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Threads of Compassion and Peace: Uncovering Shared Values in *Raḥmah* and *Karūṇa* for Social Harmony

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the similarities between *raḥmah* in Islam and *karuṇa* in Buddhism to promote social harmony and interreligious understanding. Using a qualitative design, it analyzes theoretical data from Islamic and Buddhist scriptures. The findings reveal that both *raḥmah* and *karuṇa* represent core virtues of compassion, empathy, and care, which is are the central teachings in both religions. Three key similarities are identified: (1) both concepts fundamentally refer to compassion involving empathy and protection; (2) the Buddha and Prophet Muhammad serve as ideal models of selfless love and service; and (3) both concepts extend compassion universally to all beings, forming ethical foundations in both traditions. These shared values are evident in interfaith initiatives, relief efforts, and community programs in Malaysia. The study proposes a framework for compassionate leadership and inclusive governance, encouraging long-term collaboration and mutual respect among Muslim and Buddhist communities, and beyond.

Keywords: *Raḥmah*, *Karūṇa*, religious ethics, interreligious peacebuilding, social harmony

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to encourage Muslims and Buddhists to learn about some important values of Islam and Buddhism to increase their knowledge and develop a better understanding of other religions. It will specifically focus on some similarities between the concepts of *raḥmah* and karuna in Islam and Buddhism. Since the thoughts are comparable, both sides would be more likely to acknowledge and respect one another.

In Malaysia, relations between Buddhists and Muslims are shaped by the political influence of the Muslim majority, which began when the country gained independence from Britain in 1957 as the Federation of Malaya. Although Muslims make up only around 60% of the population, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, while Buddhists make up about 20% of Malaysia's population, making them the largest religious minority in the country. (Obuse, 2024, p. 100)

This research aims to make a modest contribution to the inspiring vision of interreligious harmony by highlighting the similarities of the concepts of *raḥmah* and karuna between Islam and Buddhism, notwithstanding the major doctrinal differences between the two religions. Religious harmony is a crucial aspect of social cohesiveness and peaceful coexistence in any society. It entails mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance of the diversity of religions and beliefs. In addition to learning about other people's beliefs and practices, studying several religions will teach people how to communicate with people of different cultures and faiths, identify points of agreement, and collaborate for the greater good. The Dalai Lama has emphasized the importance of non-violence and respect for all religions. In his book Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World, he writes that "we must recognize the fundamental unity of all human beings, regardless of our religious differences."(Dalai Lama XIV, 2012, p. 21) He also emphasizes the need for education and

understanding to promote religious harmony, stating that, "education is the key to a better world, and that includes education about the world's religions."(Dalai Lama XIV, 2012, p. 93)

In addition, finding similarities among religions can help to break down stereotypes and prejudices that may exist between different groups. By emphasizing the commonalities between religions, one can encourage greater understanding, respect, and cooperation between different communities. Furthermore, the search for similarities among religions can also help individuals to better understand their own beliefs and practices. By exploring the similarities among different religions, individuals can gain a broader perspective on the human experience and their place within it.

Figure 1.1 below shows the similarities found in the concept of *raḥmah* and karuna which are divided into three essential points. The first and second points indicate the theoretical concept based on the scriptural views in both Islam and Buddhism. Meanwhile, the third point denotes on the practicality of these concepts implied in both religions.

