

Seyed Hamid Hosseini

**THE RELIGION OF
FREEDOM ADN
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IN QURAN**

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The religion of freedom and freedom of religion in quran



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Loving, The Merciful

The religion of freedom and freedom of religion in quran

Seyed Hamid Hosseini¹

There is no compulsion in religion

Desirable religiosity is discussed many times by the holy Quran, whilst emphasising on individual freedom and autonomy in the realisation of this truth-seeking religion. This notion is to the extent that the Quran absolutely rejects any kind of compulsion in religious affairs and explicitly declares in verse 256 of Surah Al-Baqarah:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ.

No compulsion exists in religion.

The place of faith is in the heart², and does not accept any imposition. Consequently, the answer of the prophets to those not open to accepting their invitation towards God and to those who imposed their beliefs was: religion is not compatible with compulsion. We read an example of the answer to the first group in verse 28 of Surah Hud, referring to the words of Prophet Noah addressed to the nobles of his people who did not accept his invitation:

¹ . <https://t.me/hamidhossaini>

² . As mentioned in verse 14 of Surah Al-Hujurat:

«وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ»

for faith has not yet entered your hearts.

أَنْزِلُكُمْ مَوْهَا وَأَنْتُمْ لَهَا كَارِهُونَ.

Shall we compel you to accept it while you are averse to it?

A second example can be seen in the answer that verse 88 of Surah Al-A'raf quotes from Prophet Shu'ayb to the nobles of his people against their religious enforcements:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَا شُعَيْبُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُوذُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا قَالَ أَوَلَوْ كُنَّا كَارِهِينَ.

The chiefs of the arrogant among his people said: 'O Shu'ayb, we will surely expel you, and those who believe with you from our city, unless you return into our creed.' He said: 'Even though we dislike it?'

Nevertheless, it is difficult for many believers to accept that religion is optional. Perhaps out of good intentions and compassion, they think that forcing others is in their best interest as they will be led to the path of salvation. However, the Quran combats this illusion and addresses these believers in verse 31 of Surah Al-Ra'ad that if there was any benefit and expediency in religious coercion, God would have done so easily:

أَفَلَمْ يَيَّاسِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ لَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ لَهْدَى النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا؟

Have not those who have believed lost hope (and yet known) that if Allah had willed He would certainly have guided all people?

Although the Holy Prophet never obliged anyone to be religious, but since he was very eager to bring people to faith³, the Quran reminds

³ . An example of this eagerness is described in verse 6 of Surah Al-Kahf as follows:

«فَلَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَفْسَكَ عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ إِنْ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا»

him many times that he is not a gaurdian or accountable for the people. One of these reminders can be found in verses 104 and 107 of Surah Al-An'am, where God first says through His Prophet:

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ.

Certainly clear proofs have come over to you from your Lord.
Whoever therefore sees (with insight), it is to his own gain, and whoever is blind, it is to his own loss; and I am not a keeper over you.

And then in the following verse the same point is repeated and the Prophet is addressed as:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَشْرَكُوا وَمَا جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِوَكِيلٍ.

And had Allah pleased, they would not have associated others with Him (committed polytheism), and We have not made you a keeper over them, nor are you over them a gaurdian.

God's tradition is that guidance of individuals must be dependent on their own choice and not the imposition or the interest of others; therefore, in verse 56 of Surah Al-Qasas, the Holy Prophet is reminded that guidance complies with this rule set by God:

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ.

Verily you cannot guide whom you like, but Allah guides whomever he pleases, and He knows best those that are guided.

And in verses 21 and 22 of Surah Al-Ghashiyyah, God alerts His Prophet that his duty is to warn and not to dominate over people:

Then maybe you will fret yourself to death with grief and put yourself in danger, following after them, if they do not believe in this Message

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ لَّسْتَ عَلَيْهِم بِمُصَيْطِرٍ.

Therefore remind them that you are only a reminder and you have no control (dominance) over them.

This is the same point that is mentioned in verse 99 of Surah Al-Ma'idah with this statement:

مَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ.

Nothing is incumbent upon the Messenger (has no duty) but to convey (The message of Allah).

Therefore, when "the path of guidance becomes apparent from the path of error"⁴ people should be left free so that whoever wants can decide to accept this obvious truth, and whoever doesn't want to accept, can deny the truth and become a disbeliever by their own will and choice. Hence, in verse 29 of Surah Al-Kahf, it is said:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ.

⁴ . In verse 256 of Surah Al-Baqarah immediately after the announcement of

«لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ»

no compulsion exists in religion, it is said:

«قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ»

The path to reaching good and righteousness has been clearly revealed from the path to evil and corruption

the point expressed in this verse is contrary to the opinion of those who have used it as an excuse to nullify the Quran's ruling on religious freedom, as it is emphasising the uselessness of religious coercion. That is, when the path of good and evil is well presented, but some people yet still choose the wrong path, there is no benefit in forcing them to return from this path and everyone chooses their own path and destiny.

