



Review

Inter-Faith (Sects) Dialogue and Harmony in the Light of Noble Sīrah of the Holy Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)

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Abstract

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Ideological differences among people are found in every society. In a same place, people follow different religions, multiple cultures and more than one economic system. This phenomenon divides people into multiple religious, social and economic groups in a society. One of the basic reasons of Muslim declination is religious pluralism or their mutual disputes on the base of some juristic matters. Islam is a universal religion and promotes human sociability. Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) preached His followers, unity, harmony and mutual understanding, whole His life. Today, we can minimize the furor among people pertaining to different religions or societies by inter-religious dialogue as prescribed by Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). Also, different Muslim sects can be united by following the noble Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). This paper is to highlight the Islamic policy of interfaith dialogue in the light of noble Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The main objective of this study is, to elaborate the positive image of Islam in a society. A descriptive research method has been used for this study.

Keywords: Harmony, Peace, Unity, Dialogue, Disagreement.

INTRODUCTION

An Introduction to Islamic Policy toward Inter-Religions (Sects) Dialogue

Islam is a religion of peace and harmony. It is not a religion for some specific people or a specific region. It is the religion for all mankind of whole this world. Nobody has the copyright of Islam or Islamic Shari'ah. It is the religion revealed by Allah on His beloved Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in the Arab peninsula in 7th century A.D. The revelation of Islamic teachings encompasses previous religions and cultures. In its introductions, the universal and cosmopolitan practices and beliefs were modified, those that were practiced in previous religions. All old religions were nullified and shaped in Islam as the last and everlasting religion. It holds all the basic characteristics which the old religions had earlier. Even

some different and opposite concepts of previous religions were assembled into Islam after renovation.

Islam invites people to become a single nation. It invites people of different religions, cultures, regions, and sects to create harmony and mutual understanding for the existence of a universal peace and love. For this purpose, the very first step taken by Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), was universal brotherhood, anti-terrorist policies, and cooperative relations among people of different places or having different religious backgrounds. During his whole life, Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), taught harmony, love, affection, cooperation, and mutual understanding. He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) tied people into a single relation. He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) gathered people under the oneness of Allah. He (صلى الله عليه وسلم) invited people to become a single nation.

This was the basic aim of his teaching as well as his pious mission. Even, He (ﷺ) gave a lot of instructions to remove the tension or bias among different social and religious groups. On the base of some ideological differences, when some groups are created, He (ﷺ) advised people to prefer unity, harmony, and mutual understanding because grouping in Islam has been discouraged. He (ﷺ) explained the dangers of pluralism and benefits of unity, many times. He (ﷺ) made policies to erase the conceptual and tribal bias and advised the people to follow the teachings of Islam only. Many practical examples are there in the life of Holy Prophet (ﷺ) that He invited the Jews and Christians to maintain dialogues and worship together on the base of beliefs or practices which are common among them.

Statement of the Problem

Islam is a religion of peace and harmony. It permits difference in opinion and emphasizes on unity among people. It discourages pluralism in a society. In a single society, existence of different classes and different school of thoughts is a natural phenomenon. Islam advises its followers to create harmony among people. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also taught His followers interfaith dialogue and harmony whole His life. This study is to highlight this aspect Islam.

Literature Review

Several books on the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) were consulted to conduct this study. Generally, all books on Sīrah contain several aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). An on Sīrah, written by “Safi ur Rahman al-Mubarakpuri”, with the title “Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum”, and it’s the English translation; “The Sealed Nectar” was consulted. This book is an award-winning book and covers all the aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). This book was retrieved from <https://islamicbulletin.org>. Taha Jabir al Alwani compiled a book titled, “The Ethics of Disagreement”. In this book, the writer explained the causes and motives of differences and the nature of differences in different periods of Islam. He also elaborated on the Muslims’ struggles to create harmony in a society. The translation of the Holy Qur’ān under the title “The Meanings of the Glorious Qur’ān” by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall has been used for this study. English translation of different Hadiths has been taken from “<http://Sunnah.com>”. The translation of different books of Hadith on this website has been uploaded by Dar-ul-Salam; an international institution of book publications.

