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A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE NOTION OF DIALOGUE IN ISLAM AND BUDDHISM

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Abstract

Interfaith dialogue is a vital tool for promoting understanding and cooperation between different religious communities. This article presents a comparative study of the Islamic and Buddhist perspectives on interfaith dialogue. Drawing on primary sources from both religions, this study explores the theological foundations of interfaith dialogue and the practical strategies employed by Muslims and Buddhists in promoting interfaith understanding. The similarities and differences between the two religions' approaches to interfaith dialogue are analysed, examining how their respective beliefs, practices, and histories shape their attitudes towards religious diversity. The research design is qualitative using library research by emphasizing content analysis on Islam and Buddhism scripture. The results show that Islamic paradigms of interreligious dialogue is *da'wah* (propagation, invitation or introducing Islam) that rooted from Tawḥīd, in

contrast Buddhism, promotes on liberation from human suffering which rooted Bhavana and mindfulness. The study contributes to the principle of interfaith dialogue and provides insights into the potential of interfaith relation for sustaining harmony, peace, and mutual respect in diverse societies. Studies suggest the understanding of each fundamental to encourage Muslim and Buddhists scholars to produce comprehensive interreligious dialogue, theologically and philosophically.

Keywords: Interfaith dialogue; Islam and Buddhism; Comparative religion; theological dialogue; religious tolerance.

Khulasah

Dialog antara agama merupakan wadah penting dalam mempromosikan persefahaman dan kerjasama antara penganut agama yang berbeza. Artikel ini membincangkan suatu kajian perbandingan mengenai perspektif Islam dan Buddhisme terhadap dialog antara agama. Berdasarkan sumber daripada kedua-dua agama, terdapat asas teologi dialog antara agama dan pendekatan yang digunakan oleh Muslim dan penganut Buddhisme dalam mempromosikan persefahaman antara agama. Artikel ini juga menganalisis persamaan dan perbezaan dalam pendekatan kedua-dua agama terhadap dialog antara agama, dan mengkaji bagaimana keyakinan, amalan, dan sejarah masing-masing membentuk sikap mereka terhadap kepelbagaian agama. Reka bentuk penyelidikan ini adalah kualitatif dengan menggunakan kajian perpustakaan dengan penekanan analisis kandungan terhadap sumber-sumber Islam dan Buddhisme. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa paradigma Islam dalam dialog antara agama adalah dakwah (seruan) yang berakar daripada ketauhidan, manakala Buddhisme menggalakkan keadaan kesedaran diri (*mindfulness*). Kajian ini memberikan sumbangan kepada prinsip dialog antara agama dan memberikan wawasan tentang potensi hubungan

antara agama untuk mengekalkan keharmonian, keamanan, dan saling menghormati dalam masyarakat yang pelbagai. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan keperluan persefahaman yang mendalam bagi membolehkan sarjana Muslim dan Buddhisme menghasilkan dialog antara agama yang komprehensif dari segi teologi dan falsafah.

Kata kunci: Dialog antara agama; Islam dan Buddha; perbandingan agama; dialog teologi; toleransi agama.

Introduction

Muslim-Buddhist dialogue is an essential component for world peace. Islam and Buddhism are two world religions that comprise over half Southeast Asia's population. The ever word Islam is rooted peace and Buddhism teaches *Maitrī* (loving kindness), yet the meetings between Muslims and Buddhists is portrayed as violent confrontation in the modern time.[1] Needless to say, dialogue between them has the power to bring about peace and reconciliation in an era of the so-called 'Islamophobia' that potentially exists among Muslim and Buddhist religious societies[2] based on the solid ethnoreligious orientation[3]. The interfaith dialogue is recognized as neither peripheral nor a luxury but rather as an imperative of our times. It is through engaging with others and building trust at the deepest level that individuals experience transformation. Dialogical commitment provides a space in

[1] Mohamed Ashath, "Peaceful Coexistence Through the Concepts of Brahmavihārās of Buddhism and Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿa of Islam: A Content Analysis," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 6(1) (2021), 1–16, https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v6i01.1298.

[2] Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli, Jaffary Awang & Zaizul Ab Rahman, "Identifying Islamophobia in Malaysian Buddhist Context," *Al-Itqan: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies*, 5(2) (2020), 89.

[3] Jaffary Awang, Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli & Zaizul Ab Rahman, "Intercultural Theology in the Multicultural Context of Muslim-Buddhist Relation in Malaysia: History, Identity, and Issues," *Religions* 13(11) (2022), 10, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111125

which a deeper understanding of God can be attained and where individuals can learn to interact more effectively, fostering cooperation not only for the benefit of society but also for personal and spiritual development.

This study emphasizes the significance of interfaith dialogue in our contemporary pluralist world, highlighting its essential nature despite the inherent challenges it presents[4]. In this contemporary pluralist world, dialogue is essential, if not, extremely challenging. The reluctance to dialogue comes from the misconception that with the respect of other religious beliefs, one has to reject one's own. Religious traditions face both internal and external pressures as they navigate engagement with diverse religious communities[5]. These challenges may manifest in various ways, including feelings of being threatened by many religious beliefs, a tendency to demonize those who are different, or an excessive eagerness to accommodate others at the expense of one's tradition. While some individuals may not be directly affected by these phenomena, it is difficult for anyone to remain unchanged in the face of such challenges. In a diversity world, rejection for absolute values is assumed appropriate[6].

For Muslims[7] and Buddhists[8], giving up fundamental beliefs and values is daunting. Both religions have their

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[4] Bayfield, T. Race, "Religion and Shared Theology," in *Twenty-First Century, Theologies of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 109–127, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324077_009

[5] Clooney, F. X., *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[6] Bjoernaas, T. I., "Christian Muslim Dialogue: Karl Rahner and Ismail al-Faruqi on Universal Salvation," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 27(1) (2018), 45, https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.27.1.3275091

[7] Çakmak, M., "Foundations of Religious Inclusiveness in Muslim Thought," *Islamic Quarterly* 60(4) (2016), 467–508.

[8] Velez de Cea, J. A., *The Buddha and Religious Diversity* (London: Routledge, 2013), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203072639.

own exclusive and inclusive interpretation[9]. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad's Islamic shariah that rooted from the Noble Qur'an and Hadith is the absolute value for Muslims, comparable to the Dharma and Vinaya – teaching constitutes of the Gautama Buddha.[10] Although Islam and Buddhism are frequently depicted as radically different and doctrinally irreconcilable[11] with their similarities limited to the ethical–philosophical spectrum, Islam and Buddhism empirically offers common thematic orientations[12] in comparing elements from different religious traditions based on theology, history, culture[13] and mysticism.[14] While the other principle is tolerance – emphasizing on

[9] Rooted from Christianity, inclusivism does not flatly deny other religions any value or truth, but only maintains that the value and truth of one's own religion are unrivalled, since inclusivism considers itself to be able to 'include' (all) other religions – vis-à-vis exclusivism. See, R., Jonkers, P., Theology, C., & Wiertz, O. J., *Religious Truth and Identity in an Age of Plurality* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 5, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429019678

[10] Yusuf, I., "Islam and Buddhism Relations from Balkh to Bangkok and Tokyo," *Muslim World* 100(2–3) (2010), 180, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2010.01312.x; Yusuf, I., "A Muslim's Reflections on Saddharamapundariksutra: The Lotus Sutra," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 40(May) (2020), 93.

