



**Islamic Approaches and  
Principles of Dialogue**

*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*

*In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful*

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Real unity can be developed only through sorting out our internal differences, and if some of these differences are just too insurmountable, then we must learn to live together despite them and with them.

—Asghar Ali Engineer

## Islamic Approaches and Principles of Dialogue

We need dialogue.

Sitting in Dubai airport waiting five hours for my plane to Turkey, I met a man waiting for his flight back to Saudi Arabia. I was on the way to Iraq to research Islamic approaches to dialogue; he was on his way home from a business trip. The airline ticketing counters for our flights were closed, not opening for a few hours. We could not go to the main part of the airport without a boarding pass and there was little to do except sit on the benches with our luggage and wait. He was dressed in full dishdasha and I was jet-lagged from a long flight, dressed in black jeans and a loosely placed hijab which was more around my shoulders than on my head—and so the dialogue began. After a few hours of dialogue, we both walked away changed, transformed, and, in fact, the topic of transformation was discussed. We exchanged e-mail addresses, he paid the extra charge of weight on my cargo of medical books for the Iraqi people, and we still keep in touch. We had come to a new understanding about each other and ourselves, through gentle questioning, deep listening, respect when we disagreed, smiles when we agreed, and hope for the future in a world where many misperceptions currently grow out of proportion, and where misunderstandings are fueled and stroked by increased frustration—and sometimes violence.

Having spent years researching dialogue within both a secular and religious context, this experience answered my question on the value of transformative or constructive dialogue using Islamic approaches and principles.

There is a need for dialogue. It can be spontaneous as described above or formal, taking place in the dialogical forums so frequently mentioned in the media. Dialogue may occur in a formal group or in a casual gathering over a meal. Dialogue between people can be a one-time event or a long-term, sustainable activity taking different forms and styles. It can be a written dialogue, recalling the works of the Greek philosophers, or it can be a physical dialogue, using body language when lack of similar foreign language skills occurs and translation is unavailable.

During an interview at the “So that ye may know one another” conference, Dr. Ahmed Badr al-Deen Hassoun, Mufti of Aleppo, stressed the need for intra-faith dialogue within the Muslim *ummah*. He said, “We have failed in the Muslim world to get to know one another and to get to know the ‘other’ as well, and when we met our brothers from the West and we introduced ourselves and our religion to them, they rebuked us for not taking this step much earlier. We have wronged our religion by doing so . . . Allah meant it so that every Muslim will get to meet other members of his community every week during the congregational prayers and to meet others from different countries during hajj (pilgrimage).”<sup>1</sup>

We will explore the definition of dialogue in both Western terms and Islamic approaches, and principles of dialogue, including the following points:

- Misunderstandings of the term “dialogue” and the definition of dialogue
- Types of communication in Islam

- The Islamic dialogical principles, including *adab al-ikhtilaf* (The Proper Manners of Expressing Differences of Opinion),<sup>2</sup> based on Al-Qur'an, Al-Hadith, and Sunnah
- Historical examples of Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue
- Platforms used for Islamic approaches to, and principles of, dialogue

## Methodology

The author has use a multi-methodology research approach to Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue. Upon finding little resources specifically addressing Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue and intra-faith dialogue, I wanted to explore and comprehend Islam's religious and cultural approach to communication, utilizing true listening skills. Having taken part in thousands of conversations, dialogues, and debates—both individually and within groups—this writer has experienced a self-transformation, interpersonally and in terms of self-awareness. This is based on participatory observation, including interviews and experiences that occurred while conducting investigations about dialogue within the Islamic context, both in Iraq and the United States. Extensive research into published sources has been incorporated, as is reflected in this work's bibliography.

## Offering a Definition of Dialogue

The word *dialogue* is interpreted differently both linguistically and perceptually within different languages, cultures, and religions. Individuals may thus understand the word's definition and concept in a diverse manner. Currently, the term dialogue has been used loosely and is often used incorrectly to describe forms of communication that are actually debates, negotiations, mediations, discussions, or *dawah* (the call or invitation to Islam). *Dawah* may use dialogue as an

approach or method, but in itself is not dialogue. Dialogue can be used as a foundational component to the above reconciliation activities; however, dialogue does not require conflict as a starting point for transformative and constructive communication to take place.

The misapplication surrounding the concept of dialogue begins with political entities, think tank organizations, and the media. Consequently, the erroneous use of the term dialogue has filtered down to civil society, causing additional miscommunication and misunderstanding, and thus interfering with the dialogical process.

An Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization article, “Acheh: Dialogue towards Cease-Fire Must Fulfill Three Important Points,” offers an example of how the word dialogue is often misused:

The war is still ongoing and armed clash is still part of Acehnese daily lives as it has been before the tsunami disaster. Therefore to materialize any intention of cease-fire and peace, both sides must carry out a concrete step in the form of *dialogue (negotiation)*. In the road to negotiation, both sides must release all political prisoners detained during the Martial Law and the civil emergency—this point is important to build the trust between both sides . . . Both sides must agree to a *dialogue or a negotiation mediated* by the United Nations, as an institution with the authority to give sanction to any side that violates the agreement—this point is important to eliminate and to avoid the shortcomings of the past peace agreement (CoHA).<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, Ujwal Thapa directly confronts the misuse of the word dialogue in his article from the *The Kathmandu Post*, “Dialogue Versus Negotiation”:

In Nepal, these days, in any newspaper, one comes across the word “dialogue.” Amongst the Nepali elite, “dialogue” seems to be the word of the day. But what does it really mean? Well, mostly the political circle, media and intellectual society have grossly misinterpreted the term “dialogue.” They seem to have jumbled up “dialogue” with that of “negotiation.” . . . A constructive dialogue creates an open mindedness in both parties who can then pave the way for negotiation on each party’s needs properly and ultimately come to a settlement. The last time the Nepal Government and the Maoist negotiators met to talk, the press and almost “everybody” called it a dialogue, instead of

“negotiation” which is what it was in essence. This negotiation ended in a complete failure because proper dialogues between them did not precede this stage.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, dialogue is defined as a type of communication between people that respects the differences of “the Other,” which allows for true listening in a safe environment that offers possibilities for the transformation of self-awareness in each individual. In an interview about this topic, Yahiya Emerick notes that genuine dialogue involves “communication between different entities in which no side adheres to absolutist positions and is willing to consider the positions of others, modify their own if logic dictates, and offer an intelligent discourse on their own beliefs.”<sup>5</sup>

Karim Khutar Almusawi from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq describes dialogue in the following way:

We can simply say that dialogue is accepting others’ views. Also, dialogue means the ability to share thoughts and values with others in a peaceful and civilized way, in general, the common values. I believe that there is a lot between people from diverse backgrounds. Debate is the way of defending thoughts and beliefs in front of the people that have different and extreme points of view.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Asghar Ali Engineer clearly describes dialogue and its outcomes in his *Qalandar* interview:

As I see it, genuine dialogue has no hidden agenda. It aims not at converting the other—whether the sectarian or religious other—but, rather, at understanding him or her. Each partner to the dialogue process should be firmly rooted in his or her religious tradition, but at the same time must be willing to listen to what others believe and to respect their right to believe what they want to. Dialogue of this sort is essential in order to combat prejudices and remove misunderstandings. It also leads to an appreciation of what the different religions or sects share in common, such as basic ethical values, which, in turn, can form the basis of joint efforts to work for social justice, peace and so on.<sup>7</sup>

The above definitions and descriptions clearly address the key dialogical ingredients of understanding, respect, acceptance of differences, and a search for common ground, with the possibility of combined solutions for the betterment of civilization. If dialogue could produce these elements easily, there would be a more coherent society in the world today.

