

Afterthoughts on bridge-building

HARRY ALMOND is a minister of the Reformed Church in America and has been on the National Council of Churches' Task Force for Christian-Muslim Relations. He and his wife spent over 20 years in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon, where their two daughters were born, one in Iraq and one in Bahrain.

I AM honoured to be included in this distinguished company. As an American I am saddened at the arrogance we project. Therefore I would like to make four suggestions to Christians in co-operating with Muslims:

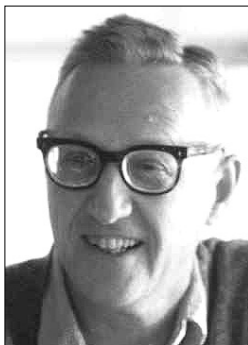
Appreciation It is so easy to pick out areas where we disagree, and you can make yourself miserable if you want to do that. But think of the things that unite us with our Muslim brothers and sisters. We have one God in common. We have a common source of morality beginning in the Ten Commandments of Moses and the other revealed standards of moral and ethical conduct. We Christians don't want to be judged by our fanatic fringes, nor do our Muslim brothers want us to judge them by their fanatic fringes.

Honesty Not honesty about the other fellow but honesty about ourselves—about our own failures and shortcomings. We must 'walk a mile in the other man's moccasins'; we must look at history from the other's point of view. Honesty about ourselves is painful. We remember one side, others remember other aspects. We can only say "sorry" if we really feel the cost of it. Honest apology is a golden key, because we begin with our own and not the other fellow's sins.

No compromise Never compromise on your own basic beliefs. I sometimes think that Muslim knees are much more flexible than Christian knees. The discipline of observing the prescribed prayer times, the fast, alms, the pilgrimage, is something from which we Christians could learn a lot!

Vision for others Take time to seek God's vision for the people with whom you wish to co-operate. We all can pick out faults, but we need to find God's vision for others and to ask God what their role is in the world today.

It is my deepest conviction that Jews who really live in the prophetic tradition rooted in the Decalogue of Moses, and Christians who live that experience of the Cross which says, "Not my will but Thine be done," and Muslims who live in true surrender to Allah, can together bring in a new world.



Foreword

by **Imam Dr ABDULJALIL SAJID**

Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony, UK

I WATCHED the dreadful events of September 11, 2001 with horror. The evil acts of 19 men changed our world. Their hate led to wars in which thousands more lost their lives. Over the next 18 months, up to Madrid on March 11, 2004, there were twelve more atrocities.* I condemn these actions unreservedly.

A man who is not afraid to die cannot be threatened – he has to be won over. Violence won't change the present state of anger and arrogance, hopelessness, frustration and fear. Neither will it bring justice, freedom and peace.

I am grateful to a Christian friend for the idea for this booklet. He suggested asking Muslims around the world for their personal experiences. I am thankful to the 19 who appear in this booklet for their courage in facing their own prejudices, fears and hatred. I have been fortunate to meet them in many different ways – through academic work, at conferences and at the world centre for Initiatives of Change in Switzerland (*see glossary, p 41*). What they write shows an alternative way ahead.

These stories show that there is always an initiative of change we can take, if we listen for the will of God. The booklet ends with a contribution from an American, because I was so struck by what he had to say.

** Tunisia 11-4-02; Yemen 6-10-02; Bali 12-10-02; Jordan 28-10-02; Mombassa 28-11-02; Riyadh 12-5-03; Casablanca 16-5-03; Jakarta 5-8-03; Riyadh 8-11-03; Istanbul 15-11-03; Istanbul 20-11-03; & Madrid 11-3-04*

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rhetoric we need reason. We must deny terrorists the opportunities to exploit the social, economic and political problems that continue to blight our world.

Fanaticism, terrorism and extremism are symptoms of a problem, not the actual causes. Our goal should be to eliminate the underlying social and political wrongs which breed them, such as:

- 1) *Hurt, anger and despair*
- 2) *Frustration and powerlessness*
- 3) *Occupation and domination*
- 4) *Injustice and suffering*
- 5) *Corruption and greed*
- 6) *Oppression and dictatorship*
- 7) *Debt, poverty and hunger*
- 8) *Discrimination & Islamophobia*

Islam is often held responsible for the acts of a handful of Muslims. Islam, whose name means peace, cannot encourage its adherents to work for death and destruction. It is

an irony that the light of Islamic learning, which brought an end to the dark ages of the West is now being seen as responsible for the advent of an age of terror.

To blame Islam for terrorism is baseless and erroneous. Islam stresses charity, mercy, and compassion. Like other religious traditions, Islam recognises the right of peoples to challenge aggression, even though it puts a higher premium on forgiveness. Islamic texts emphasise forgiveness and peace.

I strongly believe that fighting terror with bombs and bullets only plays into the hands of the terrorists. Being tough on the *causes* of this evil act is as important as identifying the terrorists themselves. We must pray to overcome our own arrogance, hatred and bitterness. Let us commit ourselves to tackle the injustices that breed the desire for revenge and create the spiral of violence.

For more Muslim reflections on September 11 and its aftermath,

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POSTSCRIPT

What are the root causes?

Imam Dr ABDULJALIL SAJID was born in Pakistan and came to Britain 32 years ago to work as a bridge-builder between faith communities



I WAS shocked and horrified by the events of Tuesday 11th September 2001. Many Muslims were also killed in this tragedy. Whoever is responsible for these atrocities, regardless of their religious, ethnic, racial, cultural or political beliefs must be brought to justice. These attacks are attacks on Islamic values that over a billion Muslims around the world treasure and share. The name of Islam has been dishonoured. Islam has been hijacked and Muslims all over the world are facing the consequences.

There are Muslims who claim to be religious but try to impose their views on others by force. But Islam teaches respect for freedom of conscience and belief. Extremism is alien to Islam.

Islam is a religion of moderation. The Holy Qur'an defines Muslims as the well-balanced middle nation model for others (2:143) and advises them not to follow extremism in religious interpretation (4:171, 5:77, 22:78).

The Holy Prophet warned Muslims: ***Beware of extremism in your religion, as people before you were destroyed themselves because of their extremism.***

Islam condemns all forms of terror, killing without due process of law, injustice, corruption, tyranny and oppression. There is no justification for the use of terms such as 'Islamic terrorists'. But as a Muslim I must be aware of deeds by other Muslims in the name of Islam. I feel ashamed when I hear that they are breaking the Law of Islam. I sincerely apologise to those who have suffered from senseless actions of so-called Muslims. I seek forgiveness from Allah and ask forgiveness from my fellow beings. However, we must find the root cause of the problem.

To eradicate terrorism we must address the conditions that can give rise it. To combat terrorism we need a united front. Building bridges between nations and peoples must be part of that strategy. Instead of vengeance we need justice; instead of

Introduction

Dr MUKTEDAR KHAN earned his PhD in International Relations, Political Philosophy and Islamic Political Thought from Georgetown University, and is now Assistant Professor of Political Science at Adrian College, Michigan.



WHAT happened on September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington DC will forever remain a horrible scar on the history of Islam and humanity. No matter how much we Muslims condemn it, and point to the Qur'an and the Sunnah to argue that Islam forbids the killing of innocent people, the fact remains that the perpetrators of this crime against humanity have indicated that their actions are sanctioned by Islamic teachings. Why are some Muslims so angry at the US that they would perpetrate such an evil and inhuman act? An even more puzzling question is how Islam could be the motivation or justification for such an act.

It is important to clarify that in spite of its gross inhumanity, the attack on America is certainly not the most egregious of crimes against humanity. The Spanish Inquisition, the Holocaust, the genocide in Rwanda, the systematic elimination of the Native Americans, the appalling ethnic cleansings in Africa, Cambodia and Bosnia (to mention but a few) are in sheer number of casualties much bigger crimes. In India thousands of Sikhs were slaughtered as revenge for the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The attack on America is significant because of its spectacular nature, its target—the world's sole superpower—and the fact that it was caught on tape.

In the aftermath of September 11 ordinary Americans displayed an extraordinary resolve to pre-empt any backlash against American Muslims. American leaders at all levels took special measures to ensure that the lives, the mosques and the properties of Muslims were safe. Under extremely testing circumstances, the American people displayed a remarkable commitment to tolerance and to intolerance of bigotry. In this display of respect for diversity, Muslims need to catch up with the Americans.

