



Granting Asylum to Truth-Seekers from the perspective of Qur'an

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Abstract

From the very beginning of the Islamic era, it has happened many times that a number of polytheists, in response to their call of nature, applied for a voluntary listening to the Quran. This phenomenon, which is called "Asylum-Seeking of Polytheists" in the Quran, was considered as a unique and incomparable event throughout the Islamic history in the field of propagation of the religion of Islam for non-Muslims. Asylum means seeking refugee by the idolaters. In this case, it is obligatory for the Muslims to provide the ground for realizing this important issue, to remove the possible obstacles and to accept the asylum-seeker pagan and provide him with sufficient verses and proofs so that he may be guided to the right path. In this article, while giving an objective explanation of this issue, as well as referring to examples of "granting asylum to truth-seeking pagans", we study the practical solutions in this regard, which are presented for the first time and, if realized, good conditions would be created for non-Muslims. Obviously, this kind of asylum is a cultural and religious asylum and not a political asylum.

Keywords: Asylum-Seeking of Pagans; Granting Asylum; Global Duties; Propagation of Quran

Introduction

As the creator of the universe, the Almighty Allah is rationally and conventionally the highest and best source of guidance of mankind towards his perfection. Since the universe is a wisely and thoughtfully created system, the guidance of mankind has been performed by prophets and revealed books. In other words, the sent prophets, descended books, and the religious legislations are all manifestations of divine guidance.

On the other hand, the primary guidance of Allah is not specific to a certain type of human, but it is a universal and general favor for humanity, as specified in the Qur'an, and in the next step, the human, having freedom, chooses between gratitude and ingratitude so that divine aberration or guidance is followed through reason.

"Then we showed him the Straight Path: Whether he chooses to be grateful or be Ingratitude and disbeliever" (Sūrah al-Insān/3).

As the Holy Qur'an has always been a clear answer to all questions and ambiguities of Muslims and non-Muslims, it includes anything useful for human guidance.

"We have not neglected anything in the Book. Then to their Creator and Nurturer all [creatures] shall be gathered" (Sūrah al- An'ām/38).

"And those who hold fast to the Book and perform regular prayers [be sure] we do not withhold the reward of the righteous" (Sūrah al- A'raf/170).

Therefore, one of the key universal duties of faithful Muslims is to provide the grounds for all Muslims' and particularly non-Muslims' access to Quranic verses, especially if the request for hearing Quranic verses happens to be given by a polytheist or infidel.

2. Statement of Problem

In this study, God willing, we will try to evaluate the importance of removing barriers to the non-Muslims' access to the Qur'an as well as ways of making the Qur'an accessible to non-Muslim communities, and to present practical solutions to this.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following two questions:

- 1) What is/are the duty/ies of Muslims towards non-Muslims' asylum-seeking?
- 2) What are the cases in which non-Muslims' asylum-seeking is accepted?

3. Background

This research, in light of presenting new practical solutions, has not been investigated before, although there has been an effort to explain and interpret the relevant verses, we hope God makes the authors steadfast and makes all of us victorious and honored in helping the Muslim community. Here are some of these efforts:

- Comparative study of asylum law in jurisprudence and international documents, Seyyed Mohammad Qari Seyyed Fatemi
- Asylum in Islam and its comparison with the international law, Omid Shari'at Zadeh
- The study of the rights of refugees in jurisprudence and the international documents, Abol Qasem Sham Abadi

4. The Meaning of Asylum or Asylum-Seeking

The word asylum or asylum seeker means asking for support, assistance and refuge from the other party, and some have merely defined it as seeking asylum in a foreign country. Which is often compared with the word refugee in English. This word in English, has a different meaning such as asylum and emigration through escape. (From Dr. Moin's Dictionary)

4.1 Asylum or Asylum-Seeking in the Quran

This term means seeking asylum by the idol worshipers. The most important verse of the asylum-seeking in Surah At-Tawbah refers to this beautiful point of Islam: "If any of the pagans ask you to give them refuge, give them asylum so that they may hear the words of God. Then, return them to their towns for they are an ignorant people."

