

CHAPTER III

THE QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

SINCE its inception, Islam (through the Prophet) has interacted with non-Muslims. During the Madinan and Makkan periods, Islamic teachings guided the first Muslims in the proper ways of addressing and dealing with non-Muslims. The following pages explore some Qur'anic verses and hadiths that provide examples of such interaction. Many imams and Muslim scholars cite such verses, especially in the context of calling for peace and reconciliation among Muslims in conflict situations.¹

Although interfaith dialogue was developed within a non-Muslim context, Islam has many similar concepts and terms, including the language for the dialogue process itself. These concepts have been drawn on since the Prophet's time for both intra-Muslim and interfaith dialogue. Research on the Qur'an reveals that it contains a deeply rooted dialogical process. By examining the list of principles mentioned in the previous chapter, we can understand the need and appreciate the method for building human and interfaith relationships.

Some Qur'anic Terms

Ta'arafu: *Ta'arafu* is defined as knowing, understanding, and building relations. An interfaith meeting could be called a *majlis li Ta'arafu* (a meeting for building understanding):

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have

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made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

The primary assumption of interfaith dialogue is that religious diversity and the multiplicity of spiritual paths to truth is of divine origin. The Qur'an supports this belief, declaring explicitly in the above verse that Allah, in His wisdom and with full intent, created different nations and tribes, each with its own spiritual path. But the Qur'an also asserts that Allah intended people to seek each other's acquaintance and learn from each other's differences (*li Ta'arafu*).

Ta'arafu is illustrated in the following story. Once a Muslim traveler who entered a mosque did not know how to pray. A local Muslim accused him so harshly of being ignorant in Islam that the two were on the verge of fighting. However, the offended traveler quickly found himself at home when others approached him and politely introduced themselves to him. When the offending Muslim had cooled down, he asked the newcomer for forgiveness.

Ta'arafu also helps with interreligious relations. For example, when a young non-Muslim woman married a Muslim, her parents objected because they had a very bad image of Islam. They told her she was marrying a "terrorist." *Ta'arafu* changed the whole family's mind-set. The young woman later accepted Islam, and her parents accepted her marriage.

Interfaith educational activities (e.g., seminars and lectures in world religions, social gatherings of Muslims with non-Muslims), interfaith meals, collaborative efforts on social justice programs (e.g., Habitat for Humanity), and all similar activities that lead to helping and building relations with people are displays of *Ta'arafu*. The mandate to get to know others and appreciate their uniqueness as the expression of Allah's will is dialogue's core function. It is not a concept foreign to Islam; rather, it is integral to it.

Islah: Another Qur'anic term, *islah* (bridge-building, reconciliation, restoring relations, and resolving conflicts) appears in many forms throughout the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an often calls bridge-builders *muslihin* (a word derived from *islah*). Clearly, this term is

linked to the meaning of interfaith dialogue's quest for peaceful coexistence and good relations. Other derivatives are *sulh* (peacebuilding and conflict resolution) and *salaha* (wishing the best, bridge-building, and searching for goodness). The examples below highlight the Qur'anic emphasis on helping others toward goodness and reconciliation:

No good comes, as a rule, out of secret confabulations – saving such as are devoted to enjoining charity, or equitable dealings, or setting things to rights between people: and unto him who does this out of a longing for God's goodly acceptance We shall in time grant a mighty reward. (4:114)

He answered:

O my people! What do you think? If [it be true that] I am taking my stand on a clear evidence from my Sustainer, who has vouchsafed me goodly sustenance [as a gift] from Himself [how could I speak to you otherwise than I do]? And yet, I have no desire to do, out of opposition to you, what I am asking you not to do: I desire no more than to set things to rights in so far as it lies within my power; but the achievement of my aim depends on God alone. In Him have I placed my trust, and unto Him do I always turn! (11:88)

Further, the Qur'an asks people to do justice at all times:

And unto [the people of] Madyan [We sent] their brother Shu'ayb. He said: "O my people! Worship God alone: you have no deity other than Him. Clear evidence of the truth has now come unto you from your Sustainer. Give, therefore, full measure and weight [in all your dealings], and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs; and do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered: [all] this is for your own good, if you would but believe." (7:85)

Interfaith dialogue is nothing more than working to bring *islah* (reconciliation and building relations). *Islah* between Muslims brings unity and prosperity; in interfaith relations, it fosters good relations and peaceful coexistence. The imam's role is to facilitate reconciliation and guidance both within Muslim communities and in their relations with other communities. For example, imams must resolve family disputes. Sometimes, even non-Muslim couples seek their intervention. *Islah* is a prophetic way and carries a serious responsibility. Difficult as it is, the

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work of improving familial and communal relationships can best be performed through *islah*. Much interfaith work is actually *islah* work, whether it involves participation in habitat for humanity, mediating racial and ethnic disputes, or, most importantly, healing the rifts within the global Muslim community.

Mujadalah: This Qur'anic term describes an early historical period in interfaith relations when followers of different religions sought to convert each other. Special interfaith circles dedicated initially to logical debate escalated into hostile arguments in which two or more sides competed to prove which one was more capable of answering theological questions. Thus, *mujadalah* refers to any attempt to convert others. It was practiced, before Islam, between Christians, Jews, and others. The Qur'an reformed this practice by asking Muslims to display respect for others when engaging in such activities: "And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner..." (29:46). Whenever interfaith dialogue happened between Christians and Muslims or Jews and Muslims, the early Muslims showed their respect for others and, when they differed, did so with dignity and avoided harsh language.

Influenced by this historical precedent, contemporary Muslims have often used *mujadalah* interchangeably with theological debates. It should be clear from what was said above, however, that *mujadalah* is not a synonym for dialogue, for both activities have different objectives and structures. The only thing they have in common is a commitment to avoid harshness and physical force.

Ihsan: *Ihsan* comes from the root *hasan* (to do better, beautify, look one's best). The Qur'an asks Muslims who engage in interfaith dialogue to speak and act in a civilized manner, even if their partners do not: "But [since] good and evil cannot be equal, repel thou [evil] with something that is better and lo! he between whom and thyself was enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [unto thee], a true friend!" (41:34)

Here is an example of how *Ihsan* may be used: Once an imam in New York answered a phone call from a man who said to him: "Leave

this country and go home, you lunatic.” The imam politely asked the man to come for a cup of tea so that they could meet and talk. The man started to cool down and later apologized. *Ihsan* repairs damage and remove sickness from people’s hearts. All prophets were *muhsinin* (doers of goodness). *Ihsan* is a prophetic way since those who practice it win the hearts of people.

Al-Hikmah wa al-Maw‘izah al-Hasanah: The meaning of this phrase is “wisdom and goodly exhortation.” “Call thou [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer’s path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner – for, behold, thy Sustainer knows best as to who strays from His path, and best knows He as to who are the right-guided” (Qur’an 16:125). In the last years of the Prophet’s life at Makkah, when he and his followers were facing the severest degree of persecution, this verse was revealed. In contrast to the Bedouin way of requiting like for like, the Qur’an told the Muslims to requite the Makkans’ persecution with the honey of a honeybee – in other words, by exercising wisdom and giving good advice. This approach also has a powerful effect on intra-Muslim relations, for it brings unity and prosperity to the entire community.