[11] Obuse, K., "Theology of Religions in the Context of Buddhist-Muslim Relation," in *Asean Religious Pluralism: The Challenges of Building a Socio-Cultural Community,* ed. I. Yusuf (Bangkok: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2014), 72–85.

[12] See: Shah-Kazemi, R. et al., "Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism," *Religious Studies Review* 39(2) (2010), 121.

[13] See Jaffary et al., "Intercultural Theology in the Multicultural Context," 2; Frydenlund, I., & Jerryson, M. eds., *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theravada World* (Singapore: Springer, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9884-2.

[14] Khajegir, A., & Heidary, S., "Levels of Existence in Islamic Mysticism and Buddhist Mahayana," *Journal of Religion and Theology* 4(1) (2020), 8–18; Yusuf, I., "Dialogue Between Sufism and Buddhism: The Concepts of al-Insan al-Kamil and Bodhisattva," in *Measuring the Effect of Iranian Mysticism on Southeast Asia* (Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. 2004), 207–218.

agreeing and cooperating in matters of goodness, and disagreeing on other issues, especially on the element that contra to the religious principle. This fundamental principle is a common point between this study and is indubitably the starting point of Muslim-Buddhist dialogue.

However, in the preoccupation of finding commonalities, it is important not to underestimate the major obstacle between this study: the differences in following three theological doctrines, namely the concept of prophethood, God, and salvation. While it is valuable to seek common ground, it is equally important to acknowledge and appreciate the uniqueness of each religious belief. By considering the Islamic and Buddhist scriptures, it becomes evident that both faiths recognize and celebrate diversity while respecting each other's religious context. This paper begins with the definition and concept of dialogue from Islam and Buddhism point of view, followed by the approach in dialogue besides the challenges in the contemporary period.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing content analysis as the methodological tool. Content analysis was used to quantify the occurrence of specific words, phrases, subjects, or concepts in a set of historical and contemporary texts from the fields of religious studies and comparative religion.[15] The selected texts included Islamic and Buddhist scriptures, books, articles, and religious authority guidelines that were relevant to the concepts of dialogue. The content analysis enabled a systematic examination of these sources, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the theological foundations and practical strategies related to interfaith dialogue in Islam and Buddhism.

The Notion of Dialogue in Islam

Dialogue is known as a medium to engage people from the different background and faith towards tolerance in society. The term 'dialogue' derived from etymology Greek[16], that is *dialogues*, *dialogos*, *dialegesthai*, or a combination of words *dia* (through); with word *legein* or *logos* (conversation);[17] which refer to discussions, conversations formal form between a group or country for resolve problems or misunderstand[18]. The term 'dialogue' also encompasses matters related to conversation, discussion, and deliberation between two or more parties, typically taking place in a formal and planned setting.[19]

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica [20] defines 'dialogue' as a word spoken by characters in drama or fiction. It also refers to the genre of literature in conversation. In Arabic, the word dialogue is *al-ḥiwār* as in etymology means an action to return something to something, which terminology from the word *al-muḥāwarah* refers to replying or responding a word among talking people.[21]

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[16] *Encyclopedia of Religions and Spiritual Development* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, 2006), 345.

[17] Muhammad Shafiq & Mohammed Abu Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (Herandon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 1; Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli & Jaffary Awang, "Dialog Antara Agama Menurut Perspektif Islam," *International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 3(2) (2016), 147.

[18] *Macmillan English Dictionary* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2002), 381.

[19] Khambali, K. M. Senin, N. H., "Citra Dialog Antara Agama dalam Perspektif Islam dan Kristian: Analisis Awal", *MALIM – SEA Journal of General Studies* 13(July) (2012), 169–198.

[20] The Encyclopaedia of Britannica, "Dialogue", https://www.britannica.com/art/dialogue, retrieved May 30, 2017.

[21] Ibn Manzur, Jamaluddin Muhammad bin Mukarram al-Ansari, *Lisan al-'Arab*, vol. 5 (Cairo: Dar al-Misriyyah li al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjamah, n.d.), 298; Ahmad Zamri, Yahya bin Muhammad Hasan, *al-Hiwar: Adabuhu wa Dawabituhu fi Daw' al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah* (Makkah:

Expending the connotation, Rohi Ba'albaki in this regard use the word by referring to several meaning as *hādatha* (talk), *bāḥatha* (consult), and *nāqasha* (discuss) which connotes the meaning; to dialogue with, hold a conversation with, talk with, speak with, converse with, discourse with, confer with, hold talks with, to discuss with, to debate with, argue with, reason with[22]. Although the word dialogue in Arabic connotes broad meaning as Rohi Ba'albaki suggests, the meaning of dialogue is subject to the context – which is a more positive connotation vis-à-vis argument, quarrel, and debate.

During dialogue, the first party will first listen to the second party's point of view so that the first party can understand his position in the dialogue[23]. While the words of 'interreligious' or dialogue between people of religions is a combination of the word 'dialogue' with the word 'inter' and 'religion'; where 'dialogue' refers to the conversation, and 'inter' is the meaning of between or among. In general, the words of interreligious dialogue refer to that dialogue occur among religious people[24], between two faith or between two religious' denominations.

According to Ghazali Basri, interfaith dialogue refers to the ability of a religious group to react to any issues that arise whether it involves the own group or others, or a mechanism for identifying points of similarity and

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Dar al-Tarbiyyah wa al-Turath, 1994), 19-20; 'Abd Allah bin Husayn al-Mujan, *al-Hiwar fi al-Islam* (Makkah: Markaz al-Kawn, 2006), 17.

[22] Rohi Ba'albaki, *al-Mawrid* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 1995), 449.

[23] Ahmad Faizuddin & Jaffary, "Dialog Antara Agama Menurut Perspektif Islam.", 147.

[24] Ayyoub, M. M., "A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue," in *Faith Meets Faith*, ed. Omar, I. A. (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 9.

differences between religions.[25] While Khadijah et al. define the interreligious dialogue refers to the cooperation and positive interaction between parties of different religious traditions, taking place at both individual and institutional levels. Its purpose is to foster mutual understanding through discussions on shared religious values and cultivate respect for the diversity among religions.[26]

Interreligious dialogue on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on fostering effective communication and fostering relationships with individuals of diverse religions and cultures in order to combat ignorance and mitigate interreligious misunderstandings. Its core purpose is to promote mutual understanding and respect for each other's religious traditions. Interreligious dialogue does not aim for absolute agreement, but rather seeks to facilitate an open exchange of ideas and perspectives that allow for a deeper understanding of one another despite differences in beliefs.[27] Thus, dialogue can be recognized as the effective mechanism that can create a conducive environment for religious people, respecting and celebrating different views in accordance with the nature of human creation. The ongoing dialogue between various elements of religion, culture, and thought in civilization contributes to the development of good understanding and harmony in life.[28]

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[25] Ghazali Basri, "Inter-religious Dialogue in Malaysia," in *Monograph Series, Centre for Civilisational Dialogue*, No. 9 (Kuala Lumpur: Pusat Dialog Peradaban Universiti Malaya, 2009), 6.

