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# THE ROLE OF INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE IN PROMOTING GLOBAL PEACE AND HARMONY: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

## AHMAD I[1], TIRMAZI MS[1], KHATTAK AH[2] AND REHMAN AU[*3]

1.  Department of Islamic Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad Pakistan

2.  Centre for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Women University Swabi, Pakistan

3.  Department of Political Science, Women University Swabi, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author E Mail:** rehman.phd@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Discussion and dialogues are key to obtaining clarity and consensus on a topic, an issue or dispute. The inter-faith peace, harmony, tolerance, understanding, universal peace, belief in oneness and unity; and basics of other equal values can be obtained through debate and dialogue. It is imperative to make this world as abode of peace. Through positive dialogue, antagonism and distances could be diminished followed by an end of estrangement. This element is proved in history and Islamic teachings are evidential of it that enemies' hearts can be won by love and sincerity. This research study has analysed the teachings of Islam in dealing with other religions of the world vis-à-vis the mandatory Islamic principles and conditions. The material studied for this paper includes modern-day literature of the western world and the fundamental Islamic sources i.e., the Holy Quran and Hadith. The study has analysed that Islam promotes, inter-faith harmony, global peace and prosperity among all the religions and states of the world.

Keywords: Inter-Faith Dialogue, Holy Quran, Hadith, Peace and Harmony

# 1.    INTRODUCTION

## 1.1.    The Meaning of Dialogue:

The connotation of inter-religious (inter-faith) dialogue is negotiation, discussion, discourse, communication, and exchange of thoughts, ideas and opinions among world religions. The substitute of it is 'Hawar' in the Arabic, 'Muqalma' in Urdu and 'Dialogue' in English. Nowadays the terms 'Dialogue', 'Hawar' and 'Muqalma' are generally used in interfaith. Hawar is infinitive and derived from Hor that is called Marajiul Kalam and also used for debate, discussion and battle [1]. It is mentioned in the Holy Quran: "Certainly, Allah (SWT) heard voice of that woman which is having argumentation with you and appealing to Allah. Allah is seeing and listening both of yours's communication [2]. "Hawar is different both from debate and discussion. It is favourite whereas others (Manazra and Mujadila) are not much liked acts in general, as they end in hatred, contempt and fight.

The word Mujadila (Jadal) has been used 29 times in the Holy Quran giving sense of deprecation, whereas Hawar has been mentioned thrice as exchange of thoughts, ideas, and points of view with one another [3]. The Oxford Dictionary defines Dialogue as,"to give, to meet, to exchange view or to negotiate [4]". So, there is no doubt in it that Islam not only lays stresses upon negotiation and values it high but also enforces it. Regarding Islamic teaching for peace and harmony, the Holy Quran and the best ethics of the last Prophet of Allah (SAW) withstand the proof. There is Allah's command rewardingly: "and O Prophet! Good and evil are not similar. You dispel evil with best act of kindness. You will witness who hated you will be your best friend [5]".

## 1.2.    The Need and Importance of Interfaith Dialogue:

The door for an inter-religious dialogue of interfaith harmony has always been opened ever since in Islam. The Muslim History bears witness to it that Muslims have maintained good relations and tolerance with other religions and nations of the world. Even in the state of war, such practices had not been shunned. After the 9/11 event, attacks were stormed against Islam, and anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic countries perceived the Muslims being terrorists, fundamentalists and narrow-minded. The need of interfaith dialogue increased for

international relations pertaining to diplomatic and consular relations in particular. Therefore, this point may be focused in the light of good example of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his teachings may be strengthened in contemporary times [6].

Islam, a religion of righteousness and invitation, encompassing the world because of its invitation, makes it mandatory for every Muslim to deliver or convey the universal message to the world. It is the only religion among all other faiths of world which has not only ordered for its global level spread but also elucidated formal principles to have communication and dialogue with other people, nations and cultures [7].

The examples of dialogue and negotiation are present in the Holy Quran and pure conduct of the last messenger from individual to collective level. The Holy Prophet (SAW) had dialogues with Arabian polytheists, Quresh's chieftains, from Warqa Bin Naufil to Christian scholars of Najran both individually and collectively. Similarly, the charter of Medina carried out during Prophet Muhammad (SAW)'s life at Medina was a kind of dialogue in the shape of a pact between Muslims and Jews [7].