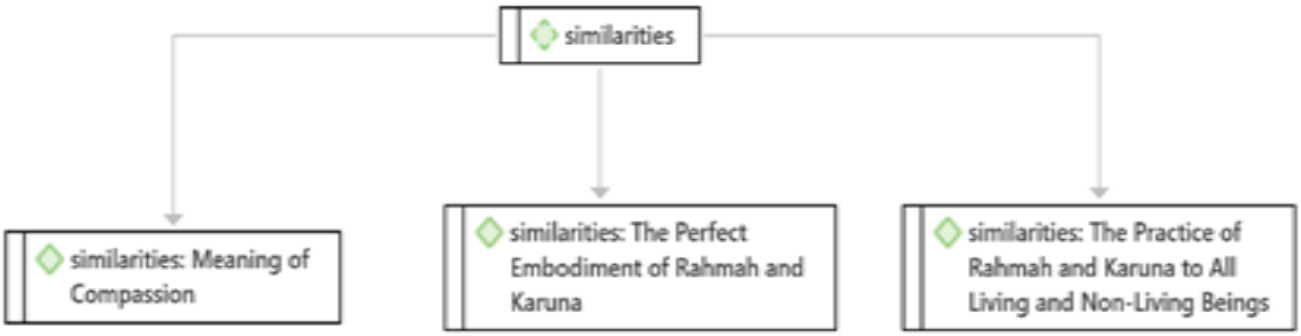

Figure 1.1 The Similarities between the Concepts of *Raḥmah* and *Karuna*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In venturing into the theoretical part of the concepts of *raḥmah* and *karuna* in Islam and Buddhism, it is very important to refer to the primary sources of the religions. Apart from that, the secondary sources which contain commentaries and explanation of the books of guidance in Islam and Buddhism are essential too in explaining the concepts. In Buddhism, the Buddhist canon of scripture is huge, running to more than 100,000 pages. Buddhists identify their canon as the Tripitaka, which denotes 'Three Baskets.' These three are the *Vinaya* (guidelines for reverends and nuns), the *Sutras* (teachings of the Buddha), and the *Abhidharma* (higher discourses or works of systematic philosophy). Buddhism also has numerous distinct sets of texts which are the Pali canon, Chinese canon, and Tibetan canon.(Grant Hardy, 2014, p. 89) The researcher refers to *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Terminologies* by Murthy,(Murthy, 1991) and *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* by Edward A. Irons,(Irons, 2008a) to explore the definition of the concept. In order to understand the doctrines and concepts in Buddhism, this research referred to four main *sutras* (teachings of the Buddha) of Theravada Buddhism namely *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Digha Nikaya)* translated by Maurice Walse,(*The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Digha Nikaya)*, 1987) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* by Bhikkhu Nanamoli,(*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya)* translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi,(*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya)*, 2000) and *The Book of Gradual Sayings (Anguttara Nikaya)* also translated by Bikkhu Bodhi.(Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012) Besides the four *sutras*, this research also refers to *The Book of Discipline* (*Vinaya Pitaka*) which contains four sections; *Sutta Vibhanga*,(*A Book of the Discipline: Sutta Vibhanga*, 1949, Volume I–III) *Mahavagga*,(*A Book of the Discipline: Mahavagga*, 1949, Volume IV) *Cullavagga*,(*A Book of the Discipline: Cullavagga*, 1949, Volume V) and *Parivara*.(*A Book of the Discipline: Parivara*, 1949, Volume IV) All of these *sutras* are translated to English from their original Pali language.

Regarding Islam, the theory of the concept of *raḥmah* are based on two primary sources, Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The researcher refers to some significant commentary books of

Qur'anic *tafsīr* to explain the meaning of *raḥmah* that contains in Qur'anic verses. The renowned classical Qur'anic commentary is *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*,(Ibn Kathir, 2000) and the books of *tafsīr* by Syed Qutb, *In the Shades of the Qur'an*,(Qutb, 2003) which are more contemporary. Besides, another book is also important to understand *raḥmah* in Islam from the *Qur'a*nic view which is *The Opening Chapter of the Qur'an (sūrah al-Fātiḥah)* by Maulana Abulkalam Azad.(Azad, 1991) This book focuses only on the first chapter of the Qur'an with commentaries and interpretations. Besides, there is one section on *raḥmah* discussed in this book. Therefore, the book is helpful to know the contexts of the concept of *raḥmah* in Qur'an along with the consequences of it.

While reviewing the studies between Islam and Buddhism, there are scores of works that use comparative analysis approach on comparing the concepts in Islam and Buddhism. To name a few, there are *Islam and Buddhism in the Modern World*,(Hosein, 2001) *Islam and the Wisdoms of Asian Religions*,(Cheng, 2012) *Buddhist and Islamic Orders in Southern Asia: Comparative Perspectives*,(Feener, 2019) *Peradaban Global: Dialog Buddha-Islam* (Global Civilization: Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue),(Ikeda, 2012) *Islam and Buddhism*,(Yahya, 2005) *Islam and Buddhism*,(Imtiyaz Yusuf, 2013) *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*,(Elverskog, 2010) and *Buddhism from Islamic Perspective*.(Muhammad Vandestra, 2017) Nonetheless, as mentioned above, all of these works focus more on general issues and the fundamental teachings in Islam and Buddhism. Instead of looking at those components, this research explores specifically on the wonder of the concept of *raḥmah* in Islam and *karuna* in Buddhism. Another important book to be highlighted here is *Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism*,(Shah-Kazemi, 2010) which contains a chapter specifically discussing *raḥmah* in Islam and *karuna* in Buddhism. However, this book discusses only on the theoretical part of the concepts. Additionally, since the book comprises many different concepts in both religions, the chapter on *raḥmah* and *karuna* only provides a superficial approach to the issue. Another significant book in this research is *Compassion in the World's Religions*.(Niyogi Balslev, 2010) This book is very useful in looking at the concept of compassion from the world's religions including Islam and Buddhism. The book compiles articles from scholars of respective religions that discuss on compassion as the cardinal virtues. However, there is still the need to provide a comprehensive comparative analysis between the teachings of *raḥmah* and *karuna* in the religions and the practice of the followers. Therefore, while looking at those dimensions on the theoretical part of *raḥmah* and *karuna* in Islam and Buddhism, this research also examines the level of understanding and practical aspect of Muslims and Buddhists.

