

# INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS

**Emotional Intelligence in Interfaith Relations:  
Lessons from Prophet Muhammad's Interaction with  
the Christians of Najran**

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**Emotional Intelligence in Interfaith Relations:  
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## **Abstract**

Goodwill and cooperation between different faith communities are hallmarks of successful plural societies. Towards this end, strong leadership plays a crucial role to direct and guide communities towards building bridges of mutual trust and respect for others. In a world of rapid change and unpredictability, interpersonal skills as embodied by emotional intelligence is a cornerstone of robust interfaith relations. This paper highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in interfaith relations. It discusses the value of emotional intelligence as exemplified by the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad through his interactions with the Christians of his time. In particular, the paper looks at Muhammad's encounter with the Christians of Najran in 631 which makes a compelling case for true religious pluralism as advocated by Islam. The paper begins with a discussion on emotional intelligence before it outlines the historical account of Muhammad's encounter with the Christians of Najran. It concludes with an affirmation that emotional intelligence is foundational for successful interfaith relationships to effectively bring religiously diverse people together amidst the ongoing challenges and conflicts.

## Introduction

Positive interfaith relations are the hallmark of successful plural communities. Religion can become an important point of moral reference that unites different faith communities. Hence, focusing on the universal moral values shared by all religious traditions is the logical step to promote mutual respect for all religions, leading to a viable foundation for establishing peace and justice. With such a solid unifying foundation, interfaith communities can then progress to effective dialogue, cooperation and mutual understanding. However, its realization must begin with a strong leadership that can rally people together with a strong sense of trust and values, that can shape noble characters who can successfully navigate the differences inherent in each faith community.

This paper attempts to highlight the value of emotional intelligence in interfaith relations. It will do so by looking at the character and qualities of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdullah (d. 632) as exemplified during his interactions and engagements with the Christians of his time. Books on prophetic biography (or books of *sirah nabawiyah* as they are known in Islam) have captured numerous incidents where Muhammad engaged and established cordial relationship with Christians, including the signing of treaties and covenants with them.<sup>1</sup> This paper looks at one these engagements where Muhammad had a hospitable and fruitful interaction with a group of Christians from Najran. This group of Christians came to Medina<sup>2</sup> at the invitation of Muhammad in the year 631. At the end of the three-day visit, they recognized Muhammad as a trusted leader whom they were comfortable to engage with further. The meeting between Muhammad and the Najran Christians resulted in the signing of an agreement or covenant known as “Covenant of Muhammad with the Christians of Najran.”<sup>3</sup> During this incident, Muhammad also allowed the Christians to perform their prayer in his mosque.

From this incident, it is evident that Muhammad, with a deep foundation of emotional intelligence, expressed high morals and congeniality in interfaith relations. This is proven through the values he exemplified, such as respect, mutual trust, empathy, and warm hospitality. The motivations for his genuine interfaith relations were founded upon a pluralist attitude and inclusivist mentality.<sup>4</sup> Among the most visible examples of his pluralist attitude is that throughout his lifetime, Muhammad always retained very strong ties with members of different tribes and non-Muslims, especially the Christians and Jews.<sup>5</sup> For example, he trusted the Christian king of Abyssinia, Najashi or Negus, even though he was not a Muslim, to protect the Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia during the first *hijra* (migration) in 613.<sup>6</sup> His inclusivist mentality will be highlighted in this paper through his authentic relationship with the Christians from Najran. By inviting them to Medina and allowing them to pray in his mosque, he viewed the right for all people to worship and practise their religion anywhere. His embracement of religious pluralism and inclusivism can also be observed from the covenants and treaties he signed with Christians including the Christians of Najran and the Christian monks of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai.<sup>7</sup> These values form the key ingredients of emotional intelligence. They are found throughout

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<sup>1</sup> There are many books written on the *sirah* or Prophetic biography. Some of the known works on the history of Muhammad which have been translated to English include Ibn Ishaq's *Sirah* (translated by A. Guillaume as *The Life of Muhammad: Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955); Ibn Hisham's *Sirah*; Ibn al-Qayyim's *Zad al-Ma'ad*; Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi's *Muhammad: The Ideal Prophet: A Historical, Practical, Perfect Model for Humanity*, Madras: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1925; Safi-ur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri's *Ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum* (“The Sealed Nectar”); Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006 [1983]; and Dr Muhammad Saeed Ramadan al-Buti, *The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*, trans. Nancy Roberts, Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> A city north of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia today). This is the city where Muhammad migrated to from Mecca. He passed away and was buried there.

<sup>3</sup> For the full translation of this covenant, please see John Andrew Morrow, *Six Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of His Time*, Tacoma, WA: Covenants Press, 2015, 25-38.

<sup>4</sup> Pluralist attitude here means the acceptance that there are a multitude of beliefs that co-exist in the community, while inclusivist mentality refers to the notion that no one is left behind, discriminated against, and denied dignity based on the humanity principle for all.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad viewed his mission as a continuation of the message brought from the prophets before him. From the beginning, Muhammad closely identified his message with the Jewish and Christian traditions.

<sup>6</sup> This was the migration of Muslims to Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia). During the Meccan polytheists' persecution of Muslims, Muhammad had sent his companions to Abyssinia to seek asylum and protection of a Christian king in 615. Abyssinia at that time was ruled by a Christian ruler. Muhammad told the group that King Najashi (Negus) of Abyssinia was a Christian, so they would be safe there.

<sup>7</sup> This is a document written by Muhammad to the Christian monks of Saint Catherine Monastery in Mount Sinai in 625. Through this letter, Muhammad assured protection of the Christians, freedom of worship and movement and the right to protection in war among others. Muhammad's letter to the Christian monks at Mount Sinai is also known as “The Charter/Covenant of Privileges to the Christians” or the “Ashtinameh of Muhammad”.

Muhammad's life with the single goal of establishing genuine interfaith relationships through the principles of trust, respect and winning over hearts and minds.

