



Multi-Faith Neighbors Network

An Islamic Theology of Multi-Faith

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Engaging in multi-faith efforts has always been an integral part of Islam. Prophet Mohammed (saaw) was no stranger when it came to living, working, dealing, and interacting with people of other faith groups. In Mecca, many different tribes would pass through with their caravans and perform pilgrimage at the Kaaba. In Medina, people from many different faith groups including Jewish and Christian communities lived under the protection of Prophet Mohammed (saaw), where they were free to practice their faith as they pleased.

The life of Prophet Mohammed (saaw) is our best example. Prophet Mohammed (saaw) taught that Muslims are expected to interact and forge multi-faith relationships for the good of humanity and as an act of worship to our creator, Allah (swt). These multi-faith relationships are necessary to promote harmony, justice, and peace as a communal responsibility. If Allah (swt) put all of us on earth to co-exist, then we must do so in a way that benefits all, without imposing our religious beliefs onto others or changing what we believe.

When multi-faith relationships are thriving, our own convictions and connection to our faith is also strengthened. We are constantly reminded about what would be pleasing to Allah (swt) when we are having conversations, when we are working on projects to help our communities advance and when we advocate for justice for all.

In the following paragraphs, we outline a selection of verses from the holy Quran to demonstrate how Allah (swt) has required us to obey him in our multi-faith relationships.

Religious Freedom

Knowing that Allah (swt) has created the world and all humanity, He is the one who will deal with the affairs of humanity on his own terms. He guides us as Muslims to be obedient to Him as He alone knows what He has planned. Allah (swt) said to Prophet Mohammed (saaw), "Had your Lord so willed, O Prophet, all people on Earth would have certainly believed, every single one of them! Would you then force people to become believers?"(Quran 10:99)

Allah (swt) himself points out his decision to have people from different faith groups exist and therefore we must respect and accept this decision. It is also our duty to Allah (swt) to protect the human rights of each individual, regardless of their faith. If He wanted, He would have made all humans believe in one faith. "To each of you, We have ordained a code of law and a way of life. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given each of you. So compete with one another in doing good. To Allah you will all return, then He will inform you of the truth regarding your differences." (Quran 5: 48)

No Compulsion in Religion

Not only is Islam a faith that recognizes religious freedom but it also advocates the principle which prohibits forced conversion. Every human being is free to make the choices he/she wants where their faith is concerned. Our responsibility as Muslims is to convey and share the message of Islam to others, but the decision is up to the individual. Through our actions, others will see Islam and if Allah (swt) wants to guide them to Islam, He will. If they choose to follow another faith, we can't harm or oppress them. "There is no compulsion in religion." (Quran 2:256) We can learn from each other and strive to lead productive lives knowing that everyone respects each other, even if we believe differently.

Build Relations with People of the Book

Allah (swt) encourages us to build and keep relations with the people of the book. Christians and people of the Jewish faith have been closely connected to the Muslim community for thousands of years. Islamic history is a continuation of what Prophets Moses and Jesus preached and Allah (swt) makes this connection apparent throughout the holy Quran. "He has ordained for you believers the Way which He decreed for Noah, and what We have revealed to you O Prophet and what We decreed for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, commanding: "Uphold the faith, and make no divisions in it." What you call the polytheists to is unbearable for them. Allah chooses for Himself whoever He wills, and guides to Himself whoever turns to Him. (Quran 42:13)

When Allah (swt) says "Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully,"(Quran 29:46) He is not only guiding us to a particular behavior that He is expecting from us, but He is also commanding us to interact in a dignified and honorable way with the people of the book.

Protection and Respect for Places of Worship

It is imperative for Muslims to safeguard places of worship and even more important to protect places where worship is different than ours. Places of worship are there because Allah (swt) allowed them to be there. "Had Allah not repelled the aggression of some people by means of others, destruction would have surely claimed monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's Name is often mentioned. Allah will certainly help those who stand up for Him. Allah is truly All-Powerful, Almighty." (Quran 22:40)

We as Muslims play an important role in the world when it comes to being accepting, understanding, and respectful because we live with people from different faiths within our communities. The harmony which Allah (swt) talks about is only achievable when

everyone in each community is able to feel safe and protected in worshiping as they please and attending their places of worship in peace.

Respect for Humanity

As the creator and the sustainer of the world, Allah (swt) created all humans with the expectation to uphold and establish dignity and respect for others. As a minimal starting place, He expects us to be mindful of the people around us so that we don't violate the honor that Allah (swt) has bestowed on them.

Allah (swt) is also the judge of whether or not we extend our hand in kindness, peace, and empathy to others so that together we can tackle issues that are crippling our communities and destroying civil societies. It is wrong to violate someone else by oppressing them and their beliefs, and it is particularly wrong to do so thinking we are doing the work of Allah (swt).

The diversity of humanity is also something Allah (swt) wants us to recognize and explore with gratitude. Learning and appreciating one another is one of Allah (swt)'s ways of teaching us how to build sustainable relationships which then cultivates peaceful and thriving communities. "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Aware." (Quran 49:13)

All Judgment Belongs to God

Allah (swt) reminds us throughout the holy Quran that the only and final judgment belongs to Him. We at times may be swayed to believe that we as Muslims have to be the judge because we want to prevent others from doing such acts which are displeasing to Allah (swt), but Allah (swt) invokes our faith in Him and His authority in response. He alone preserves the role of the judge to only Himself. "The Trumpet will be blown and all those in the heavens and all those on the earth will fall dead, except those Allah wills to spare. Then it will be blown again and they will rise up at once, looking on in anticipation. The earth will shine with the light of its Lord, the record of deeds will be laid open, the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward—and judgment will be passed on all with fairness. None will be wronged. Every soul will be paid in full for its deeds, for Allah knows best what they have done. (Quran 39: 68-70)

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