And say: 'The truth is from your Lord; so whoever wills, let him believe, and whoever wills, let him disbelieve (and cover the truth).'

Of course this statement is not a permission to oppose God's command⁵; but rather it means that all existence submits to God Almighty as God has intentionally willed for the good and bad fate of individuals to be determined only by their own choices and not to be influenced by forced religious or anti-religious behavior⁶.

Some say that religion at its principle is optional, but after accepting, religion becomes a set of mandatory enforcements which you must obide from. A group also thinks that one of the duties or authorities of an islamic governance is to implement religious regulations, even by force. This is despite the fact that in terms of moral obligation or consequences in the afterlife, there is no difference between the principle or secondary aspects of religion. The Quran values the implementation of religious rules in society and considers it as a sign of faith, as long as the people themselves have willingly chosen to

⁵ . According to to verse 83 of Surah Al-Imran, all existence has submitted to the will of God and nothing happens without His will:

«أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْتَغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ»

Is it then other than the religion of Allah that they seek (to follow)? And to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and unto Him they shall be returned.

⁶ . The ineffectiveness of forced anti-religious behaviour is stated in verse 106 of Surah Al-Nahl as follows

«مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أَكْرَهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ غَضَبٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ»

He who disbelieves in Allah (and covers the truth) after believing in Him; not he who has been compelled, while his heart is still content with the faith, but he who opens (his) heart to disbelief, upon them shall rest wrath from Allah and for them shall be a great chastisement.

obide by the rules and have submitted wholeheartedly. Therefore, in verse 65 of Surah Al-Nisa, which emphasizes the necessity of the unquestionable implementation of the Prophet's judgement, we can see that it also acknowledges the necessity of voluntary acceptance and wholehearted submission as a sign of true faith, rather than imposing his judgements onto people.

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا.

But no, by your Lord! They do not believe (in reality) until they make you the judge regarding the disagreement between them. They find within themselves no dislike of which you decide and submit with full submission.

A great fallacy or misunderstanding that occurs here is that the supporters of religious compulsion use the "the personal duties and obligations" of someone who has realised the truth of religion and its rulings as an excuse to interfere and consider compulsion as valid in other people's religiosity. Although each person is obliged to personally consider God's commands as a necessity and fulfil them as a definite duty, there is no insistence nor does anyone have the right to force others into religiosity.

Worries of the concerned

There is no doubt nor dispute that the Quran considers the liberation of humans from various chains and limitations as one of the goals of this truth-seeking religion. Yet, some people by confining and limiting this freedom to spiritual dimensions, ignore the clear stance of the Quran regarding political, social and ideological freedom. They say that if we let the greedy and lustful human free, nothing but corruption and destruction will result. Thus, they view greater social freedom as the cause for decreasing of not only general freedoms, but spiritual freedom as well.

In contrast, the Quran views humans differently, and despite many warnings about the dangers of lust, selfishness and condemning the hasty nature of mankind, it also praises our positive and noble characteristics. Some examples mentioned would be: the dignity of mankind and superiority over many creatures⁷, our pride in carrying God's trust⁸, reliance on our position as the caliph (representative) of God⁹ and the

⁷ . In verse 70 of Surah Al-Isra we read:

«وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا»

And indeed we have honoured the children of Adam, and We carried them on the land and the sea; and We provided them with sustenance of the good things; and We preferred them greatly over many of those created.

⁸ . In verse 72 of Surah Al-Ahzab, it is said:

«إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا»

erily we offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were afraid thereof; and man undertook it, verily he is unjust, ignorant.

⁹ . The story of the creation of man begins in verse 30 of Surah Al-Baqarah like this:

prostration of angels for us¹⁰. The Quran considers all of these as a testimony to our freedom, because as mentioned in verse 165 of Surah Al-An'am, humans will be faced with trials and hence have been assigned to this exalted level in order to be compatible and deserving of the reward or consequence that follows.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ.

And it is He Who has made you successors on the earth, and raised some of you above others in grades that he may try you in respect to what He has given you. Verily your Lord is swift in retribution, and indeed He is Forgiving, Merciful.

This is the same point which is introduced as the philosophy of life and death in the second verse of Surah Al-Mulk:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَفُورُ.

«وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ»

And when your Lord said to the angels: 'I will certainly appoint a successor on earth', they said: 'will You place therein one who will cause corruption and bloodshed, while we praise You and sanctify You?' Allah said: 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.'

¹⁰ · In addition to mentioning the prostration of the angles for Adam in the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah alongside other verses, in verse 11 of Surah Al-A'raf, it is mentioned about the prostration of angels to Adam after the creation and appearance of all humans:

«وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ»

And indeed we created you, then We fashioned you, then We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourself unto Adam² so they all did prostrate themselves except Iblis; he was not of the prostrating ones.

