Interfaith Dialogue: an Islamic approach

Dr Dzavid Haveric

2013

Contents

PART 1: Interfaith dialogue: its meaning in a general context p. 2

PART 2: Golden Rule: source for a mutual respect of various faiths p. 5

PART 3: Interfaith dialogues from an Islamic point of view p. 9

PART 4: Instead of a conclusion p. 14

PART 5: Bibliography p.15
Interfaith dialogue: its meaning in a general context

To begin with the term ‘dialogue’ which itself should be understood in its very basic meaning. The root of the word *dialogue* derives from Greek *dialogos*, from *dia* and *legein*, to speak (i.e. ‘conversation’), also, from *dialegesthai*, ‘to discuss’; and from Latin *dialogus*, ‘conversation’. It means the effort of talking to share a meaning with someone. *Dialego* also means both ‘to talk about, and to investigate’. Those who participate in dialogue need the topic of talks or investigations. The term dialogue suggests that there is more than one person involved, but the number of participants depends on the topic and the people concerned with it. Individuals and/or groups of various faiths and/or faith-based organisations engage in dialogue (‘dialogue between followers of different faith traditions’), which is commonly called the *interfaith dialogue* (‘dialogue between different faiths’).

Interfaith dialogue between members of different religious traditions in the 21st century will have a decisive role regarding the destiny of the mankind of modern world. The ecumenical interfaith movement is quite indispensable in this day and age. So, in recent times faithful persons of different religious traditions have gradually come to the conviction that they do not hold such a secret entirely unto themselves, but rather they have very important aspects to learn from each other. For that reason they are approaching their encounters within the same religion and with other religions not primarily in the teaching mode, but more importantly the learning mode – seeking together to find more of the meaning of life and values of cultural-religious diversities. Our minds determine the extent to which we can be potential sharers in a common enterprise and potential *interlocutors* (‘participants in conversation’). It determines, at least generally, what practices and discourses are achievable as well as provides a basis for communication, mutual understanding and social cohesion.

Religion serves as a unifying bond that holds people together and provides a basis for identity vis-à-vis non-members of the faith. Dialogue may reflect both inner unity and recognized plurality. Religious traditions might facilitate mutual understanding, trust and dialogue. The contemporary interfaith dialogue is gaining a firm interfaith, intercultural and intercivilisational justification. However, in our day, interfaith dialogue needs to be understood in a new, modern and appropriate context. At the start it is very important to make a clear distinction between debate and dialogue – clearly, ‘debate is *not* dialogue’. While, dialogue seeks adjustment and understanding, debating involves argument and polarisation. The first make neighbours, the second alienate them. Interfaith dialogue is neither ‘just chit-chat’, nor ‘competition’ between participants in their cross-cultural encounters, nor the imposition of one-sided views. It is *not* a ‘victory’ of one over another; it is rather a fruitful exchange of knowledge, information and experience. However, in a dialogue, participants are *not* aspiring to agree on everything, nor to achieve a consensus. Nor is it about compromise. Furthermore, interfaith dialogue cannot serve as a campaign against other religions and people. Also, a dialogue is not a public ‘discussion’, or even less it is a dispute.
among people. Similarly, ‘one-sided arguing’ in its strict meaning may be summarised as an empty amount of monologues.

The ‘interfaith conversation’ is largely dialogical. Dialogue is a genuine conversation between two people. It is a conversation in which two participants or groups seek to express their opinions precisely and truthfully and to listen with care and respect to their counterparts. In dialogue one must listen carefully, and share opinions with careful thought and patience. Also, difference can stand at the beginning of conversations, but should not stand at their end. A good question, which is acceptable in terms of manner and intention, inspires the person who answering and provides ‘food for thought’. Asking is a skill, and answering satisfactorily is a virtue. Education through interfaith dialogue is an interactive process through which people learn about and learn from a variety of faiths. The term dialogue assumes and goes on from the faith of each participant. Each participant in interfaith dialogue should express his/her own opinion based upon his/her conviction and belief. Stubborn parochial views and interpretations out of context often mislead conversations. In a dialogue, no idea can be forced on the other side and ‘each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as possible in an attempt to understand the other’s position’.

Dialogue requires listening to and hearing from other religions, cultures and civilisations and the significance of listening to others is by no means less than talking to others. It may be actually more important. Without active listening, the whole dialogue is destined to failure. An important prerequisite for dialogue is, at least, some mutual knowledge about parties who participate in the dialogue. It is also recommended that one participant should learn the name of the other participant in the dialogue and vice versa. During their conversation one participant in the dialogue should mention the name of the other participant. It is good manners to call a participant by name and title in an official conversation - that gives attention and respect to participants. Besides mutual respect and attention, interfaith dialogue comprises a range of characteristics, such as honesty, openness and mutual acceptance. Furthermore, in such fair-minded conditions talking and listening create more open and productive conversation; one side addresses the other side, and speech is exchanged.