5. The Increasing Expansion of Islam

Given the increasing spread of Islam throughout the world, the responsibility of Muslims to introduce this great Sharia and to familiarize new Muslims with the divine orders revealed in the heavenly Book of Quran, day to day, has been heavier and more important, and it is imperative that Muslims will become better acquainted with their global duties toward the Qur'an, in order to increase the popularity of the religion of Islam and the familiarity of everybody with the divine word.

Official statistics declared by institutions and news agencies show the increasing growth of Islamism in the West. We refer to some of these statistics;

5.1 The Pew Research Centre

In 2010, the Muslim population in the world was 1.6 billion, which means about 23 percent of the world's population. This is while Islam is the second largest religion in the world after Christianity. If the growth rate of Muslim populations continues, at the end of this century, the number of Muslims will surpass the number of Christians in the world.

(Taken from the site of the Pew Research Centre)

5.2 The British Newspaper of the "Independent"

In a report stating that in recent years, despite the anti-Islamic propaganda and introducing Muslims as terrorist in Western media, the British and American whites' tend to Islam has been significantly increased: in previous censuses The British Muslims were 14,000 and their number increased to 25,000 in the next census!

(Derived from Independent English newspaper site)

5.3 The New York Times's American Newspaper

This newspaper announced a quick and sustained release of Islam in the United States and said that the number of Muslims increased by 200,000 per year. The newspaper, stating that the growth of Islam among Americans is increasing rapidly and the number of Muslims is multiplying, estimates the total number of Muslims in the United States about 2 million.

(From the New York Times newspaper)

6. *The Asylum-Seeking of the Idolaters*

The first step in this process is to provide the groundwork for the hearing of divine verses for non-Muslim audiences, which will in fact be the subject of discussion of this article, which will be entitled: "granting asylum to truth-seeking polytheists" or "reciting the Quran for non-Muslims."

In the Holy Qur'an, this issue has been addressed and referred to as the "The asylum-seeking of the idolaters", which mentions the necessity of giving refuge to pagan non-Muslims. "“If any of the pagans ask you to give them refuge, give them asylum so that they may hear the words of God. Then, return them to their towns for they are an ignorant people" (Sūrah at- Tawbah/6).

Thinking in famous literary books such as *At-Tahqiq fi Kalamat al-Quran*, *Qamous Quran*, *Majma' Al-Bahrain*, *Al-Mofradat fi Qarib al-Quran* and *Lesan al-Arab*, we read that asylum-seeking means seeking refuge and protect, deviate from the way (departing from the road). (Mostafavi, 1360, v. 2, p. 40; Qarashi, 1371, v. 2; p. 88; Ṭurayhī, 1371; 3 p. 251; Ragheb Isfahani, v. 1, p. 211; ibn Manzur, p. 153, 1990 AD).

According to the style of the verse (asylum), it is obligatory for any Muslim to obey this verse and provide the conditions for hearing Quranic verses for non-Muslims.

Because as there is ignorance, there is also unfaith and the introduction of faith is knowing and awareness. Therefore, in order to guide people, they must first be provided with sufficient means for awareness and thought so that they can find the right path with insight and don't not follow the blind imitation, and they convert to Islam.

7. *Imperfection of the Idolaters and the Perfection of Believers*

On the other hand, while Shirk (Arabic: شرك *širk*) i.e. idolatry or polytheism is considered one of the greatest sins, and the Qur'an is referred to idolatry as "great cruelty", "Luqman advised his son telling him," My son, do not consider anything equal to God, for it is the greatest injustice"(Luqmān /13).

However, we find that divine guidance is for all human beings. This is a divine favor and mercy of God. Of course, the divine mercy is only for the followers of truth and those who practice and apply the teachings of the Divine Book.

There is no doubt that this book is a guide for the pious (al-Baqarah/2);

As for those who adhere to the Scripture, and they hold the assembly; we will not waste the reward of the righteous (Al-A'raf/ 170).

8. *Global Guidance, God of All!*

The God Almighty as a "guide" has been manifested in the sent Prophets and the revealed Books, and as He is evident, He does not belong to any particular type or group of mankind, but as the Qur'an says, divine guidance - at least due to the fulfillment of the authority – is offered to all the people as one of the Divine Wisdoms to the human race. Therefore, it is one of the universal duties of the faithful Muslims to provide the ground for reciting the divine verses for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike,

and to make every effort to familiar everyone with the divine revelations and provide the ground for them to be guided.

