

2nd
Edition

BEYOND WALLS

through *Initiatives of Change*

Change experiences of 120 people the world over
...they made corrections, they found directions...

SURESH KHATRI

*Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls...
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake*
Rabindranath Tagore

Beyond Walls

through Initiatives of Change

a global movement based on personal change,
helping people accept other beliefs and 'the other',
together building a world that works for all

Change experiences of 120 the world over
...they made corrections, they found directions...

Suresh Khatri



Initiatives of Change
India

Addressing global needs through personal change

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for Aman
for Meera

❧ Beyond Walls ❧

Contents:

Foreword by Dr Rajmohan Gandhi	1
Introduction to Initiatives of Change	3
How do I start?	7
Adding zing to life – one way to do inner listening	8
Stories of:	
1. Dr Sameera Nayeem, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, India	13
2. Niketu Iralu, Sechü Zubza, Nagaland, India	15
3. Pramod Boro, Kokrajhar, Bodoland, India	18
4. Letlapa Mphahlele, Manaleng, South Africa	20
5. Elena Schwarts, Moscow, Russia	22
6. Dmytro Prytulenko, Kyiv, Ukraine	24
7. Ratu Meli Vesikula MBE, Suva, Fiji Islands	26
8. Helena Salazar de von Arnim, Bogota, Colombia	29
9. Ismar Villavicencio, Montevideo, Uruguay	32
10. Pravin Nikam, Pune, India	33
11. J S Parthiban, Salem, India	35
12. Deepak Teraiya, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India	37
13. Neichüte Doulo, Kohima, Nagaland, India	39
14. Wati Mollier, Mokokchung, Nagaland, India	41
15. Kolezo Chase, Chümoukedima, Nagaland, India	43
16. Robert Solo, Bara Basti, Nagaland, India	45
17. Norma Suvarna, Mumbai, India	47
18. Aviva Segall, Omaha, USA	48
19. Zeke Reich, New York, USA	50
20. Chris Breitenberg, New Jersey, USA	53
21. Dr Imad Karam, Gaza, Palestine	56
22. Tianethone Chantharasy, Sydney, Australia	58
23. Nith Chittasy, Sydney, Australia	60
24. Mike Brown, Adelaide, Australia	62
25. John Bond, Oxford, UK	65
26. Nigel Heywood, Melbourne, Australia	67
27. Rob Lancaster, Canberra, Australia	69
28. Alex Birnberg, Ballarat, Australia	72
29. Lindsay Cartwright, Perth, Australia	74
30. Kim Vuth, Phnom Penh, Cambodia	75
31. Haridas Nair, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia	77

32. Peter Heyes, Edmonton, Canada	79
33. Olena Kashkarova, Kyiv, Ukraine	81
34. Diana Damsa, Baia Mare, Romania	84
35. Dana Lazar, Baia Mare, Romania	86
36. Djurdjica Fuchkan, Zagreb, Croatia	89
37. Bhavesh Patel, Chishinau, Moldova	92
38. Kiyoshi Nagano, Tokyo, Japan	94
39. Keisuke Nakayama, Ako, Japan	97
40. Ajaz Dar, Sial, Kashmir, India	99
41. Altaf Khan, Srinagar, Kashmir, India	101
42. Ambreen Bashir, Baramullah, Kashmir, India	103
43. Dr Raj Kumar Anand, Mumbai, India	104
44. Dr Raviprakash Dani, Houston, USA	106
45. Rekha Shahani Jagasia, Mumbai, India	108
46. Zarin Virji, Mumbai, India	110
47. Russi Lala, Mumbai, India	112
48. Sarosh Ghandy, Bengaluru, India	115
49. Rajendra Gandhi, Mumbai, India	117
50. Mayur Shah, Baramati, Maharashtra, India	119
51. Parag Shah, Baramati, Maharashtra, India	121
52. Dr Yoginder Sikand, Bengaluru, India	122
53. Vic and Mell Walker, Toronto, Canada	125
54. Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, Geneva, Switzerland	127
55. H��l��ne Guisan-Demetriades, Lausanne, Switzerland	129
56. Andrew Stallybrass, Caux, Switzerland	131
57. Elsa Vogel, Birmingham, UK	133
58. Philippe Lasserre, Paris, France	135
59. Renjou Liu, Tainan, Taiwan	137
60. Ming Ling Xiong, Shenyang, China	140
61. Erhling Wang, Taipei, Taiwan	142
62. Hsu Shou Feng, Tainan, Taiwan	144
63. Qianhan Xiong, Changsha, Hunan, China	146
64. Nandor Lim, Penang, Malaysia	148
65. Mohammed, Kabul, Afghanistan	150
66. Farishta Afzaly, Parwan, Afghanistan	152
67. Shair Ahmed, Kabul, Afghanistan	154
68. Sanaz Ohodi, Teheran, Iran	155
69. Ramez Salame, Beirut, Lebanon	157
70. Wadiaa Houry, Zahle, Lebanon	159
71. Muhyeddine Chehab, Beirut, Lebanon	162
72. Dr Bryan Hamlin, Boston, USA	164

73. John Munro, Sussex, UK	166
74. Howard Grace, Berkshire, UK	169
75. David Young, Brighton, UK	171
76. Peter and Jean Everington, London, UK	173
77. Rev John Burrell, Benson, UK	175
78. Dr Nagia Abdelmougheny Said, Cairo, Egypt	177
79. Ann Njeri Ndiangui, Machakos County, Kenya	179
80. Mike Muikia, Subukia, Kenya	181
81. Carole Khakula Tincas, Copenhagen, Denmark	182
82. Tasnim Idriss, Tunis, Tunisia	184
83. Yusuf Mustapha Olatunji, Lagos, Nigeria	185
84. Abdullah Alwazin, Jakarta, Indonesia	187
85. Miftahul Huda, Bandung, Indonesia	188
86. Om Bagaria, Tezpur, Assam, India	190
87. Vivek Asrani, Mumbai, India	192
88. Jens J Wilhelmsen, Oslo, Norway	193
89. Kiran Gandhi, Shendurjane, Maharashtra, India	195
90. Neeru Gandhi, Shendurjane, Maharashtra, India	198
91. Anjali Gandhi, Pune, India	199
92. Chandreshwar Khan, Jamshedpur, India	201
93. Appal Raju, Jamshedpur, India	203
94. Vijayam Kartha, Pune, India	205
95. Dr Ravindra Rao, Shendurjane, Maharashtra, India	207
96. Archana Rao, Shendurjane, Maharashtra, India	209
97. Kamal More, Godavali, Maharashtra, India	211
98. Manda Tai Beloshe, Beloshe, Maharashtra, India	213

Ifl – ‘Initiatives of Change for Life’ Outreach Team

99. Zooni Dash, Rourkela, Odisha, India	217
100. Sunny Mawiong, Shillong, Meghalaya, India	219
101. Jigme Wangyal, Basgo, Ladakh, India	221
102. Penuo Hiekha, Kohima, Nagaland, India	223
103. Damko Wangyal, Panchgani, India	224
104. Anup Pawar, Panchgani, India	226
105. Wimmarshana Ranasinghe, Narammala, Sri Lanka	228
106. Mohammed Ghabriss, Kafarromen, Lebanon	230
107. Karma Phuntsok, Leh, Ladakh, India	233
108. Neas Wanimbo, Wamena, (West) Papua	234
109. Chuskit Angmo, Leh, Ladakh, India	236
110. Leena Khatri, Panchgani, India	239

New IofC team in Nepal

111. Keshab Dahal, Kathmandu, Nepal	242
112. Rabindra K Mahato, Bhangaha, Nepal	243
113. Meena Sharma, Kathmandu, Nepal	245
114. Kamal Kandel, Lumbini, Nepal	246

Ek Naitik Bharat – Five year outreach team for An Ethical India

115. Radha Giri, Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, India	249
116. Biplab Mahato, Dorka Sai, Jharkhand, India	251
117. Himanshu Bharat, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India	253
118. Rohit Jagtap, Akola, Maharashtra, India	255
119. Tongpang Kumzuk Longchar, Changki, Nagaland, India	257
120. Pradeep Sen, Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh, India	259

Your chance to do Inner Listening 260

Your story for *Beyond Walls* 261

FOREWORD by Rajmohan Gandhi

BY blood an Indian and by birth a Fijian, Suresh Khatri is an Earth citizen in his spirit. For over half a century, he has unceasingly offered a distinctive kind of friendship to people he has run into in different parts of our world, no matter their religion or race.

His friendship is a blend of warmth and challenge, at times a difficult, even perhaps an annoying challenge. Suresh believes that everyone can be a changemaker, that everyone has access to an inner source of wisdom-cum-strength, and that everyone can and should access that source.

He conveys this conviction in plain language to those amidst whom he finds himself.

Over the decades he has found himself among, and interacted with, a range of fascinating human beings, many of whom have shared his convictions or responded positively to them.

Now he has collected remarkable stories from many of these friends, stories revealing the hope-giving things that happen when human beings obey nudges from an inner director that seems to exist within us.

The collection is from an array of diverse, even apparently clashing, backgrounds. In these stories, and accompanying quotes, I see a hint of a wonderful world of the future, where no wall will block humans from giving of their best, where no mountain, abyss or ocean – no hate or fear – will divide humans from one another.

That world may seem very distant to us, but the people whose stories Suresh has obtained are real and alive. If, alas, a few of them are no more, their stories remain fresh and speak to us.

If Suresh had asked me to relate my story, I would have reminded him that in the long-ago year of 1956, when I became 21, people I ran into helped me recognize that my life had a purpose.

I was startled. Not that I was down on myself until then. I just had small expectations. That the world needed me, that I could play a part no one else could, was to me an astonishing thought.

Just what it was that produced this realization, I cannot now precisely say. Perhaps God used the people I ran into to infuse that sense inside of me.



I began to enjoy quiet and prayerful reflection, reading religious texts and commentaries as well as literature and history, and looking at the world with fresh curiosity and eyes of hope. My life took a wonderful turn.

Along with a purpose in life, I also fortunately found an understanding that like everyone else I had often fallen short of my ideals. Reflection brought reminders of acts of dishonesty, pulls of selfishness and thoughts of envy. I made restitution where possible.

My shoulders felt free and light, and I was all set to change the world. Later I realized that vanity and fancy may lie deceptively close to a sense of purpose.

We all know that our wondrous world is also one of fears, hates and thirsts for revenge or power. In such a world, my true task, I would discover, was to encourage others in a sense of purpose and in efforts to heal. The role of others was at least as important as my role and probably more so; prayerfully and gratefully thinking of others should be a steady part of my life. Meanwhile, I must do my part as well as I can.

I respect Suresh for his life-commitment and his friendship to so many, and I congratulate him on the effort that has produced this book of experiences.

Readers will find, I believe, that it augments their stock of hope. God willing, they will also see from the stories the possibility that hurts can be healed, that steps towards justice and reconciliation are satisfying and often rewarded.



Introduction to Initiatives of Change (IofC)

CHANGE ONESELF – CHANGE THE WORLD

‘I was wrong!’ These three words are not easy for humans to utter. Spoken over a century ago, they began an outbreak of change in people, which fanned out through countries and continents.

In 1908, a seemingly unremarkable American accepted his own fault in a corrosive dispute, which had lasted many months and led to his resignation from a job that he saw as a vocation. This disagreement, with six members of the board that employed him to run a home for underprivileged boys, had consumed his emotions and destroyed his physical health.

He recognized that it was his ego that had built up the Himalaya of hate in him and had obscured his view of the pass that could lead him to freedom. He became ready to acknowledge that even if the six men he railed against were in the wrong, he was at fault too – for being so embittered against them.

He wrote to them, saying the three other words that are difficult for humans to utter sincerely, ‘I am sorry!’

By this simple act, Frank Buchman became a free man.

The change in Buchman was noticeable to everyone around him. He went for a walk with a student who wanted to find out what had caused it. Buchman told him what had happened to him, and this inspired the young man to look at his own life. He too found inner liberation.

Since then, thousands the world over have replicated the experience Buchman found in 1908 – that freedom comes through admitting where one is wrong and making amends. This enabled them to expand their hearts and ways of thinking and to care for people way beyond themselves and their own circle.

Oxford scholar Dr Charis Waddy said of Buchman: ‘He did not face people with a dogma but with an experience.’

Buchman’s experience enabled him to help countless others find release from their inner blocks to self-realization.



VALUES AND DIRECTION

To help people reflect on their past, Buchman suggested they let the four searchlights of absolute purity, honesty, unselfishness and love shine into every corner of their lives. His promise was that anyone who did this with full

sincerity would discover from their own conscience all the points they needed to correct.

Not long after this experience, Buchman took up a post at Penn State College in the USA. Students lined up well into the night to seek his spiritual counsel. These engagements, one on the tail of another, crowded his waking hours. He began to feel that he could not cope with the pressure, and that his encounters with people were not making a lasting difference to their lives. He felt he needed greater strength and inspiration.

A visitor to the college suggested another major tool for personal change and growth. It was very simple: taking an hour of silence every morning to seek and write down inspiration and specific direction from his inner voice or, as he understood it, God.

True, inspiration can come at other times of the day. But, in the years ahead, this morning discipline of prayerful reflection would often bring ideas for the people he would meet that day or of action that he and his team could take to spread this way of living worldwide.



Buchman made a practice of writing down the thoughts that came to him in this time of quiet. This, he stressed, freed his mind from the clutter of thoughts he wanted to retain, so that he could receive further inspiration. A 30-year-old contributor to this book, Mohammed Ghabriss of Lebanon, says, 'Thoughts disappear. Ink does not. Thoughts shape up as you write them down.' Buchman popularized this simple daily tool of writing down what comes from within.

Through this practice, personal correction was joined by life direction and conscience was joined by the inner voice. Through the decades since, these twin tools have become the bedrock of a new way of life for thousands of people.

As people experimented with these ideas, they found a greater role in bringing change around them and even beyond. Their lives no longer mirrored the world's problems. They made addressing the world's needs the priority for their lives. People of many faith traditions accepted this approach, in the belief that their walk talked more than their talk walked. They found that sharing the tough corrections they had made in their own lives was more effective than preaching or platitudes.

Many gave up shining career options to build up the global movement which is now known as Initiatives of Change (IofC).

EXPANDING WORLDVIEW, DIMINISHING EGO

IofC today is a vibrant rainbow of people of all religious hues and beliefs, working in teamwork. They have found an expansion of heart and mind that embraces ‘the other’. Through this *IofC* has contributed to interfaith understanding and to interfaith collaboration.

Deep inner change often seems to expand one’s worldview, as it diminishes one’s ego. Many of those who tell their stories in this book have found true appreciation of other beliefs, viewpoints and opinions.

For instance:

Ann Njeri Ndiangui, a Christian from Kenya, expresses: ‘Through *IofC*, I have made great friendships with Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and people of no religion. They have helped in strengthening my belief.’

Human Resources consultant Kiran Gandhi, an Indian Jain, writes of *IofC* helping him ‘to cultivate a broadminded outlook towards the religious beliefs of others’.

Mohammed from Afghanistan shares: ‘Any time I saw non-Muslims I had feelings of hate towards them. I could never imagine sitting with people from another religious background. I can now honestly say that I respect people from every religion, background and culture.’

Kim Vuth of Cambodia says: ‘I became a Buddhist because it was the faith of my family. I had negative impressions of other religions. But I have learned that my religion is no better than any other. *IofC* opened my heart to people of other faiths and of no faith.’

Such people have found a new openness and compassion towards ‘the other’. Their judgment is no longer distorted by past prejudices or inherited beliefs, with their comical insistence on superiority. They have relinquished their monopoly on



the path to salvation and their insistence that their religious beliefs are the only way for mankind. They have accepted that they too are fault-ridden and begun to work with everyone to deal with a world full of deprivation and depravity.

An outstanding feature of Asia Plateau, India’s vibrant *IofC* centre, is the regular early morning multi-faith prayer meeting, ending with collective silence. The idea was drawn from the daily practice of Mahatma Gandhi in his *ashrams*. Thousands of people attend residential *IofC* programmes at Asia Plateau every year, and each programme includes a multi-faith prayer meeting.

In these, anyone of any belief can offer an invocation, devotion, prayer, hymn or *bhajan* in their own distinctive way and language, in a coming together of differently labelled souls which can be indescribably inspiring.

This event epitomizes the sea change in IofC globally. It started over a century ago primarily as a Christian evangelistic movement. Today it has become one of the world's most striking contributions to interfaith openness, understanding and, above all, teamwork.

These serene invocations held in the pure fresh crispness of the morning offer a promise of a more respectful, compassionate world.



Asia Plateau, MRA/IofC Centre, Panchgani

CONTRIBUTION TO HISTORY

ALL around the world, so much pain results from humans' preoccupation with material acquisition, dogma, sectarianism, resources and territory. IofC helps people to create new space in their hearts and minds for the beliefs and the rights of others.

A vast global community of people of all faiths have found new satisfaction through more selfless living and giving, as part as of a world movement of social change starting with personal change.

How do I start?

FOR the world to change, I need to change myself first. ‘Change myself, change the world’ is the primary practice of IofC.

In the 115-year history of IofC, there are innumerable instances of knotty personal, national and international problems being resolved on the basis of people starting with themselves. Be it the reconciliation of France and Germany after decades of hatred, to which this approach contributed, or the impact today on the delivery of grassroots development by government servants in Meghalaya, the beautiful state in the north east of India.

So, what is the revolutionary process of changing society through changing oneself that IofC proposes?

It starts with admitting wherever you are wrong or at fault. Even if it’s only one thing, rectify it by owning up, making restitution or apologizing. This will launch you onto the path of change. It won’t be easy. You will have to tunnel through the roadblocks of ego at each step. But if you wish to experience newness in your life, then try making one such correction right away.



To help identify where to start, IofC suggests four guides: absolute **p**urity, **h**onesty, **u**nselfishness and **l**ove (**phul**, which is Hindi for flower). These four values will alert your conscience to what you need to do – apologies, repayments, admitting to dishonesty, illicit relations or energy-sapping indulgences, addressing jealousy or hate... If you act on this sincerely, it will free you and renew you – and often other people too!

Inspiration for life

THE next step is to adopt the discipline of taking time out every day to listen to the inner voice. This is the most practical way of moving from self-centredness to other-centredness. It will help you go deeper, nourish you inwardly, transform you outwardly and make you more effective as an agent for change.

The best time for this is the early morning, although inner listening can be done at any time of the day or night. IofC puts great importance on writing down what you hear from your inner voice. This acts as an aid to memory, but also signifies seriousness in your commitment to implementing the thoughts and ideas that come to you.

Because we are all fallible, it is wise to share these thoughts with someone you trust who is committed to the same practice. Sharing your thoughts can also strengthen your resolve to take them forward.

World-changing power

W*HERE* does this inner voice come from? Some speak of the True Self, others of the Higher Power, the Creative Intelligence, the Universe, the Divine or, simply, God. Inner listening is the way to make a deeper and growing connection with whatever you call that life-changing force.

The experience of hundreds the world over is that when we listen with as much selflessness as possible, unexpected ideas can come. When heeded, these thoughts can lead to actions, which make a difference to the problems facing us or society – especially when they come from a space of real warm care for specific people or situations.

Morning silent times give us inspiration, new thinking and new ideas. Over time new care for people and the world will populate the heart, mind and spirit.

Addressing global needs and conflicts through personal change is the vital, missing element that IofC offers.



Is life a bit tasteless? Here's how to add ZING to it!

Most people feel they can manage life on their own strength. And do so, seemingly with success. Yet so many lives are tormented, tasteless or dissatisfied. There is a way of releasing the untapped potential within us and enjoying greater fulfillment.

If there is a Creator, finding out what the divine plan for our lives might be, will add real taste to daily life.

To do this, we need to listen deeply within, not just to the brain as we normally do, but to the heart and the inner voice. The process is simple, but difficult to make time for and put into daily practice.

Early mornings are best for inner listening. Sleep and wake up earlier, so that you can find that time in the freshness of the morning.

Set aside minimum 20 minutes every day. An hour is best if you can.

CONNECTION

First, be fully awake and become alert to what the inner voice in your heart wants to say to you about your day, your life, especially how you can make it more fulfilling.

Since memories are faulty, it is important to write the thoughts down. This has a spiritual value too, as putting something down in ink strengthens intention and commitment.

CORRECTION

Let the spotlight of the four absolute values of Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness, Love (PHUL) show where you need to make hinge-point corrections of your life so far.

Make apologies for anger, hatred, jealousy, dislike and hurtful behaviour.

Tell your partner or teammates the very worst about you.

Pay money back where you should.

Be honest about lies.

Become someone who can be trusted. Free energy to care by stopping self-indulgence.

Stop going to internet sites that don't really help you.

Deal with everything that stops you thinking of others and playing a greater role.

and so on ...

These seemingly simple, yet difficult, corrections hold the master key to change, freedom and growth.

DIRECTION

After cleaning up the stains on your conscience, you are more ready to receive direction.

Though inner listening cannot be structured in any exclusive way, here is one way of spending the 20 minutes you allot every morning:

- * Two minutes:** Quickly note all the to-dos for the day so the mind is free to go deeper – bills to pay, phone recharges, shopping to do, emails to send, people to see, things to do at work and at home....
- * Two minutes:** Wish well or pray for your own and everyone's day. Read a spiritually helpful text and reflect on it.
- * Three minutes:** Find where you need to correct anything from yesterday. How do you grow further within, and become more satisfied spiritually?
Ask new questions and dwell on them.
- * Five minutes:** Think about, care about, live into and pray for the lives of at least three people – the same ones – every day, so as to be ready to be shown ways of helping them to find change and fulfillment in their lives.
Slowly expand the number of people you think about.
- * Eight minutes:** Think of at least one issue in society which you commit to do something about in your lifetime – corruption, hatred, women's rights, caste-ism...
Seek fresh inspiration on it daily.

Be open to receive totally unexpected thoughts at any time during this process.

New adventures in satisfying living and inner growth begin with inner listening and obedience.

Try letting the Creator do for your life what you cannot, and bring a zing to it!



Facts

These personal stories are of 120 people from 36 countries on six continents.

The respondents are of differing religious, spiritual or belief persuasions: 44 Christians, 29 Hindus, 16 Muslims, nine Buddhists, four Jains, four Taoists, three Jews, three Zoroastrians (Parsis), two atheists, one Sikh, one Shinto, one Tenrikyo adherent, one Quaker, one Brahma Samaji, one agnostic secularist.

Their ages range from 21 to 106; and 59 are between 20 and 45. Thirty eight are women. Six are inter-religious couples.

Despite this variety of backgrounds, there is much consonance in their stories, partly because they responded to the same set of questions. But the similarities also re-emphasize the fact that, beneath everything, we all are the same – and thus also able to find similar liberation.

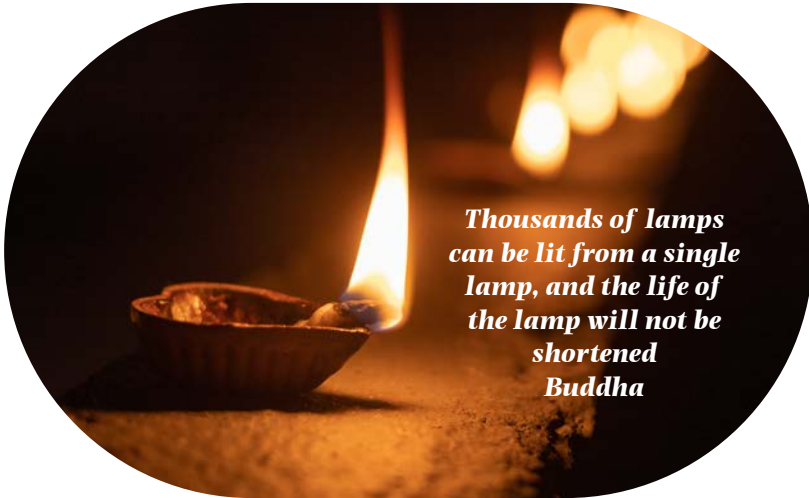
Acronyms and terms used

* MRA (Moral Re-Armament) and IofC (Initiatives of Change) are successive names for the movement initiated by Frank Buchman. It was known as Moral Re-Armament from 1938 to 2001, when the name was changed to Initiatives of Change. The name used by a contributor to this book will generally be the one that was current when they met this way of life.

* Most of those involved in MRA in its early days were Christians. The Christian term 'quiet time' was widely used to describe the core practice of listening to one's inner voice for direction. Today, in a movement which has spread to all faiths and continents, a more appropriate name is 'inner listening time'.

* Asia Plateau in Panchgani, India, and Mountain House in Caux, Switzerland, are the two main world conference centres of IofC.

* Action for Life (AfL) was a 10-month IofC programme fostering leadership for societal change in youth from all continents. There were five such programmes from 2001 to 2011. AfL spent half its time in India and the rest in other countries.



*Thousands of lamps
can be lit from a single
lamp, and the life of
the lamp will not be
shortened
Buddha*





I am a practising Muslim but I believe in Deepavali and we celebrate Christmas

Dr Sameera Nayeem

Dewas, M P, India

*Prof of English. Master trainer,
Madhya Pradesh Happiness Department*

A sari-clad Muslim lady daily sporting a *bindi* (vermillion spot on forehead), a Hindu symbol of being married. A bigness immediately strikes anyone meeting Dr Sameera Nayeem, a professor of 35 years. But how did she come to such large-heartedness?

Hers is a family of professors, award-winning writers and freedom fighters. From them she learned appreciating other ways, also from Jain neighbours. An uncle questioned her wearing a *bindi*. Her learned father responded, 'It is not forbidden in the Quran...Let her wear it if she likes it.'

In December 2016, she met IofC in a workshop in Bhopal, organized by Madhya Pradesh's Rajya Anand Sansthan (Happiness Department). 'An amazing experience. It gave my life a new direction. I thought I was already fulfilled in life. But inner listening gave a new vision and corrections helped me develop in a new way. Past grievances, pain and sorrows were vented. As I collected and corrected myself, I felt relieved with their purgation.'

Her major correction was saying sorry to her husband, for grievance of years for having ruptured their fairytale family life. Moh'd Zakir, a software engineer, went to see his ancestral lands in Rajasthan 20 years ago. Seeing the plight of drought-ridden villagers, he left his job and started an agitation that the world saw on CNN, BBC etc. He stayed on, working for the villagers' rights.

In 2014, vested interests framed Zakir for standing for *panchayat* (village) elections. Sameera says, 'I, a state election trainer, gave people lectures about democracy. But when my husband said he was contesting, I said angrily, "It's a thankless task. You think people care about us? I can't support you." But, the villagers, appreciating his sacrificial service, elected him while he was in prison for 19 days. His victory stunned Sameera. 'It made me ashamed of myself.'

After that IofC-*Alpaviraam* (Reflective Pause) programme, she went from Dewas in early 2017 and apologized to Zakir. She also went door to door thanking villagers for electing him. Affectionately, they gifted her whatever they had - a rupee, ten rupees etc. They said, 'Our *bindani* (daughter-in-law) has come

home for the first time.’ That correction gave her new life directions.

Sameera went back to a jeweller after 18 months and paid Rs 12,000 for a ring that the shopkeeper had failed to put on the bill. She had seen his mistake but had remained mum then. ‘My inner voice said this is wrong - it is theft.’

After 20 years she returned four out-of-print books to the Vikram University Central Library in Ujjain. I had said, ‘From so many books in the library if I keep some, it doesn’t matter. But the Inner Voice did not agree, saying, “The books will be in the library for you to borrow anytime. Meanwhile, others can also use them.”

***I got Alpaviraam late in life
but it is a beautiful journey now***

‘I’ve since said sorry to many people. Some had forgotten those instances. They never imagined I’d have such grievances. But I was very negative then. I asked for forgiveness. My soul feels relieved. As I have changed the scene around me, my son, my husband and the family are also changing.

‘Six months ago my mother went into coma after a brain haemorrhage. Doctors were refusing to treat her, saying it was useless. My prayers to the Universe worked. She is now coming back.

‘*Alpaviraam* is an official programme of the Madhya Pradesh Government to spread this reflective pause practice state-wide. *Alpaviraam* has its roots in the inner listening core of IofC. I am fortunate to work as a trainer, now with a new self-confidence, presenting these programmes in two of the 10 divisions of M P. I must have reached 80,000 people in events, many of three days. And I can see that my life-changing experiences have motivated participants a lot.

‘Between 2016 and today, IofC has changed my life. Inner listening has given me a strong backbone. Earlier what I was telling, often I was not practising. I got *Alpaviraam* late in life but it is a beautiful journey now.

‘On inter-religious issues, I believe the Universe is one. God, *Allah* or *Bhagwan* are different names we give. The Supreme Being is everywhere. And, everywhere is the Universe. No religion says you should lie, or kill. So why fight? Vested interests mislead and make us forget these basics.

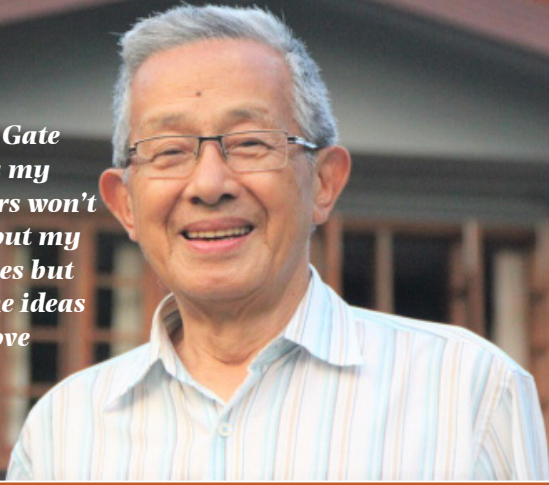
‘I am a practising Muslim but I believe in *Deepavali* and we also celebrate Christmas. Many in my family have had inter-religious marriages.

‘Now, I feel the Universe helps me out all the time. While hundreds have to go to Dharamsala to glimpse the Dalai Lama, His Holiness came to a village in my district. I was given the high privilege of translating him into Hindi.’

The IofC process of CCD – Connection, Correction and Direction, has given new adventures in my life journey. I’m in *anand* (happy) and stepping ahead to make this earth a more beautiful place.

Allah makes the impossible possible

*At the Dazzling Gate
whoever checks my
immigration papers won't
ask questions about my
religious doctrines but
what I did with the ideas
sent from above*



Niketu Iralu Sechü Zubza, Nagaland, India

Elder of the Angami tribe. Conscience voice of the North East India region. Decorated for his work by the Assamese and Bodo people. He has worked with MRA/IofC since 1957 and with his wife, Christine, hosts Kerünyü Ki (the House of Listening), the IofC centre in Nagaland

THE MRA team who came to my Chennai college seemed honest, happy and having a purpose in life – the exact opposite of me. They said MRA was out 'to remake the world, starting with change in people'. They described where they had put things right in their lives. Their commitment spoke powerfully to my hungry heart and soul.

In my first time of silent listening with them, I wrote down, 'You're a very selfish man, jealous of so many people. You don't love anyone. You're selfish in everything you think and do.'

When my turn came I read this out, after saying I was sorry for wasting the time of the meeting. The chairman said those honest thoughts would change my life if I kept on listening and obeying. In the next days I tried making a list of the specific ways in which I was selfish and found I was questioning everything I was used to thinking and doing.

If these new friends had not stuck with me and encouraged me by their honesty about their own battles and by their selfless, unyielding commitment, I would not have walked further on the road I started to see stretching ahead.

I could not walk away from 'remaking the world starting with change in

people'. I knew the first part was desperately urgent and my soul ached for it; but I could not get beyond the sad thought that anything an ordinary person like me might do was pointless.

However, I decided to act on a small but clear thought about my selfishness. One night after others went to bed I had removed the powerful light bulb in the common bathroom, and replaced it with the weak bulb from my room.

What I had done disturbed my inner listening. So I restored the two bulbs to their original places. The next thought was to see our warden, the most popular English professor. I feared he would think I was a pathetic boy from the northeast frontier. But the thought wouldn't go away and one evening I knocked on his door.

I told him I had come with something small and rather silly. I explained I had put right the wrong I had done but the experiment I was making seemed to require I be honest with him. Instead of laughing at me, he thanked me and added, 'Keep it up!'

As I walked back to my room I was happy that for the first time I had done something because it was right, without thinking of what I would get in return. The professor, whom my whole English class loved, believed in my conviction!

Then I wrote to a Nepali who worked under my father (one of the first Naga doctors) in the Government Hospital in Kohima. I told him I was jealous of his family, who owned the provision store where all our money went, and that I had wished for it to be destroyed by 'anti-social elements'.

It was much more difficult writing my father. I could not leave out the time in high school when I had ordered a book on sex, and had lied to him about it. My father was in prison, only because he was the brother-in-law of A Z Phizo, who was spearheading the Naga political struggle. He felt deeply humiliated that the government he had served should treat him in such a way.

***I deeply respect the time-tested practices
adherents of different religions
have developed***

He replied to my letter, 'I do not know what MRA is, but if it makes people honest as it has done in your case, it must be a good thing.' He also said, 'I know what you, my children, feel about the way I have treated your mother. I promise I will treat her differently from now on.' He returned a different man from his year in jail.

These initial small beginnings gave me a glimpse of the side of my life God saw. And in seeing it I was seeing something of God. I committed my life to do whatever God might guide me to do with others similarly committed.

Listening to the inner voice and trying to follow it has meant that I have come to deeply respect all religious beliefs and time-tested practices which adherents of different religions have developed to worship the Almighty.

The answer Frank Buchman crafted for the world in crisis came directly from

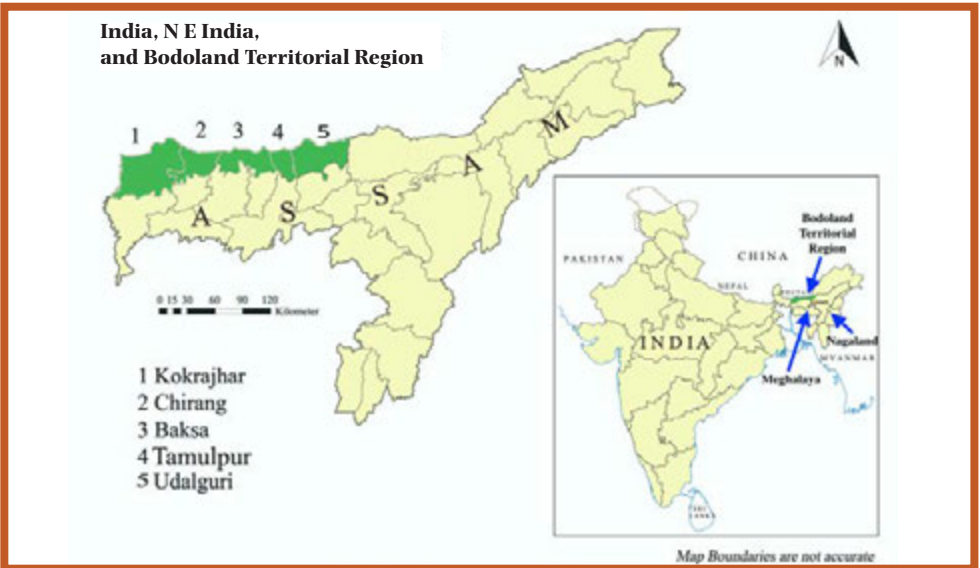
his experiments in listening and obeying, becoming a part of the cure instead of continuing to be part of the disease. He committed his life to building a world led by people led by God, where 'empty hands will be filled with work, empty stomachs with food, empty hearts with an idea that really satisfies'.

For the first time I had done something because it was right, without thinking of what I would get in return

The human population is projected to reach 10 billion by the end of the 21st century. The only safe option open to us is to build the just, fair and sustainable society that Gandhi and Buchman fought for.

The increasing number of courageous voices for human rights and freedom, often in brutal undemocratic lands, are sustained by a spiritual and moral 'aquifer'. Gautama Buddha, Mahavir, Kabir, Gnyaneshwar, Tukaram, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Ramakrishna, Tagore have all replenished it down the centuries.

I am sure that when I arrive at the Dazzling Gate after leaving this world, whoever checks my immigration papers will not ask questions about my religious beliefs and doctrines, but about what I did with the ideas and thoughts I was regularly sent from above.



***What is right is right even if no one does it.
What is wrong is wrong even if every one does it***
G K Chesterton



*A leader who listens to the Inner Voice
- and to people*

Pramod Boro
Kokrajhar, Bodoland, India
*Student leader, now elected Chief
of Bodoland Territorial Region (popn. 3mn)*

ON 2nd October 2009, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, Pramod Boro, leader of up to 100,000 followers in the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), publicly made a call for non-violence in Bodoland. They adopted this new, hitherto untried way to achieve their community's aspirations for autonomy and justice, having understood that violence inevitably leads to unending violence.

North East India found his call strikingly unexpected. Some militant groups fighting for their political autonomy eventually also followed their example; or seriously questioned what violence had fetched them. The fact was that violence had got hundreds of their own people killed in unwinnable wars against the Indian State. Through Pramod, today Bodos no longer think that violence is the only way. Hate and insurrection no longer seem the first recourse for aggrieved communities of N E India.

Pramod is now elected head of 3 million in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), an autonomous political entity within Assam since 2003. His attempts to keep his governance corruption-free have succeeded significantly. Not in all instances. There are leakages and siphoning he knows of. He is being watched with hope by good people, who secretly pray he succeeds against very heavy political odds.

He tells about his life that he was born into drunken violence at home. Father drank and regularly beat mother up, at times leaving her lying on the floor for days. A shy reclusive boy, Pramod remembers at age eight, nursing mother to health, tending to her, cooking for her in her wretched beaten-up condition.

As a youth, he saw innocent people killed within the Bodo struggle, with necks, ears and tongues slashed. Such violence and bloodshed stirred Pramod. He wanted to gather youths to take up arms to kill those wreaking such atrocities. He thought that would end the suffering prevalent in society and bring wellbeing.

But then after years of this insurrection, he had the courage to see and admit they were getting nowhere. He was figuring out: 'Is it inevitable that violent struggles must counter violence? Will this really restore peace? Would his group not only add to the years of unending violence and terror?'

Bodos were known as the most feared militants in N E India. But, around

10,000 Bodos had been killed. Many more than their 'foes'. And they had nothing to show for it.

So, Pramod felt to learn about and walk the path of non-violence. He went to meet the Gandhians of Assam. They told him non-violence was not his 'cup of Assam tea'. As leader, it would be too difficult a path for him. But he persisted.

Violence is easy to adopt. Harder to give up. But, does vengeful hate and violence really work?

In 2009, consulting Dr. Sunil and Jenny Kaul of Udalgiri, his ABSU launched a novel 'Illegal Weapons and Violence-Free Bodoland' campaign. On 2nd October they famously made public adopting non-violence as their way. 'We may not know enough about its meaning, but we cannot adopt any other method for the sake of our people. This is the new medicine for us.'

Following Gandhi, once he did a six-day total hunger strike that finally got Delhi to respond to his demands for dates for meaningful negotiations.

Also in 2009, Pramod met Niketu Iralu of Nagaland. He found IofC's listening to the inner voice, the best way for him and his people. 'Through IofC, I find inspiration to continue in seeking non-violent and creative solutions.'

Pramod once escaped death in the captivity of militant groups. He says now, 'IofC has had a big contribution in my second innings in life. It helps me ask why I was spared. I've now learned that to draw a good line, you have to connect the right dots. One dot cannot do it.'

In the process of looking at where he must change, he made apologies. Once in a scuffle he had pushed his son so hard that he fell to the ground injured - on the way to hospital, he apologized to his son. Since then, their tempestuous relations have altered totally. He apologized to nationally-awarded Padma Shri Ravindra Bhai, who had been beaten up badly by his people for perceived anti-Bodo views.

After abjuring violence, even before he became political head in Bodoland, virtually every year he organized IofC training events for Bodoland's youth to prepare future leadership. As BTR 'Chief', he has sent most of his elected members including his 'Cabinet' in two groups to Panchgani for a week's exposure to IofC.

As leader he scores at most three hours of sleep but he still reckons to seek inspiration from the inner voice for his impossibly huge task. Nearly two years on, his conscience still seems alive and he has not been lured or bought.

Bodos look at him and say, 'With his integrity, he is the only one who can be expected to do something great for our people.' The whole North East India watches - wishing, even praying, that he does.

For the sake of exemplary ethical leadership everywhere, perhaps India and the world should also root for Pramod Boro.

Not every lesson is found in books. Some lessons are given by life

Letlapa Mphahlele

Manaleng, South Africa

Anti-apartheid fighter. Ex-MP for the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania



I ditched the God who had 'chosen people' and embraced atheism

LETLAPA Mphahlele grew up in rural South Africa during apartheid. At 17, he went into exile to join the liberation struggle, rising to director of operations of the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress. In 1993 he ordered several high-profile retaliatory massacres, one of which, at the Heidelberg Tavern, killed a student, Lyndi Fourie.

Lyndi's mother later forgave Letlapa. Their story is told in the award-winning film, *Beyond Forgiving*. He writes:

'If all life is a journey, mine started 62 years ago. I was born into religion, swinging between belief in ancestors and the Christian God. Then I ditched the ancestors and stuck to the one God of the Bible.

'I grew up in white-dominated South Africa, whose rulers saw themselves as God's chosen people. To me the Christian faith became part of the politics of oppressive power. So, at 20, I ditched the God who had 'chosen people' and embraced atheism.

'In exile in neighbouring Botswana, I learned that beliefs or the absence of them do not necessarily make people good or bad. It only took one football game against *Khoisans* (Bushmen) to unmask us as oppressors in freedom fighters' skin. The referee, one of us, made us winners unfairly, despite the *Khoisans* outplaying us. We could not let them beat us, could we? A hollow victory!

'More than a game of football, it was an arena of prejudice. We believed in freedom – for ourselves, not for others. We resisted white supremacy. But we carried ethnic supremacy in our hearts, in our heads.

'A highlight of my life journey has been meeting and working with Ginn Fourie. Her daughter, Lyndi, died in an attack I had ordered. She had every reason to hate me.

'The first time I met her was at a Cape Town Press Club event. Never before had I come so close to a person who had lost her beloved child because of my orders.

'In our follow-up meeting, Ginn said that in spite of the pain and loss I had caused her, she forgave me. The moment defies description in words.

Beyond Walls

‘I felt my humanity being restored by someone who I had identified as a legitimate target of the armed struggle.

‘There’s no law saying people must forgive the killers of their children. When charges against me were withdrawn by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I felt nothing compared to what I felt when Ginn, unasked, uttered words of forgiveness.

‘Even as we draw battlelines, we ought to recall that among the people we designate as enemies, there are people like Ginn. When we recognize humanity in others, we water the roots of our own humanity.

Is this a vision that can unite atheists like me with all believers – where we work together for a greater ‘yes’ to the reality of a common humanity?’

***Never before had I come
so close to a person
who had lost her beloved child
because of my orders***

***Human beings are perhaps never more frightening than
when they are convinced beyond doubt that they are right***
Laurens van der Post



*Evil starts inside one's soul
with the refusal to respect
the dignity of another*

Elena Schwarts
Moscow, Russia

English teacher for PhD biology students

WHEN Russia attacked Ukraine on 24th February 2022, pitch darkness fell upon me. Our country's evil deed seemed irreparable. But through the darkness, shone memories of IofC in two dear places, Caux and Oslo. I felt that if anything could save our world, it was the four principles of Initiatives of Change.

I discovered IofC in 2006 when Norwegian, Leif Hovelsen, came to Moscow to launch the Russian publication of his book *Breaking Through Walls*. Reading it brought immediate recognition. It offered something I had always sought.

Born in Moscow in 1975, I was brought up by my widowed mother - a doctor and an heir to traditions of Russian and Latvian intelligentsia. My father was exiled by Stalinists. My mother never encouraged me to believe in Soviet Communism, nor openly oppose it. What she taught was: be decent, don't lie, respect other people and their privacy, be kind to all creatures and read a lot. Another source of my ethical values was Russian and European literature.

In childhood, I wasn't a believer. The environment was devoid of religion. The radical change towards the Church and the freedom of the 1980s' *perestroika* (reforms), spurred a spiritual search in me. Being a product of the break with religious tradition, my search was wholly unconventional. Ethical norms inculcated in me, and my own common sense guided me.

Important contributors were the Gospels and Sri Aurobindo, an Indian thinker. From him, I learnt to look at humanity and different religions as parts of a whole. No matter how different their traditions and pathways, they all may lead to God. Like the Gospel's: 'In My Father's house are many rooms.' This early openness to various spiritual experiences was essential to form my worldview.

But my path lay through Christianity. Finding meanings in the Gospels required hard work. Though I am a biologist, I never saw contradiction between science and religious faith.

In the 2000s, Russian philosopher, Gregory Pomeranz, a profound influence, added new aspects to my worldview. He echoed both Indian and Christian wisdoms. Pomeranz described how naturally, different religions may become a symphony of beautiful melodies. 'The depth of each great religion is closer to the depth of another than to the surface.' Pomeranz gave me the understanding that evil always starts inside one's soul with the refusal to respect the dignity of the other.

Frequent Caux-goer, Gregory Pomeranz was very close to MRA. Actually, I learned about inner listening first from him. According to him, a true turning point in our civilization is only possible through discovering the contemplative pause, when a person can listen to the voice of his inner self.

Leif Hovelsen's book presented simple clarity and profundity in the problems discussed. What struck me was he applied Christ's teaching to himself: 'You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye. Then you will see the speck in your brother's eye.'

I realized how long and thorny my own path would be if I ventured on it. But Leif convinced me that only through IofC's four simple principles, transformation of the world could come. His experience showed apology and reconciliation were not an abstraction. Him saying sorry to someone who mistreated him in the concentration camp was mind-blowing!

Leif's friend, Jens Wilhelmsen (see Page 193) says appealing to the better side of opponents can break walls of misunderstanding. No matter how corrupt, there is always good in him. That, I know now from experience.

My first Caux Forum in 2012 was a turning point and the happiest week in my life. It was the clean, caring society I dreamed of. Through sessions, and cooking with people from different countries, IofC's ideas penetrated my heart. (Doing practical things together may help one talk even with enemies.) After Caux I felt linked to all humanity. There were now no alien countries. Anything happening in Nigeria or Australia was happening to me too.

Unfortunately, when you descend from Caux, its light can fade amidst everyday problems. I confess I didn't consistently follow IofC. Perhaps that is why I didn't read the dangerous signs of moral degradation in my country. The tragedy in Ukraine

***After Caux I felt linked
to all humanity***

woke me up.

Pain from the total injustice of the war and atrocities committed by my countrymen forced me to rethink my life and lack of responsibility for my society. I felt I needed to say sorry to the people of Ukraine, to myself and to my country. Sorry – as I ignored violence and injustice in everyday life. Sorry – as I had turned a blind eye to little lies. Sorry – as I did not do what I could to stop routine corruption. Sorry – as I allowed the infernal military machine to grow. Sorry – as, unnoticed, I became a part of an evil state.

Saying sorry did not heal me from the feeling of guilt but it gave me hope that I might, with God's help, have a part in future in national healing.

Only through these four absolutes can we get out of the present darkest crisis. And IofC will see a second dawn. Its true destiny is waiting to be fulfilled. And with all my heart I wish to become a part of this transformation.

***Better bread and water than pie with trouble
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn***

Dmytro Prytulenko

Kyiv, Ukraine

Peace activist. He and his wife run an English language institute in Kyiv

I visited a mosque and shared my story and prejudices with the Imam



(This was written in 2017. Under ever-present danger for all Ukrainians, Dima is working with foreign media to get news from Ukraine out to the world.)

I first came across IofC in the summer of 2009, through an enthusiastic group of young people who called themselves Club of Young Leaders. They inspired me and changed my view of the world. I became a more responsible person.

I started doing things with them. We collected all the rubbish from a beach, helped children in an orphanage, conducted street actions for reconciliation and peace, and ran some other activities.

Thus I became more aware that I can be an influence for change in the world, especially if I start that change in myself. That opened up the joyful peace in my life of love and service.

I became calm, no longer 'crazy' and quick to lose my temper.

Later, I took part in an IofC course. From then on, I began the practice of listening to my inner voice. I understood that I already had within me all the answers to questions I was asking. All I needed to do was to listen to that inner voice more. I was also introduced to the four standards of purity, honesty, unselfishness and love.

In 2010 I joined the Action for Life (AfL) 5 programme that started in India and went to several Asian and Pacific countries. During that time, I did a review of my life and was inspired to put things right where I found I was wrong.

I was born and brought up in Crimea. I had always had a big struggle within me about the Crimean Tatars, a Muslim community. I was beaten up by a group of them when I was young and had nursed a big grudge against them. During AfL, I realized that I both wanted and needed to forgive them.

When I returned to Simferopol in Crimea, I visited a mosque and shared my story and prejudices with the Imam there. After that I apologized to the congregation. Now I have more Crimean Tatar friends, and I have also learned about their history and the struggles they have undergone. That touched me.

Since I was 15, I had a tense relationship with my father. I wrote many letters to him from India, sharing my experiences and reflections. I wanted to unite our family and bring reconciliation with my father. I have partially succeeded.

When I came home from AfL I was dead serious about putting every single thing in my past right. I went to the director of a hardware shop where I used to work to offer to return the things I had stolen from it.

AfL affected me a lot. I became calm, no longer 'crazy' and quick to lose my temper like before. Some people said that I'd become wiser and more open. I have shared what I learnt in IofC with my wife and it has helped our relationship to grow.

I also developed organizational and planning skills, and gained experience in team building and public speaking. Living together with young people of different nationalities, religions and cultures gave me experience in more effective communication to apply back home.

For instance, on my return, I got involved with young people's community development in Simferopol, where distrust between local and foreign students ran high. More than 2000 international students lived isolated from the general population and were often discriminated against as well.

I took leadership in organizing an international community group, created the Language Exchange Club of Simferopol and established the first English-speaking group in April 2013, encouraging others to join me.

The community has grown to more than 1200 members. Among them are international and local students, university lecturers and foreign travellers. The meetings have encouraged intercultural communication and have built tolerance and international friendships.

I already had within me all the answers to questions I was asking

A word aptly uttered or written cannot be cut away by an axe
Nikolai Gogol

I apologized to the Indo-Fijians and then to all non-Fijians present. Finally, to my own people I admitted, 'I led you in the wrong direction.'

Ratu Meli Vesikula MBE

Suva, Fiji Islands

Fijian high chief. British Army Regimental Sergeant Major. A leader of the extreme Fijian nationalist Taukei movement behind the 1987 military coups. Served as interim Minister of Fijian Affairs and was a member of the committee for a new multiracial, democratic constitution for Fiji



Igrew up in a Fijian village, son of a traditional chief. When I left to join the British Army, my father told me to return when I reached 40 to lead our people. So, in 1984 I retired, with an MBE for my services.

I left Fiji a Crown Colony and returned to an independent sovereign nation. I found the indigenous people in despair, unable to keep up with the pace of development. I became an assistant administrator in Naitasiri Province on Viti Levu, the biggest island in Fiji.

In 1987, for the first time since Independence in 1970, there was a change of government, away from rule by our traditional chiefs, to a multiracial government. Ruthless indigenous leaders told credulous rural Fijians that this new government was Indian-controlled and that they would lose control of their way of life, lands and destiny. The ultra-nationalist *Taukei* Movement was created, to fight for the supremacy of the indigenous Fijians.

A month after the elections, a military coup overthrew the multiracial government. Anger, hatred and violence became the order of the day. I got involved in the *Taukei* Movement, using my military training to raise the level of violence, and became its public spokesman.

We made speeches filled with hatred, leading to indiscriminate beatings of innocent Indo-Fijians. Gangs were sent into Suva's streets to loot and burn Indo-Fijian property. In the grounds of the Government Buildings, we dug a *lovo*, a traditional Fijian cooking pit with white-hot stones. I announced to the world media, 'This is where Fiji's Indians are going to end up if they oppose supremacy of us indigenous Fijians.'

Illegal firearms entered the country. People were arrested. But leaders of the *Taukei* Movement started to die in mysterious ways. There were rumours of an invasion. The economy collapsed. But I continued to believe I was doing something

great for my people. I did not realize that people like me were responsible for the huge mess my country had got into.

When one of my closest friends was killed, I felt I was going to be next. After giving the eulogy at his funeral, I cried out within, 'God, if you're out there, please come and help me.'

The very next day a pastor phoned. He said, 'I believe you love your country and people but you're going about it the wrong way.' Half an hour later, he was in my home sharing the gospel and praying with me.

This was the start of a life-changing journey. Through a 40-day fast and prayers, my life was transformed. I began to see how wrong I was to divide people and foster anger and hatred. I visited Prime Minister Bavadra who had been ousted by the coup, to seek his forgiveness. I worked with him until his untimely death in 1989. My *Taukei* friends saw this as an act of betrayal. I was arrested and tried in court.

One day at a bus stop an Indo-Fijian asked, 'Are you Ratu Meli Vesikula? We've been trying to meet you. May I invite you to our home to talk about a different way for Fiji?'

Intigued, I went to their home. He and his wife told me of changes in situations all over the world through MRA. They gave me material to read and videos to see, which told of people who had experienced change in themselves and were serving their societies with a different effectiveness. 'That's what I've always wanted to do with my life,' I thought.

People like me were responsible for the huge mess my country got into

I heard of the importance of times of inner listening. What a shock awaited me when I sat, ready to write

down whatever came! I was shown the face of a man who I had wronged a few years earlier. I realized I wanted to apologize to him. Just as quickly, doubt came into the equation. Then I said, 'OK God, if ever I meet him, I promise to apologize.'

On getting off the bus in Suva next morning I ran straight into this very man! I grabbed him by the hand, led him to a park corner and delivered my apology. It was fully and generously accepted.

As I became intent on correcting all the wrongs of my past, more relationships were repaired. But there was still trouble at home. I refused point blank to apologize to my wife, Elizabeth. I used to tell myself that it was not the done thing for a chief, or a regimental sergeant major, to apologize to the little woman.

My inner listening times became half-hearted and no further word came from Above. Over some 17 days, I began to see how loyal and true Liz had been and how unfeeling and mean I had been.

I came into the kitchen as she was drying the plates after dinner. 'Darling, that incident earlier today was totally my fault. I am sorry. Will you please forgive me?' A few plates slid out of her hands as she turned around in disbelief, 'Is that really

you?’ I apologized for the tough and hurtful time I had given her and she forgave me. A door opened to a newfound love that would hold us together forever.

In late 1989, I wrote a long letter to Fiji’s newspapers apologizing to the Indians of Fiji. But most Indians at that time could not accept my apology as genuine.

In 1990 we had an international IofC conference in Suva. I decided to apologize again, this time publicly in person. I apologized first to the Indo-Fijians and then to all the non-Fijians present. Finally, I turned to my own people and said, ‘I am sorry, I led you in the wrong direction.’

*I saw how wrong
I was to divide people and
foster anger and hatred*

You could have heard a pin drop; I could see tears in several eyes. People shook hands across the racial divide. It was an amazing scene. In the next session an Indian businessman said, ‘To us, the Indians of Fiji, Ratu Meli represented all that was evil in humanity. Today we have heard his apology. We feel it is really genuine.’ He stretched out his hand: ‘Ratu, this hand represents the hand of the Indian people of Fiji.’ Since that time, Y P Reddy and I have worked together.

In October 2001, my full apology was carried live on national TV as I delivered my maiden speech in Fiji’s Senate. The veil of darkness had been removed.

Just as the sea is an open, ever flowing reality, so should our oceanic identity transcend all forms of insularity, to become one that is openly searching, inventive, and welcoming

Epeli Hau’ofa, Tongan writer

*I needed to forgive those
I had hated for so long
It seemed like committing treason
against myself*

Helena Salazar de von Arnim Bogota, Colombia

Teacher. Great-grandmother



I was born in 1941 in Bogota, Colombia. I'm married to a marvellous German-Colombian man. We have five children, 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

My father was a visionary who foresaw that the world was going to become smaller and smaller. He thought his children should be prepared and he sent us to schools where foreign languages were taught. My mother was a practical woman with a marvellous sense of humour. She taught us to see things as they are.

