

The Impact of Dialogue in Achieving Religious Coexistence: The Migration to Abyssinia as a Model

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Abstract

This paper addresses one of the most important issues in religious and human studies today: the issue of coexistence among followers of different religions. This is particularly relevant in these times when borders have dissolved, societies have opened up to one another, and an individual's interaction with those who differ in belief and religion has become an almost daily occurrence. While the Western call for coexistence represents an exceptional initiative and an attempt to solve problems that humanity has fallen into and whose consequences all societies, East and West, have experienced, the principle of coexistence is considered an authentic principle of Islam, indeed part of its creed. Since this is the case, Muslims today must fulfill their duty in this field. This paper constitutes an attempt to establish the theoretical foundation for the principle of coexistence among followers of different religions and the impact of dialogue in achieving it, relying on the study of dialogues that took place before and during the presence of Muslims in Abyssinia after the Prophet (peace be upon him) directed his followers to migrate there and live in a society that embraced a religion different from theirs. The result was the achievement of coexistence in an atmosphere of understanding and harmony.

Keywords: *Coexistence, Dialogue, Migration to Abyssinia.*

Introduction

In the Name of Allah

The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, who said in His Noble Book: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (Al-Hujurat: 13). He made diversity and difference, after the unity of human origin, a means for mutual acquaintance and cooperation in achieving good for humanity. This is a divine call for mutual acquaintance, and among its requirements are communication and coexistence. This is affirmed by the principle of human brotherhood that the Prophet (peace be upon him) called for when he said: "You are all from Adam, and Adam is from dust."

Human societies have opened up to each other in a way unprecedented in their history. With this openness, calls have multiplied that attempt to define the features of relationships between societies and states. Some envision wars and conflicts based on doctrinal foundations, such as the clash of civilizations², while others call for dialogue to achieve coexistence. In both paths, religion constitutes one of the most important factors that shape the features of relationships between human societies—indeed, it is the most important factor of all.

The intensity of competition has increased and interests have conflicted with the openness and material convergence that humanity has witnessed, accompanied by an imbalance in the balance of power in this world. The stronger party has attempted to universalize its civilizational model and achieve its goals through various means and methods, foremost among them wars. This has led humanity to suffer their calamities and disasters, and not even the victorious societies in these conflicts have been spared from those calamities and disasters.

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² See, for example: Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, translated by Talaat Al-Shayeb, 2nd edition, Sutar, 1999.

Since religion, as I mentioned earlier, is the most important factor that determines the relationship between human societies, attempts have emerged to utilize it to reduce tension and avoid the calamities that war brings to all humanity. Wars and all forms of conflict are merely manifestations of ideas about which dialogue has been absent³. The need for such attempts has increased with the emergence of problems and challenges that concern all people, foremost among them the phenomena of poverty, terrorism, atheism, and the collapse of values.

This has led to the emergence of calls for dialogue and coexistence among followers of different religions. These calls have not been free from being a strategic choice for those who issue them to achieve gains without resorting to war. Examples include the former Soviet Union's call for peaceful coexistence while declaring that this did not mean stopping attempts to convert the world to communism⁴. Similarly, Western countries, led by the United States, called for Islamic-Christian dialogue in an attempt to win Islamic countries to their side in the Cold War against the Soviet Union⁵. The same applies to the Vatican's call for dialogue in the Second Vatican Council, where the Pope stated in the Redeemer's message that this call did not mean stopping efforts aimed at Christianizing the world⁶.

Since the matter is completely different for Islam and Muslims—where dialogue and coexistence with others constitute an integral part of the Muslim's creed and an authentic Islamic value—it is never acceptable for Muslims to remain the affected element in achieving dialogue and coexistence among humans. Rather, they must embark on this field by establishing the theoretical foundation for such ideas and launching initiatives and working to achieve them in ways that benefit all humanity. This stems from their mission in this universe, which their pure religion has defined for them: to inhabit it according to Allah's methodology, in line with the message of our master Muhammad (peace be upon him), which the Quran confined to mercy for all existence: "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds." This is also in line with the Islamic vision of the world, which the Noble Quran presents as based on tolerance⁷.

From here, I hope that this paper will be one of those attempts seeking to establish the theoretical foundation for the idea of dialogue and coexistence from the Islamic perspective, by focusing on the role that dialogue plays in achieving coexistence among followers of different religions. This will be done by relying on the dialogues that occurred before and during the migration to Abyssinia by order of the Messenger (peace be upon him). This matter itself constitutes clear evidence that the principle of coexistence is considered an authentic Islamic principle, as the Messenger (peace be upon him) directed his followers to migrate and live within a society that practiced a religion different from theirs.

I have structured this research into two sections and a conclusion.

³ Muhammad Kanoun Al-Hasani, "Dialogue and the Foundations of Coexistence with Non-Muslims," *Journal of the Scientific Council*, Year 3, Issues 8 & 9, Morocco, pp. 68–74.

⁴ Abdulwahab Kayyali, *Encyclopedia of Politics*, Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, Beirut (Vol. 1, pp. 765–766).

⁵ See, for example: Samer Abu Rumman, *The Political Dimensions of Interfaith Dialogue: The Islamic-Christian Dialogue as a Model*, 2nd edition, Modern Books World, Irbid, Jordan, 1426 AH – 2005. Also, see "The Redeemer's Message" published on the Arab Church website.

