

## A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

### A Muslim's Experiences with Initiatives of Change

by **Imam Dr Mufti Abduljalil Sajid**

**V**ISITING Indonesia in late 2006 posed some questions, which have been something of a challenge to me. As a senior and experienced Muslim, why have I been working closely with Initiatives of Change? What is the link between the two and do we have common ground? To the second question I can give an unqualified Yes. But explaining why and how may take a few more words. I looked back on my six decades and decided to try and trace the steps I have taken and the journey I have made to discover the common ground, which has led to my close association. I have also traced from my own research some of the Qur'anic references, which have reinforced my conclusions. So this short summary falls into two parts, the personal and the theological.

My family comes from a place known as Rajanpur in the Punjab near to the borders of all four provinces of Pakistan. I was born on 1st November 1947, the year in which Pakistan was partitioned from India at the time of Independence. We were a simple family and I was one of 14 siblings. But I was fortunate in getting schooling and was the first member of my family to go to University and get a degree.

In 1964 I was set a project by Punjab University in Lahore on the subject of Honesty in World Religions. I found material on every faith for my research but I had a little difficulty in finding the answer to the question, 'Do Christians have any moral standards?' In the British Council Library I was shown a book called *Remaking the World* that is the collected speeches of the late Dr. Frank N.D. Buchman who was an American Lutheran Church Minister. Buchman was descended from Swiss immigrants who settled in Allentown, Pennsylvania. It was only later that I discovered that one of Frank Buchman's ancestors, called Bibliander, was the first person to translate the Holy Qur'an into a European language.

I was surprised to discover from this book that Buchman not only believed in morals but felt that a true Christian should aim to live by *absolute* moral standards,

something he had learned from the scholar Henry Wright to summarise as Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness and Absolute Love. Was not this, I thought, exactly what the Prophet of Islam, peace be on him, described in the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and Ahadith (sayings of the Holy Prophet of Islam)

Reading Buchman's speeches I got a picture of a man who was fearless, frank and yet humble. It left a big impression on me but it remained a bit of knowledge stored in my memory and I did not take it any further. I moved on in my career and was employed in the University of Dhaka, then the capital of East Pakistan and now the capital of Bangladesh.

### **Living with other cultures**

With the separation of Bangladesh in 1971 people like myself from West Pakistan were in some danger of a lash back from those forming the new administration of the country. However colleagues in Dhaka University helped me to leave and return to Lahore where I was able to find employment in the University. It was not until some 35 years later that I was able to visit Dhaka again - this time with my wife, Jamila, who grew up in Bangladesh during the first eight years of her life.

In 1972 I was nominated an invigilator for the University examinations in Lahore. At the time there was a lot of cheating among the students, against which I decided to take a stand, which I did in the face of violence and threats. As a result the students took out a demonstration against me in front of the Vice Chancellor's office. The Vice Chancellor was concerned to prevent a riot and loss of life so he asked me to lie low and then arranged for me to take a further course of studies in UK. That is how I arrived in London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) at London University.

My early experiences in Britain were not happy ones. I felt the British were closed and unfriendly, resulting in my feeling lonely and isolated. I missed my wife, the two small daughters we had at that time as well as my larger family. I decided that despite the opportunity I had in London, I would leave after Christmas to return to Pakistan, taking my chance for future employment. However, just before the end of

term a notice appeared on the student notice board announcing that any foreign student who would like to spend their Christmas holiday with a British family could telephone a certain number to be so placed. As the University would be empty over Christmas, I decided to apply, and I was allotted to stay with a Reverend Carr and his family in Reigate (Surrey) for the vacation. I decided to go and it turned out to be a turning point for me.

Reverend Carr was a Church Minister with a large family and they made me feel completely at home. I was surprised to discover that they did not serve alcohol, which had been something that I detested in most of the places I went to in England, so this was a great blessing to a Muslim like me. Further, they had no TV in their home, which was unusual at that time. I was in a completely new situation and I saw that my judgment of Britain as a place of booze and loose living was by no means the whole picture. I decided to stay and complete my course at London.