This paper aims to demonstrate that reaching a pluralistic state or mindset in an interfaith relation is built upon genuine social interactions and the building of an authentic relationship. The original source of such interaction must begin with interfaith leaders and activists who model care and concern for people of the religious other. The focus of such interactions is the building of trust and confidence such that people feel that their well-being is of utmost priority. In summary, the paper suggests emotional intelligence as a prerequisite and thus viable remedy for the contemporary challenges of interreligious tensions and conflicts. The paper begins with an introduction on emotional intelligence. In particular, it looks at the foundational works of psychologist Daniel Goleman<sup>8</sup> who developed a framework for emotional intelligence. The paper then traces the historical account of Muhammad's interactions with the Christians of Najran. It will also highlight key messages from the agreement made between Muhammad and the Najran Christians. The paper demonstrates that Muhammad's noble character as portrayed during his interaction with the Christians of Najran are in alignment with Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence. Finally, the paper provides an analysis of this interaction between Muhammad and the Najranis before it concludes with the affirmation that emotional intelligence is a fundamental value for interactions between people of different faiths.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

For decades, researchers have studied the reasons why a high level of mental intelligence or IQ does not necessarily guarantee success. By the 1980s, psychologists and biologists, among others, were focusing on the important role other skill sets needed to process emotional information played in promoting worldly success, leadership, personal fulfilment, and meaningful relationships. These psychologists developed theories and frameworks which are applied by many to improve performance, skills, and competence in daily affairs.<sup>9</sup>

Emotional intelligence is understood as the ability to manage our emotions and the emotions of those around us. It is also the ability to understand, use, and manage our emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict.<sup>10</sup> According to the findings of psychology professors John Mayer and Peter Salovey, emotional intelligence can be defined as the "abilities to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth."<sup>11</sup> Mayer and Salovey presented a framework for emotional intelligence as a set of skills hypothesized to contribute to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life.<sup>12</sup>

Psychologist Daniel Goleman then developed Mayer and Salovey's psychological theory of emotional intelligence. He popularised the concept of emotional intelligence in 1995 through his book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, and developed a framework of five key components that make up emotional intelligence. They are:

- Emotional self-awareness — knowing what one is feeling at any given time and understanding the impact those moods have on others.
- Self-regulation — controlling or redirecting one's emotions; anticipating consequences before acting on impulse.

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Goleman is an internationally known psychologist and author of the New York Times bestsellers *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, New York: Bantam, 1995, and *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, New York: Bantam, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> When Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer first formally defined the term "Emotional Intelligence" in an academic journal in 1990, they described it as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions," and presented an empirical model demonstration of how emotional intelligence could be tested as a mental ability. Since that time, the term has captured the interest of the media and the public, as well as researchers and professionals in the fields of education, psychology and business, due in large part to the publication in 1995 of Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

<sup>10</sup> See Jeanne Segal et al., "Improving Emotional Intelligence (EQ)," HelpGuide.org, accessed on December 28, 2021, available at: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-eq.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> This definition can be found, among other places, in John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David R. Caruso, "Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications," *Psychological Inquiry* 15.3 (2004): 197-215, 197. See also, John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey, "What is Emotional Intelligence?," in *Emotional development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*, eds. Peter Salovey and David J. Sluyter, New York: Basic Books, 1997, 3-31.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Salovey and John Mayer, "Emotional Intelligence," *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 9.3 (1990): 185-211.

- Motivation — utilizing emotional factors to achieve goals, enjoy the learning process and persevere in the face of obstacles.
- Empathy — sensing the emotions of others.
- Social skills — managing relationships, inspiring others and inducing desired responses from them.<sup>13</sup>

While this emotional intelligence framework is often discussed in the context of enhancing competence in the classroom or the boardroom, Goleman has made the elements of emotional intelligence applicable to a broad segment of society, including interfaith relations. Emotional intelligence has much to do with one's ethical and moral values.<sup>14</sup> It has importance in the management of relationships and diversity. Relationship management involves open communication and effective handling of differences and conflict. It is using awareness of one's own emotions and those of others to manage interactions successfully.

For example, Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence includes the values of empathy and social skills. Both are values and qualities deemed important to be embodied by interfaith leaders<sup>15</sup> for genuine and meaningful interfaith relations. Empathy is the ability to "put oneself in another person's shoes"—to understand the other's situations, perceptions, and feelings from their point of view and to be able to communicate that understanding back to the other person. It is a critical skill for leadership including interfaith leadership. Empathy influences the thinking process and nurtures one's mind to think deeply and positively. In interfaith relations, it can ensure mutual understanding, acceptance, and respect of different faiths and cultures. Empathy is both a cognitive and moral virtue. It involves a desire to learn intellectually about other religions and their followers, as well as a willingness and ability to penetrate the religious mindset of others and understand them from within<sup>16</sup>. According to Catherine Cornille<sup>17</sup>, one must have sympathy for the religious other — openness to the "meaningfulness and worth of his or her religious life. It includes respect for and interest in the beliefs and practices of the other."<sup>18</sup>

Goleman highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership. He said that the "most effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: They all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. It is not that IQ and technical skills are irrelevant. They do matter, but...they are the entry-level requirements for executive positions."<sup>19</sup> For leaders, managing relationships is an important social skill because human interaction is amazingly complex. To deal with this complexity, one needs the set of skills to manage relationships and navigate differences and diversity. People live as parents, children, friends at the same time and their failure to live up to the responsibilities that comes with these various roles deeply affects the greater society. Fruitful and positive interaction requires emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is both an art and a skill. Muhammad was a master at this skill. His life is full of examples of how he embodied emotional intelligence intensely in his daily affairs and dealings with people, regardless of their background through the values of care, love, compassion and empathy. According to Mikaeel Ahmed Smith,<sup>20</sup> a sharp emotional intelligence is built upon the development of both intra and interpersonal intelligence. These intelligences are the backbone of emotional intelligence because they provide a person with emotional awareness and understanding of his or her own self, an empathic understanding of others, and the ability needed to communicate effectively and cause change.<sup>21</sup> He explained that:

<sup>13</sup> See "The 5 elements of emotional intelligence," ICAEW Insights, 28 April 2021, accessed on 26 January 2022, available at: <https://www.icaew.com/insights/student-insights/the-5-elements-of-emotional-intelligence>.

<sup>14</sup> Values and qualities that emanate from one's emotion has to do with his moral and character. Hence, emotional intelligence is closely connected with moral intelligence.

<sup>15</sup> I refer interfaith leaders here to religious leaders and interfaith activists and grassroots leaders.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, New York: Herder and Herder, 2008, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Cornille (born 1961) is a professor of comparative theology and specializes in theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. She presently holds the Newton College Alumnae Chair of Western Culture in the department of theology at Boston College.

<sup>18</sup> Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Goleman, "What Makes a Leader," *Harvard Business Review*, Harvard Business Publishing, January 2004, quoted in Andrea Ovans, "How Emotional Intelligence Became a Key Leadership Skill," *Harvard Business Review* (Harvard Business Publishing, May 5, 2015), available at: <https://hbr.org/2015/04/how-emotional-intelligence-became-a-key-leadership-skill>.

<sup>20</sup> Mikaeel Ahmed Smith (Michael V Smith) is an instructor and faculty member at the Qalam Seminary. Smith previously served as a resident scholar at the Islamic Society of Annapolis and the Islamic Society of Baltimore. He grew up in a deeply spiritual Christian home in Buffalo, New York. At the age of 18, he embraced Islam after reading the Quran and the autobiography of Malcolm X. He is the author of *With the Heart in Mind: The Moral & Emotional Intelligence of the Prophet*, Carrollton, TX: Qalam Books, 2019, a book exploring the moral and emotional intelligence of the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, *With the Heart in Mind*, 61.

