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Revisiting Interfaith Relations in the Context of *Sirah:* A Case of *"Ahl al Kitab"*

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Abstract

Religion has emerged as a major power in today's society, and it must be a force of good—for conflict resolution rather than conflict production. It is often assumed that all faiths in the world educate their followers to love, respect, collaborate, and help their fellow creatures. At the same time, countless horrific deeds have been performed using the word "religion," resulting in recurring crises of war, terrorism, innocent deaths, and so on. The non-observance of tolerance, brotherhood, and humanism between the religions adds a fuel to the fire. People in today's globalized world live with a variety of religions and beliefs that vary from place to place. The worrying rise in religious disputes in our modern society is all too well recognized. Conflicts between various religious traditions and groups within the same faith have also arisen. Hence, there comes the necessity of dialogue. The dialogue between different faiths or religions has the importance of first-class to promote love, harmony, and peace in today's globalized world. As Islam has also an appeal to interfaith dialogue. This study examines the interfaith relation between Islam and Ahl al Kitab (Jews and Christians) as understood from the Si'rah of the prophet of Islam, Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The study will analyze the events in the life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and show how he interacted with the 'people of the book' and emphasized the virtues of justice, equality, tolerance, and communal harmony between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. This research on interfaith dialogue is an attempt to promote harmony between Islam and the People of the Book, remove mutual misconceptions, and bring *'Ahl al Kitab'* closer to Islam. The study will inspire Muslims to imbibe the qualities of a human and behave with respect and honour towards all fellow humans irrespective of their faiths.

A. INTRODUCTION

Religions are historically divided into two main categories: divine and non-divine. Divine religions include religions that have arisen through divine revelation and the dispatch of messengers, and adherents of divine religions believe in some divine book and a prophet. Their beliefs include belief in Allah, His Books, Prophets, angels, the afterlife and resurrection after death, heaven, and hell. The divine religions included the three religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, whose followers are called Jews, Christians, and Muslims respectively, each of them believes in the heavenly books they claim, such as the Quran, the Torah, and the. However, over time, some of

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the above beliefs of Jews and Christians were distorted and false beliefs were added to them. But despite their distorted beliefs, they claim the same Book that was revealed unto them and believe the Prophet that was sent to them. In the division of religions, they are considered separate from other non-divine religions. These three are called the *"People of the Book"* (*Ahl al Kitab*). All three religions are also called Abrahamic religions because all three are attributed to Prophet Ibrahim A.S. Prophet Moses A.S and Prophet Jesus A.S were from the Israeli branch of the Prophet Ibrahim A.S, while the Prophet Muhammad PBUH was written in the fate of the Ismaili branch of Ibrahim. Hence, the Jews and Christians are relatively close kinsmen of Muslims. The treatment of these two religions – Jews and Christians in Islam is different than all other world religions. The Quran references and treats *'Ahl al Kitab'* differently among all world religions. The Quran directly addresses them to come closer to the commonalities rather than differences[i]. In the same chapter, the Quran mentions some of them as believers[ii]. Regarding the rulings of *Shari'ah,* if any rulings were not revealed in any matters of *Shari'ah,* Prophet Muhammad PBUH used to agree with *'Ahl al Kitab'* instead of polytheists[iii]. Islam is a mercy and guidance for all mankind. Its invitation is not for any particular class, group, or region, but without discrimination of color, caste, creed, and religion, it is for all human beings. Therefore, the order of preaching and the style of invitation have characteristics that is compatible with human nature and temperament. Islam's style of invitation is based on wisdom. One of the main virtues and wisdom of Islam is that it builds commonalities instead of differences to convey its call to disbelievers and opponents. The Quran says, *"Invite all to the way of you Lord with wisdom and kind advice"*[iv]. Our approach to *Ahl al Kitab* should be the same that is proven by the Quran and *Sunnah* and reject every extremist and violent point of view that has been established by a class devoid of wisdom and knowledge. The nature of the religion of Islam is ease, flexibility, and gentleness. Whoever tries to make this religion strict, the softness of the religion will prevail over him. *"Indeed, Islam is easy; who makes it difficult will overcome him. Take the straight path, adopt moderation and mediocrity, and give good tidings"*[v]

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Methodology of this research is descriptive, explorative, and analytical. The data collection is primary and secondary sources consisting of Arabic and English literature. Of these available sources, the study offers systematic and analytical

evaluations to understand the Prophet's interfaith relationships with Jews and Christians.

