

Islamic Method of Encouraging Unity and Communal Harmony through Interfaith Dialogue

Bilal Ahmed Bhat and Dr. Sheikh Jameil Ali

Article Information:

To cite this document:

Bilal Ahmad Bhat, & Dr. Sheikh Jameil Ali. (2023). Islamic Approach of Upholding Peace and Communal Harmony through Interfaith Dialogue. Karachi Islamicus, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.58575/ki.v3i2.37>

For Authors: If you would like to write for this Journal, then please use our Author Guidelines 'service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit our website for more information.

About Karachi Islamicus:

Karachi Islamicus is a Bi-Annual Research and Referred Journal published by MANARS, Karachi. The Journal covers authoritative, topical and original research papers in all fields of Islam and Religious Studies that interests a wide range of authors symbolizing an outstanding development within an explicit field.

Review and Publication Policy of Karachi Islamicus:

Articles sent for publication in 'Karachi Islamicus' go through an initial editorial screening followed by a double-blind peer review. The Editorial Board of the Journal is responsible for the selection of reviewers based on their expertise in the relevant field. All the papers will be reviewed by external reviewers from outside the organization of journal.



© 2023 by the Licensee MANARS, Pakistan. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Islamic Method of Encouraging Unity and Communal Harmony through Interfaith Dialogue

Bilal Ahmed Bhat¹ and Dr. Sheikh Jameil Ali¹

¹ Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) Awantipora, Jammu and Kashmir;

Correspondence: bilal.bhat@islamicuniversity.edu.in;

Received: 9 September 2023; Accepted: 17 October 2023; Published: 30 December 2023

Abstract: Dialogue allows us to discuss nearly anything while listening, arguing, and agreeing to differ without losing our composure, patience, temper, or sense of dignity. Any attempt to make people aware of the mutual understanding of different faiths on the basis of common grounds in the world religions is called interfaith dialogue. It is highlighted as an emblem of peace by the religionists of the world. Interfaith dialogue is important for promoting peace, tolerance, harmony in the world. It consists of meaningful interaction and exchange between people of different groups (social, cultural, political and religious) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding. The holy *Qur'ān* asks Muslims to engage in constructive dialogue with people of other faiths on the basis of what they have common; doing righteous deeds. The foundation of the study lies in the textual analysis and historical interpretation of the *Qur'ān* and Sunnah. The Study aims to present an interpretation of the verses of the *Qur'ān* relating to interfaith dialogue and also highlight the concept of interfaith dialogue in Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*).

Keywords: Qur'ān, Sunnah, Interfaith, Dialogue

Introduction: The need for greater understanding between people of many religions, regions, ethnicities, and cultures has never been greater than it is today in the long history of humanity. Never before was the call as urgent as it is right now.

During the twenty-first century, a significant technological revolution occurred. The modern world exists as a single entity. With the aid of mass media, science and technology have broken down the barriers erected by the idea of nation states, and the world has become a single global community. The necessity to view this universe as a single entity is being imposed upon us by economic, social, and political factors. A number of developments have occurred in recent years, including the linking of several currencies¹, globalization of trade and commerce, corporate investment in economic development, and interdependence of political fortunes. Nowadays, no nation can afford to exist in isolation and seclusion². All of this is a proven historical fact. However, despite this technological advancement, a true explanation and knowledge of the minds of diverse peoples, the goals and purposes of various ideologies, and the tone and temper of other cultures have not yet fully taken shape. Instead, this component has largely been ignored. Unfortunate discord occurs between the development of methods on the one hand and the rise of global human consciousness on the other. Economic and political connections are expanding every day. However, they do not serve as a replacement for a correct comprehension and appreciation of one system or another. True human connection is still a long way off.