Ta‘awun: This word indicates the Qur’anic mandate to work together for the good of God’s creation. It is meant to apply to people who might otherwise be seen as enemies, as the Makkans were seen in the Prophet’s time. If it is sincerely implemented, the well-being of all people is assured. *Ta‘awun* is the principle underlying the current understanding of dialogue and conflict resolution. People get together in interfaith dialogue to understand one another and work together for the betterment of the community:

O you who have attained to faith! Offend not against the symbols set up by God, nor against the sacred month [of pilgrimage], nor against the garlanded offerings, nor against those who flock to the Inviolable Temple, seeking favor with their Sustainer and His goodly acceptance; and [only] after your pilgrimage is over are you free to hunt. And never let your hatred of people who would bar you from the Inviolable House of Worship lead you into the sin of aggression: but rather help one another in furthering virtue and God-

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consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of God: for, behold, God is severe in retribution! (5:2)

The opposite of *ta'awun*, namely, those who want to tear down the human community, is prohibited. The Prophet said: "Help your brother both when he is persecuting and when he is persecuted." The Companions, puzzled by his statement, asked him for clarification. He replied that they should help such people by preventing them from engaging in such activities.² Muslims who help Katrina victims with food and shelter and who work with non-Muslims in this and other service activities are acting in accord with *ta'awun*. The benefits of such behavior come from unexpected sources. For example, Houston's Muslim community and nearby areas fed and housed Katrina victims, a charitable action that was appreciated nationwide. Proof of that came when a non-Muslim sent a donation to a mosque for the earthquake victims in Pakistan and enclosed the following message: "You helped in Katrina and deserve to be helped today in your disaster."

Istabiq al-Khayrat: Literally defined as "to excel or compete in good deeds," this refers to outperforming non-Muslims when it comes to doing good works. Addressing the issue of religious diversity, Allah tells Muslims:

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ. (5:48)

Interfaith dialogue embodies the call to *Istabiq al-Khayrat*, and for Muslims comes the additional mandate that they should outshine non-Muslims in serving people. In other words, if non-Muslims

extend their hands in cooperation, peacebuilding, or any kind of constructive good for the community at large, Muslims should extend their hands even farther. In fact, they should stand at the front of the line and be the leaders. The Sunnah, as always, sets the standard. When Muhammad was thirty-five years old and not yet a prophet, the Makkans were about to fight among themselves over the honor of placing the Black Stone back into its proper place in the newly rebuilt Ka'bah. To avoid a tribal war, they decided that the first person to pass through the al-Safa gate would be their mediator. Muhammad, the first to do so, very wisely helped them avert a war and achieve a peaceful solution.³

This peaceful and creative arbitration illustrates how Muslims can adopt a nonviolent approach to problem solving when addressing internal and external problems.

Qur'anic Examples of Religious Reconciliation and Peaceful Coexistence

Islam recognizes the other religions that were established before the Qur'an's revelation. Before and after Islam, world religions have been at war with each other; Jews and Christians rejected each other violently. Their mutual persecution is documented in many books on Judeo-Christian history. Islam's unique contribution to civilization is its recognition of the presence of other religions and its acceptance of the need to live in peace with those religions. Al-Faruqi, confirming this fact, says:

The respect with which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scriptures, is not a courtesy, but an acknowledgement of religious truth. Islam sees them in the world not as 'other views' which it has to tolerate, but as standing *de jure*, as truly revealed religions from God. Moreover their legitimate status is neither socio-political, not cultural, nor civilizational, but religious.⁴

The assertion of one transcendent God: Such a God, beyond gender, color, and personification, enables the establishment of a truly universal

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community. The Qur'an stresses that all people are the children of Adam and Eve. All people are vicegerents of God on Earth and stand as equals with each other before Him. Islam's very ideals, based as they are on the worship of One God and the injunction to seek unity based on their common creation by that One God, move people away from the concept of a 'chosen race' and of 'gentile.' It helps them see themselves as equally respected creations of God:

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

Humanity's first covenant with God: Our fundamental unity was revealed at our creation. After creating Adam and Eve, God drew forth from their loins all of their children, from the first human being to the last, and called upon them to testify:

And whenever thy Sustainer brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He [thus] calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: "Am I not your Sustainer?" to which they answer: "Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto!" [Of this We remind you,] lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "Verily, we were unaware of this." (7:172)

This covenant obligates people to know God, know each other as one people, and build the friendly relations essential for peaceful co-existence.

Din al-Fitrah: What al-Faruqi called Ur-religion or religeo-naturalis is the process by which people recognize God as transcendent and holy and, hence, worthy of adoration. Humanity possesses this concept of *din al-fitrah*:

And so, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition which God has instilled into man: [for,] not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created this is the [purpose of the one] ever-true faith; but most people know it not. (30:30)

The Qur'anic Perspectives of Interfaith Dialogue

The Prophet said about this verse: “Every child is born with this inherent nature. It is one’s parents that make one a Christian, a Jew, or a Zoroastrian.”⁵

Din al-Fitrah and al-Din al-Hanif: The concept of *din al-hanif* focuses the concept of *din al-fitrah*. Hanif applies to all people who adhere to and worship the one true transcendent God. The Qur’an states that Abraham and all Biblical prophets, including Muhammad, were *hanifs* whom Muhammad called his brothers. The Qur’an enjoins on humanity the ideal of the *hanifs* by asking:

And who could be of better faith than he who surrenders his whole being unto God and is a doer of good withal, and follows the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false seeing that God exalted Abraham with His love? (4:125)

Abraham was neither a “Jew” nor a “Christian” but was one who turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself unto God; and he was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him. (3:67)

Islam as a continuation of the Abrahamic faiths: The Qur’an says: “And lastly, We have inspired thee, [O Muhammad, with this message:] ‘Follow the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.’” (16:123).

Affirming that Islam is a continuation of the Biblical message, the Qur’an says:

In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah – and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] insight through revelation as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus: Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein. [And even though] that [unity of faith] to which thou callest them appears oppressive to those who are wont to ascribe to other beings or forces a share in His divinity, God draws unto Himself everyone who is willing, and guides unto Himself everyone who turns unto Him. (42:13)

Ummah: The concept of Ummah (religious community) is very supportive of interfaith interaction. First, it presents humanity as a

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single religious family of brothers and sisters, as the children of Adam and Eve. “And [know that] all mankind were once but one single community, and only later did they begin to hold divergent views. And had it not been for a decree – that had already gone forth from thy Sustainer, all their differences would indeed have been settled [from the outset]” (10:19).

Second, the Qur’an calls every religious community an Ummah. God sent prophets to remind humanity of its primordial pledge to obey God and live together in peace. These prophets, although coming from different parts of the world, brought people the same message. Some believed in them and others rejected them:

And indeed, within every community have We raised up an apostle [entrusted with this message]: “Worship God, and shun the powers of evil!” And among those [past generations] were people whom God graced with His guidance, just as there was among them [many a one] who inevitably fell prey to grievous error: go, then, about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth! (16:36)

Ahl al-Kitab: This concept reveals and encourages the further development of special and intimate relations among Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Qur’an uses *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book) specifically for Jews and Christians. The objective is to remind not only Jews and Christians, but also Muslims, that their religious heritage is shared and that their religious roots are similar. The Qur’an addresses Prophet Muhammad:

Say: “O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our lords beside God.” And if they turn away, then say: “Bear witness that it is we who have surrendered ourselves unto Him.” (3:64)

The shared heritage here is the concept of One transcendent God and the obligation to obey certain rules established by Him.

