Dear brothers and sisters: Allah created human beings with potential, abilities, and desires. He also created them with reason, so they can control their abilities and desires. This distinguishes them from other creatures.

Reasoning helps us to express ideas, to discuss them with others. That is why the Qur’an gives great attention to dialogue, discussion, argument and debate. The Qur’an says, ‘…but man is, in most things, contentious.’ [18:] this debate will even continue until the Day of Judgment. The Qur’an says, ‘One Day every soul will come up struggling for itself…’ [16:111] People used to discuss their affairs and the issues that interested them and they used to know how to discuss and debate in a good and proper manner. Although some were ignorant about the proper manners of debate and discussion.

Dear brothers and sisters: The definition of dialogue is when two individuals or groups explain their viewpoint to each other regarding an issue in order to reach common ground, an agreement, or understanding. The Qur’an has set the basis for the manner of dialogue and debate with others, Muslims and non-Muslims. Allah says, ‘Invite [all] to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and good preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.’ [16:125] In this verse, the Qur’an distinguishes between what is required for giving admonition and advice and what is required when one argues or debates. With admonition, the Qur’an used the word hasanah [good]. With argument or debate, it used the word ahsan [the best]…but why? Because, with admonition, there is usually no disagreement between the two parties as they believe in the same ideas and principles; while with argument or debate, there is disagreement among those who are involved in the dialogue.

The word jidal [dispute or dialogue] is mentioned in the Qur’an 29 times. This guides the Muslim to follow the proper way and approach dialogue or argument wisely. The Qur’an praises the constructive dialogue which leads to positive and successful consequences in every field of life. The Qur’an mentions in more than one place the manner of making dialogue and the way to argue with the People of the Book [Christians and Jews]. Allah says, ‘And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in [a way] that is better…’ [29:46]

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The Qur'an also mentions other dialogues between disbelievers and Prophet Muhammad to show us how to control the dialogue in the best way even with non-Muslims. The Qur'an says, ‘Say: “Who gives you sustenance, from the heavens and the earth?” Say: “It is Allah; and certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or in manifest error!”’ [34:25]. Then the dialogue is ended with: ‘Say: “Ye shall not be questioned as to our sins, nor shall we be questioned as to what ye do.”’ [34:26]

Dear brothers and sisters: there are manners and etiquette of making dialogue or argument in Islam. These manners can be summarized as follows:

- Having sincerity: Some people speak in order to display their knowledge of a certain topic, or show their eloquence. Others hate anyone except themselves speaking in a gathering. Such insincerity does not of course include teaching those who have only a rudimentary understanding of Islam, or to enjoin good and forbid evil. A great scholar used to say, “I never argued with a man except if I wished to help him and lead him in the right direction, asking Allah to give him protection and guidance. I never spoke to a person except that I did not care whether Allah showed the truth on my tongue or his tongue. Others used to say, ‘For me, my view is correct, for others it can be incorrect.

- Lowering one's voice, for raising one's voice reflects a lack of manners. Shunning excessive talk and badmouthing others. The Messenger of Allah said: “The dearest and nearest of you to me on the Day of Resurrection will be the one who is best in manners; and the most abhorrent among you, and the farthest of you from me [on that Day] will be the offensive [i.e. in speech], the garrulous, and the Mutafayhiqoon…”

- To avoid insults and abuse and obscene words. It was narrated that the Prophet [pbuh] never used foul speech, nor did he like to listen to it.” [Al-Bukhari ] If a bad word was used in his presence, he would turn his face away to reflect his objection to it.

- Among the manners of dialogue is to have knowledge about the issue of discussion. It is also important to study the issue first, to study the words you will say before, for it is very serious not to understand the meaning of words. It is also very serious to talk without knowledge. The Qur'an warned us against that saying, ‘Behold, ye received it on your tongues, and said out of your mouths things of which ye had no knowledge; and ye thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of Allah.’ [24:15]

- Among the etiquette of proper dialogue is to address people according to their understanding and knowledge. The Prophet said, ‘Address people according to their understanding and knowledge.’ He also said, ‘I was ordered to address people according to their understanding.

- Using comprehensible words: One should not address people with words and phrases that are beyond their comprehension, or use a difficult language. He must adopt simple wording and terminology, even when addressing certain specialties in particular fields of knowledge. This is so that the common people can understand. ‘Ali reported that the Messenger of Allah said: “Talk to people with speech that they can understand. Do you wish that people believe in Allah and His messenger?” [Al-Bukhari]

- Not interrupting the speaker: If a person enters into the presence of people whilst they are talking, then he should not interrupt them. Beginning by greeting people before addressing them: The Prophet said: “If a person begins talking to you before greeting you, then do not reply to him until he greets you.” [Abu Nu’aym]

- Refrain from lying, even in jest: It is impermissible for a person to lie, even in jest. The Prophet said: “Woe to the one who talks to people and lies in order to make them laugh! Woe to him! Woe to him!” [Ahmad]

- Finally, it is very important and also recommended to avoid useless disputes and arguments because it leads to hate and enmity. This is called in Arabic Miraa’ [insincere and useless dispute]. A Muslim should avoid such dispute even if he is right. The Prophet said, ‘I will guarantee a house in the paradise for whoever avoids Miraa even if he is right.’

Finally, Muslims should always supplicate to Allah [pbuh] to open their hearts and minds to the truth. We also ask Him to guide us all.