If the humanity is to advance and develop and reach the highest peaks of peace and harmony, such discord must be put an end since it is out of step with the needs and spirit of our day. The largest and most urgent need is probably for more interaction amongst the many peoples of the world so that we can better understand one another. It is clear that understanding other cultures has always been important, but today that importance has increased. To encourage unity and understanding across various cultures and religions around the world, the same thing has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, ALLAH Almighty says:

“Say: people of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we shall serve none but ALLAH Almighty and shall associate none with him in his divinity and that some of us will not take others as lords besides Allah³”

Interreligious communication is essential for preserving peace and harmony in the multiethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural world in which humans live. Tragic incidents have occurred countless times throughout history. A few of the conflicts that are still wreaking havoc on the world today are the attacks of 9/11, the Israel-Palestine dispute, the invasions of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, the clashes between the Muslim and Buddhists in Thailand, and the genocide of Muslims in Myanmar⁴.

Although it is often considered that all religions teach compassion and love for all people, many horrible crimes have been committed in the name of a religion that has killed numerous innocent people, including women and children. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to foster inclusivity by facilitating dialogue among individuals of diverse religious and cultural affiliations, with the aim of promoting substantive interreligious discourse for the betterment of humanity at large. One important method for lowering and resolving religious tensions is interreligious dialogue. Its common goal is to bring together adherents of many religions and contribute to interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence. Muslims have been instrumental in fostering interreligious cooperation since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) since Islam, a religion that is practiced by all people, promotes love, tolerance, and compassion for all people.

The Notion of Interfaith dialogue: The term "dialogue" is derived from the Greek word "dialogos," with "dia" meaning "through" and "logos" meaning "word." Dialogue is a form of communication that occurs "through words."⁵ It can be defined as an exchange of ideas, thoughts, or opinions between multiple parties with the purpose of sharing knowledge and gaining mutual advantages⁶. According to Swidler, dialogue refers to a discussion that takes place between two or more individuals who hold different perspectives yet share a similar topic of discussion.⁷ Interreligious dialogue involves cultivating constructive relationships with shared and collaborative attitudes among adherents of diverse religious beliefs. Unlike a dispute focused on winning, dialogue emphasizes understanding the perspectives of the opposing party.⁸ The objective is to enhance effective communication among individuals from various cultural backgrounds, thereby diminishing interreligious misconceptions and lack of knowledge. Interreligious discourse entails a genuine and reciprocal exchange of perspectives aimed at understanding and appreciating each other's beliefs and entitlements. Its objective is to recognize shared principles while acknowledging disparities, with the purpose of narrowing the divide between various faiths⁹. The primary goal is to make a meaningful contribution to the promotion of interreligious harmony and peaceful cohabitation. Hans Kung emphasized that peace among nations is impossible without harmony among religions. Interreligious harmony is unattainable without interreligious discourse. Interreligious discussion cannot occur without a thorough examination of the fundamental principles of each religion.

Qur'ānic Definition of Dialogue: There are various conversations mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān. These conversations include between prophets and God, between angels and God, between prophets and their communities, between people, and even conversations involving interactions with the Satan. In the *Qur'ān*, two Arabic terms have been used to delineate the concept of conversation. The term "hiwar" originates from the root word ح و ر and encompasses various forms of discourse involving multiple individuals. Its primary purpose is to address conflicts, present arguments, establish truths, challenge flawed reasoning, and respond to inaccurate assertions or perspectives. It is worth mentioning that Surah al-Kahf verses 34 and 37 explicitly allude to the term "discussion". ALLAH Almighty says:

So, the owner had fruit in abundance and he said to his neighbor, while conversing with him: "I have greater wealth than you and I am stronger than you in numbers"¹⁰ While conversing with him his neighbor exclaimed: "Do you deny who created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, and then fashioned you into a complete man?"¹¹

The word "hiwar" in both of these verses is used to denote "conversation." In these two passages, the term "hiwar," according to Ibn Kathir in his tafsir, has a pejorative meaning that means "to debate him, oppose him, and boastfully undermine him." However, Tabari offers a different perspective, viewing dialogue as "they take and give in the course of speaking" in contrast. This definition is consistent with that in the book "Lisan al-Arab." Additionally, a similar phrase is used in a good context in Surah al-Mujadalah verse one, referring to a cool, collected conversation (al-hiwar al-hadi) meant to find and establish the truth. As ALLAH Almighty says:

Allah has indeed heard the words of the woman who is pleading with you concerning her husband and is making her complaint to Allah. Allah is hearing your mutual conversation. He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.¹²

The second word used in the *Qur'ān* for dialogue is "Jadal," originated from the Arabic root word ج د ل which has a general connotation akin to "hiwar." However, "Jadal" is used when the goal is to win over the opposition, regardless of how weak or convincing the evidence is against them. ALLAH Almighty says:

in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance¹³.

"And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)"¹⁴."

In the world, there is not a single nation devoid of diversity. God gave us diversity for the benefit of humanity. The *Qur'ān* states:

"If Allah had willed, He would have made you a single community"¹⁵."

The above-mentioned verse makes it clear that God's design encompasses the presence of multiple religions. As a result, Muslims should recognize diversity as a divine blessing and peacefully coexist in friendly terms with individuals who follow different faiths, cultures, and beliefs. The Quran provides several instances of constructive dialogue as a guide. It

encourages Muslims to engage with those of different religions with the highest levels of respect and wisdom. As ALLAH Almighty says in The *Qur'ān*:

“Invite (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good words; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. Indeed, your Lord is all knowing of those who have strayed from His path and who receive guidance¹⁶.”

To improve a mutual connection, wisdom, polite communication, and gracious behavior are essential. God desires that all people uphold justice in all facets of life. Al-Adil (the Just) is one of Allah's (SWT) names. There cannot be goodness without justice. As a result, developing a community that is peaceful and wealthy requires justice. Because of this, the *Qur'ān* places a strong emphasis on treating everyone justly, regardless of their religion, culture, or nationality. The *Qur'ān* further says:

“O! you who believe! Stand out for God, as witness to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God, for God is well acquainted with all that you do.”¹⁷

Human connections can be strengthened by acting with justice, kindness, and respect. For this reason, Muslims are urged by ALLAH Almighty to treat one another with love and justice, regardless of their religious beliefs. Allah says in the *Qur'ān*:

“And He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves just.”¹⁸

Muslims are reminded through the *Qur'ān* that all people, regardless of their faith, culture, or race, have a common ancestor., ALLAH Almighty Says:

“O mankind! Be careful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread a multitude of men and women.”¹⁹ “O mankind! Verily we have created you of a male and a female and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of him: God is all knowing, all aware.”²⁰

The aforementioned verses elucidate the notion that God is the creator of all individuals, originating from Adam. Furthermore, these passages assert that they convey a comprehensive and distinctive understanding of oneness by underscoring the common ancestry of humanity.

The *Qur'ānic* instruction to familiarize oneself with others can be seen as an endorsement of interreligious communication. The notion that all humans share a common origin serves as the fundamental basis for their inherent equality. In the final address delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātam un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*), he conveyed the following message: “O people, it is imperative to recognize that the divine being responsible for your creation is singular, and you all share a common lineage stemming from a shared paternal ancestor.” According to the statement, individuals of Arab descent do not possess inherent superiority over individuals of non-Arab descent. Similarly, those of white ethnicity do not possess inherent superiority over individuals of black ethnicity, and vice versa. The only basis for differentiation and superiority is in the level of righteousness exhibited by individuals. The *Qur'ān* enjoins Muslims to exhibit benevolent conduct towards their neighbors, regardless of their religious affiliation. Al-Tabari elucidates in his exegesis that the concept

of neighbor in Islam encompasses individuals belonging to both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. In the Islamic faith, it is believed that all individuals possess equal rights. The Qur'ān serves as a reminder of the shared elements present in other religions, emphasizing the importance of fostering collaborative and harmonious relationships among individuals adhering to diverse religious beliefs. The Qur'ān says:

“Say: O people of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah.”²¹

The Qur'ānic verse, “Come to common terms as between us and you”.²² provides a connotation of dialogue. Even though the verse particularly refers to the People of the Book, its relevance today is much broader. While addressing non-Muslim rulers in letters, the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) of Islam also emphasized shared ideals. The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) referred to the aforementioned Qur'ānic passage in his letter to the kingdoms of Abyssinia and Byzantium.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Interfaith Dialogue: The Sunnah²³ of Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) as described in the books of sīrah provides us abundant examples of the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which provides numerous instances of friendly interactions and dialogue between Muslims and individuals of different beliefs. The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) engaged with people from varying ideologies, such as believers, non-believers, idolaters, and atheists, throughout his lifetime. He maintained social and economic ties with both Muslims and those who did not follow Islam. The essence of the current motto “Love for all and hate for none” was exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*), as he refrained from cursing even his adversaries. This principle was evident when he endured severe persecution while conveying the message of Islam to the people of Ta'if. Despite the mistreatment, he refrained from cursing them and instead prayed for their forgiveness.²⁴ Another notable incident involved a woman who would scatter thorns on the path the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) would traverse. Despite this, he chose to remove the thorns without reprimanding or cursing her²⁵. Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) set a model for all humanity. He is reported to have said: “All creatures of God are the members of the family of God, and he is the best-loved of God who loves His creatures best.”²⁶

Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) advised Muslims to exercise self-restraint while being abused verbally by non-Muslims. It is narrated by Urwah Ibn Zubair that “Once the holy prophet of Islam was sitting with his wife, ‘A'ishah, and a few companions. A group of Jews were passing them and said: ‘Al-samu alaika’ (May death be upon you). The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) kept silent and did not respond to the Jews. But, ‘Ayishah (*Radi Allah Anhā*), the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*), responded with anger by saying ‘Alaikum wa la'natullah wa ghadabAllahu ‘alaikum (same to you as well as may ALLAH Almighty’s curse and anger be upon you). On hearing this, the holy prophet persuaded ‘Ayishah (*Radi Allah Anhā*) by saying

that 'ALLAH Almighty (SWT) loves gentleness'²⁷. self-restraint and gentleness are vital forces for strengthening human relationships in the society. The examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) can be enlightening for all people irrespective of their religion.

The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) constantly thought of the welfare of all the creations of God. It is narrated that Nawwas Ibn Siman asked the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*), what is a good deed? Then the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) replied, doing good to the creation of ALLAH Almighty²⁸. The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) asked his companions to treat well the inhabitants of a land that enters under Muslim rule. Abu Dharr al- Ghifari reported that the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) of Islam said, one day you will conquer Egypt, and you must treat the people well therein. Taking care of the people around him was one of the highest priorities of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*). The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) maintained an excellent relationship with his neighbors regardless of their ethnic and religious identities. He emphasized helping and supporting neighbors. Ibn Abbas reports that the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) said: He is not a true believer who eats with contentment (in full stomach) while his neighbors remain hungry by his side²⁹. This is evidenced by another hadith reported by Abdullah Ibn 'Amr that a sheep was slaughtered for him. He asked his slave, 'have you given some meat of the sheep to our Jewish neighbor? He repeated three times and said: I heard the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) saying that Jibril kept recommending to me to treat my neighbors in such a good way that I thought he would make them my heirs"³⁰.

Following the Battle of Khyber (628 CE), the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) instructed his companions to return all Jewish scriptures, demonstrating his deep respect and affection for non-Muslims. Dhimmi, referring to non-Muslims residing in an Islamic state, were explicitly protected from unfair treatment by the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*). He is reported to have stated, as narrated by Safwan Ibn Sulaim, "On the Day of Judgment, I will stand against anyone who oppresses a Dhimmi, imposes excessive taxes, or takes something from them without permission."³¹

Another tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) states,

"Harming a Dhimmi is akin to harming me, and harming me is akin to harming ALLAH Almighty."³²