[26] Khadijah Mohd Kambali @ Hambali, Suraya Sintang, Azmil Zainal Abidin, "Dialog antara Agama dalam Konteks Ilmu Perbandingan Agama Menurut Perspektif Islam," *TAFHIM: IKIM Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* 6 (2013), 83–120.

[27] Ahmet Kurucan & Mustafa Kasim Erol, *Dialogue in Islam: Qur'an – Sunnah – History* (London: Dialogue Society, 2012), 20.

[28] Hussain, L. K. A.-S., & Ramli, A. F., "Contributions of Islamic Civilization to the Mathematics Development," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 2(2) (2017), 199–208, https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v2i2.1450

a. The al-Qur'an and Interreligious Dialogue

In general, the discussion of dialogue has its own notion in the Islamic scripture, referring to an interaction or talking between two or more people with different viewpoints. According to al-Tantawi, the concept of dialogue that related with the term *al-mujadalah* (debate) and *al-muhawarah* (dialogue), each mean connotes 'to subduing and defeating the enemy through the establishment of strong arguments and evidence.'[29]

Defining the meaning of dialogue, al-Tantawi suggest it also can be related with the terms of *al-qawl* as etymology also refers to talk, discussion and debate.[30] In the Noble Quran, the word *al-qawl* has been mentioned more than 1700 time in many contexts of verses. For example, in calling notion of the dialogue, "*Yā ayyuhā ladhina āmanū*" (O believers!)[31], "*Yā ayyuhan nās*" (O humanity!)[32], "*Yā ayyuhan nabiyy*" (O Prophet!)[33], "*Yā ayyuhal rasul*" (O Messenger!).[34] On the other hand, the scenario of dialogue in the Noble Quran manifested through a dialogue between prophet Solomon with the ant[35], between Allah (SWT) with angles[36] and Iblees.[37] In terms of interreligious dialogue, there are two version of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH); *first*, with the people of the Book (*Yā ahlāl kitāb*);

> "Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything

[29] Muhammad Sayyid al-Tantawi, *Adab al-Hiwar fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahd Misr, 1997), 4.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Q.S. 2:153.
[32] Q.S. 2:21.
[33] Q.S. 33:45.
[34] Q.S. 5:41.
[35] Q.S. 27:18.
[36] Q.S. 2:30.
[37] Q.S. 15:32.

> with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah…"[38]

Second, with the disbelievers (*Yā ayyuhal kāfirūn*):

> "Say, "O disbelievers I do not worship what you worship"[39]

The first verse highlights the call for equitable dialogue between Muslims and the People of the Scripture (referring to Jews and Christians). It emphasizes the shared commitment to worshiping Allah SWT alone, without associating any partners with Him. This verse encapsulates the fundamental Islamic belief in the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*) and rejects the worship of anyone or anything besides Allah. It emphasizes the importance of finding common ground and promoting *Tawhid* in interfaith dialogue. The verse suggests that the basis for dialogue should be the acknowledgment of the central tenets of *Tawhid*. While the second verse addresses the disbelievers, conveying a clear message that the speaker (in this case, Prophet Muhammad) does not worship what they worship.

This verse emphasizes the distinction between the Islamic faith and the beliefs of the disbelievers. It serves as a statement of religious identity and highlights the uncompromising *Tawhid* principle of Islam. By expressing this difference, the verse sets a boundary between the Islamic faith and other faiths, emphasizing the importance of maintaining distinct religious identities while engaging in respectful dialogue. Both verses demonstrate the importance of clear communication and the assertion of religious beliefs in interfaith encounters. While the first verse focuses on finding common ground and emphasizing shared beliefs, the second verse emphasizes the distinction between *Tawhid* principle of Islam and other belief systems.

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[38] Q.S. 3:64.
[39] Q.S. 109:1.

These verses highlight the multifaceted nature of interfaith dialogue, encompassing both efforts to establish commonalities and the need to maintain religious identity and beliefs. They provide insights into the Noble Quranic approach to engaging with people of different faiths, promoting dialogue while affirming the core principles of *Tawhid*. In sum, the version of interreligious dialogue scenario in the Noble Quran underscores the importance of dialogue in the Noble Quran and its role in facilitating communication, understanding, and guidance. The use of the word '*al-qawl*' to address different groups of people in the Noble Quran reflects the Quranic emphasis on the significance of the audience and context in effective communication. The dialogues that occur in the Noble Quran serve various functions, such as conveying divine messages, testing human faith and knowledge, and providing moral guidance and examples.

b. Hadith and Interreligious Dialogue

In the Hadith, the concept of dialogue was not far from what has been profound in the Noble Quran. The word etymologically refers to talk, discussion, and debate. For example, in a Hadith narrated by Abu Darda':

> "There was a dispute (*muhāwarah*) between Abu Bakr and 'Umar, and Abu Bakr made 'Umar angry. So, 'Umar left angrily. Abu Bakr followed him, requesting him to ask forgiveness (of Allah) for him, but 'Umar refused to do so and closed his door in Abu Bakr's face. So, Abu Bakr went to Allah's Messenger PBUH while we were with him. Allah's Messenger said, "This friend of yours must have quarrelled (with somebody)." In the meantime, 'Umar repented and felt sorry for what he had done, so he came, greeted (those who were present), sat with the Prophet, and related the story to him. Allah's Messenger became angry, and Abu Bakr started saying, "O Allah's Messenger! By Allah, I was more at fault (than 'Umar)." Allah's Messenger

> said, "Are you (people) leaving for me my companion? (Abu Bakr), Are you (people) leaving for me my companion? When I said, "O people I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah," you said, "You tell a lie," while Abu Bakr said, "You have spoken the truth."[40]

The Hadith use the word *muhāwarah* referring to a dispute between two prophet's companions. This connotation is close to debate and quarrel instead of the real meaning of dialogue, which is supposed to be more positive. Ahmad Zamriand Abdullah Mujan also differentiate the concept of dialogue and debate as the nature of dialogue limited to positive approaches and does not aim to win a personal view over the other party as happens in a debate or argument.[41] Therefore, the Noble Quran positioning the word *al-mujādalah* (debate) with *aḥsan* (in a way that is best) as stated in Surah al-Nahl "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best."[42]

In same view, al-Qasim and al-Ḥamd argue, although dialogue and debate – both involve a meeting, discussion and talk between two parties, dialogue tend to reflect the interaction rather than debate that usually leads to arrogant and obsess with own opinion[43]. Dialogue involves openness and willingness to listen to the other party's point of view even if there is a difference in the topic discussed. In the

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[40] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari li al-Imam Abi 'Abdillah Muhammad bin Isma'il*, Book 65, Hadith Number 162 (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2004).

[41] Ahmad Zamri, *al-Hiwar*, 19-20; Al-Mujan, *al-Hiwar fi al-Islam*, 17.

[42] Q.S. 16:125; Muhammad Bassam Rashdi al-Zayn, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahris li ma'ani al-Qur'an al-'Adhim* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), 347.

