

Concept Paper

THE CALL FOR SULHE KUL OR PEACEFUL- COEXISTENCE AND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN SUNNIS AND SHIAHS AND OTHERS

A DIALOGUE ON THE VALUES OF PEACFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN ISLAM.

THE CORE VALUES OF ISLAM

Building a peaceful world based on universalism, inclusiveness , peaceful co-existence and free of violence are central to the world view of Islam. It encompasses the worth and esteem of all human beings irrespective of distinctions between religion, colors, culture, race or language. “We have honored the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation.”Al-Isra:17: 70. Its values spell plurality and abundance for all.

The word Islam itself is the trilateral root, salima, means “to be safe, secure, tranquility (8:61) It is imperative to realize that ensuring peace is one of the primary concerns of Islam. In ensuring such peace it is necessary not to tread on, or demolish or eradicate upon the rights of others in pursuit of one’s own right. From the root word salam, means, peace, tranquility. (Quran, Surah Al-Anfal 8:61)

There are several core values in the Islamic tradition in relation to peace. It is imperative to realize that ensuring peace is one of the primary concerns of Islam. In ensuring such peace it is necessary not to tread on, or demolish or eradicate upon the rights of others in pursuit of one’s own right.

On the other hand the use of violence is antithetical to Islam. A Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad clearly states: “ A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people feel safe” and again “The believer in God is he who is not a danger to life and property of any

other.” (Tirmizi, Nisai and Bukhari); the Prophet said “All creatures form the family of God: and he is best loved of God who loves His creatures” (Baihaqi; Qitab-ul Iman);”Mankind is a fold every member of which is a shepherd to every other and will be accountable for the welfare of the entire fold” (Bukhari: Kitab al Iman)

The *Quran* recongnizes diversity, acceptance and the tolerance of differences based on gender (49:13; 53:45), colour, language (30:22), belief and nationality (4:1, 64:2, 6:165, 5:58). Harmony between the different social groupings and communities is praised whereas unhealthy competition and control of one by the other is condemned (2:213, 4:136,10:19, 16:64). Scholars cite the Prophet’s saying, “My *Ummah’s* differences are a mercy”

The right to life, equality among all people; between individuals and groups, between races and peoples, and between governors and the governed are the bedrock of Islam. There are therefore no restrictions or exceptions; no difference in legislation between white and black, or between rulers and the ruled. Excellence of conduct is the only mark of superiority. The Prophet said: “O people! Verily your Lord is one... All of you belong to one ancestry of Adam, and Adam was created out of clay. Verily the noblest among you in the view of Allah is he who is the most pious. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab except in piety” These rights include political, economic, social and intellectual rights.

Peacemaking is a duty of all humankind. Prophet Muhammad came as a mercy for all human beings without distinction of religion, race or color. The role of Muslims in building peaceful communities, nations, and a peaceful world is clear when examining Islam’s the above stated specific principles of coexistence and cultural diversity, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, and transformation. These concepts are central to Islam’s framework of peacemaking.

THE TERMS “SUNNIS” AND “SHIAHS”

The expressions Sunni and Shiah are post Quranic terminologies . The word used for the followers of Islam in the Quran are “Muslims”. All

Muslims believe in same one God; believe in Prophet Muhammad (and all other God prophets; peace be upon them all) and his Sunnah (sayings and practices); believe in Qur'an holy book (and other God holy books); believe in the five pillars of Islam; Perform the same Salat (praying) facing the same direction of Kaaba (Mecca); Perform the same Hajj (pilgrimage) with same rituals; Believe in the same Islam articles of faith.

Both face the direction of Kaaba when praying; both could pray in any mosque regardless of the praying leader; is Sunni or Shiite; both recite the same Qur'an without single letter difference; both perform the same hajj rituals side by side; both follow same Qur'an and prophet Muhammad teachings and morals.

They both revere Prophet Muhammad as the last of the Prophets, they both look to the Qur'an for guidance.

The truth is that Sunnis and Shias have intermarried, lived in peacefully in the same neighborhood for centuries. Millions of people of both sects have peacefully converged on the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Islam has continued as a constructive social phenomenon and these traditional relationships have persisted and ways of life have not been destroyed by modern ideologies as historical truths.

While there a few theological differences of opinion in viewing the landscape between Sunnis and Shias, to claim that they have been in a perpetual state of war and animosity throughout their existence is an absurd deception and a misreading of history. These differences by and large have been derived based on their different historical experiences, political and social developments, as well as ethnic composition.

The interesting question, however, is, whether religious affiliations have been the absolute and only reason for culmination of violence. The divide and rule policy to seek political gain has been an old one. Constraints between sectarian elements can be overcome through a dialogue on peace and reconciliation.

