

continue to do so. Let us remember, like Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, as she bit into the liver that was Hamza, the Lion of God, every human being is entitled to the mercy of God no matter how heinous their crimes; whether Serbian fascists, religious fanatics, Zionists, American murderers, pillagers & rapists of Muslim girls or any other barbarian who from ignorance opposes the most sublime & supernal teaching ever given to humanity.

Islam began as something strange, in the midst of a cruel & violent society, and it will return as something strange in the midst of a cruel & violent society. The greatest lessons can be learnt from the tolerant behaviour of our Prophet (p) who suffered much worse humiliation than any of us can imagine. The greatest tribulation faced our Prophets & then those who were nearest to them.

A smile is charity, he said. There is a story of a man who sat selling sugar in the market right next to a vinegar merchant. There was always a crowd of people buying vinegar while the sugar merchant got no business. When he asked a wise man why people preferred the bitter vinegar over his sweet sugar the response was simple: "You are selling sugar, but **your face is like you were selling vinegar**, while your neighbour who is selling vinegar, his face is like he was selling sugar." **The moral is that attitude and appearances are very important.** Be "soft" the Quran instructs. We Muslims claim to have answers to all the world's problems; we claim to have the "sugar" – the Quran, Islam, the Prophet's model – but we are carriers of bitterness. Harsh & hard-hearted.

The smallest of pebbles that's tossed in a pond makes ripples that reach far and wide...just as the smallest of kindnesses shown can touch someone deeply inside. So we shouldn't dismiss any words that we've spoken nor small, thoughtful gestures we've made...For they've each left a mark...as they've reached someone's heart with a comfort that won't quickly fade!

Islam has a bright future only if we are willing to **make the mosque the centre of our lives**, and **not a place for a few weekly rituals**. Mosques are not isolated islands but higher safe grounds where humanity may salvage itself from the deluge of Godlessness and crumbling moral values. What is stopping drowning humanity (shattered vases) from coming to the mosque is our divisive & dirty character; our arrogance & pettiness. Heed the Prophet, listen to the Prophet, obey the Prophet.

People do not hesitate to raise to divinity and even make "gods" out of other individuals whose lives and missions have been lost in legend. Historically speaking, none of these legends achieved even a fraction

of what Prophet Muhammad (p) accomplished. And all his striving was for the sole purpose of uniting mankind for the worship of One God on the codes of moral excellence. Today, after a lapse of fourteen centuries, the life and teachings of the Prophet (p) have survived without the slightest loss, alteration or interpolation. They offer the same undying hope for treating mankind's many ills, which they did when he was alive. This is the inescapable conclusion reached by a critical and unbiased history. For he, God bless him and grant him peace, is truly a mercy to all the worlds. A molder of vases & a wonderful mender.

The Prophet (p) gave our lives deep meaning when he taught us that encouraging good, prohibiting evil, lifting the burden of the weak person & removing an offensive thing from a path are all acceptable prayers to God. We can never remain in a "weak" state if we follow such instructions. From fragility we will move on to a strength that Hercules will be envious of. From fragility we will attain sublimity that the angels will mention our names with dignity. From fragility we will ascend to magnanimity that people will be happy to learn from us. From fragility we would move closer to Divinity and achieve total serenity. We would have understood that we were created "weak" **not** to give up and give in. But to overcome.

Since these weak characteristics are in one's fundamental nature, then those who overcome them and progress ought to guide the ones that are constrained and imprisoned by them, for they are in need of mercy, advice and rectification. "**You will not believe until you love for others what you love for yourself.**"

As we engage in our earthly struggles we put our dependence on God for ultimate success. That's the best strength. "Whoever believes in God, then they have grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will **never** break." (2:256) Such a strong, beautiful vase!

And we have this spiritual metaphor from the Bible: Now we have this treasure in **clay jars**, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but **not crushed**; perplexed, but **not in despair**; persecuted, but **not abandoned**; struck down, but **not destroyed**.

By repairing broken ceramics it's possible to give a new lease of life to pottery that becomes even more refined thanks to its "scars". The Japanese art of kintsugi teaches that broken objects are not something to hide but to display with pride. Good for pottery; good for humans! May we be mended vases that holds flowers that smiles & laughs, no matter what the circumstances...for mended vases are beautiful & have their own heavenly language.

The Fragile Vase

"...For man was created weak..."
(QURAN 4: 28)

The Messenger's

Tolerance

of the shortcomings

of individuals

are some of

the most

Compelling

historical

narratives

ever written

**Both too much and too little
of Tolerance can lead to
harmful results.**

"Man was created of haste (impatience)."

It is necessary to understand the fundamental nature of a human being, that we are: **weak, hasty, ignorant & unjust**. We are also **anxious, unappreciative, obstructive, fearful, mean, stingy & miserly**. We love to **flatter** from our Lord in wealth & health, and **despair, argue, arrogantly ignore & turn away** when in poverty & sickness. We also **rejoice & boast** when in wealth. We are never fed up or bored of asking for wealth. These characteristics are always present in us; however, they increase or decrease, surface or fade away according to the upbringing & the amendment of the spirit.

