

QUR'ANIC GUIDELINES FOR PLURAL SOCIETY

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Foreword

One big objection to Islam is that its teachings are not compatible with a plural society. It segregates its adherents from the followers of other religions. Its teachings on cordial social relationships are meant only for Muslims; while it has hatred and contempt for the followers of other faiths. Not only that, but, citing certain verses of the Holy Qur'ān, it is claimed that it prohibits Muslims from maintaining friendly relations with the followers of other religions, and enjoins Muslims to be always at war with them, and wherever chanced upon, pursue them to death.

All these claims are the result of misapprehension and of not taking the Qur'ānic verses in their proper context. This booklet attempts to explain that the Holy Qur'ān emphasises mutual coexistence in a plural society, and allows cordial social relationships with non-Muslim parents, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances and other persons. Moreover, it elucidates the correct meaning and proper context of the verses which prohibit friendly relations with non-Muslims and enjoin fighting and killing them.

This booklet, it is hoped, will prove helpful in removing many such misunderstandings.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Qur'ānic Guidelines for Plural Society

It's a fact that human beings are different from one another in many ways. They are not similar in any manner – complexion, race, region, culture, civilization, way of life, ideology, religion; rather there are conspicuous differences in them from all these aspects. Ignoring these differences, tolerating them and in spite of them living together in a peaceful manner is considered an important value in the modern age. For this a term 'pluralism' has been coined.

Reference Oxford Dictionary defines pluralism thus:

"The existence or toleration in society of a number of groups that belong to different races or have different political or religious beliefs."

In *Britannica Reference Encyclopaedia*, its definition is as under:

"Pluralism assumes that diversity is beneficial to society and that the disparate functional or cultural groups of which society is composed – including religious, trade unions, professional organisations and ethnic minorities – should be autonomous."

Reality of Objections to the Holy Qur'ān

One big point from among the objections to the Holy Qur'ān is that it is separatist. It teaches individualism to its followers and wants to keep them isolated from

practitioners of other religions. The teachings and guidelines it gives in regard to amiability, compassion, equality, mutual contact, cooperation, succour and pleasant human relationships, are limited to Muslims. As for the followers of other religions, it has nothing but hatred and contempt. It enjoins the Muslims not to maintain any contact with adherents of other religions, and not to be compassionate and well-wishing to them, rather to lose no opportunity to harass, look down upon and trouble them. Thus, an impression is created to show that Islam is not fit for a plural society. Today, when the entire world has contracted to become a village, intercommunication with peoples belonging to the various nations, groups and religions is inevitable; in this situation, they say, the social teachings of the Qur'ān are an obstacle in the way of communal harmony.

Not only that, but it is also claimed that certain verses of the Qur'ān command Muslims to pick quarrels with and wage war against followers of other religions. Therefore, as long as these verses are not dropped from the Qur'ān, riots in the country cannot be contained. In the backdrop of these allegations, some time ago, a case was filed in the Calcutta High Court to seek a total ban on the Qur'ān but the learned judges dismissed the plea, thanks to their good sense.

This perception of the teachings of the Qur'ān is not justified. True, the Qur'ān marks a distinction, as a matter of principle, between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. But this distinction does not leave even the slightest impact on human rights and social relationships. Every person, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, can derive benefit from the fundamental rights the Qur'ān has determined. The

guidelines and teachings Islam gives for an ideal society can be applied to all persons of the society, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. The Qur'ān gives clear guidelines and commandments regarding the mutual relationships of the people living in a society where the followers of various religions live. In the light of these teachings, social relationships cannot be based on malice and animosity, hatred and contempt, tension and distrust, but rather they can be established on amiability, compassion, mutual cooperation, goodwill and benefit of the doubt.

Relationship with Parents and Relatives

The closest relation one has in a society is with his parents and relatives. The Qur'ān enjoins amiability with them, and in this matter maintains no distinction in their being Muslim or non-Muslim. If a person accepts Islam as true religion, but his parents are deprived of this felicity, even then this difference in terms of religion does not stop him to serve them, take care of them and treat them amiably. Not only that, but as a result of his acceptance of Islam his parents get incensed, pressurise him variously to abandon Islam, and even torture him; even in these circumstances the general guideline is that he must not renunciate the true religion; however, as a reaction he ought not to stop serving his parents and treating them amiably, rather he must not commit even the slightest negligence in this regard. Hence the Qur'ān's clear guidelines:

وَإِنْ جَاهَدَكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا وَصَاحِبِهَا فِي
الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا ۗ (لقمان: ١٥)

"But if they press you to associate others with Me in My Divinity, (to associate) those regarding whom you have no knowledge (that they are My associates), do not obey them. And yet treat them well in this world."