“emotional intelligence by itself is not sufficient for individual reform or societal reform; instead, it is only one part of the puzzle. The ‘*‘aql*’ or intellect that is referenced repeatedly in the Quran is a more comprehensive tool that not only recognizes how to understand the psychological and emotional aspects of people but recognizes morally upright and sound behavior. After that this intellect, if healthy and mature, forces a person to conform to that standard. Therefore, we understand the ‘*‘aql*’ to be a comprehensive collection of intelligences analogous to Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory.”<sup>22</sup>

After outlining briefly what emotional intelligence is, we will now move to the next part of the paper which is the famous story of Prophet Muhammad’s interactions with the Christians of Najran. It is important to remember that this is not the only interaction Muhammad has had with Christians in his lifetime. Muhammad had various interactions with the Christians of his time and even signed treaties with them.<sup>23</sup> Harmonious interfaith relations can be seen in the encounters with monk Bahira,<sup>24</sup> Waraqa ibn Nawfal,<sup>25</sup> King Negus in Abyssinia, and the letter of Muhammad to the Christian monks of Mount Sinai. Although there were theological differences between the religious faiths, these differences did not weaken the good relations between the Muslims and others created in the form of an agreement for mutual respect and protection.

Another well-known example of positive interfaith relations during the time of Muhammad is the Medina Charter. Drawn up by Muhammad, the Charter was intended to end inter-tribal conflicts and maintain peace and cooperation among the people of Medina. Through the Charter, Muhammad successfully organized all ethnic and religious groups in Medina, uniting them as brothers, despite different religious and ethnic backgrounds, all having the same duty to defend Medina from attacks and aggression.<sup>26</sup> The life of Muhammad comprises numerous examples of dialogue and conversation between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>27</sup> He spent his life in dialogue with Muslims, non-Muslims, atheists, and idolaters. His life can be seen as a model and true example of interfaith dialogue. In consonance with the verses of the Quran, Muhammad is reported to have said, “*All creatures of God are the members of the family of God, and he is the best loved of God who loves best His creatures*”.<sup>28</sup>

## The Christians of Najran

One of the most important interactions between Muhammad and the Christians happened during a visit by the delegation of Christians from Najran to Medina. Najran is located about 1200 kilometres south of Medina. Muhammad’s encounter with the Najran Christians took place in 631 (or 9 of the Islamic calendar), one or two

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 62. Note that Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences proposes that people are not born with all of the intelligence they will ever have. This theory challenged the traditional notion that there is one single type of intelligence, sometimes known as “*g*” for general intelligence, that only focuses on cognitive abilities. For more on his theory of multiple intelligences, please see “A Beginner’s Guide to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI),” MI Oasis, accessed on December 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.multipleintelligencesoasis.org/a-beginners-guide-to-mi>.

<sup>23</sup> When Muhammad was born, the Meccan Arabs were already acquainted with Christians. Every year, people from outside Mecca flocked to the city to visit the seasonal markets at Ukaz, a forum for Arab poets to hold a poetry competition and for traders to offer their merchandise. Among the visitors, there were traders from Arab tribes who had converted to Christianity. In addition, traders of the Quraysh themselves, including Muhammad, used to bring the caravan to go to distant lands, including Syria, in which most of the population were Christians.

<sup>24</sup> The first interaction between Muhammad and Christians took place when he was traveling to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib. The Christian whom Muhammad encountered was a monk, Bahira, who was living in Bustra, a Roman colonial city. Monk Bahira was known for his belief that a prophet was soon to appear among the Arabs. Bahira had studied old Biblical manuscripts, where he had learned of the coming of a final prophet, and he was convinced that this prophet would appear in his own lifetime. He was particularly interested in the Arab merchants who visited Syria, to see if his conviction would come true.

<sup>25</sup> Waraqa ibn Nawfal was a well-known Christian who converted from paganism to Christianity. He understood the features of the revelation that had been given to Muhammad. He sincerely supported Muhammad as a Christian believer when he understood that Muhammad was the awaited prophet, after Moses and Jesus.

<sup>26</sup> Mohamed Bin Ali, “Religious Pluralism and Peace: Lessons from the Medina Charter,” RSIS Commentary CO16035 (2016), available at: <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/srp/co16035-religious-pluralism-and-peace-lessons-from-the-medina-charter/#.Y9NK5nZBw2w>. See also Yetkin Yildirim, “The Medina Charter: a Historical Case of Conflict Resolution,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20.4 (2009): 439-450.

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Z. Haq, “Muslims’ Participation in Interfaith Dialogue: Challenges and Prospects,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 49.4 (2014): 613-646.

<sup>28</sup> Narrated by Anas. *Mishkat al-Masabih*, 3:1392. See also Mohammad Elius, Issa Khan, Mohd Roslan Bin Mohd Nor, et al., “Islam as a Religion of Tolerance and Dialogue: A Critical Appraisal,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18.52 (2019): 96-109.

years before his death. This encounter with the Najran Christians is documented by Ibn Hisham as recorded through Ibn Ishaq.<sup>29</sup> Both Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham are famous biographers of Muhammad.

Muhammad had been sending official letters to different countries and their rulers, inviting them to Islam. Among these were two different invitations that had been sent to Najran with Khaled ibn al-Walid and Ali ibn Abi Talib.<sup>30</sup> At that time, the Najran Christians had a highly organized religious life. Before Islam, foreign preachers had even visited the town, such as the Italian priest Gregentius, who had deepened their religious knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Few of the Najran Christians converted to Islam; many of them did not change their religion after these invitations. Muhammad sent a representative to them, Mughira ibn Shu'ba, who was sent to explain the invitations and the religion of Islam. After discussions with Mughira, the Christians of Najran decided to send a group of people to visit Muhammad and the Muslims in Medina. The delegation was made up of about 60 well educated Christians: a bishop, his 45 scholars, and 15 men. It is said to have been led by three men: the leader, Abd al-Masih, who served as the delegation's governmental affairs, Al-Aiham al-Sayyid believed to have served as the delegation's educational and political officer and Abu Harithah ibn 'Alqamah, the only bishop who is believed to be the delegation's top scholar.<sup>32</sup> Their intention was to learn about the nature of the revelations Muhammad was receiving and to have a theological dialogue with him.<sup>33</sup>

