Abstract

This article seeks to explain the concept of the dialogue of Ḥikma as a Qur'anic principle in developing harmony in Muslim–non-Muslim relations. Living together harmoniously is essential in a community made up of a myriad of cultures and religions. Efforts to create harmony can be realized through the dialogue of Ḥikma and by inculcating it as the culture in daily life interaction. This is truly essential in the context of mixed-faith families. In order to explore how the dialogue of Ḥikma can be applied in Muslim–non-Muslim relations, this article examines the experience of Muslim converts living together with their non-Muslim families of origin. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with selected Muslim converts from a variety of cultural backgrounds, living in the area of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The results indicate that Muslim converts share similar experiences in applying the dialogue of Ḥikma as a mechanism for solving family problem arising as a result of conversion to Islam.
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This article seeks to explain the concept of the dialogue of Ḥikma as a qur'anic principle in developing harmony in Muslim–non-Muslim relations. Living together harmoniously is essential in a community made up of a myriad of cultures and religions. Efforts to create harmony can be realized through the dialogue of Ḥikma and by inculcating it as the culture in daily life interaction. This is truly essential in the context of mixed-faith families. In order to explore how the dialogue of Ḥikma can be applied in Muslim–non-Muslim relations, this article examines the experience of Muslim converts living together with their non-Muslim families of origin. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with selected Muslim converts from a variety of cultural backgrounds, living in the area of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The results indicate that Muslim converts share similar experiences in applying the dialogue of Ḥikma as a mechanism for solving family problem arising as a result of conversion to Islam.
The term “Muslim–non-Muslim relations” is not very different in meaning from “inter-faith relations.” The former is more specific, referring to relations between the people who practise different religions, while the latter, being more general, also refers to relations between different religious teachings. The concept of Muslim–non-Muslim relations basically refers to the historical experience of people of different religions, whether in the trilogy of Jewish–Christian–Muslim relations or in bilateral relations, be it Muslim–Jewish or Muslim–Christian. Historically, Muslim–Christian relations took place in the form of mutual influence, cooperation and confrontation (Goddard 2007; Goddard, H. 2001. *A History of Christian–Muslim Relations*, Chicago, IL: New Amsterdam Books).


View all references. Efforts to promote Muslim–Christian understanding and cooperation are well underway. One recent development that proves the seriousness of these efforts is the document *A Common Word between Us and You*, signed on October 13, 2007 by representatives of Sunni and Shi‘a Islam and sent to Christian leaders. This document was created through the initiative of the Royal Al Al-Bait Institute for Islamic Thought, based in Amman, Jordan, to attest to the fact that, though differences exist, the basis for religious understanding and cooperation is essential for living together (Haddad and Smith 2009). Haddad, Y. Y. and Smith, J. I. 2009. The Quest for a Common Word: Initial Christian Responses to Muslim Initiative. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 20(4): 369–388. (doi:10.1080/09596410903194852) [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®]

View all references. Muslim–Christian relations are not only important in promoting universal peace. They are also significantly relevant in building Malaysian national unity. In relation to the situation of Sabah as a multi-religious state in the East Malaysia island of Borneo, Christianity is not only accommodated as the second most widespread religion after Islam, but is also clearly involved in the presence of both religions within one family. This situation results in certain varieties of approach in the performance of religious practices, which demands tolerance between members of the two sides of the family. This article will feature the experience of Muslim converts or new Muslims in Sabah when applying the dialogue of *ḥikma* as an approach to maintaining family ties. This kind of situation can be best illustrated through the examples of several case studies of harmonious living in mixed-faith families in Sabah.

The idealism of dialogue

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View all references, “many Christians today still have a very restricted idea” of what the Second Vatican Council (1965) meant by the term “dialogue.” He goes on: In a sense, the term “dialogue” is misleading, because it seems to imply that what Christians should be doing is mainly *talking* to people of other faiths. Many conceive of dialogue as formal interreligious gatherings where religious leaders make long speeches, or else as round-table discussions among scholars and theological experts of various faiths. However, Thomas Michel argues that the Church’s actual teaching about dialogue is intended to be much broader, promoting new life encounters with followers of other religions in various ways. In his encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, Pope John Paul II (1990). *Redemptoris missio*. Accessed January 18, 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html

View all references, par. 57 shows just how broad a compass dialogue embraces: A vast field lies open to dialogue, which can assume many forms and expressions: from exchanges between experts in religious traditions or official representatives of those traditions to cooperation for integral development and the safeguarding of religious values; and from a sharing of their respective spiritual experiences to the so-called “dialogue of life,” through which believers of different religions bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society.

