

Islam and the Concept of Peaceful Co-existence

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Introduction

The concept of coexistence arose with the emergence of societies and grew out of the affinities between its members. When one ponders over the depth of the meaning of the expression of peaceful coexistence, as well as its morphology and syntax in various languages, one reaches the conclusion that the expression reflects somewhat an uneasy position, fluctuating between peace in its clear and straightforward meaning and war in its traditional and well-known meaning. Islam being a living reality has never violated the domain of this concept and contributed to the human civilization in a much constructive manner. The present study highlights and attempts to address the reality of the coexistence that Islam calls for beyond the usual meaning of the term even when it is modified by the attribute peaceful going beyond this basic meaning, allows us to consider larger meanings. One of such meanings is the possibility of living with one another, outside the context of conflict and within the context of one of the most important values of Islam and one of its distinctive features, i.e. tolerance which allows for the full range of freedom that it conveys to all humanity, and equality amongst all, without race or sex distinctions. This attitude also conveys that all inherited enmity should be eradicated, and assumes that all humans look at each other with noble and considerate feelings and that they all aspire to truth and freedom. It also overcomes all the selfishness which might control one's actions. And this is usually the case, as can be witnessed by the bloody events recorded in history, which were greatly influenced by the conflicts arising from cultural factors such as intellectual and religious differences and likewise all the distinctions that thinking and freedom of speech might unfold.

1.1 The Peaceful Character of Islam

Here, we would like to insist that tolerance is a very important value in Islam and that in Arabic etymology it originates from the word meaning indulgence. It is an overall feature of Islam which characterizes all its aspects of worship Jurisprudence and behaviour.

The Prophet (PBUH) has highlighted the importance of this feature and made it the epitome of Islam when he said: "I came with the upright and tolerant religion", 1) And when somebody asked him (PBUH): "Which religion is liked most by God?", he replied: "The upright and tolerant religion." (2)

As to "the upright religion", it has been mentioned in several verses of the Holy Qur'an, as in God Almighty's command when he orders the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims to express their view concerning what some people of the Book allege about Islam, including the chauvinism expressed in their views and defamation of others, and to state that they believe in all the holy Books and the messengers upon whom these books were revealed. "And they say; Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided, Say (unto them, O Muhammad) Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters. Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and unto Him we have surrendered." (3)

The upright is he who has a sincere inclination towards what is right and who is truthful and obedient to God's command, without wryness or hypocrisy following thus the pattern according to which Abraham (PBUH) lived, and which later on became the characteristic of every Muslim on the basis of the fact that Abraham's religion contains the roots of the creed of God's oneness. This is the same point of view that was expressed in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an: "The messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and (so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers – We make no distinction between any of His messengers." (4)

The Holy Qur'an considers this tolerant and comprehensive belief a sign of being well guided and a proof thereof, If this otherwise, then such a belief is only a false appearance leading to ignorance and conflict. God Almighty states: "And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism." (5)

The link between divine guidance and Abraham's uprightness occurs in many Qur'anic contexts as in God Almighty's verse; "Say: Lo! As for me, my Lord hath guided me unto a straight path, a right religion, the community of Abraham, the upright, who was no idolater." (6)

As to the adjective "tolerant" it is related in Arabic derivation to magnanimity, indulgence and permissibility. From an

etymological point of view it refers to meanings such as generosity, and open-handedness. Then, it acquired the meanings of ease and leniency in interaction with other people and contexts which call for tolerance and generosity. The Prophet (PBUH) says: "Indulgence reaps benefit and tight handedness reaps misfortune: (7) He (PBUH) also says: "God Bless an indulgent man when he sells, when he buys and when he is in need", (8) A man asked him once: "O Prophet of God, which is the best work?", the Prophet (PBUH) replied: "Belief in God, almsgiving and fighting holy wars for the sake of God and a blessed pilgrimage". The man said: "This is hardly possible to achieve, O Prophet of God". The Prophet (PBUH) then replied: "Addressing others tenderly, generosity, indulgence and treating others nicely." (9)

2 Moderation and Optimism

The true face of Islam is represented by indulgence, moderation and optimism. The most important features of this religion are:

First: It is a natural religion in the sense that it suits the natural predisposition of man and is accessible to his understanding and dedication. God Almighty says: "So set thy purpose (O Mohammad) for religion as a man by nature upright-the nature (framed) of Allah, in which he hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not". (10)

