

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW)'S LETTERS

Dr. Muhammad Abdullah*

Muhammad Akram Sajid**

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) led his life in various aspects, every aspect gives eternal light to mankind in every walk of life. This is why his prophet-hood is universal.

Today inter-faith dialogue is very essential with rest of the civilizations and religions. Islam also invites rest of the religions to sit on one table on the basis of common points. Prophet (SAW) wrote to heads of the states after Hudaibia Truce. These letters are safe in the books of Seerah of the Prophet (SAW) and history. The letters have different shapes to study the most important is that, he invited the then international powers towards Islam. Apparently the addressed ones are merely two big powers of the world but having mixture of many civilizations. What kind of address was opted by the Prophet (SAW), What were the common aspects of these letters? What was the mode of conveying his invitation, most important is this, what was the response of these letters. There are three main things to be noted at: sympathetic behaviour, enemy like views, neutral response. Now a days studying these letters are very need of the day in the light of inter-civilization dialogue and the practical approach towards the Seerah of Holy Prophet (SAW). We see different kinds of ideas and theories. The same way of address as was opted by Holy Prophet (SAW) in this dialogue.

According to some of the intellectuals, the term Inter-faith dialogue has been imported from the west and was manipulated by the Orientalists for their own interests. They desire to impose their ideas by this methodology towards the Muslims. Orientalists have no equal based discussion or eradicating misunderstanding between the Muslims and non-Muslims rather adding more doubts. So Muslims should not involve themselves in this intrigue. The targets set by the west have always been more than one. Islam has always been the well-wisher of all the religions of the world.

Qur'an by the common things invite normally to all the world particularly the book-keepers, and this invitation or being close to them is basically the inter-religion dialogue, it can extend

* Associate Professor, Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of the Punjab, Lahore

**Lecturer, Islamic Studies, Government College Township, Lahore

inter-civilization dialogue in the long run and Islamic teachings can be conveyed by this way. Moreover this inter-action can bring people closer by inter-faith dialogue.

The universality of Islam can be depicted by connectivity of the whole nations not living separate from one another. Muslims should live each other peacefully. It can win the hearts of even an enemy by loving him as Qur'an says:

﴿وَلَا تَسْتَوِى الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ﴾

(1)

The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel (The evil) with one which is better (i.e. Allah orders the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger and to excuse those who treat them badly) then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend.

From the day one there have been two methods of dialogue, one face to face to discuss sitting round the table second by writing to though, its meaning is very vast anyhow we at the moment have letters of the Prophet (SAW). Letters have been written from the ancient times, correspondence exposes intimacy one's different aspects of life personality and his ideas.

There are approximately three hundred these letters safe in the books of Hadith, Seerah and History among them 139 are those whose text is safe and 86 are those summary has been mentioned. Six has been discovered originally in the near past. They may be divided into these parts:

1. Preaching Letters
2. Official Orders
3. Replies
4. Orders to the Sub-ordinates (2)

Here is a description of these letters for inter-religion dialogue. They were written to the surrounding rulers just after the truce of Hudabia. They all are of preaching types of letters and the best example of Comprehension and preciseness. After having a birds eye view, one can divide them into as

1. Beginnings with the Name of Almighty Allah (3)
2. In the beginning there is the name of the sender according to the custom of Arabs. He (SAW) started with his own Name. The ruler of Persia got angry that why his name

was after Muhammad (SAW) name. Wrote to as, Muhammad bin Abdullah or Muhammad Rasulullah. i.e. the message and authority, also a condom of their belief in a very slight way as was the case with the Christians who say Christ the son of Allah.

