**ISLAM – A RELIGION OF TOLERANCE**



**3.159**. It was by a mercy from God that (at the time of the setback), you (O Messenger) were lenient with them (your Companions). Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away from about you. Then pardon them, pray for their forgiveness, and take counsel with them in the affairs (of public concern); and when you are resolved (on a course of action), put your trust in God. Surely God loves those who put their trust (in Him).(A)



**16.90**. God enjoins justice (and right judgment in all matters), and devotion to doing good, and generosity towards relatives; and He forbids you indecency, wickedness, and vile conduct (all offenses against religion, life, personal property, chastity, and health of mind and body). He exhorts you (repeatedly) so that you may reflect and be mindful!(B)



**7.199.** (Even so, O Messenger) adopt the way of forbearance and tolerance, and enjoin what is good and right, and withdraw from the ignorant ones (do not care what they say or do).(C)

**ISLAM – A RELIGION OF TOLERANCE**

**ISLAM**  is a word derived from the root words silm and salamah. It means surrendering, guiding to peace and contentment, and establishing security and accord.

Islam is a religion of security, safety, and peace. These principles permeate the lives of Muslims. When Muslims stand to pray, they cut their connection with this world, turning to their Lord in faith and obedience, and standing at attention in His presence. Completing the prayer, as if they were returning back to life, they greet those on their right and left by wishing peace: “Remain safe and in peace.” With a wish for safety and security, peace and contentment, they return to the ordinary world once again.

Greeting and wishing safety and security for others is considered one of the most beneficial acts in Islam. When asked which act in Islam is the most beneficial, the Prophet replied, “Feeding others and greeting those you know and those you do not know.”[1]

**Accusing Islam of Terrorism**

How unfortunate it is that Islam, which is based on this understanding and spirit, is shown by some circles to be synonymous with terrorism. This is a great historical mistake; wrapping a system based on safety and trust in a veil of terrorism just shows that the spirit of Islam remains unknown. If one were to seek the true face of Islam in its own sources, history, and true representatives, then one would discover that it contains no harshness, cruelty, or fanaticism. It is a religion of forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance, as such saints and princes of love and tolerance as Rumi, Yunus Emre, Ahmed Yesevi,[2] Bediüzzaman,[3] and many others have so beautifully expressed. They spent their lives preaching tolerance, and each became a legend in his own time as an embodiment of love and tolerance.

Jihad can be a matter of self-defense or of removing obstacles between God and human free choice. Our history is full of examples that show how this principle has been implemented in life.

Of course there are and should be occasions where war is unavoidable. However, the Qur’anic verses on jihad that were revealed for particular conditions have been generalized by some short-sighted individuals. Whereas in actual fact war is a matter of secondary importance, it has been given priority as an essential issue by these people. Such people do not understand the true meaning and spirit of Islam. Their failure to establish a proper balance between what is primary and what is secondary leads others to conclude that Islam advocates malice and hatred in the soul, whereas true Muslims are full of love and affection for all creation. Regarding this, how apt is the following couplet:

Muhammad was born out of love,

What can be born out of love without Muhammad?

**Love Is the Essence of Creation**

The Pride of Humanity was a man of love and affection. One of his names was Habibullah (the Beloved of God). In addition to meaning one who loves, habib means one who is loved, one who loves God, and one who is loved by God. Sufi masters like Imam Rabbani,[4] Mawlana Khalid,[5] and Shah Waliyyullah[6] state that love is the ultimate station of the spiritual journey.

God created the universe as a manifestation of His love for His creatures, in particular humanity, and Islam became the fabric woven out of this love. In the words of Bediüzzaman, love is the essence of creation. Just as a mother’s love and compassion compels her to allow a surgeon to operate on her sick child to save his or her life, jihad allows war, if needed, to preserve such fundamental human rights as the right to life and religious freedom. Jihad does not exclusively mean war.

Once a friend said to me: “Without exception and regardless of differences in faith, you meet with everyone, and this breaks the tension of Muslims toward probable opponents. But it is an Islamic principle to love those things or people who must be loved on the way of God and dislike those things or people who must be disliked on the way of God.” Actually this principle is often misunderstood, for in Islam all of creation is to be loved according to the rule of loving on God’s way.

“Disliking on the way of God” applies only to feelings, thoughts, and attributes. Thus, we should dislike such things as immorality, unbelief, and polytheism, not the people who engage in such activities. God created humanity as noble beings, and everyone, to a certain degree, has a share in this nobility. His Messenger once stood up out of respect for humanity as the funeral procession of a Jew passed by. When reminded that the deceased was a Jew, the Prophet replied: “But he is a human,” thereby showing the value Islam gives to human.

This action demonstrates how highly our Prophet respected every person. Given this, the involvement of some self-proclaimed Muslim individuals or institutions in terrorist activities can in no way be approved of by Islam. The reasons for this terrorism should be sought for in the actions themselves, in false interpretations of the faith, and in other factors and motives. Islam does not support terror, so how could a Muslim who truly understands Islam be a terrorist?

If we can spread the Islamic understanding of such heroes of love as Niyazi-i Misri,[7] Yunus Emre, and Rumi globally, if we can extend their messages of love, dialogue, and tolerance to those who thirst for this message, then everyone will run toward the embrace of love, peace, and tolerance that we represent.