(Surah Luqman 31: 15)

This verse was revealed in the Makkah period at the time when the Quraish youth had been submitting to the call of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and coming to the fold of Islam. On the other hand, their parents, relatives and members of their respective families were making every effort to stop them from doing so, get them back to their ancestral faith; and, in case of failure in their efforts, torturing them physically. It was quite possible that in these circumstances the youth might have resorted to reaction and a sense of revenge against their parents and relatives might have developed in them, or at least they might have turned careless about them, but they were instructed not to obey them in untruth, but behave well with them and treat them amiably in worldly matters.

After parents come relatives. They too likewise deserve cordiality. Whether relatives are coreligionists or belong to some other religion, the Qur'ān enjoins its followers to pay their rights and not to be negligent in taking care of them. How sensitive the Qur'ān is in this matter can be gauged well with one example. To be an heir to inheritance, Islamic Shari'ah has set the condition that he must be a Muslim. No non-Muslim can be a Muslim's heir. But it does not mean that he cannot receive any monetary benefit through any other means. The Qur'ān has allowed a Muslim to give some part of his property or wealth to his non-Muslim relatives by means of will or gift. Allah the Exalted says:

وَأُولُوا الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ
إِلَّا أَنْ تَفْعَلُوا إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَائِكُمْ مَعْرُوفًا (الاحزاب: ٦)

"According to the Book of Allah, blood relatives have greater claim over each other than the rest of the believers and the Emigrants (in the cause of Allah), except that you may do some good to your allies (if you so wish)." (Surah Al-Ahzab 33: 6)

This verse says that the rights of relatives are superior to those of other people. Surah Ahzab was revealed in 5 Hijri. Prior to this, after his migration to Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ had established brotherhood between Muhajireen and Ansar. On the basis of this relationship, Muhajireen and Ansar were heirs to one another. After the revelation of the verse mentioned above, this practice was abolished and relationship was declared as the basis of inheritance. The last part of the verse, *إِلَّا أَنْ تَفْعَلُوا إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَائِكُمْ مَعْرُوفًا*, [except that you may do some good to your allies (if you so wish)] means that if you want to extend monetary help to your relatives other than those who are heirs, you can do so by any other means (for example, will or gift).

Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya says:

*"With this verse, it has been allowed to will (some property) to a non-Muslim (relative). That is, it may be done to one's non-Muslim relative. Although there is no Dīni relation with such a relative yet he is a relative genealogically; hence a will may be bequeathed in his favour."*¹

Qatadah, Hasan and 'Ata say:

¹ Qurtubi, *Al Jam'i lil-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Al-Hay'at al-Misriyya al-A'ammah, 1987, 14/126.

"In this verse, it has been permitted that a Muslim may give his non-Muslim relative whatsoever he wants in his lifetime, and at the time of death he may will in his favour."²

Cordial Relationship with Neighbours

After relatives, the next close relation we have is with neighbours. They are always with us. If the neighbour is good and trustworthy, one can busy oneself in his job or business, quite contented that his family, home and belongings are safe. If not so, he cannot enjoy peace of mind. The Qur'an teaches a Muslim to be a good neighbour. He should not cause any harm to his neighbours, should help them in their hour of need and maintain cordial relations with them. The Holy Qur'an say:

وَالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ
وَالْجَارِ الْجُنْبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ (النساء: ٣٦)

"Do good to your parents, to near of kin, to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbour who is of kin and to the neighbour who is a stranger, and to the companion by your side...." (Surah An-Nisa 4: 36)

This verse enjoins amiability with three kinds of neighbours: first, *الْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ* (neighbour who is relative), second *الْجَارِ الْجُنْبِ* (alien neighbour), and third *الصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ* (sidekick, a companion for a short time). Some exegesists have opined that *الْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ* means Muslim neighbour and *الْجَارِ الْجُنْبِ* non-Muslim neighbour.³

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 5/183. Allama Qurtubi mentions his name as Nouf al-Shami.