Muslims, including American Muslims, have been practising hypocrisy on a grand scale. They protest against the discriminatory practices of the US and Israel but are silent against the discriminatory practices in Muslim states. In the Gulf States one can see how laws and even salaries are based on ethnic origin. This is racism, but we never hear of Muslims protesting against it at any international forum.

The point however is this—our belief in Islam and commitment to Islamic values is not contingent on the moral conduct of the US or Israel. And as Muslims can we condone such inhuman and senseless waste of life in the name of Islam?

A nation of moderation and justice....for what is right
(Qur'an 2:143; 3:110)

Many Muslims also believe that the US is inherently opposed to Islam and Muslims. Osama bin Laden for one has claimed that by maintaining troops in Saudi Arabia (to protect the monarchy from any popular revolution) the US actually occupies the two most important Muslim holy sites, Makkah* and Medina. And that through Israel, which is seen as an outpost of Western imperialism in the Arab world, the US occupies Jerusalem, the third most holy Muslim city. Add to this the systematic destruction of Palestinian land and the daily atrocities, assassinations and dispossession of the Palestinians by a US-funded Israeli army, and it is not difficult to imagine why the US is not seen as a beacon of freedom and virtue in the Muslim world.

Does this mean that angry Muslims are allowed to perpetrate collateral damage that includes nearly 3,000 innocent people? Certainly not. The purpose of this article is not to condone what happened on September 11. What happened was horrible, inhuman and un-Islamic. But reflection over Muslim grievances can help us understand how even devout people can be driven to commit themselves to terror.

How can Islam permit or incite terror?

Distorted interpretations of Islam are used by extremists as a rhetorical instrument for mobilisation of resistance and justification of their actions. Islam specifically forbids suicide (Qur'an 4:29) and the killing of civilians, women and children (Bukhari: *Book of Jihad* – a book of sayings of the Prophet). The theory of Jihad (struggle in the path of God) forbids violence except 1) when Muslims are not allowed

to prisons. “The way we deal now with lawbreakers does nothing for those they have injured, for reforming the criminal or for repairing society,” says Ples Felix. He and Khamisa are helping Tony Hicks learn and grow while he’s in prison; when he is freed, they hope he’ll work with them at the *Tariq Khamisa Foundation*, helping others avoid the tragedy of violence.

A visitor to a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut writes:

We reach the camp by driving through the centre of Beirut, a city literally torn to pieces in a vicious, 15-year civil war that ended in 1990. Much of the downtown commercial core of the city has been rebuilt, but here in this camp there are still bullet holes and walls crushed by mortar shells and artillery rounds. I am here with a group of 12 people from eight countries, all members of Initiatives of Change, a peacemaking group with a long history of helping heal conflicts around the globe.

We’re in Beirut to learn more about how we might help bridge the gap between the Muslim world and the West. The visit to Bourj El-Barajneh Camp is part of our education. We’re met at the camp’s entrance by Osama Ayoub, a young Palestinian who was born in the camp, set up after his parents and 300,000 other Palestinians were forced out of their homes when the state of Israel was established in 1948. Like many other Palestinians his age, he’s only known life in the camps, supported by minimal grants from the United Nations and the charity of others. In Lebanon, Osama is a second-class citizen. He cannot vote or hold a passport, and he has only limited rights to study and work.

Osama leads us through winding alleys so narrow that two people can barely pass. I may be safer here than in most American cities. Still, following an unknown guide deep into the heart of a crowded camp of Palestinians, many belonging to an organisation that launches suicide bombers, a week after their leader has been assassinated by an American-made missile—the hair rises on the back of my neck.

We meet with camp leaders at a youth centre. They bring out sweet treats and bottled sodas. Their stories are moving—but not more so than stories I have already heard from Israelis who have lost family and friends to Hamas bombs, and who live in fear that they will be the next. After an hour and a half, we wind our way back out to the edge of the camp. We take pictures with Osama and several other Palestinians who have come with us to our bus. On the bus, in thirty seconds we are passing a McDonalds and a Kentucky Fried Chicken, and the glitz of a resurgent Beirut. There is no resurgence in Bourj El-Barajneh camp. Inside it are 14,000 angry and frustrated, yet determined and resourceful, people.

Victims at both ends of a gun

The stories of AZIM KHAMISA and PLES FELIX, taken from the Giraffe Project 'Voices of Hope'



THE bare facts of the story are these: Azim Khamisa's 20-year-old son, Tariq, was making a delivery for a San Diego pizza parlour when he was shot and killed in a failed robbery attempt by a gang. The killer was Ples Felix's 14-year-old grandson and ward, Tony Hicks, who was sentenced as an adult for the murder and is now imprisoned.

That could have been the end of the story. But it was only the beginning, as you might guess from the photo. That's Khamisa on the left, Felix on the right.

Devastated

Khamisa, a banker whose family had fled violence in East Africa years earlier, was devastated by his son's death, yet he reached out to the killer's family, realising that they too had lost a boy.

Felix, a former Green Beret who is a programme manager for San Diego County, was devastated by what his grandson had done. It had been the first night he had ever defied his grandfather and left the house to meet with the gang. Felix went alone to a gathering of the grieving Khamisa family, telling them of his own grief at

what his grandson had done.

Khamisa established a foundation in his son's memory; and he and Felix formed an alliance that transforms their losses into a resolve to see that other families do not suffer such tragedies. "There were victims on both ends of the gun," says Khamisa. "Ples and I have become like brothers."

Today Khamisa and Felix go again and again into schools—together—to talk to students about Tariq's death and about gangs, to help the kids talk about the awful effects of violence on their own lives, and to affirm that they will avoid violence themselves. Kids hearing the two men's story and seeing them working together also get an unforgettable picture of a response to violence that is not more violence and hatred. Commenting on their work in schools, Khamisa says, "Every time you talk a youngster out of committing homicide, you save two."

Both men are speaking out for restorative justice, a way of dealing with criminals that helps law-breakers understand what they have done and make restitution to those they have harmed, rather than just sending them

to practise their faith (freedom of religion is threatened), 2) when people are oppressed and subjugated (in pursuit of freedom) and 3) when people's land is forcibly taken from them.

Islam allows a range of responses to these kinds of actions. One can forgive the oppressor or one can respond in kind. There are Qur'anic sources encouraging both positions:

And slay them wherever you find them, and drive them out of the places from where they drove you out, for persecution is worse than killing (2:191).

Tell those who disbelieve that if they cease persecution of believers that which is past will be forgiven them (8:38).

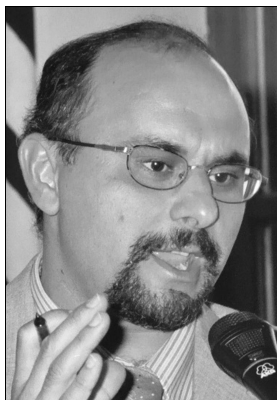
Those who prefer the first verse over the second will wage war to fight injustice. And most militant Muslims invoke this verse in the defence of their actions. But then there are Muslims who prefer the second verse and seek a negotiated end to persecution through forgiveness. The Qur'an encourages Muslims to forgive Jews and Christians if they have committed injustices against them (Qur'an 2:109; 3:159; 5:85). The two verses above are examples of the tension between realism and idealism in Islam.

While war in search of justice and to escape persecution is permissible in Islam, what happened on September 11 certainly is not. How would those Muslims responsible for the slaughter of those civilians rationalise their actions in the light of this Qur'anic verse:

He who has killed one innocent soul, it is as if he has killed all humanity. And he who has saved one soul, is as if he has saved all humanity (5:32-3).

To my mind there is absolutely no justification and no way of rationalising what happened on September 11. I am convinced that Islam does not shape the perpetrators' values and their beliefs. Islam is a religion of peace and I pray that good Muslims (Quran 11:116) will rescue Islam from the clutches of those who use it for their own political purposes. **Until Americans revisit their foreign policy practices, and good Muslims challenge distorted interpretations of Islam consistently, we may not come out of the circle of terror and counter-terror.**

** see glossary*



A moment of truth

HISHAM SHIHAB is a
former Lebanese militiaman,
now a journalist and lecturer

BORN in Lebanon in 1960, since my early childhood I became aware that the world was divided along sectarian lines. Playing in the few green fields left among the growing ‘forest of cement’—Beirut in the early 1960s—I realised that those boys who had different names, like Pierre and Elias, were Christians. They used to side with each other in any quarrel irrespective of what was right or wrong. Even a brawl over marbles used to lead to a fight.

