

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

“INTER RELIGIOUS COOPERATION IN PEACEMAKING”

Keynote Paper

by

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Introduction:

The greatest challenge of mankind in the contemporary world is the religious identity and emotions are often manipulated to achieve the self centered goals of vested interests. The misuse and misrepresentations of different faiths are being used as means of achieving selfish, disruptive and violent goals. Intense struggle by one part of mankind to prove supremacy over another has often turned brutal with perilous consequences for all. Extremism, terrorism and other forms of violence in the name of religion have nothing to do with the genuine understanding of religion but are a threat to human life for which religion has sometimes been used as a divisive tool. In spite of the said misuse by different vested groups, through out history religion has played the most important role in salvaging humanity through its righteous guidance.

Role of the Religions:

All religions are unique, thus it is not meant to be focused on the disparities between them but rather, its purpose is to focus on the common values taught by each faith. All religious communities and in particular, their leaders should make a collective effort to unite the entire world in our common shared values of peace, compassion, justice and harmony. These are values that truly form and characterize our society. In order to foresee this, vital roles have to be played by the major religions of the world. We should collectively concentrate on the common principle values taught by each faith. All religious doctrines have been revealed to practice teachings of selflessness and inner reflection as a means for the betterment for ones fellow man for mutual and respectful co-existence.

Inter faith cooperation is not just the responsibility of religious leaders but the shared responsibility of people of all faiths.

In this regard the Holy Quran says:

'O Mankind, we have created you male and female, and have made you races and tribes, that you may know one another' (Al Quran 49:13).

According to Old Testament:

"Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9),

And in Judaism it is stated:

"Seek peace and pursue it..." (Psalm 34:15)

Seek it where you are and pursue it in other places as well."

Human values and Religion:

Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and all other Messengers cautioned mankind of conflicting against evils of greed and selfish pursuits of happiness as a means of satisfaction, which ultimately causes suffering to mankind.

Similarly in **Hinduism**, Lord Krishna gave Peace formula very succinctly

"He who loves devoid of all attachment, giving up desires, egoism and the sense of I and mine, attains peace."

Swami Vivekananda says'

"Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension are the substance of my faith"

According to **Old Testament:**

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)

"May God.. grant you to be of the same mind with one another.."(Romans 15:5-6)

Buddha has clearly pointed out,

“ the roots or the innermost cause of our sufferings as well as of our happiness lies within our mind. Greed, hatred, jealousy, pride etc. are the causes of all problems. Contentment, satisfaction, loving kindness, compassion and wisdom are the source of lasting peace and happiness for the individual as well as for the society.”

The unity of the Creator and of the mankind, call for love, patience, peace, justice and equality- these are the essence of all the religions which came through the Holy Prophets and Messengers of God starting from Prophet ADAM (AH), Prophet NOOH (NOAH) (AH), Prophet IBRAHIM (ABRAHAM) (AH), Prophet DAUD (DAVID) (AH), Prophet MUSA (MOSES) (AH), Prophet ISA (JESUS) (AH), and the last PROPHET MOHAMMAD (SAW), (Peace Be Upon Them).

The Holy Quran says:

“We have sent thee Inspiration to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob) and the Tribes, to Isa (Jesus), Ayyub (Job), Yunus (Jonah), Harun (Aaron) and Solaiman (Soloman), and to Dawud (David) we gave Psalms. Of some Messengers we have already told thee the story; of others we have not;- And to Musa (Moses) Allah spoke directly;”

(Surah Al Nisa 4: Verse 163-164).

Islam not only recognizes all the Messengers but makes no discrimination between them.

The Holy Quran says:

“the Messenger Mohammad (SAW) believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. Each one believes in; (a) Allah, (b) His Angels, (c) His Books and (d) His Messengers. They say We make no distinction Between one and another of His Messengers. We hear and obey, oh! Lord and seek your forgiveness”

(Surah Baqara 2 vs.285).

Prayers of the Messengers as stated in the Holy Quran:

Referring to the honorary status bestowed upon Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (AH) as a Friend of our Lord it is mentioned in the Holy Quran “*And who can be better in religion than one who submits his face (Himself) to Allah; and he is a Muhsin (a Doer of good). And follows the religion of Abraham the Hanif (Monotheist). And Allah did take Abraham as a Khalil (an intimate friend).*” (Sura Al –Nisa: vs125).

As the descendants of Prophet Ibrahim (Ah), prophets of our Creator, Prophet Musa (Ah), and Prophet Mohammad (SAW) share the religion and teachings of their ancestor, Prophet Ibrahim (Ah). Given this fact, it is only appropriate that we collectively seek inter religious cooperation through dialogue to further seek knowledge on the prayers that were asked by the holy Prophets. The following prayer excerpts are from the Holy Quran referring to the significance and respect given to the Prophets prior to Prophet Mohammad (SAW). The Holy Quran repeatedly declares that the high status and dignity must be given to these Prophets as an essence of Islam which reveals the acceptability of other Prophets.

Prayer of Prophet ADAM (AH): “They said: Our Lord we have wronged our own souls: If Thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy mercy, we shall certainly be lost.”
(Sura Araf 7 vs 23)

Prayer of Prophet NOOH (NOAH) (AH): “So he said: “Embark ye On the Ark In the name of Allah, whether it move or be at rest! For my Lord is, be sure, Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.
(Sura Hud 11: vs 41)

Prayer of Prophet IBRAHIM (ABRAHAM) (AH) “And remember Abraham and Isma’il raised the foundations of the House (Holy Kaba) (With this prayer): ‘Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the All-Hearing, The All-Knowing.’”
(Sura Baqarah 2: vs 127)

Prayer of Prophet LUT (AH): “He said Oh my Lord! Help Thou me against people who do mischief!”