Second: It is the religion of moderation God Almighty says: "Thus We have appointed you a middle nation..." (11) Moderation is the best of attitudes. It may be between two extreme attitudes: negligence and exaggeration or disengagement and excitement. And this is exactly what the Prophet (PBUH) means when he states: "The best stand is the middle one" (12)

Third: It is the religion of ease. God Almighty says: "Allah desireth for you ease, He desireth not hardship for you" (13) And the Prophet (PBUH) says: "Religion is ease and it will overpower whoever wants to make it otherwise, so be guided and be optimistic" (14) He (PBUH) also warns against straying away from ease in religion: "Beware of exaggerating in religion, those before you who did so only met with ruin" (15)

Fourth: It is a religion which insists on good behaviour, which should be characterised by civility, gentleness and be based upon good deeds, generosity and high morality. God Almighty gave the following emphatic description of his Messenger (PBUH), "And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature", (16) He also gave him the following advice which rather highlights one of the Prophet's characteristics: "Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then lo! he between whom and thee there was enmity (will become) as though he was a bosom friend", (17) It is no surprise that the Prophet

(PBUH) says later on: "I was sent to perfect high morality in people" (18)

2.1 Tolerance

The notion of tolerance appears to be a distinctive feature that fortifies the society which Islam advocates and where people are called upon to coexist. It is a religion of magnanimity, in which there should be neither discomfort nor chauvinism, neither exaggeration nor extremism, neither violence nor terrorism, be it towards oneself or the others (19) We refer here to all those who live in this society be they Muslims or otherwise, and even those who belong to other societies as they also have their rights, those we refer to today as human rights. These rights concern the civil, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the life of the individual and that of the group. These rights focus on one central aspect which is that of freedom. And as we know, freedom is a natural right for all individuals. These individuals cannot survive without tolerance. i.e. without the right to differ.

It will remain that the issue of tolerance examined from this wide perspective needs clarification, albeit from a brief discussion of the morphology of the word tolerance. The word *Tasaamuh* (tolerance) has the same form as that of *Ta'aayush* (coexistence) already referred to, and coined on the basis of the form *Tafaa'ul*. It is closer in meaning to the verb of origin which is that of forgiving, or to the meaning of spontaneous compliance resulting from the tolerance of the religion itself and its call to all Moslems to be tolerant.

Islam is far more than a Theology and is concerned with societal life in the sense that it advocates the setting up of a legitimate society which has its own legislation, regulations and principles which govern the different matters of its life.

As such, Islam is a religion which concerns at the same time the individual and the society (20). It takes the individual as a starting point to encompass the group. It looks at individuality in its philosophical and psychological meaning which is synonymous with personality. It also looks at it in its social dimension making of individuality the state of the individual which considers him a component unit amongst all the units which make up society. Individuality is also looked at from the point of view of a unit having its own features and faculties which make a capable of living within that society, and which make it free of all the kinds of behaviour which might lead the individual to be selfish and solitary, considering only his own interests with the exclusion of the others.

For all this, and especially from the perspective of difference, Islam does not oblige or coerce anybody to adopt it. God Almighty says: "There is no compulsion in religion" (21). In

the same verse, God Almighty responds to whoever might wonder about the reason for this lack of coercion. "The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believed in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will n ever break." This is a motivating response, which also means that God Almighty promises the tolerant Muslims, who have faith that they are safe and successful, like the man who holds unto a sturdy rope cannot fear that he will collapse or fall.

Indeed, the secret in allowing difference is that Islam advocates faith which should be based on observation, contemplation and then choice. At the same time God Almighty has given the opportunity to those who believe and who perform good deeds to reap requital and recompense, as opposed to those who neither believe nor perform good deeds and who should expect all the punishment that should ensure there from. It should be understood that when Islam allows freedom of faith, it also leaves the final word to difference about it to God Almighty who says, "It is your God who arbitrates between them on the Day of Reckoning upon their differences (about religion)" (22)

2.2 Derivatives for Co-existence

The Quranic verse: *"There is no compulsion in Religion"* to mean that nobody should be made to adopt Islam through the use of force, persecution and intimidation or similar means, because it is a religion that is based on thought and contemplation. Thus, the notion of freedom of faith, in the view of Islam, starts out from the idea that religion is both faith and belief. Any personal and inner feeling has to be based on conviction, inclination and ease. This is because adopting Islam means that one has led and submitted himself to God Almighty.