After completing my studies I was asked to stay on for a job and my wife and my children joined me. So all our five children (3 girls and 2 boys) were brought up in England, starting in East London. Five years later we moved to Brighton where I started the first mosque in the city and began working to establish an interfaith group as well as a Council for Ethnic Minority Groups. I was appointed a local magistrate and got to know many people at all levels of society.

### **Responses to a Radio Interview**

In 1985 as a result of an interview I gave on local radio I received a letter from a Mr. Richard Pearce, who was working not far from my mosque. He had been struck by the interview, he said, and he would like to meet me. Sometimes we would pass in the street as he returned from work and I went home from the mosque. Although he wanted to talk with me, I was so busy that I did not feel I could spare the time. He happened to be a New Zealander working temporarily in Britain, so he got a British friend to try ringing me up to fix an appointment. That was how I got a phone call from David Young asking if he and Richard could come and meet me.

Being a courteous person and not wanting to offend I asked to be excused on account of the pressure of work. However when they persisted I said to David Young, “Look, if you can come at 6.00 am, I could spare half an hour.” I was confident that no Englishman would agree to an appointment at that hour. But my bluff was called because they agreed to come!

This first encounter led to some others, but for me the great surprise was that both these men were familiar with Dr. Frank Buchman and involved in the work of Moral Re-Armament (now Initiatives of Change), which Buchman had initiated. To cut a long story short they invited me to meet other friends and attend some meetings of Moral Re-Armament locally. Then they suggested I might like to come to an international conference at the World Centre for Moral Re-Armament at Caux, Switzerland. My first visit was in 1990 and I have been a number of times since.

I warmed immediately to what I found in Caux. There were echoes there of the world community of common humanity - the UMMAH - which every Muslim believes in and aspires to being part of creating. I found people living together, caring for and thinking for each other. All wanted to serve and achieve a common aim, to repair what was wrong in the world and to rebuild it. In addition I found each person voluntarily took part in the running of the Centre and the practical arrangements. I found people who listened to what others expressed and were not merely trying to get across their own particular view. Above all I sensed a determination to tackle the difficult problems in the world and to try to tackle the evil lying behind them.

All this prompted me to find out more about this man Frank Buchman. What exactly could I, as a Muslim, learn from him and the way he worked? Was it relevant to my own commitment and convictions? I realised that the turning point in Buchman’s life came in 1908 when he was challenged through a woman speaker to face the pride and self-righteousness in the way he resigned from a job, leaving with great a bitterness against the six directors of the organisation. His bitterness followed him wherever he went. He faced the fact that whatever others may have done, he was also wrong. He decided to apologise to the six men for his bitterness and blame. And he became a free man. He used this experience of change to his dying day to help

others to change. In this way one person's change led to a network of change spreading from person to person, nation to nation.

I discovered Buchman was a man of faith who deeply believed that God would guide people who listened and were ready to obey. But his faith was not exclusive. He would have endorsed what Mother Theresa said: 'What we are all trying to do by our work is to come closer to God. We become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better Catholic, a better whatever we are, and by being better we become closer and closer to Him. What approach would I use? For me naturally it would be a Catholic. For you it might be Hindu, for someone else Buddhist, according to one's conscience. But I cannot prevent myself from giving what I have.'

I left Caux after that first visit feeling that here was an action I felt called to participate in, something which encapsulated the dream every Muslim would want to be part of. Later I would meet so many different people that I began to get the full picture of what Dr. Buchman had created through this international team of people, which in 1938 was launched with the name, Moral Re-Armament. I learned the way in which they worked, namely through identifying the needs in the world and then setting out to change the people involved so that solutions resulted.

### **A European Experience**

In 1992 I accompanied Gerald Henderson, a British friend from Liverpool, on the first of two visits to Germany (the second was in 1998). I had previously been to Germany a few times on interfaith projects. But this was my first visit with colleagues in Moral Re-Armament and I had a special interest in doing this because I had heard that before the Second World War Buchman had visited Germany many times and made many friends there. He had tried very hard to reach some of those who had set their sights on creating a powerful but godless country, which eventually took the world into war. But Buchman did not forget Germany and it was after the war that he returned to help rebuild the country and its links with the rest of the world. I found it helpful to learn about a move he initiated in 1948 of an international team with a musical revue outlining the theme, 'Es Muss Alles Anders Werden' (Everything must be different). To a defeated and downcast nation it brought hope and a new aim,

particularly in the industrial areas where the communists were trying to exploit the sense of hopelessness by offering a Marxist solution. But when some of the hardened, committed communists began finding in Moral Re-Armament a new way forward, Buchman could say in a speech in 1950, “Marxists are finding a new thinking”.