Michel continues: In documents produced by the Vatican, these forms or expressions of dialogue have been generally elaborated as four types of interreligious encounter: the dialogue of life; action; theological exchange; and the sharing of religious experience. What is involved here are various dimensions of life pertaining to the element of sharing with the followers of other religions. It is a way of living with others that involves interaction at the levels of *being* (dialogue of life), *doing* (cooperation on social issues), *thinking* (study, discussion of theological issues), and *reflecting* (sharing of religious experience) on one’s own experience of the Divine. In the Church’s vision of life...
shared by Christians and the followers of other religions, talking or discussion plays a role, as it does in all forms of human life, but discussion must not dominate, nor must the shared life referred to by the term “dialogue” be limited by or reduced to formal occasions and deliberations.

In 1979, the Asian bishops sought to put the emphasis on dialogue as it should be practised by ordinary Christians (that is, by “non-experts”). Guided by a pastoral awareness that the primary hearers toward whom Church teaching is directed are not theologians but rather Christian believers living in day-to-day contact with followers of other religions, the Asian bishops gave priority to the “dialogue of life,” which they said was “the most essential aspect of dialogue.” According to the Asian bishops, the dialogue of life occurs when:

“Each gives witness to the other concerning the values they have found in their faith, and through the daily practice of brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality, each show themselves to be a God-fearing neighbor. The true Christian and [their neighbors of other faiths] offer to a busy world values arising from God’s message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear his/her non-Muslim family of origin. This study will therefore elaborate further on the concept of the dialogue of ikma and assess the extent to which it can be applied to generate harmony in new Muslim and non-Muslim family relations.

The concept of the dialogue of ikma

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The term “dialogue of ikma” arises from two concepts – “dialogue” and “ikma” (“wisdom”), and can be understood by explaining each word separately and analysing the meaning of the term formed by combining them. Shafiq and Nimer (2007), refer to dialogues between individuals or groups of people. However, Shehu (2008, 2008). Nostra Aetate and Inter-religious Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia Press.

View all references explain that the Arabic term literally nearest in meaning to “dialogue” is yuḥāwīr (Q 16.34, 37; 58.1), which refers to dialogues between individuals or groups of people. However, Shehu (2008). Nostra Aetate and Inter-religious Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia Press.

View all references explain that the term yuḥāwīr in Q16.34, 37 is related to another term – ḫāşīr dīnī (“religious dialogue”) – which carries with it the sense that interfaith dialogues must be understood to use suitable methodologies. The Qur’an explains that dialogues must be built on the basis of amicable conversation without bias, in order that other parties may be understood. In Q58.1, the word ḫāşīr also puts emphasis on amicable and friendly conversation, which must be held with everyone regardless of gender or status. Shehu (2008). Nostra Aetate and Inter-religious Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia Press.

View all references provides an explanation of interfaith dialogue according to the Qur’an, as follows:

Through the terminological usage and contextual usage, the Qur’anic verses promote the core principles for fruitful and amicable inter-religious conversation or dialogues between Muslims and others. It is for the sake of introducing the Message of al-Islam to this Othersness that Muslims must develop a sense of inclusive understanding of the pure message conveyed by the Qur’anic verses related to such dialogue. (112) Another term in the Qur’an that is synonymous with dialogue is jīdāl (Q29.46, 16.125), which, more precisely, literally means debate to determine truth. Shehu (2008). Nostra Aetate and Inter-religious Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia Press.

View all references elucidates that jīdāl is used in legal terminology to support evidence. However, the Qur’an also uses this term to describe amicable conversation. Shehu concludes that debates between two parties can be both firm and amicable, as envisaged by the Qur’anic phrase jādīthum bi-l-lāthī hiya aḥṣan (“argue with them in ways that are best” [Q 16.125]).

The word jīdāl, which appears 29 times in the Qur’an, is used in the context of debates on religious issues regarding theology as well as societal matters faced by people of religion. One of these social issues or current problems involving people of religion in Malaysia revolves around religious conversions. In this matter, Islam strictly forbids any Muslim, whether a born Muslim or a new Muslim, to convert from Islam to another religion. However, firmness in dialogue according to the guidelines provided by Islam, must be bi-al-ḥusn (“in an amicable manner”) or, bi-l-lāthī hiya aḥṣan (Q16.125), as stated above, indicating that the better or best approach and attitude lies in showing affection and respect for others.