This study examines the interfaith relation between Islam and Ahl al Kitab (Jews and Christians) as understood from the Sirah of the prophet of Islam, Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The study will analyse the events in the life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and show how he interacted with the 'people of the book' and emphasized the virtues of justice, equality, tolerance, and communal harmony between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. This research on interfaith dialogue is an attempt to promote harmony between Islam and the People of the Book, remove mutual misconceptions, and bring 'Ahl al Kitab' closer to Islam.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Referencing "*Ahl al Kitab"* in the Quran

The holy Quran has mentioned Muslims, Jews, and Christians with their holy Books as a single community and has specified that there are only two revealed religions apart from Islam; the Jews and Christians. The holy Quran has gathered all these three religions in one direction of the divisions of religions. The holy Quran has itself declared to be the confirmation of the earlier revealed books of the Jews and Christians. In *Surah An'am,* the Quran says, *"(like that book) this too is a Book which we have revealed; full of blessings, confirming what was revealed before it so that you might warn the people of the Mother of cities (Makah) and those around it. Those who believe in the hereafter believe in it and are ever mindful of their prayers".*[vi] In *chapter 10,* it states, *"And this Quran is such that it could not be composed by any unless it is revealed from Allah. It is a confirmation of the revelation, and before it and a detailed exposition of the Book. Beyond doubt it is from the Lord of the Universe".*[vii] In *chapter 35,* it says, *"The Book we have revealed to you 'O Prophet' is the truth, confirming what came before it. Surely Allah is All-Aware, Alll-Seeing of His servants".*[viii] The Quran introduces itself as a testimony of the earlier scriptures. In *Surah 3*, it introduces itself as, *"He sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming what came before it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel".*[ix] Similarly, the Torah and the Gospel also mentions the Prophet hood and Messenger ship of the Holy Prophet PBUH and his attributes and perfections. See its statement in Surah Al-A'raf*, "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and prohibits them from what is wrong and makes lawful for them*

what is good and forbids them from what is evil an relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them. So they, who have believed in him, honoured him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him- it is those who will be successful".[x]

The holy Quran also includes that even in Torah and Gospel; the attributed of the companions of the Prophet were also mentioned. In *Surah al-Fath*, the statement follows as, *"Muhammad PBUH is the Messenger of Allah. And those with him are firm with the disbelievers and compassionate with one another. You see them bowing and prostrating ˹in prayer˺, seeking Allah's bounty and pleasure. The sign ˹of brightness can be seen˺ on their faces from the trace of prostrating ˹in prayer˺. This is their description in the Torah. And their parable in the Gospel is that of a seed that sprouts its ˹tiny˺ branches, making it strong. Then it becomes thick, standing firmly on its stem, to the delight of the planters—in this way Allah makes the believers a source of dismay for the disbelievers. To those of them who believe and do good, Allah has promised forgiveness and a great reward".*[xi] In the context of the Quran, those who believe in the revealed Books are called *"Ahl al Kitab"* (Jews and Christians). The Jews believe in Torah, a revealed Book of Prophet Moses A.S., and the Christians believe in the Gospel that was revealed on Prophet Jesus A.S. The holy Quran references only these two communities as *"Ahl al Kitab"*. *"For you (the disbelievers) may say the Book was sent down only to two groups (Jews and Christians) before us, and we were unaware of what they read and taught."*[xii] In this verse, Allah the Almighty excludes Jews and Christians among Pagan Arabs. Therefore, in relation to the Torah and the Gospel, they are called the "People of the Book" while the rest of the people are considered absolute "disbelievers" because their belief is not related to any heavenly Book or prophet. In Chapter *6*, Allah has declared the Quran to be the confirmation of the earlier books revealed on the Prophet Moses and Jesus, *"And this is a Book which we have sent down as blessed and confirming what was before it (books), that you may warn (disbelievers) of the mother of cities (Makkah) and those around it. Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they are maintaining their prayers."*[xiii] In *Chapter 3,* The Quran is introduced as a book that confirms all previous books revealed in their respective times, *"He (Allah) has sent down upon you (O' beloved Prophet), the Book in truth, confirming what was (revealed) before it, and He revealed the Torah and the Gospel."*[xiv] In the same way, the Torah and the Gospel also contained the mention of the Prophet Hood of Prophet Muhammad PBUH and the truthfulness of the Quran before the believers of the Torah and Gospel.

The Quran says, *"Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom, they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits them the evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them. So, they who have believed in him honoured him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him (Quran), it is those who will be the successful."*[xv] The holy Quran mentions clearly that the Christians are more generous towards Muslims and has stated the reason because of their religious men, pious worshipers of Almighty Allah who does not have any hatred towards Muslims. Allay says, *"And you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, "We are Christians." That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant"*[xvi].