Ahadith also greatly emphasise amiability with neighbours. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

من كان يؤمن بالله واليوم الآخر فليحسن إلى جاره

*"Whosoever believes in Allah and in the Last Day then let him be good to his neighbour."*⁴

In another hadith, once Allah's Messenger ﷺ, while he was sitting with some of his Companions, said thrice: "By Allah, he is not a believer!" The Companions enquired: "Who? O Allah's Messenger ﷺ!" He said:

الذي لا يأمن جاره بوائقه

*"One whose neighbour does not feel safe from his evil."*⁵

In the above-mentioned verse and Ahadith, the word 'neighbour' is common. It is not restricted to Muslims. It also means non-Muslim neighbours. That is why the Companions used to treat even their non-Muslim neighbours amiably. Hazrat Mujahid says that (once) he was with Hazrat Abdullah bin Amr. When his servant sacrificed a she-goat, he said: "When you distribute its meat, send first of all to our Jewish neighbour." A person asked: "Will you send it to that Jew?" He said: "I heard the Prophet ﷺ enjoining good treatment of our neighbours

⁴ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Adab, Chapter, Man Kana Yu'minu Billahi Wa al-Yawmi al-Aakhiri Fa La Yu'zi Jarahu; Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Chapter, Al-Hath Ala Ikram al-Jar

⁵ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Adab, Chapter, Ism man la yamano Jaruhu bawayiqahu; Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Chapter, Tahreem iza al-Jar

with so much stress that we feared he would make them our heirs."⁶

Social Wellbeing

When some people live at a place, they establish social relationships. For mutual cordial relationships, it is necessary that all people take care of one another. Be loving and compassionate to their neighbours, acquaintances and colleagues. Share their pleasures, treat their sorrows as your own, and do not hesitate in offering sympathy, compassion, consolation and commiseration to them. Islam gives full consideration to human sensibilities. It is not only adaptive to maintaining human contact with non-Muslims but also enjoins it:

لَا يَنْهَى اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُواكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ○ (الممتحنة: ٨)

"Allah does not forbid that you be kind and just to those who did not fight against you on account of religion, nor drove you out of your homes. Surely Allah loves those who are equitable." (Al-Mumtahanah 60: 8)

This is a very important verse on the relationship with followers of other religions living in a plural society. There are two sentences therein: *أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ* (be kind to them) and *تُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ* (be just to them). *بَرٌّ* means amiability and kindness;⁷ it includes the sense of being more and more

⁶ Bukhari, al-Adab al-Mufrad, 1/22; Sunan Abi Dawood, Kitab al-Adab, Chapter, Fi Haqq al-Jawar

⁷ Ibn Katheer, Abul Fida Imaduddin Ismail, Tafseer al-Qur'an al-Azeem (Tafseer Ibn Katheer), Al-Maktaba al-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, Egypt, 1356H, 4/349; Lisan al-Arab, 4/54, word 'Bir'

amiabile: (البِرّ: التوسّع في الاحسان اليه).⁸ Some exegesists have described نَقَسِيطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ as being just to them while other exegesists take it as spending some wealth on them as a matter of commiseration (ان تعطوهم قسطاً من اموالكم على وجه الصلة).⁹

Some exegesists declare this verse as abrogated, but most of them are of the view that this verse is not abrogated (وقال أكثر أهل التأويل: هي محكمة).¹⁰

Imam Qurtubi writes:

هذه الآية رخصة من الله تعالى في صلة الذين لم يعادوا المؤمنين ولم يقاتلوهم.¹¹

*"In this verse Allah the Exalted has permitted having cordial relations with non-Muslims who are not hostile to Muslims, nor are they at war with them."*¹¹

Imam Razi says:

قال أهل التأويل: هذه الآية تدلّ على جواز البرّ بين المشركين و المسلمين، وان كانت الموالة منقطعة

"Exegesists have opined that this verse means that kind and cordial relationships between polytheists and

⁸ Raghīb al-Asfahani, Al-Mufradat fi Ghareeb al-Qur'ān, Al-Matba'tul Maimaniyyah, Egypt, 1324 H, p. 93

⁹ Ibn al-Arabi, Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Maliki al-Ishbili, Ahkam al-Qur'ān, Matba'tus-Sa'adah, Egypt, 1331 H, 2/249; Al-Mawardi, Abul Hasan Ali bin Habib al-Basari, Al-Nukat wa al-Yoon (Tafseer al-Mawardi), Matabe' al-Maqhawi al-Kuwait, 1402 H, 4/223; Tafseer Qurtubi, 18/59; Razi, Fakhrudin Muhammad bin Umar, Mafatih al-Ghaib (Al-Tafseer al-Kabeer), Al-Matba'tul A'mirah, Egypt, 1308 H, 8/134

¹⁰ Tafseer Qurtubi, 18/59

¹¹ Op. cit.

