

## Remodeling Interfaith Dialogue in 21<sup>st</sup> century:

### Counseling Muslims from *Sīrah*

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*The *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ is a guiding light for Muslims and rest of the world. It supports Inter faith dialogue, religious pluralism and human rights which are of immense importance in the present era. This article is based on remodeling of interfaith dialogical activities in 21<sup>st</sup> century taking guidance from the *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ. In order to extract principles from *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ, treaties, letters and verbal disputations are accessed. After a comprehensive study of interfaith dialogue prevalent in 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is compared with principles of interfaith dialogue adopted by Prophet ﷺ in order to analyze deficiencies or inconsistencies present in interfaith dialogue practiced in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally in the light of this study suggestions are put forth for dialogue with non-Muslims in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Emphasis on acceptance of pluralism, human rights and ethical values is stressed. The proposed model also highlights many deficiencies of 20<sup>th</sup> century interfaith dialogue and caters for changing social needs and contemporary global trends. The work is significant for re-orientation of the attitude of reluctance from dialogue among Muslims and to understand the requirement of bigger and more focused steps in favor of international stability of Muslims.*

**Keywords:** *Dialogue, Prophet's Sirah, Religious Pluralism, Interfaith Dialogue, Human Rights.*

#### **Introduction**

Establishment of a community is necessary for mankind to live serenely on the globe. This formation of a community is impossible without interaction between its different fragments. The miscellany in religion has been playing its role in classifying mankind in distinguishing groups since the beginning of the universe.

Peaceful concomitance owes a great deal to the peaceful conversation and

exchange of ideas. Islam imparts peaceful coexistence with different religions through its text. In addition to the decrees of the text, the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the living model of what Quran stated. There is a strong need among Muslims to be aware of what Islam says about dialogue. This is because of the augmented gap of communication between different religions stereotypically classifying them into ‘Islamophobic Muslim World’ and the ‘Secular Western World’ in the previous century. The conflict of culture and civilization has created animosity and acrimony in them for one another. Terrorism and power has boosted the aversion is at its peak. Not only at international level, Muslims are facing stereotypical humiliation and pigeon-holing at communal level as well.

Despite the steps taken for promoting the notion of dialogue and cessation of such hostilities by international organizations and agencies, especially after 9/11, the results are not up to the mark. Apprehension among Muslims for dialogue with non-Muslims need to be recognized and cautious measures should be taken to overcome them. Interpretation of Qur’anic verses related to dialogue and beacon light of *Sunnah* can play most important role in orientation of their mind because these two sources of *shariah* are the most reliable and understandable for a common Muslim with no exceptions of sect. or creed. As the globalization of the world in 21<sup>st</sup> century has changed the scenario of dialogue that was in the past, the question arises: How can the principles and guidelines for dialogue with non-Muslims provided by Prophet ﷺ in his era be applicable in 21<sup>st</sup> century? To answer this question, there is a need for Muslims to derive principles and ethical guidelines for dialogue, from Prophet’s *Sīrah*, in the contemporary scenario and reformulate principles of interfaith dialogue with the help of *ijtihād*. *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ should be construed in detail in order to derive the guidelines for the concerned issue.

This article first discusses the meaning and types of dialogues. The discussion is then divided in two parts. Part I deals with principles adopted by Prophet Muhammad in his dialogues with other religions and nations. To extract principles of dialogue from *Sīrah* letters, treaties and verbal disputations of Prophet Muhammad have been used as primary source for this research. Part II deals with principles of dialogue adopted in 20<sup>th</sup> century and suggestions for dialogue for 21<sup>st</sup> century in the light of Prophet Muhammad’s *Sīrah*.

### **Meaning of Dialogue**

The term “dialogue” (n.) (Arabic, *hiwar*) literally means conversation, discourse, argument, discussion, chat, debate, conference, consultation.<sup>1</sup> Technically, dialogue is a significant interaction between people belonging to divergent groups in order to exchange notions for the sake of understanding each other and not for convincing each other. In its interfaith understanding, dialogue is the interaction between people of different faiths for acquisition of

knowledge about each other's belief and building bridges that lead to the acceptance of each other in a community.<sup>2</sup>

According to Paul Hedges, there are four different forms of dialogue.