On the one hand, the history of dialogue is as old as human culture and civilisation, while on the other it is something ‘innovative’. Interfaith dialogue, as the term is used today to characterise encounters between persons and groups with different religions, is something ‘quite new under the sun’, illuminated Swidler. It intends to form a new relationship and unity among the existing religions, a unity in which each religion will acknowledged without being dissolved. Contemporary interfaith dialogue includes various interconnected aspects such as the need to cultivate understanding, to initiate communication, to work on particular issues of mutual concern, to correct stereotypes, to articulate similarities and differences, and to facilitate means of witness and collaboration. However, dialogue is not only talking about themes where there may be common ground or where we need to understand diverse approaches to the same topics. It also includes exploring a set of religious concepts unique to one faith group. Interlocutors’ contributions to interfaith understanding include a vision of a creative and enriching relationship between members of various faiths.
Nowadays interfaith dialogue has become more urgent than ever before. Tolerance and dialogue are a realistic and challenging response to our present social conditions. Interfaith dialogue, as a formal talk, is designed towards developing greater understanding between various religions. Indeed interfaith dialogue is just one means of creating a greater understanding between different religious communities, but it is possibly the most potent. It takes place across a range of different levels. It also takes place regularly on a local or grass roots level.

In fact, true dialogue in its broader settings should cover many aspects and ‘bring together all relevant sides’. Bridges are instruments of bringing different people, religions and cultures together. Indeed bridges are a necessary part of life and they are particularly valuable in a religious sense. They can function as interfaith connectors between people of entirely diverse viewpoints and world views. Bridge-building can take various forms such as interfaith dialogue, especially in multicultural and multifaith societies. In this way, to fulfil their peace-building missions in the light of true nature, different religious representatives must be on the platform of genuine ecumenical dialogue. Dialogue in such a desirable context is based on freedom and free will. Interfaith conversation is a framework in which people articulate their support for the same universal religious freedom. Successful dialogue has to be carried out with sincere respect for the freedom of the people of other religions. It also forms a positive relationship and unity among the existing faiths. People engaged in an interaction and conversations need to be aware of the particularities of individual experience and the limitations of interpretations. Through dialogue, speaking and listening shape a conversation; both sides can exchange their ideas as they are able to address their experiences. When participating in a dialogue people should be open to the diversity of others’ experiences and their religious interpretations.

One performs a dialogue only when one respects the other party and regards the other party as equal. In a dialogue, one should respect the independent identity of the other side and his or her independent ideological and cultural integrity. Only in such a case, can dialogue be a preliminary step leading to peace, security and justice. Dialogue in ecumenical spirit brings us up against the phenomenon of fundamentalism and religious exclusivism, which appears to be intolerant of other ideas, beliefs or philosophies. Religious traditions might also facilitate mutual understanding, trust and dialogue. If different scholars and students interested in religious issues have better knowledge of other religions they would be in a much better position to negotiate but also to carry on interfaith dialogue. However, dialogue is not only talking about themes where there may be common ground or where we need to understand diverse approaches to the same topics. It also includes exploring a set of religious concepts unique to one faith group.

Today, we cannot discuss religion seriously, both locally and internationally, without being aware of contemporary time and the context of a ‘conversation’ with modern secularism. The critics of religion may actually lead us to a deeper appreciation of religion. Secularisation has come to mean not that societies are irreligious, but that they are religious and spiritual in new and different ways. Moreover, pluralist societies are not godless. Religious pluralism and tolerance are among the basic fundamentals of a civil society. Religious pluralism creates
the possibility of tolerance and the co-existence of adherents of various religions and cultures.\textsuperscript{46} Within a plural society interfaith activity can help us to learn more about others, their beliefs and values. It can help eliminate ignorance, stereotyping and prejudice.\textsuperscript{47} In this way, Farid Esack outlined that religious pluralism is ‘the creation of an environment in which everyone is safe and free to be human and to serve God’.\textsuperscript{48}

In constructing and fostering a culture of peace, an important and genuine insight is ‘to be religious means to be interreligious’.\textsuperscript{49} Accordingly, we need to have reflective interreligious identities with a global vision, which will be able not only to promote our own cultural-religious uniqueness and to reflect on the essential nature of religious practice and expression, but to desire to talk and participate with followers of other faiths and their religious rituals and/or ceremonies.\textsuperscript{50} It will, then, create a climate of interreligious harmony, social cohesion and a culture of peace which must be based on social justice and human rights observance.\textsuperscript{51} By fostering a culture of peace, people also promote a culture of dialogue. Each aspect of such a culture would contribute to peoples’ mutual learning, building sophisticated relationships with each other and the surrounding natural environment, and developing a better projection for their shared future. A culture of peace initiates a widespread and profound culture of dialogue to distribute understandings and cooperation around different issues.\textsuperscript{52}

To understand the human is to understand humanity’s depth and width. As human beings tend to be both local and global in their orientation, seeking a common ethic is vital. Hence, humanity is the essential identity. Today people need to develop a greater sense of unity, a greater awareness of humankind living on one planet.\textsuperscript{53} In this way, participation in interfaith dialogue also increasingly leads to ‘intercivilizational dialogue’.\textsuperscript{54} The importance of interfaith, intercultural and intercivilisational dialogue is obvious in light of the fact that today almost all societies are plural. This call for a common understanding of basic values, norms and orientation is accepted, confirmed and followed by all groups in society.\textsuperscript{55} Having now outlined the interrelated aspects of the interfaith dialogue it is important to search commonalities, particularly reflected in the Golden Rule.

