


Coexistence and Communication with the other in Islam: A Civilizational Framework for Building Common Humanity

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ABSTRACT

Coexistence and communication have been the foundation of relationships between Muslims and others throughout various ages and historical periods. These principles are deeply rooted in the core teachings and values of Islam, which emphasize harmony and understanding. The manifestations of coexistence and communication have appeared across different aspects of human interaction, leaving a profound impact on building a comprehensive framework for shared humanity. This framework respects individual particularities while simultaneously allowing all parties to achieve their objectives and interests without infringing upon the rights or obstructing the goals of others. This study seeks to explore three key dimensions that frame civilizational coexistence and communication between Muslims and non-Muslims: the social dimension, the cultural and scientific dimension, and the economic dimension. Through these aspects, the study provides vivid examples, solid stances, and clear illustrations that highlight the authenticity and resilience of the values of coexistence and communication. It also acknowledges periods of decline and disruption that affected these values at certain times.

Keywords: Coexistence, Communication, Shared Humanity, Non-Muslims.

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the terms *coexistence* and *communication*—in their positive sense—and delving into their true essence, one inevitably concludes that they are interconnected and complementary. One of the terminological definitions of coexistence states: *"The gathering of a group of people in a specific place, bound by the necessities of life such as food, drink, and basic living needs, regardless of their religion or other affiliations, with mutual recognition of each other's rights without complete assimilation or fusion."*

As for communication, in the sense we intend, it refers to a behavior that arises between two parties, bringing them closer within a shared framework through mutual will and desire.

When these concepts are tied to the human and civilizational aspect, it becomes evident that they are a necessity. They are the essence of civilization, the foundation of human social cohesion, and the means to highlight and solidify shared human values such as tolerance, good treatment and neighborliness, justice, cooperation, freedom, loyalty to covenants, and more. These values are critical for achieving security, stability, and the happiness humanity aspires to, as well as fulfilling the divine duty that Allah, the Exalted, has entrusted to all His creation: the construction and development of the earth.

Islam is a religion that emphasizes communication, coexistence, mutual understanding, and tolerance among nations and peoples. It advocates for the exchange of benefits and interests among all humanity, making these principles a central means for overcoming potential conflicts and disputes. This message is explicitly stated in the Qur'an, which calls for mutual acquaintance in the verse:

“O mankind, 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 Acquainted.” (Surah Al-Hujurat: 13)

This verse underscores the importance of diversity as a means to foster understanding, cooperation, and unity, emphasizing that righteousness and piety are the ultimate measures of worth in the sight of Allah.

Islam has surrounded the principles of coexistence and communication with a set of guidelines and regulations that must be adhered to and respected. These guidelines fundamentally revolve around ensuring that no harm is inflicted upon the core tenets and principles of the Islamic faith, nor should there be any compromise on its legislations and values. Importantly, these guidelines align harmoniously with the foundational elements of genuine communication and coexistence, which aim to build strong and just relationships.

Research Problem

Despite the many shining examples of communication and coexistence between Muslims and others throughout history, the varying temporal and cultural circumstances raise questions about how these values can be effectively activated in the modern era to achieve harmony between Islamic identity and the demands of a rapidly changing global reality.

Research Significance

The importance of this research lies in its focus on the enduring Islamic principles that promote communication and coexistence. It highlights practical examples that demonstrate Islam's role in fostering positive relationships with others, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and affirming shared human values.

Research Objectives

- Highlight the Islamic legal foundations for communication and coexistence.
- Review historical applications of communication between Muslims and others.
- Provide recommendations for activating the values of coexistence and communication in light of contemporary challenges.

Furthermore, the interaction and coexistence between Muslims and others have been vividly demonstrated across various aspects of life, including social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. These practices have solid foundations in Islamic teachings, and their applications have been observed across different eras and historical periods of Islam. This rich legacy is reflected in the numerous examples and practices of harmonious interaction that we will explore in the following sections.

First: The Social Dimension

The social dimension is one of the most significant aspects through which coexistence and communication between two groups can be observed. It is broader, more inclusive, and more comprehensive than the other dimensions discussed. A prime example of social interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims is the relationships that existed in Medina during the Prophet's time, encompassing both general and specific connections with the city's non-Muslim residents. These relationships were formalized and documented in the Constitution of Medina, written by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to organize the affairs of Medina among all its inhabitants, whether among Muslims themselves or between Muslims and Jews and other non-Muslims.