1. **Dialogue of Life:** is a basic type of dialogue at personal level in which people of divergent faiths live together and share their routine life experiences.<sup>3</sup>
2. **Dialogue of Action:** is a dialogue in which people of different religious groups come together and become organized for special matters like human rights, integral development, etc. aiming at cooperation for the betterment of society.<sup>4</sup>
3. **Dialogue of Theological Exchange:** refers to exchange of the theological and philosophical ideas related to different religious groups involving structured meetings. These issues are compared with each other for factual understanding and promoting spiritual dimensions of the religion. It is also known as discursive dialogue.<sup>5</sup>
4. **Dialogue of Religious Experience:** is called as interior dialogue in which there is sharing of faith with either discussion or practice. It may occur between individuals and groups. It is usually carried out by prayer or meditation in the situation where members of other faiths observe silently.<sup>6</sup>

#### literature review

Leading Tafseer and Hadith books have been reviewed for this research. It contains letters of the Prophet ﷺ to the kings, emperors and the infidels and his pacts and treatise with them. These letters are the major source for making the models of interfaith dialogue in the light of *Seerah*.

Islamic Perception for the Remedial Solution to the Problem of Religious Extremism by Prof. Dr. Ahmad bin Yousuf al-Draiweesh is a helpful working paper to the research. The author has underlined dialogue as a means of eliminating religious extremism and the existing conflicts between different communities which is more operative in this globalized world. *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims*, is the book of M. Shafiq and M. Abu Nimer, *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence: Theory and practice* by Abu Nimer, and *Unity in diversity: Interfaith dialogue in Middle East* by Abu Nimer and co authors Khoury and Welty Emily are good sources. The book, *Peacebuilding by, between and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians* by Abu Nimer and Augsburg is also cited in the research. Abu Nimer is an expert on conflict resolution and dialogue for peace. His writing is related to the same subject in which he has expounded the meaning of interfaith dialogue in detail and its guiding principles laid down in Quran and Sunnah of Prophet ﷺ. He has pointed out the treatment of Prophet ﷺ with non-Muslims in *Makkan* and *Madinan* period which opens the door for interreligious dialogue.

*The Present Day Application of Initial Christian-Muslim Interaction* by M. Riaz Ahmad and Dr. Tahira Basharat is a relevant article for the research. This

article has helped in extracting further rules from Prophetic *Seerah* and examines their application in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The book, *Muslim-Christian Engagement in Twentieth Century* and the thesis, *Isma'il Al-Faruqi and the Interfaith dialogue: The Man the Scholar, the Participant* are written by Charles Fletcher. Both of these are basically about the life and thought of renowned Muslim scholar Isma'il Raj'i Farooqi. He is famous for the most systematic attempt for the articulation of dialogue in theoretical manner. These writings are actually the examination of methodology of his engagement with non-Muslims and its practical application in the modern world which is to be viewed in the research for making models for the dialogue in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Book of Isma'il Raji Faruqi, *Muslims in dialogue: Evolution of Dialogue* is also used for getting assistance from his thoughts.

The article, *Peace and conflict resolution in Madinah Charter* by Yildirim is also helpful and relevant. *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Twentieth Century* by Atallah Siddiqui is an excellent resource book for the research. The book centers on six eminent scholars of Islam who are well-known for participating in organized dialogues and are the representatives of Muslims all over the world. *From Conversion to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post 9-11 America* by Liyatikali Takim, *The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue* by Saleh Yucil, *Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding* by Thomas Scheffler are excellent contemporary writings to be quoted in the research. These are among the most debated topics worldwide and help for understanding of world peace and dialogue situations after the incident of September 11. In *What Everything Needs to Know about Islam*, John Louis Esposito, somewhat, clarifies through the sources of *shariah*, the allegations on Islam to be an extremist religion. The writings of Esposito are being acknowledged a lot internationally.