To reconcile and build good relations with Christians and Jews, the Qur’an permitted Muslims to eat their food and encouraged the Jews and Christians to eat the Muslims’ food (5:5). Today, many Muslims

still eat kosher food. The hope here is that such sharing will result in friendly relations, peaceful exchanges of ideas, and mutual understanding. This hope also rests on the historical Middle Eastern tradition of respecting those who eat your food and protecting them if requested.

The Qur'an told Muslim men not to marry women who worship idols and encouraged them to marry pious *Ahl al-Kitab* women (5:5). Marriage in Arabia was a sign of bonding, alliance building, and cooperation. Prophet Muhammad married women from different tribes, as well as Jewish and Christian women, to build a network of support and protection.

Al-Ummah al-Wasatah: This phrase, defined as a “distinguished community of the middle path,” posits Islam as a purified religion and the Muslim community as the model for pure monotheistic worship. Such a community honors other faiths without compromising Islam’s uniqueness and authenticity.

Implicit in this “middle path” is a distinction between those religions whose differences are God-given and therefore to be respected, and those religions whose differences reflect departures from pure monotheism and are therefore subject to criticism. We recall that the Qur'an first stressed the concepts of God's unity and that all people were equal before Him. Second, it states that all prophets taught God's Oneness and, third, explains how the religious communities before Muhammad falsified the true teaching of pure monotheism (*tahrif*). For a while, the Qur'an accepted the Torah and the Gospels as true revelations while simultaneously accusing the Jewish and Christian communities of, at some point in the past, obstructing or corrupting God's revelation. It is in this context that the Qur'an becomes the purified text that restores the prophetic concept of pure monotheism. In this sense, Islam becomes the true or purified way and the Muslim community becomes the model Ummah of believing in a pure monotheism.

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Using the Qur'an to Address Challenging Issues

It cannot be repeated too often that interfaith dialogue is not about compromising the participants' religious beliefs, but about understanding and respecting each other's beliefs through education. Therefore, it does not seek to create a unified belief system, but rather to accept different beliefs and create a friendly atmosphere of peaceful coexistence. Such an atmosphere cannot always be assumed, however. Sometimes Muslim participants must work hard in the early stages of dialogue to clarify Qur'anic language about which non-Muslims often have serious misunderstandings. Following are some of these misunderstood terms and some clarifications.

Kufr

The Qur'an uses this word, usually translated as disbelief, to mean different things. Its basic meaning is being ungrateful, hiding or covering the truth, rejecting the truth, and not believing in God. Other meanings can also be derived. The first meaning is clear in the following verse:

Answered he who was illumined by revelation: "[Nay,] as for me - I shall bring it to thee ere the twinkling of thy eye ceases!" And when he saw it truly before him, he exclaimed: "This is [an outcome] of my Sustainer's bounty, to test me as to whether I am grateful or ungrateful! However, he who is grateful [to God] is but grateful for his own good; and he who is ungrateful [should know that], verily, my Sustainer is self-sufficient, most generous in giving!" (27:40)

Here *kufr* is used as the opposite of *shukr* (grateful). The meaning of *kufr* depends on the historical context of its use. Note, for example, that in the following verse it is used to describe a specific situation, when Allah asks the Jews to believe in the Qur'an:

Believe in that which I have [now] bestowed from on high, confirming the truth already in your possession, and be not foremost among those who deny its truth; and do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain; and of Me, of Me be conscious. (2:41)

Here, *kafir* (a derivative of *kufri*) is used to warn certain Jews. It does not mean that Jews in general are not believers in God, but only those specific Jews who were rejecting Muhammad and the Qur'an at that point in time. This is also true for other verses in which *kufri* is used in reference to the Jews and Christians (e.g., 2:41 and in those verses that contain another derivative: *kafara*). This interpretation does not mean that Jews and Christians do not believe in God. The Qur'an makes it clear that the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is One and same God (29:46). Elsewhere, the Qur'an says: "Whereas those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muhammad - for it is the truth from their Sustainer - [shall attain to God's grace:] He will efface their [past] bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest" (47:2).

Jews and Christians are not infidels. However, the Qur'an asks them to believe in Muhammad and the Qur'an, with their belief in the Biblical prophets and the scriptures that were revealed to them. Furthermore, the Qur'an asks Christians to abandon their concept of the Trinity and adopt the true concept of God's Oneness. The Qur'an uses *kafara* (covering up, hiding the truth, or committing an act of disbelief) for calling Jesus the Son of God or for saying that Allah is one of three. The Qur'an asks Christians to reject these false concepts (5:72-73).⁶

When al-Faruqi was asked if Jews and Christians should be called infidels, he replied that this word is applied only to those who do not recognize God at all. Therefore, he said, anyone who believes in God but is not a Muslim cannot be considered an infidel. Al-Faruqi further said that no Jew or Christian may be called an infidel a priori. However, if he or she denies God, or His unity and transcendence, he or she may be called an infidel.⁷

Discussions of such questions can – and should – be peaceable. For instance, in a recent dialogue entitled "Christians and Muslims on the Trinity in Christianity and the Transcendence and Unity of God in Islam," two speakers honestly explained their beliefs to an audience of 150 Muslims and Christians, including priests and imams. Afterwards, many questions were asked in a thoughtful, searching spirit. At the end, the audience expressed its appreciation for the speakers' honesty and clarity.

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Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Qur'an* has a good discussion on *kufir* and its derivatives in reference to verses 2:6 and 74:10. He translates *kafir* as generally meaning "denying the truth," with the exception of 57:20, where the word is used for farmers covering the seeds. He feels that the common translation of *kuffar* as disbelievers and particularly infidels is generally inappropriate.

The word *kafir* (and related words, such as the abstract noun *kufir* "disbelief") as mentioned in the Qur'an can be put together in 14 different categories:

1. *Kufr al-Tawhid*: to reject the belief in the Oneness of God. The Qur'an says: "Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth – it is all one to them whether thou warnest them or dost not warn them: they will not believe." (2:6)
2. *Kufr al-Ni'mah*: to lack gratefulness to God or to people. The Qur'an says: "So remember Me, and I shall remember you; and be grateful unto Me, and deny Me not (*la takfurun*).” (2:152)
[Pharaoh said to Moses]: "And yet thou didst commit that [heinous] deed of thine, and [hast thus shown that] thou art one of the ingrate! (*kafirin*)” (26:19)
3. *Kufr al-Tabarri*: to disown/clear oneself from. The Qur'an says: "Indeed, you have had a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said unto their [idolatrous] people: 'Verily, we are quit of you (*kafarna bikum*) and of all that you worship instead of God'..." (60:4)
4. *Kufr al-Taghtiyah*: to hide/bury something, like planting a seed in the ground. The Qur'an says: "Its parable is that of [life-giving] rain: the herbage which it causes to grow delights the tillers of the soil (*kuffar*).” (57:20)
5. *Kufr al-'Inad*: Disbelief out of stubbornness. This applies to someone who knows the truth and admits to knowing the truth but refuses to accept it and refrains from making a declaration. The Qur'an states: [Whereupon God will command:] "Cast, cast into hell every [such] stubborn enemy of the truth." (50:24)
6. *Kufr al-Inkar*: Disbelief out of denial. This applies to someone who denies with both heart and tongue. The Qur'an states: "They

