

# Contemporary Significance Of Interfaith Harmony: In The Light Of Seerat Tayyaba

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## Abstract:

Islam is a religious faith characterized by principles of peace and compassion, advocating for the inherent dignity of all individuals, regardless of their social status, racial background, or religious affiliation. The principles of compassion and tolerance are evident in several facets of Islam and in the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

We inhabit a cultural milieu in contemporary global civilization characterized by diverse religious and belief systems. Religious diversity is an inherent and widespread reality within our society. Despite their numerous intellectual and practical distinctions, all religions are committed to advancing human well-being. All of them promote the values of ethics and compassion inside individuals. However, regrettably, despite these moral teachings, the erroneous view of pluralism has resulted in the emergence of religious extremism and the disharmony observed in inter-religious relations that we currently encounter. In the contemporary era, it is undeniable that numerous lives have been lost in the context of religious conflicts. Over the past two decades, the international community has witnessed a significant rise in inter-religious disputes and confrontations. Indeed, at the regional level, every individual has a pervasive sense of insecurity and profound hatred, frequently driven by religious disparities.

To effectively address the issue of religious disputes and promote Unity amidst diversity, it is imperative to foster peaceful relationships and cultivate a spirit of tolerance towards differing opinions. This research study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of Religious Tolerance, as interpreted through the lens of two prominent Islamic sources, namely the Quran and Seerah. To foster improved relationships and mutual respect among individuals of many religious beliefs, examining the causes of intolerance and exploring how the Quran and Seerah offer guidance on cultivating a spirit of religious tolerance throughout society is imperative. In this discourse, we will examine the promotion of interfaith tolerance and the recognition of its patterns and extent, considering its present significance.

**Key Words:** Islam, contemporary global civilization, religious conflicts, Religious diversity, Quran, and Seerah.

## Introduction:

It is indisputable that social well-being is contingent upon Religion, as Religion has consistently significantly influenced generations, eras, and nations. Faith refers to the instructions and directives that Allah communicates periodically through His prophets to His followers, enabling individuals to attain prosperity in the present life and the afterlife. E. B. Taylor (1832-1917) defined Religion as follows:

"The belief in spiritual being"<sup>1</sup>

Holding faith in higher entities is commonly referred to as Religion. It has been determined that Religion serves as a foundation for establishing fundamental principles that govern human society. These principles facilitate the interconnectedness of individuals, enabling them to engage in various relationships and transactions. Moreover, Religion is crucial in ensuring that individuals uphold their rights and fulfill their obligations, fostering a sense of mutual equality and fairness. Faith is the foundation for cultivating and establishing cultural norms and traditions. Religion is pivotal in shaping several aspects of human existence, encompassing moral and behavioral standards, social concerns, political and constitutional matters, societal ideals rooted in civilization and etiquette, knowledge, and philosophical pursuits. Religion serves as a manifestation of various dimensions. During the era of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the subsequent centuries, minority groups had comprehensive autonomy in social, educational, and collective concerns while also benefiting from safeguards ensuring the safety of their property and lives. However, despite society's increasing secularisation, there is a

concurrent trend towards embracing a less refined and cultured behavior. In contemporary communities, there is a discernible decline in the prevalence of love, peace, tranquillity, and tolerance. This erosion is not solely attributable to religious factors, as it extends to curtailing individual rights. However, acts of violence are being perpetrated, motivated by religious beliefs, wherein individuals take another person's life, even though no religion condones the act of murdering or engaging in riotous behavior on Earth without justifiable cause.

According to the Islamic perspective, Religion is not attributed to a specific evolutionary process. Still, it is perceived as a continuous manifestation of divine commands and the succession of prophets throughout various historical periods. This religious continuum commences with Hazrat Adam and reaches its culmination with the Holy Prophet (PBUH) until the end of time. Hence, it is indisputable that the heavenly truths imparted to the Prophets were identical. The general concepts of Shari'a and ethical principles were found to be congruent. The teachings and messages conveyed by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them) were similar. Hence, it may be said that the prophets exhibited a sense of Unity and shared fundamental views across various aspects. The subject topic in question has been expounded upon in several sections of the Qur'an:

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا  
وَالَّذِي أُوحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ  
وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا  
تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ<sup>2</sup>

“He has made plain for you the Religion with which He charged Noah and that which We have revealed to you, and that with which We charged (Prophets)

Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, (saying): 'Establish the Religion and do not be divided therein.'

Hence, in the present-day context, it is imperative to thoroughly elucidate the concept of interfaith harmony and comprehensively examine its practical manifestations and contemporary imperatives.