PART 2

Golden Rule: source for a mutual respect of various faiths

A system of religious beliefs serves as a ‘road map’, a guide to coping with the physical and social environment and it also charts paths for interfaith dialogue.\textsuperscript{1} Religious belief and customs have both historical and social character and particular beliefs and practices are constituted or formed by traditions in which they are established.\textsuperscript{2} Different people take different paths in their lives, but they often realise their commonalities. It is very important to recognise and respect that we all have a destiny together with people of different faiths, races, cultures and traditions, both locally and globally.\textsuperscript{3} Side by side, various religions have
searched and still search for a path to fruitful dialogue in today’s multi-religious world. For all their diversities, there are certain properties that most of religions hold in common - divine ground from which humankind has sprung. Indeed they contain some versions of the Golden Rule. These represent significant commonalities on which to build in promoting interfaith dialogue and the nonviolent resolution of differences, pointed out Johnston. The principles for dialogue are common for all religions. And they are in accord with the Golden Rule, too. Muslims, Christians, Jews, and adherents of other faiths, can learn from each other and from the world the need for a new way of looking at the problematic realities that confront us as human beings. They commonly can reach out to each other and share some of the deepest mystical perceptions of God. Going back in history, the prophets, mystics, philosophers and poets were advanced in exploring common values, which we need to rediscover. In our global village, we can no longer afford a parochial or exclusive vision. To discover that our own faith is profoundly in agreement with others is an encouraging experience.

No religion has proven itself ‘superior’ to the others. Religious diversity is not only a given, but a happy given of human history. It is routine to say that religions are the recognition of the elements of sacredness in the world. The acknowledgment of religious pluralism shapes the foundation for interreligious dialogue. There are three important interfaith aspects: (1) recognition of difference; (2) acknowledgement of the right to difference, and (3) acceptance of plurality in belief. In this way, faith, within a multi-faith society, is where a central disposition is accepted, trusted and employed. Also, there is a wide diversity of theological points of view, particularly in pluralistic societies. So, pluralism is evident not only between major religious denominations, but also within the same denominations. Brislin argued that pluralistic societies encourage and/or tolerate religious heterogeneity with respect to the values and customs of different groups. Also, religions of the world all wish that the one, single test of any kind of faith is that it must show deeper understanding and ‘practical compassion’ - compassion demands that we ‘feel with the other’.

The Golden Rule is the most essential requirement for dialogue: Love requires not just that we do good deeds to others but that ‘we respect them, affirm them, listen to them, and be ready to learn from them’. The Golden Rule is the embodiment of Universal Love and it is also a creative force for good in our lives and affairs. It is about ‘loving and caring relationships’. The truth of the Golden Rule would be revealed only if we put it into practice in our daily life. The fact is that every religion, be it Islam or any other, aims at teaching people love, brotherhood and humanity. Various faith traditions work mutually on a variety of social issues as their common testament to many of the shared values. Different religious traditions cooperate on issues such as poverty, unemployment, industrial rights, indigenous rights, land mines, nuclear testing and asylum seekers. It also includes cultural and economic, literary and artistic, intellectual and political, legal and legislative as well as safety and security-related issues. In order to build a bridge and cooperation between various faiths and support their interaction, it is crucially important to include an ecumenical approach and the Golden Role. The Golden Rule is the opposite of greediness, egotism, hatred and violence.
Although world religions vary greatly in their individual system of beliefs, practices and traditions, one thing that they all share is the Ethic of Reciprocity, or as it is commonly known, the Golden rule. For the present and future, a very significant example in relation to multi-faith understanding and respect is related to the Golden Rule with its wealth of thoughtful and balanced resources that derive from it. Indeed the Golden Rule represents an unavoidable source in any serious consideration toward mutual respect and understanding. Many contemporary scholars maintain that if we could line up the ethical codes of all the religious traditions of the world, we would find, as it were, a ‘golden thread’ raining profoundly through all of them. In the Western culture it is called the Golden Rule. It means: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’; or the Silver Rule, which means ‘Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you’. Indeed, to re-discover that our faith is so deeply in accord with others is an affirming experience.

The Golden Rule has an enduring value for humanity. Every religion has some version of the Golden Rule. The Golden Role implies very concrete standards to which we humans should and wish to hold firm when they concern, for instance welfare, individuals or humanity as a whole. It profoundly suggests a better world order, human understanding and togetherness. ‘All humanity is a single body’. This also means that all humankind is a family – brothers and sisters, equal before God. Through the historical and multi-religious context, there are the following versions of enduring values of the Golden Rule:

- Zoroaster (625–551 BC): ‘That which is good for all and any one, for whomsoever – that is good for me … what I hold good for self, I should for all’.

