

## CONCEPTUAL BASICS FOR UNITY IN MULTI-ETHNIC DIVERSITY: THE QUR'ANIC AND PROPHETIC PARADIGM

(Konsep Asas Perpaduan Dalam Kepelbagaian Etnik: Paradigma Al-Quran Dan Kenabian)

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### ABSTRACT:

*Islam affirms that the universe is a unity emanating from a single Will of the Sustaining Lord; and man himself is a part of this universe, dependent upon and related to all other parts; individuals are as atoms in the universe, therefore, they must have the same dependence upon and relation to one another. So, the Islamic belief is that the humanity is an essential unity; its scattered elements must be brought together, its diversity must give place to unity. This worldview of unity in diversity or cosmopolitanism is widely seen in the Qur'an and the Prophetic practices of multi-cultural unification which overwhelmingly focus on freedom of religion, inter-religious symbiosis and reciprocal obligations, religious tolerance, just and equal treatment to the non-Muslim subjects and social security towards them, conflict resolution, developing mutual understanding through dialogue and mutual cooperation in common interest. This paper aims to introduce the Islamic concepts of cosmopolitanism in a theoretical and practical framework by conducting an analytic textual reading of the concerned Qur'anic verses and a historical survey of the Prophet's (pbuh) efforts at unity in diversity.*

**Keywords:** *Unity, ethnic, Qur'an, Sunnah, Islamic belief, Muhammad.*

### ABSTRAK:

*Islam membuktikan bahawa konsep alam semesta adalah daripada perpaduan yang dikehendaki oleh tuhan yang maha kuasa; dan manusia adalah sebahagian daripada alam semesta, yang saling bergantung dan berkait antara satu sama lain. Seseorang individu itu umpama atom di alam semesta yang bergantung dan memerlukan antara dengan lain. Dalam kepercayaan Islam, kemanusiaan adalah asas penting perpaduan yang mana elemen berselerakan etnik/kaum harus digabungkan bersama agar kepelbagaian ini dapat membentuk perpaduan. Pandangan tentang perpaduan dalam kepelbagaian etnik ataupun konsep kosmopolitanisme ini dapat dilihat secara meluas di dalam al-Quran dan sunnah nabi tentang penyatuan pelbagai budaya yang memberi tumpuan hangat kepada kebebasan beragama, saling memerlukan walaupun berlainan agama dan tanggungjawab dua hala, toleransi agama, layanan yang adil dan saksama kepada orang bukan islam dalam konteks keselamatan sosial, penyelesaian konflik, membangunkan persefahaman melalui dialog-dialog dan kerjasama demi kepentingan bersama. Kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk memperkenalkan konsep islam tentang kosmopolitanisme secara teori dan rangka kerja praktikal melalui analisis bacaan teks ayat-ayat al-Quran yang berkenaan dan kajian sejarah tentang usaha Nabi Muhammad (s.a.w) demi membentuk perpaduan dalam kepelbagaian etnik/kaum.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Perpaduan, etnik, al-Quran, amalan nabi, kepercayaan Islam, Nabi Muhammad.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The matter of unity in ethnic diversity in the first Islamic state has been a burning question in the western as well as westernized, westoxicated, westoxified and Islmophobic academia and think-tanks throughout the world. It is stereotyped that the early Islamic state had shown least tolerance toward other races and ethnic communities especially Jews and Christians and resorted to despotic and coercive approaches towards them. Prophet's expeditions against Jews and the second Caliph Umar's expulsion of both Jews and Christians from Arabian Peninsula are painted and presented as a 'proof' of Islam's intolerance towards others. However, the Islamic state by virtue of its very title is in no way a nationalistic, racial or ethnic sate and thus incorporates even the non- Muslims upholding the (Islamic) principles of unity and co-existence. The Islamic concept of multi-ethnic unity had widely come to the light in the first Islamic state when it was established by the Prophet in a multi-cultural society of Madinah. However, unity and co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in the very first phase of the Madinah state was seen in a very wider framework. Its roots are connected to the Islamic worldview of universality, freedom of religion, inter-religious symbiosis and reciprocal obligations, religious tolerance, just and equal treatment to the non-Muslims, conflict resolution, developing mutual understanding through dialogue and mutual cooperation in common interest. The following pages would try to explore the myth and reality of the issues concerned, and analyze them to uphold the truth. References from the Qur'an, and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on the subject have been cited and examined to authenticate the findings and conclusions. We would be focusing on how the issue of unity in ethnic diversity came to flower theoretically and practically in the earliest state established by the Prophet Muhammd (pbuh).

