

Living with non-Muslims and the ten principles

By Dr. Mohammed Yasir 'al-Qadmani

Much has been written on this critical issue by contemporary writers, ranging from long-winded works to brief renderings. Recently, however, I chanced upon a related speech that was highly enlightening and sufficiently comprehensive. It seemed to encapsulate relevant essentials found elsewhere, but was more insightful and specifically elaborative as far as the Qur'an and Sunnah were concerned. It seemed appropriate that I transcribed and condensed the speech to make it more accessible and conveyable, especially at a time when many of the Islamic precepts and prescriptions are being portrayed so negatively.

This speech of the respected and erudite scholar, Shaykh 'Umar 'ibn Mohammed 'ibn Salim 'ibn Hafiz, has been entitled,

'Living With The Other – A Historical Reality And A Real Necessity.'

The honourable Shaykh believes that:

Mutual acquaintance is the primary purpose behind the diversity and multiplicity of the human race. 'Allah addresses mankind thus: **'O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.'** [Qur'an 49:13]

By reminding them of their singular origin a psychological path has been paved for social affinity and convergence, elimination of mutual hostility and eradication of any sense of individual excellence.

The essential foundation for coexistence, however, is the adoption of patience. 'Allah states: **'We have made some of you as a trial for others: will ye have patience?'** [Qur'an 25:20]

The following are the ten principles enshrined within the Shari'ah, which should clarify the concept of coexistence.

Rules For Coexistence

1. No coercion in winning converts to the faith

‘Allah mentions: **‘Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from Error.’** [Qur‘an 2:256]

It should be noted, however, that propagating of religion and recounting its advantages will not fall under coercion, for it is the latter that is prohibited, whilst the former, i.e., preaching of the faith, is an obligation on, and among the prominent missions of, the Muslim community.

There is a clear difference between applying force to convert and repelling the aggression of those who cause hindrance in conveying the Message and prevent elucidation of it via substantiated arguments. For the latter shall be confronted militarily as commanded by the Qur‘an: **‘And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for ‘Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrong-doers.’** [Qur‘an 2:193]

The prescription of the enactment of penalty against those exhibiting scandalous behaviour does not in any way contradict the previous verse [**‘Let there be no compulsion in religion’**].

2. Protection of the blood, property and honour of all citizens

‘Allah states: **‘On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.’** [Qur‘an 5:32]

It is reported by ‘Imam Bukhari on the authority of ‘Abdullah ‘ibn ‘Umar that the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) said:

‘One who kills a *mu’ahad* [one guaranteed with protection, normally referring to a non-Muslim in a Muslim country] will not [even] smell the fragrance of Paradise, even though its scent is perceptible from a distance of forty years [of journeying].’

Hence on the basis of the protection of life, property and honour, it is imperative that relationships are created among all groups of people and communities.

3. Administration of justice and fairness in governance between all communities

Emotional attachment or personal hate should not be allowed to prejudice a verdict; neither to affirm a wrong nor to invalidate a right.

‘Allah states: **“Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; And when ye judge between man and man, that ye**

judge with justice: Verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you! For ‘Allah is He Who heareth and seeth all things.’ [Qur‘an 4:58]

It is also mentioned: **‘O ye who believe! stand out firmly for ‘Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear ‘Allah. For ‘Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.’ [Qur‘an 5:8]**

The glorious history of Islam recounts the story of the horse race between the son of ‘Amr ‘ibn ‘al-’Aas and an ordinary Egyptian. Having been defeated, ‘ibn ‘Amr [whose father was the governor of the city], out of anger, physically struck the Egyptian, who then went to ‘Umar ‘ibn ‘al-Khattab and complained. ‘Umar, the then caliph, summoned both the father and the son and asked the Egyptian to retaliate in equal fashion. Further, admonishing the two, he said, “Since when have you begun to own people who were born free in this world?”

This account is a true reflection of the Islamic principle of justice and equality.

4. Love and loyalty vis-à-vis charity, justice and kindness

Whereas love and allegiance cannot be shown to one who does not believe in ‘Allah and His messenger (*upon whom be peace*), the values of charity, justice and kindness to all have been prescribed by Islam and are from the legacy of the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*).