The Constitution of Medina included the following principles:

“The Jews shall bear their expenses, and the Muslims shall bear their expenses. There shall be mutual support against whoever fights the people of this document. There shall be mutual advice and consultation, and righteousness without sin. No man shall be held accountable for his ally's actions. Support shall be given to the oppressed. The Jews shall contribute jointly with the believers as long as they are at war. Yathrib shall be a sanctuary for the people of this document. The neighbor shall be treated as oneself without harm or wrongdoing.”

This foundational document demonstrates the Prophet's ﷺ approach to fostering a social framework based on mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility among the diverse inhabitants of Medina. It serves as a model of how social coexistence can be effectively organized to ensure harmony and unity in a pluralistic society.

Social communication and coexistence were exemplified in various practical forms throughout Islamic history, reflecting the spirit of tolerance and openness established by Islam. One prominent example is marriage and intermarriage, where several Companions married women from the People of the Book. For instance, Uthman ibn Affan married Na'ila bint al-Farafisa al-Kalbiyya, who was Christian, while Talha ibn Ubaydullah married a Jewish woman, as did Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman. Although Umar ibn al-Khattab advised against marrying women from the People of the Book for social reasons, he did not prohibit it, basing his stance on the verse:

“And [lawful in marriage are] chaste women from among those who were given the Scripture before you.” (Surah Al-Ma'idah: 5).

Another example is the kind treatment Muslims extended to people of other faiths. For instance, it is recorded in *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* by Ibn Sa'd that the delegation of Abd al-Qays camped at the door of Ramlah bint al-Harith, where they received hospitality for ten days, as was customary for guests of the Prophet ﷺ. Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ graciously hosted the Christian delegation of Najran, consisting of fourteen noblemen, and accommodated them in the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, providing them with excellent treatment.

The Prophet ﷺ also instructed his companions and the caliphs after him to honor delegations, saying:
"Grant delegations the same rewards I used to grant them."

Al-Bukhari included a chapter titled "Gifts for Delegations," and Al-Muhallab ibn Abi Sufrah explained: "This includes the practice of honoring delegations as a means of fostering goodwill. This applies to both Muslim and non-Muslim delegations, as they often bring matters of benefit and reconciliation for Muslims."

Social participation was evident in daily interactions. The Prophet ﷺ visited a sick Jewish boy, sat by his bedside, and encouraged him to accept Islam. The boy looked to his father, who said,

"Obey Abu al-Qasim." The boy embraced Islam, and the Prophet ﷺ said: "Praise be to Allah, who saved him from the Fire."

The Prophet ﷺ also engaged in mutual dealings with non-Muslims. For example, it is reported in Al-Bukhari that the Prophet ﷺ passed away while his armor was mortgaged to a Jew to provide for his family. Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib also narrated that the Prophet ﷺ gave charity to a Jewish household, which continued to benefit from it regularly.

These examples showcase the Prophet's ﷺ practical implementation of social coexistence and communication, fostering a spirit of respect, cooperation, and mutual benefit.

Among similar examples is the narration by Imam Malik, Ibn Abi Shaybah, and others from Amrah bint Abdulrahman, that Abu Bakr once entered upon Aisha while she was unwell and being treated by a Jewish woman who was performing ruqyah (spiritual healing). Abu Bakr said, *"Treat her with the Book of Allah."*

In connection with the social dimension, Muslims allowed non-Muslims to practice certain professions closely linked to people's daily lives. This was especially evident in the field of medicine, one of the most critical professions. It is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ sought medical treatment from Al-Harith ibn Kaladah and advised his companions to consult him as well. Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah, in his *"Tabaqat al-Atibba"* (The Classes of Physicians), included biographies of Christian physicians from the early Islamic centuries. He mentions a physician named Abu al-Hakam, describing him as a skilled Christian doctor proficient in various treatments, whose services were sought by Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan for preparing medicines for specific purposes.

Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah also wrote about Ibn Athal, describing him as an outstanding Christian physician in Damascus during Mu'awiyah's reign. Mu'awiyah appointed him as his personal physician, trusted him greatly, and frequently engaged in discussions with him, day and night. Ibn Athal was highly knowledgeable about single and compound medicines, including those with lethal poison, which made him highly valued by Mu'awiyah.

This inclusion of non-Muslims was not limited to the field of medicine. They also practiced prestigious professions and held significant positions in Islamic society, which provided them with means of livelihood and raised their status within the community. This reflected the spirit of coexistence and tolerance that characterized Islamic society. Such professions included trade and finance, while skilled non-Muslims were even appointed to high-ranking positions, such as ministerial and administrative roles, as well as scientific endeavors.

Another example of social coexistence was the exchange of gifts between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself accepted gifts from the rulers of his time. For instance, Yuhanna ibn Ru'ba, the king of Ailah, gifted him a white mule and a cloak. Similarly, the King of Dhu Yazan gifted him a robe purchased for thirty-three camels and a she-camel, which the Prophet ﷺ wore once. Ukaydir of Dumat al-Jandal gifted him a silk garment, which the Prophet ﷺ gave to Ali ibn Abi Talib. It is also narrated that the Negus (King of Abyssinia) gifted the Prophet ﷺ three spears (harpoons) and, in another account, two black shoes of pure color.

The history of Islamic civilization is filled with numerous examples and models of social coexistence and communication between Muslims and others, whether within the Islamic society itself or in its relations with other human communities.

Second: The Cultural and Scientific Dimension

Cultural and scientific coexistence and communication have been central to Islam's mission, serving as powerful tools for fostering relationships among human beings. Since the advent of the Islamic message, Muslims have embraced cultural and scientific interaction as a means of introducing people to the new faith. The Qur'an encourages Muslims to allow non-Muslims to enter Islamic lands to learn about the religion, explore Islamic culture, and engage with its intellectual traditions. This is evident in the verse:

"And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety." (Surah At-Tawbah: 6)

One notable example of cultural interaction is when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ instructed some of his companions to learn the language of the Jews. This enabled them to communicate effectively and respond to Jewish correspondence while safeguarding against potential risks arising from language barriers. Imam Al-Tahawi narrates from Zayd ibn Thabit that he said:

"The Messenger of Allah ﷺ ordered me to learn the script of the Jews, and I did so in less than half a month. When I learned it, I would write to the Jews when the Prophet ﷺ wrote to them, and I would read for him when they wrote to him."

In another narration by Ibn Abi Dawud in *Al-Masabih*, Zayd ibn Thabit said:

"The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to me, 'I receive letters, and I do not want everyone to read them. Can you learn the Hebrew (or Syriac) script?' I replied, 'Yes.' I learned it in seventeen days."

The mastery of languages has always been a key to understanding other cultures, traditions, and sciences. Many Islamic scholars were renowned for their linguistic proficiency, enabling them to engage with diverse knowledge systems. Some companions of the Prophet ﷺ excelled in multiple languages. Sheikh Abdul Hayy Al-Kattani mentions in *At-Taratib Al-Idariyya*:

"One of the most remarkable accounts is what I read in Mir'at Az-Zaman by Sibṭ Ibn Al-Jawzi, who mentioned Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr's slaves. Hisbam said he had one hundred slaves, each speaking a different language, and Ibn Az-Zubayr could communicate with each in their own tongue. This is among the most astonishing examples of linguistic proficiency among the Companions and their successors."

Sheikh Abdul Hayy Al-Kattani, in another part of his book *At-Taratib Al-Idariyya*, commented on the linguistic proficiency of Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr and his retinue, stating:

"This is something remarkable that indicates the breadth and depth of knowledge among them. I do not know of any similar example recorded about any other nation or state."

An essential aspect of cultural and scientific interaction that deserves attention is the role of translation and the transfer of knowledge from other languages into Arabic. This process significantly contributed to scientific cross-pollination between Muslims and other civilizations, representing a distinguished form of cultural exchange and one of the brightest examples of civilizational communication.

The Umayyad era marked the beginning of organized translation efforts. Prince Khalid ibn Yazid played a pivotal role by commissioning a group of Greek philosophers residing in Egypt who were knowledgeable in Arabic to translate books on various sciences from Greek and Coptic into Arabic. This initiative laid the groundwork for the translation movement in the Islamic world.