⁶ As stated in Chapter Five, Paragraph 55 under the title "Dialogue with Brothers from Other Religions": "Dialogue between religions forms part of the Church's missionary work. As a method and means for mutual understanding and enrichment, it does not conflict with the mission to the nations. On the contrary, it is specifically tied to it and is an expression of it. This mission is directed at people who do not know Christ or His Gospel, most of whom belong to other religions. God calls all peoples to Himself, and in Christ, He wishes to include them in the fullness of His revelation and love. He never ceases to manifest His presence in many ways, not only to individuals but also to peoples, through their spiritual riches essentially and fundamentally expressed by religions, even though they contain 'gaps, impurities, and errors.' The Council and subsequent authoritative teachings have elaborated on all of this, consistently and firmly affirming that salvation comes from Christ and that dialogue does not exempt from evangelizing the Gospel." See Abdul-Wadud Shalabi, *The Secrets and Mysteries of Interfaith Dialogue*, Dar Al-'Itisam, pp. 13 and beyond.

⁷ "See Qais Mahmoud Hamed, 'Activating the Concept of Worldview in the Issue of Coexistence,' *Tafakkur Journal*, Volume 11, Issue 1, 1432 AH – 2011 AD."

The first section is titled "Dialogue and Coexistence and the Relationship Between Them," and it consists of two requirements:

- First requirement: Concepts
- Second requirement: Objectives of dialogue within the scope of coexistence

The second section: The dialogues that occurred before and during the migration to Abyssinia and their impact on achieving coexistence.

- First requirement: Accounts of the migration to Abyssinia
- Second requirement: The dialogues and their impact on achieving coexistence

The conclusion contains the most important results and recommendations.

First Section: Dialogue and Coexistence and the Relationship between Them

First Requirement: Concepts

There is no doubt that many books and research papers have been written addressing the issue of dialogue and coexistence among followers of different religions. Conferences have been held to examine and address issues of dialogue and coexistence⁸, all of which have extensively addressed the concept of dialogue, its conditions, etiquette, and objectives, among other topics. A considerable number of them have also addressed the concept of coexistence. Therefore, I will not elaborate extensively on this topic and will attempt to suffice with what serves this research.

First: The Concept of Dialogue

Linguistically, dialogue (*hiwar*) derives from *hawr*, which means returning from one thing to another. *Muhawara* (dialogue/conversation) is the exchange of speech in discourse⁹. In the linguistic lexicon, the letters Ha, Waw, and Ra have three origins: one is color, another is return, and the third is that something revolves in circles¹⁰. In *Lisan al-Arab*, "*ahar alayhi jawabahu*" means he returned his answer to him, and *muhawara* is mutual response. "They dialogue with each other" means they exchange speech, and *muhawara* is the exchange of logic and speech in discourse¹¹.

Dialogue has appeared with this meaning three times in the Noble Quran: twice in Surat al-Kahf and once in Surat al-Mujadala. In Surat al-Kahf, when mentioning the story of the owner of the two gardens, the Quran used the verb "*yuhawiruhu*" to indicate the exchange of speech between them. The same applies in Surat al-Mujadala, though in Surat al-Mujadala there is a subtle meaning: that mere exchange of speech and each party's expression of their viewpoint constitutes dialogue. If the matter reaches the level of argumentation and evidence, it becomes *jadal* (disputation)¹².

⁸ For example, the conference "Dialogue with the Other in Islamic Thought," Sharjah 2007, whose papers are published on the official website of the Sharjah Government, General Secretariat of Endowments.

⁹ Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Azhari, *Tahdhib al-Lugha*, edited by Muhammad Awad, 1st edition, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut (Vol. 5, p. 146).

¹⁰ Ahmad ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lugha*, edited by Abdelsalam Haroun, Dar al-Fikr, 1399 AH / 1979 AD (Vol. 2, p. 115).

¹¹ Muhammad ibn Mansour, *Lisan al-Arab*, 3rd edition, Dar Sader, Beirut 1414 AH (Vol. 4, p. 218).

¹² Muneer al-Ghudban, *Dialogue: Law, Reality, and History*, 1st edition, Dar al-Salam, Cairo 1432 AH / 2011 AD, p. 9.

Thus, dialogue and conversation are nothing more than presenting arguments and exchanging speech away from obstinacy and contention.

Therefore, dialogue in its absolute sense is the exchange and alternation of speech. Terminologically, some have defined it as follows: "The exchange by interlocutors from different faiths of ideas, facts, information, and experiences that increase each group's knowledge of the other in an objective manner that shows what convergence and difference may exist between them, with each party maintaining their beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual respect and treatment in the best manner, away from motives of doubt and purposes of disparagement. Rather, what is hoped for is the spreading of affection, the spirit of peace, understanding, harmony, and cooperation in areas where there is agreement on works of general benefit to humanity."¹³

I say that this definition, despite its length, expresses the reality of dialogue that many parties call for these days. However, the question remains: to what extent do the dialoguing parties sincerely commit to what is stated in it? This is not an easy question to answer, but there are signs of non-commitment that I mentioned earlier, which makes many Muslims in particular view calls for dialogue as a type of conspiracy.

Therefore, sincere and wise people must address such matters—especially since one of the meanings of dialogue in language is reason. It is said: "So-and-so does not live with ahwar," meaning with reason, and it is said that ahwar refers to a person's heart¹⁴.

It can be said that interfaith dialogue is: adopting discussion and the exchange of ideas as an alternative to conflict and war, in order to achieve common goals between the interlocutors.

Second: Coexistence

It is clear that coexistence is a derived noun from the root 'aysh (living), and 'aysh as mentioned in linguistic dictionaries means food, drink, and what sustains life¹⁵. In *Tahdhib al-Lugha*, 'aysh means life¹⁶. In *Maqayis al-Lugha*, the letters 'ayn, ya, and shin form a sound root indicating life and survival¹⁷. In *Lisan al-Arab*, "ayshahu" means he lived with him¹⁸. In *al-Wasit*, "ayshahu" means he lived with him, and "ta'ayshu" means they lived in harmony and affection, hence "peaceful coexistence."¹⁹ In the *Contemporary Arabic Dictionary*, "neighbors coexisted" means they lived in affection, giving, and good neighborliness. "Peaceful coexistence between states" means agreement on non-aggression. "People coexisted" means they existed in the same time and place. "Coexistence" is shared living between peoples who differ in doctrine and religion, or between states with different principles. It is understanding between conflicting states or between human groups or sects to forget their differences²⁰.

