

The Problem of Religious Toleration: Assessment Values in Surah Al-Kafirun

Muh. Syaifudin

Postgraduate Program of Wahid Hasyim University,
X/22 Menoreh Tengah Street, Sampangan, Semarang, Indonesia 50236
sayfuddin_iz@yahoo.com

Abstract-inter-religious tolerance is an absolute case in this era of globalization. nevertheless, the limits of tolerance necessary to ensure a life of harmony, harmonious and peaceful. Even in the interaction between religious communities themselves. In general, historical figures, scholars, as well as religious teachings, all have the principles of tolerance. Hindu religion in India, Buddhist religion in Asia and Islam in Arab, although born and grown in certain areas, but all of them calling for tolerance. That is what causes these religions still exist in various parts of the world until now. Islam, in terms of tolerance has rules and clear boundaries. In the matter of faith, tolerance means respecting others without bothering. This is referred to in Sura Al-Kafirun. This surah illustrates that faith can not be replaced even though bought by anything in this world. Surah which consists of six ayat also asserts that the other party can not we forced to follow our beliefs.

keywords : Tolerance, religion, Al-Kafirun

Inter-religious tolerance

Toleration is "the practice of deliberately allowing or permitting a thing of which one disapproves. One can meaningfully speak of tolerating—i.e., of allowing or permitting—only if one is in a position to disallow." It has also been defined as "to bear or endure" or "to nourish, sustain or preserve." Toleration may signify "no more than forbearance and the permission given by the adherents of a dominant religion for other religions to exist, even though the latter are looked on with disapproval as inferior, mistaken, or harmful."¹

There is only one verb 'to tolerate' and one adjective 'tolerant,' but the two nouns 'tolerance' and 'toleration' have evolved slightly different meanings. Tolerance is an attitude of mind that implies non-judgmental acceptance of different lifestyles or beliefs², whereas toleration implies putting up with something that one disapproves of.

Historically, most incidents and writings pertaining to toleration involve the status of minority and dissenting viewpoints in relation to a dominant state religion. In the twentieth century and after, analysis of the doctrine of toleration has been expanded to include political and ethnic groups, homosexuals and other minorities, and human rights embodies the principle of legally enforced toleration.

This article focuses on the problem of religious tolerance or religious tolerance problem itself. In order to provide a comprehensive overview on the issue, here are some views of major religions on tolerance :

¹ Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003) [ISBN 0-691-09270-2](#) , pp. 5–6, quoting D.D. Raphael et al

² Merriam Webster. Retrieved 2012-03-07

Hindu

The Rigveda says Ekam Sath Viprah Bahudha Vadanti which translates to "The truth is One, but sages call it by different Names"³. Consistent with this tradition, India chose to be a secular country even though it was divided partitioning on religious lines. Whatever intolerance, Hindu scholars displayed towards other religions was subtle and symbolic and most likely was done to present a superior argument in defence of their own faith. Traditionally, Hindus showed their intolerance by withdrawing and avoiding contact with those whom they held in contempt, instead of using violence and aggression to strike fear in their hearts. Hinduism is perhaps the only religion in the world which showed remarkable tolerance towards other religions in difficult times and under testing conditions. Even Buddhism, which spread in India mostly through negative campaigns against Hinduism, cannot claim that credit. Criticizing other religions and showing them in poor light to attract converts to its own fold was never an approved practice in Hinduism⁴.

Pluralism and tolerance of diversity are built into Hindu theology India's long history is a testimony to its tolerance of religious diversity. Christianity came to India with St. Thomas in the first century A.D., long before it became popular in the West. Judaism came to India after the Jewish temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. and the Jews were expelled from their homeland. In a recent book titled "Who are the Jews of India?" (University of California Press, 2000), author Nathan Katz observes that India is the only country where the Jews were not persecuted. The Indian chapter is one of the happiest of the Jewish Diaspora. Both Christians and Jews have existed in a predominant Hindu India for centuries without being persecuted. Zoroastrians from Persia (present day Iran) entered India in the 7th century to flee Islamic conquest. They are known as Parsis in India. The Parsis are an affluent community in the city of Mumbai without a sense of having been persecuted through the centuries. Among the richest business families in India are the Parsis; for example, the Tata family controls a huge industrial empire in various parts of the country. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the powerful Prime Minister of India (1966–77; 1980–84), was married to Feroz Gandhi, a Parsi (no relation to Mahatma Gandhi)