### Literature Review:

Interfaith harmony, a contemporary concept, has its roots in the Islamic tradition, where interfaith discussion has had significant importance since the advent of the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'an is a comprehensive source that elucidates the ideas of preceding Ummahs and faiths while safeguarding a specific set of Islamic teachings. The Qur'an refers to a significant principle about interfaith interaction.

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ  
الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ<sup>3</sup>

“Inspiration and the Quran) and fair preaching, and argue with them in a better way.”

Muslim scholars have studied different faiths by examining the concept of Ahsan, as mentioned in this verse, or the idea of seeking commonalities and establishing harmony, as described in the Holy Qur'an. The commentators have elucidated several facets of interactions, transactions, and conversations with individuals who do not adhere to the Islamic faith.

In the compilation of literary works by esteemed Muslim scholars and authors about the field of religious studies, one notable inclusion is the book titled " Al-Fasl fi Al-Milal wa'l-Ahwa wa'l-Nihal" authored by Allama Ibn Hazm Al-Andlasi (994-1064 AD). The works of Allama Abdul-Karim Shahrastani, namely Al-Milal wa al-Nihal,

hold significant scholarly significance. These works hold the esteemed status of being considered the Umhat al-Kitab in Muslim religious studies. In the realm of scholarly research articles, there exist publications authored by Islamic scholars that pertain to the subject matter at hand. Imran-ul-Haq Kalyanwi's paper titled "Inter-Religious Harmony and Tolerance - In the Light of Current Situations and Islamic Teachings" holds significance in this context. The present discourse sheds light on the prevalent anti-Islamism within society and the historical context of Western opposition in Islamic societies. It explores the concept of inter-faith peace from the perspective of Islamic teachings. The article "Inter-Religious Dialogue - Principles and Manners," authored by Hafiz Mahmood Akhtar and published in Jihat-ul-Islam, accurately interprets Inter-Religious Dialogue within Islamic teachings. It explores the appropriate conduct and manners that should be observed during such dialogues, aligning them with Islamic principles.

The preceding literature review examined the significance and characteristics of inter-faith dialogues about Islamic teachings. As mentioned, the article delves into inter-faith harmony, tolerance, style, and scope. The subject matter has been critically examined within the context of Sirat Tayyaba.

### Definition of interreligious tolerance:

Interfaith tolerance refers to the acceptance, respect, and peaceful coexistence among individuals of different religious beliefs and practices. It encompasses recognizing and appreciating the diversity of religious perspectives while fostering them.

In Arabic, the term is most closely associated with harmony, including compatible, compatible, equal, and close. In the Urdu

language, the term "compatible" can be understood as having a similar meaning to the English words "coordinate conduct," "harmony," and "Converging towards a state of close consensus." In the context of lexicography, the term "compatible" denotes the state of interconnectedness, Unity, and harmonious coexistence between two or more entities or individuals. In Arabic, "unity" also explains what "harmony" means. It refers to means that "one thing is united with another thing," "the country is united," or "two or more things are united," which means that they are mixed and have become one."

The notion of tolerance is defined in the Encyclopedia of Britannica as follows:

"Intellectual and practical acknowledgment of the right of others to live under religious beliefs that are not accepted as own."<sup>4</sup>

In its literal interpretation, toleration entails enduring and permitting ideas deemed unpleasant or incorrect from one's perspective. Religious tolerance can be observed when an individual or collective entity, although holding differing religious beliefs from our own, embraces and adheres to their perspective while concurrently fostering positive social relations and interactions within an unbiased atmosphere. Engaging in conflicts with those who hold divergent beliefs, imposing one's perspective upon them, or harboring animosity towards them only due to this divergence, while also exhibiting unequal treatment in any social context, can be regarded as intolerance. In this context, interfaith tolerance refers to accepting and respecting diverse religious beliefs and practices. The underlying significance is in advocating for individuals adhering to alternative religious practices

with the entitlement to freely pursue their belief systems and ideologies while refraining from exhibiting hatred or any bias towards them solely based on their religious divergence.

Harmony entails converging several entities, resulting in balance and equity, which share a common purpose or trajectory. Therefore, inter-religious harmony pertains to religious systems founded upon celestial and divine revelations. The concept described is a cohesive entity characterized by its harmonious integration, shared origins, consistent teachings, and core beliefs.