It can be well estimated out of this that magnanimous Prophet (SAW) ordered his companions to learn other nations' languages so that language of invitation could be easy and comprehensible; as such impressions and impacts cause love and fraternity. This was the reason that the holy Prophet (SAW) himself provided training to his companions in this regard [8]. The ambassadors sent to kings/monarchs of the world had been communicating with them in their local language, which is miraculously a clear proof of dialogue in the same language of them [9].

People blessed with rational thinking and attitude, know it very well that a dire need of interfaith dialogue at the moment of globalization is more important than previous century. This is the only solution that will be fruitful for bringing both the opponent and addressee to a same platform and further directly diverted towards consideration where arguments can be completely explained. This dialogue can occur from every aspect like individual, collective, religious and cultural etc.

Allah (SWT) has declared all human beings as one family and commanded its every member to be well-wisher of

another. In this connection, he further declared: "All creatures are family of Allah (SWT) and he who does well with His family is His most favourite [10]. "

At this time, it is the best act of kindness with the other creatures of Allah (SWT) that they may be saved from extinction and benevolence is to cause someone with permanent blissfulness. For which the interfaith dialogue is the best means.

One of the major targets and objectives of dialogue is to establish argument and proof so that no any suspicion remains. This is a divine order from Allah (SWT) declaring that: "Present an argument if you are righteous [11]". Besides this, removing doubts are also mandatory which are coming against expressing and accepting truth as declared by Allah (SWT): "Call people to path of Allah with wisdom and exhortation [11]".

Islam emphasises on search for actual reasons of unrest and turbulence and division. It should be main target and aim of interfaith dialogue's targets and aims to identify which are causes behind turbulence, division, unrest and terrorism and extremism. Determining actual causes behind all these through dialogue is actual meaning of dialogue. Every human is worried of unrest in the world

in current time, conflict and disruption. In this global village, interfaith dialogue may be utilized as shield for remedy and cure of political, financial, intellectual, moral, religious and social violation, cruelty and injustice. Islam has given so importance to peace that if foe is in condition of war but if he desires peace, then divert with peace to him.

## 1.3. Brief History of the Interfaith Dialogue:

There are many forms of Hawar (Dialogue), for example, individual and live dialogue, by correspondence, meetings, gatherings, conferences, discussions and debates. It had been established in the time of Holy Prophet (SAW) if studied from point of view from Islamic history. Its examples, record, commentaries, samples and patterns can be found in the practices of the Prophet (SAW). His (Prophet Muhammad) negotiations with either Christians of Najran or Warqa Bin Naufil, with Jews of Medina after migration and business dealings or correspondence with monarchs of that time, all pertain to interfaith dialogue in different forms.

The scope of these dialogues seems to be vast from ordinary people to great

scholars and then to government level (Caliphs of the time). Apart from this, the dialogue has been continued through formal correspondence of letters as well. The dialogues from the early prophetic time to later rise/dominance of Islam consisted of topics like beliefs and conversations. But these dialogues never put pressure, narrowness, and restriction on polytheists of any kind whereas on the contrary, they got free, tolerant and broad-minded society which has been actually temperament/nature of Muslims and Islam.

Nevertheless, a special change has been observed in these dialogues along with expansion in its scope in $20^{th}$ century. Acceleration in flow of life, diversity, progress in science technological development, modernity and advancement in latest terminologies, close relation and contact (amalgamation) in international community have caused expansion in it. Some of names of such high-level scholars are: Shaikh Tahir Aljazaer, Shaikh Abdullah AlIlmi Alghazi Aldamshaqi, Shab Muslim, Shaikh JhajAlbetarLebnani, Shaikh Syedi Ghaaz Laba Indoneshi, Shaikh Ahmed Widat African, Mufti Shaikh Ahmed Kuftar Washam, Moreover, Shahikh

Rahmat Allah Kiranavi, and Dr. Zakir Naek Hindustan etc.

