

The Sunnah of Smiling: Promoting Peace and Well-being in Pakistan

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Abstract

Intolerance and societal discord have become pressing issues in contemporary Pakistan, undermining the nation's harmony and well-being. This article explores the profound impact of smiles as a means to combat intolerance and foster a more peaceful society. Drawing inspiration from the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), who advocated smiling and kindness, we delve into the religious, moral, medical, and social benefits of this simple yet powerful gesture.

By shedding light on the disadvantages of intolerance, this article highlights the urgency of change. We discuss how smiling not only reduces social aversion but also uplifts individual moods, making it a potent tool for enhancing overall well-being. Supported by modern medical science, this practice offers physical and mental health benefits.

This article advocates for the revival of the Sunnah of smiling in Pakistan, emphasizing its potential to bridge divides, reduce conflicts, and promote peace, ultimately contributing to the nation's overall prosperity and happiness.

Keywords: Smiling, Tolerance, Peace, Pakistan

I. Introduction

Brief Overview of the Issue of Intolerance in Pakistani Society

In recent years, Pakistan has grappled with a growing concern that threatens its social fabric and harmony: intolerance. Intolerance, in this context, refers to the unwillingness or resistance to accept differing beliefs, opinions, or ways of life. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, from religious and sectarian intolerance to ethnic and cultural divisions.

One of the prominent manifestations of intolerance is the frequent occurrence of social conflicts, often stemming from trivial differences or misunderstandings. These conflicts have led to a fragmented society where individuals and groups are increasingly polarized, and dialogue and cooperation are hindered. Intolerance has seeped into various aspects of daily life, affecting interactions in workplaces, communities, and even within families.

The Importance of Addressing Intolerance and Promoting Peace

Addressing intolerance and promoting peace is not merely an option but a pressing necessity for Pakistan. The consequences of unchecked intolerance are far-reaching and detrimental to the nation's well-being. Here's why it is crucial:

Social Cohesion Intolerance fractures the social fabric, eroding trust and unity among citizens. To build a strong, cohesive society, it is imperative to nurture an environment where differences are not only accepted but celebrated.

Economic Prosperity: A tolerant society is more likely to foster economic growth. Intolerance can deter investment, hinder development, and discourage innovation. Promoting peace and tolerance can create a more conducive environment for economic progress.

Political Stability: Political divisions fueled by intolerance can lead to instability and unrest. A peaceful and tolerant society is better equipped to address political differences through dialogue and democratic processes.

International Image: Pakistan's image on the global stage is affected by its internal harmony. A society marked by peace and tolerance is more likely to be respected and trusted by the international community.

Individual Well-being: At a personal level, intolerance can lead to stress, anxiety, and reduced overall well-being. Fostering an atmosphere of acceptance and respect benefits individuals' mental and emotional health.

Religious and Moral Imperatives: Many religious and moral teachings emphasize tolerance, compassion, and understanding. Promoting these values aligns with the core principles of various belief systems.

In conclusion, addressing intolerance and promoting peace is not only a moral imperative but also essential for Pakistan's progress and prosperity. It requires a concerted effort at various levels of society, from individuals to institutions, to cultivate an environment where differences are acknowledged with respect and where the simple act of smiling can bridge divides and promote unity.

The Disadvantages of Intolerance

Explanation of Intolerance in Pakistani Society

Intolerance in Pakistani society is a multifaceted issue that has emerged as a significant concern in recent years. It encompasses various forms, including religious, sectarian, ethnic, and cultural intolerance, all of which contribute to social division and conflict.

Religious intolerance is particularly prevalent in Pakistan, where the country's diverse religious landscape has, at times, become a source of tension. Acts of

religious discrimination, discrimination against religious minorities, and sectarian violence have marred the nation's social cohesion¹.

Sectarian intolerance, characterized by conflict between different sects within Islam, has also plagued Pakistan. This has resulted in numerous incidents of violence and discord, such as the targeted killings of religious scholars and leaders². Ethnic intolerance has been a long-standing issue, with tensions arising from disparities in power and resources among different ethnic groups. This has led to political and social unrest, notably in the province of Baluchistan³.

Cultural intolerance is evident in the form of discrimination against minority cultures and languages. This has hindered cultural diversity and has implications for education and social inclusion⁴.

In summary, intolerance in Pakistani society is a complex issue rooted in religious, sectarian, ethnic, and cultural divisions. It has led to social conflicts, violence, and political instability. Addressing these challenges is essential for building a more tolerant and harmonious society.