A civilization may encompass two primary domains of interfaith tolerance. The initial circle pertains to tolerance, wherein acknowledging religious diversity is embraced as an undeniable reality. This acceptance is accompanied by a kind disposition, allowing individuals to coexist harmoniously despite their contrasting beliefs. The second circle encompasses more than mere recognition of differences; it involves active and equitable engagement in socio-cultural interactions with individuals belonging to that circle. To foster the development of a harmonious society, all parties must embrace the principle of tolerance. The concept of tolerance is elucidated in the statement of the principle of tolerance, which was formulated by the United Nations Organization UNESCO in 1965, as follows:

Tolerance is respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, forms of expression, and human ways. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought,

conscience, and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is a moral duty and a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to replacing the culture of war with peace.<sup>5</sup>

### **Interreligious Disparities: The Roots of Intolerance:**

Inter-religious tolerance is a fundamental and essential principle for fostering peace within any given society. Its absence often leads to societal disorder and upheaval. Consequently, whether it is emphasized in the United Nations philosophy or the moral doctrines of many religions, many legal and ethical frameworks support the promotion of inter-religious tolerance. Dedicated endeavors are undertaken to foster and cultivate tolerance among adherents of diverse religious beliefs. However, certain socio-psychological conditions exist that render the attainment of religious tolerance unattainable. These elements serve as catalysts for intellectual intolerance, leading individuals to exhibit hatred and prejudice based on religious disparities, so impeding the acceptance and implementation of alternative ideologies by others. In contemporary times, regardless of geographical location. The emergence of war and terrorism in the context of religious motivations might be attributed to intolerance and a shortage of tolerance. Hence, it is imperative to consider the underlying causes and motivations of intolerance while formulating any approach to fostering tolerance.

- **The desire to eradicate other religions:**

Generally speaking, individuals often desire to cease all ideologies and religions contradicting or opposing their faith or beliefs, aiming to establish their Religion as the sole prevailing belief system worldwide. It might be considered acceptable when this desire is accompanied by sincerity, tranquillity, security, patience, and tolerance. However, if this desire transforms into extremism and unwarranted enthusiasm, it leads to an intolerant attitude. Hence, it is evident that certain religious doctrines advocate for eradicating adherents from other faiths. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus, revered for his teachings and spiritual significance, is depicted as stating:

Where are my opponents? Bring here and kill before my eyes all of my enemies who did not want me to be their monarch.<sup>6</sup>

The occurrence of the teachings attributed to Sayyidna Isa (peace be upon him) is highly improbable, as they appear to have been incorporated into these religions after the distortion of the revealed scripture. The phenomenon entails the stimulation of intolerance through specific wants, wherein individuals perceive it as their religious prerogative to eradicate the presence of alternative religious beliefs.

- **Criticism:**

Prejudice plays a significant role in fostering intolerance, as it influences an individual's inclination to develop either affection or hatred towards another person. Prejudice is a widely recognized societal tradition that has been extensively studied and analyzed.

حبك الشيء يعنى ويصم<sup>7</sup>

Individuals experiencing bias may exhibit a limited understanding of moral principles,

distinguishing between ethical and unethical behaviors and discerning virtues and vices. The individual seeks to gratify their emotional state by engaging in acts of prejudice, demonstrating a lack of restraint in harboring hatred towards others. Bigotry significantly contributes to the lack of inter-religious tolerance, resulting in intolerance and obstruction. This impediment persists despite efforts to promote tolerance. The interpretation of a dream cannot be deemed inherently dishonorable.

- **Lack of knowledge of alternative religious beliefs:**

The prevailing sentiment among a significant portion of the population is characterized by a restricted level of education and a narrow perspective, leading them to believe that their religious beliefs possess exclusive and superior teachings. Consequently, individuals adhering to alternative religious beliefs perceive them as mere adherence to mythical narratives and immoral behaviors that harm society. This cognitive process inherently engenders a sentiment of hatred towards adherents of alternative religious beliefs, hence fostering a proclivity towards intolerance.

- **Individualism or ego:**

Selfishness and self-righteousness are identified as prominent factors contributing to intolerance. These traits manifest when individuals prioritize their religious beliefs and ideologies, leading them to critique alternative religions and their adherents. The underlying psychological rationale for this behavior is rooted in the inclination to perceive oneself as being of higher status or superior to others. Per the assertions made by Professor Abdul Khaliq Sehrani, individuals who exhibit self-centered tendencies tend to perceive themselves as superior to others.

