

# THE NECESSITY OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FROM QURANIC PERSPECTIVE

By  
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(In the Name of God, The most Merciful, and The Most Compassionate)

First of all I would like thank you all for inviting us here and giving a chance to talk about tolerance from Islamic perspective. Let me begin my presentation with a prayer of the Prophet ﷺ

O Allah (God), join our hearts, mend our social relationship, guide us to the path of peace, bring us from darkness to light, save us from obscenities, outward or inward, and bless our ears, our eyes, our hearts, our wives, our children, and forgive us; You are the Forgiving, the Merciful. And make us grateful for your blessing and make us praise it while accepting it and give it to us in full.<sup>1</sup>

This is the declaration of the Vatican II Council:

1. We as Christian Community have respect for Muslims.
2. They believe that there is only One Allah (God) who is Ever living, the Self-subsisting, Powerful, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and sent down a messenger to deliver His message for them.

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<sup>1</sup>-Sunan Abu-Davud, Book 3, Number 964; Narrated by Abdullah ibn Maswood

3. They submit the commandments of Allah (God) sincerely like Abraham (عليه السلام) even though they do not understand what Allah (God) says in the Qura'an exactly.
4. They believe that Jesus is a messenger of Allah (God) like the prophet Muhammad and they perform five times daily prayer, fast during a holy month, gives obligatory charity and worship Allah (God) <sup>1</sup>.

This declaration from Vatican immediately reminds me our slogan "Peace Begins in Understanding Others" Mostly this declaration is being shown as a starting point for such kind of dialogue activities, but in fact it is not correct. If you consider the whole history of humankind, you realize that it was started with the previous prophets of Allah with their own communities. Especially 14 centuries ago the achievements of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) are really significant as we will analyze here in this article.

Thanks Allah nowadays, when it was needed more and more in this century of wars, the number of these kinds of activities, declarations etc. from both sides are being given and interfaith dialog among the followers of different faith is increasing and getting better day by day.

Right now, before I start giving some details about the topic, I would like to talk about one of my experiences: I was in the United States, at Indiana University to pursue my masters in 2003, we have founded there a group which is Indiana Muslim Dialogue Group ([www.bmdg.org](http://www.bmdg.org)). As one of the representatives of this group, I had visited so many churches and given some seminars over there about Islam. Once we were invited by St. John Catholic Center to give a speech about "Islam in General". This was a special program of Interfaith Dialogue Club activity of this church. There were some other representatives from different faiths also; every representative gave a speech about their belief at that time. But after talking about "Islam in General" Mss. Rebecca, the religious director of Indiana University and in the mean time the head of five different Church told me something very surprising. She said: 'O Mr. Murat! I was thinking

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<sup>1</sup>- 3.Abbott, M.S. Walter, the Documents of Vatican II 1963-1965

about you Muslims that you were worshipping to the Prophet Muhammad, thanks for your enlightening speech”

When I heard that, I was shocked and could not help asking this question: “Is this a very well spread idea in the States about Muslims?” and she said “Yes”. She informed me later about the reasons of this misconception: “It is a comparison of Christianity with Islam; we have, as Christians, Jesus in our belief as a divine being to be worshipped. And as a result of this, most of the common Christians believe that you, Muslims, have the prophet Muhammad as a divine being to be worshipped. This is the first and the most important reason, but the second one is that, you, Muslims do not have interaction with non-Muslims, you do not introduce Islam to the others, this is also worth considering reason for such kind of stereotyping about Islam here in the USA. That is my first time to meet with Muslims, to sit together and share some information among us” she said.

As you see in this example, If Mrs. Rebecca had corrected her wrong belief about Islam; it is the result of interfaith dialogue activities. So, the benefits of such kind of programs cannot be denied of course. If it is the case then, right now it is time to analyze the place of that in Islam.