Negative Consequences of Intolerance in Pakistani Society

Social Conflicts and Violence: Intolerance, particularly in religious and sectarian contexts, has resulted in numerous instances of social conflicts and violence. For example, the sectarian violence between different Muslim sects, such as Sunni and Shia, has claimed countless lives and created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity⁵.

Minority Discrimination: Religious intolerance has led to discrimination against religious minorities, particularly Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, in various aspects of life, including education and employment. This discrimination has marginalized these communities and hindered their social integration⁶.

Ethnic and Cultural Divides: Intolerance has fueled ethnic and cultural divides, leading to regional tensions and conflicts. The province of Baluchistan, for instance, has experienced long-standing ethnic conflicts driven by perceptions of marginalization and resource disparities⁷.

Polarization in Society: Intolerance has contributed to the polarization of Pakistani society along religious, sectarian, and political lines. This polarization hinders constructive dialogue and cooperation, making it challenging to address critical issues facing the nation⁸.

Limiting Freedom of Expression: Intolerance can manifest as restrictions on freedom of expression. Criticism of religious or ideological matters can lead to threats and violence, causing self-censorship and limiting open discourse⁹.

These examples illustrate the far-reaching negative consequences of intolerance in Pakistani society, including social conflicts, violence, discrimination, division, and a stifling of freedom of expression. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

The Urgent Need for Change

Escalation of Violence: Intolerance in Pakistan has led to a disturbing escalation of violence, often with severe consequences. Sectarian clashes, targeted attacks on religious minorities, and acts of terrorism driven by intolerance have resulted in loss

of lives and widespread fear. The urgency lies in preventing further bloodshed and ensuring the safety and security of all citizens¹⁰.

Threat to National Unity: Intolerance poses a direct threat to national unity and cohesion. Divisions along religious, sectarian, ethnic, and cultural lines weaken the bonds that hold a diverse nation like Pakistan together. A fractured society is more susceptible to external pressures and internal strife, making it imperative to address these divisions¹¹.

Economic Implications: The impact of intolerance on the economy cannot be ignored. It deters foreign investment, hampers economic growth, and exacerbates poverty. The urgency for change lies in creating an environment conducive to economic prosperity, as a stable and prosperous economy can contribute to a more harmonious society¹².

Global Image: Pakistan's image on the global stage is tarnished when intolerance leads to violence and discrimination. The nation's reputation as a responsible member of the international community is at stake. Urgent change is needed to improve Pakistan's standing and diplomatic relations¹³.

Youth Engagement: Pakistan has a significant youth population that is increasingly exposed to intolerance and radicalization. The urgent need for change includes engaging the youth in constructive dialogue, promoting tolerance, and providing opportunities for education and employment to prevent them from falling into the traps of extremism¹⁴.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage: Cultural diversity is a source of strength and richness for Pakistan. Intolerance threatens this diversity by marginalizing minority cultures and languages. The urgency for change lies in preserving and celebrating the nation's cultural heritage for future generations¹⁵.

In summary, the urgent need for change in addressing intolerance in Pakistani society arises from the immediate threats posed by escalating violence, the erosion of national unity, economic implications, global image, youth engagement, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort at multiple levels, from government policies to community initiatives and individual awareness, to promote tolerance, dialogue, and understanding.

The Sunnah of Smiling in Islamic Teachings

Reference to the Teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) Regarding Smiling and Kindness

The teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) hold a central place in Islam, and his guidance extends to various aspects of human behavior, including the act of smiling, as Allah Almighty says:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ¹⁶

«And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds»
The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) set a profound example of kindness and approachability through his own demeanor. Here are some sayings of Holy Prophet about smiling.

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَبَسُّمُكَ فِي وَجْهِ أَخِيكَ لَكَ صَدَقَةٌ وَأَمْرُكَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهْيُكَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ صَدَقَةٌ وَإِزْشَادُكَ الرَّجُلَ فِي أَرْضِ الضَّلَالِ لَكَ صَدَقَةٌ وَبَصْرُكَ لِلرَّجُلِ الرَّدِيءِ الْبَصَرَ لَكَ صَدَقَةٌ وَإِمَاطَتُكَ الْحَجَرَ وَالشُّوكَةَ وَالْعُظْمَ عَنِ الطَّرِيقِ لَكَ صَدَقَةٌ وَإِفْرَاغُكَ مِنْ دُلُوكَ فِي دُلُو أَخِيكَ لَكَ صَدَقَةٌ¹⁷

Sayyidina Abu Dharr (RA) reported that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said, "Your smile before your brother is a sadaqah for you, and your enjoining piety and forbidding evil is a sadaqah. Your guiding one who is lost on the land is a sadaqah for you. Your leading the blind is a sadaqah for you. Your removing from the thoroughfare a stone, a thorn or a bone is for you a sadaqah. And, your filling with your bucket the bucket of your brother is a sadaqah for you.