In 1980, I met Peter and Digna Hintzen from the Netherlands. They had come to Colombia to bring an idea: that it was possible to change the world, if you just choose to start with your own self.

It was for all people – you didn't need diplomas, PhDs, money, power or influence. Even children or old people could have a part at their own rhythm. All this, just by learning to listen to the soft voice of truth inside one's heart. I didn't have to think for long to know I wanted to be part of this global fellowship.

Then I saw a film about Irène Laure, the wartime French socialist leader and MP from Marseilles. I started crying, very softly, for I could see my life through hers, like in a mirror. She was talking about the huge hate she had had and how she had wanted Germany wiped out from the face of the earth.

I had also wanted a lot of people obliterated from the planet, starting with my

cousin and my brother. In fact, all the people I blamed for the awful situation which had engulfed me since I was six. I had lived with feelings of crushing, overwhelming terror and worthlessness, of having no one to explain something I didn't even have the correct vocabulary to express.

From when I was six, a cousin systematically raped me, year after year. He was about 12 when it began. I was not able to defend myself. I knew that in a world made by men for men, I had no chance of being believed or understood. I already knew this from experiences with my younger brother. He always managed to have me punished for whatever he did wrong.

My cousin used to say, 'If you dare say anything about this, remember it is your word against mine, see? I'm a man and you're only a stupid, good-for-nothing, little girl!'

*Warmth grew inside
my tired, lonely heart.
I felt free, as I'd never felt before*

So I never had the courage to say anything to anybody. It was only when, at the age of 19, he went to study abroad that, at last, things changed for me. But by then I was so angry and full of hatred, I harboured vengeance against the whole world.

Listening to Irène Laure, my hate against myself for being a woman came out. I just couldn't live with myself, especially with this huge lie that my life had become – all the tricks, the cover-ups, the pretence so that people would never know the truth I was so ashamed of. I tried hard to appear happy and fulfilled. But inside me, a secret, disastrous tragedy was being lived out.

Then I heard Irène Laure say in the film, 'You cannot forget, but you can forgive.' It was as if she knew I was there, and she personally wanted to say those words to me. Warmth grew inside my tired, lonely heart – the sensation of a vast ray of light beaming into my mind and soul, and a huge space opening around and inside me. I felt free, as I had never felt before.

But then I had this awful feeling that I needed to forgive those I had hated for so long. It seemed like committing treason against myself. I had been so angry for so long, that I didn't know how to live otherwise. It took me a long time to walk very slowly from darkness towards the light.

I tried practising inner listening. The four absolute standards – purity, honesty, unselfishness and love – were indispensable tools, to get to know myself better, particularly to forgive myself.

The worst enemy I had was myself. I used to treat myself with harshness and contempt. Now Helena is Helena's best and most faithful friend.

For the next five years the thoughts that came to me in my times of silence were the names of people I needed to forgive. What a big surprise it was to find out that I also needed to ask for their forgiveness for my ill will against them and for my desire for revenge.

This experience changed my life completely. I wanted to go around the world to tell people about the possibility of a new life; that everybody could find it!

Once at the IofC centre in Caux, Switzerland, someone from another religion asked me what mine was. I said, 'Catholic.' To my surprise this person said, 'Helena, you'd better become the best Catholic you can be. Otherwise you will be stealing our wealth from us... You're called to show us the beauty of your faith.'

I discovered I lacked knowledge about my faith and that the way I lived would be the way people would perceive all Catholics. This led me to look more deeply into my faith and start growing as a believer. Then I made a frightening discovery: that I had become a fundamentalist! I thought I had the truth, the only truth. The whole world should be converted to my faith.

Getting to know IofC I had the chance to share with people from so many different religions – some I didn't even know existed! I found so many points in common, such beauty, such fine examples of real acceptance and obedience of God's plan for their lives, that it humbled me.

'You're called to show us the beauty of your faith'

IofC has a special contribution to make to the new generations as it did for the older ones – to teach them to stop being pulled from one side to the other by the latest fad or fashion. Many times the trigger to personal change can be the inner call to do something other than what everybody else does. Listening to their inner voice and choosing lofty principles to live by, will instead help them become their own masters.

Eternal truths never grow old. And the heart of humans will always be the same. So, the same medicine will be just the correct one.

Do unto others what you would love to be done unto you



Ismar Villavicencio

Montevideo, Uruguay

*Honduran IofC worker living with family
in Uruguay*

THE ideal of helping build a better world, starting with myself struck me in IofC. Also the possibility of working with people from different backgrounds. Above all, getting connected to a clear calling from God. Inner listening and the four standards in a life review brought reconciliation with myself, my mum, biological father, stepfather and siblings. Free from that hatred and low self-esteem I sought my greater purpose in life. What did God want from me?

During youth, I constantly experienced lows from a lack of purpose in life. I had even considered suicide because of meaninglessness. But, somehow, God was always there for me through different people; and I am still alive today.

After a year of self-discovery I signed 'a blank sheet' asking God to write in my life mission I will commit to. This then gifted me the perfect life partner for God's mission for us – to offer others what we were offered in this way of life.

Since 1996, I tried to remain faithful to that calling. Then, I met the travelling cast of the musical revue *Gente Que Avanza* (People on the Move). This was the Latin American vehicle that God used to fulfil His mission for us.

IofC enriched my religious experience. An open-minded evangelical Protestant, I pursue inner freedom, questioning suggested religious ways. Through inner listening, IofC has given me my personal path in faith.

I have learned to be more respectful of other religious and spiritual perspectives. I confess, for me it is easier with monotheists or atheists. With polytheists I have prejudices. Anyway, I wish more Latin Americans could meet people from other religions. With IofC I have got that through travel.

I believe all have a spiritual dimension. Inner listening helps people connect to that without the false dilemma of attaching to this or that religion.

God's mission is not a command to consider but to obey

*For his social service,
a village boy reaches the Queen of England,
meets the UN Secretary General,
is chosen Commonwealth Youth Coordinator for
Asia, studies at LSE London on full scholarship*

Pravin Nikam

Pune, India

Lawyer. Social Servant



MY landless parents had to migrate in search of work from Asu village in rural Phaltan in Satara to Pune. These childhood struggles motivated me to pursue education. I worked as a newspaper boy and finished my BA in Political Science.

Travelling to Assam I met Roshni, forced to drop school because of her first menstrual cycle. This led me to start a non-profit, *Roshni*, to educate girls on menstrual hygiene management and the physiological process that occurs.

As I went from BA to Law, I mobilized a team of students to work for criminal justice. This community work exposed me to challenges faced by women and people from marginalised communities with no access to justice. Thus I founded Samata Centre (Action For Impact Foundation) to mentor students from low-income and marginalised backgrounds to access scholarships for higher education and skill development; and train teachers as facilitators on gender and the Constitution.

But feeling their distressful situations gave me emotional and psychological trauma, resulting in anxiety, feeling numb, and severe trust issues with people.

Fortunately around then, I went to IofC's Caux Scholars Program at Panchgani. I learnt to have a reflective inward-outward journey. I was drawn to IofC for its emphasis on 'acknowledging and healing historical scars of conflict, bringing parties together in safe settings to enable seeing the problem as the other sees it.' IofC helped me make choices in line with my conscience; and equipped me with inner listening times and self-reflection. It made me more sensitive to the needs and perspectives of others. My worldview changed.

IofC opened my eyes. I realized I had not been giving time to my parents or to my brother in his life choices. Working as a volunteer in tribal regions, I was absent from home. IofC gave me confidence to own up to past wrongdoings and reconcile with myself by freeing myself from guilt. Now I spend time with the family.

My purpose in life has shifted. IofC helped me redefine the meaning of life, and become an effective change agent building trust across communities. It gave my leadership the conviction to behave responsibly.

The practice of listening in silence is a powerful tool for deepening my inner life, allowing tapping into my conscience and the guidance of a higher power, rather than just listening to external voices. It enables me to become more grounded in my own truth and wisdom. It also teaches me how to touch another person's life with respect, showing genuine interest and care.

I now prioritize making meaningful connections with others, being more present in conversations. I also ensure everyone feels heard, respected, and supported. By being mindful of my own energy and the energy of the person I'm interacting with, I can better gauge how best to approach a conversation, as well as when to step back so they have their own space.

I have learned to use my words to bring joy and comfort, express kindness, appreciation, and understanding, to create a safe space for others to open up and be understood. In addition, I have learned to be patient and willing to go deeper with someone if they are feeling vulnerable or hesitant to open up.



I have become truly engaged with the world in a more meaningful way, having developed a greater sense of compassion for the struggles in the world. IofC is a way of living with integrity and authenticity, which is increasingly important in engaging with our interconnected global society.

Inner listening helps me gain greater appreciation and understanding of other religious beliefs and traditions and to recognize that there are many valid paths to spiritual fulfillment. It has enabled me to have meaningful conversations with people of different religious backgrounds and to be open to learning from and respecting the values and beliefs of others.

I have learned from the different faiths in my home that each person has an inherent worth and dignity that is independent of external circumstances.

*I slept and dreamt life was joy,
I woke and saw life was service.
I acted and behold, service was joy
Tagore*

I took the bank to the people

Joseph Santamaria Parthiban

Salem, India

Banker. Selfless servant of the poor and needy



SONG OF ASIA was the best thing. A preview of what my life could be if I followed God's way. I learned unique ideas - with no expiry date.'

But shattered that his cherished three year old community of 60 from 15 countries with the IofC musical, *Song of Asia* was suddenly disbanded in 1976, J S Parthiban returned home dejected - for months. Then shook himself out and applied for nine jobs – railway stationmaster, village *munsif* (magistrate), state and central excise officer, bank manager... He got all nine. He chose one. And the story of a unique, extraordinarily kind banker began.

Parthiban studied at a Tirupattur Catholic college in the 1960s. He was student president when, meeting IofC, he returned nearly 200 books to the college library. Soon after he told the college assembly about this, the librarian showed him the stacks of books other students had returned! 'Now my greatest fear is doing things against my conscience.'

In 1998 Parthiban became manager of the Indian Bank in New Delhi. At lunchtime he chatted with beggars and vendors around Connaught Place. They came from Bihar and UP villages for jobs in Delhi to pay off debts and get daughters married. Not finding anything, they took to selling on the streets. All they earned went to loan sharks, keeping them in perpetual poverty. In this dismal, dead-end of a life, many became alcoholics, frequented prostitutes. When they went home they borrowed more, to buy clothes and gifts to hide their jobless penury in Delhi.

Banks had no schemes for loans to street folk then. Parthiban won their confidence to open savings accounts. He pointed them to his branch, without divulging he was manager. With deep concern for them, Parthiban helped them start with tiny savings. In a week 100 accounts were opened.

In three years many saved the dream Rs 100,000 amount. By 2002, when he left Delhi he had opened 500 savings and 300 recurring deposit accounts for beggars and street sellers. He often stood guarantor. 'Their need was genuine and I took the risk.' His trust was never betrayed. All loans were paid regularly.

A boy selling water at 50 paise a glass saved Rs 200,000 and was totally free of loan-sharks. Street vendors' children got special loans for higher education. A fruit-seller saved enough to get her daughter married well.

In 2002, Parthiban was transferred to Elachipalayam in his home state. He went all out facilitating micro-loans for village women. He introduced the innovative zero balance account for the poor. Special Self Help Groups – SHGs – the first of their kind were started with lepers, the chronically ill and transgender folk too. Education loans for their wards and housing loans were given. The ‘forgotten people’ living BPL (Below Poverty Line) like the handicapped and disabled, basket weavers, cobblers, waiters, street acrobats, snake charmers and fortune tellers benefitted. Agri-business loans for sheep rearing, piggeries, bee-keeping etc. were given.

Now my greatest fear is doing things against my conscience

Initially, he reacted negatively to a woman coordinator of SHGs. Upon reflection, he apologized to her, also telling her about returning stolen library books. In days, she made ‘a complete turnaround’, pledging her jewellery to raise Rs.90,000 to pay what was due to members of her SHG. Then on, she assisted the bank with recovery of dues to a 98% track record.

A little over 12,000 individual beneficiaries including roughly 10,000 SHG ladies have benefitted. The Collector of Namakkal District awarded his branch for best performance in helping underprivileged women.

Parthiban’s final posting was in the hill station, Yercaud above Salem. Here too, on his famous black scooter he ventured to remote hamlets of hill tribals where no banker had gone. You have to accompany him to see the affection lavished on him by tribe after tribe whose financial fortunes he changed in a decade.

As Senior Manager, he used his authority to lend money at a reduced rate. He encouraged communities to form SHGs to get big loans at 1% less interest.

Once his bike lost the way in the hills and ended up in a village where poverty was eternal. Wives were desperate as husbands were invariably alcoholic, making the family’s life hell. He made these women financially independent through loans to buy buffaloes. They sell milk and repay loans.

Parthiban’s branch helped 188 SHGs with loans totalling Rs 22.5 million. His Banking on Change YouTube video on his work is used for training officers by various banks, the Reserve Bank of India and universities in Latin America.

In 2002 his decades of service was recognized by three corporate houses who cited him as a true ‘Hero of Tamil Nadu’.

Parthiban believes that banking should be a service-oriented holistic business, not just for profits. ‘Money-lenders tempt and leave the poor in a debt-spiral, taking away the little they have. My passion is to take people away from loan sharks. I get inner satisfaction bringing happiness to so many families.’

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others
Mahatma Gandhi

After inner listening, I resigned from a high position and salary to serve society

Deepak Teraiya

Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Trainer. Coach extraordinaire



WHATEVER you are today is because of whom?' 'What are the most important moments and people for you?' These questions in our training programmes prompt thousands to self-examine and self-assess.

In 2012, I came for a ToT on Values & Ethics in Public Governance at Asia Plateau, Panchgani. During inner listening on 'Do I need any corrections in my life?' From my conscience I received some strong corrections to make.

Good in college studies, I used to get many books from the college library on the accounts of teachers and librarians. I did not return four. Though in 2009, I confessed my lapse to the college librarian, I did not return the books. And here I was, going around believing I lived with integrity. In another inner listening time, I felt a strong stab of remorse. In 2012 I returned the four books taken in 1994, with a letter of apology and a Rs 5001 cheque. The librarian accepted the books but not the cheque. So, then I bought books worth Rs 7500 and gifted them to the library. That was my atonement.

'I'm to blame for my father's untimely death' was a thorn in my conscience for seven years after his death. I had tormented him with my teenage mischief and disquieting neglect of education (bunking school for movies, and constant truancy from class). Guilt was lodged in me. Later it was alleviated by psychotherapy, hugging father's photo, crying for an hour and apologizing to him.

But in 2012, reprocessing through IofC this perennial inner trauma, I felt a final release. Since then, I have shared this experience in our training programmes. Today I am humbled to have been a catalyst in building positive relationships in thousands of individuals and families as a relationship coach and trainer.

The most important change: from January 2003 to October 2011, I was in well-paid government jobs in different offices as Professor, Deputy Director, Registrar and Officer on Special Duty in the Government College. In 2011, after listening to the inner voice, I resigned from this high position and salary.

Strangely, for this 2012 Panchgani training, the government still nominated me. In those days I was in a dilemma, wondering if I had done the right thing, leaving a secure government job. After several inner listening sessions in solitude, during the seven-day Panchgani training, I found full clarity on my 'Life Purpose'.

Today, I clearly see that I was born to be a medium to reveal better living processes to people through powerful, intuitive trainings. Both of us husband and wife, *Uddeepak* (Uma + Deepak) are walking on this glorious path of fulfilling our life purpose. Thanks to IofC, we enjoy being the medium-stimulator-catalyst for stimulating nourishing energy, joy, and peace among employees of government, non-government and corporate organizations and also thousands of families.

The important lesson I learned from IofC is that the science and art of living comes and develops from within. Even as a child I was an activist fighting for justice. I have also found answers to many questions about piety, religion and *swadharma* (sacred calling) through dialogue with the inner self.

My childhood and adolescence were spent in the communally-charged environs of old Manekwadi in Bhavnagar, Gujarat. In addition to Brahmin beliefs and rites in our family, the tradition of offering *shrifal* (fruits) and *pooja* (worship) to the Moharram *Tajiya* processions were inherited from my grandmother.

I learned from IofC that the science and art of living comes and develops from within

My definition of *swadharma* has evolved to honouring all religions, but today it is indelibly clarified through the life values of purity, honesty, selflessness and love (all unconditional) of IofC. That is why my goal in life through our trainings is to help dissolve discrimination and hatred of religions, castes, gender, age, position, regions, work or economic-social status.

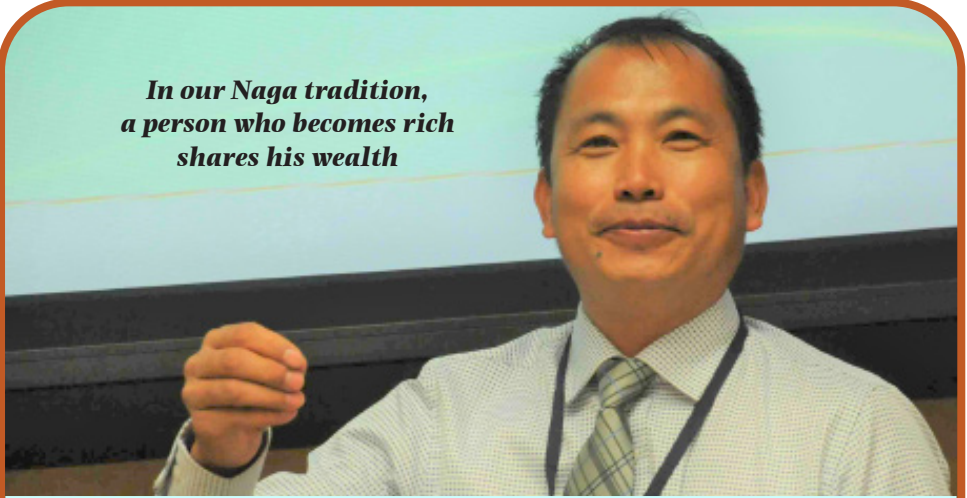
'This age is of polarization. But that is not our nature'. This is at the core of our trainings, be it a 'home stay' programme where Hindu and Muslim students stay in each other's home for 10 days; or training for sex workers, transgenders, LGBTQIA+, community development, gender equality or with youth on serious drugs.

Our trainings on 'Values in Life' and 'Equality' are not limited to classrooms of government, non-government or corporate organisations, officers and teachers. We see the whole society being a classroom for us through IofC's amazing tools: Inner Listening, Global Change through Self Change, the Freedom Glass demo (airing the truth within that others do not see), the four standards of PHUL and the CCD process (first Connection, next Correction, then Direction).

All over India, people will ask your full name to discern your 'high' or 'low' caste. Now I reply 'Deepak' only. When I still slip up, being a true Brahmin becomes a distant thing. I am moving to become a good human. Hence a better Brahmin. Now humanity is my religion. So, all religions are mine.

***It is never too late to start doing the right thing
Gujarati saying***

***In our Naga tradition,
a person who becomes rich
shares his wealth***



Neichüte Doulo, Kohima, Nagaland, India

*Received Social Entrepreneur of the Year award from the Schwab Foundation in 2017,
the first person from North East India to do so.*

Part of the Niti Ayog (national planning body) of India

To bring change, first deal with those polluticians!' insisted Naga student leader, Neichüte Doulo, at his first IofC conference at Asia Plateau in June 1992.

In the years since, Neichüte has helped start 8000 business enterprises all over Nagaland. Over 4000 still endure.

At Panchgani, Frank Buchman's words, 'As I am, so is my nation' struck him like a lightning bolt. Inner listening made him turn his head around for the first time and see where he himself was corrupt.

A chicken crossed his mind. In 1988 he and some friends had stolen and enjoyed a neighbour's chicken. He lied when its owner, an old villager, accused him. Now, convicted by conscience, he could not sleep: he found it difficult to admit he had stolen, especially to his parents.

His accomplices back in the village laughed at him when he said he wanted to repay the old man for the chicken. But Neichüte held firm. The old man refused to take the money but happily took a kilo of sugar and forgave Neichüte. Friends still rib him with the name of *murgi chor* (chicken thief) that stuck to him for years.

This experience gave him a life-long lesson – that, given the opportunity to be corrupt, he was no better than those corrupt politicians. He set new aims for his life.

A major one was to help unemployed Naga youth to start sustainable enterprises. In 2000, he set up Entrepreneurs Associates (EA) to promote entrepreneurship for young people. Its operations are managed through three legal

entities: a thrift and credit society, an NGO which trains young people in enterprise management and a non-banking finance company which offers loans. Believing that too-easy dependence on grants from Delhi or abroad was the reason ‘why we, as a Naga people, do not grow’, he resolved not to accept such grants or to take credit from banks.

Today EA has a target budget of Rs 1 billion. They manage their work through regular fundraising drives and taking up NGO or government projects. Neichüte takes no salary but runs his own business. EA’s 78 other employees are all paid.

Aspiring entrepreneurs take part in a 30-day training programme. Each day starts at 5 am with a jog through town. ‘For most, it is the attitude which is the problem, not capital,’ he says. ‘We teach them self-confidence and to face rejections and failures. They learn to define themselves, not let others define them.’

We teach them self-confidence and to face rejections and failures

Over 60,000 Nagas have participated in EA’s awareness-raising programmes in the last 19 years. Some 4500 have set up successful businesses, which have created over 17,000 new jobs. Until 2018, EA worked with 300 families a year. Then they took on a target of 5000 families. A fifth of these are women street vendors of vegetables.

‘From the start we insisted that our entrepreneurs must take society forward with them,’ says Neichüte. ‘In our Naga tradition, a person who becomes rich is to share his wealth and come to the same level as the poorest. That is why we never had landlords or monarchs.’

Stars refused, so I had to shine on my own
K Insing



Unforgiveness, bitterness and hatred were packed inside me like a bomb, ticking away

Wati Mollier

Mokokchung, Nagaland, India

Government primary school teacher

SEEING IofC people from different faiths and ethnicities putting Christian values into practice made me feel like an empty Christian drum making noise but having no substance.

Despite the life-changing decisions I took after encountering IofC, I always felt a sense of conflict between my 'superior' religion and other 'false' faiths. Then a friend helped me by sharing from her experience, saying 'I am becoming a better Christian after associating with this movement.'

Now aged 34, I have worked for six years as an English teacher in a remote village in the Japukong range, bordering Assam. It is infamous for bad road connectivity and lack of basic facilities. Ever come across a road paved with bamboo? We have those roads.

As a *Sarva Shiksha Abhyan* (universal elementary education) teacher, I faced irregular salary payments. In the first week, I became depressed about the pathetic condition of the school and, above all, the non-exemplary school head. The senior students didn't even know the alphabet!

At times I wanted to pack my bags but I had promised God to serve him sincerely wherever he sent me. I began offering free tuition, started morning assemblies in English, inspections and parent-teacher meetings. Other young teachers joined me. In the third year our efforts bore fruit. My students began to read and write. Parents stopped taking their children to the fields during school hours and sent them to school in clean uniforms.

In July 2016 I attended an IofC dialogue in Meghalaya. There I heard, 'Hurts not transformed are transferred.' Unforgiveness, bitterness and hatred were packed inside me like a bomb, ticking away. I carried a load of unresolved anger against my alcoholic and abusive father.

Early one Sunday morning I fasted, went to church to pray, and then called my family to the kitchen. I poured everything out and said, 'I forgive you, father, in

*I am becoming
a better Christian after
associating with this movement*

Jesus's name.' I also asked his forgiveness for not being a better son. I begged my siblings to forgive my father and asked him to forgive my dead, immoral grandfather, against whom he was embittered.

I said sorry to my elder sister for losing my temper and hitting her many years ago. Tears streamed from every eye as we forgave one another around the kitchen table and together thanked God. That morning, years of hurts and bitterness were lifted from my family. Soon, my father forgave those he had hated for years, bringing an end to one cycle.

***'Hurts not transformed
are transferred'***

The head of our school had held his post for 22 years. He was not transparent when it came to accounting for midday meals, cooking costs, honorariums, students' scholarships and so on. But everybody kept quiet. The midday meals were meant to feed students whose parents struggled to provide them with even one square meal. So I confronted him, 'I am not against you personally but what you are doing is wrong.' He didn't like it but he made some changes, and midday meals began to be disbursed regularly.

In my crusade against the injustices in my school, I had forgotten that I had been marking myself present in the register when I really had been absent. Everybody did this. 'What is right is right even if nobody is doing it and what is wrong is wrong even if everybody is doing it.' This appalling truth struck me during an inner listening time at the IofC dialogue. In front of my colleagues and the school head, I owned up and promised to stop this practice.

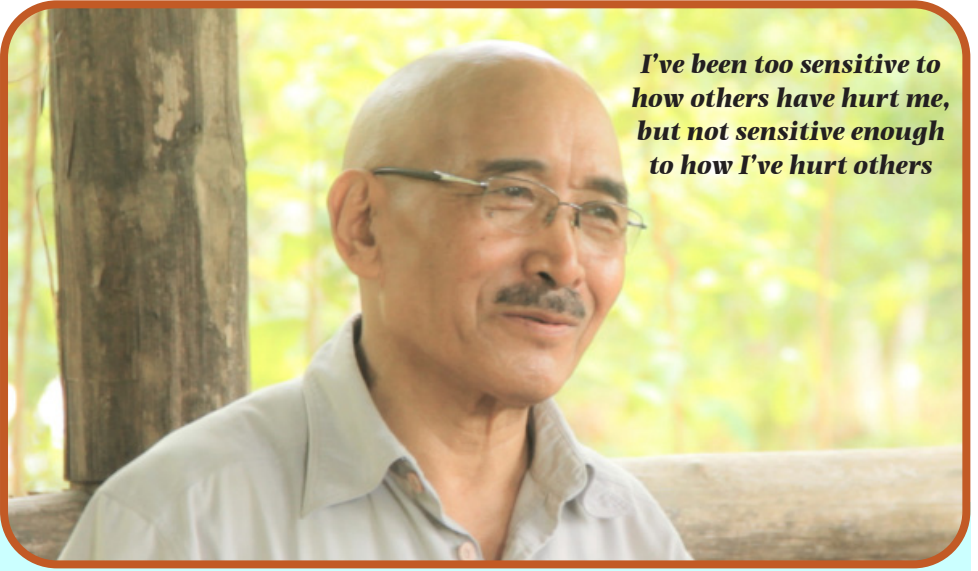
Before I put things right with my father, I was a strict disciplinarian. Many students were hurt because of my actions. I made up with them too.

In 2018 I arranged a day's IofC interaction with two batches of teachers at the Mokokchung College of Teachers' Education. In these sessions the former General Secretary apologized to teachers for his domineering attitude while in office. A teacher expressed his decision to be more honest with his wife. Another decided to do something from his end to resolve 17 years of troubles with his father.

Your story could be the key that unlocks someone else's prison.

Don't be afraid to share it

Toby Mac



I've been too sensitive to how others have hurt me, but not sensitive enough to how I've hurt others

Kolezo Chase

Chümoukedima, Nagaland, India

Official spokesman of the Naga National Council. Taught for 33 years. As principal of the Patkai Christian College in Dimapur, set a benchmark of probity by never taking anything of the college for personal use. Instituted a social security scheme for employees that covers accidents and on retirement pays out six times the amount paid in. When he retired in 2010, he chose not to take the sum due to him

WHILE almost insane with hate and bitterness, I came to know the secret of listening to God through one of my elders, Niketu Iralu. I was touched by the stories I heard of how hate and passion for revenge had been replaced with a greater purpose in situations similar to mine.

I grew up in a family where the Naga struggle was central to our lives. We risked everything precious for it. I was as ready to die for our national struggle as the five brave men in my immediate family who had sacrificed their lives for it.

But when dissension crept into our national struggle, the brave Naga fighters became bitter rivals. I became part of the problem.

In the late 1960s, my cousin, Captain Arüno, was shot dead, and another cousin, Mowu, commander-in-chief of the Naga army, was blatantly betrayed twice. I felt as if the sun had disappeared from my world. I vowed to eliminate those I thought responsible for all the setbacks in my life and the national struggle.

I decided to kill Kughato Sukhai, the man I considered responsible for our tragedy. He was PM in the underground Naga Government. I tried to find the right

moment to shoot him, but he was always in a jeep in the company of other people. Singling him out as a target was impossible. But I was sure I would get him one day.

Then one morning in my inner listening time, the thought came, 'You have the courage to kill him. But have you courage enough to love him to make him a different man?' This thought caught me off guard. It led me out of my bitterness, though not without a tough struggle.

You have the courage to kill him. But have you courage enough to love him to make him a different man?

I took up the challenge. And it became the turning point of my life. I never knew it would take as much courage to love as to kill. I felt guilty about what I had attempted to do and repented. But apologizing to Sukhai was much more difficult than I had realized. To me, it was he who needed my forgiveness.

Given our traditional code of honour and revenge, I also knew my kinsmen would not understand my decision. But I prayed to God to enable me to meet Kughato Sukhai. When we met, we had a deep, moving moment. I asked his forgiveness for my hatred and for what I had tried to do to him. I told him, 'I have been so sensitive to how others have hurt me, but so insensitive to how I have hurt others.'

My apology started a chain reaction. When my betrayed cousin, Mowu, came out of prison after seven years, Sukhai visited him. He said, 'I've come to thank you for not taking revenge on us. I do apologize for what happened to you, and ask for your forgiveness. Though all my tribesmen are not responsible for what happened to you, I apologize and ask forgiveness on their behalf also. We must work together again to show our Naga people a new way.'

Our clan were deeply moved that although he was not well, Sukhai had travelled a long distance from his village to put things right. We regretted that he died not long after. He had been Prime Minister of the Federal Government of Nagaland. He had shown us his greatness by coming to put right what had gone wrong.

The way of real peace goes beyond handshaking and embracing one another. I found myself at peace with those I hated or feared when I humbled myself before God by letting go of the big ego in me.

The more I fall apart, the more God shows me the way
K Insing

Robert Solo

Bara Basti, Nagaland, India

Well-known social activist. Resident of Bara Basti in Kohima whose people are often feared by outsiders. They are reminded, 'This is our land you are on!'



'Only a person like you will come back to say sorry.'

ONCE, I insulted a police officer who pulled me up for driving without a helmet. Just then a Minister's official car was allowed to get away with a traffic violation. I pushed the chin of the officer towards the Minister's car. Throwing the Rs 300 fine in his face, I drove off. At home, I asked myself, 'Did I not just throw my weight around because I'm from Bara Basti?' I went back to the traffic post and apologized, saying, 'I was wrong. Slap me or imprison me.' The officer said, 'Only a person like you will come back to say sorry.'

This was after I met IofC through Uncle Niketu speaking in Kohima. I thought this fellow was bluffing. No one can be that honest or live out what he was preaching. Yet the message was clear – put things right.

Then he invited me to an IofC workshop. When the inner listening time was called an incident came to my mind strongly. Years before I had got very angry with my sister, had hit her, making her nose bleed. The challenge was, 'Can I apologize to her?' I went home, held her and said sorry. 'You were too young to receive that kind of blow from me. I need you to forgive me.' She held my hand and said, 'Brother that happened long ago but I forgive you.'

I said to myself that there is something in this IofC. I should follow it.

I was 14 when my aunt began looking after us, because of the early death of my mother and alcoholic father. I hated Jesus. If God really existed then things would not be so difficult for my family. I became bitter and got into drinking, chain-smoking, girls, ganja and into hard drugs at age 15 for 10 years, becoming an addict with two close friends,

We decided to give it up – but went for a final fling. One took an overdose and died on the way to the hospital. We two got arrested and jailed; but my friend got bail.

When I was released, I went straight to meet old friends who offered drugs and fed me. At home my sister had insisted on preparing a welcome-home meal, with my favourite, dog meat. They prayed over the meal. I took the plate heaped for me, overturned it on the floor and stamped on it.

Calmly, but in tears, my aunt said none of them would eat either. I thought that if they died, I would be free to do everything the Devil wanted me to.

The next day my three sisters and aunt fasted and just read the Bible. I went out and sat in a chapel. When the church bells rang, they suddenly seemed to ring inside my head, louder and louder. I began crying. Then out of nowhere my sister's face came into my mind. Suddenly I realized that I loved them. I didn't want them to die. I ran all the way back up the steep hillside and found my aunt praying. I called out, 'Aunty, can you forgive me?' She hugged me and said, 'You've grown so big but you're still my little child.'

The next day, I went to rehab for some months. After recovery I worked really hard on our fields that lay beyond the jungle.

Through IofC my conscience awakened, changing my mind completely. I started to see where I, not others, had been wrong. 'Instead of crusading against the Devil

***IofC is producing
a better human being out of this devil***

in others, why not look for the God in us?' The choice is always mine.

Because of these choices, society started trusting me. I was appointed interim president of the century-old Naga Club. On my village executive, I've ensured that funds allocated for my sector are utilized for the drains, roads or other projects they are designated for.

The Eastern Naga region wants to secede from Nagaland. An Easterner once said to me, 'You Angamis are like the Brahmins of India, thinking you're better than others.' My efforts at building trust are bearing some fruit. Some of us from different tribes are trying to build a special hostel for Eastern Nagas working in Kohima.

Recently I led a campaign to stop the malicious transfer of an upright senior police officer. A thousand people signed a petition to retain this honest Hindu officer, in a place where everybody is Christian.

Sadly many Christians think that there is only Jesus Christ for the world. The Dalai Lama and Mahatma Gandhi have proved that God is not in a church or temple but is in people. Hinduism is the most tolerant religion – I have seen Hindus offer candles in churches marking their respect for every god. Hindus are not like Christians or Muslims, who always try to convert others and maintain that their religion is better than others.

***Those who crusade not for God in themselves,
but against the Devil in others,
do not succeed in making the world better
Aldous Huxley***

*There was a big change in me,
from being a hot-tempered,
dominating wife and mother
to a calmer, more understanding woman*

Norma Suvarna

Mumbai, India

Businesswoman



It was through my two teenaged children I met Moral Re-Armament. They went up to Asia Plateau for a youth camp and came back 21 days later completely changed human beings – more mature, more caring, considerate and compassionate.

So I just had to find out what went on during those camps. My husband, Raj, and I drove up to Panchgani from Mumbai. An industrial programme for workers and supervisors was taking place. What was happening there captivated us.

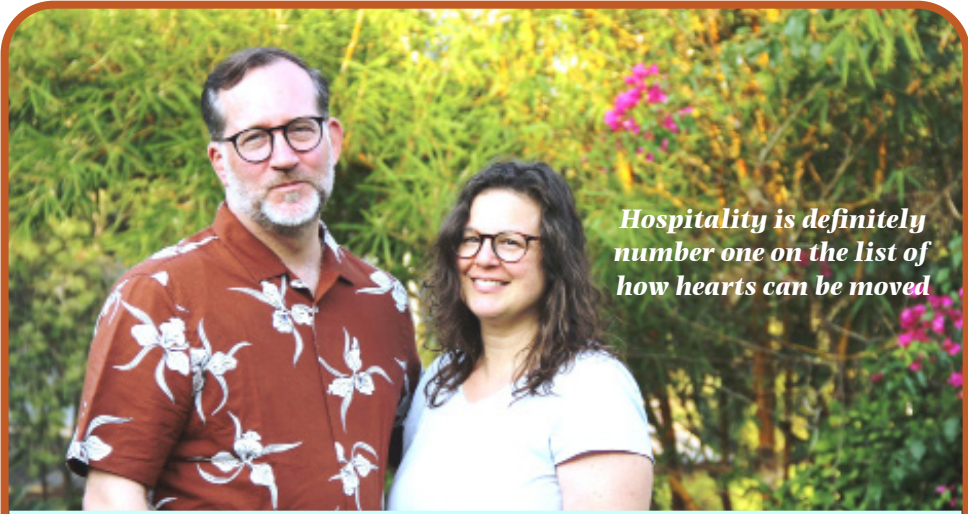
There was a big change in me, from being a hot-tempered, dominating wife and mother to a calmer, more understanding woman. We were able to open our home to people and make them feel truly welcome. I continued to volunteer with IofC for the next 18 years.

We Jews as a whole are very proud and particular in the way we pray. Judaism advocates the view that mankind has a personal relationship with God. Each has a personal connection with God. We are reminded that we pray not only to praise God and ask for forgiveness from him and humanity but that we are also responsible for life around us.

The word *tefillah* in Hebrew means to think, to judge our own being, to look inwards – not just up to Heaven with no personal responsibility. Prayer helps improve our affinity with all that is holy in ourselves.

For me, inner listening times changed prayer from a monologue to a meaningful conversation with God.

*The highest form of wisdom is kindness
Talmud*



Hospitality is definitely number one on the list of how hearts can be moved

Aviva Segall

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Residing Music Director and Principal Conductor for the Omaha Area Youth Orchestras

MY husband, Patrick McNamara, encountered IofC shortly after we started dating. Later he was a Caux Scholar and an intern with the Caux Scholars Program. He has also served on the IofC-USA Board.

Patrick proposed to me at Lake Geneva when I visited him at Caux during his second time there. I participated in a conference and found the people open, hospitable and able to connect with others in the world. It was wonderful to see a model for interfaith dialogue and deepening understanding as we began our journey as an interfaith husband and wife.

Patrick is Christian and I am Jewish. We are involved in an interfaith collaboration closer to home: the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha. A new synagogue, mosque and church are being built on one campus: this is the first time in the world that this has intentionally been done. A fourth building in the middle of those three houses of worship, which we will call Abraham and Sarah's Tent, will be dedicated to interfaith understanding. This lesson in positive co-existence and mutual learning is echoed in the work of IofC.

Honest conversation can open up deeper relationships

My favourite aspect of IofC is the global connection that helps underscore that all people around the world are made in God's image.

I used to be uncomfortable discussing religion with Christians, feeling that

they had an ulterior agenda of converting me and that they often felt superior. People within IofC encourage open and honest dialogue and that has made me more comfortable engaging in religious dialogue with anyone. I appreciate the time I have spent with non-Christians within IofC, as that has made the organization feel more broad and inclusive.

Hospitality is definitely number one on the list of how hearts can be moved. Those who have been involved for a long time with IofC have a gift for small gestures that can make a person feel welcome and comfortable. Honest conversation can open up deeper relationships. IofC is great at intentionally creating spaces – at Caux and Panchgani – where those deeper relationships are inspired.

The downside of this is that when we are not in those spaces, it is hard to feel as connected to the work of IofC. My husband and I don't have many mutual spiritual friends in our everyday lives because we are both involved in our own religious communities.

When we visited Asia Plateau, I was inspired by the way IofC in India was connected with the business sector, government officials and taking on issues like corruption and village women's empowerment.

Often when I think of IofC, I think about the story of Abraham coming out of his tent and offering hospitality. His visitors are first described as men, but later as angels (the Hebrew for 'angel' also means 'messenger'). This seems an apt metaphor for what IofC does. By offering genuine hospitality and kindness, IofC provides opportunities for God's messages to come to us through our honest and caring interactions with others.

It was wonderful to see a model for interfaith dialogue and deepening understanding as we began our journey as an interfaith husband and wife

Every act of forgiveness mends something broken in this fractured world
Jonathan Sacks



*I was the first Jewish person
some of them had ever spoken to*

Zeke Reich New York, USA

*A psychotherapist at a community
mental health clinic. Involved with
Initiatives of Change since 2004*

IN 2004 I went to the IofC centre in Caux, Switzerland. I saw Caux as a way for me to get outside of my cultural 'comfort zone'. I had spent my 23 years in a world of limited diversity, surrounded by family and friends in New York City who were intellectually elite, suffused in Euro-American high culture, and largely Jewish.

I had been searching for meaning in my life, but intellectual New York life had not supplied me with the answers I needed. With one Jewish parent, I leaned towards a Jewish cultural identity, but I had never found Judaism to offer me a strong sense of spiritual fulfilment.

Knowing that many people considered Caux a spiritual place, I resolved that one of my goals would be to connect more strongly to my religious background. To this end, I brought a Jewish text with me: *Pirkei Avot* (The Ethics of the Fathers), ethical maxims from Talmudic rabbis. Early on at Caux, I found in it a short passage that set the entire agenda for my spiritual journey that summer.

Hillel taught:

Do not withdraw from the community;
Do not be sure of yourself till the day of your death;
Do not judge your fellow human being till you stand in his situation;
Do not say, 'It is not possible to understand this,'
for ultimately it will be understood;
Do not say, 'When I have leisure, I will study,' for you may never have leisure.

I saw this text as an aspirational statement for my Caux time: I would try to gain psychological flexibility through rich interpersonal relating. The texture of the place, from quiet time set aside for reflection to deeply personal plenary sessions, fostered a way of being in the world that would have made Hillel proud.

One rich summer led to the next and the next. On each visit I found myself connecting with Jewish spirituality in a way that I was still not finding during the

rest of the year, while simultaneously meeting people from all over the world and feeling my own preconceptions change.

But there was one way in which I never lived up to my own values. Somehow when I was around anyone from North Africa or the Middle East, I kept finding myself closed and disconnected. I would likely have denied it, but I was holding part of myself back.

Under the surface of my awareness, I was holding on to a strong sense of defensiveness and fear. I imagined I was being blamed for the actions of the state of Israel or the Jewish people. I felt as though the weight of defending either entity rested on my shoulders. Full of fear and guilt, I maintained my guard and kept my distance.

In my third summer at Caux, fighting began between Israel and the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon. The whole of Caux seemed to enter into turmoil. A young man from Beirut was unable to return home, and groups from Gaza, Tunisia, and Egypt were agitated about the chaos in their region.

There were no Israelis at the centre that week, but the Jewish Americans there felt troubled. It was easy to feel that 'our people' were being seen as the bad guys and that we were being seen as their representatives.

My instinct was to retreat, let the situation blow over and get on with the summer. But the spirit of Caux stood in my way. Two white-haired women from different continents saw how much I was closing down. They encouraged me to open up to the people I feared.

And so it was that I found myself sitting next to a Gazan woman with the intention of having an in-depth conversation. I could still feel my mind gearing up to become defensive about Israeli policy towards Palestine. I became ready to debate, almost as though to hear her views without rebutting them would have been to betray the entire Jewish nation.

But then she said, 'I would like you to listen to what it is like for me at home. You don't have to agree with everything I say, but you don't have to defend

I was able to hold the truth of her experience without needing to defend my own

yourself against it either. I would like you simply to listen.' For the first time, I began to allow myself to lose my sense of certainty about this issue.

She described the helicopters flying overhead, the sleepless nights with the sound of explosions, the helpless anger she felt every day. I felt a natural empathy which could exist side-by-side with, rather than in contradiction to, my political views. By the end, I was able to hold the truth of her experience without needing to defend my own.

After that, a whole world opened up. I played soccer with Tunisians, took walks with a Lebanese man, and woke up at four in the morning to attend a Muslim prayer service with Egyptians. I quickly found these individuals could now form part of

my community and that I was standing in their shoes rather than judging them. I never forgot we saw the world in very different ways, but I no longer saw that fact as a threat.

I was the first Jewish person some of these new friends had ever spoken to. I described Jewish values to them, shared my views on the legitimate security concerns of Israelis, and invited them to break bread with me on a Friday night while I sang traditional blessings.

I had never before been seen so strongly as a Jewish person. Over the course of the summer, my sense of religious grounded-ness and interreligious relationship grew hand in hand.

On the last day, there was an opportunity for participants to make a statement about their conference experiences. I talked about the fear and guilt that I had held on to and the sense of relief that I had begun to experience. I asked my new friends from North Africa and the Middle East for their forgiveness for having built up such walls in myself.

***I imagined I was being
blamed for the actions
of the state of Israel***

As I spoke I felt two sensations run through my body. The first was the feeling of my heart seeming to burst as I spoke about the openness I had begun to feel that summer.

The second was the sensation of my feet pressing firmly into the floor. I knew then, as I had never known before I left my cultural comfort zone, how deeply rooted I was in my own spiritual tradition, my cultural heritage and myself.

***Every human being has the obligation
to contribute somehow to this world***
Edith Carter



Chris Breitenberg

New Jersey, USA

Musician. Writer. Served with IofC in several countries. Grateful to Google for guiding him, on a cold dreary day in December 2003, to the joyful IofC community of Action for Life

India's greatest gift is her open invitation to be your authentic self

WATCHING those two buildings come down in 2001 in a mess of fire, steel and people, I knew my life was changing forever.

I'd long been curious about, even compelled by, religion. As a child of devoted Christians, the spiritual path was always a focal point of my personal development. Although I grew unsatisfied with the trappings of organized religion and its answers to the questions of my teenage years, my interest never waned. I arrived at university with a deep desire to explore other channels of spiritual expression as well as those thinkers who pursued its deconstruction.

Semesters passed by and my coursework ran parallel to my spiritual journey. Each lecture, book and perspective provided new colours and textures to my thinking. But no exact image came to light. No clarity. Nothing moving. Nothing personal. I struggled to see connections with my own experience.

But something came to light for me that September morning, and in its wake. As one with a strong sense of faith, but no real clarity about its exact shape, I thought I might be a link between people with different religions and those who followed no particular religious path but desired an awakening of a spiritual spark in their own lives. I could be a go-between, a bridge.

I searched. Who else thought this way? Who could help me to grow as this link?

I was disappointed with the interfaith dialogue groups I encountered. I wanted to find people engaged in robust conversations with mutual respect, challenging each other to deepen their own faith while growing in understanding and appreciation of others. What I found was a lot of 'nice' talks where 'nice' people discussed the 'nice' parts of their religious traditions, agreeing on what was shared in common rather than digging into what made each one great. It was watered-down and half-baked, without depth.

Around this time, through the Net, I found out about Action for Life, an IofC programme which aimed to develop a new generation of changemakers, equipped with integrity and faith, and committed to bringing transformation in the world, starting with themselves. For five months, the programme was based in India – a place I longed to visit.

I packed my bags for India with two beliefs. First, that I would have the bold, enriching conversations between faiths that I had so desired. Second, that I would return either a Hindu or a Buddhist.

Together, as a community of Hindus, atheists, Buddhists, seekers, ‘nones’, Muslims, Christians and agnostics, we created a safe space to have open discussions. We asked hard questions, found new answers, shared our personal journeys and the pain of our individual and collective faith histories. We challenged, laughed, wept, embraced and grew in our own faiths and in respect for each other’s.

But I didn’t come back a Buddhist or a Hindu. I came back a Christian.

Those conversations revealed that not claiming my own sense of spiritual perspective made me feel spineless. Flimsy. Shifting like sands in the desert or a politician on the hot seat. And I couldn’t be a bridge without a strong foundation.

I searched as hard as ever. I dug as deep as I could. I cried out.

And that’s where India’s generosity overwhelmed me. It’s a country that gives a visitor so much. Perhaps her greatest gift is her open invitation for you to be your authentic self, knowing she is a big, beautiful, diverse and ancient place with room for you. And as I wandered under the banyan trees and visited mosques, practised yoga, chanted prayers, lit *diyas* (lamps) for the *aarti* (adoration) and studied meditation, the experience constantly pushed me back to myself.

In reading Gandhi, Tagore, Thich Nhat Hanh, Kabir, Rumi and others on the Deccan Plateau-side, I heard a call back to my home. My family. The faith of my fathers and mothers. I felt a divine impulse that I am an intentional part of an immense and beautiful creativity and that my arrival on earth occurs in love and thoughtfulness.

I felt renewed. And I found my faith again. Or perhaps it found me.

I started to have a regular time of reflection. Over time, I saw issues and relationships in my life in a new way. I was getting clarity, perspective and meaningful steps for action. I reconciled with my grandfather. I renewed a relationship with my parents. I was taking bold action in faith and love. I was opening up to relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And something else arrived too – the underlying belief that I have access to an enormous wellspring of love and truth in which I can live my whole life. The important bit is not that I express it all the time (though this is my hope), but that I believe it, have experienced it and will again.

This realization brought an immense freedom. For years I had been obsessed

***We challenged, laughed,
wept and grew in our own faiths
and in respect for each other’s***

with the intellect and suffered under a self-imposed identity desperately attached to fact and reason.

I no longer felt the need to defend my beliefs or impress them upon others. I could listen and seek to understand others. I could ask questions and live into them. I could emote freely and let that expand my being. I could be myself. Authenticity emerged. I was no longer threatening and I no longer felt threatened.

***I couldn't be a bridge
without
a strong foundation***

To me, authenticity is the most compelling force in the world. It's fearless, graceful and invitational. And though many run from it or defend themselves from it, above all I believe people want to be near it. For when we encounter it, it's a wildly exciting and challenging thing. A humbling and strengthening thing. A beautiful and terrifying thing.

Years on, I see that September day differently. Still tragic. Still painful. But I understand it now like seeing an open door at a moment when I finally had the strength to walk through it.

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another...And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity - Colossians 3:10-12

*IofC deepened my faith and
made me a better Muslim*

Dr Imad Karam

Gaza, Palestine

PhD in Media Sociology.

*Worked as journalist in Palestine, now lives
in London with family. Executive Director
of Initiatives of Change International*



I was born under Israeli occupation in 1976 in Gaza city, Palestine. As the eldest son of 10 children, I began working to support the family when I was 12, while also attending school.

In 1999, I was working as a journalist. My friend Mohammed went to an MRA conference in Caux and returned to Gaza enthused to make a difference. He described MRA as a global movement aiming at strengthening the moral and spiritual foundations of society. My friends and I liked this message as it reinforced values already rooted in our culture and religion.

We felt our society needed healing from a history of violence as generations had been born knowing only occupation and conflict. We noted with concern that the only ambitions of our schoolchildren were to become fighters and soldiers.

So we formed a group to do something. Although our only experience of life was under Israeli military occupation, we felt we needed to ensure future generations did not remain scarred.

In 2000, I was part of a group from the Palestinian media invited by the UN for training in the US. This opened my eyes to the power of the media and made me pursue postgraduate studies. In 2002, I got a scholarship to the UK and completed a PhD in media sociology in 2007, the year I got married.

Mohammed recommended I contact the IofC team in the UK. I was cautious as I was told that in the UK IofC was registered as a Christian charity. Perhaps they might try to convert me?

I started going to a weekly young people's forum at IofC's London centre. The more I visited the centre, the more I was attracted to IofC's ideas.

In 2004, I joined the film-making team of the late David Channer. He was my mentor. His personal care deepened my commitment. I was attracted by the standards IofC advocates. They acted as private daily checks and also refreshed my religious practice, which was ritualistic. For example, they made me

self-accountable when nobody else would know whether I had done something or not, such as going through a ticket barrier in the city Metro without buying a ticket or using the work phone or car for personal purposes.

IofC helped me see some of the bad relationships I had with my family. I had taken them for granted. I started to care for them in the right way. I had not spoken to one uncle for years because of anger about him not standing by me when I needed him. I felt able to go and visit this uncle, the first time I was allowed back to Gaza, and apologize to him. A burden was lifted forever.

Perpetrators of inter-religious violence can become instigators of peace

IofC also helped me recognize my life calling. I was privileged to be in the team that made the award-winning film, *The Imam and the Pastor*, about the reconciliation between Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye from Nigeria, and their peace-building work.

The film shows that perpetrators of inter-religious violence can become instigators of peace. I have since travelled with these two men and the film to Egypt, Lebanon, Nigeria, Australia, the USA, several European countries, Sudan and South Sudan.

Next, I helped make another award-winning documentary, *Beyond Forgiving*, depicting the journey of two South Africans to bring healing and reconciliation to their country. The daughter of one, the white lady, was killed in an order for violence by the other, a black militia leader.

Often, I am asked how I feel being a Muslim working for IofC, which has Christian roots. The answer is very simple. IofC deepened my faith and made me a better Muslim. It is open to all people of faith or of none, who are willing to look at their lives, change where needed and contribute to making the world better.

IofC's founder, Frank Buchman, was keen on introducing people to God. When it came to people of different faiths, he tried to help them deepen their own faith. He always sought to bring people together under God for the sake of humanity. I find IofC's ethos and approach compatible with my Islam.

Never underestimate the power of dua (supplication)

Tianethone Chantharasy

Sydney, Australia

Diplomat.

Deputy Foreign Minister of Laos (1974-1975).

Elder statesman of Laotian Australians



When I told her all I had kept hidden from her, my wife said, 'I thought the truth would be far worse than you have shared!'

MY mother was a fervent Buddhist and patiently practised the Five Precepts of Buddhism. She had been left a young widow. Her inner peace, courage and resilience in hard times inspired me deeply.

In my teenage years I longed for something greater to guide me. I was very independent, and rather extreme by nature. I pondered the heart-warming, wise thoughts of senior Buddhist monks and those found in books and magazines. Thanks to this preparation, I was ready to take the next step forward on my spiritual journey.

My first exposure to MRA was in 1957 at a world conference in the USA. I learnt how to listen to the inner voice. I can vividly remember the sacred voice urging me to put right wrongs and steer towards a new direction in my life.

I used to work non-stop, taking on many public responsibilities and labouring long hours to the detriment of relations with my wife and family. I wanted to help others and was involved in many social and humanitarian activities. But I was blind to the excesses I was addicted to, thinking my behaviour was commendable and 'virtuous'.

The inner voice shook me up, getting me to face the stark reality of my life. My long neglect of my fundamental responsibilities had created disquiet, loneliness and tears in my family, whom I said I loved the most. I apologized to my wife. When I told her all I had kept hidden from her, she began laughing. I half-chided her, 'Other women cry when their husbands tell all.' She replied, 'I am just relieved. I thought the truth would be far worse than you have shared!'

Ever since I decided to deal with my problems by exercising moderation, my life has changed. I realized that my compassionate actions should be well-intentioned and timely, acted upon in wisdom and, as a priority, create peace and harmony in my own family.

The worldview I held became broader. Through MRA I met outstanding leaders. I have great admiration for their honesty, humility, deep sense of mutual trust and friendship. This sense of 'one-ness' is still vibrant in IofC events and homes in the world today.

My purpose in life is to achieve Nirvana on this earth. Nirvana is this feeling of coolness of heart, inner peace and inner freedom. To achieve this bliss, I meditate on a regular basis, followed by listening to my inner voice. I try my best to accumulate good merits through purity of thoughts, words and actions; and through being mindful of the presence of selfish cravings and attachments. I also work to harbour no bad thoughts for friend or foe; to withhold judgment or let it go. This is a process of self-purification leading to this deep-souled feeling of coolness.

***This is the most
soul-awakening beauty
I have ever bathed in***

I apply the secret of listening to the inner voice as a daily discipline in my life, and with the family. Sharing after these quiet times promotes honesty and democracy in the family, respecting different opinions and approaches to life. It improves communication, tolerance and understanding between generations.

In my view, listening to the inner voice leads to one of life's most miraculous discoveries for anyone who tries it. For Buddhists, I think it is the supreme wisdom and light of Dhamma. For Christians, it is the voice of God.

Now I see the world through new eyes. I count my blessings every day and am grateful to have time to laugh with the people I love, without taking myself too seriously.

If individuals like myself and many others of my age – stubborn as we were – have changed the direction of our lives, there is great hope for our world. I feel especially uplifted in the company of people with different religious beliefs as it widens my perception of the world.

***Radiate boundless love towards the entire world
Buddha***

Nith Chittasy Sydney, Australia

Electronics engineer. Entrepreneur

The more I keep my heart open to those who hurt me, the more they are amazed



ONE morning, my family needed milk. I went next door to buy a carton and paid the shopkeeper in small change. He abruptly swept the coins away and almost hit me. I thought at once that he was a racist, an anti-Asian. His action bothered me all day. Many negative thoughts built up in my mind. I did not go back to his store for a few days.

