

# Good News

...And give good news to those who do good (to others) - HQ 22:37

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## ‘Tolerance’ an Act of ‘Humanity’

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The current expansion in mass media and communications reveal more evidently that our world contains a variety of different cultures, races, religions, and ideologies. Thus, despite our common humanity, our differences demand tolerance as an essential and very relevant prerequisite for harmonious co-existence. In our highly globalised world, a realisation for such tolerance, good fellowship, and mutual respect for the survival of harmonious international relations is becoming more pronounced.

## The Moral Dynamics of Tolerance:

The ability to be tolerant of the views, beliefs, and cultures of the ‘other’ is a very important ‘moral’ value in a multi-faceted society. However, in a rigid, authoritarian society the right of the ‘other’ to practice their diversity and differences openly and freely is often undermined.

Secondly, tolerance in a pluralistic society is a form of ‘humanity’ itself. A person who can tolerate the ‘other’ is able to see the one common **Source** where the various differences and diversities as found in the world, flow from. This Unified Bond that permeates all diverse phenomena of creation and transcends multiplicities is what the

prophets and mystics term, ‘**The One God**’ of the entire universe and humankind. In the words of the Holy Qur-an:

And your God and our God is One God. There is no god but He, the Beneficent, the Merciful. – 2:163

Tolerance permits us to experience the sympathetic feeling of Divine Inter-connectedness among diverse creatures that permits these differences.

The Islam as expressed in the pristine pages of the Holy Quran and in the exemplary conduct of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) in contrast with the rigid, self-centred and flawed interpretations of extremists, clearly advocates pluralism and encourages tolerance in its relationship with the religious ‘other’. To this end the Holy Quran states:

For every one of you We appointed a law and a way.  
**And if Allah had pleased, He would have made you a**

**single people**, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah will all return, so He will inform you of that wherein you differed. – 5:48

World renowned scholar and author, Muhammad Ali, commenting on this verse, explains:

This verse clearly pointed out that if God so willed it, He can create a single community out of varied groups of people. Nevertheless, God planned that humankind be varied in its popular expressions. God’s endowment of a pluralistic world is His grace to humanity. Our differences provide the venues for the existential celebration of life and of living; variety and diversity being the potent antidote to our humdrum existence.

Each community has its own unique way of life, its

own customs and traditions, its own laws. Nevertheless, no matter how diverse these ways of life are, it should be understood in the light of the Almighty's life affirming purpose in allowing such diversities—a flourishing humanity. It is therefore clear that although God can produce a uniformed world of totalities by imposing a single law for all communities, yet He prefers to create pluralistic communities so that humankind will learn the values of tolerance, harmony, and fraternity.

Another aim of God in creating varied communities (according to the Holy Quran) is to test human beings in the conduct of virtuous deeds. He tests the various societies if they can live amicably and cordially with each other despite their differences. The divergence in each society's ways of life should not be a

cause of disharmony and differences; instead, societal divergences should prod each community to vie with one another in the performance of virtuous conduct.

The Holy Quran insists that the best way of putting an end to religious, cultural, and ideological conflicts is to tolerate differences with openness and good faith. Each religious community should do righteous deeds according to their tenets; leaving to God the judgment as to which community is the best. The final section of the passage states: 'To Allah will all return, so He will inform you of that wherein you differed.' The verse is thus very precise in stating that it should be left to God (and to God alone) in deciding the truth of the matters that people dispute. It is not for humans to pontificate which view is true and which is wrong. Vain and

fruitless arguments as to which religious, ethical, and ideological point of view is right or wrong will only lead to communal fracas and infringement of societal concord. Likewise, the verse firmly admonishes human beings to contend with one another in good deeds by using their own respective laws as bases of their righteous conduct.

### **‘Humanity’ before ‘Theology’**

In another verse of the Holy Quran, the Holy Book of Allah makes the point that righteousness transcends ritualism. Says the Holy Quran:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but righteous is the one who believes in Allah and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him, to the near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and

the wayfarer, and to those who ask, and to set the slaves free; and keeps up prayer, and pays the poor-rate [i.e., charity]: and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict [adversities]. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty. – 2:177

The great master of Islamic mysticism, Muhiyuddin Ibn Arabi (*circa* 1164-1240 AD), in his Sufi treatise, ‘Bezels of Wisdom’ (*Fusus al-Hikam*) provide a very universal and inclusive interpretation of the above passage. For him the passage encourages religious pluralism and tolerance by going beyond the ritualistic demands of different ceremonial expressions of worship and focusing instead on the importance of ‘humane’ character, namely compassion towards others and persevering faith in the midst of trials and difficulties. For him, more

than the outward manifestations of piety, the crucial intention of the Holy Quran is for the Muslim Community to produce proper human beings who are sensitive to the needs of others. The Holy Quran endeavours to create compassionate and “humane” persons who act with benevolence and equanimity to everybody with no regard whatsoever to racial, cultural, religious, or ideological differences.

Finally everyone will be given their just recompense based on their deeds and not because of their religious adherence. The Holy Quran affirms:

So he who does an atom’s weight of good will see it.  
And he who does an atom’s weight of evil will see it.

**We strongly condemn all forms of human rights abuses; the wanton abuse of the environment and the rest of God’s creation. We especially condemn, from the top of our voices, the ruthless killings of all innocent parties in the name of Religion or State!**

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