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A THEOLOGICAL COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF TOLERANCE IN ISLAM AND BUDDHISM

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Abstract

Religious tolerance is a fundamental ethical principle in both Islam and Buddhism, shaping interfaith relations, governance models, and societal harmony. While both traditions emphasize compassion, patience, and mutual respect, their doctrinal foundations of tolerance differ significantly. Islamic tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) is rooted in Islamic monotheism (*tawḥīd*), divine law (*sharīʿah*) and prophetic teachings (ḥadīth), where interfaith coexistence is structured within legal and ethical frameworks. The Qur'an (2:256) affirms that "there is no compulsion in religion," and historical precedents such as the Constitution of Medina institutionalized protections for religious minorities. Conversely, Buddhist tolerance (*kṣānti*) arises from a nontheistic spiritual path in which moral conduct is governed by *karma* rather than by divine commandments. Buddhism fosters patience and forbearance as essential virtues in the Bodhisattva ideal and meditative disciplines, emphasizing inner transformation rather than legal enforcement. By analyzing both primary religious texts and contemporary sources, this study highlights

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common values between Islam and Buddhism, advocating for deeper interfaith dialogue and academic research on universal principles of tolerance. Understanding Islamic and Buddhist tolerance offers valuable frameworks for fostering religious harmony and coexistence in a diverse world.

Keywords: Religious tolerance; religious pluralism; *tasāmuḥ*; *kṣānti*; Islam and Buddhism.

Khulasah

Toleransi agama merupakan prinsip etika asas dalam Islam dan Buddhisme, yang membentuk hubungan antara agama, model tadbir urus dan keharmonian masyarakat. Kedua-dua tradisi menekankan belas kasihan, kesabaran dan saling menghormati, namun asas doktrin toleransi mereka berbeza secara ketara. Toleransi dalam Islam (*tasāmuḥ*) berakar umbi dalam ketauhidan, hukum syariah dan ajaran kenabian, merangkumi kewujudan bersama antara agama dalam kerangka undang-undang dan akhlak. Al-Quran (2:256) menekankan bahawa "tidak ada paksaan dalam agama," dan rekod sejarah seperti Piagam Madinah yang menginstitusikan perlindungan untuk penganut agama minoriti. Manakala toleransi dalam Buddhisme (*kṣānti*), terbina daripada jalan kerohanian non-teisme, di mana tingkah laku moral ditentukan oleh karma dan bukannya perintah Tuhan. Buddhisme memupuk kesabaran dan ketabahan sebagai nilai penting dalam disiplin ideal dan meditasi Bodhisattva, menekankan transformasi dalaman berbanding pelaksanaan undang-undang. Dengan menganalisis kedua-dua teks agama utama dan sumber kontemporari, kajian ini menyerlahkan nilai bersama antara Islam dan Buddhisme, menyokong dialog antara agama dan kajian akademik yang lebih mendalam mengenai prinsip toleransi sejagat. Menerusi pemahaman terhadap konsep toleransi dalam Islam dan Buddhisme, ia menawarkan kerangka yang berharga untuk memupuk keharmonian agama dan kewujudan bersama dalam dunia kepelbagaian.

Kata kunci: Toleransi agama; pluralisme agama; *tasāmuḥ*; *kṣānti*; Islam dan Buddhisme.

Introduction

Religious tolerance has historically played a vital role in promoting peace, mutual understanding, and coexistence among diverse communities. In today's increasingly interconnected world, shaped by globalization, migration, and technological advancement, its relevance is more critical than ever. The modern world is characterized by unprecedented levels of multicultural and interfaith interaction, rendering religious tolerance indispensable for social cohesion. Yet, despite its recognized importance, religious intolerance and sectarian conflict persist across various regions, often intensified by political agendas, ideological divides, and deep-rooted historical grievances. Within this context, Islam and Buddhism, two of the world's major religious traditions, offer distinct yet profound perspectives on tolerance, shaped by their respective metaphysical worldviews and moral philosophies. Islam, rooted in monotheistic law and ethics, and Buddhism, grounded in non-attachment and compassionate restraint, both articulate frameworks that support coexistence and respectful engagement with difference.

While scholarly discussions on religious tolerance have frequently focused on Christian and secular paradigms, there remains a significant gap in comparative studies of Islam and Buddhism, particularly concerning their conceptual frameworks and historical expressions of tolerance. This study examines how Islam and Buddhism define, practice, and express religious tolerance, with particular focus on the concepts of *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti*.

The concept of *tasāmuḥ* in Islam, derived from the Arabic root *samḥa* (denotes leniency, forbearance, and generosity), reflects a comprehensive approach to religious tolerance that is deeply embedded in Islamic theological

teachings. The Qur'anic principle of "no compulsion in religion"[1] and the Prophet Muhammad's engagements with non-Muslims provide foundational insights into Islamic tolerance. In Islamic legal and ethical thought, *tasāmuḥ* is often associated with principles of justice (*'adl*), mercy (*raḥmah*), and respect for religious diversity, particularly in relation to the *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book).[2]

Islamic history has offered numerous instances in which *tasāmuḥ* was institutionalized, such as the Constitution of Medina, which established a multi-religious framework for coexistence and allowed religious minorities to practice their faiths freely. However, alongside these examples of tolerance, there have also been periods marked by religious conflict and exclusion, highlighting the need for a nuanced exploration of how Islamic principles of

[1] Surah al-Baqarah 2: 256.