Through the practice of inner listening, a thought came to me that was ever so clear: I had escaped from my war-torn country, Laos, to Australia to make it home – not to create more trouble here. Above all, not to cause another war, however small. The clear thought was that I should introduce myself formally to the shopkeeper.

The next morning I went back to the shop and said, ‘Good morning! My name is Nith. What’s yours?’

He replied very nicely, ‘My name’s Bill.’

I said, ‘Hi Bill, I work next door.’

We shook hands. All the ill feelings I had towards him melted away. I could feel my heart opening out to him. We became friends.

Three weeks later, I went to the shop and walked to the fridge to get some milk. There was none. ‘Bill, no milk today?’ Bill replied, ‘Oh Nith, no milk left today, but don’t worry. I’ve got one for you upstairs!’

I learnt that Bill didn’t like small change from any customer.

This incident taught me that it is important not to keep hurts in my heart. IofC has taught me to forgive quickly and get on with life as soon as possible.

The sincerity in word and action of people in IofC was what stood out for me. When I attended IofC gatherings, I began to see the world as one big family. I met other faiths and cultures and learned a great deal from them, finding common ground that allows us to work together for all.

IofC’s four absolute standards resonate well with such Buddhist teachings as ‘to do good, not to do evil and to purify the mind from greed, hatred and delusion’. From IofC I have learned forgiveness, not to blame others, not to take things personally.

There are instances when people close their hearts to me. Some compete and even stab me in the back. I have tried to keep my heart open and continue working

with them. It takes a long time but it is the only way I have found that trust can be built. The more I keep my heart open to those who hurt me, the more they are amazed. Without realizing, they start to come back into friendship and teamwork.

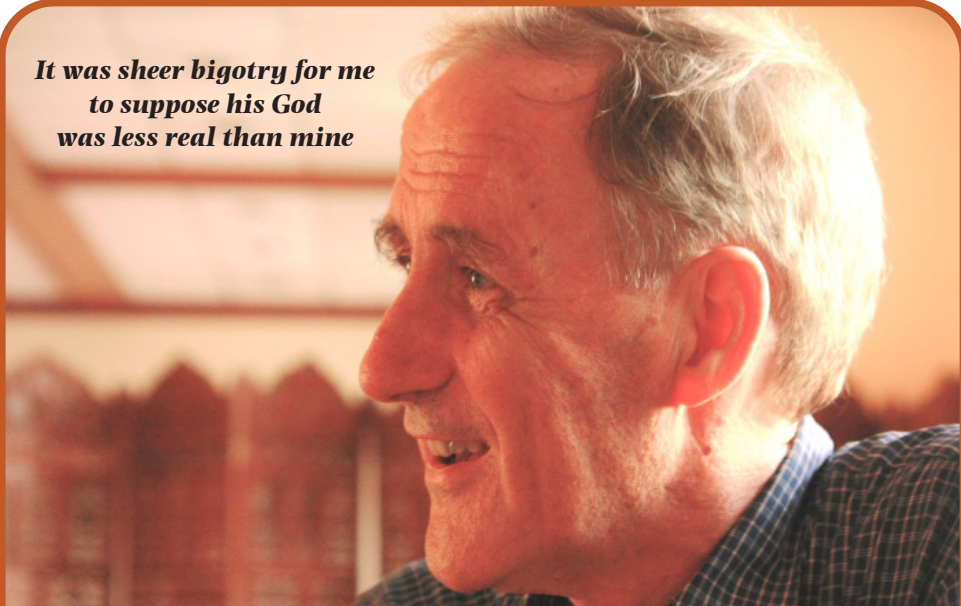
IofC has shown me the goodness of other religious beliefs and to respect those who live their lives according to them. It has helped me go deeper in my own Buddhist beliefs. From childhood, I was taught by our elders about karmic effects: 'If you want someone to prosper, you prosper. If you want someone harmed, you will be harmed.' This has given me a deep commitment to serve others.

Through IofC, I have found the passion to serve my people and to help them prosper through practising our Buddhist teachings. For over 10 years, I have helped at my Buddhist temple just outside Sydney. I have learnt that it is only through my actions that I can motivate people around me.

***I escaped from my war-torn
country to Australia
to make it home
– not to cause another war,
however small***

***Conquer anger with non-anger, badness with goodness,
meanness with generosity
Buddha***

***It was sheer bigotry for me
to suppose his God
was less real than mine***



Mike Brown, Adelaide, Australia

IofC full-time worker of five decades plus. Writer, trainer, creative social activist. Played an enabling role with his wife Jean in the Sorry Day movement that led to the Prime Minister apologizing to Aboriginal Australians of the 'Stolen Generations'. Awarded Non-Indigenous Australian of the Year in 2000 by Aboriginals in his state

AT 19, along with many young idealists in the early Sixties, I dropped out of university 'to change the world'. Actually, it was more like I dropped not just university but career, ideas of marriage, family, bank accounts and every other civilized concept of a 'normal life'.

This was in response to what I felt was an unmistakable call from God to see Australia and my world transformed by a collective effort of a generation of 'revolutionaries' with a similar mindset. In my view then, that was what MRA was about. It was inevitable and irresistible. And right!

If that sounds brash, naive, presumptuous, I admit it was. I regret the arrogance, but I don't feel I was completely deluded. For I've seen some amazing changes in the world (whether or not I had anything to do with them).

At 14, I'd 'given my life to God' in a personal way at a Christian church camp. Through those turbulent teenage years, my morning quiet time to pray, read the Bible and listen for God's whispers kept me on a steady track. To me it was real: the most real thing.

Five years after leaving university and Australia (mostly spent in the USA), I came home and crashed! I had lost the passion. The idealistic call sounded hollow. I had also lost the spiritual disciplines. And I wasn't sure whether God existed or not. With the help of some books and compassionate family and friends, but most of all through my own conscience and spiritual hunger, I was led back into a relationship with what I called 'the Universal Creative Loving Intelligence'.

Since that was too long-winded, I simply accepted 'God' again, though with a humbler, more searching view than I had as a teenager.

A critical turning point was in a Catholic Monastery in Northern Ireland where – after a severe bout of self-doubting rebellion and trying to run away – the lives

of these joyfully faith-filled men there got through to me. I knew in my gut that it had really been all about me and my achievement, my making an impression, my rightness, about

***Fifty years after that blind leap,
I can recount a life rich with challenges,
fascinating people, flat-out activism
and bewildering failures***

'doing my own thing'.

As my punctured 'own thing' lay like a crumpled balloon that night, I understood the truth that 'you find your own destiny in helping others find theirs'. Essentially your transformation and fulfillment lies not in you, but out in the world.

For a follower of the Christ, which I tried to be, it was the lesson of the Cross – of finding yourself through laying down your life and self-inflated ambitions, and learning to serve rather than succeed, to give instead of take.

I had started with the notion that God had a plan for my life, and I just had to find it. After Northern Ireland, I began to see God as the Creator still creating His design for the world and all in it. If I was sensitive enough, I could find my part in making it happen. His 'plan' for me was not some predestined divine blueprint for self-development and success, but that I grow through a living, loving, listening relationship with His Presence, deep within me – also stretching across seven billion people, in fact the whole universe.

Fifty years after the blind leap out of university, I can recount a life rich with challenges, fascinating people, flat-out activism and bewildering failures! It's taken me into racial dialogues in America's inner cities, to proud but grieving outback Australian Aboriginals, to hearing Sudan's traumatised child soldiers and the hopes of young Cambodian students, to rubbing shoulders with political leaders and sitting through long nights with desperate drunks, to travelling India with young aspiring changemakers and to boardrooms with dark-suited businessmen.

What have I learned? Basically, that I'm still learning. I am discovering I don't have the answers; that steps towards answers emerge through a sharing of human pain and forgiveness, love and compassion; and as we listen to the inner authority of

God, or the Truth, or the 'inner voice' (whatever you call it). I'm learning that 'God is not a problem to be solved (or explained), but a mystery to be enjoyed'.

I am involved in perplexing situations where intervening with moral challenges and spiritual truisms seems plainly ineffective, just rude. The response needed is simply to be there with the one who is struggling, to listen with compassion, to listen together for a wiser truth than our reactions, to ask the question they can only answer with their lives.

It is mostly from others that I've learned, including people of other faiths:

Like the Hindu 'untouchable' street-sweeper in Delhi who said 'only God' was able to release him from his violent lust for revenge against the man who had killed his brother. I realized it was sheer bigotry for me to suppose his God was less real than mine, or, for that matter, any different.

Or the Buddhist patriarch of Cambodia, smiling with compassion despite losing 35 of his family in the Pol Pot holocaust, who opened for me the 'noble truth' that there is suffering everywhere, and spelt out the path beyond suffering.

Or the African-American social worker in a drug-ridden part of San Francisco who gave me my first copy of the Qur'an and helped me to see the dignity and strength of following the 'straight path', with the help of God 'most gracious, most merciful'.

Steps towards answers emerge through a sharing of human pain and forgiveness, love and compassion

Or the Jewish rabbi who confronted me with my unconscious assumption that 'Christians have an edge over others about forgiveness'. Every year since then I have participated in the Yom Kippur festival that leads one through a profound embracing of repentance before God and others.

Or the Aboriginal elder, quietly telling the story of a Spirit Ancestor who came from the stars and lives in Nature around us, speaking to our gut-level *miwi* consciousness.

I have seen, over and over, that when someone takes a courageous step to face some untruth in their lives, to repair some wrong attitude or behaviour, to break some addictive bitterness or habit, an energy of positive hope is released which often sets off a chain reaction in others, even changing deadlocked situations.

The bigger the hat, the smaller the property
Australian proverb



*As an Australian,
the discrimination against
Aboriginal Australians
troubled me deeply*

John Bond

Oxford, UK

*Writer: Five decades a full time IofC Volunteer.
Awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for
services on the National Sorry Day Committee*

I have spent my life exploring practical applications of Frank Buchman's conviction: 'When man listens, God speaks. When man obeys, God acts. When people change, nations change.'

I am a bad listener. False motives creep in and I can get things wrong. That is painful. But I have discovered a Presence that loves me, has a purpose for me and, if I mess up, always has a new purpose. A Presence I can trust.

That trust began when I was seven years old. My father had served in harsh war campaigns, and he paid a price. His explosive temper was probably a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder.

My mother found this hard to endure. By 1957, struggling to cope with four children and her husband's outbursts, she was seriously considering leaving him. That year they went to Caux, the IofC centre in Switzerland. There love was reborn between them, and our home found a new harmony.

Probably this was a factor in my decision, having graduated from school, to devote myself to the work of IofC. I knew that wounds of the spirit could be healed.

I spent the next 10 years in Africa. Zimbabwe – or Rhodesia as it was when I arrived – was ruled by a white minority government, and a war of liberation was growing. Kit Prescott, who led the IofC work there, was convinced that, though we were few, we would be used by God to bring a new approach. I found myself working with Alec Smith, the son of the white Prime Minister. Alec's attitudes had been transformed through his encounter with IofC.

We organized large meetings all over the country. We brought the leaders together, black and white, in informal gatherings inside and outside the country. Today IofC is recognized as a significant contributor to the agreement which eventually ushered Zimbabwe into being.

I had grown up in Scotland, and emerged from my schooling with attitudes of

racial superiority. In Africa I saw how false this was. Perhaps that is why, when I moved to Australia, the discrimination against Aboriginal Australians troubled me deeply.

I was living in Canberra in 1997 when an inquiry exposed the tragic impact of assimilation policies which removed tens of thousands of Aboriginal children from their families, up to the 1970s. The Government loathed this inquiry and refused to apologize for the policies. But Sir Ronald Wilson, the judge who had conducted the inquiry, had been profoundly moved by hearing the stories of 500 Aboriginal people who had been removed – now known as the Stolen Generations. ‘I was a hard-boiled lawyer,’ he said, ‘but this inquiry has changed me, and if it can change me, it can change Australia.’

I knew that a profound change of heart can open up entirely new possibilities for wider change. So a colleague and I arranged a speaking tour for Sir Ronald in Canberra. He proposed that since the Government refused to apologize, the Australian community could do so, and invited me to a meeting to plan this Sorry Day. At this meeting I became Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee.

A million people joined us and Sorry Day was a huge national event. The Stolen Generations were so moved that they launched a Journey of Healing, inviting the whole Australian community to help heal the wounds resulting from the removal policies. Over the next 10 years, hundreds of events were held each year.

Gradually we saw attitudes change in Parliament. When the ruling party was defeated in national elections in 2007, the new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, announced that he would make the apology, and invited the Opposition party to join him. The Opposition, who had refused for 11 years to apologize, agreed.

***False motives creep in and
I can get things wrong***

The day of the apology in the full Parliament was soul-stirring. Throughout the country people watched on large public screens, many in tears. Five billion dollars were allocated to transform the social conditions of Aboriginal Australia.

The campaign was tough, sometimes agonising. But I was constantly inspired by seeing healing and new hope among the Stolen Generations. And by discovering that, when we organised large events despite our meagre financial resources, unexpected support pulled us through. Evidence, to me, of that loving Presence.

The clash of ideas brings forth the spark of truth

Taking daily time in quiet has become the touchstone of every major decision I make

Nigel Heywood

Melbourne, Australia

Grew up on a farm in New South Wales. Studied Fine Arts at Australian National University. Full-time IofC volunteer, 2001-2013, working in 20 countries, including the Solomon Islands, South Sudan and Australia.

Last worked for Red Cross Emergency Services in Victoria



IN 2001, at the age of 24, I found that I was depressed and drank excessively. I woke up one morning and prayed, ‘God, I don’t know how You work, but I’m moving city to show that I want to change. Help me find help.’

Through a friend I connected with IofC in Melbourne and joined a nine-day course. Being part of a caring community and hearing stories of courage and change reignited a sense of hope I had lost.

I was introduced to the idea that real change in the world starts with change in me. The simple practicality of this idea has grown in power and impact in the years since.

Alongside this was a practice that has become the touchstone of every major decision I make: taking daily time in quiet for self-reflection, prayer and seeking direction.

Over a period of 10 years I began to face up to my lying, cheating and wrecked relationships. It took three years to let go of drinking. I was honest with my parents about things I hid from them. I returned money for false overtime. I apologized to friends for harm I had caused.

I learned to trust the voice of conscience and wisdom, deeper than my own. I was challenged to see where I needed to be honest, pure in my intentions, not act out my compulsive selfishness, and learn to love.

Over these years I was influenced by the transformation in the lives of people I worked alongside: a Buddhist Cambodian teacher deciding not to take bribes from his students; a South Sudanese former child soldier deciding to forgive and rebuild peace; a Chinese friend standing on stage with his mother and forgiving her for beating him; a Hindu friend choosing to continue to live with an open heart

of service after losing his brother to cancer. I lived and worked with ordinary people who showed how much difference their lives could make when they listened to that deeper wisdom – and acted.

I learned to trust the voice of conscience and wisdom, deeper than my own

IofC gave me the chance to work in a world of complexity

and difference, where I had to ask a new set of questions. Working alongside Hindu friends who served without money, in complete faith, was a challenge to me. Was their leap of faith any less real? Working with young Indonesian Muslims trying to confront extreme Islam made me look at whether my own faith was having any impact.


I explored my Christian walk more deeply. I picture life as a great circle with Christ in the centre. At each moment I am moving towards or away from that relationship. I believe he calls me to act with him in all circumstances. Many times it is not clear or I'm caught up in my own mind. Taking the time to sit quietly and listen helps me to take practical steps.

This central key unlocks the door to global change. The energy and creativity that are released when people develop trust and integrity allow for new networks and communities to develop across tribal, religious and national conflicts. This bridges the divide between victim and perpetrator.

I have witnessed rebel fighters reconciling in the Solomon Islands. One commander returned to all the villages he had terrorized, to apologize for what he had done. He showed us footage of weeping mothers lining up to forgive him. I helped train some 200 South Sudanese peace mobilizers in 2013: Muslim and Christian leaders reconciled, men decided not to beat their wives, and one woman who had given birth after rape reached out to forgive the perpetrator in order to reunite two divided villages.

I often feel foolish in trying to make a difference. Which is why I'm inspired to work alongside friends who keep listening within and to others, searching for that collective inspiration that might turn a situation around.

If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his step firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand – Psalm 37



As a Christian, the question of whether Gandhi is in heaven or hell is an interesting debating point, but not particularly germane to my everyday life

Rob Lancaster
Canberra, Australia

*Law graduate. Leadership trainer
and facilitator*

IN 2007, I was at the end of my studies in Australia, and looking for a stimulating way to spend my final summer break. Going to India was one. I have close family links with IofC stretching back to grandparents on both sides. So, it occurred to me I could volunteer at Asia Plateau, the IofC centre in Panchgani.

Whilst I was broadly on board with the basic message, I hadn't at that point felt any particular vocation to engage more closely with the work of IofC.

My visit coincided with two significant events: the 40th anniversary of Asia Plateau and a large global consultation of those working with IofC. The 40th anniversary gave an inspiring sense of a worldwide fellowship through the generations. Afterwards I was asked to work on a daily podcast about the consultation for the international IofC network.

The 10 days were, frankly, not an especially uplifting experience, but paradoxically they sparked something inside me. I saw in IofC a context in which I can live the breadth of my conviction.

IofC has been an effective container for going deeper and more honestly into a personal spiritual search. I haven't done too many terrible things in my life. This reality is a simple blessing and the gift of a loving upbringing rather than the result of any great attributes I've cultivated. It can mask the equal reality that even so-called 'lesser' evils are the seeds of hatred and bitterness in the world.

As Alexander Solzhenitsyn puts it: 'If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us.... But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.'

One example which comes to mind is from a simple email thread a few years

ago, where I was sharing some frustrations. A friend wrote to me: 'I find the tone of your recent messages quite high-handed, bordering on arrogant in places.'

I knew my tone was a reflection of my frustration and disappointment with my failure to meet the standards I'd set for myself. I recognized that, whilst there were areas where others could be doing things differently, I needed to work more consistently on developing an appreciative approach. I needed to spend more time understanding where the other person might be coming from rather than trying to get them to see where I was coming from.

I apologized to the people on that loop, but a sincere apology means a dedicated effort to improve. It's very much a work in progress. I was reminded of that during fieldwork later, where we had a breakdown in our team's relationship with a local host. One of the contributing factors was my failure to articulate my appreciation for their considerable work in looking after us.

Often I think appreciative thoughts, but on balance I share my criticisms more readily than my affirmations. Despite apologizing there remains an undercurrent of hurt. Sometimes, also, I may not be forgiven by the other person. And that too is life.

Months later I was a third party to a conflict between two people – another part of the world, another culture, and a different set of circumstances. But as I observed this from a more objective position, I saw more clearly how otherwise reasonable people can become quite deaf and uncaring towards each other when egos clash. It gave me some insights into the earlier situation and a better awareness of when I'm letting my ego in.

The ego isn't going to sanction its own demotion or demolition

These behavioural points are not ends in themselves, but reflections of what is happening at a deeper level. That deeper level for me is where the real business of life goes on, and where the question of spirituality comes in.

I was brought up by Christian parents. I don't believe IofC adds anything particular to my beliefs, though it's a space where my beliefs are refined, challenged and nuanced. It encourages anyone in the search for a vocation in life at the deepest level. It doesn't prescribe a particular religious framework, nor offer an alternative spirituality, but emphasizes that unless we move beyond our individual selfish preoccupations, aspirations to change the world are genuinely pie in the sky.

The ego isn't going to sanction its own demotion or demolition. That means the answer has to be beyond our ego and its superficial attachment to career, money, anxieties, unhealthy relationships, etc.

IofC has exposed me to people of other spiritual beliefs and worldviews, who openly share and discuss them. This has had two healthy effects.

Firstly, it has underlined that if we judge religions by their human adherents, we are likely to have a bipolar reaction that swings between incredulous admiration and inspiration to bitter disappointment and resentment.

Secondly, I've come to be less preoccupied with the specifics of what qualifies

me for a good deal when I die, assuming there are options. So as a Christian, the question, say, of whether Gandhi is in heaven or hell is an interesting debating point, but not particularly germane to my everyday life.

Rather the question is am I doing my utmost for the highest I know? If there is a love that surpasses human understanding, and I am able in some way to reflect that in how I deal with people, then what they subsequently do or believe is neither within my control nor particularly worth worrying about.

***Often I think appreciative thoughts,
but I share my criticisms
more readily than my affirmations***

I often return to the idea of aiming to 'meet people at the point of their deepest need'. How often I walk into conversations conscious of how I am feeling, how I might be being perceived, what the other person can do for me, other tasks I have to do, other people I would rather be talking to than the person I am with, and so on.

The world needs people who are more interested in what they can do for others than in what they can do for themselves. I regularly return to the extensive definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 in the Bible. If I take it seriously, it is enough to keep me challenged, looking in the right direction and hopeful.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal – Corinthians 13



I found the courage to jump ship from the standard life path

Alex Birnberg, Ballarat, Australia

Federal government servant. Teacher. NGO worker

BORN in Melbourne, to the comfort and security of a wealthy country, I grew up nonetheless with the family's stories of war, genocide and the tragedy of Europe's 20th century. This mixture of safety and stories of survival imprinted deeply in me the need to give something meaningful to the world.

My journey took a pivotal turn in high school, when I was subjected to four years of relentless bullying. It shut me down as a person. I closed in on myself and limited my life to a safe career. However, the confines of this 'normal' life crushed me. I turned to the distractions of the material world to hide from my unhappiness.

Around then a friend suggested to my mum that I should join a short IofC course being run by visitors from the UK. My family is not at all religious. The course opened my eyes to the inner world, which I had never explored till then. This only made my situation more intolerable: I could now see more clearly the limited life I was living.

I was intrigued and started to go to IofC conferences and ended up in Caux for an internship. Still, it took the lure of a nine-month programme in India and Asia before I had the courage to jump ship from the standard life path. Action for Life was a real adventure: that is, the outcome was totally unexpected.

I went to India looking for new direction. Instead, through a full day of fasting and silent reflection alone on the Panchgani tableland, I had my first encounter with an inner spiritual reality. I could no longer live a small, safe life. That encounter, as scary and upsetting as it was, shifted my entire way of looking at life.

This started my journey with IofC as a full-time volunteer. I tried to put right my past: writing letters to my parents to initiate a new relationship with them, giving a full account of my income to the tax office, being honest with my friends and apologizing to former girlfriends for my selfishness.

I started to put down these burdens, but the deepest transformation still eluded

me because I held back from that deepest Truth which sat inside me. It was too scary to accept – too different from everything I had grown up with.

As a full-time volunteer, life was exciting, challenging and often confusing. Without a ‘boss’ or clear guidelines, it was hard to know what I was meant to be doing or how to deal with challenges that came my way. I was lucky Jim Coulter, a 100 year-old, lifelong full-time IofC volunteer, helped out by becoming my mentor. Trying to follow guidance from inner listening, I kept wondering if I was really making a difference or just a series of interesting mistakes.

Finally, exhausted and disheartened, I went on a road trip to West Australia with a fellow volunteer. On that journey, with long stretches of reflection time, I finally took the courage to plunge, surrender to that inner Loving Spirit and follow it on the path it was asking me to take, towards Christianity.

IofC has allowed me to take that chance at being fully human

Then I worked in a charity organization trying to help young people realize their inner potential. Each day I saw how limited our culture is in inspiring our next generation to fully embrace their humanity. We humans are made of two parts, the logical and the ‘illogical’. In fear, we have pushed away that second side of ourselves.

I believe that IofC builds bridges not just between groups that do not trust each other, but also within us. It gave me the chance to build a bridge to that irrational side of myself, which is as much me as my conscious rationality.

We divide ourselves at our own peril. IofC has allowed me to take that chance at being fully human. Any group that can do that is important for this hurt, fractured world.

A good conscience is a soft pillow
Australian proverb



Lindsay Cartwright

Perth, Australia

Uniting Church minister.

MRA full-time worker for 60 plus years

The sectarian hostility with which I had grown up fell away

THE son of a trucker, I was born in an Australian country town. I met MRA as a student at Melbourne University. The idea that you can have a part in changing the world through change in your own life was a revelation to me. I began by writing a letter to a grocer apologizing for having stolen a packet of cheese, and sent some money to pay for it. He wrote back, 'If you follow your conscience in life, you will do all right.'

MRA helped me put my Christian faith into practice and has been a mainstay in my life wherever I worked – Australia, New Zealand, UK, Italy, Switzerland or India.

When Frank Buchman, the initiator of MRA, was in New Zealand in 1956, I went with other friends to plan with him every morning. After I had expressed my thoughts he said to me, 'You could be more honest.'

This set off a train of thoughts in my heart. One of my motives for going into Christian ministry had been to gain a college and university education. I said sorry to God, and later apologized to my college principal. This led to peace and satisfaction and a deeper care for people.

The practice of taking time to listen to God each morning has been a continual source of inspiration and direction. When I arrived in my first parish I had the clear thought to make friends with the local Catholic priest. We became friends and the sectarian hostility with which I had grown up fell away.

Some years later, I spent four years with MRA in Italy. Two men I worked with were in the Communist Party. They re-found their faith, left the party and returned to the Catholic Church. One wrote a song, *Primavera* (springtime) in celebration of the new life he had found.

*The greatest glory lies not in never falling,
but in rising every time we fall*

Kim Vuth

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Travel company proprietor



***Materialism threatens the future
like a River Mekong flood***

MY first encounter with IofC was in 2002 at the 10th Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in Malaysia. There were many turning points for me from that event. I realized that I am unique, but also a part of everything that happens in the world. I have a part to play in making it a better place by starting with changing myself.

I remembered that five years earlier I had stolen a book from my teacher and needed to return it. In those days, I only thought about myself, wanting to be top in class so that later I would have a chance to go high up in society. At times I saw this was wrong, but I still went through life taking care only of myself. I thought it was normal for people to cheat others, and that the rich and powerful would always win.

IofC turned me from being such a selfish person to someone who began to think of others around me. I had never had good relations with my four younger sisters and my father. I overheard them saying I behaved like a tiger, who only thought of himself. My mother was the only person I got along with.

The APYC opened my eyes to my attitude and behaviour. I returned home with new hope. For the first time, I bought presents for my family. I began using words of encouragement, motivation and love to my sisters and father, instead of always berating them. Through this my family changed.

The four absolute standards are universal norms that anyone, whether religious or non-religious, can use as tools for measuring the way one behaves. They can change one's life significantly. I felt inner peace and happiness after starting to change myself. I have also seen that personal stories of change really do touch people's hearts.

What touched me most was that people in IofC acted as role models. They did their best to live out the values IofC promotes. By practising those values in my own life, changes took place.

***This method of getting related
to God's universal spirit can be
adopted by every single person,
whatever their religion***

In one time of inner listening, I thought of all the tissue paper and toothpicks strewn on the floor of cafes. I imagined a thousand people throwing toothpicks on the ground. I decided to stop littering. With four schoolmates who had also been at APYC, I launched a town-cleaning campaign. We were surprised when around 130 people registered for it.

***IofC opened my heart
to people of other faiths***

The Buddhist faith is a strong part of my identity. I accepted that a common goal

for all faiths was peace. Yet I felt that peace could not be achieved by other religions. I saw them as a source of conflict and threat to global harmony.

I am an ordinary Buddhist, with no formal training. Actually, I became a Buddhist because it was the faith of my family. I had negative impressions of other religions. But I have learned that my religion is no better than any other. I have become more sensitive to other religions and would like other people to learn to appreciate every religion in the same way. IofC opened my heart to people of other faiths, and of no faith.

Materialism threatens the future like a River Mekong flood. It makes people feel their lives are meaningless. They do not have the time, or the paths, to search for meaning. They are too busy catching up with the dramatic growth around them, wanting more than their needs, taking away others' natural resources, like the beautiful timber from Cambodia's forests. Some have more than they need, while others starve.

People of all religions – and those without religion – must put aside their differences and work together to wake the world up to caring for others.

Treat others as you want to be treated yourself

*I am no less a Hindu when
I am inspired by writings of other faiths*

Haridas Nair

Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

Lawyer, CEO of APHEM (an educational trust), MRA/IofC activist



MY parents moved from Kerala to Malaya before independence. My father served in the British Air Force and was a prisoner of war in Japan. Later, he worked in the civil service in Malaya. Our home was family-centred with daily visits to Hindu temples. Life was simple. My school life focused on sports rather than studies. My faith only became strong when exams approached. Then I prayed fervently, hoping God would do for me what I'd not done myself.

In 1970, I went to Mumbai for university. I mixed with students from different nations. I learnt about Marxism, Naxalism and the need for change. The atmosphere was of cynicism. Those with money had their many interests. Those without struggled to exist. What hope was there for the future.

I was invited to a conference at Asia Plateau. The duration stretched to 10 days as I fell ill. So, I read a book by Peter Howard, about the ideas of MRA. I liked the concept of bringing changes in society, but listening in quiet, reflecting on one's life, in the context of absolute moral standards, was more than an eye-opener. I recognized the link between personal shortcomings and the challenges society faced. It was logical that change had to start with me.

I told my parents the things I hid from them, returned money to the railways for travelling ticketless, divulged to the government black market currency transactions, said sorry for strained relationships and even gave up smoking. These experiences are touchstones in my ongoing journey of faith.

I took a year off studies to work as a full-time volunteer with MRA, and ended up spending ten years with MRA in India, with 18 months in UK. During my time there I met people who took their Christian faith seriously. I voluntarily attended Bible studies and read inspirational Christian books. An Englishman gave me a copy of Bhagavad Gita leading me to an exploration of Hinduism. I read Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth*, and discovered 'listening to the inner voice' was a major part of his experience and activism.

I understood why moral values needed to be absolute. 'Only what can be measured can be improved' led me to a deeper understanding of otherwise abstract values. The best way to realize the truth of my beliefs was to live them out. I experienced what it means to be honest, to be forgiven and to forgive, to be compassionate and loving, and to deal with my own challenges of anger or greed. Change is constant and growth is always an option. With time, my sense of faith has grown. Now I agree with what Carl Jung said, when asked whether he believed in God: 'I don't believe. I know.'

***High divorce rates, promiscuity,
drugs, violence
and hedonistic behaviour
transcend boundaries of religion***

Over the last 37 years my wife, three daughters and I have made our home in Malaysia, a multireligious country. In 1984, I took *Syariah* (Sharia) Law to complement my law degree. This replaced my ignorance of Islamic jurisprudence with knowledge. It took me beyond tolerance to understanding.

Active in the interfaith movement, I know, despite differences, we share an underlying sense of humanity. As we work together, we bring greater strength to resolve societal challenges – high divorce rates, promiscuity, drugs, violence and hedonistic behaviour that transcend religious boundaries. Religion is not just to reshape society but also provide believers with capacity to live meaningfully as agents for change in this materialistic age.

Reading about different faiths greatly nourishes me. I am no less a Hindu when I am inspired by writings of other faiths. Their expressions can often provide new and meaningful insights into my own understanding. Part of my journey of faith is to be open to the wellsprings of life everywhere.

As a Hindu, I know that at the core of our being is the source of all existence – *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am the Divine Self). Knowledge of the outer world provides material benefits but the rishis (sages) stressed that knowledge of the inner being gives mastery over one's life. As one diminishes one's ego, a greater sense of illumination and clarity results. This moral journey leads on to the spiritual journey – the connection with the Brahman or Being – with inner listening providing the way towards deeper experience.

***Never get into your head that your faith alone is true
and every other is false
Sri Ramakrishna***

*In Asia, I've experienced cultures and religions
I'd never dreamt of in my younger days.
Each one has helped me become more of a real person*

Peter Heyes
Edmonton, Canada

Teacher. Youth mentor



IN 1962 I was living with my parents and 12 younger siblings in England. I worked in another city. In winter, the smog was often so thick the trains couldn't run and by the time I reached my hometown there were no buses so I had to walk. The council couldn't give us a bigger house, so we lived in two connected apartments. Rents were so high, I couldn't move away. Life was a bit of a drudge.

One of my younger brothers came home with free literature, after a teacher at his school had arranged a visit from an MRA speaker. The articles interested me. I wrote to the address given for further information. Instead of sending literature, the MRA people in London told the teacher to come knocking. Being shy and young, I didn't like this approach but I invited him in.

The end result was I started helping the teacher to show an MRA film to groups during industrial unrest. The film was about two families on either side of a dispute in a factory. I often travelled to London – using the fare reductions I got working for the railways – to see MRA plays at the Westminster Theatre, which it owned.

As an introvert, I found these expeditions frightening but also thrilling. They took me out of my cramped home and humdrum life to mingle with people I saw as richer, more educated, more interesting. But I also felt terrified in their company.

My father, a coal miner, was forced to take a poorly paid menial job above ground after

***Here I was, a dropout at 14,
being asked to study for a doctorate!***

an underground explosion. A lifelong communist, the best way to make him angry was to put on a TV church service. He viewed the church as an oppressor. I took an interest in religion simply as a way of getting at him. I saw MRA as a way of getting out of the dark cloud of communism.

It's been a 65-year journey. Slowly, I saw the good in my Dad's communism; it wasn't the cause of everything wrong in my life. Now I can say I love my parents. Back in my youth, I wouldn't have used that word. My childhood was the class struggle, miners' strikes and the world of the poor.

MRA/IofC opened my eyes to another world where people from different classes work together to make things better for everyone.

In 1964 I moved to Canada and by 1970 had saved up enough to go to university. After passing my BSc I was invited to take a PhD. Here I was, a dropout at 14, being asked to study for a doctorate! I soon realized I wasn't happy doing research. I had been doing some teaching during my postgraduate years and preferred the classroom environment to lab work. So I turned my PhD into an MSc and also studied for a teaching diploma.

In 1980 I went to Northern Nigeria as a volunteer to teach science to 1200 Muslim boys in the Sahel. I learned to appreciate Islam, especially people's discipline with their prayers.

I borrowed films from the British Council to show to my students, including the MRA film *Freedom*. They would leave shouting 'Freedom!' in their language, like in the film, while I wondered if I'd be charged with inciting rebellion.

One summer while I was away there was a military coup. My house was ransacked, mainly by teachers. I decided to return to Canada but to what? Someone said, 'People tell me to ask God to open a door. But I ask him to close all doors but one.'

In Canada I got just one job interview. The interviewer asked if I would work in Fort McPherson. I had no idea where it was but, being a man, didn't ask. I ended up working 12 years with the Dene and Inuit people above the Arctic Circle.

One day I tried to help a Grade 5 student who was struggling. He flew into a rage, grabbed my thumb, bent it backwards, dislocating it. Locals told me his alcoholic parents were up in court that day for drunken driving. The student was worried more about going home and finding no parents.

I realized more than being a caring teacher, I needed to know my students. So I got them to tell me their home situations. Class time became better; I knew when anyone was having a bad day and students knew if I had a headache.

From 2001 I started going to Asia Plateau to help with the Action for Life programmes. It was both an outward journey, and an inward journey learning about changing ourselves. Those years helped broaden my outlook.

Nowadays I am mainly based in Cambodia, working with young people in different parts of South East Asia. When I visit schools, I share my mistakes and encourage teachers and students to embrace theirs rather than treating them as shameful. The way to a person's heart is through sharing such learning experiences.

In Asia, I discovered a new world and experienced cultures and religions I'd never dreamt of. Each one has helped me become more of a real person.

***I had no idea where Fort McPherson was
but, being a man, I didn't ask***

***Gratitude can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home,
a stranger into a friend. It makes sense of our past,
brings peace for today,
and creates a vision for tomorrow
Melody Beattie***

Olena Kashkarova Kyiv, Ukraine

Ukrainian of Russian background, involved with Initiatives of Change through its Foundations for Freedom programme. Her apology as an ethnic Russian to an ethnic Ukrainian laid the foundation for the Healing the Past project which explores the root of conflict in Ukrainian society. Worked for the UN Development Programme as a specialist on reconciliation



The major power of IofC for me is in practice. What's the use of listening if you then don't act?

IF you are looking for dramatic events, epic changes, miracles you can move straight on to the next piece in this book. So far, my faith and my involvement in IofC, which are closely interconnected, have given me more of a feeling of growth than of sudden change.

The first thing that attracted me to IofC was the opportunity to really get to know people, leaving behind masks of being 'cool' or 'indifferent'. I was 20 then and only had a few people I trusted enough to talk about my beliefs and search for meaning. During the week-long Foundations for Freedom course, I got to know people more deeply than in a whole year of studying with them.

I discovered I was not the only one interested in the 'meaning and purpose of life'. We all shared the same concerns: even people I hadn't the slightest suspicion might! It was such a relief not to feel like an alien any more.

IofC was a confirmation of what I already knew. In my opinion IofC's philosophy is self-evident. It's obvious that I influence people and situations around me according to who I am as a person, and whether I do what I say. Trying to change a situation without changing myself is silly. An Orthodox saint, Serafim Sarovsky, said: 'Save yourself and thousands will be saved around you.'

The major power of IofC for me is in practice, in being open to listen and courageous enough to act. My experiments with this have had varied success.

The first challenge was to listen to whatever comes, without any intellectual

attempt to organize my thoughts or make them up. That is such a temptation when everybody except me has such deep, life-transforming thoughts. Mine are like fleas – small and jumping in different directions.

Staying with my experience and staying true to myself was what I understood a Quiet Time to be. At times I find that it's not me, but my false 'serene' mask sitting quietly, trying to listen. But a mask, even a serene one, can't hear.

We know that our ability to delude ourselves is unlimited, especially when it comes to doing something inconvenient or even scary. Or when I really want something for myself. Is the thought from my mind or ego, intuition, conscience or God? Perhaps it's not even my voice, but that of the society around me?

IofC's answer is to check the thoughts against four moral standards and to share them with friends. Then it should become clear. Well, it didn't for me.

If you want to distinguish someone's voice from other voices, then you need to get to know this person. It became evident to me that I needed to get to know God better if I am to hear him. But how?

From childhood I have believed in God, without being attached to any religion. I sought answers from different religions and philosophical systems, pretty much everywhere. Gradually I understood that this is like searching for water by digging small holes here and there. There are many different ways to God, but I needed to follow one if I wanted to get anywhere.

I chose Christianity first intellectually, then in my heart. The logical reason was that religions are adapted to the needs and mentality of certain nations. For me,

***It became evident to me
that I needed to get to know
God better if I am to hear him***

as a Russian, the most natural was Orthodox Christianity. My ancestors had already walked this path. But logic was not enough. Only during an Ignatian retreat – a week in silence and prayer – did I feel I could say 'yes'

to Christianity, with all the integrity I had within me.

I didn't become a zealous neophyte, not even a mediocre one. I seldom go to a church or to confession, and receive communion even more rarely. Just once have I observed Lent. I lack discipline in my commitment and tell myself that the time in quiet every morning and spontaneous prayers are enough for me. This and an Ignatian retreat every year keep my faith alive.

I do not try to differentiate between the voices now, but just concentrate on God's presence and prayer. What helps me is a simple anxiety-calming thought: that it's all right to make mistakes.

Acting on thoughts often becomes a real trial for me. 'I can't, I don't want to!' is my usual first reaction. But in the Russian language, listening and obeying are words of the same origin and one implies another. What's the use of listening if you don't then act?

When a clear thought came to me that I should move to a village in Central

Beyond Walls

Ukraine to help build a community house for IofC, I was scared even to voice it. But the thought was so clear I didn't dare disobey, even though it seemed crazy.

I wish I could say my arrival changed everything and the house got built in days! Though the whole process was blessed by numerous miracles, like people and money arriving, it was also slow and full of challenges, turmoil and doubts.

I can't live just to answer my own needs and desires, when there's so much suffering and injustice in the world. This would betray all my experience of myself as I am now, and as I could become. The alternative is to give everything to God completely. Let him freely use my body, mind, everything I have.

Failures just show me where I don't allow God to act through me. What do I still hold on to so much that there is no space for him?

This deeper understanding is not something I have gained forever. I need to renew this commitment daily. The practice of the Inner Listening Time is precious here.

***My thoughts are like
fleas – small and jumping
in different directions***

***O Lord, teach me to treat whatever may happen throughout the day
with peace of soul and firm conviction that your will governs all.
In all my deeds and words, guide my thoughts and feelings
Prayer of Orthodox Optina Fathers***

It was painful to realize that I belonged to the discriminating group



**Diana
Damsa**
Baia Mare,
Romania

Full-time IofC volunteer

THE simplicity, optimism and openness of people involved in IofC work captured my heart – the genuine intentions I felt in them, the care and interest they showed in me and in individuals in general. It was a nice combination of care for the individual and care for the world’s needs. There was respect for ‘the other’.

They were not only speaking about doing good but were genuinely trying to implement it in their own lives. They provided a safe space for open, non-judgmental dialogue and for global thinking that did not level or squash but valued differences and everyone’s contribution.

I was encouraged to discover and be myself – to be my best. Their message was that my work and my talents were not too small to make a significant positive contribution.

IofC taught me appreciation of cultures very different from mine, and patience to discover and enquire before giving my own irrevocable judgment!

It helped me to seek my spiritual roots and a deeper understanding of my own faith tradition – Orthodox Christianity. I discovered that all I had learned through IofC had a solid basis in my Church.

It had all been there, but perhaps I had had no true desire to search for it. Through IofC it all became more tangible and I became even more rooted in my faith – and, at the same time, accepting of all humankind, with all our cultural and religious variety.

***Those who are free of
resentful thoughts surely find peace***

I gained an extraordinary inner freedom I value very much. My priorities changed. I am less concerned with pleasing people or with success based on material gain or recognition. I am more appreciative of people and what I have. I feel less judgmental and more ready to forgive. I am more ready to give of myself, my skills, my time, my belongings.

When I was in India in 2005 during Action for Life 3, I discovered that the gypsies we despise in Romania originally came from North India. My people speak ill of them, giving them as a bad example while educating children. When something is stolen or destroyed, gypsies are scapegoated.

I started calling Roma people by their preferred name

It was painful to realize that I belonged to the discriminating group. With shame I accepted my prejudice. I started calling Roma people by their preferred name. I have apologized to them for the way my society holds on to a totally negative image of them.

I started to speak about this uncomfortable Roma topic with my closest friends and family, and through NGOs. My mission is to raise awareness within wider society and break the chain of passing on prejudice from one generation to the next. We are just one people.

Love is patient and sweet; love does not envy; love is not upset neither puffed up. Love does not commit what is shameful, neither does it seek its own; it is not provoked, neither does it entertain evil thoughts. Rejoices not in evil, but in the truth. Endures all things, believes all things, bears all

St Paul



*In my deludedness, I was convinced
the source of my unhappiness lay in
my lack of material goods*

Dana Lazar

Baia Mare, Romania

TV journalist. Mother of two

ILL always be grateful to my Afghan friend Khalid who asked me at Panchgani, ‘How can you hate something as beautiful and peaceful as your country? You’ll never hear an Afghan saying he hates his country. We’re proud to be Afghans.’ I was dumbfounded. I had never thought before that I could love my country.

IofC came into my life at a time of inner searching. Its ideas were an option for filling a void, deep in my soul. Not knowing anything about it before, I was drawn like a magnet to words like moral values.

In my materialistic world, I had completely forgotten about such values. In my deludedness, I was totally convinced that the source of my unhappiness lay in my lack of material goods. The spiritual was something too abstract, even counterproductive, unworthy of being taken on board.

For me, IofC was a way to understand the meaning of life – and flush out the superficiality. As part of the IofC ‘life school’, Action for Life 5, I learned so many things about myself, others, and the world through observing, talking with people and sharing experiences.

I was always a proud person. I thought analyzing things and situations saved you from facing analysis of yourself. Wrong. I found the picture is only complete when you succeed in seeing yourself objectively.

It took years, and a few honest, selfless people to help me understand the meaning of the precious words ‘forgiveness’, ‘reconciliation’, ‘love’, ‘unselfishness’. It was a huge realization that people make mistakes regardless of culture, education, religion, age or nationality. When I saw people admit their wrongs, I didn’t feel so embarrassed because of my mistakes. I felt strong, relieved and useful when I was able to share mine with others.

I was a news reporter for the most watched television channel in my town.

A fresh university graduate, I was full of enthusiasm and passion, ready to step on dead bodies to become popular and recognized.

In those days, the hottest subject in Romania was the trial of our city's mayor on charges of corruption. The entire media was uber-excited, exploring every alley, but information was scarce. There were almost no press statements, and the judge banned media access to the courtroom.

My boss was the mayor's political opponent. He asked me to take a hidden mike into the courtroom and record every word. I knew that I would be breaking the law, and was a bit afraid too: but I was too proud to refuse my boss. I told myself that this was my chance for glory.

The 'scoop' did create a sensation, but I felt more miserable than proud. The following day I walked past the mayor. He just looked at me and said, 'Quite a scoop! But I don't blame you. You have heads that you have to nod to.'

It was a long-drawn-out lawsuit. The mayor was sentenced to two and half years in prison. In India, just before Christmas, I suddenly thought of him. I was learning about honesty and apology. I felt full of remorse and heavy at heart about the incident. I knew I had to do something.

After a week of frustration, I decided to send him a letter in prison – where he was going to be alone for Christmas. I expressed not only sorrow for what I'd done and my need to be forgiven, but also compassion and my deep wish to help him endure this period. I did not receive an answer.

A few months later, back home in Romania, I decided to go and meet him. After ten months in prison, he had been paroled. With my heart in my throat I asked him to forgive me. 'You are not the only one who has asked me for forgiveness. Many of your colleagues did the same thing; and I am glad to see some honesty around. But it is an act of courage that few can muster. If you forgive yourself, I have nothing to forgive.'

I gave him a bookmark from the Solomon Islands made of *tapa* (mulberry bark cloth). He said, 'I will keep it in my Bible, the book that starts each day of mine. And I will remember the honesty lesson learned today.'

Another landmark life experience: one day in East India I shared the tale of my bad relations with my sister: a tragic story about jealousy, anger, competitiveness and even hate. A student in the audience stood up and said that through my sharing, he recognized his bad relations with his own brother. He said, 'I don't need a tragedy before I think of asking for forgiveness of my brother. For me change will start today.'

Then I understood shame is useless. If you keep it buried in your soul, it kills your spirit. Nothing and nobody can change our lives but ourselves. For any change you need courage, passion, vision and discipline.

***IofC was a way
to understand the meaning of life
– and flush out the superficiality***

I was born and raised an Orthodox Christian. Impacted by Hindus showing respect for Nature by honouring the sun every morning, helped me adopt this ritual that was not mentioned in my religion or culture.

I also found in this quiet, inner listening the seed of every religion on earth

IofC showed me where my practice of my religion didn't succeed. It taught me that I am part of the universe and 'God has a plan for every one of us', even for me. But I have to 'listen' if I want to find it. I also found in this quiet, inner listening the seed of every religion on earth.

***Enthusiastic people believe that
the best way to predict the future is to create it
Aristotle***



*I started to experience everything
as a gift of God.
Prayer and fasting
became the way to fight for my homeland*

Djurdjica Fuchkan

Zagreb, Croatia

Educator and peace activist

I was raised in a home full of love, feeling safe and protected. I remember the smell of our flat in Zagreb and of my kindergarten. I don't remember all the hospitals where I spent most of my early childhood. My sister, Bosiljka, died on the day I was born. The doctor wouldn't treat her because my father was imprisoned as an enemy of the state. She was two and a half.

Fear of death was my constant companion. I remember being alone under a tree by a stream and thinking that the tree would remain, the stream would flow, the crickets would chirrup but I was going to die.

Vlado, the father of my children, entered my life when I was 16. We were together for 20 years. It was a time of painful inner convulsion, craving for confirmation that I was loved and that I was capable of loving. One night Vlado left.

When I locked the door after Vlado, I fell down crying, burdened by fear of the pain of loneliness and full of resentment. There was no one in the world who could understand my suffering or lend a shoulder for me to rest on.

As time went on, I started to investigate different spiritual teachings and to see my sins. For the first time I cried out for God and opened the Bible. I listened to God speaking to me through the words I read. I knew that I was no longer alone.

My daughters told me they wanted to be baptized. I started going to church with them, but only because I felt it was required of me. My experience of God was not connected with church; I found his presence in my home, in nature and in myself. Later, on a pilgrimage to a sacred site, I accepted God in a new way and found a peace I had not known before. Since then, I have not been afraid of death because I know that my God is leading me to eternity. In time, I recognized the Catholic Church as my other mother.

Once when I was praying I heard the words, 'Are you praying for Vlado, too?' I cried as I prayed for God's will in Vlado's life and that of the woman he was living with, and in their life together. That prayer tasted bitter at first, but as I felt God winning over my selfishness it became peaceful.

One day while cleaning the house, I felt my whole being emptied. I was

completely filled by what I called 'the Great Speech'. It was a tremendous, painful, inner breakthrough into the future facing my family, my people, my homeland, my Church and me. It spoke of the horrors that were coming with the approaching war. I was told I would bring peace, but not how.

I prayed every day and little by little I started to experience everything, in a different way, as the gift of God. Prayer and fasting became the way to fight for my homeland. My sufferings were increased by the sufferings of others around me. I prayed for hours to find purpose behind my suffering. I prayed for hours for what I was supposed to do so things could become better. But sorrow and bitterness were still in me.

In the winter of 1991-92, I went to Caux. One night, after a long time of praying for peace, I received a clear answer, 'Write a letter of repentance to Vlado and stop smoking!' I was shocked. What had smoking and some completely unnecessary repentance of mine to do with the suffering of my homeland and my wish to be a peacemaker?

The thought kept coming back. Gradually, it became clear to me that this instruction was an answer to my prayers. I felt it would be easier to stop smoking first, but God wanted it the other way round!

Through prayer I realized I had hurt love throughout my life. I had hurt my family, my people and mankind. It was a sad, silent insight. At the same time I was saturated with joy and gratitude that I had been pardoned completely. I found out that God loved me unconditionally.

I wrote a short, clear letter of repentance. At breakfast I asked for my daughters' forgiveness for how much I had wronged them. I showed them the letter and told them that I did not have the strength to post it. Lenka did it for me. I did not expect an answer, but I felt lightness in myself and knew God would do the rest.

At the same time, I struggled against smoking. The whole world seemed to stink of nicotine and cigarette butts. I would throw my cigarettes out of the window at night and then go looking for them with a flashlight. On the train, I would throw the packet away and then ask someone for just one cigarette and then another...I would hand cigarettes over to God during mass. Afterwards, I would start again. I found I could not pray and smoke at the same time. That led to a very difficult conflict. I became scared of my strong addiction.

During a family conference at Caux I opened the window of my room, looked at the beautiful winter night and, of course, lit a cigarette.

Yet again I promised God that it was the last cigarette of my life. When I stopped speaking I burst out laughing: 'But You know that I am lying,' I said. 'Help me. You can do everything.' Then I fell asleep.

The next morning I did not have the bad taste of the cigarette in my mouth and

I would throw my cigarettes out of the window at night and then go looking for them with a flashlight

Beyond Walls

the room did not smell. I had no desire for cigarettes. It was as though I had never been a smoker. I experienced the fragrances around me intensely. I had been given the gift of giving up smoking.

***I know nothing about the future
except that Love waits for me there***

in a most unusual way. The desire to smoke had completely disappeared.

I became calmer and started experiencing everything differently. I saw it had not only been about cigarettes but also about my self interest, which saw people as a part of my life project, there to fulfill what was important for me. I had not taken them to my heart in the way that Love required.

Freedom is only in God, who is waiting for us in the opacity of the future, which I know nothing about except that Love waits for me there.

Later, when I tried to light a cigarette to see whether the gift was for real, I became sick

***People questioned me, saying I wouldn't make it,
I wasn't good enough because I wasn't big and strong
Luka Modric, Croatia's Qatar soccer team captain***

In each religion there appear to be many more followers than practitioners

B *BRITISH* with an Indian Hindu heritage, I have spent a large part of my life involved with individuals who are trying to make a positive difference in the world and in their own lives. This has led me into the fields of training, facilitation and coaching. I use this expertise in most of my work and life.

I design and facilitate learning and development for people, organizations and networks. I believe that in an increasingly uncertain world, there are no off-the-shelf, predefined, ideal solutions. Instead, organizations can find their evolutionary capacity through engaging the hearts and minds of their own people. My clients are a mix of the social and the corporate.

IofC's initial attraction for me was the fact that it was exploring matters I knew nothing about: questions about the world and about how each person can make a difference, and the idea of an inner voice. Attraction then turned into interest, as I found many of the people I met had real experiences of positive change in their lives and the situations they were engaged in.

I found a way to start working on difficult relationships in my family. I found a way to move beyond some of the worst things I had done that weighed me down. I found a whole new area of life to explore – the inner life, spirituality, religion, the process of individual change and its relationship to change in the world. I found a new community of friends and a new way to live.

No, I don't have religious beliefs, but IofC ignited for me an exploration into spirituality and its practice. That led me to explore the major religions through books and also through the people I met who were practitioners.

I have come to believe that there is a wordless core experience that some religious practitioners reach and then cloak in the language of their religion and culture. This wordless core is a fundamental experience open to all humans and can be accessed in a variety of ways, not just religious. Sadly, in each religion there



Bhavesh Patel

Chishinau, Moldova

Freelance facilitator and trainer for social and corporate organizations. Life coach

appear to be many more religious followers than practitioners. These followers choose to have untested beliefs rather than practised experience.

Even though IofC started a process of awakening in me, many other influences have played a part: so it is difficult to say what I learnt where.

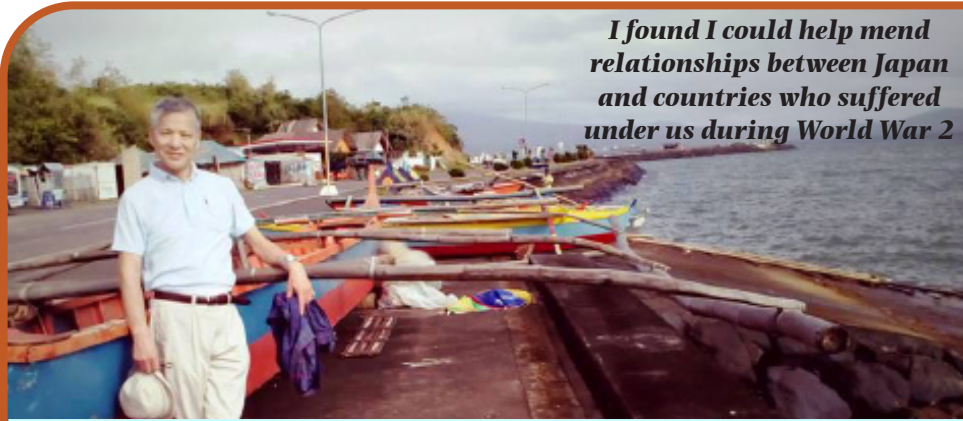
***In an increasingly uncertain world,
there are no off-the-shelf,
predefined, ideal solutions***

Anyway, what I have learned about how to touch another person's life is:

- Create a real space of listening, in which you genuinely listen to the other person with love and acceptance.
- Care unconditionally, not expecting the other person to do something because you have cared for them.
- Ask genuine questions because you have real interest. Do not try to use some formula.
- Offer your own experience, successes and struggles, where you feel it is relevant, or you feel moved to.
- Care for the small as well as the big details, because you've no idea how important it could be for the other person.
- Pray for the other person and their innate potential.

The heart of IofC's experience offers a way forward in a world which continues to grow in complexity. Experts are finding it harder and harder to offer solutions to the endless issues we face individually, nationally and globally. IofC's experience in connecting with a deeper flow of innate wisdom could be the missing factor in the puzzle.

No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible
Voltaire



I found I could help mend relationships between Japan and countries who suffered under us during World War 2

Kiyoshi Nagano

Tokyo, Japan

After interning with Moral Re-Armament in Canada, USA, Europe and India, worked for the International Initiatives of Change Association of Japan and served as Senior Managing Director from 1984 to 2015

WHEN I was 27, I decided to resign from my job, hoping to wander through Asian countries for a year or two. Instead of this, I ended up in Canada travelling with the MRA musical, *Song of Asia*. Altogether I spent three years abroad with MRA.