THE POLITICS OF POWER

For several decades, Catholics and Protestants like the Shias and Sunnis in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan) in Northern Ireland have been accused and blamed for violence. The fact that they fought for land or for geographical or political reasons has often been forgotten. The fact, however, remains that neither Catholicism nor Protestantism (nor Shias and Sunnis) endorse such violence. Unfortunately, those with profound obvious religious affiliations have unabashedly been accused of instigating violence, deteriorating situations and escalating tensions.

Presently both Catholics and Protestants make the effort to build bridges co-exist with one another in peace and harmony. Following their own paths they collaborate, hold Seminars, Dialogues with each other as well as with people of other Religious Traditions. Such an approach ideally lends credibility paving the way for a better environment to construct and build their educational, cultural and social Institutions.

Similarly, the conflict currently looming between certain Sunni, Shiah or other sectarian factions in the world generally today have less to do with religious differences and more to do with modern identity politics. Some have sought to exacerbate these divisions in order to perpetuate conflict and maintain a Middle East which is at once thoroughly divided and incapable of asserting itself. This is being played out in Syria, Lebanon and other countries throughout the Middle East. Today Yemen is entangled in the broil . Innocent citizens suffer and he several innocent lives are lost.

For centuries, Sunni, Shias and other sections (as well as Christians, Jews and other religious groups) have lived closely intertwined with one another in the Middle-East, to a degree beyond comparison anyplace in the world. Even where they have exerted power through distinct political structures, the argument that this has culminated in conflict does not hold ground even to a perfunctory analysis. While the Sunni Ottoman Empire and Shiah Saffavid Empire experienced their share of conflict, they also lived peaceably alongside one another for

centuries, even considering at inappropriate at times to engage in conflict with one another .

Nonetheless, presently despite Islam's rich historical heritage of peaceful co-existence, the violent clashes sectarian between the Sunni , Shiahs and other sections presently in Iraq , Syria and Yemen are leaving thousands of innocent dead. It is a distressing situation not only Muslims but for world citizens as a whole.

Political leaders and religious leaders could assist in overcoming this sharp divide . The advantages of such an endeavor would be numerous in terms of economic advantage along with several gains that accompany it. This divide needs to be bridged though a dialogue on peaceful co-existence and mutual co-operation.

Notwithstanding, while neo-conservatives practically drool in anticipation of Muslims committing harakari against one another, away from the political sphere , ordinary people continue to live with the deeply ingrained sense of tolerance that has traditionally characterized the once-global civilization of Islam.

CONCLUSION : MUSLIMS IN INDIA CAN PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

The heritage of India's multi-religious, multilingual and multi-racial diversity, its inclusiveness has forged through centuries. For centuries it has provided a home to very significant number of practitioners of practically every other major religion of the world, be it Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism or the Baha'ism. Throughout centuries, Muslims in India have co-existed peacefully with followers of all religions. We have all lived together despite the "divide and rule" policies of politicians. Muslims in India can play a key role in the process of peace and reconciliation between the Shiahs and Sunnis.

On 30th October 2013, The Wisdom Foundation, India, invited the respected Indian Ulema to take a lead role in sharing their knowledge thereby suggesting solutions to resolve the dilemmas facing the

Muslims by constructing a historical narrative based on perspectives that will help Muslims to peacefully emerge from that which makes Shiah and Sunnis opposing forces. Both the Sunni and Shiah Ulema attended the Meeting and discussed the importance of dialogue for peaceful and harmonious co-existence between the communities. The Wisdom Foundation expresses its deep gratitude to all the Ulema and Scholars who attended the Dialogue. We particularly thank Maulana Athar Ali, Director, Mohammadia Idarah, and Maulana Zaheer Abbas, Vice Chairperson Shiah Muslim Personal Law Board, for taking a lead role in the helping us to organize this Event.

The dialogue was very successful and fruitful where all present expressed a desire to further the efforts towards more such events. In keeping with values of peace and reconciliation in Islam, the Wisdom Foundation requests holding such dialogues throughout India and appeals to Muslims in India to join hands in this process and set an example to the rest of the world.

As a follow-up to this Conference, The Wisdom Foundation will bring forth a publication on Islam's values on Peaceful co-existence with quotations from the Quran, Traditions of Prophet. We will request Ulema from ALL schools of thought to kindly share their knowledge with us and the rest of the world. The publication to be brought out in in English, and Urdu the form of a Booklet will be translated into Hindi, Marathi and other languages. It will be compiled as a Text and distributed to Educational Institutions : schools of ALL mediums of languages, denominations, patshallas, madrassas. We will also circulate them to Government offices and Members of Parliament.

We will also set-up Committees from ALL Muslims denominations to work together and assist in programs for harmonious co-existence and peace.

**Zeenat Shaukat Ali
Director General, The Wisdom Foundation
1st June 2015**