Arrangement of dialogues have often been made at the level of governments or kingdoms or then under ministries or religious congregations and under societies. In history of $20^{th}$ century's journalism, such dialogues have been arranged time and again. It must be kept in mind that these kinds of dialogues have often been arranged generally by western world [12]. In the light of principles, manners, aims, targets, objectives of dialogue, today's interfaith dialogue has been losing its significance and majority of scholars view it a fruitless effort. This means, achieving a mission and fruitful results for few selfish individuals, institutions and some countries. The opponents have succeeded somehow in their aims, which has been an agenda of globalization of international colonial powers that seems constantly moving forward to achieve their material and political gains by working against inter-faith dialogue.

Since the direction of interfaith dialogue has changed, it has been concealed under unclear and ambiguous field. It's not an effective and sincere effort for solution of problems of the world. Because the

problems or subjects on which dialogue has taken place, the recommendations haven't been adopted despite being crystal clear. It looks that both Eastern and Western world has been wasting time and money especially the developing countries. The suggestions and recommendations at the end of first international Muslim Christian Conference (1974) were compiled as follows:

- Both Muslims Christians communities should allow each other to learn their faith in their own compliance.
- Both Muslim and Christian communities should be freed, and violence may be stopped against them.
- Brutality and injustice must be stopped in Palestine and struggle for protection of Palestinians' rights is necessary to be strived for [12].

However, it has been observed that no significant step has been taken by the developed and developing states to practically implement the above mentioned recommendations.

**1.4. The Principles of Interfaith Dialogue:** Holy Quran has explained the

principles of dialogue for the preachers and arbitrators. There is Divine command: "Call people to your lord with wisdom and good exhortation and argue with them in an excellent way [11]." Syed Suleman Nadvi has expounded the distinctive feature of Islam in the words How to invite people to accept "that: truth, was the major principle and teaching which came into action through last messenger of Allah (SAW). The religions, which claim to be revealed and missionary, cannot hold that their scriptures do not explain crucial principles of preaching for them. In the same way, Muhammad (SAW)'s scripture has been revealed in comprehensive and summarized way of it to its followers that how it ought to be delivered to people and how to invite them to truth [13].

Islam has not only commanded to its followers for spread and promotion but also given education of basic doctrines of dialogue. Magnanimous Prophet (SAW) has presented those principles to world.

**1.5. Preference of Islam and Interfaith Dialogue:**

It has been assessed from historical events of Islam that whenever the great Prophet (SAW) got options to choose

between peace and war, he preferred peace over war. For example, the treaty of Hudaibiya can be referred in which the noble Prophet (SAW) truced on such terms and conditions despite companions felt disheartened that ostensibly showed defeat of Muslims. But this event of peace provided free atmosphere of dialogue so that Muslims and polytheists of Makkah listened and understood each other's point of view. According to Imam Zahri after this event, the Companions of Prophet (SAW) became more confident, used to meet freely with each other and had free discourse regarding Islam. This wise move pushed many people into the domain of Islam [14].

In short, it can be summed up that mutual dialogue and peaceful society is a requirement of Islam. This is Allah (SWT)'s promise that whenever there will be communication on basis of arguments then victory will surely be in favour of Islam and its followers. The order of Allah is:"It is that Allah who sent His apostle with true religion and instruction so that he may dominate Islam over all other religions then why it does not feel unpleasant to polytheists [15]". Solid and sound argumentations of Islamic teachings are key tools and techniques of Muslims in interfaith dialogue. Opponents in such dialogues are often defeated mainly due to this tool that's why they have been adopting cheap methods and tactics. It was due to Prophet (SAW)'s dialogue with Najran's scholars (Christianity) that debate was won by Muslims and few of their scholars accepted Islam. Therefore, it has been analysed that the doors and options of dialogue should never be closed by the Muslims.

## 1.6. Interfaith Dialogue and Search of Collective Values:

Being Muslims, it is imperative on all of us that for the betterment and development of human race, commonalities in dialogue with other religions may be emphasized. Allah (SWT) declared: "Say o people of book! Come to such word which is common between you and us. That is, this that we may neither worship anyone else except Allah (SWT) nor hold any partner to him [16]". And giving reference of this verse by Holy Prophet (SAW) in dialogue related letters to kings of different countries and conversing of Islamic ambassadors according to prevailing laws to listener is enough proof for validity of interfaith dialogue [17].