Before I start giving some detailed information about the tolerance and interfaith dialogue in Islam let me ask one question:

### **Did Muhammad (ﷺ) claim that he brought and established a new and different Religion?**

This question has an immediate answer: No! According to the Qura’an Allah has revealed Torah, Bible and finally the Qura’an. All of them came from the same source. In fact, there are some changes among them but these are not related to the essential beliefs but related to current conditions of that age in which they were all revealed. And of course it is really normal. This coming verse remind us the position of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ):

﴿قُلْ مَا كُنْتُ بِدْعًا مِّنَ الرُّسُلِ﴾

"Say: Jam no new thing among the messengers, I am no bringer of a new doctrine among the messengers"

Let me recite some more verses of the Qura'an which will support this idea:

﴿شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ﴾

"The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Ibrahim and Mousa and Jesus that keep to obedience and be not divided therein"<sup>1</sup>

These two verses above simply say that Muhammad (ﷺ) did not claim that he brought a new religion. He had never said even a single word indicating such a claim. As everybody knows we are all the members of The Family of Abraham In fact Muhammad (ﷺ) indicates that directly, He says: Both in this world and in the Hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary (Peace be upon both of them ﷺ). The prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Muslims Judaism, Christianity and Islam are three forms of one religion, which, in its original purity, was the religion of Abraham: Al-Islam, that perfect Self-Surrender to the Will of Allah (God), which is the basis of Theocracy. According to these verses that I mentioned, it is undeniable that the Qura'an is just a last step of the processing of revelation since the beginning of the time. Allah describes three holy books and says about all of them that there are guidance and a light in them. If you listen carefully you will notice that in these verses there are also two remarkable commands: "Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein." The same thing, Related to this verse above, we believe that, What Allah revealed is Torah, Bible and

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<sup>1</sup>-The Quran, 42/13

<sup>2</sup>- Ahmed ibn. Hanbel: 10558, Narrated by Abu Huraira

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the Qura'an. It is very obvious that there is also a big invitation for the People of the Scripture like that: " O Believers! Concentrate on the Holy Books and try to understand it correctly, so, finally make it your way of life. Allah invites the People of the Book to look at their own scriptures carefully" I can't imagine a better reason for the dialog among the members of these religions. Its meaning is so clear: DIALOG!

As we all know according to the Islamic thought, it is impossible to have a benefit from the Qura'an without believing in the Bible, Torah, The Book of Psalms, etc. First of all, there are six pillars in the Islamic creed that everybody has to believe to become a Muslim or to stay as a Muslim. In my opinion first two of these pillars encourage Muslims to the interfaith dialog.

- 1.To believe in the holy books which are revealed before the Qura'an.
- 2.To believe in all of the Prophets (Peace be upon them ﷺ) who are sent before Muhammad (ﷺ) by Allah (God).

As it is obvious, there are some reasons for a dialog instead of hate among us just in the beginning of the Qura'an.

If I am supposed to start talking about today's subject directly I would say tolerance among the members of different religions begins in being aware of the similarities and common things. PEACE BEGINS IN UNDERSTANDING OTHERS. So, because of that we should learn a little more about the people around us in the light of Qura'an.

## **Verses Of The Qura'an Which Encourage Tolerance And Interfaith Dialogue**

If we start reciting all of the verses in the favor of dialogue, it will take too much time. Because the Qura'an is full of such kind of verses. If you just remember the stories of the previous prophets in the Qura'an you will realize that what they were doing was interfaith dialogue with their own nations all the times.

So, after this brief encouragement above to have a good relationship with the People of the Scripture what can be inferred about some kind of

Christians and Jews? Allah says:

﴿لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ (١١٣) يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١١٤)﴾

"They are not all alike; of the followers of the Book there is an upright party; they recite Allah's communications in the nighttime and they adore (Him). They believe in Allah and the last day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and they strive with one another in hastening to good deeds, and those are among the righteous"<sup>1</sup>.

There is a worth note fact in the verses above that Allah (God) emphasize the most important common beliefs among three religions, to believe in the same Allah (God) and the Last Day (Hereafter). As we see Allah (God) does not mention prophet hood here. In my opinion that means: forget the differences and be together in common things for the sake of peace.

We as Muslims should keep in mind that Qura'an commands Muslims to be together in common things in this coming verse:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ﴾

"Say: O followers of the Book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you"<sup>2</sup>

These verses are not all we have about the others in the Qura'an, right now we'd better turn our attention to other these coming verses:

﴿...وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُم مَّوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى﴾

<sup>1</sup>-The Qura'an, 3/113, 114

<sup>2</sup>-The Quran, 3/64

"And you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: We are Christians." <sup>1</sup> This reality is what I had seen in the USA during my stay there.

There is a really important reality in the Qura'an if you notice here in this coming verse, usually whenever Allah (God) mentions the word "Qura'an" he describes it as "a verifier:

﴿وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ  
وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ.....﴾

And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Scripture and a guardian over it" <sup>2</sup> For me this reality of the Quran is also to remind us the importance of seeking the common ground among us.