In the Holy Quran, there are clear statements about the right belief and righteous deeds of some of the "*People of the Book"*. In *Chapter7*, Allah says, *"And among the People of Moses is a community which guides by truth and by it establishes justice."*[xvii] In Chapter al-Imran, there is a mention of the attributes of the believers among *"Ahl al Kitab"*. *"And indeed, among the People of the Scripture are those who believe in Allah and what revealed to you and what was revealed to them, (being) humbly submissive to Allah. They do not exchange the verses of Allah for a small price. Those will have their reward with their Lord. Indeed, Allah is swift in account."*[xviii]

2. The Treatment of *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book)

In the Quran, Ahl al-Kitab which includes Jews and Christians, is characterized by a complex blend of respect, recognition, and critique. This approach reflects the Quran's overarching commitment to promoting justice, dialogue, and religious tolerance while also affirming Islamic beliefs. The Quran's treatment of Ahl al-Kitab reveals a complex interplay of respect, dialogue, and critique, reflecting its broader message of justice, peace, and theological clarity.

a. Respect and Recognition of Previous Revelations

The Quran acknowledges the legitimacy of the earlier scriptures given to Jews and Christians. This recognition is evident in several verses. For instance, Surah Al-Baqarah states: "The Jews say, 'The Christians have nothing [true] to stand on,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews have nothing [true] to stand on.' Yet they [both] recite the Scripture. Thus, those who do not know are like those who do not know."[xix] This verse

underscores a mutual recognition of shared divine revelation while acknowledging differences in interpretation.

Further, Surah Al-Ma'idah highlights the Quranic acknowledgment of the Gospel: "And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah."[xx] This endorsement of previous scriptures establishes a basis for mutual respect between Muslims and adherents of earlier faiths, reinforcing the shared heritage of divine guidance.

b. Emphasis on Common Ground

The Quran emphasizes the theological and moral commonalities between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Surah Al-Ankabut states: "And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them."[xxi]This directive encourages Muslims to engage in respectful discourse with Jews and Christians, highlighting shared values and beliefs. The verse aims to foster a cooperative environment based on common ground, which is crucial for peaceful coexistence.

Additionally, the Quran acknowledges the shared belief in one God and moral principles. Surah Al-Baqarah asserts: "Indeed, those who have believed [in the Quran], and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabians before [the Quran], those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteousness will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve."[xxii] This verse reinforces the idea that righteous individuals from these faiths are acknowledged and rewarded by God, promoting a sense of inclusivity and mutual respect.

c. Social Interactions and Integration

The Quran's approach to social interactions with Ahl al-Kitab reflects a degree of integration and acceptance. Surah Al-Ma'idah permits Muslims to eat the food prepared by Jews and Christians and to marry their women, indicating a significant level of social and cultural integration: "This day [all] good foods have been made lawful, and [lawful in marriage are] chaste women from among the believers and chaste women from among those who were given the Scripture before you."[xxiii]

This provision suggests that while religious differences exist, there is an acceptance of social practices that facilitate harmonious living. It reflects the Quran's intent to foster peaceful and practical coexistence, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and cooperation in everyday life.

d. Dialogue and Dispute Resolution

The Quran advocates for respectful and constructive dialogue with Ahl al-Kitab. Surah Al-Ankabut advises Muslims to "argue in a way that is best,"[xxiv] promoting a method of discussion that is both respectful and constructive. This directive is aimed at minimizing conflict and fostering understanding between different religious communities.

However, the Quran also acknowledges the potential for disputes and emphasizes that discussions should be conducted with wisdom and patience. The approach is designed to promote harmony and prevent disputes from escalating into hostility or violence.

e. Theological Critique and Clarification

Despite the respect shown towards *Ahl al-Kitab*, the Quran also addresses and critiques specific theological points. For example, it critiques the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus and the concept of the Trinity. *Surah Al-Ma'idah* states: "They have certainly disbelieved who say, 'Allah is the third of three.'[xxv] Such verses are intended to clarify Islamic monotheism and correct perceived deviations from it.

This critique is articulated in a manner that aims to educate and clarify rather than to alienate. The Quran addresses theological differences while maintaining a tone of respect and a focus on dialogue.

f. Promotion of Justice and Fairness

The overarching principle guiding the Quran's treatment of *Ahl al-Kitab* is justice. The Quran promotes a balanced view that respects previous revelations while affirming Islamic beliefs. This approach is designed to ensure fairness and prevent discrimination, encouraging Muslims to interact with Jews and Christians in a manner that is just and equitable.

The Quran's treatment of *Ahl al-Kitab* reflects a sophisticated balance between respect, dialogue, and critique. By acknowledging the legitimacy of earlier revelations, emphasizing common beliefs, and permitting social interactions, the Quran fosters an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. At the same time, it addresses theological differences with the aim of clarification rather than confrontation. This approach highlights the Quran's broader message of justice and peace, promoting harmonious relationships between Muslims and adherents of other Abrahamic faiths.

