

# Prophet Muhammad's Approach to Inter-Faith Dialogue: A Model for Contemporary Global Peace

- Sirajuddin Shaikh

## Abstract

*The interfaith dialogue of Prophet Muhammad is a perennial example for global peace and harmony. His life provides a roadmap to the deepest of insights, how people brought up in different religions and many cultures can harmoniously live together. In this presentation, the researcher discusses the manners that ought to be followed by individuals belonging to different faiths including Jews, Christians, and pagans on how the Prophet dealt with them. By looking at important historical events in the life of Muhammad such as the Charter of Medina, this study shows how his methods respond well both to past and present challenges pertaining to religious diversity.*

**Keywords:** Interfaith Dialogue, Global Peace, Prophet Muhammad, Religious Pluralism, Diplomatic Lessons.

## Introduction

In today's scenario, the pursuit of peace remains difficult to track down. Even after making so many significant advancements in technology and communication, the world is still entangled in conflicts, a great number of which are powered by the charcoal of religion, ethnicity, or culture. Whether it is the never-ending turmoil in the Middle-East or rising tension between South Asia and Africa with themselves, these conflicts either trace their past to certain unresolved historical disputes that could be subsided by alien factors leading towards, for example, rivalry among states of the world order. The emergence of religious extremists such as ISIS and Boko Haram had added complexity to the situation, twisting religion to support their violent acts. That simply perpetuates cycles of conflict and deepens mistrust between religious communities as well, expanding before narrowing paths that culminate in global peace.<sup>1</sup>

Interfaith dialogue, as such, becomes a relevant response to cipher points. Interfaith dialogue is a form of intellectual journeying to bring forth the ideas between people involved in religious traditions, with the motive of opening communication with mutual respect about our attitudes toward each other and beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim, I. & Othman, Mohd&Dakir, Jawiah& Samian, Abdul & Hasim, M.S. &Stapa, Z. & Awal, N.A.M. & Awang, Jaffary& Ismail, Ahmad Munawar & Idris, Muhamad Razak & Yahya, Shamsul & Ibrahim, S.M.I. & Zain, Amy & Ramli, Ahmad. (2012). The importance, ethics and issues on interfaith dialogue among multi racial community. *Journal of Applied Sciences Research*, 8(6), 2920-2924, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291873536>

This is the perspective where the teachings of Prophet Muhammad regarding relations with other religions and other people can be instrumental in devising a way to achieve peace in this world.<sup>2</sup>

Prophet Muhammad lived in a world of religious pluralism and was just, merciful and balanced in his interactions with various Christian, Jewish, or pagan communities, although by indulging deeply into their beliefs and perspectives while doing justice and mercy for the common good. Almost all leaders of faith communities have historically responded to religious diversity in one of two ways: hostility or indifference, but The Prophet was the opposite; a model of inclusive engagement where respect for other faiths was intrinsic.<sup>3</sup> By studying and implementing the methodology practiced by the Prophet in his engagements with other faith communities, modern societies can discover that there are workable ways to end conflicts peacefully while enabling greater harmony in a global family. This paper will delve into how the way of engaging in inter-religious dialogue by the Prophet can be a blueprint for achieving global peace today and provide perspective as to what extent his teachings are relevant/applicable towards our complex world today.

### **Historical Context of Interfaith Relations**

Pre-Islamic Arabia was a place of many faiths with no dominant religious identity. Arabian society was essentially polytheistic with tribes idolizing various gods.<sup>4</sup> It was considered the central objective and decision from all tribes as it is in Mecca where there were a high number of religious practices because their major idol, then, Kaaba happened to take place here. The monotheistic influences of Judaism and Christianity, despite the ubiquity of polytheism are also notable.<sup>5</sup> Jewish tribes were originally present in lands of Yathrib, an area later to be called the city Medina, and Christian communities had settled in northern Arabia with a presence that was important there they came under direct influence from neighboring Byzantine Empire. Also, the Hanifs (monotheists) tried imitating Abrahamic tradition by disbelieving idol worship and preaching monotheism.

