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## The Hospitality of Communication in Islam: An Analytical Study on Contemporary Works of *Tafsīr*

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**Abstract:** The paper attempts to elucidate different levels of hospitality that relates to human communication. It focuses mainly on reading verses of the Qur'ān that speak of ethical conduct in dealing with others and analysing its contexts. The divine message given to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH emphasises on the significance of hospitable relation in every sphere of human life. It plays extremely important role in avoiding misunderstanding and conflict within the society. The emergence of tensions between individuals in the community has always been the result of harshness and negative words applied in communication. In the discussion, we employ the method of deductive analysis on the views of contemporary scholars in the field of Qur'anic *tafsīr* who interpret the verses adopting a sort of contextual approach. The scope of the study is limited to analysing the interpretation of verses related to ethical relation between individuals, family members, diverse religious adherents, and governmental leaders. The significance of this study is that it addresses the question of why humanity should take benefit from the Qur'anic guidance on the hospitality of communication to maintain peace and harmonious life.

**Keywords and phrases:** Hospitality, Communication, *Tafsīr*, Conflict solving, Qur'ān and communication.

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## Introduction

The research begins with the examination of Qur'anic terms related to human communication and the ethics that should be observed by individuals. The relevant terms which are frequently mentioned in the Qur'ān are *al-ḥiwār*, *al-jidāl* and *al-mahājjah*. Verbal communications is unavoidable when it involves human interaction. God, however, has provided guidance for mankind which should be learned and emulated in order to avoid crisis and conflict in their lives. Whatever problems that people may encounter in terms of verbal communication may be solved by observing the concept of hospitality in communication.

The following is an example of the lack of hospitality between two individuals in which the Qur'ān uses the word *al-ḥiwār*,

'(Abundant) was the produce this man had he said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument: "more wealth have I than you, and more honour and power in (my following of) men".'<sup>1</sup>

It highlights the superiority of the individual who had been granted the abundance of financial status over the piousness of the poor. The rich man communicated harshly claiming that he possesses a beautiful palace with a garden in which water flows and even reiterated, 'I own more wealth than you.' The dialogue between the two individuals illustrate polar behaviours. The poor man demonstrated humbleness while the rich man felt superior due his possession of abundant wealth. He assumes that his wealth will never perish and his residence excels the garden of Paradise.<sup>2</sup>

In the dialogue, as mentioned in the following verse, the less fortunate individual responded courteously by saying,

"Do you deny Him Who created you out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned you into a man?"<sup>3</sup>

The courteous communication of the poor man is visible in which whatever wealth a person may possess, he should rather offer gratefulness to God and the bounties given to him should be utilised to worship Him. In addition, he should develop the habit of assisting less fortunate individuals in the community.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of harshness in communication was indicated in the verse,

'Allah has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to

<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān, 18: 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ṭaṭṭāwī, Muḥammad Seyed. (1998). *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*. (Cairo: Dār Nahdah Misr li al-Tibā'ah wa al-Tawzī'), 515-516.

<sup>3</sup> Qur'ān, 18: 37.

<sup>4</sup> Ṭaṭṭāwī, *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*, 517.

Allah; and Allah (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for Allah hears and sees (all things).<sup>5</sup>

It deals with the relationship between a husband and wife. The husband sought a solution by approaching the Prophet PBUH with the use of gentle and mild words.

The word *al-jidāl* is another term which initially relates to the argumentation. The use of such phrase is to convince others that his opinion is more viable.<sup>6</sup> Disputes arise from a divergence of opinions. Those who are involved in such scenarios tend to impose their own ideas as if they are the only right one.<sup>7</sup> In certain cases, disagreements may also take place between adherents of different religious beliefs. Each follower claims that his religion is more authentic.<sup>8</sup> The divine guidance provides the normative guidance to observe a courteous approach which is in line with the theological understanding of hospitality in dealing with the people of the book (Jews and Christians) as indicated in the verse that says,

‘And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, “We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)”’.<sup>9</sup>

### Hospitality between Individual and Family

The message given to Prophet Muhammad PBUH is to secure peace in the community. All individuals are required to communicate gently to ensure harmony. The doctrinal revelation ushers the establishment of justice across ethnical and religious affiliation. As pointed out before, misunderstandings, disputes and even conflicts mainly stem from the un-ethical manner of dealing with others. From a religious angle, a person will not achieve the perfection of faith without demonstrating kindness when interacting with other members of the community. The Prophetic tradition establishes guiding principles of hospitable communication that would lead to a peaceful life. First and foremost, every individual should be more alert when uttering the truth, and shun from the use of decorative expressions that, in many cases, can be misleading and deceptive. Nonetheless, truthful words also need to be accompanied with hospitality. Hence, believers should communicate with politeness. The commandment of gentle communication can be referred to this verse that says,

<sup>5</sup> Qur’ān, 58: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Sha’rāwī, Muḥammad Mutawallī. (2002). *Tafsīr Sheikh Mutawallī Sha’rāwī*. (Cairo: Maṭābī Akhbār al-Yawm), 702.