The terms ḫāşīr and jīdāl both indicate a method of dialogue that is open, where Muslims, as participants, are motivated to carry on a discourse based on divine values. They are taught how to have dialogues in a wise, gentle manner, without using force and respecting the beliefs of the other party. A number of principles can be found in this method, which are ikma (“wisdom”), al-maw’īza ḥusana (“good teaching”) and bi-al-ḥusn al-jīdāl (“through the best dialogue”) (Hasan 2001).


View all references. Explanations for each of these principles are provided by Galigo (2006, Galigo, S. B. A. 2006. Anjakan paradigma dakwah dalam menghadipe pelampaugama, Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia Press.

www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09596410.2013.772328
The importance of the dialogue of Ḥikma in Muslim–non-Muslim relations

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The dialogue of Ḥikma is capable of generating harmony in Muslim—non-Muslim relations because the Ḥikma concept offers the best method for conveying the message of Islam to certain selected target groups. This may take place spontaneously in daily life interaction, whether in the workplace, study area or local neighbourhood. It is a method for clarifying misunderstandings, misconceptions and inaccurate interpretations about Islam. This is very relevant to the problems faced by a new Muslim who chooses to become Muslim either for relational reasons (getting married, befriending other Muslim) or rational reasons (self-study or self-investigation).

The most common problem faced by new Muslims in Malaysia arises in terms of objections, prejudice and persecution from his own ethnic group and those who cannot understand Islam, as well as from non-practising Muslims. In the survey conducted by Abdullah and Shukri (2008), Abdullah, O @ Leng C. H. and Shukri, A. S. M. 2008. Muslim Converts in Malaysia: The Problem of Cultural Adjustment, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute University of Malaysia.

View all references) on 200 converts in Selangor (Peninsular Malaysia), it was found that 65% of fathers, 55% of mothers, 65% of brothers and 65% of sisters were against the family member's conversion to Islam. The survey showed that, generally speaking, the reason for rejection was that non-Muslim families perceived Islam as a religion that is not highly esteemed. In addition, they did not appreciate that the new Muslims had embraced a new faith but thought of it as the “Malay-religion.” Usually, after a marriage between a Muslim and a new convert to Islam, the couple would live in the Malay (i.e. Muslim) area, as the non-Muslim family would generally not let the new convert to stay with them because of the differences in culture, customs and value systems. New Muslims cannot venerate idols or eat pork and must pray five times a day, and this makes it difficult for them to stay in the non-Muslim home. Abdullah and Shukri (2008), Abdullah, O @ Leng C. H. and Shukri, A. S. M. 2008. Muslim Converts in Malaysia: The Problem of Cultural Adjustment, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute University of Malaysia.

View all references) also argue that a new Muslim always feels that he is marginalized, as he is not able to fit into the society of the community of his previous religion and cannot easily integrate into the new Malay community either. His religion is no longer that of his own ethnic group but he has also become just a new member in the Islamic umma. Abdullah and Shukri (2008), Abdullah, O @ Leng C. H. and Shukri, A. S. M. 2008. Muslim Converts in Malaysia: The Problem of Cultural Adjustment, Kuala Lumpur: International Institute University of Malaysia.

View all references) further explain that there are differences between conversion to Islam and conversion to any other religion, including that conversion to Islam in Malaysia is more controversial than conversion to other religions. Furthermore, difficulty in distinguishing between the true tenets of a religion and the behaviour of adherents who do not fully understand it is one reason for misunderstanding and misconception in Muslim—non-Muslim relations in Malaysia. For example, non-Muslims may see Islam as a religion that belongs exclusively to the Malays and regard Malay culture and customs, as well as the behaviour of Malays, as a depiction of the real teaching of Islam. Abdullah and Chuah (2003), Abdullah, M. S. Y., and O. A. Chuah. 2003. “The Problems of Mu'allaf in Malaysia.” Jurnal Islamiyyat 24 (Malaysia National University, Bangi): 65-84

