

Islamic Guidance for Minority Communities: Living with Purpose and Peace in the Present Era

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing and often polarized world, Muslim minority communities face unique challenges in preserving their faith while engaging positively with diverse societies. The teachings of Islam, however, provide timeless guidance for living with purpose, dignity, and peace amid such complexities. This study, titled "*Islamic Guidance for Minority Communities: Living with Purpose and Peace in the Present Era*," explores how Islamic principles can help Muslims navigate life as minorities without compromising their values or social harmony. Rooted in the Qur'an and the Prophetic example, Islam promotes coexistence, justice, and compassion towards all people, regardless of their religion or background. The paper emphasizes key Islamic teachings such as *adl* (justice), *Ihsan* (goodness), *sabr* (patience), and *shura* (mutual consultation), showing how these values nurture a balanced way of life that harmonizes faith and civic responsibility. Rather than viewing minority status as a limitation, Islam transforms it into an opportunity for moral excellence and constructive contribution to society. The Prophet Muhammad's example in Medina, where he established peace among different tribes and faith communities, remains a living model for Muslims today. The paper further explores how education, dialogue, and community engagement can enhance Muslim identity and foster mutual understanding in multicultural societies. By drawing on both classical sources and contemporary realities, this research highlights the relevance of Islamic guidance for achieving inner peace, social cooperation, and a higher spiritual purpose. Ultimately, it argues that when Muslims embody Islam's universal ethics, they not only protect their faith but also become agents of peace and positive change in the modern world.

Key Words: Islamic guidance, Muslim minorities, Prophetic model, Justice and Compassion.

1. Introduction

Muslims residing as a minority in societies encounter distinct problems, including the preservation of their faith and the integration into communities with diverse

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beliefs and traditions. This circumstance necessitates a balanced approach grounded in Islamic teachings that direct individuals towards patience, justice, benevolence, and resilience. The Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provide profound insights, establishing a framework for living as a minority while preserving robust religion and making beneficial societal contributions. This article thoroughly examines these principles, emphasizing how Muslims should exemplify the spirit of Islam in their speech, conduct, and interactions with others.

1.1. The Historical Context of Muslims as Minorities

Throughout Islamic history, incidents of Muslims residing as a minority provide significant insights into contemporary society. In the initial years of Islam, the Muslim population in Makkah was a minority enduring considerable persecution and social ostracism. The Quran revealed during this period emphasized themes of patience (sabr), reliance on Allah (tawakkul), and the significance of sustaining faith under adversity. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his adherents faced significant adversities, yet their resilience and ethical principles garnered the respect and esteem of even their most fervent adversaries. A prominent instance of Muslims residing as a minority is the migration to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) during the formative years of Islam. A group of Muslims, enduring intense persecution in Makkah, sought asylum under the Christian monarch, the Negus. The Prophet (peace be upon him) selected Abyssinia due to its sovereign's esteemed reputation for justice and equity. This episode serves as a significant lesson in coexistence, reverence for many beliefs, and the necessity of forging coalitions grounded in common ideals.¹

1.2. Coexistence in Andalusian Spain and the Ottoman Empire

Historically, Muslims have existed as minorities or within multi-religious societies, often cohabiting amicably with individuals of varying beliefs. Two prominent examples of Islamic coexistence with non-Muslims are Andalusian Spain (Al-Andalus) and the Ottoman Empire. These cultures were marked by cultural, intellectual, and religious diversity, with Muslims, Christians, and Jews coexisting and contributing to a shared civilization.

Although coexistence encountered problems, these eras illustrate how Islamic governance and societal frameworks promoted pluralism, knowledge sharing, and economic development.

1.3. Andalusian Spain: A Model of Coexistence

Andalusia (Al-Andalus), the Muslim-governed territory of Spain from 711 to 1492, was a pinnacle of cultural and religious tolerance in medieval Europe. During

Islamic governance, the Iberian Peninsula thrived in the domains of art, science, philosophy, and architecture, mostly owing to the cooperation of Muslims, Jews, and Christians.²

1.4. Governance and Religious Tolerance

During Muslim governance, Andalusia instituted the dhimma system, a legal structure that safeguarded Jews and Christians (dhimmis) and let them freely practice their faith in return for a specific fee known as jizya. This was established on the Islamic principle expressed in the Quran: "There is no compulsion in religion." The correct course has become differentiated from the incorrect."

The Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba established a legal system that afforded religious minorities autonomy in personal matters, such as marriage and inheritance, by their various theological doctrines. The rulers of Al-Andalus intentionally appointed Jews and Christians to administrative positions, fostering an atmosphere of cooperation.

1.5. Cognitive and Cultural Advancement

Muslims in Andalusia advanced education, translation, and information dissemination, creating Córdoba, Toledo, and Granada as centers of intellectual achievement. Muslim thinkers such as Averroes (IbnRushd) and Jewish scholars like Maimonides (Musa ibnMaymun) worked to translate Greek, Roman, and Persian texts into Arabic, which were then spread across medieval Europe. This transmission of knowledge preserved old scholarship and significantly influenced the European Renaissance. The fields of medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and mathematics flourished, with Muslim contributions spreading to the rest of Europe through Spain.

This was founded on the Islamic idea articulated in the Quran:

*There is no compulsion in religion. The right path has become distinct from the wrong.*³

The Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba implemented a legal framework that granted religious minorities liberty in personal affairs, including marriage and inheritance, according to their respective religious rules. The sovereigns of Al-Andalus deliberately assigned Jews and Christians to governmental roles, promoting a climate of collaboration.

1.6. Intellectual and Cultural Flourishing

Muslims in Andalusia promoted education, translation, and the sharing of information, establishing Córdoba, Toledo, and Granada as hubs of intellectual accomplishment. Muslim intellectuals like Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Jewish scholars such as Maimonides (Musa ibn Maymun) collaborated in translating Greek, Roman, and Persian books into Arabic, which were subsequently disseminated in medieval Europe. This transfer of knowledge safeguarded ancient scholarship and directly impacted the European Renaissance. The disciplines of medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and mathematics thrived, with Muslim contributions disseminating to the rest of Europe via Spain.⁴

1.7. Decline of Muslim Rule and End of Coexistence

Although Andalusia exemplified harmonious cohabitation, tensions escalated as Christian nations initiated the Reconquista of Spain. Following the fall of Granada in 1492, the new authorities evicted or compelled the conversion of Muslims and Jews, so terminating centuries of coexistence. The Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834) systematically persecuted non-Christians, resulting in extensive oppression.⁵ Notwithstanding its final decline, Al-Andalus exemplifies how the Islamic government fostered tolerance, scholarship, and mutual respect among diverse faiths.

2. The Ottoman Empire: A Multi-Religious Society

The Ottoman Empire (1299–1924) was one of the most enduring Islamic empires, governing extensive territories in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Similar to Al-Andalus, the Ottomans exhibited religious tolerance by enacting regulations that let Christians, Jews, and other religious groups coexist together under Islamic rule.

2.1. The Millet System: Legal Autonomy for Non-Muslims

The millet system was one of the most notable features of the Ottoman Empire's administration. This arrangement provided religious minorities with autonomy in their legal and religious matters while maintaining allegiance to the Ottoman state. Each religious community—Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Christians, Jews, and others—possessed its judicial courts, educational institutions, and places of worship.⁶

In this system, non-Muslims were not compelled to convert and may attain elevated positions within the empire. Certain Christian families in the Balkans voluntarily conscripted their sons into the Ottoman military and government via the devshirme system, where they frequently achieved influential positions.

2.2. Religious and Cultural Coexistence

In contrast to medieval Europe, where Jews experienced regular expulsions, the Ottomans embraced Jewish refugees, especially following the 1492 deportation from Spain. Sultan Bayezid II notably welcomed Jews to inhabit Istanbul, Thessaloniki, and Izmir, where they prospered in trade, finance, and medicine.⁷

Muslims, Christians, and Jews influenced Ottoman art, music, and architecture, evident in

renowned edifices such as the Hagia Sophia (transformed into a mosque) and Topkapı Palace.

Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, emerged as one of the most varied cities globally.

2.3. Stability and Later Decline

For centuries, the Ottomans upheld harmonious relations among religious communities, thereby ensuring stability throughout their empire. However, by the 19th and early 20th centuries, burgeoning nationalist movements and European colonial interventions undermined Ottoman authority. The Christian and Jewish populations diminished due to coerced migrations, conflicts, and European influence. The empire was officially dissolved in 1924 with the abolition of the caliphate.⁸

2.4. Lessons from Andalusia and the Ottoman Empire

The historical experiences of Al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire offer essential insights into coexistence, government, and multicultural tolerance. Islamic Law can Accommodate Religious Minorities: Both cultures established structures (dhimma, millet) that safeguarded non-Muslims. Knowledge and Cultural Exchange Promote Advancement: Cooperation in science, medicine, and philosophy has resulted in civilizational progress. Tolerance Fortifies Societies: Amicable relations among Muslims, Jews, and Christians led to flourishing societies.

The Erosion of Tolerance Results in Persecution: The conclusion of Andalusian governance and the deterioration of the Ottomans illustrate how the absence of pluralism can precipitate societal disintegration.

3. Challenges Faced by Minority Communities

Muslims residing as a minority in non-Muslim nations frequently encounter numerous problems that stress their perseverance, faith, and capacity to integrate while maintaining their religious identity. The hurdles can be classified as prejudice and discrimination, media misrepresentation, and integration difficulties in diverse societies.

3.1. Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Discrimination Understanding Prejudice Against Muslim Minorities.

Muslims, as minorities in Western and non-Muslim majority nations, frequently encounter prejudice and discrimination stemming from misconceptions, prejudices, and historical biases. Islamophobia has proliferated due to political discourse, extremist actions, and international crises. Numerous Muslim groups encounter employment discrimination, hate crimes, and

social marginalization.

A significant factor contributing to Islamophobic sentiments is the view of Islam as a "foreign" or "violent" faith, despite its extensive history in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Research demonstrates that Muslims are one of the most adversely viewed religious groups in Western cultures.⁹

3.2. Workplace and Educational Discrimination

Muslims frequently encounter systemic prejudice in work and education. Research indicates that Muslims have reduced employment opportunities, despite possessing qualifications that are equivalent to or surpass those of non-Muslims. A study conducted in France and the UK indicated that Muslim applicants were less likely to receive interview call-backs than their non-Muslim counterparts.¹⁰

3.3. Hate Crimes and Islamophobia

Incidents of hate crimes targeting Muslims have increased, especially following terrorist attacks inaccurately linked to Islam. Human rights organizations and governmental reports indicate that Muslims are often subjected to verbal abuse, mosque destruction, and physical violence.¹¹

3.4. Impact on Mental Health

Continuous exposure to stereotypes and bigotry adversely impacts the mental health of Muslims. Research has associated Islamophobia with elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in Muslim youth.¹²

3.5. Misrepresentation of Islam in the Media

➤ How the Media Shapes Perceptions of Islam

Media representation significantly influences public perceptions of Muslims. Studies consistently indicate that Western media predominantly depict Islam negatively, linking it to terrorism, oppression, and extremism. This fosters misconceptions that engender hostility towards Muslims. A content analysis of prominent Western news organizations reveals that Islam is frequently characterized as a threat to Western values, while Muslim-majority societies are portrayed as regressive or violent.¹³

➤ Social Media and Fake News

The proliferation of social media has intensified the distortion of Islam. Misinformation, disinformation, and manufactured news narratives depicting Muslims as risks to national

security are extensively disseminated online, shaping public attitudes. Research indicates that misinformation and Islamophobic narratives proliferate swiftly on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, exacerbating the marginalization of Muslim populations.¹⁴