- Confucius (551-479 BC): ‘Do not to others what you do not want done to yourself’.

- In Taoism: ‘Regard your neighbour’s gain as your own gain and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss’.

- Buddha (563–483 BC): Comparing oneself to others in such terms as ‘Just as I am so are they, just as they are so am I, one should neither kill nor cause others to kill’.

- The Hindu epic, the Mahabharata (3rd century BC): ‘Do not to others what you do not wish done to yourself; and wish for others too what you desire and long for yourself – this is the whole of the Dharma; heed it well’.

- In Jainism: ‘One should treat all beings as he himself would be treated’.

- In Judaism, the Book of Leviticus expresses: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.

- In Christianity, Jesus expresses: ‘Do for others what you want them to do for you: this is the meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teaching of the prophets’.
In Islam, Muhammad expresses: ‘You should like for others what you like for yourself; and what you feel painful for yourself, hold that as painful for all others too’.

In Baha’i: ‘Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself’.

In Sikhism: ‘I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all’.

In African Traditional Religions: ‘One who goes to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts’.

In Native Spirituality: ‘We are as much alive as we keep the Earth alive’.

In Unitarianism: ‘We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part’.

The above selections from the sacred writings reveal how often religions, originating in very different culture and in ages far apart, teach similar doctrines and similar principles of ethics. Hence, in the context of the Golden Rule, people find common values that transcend differences and encourage the well-being of all humanity. For more than millennia, the Golden Rule encourages people to extend their concern beyond themselves and to embrace a greater understanding and deeper respect for others. In a similar way it is possible to explore many other sacred messages which strongly support peace, humanity, social justice and harmony, compassion, solidarity and prosperity. Different religions with their universality and messages are certainly not on the edge of disappearing and indeed they continue to show their great diversity and significance in the modern world. ‘Every religion emphasizes human improvement, love, and respect for others, sharing other people’s suffering and fostering peace. On these lines every religion had more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal’, stated the Dalai Lama. For instance, peace (shalom, salaam, eirene and pax) is a central feature in the system of most religions.

All religions claim that God has created different communities, different scriptures, laws and ways of life to live in peace and harmony with each other. The differences of laws and ways of life should not become a cause of disharmony and differences. What is desirable for all human beings is to live with these differences and vie with one another for good deeds. Also, the growth of knowledge that shares common values is to be found in the growth of true ideas within the context of different positive views. Whenever we speak, that is to say, the breath of our mouths, beliefs, thoughts and feelings exhibit the picture of the multi-religious world. For instance, Flugel in Tolstoy’s work A Calendar of Wisdom points out the following:

There is one general principle which has developed from the early period of the life of humanity to the present day. In the depth of all religions there flows the general, unifying truth…Let Persians bear their taovids, Jews wear their caps, Christians wear their cross, Muslim wear their sickle – moon, but we have to remember that all these are only outer signs and the general essence of all
religions is to love your neighbour, and that this is requested by Manuf, Zaraostra, Buddha, Moses, Socrates, Jesus, St Paul, Muhammad.

As a final point, Feisal Abdul Rauf in Similarities Stressed In Interfaith Dialogue asserted that ‘the most important thing is that all faith traditions believe in the Golden Rule. They believe in the same principles of righteousness and ethics...the fundamental principles of all faith communities are identical’.

The value of various religions and communities is that they may compete and participate with each other in goodness. Indeed, various faith traditions are unique resources of shared values such as compassion and justice. Long-term attention and cooperation will create favourable conditions and common values can eliminate the development of prejudice. It is always supported by productive cooperation and frequent interaction.

That mutual life developed various forms of reciprocated human relations in which everyone can have an inner identity, which includes religion and/or culture and customs. Also, various people who live and work together, interacting, communicating, cooperating and sharing the same basic values of the civilisation, religion, culture and circumstance of their historical lives and the past. Conclusively, the God Almighty teaches us that our future might be better than our past, but also the common reason tells us that we cannot change our past, nor forget it but we can, with God’s help, shape our better future.

PART 3

Interfaith dialogue from an Islamic point of view

Islam is a dynamic, multifaceted and complex religion. The principles on which the Islamic system is based are constant, unalterable and universal ones originating in Divine revelation. The characteristic of Islamic doctrine by which the religion of Islam occupies its particular position in world history can be recognised by its unique teaching on Divine nature, the origin of the universe and the extent of eminence in it, the Divine guidance of man and the volume of human freedom, the nature of life after death, the nature and meaning of Divine worship, human nature, the way of the acquisition of wealth and its maintenance and the way of human reasoning and the interpretation of Divine will. The word salam, means peace, and has a close affinity with the word Islam. Hence, the concepts of peace, tranquillity, harmony, are in tune with integration and serenity, and form an integral part of Islam. Ilm, or knowledge, is an important concept of Islam. The urge ‘to know’ transformed Islam from its desert origins into a world civilisation. Knowledge depends, in essence, on the faculties of hearing, seeing and reasoning. The Qur’an explains that reason is a blessing which is to a large extent indispensable in arriving at proper judgements. Besides religious knowledge, the Qur’an puts an equal stress on natural science, psychology, humanities, and other areas of knowledge. Islam is also a path that guides Muslims to God by connecting logic, ear, eyes, tongue and heart to divine light. During the course of history Islam developed its initial capacity to meet challenges creatively. Among Muslims a great variety of opinions
developed with a broad spectrum of communities, cultures, attitudes, interpretations and feelings.\textsuperscript{10}