Consequently, harming non-Muslims, particularly Dhimmi, is seen as an affront to ALLAH Almighty. The societal structure instigated by the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) in Madinah

serves as a model of harmonious cohabitation, where the community in Madinah was founded upon common interests rather than religious divisions. The Charter of Madinah was established to govern all aspects of the population, regardless of their faith. The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) united the diverse population of Madinah, including Jews, polytheists, and various ethnic groups, into one ummah³³. They coexisted harmoniously while preserving their distinct identities within a single political, economic, legal, military, and social entity. The charter aimed to promote harmony, protect the lives and property of all residents of Madinah, combat injustice and aggression irrespective of religious or tribal affiliations, and ensure religious freedom. In Madinah, Jews and Muslims lived together in peace.³⁴

In Madinah, the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) never compelled non-Muslim residents to follow Islamic laws. According to Abu Hurairah, a group of Jewish scholars visited Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) seeking his judgment on a case involving a fellow Jew who had committed adultery. The Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) made his decision based on Jewish scripture³⁵. In addition to the Charter of Madinah (Mithāq-e-Madīna), the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) entered into numerous agreements with Jews, Christians, and polytheists. Another historically significant document is the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) agreement with the Christians of Najran, which was in line with the principles of peaceful coexistence and protection of rights as per that pact:

“No clergy’s or monk’s post shall be changed, nobody shall be denied travel, their places of worship shall not be destroyed or turned into Islamic masjids or added to Muslims’ buildings. ... If they (Christians) need help from Muslims with repairing their churches, monasteries or any other religious or worldly business, Muslims shall help them without placing them under any obligation; help and support for their religious needs shall be provided out of abiding by the promise of God’s Messenger, as a donation and as God’s grace.”³⁶

Historical Development of Interfaith Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective: The Islamic way of interfaith dialogue has a long and rich history that dates back many centuries. Here is a quick summary:

- *Early Period of Prophets ﷺ Mission:* In Arabia, Jews, Christians and polytheists interacted with Muslims throughout the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*). An early example of a constitution that guaranteed the rights of many religious sects and created guidelines for collaboration is the Charter of Medina (622 CE).³⁷
- *Islamic Golden Age:* From the eighth to the thirteenth century, Muslim academics conversed with those of other religions, such as Jews, Christians, and Hindus. Many ancient Greek and Roman books were translated into Arabic during this time, promoting communication and knowledge exchange.³⁸
- *Islamic Spain (Al-Andalus):* renowned for its religious diversity, served as a hub for interreligious discussion. Scholars from many religious backgrounds, including Muslims, Jews, and Christians, frequently worked together to translate and preserve classical works, advancing European scholarship.³⁹

- *Ottoman Empire*: The Ottoman Empire, which was renowned for its religious diversity, set up organizations to oversee interactions between religious groups. The "Millet System" gave various religious organizations some latitude in running their own affairs.⁴⁰
- *Modern Interfaith Initiatives*: Interfaith communication has seen a renaissance in the 20th and 21st centuries, frequently driven by Islamic academics and groups. In a globalized society, these initiatives seek to promote mutual respect, peace, and collaboration among believers in many religions.
- *Key individuals*: Prominent Muslim thinkers who supported discussion and change, such as Muhammad Abduh, as well as more recent individuals like Sheikh Ahmad Deedat, Dr. Zakir Naik, Tariq Ramadan and many more have contributed significantly to the advancement of interfaith understanding.
- *Interfaith Organizations*: A number of Islamic interfaith groups have been founded to promote communication between various religious communities, including the King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

Islamic views on interreligious communication have stressed the value of tolerance, understanding, and cooperation throughout their history, guided by the values of justice, compassion, and respect for variety. In the contemporary world, these initiatives are still being developed as Muslims participate in interreligious dialogue to foster understanding and peace.