3. Interfaith Relations in the context of *Sirah*

a. The Prophetic Approach to Interfaith Relations.

After the proclamation of Nabu'wah (prophet hood) by the Prophet, Muslims were persecuted at large by the infidels of Makkah which led the band of Muslims to migrate to Abyssinian. The third Caliph of the orthodox caliphate Hazrat Uthman R.A and his wife were also among the emigrants.[xxvi] The king of Abyssinia Negus was a Christian and the Prophet was well aware of his faith. But Prophet Muhammad PBUH ordered his faithful supporters to migrate towards the land of Negus as he was known for his kind-heartedness. The holy Quran says about this migration, *"And those who migrated for the cause of Allah after they had been wronged, we will surely settle them in this world in a good place; but the reward of the hereafter is greater, if only they could know"*[xxvii]. The famous *Imam Qurtubi* in his *'Tafsir al-Jami li Ahkam al-Quran'* writes under this verse that Hazrat Qatada R.A says,*"In this Ayat, there is a mention of those Sahaba who after being persecuted by infidels at Makkah left their homes to migrate towards Abyssinia".* Thereafter Allah made this place the home of migration for the believers and provided them help and shelter[xxviii]. *Imam ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi* and *Imam ibn Jarir al-Tabari* have mentioned that in the above verse *'good place'* refers to both places of Abyssinia and Medina as Muslims migrated to both of these places.[xxix] *Imam Makki bin Abi Talib al-Maqri* in his *'al-Hidayah ila Bulugh al Nihayah'* says that the migration here refers to Abyssinia not to Medina as this verse was revealed at the time of emigration to Abyssinia.[xxx] Ibn Aliyah also says under this verse that, "Inn this verse there is a mention of those who migrated to Abysinia not of Maadina as this verse was not revealed during the time of migration to Medina. Al muharir. The Prophet PBUH ordered his companions*, "If you migrate to Abyssinia then it is better for you as its king is not a tyrant and that land is piously fertilized. The land of Abyssinian is the land of truth".*[xxxi] After this proclaimation of the Prophet, the companions migrated to the land of Negus for the protection of their faith and this was the first migration of the Muslims. Ibn Hisham .When Muslims reached the court of Negus, the spokesperson of Muslim emigrants Hazrat Ja'far bin Abu Talib R.A informed Negus about the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and the dialogue between Muslims and Negus held in this way that Ja'far told to him:

"We were the Jahiliyah people, worshipping gods, consuming animal remains, believing in immortality, fleeing from our families, breaching the mutual protection cl ause of the covenant, and the powerful among us were destroying the weak. That was our condition until Allah sent a prophet to us from among ourselves, whose ancestry we are cognizant of and whose truthfulness, honesty, and purity we are aware of. He

was the one who summoned us to Allah and commanded us to worship Him alone, sh unning the stones and idols that we and our forebears had hitherto worshipped in His substitute. He also told us to proclaim the truth, provide others withwhat they need, stick by our families, and abstain from wrongdoing and bloodshed. He prohibited im morality, giving false testimony, denying the orphan his legal rights, and disparaging chaste women. He commanded us to worship Allah alone and to associate Him with n o one else. He further commanded us to observe prayer, give alms (zakah), and engag e in fasting".[xxxii]

Ashana al-Najashi, the king of Abyssinia, when listened to the praises and virtues of the Prophet, cried and conversed with Muslims in the following sentences, "I welcome you and him also who is your prophet. I bear witness that he is true as Messenger of Allah and he is the one who has been mentioned in the Bible. The Prophet Jesus A.S has foretold about him. O' you Muslims, stay there wherever you want to stay. I swear by Allah if I won't be the king of this land, I would have visited the Prophet. Go and live in peace here. If anyone hurts you in anyway, he will be surely punished.[xxxiii]

Hazrat Umm e Salma R.A narrates their stay at Abyssinia in these words, *"we lived with freedom and dignity in the land of Negus and we prayed to our Almighty Allah without any oppression in such a way, we haven't prayed before"*[xxxiv]. When Negus died the Prophet led his funeral prayer and Hazrat Aisha R.A says that light was always shining on his grave.[xxxv]

b. Migration to Medina (Land of *Ahl al Kitab*)