## **PART I: Interfaith Dialogue in Prophet ﷺ's Sīrah**

Dialogue had been a tradition of Holy Prophet ﷺ from the advent of Islam in Makkah to the spread of Islam in Madīnah. He had dialogue with people of different faiths as well as people with no faith (kāfirūn). Dialogue of life, dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of action are found in the Sīrah. Verbal disputations, treaties and letters written by Prophet Muhammad are the guiding sources for us to derive principles of interfaith dialogue and adopt these principles in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **I. Verbal disputations**

Prophet ﷺ opened room for dialogue with Jews, Christians and idolaters to convince them with logical reasoning and politeness. Some of his verbal argumentations are as under:

1. In the period of Makkah, Utbah bin Rabi'ah came to Prophet ﷺ and tried to bribe him with money and power. He patiently listened to him and recited first five verses of Surah Fussilat and told him to react as he likes. He was greatly moved by Prophet's behavior.<sup>7</sup>

2. Once the Prophet ﷺ received a delegation of Christians from Najrān at his mosque. Prophet ﷺ allowed them to pray in the mosque. They prayed towards East. After prayer, they spoke to the apostle about 'Isa. However, they disagreed with him. They had three stances as follows:
- a) 'Jesus is the God' because he used to raise the dead, cure illness, predict future, bring the shape of bird to life.
  - b) 'Jesus is the son of God' since he did not have father and he spoke while he was in cradle.
  - c) 'Jesus is one of the trinity' because he said 'We did, command, create and decide'. If there was no trinity, He would have said 'I' instead of 'We'.<sup>8</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ said to them, 'Submit yourselves'. They said that they have submitted themselves to him. He said, 'You lie. Your assertion that God has a son, your worship of the cross, and your eating pork hold you back from submission'. They said, 'But who is the father, Muhammad (ﷺ)?' On this, the Prophet ﷺ remained silent until Allah sent revelation regarding the Prophethood of 'Isa and the commandment of Mubāhalah<sup>9</sup>. Prophet ﷺ asked them for Mubāhalah but they decided not to do it due to fear of curse from Allah. They requested him to send a person who would decide between them in monetary disputes. The Prophet ﷺ accepted it and chose Abu 'Ubaidah Bin al-Jarrāh<sup>10</sup> for this matter. The incident of Najrān is a great example of tolerance for other religions.<sup>11</sup>

3. Once a Jew priest came to the Prophet ﷺ and greeted, "Assalāmu 'alaika Ya Muhammad." One of the companions pushed him. On this, he asked, "Why did you push me?" The companion said, "Why didn't you call him The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ?" The priest replied: "I called him by the name given to him by his family." Upon this conversation between the two, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ responded: "The truth is my real name is Muhammad as given by my family." The priest then told him that he had come to ask some questions. The Prophet ﷺ responded: "Is there benefit if I answer your questions?" He said: "I will listen with my two ears." The Prophet ﷺ said, "Come on, ask me!" He asked some questions which Prophet ﷺ replied. Those questions are: "Where is the human on the day of judgment?" He answered: "At the bridge of al-sirat" The Jew asked: "Who are the first ones walking on it?" Reply came: "The poor people from Muhajirin." The question was raised: "What makes them happy when they are entering the heaven?" The Prophet ﷺ answered: "A slice of shark's heart." He asked another question: "What is their food?" Answered: "A bull slaughtered for them and eaten from its head." The Jew asked about their drink? Prophet ﷺ said: "A spring called Salsabil". The Jew became satisfied with the answers and said, "I came to you to ask questions which

were unknown by people on earth except by the Prophet or known by a man or two men.” The Prophet ﷺ responded: “Is there benefit if I answer your questions?” He said: “I will listen with my two ears.” The Jew asked another question: “What is the process of baby making?” He answered: “The sperm color of man is white and the woman is yellow, and if they are united and the man’s sperm controlled the woman’s, as a result, the baby boy is born by the power of Allah. If the woman’s sperm controlled the man’s resulted in baby girl by the power of Allah.” He said: “You are right, and you are truly the Prophet.”<sup>12</sup>

Dialogical lessons of *Sīrah* drawn from the above incidents are:

- Dialogue should be initiated with a clear objective.
- Islam adopts some rules and regulations in acceptance of religious diversity.
- The dialogue is not meant to impose your beliefs and viewpoint.
- The matters of agreement should be discussed first, and then the matters of disagreement.
- The dialogue maker should be a reliable, trustworthy and truthful person in the eyes of all.
- Parties to dialogue should listen to each other’s arguments with patience, without any sort of interruption.
- Respect and honor of the other party should be the foremost responsibility for dialogue maker.
- Wisdom, Knowledge and beautiful argument are the significant characteristics of dialogue.
- Dialogue is not meant for just ‘conversation’, it entails working together with cooperation for mutual understanding of each other while maintaining the individuality of each other.
- Ethics should be taken as the basis for dialogue instead of theology.
- The dialogue makers have to respect the opinion of the other party and should accept, openheartedly, the point which causes no damage to the agenda of dialogue.
- The protection of worship places and tolerance for rituals of each other are significant for peaceful coexistence.
- Dialogue makers should have proper knowledge about the common teachings and the text of other religions.
- Dialogue can be made successful with patience and endurance even if the other party is not so honest in carrying out dialogue.

## II. Letters

In 6<sup>th</sup> A.H., after establishing stability in Madīnah, Prophet ﷺ wrote letters to different emperors of East and West and to different leaders of tribes in order to give them the message of Islam. These letters provide many rules and regulations for carrying out interfaith dialogue. Two of these letters are

discussed below.

### 1. The Letter to Hercules, the Roman Emperor

*“In the name of Allah the Merciful, from Muhammad son of Abdullah, the Prophet of Allah to the Honorable Roman Emperor, Hercules. I ask you to convert into Islam and you are guaranteed to be save and safety for those who follow the truth. I confessed that there is no God, but Allah. There is no one like Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger. I ask you to come to Allah. I am the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who gives warning to the entire humans in the world and have the right to remind the gentiles. Convert yourself into Islam, and you will be saved. And if you refuse it, you will bear the sins of your people”.*<sup>13</sup>

Distinctive features of the letter relating to the dialogical conversation are as follows:

- Prophet ﷺ started the letter with the name of Allah.
- He introduced himself through the name of his father first and then as prophet of Allah.
- The word “honorable” was written to give respect to the Emperor.
- The call for Islam was given to him along with the consequences of its acceptance and non-acceptance.
- The text of the letter is brief but eloquent.
- The dignity of the religion should be maintained in the dialogue by using polite, yet courageous tone.
- The scheme of dialogue includes the clause of supporting the truth which is in the welfare of all.

### 2. Letter to Rifa'a Bin Zaid Juzami:

*“In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the merciful. From Muhammad, Prophet of Allah to Rifa'a Bin Zaid. I am sending Rifa'a to his community. He will extend the invitation of Allah and His Prophet to his community. Whoever will accept his invitation, shall be taken as belonging to the organization of Allah and His Prophet and whoever will refuse to do so, shall be secure for two months.”*<sup>14</sup>

As the name indicated, this person belonged to the tribe of *Juzam*. The most distinguishing lesson from this letter is that Islam accepts non-Muslims and ensures peace and safety of them. This letter gave another dialogical principle that those who refuse to reach to the conclusion of dialogue or to accept the right thing cannot be compelled or abused. There should be tolerance and polite attitude towards them and give them space to rethink over their choices.

### III. Treaties

#### 1. Charter of Madīnah:

After migration to Madinah, Muslims were exposed to a non-familiar environment. There were three basic communities residing in Medina:

- *Ansār* and *muhājirīn*,
- Idolators (like *Aus* and *Khizraj* tribes)
- Migrant Jews who had strong influence on the economy of Madinah.

Prophet ﷺ had meetings with latter two communities and designed a charter of peace which was the first written constitution of Islam.<sup>15</sup> The rules and regulations of dialogue extracted from the treaty are:

- The first and foremost aim of the community is to establish peace and security.
- People belonging to various faiths are independent to practice their own religions without any hindrance.
- As they are one *ummah*, they should be united against a third party of enemies.
- The covenant between various groups should be based upon mutual consultation on righteousness. There should be no fraud and deception.
- If any of the groups is accused of any wrongdoing, no matter to which faith it belongs, the policy maker has to help that party against the other.
- There must be a neutral institution for policy making which should act as the arbitrator if any issue arises and its decision should be binding upon all.
- People belonging to various faiths are subject to equal protection and rights, no matter what the religion of the State is.
- Pluralism has always been the characteristic of Islamic society. Islam acknowledges diversity in religions and sets principles for peaceful concomitance.
- Once a covenant is made between the states or within the state, all should forget the past oppressions and suppressions.

