ISLAM: A RELIGION OF TOLERANCE OR TERRORISM
(AN ANALYTICAL AND CRITICAL STUDY)
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ABSTRACT
Islamic teachings are based on a strong foundation of tolerance. Islam has no connection whatsoever with either terrorism or extremism. Islam is a peaceful, practical religion whose Universal teachings are based on duty consciousness, love, peace, mercy, security of mankind and moderation at all levels. This paper discusses that the essence of the teachings of the Qur’an is the establishment of peace and elimination of mischief and corruption. There are innumerable verses in the Qur’an which condemn the disruption of peace in society or to help in this regard is totally against Allah’s Commandments. The Prophet (PBUH) preached and practiced excellent behavior towards all irrespective of caste, creed or colour. He established unity and justice in society and tried to get to the root-causes of moral and social degradation in society and then their complete eradication through practical endeavours. He commanded the Muslims to fulfill the obligations towards non-Muslims and not break the promise and treaties made to them. He (PBUH) forbade prejudiced attitude towards non-Muslims. The prophet (PBUH) not only emphasized good behavior towards human-beings but also towards animals and birds. He (PBUH) also taught Muslims to respect nature.

Keywords: ISLAM; RELIGION; TOLERANCE; TERRORISM; ANALYTICAL; CRITICAL STUDY

TOLERANCE (TASAMUH)
Literally the word tolerance means "to bear" As a concept it means respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of the world’s cultures, forms of expression and ways of being human. In Arabic it is called "tasamuh". There are also other words that give similar meanings, such as "Hilm" (forbearance) or "`afu" (pardon, forgiveness) or "safh" (overlooking, disregarding). Thus it means to hold something acceptable or bearable.

Tolerance and beyond at all Levels: Islam teaches tolerance and beyond which is acceptance at all levels, among individuals, groups and states and also family members. Tolerance among the members of the community: tolerance in views and opinions, tolerance among the different Islamic Juristic Schools and sects, tolerance among Muslims and the people of other faiths. Islam is a progressive religion and approves pluralism, tolerance and acceptance. Allah commands all Muslims to bring peace, harmony and tranquility to the world. The fundamental characteristics of Islamic morality are virtues such as love, compassion, tolerance, sacrifice, forgiveness and justice.

Fethullah Gulen writes, “One should seek Islam through its own sources and its own true representatives throughout history, and not through the actions of a tiny minority that misrepresent it. The truth is that there is no harshness and bigotry in Islam. It is entirely a religion of forgiveness and tolerance.” (1)
TERRORISM (IRHAB)

In Arabic terrorism is called “Irhab” and a terrorist is “Irhabi” and extremist is called Mutatarrif. The Plural of “Mutatarrif” is “Mutatarrifoon”. In Arabic it is said Tatarrafa fi Kaza means he crossed all levels of moderation and was not on a middle path. The terms “Islah (social reformation, betterment)” and “Fasad”(mischief) have been frequently used in the Qur’an.

Shaikh Abu Jafar Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 Hijra) says “Al- Ifsad” (Mischief, corruption, spoiling, ruining) is anything that is a cause of suffering and loss for people. It is advisable to free the society of such disruptive forces. On the other hand, “Islah” (social reformation, betterment, improvement) is a thing which leads to betterment of society”. (2)

Islam does not teach “Irhab” (terrorism) and “Fasad” (Mischief, corruption, spoiling, ruining). On the other hand it preaches protection of life and property. If terrorism is becoming a source of contention, by spreading its tentacles, Islam teaches effective ways of taking control of the hostile situation and by countering it. Islam lays great emphasis on love of mankind, peace and security, duty consciousness, and moderation. It is a peaceful and practical religion with a Universal appeal. According to the Qur’an and Sunnah, it is the responsibility of each and every Muslim to actively propagate well-being and happiness and eliminate evil.

Allah says in the Qur’an:

1. (2:205) “And Allah doesn’t love corruption”
2. (28:77) “Verily, God does not love the spreaders of corruption!”
3. (7: 56) “ Do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered”
4. (2: 191) “ for oppression is even worse than killing”
5. (2: 217) “Oppression is more awesome than killing”
6. (2: 224) “and promote peace between men”
7. (8:1) “ And keep alive the bonds of brotherhood among yourselves”
8. (24:22) “ let them pardon and forbear”
9. (5: 32) “ If anyone slays a human being-unless it be (in punishment) for murder or for spreading corruption on earth- it shall be as though he had slain all mankind: whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind”

Al-Tabari, Muhammad bin Jarir (d. 310/923), a famous Jurist and historian, has discussed and proved the various aspects of this verse (5:32) in detail by various quotations. According to one view the meaning of “if anyone saves a life” is “to forgive inspite of having the power to take life for life”. According to another view it means, “a person who saves another from drowning, burning and killing” yet another meaning says “to save one from falling to death” This amounts to saving the entire humanity from death and destruction. This is also quoted that, “a person who refrains from killing a human being
has given life to the entire mankind” A piece of advice given by Qatada is quoted “O Children of Adam! Save mankind from destruction and give it life with your wealth and if it is in your power, give life to mankind by forbearance and forgiveness for their sins” (3)

THE PURPOSE OF SHARI’AH: ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PEACE OR MISCHIEF?