➤ Addressing Media Bias Against Islam

Initiatives to counteract adverse media representations encompass Muslim advocacy organizations, interfaith discussion programs, and independent journalism. Organizations like CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) and the Muslim Council of Britain actively combat disinformation and advocate for favorable portrayals of Muslims.¹⁵

3.6. Workplace and Educational Accommodations

Muslims in secular societies frequently encounter challenges in reconciling religious obligations with professional and academic requirements. The principal concerns encompass: Inadequate prayer facilities in businesses and educational institutions. Difficulties in practicing Ramadan within professional environments. Discrimination based on the wearing of Islamic garments, such as hijabs or beards.¹⁶

3.7. Interfaith Relations and Social Participation

Interfaith communication is crucial for fostering mutual comprehension between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims can encounter misconceptions and animosity, complicating ecumenical efforts.

Notwithstanding these hurdles, interfaith efforts have demonstrated efficacy in nations like the UK and Canada, where religious leaders collaborate to foster harmony and combat Islamophobia.¹⁷

4. Islamic Guidance on Living as a Minority

Islamic guidance for minorities encompasses the ethical, social, and legal norms that Muslims adhere to while living in communities where they are not the predominant group. This instruction is derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah (Prophetic traditions), and Islamic law (Fiqh), offering methods to maintain religious identity while positively engaging with the wider society.

The principles individuals may follow to live in society while steadfastly adhering to

Their religious beliefs are as follows.

- Acknowledging Diversity as a Divine Plan
- Upholding Tawhid and Strengthening Faith
- Engaging in Patience and Perseverance
- Building Relationships Based on Good Character
- Promoting Justice and Fairness

4.1. Acknowledging Diversity as a Divine Plan

The Quran acknowledges diversity as a deliberate part of Allah's creation. It states: "O mankind, we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you".¹⁸

In this short verse, Allah Ta'ala addressed all human beings and explained three very important principled facts:

One is that you all have the same origin, from one man and one woman your entire species has come into being, and all your races found in the world today are the branches of a primitive race that was born from a mother and a mother. It started with a father. Secondly, despite being one in origin, it was a natural thing for you to be divided into nations and tribes. All human beings on the whole earth could not have one family. As the generation grew, it was inevitable that numerous families would be formed and then tribes and nations would emerge from the families. Thirdly, if there is and can be any basis of excellence and superiority between man

and man, it is only moral excellence. All human beings are equal by birth, because they have one creator, the same substance of birth, and the same mode of birth, and they all trace back to the same mother and father. In addition, the birth of a person in a particular country, nation, or community is a matter of coincidence, in which there is no interference of his own will and choice and his efforts. There is no reasonable reason why anyone should have superiority over anyone else in this regard. The main thing that makes a person superior to others is that he is more God-fearing than others, avoids evil, and follows the path of goodness and purity. Such a man, whether he belongs to any race, any nation, or any country, is valuable because of his personal qualities.

This verse emphasizes the significance of mutual understanding and respect. Diversity is an opportunity for debate and collaboration, not an obstacle. Classical scholars such as Imam Al-Qurtubi view this verse as an exhortation for humility and the cultivation of healthy relationships. For Muslims residing as minorities, embracing variety enables them to embody the Quranic principle of coexistence. By interacting with people politely and pursuing common ground, they can foster shared human values and harmonious relationships.

4.2. Upholding Tawhid and Strengthening Faith

Steadfastness in faith is essential for Muslims in minority contexts, where challenges to religious identity may emerge. The Quran advises:

*And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided.*¹⁹

The rope of Allah signifies His religion, characterized as a rope because of its role as the connection that forges the relationship between believers and Allah, while also uniting all believers collectively. Organises a gathering. Maintaining the integrity of this bond signifies that the paramount concern for Muslims is "religion"; they are invested in it and should endeavor to uphold it while fostering collaboration among themselves to further its cause. When Muslims diverge from the fundamental tenets of their faith and the principles of its foundation, focussing instead on minutiae and peripheral issues, they will inevitably experience the same divisions and discord that occurred before to the Prophets (peace be upon them). He has misdirected the nations from their fundamental purpose of existence, causing them to endure suffering in both this world and the afterlife.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared that prayer was the basis of faith:

*The first thing that the slave will be called to account for on the Day of Judgment is the prayer. If it is sound, then the rest of his deeds will be sound.*²⁰

Muslims are stimulated to worship and develop strong communities and seek Islamic knowledge to enhance and maintain this relationship with God.