The interfaith dialogue between the Muslims and the people of the book can be well understood by the fact that the Prophet lived his 53 years in Makkah and the result of the conversions were not more than 300 neo-Muslims. The attitude of the infidels at Makkah was more stubborn towards the new faith-Islam because there was a huge difference in between the two faiths primarily lies in the belief of Tawhid-oneness of God. On the other side after his migration to Medina the number raised to ten thousand because of the positive attitude of Ahl al Kitab as the two faiths share more commonalities than other faiths. Medina was called *"Yathrib"* before Prophet Muhammad PBUH migrated there and after his blessed migration, its name was changed to *"Medina al Munawarah"* (Illuminated city). This city of the prophet was also the land of the "people of the Book". Those who made allegiance in *'Uqba al Thani'* were from the tribes of *'Aws and Khazraj',* who were themselves from the "people of the Book"*(Ahl al Kitab).* The difference between the non Ahl al Kitab and *Ahl al Kitab* can

be seen in the pact that the Prophet made with *Ahl al Kitab*. The pact included, "This pact is between the people of Medina and Muslims after the migration of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The Jews are also included in this pact. This pact is from the Prophet between the Muslims and the people of Medina and their allies to withstand each other during the war times. They form one nation. Ibn zanju'iah and Ibn Ishaq narrates the first portion this pact as follows, "The Prophet made the pact with the people of Medina and also included the Jews in this pact who also form as a part of it. They were given their religious, civil and economic rights and liberty*. In the name of Allah, the most compassionate and the most merciful, this pact is between the Quraish and Ahl e Yathrib and those who are their allies, who stand with each other during the times of war. They all constitute on Ummah*[xxxvi]*.* Further Ibn Zanju'iah narrates that, after the migration of the Prophet, he made a pact known as the *'Mithaq al Medina'* constitution of Medina. *Ahl al Kitab* also formed a constituent part of this pact besides Muslims. The *preface* of this constitution was written as *"This is a pact after the Prophet migrated here at Medina. This pact is between the people of Medina including Jews and migrants from Makkah. This is a constitutional pact from the Prophet Muhammad pbuh. The people of Medina including Jews and emigrants and those who support them, all constitute one community an Ummah"*[xxxvii].The Prophet said about the Jews in this pact, "Indeed the Jews of *Banu Awf* are included in *Ummah* with other Muslims but they shall be governed in their religious matters by their own religious laws".[xxxviii].

Here however, it should be noted that there is no opposition between the *"Ummat e Muslimah"* (Muslim *Ummah*) and the inclusion of the Jews in *"One Ummah"* as referred to in the constitutional pact of Medina. The fact is that by Muslim *Ummah,* it means one community in terms of their religion, belief, and faith, and the Jews and Muslims as one *Ummah* constitute oneness in their political, social, and defense cause. This here reflects the concepts of constitutional nationality and citizenship on which basis the Prophet laid the foundation of a multi-cultural society that remains the model for interfaith tolerance and peaceful coexistence in today's world.

The inclusion of the Jews in one *Ummah* grants the society to live together with peace, love, and tolerance and stand and support each other in all matters of political, social, economic, and in defence when needed.

Besides the Jews of Banu Awf, other Jewish tribes and their allies of Medina were also included as part of one Ummah and their constitutional status was the same

as that of Banu Awf. These included the Jews of Banu Najar, Banu Harith, Banu Jushm, Banu Sa'idaand Banu Aws.[xxxix]

1) Main Characteristics of the Prophet's (pbuh) Relationship with the Ahl al-Kitab

The Prophet created justice and honored the People of the Book while also engaging in humanistic interactions with people who possessed noble attributes and virtues. The People of the Book in Medina openly dealt with their Muslim neighbors, and the Prophet Pbuh traded with his Jewish neighbors. Even a Jewish Medina resident possessed a shield belonging to the prophet, which he had surrendered as a guarantee for a debt[xl]. Furthermore, he zealously safeguarded the rights and freedoms of the People of the Book, upheld the values and traditions he shared with them, and treated them with dignity and respect. He paid regular visits to Jewish religious schools (Beit Midrash) to ensure that their freedom to learn and teach their faith was not restricted[xli]. When a group of Christians from Najran arrived to form a treaty with the Prophet (pbuh), he graciously permitted them to pray in the mosque for the entire day[xlii]. It is widely known that Muslims prayed toward Jerusalem for 17 months before God designated the Ka'ba as the destination of Muslim prayer. This demonstrates the relevance of ideas and customs shared with the People of the Book, emphasizing Bayt al-Maqdis' prominence in Islam[xliii]. Furthermore, in mundane concerns not clearly specified by the divine will, the Prophet (pbuh) chose to resemble the People of the Book rather than the idolaters. In contrast to the idolaters' tradition of separating their hair over the forehead, he let his hair drop over his forehead, as did the People of the Book[xliv]. In his personal interactions with People of the Book, he demonstrated rigorous good neighborliness, compassion, and kindness, regardless of religious affiliation. This is supported by al-Bukhari's story of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr's desire to share meat with his Jewish neighbour: 'Mujahid stated that a sheep was sacrificed for 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr. He questioned his slave, "Have you given any to our Jewish neighbour?" Have you donated anything to our Jewish neighbour? I heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and give him peace, say, "Jibril kept on recommending that I treat my neighbours well until I thought he would order me to treat them as my heirs."[xlv]. The Prophet (pbuh) was also willing to accept the hospitality of People of the Book, such as the case of a Jew in Medina (unnamed in the sources) whose dinner invitation he accepted[xlvi]. When he visited the ill and provided spiritual and material assistance, he did not discriminate against anyone based on their religious beliefs[xlvii]. In addition, when the funeral procession of a Jew passed by him on