[43] Khalid bin 'Abd Allah al-Qasim, *al-Hiwar ma'a Ahl al-Kitab: Ususuhu wa Manahijuhu fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah* (Riyadh: Dar al-Muslim, 1994), 104-106; Muhammad Ibrahim al-Hamd, *Akhta' fi Adab al-Muhadathah wa al-Mujalisah* (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzaymah, 1996), 67-68.

same notion, Shehu argues that 'debate' or *al-jidāl* (Arabic) refers to the objection to the truth or false view[44]. The term of 'debate' is dependent on the context – if it is occurred to differentiate between right and wrong, then it is allowed vis-à-vis to justify the wrong principle. Debate at least may consider as '*quarrelling dialogue*' in general and share certain goal with dialogue[45].

On the other hand, the practical dialogue can identify thorough several prophet Muhammad series of dialogue with other ruler as Heraclius – the King of Rome. The dialogue which has been implement in textual inviting the king to Islam as as follows:

> "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful (This letter is) from Muhammad the slave of Allah and His Apostle to Heraclius the ruler of Byzantine. Peace be upon him, who follows the right path. Furthermore, I invite you to Islam, and if you become a Muslim, you will be safe, and Allah will double your reward, and if you reject this invitation of Islam, you will be committing a sin of Arisiyin (tillers, farmers i.e. your people). And (Allah's Statement:) 'O people of the scripture! Come to a word common to you and us that we worship none but Allah and that we associate nothing in worship with Him, and that none of us shall take others as Lords beside Allah. Then, if they turn away, say:

[44] Shehu, Fatmir Mehdi, *Nostra Aetate and the Islamic Perspective of Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2008), 103.

[45] Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, K., Ghazali, A., & Senin, N., "Fundamental Elements in Sustaining Inter-Religious Harmonious Relations Under Islamic Perspectives in the Age of New Media," *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)* 7(2) (2022), 147-165; Jaffary Awang, Ramli, A. F. & Rahman, Z. A., "Refleksi al-Ghazali dalam Dialog Antara Agama," *Islamiyyat: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 44 (Special Issue) (2022), 97–107, DOI: https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2022-44IK-10

> Bear witness that we are Muslims (those who have surrendered to Allah).' (3:64).[46]

The similar letter of invitation to Islam sent to six rulers in 629 AD – the Persian king, the Byzantine emperor, the Negus of Abyssinia, the governor of Egypt, a Ghassanid prince, and a chief of the Banu Hanifa in south-east Arabia[47]. What was very interesting, the letter tradition has been followed by Umayyad Muslim Caliph, 'Umar 'Abd al-'Aziz (682–720 C.E.) on his letter to the Buddhist Maharaja, Sri Indravarman the Srivijaya (702–728 C.E.) inviting them to accept Islam. Nu'aym bin Hammad wrote,

> "The King of al-Hind sent a letter to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, which ran as follows: From the King of Kings, who is the descendant of a thousand kings, whose consort, too, is the descendant of a thousand kings, in whose stables are a thousand elephants, and in whose territories are two rivers which irrigate plants of aloes, odoriferous herbs, nutmeg, and camphor, whose fragrance spreads to the distance of twelve miles, - to the King of the Arabs, who does not associate other gods with God. I have sent to you a gift, which is not much of a gift but (just) a greeting and I wish that you may send to me someone who might teach me Islam and instruct me in its Laws [or as in another version, might teach me Islam and explain it to me. And peace be upon you!"[48]

Based on the discussion on dialogue in the Noble Quran and Hadis that also occurred in Muslim history,

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[46] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 1, Hadith Number 7.

[47] Al-Ya'mur, Muhammad bin Sayyid al-Nas, *'Uyun al-Athar fi Funun al-Maghazi wa al-Syamā'il wa al-Sirr*, vol 2 (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, n.d.), 350-351.

[48] Fatimi, S. Q., "Two Letters from The Maharaja to The Khalifah," *Islamic Studies* 2(1) (1963), 129; Abu al-Mahasin Ibn Yusuf Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa al-Qahirah* (n.p: Dar al-Kutub, 2010); Jaffary et al., "Muslim and Buddhist Encounters," 137.

Islam at the first place relate the dialogue motivation with *da'wah* – calling or invitation to Islam with willingness. The discourse of dialogue and *da'wah* also has been extensively examined by Islamic scholars, drawing upon various forms of dialogue found in the Noble Qur'an and Hadith. Examples include dialogues between the Prophet with other groups, not limited to Christians, Jews and Sabians and their polytheists.[49] It's in line to the dialogue objective to propagate Islamic teaching to the mankind regardless their ethnicity, languages and cultures.[50]

Thus, the dialogue itself has two categories. According to Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi the Noble Quran presented two forms of dialogue, whether to praise the believers among the People of the Book or to condemn those who are astray[51]. In same argument, al-Qasim classified two forms of dialogue: *first*, the shariah dialogue – allowed in Islam, based on five principles[52]:

a) To invite people to accept Islamic teaching.
b) To explain the wrongness of other religious doctrines.
c) To refute doubt of other religions on Islam.
d) To strengthen faith among Muslims.
e) To manifest the goodness of Islamic Shariah.

While the non-shariah dialogue – not allowed in Islam, is based on three principles:

a) To obey and love the doctrine of other religious followers.

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[49] Al-Zayn, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahris,* 347-370; al-Tantawi, *Adab al-Hiwar,* 4; Ahmet Kurucan & Mustafa Kasim, "Dialogue in Islam", 37.

[50] Al-Qasim, *al-Hiwar ma'a Ahl al-Kitab*, 112-127; Ahmad Zamri, *al-Hiwar*, 43; Ibrahim, Mohammad Said Mitwally, "Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Legal Perspective on its Validity, Concept and Practices," *Insights: Muslim Non-Muslim Relations* 3(1) (2010), 95.

[51] Al-Tantawi, *Adab al-Hiwar,* 181.

[52] Al-Qasim, *al-Hiwar ma'a Ahl al-Kitab*, 112-127

b) To bridge among religious doctrines without any limitation.
c) To justify and support other doctrines.

The classification of dialogue is not far from the majority of Muslims that uphold an exclusivist position as Islam is the true religion, so it is their responsibility to deliver the message to other religions. The concept was not far from other missionary religion as Christianity as both aim on propagating their respective religions.[53] Thus, interreligious dialogue should occur in Islam without discrediting Islam from other religions to sustain its superiority, nor to change other religious doctrine.

Dialogue, on the other hand, serves the purpose of providing a comprehensive explanation of religious understanding and belief systems to others in an academic and constructive manner. The primary objective of dialogue is to address and overcome the challenges faced by contemporary multireligious societies, both internally and externally[54]. By bringing together followers of different faiths with the aim of fostering interreligious harmony and promoting peaceful coexistence.[55] In contrast, Muslim inclusivists refute the motivation for converting others to accept Islam, as it will lead to discomfort due to the treatment on their belief system For example, in the case of the Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Myanmar, the Buddhist nationalist justified their aggression against minority

[53] Bayfield, T., "Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives," *Journal of Church and State* 4(1) (2016), https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59698-7.

[54] Mohd Farid Mohd Shahran, "Kebenaran Prinsip dan Keperluan Dialog," in *Islam dan Hubungan Antara Penganut Agama*, eds. Azizan et al. (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit IKIM, 2019), 172.