But in these visits our aim was to promote unity between local Muslims and indigenous Germans in places where Muslims from Turkey had settled. In our first visit Rev Martin Ekart Fuchs was the main initiator of our programme. We took part in a dialogue at the Christian-Islamic Society. We went to Mannheim, where our host was Helmut Schmitt, the Mannheim Commissioner for Immigrants. The German Government had planned and financed a mosque on a large scale there. It is an area where many Turks had come for employment and a chance of a good future. I felt that the efforts of the city and especially of Helmut Schmitt were giving an example to other cities of Europe through what they had done.

I was struck by the value of setting up an institute with well-trained staff, including social workers and educators who speak the mother tongue, as an important requirement of training, information and understanding. It was somewhat of a surprise to find that the Imam of the newly opened Mosque was not conversant with German. Nor did he seem to feel that there was any need for him to speak it. How, I wondered, can people work together when not willing to learn the local language? And I was bold enough to express this openly with, I hope, some results.

Our visit led later on to some special seminars in Caux where Muslims and non-Muslims could confer and share their hopes and common endeavours with helpful results.

### **Buchman’s Vision for Muslim World**

During these many encounters with people and meetings, whether in Britain or in other countries I learned something of the friendships, which Buchman had made with Muslims from many countries. One example of this was the late Mohammed Fadhel Jamali from Iraq. Jamali had a distinguished career for his country in educational and political fields and he paid heavily for his readiness to stand up for

what is right in the face of political pressure. In 1945 he was present in San Francisco at the founding conference for the United Nations. Jamali played an important role in the drafting of the Charter of the UN at that time, especially in pointing out the need of ensuring the rights of those nations (like his own) who were under some form of mandate. He remarked that as important to him as his part in the drafting of the Charter was his meeting with Frank Buchman. In San Francisco at that time Buchman invited him to see the play, *The Forgotten Factor*, which portrayed the solution to an industrial strike. Jamali was captivated by the theme of the play, "It's not WHO is right, but WHAT is right". He wrote, "I'll never forget it! It made a lasting impression on my mind and spirit. It showed how violence is not the way, but that the road to just and lasting peace lies in forgiveness and in the admission of mistakes, both in families and in politics." He kept touch with Dr. Buchman and was inspired by Buchman's vision for the Muslim world to be a 'girder of unity for all civilization'.

Never afraid of controversy Jamali, now no longer Iraq's Prime Minister, also spoke out in April 1955 at the International Conference of Asian nations at Bandung, Indonesia. At the height of communism's bid for world power and when the discussion was over the question of disarmament, Jamali had this statement to make. "Physical disarmament is not enough: the truth is that what the world needs is ideological disarmament. Achieving that, we must work on the basis of moral rearmament and physical disarmament whereby men of all races and nations with clean hearts, with no rancour or hatred, approach each other with humility, admit our own mistakes and work for mutual harmony and peace. It is then, and only then, that the world will turn into one integral camp with no Eastern or Western camps."

Many others could be named and their encounters with Dr Buchman described. For instance Abdul Khalek Hassuna, Secretary General of the Arab League, was one such person as well as his predecessor Abdul Rahman Aziz. Si Bekkai, a Prime Minister of Morocco at the time when the Pasha of Marrakech helped with a miraculous change in relations with France which led to Independence for Morocco, was another. And similarly the Independence of Tunisia, which was achieved without bloodshed, was ascribed by Mohammed Masmoodi (a Cabinet Minister in Independent Tunisia) to his meeting and friendship with Buchman and the link he was given with France as a result.

