

TOLERANCE

THE ESSENCE OF FAITH

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STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS, FOR THE MOST PART, DO NOT LIE IN THE DOMAIN OF RELIGION. THEY ARE CREATED BY FOLLOWERS OF ONE RELIGION OR ANOTHER ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OWN VISIONS AND IDEAS, AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CURRENT TIME. HOWEVER, CONFUSING THE FAITH INHERENT OF MAN AND THE RELIGION, WHICH APPEARS IN HIS LIFE MUCH LATER, AND MAKING CONTRADICTIONARY CONCLUSIONS ON THIS BASIS IS ONE OF THE GREATEST VICIES OF ALL SOCIETIES.



In contrast to this historical misunderstanding, there is a humane and highly civilized concept like **religious tolerance**, and without obvious evidence, it is closely linked to the essence of this or that religion all the time. However, I believe, the roots of tolerance should not be sought only in religion itself. It is useless, and it has never led, and is unlikely to lead, to the desired results. Ironically and paradoxically, this desire often works against religion itself.

The practice of the realization of faith shows that the main grains of religious tolerance are available in places where there is practically no nationalism and ethnocentrism, where there is love for the homeland and people and where deep belief in one chosen God is not based on hatred toward people of other nationalities and other faiths. Only in a reality where there is love and respect, is it possible to join the divinity of existence and coexistence.

Religious tolerance is part of the overall system of relationships in a society where, as we know, there are other, for example, democratic rules of establishing relationships. The main thing is whether it is possible to maintain social relations at an equal distance from both nationalism and religious extremism. This is a tall task for politicians, who, for quite objective practical reasons, have been unable to find and offer the public an acceptable universal option for centuries. But this unsuccessful quest has been going on since ancient times.

The thing is that between nationalism and patriotism, just like between religious extremism and tolerance, there is a deep chasm, which is often ignored by researchers.

Anticipating the question about the essence of patriotism and nationalism as important determinants of religious hatred and religious tolerance, I believe that patriotism,

as opposed to nationalism, cannot have an imaginary or real enemy.

Nevertheless, all faiths, as a basis for the creation of various religious organizations and as a whole system of regulations, rules, taboos and permission, are theoretically and textually mutually tolerant and acceptable for the establishment of normal relations between their followers. They, by and large, are designed to organize the relationship between believers in society.

Under present conditions where there are democratic and secular systems aimed at resolving all forms of social relations in society, religious rules are an additional means of organizing human relations and a personality factor.

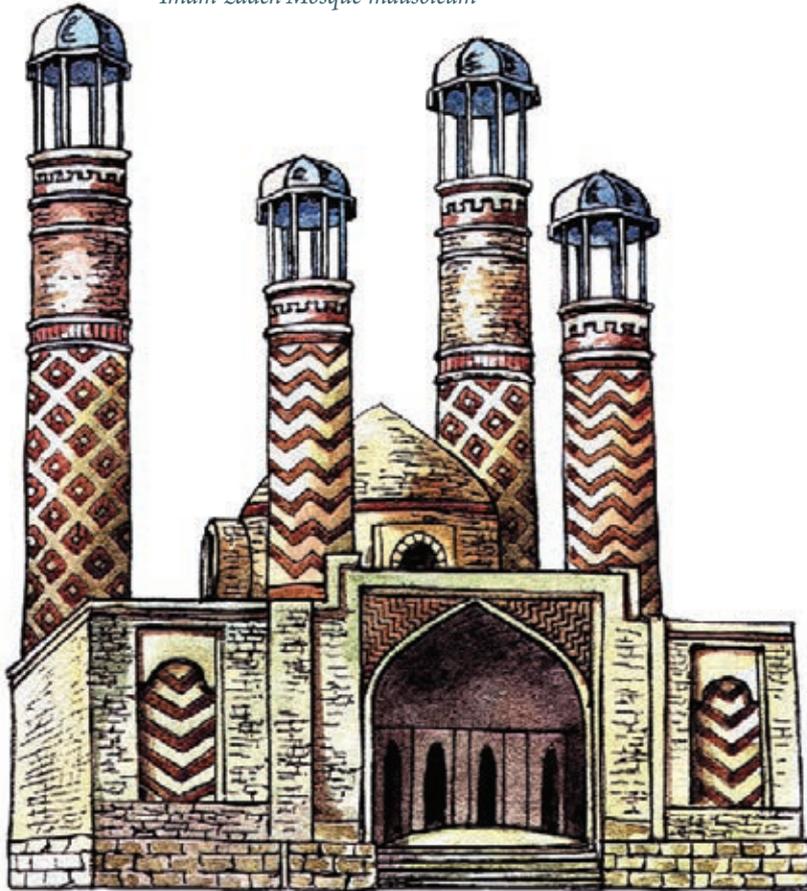
By and large, there is no one faith against another in principle!

