



Is Participating with the Festive Season a Sign of Respect and Tolerance?

When we are brought up in the West and attend the school systems in these countries, we are introduced from a young age to the concepts of **respect** and **tolerance**. We are taught that these concepts lie at the basis of Western societies and that citizens living in these societies should uphold these high values. The practise of these concepts in Western societies is that one should be tolerant to different ideas, opinions and beliefs, and that we should respect other people's values and traditions.

We are also taught that we don't necessarily need to agree with each other as long as we just show "respect and tolerance" as this lies at the basis of creating good community relations. With this idea in mind, we will be taught about the different religions in the world as any other subject and we will learn about the different festivals and traditions belonging to these religions whilst doing so. This respect and tolerance also entail that we are expected to participate and help organise the different festivals at school even though they emanate from a very different viewpoint of life and/or religion than our own.

This notion of respect and tolerance towards different values and beliefs directly stems from the framework of secular liberal values where the belief of others is tolerated within society but is not without limits. The belief of the other needs to **coincide with the secular liberal way of life**. It is this last sentence where we start seeing the cracks of the manifestation of the values of **respect** and **tolerance** from a Western liberal perspective.

So yes, we will be allowed to celebrate our Eid festival in schools or at work in the same way that it will be expected to attend the Christmas celebrations. This is because, from a secular way of life, there is nothing wrong with attending a celebration of any religion as long as it doesn't interfere with the secular way of life. Celebrating Eid, explaining the background of this feast and allowing children to take sweets and treats to school perfectly fit within this framework. But we need to understand that this respect and tolerance have got very clear limits and that it is the cause of erratic behaviour and decision making when we see its implementation in the West.

For example, we do not see the same **respect** and **tolerance** when debating on how far "freedom of speech" should go in regards to insulting the most important person to 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide, the beloved Prophet Muhammed (saw). Respect and tolerance are nowhere to be found and Western governments suddenly have no problem at all with causing sadness and grief to so many Muslims. If the concern was truly about being respectful and tolerant, wouldn't it be far more important to put limits to this freedom of speech in order to prevent insulting so many Muslims than to allow children to celebrate Eid at school.

A true debate on the correctness and soundness of the value of "freedom of speech" is hardly tolerated, and compromising it in order to show **respect** and **tolerance** will not be facilitated. In fact, there is a big chance that you will be labelled as an extremist or somebody who is still stuck in Medieval times when trying to initiate any kind of discussion on the subject. This is because we will then be thinking outside the secular framework; something that isn't tolerated and clearly highlights the boundaries of this so called respect.

Therefore, Muslims shouldn't believe the narrative that not participating in Christmas celebrations or any other celebration which compromises our own belief has anything to do with being disrespectful or intolerant. Muslims need to understand that differences in religious values and beliefs aren't what lie at the cause of friction between different groups in society and that pressuring somebody to participate with celebrations they do not believe in can't ever be seen as a means to create cohesion within society.

Instead, we need to invest our time in examining what Islam teaches us about the participation of celebrations which emanate from different creeds and we need to spend our time in explaining the reasons why we have chosen for the path to dedicate our lives to that which was sent to us by our Creator Allah (swt). Imam Ahmad in his Musnad reported that Uqbah bin Amir (ra) reported that the Prophet (saw) said: «يَوْمُ الْفِطْرِ، وَيَوْمُ النَّحْرِ، وَأَيَّامُ التَّشْرِيقِ عِيدُنَا أَهْلَ الْإِسْلَامِ» **"The day of Fitr and days of Tashriq are our holidays, the people of Islam."**

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