I was 13 when an extremist Muslim group recruited me. My brother and I were attracted by a group of teenagers studying the Qur’an in our mosque under a man in his early twenties.

Soon I was taken to military training camps. We felt that we were following the path of Muhammad or Saladin. Verses from the Qur’an were often invoked to prove that Jihad was an obligation. Preachers often

supported their views with fatwas (verdicts) from the Middle Ages, and argued that we were sinners if we gave up Jihad. We were told: “If you want to shoot straight, imagine a Christian in your sights.”

My brother killed

Later I went to college. My involvement in the war became minimal, until a Leftist Christian militia killed my brother. After that, I attended classes by day, and stalked the members of that party at night.

In 1975, as the terrible civil war broke out, I joined in the conflict, shelling Christian neighbourhoods and lying in ambush for Christian militias. Later, I was given a long-range rifle with a powerful telescope and ordered to snipe at people in the Christian part of Beirut. It was a moment of truth when, through my lens I saw three people running for cover: an old

5 That any treaty or agreement signed will not be broken even if other conditions are fulfilled (8:72)

Now, is there any capacity in which Muslims can do Qital today? There is none. Shame on those culprits who call themselves Muslims and defy all these limits to which Allah has bound us.

We mould the Law

When ordinary Muslims see Islam through the eyes of these culprits, we become sceptical about our religion, and we think that somehow a change is required, so we mould the divine law just a little bit.

Those Muslims, individuals and groups who take the divine scheme

in their own hands by saying that they have not any real Muslim government to take the decision of Qital, must remember what the Prophet Muhammad said when a disciple, Huzaifa, asked (as narrated in Bukhari, 7084): “What if Muslims don’t have any government or ruler?”

The Prophet replied: *In that case stay away from all those groups (who are fighting) even if you may have to die in a jungle chewing the root of a tree.*

The September 11 killings of innocent people and other terrorist acts demand a change from us, which is a return to our roots, a return to the Holy Qur’an, and the way of all the Prophets.

Towards partnership between Muslim and Western cultures

WORLD peace is at stake as we examine the possibility of cultural partnership between Muslim and Western cultures.

There is now an impasse in both cultural blocs that produces violence and counter-violence. Neither the West nor the Muslim world is free from the anxiety and the cloud of insecurity that engulfs the entire world as a result of this violence. The world can only be free from this anxiety and insecurity if the two blocs come to an understanding of the issues that separate them and those that bring them together.

The basis for partnership between the Muslim and Western cultures is that they would be economically interdependent. Western leaders should co-operate with Muslim leaders to eradicate this ‘culture of poverty’.

His Highness Dr Ado Bayero, the Emir of Kano, Nigeria

Return to our roots

UBAID KHALID, an architect, graduated from the Near-East University in North Cyprus. In his field practical knowledge and skill are very important, besides traditional academic theory. He was engaged in many part-time jobs in different architectural offices in Pakistan and Cyprus throughout his studies.



I REMEMBER being in the office of my teacher, at his house. We were talking about the task on which I was working. It was 9 o'clock at night. I was about to leave when he suddenly came in from the lounge and said that the Twin Towers of New York were being smashed down.

Because I had not seen the news myself, I remained sceptical until I reached home and saw the awful clips on TV. It came to my mind that Muslims might be behind this evil act. And later it did so appear.

Why?

Why did it happen? Why was I thinking about Muslim involvement in this terrorist act? Because it is evident from what people are doing in the name of Islam. As a Muslim I condemn those leaders, chiefs and terrorists who led people to the killing of innocent people by picking a verse from the Qur'an and

applying whatever meaning they like to it. They are the real culprits who are responsible for the decline of the Muslim world, leading its people directly opposite to the teachings of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad.

Jihad or Qital?

I think they are confusing Jihad (inner struggle) with the term Qital (war/fighting). The conditions for Qital are:

- 1 That Qital will only be fought against tyranny (2:190-194, 4:75-6)
- 2 That fighting is only prescribed when you have been driven out of your own homes and the only way to get them back is fighting (2:190)
- 3 That the decision to fight as Qital will be taken by a valid Muslim government after proper consultation with its people
- 4 That there will be no killing of non-combatants who have not come to fight (2:190)

woman and two boys. One looked like a cousin of mine. The woman reminded me of my grandmother. My conscience told me that they were people like us. I refused to follow orders and decided to quit. No causes are worth that bloodshed, I thought.

'Love your enemy'

For my college course, I read the Qur'an and the Bible. I discovered that a Muslim could not be an observing Muslim if he did not believe in Jesus and his message, and respect the Christians. When I read the verse, 'Love your enemy' I realised that my countrymen who were fighting us were not good Christians. And we were not good Muslims. I understood that I had been taught ideological Islam, not Islam the faith. I decided to move from the 'house of fear' to the 'house of love'.

At the end of the war a friend and I started an NGO to encourage dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Three years ago I went to

Caux* in Switzerland for a conference, and saw my compatriot Assaad Chaftari apologising with tears for the atrocities he had committed against Muslims. I could not let him take the blame alone. I rushed to the stage, and shared responsibility with him. Now we are working to defuse the culture of hate in Lebanon.

We Muslims have to do away with anachronisms like military Jihad, the inferior status of women, and the lack of human rights. We need to alleviate the miserable economic conditions most Muslims live in. But that by itself will not answer terrorism. The lack of democracy and human rights in Muslim societies creates a vacuum of leadership that is often filled by extremist groups.

We need to look at our own wrongs. Moderate Muslims should reclaim Islam from its highjackers, the extremists. If we can hold to our common values, this will help block the drives to war and terrorism.

* see glossary

A Truth & Reconciliation Commission along South African lines should be constituted. We have suffered a lot but we cannot build our society on revenge and looking back; we have to forgive each other.

Osman Jama Ali, when Deputy Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Somalia, 2003

Thoughts of an Afghan refugee

SHABIBI SHAH is a poet, born in Kabul, Afghanistan. With a degree in journalism and Persian literature at Kabul University she taught Persian for 12 years. Her husband, Zafar, a respected journalist, was too outspoken for the Soviet occupiers. He fled the country in 1982, followed by Shabibi and their children. They eventually found refuge in the UK, where Zafar died. She has studied bilingual counselling and interpreting and in 1999 won an award from the National Organisation for Adult Learning.



SEPTEMBER 11 brought so much hatred, fear and anger to the world, especially amongst the Afghan/Muslim groups in Britain. Virtually every Afghani has either been the subject of, or has witnessed, brutality before arriving in exile. Now they found themselves confronted with another horror for which their country was being blamed.

For the first few weeks afterwards I was mostly housebound, and feared for my son's life at school. Every morning I reminded him not to say he was from Afghanistan.

The tragedy affected many Afghan families. It dramatically changed some lifestyles and views forever. One man told me how after

September 11 he was very self-conscious about his beard; he shaved it off but was uncomfortable about his Islamic name. Other Afghans turned bitter towards America, saying that civilians have been getting killed in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq daily for years—they were glad that America now felt their pain for once.

A delicate, uprooted plant

When I came to Britain in 1984 I felt like a delicate, uprooted plant that might not re-grow again. It took a long time to get over the fear of our displacement and adjust to a new country. But since 2001 I am nervous again. Sometimes on the bus, women ask me where I come from. I had always answered with pride, but now I avoid answering.

THREE days after the attack on the United States, Laila, 13, was with a Christian friend in her schoolyard, with a scarf on her head. A youth came up and yanked the scarf off, insulting her and saying she was a terrorist and a Muslim. She should leave the school and the country, he shouted.

She was in fact born in America, and had grown up there. So all she could do was to defend herself in front of the students who'd gathered there on hearing the arguments and yelling. The school administration then intervened to protect her, and a teacher took her home. The girl's mother called the police, who began investigations. But Laila told them that she had nothing against the boy and held no hatred towards him, and would accept an apology.