Dialogue is also a transformative process. As mentioned before, a rare single encounter might possibly ignite this transformation. In most instances, though, at least several encounters are needed for sustainable change and the transformation required for peaceful co-existence, which is one possible goal and outcome of the dialogue process. Harold Saunders emphasizes that “only through repeated interactions do people come to feel safe enough to open themselves to a degree that may be painful or respectful enough to give an opposing view a careful hearing.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Central Components of the Dialogue Process**

In practical terms, whether it involves two people or a group, key components must be present for dialogues to function successfully. These include:

- A decision to connect as equals
- Self-conscious awareness of thought processes
- At least a temporary suspension of perceptions, assumptions, and “positions”
- Deep listening with compassion
- A desire to seek and explore shared interests through inquiry
- Reflection

Let us now explore these central components in greater depth.



### *1. A Decision to Connect as Equals*

The first key element is the conscious decision to engage in communication and the acceptance of each person as equal in a dialogical situation, whether it is between two people or a larger group. The office of Grand Ayatollah Makaremshirazi characterized dialogue as “any sort of logical, fair and free from prejudice [discussion,] accompanied with courtesy and respect . . . [that] is permissible in Islam.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to striving to be fair and free from prejudice, genuine dialogue also requires power symmetry: deciding to engage as equals, regardless of gender, education, religion or beliefs, age, politics or background. Mark Smith in his article “Dialogue and Conversation” addresses the issue of symmetry: “Dialogue does not require egalitarian relationships,” he writes, “but it does entail some sort of reciprocity and symmetry. Otherwise the response we may make could be distorted by the concern that what we say may be used against us by the more powerful ‘partner.’”<sup>10</sup> The Al-Qur’an warns against the kind of egoism that can impede dialogue by emphasizing kindness in interpersonal relationships and the need for humility:

And serve Allah. Ascribe no thing as partner unto Him. (Show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbour who is not of kin, and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer and (the slaves) whom your right hands possess. Lo! Allah loveth not such as are proud and boastful. (Al-Qur’an, 4:36)

Finally, in terms of equality and reciprocity, it is essential that the setting for dialogue must be equitable to the participants. This means that there should be a balance of power, including a safe, neutral environment, which does not favor one individual or group over another.



## 2. *Self-Conscious Awareness of our Own Thought Processes*

The second key component is the understanding our own individual conscious concept of the truth derived from the combination our upbringing, education, environment, and perceptions. From the moment we are born, our thoughts form based on the above influences, and thus these elements construct our perceptions of truth and reality.

In dialogue, we need not give up these perceptions but only have the willingness to suspend them long enough to adequately listen to other people's conscious perception of reality without our own thought processes blocking their communication to us. In a sense, it is stripping away all things learned and going back to our beginning. This involves recognizing the limitations of our knowledge, while at the same time listening with awareness:

Say: Each one doth according to his rule of conduct, and thy Lord is Best Aware of him whose way is right. They are asking thee concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is by command of my Lord, and of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little. (Al-Qur'an, 17:83–84)

This does not mean giving up or jeopardizing one's faith and beliefs. Quite the contrary, the dialogue process strengthens our faith through self-awareness, self-knowledge, and rediscovering Islam through a review of the *nafs*, the learned behaviors and misperceptions on this journey of life. Dr. Muhammad Nimr al-Samak explains the importance of unity through differences: "This unity," he writes, "is based on our differences and not on conformities and similarities, because human differences reveal and witness at the same time the greatness of the Lord the creator. This means that accepting and respecting plurality as God created us, is in itself an expression of believing in God."<sup>11</sup>

The basic principles that are vital to dialogue are discussed in William Isaac's book, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. These include listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing.<sup>12</sup> Suspending thoughts, perceptions, assumptions are critical to dialogue, including a leaving behind of lingering stereotyping. This requires willingness, motivation, and a constant self-awareness of thoughts.

### *3. Deep Listening with Compassion*

A third key component of dialogue is deep listening, also known as compassionate listening. A clear example of this is found in the Compassionate Listening Model. This model “requires questions which are non-adversarial and listening which is non-judgmental. Listeners seek the truth of the person questioned, seeing through ‘masks of hostility and fear to the sacredness of the individual.’ Listeners seek to humanize the ‘other.’ They do not defend themselves, but accept whatever others say as their perceptions, and validate the right to their own perceptions.”<sup>13</sup>

Modern day scientists of dialogue, David Bohm and William Isaacs, both suggest that dialogue has always been a style of communication, beginning with ancient tribal dialogue, and today includes “people who meet informally for dialogue, friends in a home, a group of women from different countries . . .”<sup>14</sup> Thus dialogue does not always denote formal meetings, but occurs on a daily basis and as a natural occurrence. Dialogue may transpire while washing dishes together with another person, before a hunt, or in tribal circles and rituals.<sup>15</sup>

Based on the fact dialogue and communication has existed since the beginning of language, it is an important factor in global events in our current day, including the capability to listen deeply using different senses, including sight, hearing, touch, and what some people call the “sixth sense,” intuition. This includes awareness of body language in addition to auditory

listening. From these listening tools we can gain a deeper understanding to another's thoughts and emotions, perhaps relating their experiences to ours on an empathic and intuitive level.

Describing the relation between intuition and authentic perception, Al-Ghazzali notes that “the knowledge of the reality of the world that is in the heart sometimes comes through the senses (thoughts directed to the world of senses), and sometimes from the preserved Tablet itself, even as the form of the sun is perceived by the eye some times by looking at it directly, and sometimes by looking at its reflection through water, and this reflection does not differ in its form from the original.”<sup>16</sup> This affects our ability to listen deeply and without prejudice.

#### *4. A Desire to Explore Shared Interests Through Inquiry*

Seeking shared interests through inquiry, rather than being bound to individual, fixed positions, is the fourth key to dialogue. While hosting in the United States a mixed delegation from Iraq with the shared interests of economics, everyone communicated beautifully through dialogue; but back in Iraq, the same diverse groups of people were in debate and conflict. At what point does peaceful co-existence turn to conflict? The transition occurs when people focus on position and status, rather than working for shared interests and common ground, for example, in the areas of education, values, family, traditions, morals, economics, social justice, civil rights, and humanitarian aid. Dr. Abu-Nimer, Executive Director of Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, explains the common interest or separation stage in his book *Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, and Change*.