"...so that those who should perish, may perish based on a clear proof and those who should live, may live based on a clear Proof. And verily, Allah is The Knowing Hearer" (Al-Anfal/42).

"We did not send you but as a guide to all mankind in order to give glad-tidings to the believers and to warn those who have gone astray; But the majority of the people are Ignorant" (Saba'/28).

"O, our Creator and Nurturer! Ordain for us in this world what is Good and in the Hereafter as well. We have been guided to you." Allah Declared: "I shall afflict with My Chastisement whom I decide entitled; And My Grace embraces all things, so I shall Ordain it exclusively for those Who are pious and pay alms and Believe in Our Signs"(Al-A'raf/156).

9. Divine Favor and Mercy for Human Guidance

The Surah At-Tawbah (repentance) is the only sūrah among all the sūrahs of the Qur'an that has been started without Bismillah (بِسْمِ اللَّهِ: In the name of God). Most scholars believe that there is a contradiction between having divine favor and divine disfavor toward the idolaters and that's why this sūrah is not begun with "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim". Strangely enough, in the next few verses, God speaks of His mercy and reverence over idolaters! It is as if a kind father sometimes uses harsh language to bring his child back, but he does not fundamentally seek to distance his child from the safe environment of life, and he tries to return him by whatever means possible.

But this affection has a limited extent, and it will be finished for one who cannot be guided. Similarly, it is mentioned in the Qur'an about Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him), who made great efforts to guide his uncle, and repeatedly invited him to monotheism, but when the noble Prophet saw his uncle's refusal against clear monotheistic reasons, he disowned him and departed from him. "...^{وَ} And Ibrahim did not pray for The Forgiveness of his father but for a Promise that he had given him before; and when it became clear to him that His father was an enemy to Allah, he disowned him. Ibrahim was indeed a Forbearing soul and a constant-invoker To Allah" (At-Tawbah/114).

10. Granting Asylum Is Allowed

The Qur'an allows the idolaters to ask for asylum and considers it as an entry to provide them with the conditions for delivering the pure Islam of the Qur'an. Because, as it was mentioned for the respected reader, asylum-seeking of the polytheists first and foremost concerns the Prophet (peace be upon him). Because the polytheists, before acquaintance with the Qur'an, have seen the Prophet (pbuh) and really want to say that we want to know the Islam you are practicing and this verse is apparently a promotion in its highest degrees of that holy prophet.

11. The Purpose and Characteristics of the Asylum-Seeker

One who has reached this degree of need has been undoubtedly confused, because if the idol worshipers at the dawn of Islam or any era cannot convince their followers, in fact, they create an

opportunity for them to think about the nature and correctness of their religion, and sooner or later they will realize their own mistake and the invalidation of their religion.

The demand for asylum by idol worshipers was a phenomenon that occurred many times at the dawn of Islam. But a similar event has been happened over and over in the present era, and it makes the responsibility of Muslims toward their religion extremely important.

The purpose of pagan for asylum-seeking can be anything. According to the verse of asylum, some polytheists are only willing to convert to Islam to escape from the system of ignorance and oppression of their ruler, sometimes, healthy and intact natures tend to know more about Islam and the Qur'an, and sometimes they only desire to hear Quranic verses as a phenomenon discussed in various social circles.

The purposes of the polytheists, as mentioned, can be various and numerous. But the command of Islam against all these goals is one thing and it is providing the conditions for the acquaintance of the pagans with the Holy Qur'an. (Even hearing the Word of Allah), but the effect or in-effect of the Qur'an on the hearts of the audiences is beyond the human will and decision. "We are the Supreme Knower of what these pagans say; and it is not for you [O, Messenger] to force them to have Faith in the Truth, so admonish with The Holy Qur'an only those who fear My Warnings" (Qaf / 45).

Therefore, the asylum-seeker pagan must be accepted, it doesn't matter what his purpose is and he would be granted refuge in a best possible way. Then, our behavior to him is not different from that of other members of the Muslim community.

But at the same time, wisdom requires that precaution be applied, since it is possible that such a request is a lie to make Muslims busy or maybe they want to gossip.