Ideological Differences, its Causes and Islamic Emphasis on Unity

A religion itself is not responsible for ideological differences among people. It facilitates human beings in different walks of life. The Creator (Allah) of mankind sent the instructions to lead a life according to His will. All Prophets performed this pious responsibility. So, every time, people were invited to the oneness of Allah. Every Prophet promoted single culture (oneness of Allah) at his time. But, with the passage of time, people separated themselves from this single mission and make some kinds of classes, schools of thought, and groups based on some spiritual causes or to get some personal benefits. A religion or a Prophet has not recommended such kind of grouping or plurality. According to sociologists, the very basic role of a religion is, to tie the people in a strong relation in society. According to Emile Durkheim (trans. 1858-1917), a French sociologist, religion plays a positive role in a society, he said; “I had a clear view of the capital role played by religion in social life.” Durkheim (trans. 1982)

A religion, in one’s life, plays an eminent role in modifying one’s personality. Religion plays as a social institution in one’s life. It socializes a person from birth to death. It involves in man’s activities whole the life. Even the death ceremony of a man cannot be completed without a clergyman. “Religion, then, is a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on recognizing the sacred.” Macionis (trans. 2017) But, people use religious teachings for their personal purposes and sometimes for political purposes. Many times, people misuse a religious belief to get to some specific ends or to protect their vested interests. Different sects or groups come into existence based on different objectives, goals, and aims.

The basic reason for ideological differences in a society or among people is the variety and vastness of a subject. Also, in some optional cases, multi schools of thought are created spontaneously. Even, people have the same physical standard. For instance, there are many theories of scientists about the creation of the universe. “Astronomers have three rival theories. By matching the predictions of each theory against the observed properties of the universe”. Thorpe (trans. 2010) In psychological point of views, many theories are there about human personality. “There are several different theories that attest to the psychology behind crying.” Salkind (trans. 2002) Like this, a number of economic systems are functional in this world. Some renowned philosophers have presented different theories on basic cause of creation of the universe. So, a religion, itself is not responsible for ideological differences in a society and no single Prophet preached to create a separate group on the base of religious teaching. The reasons behind differences, disagreement and pluralism are the vastness of human thinking, different standard of acceptance or rejection and due to more than one option

in a single matter. Islam is a religion which covers all aspects of life and gives multiple instructions for a person related to every field. To create sociability, harmony and congenial environment among people, in a society, Islam practically trains its followers in different ways. The core point of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was to exist brotherhood, united relations and loving interactions in a society. On many places, in Holy Qur'an, and from whole the life of Holy Prophet (ﷺ), unity, harmony and mutual understating have been taught. Even having different opinions, Islam dislikes to create a sect or group on the base of ideological differences. As, it has been advised in Holy Qur'an;

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا (سوره آل عمران: ١٠٣)

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of Allah, and do not separate.” Pickthall (trans. 2011) This is a very basic principle of Islam to create a loving, caring and mutual understating environment in a society or in a state. This policy was not only for Muslims but people of an Islamic society can enjoy peaceful and social environment. Also, to create friendly relations with the people of other religions or societies, Islam makes different universal strategies which are beneficial for Muslims as well as non-Muslims. For this reason, many times, in Holy Qur'an, people were generally addressed by Allah. A common word “الناس” was used in Qur'anic text to raise the importance of humanity and to prove that Islam is a religion for the people of all regions, colours races and castes.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَسُجُودًا (سوره الحجرات: ١٣)
وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا-

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah.” Pickthall (trans. 2011) Like this in on another place whole the mankind was addressed by Allah with a common word “الناس”. This word represents the people related to different religions and cultures. This word was not used for some specific people but, whole the humanity was generally addressed by Allah.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ- (سوره فاطر: ١٥)

“O mankind! Ye are the poor in your relation to Allah. And Allah! He is the Absolute, the Owner of Praise.” Pickthall (trans. 2011) Allah is the personality who feeds people of every kind and region. He is keeps authority on whole the mankind and He is only able to be worshipped by people not only by Muslims. Here, the word “الناس” is used and this surah was named surah Al-Naas.

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ-مَلِكِ النَّاسِ-إِلَهِ النَّاسِ (سوره الناس: ٣-١)

“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind. The King of mankind. The God of mankind.” Pickthall (trans. 2011) This concept was clarified that Islam is a universal religion, Prophet Muhammad is a universal Prophet. One cannot claim that he is that Islamic teachings, commandments and ritual practices are for some specific people or region. Islam is a religion of all kind of people, cultures and regions. Its focus is mankind not the people

of special region, age or color. This quality attracts people pertaining to different areas of the world. Its emphasis is to create a single kind of nation which is based on oneness of Allah and that holds a single type of culture. On many places, in Holy Qur'an, people of different religions (especially; Jews and Christians) have been invited to come to the points which are common among them. This is to eradicate the bias and orthodoxy in a society and to maintain a peaceful environment. In a society, especially in an Islamic society this is the major cause of harmonious environment.

