



## Tolerance in the Perspective of Surah Al-Kafirun

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Surah Al Kafirun, Religious, Tolerance, ; Islam, Perspektif

*Received :* 12, Oktober

*Revised :* 20, November

*Accepted:* 3, December

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### ABSTRACT

This research discusses focusing on Surah Al-Kafirun and hadis which are relevant in the context of religious tolerance. This surah (Al-Kafirun) was revealed in response to the polytheists' offer to the Prophet Muhammad Saw to alternately worship Allah and their gods, highlighting the importance of the principle of oneness in Islam. Currently, there is disharmony between non-Islamic and Muslim communities, particularly regarding the term "kafir," which is often perceived as discrediting those outside of Islam. Several of Mufassir, such as Al-Tabari, state that these verses were addressed to the leaders of the polytheists, while Al-Razi emphasizes that the Prophet did not permit his followers to commit disbelief, as he was sent to guide his people towards goodness. This research is a library study that examines verses and hadis as well as literature from various mufassir that are relevant in the Quran and hadis, particularly in the context of Surah Al-Kafirun. The author argues that the term "kafir," meaning "closed heart," is more appropriate than "non-Muslim," which translates to "not safe." Through this analysis, the author hopes to demonstrate that although the term carries negative connotations, every closed heart has the potential to open through Allah's guidance. This creates hope for building better tolerance among religious communities, promoting dialogue and deeper understanding.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In Islam, tolerance is one of the fundamental values that shares the principle of engagement in the human world. This teaching also provides an illustration of the opportunity to embrace religion in a good and proper way. Islam portrays the believer, who will show the religion as a mercy to the worlds (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*). Clearly, this claim indicates that Islam has the potential to be a source of harmony for all of humanity and the universe.

However, in recent years, the understanding of religious tolerance in Islam has often been distorted by various differing views and thoughts. How people outside Islam understand Islam, especially in the context of religious tolerance, is often influenced by the negative narratives that arise from violent actions by a few individuals or groups. This leads to the formation of incorrect stereotypes about Islam, including questions regarding certain verses in the Quran, such as Surah Al-Kafirun. This has become an interesting topic to explore, supported by Hadiths as references, hoping that this study will bring enlightenment. Surah Al-Kafirun, which explicitly declares differences in belief, often comes under scrutiny in discussions about tolerance. Many interpret this verse in a way that could trigger misunderstandings, so it is important to conduct a thorough study of the context and correct interpretations. The diverse interpretations of Quranic verses, especially those related to tolerance, demonstrate that a holistic and contextual understanding is essential to explain the true essence of Islamic teachings.

Some views of Surah Al-Kafirun are limited to fragments of verses that become problematic when viewed negatively, as the intended meaning of the verse is not properly understood. In reality, the Quran is the highest language, and each verse can have many interpretations. Therefore, for those who lack understanding of the Quranic verses, interpreting them without knowledge may lead to issues – not because of the Quran itself, but due to the lack of knowledge in understanding it.

The Quran has beautiful language, and in calling humanity, it embodies the beauty that the Quran possesses. The Quran, as a book, is a miracle that will never end to be read, from children to adults, from kindergarten to university professors. The Quran will never be completed in terms of learning and study, and this is what makes the Quran special. The entire content of the Quran can be used as material for preaching, starting from Surah Al-Fatihah to the last Surah, Annas.

The Quran, as the primary source of Islamic law, is absolute and unquestionable. However, the interpretation of its verses often varies, which can be due to differences in cultural, historical, and social backgrounds. On the other hand, Hadiths, as the secondary source, also have varying levels of authenticity, requiring a critical approach in understanding and applying them. The Quran is the source of all Islamic law and serves as the main reference, followed by

Hadiths as secondary references. In interpreting a verse, scholars of tafsir may have differing views, influenced by conditions at the time, such as the reasons behind the revelation of a verse (Asbabun Nuzul), or different methods of interpreting verses by some scholars of tafsir. This condition results in various interpretations but does not change the content of the verse itself. This is why the study aims to conduct an analysis of the Quran and Hadith related to tolerance in Surah Al-Kafirun.

With this background, the aim of this study is to explore the teachings of tolerance in Islam through Surah Al-Kafirun and relevant Hadiths. It is hoped that this research will provide enlightenment and a better understanding of tolerance in the context of Islam, as well as help build a communication bridge between Muslims and non-Muslim communities.

