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Qur'ānic Foundations of Interfaith

(Is *Da'wah* (Calling to God) Interfaith?)

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Abstract:

The paper addresses two questions: does the Qur'an commands interfaith and is interfaith Da'wah (calling people to the worship of one God)? First, it will discuss what interfaith means today. Interfaith has moved from the medieval "exclusive attitudes (that) promote suspicion and disdain of the other traditions". Further, it has also moved from pluralism's desire to tolerate other religious traditions to celebrate the other. The paper will reflect on āyah (verse) 48 of Sūrah (Chapter) 5 to establish a firm Qur'anic foundation for the diversity of religions required by the Qur'an. The āyah informs if God willed He would have made the whole humankind united in one religious community ([ummatan wāhidatan](#)), but He chose not to do that. Instead, He wants to test us in the religious community we claim ours. God wants diversity of religious practices as it creates conditions in which religious communities can compete with each other in doing good ([khayr](#)). Finally, the Qur'an commands ta'āraf (get to know each other) and ta'āwan (cooperation) in doing good (49: 13 & 5: 2 respectively), two key goals of interfaith movement today. The paper concludes interfaith meets Quranic commands of ta'āraf and ta'āwan. Therefore, Muslims should engage in the interfaith movement. However, ta'āraf and ta'āwan only do not meet the requirement of Da'wah. Da'wah requires to intentionally invite people to the worship of one God. Whereas interfaith is not about calling others to one's faith.

Keywords: *Interfaith, Proselyte, Dialog, Ta'āraf, Ta'āwan, Da'wah, Amr bil ma'ruf.*

Introduction

This paper is an inquiry in determine if the Qur'an commands interfaith, and is interfaith *Da'wah* (calling people to the worship of one God)? To answer the first question, we explore what interfaith stands for today, and if the Qur'an accepts and promotes such understanding. To answer the second question, we explore Qur'anic concept of *Da'wah*, and determine if interfaith accommodates such conception. Thus, the paper is divided into three sections: What is Interfaith, The Qur'anic Foundations of Interfaith, and Is interfaith *Da'wah*?

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Interfaith has moved from the medieval “exclusive attitudes (that) promote suspicion and disdain of the other traditions”. Later, modernity introduced the idea of religious pluralism that required *tolerating* other religious traditions. Today, the interfaith movement *celebrates* all religious traditions. In short, freedom of religion is firmly established in our global world, and it is an integral part of the interfaith movement.

The paper argues, the Qur’anic injunction in 5: 48 calls for diversity of religions in the human world. Tomorrow, on the Day of Judgment, God would judge each religious community with the religious law and ethic that they claimed in this world. This creates a possibility for religious communities to compete in doing good in our life on the planet earth.

Finally, the Qur’an commands *ta’āraf* (get to know each other) and *ta’āwan* (cooperation) in doing good (49: 13 & 5: 2 respectively), two key goals of interfaith movement. Therefore, Muslims should participate in interfaith movement. However, *ta’āraf* and *ta’āwan* fulfil partial requirements of *Da’wah* as *Da’wah* also requires *calling people to the worship of one God*. Therefore, Muslims should not be satisfied when they take part in interfaith movement and believe they have fulfilled the duty of *Da’wah*.

What is Interfaith?

All human faiths¹ have two key components – a metaphysical dimension and an ethical code. The metaphysical dimension deals with unseen and unknowable reality that may include a conception of God or gods, some impersonal force, an idea, a mathematical mind, or a spiritual reality, e.g., energy. The ethical dimension deals with how one is to behave towards fellow human beings, organic life (plants and animals), and environment. Since Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) we acknowledged human *mind* was incapable of grasping metaphysical reality, and hence it cannot be known and therefore agreed upon among human beings.² Ethics, on the other hand, deals with human beings living on the planet earth. Therefore, humankind cannot escape paying attention to the ethics of living together. It is for this reason that the current discourse of interfaith limits itself to know different faith traditions and work together for a peaceful and just co-existence without involving the metaphysical or theological dimensions of faith.

¹ I consider having no religious faith, a faith also. Having no faith acts as a religious faith, i.e., it impacts every aspect of life.

² Though it is generally entertained that the *subjective* experience of divine is a possibility. Thus, making religion possible.