From the foregoing, we note that coexistence requires the existence of more than one party, the existence of difference between the coexisting parties, and that this coexistence must be characterized by affection and peace.

¹³ Abd Rab al-Nabi Abu al-Saud, *Fiqh al-Hiwar ma'a al-Mukhalif* (The Jurisprudence of Dialogue with the Opponent), 1st edition, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Cairo, 1929, p. 26.

¹⁴ Al-Azhari, *Tahdhib al-Lugha* (Refinement of the Language), vol. 5, p. 147.

¹⁵ The same source, vol. 3, p. 39.

¹⁶ Ahmad ibn Faris, *Majmal al-Lugha* (The Summary of Language), edited by Zuhair Abdul Mohsen, al-Risala Foundation, Beirut, 2nd edition, 1406 AH / 1986 AD, vol. 1, p. 639.

¹⁷ The same source, vol. 4, p. 194.

¹⁸ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* (The Tongue of the Arabs), vol. 6, p. 321.

¹⁹ Arabic Language Academy (Ibrahim Mustafa, Ahmad al-Zayyat, Hamid Abd al-Qader, Muhammad al-Najjar), *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit* (The Intermediate Lexicon), Dar al-Da'wa, vol. 2, p. 639.

²⁰ Ahmad Mukhtar Abd al-Hamid, *Mu'jam al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya al-Mu'asira* (Dictionary of Contemporary Arabic), Alam al-Kutub, 1st edition, 1429 AH / 2008 AD, vol. 2, p. 1583.

The Encyclopedia of Politics states that peaceful coexistence is the rejection of war as a means of settling disputes, adopting negotiations and mutual understanding, respecting the sovereignty of other states, and recognizing equality and mutual benefit as the basis of international relations²¹. Some have defined it as: "An agreement between two or more states to refrain from war to avoid its dangers and to explore the possibility of economic, cultural, and scientific cooperation between them."²²

Based on the foregoing, we can define coexistence among followers of different civilizations and religions as: "The attempt by followers of different civilizations and religions to share in the means of living and work to activate the role of religions in resolving disputes and avoiding wars on the global level."

The Emergence of the Call for Coexistence

Despite the foregoing, coexistence as a term is considered among the modern terms. The emergence of this term dates back to after World War II and the rise of the Eastern bloc led by the former Soviet Union and the Western bloc led by the United States of America. The call for coexistence initially emerged from the Eastern bloc. The nucleus of this idea emanated from Lenin, who believed that the world's transformation to communism would not happen all at once but would require long periods of coexistence between different systems preceding that transformation. Then came Khrushchev, who was the first to launch the term "peaceful coexistence" in international forums, though coexistence in his view did not mean retreating from attempting to convert the world to communism, but rather exploiting the idea of coexistence to achieve that goal²³. In the Western concept, peaceful coexistence means "live and let live" according to the Encyclopedia of Politics.²⁴

I note that Western countries were the ones who exploited the idea of coexistence to pounce on communism and eliminate it, and even attempted to eliminate any civilizational model that constitutes an obstacle to universalizing the Western civilizational model throughout the world. Indeed, the Western Church applied the same theory when it considered the call for dialogue and coexistence as a means to Christianize the entire world, as will be discussed later in this research.

We note from the foregoing that coexistence as a principle in the modern era emerged only after humanity suffered the calamities of World War II, and also after the possession of weapons of mass destruction that no party can use without harming its own interests. Meanwhile, in Islamic civilization, although coexistence did not appear as a term, it was a lived reality, a civilizational value, and a fundamental principle.

With the development of communication means and the opening of human societies to each other, the call for coexistence among followers of different religions and civilizations has become one of the most widespread calls these days, and each party tries to direct this call to serve its interests and achieve its goals.

Third: The Relationship Between Dialogue and Coexistence

It is clear from the above that coexistence is the hoped-for state that different parties seek to achieve, and it is evident that dialogue is the ideal means to reach such a state. This does not mean that dialogue ends when that goal is achieved; rather, it must continue as it is considered one of the most important manifestations of coexistence among followers of different religions. Therefore, there is an inseparable connection between dialogue and coexistence. While dialogue constitutes a means to achieve coexistence,

²¹ Abd al-Wahhab Kayali, *Mawsu'at al-Siyasa* (Encyclopedia of Politics), Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, vol. 1, pp. 765-766.

²² Dictionary of Social Sciences Terms, p. 68.

²³ The same Abd al-Wahhab Kayali reference and the Dictionary of Social Sciences Terms, p. 68.

²⁴ For details on these issues see Muhammad Faris al-Jamil, *Al-Hijra ila al-Habasha: Dirasat Muqarana lil-Riwayat* (Migration to Abyssinia: A Comparative Study of the Narratives), 2nd edition, Dar al-Faisal al-Thaqafiya, Riyadh, 1425 AH / 2005 AD.

dialogue is simultaneously considered a form of coexistence and a sign of it among followers of different religions.

Second Section: The Dialogues That Occurred Before and During the Migration to Abyssinia and Their Impact on Achieving Coexistence

First Requirement: Accounts of the Migration to Abyssinia

No book of biography (*sira*) or history has failed to mention the incident of the migration to Abyssinia. I will focus in this section on mentioning the accounts that show the dialogues that took place in this incident, without focusing on the points of agreement and disagreement among narrators regarding the dates of this migration, some of its events, the number of migrants, and their names.²⁵ The account of Ibn Ishaq from Umm Salama, the wife of the Prophet (peace be upon him), almost forms the backbone of these accounts, and these are the accounts I will rely upon, while adding what is not mentioned in them from other accounts in the form of parenthetical sentences.