## **Pakistan and The Forgotten Factor**

And in my own country of birth, Pakistan, the founder of Independent Pakistan, Quaidiazam Mohammed Ali Jinnah responded to Buchman's aims. In London in 1946 Jinnah saw the same play *The Forgotten Factor*, which had moved Jamali so much. The portrayal in the play of the tough employer as a man who 'would not budge' tickled him and he laughed out loudly - the first time that his companions had even seen him smile since arriving in London. Over dinner with Buchman afterwards, Jinnah told Buchman in referring to the play, "Apology, that is the golden key". Later after Independence had been achieved, but at a great loss of life and property, Jinnah admitted that he had not expected the violence, which erupted, and he apologised to those who had suffered so much.

I could list many others, but I would like to name just a very few Muslims who had or now have close touch with Frank Buchman or Initiatives of Change. For instance the late Mohammad Salih Sangitti, a former Speaker of the Sudan Parliament, was one - and a very influential person in the then newly independent Sudan. Another Sudanese, who was first introduced to Moral Re-Armament in his student days in Oxford and who has been involved ever since, is Ahmed El Mahdi, the senior surviving grandson of the late Mohammad Ahmed El Mahdi.

The present Chairman of Initiatives of Change in Malaysia is Tan Sri Hajjah Saleha Mahammad Ali, who visited Caux and met Buchman soon after the end of the Second World War when she was at London University. Since her return to her own country she has prominently advocated close teamwork between Muslims and others in Initiatives of Change. Another visitor to Caux was the Mufti of Albania. He had been 22 years in prison when the Communists were ruling his country. He came to Caux with the Minister of Religion and spoke of his experiences of God taking care of him during those 22 years and his finding in Caux the spirit of Islam pervading the place.

## **A Muslim President for Initiatives of Change**

Most recently Mohamed Sahnoun was elected President of the International Association of Initiatives of Change in succession to Cornelio Sommaruga, a former



President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Sahnoun, a former Ambassador of Algeria, has been widely sent by Kofi Annan when UN Secretary General on peace building initiatives in Africa. In Caux in 200? he told delegates, “We change ourselves so that we can create an environment of peace. We must learn to really listen to each other”. The “Initiatives of Change” is a diverse, global network committed to building trust across the world's divides. It comprises people of many cultures, nations, beliefs and backgrounds who are committed to transforming society through changes in individuals and relationships, starting in their own lives.”

Buchman’s hope was that Muslim countries should become ‘a belt of sanity to bind East and West and bring moral rebirth’. That, I thought, is a very big challenge, not only to me as a Muslim, but to us all.

In Caux I learned the importance which Buchman and his fellow workers attached to the principle and practice of forgiveness, which Muslims also consider vital. The Holy Qur’an enjoins us Muslims to ‘pardon and forbear’ in all our doings. Later, as promised you will find some examples from Islamic teaching.

Personally I also have some experience of this business of facing criticism and setbacks. In 1996 some events at the Dyke Road Mosque and Islamic Centre in Brighton tested my own practice of forgiveness to the limit. I was Director/Imam of that Mosque at the time. I had tried to help some people to gain British citizenship and given them training in Islam. Later they seem to come under the spell of some radical preacher and began veering towards violence. They disapproved of my policy of trying to work with all sorts of people. Finally they challenged my leadership and took over the Mosque by force in 1998. What, I wondered, should I do? How should I respond to this challenge? I discussed various options with the Trustees of the Mosque and, having made all possible legal moves, finally the only way forward seemed forgiveness. It was not easy as the temptation to try and hit out was strong. I resisted that way.

### **Muslim/Christian Teamwork in Middle East**

After my first encounter with Richard Pearce and David Young I got to know the Centre in North West England, which was used for conferences and meetings by Moral Re-Armament at that time. At one such conference in 1997 I forged a deep friendship with an American, Bryan Hamlin, who had worked for some years with Initiatives of Change and had developed remarkable touches with people in both Palestine and Israel. I had the privilege of visiting these places twice with Hamlin with the intention of inviting both Muslims and Jews to Caux for conferences there. I learnt from Bryan the secret of living with an open heart and using our honesty to change people. It enabled us to reach people whom few foreigners could meet and to bring to bear the factor of openness and reconciliation in an otherwise often closed society. As I did this I thought of many instances from the life of the prophet, which we can all benefit from.