Consequently, they make imprudent and exaggerated statements, often supporting their religious sect and leaders. Similar to the tendency of specific individuals to embellish their religious beliefs and leaders, there exists a parallel inclination among them to engage in defamatory behavior towards other religions and their respective leaders and adherents. It is worth noting, however, that religious leaders adopt a more moderate stance and disapprove of such public attitudes within this particular group.<sup>8</sup>

- **The absence of interaction:**

The establishment of a social divide amongst our country's minorities is a lamentable occurrence, as it is disconcerting that we exhibit a repugnance towards engaging in any form of social interaction with them solely due to the divergence of their religious convictions from our own. Multiple misconceptions concerning interactions with individuals who do not adhere to our religious belief system contribute to this phenomenon. The experience of being alienated from other religions inherently gives rise to a feeling of estrangement, which fosters a sense of separation rather than acceptance.

- **The notion of tolerance within religious contexts:**

The principle of tolerance is present in various forms within the major religions worldwide. Hindi religions, be it Hinduism or Buddhism, and Abrahamic religions, i.e., Judaism and Christianity, all advocate for fostering interreligious connections. It is imperative to exhibit patience and tolerance when interacting with individuals of other religions.

The term "tolerance" is not explicitly mentioned in Christianity's most sacred

Gospel. However, the teachings ascribed to Jesus Christ, may peace be upon him, encompass principles that align with tolerance. As seen in the Gospel of Mark:

John addressed him. Dear teacher, we have witnessed one individual doing exorcisms in your name, despite not being a group member. Consequently, we took it upon ourselves to prohibit his actions. Jesus then uttered the instruction to refrain from prohibiting him. Due to the absence of any individual capable of performing miracles in my name, any prompt attribution of hostility towards me would be expeditiously rendered. The notion that what is not in opposition to us is in support of us holds significance.

The concept of tolerance is evident in several teachings of Gautama Buddha, which ultimately influenced the transformation of Ashoka, a warrior ruler, into a proponent of peace. The writings of Ashoka, widely regarded as the primary texts of Buddhism, prominently reflect the principles of interfaith tolerance. As per Ashoka's account, the publications above can be characterized as "religious texts" that promote the populace's well-being<sup>9</sup>. Promoting religious tolerance held significant importance in the teachings of Gautama Buddha, and Ashoka recognized its imperative nature in dissemination. Religious tolerance is a paramount virtue, as evidenced by inscriptions at numerous locations. The proclamation he issued has been documented on the pillar erected at the location of Girnar.

"The loving king of the gods aspires for individuals from diverse sects and nations to possess awareness and actively promote virtuous actions. It is imperative for individuals belonging to all sects and nations to comprehend that the

monarch's priorities lie not in the pursuit of wealth and prestige but rather in disseminating fundamental ideas across all religions, fostering a culture of tolerance among all individuals."<sup>10</sup>

The scholar's statements regarding tolerance indicate that it is an inherent moral element inside all religions, necessitating adherence. However, there appears to be a noticeable absence in promoting these beliefs. The absence of practical and philosophical underpinnings within these religions has hindered the effective implementation of inter-religious tolerance among its adherents.

#### **The idea of tolerance, its expression, and its application in the Qur'an and Sirat Tayyaba:**

As a religion, Islam encompasses principles of justice, equality, and human rights that transcend religious, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries. The teachings found in the Qur'an and Sirat emphasize the need to uphold individuals' social, economic, moral, and intellectual well-being. When examining the historical account of the Prophet, peace be upon him, numerous significant instances arise whereby he emphasized the necessity of exhibiting virtuous conduct and fostering tolerance, even in the face of theological disparities. The Covenant of Madinah, the Sermon of Hujja-tul-Wadaa, and the text of the Peace of Hdaybiyyah represent prominent instances in which religious freedom and tolerance were effectively safeguarded and promised. It must be noted that these examples of religious harmony and tolerance date back to the times of almost fourteen hundred years ago from the current times when legal justifications were provided for religious tyranny and the violation of human rights was considered standard

practice. In contrast, the notion of religious tolerance was infrequently observed. Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Sani, an esteemed academic, asserts:

"During a significant era in human history, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emerged as a prominent figure who played a pivotal role in promoting religious freedom and tolerance for non-Muslim nations and minorities. In a time characterized by a lack of awareness and understanding regarding these principles, the Prophet provided guidance. It implemented practical measures to uphold the privileges associated with freedom and religious tolerance. This period was marked by a general unfamiliarity with religious freedom and tolerance, as the human mind had yet to grasp their significance fully."<sup>11</sup>

In contemporary times, there has been criticism regarding the perception of Islam as an extremist ideology, suggesting that Islam exhibits a highly assertive stance towards other faiths and does not acknowledge the legitimacy of any religion apart from its own. It is a well-established observation that Islam uniquely encourages its adherents, including the Prophet himself, to acknowledge the presence of other religions and refrain from displaying unwarranted hostility towards them. According to the teachings of Islam, Allah states:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي  
الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ  
تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ  
الْمُقْسِطِينَ<sup>12</sup>

“Allah does not forbid you to be kind and to act justly to those who have neither made war on your Religion nor expelled you from your homes. Allah loves the just.”