4.3. Engaging in Patience and Perseverance

Patience (*sabr*) is a defining characteristic of the early Muslim community, particularly during their minority status in Makkah. The Quran reminds believers:

*"O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient."*²¹

Following his appointment to the Imamate, essential directives are now being communicated to this Ummah. Primarily, they are cautioned that this is not a path of ease. This is a significant and perilous responsibility, fraught with various hardships, severe trials, and inevitable losses. However, if you confront these challenges with patience, resilience, determination, and autonomy, you will progress on the path of God, and blessings will be bestowed upon you.

4.4. Trials are seen as a test of faith:

*And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient."*²²

Patience is not passive endurance but active reliance on Allah, combined with hope and striving for justice. The Prophet (peace be upon him) exemplified this during the Makkan period by responding to hostility with wisdom and forbearance.

4.5. Building Relationships Based on Good Character

The Quran and Sunnah repeatedly emphasize the importance of good character and ethical behavior. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

*The most beloved of you to Allah is the one who is best in character."*²³

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "On the Day of Resurrection, there will be nothing heavier than good conduct on the table of a believer, and Allah hates indecency and bad language."²⁴

Muslims are urged to act with kindness and justice even toward those who misunderstand or oppose them. The Quran states:

*Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life."*²⁵

This verse clarifies the misconceptions held by short-sighted and impatient individuals from both Muslim and non-Muslim groups who believe that embracing

truth, honesty, and piety will determine a person's fate in the hereafter, regardless of other factors. His universe must be completely disrupted. In reply to them, Allah asserts that this notion of yours is erroneous. With the appropriate mindset, both the hereafter and the present world are shaped. Individuals who are genuinely honest, virtuous, and principled tend to experience a superior worldly existence compared to those who are deceitful and malevolent. Their impeccable character bestows upon them a reputation and genuine honor that others lack. The untainted and genuine success they achieve is inaccessible to individuals whose every accomplishment stems from unethical and corrupt practices. Although they reside in Buria, the miscreants in the vicinity cannot attain even a modicum of heart contentment or moral tranquility.

Acts of kindness, transparency, and ethical conduct not only foster mutual respect but also dispel misconceptions about Islam.

4.6. Promoting Justice and Fairness

Justice is a universal value in Islam. The Quran commands:

*O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives.*²⁶

This verse stressed that He asserted that he should not only pursue the road of justice but also embody it. Your responsibility is not merely to administer justice but to champion its cause. Ensure the eradication of injustice and the establishment of justice in its stead. Your role as a believer is to provide the necessary support for the establishment of justice.

Muslims in minority contexts are called to advocate for justice within their communities, regardless of ethnicity or faith. This includes supporting marginalized groups, standing against oppression, and upholding the rights of all individuals.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or is oppressed." When asked how to help an oppressor, he replied: *"Restrain him from committing oppression. That will be your help to him."*²⁷

5. Practical Strategies for Muslim Minorities

Practical strategies for Muslim minorities encompass proactive measures that enable individuals to uphold their faith while actively participating in society. These approaches emphasize the preservation of religious identity, adherence to local laws, and meaningful engagement in community life. By drawing on Islamic principles

and jurisprudence, Muslims can navigate societal challenges while fostering peaceful coexistence, contributing to social well-being, and adapting to diverse cultural environments.