- [who turn away from it] are fully aware of God's blessings, but none the less they refuse to acknowledge them [as such], since most of them are given to denying the truth." (16:83)
7. *Kufr al-Kibr*: Disbelief out of arrogance and pride. The disbelief by the devil (*iblis*) is an example of this type of *kufr*.
 8. *Kufr al-Juhud*: Disbelief out of rejection. This applies to someone who acknowledges the truth in his heart, but rejects it with his tongue. This type of *kufr* is applicable to those who call themselves Muslims but who reject any necessary and accepted norms of Islam such as *salah* and *zakah*. The Qur'an states: "[And] in their wickedness and self-exaltation they rejected them, although their minds were convinced of their truth: and behold what happened in the end to those spreaders of corruption!" (27:14)
 9. *Kufr al-Nifaq*: Disbelief out of hypocrisy. This applies to someone who pretends to be a believer but conceals his disbelief. Such a person is called a *munafiq* (hypocrite). The Qur'an states: "Verily, the hypocrites shall be in the lowest depth of the fire, and thou wilt find none who could succour them." (4:145)
 10. *Kufr al-Istihlal*: Disbelief out of trying to make *haram* into *halal*. This applies to someone who accepts as lawful (*halal*) that which Allah has made unlawful (*haram*) like alcohol or adultery. Only Allah has the prerogative to make things *halal* and *haram* and those who seek to interfere with His right are like rivals to Him and therefore fall outside the boundaries of faith.
 11. *Kufr al-Kurh*: Disbelief out of detesting any of Allah's commands. The Qur'an states: "[But] as for those who are bent on denying the truth, ill fortune awaits them, since He will let all their [good] deeds go to waste: this, because they hate [the very thought of] what God has bestowed from on high and thus He causes all their deeds to come to nought!" (47:8-9)
 12. *Kufr al-Istihza'*: Disbelief due to mockery and derision. The Qur'an states: "Yet, indeed, if thou wert to question them, they would surely answer, 'We were only indulging in idle talk, and were playing [with words].' Say: 'Were you, then, mocking at God and His messages and His Apostle?' Do not offer [empty] excuses! You have indeed denied the truth after [having professed]

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your belief [in it] – Though We may efface the sin of some of you, We shall chastise others – seeing that they were lost in sin.” (9:65-66)

13. *Kufr al-I'rad*: Disbelief due to avoidance. This applies to those who turn away and avoid the truth. The Qur'an states: "And who could be more wicked than he to whom his Sustainer's messages are conveyed and who thereupon turns away from them, forgetting all [the evil] that his hands may have wrought? Behold, over their hearts have We laid veils which prevent them from grasping the truth, and into their ears, deafness; and though thou call them onto the right path, they will never allow themselves to be guided." (18:57)
14. *Kufr al-Istibdal*: Disbelief because of trying to substitute Allah's Laws. This could take the form of: (a) rejection of Allah's law (Shari'ah) without denying it, (b) denial of Allah's law and therefore rejecting it, or (c) substituting Allah's laws with 'artificial' (i.e. non-Muslim) laws. The Qur'an states: "Now had God so willed, He could surely have made them all one single community: nonetheless, He admits unto His grace him that wills [to be admitted] whereas the evildoers shall have none to protect them and none to succour them [on Judgment Day]." (42:8) The Qur'an also says: "For, verily, God is with those who are conscious of Him and are doers of good withal!" (16:128)

The word *kufr* can also be applied to a Muslim when he is doing something wrong, but not necessarily something that would place him or her outside the state of belief in Islam. For example, a Muslim who is able to perform the Hajj but does not go, without denying the need to go, would be committing an act of *kufr* in a sense of ungratefulness to God:

Behold, the first Temple ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah: rich in blessing, and a [source of] guidance unto all the worlds, full of clear messages. [It is] the place whereon Abraham once stood; and whoever enters it finds inner peace. Hence, pilgrimage unto the Temple is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it. And as for those who deny the truth – verily, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds. (3:96-97)⁸

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In reality, the Qur'an carefully distinguishes among people's allegiances to God and we can divide humanity into five religious categories, as follows:

1. *Al-Muslimun*: those who believe in One God, in all Biblical prophets, Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, all revelations, the Qur'an as God's final revelation to humanity, and the Day of Judgment (2:2-5).
2. *Al-Mulhidun*: The disbelievers in God, those who do not accept His existence. The Qur'an uses the word *Mulhid* for such people who reject His name. For example, the Qur'an says: "And God's [alone] are the attributes of perfection; invoke Him, then, by these, and stand aloof from all who distort the meaning (*Yulhidun*) of His attributes: they shall be requited for all that they were wont to do!" (7:180)
3. *Al-Munafiqun*: The hypocrites, "And there are people who say, 'We do believe in God and the Last Day,' the while they do not [really] believe..." (2:8-18). When Muhammad and his followers migrated to Madinah, such people only pretended to be Muslims. The Qur'an addresses them in almost all of the surahs (chapters) revealed in Madinah.
4. *Al-Mushrikun*: The ones who associate other people and things with God, those who worship idols. In reference to their idol worship, the Qur'an says: "Verily, God does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills: for he who ascribes divinity to aught beside God has indeed contrived an awesome sin" (4:48, 116).
5. *Ahl al-Kitab*: People of the Book, namely, Jews and Christians, those who believe in God but not Muhammad and the Qur'an (2:105; 3:64). This phrase is very common in the Qur'an. The word *Kufr* can be applied in one meaning or another to all people including Muslims in the light of the categories.

Wali

Non-Muslims often ask Muslims why the Qur'an seems hostile toward them. "Why," they ask, "does it warn Muslims not to take

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Jews and Christians as their friends?” This supposed warning, however, is based on a misconception: it is derived from some translations where *wali* is rendered as “friend,” without any explanation of its actual complexity. When people who are not familiar with Arabic read the translation, they understand ‘friend’ to be the only meaning and, from that mistaken assumption, claim that the Qur’an forbids Muslims to associate with Christians and Jews.

Actually, *wali* means guardian, protector, and provider. God is the believers’ *wali* (guardian); for those who obey Satan, Satan is their guardian. This usage frequently occurs in the Qur’an: “Allah is the protector of those who have faith. From the depths of the darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject faith, their patrons are the evil ones (*taghut*). From light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness” (2:257).