MRA taught me how to reflect on my life through inner listening and finding first what to correct from my past. On my return to Japan I visited two station masters and paid back money because I had travelled without paying the full fare when I was a student. I also went to my school and gave back a book voucher that enabled me to buy books cheaply. When I was in charge of the school library, I used to borrow books without recording them. Many years later, I found some books that had not been returned. So I decided to compensate for them.

After these corrections, I felt my heart become freer. It gave me more space to think for other people.

After I came home in 1979, I began to work full-time with MRA in Japan. Though I am a very ordinary person, I found I could help mend relationships between people of Japan and people from countries which had suffered under Japan during World War 2.

For instance, on a visit to Taiwan nearly 35 years ago, a friend invited me to his home. The following day he said to me, 'Kiyoshi-san, you were the very first "Made in Japan" product that ever entered our house. My father, who originally came from Mainland China, prohibited anything related to Japan coming into our home. This

was because he had seen his father being beaten up in front of him by a Japanese soldier. But since last night, he seems to have begun to change his attitude.'

To my surprise, they invited me to stay at their house when I visited Taiwan again the following year. I kept sending New Year's cards to the father until he passed away.

In 1986, at Asia Plateau I was one of group of Japanese who sang a song in Korean to welcome a group from Korea. Among them was a nun, who came to the IofC conference centre in Caux, Switzerland, the next summer, when I was also there. A Swiss friend persuaded her to have a meal with me and a Japanese student.

'I want to say something before we start the meal,' she said. With tears, she told us of all the suffering she had gone through in the Japanese colonization of Korea. I translated for the Japanese student. We all began to weep. 'I know you were born after the War and aren't responsible for what happened,' she said, 'but I wanted to free myself from bitterness against the Japanese people. Today, these tears have washed away my bitterness. From now on, you're my brother and my sister.' Then she hugged us.

Since then she has been serving people in need in many countries. In 2010 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. I feel honoured that she keeps treating me like her real younger brother even now.

In 2010, an Australian, who had come to Japan to heal his injured ankle in our hot springs, attended an IofC meeting in Tokyo. Just before leaving, he started

sharing his family story with me. Both his grandfathers had been involved in World War 2. One of them had suffered a lot as a

You were the first 'Made in Japan' product that ever entered our house

prisoner of war in Burma. He used to tell him, 'Never trust the Japanese. They are the most cruel people on the earth.' Both grandfathers' experiences had affected the whole family badly, even down to his generation.

I listened to him sincerely and apologized for what had happened to his family. He responded kindly, saying, 'Now, not only my ankle but also my heart has been healed.'

On my way to the office in 1995, I used to see a young man who looked South Asian. One morning I said 'hello' and asked him where he came from. He was from Sri Lanka, delivering newspapers and studying Japanese at a language school. We made a date to meet. He shared how hard he was finding it to adapt to Japan's climate, customs and culture. His living conditions were very bad. He underwent many difficulties, but our friendship kept growing.

In 2011, he managed to open his first Sri Lankan restaurant in Tokyo. At the opening ceremony, I met a young Sri Lankan who was helping him. I asked my friend how he had met him. He told me that one day he'd seen the young man limping at a station. He asked him what had happened and where he came from,

and discovered that he was a Sri Lankan student who had injured his leg but could not go to hospital because he did not yet speak Japanese.

My friend accompanied him to a hospital and translated for him. Since then they became good friends; and the student offered to help at the opening of the restaurant voluntarily. I told my friend that it was good of him. My friend said, 'You may not realize how grateful I was when you said hello to me that morning and became my first good Japanese friend. I had been in great difficulty then. Since then, I gradually started learning about MRA and decided that if ever I saw a person in need, I would offer my help to that person. That is the kind of spirit I learnt from MRA.'

***Not only my ankle
but also
my heart has been healed***

It is not a must to become a believer of a particular religion in order to keep one's mind awakened. Acquired wisdom is the special quality of human beings. Equipping oneself with compassion, integrity and humility and making anger, jealousy and self-conceit our common enemy would help realize the grand potential of mankind

The Dalai Lama

Keisuke Nakayama

Ako, Japan

After retiring in 2009, helped to found Harmony Co-Creation Initiatives. A director of IofC Japan. President of a community of 300 households and an elder of the Tenrikyo faith

WHEN I was 20, the life story of Frank Buchman and the transnational nature of IofC captivated me. As a young Japanese Tenrikyo believer, I found IofC appealing.

It was answering materialism by dealing with human nature, reducing greed and fear. It also seemed to be an answer to the dilemmas of communism and militarism. And its belief in guidance from a higher power resonated with the Tenrikyo belief in God the Parent as Creator and Guardian.

IofC became very practical when I came to the point of putting things right in my life. I made a moral inventory and rectified things one by one:

- I wrote to a shopkeeper in my hometown, Ako, sending him money which I had owed him for so long.
- I sent a postcard to my elementary school headmaster, apologizing for messing up some young trees in the schoolyard while plucking leaves for my silkworms.
- I was honest with my professor about cheating in an examination.
- I wrote to the priest of a Shinto shrine in Ako with postage stamps for the amount I and some other kids had stolen from the shrine.
- I wrote – not easy – to my father, telling him what I had done behind his back, including stealing money from his wallet.
- Once I had cheated on my school results. My elder brother read my letter of apology out, and my relationships with my father, mother and sisters changed drastically.
- I found a new equation of respect and affinity with my elder brother's wife.



From being strongly nationalistic, I became more open; from being narrowly ethnocentric I developed a global view

My self-righteous attitudes began to vanish. I accepted that I was a self-centred person and didn't care for others. Defeated-ness about my personal habits was replaced by freedom and greater confidence. I learned the mystical power of silence, listening to one's inner voice.

In recent years, occupied with far too many activities and obligations, I find inner listening times vitally important. I try to make a rule of having quiet times first thing in the morning and at the end of the day. During the day, I take periods of inner listening before meeting people.

***Unless honesty is coupled with love,
it hurts people and damages trust***

This new way of living – changing oneself and then going all out caring for everyone in the world – brought an enriching, bigger purpose in my life. I began to help and serve people around me: my family, my co-workers, the local community, the nation and beyond.

In my professional life, I found I had been more concerned about the accomplishment of tasks than managing and nurturing my team. I learned a hard lesson that unless honesty is coupled with love, it hurts people and damages trust.

In 2010 a group of us in Ako started a new research board, Harmony Co-Creation Initiatives, to uncover the historical heritage that had been neglected in the 70 years since World War 2. This will enable us to find a new Japanese identity with pride, confidence and humility.

In this globalized world, young Japanese must be equipped with the spirit of serving the world. As a young person, the kamikaze (suicide) pilot was my idol – as the best patriotic, young hero. I too was ready to sacrifice. From being a strongly nationalistic Japanese youth I became more open and internationally minded; from being narrowly ethnocentric I developed a global view. My respect for other religious beliefs rose.

***Morals without economics are nothing
but a daydream.***

***Economics without morals lead to crimes
Sontoku Ninomiya of Tenrikyo***

*Take your children to meet
other communities to rid prejudices*

Ajaz Ahmed Dar

Sail, Kashmir, India

Teacher and peace activist



FAR from Srinagar, I was born in a village in Badgam district. The fifth child but the first son. Excessive affection and attention made me a spoiled kid. To educate us a tutor was appointed but I had become arrogant, regarding myself the best, also the most honest with no faults. In everything, mine always had to be the last word, trying to prove all others wrong.

Then a lawyer, Altaf Khan invited me to Panchgani. First I declined. He persisted. In January 2013, I went with some other Kashmiris. We arrived at midnight. At breakfast IofC people met me with warmth as if they knew me well.

For the first couple of days, whatever they told at Asia Plateau I felt I knew it all. Nothing new for me. This purity, honesty, unselfishness and love they talked of, was already there in my life. I did not need to change. There was no fault in me.

On the fourth early morning in the silent, soul nurture time with Nature, I saw Leena Auntie sitting under a tree writing thoughts. I wanted to talk with her but she gently signalled that I should just sit and reflect. I sat. Suddenly thoughts of my wrongs began to rush in. It was a turning point.

I, who thought myself the best human around, had kept a separate bank account that even my father, who had brought me up so lovingly, did not know of this secret stash. I deceived him, constantly lying to him that I had no money to give him.

My relations with my sister were broken. I insisted she was the guilty party. But then I saw, beneath it all I was jealous of her, not wanting her to excel more than me.

Many other self-recriminatory illuminations streamed in all saying, 'Ajaz, you are a dishonest human.'

In the seven days at Asia Plateau I accepted I was fault-ridden. I had committed so many wrongs. It was only logical to correct these next. I told my father about the secret bank account. He said nothing, just embraced me and thanked Allah for IofC. I apologized to my sister also.

Now on visits to Asia Plateau, those turning point thoughts are refreshed in me each time.

At one point, I found that my children, 13 and 10, acquired prejudices about Hindus, to the extent they believed some had horns on their head. A simple impulse grew: 'Give them exposure. Take them to meet other communities.'

So I took them to a temple. They greeted Hindus warmly and handed them flowers to offer inside. I got them to meet mainland tourists to the Valley, also some Indian Army men. Now their suspicions and prejudices are diminishing. Helping our children meet and understand others is where each of us can make a start.



In 2020 when Covid struck, all schools closed. One morning I was engulfed with concern for the future of kids having no school. A flash of an inspiration came, 'Why not start teaching out in the open?'

Initially people warned that this will spread Covid. But I took all precautions, especially physical spacing. I began teaching in apple orchards, in lanes and streets. Slowly my teaching colleagues joined in this outdoors schools' mission in their areas. This became a movement and thousands of children got schooling all over Kashmir. The Education Dept also endorsed this teaching method. It became a success story in Kashmir, with the best public exams' results that year.

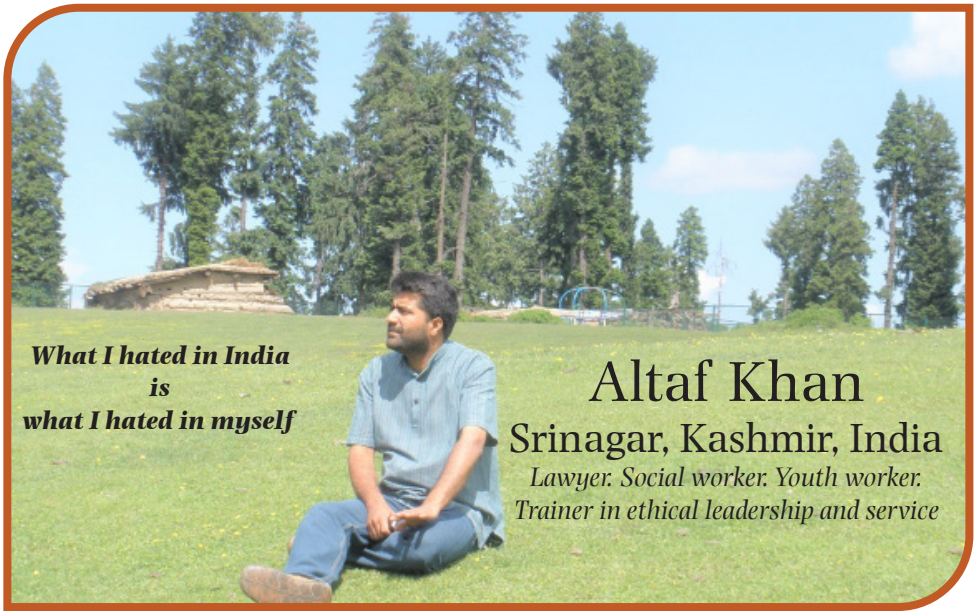
The world knows that Kashmir is a conflict conundrum. In all these tortured years, trust has been drained out dry. One morning a thought came, 'Why not help build trust through a "Love Is The Only Solution" programme?' This has started with teachers, health and kindergarten staff. Over a 100 have been trained to conduct these programmes.

***Love is religion.
Religion is love***

Typical among positive awakenings through this novel programme is one Muslim saying, 'Today religion alienates us from others, creates misunderstandings. Here I found what love is.'

A child who had lost both parents said, 'There is lot of talk of spreading love but only hate and anger seem to be spreading. Today I learned that in the world there is such a thing as love.'

***When we repair our relationship with Allah,
He repairs everything else for us***



***What I hated in India
is
what I hated in myself***

Altaf Khan
Srinagar, Kashmir, India
*Lawyer. Social worker. Youth worker.
Trainer in ethical leadership and service*

IofC gave me hope that the world is not such a bad place to live in, that things can change and that we have potential to leave behind a better world.

I will not say that IofC changed my life altogether. The understanding it brought was so gradual that sometimes I feel that I was always like I am today. But when I analyze myself I see vividly that a lot has changed. My perception of global issues, as well as the issues around me in Kashmir, has been enhanced.

It is always easy to blame someone else for the odds in life and the world. IofC taught me to realize that I am also part of the problem and to keep trying to change myself in order to become part of the solution. I have learned to evaluate and critique my life constantly.

It has also given me the courage to admit what is wrong in me, to say sorry and to make corrections. This frees me from nurturing guilt.

Hence, I admitted to the senior lawyer whose associate I was that I had secretly pocketed some cash payments from clients. I had justified this to myself because I had done all the work on those cases. He was surprised, but forgiving.

I hated India for what it had done to me and to thousands of people in Jammu and Kashmir. However, I have come to the conclusion that what I hated in India is what I hated in myself.

Now I have understood that it is not just the country or its institutions that are responsible for inflicting pain upon human beings. It is the people who constitute states and institutions who inflict pain. These very people also have the potential to heal wounds.

IofC ideas are based on the wisdom of centuries. We all know these truths.

However, this fellowship implements them. These ideas conform exactly with my religious beliefs. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, 'I have come to this world to upgrade the moral values of people.' Most significantly, he said 'Ibdahu bi nafsihi (begin with yourself)'. This is the basic principle of Islam.

IofC provides opportunities to work with people who embrace different belief systems and faiths, accepting and understanding the other without rebuttal. It is not my duty to convert everyone to what I believe. Every faith and belief system brings something new to humankind.

It is not my duty to convert everyone to what I believe

If God wanted every human being to follow the same faith he would not have created different peoples and different religious beliefs. Accepting and loving people from other faiths gives more colour to life.

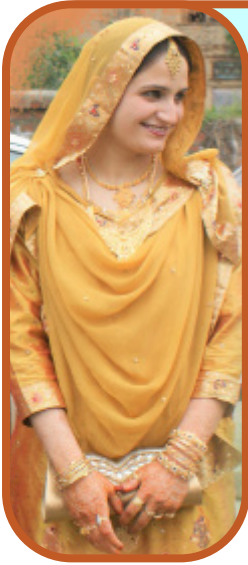
As a Muslim I believe in Islam's principles. But I have equal respect for other faiths or beliefs. This goes in absolute harmony with my religious beliefs. Lakum deenakum waliya deen (let them have their religion and I have my own).

Thorough IofC I have made friends with people who would have ordinarily never been my friends. For example, during one of our interactions in the Kashmir Valley, a young Kashmiri Pandit woman said, 'I would like to see all Muslims dead.' This comment would normally have been reason enough to steer away from her. However our team continued conversations with her. Finally we saw change in her understanding of things in Kashmir. We became friends.

Had it not been for the training of IofC, we would probably have given up on her, letting her continue in her bitter cocoon.

***After asking Allah to guide you to the straight path,
don't just stand there. Start walking!***

Albaz Poetry



Ambreen Bashir

Baramullah, Kashmir, India

Masters in Social Work. Mother of two daughters

WHEN I first visited Asia Plateau in 2006, the care and concern for all, without consideration of caste, colour, status and religion, captured me.

In a personal sharing session we were asked to write letters of apology to any of our near, dear ones.

I had lied to my father about my exam results in the first semester of my Masters. I had told him I had scored good marks: that was not true. This lie had kept on killing me inside – all along. I got the courage to write a letter to my father in Kashmir confessing.

My father was so excited when he got the letter that he rang me up immediately in appreciation. Since then I have tried to avoid resorting to lies.

My worldview is that we should care for this wonderful world and add to its beauty. My life purpose is to be a helping hand for the deprived.

This lie had kept on killing me inside

In Islam, the IofC principles are already mentioned but putting them into actual practice definitely gives me mental peace and happiness. I have learned to listen with care to others, share personal stories of applying absolute values to purify my heart and become a helping hand to souls that feel unheard.

May Almighty Allah support us in correcting all our misdeeds; then only can the deprived sections of society be made happy.

Zakat is donating 2.5 per cent of all your wealth to the needy to purify your wealth and soul. If every Muslim gives *Zakat* on time, poverty will reduce a great extent.

***No matter how many steps you take away from Allah,
it takes only one step to go back to Him***

Dr Raj Kumar Anand

Mumbai, India

Paediatrician. Author of the bestseller.

'Dr RK Anand's Guide to Child Care'.

Global advocate for breastfeeding.

Got India to pass related legislation for Child Consumer Protection. A founder of the Public

Concern for Governance Trust,

which campaigns against corruption



I asked myself, 'Could I be even 10 per cent wrong?'

FROM childhood, I was surrounded with good, pious and religious people. I studied *Vedanta*. My elder sister helped me develop a deep love for the country. I used to think that I was perfect. But I needed the simple ideology of MRA to change my life and to bring freshness and dynamism in my pursuits.

A young student associated with MRA introduced me to a doctor from Ireland.

At that time, I was having serious problems with my professor in the medical college where I was an assistant professor. The Irish doctor helped me set this relationship right. I learned that if the other person was 90 per cent wrong and you were only 10 per cent wrong, it was clearly easier for you to begin changing yourself.

So, I asked myself, 'Could I be even 10 per cent wrong?' As I sought guidance from within, these thoughts surfaced in my mind: 'Your sister infused you with love for the country. But remember the other day you were watching a funny movie with your family. While everyone was laughing, it was your professor who was playing on the screen of your mind. Another day, you were examining a child. Your stethoscope was on the child's chest, but there too your professor appeared. You were so obsessed with your professor that the country was forgotten.'

As I listened to my inner voice, it became clear that I had developed acute bitterness against my professor. I then had the clear thought to write him a letter of apology for my hatred. As I wrote that letter, a big load lifted from my chest.

Then followed a flood of energy for numerous social services activities – beginning work in an orphanage, in a village and in a slum; treating the children of teachers and those serving in the armed forces free of cost; founding a trust to fight corruption; helping build harmony between Hindus and Muslims; improving relations with my teenage son; helping solve a prolonged junior doctors' strike in

Delhi; taking up public health issues like the importance of oral rehydration, healthy living, breastfeeding and rational medical practice; participating in radio and TV programmes; yoga and music; writing articles and books on child care for the lay public.

A unique feature of Hinduism is its acceptance of all religions

I was instrumental in forming the Public Concern for Governance Trust (PCGT) with some of India's best. Among its successes was a public interest litigation in the Bombay High Court against the malicious transfer of a Director of the Anti-Corruption Bureau who had been very effective in going after corrupt senior government officials.

I keep learning from all religions. For instance, St Paul's statement, that the greatest thing in the world is love, rhymes with Hindu scriptures. It fills me with love and compassion. I stop judging and trying to control. Rather than being critical when the other person does not fully follow universal values, I offer support and am available.

A unique feature of Hinduism is acceptance of all religions. Gita says, 'As the different streams having their source in different places all merge their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths we take through different tendencies, various though they appear, all lead to you.'

***God is present within all the time. When we choose to let him guide us,
we'll be able to offer our own unique gifts to the world of friends around us.
Each Day a New Beginning***

Dr Raviprakash Dani Houston, USA

*Indian-American agricultural scientist,
Ex Vice-Chancellor of PDKV Agri University,
Maharashtra. Consultant for USAID in the
Caribbean, Ukraine and Uzbekistan*



***I have no intention of drinking today –
the only day I can ensure my sobriety***

WHEN I first visited Asia Plateau in 1969, I was told that IofC is basically what Prakash Dani does with it. Somehow I ended up making a commitment to stay with these ideas.

Initially I gathered courage enough to apologize to my father for ‘unaccounted expenses’, utilizing money he gave me on movies and other errands he disapproved of. Only years later was I able to give up smoking. The greatest challenge was my reluctance to accept the ‘absolute’ part of the absolute standards.

I found it hard, nearly impossible, to give up the habit of excessive drinking. I got addicted while doing post-graduate studies in Russia and Uzbekistan. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and the power of the absolute standards, especially purity, on the basis of ‘one day at a time’ rescued me. They also restored my lost faith. By the grace of that power greater than myself, I haven’t drunk alcohol since 21 January 1997.

And I have no intention of drinking today – the only day I can ensure my sobriety. There are no guarantees for tomorrow, no matter how committed I am. The only sure way is seeking fresh commitment one day at a time via inner guidance each morning.

IofC’s unique multicultural accent on training in democratic governance with a stress on character and ethics was highly welcome to me. As Vice Chancellor, I sent 142 of my staff and faculty to Asia Plateau for training.

The Mahatma believed that regardless of the regime people live under – democracy or dictatorship, capitalist or socialist – they always possess freedom of conscience, an inner capacity to make moral choices. His struggle was not against the colonizer but against the colonial system. He sought to free the colonizers themselves.

There came a time in my association with IofC when not much seemed to happen in my inner world. During my next visit to Asia Plateau, I accepted that my understanding of change was meant to move in a new direction of acceptance of self and others.

That landmark moment came during a surprise retreat involving His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama.

Now I turn my attention to what is needed to counter farmer suicides, disempowering politics and recurring genocides

accepting tough truths like, 'One's enemy is one's most effective teacher.' Rising above historic anguish, he peacefully reiterates his famous message to the Chinese, 'You may have stolen my motherland, but I will not let you steal my mind.'

I was struck and intrigued by the honesty of his non-dogmatic message. He kept stressing the need for 'internal disarmament' – taming greed, ill will and delusion that often enter and gain a strong foothold in one's mind.

I tend to worry about some of my diehard character defects. Will I ever have time to change the world around me? Now instead I turn my attention to what is needed to counter farmer suicides, disempowering politics and recurring genocides.

It would be hard for anyone to ignore the Dalai Lama's radiant happiness. Perhaps it comes from

***In recognition of human frailty and weakness,
the qualities of moral scruples, compassion and humility
are only accessible through powerful, individual development
in a relevant social milieu,***

so that a more humane world will come into being as an ultimate goal
The Dalai Lama

*I made a lasting, landmark decision
never more to remain
grounded in
grievances or to be judgmental*

Rekha Shahani Jagasia Mumbai, India

Educator. School principal for 13 years



I learned what true forgiveness is from family elders. They fled from Pakistan after the 1947 partition of India, leaving everything behind – their houses, acres and acres of land and more than 20 schools. Not once did I see any hint of hurt, anger or bitterness disfigure their faces. They finally settled, as refugees, in Mumbai.

They rented a school and used it from 7.00 am to 11.00 am, sending buses to remote parts of the city to pick up displaced Sindhi children. Before partition they had 23 boys' schools and one girls' school – Kamla Girls High School run by the Brahmo Samaj. Partition necessitated co-education, and Kamla Girls High School became Kamla High School, catering to Sindhi refugees.

In school assemblies, we had multifaith prayers and silent contemplation. It created a bond amongst students and teachers; also with the neighbourhood. The school gates were opened. Strangers walked in; new friends were made.

Initially some said, 'Muslims uprooted us and yet you admit them to your school.' My father responded, 'These kids aren't responsible for the partition. Neither their parents. Our job is to educate every child who walks in, irrespective of creed or caste. Then you ensure no more terrorists are created.'

Meeting IofC people in 1991 had a great impact on my personal and professional life. I saw their humility and joy in doing things for the world. IofC has made my life journey wonderful. I made a lasting, landmark decision: no more to remain grounded in grievances or be judgmental. Thus, I became free of bitterness and forgave close relatives.

***By educating them you're ensuring
no more terrorists are created***

Some relatives harmed me professionally and did me out of my pension and benefits, as principal of Kamla High. To my family's surprise, I visited my uncle on

his hospital deathbed and told him I was putting all those feelings behind me. He uttered, 'Please forgive me'. In two days he died; and, as a *Brahmo acharya* (priestess), I conducted all his last rites.

Every school assembly now has a minimum 10-minute pause for students and staff to do inner listening

I found a new, appreciative relationship with my mother-in-law. I married at 19, while in college. When I was 28, my husband suddenly died. Soon after this devastation, my mother-in-law 'drove me out' of their Churchgate home, buying me a home far away in Khar. I started bearing life's burdens with my two children. Through IofC I saw she was acting out of more generous motives than I ascribed her. Her reason was that if I continued to live with her, I would never find a new husband (and, indeed, at 48, I did). My relationship with her became excellent. I visited her at Churchgate regularly. She would eagerly stand on her balcony waiting for me to appear in the street below.

My children are making also giving up grudges against family members.

Though I speak a lot, my strength comes from my silence: a habit instilled in me from childhood by *Brahmo Samaj* teachings. This reformist *Brahmo* faith is universalist believing in the 'fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of mankind' and having no created intermediaries. IofC's inner listening times give momentum to my silence. I believe that the 'inner voice is the divine will voiced'.

During my 1990s' visits to Panchgani, the 'Education Today, Society Tomorrow' (ETST) offering was born. If society was not going the way it should, wasn't education largely to blame? ETST programmes for teachers, students, and other stakeholders have been going on for 30 years now.

In 2002, a group from Action for Life 2 visited Mumbai. We saw them practising inner listening and, more particularly, writing down those morning thoughts. Every Monday, AfL also had a full day of fasting and silence. Three of the group came to our school and shared all this and their life learnings.

Their practice of writing down the thoughts that come in silence became embedded in our school's system. Though we had practised silent meditation for years, every school assembly now has a minimum 10-minute pause for students and staff to do inner listening and write their thoughts down. This practice also takes place straight after recess in each classroom.

My father's words and my experience with IofC opened my heart to inviting the Anjuman group of schools to be a part of Kamla High School. Their branch at Bandra has more than 3000 girls, studying in Urdu. They started visiting our school once a week as a part of a local exchange programme.

**Superstitious practices which deform Hinduism
have nothing to do with the pure spirit of its dictates
Rammohan Roy**

My resolve to abandon the ruler helped me find peaceful ways of facilitating learning

Zarin Virji

Mumbai, India

Teacher of 25 years. Principal of Universal School at Tardeo



WHAT struck me most in my first encounter with MRA was the cleanliness and greenery of Asia Plateau. In 1980, there were very few places in India that practised rainwater harvesting.

As a shy 16-year-old, I was completely bowled over by the faculty for the youth camp. Adults from different parts of the world actually took the time to listen to me and ask for my opinion. To find a diverse group from different faiths working towards the same purpose was jaw-dropping. Where else would I have been able to engage with people from Nagaland?

While I was pulled towards the core ideas of IofC, I did not perceive any need for change in myself.

Gradually I began to see the need for improvement in my relationship with my mother. I had the usual teenage conflicts with her. Apologizing to her was the beginning of a newfound honesty in our interactions. We continued to have a stormy relationship but I was able to manage it better thanks to my inner promptings. When my father was diagnosed with Parkinson's, my mother and I cared for him, drawing strength from each other; our mutual love and respect deepened through the course of his illness and beyond.

My heart was set on being a journalist but after graduating, I decided to work with IofC for a year. In that year, we visited many schools across India and I had the compelling thought to become a teacher. This has led me down a fulfilling path.

A change milestone happened when I was working temporarily as an untrained teacher. I was trying to teach English to a class of unruly 10-year-olds at a school for economically disadvantaged children. Some colleagues advised me to use the ruler to discipline them, as 'that's the only language these children understand'. Reluctantly, I followed their suggestion, but the noise level remained the same.

Out of desperation I turned to my inner voice for direction: it convinced me to stop the physical abuse and apologize to the children. I tried to fight off the thought, as I felt the children would not understand. But as soon as I expressed my heartfelt apology, the class went absolutely quiet.

As soon as I expressed my heartfelt apology, the class went absolutely quiet

From the next day on things were not a whole lot better, but my resolve to abandon the ruler helped me find peaceful ways of facilitating learning. After 25 years in various classrooms, I can safely say I have never again had to use physical or emotional abuse to win learners' attention.

Another change milestone occurred when my colleague received greater praise than me for a workshop on which we had worked equally hard. I shared my feelings of jealousy with her and freed myself of that negativity. Thanks to such honest interactions, we have succeeded in building a strong team.

After my parents died, I was filled with an aching emptiness. I decided to pursue an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Sheffield. This leap into the unknown has opened a satisfying new chapter in my life. My writing is an avenue by which, I believe, I can touch human hearts.

Over the years, I have learned to make corrections in myself whenever a relationship is going sour, to live to make the other person great (this enriched my professional life) and to flow in the river of compassion.

***Vispa hu-mata, vispa hookhta
Vispa hvarshata-baodho-varshata;
Vispa dush-mata, vispa duz-ukhta,
Vispa duz-varshata, noit baodho varshata.
All good thoughts, good words and good deeds are the expressions of
my resolute will and clear insight.
They lift my soul onward to its bright and heavenly height
Avesta***



Russi Lala

Mumbai, India

Publisher. Journalist. Author.

*Ex - Executive Director of one of
India's biggest charitable trusts – the Dorabji Tata Trust*

*The quality of our life reflects
the quality of our prayer relationship with God*

FOUR thousand years ago in today's Afghanistan, Zarhost (Zoroaster in Greek) proclaimed there was only one God and that God wants you to live by good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

The Zoroastrian religion existed under various Persian dynasties till Islam defeated Persia in the seventh century. Persecuted refugees from Pars in Persia came to India.

The Hindu king showed them a full glass of milk, to demonstrate that he could not take any more people into his kingdom. The Parsis just added a pinch of sugar. The king allowed them to stay. They promised never to convert the locals. There are only about 100,000 Zoroastrians around the world: but they have added fine flavour to societies through their faith and humanitarian service, felt by millions in India and beyond.

I was brought up in that faith. When I was 14, a Marxist private tutor argued with me against God. In the end I lost my faith.

I now believe there is a pilgrim soul in all of us. An inner searching continues throughout our lives. Lacking a purpose in life, despairing millions seek refuge in drugs, alcohol, in crime and other anti-social behaviour. They are the walking wounded of our world with no one to turn to. Those with money may lose themselves in unbridled consumerism or sex but deep within, the nagging feeling remains.

People want to know their place in the world, where they can anchor their spirit, find a direction and pursue a purpose beyond their own advancement. Those who find it have a sparkle in their eyes even at 80. Those who do not look vacant-eyed even at 40.

Such was my state when I graduated from college at the age of 19. I was spiritually starved. I found an outlet in frenzied activity, handling more than one task at a time as a journalist and publisher. But a career is not a purpose. A noble purpose is one that deeply satisfies not just oneself but is also beneficial to others.

I traversed the desert of atheism for five years. There were no fountains to nourish my spirit. I wanted a faith and searched for one. I was lost till I found MRA in 1952. I saw their plays in Mumbai and attended a meeting at the Taj Mahal Hotel. The faces of the young people there showed they had a purpose in life that I lacked. I wanted what they had.

But there was a price to be paid, including absolute honesty. That made me uncomfortable. Not because I was used to lying but because there was one truth I had hidden from the person next to me.

Around that time, in a fit of anger, I stormed out of my father's house and checked into a hotel. A week later I saw an MRA play about two feuding brothers and how they found unity. During one of the songs, I felt the anger against my father melt. After the show I went home to collect my papers, not meaning to stay. Papa, already in bed, said, 'It's late. Why not stay the night?' I was too proud to say 'yes'; too weak to say 'no'. I stayed.

Journalistic power is a heady drink, especially when you are 20. I was honest in my investigative reporting. But there was one personality I attacked bitterly because I held him responsible for the ills of the state of Maharashtra – Chief Minister Morarji Desai.

I was honest about my facts but insensitive about the words I employed. I relished the sudden prominence and power I was getting through my columns. I fought against the idea of apologizing for deliberately hurting him. When I wrote to him, he accepted my apology saying: 'I hope you will agree that criticism to be effective should aim at the deed and not the doer.'

I had been running away from myself for nine months. One morning I wrote down 'absolute honesty' and listened to my inner voice. I had four pages of what to tell the person I was dishonest with. That evening I met that person. My courage failed me. I came home saying to myself, 'I am a coward.'

Next morning my first thought was, 'You can't live a lie all your life.' When I finally jotted it down, the next thought was: 'You won't get any more thoughts till you obey the thoughts you've already had.'

You wanted proof with a hundred snakes – God gave it with one

I knew I was at a crossroads. I asked myself: 'Do you want to be a free man or remain a slave all your life?' That evening I read out the four pages, unedited, to the person concerned. It was difficult but I felt a burden roll off my chest.

A fortnight later I was in the hills of western India where rugged peaks reach for the skies. Walking up a hill at noon I stood on a small bridge above huge black pipes conveying water to a hydro-electric project. Looking down, I told myself, 'If there were a hundred snakes there and I was thrown into their midst and still survived, I'd believe there is a God.'

No bells rang. I went home. Four mornings later, on a deserted site not far from

that bridge, I sat on the ground, absorbed in a book. I heard a rustling and a voice within said compellingly, 'Look!' I did. A snake was coming straight at me. I jumped back. The snake came to exactly where I had been sitting and slithered down the depression. As I watched its tail disappear, the thought flashed in my mind: 'You wanted proof with a hundred snakes – God gave it with one.' Had I been bitten, I would have had to go almost a mile for help.

I have never doubted God's existence since, or his interest in my life.

Faith flourishes when you accept God has a plan and you have a part. Inner listening times are the means to find that plan day by day. In my morning quiet times I seek not only correction but also direction. I begin with a brief prayer or inspirational reading from the scriptures or elsewhere. After 55 years of this discipline, I often just thank God for all he has done for me and for the love he has shown for me.

The quality of our life reflects the quality of our prayer relationship with God.

Happiness comes to them who bring happiness to others
Zoroaster



*Tensions between
the workers and their managers
reduced substantially*

Sarosh Ghandy

Bengaluru, India

*Former Managing Director of Tata Motors,
Jamshedpur. Chair of Caux
Initiatives for Business (Asia)*

I first met MRA in Jamshedpur in the early 1970s, through a Kolkata trade unionist, Satya Banerjee. He told me about the industrial seminars which MRA was conducting at Asia Plateau. They aimed to foster better understanding between managers and trade unionists in the hope of reducing the industrial strife that was rampant in India at that time.

I was intrigued that a union leader would be working for industrial harmony. My experience of union men till then had been quite the opposite.

The company I worked for, Telco (now Tata Motors), had just been through a decade of hell vis-à-vis industrial relations. The environment in the plant and on the shop floor was tense, mistrustful and antagonistic. In 1969, this had culminated in a 69-day work stoppage, which started as a one-day strike.

*IofC showed me how to
listen to my soul*

After finding out more about MRA's industrial seminars at Asia Plateau, I decided to send teams of my managers and workers to them. I hoped that during the five days together, they might learn to better appreciate each other's priorities and pressures, and that this would ease the tensions in their departments.

I was pleasantly surprised at the results. Tensions between the workers and their managers reduced substantially, enabling us to get our men to take a far more active role in the management of their own daily work. They participated in programmes which not only improved their productivity but also enhanced the quality of their work and helped create a happier environment on the shop floor.

Over the years we must have sent close to 2000 people to Asia Plateau.

I only got directly involved with MRA, called IofC by then, in 2002, when a

group of us got together to start an Asian chapter of the Caux Initiatives for Business (CIB), with the aim of increasing corporations' ethical and social commitment. Since then it has been one long joyous ride, albeit with a few frustrations.

IofC is full of 'good' people. People who really want to help others, who really want to make those around them happy; people who have learned to listen to their soul.

My IofC colleagues have shown me how to listen to my soul. In everyday life we are conditioned to intellectualize. Listening to the soul may be a little more challenging but it makes you a better person.

IofC has also taught me to love those around me, no matter who they may be. This has helped make me a happier person.

*Do not hold grain waiting for higher prices
when people are hungry
Zoroaster*



In the past, MRA was considered an alternative to communism or capitalism. Now we need to develop its practices as an alternative to materialism

Rajendra Gandhi

Mumbai, India

*Pioneer industrialist in rubber recycling.
Philanthropist, who runs mammoth
charitable educational institutes*

IN life there are events that are ‘game changers’, which lead to a change of course in one’s life. For me, meeting the idea of Moral Re-Armament, as a student at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Mumbai, was one such event.

I was born in an affluent Jain family, to devout parents who wanted all their children to practise our various rituals. From a young age, I was compelled to go to the Jain temple, perform puja and recite sutras regularly. When very young, I did not mind doing this. But as I grew up, I had questions and doubts. I did not understand the purpose of some of the rituals and performed them more out of fear of offending my parents than belief.

At the age of 10, I was packed off to a boarding school, and from there I went to the IIT to pursue engineering. During those 11 years away from my parents, I had the freedom to perform, or not to perform, those rituals. I did continue to perform a few of them, irregularly.

I also began to question God’s existence. I realized that one cause of major violence and loss of life in the world was issues between religions. This strengthened my views about the absence of God. I began to have more respect for rationalists and atheists.

It was around this time I met MRA. It challenged me to listen to the little voice within to see where I needed to change, before seeking change in others around me.

An initial experience was getting honest with my parents about things I had hidden from them that needed their forgiveness. My father was domineering and famous for his temper. Everyone dreaded him. I had to overcome my fear of him.

I wrote honestly to my parents, and talked with my father face to face. This was a defining moment in my life. I began to experience respect for him flowing out of love, rather than fear.

As I began to interact with my newfound friends in MRA, I began to reflect on the oft-used words: ‘When man listens, God speaks. When man obeys, God acts.’

I was convinced that special inner prompting often comes in one's time of quiet reflection. Sometimes this is very clear, almost as if it were an order. I tried to obey such promptings. In several instances, I found benefits. There were also instances where I was disappointed.

I began to experience respect for my father flowing out of love, rather than fear

Having a time of quiet as regularly as possible helped me with career and business choices and in interpersonal relationships in my family, business and community.

By far the most significant benefit has been getting to understand the philosophy and spirituality of Jainism better.

After my marriage I was privileged to interact with a Jain spiritual master. He encouraged me to reflect on the teachings enunciated in our scriptures. He never argued with me about my beliefs, or about the existence of God.

I began to read Jain scriptures and reflect on them. This was another defining moment. I began to understand spiritual aspects of life, such as the purpose, inner compulsions, motives and emotions that rule our outer manifestations.

I promised my master that I would take 15 minutes every day to reflect on spiritual readings. Slowly, I found myself giving an hour or more, often comparing MRA literature with Jain spiritual literature.

I was elated when I discovered in Gandhiji's autobiography that many of his life's convictions were shaped by his interaction with a great Jain scholar – Srimad Rajchandraji – during his time in South Africa.

I could see the connection between the four benchmark standards of purity, honesty, unselfishness and love and the four harmful passions the Jain scriptures talk about – greed, deceitfulness, ego and anger. I could relate to the idea that at every moment these four passions rule our emotions and shape our external interactions.

I have begun to appreciate and respect the five virtues of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *acharya* (not taking what is not yours – both material and non material), *brahmacharya* (controlling sexual desires) and *aparigraha* (non-accumulation/possessiveness). Each of these gets a lot of meaning, as one cares to dive deep within one's self.

Today the world is focused on material development. Increasing materialism is leading to intense consumerism. This is the new deadly challenge. From the threat of communism, fascism, socialism, capitalism, we now face the menace of materialism. Unlike the other threats that were confined to certain geographical regions, materialism pervades the globe, across all classes, communities, religions and ages.

If in the past MRA was considered an alternative to communism or capitalism, now we need to develop its practices as an alternative to materialism. I find a challenging but inspiring alternative in *aparigraha*.

All humans crave a just system

The inside and outside of my life started coming into sync

Mayur Shah Baramati, India

*Businessman. Stock trader.
Adventure travel enthusiast*



WHAT drew me to IofC was the silence – the eternal, universal, scientific idea of listening to one's inner voice for life wisdom. Fellowship was also a draw, as well as an extended global family of the like-minded.

Taking IofC into my life made me more humble and down-to-earth, more silent and calm. It made me more observant, listening to people, nature and life. And thereby it made me more action-oriented.

IofC's ideas and practice put the searchlight on me. As I recognized my own dark side and the gaps that existed between my talk and my walk, the inside and outside of my life started coming more and more into sync.

I became ashamed of the very things I was proud of earlier. I used to boast to my business friends about how I had 'managed' this or that government officer, getting him to have my job done speedily. I used to be quite puffed up about how much I had achieved in business at a young age.

Corruption causes untold difficulties for the less well-off people in our society. They get left unattended in government offices. Through IofC, I met people who had taken courageous steps to stop or fight corruption.

I also met women who spoke movingly about healing in heartbreaking family situations. I met someone whose father had taken her as a six-year-old across the border from Tibet to India and left her there, never to meet her family again.

I realized my sorrows really meant nothing compared to theirs. All my fame and pride didn't amount to anything.

I felt so insignificant – yet also significant, because of the inner wisdom and strength I had found. There was so much to change in terms of perceptions, accepting things, understanding. There was so much to correct and confess: things to stop and things to start. I became my own observer and critic.

The first corrective step I took was to stop bribing government officers at the

Department of Telecom. It meant losing business in the beginning but eventually people saw we were not party to corruption. Our business goodwill was enhanced.

Eventually I was able to become truly ethical, transparent and yet successful in my Stock Advisory and Wealth Management business. In addition, through organizing adventure trips, I could help others break free from whatever holds them back.

I was born Jain and am a Jain at the core. IofC subtracted a lot of selfishness from my earlier ways and beliefs.

Pratikraman (introspection) is a process in which Jains do *prayaschit* (repentance) for things they do wrong, reminding themselves not to repeat them. Devout Jains

***Eventually I was
able to become truly ethical,
transparent and
yet successful in my business***

practise *pratikraman* twice a day, sitting in silence for 48 minutes to pray, recite *sutras* and the *navkar mantra* (the standard nine mantras of basic Jainism) and ask for forgiveness from all and for the cleansing of one's soul.

When I was small, my *Nani* (mother's mother) would get all of us kids together and make us do it – for a reward of one rupee, five rupees or mangoes! As I grew up, I hardly observed this practice.

But recently I sat still in silence and recited the *navkar mantra* 108 times, keeping count on my fingers. My eyes filled with tears. I gradually found a calm place inside – an effortless peace. Then I prayed for peace in the world, especially in Syria, the Korean Peninsula, Turkey, Kashmir, Palestine, and in human hearts and minds. May there be beauty all around for all!

IofC's practice of observing silence and listening to the voice inside deepened my inner life and made me contemplative and more tolerant of others' beliefs. Everywhere today people need silence to slow down and find inner peace and harmony. The world needs people who are true to themselves, uncompromising, non-negotiable, steadfast individuals. IofC helps people become self-observant, self-confident and selfless.

***Silence is the language of God.
All else is poor translation***

Parag Shah Baramati, India

*IT specialist. Trainer
Group facilitator*

I, a Jain, fell in love with a Muslim girl. I couldn't accept her because of her Islamic faith, but love slowly melted the ego



AT Asia Plateau, first I was inspired by how well such a multinational, multifaith group worked together. During inner listening, challenging thoughts came.

I had treated my father shabbily blaming him for our economic woes. I changed my attitude, appreciating all he had done for me. I had had a fight with classmates ending up at a police station. From Panchgani, I called one and said sorry for my behaviour. We spoke about what went wrong. It resulted in him reconnecting with another friend, from whom he had distanced himself.

These steps of personal change broadened my thinking. IofC complemented my Jain beliefs imbibed from childhood. The special element it added is that we all are a universal family. I started accepting whatever good my inner self finds, no matter from which religion it comes.

I fell in love with a Muslim girl. I had lived in a society, which spoke ill of Muslims. I battled long within. I couldn't accept her because of her Islamic faith. I reviewed everything embedded in me. Surprisingly the responses from within were truthful and challenging, but while my heart could accept them, my head wouldn't. But love slowly melted my ego and I started accepting.

To be alone, to understand my deepest feelings I left home. I worked in Pune with global IT companies. Those three years built enough strength to battle the world to marry who I loved. We were clear we wouldn't stay together till our parents agreed. In 2013 we married legally and in the Muslim way, but we didn't live together. It took 18 months for everyone's blessings. Today we have two daughters, Pareezara and Amaira.

Maybe God paired Asma and me to bring harmony between communities.

*All human beings are miserable due to their own faults,
and they themselves can be happy by correcting these faults*
Mahavir Swami



*Utterly new for me was
admitting one's mistakes or wrongdoings*

Dr Yoginder Sikand Bengaluru, India

*Former university professor.
PhD in history. Writer. Translator*

FOLLOWING a major personal crisis some years ago, I began to realize my life had got out of hand. Till then, my life was basically about maximizing sensual enjoyment, tempered with a certain social commitment. Not once did I ever care to reflect on the state of my soul. I was so obsessed with critiquing the negativities that I saw outside me, that I failed to acknowledge the abundant goodness that also existed around me, and to recognize the abundant negativity inside me.

I thought of myself as playing a role in changing society. But never once did I seriously feel that I needed to change myself! It was as if the whole world needed to change, except me!

Sometimes things happen in our lives and we are forced to contend with issues that we have sought to ignore. I began to work on myself and to travel to places associated with different religious traditions. When I was spending time in a community up in the foothills of the Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh, run by people of the Tibeto-Buddhist tradition, I met a group of young people from Initiatives of Change (IofC).

One morning I joined them in their daily inner voice listening session. Later I accompanied them on a visit to a Tibetan school, where they told the students how inner voice listening had transformed their lives and given them a purpose beyond themselves.

I was won over by their simple but compelling idea:

'Sit in silence for, say, 20 minutes or half an hour every day, preferably in the morning, and invite your inner voice to speak. Listen attentively to what it says. If what you hear is in accordance with the norms of honesty and goodness and the welfare of all, you could take it to be your inner voice telling you something important. Write it down in a notebook.'

It was as simple as that.

Anyone and everyone could do inner voice listening. It wasn't tied to any

particular religion or ideology. After all, no matter what our belief-system, every one of us has an inner voice.

The group then said, 'When you listen to your inner voice, you may be confronted by memories of some harm or hurt you may have caused. Your inner voice may tell you to make reparations for this. If you heed it, you will be liberated from your guilt. A burden will be lifted from your shoulders.'

This was no empty rhetoric. Members of the group revealed how they had made amends for wrongs they had done and how this had led to healing of broken relationships. Utterly new for me was this admitting of one's mistakes or wrongdoings, mustering the courage to apologize for them, and being willing to face possibly difficult consequences.

I had never heard of anything like this before!

I had wronged many, many people in my life. But I hadn't ever considered acknowledging this, not even to myself. Nor had I ever thought I needed to apologize for it. I had concocted all sorts of excuses to legitimize my bad behaviour to myself.

As I listened, I could see that seeking forgiveness was truly liberative, freeing one from the burden of guilt, self-hatred, resentment and other negative emotions. It taught me that as long as we conceal, deny or suppress our memories of the wrongs we have done to others, we can never be truly at peace.

I began to set apart time in the mornings to listen to my inner voice. One of the first things it prompted me to do was to confess some of the wrongs I had done years ago to others.

Inner voice listening is a major highlight of my day. I just love it!

For instance, I wrote to a professor who had given me a generous fellowship some two decades before. I told him how I had cheated on my expenses claims, giving fake bills to the college. I requested him to forgive me.

I wrote to a landlady, saying how ungrateful I had been to her for her kindness. She had been wonderful with me when I had lived in her house, but when she came to stay with me I had treated her quite shoddily. I requested her to pardon me.

I also sent a friendly email message to my sister-in-law, from whom I had cut off links because I had stopped speaking with my brother, her husband.

The results were truly amazing! My professor wrote to me saying that yes, of course, he had forgiven me. Though my landlady didn't reply I am glad that I wrote to her. And I am now in contact with my sister-in-law.

There was also a time when I reveled in negative talk. I really enjoyed being critical. If I wasn't badmouthing a person (behind his or her back, of course), I was complaining about the salt in the daal or the lack of it, the weather or the traffic, the rate of inflation or the garbage in the streets, or the terrible way the world was heading.

I became aware of my addiction to negative talk and how it was harming me.

I worked on addressing it. Now it isn't a compulsive habit any longer. I find that the less negative talk I engage in, the happier I feel with myself and with the world around me.

Inner voice listening has now become a part of my daily life, although there are days when I skip the exercise or don't spend as much time on it as I should. I put the alarm for a set time and let my soul speak to me.

Inner voice listening has helped me grow in communication with God, in my realization of the need to introspect, to admit where I have gone wrong, to seek forgiveness, to pray for others, including those of whom I may be resentful, to take time to be aware of what's happening inside my mind, and to be mindful of important tasks that I need to do. It has also helped me appreciate the preciousness of silence. This exercise is one of the major highlights of my day, and I just love it!

As a revolutionary youth my prayer was: 'Lord, give me the energy to change the world.'

In middle age realizing half my life was gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to: 'Lord, give me the grace to change all who come in contact with me; just my family and friends.'

Now that I am old and my days numbered, my one prayer is: 'Lord, give me the grace to change myself.'

***Not once did I ever care to
reflect on the state of my soul***

***If I had prayed for this right from the start,
I would not have wasted my life
Sufi Bayazid***

Vic and Mell Walker

Toronto, Canada

*Vic - Office equipment specialist.
ex Captain, Canada cricket team
Mell - Government servant*



*On my knees, I asked Christ to
remove my racial prejudice*

‘**THEY’RE** out to remake the world.’ This January 1968 Reader’s Digest article began change in me and my husband. We were in our 30s, searching for answers to life.

We were part of a group of married couples of faith who met each month and discussed enthusiastically, but did not have any hope of the world changing through the Church, or through our own or anyone’s efforts.

After reading this article, we did some research and discovered the movement known as MRA, now IofC, with an office located in Ottawa. We eagerly ordered books and began attending meetings.

Our Christian faith was strong but the surrender of our wills to God was new. But it seemed so right, as did absolute moral standards, inner listening and restitution for wrongs committed.

With an apology to my ex-boss, I returned a stapler I had taken from the office six years before. That thought was blocking my daily inner listening. I also discovered six Government of Ontario pencils in our desk drawer which I returned to my government office. Through honest apology I was able to restore a broken relationship with a good friend.

My husband returned a few expensive tools that he had taken from his company without permission.

We both found that living by absolute moral standards brought us a new freedom of spirit, a closer relationship and a new conviction that change is possible.

I came from a racist family. On my knees, I asked Christ to remove my racial prejudice. The next morning I saw people on the subway with equality and acceptance.

Through IofC I became open to the goodness of people of different races and faiths and this helped me to overcome my false superiority.

In 1973 we went to Caux. This brought a great deepening of faith for both of

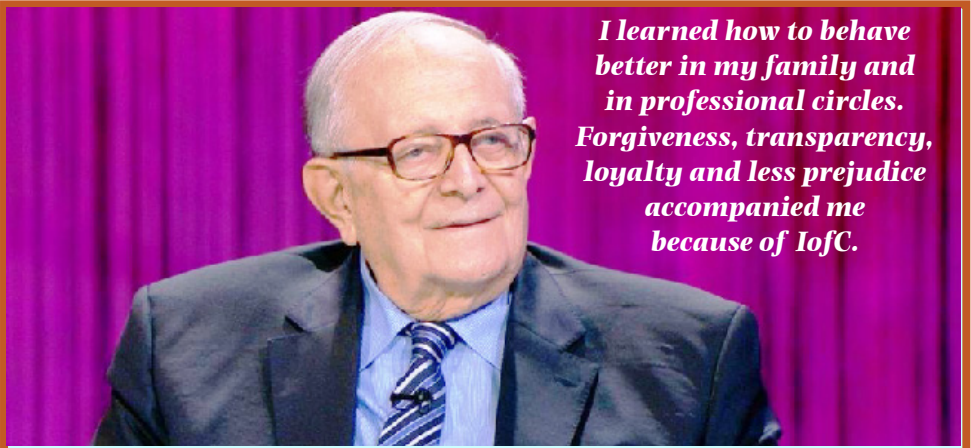
us. But my husband also made the shattering confession that he had had an affair three years earlier.

When we got home my life fell apart over some two weeks in hurt, angry quarrels and fierce unforgiveness. I decided I wanted a divorce and told my husband that he should plan to leave. He agreed and left me in the den where I fell on my knees, in gushing tears, praying: 'Oh Lord, I can't forgive, please help me, I can't forgive.' In minutes my tears stopped and I found myself vaguely walking towards the bedroom where my husband put his arms around me. In that moment all the hate in my heart vanished. My love for him was restored – till today.

***My life fell apart
in hurt, angry quarrels
and fierce unforgiveness***

Now, near 90, Vic and I believe that IofC is desperately needed for peace between nations, for respect towards the different races and various religions of the world, for the remaking of marriages and the strengthening of families.

Do not let the wrongdoing of others rob you of your peace
Anon



I learned how to behave better in my family and in professional circles. Forgiveness, transparency, loyalty and less prejudice accompanied me because of IofC.

Dr Cornelio Sommaruga

Geneva, Switzerland

Swiss humanitarian lawyer and diplomat. President of the International Committee of the Red Cross 1987-1999. Honorary President of Initiatives of Change International

NEGOTIATIONS were always part of Cornelio Sommaruga's work as a Swiss diplomat in the fields of foreign affairs, trade and finally humanitarianism. What came constantly into play was the troika of commitments he had chosen at the age of 18: to serve, to defend human dignity, and to live in and for the family.

He landed at the IofC centre in Caux because of his mother who, through her personal experience, had brought the Caux spirit to their home. He writes:

'I was in search of more spirituality in my life and knew that I would find it in Caux, as well as extraordinary contacts with people of goodwill from the entire world. Caux perfectly fulfilled my expectations. I learned a lot, like how to behave better in my family and in professional circles. Forgiveness, transparency, loyalty and less prejudice accompanied me because of IofC.

'In my encounters with other human beings I put tolerance first. That is, listening without prejudice, as well as having an open dialogue despite differences of opinion, but also being cautious in giving advice. One has to remain humble and not believe you always know best.

'There is no doubt that IofC has a prominent place in the world of today. This begins with IofC's history and Caux's 75-year record of working for reconciliation and peace.

'The world is in search of values. So many young people today seek their form of spirituality on their own. It is rewarding to see how much the IofC entities

My Roman Catholic belief was regenerated through Caux. It helped me take the fundamental step to serious inter-religious dialogue

around the world are promoting the fundamental principles of purity, honesty, unselfishness and love.

'Initiatives of Change focuses particularly on the vital link between

personal change and global change in order to equip people to play their part in building a better society.

'My Roman Catholic belief was regenerated through Caux's principles. It helped me to take the fundamental step to serious inter-religious dialogue. My way of saluting people of all languages with *Grüss Gott* (God bless you!) was an external signal of my spiritual openness to all faiths.'

God created us for fellowship so that we should form the human family, existing together because we were made for one another

Desmond Tutu



The discovery of the inner voice was one of the landmark events of my life

Hélène Guisan-Demetriades Lausanne, Switzerland

Teacher, married a Swiss lawyer who became an MP and Senator. Translated Greek tragedies into French and wrote three books proposing a spiritual way of living

I am 106 years old. I was born Greek Orthodox. I arrived in Switzerland as a Greek refugee from Constantinople (Istanbul) after the First World War. After a long search, I found a true religious faith when I was 25 years old. But this faith didn't help me live happily in my married life or as the mother of four beautiful children.

I was deeply divided. I wanted to pursue a literary career, but was not able to assimilate that with my family life. I was truly in a state of despair when I went to the MRA conference centre at Caux in 1960.