When discussing the concept of tolerance within the framework of Islam, it is essential to note that tolerance in Islam encompasses the acceptance of other theological perspectives while actively refraining from engaging in words and actions that may inflict emotional distress onto individuals who do not adhere to the Islamic faith. Furthermore, rather than advocating for segregation from individuals who do not identify as Muslims, it is imperative in Islam to foster relationships with individuals of other faiths grounded in justice and equality principles.

The prevailing misconception regarding inter-faith tolerance often involves the notion that it entails the endorsement of other religions, ideologies, and contradictory perspectives. Nonetheless, it is essential to clarify that tolerance does not entail endorsing anti-religious beliefs. Instead, it necessitates the demonstration of patience and tolerance, especially in instances where there may be a lack of comprehension, to honor and acknowledge the religious sentiments of others. A collective entity approached the esteemed Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It proposed a reciprocal arrangement wherein they expressed willingness to adopt his religious beliefs if he embraced theirs.

Furthermore, they suggested a mutual agreement to worship their deities for a specified duration, with the condition that they would reciprocate by venerating their chosen deities. During this particular event, Surah Al-Kafrun was disclosed to the

Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), elucidating the genuine significance and principle of tolerance. It clarified that tolerance does not entail adopting the religious beliefs of others but rather engaging in the peaceful practice of one's faith.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينٌ<sup>13</sup>

To you, your Religion, and to me, my Religion."

Likewise, it is essential to note that interfaith tolerance should not be misconstrued as an unconditional acceptance of all religious beliefs and practices but rather as a form of tolerance that operates within reasonable boundaries. Non-Muslim individuals residing in a Muslim nation should be granted the liberty to practice their religious beliefs. However, it is crucial to establish reasonable boundaries to ensure that this freedom does not infringe upon the rights and well-being of others in terms of their life and property. Individuals who engage in religious worship must be granted the freedom to do so. In the context of a Muslim state, it becomes the duty of the state to acknowledge, honor, and ensure the individual's religious practices, thereby providing them with a sense of religious security. However, it is essential to note that certain limitations may exist regarding exercising religious practices based on religious grounds. If there is a threat to life and property, or a cause of social disruption, such as human sacrifice, murder, and obscenity, then the state cannot provide this freedom in the name of Religion.

Religious tolerance is a vital aspect of Islamic civilization, with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) assuming a significant role in instructing and advocating for this essential human ideal. In one instance, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him) said, "Be cautious! I pledge to advocate for individuals who experience oppression or infringement upon their rights, particularly those belonging to minority groups. This commitment extends to instances where individuals suffer excessively or have their possessions taken against their consent. I vow to champion their case on the Day of Resurrection. I will comply with the request."<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, on a separate instance, when a group of Christians arrived from Abyssinia, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) arranged for their lodging within the mosque premises and expressed, "These individuals possess a commendable status; thus I deemed it fitting to host them personally."<sup>15</sup>

Numerous beautiful examples of the Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) regard and tolerance towards non-Muslims can be found in his glorious biography. Islam is today's most tolerant faith in the world of religions, which is recognized not just by Muslim scholars but also by non-Muslims, thanks to the Prophet's (PBUH) honest efforts. In his book "The Preaching of Islam," TW Arnold. I say:

"No religion can be found as tolerant and peaceful as Islam, which has given such religious freedom to others. Tolerance is a special feature of Muslims; complete religious freedom has been the constitution of their Religion."<sup>16</sup>

### **Religious tolerance:**

Islam is a religious tradition that has a distinctive recognition of the presence of other religious traditions. Surat al-Kafrun in the Qur'an explicitly and unequivocally

permits anyone who does not adhere to the Islamic faith to practice their religious beliefs freely. The Islamic faith does not advocate for the eradication of other religions. The Qur'an acknowledges the existence of diverse religious beliefs and promotes the idea of goodwill toward them. Consequently, the Qur'an bans the imposition of religious practices on individuals and emphasizes the importance of religious freedom. According to Islamic teachings, Allah states:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبِّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ  
جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا  
مُؤْمِنِينَ<sup>17</sup>

And had your Lord willed, those on Earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people so that they become believers?