Even in the context of human relationships, *wali* refers to a relationship of guardianship or protection, especially in situations where it is vital to distinguish between one’s true and false supporters. Consider the following verse: “O you who have attained to faith! Do not take your fathers and your brothers for allies if a denial of the truth is dearer to them than faith: for those of you who ally themselves with them – it is they, they who are evildoers!” (9:23)

This verse refers to the battle of Badr, when the Makkans attacked the Muslims on the outskirts of Madinah. Brother stood against brother, and father against son. It is in this context that the Qur’an asked for Muslim solidarity, so that they would not betray their fellow Muslims when faced with fighting against their own blood relations. According to today’s political thinking, such a betrayal would be considered treason and could be punished with death or imprisonment for life. Modern states demand loyalty to the state above all personal loyalties. Yet in situations that do not conflict with loyalty to other believers, the Qur’an commands respect for personal loyalties, especially those owed to parents:

And [God says:] “We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: [hence, O man,] be grateful towards Me and towards thy parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys’ end. [Revere thy

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parents;] yet should they endeavor to make thee ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which thy mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not; but [even then] bear them company in this world's life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn towards Me. In the end, unto Me you all must return; and thereupon I shall make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life]." (31:14-15)

Now we come to the verse that seems to say that Muslims must not make friends with Jews or Christians. "O you who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies..." (5:51). This translation is typical in its use of 'friends' for *awliya'*, the plural form of *wali*. Yet we know that *awliya'* means protectors and masters. So what is this verse actually saying? One must understand the "occasion of revelation" or the historical context in order to understand the use of *awliya'* here. This verse refers to a special situation: one of Madinah's Jewish tribes betrayed the Muslim community, which was fighting for its life against the Makkan pagans. Known as the Battle of the Ditch as well as the Alliance of the Makkan Tribes, it consisted of the following event. The tribe of Banu Qurayzah had pledged, in both a treaty and the constitution of Madinah, to help the Muslim community fight its enemies. Instead, it teamed up secretly with the Makkans during the fight. After the battle was over, the Prophet called a *shura* (a parliament meeting in the modern sense) to decide what to do about this act of disloyalty. But disloyalty breeds disloyalty, for the hypocrites backed the Banu Qurayzah. In the midst of this series of betrayals, the controversial verse cited above was revealed.⁹

Such verses do not prohibit political, economic, and social dealings with non-Muslims. In this, as in all things, the Prophet himself provides the best example. He trusted 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Urayqit, a non-Muslim, as a guide during his migration (Hijrah) from Makkah to Madinah, even though the Makkans had offered a big reward for his capture.¹⁰ On another occasion, the Prophet selected Ibn Abi Hadrad, a non-Muslim, to spy on the Thaqaifi army – a highly sensitive mission in a critical situation.¹¹

Other examples of his acceptance of protection offered by non-Muslims abound. Perhaps the most famous one is his living under Abu Talib's (his non-Muslim uncle) protection until the latter's death.

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During Muhammad's mission to Ta'if, he was injured and returned to Makkah with the help of the non-Muslim Mat'am ibn 'Adi and his sons. The Prophet was so grateful that he said, after Badr, that if Mat'am were alive and had asked him to release the prisoners, he would have done so.¹² In addition, he signed an agreement of cooperation with Madinah's Jewish tribes soon after his migration, concluded the treaty of Hudaibiyyah with the pagan Makkans, and accepted an alliance with the non-Muslim Banu Khuza'ah tribe. In fact, this tribe participated in the conquest of Makkah.¹³

But good relations with non-Muslims were not formed simply for the sake of expedience; rather, doing so with all people, especially with Jews and Christians, is strongly encouraged by Islam as a universal practice. Yusuf al-Qaradawi cites examples from the *sirah* of the Prophet and his Companions of how to treat non-Muslim neighbors and people in general. Some examples are:¹⁴

- The Prophet sent gifts to be distributed among poor Makkans despite their hostility, sent gifts to kings and accepted gifts from them, and assigned an annual charity to a Jewish family in Madinah.
- When a Christian woman named Umm al-Harith ibn Rabi'ah, died, some of the Companions attended her funeral.
- When a sheep was slaughtered in a Companion's home, he sent some of the meat to his Jewish neighbor.
- Following the Prophet's way, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab sent his non-Muslim brother a piece of garment as a gift.
- The Prophet borrowed money from non-Muslims.¹⁵
- He honored non-Muslims, whether alive or dead. Once, when a funeral procession was passing by, he stood up in respect. His Companions told him that it was the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet asked: "Isn't it a human soul?"¹⁶

The point of these examples is that the Qur'an, the hadiths, and the Sunnah stress Islam's respect for people's rights and their humanity. Everyone, from one's companion to a wayfarer, has the right to be respected, treated fairly, and protected from harm and indignity (4:36).

Will the Christians and the Jews Enter Heaven in Islam?

Another sensitive topic is whether Muslims believe that Jews and Christians will inevitably end up in hell. For example, in a recent public dialogue between Christians and Muslims, the first question was how Christians could possibly dialogue with Muslims since Muslims believe that Christians are damned. In return, the Muslim speaker asked the Christian questioner what he believed about Muslims' chances of escaping hell and asked: "Don't Christians believe that the way to heaven is through Jesus alone? We are not here to send people to heaven or hell, but to find ways of building good relations with each other and to serve the cause of suffering humanity."

Yet this question is a crucial issue in interfaith dialogue. Every religion believes that their God will place them in heaven ahead of others. Jews and Christians also believe this. No religion is ready to share the same place in heaven with another one. During an interfaith session at Rochester's Islamic Center, a Muslim and a Catholic speaker defined their religions' respective understandings of hell and heaven. In the Q&A session, someone asked the Catholic speaker if he believed that non-Catholics would go to heaven. In reply, the speaker narrated a humorous story from his own tradition saying that the Catholics had already filled the empty spaces in heaven before the others, including the Muslims and non-Catholic Christians, had even arrived at its gate! Meaning that Catholicism had had a head start in time over the others. The speaker's joke helped create a relaxed atmosphere because it suggested that none of us should be fighting over a question about which "only God knows best."

Yet at the same time, each religion's sense of exclusiveness as regards its understanding of heaven and hell gives believers the energy and the motivation to do the best they can within their own belief system. This results in what the Qur'an calls God's decision "put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct" (67:2). This belief resembles the concept of nationalism, but without its violence, for just as each nation-state proclaims itself superior to all others, each religion seeks to outdo the others in converts and to become dominant, not only on Earth but in heaven. Yet the Qur'anic concept of

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Istabiqu al-Khayrat (excel and compete in doing well) reveals that this competition should be in the area of doing works of peace, not of war. So while nothing is wrong with this competitive spirit, the most important thing is finding ways to live in peace with others. It is not who wins or loses, but how the game is played. Islam instructs its believers to adopt *adab*, compassion, and respect toward all those whose religions have likewise told them to strive to do good.

Interfaith dialogue does not seek to send all people to heaven; rather, its concern lies in encouraging them to avoid violence and hatred and to cultivate peace and solidarity among themselves. Interfaith dialogue says that each religion's self-asserted positive claims should be made forthrightly and without reliance on invidious comparisons. Consider the difference between the following two approaches. On the one hand, one imam mentioned during his Friday sermon that Jews and Christians are bound for hell if they do not accept Islam. On the other hand, another imam said that Islam is Allah's chosen path and that those who believe in Him, the angels, the Biblical prophets, Prophet Muhammad as seal of the prophets, all holy scriptures including the Qur'an, the Hereafter, the Resurrection, and in the Day of Judgment—He, in His mercy, will bless such people in heaven. The difference in the approach between these two imams should be clear. Which of these imams more truly represents the spirit of interfaith dialogue?

Muslims would certainly oppose and reject those who say that Muslims are bound for hell or that Islam is an evil religion; conversely, Muslims should avoid saying that Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, or others will end up in hell. Allah has gifted people with intellect; they understand what is meant by saying that God will reward Muslims. Direct criticism of other religious practices and beliefs is unhealthy in any setting, especially in a dialogical context, and may easily escalate into further animosity and even hatred. Consider what happened in a recent dialogue when an imam presented the Muslim position on the afterlife clearly, as prescribed above. At the end, a Muslim raised his voice to say that while the imam had spoken correctly, he had neglected to tell the non-Muslims present they were all bound for hell unless they accepted Islam immediately. This type of language and approach creates a hostile atmosphere and must be avoided.