[2] It has been a consensus (*ijma'*) among scholars, both from the Salaf and Khalaf traditions, including Imam al-Shaf'i (767–820 CE), Imam al-Shirazi (1003–1083 CE), and al-Qaradawi (1926–2002). This ruling is based on the words of Allah (SWT) in the Qur'an, specifically referring to the *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book) as belonging to two distinct groups. For instance, in the context of their characteristics, the *Ahl al-Kitab* are those who were given scriptures, and it is permissible to marry their women and consume their slaughtered animals. The Qur'an also categorizes the *Ahl al-Kitab* into two groups. The first comprises those who have faith, referring to followers of the teachings of previous prophets. After the arrival of Prophet Muhammad, this group accepted his message and followed his teachings. Meanwhile, the second group consists of those who refused to believe in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad; they are thus considered to have fallen into disbelief and deviation. However, there exists a minority view among modern Muslim scholars that expands the category of *Ahl al-Kitab* to include adherents of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, similar to Jews and Christians. One of the proponents of this view is Muhammad Rashid Ibn 'Ali Rida (1865–1935). See Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli, "Pemikiran dan Sumbangan Imtiyaz Yusuf (1957-) dalam Hubungan dan Keharmonian antara Islam dan Buddhisme," (PhD thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2024), 254.

tolerance have been interpreted and applied across different historical contexts.

On the other hand, Buddhism presents the concept of *kṣānti*, which is often translated as "forbearance," "patience," or "tolerance." *Kṣānti* is one of the six perfections (*pāramitās*) in Mahayana Buddhism and is a fundamental ethical virtue in both Theravada and Mahayana traditions. It is deeply connected to Buddhist teachings on impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*), collectively encourage practitioners to cultivate patience, acceptance, and understanding in the face of adversity.

Unlike Islamic tolerance, which is grounded in a theistic worldview and formalized through syariah law such as the *dhimma* system, Buddhist tolerance is rooted in philosophical and ethical principles, particularly non-attachment, forbearance (*kṣānti*), and compassion (*karuṇā*). Historical expressions of Buddhist tolerance include Emperor Aśoka's edicts promoting religious pluralism and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), as well as Buddhism's ability to coexist with indigenous belief systems as it spread across Asia. However, as with Islam, the application of Buddhist tolerance has not been uniform; there have been instances in which Buddhist communities were entangled in interreligious tensions and conflicts, revealing the complexities of interpreting tolerance in historical and socio-political contexts.

Given these rich but distinct traditions, this study seeks to answer several key questions: How do Islam and Buddhism define and practice tolerance within their theological and ethical frameworks? What are the primary doctrinal sources articulating tolerance in each tradition? What are the similarities and differences in the philosophical underpinnings of Islamic and Buddhist tolerance? How can a deeper understanding of *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti* contribute to contemporary interfaith dialogue and

promote more sustainable models of religious coexistence? This study seeks to answer these questions by offering a comparative analysis that moves beyond minimal conceptions of tolerance as mere non-interference, delving instead into the doctrinal foundations and ethical imperatives underlying *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti*.

To achieve this, the study is guided by two primary research objectives. First, it seeks to define and explore the meanings of *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti*, analysing their theological and linguistic origins as well as their interpretations in classical and contemporary religious thought. This involves a textual analysis of key Islamic and Buddhist scriptures, including the Qur'an, Hadith, Buddhist sutras, and commentarial traditions. Second, the study examines the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti*, investigating how these concepts are embedded in broader frameworks of Islamic and Buddhist ethics. This includes an exploration of how these traditions understand human nature, morality, and the purpose of religious coexistence. For instance, while Islamic tolerance is often framed in relation to divine justice and law, Buddhist tolerance is tied to the principle of *upāya* (skilful means) and the Bodhisattva ideal of compassion.

By integrating theological and ethical analyses, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on religious tolerance, offering insights that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant for contemporary interfaith relations. Understanding how Islam and Buddhism have conceptualized and practiced tolerance not only enriches scholarly discussions but also provides valuable lessons for fostering religious harmony in today's globalized and often polarized world. The comparative study of *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti* highlights the diversity of approaches to religious tolerance while also revealing shared principles that can serve as a foundation for meaningful interfaith dialogue. In an era where religious

intolerance remains a pressing challenge, revisiting these rich traditions of tolerance offers a timely and necessary intellectual and ethical engagement that can help shape more inclusive and peaceful societies.

Conceptualizing Tolerance in Islam: *Tasāmuḥ*

Tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) in Islam is an integral theological and ethical principle shaping the framework for interfaith relations and social harmony. Unlike the Western notion of *tolerantia*, emphasizing passive non-interference in the beliefs and practices of others, *tasāmuḥ* in Islam is deeply rooted in concepts such as mercy (*raḥmah*), generosity (*karamah*), nobility (*sharaf*), and forbearance (*hilm*).[3] It is not merely an obligation to 'allow' differences, but a proactive approach that promotes justice, kindness, and mutual respect. This principle is embedded in the Qur'anic message, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and the Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), making it a fundamental element of Islamic governance and interpersonal relationships.