Inter-Religions (Sects) Dialogue in the Light of Noble Sirah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

Whole the life, Holy Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) preached unity, brotherhood, harmony and mutual understanding. He was 15 years old when He assisted his uncle in a war. That war was ended after a peace agreement. But many times, even after migration, Holy Prophet (ﷺ) memorized that incident. He told that to attend an agreement like that, that was precious time for him. “I witnessed a confederacy in the house of ‘Abdullah bin Jada ‘an. It was more appealing to me than herds of cattle. Even now in the period of Islam I would respond positively to attending such a meeting if I were invited.” Mubarakpuri (trans. 2021) so, by nature, it was the part of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)'s personality to maintain peace, unity and sociability in a society. Further, many points can be derived from the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ): A Universal Ambassador of Peace, Unity and Brotherhood

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was a peace liking person and used to propagate harmony whole His life. It was the basic characteristic of His personality that He used to teach and practically adopted this strategy. Even against enemies, He showed great tolerance when people teased Him in different ways. He, for the first time in the history of Arab, formed a universal brotherhood by eradicating different social evils. “The Bedouin tribesmen of Arabia had a reputation as fierce warriors. But their number was small; and plagued by disunity and internecine warfare, they had been no match for the larger armies of the kingdoms in the settled agricultural areas to the north. However, unified by Muhammad (ﷺ) for the first time in history.” Hart (trans. 1990) This was the result of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that people who were illiterate became literate. Those who were categorized as unsocialized became socialized. Many social values were introduced by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and implemented on people. An ideal society

came into existence in the result of these revolutionary policies. After migration, this was happened that people who migrated and those who received them made brothers. This brotherhood is given the example all over the world to sustain the interactions among Muslims. "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) established an alliance (of brotherhood) between the Emigrants and the Helpers in our house." Abu Dawud (trans. 2018) One of basic policies of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was, His teaching the followers to tolerate the harsh words, bad comments and severe backlash of people in the way of preaching. He emphasized on, to tolerate or bear every hardship with smiles. He advised the followers to build good relations while living in a same place. "Don't sever relations of kinship, don't bear enmity against one another, don't bear aversion against one another and don't feel envy against the other and live as fellow-brothers as Allah has commanded you." Imam Muslim, (trans. 2018) The result was seen by people that people who were enemies of centuries became brothers. They were tied in a relation that they began present their properties for others. They began to spread honor, respect and love for one another. An ideal society came into existence in which enmity changed into brotherhood.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) Declared; Islam was the Religion of all Previous Prophets

The basic and common of every Prophet's teaching was to propagate the oneness of Allah and to make people civilized by the introduction of social values. The basic point or mission of every Prophet was same. They used to invite to the submission of Allah and to eradicate the social evils. From the creation of man and for his guidance, with the passage of time, a pious man and a set of instructions were revealed. Partially, these instructions were different but the main points were same. This is called a religion. "Religion is an organized system of beliefs, rituals (acts and ceremonies), personal practices and worships directed toward a supreme power or deity (god)." The World Book Encyclopedia (trans. 2013) Due to same objectives of the preaching of every Prophet or religion, it is named as "Islam". From start to the last revealed religion, it has been declared by Allah that Islam was the religion of every Prophet. "I perfected your religion for you and completed my favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL- ISLAM." Pickthall (trans. 2011) This phenomenon was further explained by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that every child is born on the nature of Islam and after birth, his parents or his personal socialization makes him another. "There is none born but is created to his true nature (Islam). It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian quite as beasts produce their young with their limbs perfect." Imam Muslim (trans. 2018) It means, for all human being, a

common religion has been structured. But, man by his own perception converts himself toward other natures. He changes the basic instructions given by his creator and adopts different baseless theories and practices. To create some kind of harmony and mutual understandings among people especially among people pertaining to different religions or philosophies, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) gave this point of view that 'Islam' is the religion of whole mankind. From Adam (A.S) to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Islam is the religion of all the Prophets and nations. "Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Both in this world and in the world hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary. The Prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one." Bukhari, (trans. 2018).