one occasion, he showed his respect by standing up, and when some of his companions questioned his action, pointing out that the deceased was a Jew, he responded by observing that the person was a human being, demonstrating his respect for his Jewish neighbors and indeed for all human persons as such.[xlviii] Finally, on his deathbed, he said: I entrust to you the Jews and Christians who are People of the Book[xlix]. This meant that he wanted Muslims to treat the People of the Book who lived under Muslim control as *dhimmis* (i.e. under a contract of protection or *dhimma*), as he had done during his lifetime, rather than persecute or insult them in an unworthy manner. These few examples demonstrate that our Prophet (pbuh) embraced non-Muslims from the start and strived to establish relationships with them in a culture of religious freedom, pluralism, and the quest for common ground. He never discriminated against anybody based on their religious identity.

Any historical occurrence of such discrimination is the consequence of continual enmity and attacks against Muslims by specific individuals; otherwise, neither Christians, Jews, nor polytheists experienced any prejudice.[l]

2) Interreligious Harmony and the Pact of Medina

The significance and importance of this pact which is classified as the *'first written constitution'* of the world in the reconciliation of the faiths of Medina in the times of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH can be understood from the below-mentioned highlights:

a) For the integration of the Medinan faiths, the Prophet constituted one *Ummah* in terms of political unity irrespective of the faiths they belonged to.
b) The Jews as a constituent part of this constitutional pact are guaranteed the protection of their lives and property.
c) The right to freedom of religion is given to the Jews to practice their religion and follow their rituals, commandments, and practices.
d) The Prophet laid the foundation of the *"Concept of Integration"* and formed one race based on mankind irrespective of religion, colour, or gender. He said, *"No Arab has any superiority over non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab. No white is better than black and no black is over the white".*[li]

The Pact of *Medina* is that constitutional document that has the status of the first written constitution in the entire history of human life. The names and titles that are given to this document are, "the pact of peace, the pact of freedom, the pact of brotherhood, the pact of non-oppression, the pact of integration. The meaning of these

names and titles is to establish peace, harmony, love, and brotherhood between Muslims and other religions.

The many tribal, ethnic, and religious groups that signed the Medina Charter were said to have constituted one "ummah," or a shared political, economic, legal, military, and social entity that allowed them to live in harmony while maintaining their individual identities. All signatory groups are guaranteed peace, security, freedom, equality, justice, and community life based on fundamental, universal human principles by this Charter, which is structured similarly to a federation. All of the agreement's stipulations may be found in the Qur'an[lii]. The Charter, which serves as the constitution of the Medina city-state and by which the Prophet (pbuh) is accepted as a leader, is characterized by pluralism and freedom, quite different from the nation-state model which is built around a racial and linguistic community. It lays down the principle of mutual responsibility of the parties. A social contract that is not based on blood, language, religion, race, or class distinctions, the Charter demonstrates that differences in faith do not constitute an impediment to coexistence.[liii]

Its political components anticipate a pluralist and participatory society, while its legal features contain several rules pertaining to legislative, executive, and judicial organizations. It was a significant step in transforming the chaotic tribal structure that existed in Medina prior to the Hijra, or the movement of people from Mecca to Medina, into a more livable city.The Charter document governs interactions between various groups in a mixed-race community that includes Jews, Muslims, and idolaters. The word "ummah" appears at the start of the text and appears to allude to the Muslims as "one community (ummah) to the exclusion of all men," including those who are native to Yathrib/Medina and those who have emigrated from Mecca and other places.

Ummah is the phrase used in Islam to describe the global Muslim community. The Qur'an and the Prophet (pbuh) both used it to identify the believing community. It strongly suggests fraternity, dedication to one another, and support. The intended bond between the signatory groups to the Charter, who had endured years of constant intergroup strife, might not have been quite the camaraderie typical of a society united by a common ethos and set of beliefs. However, the term "ummah" is used to refer to the people of Medina in a far more inclusive manner later on in the text.