These following principles or strategies individuals may engage to live in society

- Practicing Da'wah Through Actions
- Balancing Integration and Identity
- Fostering Community Support
- Responding to Hostility with Wisdom Navigating Political and Legal Systems
- Educating the Next Generation

5.1. Practicing Da'wah Through Actions

The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised:

*Make things easy, do not make things difficult; give glad tidings, and do not scare people away.*²⁸

Indeed, personal exemplification through both speech and conduct constitutes the most potent approach for effective Dawah. Muslims residing as a minority can engage in da'wah (inviting others to Islam) by demonstrating exemplary conduct. Through contributions to societal welfare, participation in volunteer activities, and the demonstration of compassion, Muslims can motivate others and exemplify the beauty of Islam. This indicates that individuals interacting with a Muslim person perceive them as helpful, kind, polite, compassionate, respectful, supportive, truthful, trustworthy, honest, responsible, reliable, and sincere.

5.2. Balancing Integration and Identity

Muslims are encouraged to actively contribute to the societies in which they live while preserving their Islamic identity. The story of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him) illustrates this balance. Serving as a minister in a non-Muslim society, he maintained his faith while governing with justice. Muslims today can follow this example by engaging in civic life, participating in constructive dialogue, and promoting positive change, all while adhering to Islamic values.

5.3. Fostering Community Support

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of community:

*The believers are like one body; if one part of the body hurts, the rest of the body will also suffer.*²⁹

Ibn Umar reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, stated, “The individuals most cherished by Allah are those who provide the greatest benefit to others.” The most cherished act in the eyes of Allah is to bring joy to Muslims, alleviate their distress, cancel their debt, or satisfy their hunger. Walking with a brother to address a need is more cherished by me than secluding myself in this mosque in Medina for a month. He who suppresses his anger, Allah will obscure his shortcomings. Whoever restrains his anger, despite having the capacity to express it, will have his heart safeguarded by Allah on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever assists his brother in fulfilling a need until it is accomplished, Allah Almighty will ensure his stability on the bridge on the day when the foundations tremble.³⁰

Muslim minority communities should establish institutions such as mosques and schools to provide spiritual, social, and economic support. These centers act as hubs for education, worship, and community service.

5.4. Responding to Hostility with Wisdom

The Quran advises:

*Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.*³¹

It is said that one should not combat evil with mere good deeds, but rather with exemplary good deeds of the highest quality. The utmost virtue is to exhibit kindness towards an individual who has wronged you when the opportunity arises.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) consistently demonstrated this principle, forgiving his oppressors and treating them with dignity. Muslims are encouraged to respond to hostility with patience and wisdom, transforming enmity into friendship.

5.5. Navigating Political and Legal Systems

Muslims are advised to fulfill their commitments and respect the laws of the land: *And fulfill [every] commitment. Indeed, the commitment is ever [that about which one will be] questioned.*³²

This was not merely a moral directive; thereafter, with the establishment of the Islamic government, both administrative and legal actions were implemented to safeguard the rights of orphans, the specifics of which are documented in the texts of hadith and jurisprudence. This overarching principle asserts that the Islamic state

safeguards the interests of all citizens who are incapable of protecting their interests. The pronouncement of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) signifies this orientation, serving as the foundation for a comprehensive chapter of Islamic jurisprudence.

Participation in political and legal systems, when done with care and integrity, allows Muslims to advocate for policies aligned with justice and equity.

5.6. Educating the Next Generation

Raising children with strong Islamic values is a priority for Muslim minorities. The Quran records Luqman's advice to his son:

*O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you.*³³

An individual is also a virtuous person. There is an implicit suggestion that whoever undertakes the responsibility of directing and stopping evil will always experience sorrow. Society distances itself from such an individual, while the latter endures many forms of torment. Conversely, it may also signify a labour of considerable bravery. Advocating for societal reform and confronting its challenges is not solely the responsibility of the faint-hearted. This endeavor necessitates considerable emotional and intellectual investment.

Parents and community leaders must ensure that children are equipped with the knowledge and confidence to maintain their Islamic identity.