The next day, being scared for his daughter's life—especially after seeing the media coverage directed against what was called Muslim terrorism—her father

did not send her to school. Surprisingly, the boy's father came with his son to Laila's home, accompanied by the sheriff, the school head and a number of students and teachers, to apologise for what had occurred.

Afterwards the police escorted the girl to and from school daily as a temporary precaution. The local press and radio station interviewed the family and asked if any similar harassment had taken place. The newspaper showed a photo of the family in Islamic dress, and wrote how they are living peacefully and securely.

The role of the local community in that small town was strong and effective. They were able to limit the problem and resolve it without allowing it to grow out of control, and to act as mediators between the boy's family and the girl's. The two families are now close with strong ties of friendship and have not encountered any further harassment.

Blaming Islam is ludicrous

UK Prime Minister **Tony Blair**, meeting in Downing Street with leaders of the Muslim communities in Britain on 27 September 2001, said:

I'd like to start by making one thing absolutely clear: what happened in America was not the work of Islamic terrorists. It was not the work of Muslim terrorists. It was the work of terrorists, pure and simple. We must not honour them with any misguided religious justification....Blaming Islam is as ludicrous as blaming Christianity for loyalist attacks on Catholics, or nationalist attacks on Protestants in Northern Ireland.

A headscarf in New York

MANSOUR ABU RASHID is a retired general of the Jordanian Army. During border skirmishes he was captured by the Israeli Army and taken prisoner. After his release he was appointed adviser to the late King Hussain. Later as Chairman of the Jordanian Military Liaison Office, established after the peace treaty between Jordan & Israel in 1994, he resolved disputes on the Jordan/Israeli border through reconciliation on a number of occasions.



IN August 2003 I participated in a peace-building conference at Caux,* Switzerland. At the time I believed that resolving conflicts and disputes between groups in society, or between nations, ethnic groups, minorities, or religious sects, was a duty that falls on governments or governmental organisations.

But at the conference I found that there were people who committed themselves through their jobs, work, and personal conviction to resolving disputes and disagreements at all levels. I realised that the work that I had done through my service, and that I am doing now through my small establishment, is minimal compared to what is being done by those I met at the conference. I see in those people hope for a way out of a feuding world and its materialistic values.

The meetings saw the participants from 73 countries, with different religious and racial backgrounds, united by one common goal, living in peace without any kind of segregation, peacefully resolving conflict without resorting to violence.

Resolving conflicts

What I observed during my time in the conference, through meetings and meals together arranged between Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Israeli, Jordanian, Egyptian, Algerian, and Tunisian guests, will help me in my efforts to resolve conflicts and disputes, as founder of the Amman Centre for Peace & Development.

LET me now share a story of one of my relatives living in New York:

** see glossary*

English friends kept contacting me and even asked us to stay with them. But the media in the West is so powerful that it can influence people in whatever way it wants, and they make it out to be a war between Islam and Christianity. Unfortunately that played a big part in my fear, anger and frustration. People don't know how much damage Bin Laden and his group have done to Islam. The faith that I knew and grew up with was far from this view. Islam meant peace and brotherhood to me. It is a peaceful religion that has co-existed with other religions for centuries. The label 'Muslim fundamentalist' was horrible, unfair and hurtful.

When the American Embassy in Britain held a service of remembrance for September 11, I bought a bunch of flowers and decided to go.

As I stood there I was crying. A woman came up and asked why. I turned and said, "I am sorry to say I'm from Afghanistan. There was a time when I would have been proud to say that, and to give my life for Afghanistan—but I'm sure I will be again some day."

Face the real reasons

That was the only time I felt ashamed to admit where I was from. She tried to console me and said Afghanistan was not to blame.

After September 11, people in the West took a lot more interest in Islam and its history. Until then the USA seemed unaware of its arrogance and cynicism towards the underdeveloped world. Now it has the chance to face squarely the real reasons behind that awful atrocity. Will it be humble enough to learn the lessons?

As British Muslims come to the full realisation of these most awful events, which they condemn wholeheartedly, they too are beginning to feel a huge sense of fear. Terror makes victims of us all; it is beyond reason. Terror on this scale must not be compounded by knee-jerk reactions that would make victims of other innocent peoples of the world. This would only add to the devastation caused.

I am glad to note that from the very beginning the British Prime Minister together with the American President made it clear that Islam and the Muslim community are not to blame for the tragedy. We are dealing with fanatical individuals who have behaved in this most abhorrent and abominable manner. This is not a crusade or conflict between Islam and the West.

A British Muslim leader, on the day after 11 September 2001

Our home was burnt to the ground

IDREES KHAN, a businessman, was born in India, fled to Pakistan during Partition, then went to Scotland to study engineering. His career took him back to Pakistan, then Iran, Germany and Britain.



I WAS appalled at the loss of life in the United States on September 11. As a Muslim I felt sad at the depth of desperation which must have filled the minds of the young people committing this act. What sort of response can one make to something like this?

As a boy, the eldest of six children, I witnessed upheaval and bloodshed at the time of the partition of India. Our family home was in the city of Hoshiarpur, in the Indian Punjab. My father, an officer in the Indian Army Medical Corps (AMC) who had served in the war in Burma, had already received his transfer papers to the Pakistan AMC. Prior to the fateful day, 15 August 1947, we embarked on a holiday to Kashmir.

We reached Rawalpindi but it became obvious from communal rioting and events in Kashmir that it was impossible to continue. Ten million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims had fled their homes. My father took an army truck and drove back to

look for relatives. He rescued his brother's family but his younger brother was never seen again. Our home had been burnt to the ground by arsonists. We, like millions of others, were refugees. We were fortunate to be allocated a bungalow by the Pakistani Army and, as the years passed my parents were granted some restitution of their property in India with similar property in Pakistan.

Firm friends with Hindus & Sikhs

In 1951 I won a scholarship to Glasgow University where I studied engineering. There I became firm friends with a number of Hindu and Sikh students. Upon graduation I worked in multinational companies in Pakistan, Europe and the Middle East.

Forty years on, married and living in Wales, I found myself at an interfaith meeting in England. A man stood up and apologised for the mistakes the British had made in India. My first response was in fact

me a good Muslim". Then I heard Abul Hazaghi, representative of the Shah of Iran, saying, "I come here every year to get my Islamic furniture polished". I heard Prince Hassan, cousin of King Farouk of Egypt, and the Tolon Na, a Muslim Ghanaian chief. They made a lasting impression on me and I realised that it is not only prayers that make a good Muslim, but also care for the other person's feelings, and that barriers that separate man from man, and man from God, have to be destroyed.

When I was the all-India President of the Kutchi Memon Federation, I invited Rajmohan Gandhi* to address us. After his talk someone asked: "Islam teaches all that Mr Gandhi just said, so why should we become members of MRA?" Rajmohan asked me to reply. I said MRA is not an organisation where one becomes a member. It is a way of life based on four absolute moral standards, Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love, accompanied by a quiet time.

High on a shelf

I then told a story: There was an owner of a factory who was staying abroad. From there he periodically sent letters and messages to the manager about how to manage the factory. The manager loved the owner and treated his communications with great respect, covering

them with silk cloth and placing them high on a shelf. Years went by but the factory deteriorated slowly. One day a friend passed by and on seeing its condition asked the manager, "The owner must be sending you some instructions on looking after the factory?" He replied, "Yes, he is in touch. I have great respect for his communications. I keep them high on a shelf." The friend said "Don't you think you should understand them and act on them?"

Surrender completely

The 'owner' in the story is God, the communications are from the Qur'an, the 'manager' represents us Muslims. And the friend is MRA. The moral can be summed up in these words: "The ideals which we hold but do not live up to have no power to withstand the realities of bitterness, division and greed that dominate us."

If Muslims today follow our religion according to the Message sent to us, and show love to human beings, and surrender completely to God and have faith in Him, we will, Inshallah, have a new world.