Buddhism

Although the Buddha preached that "the path to the supreme goal of the holy life is made known only in his own teaching", according to Bhikkhu Boddhi, Buddhists have nevertheless shown significant tolerance for other religions: "Buddhist tolerance springs from the recognition that the dispositions and spiritual needs of human beings are too vastly diverse to be encompassed by any single teaching, and thus that these needs will naturally find expression in a wide variety of religious forms."⁵ James Freeman Clarke said in *Ten Great Religions* (1871): "The Buddhists have founded no Inquisition; they have combined the zeal which converted kingdoms with a toleration almost inexplicable to our Western experience."⁶

The Edicts of Ashoka issued by King Ashoka the Great (269–231 BCE), a Buddhist, declared ethnic and religious tolerance. His Edict XII, engraved in stone, stated: "The faiths of others all deserve to be honored for one reason or another. By honoring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others."⁷

³ "[Hinduism – a general introduction](#)". Religioustolerance.org. Retrieved 2012-06-21

⁴ "[evidence of tolerance](#)". Jayaram V/Aniket Patil. Retrieved 2014-08-17.

⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, "[Tolerance and Diversity](#)". *Access to Insight*, 5 June 2010. Accessed March 6, 2011

⁶ Tweed, Thomas, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2000) p. 101 [ISBN 0-8078-4906-5](#)

⁷ Kristin Scheible, "Towards a Buddhist Policy of Tolerance: the case of King Ashoka" in Neusner, Jacob, ed. *Religious Tolerance in World Religions* (West Conshohocken, PA, Templeton Foundation Prsss 2008) p. 323

However, Buddhism has also had controversies regarding toleration. See Dorje Shugden Controversy. In addition, the question of possible intolerance among Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Myanmar has been raised by Paul Fuller.[72]⁸

Islam

The name ‘the Tolerant (al-Ḥalīm)’ is one of the names of Allāh.[citation needed]

Circa 622, Muhammed established the Constitution of Medina, which incorporated religious freedom for Christians and Jews.

Certain verses of the Qu’ran were interpreted to create a specially tolerated status for People of the Book, Jewish and Christian believers in the Old and New Testaments considered to have been a basis for Islamic religion:

Verily! Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.⁹

Under Islamic law, Jews and Christians were considered dhimmis, a legal status inferior to that of a Muslim but superior to that of other non-Muslims.

Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire held a protected status and continued to practice their own religion, as did Christians. Yitzhak Sarfati, born in Germany, became the Chief Rabbi of Edirne and wrote a letter inviting European Jews to settle in the Ottoman Empire, in which he asked: "Is it not better for you to live under Muslims than under Christians?"¹⁰ Sultan Beyazid II (1481–1512), issued a formal invitation to the Jews expelled from Catholic Spain and Portugal, leading to a wave of Jewish immigration.

According to Michael Walzer:

The established religion of the [Ottoman] empire was Islam, but three other religious communities—Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish—were permitted to form autonomous organizations. These three were equal among themselves, without regard to their relative numerical strength. They were subject to the same restrictions vis-à-vis Muslims—with regard to dress, proselytizing, and intermarriage, for example—and were allowed the same legal control over their own members.

Surah Al-Kafirun and the concept of religious tolerance

This surah is descended at Mecca and its tone and contents presents clear witness of this fact. Similarly the sabab e Nuzul (all about the descent of the Surah) too by the will of Merciful God will be later defined and another reason for this statement is that some guessed it to be Madani(surah descended at Madina).

The tone of the surah reveals that it was descended in the period when the Muslims were in minority and the unbelievers were in the majority and the noble prophet peace be upon him was under severe pressure by the unbelievers. They were persistently wanted to bring him to compromise with the polytheism. The great prophet peace be upon him was refusing them all and casting them aside and making them desperate, without twisting the fists of rage with them¹¹.