[55] Elius, M., Khan, I., Bin Mohd Nor, M. R., Yusoff, M. Y. Z. B. M. & Noordin, K. Bin, "Islam as a Religion of Tolerance and Dialogue: A Critical Appraisal," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18(52) (2019), 96–109.

Muslim society as they were threatened by the Islamic propagation activities which tend to convert the Buddhists[56]. Although this was a baseless claim, it has been an excuse to the Muslim as a threat to the survival of the nation's religion, culture, and economy and a threat to the Buddhist kingdom.[57]

Therefore, due to misconception on the meaning of *da'wah* nor the contradiction between the dialogue and *da'wah*, it needs to reconcile the meaning of *da'wah* in order to return it to the original contexts that is more universal and holistic, instead of converting others by force. On the other hand, 'the affirmation of faith' – "To you be your Way, and to me mine"[58] as stated in the Noble Qur'an's manifests the principle of 'no compulsion in religion' explicitly forbids Muslims from forcing or compelling non-Muslims to convert to Islam, because conversion should be voluntary and willing; their conversion to Islam must rely entirely on their wills and faiths in Islamic traditions and practices, as well as Islamic teachings in general. Under the principle of 'invitation methodology to Islam,' the Noble Qur'an instructs Muslims to employ three approaches: wisdom, good advice, and

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[56] Jaffary Awang, Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli & Zaizul Ab Rahman, "Muslim Views on Other Religions: With Special Reference to Buddhism," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77(4) (2021), 5, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6608

[57] Jaffary Awang, Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli & Zaizul Ab Rahman, "Muslim and Buddhist Encounters : Between Conflict and Harmony," *Islamiyyat: The International Journal of Islamic Studies* 44(1) (2022), 132, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2022-4401-12; G. van Klinken & Aung, S. M. T., "The Contentious Politics of Anti-Muslim Scapegoating in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47(3) (2017), 353–375, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1293133; Crouch, M., "Myanmar's Muslim Mosaic and the Politics of Belonging", in *Islam and the State in Myanmar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9–36, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199461202.003.0002

[58] Q.S. 109:6

respectful debate. It emphasizes the importance of engaging in dialogue and discussions with others in a manner that is characterized by wisdom and good manners.

The term 'good debate' in this context can indeed be understood as engaging in debate or argumentation while employing the greatest and most pleasant manners. It emphasizes the importance of presenting one's perspective in a respectful and constructive manner, promoting understanding and mutual respect rather than engaging in hostile or confrontational exchanges. The use of the term 'good debate' highlights the significance of dialogue and intellectual discourse not just means to convey the message of Islam effectively and foster understanding among different individuals and communities, but also to express that Islam really emphasizes the importance of interaction among people to spread love, kindness, and peaceful living among humankind[59]. It encourages Muslims to engage in thoughtful and respectful discussions, considering diverse perspectives and presenting their arguments in a persuasive and respectful manner.

However, if these three approaches of inviting non-Muslims to Islam do not work, Muslims must adhere to the principle of 'affirmation of faith'. This means that Muslims who have engaged in external *da'wah*, inviting non-Muslims to embrace or accept Islam, and have not succeeded in convincing them, should respect their decision and allow them to practice their religion of choice. It is worth noting that there are two different types of *da'wah*: internal and external. The internal *da'wah* refers to the efforts made within the Muslim community to strengthen the faith of Muslims and promote adherence to Islamic

[59] Mohd, K., Hambali, K., Mohd Paudzi, N. H. & Sultan Mohsen Sallam, A. N., "Islamic Perspective on the Concept of Interaction Among Multicultural Society," *AFKAR: Journal of Aqidah and Islamic Thought* 23(2) (2021), 249–274, DOI: https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol23no2.7

principles. External *da'wah*, on the other hand, involves reaching out to individuals who are not followers of Islam and inviting them to explore and consider the teachings of the religion.

In the specific context mentioned, where Muslims have engaged in external *da'wah* but have not been successful in persuading non-Muslims to embrace Islam, it is important for Muslims to uphold the principle of respecting religious freedom. Islam recognizes that individuals have the right to choose their own religious beliefs and practices, and Muslims should honour and allow for this freedom. [60] In addition, Ismail al-Faruqi on discussing the meaning of da'wah argued, the act of calling to the Islam is not equivalent to forcing someone to accept it[61]. Allah commands that, "there should be no coercion in religion"[62] and that the objective of the call can only be achieved through the individual's free will. The purpose of the call is for the caller to exercise their own judgement and acknowledge Allah as their Creator, Master, Lord, and Judge. Any attempt to force or impose this belief contradicts its very nature and is punishable with Jahannam. Coercing someone to convert to Islam is viewed as a severe violation of human rights and is considered second only to homicide. The Noble Quran advocates the use of persuasion in calling people to the faith, arguing with them in the most gracious manner, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best…"[63].

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[60] Ahmad Faizuddin & Jaffary, "Dialog Antara Agama Menurut Perspektif Islam.", 32; Jaffary et al., "Muslim Views on Other Religions, 4.

[61] Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji, "On the Nature of Islamic *Da'wah*," in *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, ed. Siddiqui, A. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1982), 33.

[62] Q.S 2: 256

[63] Q.S 16:125

If they are not interested due to prejudice and misunderstanding, they must be left alone without disconnecting the social relation in humanistic values. Ismail al-Faruqi clearly state *da'wah* is not coercion but it refers to the pure invitation with willingness. Therefore, the Noble Quran stress on the 'common terms' or *kalimatin sawā'* when dialogue with the People of the Book,

> "Say, 'O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah." But if they turn away, then say, "Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]."[64].

In the same argument, Ataullah Siddiqui clarifies that the *da'wah* is about 'communication' and 'invitation' to Islam, not about conversion[65]. While dialogue, on the other hand, is about talking with, and not simply talking about, people of other faiths, beliefs, and persuasions. The reality is that the differences of religions are God's plan, and it will remain so forever. The human burden is to connect with others in dignity and with respect. Based on this argument, we can conclude that dialogue and *da'wah* are interrelated but have different meanings. Dialogue can be a part of the medium of *da'wah*.

Dialogue can be a medium to deliver an Islamic message which is universal, not limited to inviting people to accept Islam as a way of life. If people accept it, it is an advantage to the Muslims. Because people do not have authority to change inside of the human heart, nor do they force them for it. If people do not accept Islam, dialogue can still occur by focusing on the humanistic or common values that other religious traditions have also promoted.

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[64] Q.S 3:64

[65] Siddiqui, Ataullah, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1997), 70-75.

This has been rooted in the Noble Quran where the dialogue reflects to the people of other faith.