12. The Cases of Pagans' Asylum-Seeking

According to the most commentators, asylum-giving to polytheists is only allowed in the religious affairs and understanding the truths of the faith; and out of this framework, it must be done by the command of the Imam of Muslims or the caliphate of the time (Alusi, 1994, v. 5, p. 248).

Allameh Tabatabai in al-Mizan, regarding the asylum-giving to polytheists for hearing the Qur'anic verses, believes that the asylum-giving the holy Quran mentions is to polytheists who ask for refuge to discuss about the verses (Tabataba'i, 1370, v. 9, p. 154).

Some commentators also believe that there is the likelihood of vandalism, cover, and espionage, and it is possible that pagans with non-peaceful purposes will apply for cultural asylum (Mughniyeh, 1424, v. 4, p. 13).

Asylum-giving to the polytheists is only in the circle of preaching and understanding the verses and decrees of Islam, as in other cases the asylum-seeking has its own particular circumstances, and Allameh Tabatabai also refers to this point (Tabataba'i, 1370, v. 4, p. 13).

13. The Meaning of the Asylum-Seeking Verse in the Holy Quran

Many commentators have considered the meaning of this verse as the absolute verse of the century, because they believe that Arab theologians are familiar with eloquence and rhetoric, and they have understood the verses and the meanings of the Qur'ān's arguments. (Tantawi, 1997, v. 6, p. 209), and as understood from the style of this verse, it means the Uṣūl al-dīn (Arabic: أصول الدين) or principles of religion (Tabataba'i, 1370, v. 9, p. 153). Other meanings have been mentioned, including the sources of Tawhid (Faiz Kashani, v. 2, p. 322).

It seems that the view of Allamah Tabatabai is closer to the truth. He believes that the meaning of this verse is the principles of Islam, because it is almost impossible that a polytheist is to discuss and question about the details of religion, and our main dispute with non-Muslims is the same monotheistic issues of Islam.

14. Controversial Cases with the Polytheists

The discussion of the Quran with the idolaters has often been mentioned in three extremely important issues: Tawhid (i.e. monotheism), *Nubuwwah* (i.e. prophecy) and 'Ākhirah (i.e. resurrection).

14.1 Monotheism

" Say [O, Messenger!]:" If you know tell Me, to whom belong the earth and what Is therein?"

They will immediately reply:" To Allah." Then say:" If you know this, why do not you stop disobedience to Allah's Commands?"

Say [O, Messenger!]:" Who is The Creator of the Seven Heavens and The Mighty Throne?"

They will soon reply:" Allah"; say:" Do you not fear Him then?"

Say:" If you know, tell me who is The Absolute Sovereign over all Creatures? And who is the One Who Protects all, and He is Independent and free from the need of being protected?"

They will reply:" Allah is the Absolute Sovereign." Then tell them:" If you know all these, then you must be bewitched that you behave like this."

We bestowed upon them the Book of Truth, but they are against the Truth and they are indeed the liars" (Al-Mu'minūn/84-90).

14.2 Prophecy

"And they also said:" Why among the affluent men of the two cities [Makkah and Taef] Qur'an should be sent down on Mohammad?" (Az-Zukhruf/31).

"[Nuh added:]" Do you [O, my people] Wonder that a Message from your Creator and Nurturer should come to you by a man from your own community to warn you and advise you, so that you May try to be pious and receive Mercy from Allah?" (Al-A'raf/63).

"Is it a wonder for this people that We Have sent Our Revelations to a man From among themselves that he should Warn mankind[of the consequences of Their misdeeds]and give glad-tidings to Those who believe that they shall have With their Creator and Nurturer a lofty Stand and the rewards of their good Deeds? But the disbelievers say:" He is indeed an evident magician!" (Yūnus /2).

14.3 Resurrection

"And the disbelievers said to the people:" Shall we show you a man who claims when you are turned into dust after your death, then you will again have a new life?" (Saba' /7).

"The disbelieving people of the world [who are neglectful about The Day of Judgement] say to one Another:" Shall we be brought back to the prime of our life?"(an-Nāzi'āt/10).

"And the disbelievers say:" Is it possible to regain life after we died and became Lost in the earth of our graves?" The truth is that they deny the Meeting With their Creator and Nurturer." (As-Sajdah/10).

