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Name: HM

Age: 14

Nationality: Pakistani

Religion: Islam

Gender: Female

### **“THE PRINCIPLES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, TOLERANCE AND LOVE FOR ALL HUMANITY”**

Sometimes a thought emerges in my mind: How do we humans define love, affection and care in our lives? Is love just about loving your family, friends and yourself? Or is it about loving everyone in your life because everyone matters? Our generation is full of hatred and dislike. Do we even care to ask ourselves if we should love everyone and not just those who are most like us? Honestly speaking, we do not ask this because it is hard to imagine love for humanity. Yet that is what we need – real love for our fellow humans because every life matters.

Once I had this friend who was a Shia. Shias belong to the denomination of Islam with the belief that the Islamic prophet’s proper successor, as caliph, was his son-in-law. The two of us were very close to each other and would share everything. A relative came to our house one day. At that moment we were watching a movie together and my relative started asking my friend questions. When my relative came to know that she was Shia, chaos burst out immediately. My relative started uttering swear words to my friend and she went home crying.

I was appalled and was drenched in anger. What kind of justice was this? Can’t a person have the right to follow whatever religion they think is right? Just because they believe something that is different than them, does that make them less than fully human? Does that relinquish their rights, their very freedom, even their right to life itself? Just because of this, should their life be turned into a living hell? This is completely absurd. The choice of a religious path depends on that person, his or herself, alone. No other person should ever force themselves upon them by fear and threat. Yet this is what we are seeing now every day.

In this society, it’s almost as if freedom is never really given. Because someone has a point of view on religion and when they do, they refuse to tolerate the other person’s point of view, they dismiss that point of view as useless, and the person following that religion is suddenly of no worth whatsoever and can be easily tortured or killed. Religion is somehow the distinguishing point between what makes the person a human with rights to be protected or an animal with no rights at all.

We worship and devote ourselves to a specific God, to a path that we think is right. The religion we choose is up to us. However our society has snatched that right from us. Society forces us to follow the one religious path that it thinks is right. Society makes its rules and forces us to follow them. Freedom of religion and spirit is the essential source of hope in our time, and the hour is getting late. Why can't we be tolerant and accepting of people's differing paths?

In India during the Mughal Times, there was forceful conversion of Islamic girls to Christianity. Is this justice? Were the girls not right in their previous spiritual callings – were they somehow subhuman? If they were weak in society did this mean that they couldn't be given their rights, their religious freedom, and the love they require from other humans?

We, people of this generation have a big duty. The duty is to create tolerance in religion. We need to go beyond tolerance to real affection; to the love for others regardless of their religion. We have the duty to define principles of religious freedom. The generations before us have suffered a great deal and we don't want to be like them. It's our duty to unite the world and make it a perfect place, a better place.

So first let's start with talking. We all have a lack of communication between us, which leads to misunderstandings and at the worst, hatred. Don't be quick to believe all of the bad things that you hear about someone else's faith. If there is something troubling you or you want to clear it, then talk about it. It's the best solution. Go and talk to the person, ask him or her everything you want to. Let them explain how they view God and neighbor. Clear all your doubts. Learn about them in depth and Inquire about as many things as you want and you'll soon realize that half of the things you thought you knew weren't even real.

I want to share a class experiment we did in our school just to give an example. We invited one of the teachers in our class whom we all were afraid of, to lunch with us. We divided our duties and came up with three groups. One group made the invitation card. The other brought the food and another served it. All went well, as we talked about the little things of life, things went smoothly and we soon realized that talking about everyday things, like food, points us to our common humanness. Also discuss and understand the things you have doubts on or the things you wish to clarify, but never forget to control your anger. It's one of the leading causes of aimless fighting and violence. My world is filled with terrible violence because people just don't connect with each other in the market or in the small things of life where friendships form. There have been lots of Muslims, Christians and Jews who have lived in the same towns and gotten along really well because they did the small daily things together. History has shown as that there is always a way for peace. Threat and violence is not the right communication. Only talking can help. Let's connect with each other about the nice everyday world we share, increase tolerance, create affection and love between people, and renew our dedication to religious freedom. It is our duty to unite this world and make it a better place.

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