

En Route

Owners of dreams

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Every time when bombs are detonated on purpose to kill and injure innocent people, we all ask why. We ask who it is who can do such terrible things and we wonder if they could not find other ways of expressing their grievances. Sometimes, we may suspect that there are no real motives behind, and even that outsiders are used to create insecurity and chaos. Last week, sixty people were killed in Quetta, and more than double that number injured causing pain and suffering; some will die and others will face a life as physically and mentally traumatized and crippled people.

Those who carry out such atrocities are no longer *owners of dreams*. They have lost their way. They have lost their trust in God and fellow human beings. They have no understanding for the concept of tolerance.

I grieve the victims, but I also feel sorry for the perpetrators, wondering how it could happen in a country such as Pakistan with kind and gentle people. How can some people go so far astray? Do they really believe they will get any results that are positive? As a pacifist, I also ask such questions to governments who use military force against other countries, even groups within their own countries. Is it not unworthy of human beings in our time to use war and terror as methods of trying to solve conflicts? Besides, wars and violence rarely solve conflicts; they rather create more and lasting hatred. It is only negotiations and dialogue that solve conflicts, based on empathy with the suffering of others and a wish to make the future good for all. Is this difficult? It can be, but it shouldn't be. We are all *owners or dreams*, believing in a better tomorrow, not only for ourselves but also for our neighbours.

Jesus, Issa, said that we should love God above all, and equally important, we should love our neighbours as ourselves. Furthermore, Jesus said that we should love our enemies, too, an advice that we throughout history have not followed, being it Christians, Muslims or other believers. His advice is a logical advice, if we want to listen and see. Because it is through doing good that we become good. We should do what is right and fair, equally for our enemies and ourselves. St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) underlined the same in his beautiful prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me saw love." Because: "It is in giving, that we receive; it is in pardoning, that we are pardoned."

Then, far from perfect as we human beings are, we may say that it is impossible to love our enemies. That is perhaps true. Only God is unconditional love. However, we may interchange the word 'love' for 'tolerate', as is closer to the original word's meaning. Thus, we should tolerate our enemies, even respect them and try to understand them. That is more feasible, in small and big conflicts, if we try to put ourselves in our enemies' place. How do we look from the enemies' point of view? We should remember that those that we disagree with are also *owners of dreams*. They, as we, hope for conflicts to be solved so that they can live in peace, harmony and prosperity.

But the term 'tolerance', what exactly does it mean, and what does it not mean?

The Latin word 'tolerantia' means to bear, endure, live with and have a permissive attitude toward something, without accepting, or agreeing. It means to have sympathy or indulgence for something or someone who is different from oneself, as regards opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc.

Tolerance does not mean to accept or agree with the other. It doesn't even mean to respect. Well, it means to respect the person who has different opinions, or is different and behave differently. For example, if I am a Christian and you are a Muslim, we disagree on some religious issues. But we must respect each other as persons. We must accept each other's right to be different. Ideally, we must help each other to be as good believers as we can within each other's different faiths. After all, God is one and the same, we all say.

The French philosopher and scientist Voltaire (1694-1778) was one of the European Enlightenment's deepest thinkers and fiercest debaters and satirists, advocating for freedom of religion, freedom of expression,

separation of church (religion) and state, greater fairness in tax collection among the different classes, and less corruption and privileges by the secular and religious leader. The only way for the masses to avoid exploitation mentally and physically was through education, under an enlightened monarch, Voltaire thought. As he grew older and perhaps more realistic, he altered the conclusion of one of his main works “Candid, or Optimism” (1759). He didn’t think change should wait till people were educated. He simply said: “It is up to us to cultivate the garden.” But he didn’t live to see the French Revolution, which began in 1789.

Voltaire’s huge production of scientific and literary books and pamphlets in all genres has been read till our days and they have played essential roles in moral philosophy and politics. Underlining his liberal and tolerant attitudes, let us include a famous citation in a letter to a friend, where he is said to have written: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

That is also what I want to emphasize in this article. I want to say: Let us live and let live. There is room and opportunities for everyone in God’s garden. That is what can lead us away from terrible bomb attacks like the recent one in Quetta, and so that we can start dialogue and cooperation even if we disagree on certain things.

We are many Pakistanis, French, Norwegians and people from all countries, creeds and cradles, social backgrounds, classes, ages and genders, who are *owners of dreams* of a better tomorrow, the way Voltaire too was dreaming and working purposefully. Even many of those who use wrong and violent means and weapons also have dreams. We need to help them to see how they, too, can argue for their viewpoints and causes in peaceful ways. Even if we detest what they stand for, we should help them to change and see their dreams realized through democratic ways.

Yet, there are also limitations to what we should tolerate and accept. What we do must not be harmful to others. We must not infringe on the integrity and values of others. We must work for equal human rights for all.

Imagine how powerful we can become together if we work for good in this world, with God’s help. Imagine how prosperous, peaceful and harmonious our societies would become. This is what all who are *owners of dreams* want – to be applied in concrete situations in Pakistan and elsewhere, such as in the upcoming elections in Kenya, where intolerance and violence flared up in the elections five years ago.

Those who are downtrodden, exploited, humiliated and disrespected today will be given their rights and rewards – and also those who exploit will be freed of their burden of exploiting. When slavery and apartheid ended, also the exploiters were saved from the terrible structures they were part of. We should also look at our own times and situations: Do we do the utmost to make life better for people in our societies, for all the girls who are out-of-school, the women and men who are illiterate, the boys and men who are exploited at workplaces, and so on? Do we do what we can to help others, and ourselves, to see a better tomorrow?

With God’s help, may we see our dreams realized - and then, if we employ tolerant approaches and thinking, there will never be terrorist attacks like the recent one in Quetta and elsewhere. So much direct and structural violence would be ended. We must say as was said after World War II: “Never again” - because such violence is degrading to us as human beings.

As believers in God and humanity, we must make every day and every action into a sermon for good. That is what we must work for, all of us who are *owners of dreams*, believers in tolerance and equality, and knowing that the best days are yet to come. That is my promise and hope. So, let us all do what we can, and be assured that God will do the rest.

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