* see glossary

The best secured borders are reconciled neighbours

Rt Revd Riah Abu El-Assal, Presiding Bishop of Jerusalem & the Middle East



A crooked stick cannot cast a straight shadow

HAROON KABLY
is a former Supreme Court lawyer from India

JUST as a crooked stick cannot cast a straight shadow, hate-filled actions cannot cast a shadow of love. Hatred begets hatred. Islam is a religion of peace and love.

Many Muslims today seem to have forgotten the life of the Holy Prophet. When a Jewish woman used to throw filth on him as he passed by her house on his way to the Mosque he did not get angry; he brushed it off and proceeded on his way. One day when he was passing she was nowhere to be seen. He enquired and was told she was not well. Accompanied by a neighbour, he went and asked about her health and then brought the medicine she needed. She felt sorry for her actions. Such was the example he set for our lives.

Apologise sincerely

Prior to 1952 I used to pray five times a day, read the Qur'an, and thought that I had done what a

Muslim should do. Then I met Dr Frank Buchman* and the international group he brought with him to Bombay. At their meeting, speaker after speaker came up on the stage and shared their experiences. I felt they were all talking about me. I went home and pondered over those speeches. A glaring thought passed my mind. "Have you cleaned up the mess you have gathered all these years?" I ignored this and proceeded with my work. Yet something drew me and I found myself once again amongst them. This time the thought was clear. "The only way to clean up the mess is to sincerely apologise."

My Islamic furniture polished

I was invited to their summer assembly at Caux*. I went for two months and stayed for ten. There I heard Mahmoud Masmoudi who later became one of the ministers of Tunisia. He said, "MRA* has made

to point out the positive contributions they had made—the railways, justice system, civil service and the army. However, I still - harboured a deep resentment towards the British for their mistakes at the partition of India and Pakistan. When I looked at things honestly, I had to admit that this was only half the picture.

Abduction

In January 1992 my wife and I were invited to attend a conference in India on the theme of Reflection, Healing and Reconciliation. A Hindu couple from Kashmir told of their abduction from their home by a gang of Muslim youths. The Indian army eventually rescued them from this harrowing experience. I could not help thinking about the death toll suffered by Muslims in Kashmir since 1947.

Impelled by an inner force

We met Rajmohan Gandhi, one of the founders of the centre in Panchgani*, when the conference took place. He has devoted his life through his writing and other ways to working for peace between different communities in India. We also met an Indian academic who told us that the Moguls had built

mosques on the sites of Hindu temples throughout India. It was some months later the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was dismantled.

When it was time for me to speak at the conference I found it very difficult, but as I began I was impelled by an inner force to talk about my family's experience at partition. Justice Narula, a Sikh and retired Chief Justice, was sitting in the audience. I apologised to the Hindus and Sikhs for the suffering their communities went through as a result of Muslim violence at the time of partition and asked for their forgiveness.

Released from a great burden

The response was overwhelming. A change came over me, as if I had been released from a great burden. I had truly learnt how to forgive. After this I set about putting right my relationships in the family. This was much harder! Since then so much has happened to change my life that I feel more optimistic about the future. Though it can be a challenge *not* to find someone to blame for all the suffering in the world, when we join with those we blame in a healing process, miracles can happen.

** see glossary*

Fundamentalism tries to impose a single truth on a plural society.

Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi, UK



Where was God on September 11?

ABDULAZIZ SACHEDINA is a Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Virginia. His latest book is *'The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism'*.

NEW YORK and Washington were grieving. Sorrow covered the horizons. The pain of separation and of missing family members, neighbours, citizens, humans could be felt in every corner of the country. That day was my personal day of 'Jihad' (inner struggle)—with my pride and my identity as a Muslim.

My personal Jihad

This is the true meaning of Jihad – 'struggle with one's own ego and false pride'. I don't ever recall praying so earnestly to God not to attribute such madness to Muslims. I felt the pain and, perhaps for the first time in my entire life, I felt embarrassed at the thought that it could very well be my fellow Muslims who had committed this horrendous act of terrorism. How could these terrorists invoke God's mercy and compassion when they

had, through their evil act, put to shame the entire history of this great religion and its culture of toleration? Had Islam failed to teach them about the sanctity of human life? Hadn't this God, whom they call the Merciful, the Compassionate Allah, given them the gift of the Revelation that regards the killing of one person *as though he had killed all of humankind?* (Qur'an 5:32-3). Hadn't the founder of Islam, Muhammad, taught that suicide, in any form and for any reason, was absolutely forbidden?

Everywhere in the ruins

As I struggled to understand the meaning of the verse: *We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, so that it is clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not enough that God is witness over everything?* (Qur'an, 41:53) I realised that God was everywhere in the ruins,



Passion for justice —not revenge

JAMILA SAJID is a housewife, marriage counsellor and interpreter

I AM the mother of five beautiful children and wife of Imam Sajid who is very active in community work locally, nationally and internationally. I came to England from Pakistan to join my husband who was a student in the early 70s. Living in London I faced a lot of hate and verbal abuse. I did not like England because of its cold weather and racism.

We moved to Brighton in 1979 when my husband was offered a job. I fully adjusted to Brighton life, where I helped women with various matrimonial matters. I also assisted many with translation and interpretation, being a trained professional interpreter.

Frozen

On September 11, 2001, I was hooked to the TV as I watched the horror of that evil attack on New York. I was frozen—my eyes could not believe what I was seeing. For a second I thought it was fiction – it

looked like a horror movie.

I was frightened for my husband and children lest there was a backlash. I thought all Muslims would be blamed and that revenge would take place. My worries became true when I started receiving hate calls and some mosques received threats. For months I was afraid to go out by myself in case I was attacked by racists.

A responsibility to change

When the 'war on terror' started I thought it was wrong because one cannot wage war against an idea. *One can only win over fanatics by having a greater passion for justice than they have for revenge.* Education, forgiveness and diplomacy are the real solution to the threat of terror. The lesson I learnt from September 11 is that the world has changed and will not be the same again. All of us have a responsibility to change ourselves for the common good.

time, and thanks to many exchanges with my students, many have understood that the West could have another face.

I would say that if I had not encountered these ideas I would have returned home with much hatred and bitterness. What I learnt in the West, others have not, and many have returned home with hate and vengeance towards the country which received them.

My encounter with Christians

The second experience that I would like to share is that of my encounter with Christians. Before we left Tunisia, my father wished to prepare us to integrate into the French system and he put me in a local Catholic school where discipline was very strict. For a minor offence my trousers were removed and I was beaten. This did not leave any marks on my bottom, but did on my mind! I detested that man in his black robe, and was terribly afraid of going to France for I feared that a Christian country would be made up of men like this. Once in France I discovered that it

was far from being Christian, but I was seized by fear again when I had to go to the private school.

Human nature the same

Thank God, I found teachers who were welcoming and open, and who spoke to me about my country. They even took an interest in my faith to the point where I became more interested in it myself, because they often asked me questions which I didn't know how to answer. I learnt above all to open myself to other religions, and to understand them from the inside. Since the end of the 1970s I have begun to take part in inter-religious meetings. Today more than ever we need to know each other, for the future of the world depends on it.

The experiences through which I have lived could have led me to very negative results if God had not helped me to take the right road. I am convinced that human nature is the same everywhere whether we are Muslim, Christian, Jewish or of another tradition, from the East or the West.

** see glossary*

We share many key values in common:

respect for knowledge, for justice, compassion towards the poor and underprivileged, the importance of family life and respect for parents.

HRH Prince of Wales, at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 1993

showing His signs and reminding human beings of the satanic forces 'in themselves' to which they can succumb, while falling prey to self-deception that they were doing the bidding of the merciful God.

Letter in a suitcase

In the days that followed, more and more information about the terrorists became available, including the five-page letter left in a suitcase in a car parked at Logan Airport in Boston. If anything, the fanatical mindset of Muslim extremists became obvious as I read: "If God grants any one of you an opportunity to kill, you should undertake it as an offering on behalf of your parents, for they are owed by you... If you kill, you should plunder those you kill, for this is a sanctioned sunna (tradition) of the Prophet."

This was not only an attack on innocent people, as I reflected; it was also an attack on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad!