When the Najran delegation reached Medina, they engaged Muhammad in a theological dialogue on Christology for three days in the Prophet's Mosque known as al-Masjid al-Nabawi. At the audiences which they had with him during their stay, many points of doctrinal issues were discussed. However, the main part of their discussion was centred on interfaith issues. There were some disagreements between Muhammad and the Christians on Jesus and the Concept of the Trinity. A Quranic revelation was then revealed to Muhammad. It says: "*Verily the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then said to him 'Be!', and he was. This is the truth from thy Lord, so be not of the doubters. And whoso contend with thee and say: Come ye, and let us summon our sons and your sons and our women and your women and ourselves and yourselves. Then we will imprecate, putting God's curse on those who lie*".<sup>34</sup> Muhammad then recited these verses to his Christians guests and invited them to meet with him and his family and to settle their disagreement. The Najran Christians said they would think about it. The next day, when they came to Muhammad, they saw that Ali (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law) was with him, and behind them were Fatimah (Muhammad's daughter who was married to Ali) and her two sons. Muhammad was wearing a large cloak and he spread it wide enough to enfold them all in it, including himself. For this reason, the five of them are reverently known as "the People of the Cloak" (or *ahl al-kisa'* in Arabic). As for the Najran Christians, they said they were not prepared to carry their disagreement so far as imprecation; and Muhammad made with them a favourable treaty according to which, in return for the payment of taxes, they were to have the full protection by the Muslims for themselves and their churches and other possessions.<sup>35</sup>

Muhammad then allowed the Najran Christians to pray in his mosque where the Muslims prayed. The whole incident was an occurrence of peaceful dialogue between Christians and Muslims; it was the first time that Christians prayed in a mosque.<sup>36</sup> Muhammad had warmly welcomed the Najran delegation and provided them with a place to stay in Medina, in a secure place close to his mosque. He even ordered that their tent be pitched for them by the Muslims. However, the Najran delegation and Muhammad were not able to reach a consensus in theological terms. At the end of these exchanges, the Najran Christians told Muhammad:

O, Abu al-Qasim,<sup>37</sup> we decided to leave you as you are and you leave us as we are. But send with us a man who can adjudicate things on our properties, because we accept you.<sup>38</sup>

The delegation was granted their request and a written assurance was provided by Muhammad that their lives, property, and religion would be protected. He made witnesses sign this undertaking. The Najran

<sup>29</sup> Craig Considine, *People of the Book: Prophet Muhammad's Encounters with Christians*, London: Hurst and Company, 2021, 88

<sup>30</sup> The expedition of Khalid ibn al-Walid to Najran took place in 631 (10 AH). This event is partly mentioned in the Quran in 3:61 and was also mentioned by the Muslim jurist Tabari in his exegesis of this Quranic verse.

<sup>31</sup> Ismail Acar, "Interactions Between Prophet Muhammad and Christians," *The Fountain* 50 (April-June 2005), available at <https://fountainmagazine.com/2005/issue-50-april-june-2005/interactions-between-prophet-muhammad-and-christians>.

<sup>32</sup> Considine, *People of the Book*, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 89-92.

<sup>34</sup> Quran 3: 59-61.

<sup>35</sup> Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, 324-325.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Hisham, *Sirah*, 575-577.

<sup>37</sup> This is one of the names Muhammad was called by people during his time. The name Abu al-Qasim means the father of Al-Qasim – a reference to Muhammad because Muhammad had a son by the name of Al-Qasim who died at a very young age.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from Considine, *People of the Book*, 94.

Christians were the first Christian community with whom Muhammad had a *jizyah* agreement.<sup>39</sup> This agreement which was written in a form of a covenant, is characterized by mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation. Although the Najranis had disagreements with Muhammad about the concept of the Trinity, they were able to make this meaningful social pact.

Canadian scholar John Andrew Morrow<sup>40</sup> highlighted this covenant of Muhammad and his other treaties with the Christians in his book: *Six Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of His Time*. Morrow provided a detailed account of Muhammad's conduct as seen through his cordial interactions with Christian monks, priests and communities.<sup>41</sup> He has also translated the documents of Muhammad from their original Arabic language to English. These documents, despite their significance and while they were known to many scholars have been largely neglected by both traditional Muslims and modern western scholarship.

Below are some passages from the covenant stating Muhammad's protection of the Christians as translated by Morrow:

I hereby declare that my horsemen, my foot-soldiers, my armies, my resources, and my Muslim partisans will protect the Christians as far away as may be located, whether they inhabit lands which border my empire, in any region, close or far, in times of peace as much as in time of war.

I commit myself to support them, to place their persons under my protection, as well as their churches, chapels, oratories, the monasteries of their monks, the residences of their authorities, wherever they are found, be they in the mountains or the valleys, caves or inhabited regions, in the plains or in the desert.

I will protect their religion and their Church wherever they are found, be it on earth or at sea, in the West or in the East, with utmost vigilance on my part, the People of my House, and the Muslims as a whole.

I place them under my protection. I make a pact with them, I commit myself to protect them from any harm or damage; to exempt them from any requisition or any onerous obligations and to protect them myself, by means of my assistants, my followers and my nation against every enemy who targets me and them.<sup>42</sup>

On the protection of the Christians, Muhammad was even more specific to include protection of Christian leaders such as monks and bishops as well as their places of worship. Not only they were given protection but were also exempted from paying tax. The covenant says:

It is not permitted to remove a bishop from his bishopric, a monk from his monastic life, or an anchorite from his vocation as hermit. Nor is it permitted to destroy any part of their churches, to take parts of their buildings to construct mosques or the homes of Muslims. Whoever does such a thing will have violated the pact of Allah, disobeyed his messenger, and become estranged from the Divine Alliance.

It is not permitted to impose a capitation or any kind of tax on monks or bishops nor on any of those who, by devotion, wear woollen clothing or live alone in the mountains or in other regions devoid of human habitation.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Jizyah* is a tax paid by non-Muslims living in a Muslim state. Since the non-Muslims are exempt from military service and taxes are imposed on Muslims, they must pay this tax in compensation. It guarantees them security and protection. If the state cannot protect those who paid *jizyah*, then the amount they paid is returned to them.

<sup>40</sup> John Andrew Morrow (Imam Ilyas 'Abd al-'Alim Islam) is a Métis Canadian Muslim scholar who embraced Islam at the age of sixteen. He studied Islamic sciences for over three decades at the hands of both traditional Muslim scholars as well as Western academics. He completed post-doctoral studies in Arabic in Fez and Rabat and considers Morocco to be his second home. He worked as a university professor for two decades, retiring from teaching after reaching the rank of full Professor. He has authored a vast body of work, including over one hundred academic articles and thirty scholarly books. His works include *The Islamic Interfaith Initiative: No Fear Shall be Upon Them* (2021), *The Messenger of Mercy: The Covenants of Coexistence from the Prophet of Pluralism* (2021), and *The Most Controversial Qur'anic Verse: Why 4:34 Does Not Promote Violence Against Women* (2020), among many others.