What kind of society does Islam want to prepare? One thing is crystal clear that the purpose of Shari’ah is positive development, welfare and betterment of society and not creation of strife, commotion and chaos. While analyzing the purpose of Shar’iah Imam Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid (d.505/1111), a great theologian, logician, jurist and mystic writes,

“The very objective of Shari’ah is to promote the welfare of the people which lies in safeguarding their faith, their life, their intellect, their posterity, and their wealth. Whatever ensures the safeguarding of these five serve public interest and is desirable.”(4)

Ibn Qayyim, al-Jawziyya’s (d.751/1350) statement also supports similar theme about the purpose of Shari’ah, he writes “The basis of Shari’ah is wisdom and welfare of the people in this world as well as the hereafter. This welfare lies in complete justice, mercy, well-being and wisdom. Anything that departs from justice to oppression, from mercy to harshness, from welfare to misery and from wisdom to folly, has nothing to do with Shari’ah.” (5)

CONDEMNATION OF TERRORISM IN TRADITIONS OF PROPHET (PBUH)

When the prophet (PBUH) was born the entire Arabian peninsula was in the clutches of political, cultural, social and economic turbulence. Lawlessness and barbarism were sources of pride for them. Buying and selling of men and women was their business. Women were treated with degradation. The Prophet (PBUH) spent his entire life trying to develop the characters and personalities of people in the noblest manner. He (PBUH) taught his people love for knowledge, politeness and sophistication, forbearance, forgiveness, acceptance for difference of opinion, equality and justice in such a way that tyrants with mean natures transformed into extremely kind people with lofty and noble natures. People who buried their daughters alive became guardians and protectors of their respect and modesty.

Emphasis on excellent behaviour with people: The Prophet (PBUH) gave the people irrespective of their caste, creed or colour a very clear understanding of their position and status in society and also the nature of their mutual relationships and attitudes. He (PBUH) also said that people who wish for Allah’s closeness and love must be good, kind and loving with mankind in general. He said, “All mankind is Allah’s family; the best among you in the sight of Allah is he who is human towards his family.”(6)

An excellent example of equality and justice to mankind: One of the major causes in the rapid growth of conflict, strife and terrorism in society is total absence of justice and deprivation of the due rights of people. Another worth mentioning factor is also the division
and sub-division of people in a Muslim society on the basis of caste, creed, religion and sect thereby leading to exploitation of the masses. The above mentioned factors pollute the atmosphere of society. The Holy prophet (PBUH) said: “People are like teeth of a comb”(7)

All human beings are the sons and daughters of Adam: The Prophet (PBUH) brought to people’s attention the actual nature of mankind by saying that men and women are the sons and daughters of Adam who was made of clay. People, therefore, must always remember their humble, earthly origin and not transgress the limits set by Allah. He said: “You are children of Adam and Adam was created out of clay.”(8)

Prevention of causes leading to terrorism: Not trying to control anger and negative thoughts can lead people astray towards wrong and destructive steps. Anger and negative thoughts and actions when uncontrolled can make one adopt wrong and destructive steps. Muhammad (PBUH) said “The strong man is not one who defeats people by physical force but one who is able to control himself in anger”. (9)

The wide gap between the rich and poor sows seeds of envy and hatred in the minds of poor people who may be already suffering from low self-esteem, various insecurities and deprivations. The Prophet (PBUH) admonished people to shun envy esteem from their lives, he (PBUH) said, “Avoid envy at all costs as it destroys all your good deeds as fire destroys wood” (10)

The Prophet (PBUH) said avoidance of two bad habits that can destroy lives by moving towards disastrous consequences are envy and greed, he (PBUH) said, “Don’t be jealous of one another, don’t look downs on others and become brothers of one another” (11)

Definition of a Muslim? The Prophet (PBUH) emphasised on social and moral responsibility of human beings, he said, “A Muslim is one from whose tounge and hands Muslims are safe from evil”(12)

Prophet (pBUH) said, “ Whosoever relieves the suffering of his fellow brother, Allah will remove his suffering and grant him ease in life, and whosoever relieves a Muslim of his pain, Allah will act mercifully towards him on the Day of Judgement.” (13) Muslims living in the West today, are going through tough situations. Whosoever tries and relieves them from their painful and agonizing situations. Allah will ease their sufferings on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (PBUH) said, “ Make life easier for Muslims by removing painful hurdles.” (14) This means removal of obstacles like thorny branches and big stones from the path, removal of poverty, starvation, disease and ignorance, removal of difficulties and problems.