The Qur'an does not explicitly include a singular term that directly represents tolerance as it is broadly understood in modern thought. However, linguistic analysis of Arabic terms in the Qur'anic context reveals that *tasāmuḥ* is the closest equivalent to the concept of tolerance in Islamic discourse. According to *The Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary of Current Usage*, 'tolerance' is translated as *tasāmuḥ* and *tasāhul* (forbearance). At the same time, *al-Mawrid al-Hadith: A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary* extends its meaning to include *taḥammul* (steadfastness), *tasāmuḥ* (overlooking or forgiving), and al-*tafāwut* (disagreement).[4] Thus, Muslim scholars agreed that the

[3] Zilio-Grandi, Ida, "The Virtue of Tolerance: Notes on The Root SM-Ḥ in The Islamic Tradition," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 45(4) (2019): 429-437.

[4] Zilio-Grandi, "The Virtue of Tolerance," 429.

closest term of tolerance is *tasāmuḥ*.[5] These terms collectively encapsulate values such as indulgence, kindness, leniency, clemency, mercy, patience, self-control, endurance, gentleness, and flexibility, illustrating that Islamic tolerance goes beyond passive acceptance to include a moral responsibility to engage with others through generosity and wisdom.

Theological Foundations of *Tasāmuḥ* in Islam

The theological basis for *tasāmuḥ* in Islam is firmly rooted in Qur'anic teachings, Prophetic traditions (Sunnah), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Islamic virtue ethics (*akhlaq*). Theologically, tolerance is framed not as a concession but as a divine imperative that aligns with Islamic principles of justice (*'adl*), compassion (*raḥmah*), and wisdom (*ḥikmah*).[6] The Qur'an presents tolerance as an essential aspect of the divine plan for human diversity, emphasizing moral responsibility rather than mere coexistence.[7] The Qur'an explicitly acknowledges religious diversity and calls for engagement with people of different faiths in a spirit of justice and kindness. Several verses underscore the theological basis of tolerance. The verse in Surah al-Baqarah declares:

> "There is no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most

[5] 'Ali Muhammad Salih 'Abd Allah, *al-Hiwar al-Dini al-Ibrahimi fi Mizan al-Qur'an* (Misr: Dar al-Salam, 2007), 213.

[6] Iqtidar, Humeira, "Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," *ReOrient* 2(1) (2016), 5-11.

[7] Jaffary Awang, *Toleransi Agama dan Perpaduan Kaum, Pandangan Intelek: Satu Observasi Ringkas* (Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2003), 78; Baidhawy, Zakiyuddin, "Building Harmony and Peace Through Multiculturalist Theology-Based Religious Education: An Alternative for Contemporary Indonesia," *British Journal of Religious Education* 29(1), 15-30, 21.

> trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things."[8]

This verse establishes a fundamental principle of religious freedom in Islam, a view supported by classical exegesis scholars such as al-Ṭabarī (d. 923)[9] and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373)[10], who affirm that Islam does not impose faith upon individuals and that religious belief must be accepted voluntarily[11], excluded from idol-worshipers or apostates[12]. Furthermore, Surah al-Ma'idah states:

> "To each among you, We have prescribed a law (*shir'ah*) and a way (*minhāj*). If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community (*ummah*), but He intended to test you in what He has given you. So compete in righteousness."[13]

This verse highlights that religious diversity is not an error but part of God's divine plan, a perspective emphasized by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209)[14], who interprets this verse as a call for mutual understanding

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[8] Surah al-Baqarah 2: 256.

[9] Al-Tabari, Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir, *Tafsir al-Tabari: Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil aya al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar Hijr, 2001), 5: 408–414.

[10] Ibn Kathir, Imad al-Din Abi Fida' Isma'il bin Kathir al-Dimasyq, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (CAiro: Mu'assasah Qurṭubah, 2000), 1: 682–684.

[11] Iqtidar, "Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," 5.

[12] The majority of Islamic scholars firmly reject the act of apostasy, based on the principle of safeguarding religion (*hifz al-Din*). The Qur'anic verses stating that "there is no compulsion in religion" (2:256) specifically refer to inviting non-Muslims to Islam. This indicates that, while Islam is the true religion, it cannot be imposed on others. See, Syamsudin, S., "Antara Hukum Murtad Dalam Islam Dengan Kebebasan Beragama Menurut Hak Asasi Manusia (HAM)," *El-Mashlahah* 11(1) (2021), 44-59.

[13] Surah al-Maidah 5: 48.

[14] Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din, *Tafsir Fakhr al-Razi al-Mushtahar bi al-Tafsir al-Kabir wa Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005), 6:14-20.

rather than religious uniformity.[15] Similarly, Surah al-Hujurat reinforces this principle by stating:

> "O humankind, We have created you male and female and made you nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honoured among you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous."[16]

According to al-Qurtubi (d. 1273),[17] this verse underscores that Islamic tolerance is based on ethical excellence rather than religious or ethnic superiority.[18] The Prophetic model of *tasāmuḥ* further exemplifies the active practice of tolerance within early Islamic society. The Constitution of Madinah (622 CE), one of the earliest legal documents in history, established a multi-religious political entity in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims had autonomous rights.[19] This charter legally protected religious minorities, ensuring their freedom of belief and judicial independence, a model that predates modern secular concepts of religious tolerance.[20] The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah (628 CE) with the Quraysh polytheists also exemplifies political tolerance, as it permitted Quraysh non-Muslims to practice their faith freely despite previous

[15] Sachedina, Abdulaziz, "The Qur'anic Foundation of Interreligious Tolerance," in Richard J. Jones, *Fine Differences: The al-Alwani Muslim-Christian Lectures 2010-2017* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2020), 160-174.