<sup>41</sup> See John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World*, Tacoma, WA: Covenants Press, 2013, and John Andrew Morrow, *Six Covenants*. Morrow presented six covenants of Muhammad with the Christians. They are his covenants with the Christian Monks of Mount Sinai, Christians of Persia, Christians of Najran, Christians of the World and Assyrian Christians.

<sup>42</sup> Morrow, *Six Covenants*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

The notions of freedom of religion and interreligious marriage are also touched upon by Muhammad in his covenant. It says:

No Christian will be made Muslim by force: And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better [Quran 2:46]. They must be covered by the wing of mercy. Repel every harm that could reach them wherever they may find themselves and in any country in which they are.

If a Muslim takes a Christian woman as a wife, he must respect her Christian beliefs.<sup>44</sup> He will give her freedom to listen to her [clerical] superiors as she desires and to follow the path of her own religion. Whoever, despite this order, forces his wife to act contrary to her religion in any aspect whatsoever he will have broken the alliance of Allah and will enter into open rebellion against the pact of His Messenger and Allah will count him among the impostors.<sup>45</sup>

While the key message of the covenant revolves around the protection for the Christians, it also outlines protection for the Muslims as well. The covenant states:

None of them [the Christians] will shelter the enemies of the Muslims in their homes from which they could await the moment to launch an attack. May these enemies (of the Muslims) never be allowed to halt in their regions, be it in their villages, their oratories, or in any other place belonging to the enemies of war of the Muslims by furnishing them with weapons, horses, men, or anything else, nor must they treat them well.

They [the Christians] must host for three days and three nights any Muslims who halt among them, with their animals. They must offer them, wherever they are found, and wherever they are going, the same food with which they live themselves without however being obliged to endure other annoying or onerous burdens.

If a Muslim needs to hide in one of their homes or oratories, they must grant him hospitality, guide him help, and provide him with their food during the entire time he will be among them, making every effort to keep him concealed and to prevent the enemy from finding him, while providing for all his needs.

Muhammad warned that the covenant should not be violated. It is also explicit from the words of Muhammad in this covenant that the message is not meant only for Muslims during his time, but for the entire *ummah* (community) until the end of the world. At the end of the covenant, it says:

This covenant, which I wish to accord myself, binds me. Anyone from my ummah who, after me, breaks the Covenant of Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, the Proof of Allah will be raised against him, and Allah is sufficient as a Witness.

Whoever contravenes or alters the ordinances of this edict will be cast out of the alliance between Allah and His Messenger.

May everyone abide by the treaties and alliances which have been contracted with the monks, and which I have contracted myself, and every other commitment that each prophet has made with his nation, to assure them safeguard and faithful protection, and to serve them as a guarantee.

This must not be violated or altered until the hour of the Resurrection, Allah-willing.<sup>46</sup>

This covenant was written by a companion of Muhammad, Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, signed by Muhammad and witnessed by several other companions including Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn 'Affan and

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<sup>44</sup> The Quran speaks about the People of the Book and permits marriage of Muslim men to women who are People of the Book (Jewish and Christian women). However, Muslim jurists differ on the permissibility of Muslim men marrying Christian and Jewish women today due to the argument whether the Christians and Jews today are still considered People of the Book. See Ayse Elmali-Karakaya, "Interfaith Marriage in Islam: Classical Islamic Resources and Contemporary Debates on Muslim Women's Interfaith Marriages", *Religions* 13.8 (2022): 726, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080726>. See also Mohammad Gamal Abdelnour, "The Islamic Theology of Interfaith Marriages between Theology, Law, and Individual Ijtihad," *Interreligious Relations* 17 (2020).

<sup>45</sup> Morrow, *Six Covenants*, 35-36.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31, 38.

'Ali ibn Abi Talib who, together with Abu Bakr al-Siddiq were later known as the four rightly guided caliphs (*khulafa' rashidun*).<sup>47</sup>

## Analysis

The experience of Muhammad with the delegation of Christians from Najran is a seminal example of the Muslim-Christian relationship. This incident is perhaps one of the most significant and eminent interactions between the Muslims and Christians in the history of both religions. At least three values important for an interfaith relation can be observed from it. First is the way the dialogue between the two faith communities was conducted. Muhammad and the Christian leaders had an open and respectful theological discussion. This interfaith interaction they experienced was indeed a serious engagement in theological discussions about Islam and Christianity.

Although the Muslims and Christians agreed to disagree on the claim that Jesus is the Son of God as obviously argued by the Najranis, interestingly they shared some common grounds in their reverence of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> For example, they agreed on Jesus' miraculous birth, his ability to produce miracles and his title as Messiah.<sup>49</sup> Through this encounter, Muhammad and the Christians of Najran have proven that interreligious dialogue which includes discussion on theological issues is not only possible but can be conducted in the most natural and respectful manner.

Second, Muhammad had allowed the Najran Christians to perform their prayers at his mosque. After the theological dialogue Muhammad and his Christians guests had in the mosque, the Najranis asked to leave to conduct their prayer. They had intended to leave the mosque to pray on the streets of Medina. Muhammad asked them to remain in his mosque. He said that they were already in the house of God and that they were welcome to perform their prayers inside the mosque.<sup>50</sup> The Najran Christians accepted his invitation.

Allowing his Christian guests to perform their prayer in his mosque demonstrates Muhammad's embodiment of emotional intelligence. The profound sense of empathy, which is a big part of the emotional intelligence quotient, is clearly seen when Muhammad allowed his guests to perform their prayers in his mosque. He made his guests feel welcome with his hospitable act. He eased their affairs and made them feel highly respected as guests. By allowing the non-Muslims to pray in a mosque, Muhammad had a higher vision of prioritizing interfaith relations over possible traditional conventions in the religion.<sup>51</sup> This attitude falls within Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence, where social skills demand proper management of both one's and others' emotion to effectively connect, interact and work with others.

Muhammad's warm hospitality and respect for visitors was his personal trademark throughout his lifetime. On another occasion, Adi ibn Hatim, a Christian who later converted to Islam described the warm hospitality when he was invited to Muhammad's house. He said, "The Messenger of God then took me to his house, picked a cushion made of wool and stuffed with leaves, and gave it to me saying; 'Sit on this.' I said: 'Rather, you sit on it.' Muhammad then said: 'No. you sit on it,' and he sat on the bare floor."<sup>52</sup> Muhammad emphasized the high status of one who treats his guest well when he said, "*Let the believer in God and the Day of Judgment honour his guest.*"<sup>53</sup> Based on this, honouring, or treating a guest well is coupled with two of the most important beliefs in Islam: belief in God and belief in the Day of Judgment.