While many comparative studies have looked at the teachings of Buddhism and Islam, most of these studies tend to concentrate on basic principles or general doctrinal themes, frequently using descriptive methodologies that avoid in-depth theoretical analysis or practical implications. Specifically, there is still a substantial lack of scholarly research comparing the concept of compassion (*raḥmah* in Islam and *karuṇa* in Buddhism) as a lived ethical practice and a theological construct. Existing research on these topics, such Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism (Shah-Kazemi, 2010), only briefly examines them, while more general works on interreligious communication frequently ignore the many intersections of compassion as a key virtue. Furthermore, particularly in diverse environments like Malaysia where interfaith involvement is becoming more and more important, there is a dearth of research that links scriptural interpretations with the actual activities of Muslim and Buddhist groups. This study aims to close this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of the idea of compassion as it is expressed in both Buddhist and Islamic texts, backed up by both traditional and modern commentary. Furthermore, it investigates how these ideals appear in ecumenical endeavours and community customs. This study intends to promote mutual understanding and long-term cooperation between the Muslim and Buddhist communities by offering a fresh framework for inclusive governance and compassionate leadership.

METHODOLOGY

To obtain reliable and trustworthy findings, the researcher employs multiple modes of data collection by using qualitative methods. The data are gathered from conceptual, descriptive, and comparative analysis. To identify and analyse the concept of *raḥmah* and *karuna*, an objective and systematic study is attempted to understand the concepts in both religions as accurately as is feasible. The methodology applied is a conceptual, descriptive, and comparative analysis which depends entirely on library research. In venturing into the theoretical parts of the concepts, the conceptual analysis of *raḥmah* and *karuna* are presented to explore and

understand the meaning of these concepts in the hands of its main scriptures of Islam and Buddhism as the primary sources which are Quran, *Tipitaka* and Mahayana *sutras*. In presenting the meaning of the concept, the researcher implements a descriptive and analytical method. At this level, these concepts are discussed according to the verses in the scriptures. The secondary sources are also used to explore the discussions of the scholars on the meaning of the verses in the main scriptures.

Notably, although no primary field data were collected, thematic saturation was achieved by identifying recurring patterns across diverse texts. Key motifs like universal compassion, the sanctity of all life, and devotion to alleviating suffering emerged repeatedly in the Qur'an, in collections of the Prophet's sayings, and in various Buddhist teachings. By cross-checking multiple sources until no new themes appeared, we ensured that our analysis captured the full breadth of each concept. This textual saturation provides confidence that the main dimensions of *raḥmah* and *karuṇa* were thoroughly represented in the study.

Table 1.1 Primary religious sources analysed for raḥmah and karuṇa.

Religion / Tradition	**Primary Scriptural Sources (examples)**
Islam	*Qur'an* (the Holy Book of Islam); Hadith collections (e.g. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim) – sayings of Prophet Muḥammad; major Qur'anic commentaries (tafsīr) on mercy/compassion.
Buddhism	*Tipitaka* (Pāli Canon) – including Vinaya (monastic code) and Sutta Nikāyas (e.g. *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta*, *Aṅguttara*); Mahāyāna sutras (e.g. Bodhisattva Precepts) – emphasizing universal compassion.

The conceptual and comparative methods meant focusing on *what* the texts teach, rather than prescribing actions. The analysis was descriptive and analytical: passages were quoted and explained, then compared across traditions. The secondary literature (scholarly articles, dictionaries, etc.) helped clarify difficult verses and doctrinal nuances. By grounding our study in scripture alone, we maintained objectivity and respect for both faith traditions' internal logic.

The Meaning of Compassion in Raḥmah and Karuna

The first similar point found by the researcher in this research is that both the concepts of *raḥmah* and *karuna* bring the same meaning of compassion when translated in English. The meaning of compassion is being used in the main scripture of Islam and Buddhism in referring to *raḥmah* and *karuna*. *Raḥmah* is an Arabic word rooted from *raḥima-yarḥamu-raḥmah* which can be translated as the womb, blood relatives; mercy, kindness, compassion, pity, sympathy, to show mercy, to show compassion, to let off, to be kind, forgiveness, bounty, good fortune, blessing.(Elsaid M. Badawi & Muhammad Abdel Haleem, 2008, p. 354) In the *Dictionary of Islam*, the word *raḥmah* has been translated as mercy, compassion.(Thomas Patrick Hughes, 1885, p. 531) Also, the word can be translated as be merciful to.(Muhammad Ali Alkhuli, 1989, p. 46) In the Dictionary of Islamic Words and Expressions, it defines *raḥmah* as not just means mercy, but it means kindness, tenderness, caring and the like as well.(Mahmoud Ismail Saleh, 2011, p. 190) The Encyclopaedia of Islam as *raḥma* states that the word is a Qur'anic term, denoting either kindness, benevolence (synonym of *ra'fa*) or – more frequently – an act of kindness, a favour (synonym of *ni'ma* or *faḍl*).("Rahma," 1995, p. 398)

Its connotation is wide enough to cover the qualities of love, compassion, benevolence and generosity. In the Malay language, when translating *raḥmah* it turns to be '*penyayang'* which is compassion. Giving the term compassion, it means an actual sense of partaking in the suffering of others as is described by the etymology of the word; com-passion means to 'suffer with' another.(Reza Shah-Kazemi, 2010, p. 46) However, there is also another point that highlights that mercy is perhaps a poor translation of *raḥmah*. Instead, *rahmah* is more inclined to convey compassion, kindness, goodwill and beneficence.(Mohammad Hashim Kamali, 2008, p. 35) It can be seen in the discussions above, the term *raḥmah* is usually associated with the nearest meanings which are compassion, and mercy. Hence, the meaning of *raḥmah* can best be understood as compassion.