Muslims are permissible; however close contact with them is prohibited."¹²

Financial Assistance to the Poor

Some people are poor and needy, helpless and hapless. It is the duty of the wealthy and affluent to take care of them, and help and support them when they stand in need. In this regard, the Qur'an does not make any distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. It enjoins to spend on non-Muslims, too. Not only that, but it says explicitly that you should spend on non-Muslims just to earn the pleasure of Allah, having no hope of deriving any material benefit from them. And they should not be enticed to accept Islam by means of spending wealth on them. Allah the Exalted says:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
فَلَا تُنْفِسْكُمْ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُؤَفِّ إِلَيْكُمْ
وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تظَلَمُونَ (البقرة: ٢٧٢)

"You are not responsible for setting these people on the Right Way; Allah sets on the Right Way whomsoever He wills. Whatever wealth you spend in charity is to your own benefit for you spend merely to please Allah. So, whatever you spend in charity will be repaid to you in full and you shall not be wronged."

(Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 272)

This verse was revealed in the context of spending. The verses preceding it address the believers, exhorting them to spend out of whatsoever Allah the Exalted has

¹² Tafseer al-Kabeer, 8/134

blessed them with, both openly and secretly, on His needy slaves, and not to be enamoured with anxieties of poverty and hunger created by Satan, and spend wholesome things out of your wealth, do not put aside vile things for charity. In this context the Muslims were exhorted to spend, keeping in view the pleasure of Allah. You will reap its benefit and you will be immensely rewarded. It is not necessary that those who deserve your help are from among the guided. Do not entertain the idea that you will spend on them only when they accept Islam. It is not your responsibility to make them come to the fold of Islam. It is Allah Who guides those whom He wills. Whether or not they accept Islam, it is your duty to fulfil their needs if they are in need if Allah has made you well-off. It is reported in the Traditions that in the beginning the Companions did not spend on their relatives who had not come to the fold of Islam. Some Companions enquired the Prophet ﷺ about whether those who are not co-religionists could be given financial assistance. Then this verse was revealed.¹³

Honour and Respect

For a happy way of living, dealing amiably with all people of the society is necessary, they should be respected and honoured, and addressed in a decent manner. In this regard too, the Qur'ān has not made any distinction. Allah the Exalted says:

وَإِذَا حُيِّبْتُمْ إِلَىٰ بِرِّهِ فَعَجَبُوا بِهَا حَسَنًا وَأَوْرُدُوهَا ۗ (النساء: ٨٦)

¹³ Abu Jafar Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Tabarī, Jamiul Bayan a'n Tawīl āy al-Qur'ān (Tafseer al-Tabarī); Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 1969, 5/588; Tafseer al-Kabeer, 2/365

"When you are greeted with a salutation then return it with a better one, or at least the same."

(Surah An-Nisa 4: 86)

On one occasion, Hazrat Ibn Abbas said:

"Return a greeting, whether the person saluting you is a Jew, a Christian or a Zoroastrian." Thereafter he recited this very verse.¹⁴

Ahadith also tell us that non-Muslims can be greeted with salutation, their greeting be returned, and they be received with warm handshake. Hazrat Usama bin Zaid relates that the Prophet ﷺ passed by a group of people which included Jews and polytheists as well as Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ greeted them.¹⁵

It was also the practice of the Companions that they greeted with salutation whomsoever they met; and in this regard, they did not make any discrimination. They also enjoined others to do so. Hazrat Abu Umamah would greet with salutation whomsoever he met on the way, whether the person was Muslim or anyone else, younger or older. When enquired, he replied that we have been instructed to commonise Salam.¹⁶ It is also reported about Hazrat Abdullah bin Masood that he used to take the lead in greeting, whether the person he was meeting was Muslim or non-Muslim.¹⁷