Third, through this incident, Muhammad has portrayed a pluralist attitude and inclusivist mentality. His appreciation of religious pluralism and embracement of inclusivism can be clearly seen from the manner he interacted and engaged with his Christian guests. Peaceful co-existence which is embodied through authentic understanding of inclusivism and religious plurality is fundamental to ensure interreligious stability and harmonious living. This pluralist attitude and internalisation of inclusivity is attuned to Goleman's emotional

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>48</sup> Jesus or Isa as he is known in Arabic is a prophet of Islam according to the Muslims' belief. For the Muslims, Jesus is not the son of God. In the Quran he is described as the "word" or "spirit." Jesus is mentioned in the Quran 25 times, with an entire chapter named after his honoured mother, the Virgin Mary, to whom he was born miraculously.

<sup>49</sup> For Muslims, Jesus is also the chosen Messiah (or *Al-Masih* in Arabic) to return to this Earth in its final days (though the implications of the term Messiah differ between Muslims and Christians) and distinguished in the hereafter with a special place in paradise. In the Quran, Jesus is described as the Messiah (*al-Masih*), born of a virgin, performing miracles, accompanied by disciples, and being raised to heaven. The Quran asserts that Jesus was not crucified nor died on the cross, but was miraculously saved by God.

<sup>50</sup> Considine, *People of the Book*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> In Islamic tradition, the words, deeds, and agreements of Muhammad constitute a *Sunnah* (a prophetic practice or tradition). It can be argued this incident becomes a basis for the permissibility of non-Muslims to enter or even perform their prayers in a mosque. However, Muslim jurists differ in their opinions on this issue.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted from Smith, *With the Heart in Mind*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> *al-Bukhari* hadith no. 6136. *Muslim* hadith no. 47.

intelligence framework where social skills founded upon values and emotions are essential in the management of relationship and diversity. Inclusivism is indeed one of the most important teachings of Islam. The endeavour for harmony has been expounded clearly throughout Muhammad's interaction with the Christians and other non-Muslims. Appreciating differences and solidifying interfaith relationships are among the values exemplified by Muhammad during his lifetime.

In the discourse on religion and interfaith relations, inclusivism can be understood as the appreciation of religious plurality. It can help to comprehend the relationship between religions. While believing that his religious belief is true, a religious inclusivist accepts the existence of other beliefs. Such understanding of inclusivism and living within a religiously plural context is not alien to Islam.<sup>54</sup> Rather, many parts of the Quran speak about it and extoll its virtues.<sup>55</sup> It has been an important tradition in Islam as exemplified by Muhammad in the incident with the Najran Christians. From an Islamic perspective, both inclusivism and religious plurality signify an important principle which is the appreciation of God's creation of diversity. As God has created diversity in the natural world, Islam views such diversity through Quranic principles that explain the objectives of such diversity.<sup>56</sup> In today's context, inclusivism is seen as an important virtue in interfaith relations. This is especially true in an era where interreligious strife, conflict, and violence are rife. As such, inclusivism does not only help to enhance interfaith relations, but has the potential to reduce exclusivist behaviours and anti-religious sentiments.

Assuring the safety of Christian persons and their religion is an act of mindful realisation of the needs of minority communities, that is the preservation of their faith and their physical well-being, free from persecution or discrimination. By assuring protection, Muhammad sought to allay fears and suspicions while encouraging goodwill and cooperation between different faith communities. Having such realisation of the needs of others is an important trait of emotional intelligence. With it, Muhammad not only established a cordial relationship with his non-Muslim friends, but importantly enhanced the quality of relationships with the people around him. From a psychological perspective, what Muhammad did in this incident was to use awareness of his own emotions and those of his guests to manage interaction successfully. Such an attitude (awareness and realization of the conditions and needs of others) falls within Coleman's emotional intelligence framework that is self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management.

Muhammad's call for protection of the Christians is also aligned to the Quranic injunction of respect for people of other faiths and their places of worship.<sup>57</sup> While acknowledging that Islam is the true religion, the Quran calls for respect and protection of other religions and their places of worship. It mentions: "Had God not repelled some people by means of others, synagogues and churches, mosques and monasteries in which God's name is mentioned, would have been demolished".<sup>58</sup> The Quran also states that Jews and Christians and all those who perform righteous deeds in the name of God will attain reward from God. This is explicitly outlined in Quranic verse 2:62. The appreciation of religious plurality was clearly portrayed by Muhammad in this incident with the Najranis and during his interaction with other non-Muslims. This historical account of Muhammad's protection to the Christian community could not be more important and timelier today to counter acts of violence and persecution of Christians in Iraq by the militant group ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). It also shows that following Muhammad's footsteps by protecting Christians is a moral responsibility upon the Muslims. It is reported today that pervasive persecution of Christians, sometimes amounting to genocide, is ongoing in parts of the Middle East and beyond.<sup>59</sup> It is also reported that atrocities of ISIS against Christians, Yazidis, Shi'a Muslims and other religious minorities in areas under its control amount to genocide.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See Abdullah Saeed, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism among Muslims Today between Theological and Social Dimensions", *Interreligious Relations* 21 (2020): 1-15.

<sup>55</sup> The Quran encourages Muslims to embrace religious plurality and exhorts Muslims towards inclusivism. The Quran speaks positively about diversity of religions and ethnicities by regarding them as signs of God's mercy and glory exhibited through His creations. It also appreciates plurality as a natural phenomenon. Essentially, the Quran has laid down the principles that govern positive interreligious relations. All this is evidence that Islam values diversity and human dignity.

<sup>56</sup> Mohamed Bin Ali, "CO18039: Inclusivism and Religious Plurality: A Quranic Perspective," RSIS Commentary CO18039 (2018), available at: <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co18039-inclusivism-and-religious-plurality-a-quranic-perspective/#.Y9OR3XZBw2w>.

<sup>57</sup> Respect for the human being is exemplified in countless deeds of Muhammad. A famous hadith explicitly showing the deep sense of honour Muhammad had towards non-Muslims is the incident where the Prophet stood up when a funeral procession of a Jew passed by him. When informed that it was a Jew, Muhammad said, "Is he not a human soul?"

<sup>58</sup> Quran 22:40.

<sup>59</sup> This is according to a report commissioned by the British foreign secretary, Jeremy Hunt. Please see Patrick Wintour, "Persecution of Christians 'Coming Close to Genocide' in Middle East – Report," *The Guardian* (2 May 2019), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/02/persecution-driving-christians-out-of-middle-east-report>.

<sup>60</sup> See Huma Haider, "The Persecution of Christians in the Middle East", K4D (2017): 1-17, available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/59786a0040f0b65dcb00000a/042-Persecution-of-Christians-in-the-Middle-East.pdf>.