In a similar vein, *karuna* is a Sanskrit term meaning 'compassion.'(Nyanatiloka, 1970, p. 80) It is a spiritual quality perfectly embodied by a Buddha and an ideal for all Buddhists.(Todd T. Lewis, 2007, p. 707) The term

'compassion' is an English term translated which might have its own connotation and nuance if used as an equivalence to the Sanskrit term '*Karuna*', which is also usually translated as 'pity'.(Watanabe Shogo, 2015, p. 267) In Buddhism, *karuna* indicates the qualities of the heart – love and respect for all living beings.(Irons, 2008b, p. 278) It is also one of the four Buddhist virtues which are known as the 'Four Immeasurable Minds' apart from *metta* (loving-kindness), *upekkha* (equanimity), and *mudita* (rejoicing with others' success). In Buddhism, *karuna* encompasses the "meaning and competency to discharge and transmute suffering and alleviate griefs."(Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 172) Modern Buddhist teacher and scholar, Thich Nhat Hanh has acclaimed that, despite the fact that *karuna* comprises 'deep concern,' one does not have to suffer the equivalent encounter as another that one may feel *karuna*.(Dorothy N Gamble & Marie Weil, 2010, p. 50) Relatively, one must attend cautiously, look intensely, comprehend, and attach with the suffering of others but not decline the capability to help.

Karuna is also defined as the bestowing virtue as the leading passion in a Bodhisattva.(Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 1985, p. 353) In another source, *karuna* is closely related with *prajna* (wisdom), as *karuna-prjana* which are not only inseparable cardinal virtues of a Bodhisattva, but is merged into an indivisible whole in the advanced stages of enlightenment.(Garma C. C. Chang, 1971, p. 255) *Karuna* is primarily the pathos of compassion redressing human sorrow, which recognize the fundamental suffering of individual existence, the equal love for all beings, and the practice of substituting other sufferers for oneself.[1] Therefore, the meaning of *karuna* can be understood here by grasping the gist of suffering in Buddhism.

Similarly, there is another inevitably interesting and amusing part founded by the researcher regarding the meaning of these concepts. From the adventurous journey in exploring the meaning of *raḥmah* and *karuna*, the researcher found that both concepts have the same discussion on the meaning of 'womb' which symbolizes the explanation of compassion.

The discussion of *raḥmah* indicates that the Names of Mercy, *Al-Raḥman* and *Al-Raḥīm*, give voice to this visionary instinct of heavenly love, and they are both interrelated to the word *raḥm*, which means 'womb' in English as mentioned previously. Here, it sights another mystery of the all-encompassing oneness of mercy, just as the womb completely encloses the embryo growing within it. That is the divine 'matrix' of compassion that comprehends and nurtures the whole quantity of existence unfolding within itself.(Shah-Kazemi, 2007, p. 7) Unsurprisingly, the root word of *raḥm* which means womb can be very relatable with the concept of *raḥmah* as Allah created the womb to protect a life living and growing inside. There is none as remarkable as the creation of a baby inside the womb, and the most divine miracle is that when the baby has been delivered, he will be totally undependable unlike before. This is how miraculously the womb is created by Allah as the place of shelter and provider to the living creature inside it. That is how it can be connected to the concept of *raḥmah* in Islam, whereby the word itself is full of overwhelming meaning and wisdom.

Along those lines, it is interesting to point that in Buddhism, one of the terms representing the Buddha's nature is *tathagatagarbha*. The term *garbha* also has two meanings, embryo, and womb. Thus, the term *tathagatagarbha* may mean either "embryonic Tathagata" (the incipient Buddha) or "womb of the Tathagata," understood as that which possesses the essential attributes of the Tathagata in their fully developed form. The first meaning often is discussed as the cause of the Tathagata, and the latter meaning as the fruit of Tathagata. As fruit, it represents the fulfilment of the Buddha path and is linked with such terms as *dharmakaya* and *nirvana*."(Sallie B. King, 1991, p. 4)

This womb or form not only encompasses all things, but it is also enclosed inside the soul, being one with imminent Buddha-nature (*Buddhadhatu*) which every individual must struggle to achieve. This concept *tathagatagarbha* and the concept of *karuna* are related in that the realization of *tathagatagarbha* can lead to the development of *karuna*. When one recognizes the fundamental Buddha-nature within oneself, one can also see it in others, leading to a greater sense of empathy and compassion for all beings. Similarly, the cultivation of *karuna* can help one to see beyond the surface-level differences and recognize the shared Buddha-nature that exists in all beings. Overall, the concepts of *tathagatagarbha* and *karuna* are both important aspects of

[1] Frederick Harold Smith, *The Buddhist Way of Life: Its Philosophy and History* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 124.

Buddhist philosophy and practice, emphasizing the interconnectedness and potential for awakening within all beings.