The common interest or separation stage is basically when participants realize that they cannot convince each other, or change each other, and that they have nothing left to say to the other side. At this point, some of the participants will be willing to look for the common or similar concerns and interests of both sides. In this stage the participants

learn the importance of being aware of the other side's perceptions, and obtain or develop the ability to compromise and understand the other side's needs.<sup>17</sup>

Reflection and evaluation is one of the most important key elements to sustainable dialogue. As the individual or group goes through the process of dialogue, continuous reflection and evaluation aids the process and journey. Reflection allows the inquiries and responses to be examined from all the participants' perspectives with shared interests, which are transformative to the one shared interest, the love of Allah:

Hast thou not seen that Allah, He it is Whom all who are in the heavens and the earth praise, and the birds in their flight? Of each He knoweth verily the worship and the praise; and Allah is Aware of what they do. And unto Allah belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and unto Allah is the journeying. (Al-Qur'an, 24:41–42)

Through the above key elements we can examine through the Al-Quran and the Al-Hadith, the approaches and principles of dialogue within the Islamic context and framework, dialogue being the foundation to Islam.

## **Islamic Approaches and Principles of Dialogue**

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.

—Al-Qur'an, 16:125

Out of the Arab Peninsula, Allah, the Creator, revealed the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The entire Middle East is rich in the Abrahamic traditions and cultures that date back thousands of years; and within this context, the post-Muhammadan



Islamic approaches and principles hold the key and seal to constructive communication through dialogue and the reconciliation of conflict on all levels.

Islam has both a religious and cultural foundation to communication. If we compare the two major cultural systems, which are the modern and traditional cultures (also known as Western and Eastern cultures, or low-context and high-context cultures), we will find that each are unique, thus affecting communication overall.

Muslims—particularly in the Middle East, Pakistan, and India—follow a high-context culture within the Islamic ummah. Traditional, high-context cultures communicate differently than other cultures, and some believe that the thought processes developed from birth are actually different. This framework was researched and developed by Edward Hall, who points out that the characteristics of traditional cultures include hierarchy, community welfare, birth status, cooperation, historical interpretation, formality, indirect communication, and patriarchal and spiritual values.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, Western, low-context culture has different values—not better or worse, but simply different. Individualism is emphasized over the traditional family; Western culture and communication is more direct and more verbal, versus the use of indirect body language, such as lowering of the eyes and other behaviors used in traditional cultures.

In the same regards, it would be inappropriate to categorize all people from a region or religion into one context or the other. There are subgroups within cultures; and as globalization is occurring, the lines between the cultures is blending to perhaps a third culture, the global culture which is a blend between the two, high- and low-context, or in simpler terms, traditional and Western cultures. To understand this concept, imagine the traditional culture being the color blue and the Western culture representing the color yellow. When an individual or group experiences or lives in a culture outside their own for a period of time, they are influenced and transformed in

part by their experiences. Thus they can not fully return to their own “color,” nor can they completely have the total understanding from the new culture, simply because they were not born into it and missed early experiences in childhood. This is when they turn more global, as the blend of yellow (Western) and the color blue (Traditional) forming a new culture, Green (Global).

In regards to Islamic approaches to dialogue, Islam could be considered traditional in mannerisms, although individuals may be traditional or a global cultural blend. This is crucial in understanding the Islamic approach to dialogue, specifically in the Middle East, and especially when multi-cultures are represented in interreligious dialogue.

Zaharna, in his paper about American and Arab culture, makes a clear and poignant statement about cross-cultural misperceptions and how it affects communication: “While the two styles are very different, most cultural differences tend to lie below the surface of one’s awareness. Without a conscious awareness of how another culture is different from one’s own, there is a tendency to see the differences of another through the prism of one’s culture. This is how the phenomenon of ethnocentrism occurs. When ethnocentrism occurs, cultural differences are no longer neutral, but rather negative. As Norman Daniels (1975) said . . . when differences aren’t perceived as differences, they are perceived as right and wrong.”<sup>19</sup>

Conflict situations, which are natural on all levels of human contact, can arise within a culture, a religion, or externally on an international level. Avruch discusses that conflicts within cultures are caused by misperception or a “failure to communicate.” These misperceptions can be reconciled through dialogue and education and rarely are the true source of the conflict. Instead, Avruch suggests that “socially constructed and politically motivated ethnic difference” are causes of conflict on the international level.<sup>20</sup>

Misperceptions grow from experience, education, cultural upbringing, and receiving misinformation. These thought processes develop the day we are born and are sometimes generational developments, built layer upon layer. Suspension of our habitual thought-patterns and assumptions is important in this phase, which allows room for new information to be received. This is true whether a dialogue is between parent and child or a dialogue within the context of an Israeli–Palestinian encounter.

It is important that people are aware of their own culture and style of communication when talking with other people. Dr. Siddiqui discusses this need for self-awareness within one's one culture concerning interreligious dialogue:

My suggestion would be to have communication with leaders of churches and synagogues on the fundamentals of dialogue before we get excited about [either] inviting [or being invited by] the other people. Let us talk about what is meant by peace. Can peace be attained without justice? When they see the light, I am willing to believe that they would know why Muslims are so excited about rights of people in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, etc.

Muslims also need to have a dialogue within, before they reach out to others. In post-9/11 [times], we have many masquerading as wise guys, who are basically nothing more than stooges of empire-builders. Oftentimes, it is their message that is being propagated by media pundits here. The pressure is tremendous on our folks to conform to Western mores, at the exclusion of Islamic norms. This is suicidal and must be resisted by genuine Muslim intellectuals.<sup>21</sup>

Islam strives for the truth and this is a foundation for dialogue, both in the theological sphere and within the community and family. The approach varies based on the topic, participants and format, but most people begin dialogue with an absolutist stance. As Yahiya Emmick states about Islamic theological dialogue with people of other religions:

The primary approach of the Qur'an is to first dialogue with people on general themes (Look at nature, the universe, society . . . how could it all have come to exist?). Next the dialogue shifts to logical themes, especially when it starts to ask people what they believe

and why (Do you see idols? How can you worship a stone? Do you believe God is all powerful, then why would he need a son to quench his wrath?). Finally, after the initial steps, you have the positions of finality, like bedrock upon which the seeker can stand. (He is Allah, the One, Who created everything, now submit.)<sup>22</sup>

Learning to suspend thoughts and cross-cultural training removes the absolutist stance, allowing for all truth to appear and be realized.

### **Communication within an Islamic Context**

As mentioned, dialogue must not be confused with debate, negotiation, or argument. There are at least five words in Arabic describing different forms of Islamic communication. *Al-hewar* represents the closest concept to the Western meaning of constructive or transformative dialogue as we have defined it. It denotes the exchange of thoughts and ideas coming to an awakening or awareness or revelation. This writer spent over a year searching for the true meaning of dialogue within an Islamic context by asking many scholars and people about dialogue. Although the word *al-hewar* was often given, it is almost impossible to truly define the word linguistically, to fully describe dialogue, as the term denotes an experience. The purpose of this dialogue is to find common ground and agreement, but if this process does not take place then it is considered controversy, or conflict.

*Al-tabawur*, on the other hand, means discussion, “examining and responding in a discourse and engaging in give and take in it.”<sup>23</sup> The English word *discussion* comes from the Latin verb *discutire*, which means to strike asunder, shake apart, or scatter.<sup>24</sup> Discussion is an earnest conversation, usually on a particular topic. A business meeting would be an example of a discussion, without deeper spiritual or emotional involvement.

