

Promoting Positive Peace via Inter Religious Dialogue: Bridging Understanding among Muslims and Non-Muslims

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Abstract : Islam means peace or religion of peace. The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) aim to significantly reduce all forms of violence and to end conflict and insecurity either at national or international sphere is in line with the concept of peace in Islam. The recent hatred against Islam and Muslims especially since the post 9/11 has caused the sentiment of Islamophobia. By contrast Muslims in the Middle East and Asia generally see Westerners as selfish, hypocrites, immoral and greedy and as enemy to their religion. The situation should be tackled by imposing negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies) which is substantial in Islam. There is a close connection between interreligious dialogue and peace building. By interreligious dialogue, people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other. There will be human interaction and relationships in interreligious dialogue which take place at many levels. The diversity in intra and inter religions, is a fact a fitrah created by Allah. The differences or diversities can be managed by moderation and tolerance from the people of different religious background. Every religion encourage peace among humankind where by understanding between religious believers is useful in bringing people together. All religions should stop paying attention to unimportant differences and details. The main objective of this paper is to prove that Islam is a religion advocates positive peace and interreligious dialogue for the permanent peacebuilding.

Keywords: peace, inter religious dialogue, understanding, Muslims, non-Muslims

1. Introduction

The concept of “world peace” as a human ideal, refers to not only avoidance of war and violence (negative peace), but also cooperation on peaceful settlement of disputes, and calls for freedom, security, development and human prosperity around the world

(positive peace). This movement received momentum in the 20th century by the international community and was used as a model for the formation and activation of international organizations, including the United Nations (Bahram & Alireza 2017). United Nations has designed a plan to promote peaceful societies at national levels, as well as the role of cooperation at the international level. The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) aim to significantly reduce all forms of violence and to end conflict and insecurity either at national or international sphere. Goal 16 of SDGs of the United Nation SDG, states that:

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

SDG that is proposed by the UN is in line with the concept of peace is Islam. And the word “Islam” is derived from “*salaam*” a word meaning peace. Islam means peace or religion of peace. Muslims greet each other by saying “*al-Salaam `alaykum*” meaning “Peace be upon you”. Besides, Islam advocates the principles that support non-violent resistance, such as persuasive engagement and diplomacy, consultation and dialogue, withdrawal from situations of injustice and boycotting acts of aggression (Mohammad Hashim 2016).

However, recently there had been a massive surge of hatred against Islam and Muslims especially since the post 9/11. There has been increasing sentiment of Islamophobia It is “a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism which targets the symbols and markers of a being a Muslim” (Awan & Zempi 2020). Consequently, there is a reciprocal relation between Muslims and non-Muslims where many in the West see Muslims as fanatical, violent, and as lacking tolerance. Meanwhile, Muslims in the Middle East and Asia generally see Westerners as selfish, hypocrites, immoral and greedy.

However, it cannot be denied that the image of Islamophobia is created by Muslim themselves. There are a number of Muslim organizations which present a bad image of

Islam. The extreme organization such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Al-Qaeda, ISIS, ISIL, Taliban, Boko Haram, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Hizbul Mujahideen justified their wrong doings under false justification. They are misinterpreting Islam by pursuing jihad under their own justification. All Muslim terrorism activity has nothing to do with Islam. Islam and Muslims are two different subject matter. It is not fair to judge Islam on the appearance of Muslims or certain group of Muslims (Mateen 2018). Thus, Muslims must represent the true Islam, behave according to Shariah and avoid any involvement in any form extremism, revenge or suicide bombings (Kazeem 2020). There are a number of verses of Holy al-Quran warn Muslims of fanaticism and extremism. (See al-Quran: 2: 190, [2: 256](#); 5.77, 8.61, 11.12 & 41:34).

Nowadays, peace is understood in two aspects, namely negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence but can include latent conflicts. It is a kind of peace that not always by peaceful means. The absence of violence can be in the term of cultural violence, nature violence, direct violence or structural violence. When, for example, a ceasefire is enacted, a negative peace will ensue. It is negative because something undesirable stopped happening (e.g. the violence stopped, the oppression ended), however the element of violence still there in the society. The feeling of not trusting each other is still growing in the society. For example, the Muslims still do not trust of their fellow non-Muslim or vice versa. In this case, Islam does not deny the concept of negative peace; through reconciliation and peace-making efforts in resolving conflicts among individuals or groups, to ensure the positive peace among communities can be formed.