Throughout history there were many interfaith dialogues and cross-cultural encounters that included Islam and Muslims. However, there are some groups, including those within Islam, which obstructed endeavours for dialogue and understanding, disrupting the dreams of peace and friendship.\textsuperscript{11} Their visions of Islam and other religions happen to be parochial-based with short-sightedness and narrow minds. In spite of this, there is also a growing challenge and need for a dialogue in which Muslims take an active part. But, it is also important to cultivate a more appropriate and balanced view of Islam.\textsuperscript{12} It is because the spirit of Islam is opposed to isolation and exclusiveness.\textsuperscript{13} Many Muslim scholars across the world are engaged in interfaith dialogue. Their knowledge of Islam and the need to cooperate with non-Muslims motivates their commitment to interfaith dialogue and activities. Their engagement and interaction with various groups contributes to the promotion of the spirit of respect, kindness and generosity as well as diversity.

The first principal source of Islam is the holy Qur’an, and there is the second source of authority in Islam; that is the Sunna or the Hadith (i.e. report of the sayings or deeds of the Prophet Muhammad transmitted by his companions). Islam made learning and the scientific pursuit for knowledge a religious obligation. By the aid of the Qur’an and the Sunna, Muslims contribute to the light of humanity, knowledge and spiritual enrichment.\textsuperscript{14} It is also important to include Sufism, an ascetic and spiritual movement in Islam, which developed one of the most profound forms of philosophy.\textsuperscript{15} The Sufis seek to transcend the world of forms, to discover profound encounters with other traditions, and also to find the crucial source for the understanding in depth of other faiths nowadays through their spiritual journey ‘from multiplicity to Unity, and from the particular to the Universal’, underlined by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.\textsuperscript{16}

The holy Qur’an and the Hadith provide a framework for Muslims’ self-understanding and their understanding of others. The Qur’an offers very clear guidelines and encouragement for Muslims to engage in interfaith dialogue. For Muslims a constructive dialogue is not only permitted it is commended.\textsuperscript{17} There are several places in the Hadith, which also reflect Muslim engagement with non-Muslims and respectful treatment in these encounters.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, the Qur’an is a basis of wide ethical principles and the core of the Islamic message that is comparable with the central values of other monotheistic traditions as well as in accord to broad humanistic values.\textsuperscript{19} The Quran is also a source of inspiration for interfaith dialogue and the approach and methodology of dialogue are also explained in the Qur’an:\textsuperscript{20}

‘O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we take not, from among ourselves lords and patrons other than God...’ (Qur’an, 3:64)

‘For you is your religion, and for me is my religion’. (Qur’an, 109: 6)

‘Speak good words to all people’. (Qur’an, 2:83)
‘Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best’. (Qur’an, 16: 125)

In relation to demonstrating the virtue of searching for truth and goodness as well as imparting knowledge and communicating with good manners to others, individually or in masses, the following Hadith also stated:  

‘Talk in the manner they can understand’.

‘Make it easy and not hard, delight and do not incite the aversion’.

Dialogue also comprises disagreement and argument, but always in a respectful and careful way. A prerequisite in such a dialogue is that both interlocutors and/or communities should learn about each other, but not through sources that are critical or conflicting. Kind talk is a distinguished source of success that leads to the foundation of a refined society. God also commands, people to talk in a low voice – ‘lower the voice’ (Qur’an 31: 19) – because it is a sign of kind talk. The voices of the quiet Muslim men and women are also dedicated to the ideas of peace and tolerance. They commonly believe that they have something good, decent and helpful to offer in the way people live. At all times, Muslims must show the best of manners and wisdom when speaking of faith to others. Indeed, God commands Muslims in their encounters to behave towards non-Muslims justly, respectfully and to show kindness to them. God also commands Muslims to listen to all points of view and survey all schools of thought, without rejecting one point of view except after proper understanding and thorough investigation – ‘they should adopt the best of what they have’. The Qur’an (39: 18) states: ‘Those who hear others’ talk and follow the best thereof – such are those whom God hath guided, and those endued with understanding’. It reflects diversity of thought within Islam, but also Islamic openness to plurality and talks. Hence, diversity within Islam itself opened avenues for the plurality of views.