#### 2. Treaties with BanuDamrah, BanuJuhaina , BanuZur'a and Banu Rab'a Tribes

After his arrival in Madinah, Prophet ﷺ made peace treaties with the leaders of the border areas of Madinah. Following dialogical principles are noteworthy in those treaties:

- Muslims should live in peace with non-Muslims within the community and outside the community.
- If non-Muslim party offers peace covenant on reasonable basis, Muslims should accept them with full cooperation.
- The life and security of non-Muslims in a treaty are as important as that of Muslims.



- Alliance with the states present outside the boundaries of Muslim states is of great importance and a *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ.
- As rules and regulations for both parties of dialogue are same, they should together confront their enemies.
- As religion of both parties cannot necessarily be the same, mutual combat against the enemies may exclude religious wars. Non-Muslims cannot be forced to participate in *jihād* along with Muslims.
- Pious and non-combatant people living outside the boundaries of the states in treaties should be entitled to the same peace and security.
- There should be no interference from the other party in the internal affairs of the state.

### 3. Treaty of Hudaibiyah

The treaty of *Hudaibiyah* was signed between the Prophet ﷺ and *Quraish* at *Hudaibiyah* in *dhul-qa'dah*, 6<sup>th</sup> A.H.<sup>16</sup> It can be inferred from the treaty that,

- Peacemaking within the communities was the most significant element of Prophetic treaties with non-Muslims.
- It is evidenced from the lenient behavior of Prophet ﷺ in the treaty that the parties of the dialogue should not be so hard to one another. Lenience towards other may, sometimes, contribute for better results in the long run.
- If the parties participating in dialogue demand something which does not have a clash with Islamic conjunction, it is allowed to maintain it.
- There should be no extreme and harsh attitude towards the other party.

### PART II: Interfaith Dialogue in 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Muslim's apprehensions to carry out dialogue with non-Muslims had been a hurdle in dialogue activities in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Phenomenal emphasis on *Maqasid-e-shariah* in Islam and necessary participation of other nations for its implementation was hardly discussed among religious scholars. If discussed, it was taken negatively. It was a common view of Muslims that dialogue with West is equivalent to dialogue with secularism.<sup>17</sup> Dialogue organizers approached representatives who were appointed by the government were in a way constrained to speak in a particular way. They could not be the representatives of the entire Muslim world belonging to different regions and sects. Furthermore, the language also became the barrier between representatives of various faiths. Scholars of Islam are well versed in Arabic or native languages, whereas, dialogue can be properly conducted in the milieu where each representative is well versed in a particular language in order to avoid fallacies.<sup>18</sup>

The Christian world is more likely to engage in dialogue because they are politically and economically more stable than Muslim world. When they organized interreligious dialogues, their agenda was set by themselves which,

according to Muslims' perception, was different from their culture and mindset. So dialogue was a sort of disguised Christian missionary practice.<sup>19</sup> In the dialogical initiative between Muslims and non-Muslims, West had become the actual operator of dialogue while Muslims were just like invited guests who had not a proper say over the issues. This situation was one of the major causes of the lack of Muslims' interest in dialogue.<sup>20</sup> Interfaith dialogue movement was initiated by Christian churches after mid-90s. Dialogue movements after mid-90s are summarized as follows:

In 1965, *Nostra Aetate*<sup>21</sup> has been considered as a major turning point in the history of Muslim-Christian relationship when Roman Catholic Churches changed their policy towards non-Christian world. In 1974, the Vatican formed the *Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims* aiming theological ties with Muslims in a positive sense.<sup>22</sup> In 1976, Muslim organization, *Jami'yat Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiyah Al-'Alamiyah*<sup>23</sup> and Vatican organized Christian-Islam Congress in Tripoli where the framework for establishment of joint multi-religious community was tried to be made and the socio-political and theological subjects that were needed to be clarified were discussed.<sup>24</sup> In 1990, *Nostra Aetate* Foundation was established to promote mutual understanding and collaboration between different religions, and to prepare persons for promoting dialogue.<sup>25</sup> In 1994, a joint conference was led by Pontifical Council of Interreligious dialogue and Muslim World Congress in Cairo whose basic agenda was the awareness of human rights.<sup>26</sup>