Although the languages and cultural contexts are different, *raḥmah* and *karuna* both express compassion in its fundamental sense. Both terms imply a strong sense of empathy, care, and concern for other people, especially those who are weak or in need. *Raḥmah* and *karuna* both stress the value of showing compassion to all living beings without exception or bias. These concepts are essentially manifestations of the core human virtues of compassion, empathy, and caring for others.

Prophet Muhammad as Raḥmah to the Whole World and Buddha as the Perfect Practitioner of Karuna

Other similarities found between the concept of *raḥmah* and *karuna* is the position of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as *raḥmah* to the whole world and Buddha as the perfect practitioner of *karuna*. In Islam and Buddhism, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Buddha are venerated personalities who are recognised for emulating the values of *raḥmah* and *karuna* towards all beings.

In Islam, to love Allah is to love His Love, the Prophet, which is expressed in countless forms of creative manifestations, guiding revelation, and merciful reintegration. These three principles are manifested in the Prophet as the *al-insān al-kāmil* (perfect man).(Shah-Kazemi, 2007, p. 12) Thus, the love of Allah is attached from the imitation of the Prophet. He is not just the Messenger of Allah, but also the very personification here below of the reflected *raḥmah* of Allah on high. The Prophet is a strongly spiritual one and consequently the Qur'an designates him as *Raḥmatan lil 'ālamīn* in *sūrah al-Anbiyā'* (21): 107; "We sent thee not, but as aercy for all creatures."(Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 2006, p. 221) Had he been in quest of authority, he would not be designated as such. The entire life of the Prophet displays that he on no occasion went in the quest for supremacy. He does not once assemble an army for that intention. He prevailed and devoted himself to *raḥmah* and peace. Prophet's name Muhammad *al-Amīn* (the praised one) is not because of his wars but because of his human qualities and the Prophet came to be known as Muhammad much before he became head of the community.(Asghar Ali Engineer, 2011, p. 102) He is known as *al-Amīn* (the honest one) as he never once lied. The forty years of life before his prophethood is known. He lived with virtues which are his truthfulness, wisdom and *raḥmah* to all people regardless of sections.

Nevertheless, there are times in his life when he had to protect himself and the new Muslim communities as the nonbelievers of Quraysh never left him in peace. He had to travel from Mecca when tyranny by the nonbelievers of Quraysh became unbearable. It expresses extensiveness for the Prophet and displays that he never pleaded to them even throughout the vilest condition.(Asghar Ali Engineer, 2011, p. 149) On top of that, the Prophet never professed war against any country, or against any community. But when ambushed, he fought for his resistance. The entire verses in the Qur'an about war apply to such circumstances. On many occasions, the tribes with whom the Prophet had made a peace treaty with broke it and deceitfully attacked Muslims. It is only then that the Qur'an commanded him to fight in self-defence. On one occasion, Allah instructed the Prophet to reply with peace to the disbelievers. This is indeed the conduct of *raḥmah* even to the people who regarded him as an enemy. As stated in *sūrah az-Zukhruf* (43): 88-89; "(Allah) has knowledge) of the (Prophet´s) cry, 'O my Lord! Truly these are people who will not believe!' But turn away from them and say 'Peace!' But soon shall they know!"(Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 2006, p. 350) The instruction given here to the Prophet is also consistent with the description of the 'servants of the Compassionate,' who reply with the word 'Peace' when they are addressed by the foolish. The Prophet too is a great forgiver. As far as possible he would forgive even the worst of his enemies.(Asghar Ali Engineer, 2011, p. 104)

Similarly in Buddhism, S. R. Bhatt articulates that the Buddha is a personification of *karuna*, or all-encompassing love.(S.R. Bhatt, 2002, p. 48) He develops the characteristics of *karuna* to embrace *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna*, voiced concretely through virtues – *kusala*. In this way he subordinates everything to love. This approach encompasses individual and social morality.(Wojciech Maria Zalewski, 2012, p. 176) In discussing on the Buddha as the perfect practitioner of *karuna*, it is highly likely relatable with the concept of *bodhisattva*. Gautama Siddhartha as Buddha is a *bodhisattva* for many lives prior to his enlightenment. For a *bodhisattva*, salvation of one requires the salvation of all beings. *Bodhisattvas* pledge to delay their own liberation and to endure in the world as Sakyamuni. Sakyamuni did succeed in his enlightenment, and applying

karuna that relates to others until all beings have been saved.(Lindsay Jones, 2005, pp. 996–1000) The bodhisattva seeks the liberation of others before that of oneself, through selfless *karuna*. Hence, *bodhisattvas* postpone their own enlightenment, choosing to remain in the world practicing *karuna* for others until all beings have been enlightened. According to Spencer, "the ultimate component of the ideal of the bodhisattva is *karuna* and self-giving. *Mahakaruna* turns out to be the motivating ethic in his life."(Sidney Spencer, 1963, p. 89) The *bodhisattva* path necessitates the practitioner to become faultless, over many lifetimes, as stated in the ten virtues or *paramitas*.