The Lord who created death and life so that He may test you that which of you is better in deed. And He is the Omnipotent, the Oft-Forgiving.

Yet, there are narrow-minded individuals who suppose that guidance and bringing people to faith is of such priority that the bitterness and ugliness of religious coercion can be tolerated and justified. In the early days of Islam, there were a group of muslims who accompanied the Prophet and yet believed that they had more sympathy and were more concerned about the interests of religion than him.

According to an authentic hadith previously documented by the commander of the faithful-Imam Ali and then narrated by Imam Reza, the concerned put pressure on Prophet Muhammad to deprive people of their freedom to increase the strength and power of Islam. But the Prophet's answer to them was: "I'm not willing to meet my dear and great God with a heresy that He did not share with me, I am not a person of duress and compulsion"! It was here that verse 99 of Surah Yunus was revealed:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ.

And if your Lord had willed whoever is on the earth would have believed, all of them, all together. Will you then compel the people till they become believers?

In continuation of this enlightening hadith, the meaning of the verse has been explained as follows: "God says that If I wanted, I could have forced people to have no other option but to accept religion, just like when they will notice the truths of this existence after death and when the hardships of the afterlife are observed. But if I had done that, then they would no longer be worthy of any reward or praise from me. Rather, I want people to believe with their own freedom and choice so

that they become worthy of my company (nearness) and a dignified eternal life in heaven”¹¹.

It is for this reason that the Quran very frankly says several times without any compromise or fear, the same point mentioned in ayah 29 of Surah Al-Kahf:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ.

And say: ”The truth is from your Lord; so whoever will, let him believe, whoever will, let him cover the truth (disbelieve)”

The creator of the universe knows very well the consequences of opening the path of evil and corruption to those who desire sin.¹² Yet, God will let them drown in their games¹³, rebellion¹⁴, and their lusts and desires¹⁵ in order for the freedom and free will of all individuals

¹¹ . Sheikh Sadugh, Ayun Akhbar Al-Redha (a.s.), Tehran; Jahan: vol 1, pg 134.

¹² . In Surah Al-Qiyamah, verse 5 we read:

«بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ»

Nay! Man desires to be free to continue committing sins all his life!

¹³ . In verse 91 of Surah Al-An’am we read:

«قُلِ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَرْهُمْ فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ»

Say: Allah, then leave them sporting in their vain discourses.

¹⁴ . In verse 110 of Surah Al-An’am it is stated:

«وَنُفِّلُوا أَفْئِدَتَهُمْ وَأَبْصَارَهُمْ كَمَا لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَنَذَرْنَاهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ»

And We will turn their hearts and their sights, even as they did not believe in it the first time; and We will leave them in their contumacy wandering blindly.

¹⁵ . In the third verse of Surah Al-Hijr we read:

«ذَرْنَهُمْ يَأْكُلُوا وَيَتَمَنَّوْا وَيُلْهِمُهُمُ الْأَمَلُ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ»

to continue to persist. It is for this reason that in verse 28 of Surah Hud, God quotes the words of Prophet Noah who said to his people; "when you do not see these clear reasons and do not like this divine mercy, then why should we force you to it?"

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّي وَأَتَانِي رَحْمَةٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِهِ فَعَمَّيْتُ عَلَيْكُمُ نَارَ مِكْمُلُهَا وَأَنْتُمْ لَهَا كَارِهُونَ.

He said: "O my People! Tell me, if I be upon a clear proof from my Lord, and He has grant me a mercy from His Presence, but has been obscured for you; shall we compel you to it while you are averse to it?"

Of course, in an open environment, enemies will also gain the opportunity to advocate. God has set up this trial, and has decided to leave the "devils" free in their enmity and in spreading their falsehood¹⁶ so that people choose for themselves.

The Quran emphasises freedom of expression for its oponents as it considers the recieving of divine guidance to be in light of avoiding the worship of idols to whom God has also given time and opportunity for self-realisation and amendment. The Quran considers the perfection of humanity to lie on the path of listening to a variety of opinions and

Leave them so that they may eat and enjoy themselves, and that they may be bemused by hope for they will soon know.

¹⁶ . This statement is very clearly stated in verse 112 of Surah Al-An'am:

«وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا شَيَاطِينَ الْإِنْسِ وَالْجِنِّ يُوحِي بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ زُخْرُفَ الْقَوْلِ غُرُورًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ مَا فَعَلُوهُ فَذَرْهُمْ وَمَا يَفْتَرُونَ»

And thus did We assign for every prophet an enemy, the satans from humans and jinn, who inspire each other with flashy words to deceive (them). And had your Lord pleased they would have done it. (Allah's way of treatment is freedom of men) therefore, leave them with what they forge.

choosing the best of them. Accordingly, in verses 17 and 18 of Surah Al-Zumar we read:

وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ. الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ
أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ.

And those who avoid false deities [powers antithetical to God] so that they do not worship them and turn to Allah, for them are glad tidings; so announce the good news to My servants. Those who listen to the Word and follow the best thereof, those are men of understanding.

