

THE RELEVANCE OF TOLERANCE AND FORGIVENESS TO THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT OF A NATION: AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In a bid to make life meaningful, beautiful and fruitful for man, Islamic education avails man with all he needs in all spheres of life so as to achieve the said goals. With all the provisions contained in the Glorious Qur'an, the prophetic traditions and various explanations of Islamic scholars coupled with all other sources from which this field derived its source, one is rest assured that each and every aspect of it's teachings is worthwhile for man to know in life. A very good example is its teachings on tolerance and forgiveness which this paper viewed as being worthy of mentioning in relation to peace and development of a nation. The paper assessed tolerance and forgiveness as inevitable in man's life and considered the consequences of lack of adoption of tolerance and forgiveness in man to man relation and in his relationship with his Lord. Furthermore, the paper discussed some ways by which this could be achieved from the Islamic Education perspectives.

Introduction

Tolerance and forgiveness are two interwoven concepts as one often leads to the other. As responsible beings on earth, human beings do face two challenges in life. The first challenge is how to relate effectively, efficiently and successfully with their creator while the second is that of how to perfect their relationship with the other beings. In man's relationship with his Lord, he needs to tolerate some conditions and seek for His forgiveness in order to forge ahead. In his interpersonal relations, he needs to tolerate and forgive his fellow being as he also needs to seek for forgiveness from them when the need arises.

Considering the fact that man is a goal-oriented being the ultimate of which is peace, progress and development in life. The attainment of all these no doubt remains a

mirage if he fails to embrace the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness in his day to day activities. This paper therefore, attempts to critically examine how tolerance and forgiveness affects peace and development of a nation from the perspectives of Islamic education. The paper is an open discourse that gives room for its application to every community.

Conceptualization of Terms:

Tolerance: Hornby (2001), describes tolerance as acceptance of different views, opinions or behaviour of other people. It also means the ability to endure pain hardship or difficult condition.

Forgiveness: Hornby (2001), explains that the term forgiveness is a noun which originates from the verb forgive. It means to stop feeling angry with somebody who has done something to harm, annoy or upset you. It also means to stop feeling angry with yourself.

Peace: Metuh in Olupona (1992), explained that peace entails beneficial adjustment of harmony between the individual and his Lord on one side and his fellow men on the other side. Khan (1993), observed that peace applies to the entirety of the concentric relationship existing between individual and individual, individual and community, community and community, nation and nation.

Development centers on the process of growth and achievement and progress in material and mental well being of a people, community, nation or the world.

Amucheazi (1985) sees national development as a multi-dimensional process involving the entire life of man such as his economic and political, psychological and social relations among others. Development of a nation is reciprocal to the state of peace, hospitality, friendliness or how harmonious people live in a society.

The Inevitability of Tolerance and Forgiveness in Life.

Tolerance and forgiveness are essential ethical virtues needed in our day to day activities for in that man is an incomplete and imperfect being. The Qu'ran categorically described the nature of man as being weak, incomplete and imperfect. Almighty Allah in the Qur'an says:

And Allah wants to lighten for you (your difficulties)
and mankind was created weak. Q:(4:28)

However, Islam does not by the above information encouraged man to be weak, a quality which could indulge man's indolence and mistakes. All that the religion intends is to acquaint man with the knowledge of himself so that in understanding his weakness he can learn to tolerate and forgive the infirmity of his fellow man. When this is wholeheartedly, adopted it give room for peace, growth, progress and development of the people and their society. Secondly, there are individuals' differences: Among the wonderful nature of Allah's power is the variation which He has put into man and other creatures. The human society is a conglomeration of people of divergent beliefs, values, aspiration, whims and caprices all of which constitute the human interest, personality, traits and characters. So unique are these different intrinsic qualities that no twins are identical in the real sense of the word. Not even Siamese twins! With the understanding of this nature of man, people in a society, though with varying degree of differences need to be supportive of one another through the adoption of tolerance and forgiveness in their lives.

Thirdly, there is a paradox of life. The entire life of man is made up of two sides. No man lives without passing through these sides. In life there is happiness and sorrow, hardship and ease, positive and negative, life and death; moreover, the Qu'ran explained that man shall be tested with fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits so as to see how tolerant and patient he would be Q:(2:155).