To begin with Sakyamuni, the Buddha is the very personification of *karuna*.(S.R. Bhatt, 2002, p. 54) He owns an affectionate heart which is protracted to all beings deprived of difference. Out of *karuna* for all beings suffering in misery he preached *dharma,* and he did so not to a designated group of people but to the whole suffering multitudes. The Buddha is notable from all other beings because of his *mahakaruna*, that is his strong longing and determination to struggle to relieve the suffering of the multitudes. The stories of the unbelievable bigheartedness of the Buddha for instance in sacrificing his life for a hungry tigress displays the perfect concept of the awareness in profiting both oneself and others. (Stephen Jenkins, 2013, p. 468) One who is unsuccessful in benefiting his own self cannot even initiate the thoughts for creating love, which is highly crucial in practising *karuna*. *Karuna* is for all to embrace and to oneself. When the Buddha enters the jungle to sacrifice his life to a tigress, he announces that this is a huge chance. And the story ends by unfolding his histrionic rushing towards Buddhahood. Such behaviour should be understood from a life perspective rather than as self-termination. Quest of one's uppermost empowerment is inspired by the goal to benefit others, and benefiting others leads to one's maximum empowerment.

Walpola Rahula states that by following the example of the Buddha, who is the personification of *mahakaruna* and *mahaprjana* (great wisdom), one must contemplate that the meaning of life is to cultivate *karuna* for all living beings deprived of judgement and to strive for their virtue, contentment and amity, and to prosper wisdom serving to the realization of Ultimate Truth. Therefore, for a man to be perfect like the Buddha, there are two aspects that he should generate correspondingly which are *karuna* on the one side and *prajna* on the other side.(Norm Phelps, 2004, p. 45) It signifies that the Buddha himself is an incarnation of *karuna*. His heart conceded at the sufferings of all beings and tried his level best to amend their suffering throughout his life.

There are tons of tales and stories in Buddhist traditions highlighting on the Buddha's previous life being the perfect practitioner of *karuna*. One of them is the Jataka Tales. These tales are significant among all Buddhist tradition. These tales are prevalent among Buddhist Asian Americans in all parts of the world. The Jataka Tales is so prominent, that it is frequently narrated by elders to explain to the children the meaning of being Buddhist, in totaling to its central teachings including *karuna*. These tales educate the children that Buddha is the perfect embodiment of *karuna* and his *karuna* is expedient. One of the interesting tales that teaches on *karuna* is entitled 'The Rabbit on the Moon'.("Asian Buddhist American: The Jataka Tales," 2011, p. 1221) It can be seen here that the Buddhas, and bodhisattvas are not just a perfect practitioner of *karuna* but also acquire many other honorable potentials such as kindness and persistence.

In Islam, due to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) compassion and empathy for everyone, regardless of their background or socioeconomic class, his is revered in Islam as the '*raḥmah* to the worlds' (Qur'an 21:107). His teachings emphasised the significance of compassion, kindness, and justice, and he continually displayed acts of charity and mercy towards people in need. Similarly, in Buddhism, Buddha is revered as the 'Perfectly Self-Awakened One' who personified the virtue of *karuna*, or compassion for all beings. In his teachings, he stressed that ignorance is the source of suffering, and that overcoming suffering requires the development of compassion and wisdom. Despite the differences in their respective religious practises, the Buddha and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) both emphasised the value of compassion for all living things in their teachings and actions. They both emphasised the need of showing people kindness and empathy and the interconnectivity of all beings. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Buddha both exemplified *raḥmah* and *karuna*, and while the circumstances and specific teachings of Islam and Buddhism are different, their shared principles are universal and serve as a reminder of the significance of showing love and care to all beings.

The Practice of Raḥmah and Karuna to All Living and Non-Living Beings

The emphasis on showing compassion and kindness to all living and non-living beings is a similar theme in both the Islamic practise of *raḥmah* and the Buddhist practise of *karuna*.

Islam considers all of creation, including plants, animals, and even inanimate objects, to be part of *raḥmah*, which goes beyond human beings. In accordance with Islamic beliefs, Allah (God) is the source of all *raḥmah*, and people are urged to exhibit this quality when interacting with all of creation. In the *ḥadīth* perspective, the concept of *raḥmah* has always been highlighted in thousands of *ḥadīth* in numerous books. It stresses many chapters, including *raḥmah* of Allah, and *raḥmah* on individual, family, society, animals, plants, and earth. Apart from that, numerous *ḥadīth* had been highlighting the concept of *raḥmah* portrayed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in everything that he has done, and this proves that the verse from the Qur'an in *sūrah al-Anbiyā'* (21): 107 says, "We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures."(Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 2006, p. 221)

As stated in the *ḥadīth* narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Allah created a hundred mercies, and He placed one mercy among his creation. They show mercy to one another by it, and there are ninety-nine mercies with Allah."(Imam Abu Isa Mohammad Ibn Isa At-Tirmidhi, 2007, p. 250) The purpose of this narration is to display the incalculability of Allah's *raḥmah* towards His creations. According to the *ḥadīth*, by the virtue of one *raḥmah* which is revealed to the present world out of ninety-nine, men show *raḥmah* towards one another and the mother is *raḥmah* to her child, and the wild animals is humane with its offspring, and when the Day of Resurrection comes, Allah will bound this one *raḥmah* with the other ninety-nine and He will spread them out upon all His creations. It can be seen here that everything that happened in this world is out of *raḥmah*, whether it is an action of a human or animal. It is just one part of the virtue of *raḥmah* from Allah, out of other ninety-nine remaining. This *ḥadīth* shows how immeasurable and bountiful is the virtue of the Creator of *raḥmah* to His creations.