The third term used concerning Islamic dialogue is *al-jadal* (dialectics), a discussion similar to a persuasive debate through provable documentation and logic. *Al-jadal* is the most commonly



used concept when theological scholars approach each other in discussion and the use of theological debate takes place. This misconception of debate as dialogue—especially with theologians, academics, think tanks, and now civil society—has been a major obstacle for fostering constructive dialogue. As various groups are coming to realize that logical debate is in fact a different form of communication than dialogue, a desire to research and practice genuine dialogue is arising both within Islam and other faiths.

In his book *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam*, Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani describes *al-jadal* as “a discussion in a contentious manner in order to gain the upper hand.”<sup>25</sup> *Al-jidal* (eristics) is similar to *al-jadal*, but is a higher escalation of the debate into a meaningless argument or polemic. This transforms the debate into a form for which logical mediation from a third party or facilitator would be warranted.

The fourth major term, *al-mira’*, means to dispute or quarrel. Dr. Al-Jirari writes that “it is used as a metaphor to describe the actions of the parties in a dispute: each disputant tries to extract what the opponent has, in the same way a milker extracts milk from the udder.”<sup>26</sup> Dr. Abbas al-Jirari clarifies this further in his book, *Dialogue From The Islamic Point Of View*:

The three terms are derived from the verb *jadala*, which means to engage in a dispute. The term *al-jadal* appeared in two Quranic verses, with the meaning of *al-mukhâlafa* (disagreement) and *al-munâza‘a* (dispute, controversy) concerning an opinion, including what can reach the level of an intense dispute. The first verse contains Allah’s statement: “. . . but man is more than anything contentious” (Sûrah al-Kahf [The Cave]; 18:54).

The second verse contains Allah’s statement: “And say: Are our gods better, or is he? They raise not the objection save for argument. Nay ! but they are a contentious folk” (Sûrah Az-Zukhruf [Ornaments of Gold, Luxury]; 43:58).<sup>27</sup>

Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani defines a severe dispute as *shiqaq*, dissension; it means “carving out a piece of ground into distinct portions, and seems to suggest that one piece of ground is not

wide enough to accommodate both disputants at the same time.”<sup>28</sup> He illustrates this by two verses from the Al-Qur’an:

And if ye fear a breach (*shiqaq*) between them twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk and an arbiter from her folk. If they desire amendment Allah will make them of one mind. Lo! Allah is ever Knower, Aware. (Al-Qur’an, 4:35)

And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism (*shiqaq*), and Allah will suffice thee (for defence) against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower. (Al-Qur’an, 2:137)

The term *al-tahawur* comes closest in many ways to the English term “discussion,” while *al-hewar* most closely denotes a transformative or constructive dialogue, with or without facilitation. Despite this, the term “dialogue” from an Islamic perspective may contain different perceived meanings than it does in English, because of different nuances and connotations that exist between the Arabic and English languages.

Any communication may fluctuate to include several of the communication styles described above. A discussion may transform itself into constructive dialogue or escalate into a debate—or even an argument—and transition back to a dialogue. If one can envision the communication between individuals or groups as flowing up mountains and down into valleys, and plateaus, this image offers a vivid metaphor for the shifts in communication styles that often occur in groups.<sup>29</sup>

Dialogue using an Islamic approach takes place in all frameworks of interpersonal communication. This approach can be seen in between husbands and wives, in communities, mosques, universities, between friends and nations. Striving for truth in Islamic dialogue utilizes proof, documentation from the Qur’an and Hadith, and also allows for the exploration of personal experience and narrative. Many times a response drawing on one of these resources may

be a traditional, indirect, respectful response, but might appear to people outside the culture as resembling a debate. In other cases, it might well be a debate of sorts.

***Adab* and *Adab al-Ikhtilaf* (“The Proper Manners of Expressing Differences of Opinion”)**

Actions are lifeless forms, but the presence of an inner reality of sincerity within them is what endows them with life-giving Spirit.

—Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah

Proper manners and guidelines as put forth in the Al-Qur’an and Al-Hadith are the foundations for Islamic approaches to dialogue. Honor, respect of participants, hospitality, including sincerity of good intent and consideration of the “other,” are all priorities. *Adab* is interwoven into the Muslim community starting at birth and is an essential guiding principle for the community as a whole. Tetz Rook, in his paper, “The Influence of *adab* on the Muslim Intellectuals of the *Nabha* as Reflected in the Memoirs of Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali (1876–1953),” explains that “the socio-ethical side is primary and ‘active,’ where *adab* designates a wide range of social and ethical virtues, like good manners, tact, grace, indulgence towards friends, refined taste, courage, erudition and literary skill.”<sup>30</sup>

Current events have threatened the very foundations of Islamic society, including *adab*. In many conflicts, the very essence of dealing with the ethics of disagreement is gradually being put aside for the purpose of aggressively pursuing positions, especially political positions, rather than shared interests. This focus on positions rather than common interests tends to create further divisions as opposed to encouraging a respect for differences. Certainly there are acceptable differences within Allah’s creation, as is seen in the Al-Qur’an:

In truth thy Lord destroyed not the townships tyrannously while their folk were doing right. And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing, save him on whom thy Lord hath mercy; and for that He did create them. And the Word of thy Lord hath been fulfilled: Verily I shall fill hell with the jinn and mankind together. (11:118–120)

Thus our purpose is to accept individual differences and to strive for peaceful co-existence, with respect and tolerance, based the same common interest: our love and servitude to Allah, and care for his creation. The Al-Qur’an warned against divisions, *shiqaq* or dissension, in Islam, commanding one religion and unity while respecting an individual’s personal spiritual relationship with Allah within the five pillars of Islam:

He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in thee (Muhammad), and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided therein. Dreadful for the idolaters is that unto which thou callest them. Allah chooseth for Himself whom He will, and guideth unto Himself him who turneth (toward Him). (42:13)

And they were not divided until after the knowledge came unto them, through rivalry among themselves; and had it not been for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord for an appointed term, it surely had been judged between them. And those who were made to inherit the Scripture after them are verily in hopeless doubt concerning it. (42:14)

Unto this, then, summon (O Muhammad). And be thou upright as thou art commanded, and follow not their lusts, but say: I believe in whatever scripture Allah hath sent down, and I am commanded to be just among you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. Unto us our works and unto you your works; no argument between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and unto Him is the journeying. (42:15)

With the teachings of Islam, based on our unique perceptions and experience, we must guard against egotistical desires, whether personal or socio-political, and seek constructive insight, knowledge, and solutions. Taha jabir al-‘Alwani discusses the benefit of acceptable differences in this light: “If intentions are sincere, differences of opinion could bring about a greater awareness

of the various possible aspects and interpretation of evidence in a given case . . . If these limitations and norms are not observed, differences could easily degenerate into disputes and schisms and become a negative and evil force producing more rifts in the Muslim ummah, which already has more than enough of such fragmentation.”<sup>31</sup>