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No one global definition of interfaith exists. A good definition to which almost all agree is “cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different [religious](#) traditions (i.e. ‘faiths’) and/or [spiritual](#) or [humanistic](#) beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels”.³ The Parliament of the World’s Religions (PWR) in their “Vision and Mission” captures the same in a broader sense: “Our vision is a world of peace, justice and sustainability. In the world we envision: Religious and spiritual communities live in harmony and contribute to a better world from their riches of wisdom and compassion”. Such that i) “Religious and cultural divisions and misunderstandings are replaced with respect and understanding”, ii) “The richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of communal, civil, societal, and global life”, iii) “The world’s most powerful and influential institutions move beyond narrow self-interest to realize the common good”, iv) “The Earth and all life are cherished, protected, healed, and restored”.⁴ The World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations (WCMIR)’s founder Dr. Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018) adds an important dimension to interfaith work. He wants to create “a moral force for global peace, tolerance, and understanding at intra-faith and inter-faith levels. Meaning, a movement that would stand up as a voice of conscious for injustice anywhere and against anyone”.⁵ This implies standing up against one’s own community when it involves in injustice.

At present some people claim having no “religious faith”, but this does not imply their moral and ethical commitment to life and society is any less than a religious person. They are part of the interfaith community. In the above, the first definition includes them as persons with “[spiritual](#) or [humanistic](#) beliefs”, and PWR includes them as “spiritual communities”. Thus, to be part of the interfaith movement being human is a sufficient condition.

In its forward movement, interfaith discourse implicitly or explicitly does not want to convert the other to one’s own tradition. Each belief teaches how to live a life and hence worthy of respect. Further, interfaith dialog is neither an attempt to compromise one’s beliefs, nor to create a new religion by mixing beliefs and traditions of various religions. Rather, it is an effort, remaining true to one’s

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interfaith_dialogue, accessed Dec. 12, 2024.

⁴ <https://parliamentofreligions.org/our-work/mission/>, accessed Dec. 30, 2024.

⁵ World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations (WCMIR) broacher; <https://wcmir.org/>.

beliefs, traditions, and values, bring solutions to common human problems. In short, interfaith “focuses on protecting human dignity, promoting inter-faith and inter-cultural understanding, social and economic justice, eradication of poverty and hunger, violence and oppression, and exploitation of earth and environmental resources”.⁶

The Qur'anic Foundations of Interfaith

In the following, the paper will explore five Qur'anic foundations of interfaith as follows: i) God wants diversity of religions, ii) Humankind is one family equally dignified, iii) Believers' behavior towards believers of other faiths, iv) God's *Sunna* (behavior) in this world and in hereafter, v) Social dimension of *Tawhīd* (oneness of God).

i) God Wants Diversity of Religions

In general, Muslims or non-Muslims may be surprised to learn that Qur'anic God wants diversity of religions. The Qur'an, on the other hand, is clear on this matter. We read in *Sūrah al-Mā'idah*, “... To each of you We prescribed a law [*shir'*] and a method [*min'hāj*], [i.e. a religious law and ritual/moral code]. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation (united in religion) [*ummatan wāhidatan*], but (He intended) to test you in what He has given you; so race to (all that is) good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will (then) inform you concerning that over which you used to differ” (5: 48).⁷ From the *āyah*, it is clear over time God gave different communities different ways of living life (*shir'* and *min'hāj*). He will judge each religious community based on the *shir'* and *min'hāj* given to them. The real issue is how one acts based on what one is given. From a practical point of view, it is impossible to determine in this world who is correct or incorrect, as believers of each faith are sure of their faith's truths. According to the *āyah*, God will make this determination on the Day of Judgment. So, why fight over it in this world? This does not mean that we shall not invite others to our tradition. Naturally, if we like something for us, we want to share it with others. The other is free to accept or reject our invitation. However, it should not be the cause of rage, anger, dislike, or fighting among us. According to the Qur'an, “There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion ...” (2: 256). Therefore, each religious community is free to choose their way of life. At another place in the Qur'an, God informs, “For each (religious following) is a direction (*waj'hatun*) toward which it faces (*muwallīhā*). So, race

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ All translations are from *Sahih International* available at <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp>.

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to (all that is) good (*khayrāt*). Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you forth (for judgement) all together. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent” (2: 148).