There, quite unexpectedly, God spoke to me clearly and I decided to obey him, whatever be his will. It meant putting aside the writing of a book. Its aim was to promote God's presence in the world but it hindered me from lovingly supporting my husband, a brilliant Swiss politician, or educating my children properly.

I discovered God's daily guidance through quiet times and began to control my behaviour, through the four moral standards. I worked with the local and Swiss team of MRA to bring some change to many hearts throughout the country.

After 20 years and the loss of a son, I resumed writing and published three books full of the inspiration I found in Caux. The first, *A Third Presence*, has been translated from French into English, and others have appeared in Greek, Romanian, Russian and German.

In a night of prayer and fasting I read *The Mountain of Silence*, a search for Orthodox spirituality by Kyriacos Markides, a Cypriot professor of sociology in the USA. He introduces us to the life of several monks of Mount Athos and Cyprus and helps us discover deep riches.

That book moved and inspired me. But I also thought that it was not through my own religion and church that I discovered the grace of the Holy Spirit, given to monks after days and nights of prayer and fasting.

The discovery of the inner voice through MRA was one of the landmark events of my life. Day after day, it helped me find which way to go.

And I have finished my 106th year of life with a grateful heart for I am still able to live at home. I endure growing weakness and uncertainty but the inner voice I discovered in 1960 at Caux is becoming more and more supportive and useful. In fact, it is my best friend at such advanced age as mine. It keeps me related both to this world and the Other.

I am still trying to better myself with more love for people, more listening to them, more hope in order to change our world a little bit. What an unending work!

My conviction is that IofC's most meaningful part in the future is to bring peace between the different world religions and denominations, through teaching each of them to listen deeply to the inner voice. This method of finding transcendence, of getting related to God's universal spirit, can be adopted by every single person, whatever their religion. It is a common factor to live by and unite on.

Andrew Stallybrass

Caux, Switzerland

Originally from Britain and married to a Swiss, Eliane. Writer. Publisher. Lifelong full-time IofC worker



This experience taught me that if there is a God, he sees beyond labels to our hearts, to the depths and shallows of our beings

BORN, baptized and confirmed in the Anglican Church, I felt called by God to work with Moral Re-Armament when I was in my late teens. I sometimes felt a little two-faced. To Christian friends, I would insist on the Christian roots of MRA. But if a non-Christian asked, I would reply that it was an interfaith movement.

In Geneva, where my wife and I have lived for a good deal of our working lives, I joined a local Reformed (Calvinist) parish. I have held a number of positions in this church, including representative on a committee bringing together Geneva's main faith communities.

After two years of part-time theology studies at Geneva University, I became a recognized lay preacher. Now I help look after church services during the Caux summer conferences, at the Protestant and Catholic chapels in the village. In my view and experience, it is important to know where we belong, where we have put down our roots. Only then can we reach out to others, who may not share our belief systems and who may have a very different experience of life.

I've never felt the urge or the call to try to make others believe what I do. I've felt that our interactions should always be more in the register of 'sharing'. I can share my experiences of life and the spiritual, and listen to and learn from the experiences of others.

I deeply believe there is something of God's spirit in every human; that he deeply loves every child of his, not just those who stick certain faith labels on themselves. As a Christian, I try to see the Christ already present in the other.

The deepest spiritual experiences I have had in life have been around death. They have closely involved my only, younger, brother, who is an agnostic. Climbing together in the Swiss Alps is a great way of bonding, with few words. There are also a number of very powerful symbols and realities in climbing.

Once a snow-bridge gave way under my feet, and I fell into a crevasse. My brother held me on the rope that joined us, and hauled me out. And I was struck by the thought that my guardian angel was agnostic!

Then we accompanied our much-loved mother to death, through her last 10 days in hospital. I'd been with her in London, and returned to Geneva. My brother arrived after I left. He rang saying, 'She doesn't need you, but I do. I can't go through this without you' – one of the most deeply stirring things ever said to me. I got on the first plane, and one of us was with her until she slipped away.

The night before she died, he came to the hospital with a family Bible and read us his favourite passages. We wrote and then exchanged diaries about this time. In mine, I said, 'Dear brother, I hope I don't offend you in your un-belief if I say that I see in you something of the Christ whom I try to love and serve.'

This experience taught me on an existential level that if there's a God, he sees beyond labels to our hearts, to the depths and shallows of our beings. He saw two brothers who loved each other, loved their mother, and were ready to show it.

***My brother hauled me out.
I was struck by the thought that
my guardian angel was agnostic!***

So we walk, all of us, on a journey of life. We meet and part; we walk together for periods. We can all share our experiences of the road, our fears, dreams and longings.

Just as our DNA seems to mark each one of us as unique, so none of us seems to perceive the divine in exactly the same way. And yet there seems to be some common humanity, some spirit of life itself that we can all plug into, and which unites on a deeper level beyond words.

***We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it
Jane Austen***



IofC added greater discipline to my life, helping me take a time of reflection every morning for the last 70 years

Elsa Vogel

Birmingham, UK

Unsalariated MRA/IofC worker for over 70 years, serving on four continents

DURING the liberation of Paris in August 1944, I was visiting a friend's home. Two tanks – one German and one American – faced each other in that street. I could not get home, and had to stay with my friend. Someone threw a bottle of alcohol into the German tank and it exploded. Petrified, we wondered what would happen next. Nothing did - but there was no food to buy in the locality.

The next morning my friend and I joined 40 people waiting for vegetables at the corner shop. Suddenly a Volkswagen Sedan appeared with two German soldiers. One got out and rapidly machine-gunned down the whole queue. We were the last – there were no bullets left for us! We ran and brought my friend's father, a doctor, to the bloodied scene. My hatred of the Germans grew stronger than ever.

The next day, the Allied Forces arrived in Paris and we rushed to the Arc de Triomphe to welcome them. Suddenly, bullets came hailing onto the crowd from a nearby rooftop. The French militia ran up and dragged six German soldiers down to the street. They were killed on the spot and thrown into a lorry. I did not like the Germans, but I did not like this either.

We were grateful to be liberated, but there was such tremendous hatred in all of us – French towards Germans, and vice versa. As an 18-year-old, having witnessed such events and feeling there was too much hatred in the world, I wondered what kind of future there was for me.

Six months after these horrific incidents, by good fortune, I met two friends whose families were pioneering the ideas of Moral Re-Armament in France. At that time, MRA was involved in bringing reconciliation between France and Germany.

There were no bullets left for us They made clear that change in society would have to start with change in the individual. A spark was born in my heart as I listened to them and deep down I said, 'This is the life I want to choose.'

My friends' faith was practical and dynamic. I asked, 'What is it you have that I do not seem to? I too have a faith.' Their answer was, 'It could be that we have

learned to try and listen to the voice of God, who can speak to the hearts of people. Inner listening creates space to see where we and our attitude to life should change.' They asked, 'Would you like to be silent now and try for a while?' Rather reluctantly I agreed. It turned out to be a moment of great truth. Thoughts and feelings I had kept secret for years overflowed.

I had had a complex upbringing. When I discovered that I was illegitimate, I experienced deep hurt and shame. I became rebellious and difficult to live with.

In that time of quiet the thought was, 'You've been hurt but you have also hurt people around you. You need to apologize to your mother; thank her for not having given you up for adoption.' I struggled with that; but it was the first step in my spiritual journey. My mother lived abroad and never responded, but for the first time, I felt free to be myself. A great burden fell from my shoulders.

After two more years of study, I felt the calling to dedicate myself to the work of MRA and ended up in Brazil. There I met many young people born out of wedlock like me. As I heard their tales of pain, I saw I was still bitter and full of blame. I gave God an ultimatum: 'Either

The bitterness went and never came back

you take away all this bitterness or I stop working for you!' He did not wait long to give me his answer: 'If you still feel hurt and bitter it is because you blame everyone but yourself and do not take any responsibility.' I didn't like that, but God showed me how I had closed my heart when I was eight. That choice was not the responsibility of my parents. It was mine. That was as serious as the circumstances of my birth. It was hard to 'hear' this but finally I accepted it wholeheartedly. The bitterness went and never came back. And 12 years later, I had the chance to talk the whole thing over with my mother.

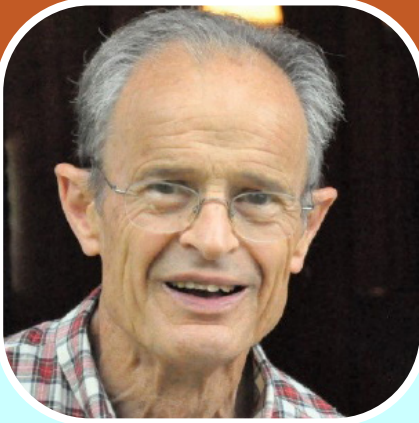
Over the last 75 years, IofC work has taken me, and my husband, Laurence Vogel, all over the world. 40 years in Latin America, especially in Brazil. 25 years ago, we came back to Europe, first to London, then Birmingham, where Laurie died in 2010. I still live there and am especially involved in building bridges with other faiths, particularly with Muslims.

I have learned from MRA that to touch the hearts of other people deeply, I first need to give them genuine friendship. Then, as time goes on, I can tell them simply about my own experience of change and sometimes, after much reflection, ask a direct question, which could unlock the heart of the other person.

Over decades MRA/IofC changed me by challenging my deepest motivations. I found a clear purpose for my life and learned how to let the whole world walk into my heart. It added greater discipline to my life, helping me to take a time of reflection every morning for the last 75 years!

I did not have prejudices about other religions but IofC gave me the enriching experience of working closely with people of other faiths. I have had and still have a fascinating life – with no regrets.

Love one another as I love you - Jesus



MRA's role was to be an interface between religions, and between the religious and the non-religious world

Philippe Lasserre

Paris, France

*Writer, who graduated in German and French Literature from the Sorbonne in 1957.
Full-time volunteer with MRA/IofC for over 60 years*

IN 1952, a 19-year-old, I spent a few days in Caux.

Three factors left a mark:

- The dynamic young people I met. Their lives impressed me: selfless and ready to serve, determined to fight for a new world. They were also very direct with me. They were travelling around the world! I wanted to go with them.
- MRA was engaged in significant battles, decolonization and Franco-German reconciliation. Though not committed in any way, I was politically alert. I was concerned about the issues facing my country, uprisings in Indochina and North Africa and the challenge of rebuilding Europe after the war. My plan was to teach German and through that, participate in rapprochement with our former enemy.
- My new friends helped me change: writing a young lady clarifying a relationship, honesty with my father, returning a small sum to a friend. An amazing feeling of liberation followed. More steps of personal change came. I faced my mistakes and the harm I did to people, to be honest and make restitution. Gradually my faith, as a Christian, was becoming more real.

I was aware of MRA's Christian roots, but it was clear MRA was not a religious movement. This was confirmed by stories of people changing their ways and saying MRA helped them become better Christians, better Muslims or better Buddhists. MRA was an interface between religions, and between the religious and the non-religious world. This awareness helped me be open to people of other faiths or of no faith.

We lived with a suitcase, and sometimes a typewriter, as our only earthly possessions

After graduating, I decided to give all my time to MRA. I left for the US without a return ticket, for a summer conference with students from all continents. The World Youth Congress in Moscow was taking place at the same time. Frank Buchman saw

our gathering as a response. Not the size or the world impact of that Congress, but it touched us deeply and gave us moral, ideological and spiritual training. Several who attended reached prominent positions in their country.

Then we travelled the US with stage plays. The Canadian stage crew head said, 'Just out of university, how about working with your hands now?' I joined his crew for *The Crowning Experience*, a musical dealing with race relations. That was when the battle for black civil rights, led by Martin Luther King Jr., began.

We had a four-month campaign in Atlanta, Georgia, where segregation between blacks and whites was total. Our force of 200 contacted all elements of the population. Three years later, I saw segregation had disappeared from all public places.

In the Cold War, we believed we were 'the only ones' combatting communism. We felt we were better because we aimed at changing human nature, whereas communists were only changing structures. Everything we did had to be 'ideological', to bring an alternative to communism. Men are fallible. So are organizations. Periods of success often come with problems. It must not alter our commitment. Movements, like humans, can correct themselves.

During these critical decades, MRA became a strong movement, active in every continent, with successes in Atlanta, Cyprus, South Tyrol and North East India.

Can we be fed by our own spiritual garden and also be enriched by our neighbour's?

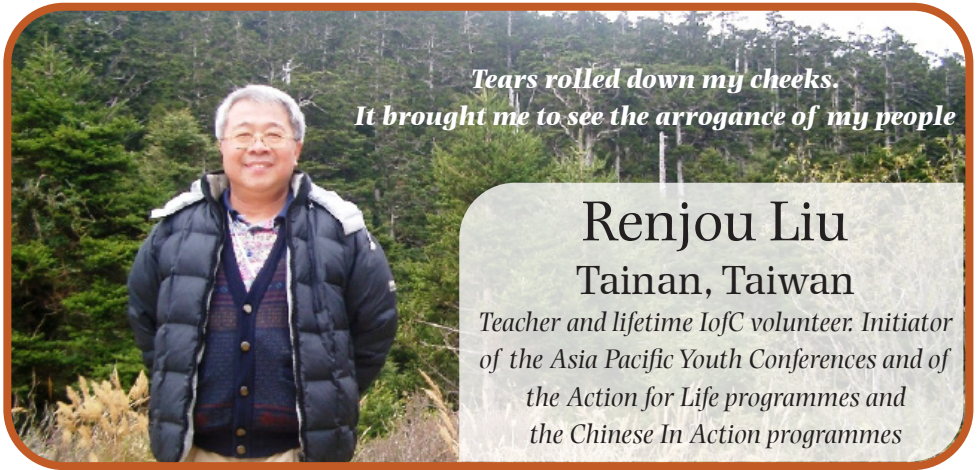
After US, I returned and was drafted into the armed services, with a year in Algeria during the independence war. In 1962, after hesitation, I decided to continue working full-time with MRA. My work with MRA was an inner calling. We lived with a suitcase, and perhaps a typewriter, as our only earthly possessions, ready to give our all for transforming the world, accepting a healthy, strict life discipline. Later when we enjoyed more comfort and security, my wife and I continued to apply what we had learnt.

MRA was the practical expression of my Christian faith, constantly reminding me of my need for personal change, challenging me to live a life of service and working daily on my spiritual garden. With age I was prepared for new tasks. I'd learned to listen, avoid hasty judgments, not let my tongue utter what could do harm and always to take the human factor into account.

Each one tend our own personal spiritual garden but not infringe on our neighbour's. Visit it, but not alter it. Can we be fed by our garden, also enriched by our neighbour's?

IofC has strong assets: its unique position on religion, its accent on individual change as a key to all other forms of change, its capacity to draw the best out of individuals. It has an important role to play in the world of today and tomorrow.

To want to, is to be able to



*Tears rolled down my cheeks.
It brought me to see the arrogance of my people*

Renjou Liu

Tainan, Taiwan

Teacher and lifetime IofC volunteer. Initiator of the Asia Pacific Youth Conferences and of the Action for Life programmes and the Chinese In Action programmes

AS a student, I was eager to make friends – especially girl friends. Partly for that reason, I went to the university's MRA Sing-Out group. And so started my life-long journey in MRA/IofC.

Then I met Dr and Mrs Daniel Lew. They had just returned to Taiwan after his retirement as a diplomat and had been committed to MRA for decades. Under their care and guidance, I began to learn about quiet inner listening.

I was a carefree guy. My personal philosophy was: so long as you don't hurt anybody, you can do anything you like. Yet the way I behaved was causing pain to my family and bringing trouble to society. In hindsight, it was pure self-centredness. I was like a wild horse, full of energy, but running around aimlessly.

MRA showed me a different way of living. I took some time to listen to my inner voice and examine my life against the four standards. It took me little effort to see the many flaws in myself, and the people I had hurt. I wrote their names down one by one and shared them with my team. This gave me strength to put my thoughts into action.

I wrote to my family asking them to forgive me. I returned borrowed books and things belonging to other people. I became more mindful about my words and deeds. I took in others' criticism with respect. It was like cleaning a slate, wiping and scrubbing away the dirt and dust from all corners of my life.

In early 1980, at an MRA conference at the Cultural University in Taiwan, I pledged to commit my life to the Almighty. After my national service, I taught in a high school for four years and got married. In 1984, I left my job and began working full-time with MRA without salary, and have been doing so since.

When I was small, my family was poor, and life was harsh. My mother would follow the neighbours and worship in many temples. We kids would come along with the incense and offerings. Underneath, I didn't have a clue who or what we were worshipping.

I also went to church several times during Christmas, just because we'd be given presents. I did not take away any learning. In my university final year, I had the opportunity to read the Bible guided by the Lews and during my national service I used to visit a foreign Catholic priest in the local church.

***It was like
cleaning a slate, wiping
and scrubbing away the dirt
and dust from
all corners of my life***

The quiet time helped me experience the presence of God, feeling the ultimate connection between human life and the universe. Though I did not belong to any religion, the practice of faith was quietly taking root in my life.

In 1986 I went to Australia to do an MRA course. One day a group of us went visited a couple in their 80s, Hedley and Peggy Bunton. They had been missionaries in China and Hong Kong for 30 years.

Hedley Bunton told us: 'When I was in Canton (Guangzhou) one day, I went to a gathering of young Chinese. They were reprimanding the Japanese for invading their country. Suddenly, a young man stood up, speaking in an angry voice and pointing at me, "And you British are the next we hate most!" I was totally distressed. I felt everything I had done in China had been in vain.

'In my quiet time the next morning, I was able to see the truth. The British planted opium in India and sold it to China for money at the expense of the health and life of the Chinese people. For the British colonialist, the missionary is like the right hand and the merchant the left hand. We were preaching the gospel with the one hand, and selling opium with the other.

'The right hand must admit the wrongs of the left. God wants me to apologize to every Chinese I come across. Although I'm Australian, my ancestors are British. Today I must admit my ancestors' mistakes and ask forgiveness for the suffering we British inflicted on your people.'

I was the one Chinese there in the Bunton home. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I felt sorrowful. It brought me to see the arrogance of my people. My friend sitting next to me also wept. I thanked the Buntons for their dedication in serving the Chinese and their humble apology. I knew in my heart we were all humans with faults and desires.

Rev Bunton's truthfulness to his faith and unreserved love for China became the motivation behind my becoming a Christian. When I returned to Taiwan, my wife, Grace, told me she was considering baptism. On 26th October 1986, we got baptized in the local church.

In any democratic society, we need citizens with social awareness who can set good examples for others. I believe IofC is relevant to the world today. Its central proposition is to respect and learn from different cultures, and to seek guidance by listening to one's inner voice. This way of living often enables me to see myself more clearly, and inspires me to gain insights into the real needs of people and society.

Beyond Walls

In Taiwan my teammates and I have founded the MRA Association, launched Clean Election Campaigns and organized the Asia Pacific Youth Conferences (which have been held every year since 1991 in different countries in the region). More recently, we have set up the Family EQ Association to promote work in personal growth and family learning. With other IofC members abroad, I initiated and have run five Action for Life programmes for about 150 young people from around the world, and started Chinese in Action, which takes diaspora Chinese to serve in Mainland China.

***I was like a wild horse,
full of energy, but
running around aimlessly***

Influenced by MRA's accommodating attitude towards other traditions of faith, I have remained open to and respectful of other people's beliefs.

Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. Don't you think he will attend to you and you'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.
The Message version of the Bible

*The protective layer over my heart
broke. My mind became wide open
to different religions and cultures
– and also to myself*

Ming Ling Xiong
Shenyang, China
*Masters in Sociology.
Worked for a non-profit*

MY home is in North East China. After I got my Masters in Sociology in 2008, I chose to work in a non-profit organization. I wanted to help people find inner peace and a harmonious life. But, after some years, I realized I didn't have these things myself. I began to struggle inside. It felt like some parts of my life were missing.

Around that very period, a small group from IofC came to do workshops in Shanghai. At the workshops, I saw the way they cared for each other and approached people. I could sense genuine love and care. I loved that dynamic and wanted to know more. They recommended I join Action for Life 5.

Through the programme I got to know more IofC people. Many were full-time volunteer workers. That was the first time I had heard of that kind of non-salaried lifestyle. They focused on what they could give, not what they could get. Even though they had different religious faiths, they shared the same attitude. They were all totally committed, even surrendered, to what they believed in and had deep trust, also in each other.

That was the first time I got close to the spiritual part of human life. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions became so vivid for me. I took part in multifaith prayers and inner listening times. We celebrated festivals together and meditated together. In the process, I felt peace in my heart. I felt I had found the missing part of my life and got my passion back.

The protective layer over my heart broke. My mind became wide open to different religions and cultures – and also to myself. I began to think more deeply and I realized I was not as good as I used to think I was. What I mostly did in life was complain; I was not part of any solution.

I had had a quarrel with my neighbour. We hadn't talked for years. I used to think it was all because of her bad behaviour; there was no problem from my side. But an old Chinese saying goes, 'You can't clap with one hand'. It takes two to make a quarrel. Even if my neighbour was 99 per cent wrong, I was still one per cent at fault. I sent a postcard saying sorry for my part. When I returned home, she gave me a big smile and the warmest welcome. The conflict had melted.

I learnt three important things from my Action for Life journey:

First: spiritual life is important. It makes a human real, and we can find our roots from it.

For me, it does not necessarily mean connecting with a specific religion, but having faith that we come into the world for some larger purpose. We must connect with our hearts and listen carefully for what our conscience tells us to do.

Second: we must be the change we want to see in and around us. In our modern world, it is becoming so easy to get all we want – and to complain when things don't turn out as we expect. We see complaining everywhere – in chats with friends, on the Internet and TV. IofC taught me that, rather than complaining or hoping others will act, I must take responsibility to do something about the things I am not satisfied with.

The third thing I learnt was that everyone has something to give. It may not be money or things: it may be a listening ear or encouragement to someone who needs them. Our honest sharing can touch people's hearts and trigger positive changes.

These days we are going further and further away from the essential core of human beings. That is why IofC is so important: it demonstrates a human life-style, which everyone can be inspired by.

***Everyone has something to give.
It may not be money or things:
it may be
a listening ear or encouragement***

***For all things difficult to acquire,
the intelligent man works with perseverance
Lao Tzu***



Erhling Wang

Taipei, Taiwan

Certified psychology counsellor.

Mother of one

***I was encouraged to bring
light and warmth into my
dark and cold heart***

WHAT attracted me to IofC was its people and their acceptance of me. They didn't judge me. I felt fully accepted and loved. This gave me power to accept and love others. I became more aware of how my actions affect others and the world.

My parents taught me that acquiring wealth was the most important thing in life. I learned to be selfish and greedy. I used to steal when I was a child – and even when I was at university.

But that was not my parents' fault. They had learned this materialism from their parents and society. IofC gave me the opportunity to find new values. Instead of blaming my family for how they had influenced me, I chose to understand and respect their lives. Gradually, I got to know how the collective subconscious influenced them – and me.

I decided to begin living with new values. I returned money to a shop from which I had stolen. I wrote a letter to my teacher admitting cheating in her exam and apologizing. I said sorry to my ex-boyfriend because I realized how much my selfishness had hurt him. I am still working hard on being part of the answer in my society instead of the problem.

When I was one month old, my parents sold me. I came to know this when I was eight. My adoptive father and mother divorced when I was 12. My mother told me that my father had said he didn't love me at all since I was not his birth child. He did not want me. A seed of hatred got buried in my heart. I felt abandoned.

Through meeting IofC, I was encouraged to bring light and warmth into my dark and cold heart, and turn the hatred into love. I was able to love people again. Even though I did not know where to send them, I wrote many letters to my adoptive father expressing my appreciation of him. About two years ago, I found where he

was and met him. He was very sick. I found myself having the strength to thank him for raising me and to love him for who he is.

I didn't have a specific

***I saw two government ministers,
a Catholic father, a Buddhist and two Muslims
eating together.***

***What kind of movement can
get such people talking?***

religious belief before meeting IofC and I still don't, but IofC has inspired me to search. Through my IofC friends, I have learnt about many different religions and discovered what believing means to them.

Though still on my way, I have already experienced connection with the higher power. I handed myself over to that higher power, prayed and asked it to use me as a tool to meet the world's needs. This may be the reason I have trained to be a psychology counsellor. Through that connection, I found my way and gifts to serve the world.

When I first attended an IofC conference in Cambodia many years ago, I saw two government ministers, a Catholic father, a Buddhist and two Muslims sitting together over a meal. It was the biggest surprise for me. What kind of movement can bring such people together and get them talking?

After participating in Action for Life, I experienced the magical power that is in IofC. Accepting people for who they are is important: just caring for them without any motive of wanting them to change. Instead of telling people what they have done wrong or asking them to change themselves, it is better to share my own stories of transformation. 'I care about you just because of who you are' – that's what I learned from IofC. I have been so touched by being understood and loved, without any conditions.

In my counselling work, leading people to connect to their inner voice has become one of my important aims. It really works – even for those who used to beat their wives or for those who wanted to commit suicide.

Enduring deepening pain is how one ascends



IofC's moral values provided a point of reference for effective teamwork across religious and partisan boundaries

Hsu Shou Feng

Tainan, Taiwan

Professional interpreter.

Responsible for IofC Taiwan.

Recent member of IofC International Council

IofC's practice of listening to the inner voice in times of silence is very much in line with ancient Chinese wisdom, which prescribes how individuals attain supreme good by attuning their minds to become still, silent, contemplative and finally insightful.

For the Confucianist it is like following one's *Liang-Ji* (innate knowledge of the good) or the faculty of discernment. When connected to this source of inner wisdom, one often gains new perspectives, corrections and directions.

One of my early experiments with inner listening led me to new, unexpected possibilities. After receiving the same thought for three consecutive days at an international youth programme in 1993, I was impelled by the voice that was shouting inside my mind: 'If you don't do it right now, you will never do it.'

The thought was to write a letter of apology and appreciation to my father. This simple action brought a sense of liberation in my heart and marked my first step towards improving family relations.

Later that year, I found myself struggling with my MBA studies. I couldn't pull myself together to finish the thesis that I had been working on for several years. For more than two months, I was under enormous mental stress, to the extent that I felt spiritually paralyzed.

When I turned the searchlight inward on myself and listened to my *Liang-Ji*, I realized how fearful I'd been of other people's opinions. I was afraid that I'd be considered a total failure if I couldn't complete my studies.

I also realized that this fearfulness was caused by a self-centred perspective about my life, which had become dry and constricting. I decided that from then on I would take full responsibility for my life and, in particular, for the decision I had to make about my studies, whatever the consequences.

Eventually, I quit my studies and embarked on a journey of exploring how I could make my life relevant to the lives of other people in more unselfish and meaningful ways. For the past two decades, this adventure has happened mostly through my association with IofC.

I was involved in the Clean Elections Campaign, a programme launched by IofC Taiwan in a strategic alliance of 70 NGOs to address corruption in electoral practices and politics in Taiwan. It brought home to me the saying, 'As I am, so is my nation'. Each and every one of us matters in the building of nationhood. Even the best institutions won't work if people don't have the right motives and behaviour.

This campaign showed how inspired, focused actions by a small group of committed people, united under shared moral and spiritual principles, can make a positive impact on national issues.

IofC's unique contribution was to create a safe space of trust and transparency where people from diverse backgrounds could come together. IofC's four moral values provided a point of reference for effective teamwork across religious and partisan boundaries. Similar grassroots initiatives have been launched in other continents.

To me IofC work is about putting things right by putting people right – starting with ourselves. With the practice of listening to the inner voice as the starting point, ordinary people can be led onto a path where changes in personal motives and

***I was afraid that I'd be considered
a total failure
if I couldn't complete my studies***

behaviour have an essential part in addressing issues of humanity.

This link between the personal and the global is affirmed

in an important passage from *Great Learning*, one of the Chinese classics: 'To get rid of material desires, acquire knowledge. To be sincere, rectify one's thoughts. To govern the country, to bring peace to the world, cultivate oneself and put one's family in order.'

***If the family lives in harmony,
all affairs will prosper
Confucius***



*Although I studied
psychology,
I did not know
how to help myself.
Now I can connect
with the spiritual part of
religious beliefs*

Qianhan Xiong

Changsha, Hunan, China

Psychology Masters

I heard about IofC while studying in UK. Already I had done volunteering in China and Kenya. I was attracted to IofC, mainly because of the inner listening time. I like the idea that each one listens to their inner voice, makes their own choices, and is responsible for them. I feel hopeful when a group of people do this together. I particularly like the respect for each person's inner voice, the listening, and the reflections in this process.

As a rational thinking person studying psychology, I used to be quite analytical. I analyze, to make things better and make everyone's life better. At least, I believed that was my motivation. However, my analytical outcomes often seemed to offend others or were perceived as judgmental. This troubled me, hurt me when it happened over a long time. I was wondering: should I just stop caring? I felt that if I stop trying to make things better, and stop analyzing, I would not get hurt. What was ironic to me was that although I studied psychology, I did not know how to help myself. I did not have any answers at that time.

As you can imagine, I like thinking by myself. Thinking used to make me feel a bit better every time, but still, I did not feel that I had a direction. When I first had an inner listening time with a group of people back in 2014, I was touched. I still can recall the inner peace I felt and a feeling of relief. The more times of inner listening I had, the more I could see how broad this world is. I started to look beyond my problems and my struggles. I started to think about more than just solutions of problems.

When I stopped trying to fix things all the time, I realized that my actions of trying to solve problems actually created more problems. Simply because I did not

respect the feelings and the inner voice of others. I should not replace anyone's inner voice with mine, even though I analyzed everything and believed that I was right; just trying to make things better and protect others.

I saw so many conflicts around me and, I believe complications in this world start with this petty behaviour, trying to solve problems outside, when the solution actually starts from the inside. I realized that my attempts at controlling problems outside are out of desperation, when I did not believe that things will get better; when I lost faith in myself and others. I practice this everyday: to have time just

***Facing the true self is always
challenging, uncomfortable,
and difficult***

to be with myself. I must first feel love inside, to give love. I must first feel peace inside, to make peace. If I try to change things outside without connecting with myself inside, then all my attempts are just part of personal ambitions. I think supporting more people to connect with themselves inside, starting from myself everyday is my purpose in life.

I do not have a religion, but I do have beliefs. IofC is like a mirror that helped me see myself more clearly. IofC let me own my practices and be responsible for my life. I think the respect for each person's inner voice is a valuable lesson for everyone starting from myself.

I used to resist religious beliefs, as I do not like others telling me what to think and believe. Now I can connect with the spiritual part of religious beliefs. I do not have to join them or agree with each of them. I still can have inner listening times together with people who have different religious beliefs.

Everything starts with connecting with oneself. Without inner connection, there are no other true connections. Facing the true self is always challenging, uncomfortable, and difficult. However, it can serve as a solid foundation for all the inner resources in my life.

When I try to cover a mistake, I create another. This process is endless and exhausting, even though it seemed to give me a brief break. Mistakes are a normal part of life. They do not mean I am a less valued person. Accept my imperfection and be responsible for them. This small change brings peace back to life.

This world definitely needs more people who practise inner listening and connect with themselves. There is too much of achievements-related goals and chasing for perfection in the world. They take peace and happiness away from life. I feel the practice of inner listening can help people re-evaluate their life and self-worth. I hope there are more meaningful connections being built in this world.

When outside problems are too difficult to solve, I take a break and connect within. Sometimes, outside problems got solved naturally, when I connect with myself and share with others.

When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be
Lao Tzu

When it came to me getting along with people of a different religion, nationality, culture, the scene was appalling

Nandor Lim Penang, Malaysia

Part of a team of full-time volunteers including his wife, Weny - they work especially with Malaysia's Chinese community. Generously supported financially by his community leaders



I was totally put off when I first encountered MRA/IofC. I kept running away until September 1999, when I narrowly escaped death in the Taiwan earthquake.

This experience jolted me awake. I realized the perishability of all my achievements; and that all my relationships were severed or frayed. I had not worked out who I really was or what I wanted out of life.

Earlier I'd felt IofC's moral criteria were too high. But now I became ready to accept IofC's challenge. I was finally drawn in by some folk in IofC who lived out its practices and treated me with full sincerity.

My university major was Chinese literature. I studied the life of Confucius and his philosophy of education. In his classic *Great Learning*, he stressed: 'Making the whole kingdom peaceful and happy depends on the government of the state, which depends on the regulation of the family, that hinges on the cultivation of the person which requires rectifying the mind and sincerity of thoughts. The perfecting of knowledge depends on the investigation of things.'

Until I truly practised the essence of IofC I regarded this truth as 'theory', unlikely ever to be realized.

I was a cynical person, with no sense of security, and a strong distrust of others. Especially when it came to getting along with people of a different religion, nationality or culture, the scene was appalling.

IofC had a clear impact on my life values and my world vision. I asked for forgiveness and paid back money to my grandparents as I used to steal from their pockets. After that, until they passed away, I had a new, close bond with them.

I wrote almost a hundred letters to relatives and friends saying sorry for my bad behaviour and nonsensical attitude. I had been full of false intentions towards others, masking the truth, using them for my convenience.

I managed to express my true feelings lovingly to my father and mother about

their separation. I learned to respect their parting. It took courage to express my love and tell them about all I had done in the past – my boozing, broken relationships, affairs, fights...

My work is organizing conferences on reconciliation in the family. I've taken my parents to a few of them to support families with similar issues. I go to schools in Malaysia to share my life story so that others get courage to confront their biggest challenges.

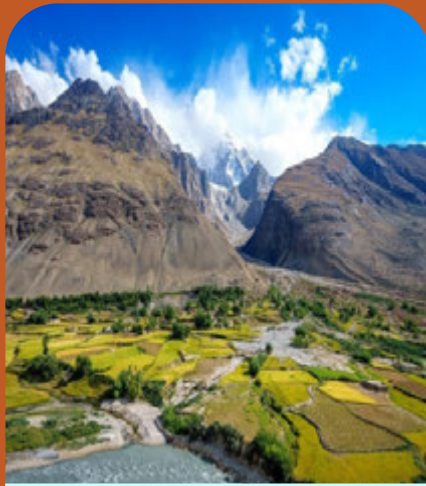
***I subtracted God from my life
because God didn't protect
my parents from separating***

Now my mind is open towards people of other religions, nationalities and cultures. No longer do I feel any exclusivity. Through IofC, the focus of my life has been refocused from my own culture and education to those of all people.

As a child, I followed my parents' belief in God. Later I subtracted God from my life because God didn't protect my parents from separating.

In one inner listening time, I had a very clear instruction, 'You don't believe in Me, because you think I let you suffer.' But then I realized that time and again as an unpaid full-time volunteer, I had experienced provision from the higher power in unexpected ways. This led me back to belief.

***What the superior man seeks is in himself,
what the small man seeks is in others
Confucius***



Mohammad Kabul, Afghanistan

*Lawyer from the Tajik tribe.
Social activist*

*I could not even imagine
sitting with people
from another religious background*

I gave back to my sisters the educational opportunities I had torn away from them.

I was brought up believing a Muslim should not even talk to a non-Muslim. I could never imagine sitting with people from another religious background and sharing thoughts. Any time I saw non-Muslims I had feelings of hatred towards them.

When I was a child, my religious teacher used to say, 'You are Muslim. You are better than any other human beings in this world. Hate non-Muslims as much as you can. When you see them, if you are not able to do anything more, at least throw a stone at them!'

In late 2010 I was nominated by Mahboba's Promise, a charity working for homeless and orphaned children in Kabul,

to take part in the IofC internship programme at Asia Plateau in Panchgani, India.

During those five months I could not avoid sitting with people from different religious backgrounds. And when I felt their care, kindness and desire to help others, regardless of religious background, I started remembering those things my religious teachers had told me.

Everything in IofC was new. I had not known any of these sorts of ideas before. They attracted me. Taking time out regularly for 'inner listening' was one of the most important things I experienced with IofC.

For the first time in my life, I looked back at my past, to put right the wrong things I had done.

For example, I did not have a good relationship with my sisters or with a senior relative who had treated us unfairly. To put these relationships right, I did something I'd never done before. I asked for forgiveness from my sisters and from that relative. This changed my life, also my attitudes and actions.

On returning home, I gave back to my sisters the educational opportunities I had summarily torn away from them. I allowed them to go back to school. I said sorry for all the years they had suffered from my tough decisions and actions. One of my sisters went on to graduate in Islamic Law at Kabul University.

The four absolute values paved the way for me to accept that women have the same rights in the family as men. From that time onwards I have stood for gender equality. I have also conducted seminars on this issue with different ethnic groups at Kabul University.

The atmosphere in my home has changed. We are not just brother and sisters; now we are also friends. Warmth and affection is everywhere in our home. After my time at Asia Plateau, my sisters were astonished to see me smiling. For years I had never smiled, as there was peace neither inside me, nor outside in my society.

Putting things right made me feel light. I had never had that kind of feeling before.

I no longer believe that violence is the only way to overcome a problem. Violence used to be the first option for me when I faced any problem. I used it many times. As a consequence, I lost many friends, relatives and other relationships.

In the past, a Muslim was giving me guns and teaching me not to care about anything else; but in IofC, non-Muslims were giving me hope. They were helping me not just to free myself but also to become useful for my society. All this helped me to respect their religions and see that Allah actually created all of us to live alongside each other peacefully.

***I gave back to my sisters
the educational opportunities
I had torn away from them***

I let go of religious discrimination, in the light of absolute love. In India several times I even went to church. I can now honestly say that I respect people from every religion, background and culture.

The camel cannot see its own hump



Recognising our mistakes and taking action on that, matters

Farishta Afzaly Parwan, Afghanistan

Masters in Social Work

I come from central Afghanistan. Most of my life I have lived as a migrant in Quetta, Pakistan. I am a Muslim girl from the much-maligned Hazara tribe, one of the four main ones in Afghanistan. I hold firmly onto what Islam says: 'Always stand against injustice and speak for truth and reality, no matter how difficult.'

While pursuing my Bachelor's in 2017 at the Asian University for Women (AUW) in Chittagong, Bangladesh, a Nepalese friend told me about IofC holding their 23rd Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in Panchgani, India. I applied instantly.

IofC's approach of bringing people from different backgrounds, ages and faiths together under one roof to share their stories of transformation drew me. From APYC, I decided to be part of this global initiative.

Upon return with other APYC participants from our University, we shared with friends, teachers, and family members how amazing this experience was. IofC had taught me the importance of high moral standards and how applying these can lay the foundation of a renewed, meaningful life. So, I took the plunge with one of my friends I was upset with, about a long interpersonal confrontation. I started the conversation, and hugged her, not keeping in mind all that had happened. I realized that the act of forgiveness was so powerful. I felt so peaceful from it.

Once, at university, I got mad at a minor comment by a very close friend. She was shocked by my behaviour. Later I realized the real cause was rooted in piles of anger from the past. We had an honest conversation. I apologized for hurting her. Now our friendship is beautiful. We are truly there for each other whenever needed. Recognising our mistakes and taking action on it matters.

One of my seniors, a good friend at the university, after graduating suddenly unfriended me from *facebook*. I do not remember having done anything bad to her. Through another friend I came to know it was because I was working with somebody she was in tension with. She wanted me also to cut out that person. It hurt me because it was not a legitimate reason to sever ties. Secondly had she told me about the reason directly, it would have been different.

After attending online sessions with IofC during Covid and through Ramadan fasting, I realized I needed to clear the misunderstandings. I apologized to her, if I had hurt her. I felt freer.

In the past, I used to judge people based on their actions and also on how they

dress. The reason was that I had lived confined to a very limited location with people mainly from my Hazara ethnic grouping. No exposure to other cultures or the outside world. So, now I have learned not to judge anyone even unintentionally.

Another initiative was mediating in a serious conflict among Afghan juniors at my university. A serious confrontation that could have turned ugly. The small act of bringing these students in one place allowed them to hear each other out fully. This resulted in solving the misunderstandings. Towards the end of the facilitation, we took some moments of silence and then everyone hugged each other. All felt better forgiving each other.

So, I saw the power an individual can have on someone else's life, helping them be a better version of themselves. And that genuine conversations sometimes have to be facilitated.

It also taught me that we human beings always have the choice of becoming the forgiver or remaining the aggrieved.

Through IofC I learned that regardless of our religious beliefs we can still co-exist. It made me realize how beautiful it is to live in diversity, embracing each other regardless of our differences.

I particularly carry with me the times of silence at APYC and how powerful that practice is. Having periods of silence every day helps me reflect on my actions and ask myself tough questions.

I realized that act of forgiveness was so powerful. I felt so peaceful from it

IofC has made me realize that you do not have to be from one particular group of people, faith, or nationality to help another. All it takes is to understand that we are all human beings sharing more in common than having things separating us. It is okay not to believe in the same things. Once I start appreciating others as individuals, more harmony is possible. It is okay to have a different faith yet mingle with people from other faiths. Just enjoy living by serving each other.

The world needs IofC because it brings together people from different faiths, genders, ages and schools of thought. I wish to see IofC sessions in schools, training centres and universities. What can be more beautiful than for students to learn these values early on in life from their educational institutions?

Also having interfaith sessions and training in IofC will allow people to understand 'the other' rather than work from prejudices. That will help the next generation build more tolerance towards people from different religions and backgrounds. Above all, becoming a good listener creates a better world.

*If you don't believe in any religion,
at least be free-spirited and honest in your actions*

I had negative perceptions and misconceptions about foreigners

Shair Ahmed

Kabul, Afghanistan

Journalist



DREAMS do come true. It happened for me when I stepped into IofC India in 2012 as an intern at Asia Plateau! Before that, I had never interacted with anyone outside my country, religion, culture, or sect.

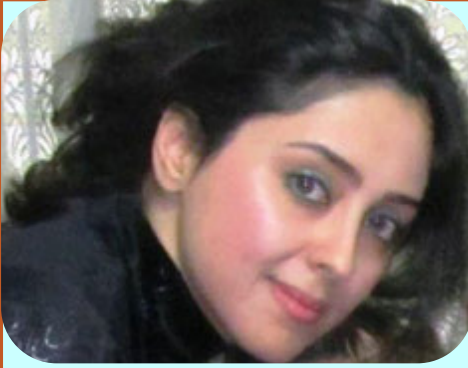
The first major change that IofC brought to my life was respect and value for foreigners, whom I had negative perceptions and misconceptions about. After interactions and deep conversations, I changed my way of thinking and opened myself to diverse ideas and thoughts.

The second major change was mending my relationship with my stepmom. Throughout my life, we had had a tense, even hostile relationship. She always seemed to control my father and our family's life. Often, I used to be disrespectful and have misunderstandings with her. In India, I decided to improve my relations with her and called her up to wish her *Eid Mubarak*. She was totally surprised but very happy to hear my voice. I felt liberated from within.

My commitment is to spread the idea of IofC in my nation, living by Gandhiji's 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. I have started to organize sessions on personal transformation, leadership, and an initiative called 'Afghanistan – I Care!'

I was fortunate to attend IofC's Caux Scholars Program in Switzerland. I learned about conflict transformation, trauma healing, peacebuilding, restorative justice and reconciliation. The programme helped me to explore the root causes of different types of conflict. I now look at conflict as an opportunity rather than a challenge in my life. I want to bring this experience to my fellow Afghans so that they too can transform themselves.

One good deed is worth a thousand prayers



Sanaz Ohodi

Teheran, Iran

*MBA in Human Resources, ten years'
managerial experience in the
corporate world*

*I became the only female manager
in my company.
This is not too common in Iran*

AS a Persian woman enjoying the simple things of life, I used to be quiet, persevering and self-motivated, loving music, nature and adventure. I always looked forward to the next best thing.

Being happy is a state of mind. I feel people should not settle for less. I have been blessed with a healthy and open-minded family. Quite different from most families in Iran, my parents gave me the freedom to explore the world.

When I was a child, they provided me with every opportunity to learn what I desired. So I studied mathematics

in high school and then English in one of Iran's state universities. English enabled me to do further studies abroad. I received a scholarship to do an MBA in Indonesia, and graduated in 2010.

While I was studying in Jakarta, a young Kenyan woman who was taking part in an IofC programme came to our dormitory. I was so inspired by her that I decided to get deeper into this. I went to an IofC conference in Malaysia, where I was deeply struck by the quote, 'Be the change you would like to see in the world'. I wanted to learn more about change.

So I went to Asia Plateau as an intern. There I found out how to live by conscience and courage, to resonate with love and compassion, to awaken the *Great Spirit* within me and others to bring more peace to this world. This became my vision in life.

Purity seemed impossible but after hearing people talk about their experiences, I took action to really be myself, authentic in words as well as action, rather than fearing what others think.

There was a time when I hadn't told the truth to my parents. Honesty challenged me to come clean. I told my mum everything that I had kept from her.

Unselfishness brought me love – for all human beings, whatever their backgrounds. I learned to make my world larger than just my own life, family and friends. I started visiting disabled people once a week and became good friends with them.

Love challenged me to ask forgiveness from someone who used to be my best

friend. I had stopped talking to her because of something she said to me. The day we studied love at Asia Plateau, I sent her an email apologizing for judging her and cutting off our friendship. We have become great friends again.

I also forgave a relative who used to be wicked towards my dad. I called him and had a good conversation with him.

I learned to make my world larger than just my own life

I became an operations manager, the only female manager in my company. This is not too common in Iran. IofC enabled me to bring some of the change I was looking for in my society.

I try to apply IofC values and inner listening times constantly. Now I am a little more patient and open to God's will. And I have a life where each moment is joyous.

***A greedy man will always find himself in shackles.
Greed is the key to trouble and carries man to hardship.
Amir al-Muminin***



The rebirth of my personal faith could have merely made me a self-sufficient, proud Christian believer. MRA has constantly challenged me to go beyond this

Ramez Salame

Beirut, Lebanon

*Lawyer. Hinge-person for IofC
in the Mediterranean*

HOW would I describe myself when I was 21 years old? A hard-working young man, who had ideals and hated injustice, but who at the same time was self-centred, ambitious and impure. This last-mentioned side of me was starting to harm people around me. It was in this state, without intentionally looking for it, that I first came into contact with MRA through some British trade unionists who were visiting Beirut.

Shortly after that, two young men belonging to MRA invited me to meet with them in the early mornings for a time of silent reflection and then sharing. These quiet times were the occasion for God, in whom I had lost all faith, to appear in my inmost self.

I started having thoughts of real care for people around me – and, surprisingly, was able to put them into practice with much ease. This brought a deep joy into my life, which I had not known before. I started to be open to the interior life of prayer.

That year I went to the world centre of MRA in Caux, Switzerland. There, my roommate challenged me that if I wanted to build a new world I had to ‘scrape my heart’. This phrase stuck in my mind.

In a period of reflection in my room, I noted down four things which needed to be put right in my life: my relationships with my father, with my brother and with friends I had betrayed, and a book I had stolen.

I wrote a letter of apology to my father. I spoke to my friends, confessing my betrayal and expressing my regret. I gave back the book I had stolen. The most difficult thing was apologizing to my younger brother and confessing my jealousy; but, yielding to the inner urge, I was finally able to do so.

When I did all that, a radical transformation took place in me. Suddenly, I was a free person. Old habits and resentments disappeared. A profound sense of reconciliation permeated my being. What was the force which gave me this extraordinary freedom? For me there was no doubt: it was God. Since then he has

become the central reality of my life, and the quiet time has become a daily discipline.

Life after that experience didn't become less tough. In 1975, when I was 28, war broke out in my country. Our country of six million is about 40 per cent Christian and 60 per cent Muslim. I was one of many Christians who took up arms and joined the militias in the fighting. But in one morning's quiet time, I read Jesus's words: 'My kingdom is not of this world'. I then perceived that there was a higher battle than the fighting I was engaged in. I gave up my military weapon.

I decided to reach out to my Muslim compatriots from whom the war had separated me

Before the war broke out, I had gone to meet the Mufti to apologize for my negative feelings towards my country people. After giving up arms, I decided to reach out further to my Muslim compatriots from whom the war had separated me. I took the spiritual risk of reaching out to our neighbours in prayerful determination. Together, we initiated dialogue sessions that lasted many years. People in high positions of our country also participated in them. That was our humble contribution to the peace and reconciliation process.

MRA has given my life a firm purpose: to live and work for the renewal of my country and the remaking of the world. This begins with submitting my personal life in all its aspects, on a daily basis and without complacency, to the light of God. The rebirth of my personal faith could have merely made me a self-sufficient and proud Christian believer. But MRA has constantly challenged me to go beyond this.

It helped me reach out to others – particularly my Muslim compatriots of all denominations – and to work with them for a renewal that must start first in our own lives, on the basis of our shared need for each other. This, for sure, has made me a better follower of Christ.

If you go to the altar to present your offering and, on your way, remember that your brother has something against you, go first and reconcile with him - Matthew 5

I accepted lowering my guard, getting exposed to others' cultures, faiths and non-faith



**Wadiaa
Khoury
Zahle, Lebanon**

*PhD in Educational
Legislation and Policy,
Masters in Law.
University lecturer*

I was born in Zahle, a town with a Christian majority, in the centre of Lebanon. I am part of the Greek Catholic denomination, in a small country of 18 different religious groups – always a source of both richness and tension. All my schooling was in a Catholic school, where my aunt, a nun, was part of the administration. A few years after the end of the Lebanese civil war, I studied Educational Sciences at the Jesuit University in Beirut.

It was only then that I met my first Muslim compatriots. Providentially, this coincided with the launch of my real encounter with IofC. Before my first year at university I visited the international IofC centre in Caux, Switzerland, and after my degree I took part in Action for Life, a 10-month IofC leadership training programme in India and East Asia.

Since then, my involvement with IofC has become part of my life, running parallel with my further studies in Law and my work – first as a high school coordinator, then as a trainer, and later, after my PhD, as a university lecturer.

The moment I decided to adopt the way of the absolutes, I committed my life to being a chain of continuous beginnings. This became possible when daily quiet times became an indispensable, privileged way of starting every day.

Though IofC didn't bring anything new to the content of my Christian faith, it helped me unlock its great richness and put it into practice. I had learned from my early catechism to see God's presence in every creature and to treat everyone, including enemies, with the love and respect I'd offer to Jesus in person. Nonetheless it was still impossible to turn ideas into practice and live this way without the exposure I was blessed with through IofC.

Christian institutions in Lebanon are open to all, without discrimination based on faith or race, but it was rare to see this happening in a spirit of mutual enrichment. From my perspective, the spirit was mostly one of giving to those in need, whether on the material or the spiritual level.

Through IofC I learned to accept lowering my guard and getting exposed to others' cultures, faiths and non-faith. What was impossible to understand before in Jesus's historic encounters with people of different faith traditions then became completely understandable: the ability to see humans as a whole.

***My country became
far wider than my own
town and community***

During the Action for Life programme, it became clear to me that, in order to be part of the healing rather than the sickness in the world, I had to deal with the barriers in my own life.

I had difficulty communicating with my father, who belonged to a far different generation. He also had a major hearing problem. I wrote him a four-page letter including all that I had strived to tell him previously without any success. Even though this letter didn't have a magical effect as in fairy tales, it freed me from victim status. I started to understand the frustration I was living through of not being really known by, or enjoying a lively interaction with, the person who was supposed to be so close to me.

Then I realized how much I had generalized this frustration to include even my Muslim compatriots, who were as challenging to deal with as my father. My inner will to change led me, after Action for Life in 2002, to do my Law degree on the Muslim majority campus of the Lebanese University.

Those four years of study resulted in many friendships and in priceless visits to my new friends' villages far in the north and south of our tiny Lebanon. Unlike many Lebanese, I found my country becoming far wider than my own town and community. I came to understand the treasures and challenges of each region and group, in what we call 'Lebanon's blessing and curse of geography'.

This was a translation into personal experience of the IofC song that accompanied most of the presentations I was involved in during Action for Life:

*Walk a mile in another man's moccasins,
Before you leave him condemned forever.
Live a day with another man's family,
Years of hurt can end and a foe become a friend,
As you find that he's just the same as you inside!*

My role got clearer by the day. With this clarity came a big responsibility. I want to work for authentic reconciliation in Lebanon, based on the long history of common values and spiritual bonds between all its communities. I also see Lebanon

playing a crucial role in today's changes in the Arab countries and the world, by giving a model of how different communities can live together in an environment of freedom.

After finishing my Law degree and my Master's in Public Law, I worked on a thesis, researching teachers' 'civic skills' in schools representing all of Lebanon's mosaic. Since I completed this in 2014, I use every lecture and training programme I deliver to build a new generation of teachers who are exposed to absolute moral standards and the role of every individual in 'remaking' Lebanon and the world. A networking and empowerment plan is currently being woven with my IofC team in Lebanon, to support trainees who will become the new 'civic agents' of the country.

I believe IofC cannot stand if it loses its spiritual base – the one thing that gives meaning to hope and sacrifice. It is our role and responsibility to know how to keep this base visible and available.

Pope Benedict XVI said: 'We live today under the dictatorship of relativism; everything is viewed as being subjective and transitory, in respect to one's own desires.' IofC's absolutes resonate with the Church's steadiness in terms of values and the trajectory towards the 'sanctification' of humans. They are an indispensable ally of Pope Francis' work for justice and trustbuilding between all faiths and groups.

***I committed my
life to being a chain of
continuous beginnings***

Never hesitate to go far beyond all seas, all frontiers, all beliefs
Amin Malouf

*I committed horrible military acts
against the enemy,
thinking I was serving my religion*

Muhyeddine Chehab Beirut, Lebanon

*Former Islamic militia leader, now peacebuilder.
Elected Mokhtar (official intermediary)
of a city neighbourhood*



I grew up in an Arabic-Islamic environment, which took great pride in its heritage. I was educated in Islamic schools where all teachers, administrators and students were Sunni Muslims. My family's roots can be traced to Koraish, the tribe of the Prophet's mother.

I was zealous about defending my *umma* (group), my people and my faith. In 1975, when fighting broke out in Beirut between Muslim Lebanese and Christian Lebanese, I was 19. Naturally I joined an Islamic militia. Because of my fervour and dare, I was quickly promoted to leadership.

The 12-year war transformed me into an experienced soldier. I committed horrible military acts against the enemy, thinking I was serving my religion in fighting the 'agents', the 'infidels' and the 'new crusaders'. I carried inside me an indescribable amount of hatred towards Lebanese Christians. I saw them as agents of Israel and the West, and as greedy people who wanted to control Lebanon and expel its Muslim population.

The war tore me up psychologically; it fractured my personality because of actions I took and the horrible scenes I witnessed. When it ended in 1990, my future was unknown. I had married one of my relatives and our family was falling apart because of my character. I had become accustomed to violence, screaming, cursing and a lack of consideration for others. Add to that the permanent anxiety and tension I was feeling and the nightmares, which never left me.

I surprised myself when, after the war, I felt the need to discover the Lebanese Christians. Was I right in fighting them? I visited the Christian areas to verify my opinions and seek peace of mind by justifying my war against them. The images and stereotypes I harboured were drastically contradicted by the reality I found. I was stunned.

Positive feelings started to grow in me, convincing me of the need to invest my best efforts in preventing a repetition of the war and making sure my children did not fall prey to the ignorance, stereotypes and bad actions I had been guilty of.

Beyond Walls

Between 1990 and 2000, with some friends, I made a few humble attempts to work for change by writing articles in the respected daily newspaper, *An-Nahar*, on the need for dialogue and reconciliation.

In 2000, a friend introduced me to the MRA group in Beirut. At first I was cautious, but finally I began to attend their weekly meetings. There I found an approach I'd never heard of before. It focused on the concept that change in nations and communities cannot happen before it happens inside a person. This change has to be based on foundational moral values. I also discovered the practice of 'quiet times'. It appeared to be a realistic approach and, more importantly, it did not contradict the principles of Islam.

I grasped the first opportunity to make a public apology for my evil actions during the war, during a meeting in front of a large group of people. I began contributing articles, participating in conferences and lectures in schools and universities – anywhere I could spread awareness, especially in the young generation, of the danger of war and the importance of resolving conflicts through dialogue and understanding.