The translation movement flourished during the Abbasid era, driven by numerous factors, including the enthusiasm of Abbasid caliphs such as Abu Ja'far Al-Mansur, Harun Al-Rashid, and Al-Ma'mun, who supported and funded these efforts. Wealthy individuals also contributed, such as the sons of Musa ibn Shakir, who dispatched Hunayn ibn Ishaq, a Christian scholar, to the Byzantine Empire to collect rare manuscripts and books.

Translation efforts were not limited to the Islamic world. For instance, King Roger of Normandy established an academy that brought together Muslims, Christians, and Jews to translate Arabic sciences into Latin.

Among the prominent Islamic scholars who facilitated intellectual exchange through translation, dissemination, refinement, and adaptation of foreign sciences were Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, known as the "Second Teacher" due to his profound interest in Aristotle's works, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), who excelled in Greek philosophy and made groundbreaking contributions to various fields, particularly medicine. This is also evident in the works of other luminaries such as Al-Razi, Ibn Al-Nafis, Jabir ibn Hayyan, and Ibn Al-Haytham. These scholars served as bridges between Islamic and other ancient civilizations, making human scientific heritage a shared legacy. Their translations and commentaries ensured that knowledge from one civilization enriched another.

This intellectual exchange extended beyond translation. During the Abbasid era, there were numerous scientific and cultural interactions with the Byzantines. For example, John the Grammarian visited Baghdad in 830 CE during the reign of Al-Ma'mun to represent the Byzantine Empire and discuss religious and philosophical matters. He was frequently summoned by the caliph and became a close member of the court.

Similarly, King Roger of Sicily invited the Moroccan geographer Al-Sharif Al-Idrisi to compile a comprehensive geographical work. The result was Al-Idrisi's renowned book, *"Nuzhat Al-Mushtaq fi Iktitraq Al-Afaq"* (*The Excursion of One Who is Eager to Traverse the Horizons*), along with a model of the globe.

These examples demonstrate that the exchange of scientific and cultural knowledge was not merely a matter of translation but also involved robust scholarly interactions and collaborative endeavors. Such efforts highlight the inseparability of science and civilization, as the development of knowledge is a cumulative process shared by multiple civilizations over time. As Al-Kattani noted, *"It is erroneous to attribute the development of science and technology to a single era or nation, for every civilization builds upon the knowledge accumulated by earlier ones."*

One notable form of intellectual communication between Islamic scholars and others is the scientific debates that brought together experts from various disciplines to discuss significant scientific and philosophical issues. These debates often took place in the courts of caliphs, sultans, ministers, and notable figures. A prominent

example is the debate between the grammarian Abu Sa'id Al-Sirafi (d. 368 AH) and the logician Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus (d. 328 AH) in the court of Abu Al-Fath Ibn Al-Furat (d. 327 AH), the vizier of Al-Muqtadir Al-Abbasi. The topic of the debate was Arabic grammar versus Greek logic, held in the year 320 AH, and attended by a group of prominent scholars. The debate concluded with the victory of Abu Sa'id Al-Sirafi, showcasing the strength of Arabic grammar and its intellectual framework.

During the Abbasid era, debates between scholars and theologians flourished. For instance, Yahya ibn Khalid Al-Barmaki hosted gatherings where theologians, philosophers, and scholars from various religious and philosophical backgrounds engaged in discussions on topics rooted in kalam (Islamic theology) and philosophy.

Another significant example of cultural and scientific communication is the scholarly gatherings organized by prominent Muslim scholars, which were attended by individuals from diverse faiths, including Muslims, Jews, Christians, and others. These gatherings served as platforms for exchanging knowledge and ideas, fostering an inclusive intellectual environment. Records of such gatherings are well-documented in many Islamic historical and biographical works.

In conclusion, cultural and scientific communication is a vital aspect of fostering relations between Muslims and others. When carried out within the framework permitted by Islam, aligned with its tolerant principles, and in harmony with Islamic identity, such interactions can significantly enhance mutual understanding and cooperation without compromising religious or cultural distinctiveness.