### **Research Methodology**

This research uses a descriptive method with a library research approach, aiming to explore and analyze the Quranic verses and Hadiths related to Surah Al-Kafirun. The data collection process is carried out by utilizing various literatures from scholars of tafsir and other relevant sources.

The first step in this study is to identify the verses found in Surah Al-Kafirun and related Hadiths. This research refers to various tafsir books, both classical and contemporary, to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and context of the verses. Additionally, a review of previously published journals is also conducted to examine existing views and determine the contributions that can be added by this research.

In this study, an analysis of the collected data is performed, prioritizing new perspectives that may not have been extensively explored in previous studies. Emphasis on other aspects of Surah Al-Kafirun is expected to provide new insights into understanding the context of preaching, especially in the current social and cultural situations.

The results of this analysis are expected not only to enrich the scientific treasure but also to provide practical contributions to the implementation of preaching in society. This research aims to present comprehensive and in-depth results, so it can serve as a reference for future studies and provide enlightenment in understanding the messages of preaching contained in Surah Al-Kafirun.

Furthermore, the research methodology uses a qualitative approach, covering several related aspects as an explanation of the form of the qualitative approach taken.

## Research Findings and Discussion

### 1. Definition of Tolerance

Tolerance, as defined in the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Dictionary), comes from the word *toleran*, which means to have an attitude of respecting, allowing, or permitting differing views or beliefs, practices, or behaviors. This indicates that tolerance has a nature or attitude of being tolerant (Nasional, 2008). According to Misrawi (2007:161), the term tolerance originates from the Latin word *tolerantia*, which means leniency, kindness, ease, and patience (Yenuri et al., 2021). Simon Blackburn (2017: 871) explains that the meaning of tolerance has greatly evolved and now tends to be more neutral. He defines tolerance as the restraint from acting on matters that one disagrees with, especially in religion, politics, or anything seen as foreign from one's perspective. Meanwhile, Nurcholish Madjid (2009: 15-17) refers to this concept of openness as *inclusivism* (Rifki Rosyad, 2021).

In terminological terms, according to Abu A'la Maududi, tolerance can be defined as an attitude of respecting the beliefs and actions of others, even if they are considered wrong from our perspective. Tolerance means refraining from using violence or coercion to change the beliefs of others and not obstructing their right to practice what they believe (Rosyidi, 2019).

Thus, tolerance encompasses respect and acceptance of differences, alongside the ability to restrain oneself from actions deemed unacceptable, especially in religious contexts. Tolerance is also related to inclusivism, as it involves openness to differences. Therefore, tolerance is an attitude of respect, self-restraint, and openness toward various views and beliefs.

In Islam, tolerance grants non-Muslims the absolute right to freely follow any religion; it is not just Muslims who are given this freedom (Ghaib et al., n.d.). Tolerance in Islam is crucial and aligns with the principles of respect and acceptance of differences. Islam and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) instructed Muslims to respect the beliefs of others and not to harm others' faiths, particularly in the realm of religion. The concept of acknowledgment and inclusivism is also reflected in Islamic teachings, where Muslims are commanded to demonstrate respect and tolerance, encompassing differences in beliefs. The Quran asks Muslims to unite and maintain positive friendships, avoiding disputes that disturb unity. Therefore, Islam embodies tolerance as an attitude of respect, self-restraint, and understanding toward various viewpoints and beliefs, fostering a harmonious and peaceful society as *rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy to the worlds).

## 2. The Importance of Tolerance in Islam

In Islamic teachings, tolerance is seen as the essence of religion, educating its followers to respect and accept all forms of differences. In light of this, Muslims are encouraged to live peacefully alongside followers of other religions and all of Allah's creations. The Quran instructs Muslims to recognize the importance of respecting and honoring the beliefs and views of others, as well as their own, in order to achieve harmony and compassion. The teachings of the Quran and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) guide Muslims to be just and fair to everyone, including non-Muslims.