<sup>7</sup> Jarīshah, ‘Alī. (1412H/1992M). *Adāb al-Ḥiwār wa al-Munāzarah*. (Manṣūrah: Dār al-Wafā li al-Ṭibā‘ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī), 19.

<sup>8</sup> Mawīl, Muḥammad Kamāl. (1420H/2000). *al-Ḥiwār fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. (Beirut: Dār al-Farābī li al-Ma‘ārif), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Qur’ān, 29: 46.

O you who believe! Keep you duty to Allah and fear Him, and speak always the truth<sup>10</sup>

A person cannot reach to the level of *taqwā* (God's consciousness) without exhibiting compassionate behavior. Communication accompanied by courtesy represents characters of faith. Thus, when a person engages in various behaviours such as business and socio-political activities, they should observe the truth. By referring to the words of wisdom of the Prophet PBUH, a Muslim scholar is of the view that saying the truth would lead to virtuous deeds and God's forgiveness.<sup>11</sup>

A person who follows virtuous deeds will be elevated to higher ranks beyond those who donate their wealth whilst involving themselves in insult and mockery. Moreover, promoting goodness represents the central theme of the revelation. The Prophet PBUH emphasizes the use of hospitality while dealing with others as reflected within the hadith,

Whoever claims to believe in God and the Day of Judgement, then, he should say the good word or just keep quiet.<sup>12</sup>

The absence of hospitality between individuals could ruin relationships and friendships, and potentially cause breakdowns of family structures. The above shows the importance of hospitality pertaining to inter-individual relation. In that particular case, the conceptual framework of Prophetic direction is phrased using the expression '*falyaqul khayran*' (lit. say the truth and good word).

Another term which carries the connotation of hospitality is the word *al-iḥsān* (lit. kindness) that represents the highest level of hierarchical belief. The message of revelation urges all believers to observe *iḥsān* in conducting activities as mentioned in this verse that says,

Worship none but Allah; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak well to the people.<sup>13</sup>

The word 'treat with kindnesses' is the translation of *al-iḥsān* in its original Arabic text. Hence, behavioral conduct towards one's parents through virtuous deeds is another dimension of hospitality that needs to be carried out by all believers. In the wider context, there should not be any distinction in offering hospitality to mankind across religious and cultural identity with the sole aim of securing peace and cordial relations.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Qur'ān, 33: 70.

<sup>11</sup> al-Sa'dī, 'Abd Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir. (2000). *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr Kalām al-Mannān*. (Beirut: Muasaah al-Risālah), 673.

<sup>12</sup> Muslim, ibn al-Hajjāj, al-Qusyairi al-Nisābūrī. (n.d). *al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar bi Naql al-'Adl 'an al-Adl ilā Rasūl Allah SAW*. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī), 68.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'ān, 2: 83.

<sup>14</sup> al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm*, 58.

The theological precepts also assert to maintain the cohesion and togetherness in the family in which both husband and wife should observe politeness, tolerance and mutual collaboration. It strongly prohibits children of being rude against their parents as the verse says,

And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be dutiful to your parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them, but address them in terms of honour.<sup>15</sup>

There must be a reason why the Qur'anic verse strongly prohibits insolence against parents. Exhibiting kindness is demanded as showing appreciation towards them as they endured a lot to raise their children till the age of maturity. It also relates to the hardship of mothers who delivered and nurtured them. It is considered as a great sin for children who do not adopt hospitality in their daily lives.<sup>16</sup> Even Muslim scholars consider integrity toward parents as a major factor of a prosperous life.<sup>17</sup>

There is an allusion informing the great shock of parents stemming the children's misconduct toward them. Hence, they should take all precautionary measures prior to any incidents by training them properly about morality and ethics to avoid tribulation they may face as the verse says,

O you who believe! Truly, among your wives and your children are (some that are) enemies to yourselves: so beware of them! But if ye forgive and overlook, and cover up (their faults), verily Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.<sup>18</sup>