In *Al-Ādāb al-Mufrad* (Manners in Islam) by Sheikh al-Kabīr Imām al-Bukhārī, it highlights the compilations of the *ḥadīth* and the sayings of the *ṣaḥābah* (companions) on manners consisting of all the *ḥadīth* on *raḥmah* which brings virtues and wisdom in all aspects even in the smallest things or creatures. In fact, there is one specific chapter on *raḥmah* whereby it consists of the *ḥadīth* on the concept of *raḥmah* portrayed by the Prophet as well as the *ṣaḥābah*. Looking from the *ḥadīth* perspective, it is included in the book of good manners as the prophet is understandably a source of virtue and the epitome of *raḥmah*. As stated in one of the *ḥadīth* in this book; Sayyidina Jarir had said that the Prophet said, "He who does not show *raḥmah* to other people, Allah does not have *raḥmah* on him."(Imam Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, 2009, p. Vol. 9, 1652) The word people in this *ḥadīth* includes believers and disbelievers, pious and wicked, all without distinction.

In the light of *raḥmah* on living being and things, there is an essential tradition that highlights *raḥmah* as a kinship or bonding of brotherhood, which is; Abu Muhammad Jubair bin Mut'im reported: Messenger of Allah PBUH said; "The person who severs the bond of kinship will not enter Jannah."(an-Nawawi, n.d., p. 158) This *ḥadīth* postures a stern threat to those who interrupt the Divine commands of preserving good ties of kinship. Notwithstanding such a stern caution, this major sin is very common in contemporary society. The purpose of this warning is that Muslims should circumvent themselves from it. It can be seen here that *raḥmah* is closely related to the relationship among human beings, and one should not only concern himself with his relationship with Allah. Indeed, having a good and harmonious relationship with others is *raḥmah*. Another tradition states; Sayyidina Abdullah bin Umar has narrated that, "He who fears his lord and joins ties of relationship will have his life prolonged and his wealth multiplied, and his family members will love him."(Imam Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, 1971, p. 94) This *ḥadīth* gives an assurance that Allah will bestow three kinds of favours in this world on whoever has the fear of His lord and will always keep the ties of relationship united.(Imam Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, 1971, p. 95) There are many *ḥadīth* that speak of increasing one's life span and wealth as these two things are craved by everyone. Hence, the Prophet PBUH has shown a very easy way to achieve that, by following his advice of protecting relationships as a value of *raḥmah* towards relatives and friends.

Similarly, all living things, including animals and even inanimate objects, are included in the practice of

karuna in Buddhism. The school of Buddhism places a strong emphasis on the interdependence of all things as well as the necessity of acknowledging all beings' suffering and working to bring about their liberation. The Buddhist ethical code emanates from *karuna*, and it strikes to each and all form of existence. The Buddhist tradition positions life in its centre. Life is scrutinized from a viewpoint of an individual rather than social life, even though certainly the essential moral values that Buddhism demands for have social consequences. As stated in the *Upasaka Sutra*, a bodhi mind setting of a person is governed by *karuna*. In this *sutra*, the Buddha said: "Good man, sentient beings stimulate the bodhi mind because of generating a source or a disclosing source, or both. Know that the generating source is one's *karuna*. Outside of *karuna*, one stimulates the bodhi mind. Consequently, one's mind of *karuna* is the generating source."(*Boddhisattva Precepts: Selected Mahayana Sutras*, 2012, p. 129)

Buddhism preserves a stimulating stability between followers and community. The leading value to achieve the Final Value of Life is through the 'Three Jewels', particularly the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. Because *Sangha* is one of the 'Jewels', it displays that a community is indispensable in this tradition to augment individual life.(Wojciech Maria Zalewski, 2012, p. 176) A specific teaching that is relevant for community workers and public practitioners is the Buddha's intensity on *karuna* for all beings.(Dorothy N Gamble & Marie Weil, 2010, p. 50) In Buddhism, the prayer of the three refuges is a central tenant, later "taking refuge in the Buddha and in the *Dharma*," the verse ends with, "I take refuge in the *Sangha* – the community that lives in harmony and awareness."(Thich Nhat Hanh, 2000, p. 69) It has been seen that the Buddhists encouraged an atmosphere of peace and *karuna* for all in their communities, that is to help the spiritual journey become a reality. The monastics hold that in the Buddhist system, the community is just as important as the Buddha.