In this account from Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her): "When Mecca became constricted for us and the companions of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) were harmed and persecuted, and they saw the affliction and persecution they suffered in their religion, and that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) could not repel that from them—while the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was under the protection of his people and his uncle, so nothing of what he disliked that befell his companions reached him—the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said to them: 'In the land of Abyssinia there is a king under whom no one is wronged'—and Ibn Hisham added: 'and it is a land of truth'²⁶— 'so go to his land until Allah makes for you relief and a way out from what you are in.' So we went out to it in groups until we gathered there, and we settled in the best house with the best neighbor. We were secure in our religion and did not fear any injustice from him.

When Quraysh saw that we had found a home and security, they agreed to send [messengers] to him regarding us to expel us from his land and return us to them. So they sent Amr ibn al-As and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'a, and they gathered gifts for him and for his courtiers. They did not leave any man among them without preparing a gift for him according to his status, and they said to them: 'Give each courtier his gift before you speak about them, then give him his gifts, and if you can make him return them to you before he speaks with them, then do so.'

So they came to him, and there was no courtier among his courtiers to whom they did not present his gift and speak with him, saying: 'We have come to this king regarding some foolish ones among our foolish people who have abandoned their people's religion and have not entered into your religion. Their people have sent us regarding them so that the king may return them to them.' When they spoke to him, they advised him to do so, and they said: 'We will do it.'

Then they presented the Negus with his gifts, and the most beloved thing to be given to him from Mecca was leather.²⁷ When they brought him his gifts, they said to him:

'O King, some foolish youth from among us have abandoned the religion of their people and have not entered into your religion. They have come with an innovated religion that we do not know, and they have taken refuge in your land. Their tribes—their fathers, uncles, and people—have sent us to you regarding them so that you may return them to them, for they know them better.' His courtiers said: 'They have

²⁵ Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyya* (The Prophetic Biography), edited by Mustafa al-Saqa et al., 2nd edition, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi Press, Egypt, 1375 AH / 1955 AD, vol. 1, p. 321.

²⁶ Al-Adim: plural of Adim, meaning tanned leather. See Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, vol. 12, p. 9.

²⁷ Abu al-Fida' Ismail ibn Kathir, *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyya*, edited by Mustafa Abdul Wahid, Dar al-Ma'rifa, Beirut, 1395 AH / 1976 AD, vol. 2, p. 10.

spoken the truth, O King. If you return them to them, they would know them better, for they have not entered into your religion, so you would not protect them by that.' He became angry and said: 'No, by the life of Allah, I will not return them to them until I call them and speak with them and see what their matter is. People who have taken refuge in my land and chosen my protection over the protection of others—if they are as they say, I will return them to them, and if they are otherwise, I will protect them and will not let them get to them, and I will not give them satisfaction.'"

So the Negus sent to them and gathered them together. Nothing was more hateful to Amr ibn al-As and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'a than to hear their words. When the Negus's messenger came to them, the people assembled and said: "What shall we say?" They replied: "What should we say? By Allah, we shall speak what we know and what we follow of our religion and what our Prophet brought, whatever the consequences may be."

When they entered upon him, it was Ja'far ibn Abi Talib who spoke for them - and in Ibn Kathir's Prophetic Biography: Ja'far said: "I am your spokesman today,"²⁸ and in another narration: "Let none of you speak²⁹, I am your spokesman today." The Negus said to him: "What is this religion that you follow? You have abandoned the religion of your people, yet you have not entered Judaism or Christianity. What is this religion?" - And in al-Bayhaqi's Signs of Prophethood: "Are you Christians?" They said: "No." He said: "Are you Jews?" They said: "No." He said: "Are you following your people's religion?" They said: "No." He said: "Then what is your religion?"³⁰

Ja'far said: "O King, we were people steeped in polytheism: worshipping idols, eating carrion, mistreating our neighbors, and violating prohibitions among ourselves by shedding blood and other transgressions. We neither forbade anything nor made anything lawful. Then Allah sent to us a prophet from among ourselves, whose loyalty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness we knew well. He called us to worship Allah alone, without partner; to maintain kinship ties; to act kindly toward neighbors; to pray and fast; and to worship none but Him.

In Ibn Hisham's biography it is mentioned: Our people opposed us, persecuted us, and tried to lure us away from our faith, urging us to return to idol worship instead of worshiping Allah Almighty and to permit what was formerly forbidden, such as abominations. When they oppressed, wronged, and constrained us and stood between us and our religion, we fled to your land. We chose you over others, sought your protection, and hoped not to be wronged in your presence, O King."

He [the King] said: "Do you have something of what he [Muhammad] has brought?" He summoned his bishops and ordered them to spread copies of the Scriptures before him.

Ja'far said: "Yes," and was asked, "Come, recite to me what he has brought."

Ja'far recited a portion from Surat Maryam starting with the verse "Kaf Ha Ya 'Ayn Sad" (Maryam), which moved the Negus to tears until his beard was soaked, and his bishops wept until their Scriptures were wet. Then he said: "This speech comes forth from the same lamp from which Moses' revelation came forth. Go forth in peace. By Allah, I will never hand them over to you nor will I give you any harm."

²⁸ The same source, vol. 2, p. 12.

²⁹ Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi, *Dalaa'il al-Nubuwwa wa Ma'rifat Ahwal Sahib al-Shari'a* (Proofs of Prophethood and Knowledge of the Conditions of the Lawgiver), 1st edition, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1405 AH, vol. 2, p. 302.

³⁰ Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Mutalibi, *Kitab al-Siyar wa al-Maghazi* (Book of Biographies and Military Expeditions), edited by Suhail Zakkar, 1st edition, Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1398 AH / 1987 AD, vol. 1, p. 213; also see Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi, *Dalaa'il al-Nubuwwa*, vol. 2, p. 302.