¹⁴ Bukhari, al-Adab al-Mufrad, Chapter, Kaifa al-Rad A'la Ahl al-Dhimmah, 2/533

¹⁵ Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar al-Asqalani, Fath al-Bari bi-Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 11/41

¹⁶ Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar al-Asqalani, Fath al-Bari bi-Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 11/41

¹⁷ Abd al Razaq, Al-Musannaf, Kitab Ahl al-Kitab, Chapter, Assalam A'la Ahl al-Kitab

Business Dealings

Members of a society stand in need of one another's help, support and cooperation at every step, and have to enter into various dealings. If it isn't so, it would be difficult for them to live. The adherents of different religions living in a society may be one another's helpers and supporters and enter into one another's business dealings. In this regard, the Qur'ān does not deem religious variance an obstacle. It teaches that its followers may run a business in cooperation with non-Muslims, enter into mortgage or cultivation dealings with them, use their products without any abomination and sell their products to them, render services at their venues and appoint them for some work. Thus, Muslims may enter into every kind of business and commercial dealings with non-Muslims. Religious variance does not make any difference in doing so. In this regard, the Qur'ān gives fundamental teaching:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ (المائدة: 1)

"Believers! Honour your bonds!" (Surah al-Maidah 5: 1)

Ahadith and Traditions have it that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his Companions used to enter into every kind of dealing with non-Muslims.

Hazrat Ayesha relates that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, towards the end of his holy life, mortgaged his armour with a Jew to secure some grain to fulfil the needs of the family.¹⁸

¹⁸ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Buyu, Chapter, 'Shira' al-Nabi ﷺ bil Nasi'at and other chapters; Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Musaqat, Chapter, Al-Rahn wa Jawazuhu fi al-Hazar kal Safar

Hazrat Abdur Rahman bin Abi Bakr narrates that a polytheist came to the Prophet ﷺ with a few she-goats; the Prophet ﷺ purchased one she-goat from him.¹⁹

Hazrat Ibn Umar recounts that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, after the Victory of Khaibar, left the pieces of land there with the Jews on the condition that they would cultivate them for half of the farm produce.²⁰

For the migration journey a non-Muslim was hired as guide and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and Hazrat Abu Bakr travelled to Madinah under his guidance.²¹

Hazrat Khabbab says that he was an ironsmith and rendered some services to A'as bin Wail (a famous non-Muslim) in Makkah.²²

Explaining a hadith, Imam Nawawi says:

*"All Muslims agree that contacts may be entered into with dhimmis and other kafirs provided the dealings haven't anything haram (unlawful)."*²³

Tolerance

The basic principle of pluralism is tolerance. That is, deeming one's faith and religion as true, one

¹⁹ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Buyu, Chapter, Al-Shir'a wa al-Bai' ma'l Mushrikeen wa ahl-al Harb; Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Ashribah, Chapter, Ikram al-Zaif

²⁰ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Muzara'a, Chapter, Al-Muzara'a Ma'al Yahood and other chapters; Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Musaqat, Chapter, Al-Musaqat wa al-Muamlat Bijuz min al-Thamar wa al Zara'a

²¹ Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Ijarah, Chapter, Istijar al-Mushrikeen ind-al-Zaroorah

²² Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Al-Ijarah, Chapter, Hal Uwajaru al-Rajul Nafsahu min Mushrik fi Dar al-Harb

²³ Nawawi, Sharah Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Musaqat, Bab al-Rahn

acknowledges the freedom of those, who do not agree with him, to practise the faith and religion they want. The Qur'an is its proponent. Allah the Exalted says:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ (البقرة: ٢٥٦)

"There is no compulsion in religion. The Right Way stands clearly distinguished from the wrong."

(Surah al-Baqarah 2: 256)

The pleasure of Allah lies in that all human beings follow the straight path and keep away from His prohibitions, but the Will of Allah is that they adopt the faith and religion for themselves quite independently. Therefore, He has not made entire mankind Muslims and also directed His Messenger ﷺ not to resort to compulsion in this matter. The Qur'an very explicitly says:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (يونس: ٩٩)

"Had your Lord so willed, all those who are on earth would have believed. Will you, then, force people into believing?"