Let us explore *āyah* 5: 48 in detail.⁸ According to the *āyah*, if someone claims to have guidance, do they act upon it? For example, the Qur'an asks Christians (the People of the Gospel, *Injīl*) to “judge by what Allah has revealed therein [the Gospel]. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed – then it is those who are the defiantly disobedient (*fāsiqūn*)” (5: 47). The same is the case with Jews. The Qur'an asks Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)⁹, “But how is it that they come to you for judgement while they [Jews] have the Torah, in which is the judgement of Allah? ...” (5: 43). God wants human beings compete in doing good. Competition happens when there is diversity. Each community competes with the others to demonstrate their moral superiority. As far as pagan Arabs were concerned, God explained to the Prophet, “... if Allah had willed, they [pagan Arabs] would not have associated [*ashrakū*]. And We have not appointed you over them as a guardian, nor are you a manager over them” (6:107). Meaning the Prophet's job was to invite all to God, but the Prophet was not responsible if they accepted or rejected his message. This is the model set for future Muslims to follow till the Day of Judgment.

Āyah 5: 48 applies to each religious community and not only to Jews and Christians. “For each among you We have appointed a law and a way” indicates that different religious communities may have different ritual and legal formulations specifically ‘appointed’ for them by God, and that each religious community is independent of the laws of other such communities, even if the essential truths and principles of the religions are the same”.¹⁰

Quoting a scripture out of its literary context can lead to a meaning not intended by the text. So, let us consider the textual context of 5: 48. The context in '*āyāt*

⁸ For a detailed discussion of how this *āyah* is understood in the Muslim tradition, please see Nasr, Seyyad Hossein (Editor-in-Chief), *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017), 570; also available at: <https://ia601806.us.archive.org/16/items/TheStudyQuranANewTranslationAndCommentaryBySeyyedHosseinNasr/TheStudyQuranANewTranslationAndCommentaryBySeyyedHosseinNasr.pdf>

⁹ Peace be upon him (pbuh), a standard benediction for Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

¹⁰ Nasr, Seyyad Hossein (Editor-in-Chief), *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*, 570.

5: 41-47 of the *Sūrah* is religious cultural relativism. Cultural relativism assumes that each culture has a moral code that determines its idea of good and bad. Therefore, each culture should be judged by the ideals of their moral code.¹¹ The *'āyāt* 5: 41-47 specifically deal with the case of Jews and Christians, living with Muslims in Medina when this *āyah* was revealed.¹² Each *āyah* in 5: 42-47 start with a *wa* (and), thus connecting them together and a response to *āyah* 5: 41: "... If you are given this, take it; but if you are not given it, then beware ...". Muslim tradition informs the context of the *'āyāt* as the case of two Jews who committed adultery. The matter came to Jewish scholars to sentence their punishment. They instructed them to have the punishment decided by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) instead. The scholars told them, "... If you are given this [the sentence of flocking by the Prophet], take it; but if you are not given it [e.g. if given the sentence of death by stoning], then beware [i.e. not take it]". *Āyah* 42 gives the Prophet an option to decide the matter or opt out. The Prophet decided to sentence them. To which God commented, why should they ask you for sentencing when God's command was already in Torah (*āyah* 43), i.e., the punishment of adultery. Further, their prophets, Rabies (*rabāniyūn*) and scholars (*ahbāru*) used to enforce the punishment throughout their history (*āyah* 44). So, it is not a new case. In *āyah* 45 God reminds one punishment in the Torah: "And We ordained for them therein a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds is legal retribution. But whoever gives [up his right as] charity, it is an expiation for him. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed – then it is those who are the wrongdoers". The Prophet called for a Jewish scholar. He asked him the punishment of adultery in Torah. The scholar was among the truthful ones. He said it was death by stoning. The Prophet gave this judgment. Some corrupt Jewish scholars did not want to implement the punishment of adultery as stated in the Torah and their tradition. They hoped the Prophet may give a lenient punishment, for example a certain number of lashes.

In the above discussion, we may ask why Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not give a punishment based on his *Shir'* (law)? He was the new prophet and could

¹¹ One exception to this rule is that "the norms of a culture reign supreme *within the bounds of the culture itself*" and therefore cannot be forced upon other cultures. For example, "once German soldiers entered Poland, they became bound by the norms of Polish society – norms that obviously exclude the mass slaughter of innocent Poles". See Rachels, Jame and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* 6th (sixth) edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, (2010).

¹² On the same lines Buddhists, Confucianists, Sikhs, etc. may be judged by their books or oral tradition. According to the Qur'an, God sent in *every* nation (*ummah*) a messenger (16: 36), and hence each can be judged according to what they are given.