However, if despite all efforts of ensuring cooperation and kindness in the family, parents are still not treated properly as hoped, they should exercise patience. They (parents) are not allowed to retaliate against their children with negative attitude rather they should continue to demonstrate a good example.<sup>19</sup>

It is worth noting that God's mercy towards the individual is inseparable from kindness offered to parents. The blessing, prosperity, and happiness has a strong connection with the hospitality. Children are required to be extra cautious in dealing with their parents. Arrogance and superiority could become the source of bankruptcies in this world prior to their lives in the hereafter. This is the warning given by the Prophet PBUH as mentioned in his *ḥadīth* that says,

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<sup>15</sup> Qur'ān, 17: 23.

<sup>16</sup> Quṭb, Sayyid. (1998). *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq), 221.

<sup>17</sup> Ṭanṭawī, *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*, 252.

<sup>18</sup> Qur'ān, 64: 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ali, Yusuf. (1410H). *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the meanings and Commentary*, (Madinah al-Munawwarah: King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex), 1760.



Allah will be pleased whenever parent is in state of pleasure. On the contrary, Allah will engrave whenever a parent is disheartened due to the rudeness of children.<sup>20</sup>

The following statement teaches us to conduct ethical behaviour in dealing with parents. It also appeals to pray for their well-being as reflected in this following verse that says,

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months. At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says, "O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for Your Favour which You has bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds such as please You; make my offspring good. Truly have I turned to You and truly, I am one of the Muslims".<sup>21</sup>

Parents struggled to raise children with great hardship, and the mother weaned them after a period of thirty months that was never without care and attention. Their spiritual faculties gain the upper hand after reaching the age of forty. Therefore, they should repay the parents by invoking for the goodness of their life.<sup>22</sup>

It is worth noting that hospitality plays a major role in securing harmonious relations. The family that does not bother about it will pay the price for the crisis. In view of this, all members should give mutual respect and collaboration to perpetuate happiness and harmony.

### **Hospitality With the Adherents of Other Religions**

Believers are subjected to some forms of courteous relations with other followers. Offering hospitality across faithful boundaries is solely aimed at seeking common agreement. It is quite interesting to note the view of Hans Kung in which he said, 'There can be no peace among the nations when there is no peace among the religions. There can be no peace among religions without peaceful co-existence among its adherents.'<sup>23</sup> Therefore, one of the purposes of treating other religious adherents with hospitality is to maintain peaceful life.

All believers should tolerate differences especially when the other party convinces him with the use of cogent argument.<sup>24</sup> Sha'rāwī maintains that religious

<sup>20</sup> al-Tirmidhī (1998). *al-jāmi' al-Kabīr*. (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami), 374.

<sup>21</sup> Qur'ān, 46: 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ali, Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'an*, 1548.

<sup>23</sup> Toha, Anis Malik (1431H/2010M). *Ḥiwār al-Adyān bayn Jusūr al-Tafāhum wa Hifẓ al-Huwiyyah. al-Tajdīd*, 14 (27), pp. 133.

<sup>24</sup> 'Ajk, Bassām Dāwūd (2008), *al-Hiwār al-Islāmī- al-Māsihī: al-Mabādī, al-Tārīkh, al-Mawḍū'āt wa al-Ahdāf*. (Damascus: Dār al-Qutaybah li al-Tibā'ah), 20.

dialogues need to be worked out in a friendly atmosphere for the effectiveness of exchanging ideas.<sup>25</sup>

Other Muslim scholars constructed a theoretical framework in which, firstly, appeals each individual to agree on the diversity of religious and cultural tradition<sup>26</sup>. This is in line with the purpose of human creation with a variety of races and nation as stated in the following verse:

Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the People of the Book, after the clear Signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. Allah by His Grace guided the believers to the Truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For Allah guides whom He wills to the straight path.<sup>27</sup>

The verse ensures the purpose behind the creation of humanity into diverse races and faithful affiliation to galvanize understanding and cooperation. There should not be superiority and undermining others regardless of the ethnical origin and civilization might be as the judgment on status of dignity is simply based on God's consciousness. Secondly, the discussion must be conducted sincerely to tolerate different theological concepts. Thirdly, the truth must prevail and there should not be any compromise in matters related to each religious doctrine.<sup>28</sup>

Hospitality is inseparably linked with fairness in the society. The message given to the Prophet PBUH asserts to perform virtues deeds and establishment of justice as the verse says:

O you who believe! stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do.<sup>29</sup>

It requires all believers to behave fairly even at the expense of their lives. An unjust person will not be considered as believers although he may perform daily ritual services. Adopting behavioral conduct toward others should be in the light of establishing of justice in the society.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Midani, 'Abd al-Raḥman Hasan Ḥabanakah. (1414H/1993M). *Dawābit al-Ma'rifah wa Uṣūl al-Istidlāl wa al-Munāẓarah*. (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam), 371.