Islam ushered radical changes into this religio-cultural environment. Prophet Muhammad appeared as a figure of unity within the tribes and religiously diverse region. The Constitution of Medina, a written constitution from the early 7th century AD that is often cited as the first ever real agreement between Muslims and non-Muslims living together on

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<sup>2</sup>Karim, Khairulnizam&Saili, Suzy. (2009). Inter-faith Dialogue: The Quranic and Prophetic Perspective. *Journal of Usuluddin*. Vol 29. 65-93. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255977296>

<sup>3</sup>Yildirim, Y. (2009). The Medina Charter: A historical case of conflict resolution. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 20(4), 439–450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410903194894>

<sup>4</sup> The Quraysh tribe, which dominated Mecca, worshipped Hubal, a deity associated with the moon, and other gods like *Lāt*, *‘Uzzā*, and *Manāt*, who were linked to fertility and natural forces.

<sup>5</sup> Jewish tribes such as the *Banu Qaynuqa* and *Banu Nadir*, settled in the Arabian Peninsula, had interactions with their polytheistic neighbors, which influenced local religious practices. Christian influence also came from the Byzantine Empire and the presence of Christian tribes such as the Ghassanids, who played a role in the region.

Islamic lands. An agreement between the Muslims, Jews and other tribes made this treaty where equality among all of them was assured with a reminder that peace achievement by any means is obligatory to everybody. The Constitution is frequently held up as an early model of Islamic interfaith dialogue and collaboration.<sup>6</sup>

The treaty of Hudaibiyyah also had a great impact on interfaith-relations and although it was only supposed to last ten years, that period allowed Islam as a faith to grow out of the tribe-centric stage. Religiously, the Hudaibiyyah was a turning point—allowing for greater interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims and encouraging them towards the peacefulness of Mecca.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the letters that Prophet Muhammad wrote to multiple heads of different nations and religions like Christian King Negus” and “Byzantine Emperor Heraclius are also considered as among the most respectful messages for dialogue.

Finally, and very significantly in relation to the diplomatic efforts of the Prophet from without, we should remember that his contacts with the Jews as well as Christians in Madina showed him how other faith communities could establish day by day practical cooperation across traditions. These small communities gathered under the banner Islamic rule, under which they found a spirit majestic that enabled it to rise above individual theological nuances underneath the law enforced by those who read from their revealed texts, as several historical accounts and hadith proved. The emphasis of the Prophet on good conduct, justice and mutual respect laid the framework for Islamic theological prescriptions regarding interfaith-relations.<sup>8</sup>

### **Prophet Muhammad’s Principles of Interfaith Dialogue**

Prophet Muhammad was an embodiment of interfaith dialogue with strong ethical underpinnings marked by values such as, respect for diversity; justice and compassion to all human beings while pursuing the common good. These were not only philosophical principles but have been practiced in situations in the world issuing precedents for interfaith practice within a pluralistic culture. His style is one of inclusivity and tolerance, the framework which enabled a peaceful co-living among diverse religious communities.<sup>9</sup>

The constitution of Medina stands out as one of the most notable examples in practice. A unique document, drawn up after the Prophet's migration to Medina, which laid

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<sup>6</sup>Khan, I., Elius, M., Mohd Nor, M. R., Yakub zulkifli Bin Mohdyusoff, M., Noordin, K., & Mansor, F. (2020). A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam. *Sage Open*, 10(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020970560>

<sup>7</sup>Bsoul, Labeeb. (2017). The impact of Hudaibiya on contemporary treaties: Between memory and desire. *Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies R&D*, 2. 1-33. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319903714>

<sup>8</sup>Elius, Mohammad & Khan, Issa & Mohd Nor, MohdRoslan. (2019). Interreligious Dialogue: An Islamic Approach. *Journal of Katha*. 15. 1-19. [10.22452/KATHA.vol15no1.1](https://doi.org/10.22452/KATHA.vol15no1.1)

<sup>9</sup>Golestani, T. A. (2019, November 25). Prophet Muhammad’s Model of Interreligious Dialogue Based on Research on the Letter to the Christians. *Unity and Dialogue*, 74(2), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.34291/Edinost/74/02/Amini>

down the rights and duties of all inhabitants, including Muslims, Jews as well as other tribal groups.<sup>10</sup> The Constitution enshrined the principle of respect for one another and justice where each community would be able to practice their faith freely but in which all communities were also meant to enhance the collective welfare and security. In this way, a model of a multi-faith society under a shared ethical universalism had been established.