The lessons mentioned above became evident during the establishment of Madinah, where the Holy Prophet (PBUH) drafted a constitution known as the Covenant of Madinah. This constitution is a unique example of tolerance among historical religious states.

### Religious freedom:

Religious freedom refers to the fundamental right of individuals to hold and practice their chosen religious beliefs without interference or coercion from external sources.

Islam unequivocally prohibits the imposition of its religious beliefs on adherents of other faiths through coercive means. The Quran explicitly states that:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ  
فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ  
اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا  
وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ<sup>18</sup>

There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the Religion. The correct course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

The significance of religious freedom holds excellent prominence within the Islamic faith. Islam not only espouses the concept of freedom of thinking but also takes it further by denouncing any endeavor to eradicate religions or impose religious oppression and terms it as "fitnah." The user suggests that in the event of religious oppression within a society or state, appropriate measures should be implemented at the governmental level to address and mitigate such circumstances. Religious oppression has been characterized as fitna in the Holy Quran. So Allah states in the Quran:

وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ<sup>19</sup>

According to most commentators, this verse depicts a scenario where men experience religious oppression due to temptation. Hence, Maulana Maududi espouses a similar perspective in the exegesis of the Qur'an, wherein the term "fitna" is employed in a manner akin to the English term "persecution," specifically referring to the unjust mistreatment of a collective or individual based only on their identity. Suppose it is thought that an individual deliberately addresses oppressive systems by embracing alternative ideas and ideologies and, in doing so. In that case, he endeavors to reform the prevailing societal structure through critique and propaganda. The verse undoubtedly conveys that killing a human is a highly objectionable sin. However, it also highlights the negative consequences when a

particular human or collective group imposes intellectual oppression upon others, compelling them to conform to a prescribed truth they believe to be correct. While imposing their beliefs on others, they persecute others instead of convincing them through constructive arguments. Such people engage in an act that is heinous enough and should be stopped even through force.<sup>20</sup>

Islam's adamant declaration must be considered to realize religious freedom since it is essential to creating a climate of tolerance. The expression of this doctrine by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is evidenced by the historical event in which the Muslims successfully conquered Bait al-Maqdis in 637. During this conquest, Hazrat Umar (RA) demonstrated remarkable levels of tolerance, as documented in his written statement:

"This document represents the peace accord bestowed upon the inhabitants of Eljah by Umar Farooq, a devoted servant of Allah (may Allah be pleased with him). This peace encompasses protecting their lives, properties, places of worship, religious symbols, and the well-being of healthy and sick individuals within their religious community. The thunders mentioned above will not be inhabited or be subjected to overthrow. Neither the individuals nor their premises will incur any harm. The crosses and possessions of individuals will not experience any reduction. Individuals should not be compelled or coerced in matters of their religious beliefs. Neither individual will experience any harm."<sup>21</sup>

### **Religious ceremonies' sanctity:**

One significant challenge within religious tolerance is the inclination to belittle and disparage the rituals associated with alternative faiths. In this context, defiling religious figures, places of worship, and sacred texts is particularly prevalent. The Qur'an and Sirat Tayyaba provide comprehensive teaching on the matter, emphasizing that it is not appropriate for Muslims to engage in derogatory behavior towards the religious practices of other faiths. Islam has undertaken a significant intellectual reform that fosters a broad-minded perspective toward other religions, promoting respect for their adherents and their respective rites. What factors contribute to the promotion of religious tolerance? Refraining from derogatory remarks about the deities of different religious traditions and showing respect for their revered individuals and ceremonies can be deemed a commendable approach. Within religious studies, Islam stands out as a faith that espouses the fundamental tenet of respecting the deities, prophets, and rituals associated with many religious traditions.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) consistently demonstrated reverence towards the religious practices of individuals adhering to different faiths, and he imparted this guidance to the Muslim community. Consequently, several Torah manuscripts were discovered alongside the spoils during the Battle of Khyber, prompting the Jewish community to request their restitution formally.<sup>22</sup>

The Holy Qur'an references the Messengers, wherein Allah Ta'ala has explicitly named specific individuals, while others remain unnamed, who were sent to the various realities of the world to spread the teachings of Allah. Based on a hadith attributed to the

Prophet (PBUH), it is stated that one lac and twenty-four thousand prophets have been dispatched to the Earth. In this context, it is noteworthy that individuals recognized as prophets within Islamic theology, although not explicitly referenced in the Holy Quran, are also included in the circle of prophethood.