It is true that Abrahamic religions teach that God is just and that the implementation of justice is part of God's purposes for human societies. Muslims in general believe that God's sacred law, the Sharia,

provides the scales of justice for Muslims. But who are these people who claim for themselves the right to define the parameters of divine justice, and inflict destruction on human society in the name of the Sharia? I am wondering how God's religion can become a source of terror and meaningless destruction. Did God send humans on earth to destroy one another in His name? Or, did He send them to live in peace and harmony?

A contrived meaning

I continued to search for the religious sources of terrorism, if there were any, in the scriptures or in the tradition ascribed to the Prophet. As I searched, I became aware that the term Jihad, which is commonly used by these terrorists to legitimise their criminality, does not appear in the meaning of 'holy war against the infidels' at all. In fact, terrorism in any form does not qualify as anything more than a cowardly act and an expression of rejection of God's blessing of life. So, the term 'Jihad' in the lexicon of these murderers does not appear in more than a contrived meaning to cover up the horror of their satanic behaviour.

Deliver us from fifty years of suffering, to a new dimension of sanity.

Prof. Sari Nusseibeh, President of the Palestinian University Al Quds, Jerusalem



Dance of Celebration

*The American administration and many Iraqis have pledged to put Saddam Hussein on trial. He will be accused of many crimes against humanity, including the gassing of thousands of Kurdish Iraqis. **SAREN AZER** was one of the first medical aides into the Iraqi town of Halabja after it was bombed with chemical weapons. Now he works as a senior post-doctoral fellow in pulmonary medicine at a Vancouver hospital.*

THINKING of those in the West who supported Saddam Hussein during Iraq's 10-year war with Iran, who else should go on trial with Saddam? Whatever the answer, I now join other Kurds in a dance of celebration. We may not have found our David, but at least a Goliath has fallen.

My birth in 1966 in Iran coincided with a widespread uprising of Kurdish people on the Iraqi side of Kurdistan. My earliest memories are of large migrations of Kurdish highlanders from one side of the border to the other, and of refugee camps, the wounded and injured, and long walks on the skirts of the Zagrus Mountains. It was only many years later that I realised that there was a world beyond those mountains and the Kurdish highlands, a world in which wars are not the daily routine. Yet, many more years passed before I was able to meet this world.

My years of childhood were a contrast between the astonishing beauty of the Kurdish highlands—its nature, people and their culture—and the brutality of war and its destructive power. From an early age, with the death of each person close to me, the desire to make a contribution to peace and harmony grew stronger in me. I remember countless days when we had to leave school and go back to the basement of our home, where my father would supervise our studies.

War between Iraq and Iran

I finished my high school in 1983 and the following year I started university in Iran. My years of undergraduate studies coincided with the terrible war between Iran and Iraq. We were close to the Iraqi border and our studies were frequently interrupted. We often had to help evacuate the dead and wounded. It should be noted that,

if sometimes they were right! I even came to use racist reasoning to justify my own mistakes. For example, if I arrived late for a meeting, I wouldn't accept any criticism because I considered it was quite normal that anyone could have unexpected difficulties. I took any comment on this subject as a humiliation. Only later did I understand the real meaning of punctuality.

Decisive 24 hours

In July 1973 my father encouraged me to go on holiday in Switzerland for a few days, with a backpack and a very little money. Chance or Providence or the inner voice—call it what you will—led my footsteps to a wonderful place called Caux,* the international conference centre of Initiatives of Change. I stayed 24 hours—a short time, but it was decisive for the rest of my life. Many things caught my interest, others my curiosity and yet others my astonishment. Was it a dream or reality that I was living? No, it wasn't a dream, it was reality. I met there French people who were very different from those I knew in Paris: French who recognised the racism in their country. They asked forgiveness and proposed that we fight together against this scourge and to work to understand each other better, putting the emphasis on

the positive characteristics of each one.

Since then I have learned to work with these people. It wasn't easy; we got angry sometimes, but we decided always to be frank, to tell the truth whatever the risk. At the same time, I became aware of the privilege of being between two civilisations: I am Arab by culture and Muslim by religion, but I have lived in a Western country since my childhood. I felt that I could contribute to bringing together both civilisations.

Return to Tunisia

After 15 years in France, I decided to return to my country, because if we want to build bridges, we need to work on both sides. I had learnt so much on this side of the Mediterranean and I wanted to pass on what I had learnt to the other side to help consolidate our relations. I returned home without a car, without money in my pocket, but with a lot of books and a heart full of experiences.

Back in Tunisia I was shocked by the ideas of my students about the West: most held a narrow-minded view, considering the West as a world under the dictatorship of materialism and moral decay. We reproach the West for so many things, but we are no better, often imitating the worst aspects. But in

Recognising racism

HATEM AKKARI comes from Tunisia. Like many North Africans, he has spent a good part of his life in France. He shares two personal experiences that have a bearing on the relations between these two worlds: the first concerns his life in the West and particularly in France, and the second his encounter with Christians.



TOWARDS the end of the 1960s my father, a primary school teacher, had to emigrate to France for political and intellectual reasons—as do many who have fundamental differences with the government in their countries. This gave us a new social status as immigrants, identified as ‘North African Arabs’—an expression that invariably contains a negative connotation. Perhaps the most virulent reactions encountered were at school and particularly from a woman who advised us on courses we could take.

You are dreamers

I wanted to follow a long scientific route, but she said, “You Arabs - aren’t you the ones who wrote *A Thousand And One Nights*? You are dreamers; you come to France to become doctors, engineers, to get rich and go back

home with a car. No, my little boy, you’ll learn a skill and in two years you will be a worker.” That was the collapse of our reason for coming to France. The alternative was to study at a private school, but my father was a worker who earned very little. He couldn’t send both me and my brother to a private school. He had to choose between us. He chose me. I hardly dare express what this meant and continues to mean for me.

Justifying my mistakes

So I attended a Catholic private school. This experience of racism was very bitter and it left me with a deep hatred towards those responsible. It was difficult for me—probably for anyone—not to fall into generalisations. As a result I considered everyone who criticised Arab society and Muslim people as racist with a destructive aim—even

due to the critical need for medical services in these war years, we had to attend extensive courses and programmes in practical medical services.

Peace and human rights

In 1993 I left Iran in search of a safe haven. I travelled through many different countries looking for a place where I could stay and be safe. Finally, in June 1994, I was able to join my older brother, who had also been forced to leave Iran for political reasons, and who had been living in Canada since 1988. I spent the first few months learning English, adjusting to Canada’s climate and

lifestyle and seeking a route through which I could continue my education. In 1996 I was accepted as a graduate student in the Pulmonary Division of the Department of Medicine at the University of Alberta. I finished my PhD in June 2001 and am now completing my senior postdoctoral fellowship.

During my years in Canada I have also been extensively involved in the areas of human rights and the environment. Since 1996 I have volunteered with Amnesty International and the International Society for Peace & Human Rights (ISPHR), which I co-founded.

SHARMIN AHMED is co-founder of an Islamic Policy research think-tank, *The Minaret of Freedom Institute*, & author of ‘*The Rainbow in a Heart*’ on women as agents of peace.

AS a young Muslim girl of Bengali origin, in 1971 I witnessed the horrors of the deaths of millions of innocent Bengalis at the hands of the invading Pakistani Army because of a shattered dialogue—a broken promise. In Pakistan’s first-ever general election, the Awami League had won a landslide victory. But the military rulers from the western wing of Pakistan declined to transfer power to the elected representatives. A sense of racial superiority of the Pakistani military culture and a lust to retain power by any means resulted in this genocide.

As the new nation called Bangladesh emerged from the ashes of the millions of martyrs and the silent tears of thousands of nameless violated women, my conviction deepened for a better tomorrow in which a **genuine dialogue of hearts** and a mutual interaction of minds (irrespective of religious and cultural differences) will be celebrated as a means of achieving a wholesome personal and social transformation.

Singapore on September 11

FATIMA MINHAS was born in Pakistan, grew up and was educated in the UK and now lives in Singapore, working as a senior legal editor in a publishing house.



I WAS at home in Singapore at around 10pm on a usual weekday evening. My husband Zaheer and I were watching TV when a 'breaking news' headline interrupted the programme.

It's not surprising we didn't sleep well that night. Next day at work was not productive. We learned that one of our sister companies in New York had lost all its employees in Tower 1.