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and Protection of Minorities Rights

Islam protects the rights of minorities by legislation as well as practically. After migration, when the base of Islamic state was laying, a pact was settled among different tribes nearby Yasrab. Later it was named 'Madinah Pact'. It is memorized as a peace pact settled by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) after migration. In this pact, different rival groups and three groups of Jews were incorporated. It's very prominent point was, to co-operate each other especially at the time of foreign invasions. Everybody was given the freedom to celebrate their social as well as religious festivals. "The right of giving protection to non-Muslims is extended to the humblest of the believers (and all Muslims must respect it and give him support)." Asqalani (trans. 2020) This was not given to only the Jews of Madinah but the people pertaining to different religions and living under an Islamic state were given the due rights and full respects to their holy places. "The Jewish community in Madinah was made up of three leading tribes: Bani Nadir, Bani Quraiza and Bani Qainuqa. Each of them was a party to this pact. The Prophet also made similar pacts with other tribes in and around Madinah." (Azami, trans. 1996) Moreover, in the ideal state of Madinah, many non-Muslims were exempted from taxation. For peace purposes and to create harmonious environment, minorities were given proper security by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Their property, dignity and future were secured in an Islamic society. After Khyber conquest, Jews were allowed to live at that place. They were given the option whether they can leave land as well as they can cultivate their agricultural land under the supervision of Muslim authorities. "Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) gave the land of Khaybar to the Jew's on the condition that they work on it and cultivate it, and be given half of its yield." Bukhari (trans. 2020) Protection of minorities rights creates great

harmony and peaceful environment in a society. Such policies made Islamic state an Ideal state. After migration, when Muslims got a free piece of land, they brought the teaching of Islamic in practice. A welfare state came into existence in which every member of that state was saved, secured and equal socially as well as legally.

Prophetic Teaching to Give Honor to Opponents Opinions

Islam carries vastness in its every commandment and practice. In one case, different option can be seen. Different opinions of different scholars and jurists can be noted on a single issue due to vastness of its nature. For a single problem, multiple solutions are presented by experts due to this reason. These differences or multiple opinions create different school of thoughts. "Differences of opinion on intellectual issues, and by extension - on juristic ones as well, are natural on account of the inherent disparities in intelligence, understanding, and analytic capacities with which people are created." Alwani (trans. 1993) Sometimes, these differences or different school of thoughts cause quarrels and disagreements among people. So, for this purpose, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) taught His followers different ethics in case of disagreements. They were advised to give respect to the opinion of every person even he (or she) is not a Muslim. Difference in opinions is a natural phenomenon but to create a group, class or sect has been prohibited by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Having differences in opinions, pious companions and later jurists showed exemplary ethics. They used to respect each other even having different ideological differences. "Despite their differences of opinion on some issues, their feelings towards each other only increased in mutual respect and love." Alwani (trans. 1993) This action creates great harmony and mutual understanding among people of a society as well as all over the world. A society which is called multicultural or multi-religious can be peaceful under this type of policy. In our country (Pakistan) or in a region where people of different religions or cultures are living together. This policy can be used to create a peaceful environment. For mutual understanding or mutual cooperation, it is necessary to give honor or respect to other's opinions and to care for the arguments of every person who is living in the same society. If one is deprived of sharing one's views, it will create an environment of exploitation and deprivation.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) offered Dialogue to Jews and Christians

Islam is the religion of all Prophets from Adam (A.S) to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). With the passage of time,

people pertaining to different religions made different groups on the name of Prophets, regions and on the base of some philosophical theories. To create some kind of harmony and mutual understanding, people of different religions were offered dialogue on common points among them. First this was offered in Holy Qur'an. "O People of the Scripture. Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partners unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah." Pickthall (trans. 2011) From the noble life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), such offers have been noted. Before conquest, in 6th H, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) settled an agreement with non-Muslims of Makkah at the place of Hudaibia. This offer was presented also to the Jews and Christians of Madinah. The offer of dialogue causes harmony among rivals as well as among different minorities, in a society. This strategy also shows the freedom of speech, opinion and conversation. "We believed in Allah and what was revealed to us" and that which is found in Surah Al-'Imran:" Come to that word (creed) which is common between you and us." Imam Muslim (trans. 2018) For a welfare and progressive state, this strategy is necessary to be practiced. Minorities are also part of a state so their involvement or services in a state cannot be ignored. If a state of county deprives the minorities from basic rights, that cannot flourish. In minorities, there are different experts of different fields those who can better sever their society.

