The Compassionate Diplomat: Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) Approach to Interfaith Relations

Dr. Abdul Ghaffar
Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Okara, Okara
Email: Aghaffar488@gmail.com

Dr. Tanveer Qasim
Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore
Email: Tanveerqasim@yahoo.com

Waqas Ali Haider
Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Okara, Okara
Corresponding Author Email: Waqas.alihaider@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the Islamic perspective on interfaith relations as modeled by Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Emphasizing the sociable nature inherent to humans as described in Islamic teachings, the discourse underscores the role of all prophets, culminating with Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), in advocating for peace and mutual respect across diverse religious groups. The text elaborates on the Quranic directive that guides Muslims in maintaining decorum in their interactions with non-Muslims, urging adherence to an ordained path of behavior while avoiding the influence of those lacking true knowledge. Central to the discussion is the classification of interactions between Muslims and non-believers into three main categories: alliances, which are strictly prohibited; cordiality, which is permissible to avoid harm, encourage guidance, or honor guests; and charity, advised against only in the context of conflict with enemies. This framework highlights Islam's balanced approach to fostering respect and tolerance among different faith communities without compromising the core principles of the religion. The paper advocates for further research to compare these Islamic interfaith principles with those of other major religions, assess their application in various historical and contemporary contexts, and explore their sociological impacts on global peace and community integration. Through such scholarly endeavors, the universal and inclusive nature of Islamic teachings on interfaith relations can be more profoundly understood and appreciated.

Keywords: Interfaith, Life of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), Ethical Guidelines, Political Relations, Economic Relations.

Introduction:

Islam inherently advocates for sociability, a trait embedded within human nature by Allah Almighty. From Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammadﷺ, the last of the prophets, the message has consistently been one of peace and mutual respect. Today, Muslims live globally and frequently interact with non-Muslims, navigating a complex web of interfaith dynamics. Islam, a universal religion, not only sets apart its followers with unique beliefs, ideologies, and cultural practices but also offers a model in the life of Prophet Muhammadﷺ for managing these interactions. The universal code of interfaith relations provided by Islam showcases actionable examples within the Prophet's life, guiding followers in their conduct with non-Muslims.

Allah Almighty declares, "Then We put you, [O Muhammadﷺ], on an ordained way concerning the matter [of religion]; so follow it and do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know."[1]. This directive emphasizes adherence to divine guidance, steering clear of uninformed desires, and underscores the regulated approach Islam takes toward humanity and international relations. Not only does Islam instruct in social, political, and economic engagements, but it also stresses respect and honor across all religions.

Theoretical Framework:

The Islamic perspective on interfaith relations is rooted deeply in the doctrines of the Quran and the Sunnah, which provide a clear distinction between followers and deniers of truth. The Quran states, " Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful."[2] illustrating the dual path of human destiny either towards gratitude or ingratitude. This framework categorizes humanity into those who accept divine guidance and those who reject the truth.

Islamic Teachings on Interfaith Engagement:

Islamic interfaith relations are not merely social necessities but also avenues for propagating the true message of Islam. According to Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, interactions with non-believers are categorized into three types:

Al-Muwalaat (Alliance):

Impermissible under any circumstances.

Al-Mudaaraat (Cordiality):

Permissible to prevent harm, encourage guidance, or honor a guest.

Al-Muwaasaat (Charity):

Advised with non-combatants but not with enemies. Mufti Muhammad Shafi further discusses these interactions, noting their legality except when they potentially harm Muslims. [3]

Discussion on Islamic Principles of Interfaith Relations:

In the context of interfaith interactions, Islamic teachings delineate specific principles guiding how Muslims should conduct themselves with people of other faiths. These guidelines are derived from the Quran and Hadith and include Al-Muwalaat (Alliance), Al-Mudaaraat (Cordiality), and Al-Muwaasaat (Charity). Each of these has distinct rules and intentions, shaped by both theological directives and pragmatic considerations, to foster peaceful and respectful coexistence while maintaining religious integrity.

Al-Muwalaat (Alliance) – Impermissible Under Any Circumstances:

Al-Muwalaat refers to forming alliances that imply a deep bond of loyalty and support that may conflict with Islamic principles. In interfaith contexts, this type of alliance might risk compromising the fundamental beliefs and practices of a Muslim, especially if the alliance obligates defending or promoting beliefs contrary to Islamic teachings. For instance, forming a military or political alliance with groups that actively oppress Muslims or other religious communities would be considered impermissible. This restriction aims to prevent situations where Muslims might have to act against their conscience or the principles of justice as outlined in Islam.[4]

The prohibition of Al-Muwalaat with non-believers is underscored by several Hadith and the teachings of early Islamic scholars who advised against such relationships that could lead to a dilution of one's faith or a compromise on moral and ethical standards set by Islam. This principle is crucial in maintaining the religious identity and autonomy of the Muslim community, ensuring that Muslims remain committed to their doctrinal beliefs and community welfare without external interference.[5]

Al-Mudaaraat (Cordiality) – Permissible to Prevent Harm, Encourage Guidance, or Honor a Guest:

Al-Mudaaraat involves showing kindness, respect, and good manners towards non-Muslims. This practice is recommended as a means of da'wah (inviting others to Islam) and as a way to ensure peaceful coexistence. It is permissible and sometimes necessary to engage in Al-Mudaaraat to prevent harm, encourage non-Muslims towards Islam, or simply as a mark of respect to a guest, reflecting the Quranic values of kindness and justice.[6]

The Prophet Muhammadﷺ is often cited as a model for this behavior; he treated non-Muslims with kindness and respect, even those who were openly hostile towards him and his followers.[7] This approach not only prevents conflicts but can also open doors for more meaningful interfaith dialogues and possibly guide others toward embracing Islamic teachings through positive personal experiences with Muslims.