مَا رَأَيْتُ أَحَدًا أَكْثَرَ تَبَسُّمًا مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ¹⁸

Sayyidina Abdullah ibn Harith ibn Jazz narrated. I did not see anyone smiling more than Allah's Messenger (SAW)

مَا كَانَ ضِحْكُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِلَّا تَبَسُّمًا¹⁹

Sayyidina Abdullah ibn Harith ibn Jazz narrated: Allah's Messenger's (SAW) laugh was only a smile.

Allah's messenger used to smile with dignity, and would never laugh loudly like people do nowadays.

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ مَا أَعْلَمُ لَضَحِكُمْ قَلِيلًا وَلَبْكَيْتُمْ كَثِيرًا²⁰

Sayyidina Abu Huraira (RA) reported that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said, "If you know that which I know then you would certainly laugh little and weep much"

سَمِعْتُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ وَيْلٌ لِلَّذِي يُحَدِّثُ بِالْحَدِيثِ لِيُضْحِكَ بِهِ الْقَوْمَ فَيَكْذِبُ وَيْلٌ لَهُ وَيْلٌ لَهُ²¹

Bahz ibn Hakim reported on the authority of his father from his grandfather that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said, "Woe to him whom recounts a tale to make people laugh speaking lies. Woe to him! Woe to him!"

ثُمَّ وَعَظَهُمْ فِي ضَحِكِهِمْ مِنَ الضَّرْطَةِ فَقَالَ إِنْ لَمْ يَضْحَكْ أَحَدُكُمْ مِمَّا يَفْعَلُ²²

...Then, he (Prophet Muhammad) admonished them saying, "Do not laugh when somebody breaks wind. At what does one of you laugh at that which he himself does"

وَلَا تُكْثِرِ الضَّحْكَ فَإِنَّ كَثْرَةَ الضَّحْكَ تُمِيتُ الْقَلْبَ²³

Prophet Muhammad said: "...do not laugh much for much laughter causes the heart to die"

عَنْ جَرِيرٍ قَالَ مَا حَبَّبَنِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - مُنْذُ أَسْلَمْتُ وَلَا رَأَى إِلَّا تَبَسَّمَ فِي وَجْهِهِ²⁴

Jarir (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: Since I embraced Islam Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) never refused to see me and he did not see me but with a smile on his face.

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ زَوْجِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - أَنَّهَا قَالَتْ مَا رَأَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - مُسْتَجْبِعًا ضَاحِكًا حَتَّى أَرَى مِنْهُ لَهَوَاتِهِ إِنْ كَانَ يَتَبَسَّمُ - قَالَتْ - وَكَانَ إِذَا رَأَى غَيْمًا أَوْ رِيحًا عَرَفَ ذَلِكَ فِي وَجْهِهِ. فَقَالَتْ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَرَى النَّاسَ إِذَا رَأَوْا الْغَيْمَ فَرَحُوا. رَجَاءً أَنْ يَكُونَ فِيهِ الْمَطَرُ وَأَرَاكَ إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُ عَرَفْتَ فِي وَجْهِكَ الْكَرَاهِيَةَ قَالَتْ فَقَالَ « يَا عَائِشَةُ مَا يُؤْمِنُنِي أَنْ يَكُونَ فِيهِ عَذَابٌ قَدْ عَذَّبَ قَوْمٌ بِالرِّيحِ وَقَدْ رَأَى قَوْمٌ الْعَذَابَ فَقَالُوا (هَذَا عَارِضٌ مُطْمَئِنَّا) ». ²⁵

Narrated 'Aisha: I never saw Allah's Apostle laughing loudly enough to enable me to see his uvula, but he used to smile only. And whenever he saw clouds or winds, signs of deep concern would appear on his face. I said, "O Allah's Apostle! When

people see clouds they usually feel happy, hoping that it would rain, while I see that when you see clouds, one could notice signs of dissatisfaction on your face." He said, "O 'Aisha! What is the guarantee for me that there will be no punishment in it, since some people were punished with a wind? Verily, some people saw (received) the punishment, but (while seeing the cloud) they said, 'This cloud will give us rain.'"