### Some Verses Which Are Claimed To Be Against Interfaith Dialogue

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَى أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ  
بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

سورة المائدة آية ٥١

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا آبَاءَكُمْ وَإِخْوَانَكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ إِنْ اسْتَحَبُّوا  
الْكُفْرَ عَلَى الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَاُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾ سورة

التوبة ٢٣.

The word ﴿أَوْلِيَاءَ﴾ is mostly translated as "friends" in our commentary books, but it is completely wrong translation, because of this coming verse of the Qura'an:

<sup>1</sup> -The Quran, 5:82

<sup>2</sup> -The Quran, 5/48

﴿وَإِنْ جَاهِدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

And if they contend with you that you should associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them, and keep company with them in this world kindly, and follow the way of him who turns to Me, then to Me is your return, then will I inform you of what you did<sup>1</sup> If there was a prohibition in the first and second verses above to get some friends from none-Muslims, in the third verse Allah would not command us to "keep company with them in this world kindly" Because of this verse, acceptable translation for the word of Awliya 'أولياء' should be "Protectors" or "Guardians" in these verses of the Qura'an.

Off course you can not give this "Friends" translation for that verse, because, in this case also the verse which gives permission to Muslim men to get married with the women of the people of the book should be illogical: Off course some body should love his wife even if he got married with a Christian or Jewish girl.

### The Islamic principles that guide the relations among the other people

First of all there is a general principle in the Qura'an which teaches us what to think about the other people: I think we all should keep in mind this coming verse of the Qura'an:

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

"O mankind ! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in Allah's (God) sight is the most

<sup>1</sup>-The Quran, 31.015

righteous of you. Allah (God) is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the encouragement of you may come to know one another I would like to mention a really important fact in our religious life. As you all know, some of the most important effects of the religion in our daily life are its effect to our diet and our family life such as marriage rules etc. So, let's see what Quran says in this matter:

﴿الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَلٌّ لَّكُمْ  
وَطَعَامُكُمْ حَلٌّ لَهُمْ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ  
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ  
مُسَافِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي أَخْدَانٍ....﴾

“This day (all) the good things are allowed to you; and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them; and the chaste from among the believing women and the chaste from among those who have been given the Book before you (are lawful for you); when you have given them their dowries, their mehr مهر , taking (them) in marriage”<sup>2</sup>

All the times while we are shopping in the US we are looking some signs marked on food products indicating that whether that food is kosher or not. On the other hand a Muslim man can get married only with a follower of one of the Abrahamic faiths such as a Jewish or a Christian girl. What a significant common thing! Followers of these three religions should look at this verse very carefully and understand how Allah encourages them to have a wonderful relationship among them. Its meaning related to this significant common thing must not be forgotten all the time until the end of the days because of its importance.

There is a special verse which is related to the People of the Scripture, teaching how to interact with them:

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<sup>1</sup> -The Quran, 49/13

<sup>2</sup> -The Quran, 5/05

﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which has been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our Allah and your Allah is One, and unto Him we surrender".<sup>1</sup> in this verse Allah teaches believers in what way they are supposed to interact with others and what kind of behavior they are supposed to have. There is a worth consider and noticeable commandment in this verse: Allah commands Muslims to find a common word while they are having a conversation with the People of the Scripture, it is read: and say: We believe in that which has been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our Allah and your Allah is One, and unto Him we surrender.<sup>2</sup> According to Ibn Jarir this coming verse of the Quran should be mentioned at this point.

﴿ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ...﴾

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Kathir ابن كثير mentions the story of Moses (Peace be upon him ﷺ) and Pharaoh as a brilliant example at this point 21 Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt and was claiming to be the God of the

<sup>1</sup> -The Quran, 29/046

<sup>2</sup> -The Quran, 2/046

<sup>3</sup> -The Quran, 16/125

Earth. And Allah sent Moses as a messenger to warn and guide him. But we need to look at this verse carefully to understand the way of communication with others according to Islam. Allah says:

﴿ اذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ (٤٣) فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ

يَخْشَىٰ

"Go both of you (Moses and his brother Aaron), unto Pharaoh. Lo! He has transgressed (the bounds). And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear." <sup>1</sup>

