

## *The Concept of Tolerance in Islam*

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The observance of tolerance on all levels is undoubtedly, a major component of the foundation of Islam's legislation and enhances the methodology employed by Muslims in implementing and promoting this legislation. Accordingly, countless discussions on tolerance exist in the scholarly works produced by Muslims since the demise of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), who established the substance for moral, spiritual and social values by means of emulating the theological and philosophical injunctions and guidelines of the holy *Qur'ān*. The religious instruction and admonishment existing therein were elucidated and exemplified in the Prophetic personality, through the establishment of the Charter of Medina, thereby ably demonstrating that Islam composes of both worship and servitude to Allāh, the Creator, as well as of providing service to His creation.<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) remarked, "All the children of Ādam commit error, and the best of them are those who repent."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For more information on the Charter of Medina and the Prophetic guidance, wisdom and instructions, see Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām al-Ma'āfirī, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* (Cairo: Darelhadith, 2006), 368-370; Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah ma'a Mūjiz li Tārīkh al-Khilāfah al-Rāshidah* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 150- 154. For more information on tolerance in Islam, see Shadi Nafisi, "Tolerance in Islam," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (2018): a5145, accessed on 29 February 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5145>; Mohamed Omar Moftah Medon and Ali Mohamed Aneba, "Role of Islam and its Tolerance in Constraining Terror," *Ulul Albab Jurnal Studi Islam* 13, no. 2 (2012): 113-122, accessed on 29 February 2020, <http://ejournal.uin>

[malang.ac.id/index.php/ululalbab/article/view/2370](mailto:malang.ac.id/index.php/ululalbab/article/view/2370); Ridho al-Hamdi, "Coping with Religious Tolerance and Gender Equality: Comparing Islam and Good Governance Perspectives," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 163-193, accessed on 29 February 2020, <https://doaj.org/article/c828320449354678b96bb3f41b5dc6d3>.

<sup>2</sup>Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dauliyyah, 2004), Chapter 34, 407; and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, Volume 20, 344, accessed on 02 October 2019.

In *Sūrah al-Mu'minūn*, Allāh instructs, “Repel the evil with that which is the best. We know well what they attribute.”<sup>3</sup>

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, one of the most celebrated Muslim poets, stated, “Listen with the ears of tolerance! See through the eyes of Compassion! Speak with the language of Love!”<sup>4</sup>

There are various types of tolerance that apply to many spheres of life. Cultural tolerance applies to all communities, as each community has its own habits, traditions and culture that it seeks to spread and preserve.

Tolerance of hereditary disposition: The Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is reported to have declared during the farewell pilgrimage:

Oh people! Behold, your Creator is certainly One Being. Surely, your father is one person. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor is a non-Arab to an Arab, or a person of fair skin colour to a person of dark skin colour, or vice versa, except by attaining consciousness of Allāh...<sup>5</sup>

In another hadith, Zubayr (may Allāh be pleased with him), one of the companions, reported that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) stated:

Lurking towards you is the disease of previous nations, i.e., envy and hatred. This disease is like a razor, and its effect is unlike the cutting of one's hair. Rather, it leads to the devastation of one's faith. By Him, in whose control my life is! You will not enter Paradise until you believe, which cannot be achieved until you express love for one another. Should I not inform you of a characteristic that will fortify your faith? Spread peace amongst yourselves.<sup>6</sup>

This Islamic standard of living found further progress during the eras of the Prophet's successors, namely, the rightly-guided Caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, as well as during the lifetimes of the rest of the Companions. 'Alī, the fourth Caliph of Islam and the cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), instituted the basis for the *Chishtī* Order, having been one of the closest Companions and the first boy to

<sup>3</sup>The holy *Qur'ān* (Medina: King Fahd Printing Press, 2006), *Al-Mu'minūn*, 23: 96.

<sup>4</sup>Maria Yousuf, et. al., “Mevlana Rumi: A 13th Century Scholar's Teachings to Foster Tolerance, Peace and Harmony,” *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*, 4, no. 4 (2019): 71- 75, <http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/journal/paperinfo?journalid=214&doi=10.11648/j.ijecs.20190404.13>.

<sup>5</sup>Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, Volume 38, 474, accessed on 02 October 2019.