Al-Muwaasaat (Cooperation) – Advised with Non-Combatants but Not with Enemies:

Al-Muwaasaat refers to the act of charity and benevolence towards others, regardless of their faith. Islam encourages Muslims to perform acts of

charity towards all individuals in need, particularly those who are not engaged in direct hostility against Muslims. This principle is rooted in the universal Islamic values of compassion and empathy for the suffering. However, it excludes those who are actively engaged in combat or hostilities against Muslims, where extending charity could inadvertently support continued aggression against the Muslim community.[8]

Charitable actions are viewed as a practical demonstration of the Islamic teachings of goodwill and the universal brotherhood of humanity.[9] Such acts are expected to transcend religious boundaries, fostering mutual respect and understanding across different communities.[10] This practice is supported by numerous Quranic verses and Hadiths that promote the welfare of humanity and discourage discrimination in giving aid based on religion, except in cases where it could harm the Muslim community.[11]

Summary of the Section:

In Islamic teachings, the guidelines for interfaith relations are meticulously defined to balance the preservation of Muslim identity and values with the need for harmonious coexistence. These guidelines include Al-Muwalaat (Alliance), Al-Mudaaraat (Cordiality), and Al-Muwaasaat (Charity), each tailored to specific contexts and purposes. Al-Muwalaat strictly prohibits forming alliances that could compromise a Muslim's religious integrity, reinforcing the commitment to Islamic principles without external influence. Al-Mudaaraat allows for and encourages courteous interactions that can prevent harm, facilitate peaceful cohabitation, and potentially guide others toward Islam through positive engagements. Lastly, Al-Muwaasaat promotes acts of charity towards all, particularly non-combatants, to embody the Islamic values of compassion and mercy, while cautioning against aiding those in conflict with Muslim communities. Together, these principles offer a comprehensive framework for Muslims to navigate their interactions with non-Muslims, ensuring that their actions always align with their faith and contribute positively to the broader societal fabric.

Research Question:

How do the teachings of Prophet Muhammadﷺ and the principles outlined in the Quran influence the conduct of interfaith relations among Muslims in contemporary societies? This question seeks to explore the application of Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ life and his prescribed interactions with non-Muslims as a model for fostering mutual respect and peace in a multi-religious context. By examining the specific directives given in the Quran and the Hadiths—such as the prohibition of alliances (Muwalaat) with non-believers, the encouragement of cordiality (Mudaaraat) to prevent harm and promote guidance, and the endorsement of charitable actions (Muwaasaat) towards non-combatants—the study aims to assess how these religious tenets are interpreted and implemented by Muslim communities

today. Furthermore, the research will analyze how these Islamic principles of interfaith engagement can contribute to resolving contemporary challenges in global interreligious interactions, potentially offering insights that could be applied universally across different religious and cultural landscapes.

Research Objectives:

To Analyze the Islamic Framework for Interfaith Relations: This objective aims to dissect the Quranic injunctions and the Hadiths that dictate the behavior of Muslims towards non-believers, particularly focusing on the concepts of Muwalaat (Alliance), Mudaaraat (Cordiality), and Muwaasaat (Charity). By understanding these frameworks, the research will explore how Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ teachings guide modern Muslim interactions with other faiths.

To Assess Contemporary Application of These Teachings: The study intends to examine how these principles are implemented by Muslims in various contemporary societies. It will involve a comparative analysis of different Muslim communities to identify how cultural, social, and political contexts influence their approach to interfaith relations.

To Evaluate the Impact on Global Interfaith Peace: This objective seeks to investigate the effectiveness of Islamic interfaith principles in fostering global peace and harmony. The research will analyze case studies where these principles have been applied to resolve interfaith conflicts and enhance mutual respect and understanding between different religious groups.

To Offer Insights for Universal Interreligious Engagement: Finally, the study will propose ways in which the Islamic approach to interfaith relations can provide valuable insights and methods that could be adapted by other religious communities. This will include a discussion on potential universal strategies for enhancing interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Research Methodology:

The methodology for this research will primarily utilize document analysis and comparative case studies to explore the teachings of Prophet Muhammadﷺ regarding interfaith relations and their practical implications in contemporary settings. Initially, an extensive literature review will be conducted to gather insights from academic journals, religious texts, and authoritative interpretations of the Quran and Hadiths. This will help establish a solid theoretical framework on Islamic interfaith principles. Following this, a comparative analysis will be employed to examine how these principles are interpreted and implemented across different Muslim communities worldwide. This will involve analyzing published reports, scholarly articles, and case studies that document instances of interfaith engagement within these communities. The focus will be on extracting patterns, similarities, and differences in the application of the principles of Muwalaat (Alliance), Mudaaraat (Cordiality), and Muwaasaat (Charity). The synthesis of this data will enable a comprehensive understanding of the

effectiveness of Islamic teachings in fostering interfaith harmony and will culminate in the development of a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing interfaith dialogue and cooperation, informed by the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammadﷺ. This approach ensures a rigorous examination without the need for direct fieldwork, making it feasible within resource constraints and avoiding the complexities of primary data collection.