If Allah (God) commands to speak a gentle word unto Pharaoh who had claimed to be The God of the Earth, what about the others, such as the people of the book? Christians or Jews? As it appears, undoubtedly there is no way to make disturbing remarks while sharing the same world together especially while we are having lots of common things among us. As another example for that let me indicate that the most important part of Islam, as you know, is to worship only one Allah (God) without associating anybody or anything with Him. And let's see how a Muslim is supposed to behave if his parents force him to leave his/her belief: 'And if they contend with you that you should associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them, and keep company with them in this world kindly, and follow the way of him who turns to Me, then to Me is your return, then will I inform you of what you did'

After the indication of this relationship and some common things among us let me ask you one question:

### **Is Islam really tolerant of other beliefs?**

Because of the place where I am giving this talk, I especially emphasized the relationship among Muslims and the People of the Scripture but the Quran indicates one universal Islamic law which is not only related to the People of the Book but also to other beliefs. First of all

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<sup>1</sup>-The Quran, 20/ 43,44

let me say that I find much confusion of ideas even among Muslims on this subject, owing to defective study of the Quran and the Prophet's life. Many Muslims seem to forget that our Prophet had allies among the idolaters even after Islam had triumphed in Arabia, and that he fulfilled his treaty with them perfectly until the term thereof. Secondly, let us turn our attention to the most important verse of the Quran in this subject. Allah (God) says: "There is no compulsion in religion."<sup>1</sup> Allah (God) also says in the Quran about an attitude that every Muslim missionary is supposed to have:

﴿وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَآمَنَ مَن فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُم جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them; will you then force men till they become believers?"

Muslims should keep in mind this Quranic statement all the times:

﴿لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ﴾

To you your religion, and to me my religion."<sup>2</sup>

I have mentioned lots of verses in my speech but there are also worth mentioning some historical examples for my claims? Yes certainly there are. As an example for the way of interaction from Islamic perspective with people who are neither Muslims nor Christians nor Jews, I want to give a special example. This example is about Hazrat Asma, sister of Hazrat Aisha. One time her pagan stepmother had come to city of Madina from Mecca and had wanted to see her stepchild Asma, but Asma (Peace be upon her) had hesitated to behave towards her respectfully and show her some hospitality, because of that she went to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) to ask about the situation and to learn

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<sup>1</sup>- The Quran, 2/256

<sup>2</sup>- The Quran 109/6

what she was supposed to do? Then, Allah had revealed one verse to Muhammad (ﷺ) 27 explaining what Muslims are supposed to do in such cases:

﴿لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُواكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ﴾

Allah does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves the doers of justice.<sup>1</sup> If we pay our attention to the situation carefully, we see that the aforesaid woman (Asma's stepmother) was a pagan. But even though she was an unbeliever, Allah encouraged Asma to shove her (and also all of us) the way of kindness and deal justly with her. Therefore we need to compare the situation, what we see is so obvious; the Islam is full of tolerance towards religious differences especially towards the People of the Scripture because of the same source.

To bring some traditional proofs of what we claim, I would like mention that, once the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was passing a Jewish funeral and he stopped to pay his respects. When reminded that the man being buried was a Jew, Muhammad replied, He is still a human being though. He showed the value given to humanity in Islam.

It is one function of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. History provides many examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths:

When the second caliph Omar (May Allah be pleased with him رضي الله عنه) entered Jerusalem in the year 634, Islamic law also permits non-Muslim minorities to set up their own courts, which implement family laws drawn up by the minorities themselves. When the caliph Omar took Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup>-The Quran, 60/ 8

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from the Byzantines, he insisted on entering the city with only a small number of his companions. Proclaiming to the inhabitants that their lives and property were safe, and that their places of worship would never be taken from them, he asked the Christian patriarch Sophronius to accompany him on a visit to all the holy places. The Patriarch invited him to pray in a Church, but he preferred to pray outside its gates, saying that if he accepted, later generations of Muslims might use his action as an excuse to turn it into a mosque. Above is the mosque built on the spot where Omar did pray?

Another example: prior to the Spanish Inquisition, Jews and Christians lived and prospered in Andalus (Spain) for centuries under Muslim rule. Islam granted freedom of worship to all religious communities in the city. In Spain under the Umayyads and in Baghdad under the Abbasid Khalifas, Christians and Jews, equally with Muslims, were admitted to the Schools and universities - not only that, but were boarded and lodged in hostels at the cost of the state. When the Moors were driven out of Spain, the Christian conquerors held a terrific persecution of the Jews. Those who were fortunate enough to escape fled, some of them to Morocco and many hundreds to the Turkish Empire, where their descendants still live in separate communities, and still speak among themselves an antiquated form of Spanish. The Muslim Empire was a refuge for all those who fled from persecution by the Inquisition. As another example of that: at the late 20th century Jews were being tortured in Russia and the Emperor of Ottoman Empire, Sultan Abdulhamid II who was the caliph of Muslims in the world at that time sent a warning to Russia saying: I want you stop torturing Jews and if you do not do so, I will come there with my army and make you stop that. The problem was solved at that time by the means of your Muslim brothers.