View all references) state in their study that someone who converts to Islam must be fluent in Bahasa Malaysia, wear traditional Malay clothes, and practise the Malay culture. This idea has spread and developed into an inherited understanding on the part of some non-Muslims who are involved in the conversion of their family members to Islam. At the same time, there are Muslims who do not fully practise Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet s.a.w. Abdullah and Chuah (2003), Abdullah, M. S. Y., and O. A. Chuah. 2003. “The Problems of Mu'allaf in Malaysia.” Jurnal Islamiyyat 24 (Malaysia National University, Bangi): 65-84

View all references) explain through their research that new Muslim converts are often confused by behaviours and attitudes of Malay Muslims that do not project the true image and nature of Islam and are even sometimes worse than those of non-Muslims, such as free association between members of the opposite sex, which are clearly against what is allowed in Islam, and lead to social problems. This adds to misconceptions about Islam and is a leading factor in why non-Muslims reject conversion to Islam; they feel that converting to Islam brings neither a added benefit nor positive change. The converts in our study also noted that one of the main issues in Muslim—non-Muslim relations is how to live harmoniously with their family of origin who follow different religions. This is because non-Muslim family members may not only possess a limited understanding of the teachings of Islam, but may also be worried about the change of identity of their newly converted family member. They find the changed lifestyle of their Muslim family member strange and unusual. The daily routine that they once shared as a family is now limited by Islamic laws, about which they have little understanding, such as eating halal food, covering the ʿawra, performing Salāt, fasting in Ramadan, reciting the Qur'an and many other things. They consider these practices odd and a worrying and drastic change.

The harmony in the family becomes increasingly affected when the efforts of converts to become good, practising Muslims while living together with the family are considered as attempts to influence the beliefs of the non-Muslim members. As a result, they dislike and are greatly concerned about the presence of Muslim converts in the family, who are now separated by their religious beliefs and practices. Sometimes it reaches a point where they see their Muslim members as a threat to the family. As a result, most Muslim converts find it difficult to present the news of their conversion to their family, because many non-Muslim family members feel dissatisfied, doubtful, worried and prejudiced towards their Muslim kin who have begun to lead lives different from those to which they were accustomed.

In this situation, most non-Muslim families refuse to accept the conversion of one of their own to Islam, to the extent that it puts a strain on their family relationships. This is when dialogues are required in order to clarify misunderstandings and the changes that take place as a result of conversion to Islam, so that non-Muslim family members can accept the decision to convert to Islam, just as they would regard to conversion to any other religion. Even though total acceptance would be difficult for non-Muslims due to the Islamic system and way of life, which are considered to be strict, dialogues make it possible to rectify family relations by providing explanations and clarifications directly or through an interface. It is a method for clarifying misunderstandings, reconciling in family relationships that have been affected by confusion and doubt about the conversion of family members to Islam. In truth, the problems faced by families with members who adhere to different religions are caused by their different views on religion, leading to problems that require mutual understanding and a high level of tolerance in many matters. In view of these problems, a dialogue of Ḥikma approach is necessary for explaining misunderstandings or misconceptions about the religious boundaries and obligations in Islam, without making any distinctions between born Muslims and Muslim converts or new Muslims. The process of acculturating dialogues into Muslim—non-Muslim relations in Malaysia must be carried out with Ḥikma (wisdom) and the ethics of dialogue outlined by Islam. Bakar, Baharuddin, and Ahmad (2009), Bakar, O., Baharuddin, A. and Ahmad, eds, Z. 2009.
View all references) explain that the ethics of dialogue encourage agreeing to disagree, respecting differences, appreciating the inability to accept other people's opinions, sincerity, sympathy, empathy, and patience. Abdullah and Rahman (2007a, 2007b, 2014) describe the conditions for dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims as follows: Muslims i) must be confident that Islam is the true religion; ii) cannot coerce others to accept Islam in any way but instead must educate and explain to others; iii) work hard towards calling others to Islam by using Ḥikma, maw’iz, iṣrā, ḥusnā, and jadal in a good way; iv) must be aware of their responsibility to spread the teachings of Islam and the results that would come of it; v) must be responsible in making sure that the true nature and implementation of Islam be brought to light in the best possible way. (45)