The stream of *karuna* does not stop with human species but overflows to nature. The encouragement of common obligation in Buddhism has vegetarianism by means of its consequence. *Ahimsa* and *karuna* indicate *sarvasattvanukampa* (compassion for all beings) and *sarvajivadaya* (kindness for all beings).(S.R. Bhatt, 2002, p. 60) It rejects killing of life of animals and plants. All life is holy and eloquent and thus meat consumption and killing of animals or even cutting of green trees is offensive to the Buddhist essence of *karuna*. Attention for the wellbeing of the natural world has been an imperative component throughout the history of Buddhism. Acknowledgement that human beings are fundamentally reliant on and unified with their environment has escalated to an innate love and veneration for nature. The Buddhist environmental science is profound and worldwide. Love of and contemplation for nature has been its foundation. The present Dalai Lama noted that: "In Buddhism, the external environment is seen in some sense as a product of collective karma. Therefore, the existence of a flower, for instance, is related to the karmic forces of the beings who live in the environment of the flower."(Francisco J Varela, 1997, p. 81)

Hence, basic to the Buddhist ethics is not to harm animals and practice *karuna* for all sentient beings, without making a distinction among those having two, four or no legs as stated in *Sutta Nipata*. It expresses the feelings of the Buddha in the following way.(Lord Chalmers, 1932, p. 37) The Buddhist principle of *karuna* demands for a transvaluation of ideals through a model modification based on a tolerant view of life and reality. It appeals for a global ethics of accountability and affinity. It encourages wholeness of life and the understanding of substantially complex interaction of relationships, existing and working together collectively, while sharing a mutual life with a cosmic camaraderie.

The shared values of the practice of *raḥmah* and *karuna* for all living and non-living beings highlight the significance of understanding the interconnectedness of all creations and working towards a more sustainable and compassionate world. Although the specific teachings and practises of Islam and Buddhism differ, there is no doubt that these two religions share values of *raḥmah* and *karuna*.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings on similarities of *raḥmah* and karuna aims to inspire Muslims and Buddhists to learn about and explain some fundamental principles of Islam and Buddhism to broaden their knowledge and foster a greater understanding of other faiths. It concentrates particularly on the parallels between the Buddhist and Islamic notions of *raḥmah* and karuna. These findings suggest that there are three main similarities found in this

research which are on the meaning of both notions which are defined as compassion. The same theoretical concepts on Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Buddha as the most important figures in Islam and Buddhism and being the symbol of *raḥmah* and karuna. Additionally, it was found that the practicality of these concepts is applicable to both living and non-living creations.

Raḥmah is a fundamental Islamic principle that is frequently expressed as love, compassion, and mercy towards all living things. Like this, karuna is a core Buddhist concept that places an emphasis on compassion and empathy for all living things. Both ideals stress the significance of appreciating how all of creation is connected and attempt to ensure the welfare of all creatures. The values of *raḥmah* in Islam and karuna in Buddhism have the potential to serve as a bridge for religious engagement between Muslims and Buddhists. These shared values of compassion and empathy towards all beings can foster mutual understanding and respect and thus promote peaceful coexistence between the two communities if understood and practiced by the followers of both religions.

Religious engagement in Malaysia is shaped by a range of factors, including government policy, historical legacies, and cultural norms. While there are certainly challenges and tensions related to religion in the country, there are also many examples of positive engagement and cooperation among diverse religious communities. Thus, Muslim and Buddhist scholars have recognized the potential for collaboration and cooperation between the two traditions based on shared values of *raḥmah* and karuna towards all living beings.

Dr. Kazimi has emphasized the importance of recognizing the shared values of compassion and empathy towards all beings in Islam and Buddhism. In his view, these shared values can serve as a foundation for building bridges between Muslims and Buddhists and promoting mutual understanding and respect. (Reza Shah-Kazemi, 2010, p. 56) Similarly, Buddhist scholars have also recognized the potential of the shared values of *raḥmah* and karuna towards all beings in Islam and Buddhism. The Dalai Lama marks: “Undoubtedly, compassion prevails at the core of the teachings of both Islam and Buddhism, as it also prevails at the core of other great religious traditions.” This, he addressed, “should be grounds for Muslims and Buddhists to conquer any sense of vigilance they may feel about each other and cultivate a productive, entrusting friendship.” (Tibetan Review, 2010)

This study highlights *raḥmah* and karuna as essential values in Islam and Buddhism that support religious dialogue and institutional development. In Malaysia, Muslims and Buddhists have engaged in interreligious dialogues that emphasize these shared values, fostering mutual respect and understanding. As core ethical teachings in both religions, *raḥmah* and karuna can be positioned as central themes in such engagements. These values provide a framework for the administration of religious institutions by promoting compassion, kindness, and empathy, which are necessary for cultivating a positive and productive environment. They contribute to the development of a supportive atmosphere in which individuals feel valued, respected, and cared for. Furthermore, they foster cooperation, harmony, and understanding among members of the institution.

In conclusion, the shared values of *raḥmah* in Islam and *karuṇa* in Buddhism offer a meaningful foundation for institutional frameworks not only among Muslims and Buddhists in Malaysia but also for other religious communities. These values emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the collective responsibility to promote well-being, forming the basis for building bridges of understanding and mutual respect in a multi-religious society.

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