One example of this was the value of the Quiet Time, of Prayer and of Listening to God, which is underlined in the Holy Qur'an. What an important element Bryan and I found this to be in our travels together! Often when we were somewhat uncertain of our next move, we would feel the nudge of the Almighty showing us how and where to make our next move.

Recently in Brighton we have made use of a remarkable film, which portrays a fine example of peacemaking in Nigeria. Titled *The Imam and the Pastor* it is the true story of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye. I met them in 2005 in Caux and first heard their story. They were leaders of the Muslim and Christian militia in Northern Nigeria when the Imam felt he was not following the principles the Holy Qur'an preached. He struggled within himself but eventually approached the Pastor, who rebuffed him. However he did not give up, but tried a second time and gradually they began to establish a relationship. In working for peace and reconciliation together they have become closer than brothers and have impacted thousands of people in their country with the prospect of change. Now with the film detailing their change on the screen, thousands more are being affected. And through Nigerian Television greater numbers are now being reached.

### **The Role of Women**

During the last year my wife and I visited several countries where we had the chance to experience Initiatives of Change first hand. We also went to Pakistan as part of a British Council project of visits to Muslim countries with particular reference to the role of women in Islam. One result was that Jamila found herself expected to make speeches - a big change from her regular role as housewife.

She found herself talking to and being interviewed by a wide variety of people. What came out was her deeply held conviction that a woman's greatest contribution is as a homemaker and a family builder. It is a role that she loves and gives her whole heart to. As she often said, "the world is full of greed and hate; we must give our time and energy in guidance from God to serve humanity above ourselves; as the Holy Prophet of Islam said, the best among you are those who serve others selflessly so that we can create a world around ourselves which is greed-free and hate-free".

For so many of us Muslims, the destruction of the World Trade Centre on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 was a deeply shameful act. The killing of so many innocent people was itself a terrific shock. But the fact that it was described as being done in the name of Islam was even more shocking. With many others I tried to make moves to make amends for this act. But above all I gave much thought to the reason lying behind such an outrage. We are encouraged in the Holy Qur'an to carry out self-criticism, to reflect and search for fresh and creative thinking. I thought back to Frank Buchman's actions after the horrors of the Second World War and the ways in which he reached out to the German people and particularly to help give alternatives to those, like the communists, who sought to exploit anger and defeatism. Was not the next task for people like myself to find ways of providing hope and a positive way forward to the young Muslims who were driven by hatred and bitterness to carry out acts of violence and even suicide to draw attention to their passionate views? And could those, I wondered, who had had the power to control so many world events give thought to the impact of their decisions on so many people and nations. These decisions, which they made with the best of intentions, so often proved disastrous for so many, as can be seen in situations like the Middle East as well as areas where the clash between communists and anti-communists left thousands of lives ruined and countries impoverished. Here is a task that needs the best minds and actions of us all,

whether Muslim or non-Muslim, and to take this on together. This perhaps is the next stage to be travelled on my journey of discovery.

## **COMMONALITIES BETWEEN ISLAM AND INITIATIVES OF CHANGE**

Here is the power of the moral teaching of Islam – in its broad moral view which comes from the idea of promoting good and preventing evil, the idea from which may be derived the following moral imperatives:

### **1) Read and Learn! *Read and learn in the name of God who has created.*<sup>1</sup>**

It means, then, that the revelation of the Holy Qur'an did not begin with the imperative of faith, but with the imperative of knowledge. God Almighty did not ask Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), to believe, but He has asked him to read and learn what and how to believe. This is so because man is born with faith. There is no need, therefore, to ask man to believe if that is already in his soul. But there is a need to remind man that he ought to read and learn what is in his soul. So, man needs knowledge with faith as well as faith with knowledge. And here is where both East and West need Islam to teach them: the East to practice knowledge and the West to appreciate the faith.