On the other hand, they suggest that non-Muslims i) be aware that should they think Islam is not the true religion, they must provide proof for this thought. If they fail to do so, they must try to understand this religion though they choose not to adhere to it; ii) be fair, in that if Islam does not force people to be Muslims, they too must not coerce Muslim converts to little or demean the status of and practices in Islam, even in the name of pluralism, liberalism, religious unity or others; iii) be able to differentiate between the nature of Islam as a protected religion of truth and the current reality of some Muslims who are still searching for the truth in Islam. Meanwhile, both parties should i) hold discussions on the teachings of their respective religions in a peaceful, fair, objective and prudent manner; ii) be ready to honestly and sincerely accept and acknowledge the truth when they have reached a mutual agreement on a particular argument; iii) look at their mutual friends, both from their own religion or other religions as “truth seekers,” and must be ready to give them guidance with Ḥikma. (30–32)

They affirm that dialogues in Islam are not meant to force others to accept Islam. Instead, a dialogue of Ḥikma is used to deliver the message of Islam so that it can be perceived in the correct way. In other words, any deviations that are meant to influence Muslims in any way must be clarified through the Ḥikma approach so that people may understand the true nature of Islam. Doing this through the application of dialogue is especially important for those who have newly converted. This is because their change in faith will lead new Muslims to explain the difference between their former religion and new religion (Islam) to their non-Muslim families, who in general lack understanding and are confused between the real nature of Islam and what Muslims do. This is why dialogues play an important role in the daily interactions of new Muslims with non-Muslims.

The application of the dialogue of Ḥikma by new Muslims in Sabah

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The dialogue of Ḥikma is an approach to communication that may be used by new Muslims to build harmonious relations with non-Muslims. In other words, it can be used as a mechanism for reconciliation in handling family problems that result from conversion to Islam by a family member. The dialogue of Ḥikma can also function as a method of da’wa in spreading the teachings of Islam, both verbally and non-verbally, to people who have yet to understand Islam. This means that, apart from being able to deliver convincing and reasonable arguments, Muslim converts must also be able to deliver da’wa through non-verbal means of communication, such as by displaying good behaviour, finding ways to attract and console family members and being intelligent in portraying the true way of life based on the guidelines provided by Islam.

The state of Sabah was chosen as a study area since it is a Malaysian state that is not only diverse in its multi-religious society, but also typically known as having the highest number of new Muslims. Historically, Sabah underwent mass conversion to Islam among people of no religion in remote areas in the late 1960s until 1972 and this historical experience contributed significantly to the fact that Sabah became the state with the highest number of new Muslims. The situation is not much different today, when Sabah still records a very high rate of conversion to Islam through the process of inter-marriage. In Malaysia, inter-marriage does not mean the marriage of a Muslim to a non-Muslim. Rather, it refers to the marriage of a Muslim to a Muslim convert because a non-Muslim can only marry a Muslim after converting to Islam.

In order to understand how the dialogue of Ḥikma is applied by new Muslims, this study used in-depth interviews with selected participants from around the Kota Kinabalu area. The collection of data involved converts from various ethnic groups and districts/states. The participants can thus be divided into two categories. The first includes converts from the Kadazandusun, Murut, Rungus, Sino and Chinese ethnic groups in Sabah. The second includes Chinese, Indian and Iban new Muslims from Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak. The results of the interviews are displayed through narrative-description in verbatim-transcriptions, as shown below. Some parts of interviews that elicited answers in the Malay language have been translated into English for convenience: i) The other day, my mother cried because she hoped that I would take care of her, father and the house. She said, “You are our only hope, if you embrace Islam, who will take care of me?” I said, “I’m not going anywhere, you are still my responsibility, how could I leave you?” But mother kept on crying. I felt that I had to prove my words to be true. Every month I would go home and send money. Mother cried for a week, but I often called and continued my work as usual.

See next page
This dialogue can be seen as a dimension of *ḥikma*, whereby the daughter spoke politely to her mother and at the same time fulfilled her role as a dutiful daughter. *Ḥikma* was applied in this situation in the sense of being responsible in practising Islam as a way of life. By respecting her mother, the daughter demonstrated the most important aspect of Islam mentioned in the Qur’an and Prophetic tradition. In this way, the dialogue of *ḥikma* as applied by Muslim converts is teaching followers of other religions by the converts’ attitudes and behaviour.