[16] Surah al-Hujurat 49:13.

[17] Al-Qurtubi, Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah. 2010), 8: 517.

[18] Iqtidar, "Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," 5-11.

[19] Mojahedi, Mohammad Mahdi, "Is There Toleration in Islam? Reframing a Post-Islamist Question in a Post-Secular Context," *ReOrient* 2(1) (2016), 51-72.

[20] Sachedina, "The Qur'anic Foundation of Interreligious Tolerance," 160.

hostilities, demonstrating Islam's commitment to peaceful coexistence.[21]

Additionally, the Prophet's treatment of non-Muslims set a precedent for interfaith harmony. Upon the conquest of Makkah in 630 CE, rather than punishing his former enemies, the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed, "Go, for you are free." [22] His policies toward Christian and Jewish communities similarly ensured their protection and religious autonomy, exemplified by his covenant with the Christian monks of Najran, which explicitly stated, "Christians shall not be harmed nor coerced in their faith, but subject to the specific condition."[23] *Tasāmuḥ* in Islam does not imply unconditional acceptance to the extent of pressuring individuals to embrace ideas or practices conflicting with Islamic teachings. [24] Instead, Islamic tolerance is guided by the principle of being "firm in principle, tolerant in attitude." This means Muslims are encouraged to remain steadfast in upholding the truth while respecting the rights and beliefs of non-Muslims.[25] These precedents highlight that Islamic tolerance is not a passive virtue but an active duty to ensure justice and religious freedom.[26]

Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) institutionalized religious tolerance through the concept of *ahl al-dhimmah* (protected non-Muslims). Under classical Islamic governance, non-

[21] Iqtidar, "Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," 5.

[22] Al-Asqalani, Ahmad bin 'Ali bin Hajar, *Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Maghazi, Bab Dukhul al-Nabi SAW min a'la Makkah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990) 7: 611.

[23] Al-Baladhuri, Ahmad Ibn Yahya, *Futuh al-Buldan* (Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal, 1988), 1: 85-86.

[24] Armayanto, Harda, "Managing Religious Diversity: An *Ihsan* Approach," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 25(1) (2023): 99-130.

[25] Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman & Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Religious Tolerance in Malaysia: Problems and Challenges," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3 (2013), 83

[26] Mojahedi, "Is There Toleration in Islam?" 51.

Muslims were granted legal protections, religious autonomy, and security in exchange for paying the *jizyah* (tax for non-Muslims), which was a financial contribution rather than a penalty, as it exempted them from military service.[27] Scholars such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 1350) have affirmed that Islam does not force faith upon anyone but merely provides guidance.[28] He emphasizes that the Prophet Muhammad never coerced individuals into Islam, only fighting those who initiated hostility against him.[29] Legal maxims such as 'Harm should be removed' (*al-ḍarar yuzāl*) and 'No harm, no retaliation' (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*) further ensured that religious minorities were not subjected to unfair treatment.[30]

This approach encourages Muslims to remain steadfast in upholding the truth as outlined in Islamic teachings while simultaneously maintaining respect for the beliefs and practices of non-Muslims. This nuanced understanding of *tasāmuḥ* ensures that a respect for diversity does not dilute the foundational values of Islam, preserving both religious freedom and a spirit of mutual coexistence. [31] Islam prioritizes genuine belief and voluntary acceptance, emphasizing that embracing Islam should stem from individual conviction and faith in its teachings, rather than

[27] Iqtidar, "Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," 11.

[28] Sachedina, "The Qur'anic Foundation of Interreligious Tolerance," 160.

[29] Al-Jawziyyah, Shams al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Ayyub al-Dimashqi Ibn Qayyim, *Hidayat al-Hayara fi Ajwibat al-Yahud wa al-Nasara*, ed. Muhammad Ahmad al-Haj (Jeddah: Dar al-Qalam, 1996), 169–172.

[30] Muhammad Sidqi bin Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Burno Abu al-Harith al-Ghazzi, *al-Wajiz fi Idah Qawa'id al-Fiqh al-Kulliyyah* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah al-'Alamiyyah, 1996); Mojahedi, "Is There Toleration in Islam?" 51-72.