ولا تحقرن شيئا من المعروف وأن تكلم أخاك وأنت منبسط²⁶

Prophet Muhammad said "...Do not look down upon any good work, and when you speak to your brother, show him a cheerful face."

لَا تَحْقِرَنَّ مِنَ الْمَعْرُوفِ شَيْئًا وَلَوْ أَنَّ تَلَقَّى أَخَاكَ بِوَجْهِ طَلْقٍ²⁷

Prophet Muhammad said "Do not look down upon any good deed, whether it is meeting your brother with a cheerful face".

In summary, the teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) regarding smiling and kindness are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. Actually, smiling is closely tied to religious values in Islam, reflecting concepts of charity, kindness, compassion, positive relationships, inner peace, and gratitude. It is viewed as a way to embody these values and spread positivity in one's interactions with others. So they underscore the significance of a warm and friendly demeanor, as exemplified by the Prophet himself. These teachings emphasize the power of a smile to promote goodwill, charity, and harmonious relationships, making them an integral part of Islamic ethics and etiquette.

The Moral and Social Benefits of Smiling

How Smiling Reduces Social Aversion and Promotes Positive Interactions:

Breaking Barriers: A smile is a universal sign of friendliness and approachability. When people smile, it breaks down initial social barriers and communicates openness. This simple gesture can make others feel more comfortable in approaching and interacting with the person who is smiling²⁸.

Creating a Positive Atmosphere: Smiling can set a positive tone in social settings. When someone smiles, it often elicits positive emotions in others, leading to a more pleasant and enjoyable interaction. This positivity can contribute to a sense of well-being and bonding²⁹.

Enhancing Communication: Smiles can improve the quality of communication by conveying warmth and sincerity. People are more likely to trust and engage in open and honest dialogue with individuals who appear friendly and approachable through their smiles. This trust can foster better understanding and cooperation³⁰.

Reducing Social Tension: Smiling can diffuse social tension and conflict. In potentially contentious situations, a smile can signal a willingness to cooperate and find common ground. It can also de-escalate confrontations and contribute to conflict resolution³¹.

Promoting Inclusivity: Smiles are inclusive and can help bridge cultural and linguistic divides. They transcend language barriers and convey positive intentions universally. In diverse societies, smiling can create a sense of belonging and acceptance among individuals from various backgrounds³².

So, smiling serves as a powerful tool for reducing social aversion and promoting positive interactions. It fosters openness, positivity, trust, and effective communication, ultimately contributing to more harmonious and inclusive social relationships.

The Moral Implications of a Smiling Society

Fostering Kindness and Compassion: A society where people smile more often tends to cultivate kindness and compassion. Smiles are not merely facial expressions; they represent an attitude of goodwill toward others. Such an attitude encourages individuals to be more considerate and empathetic toward their fellow citizens³³.

Promoting Ethical Behavior: A smiling society is often associated with ethical behavior and honesty. People are more likely to trust individuals who appear sincere and approachable. This trust forms the foundation of ethical interactions and transactions, both in personal relationships and in business³⁴.

Enhancing Social Cohesion: Moral values such as unity, solidarity, and cooperation are reinforced in a society where people smile and interact positively. Smiling fosters a sense of belonging and social cohesion, where individuals are more likely to support and help one another during times of need³⁵.

Reducing Prejudice and Bias: A smiling society is less prone to prejudice and bias. When people interact with open hearts and smiles, they are more likely to look beyond differences and judge individuals based on their character and actions. This reduction in prejudice can lead to a more just and equitable society³⁶.

Embracing Generosity: Generosity and the willingness to share with others are moral values that align with a smiling society. When individuals are cheerful and content, they are more inclined to be generous, both in terms of material resources and emotional support, contributing to the overall well-being of the community³⁷. Thus, a society where smiling is prevalent carries several moral implications, including fostering kindness, promoting ethical behavior, enhancing social cohesion, reducing prejudice, and embracing generosity. These moral values contribute to a more harmonious and virtuous community that prioritizes the well-being and happiness of its members.

The Medical Benefits of Smiling

Scientific Evidence Supporting the Positive Impact of Smiling on Health

Stress Reduction: Numerous studies have shown that smiling, even in stressful situations, can lead to a reduction in stress levels. When you smile, your brain releases endorphins, which are natural stress reducers. These endorphins promote a sense of well-being and help lower cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress³⁸.