The stereotypes I harboured were drastically contradicted by the reality I found

I intensified my efforts to read the writings of enlightened Islamic thinkers and to learn more about Christianity. This gave me a new religious maturity. My Islamic faith gained a deep dimension in my daily life, through prayer, fasting, acts of charity, being fully honest, avoiding hypocrisy and staying away from bad practices.

I worked hard at cooling down the issues which troubled my wife and children. Our relationship changed from tension to understanding. With time, my family was filled with love and cooperation. The academic performance of my children improved dramatically.

***Forget the past, but remember the lesson
Lebanese saying***

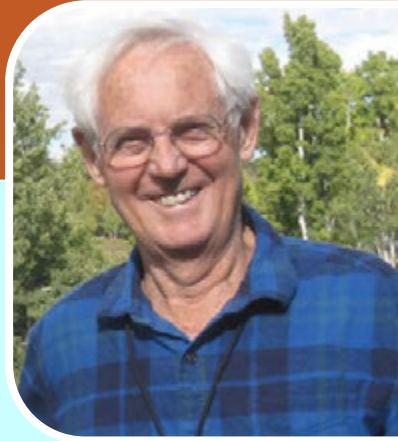
MRA was the vehicle for me becoming a Christian; it would also prove to be the path away from Christianity, or rather beyond it

Dr Bryan Hamlin

Boston, USA

PhD in Microbiology. Naturalist.

IofC full-time voluntary worker for four decades



At age 76, I am now an agnostic secularist. That is, I do not see religions as based on facts so much as sincere attempts to make sense of life.

I put this ‘confession’ at the start. If, like me, one goes from being a Christian to a non-believer, some may think that one has ‘lost one’s faith’ – whereas I don’t feel I’ve lost anything but rather gained a greater insight.

I was attracted to MRA by the idea that an ordinary young person (I was 19) could actually have a part in changing the world. I underwent a dramatic change by examining my life according to the four moral standards and being honest in detail with one new MRA friend. It meant apologizing to my stepmother for my bitterness towards her. My own mother had died when I was ten and my father remarried.

I wrote a letter of apology to the UK Minister of Public Works for stealing the sign off his ministry door while drunk. I didn’t have the sign any more. So I enclosed 10 shillings, half a UK pound! (I was poor). What I didn’t know until much later was that the Minister’s secretary was trying to get him to take an interest in MRA. So my letter was evidence to him that MRA worked.

As a result of this change, I became a Christian and a member of a church. This seemed the natural thing to do, as my background was Christian. The irony is that although MRA was the vehicle for me becoming a Christian, it would also prove to be the path away from Christianity, or rather beyond it.

Christianity regards itself as the ultimate truth and therefore holds that other religions do not have the full truth. In MRA I met people of other religions often more ‘changed’ than me. At church I was urged to try convert Hindu colleagues to Christianity ‘for the sake of their souls’.

I was beginning to doubt the claim that ‘having Jesus in your life’ gave you any special powers compared to others. However, I still believe that the man, Jesus, lived an extraordinary life, as did Mohandas Gandhi, and that he gave the world some of the best moral teaching.

In 1993, I was a delegate to MRA's Global Consultation in Cyprus, where it was finally decided to redefine MRA as 'inter-religious'. I remember feeling the pain of people who had worked for years with MRA. One woman said, 'Although we were made to feel welcomed, that welcome was always into a Christian tent.'

In the 1990s I made seven trips to the Middle East, getting to know devout Muslims and Jews. I visited Jerusalem, the so-called Holy City, where the three Abrahamic faiths come together but where distrust between them, and indeed between their sub-groups, is palpable. I felt more and more that each religion has a different window on truth as human beings search for answers to the basic questions.

I have a PhD in biology. Biology is a 'dangerous' science because it attempts to answer those questions to which mankind has sought answers over millennia, often through religion. Where do we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? I say 'dangerous' because the answers may challenge one's cherished beliefs. Through my studies as a young person and throughout my 40 years working full-time with MRA/IofC, I have tried to stay faithful to the search for what is true, however costly or uncomfortable that search may prove.

I won't go into the details of my present belief system, which resulted from that search – except to say I am a secularist and never felt more anchored and secure than now. I believe the world is facing great danger and I think too much is due to religious conflict. By mid-century this will, I believe, lead to a widespread disillusionment with religion and a greater acceptance of science-based reality.

I believe love of all humanity and the beauties of nature can be a spiritual experience for non-believers.

In the coming decades, I see IofC as well-placed to play a crucial two-part role. One should be an expansion of what IofC has been doing for some time now – working for reconciliation between the different faiths. The other should be to provide a global vehicle for what might be called a spiritual experience for non-believers, and most importantly the promotion of moral values separate from any religious base.

My country, the USA, is a very Christian country with church attendance much higher than in European countries. Yet our rates of crime, gun violence and child abuse are some of the highest in the world. I strongly believe that from an interreligious base, and if we could open our hearts and minds to non-believers more, IofC could forge a powerful promotion of reconciliation and moral values across the world. The best is yet to be. But as always it will need change.

Each religion has a different window on truth

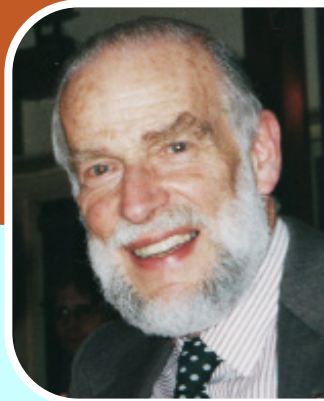
Behave decently without expectation of rewards or punishment after you are dead

*I didn't want to spend life selling
cigarettes, soap and shampoo.
I took the leap, living on faith and prayer,
without salary*

John Munro

Sussex, UK

Editor. Publisher



I met Moral Re-Armament (MRA, later Initiatives of Change) whilst a national serviceman in the RAF in Egypt in 1949, through a padre, Cecil King. Having been brought up in care, I'd never been to church, but I began to 'catch' religion.

On demob, aged 20, I tried six different churches around where I lived. None seemed interested in me – or my search. Then I had an invitation to an MRA meeting in the next village. What the speakers said made sense to me.

It was my salvation. I was working in advertising as a layout artist in London, just around the corner from MRA's HQ. The Korean War had just started, and I half-expected to be recalled. I had said to myself, 'If I get killed out there, well, that would settle the problem of what I'm meant to do with my life.'

After 18 months of growing closer to people in MRA, I was invited to join a six-month tour of the industrial cities of Britain with the play *The Forgotten Factor*, in 1952. I realized I didn't really want to spend my life trying to sell more cigarettes, soap and shampoo, so I decided to take the leap. There was no salary. It meant living on faith and prayer. I had just £5 in savings, and that went on a suit. Then Padre King covenanted £5 a month to me, which helped a lot.

Fast forward to when I was 45. The deputy director of the social work department of West Sussex County Council, where I worked, decided they needed a house journal. They had 2500 staff scattered in 125 different locations. A staff magazine could provide information, involvement and identity. He had heard I'd been in publishing. I leapt at the chance. *The Whistler* eventually won the national prize for best house journal. In the following 15 years, my team produced over a hundred issues.

Then, a new director was appointed. Whilst he was marvellous with money, he was, in my opinion, poor with people. He was so competent that he seemed contemptuous of those of lesser abilities. People went in fear of him, and many felt bullied.

I now had to get his approval of the finished proofs of *The Whistler*. Sometimes

that took days. I felt humiliated at his offhand ways. Things came to a head with the 1989 Christmas edition. Time was short for countywide distribution before the holiday; and it was a bumper issue – one of the best I'd done.

For no apparent reason he just wouldn't look at it for several days. I felt he regarded my work as unimportant. I was so angry I wanted to institute a grievance procedure against him.

Over coffee at a fortnightly Bible-study, someone asked me, 'How are you getting on with your director?'

'Oh, I could kill him!' I shot back.

The room suddenly went quiet.

'Would you like to talk about it?' asked Andy, our host, gently.

So I explained how furious I was. I felt full of hate at being humiliated and devalued (a deadly echo of my childhood experiences, I realized much later). In the end, three of the group prayed for me, one after another. I felt a change coming over me. It was extraordinary: the anger seemed to melt away. I found I actually wanted to care for that man. Compassion filled my heart. Tears flowed.

Next day I went to work a changed man. I was no longer his victim, but an equal – concerned for him and his problems. I abandoned any idea of taking action against him. The difference in my demeanour seemed to trigger a more respectful response from him. *The Whistler* emerged from his office in time for Christmas.

To my surprise, he made an eloquent speech at my retirement party the following March and wrote a warm piece of appreciation in the following issue of the magazine.

My own special conviction is in the power of the printed word. It can go on working when all the rest have stopped! In particular, I want to help elders in MRA to record their stories.

So I've now got a website (www.changemakersgallery.com) that includes the dozen or so books and booklets I've produced – some with my late friend, John Faber.

In the war, when I was in Egypt's Canal Zone, I treated the local people as inferior, and called them 'wogs'. I never got to know any (except our *chai* and *dhobi wallahs*, who supplied our tea and did our laundry), nor did I ever visit an Arab home. At the shops we just haggled; there was never any real conversation. To my deep shame I

Humiliation is the nuclear bomb of the emotions

recall my disappointment that, when guarding the airfield at night, I never shot any 'intruder', as many of the lads expected to.

When I was about 70, I was sitting in a gathering of local supporters of MRA, which included the Imam of Brighton. Something he said suddenly opened my eyes to the way I had unconsciously regarded all 'coloured' people as inevitably second-class. It was an awful realization; I sat there incredulous at my astounding blindness. I was overwhelmed with shame.

In tears I apologized for my attitude of false white superiority and arrogance.

He immediately responded, accepting it with a winning smile. This was the beginning of a warm relationship, which led me to produce publications for him.

We British reneged on our promises to the Arabs in 1917, in the Balfour Declaration, and after the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, and we failed them in 1947 when we abandoned the mandate over Palestine. We also made incompatible promises to the Jews.

I long for our leaders to have the humility to acknowledge where our attitudes need to change and the reparations that we need to undertake.

I had unconsciously regarded all 'coloured' people as second-class

Humiliation is the nuclear bomb of the emotions. I experienced that as a child. My dignity and self-respect were continually violated. I felt angry but powerless, useless and second-class. Some people retreat and become closed-up, depressed and passive. Many seek violent revenge. Others convert their anger into an intense drive to change the situation. I am grateful I had help to choose the latter course.

Example is always more efficacious than precept
Samuel Johnson

We are all reaching out to a spiritual dimension which is far beyond our capacity to grasp

Howard Grace

Berkshire, UK

Physics graduate. Teacher.

MRA full-time worker. Founder of West Berkshire Peace and Integration Forum.

Executive Producer of the film 'Beyond Forgiving'



M^Y parents were good, caring people. Neither religious nor atheists, such issues weren't a factor in their lives – or in mine either. In late teens, a painful break-up with my Christian girl friend made me a militant atheist.

University saw me active in social causes like nuclear disarmament and anti-apartheid. I followed an inner compulsion. As Student Union president, I covertly altered voting figures of a motion I wanted passed. Yet I was critical of dishonesty in politicians. At that point an MRA person, who knew nothing about this, suggested that I should do an internal audit to see if I was living the quality of life I wanted to see in society. This made sense.

The first step in changing the focus of my life was to be honest to the Student Union about my vote-fiddling. Surprisingly, I wasn't thrown out. That honesty was about being true to what I deeply felt to be right. It caused inner liberation but had nothing to do with religious beliefs. In fact my atheistic thinking had hardened during those years at university.

The importance of the link between personal and societal transformation grew in my spirit. It was worth sacrificing for. So, about a year later, I launched out to work full-time with MRA on a voluntary basis.

In belief terms, I was still an atheist. But, after several years, I began to make a link between my inner moral compass and the 'God' people talked about. I'm uncomfortable with various doctrinal teachings about Jesus: my becoming a Christian was to identify with his totally selfless life. In the Holy Land, I saw a plaque saying: 'Father, I do not understand you but I trust you'. This became the basis of my faith and in living a path of integrity.

In the last 57 years, through many transitions of belief, I've been committed to IofC, focusing on trustbuilding. For 14 years I worked full-time with IofC in

Australasia, Europe and Africa. In 1979, in apartheid South Africa, I fell foul of the security police. Suddenly I found myself back in Britain with my wife and two small children. My 'vocation', to help South African friends in building a new society, had been cut from under me.

So, at the age of 40, I trained to be a maths teacher and taught for 14 years. Then I founded an IofC programme which in 16 years facilitated some 800 sessions in senior schools of Britain, stimulating thought on purpose in life and motivation. Many young people we engaged with didn't relate to religion but real-life stories resonated with them.

One colleague who joined me for 36 school visits was Letlapa Mphahlele, a former liberation army commander who, during apartheid times, ordered retaliatory massacres of white civilians. He told how Ginn Fourie, whose daughter was killed in one of these, later forgave him. They then worked together as peacemakers.

Seeing the impact his experience made on students led me to team with Imad Karam

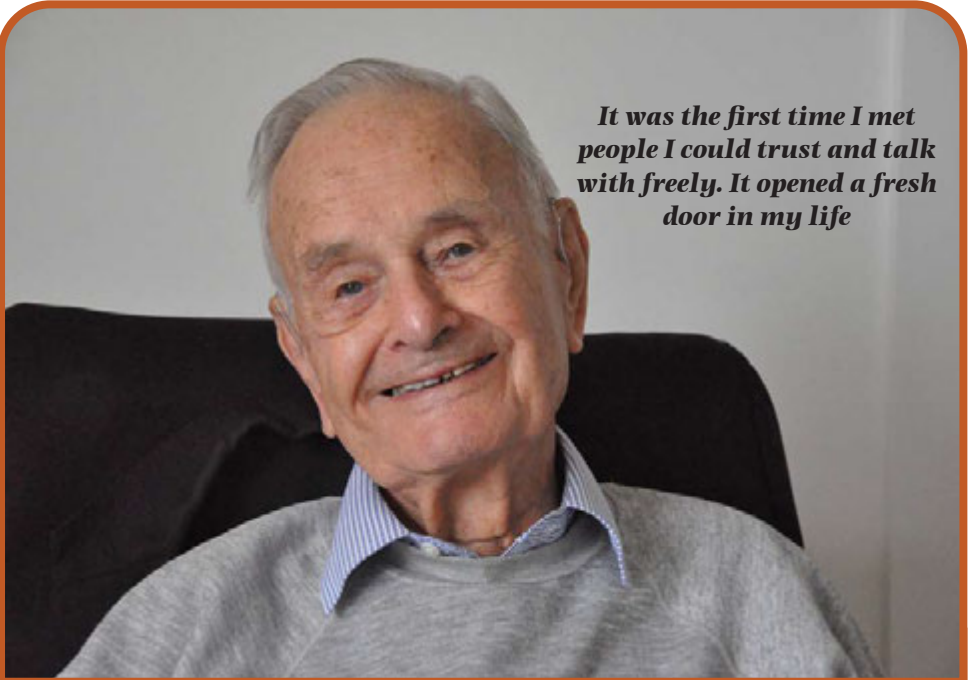
*I was honest about my vote-fiddling.
I wasn't thrown out as I expected I might be*

to produce the film *Beyond Forgiving*. It documents Letlapa and Ginn's stories and peacemaking work. It also prompts discussion on the profound spiritual commonality between a white, female Christian and a black, male atheist. Experiences like theirs, and long friendships with people of various beliefs and cultures, lead me to conclude that we are all reaching out to a spiritual dimension far beyond our capacity to grasp.

For over 30 years my wife and I were members of a mainstream church, where we still have many friends. But we became increasingly uneasy with the emphasis on 'correct doctrinal belief' as the deciding factor as to whether you were a Christian or not.

So, we looked around for a Christian fellowship which had an ethos more inclusive of diversity and found this with the Quakers. Their commitment to social change and emphasis on silent reflection resonates with our IofC convictions. Quaker faith holds that it is spiritual experience which is central, not the use of a particular form of words (whether that be 'God' or anything else). They see faith as a 'trust' response to something deep within our hearts, irrespective of what we believe to be its source.

Silence is a true friend who never betrays



It was the first time I met people I could trust and talk with freely. It opened a fresh door in my life

David Young, Brighton, UK

Engineer; awarded the Military Cross in World War 2. Full-time with IofC for over 72 years, including 30 years in India, where he and his wife, Margot, helped with the building of Asia Plateau

IN 1942, the year I was commissioned as an army officer, I met MRA people for the first time. I found myself in the position of making decisions which affected others, rather than merely being told what to do. Searching for practical answers, MRA gave me some steps to take.

There was an officer in our unit who we all found very difficult. He always disagreed with what others said. The idea of starting by looking at myself made me realize that I was saying things behind his back, which I did not say to his face.

When I apologized to him, the result was surprising. After a long silence he said, 'I realize I am a very difficult person, and I can't work with anyone.' He told me about his parents separating, leaving him with two homes and that he did not feel at home in either. We began working together and found common ground. He did not become a saint, but he did change.

During World War 2, wondering what the future held if I survived, I saw in MRA a purpose which gave me direction. The idea of listening to others and to God, starting with listening to my own conscience, gave me a calling to follow.

It was the first time I met people I could trust, with whom I could talk freely. It opened a fresh door in my life. I found I could exchange ideas, express my feelings and fears without losing face. It was a level of friendship deeper than I had known.

I saw in MRA a purpose which gave me direction.

The idea of listening to others and to God, starting with listening to my own conscience, gave me a calling to follow

To my somewhat theoretical, yet sincerely held, Christian belief, MRA added the discipline of a regular, daily quiet time and the simple idea that every time I point the finger at someone else I need to look at the three fingers pointing back at me.

In Asia I also began to connect more deeply with people of other religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, listening to their views and observing their actions and customs. This deeper connection has continued to this day.

Win by persuasion, not by force

*I need to be the person I want to be,
not who others want me to be*



Peter and Jean Everington London, UK

Teachers. IofC full time volunteers more than 55 years

ONE day the Principal of the Muslim College in London asked for help. He was running a course for a visiting group of senior Malaysian muftis, imams and other officials. Part of the aim was to help them relate to sound elements in the West. Could Peter give them two one-hour talks on Moral Re-Armament?

It began the following day, and MRA remained on the syllabus for eight more Malaysian groups in the next years. They were responsive men and women of great dignity. The exercise was to show that MRA is indigenous to all people of good will, as a gateway to faith, a bridge across difference, and an element of statesmanship.

Some years later we were guests of MRA Malaysia. We were taken to see the Minister for Religious Affairs in Kuala Lumpur, who arranged a reception in the Ministry with several who had been in London. Others were warmly hospitable to us and our son John in Ipoh and Penang.

It was Peter's second visit to the country, but Jean had known Malaysia much earlier. Not long after resigning her salaried teaching post in London, she was helping with MRA India's outreach to schools. In 1970 some Malaysians visited the new Asia Plateau centre at Panchgani, where they saw the European musical show *Anything to Declare?* They felt it could help restore national cohesion after race riots the year before.

Returning to their country they won support for an invitation to the 60-person company, but asked for two people from Panchgani to assist with preparations. Jean Robertson was sent with another British teacher Jill Robbins to assist a national committee, whose Patron was the Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. For nearly six months spanning the event, Jean stayed with the pioneer social worker Saleha Mohammed Ali, maintaining close friendship with her family for years afterwards.

When we married in 1972, Peter had been working with MRA Iran for several months. Friends there wanted westerners who could help bring the message of change to colleges and other sectors. There was also a weekly MRA programme on Education TV. We were based in Tehran for the next two years, with visits to Isfahan, Shiraz, and the oil city of Abadan on the Gulf.

We also made three visits to India in those years. Iranians were going to the new Asia Plateau conference centre in Panchgani, where a sparkling musical revue

Song of Asia was taking shape. *Anything to Declare?* had earlier been welcomed to Iran. Could an official invitation be secured for this Asian production? Hard as we all tried, our efforts failed. By the end of that decade, an autocracy yielded to violent revolution. What good, if any, had we British done? Sometimes you are sent to a place for what you need to learn. We had found an expansion of mind and heart alongside Iranian friends, and an abiding love for their country.

MRA started for Jean as a teenager with an apology to her headmistress for disruptive behaviour. For Peter at twenty, a clean-up with the absolute standards meant apology to a younger brother for his domineering ways.

MRA says, 'As I am, so is my nation.' With the approaching end of Empire, Britain had to learn to serve the peoples we had dominated. While Peter was at university, Britain invaded Egypt in 1956. He was ashamed, but what to do? And what to say to his Egyptian student friend, Mohammed Hassouna?

Through failure in Iran, we found an expansion of mind and heart

The inner voice prompted a switch in his studies to Arabic. In 1958 he embarked on eight years as a teacher, then college lecturer, with the Sudan Ministry of Education. Apart from teaching, the point was to support the peacemakers aiming to end the conflict between Arab North and African South. Patriots from both regions have added to the world story of change through MRA.

Egyptians and British have worked over the years to restore relations. In 1973 people from both countries arranged a programme of student exchange visits in the spirit of MRA. Over the next twenty-five years it spread to include Jordan, Sudan, Palestine, and Lebanon, with some French and Dutch participation. The Caux conferences played a vital part. We have often been in Cairo, where Mohammed Hassouna is now Chair of MRA Egypt.

To live this life, we need models of faith. The Peter in the Bible gave great leadership and also made mistakes. He was sometimes in rivalry with fellow workers. Changed and forgiven, he found the important thing was not his status, but lifting the morale of others. Later, he wrote his friends, old and young, 'Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand, and he will lift you up in due time. Cast all your cares on him, for you are in his charge.'

After fifty years of marriage we look back on unexpected gifts. One gem was from a Hojjat al-Islam (senior cleric) in Abadan. Observing Iranian Muslims and British Christians at work together in a spiritual cause, he offered a Quran verse which to him illustrated MRA: 'If those who are believers practise good deeds, God who is merciful will give them an affection for one another.' A sign of hope for reconcilers and rebuilders anywhere.

A superior man is modest in his speech but exceeds in his actions

We need to be both rooted in our own faith tradition and open to learning new things from others



Rev John Burrell Benson, UK

Studied at Reading and Oxford Universities. Worked for IofC in Africa for 13 years. Ordained in 1987 and served in the dioceses of Pretoria (South Africa) and Oxford

AN MRA youth conference helped me to experience a community of faith, care and purpose which deeply attracted me. I was 17 years old.

When I finished studying at my first university, I decided to put what I had witnessed into practice. I was honest with my parents about leading a double life at home and university; and then committed my life to Jesus Christ. I felt liberated and clearly led to study for a further course.

My family had lived in Africa briefly when I was a child and I was keen to return. An invitation to work for IofC in Ethiopia for a year developed into 13 years in East and Southern Africa. I had the privilege of witnessing the transformation of Rhodesia into Zimbabwe in 1980, the fruit of many actions, including some courageous initiatives of MRA. Lord Soames, the outgoing British Governor, described the outcome as 'miraculous'.

I was convinced of the power of God to change people's lives, and of the power of such people working together to bring transformation to communities and nations. I witnessed this in Zimbabwe, as did so many others, although there is great sadness at more recent developments there.

In the aftermath of all these frenetic events I realized that my own spiritual life was in great need. I had not been nurturing the sacred centre. Africa is such a beautiful and complex continent. I realized that situations would always continue to improve or deteriorate. But I had seen that people's lives had been transformed; they were the miracle. I wanted to rediscover the roots of my faith.

Returning to the UK with my wife and family, I trained for ordination in the Church of England. All through my training I drew on my experiences with IofC. What a privilege I had had. I also realized how much attitudes in the Church had changed towards MRA. We had a quiet time written into our daily programme and sharing the results with others was encouraged.

There is a danger that those involved in IofC from different faith traditions, and

relating to each other on common ground, can neglect their personal sustenance and wellbeing, drawing from their own tradition. We must give each other space to be ourselves. We must be sensitive and inclusive but not bland.

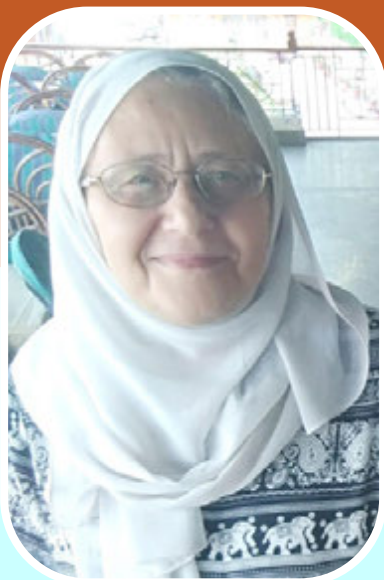
***The 'other' can
become 'brother'***

IofC's experience of working with people of different faiths and cultures is more important than ever in our global village. I have cherished memories of working with Muslims in Ethiopia. When we take time to get to know each other and share a commitment for transformation, the 'other' can become our 'brother'. Jesus reminds us of the Jewish law: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

The Church of England and IofC have so much to share. As the established national Church, how to minister to people of any or no faith? How to be open-minded about new ethical issues and yet faithful to our tradition and doctrine? How to keep the 70 million members of the Anglican Communion worldwide, who live in such different contexts, united?

Christians are familiar with the 'both/and' argument when looking at Christ: he was both man and God. We need to keep both the global and the intimate perspective. We need to be both rooted in our own faith tradition and open to learning new things from others who may be from another tradition. Above all, we need to have confidence in God.

***Preach the gospel at all times,
but only use words if necessary
St Francis***



My participation in MRA has turned my life upside down, especially through my daily 'golden period' of inner listening

Dr Nagia A Said

Cairo, Egypt

IofC elder in the Mediterranean region

MY mother, Enayat Elhakeem, while a student, advocated a peaceful boycott of British goods to resist Britain's occupation of Egypt. She was among the first women to lecture at Al-Azhar University. My father, Abdelmoghney Said Salama, a writer, politician, economist and community activist, was interned twice for calling for independence.

My parents met Moral Re-Armament when they were engaged.

I was 14 when President Kennedy was assassinated. This event led me to conclude we need to remove not just weapons from hands, but also hatred from hearts. I decided I wanted to become an agent of change.

In 1968, I went to Caux for a World Youth Leadership course. One of the coordinators told me, 'Egypt is at the crossroad of civilizations, of revolution and independence. Will it be the crossroad of moral renaissance?'

His words inspired me in my commitment to change that starts with oneself. I wrote a multimedia show, Egypt, New Hope, dealing with apathy, despair and inferiority after our defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel.

On our return from Caux, three of us students met the Minister of Youth and suggested that his Ministry invite a delegation of British students to Egypt. The first delegation came to Egypt in 1973 and then a group of Egyptian students went to Caux and the UK. These exchanges continued for 10 years, building bridges of understanding. Over the next decades, they expanded to include Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan and Palestine, under the name British-Arab Exchanges (BAX).

In the rainbow, every colour counts

As an engineer I compared building the strength-bearing capacity of pre-stressed concrete bridges to reinforcing oneself through personal change and *jihad al nafs* (inner struggle).

In 1974 I married my tutor, Abdelmohsen Farahat, and moved to the USA for graduate studies. There, we faced prejudice from some professors who did not value our Arab-Islamic background. Over time we won their respect and support.

In August 1990, the world was shocked at the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Multinational troops in Operation Desert Storm drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.

Nations, which had seemed united, were drifting into ruthless wars. I wondered why. My mother responded, 'In many parts of the world, petroleum and cotton are called "black gold" and "white gold". But the human being, the most valuable resource, is being wasted and destroyed. That is the "live gold".'

So I wrote a multimedia presentation called *Operation Desert Spring*, which included songs, poems and stories from MRA's heritage. It has now been developed into a bilingual version in Arabic and English to help abolish illiteracy, revive morals and promote a culture of human dignity.

In 2001, I lost both my parents. Now I am aspiring to fulfill my late mother's wish to establish the Tawba Compound, a mosque and IofC centre within the Egyptian cultural context, on land she had dedicated in Cairo. It will serve the needs of the community, inspiring change starting with oneself.

That year, the world was shocked by the Twin Towers attack in New York. We met with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. He wrote about the need for a dialogue of the Mediterranean, clarifying the Islamic standpoint against terrorism. In 2005 the Egyptian MRA team organized the first Pan Arab meeting for international IofC groups to crystallize the

***We need to remove not just weapons from hands,
but also hatred from hearts***

Arab contribution in creating a better future for all.

We should never forget that 'man's extremity is God's opportunity'. Helen Dumreicher, who lived in Egypt most of her life, used to say seeking inner guidance is 'the illumination, not the elimination of reason'.

My parents encouraged me to have friends of different faiths. In the rainbow, every colour counts. In life every human being counts. Humans are designed as strings that are meant to play together to produce a harmonious tune.

***Your medicine lies inside you, yet you do not see.
And your illness is inside you, yet you do not feel.
Do not claim that you are a small particle
while in you, the whole universe is folded
Ali Ibn Abi Talib***

I grew up with a lot of hatred towards one ethnic group. Apologies and forgiveness led me to find my calling to be a creator of peace

Ann Njeri Ndiangui

Machakos County, Kenya

Peace activist. Full-time IofC worker

MINE is a big heart for people. I have a big passion for Kenya, my home and for Africa, my beloved continent. As a social activist, I believe in the welfare of every human being. I dream and work for a Kenya, Africa and world where everyone has a chance to live a dignified life that goes beyond self, and embraces service to others.

I work with IofC in Kenya on peacebuilding with a bias towards women and young people. I have a diploma in IT, a higher diploma in Counselling and Psychology, and now I have a Masters in Peace Studies and International Relations.

In 2006 I came to know about IofC. It changed my life completely! My views about people, religion and races were totally transformed. The key was what I still refer to as the best gift in my life – the art of inner listening.

That still small voice – some call it conscience, others the inner voice and some God – challenged me to mend my relationship with my sister by apologizing to her and forgiving her as well. It was difficult, but somehow I found the courage. It left me feeling the most liberated person from within! It also opened my eyes and heart, to see and put right other wrongs of my life. I was challenged, and continue being challenged, to be the change I want to see.

After mending my relationship with my sister and a lot of inner searching, I began to see an even bigger need: the deep-rooted problem of violent ethnic division

in my country, specifically in my Rift Valley Province. I grew up with a lot of hatred towards one ethnic group in the region. I had to take a personal journey of healing through apologies and forgiveness towards them, and others. This journey led me to find my calling to be a creator of peace between all warring ethnic groups – a calling I continue to pursue with great passion.

I was challenged to live the values of my religion – not just talk about them!

I've seen in Kenya how IofC creates bridges across divisions through inspiring personal transformation. It gave me an opportunity to interact with and appreciate people from all backgrounds, races, beliefs, religions, social status.

I was initially conservative about relating with people of other religions. You can blame it on having been born and brought up in a largely Christian society, with hardly any contact with people of other faiths. You can also blame it on my church leaders who always made it clear that unless you believed in Jesus Christ you were doomed to burn in the eternal fire of hell!

With this kind of background, I needed a profound experience to be able to appreciate and respect people of other religions or no faith – even when I don't agree with some of their doctrines.

Today, I am a much stronger believer than I was before I met IofC. That is because I was challenged to live the values of my religion – not just talk about them! I also learnt that even if I believe that my religion is the best, I should not use it to attack or downplay others'.

Through IofC, I have made great friendships with Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and people of no religion. They have helped in strengthening my belief. I would be more than willing to fight for the rights of people of any faith, in matters that do not compromise my beliefs.

When you show the child the moon, it sees only your finger
African saying

The greatest threat to our nation is not food shortages or lack of clean water, but lack of good character in people

Mike Muikia

Subukia, Kenya

*Youth leader. Moviemaker.
Kenyan TV anchorperson*



I first met IofC as a high school student through a group from Action for Life 3 who visited my town. I joined them in visits to schools and for community workshops.

After the group left, we started an IofC team in my hometown. We met daily for times of inner listening, and sharing. With the help of people who had met the idea years before, we started some initiatives to conserve the environment. I started to become aware of my society's needs.

Some of us got an opportunity to go to Asia Plateau as interns. Attending conferences and meeting people from many different cultures had a tremendous impact on me. I realized that other countries are also in great need of healing, reconciliation and justice.

I started examining my life against IofC's values. In some instances it was hard to admit fully that I'd been wrong. For example, I hated my father. I decided to open up to him about what I really felt. Even if he was 100 per cent wrong, it did not mean that I was right. Today we are the best of friends.

We are all entitled to a purpose in life that satisfies, builds trust and integrity, and creates answers. We must dare to invent the future through boldly denouncing what is wrong and advocating what is right. And we have to start with a change in ourselves. As Gandhi believed, 'My life is my message.'

In our country, IofC is helping to reconcile communities in conflict, campaigning for clean elections and addressing other problems. The greatest threat to our national security is not food shortages or lack of clean water, but lack of good character in people.

Examine what is said, not who is speaking

Carole Khakula Tincas Copenhagen, Denmark

Kenyan artist, born into an 'IofC family'.

*Worked with IofC for four years
in India and Norway*



***The prayer discipline of
Islam challenges my
Christian self***

I had my first real encounter with IofC when I was looking to discover my innermost potential, find my life purpose and grow more as an individual. I was blown away to find people who had given their whole lives without salary to caring for others. I was inspired by their selflessness, servant-leadership and genuine interest in people. At that point, I was interested in receiving mentorship: what better place to find it!

IofC gave me the chance to interact with people of different ages and cultures. The young people really challenged me. They were leading changed lives, for a noble cause, subscribing to high values without compromise. I wanted in!

Like every other person who encounters IofC and tries it out, I started with putting right what was wrong in my life. I wrote letters to friends asking for forgiveness, and in some cases, being honest where I had not been before. After an internship with IofC India, I returned home and paid my debts. I took back borrowed university books that I had been intent on keeping for life. All these pretty tough moves made me, I found, a more honest and trustworthy person.

The service I gave, and the constant interaction with people from all walks of life, drew me out of my self-centred shell. I found myself engaging with people on a way less superficial level.

As I was exposed to different cultures and needs, my worldview broadened. This led me to ask how I could contribute to making the world better. Today, I find it impossible to think of what benefit a regular job would give me. It has to do more than satisfy me materially. I set up a ceramics industry that I hope in time will improve the socio-economic status of a lot of people.

As a Christian, I am wired to obey God through reading and understanding His word. Even though I spent time in prayer, I didn't have the discipline of setting time aside to listen to Him on a daily basis. Through daily quiet times, my time of reflection was enriched. Also, IofC gave me a push in walking my talk. I was held accountable and encouraged to take action.

Beyond Walls

My first encounter with other religious beliefs happened in India. Our group was multireligious. We were each asked to study a religion we didn't belong to and find out its similarities to our own, as well as its uniqueness. I studied Islam. I was surprised to find out that they recognized Jesus and Moses.

***I was interested
in receiving mentorship;
what better place to find it!***

At the end of it all, I had found a new respect for other religions and had even cast away my phobia of some. As a born-again Christian, that was tough! I saw the purity, beauty, spirituality and depth of other religions. For instance, the prayer discipline of Islam, as well as their perspective on purity, challenges my Christian self.

I believe that religion is a way of connecting to a higher power. However, when taken to the extreme, it can be a tool for destruction. Religion becomes dead when it is neither understood nor practised.

As we grow busier and busier, the world yearns for intuitive, deliberate care of individuals – something which IofC has perfected over the years and managed to hand down.

***You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain
amount of madness. In this case, it comes from non-conformity,
the courage to turn your back on the old formulas.
We must dare to invent the future***

Tasnim Idriss

Tunis, Tunisia

English Teacher. Interpreter



I started to regain faith in humanity the moment I got connected to Initiatives of Change, where coexistence is beautifully practised as a sacred faith

I was invited, as a young Tunisian who took part in the Tunisian Revolution, to a conference at Caux. Unfortunately, I couldn't go but sent a speech. It was distributed to everyone. From that, I knew IofC really cared about people. I vowed to be committed to its standards: absolute purity, absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness and absolute love.

IofC helped me put my beliefs into practice with more honesty, especially in my relationship with my mother. She has chronic kidney problems and my worry about her often caused misunderstandings. I have learned to make her happier by not justifying my deficiencies. Now I share much more with her, my family and friends, and I talk more willingly about my frailties.

In 2014, IofC France invited 12 of us young Tunisians to visit France. At the World War 1 cemetery in Verdun, I saw the names on the stones were from all regions and religions, my fellow human beings. I felt connected.

I felt the same sense of belonging sitting in a church in Lebanon for interfaith prayers organized by IofC Lebanon. Despite countless differences, we had a lot in common and we cherished the multiple flavours in our cultures.

We took pride in the fact that my dad and my aunt were jailed for belonging to two different opposition parties

What IofC advocates is perfectly in tune with my faith as a Muslim, especially linking personal change with making a difference in the world. The Quran says: 'Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts.' This powerful verse has always been my family's motto.

My grandmother, Assia Masmoudi, taught our family to cherish political diversity instead of splitting up like other families. We were proud my dad and my aunt were jailed in pre-revolution Tunisia for belonging to different parties. They shared love of nation but had different ways to show it.

None is higher than the other unless he is higher in virtue

*I am committed to help Africans embrace
the practices of IofC*

Yusuf Mustapha Olatunji

Lagos, Nigeria

NGO worker



MY entry into IofC was unplanned. In 2013, I went to deliver a job to the IofC centre in Ikoyi, Lagos; and met the Council of Management. They were warmly welcoming. Though I flopped on the job, they were not critical. Instead, they offered suggestions. At once, I loved those grey heads.

When I asked them what IofC was, they said ‘the change I yearn to see in the world begins with me’. They invited me to their next open programme and to research online. There, I was captivated by the four values. But I still needed to experience them. I attended the programme and joined the volunteer team. Since then, people in IofC, the values, and my potential part in remaking the world keep me on this path.

IofC reinforced personal accountability in me. I wasn’t a sinner, nor was I a saint. I found I had a lot to change in myself. IofC helped me. Now I try to be true to myself.

IofC helped me hugely in my relationship with my biological mother. Growing up in a polygamous family, without one’s own mother to care for you, was challenging. Luckily, one of my stepmothers (God bless her soul) was there for me. She nurtured me like her own. I resented my mother for leaving me and wouldn’t talk to her even when she tried.

Through practising inner listening, I found healing and was able to forgive myself, and my mother. It wasn’t easy and even now relating to her as she wants is problematic. But I try to perform my duties as a son and provide for her monthly needs. Though I love her and shower her with care, in truth, the bond is still missing. I try every day to play my part and be present in her life.

I used to lead a team of volunteers. But, distributing their stipend, I would pocket part of it, thinking they were overpaid. I corrected my mistake by asking for their forgiveness. That was hard. I also offered to return what I had taken. Everyone was astonished.

In 2019, upon return from training in Asia Plateau in India, I began to relate with people differently. I always felt I had superior knowledge and thought I was better than my co-volunteers because of my greater exposure to IofC values. This created enemies within the team and affected productivity and the collective commitment.

Through inner leading, I was able to correct this and began to be more respectful.

The practice of IofC helps me be more accountable to myself and to those with me, to never give up on myself and never to think that corrections aren't necessary. Little daily corrections provide the oil for my being able to move forward.

***Diversity is one of our
silent core values***

Through IofC, I have learned to forgive absolutely – to confess my sins, and to seek forgiveness from myself and others. I have learned to allow myself to heal. One of the greatest lessons IofC has taught me is how to be my authentic self to be free. I don't lecture people about changing. I talk about my experience of living out values whatever others say.

IofC has developed my leadership skills by genuine and sincere service to others. We all want to be served, but not all of us want to serve others.

IofC to me is not another religion or another tool to reinforce religiousness. It reinforces love, tolerance, neighbourliness, and the true nature of human beings. It has strengthened my belief that we are all one, irrespective of the faith we practise. Now I can openly deepen my spirituality with people of other faiths without getting bogged in religious differences. This is a unique gift that unifies and breaks down barriers.

Diversity is one of our silent core values. One of my goals is to involve more Muslims in the fold if we are to remake the world. For that we need not only Muslims or Christians, we need everyone. Yes, the world needs the tools IofC has to offer. But the world needs the people in IofC more.

I also don't want us to get lost in structures, and end up forgetting the people, the community, and the fellowship that has always been the backbone of this idea globally.

I am committed to help Africans embrace the practices of IofC. I believe Africa can be different, and help usher in sustainable change in the world. Africa, over 65% youth, is a goldmine for IofC. With the right people, we can tap into this and usher in a wave of genuine personal transformation. I long to organize with other like-minded, young, vibrant Africans to create platforms and secure support to champion initiatives across the continent.

IofC emboldens the idea that we can communicate with and hear from someone higher than us. This is a gift even to atheists.

***Do not waste water even if you were at a running stream
Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)***

As I grew up I got infected with the toxins of exclusivity. For me now, spirituality means unification with all beings

Abdullah Alwazin

Jakarta, Indonesia

Social work volunteer



WHAT attracted me to IofC in the beginning was quite shallow: the chance to sharpen my English-speaking skills and have more world exposure.

IofC totally changed my worldview. It reshaped my thinking and took me towards true multiculturalism and readiness to interact with people from different backgrounds. It cleared my vision.

It also helps me to keep examining my motives. I make new decisions daily, such as not to bribe traffic policemen when I pick up fines. It purifies my motives in relationships and prompts me to forgive those who hurt or infuriate me, especially those who owe money to me. That is the hardest part, because for me money is a symbol of my struggle to be an independent person – in fact, to be free from dependence on my parents.

I have had some tortured experiences regarding money relationships. It really hurts me when those who borrow money do not return their loans in time. However, on some occasions I too fail to guide myself with IofC beliefs. In practising IofC, there is a start but there is no end.

Even though by tradition I am Muslim, I am not a very religious person. So my responses may not represent the point of view of most Muslims. IofC ideas lead me in finding my way to understand Islam in the perspective of humanity.

In my early years, I was a multiculturalist. But as I grew up, I got infected with the toxins of exclusivity. IofC helped me to be rid of these toxins. It helped me understand that Islam is the religion of universal kindness, and rediscover the wisdom and values in my faith.

For me now, spirituality means unification with all beings. All human beings come from the One Great Source.

IofC encourages me to serve humanity and to work beyond interfaith dialogue to interfaith collaboration.

*God will never change the condition of a people
unless they change themselves*
Quran

Miftahul Huda Bandung, Indonesia

*Full-time IofC worker.
A coordinator of IofC Indonesia*



I became open to what other people felt about Islam. I thought what about my friends who are a minority in Indonesia?

MY parents gave me an Arabic name, which means ‘the key to enlightenment’. They probably hoped I’d become a good person who inspired others.

I was born in a small town in East Java, where my father had a small grocery shop in the traditional market. He did business with Chinese Christians who sent groceries to his shop without asking for advance payment. Their mutual trust eventually grew into a business partnership, from which our family benefitted. This relationship showed me

that I could live together with people different from me.

As Imam, my father devoted noon till evening to teaching Islam to the community.

One day, when I was five, my father took me into the city, to enjoy its playgrounds, zoo and a restaurant. Later that day, I found myself locked in a dark room in a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) crying, banging on the door, feeling deeply betrayed. I stayed there for four years with my elder sister and a younger brother.

My father thought that *pesantrens* would give his children the best education. But I felt unwanted and abandoned. I kept my anger inside, but I blamed my family for it.

In 2003 I came across IofC when Action for Life 2 visited the State Islamiya University in Jakarta where I was studying. Many of us got interested in IofC, but asked, ‘Do IofC ideals mesh with Muslim values?’ We felt it was presented in a western, Christian style.

But we were attracted by the genuine friendship we got from these people from other lands who neither drank nor smoked. We were also impressed by their practice of early morning inner listening. I did not always get up early to do my prayers, as I should as a Muslim. One day a Christian friend woke me – to perform Islamic prayers! He also invited me to have a time of inner listening. I found this friend was more ‘Muslim’ than I was.

I tried applying IofC. I learned to forgive my parents. I learned to forgive myself, finding out who I really am – a demanding person. I also accepted I was jealous of my

elder sisters who went to better schools. When I reconciled with my parents, I heard about the challenges they had been through. The more I heard their life stories, the more I understood where they came from.

In 2004, I went to the IofC Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in Cambodia, hosted by Cambodian Buddhist youth. They served us non-halal meals. It was a shock.

Even so, I chose to enjoy the conference. I became open to what other people felt about Islam. I returned home having experienced what it feels like to be a minority. I thought, what about my friends who are a minority in Indonesia? What about their cultural and religious rights?

Islam is misunderstood by some Muslims, as it is by non-Muslims

In 2006, after the Bali bombings, I went to Bali for a big conference on Global Healing. I was the lone Muslim in that international crowd, where it seemed OK for young people to drink alcohol, and men and women to mix freely. It was not easy for me.

In one group, people shared stories of their losses and their fear of Muslims. Finally, I took courage and apologized to the young Australian delegates, as most of the Bali victims were Australian, 'I do not represent those calling themselves Muslims who did the bombing,' I said. 'But I'm sorry the bombing was done by some Muslims.' They responded well, some in tears.

Since then, I am open about my identity, telling an Islamophobic world that Islam is misunderstood by some Muslims, as it is by non-Muslims.

I started working in Indonesia with young people who are in danger of being radicalized into terrorism. My team and I run regular dialogues between young Muslims and Christians, so that they can listen to each other, break down prejudices, become friends and work together to respond to Indonesia's challenges.

How can I make the message of Islam a blessing for the whole earth? It can only happen through a better me.

Speak only when your words are more beautiful than the silence

Om Bagaria Tezpur, Assam, India

Technical innovator. Businessmen. Seeker and activist. He inspired cleanliness and parks in Tezpur and was instrumental in getting the Assamese Courts to outlaw bandhs (coercive general strikes)



My restlessness scarred me and created problems for others, but the company wanted the fruits of my restlessness

IN April 1972 a friend from Shillong asked me to host an MRA group who were setting out on a road trip to Upper Assam. He said they were ‘change specialists’. I jumped at the opportunity because I felt the trade union leader in our tea machinery factory needed much change.

When I heard the group share their own stories of personal change leading to change in those around them, I was hooked.

Around then, my uncle, who had started the company, suffered a heart attack – a fall-out from a workers’ agitation, which had lasted eight years. I was praying for his recovery with factory staff in the temple in the plant’s precincts, when the thought suddenly hit me: ‘Have you ever prayed for that fitter you know has been ill for six months?’

I had come to believe there is some magic in unfettered obedience to intuitions of that kind. So I left the prayer hall, went straight to the fitter’s home and begged his pardon for the company’s neglect of its obligations to him as a worker injured on duty. I told him he must get treatment and offered to pay for it myself. I sent him 1300 kms to Bihar for specialized treatment.

The news of this spread like wildfire in the factory. For the first time I’d allowed my heart to take over from my head. The fitter said nothing, but it led to the end of the dispute. Previously I’d been scared of the union leader, but now I invited him and his team home for tea. They had no fewer than 32 demands. I asked them to list the ones they felt were really legitimate and promised I would fight to get them accepted. The dispute was sorted out within days. We started work on a new housing scheme for workers.

My uncle, a pioneer of tea machinery manufacturing in India, had defined industriousness. He put up slogans in the factory such as ‘Work is Worship’. That sort of thinking took me away from the essence of my being. I became a usable, programmable person.

My failing has always been hyperactivity, speed and noise. That wasn't just the effect of the business; it was part of my nature. My restlessness scarred me and created problems for others, but the company wanted the fruits of my restlessness. My uncle discouraged anything to do with the heart because it wasn't thought useful.

The western idea of putting a premium on the mind as opposed to the heart became superimposed on our culture because it produced material 'goodies'. We are mesmerized by it.

Silence was the antithesis of all I had been used to. The *rishis* saw long ago that we can only come face to face with our nature, and try to deal with it in silence. How else?

With IofC, my horizons widened. I became more aware of the needs of the society around me. Change for the better – personal, social and national – became the focus of my life.

***I left the prayer hall,
went straight to the fitter's home
and begged his pardon
for the company's neglect***

I got the values of forgiveness, apology and restitution from IofC to make practical my latent religious

beliefs such as the oneness of all beings, the eight-fold path for achieving yoga (union) with the divine, and that service to man is service to God.

A silent body is clean, uncluttered and airy, like a well-kept home. A silent mind is free of me and mine, likes and dislikes, hates and hurts, attractions and aversions. A silent heart is full of love, gratitude, generosity, forgiveness and compassion. A silent intellect is free of dogmas, fixations and isms.

I try to turn away from all kinds of compulsive activity, physical and mental, one thought on the coattails of another.

***Without an all-forgiving compassion in our hearts,
the gates to deepest consciousness can never open***
Ekhnath Easwaran

Vivek Asrani

Mumbai, India

Managing Director of Kaymo Fasteners.

Financial Trustee of IofC India, TOYBANK (helping 50,000 children in 285 play centres) and PRAJA (NGO holding elected representatives accountable).

Initiator of Association of Youth for a Better India.



We walked away from a deal with a corrupt, private sector company, which could have doubled our turnover overnight

TO my astonishment – and huge relief – when I told my parents I wanted to marry a Muslim, they agreed in 30 seconds! Rashida's parents took a little longer. They had major reservations, but today these are history.

Remarkably, Rashida had no objection to our two sons being brought up in the ways of our joint Hindu household; and for them to choose for themselves later in life. Religion has never been an issue between us. The spiritual dimension of life is what we place greater emphasis on.

IofC came into my life quite accidentally, when we were running a youth organization in Mumbai. Later, when I was very unwell, I was told to spend four months in the hill station of Panchgani. I called IofC and was invited to stay at Asia Plateau. It was a turning point in my life.

I started applying IofC principles in my personal and work life, experiencing amazing outcomes. I started listening more patiently, where earlier I would be quick to react. IofC also brought to my conscious awareness the connection between relationships at home and effectiveness in the workplace. All this helped change many policies at our workplace.

I came from a very traditional mindset. IofC challenged my thought process, many times to my discomfort.

At the threshold of starting a business, I decided to test my convictions by building it on principles. In our second year we were challenged while negotiating an order, which could have doubled our turnover overnight. It was with one of the most corrupt purchase departments I have come across – private sector, not Government. We walked away from that order.

I asked 'What does it take for us to be market leaders without compromising?' As a result, we grew our business in ways which we might not have. I discovered that when we anchor ourselves to principles, it unleashes our creativity and innovation.

Your mind should be where your hands are - Swami Chinmayananda

If you want to draw a straight furrow, harness your plough to a star



Jens J Wilhelmsen

Oslo, Norway

Speaker. Writer. Author. Unsalaries IofC worker for 70 years. In his 90s, still a revolutionary thinker

I found it difficult to live with my uncontrollable determination to be seen and acknowledged

WHAT drew me to MRA/IofC was the simple idea that the best place to start, if you want to have a better world, is with yourself and your own nation.

In May 1945, when freedom returned to Norway after five years of German occupation, I was 18. I had utopian hopes that the world would be a different place after the war. But the Cold War began. I feared a new war, with atom bombs. Decisions about the future were taken at a level where people like me had neither insight nor influence. I became totally disillusioned.

MRA gave me a tool to deal with my fears and frustrations. I found a sense of purpose and a faith that the ordinary person could make a difference.

To see where I needed to start, I wrote down four absolute moral standards – honesty, purity, love and unselfishness – and noted under each where change needed to begin. First were some white lies, which, to me, were justifiable. But the list became more revealing. Money I had stolen, gullible relatives I had fooled. Stories I had invented to impress friends. Playing around with girls, without a thought for them as people. Lack of helpfulness at home.

The humiliating details on the four pieces of paper brought me face-to-face with the true me. German philosopher Hegel said, ‘Truth is the entirety.’ That entirety had been lying like a dead weight under the threshold of my consciousness, causing pretence and lack of openness.

My first corrective step: I considered my stepfather too old to understand me. I accepted I had hidden so much from him that he did not know who I really was. I put my cards on the table. After a month he said to me: ‘I too have something I want you to know.’ In 10 minutes I got a totally new picture of a man I had lived with for years. After this we could talk about anything. Our spontaneity and freedom were no longer blocked by taboo zones. He then told my mother what he had told me. There was uproar and tears, but soon they seemed to have fallen in love with each other afresh. Home became much more enjoyable. For me that was decisive evidence that IofC works. At his funeral, I said, ‘He was my best friend.’

I changed from a disillusioned pessimist to someone convinced that something could be done in the most hopeless of situations. Consequently, I accepted an invitation to work in Germany, a nation I had resented. I lived there for five years and discovered Germans are much the same as Norwegians. I stopped attributing evils to different nations or communities, and recognized that all people have the capacity for change.

Working with the MRA group in Germany I discovered sides of myself I was unaware of as a loner. I liked to be number one, easily hurt when others were chosen instead of me. Our team motto was, 'Live to make the other fellow great!' That didn't come naturally to me. I found it difficult to live with my uncontrollable determination to be seen and acknowledged. When I treated my friends as competitors, I learned to admit my ego was quite big enough already, and swallow my pride. Often it took me long to get out the words, 'I am sorry', liberating and bridge-building though I kept discovering them to be.

I had no faith in God when I met MRA. Experimenting with the idea that there is a higher power, mainly through having daily morning inner listening times, little by little I came to believe: 'When

man listens, God speaks, and when man obeys, God acts'. When I acted upon these morning thoughts, I discovered I could be of help to others. My faith grew that there is a God who speaks. I also saw the clear relationship between personal life and society. I began to get involved politically.

What builds trust is not proving your idea is right, but being honest about your own struggles to live it. Admitting my own mistakes opened hearts and paved the way for solutions. Not always: admissions of wrongdoing can be rejected or greeted with suspicion. But the positive experiences predominate: conversations can begin that remove misunderstandings and cure prejudices, in personal relationships or between nations.

In the Norwegian media I read about India's conflicts with Pakistan or China. We in Europe have drunk the bitter cup of nationalism till it was empty, costing 16 million lives in World War 1 and 60 million in World War 2. Is Asia going down the same path as it ascends to world leadership? The world longs for examples where nations resolve their differences without resorting to war.

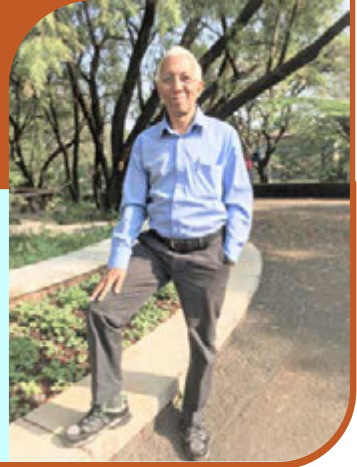
There is also the task of strengthening the fabric of moral standards and attitudes which makes free society possible. Demanding the freedom to do as we please is the grave-digger of that very freedom. Part of IofC's task is to assert the validity of such standards, and to help person after person live by them.

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage - Psalm 27*

*Human wisdom has clearly proved inadequate.
We badly need IofC's idea
of tapping into a higher wisdom for solutions*

Kiran Gandhi Shendurjane, India

*Metallurgical engineer IIT Mumbai.
Human Relations expert
with lifetime experience in industry*



IofC came into my life in 1970 when I was a final-year engineering student at IIT in Mumbai. What first attracted me was the quality of the people in IofC. I'd rarely come across people like these who did not blame others, who admitted where they'd been wrong, and took steps to make corrections. What I found most amazing were the unconditional apologies many had made to those they had hated or wronged. Their love, care and friendship won my heart.

A few specific things that I particularly liked about the ideas of IofC were:

- It does not expect you to follow any human leader, religious teacher or guru, but your own inner voice.
- The concept that every human being on earth has a unique contribution making the world better.
- For the world to change, change must happen in people; before expecting others to change, one must change oneself and become a part of the solution.
- A committed minority working as a team can change any situation. Even one individual can make an impact. I found this empowering.
- In a world with a large number of divisive ideologies, IofC united people across race, religion, class, generations.