A notable example demonstrating the Prophet's dedication to interfaith dialogue is conveyed in the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. The treaty was negotiated by Muslims and the Quraysh, a Meccan tribe; it marked an important diplomatic achievement of the Prophet which brought peace and reduced violence between them.<sup>11</sup> The Prophet, though faced with some resistance from his own people in the matter of peace-dealing but he had a far sighted approach towards dialogue and negotiations as they could pay off at much larger scale. It provided a greater opportunity for unity between Muslims and non-Muslims, resulting in the relatively bloodless entry of Mecca into Islamic control that also illustrated Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ commitment to peace.

His letters to Christian monarchs like the Negus of Abyssinia and Heraclius Emperor of Byzantium only prove his commitment to interfaith dialogue. The letters, very polite in tone, invited the leaders to Islam by underlining values being common and good as pursued collectively. The Prophet is a role model for respectful communication with people outside the community of faith and thus, teaches respect and inclusivity in his conduct toward others even when they do not share the same convictions.

In its approach to interfaith relations, the work revives these sources revealing that inclusivity and tolerance were among cornerstones of the Prophet's beliefs. Throughout his campaign, he remained insistent in the necessity of peace between faiths and creeds. This is clear from his encounter with a Christian delegation of Najran that came to Medina for religious discourse. They were not only tolerated but the Prophet also welcomed them and permitted them to pray in his mosque showing a high level of tolerance & respect towards their religion.<sup>12</sup> He worked for a better societal approach taking people of different faiths together and hence set an example in the sense that when we use him as our point-of-reference, he only promotes peace around the world through interfaith dialogue.

### **Application of the Prophet's approach to contemporary Global Peace**

The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad have a lot to teach us about how we can approach global conflict according to those same principles today. These are unique principles that when contrasted to other peace models, not only make a remarkable difference

<sup>10</sup>Wildan, T. (2023). Principles of the teaching of nation and state life in the Constitution of Medina. *Ibda': Jurnal Kajian Islam dan Budaya*, 21(1), 17-36. <https://doi.org/10.24090/ibda.v21i1.6747>

<sup>11</sup>Elsayed, K. A., & Yusoff, K. (2012). The Implication of Peace Treaties in Disseminating Da'wah Islamiyah (the Islamic call) among Non-Muslims: A Special Reference to Hudaibiya Treaty. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 6(7), 204-212. <https://www.ajbasweb.com/old/ajbas/2012/July/204-212.pdf>

<sup>12</sup>ṢaḥīḥBukhārī: 59: 663, ṢaḥīḥMuslim: 31: 5949

but can be measurable benchmarks for successful interfaith initiatives! A strong framework to promote world peace can be established by combining these techniques.

### **Addressing Contemporary Global Challenges**

Many times contemporary global cross-border conflicts have some religious root which adds to the longstanding nature of political, ethnic or social tensions- exciting them into outright violence. The conflicts are deeply ingrained in a complex weave of historical hatreds, cultural distinctions and external concerns so deep set on their heels that they will be hard to heal. This multifaceted problem can be addressed in a nuanced way by following the example of Prophet Muhammad, who stressed justice and while maintaining dignity on own religion.