Social and Societal Interactions in Interfaith Contexts – Guidance from the Seerahﷺ:

Islam offers a well-defined framework for social interactions, extending beyond intra-faith dealings to include comprehensive directives for engaging with non-Muslims.[12] Central to this framework is the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammadﷺ, whose Seerah provides practical guidance on interfaith hospitality and societal interactions.[13] This section explores how these teachings can foster mutual understanding and coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslim communities.

Hospitality Towards Non-Muslims:

Hospitality is deeply ingrained in Islamic tradition, exemplified by the practices of the prophets and continued robustly by Prophet Muhammadﷺ. His approach to hospitality was inclusive, extending to both Muslims and non-Muslims, demonstrating the universality of his message and the kindness at the heart of Islam. Notable incidents, such as his interactions with non-Muslim guests, highlight the profound impact of generosity. For example, a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) illustrates this: a non-believer once consumed the milk of seven goats at the Prophet's home, an act of hospitality that eventually led to the guest embracing Islam the following morning.[14] This narrative underscores hospitality not just as a cultural norm but as a strategic and heartfelt approach to interfaith dialogue.

The Qur'anic Perspective and Hadith on Interfaith Social Engagements: The Qur'anic verse, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammadﷺ], except as a mercy to the worlds."**[15]**, encapsulates the ethos of mercy that should characterize all interactions, including those with non-Muslims.[16] Further enriching this perspective are Hadiths that demonstrate the Prophet's engagement with non-Muslims, such as when a Jewish individual offered him a bowl of milk, which he accepted graciously. His response, blessing the individual to remain handsome, showcases the positive impact of respectful and kind interactions across religious boundaries.

Allowable Social Interactions with People of the Book:

Islamic teachings advocate for open social interactions with People of the Book, allowing Muslims to share meals and partake in social activities, provided these interactions do not involve anything prohibited (haram). Such engagements are not only permissible but encouraged as they promote Dawah and exemplify Islamic virtues of tolerance and peace. The Prophet's

life offers numerous instances where he participated in social exchanges with Christians and Jews, reinforcing the importance of maintaining good relations while adhering to Islamic principles.[17]

Practical Implications for Contemporary Muslim Societies:

These historical precedents set by the Prophet Muhammad☫ highlight the importance of hospitality and respectful engagement in modern interfaith contexts. By emulating the Prophet's approach, Muslims today can navigate the complexities of interfaith interactions effectively, ensuring that these encounters are conducted in a manner that promotes peace, mutual respect, and understanding. Such practices are not only fundamental to Islamic teachings but also essential for the harmony and prosperity of increasingly diverse global societies.[18]

Exchange of Gifts with Non-Muslims: Enhancing Social Bonds through the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad☫:

The practice of exchanging gifts plays a pivotal role in strengthening social relations and fostering mutual respect and love across diverse communities. In Islamic tradition, particularly within the Seerah (Prophetic life) of Muhammad☫, there are numerous instances that highlight the importance of giving and receiving gifts, not only within the Muslim community but also with non-Muslims. This practice is seen as a bridge-building tool that can alleviate misunderstandings and foster peace.[19]

Prophetic Encouragements on Gift-Giving:

Prophet Muhammad☫ strongly encouraged the act of exchanging gifts as a means to clear away any rancor and build love among people. According to Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet said, " Give gifts, for indeed the gift removes bad feelings from the chest."[20] This encouragement underscores the value placed on gifts in improving interpersonal relations and softening hearts, which is particularly beneficial in the context of interfaith interactions.

Historical Instances of Interfaith Gift Exchanges:

Prophet Muhammad☫ himself set a precedent for accepting gifts from non-Muslims, demonstrating an openness and respect towards other cultures and leaders. For instance, a well-documented event involves the Prophet accepting gifts from the leaders of Persia. Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Emperor of Persia sent gifts to the Prophet, which he graciously accepted.[21] This act was not just a mere acceptance of a gift but a diplomatic gesture that acknowledged the givers' respect and consideration, thereby enhancing political and social relations.

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates another example, highlighting that the Prophet stated he would accept any gift, even as humble as a sheep's hoof, and would also accept invitations to meals, "I shall accept the invitation even if I were invited to a meal of a sheep's trotter, and I

shall accept the gift even if it were an arm or a trotter of a sheep"[22]. This openness to accepting gifts and hospitality plays a crucial role in diplomacy and social relations, demonstrating humility and gratitude, which are core elements of the Prophet's character.

Implications for Contemporary Interfaith Relations:

The practice of exchanging gifts, as modeled by Prophet Muhammadﷺ, holds significant potential for enhancing interfaith relations today. It can serve as an effective means of communication and relationship-building between different religious groups. Emulating this prophetic practice can help bridge gaps, foster mutual respect, and encourage a deeper understanding among diverse communities. In contexts where tension and misunderstandings prevail, the simple act of giving and receiving gifts can pave the way for more substantial dialogue and cooperation.