Yet, Muslims are divided on the criteria for judging whether a person will go to heaven or to hell. Some assert that the criteria for entering heaven are fairly inclusive, for they consist of believing in one God and the Day of Judgment, doing good deeds, and believing in the prophets and the scriptures that were sent to guide people toward that goal. Authoritative works upholding this broad view include Abul Kalam Azad's *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, Rashid Rida's *Al-Manar*, Muhammad Hassan al-Tabataba'i's *Al-Mizan fi al-Tafsir al-Qur'an*, as well as certain writings influenced by Sufi writers. In his *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Fazlur Rahman expounds upon this understanding of the criteria for entering heaven in Appendix II.¹⁷ In his book *Qur'an: Liberation and Pluralism*,¹⁸ Farid Esack develops Rahman's thesis, basing his conclusions on an elaborate study of the Qur'an's approach to other faiths.

But the majority of *tafsir* (exegesis of the Qur'an) in both the classical and modern periods argue for more exclusive criteria. While listing belief in God, the Day of Judgment, good deeds, all the prophets, and all the scriptures as essential, they also include belief in Muhammad as the seal of the prophets and the Qur'an as God's final and preserved message to humanity. The majority of Muslims endorse this interpretation.

The same Qur'anic verse can sometimes support both sides of the debate. Those Muslim scholars who use the inclusive position to support religious pluralism and the universality of Islamic values buttress their belief that some Jews and Christians will go to heaven on such verses as the following:

Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:62)

Opponents argue that such verses refer only to those Jews and Christians who were alive during the time of their respective prophets and before the appointment of Muhammad as God's final prophet. They point out that when he was asked about the fate of those who

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died before his prophethood, Muhammad replied that they would be treated according to the standards of their own faith.¹⁹ Regarding the requisite set of beliefs, the opponents argue that many other verses confirm that belief in Muhammad and the Qur'an is essential for people to enter heaven.²⁰

However, in reference to interfaith dialogue, too much consideration of these questions is unproductive. After all, many Muslims do not ponder the criteria of who will enter heaven or hell too much. They say that such a judgment belongs only to Allah. As explained above, the real issue of interfaith dialogue is how one expresses oneself and builds peaceful relationships while participating in dialogue. Islam is an Earthbound religion and thus very concerned about peace on Earth. While belief in the hereafter is a very significant part of Islam, it must not be disfigured by harsh, provocative language. Rather, it should be explained gently and modestly, for the truth is that only Allah knows who will enter heaven. It is best to say that "I do not know what my fate will be in the hereafter. Allah knows best who will end up in heaven and hell." The Qur'an, describing the Day of Judgment vividly, makes clear that only Allah can make this determination:

And [on that Day,] the trumpet [of judgment] will be sounded, and all [creatures] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will fall down senseless, unless they be such as God wills [to exempt]. And then it will sound again - and lo! standing [before the Seat of Judgment], they will begin to see [the truth]! And the earth will shine bright with her Sustainer's light. And the record [of everyone's deeds] will be laid bare, and all the prophets will be brought forward, and all [other] witnesses; and judgment will be passed on them all in justice. And they will not be wronged, for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever [good or evil] he has done: and He is fully aware of all that they do. (39: 68-70)

Yet while it is sometimes important to adopt a more inclusive stance toward other religions, it would be a serious error to adopt this stance on all occasions. It is misleading for Muslim scholars in a dialogic context to claim that a universal set of beliefs is valid for all religions or to claim that Islam includes all religions. Such an assumption of inclusiveness denies Islam its unique message as well as the specific historical and religious traditions that distinguish Islam and make it appealing.

Of course, Muslims who believe that interfaith dialogue is forbidden assert loudly that all non-Muslims are damned. Muslim participation in interfaith dialogue calls for those on the extremes to adopt a middle way in order to avoid sharp divisions among Muslims and thereby preserve the Ummah's unity. This is particularly important for Muslim communities in the West, for they are currently experiencing difficult times. Imams and the Muslim scholars of Islam should make joint efforts to guide the community toward moderation. By easing the pressure on Muslims, this outreach will enable individuals to follow the Prophet's ways more faithfully.

Dar al-Islam

The word literally means the abode or house of Islam used as an antonym to the word *Dar al-Harb* (the abode of war). There is confusion in use of these words. To some *Dar al-Islam* refers to those countries or communities where Muslims are free to practice their religion. For others, it means a state that is administered by Muslims according to Shari'ah no matter if Muslims are in the majority or minority.

The word *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* are not used in the Qur'an. However, the word *Dar al-Salam* is used in the Qur'an: "Theirs shall be an abode of peace (*Dar al-Salam*) with their Sustainer; and He shall be near unto them in result of what they have been doing" (6:127). In another place the Qur'an says: "And [know that] God invites [man] unto the abode of peace, and guides him that wills [to be guided] onto a straightway" (10:25). Even so, these verses refer to the life in the hereafter according to the commentators.

There are some other references in both the Qur'an and Hadith that later in history supported the theology of the terms *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*. For example, the Qur'an says: "Behold, those whom the angels gather in death while they are still sinning against themselves, [the angels] will ask, "What was wrong with you?" They will answer: "We were too weak on earth." [The angels] will say: "Was, then, God's earth not wide enough for you to forsake the domain of evil?" For such, then, the goal is hell - and how evil a journey's end!" (4:97). Or this verse: "Behold, as for those who have attained to faith,

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and who have forsaken the domain of evil and are striving hard, with their possessions and their lives, in God's cause, as well as those who shelter and succour [them] – these are [truly] the friends and protectors of one another. But as for those who have come to believe without having migrated [to your country] – you are in no wise responsible for their protection until such a time as they migrate [to you]. Yet, if they ask you for succour against religious persecution, it is your duty to give [them] this succour—except against a people between whom and yourselves there is a covenant: for God sees all that you do” (8:72). Imam Shaybani of the Hanafi School of Thought refers to this verse that its application to migrate from Makkah to Madinah was abrogated in the life of the Prophet as Muslims were allowed to stay in Makkah.²¹

A close look at these terms reveals that they were coined during the political hegemony of the Khulafa' (Caliphate) period of Umayyad and Abbasid. The Muslim jurists believed that Islam had come to rule the world and had no doubt that a universal caliphate could be a reality. Seeing it as God's command, they believed that the whole world should live under Islam (*Dar al-Islam*) for peace and security. Therefore, those who resisted living under the caliphate were called as *Dar al-Harb* and were to be occupied. The people of the book were to pay *jizyah* as the Qur'an referred to it in 9:29, and the polytheist were to be converted. The Jews and Christians, however, are stated as people of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*) in the Qur'an, and as such, later when India was occupied by Muslims, they were not converted but were granted the status of the people of the Book.