One part of the resolution to engage in dialogue takes place by reincorporating adab in our lives. Khalid Musud, a renowned scholar, currently the Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan, explains the use of adab within a dialogical context. He writes that “an essential element in the adab dialogue is to recognize the sincerity of the other party and to appreciate the value of dissent believing that only by recognizing differences can we come to an effective consensus . . . By not listening sincerely to the dissenting voices, you never know the weaknesses of your own thought, or you miss the opportunity of alternative thinking. The fear that dissent will divide us has been so strong that our ethics of dialogue became very authoritarian and conservative. Ironically, it has not prevented schism, but has rather fostered a kind of mutual mistrust which is more dangerous than even anarchy. Muslims have lost their sense of adab as well as the urge and ability to speak to others.”<sup>32</sup>

Rediscovery of adab, an important cornerstone of Islam, is a crucial and most-needed element in dialogue and communication between Muslims today. This leads us to the basic elements of adab, good behavior and manners, including the qualities of honesty, respect, kindness, mercy, compassion, humility, patience and justice. One of the simplest instances of adab is gratefulness, giving thanks to Allah, and this was taught by Prophet Muhammad (*saws*) by saying:

*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*  
*In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate and Merciful*



We can also see how these qualities of good adab are expressed in Al-Qur'an and Al-

Hadith:

*Honesty:*

And cover not Truth with falsehood, nor conceal the Truth when ye know (what it is).  
(Al-Qur'an, 2:42)

Allah's Apostle said to us, "Honesty descended from the Heavens and settled in the roots of the hearts of men (faithful believers), and then the Quran was revealed and the people read the Quran, (and learnt it from it) and also learnt it from the Sunna." Both Quran and Sunna strengthened their (the faithful believers') honesty.<sup>33</sup>

*Respect:*

That is (the Bounty) whereof Allah gives Glad Tidings to His Servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin." And if any one earns any good, We shall give him an increase of good in respect thereof: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service). (Al-Qur'an, 42:23)

Abd Shuraib al-Adawi reported: My ear listened and my eye saw when Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) spoke and said: He who believes in Allah and the hereafter should show respect to the guest even with utmost kindness and courtesy. They said: Messenger of Allah, what is this utmost kindness and courtesy? He replied: It is for a day and a night. Hospitality extends for three days, and what is beyond that is a Sadaqa for him; and he who believes in Allah and the Hereafter should say something good or keep quiet.<sup>34</sup>

*Kindness:*

Allah forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers. (Al-Qur'an, 60:08)

Salman reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: Verily, Allah created, on the same very day when He created the heavens and the earth, one hundred parts of mercy. Every part of mercy is coextensive with the space between the heavens and the earth and He out of this mercy endowed one part to the earth and it is because of this that the mother shows affection to her child and even the beasts and birds show kindness to one another and when there would be the Day of Resurrection, Allah would make full (use of Mercy).<sup>35</sup>

### *Mercy:*

The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy. (Al-Qur'an, 49:10)

Jundub reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) stated that a person said: Allah would not forgive such and such (person). Thereupon Allah the Exalted and Glorious, said: Who is he who adjures about Me that I would not grant pardon to so and so; I have granted pardon to so and so and blotted out his deeds (who took an oath that I would not grant pardon to him).<sup>36</sup>

### *Compassion:*

And of mankind is he who would sell himself, seeking the pleasure of Allah; and Allah hath compassion on (His) bondsmen. (Al-Qur'an, 2:207)

Usama b. Zaid reported: While we were with the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him), one of his daughters sent to him (the Messenger) to call him and inform him that her child or her son was dying. The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) told the messenger to go back and tell her that what Allah had taken belonged to Him, and to him belonged what He granted; and He has an appointed time for everything. So you (the messenger) order her to show endurance and seek reward from Allah. The messenger came back and said: She adjures him to come to her. He got up to go accompanied by Sa'd b. 'Ubada, Mu'adh b. Jabal, and I also went along with them. The child was lifted to him and his soul was feeling as restless as if it was in an old (waterskin). His (Prophet's) eyes welled up with tears. Sa'd said: What is this, Messenger of Allah? He replied: This is compassion which Allah has placed in the hearts of His servants, and God shows compassion only to those of His servants who are compassionate.<sup>37</sup>

### *Humility:*

And when it was said unto them: Dwell in this township and eat therefrom whence ye will, and say "Repentance," and enter the gate prostrate; We shall forgive you your sins; We shall increase (reward) for the right-doers. (Al-Qur'an, 7:161)

I heard the Prophet saying, "Shall I tell you of the people of Paradise? They comprise every poor humble person, and if he swears by Allah to do something, Allah will fulfill it; while the people of the fire comprise every violent, cruel arrogant person."<sup>38</sup>

### *Patience:*

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is



Best Aware of those who go aright. If ye punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith ye were afflicted. Endure thou patiently (O Muhammad). Thine endurance is only by (the help of) Allah. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they devise. Lo! Allah is with those who keep their duty unto Him and those who are doers of good. (Al-Qur'an, 16:125–128)

Malik related to me from Malik from Ibn Shihab from Ata ibn Yazid al-Laythi from Abu Said al-Khudri that some people of the Ansar asked the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and he gave to them. Then they asked him again, and he gave to them until he used up what he had. Then he said, “What wealth I have, I will not hoard from you. Whoever has forbearance, Allah will help him. Whoever tries to be independent, Allah will enrich him. Whoever tries to be patient, Allah will give him patience, and no one is given a better or vaster gift than patience.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Justice:*

Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight: that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination.  
(Al-Qur'an, 17:035)

Allah's Apostle said, “Allah's Hand is full, and (its fullness) is not affected by the continuous spending, day and night.” He also said, “Do you see what He has spent since He created the Heavens and the Earth? Yet all that has not decreased what is in His Hand.” He also said, “His Throne is over the water and in His other Hand is the balance (of Justice) and He raises and lowers (whomever He will).”<sup>40</sup>

The first step towards dialogue of any kind with another person is recognizing the above attributes and striving to manifest them in our lives through thought, word, and action. It is not an easy task. We are all human, thus less than perfect, but the conscious and sincere intent to ingrain these traits on a daily basis is a reflection of genuine spiritual aspiration. Self-awareness of our thoughts through reflection, *dua*, and through *salat* helps us with the Greater Jihad, the inner jihad of the heart, the *jihad an-nafs*. One of the first steps is to recognize clearly that we are not the boss, and we do this by first uttering in complete surrender:

*la ilaha illa-Llah, Muhammadan rasulu-Llah*  
“there is no god except God” and “Muhammad is the messenger of God”





By submitting totally to Allah, only then can we begin to rediscover attributes which allows for peace within us:

(Triumphant) are those who turn repentant (to Allah), those who serve (Him), those who praise (Him), those who fast, those who bow down, those who fall prostrate (in worship), those who enjoin the right and who forbid the wrong and those who keep the limits (ordained) of Allah—And give glad tidings to believers! (Al-Qur’an, 9:112)

From this comes, first, repentance and gratitude, giving thanks to Allah for our very existence and each breath. In gratitude we come to the realization of Allah and his creation, surrendering to this love and respect through servitude. To love Allah is to obey Him; and to obey Him is to truly love Him, thus surrendering to His Will.<sup>41</sup> Understanding this, we are to love and serve Him in prayer and worship and with our relationship with His Creation in patience,<sup>42</sup> for each creature received His sacred breath of life:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the Allah-fearing. (Al-Qur’an, 2:177)

From there we can ask for honesty, respect, kindness, mercy, compassion, humility, patience and justice, including balance in our lives and in our hearts. We seek God’s will, the true meaning of “inshallah,” by not allowing emotion or intellect to be lopsided to either side, but to be in balance with clear thinking and a pure heart. This balance allows us the ability to listen to others deeply, with compassion and respect.

Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghudda, who has written extensively on Islamic manners, advises that “if a colleague did not understand an issue and asked a scholar or an elder to explain, you should listen to what is being said. The repeated explanation may give you additional insights to what you already know. Never utter any word belittling your colleague, nor allow your face to betray such an attitude.” In this we find real-life application of adab to a dialogical encounter: Never interrupt a speaker. Never rush to answer if you are not very confident of your answer. Never argue about something you do not know. Never argue for the sake of argument. Never show arrogance with your counterparts, especially if they hold a different opinion. Do not switch the argument to belittle your opponent’s views. If their misunderstanding becomes evident, do not rebuke or scold them. Be modest and kind.”<sup>43</sup>

We implement these attributes in our thoughts, our words, and communication to others and through our deeds on a daily basis, vigilant of deviation and strife that may take us away from Allah. Thus it is with development of adab we become closer to Allah and to our fellow man—and this can be seen through dialogue.

### **Dialogical Examples in Islamic History and Tradition**

Islamic texts are rich with examples of dialogue. Dialogues in Islamic history include communication between the Prophet and angels, Iblis (Shaytan), dialogue among the Prophets, the companions, dialogue within the Muslim *ummah*, the dialogue of *dawah*,<sup>44</sup> and interreligious dialogue, by engaging those of other beliefs. Many unrecorded dialogues have occurred between believers at the mosque, with imams, within the community, and within the family.

Karim Almusawi eloquently states that “the great examples [of dialogue] come from the history of the prophecy age of the Prophet Muhammad, because the prophecy period was unmarked and not politicized yet. Also, I want to say from the Twelfth Imam and the other

distinguished followers from different Islamic doctrines. There were schools of thought during the Islamic dictatorship empires that believed in dialogue, and there were forums for this purpose, but at the same time at that age built the schools of extremity and closing the diligence.”<sup>45</sup>

One of the most famous dialogues was one between the Prophet and the Christian Najran Tribe. Upon arriving in the city, the Prophet invited them to rest for a day and refresh themselves. The next day dialogue began, and although they did not agree on many issues, and although the Christians did not convert to Islam, both parties refrained from conflict:

When the Christians of Najran refrained from entering into a maledictory conflict against the Prophet, he said: “By the Lord who has appointed me as his Messenger in truth, had they chosen the malediction, there would have been a shower of fire upon them in this very field.”<sup>46</sup>

The Holy Qur’an in itself is a dialogue between Allah and his creation. Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, Grand Mufti of Syria in a lecture discusses the importance of dialogue, “Much of the Quran is a free-flowing dialogue between Muhammad and God that discusses the lives of Muhammad and the preceding prophets. This dialogue is generally rhetorical in format, and shows intellect and patience on the part of the prophets, in stark contrast to the dialogue of the peoples of the other religions with their prophets . . . The second source is Sunnah, which are collections of meticulously authenticated sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. It is the height of his call for freedom of belief and for free dialogue, in dignity and in the light of rational judgment, and clear evidence for the sake of truth and the delight in it. We have already stated the Prophet’s applications of dialogue and his putting it into practice as alluded to in the Quran.”<sup>47</sup>

Within the Holy Qur'an, we can see dialogue and advice in speech and communication. In Malik's *Muwatta*, the importance of thought in speaking is stressed, as is purity of intent in communication. Once again the basic principle of adab is discussed:

Malik related to me from Muhammad ibn Amr ibn Alqama from his father from Bilal ibn al-Harith al-Muzani that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "A man speaks what is pleasing to Allah and he does not suspect that it will have the result that it does, and Allah will write for him His good pleasure for it until the day when he meets Him. And a man speaks what excites the wrath of Allah and he does not suspect that it will have the result that it does, and Allah will write His wrath for him for it until the day when he meets Him."<sup>48</sup>

During the Abbasid dynasty around 762 CE, the "Golden Age" of Islamic culture and civilization came to life in Baghdad. The city of Baghdad, named in Persian "the Gift of God," was the center of learning and culture for a diversity of religious scholars from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. It was not unusual for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to work, study, debate (with good adab), and engage in dialogue together. Incredible progress came from this time period, including the work of al-Khwarizmi, also called "the father of algebra."

Another example of peaceful historical co-existence among faiths, rooted in the principles of adab and dialogue, can be seen in Spain's Andalusian period. Commerce and culture flourished, and the sciences excelled. Dr. Abdellatif Charafi discusses the Abrahamic interaction in his paper, "Once Upon a Time in Andalusia":

The unity of the Abrahamic tradition and the critical approach to philosophy are expressed with the same force, in the work of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who was a contemporary of Ibn Rushd. At the synagogue before the Torah, he said: "If for Ibn Rushd the Holy Book is not our Torah but the Qur'an, we both agree about the contributions of reason and of revelation. These are two manifestations of one same divine truth. There is only a contradiction when one is faithful to a literal reading of the scriptures, forgetting about their eternal meaning."<sup>49</sup>

Historically, dialogue is a fundamental element of communication within the Muslim community and with other faiths. The spirit of dialogue leads to mutual understanding and

peaceful co-existence. When positive outcomes take place—through the sciences, mathematics, culture, economics, and, most importantly, understanding and tolerance between people—in all those cases, the spirit and practice of dialogue has been present. In terms of the conflict and divisions we see today, for example, in Baghdad, what if the opposite were true? Perhaps there is hope for another “golden age” of Islam by applying the Islamic approaches to, and principles of, dialogue.

### **Platforms for Islamic Approaches to Dialogue**

In current times, we know there is a need for dialogue within the Muslim ummah and with other faiths. Today’s global technology has improved, leading to the growth of different forms of communication. With faster modes of transportation, such as air travel, and with new ways of communicating, such as the Internet, possibilities for dialogue around the globe also become greater. “Visiting” scholarly exchanges are not unusual. International conferences, trainings, and workshops incorporating dialogues are increasing. Real growth has been seen on the Internet through forums, instant messaging, and other kinds of electronic communication, which has made it an increasingly affordable platform for dialogue between humans globally on the grassroots level. More importantly, there is increased access to information about Islam, adab, and outreach to other religions and cultures. Preparation through self-awareness and knowledge better supports meaningful and transformative dialogue.

Little has been written about Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue in civil society. But it is spontaneously understood at a conference, a school, or within a family or community environment that dialogue is a natural form of communication.