No sane person favours unlimited freedom, yet the banning and censoring of the works and media of other schools of thought and labelling them as fake views or "dhalleh (deceitful) books" is not part of this religion's mission and has not been deemed necessary. Instead, the believers are advised to treat everyone, even the enemies of religion fairly and justly. Based on this golden moral rule which says "whatever you don't like for yourself, then don't like for others", we learn that if we were to so create any restrictions for the freedom of our opponents, it would be the same restrictions that we wouldn't mind if they were to apply to us. For example, there is a held view that we as muslims can promote our religion in other countries, but we will not allow others to promote their religion in our countries. Yet how would this be fair? Then surely if we wouldn't like someone to stop us from expressing our beliefs, we should not suppress the freedom of expression of others. Whilst considering the points above, we can see that verse 194 of Surah Al-Baqarah adds onto our discussion by expressing that, only depriving the freedom of those who violate the rights of others is compatible with piety (God consciousness):

فَمَنْ اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ.

“Whoever then trespasses you, then trespass against them as they have done to you, and have awe for Allah, and know that Allah is with the pious ones.”

The golden foundation of morality

Whilst the peak of human values are reflected in an individual's morals and virtues obtained by adhering to sacred and sublime truths, it is the moral values held by a society that can provide equal opportunities and the necessities of life for individuals to move towards their virtues.

By learning from thousands of years of wars, massacres and sufferings carried out by the hands of those claiming of earthly or heavenly virtues, expert ethical thinkers have concluded that the effort for providing a common code for the superior virtues of individuals in a society would be better used when focused on supplying the minimum necessities for coexistence and creating an environment whereby all have the opportunity for choosing the best.

Although the Quran insists on divine values and views the achievement of virtues to be dependent upon faith and monotheistic behavior¹⁷, when dealing with social ethics, it is from a very earthly point of view. We find that the Quran emphasizes on common human interests and a peaceful life for all beliefs and preferences.

From examining dozens of verses of the Quran that contain social recommendations, we find that none of them are based on anything other than the concept of "instalments and justice". And all topics

¹⁷ . Verse 75 of Surah Taha states on this regard :

«وَمَنْ يَأْتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَى»

And whoever comes to Him a believer (and) he has done righteous deeds, for such are the most sublime degrees

pointed to from writing debts¹⁸, and assigning adopted children¹⁹, to attending to orphans²⁰, forming judgements²¹ and even the biggest political issues are all set on this same axis. This is to the extent that the Almighty God, in verse 25 of Surah Al-Hadid, considers the reason for the assignment of the prophets to have been for providing the

¹⁸ . Verse 282 of Surah Al-Baqarah, includes recommendations on writing a receipt for the amount and timeframe of instalments which emphasizes on ensuring its fairness:

«وَلْيَكْتُبْ بَيْنَكُمْ كَاتِبٌ بِالْعَدْلِ»

And let a scribe write it down justly between you.

¹⁹ . At the beginning of verse 5 of Surah Al-Ahzab, the Quran states the reason for the necessity of assigning adopted children to the fathers as the following:

«ادْعُوهُمْ لِآبَائِهِمْ هُوَ أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ»

Call them after their true fathers that is more equitable with Allah.

²⁰ . And in the third verse of Surah Al-Nisa, the Quran expresses the concern for injustice to be the only barrier for permitting polygamy and considers the observance of justice to be condition for the permission for polygamy:

«وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا»

And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry those women who seem good to you, two or three, or four; but if you fear that you will not act justly between them then marry only one or someone your right hands have acquired.

²¹ . In verse 58 of Surah Al-Nisa we read:

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا»

Verily Allah commands you that you restore deposits to their owners, and when you judge between people, you judge with justice; verily good is the admonition Allah gives you; verily Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing

conditions necessary for individuals to manage society on the means of justice:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ.

Verily, we have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs and sent with them the Scripture and the Balance so that people rise up to justice.

The importance of this point becomes evident to us when we understand that in all instances of the uses of "instalment and justice" and in the recommendations from the Quran and 'ahadith', we find that no alternative definition for justice has been presented from its original conventional definition which is based on our human and earthly understanding of good and bad as a measure of moral human behaviour. It is on this basis that the words "ma'ruf" (knowns/ common understanding) and "u'rf" (customs) have been mentioned for 40 times in the Quran, insisting on fair social relations. Moreover, ayah 199 in Surah Al-A'raf obliges the Prophet to trust the common human conscience shared in society and to ask the people to live according to the common understanding of good and bad recognised among themselves:

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ.

Choose forgiveness, enjoin customs and keep far from the ignorant.

The secret to this trust in humanity comes from the view that the Quran has on the divine nature of man and believes that the inner call of our conscience is the word and command of God, and that the genuine and truth-seeking religion is nothing but submission to the truth that we find within ourselves. This is reflected in verse 30 of Surah Al-Rum:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ.