The most corrosive modern conflict is the violence that finds its origin in tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims, such as those we see today, where Syria, Iraq and Yemen all play very significant roles.<sup>13</sup> The wars are not strictly religious in nature, rather these conflicts have been mixed with political power games and economic disparities leading to further results due to foreign intrusions. The conduct of the Prophet regarding justice and fair representation witnessed through the Constitution of Medina has particular resonance in this regard.<sup>14</sup> He created an order in which the various tribes and religious communities had equal rights as well, a template from that age for today. Governments in conflict zones could take political initiatives to redress not only the issue of marginalisation which may be leading a wider audience sought for extreme ideologies but also on fairer political representation and equitable sharing of resources among different sectarian constituents. The trade policy of the Prophet and his treaty with Quraish are perfect examples that negotiations work better than force. International mediators could use a similar logic and provide an enabler for both sides to communicate more openly with each other, which would help bring forward ideas that are acceptable by the conflicting parties of nations in immediate proximity.<sup>15</sup>

The question of the Rohingyas, a persecuted Muslim minority in Myanmar, is another major issue. Due to ethnic nationalism and religious intolerance, this crisis has intensified wars making it one of the greatest humanitarian issues today by endangering lives through violence, displacement and denial of citizenship. Prophet Muhammad— himself a member of oppressed minority communities, and sovereign in an age when he could easily have abused his power to oppress others too through strong silencing laws— was known for protecting minority rights, as, for instance, he signed covenants with Jewish tribes individually at Medina. International bodies and governments also have to enact laws that defend the rights

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<sup>13</sup>Hotez P. J. (2018). Modern Sunni-Shia conflicts and their neglected tropical diseases. *PLoS neglected tropical diseases*, 12(2), e0006008. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0006008>

<sup>14</sup> Ishak, B. B., & Aziz, S. B. A. (2022). The Madinah Charter In Light of A Modern Constitution. *IIUMLJ*, 30(1), 195-220. <https://journals.iium.edu.my/iiumlj/index.php/iiumlj/article/download/713/351/2723>

<sup>15</sup>İskenderoğlu, M. (2024). *Interreligious dialogue models from the life of the Prophet Muhammad: By Alwani Ghazali and Muhammad Kamal*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2024.2353514>

of oppressed minorities. And organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch might use its principles to advocate for the Rohingya, instead of focusing on world opinion in seeking international justice and protection.

First, Islamophobia that is based on racism and finds an image in prejudices, discrimination and hatred against Muslim have largely been confronted by social cohesiveness and mutual understanding within western societies.<sup>16</sup> Prophet Muhammad has thought knowledge as well to help fight against ignorance and prejudice, this can be used today. Educational programs that focus on the commonality of values across various faiths could well be part-and-parcel of a way to decrease Islamophobia. Interfaith curricula that emphasize Islam's contributions to the global civilization should be adopted by schools and universities. In addition, working to provide collaborative projects and dialogues that connect Muslim communities with non-Muslim counterparts could recreate the Prophet's work emanating from Medina. Opportunities for exchange through such initiatives as interfaith community centers and joint social service projects could help to bring alive the stories of diversity by catalyzing action, dispelling signals that activate stereotypes among members outside our own communities, and building solidarity.

After the Bosnian War (1992-95) there was a persistence of severe ethnic and religious violence between the three main communal divisions: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. Plans of rebuilding peace and coexistence were focused through initiatives based on interfaith harmony. Emulating the principles of inclusivity and respect that had been laid out by Prophet Muhammad some organizations, like Interreligious Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina initiated various programs to bridge those divides and promote mutual understanding between denominations. The Mytilini reform program held dialogue hubs between Muslim, Orthodox Christian and Catholic leaders to air grievances; discuss perspectives; build trust.<sup>17</sup> This was rooted in the tradition of dialogues which took inspiration from the Prophet and his engagement with other religious communities towards finding common ground. Educational workshops on history and contributions of faith-based communities, bring a sense of shared heritage and collective identity to eventually erase misconceptions further encouraging cooperation united by common objectives. These projects represent the model of *sabrānd muwāṭānahset* for us by the Prophet better than any slogans or hash-tags ever could; playing key roles in helping to not only move forward but also begin a process of healing.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Kozaric, E. (2023). Are Muslim experiences taken seriously in theories of Islamophobia? A literature review of Muslim experiences with social exclusion in the West. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 47(5), 907–940. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2268179>