A beautiful explanation of this is found in the following verse: **“Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for ‘Allah loveth those who are just.’ [Qur‘an 60:8]**

The prohibition in this verse is restricted to a specific category of people; those who have mobilized their forces with the intent of aggression, oppression and prevention from the path of ‘Allah, as stressed in the subsequent verse: **“Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong.’ [Qur‘an 60:9]**

When seen collectively and within context it becomes evident that verses such as, **‘O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell - an evil refuge indeed.’ [Qur‘an 9:73]**

allude to a specific group of people who have amassed forces for the object of persecution, confiscation of freedoms and propagation of corruption.

No doubt the aggressor has to be confronted, but there are guidelines that have been set down on how to deal with this too.

The following narrative will provide an overview of these:

Bayhaqi reports on the authority of ‘abu ‘Imran ‘al-Jawni that ‘abu Bakr, *may ‘Allah be pleased with him*, [once] sent Yazid ‘ibn ‘Abi Sufyan to ‘*al-Sham* [modern-day Syria and neighbouring lands]. As he was seeing him off Yazid remarked, “I dislike the fact that I am riding whilst you are walking”. [Hearing this] ‘abu Bakr replied, “You have come out as a *ghazi* [one who fights for defence and truth] in the path of ‘Allah and so I expect reward for this walking of mine. He then advised him in the following words, “Do not kill a child, a woman, or an elderly person; neither strike a frail and sick person, nor kill a hermit. Ensure not to cut off fruit-bearing trees, nor seek to desolate populated areas. Do not kill camels or cattle but for food, and never sink date palms into the sea, or set them alight.”

If these were the ethics of the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) in respect to aggressors and persecutors, one wonders what kind of character he would have shown to others?

5. Honouring of pacts and treaties and refraining from treachery and dishonesty

‘Allah states: **‘(But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against you. So fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their term: for ‘Allah loveth the righteous.’ [Qur‘an 9:4]**

‘Ibn Hisham has recorded the following in his famous *sirah*:

‘When ‘abu Jandal came to the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) following the Hudaybiyah treaty [to embrace Islam], the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) said to him, “O ‘abu Jandal! Be patient and anticipate reward, for ‘Allah is going to create a way out for you and the other Muslims with you. We have signed a truce between ourselves and them, and we have promised not to violate this and they too have committed themselves to it in the Name of ‘Allah. Hence, we shall not breach this truce.”

Long-term stability and confidence can only be expected when all parties commit to agreements. This in turn will create a sense of security and a sound atmosphere of coexistence, under which exchange of mutual interests can take place.

6. Identifying those with whom dealing is possible against pathological and notorious trouble-makers

The Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) had, as he left from Mecca with ‘Abu Bakr, hired a *mushrik* [polytheist] in whom he had confidence, as a guide.

Moreover, in the battle of Badr, the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) is reported to have said to his companions upon encountering the enemy:

‘I know of many men from the clan of Banu Hashim, and others too, who have been forced to fight this battle. So if you happen to encounter any from the tribe of Banu Hashim, do not strike them; and the one who encounters ‘Abbas ‘ibn ‘Abd ‘al-Muttalib should not kill him either, as he [too] has been made to come against his wish.’

Furthermore, upon returning from Ta‘if, the Prophet [expecting potential harm from the Meccans following the demise of his uncle ‘abu Talib] entered the protection of Mut‘im ‘ibn ‘Adi whilst ‘abu Bakr sought protection in ‘ibn Dughunnah.

7. Making distinction between material sciences [manual professions, linguistics, engineering, sociology, mathematics, industrial sciences, etc.] and those which relate to Faith and Shari’ah

In relation to the above, whilst the former may be taken from anyone with grounding in that particular science, providing there is no omission of any obligation of Shari’ah, the latter can only be acquired from its authentic sources that have been qualified through rigorous checks of ‘*isnad* [lineage of narration]. If the same condition was applied to worldly sciences too, transfer of everyday knowledge would have been hampered substantially.

Hafiz ‘ibn Hajar states in his legendary Fath ‘al-Baari: “Ahmad and ‘ibn ‘abi ‘al-Bazzar report on the authority of Jabir that ‘Umar – May ‘Allah be pleased with him – [once] came to the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) with a book which he had acquired from some ‘*ahle-kitaab* [People of the Book]. When he read it out to the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*), he became angry and said, “I have brought to you that which is pure and white. So do not ask them of anything which they may respond to with truth and you belie it, or falsehood

and you affirm it. By Him in Whose hand lies my soul, if Musa [Moses] had been alive he would have no choice but to follow me.”