So set your face to the religion being truth-seeking, the same nature (frame) of Allah in which He has created mankind. There is no altering of Allah's creation. That is the enduring religion, but most people do not know.

Without a doubt, this verse does not intend to say that all perceptions are correct nor are all desires innate, since the contradictions between many perceptions and the wickedness of many lustful desires are so apparent that no one could possibly regard them as divine. Yet the fact that we recognise that the the incorrectness of opinions due to their multiplicity and contradictory stances, and just as we can sense the ugliness of some desires and behaviours, this is the best proof for the existence of a reliable basis for distinguishing between right and wrong in the human existence.

Certainly, besides the divine nature and the power to distinguish between good and bad, human beings are encumbered by instincts and lusts that even take the intellect and power of thinking captive and disable our ability to understand and distinguish. Yet from this point we cannot come to the conclusion that what others say is wrong, and only our perception of a sacred text, or a theoretical experience or any other basis that we consider to be correct, should be the criterion of right and wrong. Because, the same factors that caused others to reach incorrect conclusions and defend them decisively, may have left the same effect on our perception and outlook. Excluding ourselves and our school of thought from this general principle has no basis other than self-exaltation and arrogance.

In this situation, the only way to benefit from our divine nature and to stay safe from potential harms, is to leave situations that expose you to the effects of lust and selfishness or in danger of the handiwork of carnal desires. And it is under such conditions that we should identify the untainted message of our divine nature. If we don't come out of the shackles of assumptions and excessive self-assurance, even if we are in

possession of the holiest scriptures and teachings, it is still possible that our understanding will become influenced by our selfishness. However, if we put ourselves in the place of others and listen to someone else's inner calling, we will appreciate its divinity better and we will oblige ourselves to "favour for others what we like for ourselves".

Punishment for leaving the religion

Usually after explaining the Quran and the Ahlulbayt's disagreement with religious enforcement, the first question mentioned is that if there is no compulsion or enforcement in religion, then why are people not permitted to change their religion? And why is the path of freedom of choice closed with such heavy punishments; such as the death penalty for an apostate? To answer this important and necessary question, we need to look at the Quran's point of view regarding apostasy without relying on previous conceptions.

In order to understand the position of the Quran in dealing with apostasy, in addition to paying attention to the verses that consider imposed religion as futile and undesirable, it is necessary to also examine more than 15 verses that explicitly condemn turning away from religion and prescribe severe punishments for it.

Of course, wherever the Quran talks about disbelief after faith and blames apostates, it is referring to those who have accepted the clear evidence showing religion as the truth, yet consciously and intentionally turn away from it. Those who are described in verse 86 of Surah Al-Imran as follows:

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ
الظَّالِمِينَ.

How shall Allah guide a people who have disbelieved after their belief and (after) bearing witness that the Messenger is true, and clear proofs had come unto them? And Allah guides not the unjust people.

And it is for this reason that such people have been described as those who have been led astray and as transgressors in verse 108 of Surah Al-

Baqarah ²² and verse 82 of Surah Al-Imran²³ respectively. Moreover, in verse 149 of Surah Al-Imran, such people are named as those who are in loss²⁴. Earlier on in the same Surah, in verses 86 till 91 the severe and eternal punishments are described as well as not accepting their repentance and compensation²⁵. Many other verses in the Quran also describe the punishments for apostasy such as the destruction of good deeds²⁶, deprivation of God's forgiveness and divine guidance²⁷,

²² . Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 108:

«وَمَنْ يَتَّبِدْ الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ»

And he who exchanges faith for falsity (covering the truth), he has surely strayed from the right way.

²³ . Surah Al-Imran, verse 82:

«فَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ»

Then whoever turns back after that , -these are they that are the transgressors.

²⁴ . Surah Al-Imran, verse 149:

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَطِيعُوا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُرْدُّوكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ»

O' you who have Faith! If you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back on your faith, so that you will turn back in loss.

²⁵ . These collection of verses contain many important points, but due to their length, the text and translations were not quoted. It is advised to the dear readers to refer to the Quran and study these few verses.

²⁶ . Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 217:

«وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ»

But whoever of you turns back from his religion, and dies disbelieving – such are they whose deeds shall be of no avail in this world and Hereafter; those are the inhabitants of the fire, wherein they shall dwell forever.

²⁷ . Surah Al-Nisa, verse 137:

painful punishments in this world and the hereafter²⁸, and incurring God's wrath and great punishments²⁹. However not once has there been any reference made to the implementation religious legal penalties (based on Sharia law) for apostates.

The Quran has dealt with the subject of apostasy many times and has very seriously and decisively prohibited this sin and deviance by warning the perpetrators of receiving the severest and greatest punishments in the afterlife, but it has never mentioned any worldly punishments or consequences in this context. This is very meaningful and clearly shows that a school which is the flag bearer of freedom of thought and belief and repeatedly insists on the non-compulsory nature of religious affairs, would never be pleased with rulings and treatments which goes against our claims and that destroy any opportunity for freedom of choice.