Third: The Economic and Trade Dimension

It is well-established that Allah has distributed resources and blessings among people, granting some what others lack. This natural diversity necessitates the exchange of goods and services, allowing every group to benefit from what others possess. History bears witness that economic and trade relationships often precede political relations, as the latter usually result from the former.

Economic and trade exchanges played a significant role in fostering communication and coexistence between Muslims and others, even though periods of stagnation occurred due to various factors. The roots of this interaction can be traced back to the Prophetic era, exemplified in the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, signed between the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Quraysh in the sixth year of Hijrah. The treaty included provisions ensuring the safety of trade caravans for both parties, as stated:

"Whoever comes to Mecca from the companions of Muhammad for pilgrimage, Umrah, or to seek the bounty of Allah is secure in his life and wealth."

When the Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina, one of the foundations for building the new community was the establishment of markets. Among the prominent markets at the time was the Market of Banu Qaynuqa', frequented by Muslims for trade. Uthman ibn Affan said:

"I used to buy dates from the market of Banu Qaynuqa' and bring them to Medina. I would measure them and report the quantity to the buyers, and they would pay me my agreed profit based on my word. When the Prophet ﷺ learned of this, he said, 'When you sell, measure.'"

This market is also mentioned in the story of Abdul Rahman ibn Awf and Sa'd ibn Rabi', when the Prophet ﷺ established bonds of brotherhood between the Muhajirun (migrants) and Ansar (supporters). Sa'd offered to share half of his wealth with Abdul Rahman, who declined and instead asked, *"Where is your market?"* He was directed to the Market of Banu Qaynuqa' and began trading there.

Additionally, the Prophet ﷺ's transaction with a Jew, where he purchased food on credit and pledged his armor as collateral, further demonstrates the permissibility of trade with non-Muslims. Scholars have cited this as evidence of the legitimacy of commercial dealings across faiths. Trade, as a means of mutual exchange, serves as a key avenue for fostering communication and coexistence.

Another example is the Heraclian dinars brought to the Arabs from Roman territories during the Prophet's time. These remained in circulation until the reign of Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, who was the first to mint Islamic dinars, known as Marwani dinars.

These instances highlight how economic interactions served as an effective medium for fostering coexistence and mutual benefit between Muslims and others, showcasing the inclusive nature of trade within the framework of Islamic principles.

Trade has historically served as a robust bridge for fostering communication between Muslims and others, playing a pivotal role in the spread of Islam. Muslim traders exemplified the noble values of Islam in their dealings, such as honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, and fulfilling commitments. By embodying these principles in their commercial interactions, they showcased the high ethical standards of their faith. This influence was particularly evident in regions with significant trade relations with Muslims, such as India and China, where Islamic values left a lasting impression on local communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, these glimpses reveal that Muslims' communication and coexistence with others took on various forms and had clear applications across multiple aspects of life. This underscores that communication and coexistence have been the default state, even if they were not always consistently realized across all times and places.

It is important to emphasize that the relationships of communication, coexistence, and tolerance between Muslims and others must always be governed by the principles, teachings, and values of Islam. These values inherently aim to promote the welfare of all humanity and align seamlessly with genuine interests and shared human values, ensuring harmony and mutual benefit.

Therefore, the research has concluded with several important findings, including:

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Islam has established clear foundations for communication and coexistence in various fields, in line with its noble objectives and the realization of public interest.
- Cultural and scientific interaction between Muslims and others significantly enriched Islamic civilization and left a prominent impact on other civilizations.
- Trade served as a strong bridge for communication, with Muslim traders playing a crucial role in spreading Islam and its values across many regions of the world.
- Coexistence was not merely a slogan but was manifested in practical practices encompassing social, cultural, economic, and political relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The need to promote Islamic values that advocate for communication and coexistence through educational curricula and media, contributing to raising a generation aware of these values.
- Supporting studies that highlight positive examples of Islamic coexistence with other cultures to enhance the civilizational image of Islam.
- Leveraging historical experiences in cultural, scientific, and trade interactions to develop policies that promote global cooperation in the modern era.
- Encouraging dialogue between cultures and religions to foster mutual understanding and address intellectual and social challenges that hinder peaceful coexistence.

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