They left, and among them was the most pious, Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'ah. Amr ibn al-'As said to him: "By Allah, tomorrow I will bring weapons to destroy their farmlands and tell them that their god—Jesus son of Mary—is a servant." Abdullah ibn Rabi'ah replied: "Do not do this; although they differ from us, they have kinship ties and rights." But Amr insisted.

The next day Amr approached the Negus and accused the Muslims saying: "O King, they speak greatly of Jesus." The Negus sent for them and asked about this, but none was found comparable to Ja'far's dignity. They said among themselves, "What will you say about Jesus if he asks you?" The Muslims replied: "We say what Allah has declared and what our Prophet instructed us to say."

When they entered, standing before the Negus holding his staff, he asked: "What do you say about Jesus son of Mary?"

Ja'far said: "He is the servant and Messenger of Allah, His Word and Spirit cast into Mary the Virgin."

The Negus lowered his hand to the ground, plucked a leaf between his fingers, and said: "Except for Jesus son of Mary, what you have said is this leaf." Some of his bishops whispered in dissent.

The Negus said firmly: "Even if you quarrel among yourselves, by Allah, go forth for you are the trustworthy (Sheyūm) of my land. Whoever insults you pays a fine; whoever insults you pays a fine; whoever insults you pays a fine—thrice. I wish I had a treasurer, and I have never wronged any of you."

He declared that he never accepted a bribe when he protected his kingdom and never would for them, returning the gifts of the Quraysh delegates, and the Muslims left his land honored but rejected the slanders brought against them.

They stayed with the best neighbor in the best home until a man from Abyssinia rebelled against his king. This was a heart-wrenching moment for them, fearing the king would be replaced by one unfamiliar with their rights. They prayed for the Negus, and he led an army that defeated the rebel.

Zubayr ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib went to the battlefield, carrying a water skin, floating in the Nile till he reached the army's meeting place and witnessed the battle. The Negus was victorious, and Zubayr joyfully proclaimed to them the king's triumph.

They remained under the Negus's protection until some returned to Mecca or stayed wherever they pleased."³¹

The Second Requirement: Dialogues and Their Impact on Achieving Coexistence

The First Dialogue: The Prophet's (peace be upon him) words to his companions: "In the land of Abyssinia there is a king under whom no one is wronged, and it is a land of truth, so go to his country until Allah provides you with relief and a way out from what you are in."

There is no doubt that this dialogue was preceded by other dialogues between the Prophet and his companions (peace be upon him), as evidenced by what Imam Ahmad narrated in his *Musnad*: "We complained to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), and he was at that time resting his head on a cloak in the shade of the Ka'bah. We said: 'Will you not seek Allah's help for us? Will you not seek help for us?' He said: 'Among those who came before you, a man would be taken and a hole would be dug for him in the earth, then a saw would be brought and placed on his head, and he would be cut in half, but that would not turn him away from his religion. He would be combed with iron combs that would remove the

³¹ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, edited by Shu'aib al-Arna'ut, 1st edition, al-Risala Foundation, 1421 AH / 2001 AD, vol. 34, p. 552; this hadith is authentic and narrated by al-Bukhari in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Virtues, Chapter: Signs of Prophethood in Islam, hadith no. 3612; see Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, edited by Muhammad Zuhair and Nasir Nasir, 1st edition, Dar Tawaq al-Najat, 1422 AH, vol. 4, p. 201.

flesh and sinews from his bones, but that would not turn him away. By Allah, Allah will complete this matter until a rider travels from Medina to Hadramout fearing nothing but Allah and the wolf for his sheep, but you are impatient."³²

After Quraysh saw the beginning of the Messenger's (peace be upon him) message spreading, they adopted a policy of persecution and torture to deter people from following him (peace be upon him). This was a policy from which no Muslim escaped at that time, even Umar ibn al-Khattab, whom Quraysh held in great regard, was afflicted by what befell him.³³ When the matter reached a great extent in harming his companions (peace be upon him), he showed compassion for them and directed them to migrate to the land of Abyssinia, saying to them: "In the land of Abyssinia there is a king under whom no one is wronged, and it is a land of truth, so go to his country until Allah provides you with relief and a way out from what you are in."

This guidance from him (peace be upon him) is nothing but a declaration of the principle of coexistence between followers of different religions. He (peace be upon him) directed them to migrate and live in a society different from their own and follow a religion different from theirs. We can observe in his dialogue (peace be upon him) his emphasis on the two principles of justice and truth.

a) Justice: Justice forms one of the foundations upon which Islam relies in calling for coexistence among all human beings. Justice is a right that is established for humans simply by virtue of their humanity, and it does not depend on a person's religion, race, or sect. It is no secret that one of the most important elements for successful coexistence among humans is fulfilling duties and taking rights, which can only be achieved through justice. Justice, as Ibn Ashur says, is delivering rights to their rightful owners and preventing aggressors from denying rights to those who deserve them. Justice is also an obligation upon everyone toward everyone.³⁴ Hence, the Prophet's (peace be upon him) attention to the Negus's justice - the migrant Muslims would find no better society to live in than one whose ruler is characterized by justice.

b) Truth: The Prophet (peace be upon him) described Abyssinia as a land of truth. Truth is a fundamental requirement that must be realized by everyone who calls for coexistence between followers of different religions. For coexistence to succeed, there must be truth in it at all levels, in word and deed. There must also be truth in working to implement and follow up on the recommendations that result from dialogue to achieve coexistence. Truth in intentions comes first and foremost. If intentions are not sincere, once their insincerity is revealed, all efforts aimed at achieving coexistence will be scattered like dust. This makes each party in dialogue and coexistence view the other with suspicion and doubt. We have seen examples of this earlier in this research, which has resulted in many Muslims viewing calls for dialogue and coexistence between followers of different religions with suspicion and doubt.