There are those who may object to this, basing their objection on the Prophet's (PBUH) saying: "I was ordered to fight people until they declare that there is no God other than Allah and that I am Allah's Messenger. So if they do they will have spared their blood and belongings thanks to their declaration and for the sake of Allah" (23)

We wish to show that this order was issued to the Prophet (PBUH), to urge him to face the attacks of the idolaters who confronted him and stood in the face of the call of Islam in Mekkah, and forced him and his followers to emigrate to AL. Madinah. But after the conquest of Mekkah and the establishment of Islam therein, our religion considered its adversaries with tolerance, as long as they did not fight it and did not attempt to establish tyranny or injustice and whatever persecution would result there from, God Almighty says: "And fight them until persecution is

no more, and religion is for Allah" (24). The notion of persecution refers to whatever stands in the way of the call for Islam, which is permanent and continuous, or at least that is the way it should be.

Islam distinguishes in its treatment of its opponents between those who fight Muslims and those who are at peace with them. As to the opponents who are at peace with Muslims, God Almighty says: "Allah forbiddeth you n ot those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and ideal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers" (25). As to the opponents who actually fight Islam God Almighty says in the following verse. "Allah forbiddeth you only those who warred against you on account of religion and have driven you out from your homes and helped to drive you out, that ye make friends of them, Whosoever maketh friends of them – (All) such are wrong-doers" (26).

3. Islam's Constructive Character

Islam advocates freedom, it is because it is a religion of life, which calls upon the person to exert his being by his presence, activity and productivity. This presence is also supposed to be based upon co-existence and characterised by dignity and honour. The primary aspect of this behaviour is connected with the belief in only one God, a phase which liberates man from idolatry in all its aspects, starting from the worship of idols and fetishes through straying into idiosyncrasies and the giving in to the tyranny of money and the exploitation of man by man.

In this way, the freeing of man from believing in more than one deity has led to another level of freedom, that of freeing man from all kinds of domination that might control him and hinder his existence. Islam has thus allowed man to be sheltered from enmity, and tyranny, or anything that might usurp his freedom, or his life, or his religion or deprive him of his belongings, family and all his sacred values. God Almighty explained the importance of security from hunger and fear and its reflection on worship in the following verse from the Glorious Qur'an. "So let them worship the Lord of this House, Who hath fed them against hunger and hath made them safe from fear" (27). The Prophet (PBUH) stressed the importance of the psychological and social security of man in the following Hadith: "Whoever becomes safe in his home and society, and sound of health, who has his daily food, should consider as if we were given the whole world" (28).

3.1 Human Rights and General Freedom

Islam has been a precursor of all constitutions and legislations which mention human rights and which have highlighted its individual and general freedom. Suffice it to only mention some

of the aspects that Islam has called for in this context, as is the case of the protection of shelter about which God Almighty says: "O ye who believe; Enter not houses other than your own without first announcing your presence and invoking peace upon the folk thereof" (29). And also the freedom of correspondence and all such instances where Islam forbids its violation by spying. In this context, God Almighty warns people against trying to find out about what is not readily apparent in people's personal life and says: "And spy not, neither backbite one another" (30)

One issue that is generally raised in this context and which is most of the time misunderstood is that of the call of Islam for the holy war (31). We would like to raise the following three points in order to clarify this issue.

First: Islam rejects the use of force to convert non-Muslims to Islam, God Almighty says in a verse that we referred to earlier. "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break" (32).

Second: Islam's call for peace does not mean giving in to enmity and tyranny, and letting evil deeds and injustice go unspoken against and giving in to immorality or any such behaviour which is a violation of human life which God Almighty has based its shari'a (Islamic law) upon knowing each other, forgiveness, coexistence and living together.

Third: Through this Shari'a, Islam considers that the basic attitude of man is his inclination toward peace, and that recourse to war occurs only in absolutely necessary situations. Evidence for such a position is clear in the Prophet's (PBUH) call to Muslims to avoid wishing for fighting, and to be firm when they are led into fighting. He (PBUH) said: "Do not wish to fight your enemy and ask for God's forgiveness, if you do encounter him, call the Name of God and be firm" (33) As such he considers war a violation of peace and thus a crime, as long as there are no particular situation which call for war and which make it fair and legitimate. This is exactly what various modern international treaties agree with. To mention only one of these treaties we can refer to the United Nations Charter, which urges nations to solve their differences through peaceful means, and to avoid the use of violence and threats in order to preserve international peace, security and justice. This is also what makes this charter prohibit war except in situations of legitimate defence as has been defined in Article 51, which stipulates that, "there is nothing in this Charter that weakens or curtails the natural right of nations, be they individuals or groups, to defend themselves should an armed force attack any one of the members of the United Nations of the United Nations, until the Security Council takes the necessary measures to keep international peace and security."