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have considered all previous laws in the Torah and Gospel annexed. Why was God concerned about bringing the case to the Prophet, when the punishment was already known in the Jewish tradition. God and the Prophet intended to decide the matter according to what Jews had, i.e., the Torah. Implying Jews were responsible to the Torah, even though a new prophet was in place as 5: 48 suggests. If a Jew became Muslim, the Qur'anic law would apply instead of the Torah. Historically, it is important to note that under Muslim political domination, in general, the Prophet's practice continued. Muslim kings or sultans appointed Jewish or Christian judges to decide their matters according to their religious laws.¹³

The Qur'an commands Muslims: "... And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from al-Masjid al-haram lead you to transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty" (5: 2). The context of this *āyah* is that during the time of the Prophet, Arab tradition required access to Ka'ba (the cube or the house of God in Mecca) to all. The polytheists of Mecca, at one point, stopped the Muslims to enter Ka'ba. This was a clear violation of Arab tradition and religious right. Despite the injustice, the Qur'an instructed Muslims not to transgress in their hatred for the polytheists. Meaning they should not stop cooperation in doing good and no cooperation in sin and aggression despite the injustice done to them. If they opposed this command, God threatened to punishment them.

ii) Humankind is one Family, Equally Dignified

The creation story of humankind in the Qur'an leaves no doubt that humankind is the progeny of one man and a woman – Adam and his spouse.¹⁴ Since we are progeny of one father and mother, we are one family. Further, God intrinsically endowed this family with the consciousness of one *Rabb* (Lord) and of good and evil. For example, "And (mention) when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], 'Am I not your Lord'? They said, 'Yes, we have testified'. (This) - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware'" (7: 172); "And (by) the [human] soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it (with discernment of) its wickedness [*fujūr*] and its righteousness

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSHYOm8Dwx4> accessed May 23, 2025.

¹⁴ The Qur'an does not mention Adam's wife name. Therefore, I chose not to mention it.

[*taqwā*]" (91: 7-8). Thus, humankind is one in its constitution (ontology) that is based on the nature (*fit'ra*) given to them by God and “no change should there be in the creation of Allah” (30: 30).

If humankind is one in its constitution, why do we see diversity of nations and tribes? This diversity is the will of God: “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples [*shu'ūban*] and tribes [*qabāil*] that you may know [*ta'āraf*] one another. Indeed, the most noble [*akram*] of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous [*atqā*] of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted [*khabīr*]" (49: 13). The purpose of diversity is to “foster recognition and understanding between different groups, not to be a source of division”. At another place, God equates diversity with His signs: “And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge” (30: 22). It would be quite boring if all humans were white or black. According to the Qur'an, righteousness is the only criteria that makes one person nobler than the other. In human society, progress takes place when there is diversity of thought and action.

The process through which human beings acquire diversity of nations, tribes, and beliefs is through culture. The accident of birth in a certain culture chooses our identity and beliefs. It is as if a human baby wears a mask of the culture in which they are born. However, it is important to note that the cultural mask does not come with the baby. It is secondary. It is external to our one humanity. The challenge is to realize that the glasses of our culture do not make us see various distinct human families.

In the creation story of Adam and his spouse, Adam gained dignity when God's created soul entered Adam. It was only then that the angels were to prostrate him (15: 29). Adam gained dignity because of the soul which enters every newborn baby. Therefore, dignity is the common heritage of humankind. The Qur'an specifically states, “And We have certainly honored (*karramnā*) the children of Adam (*banī ādam*) and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred (*faddalnā*) them over much of what We have created, with (definite) preference” (17: 70). Therefore, no human being should suffer discrimination against their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or nationality. Further, God created each human being His Caliph (viceregent) on the earth (2: 30). The Caliphate does not belong to the ones who submit to one God. It is also the common heritage of humankind. Therefore, as far as life on this earth is concerned, we are all in it together. No one knows who will succeed or fail the test of this life. God will make this decision on the Day of Judgement (2: 148). We need to be humble and not judge others. Being children of one human family, we need to take care of weak or suffering family members.