This is more than sufficient argument for interfaith dialogue that one of the patterns of prophets regarding invitations has been the dialogue as; Prophet Noah (AS) had a dialogue with his nation to the extent that they named him as controversy. Allah (SWT) said: "They said, O Noah (AS), you have debated with us and even debated too much, now bring upon us (the punishment of Allah-SWT) what you threatened us, if you are one of the truthful [18]". Similarly, the dialogue of Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) with his nation and Moses (AS)'s long dialogue with Pharaoh has been mentioned everywhere in Holy Quran as adornment. To sum up all, dialogue is best means of inviting towards right. Because Allah (SWT) has declared the invitation towards right as best invitation: "And whose talk will be better than that person's talk who called towards Allah (SWT) and did good and said I am Muslim [5]."

Every religion appreciates good manners and deprecates bad manners. Therefore, such qualities or traits may be highlighted in interfaith dialogue which come under domain of good ethics. These are for example, justice, honesty and sincerity, sympathy, truthfulness, promise keeping, self-control and dutifulness etc., and abstain from bad manners and vices like selfishness, theft, robbery, bribery, embezzlement, injustice and cruelty etc.

## 2. METHODS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The Holy Quran has declared certain set principles and methods of holding dialogue with scholars of other religions. Therefore, it emphasizes upon adopting following methods in this regard.

### 2.1. Direct Dialogue for Invitation Towards Monotheism

Monotheism is the fundamental principle of Islam which cannot be compromised in any case. There is a clear order of Allah (SWT): Say, "O People of the Book, come to word common between us and between you, that we worship none but Allah (SWT) [16]". On one common thing means, that we should agree on worship of one Allah only. Therefore, it is clear that no compromise can be made on the oneness of Allah (SWT).

### 2.2. Pattern of Dialogue should be Moralistic and Reminder:

According to the Islamic principles, the moralistic approach along with reminding the blessings of Allah (SWT) should be adopted during dialogues. As there is Allah's order: "O children of Israel! Remember my bounty with which I had

conferred upon you and to this thing that I have blessed you with virtue and supremacy over all other nations of world [19]". Therefore, it is one of the best strategy to be used in debate and discussions during dialogues with other religions.

## 2.3.    Encouragement &Pattern:

One of Quranic methods for goodness of mankind is sometimes through encouragement and sometimes through inculcating fear in the minds (tarhib) and invitation pertaining to imagination may be given. As it is mentioned in this verse: "If they had upheld the Torah and the Injil and what had been sent down to them from their Allah (SWT), they would surely have had plenty to eat from above them and from beneath them. Among them are moderate people as for most of them, evil is what they do [20]". Therefore, it can be analysed that the 'People of Books' may be encouraged with different techniques and adapting different patterns of advice, to follow the teachings of Islam.

## 2.4.    Method    of    Denial    and Rejection:

Besides other above mentioned methods, Holly Quran has also adopted method of denial and rejection in methodologies being used in dialogue as displayed in this verse: "O People of the Book, why do you confirm the truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth when you know (the reality) [16]"? So, it is clear that the 'People of Books' can be questioned on the basis of the clear evidence regarding truth and falsehood of the religions. On the basis of clear arguments, their claims and beliefs regarding the religions other than Islam can be denied and/or rejected.

## 3.    MANNERS    AND    ASPECTS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Besides above mentioned methods of inter-faith dialogue with other religions, Islam has also given certain set manners and aspects to be adopted during such debates and discussions. From the perspective of 'manners of dialogue', some of the useful interfaith dialogues have been presented below:

## 3.1.    Adherence to Truthfulness and Honesty:

Islam has zero tolerance for those who does not adhere to the truthfulness and honest in dealings either at individual level, family, group, or in relations with other states. Allah (SWT) and His Apostle are true. Therefore, believers have been commanded to be true  and side by truthful. There is an order of

Allah: "O Believers! Fear from Allah and stand by side of honest and truthful [15]". It clarifies that believer shall not have a formal relation with or extend their support to those who are dishonest and untrustworthy. Moreover, dialogues shall be held on the basis of honesty and truthfulness whatever the circumstances may be.

### 3.2.    Justice and Kindness:

Allah (SWT) has ordered to maintain justice and kindness towards known and unknown individuals. Another aspect of kindness is that an impartial attitude may be applied towards everyone. There is an order of Allah (SWT): "…. and be just when you speak, even though the one (against whom you are speaking) is a relative; and fulfil the covenant of Allah (SWT)…..[21]". Therefore, it is understood that Muslims shall ensure justice and kindness during their dialogues with other scholars, irrespective of their religions or any other relation.