The adherence to this belief concept holds significant importance within the context of inter-faith tolerance, as it necessitates that individuals adhering to the Islamic faith refrain from engaging in any form of derogatory or critical behavior towards the prophets revered in other preceding religions. Throughout his sermons and literary works, the famous and revered author of the subcontinent, Maulana Qasim Nanutawi, emphasizes the need to refrain from derogatory remarks about revered figures within the Hindu community, including but not limited to Rama and Krishna. In the subject's biography, a direct quotation is attributed to him, stating:

It is not surprising that the prophets of India, like other prophets, are not explicitly named the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The attribution of Jesus' claim to divinity by Christians, along with the presence of rational and speculative counterarguments, has led to a similar attribution of divinity to Shri Krishna and Shri Ramchandra, albeit wrongly. It is not surprising that both Shri Krishna and Shri Ramchandra are exempt from the abovementioned shortcomings, as accusations of adultery and robbery have been made against them.

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ  
فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِّكُلِّ  
أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُم  
بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ<sup>23</sup>

And do not insult those they call upon besides Allah, lest they

insult Allah out of hostility and ignorance. Thus We made it attractive to every community for their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them of what they used to do.

To the reverence of religious sites, the Qur'an and Sirat convey a profound notion of tolerance, emphasizing that all places of worship, regardless of their affiliation with Islam or other faiths, should be regarded as sacred spaces dedicated to the worship and commemoration of Allah. This principle is readily apparent. This notion is associated with the domains of respect. According to the Qur'an's teachings, references are made to the church.

وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ  
لَّهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِغَ وَبَيْعَ وَصَلَوَاتٍ وَمَسَاجِدَ  
يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَن  
يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ<sup>24</sup>

“And were it not that Allah checks the people, some through others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned. And Allah will indeed support those who support Him. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might.”

The verse above notably concludes with a reference to the mosque, indicating a notable level of tolerance conveyed through verbal expression. In the text, Sirat Tayyaba, a notable illustration of the Qur'an's directive is evident, whereby it is observed that whenever the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) dispatched a military force for the

sake of Jihad, he always emphasized the importance of preserving the sanctity of non-Muslim places of worship.<sup>25</sup>

The formation of inter-faith tolerance greatly hinges upon the fundamental significance of respecting one another's religious practices. The teachings derived from the Qur'an and Sirat emphasize the importance of mutual respect among individuals within a society, particularly about religious beliefs and practices. It is emphasized that individuals should refrain from derogatory behavior towards others' religious affiliations, including refraining from insulting their identities. Furthermore, the scriptures of various religions are to be regarded with reverence, and individuals are expected to demonstrate respect for the customs and protocols associated with places of worship.

#### **Religious consciousness:**

To foster inter-religious tolerance, individuals within a community must possess comprehensive knowledge about one another's religious beliefs and ideologies. This awareness prevents potential ideological misconceptions from impeding understanding and mutual ties, facilitating inter-religious conversation. We must possess a comprehensive understanding of diverse religious traditions. In light of this requirement, the Holy Prophet instructed some Companions to acquire proficiency in the sacred languages spoken by the Jewish community. Hence, it is recorded that the Prophet of Islam, on a specific occasion, directed his esteemed companion Zayd bin Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him) to acquire proficiency in Hebrew, the linguistic medium employed by the Jewish community, to comprehend Jewish texts. Subsequently, many Companions and adherents acquired knowledge of Jewish customs through the teachings of esteemed individuals such as

Hazrat Abdullah bin Salam (may Allah be pleased with him) and Ka'b Al-Ahbar.

#### **Social interaction:**

The scriptures prove that he consistently demonstrated love for individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, fostering proximity and tolerance within society. The individual in question, revered with the honorific "peace and blessings of Allah be upon him," maintained social interactions with individuals who did not adhere to the Islamic faith by the principles and guidelines outlined in Shari'ah. It is important to note that this individual did not engage in any form of discrimination based on religious affiliation. He even forged deals with his most formidable adversaries, namely the polytheists of Makkah. As exemplified by the Messenger of Allah, engaging in social interactions with adherents of different religious beliefs is considered a practice per the Sunnah. Hence, according to the account provided by Hazrat Anas, a Jewish adolescent was in his employ, and upon falling unwell, Hazrat Anas proceeded to visit him<sup>26</sup>. Qatila, the mother of Hazrat Asma bint Abu Bakr, who adhered to polytheistic beliefs, implored Hazrat Asma to accept her offering and permit her visitation to his residence<sup>27</sup>. It is advisable to exhibit kindness towards one's mother<sup>28</sup>. The historical evidence supports the notion that the Prophet exchanged presents with rulers who were not adherents of the Islamic faith. The exemplary actions of the Prophet further substantiate this<sup>29</sup>. Likewise, the occurrence of Najran holds significant recognition as it pertains to a delegation of sixty Christians who sought an audience with the esteemed Holy Prophet. It is well acknowledged that the Holy Prophet graciously received and housed them within the revered confines of