In the Islamic context, the basic principle is tolerance, assuming the Holy of the other religions to be ‘Holy’, their prophets to be prophets of God and their revelations to come from God. Secondly, Islam supports endeavours of all faiths under the single roof for constructive dialogue and interrelation. Thirdly, Islam together with other faiths constitutes and contributes to a new humanism because it is founded on a new faith in man. For the usefulness of interfaith common goals; we must learn to regard ourselves in relationship to others, whether religious or secular. There are two key ground rules, namely simple and far-reaching, which need to be observed when two parties participate in dialogue. First, ‘compare equal to equal’; and second, ‘allow each party to define itself to the others’. The Sufis also claimed: ‘Whatever brings people together for a good is good’. This statement represents the roads which bring people to an agreement. It is because ‘Reality teaches through contrasts’.

People, regardless of nation or political borders, have far more in common than they realise. Living in harmony is the common aim of many different religions, including Islam, in modernity and it is their specific historical duty in future. In fact, it is also a continuous task for Muslims too that emerges from daily reality. It is important to creates a new paradigm in
understanding the relationship between Islam and the West with all their positive traditions which should be, then, integrated inside our religious experience. Islam calls for cooperation only when cooperation means the happiness of all people, so that when people turn to it they may achieve the prosperity and peace they yearn for. Time after time, Muslims are taking an important role in interfaith and intercivilisational dialogue, locally and globally. Interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism have become an integral part of contemporary Islamic discourse. In the modern world the only way to get others to accept different ideas is by dialogue, intercultural and interfaith activities. A sincere dialogue needs to be established in order to increase mutual understanding. Therefore, today, a ‘dialogue is a must’, recalled Gulen.

Both, interfaith tolerance and dialogue are two important elements which provide peace in society. For peace to be attained between people a primary condition is that they look to each other with benevolence and tolerance. When people of different cultural-religious backgrounds mutually respect the others’ distinctiveness and rights, they can live in peace and harmony. People’s duty toward society is to see what is good, say what is good, to desire the good, and do what is good – clearly that is to respect its laws and rules and keep society safe. Furthermore, the heart of any religion is none other than that single, universal Truth that lives at the heart of all authentic religions. Sufis often speak of dialogue in terms of the heart. For them interfaith dialogue represents many ‘paths to the heart’, especially for those who do not consider various faiths as mutually exclusive and unavoidably antagonistic systems of dogmatic belief. It was said that interfaith respect can exist after people achieve ‘inter-heart’ harmony; which is a gift that can only be granted by the true spiritual teaching of any faith. A Muslim proverb said: ‘what comes from the lips reaches the ears. What comes from the heart reaches the heart’. Indeed, dialogue between people of different faiths, and across cultural differences, opens our hearts to one another as human beings. In this way, the Sufis maintained that ‘spiritual conversation is divine light and it brings people close together and melts us in unity’.

In Islam both broadmindedness and tolerance are terms which also indicate generosity and coexistence signify a liberal and respectful approach when dealing with other people’s opinions, beliefs or ways. Furthermore, Islam encourages social activity, a sense of community, a sense of belonging, a sense of place and a sense of diversity. The idea of social virtue in Islam conveys social mannerisms or good conduct, and as a term of ethics it signifies the system of virtue on which peace, social harmony and wellbeing with others is based. In this way, Islam recognises plurality of faith communities according to their religious affiliation. In a pluralistic society relationships are interrelated and interdependent. Making peace among people is one of the basic aims of Islam, too. It becomes one of the worthiest human qualities which springs only from noble hearts that bear love for others. For instance, Muslims pray for peace, Christians and Jews pray for peace as well. In his Mercy Oceans’ Divine Sources Sheikh al-Qubrusi observed how peace and harmony within diversity is achievable.

For peace to be attained between different people a primary condition is that they look to each other with benevolence and tolerance. Look at these beautiful
gardens: one and the same soil and so many hundreds of different kinds of trees and plants. They cannot be seen complaining about the proximity of the other kinds of plants. They are not fanatics insisting that all of the trees in the area should be of one and the same variety.

The story tells how all the different people may live together in peace and harmony. If people of different backgrounds or religions live near to each other, and each is respecting the others’ characteristics, ways of life and ideas, then they may live in their neighbourhood without misunderstanding. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad was living next door to a Jew, and indeed, he always emphasized the importance of fair neighbourly relations. In fact, in the holy Qur’an it is specially mentioned that neighbours are some of the first recipients of help and charity. So, the neighbourhood, based on mutual respect, is an important concept in Islam and the closeness of people of different backgrounds destroys fanaticism – ‘you have been called to be good neighbours’. Therefore, for Muslims it is important not only to respect their own community, but to express goodness to members of other communities too. In Islam the moral and social concept of neighbourhood also implies various nationalities and races, occupations and classes and cultural and religious communities, living nearby to one another, or being employed in the same occupations, as well as strangers who are living temporarily in the same organised society. There were also equal friendships between Muslims and non-Muslims, symmetrical in their balance, not divided by ‘border, nor breed, nor birth’.