(ii) My parents were not angry, but they were quite surprised about my decision, so I explained how Christians believe in Jesus and how Islam does not depict Jesus in any bad way and that I didn’t think it was wrong for Christians to become Muslim. (Source: Interview conducted on October 25, 2008 at Teratak Fitrah class, Sembulan, Kadsan/L-Ppr-Resp13)

This dialogue explains the methodology of the convert using *ḥikma* by not condemning her parents’ Christian religion and not trying to force her mother to accept Islam. As part of bridging, the daughter brought up the similarities between the two religions, which is considered the most essential aspect in interfaith dialogue. In Islam, by practising *ḥikma* in interfaith dialogue, one must not force an adherent of another religion to convert. Rather explaining the beauty of Islam becomes a platform for building a bridge to harmonious living together.

(iii) I told my family what is good about Islam – for example in terms of people. There are people who get drunk, have family problems, have no principles, have jobs but seem like they don’t, who are always absent because they’re drunk, and people who hit their wives. I told them that the religion that could be made an example of is Islam.

If you sin, you can ask for forgiveness and repent. I said, how could human beings really forgive each other? But they won’t listen; it is so difficult to regain their trust.

How to approach children – let them watch the *adḥān* (on television), prayers and some interfaith discussion. For example, how *ḥarām* things can cause many diseases. That is the advantage of staying away from the *ḥarām*. However, I will not force them if they’re not interested. The benefit of making the hajj or pilgrimage is when you get there, you can see how holy it is, and you can see your behaviour. You can look back at what you’ve done. One of my children said he wanted to go there, but I said he had to become Muslim first. (Source: Interview on July 24, 2009 at respondent’s office, UMS, Kadsan/L-Ppr-Resp14)

In this dialogue, the convert applied the concept *ḥikma* in explaining current phenomena. The convert came up with the solution to problems through the good moral values taught by Islam by presenting logical reasons. In other words, the convert instilled indirectly the value of Islam as a solution to problems without forcing his/her family to convert to Islam. The convert successfully introduced Islam from a different angle, simply and easily.

(iv) ... after I became a Muslim, I just did some things more often compared to before such as visiting my parents, giving money to my mother or paying some of their living expenses and I don’t mind when we eat together.

Secondly, when my mother wanted to go to church, I would send her even though people around said that I shouldn’t do that because it would seem like I was letting them think their religion is right. But for me, a son should do this and I wanted to show my mother that I was still her child even though I had become a Muslim. (Source: Interview on September 16, 2008 at researcher’s office in UMS, Kadsan/L-Ran-Resp15)

The dialogue above inclines towards a practice of tolerance whereby the convert did not ignore his or her duty as a child. Wisdom (*ḥikma*) does not restrict dialogue to words; it also crystallizes it through acts of tolerance and practising filial piety. The convert emphasized *ḥikma* in communication with his family members indirectly by carrying out his own responsibilities and giving the same rights to family members who remained in their own religion. Therefore, the essence of *ḥikma* can be seen as cultivating sincere understanding, respect and tolerance in harmonious Muslim–non-Muslim co-existence.

This study shows that it is possible to apply the dialogue of *ḥikma* in all kinds of situations, through both verbal and non-verbal communication. Samples of the dialogues applied by Muslim converts above show: arguments presented with *ḥikma*, using points that are solid, logical and rational according to the culture and beliefs of the target group; the ability to explain the true nature of Islam, which must be understood through the process of learning and not simply inherited; how to speak gently, politely and in a way that is acceptable; how to cooperate with and convince one’s family that responsibilities do not change with the change in religion; how to demonstrate the true nature of Islam; how to present rational arguments; the ability to explain the true nature of Islam; how to speak gently, politely and in a way that is acceptable, through both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Implications of the dialogue of *ḥikma* in generating harmony

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By applying the dialogue of *ḥikma*, it is possible to rectify family relations and regenerate harmony between members of different religions. This can be observed through the experience of converts, when relationships that were initially strained or contentious due to the conversion of a family member became more accommodative. Experiences such as this can be explained through the transcripts of interviews below (translated into English from Malay for convenience):

(i) Okay, for the second year, I will choose pattern number three (accommodative), because it was quite balanced. Yes, that is the pattern of our relationship until now.