the Prophet's Mosque, extending generous hospitality during their stay<sup>30</sup>.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the historical occurrence involving a Jewish woman allegedly poisoning the Holy Prophet is a regrettable event highlighting the Holy Prophet's engagement with those who did not adhere to the Islamic faith. Islam places significant emphasis on social relations, urging individuals to cultivate interpersonal connections without discrimination towards Muslims and non-Muslims. It necessitates the preservation of all these relationships, the promotion of harmony, and the achievement of perfect Unity within society<sup>31</sup>. The promotion of religious tolerance necessitates fostering social interactions that mitigate societal alienation. A common misperception is that extending greetings to individuals who do not adhere to the Islamic faith is impermissible. However, this directive from the esteemed Holy Prophet has been duly delivered.

رد السلام على من كان يهوداً او نصرانياً اور مجوسياً<sup>32</sup>

It is imperative to acknowledge and reciprocate pleasantries extended by individuals, regardless of their religious affiliation, be it Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism. Likewise, it has been established that supplicating to a Jewish individual is advocated by the Prophet (peace be upon him).<sup>33</sup>

According to the narration by Ibn Abi Shaybah, a fundamental aspect of wisdom, following the belief in Allah, involves fostering reconciliation and demonstrating tolerance towards others.<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion:

Despite Islam's rejection of idolatry, polytheism, and false religions, numerous instances exist in the Prophet's biography where he conveyed to non-Muslims their intellectual errors and fulfilled the duty of issuing warnings. However, none of these occasions resulted in a change of belief or acceptance of Islam by the individuals involved. The Qur'an and the Seerah do not provide instances where eliminating other religions is sanctioned. On the contrary, the Qur'an refers to such actions as fitnah, expressing worry.

The examination of religious scholars' scriptures reveals the presence of inter-faith tolerance as a prevalent notion throughout various religions. However, the Qur'an and Sirat provide theoretical and practical foundations for actualizing this virtue. In this context, it is noteworthy that while the foundational principles of Islam incorporate positive conceptions, the presence of these principles is not observed in other religious traditions. By promoting the concepts derived from the Qur'an and Seerah, it is conceivable to eradicate hatred within society and foster inter-religious tolerance.

### Recommendations:

Based on the study as mentioned earlier and guidance derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, the subsequent proposals are put up as potential measures to foster inter-religious tolerance within society:

1. The dissemination of religious scholars' teachings on religious tolerance should be actively pushed through the publication of books, distribution of pamphlets, organization of conferences, and utilization of various media platforms. Furthermore, it is imperative to foster an environment

- that encourages and supports scholars who engage in scholarly discourse on this subject at both the university and government levels.
2. Instead of adopting a discussion structure, producing scholarly publications or encyclopedias that provide accurate and authoritative information about many world religions is advisable.
  3. Translating sacred writings from different world faiths into Urdu is critical to allow scholarly investigation into global religions in the Urdu language.
  4. There is a need to incorporate the teaching of ancient sacred languages, such as Sanskrit and Hebrew, inside university curricula.
  5. Both electronic and print media must prioritize the promotion of intellectuals who actively pursue ideals of tolerance and human brotherhood.
  6. There is a need to consider the prohibition of periodicals, books, and programs that contribute to societal disorder by ridiculing and disrespecting various religious beliefs.
  7. Muslim individuals are responsible for actively fostering inter-faith tolerance, given that it is an inherent religious obligation within their faith.
  8. It is imperative to cease the cycle of criticism and insults directed at one another's religious beliefs and prioritize endeavors to foster shared values and Unity.
  9. It is imperative to ensure that all religions be accorded equitable respect within the realm of the state, thereby precluding any form of discriminatory treatment based on religious affiliations.
  10. It is imperative to convene interfaith assemblies, wherein religious leaders from diverse traditions can foster mutual connections and rapport.
  11. It is imperative to disseminate public understanding of the principles and dynamics of engaging with individuals who do not adhere to the Islamic faith, using insights from the teachings of Sirat Tayyaba.
  12. The organization of national training should be prioritized. Individuals must demonstrate reverence towards all religions, including their respective sacred figures and rites, as an essential obligation both from a religious and national standpoint.

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