Nowadays, Muslims are increasingly faced with a range of visions both for the place of Islam in a pluralistic world, and for the place of pluralism in Islam. Among the most important lessons to be learned from contemporary Muslims are related to their struggling experience to come to terms with pluralism. Religious pluralism appeared to be a matter of great interest and a main intellectual challenge among the Muslims. Over time, diversity within Islam is considered not only acceptable, but beneficial. However, Muslims in the West also must understand that they live within the culture of secular humanism. The idea of secularism cannot be separated from the vessel of modernity. Muslims are finding that certain aspects of modernism are necessary for their survival in their adopted new Western society. Wherever Islam found its way among cultural environment, it has shown itself in complete accord with progressive tendencies. So, Islam offers its adherents many ways of coping with life in Western society, such as long-standing readiness for interfaith dialogues, the positive attitude to knowledge, religious education and scientific research, the civil nature of marriage and so on. By anchoring themselves within the true fundamentals of their faiths in pluralistic society people, including Muslims, can project a fresh and decent course for new understanding. Also, as a behavioural phenomenon, religion, its role and function and significance can be studied within a secular society, because all known cultures have some form of religious beliefs. While the external manifestations of beliefs and attitudes may be very different, there is no inconsistency in a pluralistic society and no pressure to change.

Furthermore in relation to Islam and the West, there is not only a need for interfaith toleration, but innerfaith toleration too in order to develop understanding and a trust of
brotherhood, partnership and friendship everywhere. Interfaith dialogue, truthfully performed and accomplished, has the power and message to disclose and spread the fundamental truth that all human beings share a great deal in common at their deepest spiritual level. To work in a humility of spirit for the human good, to strive with all energy to approach the perfection of the All-Perfect, is the essential principle of Islam. The Qur’an teaches that all humanity deserves divine honour, with no distinction as to colour, race or nationality: ‘We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation’. (Qur’an, 17: 70)

PART 4

Instead of a conclusion

The Sufi Mawłana Jalaluddin Rumi in his Seven Pieces of Advice said:

In generosity and helping others – be like the river
In compassion and grace – be like the sun
In concealing others’ faults – be like the night
In anger and fury – be like dead
In modesty and humility – be like the soil
In tolerance – be like the ocean
Either appear as you are, or be as you appear
PART 1

1 Hidayat, 2003, 13-4
2 Kurucan, and Erol, 2011:20
3 Silajdzic, 2006:34
4 Rauf, 2005:276
5 Swidler, 2006:1
6 Sweet in Sophia, 1998: 90
7 Aceves, 1974:15; 224
8 Cox in Johnston and Sampson, 1994:267
9 Swidler, 2001:7
10 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999: 201
11 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:198
12 Kurucan and Kasim Erol, 2012: 20
13 Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Oxford Islamic Studies
14 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999:200
15 Gulen, 2011: xv, Vol 2
16 Puett in Egebreton, 2009: 50
17 Swidler, 2001:7
18 Khatami, 2000
20 Khatami, 2000
21 Khatami, 2000
22 Swidler, 2001:7
23 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:199
24 Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Oxford Islamic Studies
25 Pellach in Fagenblat, Landau and Wolski, 2006:132
26 Pellach in Fagenblat, Landau and Wolski, 2006:139
27 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999:201
28 http://studiesofreligion.org.au
29 Pellach in Fagenblat, Landau and Wolski, 2006:139
30 http://studiesofreligion.org.au
31 Altwajirj, 2001:4
32 Parshall, 1983:113
33 El Erian, 1990: 117
34 Silajdzic, 2006:52
35 Kurucan, and Erol, 2011:22
36 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999: 201
37 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:199; 288
38 Khatami, 2000
39 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999:205
40 Cox in Johnston and Sampson, 1994:267
41 Kung, 1999:784
42 Pellach in Fagenblat, Landau and Wolski, 2006:132
43 Haught, 1990:3
44 Bouma, 2005
45 Lewis, 2005:162
46 Hick 1993
47 Bharat, J. and S., 2007: 52
48 Esack in Esposito, 2008
49 Cahill, 2012
50 Cahill, 2003
51 Cahill, 2012
52 Atlee, T., n.d., Building a Culture of Dialogue (among other things)
53 Hidayat, 39-42
54 Provenscher, 2010:71
55 Hidayat, 2003:14