⁸ <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2146000,00.html>

⁹ Quran 2:62

¹⁰ B. Lewis, "The Jews of Islam", New York (1984), pp. 135–136

¹¹ As-Soyuthi, Lubab el Nuqul fi Asbab en Nuzul, p. 218

This is an example for all the Muslims for not compromising with the enemies in the fundamentals of the religion. Whenever such a demand is offered from their side the enemy must get completely desperate. Specifically this surah twice emphasised this words "I never worship your idols". And this stress is to make them desperate, as the stress is laid twice that" you never worship my Supreme and Single God which is the proof of their stubbornness and its final outcome is that 'I am with my religion of monotheism and you be with the your rotten and contaminated religion of polytheism. About the virtues and merits of the Surah e Kafirun there are numerous narrations which defines the extra ordinary importance of its contents such as: In a hadis by the great prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, it is described: One who recites the Surah e Kafirun as if he had recited one fourth of the noble Quran. The rebellious devils leave him and he gets pure by the dirt of polytheism and becomes safe and secure by the fear and terror of the judgment day.

The term 'one fourth of honourable Quran' is for the reason that almost one fourth of the holy Quran struggled with the polytheism and idol worshipping and its extract is illustrated in this surah. And getting far away from the uncontrollable devils is to drive away the idol worshippers and we are well aware that polytheism is the best tool of Satan. To get saved on the Day of Judgment, at the first place it to be influenced by the belief of the monotheism and the denial of the polytheism and around the axis of this subject Surah e Kafirun rotates.

In another hadis by the great prophet peace be upon him, we read: a man approached him and requested him: O prophet of Allah! I came to you to teach me something for recitation at the hours of bed time. He said: when you go to bed recite Surah a Kafirun and sleep. This is the expression of hatred towards the polytheism¹².

In a narration by the prophet of Allah peace be upon him who told to Jubair bin muta'm: What do you like the best company as a friend and the belongings to be with you while starting a voyage?.

Yes! O Prophet of Allah my parents be sacrificed upon you. He replied: Recite these five chapters of Holy Quran by the names Kafirun, Nasr, Tauheed (qul huvallahu ahad), Nas and Falaq. Start your recitation by bismillahir rahman nir raheem.

Historical Background

There was a time in Makkah when although a storm of opposition had arisen in the pagan society of Quraish against the message of Islam preached by the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace), yet the Quraish chiefs hall not yet lost hope that they would reach some sort of a compromise with him. Therefore, from time to time they would visit him with different proposals of compromise so that he accepted one of them and the dispute between them was brought to an end. In this connection, different traditions have been related in the Hadith.

According to Abdullah bin Abbas, the Quraish proposed to the Holy Prophet; "We shall give you so much of wealth that you will become the richest man of Makkah; we shall give you whichever woman you like in marriage; we are prepared to follow and obey you as our leader, only on the condition that you will not speak ill of our gods. If you do not agree to this, we present another proposal which is to your as well as to our advantage."When the Holy Prophet asked what it was, they said that if he would worship their gods, Lat and Uzza, for a year, they would worship his God for the same space of time. The Holy Prophet said: "Wait awhile; let me see what my Lord commands in this regard."Thereupon the revelation came down: Qul ya-ayyuhal- kafirun... and: Qul afa-ghair Allahi... (Az-Zumar: 64): "Say to them: ignorant people do you bid me to worship others than Allah?"¹³.

According to another tradition from Ibn Abbas, the Quraish said to the Holy Prophet: "O Muhammad, if you kiss our gods, the idols, we shall worship your God."Thereupon, this Surah was sent down..

¹² Ibn Katsir, Tafsir Ibn Katsir (Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Azhim), vol. 8, p. 507

¹³ Ibn Jarir Ath-Thabari, Jami' Al-Bayan fi Ta'wil Al-Qur'an, vol. XXV. P. 661

Said bin Mina (the freed slave of Abul Bakhtari) has related that Walid bin Mughirah, As bin Wail, Aswad bin al-Muttalib and Umayyah bin Khalaf met the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) and said to him: "O Muhammad (upon whom be Allah's peace and blessings), let us agree that we would worship your God and you would worship our gods, and we would make you a partner in all our works. If what you have brought was better than what we possess, we would be partners in it with You, and have our share in it, and if what we possess is better than what you have brought, you would be partner in it with us and have your share of it." At this Allah sent down: Qul ya-ayyuhal-kafirun¹⁴.