<sup>26</sup> 'Ulwānī, Ruqayyah Ṭāha Jābir. (1426H/2005M). *Fiqh al-ḥiwār ma'a al-Mukhalif fī Ḍaw' al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*. (Riyadh: Jā'izah Amīr Nāif bin 'Abd al-Azīz 'Alī Su'ūd al-'Ālamiyyah li al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah wa al-Dirāsah al-Mu'āṣirah), pp. 52-53.

<sup>27</sup> Qur'ān, 2: 213.

<sup>28</sup> al-Marāghī, Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā. (1946). *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā Bāb al-Ḥalabī), 142.

<sup>29</sup> Qur'ān, 5: 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ridā, Muḥammad Rashīd. (1990). *Tafsīr al-Manār*. (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah), 2004.

Hospitable communication with other religious adherents must be conducted in a good manner in which a person should not undermine the doctrine of other faiths.<sup>31</sup> This guiding principle can be seen in this verse that says:

And dispute you not with the people of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we have submitted."<sup>32</sup>

It represents the guiding principle of hospitable relations with people of different faiths by demonstrating positive behaviors. Dealing through gentle communication could become a decisive factor that attracts sympathy from others. On the contrary, harsh expressions will only create negative impressions toward certain religious doctrines.<sup>33</sup>

Sha'rāwī further explains that whenever someone is involved in an argument with followers of other religion, he should use kind words. According to him, God laid down ethics of argumentation with the sole aim of bringing out a person from disbelief into belief and from the opposing truth to conviction. This could be only achieved through the observance of fairness, he said. Moreover, he clarifies further that the communication with people of the book must be handled with utmost care as they believe in the messages given to the previous Prophets who propagated monotheism and morality.

The fifth, he asserts, the best manner must be demonstrated as discussions on religious doctrine may cause sensitivity. Even when dealing with those who worship statues, he stated, should not be vilified and humiliated. This ethical manner have been clearly explained in the following verse that says:

And insult not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongly without knowledge. Thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings; then to the Lord is the return and He shall then inform them of all that they used to do.<sup>34</sup>

Even though people believe in paganism, they regard their religion as superior and will defend it at any cost. The above textual evidence advises us to interact ethically and utter words of wisdom.<sup>35</sup> We may disagree with their spiritual practices yet we should not speak to humiliate them. Looking down on other religions will only potentially generate antagonism and recalcitrance.

<sup>31</sup> See: Turkistani, Aḥmad Sayfuddin. *al-Ḥiwār ma'a Ashāb al Adyān: Mashrū'iyyatuhu wa Shurūṭuhu wa Ādābuhu*. Retrieved on 20th June 2019 from <http://www.al-islam.com>.

<sup>32</sup> Qur'ān, 29: 46.

<sup>33</sup> Ṭaṭṭawī, *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> Qur'ān, 16: 108.

<sup>35</sup> Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl*, 1169.

## The Hospitality of Communication with Tyrants

All mankind conduct socio-economic and even political activities with their superiors such as managers, head of department of certain agencies, as well as the authorities. In this section we aim at explicating certain ethical guidelines contained in the Qur'ān which could be used as a system of sociological communication with leaders to maintain peace and harmony. The message given to the Prophet PBUH highly emphasizes on hospitality and ethical conduct that represents a major aspect of the belief. Thus, the tradition of the Prophet PBUH discusses the status of a believer who loves peace and harmony:

A Muslim is the one whose tongue and hand are secured (from evil deeds) and a Muhajir (Emigrant) who refrains from what Allah has forbidden.<sup>36</sup>

Humanity are social beings and in need of someone who is in charge to manage their affairs. A society that comprises of individuals also needs an authority and leadership. The fruitless relationship between leader and individuals mainly stem from inappropriate communication between them. The divine guidance necessitates obedience of each individual towards the leadership as illustrated in the following verse, saying:

O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe in Allah and the Last Day: That is best, and most suitable for final destination.<sup>37</sup>

Whatever the policies made by a leader may cause ruthlessness, yet they should be loyal and firmly stick towards the truth. When a policy contradicts public interests, each individual should have the concern to remind him with kindness to guide him on the right track. The practical example can be referred to the story of Prophet Musa who was delegated to deal with the Pharaoh who was an authoritarian. God commanded to convey the message to Pharaoh to observe justice instead of becoming an oligarch and claiming himself as 'the Supreme Lord'. The Pharaoh was arrogant when he said the following: 'Saying, "I am your Lord, Most High"<sup>38</sup>.