PART 2

1 Aceves, 1974:223
2 Sweet in Sophia, 1998: 75
3 Pellach in Fagenblat, Landau and Wolski, 2006:139
4 Johnston, 1994:316
5 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999: 200
6 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:193
7 Armstrong, 2006: xii-v
8 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:193
9 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:194
10 Huxley, 1954: 65
11 Esposito, 2008
12 Weeks in Haveric, 2006: vii
13 Weeks, 1990:12
14 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:314
15 Brissin,1986:288
16 Armstrong, 2007, article: Discovering the common ground of world religions
17 Knitter in Esposito, 2008
18 Interfaith Unity, Essay Rev. Leslie Mezer; Rayser, 1978:13
19 Armstrong, 2006: 381
20 studiesofreligion.org.au
21 Altwaijri, 2001:4
22 Armstrong, 2006:392
23 hipstemonk.com/the-golden-rule
24 Armstrong, 2006: xv
25 Smith, 1991:385
26 Kung, 1999:4
27 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998: 265
28 Rauf, 2005: 13
29 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:177; Frost, 1943:399-400; South Australia Interfaith Network
Gathar, 43.1
Analects, 15.23
Lao Tzu, T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213-218
Sutta Nipata 705
Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva 113.8
Sutrakritanga 1.10.1-3; 1.11.9-11, 33
Leviticus 19:18
Matthew 7:12
Hadith
Baha’u’Ilah, Gleanings
Guru Granth Sahib, p.1299
African Traditional Religions, Yoruba Proverb Nigeria
Chief Dan George
Unitarian principle
30 Frost, 1943: v
31 goldenruletheworld.org
32 Frost, 1943:380-410; Juji, 1947
33 Giddens, 1992:479
34 Kung, 2000: IX
35 Cornforth, 1977:148
36 Ree, J., 1999: 65
37 in Tolstoy, 1997:2
38 Rauf in Vineyard Gazette, 2012
39 F. Rahman in Brown, 2004: 231
40 Brislin, 1986:199
41 Filipovic, 2009
42 Ceric, 2005

PART 3

1 Parshall, 1983:145
2 El Erian, 1990
3 Imamovic, 1971: 470
4 El Erian, 1990: 11
5 Sardar, Z. and Davies, W. M., 2004: 45
6 Sardar, Z. and Malik, A. Z., 78
7 Tabbarah, 1988:261-4
8 Tophus, 2009: 4
9 Rahman, 1966: 291
10 Sardar and Davies, 2004: 10
12 Rauf, 2005: xiv
13 Ali, 1978:210
14 El Erian, 1990: 11
15 Griffiths, 1994: 31
16 Seyyed Hossein Nasr in Shah-Kazemi, 2002:141
17 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999: 203
18 Provencher, 2010:61
19 Brown, 2004: 232
20 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999: 203
21 Imamovic, 1971: 358; B. 64: 62
22 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998:199
23 Borges in Roy and Brasted, 1999: 203
24 Tabbarah, 1988:239
26 Tabbarah, 1988:427
27 Tabbarah, 1988:427
28 Haveric, 2013: 23
29 Silajdjc, 2006:39-40
30 Rauf, 2005:277
31 al-Qubrusi; Elahi
32 al-Qubrusi; Elahi
33 Gulen, 2011: ix, Vol 2
34 Balic in Waardenburg in Taji-Farouki, S. and Nafi, 2004:284
35 Silajdzic, 2006:63
36 Tabbarah, 1988:237
37 Esposito, 2011: 90
38 Esposito, 2011: 90
39 Gulen, 2011: ix, Vol 2
40 Gulen, 2011: ix, Vol 2
41 Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Tolerance in Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Comparative Study of Fethullah Gülen and Abdul Karim Soroush
42 al-Qubrusi, 1984:16-7
43 Elahi, 1993:133
44 Nasr, 2004:316
45 Shah-Kazemi, 2002:141
46 Talib, M., Baba Jaan Jee in ‘Islam and its attitude to Interfaith’, A Global Guide to Interfaith Reflections from around the world, 2007: 35
47 Ahmed, 1999: 237
48 Rauf, 2005:278
49 Hill, Knitter, and Madges, 1998: 267
50 Imamovic, 1971: 360
51 Ahmed, 1999: 7
52 Imamovic, 1971: 372
53 Nasr, 2004: 160
54 Sardar, 1991:131-2
55 Tabbarah, 1988:235-6
56 Qubrusi, 1984:16-7
57 Al-Qubrusi, 1984:17
58 Al-Qubrusi, 1984:21
59 Imamovic, 1971: 396
60 Akbar, 1996:191
61 Brown, 2004:233
62 Brown, 2004:233
63 Nasr, 2004: 53
64 Lewis and Churchill, 2008: 51
65 Silajdzic, 1997; Balic in Izetbegovic, 1984: vii; Rauf, 2005: 9
66 Sardar, 2004:277
67 Erian, 1990:102
68 Ali, 1978: 180
69 Balic in Izetbegovic, 1984: vii
70 Rauf, 2005: 9
71 Aceves, 1974:15; 219
72 Brislin, 1994:289
73 Tabbarah, 1988:429
74 Rauf, 2005:278
75 Ali, 1978:79

PART 4

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi
Bibliography


Altwaijri, O. A., 2001, Political aspects of the intercivilisational dialogue from an Islamic perspective, Study presented at The International Conference on Intercivilisational Dialogue, United Nations University, Kyoto, Japan.

Al-Qubrusi, N. S., 1984, Mercy Oceans’ Divine Sources, Offset Printers, Turkey.


Atlee, T., n.d., Building a Culture of Dialogue (among other things)


Silajdžic, A., 2006, *Muslim Perceptions of other religions: Experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, El-Kalem, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Sarajevo.


---

*Interfaith Dialogue: an Islamic approach* © 2013 Dr Dzavid Haveric