The historical events in Islam indicate that the agreement between the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) of Islam ﷺ and the Christian delegation from Najran during the early years of the Hijrah era marked the initiation of interfaith communication. Some scholars argue that Muslims sought such a pact due to their initial vulnerability upon their arrival in Madinah and that their strength grew with the establishment of the Islamic state. However, considering relevant verses from the Qur’ān, the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) traditions (Sunnah), and historical context, these interpretations appear unfounded. Even during the pinnacle of the Islamic state's influence, the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) consistently honored all his agreements, including the Madinah Charter (Mīthāq-e-Madīna), without any breaches from the opposing party.

Throughout his life, Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) consistently demonstrated compassion and empathy toward all individuals. When the Muslims conquered Makkah in 630 CE, gaining total control over those who had previously persecuted the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) and his companions and forced them to migrate to Madinah, he chose not to seek vengeance but instead granted amnesty to all and told them that I will deal with you like Prophet Joseph (AS) had dealt with his brothers and recited the famous verse of the Holy Qur’ān:

“He said: "This day let no reproach be (cast) on you: ALLAH Almighty will forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy”!⁴¹

The companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥaḍrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu ‘alaihi wa ‘alā ‘Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) also internalized his principles. Historical

evidence attests to the equitable treatment of non-Muslims in various Islamic societies, where they enjoyed the freedom to practice their faith, and their religious institutions, such as temples, churches, and synagogues, were safeguarded and respected.

Conclusion: The study reveals that it is normal to have a society with a variety of religions, and Islam, being a global religion, promotes the practice of interfaith dialogue. The principles outlined in the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muhammad (*Ḥadrat Muhammad Rasūlullah Khātām un Nabīyyīn Ṣallallahu 'alaihi wa 'alā 'Ālihi wa Aṣḥābihi wa Ṣallam*) sunnah demonstrate the fair and impartial treatment of those belonging to different religions as fellow members of the human race. Islam has successfully assimilated into a diverse society characterized by various religions and civilizations; despite the differences it has with other religions. Islamic teachings strongly prohibit Muslims from inflicting damage upon those of different faiths. Instead, they highlight the importance of providing assistance, protection, and ensuring that their due rights and honor are indorsed.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive analysis of the aforementioned discussion, encompassing both pro and con arguments for interfaith dialogue, demonstrates that Islam explicitly encourages its adherents to participate in interfaith dialogue. Islam promotes and approves both interfaith discourse and missionary effort as separate aspects. Dialogue proves to be a highly efficient method for communicating the teachings of Islam to individuals of different religious beliefs, particularly considering the widespread misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims among those who do not follow the faith. Harnessing such chances can aid in dispelling misconceptions and fostering the authentic essence of Islam on a global scale.

Effectively implementing Islamic teachings regarding interreligious discourse has the capacity to eliminate violence, mistrust, and disputes among diverse religious communities. It is imperative for Muslims to acknowledge and engage in interfaith discussion, irrespective of its underlying objectives. Without the involvement of knowledgeable Muslim academics, these discussions may be vulnerable to exploitation by unskilled persons, perhaps causing damage to the reputation of Islam and Muslims. Hence, it is imperative for competent Ulāmā to assume leadership, showcasing the authentic essence of Islam and debunking misunderstandings. Interfaith dialogues should strictly adhere to the principles of Islamic Shari'ah, without making any concessions on religious essentials. This need is not only a reaction to current demands, but also presents a substantial challenge that requires daring confrontation.

Notes and References:

¹ Some examples of nations with a single currency include:

- Eurozone countries: These are the 19 European member states out of 27 that have adopted the euro as their official currency.
- Caribbean Community (CARICOM): Several Caribbean countries, including Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, use the Eastern Caribbean dollar as their official currency.
- CFA Franc Zone: This is a monetary union of 14 African countries, mostly former French colonies, that use the CFA franc as their common currency.
- Ecuador: Since 2000, Ecuador has used the US dollar as its official currency.
- Panama: Since 1904, Panama has used the US dollar as its official currency.

² Turkey's February 2023 earthquake serves as a powerful example of why no nation can afford to exist in isolation and seclusion.