## CONCEPTUAL BASICS

### 1. **Universalist Basis of Islamic Belief:**

A believer in only One God, Who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Master of the East and the West and Sustainer of the entire universe, can never be narrow in outlook. He looks on everything in the universe as belonging to the same Lord he himself belongs to. His sympathy, love and services are not confined to any particular sphere or group. His vision is enlarged, his intellectual horizon widens, and his outlook becomes as liberal and as boundless as is the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> With this worldview, Islam has always been Universalist and the Muslims have, as far as this problem is concerned, the cleanest record in history. The Quran speaks with utmost emphasis and clarity:

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<sup>1</sup> . Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, translated and edited by Khurshid Ahmad (U.S.A: Indianapolis, The Islamic Teaching Center, 1980), 74.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا  
وِنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

*O men! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate; and out of the two spread many men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights, and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you.*

(Al-Nisa, 4: 1)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاتُمْ  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

*“O mankind, We have created you male and female, and We have made you peoples and tribes, that you might know one another, verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well-acquainted”.* (al-Hujurat, 49: 13)

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ (١١٨) إِلَّا مَنْ رَجِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ  
وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لِأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ (١١٩)

*Had your Lord so willed, He would surely have made mankind one community. But as things stand, now they will not cease to differ among themselves and to follow erroneous ways.*

*Except for those on whom your Lord has mercy. And it is for this (exercise of freedom of choice) that He has created them. And the word of your Lord was fulfilled: 'Indeed I will fill the Hell, with men and jinn, altogether.* (Hud, 11: 118-119)

In the cited verses, “the whole of mankind has been addressed to reform it of the great evil that has always been causing universal disruption in the world, that is, the prejudices due to race, color, language, country, and nationality. On account of these prejudices man in every age has generally been discarding humanity, drawing around himself some small circles, and regarding those born within those circles as his own people and those outside as others. These circles have been drawn on the basis of accidental birth and not on rational and moral grounds. Then the discrimination between one's own people and others is not only confined to this that those who are looked upon as one's own people are shown greater love and cooperation than others, but this discrimination has assumed the worst forms of hatred, enmity, contempt and tyranny. Islam has welded and combined innumerable races and communities scattered in all corners of the earth into one universal Ummah.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these verses are implying that this equality of biological origin is reflected in the equality of the human dignity common to all and the all belong to one human family, without any inherent superiority of one over another. In other words, men's evolution into "nations and tribes" is meant to foster rather than to diminish their mutual desire to understand and appreciate the essential human oneness underlying their outward differentiations; and, correspondingly, all racial, national or tribal prejudice ('asabiyyah) is condemned - implicitly in the Qur'an, and most explicitly by the Prophet. In addition, speaking of

<sup>1</sup> . Abul Ala Mawdudi, *Tafhim al-Quran*, Surah: 49:13.

people's boasting of their national or tribal past, the Prophet said: "Behold, God has removed from you the arrogance of pagan ignorance (jahiliyyah) with its boast of ancestral glories. Man is but a God-conscious believer or an unfortunate sinner. All people are children of Adam, and Adam was created out of dust." (Fragment of a hadith quoted by Tirmidhi and Abu Da'ud, on the authority of Abu Hurayrah.)<sup>1</sup>

This is addressed to all mankind and not only to the Muslim brotherhood, though it is understood that in a perfected world the two would be synonymous. As it is, mankind is descended from one pair of parents. Their tribes, races, and nations are convenient labels by which mankind may know certain differing characteristics. Before Allah, they are all one, and he gets most honor who is most righteous<sup>2</sup>. The universalism of Islam transcends all human distinctions. It reaches to the *fitrah*.<sup>3</sup>