The Seerah provides numerous examples where gift exchanges have served to strengthen bonds and promote peace between Muslims and non-Muslims. By integrating this practice into modern interfaith strategies, communities can build on a proven historical precedent to enhance mutual respect and coexistence. The prophetic approach to gift-giving is a testament to the universal values of kindness and generosity, which transcend religious and cultural boundaries, making it a timeless tool for building harmonious relations.

Participation in Non-Religious Interfaith Events:

Islam offers guidance for Muslims regarding their participation in non-Muslim social events. Muslims are generally encouraged to engage in social interactions that promote community cohesion and goodwill, such as attending weddings, birthday celebrations, and commemorating professional achievements. These interactions are seen as opportunities to foster positive relationships and understanding between people of different faiths. However, when it comes to religious ceremonies of other faiths, Muslims are advised to exercise caution. Participation in rituals that contradict Islamic tenets is not permissible.[23] This is to maintain the integrity of one's faith and avoid actions that could be interpreted as endorsing beliefs that are contrary to Islam.

Navigating Grey Areas:

There are instances where the lines between social and religious activities may blur, making it difficult to determine the appropriateness of participation. In such cases, Muslims are advised to exercise caution to maintain their religious integrity. The Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ guidance sheds light on this: " That which is lawful is plain and that which is unlawful is plain, and between them are matters that are not clear, about which not many people know. Thus he who guards against the unclear matters, he clears himself with regard to his religion and his honor."[24] This Hadith emphasizes the importance of avoiding actions that might compromise one's faith or personal dignity, especially in ambiguous situations.

Increasing Social Connections with Good Intentions:

When attending interfaith social events, Muslims should aim to enhance inter-communal relationships and promote an atmosphere of goodwill and understanding. The intention behind participation should always be clear—to build friendly ties and not to compromise one's religious values. This balanced approach ensures that Muslims can be part of a pluralistic society while firmly adhering to their faith principles.

Maintaining Boundaries:

Islam encourages Muslims to build social relations and partake in community events, provided they are non-religious in nature. However, it is imperative for Muslims to maintain the boundaries set by their faith. This means participating conscientiously in such events while avoiding any practices that conflict with Islamic teachings or ethics. The emphasis is on respectful engagement that honors Islamic principles and the cultural norms of other communities, ensuring that social integration does not compromise religious integrity.[25]

In summary, while Muslims are encouraged to engage with broader society through participation in non-religious interfaith events, it is essential to navigate these interactions carefully. By adhering to the principles set by Islam and guided by the wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims can effectively contribute to and enrich their community interactions without compromising their faith.

Greeting Non-Muslims – Principles and Practices in Islam:

Islam instructs its followers to respond to mistreatment and discourtesy with exemplary manners and conduct. This principle also applies to interactions with non-Muslims. While Muslims are encouraged to be kind and uphold the values of universal brotherhood, Islamic teachings provide specific guidance on greeting non-Muslims. It is generally recommended to return greetings in a manner that respects Islamic principles, ensuring that such exchanges are courteous and do not compromise one's religious beliefs.[26]

Prophetic Teachings on Greetings:

The Hadith narrated by Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-'As (may Allah be pleased with him) highlights the inclusive nature of Islamic greetings. He reported that a man asked the Prophet, "What (sort of) deeds in or (what qualities of) Islam are good?" He replied, "To feed (the poor) and greet those whom you know and those whom you don't know."[27] This guidance underscores the importance of spreading peace through greetings, regardless of the recipient's faith.

Diverse Scholarly Views on Greeting Non-Muslims:

Diverse Scholarly Views on Greeting Non-Muslims: Islamic jurisprudence presents a spectrum of opinions on the permissibility of Muslims initiating greetings to non-Muslims. Some scholars, adhering to a

more conservative interpretation, suggest refraining from initiating the greeting of 'Salam' (peace) to non-Muslims, citing its religious significance within Islam. They reference the Hadith where the Prophet Muhammadﷺ instructed not to initiate the greeting with Jews and Christians.[28] On the other hand, many contemporary scholars argue that greeting non-Muslims, including with 'Salam', is permissible, especially if the context is social and aims to foster good relations. This view is supported by the general Islamic principles of kindness and the narrations of some Companions, such as Ibn Mas`oud and Ibn Abbas, who advocated for returning greetings to everyone, regardless of their faith[29]. The latter perspective aligns with the broader Islamic ethos of love, affability, and maintaining good ties with all people

Maulana Jalaluddin Umri's Perspective:

Maulana Jalaluddin Umri advocates for a practical approach in a mixed society where Muslims and non-Muslims live under shared civil and legal frameworks. He suggests that in such societies, greeting non-Muslims in a manner that does not compromise Islamic values can be part of fostering a peaceful coexistence. If there is any concern about the religious implications of saying "Salam," alternative phrases expressing respect and goodwill can be used.[30]

Jurisprudential Basis:

Islamic jurisprudence suggests that when a Muslim is confident that the greeting 'Salam' was said correctly by a non-Muslim, the reply should be 'Wa Alaikum'. This guidance is derived from Hadith where Prophet Muhammadﷺ instructed to say 'Wa Alaikum' when greeted with 'Salam' by People of the Book.[31]

Ensuring Appropriateness in Interfaith Contexts:

While engaging in social exchanges with non-Muslims, Muslims are encouraged to maintain the integrity of their faith expressions. It is advised to avoid phrases or actions that might be exclusively associated with non-Islamic religious or cultural symbols. The focus should always be on promoting mutual respect and understanding, guided by the principles of equality, justice, and good character as taught by the Prophet Muhammadﷺ.[32]

Greeting non-Muslims in a respectful and appropriate manner is consistent with the Islamic values of kindness and respect for all humanity. By navigating these interactions thoughtfully, Muslims can embody the prophetic virtues of hospitality and goodwill, enhancing social harmony in diverse communities.