In terms of positive attitude, they still care about me. For example, my father, who knows that I love chocolate, will send some to me
I know that they love me. My mother, though she is angry with me, still loves me. (Source: Interview on November 18, 2008 di pejabat pengkaji UMS, Gnaa/L-Lbn-Resp1) ii) After that, they would say, why marry a Muslim? You won’t be able to eat this and that. Though I received some positive feedback from my father. He said (in the car), “I’ve given you education, a good life for you until today. Now, it’s up to you what you want to do. What’s important is that you live peacefully, and think of what you want to do. It does not matter who you marry. What’s important is that you remember us.” I think father could accept it but there was not much change. (Source: Interview on May 24, 2008 respondent’s house at University Apartment, Iban/P-Twu-Resp7) iii) My mother can now accept my conversion. Mother feels more comfortable with me. I was afraid when I started wearing the hijab. At last, I was determined. My sister once said, “You have the nerve to wear the hijab?” I said jokingly, “Alang-alang menyeluk pekasam, buam sampai ke pangkal lengan” (if you are going to dosomething, you might as well go all the way). If Islam tells us to pray or wear the hijab, we should just do it. Now, my family are more comfortable with my appearance and the change in my identity. My friends and the community around me responded awkwardly towards these changes, but I hardened my heart. (Source: Interview on August 23, 2008 at respondent’s workplace, Masjid Negeri, Mrt/P-Tam-Resp31) iv) I have been a Muslim for nearly ten years and my family, especially my mother have slowly begun to accept Islam. A few years after I converted, my youngest sibling began to accept Islam. Now, all three of my younger siblings are Muslims. My mother is now more open and is no longer hostile towards Islam. She even prepares food for my younger sibling’s sahur and breaking fast in Ramadan. (Source: from Arca Sahabat 2007/2008 “Mengapa saya pilih Islam” (Why I choose Islam) and verified through an interview on January 18, 2009 at respondent’s workplace at Pasut Keshiatan UMS (UMS Health Centre), Sino/P-Kng-Resp43) It can be deduced from the above interviews that the dialogue of Ḥikma may lead to harmonious living under one roof between the converts and their families of different religions. The finding that emerges is that applying this dialogue creates accommodative interaction, which is categorized under the third stage of post-conversion challenge.

There are four stages of challenge for converts in adapting to their families who hold different religions. The first stage is contentious interaction, followed by supportive interaction, accommodative interaction, and lastly neutral interaction. From the results discussed above, it can be concluded that the converts had reached the third stage of interaction – accommodative interaction. After that, the application of Ḥikma leads to harmonious co-existence through wisdom in interaction by the converts, which may be tense in the early stage. Ḥikma also includes positive behaviour in response to the tense situation and employing patience in instilling good examples. Ḥikma does not compel converts to convert their family members to Islam, but builds a bridge between different religions and generates a harmonious society.

Conclusion

Jump to section

Introduction

The dialogue of Ḥikma is at the root of Muslim–non-Muslim relations, as it features wisdom in both verbal and non-verbal communication, according to the ethical rules of dialogue. It offers an intelligent approach through the use of amicable and polite ways of presenting ideas, supported by convincing and relevant arguments, so that the target audience can see the beauty, advantages and differences that Islam offers in comparison to other religions. The dialogue of Ḥikma is not just needed as a mechanism for reconciliation in family relations that are affected by conversions to Islam, but also serves as a method of da’wa in elucidating the true nature of Islam. Even Christian scholars engaged in the study of Islam are in a sense also involved in dialogue. Such experiences normally lead those who share in them to reflect deeply on their own religion in the privacy of their own thoughts, since to meet someone with opposing views is disturbing. The experience of new converts in Sabah in applying the dialogue of Ḥikma in both verbal and non-verbal communication accompanied by relevant, logical and rational arguments while at the same time being accommodating towards the cultures and beliefs of a particular target group, has proven the true nature of Islam, which is that Islam must be understood through the process of learning. In addition, the use of gentle and polite ways of conducting dialogue is effective in making an impression in people’s hearts. Research has shown that the dialogue of Ḥikma, applied by Muslim converts in daily life interactions with their non-Muslim family members, is capable of transforming family relationships from being tense to being more accommodative and thus re-establishing harmony. Reflection may merely confirm some people in an attitude of xenophobia in which “defences” are strengthened, but dialogue might be described as the mutual exchange of views between people who have a genuine concern for one another and are open to learning from one another. The dialogue of Ḥikma should therefore be established as a principle of communication in Islam to generate harmony in Muslim–non-Muslim relations. This will in turn improve the image of this beautiful religion and lessen misunderstandings of it. If the dialogue of Ḥikma were applied in daily-life interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims, it would be possible to re-establish and maintain harmonious interfaith relations in Malaysia.

References

Ummah and Global Understanding (ISUGU).