Prophet Musa and Harun were in a state of fear to communicate with Pharaoh. They even considered to equip themselves with weapons to defend a potential attack. However, God just required them to communicate with the use of mild words to convince him by saying,

'But speak to him mildly; perhaps he may accept admonition or fear (Allah).<sup>39</sup>

This reflects the example of hospitality communication with superiors. Although Pharaoh governed his people with the use of an iron fist and dictatorship,

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<sup>36</sup> Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Qur'ān, 4: 59.

<sup>38</sup> Qur'ān, 79: 24.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'ān, 20: 44.

Nevertheless God required Prophet Musa to maintain hospitality in communicating with him. Kind words could reduce the level of anger and soften the heart of a person. It could also serve to incite awareness of an individual whom is characterized with a stubborn and hot temper. Even a hard-hearted person could be remedied with the use of gentle communication.<sup>40</sup> God required Prophet Musa to tell the truth about the task which had been granted to him and the appointment as Messengers to promote justice and annul all kinds of enslavement. Thus, through polite verbal communication he requested Pharaoh to liberate Israelites to live freely without burden and punishment.

The manner in which God wants Prophet Musa to communicate is as stated in the verse below:

So go you both to him, and say, 'Verily we are messengers sent by the Lord, so let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not; indeed, we have come from the Lord! And peace will be upon him who follows the guidance.'<sup>41</sup>

The evidence reflects an ideal communication between an individual and a tyrannical leader. Both Prophet Musa and Harun commenced the discussion by introducing themselves as the Messengers of God. They did not accuse Pharaoh as one who has committed a grave sin although he claimed himself as the 'Supreme Lord'. They merely said 'we are Messengers of your God!' They did not declare comments such as "you are not the Lord". They ensured that the purpose of meeting him was simply to make an appeal on behalf of the Israelites to release from their bondage. They did not threaten the Pharaoh of any wrath of God will come upon him. With humbleness they said 'Send forth, therefore, the Children of Israel with us, and afflict them not'. Even in their reply to the arrogance of the Pharaoh, they just said, "With a Sign, indeed, have we come from thy Lord! As a final message in their communication with the Pharaoh, Prophet Musa and Harun concluded with an appeal by saying: 'peace to all who follow guidance.'

## Conclusion

The Quran revealed to the Prophet PBUH is a source of guidance and mercy for all humanity. Amidst the diversity of culture, lifestyle and religious beliefs, every individual should cooperate to establish world peace and stability. Now more than ever, human beings are in need to observe hospitality in communicating with others to sustain peace and harmony around the globe. The need for positive communication when interacting with others will be the decisive factors in overcoming major problems like racism, extremism, terrorism, sectarian violence, bigotry, war, etc.

Unethical communication among people of different cultures and religion either through face-to-face communication or social media can most likely trigger a

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<sup>40</sup> Ṭaṇṭawī, *Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*, 108.

<sup>41</sup> Qur'ān, 20: 47.

confrontational situation among various groups that can destroy peace and harmony in human lives.

In this regard, the Qur'ānic teachings require all believers to respect and cooperate with others regardless of their religious belief, custom, culture and origin. The Qur'ān has laid down the basic guidelines to establish peace at many different levels. Ethics is essential for all frameworks of communication whether between husband and wife, between parents and children or between an individual with other segments of the society. Thus, hospitable communication from the Quranic angle represents clear and discerning guidelines on the basis of fraternity. It has presented a good model for peaceful coexistence and cooperation among mankind which guarantee a better life for everyone. The ethics of communication can be claimed as the most significant part for the establishment of peace in the community. Political crises which happens in many parts of the world is due to the absence of ethical communication between political and governmental leaders in handling the issue. Likewise, the tension which might occur in the family as well as between all religious adherents is due to miscommunication between them. Hence, it is imperative to shed more light on Qur'ānic guidance related to ethic of communication as an alternative solution to human problems.

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