According to Saleh Yucil, *Nostra Aetate* was truly the first step towards Dialogue between the religions and that initiative paved way to joint movements and programs related to dialogue. But the result was not so fruitful in the sense that there could not be any success in institutionalization of dialogue.<sup>27</sup> However, World Council of Churches and Roman Catholic Church played the most significant role in this regard. Muslim organizations were developed and moved towards dialogue in 1980s onwards.<sup>28</sup>

### **PART III: Interfaith Dialogue in 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Counseling Muslims from Sirah**

In the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century in 2001, 9/11 attacks revived the prejudices against Islam and Muslims and they were regarded as the irrational and extremist people. Acrimonious attacks on Islamic text by Christian writers made the situation grim. The effect of the incident was seen at international level when Iraq and Afghanistan had to face the consequences of it. There came a time when Muslims realized that it was better to speak with, instead of speak about each other. The major responsibility was on the shoulders of the Muslims residing in American states where they were facing stereotypical behavior of people living there. They sought, at that time, the necessity of a paradigm shift from "conversion" to "conversation" between different faiths not only for coexistence but also for the remedy of negative depiction of Islamic jurisprudence. Muslims realized the need to involve other religions to come to the front and speak about

the suppression of rights of Muslims after that incident.<sup>29</sup>

2006 was the significant year that moved almost all religious communities to step forward towards peace and dialogue. Inclusive theological thought of Pope Benedict XVI made him deliver a lecture in Regensburg, Germany in which he explicitly declared Muslims 'the evil and inhuman'. This lecture provoked Muslim world to protest at international level. It also instigated the intellectuals to work on the misgivings of Islam that was afflicting the other religions.<sup>30</sup> As a result of this, in 2007, a Common Word Invitation for Muslim-Christian Dialogue was issued by Iran which was not welcomed by the Catholics according to the expectations. A mixed response was noticed by them. The best response was in the University of Yale where 300 eminent representatives of Christians signed the proposals of Common Word. The involvement of Saudi Arabia strengthened the movement in 2009.<sup>31</sup> Interreligious Dialogue Conference was organized at Seville in 2010 where young Jews, Christians and Islamic professionals came forward to develop the best methods in order to eliminate the phenomena of islamophobia, xenophobia, intolerance etc. It continues each year to re-examine its connotations.<sup>32</sup>

From then onwards, the phenomenon of 'Clash of Civilization' started to change into 'Dialogue between Civilizations'. Not only Muslims, Jews and Christians are also working on their texts in order to meet the challenges of pluralism in the present day world.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to *Jami'yat Al-Da'wah Al-Islamiyah Al-'Alamiyah*, Muslim organizations that were known for initiating dialogue with non-Muslims in 20<sup>th</sup> century were *Mu'tamar Al-'Alam Al-Islami* (established in 1964) and *Rabitat Al-'Alam Al-Islami* (in mid-1950s). Although dialogue was not in the primary objectives of these organizations, however, they were indirectly related to promote dialogue on the part of Muslims.

Religious leaders among each community should make their own people aware about the issue in the light of their own religious teachings. In the contemporary scenario of 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a need to do something more than tolerating and understanding each other. It is the time to embrace each other and acknowledge the pain suffered by each other.

Counseling Muslims from Prophet's *Sīrah* for Construction of Model for Interfaith Dialogue in 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

In Prophet's *Sīrah*, three types of dialogue are prominent:

1. Dialogue of theological exchange
2. Dialogue of action
3. Dialogue of life

Models of these three types of dialogue from the *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ are as under:

### **Dialogue of Theological Exchange**

Dialogue of Theological exchange should be carried out as follows:

- Dialogue should begin with the name of Allah ﷻ. Belief in God/gods is the basic similarity between all of the religions. So, it is a good gesture to point out the similarity before commencing the dialogue.
- The dialogue maker should, then, introduce himself in a proper way by using appropriate words. He should be a reliable, trustworthy and truthful person in the eyes of all.
- Due respect should be given to the representative of the other party by using decent words for him.
- Good wishes to the other party can create a peaceful and friendly environment to proceed the dialogue.
- The memo of dialogue should be discussed in brief but eloquent way.
- There should be a clear objective of dialogue, otherwise, it will be of no use. The main objective of dialogue should be the elimination of evil from the world.
- The dialogue is not meant to impose something on someone. The matters of agreement should be discussed first, and then comes the matters of disagreements.
- Wisdom and beautiful arguments are the significant characteristics of dialogue.
- Dialogue makers should listen to the arguments of each other with patience, without any sort of interruption.
- The dialogue makers have to respect the opinion of the other party and should accept, openheartedly, the point which causes no damage to the agenda of dialogue.
- The dignity of the religion should be maintained in the dialogue by using polite, yet courageous tone.
- In interfaith dialogue, Dialogue maker should have sufficient knowledge about the common values between different faiths.
- Convincing the listeners about the credibility of the dialogue makers is also a prominent characteristic of the dialogue of Prophet ﷺ.
- Dialogue makers should have proper knowledge about the common teachings and the text of other religions.
- Dialogue can be made successful with the patience and endurance even if the other party have bad intention.
- Good will gestures should be made in order to keep environment conducive to dialogue.
- Psyche of addressee and the teachings of his religion must be kept in mind during conversation.
- The scheme of dialogue should include the clause of supporting the truth which is in the welfare of all.
- It is the responsibility of dialogue makers to ensure the benefit of all.

- Honesty in the conclusion of the dialogue should be the aim. Peace and security in this world and Hereafter should be made possible.
- The parties of dialogue should not be so hard to one another. Leniency towards other may, sometimes, contribute for better results in the long run.
- The party which refuses to reach to the conclusion of dialogue or deny the right thing should not be compelled or abused. There should be tolerance and polite attitude towards it and give it space to rethink over its choices.
- The dialogue maker should be well aware of the religious text of his and the other party. So that references can be made for settlement in the required situation.
- Dialogue makers should be conscious about the history and the future of the community and the consequences of the application of their conclusion.

### **Dialogue of Action**

- The very first thing worth remembering in Dialogue of Action according to the *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ is that Islam accepts religious diversity with some rules and regulations.
- Dialogue is not meant for just 'conversation', it entails working together with cooperation for mutual understanding of each other while maintaining the individuality of each other. This is what the *Sīrah* of Prophet ﷺ conveys. In some situations, Prophet ﷺ gave arguments for converting people to Islam and ended up on a peace covenant of their freedom and betterment.
- Ethics should be taken as the basis for Dialogue of Action instead of theology.
- The aim of the community is to establish peace and security.
- The community should come forward for the issues like human rights and integral development etc. because people belonging to different faiths living in the same community are regarded as one *ummah* by the Prophet ﷺ.
- There should be no interference from the other party in the internal affairs of the state.
- The covenant between various groups belonging to that *ummah* should base upon mutual consultation on righteousness. There should be no fraud and deception from any group of the community.
- It must be kept in mind that reconciliation on false thing will lead to the destruction of the whole society in the long run.
- Once a covenant is made between the states or within the state, all should forget the past oppressions and suppressions and should work in

complete harmony.

### **Dialogue of life**

The Prophet ﷺ said:

*“Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on non-Muslim minority, or curtails his rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I (Prophet Muhammad) will complain against that person on the Day of Judgment.”*<sup>1</sup>

This *Hadīth* of Prophet ﷺ clearly refers to the dialogue of life. Following are the principles for Dialogue of Life or Social Interaction based on the Sīrah of Prophet ﷺ:

- Pluralism has always been the characteristic of Islamic society. Islam acknowledge diversity in religions and set principles for peaceful concomitance.
- People belonging to various faiths are subjected to equal protection and rights, no matter what the religion of the state is.
- People belonging to various faiths are independent to practice their own religion without any hindrance.
- Freedom of preaching religion is the basic right of all religions living in a community.
- The protection of worship places and tolerance for rituals of each other are significant for peaceful coexistence.
- As they are one *Ummah*, they should be united against a third party of enemies. As rules and regulations for both parties of dialogue are same, they should together confront their enemies.
- As religion of both parties cannot necessarily be the same, mutual combat against the enemies may exclude religious wars. Non-Muslims cannot be forced to participate in *jihād* along with Muslims.
- Pious and non-combatant people living outside the boundaries of the states in treaties should be entitled to the same peace and security.
- If any of the groups is accused of any wrongdoing, no matter to which faith it belongs, the policy maker has to help that party against the other.
- There must be a proper neutral institution of policy making which should act as the arbitrator if any issue arises and its decision should be binding upon all.
- Once a covenant is made between the states or within the state, all should forget the past oppressions and suppressions.
- If non-Muslim party offers peace covenant on reasonable basis, Muslims

should accept them with full cooperation.

- Muslims should live in peace with non-Muslims within the community and outside the community.
- It is allowed to meet, greet and have social and commercial relationships with non-Muslims.
- Alliance with the states present outside the boundaries of Muslim states is of great importance and a *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ.
- If the parties participating in Dialogue of Life demands something which does not have a clash with Islamic conjunctions, it is allowed to maintain it.
- There should be no extreme and harsh attitude towards the members of the same community.

### Conclusion

Dialogue in the era of Prophet ﷺ was totally different from that of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The basic objective of dialogues of Prophet ﷺ with non-Muslims was spread of Islam and establishment of peaceful society by consultation of all parties. He himself initiated dialogue with non-Muslims on the basis of theology, ethics and human rights. He used letters, treaties and disputations as tools of dialogue with heads of states, tribes and influential persons. He emphasized not only the matters of agreements but also the matters of disagreements in his treaties and accepted the pluralism in the society. The argumentation of Prophet ﷺ's dialogue was on the basis of revelation, theology and the similarities between the faiths. His preaching activities were not concealed.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims were reluctant to carry out dialogical activities. There was no initiative from the side of Muslims in the field of dialogue. It was initiated by Christians with their own set of principles. The basic objective was conversion and interfaith peace under the umbrella of dialogue. Matters of agreements were discussed in conferences, literature and disputations at scholarly level on the basis of theology. Reliance of Muslims was on textual interpretations. Theology and *'ibādāt* were emphasized and argumentations in dialogue were based on one's own text. Pluralism was not accepted in 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The model of dialogue for 21<sup>st</sup> century should be based upon the dialogue in Prophetic era which is according to the current scenario of globalization. The objectives of dialogue should be changed from conversion to conversation and peace among humans. The dialogue, today, should be based upon ethics and human rights which is the most important need of the present day world. Muslims should, themselves, initiate dialogical activities at grass root level and should focus on the application of the text by use of *ijtihād*. There is a strong requirement to emphasize on *mu'āmlāt* in addition to *'ibādāt*. Preaching activities should be unconcealed and separated from dialogical activities. Tools

for dialogue should be constructed after the consultation of all parties. They can be legal documents, conferences, and seminars. Format of dialogue should be the discussion on not only the matters of agreements but also the matters of disagreements on the basis of the similarities between different faiths. Ethics should be taken as the basis for dialogue instead of theology.<sup>34</sup>

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- 5- Ibid., p. 60 See also: Ezejobelu, E.E. op. cit p. 118
- 6 - Ibid., p. 61
- 7- Ibn- Ishaq, (2004). *The Life of Muhammad* (Guillaume, A. Trans). Karachi: Oxford University Press. pp. 132-133
- 8 - Ibn Kathir, H.I.E. (2003). *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*(vol. 2). Riyadh: Darussalam Publication. pp.176-178
- 9- It refers to a particular form of resolving religious disputes. When the argumentations from both sides fail to resolve a religious issue, the parties jointly pray Allah to cast His curse on whichever of the two parties is false. Since curse means 'moving someone far away from the divine mercy', -and moving far away from mercy is being close to divine wrath -- therefore, the essence of the meaning is: Wrath be on the liar. As such, whoever is the liar shall face the evil consequences whereupon the truth will become evident before the disbelievers as well. Invocation in this manner is called 'Mubalahah'.
- 10- Abu 'Ubaidah Bin al-Jarrāh was a famous companion of Prophet whom he called 'trustee of my ummah'. His great qualities include his eloquent and gentle speech.
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