Indeed, some have wanted to consider God's command in the context of the mass suicide of the Israelites after worshipping the calf, mentioned in verse 54 of Surah Al-Baqarah, or the promise of worldly punishments in verse 74 of Surah Al-Tawbah, as a reason to deal with apostasy, but such a ruling is not obtained from these two verses.

«إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا ثُمَّ آمَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا ثُمَّ أَزْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَّمْ يَكُنِ اللَّهُ لِيُغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَلَا لِيَهْدِيَهُمْ سَبِيلًا»

Verily those who believed, then disbelieved, again believed, and again disbelieved, then increased in their disbelief, Allah will not forgive them, nor will He guide them to the right way.

²⁸ . Surah Al-Tawbah, verse 74:

«وَإِنْ يَتَوَلَّوْا يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ»

And if they turn away, Allah will chastise them with a painful chastisement in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall not have on the earth any guardian or any helper.

²⁹ . This point has been raised in verse 106 of Surah Al-Nahl, whose text and translation have been quoted earlier on for the explanation of the ineffectiveness of forced anti-religion behaviour.

Hence, these arguments do not contradict the numerous and evident reasons that negate these worldly punishments assigned for apostasy of having any Quranic basis.

The verse in Surah Al-Baqarah describes the punishment for worshipping of the calf as such:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ ۖ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّكُمْ أَنْظَرْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ بِاتِّخَاذِكُمُ الْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوا إِلَىٰ بَارِئِكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارِئِكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ.

And when Moses said to his people: 'O' my people, you have indeed wronged yourselves by worshipping the Calf; so turn (in repentance) to your Creator and slay yourselves, that will be better for you with your Creator'. Then, He turned towards you mercifully, (accepting your repentance). Truly, He is the Oft-Pardoning, the Most merciful.

Although according to the opinion of many commentators, it can be understood from this verse that the punishment for the Israelites after their apostasy and worshipping of the calf, was to slay each other. However, we should consider that it is possible for the sentence to have been a trial and not implemented in practise, or they were forgiven for their repentance. Thus we cannot reach a clear conclusion about the certainty and perpetuity of such a ruling even for the religious law (Sharia law) of Prophet Moses, let alone apply the events of a specific incident in another religious law to the verses of the Quran and issue such a heavy verdict.

But the punishment of this world announced in the verse 74 of Surah Al-Tawbah is related to the disbelievers and hypocrites who after converting to Islam, have spoken blasphemous words while violating, breaking agreements and starting wars. This verse first asks them to repent and say:

وَإِنْ يَتَوَلَّوْا يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ.

And if they turn away, Allah will chastise them with a painful chastisement in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall not have on the earth any gaurdian or any helper.

Here, if we pay attention to the context of the statement, we will understand that the meaning of worldly punishment is defeat and destruction in jihad (war/combat) which God has advised the Prophet to do strictly in the previous verse. This matter has nothing to do with non-combat conditions and or even with the verdicts given for apostasy.

Another group of jurists, in order to justify the famous fatwa and solve the problem of its inconsistency with the verses of the Quran, relate this punishment to acts such as widely declaring (propagating) apostasy and uncertainty between Muslims and say: "the change in one's opinion and leaving Islam in itself does not have a worldly punishment. But such a person is not allowed to express and propagate his new belief, and if he does so, he will be punished for the crime of sedition". Yet this justification also does not seem compatible with the Quran's point of view, and a careful examination shows that when dealing with apostates who intend to mock and weaken religion, this book suffices to warning of the torments of the afterlife.

In verses 65 and 66 of Surah Al-Tawbah we read:

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّمَا كُنَّا نَخُوضُ وَنَلْعَبُ قُلْ أَبِاللَّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ وَرَسُولِهِ كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَهْزِئُونَ. لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا قَدْ كَفَرْتُمْ
بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ إِنَّ نَعْفَ عَنْ طَائِفَةٍ مِّنْكُمْ نُعَذِّبُ طَائِفَةً بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا مُجْرِمِينَ.

And if you question them, they will certainly say: 'We were only discoursing and sporting'. Say: "Were you mocking Allah, His signs, and His Messenger?" Do not make excuses. You have disbelieved after your believeing. If We forgive a party of you, We will chastise another party for they have been sinners.

So therefore, we can see that in these two verses that some wanted to document them in support of executing apostates, like many other similar verses, there is no mention of violent treatment or worldly punishment in response to their ridicule and insults. This is because the All-Wise God knows very well that being harsh against the insults and punishing people for their false beliefs will present religion and religious people as irrational and lacking self confidence, and indeed will not lead to their reformation. Practising forgiveness and tolerance in social life and postponing the punishment of such people to the next world will be the basis for reforming some of them and will present a beautiful face of religion, attracting pure hearts. Therefore, in verse 54 of Surah Al-Ma'idah, after referring to the possibility of apostasy of some Muslims, instead of punishing the apostates, the Quran uses its beautiful logic to compensate for such losses by saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ ...