On the other hand, positive peace is defined as the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. This peace is filled with positive content such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict. This such peace consists of; (i) Nature peace (human relations with other beings are controlled constitutionally within a community to which not only mankind belongs); (ii) Direct positive peace (physical acts of kindness or words that cultivate positive and peaceful communities and the world); (iii) Structural positive peace (intra and interpersonal peace which involve inner structures of society both relating laws and social structures); and (iv) Cultural positive peace (Implementing a culture of peace throughout media, interaction, and style via religion, law and language). Positive peace is the best protection

against violence and the long-term remedies can be achieved. The positive peace is filled with positive elements such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict (Galtung 1996).

Actually, positive peace is substantial in Islam (Rizki Dian & Ahmad Sahide 2019). The values found in positive peace is the basis of morality (akhlaq) in Islam that should be attached to each individual, which cause the existence of the real peace. Abu Zahra points ten principles of *mu'amalah* or relationship among people, such as respect for mans' dignity (al-Isra '17:70); unity (al-Baqarah 2:213) (Ali-Imran 3:103); cooperation in good deeds or humanity (al-Maidah 5:2), tolerance (al-Kahf 18:29) (al-Kafirun 109:6), freedom (to decide fate and religion) (al-Baqarah2: 256) (Al-Rahman 55:60); justice (al-Hujurat 49: 9); equality in human relationships (al-Hujurat 49:13) (al-Balad 90: 11-13)); integrity (al-Maidah 5:1) (an-Nisa 4:58); and compassion (Maryam 19:96). In this respect, it is clear that in promoting positive peace, the attention should be given to the spiritual self-awareness inherent in human nature. This will avoid them from violence. Human nature has a tendency for peace and friendship and enjoying compassion, and love for others.

The first and cardinal principle of positive culture of peace is shown in the acceptance of religious faith is optional. According to Islam, people are free to accept religious belief as stated in the Quran: *"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things."* (2: 256).

Besides that, the positive peace is advocated in the creation of the non-violent society where the principle of peace as the primary law. Al-Quran states that *"Allah invites to the Home of Peace, and guides whomever He wills to a straight path"*. (10: 25). And also, al-Quran says that Allah always commands the Muslims towards peace. *"But if they incline towards peace, then incline towards it, and put your trust in Allah. He is the Hearer, the Knower"*. (8: 6).

Human nature tends to peace, and not violence. The violence comes from how we learn, not from our human nature will destruct the positive peace. There are eight pillars or factors (as shown in the following diagram) that determine the realization of the positive peace. It should be noted that one factor would tend to strengthen others and vice versa. The relative strength of any of eight pillars, has the potential to positively or

negatively influence the other pillars. This will influence the peace. This aspect has been highlighted by Peck (2002: 41-42), where between development, human rights and peace, there must be a strong connection in order to solve the early complications before they turn into a serious problem. This step will ensure “good governance” allowing for people to set their priorities, to provide and promote their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and a pluralistic space where people can live together peacefully and have freedom to be developed in all fields.



Islam as a religion of peace advocates five basic principles of positive peace that should be observed. They are clearly stated in the al-Quran:

1. All of humanity has a common origin. All humans are descended from Adam and Eve, where they inhabited the earth. *“Oh humankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored among you in the sight of Allah is the who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)”* (Al-Quran 49:13). Thus, human dignity must be recognized and respected, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or tribe.

2. The diversity among people shows the richness of traditions. Al-Quran (49: 12) states: *“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily*

the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)”.

3. Muslims striving to improve the world must cooperate, collaborate and engage in dialogue with others and among themselves to foster peace. *“Help one another in acts of piety and righteousness. And do not assist each other in acts of sinfulness and transgression. And be aware of Allah. Verily, Allah is severe in punishment”* (al-Quran 5:2).
4. To be actively involved with one’s tradition means to be engaged with others in a respectful manner. *“God does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, God loves those who act justly.”* (al-Quran 60:8).
5. Practicing good deeds and striving toward justice must be present in everyday dealing with all human beings. *“God does not forbid you from being good to those who have not fought you in the religion or driven you from your homes, or from being just towards them. God loves those who are just.”* (al-Quran 60: 8).

Given the above backdrop, this paper is going to prove that Islam is a religion advocates positive peace and interreligious dialogue for the permanent peacebuilding in the world.