Back to basics

The international media has described September 11 as 'the day that changed the world'. I didn't feel as if the world had changed at all, but I did feel that the perception of Islam had changed. Being a Muslim would now be more testing. How could I justify to non-Muslim friends that these terrible acts were not in our teachings. Killing the innocent is never allowed. I had to go back to basics. I had to refer to

the Qur'an.

There was certainly a new interest in Islam and Muslim societies. Books on Islam were suddenly enjoying an international sales boom. The Qur'an was reprinted to meet the demand.

What is Islam?

This was enabling people to learn first hand that Islam is a peaceful religion founded upon tolerance, justice, mercy and love. Statesmen, political scientists, researchers and thinkers consider it necessary to understand Islam correctly and have given speeches underlining Islamic tolerance and willingness to reach agreement. Americans have since approached Muslim organisations in order to find the most accurate information about Islam and its history. The Middle East Media Research Institute reported that in the two years after September 11, in America alone, 34,000 people

At that time I came in contact with a couple who introduced me to Initiatives of Change. I was touched by their ideas. I thought they were what I was looking for. With this couple I started a process of healing and reconciliation between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims in Pune, which is still going on.

Don't impose solutions

It is easy to blame an individual or group for the sufferings of the Kashmiri people. Most see India as their enemy, but there is a lot more to it than that. Many Indians don't know what is happening in Kashmir. I think the most important thing is to allow people to have dialogue and to understand each other, listening to our 'inner silence', instead of imposing solutions which are the result of preconceived notions.

With these thoughts I joined the 'Action for Life' team* for nine months. I believe that the world is one family and together we can make it heaven. It was not easy to give up my practice in the very first

year of my career, but I am sure God wants me to do this and chose me for it. I don't have any resources but if He wants me to be here He will produce them. I have submitted myself to God, listening to my inner voice and guidance from Him.

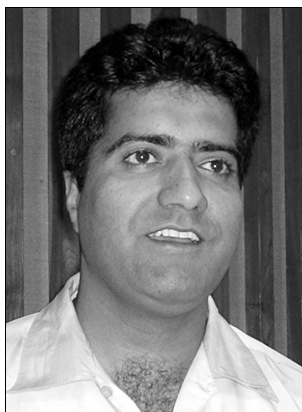
My Mission: to work in Kashmir and in other parts of India for issues relating to human rights and social justice; to work to bridge the gaps between different communities, by becoming a resource and providing a base for greater interaction between them; to work as a human rights activist helping with free legal aid for the needy.

My Vision: to have a violence-free, clean, spiritually and economically developed Kashmir; to have more youth fully committed and motivated to work for social change; for Kashmir to be a place where equality for all will be the basis of any programme, and the administration and representatives will be responsible and accountable. The Kashmir of my dreams is possible.

* see glossary

Ashamed

We feel deeply ashamed of the international campaign of wanton violence and terrorism carried out in the name of Islam.... We specifically call upon Muslim imams and senior leaders, both Sunni and Shia, to issue a joint and unequivocal condemnation of all acts of violence. From a letter from more than 20 Muslim professionals in the London *Times*, 14 March, 2004



Listening to the inner voice

MOHAMMAD ALTAF KHAN
is a law student from Kashmir

I WAS born in 1973 in Srinagar. I finished my schooling in 1988 and my BSc from Kashmir University in 1996 and began work on a local Urdu newspaper. Since then I have worked in different social and political organisations in Kashmir and elsewhere. I then started teaching children of the Hanji community (boatmen living on banks of the River Jehlum) in Srinagar. I wanted to set up a school for this community but could not do so because of the prevailing violence.

Arrested

In 1997 I was arrested for having connections with extremists in the Kashmir valley. I was tortured in Delhi for a month and in Kashmir for some forty-five days. I can't express the pain and suffering of that time. Afterwards I was detained altogether for two years in different jails. It was during this time that I

began to feel hate not only for the people responsible for my pain and suffering, but towards the whole of India. Finally my detention ended in August 1999 leaving within me hate, anger and frustration.

Overcoming my prejudices

Throughout this experience the thought that came to my mind was about how I could use my life to mitigate the sufferings of my people. I thought the legal way was the best way to fight injustice. I went to Pune where I was admitted to the Law College.

This was a difficult time. I carried my hate with me but luckily my roommate was a person from northern India, Gagandeep Sharma, who helped me overcome my prejudices. I started believing that my whole struggle in Kashmir had been futile—I was as selfish as everybody else.

embraced Islam. The entire world is asking: 'What is Islam?'

Singapore, which prides itself as a multi-racial, multi-religious society, is not only proud of its diversity, but also its intercultural exchange. We've been fortunate that Muslims were not subject to violence and abuse in the days after September 11.

Respectful to all religions

Society is much more harmonious and respectful to all religions. This is perhaps largely due to the Government because all the prominent religions are recognised and celebrated together. Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist festivals are all public holidays. So from a young age children are encouraged to recognise and

appreciate each other's cultures and religions. A Chinese child will understand why their Muslim friend is fasting and what *Eid ul Fitr* means; likewise, a Hindu child will exchange oranges with Chinese friends and serenade the Chinese New Year with *Gong Xi Fa Cai*.*

At school in the UK, I don't remember ever learning about other religions, let alone non-Christian religious festivals being designated public holidays!

The fear of Islam amongst non-Muslims is because the religion is largely misunderstood. It is a shame that a small minority of extremists become the voice and face of our peaceful faith, when they blatantly misrepresent it. * see glossary

Respect and be respected

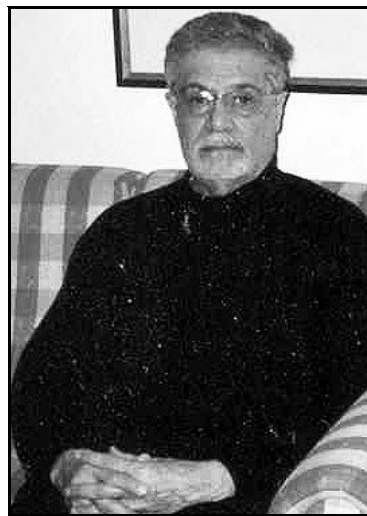
From Washington DC, Arshad Muhammad reported on the visit on September 17, 2001 of US President **George W Bush** to the Islamic Centre in Washington. Following Muslim custom he removed his shoes before entering the mosque.

Bush said: *Millions of US Muslims are making an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. In our anger and emotion we must treat each other with respect... Those who feel they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take out their anger don't represent the best of America, they represent the worst of humankind and they should be ashamed of that kind of behaviour.*

He reminded people that: *These acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith and it's important for my fellow Americans to understand that.... The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam.*

From Godless to God-fearing

WAHEED ZAMAN was born and bred in Hyderabad, Deccan, in India. His father was the Chief Engineer and Secretary to the Nizam's government, and Waheed became an engineer himself. His work took him to the Middle East, helping to construct 500 electrical sub-stations in Iraq, 15 transformer sub-stations in Syria, and with the electrification of three towns in Iran, an irrigation project and a diesel power plant in Egypt. Each time he was working with people of other faiths.



FROM 1911 to 1948 Hyderabad possessed a ruler, Nizam Osman Ali Pasha, who was at the time the richest man in the world. He was also a poet, a philosopher, and a shrewd judge of men. He was a kind and tolerant Muslim. He lived simply and ate little himself, but the food for the rest of the palace was sumptuous. On Christmas Eve, he would be driven to a Catholic mission to leave a big donation for the Sisters.

Peacefully together

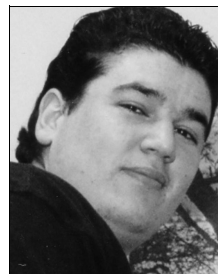
He was an orthodox Muslim and went for prayer at the Juma Mosque every Friday. He gave large sums to the poor; this was his protection against terrorism. He had no police escort during prayer. Since it was a Muslim state, Sharia law applied for

Muslims, while for Christians, the British law. Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together peacefully.

To Makkah a second time

In 1938 the Nizam sent my father to Makkah (Mecca) to install a power plant to light the Holy Mosque as his gift. My family of six were the guests of King Ibn Saud and stayed near the Holy Mosque. 35 years later I met a colleague of my father's who asked me to arrange a German consulting group to help with air-conditioning in the Mosque. So, Allah brought me back to Makkah a second time.