*Emotional intelligence and interfaith relations*

Successful interfaith relations require a high level of emotional intelligence. For leaders, having emotional intelligence means having the ability to separate the feelings of others and analyse them in an objective manner. By not judging the person, and taking their feelings into consideration, leaders can perceive the reasons behind actions. Emotionally intelligent leaders are both cognitively and emotionally empathic. These leaders are highly attuned to the states of others and understand that empathy involves both a cognitive component (understanding what others are going through) and an emotional component (feeling what others feel).<sup>61</sup>

For interfaith leaders, emotional intelligence develops interpersonal emotional awareness and understanding. It is a tool for change. The ability and willingness to be in touch with one's own feelings and the feelings of others is based on empathy. It is empathy for one's own self which becomes the basis of intrapersonal intelligence, and empathy for others which becomes the basis of interpersonal intelligence, both of which are key aspects of emotional intelligence.<sup>62</sup> For example, in a situation of interreligious conflict, religious leaders should empathize with the condition and the suffering of their followers and the followers of other religions. Having that empathy will push for a more robust conflict resolution.

What Muhammad has portrayed through his interactions with the Christians of his time is empathetic leadership.<sup>63</sup> This form of leadership emanates from a loving soul that is filled with trust, emotional intelligence and inclusivity. The life of Muhammad is full of empathy towards others, regardless of their backgrounds. He is a leader known for his values of compassion, sympathy, empathy, and respect. In one of his sayings, Muhammad reminded the Muslims of the importance of these values by saying, "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever."<sup>64</sup>

Empathy which is a key component of Goleman's emotional intelligence framework, is one of the most central values essential for a healthy human (and interfaith) relationship. With empathy, people understand, care and provide assistance to those who are in need or suffer. Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine oneself in their place. Essentially, it is putting oneself in someone else's position and feeling what they must be feeling.<sup>65</sup> Empathy allows people to build social connections with others. By understanding what others think, feel and go through, people are able to respond appropriately in social situations and in the best possible manner. A robust interfaith leadership not only requires tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, but also demands empathy to influence people and the community. A true interfaith leader is one who constantly engages people from different beliefs and backgrounds in dialogue and discussions with an embodiment of emotional intelligence just as Muhammad did with the Najran Christians. These engagements require not only knowledge and understanding of different beliefs, cultures and theological positions, but also skills and tools that help them connect with the people they engage in a more harmonious, genuine and natural way.

The skills and tools here refer to the values and qualities which form the framework of emotional intelligence. The values of mutual trust, empathy and inclusivity develop one to become an empathetic leader in an interfaith leadership. For example, Professor Leonard Swidler in his "Dialogue Decalogue" outlines mutual trust as one of the ten principles essential in an interfaith dialogue. He explains that "dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust. Because it is persons, and not entire communities, that enter into dialogue, it is essential for personal trust to be established. To encourage this, it is important that less controversial matters are discussed before dealing with more controversial ones."<sup>66</sup>

A robust interfaith leadership depends on the ability to communicate and understand other religions. Understanding what a person or community is going through is the first step to empathizing with them. The incidents of the Najran Christians and the letter of Muhammad to the Christian monks of Saint Catherine which is also known as the Charter of Privileges shows that Muhammad understood with empathy the conditions and

<sup>61</sup> Shadé Zahrai, "Council Post: Seven Traits of an Emotionally Intelligent Leader," *Forbes* (5 January 2021), available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2021/01/05/seven-traits-of-an-emotionally-intelligent-leader/?sh=28f9d0d57f21>.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, *With the Heart in Mind*, 58.

<sup>63</sup> An empathetic leader is one who has a genuine interest in other peoples' lives, the challenges they face, and their overall feelings. This kind of leader makes an effort to understand their situations and what they are going through, in order to offer support. See Alexia Roncero, "Empathetic Leadership: Are Empathetic Leaders Born or Made?," *BetterUp* (12 February 2021), available at: <https://www.betterup.com/blog/empathetic-leadership>.

<sup>64</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari* no. 6011 and *Sahih Muslim* no. 2586.

<sup>65</sup> Kendra Cherry, "What Is Empathy?," *Verywell Mind* (11 October 2022), available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562>.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20.1 (1984): 1-4.

challenges of the Christian community in Medina. He understood the difficulty faced by the Najran Christians to find a spot to perform their prayers in the streets of Medina.

If one studies books on the character of Muhammad (known as *Shama'il* books in Arabic),<sup>67</sup> they will find that Muhammad was beyond exceptional in his ability to make people feel at ease and receptive. He took great care in studying the people around him and deeply understanding them. He had co-existed peacefully and successfully with people of various faith communities. He lived alongside the Christians and Jews both in Mecca and Medina. Muhammad did not sever ties with the Jewish community even when there were some apparent disputes with some of the Jewish tribes in Medina.

Muhammad also entrusted several non-Muslims in the pivotal moments of Islamic history. His engagement with King Negus of Abyssinia during the first *hijra*, as mentioned earlier, is a seminal example. Another example is during the migration to Medina where Muhammad had relied on Abdullah bin Urayqat, a non-Muslim, to guide and navigate him and his companion Abu Bakr as they left Mecca for Medina.<sup>68</sup> Beyond his social relations with people of other faiths, Muhammad also emphasised that ties of kinship should not be severed because of differences in faith. He advised his companion, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, to continue maintaining a good relationship with his mother, even though they did not share the same faith.<sup>69</sup> Muhammad emphasised that ties of kinship should not be affected by one's faith and belief. He himself was close to his uncle Abu Talib who did not accept Islam and was his close confidant.<sup>70</sup>

Craig Considine argues that Muhammad's encounter with the Christians of Najran is more than a mere example of religious tolerance – it is religious pluralism.<sup>71</sup> He explained that religious pluralism was achieved in this incident when both parties engaged in difficult conversation, agreed to disagree and opened their doors to the "other" so that they could perform their prayer. As for religious tolerance, it was achieved when Muhammad welcomed the Christians of Najran to Medina.<sup>72</sup> Considine based his argument on the framework for religious pluralism developed by Diana Eck which contains four primary elements: 1) energetic engagement with religious diversity; 2) understanding across religious traditions; 3) encounter of interreligious commitments; and 4) interreligious dialogue.<sup>73</sup> Each of these elements is portrayed in the interaction between Muhammad and the Najran Christians.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

Interfaith relations is the coming together of a variety of skills, dispositions, and knowledge of the various religions. The focal point is not merely intellectual conversations and persuasive dialogues but an ability to reach and convince other people that shared humanity is the thrust of interreligious relations. This involves a set of skills that delves into the psychological aspect of how we perceive, understand and manage our own and others' feelings and thoughts. This will define how well we get along with others personally and professionally. Naturally, any form of human interaction involves a lot of emotions and interfaith is not exempted. As Dale Carnegie<sup>75</sup>

<sup>67</sup> There are numerous books written on the Shama'il of Prophet Muhammad. Among the famous ones is the *Al-Shama'il Al-Muhammadiyah* of Imam al-Tirmidhi. It is the most famous collection of narrations detailing the moral, physical, and spiritual perfections of Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>68</sup> Muhammad's close companion, Abu Bakr who accompanied him to Medina had enlisted the services of a non-Muslim Bedouin, Abdullah ibn Urayqat, to guide them to Yathrib by an inconspicuous, unfamiliar route. See lecture by Dr Yasir Qadhi, "Seerah of Prophet Muhammad 27 – The Hijrah – Emigration to Madinah," accessed on 22 November 2022, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utKZzIWZ0I4>.