The Notion of Dialogue in Buddhism

Buddhism, comparatively aloof from the vicious tides of modern social and cultural movements and not so involved in interfaith dialogue, can no longer resist the contradictions of pluralism, globalization, and secularism. In the Buddhism scripture, two words close to the meaning of dialogue are *kathopakathana* (talking/intensive talking) and *saṁvāda* (speaking together). On justifying this, a Bikhu and scholar of interfaith dialogue Lam Soon Dat, describes the *kathana* (*kathopakathana*) includes the meaning conversing[66]. While *vāda* (*saṁvāda*) refers to the particular meaning of an emphatic or formulated speech-assertion doctrine. Other terms associated with the connotation are *lapanā* (talking), *ālapana* (addressing, talking to), *sallāpa* (conversation), and *vivāda*, (dispute, contention)[67]. Thus, the Pali words sākacchā (discourse), sambhāsā (conversation), kathā (talking to), and saṁvāda, (speaking together) is the most relevant phrase for dialogue.[68] For a Buddhist, his or her faith is no bar to dialogue with other religions. The reason is that Buddhism is not a system of dogmas. The Buddha exhorted his disciples to take nothing on blind faith, not even his words. Rather, they should listen, and then examine the teachings for themselves, so that they might be convinced of its truth.[69] Buddha normally denies curarizes religions, he

[66] Lam Son Dat, *An Analytical Study of Intereligious Understanding: A Buddhist Perspective* (Punjab: The Punjabi University, 2012).

[67] English to Pali and Pali to English Dictionary Online. https://dictionary.sutta.org/, accessed January 21, 2019.

[68] See Pāli-English Dictionary. (1999). T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (Eds.). Pāli Text Society.

[69] See V. Trenckner ed., *The Majjhima Nikāya*, vol. I (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), 320. Also, in the English version, *The Collection of the Middle-Length Sayings (Majjhima Nikāya)*, vol. III, trans. I. B. Homer (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1990), 382.

generally avoided making specific criticisms of particular religions unless he was invited or challenged to do so.[70] Because of that, in the history of Sri Lanka, Arahant Mahinda who introduced Buddha Sasana to the country is described as '*dīpa-pasādaka*': one who won the hearts of (inhabitants of) the island.[71] Therefore, these attitudes promote and help interreligious dialogue initiatives.

It is clear that the Buddha did not have "Buddhists" listening to him. Once he started teaching, it is clear from the texts how people belonging to different social strata started following him. They became "hearers" (*śrāvaka/sāvaka*) of the Buddha. There are discourses reporting how some people, at the end of the sermon, would take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, and asked the Buddha to accept them as *upāsaka/upāsikā* (male/female person who stays close by). Taking refuge in the Triple Gem (*ti-ratana/tri-ratna*) and becoming a follower of the Buddha are both voluntary acts of a person, and such acts do not mean that one was converted to something by someone.[72] No doubt, Buddhism accepts and honors the 'right' of any religion to exist anywhere (like everything else) and the 'right' (the moral obligation) of the adherents of any religion to teach their religion to others.[73] So, Buddhism is ready to open for dialogue to any world religions. Because dialogue for the Buddhists is an activity known in Buddhist context as *dhamma* discussion.

In the Buddha's time, the Buddhists were encouraged to perform *dhamma* discussion among themselves and the

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[70] K. Jayatilleke, *The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975), 31.

[71] A. Tilakaratne, "Inter-Religious Understanding," in *Collected Papers: Asanga Tilakaratne*, eds. S. F. Miriswaththe Wimalagnana Thera & Denzil Senadheera, vol. V (Sri Lanka: Sarasavi Publishers, 2020).

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] *Ibid.*

Buddhists and non-Buddhists.[74] Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine interreligious dialogue from a Buddhist viewpoint, for example, by bringing concrete examples from the Sutras and by recognizing and reinterpreting Buddhist notions in light of the framework for interreligious dialogue. According to Abe, a dialogue between world religions depends upon discovering new theological structures on which 'world culture' and 'world history' can be constructed[75]. Indeed, global society never establishes harmony without a deep mutual understanding among world religions. To be a true world religion, Buddhism must deal with the pluralistic religious situation and religious condition and engage in interreligious dialogue without imposing its own ontological and axiological categories.[76]

A normal dialogue usually involves representatives of both religious groups in discussing issues, for example, a formal interfaith dialogue from various backgrounds (religious scholars, scientists and activists)[77]. However, this is no less true when Buddhists speak about other religions. In the other words, dialogue enables the Buddhist to learn and understand other faiths. This can be achieved by an effective dialogue that allows each dialogue member to deliver his or her opinion without limitation. At the same time, all parties must remain committed to an open forum in which participants are free to express their ideas and opinions without fear of recrimination for political influence.

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[74] Veerachart Nimanong, "Buddhist Spirituality and Interfaith Dialogue," *Mahachula Acadamic Journal* 3 (n.d.), 162–78.

[75] Masao Abe, *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. Steven Heine (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1995), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.

[76] *Ibid*., xix.

[77] Sivarasa, S., & Muzaffar, C., *Alternative Politics for Asia: A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue* (Selangor: International Movement for a Just World. (1999), 16.

It may happen that some religious communities that are only recently part of the dialogue, and therefore new to their ways, will not be able to 'find their language' when others make critiques that seem unjustified or misinformed to them. On finding the common aspect among people of faith, Buddhists will identify the aspect that exists in other religions while the basis also stresses by the Buddha teaching. For example, the Buddha concern about the injustice and those who oppressed under the name of religion. Thus, Buddhist urge to support those in injustice regardless of their religious background because no religion deserves to be and exhorted his disciples to be critical of any faith or his teaching. Rather, they will listen, and then test the teachings for themselves, so they may be persuaded to the truth.[78]

Dialogue in Buddhism on the other hand, holds great significance and is rooted in the teachings and practices of the tradition. Buddhism promotes open and respectful communication as a means to deepen understanding, foster harmony, and cultivate wisdom. The concept of dialogue is closely aligned with the practice of Right Speech, as emphasized in the Noble Eightfold Path[79]. Right Speech encourages truthful, beneficial, and non-harming communication in all interactions, including dialogues with others. In Buddhism, dialogue is also intertwined with mindfulness and deep listening[80]. The practice of mindfulness enables individuals to be fully present and

[78] Havanpola Ratanasara, "The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue: A Buddhist Perspective," 1996, Urban Dharma, http://www.urbandharma.org/bcdialog/bcd2/interfaith.html, accessed January 21, 2020.

[79] Baird, R. D., & Keown, D., "The Nature of Buddhist Ethics," *Numen* 41(2) (1994), 111, https://doi.org/10.2307/3270267

[80] Husgafvel, V., "The 'Universal Dharma Foundation' of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: Non-Duality and Mahāyāna Buddhist Influences in the Work of Jon Kabat-Zinn," *Contemporary Buddhism* 19(2), (2018), 291, https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2018.1572329

attentive during conversations, cultivating an open and non-judgmental attitude. Deep listening involves fully presenting to others, suspending personal biases and assumptions, and truly understanding their perspectives and experiences. This fosters empathy, mutual understanding, and harmonious relationships.