Every faith emerged, existed and can exist independently and without interfering with another, since the object of faith - God - is indivisible, He is single. Only ways to Him can be different, and that is reflected and presented in many holy books - the Torah, the Bible, the Koran and Buddhist treatises. It is the endless process of searching for different ways of approaching God that is the main factor in the longevity of different religions. This process, as evidenced by the history of religions, often leads to the division of a religion into several denominations, trends, sects and churches. Strange as it may seem, it is precisely this separation that is one of the major factors in the longevity of essential provisions of religion, i.e. a cornerstone for the preservation of any of them. In such an unusual way, the question of preserving the purity of religious canons and dogmas always remains in the spotlight of believers.

Emanating from the above, it can be concluded that in most cases not



Imam-zadeh Mosque-mausoleum



The Myrrhophores Church

are tolerant of other religions and generally tolerant in a broad sense, because we are not nationalists, ethno-egoistic and ethnocentric.

Here, it suffices to note that more than 20 ethnic minorities have lived in our country for centuries - each with its own faith, language, material and spiritual culture. In our country, along with mosques, there are Orthodox and Catholic churches and synagogues.

On the territory of Azerbaijan, joint activities by followers of different religious denominations have become a tradition from time immemorial. This is an integral part of religious life even in the domestic sphere. Understanding of universality in the diversity of faith and believers themselves is the main criterion for the convergence of people. When the leaders of the more than 10 religious communities - Islam, Christianity represented by Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism, Baptism, Baha'ism (they are represented by religious centres and entities, such as: The Board of Muslims of the Caucasus, the Baku and Caspian Eparchies of the Russian Orthodox Church, three different communities

the faith itself, but only religions, i.e. entities expressing faith can also be composed of many worldly controversies. Religious systems of world outlooks, as a rule, are seriously dif-

ferent from each other. However, the motives of one person's faith objectively cannot get in the way of a person with another faith, as it - faith - is the inner, **spiritual** state and a matter of the heart, and in all likelihood, the gates there are closed to outsiders. Figuratively speaking, the path to God is direct, and it never crossed the paths of millions of other followers of world religions. Parallel paths of approaching God are the main spiritual motive of faith.

In recent years, tolerance - religious tolerance in Azerbaijan - has been spoken about a lot and honestly, being linked to a number of important factors: our history, traditions and even politics. While not excluding their role in the manifestation of religious tolerance, I believe in another thing. **We, Azerbaijanis,**