The Second Dialogue: "Give to each patriarch his gift before you speak about them, then give him his gifts, and if you can get him to return them to you before he speaks to them, then do so." This is a dialogue that Quraysh directed to their two envoys whom they sent to convince the Negus to expel the Muslim migrants from his land and hand them over to Quraysh. This dialogue can be classified among the negative dialogues that aim to undermine the idea of dialogue between two societies wishing to coexist. This type of dialogue often comes from a third party whose interests conflict with the principle of coexistence. Within this category of dialogue falls the statement of the monks who accepted gifts from Quraysh in their dialogue with the Negus: "They speak the truth, O King. If you return them to them, they would be more pleased with them, for they have not entered your religion that you should protect them by that." These monks see no path to coexistence except among people of the same religion, as evidenced by their statement to the

³² See his story of Islam acceptance in *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, vol. 1, p. 277.

³³ Tahir ibn 'Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, Tunisian Publishing House, Tunisia, 1984, vol. 5, p. 94.

³⁴ Muhammad ibn Umar al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghaib* (Keys of the Unseen), 3rd edition, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1420 AH, vol. 27, p. 559.

Negus: "for they have not entered your religion," meaning they have not entered Christianity for you to allow them to reside in your country and coexist with its people.

Also of this type is the statement of Amr ibn al-As: "O King, some foolish young men among us have abandoned the religion of their people and have not entered your religion, and they have come with an innovated religion that we do not know. They have sought refuge in your land, so their tribes have sent us to you concerning them: their fathers, their uncles, and their people, so that you may return them to them, for they are more pleased with them." Here we notice the attempt to deceive the Negus and portray the migrants other than their reality through this dialogue. Also of this type is what Amr said in an attempt to arouse the Negus's anger against the Muslims: "O King, they say about Jesus a tremendous thing."

Despite the negativity of these dialogues, they provided us with a very great benefit, which is proof that there is no way to achieve coexistence and reach it except through dialogue. This is what Quraysh was extremely keen to prevent from happening, as they instructed their envoys to present gifts and try to obtain a decision from the Negus before any dialogue took place between him and the Muslim migrants. This is the same reason that both envoys understood, as narrated by Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her): "Nothing was more hateful to Amr ibn al-As and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'a than to hear their words" - meaning the words of the migrants. They knew that the occurrence of dialogue would ensure the Muslims' stay in the land of Abyssinia and their coexistence with its people. This matter leads us to the third dialogue, in which the Negus insisted on dialoguing with the Muslim migrants and listening to them.

The Third Dialogue: "The Negus became angry and said: 'No, by the life of Allah, I will not return them to them until I call them, speak to them, and see what their matter is. A people who have sought refuge in my land and chosen my protection over others' protection - if they are as they say, I will return them to them, and if they are otherwise, I will protect them and not leave them to them, nor will I please their eyes.'"

The Negus, from the standpoint of justice which the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) praised in him, and which we mentioned earlier cannot be achieved without justice being realized, from the standpoint of his justice insisted on dialoguing with the Muslims and listening to them to discern their reality and get to know them through listening to them, not to others. This is something that is considered nowadays among the fundamentals of dialogue aimed at achieving coexistence between followers of different religions. It is not permissible under any circumstances for those who address issues of dialogue and coexistence to build their perceptions and concepts about other parties based on their personal perceptions or the perceptions of a third party whose truthfulness or falsehood is unknown. Rather, in such issues, the opportunity must be given to each party to express itself and present its reality to the other parties participating in the dialogue in order to reach coexistence.

The Noble Quran has alerted us that listening to the other party is capable of achieving understanding and reaching the truth. Therefore, the Quran has demanded good listening to it, saying: "And when the Quran is recited, then listen to it and pay attention that you may receive mercy" (Al-A'raf: 204). The disbelievers realized this truth and tried to refrain and prevent others from listening to the Noble Quran, because if listening were achieved, the intensity of disagreement would diminish, the gap between the two groups would narrow, and the required understanding would occur. Allah says, informing about the disbelievers: "And those who disbelieve say, 'Do not listen to this Quran and speak noisily during it that you may overcome'" (Fussilat: 26). He who does not want to listen to the truth for fear of being convinced by it occupies himself with vain talk, which is the worthless speech that has no benefit, as mentioned in Mafatih al-Ghayb.³⁵ I say that within our discussion of dialogue and coexistence, every call for them that lacks sincerity is merely vain talk that should not be engaged with.

Accordingly, whoever addresses issues of dialogue and coexistence should be extremely careful to convey his ideas to people and make them listen to him. At the same time, he should listen to others and give them

³⁵ Ibn 'Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, vol. 24, p. 277.

the opportunity to express themselves. This is a refined etiquette of dialogue that should not be transgressed by anyone who dialogues with others. He should also be cautious of parties that have no interest in achieving coexistence and harmony among people, as these parties will be keen to occupy the dialoguing parties with vain talk that has no benefit. This is what the author of *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* pointed out when he said: "This is the manner of proponents of misguidance and falsehood - they muzzle the mouths of those who speak the truth and evidence, with whatever they can of intimidation and temptation, threats and enticements, and they do not allow people to debate with evidence and refer back to proofs because they are certain that their opponents' evidence is stronger. So they conceal it and repel it not with its like, but with methods of slander and deception. When their tricks fail them and they see the flashes of truth flickering, they fear that its light will spread to people who still have some good and guidance left in them, so they turn to vain talk and blow into the horns of nonsense and clamor, hoping thereby to overcome the arguments of truth and overwhelm good speech with vain talk. Such is the way of these people."³⁶

Al-Ghazali pointed to the importance of listening in *Al-Munqidh* when one of the *Batiniyyah* argued against him about his inability to remove disagreement among people, so he said: "If they would listen to me, I would remove the disagreement between them."³⁷

The Fourth Dialogue: "When the Negus's messenger came to them, the people assembled and said: 'What shall we say?' They replied: 'What should we say? By Allah, we shall speak what we know and what we follow of our religion and what our Prophet brought, whatever the consequences may be.'"