<sup>6</sup>Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dauliyyah, 2004), 2510. See also, Byeong Hei Jun, “The Sufi Concept of Love of God (Mahabbah / 'Ishq) in the Thought of Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī,” PhD. Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2007.

accept Islam. ‘Alī’s early acceptance of Islam directly from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) allowed ‘Alī to be occupied most of the time in the Prophet’s companionship and in serving Islam. ‘Alī had certainly received his education and nurturing during those years, thereby equipping him with moral fibre and spiritual insight. Moreover, the roots of *Taṣawwuf* had been planted in both the individual lives, as well as in the communal lives of the Companions.<sup>7</sup>

The companions of the Prophet Muḥammad were leaders in the propagation of tolerance and peace amongst people. Amongst such personalities, saints and disciples following the *Chishtī Ṣūfī* school mainly concern themselves with the proliferation of tolerance, thereby repudiating iniquity.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of these principles, the Prophet’s Companions inspired their students and disciples, as well as later generations to detach themselves from the temporary worldly life and live solely to attain closeness to Allāh and strive for His satisfaction. Hence, the movement of *zuhd* (Islamic asceticism) was formed during the era of the successors to the Companions (*tābi’ūn*), which subsequently led to the construction of *Taṣawwuf* and *Ṣūfī* philosophical thought.

The well-known Ṣūfī and Muslim theologian, Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, discusses the idea of tolerance in his treatise, *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Al-Ghazzālī expansively wraps all of humanity in the tolerant embrace of *Tawḥīd*, the Oneness of Allāh, “Know that the world is one stage of the stages of the journey to God Most High. All in this station are travellers. Since the destination of journey of this caravan of travellers is the same, they are all as one. There must be friendship and unity among them and mutual aid.”<sup>9</sup>

Al-Ghazzālī also stresses on tolerance as respecting each other’s rights. He urges that hu-

<sup>7</sup> Abu Naṣr ‘Abd-Allāh ‘Alī al-Sarrāj Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Luma’ fi Tārīkh al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*, (Cairo: Al Maktabah al-Tawfiqiyyah). Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhi, *Al-Ta’arruf li Madhhab Ahl al Taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001), 13-16. See also, Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *40 Hadīth on Sufism* (Amman: MABDA, 2016), accessed on 02 October 2019; and Kenneth, Honerkamp, “A Sufi Itinerary of Tenth Century Nishapur Based on a Treatise by Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2006): 43-67, accessed on 1 April 2019, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uwc.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=65eadf94-1fb9-41cb-993b-327303e40996%40sessionmgr4009>.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the *Chishtī Ṣūfī* Order, see Muneera Haeri, *The Chishtis: A Living Light* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mohamed Saied Soofie & Abdul Aziz Soofie, *Hazrath Soofie Saheb (Rahmatullah Alai) & His Khanqahs* (Durban: Impress Web, 1999); Muhammad Ameer Khurad Kirmaani, *Siyarul Awliya* (Durban: Nizami Publishers, 2013); Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalwi, *The Mashaikh of Chisht* (New Delhi: Kutub Khana Ishayat-ul-Islam, 2006); Talib al-Habibi, *Lanterns of the Path: The Blessed Lineage of the Chishti Habibi Order* (Durban: Shah Ibrahim Publications, 2002); Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi: Print India, 1983), Volume 2, 264-318.

<sup>9</sup> Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- ‘Ilmiyyah, 2006), 12.

man beings must go beyond tepid abidance-tolerance, to the loving embrace of one another.<sup>10</sup>

Another Muslim Ṣūfī, Muḥy al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī remarked about religious tolerance:

It is vain to quarrel about religion. Everyone praises what he believes; his god is his own creature, and in praising it he praises himself. Consequently, he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just, but his dislike is based on ignorance. If he knew Junayd’s saying – “the water takes its colour from the vessel containing it” – he would not interfere with the beliefs of others but would perceive God in every form and in every belief.<sup>11</sup>

This pattern of spiritual revival perpetually continued throughout subsequent generations. It was amid such religious awareness that the *Chishtī Ṣūfī* Order was established by Abū Ishāq Chisht (d. 940) in Herat, Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- ‘Ilmiyyah, 2006), 17.

<sup>11</sup>“Ancient wisdom for today’s world,” Montreal Theosophy Project, last modified in 2015, accessed on 27 March 2020, <https://theosophyproject.blogspot.com/2015/10/ibn-arabi-on-unity-of-religions-and.html>.

<sup>12</sup>See G.R. Smith, *A Muslim Saint in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1969), 3; Muhammad Ameer Khurad Kirmaani, *Siyarul Awliya* (Durban: Nizami Publishers South Africa), Volume 1, 55; *The Chishti Order in the Deccan*, accessed on 14 February 2020, [https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/63609/10/10\\_chapter%205.pdf](https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/63609/10/10_chapter%205.pdf).