Visiting Non-Muslims During Illness: Ethical Guidelines and Prophetic Practice:

Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ approach to interfaith interactions was profoundly characterized by equality, justice, and exemplary conduct.[33] He shared in the joys and sorrows of all humans, reflecting his universal message

of humanity. His interactions were not limited to Muslims; he equally engaged with non-Muslims, showing empathy and support during their times of need.[34]

One poignant instance of this compassionate practice involved a young Jewish boy who used to serve the Prophet. When the boy fell ill, Prophet Muhammadﷺ personally visited him. The narrative highlights the Prophet's kindness, as he sat beside the boy, expressing genuine concern for his well-being, and ultimately invited him to embrace Islam. The boy looked to his father for guidance, who nodded in approval, respecting the Prophet's influence and the care he had shown. The boy accepted Islam, and the Prophet gratefully acknowledged Allah for saving the boy from spiritual perdition.[35, 36]

Guidance on Interfaith Visits:

This incident not only illustrates the Prophet's mercy and concern extending beyond the Muslim community but also sets a precedent for Muslims regarding how to conduct interfaith relations, particularly in the context of illness and vulnerability. Visiting sick non-Muslims is encouraged as it embodies the Islamic values of compassion and neighborliness.

Scholarly Views on Interfaith Visits:

Islamic scholars recognize the importance of such interactions for fostering peaceful and cooperative relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. In societies where Muslims and non-Muslims live together and share social, cultural, and economic ties, visiting a non-Muslim during times of illness is seen as a gesture of goodwill and humanity. It reflects the Islamic principle that kindness and courteous behavior should not be restricted by religious differences.

Ethical Considerations and Boundaries:

While engaging in such compassionate acts, Muslims are advised to maintain the decorum appropriate to Islamic teachings. Any form of ritual specific to other religions that might be part of their illness-related customs should be approached with sensitivity and respect for one's own religious boundaries.[37]

Encouraging Community Harmony:

Visiting ill non-Muslims is not only an act of kindness but also a practical application of the Islamic teachings of mercy and neighborly duties. Such actions are conducive to community harmony and can lead to a better understanding and respect among different religious groups.[38]

The practice of visiting non-Muslims during illness, guided by the prophetic example, highlights an important aspect of Islamic ethics concerning interfaith relations. It underlines the significance of compassion and empathy transcending religious boundaries, thereby enriching the social fabric of diverse communities. This practice is deeply rooted in the Islamic

ethos of universal brotherhood and is encouraged as a means of fostering mutual respect and understanding.

Respecting Non-Muslim Funerals – Insights from Islamic Teachings:

Islam teaches respect and dignity for every human being, regardless of their faith.[39] The ethos of Islam is to promote humanity and harmony, as reflected in the interactions of Prophet Muhammadﷺ with non-Muslims.[40] There is no prohibition in Islam against expressing condolences or attending the funerals of non-Muslims if the ceremonies do not involve practices contradictory to Islamic beliefs.[41] Instead, these actions can strengthen interfaith relationships and are considered part of ethical conduct.

Historical Instances Demonstrating Respect for Non-Muslims:

One of the most telling examples comes from the life of Prophet Muhammadﷺ himself. It is reported that during his time, when a funeral procession of a Jewish individual passed by, the Prophet stood up as a sign of respect. When asked why he stood up for a Jewish funeral, he responded, "Is it not a human soul?"[42] This incident, involving Sahaba like Sahl bin Hunayf and Qays bin Saad who followed the Prophet's example[43], underscores the respect due to any deceased human being, highlighting the intrinsic value of human life regardless of religious affiliation.

Guidelines for Muslim Participation in Non-Muslim Funerals:

While Muslims are encouraged to participate in non-religious aspects of non-Muslim funerals to express condolences and solidarity, they should refrain from participating in religious rites specific to other faiths. The expression of sympathy and support should be within the bounds of Islamic decorum and principles. Offering condolences, visiting the bereaved family, and providing support are all actions in line with Islamic teachings of compassion.[44]

Differentiating Between Sympathy and Religious Rites:

Differentiating Between Sympathy and Religious Rites: Islam encourages expressing sympathy, yet it also guides Muslims to distinguish between general condolences and specific religious supplications. According to Islamic teachings, prayers for forgiveness (dua for maghfirat), which are intended for Muslims, should not be made for non-Muslims. This directive is supported by the Quran, which states: "It is not for the Prophet and those who have believed to ask forgiveness for the polytheists, even if they were relatives, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of Hellfire.[45]". Instead, Muslims are encouraged to pray for peace and express wishes for strength and patience for the bereaved family, in accordance with the compassionate practices exemplified by the Prophet Muhammadﷺ.