The total elimination of terrorism and evils from society by practical endeavours: The Prophet (PBUH) said that every person must try to prevent and eliminate factors leading to strife in society according to his own abilities, resources and limitations. He said, “Any one of you who sees a vice being done before him, should try to stopit by his hands, if unable to
do so, he should stop it by his tongue, if that is not possible he should stop it by his heart, this (the last one) is the symbol of weakest Eman.” (15)

Mission and responsibility of Muslim Community: To establish goodness and eradicate terrorism and all kinds of evil from their own community and the world is a greater duty of Muslims. The Prophet (pbuh) said, “Behold! Everyone of you is a shepherded and everyone of you is responsible for his subjects. So the sultan who rules the people is a guard and responsible for his subjects. And the husband is the custodian of the members of the household and is responsible for his subjects. And the wife is the custodian of the house of her husband and of his children and is responsible for them. And the slave of a man is the custodian of the wealth of his master and is responsible for it. Beware! everyone of you is a shepherded and everyone of you is responsible for his subjects.” (16)

In this hadith everyone has been made responsible for every thing in his charge. The Head of the State (Imam, Khaleefah, President) is supposed to have accepted the responsibility of his people. He is just like the father and has to look after the welfare, comfort, and security of their lives, property and self respect. Likewise, every man is the caretaker of each and every member of his family. In brief every individual is to be held answerable about his duties on the Day of Judgement. The higher the place of a person the higher are his duties and responsibilities to establish peace and eradicate terrorism.

Condemnation of fear and harassment in society by threat: To harass and spread fear by force, with weapons, is a deadly sin in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) warned people to refrain from these vicious acts. Otherwise they should consider themselves out of the fold of Islam. The Prophet (PBH) said, “O people! Don’t desire confrontation with your enemies and pray for Allah’s blessings.” (17)

Harassment of innocent people during wars: Torture and harassment in any way is forbidden in Islam not only during times of peace but also during times of war. Great care in this regard has been taught by the prophet (pbuh). Abdullah Ibn Umar (ra) (d.73/692) narrated that when a woman was found killed in a battle, Muhammad (pbuh) strongly forbade the killing of women and children” (18).

Unjust killing of Muslims is an act of terrorism too: Muslims have to be made aware of the maltreatment and cruelty towards non-muslim minorities, unfulfillment of their rights, unjust treatment due to differences of faith are totally against the teachings of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). Certain hadiths in this regard are quoted. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “If a Muslim kills a non-Muslim after an alliance of peace with the group he belonged to, that Muslim will be even devoid of the faintest fragrance of Heaven (he will not be able to smell the fragrance from the distance it takes to walk forty years) (19). In short, that Muslim will be very, very far away from Heaven.

The Prophet (pbuh) also said, “Listen O people, if any one of you is cruel towards a non-Muslim (after an agreement has been made) or does not give him his due rights or makes him do things beyond his powers, thereby causing him to suffer, or snatches anything from him
against his wishes, then remember I will fight from his side against you (the Muslim) on the Day of Judgement”. (20)

The fatal consequences of terrorism: An act of terrorism will be reacted by a greater act of terrorism. This is the law of nature. A person who perpetrates acts of terrorism on others, produces many other terrorists and becomes a victim to terrorism himself. The prophet (pbuh) said, “If a person does not show and give mercy to people in general, Allah also is not merciful towards him.” (21) The Prophet (pbuh) also said, “A person who inflicts torture and suffering on others, Allah will also inflict suffering and torture on him.” (22) The Prophet (pbuh) said on another occasion, “Don’t harass and make people suffer. If you do so, Allah will make you suffer and inflict punishment on you on the Day of Judgement.” (23)

The importance of the fulfillment of duties towards non-Muslims: Among the teachings which Muslim had to adhere to after the death of the second Caliph of Muslims, Umar Ibn al-Khattab (ra) (d. 23/644) were related to the fulfillment of the duties towards non-Muslims. Imam Abu Yusuf (d182/797) said, “Umar (ra) at the time of his death said, “I want to put this in my will to the next caliph of Muslims that the responsibility of the security of the lives, properties and respect of non-Muslims, the Prophet (pbuh) had taken upon himself as his responsibilities, should be undertaken by you too. The promise and pacts made with them by the prophet (pbuh) should be honoured. They should not be overburdened with something which is not in their power.” (24)

A Muslim killed a Christian or Jew. When this case was brought up before the Prophet PBUH he said, “I have more responsibility to fulfill towards people who come under my jurisdiction.” Therefore, the Prophet (PBUH) sentenced the Muslim to death for the killing of a Jew or Christian. (25) He upheld the principle of blood for blood or life for life. The criminal whether Muslim, Christian or Jew has to be punished.