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iii) Believers' Behavior Towards Believers of Other Faiths

In the matters of religion and justice the Qur'an has specific instructions for the Muslims. The Qur'an recognizes the People of the Book's places of their worship. God destroys those people who would have "demolished monasteries (*sawāmi'*), churches (*biya'un*), synagogues (*salawātun*), and mosques (*masājid*) in which the name of Allah [God] is much mentioned" (22: 40). As for those who are not the People of the Book, God forbids Muslims to insult those who "invoke other than Allah [e.g., polytheists] lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus, *We [God] have made pleasing to every community their deeds*. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do" (6: 108; my emphasis). It is for this reason every religious community believes their deeds are acts of goodness, while in some cases they may hurt others. Human beings should remain humble, as the Qur'an explains, "Say, 'Each works according to his manner [*shākilah*, mold] but your Lord is most knowing of who is best guided in way'" (17: 84).

God commands believers, "be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So, follow not (personal) inclination (*hawā*), lest you not be just. And if you distort (your testimony) or refuse (to give it), then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted (*khabīr*)" (4: 135). If believers must give witness against themselves or their parents and relatives, shall they not stand up and give witness against persons or groups in Muslim community who commit injustice? Most certainly they should. Their God expects them to stand up against injustice anywhere and by anyone.

In the story of Adam and his spouse, God asked Satan (*ib'līs*) why he did not prostrate Adam whom He created *with His own hands* (38: 75; my emphasis)? God values Adam and his progeny and pays special attention to their creation. God has expectations from humankind (*banī ādam*). An example of this expectation is instructive in the story of Moses and Pharaoh. After God gave Moses all miracles and asked him to go to the Pharaoh, who had transgressed all bounds (20: 43), God gave Moses a last advice, "And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear (Allah)" (20: 44). If God had hope with a person like Pharaoh, would it not heed Muslims to be gentle and unjudgmental about others?

Another example of how Muslims should behave towards people who want to destroy them is in *Sūrah Isr'*. The *Sūrah* speaks to the dire situation Muslims faced in Mecca before migrating to Medina. With the death of the Prophet's

wife, Khadija, and his uncle, Abu Talib, the prophet lost his personal protection in Mecca. Anyone in Mecca could harm the Prophet. The Prophet tried to establish himself in Taif, a Meccan twin city, but he was severely persecuted and had to return Mecca under the protection of a friendly Meccan tribe. The Meccan polytheists were sure about their victory over the Prophet. The Muslims did not see any other way out. If they left Mecca, they would have to leave their property, businesses, and other resources in Mecca. Further, without the support of an external tribe they could not survive on their own. In this situation, they were praying for Meccan polytheists' destruction to which God commented: "man supplicates for evil as he supplicates for good, and man is ever hasty" (17: 11). The *āyah* is a general statement about human psychology. In the literary context of the passage, it speaks to the Muslims in Mecca. God complains Muslims were responsible to deliver His message to the Meccans. Instead of praying for Meccans' guidance they were asking evil for them.¹⁵ No doubt the Meccans had been persecuting them for more than ten years, but in God's calendar time for their punishment had not come yet. This was God's decision based on His knowledge and wisdom and not on human beings' desires. They must remain patient, hoping and praying for the wellbeing of the recipient community.

The one who calls towards God and does righteous deeds is the best in speech (41: 33). For such persons there is a particular command when evil or injustice falls upon them from the addressees of their message. They are told, "For not equal are the good (*hasanat*) deed and the bad (*sayiat*). Repel (evil) by that (deed) which is better; and there upon the one whom between you and him is enmity (will become) as though he was a devoted friend" (41: 34). There is another reason for adopting the commanded attitude. Satan succeeds when human beings fight: "And tell My servants (*ibād*) to say that which is best (*ahsan*). Indeed, Satan induces dissension [*nzagh*] among them. Indeed, Satan is ever, to mankind, a clear enemy" (17: 53). Meaning when human beings fight Satan wins.

iv) God's *Sunna* (Behavior) in This World and in Hereafter

The first three verses of the first *Sūrah*, *al-Fātiḥah*, of the Qur'an introduces Allah (God) as *Rabb* (Lord) of all the worlds, *Ar-Rahmān* (Intensely Merciful), *Ar-Rahīm* (Forever Merciful), and *Mālik* (Owner of the Day of Judgment). The four qualities of God apply to all human beings. It is important to note that the

¹⁵ Azmat, Tanveer. "A Reflection on *Sūrah* al-Isra'". *Pakistan Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 2024):181-212. <https://journals.iub.edu.pk/index.php/pjqs/article/view/2650>.