6. The Prophetic Model of Living as a Minority

The life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provides numerous lessons for Muslims living as a minority. In the initial years of Makkah, the Prophet and his adherents encountered severe persecution. Notwithstanding this, the Prophet reacted with forbearance, clemency, and steadfast dedication to his purpose. He instructed his friends to persist, maintain unity, and have faith in Allah's design. Upon the Prophet's (peace be upon him) migration to Madinah, he instituted the Charter of Madinah, a seminal document delineating the rights and obligations of the many populations residing there, encompassing Muslims, Jews, and pagans. This charter served as a framework for cohabitation, guaranteeing equitable treatment for all communities and the liberty to practice their beliefs.³⁴

The Prophet's engagements with non-Muslims were characterized by benevolence, fairness, and compassion. A notable instance is his handling of a Jewish neighbor who often discarded refuse in his vicinity. Upon observing the neighbor's absence one day, the Prophet visited to ascertain his well-being. This act of benevolence

made a profound impact, demonstrating the transformational influence of virtuous character.

6.1. Application of the Lessons from the Hijrah to Abyssinia for Contemporary Muslim Minorities

Muslims living in non-Muslim majority societies can emulate the early Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia, facilitating essential harmonious coexistence and assimilation, thereby fostering an environment where Muslim minorities can effectively contribute to Western societies. This emulation is particularly applicable in contemporary contexts, especially in nations at peace with Muslims. It serves as a practical avenue for da‘wah, while hostility and bigotry alienate individuals from Islam and perpetuate a distorted perception of this esteemed religion. The migration to Abyssinia exemplifies the profound commitment of Muslims to their faith, as they were willing to forfeit their lives and possessions to protect the interests of Islam.³⁵

6.2. According to Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah (2019), lessons for contemporary Muslim minorities include:

- a.** Muslim minorities must understand appropriate conduct in various contexts and learn to engage with non-Muslims in a manner that invites curiosity about Islam and fosters respect for Muslims, akin to Ja‘far bin Abu Talib's interaction with Negus;
- b.** Muslim minorities should express gratitude and appreciation, particularly towards those who coexist peacefully with them. This will mitigate hostility towards Islam and Muslims from non-Muslims.
- c.** Muslim minorities should demonstrate their sense of responsibility towards their host country, akin to the Muslim migrants to Abyssinia who were compelled to join the army of Negus and fight for him;
- d.** Muslim minorities should refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of their hosts, except to provide assistance, aid, and support;
- e.** They should never neglect to express gratitude to their hosts;
- f.** Muslim minorities can serve as exemplary representatives of their faith if they diligently practice it and adhere to its principles as articulated in the Holy Quran and by the Prophet (peace be upon him).³⁶

6.3. Al-Sulabi (2000) identified several lessons from the hijrah to Abyssinia pertinent to the modern Muslim minority.

- a.** Muslim minority may facilitate the movement of their members for the sake of da‘wah and establish residence to systematically promote Islam.
- b.** They are permitted to marry at their place of migration to strengthen relationships.
- c.** It clarified that Islam has a connection with Christianity;
- d.** Minorities should exercise caution in selecting migration locations; for instance, Muslim migrants opted for Abyssinia due to its status as a trade hub for their adversaries.
- e.** It is preferable to migrate to a territory where the predominant religion aligns more closely with Islam, such as Abyssinia, a Christian land that is nearer to Islam, rather than to a land of idolaters;
- f.** Leaders ought to follow the Prophet S.A.W.'s demeanor, characterized by his benevolence towards his followers, his forbearance, and his affection for their comfort and tranquility, by guiding them to a secure environment.³⁷

7. Insights from Classical Scholars on Living as a Minority

Islamic scholars have historically addressed the challenges of living as a Muslim minority, providing jurisprudential and ethical guidance. Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Al-Ghazali, and IbnTaymiyyah offered important insights regarding religious tolerance, justice, and ethical conduct. Their perspectives continue to provide valuable frameworks for Muslims navigating life in diverse societies.