The definition of tolerance in Islam is such that the Prophet even prohibited verbal abuse of unbelievers. For example, Abu Jahl died before embracing Islam, despite all the Prophet’s efforts. His unbelief and enmity toward the Prophet was such that he deserved the title Abu Jahl: Father of ignorance and impudence. His untiring opposition to Islam was a thorn in the side of the Muslims.

Despite such hostility, when in an assembly of Companions where Abu Jahl’s son Ikrimah was present, the Prophet one day admonished a Companion who had been heard insulting Abu Jahl: “Do not hurt others by criticizing their fathers.”[8] Another time, he said: “Cursing your mother and father is a great sin.” The Companions asked: “O Messenger of God, would anyone curse their parents?” The Prince of Prophets replied: “When someone curses another’s father and the other curses his father in return, or when someone curses another’s mother and the other does the same in return, they will have cursed their parents.”[9]

While the Prophet of Mercy was inordinately sensitive when it came to respecting others, some Muslims today justify unpleasant behavior on the basis of religion. This shows that they do not understand Islam, a religion in which there is no place for malice and hatred.

The Qur’an strongly urges forgiveness and tolerance. In one verse, it says of pious people:

They swallow their anger and forgive people. God loves those who do good. (Al-Imran 3:134)

In other words, Muslims should not retaliate when verbally abused or attacked. If possible, as Yunus says, they should act as if they had no hand or tongue with which to respond and no heart with which to resent. They must swallow their anger and close their eyes to the faults of others. The words selected in the verse are very meaningful. Kazm, translated as swallowing, literally means swallowing something like a thorn, an object that actually cannot be swallowed; thus it denotes swallowing one’s wrath, no matter how difficult. Another verse, while mentioning the characteristics of believers, says:

When they meet hollow words or unseemly behavior, they pass them by with dignity. (Al-Furqan 25:72)

When we look at the exalted life of God’s Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, we see that he always practiced the precepts presented in the Qur’an. For example, a Companion once repented of a sin and admitted: “I am guilty of fornication. Whatever my punishment is, give it and cleanse me.” The Prince of Prophets said: “Go back and repent, for God forgives all sins.”[10] This event was repeated three times. Another time, a Companion complained to the Prophet that someone had stolen his belongings. But as the punishment was about to be carried out the Companion said: “I have changed my mind and do not want to pursue my case. I forgive this individual.” The Prophet asked: “Why did you bring this matter to court? Why didn’t you forgive him from the outset?”[11]

When such examples are studied from their original sources, it is clear that the method of those who act with enmity and hatred, who view everyone else with anger, and who blacken others as infidels is non-Islamic, for Islam is a religion of love and tolerance. A Muslim is a person of love and affection who avoids every kind of terrorist activity and who has no malice or hatred for anyone or anything.(12)

**REFERENCES**

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**(B)16:90/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

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**[1] Abu Dawud, Adab, 142.
[2] Ahmed Yesevi (d. 1166): Sufi poet and early Turkish spiritual leader who had a powerful influence on the development of mystical orders throughout the Turkish-speaking world.
[3] Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960): An Islamic scholar of the highest standing with deep spirituality, a wide knowledge of modern science and the contemporary world. He believed that humanity could be saved from its crises and could achieve true progress and happiness only by knowing its true nature, and by recognizing and submitting to God. His Risale-i Nur (The Epistles of Light) deals with the Islamic essentials of faith, thought, worship, and morality and Qur’anic descriptions of Divine activity in the universe. Containing rational and logical proofs and explanations of all Qur’anic truths, it is his reply to those who deny them in the name of science. In his work, he reveals their many discrepancies and illogical statements.
[4] Imam Rabbani (Shaykh Ahmad al-Sirhindi) (1564?-1624): Indian Sufi and theologian who reasserted and revived the principles of Islamic faith and Sufi tradition in India against the syncretistic religious tendencies prevalent under the Mogul emperor Akbar. He was given the posthumous title: Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thani (Renovator of the Second [Islamic] Millennium).
[5] Mawlana Khalid al-Baghdadi (1778-1827): Naqshbandi master considered the mujaddid (reviver) of the thirteenth Islamic century. The Khalidi order, a new Naqshbandi branch, arose under his leadership and had acquired a large following by the end of the nineteenth century.
[6] Shah Waliyyullah Muhaddith of Delhi (1702-1762): A great scholar of the twelfth Islamic century. Some writers call him Khatam al-Muhadditheen (the last of the hadith scholars).
[7] Niyazi-i Misri (1618-1694). A Sufi poet and member of the Khalwati order.
[8] Hakim, al-Mustadrak, 3:241; Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-’Ummal, 13:540.
[9] Muslim, Iman, 145; Tirmidhi, Birr, 4.
[10] Muslim, Hudud, 17, 23; Bukhari, Hudud, 28.
[11] Abu Dawud, Hudud, 14(4394); Nasai, Sarik, 4 (8, 68); Muwatta, Hudud, 28, (2, 834).**

**(12)Fethullah, M. Gulen. Love and Tolerance. Tughra Books, 2012.**