Additionally, Buddhist dialogue incorporates elements of inquiry and investigation[81]. It encourages individuals to question their own assumptions, beliefs, and attachments. Through thoughtful inquiry, dialogue becomes an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth, leading to greater insight and wisdom. Moreover, dialogue in Buddhism extends beyond interpersonal interactions to include engagement with diverse religious and philosophical perspectives. Buddhism values exploring and exchanging ideas, seeking common ground, and appreciating the diversity of human experiences. Interfaith dialogue, where Buddhists engage with followers of other traditions, is seen as an opportunity for mutual learning, fostering respect, and cultivating a more harmonious society.

a. *Kālāma Sutra* and Interreligious Dialogue

The *Anguttara Nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka* contains the *Kālāma Sutta*. This *sutta* was explained by the Buddha to the Kālāmas, a group of individuals. It is still seen as a text that supports pro-skepticism and reason. The Buddha makes his famous case for rigorously challenging religious doctrines in this *sutta*. Because of this famous phrase, the entire text has been understood as supporting the rejection of anything that goes against reason or reality, including Buddhist doctrines. When the Buddha and his disciples arrived in the city of Kesaputta, the Kālāmas approached

[81] Cohen, R. S., *Beyond Enlightenment: Buddhism, Religion, Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 153, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203098783

the Buddha and expressed doubts about his teaching. The Buddha said to them: "It is fitting for you to be perplexed, Kālāmas, fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter." He then offered his famous instructions to the Kālāmas about skepticism, arguing:[82]

> "Come, Kālāmas, do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think: 'The ascetic is our guru.' But when you know for yourselves: 'These things are wholesome; these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to welfare and happiness,' then you should live in accordance with them."

From the passage the Buddha offers the following guidance to the people on this: Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition or hearsay, nor upon rumor, nor upon what is in a scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon an axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness, enter on and abide in them."[83]

The connection between *Kālāma sutta* and interreligious dialogue is inevitable. In the context of interreligious dialogue, the *Kālāma sutta* can encourage open-mindedness, respect for diverse beliefs, and the

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[82] Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications; 2012).

[83] Dat, "An Analytical Study of Inter-Religious Understanding," 37-38.

importance of direct experience in understanding different religions. It promotes dialogue based on rational inquiry, mutual learning, and the cultivation of compassion and understanding.

The *sutta* places a strong emphasis on the need of thorough investigation, logical analysis, and firsthand personal experience in identifying what is wholesome and helpful. The Buddha exhorts the Kalamas to cultivate virtues like non-ill will, harmlessness, and wisdom as well as to consider the ethical implications and consequences of their conduct. Therefore, it is necessary to observe the following passage contains from *Kalama Sutta*, the essence of the attitude recommended by the Buddha in choosing between conflicting ideologies as a basis for living.

b. *Caṅkī Sutra* and Interreligious Dialogue

The *Caṅkī*[84] *Sutta* describes how when the Buddha arrives at Opasāda[85], Cankī visits him, despite protests from other Brahmins. The *Caṅkī Sutta* opens with the Buddha and a large community of monks arriving in the prosperous Brahmin village of Opasāda (or Opāsāda), which is Caṅkī's brahmadeya. Apparently, the Buddha's fame precedes him, and the people there go in droves to visit him. Seeing this, the Brahmin Caṅkī, too, is impressed and decides to see the Buddha, too. Five hundred visiting Brahmins discourage Caṅkī from doing so for fear of losing face, considering Caṅkī's brahminical status, but Caṅkī thinks otherwise, replying that the Buddha too has all the brahminical qualities, but even more so, is of a thoroughly pure lineage

[84] Caṅkī is a *mahā, sāla* ("great-hall," that is, rich and eminent) and learned Brahmin of the Buddha's period. Rajah Pasenadi of Kosala gave him Opasāda as a *brahmadeya* (a fief), where understandably he is the most prominent inhabitant. Opasāda is a prosperous well-populated town in Kosala, near which is a sal forest (*sāla, vana*), where offerings are often made to the devas; hence, it is also called Deva Forest (*deva, vana*).

[85] Opasāda refers to the village of Brahmins in Kosala where Canki lived, who lived in royal fief granted to him by Pasenadi.

going back many generations. Convinced, the other Brahmins, too, decide to join Caṅkī.[86] The Buddha's stance is explained in this discourse, as well as how Caṅkī and the Buddha met amicably.

According to the Bokundara Kusala Damma Himi that *Caṅkī sutra* clarify the religious otherness saying: "Just like before, today, man is 'only his own opinion is right.' They believe that the opinions of others are lies. We all have different opinions about any matter. Be it religion, philosophy, politics, or any other matter. This is the only truth that I believe and others are wrong". In this *sutra*, the Blessed One preaches that people not only argue and act like blind people, but also fight and wage war because of this exclusiveness. He further clarifies that: "If you think carefully, you will see that even the Buddhism you believe in is something you have adopted. If you talk to him, you can find out that your friend believes in a different form of Buddhism. Commentary on the Sutras although the preachers talk about the important stories in the Sutras, it is a matter of regret that the Blessed One does not comment on the matter of Dharma taught by these Sutras. This is true not only for this *sutra* but for all *sutra* commentaries."[87]

Structurally, the *Caṅkī Sutta* closely parallels the *Soṇadaṇḍasutta*.[88] Both *suttas* open with the Buddha arriving in the locality with a large company of monks and are well received. In both cases, the most eminent local Brahmin, both Brahmadeya owners, want to meet the Buddha despite protests of their peers. In the *Caṅkī Sutta*,

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[86] Bhikkhu Nānamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Cankī Sutta*, translation of the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1995)

[87] Bokundara Kusla Damma Himi, "Caṅkī Sutta: With Caṅkī: Majjima Nikāya Sutta 95 Sinhala Tipitaka Interpretation," June 14, 2018, https://sinhalatipitaka.wordpress.com/2018/05/14/mn-2-5-5-චංකී-සූත්‍රය/, accessed June 14, 2018.

[88] See "Diga Nikaya, Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta," https://suttacentral.net/dn4/en/sujato, accessed June 14, 2018.

however, no conversation between him and the Buddha is recorded, it is the young Kāpaṭhika Māṇava who is the protagonist.

The *Caṅkī Sutta* provides important insights about interreligious dialogue. It exemplifies the Buddha's strategy of confronting opposing points of view with clarity, compassion, and wisdom. The *sutta* serves as an excellent illustration of the value of attentive listening, respect for various viewpoints, and effective methods for participating in fruitful conversations.

Participants in interfaith discussion can be motivated to foster traits like open-mindedness, humility, and a readiness to question and investigate their own beliefs by the teachings found in the *Caṅkī Sutta*. It encourages participants to engage in in-depth investigation while acknowledging the transience of concepts and the possibility of dialogue-based growth and transformation. The *sutta* also emphasizes the importance of conversation concentrating on shared values and objectives. Although the *Caṅkī Sutta*'s precise text may not directly address interfaith discussion, its fundamental ideas of effective communication, finding the truth, and cultivating understanding can help to build a peaceful and fruitful discourse atmosphere among people of different religion backgrounds.

c. *Tevijja Sutta* and Interreligious Dialogue:

Tevijja Sutta (also translated as The Discourse on the Three Knowledges) is the thirteenth *sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*, preached to Vāsettha and Bhāradvāja who visited the Buddha at Manasākata. The Buddha emphasises the fallacy of the notion that attaining mere knowledge of the Three Vedas is sufficient to achieve reunion with Brahm. However, only by the practice of the four Brahmavihras can one achieve such unity.