### **2) Believe and work hard. *Those who believe and work hard deserve God's forgiveness and a great reward*<sup>2</sup>**

Man neither lives in a pure spiritual world without matter, nor in a pure material world without spirit. The secret of success is that man unites in himself these two values: his spirit and his body. In other words, the purpose of man's life is in the activity of his spirit, and that is his faith, and in the activity of his body, and that is his hard work. The Muslims will regain their dignity if they learn how to make balance between these two forces of progress: the faith of heart and the work of hand. At the moment there is a big discrepancy between the Muslim heart and the Muslim hand; there is a big gap between Muslim faith and Muslim work. There is no Muslim dignity unless this gap is overcome in such a way that the faith of heart and the power of mind work together.

### **3) Be pious and respect your parents. *God Almighty has prescribed that you worship none except Him and that you do good to your parents...*<sup>3</sup>**

This Qur'anic injunction emphasizes on the relationship between the worship of God and the respect for parents. The message is not to concede to the pressure to give up on the family values. The institution of family tradition has no alternative. The issue of the family values is not only a moral demand of human society, but also an existential condition of humanity. The attempt to break the common law of family life is equal of an attempt to break the common law of the nature of the Sunrise from the East.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 96:1

<sup>2</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 5:9

<sup>3</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 17:23

**4) Be honest and fight for your rights. *You ought to be engaged in the effort to the way of God courageously and honestly...***<sup>4</sup>

The success here and the salvation in the hereafter do not come by themselves. One should go after his/her success. One should fight for his/her rights here and now. Also one should work for the salvation in the hereafter; one should deserve God's mercy.

**5) Be aware of tomorrow. *Let every one, male and female, see what he/she is doing for tomorrow...***<sup>5</sup>

In this verse of the Holy Qur'an there is a clear proof that we have the right, nay the obligation, to plan our future and to believe that our future may be better than our past. It is really peculiar how some came to the idea that the Muslim future is hopeless and so the hope is only in the Muslim past as a way of life and a goal of history. This idea has no foundation in Islam. It is not only that God teaches Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), that **“your future will be better than your past”**, but also the common reason tells us that we cannot change our past, but we can, with God's help, shape our future in guidance with God. So, we are not responsible for the past Muslim history, but we are responsible for the future Muslim history. We should not be the prisoners of our past history. *“That is a past nation. It belongs to it what it has earned by itself and to you belongs what you have earned by yourselves, ...”*<sup>6</sup>

So, the Muslims should not be afraid to think about their future in the same way as they should not be possessed by their past. The Muslims have a future because they have faith in God. And they have faith in God because they believe that the truth and justice will prevail.

#### **6) Compassion and Forgiveness In Islam:**

Muslims are enjoined by the Holy Qur'an to "pardon and forbear... [For] do you not desire that God should forgive you your sins, seeing that God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace?" They are reminded of this duty when they pray five times daily to "Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate" or invoke "God the Forgiver" or "God the Pardoner" - four of God's ninety-nine names. Believers also have the life of Muhammad to guide them, including stories about how the Prophet chose to forgive the killers of his uncle and, after being stoned, rejected the angel Gabriel's offer to "cause the mountains to crumble" on his persecutors. Instead, he asked, "May it please your Lord to forgive my people, for they do not know" — another intimation that ignorance breeds wrongdoing.

#### **Forgiveness is important for two reasons:**

1. Very importantly, for the after-life or the life hereafter. One forgives to seek forgiveness. Seeking forgiveness is a sign of humility and forgiving others is a sign of magnanimity.

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<sup>4</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 22:78

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 59:18

<sup>6</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 2:134

2. Seeking forgiveness and forgiving others brings happiness in the worldly life - it's a psychological thing. In addition, forgiving improves relations with people by bringing good reputation and respect.

In the ancient world tribes and families carried on blood feuds for generations because they could not forgive. Islam taught a middle path between turning the other cheek and never ending blood feuds, that is, revenge to the extent harm done is allowed but forgiveness is preferred. Allah said in the Holy Qur'an:

*"The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for Allah loves not those who do wrong."*<sup>7</sup>

**The concept of forgiveness in the Holy Qur'an is expressed in three Arabic terms, (1) 'afw, (2) safhu, and (3) ghafara:**

1)'**Afw** means to pardon, to excuse for a fault or an offence or a discourtesy, waiver of punishment and amnesty. Examples of usage in the Holy Qur'an are verses 42:40, 2:187 and 5:95.