[31] Ahmad Faizuddin, Mohamed Ashath & Ahmad Moghri, "A Comparative Study on the Notion of Dialogue in Islam and Buddhism," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 25(2) (2023): 65-108.

external pressure. The principle of the 'three-invitation methodology' outlines non-violent and respectful approaches for inviting others to Islam. Depending on the circumstances, individuals' levels of understanding and intellectual capacities, Muslims are encouraged to employ one of three methods: offering wisdom, giving kind advice, or engaging in constructive dialogue and debate.[32]

Beyond legal structures, *tasāmuḥ* is also integral to Islamic virtue ethics, linking tolerance to broader moral principles such as mercy (*raḥmah*), excellence in character (*iḥsān*), and forbearance (*ḥilm*). The Qur'an explicitly states in Surah al-A'raf, "My mercy encompasses all things." [33] The Prophet Muhammad also emphasized tolerance as a marker of good character, saying, "The best among you is the one with the best character."[34] Hamza Yusuf argues that true Islamic tolerance is deeply embedded in the faith and must be reclaimed to counteract modern intolerance. Tolerance is not weakness; it is nobility and generosity. The Prophet Muhammad himself described Islam as *al-ḥanafiyya al-samḥa* (the gentle, easy-going religion). Thus, Islamic tolerance is not just about 'putting up with others' but treating them with dignity.[35] This aligns with the views of classical scholars such as al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who argued that a true faith is measured by moral excellence rather than strict legalism.[36] This moral

[32] Awang, J., Ramli, A.F., & Rahman, Z., "Muslim and Buddhist Encounters between Conflict and Harmony," *Islamiyyat: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 44(1) (2022): 131-144.

[33] Surah al-A'raf 7: 156.

[34] Al-Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Adab, ed. Mustafa Dib al-Bugha (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1997), Hadith no. 6029 Book 78, Hadith 59.

[35] Yusuf, Hamza, "Generous Tolerance in Islam," *Seasons: Semi Annual Journal of Zaytuna Institute* 2 (2005), 26-42.

[36] Yousef Casewit, "Al-Ghazali's Virtue Ethical Theory of the Divine Names: The Theological Underpinnings of the Doctrine of *Takhalluq* in *al-Maqsad al-Asna*," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4(1-2) (2020), 155; Zilio-Grandi, "The Virtue of Tolerance," 429-437; Ahmad Hifdzil

perspective on tolerance distinguishes Islamic *tasāmuḥ* from the Western notion of tolerantia,[37] primarily emerged from Enlightenment liberalism and focuses on legal non-interference rather than ethical engagement.[38]

Muslim scholars further argue that the notion of tolerance in Islam is intricately connected to the concept of revealed knowledge. Tolerance is not merely a social ethic but a value informed by sacred knowledge derived from divine revelation and deepened through intellectual reflection. This sacred foundation elevates the practice of tolerance from a pragmatic necessity to a spiritual obligation. It is not a begrudging or formal acknowledgment of others but a sincere and respectful acceptance of their existence and beliefs.[39]

In conclusion, *tasāmuḥ* in Islam is a comprehensive theological and ethical framework rooted in Qur'anic teachings, Prophetic traditions, legal principles, and virtue ethics. The terms *al-tasāmuḥ* and *samaḥa* in Islam also signify a balanced concept of mutual exchange, in which both parties are engaged in giving and receiving, rather than a one-sided expectation of concessions. [40] It also

Haq and Yoke Suryadarma, "Pendidikan Akhlak Menurut Imam Al-Ghazali," *At-Ta'dib* 10(2) (2015), 361-381.

[37] The term originates from the Latin verb *tolerare*, means 'to endure' or 'to bear.' This term also conveys broader notions such as 'to sustain', 'to nourish' or 'to preserve.' Commonly, tolerance is described as the willingness to accept behaviours and beliefs different from one's own, even without agreement or approval. It also reflects the capacity to allow others to express themselves freely, despite personal disagreements or disapproval, and encompasses an empathetic acceptance of differing feelings, habits, or perspectives.

[38] Iqtidar, "Introduction: Tolerance in Modern Islamic Thought," 11.

[39] Shah-Kazemi, Reza. *The Spirit of Tolerance in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 76.

[40] Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, Suraya Sintang & Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman, "Pemaknaan Semula Toleransi Agama dalam Berta'amul," in *Islam dan Hubungan Antara Penganut Agama*, eds. Azizan Baharuddin, Enizahura Abd Aziz, Mohd Amiruddin Kamarulzaidi (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit IKIM, 2019), 131.

encompasses meanings such as simplicity, generosity, flexibility, and a willingness to ease tensions.[41] In this sense, *tasāmuḥ* extends beyond surface-level tolerance to embody a deeper attitude of openness, one that encourages individuals to listen to differing perspectives and participate in constructive dialogue. This mutual understanding allows for an exchange of ideas without compromising or altering each other's religious beliefs.

Unlike passive toleration, Islamic tolerance emphasizes active engagement with others through mercy, justice, and ethical responsibility. The Prophet's leadership, classical Islamic governance, and virtue-based ethics all reinforce the idea that *tasāmuḥ* is not merely a political necessity but a divine imperative. However, as contemporary scholars continue to debate the application of *tasāmuḥ* in modern pluralistic societies, questions remain on how Islamic governance can balance religious identity with full civic equality in secular states.[42] The future of Islamic tolerance depends on how these theological principles are adapted to contemporary realities while preserving their ethical and spiritual essence.

Conceptualizing Tolerance in Buddhism: *Kṣānti*

In Buddhist texts, while no single term explicitly translates to 'tolerance', the concept is closely linked to *kṣānti* or *khānti*, which primarily denotes patience, forbearance, and the endurance of hardship. *Kṣānti* is one of the six *pāramitās* (perfections) in Buddhist teachings, encompassing qualities such as patience, acceptance, humility, and perseverance. These attributes collectively form *kṣānti pāramitā*, which has been historically revered in Buddhist practice, emphasizing the cultivation of endurance in the face of suffering and challenges. The term

[41] Alhashmi, Mariam, Naved Bakali & Rama Baroud, "Tolerance in UAE Islamic Education Textbooks," *Religions* 11(8) (2020), 13.