Promoting Peaceful Coexistence:

By participating in such universal human practices as honoring the deceased, Muslims demonstrate the universality of Islamic compassion. These

actions help build bridges in multi-faith societies, fostering mutual respect and understanding. The Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ life serves as a guide, showing that participating in the sorrows of non-Muslim neighbors and acquaintances enhances communal bonds and respects the shared human experience.[46]

Respecting non-Muslim funerals and expressing condolences is aligned with Islamic principles of human dignity and compassion. Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ example provides a powerful precedent for Muslims to engage positively with non-Muslim communities, promoting a message of peace and mutual respect across diverse cultural and religious landscapes.

Interfaith Economic Relations in Islam:

Islam places significant emphasis on economic interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, prescribing guidelines to ensure these transactions are conducted ethically and justly. The Quran and Hadith provide clear instructions to engage in business and trade with non-Muslims under certain conditions, ensuring that these dealings do not involve anything prohibited (haram).[47]

Historical Context and Guidance:

During the Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ time, especially after the establishment of the state of Medina, there was considerable interaction with non-Muslim communities, including Christians and Jews. These interactions were not limited to social and religious aspects but extended into economic domains. The Prophet himself engaged in commercial transactions with Jews, illustrating the feasibility and permissibility of such relationships.[48]

Prophetic Examples of Business Conduct:

An instructive example comes from how the Prophet Muhammadﷺ conducted transactions. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated that the Prophet bought some grain from a Jew, and to secure this transaction, he mortgaged his shield.[49] This incident highlights that trade and other economic dealings with non-Muslims were commonplace and conducted with mutual respect for each other's rights and obligations.

Moreover, the Sahaba also engaged in borrowing and business with Jews. There is a well-documented instance where Jabir ibn Abdullah's father died owing a debt to a Jew. Despite the creditor's initial reluctance, the Prophet intervened to negotiate terms that were respectful yet assertive, ensuring the creditor's rights were protected while also advocating for Jabir's situation.[50]

Medina's Economic Model:

In Medina, the Prophet Muhammadﷺ established a model of economic cooperation and mutual benefit. He allowed Jews to cultivate the lands of Khaybar, with the agreement that they would share a portion of the produce.[51] This arrangement exemplifies the Islamic principle of fairness in

economic dealings, even with those of other faiths. It shows that economic cooperation can serve as a foundation for broader social and interfaith harmony.

Modern Implications:

These historical precedents provide a framework for contemporary Muslim interactions with non-Muslims. They emphasize that while Muslims must adhere to Islamic principles in all transactions, there is considerable scope for cooperation, mutual respect, and shared economic prosperity. Economic engagements, such as partnerships, leasing, and various forms of joint ventures, are encouraged as long as they do not compromise Islamic values.[52]

Islamic teachings on interfaith economic relations are profound and forward-thinking, advocating for an inclusive approach that respects the dignity of all parties involved. The life of the Prophet Muhammadﷺ serves as a model for how Muslims can navigate economic interactions with non-Muslims, ensuring that such dealings are conducted with integrity, fairness, and mutual respect. This balance fosters not only economic growth but also intercultural understanding and peace.

Interfaith Political Relations in the Seerah:

In addition to social and economic interactions, the Seerah of Prophet Muhammadﷺ provides significant guidance on interfaith political relations. After the Hijra (migration) to Medina[53], the Prophet established foundational political relations with various non-Muslim communities, setting a precedent for mutual coexistence and cooperation.[54] The treaties, letters, and diplomatic engagements of the Prophet illustrate the importance of political relations between Muslims and non-Muslims[55].

The Treaties of the Prophet (Treaties of Nabawi):

The treaties made by Prophet Muhammadﷺ with non-Muslim communities were crucial for establishing peace and ensuring the collective well-being of all communities involved. These treaties often aimed at regulating trade, securing peace, and promoting the spread of Islam and its cultural values in a manner that was respectful and mutually beneficial.[56]

Example of Treaty Implementation:

A prime example is the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah[57], which, although initially seen as unfavorable to Muslims, eventually facilitated the peaceful spread of Islam and increased interaction between Muslims and non-Muslim tribes. Similarly, treaties with Jewish tribes in and around Medina were crafted to foster peaceful coexistence and mutual defense, although they required careful negotiation and clear terms to manage expectations and obligations on both sides.[58]

International Relations in the Context of Medina:

The state of Medina under Prophet Muhammadﷺ functioned as a

sovereign entity, engaging in international relations much like a modern nation-state. The Prophet's interactions were not limited to nearby tribes but extended to distant lands and empires, as evidenced by his letters to the rulers of Byzantium, Persia, and Egypt.[59] These communications were not merely diplomatic but also invitations to understand and possibly embrace Islam, highlighting the Prophet's role as a messenger and a statesman.[60]

Medina's Diverse International Relations:

Within approximately five months of the Hijra, Medina had established wide-ranging international relations, from local tribes to distant regions, through treaties and cooperative agreements. This rapid expansion of political relations under the Islamic state's leadership illustrates the effectiveness and strategic foresight of the Prophet's approach to governance and interfaith diplomacy.[61]

Coexistence and Mutual Respect:

The political framework established in Medina emphasized coexistence, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities among all community members, regardless of their religious affiliations. This approach not only stabilized Medina but also allowed it to thrive as a diverse but cohesive society. The Constitution of Medina, a remarkable document attributed to the Prophet, codified these principles, granting rights and defining duties among Muslims, Jews, and other communities within the state.[62]

The political engagements of Prophet Muhammadﷺ with various non-Muslim communities set a comprehensive example of how interfaith relations can be managed effectively at a political level. These engagements were based on principles of mutual respect, justice, and the common good, providing a blueprint for contemporary interfaith political relations. The Seerah offers invaluable lessons on navigating the complexities of international diplomacy in a way that respects diversity while fostering unity and cooperation.