(Surah Yunus 10: 99)

The Qur'an avers with utmost emphasis that Allah the Exalted has presented the Truth in an explicitly candid manner, and also granted freedom to human beings to accept it and come to the fold of Islam if they like or remain on the path of *kufr* if they so wish:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا (الذمر: ٣)

"Surely We showed him the Right Path, regardless of whether he chooses to be thankful or unthankful (to his Lord)."

(Surah Ad-Dahr 76: 3)

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ (الكهف: ٢٩)

"And proclaim: This is the Truth from your Lord. Now let him who will, believe; and let him who will, disbelieve." (Surah Kahf 18: 29)

Respect of Holy Personages of Other Religions

The Qur'ān acknowledges dialogue with adherents of religions. It wants the Truth to be explained and the Falsehood contradicted, and the false notions that the adherents of other religions have inserted in their religious teachings be sorted out; but it stresses that solemnity, gravity and politeness be maintained in dialogue and discussion, and the tone that can hurt their religious sentiments must not be adopted. In this context, the Qur'ān has prohibited its followers from uttering any unbecoming words about the personages whom they (the adherents of other faiths) hold in high esteem. It strictly directs them:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ (الانعام ١٠٨)

"And, (O Muslims!) do not revile those whom they invoke other than Allah, because they will revile Allah in ignorance out of spite." (Surah Al-An'am 6: 108)

Commenting on this verse, Imam Qurtubi writes:

*"In this verse, Allah the Exalted has prohibited from reviling idols. Because, if they are reviled, it would add to the hatred and infidelity of their worshippers. The Ulama say that the command this verse gives remains intact for the Ummah for all times."*²⁴

²⁴ Tafseer Qurtubi

Imam Razi opines on this verse:

*"Allah the Exalted has prohibited from reviling the deities of infidels. Because it is possible that in response to it, they would start uttering unbefitting words about Allah the Exalted. It aims to draw our attention that if your opponent exhibits ignorance and callowness then it is not permissible that you too start talking in a likewise manner. Because it may lead to abuse and insolence and mutual skirmishes, and this is not the way of the wise."*²⁵

Real Meaning of Prohibition of 'Friendship' with Non-Muslims

One allegation levelled against the Qur'ān is that it has prohibited Muslims from maintaining 'friendly relations' with the followers of other religions, and has called them 'enemy'. It is but natural that hatred and animosity grows against enemies; no relation is maintained with them, and efforts are made to harm them. In support of this allegation, the following verse is presented as argument:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْكٰفِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ * (النساء ١٣٦)

"Believers! Do not take the unbelievers as your allies in preference to the believers." (Surah An-Nisa 4: 144)

Such verses need to be studied in depth in their right context. The believers have been asked not to treat infidels as *أَوْلِيَاءَ* (allies). *أَوْلِيَاءَ* is plural of *ولى* (ally). Its root is ' و ' and noun is ' ولاء '. *ولاء* means that two or more things come together in such a way that there remains nothing to distinguish them. This word came to be metaphorically

²⁵ Tafseer al-Kabeer

used to mean 'nearness', whether this nearness is of a place, relationship, religion, friendship, help or faith. Both the words 'Wali' and 'Maula' are used to mean the person who has nearness of any kind of relationship out of the mentioned ones.²⁶

In such verses, the word **أَوْلِيَاءَ** (*Aulia* or allies) has been used to mean close relationship.

Allama Zamakhshari says:

(لا تَتَّخِذُوهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ) تَنْصُرُونَهُمْ وَتَسْتَنْصِرُونَهُمْ وَتَوَاطُبُونَهُمْ وَتَعَاشِرُونَهُمْ مَعَاشِرَةَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ.²⁷

"The command of Allah the Exalted 'not to take the unbelievers as allies' means that your relation with them should not be as to help them, to seek help from them, maintain brotherhood and close relationship with them, and mix up with them as closely as you do with the believers."