[42] Sachedina, "The Qur'anic Foundation of Interreligious Tolerance," 160.

kṣānti (क्षान्ति) originates from Sanskrit and is commonly translated as 'patience', 'forbearance', or 'endurance'. It conveys the idea of tolerating suffering, accepting adversity, and enduring hardship without resentment or anger. Unlike tolerance in some religious traditions, which may imply merely passive acceptance of diversity, kṣānti in Buddhism is an active quality; it is cultivated through inner discipline and mindfulness as part of the path to enlightenment.

In classical Buddhist thought, *kṣānti* is regarded as one of the Six *Pāramitās* (Perfections) in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The *Pāramitās* are six (or ten, in some traditions) essential virtues a Bodhisattva must cultivate to attain Buddhahood. The third perfection, *kṣānti*, refers to the ability to patiently endure suffering, insults, or even persecution while maintaining a state of equanimity and compassion. Beyond its ethical significance, *kṣānti* also plays a crucial role in meditation and self-discipline. It is considered a prerequisite for wisdom and compassion, as it enables a practitioner to transcend emotional disturbances and respond to conflict with mindfulness rather than aggression.

Tolerance, or *kṣānti* (Pali: *khantī*), is a foundational virtue in Buddhism, representing patience, forbearance, and the ability to endure suffering without retaliation. As one of the Six *Pāramitās* (Perfections) in Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Ten *Pāramitās* in Theravāda Buddhism, *kṣānti* plays an essential role in ethical and spiritual development, promoting harmony and preventing conflict. Unlike passive endurance, *kṣānti* is an active cultivation of inner stability, neutralizing anger and fostering wisdom-based non-retaliation. Buddhist thought recognizes three primary dimensions of tolerance: adversity tolerance (*dukkha-sahanā kṣānti*), forbearance towards others (*para-sahanā kṣānti*), and acceptance of the Dhamma (*dhamma-sahanā kṣānti*). These aspects of *kṣānti* indicate that Buddhist tolerance is not a passive resignation to suffering but an

intentional, mindful engagement with difficulties, ensuring emotional and spiritual equanimity.

This perspective aligns with historical evidence showing the Buddhism emerged in ancient India during a period of political, social, and religious turmoil, where the Buddha actively engaged in dialogue with competing religious traditions, advocating for harmony rather than dogmatic exclusivity Buddha used to visit Brahmānas and had friendly discussions and it is mentioned in Buddhist history in various discussions like dialogues with Tevijja, Canki, and Sonadada. According to the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, there were numerous teachings and schools of thought in Bharat (ancient India) during the Buddha's lifetime. However, the Buddha did not come to condemn the pagan monks and their teachings, and he also appreciated the virtues of religious teachers. He visited several religious instructors and made new friends and leaders. When Buddha visited some monasteries, the spiritual leaders calmed their disciples and cordially greeted him. He was highly valued because of his wider knowledge, protects peace by accepting differences among followers without any form of prejudice.

This inclusive approach laid the foundation for Buddhism's emphasis on tolerance as both a personal and societal virtue. The 12th Major Edict of Emperor Aśoka, a landmark of Buddhist political philosophy, reinforces this principle, stating: "On each occasion one should honor another man's sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits of the other man." This historical precedent underscores how Buddhist tolerance is not only a moral ideal but also a pragmatic necessity for fostering religious and cultural coexistence.[43]

[43] Laura O'Sullivan & Nicole Lindsay, "The Relationship Between Spiritual Intelligence, Resilience, and Well-Being in an Aotearoa New Zealand Sample," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 25(4) (2022), 1-21.

Theological and Ethical Foundations of *Kṣānti*

The theological and ethical foundations of *kṣānti* are deeply interwoven with Buddhist doctrines of non-violence (*ahimsa*), *karma*, and mindfulness (*sati*). The *Dhammapada* (Verse 5) articulates the Buddhist stance on patience and non-retaliation: "Hostilities aren't stilled through hostility, regardless. Hostilities are stilled through non-hostility: this, an unending truth." This verse encapsulates the essential role of *kṣānti* in preventing cycles of vengeance and fostering reconciliation. In Buddhist ethics, anger (*dosa*) is identified as one of the three poisons responsible for perpetuating suffering in *samsāra*, making *kṣānti* a crucial antidote for spiritual progress and ethical living.

This principle is exemplified in the *Khantivādī Jātaka*, where the Buddha, in a past life as an ascetic, endures extreme cruelty from a tyrannical king without retaliating. Instead, he remains composed and forgiving, demonstrating that patience is not weakness but a form of immense strength leads to spiritual purification. Additionally, in the *Vepacitti Sutta*, Sakka, the king of the gods, practices restraint when insulted, illustrating a wisdom and forbearance are superior to vengeance. These teachings align closely with modern concepts of restorative justice and conflict de-escalation, suggesting the Buddhist principles of tolerance can offer valuable insights for peacebuilding and legal ethics.