In these verses, Allah has drawn the attention of all mankind to a cardinal truth that in spite of being one in origin it was natural that mankind should be divided into nations and tribes. With the spread of the human race, there should be differences of colors, features, languages and ways of living among the people, but this natural difference never demanded that distinctions of inequality, of high and low, of noble and mean should be established on its basis, that one race should claim superiority over the other, the people of one color should look down upon the people of other colors, and that one nation should take preference over the other without any reason. The Creator had divided the human communities into nations and tribes for that was a natural way of cooperation and distinction between them. Rather, the differences among mankind are created by Allah to be a means of recognition<sup>4</sup>. In the first Islamic state, not only other religious traditions were merely recognized but also the recognition of the Prophets of those religions became an obligatory tool for those who want to enjoy the Islamic identity. As the Qur'an affirms:

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ  
مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

*"They were a people who passed away; they shall receive the reward of what they earned and you shall have the reward of what you will earn; and you will not be questioned as to what they did."* (al-Baqarah, 1: 136)

يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ الْعَالَمِينَ

*"O Children of Israel! Just recall My favor that I bestowed upon you, and remember that I exalted you above all the peoples of the world."* (al-Baqarah, 1: 47)

<sup>1</sup> . Muhammad Asad, *the Message of the Quran*, Surah: 49:13

<sup>2</sup> . Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *the Meaning of the Holy Quran* (U.S.A, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1892), 1342.

<sup>3</sup> . Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (U.S.A.: Virginia, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992), 76-80.

<sup>4</sup> . Abul Ala Mawdudi, *Tafheem al-Quran*. See Sura Hujrat, verse: 13.

Such responsive approach of the Muslims towards other religions in the first Islamic state had developed a kind of mentality that could have been helpful, to those who had had an appreciative mind therein, to coexist. So, the Islamic belief is that the humanity is an essential unity; its scattered elements must be brought together, its diversity must give place to unity.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Inter-religious symbiosis and reciprocal obligations

These are also important tools for inculcating coexistence. Thus, it is important to present the dealings of the Muslims with non-Muslims in Madinah state. As the main and notable presence of the non-Muslims was represented by the Jews in Madinah, the Prophet's general policy towards them was based on conciliation, friendship and cooperation. Upon arrival at Madinah, the first thing the Prophet (pbuh) considered most important is to define and strengthen the relations between Jews and Muslims.<sup>2</sup> As defining and strengthening the relations are essential for the peaceful co-existence for various distinctive societies, the Madinah-charter clearly outlines the relations, reciprocal obligations and responsibilities between Jews and Muslims to each other in this first Islamic state. By the virtue of this agreement, the relations between the Muslims and the Jews were duly regulated.<sup>3</sup> The Prophet (pbuh) sought to develop friendly relations with the Jews, who also greeted him in the hope of winning an ally. He expected cordiality and cooperation from them as the people of the scriptures. So he began to build his relations with them by meeting their rabbis and other respectable Jews. He also visited their chiefs and nobles to make friends with them. He treated them with kindness, affection and generosity. He bound himself to them in a bond of friendship on the grounds that they were Scripturists and monotheists.<sup>4</sup> The proof of the good relation between them is financial dealings. The Prophet had commercial dealings with them, including borrowing money from them. It was said that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) died, his shield was mortgaged to a Jew.<sup>5</sup> He also defended them because they believed in and worshipped One God. When he found that they fasted on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram as the day of deliverance from the slavery of Pharaoh, he also fasted with them. He prayed towards their Qiblah, Jerusalem<sup>6</sup> and even he would have liked to agree with the People of the Book in any issue where there was no divine instruction. As it is stated by al-Bukhari:

"وكان رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم يحب موافقة أهل الكتاب فيما لم يؤمر فيه بشيء"

<sup>1</sup> . Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, translated by John B. Hardie (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2000), 41.