In our interview, Mahboob Khawaja, offered insights into this natural form of communication: “While in the Arab world, I learned that Arab societies used to have an



institution of *Divan*, where social and political consultations and dialogue were held regularly. There are no fixed conditions for time and place, except mutually convenient location.”<sup>50</sup>

Another developing platform for dialogue involves the exchange of scholars and people between the West and the East, an interreligious exchange. Although one might say this is an educational exchange, we must take a step back and realize that while these people are learning in an academic setting, they do interact with the “other” on a daily basis, whether one-on-one, through a small group over dinner, or through a class discussion. Rarely are these dialogues recorded or documented, but they do take place and have transforming effects on the participants.

One of these scholarly exchanges is taking place at Catholic University with Ayatollah Ahmad Iravani, a professor from Mofid University in Qom. In addition to teaching law at Catholic University, he supports interreligious dialogue in Washington, D.C. with the support of Catholic University, and graciously speaks to students at other universities. Chris Harrison reports that Iravani “hopes his work with Father McLean and the Center for the Study of Culture and Values will help create more opportunities for exchange between Islamic scholars and their counterparts at Catholic University. This kind of dialogue is greatly needed at this time, he says.” Iravani speaks of his encounters by saying, “I like to make new friends and learn. That’s why I am enjoying my time as a student—able to be adventurous and meet so many diverse people. It is wonderful to learn so much from others.”<sup>51</sup>

Related to this exchange is the story of a Mennonite couple who spent three years in Qom, Iran, studying at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute. They have since return to the United States, sharing their positive experience and promoting Christian–Muslim relations. Evie Shellenberger spoke about her experience in Qom. In a market, Evie was asked by

a student, “I just have to ask you one more question, if you don’t mind. Aren’t Iranians enemies of the Americans? Why have you decided to come to live with people who are your enemies?”

Evie responded, “I put my arm across her shoulder and said, ‘We have never considered the people of Iran to be our enemies, and since we have lived here we have experienced first hand the warmth and hospitality of the Iranian people.’”<sup>52</sup> This brief moment in time and space between the two women clarified many misperceptions that had arisen over the years. It was an exchange of listening and heart-to-heart expression, in kindness and respect from both people.

The real explosion in Islamic dialogue has been through the Internet. Technology has made the Internet more accessible globally to all people, providing a safe environment to discuss issues in various formats that would not otherwise be available to many people on the grassroots level. These electronic platforms of dialogue may or may not be in “real time,” but do provide the opportunity to share ideas, feelings, and thoughts. It is not unusual to find a Muslim from India dialoguing with a person from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Regardless of one’s native culture, it is now possible to communicate with others in every part of the world. These encounters can be conducted through writing in private messages and “chat rooms” as well as through the use of audio and video streams.

Other formats for dialogue utilize websites, online forums, and listserves for communicating with groups via e-mail; the Islamic approach to dialogue can be seen by people addressing questions and concerns by using the Qur’an and Hadith. These exchanges also address interreligious dialogue. The drawback of these exchanges is mainly the loss of close, visual contact, the loss of body language. Discussion guidelines in several of the electronic groups include procedures for incorporating adab.

The author of this paper has engaged in dialogues with Muslims around the world for over three years, mainly through the use of instant messaging programs. Initially, most often



these conversations begin with participants discussing the age, sex, and location of all parties, and then addressing the religious identity of each person. The thoughts concerning this could be interpretive as to level of understanding of Islam and style of dialogue, whether it is a *dawah* approach or a Bohm-style dialogue. Language differences are also addressed, and patience with each other is acknowledged. Not all of encounters are positive, but those that are motivated by sincere interest do progress to sustainable dialogue; this involves communicating over days, weeks, months, and finally years. What begins as simple sharing of thoughts and ideas in the Islamic approach for truth transforms into long-lasting relationships. What I have experience over the years is respect on both sides, careful listening, a clarifying of questions and statements, and then reflection.

One downside, specifically in some chat rooms, is a stereotyping of the “Other,” especially between the West and Islam, where demeaning, hateful arguments are common, and in which misperceptions guide the discussion. On the other hand, an occasional individual is inspired to explore and become more aware of their own culture and the other’s, at times changing opinion, and separating the “issues” from the people.

There has recently been an increase in the number of conferences and trainings available for the purpose of implementing dialogue, specifically examining Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue, conflict reconciliation, and peacebuilding activities. As the programs have been rapidly expanding over the past few years, new and innovative programs are being implement in many Muslim countries and, interreligiously, in Western countries. Additional attention is being given to youth issues and specific regions in combination with humanitarian aid.

## Conclusion





There has been increasing interest in Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue, especially in the Middle East and Muslim countries. Islamic dialogue is being used in *shura* and other conflict resolution situations, along with an increased emphasis on the value of shared interests and goals. Muzammil Siddiqi, a renowned scholar, is one voice concerned about increasing tensions: “The world today is facing some major problems: the breakdown of the family system, increasing immorality, racialism and the prevalence of the culture of violence. We must focus our attention to see how to revive moral values, traditional family values, how to bring peace and harmony among races and ethnic groups, and how to remove violence from all societies in the world.”<sup>53</sup>

As communication in the world accelerates through globalization so does the possibility of misperceptions and misunderstanding. Miscommunication exists within families, communities and nations, but techniques utilizing Islamic approaches to dialogue can improve communication skills. Research and implementation of guidance for civil society based on the Al-Qur’an and Sunnah supports dialogue, offers possibilities for greater understanding, and establishes a more coherent society on all levels.

Dialogue is easier to conduct outside a conflict zone, yet what is even more important is the use of Islamic approaches and principles to dialogue within a conflict zone, such as Iraq. I asked Karim Khutar Almusawi from SCIRI, “How can we further utilize Islamic dialogue on the grassroots level for peacebuilding?” As we know, Iraq is going through a difficult period of tremendous challenges. His reply was clear: “The first point of view is that we have to find or at least have the same opinion on mutual interests among the entities in the world. Second, there must be a certain understanding or acceptance among different entities. And the third point is that we have to spread the spirit of tolerance among people all over the world to achieve dialogue

goals and objectives. Without these elements we might face many obstacles in the way of our mission.”<sup>54</sup>

Another scholar I interviewed in Iraq, who asks to remain anonymous because of security issues, agrees with Karim and further supports Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue on the civil society level. His experience has shown that Shi‘ah and Sunni frequently dialogue and interact together in Iraq, and this also includes those of different faiths. It has only been the past year that sectarian schisms have occurred. We went on to discuss Islamic approaches to conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding projects. He confirmed that transformative and constructive dialogue is possible and successful when the parties have the shared interest in serving Allah and creation with humility, compassion, and respect.<sup>55</sup>

Obviously, if Muslims in deeply conflicted regions and under extreme conditions are committed to communications with others by following Islamic approaches and principles of dialogue, the entire Muslim ummah should take the next step of supporting dialogue. It is time now to take dialogue to the grassroots level, through education, training, and rediscovery of ourselves and our relationship with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Badr al-Deen Hassoun, “Interview: The Culture ‘Of Knowing One Another’ In Islam,” 2003, 14<sup>th</sup> annual convening of the World Council of the Islamic Call. Also on line at: [http://taarafu.islamonline.net/English/Taarafo\\_Conference/2003/article21.shtml](http://taarafu.islamonline.net/English/Taarafo_Conference/2003/article21.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> G. F. Al-Albani Haddad, “A Concise Guide to the Chief Innovator of our Time,” [http://www.sunnah.org/history/Innovators/al\\_albani.htm](http://www.sunnah.org/history/Innovators/al_albani.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, “Acheh: Dialogue Towards Cease-Fire Must Fulfill Three Important Points,” [http://www.unpo.org/news\\_detail.php?arg=05&par=1836](http://www.unpo.org/news_detail.php?arg=05&par=1836).