The narrative can be summed up as follows: the Exalted One once visited the Brahman village of

Manasākaṭa in Kosala while travelling through the region with a sizable group of brothers, numbering roughly 500. There were distinguished and wealthy Brahmans were staying at Manasākaṭa: Caṅkī the Brahman, Tārukkha the Brahman, Pokkharasādī the Brahman, Jāṇussoṇi the Brahman, Todeyya the Brahman, and other very distinguished and wealthy Brahmans. When the young two Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja were exercising (after taking a bath), they started debating which path was the genuine one and which was the false one as they walked up and down, strolled up and down, and were in a reflective mood. The young Brahman Vāseṭṭha spoke thus; the straight path is which has been announced by the Brahman Pokkharasādī while Brahman Bhāradvāja spoke thus; the straight path is, which has been announced by the Brahman Tārukkha that union with Brahmā. And they went to Buddha to solve the issue and Buddha asked; did any of Brahmans or previous Brahmans experienced Brahmā (God) or is there a single one of the Brahmans versed in the three Vedas who has ever seen Brahmā face to face. But Buddha did not refuse the discourse totally but advice to accept the own spiritual experience.[89]

The Tevijja Sutta contains insightful insights that can enhance efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Participants can engage in constructive and courteous talks by considering various paths, developing wisdom, concentrating on common values, and embracing humility and openness. Interfaith discourse becomes a potent tool for promoting harmony, understanding, and collaboration among people of various religious traditions when it incorporates the ideas offered in the *Tevijja Sutta*.

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[89] See; Piya Tan, trans., *Tevijja Sutta (The Discourse on Those with the 3 Knowledges)*, https://suttacentral.net/dn13/en/sujato, accessed June 14, 2018.

Discussion

Dialogue in Islam and Buddhism shares some commonalities, but there are also distinct differences in their conceptualizations and approaches. In Islam, the recognition and the significance of dialogue is a means to foster understanding and promote peace. The Noble Quran and Hadith emphasize the importance of engaging in dialogue with people of different faiths. Islamic dialogue aims to convey the message of Islam and promote mutual understanding, guided by the principles of tauhid, wisdom, fairness, and tolerance. Muslims are encouraged to engage in dialogue with others while upholding the values and teachings of Islam.

In Buddhism, dialogue is seen as a means to deepen understanding, promote harmony, and cultivate wisdom. It emphasizes the importance of skilful and compassionate speech, rooted in the ethical principle of Right Speech. Mindfulness and deep listening are integral to Buddhist dialogue, fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and harmonious relationships. Buddhist dialogue also encourages inquiry and investigation, inviting individuals to question assumptions and cultivate personal and spiritual growth.

However, there are differences in the conceptualization of dialogue between Islam and Buddhism. In Islam, dialogue is often rooted in the propagation of faith (*da'wah*) and the conveyance of Islamic principles. It seeks to promote understanding and invite others to embrace the Islamic message. Furthermore, while both traditions emphasize respectful communication, Islam strongly emphasises the importance of *Tawḥīd* and the worship of Allah. Dialogue in Islam may involve discussions on the concept of God, the nature of faith, and the role of Prophet Muhammad as the final messenger. The focus is on introducing the *Tawḥīd* notion and inviting others to embrace it freely. In addition, the interfaith

dialogue is in line with the nature and spirit of Islam. This is because Islam is not a religion that teaches its followers to isolate themselves or separate from other religious traditions solely based on differences in religion and culture. Therefore, dialogue is crucial in establishing human unity and global harmony.[90]

On the other hand, dialogue in Buddhism often encompasses philosophical inquiries, exploring existential questions and the nature of reality. It aims to cultivate personal insight and wisdom. In summary, both Islam and Buddhism recognize the value of dialogue in promoting understanding and peace. Islam emphasizes the conveyance of the Islamic message and the importance of *Tawḥīd*, while Buddhism emphasizes mindfulness, deep listening, and personal inquiry. Both traditions share the objective of fostering mutual understanding and cultivating harmonious relationships through respectful and compassionate communication.

In addition, on findings of the notion of dialogue, the Islamic and Buddhist attitudes towards other religions have been one of 'critical tolerance' from its very foundation. This means that while Islam and Buddhism have been critical of other religions, they have also been tolerant of each other. Additionally, Islam and Buddhism have been able to combine missionary passion with this tolerant outlook. Despite being considered Buddhism as a non-missionary religion contrary to Islam in a popular sense, both religions have not carried out religious wars or persecutions against other religions for the sake of conversion. Instead, those have exhibited a remarkable degree of flexibility and have been able to spread through the dissemination of understanding.

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[90] Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Kepelbagaian & Kesatuan Dalam Konteks *Fiqh al-Ta'ayush*," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 22(1) (2020), 73-102.

Both Islamic and Buddhist notion of interfaith dialogue emphasizes the importance of building bridges between different faiths and promoting mutual understanding and respect. Both religions' 'critical tolerance' towards other religions, suggests that it is open to engaging in dialogue with other faiths while also maintaining a critical perspective. Generally, both Islam and Buddhism see that, salvation is only possible within their own way of believing and practicing religion.

Buddhism's emphasis on interfaith dialogue is rooted in healthy engagement with others and humanity. Similarly, Islam's emphasis on interfaith dialogue is rooted in the belief that all people are created by God and all humans are one family, that there is a need to promote peace and understanding between different communities. Islamic notion of interfaith dialogue distinguishes Buddhism from *Tawhidic* notions and *paṭiccasamuppāda* (cause and effect) notions.

Another, possible difference between the two notions of dialogue is that Buddhism tends to focus more on individual spiritual development and the attainment of enlightenment (*Nibbana*), while Islam places greater emphasis on social justice and the establishment of a just society (*ummah*). This distinction may be reflected in each tradition's goals and outcomes for interfaith dialogue initiatives. However, it is important to note that both religions are complex and multifaceted, and any comparison between them should be approached with sensitivity and nuance. While there are some similarities between the two notions, it is important to note that they are rooted in different religious traditions and may have different approaches and goals.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the dialogue between Islam and Buddhism holds significant potential for promoting mutual understanding, harmony, and peace. While there are differences in their conceptualizations and approaches to dialogue, both traditions emphasize the importance of respectful communication, deep listening, and the pursuit of wisdom. In Islam, dialogue is valued as a way to introduce the Islamic message, promote understanding, and invite others to embrace the *Tawḥīd* of Allah. Islamic dialogue is guided by principles of wisdom, fairness, and respectful engagement, seeking to build bridges of understanding and establish common ground. Similarly, in Buddhism, dialogue is seen as a means to deepen understanding, cultivate empathy, and explore existential questions. It is grounded in the ethical principle of Right Speech and encourages inquiry and personal growth. Buddhist dialogue aims to foster harmonious relationships and mutual learning among diverse perspectives.

Both Islam and Buddhism recognize the importance of engaging in dialogue with people of different faiths to overcome misconceptions, address conflicts, and promote peaceful coexistence. By engaging in dialogue, adherents of both traditions have the opportunity to deepen their own understanding, challenge assumptions, and build relationships based on mutual respect and empathy. Ultimately, the dialogue between Islam and Buddhism can contribute to the broader interfaith dialogue efforts,

fostering a culture of acceptance, harmony, and collaboration in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. It offers a platform for exploring shared values, common challenges, and avenues for cooperation in addressing societal issues and promoting global peace. Through ongoing dialogue, Muslims and Buddhists have the potential to deepen their mutual understanding, learn from one another, and contribute to the collective well-being of humanity by promoting tolerance, respect, and peaceful coexistence.

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