The Medina Charter: A Paradigm of Interfaith Political Relations:

The Medina Charter, also known as the Constitution of Medina[63], is a seminal document that was enacted following the migration of Prophet Muhammadﷺ and his followers from Mecca to Medina. This document established a framework for governance and coexistence among the diverse religious communities inhabiting Medina, including Muslims, Jews, and other tribal groups. As one of the earliest written constitutions, the Medina Charter set a precedent for the formation of a pluralistic society where multiple religious groups could coexist peacefully under a single political entity.[64]

Provisions and Significance of the Medina Charter:

The Charter delineated a series of civil obligations and rights, ensuring the freedom of religious practice for Jewish tribes and other non-Muslim groups. It declared all signatories as part of a single community (Ummah), granting them equal protective rights contingent upon their adherence to the

agreed obligations.[65]

The document was revolutionary, not only for its time but also in the annals of constitutional history. It established a general alliance against external threats and promoted internal justice and mutual respect. The Charter included clauses that mandated collective responsibility in defense and explicitly prohibited injustice and oppression.[66]

Interfaith Relations and Community Integration:

The Medina Charter not only facilitated political and social integration but also significantly contributed to the stability and expansion of the Muslim community in Medina. By including various tribes and religious groups, it prevented tribal conflicts and united the groups under a single political and administrative structure. This integration was crucial for the survival and eventual growth of the Muslim community during a period marked by external threats and internal conflicts.

Diplomatic and Defensive Alliances:

In addition to providing a foundation for internal governance, the Medina Charter also laid the groundwork for external diplomatic and defensive alliances. The Prophet Muhammadﷺ actively engaged in forming alliances with neighboring tribes and regions, which were critical in protecting the nascent Muslim community from external threats. These alliances were often cemented through marriages, treaties, and mutual agreements that ensured support in times of war and peace.

Economic and Social Policies Under the Charter:

The economic implications of the Medina Charter were also significant. It regulated economic dealings and ensured fair commercial practices among the residents of Medina, regardless of their religious affiliations. The charter encouraged economic collaboration, such as sharing resources and joint ventures, which contributed to the prosperity of Medina and helped integrate the economy of the community.

This charter is not just a historical document but serves as a model for contemporary interfaith relations, illustrating how diverse religious and ethnic groups can coexist under a single political system while maintaining their distinct identities and practices. The principles laid out in the Medina Charter continue to offer valuable lessons for managing diverse societies today, advocating for a balanced approach to rights and duties, which is essential for the stability and progress of multi-religious and multi-ethnic states.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah – A Landmark in Interfaith Political Relations:

The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, concluded in the year 6 AH between the Muslims of Medina and the Quraysh of Mecca, stands as a pivotal moment in Islamic history. Unlike earlier agreements primarily concerned with internal adversaries, Hudaybiyyah addressed relations with an external entity that

had been actively hostile towards Muslims. This treaty is renowned for its significant contribution to peace and the subsequent spread of Islam.[67]

Negotiations and Provisions:

The negotiations at Hudaybiyyah were marked by their strategic patience and diplomacy, led by Prophet Muhammadﷺ. Despite initial resistance from his companions, the Prophet accepted terms that seemed unfavorable at first but ultimately proved strategically advantageous. The key stipulations included:

A cessation of hostilities for ten years.

Permission for Muslims to return to Mecca the following year to perform Umrah.

A clause that allowed for any tribe to enter into an alliance with either the Muslims or the Quraysh, thereby broadening the scope of peace across the region.[68]

Impact on Interfaith Relations:

The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah is a prime example of the Prophet's strategic use of diplomacy to foster interfaith relations. By agreeing to the treaty, the Prophet secured a period of peace that was crucial for strengthening the Muslim community. This peace allowed for increased interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, facilitating the flow of information about Islam and leading to a greater acceptance and conversion among the Meccans.[69]

Cultural and Social Exchanges:

Following the treaty, there was a significant increase in social and cultural exchanges between Mecca and Medina. Meccans visited Medina, staying and interacting with Muslims, which allowed them to observe Muslim practices and ethics firsthand. These interactions often led to conversions as visitors were impressed by the Muslims' integrity, generosity, and adherence to their faith.

Expansion of the Muslim Community:

The peace established by the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah also allowed the Prophet to focus on expanding Islam beyond the immediate region. It facilitated further treaties and alliances with other tribes, which were instrumental in the rapid growth of the Muslim community. The terms of Hudaybiyyah thus not only defused a perennial threat but also paved the way for the peaceful spread of Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah remains a critical study in the power of strategic diplomacy in interfaith contexts. It illustrates how perceived short-term setbacks can lead to significant long-term gains in the form of peace, community building, and the spread of a faith. Through this treaty, Prophet Muhammadﷺ set a lasting precedent for managing conflicts and building bridges between diverse religious and cultural groups.