So far, we have addressed to the importance of dialogue and tolerance so as to maintain a worldwide peace and mutual understanding. A question arose: "Is tolerance a story of the past or can it be applicable in these modern times?"

Indeed, I would like to give some examples that prove that today dialogue and tolerance can really be practiced among world communities through mutual understanding.

Free from the context of 9/11, from early 1970s Muhammad Fethullah Gulen had been one of the outspoken and balancing personalities in Turkey who emphasized through his nationwide sermons that Islam by itself is the religion of love, tolerance and reconciliation and victory over the civilized people can only be possible through persuasion.

Muhammed Fethullah Gulen has been from his earliest years a gifted scholar and thinker, and a prolific writer and poet. He is well known for his ardent endeavors to strengthen bonds among all peoples of the world and promote dialogue and tolerance. 500 Turkish private educational institutions in Turkey and 500 international schools and dialogue centers in more than 100 world countries in Asia, Africa, Australia, Americas and Europe, promote love, tolerance and reconciliation. These institutions which are founded by Gulen's encouragements pave the way for a better world to live in for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

In these schools, black children share the same desk with white children and Muslim children play together with Christian, Buddhist or Jewish ones; that is thousands of children from various cultures, religions, languages and backgrounds take education in a common ground, free from any ignorance, bigotry and misunderstanding. A better world is in the making.

As a vivid example, on being asked by the volunteer Turkish educationists who ask Gulen's advices on admitting Christian children in Albania, Gulen replies, "They are humans too, don't you think?"

Here Gulen gives a specific definition for tolerance, He says: "Tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them."

All around the world, in the intercultural dialogue centers, thousands of people from different creeds and cultures meet at the unifying junction

of tolerance, dialogue, and reconciliation. "As a result, I would like to indicate that tolerance is not something that was invented by us. Tolerance was first introduced on this Earth by the prophets whose teacher was Allah. The best example to it is from the Holy Qur'an. On the sad incident of Slander to Hazrat Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) by hypocrites, His father Hazrat Abu Bakr, who had been giving financial support to one of those who was involved in the slander, took an oath not to give any more support to this person. But the verse that was revealed warned that this most faithful companion of the Prophet should be more lenient. The 22<sup>nd</sup> verse of Surah Al Noor reads: "Let not those among you who are endowed with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those in want and those who have left their homes in Allah's cause: Let them forgive and overlook. Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you. For Allah is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful

I want to draw your attention in particular to the expression at the end of this verse, "Do you not wish that God should forgive you. For God is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful "Allah indicates that just as He forgives us, so too should we forgive one another for the mistakes that we make. And this is illustrated to us as a Qur'anic virtue in the character of Abu Bakr.

So, it is our duty as mentioned in the Hadith, "Take on the virtue of Allah" we too should forgive and cover the mistakes of our fellows as per Allah's name, Al-Sattaar السَّاتِر ."

Closing up, as Gulen says, "Treating love with love and treating even enmity with love is the most distinguished characteristic of a heart that is overflowing with faith. Hating every one means that Satan has grasped one's heart. Love humanity, admire humanity."

## **Final Thoughts**

Historically, Islamic civilization has displayed a remarkable ability to recognize possibilities of tolerance, and to act upon these possibilities.

### **The Necessity of Interfaith dialogue**

Islamic civilization produced a moral and humanistic tradition that preserved Greek philosophy, and generated much science, art, and socially benevolent thought. Unfortunately, however, the modern puritans are dissipating and wasting this inspiring moral tradition. They are increasingly shutting off the possibilities for a tolerant interpretation of the Islamic tradition.

So, after all of these historical and Quranic information I want to remind you that Allah (God) is not the Allah (God) of the Jews or the Christians or the Muslims only, any more than the sun shines or the rain falls for Jews or Christians or Muslims only. I want to end my speech with these words, which influence me a lot:

Be so tolerant that your heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love for others. Offer a hand to those in trouble, and be concerned about everyone

Thank you for having us and peace be with you.