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Qur'an addresses the whole humanity (*an-nass*)¹⁶ and not Muslims only. Our concern in the following is about God being *Rahmān* and *Raḥīm* to all humanity, the difference between the two qualities of God, and their implications for humankind, and interfaith.

The root word for *Rahmān* and *Raḥīm* is *r-ḥ-m* which means mercy or compassion. In Arabic, this root word applies to womb or uterus. Just as in a womb a developing child is protected and provided all its needs, so is God protecting and providing all human beings in this world. The child in the womb does not know what it needs, but God fulfils its needs. This intense mercy for every human being relates to the concept of *Rahmān*. It is like a river flowing through mountains splashing with force and sound. This mercy does not care if the recipient of the mercy is a good, sinful, criminal, or an enemy of God. The *Rahmānīyah* (being *Rahmān*) “gives sustenance to believers, as well as disbelievers. His sun shines for all of them. His rain falls for all. He gave all of us the ability to think and make judgements”.¹⁷ In short, His mercy (*Rahmānīyah*) makes no “distinction on the basis of anyone’s prior performance” in this world.¹⁸

God’s *Raḥīmīyah* (being *Raḥīm*) works based on the previous performance of human beings in this temporary world in the Hereafter. This *Raḥīmīyah* will be permanent and for those who passed the test of their life in this world. As for those who fail the test, they will end up in Hell. God will not speak to them. “He will say, ‘Remain despised therein and do not speak to Me’” (23: 108). They ignored God’s messages through His prophets and the books of guidance, so will God ignore them in the life after death. Another group who “exchange(s) the covenant of Allah and their (own) oaths for a small price will have no share in

¹⁶ Besides human beings, Jinn are also the addressee of the Qur'an. See for example, 55: 14-16.

¹⁷ Khan, Irfan A., *Reflections on the Qur'an: Understanding sūrah al-Fatiha and al-Baqarah*, (Markfield, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), 37.

¹⁸ Also see 2: 126, “... (Allah) said. ‘And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination’”. The context of the *āyah* is prophet Ibrahim’s prayer for Mecca that it be a city of peace and plenty. To which God replied, his prayer was accepted for the believers, but non-believe who will live there God would have enjoyment of this life for a little bit for them. However, it is generally applicable to all who reject God.

the Hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment” (3: 77). Thus, God being merciful (*Rahmān*) will show His mercy as a *Rahīm* in the Hereafter, where “dirty and corrupt human beings will be separated from His obedient servants”. Before this judgment in this world, believers or non-believers are in the same boat. A non-believer may turn into a believer and vice versa. No one knows the result of their performance. As the Qur’an notes, “Each works according to his manner, but your Lord is most knowing of who is best guided in way” (17: 84).

One may wonder if God’s judgment and reward will happen in the Hereafter, why God destroyed many nations in this world? *Āyah* 58 in *Sūrah* 17 informs, God eventually destroys every city: “And there is no city [*qarya*] but that We will destroy [*h’likū*] it before the Day of Resurrection or punish [*mu’adhibūhā*] it with a severe punishment [*’adhāb*]. That has ever been in the Register inscribed [*al-kitābi mastūran*]”. This destruction becomes immanent when a prophet is present in a nation and the nation rejects the prophet. God decided to judge individuals on the Day of Judgement: “And all of them are coming to Him on the Day of Resurrection alone [for judgment]” (19: 95). Thus, Qur’anic God judges nations in this world and individuals on the Day of Judgment.

If God is *Rahmān* to all humanity in this world, why shall believers of one kind or the other treat each other with contempt and hate. Qur’anic God allows freedom of religion (2: 256). Shall it not heed humankind to treat each other, irrespective of their faith, with forgiveness and kindness?

v. *Tawhīd* and Its Social Dimension

The essence of Qur’anic message is *Tawhīd* (oneness of Allah), i.e. He is the Lord of the whole creation. No one has any share in His Lordship. The sharing of God’s Lordship happens when some people try to become lords over other human beings. In its social dimension, *Tawhīd* implies “saying ‘no’ to all lordship of Man over Man and becoming God’s servants alone”.¹⁹ One can sum up Qur’anic history as a history of societies where due to technological development and economic prosperity they become affluent. Then their rich people become lords of less fortunate. This leads to the destruction of whole societies except for a few people. For example, we read in 17: 16: “And when We intend to destroy a city, We command its affluent (*mut’rafīn*) but they

¹⁹ Khan, Irfan A, *Reflections on the Qur’an: Understanding sūrah al-Fatiha and al-Baqarah*, 771.