Wahb bin Munabbih has related that the people of Quraish said to Allah's Messenger: "If you like we would enter your faith for a year and you would enter our faith for a year."

These traditions show that the Quraish had proposed such things to the Holy Prophet not once, in one sitting, but at different times and on different occasions; and there was need that they should be given a definite, decisive reply so that their hope that he would come to terms with them on the principle of "give and take" was frustrated for ever.

Interpretation of surah Al-Kafirun

1. SAY: O you who deny the truth! -
2. I do not worship that which you worship",
3. and neither do you worship that which I worship!
4. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship.
- 5 Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship.
- 6 For you is your religion, and for me is my religion.

It is mentioned in the narrations that this surah is about a group of the chiefs of the Quraish tribe Like Waleed bin Mughira, Haris bin Qais, Umayeh bin Khalf as they said: O Muhammad you come and follow our religion we too follow your religion. We will provide you entirely your share whatever privileges we possess. One year you worship our Gods and the next upcoming year we will worship your God. If your religion is better we too share your religion and in that case you too achieved your benefit.

The prophet peace be upon him replied: I take refuse to the Mighty God and I will not bring any thing as his equal and identical before him.

They requested at least touch our Gods and seek heavenly gifts from them and we too support you and confirm you and worship your Supreme God.

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon him replied: I am waiting for the reply from my Provider God.

At these hours the surah of kafirun descended. The prophet of Allah peace be upon him arrived at Masjid e Haram, at that time, a group of the heads of Quraish were present there. He stood before them and recited the Surah e Kafirun till the end. When they received the message of the Surah they got totally disheartened. At that they insulted and tortured the messenger of Allah peace be upon him and his companions.

The definition : I never compromise with the idol worshippers

The ayat of this surah addressed the prophet of Allah peace be upon him and expressed :

¹⁴ Ibn Hisyam, Sirah Ibn Hisyam, vol.II, p. 34

Say O unbelievers

I will not worship whatever you worship.

You too won't worship whatever I worship.

Like this manner separated its line of faith clearly from them. And evidently stated: I will never bring faith in idol worshipping and you too by this stubbornness and blindly following your forefathers emphasise upon your belief. And from idol worshipping you acquire, illegal and abundant profits and then in that case you will never get ready to bring faith purely in One and Unique God.

Once again to make the idolaters depressed completely from every type of evil planning towards the monotheists it adds: and I will never worship which you worship.

And you too will not worship what I worship.

Therefore do not emphasise upon it which is of no use, it is impossible to compromise upon the matter of idol worshipping.

And now when it is in such a manner your religion is for you and my religion is for me.

Here some questions arise which have to be answered:

1. Why the surah started by the command 'Qul' (say)?

Was not it better to say only : O you who deny the truth!.

Without being in the beginning the term 'Qul' in other words: the prophet peace be upon him having to implement the divine command and would have said the only sentence "O the unbelievers" why he uttered the word Qul 'say'?

By keeping in the view the contents of surah the answer to the question is evident. For instance the polytheists of Arab invited the prophet peace be upon him to compromise with them in the issue of idol worshipping. And he must negate this matter for his side and say: I will never submit to you and by no means make unclean my worship by polytheism. If the word "Qul" was not been present in the beginning of the surah the words would have been related to the Dominant God in this case the ayat :

I do not worship that which you worship",

And likewise the ayat were unable to give the proper meaning. Similarly in the message by jibril (Gabriel) from Benevolent God, the prophet peace be upon him is responsible to protect the purity of noble Quran have to repeat it accurately. It is illustrating that Jibril (gabrail) alaihis salam and the prophet peace be upon him in expressing the message they did not brought a single alteration. They practically proved that they are the agents who are always ready to follow the divine commands. As it is mentioned in the ayat 15 of surah e Yunus we read:

Say: I have no right to alter the Quran by my own choice I am only following the revelation which descended upon me¹⁵.

2- Do the idol worshippers deny the Single God?

We are well aware that the idol worshippers never denied the single and unique God. According to the ayaat of noble Quran it is clearly mentioned that whenever it was asked about the creator of the heavens and the earth they were replying: the creator is one supreme God.

And if you asked them, "Who created the heavens and earth?" they would surely say, "Allah." Say, "[All] praise is [due] to Allah "; but most of them do not know.¹⁶ Then how it is expressing in this surah" I do not worship your God and you too do not worship my God".