2)'**Safhu** means to turn away from a sin or a misdeed, ignore, etc. Examples of usage in the Holy Qur'an are verses 2:109, 15:85 and 43:89.

3)'**Ghafara or maghfira** means to cover, to forgive and to remit. Examples of usage in the Holy Qur'an are verses 2:263, 42:37 and 43:43.

There are no particular words to say for asking forgiveness. However, Muslims are taught many phrases and words to keep repeating daily asking God's forgiveness. For example:

(1) ***Astaghfiru-Allah*** meaning, "I ask forgiveness from Allah."

(2) ***Subhanaka-Allah humma wa bi hamdika wa ash-hadu al la Ilaha illa Anta astaghfiruka wa atubu ilayk*** meaning "Glory be to You, Allah, and with You Praise (thanks) and I bear witness that there is no deity but You, I ask Your forgiveness and I return to You (in obedience).

### **Leadership must be forgiving:**

*"And it was by God's grace that thou [O Muhammad] didst deal gently with thy followers: for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee. Pardon them, then, and pray that they be forgiven. And take counsel with them in all matters of public concern; then, when thou hast decided upon a course of action, place thy trust in God: for, verily God loves those who place their trust in Him."*<sup>8</sup>

Explanation: Allah approved Prophet Muhammad (S) for his leniency with his followers and taught him to pardon. In addition, Allah instructed the Prophet to counsel with the followers and once a decision in a given matter was taken, follow through with it and trust Allah for results. Following the example of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim leadership is required to adopt a similar course.

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<sup>7</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 42:40

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 3:159

## **General teachings of forgiveness in Islam:**

**‘Allah orders the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly’<sup>9</sup>**

### **Family situations:**

*"O You who believe! Behold, among your spouses and your children are enemies unto you: so beware of them! But if you pardon [their faults], and forbear, and forgive- then, behold, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." <sup>10</sup>*

Explanation: In a family, some members may cause a lot of pain by their wrongdoing. Sometimes, a family member may cause others to do wrong and transgress which may cause another to commit a crime but it was not intentional. Allah is exhorting to adopt a forgiving attitude within the family.

### **Repelling evil with good:**

Allah Almighty in the Holy Qur’an commands us to return the evil that is done to us by others not only with good, but with the best! Let us look at the Holy Qur’an Verse 13:22 "Those who patiently persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord; establish regular prayers; spend out of gifts we have bestowed for their sustenance, secretly and openly; **and turn off evil with good**: for such there is the final attainment of the (Eternal) Home." <sup>11</sup>

Let us look at the Holy Qur’an Verse 23:96 "**Repel evil with that which is best**: We are Well-acquainted with the things they say."

You do not return good for evil, for there is no equality or comparison between the two. You repel or destroy evil with something which is far better, just as an antidote is better than poison. **You foil hatred with love, compassion and forgiveness.** You repel ignorance with knowledge, folly and wickedness with the friendly message of Revelation. The man who was in bondage of sin, you not only liberate from sin, but also make him your greatest friend and helper in the cause of Allah Almighty! Such is the alchemy of the Word of Allah Almighty! Your credit for returning evil with good and paying for charity is double. Also if you forgive and return the evil with good, then Allah Almighty will love you and reward you.

### **Forgiveness: A different outlook and a new start:**

I draw your attention to the actions of the Holy Prophet of Islam when he entered Makkah as victor. **Everyone was offered amnesty and complete forgiveness.** When Caliph Umar entered Jerusalem he was not even prepared to pray in a Church for fear that those who came after him may treat the place as a mosque and take it away from the Christians. But when the Crusaders took the city of Jerusalem there was a total massacre of the population. What happened in Spain? Not a single Muslim or Jew was left unexecuted or un-exiled. It was the same in Sicily where all the mosques were demolished. Even in the last century the

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<sup>9</sup> The Holy Qur’an, 41:34

<sup>10</sup> The Holy Qur’an, 64:14

<sup>11</sup> The Holy Qur’an, 13:12

same practice was adopted in Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya and many other parts of the world.