In this dialogue, the importance of consultation (*shura*) in matters of coexistence becomes clear to us. The Muslim migrants did not go to the Negus's assembly when he summoned them haphazardly, but they gathered and consulted among themselves. In an assembly like this, dialogues must take place that may be of a high degree of precision and danger. Therefore, the dialoguer must be someone with a strong personality and firm belief, extensive knowledge, expertise in types of dialogues, and knowledge of the conditions and etiquette of dialogue. The result of their consultation was summarized in two matters:

First: That Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) should be their spokesman. This is a task that must be undertaken by someone who is qualified for it. It is reported in some narrations that Ja'far said to the migrants during their meeting for consultation: "Let none of you speak, I am your spokesman today." Ja'far (may Allah be pleased with him) knew that there were extremely dangerous issues that would be raised in this assembly, foremost of which would be issues related to creed. Perhaps enthusiasm might overcome some of those present, causing them to rush into speech, which would have a negative impact on the Muslims' stay in Abyssinia. In a situation like this, dialogue must be entrusted to someone characterized by wisdom and good speech, as the intended goal that the dialoguers should reach is coexistence, harmony, and mutual respect among the parties.

Based on the two previous points, Muslims today should choose from among themselves qualified individuals capable of highlighting the true image of Islam, and the matter should not be left open for anyone to speak on their behalf.

Second: No compromising on creed regardless of the consequences. The purpose of this dialogue is for Muslims to make others know their creed pure as it came in the Noble Quran and as they learned it from the Prophet (peace be upon him). Therefore, it should be noted that Muslims entering the arena of dialogue to achieve coexistence does not mean in any way compromising the fundamentals of their creed or being diplomatic about it. Rather, people must be introduced to it as it came in its two sources: the Book of Allah the Most High and the Sunnah of His Prophet (peace be upon him).

³⁶ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, edited by Abd al-Halim Mahmud, Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, Egypt, p. 164.

³⁷ Qais Mahmoud Hamid, "Taf'il Ru'yat al-'Alam fi Qadiyat al-Ta'ayush" (Activating the World's Vision on the Issue of Coexistence), *Tafakkur Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1432 AH / 2011 AD, pp. 199-219.

The Fifth Dialogue: The Negus said to him: "What is this religion that you follow? You have abandoned the religion of your people, yet you have not entered Judaism or Christianity. What is this religion?" And according to al-Bayhaqi: "Are you Christians?" They said: "No." He said: "Are you Jews?" They said: "No." He said: "Are you following your people's religion?" They said: "No." He said: "Then what is your religion?" Similar to this dialogue is the Negus's statement: "Do you have anything with you of what he brought?"

Through this dialogue, an important matter in the issue of coexistence becomes clear to us: getting to know others should be through dialoguing with them and listening to them, not by relying on others' opinions about them, especially in these days when each party has its own specificity, and it is best able to express it. This approach is more conducive to respect and understanding between different parties.

The Sixth Dialogue: Ja'far's (may Allah be pleased with him) response to the Negus's questions: "O King, we were a people in polytheism: we worshipped idols, ate carrion, were bad neighbors, and considered permissible the forbidden acts among ourselves - bloodshed and other things. We neither made anything lawful nor unlawful. Then Allah sent to us a Prophet from among ourselves whose loyalty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness we knew. He called us to worship Allah alone with no partner, to maintain family ties, to be good neighbors, to pray and fast, and to worship none but Him." And in Ibn Hisham's Biography: "Then our people turned against us, tortured us, and tempted us away from our religion to return us to idol worship instead of worshipping Allah the Most High, and to consider permissible the vile things we used to consider permissible. When they overpowered us, wronged us, oppressed us, and came between us and our religion, we came out to your land, chose you over all others, desired your protection, and hoped that we would not be wronged in your presence, O King."

I say: Ja'far's (may Allah be pleased with him) dialogue with the Negus should be a reference for everyone who addresses issues of dialogue and coexistence between followers of different religions. We can pause at stations within it, each of which is capable of making dialogue a path to achieving coexistence. These stations are:

First Station: Mutual Respect Among Dialogue Parties.

This is achieved through each side appreciating and praising the other, a method that helps soften hearts and fosters a spirit of harmony and cordiality between interlocutors. Notice how Ja'far begins, saying, "O King," addressing the second party with the respect he deserves without any attempt to belittle him. This respect is fundamentally ingrained in the Islamic view of every human being. Allah honored all of humanity—not some groups over others—as evidenced by His words:

"And We have certainly honored the children of Adam... and preferred them over much of what We have created..." (Quran, Al-Isra, 17:70)

This forms a foundation upon which Islam calls for coexistence among all people. Observe also how Ja'far praises the Negus (al-Najashi):

"We came to your country, chose you over others, sought your protection, and hoped not to be wronged in your presence, O King."

This praise serves multiple purposes: it soothes the Negus's spirit—a natural human tendency—and it implicitly reminds him of his responsibility to coexist peacefully with the Muslims who sought refuge in his land. Surely, someone who accepted Muslims under his protection should not abandon that responsibility or hand them over to their enemies. Ja'far's approach had a profound impact on the Negus's heart and should be a model for anyone engaged in interfaith dialogue aiming for coexistence among different religions.

Second Station: Organizing and Presenting Ideas Well in Dialogue
Notice how Ja'far succinctly describes the Arabs' state before Islam, a condition akin to that of beasts rather than humans—something any sound nature, let alone a Divine Book, would repulse. He then contrasts this with the noble upliftment following the Prophet's mission, elevating Muslims from the depths of ignorance

to the pinnacle of moral and ethical values, making coexistence and respect for others a cherished cultural value and principle.