Social and Business Relations of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) with non-Muslims

From the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), many examples are quoted in which He showed excellent behavior towards non-Muslims. In the territory of Madinah, many Jews tribes were living at that time. Also, many families of Jews were there in the wall city of Madinah. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) had good relations with them socially as well as personally. Many proofs have been seen in which Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)'s business dealings were there with Jews. "The Prophet (ﷺ) purchased food grains from a Jew on credit and mortgaged his iron armor to him." Bukhari (trans. 2020) Due to the cooperative and affectionate behavior of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), people were attracted toward Him. Even His enemies used to present their precious things considering Him an honest man. People used to give respect and honor due to His attractive personality. He also used to love people and in retaliation, people also used to love Him. Even Jews of Madinah having hatred, used to love him by his personality. "Some people among the Jews kissed the

hands and feet of the Prophet (ﷺ).” Ibne Maja (trans. 2018).

A man living in a same place has to give respect and honor to others. If one wants to take respect, he should treat others with respect and affection. He should respect the festivals, personalities, holy places and practices of those people of a society in which he is living. This is the best policy to create a harmony and mutual understanding in a society. In the state of Madinah, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to do such kind of acts to make society peaceful and to attract people toward His mission. Having differences in beliefs and practices the non-Muslims enjoyed the due respect and basic rights. They were given the basic rights to enjoy their life. They were given the free hand to celebrate their festivals (social and religious). Their personalities were given due respect and honor. Even many times, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to ask for the personal situations of non-Muslims. “A young Jewish boy used to serve the Prophet (ﷺ) and he became sick. So, the Prophet (ﷺ) went to visit him. He sat near his head and asked him to embrace Islam. The boy looked at his father, who was sitting there; the latter told him to obey Abul-Qasim and the boy embraced Islam. The Prophet (ﷺ) came out saying: "Praises be to Allah Who saved the boy from the Hell-fire.”Bukhari (trans. 2020)

For this purpose, in an Islamic society, after death, non-Muslims who were not rigid or hurdle in the way of Prophetic mission, were given respect and honor as Muslims were given. For the first time, Muslims migrated to Abyssinia, its ruler was a Christian, he gave shelter to Muslims with respect. He did not show any orthodoxy and denied to the delegation of Makkah who wanted the Muslims back. All his life, he was praised by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and when he was died Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) offered his funeral prayer and asked the followers to pray for him. “The Prophet prayed and in the funeral prayer he for An-Najashi, said four Takbir.”Al Tirmizi (trans. 2018) Najashi was a Christian and he was praised and finally prayed by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). This was the symbol of brotherhood and inter-religions love of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Not only cooperative Christians but Jews were also given respect and protocol by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Many times, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to give protocol to Jews of Madinah. Many times, whenever, He saw the funeral of Jews, He used to stand in the respect of a dead body. “The Prophet and his Companions stood up for the funeral of a Jew until it disappeared.”Imam Nisai (trans. 2018) These were the strategies of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to create harmony among different religions and personalities pertaining to different religions or societies. In the result of these policies, Islam became an attractive and most liking religion of the world. A peaceful society

came into existence on a place where people used to fight for centuries for nothing. A universal brotherhood was introduced in the results of these policies.

CONCLUSIONS

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is a universal personality. His teaching was for the people of all kinds and all regions. He was the first person who gathered people on a single plate form. By His training, the people who were enemy for centuries, became like real brother. He existed a real and universal brotherhood in the history of human being. Whole his life, He preached the unity, harmony and mutual understanding. Also, from His life the ways to handle antagonism or disagreement can be learnt. Today, pluralism can be minimized by acting upon the policies of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Bias can be minimized among different school of thoughts in a Muslim society. A peaceful and progressive society can be existed by following the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to propagate the noble Sīrah. A lot of social, personal and economic issues can be solved by following the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). So, Sīrah of Prophet Muhammad should be taught to people in educational institutions from childhood to adulthood. The policies which were used by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), should be followed by Muslims and Muslims governments. Mass Media can play an eminent role in minimizing the tension among different sets and groups. So, it can be positively used in a country. Pluralism and grouping on the name of some religious beliefs should be banned by governments with the help of religious scholars. The strategies to unite different school of thoughts should be propagated by authorities. An ideal society can be introduced by following the policies of state of Madinah, its brotherhood, unity and mutual cooperative policies.

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