<sup>2</sup> . Shibli Nomani, *Life of the Prophet Including Battles* (Pakistan: Karachi, 2003, vol.1), 241.

<sup>3</sup> . Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophet* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 89.

<sup>4</sup> . Muhammad Husein Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1976), 189.

<sup>5</sup> . Zakaria Bashier, *War and Peace in the Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (UK: Markfield, the Islamic Foundation, 2006), 290.

<sup>6</sup> . Afzal-ur-Rahman, *Muhammad as a Military Leader* (London: The Muslim Schools Trust London, 1980), 157.

“And the Prophet agreed with the people of the Book in such things where there was no particular divine instruction”.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from this, there are divine commands revealed in the Qur’an that encouraged social symbiosis between the Muslims and Jews:

الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حِلٌّ لَكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حِلٌّ لَهُمْ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ نَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَافِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّحِدِينَ أَخْدَانٍ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

“This day all good things have been made lawful to you. The food of the People of the Book is permitted to you, and your food is permitted to them. And permitted to you are chaste women, be they either from among the believers or from among those who have received the Book before you, provided you become their protectors in wedlock after paying them their bridal-due, rather than go around committing fornication and taking them as secret-companions. The work of he who refuses to follow the way of faith will go waste, and he will be among the utter losers in the Hereafter.” (al-Maidah, 5: 5)

This verse proclaims that the food of the People of the Book (including the animals slaughtered by them) is lawful to the Muslim and that of the Muslims lawful to them. Furthermore, Muslims may marry those women (Christian and Jew) who have been characterized as *muhsanat* (i.e. 'well-protected women').<sup>2</sup> Such kinship is not permitted with polytheists (*mushrikun*) who are denied this distinction<sup>3</sup>. Thus, it is proved that Islam seeks for peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance between the people of different religions and cultures. Among the three Abrahamic religions, it is only Islam which has accorded recognition to Judaism and Christianity while Judaism does not recognize Jesus as the awaited Messiah or the Prophet; and Christianity does not recognize Muhammad as the true Prophet and Messenger of God<sup>4</sup>. These gestures on the part of Muhammad (pbuh) established good and friendly relations with the Jews. It looked as if the Muslims had found true and sincere friends in the Jews, who would extend great cooperation and a helping hand towards them<sup>5</sup>. These pluralistic tendencies are captured in Madinah - charter, in the article twenty five<sup>6</sup>, which states that the Jews of Banu ‘Auf are a community (*ummah*) along with the believers (*muslimun*). Non-Muslims, thus, were part of the civic Ummah constituted in Madinah. By including the Jews in the community of the believers (*ummah*), the constitution afforded a transcending alliance structure with a higher ethical level

<sup>1</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, vol. 2, Hadith No: 3365.

<sup>2</sup> Mawdudi, *Tafheem al-Quran*, see the verse: 5:5.

<sup>3</sup> Abd al-Rahman Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* (UK: Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, *Islam and Religious Pluralism*, Translated by Sayyid Sulayman Ali Hasan from Persian (United Kingdom: Stanmore, Middlesex, Islamic Centre - Wood Lane, 2006), VI.

<sup>5</sup> Afzal-ur-Rahman, *Muhammad as a Military Leader* (London: The Muslim Schools Trust London, 1980), 157.

<sup>6</sup> The Jews of the Banu ‘Auf are one community with the believers (the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs), their freedmen and their persons except those who behave unjustly and sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families. A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad — A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1955; pp. 231-233.

combined with more adequate safeguards against the destructive traditions of the vendetta and the law of retaliations.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Religious tolerance, religious freedom and social security