<sup>4</sup> Ujwal Thapa, “Dialogue Versus Negotiation,” *The Kathmandu Post*, <http://www.nepalnews.com.np/contents/englishdaily/ktmpost/2002/dec/dec26/features.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Yahiya Emerick, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, November 19, 2004.



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<sup>6</sup> Karim Khutar Almusawi, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, December 14, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, "Interview: Asghar Ali Engineer on Intra-Muslim Dialogue," *Qalandar: Islam and Interfaith Relations in South Asia*, <http://www.islaminterfaith.org/nov2004/interview.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Harold H. Saunders, *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*, 88.

<sup>9</sup> The office of Grand Ayatollah Makaremshirazi, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, March 13, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> M. K. Smith, "Dialogue and Conversation." *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, 2001, <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Nimr al-Samak, "Interview update: The Culture 'Of Knowing One Another' In Islam," In Islam," 2003, 14<sup>th</sup> annual convening of the World Council of the Islamic Call. Also on line at: [http://taarafu.islamonline.net/English/Taarafo\\_Conference/2003/article06.shtml](http://taarafu.islamonline.net/English/Taarafo_Conference/2003/article06.shtml).

<sup>12</sup> See William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (New York: Currency, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> See Compassionate Listening Project, <http://www.compassionatelistening.org/about.html>.

<sup>14</sup> William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Awakening Technology Community of Inquiry and Practice (CIP), "Practice of Circles," <http://www.awakentech.com/at/Awaken1.nsf/0bb6abfbac60e9698825649f0077c628/41ce85b6949119bd882564a6007305ec!OpenDocument>.

<sup>16</sup> M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazali*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Dialogue, Conflict Resolution, and Change: Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel*, 97.

<sup>18</sup> A complete study of the differences between low- and high-context cultures can be found in Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1971).

<sup>19</sup> R. S. Zaharna, "Bridging Cultural Differences: American Public Relations Practices and Arab Communication Patterns," *Public Relations Review*, 21 (1995), 241-255.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Avruch, *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, 29.



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<sup>21</sup> Habib Siddiqui, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, December 6, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Yahya Emerick, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, November 19, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Abbas al-Jirari, *Dialogue from the Islamic Point of View*, chapter 7; see: <http://www.isesco.org.ma/pub/Eng/Dialogue/dialogue.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Kirchoff, "Dialogue," <http://home.mebtel.net/~kirchoff/Dialogue.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani, *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Abbas al-Jirari, *Dialogue from the Islamic Point of View*, chapter 7.

<sup>27</sup> Abbas al-Jirari, *Dialogue from the Islamic Point of View*, chapter 7.

<sup>28</sup> Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani, *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> This conclusion is based on research and observation by author over a two-year period (2003–2004) with dialogue groups in Iraq and the United States, including work as moderator of an Islamic group on the Internet.

<sup>30</sup> Tetz Rooke, "The Influence of *adab* on the Muslim Intellectuals of the *Nabda* as Reflected in the Memoirs of Muhammad Kurd ‘Ali (1876–1953)," Utvik and Vikør, *The Middle East in a Globalized World*, Bergen/London 2000, 193-219.

<sup>31</sup> Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani, *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Farish Noor, "The Adab of Dissent and Dialogue: Interview with Khalid Masud," *Muslim Wakeup*, <http://www.muslimwakeup.com/main/archives/2004/03/002160print.php>.

<sup>33</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 9, book 92, number 381; narrated by Hudhaifa.

<sup>34</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, book 18, number 4286; translated by ‘Abdul Hamid Siddiqui.

<sup>35</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, book 37, number 6634; translated by ‘Abdul Hamid Siddiqui.

<sup>36</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, book 32, number 6350; translated by ‘Abdul Hamid Siddiqui.

<sup>37</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, book 4, number 2008; translated by ‘Abdul Hamid Siddiqui.

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<sup>38</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 8, book 78, number 651; narrated by Haritha bin Wahb. Translator: M. Muhsin Khan.

<sup>39</sup> Malik's *Muwatta*, book 58, number 58.2.7; translated by 'A'isha 'Abdarahman at-Tarjumana and Ya'qub Johnson.

<sup>40</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. 9, book 93, number 508; narrated by Abu Huraira. Translator: M. Muhsin Khan.

<sup>41</sup> "When someone loves Allah (*'Azza wa Jalla*) he loses his will because the lover can have no will above the will of his Beloved 'Abd Al-Qadir al-Gaylani, *Jila' al-Khatir*, chapter "On Love" (online at: <http://www.quranicstudies.com/contentid10.html>)

<sup>42</sup> al-Jawziyyah, Ibn Qayyim. *"Patience and Gratitude"* Translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab. London: Ta-Ha, 1997. *Upon reading this book, reflections and enlightenment were gained for this paper, there is not one particular page but the book as a whole.*

<sup>43</sup> Ghudda, Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu. *Islamic Manners: Discussions and Debates*. Milpitas, CA: Awakening Publications, 2001.

<sup>44</sup> See Ahmad Sakr, *Da'mah through Dialogue* (Chicago: Foundation for Islamic Knowledge, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Karim Khutar Almusawi, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, December 14, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Syed Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, *The Life of Muhammad the Prophet*, chapter 20; available online: <http://www.al-islam.org/lifeprophet/22.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmad Kuftaro, "The Quran Extends its Helpful Hand to all Mankind and to the People of the Holy Book in Particular," lecture at the "The Assembly of the World's Religions" conference, San Francisco, August 15–21, 1990.

<sup>48</sup> Malik's *Muwatta*, book 6:2.5: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muwatta/056.mmt.html>.

<sup>49</sup> 'Abdellatif Charafi, "Once Upon a Time in Andalusia," <http://muslimsonline.com/bicnews/Articles/andalusia.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Mahboob Khawaja, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, December 18, 2004.

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Chris Harrison, “Interest in Western Philosophy Leads Iranian Professor to CUA,” available online at: <http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/1141>.

<sup>52</sup> Mennonite Mission Network, “Living in Iran Gives Couple Chance to be Loved by Enemies,” <http://www.mennonitemission.net/Resources/News/story.asp?ID=502>

<sup>53</sup> Siddiqi, Muzammil. “How an Islamic Leader Views Dialogue,” *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 30, 41 [March 29, 2001] (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

<sup>54</sup> Karim Khutar Almusawi, personal communication: e-mail interview on Islamic dialogue, December 14, 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Personal interview, October 2005.

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