Islam encourages freedom of thought and denounces oppression and compulsion

The Qur'an is a Book revealed to people as a guide to the true path and in this Book, Allah commands man to adopt good morals. This morality is based upon concepts such as love, compassion, tolerance and mercy. The word "Islam" is derived from the word meaning "peace" in Arabic. Islam is a religion revealed to mankind with the intention of presenting a peaceable life through which the infinite compassion and mercy of Allah manifest on earth. Allah calls all people to Islamic morals through which compassion, mercy, peace and tolerance can be experienced all over the world. In **Surat al-Baqara, verse 208**, Allah addresses believers as follows:

> **O You who believe! Enter absolutely into peace (Islam). Do not follow in the footsteps of satan. He is an outright enemy to you.**
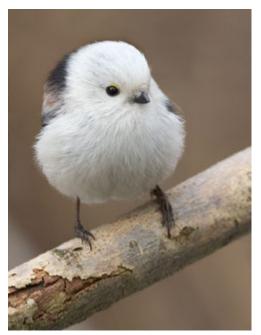
As the verse makes clear, security can only be ensured by "entering into Islam", that is, living by the values of the Qur'an. The values of the Qur'an hold a Muslim responsible for treating all people, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, kindly and justly, protecting the needy and the innocent and preventing the "dissemination of mischief". Mischief comprises all forms of anarchy and terror that remove security, comfort and peace. As Allah says in a verse, **"Allah does not love corruption". (Surat al-Baqara, 205)**

Islam Defends Freedom of Thought

Islam is a religion which provides and guarantees freedom of ideas, thought and life. It has issued commands to prevent and forbid tension, disputes, slander and even negative thinking among people. In the same way that it is determinedly opposed to terrorism and all acts of violence, it has also forbidden even the slightest ideological pressure to be put on them:

> **There is no compulsion in religion. True guidance has become clearly distinct from error. (Surat al-Baqara, 256)**
>
> **So remind them! You are only a reminder. You are not in control of them. (Surat Al-Ghashiyya, 21-22)**

Forcing people to believe in a religion or to adopt its forms of belief is completely contrary to the essence and spirit of Islam. That is because according to Islam, true faith is only possible with free will and freedom of conscience. Of course, Muslims can advise and encourage each other about the features of Qur'anic morality. All believers are charged with explaining Qur'anic morality to people in the nicest manner possible. They will explain the beauties of religion in the light of the verse, **"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair admonition..." (Surat an-Nahl, 125)**, however, they must also bear in mind the verse, **"You are not responsible for their guidance, but Allah guides whoever He wills." (Surat al-Baqara, 272)**

They will never resort to compulsion, nor any kind of physical or psychological pressure. Neither will they use any worldly privilege to turn someone towards religion. When they receive a negative response to what they say, Muslims will reply along the lines of: **"To you your religion, and to me, mine" (Surat al-Kafirun, 6)**

The world we live in contains societies with all kinds of beliefs: Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, deist and even pagan. Muslims living in such a world must be tolerant of all beliefs they come up against, no matter what they may be, and behave forgivingly, justly and humanely. This responsibility placed on believers invites people to the beauty of the religion of Allah by means of peace and tolerance. The decision whether or not to implement these truths, whether or not to believe, lies with the other party. Forcing that person to believe, or trying to impose anything on him, is a violation of Qur'anic morality. In fact, Allah issues a reminder to believers in the Qur'an:

> **If your Lord had willed, all the people on the earth would have believed. Do you think you can force people to be believers? (Surah Yunus, 99)**

> **We know best what they say and you [O Muhammad] are not a compeller over them. But warn by the Qur'an whoever fears My warning. (Surah Qaf, 45)**

A model of society in which people are forced to worship is completely contradictory to Islam. Belief and worship are only of any value when they are directed to Allah by the free will of the individual. If a system imposes belief and worship on people, then they will become religious out of fear of that system. From the religious point of view, what really counts is that religion should be lived for Allah's good pleasure in an environment where peoples' consciences are totally free.

The history of Islam is full of the tolerant practices of Muslim rulers who have respected all religions and built religious freedom with their own hands. For example, Thomas Arnold, a British missionary employed in the service of the Indian government, describes the way that Islam favours freedom in these words:

But of any organised attempt to force the acceptance of Islam on the non-Muslim population, or of any systematic persecution intended to stamp out the Christian religion, we hear nothing. Had the caliphs chosen to adopt either course of action, they might have swept away Christianity as easily as Ferdinand and Isabella drove Islam out of Spain, or Louis XIV made Protestantism penal in France, or the Jews were kept out of England for 350 years. The Eastern Churches in Asia were entirely cut off from communion with the rest of Christendom, throughout which no one would have been found to lift a finger on their behalf, as heretical communions. So that the very survival of these Churches to the present day is a strong proof of the generally tolerant attitude of the Muhammadan governments towards them.[1]

As Thomas Arnold also noted, Muslim rulers have always forbidden compulsion and oppression against non-Muslims throughout history, and developed cultures where people can freely live their religions. Non-Muslims living in Muslim lands have always practiced their religion without any difficulty. As a matter of fact, it is quite impossible for someone who fears Allah and has grasped the true morality of Islam to support violence, oppression or wickedness, or to take part in such actions. Such an individual is always conciliatory, peace making, affectionate, tolerant, compassionate and considerate. It is unthinkable for such a person to employ force or pressure particularly about the issue of religion. That is why Islam is the true solution to all acts of violence, oppression and terrorism in the world.

1- Prof. Thomas Arnold, The Spread of Islam in the World, A History of Peaceful Preaching, Goodword Books, 2001, p. 79-80

https://www.harunyahya.info/en/articles/islam-encourages-freedom-of-thought-and-denounces-oppression-and-compulsion