7.1. Imam Abu Hanifa

Imam Abu Hanifa, born in Kufa (present-day Iraq), established the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, which continues to be one of the most widely adhered to Islamic legal systems today. He was recognized for his rationalist methodology in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), prioritizing reasoning, analogical reasoning (qiyas), and public welfare (maslaha). His philosophical framework emerged as the preeminent legal system throughout the Ottoman Empire, Mughal India, and Central Asia, illustrating its pragmatic adaptability to various communities, even those with Muslim minorities.³⁸

Permissibility of Residing Under Non-Muslim Governance

Imam Abu Hanifa decreed that Muslims may reside under non-Muslim authority if they can freely exercise their religion. His *ijtihad* was predicated on Quranic principles of religious freedom (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:256).

The Prophet's emigration to Abyssinia, where Muslims resided under a Christian monarch. This decision was pivotal for Muslim minorities in areas such as Persia, Byzantium, and subsequently, colonial countries.³⁹

Legal Adaptability and Societal Integration

Abu Hanifa gave powers to contracts and transactions among Muslim and non-Muslims, Muslims, giving any economic partnerships so long as they did not include interest (*riba*) and banned goods. He allowed prayer behind a non-Muslim monarch if it maintained social peace. Such teachings encourage Muslims to assimilate and retain their religious beliefs, be involved in ethical economic activities, and obey the laws of the state; in this regard, his jurisprudence would be particularly relevant for the modern Muslim minority.

7.2. Imam Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE): Ethics and Inner Faith

Imam Al-Ghazali, referred to as "*Hujjat al-Islam*" (The Proof of Islam), was a distinguished scholar in theology, philosophy, and Sufism. His most renowned work, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of Religious Sciences), synthesizes Islamic jurisprudence, ethics, and spirituality.⁴⁰

Emphasizing Inner Faith Over External Conformity

Al-Ghazali stated that genuine religion is rooted in the heart and acts, rather than in superficial appearances. He encouraged Muslims in minority contexts to emphasize their own spirituality and moral conduct while engaging with intricate communities.

Ethical Behavior Towards Non-Muslims

He emphasized justice and benevolence in interfaith interactions, stating: "Allah does not prohibit you from being virtuous and equitable towards those who have not engaged in conflict with you due to religion."⁴¹ Al-Ghazali implemented this idea in commerce, administration, and social relations, promoting integrity and virtuous conduct in relationships with non-Muslims.⁴²

Harmonizing Spiritual and Temporal Obligations

He warned against rampant materialism while underscoring the necessity of worldly involvement. He counseled Muslims to maintain equilibrium in: Worship (*ibadah*),

Upholding daily prayers and rites, Social Responsibilities, and Participating in ethical labor and education.⁴³ His focus on spiritual integrity, ethical behavior, and equilibrium offers pragmatic direction for Muslims in secular environments.

8. Conclusion

This study illustrates that Muslims residing as minorities may effectively maneuver their social, political, and religious contexts while preserving their faith and making significant contributions to society. Based on Quranic principles, the Sunnah, traditional Islamic scholarship, and modern perspectives, it is clear that Islam offers a flexible yet robust framework for interacting with other communities that promotes justice, ethical behavior, and coexistence. The historical experiences of Muslims in Al-Andalus and the Ottoman Empire exemplify significant examples of coexistence, wherein Muslims, Christians, and Jews flourished collectively under Islamic rule. These examples demonstrate how religious tolerance, intellectual cooperation, and equitable government can foster prosperous, multicultural civilizations. Nevertheless, they emphasize that the erosion of these principles may lead to fragmentation, oppression, and social disintegration. From a jurisprudential standpoint, Imam Abu Hanifa, and Imam Al-Ghazali each offered significant insights on Muslim engagement with non-Muslim societies. Imam Abu Hanifa permitted Muslims to reside under non-Muslim governance, contingent upon their ability to practice their religion, so underscoring legal flexibility. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of inner religion and ethical behavior, encouraging Muslims to prioritize spirituality while appropriately interacting with the world.

Ultimately, the insights derived from Islamic history, classical jurisprudence, and modern scholarship underscore that Muslims in minority contexts should maintain their faith with perseverance, equity, and sagacity while seeking constructive social interaction and reciprocal understanding with others. By embracing these principles, people can promote harmony, eliminate misconceptions, and contribute to a fair and inclusive society.

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