³ Al Qur'an Sura Al Imran: 3: 64.

⁴ Mohammad Eliusa, Issa Khan, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach", KATHA, 15(2019), 01-19.

⁵ Karim, K. M., & Saile, S. A. (2009). Inter-faith dialogue: The Qur'anic and Prophetic perspective. *Journal of Usuluddin*, 29, 65–94.

⁶ David, B. (2017). *Difficult dialogues*. Clark University. <https://www2.clarku.edu/difficultdialogues/learn/index.cfm>

⁷ Swidler, L. (2014b). The dialogue decalogue: Ground rules for interreligious dialogue. In Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institution (Ed.), *Dialogue for interreligious understanding: Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institution* (pp. 47–52). Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸ Arinze, F. C. (1990). *The Church in dialogue: Walking with other believers*. Ignatius Press.

⁹ Haq, M. Z. (2014). Muslims' participation in interfaith dialogue: Challenges and opportunity.

¹⁰ Al Qur'an: Sura Al Kahf 18: 34.

¹¹ Al Qur'an: Sura Al Kahf 18: 37.

¹² Al-Qur'an, Sura al-Mujadala, 58:1.

¹³ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Nahl, 16:125.

¹⁴ Al-Qur'an Surah al-Ankabut, 29:46.

¹⁵ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Maidah, 5:48.

¹⁶ Al Qur'an, Surah al-Nahl, 16:125.

¹⁷ Al Qur'an, Surah al-Maida, 5:8.

¹⁸ Al Qur'an, Surah al-Mumtahina, 60:8.

¹⁹ Al Qur'an, Surah al-Nisa, 4:1.

²⁰ Al Qur'an, Surah al-Hujurat, 49:13.

²¹ Al Qur'an, Surah al- Al Imran, 3:64.

²² Al- Qur'an Surah Al- Ali 'Imran, (3:64).

²³ Sunnah, in Islamic terminology, refers to the collection of actions, sayings, approvals, and traditions of the prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It encompasses all aspects of the holy prophet's life, including his behavior, practices, and teachings.

²⁴ Mubarakpuri Safi ur Rehman, *The Sealed Nectar*, 2011, Riyadh, Darussalam, P. 187.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sahi Al Bukhari: 1392.

²⁷ Ibid, 6030.

²⁸ Sahih Muslim, book 4, hadith 7148.

²⁹ al-Sunan al-Kubrá 4049

³⁰ Sahi Al Bukhari: 1989.

³¹ Abu Dawud, S. (n. d.). Sunan Abi Dawud. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al- 'Asriyyah. As quoted by Mohammad Eliusa (at all) in "Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach, KATHA, Vol. 15, 01-19 (2019).

³² Albani. A. A. R. M. N. U. (1985). *Ghayatu al- Muram fi Takhrij Ahadis al- Halal wa al- Haram*. Beirut: Al-Maktaba alIslam. As quoted by Mohammad Eliusa (at all) in "Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach, KATHA, Vol. 15, 01-19 (2019).

³³ Mubarakpuri Safi ur Rehman, *The Sealed Nectar*, 2011, Riyadh, Darussalam, P. 451.

³⁴ Ibid, 455.

³⁵ Sahih Al- Bukhari, Hadith No. 4196.

³⁶ Mubarakpuri Safi ur Rehman, *The Sealed Nectar*, 2011, Riyadh, Darussalam, P. 461.

³⁷ Ibid, 197.

³⁸ Hitti P.K, *History of the Arabs*, 1989, Macmillan Education LTD. London, P. 98

³⁹ Sawlat Sarwat, *Millat e Islamia Ki Mukhtasar Tarikh*, 2014, Islamic Publications Limited, Lahore. Vol. 2, P.132.

⁴⁰ Al-Salabi Ali Muhammad, tr. Zaffar Iqbal Muhammad, *Saltanat-e-Usmania*, 2008, Zia Al Quran Publications, Lahore, P. 349.

⁴¹ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Yusuf, (12:92).