [17.](#) Quran; Tawbah 9:4
- [18.](#) Nahj al-balaghah, letter 53.
- [19.](#) Nahj al-balaghah, wisdom 176.
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