. In political, but not religious, terms, one of the Jewish tribes in Yathrib is described as "one community ('ummah') with the believers." "The Jews of the Banu 'Auf are one community (ummah) 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, because they hurt but themselves and their families," the statement continues, referring to other Jewish tribes as well as some Arab clans and tribes.

The same holds true for the Jews of the Tha'laba and the Banu al-Shutayba as well as the Jafna, a clan of the Tha'laba and the Banu al-Harith, Banu Jusham, Banu al-Aus, Banu Tha'laba, and Banu al-Najjar. It appears that the Prophet (pbuh) at least saw similarities between the community of believers (men and women from various clans and tribes) and the various groups in Medina because the name "ummah" is applied to this composite, multiple society in the Charter.

At the very least, those alliances were anticipated, with the goal of fostering harmony, cooperation, and mutual trust between them. Therefore, the Medina Charter offers a priceless example of a framework that protects everyone's rights and liberties, creating a secure atmosphere that fosters cooperation, peace, and trust—and maybe even friendship and camaraderie in the end.

The Charter can be characterized as a social structure that upheld justice and equity in determining rights and duties, managed difference based on agreement under principles that could be called "natural law," and promoted common interests under a pluralist, participatory, and unitary political framework based on lawfulness and equality before the law.[liv]

4. The Pact of Najran

The Prophet made a pact with the Christians of Najran in which the protection of their lives and properties was guaranteed. This pact of Najran guarantees the religious freedom of the Christians and assures them that the Christians of Najran are under the protection of Muslims. Prophet Muhammad pbuh is related to said in this pact, *"Allah and His Messenger guarantees the protection of the people of Najran and their allies; the protection of their lives, their religion, their land, their property, their monks and religious places. They are guaranteed the right to practice their religion. No compulsion shall be compelled on them to accept the religion of the Muslims – Islam"*.[lv].

"Nobody's position as a clergyman or a monk shall be changed, no one's travel shall be refused and their houses of worship should not be destroyed, converted into Islamic Masjids, or added to any Muslim structures.

If they (Christians) require assistance from Muslims in repairing their churches, monasteries,or any other religious or worldly business, Muslims shall assist them withou

t putting them under any obligation; assistance and support for their religious needs sh all be provided as a donation, and as Allah's grace".[lvi] The Prophet's pbuh agreement with the Christians of Najran is a historical document of equal importance to the *Charter of Medina*. The Prophet pbuh guaranteed the constitutional and legal status of his pacts.

5. Social and Commercial Relationship

The Prophet (pbuh) had social and business relationships with the People of the Book in addition to signing peace treaties with them. There are a few instances in this area. The People of the Book, particularly those in Medina, were in social, political, legal, and economic links with the Prophet (pbuh). He fulfilled his religious obligations while doing this.[lvii] For instance, the Prophet (pbuh) distributed the food of the People of the Book with authorization from the Qur'an.[lviii] In terms of business dealings, trustworthy customs state that the Prophet (pbuh) traded his armor for food with a Jew.[lix] That some of the Prophet's (pbuh) companions requested Ali for assistance in paying off their debts after conducting business with Jews, and that Ali and a Jewish jeweler formed a joint enterprise selling a certain herb.[lx]

7. Legacy and Impact

The legacy of Prophet Muhammad's approach to the *Ahl e Kitab* extends far beyond his lifetime and provides a foundational framework for Islamic engagement with other religious communities. The principles embodied in his interactions with Jews and Christians have profoundly influenced the development of Islamic jurisprudence, interfaith dialogue, and societal integration throughout Islamic history.

a. Foundational Principles of Tolerance

Prophet Muhammad's dealings with the *Ahl e Kitab* introduced key principles of tolerance and respect that have become integral to Islamic thought. His approach demonstrated that while differences in religious beliefs are acknowledged, respect for these differences is paramount. This respect is reflected in the Islamic legal tradition, where the concept of dhimmi status allowed non-Muslims to practice their religions within an Islamic state, granted their rights, and ensured their protection. These principles have been codified in Islamic jurisprudence and continue to inform contemporary discussions on religious tolerance.

b. Influence on Islamic Governance

The Constitution of Medina, a pioneering document in interfaith relations, had a lasting impact on the governance structures within Islamic states. It set a precedent

for inclusive governance that recognized the rights of different religious communities while establishing a framework for cooperation. This model has influenced various Islamic empires and states, from the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates to the Ottoman Empire, where diverse religious communities were integrated into the political and social fabric of the state.