The most salient aspect of freedom is probably that of the freedom of speech. In Islam it is considered as a favour that comes directly after the favour of life. It is through this freedom that God Almighty shows the superiority of man over the creatures which neither speak nor explain. God Almighty says: "The beneficent hath made known the Qur'an. He hath created man. He hath taught him utterance" (34). It is in this context that we can explain how the Glorious Qur'an makes man responsible for speaking the truth and condemning the act of not doing so. God Almighty says: "Confound not truth with falsehood. 'nor knowingly conceal the truth' (35). It is in this context that one can talk about, "enjoining right conduct and forbidding indecency", and Islam has linked it with faith, and has made of it what has given the Islamic community its distinguished stand and superiority. God Almighty says: "Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and ye believe in Allah" (36)

4. Treatment to Non-Muslim Communities

As for the Non-Muslim communities, which constitute minorities in the Muslim society. Islam has shown such an extent of tolerance that allows a co-existence which not only ensures their freedom of faith and worship but also makes of them full-fledged citizens. Such citizens who are very well integrated in this society with all the due freedom and respect and with no feeling of loneliness or marginality. On the basis of this capacity, it was possible for the culture and civilization created by Islam to interact while preserving a balance which still allowed them to keep all their own bases and highlights. They also kept their particular characteristics whose scope widened and improved as they kept interacting and competing. These interacting suspects did not lose any of their characterizing features which they integrated in the comprehensive Islamic melting pot where they coexisted and got synchronized within it (37).

Conclusion

If the Muslims have experienced along the latest ages events which have brought with them many negative aspects from which they suffered and are still suffering in their lives and relations, the spirit of forgiving is still alive and living on. And it is thus in spite of the distortion and attempts of destabilization remanding from the enemies of Islam, and even from some who pretend to be related to it. That spirit of forgiving is in dire need of being resuscitated from all sides within a clean and neat context of mutual trust and a belief in the self and in the other, and through an optimistic outlook on the present and the future. This has to be based also on the assumption that the person who enjoys these qualities is also responsible and has a purpose in life. It is for this purpose that he works for both his own sake and that of

humanity in general. This development could not have progressed, shined and reflected the humanness of the Islamic civilization and culture, had it not been for a capacity of open-mindedness which transcended all obstacles and hindrances. This capacity resides in its focus on Islam and not on the race of those who adopted it as a religion, while allowing non-Muslims in the spheres of consultation and discussion, and those of giving and taking, no matter when and where and whatever might result there from in terms of tribal or regional differences. This capacity also led this civilization to benefit from variety and diversity, and in a deep-rooted solution for what concerns the self and the other including the issue of tradition and modernism in all their general aspects. It also resides in the stability which results from co-existence and cohabitation on the basis of forgiveness and peace. All this had the deepest influence on the evolution of thought and the improvement of life. On the basis of this capacity, it was possible for the culture and civilization created by Islam to interact while preserving a balance which still allowed them to keep all their own bases and highlights. They also kept their particular characteristics whose scope widened and improved as they kept interacting and competing. These interacting aspects did not lose any of their characterizing features which they integrated in the comprehensive Islamic melting pot where they coexisted and got synchronized within it.