3. Written addressee's name with due respect.
4. Peace sentence is with them like peace is for them who accept the right path.
5. After that the meaning has been written very comprehensively and precisely.
6. Quranic verse has been quoted according to the situation.
7. Mobilizing and frightening style.
8. Again who accepts peace is a good news for him
9. In the very end there is his seal. (4)

As the Holy Prophet (SAW) desired to write to the rulers, he was told, they pay no heed to the letters having no stamp. A stamp was made and was used at the end of the letter. In the very beginning this stamp was made of gold but later on it was replaced by silver.(5)

Important aspects of these letters for Inter-Religion Dialogue

These letters are towards the super powers and beliefs and religions also. Infidels of Arabs, Jews, Christians and Zorasteis. It is narrated one of the letters was written to the Sindhi rulers that was honored. So there is a variety in these letters and a guiding star for today. Approximately same powers are also visible today. Let us have a view of the importance of these letters towards Inter-Religion Dialogue.

1. Invitation to the Common Aspects:

The first thing that Quran-e-Hakeem elaborates in a literary style is common thing between the writer and the written. Allah says in this respect in Surah al-Imran

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

مُسْلِمُونَ. (6)

“Say O Muhammad (SAW) O people of the scripture (Jews and Christians)! Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah (Alone) and

that we associate no portions with them, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. That, if they turn away, Say bear witness that we are Muslims.”

He explained this fact in his saying. So these facts must be accepted that God is one, Muhammad (SAW) as a Prophet and belief on the day of judgment are the foundations, to initiate the Inter-Religious Dialogue the beginning should be on common things between the two groups particularly the persons who hold Book. The principle of dialogue can be derived easily from these letters as Prophet wrote to Najjashi, After that this is sent to you, Allah has no parallel, He is the real Master, Modest, Peace giver Prophet (SAW) wrote to ruler of Bahrain.

(7) “فانى احمد الله اليك الذى لا اله غيره و اشهدان لا اله الا الله وان محمداً عبده ورسوله”

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o I pray to Allah who is to be worshipped, but no one except him I witness there is no to be worshipped but Allah and Muhammad (SAW) His man and his Prophet.

In another letter he wrote:

“فانى احمد اليك الله الذى لا اله الا هو لا شريك له و ادعوك الى الله وحده تؤمن بالله”

(8)

So, I am Prophet towards you, Allah is the only to be worshipped, has no parallel, I invite you towards Allah, accept his oneness.

These letters contain very beautifully the common things and tell the oneness of God. These letters are about to witness about Allah and his prophet (SAW) and on the Day of Judgment.

2. Respect of the Hostile and Addressee

To respect the addressee and opponent is very necessary. There should be no word or style against the respect of addressee. His rulership must be accepted. His respect must be kept in mind in conversation and writing towards to him.

Let us have a view of one of the address of the Prophet towards the ruler.

(9) من محمد رسول الله الى النجاشى عظيم الحبشه.

“From Muhammad prophet of Allah to *Najjashi* the worthy of *Habasha*.”

(10) من محمد عبدالله ورسوله الى هرقل عظيم الروم.

“From Muhammad man and prophet of Allah to *Hirqal*, the dignified of *Rome*.”

من محمد عبد الله ورسول الى المقوقس عظيم القبط. (11)

“From Muhammad a man created by Allah an his Prophet to Maquqis, the honorable of Qibat.”

من محمد عبد الله ورسول الى كسرى عظيم فارس. (12)

“From Prophet of Allah and of his creature to Qisra’ the great of Persia.”

The Prophet (SAW) preached Islam keeping in mind their how honour and dignity so was the case with governors and heads the states.

Today it is necessary to respect the sent ones either it is spiritually religious, political or social when Prophet (SAW) wrote to Qasair of Rome, a separate letter was written to their religious heads and all of his honorable titles and surnames.

3. To know the mental background of the addressee:

For Inter-Religious Dialogue one should keep in mind his mental caliber, creed history geography of addressed ones. Prophet (SAW) pointed out very comprehensively the belief of Jews, Christians, Magians and infidels of Arab and their aberration and apostasy in his letters very eloquently. For example he wrote to the heads of Khyber as Oh, Truth holders and you find things in your book also from Muhammad Prophet of Allah and his companions.