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defiantly disobey therein;²⁰ so the word comes into effect upon it, and We destroy it with (complete) destruction”. The purpose of *Tawhīdīc* movement is to establish a human society where “the rich and the powerful are concerned with their poor and weak brothers and sisters”.²¹ Interfaith addresses this issue by working together to take care of the weak and oppressed in a society.

Is Interfaith *Da'wah*?

The above Qur'anic foundations of interfaith point to a Qur'anic God who encourages diversity of religions so that human beings compete in doing good. This God is the creator of all humanity and loves all of them, at least in this world. He wants human beings to work together in doing good and forbidding evil. This sentiment is so extreme that God ordained Muslims to continue cooperation in doing good works with the Meccan polytheists even at the height of hostilities when the Meccans stopped them entering Ka'ba for a religious purpose (5: 2).

The Qur'an commands to cooperate with others (Muslims or non-Muslims) in doing good and forbidding evil: “... And cooperate [*ta'āwan*] in righteousness [*bir*] and piety (*taqwā*), but do not cooperate in sin (*ism*) and aggression [*dwan*, enmity]. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty” (5: 2); “(Such believers are) the repentant, the worshippers, the praisers (of Allah), the travelers (for His cause), those who bow and prostrate (in prayer), those who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and those who observe the limits (set by) Allah. And give good tidings to the believers” (9: 112); “And let there be (arising) from you a nation inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful” (3: 104); “You are the best nation produced (as an example) for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah ...” (3: 110). Thus, Muslims are commanded to do *ta'āwan* (cooperation) in doing good together and with others. One of the foundations of interfaith – cooperate for the good of people.

Cooperation (*ta'āwan*) cannot be done without knowing each other (*ta'āraf*). According to the Qur'an: “ ... [God] made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another [*ta'āraf*]. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is

²⁰ At other places in the Quran, it is the eminent (*mala*) of the society who behave arrogantly (*is'takbar*) who eventually lead their people to destruction (7: 90-91).

²¹ Khan, Irfan A, *Reflections on the Qur'an: Understanding sūrah al-Fatiha and al-Baqarah*, 771.

the most righteous of you ...” (49: 13). The *āyah* implies the only thing that distinguishes one human being over another is piety in the sight of God. Hence, interfaith is a vehicle that fulfils two basic Qur'anic commands, i.e. *ta'āraf* and *ta'āwan*.

We see in the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that at about age twenty, when he was not yet a prophet, he took part in the formation of a pact called *Hilf al-Fudul* (حلف الفضول, League of the Virtuous). It “was an alliance or confederacy created in *Mecca* in the year 590 AD, to establish justice for all through collective action, especially for those who were not under the protection of any clan. Because of Muhammad's role in its formation, the alliance plays a significant role in *Islamic ethics*”.²²

Let us explore the Qur'anic concept of *Da'wah* in the following. According to the Qur'an, “Invite [*ud' 'u*] to the way of your Lord with wisdom (*hik'mat*) and good instruction (*wal-maw'izati l-hasana*), and argue (*wajādil'hum*) with them in a way that is best [*ahsanu*].” (16:125). The root word of inviting (*ud' 'u*) is *d- 'w* from which *Da'wah* is derived. Thus, the *āyah* specifically address how one should do *Da'wah*. The invitation used in the *āyah* is a command. It is not a suggestion or advice to Muslims. It is a Muslim's duty. But invite the other to what? Invite to the way of your Lord. This implies not inviting to your nation, ethnicity, culture, etc. Inviting to God means inviting people to the worship of one God. As noted in the above, interfaith is not about inviting others to their faith. If we take part in interfaith with a hidden intention to posterize, we are not being honest. We are deceiving the other under the banner of interfaith. It is for this reason, Muslims and some others miss the point of interfaith, i.e., know each other and their traditions to work together for the benefit of humanity. Such people in their heart incorrectly feel they delivered their duty of *Da'wah*. Not only do they fail to do *Da'wah*, they also fail to do interfaith as their main goal was to work together for the common good.