2. Positive Peacebuilding and Interreligious Dialogue

Galtung (1976) believes peacebuilding as a bottom-up action deriving from a local or community level. He states that “a man needs a man and a nation needs each other”. The term of symbiosis has been introduced as an action involves both parties understanding the value of diversity and it being directly tied to their self-interests. Here is interreligious dialogue plays its role in positive peacebuilding.

The Holy Quran contains various examples of dialogue and interreligious dialogue such as shown in the al-Quran 49: 13; 5: 48; 16: 125. The Quranic statement “come to a common word between us and you” provides a connotation of dialogue. Though, the verse is specifically referring to the Ahl al-Kitab (People of the Book), its applied for the general dialogue (Duran 2020). Besides, there are a number of the Quranic verses encourage every man and woman to know and respect each other such as (Al-Quran 49: 11, 13). Interreligious dialogue is the preferred approach to know and respect other human beings. Historically, the Hodaybiyyah

Treaty was the milestone of interreligious dialogue in Islam, which opened the gate for interaction and discussion between Muslims and different groups of non-Muslims including Jews and Christians, and others (Isa Khan et. al. 2020).

There is a close connection between interreligious dialogue and peace building as suggested in one of the pillars that is `good relations with neighbour`. Kung (1998) suggested “there will be no peace between the civilizations without a peace between the religions! And there will be no peace between the religions without a dialogue between the religions”.

Interreligious dialogue, or also known as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely. Al-Qaradhwai reminds that: Talking to the adherents of these religions is a good thing, because in many countries Muslims live side-by-side with them, Also, there are more pagans than believers [in the monotheistic faiths] in this world, which necessitates dialogue with them”. <https://egyptindependent.com/qaradawi-calls-dialogue-pagan-faiths/>

Leonard Swidler (1987) a highly respected American scholar in the field of interreligious dialogue has identified three goals of dialogue, as following:

1. To know oneself ever more profoundly and enrich and round out one’s appreciation of one’s own faith tradition.
2. To know the other ever more authentically and gain a friendly understanding of others as they are and not in caricature
3. To live ever more fully accordingly and to establish a more solid foundation for community of life and action among persons of various traditions.

Interreligious dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. So, there are some multi -dimensional network that involve thousands of actors, committed individuals, clerics, scholars, missionaries, diplomat, politicians, professional peace makers, interfaith bodies, international conferences, research and training centres, specialized journals and so on. There are some tools used to achieve the goals (peace). They are: theological debates and seminars, uni or multi -lateral statements by religious leaders, spiritual summits of religious dignitaries, multi-religious peace prayers, government and UN sponsored dialogue events, interfaith conference, interfaith counter training, talking circles, youth camps, sport events, scholarly research and publication (Scheffler 2007). Therefore, dialogue kits, is not limited to something

that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups with the involvement of different activities together especially educational activities.

Therefore, it is found that, the organizations such as the Wajir Peace and Development Committee of Kenya, the Muslim Women’s Research and Action Front in Sri Lanka, the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice in the United States, and the Asian Muslim Action Network in Thailand proves that Muslim civil society actors are important agents of change operating within an Islamic paradigm in their communities in bringing peace through the education and social dialogue. In the Philippines, former USIP senior fellow Amina Rasul has worked tirelessly to implement peace education in Islamic education, including for women training to be scholars (Susan 2012).

Education as a social dialogue has been used by the Gulen Movement or Volunteers Movement (Hezmet) around the world. They prove that education is regarded as an important instrument for peace and a solution to three major problems of social ills, namely ignorance, poverty and division. In order to cure the ills, the movement has suggested three approaches, they are knowledge (through education), work capital (through labour) and unity (through interreligious and intercultural dialogue). The schools have been built in the ethnic and religious conflict areas such as Albania, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Philippines, Bandar Aceh, Georgia, Darfur, Kenya, Northern Iraq, south eastern Turkey, Central Asia and Caucasus. Truly, educations show its impact by reducing levels of conflict especially among the young generations and seen as bastions of inter-religious and interethnic harmony. Education also seen as a means of dialogue and as essential element of integration of young generation to the modern world (Celik 2011).