I examined my past attitudes and actions to know where I was a part of the world's problems and how I could start becoming a part of the solution.

This involved honest disclosure of jealousy towards my brothers, returning a piece of precious metal I had taken from my college lab, and apologizing to my father for building an image in him about me that was very different from the truth.

My father was disappointed at first but later began to trust me. The experience of facing myself honestly inspired real hope in me that change is possible. From being a pessimist, I became more of an optimist.

At that time I was planning to start a small industry with two friends. But as I listened to my inner voice and talked with my new-found IofC friends, it dawned on me that perhaps my life could be used for a bigger purpose.

I decided to apply what I was learning in IofC to improving relations between labour and management in Indian industry. Labour was under the strong influence of extreme leftist ideologies. I felt industry needed an ideology to build trust between unions and management based on change on both sides. I joined a huge company, which belonged to the House of Tatas. Industrial relations were particularly bad.

Over the next 14 years, living by daily inner guidance and supported by IofC friends, I was able to inspire many managers and labour leaders to change and build mutual trust. Two bitter-rival union leaders got reconciled. After many troubled years, there were no more work stoppages in the melting shop of the foundry division where they worked.

Then an unexpected opportunity arose, to transfer to the company's training department. Going by my inner voice and against the advice of most people I knew, including my father, I accepted the invitation.

I launched a novel training programme called Human Relations at Work, which trained batches of managers, supervisors, union leaders and workers for three days – together, rather than in peer groups. Over a seven-year period, all 24,000 employees took part. The programme helped to transform the company's work culture to one of trust and cooperation, resulting in an all-round improvement in performance.

I had rarely come across people like these who did not blame others

That experience convinced me of the enormous transforming power of IofC's ideas, when applied steadily and sincerely. Over the years I have guided and supported Asia Plateau's programmes on ethical leadership for industry, such as Heart of Effective Leadership for higher management.

Although born into a Jain family, I had no introduction to formal religion. My parents did not practise any religious rituals. For a long time I hated these rituals as I held the view that most people who practised them did not live ethically.

It was only after meeting IofC that I slowly realized that a spiritual dimension was missing from my life. IofC helped me become aware of the presence of a kind, loving, guiding spirit available to me, and all human beings, when we are quiet.

IofC introduced me to the practice of inner listening. As I began experiencing small and big miracles arising from obeying the spiritual guide within, I began to say to myself: 'There must be a God'. I now feel this is my greatest treasure. It has opened for me the gateway to knowing God's directions for my life and also receiving His support. It has enriched my inner, family and work life.

My family background and IofC have enabled me to cultivate a broad-minded outlook towards the religious beliefs of others. I do not have any strong religious belief of my own, but I do believe in God.

Some important attitudes that IofC has helped me develop are:

- Refrain from being judgmental and labelling people, even in one's mind. People can sense it.
- Behave respectfully towards all. Never reduce the dignity of others, even if you do not agree with them or approve of what they do.
- Expect the highest; put a challenge but begin by accepting people as they are. Be appreciative of whatever good you see in them.
- Share your own shortcomings and struggles.
- You cannot change anyone. That can happen only when the other is ready.
- God has a timing for each one. You can pray, but not push.

Almost every major crisis in the world is man-made. Therefore, IofC's basic idea that change can only happen when people change remains valid. The challenges we face today are more complex than ever before. Human wisdom has clearly proved inadequate. We badly need IofC's idea of tapping into a higher wisdom for solutions.

I feel that many with long years in IofC seem to be giving up on the idea of living by inner guidance. We seem shy about expressing a strong faith in God's leading. As a result, our ability to pass on this faith to new generations is diminished.

I feel that Jainism's core message of non-injury to life and seeking forgiveness for causing hurts is critically important to answering the threats of global warming and extremist violence. Today's greed-driven society cannot be sustained for long. There is a need to advocate simplicity. I am striving to limit my own wants.

***Facing myself honestly
inspired hope in me
that change is possible***

***Blaming your faults on your nature
does not change the nature of your faults
Indian proverb***

Neeru Gandhi Shendurjane, India

Homemaker. Mother and grandmother

I grew up in a very religious family. My mother performed set prayers and devotional rituals every morning and when I was little, I used to sit with her. I loved her singing and recitation of Sanskrit *shlokas* (verses). She read from the Gita and told interesting stories from the Mahabharat. True, also attractive were the sweets handed out at the end of the prayers!

I was brought up to believe that to be close to God, I must help the needy, the sick and the poor. That was part of my belief in Hinduism. Growing up, I saw the behaviour of many neighbours was opposite to what is taught in our religion. I felt sad when I saw their hurtful attitudes, their ill-treatment of servants and of people of some other communities.

I was told a particular religious community, which kills animals to eat or sacrifice, was a violent one. I was discouraged from having friends from them. Though educated, I believed these rumours. I now see many wars with our neighbouring country are because of this attitude. It wasn't only me. So many friends and relatives hold such perceptions strongly.

When I first met my husband, Kiran, I heard from him about IofC. To my utter surprise, I saw that though he was from the Jain religion he ate non-vegetarian food. So I asked my father how come he chose him for me. His answer was that he was a good human. I was a little confused. But we got married.

After marriage I went with him to live in Jamshedpur. I met people from different communities. Many were non-vegetarians. But they were such good people, doing fine work to make society better. In the IofC team there, I met a Muslim, Kadir Bhai. He worked for poor Hindu women, helping them find employment. There were many others like him serving people without worrying about what their religion was. For the first time I visited a Muslim family's home – Kadir Bhai's – and had a meal with them.

Now I feel ashamed of my childhood beliefs against their community. I was so wrong in my misunderstanding of them.



For the first time I visited a Muslim family's home and had a meal with them

They who give, have all things. They who withhold, have nothing

Anjali Gandhi

Pune, India

Freelance media professional

The biggest reason we need to be the change-bringers is that we only have this one world to live in

FOR as long as I can remember, IofC, then known as MRA, has been an integral part of my life. From watching the MRA movie Give a Dog a Bone as a kid, and learning about the three magical words 'please', 'thank you' and 'sorry', to realizing the importance of absolute values and implementing them in everyday life as a responsible adult. Each day I feel lucky that my parents, who have lived by the IofC philosophy for over 40 years, gifted this way of life to me.

While IofC helped me form strong, value-based beliefs and principles, living by them day to day is a challenge. Especially when you are thrown into a sceptical world, where the importance of values is lost sight of amidst the corruption, everyday lies and self-righteous pretence. All this alongside the ridicule from friends, colleagues and society when you talk of moral standards. One feels tempted to waver in order to fit in.

However, over the past 35 years I have understood the significance of Mahatma Gandhi's words, 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. Change, which is inevitable, has to begin within me. IofC to me is the religion of 'humanism', looking beyond race, class and geographical boundary and giving everyone a fair opportunity to experience 'change'.

IofC values provide an inner compass that orients me in the right direction every time I have the urge to stray. It's not 100 per cent. I'm aware when I make a wrong choice. That awareness always pushes me towards correcting the wrong and getting on track.

I worked with a private FM radio station as a copywriter, making radio ads for clients. A well-established fact in the world of advertising is that people sell what is not real. Amongst the tools used are exaggeration, unhealthy competition and endorsements by celebrities. I often had internal battles when making an ad I knew was not entirely true and which would create a dishonest picture in the minds of my



audience. What could I do? My belief in absolute honesty didn't go hand in hand with the job that earned me my livelihood.

I also struggled with deeper questions: 'Is what I am doing really meaningful? Am I doing anything to make this world a better place?' The answer I got was a 'no'. In moments of silence a thought crept in that made me switch roles within the organization. I began working on the programming team. I then had the power to work with the radio jockeys and to be part of deciding what goes out to our listeners.

Radio is a powerful medium to reach the masses. My dream was to reach out to as many people as possible, to help bring about a different way of thinking that involves inner reflection and outward action. I had the opportunity to write and broadcast content that made people think about things that matter, such as urging citizens to vote in elections, building awareness about environmental issues and

***My belief in absolute honesty
didn't go hand in hand
with the job
that earned me my livelihood***

soliciting action through a tree-planting initiative.

My decision to switch roles came because of the seed IofC planted within me to search for a greater purpose in

life. I know that there will always be the need within me to lead a morally higher life – to give more than take from this world, to invest time with people and share my story in case it helps those who are sailing in the same boat as I once was.

There are many reasons why you'd believe no good could come out of this world any more. Violence, corruption, environmental calamities, religious struggles... the list is endless. But the biggest reason we need to be the change-bringers is that we only have this one world to live in. We can either watch others destroy it or we can do our bit to make it a better place so that generations after us thank us for giving them a clean, happy and united world.

My aspiration, for which I strive, is to be true to myself and use my writing to bring change in the world. We often think words are harmless and that, unless you've committed murder, you're innocent. But some of the worst downfalls in history have been brought about by carelessly flung words. Some of the biggest revolutions globally have been brought about by simple, inspired words of leaders.

The words we say will teach, if we practise what we preach

*As a Brahmin, I avoided going into
homes of some castes.
I let go of that*

Chandreshwar Khan Jamshedpur, India

*IIT Kharagpur engineer. Served the Tata Group,
Jamshedpur, for 37 years. Visiting Faculty Xavier
School of Management. HR Consultant*



MY father, who died at the age of 115, was a traditional Hindu Brahmin *Macharya* (teacher). He had a profound love of devotional songs. He used to perform daily rituals with simplicity, discipline and devotion; the verses of the Vedas, Gita, Ramayana and Mahabharata were always on his lips.

He taught me that to practise Vedic values you need to keep asking three questions: *Kas twam?* (who are you?); *Kin karosi?* (what are you doing?) and *Kutra gachhyasi?* (what is your destination?) He stressed that the answers to these three should be in tune with each other.

I also learned that the essence of the Mahabharata and Ramayana is love for others. In the Mahabharata, its author, Vyasa, says, *Astadush puraneshu vyasasya vachnam dwayam. Propkaraya punyay paapay parpirnam.* (The greatest virtue is to help others. The greatest sin is to cause pain to others.)

I met MRA in 1980 at a three-day training programme. I heard many friends tell how they had left bad habits like smoking, drinking and taking bribes. I felt I was already a good person compared to them, because I had done none of those things. And I chanted mantras well – and regularly!

The next day, these friends said that one can only understand MRA when one experiments by measuring one's life against absolute standards and listening intently to one's inner voice, looking for connection, correction and direction.

When I went into silence two clear thoughts came. I noted them down.

One was from the Mahabharata, where the Kauravas bent on war respond to Lord Krishna's peace efforts with the words, *Jaanaa mi dharmam nachme pravriti, jaana mi adharmam nachme nivriti. Eken deven hridyo isthito yatha niyok tashme tatha karomi.* (We know what is right, but don't feel like doing it. We also know what is wrong, but we want to do it.)

They had the courage to say, 'Yes, we know it is wrong but we will still do it.' I thought, at times I am wrong, but I never ever admit it.

I used to beat my first daughter merely because my father and father-in-law doted on her. I thought if all lavished such affection on her, she would get spoiled. But in that silence, the thought came that I must say sorry to her for repeatedly slapping her.

I had not been heeding the workmen in the factory. I started listening and giving respect to everyone. When we had a handicapped son, IofC prepared me to accept him as a divine soul too.

**Daily inner listening times
have helped me
discover new meaning
in the Hindu rituals**

Since 1991, my wife and I have opened our home for an hour every Tuesday evening to people of all backgrounds to meet to see how to bring change in society.

As Rotary president in 2008, I insisted no alcohol should be paid for from Club funds. I knew I ran the risk of becoming unpopular,

once it was known no alcohol would be served at my parties.

As a Brahmin, I had it ingrained in me to avoid going into the homes of some castes. I ate only in upper caste homes. I obeyed inner guidance and let go of that.

In my inner journey, daily inner listening times have helped me discover new meaning in the Hindu rituals. I started to understand the spirit behind them. Adding the spirit to ritual gave me a true spiritual experience!

Indians always quote: *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is one family). But to understand the true spirit, we need to go to its fuller version in the Vedas: *Ayang nijha paroveti ganana laghu chetsaam, udaar charita naangtung vasudhaiva kutumbakam* ('This is mine, that is yours' is the thinking of the low mind. For the big-hearted, the entire world is family.)

Economic liberalization has come to India, but only when moral and spiritual liberation comes too will we really be able to say '*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*'.

***Jo til mahi tel hai, jo chak mak me aag,
tera sai tujhme, jaan sake to jaan
Just as every sesame seed has oil and each stone fire,
so we have God within if we care to find him
Kabir Das***



In my joint family home I ran a petty but out-and-out dictatorship

Appal Raju Jamshedpur, India

Trade union leader. Trainer. Social worker

I come from a family of workers. Somehow I managed to study up to the 12th Class and then joined Tata Tinplate Company, where I eventually became a trade union leader.

In 1983 I got acquainted with MRA in Jamshedpur. Among the best ideas in it for me were inner listening times, 'change begins with myself' and to find 'what is right, not who is right'.

Earlier I thought that I was a very good person and that I easily scored 100 per cent in adherence to ethical values. But when I looked at my life honestly, I had to accept that my score was not even 10 per cent.

I used to deliberately create problems and then solve them, just to gain attention. People were intimidated by my outer appearance. In my joint-family home I ran a petty but out-and-out dictatorship. I was quite unaware that I was overbearing.

I would berate my wife in my mother's hearing, just to show my mother I had not become 'my lady's man'. Later, I would give an earful to my mother and make sure that my wife heard it, so as to please her and appear even-handed.

I expressed regret for this, asking them not to take my harsh words to heart. I admitted to my wife that I had taken her for granted. I used to just announce that guests were coming for a meal but not tell her how many. Then, if food ran short, I would display deep annoyance. After MRA I began expressing appreciation to her.

In the factory there was one officer with whom I had heated differences. I ended up threatening him. One day I saw him berating a worker over his work. He just happened to touch him. As union leader, I blew this up, announcing everywhere, 'He has manhandled our worker badly!'

MRA helped me change and become more positive. It inspired me to play a more constructive role in society. I began inculcating new habits – learning from others, seeking and giving forgiveness.

Before globalization, our factory's production of tin plates was at a peak. We used a manual process and had 3500 workers. When demand decreased, the company started automating and laying off workers. As union leader, I was offered a job in another unit. But I stood with my workers and took the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) with them, even though the package was abysmal.

***If people are aimless,
our society will be aimless too***

After some time, I had a strong realization that our country will not prosper until its villages prosper. So I started going to villages near Jamshedpur. There I was moved by people's simplicity, teamwork and trust, but I wondered why they were still so poor. Illiteracy, superstitions and addictions were part of the problem. I decided to work on these.

I started to counsel rural youth especially about their role in the country's future. I tried to help them focus on their studies to prepare them for leadership and responsibility, because I had become a union leader without any formal training and had then felt inadequate for the task.

If people are aimless, then our society will be aimless too. So I began to counsel people about the importance of their *dharma* (life's duty) in building a healthy family and society.

Previously, I respected other religions - IofC helped that respect to grow. I used to harbour some suspicion about Muslims, feeling most terrorists are Muslims. I began to be more understanding. I accepted that their rates of illiteracy and joblessness are far higher than Hindus'. I saw the need to work more intentionally with the Muslim community.

IofC has also helped me to challenge ills amongst Hindus. I have invited party-workers of India's prominent Hindu political party to visit a Dalit's home with me for a meal, telling them, 'Show me if you are really for a different future for India'.

So much of our population still lives in poverty. We have to look for root causes and then work towards answers. IofC can help sensitize people about their responsibilities, so that they will start giving back to society.

***Truth is one;
sages call it by various names
Rig Veda***

They reflected my dreams of a classless society

Vijayam Kartha

Pune, India

Nationally awarded as amongst India's best educators

My tryst with IofC

YEAR 1991. Usual busy day at the office as new principal of Kerala Samajam Model

School in Jamshedpur. An orthopaedic surgeon and a trade union leader walk in, to invite me for a conference. Inwardly I am curious about what brought these two together. They appeared to reflect my dreams of a classless society.

I couldn't attend that MRA conference. But soon after, I went to attend a family conference at Panchgani. The warm welcome there won my heart. It was different. Sharing of personal stories and inner listening times were unique features. I was challenged by, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world'.

IofC's moral absolutes were something I could vibe with immediately. In our village, we seven siblings were brought up by our parents practising these. Father taught us the interconnectedness of everything and the need always to be loving, truthful, grateful and respectful.

We were taught the Sanskrit saying, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) and Rigveda's *Ekam Satya, viprah bahuda vadanti* (Truth is one, the wise interpret it in many ways). Every morning before getting out of bed we recited the prayer *Karagre Vasathe Lakshmi* (the capacity to create happiness, prosperity resides within me) followed by *Samudra Vasane Devi...* upon waking (seeking forgiveness from Mother Earth for treading on her). Evenings ended with prayers for the entire universe's well-being, *Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu*.

At the conference, being shy, I spoke only in the smaller breakouts. But the times of silent inner listening really made me reflect deeply. I had entries on all four pages, under each absolute. I was reminded of when I was jealous, egoistic, angry, selfish, and indulged in the blame game. I was aware of them but the personal stories of speakers helped me confront them honestly. I decided to deal with them.

Within weeks of my principalship, my colleagues had started distancing themselves from me. Conversations stopped as I entered the staff room. Their greetings were not heartfelt. Through 'inner listening', I saw that in my passion to make our school the best in town, I was behaving like an authoritarian leader. I was losing out on my relationship with them - a source of joy for me earlier.

After returning, the first thing I did was to say sorry to a few people on my list including a few students. I invited our senior-most teachers for one-to-one times.

I started by asking them about their families and then, their suggestions for school. By the time I had finished with five teachers, a colleague stopped me in the corridor saying that teachers were talking about the change in me after the Panchgani workshop. From then on I delegated responsibilities freely. A family-like bonding spread across the school. Soon I evolved from a boss to a leader. Inner listening helped. I overcame timidity and followed my aspirations. It was fascinating to see ideas, opportunities, and people wondrously turning up to fulfil these dreams.

Some unique practices we introduced were invigilation-less examinations, peer help, hobby classes (cf. the present-day vocational education suggested by the National Education Policy), teachers wearing *khadi* (homespun) on Mondays, village adoption programme, and free schooling for underprivileged children in the English medium school campuses that lay vacant in the afternoons.

An alumnus, high in the corporate world, says on LinkedIn he learned integrity from the invigilation-free exams system.

I said sorry to a few people in my list including a few students

We started environment conservation and rural school adoption programmes, self-help groups, organic farming, vocational training and employment opportunities for young villagers, residential camp schools for out-of-school tribal girls, tree plantation drives, and entrepreneurship development programmes in surrounding villages.

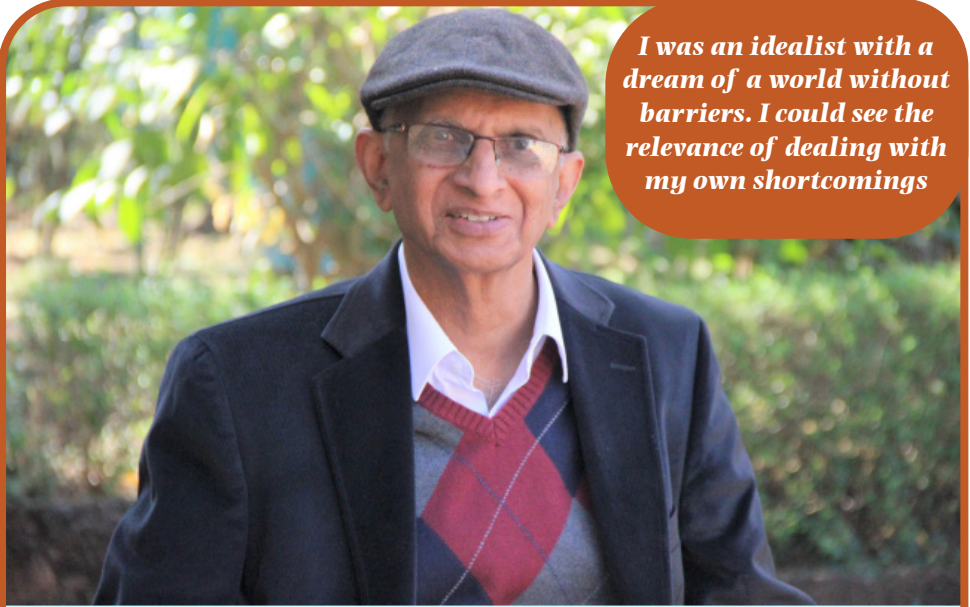
The daily inner listening and starting change with oneself gave me the courage to think beyond my role as principal. By 1995 the Kerala Public Trust was founded. We ran seven formal schools and two remotely located tribal schools, one outsourced by the Govt. of Jharkhand and the other, Eklavya School, from the Govt. of India. And four free afternoon schools for the underprivileged. That last - educating the poor - has been the most satisfying.

It's 31 years since I met IofC values. They give me a great opportunity to 'be the change I wish to see in the world'. Its practice still guides me. I falter but repeatedly it gives me the courage to make amends and move on.

Till the 1990s, Kerala had no religious polarization. It was normal to see people offering prayers in temples, mosques, and churches irrespective of their religion. Our father taught us to offer prayers while passing a mosque or a church. Many of us Hindus prayed in the chapel of our Christian school and participated in their festivals.

Today, when I see people arguing that theirs is the only true God, I am pained. But, IofC principles and the inner listening practice help me understand them too.

Compassion, the most gracious of virtues, moves the world
Kural



I was an idealist with a dream of a world without barriers. I could see the relevance of dealing with my own shortcomings

Dr Ravi Rao Shendurjane, India

Dentist. IofC Trustee

IN 1964, independent India was just 17 years old. My generation was already disappointed with the performance of India's leaders. Poverty, corruption and disunity were major issues. Many of us were captivated by the vision of Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of the Mahatma, of a united country free of corruption moving towards prosperity for all. We were prepared to pay the price of starting with ourselves. It made sense. The chance to play a concrete part in reshaping the country and the world was enticing.

While religion or God had little attraction, the idea of using absolute moral standards as a way to take an honest look at my life and to put right past wrongs appealed to me and many of my friends.

I started by admitting that as hostel prefect I had pocketed Rs 150. I returned the money. I listed all the wrongdoings that I could remember from my childhood, and put them right – including admitting to my father the kind of son I really was.

I was an idealist with a dream of a world without borders and barriers. I could see the relevance of dealing with my own prejudices and shortcomings if we were to realize any such dream. Naive as I was, I saw the task of building a new world as something that could be achieved easily with vigorous campaigns and mass movements. I believed thousands would change instantly on coming across the 'totally reasonable proposition' of IofC.

IofC provided simple tools – the inner voice and the four standards – which helped me remain true to my religion. As I felt inadequate to the task of changing society I turned to God. Humility began to set in with the realization of the need for a greater power.

As a Hindu I felt, and still feel, that IofC adds nothing to what my religion already has. On the other hand, IofC brought me closer to my own religion and made it meaningful.

***The higher power is
resident in one's own inner Self***

For instance, the Bhagavad Gita states that life's purpose is two-fold: *atmano suhkaye, bahuda hitaye* – spiritual fulfillment of the individual and the wellbeing of the whole world. Both go hand-in-hand; one cannot be without the other. The path is prescribed in the scriptures.

From time immemorial my tradition has welcomed 'truth' and 'good thoughts' from all directions. I was fortunate to go to a Hindu Mission Boarding School, which practised this concept. They had leaders of other religions speak to us regularly. So I learned to accept the truth of other religions and be inspired by them.

In my early days I learned from the leaders of IofC about caring for people – being interested in what the other is interested in, not being a bore, sharing my weaknesses and needs rather than holding forth on my virtues and achievements, being straight when needed but with love.

From life, I have learnt that love really is the ultimate. Of course, not the sentimental variety, but the one which makes you identify with the other. As the Western Indian guru Meher Baba has said, 'You and I are not WE; you and I are ONE.'

To realize this is my life's mission. I believe that is what will touch hearts. You also need to appeal to the mind through reasoning and accepting the need for wisdom higher than human. Without that the world lands itself in one catastrophe after another: wars, economic crises and environmental disaster.

Any attempt to deal with climate change just by campaigns and advocacy, without the attitudinal changes needed on a massive scale, will not stop the destruction of the world.

When one experiments, one discovers that the higher power is resident in one's own inner Self. And that it will give direction and strength to deal with the needs of society, as well as help with human weaknesses.

***The sense organs are of value.
But the mind is greater than sense organs.
Even greater than mind is wisdom.
Yet higher than that wisdom is the Self
Gita***



*I quit my perfect job and city
and moved back to India*

Archana Rao Shendurjane, India

Previously International Sales Manager for the Middle East and Asia for Faber and Faber, UK. Country Director for Global Citizen Year – an NGO offering high school graduates from abroad an immersive experience in India, Brazil, Ecuador or Senegal

MY early years were largely defined by the four standards and inner listening. I rejected them. When I was young and inarticulate, I simply lied my way through inner listening times. Later, in my early 20s, I battled it all on a more intellectual level.

A few years ago, having reached a high point in my publishing career, travelling the world in luxury and living a decadent, privileged life, I began to question the purpose of my life. Once I decided to look into my heart with honesty, there was no looking back.

I quit my ‘perfect’ job and city – Fabers and London. Most painfully, I quit my proximity to my sister, her family and my friends. I moved back to India to help my parents in their work.

I chose to live and work at Asia Plateau. Its rural development initiative, Grampari, rekindled my connection with the idea of IofC and its staggeringly simple ways. I’d like to share one small example.

My main role at Grampari was the protection of springs in the Western Ghats mountain range, to enable clean drinking water to reach villages. On one gruelling mountain trek we stopped at a modest hut, three hours from the nearest village. We met three families. Scoffing down the delicious yogurt they offered us, I got talking to one of their children about school. Then it struck me. Our once-in-a-lifetime-never-to-be-repeated trek was his daily commute to school.

He said he had a problem. After school ended he had to trek back particularly fast to ensure he had enough sunlight to do his homework.

‘Sunlight?’ I asked. The adults smiled benignly at me, explaining that they did not have electricity. We were so moved that we decided that we would donate two solar lanterns to these generous, undemanding people.

A month went by and I hadn't done anything about it apart from telling this story with much enthusiasm to all my friends, even blogging about it.

One criterion for giving these lanterns was that someone from those three

I am an IofC 'baby' – born to IofC parents. I used to say this with embarrassment and some anger. Today, I say it with deep gratitude

families would have to come to Grampari to be trained in their maintenance and repair. Their homes were so inaccessible that it was hardly surprising they didn't make the trip.

Who could reassure them that I would make good on my promise?

This story was told to 17 boys taking part in a residential programme at Grampari. It resonated deeply with one of them, Vinayak. He couldn't go, but Deepak Jadhav, our handwashing programme coordinator, and five others, resolved to take the training to the families. They hiked all the way up, carrying the lanterns and solar panels.

The lives of these three families have been changed forever. Vinayak, a trained electrician, decided to be on hand for any issues these lanterns might have. He had come to Grampari angry, arrogant, missing the disruptive village gang he was part of. He experienced a fundamental change in himself. And I did too, because of him.

The work of Grampari is effective because compassion is at its core. We see some extraordinary acts of love.

Every day I spent there, I realized how much further I have to go on this journey. How little I really know. How much I have to learn. That understanding is deeply reaffirming and tremendously exciting.

It's not just the free solar lanterns that change people's lives: it is the compassion of thought.

***You are not a drop in the ocean.
You are the entire ocean, in a drop***
Rumi

*I was illiterate but I was determined,
come what may, my son should get educated*

Kamal More Godavali, India

Grampari worker



I am from Godavali village behind the Asia Plateau tableland. We were eight in our house. Our family subsisted on daily labour, whenever that was available. Sometimes I would get paid. Sometimes not. Then we would go hungry for days. At times, I would collect scrap metal to sell and fill our stomachs.

My husband didn't like me going out and working. One day my husband had a paralytic attack. He was immobilised at home for three years. Due to lack of money, we could not get him any treatment. So, he died. Four years later, my mother-in-law also had an attack. For her too, we could not afford medical treatment. She died also.

I have a son who went to school using textbooks from others till Class 10. I could not afford to give him school uniforms, exercise or text books. He went through school using the same uniform he got in the Class 5. Sanjeevan School, where my mother worked, used to give away old uniforms (of hostelites).

It was the day of the last (school-leaving) exam paper of Class 10. He got a workbook from the school costing Rs 35 (50 cents). The school was to close till exam results were declared. I did not have the 35 rupees to be paid. So he faced humiliation for not being able to pay the money. He passed the Class 10 exams with 65%, but he did not go to fetch the result certificate because he could not pay that money.

Somewhere I felt strongly that I was illiterate and never went to school. I was determined, come what may, that my son should get educated. Two years went by. Then I came to know that one could find small jobs at Grampari. Here, training is given to make bags, dolls, earrings, soap etc. Six of us women from the village went.

All along, I feared that if I went out and worked, there would be quarrels at home. I came to Grampari with that fear in my heart. But I saw that only if I earned, would my son get educated. I resolved within that even if I am kicked out of the house, I will take my child with me and ensure he finishes school. Coming to Grampari, I was very nervous because I had never worked outside home, never talked to better placed men, never stood in front of them.

I wondered how I would manage but Grampari's Jayashree Aunty gave me confidence and courage. She said that even if you are illiterate, you can still earn some rupees. You can do anything because you have special abilities.

Then they asked us to have a time of inner listening. That gave courage, that

gave strength. From then on, I worked and started earning a little. Enough to get my son admitted in Wai College. And he graduated.

Later he did a special course in an institute and started working in a shop. When he turned 27, I got him married to a girl who was literate - a 12th grader. After marriage, I asked her if she wanted to continue studying. She said yes. So I got her admitted to Mehta College nearby.

She would go to college and I to Grampari. Some domestic work would remain undone. No matter how much I had learned by then, I was still an uneducated village woman. I became aware I had become a domineering mother-in-law. I had begun hurting the girl with my demeanour, even without saying anything. At times I would bang pots, sometimes I would react angrily to her.

By then I had begun inner listening times regularly. From that I realized I was doing the wrong thing. I apologized to my daughter-in-law for that. I also had the thought that if I went to work only after finishing household chores by myself, then the girl would be able to go to college freely and study well. So I started this new routine.

Change has taken place in me through inner listening in silence

She graduated as a topper in her college. She was felicitated especially by the college. I was invited to that function. I was so happy to see that, and happy that I had allowed her to study on. Now my daughter-in-law is in her final year of MA. She has a two-year old daughter. If she wants to study further, I am ready to assist.

In the shop where my son used to work, he had a salary of Rs. 3000. He had worked there for 15 years but his salary never increased. Now if I had been timid and without courage as before, I would have kept on accepting that. But regularly listening to the inner voice was giving me greater strength. I told my son to quit the job and set up his own shop. He rented a place, set up his own shop. All is going well.

There is a story behind my struggles. Since my mother 'gave' my father only daughters and that too three of them and no son, he abandoned her. I wanted to go school, but having only a grandmother and mother to look after us, we had no choice but to work, seeking daily labour to fill our stomachs. But what I missed myself, I see being accomplished in my daughter-in-law today as I support her studies. She seems destined to fulfill my unrealized dream.

All this I have done is after the Grampari encounter. I am grateful to it and the Centre, Asia Plateau. They lifted me up and out, placing my feet on the path to a happier future.

Inner listening times give me the courage to move forward and I will continue to do so.

You are the sculptor of your own life
Vaman Rao Pai



In controversial issues, she was often seen sitting quiet to take decisions

Manda Tai Beloshe Beloshe, India

Elected female village head

IN 2015, the government ruled mandatory 50% reservation for women for the post of *sarpanch* (elected head of village councils). Beloshe village unanimously chose Manda Tai Beloshe. She asked herself, 'I have no experience. How will I manage the village?'

Provisionally, around then she went for a three-day IofC training at Grampari in Asia Plateau. There she experienced inner listening on what changes she needed in herself, and as *sarpanch*. She decided to become less irritable with her husband and mother-in-law. That resulted in great support from both. Unusually, her husband never interfered with her work.

In the village, she involved all the *Gram Panchayat* (village council) members and village folk in every decision, small or big. Thus, she got excellent participation, even won opposition support. For 14 days, villagers gave *shramdaan* (voluntary labour) for spring conservation work and brought, after years, regular spring water from the hillside to the village.

When controversies arose in meetings, she was often seen to sit quiet to take decisions.

During Covid quarantine for outsiders, some youth abused and even manhandled her. Villagers advised her to file a police complaint. She kept calm and thought, 'If I do so, the future of those boys will be harmed.' She inspired the villagers to forgive them. No complaint was filed.

Inner listening sessions for villagers are held on Wednesdays at Grampari. One was on dealing with poisoned relationships. She thought, 'True, everyone sees I'm doing good work but I haven't talked to my *jau* (sister-in-law) for 16 years.' Her *jau* had made vicious allegations against her, rupturing relations. Manda Tai decided to start talking to her. Within days her *jau* started talking with her on her own.

Today, through Manda Tai's repairing relationships at home and employing inner listening as *sarpanch*, not only do villagers sing paeans of praise for the work done in her tenure, but people in her own home speak highly of her.



Sachin Beloshe

Sachin Beloshe is administrator in a chain of quality schools in Pune. His ancestral village is Mandatai's village, Beloshe.

Sachin tells he recently found a total cure to his knee pain of months when he apologized for longstanding anger at someone. The relief started as he penned the apology and within eight days that pain had wondrously ceased entirely.

As a Maratha, he dealt with inborn discrimination against so-called 'lower castes'.

This is a longstanding issue disfiguring the fabric of life for the 125 million people of Maharashtra.

'Since childhood, I have seen the very bad treatment meted to the Dalit community in our village and society. I thought they deserved that treatment. Because of that my mind was not clear enough to question why. Hatred had been lodged in me towards that community.

'While doing collective village work and also when I headed the Maintenance Department of Asia Plateau, I took that same discrimination with me. This led to a very bad relationship with a Dalit in the team. With time, the gap widened and I hated that person more. My seniors noticed this and tried a lot to make me see this wrong. In the daily inner listening times in the Asia Plateau office, this was what stabbed my mind constantly. But I cloaked it with lies.

'During the Covid lockdown, all Asia Plateau employees were given a Hindi book of 100 personal change stories called *Prayashchit se Parivartan* (Transformation through Repentance). My copy of the book lay unfinished at home for a long time. One day I picked it up again and chanced upon the remarkable life of Appal Raju (see Page 203) His experience about his change of attitude on casteism was a challenging eye-opener. That night I could not sleep.

'For a few days my battle with myself raged. I, a Maratha, how could I ever ask a Dalit person for forgiveness? Then I remembered an AP resident saying that if I do not put the fuel of inner listening into the car of my life, then my car will get stuck. So, my inner voice told me clearly to apologize. I still took about 15 days to do so. Now all discriminatory feelings about Dalits are completely erased from my being.

My whole outlook has become more compassionate.

***The one lesson I learned:
we should not live
with any deadweight on our minds***

***I speak yet I am silent
Tukaram***

‘IofC for Life’ (IfL) Outreach Team



THE next section features a unique group of young adventurers who, at the time of writing, are serving society without salary.

Twenty young people made themselves available, without laying down any conditions, to be part of the mobile outreach team of Initiatives of Change for Life (IfL), sharing their experience of IofC in India and beyond.

Wherever they went, they found captivating ways to emphasize the universal truth that when people change, a new factor comes in which expedites the resolution of tensions or conflicts. They travelled on bitterly cold or ultra-hot days, driving on dusty roads or spending hours on trains whose toilets were less than inviting.

They visited most of the beautiful Seven Sister states of North East India. They spent time with disaffected Bodos in Assam, young Nagas and their student bodies, officials of the Cooperative Department, Block Development Officers (BDOs) in Meghalaya and Assam, surrendered militants from the Garo Hills, border security and police officers, NGOs, village councils and *zilla parishads*.

They also had interactions with the Agricultural University in Akola; with the Tibetan community in India; with Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka's universities and cities; the government hospitals of Bihar; municipal corporations; and drug rehabilitation centres in Punjab.

In the three years, members of the group had group or personal interactions with over 20,000 individuals.

Participants were not paid, but thanks to the generosity of Providence and of

the communities they visited, they never went hungry or lacked shelter at night. State governments contributed generous sums for the training IfL provided to nearly 2500 of their officials.



Outreach team with Chief Minister of Nagaland

This was a selfless adventure in faith, which worked. IfLers believe it can work for any similarly devoted group, who are out to serve others. In its early days, inspired by its initiator, Frank Buchman, IofC grew all over the world through constant outreach campaigns. IfL's experience shows this method is still viable.



I had cheated in my MA exams. Knowing that my degree might be revoked, I wrote to the department and told them



Zooni Dash, Rourkela, India

MA Sociology. Trainer and group leader

IofC has changed my life completely and given meaning to it. There were many blockages within me because of unaddressed, unseen strings pulling me back. Dealing with them was the way for me to become free.

I used to dwell on impure thoughts especially from reading unhelpful books. They blocked me from giving myself fully to others. Then I'd feel bad about my thoughts and shut down, swimming in a pool of guilt and self-pity. I stopped reading some of those authors. I started walking the extra mile in doing something for someone else daily and those negative, self-absorbing thoughts disappeared.

Jealousy took root in me because a friend was experiencing an exciting time in Japan and I wished I could do the same. A distance towards him grew in me. It took some time, but when I met him I disclosed my feelings. We are good friends today and feel we have nothing to hide from each other.

I had cheated in my MA exams. Knowing that my MA might be revoked, I wrote to the department and told them everything honestly. The head of department actually appreciated my letter and eventually the coursework was diversified – something I had been wishing for while I was studying. She wrote back, saying that small steps like the one I had taken make one a better person.

These days I stop and correct myself when I exaggerate. I used to lie in uncomfortable situations. Now, with regular inner listening times, I am aware of my intentions. I keep asking myself, 'What is driving me?' I experience an energy shift every time.

I wrote a letter to my father expressing my hurt over his behaviour. It backfired.

I learned later that the only way I can help someone change is by loving them. It's been over six years now. It is still a struggle, but I am holding on.

I'd felt superior to my brother because I had studied more, and seen more pain. I learned to see his part of the story. Now both of us acknowledge each other's struggles, and talk like brother and sister.

With my mother, I am practising patience. I now understand where she is coming from – a space of deep worry for her 34-year-old daughter! So, we don't argue any more. There is much more understanding.

One purpose of my life is to build bridges of friendship between the peoples of the mainland and of the North East of India

During my first visit to Nagaland in 2012, I came across the hurt that people still have in their hearts because of actions of the Indian government and army. I have publicly apologized to them as an individual Indian. As a result, an Angami village near Kohima has more or less adopted me. This has helped me find one purpose of my life: to build bridges of friendship between the peoples of the mainland and of the North East of India.

I was born Hindu but was never forced to practise. My name is Muslim. Our family has always gone to Sikh gurdwaras and worn a *kada* (a steel bangle). I have a cross on me, which was given to me by a Naga pastor. To me it signifies my love for the Nagas and is a reminder to look beyond myself.

I feel compassion is my religion. I believe very deeply in the power of prayer: I have seen it work.

Religions are like the skin of a banana. Ultimately, everyone wants the white inner fruit, which to me is meaningful spirituality, a way to be one with oneself and with God.

***The purpose of life is to discover our gift.
The meaning of our life is to give it***



Only love could fill the void I had been trying to fill through money

Sunny Mawiong

Shillong, Meghalaya, India

Business Administration and Law graduate.

A founder of the civic movement, New Dawn, in Meghalaya

I studied in a prestigious school in North East India and graduated from a reputed law school in Pune. Both these institutions taught me to stay determined to accomplish big things in life. I have lived a comfortable life and always wanted a luxurious lifestyle. In that process, I became chained to many things which hindered my growth as a human being.

For some years I was a hopeless alcoholic. In that period, I nearly lost my life in accidents several times. When I met IofC in 2013, I had stopped drinking.

Daily inner listening strengthened my commitment to say no to alcohol by helping me see its drawbacks. Firstly, I become a selfish human being when I drink, focused solely on myself. Secondly, if I want to create change in the world, I need to have a healthy body. Thirdly, I've brought enough pain to my family and friends over the years. Seeing them happy with me now helps me.

I now see that only love can fill the void within that I tried to fill through money and what it can buy. Thinking beyond myself has helped me grow as a human. After a year of trying to live life as directed by inner listening, I wrote a letter to my parents expressing appreciation of them as I had never done before. The letter was delayed and arrived when I was at home. My mother opened it. I saw tears of joy streaming down her face.

I become a selfish human being when I drink

I always thought I cared for others. But when I went to the Garo Hills in my state I realized

how superficial my caring was. As a Khasi, I'd failed to reach out to the Garo tribe

and was apathetic about their problems. In fact, it was the same with all other N E India tribes. Superiority clouded my thoughts. Inner listening became a force in helping me overcome my exclusiveness. It planted the thought to carry the burdens of tribes beyond my own.

From childhood, I built up bitterness against the church because of the hypocrisy I saw. I left my church and tried to find one that spoke to me. I ended up criticizing any church I attended, and finally not attending church at all.

During inner listening I realized I was guilty of the same hypocrisy and lack of love I accused the church of. I knew what I had to do but ego stopped me. For weeks I did my best to ignore the thought I should write my church's pastor and seek his forgiveness and that of the church. When I finally did this, it freed me from the clutches of my ego and from being over-critical.

From wanting a lavish lifestyle with the best of everything to humbly living a life with only what I need has been a drastic change of direction. But it has been fulfilling to serve, lead and care for others.

Practising IofC gave me courage to travel to the militants' stronghold in the Garo Hills. The day before a programme for surrendered militants, I reflected on what I could offer. The only thing I could think of was giving my story of change.

My mother opened the letter. I saw tears of joy streaming down her face

After I shared, there was a time of silence and then we gathered in small groups. One person opened up about having been physically abused by his father. This had stirred great anger in him, leading him to flee home for the jungle and take up arms. He told me he was going to seek his family's forgiveness for the trouble he had caused. I am still in touch with him.

I have been able to find a strong connection with other faiths, through people who are living them out – a Buddhist living compassion, a Hindu upholding dharma, a Muslim imparting grace. They have enlightened me and made me a better practitioner of the Christian faith.

From what I have learnt from reading and listening to stories told by older people, MRA/IofC has played a role in transforming the world through change in individuals. One example is the bloodless formation of Meghalaya in 1970.

Through IofC, several politicians had a change of heart and reconciled with the leaders of Assam, from which our state was carved without violence.

***You were called to be free.
Do not waste your freedom to indulge the flesh.
Serve one another humbly in love – Galatians***



Without change in my attitude, I would not have been able to work with Muslims for my society or for world peace

Jigme Wangyal Basgo, Ladakh, India

PhD scholar in Buddhism. University Lecturer

I have spent most of my life outside my home state, Ladakh, which is in the far north of India. At the time of my birth the situation there was disturbed due to tension and periodic fighting between Muslims and Buddhists. Even though I am a Buddhist, there was hatred in me towards Muslims. I used to think they were evil and held poisonous dogma.

After coming across IofC and spending time in introspection, my attitude totally changed. I made some Muslim friends through *facebook*. Relating with them made me realize they were not what I used to think they were. With these new Muslim friends, I conducted some community bridgebuilding sessions in schools in Leh, Ladakh.

Without a change in my attitude, I would not have been able to do anything with them for my society or for world peace. This has been one of the biggest achievements in my life.

Six years ago, I took a year's gap from university to improve my English and went to Bengaluru with one of my friends to take some basic English courses. It cost us a huge amount of money and after four months we decided to leave.

Around then, a friend told us about the IofC centre at Asia Plateau, Panchgani. He said it would give me a chance to interact in English with many learned people. I looked into it, and saw there was an internship programme there.

We applied and within two weeks were accepted. As we entered the gates of the centre, I sensed a special, tranquil atmosphere, which made a deep impression.

The next morning, we were called for an hour of inner listening and sharing. It was so peaceful. I could think clearly, and sat in comfort in silence for the longest time in my life. I recalled the great lines of Buddha: 'You are your own teacher. You make your own future.' and 'Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.'

I realized their real meaning during this hour's journey of silence. It gave me

a strong feeling of appreciation for Initiatives of Change. I decided to carry this message to as many people as possible, and to use it in my day-to-day life.

I used to be a shy person, who hardly spoke in front of people. After experiencing listening to the inner voice, I could do extraordinary things. For instance, a few years ago, I organized IofC programmes in schools, the first ever in Ladakh.

My purpose in life is to be happy by seeing others happy. I strongly believe in the

I sat in comfort in silence for the longest time in my life

concept of karma. It is not easy.

One needs great inner strength to build unselfishness and a

compassionate mind and to place others before self – the only genuine source of happiness.

Both IofC and Buddhist practice help me to differentiate between good and bad in my life. However, through the language and tools of IofC, I can help large numbers of people belonging to different religions and cultures.

Spending silent time listening to the inner voice – taking time to recognize and filter my thoughts to get them purified – is fundamental to adopting right speech and right actions.

***If you think you are too small to make a difference,
try sleeping with a mosquito
The Dalai Lama***

*It was the first time that somebody
had returned grant money*

Penuo Hiekha Kohima, Nagaland, India

*Community builder,
helping Naga youth serve society*



MY ambition has always been to become a social worker. My father was always available to people. The moment I woke and came into the kitchen, there'd be people there waiting for him. From a young age I knew I wanted to be there for people. When I was 24, Niketu Iralu spoke in Kohima on career guidance. I was captivated by the insights he gave. I wanted to draw from his knowledge bank. Later I discovered this bank was IofC.

At first, I could not connect with the inner voice. As a Christian, praying and reading the Bible were how I understood the 'quiet time'. But over a period of time I realized that we often pray but forget to listen to what God wants us to do.

I had a thought to apologize to my Manipuri friend. It was a broken friendship. I tried to outsmart this thought but nothing new opened for me.

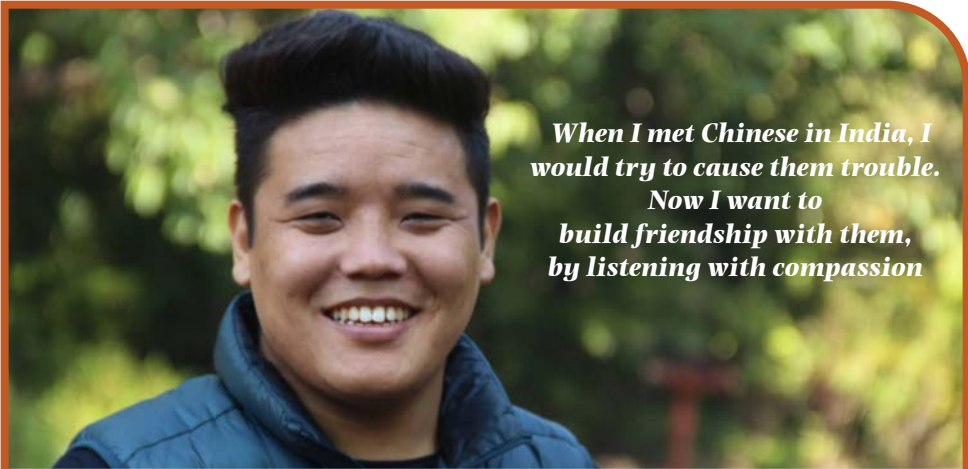
I wrote a letter to her saying sorry for my pride and ego, which had made me try to pull her down as a non-Naga, and for not contacting her for so long. I prayed hard and posted the letter.

Three months later, I received a simple handwritten reply. That letter is still with me. It made me believe in the inner voice. Later, I visited her home. I thought: 'You have started the journey of becoming a changemaker.'

In 2011, we staged an IofC youth conference in Nagaland. Seventy-two people came from 13 countries, as well as numerous Nagas.

Finance was the most challenging part of organizing the conference. The North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC) sanctioned a grant of Rs one lakh, Rs 75,000 up front and Rs 25,000 on production of receipts. Our final accounts showed that we had a large sum left over from their grant. The inner voice eventually guided me not to divert it. The director said, 'This is the first time in NEZCC's history that somebody had returned grant money!'

It's never too late to be what you might've been



*When I met Chinese in India, I
would try to cause them trouble.
Now I want to
build friendship with them,
by listening with compassion*

Damko Wangyal

Tibetan living in Panchgani

BCom. Masters in Social Work. Trainer. Group facilitator. Art therapist

I was a habitual liar, full of many small lies. If these lies were piled up, they would make a mountain. Before IofC, I didn't think they were lies. If I was late, I'd say, 'I forgot the time'. I never thought of it as a lie.

I received a scholarship from the Tibetan authorities to get coaching for my Common Admission Test (CAT), but left the coaching class halfway. It took me some time to accept my error. I felt ashamed because I always spoke up against corruption, but here I was being corrupt myself.

On 31 December 2014, I decided to pay back the money I had taken for the course so as to start the New Year with greater honesty. At that time I was interning at Asia Plateau. Afterwards, I went to see the scholarship officer in Dharamsala and told him I was ready to pay the money back in instalments.

He told me that there were many Tibetan students who took such scholarships and failed to complete their courses. Nobody had ever before come to return the money, or even just to say thank you. He said, 'If you really want to return the money, become a good, honest Tibetan. Make us proud and in the future give a scholarship to someone who is in need. That would be more than enough.' This gave me courage to try to live out the values of IofC.

I was born in a small village in Tibet but fled my country at the age of six and came to India as a refugee. Since childhood, I felt I was different from Indian students because I had to study hard and fight for my country.

I grew up with a lot of hatred in my heart towards the Chinese, who occupy

our country. When I met any Chinese in India, I would try to cause them trouble. By inflicting pain on them I wanted to make them realize the pain the Chinese government is causing to Tibetans within Tibet.

Today I still look for opportunities to meet Chinese, but my intention has changed. I want to build friendship with Chinese by listening to them with compassion. I have come to understand that the Chinese people are also going through a lot and that the ordinary Chinese are not those who decided to occupy Tibet.

When I celebrated my 25th birthday, the first people to give me gifts were Chinese. Later, I took

IofC encourages people to be practitioners and not preachers

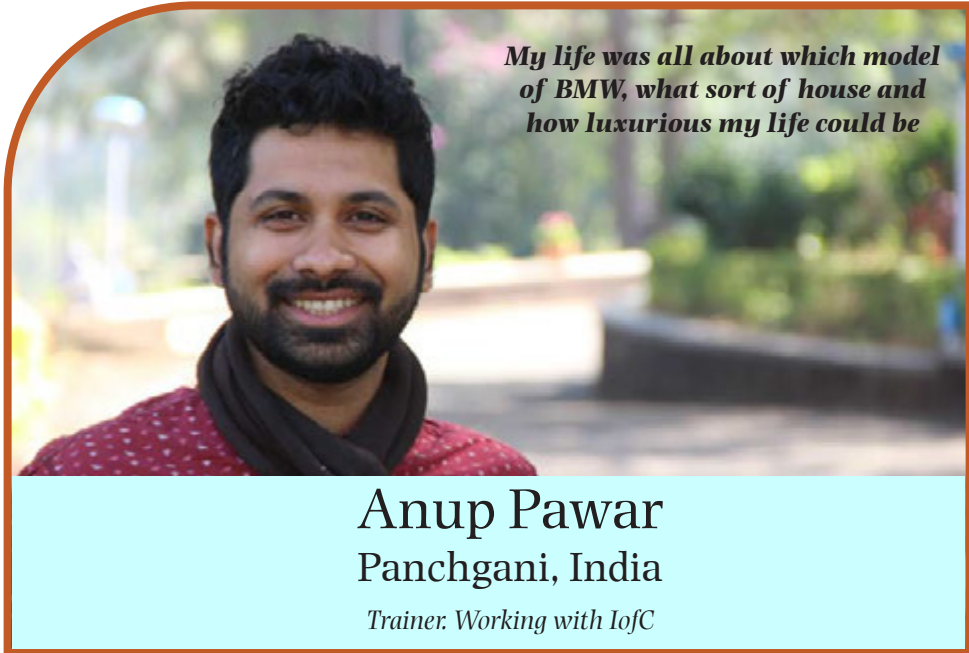
two friends from Mainland China around Dharamsala, one of the biggest Tibetan refugee settlements in India. In the past I would have never thought of having Chinese friends or travelling with them. I have learned that the only way to resolve conflict is through dialogue and building true friendship.

Growing up, I used to think only Tibet had problems, but now I see the whole world is troubled. The time has come for us to think beyond country and tribe and take responsibility as global citizens.

As a proud Buddhist, I used to take credit for all the good that Buddhists like His Holiness the Dalai Lama have done around the world. I thought I was a good Buddhist, but after reflection I found a gap between my prayers and my practice. I decided to study Buddhism. One of the first steps I took was to stop having non-vegetarian food.

After working with people of different faiths in IofC, I have developed respect for the differences we have. There is so much to learn from other religions. If I resist them, it is my loss.

*The purpose of all the major religious traditions is
not to construct big temples on the outside,
but to create temples of goodness and compassion in our hearts
The Dalai Lama*



My life was all about which model of BMW, what sort of house and how luxurious my life could be

Anup Pawar Panchgani, India

Trainer. Working with IofC

I was exploring ways to live a meaningful life. I knew what I wanted, but not the 'how'. When introduced to the idea of listening to the inner voice and living life by the four absolute standards, I wanted to imbibe these practices. Each time I tried, my whole body and soul would seem to be immersed into listening.

The journey to meaningful change started by telling my mother my exact whereabouts. I had told her I was in Satara district, but not specifically that I was in Panchgani, because I did not want her to know that I had given up my job to work without salary for IofC. When I told her the truth, I felt the lightness of freedom and found new space in my mindscape.

Before becoming part of IofC, I was only bothered about my little world – my family and myself. IofC expanded my idea of the world.

My conversation about corruption had been very simple: 'The government is corrupt, the whole system is corrupt, and this is never going to change.' When I looked within to see whether I was corrupt, I thought, 'I don't work in government'.

But when I looked more deeply, I did find something. I had done a 12-month Masters in Business Management in Scotland and stayed on after it finished. My student card was valid for a only year, but I wanted to save money. So I used my expired student card on the bus, placing my thumb on the expiry date when I showed it to the driver.

The first and second times, the bus driver gave me a weekly student pass. The third week, he looked more closely at my student card and saw that it had expired. He

asked me to buy a normal weekly pass. I pretended I was unaware of the expiry date and got off the bus. I knew the next bus would come by in a few minutes.

On the next bus, my crooked routine worked again. I was very pleased with myself. I felt proud I was saving money by using my brains. Most importantly I felt I was getting even with the UK, the nation which had looted my country for over a century and left my people bone-dry.

I had blamed politicians and government employees, but I too was guilty of corruption. I wrote the bus company. They said I could make whatever reparations I wanted by sending a cheque.

These few steps of correction freed space and energy in me to think beyond myself. Earlier my life was all about which model of BMW, what sort of house and how luxurious my life could be. I now see that my joy is in being there for people, supporting and serving them.

Religion for me was a matter of labels. My mother had brought me up in a liberal way. I was never forced to follow any rituals of my religion. I knew that I belonged generally under the Hindu umbrella, but my feelings about my religion only surfaced when talking to people of other religions. IofC inspired me to learn more about my religion.

***I felt I was getting even with the UK,
the nation which had looted my country
for over a century
and left my people bone-dry***


I did harbour some prejudices about other religions, copied from other people's views. Their hurts, bitterness and misbeliefs were transferred onto me.

In school, I had a Muslim classmate. The descriptions I had heard about Muslims did not fit him: he was just another friend, not too different from me. I never bothered to learn more. Not being a very curious person, I did not even know there were more than three religions in the world.

Through IofC I've seen how wrong beliefs, misunderstanding and incomplete knowledge create hatred and divisions. Now I accept and respect all people and religions.