O' you who have faith whoever of you turns away from his religion soon Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him...

The harmony of these verses with other verses expressing the non-imposition of religion leaves no doubt that the Quran not only does not agree with punishing those who leave Islam, but also considers forcing them to remain in the religion as they way of the arrogant. As in verse 88 of Surah Al-Araf, the Quran quotes this method by Prophet Shoaib after the chiefs of his people opposed him. The answer reported from him is in opposition to a compulsory religion:

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَا شُعَيْبُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُوذُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا قَالَ أَوَلَوْ كُنَّا كَارِهِينَ.

The chiefs of the arrogant among his people said: 'We will surely expel you, O Shoaib, and those who believe with you from our town,

unless you return into our creed'. He said: 'What, even though we dislike it?'

The same coercive logic in forcing people to accept religion is attributed to the enemies of all the prophets in verse 13 of Surah Ibrahim:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِرُسُلِهِمْ لَنُخْرِجَنَّكُمْ مِّنْ أَرْضِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُوذُنَّ فِي مِلَّتِنَا فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ لَنُهْلِكَنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ.

And those who disbelieved told their messengers: 'We will certainly expel you from our land, or else you return to our creed.' Then their lord revealed to them: 'Certainly We will perish the unjust'.

A clear example of the enmity with the freedom-loving way of the prophets was Pharaoh, who according to the report of verse 26 of Surah Ghafir, used exactly the issue of changing religion and worrying about damaging people's previous beliefs as an excuse for his violence:

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ذَرُونِي أَقْتُلْ مُوسَىٰ وَلْيَدْعُ رَبَّهُ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَن يُبَدِّلَ دِينَكُمْ أَوْ أَن يُظْهِرَ فِي الْأَرْضِ الْفَسَادَ.

Pharaoh said: "Leave me to slay Moses and let him call his Lord. I fear that he may change your religion or that he may cause mischief to appear in the land".

According to what has been said, there is no doubt that the Quran does not support punishments in this present world for those who leave religion, but why most of the jurists, based on a number of hadiths and current practices among Muslims, have issued 'fatwas' (rulings) for severe punishment such as execution, harsh and unforgiving treatment against change of opinion, requires a separate study so that by validating historical reports and the political context of such treatments, we can appreciate the role of authoritarian governments in exploiting this ruling. Recognising the difference between the logic of the Quran and the practice of the Muslims, we can understand better the

dimensions which led to the abandonment of the book of God in the Islamic Ummah.

Destruction of idols or tolerance?

Another question which usually arises after the Quran's view on freedom of belief is that if leniency and tolerance of different views is favourable, then why did Prophet Ibrahim break the idols of the polytheists and, according to what is reported in verses 57 and 58 of Surah Al-Anbiya, he did not respect their freedom nor their beliefs:

وَاللّٰهُ لَا يَكِيدُنَّ أَصْنَامَكُمْ بَعْدَ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا مُدْبِرِينَ فَجَعَلَهُمْ جُدَادًا إِلَّا كَبِيرًا لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُونَ.

'And, by Allah, I will certainly plan against your idols after you go away turning your backs'. So he broke them into pieces, all except the chief of them, that perhaps they may return to it.

In order to answer this question, contrary to the conventional justifications, it should be noted that in explaining the teachings of each school, it is necessary to separate principles, foundations and definite matters from subsidiary matters, ambiguities, exceptions and rare instances. For example, we can never give up on the clear grounds that such punishments are wrong by only referring to one instance where, as reported in verse 74 of Surah Al-Kahf, in the story of Musa and Khizr³⁰ an individual was executed before committing any crime. It is for this reason Prophet Musa did not remain silent in response to that event, even though he had promised not to object or ask any questions, as he was not willing to violate the firm principles of his faith (inner conscience) even though he wasn't aware of the wisdom behind this specific incident.

³⁰ . Surah Al-Kahf, verse 74:

«فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتَنِي نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَّقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُّكَرًا»

So they twain departed; until, when they met a lad, he slew him. He said: 'You slew an innocent person who had slain none? You have indeed done a horrible thing'.

Those who are familiar with the Quran and the Sunnah (Prophet's traditions) know very well that principles such as human dignity and freedom are among the most basic and definitive foundations of this school, and all divine decrees and orders gain meaning and relevance by relying on these principles. Similarly cursing and insulting other people's holy values is forbidden and one of the definite teachings of the Quran, as stated very clearly in verse 108 of Surah Al-Anam:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ.

And do not curse those whom they call upon besides, or they will curse Allah in revenge without any knowledge. Thus unto every nation have We made their behaviour seem fair. Then unto their Lord is their return, so He will inform them of what they used to do.