The Madinah-charter amounted to an agreement for peaceful coexistence, a defensive alliance of cooperation against aggression that sought to protect a group of small communities, each enjoying under the provisions of the Pact, control over its own people and freedom to preach its own religion. The signatories guaranteed to aid one another and to protect each other's believers against anyone who worked to bring harm upon them. Thus, they guaranteed freedom of belief and freedom of preaching to members of the Pact, despite the diversity of their beliefs<sup>2</sup> though it soon became apparent that the two communities could not exist harmoniously side by side<sup>3</sup>. This covenant was divisible into three parts. The first defines the position of the Muslims themselves and organizes them into a religious and socio-civic unity; The second provides a political arrangement to which the Jews too became a party and to whom it was acceptable; the third binds the parties to work together for the defense of Madinah and also extends security to all the peoples living in an area of a hundred square miles<sup>4</sup>. Half of the clauses - from 24 to 47 including Clause sixteen<sup>5</sup> - in this covenant mostly deal with the matters of relations with Jews.

This agreement considers the Jews as citizens within the Muslim state. They enjoyed their religious freedom and state protection. This relationship was based on perfect equality in all spheres of life, between the Jews and the Muslims. Both were guaranteed equal rights of worship and work and protection of their life and property. The charter of liberty, without any distinction, treated Jews and Muslims as equals and granted equal rights to both. Islam nowhere permitted intolerance. Its mission started with the fundamental precept of the Quran which is "*let there be no compulsion in religion*" (al-Quran, 2: 256). The pledge which the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) gave to the Christians of Najran is a living testimony of his farsighted statesmanship and religious broadmindedness<sup>6</sup>. The general policy of Islam has always been to guarantee the rights of non-Muslim populations. The system of granting civic rights to non-Muslims began with the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the methods of treating Jews and Christians made a significant start at Madinah, where he successfully organized a city-state. His was a realistic government which

<sup>1</sup>. Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publications, 1994), 74.

<sup>2</sup>. Abd al-Rahman Azzam, *The Eternal Message of Muhammad* (UK: Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 128.

<sup>3</sup>. J. W. H. Stobart, *Islam & Its Founder*, New York: E. & J. B. Young & Co. Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895, 153.

<sup>4</sup>. Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal, *The Arab Glory the Arab Grief* (India: Delhi, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli), 163.

<sup>5</sup>. Although clause 16 is included in the document dealing with the Muhajirun and the Ansar, it deals with the Jews, because it ensured that the Muslims would deal justly with their allies, the Jews.

<sup>6</sup>. Sheikh Mohammad. Iqbal, *Islamic Tolerance and Justice* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2005), 97.

secured minority interests by pledges, documents or mutual agreements. He created a healthy atmosphere for the spiritual and material development of the religious groups living under his rule<sup>1</sup>.

One can hardly doubt the fact that Muhammad (pbuh) had immense regard for the followers of other faiths and their rights. Once, some Christian Fathers came to him to discuss the merits of a true religion. During their stay, they could not find a church in which to offer their prayers. The Prophet offered them his own mosque. Another time, he accommodated visiting members of the *Thaqif* tribe in a tent fixed up within the premises of the great mosque of Madinah. When it was pointed that the visitors were polytheists, the Prophet said that no one was such but who made himself so. In his liberality, Muhammad (pbuh) went further in granting concessions and privileges to them<sup>2</sup>. The following document is a living testimony to that effect:

*“To the Christians of Najran and the surrounding territories, the security of God and the pledge of His Prophet are extended for their lives, their religion and their property-to the present as well as the absent, and others besides; there shall be no interference with their faith or their observance, nor any change in their rights or privileges; no bishop shall be removed from his bishopric nor any monk from his monastery, nor any priest from his priesthood; and they shall continue to enjoy everything, great and small, as heretofore; no image or cross shall be destroyed; they shall not oppress nor be oppressed; they shall not practice the rights of blood-vengeance as in the Days of ignorance; no tithes shall be exacted from them, nor shall they be required to furnish provisions for the troops.”<sup>3</sup>*

The pact of Najran is a positive proof of how Islam unreservedly conferred upon the Scripturalists not only social and religious freedom but also the power to decide their own civil matters. It will not be out of place to recapitulate that at Madinah a number of religious groups entered into a political arrangement by means of social contract. It looked like a confederacy which had a constitution<sup>4</sup>. Another paradigm of Prophet’s tolerance to the Jews is worth to mention here. Imam Bukhari recorded the incident:

حدثنا عبد العزيز بن عبد الله حدثنا إبراهيم بن سعد عن صالح عن ابن شهاب عن عروة بن الزبير أن عائشة رضي الله عنها زوج النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم قالت : دخل رهط من اليهود على رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم فقالوا السام عليكم قالت عائشة ففهمتها فقلت وعليكم السام واللعنة قالت فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم ( مهلا يا عائشة إن الله يحب الرفق في الأمر كله ) . فقلت يا رسول الله أو لم تسمع ما قالوا ؟ قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم ( قد قلت وعليكم )

*“A’isha reported that a group of Jews came to Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) and sought his audience and said: assamu ‘alaikum. A’isha said in response: assimu ‘alaikum (death be upon you) and curse also, whereupon Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: ‘A’isha, verily Allah loes kindness in every matter. She said: Did you*

<sup>1</sup> . *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>2</sup> . *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>3</sup> . *Ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> . *Ibid*.



*bear what they said? Thereupon he said: Did you not hear that I said (to them): wa 'alaikum."*

The Jews had made practice of greeting the Prophet not with the words assalamu alaikum (peace be on you), but with the words of abuse assamu alikum (May you die). Once, they said that and Aisha heard them. She was very angry and could not resist her emotion but said: "O evil people, may you die!" The prophet said to her "Hold back O 'Ayishah". She asked him if he had heard what they said and the Prophet said "Yes! And I responded by saying "Same on you too."<sup>1</sup>

This high standard of tolerance was shown not only by the Prophet but also by his successors. For example, fatherly treatment accorded by the second Caliph 'Umar to his Christian and Jewish subjects is known from the following incidence. Once some Muslims dispossessed a Jew of a plot of land and constructed a mosque on the site. Learning of this, the Caliph issued an order for the demolition of the mosque and restoration of the land to the real owner<sup>2</sup>.

The aforesaid events bear ample testimony to the fact that Muslims are pioneers in the field of coexistence, and that they possess, in all circumstances, a potential for coexistence with the willing followers of other creeds. This potential must not, however, be viewed as a predisposition to relinquish the slightest constituent of their identity, renounce any one of their beliefs or waive the smallest right. This sought of coexistence is one which serves noble humanitarian goals through mutual understanding, cooperation and joint action in fields likely to help achieving these goals<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. Mutual understanding and mutual cooperation

These are considerably concerned with the coexistence, in spite of the repugnant and rebellious attitude of the Jews, the Prophet adhered to a perseverant and harmless policy and wished that the Judaic prestige be maintained. This he did because of his awareness of the fact that he had spiritual links with the Prophet Moses. He not only did emphasize on similarities between him and Moses, but also in many points followed what God had approved of through the latter. Qur'an affirms in this regard:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

*"Say O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we shall serve none but Allah and shall associate none with Him in His divinity and that some of*

<sup>1</sup> . Al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 5678.

<sup>2</sup> . Sheikh Mohd. Iqbal, *Islamic Tolerance and Justice*, 123.

<sup>3</sup> . Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, *Islam and Inter-religious Coexistence on the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Publications of ISESCO, 1998), 24-25.

*us will not take others as lords beside Allah.' And if they turn their backs (from accepting this call), tell them: Bear witness that we are the ones who have submitted ourselves exclusively to Allah." (Ali Imran, 3: 64)*

The Prophet had made this call upon the People of Book sometimes between the battles of Badr and Uhud when the enmity between Muslims and Jews had come to the light and the Jews did not fulfill their commitment to help Muslims in defense of the state from the foreign aggression. In the context of this clear violation of the covenant at a moment of crisis, calling them upon to common terms should be considered as an utmost sincerity towards mutual understanding and cooperation.