15. Asylum-Seeking of the Idolaters, the Extreme of Manifestation of Divine Mercy

Allameh Tabatabai (RA) has considered the combination of these two verses as the wonders of this sūrah and, in fact, it is the perfection of divine endeavor to guide the astray, and it has been regarded as a sign of the divine glory and mercy of humanity. Because Allah, the Almighty, while hating the polytheists who don't fulfil their promise, considers their blood and property and the honor to be violated, but when He assumes that these polytheists will come to the right path and they may revive a right and revoke a wrong, He orders to forgive the pagans and give them a refuge. Therefore, if a polytheist asks for a cultural asylum to consider the religious invitation more exactly, it is obligatory to give him a refuge in order to let him hear the word of God, and as a result, the curtain of ignorance will be forsaken from his heart and the ultimatum of God will be fulfilled.

It is also astonishing that the Surah Tawbah has begun with the repentance from the idolaters, and even God, the Almighty, has dispensed to mention Bismillah, but in the heat of the anti-polytheist precepts and statements, it is talking about the pagans, who accept to hear the divine verses! How surprising this kind God is, and how wonderful the scope of mercy is. In verse 156 of Surah al-A'raf, we read: " [Mussa said:]" O, our Creator and Nurturer! Ordain for us in this world what is Good and in the Hereafter as well. We have been guided to you." Allah Declared:" I shall afflict with My Chastisement whom I decide entitled; And My Grace embraces all things, so I shall Ordain it exclusively for those Who are pious and pay alms and Believe in Our Signs."

Therefore, it may be concluded that all the warnings and fears are to avoid people from disbelief and ignorance. That is, they are a means of incapacitating and awakening people. Just as the behavior of a kind father with his child when he warns and horrifies him with a great danger to prevent the harm to his child and to protect him. Therefore, all these seriousness comes from kindness and compassion, because God does not need to torture us, and He is absolutely self-sufficient so He doesn't need to punish man for meeting His needs.

16. The Reason for Asylum-Giving to the Polytheists and the Explanation of the Quran

The holy Prophet of Islam (pbuh) is responsible for the guidance of the people, and he has to strive for absorbing the desire of the people and the unbelievers, and prepare them to become familiar with the Qur'an, in order to get acquainted with the divine words and orders, and they will be aware of the truths and teachings of Islam, and if there is a tendency towards the guidance and hearing of the right words from the other side, or there is a field for thinking and precision and considering the facts, It is necessary to welcome it, prepare the ground for it, and to give refuge and willingness and kindness, and to settle in their peaceful place, and to make him safe and eliminate his grief. Also, the Holy Qur'an is a permanent book and its mysteries are not finished, and Amir al-Mo'menin Ali ibn Abi Talib (PBUH) says: "Verily, the Qur'an has a beautiful appearance and an immortal and invisible depth, the Qur'an's wondrous material is not reduced, and its hidden secrets is not finished, and the darkness is not resolved without the Qur'an."

But it's obvious for those who are interested in the research that the perfection of the Qur'an and its complete expression in the field of epistemic needs and human performance are not such that they can be achieved with all its veracity and verbal conjecture, and that need to be exaggerated and it should not be simply neglected.

Also, Imam Ali (as) in the 198th sermon of Nahj al-Balaghah praises the Qur'an with these qualities: "the Quran is a light, whose candles are not turned off, and it is a lamp, which is always shining, and it is a way, whose walker will not go astray, and it is a lightness, whose light is not darkened and it is a separator (between the truth and false), whose reason and argument should not be defeated.

On the other hand, Allah calls everyone to think about the verses of the Qur'an. As mentioned in a verse of the holy Quran, "Do they not ponder about the Words of Revelation? Or the content of the Holy Qur'an is something new and their Ancestors were not informed of it?" (Al-Mu'minun/68);

Imam Ali (as), in his another word, calls the people to pay attention to the verses of the Qur'an and learn from it, and adhere to the Halal (i.e. lawful) and Haram (forbidden) and act to the *Muḥkam* (i.e. decisive) Qur'anic verses, and says: "...Think about the Qur'anic verses and take a lesson that is the best lessons and teachings) (Ali ibn Abi Talib, 1410, p. 318).