Pain Management: Smiling has been linked to pain relief. The act of smiling triggers the release of natural painkillers called endorphins. Research has shown that patients who engage in humor therapy, which often includes smiling and laughter, experience less pain and discomfort during medical procedures³⁹.

Boosting Immunity: Smiling can enhance the immune system. Studies have indicated that individuals who maintain a positive outlook, which includes frequent smiling, tend to have stronger immune responses. This can help the body better defend against illness and infection⁴⁰.

Improved Cardiovascular Health: Smiling may have a positive impact on cardiovascular health. Research suggests that smiling can lead to the dilation of blood vessels, which, in turn, can help reduce blood pressure. Lower blood pressure is associated with a decreased risk of heart disease⁴¹.

Enhanced Mood and Mental Health: Smiling is linked to improved mood and mental health. It triggers the release of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that contributes to feelings of happiness and well-being. Smiling and laughter have been used as therapeutic tools to alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety⁴².

In summary, there is scientific evidence supporting the positive impact of smiling on health. Smiling has been shown to reduce stress, manage pain, boost immunity, improve cardiovascular health, and enhance mood and mental well-being. These findings highlight the significant role that smiling can play in promoting overall health and well-being.

How Smiling Reduces Stress and Promotes Well-being

Release of Endorphins: When you smile, even if it's a forced or fake smile, your brain releases endorphins, which are often referred to as "feel-good" hormones. Endorphins act as natural painkillers and mood elevators. They reduce the perception of pain and induce feelings of pleasure and well-being, effectively countering stress⁴³.

Lowering Cortisol Levels: Smiling can help lower cortisol levels, which are the body's stress hormones. High cortisol levels are associated with stress-related health issues, including anxiety and hypertension. Smiling triggers a reduction in cortisol production, contributing to a sense of relaxation and calm⁴⁴.

Improved Mood: Smiling is closely linked to improved mood. The act of smiling, whether in response to a positive situation or intentionally, can send signals to your brain that you are happy. This leads to an actual improvement in your emotional state. Smiles trigger the release of neurotransmitters like serotonin, which are responsible for feelings of happiness and well-being⁴⁵.

Stress Reduction through Social Interaction: Smiling often occurs during social interactions. Engaging in social interactions and smiling at others can have a profound stress-reducing effect. Social support and positive interactions with friends, family, and colleagues can help buffer the effects of stress and contribute to overall well-being⁴⁶.

Improved Resilience: Smiling can enhance your ability to cope with stress and adversity. People who smile often tend to exhibit greater resilience in the face of challenges. They have a more positive outlook, which helps them bounce back from setbacks and maintain better mental health⁴⁷.

Thus, smiling reduces stress and promotes well-being by triggering the release of endorphins, lowering cortisol levels, improving mood, facilitating positive social interactions, and enhancing resilience. This simple and accessible act has profound effects on both mental and physical health, making it a valuable tool for managing stress and enhancing overall quality of life.

Conclusion

In a world often beset by stress, discord, and uncertainty, the simple act of smiling emerges as a powerful force for holistic well-being and societal harmony. As we have explored, the benefits of a society that smiles more extend far beyond mere facial expressions; they encompass physical health, emotional well-being, stress reduction, social bonds, resilience, empathy, compassion, creativity, and overall happiness.

Smiles have a physiological impact, reducing stress hormones and promoting relaxation. They create an emotional cascade of positive feelings, enhancing individual and collective mood. Smiles build bridges, fostering trust, cooperation, and unity among people from diverse backgrounds. They empower individuals and communities to bounce back from challenges with greater resilience. Through smiles, empathy and compassion become integral parts of society's fabric, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Furthermore, smiles are a catalyst for creativity and innovation, driving progress in various fields. They symbolize a society that values positive emotions and encourages their expression. The benefits of smiling are not confined to individuals; they ripple through communities, bringing people closer and creating a harmonious, supportive environment.

As we reflect on the holistic benefits of a society that smiles more, we recognize the transformative potential of this simple yet profound gesture. It is an invitation to embrace positivity, kindness, and connectedness. It is a reminder that, collectively, we possess the power to uplift ourselves and those around us, fostering a brighter, more harmonious world where smiles pave the way to a better future.

So, let us choose to smile, not only for ourselves but for the well-being of our society as a whole. In the collective radiance of our smiles, we find the strength to overcome challenges, build bridges, and create a more compassionate, resilient, and joyful world.

Smile—it's not just an expression; it's a catalyst for positive change in society.

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