The in-depth study of the word *Dar al-Islam* refers clearly to the political domination of Islam, ignoring those early jurists who had voiced differently. In confirmation of this claim, the case of British India is significant to study. When Muslims lost power to the British, the first reaction was emotional both politically and religiously. Shah Abdul Aziz declared India as *Dar al-Harb* in 1803. At this time, Sayyid Ahmad started a Jihad movement from the North West Frontier Province calling upon the Pushtun tribes to liberate India. Since Muslims are obligated to migrate to *Dar al-Islam* and wage Jihad against *Dar al-Harb*, some Muslims migrated from India, though most stayed including Shah Abdul Aziz. Later accepting the reality of the situation,

Muslim jurists of India debated whether India under the British was *Dar al-Harb* or *Dar al-Islam*. Looking back at the Hanafi Fiqh (jurisprudence), many came to the conclusion, including some in Deoband Seminary, that as long as there is religious freedom for Muslims, a country could be considered as *Dar al-Islam*.²²

To understand this issue in its contemporary application, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square* is a good book to read. In chapter one of this book, "Toward a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Reflections," Taha Jabir Al-Alwani comes to the conclusion that *Dar al-Islam* is any place where a Muslim can be in peace and security even if he/she lives in a non-Muslim majority. Al-Alwani explains that *Dar al-Harb* or *Dar al-Kufr* is where a Muslim lives under threat. Even if the majority there adheres to Islam and Islamic culture, a Muslim is obligated to migrate to a land of freedom. He quotes Al-Marwardi's view saying if a Muslim is able to practice his religion openly in a non-Muslim land, that land becomes *Dar al-Islam* by virtue of his settling there. Settling in such a country is preferable as other people would likely convert to Islam. Al-Alwani also quotes Imam al-Razi's citing of al-Shashi's opinion that according to him it would be better to call *Dar al-Harb* or *Dar al-Kufr* as *Dar al-Da'wah* and *Dar al-Islam* as *Dar al-Ijabah*. He calls non-Muslims as *Ummah al-Da'wah* and Muslims as *Ummah al-Ijabah*.²³

Most recently, the *Dar al-'Ulum* Deoband called India under the Hindu rule as *Dar Al-Aman* (place of protection and peace). The Vice Rector of the Seminary, Mawlana Abdul Khaleque was quoted in *Hindustan Times* on February 22, 2009 saying that Muslims in India are free to practice their religion with freedom so it is *Dar Al-Aman* for all Muslims.

The political, economic and social conditions of the modern world have changed drastically. We are living, supposedly and to an extent, in a democratic world (at least this is promoted as the ideal, whether practiced everywhere is another matter) where all citizens pledge allegiance to the constitution of the country, a constitution underscored by freedom of thought, religion and property. We all live together, both Muslims and non-Muslims, in *Dar al-'Ahad* (in a covenanted world), pledging to the constitution and in return receiving security and freedom.

Dhimmi

The term *dhimmi*, from *Dhimma*, means a pledge (*al-‘Ahd*), a guarantee (*Al-Daman*) and safety (*Al-Aman*). The word *dhimmi* means the pledge of protection from Allah, His Messenger and the believers for all non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. The term has nothing to do with citizenship. All people, Muslims and non-Muslims are equal citizens in Islamic State (*Al-Jinsiyyah al Islamiyyah*).²⁴

Why was the term *dhimmi* adopted for non-Muslims? All through history, the group in power, usually representative of one nationality or social grouping, has violated the rights of others living in that country. In the old days big tribes would subjugate the small tribes living in the neighborhood. The practice of persecuting and humiliating subjugated groups in order for the powerful elite to dominate is not uncommon as it is a method of prolonging power and the control of economic resources. To save the non-Muslims from such fear of domination and persecution, the term *dhimmi* was adopted giving them political, religious, social and economic protection. If the rights of a *dhimmi* were violated, Muslims were fearful of the consequential wrath of God.

The term *dhimmi* was strongly rooted in Arab tradition. The Arabs practiced the custom of *Jiwar* (protection) or *dhimmah* in their political system. Once the terms were agreed upon, the stronger tribe would protect the smaller one from any aggression or persecution. This protection was a matter of honor for the stronger tribe which ensured that the *dhimmah* was effective. When the Arabs accepted Islam, then the same concept of *dhimmah* was applied to non-Muslims to assure them full protection and security. Watt says, the Christians were probably better off as *dhimmis* under Muslim Arabs rulers than they had been under the Byzantine Greeks. The same is reiterated by Thomas Arnold in his *Preaching of Islam*.²⁵

The term *dhimmi* was used to encourage respectful tolerance and freedom towards non-Muslims at a time when there was little or no tolerance. There are many Hadith encouraging this protection. There is nothing negative in this term. However, the political landscape of the world, including the Muslim world, has changed a lot. Even if an Islamic State is being established in the modern world, the word

dhimmi would be considered an inappropriate application in the modern context.²⁶

Jizyah

Jizyah, the root meaning compensation, was a poll tax on *dhimmis* living in a Muslim state. It is actually a counterpart of *zakah*. Like *zakah* on Muslims, those non-Muslims who can afford it were required to pay *jizyah* to the state. Further, unlike *zakah*, the amount of *jizyah* was fixed and minimal. Initially only those who could join the army were required to pay the *jizyah*. Doi explains that *jizyah* absolved the non-Muslims from paying *zakah*, even though they were given *zakah* if they were poor.²⁷

The justification of *jizyah* comes from the Qur'an: "[And] fight against those who - despite having been vouchsafed revelation [aforetime] -do not [truly] believe either in God or the Last Day, and do not consider forbidden that which God and His Apostle have forbidden, and do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them] till they [agree to] pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled [in war]"(9:29). The Surah was revealed in the 9th year of Hijrah, the Prophet's migration to Madinah. Islam spread throughout Arabia and some Jews and Christians came under the Muslim rule. It was during that time that the Prophet himself implemented the concept of *jizyah* on the People of the Book and it continued during the Caliphate in Muslim history. The majority of the commentators of the Qur'an agree that it was obligatory only on those Jewish and Christian men who could serve in the armed forces, but were exempted and instead asked to pay a certain amount in return. Those who could not afford it, they were exempted. The *jizyah* was symbolic and exemptions were many.²⁸ Muhammad Asad translates the word *jizyah* as exemption tax. He says that non-Muslims who were allowed to join the Muslim military in later history were exempted from *jizyah*.²⁹

Mufti Muhammad Shafi in his explanation to the verse says that initially it was applied to the People of the Book and then *Majus* (Fire worshippers) were also included in the Prophet's time. However, the *Mushrikun* of Makkah were not included. They were asked to accept

Islam or leave the area. According to Abu Hanifah all non-Muslims including Hindus, Buddhists and others were asked to pay *jizyah* who could afford to pay.³⁰

Zakah is a pillar of Islam and cannot be absolved by any one. *Jizyah* is different. It is narrated that the Prophet said during the death of his son Ibrahim that he would have exempted all Copts from Paying *jizyah* if Ibrahim had lived as a mark of esteem for him. Ibrahim's mother was a Copt.³¹ It is also reported that Banu Taghlib a non-Muslim tribe approached 'Umar, the Caliph to exempt them from *jizyah* as they felt humiliated and that they would pay zakah in return. It is said that 'Umar allowed them.³²

As said before about *dhimmi*s, the same is true about *jizyah*. The political and economic, including taxation system, realities in the modern world have changed a lot. The changing circumstances demand a new look at the Qur'an and Sunnah in its application to Muslim relations with non-Muslims.

Peaceful Coexistence and Religious and Human Rights

Islam bases its name on its commitment to peace (*salam*), and one of God's names is *al-Salam* (the peaceful). In this way, peaceful living and coexistence are at the very center of what Islam enjoins on all Muslims. Given this reality, the Qur'an is very concerned with ending tribal, ethnic, and religious feuds and promoting peaceful coexistence. So true is this that some Muslims believe that the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights and the United States' Bill of Rights were influenced by the Qur'an.³³ Below are some specific Qur'anic concepts that call for preserving human dignity, exercising respect, and achieving peaceful coexistence in this world.