The way to bring forth this rebirth is by practicing revolutionary, true and absolute forgiveness. That is, forgiveness that accompanies a commitment to justice. When sincere forgiveness was sought it becomes clear that such forgiveness could only come within a commitment to justice. "People cannot simply 'forgive'—invite back into their lives on a mutual basis—those who continue to violate us," "otherwise 'forgiveness' is an empty word. Forgiveness is possible only when the violence stops. Only then can those who have been violated even consider the possibility of actually loving those who once brutalized and battered them. Only then can the former victims empower the victimizers by helping them to realize their own power to live as liberated liberators, people able to see in themselves and others a corporate capacity to shape the future." It is in the ending of injustice and the journey toward a mutual and just future that forgiveness becomes revolutionary. This understanding of revolutionary forgiveness, though Christian in inspiration, is also Jewish and Islamic in its demand for justice. By placing forgiveness in motion, the static and superficial request — even demand by the powerful — to be forgiven without embarking on a new social and political project of inclusion and justice, is placed in perspective. Forgiveness is less the end of the matter than it is a process of conversion to a future different from the past.

### **Quiet Time - Prayer in Silence – Listening to God and the Holy Qur'an:**

In the **Holy Qur'an God Almighty commands:** *“And remember your Lord in peace and silence with humility and reverence without loudness in words in the morning and in the evening and do not become one who is forgetful”*<sup>12</sup>

Silence in Islam is worshipping God Almighty in a quiet time; there are many examples in the Holy Qur'an of people who took vows of silence as a means of worship. The Qur'anic emphasis is on being aware of, and taking responsibility for, one's speech in order to avoid doing harm or causing injury through talking.

In the **Holy Qur'an God Almighty said:** *“And when any one speaks to me, I indeed listen to the prayer of any supplicant when he/she calls on Me. Indeed I am close to them and I reply to their calls. Let them also, with a will, listen to My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.”*<sup>13</sup>

### **Golden Rule:**

**"Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself".** It is noteworthy that most religions base their moral code on the highly effective Golden Rule:

**Buddhism:** Hurt **not** others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful (Udana-Varga 5:18)

**Judaism:** What is hateful to you, do **not** do to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

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<sup>12</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 7:205

<sup>13</sup> The Holy Qur'an, 2:186



**Hinduism:** This is the sum of duty: Do **naught** unto others which would cause you pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517)

**Confucianism:** Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do **not** unto others what you would not have them do to you (Analects 15:23)

**Zoroastrianism:** That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is **not** good for itself. Good thoughts, good words and good deed are the bases of good life.

**The Christian faith** actually uses two complementary rules: The (ineffective) Biblical "Golden Rule" which proclaims: "All things whatsoever ye would that man should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt 7:12). However, the (effective) Ten Commandments are framed in the negative, as all moral codes must be in order to be effective.

**Islam:** "No one is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." (Sunnah) This moral code is also a version of the Golden Rule. It is very ineffective. It is obeyed very selectively and ambiguously. Clearly, it is based on the unrealistic assumption that your brother has precisely the same needs and wants as you do. If we wish to live in harmony with others and never give rise to a conflict with others, we must convert the "**Golden Rule**" into practice: "**Don't do to others what you don't want done to yourself**".

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**By Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid** (now retired, 2014) formerly:

*Chairman Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony UK (MCRRH);*

*Chairman National Association of British Pakistanis (NABPAK);*

*Chairman Religions for Peace UK and Deputy President of European WCRP - Religions for Peace;*

*Chairman taskforce for 2008 European year of Inter-cultural Dialogue;*

*International Secretary World Congress of Faiths (WCF);*

*Adviser to European Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace (ECRL);*

*Adviser to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Europe and International Affairs Committee (EIAC);*

*Link Officer Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group (IFCG) for National and International Inter-faith matters;*

20 Wilberforce Close, Tollgate Hill, Broadfield, Crawley, West Sussex RH11 9TD

(UK) Tel: +44 (0)1293 201359 Mobile: +44 (0) 7971 861972

Email: [imamsajid@gmail.com](mailto:imamsajid@gmail.com) [jamilasajid@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jamilasajid@yahoo.co.uk)