Abu-Nimer, Khoury, Welty (2007) suggest the following ground rules for making an interreligious dialogue as effective as possible. All participants should:

- Be willing to share their views in the context of their own life story, and not presume.
- To speak for the entire religious tradition.
- Recognize the complexities and varieties of the other faiths.
- Stand firmly in their own faith while remaining self-critical and open to new.
- Perspectives.
- Undertake a realistic view of their faith, and not focus on “defence” against others.
- Be considered to have equal status and importance.
- Commit to some basic ground rules for the meeting.

Al-Qaradhawi (2004) suggests that the content of the interreligious dialogue must be focused on the similarities, not on the differences. Only through similarities, agreement between the

Proceedings of 8th International Symposium, FIA, SEUSL – 04th August 2021
ISBN 978-624-5736-14-0

participants can be achieved and benefitted. There is no dominance of one side over another, when the aim of the dialogue is to reach the truth.

2.1 Types of Dialogue

Prof. John Hick (1922-2012) a philosopher and a theologian has suggested that all religions should stop paying attention to unimportant differences and details and consider faith in and worshipping their God as the true foundation of their religion. All participants of the dialogue religions should remain committed to their principles and develop their comparative theology according to their original experience of religion and should acknowledge the common ground. He has identified three kinds of interreligious dialogue, they are:

1. Dialogue between highly intellectuals of the different faiths. It is a matter of trying to understand one another's belief systems and discussing them. This dialogue may involve religious leaders, imams, rabbis or ministers. This type of dialogue can be between Buddhist-Christian dialogues, Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue. The aim of this dialogue is to understand one another's belief systems and discussing them. There is no effort by the participants to persuade each other, or assuming that the other was wrong.
2. Dialogue at the ground level or between ordinary people. At this level, the ordinary people such as Christians, Muslims, Jews or others got together in one another's houses. They are interested to find out about others daily life, what they do in family life, how they deal with children's problems, what they eat and do not eat etc. Generally, it is a creative of interfaith friendships.
3. Dialogue of common problem. People of different religious background are getting together to cope with specific local concrete problems such as the problems of the environment, of peace, of poverty or the problems of the world (International Interfaith Centre 2020). The subject can be non-religious. In this sense, there are issues or common problems. Hassan & Mohammad Hossein (2018) state the problems could be justice, security, creativity in the context of justice and war, poverty, and so on. The level of these problems can also be urban, national and international. Eck classified it as dialogue of life or community which stress on practicality and daily life.

On the other hand, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* has introduced four types of interreligious dialogue as following:

1. Discursive dialogue, debate or discussion involves meeting, listening, and discussion on the level of mutual component intellectual inquiry. It is also known as Informational Dialogue where the participants acquire knowledge of the faith partner's religious history, founding, basic beliefs, scriptures, etc.
2. Human (Buberian) dialogue resets on the existential foundations. inclusive dialogue. This second type of dialogue has been introduced by Martin Buber. It is a dialogue that takes place between *I and Thou* as genuine dialogue, because in genuine dialogue, the self and other reciprocally acknowledge and confirm each other's existence (Larson & Shady 2009). So, this an inclusive and a genuine dialogue. Buber (1957) describes the objective of the dialogue as:

“What is called for is not ‘neutrality’ but solidarity, a living answering for one another— and mutuality, living reciprocity; not effacing the boundaries between the groups, circles, and parties, but communal recognition of the common reality and communal testing of the common responsibility”.

3. Secular dialogue stresses that there are tasks to be performed in the world and believers in different creeds may share in a program of joint action, without any attention to their respective convictions. It is also known as Practical Dialogue where the participants collaborating in promoting peace and justice. It also categorised as dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joy and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. Eck (1986) categorized this third dialogue as parliamentary or institutional dialogue where participants create interfaith dialogue in order to collaborate for integral development.
4. Spiritual dialogue which takes an introspective approach without any attempt to debate and puts an emphasis on the superiority of intuition and experience over rational thinking. Thangaraj (1999) name it as dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute. This dialogue can be categorized to: firstly, experiential dialogue with faith partners from within the partner's tradition, worship and ritual – entering into the feelings of one's partner and permitting that person's symbols and stories to guide, and secondly,

relational dialogue where the participants develop friendships with individual persons beyond the “business” of dialogue.