<sup>17</sup>Preljevic, H. (2017, Summer). The Role of the Islamic Community in Peacebuilding in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina: Case Study of East Bosnia. *Insight Turkey*, 19(3), 207-230. [10.25253/99.2017193.12](https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2017193.12)

<sup>18</sup> Ghazali, Alwani & Ahmad, Nadzrah & MohdKhambali @ Hambali, Khadijah & Meftah, Jilani & Zumrah, Abdul & Ibrahim, Zamrie. (2019). Characteristics of the Prophetic Interfaith Dialogue: Foundation for

## Comparison with Other Peace Models

Different from the others, which are either historical peace models or contemporary ones in nature, emerges the Prophet's approach and emphasises a comprehensive acceptance of differences. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648), for example, established the principles governing national sovereignty and non-intervention in Europe's religious conflicts.<sup>19</sup> Though a laudable inroad to ending acrimony, it did not adequately cover other depth aspects of interfaith relations and the mutual respect for others religion. The Westphalian peace is a European model which upholds the harmony of state between each other, without paying attention to different religious communities inside these states.

Likewise, contemporary secularism aims to keep religion out of state business, securing neutrality on religious issues. It argued, while secularism might offer to afford each religion equal space and respect, it may not take the proactive inoculation of interfaith dialogue too far which can be seen from a series of similar interactions with various religious communities revealed in Quranic narratives. Although secularism can have an effect on reducing the role of religion in public life, it also tends to downplay the positive impact religious views and principles could give towards peacebuilding and social cohesion.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, Prophet Muhammad represents a fusion of religious reverence with political and social concord. For example, the Constitution of Medina laid down a charter for building a multi-religious society and each religious community could live peacefully without losing their own identities. That approach models something that contemporary peacemaking, as a practice, badly needs: attending to these two facets together would be more faithful and coherent it seems. The Prophet's way was not a compartmentalization of religion into something separate from how we interact in the political and social realms (as in secularism or much of Western thought).

## Conclusion

The method of Prophet Muhammad in the interfaith dialogue, emerging from a point based on respect for each other to tolerance and then mutual understanding is one of the most effective way how global peace can be established today throughout our multi facet world. His relationships laid down with records on his various religious communities (proven in Covenant to Najran and Constitution of Medina) develop that upholds the dignity, autonomy, as well as also rights of personality no matter what faith.<sup>21</sup> These historical analogies provide

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Contemporary Interfaith Dialogue Enterprise. *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam*. 21. 75-102. [10.22452/afkar.vol21no2.3](https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol21no2.3)

<sup>19</sup> Bakir, A. (2022). Islam and International Relations (IR): why is there no Islamic IR theory? *Third World Quarterly*, 44(1), 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2121695>

<sup>20</sup> Doering, J., & Paker, E. (2022). How Muslims respond to secularist restrictions: reactive ethnicity, adjustment, and acceptance. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45(15), 2956–2977. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2052143>

<sup>21</sup> El-Wakil, A. (2016). The Prophet's treaty with the Christians of Najran: An analytical study to determine the authenticity of the covenants. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 27(3), 273–354. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etw027>

a roadmap for diplomacy today that emphasizes the power of true interfaith dialogue and collaboration in ensuring an enduring peace.

However, translating the Prophet's model to a contemporary setting is much easier said than done. The presence of long-standing historical disputes, the weaponization of religious praxis and identity politics as well as multiple interpretations under Shia Islam all make practical application arduous. On top of this, the prevalence of secularism in many areas exacerbates matters by often pushing religious standpoints to one side-line within public and political discussions. These issues when tackling them need to adapt the methodology used in addressing it for both time i.e then and now as mentioned above ensuring that we follow how the Prophet ﷺ went about these. To embrace these tactics, the core teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ can provide insights to inform any drive for conflict resolution in modern times and beyond global peace. His model not only gives us historical perspective, but also provides the way forward to actualize love and unity in religion in present conditions of a diverse world.

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