¹⁵ QS Yunus : 15

¹⁶ QS Lukman : 25

The answer to this Question, by keeping in the mind that the discussion is not about the creation but it is about the worshipping of god. It is evident that the idol worshippers use to believe, the creator of the world is God but they believed they must worship the idols to make them intercessors in the presence of God. Or they are completely not capable to worship God but to worship the idols with physical materialistic figures. Here the noble Quran draws a red line under this superstition and inappropriate thinking: The worship must be only for the One God not for the Idols neither for both.

3- Why it was repeated twice?

The ayat repeatedly denied the worship of the idols from the prophet's side. And the rejection of the idol worshippers, they are many discussions on this regard. A group of scholars believes: this repetition of ayat is to dishearten the idol worshippers and separate the path of Islam from the route of Polytheism. It proves no cooperation between the idol worshipping and the Monotheism. In other words as they were persistently inviting the prophet peace be upon him towards the idol worshipping and they were emphasising upon it. The noble Quran as well repeatedly denied them.

The reason of descending these ayaat and its repetition is for the reason that the tribe of Quraish offered the prophet of Allah peace be upon him that one year you worship our Gods and the next year we will worship your God. Same way another upcoming year it is your turn to worship our idols. And its next approaching year (fourth year) we will worship your idols, the above ayaat descended and refused all the offers. The way of my worship is not like you I will never worship your idols as my adoration is pure and devoid of every kind of polytheism.

You adore the idols by imitating your forefathers and my worshipping the Unique God is due to my search and thanking him. But it is evident that this repetition is to emphasise upon his firm believe.

In another explanation it is defined as in the second ayat, it is said: whatever you are worshipping I will not worship. In the fourth ayat it is said: In the past too I never worshiped your idols.

The difference is that in the second ayat the term : you worship is expressed in the form of the verb of continuation and in the fourth ayat it is ascertained in the form of verb in future tense¹⁷.

4- Does the meaning of ayat that defined below permits idol worshipping?

Your religion is for you and our religion is for us.

Sometimes as the last ayat of this surah that expresses the total peace, it is supposed that they are permitted to remain in their own religion and it is not insisting upon accepting the new religion.

But this belief is totally wrong and baseless as the tone of the ayat revealing in this term is an insult and threat to them. It means your religion is for you and you will see the grave consequences. As it is expressed in the ayat 55 of surah e Qasas: (28:55) And when they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say, "For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. peace be on you(this is a wish of separation and expressing good bye), we do not desire the ignorant.

There are hundreds of examples of such expressions in the noble Quran which invalidates the polytheism and idol worshipping in all its aspects and count it as the utmost hated act among the deeds and concludes it as the sin which is a unpardonable.

5- Even for a moment, I never compromised with the polytheism.

Whatever it is defined in this surah, it is absolutely a fact that the idol worshipping and believing in single god, both are the programmes which contradicts each other and they are dissimilar in their own different ways. They are not similar to one another. Monotheism connects the man to the Unique God whereas polytheism makes him unaware of the Majestic God.

¹⁷ Fakhr ad-Din Ar-Razi, Mafatih al-Ghaib (Tafsir Al-Kabir), vol.XVII, p. 261

Monotheism is the secret of the unity and oneness in every field of life, whereas polytheism is the cause of every kind of dispersion and disunity in every field of life. Monotheism takes the man upwards, out from the domain of materialism to the world of nature and connects him to the world beyond nature, whereas polytheism tumbles down the man into the bottom of nature and connects him to the helpless, weak and mortal creatures. For this reason the prophet of Allah peace be upon him and all the other honourable prophets not only for a moment agreed with polytheism but their first and important mission was to fight with it.

Even today all the seekers of right path, the scholars and the preachers of this religion must have to continue it and in every point of the world announce their disgust and abhorrence to every kind of polytheism. This is the true path of Islam. Conclusion: the path of Islam related Muslim relations with non-Muslims is that in matters of fundamental, for example in terms of belief, faith and creed, Islam holds strong principles. Tolerance here means mutual respect without any coercion of will. because faith can not grow by force. while in social interaction, tolerance means to help each other and help.

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