My wife is a Roman Catholic. We have come a long way in convincing our parents about our love for each other and respect for each other's religion.

***Karma kar, phal ki chinta mat kar.
Do your duty without fretting about the outcome***



Panchgani's multifaith prayers make me feel we are being showered with blessings from many religious founts

Wimmarshana Ranasinghe

Narammala, Sri Lanka

Peace-building graduate and peace worker. IofC full-time volunteer. Trainer

WHEN I met Initiatives of Change in 2012, some of us were already working for reconciliation in Sri Lanka as ordinary but concerned human beings. We had a dream of a better country and better world. So IofC attracted us.

As an Asia Plateau intern, I realized there were barriers within me. Though we were working for reconciliation in our country, I did not have reconciliation in my own family.

I was honest with my friends about judging them and showing off with tales of fun at luxury resorts with relatives, showing their pictures, when I never went at all!

Now I am much closer to my mother. I saw that I needed to see my behaviour through her eyes. Instead of being sullen and grumpy with her, I became more caring towards her in small details, like being in touch with her more often. When I returned to Sri Lanka from Panchgani, I began going home to see her every weekend.

My relationship with my sister's family also became better. I do not hate my brother-in-law any more. Though I am a Buddhist, it took time for me to realize the eternal truth, which Buddha revealed: 'Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is it healed'.

Buddhism is not a religion, but a philosophy and way of life. Since childhood we were trained to observe Buddhist practices of the *panchasheela* – no harming of living creatures, celibacy, no stealing, no lying and no alcohol. Being religious does not mean just going to the temple every day. What happens in our mind and our behaviour matters more.

Buddhism talks about starting with yourself. You are the only one who can help

yourself. We are the ones who create what we become. We cannot expect others to bring about our betterment.

Before IofC, I thought I was a good person, observing all the basic Buddhist practices. By listening to my inner voice, I found this was not the truth. IofC taught me to start with myself.

Only then others might follow. My primary focus should be on 'earning people, not money'.


The inner voice challenges me to do things I've never done before. I have learnt a lot from all the IofC programmes we have done in Sri Lanka. You receive more when you give what you have: it is a two-way process. Doing full-time IofC work has made me step out of my comfort zone to serve society.

My country is multi-ethnic and multi-religious. From childhood I experienced the differences, as well as the similarities, between religions. My father was a Roman Catholic when he was a child. Then he became a Buddhist. But we still used to celebrate Christmas. He used to take us to churches and Hindu temples as well.

I like the multifaith prayers at Asia Plateau. They make me feel we are being showered with blessings from so many religious founts.

Though we were working for reconciliation in our country, I did not have reconciliation in my own family

***When you do good things, good will come with you like your shadow.
When you do bad things, bad will be a burden like a cart is for a bullock***
Dhammapada



Something became unblocked within. A relieving, refreshing rush of energy flowed out, allowing more space to thrive and to love

Mohammed Ghabriss

Kafarromen, Lebanon

MA. Artist. Trainer.

I met IofC through a link on *facebook* about a three-week internship on developing leadership and communication skills in Caux, Switzerland. I clicked the link and read about the four ethical values, aspects of spirituality and quiet inner listening times. I didn't believe such organizations existed.

I applied with little hope of being accepted – but I was! The experience exceeded my expectations. I wanted to dive deeper, so I applied for a five-month IofC internship in India. There, I discovered the core of the whole IofC experience.

When I was introduced to the concept of inner reflection and listening, I resisted. I was a person who couldn't stay still. Thoughts I was suppressing used to come storming in each time I sat. Finally, I faced them.

I find that writing is an absolutely indispensable part of the daily practice of inner listening. 'Thoughts disappear. Ink does not. Thoughts shape up as you write them.' Writing is essential for finding clarity.

I discovered that by nature I am very judgmental and impatient with people. Soon I realized that people around me were my own reflection – what I saw in them reflected what lay within me.

At a personal story-sharing session with some government servants from Meghalaya, a man spoke about how it was too late for him to fix his relationship with his father. That struck me with a big impact. I had never thought about my relationship with my father. We were okay together but I always felt a blockage within me, which stopped me approaching him at a deeper level.

It all goes back to my childhood. My father is an electrical engineer and has built

himself up from scratch. At 19, he travelled alone to Saudi Arabia and worked there with no one to support him.

He provided my two younger brothers and me with the best of educations in private schools, branded clothes, the latest gadgets – all we wanted. I never appreciated his hard work. I kept asking him to change his job because, with his working clothes, he was an embarrassment to me. I wanted him to wear a suit like my friends' parents. He used to tell me, 'You'll understand when you grow up.'

I kept asking my father to change his job, because, with his working clothes, he was an embarrassment to me

And he was right.

In India I looked deeply at that and was overwhelmed with shame and anger. I saw that the clothes I was wearing were because of his hard work. I could afford my plane tickets because he was sweating from head to toe – at times his shoes were literally wet with his perspiration – working under the Saudi sun. He is still working there as I am typing this.

So I wrote a letter, 'Dad, you are my hero. Deep down I always want to be just like you – strong, independent and loving and caring at the same time. I just want to say I'm sorry for not appreciating your hard work and for being rude to you so many times; and to let you know that I love you.'

I kept that letter in my drawer for a week. My ego was too strong. But then I didn't want it to be too late to say sorry. So, on the *Eid Al-Adha* holiday, I texted him the letter. That night I was so nervous. My friends around me were excited, but my heart was beating so fast. My father called. I went into another room, closed the door and answered the phone.

'How are you, son?' he asked.

'I am good, I am doing well,' I answered.

'How's India treating you? Are you eating well?'

'Yes, Dad I am.'

I was so impatient and anxious, 'Dad, did you receive my letter?'

'Yes, I did.'

'Well, what do you think?' I asked.

He said, 'Now I know that my hard work has paid off.'

I started jumping all over the place talking to him, a smile covering my whole face. I felt the hugest relief ever. I was overwhelmed with happiness and a sense of freedom. Some days later I called my mom. She told me how happy my father was and how much she too appreciated what I had done as it affected everyone in the family.

Later on, I apologized to my brother for bullying him and asked my cousin for forgiveness for hurting her feelings and ignoring her pain. It felt like something became unblocked within; a relieving, refreshing rush of energy flowed out, allowing more space to thrive and love.

The world definitely needs the space that IofC provides – a space for reflection, supporting one another and correcting one's wrong deeds. Many across the world are craving to be loved and

***If the glass lens is dirty,
you can't see where your compass is pointing***

give love in return. To love means to be vulnerable.

All our life journeys are with a compass. If the protective glass lens is dirty, you can't see where your compass is pointing. Once you clean the lens, then you find a clear sense of direction not only for yourself but also for others who travel with you. IofC says, 'Check if your lens is clean. If not, clean out all the dirt that has accumulated through the years. After that, take a look again and see where the compass is guiding you.'

When I follow that compass with full faith, the others who share the same path as me become my family, spread across the globe.

A villager once travelled the world to explore other religions, faiths and cultures. When he came back, he said to his people, 'I saw people practising Islam and they're not even Muslims!'



*I need to be the person I want to be,
not who others want me to be*

Karma Phuntsok

Leh, Ladakh, India

*Masters in Economics, JNU, Delhi.
Researcher with the Tibetan Government*

MY childhood was full of stealing, often with friends. I stole pens from every class in my school. Once we stole cabling from the local power station to sell off. We looted the house of migrant labourers, while they were away. We ruined their TV just to find out what made it work. We ransacked every room. We took a mattress and kept it in a field for us to loll on in the sun.

I now feel great regret about this; but since it was years ago there is no way of contacting those migrant workers to make amends. To compensate for my guilt, I pay extra money to auto-rickshaw wallas and others less well off.

I also used to abscond from school, to the utter dismay of my mother. My father was working away from home. The pain I caused my mother by bunking off school kept on growing until one day she burst out crying uncontrollably in front of me. I felt so bad that I resolved to be different. I began studying, and soon became one of the school's best students.

I did not talk much with my uncle who stays with us in Ladakh. I wanted to reduce the distance with him. One day, he was a little drunk and he started sharing his personal problems. This gave me immense happiness. From that day I have a much closer relationship with my uncle.

When I came to Asia Plateau, my intention was to make myself different to look good in front of others. Now, I understand I need to be the person I want to be, not who others want me to be.

I am devoted to the struggle for my country, Tibet. IofC changed my way of thinking about the world, and about myself.

We are born ordinary to become extraordinary



*Their home has become my
'Muslim home'*

Neas Wanimbo

Wamena, West Papua

*IT specialist. In four years only, established 13 libraries
in the remotest mountain villages*

MY village lies near the Equator, in the spine of mountains with one permanently snow-capped peak in the middle of West Papua. I am the third son in a family of six. My second brother passed away in 2010 because of some sickness not known to us.

My father passed away in 2015, when I was at university in Jakarta, 3500 kilometres away from home. My older brother didn't tell me that he was ill, and not even when he died. That made me so angry that I deleted his contact from my phone. Whenever he tried contacting me, I rejected him. That situation lasted for a year.

In 2016 I took part in IofC's Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in Bandung. In one session, we were asked to write a letter forgiving someone. I resolved to write to my older brother. In the letter I poured out all my disappointment, anger and hurt. I included my phone number and wrote, 'Please call me, I really want to say I'm so sorry I behaved that way when our father passed away.' A week later he called me. He cried on the phone and said sorry to me. Now we have a better relationship and support each other.

During my internship at Asia Plateau, I had a Japanese friend. He was always very quiet and I thought this was because I had not greeted him properly in the beginning. So I began avoiding him. Later, when we had a conversation, I found out that he was quiet because of way he had been brought up. I apologized to him for the block that I had created in my mind towards him.

I grew up in the Christian community in Indonesia, with bad images of Muslims in my mind. I used to criticize Muslim friends saying, 'Why do you guys pray five times a day using big noisy loudspeakers, disturbing everyone else? Also why do your ladies always cover their hair; and why don't you eat some kinds of meat?'

Because of my upbringing and past experiences, I decided that I did not want to have any Muslim friends

After finishing senior high school in Papua, I went to Jakarta to continue my studies. Before going I decided that because of my upbringing and past experiences in Jakarta I did not want to have any Muslim friends. But my university put me in a hostel room with a Muslim. In the first semester I always ran away from him, saying, 'I have a group I do my assignments with'.

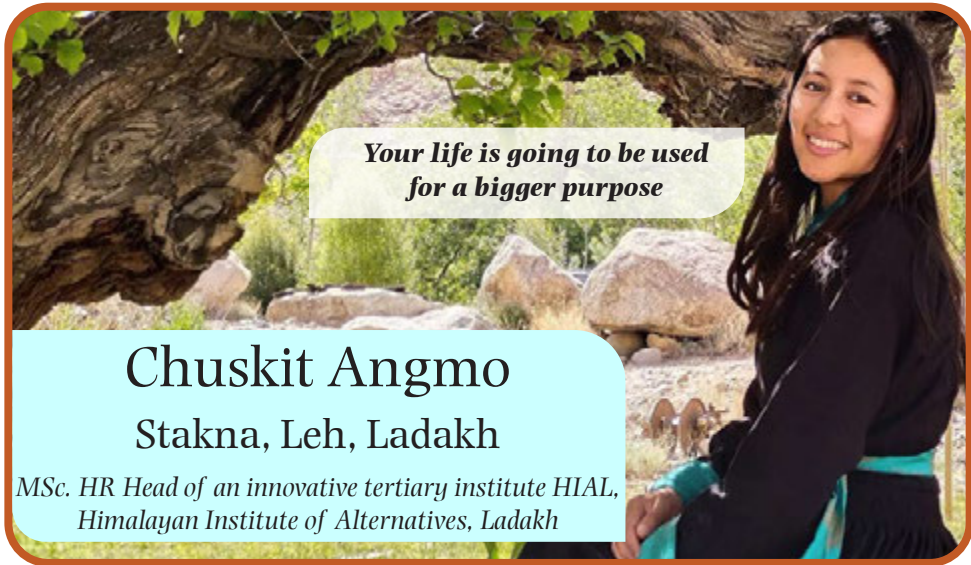
At the end of the semester, my roommate's parents invited me to come to their home for the holidays. Somehow I accepted. His parents welcomed me with such heartfelt warmth. When we came back to the hostel, I apologized to him for the image I had had of his community. I told him, 'The reality in your home is not at all like I had been imagining.'

That family even gave me a motorbike so I could visit them more frequently. Their home has become my 'Muslim home'.

Six months after IofC training in India I was able to start the first library in my mountain-side village in West Papua. Under the *Hano Wene* Foundation we have been able to establish 13 other village libraries in a short time.

I believe that only education can bring change.

Go where there is no path and leave a trail



*Your life is going to be used
for a bigger purpose*

Chuskit Angmo

Stakna, Leh, Ladakh

*MSc. HR Head of an innovative tertiary institute HIAL,
Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh*

AS I held the ashes of a relative, something hit me! I had seen a breathing human body suddenly transformed into ash! I reflected, 'This will be my fate too. I don't want to just survive. I want to live my life for others, contribute something and not waste this precious life.'

Until my Masters degree, I was living a life with a tunnel view, set for me by others. Everyone around stressed first Bachelors, Masters, PhD, job... I didn't pause to ask why, 'Is there an alternative?' I took a gap year to prepare for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) for PhD admissions. That year served as perfect ground for deeper thinking and exploration.

I started seeking something bigger than myself and 'the ordinary life'. For months I looked for NGOs to do social work with, but with a science degree I never fitted their requirements. A Tibetan friend recommended the 2017 APIP (Asia Plateau Internship Programme). The website said the only qualification needed for APIP was 'a fire in the belly to do something for the community!'

I got the substantial JRF for PhD but I chose Panchgani, as something within was calling me to seize this opportunity. I also chose this unconventional path because my Buddhist Philosophy teacher got me thinking by asking, 'What's the purpose of your life?'

IofC was reconnecting with Self and unleashing the Inner Power. In this new journey, inner listening brought me back to myself and reconnected my awareness with my 'lost self'. I found courage to tell my parents things from Delhi they didn't know - drinking, travelling to places, personal relationships etc. So, I removed my mask of 'the obedient daughter', shared my real self with them and what I believed in. All, unexpected for them.

The kind of life they envisioned for me was different from my vision. For them, financial security and career (only govt. jobs) understandably are 'a successful life'. But there is more to life. With their upbringing it was difficult for them to understand. After five years, we are finding a balance.

***I realized I have role in creating hope.
That I am not alone in that***

Then, I mended my relationship with my cousin, apologising for jealousy towards her. Amazing, once one is honest, the other person also lowers their shield and becomes vulnerable. She opened up about her feelings towards me. We understood the value of our relationship. Now it's different and beautiful.

Seeing transformations in people convinced me to extend my involvement with IofC. I joined the IofC outreach team, as volunteer, for two years in NE India, Nepal and Hyderabad. That journey also taught me about the hurts and aspirations various communities have.

My outreach learnings:

- Confidence gained speaking before an audience.
- Travelling in different conditions made me aware of my privileges.
- Staying in humble homes reconnected me to my roots.
- The gift of friends and elders who became family (home away from home).
- So many things to unravel within while serving without. I shed multiple masks I hid behind from childhood.
- Learned I can make lasting impact when I talk from my heart and just be human.
- I can't compel anyone to change. I can only care without expectations and inspire them.
- I realized I have role in creating hope. That I am not alone in that.
- Able to anchor myself with the help of a cleared conscience, unaffected by praise or criticism.
- Becoming smart enough to understand when to lead and when to let others lead.
- Courageous enough to accept mistakes and take responsibility.
- Skill in declining with love, negotiating with calmness and collaborating with pure intention.

My outreach teammates inspired in me greater responsibility towards family, community, country and the world. In Ladakh, I was concerned about powerful undercurrents between Buddhists and Muslims, even though we are blood related. In 2019, fellow-Ladakhi, Dechen Dolker, and I led an IofC team - we met four official bodies of Ladakh's Buddhists, Muslims and Christians to start a reconciling dialogue.

This led to new collaboration. One AMI (Anjuman Moin-ul Islamia) participant

invited me to join the Institute for Faith-based Diplomacy (IFBD) for reconciliation of Buddhists and Muslims. Since 2021, through two civil society meetings, and two intensive workshops with the two communities, IFBD came out with a social contract for a pluralistic society in Ladakh. A longstanding land issue between Leh and Kargil was solved due to IFBD facilitating real dialogue. We are working for the further healing needed in Ladakh.


***I can't compel anyone to change.
I can only care without expectations
and inspire them***

My job since 2021 is with the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives (HIAL), Ladakh, under world-renowned innovator, Sonam Wangchuk. HIAL seeks contextual solutions to the problems of the mountain region (environmental or educational). The experience of creating and facilitating sessions in IofC outreaches comes handy as I oversee the training and development of HIAL employees.

I have always envisioned working both locally and globally. A strong thought came to me in Nagaland during our 2019 outreach, 'You have to forget your personal interest; your life is going to be used for a bigger purpose.'

It was a strong voice and I literally felt consciously present in that moment!

When words are both true and kind they can change the world
Buddha



Bringing inner listening into the marketplace is one of MRA's greatest contributions to humankind

Leena Khatri, Panchgani, India

MA in French. Full-time voluntary worker with IofC for over 50 years, some of them in Fiji

I was only 12 when I first came across Moral Re-Armament (MRA) in the mid-1960s. There was a spirit of idealism amongst the youth of India. They responded with excitement to the MRA plays which toured India's cities, presented by international casts who were dedicated to the idea of creating a hate-free, greed-free, fear-free world where everyone's needs would be met.

I wanted to be part of such a movement. It transported me into a realm of thinking that I wouldn't have normally ventured into – that I could have a part in bringing change to society, in tackling corruption, in healing divisions.

What a dream! But it was do-able because it started with me. It implied a thorough examination of my daily life, habits and actions with a view to aligning them with the vision of a new world.

I told my school principal about my dishonesty in the classroom. I admitted to a friend that I was jealous of her. I spoke to my father about my fear- and anger-driven attitude towards him. This gave me a greater awareness of my weaknesses and the courage to use my strengths for a cause bigger than myself.

In my late teens and early 20s, I experienced the need to go deeper spiritually. The Christians in MRA felt free to interpret MRA in Christian terms. I did not feel comfortable that these expressions were delivered from an MRA platform. I felt MRA should be expressed in terms acceptable to people of all religions.

Born a Hindu, I was fortunate to have my mother as role model. She practised

the essential Hindu way of life very naturally, without the contraptions of rite and ritual with which Hinduism sometimes gets erroneously identified. I began to feel the need to know more about the essence of Hindu scriptures. The search continues.

Hindus believe in the presence of a Divine Spirit in every person. The purpose of life is to discover more and more of this Divine Power. Namaste, the greeting, means 'I salute the Divine in you'. This means that every person, however 'bad', can change as they discover the Divine within. It also means I must respect everyone as equal, and support everyone in this search. This is another way of saying 'change yourself' and 'inspire others to change', the first two planks in the four-point programme for MRA, which Buchman spelt out.

Over the years, the daily practice of listening to the inner voice has become an anchor in my life – a source of direction and of answers to the questions and conflicts that arise.

Making this practice available to everyone – bringing inner listening into the market place rather than leaving it cloistered in holy sanctums – is one of MRA's greatest contributions to humankind. Gandhi practised this at the heart of politics and made it triumph. He took major national decisions based on the whispers of the 'still small voice'. He was truly a practising Hindu but at the same time a universal human being.

Now, as IofC expands to people of many different countries and religions, one uniting factor is the practice of inner listening.

The four moral standards of absolute purity, honesty, love and unselfishness are benchmarks for our lives. They are simple to understand though harder to implement. Our respective religious teachings can help us to understand their subtleties.

***To deal with my spiritual lacunae
I need to go more deeply into
the roots of my native spirituality***

For example, in our Sanskrit-based languages, there are several words for the different facets of 'love'. Our scriptures talk about these aspects of

love. They help me understand and endeavour to practise it better. The same is true for the other three absolutes.

To deal with the spiritual lacunae in myself, I need to go more deeply into the roots of my native spirituality and apply what I learn in my life.

At the same time IofC has given me a common platform with people of different backgrounds and religions, many of whom are my dearest friends and teammates. I have come to respect their best practices.

The IofC network of IofC has a unique lived-out pattern to show the world – people of all religious persuasions, and free-thinkers, living a life of moral values, appreciating and gaining inspiration from each other's practice of their beliefs.

***Each soul is potentially divine
Vivekananda***

A new IofC team in Nepal forms – as if by magic !



IN December 2017, Keshab Dahal of Kathmandu, with multiple degrees in peace building, came to Panchgani for a 21-day course in conflict transformation. He himself got transformed through applying IofC. (His change story is the next one.)

He ventured home to try and initiate a first major IofC event. An international dialogue wondrously developed in Dhulikhel in September 2018. IofC Nepal was launched in spirit.

Keshab then inspired many Nepalis to come for extended training at Asia Plateau. He also joined the IfL Outreach Team veterans and others in various parts of India.

More than a dozen became the core of one of the fastest ever effective team of IofC. They registered Initiatives of Change, Nepal as a national organization with the Government in July 2019.

The vision they are working on impact-fully is creating a peaceful, caring, and united Nepal where every one is treated with respect and equality, regardless of their caste, language, culture, skin color, or geographical region.

Their team has motivated individuals committed to doing what is right for their communities, country, and the wider South Asia region.

Through numerous fruitful outreaches, they are on their way to bridge the long standing divide between the *Pahadis* of the hills and the *Madheshis* of the *terai* (plains). *Madheshis* are now part of their national IofC team. Municipalities in the plains are contracting them to run IofC programmes for their officials and citizens.

Keshab Dahal

Kathmandu, Nepal

Peace Activist



To live on Earth and be intolerant of others' race, religion or nationality is like being born in the Arctic and nursing an aversion to snow

I studied and worked in peacebuilding for eight years, yet my introduction to IofC made me realize how little I understood the issues around me and in the world. IofC pushed me to explore the purpose of my life. I realized I had lived so much of life comparing and competing.

Morning inner listening times provided a safe space to look within and examine my life. As a result I apologized to my sister for all the money I had stolen years before from her piggy bank.

Like many Nepalese, I disliked 'big brother' India. Living in India with IofC, I dealt with deep-rooted anti-Indian sentiments and made peace with Indian friends. My hate was transformed into new openness and energy.

Living IofC values helped me quit my decade-long alcohol habit. I had tried to stop but failed several times before. As my body became alcohol-free, my mind became clearer.

I cancelled my travel plans and joined the IofC Outreach Team to South Asia for a year of unpaid service. This turned out to be one of the best opportunities I have offered to myself. It led me to a greater life purpose and enhanced my understanding of the various lifestyles, faiths and living situations of people all over Eastern and Northeast India.

Born Hindu, I had a strong aversion to Christians. I considered Christianity a foreign religion. During this year, I met many people in Nagaland and Meghalaya who practised Christianity. I found them very humble. I took time out in silence to absorb the friendship and humility they offered me. I could now see them only as good humans. That was a clear shift from division to oneness, like waking up from separation to unification. It gave me great peace and joy.

I have internalized the fact that to live on Earth and be intolerant of others' race, religion or nationality is like being born an Eskimo and nursing an aversion to snow.

There is no fear for one whose mind is not filled with desires

*Every religion is good in special ways.
None is better or worse*



Rabindra Kumar Mahato Bhangaha, Mahottari Dt, Nepal

Social worker

WE *madheshi* or *terai*-folk (plains people) of Nepal have for ages felt looked down upon and been hurt by the attitude of *pahadis* (hill people) or Nepalis. In my high school studies in Kathmandu, I faced their derogatory treatment and discrimination.

I am from Madhesh Province of Nepal and am a student of rural development and sociology.

What attracted me to IofC was what I saw - for the very first time - in a visiting IofC Outreach Team of *pahadis*. Their selfless love, compassion and genuine listening and understanding without judging us *madheshis* was striking. It captivated me. One saw their attitudes made them the group best suited to bridge the regional differences of Nepal through their Trust Building Programme.

So, joining IofC became a turning point event in my life. I had been dealing with many personal issues. I didn't see any purpose in my life. My aim was limited to just my family. From young age I determined that money was everything. I wanted to earn money any which way I could, wanting my family to be happy being well off.

When I was the President of a Children's Club, I misappropriated Nepali Rs 7000 from the programme. After encountering IofC, through looking within and inner listening, I accepted this was my corruption. I went to my hometown and told the truth to the newly-elected Club officials and repaid the money. They have now made me a consultant of that Club.

Currently, I am a board member of a youth network and also a founder of an NGO working for child protection and on gender violence. For this, I worked with a lot of youth and do advocacy on things like giving up smoking and other addictions. But then, straight after facilitating these sessions, I myself used to light up with my friends.

So IofC taught me that while I was speaking up against weaknesses of society, I myself was culpable. Inspired by strength from inner listening, I have now given up cigarettes. I also told my parents this and apologized to them.

I had developed differences with my maternal uncle and so, had stopped visiting his home. After a special inner listening period of several hours at Asia Plateau, I came out with all my feelings about my uncle. I mailed him that day and said sorry.

Today our relationship has become very good.

Through doing all this self-correcting I have become truly happy. I have no envy, no hatred for anyone. I try and listen to my inner soul daily and keep cleansing myself. Neither pained nor worried about anything, I am trying to take this message of selfless love to the world.

Now the only goal of my life is to care. This whole world is my family and everyone living in this family, animals, birds, plants, the Himalayas too. I must love selflessly and care for each one of them.

IofC is the art of living a life which helps people connect with each other deeply

Through practising IofC, I have found equal respect for every religion. I have accepted that every religion is good in special ways. None is better or worse. The essence of every religion in the world is for all to become humane.

The practice of IofC has helped me know more deeply about the inner life. Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? I have found answers. Now I am very inspired to serve Nature and this world. I have started and will continue to do so.

I am finding that to inspire, to touch the life or heart of another person, it is absolutely necessary to bring change in one's own life, in one's own behaviour. By understanding others deeply, by listening to others, by giving love to others selflessly, we can reach and inspire people's hearts.

IofC is the art of living a life which helps people connect with each other deeply. The world is still divided in the name of religion, of high and low caste. IofC contributes by connecting people to each other.

The ideology of IofC should reach every home.

***Your work is to discover your calling and then,
with all your heart give yourself to it***

*Asking for apology always
makes me powerful*

Meena Sharma

Kathmandu, Nepal

Ex-teacher. Social activist and NGO worker



BEING a practitioner of both Hinduism and Buddhism, I try keeping my karmic accounts balanced, 'What you do to others, will come back to you.' I feel my karmic accounts are balanced. That's why I am meeting beautiful souls like you now.

My mother saved me from child marriage at 14. She helped me, as the first female in the family, to complete formal education. She does not know reading and writing but she is more aware than educated. The seeds for doing something different were sowed then by my mother. Teenage years were not only exploring and expanding myself, but deepening. I sought answers for many 'Why not's?'

In the 14-year armed conflict 17,000 people died. A million were impacted. I witnessed war closely, spending nights kept awake. In west Nepal, I met a 16-year girl going for delivery. On my return, I saw her body outside the hospital.

Many of my family are in 9-5 government jobs. I always wanted to go beyond a 9-5, 24/7 engagement. As a human, I try being humane, bring smiles now and happiness long term. I work for a better version of myself and the community I care for; and cross comforts zones to build safe spaces for the next generation.

IofC's Peace Circles shifted something in me. I related well to the four values though I had not articulated them as succinctly. IofC work for me is being rather than doing. I am in the process of transforming myself from mere transactional approaches, practising being more reflective than reactive like before. I try to create magical moments for individuals. That helps me keep moving in that sacred space. I realize 'seeing people bigger than they are' is truly powerful. Appreciation, gratitude and accompaniment are a must to sustain IofC's mission.

Apology makes me powerful. To save a colleague's marriage I supported the spouse and convinced her to be with the children. Later I realized I was wrong. After apologising, I am helping her fight for justice, an ongoing legal battle.

As to religious polemics, for me the simple *funda* (fundamental) is that if you claim Hinduism is best and *Mahadev* (God of Gods) the only supreme power, how can he be *Mahadev* without being the God of all other religions? We can make *Mahadev* the basis of interconnectedness, the interdependence of all.

Let all-embracing thoughts for all beings be yours

*Caring for others is
the key point in my life now*

Kamal Kandel, Lumbini, Nepal

Peace builder. Full time IofC volunteer



IN 2018, I encountered IofC through the Caux Scholars' Program in Switzerland. There, I met many fascinating senior folk and was inspired to know about this movement in depth.

That year, I completed my M.Phil. in Norway in Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation. Then travelled directly to Asia Plateau for eight weeks of an IofC Initiators' Programme. It proved a needed opportunity to look into myself and reflect deeply on my life.

In my family, I have parents, one elder brother, and two younger sisters. My brother is five years older than me. I did not have a good relationship with him for nearly 10 years. Reason: he was an out-and-out alcoholic.

I thought being older, he was meant to be more responsible - for my parents and for the family. But he didn't help with anything. Just drank and came home only to eat and sleep. For this I got bitter towards him. I remained angry and stopped talking with him. I never picked his calls, preferring just to shut him out. I just hated him.

For higher studies within Nepal, I left home and parents in Lumbini for Kathmandu. I did not want to go home because I would have to meet my brother there. I did want to see my parents. So during vacations, I made short visits. Thus, I kept well away from my brother.

In the seven weeks at Panchgani I had a chance to look into myself and examined my life on the four moral standards. I found I was not really honest with myself, and my family.

I saw I was definitely not loving towards my brother who actually longed to connect with me. I had graduated in world peace and yet I did not have peaceable relations with my own brother. Then I realized I had never looked at things from his perspective. So, I decided to say sorry to him. Since the disconnect had been for so very long I could not get myself to call and break the silence. So after the Panchgani programme, I went back home, said sorry and hugged him. He was surprised but happy to see that I was talking to him. We began connecting again. Happily now, maybe in answer to my prayers, my brother has given up drinking altogether and started working and earning regularly.

This is the first step I took to correct myself and move forward. I felt relieved, and moreover, liberated. I realized it had been like carrying a heavy stone on my heart. As I threw it out, I felt freer. All this, after listening to myself.

I am trying every day to see what are other things I need to throw out of my

life. And take steps to correct myself so that I can be a better person, not repeating the same mistakes. During this process, I made an apology to a friend who I was aggrieved with for long just because he came late for one meeting.

I returned money, which was mistakenly deposited in my account to the owner of the restaurant in Norway, where I did part time work. I have said sorry to my sister for my bullying. When we were young I used to scold and slap her for little things. This apology changed and strengthened my relationship with her.

Listening to myself regularly is helping me understand myself and gives fresh perspectives. I strongly feel I am finding the right direction, growing daily by caring for others and taking time to think about how to inspire more individuals with my own change experience. Caring for others is the key point in my life now.

Being a student of Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation has now helped me be part of a major Trust Building Programme in all of Nepal. It aims to bridge the long-standing divides and reduce the historical mistrust between the plains' *Madheshi* and hills' *Pahadi* communities.

With this TBP in Nepal in 18 months, we reached out to at least 1500 individuals meaningfully especially youth through 65 events. The journey so far has been a magical experience meeting so many different people in the plains.

During one regional dialogue programme, a participant shared, 'In us *Pahadis* there is the mentality that all *Madheshi* are Indian. Many factors like language, customs, skin tone make *Madheshis* different. But when we put different colours together, they can look great.'

Though I grew up in the *Terai* (plains), till this TBP I never had a chance to experience firsthand the culture, hospitality, the generosity and simple genuineness of *Madheshis*. I never had a meal with them or attended any ceremony of theirs before this.

It has led to a big extension of my *Madheshi* friends' circle and developing honest friendships with them. True that sometimes I struggled with the food, language and their lifestyle but this journey of exploring *Madhesh* is moving me towards freedom and acceptance.

We try to go beyond tolerating or coexistence to taking proactive actions to ensure trust-building attitudes and skills get embedded in both *Madheshi* and *Pahadi*. And discourage the culture of blame or avoidance of each other; and move towards acceptance and shared responsibility for the future Nepal.

Meeting with the idea of IofC and visiting Asia Plateau has been the turning point in finding life direction and helping me go beyond self-transformation. I am loving this journey of enrolling in the IofC Life University Course which has both modules - theory and practicum.

*What you show about your life to others,
and what you hide from others, God knows*

Ek Naitik Bharat – An Ethical India*

An India free of hate, greed, fear, untruth, discrimination and poverty

WITH this ambitious vision, 12 young Hindi-speaking people embarked, from July 2022, on a five-year long follow-up based, outreach programme to the grassroots of India.



Their tools are the stories of their own transformation; and building deep, lasting friendships based on mutual adherence to the inner voice.

They have already done *padyatras* (silent marches) through towns and communities with crowds of youth especially, with a banner held aloft saying ‘When we change, India changes’.

The campaign is reaching out to common citizens in different states (five so far) of India with this ideology. A West Bengal state cabinet minister and a tribal ex-MP are employing the team’s transformational capacity for training hundreds of their young people.

The response to the campaign in the first five places in three states in just the first fortnight gave at least 500 people who have begun their ‘ethical cleansing’ - making apologies for differences in the family and neighbourhood, being honest about stealing, high caste folk mingling with all others etc. Eager invitations have come for longer-term IofC inputs in all these places.

In all, they have reached 4500 people meaningfully in six months.

* The vision of Shri Prabhat Kumar, ex-Cabinet Secretary, Government of India.

Radha Giri

Kushinagar, UP, India

*National Trainer in Rural Development
and Panchayati Raj.*

*Special Awardee, Uttar Pradesh Govt
for two state-wide projects*

***Daily I began experiencing
the potency of penitence, prayer,
compassion and gratitude***



My journey to listen to the inner voice and people

IT is difficult to accept one's mistake and apologize to. Or forgive someone. I was in awe seeing people involved in IofC doing that seemingly effortlessly. I was meeting an ideology that insists on going a step further, beyond realising one's mistakes – to atonement. Listening to your inner voice, writing thoughts from within us everyday is important but a commitment to be resolute in obeying them is far more critical.

Like we all would, I scrutinised this new idea from all angles. I found knowing an ideology is different from living it. More difficult. Sometimes even problematic.

When I got attracted to IofC, I was actually despondent about life. My heart was filled with anger and hatred. Because of that my close relationships were shredded. But as soon as I apologized for mistakes and began to forgive, I found I got rid of burdens. Feeling the power of conscience and the inner voice, sitting every day with the intention of seeking and writing down God's commands for that day, I soon found that by making small changes in my behaviour, my distance from others diminished.

I excitedly began opening up every page of this new idea. Daily I began experiencing the potency of penitence, prayer, compassion and gratitude. This helped me take many important decisions of life with reasoned objectivity and inspiration. Earlier, I used to believe it is difficult to serve society selflessly. But by practising gratitude, I could move out of my own world into the greater, global community.

Relationships are easy to break but hard to heal. Disappointed with life, when I joined this ideology, my heart burned with bitterness for my uncle because he spoke infuriatingly in family land disputes. After four years I realized that I also spoke badly, and in anger. I was at fault too. The fact is I should have stayed away from elders' disputes. Through humility, I fixed my relationship with my uncle. I also apologized

to a social worker colleague because I thought I was more knowledgeable. I used to cut his words without listening to him completely.

For me compassion for the poor and the miserable is easier to practise than for people around me. I find that by sticking to moral values, I source a more fulfilling flow of spiritual energy. Praying every day for the betterment of the world and for whoever has done bad to me, helps. I even think of finding ways for that person's well-being. If I can't do anything specific, I ensure I pray for that person that day.

Only 'humane-ty' is the best religion

Stubborn insistence on the superiority of my own religion and its tenets closed my heart from learning about other religions or developing friends from other communities. Frankly this actually raised questions about my being a worthy citizen.

From hearsay from childhood, an intolerant impression got formed in me about the people of Kashmir. That it was only the Muslims who were to blame for the unending violence and hatred in the Valley. But then I met a fine Kashmiri gentleman. His genuine concern for global society and the constant bridge-building steps shook my prejudices. Whilst I talked big about social service, I saw I had hatred towards all his community. I apologized to this Kashmiri. I learned from him that only 'humane-ty' is the best religion. So now, I have begun intentionally extending care and friendship towards people of other religions.

From July 2022, I feel fortunate to be a part of a devoted nation-cleansing campaign. Our aim is to help build *Ek Naitik Bharat* (An Ethical India). With a growing team of eleven young Hindi-speaking people, we have embarked on a decade long follow-up based, outreach programme to the grassroots of India.

The ready response of most people that we met spells an outstanding promise. It has motivated each one of us to greater commitment to help change India.

It seems as if this – the practice of ethics – is the trace element that the soil of India is thirsting for, to become an ethical India.

There is more to life than the everyday experience of our senses
Gita



Their one-upmanship and credit grabbing had stalled development plans in the village: now these were able to go ahead

Biplab Mahato

Dorka Sai, Jharkhand, India

Farmer. Entrepreneur. Musician.

Rural youth leader

I took part in the nine-month Action for Life 4 programme for young changemakers in 2008-09. At first, I found it difficult to connect with this international group because I was an introvert and came from a totally rural background. But when I accepted to be myself and started learning from team members, it became easier to make friends, find my strengths and play a role in our team.

With its inner and outer journey, AfL turned out to be a great learning experience. In my outer journey, I learnt about group dynamics, teamwork, personality development, presentation and facilitation skills. In my inner journey, I began to recognize the blockages within me.

I had got into bad company, smoking, drinking and watching pornography on the Internet. Fulfilling these drives had wasted time, energy and money. I used to lie to my parents about how I was using money. The first step I took was to be fully honest with them.

Quitting my addictions and putting my past right freed me to communicate more openly. It also gave me courage to stand for what is right in my village and elsewhere.

My father had come across MRA years before. All his life he had worked for a better, poverty-free society. To that end, he had joined a political party. MRA's logic of change being more possible if each person starts with themselves fell neatly in place in his mind. He made amends with my mother who had once tried to throw herself in front of a train. Deep pain and tensions between them eased.

He found an answer to his fury against high caste and city people for their humiliating treatment of him, including once stripping him in public.

This freed him, as a village leader, to extend a hand of friendship to his political rival. Their constant one-upmanship and credit grabbing had stalled development

plans in the village: now these were able to go ahead. The village got a school, an intermediate college, sanitation and roads and was declared a Model Clean Village by the government.

Quitting my addictions gave me courage to stand for what is right in my village

My father gave up the 'income' he was getting from political deals. Next, resulting from an idea from the inner voice, a huge one-acre fishpond was dug on our land, free of cost, thanks to the generosity of the head of Tata Motors, Sarosh Gandhi. It provided my father with a constant cash crop, breeding fish for sale, and its water helps neighbouring farmers get more produce from their lands. The model was replicated by at least 80 other farmers in nearby villages.

AfL's outreach programmes in different parts of India and Asia were great learning experiences for me. I was inspired to meet people who were working to answer needs in their society. One was an electronics engineer who has worked for more than 30 years in Juna Mozda, an *adivasi* (indigenous) village in a forest reserve in South Gujarat. He is helping a women's self-help group to become financially self-sufficient and also trains village youth in solar and wind power technology.

Another had lost his job with the Cambodian government because of his unrelenting campaign against corruption. Yet he had not given up his fight.

I too want to use my skills and gifts to spread change in the lives of people and to meet the needs of my rural area.

In August 2016, with my friend, Himanshu Bharat I embarked on a seven-week, 350 km *Punarutthan Padayatra* (Walk for Change) through more than 60 villages in Jharkhand state. Twenty-five other young people joined us.




The march triggered many changes. One *padyatri* was in the illegal business of backyard home-brewing. On the march he saw the effect of the 'poison' he was selling, and decided to stop altogether.

The *padyatris* met Anupam Mahato in Dholadih village. He had become rich by cutting and selling trees from nearby forests for years. He had also gotten addicted to alcohol. He decided to stop both and make amends. He apologized to his family. And since 2016, with others, he has got nearly 400,000 trees planted.

In one village a woman apologized to her mother-in-law, who had been ill-treating her. The latter broke into tears and publicly promised to care for her as her own daughter. This prompted a change of heart in their village headman, who opened up the village council premises to everyone for the first time, for the better development of their community.

Lust, anger and greed are the three doors to ruin
Gita



The way of forgiveness is much more powerful in bringing peace of mind than the way of hatred and vengeance

Himanshu Bharat, Lucknow, India

Youth leader in Hindi-speaking regions. Social activist

WHEN I arrived for an internship at Asia Plateau, I was a hard core communist. I had concluded that the whole rotten structure of society could only be dealt with through violent upheaval.

On first impressions, I thought this centre must have been set up by capitalists to turn young people away from bringing any revolution in India against the rich, to cool down their anger about inequalities in our society.

Listening to people's experiences of personal change set off a challenging churning within me. Eventually I decided to experiment with the practices proposed by IofC.

I took three days out to be alone, to listen to my inner self. By the end of this silent sojourn, I saw a truer picture of myself, quite different from the image that I had been presenting. I saw that present within me were the roots of all the ills in society that I used to raise my voice against.

I had wanted to unite the world as one. But I only had revulsion for my own sister. I had not talked with her for 10 years. I was impelled to apologize to her. That apology did the magic of making our whole family of one joyous heart.

I had fought strongly against corruption. I was a core member of Anna Hazare's agitation for a *Lokpal* (ombudsman) for India. I helped organize the campaign in Uttar Pradesh and joined in the fast he undertook in Delhi in 2011. After the failure of his campaign, disillusioned, I took to the communist path.

Now I recalled that once in Lucknow I had been given a donation to distribute blankets to the needy during North India's winter. I had pocketed most of the money. I went to the donor, told him of my dishonesty and returned the money I had

I had wanted to unite the world as one. But I had not talked with my sister for 10 years

embezzled. Interestingly he said that he now trusted me even more than before.

There was a young woman on whom I had had designs, even though I had not acted on them. I surrendered these hidden machinations of mine.

When I was four years old, my father came to blows with a senior officer at work. He received severe head injuries, which damaged his mental condition. Treatment was only partially successful. In his half-deranged state, he was violent and abusive with everyone in our home almost every day for 18 years.

Ours became a shattered family, drained of any dreams. It was the hardest of times. I blamed my father entirely. I wished he would die and end our family's misery.

In those three days, I asked myself how differently I would have behaved if I had been beaten like he had been. I felt deeply sorry. While he was asleep one day I touched his feet and asked forgiveness in my heart. From that day I began to give him love and affection. I took him to hospital for fresh treatment. This time he recovered fully, and was able to resume his job.

There was also intense anger in me against the officer who had inflicted this injury on my father and our family. From childhood I had sought to take revenge, even considering how to kill him.

But my inner voice said that the way of forgiveness is much more powerful in bringing peace of mind than the way of hatred and vengeance. I finally forgave that man from the depths of my being. Even today I feel the freeing power of that forgiveness coursing through me.

I had been living the life of an atheist. God had no place in the layout of my life. But after cleaning up my wrongs and being able to listen to the voice of my soul, my belief in God and love of Him has blossomed immeasurably. I have been able to surrender my all to the Almighty.

I took part in the 45-day March for Change with Biplab Mahato. I am ready to help stage similar *padyatras* in every state, so that we prepare people, especially youth, to become real changemakers.

***Detachment is not that you own nothing;
detachment is that nothing owns you***

Gita

I got a caring community that will walk with you till you get back onto the right path

Rohit Jagtap Akola, Maharashtra, India

*Political activist for rights of his
marginalized community*



I met a wave of positive energy from the environment and people at the IofC campus, Asia Plateau. Its ethos, the way of thinking and living made me feel peace and purity.

Through this idea you can find who you are. I got true companions and a caring community that will walk with you till you get back onto the right path. IofC gives us the chance to remove residual guilt irking our soul.

Before IofC, I indulged in everything that prevents one from making inner progress - anger, hatred, impurity, greed, ego. So, I looked back at where I had exploded in anger and acknowledged the harm it had caused. Seeing domestic violence since childhood, hatred towards my father got embedded. From that grew hate of others. So, I worked to reduce it and not be enfeebled by it again.

Through this very anger I got someone beaten up by friends. There was another person incessantly harassing me, abusing me in front of people. Fed up, I accessed his social media account and posted something derogatory about someone else as from him. Then I got him beaten up. When I joined IofC, I became acutely conscious of the baggage of ego and anger inside me. Finally I went and told this person everything, apologized, and established friendship.

Much before I met IofC, my younger brother was beaten up by someone in the school compound. He was avenging some grievance against us. My hatred of him mounted so much I started planning to end his life. I started tracking his comings and goings. One day I lay in wait on a forest path to kill him but that day he did not turn up. I was saved from doing something unthinkable. Around then, I went for the Asia Plateau internship. There I saw I had hate for him, heaped high. I forgave in my heart, then talked and ended my enmity of him. Hatred vanished.

I had stolen books from the school library in childhood, The day I saw the thief inside me, I told the Headmaster and donated a book by the famed President Abdul Kalam-ji to the school. The headmaster seemed amused accepting it.

Even after IofC, greed still surfaces in me. I fell into a scheme to make lots of money, unethically. Everything was successfully in place. But suddenly my conscience intervened, 'This is wrong...treachery to society. Don't do this.' I took courage and

told the others. They got angry but later they dropped the plan. In this way I was able to claim some mastery over my greed.

At the time of puberty, I had no friends. I was fleeing from trouble at home. In this lonely state I fell prey to seeing dirty photos, movies. Unhealthy, vibes flowed from me. Then I went for that one month's self-realisation IofC programme and especially worked on my purity level and made apologies.

A new life journey began. As I recognised my ego, impurity, anger, greed bottled in me and began resolving them, I began seeing the good inside me and what I can do for my ill-treated Scheduled Caste community and the world.

What is global citizenry? I am on a quest for that now. My childhood was spent imbibing Buddhist philosophy and thoughts of Dr Ambedkar (the brilliant SC lawyer, social political reformer and author of free India's Constitution). For me IofC's tenets resonate with Buddhist moral norms I was brought up with – focused inner listening, the four yardsticks of PHUL. But the stress in IofC was for me to live them out, not just listen to or know them. I saw them alive in practice in IofC people.

We were brought up to respect all religions. But only through IofC, I came to know the immense wealth of compassion, naturalness and conservation inherent in India's tribal cultures. Before that I had a totally erroneous, ridiculous view of tribals, derived mainly from Indian movies. Tribal thought gave me a new way of living, that for humans the only option now is to live with Nature and follow what it teaches.

IofC is badly needed to end the pervading arrogance, false pride, showiness and inequality that is killing love - and people.

This is an age of loneliness. Very few have a true companion. Everyone needs to see if their life is bringing darkness in anyone's life. All need a good friend, neighbour, community, which can be formed by IofC's ideas of selfless caring. Can we become true friends who helps give an ethical environment to others?

***IofC removes residual
guilt irking one's soul***

Joining IofC, I now have to work for peace and justice for my Scheduled Caste and other poor, underprivileged communities. They have gone through pain for centuries. Many of our own people are exploiting our grievances for their selfishness, political and economic ends - the reason we are not socially strong today.

That is why I now have to help end old political attitudes and practices of Schedules Castes and other backward communities and create a new way, born from a renewed moral base with ideological, dedicated, far-sighted attitudes that bring real social change.

***In whom there is no sympathy for living beings:
know him as an outcast
Buddhist saying***

*Inner listening helped me mend hurt
by acknowledging my wrongs and
making restitution*

Tongpang Kumzuk Longchar

Ao tribal from Nagaland

Interfaith youth activist and relief worker



MY dad was a single parent for five years. I grew up fast as I had to look after my brother. Silently I cried in bed, praying for Mother's return, earnestly requesting God to make us a happy family. Later I understood the words, divorce and separation.

My father's transferrable all-India job took us from war-ridden Nagaland to different parts of mainland India. School was one space I felt happy in but it was difficult adjusting. I was bullied as an Ao tribal mocked for Mongoloid looks, my language, my food. During parents-teachers meets, only mine didn't come. I got scolded by teachers for this.

Unlike most Nagas, I grew up speaking Hindi and even dreamed of joining the Indian Army to 'defend the nation'. As I grew up, I realized the so-called Naga 'rebels' were my own people. We are 4 million Nagas but half, of diverse tribes, are in Myanmar. Colonial conflicts compelled us to become one people. Much changed when I returned to my village, I saw things I was blind to before - the Indian Army scanning Nagas at checkpoints everywhere; an army camp in my peaceful Assam-Nagaland border village, with helipad and military patrols.

Secretly I started alcohol. With stronger people I bullied other teens, especially non-indigenous ones. My plan was to become a revolutionary leader to kill the corrupt ministers I blamed for the ills of society.

My family relations were not good. I was full of 'hate' - of my mother too, for leaving us with a hard father. I decided to meet her, after 20 years. My world crashed when I did. She was fragile and sickly. I hesitantly told her I was her son but she - a schizophrenic now - responded, 'I'm sorry I'm not your mother, I am not married. You must be mistaken.' I returned broken, angry for trying to meet her. Also angry at my mother's and father's families, but angrier at the church. Later I understood mistakes can't be corrected by hating my relatives.

I started drinking more, thinking it will ease the pain within. Whilst drinking I suddenly thought of praying - but to whom? I offered an open prayer, 'If there any

support I can get to rid of this hurt, I promise to change and dedicate my life to better things.' The next morning, I woke up feeling different, clear about what I had to do. Let go of hurts - and the past. As a son I felt I should look after my neglected mother. I admitted her in hospital and took care of her for a year. Her chronic schizophrenia eased. But she will still never remember who I am.

Then, as a first challenge to my hate I joined the Hindi-speaking interns' batch at IofC, Panchgani. Initially, I resisted IofC's idea as a noble but foolish cause. But soon the inner listening practice helped me trust the process and mend hurts by acknowledging my wrongs and making restitution. My moral compass is kept in check through inner listening. My lust, anger and malicious thoughts had held me from connecting with myself, and the divine.

I just had to correct my wrongs before I could freely support others. I wrote an apology to the people I hurt as a teen, changed hatred into kindness to work for those in conflict zones. I apologized to a lady I mistreated, acknowledging my fear of serious relationships because of childhood trauma from my family's break-up. I took steps to stop watching porn, ceased being a habitual liar. I returned money to Saif, a workmate, who had forgotten it. I divulged pocketing Rs 40,000 from a much-praised relief project and bought medicines and books of that amount for children on the Myanmar border. I listened to my father's grievances against me, apologized for disappointing him but thanked him for the education he gave me.

Currently, hatred has gone from me, even for the Indians.

Now, I am an IofC India volunteer for inner development and peace programmes. These training tools for youth with the practice of transparent restitution are decisive for change. I give time in my small Changki village, involve myself with youth globally, refugees, disaster-affected people, anti-war campaigns and try to bring out the voice of the marginalised on youth platforms like the UNESCO MGIEP programmes on kindness.

IofC helped me reflect on religious texts from various beliefs. I started accepting various possibilities of the Truth. Our religiosity means nothing if we live selfishly. Over time I made good inter-religious friends globally.

For my multi-faith unity work, I was invited to Abuja, Nigeria for a 'Traditional Peace Leaders Conference and Consultation' in 2022, hosted by UNOSAPG and Peacemakers Network. My personal change sharing there was found most impactful. My submission was for IofC's inner development inputs in youth leadership programmes.

I work closely with churches of different denominations, and Buddhist religious networks. and connect with different faith organizations.

Momentous was my surrender to the divine existence to guide and make me an instrument of peace. My belief in a divine power has strengthened as I listen to the voice within. The world has become my home.

What you are is what you have been. What you'll be is what you do now

Pradeep Sen

Chhatarpur, M P, India

Entrepreneur. Social worker



Illegal weapons for personal safety soon grew into gun-running

THOUGH there was a tradition of social and spiritual service in my family, I got into bad company in my teens and got enmeshed into the world of criminality.

Initially I kept illegal weapons for personal safety but soon that grew into handmade gun-running across states. I made big money and lived a luxurious life, being known in the neighbourhood and city as a don. In this period I also went to jail a few times. Not only my family but others began to fear me.

In 2018 I attended the *Alpaviraam* programme of the state's Happiness Dept (RAS). There, I heard the experiences of IofC people finding change in life through correction of their wrongs. These real experiences stirred me deeply and inspired me to try and listen to my inner voice.

Because of that I left all illegal enterprises, apologized to my family, to others and to the authorities. I found till I corrected the past, no new thoughts came. Daily inner listening proffers me thoughts of changing myself, my family and society.

With Chhatarpur's youth we cleaned up and beautified the 36 acre stinking Pratap Sagar lake in our town. Water supply issues got solved as homes got clean water. Now with two groups *Pratap Youth* and *Pariyavaran Vahini* we are undertaking several environment preservation and social services programmes with no self interest. For the last two years I have helped women in 70 villages market special (jungle) honey harvested from nearby jungles, giving them assured incomes.

Because some criminal Muslims eve-teased Hindu girls and women on their way to the temple, I developed anger. That soon turned to hate of all Muslims. I had physical fights and was the prime accused in the burning down of a big Muslim property in 2010.

Last month I was cleared with the courts saying I had become 'a better citizen'.

***Just as a candle cannot burn without fire,
men cannot live without a spiritual life***

This page is for writing thoughts from your Inner Listening Time...

Beyond Walls

So, after applying the ideas in this book, please write your story here for the next edition of Beyond Walls...

Please also send to: sureshkhatr107@gmail.com

This page is for writing thoughts from your Inner Listening Time...

If you come across a change story of someone else, please write here and also send to: sureshkhatr07@gmail.com

'In every religion today we have small minorities who see beyond the horizons of their particular faith, who believe that religious fellowship is possible, not through the imposition of any one way on the whole world but through an all-inclusive recognition that we are all searchers for the truth, pilgrims on the road, that we all aim at the same ethical and spiritual standards.'

- Recovery of Faith

by Indian President, the late Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,

Remarkable stories revealing the hope-giving things that happen when human beings obey nudges from an inner director.

In them, I see a hint of a wonderful world of the future.

Readers will find that it augments their stock of hope.

- Rajmohan Gandhi

Despair torments the common citizen viewing the world: political leaders preoccupied with feathering their own rather than furthering everyone's future; the rich few getting astronomically richer and jobs becoming fewer; families breaking up - women, children suffering in silent misery in homes devastated by horrific, incessant domestic violence, sexual abuse and infidelities; greed destroying the Earth seemingly beyond repair; mounting injustices breeding more hate and inequalities, discontent exploding into unending bloody conflicts; and ethics being drained out of democracies,

Life seems a losing battle of hope against despondency for billions of common citizens struggling in a world that just does not work for them.

Within these odds, this book proposes that every person can find some sustainable hope. Certainly within. And even beyond them.

This happens as they rectify in themselves elements of the ills they see in others – dishonesty, self-interest, sexual excesses, greed, envy, hurt and hate. Because they have changed and found some freedom from these, they begin to author a different story for themselves, while nurturing a new expectation that everyone else can change similarly for a more just world.

Then, by starting each day seeking small things to do – inspiration from within them in an hour of silence, anyone can free themselves from hopelessness and inaction. The Inner Voice's inspiration helps anyone find fulfillment by starting with changing what is within their reach. It may be little, or large, but they become proactive. Rather than doing nothing just because a lot cannot be changed easily, they become fully engaged in changing what they can.

₹ 300/-

Suresh Khatri of Suva, Fiji encountered the IofC way of bringing personal and global change in New Zealand in 1966. He started by returning stolen library books from school and the British Council Library. Recognising racial prejudice in himself towards native Fijians, his apology as an Indian to Fijian chiefs for this discrimination gifted him, forever, a mind more appreciative of every race and person. An unsalaried volunteer for 57 years, he has spent four decades in India with IofC and is working full time with his wife, Leena, and elder daughter, Aparna, from 'Asia Plateau', Panchgani. Namita, his younger daughter, and her husband, Andre live in Europe with son, Aman and daughter, Meera.