We have to keep in view the circumstances in which the Muslims were prohibited from maintaining close relationship with non-Muslims. Muslims were passing through very difficult times. Their enemies had waged war against them and were hell bent on rooting them out. The attitude of Christians and Jews was also based on open hostility. They were allying with the infidels against the Muslims. The third group was that of hypocrites. These people pretended to be followers of Islam as they had 'joined' the Muslims; but, in fact, they were allied with the non-Muslims. When Muslims won some success, they

²⁶ Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'ān, 555

²⁷ Abu al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn Umar al-Zamakhsharī, Al-Kashshāf a'n Ḥaqāyiq at-Tanzil, Mustafa Al-Babi al-Halabi & Sons, Egypt, 1973, 1/619

would turn begrudging; and when Muslims received some loss, they would rejoice. All these people were united in hostility towards Muslims. In such circumstances, it was very dangerous for Muslims to have close relationship with their enemies and make them their close confidants. This was harmful from religious point of view as well as politically. That is why the Qur'ān warned the Muslims against each enemy group, asking them not to have close relationship with them. (See the verses: An-Nisa:89,144, Al-Maidah:51).

In this regard the Qur'ān instructed the Muslims so specifically as not to have as much closeness with their fathers and brothers, who had not come to the fold of Islam and preferred *kufr* to Islamic faith, as they enjoyed with the believers. Because the unbelievers in that case might have got the secrets of Muslims. (Surah Tawbah: 23)

Some verses of the Qur'ān have clarified why the Muslims have been prohibited from having closeness with anyone other than Muslims:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَكُمْ هُزُؤًا وَلَعِبًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَالْكَفَّارَ أَوْلِيَاءَ (المائدة ٥٤)

"Believers! Do not take for your allies those who make a mockery and sport of your faith, be they those given the Book before you or other unbelievers."

(Surah Al-Maidah 5: 57)

In Surah Mumtahanah(60), Allah the Exalted says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ (آية:١)

"Believers, do not make friends with My enemies and your enemies." (Ayat:1)

In this same Surah, Allah the Exalted further says:

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَىكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ
وَوَظَّهُرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ○

(آيت: ٩)

"Allah only forbids you to be friends with those who have fought against you on account of religion and who have driven you out of your homes and have abetted in your expulsion. And any who make friends with them, they are the wrong-doers." (Ayat: 9)

The first verse says that they have made a mockery and sport of your faith; they are not taking your faith in right earnest. The second verse says that they are Allah's and your enemies. And the third verse clarifies that they are at war with you because of your faith, have expelled you from your homes or extended support thereto. These are the causes that demanded, and rightly so, that close relationship should not be maintained with them.

One more verse presents the same issue thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بِطَانَةَ مَنْ دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ خَبَالًا وَدُؤًا مَا
عَدَيْتُمْ ۚ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَمَا تُخْفِي صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ (آل عمران: ١١٨)

"Believers! Do not take for intimate friends those who are not of your kind. They spare no effort to injure you. Indeed, they love all that distresses you. Their hatred is clearly manifest in what they say, and what their breasts conceal is even greater."

(Surah Ale-Imran 3: 118)

There is much eloquence in the word *بِطَانَةَ* in this verse. *بِطَانَةَ* means inner part of clothes, which snugs the body. It

is metaphorically used for a person whom one accepts as his close and trusted friend, companion and confidant.²⁸ This verse instructs the Muslims not to develop intimacy with others so as to lose secrets. Because they are not your well-wishers; they never lose any opportunity to harm you; and their hatred and enmity is manifest with their attitude towards you.

These details make it clear that only such intimacy with non-Muslims has been prohibited as can reveal the political and military secrets of the Islamic State to the enemies, and increase the problems of Muslims. This prohibition is only for those who are at war with Muslims or are supporters of their enemies. As for maintaining common human and social relationships, this prohibition does not apply to it.

Allama Qurtubi writes:

الاحسان والهبة مستثناة من الولاية²⁹

"To treat non-Muslim amiably and giving something to them is not included in 'wilayat' (close friendship)."

Backdrop of Commands to Fight the Opponents and Kill Them

A big, rather the biggest, objection to the Qur'ān is on its Concept of *Jihad*. It is said that it enjoins the Muslims to fight against non-Muslims, to deal with them severely, to lie in wait for them and kill them wherever they are found. In support of their argument, they present the following verses:

²⁸ Tafseer Tabari, 7/138; Kashshāf, 1/458; Tafseer Qurtubi, 4/178

²⁹ Tafseer Qurtubi, 8/94

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ يَلُونَكُمْ مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ وَلْيَجِدُوا فِيكُمْ غِلظَةً ۗ (التوبة: ١٢٣)

"Believers! Fight against the unbelievers who live around you; and let them find in you sternness."