2.2 Managing Diversity in Intra and Interreligious Dialogue

In al-Quran, Allah explains the diversity of humankind as a natural phenomenon which is created for human beings from a different background regardless of their races and religions. Diversity is a fitrah that created by Allah as a beauty to explore. One of them is the diversity of intra and inter religion. Within a religion there is diversity of interpreting the Book, laws, Islamic creed and so on. For example, within Islam there are animosities and incompatibilities such as Shia vs. Sunni, Ahli Sunnah wa al-Jamaah vs. Wahhabi, Tabligh Jamaat vs. Deobandi, and Ahl Hadith vs. Jamaat Islamiyyah. Because of different understanding of certain Quranic verses, or certain concept in political Islam, Muslims would kill his fellow Muslims. There are also a series of clash between Muslim vs Christians, Hindus vs Muslims, Muslims vs Jews etc. Diversity is a beauty created by Allah, in order to explore His Greatness. Al-Quran states:

O people, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is All Knowing, All Aware (49:13).

Thus, diversity in intra and inter religions, is a fact that could not be denied. Managing the differences is an art. One of the arts is moderation. Moderation does not mean that one should forsake their religion; rather it means one should at the same time not let their religious practices be a problem for others who are not of the same faith (Hilal, Raihanah & Lee 2015). Islam as a monotheistic religion acknowledges religious pluralism. As has been quoted in the *Introduction of the book Islam and Peacebuilding, Gülen Movement Initiatives*, the authors said that Abdul Aziz Sachedina has observed, recognition of pluralism will “advance the principle of inclusiveness, which would counsel accommodation, not conflict, among competing claims to religious truth in religiously and culturally heterogeneous societies” (Sachedina 2001, 23). Though accepted pluralism, religious leader should make it clear to the Muslims that Islam strongly rejected relativism and syncretism (is meant by the illegitimate assimilation of different religious elements) since in Islam the truth is absolute and it refers to the concept " Oneness of

God". That concept "Oneness of God" preserved in the Quran and must be executed without compromise (Khairulnizam, Suzy Aziziyana & Khadijah 2014). The Quran says, "Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam." (Ali Imran 3: 19)²⁶ Allah also avers: "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be acceptable of him" (3: 85).

Tolerance is another form of managing the differences. According to UNESCO (1995): "Tolerance is respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human". Gülen argues that "society has to uphold tolerance. If we don't announce jihad for anything else, we should announce it for tolerance". Al-Quran insists the culture of tolerance and Prophet Muhammad explains its importance to Muslims and their fellow humankind (Esposito & Yulma 2010). Gülen asserts that "the method of those who act with enmity and hatred, who view everyone else with anger, and who blacken others as infidels is non-Islamic, for Islam is a religion of love and tolerance" (Prat 2010). The concept of tolerance can be identified with the concept of *tasamuh*, however it is more on implies mutual tolerance and mutual acceptance of religious and cultural diversities based on Islamic perspectives. It is a receptive mind to listen to different opinions, to function in two ways as giving own views and accepting others without affecting personal or own religious belief. The principle of *tasamuh* consists of (i) Recognition of the existence of various people with all kinds of the differences such religion as sunnatullah. (ii) Acknowledging the human freedom by giving him choice to choose any religion without any force. (iii) Dealing with all people in honest and good dealings (both in words and actions) including the non-Muslims. (iv) It is proposed that good dealing include those who ignorant and behave harshly towards Muslims. (v) Muslim can only be intolerant in a case whereby the non-Muslim who hatred and fight against Muslims and Islam. (vi) Muslim can eat food prepared by the people of book and can marry them, this tolerated matters only means for them. (vii) The matter of faith and worship cannot be tolerated (Ruhaizah & Jaffary 2020).

3. Conclusion

Peace is one of the major things in Islam and everything is done in the name of God/Allah to reach peace. Muslims greet each other by saying '*as Salam `alaykum`*' meaning 'peace be upon you'. Understanding between religious believers is useful in bringing people together. One of the

approaches is inter and intra religious dialogue. While religions may have different names and meanings, they share the same value-love, compassion and toleration -while opposing violence and conflict. Islamophobia is a current phenomenon created by Muslim themselves who use the name of God as an excuse for acts of violence against a person, causes damage to property or poses t risk to the health and safety of a person or a public. At the same time, it is created by the attitude of anti-Islam which posed the negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life. One of the solutions of clash of religious faith is by inter and intra dialogue where it is an inherently valuable expression of God-given human nature, our *fitra*. Islam is a religion advocates positive peace and interreligious dialogue for the betterment of human life and the world.

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