<sup>69</sup> Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas was a companion of Muhammad. He embraced Islam at the age of seventeen but was opposed by his mother. Saad once said, "Four verses were revealed concerning me...Umm Saad said: 'Did Allah not command you to honor your parents. By Allah, I will not eat or drink anything until I die or you renounce Islam.' When they wanted to feed her, they would force her mouth open. Then this verse was revealed: (And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful to his parents; but if they strive to make you associate with Me, things of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not.)" This Hadith was also recorded by Imam Ahmad, Muslim, Abu Dawud and An-Nasa'i.

<sup>70</sup> Ustaz Ridhwan, "Can Muslims Befriend Non-Muslims?," Muslim.SG (6 September 2018), available at: <https://muslim.sg/articles/can-muslims-befriend-non-muslims>.

<sup>71</sup> Craig Considine, *The Humanity of Muhammad: A Christian View*, New Jersey: Blue Dome Press, 2020, 35. See also Craig Considine, "How Prophet Muhammad Embraced the Otherness of Christians," *HuffPost* (17 February 2017), available at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pluralism-and-the-najran-christians\\_b\\_9235554](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/pluralism-and-the-najran-christians_b_9235554).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> See Diana L. Eck, "What is Pluralism," The Pluralism Project – Harvard University, accessed on 26 December 2021, available at: <https://pluralism.org/about>. See also Diana L. Eck, "Prospects for pluralism: Voice and vision in the study of religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75.4 (2007): 743-776.

<sup>74</sup> Considine, *The Humanity of Muhammad*, 36.

<sup>75</sup> Dale Carnegie (died 1955) was an American writer and lecturer, and the developer of courses in self-improvement, salesmanship, corporate training, public speaking, and interpersonal skills. He was the author of *How to Win Friends and*

rightly puts it: "When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion....".<sup>76</sup> No matter how rational and reasonable we think we are, it is our emotions that motivate and propel us. As such, building healthy interfaith relationships require a high level of emotional understanding and large amount of emotional investment. Leaders of the future need less of a high intelligence quotient (IQ) than emotional intelligence to build trust and sustain relationships, especially of a cooperative nature.<sup>77</sup> When the Mufti of Singapore and his Christian counterpart exchange greetings on days of significance for their respective religions, it can be seen as an extension of the very same emotional intelligence that aims to build bridges and not walls that divide. For interfaith leaders, the embodiment of moral and social intelligence through good character and values will not only help to build stronger relationships with people of other religions, but will result in more genuine, meaningful and lasting ones. As a social identity anchored in a system of guiding beliefs and symbols, religion ought to serve a uniquely powerful function in shaping the psychological and social processes of its adherents.<sup>78</sup>

As the paper has demonstrated, the value of emotional intelligence in interfaith interaction and engagement cannot be understated. The foundation for all religious communities worldwide is based upon common morality principles that have universal appeal and humanistic values. As such, the prophet of Islam, Muhammad recognised the value of enhancing interfaith relations, as this would mean strengthening the morality base in the world. This becomes pertinent in a world that is becoming more secular, divisive and has largely lost its morality grounds. Muhammad becomes an excellent model of interfaith interaction that fulfils Diana Eck's religious pluralism criterion. When he opened the doors of his place of worship to the Christians to pray, he was creating a vision for his *ummah* to embrace and welcome religious diversity. His hospitality and care extended to all strangers and guests, and portrays the value of emotional intelligence as a priority in all human interaction including interfaith relations. Muhammad has proven that reaching a pluralistic state or mindset in an interfaith relation is built upon genuine social interactions and the building of an authentic relationship.

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*Influence People* (1936), a bestseller that remains popular today. He also wrote *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (1944), *Lincoln the Unknown* (1932), and several other books.

<sup>76</sup> Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, quoted in Gill Hasson, *Understanding Emotional Intelligence*, London: Pearson Education, 2015, Introduction page. The quote is also available at <https://www.forbes.com/quotes/2024/> (accessed 29 December 2021).

<sup>77</sup> Margaret Wheatley argues that while traditional leaders focus on roles and responsibilities, new leaders build human relationships that become real energy for success. See Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006, 49-60.

<sup>78</sup> Renate Ysseldyk, Kimberly Matheson, and Hymie Anisman. "Religiosity as Identity: Toward an Understanding of Religion from a Social Identity Perspective," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14.1 (2010): 60-71.

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## About the Author

**Mohamed Bin Ali** is Assistant Professor in the Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. His areas of research include Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamist ideology, religious extremism, inter-religious relations and rehabilitation of Muslim extremists. Well-versed in Arabic language and Islamic knowledge, Dr Mohamed obtained his Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Islamic Jurisprudence from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt in 2002, Masters of Science (MSc) in International Relations at RSIS, NTU in 2007 and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Arab and Islamic Studies from the University of Exeter, United Kingdom in 2013. Prior to that, he studied Islam and Arabic language at Aljunied Islamic School in Singapore from 1990-1995. Dr Mohamed also graduated with a Specialist Diploma in Counselling Psychology from Academy of Certified Counsellors, Singapore in 2006. Since 2003, Dr Mohamed has been involved in the rehabilitation programme of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) detainees in Singapore. He is the Co-Chairman and counsellor of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a group of voluntary Muslim clerics who provide religious counselling to detainees arrested for terrorism-related activities. Dr Mohamed has lectured and made numerous presentations locally and abroad; conducted courses and published widely on Islamic issues and issues of religious extremism and terrorist rehabilitation. He has also conducted field trips in many countries including Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines. Dr Mohamed is also actively involved in community-related works. He is currently the Chairman of Khadijah Mosque Management Board, Vice-Chairman, Geylang Serai Harmony Circle, member of the Syariah Appeal Board of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), associate member of MUIS Fatwa Committee, and member of MUIS Wakaf (Endowment) Dispute Resolution Committee. Dr Mohamed was a former President of the Singaporean Students Welfare Assembly in Cairo, former member of Council for Asian Terrorism Research and former counsellor at the Singapore Prison Department. He has also delivered lectures and sermons in many mosques in Singapore. Dr Mohamed was recently conferred the National Award 2022 Public Service Medal by the President of Singapore.

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