The other proof for understanding the Quran is the words of Imam Ali (as) about the Qur'an, which he says: "... no one has associated with the Qur'an unless it increased him or decreased him, it increased his guidance, and decreased his aberrance. Be aware that anyone, who has the Quran, does not need anything and he will not be self-sufficient without the Quran, then ask Qur'an for your cure. In the hardships, ask the Qur'an for help because Quran cures the greatest diseases, namely, disbelief and hypocrisy, rebellion and mischief. Therefore, through Qur'an, ask God for your demands, and with the friendship of the Quran, turn to Allah and through the Qur'an, do not ask anything from the creatures of God, because there is no means to approach the servants to God better than the Qur'an ... Know God through the Quran and advise yourselves with the Qur'an" (Sabhi Saleh, 1370, p. 312).

17. Offering Solutions and Suggestions

In this section, we are going to offer solutions which facilitate the conditions for polytheists' and non-Muslims' hearing Quranic verses after their request, and then conveying their messages and concepts to non-Muslim communities.

A) Propagation at International Terminals and Borders

Measures need to be taken to propagate Islam at airports and land and sea borders of Islamic countries as well as anywhere frequented by non-Muslims. For this purpose, influential catalogs and writings can be printed and published using the common teachings of the people of the Book and Islam.

However, this is possible through fixed centers and bases at airports and frequented places of foreign travelers and even creating the conditions consistent with the host country's rules for hearing the Quranic verses.

Imagine a counter or a room at Imam Khomeini Airport that, as soon as non-Muslim travelers arrive, they will openly welcome these passengers and carry out all of the passengers' departure services and try to influence the audience with the same behavior. Surely the strongest means of conveying the beauty of Islam is the good morals and sense of altruism, on which Islam has emphasized many years before the drafting of the human rights charter. The officials at this airport have the most sensitive responsibilities, and they must watch their words and movements in a great deal of obsession and do any service in this regard. For example, people in this section can introduce themselves as the ambassadors of the "Beauties' Religion".

B) Iranian Embassies Abroad

Beyond the borders, the Iranian embassies and agencies abroad can, in coordination with the host country, pave the way for temporary cultural or Quranic asylum-seeking of non-Muslims. To this aim, all those working in the Iranian embassies abroad should, in every respect, be good representatives of Islam for the audience and introduce the pure, free-from-unfair-propaganda Islam to the West. Notably, this requires important infrastructures including the allocation of fixed positions for this task in the embassies.

Moreover, the sacred system of the Islamic Republic of Iran needs to attempt to remove the manifestations of Islamophobia in the target countries, and scandalize the enemies of Islam, who are carrying out anti-Shiite acts under the guise of Muslims and Shi'ists and disclose their actual intentions.

C) Production and Distribution of Cultural Products Fitting the Non-Muslim Community

Cultural actions in any community should be carried out in accordance with the custom and tastes of all the people of that community in order to be accepted by them. Therefore, cultural actions to pave the way for mankind's access to the Quran and its concepts are different from the North American youth community to Latin America. For example, to prove effective, a series of planned measures need to be taken in the case of the North American youth community, who is under the influence of various films and media's strong propaganda as well as various video games. Books do not always work well against the propaganda; anti-propaganda is needed to counter it.

The so-called *cultural* actions are less costly than presence in the foreign environment and have always had significant effects on the target community.

Introducing Islam in the TED TALK programs, creating attractive and influential websites and smart phone programs such as science forums or religious question programs are a few examples in this regard.

Conclusion

One of our international-promotional tasks toward the Qur'an is to grant asylum to Quran researchers, especially among non-Muslims. Therefore, removing the barriers to this important issue and providing appropriate scientific and epistemic capabilities is one of the minimum duties of a Muslim. Playing this role is indeed performing the duties of prophets and messengers of Allah, the Almighty, which is the greatest honor!

Therefore, the Qur'anic verses and their messages deserve to be recounted to all people, including Muslims and non-Muslims.

The notable point in this regard is that although the Holy Qur'an mandates Muslims to respond to polytheists' requests for hearing the verses of the Qur'an, we can say, upon further contemplation, we can infer this result that, in addition to response to polytheists' request, providing the grounds for this important mandate by Muslims, like a designed scenario, not only has no contradiction with the mentioned mandate, but is one of its practical requirements.

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