In addition, the Qur'an made it clear that some people have been made in such a way that they are meant to serve as trial to others so as to see how patient they would be Q:(25:20). For example, children and wives are joyful things in life but also tests for man in life Q:(64:14). If such is the nature of life, tolerance and forgiveness are therefore inevitable in life.

Fourthly, tolerance and forgiveness are divine instruction. In recognition of the weak nature of man and the various differences among men in the society, Allah ordained that man should inculcate in himself the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness in his relationship with his Lord and other beings. Allah says:

So by mercy from Allah (O Muhammad) you were lenient with them and if you had been rude (in speech) and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you, so pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Q:(3:159).

He went further to say:

And said 'ask forgiveness of your Lord'. Indeed He is ever a perpetual forgiver Q. (71:10).

Going by the above divine instructions, tolerance and forgiveness are two virtuous conducts expected of a Muslim at all times so as to create an enabling environment for peace, progress and development.

The Consequences of Lack of Tolerance and Forgiveness in a Society:

If tolerance and forgiveness are lacking between two or more parties, the following consequences are likely to prevail and they include:

- i. **Loss of Respect and Regard:** If for example, a man refuses to tolerate and pardon his wife or children, he is likely to lose the respect and regard they have for him. The same is applicable to a principal who refuses to tolerate and at least pardon his staff. A person who refuses to tolerate and endure Allah's test or a sinner who refuses to seek for Allah's forgiveness would end up having his honorable status before Allah diminished.
- ii. **Transfer of aggression:** When two warring parties i.e. two families, communities or nations are in logger head and they refused to tolerate one another, the enmity between them and the attached aggression is likely to be transferred from them to the next generation; a factor which is hazardous to peace, progress and development.
- iii. **Instigation of devilish thoughts and harboring of acrimonious feelings:** The moment conflicts emanates between two or more parties, and tolerance and forgiveness are not given room to play themselves out, each party would not trust the other. The actual thing that would dominate the mind of each party is the anticipation and expectation of evil plot from each other. The mind of a Servant who refuses to tolerate Allah's test and seek for His forgiveness would be filled up with devilish thoughts. In this type of situation, peace would never have a ground to hold and invariably the society would be devoid of progressive thoughts and plan.
- iv. **Loss of lives and property:** Refusal to tolerate Allah's test and seek for His forgiveness could lead one to an action which would end up in termination of lives or loss of properties. The same consequence is applicable to those who refuse to tolerate or pardon one another. When there is war or rancor, there would be no peace and that could eventually lead to retrogression.

- v. Separation: When tolerance and forgiveness are lacking between two parties i.e. husband and wife, two friends, or communities, family members, it could lead to malicious parting of ways between them; a factor that definitely does not augur well for peace and development. A servant who refuses to tolerate the test put before him by his Lord or refuses to seek for His forgiveness may also end up trying to disassociate himself from his Lord. What this implies is that such a servant is moving away from the straight path laid down for him by his Lord to enable him succeed in life and in hereafter.
- vi. Regrets: Refusal to embrace tolerance and forgiveness could make one embark on some regrettable ventures. This could be due to loss of control and by then it might be too late to cry. Such actions are definitely enemies of progress. Blocking the gate to blessings and mercy of Allah:

A servant who refuses to tolerate Allah's test and seek for His forgiveness is moving away from Allah's mercy and blessings. Q:(71:10-12). Allah's love and His mercy are for those who restrain from anger and pardon others Q:(3:134) while, the reverse awaits those who refused to do so. Such a person would be subjected to hatred, persecution, resistance and unfair treatment from people.

Symbolising a myopic understanding of life: The attainment of peace and development in life depend on how one understands himself and the society in which he lives. He who refuses to imbibe in himself the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness does not understand the true nature of life because to "err is human and to forgive is divine".

Tolerance and Forgiveness for Peace and Development of a Nation: The Islamic Education Perspectives.