Third Station: Focusing on Monotheism and Noble Ethics
Ja'far centers his dialogue on monotheism and good morals, principles shared by both Muslims and Christians. Shared values form a strong foundation for interreligious, intercultural, and civilizational dialogue, with ethical values being among the most important commonalities to build upon³⁸. This approach is deeply instructive today: genuine coexistence efforts must focus on what unites rather than divides—without compromising or diluting doctrine, but rather as a wise way to establish common ground for all parties.

This wisdom moved the Negus to request hearing some of what was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him), and Ja'far gracefully chose to recite the opening of Surah Maryam (Chapter 19), which speaks compassionately about the prophets Zakariya and Yahya (peace be upon them), figures esteemed in both Christianity and Islam. The surah's compassionate tone highlighted that the Quran's revelation is mercy for those to whom it came and mercy for all mankind. This mercy should inspire Muslims today, who bear a message described as "a mercy to the worlds," aiming to improve humanity and lead them from darkness to light.³⁹

Fourth Station: Clarifying the True Image of the Islamic Personality and Refuting Misconceptions.

Through this dialogue, Ja'far presented a clear, luminous image of the Muslim emigrants in Abyssinia and simultaneously dispelled the misconceptions propagated by Amr ibn al-'As. Nowadays, dialogue serves as one of the best and most effective means of defending Islam and conveying its true image against the distortions spread by ignorant followers or hostile enemies.

Ja'far's method and careful selection of Quranic passages deeply affected the Negus and his bishops, moving them to tears, with the Negus proclaiming that what he heard came from the same source as Moses' revelation—"from the same lamp." Through such discourse, Ja'far succeeded in achieving peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christian Abyssinians, with no harm coming to the Muslims. The Negus declared:

"This speech comes from the same lamp which brought Moses' revelation. Go forth in peace. By Allah, I will never hand you over to enemies nor give harm."

However, Islam's enemies continue to distort its image by portraying it as a religion of hostility. Amr ibn al-'As tried to incite the Negus against the Muslims by highlighting the key theological dispute between Islam and Christianity—the divinity of Jesus—which he hoped would lead to the destruction of Muslims in Abyssinia. He told the Negus: "O King, they say great things about Jesus."

Here the Negus's justice and wisdom again appear, as he refrains from passing judgment before hearing the Muslims' response. The Muslims consult and entrust Ja'far to speak for them. Without diminishment or concession of their creed, and best articulated by the Quran, they respond. The same surah Ja'far earlier recited (Maryam) had softened the Negus' heart and now serves to clarify their belief. When asked, "What do you say about Jesus son of Mary?" Ja'far replies, inspired by the Quran:

"He is the servant and messenger of Allah, His word and spirit cast into Mary the virgin."

³⁸ Qais Mahmoud Hamid, "Taf'il Ru'yat al-'Alam fi Qadiyat al-Ta'ayush" (Activating the World's Vision on the Issue of Coexistence), *Tafakkur Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1432 AH / 2011 AD, pp. 199-219.

³⁹ The same previous reference.

This statement confounded both Amr and the Negus's bishops. The Negus said:

“That which Ja‘far said is exactly what the reality of Jesus son of Mary is, no more and no less.”

He then asserted his protection: “Even if you quarrel among yourselves, by Allah, go forth—you are the ‘Sheyūm’ in my land.”⁴⁰

The ‘Sheyūm’—as explained in classical Arabic dictionaries—means “the secure and protected ones.” The Negus continued: “Whoever insults you pays a fine; thrice over. I wish I had a treasurer. I have never wronged any of you.”

This underscores a core principle of dialogue leading to coexistence: mutual respect between different parties. No Muslim should be insulted or harmed in the society they live in despite religious difference. Further, it reveals the ideal outcome we seek from dialogue—coexistence in safety, harmony, and security—“Go forth, you are the secure ones in my land.”

I say this especially applies to Muslims, who hold a message explicitly intended to establish security and peace in the world; the very name “Islam” and its greeting “Peace” affirm this purpose.

Conclusion

This is the Migration to Abyssinia and the dialogues that took place therein, which this study has attempted to trace and analyze in order to ground the principle of coexistence from an Islamic perspective. The study reached the following conclusions:

- The principle of coexistence is an original Islamic principle, an inseparable part of the Muslim’s creed and worldview, rooted in the nature of the Islamic message based on mercy and tolerance.
- The model of the migration to Abyssinia is among the earliest and best expressions of Islam’s stance on coexistence.
- Calling for coexistence does not mean diluting stances, compromising on beliefs, or conceding them.
- In dialogue aiming at coexistence, each party must be given full opportunity to express itself and clarify its truth to the others.
- The shared elements among religions provide the strong foundation for dialogue leading to coexistence, foremost among which are monotheism, values, and noble ethics.
- Dialogue is the best means to introduce people to Islam and defend it against practices aimed at distorting its image.
- Muslims should strive to unify their position toward dialogue and coexistence among followers of different religions and civilizations, and this responsibility should be entrusted to those qualified.
- Muslims possess a civilizational and cultural heritage enabling them to lead the path of dialogue and coexistence among followers of different religions.

⁴⁰ It is stated in *Lisan al-‘Arab* that it is an Abyssinian word meaning “the safe ones”; see *Lisan al-‘Arab* vol. 12, p. 332. It is narrated written with a “seen” letter “Siyum”; Ibn al-‘Atir said in *Al-Nihaya fi Gharib al-Hadith wa al-Athar*: “Siyum is the plural of Sa‘im, meaning you graze in my land like roaming sheep without anyone opposing you.” *Majd al-Din Ibn al-‘Atir, Al-Nihaya fi Gharib al-Hadith wa al-Athar*, edited by Tahir al-Zawi, al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1399 AH / 1979 AD, vol. 2, p. 435.

In conclusion, I ask Almighty God that my timing in this research be for what is good and correct. Whatever good is found herein is from God, and whatever errors are from myself. May God guide us to the straight path.

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