﴿من محمد رسول الله صاحب موسى وأخيه المصدق لما جاء به، إلا ان الله قال لكم يامعشر اهل التوراة وانكم لتجدون ذالك في كتابكم. مُحَمَّدٌ رَّسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَاهُمْ رُكْعًا سَجِدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ ذَلِكُمْ مِثْلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَمِثْلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ كَزُرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ شَطَاةً فَازَرَّتْ فَاسْتَغْلَطَتْ فَاسْتَوَىٰ عَلَىٰ سَوَابِهِمْ يُعْجَبُ الزُّرَّاعُ لِيَغِظَ بِهِمُ الْكُفَّارَ وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا﴾

(13)

“ From, Muhammad (SAW), the Prophet (of Allah) who is a friend of Mosas, also his verifier, the revealed book Turah, listen! Allah Said in Turah clearly and this is still written in it as it is: Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are severe against disbelievers

and merciful amongst themselves. You seen them bowing and falling down prostrate (in prayer), seeking bounty from Allah and (His) good pleasure. The mark of them (i.e. of their faith) is on their faces (foreheads) from the trace of prostration (During Prayers) this is their description in the Taurat (Torah). But their description in the Injeel (Gospel) is like a (Sown) seed which sends froth tits shoot then makes it strong and becomes thick and it stands straight on its stem, delighting \the sowers, that he may engage the disbelievers."

The verse of Book holders come to was written towards Shah-e-Rome, Herclius and Shah-e-Maqawaqis. "Allah has no parallel he is the only having no one like Him. By this sentence was taken start towards Shah of Persia as they were infidels and their creed was about two gods, they were stopped opting shirk.

اشهدان عيسى ابن مريم البتول الطيب الحصينه فحملت بعيسى من زوجه و نفعه كما خلق آدم بيده .

(14)

I witness that Christ was son of Maryam, modest, she got pregnancy by the order of Allah as Adam was created by God.

To know about the language of the addressed ones is also very important. Then their social customs were also discovered. So the messengers and letter holders knew the local language, geography and manners of diplomacy.

4. Maintain the dignity of Din:

Both the groups take part equally in Inter-Religion Dialogue. He never compromised on his cause either it was a dialogue with infidels or groups from Arabs or letters (Today it is said prepared a mixer taking little from every religion) He put the message of Deen-e-Hanif with a dignified way towards addressed ones.

Let us have some samples.

1. Peace who embraces.
2. Allah will give you dual credit.
3. If you deny the responsibility of Magians would be upon you.
4. Peace upon those who accept it.

So it is not merely an appeal but also of frightening. He wrote to King of Persia.

(15) فانى انا رسول الله الى الناس كافة لانذر من كان حيا ويحق القول على الكافرين.

So, I am Prophet of Allah to the whole mankind, that he or it (Muhammad or Quran) may give warning to him who is living and that word may be justified against the disbelievers.

when the Mussailma Kazzab wrote to him (SAW) "I have been made share with Prophet-hood, half land is for me and half for the Qurash but the Qurashi are crossing the limits."

He (SAW) replied:

من محمد الى مسلمة الكذاب! بلغنى كتابك الكذب والافتراء على الله وان الارض يورثها من يشاء من عباده والعاقبة للمتقين والسلام على من اتبع الهدى.

(16)

"From Muhammad (SAW) to Mussailma Kazzab". I received your letter that discloses you lie and blame upon Allah the land is for Allah (17).

سلم على من اتبع الهدى و علم ان دينى سيظهر الى منتهى الخوف والحافر فاسلم تسلم ، و اجعل لك ماتحت يدك .

(17)

"Salam to who accepts right ways, after that Allah gives his land to one whom he wishes to give it and the last victory is for the pious men."

He wrote to Huza bin Ali the ruler of Yamama in this way. Salam to one who accepts Hadiya behold my Din is to capture all the surrounding ones if you embrace Islam you would get peace accepting Islam your land would be with in you. Huza replied.