### 3.3.    Adopting Scientific Method:

It is evident from Islamic teachings that narrating, following or copying someone's words or work (naqil) with proper source is encouraged. If a person is defendant or plaintiff, then he should present arguments for proving act and wording. Allah (SWT) declared on this: "Say, bring your proof, if you are truthful [11]." It proves that in otherwise case one must take care of originality, correctness and righteousness in his words especially during dialogue with scholastic personalities of other religions.

### 3.4.    Shunning from Difference in Words and Deeds:

It is necessary for useful dialogue that there may not be contradiction between ones words, speech and/or logic given in proof of certain argument or statement. If either of these will be lacking, then trust upon that person is lost. As words of Makkah's polytheists had turned to be ineffective because they sometimes called Prophet (SAW) to be magician, sometimes wizard and sometimes used other terminologies. Now a day's the dialogue of claimers of culture and civilization has been victim of this practice also. Muslims have often been victims of contradiction in their words and deeds across the globe. Moreover, they have been alleged of being violent and terrorists whereas a section of Muslim and none-Muslim scholars believe that the case is otherwise.

### 3.5. Affirmation and Acceptance of Proved Affairs:

It is in etiquettes of interfaith dialogue that matters proved according to Shariah and Religious postulates cannot be subject to a dialogue. There is no possibility of denial from this principle. In otherwise case, the relations between individuals and/or sates may get worsened. As a result, the dialogue would become aimless thus causing further harm to the peace and prosperity of human being.

### 3.6. Condition of Capability for Dialogue:

One of the foremost principle of holding dialogues is that the persons concerned must be knowledgeable thus having absolute command over their domain of knowledge. This is because it is not possible to defend righteousness with the weapon of falsehood. It will be blunder holding dialogue without capability. Therefore, for useful dialogue presence of specialists is necessary so that truth could depict clear picture of itself and false could waste.

### 3.7. Accepting Result of Dialogue:

There should be a prior understanding that the dialogue will be ended in a peaceful manner. Whatever results are drawn in the light of interfaith dialogue, the parties concerned should admit them with open heartedness. In otherwise case, all the efforts and work done will go in vain. It may stop the way for such future dialogues, which may be harmful for bringing peace and harmony among different religions. For successful dialogue, experiences and emotions of scholars of others religion must be honoured. Every individual has a right and may think that his viewpoint is better than others.

### 3.8. Recognition of Ijtihad and Intellectual Results:

Intellectual results if based on ijtihad should be recognised by the parties concerned without going into further difference of opinion. It is important because the views of Ijtihad may pertain to relational thinking which contain a possibility of accuracy and inaccuracy on both sides. Compelling the opponents in such affairs on a particular viewpoint is like failure of the dialogue process.

### 3.9. Impartiality and Unbiasedness:

It is mandatory that impartiality and unbiasedness must be ensured for a useful interfaith dialogue. This is required to discuss and debate the affairs pertaining to every religion and state with

impartiality. Dialogue on all affairs and events should be held on equal basis whether it belongs to the western or eastern world. Dialogues should be held on matters involving cruelty whether that belongs to Muslim or non-Muslim world. Partiality and one-sidedness during dialogues leads to failure which affects the actual aim of dialogue to bring peace and harmony.

## 4. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Keeping in view the above mentioned discussion and analysis, following key suggestions and recommendations have been given to ensure that the dialogue process is fruitful and may produce peace, prosperity and harmony among different religion of the world.

- Avoidance from unnecessary and unrealistic communication during dialogue;
- Abstinence from allegations and accusations on one another during discussion;
- Refraining from use of ambiguous and unclear terminologies;
- Talking with each other in the best possible tome and an acceptable manner;

- Avoiding mockery, contempt, anger and objections during the debate;
- Adopting a respectful and benevolent behaviour while addressing each other;
- Avoiding selfish and ego-centric approach towards the opponent scholars;
- Avoiding pride of having knowledge and giving less value to knowledge and capability of others;
- Listening to each other's arguments with cool mindedness and patience;
- Confession of mistake and admission of errors and omissions;

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