(Sura Ankabut 29 vs 30)

Prayer of Prophet SHU'AIB (AH): “ We should indeed forge a lie against Allah, if we returned to your religion after Allah hath rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any manner of means return thereto unless it be As in the will of Allah, Our Lord. Our Lord comprehends all things in His knowledge. In Allah is our trust. Our Lord! Decide thou between us and our people In truth, for thou Art the best to decide.”

(Sura Araf 7 vs 89)

Prayer of Prophet YUSUF(AH): “It was not We that wronged them: They wronged their own souls : The deities, other than Allah, Whom they invoked, profited them No whit when there issued The decree of thy Lord: Nor did they add aught (To their lot) but perdition!”

(Sura Yusuf 12 vs 101)

Prayer of Prophet ZAKARIYA (AH), “And (remember) Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord: ‘O my Lord! Leave me not without offspring, though Thou Art the best of inheritors.”

(Sura Anbiyaa 21: vs 89)

Prayer of Prophet SOLAIMAN (Solomon) (AH): “So he smiled amused at her speech; and he said: ‘ O my Lord! So order me that I may be grateful for Thy Favours , which Thou Has bestowed on me and On my parents, and that I may work the righteousness that will please Thee: And admit me, by Thy grace to the ranks of Thy Righteous Servants.”

Sura Naml 27 vs 19

Prayer of Prophet MUSA (Moses) (AH) : “Moses prayed: ‘O my Lord! Forgive me and my brother. Admit us to Thy mercy! For Thou Art The Most Merciful of those who show mercy!’” (Sura Araf 7 vs 151)

Prayer of Prophet MUSA (Moses) (AH): “(Moses) said: “O my Lord! Expand me my breast; Ease my task for me; And remove the impediment from my speech, so they may understand what I say: and give me a Minister from my family, Aaron, my brother; add to my strength through him. And make him share my task: that we may celebrate Thy praise without stint, and remember Thee without stint: for Thou art ever seeing”
(Sura Ta-ha 20: vs 25 -35)

Prayer of Prophet ISA (Jesus) (Ah.): “Say: ‘Shall I seek for judge other than Allah? - when He it is who hath sent unto you the Book, explained in detail. They know full well, to whom we have given the Book, that it hath been sent down from thy Lord in truth. Never be then of those who doubt.”
(Sura Maidah:5 Verse:114)

Religion in multi cultural society:

We are all part of community – living in a multi-cultural, multi-religions and multi-ethnic environment. The example set by Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in the Madina Charter is a prime source of a complete resolution towards the establishment of peace in a multi religious society. As a revival to the unifying spirit of the public debate held in the congress of 1400 years ago in the city of Yathrib (Madina), today’s conference aims to step forward in similar spirit – to establish World Peace. If we can carefully evaluate and propagate the knowledge derived from this significant charter, it will facilitate towards a foreseeable society devoid of violence and adversities often misconstrued from religious differences.

Our Proposals:

The religious face of this planet is changing. Throughout this century, the worldwide movement of peoples and cultures has provoked a meeting of religions that is new to history. We believe that Inter religious cooperation may serve as a great bridge for establishing Peace.

All we ask is that please come forward with the belief and adherence to your own religion that in itself is a bold step towards peace. It can also contribute towards promoting dialogues between different faiths, which can play an important role to enhance international understanding and goodwill, thereby contributing towards world peace.

To this end we hereby propose:

1. The Government should have a department on Inter religious cooperation under the Ministry of Religious Affairs.
2. Political Parties should have manifesto on Inter religious cooperation.
3. Educational Programs and the means of social communication can be essential instruments for promotion of positive attitudes towards religions and cultures.
4. Mass Media Campaign should be initiated to inform people about the common values of all faiths.
5. The teachings of Peace of all Prophets should be made available to religious leaders and special training for Imam on Comparative religion may be conducted in their native language.

6. Recognize the right of every person to freely choose, express and practice his/her own religion. Respect towards other religion should be enforced by national law. People, particularly religious and political leaders shall refrain from making any derogatory or negative comments towards other religion.
7. Maximum use of the unprecedented development of Information Technology has to be made to harmonize religious conflicts by publishing the common values in the net.
8. religious leaders must step out of their cages and go among the people and raise awareness so the people are motivated to overcome all their divisions and barricades and unite to create a new world free of all exploitation, injustice and oppression.
9. The promotion of the values of Tolerance, Truth, Justice and Love must be the aim of any religious teaching.
10. To armed forces – army, navy and air force, the police and para-military services that they incorporate religious standards in personnel training to ensure that security of the people at both peace and war time is protected irrespective of their national, religious, social and cultural status and that the respective personnel upholds these standards at all time
11. To incorporate special training on religious values and practices of different faith during the training of all national armed and security forces and UN Peace Keeping forces.

Conclusion:

We call on all political and religious leaders to accept and realize that peace among nations cannot be achieved without peace among faiths, and this may only be achieved through dialogue between the religions. Moreover, peace will never be established without

implementation of Justice. We believe that Justice can only be achieved through the teachings of common religious values of forgiveness and compassion.

The purpose of this conference can be summed up in one verse from the Holy Quran in these words“*Then We revealed to thee (Prophet Mohammad SAW) “ Follow the ways of Abraham The True in Faith, and he joined not gods with Allah.” (Suarh Nahal 16: 123)*

Every Muslim in their five times prayer (Salat) in a day seeks guidance from their Lord by saying; “*Guide us to the straight way. The way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your anger nor of those who went astray”*
(Sura Fatihah 1: vs 6 -7)

Ameen