"Very pleasant is your invitation, the Arabs are terrified by my honour if you accept my demand, I, will accept you if you give me any post, I would be your follower. Prophet wrote in his reply if you ask even a foot of land from me, I would not give it over to you. Allah who is the master holds on knows every thing".(18)

5. Sympathetic and Polite Way:

Inter-Religion Dialogue needs that preacher should invite with well-wishing and goody minded. As in the mater of mosses almighty Allah directed him :

(19) ﴿ قَوْلًا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَنَا لَعَلَّ يُتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى ﴾

“and speak to him mildly, perhaps he may accept admonition of fear (Allah)”

So this manner may be seen timely and repeatedly. He wrote at the end of letter to Shah-e-Najjashi.

قد بلغت و نصحت فاقبلوا نصيحي والسلام على من اتبع الهدى. (20)

No doubt I conveyed, advised to those who accepts the right path. Wrote to Munzar bin Sava, the ruler of Bahrain:

اما بعد فاني اذكر لك الله عز وجل فانه من ينصح فانما ينصح و انه من يطع رسلي و يتبع امرهم فقد نصح لي. (21)

After that I would mention the Name of Allah, the greatest, the most worthy this is for one who accepts and obeys and follows, so I advised the priests of Najjran,

فاني ادعوكم الى عبادة الله من عبادة العباد و ادعوكم الى ولاية الله من ولاية العباد. (22)

I invite you to worship Allah instead of a man, and to be a slave of him than that of Allah.

Syed Mehboob Rizvi writes “These letters show sympathy and welfare towards the addressees,”(23)

In the contemporary history there is a letter like to his counterpart the greatest god, master of all lands writes to the cursed and foolish one, you say you trust in God, why your god not saved your land from my hands. I would not settle the dispute till you give up land, and opted.(24)

Conclusion:

1. One response was to accept the invitation like Shah-e-Najjashi.
2. Second one the response of hard reaction and opted hostile kind of type like king of Persia.
3. Third one are those kind of people not accepting Islam but respected the bearers in lue of diplomatic manners, respected as good wishes and explained that they had some causes sent gifts to the Prophet (SAW) like rulers of Egypt and Rome.

Having a detailed view of these letters one concludes that we are facing the same behavior. In other words there are three type of tasts.

Many non-Muslims countries seek sympathy for Muslims they not only give free atmosphere for preaching but provide legal shelter also like Habsha. We should have dialogue with them so tenderly that we may not lose their co-operation. Some countries react hostile behavior even do not listen the name of the Muslims.

For them there is a particular strategy such countries are democratic and secular types. Muslims should maintain relations with them keeping in view their constitution and legal system. So preaching methodology is not same. As Quran guides us:

﴿ اذْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بَالِئِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴾ (25)

“Invadte (Mankind, O Muhammad to the way of your Lord (i.e. Islam) with wisdom (i.e. with te Divine Revelation and the Quran) and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better.”

Some countries are impartial they are liberal and allow to live with every religion and creed if their constitution and society do not receive any major change in it. Such countries are numerous. According to a cautious survey approximately twenty thousand people are embracing Islam annually in America.

Second important point is this that though today there is no regular system of corresponding with each other. But Muslims should prepare such a kind of literature that may be used for these three groups. Islam is a universal Din. Its invitation (Preaching) is for all mankind.

Third main and important point is this that we should opt friendly behavior instead of apologizing or defensive. Moreover we should not explain Islam such a way which is not according to the true spirit of Islam. Popular tradition is this when the people came to the Prophet (SAW) and gave different options to Him and offered to opt one of them and stop preaching the words He spoke at that occasion are an example for the persons.

He said, for God’s sake if they put sun on my one hand and Moon on the rest, I will not give up this preaching.

May Allah give us the vision to follow the true path of opted by Muhammad (SAW) and to explain it to the others to the true sense.

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