Stress on acts leading to the happiness of human-beings, animals and birds: The Prophet (pbuh) not only advised Muslims to perform acts which will bring ease and comfort in the lives of human-beings but also positive acts of which will make life easy and happy for animals and birds. In this regard, he (pbuh) said, “If a Muslim cultivates a farm which satisfies the hunger of men, animals and birds thereof, his act of cultivation will be rewarded by Allah as an act of charity.” (26) Imam Muslim in his book, has written a chapter whose title is “A warning against cruelty towards cats and other harmless animals”. One hadith has been quoted from various sources, “A women is doomed to go to Hell as she kept a cat in ropes and it died of thirst and hunger” (27) Imam Bukhari (d.256/870) also in Sahih Bukhari, Kitabul Adab wrote a chapter on “Sayings related to kindness and mercy towards human-beings and animals” Imam Abu Dawood from very authentic source quotes that the Prophet (pbuh) one day found a restless bird-Alhamra- in search of her chicks and became very upset. He (pbuh) asked the companions as to who had caused this sufferinf to bird by separating her from the chicks and told them to return the chicks to the mother bird immediately. (28)

On the 9th of Zilhaj, 10th Hijra the Prophet (pbuh) delivered his last sermon on mount Arafat. In that historical Sermon he preached complete elimination of bloodshed, and
practice of forgiveness and forbearance instead of taking revenge. His (pbuh)’s sermon had strong leanings towards a culture of peace and toleration.

SUGGESTIONS TO OVERCOME THE TERRORISM

Umar (RA) Used to say, “Learn to be selfaccountable, otherwise Allah will make you accountable for your deeds”(29). Suggesting self-improvement methods Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi (d.1953) says, “There can not be just one cure/prescription for all moral and ethical problems. People suffering from spiritual ailments have different psychological and behavioural problems. The best of ethical doctors is one who prescribe treatment accordingly depending on the needs of the particular individual, nation or age” (30)

1. Comprehensive plan to promote literacy in society with an improved/revised curriculum to promote peace and harmony in society with values of love, spirituality, cleanliness and aesthetics which will help in cleansing the society from conflicts and free from prejudice, hatred.

2. The curriculum of the educational institutions of Muslim countries should inculcate respect towards all living things by adopting constructive measures.

3. Every person should try his utmost to promote a culture of toleration. In the present Pakistani scenario, not only non-Muslims are living in a state of fear and insecurity but also Muslims who believe in the other than the radical brand are also finding it very hard to survive.

4. The media can play a lot more positive role in this regard by fulfilling their moral and ethical obligations and by not promoting hatred and violence in the sensitive world of today.

5. People should try to understand the tough and painful situations of Muslims living in the West and make life easy for them by taking theoretical and practical steps to undermine inclinations towards fanaticism and terrorism.

6. There are both internal and external causes for the growth of the epidemic of terrorism, Muslim societies needs improvement through Ijtihad. There is always room for re-framing individuals and society through Ijtihad.

7. All kinds of terroristic tendencies, political, economic, cultural even cyber are on the increase all over the world. The worst victims to these kinds of terrorism are the Muslims This really food for thought for all Muslims. It is very important to find out the causes behind the situations that result in the rapid spread of terrorism. Islam is a religion which believes in the elimination of conflict, discord, terrorism and extremism from societies and teaches ways to tackle them. How can Muslims teach terrorism in theory and practice when the sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh) preaches non-violence?
CONCLUSION

Although Islam preaches peace at all levels and at all times, Muslims are being branded as terrorists. And looked upon with suspicion by non-Muslims. The cure and elimination of terrorism is only possible if the social, cultural, political and religious causes leading to it are analyzed and then with all sincerity those causes be removed from societies. In case remedies are not implemented, physically and mentally healthy people will be strongly inclined to take the road of violence and terrorism. On deeper analysis of this destructive ailment, we find that comprehensive efforts were not resorted to rooting out this cancer and it was given fertile ground to thrive on in many parts of the world. Whatever steps so far have been taken to combat this onslaught of cancer are too few and incapable of tackling it-like trying to treat cancer with paracetamol, which will naturally fail miserably. Islam is a progressive religion and approves pluralism, tolerance and acceptance. Islamic teachings negate extremism, radicalism, fundamentalism or fanaticism. History provides many examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths. Unfortunately, Islamic thought, culture and tradition have been misinterpreted and distorted over the ages for a variety of reasons i.e. political, economic, social, educational, moral, spiritual and psychological etc. Islam stands for justice and fair play for all, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. All caliphs showed great exemplary attitude towards people of other faiths along with the whole Muslim community. The main cause of terrorism in Muslim community is not Islam but various internal and external, political, cultural, social and economic factors. These factors should be carefully analysed and practical solutions put forward to end this vicious situation.
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