The necessity of tolerance and respecting different beliefs as long as they do not violate anyone's rights is not only clearly understood from our intellect, reasoning and experience, but it is also confirmed and emphasized by the Quran many times. One of the clearest of these is stated in verse 8 of Surah Al-Mumtahanah:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ.

Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who deal with equity.

If we pay attention to these points, when we are faced with a situation such as the destruction of the idols which we are unaware of the background and aspects, we understand that we should interpret these situations in a way that doesn't contradict the definite principles and basis of the Quran. The reason being that in this situation, there are

numerous possibilities for exceptions, due to different circumstances, or the idols could have been the source of injustice and tyranny towards the people. And so, it is by considering these aspects that help us to understand the reasoning behind the learning from the event of destruction of the idols, yet generally being encouraged towards peaceful coexistence between different religions, leaving no room for inconsistency.

With this viewpoint, even if someone cannot interpret the nature of the destruction of the idols as anything other than an act of hate and believes that this act is essentially insulting the polytheists and creating distress and offence, it would be sufficient for them to understand this point that such a divine mission given to a unique individual in an exceptional context, does not contradict the overall principle of Islam. Therefore, in no instance can anyone use this as an excuse to offend others and insult their sanctities, as seen by the acts of ISIS that destroyed all which they viewed as polytheism, and deprive others of their rights and present an immoral image of religion.

It is here that another question or yet, objection arises which occupies the minds of those who believe in religious tolerance. They while acknowledging the incorrectness of insulting the sanctities of others, do not like the use of the word "respect" when dealing with superstitious and false beliefs of others, and believe that respecting a creed means to honour, raise, and view the beliefs as non-criticizable. But such an impression is not correct and this outlook does not have such meanings. When someone interprets their outlook as one of respect for the beliefs which they view as false, it certainly does not mean that they have accepted or agreed with those beliefs. But rather, it means that they have merely considered the beliefs to be a private matter and created an obstacle to insults, and destructive behaviour that would usually have taken place with people deprived of their natural rights.

When someone has no respect for a belief, they give themselves the right to insult and ridicule that belief instead of reviewing them

critically and distancing themselves from them. Thus if someone says that they respect an individual, without respecting their beliefs, they have only played with words. This is because the personality and identity of a human being is not defined by their physical material body, but it is their beliefs and outlooks which shape their viewpoint and circumstances.

The Quran is the word of a God which understands the human being very well and recognises that people's mindset is within the frame of the circumstances that surround them and other limitations. It is therefore natural for each person to think that their beliefs are the truth, yet other peoples' beliefs are superstitious and falsehood. And so if we were to allow ourselves to insult those who think differently to us, there would be no end to any war or dispute.

The only exception that exists in the concept of respecting other people's beliefs, is our method of treatment with beliefs that deprive and endanger others of their natural rights. Hence, dealing with tyranny and injustice and defending the rights which widely held is something favourable and recognised by all individuals. And just as we read in Surah Al-Mumtahanah, the only exception which the Quran mentions when living peacefully alongside people with different beliefs and mindsets, is injustice and the violation of others' safety and rights.

The fact that some think that respecting other people's beliefs means to validate them and list a complete page of contents by mentioning the beliefs of the likes of ISIS, other criminals and deviants to prove that not all beliefs are worthy of respect. Yet this stems from their lack of attention to the fact that our environment influences our viewpoints. They also don't pay attention to the fact they themselves consider individuals as examples of badness and deviance whom their key characteristic is not paying respect to the beliefs of others.

These fellows have not realised that in essence, the truth is not in our possession as normal human beings and no-one can claim that they have gained the correct belief, after which it would be impossible to find any other belief more lofty or truthful than that. The greatest of

thinkers and scientists are conflicted in their opinions and have realised their mistakes numerous times, and without falling into the trap of relativenss or de-valuing their beliefs, they regard their latest views with criticism.

In this case, the only solution left in wanting to correct beliefs is through rational conversations whilst relying on our common share of human conscience. We are obliged to do our utmost to gain more awareness and to understand our mistakes in order to reduce our distance from the truth.

Although not all individuals have equal access to truth-telling sources and their circumstances as well as their viewpoints towards reality is different, all do understand the importance of human conscience and the ugliness of disregarding what they have understood. So the only criterion we have for determining the level of value and respect given to others, is our ethical reasoning, not the level of conformity of their belief to the actual truth. The main problem of the likes of ISIS and other criminals and what makes them most hated is not their false beliefs, but rather their immorality, arrogance and disregard for human conscience and dialogue.

The only instance in which we are permitted to not respect someone's belief is if we are aware of all their limitations and their conditions. This would only be if we were certain they had been neglectful or stubborn in response to their awareness and the truths presented to them. This judgement is a very difficult task, except in the case of a very few people, of which only Allah the 'knower of unknown' or the companions of Allah would be able to do for them.

والحمد لله رب العالمين

All Praise to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds...