Tolerance in Islam is one of the most significant concepts, covering the most fundamental aspects of life. The core value of tolerance is to maintain peace through respect and acceptance of differences, whether they are based on ethnicity, race, or religion. Tolerance plays a role in seeking harmonious relationships by promoting communication and collaboration, encouraging individuals from diverse backgrounds to foster brotherhood and understanding. Tolerance also creates a just social environment, where everyone is embraced and treated with respect. Tolerance is not merely a moral model, but the foundation of a harmonious and just life, based on positive and prosperous tolerance.

## 3. Tolerance in the Perspective of Tafsir of Surah Al-Kafirun

Surah Al-Kafirun provides clear guidance for Muslims in interacting with non-Muslims, emphasizing the importance of tolerance and respect. Allah invites His followers to acknowledge the differences in beliefs while maintaining mutual respect. The statement "*For you is your religion, and for me is my religion*" (Al-Kafirun 109:6) emphasizes the right of every individual to adhere to their own beliefs.

- Say, "O disbelievers,
- I do not worship what you worship,
- Nor do you worship the One whom I w
- And I will never worship what you wo:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا  
تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا  
أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾ وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾  
وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾ لَكُمْ  
دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

The tolerant attitude in this surah reflects the Islamic principle of living peacefully alongside others. Muslims are encouraged to interact with understanding and without judgment, creating a harmonious social environment where differences are appreciated.

Thus, Surah Al-Kafirun not only serves as a guide for Muslims in interacting with non-Muslims but also calls for all parties to understand the

importance of tolerance in religious life, based on mutual respect. Several *mufasssirīn* (scholars of tafsir) have provided various interpretations of Surah Al-Kafirun, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging differences in belief between Muslims and non-believers while teaching a firm yet respectful attitude toward these differences, as follows:

- **First, Tafsir At-Thabari.** The reason for the revelation of this verse was due to the polytheists offering a proposal to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to alternate worshipping Allah and their idols for one year. Allah responded to this offer in Surah Al-Kafirun, indicating that such a proposal would not be accepted, as it was known to Allah that the polytheists would never believe. The Prophet was instructed to make them despair of ever achieving their goal. This was the case both at the time of the Prophet and in the future, as the polytheists would never embrace faith, leading to their defeat in the Battle of Badr (Atas et al., n.d.).
- **Second, Tafsir Imam Ar-Razi.** Imam Ar-Razi states that the verse implies that the polytheists should hold on to their disbelief, while the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) holds fast to the teachings of monotheism and sincerity. According to Imam Ar-Razi, the Prophet did not permit his followers to engage in disbelief, as he was sent to guide people toward goodness and to prevent corruption.
- **Third, Tafsir Al-Qurtubi.** Abu Shalih narrated from Ibn Abbas that the Quraysh leaders asked Prophet Muhammad (SAW) if he would agree to show respect for their idols by either kissing or touching them, in return for their belief in his message. When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) refused, the revelation of Surah Al-Kafirun came down, reinforcing the firm stance against such compromises and the unwavering message of monotheism (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi 20, n.d.).

In conclusion, the interpretations of Surah Al-Kafirun by various scholars highlight that the verse conveys a strong message of maintaining one's own belief while respecting the beliefs of others, without compromising one's own faith.

**Fourth, Tafsir Ibnu Kathir.** The phrase "*For you is your religion, and for me is my religion*" in Surah Al-Kafirun: 6 emphasizes the distinction between Islam and polytheism. This verse illustrates that everyone adheres to their own beliefs, with no similarity in worship practices. The Prophet ﷺ firmly stated that he would never follow their acts of worship, and Muslims are similarly expected to uphold the principles of their faith. (Al-Sheikh, 1994)

**Fifth, Tafsir Inspirasi.** Disbelievers are accountable for their ways, while believers have conveyed the truth to mankind. For their ways, believers themselves are responsible. Any violent actions taken by disbelievers will ultimately prove futile; in the end, the truth will triumph. Hold steadfastly to the truth. (Zainal Arifin Zakaria, 2018: 1043)

In this interpretation, the author generally conveys a spirit of optimism in life. Faith brings happiness, as reflected in the above commentary, in alignment with the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ narrated by Muslim and considered authentic by the consensus of scholars:

حَدَّثَنَا إِسْحَاقُ بْنُ إِبرَاهِيمَ وَمُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى بْنُ أَبِي عُمَرَ وَمُحَمَّدُ بْنُ بَشَّارٍ جَمِيعًا عَنِ الثَّقَفِيِّ قَالَ ابْنُ أَبِي عُمَرَ  
ي صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ ثَلَاثٌ مَنْ كُنَّ فِيهِ زَحَدْنَا عَبْدُ الْوَهَّابِ عَنْ أَيُّوبَ عَنْ أَبِي قِلَابَةَ عَنْ أَنَسٍ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ  
وَجَدَ بِهِنَّ حَلَاوَةَ الْإِيمَانِ مَنْ كَانَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْهِ مِمَّا سِوَاهُمَا وَأَنْ يُحِبَّ الْمَرْءَ لَا يُحِبُّهُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ وَأَنْ يَكْرَهُ  
أَنْ يَعُودَ فِي الْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ أَنْ أَنْقَذَهُ اللَّهُ مِنْهُ كَمَا يَكْرَهُ أَنْ يُقَدِّفَ فِي النَّارِ

#### 4. Surah Al-Kafirun Emphasizes the Importance of Tolerance Toward Others' Beliefs

One of the most well-known verses from this surah is "*Lakum dinukum waliya din*" (For you is your religion, and for me is my religion) (QS. Al-Kafirun: 6). This verse highlights that, despite the profound differences in belief between Muslims and disbelievers, every individual has the right to follow their own religion without coercion. This serves as a recognition of religious freedom, which is a fundamental principle of tolerance among different religious communities. Faith cannot and should not be imposed on anyone.

#### 5. Encouraging Muslims to Remain Firm in Their Beliefs While Respecting Others' Faith

As Muslims, it is taught to always uphold faith in Allah and His Messenger in every aspect of life, based on the principles outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith. However, Islam also emphasizes the importance of interacting wisely with others, especially in respecting their beliefs. Islam is a religion that teaches adherence to principles while showing respect and appreciation for others, regardless of their religion or convictions.

Surah Al-Kafirun strongly asserts the concept of belief while simultaneously delivering a powerful message of tolerance. The verse "*Lakum dinukum waliya din*" (For you is your religion, and for me is my religion) reflects that no one should impose their beliefs on others, and everyone has the right to their own convictions in matters of faith. Islam teaches respect for others' beliefs and prohibits forcing religious views upon anyone.

This principle is evident in various verses of the Qur'an and Hadith, which stress religious freedom and the respect for individuals' rights to choose their path. One frequently quoted verse is from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:256):

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۗ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

*“There is no compulsion in religion; verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path.”*

This verse teaches that faith must be accepted consciously and freely, without pressure or coercion. Allah’s guidance encourages Muslims to firmly uphold their faith while respecting the individual journey of others in seeking truth and understanding.

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۗ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

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## CONCLUSION

Surah Al-Kafirun teaches the importance of tolerance rooted in the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. Its main message revolves around respecting religious freedom. *"To you be your religion, and to me my religion"* is a verse that highlights how differences in belief should not be a source of conflict but rather respected as part of tolerance.

Tolerance, from the perspective of Surah Al-Kafirun, is not a sign of weakness or compromise in religious principles but rather an understanding that every individual has the right to choose their own path and beliefs without coercion. Muslims are taught to remain steadfast in their faith while also respecting others' rights to exercise their freedom of belief. This is the essence of true tolerance in Islam, which encourages its followers to coexist peacefully with others in diversity without compromising the principles of their faith.

Tolerance in the context of Surah Al-Kafirun requires a holistic and contextual understanding. Through in-depth study, it is hoped that negative stereotypes can be diminished, and a correct understanding of Islamic teachings strengthened. Thus, Surah Al-Kafirun serves as a reminder that Islam embodies mutual respect for human religiosity. Tolerance in Islam is a manifestation of religious maturity, recognizing differences while preserving the sanctity of the faith.

Islam teaches steadfast belief in Allah, adherence to His commandments, and maintaining the identity of a Muslim. This steadfastness must be accompanied by respect for others' beliefs. Islam does not promote forcing religion upon others; instead, it calls for coexistence in diversity, with mutual respect and acknowledgment of others' right to choose. Tolerance does not mean compromising religious truth but respecting each individual's right to live according to their chosen beliefs, as long as it does not infringe upon the rights of others. *Wallahu a'lam bisawab.*

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