(Surah Tawbah 9: 123)

فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَحْصُرُوهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ

كُلَّ مَرَصِدٍ ۗ (التوبة: ٥)

"...slay those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity wherever you find them; seize them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them."

(Surah Tawbah 9: 5)

Presenting verses like these, attempts are made to give the impression that as long as these verses exist, coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims is not possible.

In fact, this misapprehension came about as a result of not taking the Qur'ānic commands and teachings on war in proper perspective and reading them out of context. This issue needs to be studied from various angles:

(A) When Muslims were targeted exceedingly, they were permitted to respond to the oppression they had been subjected to:

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقْتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ ۝ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا

مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ۗ (٣٩-٤٠)

"Permission (to fight) has been granted to those for they have been wronged. Verily Allah has the power to help them: those who were unjustly expelled from their homes for no other reason than their saying: Allah is Our Lord."

(Surah al-Haj 22: 39-40)

Islamic history bears evidence that the war was not initiated by Muslims, but rather it was imposed upon them. The plan of the enemies was to crush the Muslims, who were then weak, in the nascent stage itself and extinguish the light of Islam with a blow from their mouths. It was in these circumstances that the Muslims were permitted to give them tit-for-tat response and defeat their plans; but even at such a critical time the Muslims were instructed to take revenge from them only to the extent they had been oppressed, and not to exceed the limit:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُعْتَدِينَ ○ (البقرة ١٩٠)

“Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but do not transgress, for Allah does not love transgressors.” (Surah al-Baqarah 2: 190)

- (B) The Qur'ānic verses which permit killing are not related to normal situation, rather therein lie the directives of the wartime. When a war is waged by a group, one group does not show leniency to the rival group in the battlefield, rather each tries to inflict maximum harm to the rival, kill as many of their members as possible, and thus tear their military power to pieces. At such a time, any weakness or leniency will be tantamount to endangering oneself.
- (C) War is unwanted and undesirable, but sometimes becomes inevitable. That is why various religions have given commands therefor. The followers of the religions that do not give instructions for wartime also felt compelled to go for war on different occasions. The

presence of rules and regulations on war in scriptures does not mean that they are related to usual dealings with the hostile community, but rather they are meant to address war situations specifically. For example, some references from the scriptures of Hinduism are being given in the following:

*"O Indra, bestow upon us vigorous strength of veterans, with invigorating strength that can collect booty. Through your guiding protection, we may destroy our enemies in battles, whether they be kinsmen or strangers. May we be victors over every foeman. O Hero, through your protection, may slay both kinds of foe and rejoice with abundant riches."*³⁰

*"O Agni, destroy the groups who are resisting us, chase away our enemies. O Ajeet, slay the opponents who do not believe in deities and grant magnitude and success to your priests."*³¹

*"Come hither, O Manyu, mightier than the mighty: smite, with thy fervour, for ally, our foemen. Slayer of foes, of Vritra, and of Dasyu, bring thou to us all kinds of wealth and treasure."*³²

As for Bhagawad Gita, the very subject of it is war. In fact, it consists of the long sermons of Krishna Ji addressed to Arjun, the leader of Pandavas, to mobilise him to wage war and fight the enemies.

(D) One more thing to be kept in view is that these verses address the Islamic State and its army. The Qur'an has not granted free rein to Muslims to kill non-Muslims

³⁰ Rig Veda, 6.19.8-13

³¹ Yajur Vedā, 37:9

³² Atharva Veda, 1:32:3-4

whenever and wherever they find them, but rather the authority to take a decision to wage war against the non-Muslims who are inimical to the Islamic State rests with the Head of the State. It is he who has to decide whether or not the war is to be waged; and, if yes, when and how. The subjects have to obey and follow him at all costs.

Allama Ibn Qudamah writes:

أمر الجهاد موكل إلى الإمام واجتهاده، ويلزم الرعية طاعته فيما يراه من ذلك.³³

“The decision of Jihad rests solely with the Head of the State. It is he who will take a decision thereon and the subjects are bound to accept his decision.”

If the verses, which enjoin war against infidels and polytheists, are studied in the context and perspective in which they had been revealed, there will be no room for any objection thereto, rather the reader will realise their justification.



³³ Ibn Qudamah, Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Al-Mughni ala' Mukhtasar al-Kharqi, Maktaba al-Riyadh al-Hadithah, Riyadh, 1981, 8/352

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