Furthermore, *kṣānti* is foundational to the Bodhisattva path, where self-restraint and compassion in the face of adversity are seen as crucial for enlightenment. *The Lotus Sūtra*, a seminal Mahāyāna text, elevates patience as the means by bodhisattvas endure suffering to guide others to liberation, illustrating the *kṣānti* is not only an ethical practice but also a necessary condition for the realization of wisdom and universal compassion. Additionally, Buddhist tolerance, while deeply rooted in patience, extends beyond

passive forbearance. In the *Metta Sutta*, Theravada monks recite: "Just as a mother protects her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings."

This demonstrates how tolerance in Buddhism is interwoven with *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion), creating a holistic ethical framework that promotes harmony across religious and social divides. Thus, *kṣānti* remains a timeless and transformative principle, not only as a personal virtue but also as a guiding force for ethical governance, interfaith dialogue, and humanitarian law.

Discussion

Religious tolerance is a pivotal pillar of the sustainability of pluralistic societies, and both Islam and Buddhism have articulated rich yet distinct theological frameworks for interfaith harmony. In Islamic thought, tolerance is conceptualized as *tasāmuḥ*, a multifaceted principle rooted in the Qur'anic ethos of forbearance, mercy (*raḥmah*), and legal protection of minorities, manifesting in both interpersonal ethics and formal legal guarantees. Conversely, in Buddhist doctrine, tolerance is embodied by *kṣānti* (Pali: *khantī*), signifying not only passive patience but also the cultivated endurance of suffering and provocation through non-violence, wisdom (*prajñā*), and universal compassion (*karuṇā*). Despite their divergent theological architectures, monotheistic and legalistic in Islam, nontheistic and experiential in Buddhism, both traditions elevate tolerance to a cardinal virtue, vital for individual ethical development and collective peace. This comparative analysis underscores both the convergences and distinctions between the two by critically examining their shared ethical ground, doctrinal underpinnings, and practical outworkings in historical and modern contexts.

a) Shared Ethical Foundations

Both Islam and Buddhism construct tolerance as a deeply embedded moral imperative, undergirded by parallel virtues such as compassion, patience, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence. Islamic ethics, as reflected in the recurring Qur'anic invocation of God as *al-Raḥmān* (The Most Compassionate) *al-Raḥīm* (The Most Merciful), establish mercy as a defining characteristic of divine and human conduct. The hadith literature and the Constitution of Medina further anchor *tasāmuḥ* as a communal ethic, obligating Muslims to respect religious diversity and safeguard the rights of non-Muslims. The Qur'anic verse, "There is no compulsion in religion," is often cited as a foundational text for Islamic tolerance, reinforcing the ethical imperative against coercion in matters of faith. Historical instances, such as the Prophet Muhammad's governance in Medina, exemplify how legal and social structures institutionalized tolerance.

In Buddhism, tolerance is similarly regarded as a virtue integral to spiritual and social flourishing. The Four Brahmavihāras, compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), establish a framework in which tolerance is expressed not only as forbearance but as an active cultivation of goodwill towards all beings. *The Dhammapada* highlights: "Enduring patience is the highest asceticism. The Buddhas declare *Nibbāna* to be the supreme goal. He is not a true monk who harms others, nor a true renunciant who oppresses others." This affirmation of non-harm and forbearance is echoed in canonical narratives and the conduct of Buddhist rulers, such as Emperor Aśoka, whose edicts advocate respect and honor for all religious traditions. Thus, both Islam and Buddhism regard tolerance as a spiritual and ethical discipline, making it indispensable for cultivating virtuous communities and realizing religious ideals.

b) Doctrinal and Structural Distinctions

Despite overlapping ethical emphases, Islam and Buddhism diverge sharply in the doctrinal sources and rationales for tolerance, reflecting their broader theological and metaphysical orientations. Islam, as a monotheistic tradition, grounds tolerance in the sovereignty and justice of God. The Qur'an and Sunnah provide detailed prescriptions for the treatment of non-Muslims, which are subsequently codified in legal frameworks such as the *dhimmi* system, the Ottoman millet, and the Constitution of Medina. These systems offer minority communities protection and autonomy, yet also delineate the boundaries of interfaith engagement and religious rights within a fundamentally theocentric worldview. The Qur'anic affirmation, "To each of you We prescribed a law and a method…", acknowledges diversity as divinely intended as a test to human, and frames tolerance as a juridical and moral obligation emanating from divine will. Tolerance as instantiated in classical Islamic governance, thus integrates tolerance as a structured, enforceable principle, balancing communal harmony with religious particularity.

In contrast, Buddhism's nontheistic orientation situates tolerance within a psychological and soteriological context. Absent a creator God or revealed law, Buddhist ethics derive from the doctrines of karma, impermanence, and the Four Noble Truths. Tolerance (*kṣānti*) is cultivated not through legal mandate, but as a means of overcoming the mental defilements, anger, hatred, and delusion that obstruct liberation (*nibbāna*). The path of the Bodhisattva, as articulated by Śāntideva, prioritizes forbearance as the supreme antidote to hatred, rooted in the experiential realization of interconnectedness and compassion. Buddhist communities historically implemented tolerance not through rigid legal mechanisms, but through cultural integration, adaptation, and dialogical openness to other traditions. This is evident in the syncretic evolution of

Buddhism in India, China, and Southeast Asia, where Buddhist principles facilitated religious pluralism without the need for legal frameworks comparable to Islamic law.

c) Tolerance as Divine Command versus Path of Self-Liberation

A further axis of comparison concerns the motivation and teleology of tolerance in each tradition. Islamic tolerance is fundamentally a divine command, anchored in God's justice and mercy, and implemented through ethical law and communal responsibility. It is both a collective and individual duty: believers must embody tolerance as a manifestation of faithfulness to God's will, as well as uphold it within societal structures. The legal mechanisms ensuring tolerance are not arbitrary but are rooted in the overarching purpose of divine testing and justice, as articulated in Qur'anic injunctions.