To do *Da'wah*, we must have the intention of doing *Da'wah* and make it clear to the other that the purpose of their discourse is to invite them to the worship of one God. The invitation to the way of God requires wisdom, good instruction, and argument in the best way, according to the 16: 125. While there are two positive attributes to the invitation, with wisdom and good instruction, there is a negative aspect, quarrel (*jadil*) in the best way. Dictionary defines *Jadal* to mean “quarrel, argument, dispute, [or] debate”.²³ Quarreling or arguing involves

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilf_al-Fudul accessed April 4, 2025.

²³ Wehr, Hans, <https://www.ghazali.org/books/wehr-cowan-76.pdf> accessed April 26, 2025.

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intention to show other is incorrect. It is not a discourse between two parties just to present their cases. Rather, there is a mutual tussle to prove the other wrong. Not humiliating the other but with reason and civility. This is in line with 29: 46, "And do not argue with the People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians] except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say [to them], 'We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims (in submission) to Him'". The People of the Book who become unjust in *Da'wah* discourse, the Muslims should nicely separate themselves from the dialog.

An extreme form of *jadal* is *mubāhalah* ("trial through prayer") that took place in the tenth year of the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) preaching in Medina. The Christians of Najran came to argue with the Prophet about the true nature of Jesus. The Prophet received them in his mosque. When the time of their prayer came, the Prophet allowed them to pray in the mosque. There was a heated debate between the two. They both tried their best to show their understanding of Jesus was correct. When no conclusion was reached, the Prophet was commanded to do *mubāhalah*, Qur'an 3: 61: "Then whoever argues with you about it after (this) knowledge [the Qur'an] has come to you - say, 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate earnestly (together) [*mubāhalah*] and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars (among us)'. The Christian delegation refused *mubāhalah*. However, the Prophet "accorded to them a treaty guaranteeing all their civil rights and the free exercise of their religion".²⁴ There is a lesson for us in this example. The Prophet treated them with respect, opened his mosque to them, and took care of their needs during their stay in Medina. The two parties quarreled fireclay through rational arguments. When the Christians refused *mubāhalah*, the Prophet was still kind and generous to them.

The above does not mean that *jadal* is a necessary part of *Da'wah*. The Qur'an commands to do *Da'wah* with wisdom and good instruction. However, there could be a time when *jadal* may become necessary and we may need to pursue it, just like the case of our prophet and the Christian delegation from Najran. Similarly, the above does not imply without open intention *Da'wah* is not possible. Sometimes an innocent smile may win the heart of the other. The point is that in the context of interfaith, implied, or hidden intention of *Da'wah*

²⁴ Asad, Muhammad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar, Spain: Dar Al-Andalus, 1984), 76.

damages the work of interfaith. With *ta'āraf* and *ta'āwan* we get to know each other and that may inspire someone to get interested in the other's religion. However, it should be an unintentional result. The problem arises when one or both parties have a hidden agenda of converting or delivering the message of their religion implicitly, they feel satisfied that they achieved the purpose of their meeting. Whereas the purpose of the interfaith meeting was to get to know each other and do good for our common human problems. No doubt the difference is slight, but on the one hand, it changes the dynamics of interfaith purpose, and on the other hand, it fails to meet the responsibility of *Da'wah*.

Conclusion

From Qur'anic perspective, interfaith meets two requirements of the Qur'an: getting to know each other (*ta'āraf*) and joining hands (*ta'āwan*) in doing common good. Therefore, interfaith is a necessary and important activity in which Muslims should take part. However, it will be a mistake if we believe by doing interfaith, we are also delivering the responsibility of *Da'wah*. *Da'wah* is an intentional and open activity that calls humanity to worship one God.

Interfaith movement is one of the most important movements of our time. To participate in it the necessary and sufficient condition is to be a human being with any kind of belief or no belief. It allows human beings to come together and get to know each other and their traditions. It not only tolerates but celebrates others and their traditions. It is an invitation to work together for common human problems and sufferings. Both the Qur'an and the *Sunna* of the Prophet ask us to engage in this activity as noted in this article. It has the potential to become a moral force where the people of different religions may stand up together against injustice anywhere. It can function as a third-party moral force in our global world for the oppressed people. As the Qur'an reminds us, "And what is (the matter) with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and (for) the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, 'Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper'" (4: 75)?

Da'wah, on the other hand, requires calling people to the worship of one God. It is theological in nature. It calls humanity toward the reality of this world: "... life is not but amusement [*la'b*] and diversion [*lahw*]; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear [*ittaqā*] Allah, so will you not reason"?