The Right to Life: The Qur'an upholds the sanctity and absolute value of human life:

Because of this did We ordain unto the children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being-unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth – it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind.

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And, indeed, there came unto them Our apostles with all evidence of the truth: yet, behold, notwithstanding all this, many of them go on committing all manner of excesses on earth. (5:32)

Say: “Come, let me convey unto you what God has [really] forbidden to you: Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him; and [do not offend against but, rather,] do good unto your parents; and do not kill your children for fear of poverty – [for] it is We who shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them; and do not commit any shameful deeds, be they open or secret; and do not take any human being’s life – [the life] which God has declared to be sacred – otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice”: this has He enjoined upon you so that you might use your reason. (6:151)

The same message is found in other parts of the Qur’an.

Religious Freedom: The Qur’an upholds religious pluralism as something worthy of respect:

And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe? (10:99)

And unto thee [O Prophet] have We vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come unto thee. Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ. (5:48)

And say: “The truth [has now come] from your Sustainer: let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.” Verily, for all who sin against themselves [by rejecting Our truth] We have readied a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest! (18:29)

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No Compulsion in Religion: The Qur'an prohibits forced conversion and any hindrance to religious freedom: "There shall be no coercion in matters of faith..." (2:256). Allah told Muhammad, who was very concerned that the Makkans accept Islam: "Yet if God had so willed, they would not have ascribed divinity to aught beside Him; hence, We have not made thee their keeper, and neither art thou responsible for their conduct" (6:107).

Respect for Other Religions and Religious Communities: The Qur'an prohibits Muslims from using abusive language about other religions: "But do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance: for, goodly indeed have We made their own doings appear unto every community. In time, [however,] unto their Sustainer they must return: and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing" (6:108). In this verse, *Ummah* (religious community) and *zayyana* (alluring and attractive) are used together to show that Allah made the religious injunctions – the *Shari'ah* (the sacred law) and *minhaj* (the cultural values) of each community attractive and appealing to its followers. Therefore, the Qur'an asks Muslims to show respect toward other *shara'i* and *manahij* and avoid insulting them. This type of command, which is found throughout the Qur'an, seeks to make sure that religious pluralism is respected and that each religious community's actions and beliefs are protected and appreciated.

Respect For Fair Speech About Prophets and The Founders and The Figures of Other Religions:

Peace be upon Abraham. Thus do We reward the doers of good for he was truly one of our believing servants. (37:109-11)

For, indeed, We vouchsafed unto Moses the divine writ and caused apostle after apostle to follow him; [70] and We vouchsafed unto Jesus, the son of Mary, all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. (2:87)

...God sends thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] John, who shall confirm the

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truth of a word from God, and [shall be] outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous. (3:39)

And lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world. O Mary! Remain thou truly devout unto thy Sustainer, and prostrate thyself in worship, and bow down with those who bow down [before Him]." (3:42-43)

Lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Behold, God sends thee the glad tiding, through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those who are drawn near unto God." (3:45)

Protection and Respect For All Places of Worship:

...For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques - in [all of] which Gods name is abundantly extolled - would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succour him who succours His cause: for, verily, God is most Powerful, Almighty. (22:40)

Respect for People, Irrespective of Their Religion:

Verily, as for those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, [on the one hand,] and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God, [on the other,] verily, God will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, God is witness unto everything. (22:17)

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (49:13)

In a well-known hadith, Prophet Muhammad said: "O people, your Lord is One and your father [Adam] is one. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab or vice versa, or for a white over a black or vice versa, but only in issues of righteousness."³⁴

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Freedom of Speech and Association: The Qur'an uses *shura* (consultation) to discourage authoritarianism and absolutism and to encourage people to voice their dissent in a civil manner. In fact, chapter 42 is called *surah al-Shura* in order to highlight the significance of honoring differences of opinion, freedom of speech, and freedom of association. The Qur'an speaks very approvingly of those who worship God and are conscious of Him: "...and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves..." (42:38).

The Qur'an tells Muhammad to respect his opponents' honest opinion and to consult with them:

And it was by God's grace that thou [O Prophet] didst deal gently with thy followers: for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee. Pardon them, then, and pray that they be forgiven. And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then, when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in God: for, verily, God loves those who place their trust in Him. (3:159)

This verse was revealed at the time when the hypocrites betrayed Muhammad and the Muslims just before the battle of Uhud. Muhammad, having called a *shura*, found that some of the people favored defending Madinah from within its gates. But the majority wanted to fight the attackers on open ground. Muhammad followed the majority opinion. When the 1,000 soldiers went out to face the enemy, 300 of them departed, saying that their opinion had not been respected. This betrayal came at a moment of crisis. Although the loyal Muslims suffered heavy losses during the ensuing battle, they were able to survive. Muhammad was injured, and his uncle Hamza was martyred. Even after this event, Muhammad did not banish those traitors from his *shura* meetings.³⁵

Dialogue and Communication Must Take Place in a Respectful Atmosphere: The Qur'an tells people to speak civilly to each other on all occasions, especially during moments of tension or disagreement: "And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner" (29:46). The same message is repeated often. In general, Allah commands courtesy, even to the point of outdoing one's

neighbor in this regard: “But when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace], answer with an even better greeting, or [at least] with the like thereof. Verily, God keeps count indeed of all things” (4:86). The Prophet was “neither one who abuses others, speaks bad words, or curses others. If he wanted to admonish one of us, he would say: ‘What is wrong with him? Let his forehead be dusted.’”³⁶ The word *turab* is used here. When a Muslim prostrates, his or her forehead picks up some dust. Perhaps when the Prophet was displeased with someone, he would say these words, which could also mean “May you submit to God.”

Key Points of the Chapter

- The Qur'an uses *Ta'arafu, islah, ihsan, mujadalah, al-hikmah wa al-maw'izah al-hasanah, Ta'awun*, and *Istabiqu al-Khayrat*, and similar terms to promote interfaith understanding and peaceful coexistence.
- The Qur'an recognizes the existence of other religions that arose before Islam and stresses peaceful coexistence with them through such concepts as *din al-fitrah, al-din al-hanif*, and *Ahl al-Kitab*.
- While stressing bridge building and respectful tolerance, the Qur'an emphasizes Islam's unique position among all other religions and the Muslim community's uniqueness.
- The word *kafir* has many usages. The *Ahl al-Kitab* are believers in the sense of believing in one God. When *kafir* is applied to them, it means they deny the Qur'an and Muhammad's prophethood.
- The word *wali* means a guardian or protector; it does not simply translate into “friend.” Muslims should have friendships with non-Muslims, exchange gifts with them, visit them when they are sick, and respect their non-Muslim neighbors.
- The Qur'an's concept of human rights and obligations is similar to that found in the United States' Bill of Rights and the United Nations' Charter of Human Rights.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Discussion Questions

1. Find your own Qur'anic verse that supports interfaith dialogue, as you understand it.
2. Can you think of verses that do not support interfaith dialogue?
3. What would be the most appropriate way to convey Islam's message to non-Muslims?
4. Based on your experience, what other challenges might confront Muslims who are interested in interfaith dialogue?