Kish Temple

Mountainous Jews Synagogue

Evangelist-Lutheran Church

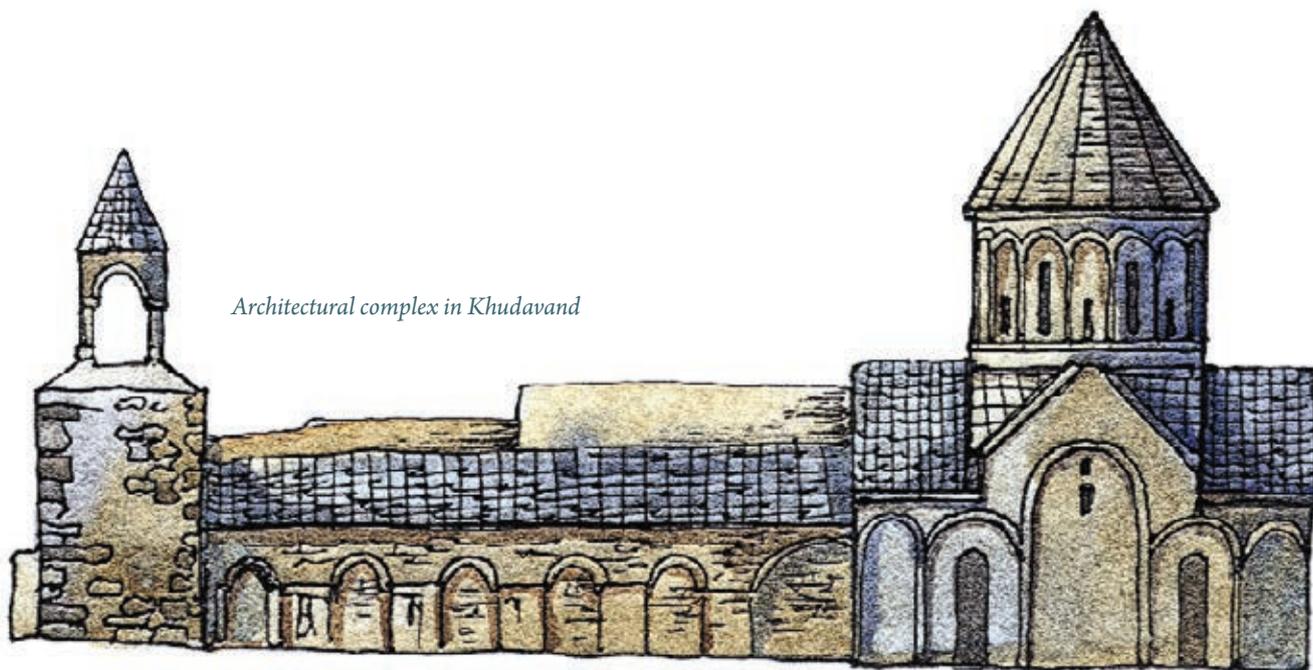


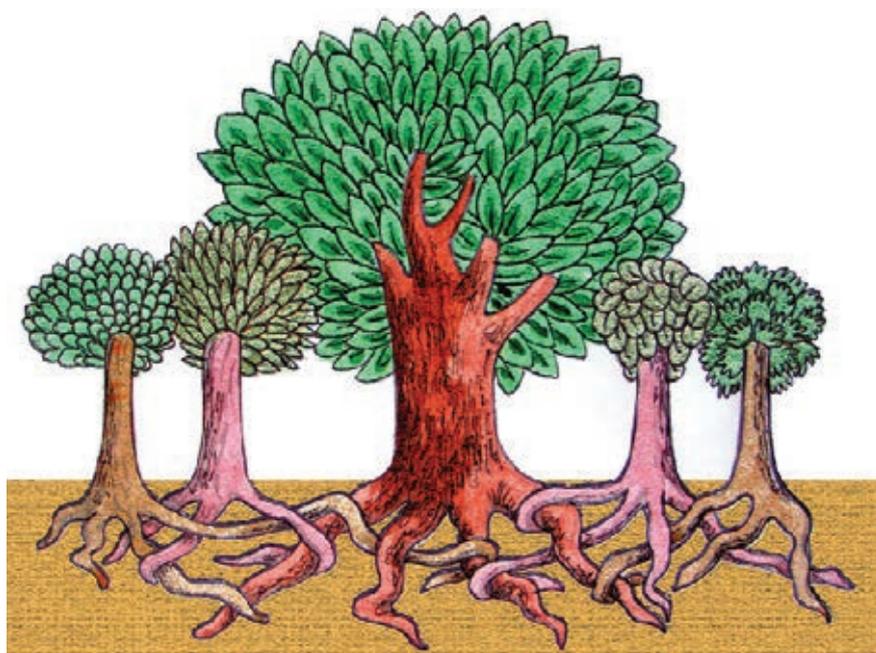
of Mountain, European and Georgian Jews, the Udi Christian Church as a successor to ancient Albania's Christianity, Seventh-Day Adventists and the Hare Krishna community) and other smaller religious groups meet in Azerbaijan, the focus of their conversation is not whose religion is

better or whose God is more powerful or which people God would have preferred. Of course, they are concerned not about such sacral aspects, but about quite ordinary matters of domestic and interpersonal nature. After finishing such an event, each participant feels like part of a community, despite the many differences in the understanding and knowledge of the attributes of God as the Creator: *"He is not mine, He is not yours, and everyone has their own*

God." That's how I would describe the atmosphere of inter-religious life in modern Azerbaijan. This is a serious spiritual structure of inter-religious relations, flowing into the general peaceful stream of the religious tolerance of the more than 8 million people in modern Azerbaijan. Thus, the heritage of our ancestors continues to live. Having adopted Islam back in the 7th-9th centuries, our ancestors did not take any part in the wars of the Caliphate.

Architectural complex in Khudavand





Regardless of whether it is good or bad, religious and national tolerance in the character of Azerbaijanis has not changed for centuries. It lies at the heart of their lifestyle, behavior and relations with other peoples and other religions. This is the main argument in favor of the long and stable tolerance of the Azerbaijanis. It is in their blood and genes. Even where it would be worth demonstrating nationalism and religious intolerance, the Azerbaijanis, for objective reasons, cannot do that, or it is inadequate by definition.

We cannot declare some other people as our enemies forever or regard ourselves as an irreconcilable enemy of anyone else. This is what we inherited from our ancestors, and we cannot change ourselves. The history of aboriginal people, including the Azerbaijanis, who originally inhabited the Caucasus region, confirms that they have had no enemies among those very peoples either in the distant or recent past. We had no problems either with the Georgians, Russians or any other people of the Caucasus. Azerbaijanis were happy

with mutual friendship and broad tolerance. In addition, we know that, historically, Azerbaijanis have had many descendants of mixed marriages. Azerbaijani men of ten married representatives of other nations and had children. Such a soulful "impulse" remains even in the current unfavorable conditions for a long and meaningful friendship. We have what we have, though many consider this behavior our weakness, inexcusable forgetfulness and acquiescence.

The absence of aggressive nationalism is the most important distinguishing feature of our people. It has become the cornerstone of our religious tolerance and friendly relations with the followers of religions of the world. I could cite many examples and compare our people with others, even with our co-religionists. But my patriotism and therefore, religious tolerance do not permit this. The inner spirit of my heart, dominating my mind, consequently fostered new emotions in me - sustained feelings of love for a **person** of another faith or nationality, a person created,

like all of us, by one great nature.

I sincerely prefer to remain as I am. This is my and our inalienable right and what is important, an essential part of everyday life and the dignity of the Azerbaijanis in general. I am sure that despite temporary bright flashes like nationalism and religious extremism caused by circumstances, many of you think and act in the same way as our ancestors and the vast majority of our compatriots in Azerbaijan and abroad. They truly show religious and national tolerance for which the bright minds of other people cite us as an example worthy of emulation and sincere respect. ✦

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