Reference:

1. Part of a Hadith related by Ibn Hanbal in his Masnad, on the authority of Abu Imamah.
2. It was related by Ibn Hanbal in his Masnad, on the authority of Ibn Abbas, It was also related, with some difference in the wording, by Al-Bukhari in Kitab Al-Imane and by Al-Trimidhi in Al-Manaqib.
3. Al-Baqarah (The Cow): 135-136
4. Al-Baqarah (The Cow): 285
5. Ibid. 137.
6. Al-An'am (Cattle): 161.
7. It was related by Al-Qudha'i on the authority of Ibn 'Awn and Ad-Daylami on the authority of Abu Hurayra. See word on this Hadith in Kashfal-Khafa by Al-Aljouni, Vol. I.P.456, Maktabat Al-Qudsi, 135JH.
8. It was related by Al-Bukhari and Ibn Majjah on the authority of Jaber.
9. It was related by Ibn Hanbal in his Masnad, on the authority of Omar Ibn Al'Ass.
10. Ar-Rum (The Romans): 30.
11. Al-Baqarah (The cow): 143.
12. It was related by Al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Kinanah.
13. Al-Baqarah (The Cow): 185.
14. It was related by Al-Bukhari and An-Nissa'i on the authority of Abu Hurayra.
15. It was related by Ahmad: An-Nissa'i: Ibn Majjah; and Al-Hakim on the authority of Ibn Abbas.
16. Al-Qalam (The Pen): 4.
17. Fussilat: 34.
18. It was related by Malik in the Muwatta (See: Tanwir Al-Hawalik: Sharh 'ala Mowatta' Malik by Jalal Ad-Dine Abdurrahmane As-Suyuti, Vol.3, P.97, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon).
19. See Tasamuh al-Islam ma'a adh-Dhat wal Akhar (Tolerance of Islam toward the Self and the Other), book made by the author to the 3rd Session of the Summer University, organized by the Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs in Casablanca on 4-6 Sha'ban 1414H/ 17-19 January 1994. (The present research is based on this book)
20. It was related by Al-Bukhari: Muslim; At-Tirmidhi; An-Nisa'i, and Ibn Majjah on the authority of Abu-Hurayrah.
21. Idid: 9.
22. At-Tawbah (Repentance): 71.
23. It was reported by Al-Bukhari; Muslim: At-Trimidhi, An-Nissa'i and Ibn Hanbal, on Abu Mussa, and added "He entwined his fingers".
24. It was reported by Al-Bukhari in the book titled Al-Iman on the authority of Anas. It was also related by Muslim and Ibn Hanbal.
25. It was reported by Al-Bukhari; Muslim; At-Trimidhi; and Ibn-Hanbal, on the authority of Ibn Omar.
26. It was reported by At-Trimidhi on the authority of 'Ubayd Allah Ibn Mohsen Al-Ansari Al-Khutaymi.
27. An-Nur (Light): 27.
28. Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah, by Muhammad Ibn Al-Hossein Al-Farra' Al-Hanball, P.160-61 (Authenticated by Muhammad Hamed Al-Faky. Dar Al-Kutub Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 143H/1983 A.d.
29. Al-Tawbah (Repentance): 6
30. Al-Ma'dah (The Table Spread): 5.
31. Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah by Al-Farra'. P.32. This point of view is shared by Abu Al-Hassan Ali Ibn Muhammad Al-Mawardi in Al-Ankam As-Sultaniyyah, PP.21-22. (Authenticated by Muhammad Badr An-Na'ssani Al-Halabi, Al-Khaneji Editions, Egypt, 1327H/ 1909 A.D.
32. See Futuh Al-Buldan by Ahmed Ibn Yahya Ibn Jaber Al-Balathiri, P.142.
33. Kitab Al-Kharaj by Abu Yusuf Yaaqub Ibn Ibrahim, P.74, Edition Salafiyyah, Egypt, 1347H.
34. Al-Kharaj wa Sin'at al-Kitabah, by Qudamah Ibn Ja'far, P.225 (authenticated by Muhammad Hossein Az-Zubaydi, publication of the Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar Annashr Arrashid, Iraq, 1981. In addition, it is related in Al-Bukkari and in At-Tirmidhi that the Prophet (PBUH) took the tribute from the magians of Hajar. It is also related in At-Timidhi that he (PBUH) took it from the magians of Bahrain; and that Omar took it from the Persians; and that Othman took it from the Persians and the Berbers.
35. Al Bayan wa At-Tabyine, by Al-Jabiz, Vol.2, P.46 (authenticated by Abdussalam Harun, 2nd edition, 1380H/1961 A.D.) See Tarikh Al-Umam wa Al-Muluk, by ja'afar Muhammad Ibn Jarir, Vol3, P.265 (Cairo: Al-Istiqamah, 1357H/1939 A.D.) See also Sahih Al-Bukhari under chapter on Al-Jihad.
36. At-Tawba (Repentance): 29.
37. Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah, by Al-Mawardi, PP.127-128.