While in Buddhism, tolerance emerges as an existential necessity for self-liberation. Rather than fulfilling a divine command, the Buddhist practitioner cultivates tolerance to extinguish the causes of suffering, greed, hatred, and delusion, and to progress toward awakening. The practice of *kṣānti* is intimately connected to the eradication of negative karma and the realization of non-self (*anattā*). While both traditions value tolerance, the grounds for doing so are distinct: for Muslims, it is obedience to God and the pursuit of communal harmony; for Buddhists, it is the realization of inner peace and the cessation of suffering through wisdom and compassion.

d) Contemporary Manifestations and Challenges

The practical outworkings of these theological and ethical principles are visible in the social and political arrangements of contemporary Muslim and Buddhist societies. Islamic-majority societies often enshrine religious tolerance in constitutional or legal provisions, reflecting the juridical nature of *tasāmuḥ*. However, the realization of these ideals is conditioned by historical,

political, and socio-economic factors, leading at times to both exemplary coexistence and, paradoxically, episodes of sectarianism or discrimination. Similarly, Buddhist-majority societies emphasize tolerance as an ethical and cultural practice, with historical precedents for peaceful pluralism. Yet, modern realities, such as Buddhist nationalist movements in Myanmar or Sri Lanka, demonstrate that the application of tolerance is neither uniform nor immune to distortion by political forces.

In conclusion, both Islam and Buddhism provide sophisticated and multi-layered frameworks for religious tolerance, anchored in shared ethical principles but differentiated by their doctrinal premises, legal architectures, and soteriological aims. Recognizing the convergences and divergences between these traditions is not merely an academic exercise but a prerequisite for meaningful interfaith dialogue and robust tolerance in an increasingly interconnected world. By situating tolerance at the intersection of theology, ethics, and social practice, a more rigorous comparative approach not only illuminates the unique contributions of each tradition but also highlights pathways for collaborative engagement and mutual respect in diverse societies.

Conclusion

This study has provided a comparative exploration of religious tolerance in Islam and Buddhism, focusing on the concepts of *tasāmuḥ* and *kṣānti*. The findings illustrate that while both traditions promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence, their approaches are shaped by distinct theological, ethical, and historical frameworks. The analysis of religious tolerance within these traditions has highlighted their shared ethical foundations, doctrinal differences, and real-world applications in various societies. First, Islam and Buddhism both emphasize tolerance, but their theological underpinnings differ

significantly. Islamic tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) is grounded in theistic and legal principles, where religious coexistence is part of divine justice and legal frameworks. The Qur'an (2:256) explicitly states "there is no compulsion in religion," and Prophet Muhammad's governance in Medina set a precedent for pluralistic coexistence. The Islamic model of tolerance is often structured within legal frameworks that protect religious minorities while maintaining Shariah-based governance in some societies.

Conversely, Buddhist tolerance (*kṣānti*) is embedded in a non-theistic spiritual framework, where patience, non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) are essential for self-liberation. Buddhist tolerance is not mandated by divine law but cultivated through ethical discipline and meditative practice. The Bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Dhammapada's emphasis on patience highlight how tolerance is a path toward enlightenment rather than a legal or external obligation. Thus, while both traditions uphold tolerance, Islam frames it within a divine and legalistic order, whereas Buddhism presents it as an intrinsic aspect of self-cultivation and ethical perfection.

Second, historically, both Islam and Buddhism have demonstrated models of religious tolerance validate their doctrinal teachings. Several historical examples of tolerance model in Islam and Buddhism illustrate how these traditions have implemented tolerance in governance, interfaith relations, and social integration. These historical models demonstrate the tolerance has been an integral part of both traditions, influencing legal structures, interfaith relations, and governance systems.

While this study has provided a detailed comparison of Islamic and Buddhist tolerance, further research is needed to expand the scope of interfaith studies and explore practical applications of religious tolerance in modern societies for example Christian and Hindu perspectives on religious tolerance, comparing their historical and

contemporary approaches to interfaith coexistence. Including these traditions would provide a more comprehensive interreligious perspective, enhancing academic discussions on universal principles of tolerance. While historical and doctrinal analyses are crucial, ethnographic fieldwork can provide practical insights into how religious tolerance is lived and practiced in everyday communities. Ethnographic research would help bridge theoretical discussions with real-world applications, ensuring the religious tolerance is not just an abstract principle but a lived reality.

In short, religious tolerance is not merely an Islamic or Buddhist ideal, it is a universal value that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. While Islam and Buddhism conceptualize tolerance differently, they ultimately share the goal of fostering peace, mutual respect, and harmonious coexistence.

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