## 5. Just Treatment

Injustice cannot give birth to a unity. Thus, the message of Muhammad (pbuh) declared justice, freedom and equality as sacred principles which defined the rights and obligations of individuals and their groups. Social justice being the objective underlying shariah, the Prophet, the Pious Caliphs and their enlightened successors took care to secure the same to those whom it was denied<sup>1</sup>. The word *equality* occurs time and again in the Madinah charter. They are not to be wronged nor are their enemies to be aided. The Muslims have their faith, the Jews have theirs. The freedom of religion is recognized and the Jews of Banu Auf are declared as one community with the believers. In addressing them after the signing of the treaty, the Prophet is reported to have said: 'Your flesh is our flesh and your blood is our blood. While they are established in their religion and their property, the reciprocal obligations are also stated. Justice was accorded to the Jews; Muslims and Jews were to have equal status. If a Jew were wronged, then he must be helped to his rights by both Muslim and Jews, and so also if a Muslim were wronged<sup>2</sup>.

The extent of this equality and justice transcends even the signatory Jews and comprehends their allies as well within the circle of the same treatment they would receive from the Muslims. The following clause affirms this action: Clause: 16, "*those Jews who follow us will be helped and will be treated with equality*".<sup>3</sup>

This clause clearly defined the status of Jews in an Islamic state. To get an equal treatment they were supposed to follow the Muslims. In order to remove any doubt regarding the treatment to be meted out to them in case they did not follow the Muslims, their fears were removed in the very next clause by saying that "Jews will not be wronged".<sup>4</sup> Even those Jews who had not opted to join the Muslims and defend Madinah alongside them were the residents of

<sup>1</sup> . Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal, *Islamic Tolerance and Justice*, 93.

<sup>2</sup> . Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Kuala Lumpur: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1983), 125.

<sup>3</sup> . Full Text of the Madina Charter, <http://www.constitution.org/cons/medina/macharter.htm>, retrieved on 19 December 2012.

<sup>4</sup> . Ibid.

the state and as such had the right to be defended against outside attack<sup>1</sup>. The Clause 34, articulates “those in alliance with the Jews will be given the same treatment as the Jews”,<sup>2</sup> thus, the Jews had been granted two very distinct concessions. The first was the guarantee that their enemies would not be helped. The second concession was that their allies would be granted the same status and same treatment as themselves.<sup>3</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the light of above mentioned evidences, unity between Muslims and other ethnic or religious communities, especially Jews and Christians in the very first phase of the first Islamic state led by the Prophet (pbuh) was seen in a very wider framework. This was resultant form the Islamic worldview of universality, freedom of religion, inter-religious symbiosis and reciprocal obligations, religious tolerance, social justice, conflict resolution, developing mutual understanding through dialogue and mutual cooperation in common interests. Upon arrival at Madinah, the first thing the Prophet (pbuh) considered most important is to define and strengthen the relations between Jews and Muslims. He then institutionalized this bilateral tie through a written covenant which is known as the constitution of the first Islamic state. Therefore, it is proved that the peaceful coexistence had got a constitutional value therein. Despite all these practices, unity and peaceful coexistence had been paralyzed through religious prejudice of Jews, their politico-economic interest, their demographic and strategic position and their hostile designs with foreign enemies, their aim of stirring up internecine feuds among Muslim (*Al-Aws* and *Al-Khazraj*) and their repeated attempts to assassinate the Prophet (pbuh) through poisoning and ambush. Through these activities and behavior, Jews had proven that they could not be trusted under any circumstances and, therefore, no state conscious of safety and security of its people could ever take the risk of allowing them to live within its boundary. However, it should be noted here that this unexpected circumstance was not an intended output of Islamic principles. Rather, it was the result of unwillingness of the other to be in unity with Muslims. The Propeht’s approaches toward other ethnics and races are fully compliant with a multi-ethnic and multi-religious unity.

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<sup>1</sup> . Gulzar Ahmed, *The Prophet’s Concept of War* (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1986), 88-89.

<sup>2</sup> . Full Text of the Madina Charter, <http://www.constitution.org/cons/medina/macharter.htm>, retrieved on 19 December 2012.

<sup>3</sup> . Gulzar Ahmed, *The Prophet’s Concept of War*, p. 118.

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