c. Interfaith Dialogue and Collaboration

The Prophet's respectful engagement with the *Ahl e Kitab* set a precedent for interfaith dialogue that continues to be relevant in contemporary times. His model of engaging with Jews and Christians, not merely as opponents but as partners in dialogue, has inspired subsequent Islamic scholars and leaders to advocate for interfaith understanding and collaboration. Modern interfaith initiatives often draw upon the Prophet's approach, emphasizing dialogue and mutual respect as pathways to coexistence.

d. Educational and Theological Contributions

Prophet Muhammad's interactions with the *Ahl e Kitab* also contributed to Islamic educational and theological development. The Qur'anic dialogues with Jews and Christians provided a basis for Islamic theology and exegesis. Scholars throughout Islamic history have used these interactions to develop frameworks for understanding religious differences and commonalities. This scholarly tradition has fostered a rich discourse on religious diversity and coexistence within Islamic thought.

D. CONCLUSION

Islam is the religion of peace and security and its invitation is extended to all people irrespective of their faiths and beliefs no matter what religion a person belongs to, the concern of his worldly and hereafter benevolence is included in the elements of the leaven of Islamic teachings. In this background, the special commands about the *Ahl al Kitab* are also the divine wisdom to give them confidence and a sense of closeness so that they reconsider the rest of the beliefs of Islam. The relations of Prophet Muhammad PBUH with the Jews of *Medina,* and the agreements and connections with them in other matters of life, were the practical form of this spirit of goodwill. The Si'rah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH acts as a model to deal fairly with all non-Muslims including *Ahl al Kitab*. The Prophet serves as a true example of maintaining good interfaith relations to promote love and harmony between different faiths. The agreements and pacts made by him with *Ahl al Kitab* provide them the security of life,

property, and religion, and no treaty or pact was broken by him. The prophet strictly warned the Muslims to not harm the people of other faiths and commanded them to be gentle, kind, and benevolent towards other people irrespective of their religions. The Sirah of Prophet Muhammad offers an invaluable perspective on interfaith relations, particularly in the context of his interactions with the *Ahl e Kitab.* His approach exemplifies how respect, dialogue, and adherence to agreements can foster harmonious coexistence among diverse religious communities. The Prophet's life and mission provide a model for navigating the complexities of religious diversity with empathy and understanding.

In contemporary times, the principles derived from the Prophet's interactions with the *Ahl e Kitab* remain highly relevant. The emphasis on mutual respect and constructive dialogue offers a framework for addressing religious and cultural differences in a globalized world. By drawing on the lessons from the Sirah, modern societies can work towards greater inclusivity and collaboration among different faith communities. Moreover, the legacy of the Prophet's approach challenges contemporary Muslims to uphold the values of tolerance and respect in their interactions with people of other faiths. It serves as a reminder that interfaith relations are not just about coexistence but about actively engaging with and understanding the diversity of beliefs and practices in our shared world. In summary, the Sirah of Prophet Muhammad stands as a testament to the power of respectful and empathetic engagement in fostering interfaith harmony. His interactions with the *Ahl e Kitab* offer enduring lessons on how to build a more inclusive and understanding society, one that embraces diversity and seeks to find common ground amidst differences. These lessons continue to resonate today, guiding efforts to promote peace and cooperation in an increasingly interconnected and diverse global community.

The entire history of Islam is filled with this spirit of mercy and goodness. Today, Christians and Jewish intellectuals unhesitatingly admit that even during the Crusades, the *Ahl al Kitab* in Europe and the Middle East lived in peace and security in an Islamic state so much as they could not have that peace and security in Christian states. Today, countless Muslims live as a minority in non-Islamic states, cultures, and societies throughout the world. Muslim governments have to deal with other governments and Muslim men and women with people of other religions in many ways. If the spokesmen of Islam will adopt an attitude of contempt and hatred towards

the infidels, polytheists, and *Ahl al Kitab* in today's global Village, then Muslims have to face much more hatred and contempt as an inevitable reaction.

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[iii] Imam Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Chapter: *Sifat al Nabi*, # 3365
[iv]Al-Quran 16:125.
[v] Imam Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Chapter: *al Din al Yusr*, # 39
[vi] Al-Quran 06:92.
[vii] Al-Quran 10:37-39.
[viii] Al-Quran 35:31.
[ix] Al-Quan 03:03.
[x]Al-Quran 07:157.
[xi] Al-Quran 48:29.
[xii]Al-Quran 06:156.
[xiii]Al-Quran 06:92.
[xiv]Al-Quran 03:03.
[xv]Al-Quran 07:157.
[xvi] Al-Quran 05:82.
[xvii]Al-Quran 07:159.
[xviii]Al-Quran 03:199.
[xix] Al-Quran 02:113.
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