- i. Admonition and Patience: With admonition, a hardened mind could be softened to understand so as to tolerate and pardon others. Furthermore, such a mind could also be guided away from undesirable acts and redirected to seek for Allah's forgiveness. Again, patience over some difficult situations which man faces from time to time is also necessary for man to live a peaceful life. Patience and admonition are enjoined in the Qur'an with the intent of saving man from loss and destruction Q:(103:1-3)
- ii. Politeness and Leniency:- People tend to accept, correct and seek for pardon over a mistake they made if they are honorably and politely reproached. This agrees with the divine instruction given to prophet Musa and his brother when they were both sent to preach to Pharaoh. The Qur'an says:

And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded to fear (Allah) Q:(20:44).

In another place in the Qur'an, Allah enjoins man to use wisdom and courteous words in the course of admonition (Q: 16: 135). With wisdom and good approach, a person can turn an evil mind into a Godly one and enhance man's tendency to succor to peace, progress, and development.

- iii. Forgive and forget sincerely: True forgiveness depends on how sincere a person is. For Allah to forgive a servant the servant must be sincere in his search for forgiveness by turning away from sinful acts. In addition, the person should intend not to go back to it again. A person would be ready to pardon and forgive another when such a person sincerely refrains from indulging in the undesirable act and promises not to repeat the same in future. In the sight of Allah a sinner who sincerely repents is like he who has no sin while the popular adage of "I can forgive but I can never forget" should not be allowed to gain ground in man to man relationship. When this is put into practice, tolerance is enhanced and development is achieved.
- iv. Equity and Justice: If tolerance is to be enhanced, equal treatment and just play must be exhibited in man's relationships with his fellow man. Unfairness and injustice can both destroy a family, society and a nation Ibn Raji (2001). Justice and equity are virtuous conducts Allah exhorts man to display at all times even if their execution be against oneself, one's parents or relatives Q:(4:135). A prophetic tradition quoted by Ibn Raji (2001: 68) says:

A just state survives even though it may be non Muslim and invariably unjust state vanishes even though it may be a Muslim state (Abu Dauda).

For man to establish peace and creates a stable environment for development, equity and justice must be maintained in his relationship with His Lord and other beings.

- v. Guaranteeing the basic fundamental human rights:- Another important factor affecting the readiness of a person to tolerate and pardon others is the institution of fundamental human rights. Islam guarantees man all the basic fundamental human rights i.e. security of life Q:(5:32), Q:(6:151), right to private property Q:(7:16), Q:(7:32) rights to human dignity Q:(17:70),

Q:(49:11-12) right to privacy Q:(24:27), Q:(49:12), Q:(24:58) right to freedom of belief and worship Q:(2:256) right to freedom of expression Q:(42:38) protection against dictatorial and unjust leadership Q:(4:148) and right of equal treatment Q:(4:68). All these enables man to be tolerant in the true sense of God and seek for His forgiveness and the same room is given to his relationship with his fellow being.

- vi. Love, care and concern: Life experience is such that Allah in His infinite mercy has made some people to excel above others in terms of wealth, health, power etc. Allah says:

And Allah has favored some of you over each others in provision Q:(16:91). That is the beauty of Allah which He give to whom He wants, and Allah is the possessor of great beauty Q:(57:21).

To prevent man from the inability to tolerate the rich class of the society due to his envious nature which usually spurs rancor into man's heart, the religion maps out the rights of the weak from the wealth of the rich. Q:(51:19).

Bambale (2007:73) related an Hadith which says:

Give presents to one another for a present removes rancor from the heart.

With the above teachings tolerance is enhanced while peace and development are given room to progress.

- vii. Arbitration, Reconciliation and Mediation: One thing which rarely happens between warring parties is for them to call themselves to order. Islam teaches that a neutral body should mediate and serve as a fence mending agent by reconciling the warring parties. Q :(49 :9).

CONCLUSION

Tolerance and forgiveness are two virtuous conducts that are necessary for the maintenance of peace in Islam. The nature of man is such that he cannot do without them while refusal to embrace them yields nothing except retrogression for man and his society. With all the above provisions, man can make the best use of them so as to benefit himself and the environment in which he lives.

SUGGESTIONS

People should always put into consideration the imperfect nature of human beings so that they could live to tolerate their lapses. As faithful being to Allah, patience over a condition that is beyond human's limit and the search for his forgiveness should be embraced for the benefit of peace and development. The society should be ambassadors of peace by trying to reconcile, mediate or arbitrate between warring parties.

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