‘Imam Muslim, in the introduction of his Sahih, relates ‘Imam Mohammed ‘ibn Sirin saying: “Undoubtedly this knowledge is the *deen*. So watch where you take your *deen* from.”

8. Responding kindness in like to those who show it and recompensing them for it

The Prophet (*upon whom be peace*), in respect of the prisoners of Badr, said: “Had ‘Adi been alive and put in a good word for these offensive individuals, I surely would have released them for his sake.”

And this was because he [‘Adi] had vociferously opposed, and ultimately tore, the covenant that imposed the boycott on the Prophet’s tribe, leaving them to suffer in the valley of Banu Shi’b for a number of years, and had given protection to him on his return from Ta‘if, as already mentioned.

It should also be noted that abandoning all forms of racism and tribalism will significantly strengthen this attitude of kindness.

‘Abu Dawud reports on the authority of Jubair ‘ibn Mut‘im that the Prophet (*upon whom be peace*) said: ‘He who calls towards ‘*asabiyyah* [racism / nationalism] is not one of us; and he who fights on grounds of ‘*asabiyyah* is not one of us; and he who dies on ‘*asabiyyah* [defending it or preserving it] is not one of us.’

9. Refraining from unproductive debates and channelling them through paths that are most effective

Among the major factors which destabilize sound coexistence is embroilment in excessive debating, instigation of tumult and agitation among people and needless criticism. The Shari’ah has prohibited us from arguing except through ways exemplary and admirable.

‘Allah states: **‘And do not dispute with the followers of the Book except by what is best.’ [Qur’an 29:46]**

It is also mentioned: **‘Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.’ [Qur’an 16:125]**

What can also help keeping away from argumentation is the appreciation that the obligation is to convey the message with gentleness and charm, not aggressiveness and domination. We should also try not to impose ourselves on people, calling to account their spiritual matters and judging them for their actions. Such attitudes may be found in some of those who claim to speak for *deen*, assuming this to be jealousy for and assistance of Islam.

10. Opening up space for researchers of truth and facilitating ways for them

‘Allah states: ‘And if one of the idolaters seek protection from you, grant him protection till he hears the word of ‘Allah, then make him attain his place of safety; this is because they are a people who do not know.’ [Qur’an 9:6]

Commenting on this verse, ‘ibn Kathir states: To paraphrase, ‘Allah says to His prophet (*upon whom be peace*): If those of the polytheists whose elimination has been deemed permissible [for their incitement and persecution] come to you to seek refuge, then give them refuge until they are able to listen to the Qur’an. This will enable them to appreciate the truth of religion, justifying ‘Allah’s position. After this they can be returned to a place of security until such time that they are able to return to their hometowns. And ‘Allah says that such prescription has been revealed to ensure that they are afforded an opportunity to benefit from divine knowledge and that ‘Allah’s religion prevails.

These were the words of my honourable and beloved Shaykh ‘Umar ‘ibn Hafiz, head of ‘Dar ‘al-Mustafa’ for Islamic Studies in the town of ‘Tarim’ in Hadhrmawt, Yemen.

May ‘Allah bless us with more occasions to benefit from his works.

I further like to state that if such is the command of ‘Allah in respect to those with whom we disagree on the basics of faith and religion, imagine what would be the importance of amity and good behaviour with those who share these fundamentals with us? If the, shedding of whose blood is no longer forbidden [due to evil actions necessitating it], has not been forgotten by ‘Allah for His message, with the possible hope of guidance, isn’t it all the more important to exhibit a similar attitude with [engaging in amicable discussion] with those with whom we agree for the most part?

Why is it that we cannot accommodate one another with respect to minor issues of *deen*? Why is it that when we are opposed in any aspect of *deen* we become enraged and begin making judgements on the character and beliefs of the critics, sometimes to the extent of excluding them from Islam itself?

This is indeed a tragic and regrettable state of affairs.

I believe that if members of our community today were truly conversant with the above-mentioned principles of coexistence, they would be ashamed to mistreat any ordinary law-abiding non-Muslim citizen, let alone one who is a Muslim.

May 'Allah grant us the ability to follow His path; and may He direct us towards that which brings His pleasure.

All praises be to 'Allah, the Lord of the worlds!

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