The human being was created in stages. The first was that he was created from dust & this is mentioned in the Quran using the word, *Turab*. The next stage is the mixing with water and it becomes clay; following that is the stage referred to as *Hamaim Masnum*. Finally the clay is fashioned and then dried by God, the Exalted. In these stages one can see great wisdom. The first stage is the dust or particle stage when the particles of the material are brought together; the next stage is the formulation of the elements fashioned from the particles water and earth. The final stage before the final form takes place is the *Hama Masnum* which is the black and pungent stage. This is fashioned into the human form and then it is dried. The drying indicates the solidification of the nature, the fixing of the form and the content. But dried clay is a fragile material. "Surely the human being was created fragile." So this true nature can be broken and it is the parents' and the communities' responsibility to preserve and protect it. If they **fail**, as we see everywhere, **the nature is shattered & the fragments release their toxic vapours onto the landscape of the world**.

But broken clay can be put back together and rebounded if the damage is not too great. This is the task of the Prophets and their inheritors, the rightly guided people of sincerity & truth. If you see the people around you as broken containers that were created to contain nothing less than knowledge of their Lord, then you are able to set

about healing this shattered but priceless vase; no matter what shape it is in, it is still a treasure...this is what the Prophets perceive.

When a funeral procession passed the Prophet's blessed presence in Madinah, he stood up out of respect. One of his companions said: "It is a Jew, O Messenger of God." The Prophet (p) answered: "Is it not a human soul?" This is the same understanding that compelled the Prophet (p) to accept the repentance of the Ethiopian who killed his uncle Hamza & welcome him into the fold of Islam as a brother. Reflect on the mercy of the Prophet (p). He forgave a murderer (a fractured human soul) & made him Muslim. We who pride ourselves as "Muslims" instead fracture human beings via insults, envy, jealousy & malice.

The Prophet (p) also accepted the Islam of the woman who not only commissioned the Ethiopian to kill Hamza but who actually bit his liver after he was dead as an act of vengeance for the death of her family members. Because of this example of the best of creation – and you have in the Messenger of God the best paragon – the Muslims who survived the merciless & barbaric slaughter at the hands of the Mongols were able to take Islam to the very people who had subjugated them to such brutality and barbarity within one generation. And those same monsters not only were transformed by the Light of God's Way, they went on to **lay the foundation** for one of **the most celestial civilizations** ever to grace the earth.

With rare exception, & unfortunately this age is one of those times, Muslims have always seen their enemies as misguided brothers, fellow sons & daughters of Adam in desperate need of knowledge, light & above all compassion. Today we show more **passion** than **compassion**. Lest we forget, the Prophet (p) is described as a mercy to all the worlds, and God is Lord of all the worlds. People in their respective places & cultures are for the Muslims nothing other than opportunities to become recipients of the mercy that is uniquely the essential element in the character of the Prophet (p). All over the world we have Muslims who have forgotten the mercy that is Muhammad (p). He was a "hero of the oppressed." We forget that Jews are the recipients of God's mercy, as well as Hindus & Christians & every other religion, sacred or secular that exists.

Coming from the Arabic root *samaha*, *musamaha* (tolerance) means to forgive and to pardon. The word *hosgoru* is used in Turkish and the word *tolerance* in English. As a term, it is used for the understanding and gentle behavior towards everyone, without prejudice, of someone who is mature and good-intentioned. Truly this is a high virtue possessed only by people of superior morality. Both too much and too little of tolerance can lead to harmful results.

Islam is the world's birthright and it is the duty of the Muslims to inform people of that divinely ordained birthright. **But this cannot be done except in the absence of malice, envy and jealousy**. Every Muslim knows the glorious story of Caliph Ali, when he lifted his sword to kill an enemy and the man spat in his face. Ali then lowered his sword and the man asked: "Why don't you kill me?" And that blessed Muslim replied: "**You have angered me and I cannot kill a man out of my own anger**." The man became Muslim. He understood in that precious historical moment the **mercy that is Islam**.

Throughout Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, tolerance was one of the most basic ideas underlying his behavior. He called people to religion and approached them with tolerance in light of the verse, "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." (21) Others being harsh and rude in response to this call did not make him forego this principle. During the Taif campaign his being forgiving towards the attack made against him & his praying for their reformation instead of their destruction is a good example of this.

There are lessons & wisdom to be gained by the modern world in the Prophet's understanding of tolerance and its application in Islamic history. Those who indiscriminately describe Muslims as fanatical, aggressive & intolerant, need to look at and analyze the life & actions of Muhammad (p) & Islamic history.

Our disempowered swords now hang over the heads of our enemies who continue to spit in our faces in every conceivable and inconceivable way. They hang high without an ounce of strength in the arm that holds them nor a bit of power to cut should they fall. But they hang high **not** for the glory of God **but as a testimony of our personal rancour & rage that we feel toward those who have abused us**. And abused they have &

It is **none** other than a **Mercy** of your Lord

(QURAN 3:159)

that you were made **Soft** for them,

& had you been harsh & hard-hearted they would have fled from you.

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