The Role of Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ Letters in Strengthening Inter-tribal and Inter-Faith Relations:

The exchange of letters has historically played a pivotal role in fostering international relations and promoting peace among different tribes and faiths. After the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, which marked a significant truce between the people of Mecca and the Muslims, Prophet Muhammadﷺ seized the opportunity to extend his outreach beyond the immediate region. He sent letters to various Arab tribes, even those residing in the vicinity of Arabia, aiming to strengthen relations and propagate the true message of Islam. According to Ibn Hisham's biography, the establishment of Islam as a central force and the conquest of Mecca led to the widespread dissemination of Islam's message in various directions, fostering its global prominence and dissemination.[70]

However, it was after the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah that Prophet Muhammadﷺ particularly emphasized a series of international invitations. Numerous historians and companions have attested to the fact that after the conclusion of the treaty, Prophet Muhammadﷺ, having fulfilled his obligations under it, sent multiple letters to various influential leaders and tribes, inviting them to Islam. These esteemed letters were not merely aimed at propagating the faith but also at fostering inter-tribal relations and peace. The foundational objective of these noble letters was to propagate and preach Islam alongside fostering relations and establishing peace among tribes and nations.

Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ vision transcended religious boundaries; his outreach wasn't confined to any particular religious group but encompassed all of humanity. He desired to spread the message of Islam to the entire world, as evidenced by his letters addressed to rulers of different faiths and regions. This inclusive approach underscored the Prophet's commitment to universal peace and harmony.

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ letters were not limited to local Arab chiefs but extended to foreign rulers as well. Historical records suggest that this series of correspondences continued until the end of the Prophet's life, spanning from the 6th to the end of the 10th Hijri century. Even after his demise, the legacy of his letters endured, as evidenced by the accounts of historians like Jarir Tabari.[71]

Additionally, a tradition attributed to Tirmidhi further corroborates this fact, stating that Prophet Muhammadﷺ invited not only the emperors of Rome and Persia but also every sovereign to the path of Allah before his passing. This highlights the universal appeal of Prophet Muhammad'sﷺ message, as his letters were addressed to rulers of various nations, transcending political and cultural boundaries.[72]

Furthermore, the primary objective of these letters was to invite, propagate Islam, and establish peace, as exemplified by the Quranic verse:

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided."[73]

In conclusion, Prophet Muhammad's letters were instrumental in promoting inter-tribal harmony, fostering international relations, and spreading the message of Islam to diverse communities, emphasizing the universal principles of peace and justice.

Correspondence with Kings and Emperors:

In the realm of political governance, Prophet Muhammad exemplified a pragmatic approach by not only addressing central powers but also engaging with the subordinate elements under the dominion of those powers. This strategic engagement extended beyond the Arab heartland to encompass regions and territories under the dominion of Iran and Rome. Rather than confining the invitation to Islam solely to major powers, letters were also dispatched to subordinate rulers and governors. This inclusive approach aimed at ensuring that influential entities within the Arabian border regions, irrespective of their hierarchical positions, were exposed to the message of Islam.[74]

Correspondence with Caesar of Rome:

The letter addressed to Caesar of Rome conveyed the essence of the Islamic invitation. It stated:

"Abdullah ibn 'Abbas related that Abu Sufyan ibn Harb sent him to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, and he called for the letter of the Messenger of Allah which Dihya had brought to the governor of Busra, who in turn passed it on to Heraclius. He read it out, saying, 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, from Muhammad, the slave of Allah and His Messenger, to Heraclius, ruler of the Byzantines. Peace be upon the one who follows guidance. I call you to Islam. If you become Muslim, you will be safe and Allah will double your reward. If you turn away, then you incur the wrong action of your subjects. "O People of the Book! Come to a proposition which is the same for us and you (to His words) Bear witness that we are Muslims."[75],[76]

According to historical records, when Prophet Muhammad dispatched a letter to Caesar of Rome through his emissary, Dihyah Kalbi, similar missives were sent to all the governors under Roman authority.

Conclusion:
1. In conclusion, the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammad stands as a beacon of light, guiding every aspect of human life. His exemplary conduct provides invaluable guidance in various spheres of life, including interpersonal relationships, socio-economic dealings, and political diplomacy. Throughout history, bilateral relations between

nations have remained essential for global progress and the establishment of peace. Islam, inherently advocating peace and security, underscores the importance of fostering robust international relations based on principles of justice and mutual respect.

2. The Seerah vividly illustrates the Prophet's interactions with non-Muslims, showcasing his hospitality, empathy, and respect even in the face of adversity. These examples highlight the universal principles of human dignity and compassion embedded within societal relations. Moreover, the Seerahﷺ serves as a paradigm for diplomatic engagements, evidenced by the Prophet's treaties and diplomatic missions aimed at promoting unity and peace among diverse communities.

3. Today, the lessons drawn from the Prophet's Seerahﷺ continue to offer a roadmap for fostering harmonious relations between nations. By adhering to the principles of tolerance, dialogue, and cooperation espoused in the Seerah, modern-day diplomats can navigate complex geopolitical landscapes and work towards global stability and prosperity.

4. In light of these insights, it is imperative to delineate clear boundaries for interfaith relations while advocating for inclusive dialogue and understanding. Building meaningful relationships with non-Muslims should be guided by the spirit of mutual cooperation and goodwill, as exemplified in the Prophet's interactions.

5. In essence, the Seerah of the Prophet Muhammadﷺ remains the singular path through which contemporary society can achieve the ideals of peace and progress in the modern era.

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