In my consortium of architects and engineers were German and Swiss Protestant Christians; I was the only Muslim. We put up a proposal for this project jointly with



Fighting the wrong battle

IMAD KARAM was born and grew up in Gaza City in Palestine. Holding a Master's degree in media and communication studies he is doing research at City University, London, for a PhD on the impact of Arab satellite broadcasting on young people.

THE events of September 11, 2001 were horrendous. For me they were overwhelming and very difficult to grasp. So when I came to the UK, I felt that I had to defend my religion against a huge degree of misconception. In the Muslim world the gravest is that all actions of any western government are a crusade against Muslims. In the western world the image is that Muslims want to destroy them since Islam is a world religion. The media often misinforms. From an American perspective, the killing of soldiers in Iraq is part of attacks by terrorists on the West by Al Qaeda.

The gap between the West on the one hand and the Arab world on the other hand has never been wider. Coupled with a double standard Middle East policy, subsequent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq have been counterproductive and the West seems to be losing the battle for the hearts and minds of Muslims. As much as Muslims and Arabs condemned the September 11 attacks, and will continue to, many

will find it more difficult to do so if the events were to be repeated. If we were to put aside political correctness, we would find that many people in the Arab world feel that America has received what it deserves. Deep down many people in the Arab and Islamic world are very sceptical about Western interventions in their affairs.

Look at the reasons why

The war on terrorism cannot be won by military means alone. These means have proved to be ineffectual—and the international community needs to look at the reasons why. We should even look into the rhetoric of Al Qaeda about injustices done to Muslims in different parts of the world—Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir and Chechnya—and relating to the presence of foreign troops near the holiest Islamic sites in Saudi Arabia.

We need help in convincing our own people that the West can change, as I have sensed may be possible since being in the West.

Free from hatred

AHMED EGAL is a refugee from Somalia now living in Sweden. In 1978 he helped found the Democratic Front for the Salvation of Somalia, and spent ten years in the bush as a guerrilla fighter. His great-grandfather was



WHEN I was 25 the then dictator of Somalia arrested me and my whole family, even though we belonged to the same clan as him. I was released after a year, but lost my civil liberties and fled to Ethiopia. There, along with other intellectuals, I criticised some of the guerrilla leaders I had been fighting with—and spent another year in jail, leaving me very bitter.

After my release, I realised we would never reach our aims by armed force, so I asked for asylum in Sweden. It was on a study course in Swedish that I met another refugee who had been a leader of the Polish Farmers' Solidarity movement. From him I learned that change has to start with oneself. Up to then I had thought mostly how others needed to be different.

I wanted to kill him

In 1993 when the war and starvation in Somalia was at its worst, I was given the opportunity to go with a Swedish aid organisation to my homeland. The trip gave me an opportunity to meet my former guerrilla leader and ask him for forgiveness for my bitterness and

hatred of him. I confessed that I had wanted to kill him if I had got the chance. But now I could tell him that I was free from my hatred. As he gradually realised what I meant, he in turn forgave me. Then I said that now both of us must forgive our worst enemy, General Aideed.

He replied, "Now, Ahmed, you are going too far. That man is to blame for the thousands of orphans we have. They would never forgive me if I made peace with him." I responded, "If we don't make peace, many more children will be orphans and they will blame us."

Four weeks later, I was surprised to hear on the BBC Somalia news bulletin that this man had travelled to Mogadishu with some of his people, and on the airfield he became reconciled with Aideed. I do not know if our conversation lay behind it, but I am grateful that it happened. It is extremely important for the future of Somalia that my former leader started to understand what forgiveness and reconciliation is all about because he was one of the five men who were chosen by the different factions at the time to lead the country towards a government.

a Pakistani civil engineering consultant. Several Arab, Egyptian and Turkish architects were our competitors. After a year of negotiation the Saudi Government decided to hold a final award meeting at Makkah. This was meant to eliminate my Christian engineering partners, as non-Muslims are not allowed in Makkah.

Open-air air-conditioning

The meeting was sponsored by the Ministers of Finance and Haj. The decision-maker was Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz. During the meeting somebody objected, "The German architects are Christians and the drawings and models are from them."

But the Sheikh was impressed by our idea of open-air air-conditioning. He found it unique and approved it, saying, "The Holy Qur'an gave a great impetus to learning, especially in the field of science, and doesn't forbid Christian architects to design improvements in the House of God for the benefit of two million pilgrims." (Muslims are encouraged to strengthen their link with Christians and Jews, as they are both 'People of the Book')

In 1967-69 I had an office in Istanbul and noticed that the rich Turkish Muslims were not interested

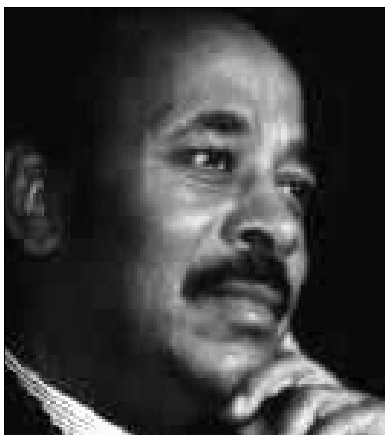
in Islam whereas the poor working classes were religious, but could not find employment in Turkey.

In central Europe there was a great shortage of workers, and thousands left Turkey to find work in Austria and Germany. They built hundreds of prayer places and mosques, and brought Islam to Central Europe. Allah had completely different plans for the revival of Islam in Europe—without using force.

Honest with my family

After completing the Makkah project I visited the centre for Initiatives of Change in Switzerland in 1988 and met the writer Dr Charis Waddy, who was the first Western woman to study Arabic at Oxford University. She brought a change in my life. I became a good Muslim, applying absolute moral standards. I was completely honest with my family about my past and took a decision not to pay bribes to get work done, as had been my custom.

I shall always remain indebted to Dr Waddy for helping me to change from a godless engineer to a God-fearing Muslim. Now my 'inner voice' tells me that, being a citizen of Europe, I should help Islam be better understood in the West.



The future was golden

Dr YUSUF OMAR al-AZHARI was Somali Ambassador to the United States and a representative of his country at the United Nations. But after a coup d'état, he suddenly found himself in a small cell in solitary confinement for six years. His experience of overcoming the hatred this engendered led him to set out to rebuild the peace of his shattered country.

AS an ambassador and leader of my country the future was golden. To complete this picture I thought the thing to do was to marry the daughter of the President of the country, which I did. The future seemed assured.

Suddenly, in a coup, my father-in-law was assassinated and a military junta took over the country. Everything began to change. A year later I was picked up at home in Mogadishu at 3am, handcuffed, blindfolded and driven 350 kilometres where I was put into a cell 3 x 4 metres. I remained in solitary confinement with nothing to read, no one to talk to for six years. During the first six months I was tortured daily. Possessed by anger and hate, I hit out violently wherever and whenever I could. I was afraid I would go insane or die. My brain was trying to burst.

One night in my desperation I knelt down to pray at 8pm. I asked the Almighty for peace within me and for a purpose to guide me. When I finally got up from my knees it was 4am. The eight hours had passed like eight minutes. I had never had a better eight hours of prayer in my life and I felt exalted. I felt cured and free of hate, despair and depression. My desire for greed and enjoyment had gone. I felt personally accountable for all my actions.

Changed overnight

The guards were surprised to find me calm and submissive the next morning. They could no longer torture me as they had done before when I had reacted to them. They wondered how I could have changed overnight. Having decided to accept prison life, I divided the hours between physical exercise and

conducting debates with myself about the past. I would spend hours thinking back over the wrongs I had done. But also I traced back the good things, so that I did not get obsessed. Six years in prison gave me a training for life which I could not have received in any other way.

In search of my family

In 1991 the military rulers who had taken over the country were deposed and the Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Mohammed Siad Barre, fled to Nigeria, where he was given asylum. When I emerged from prison, I went in search of my family and found them living in a hut. When my wife saw me standing there, she fainted. She had been told that I had been shot trying to escape. She had not realised I had been imprisoned.

Can you forgive?

"Can you forgive the man who has done all that to you?" was the question I kept asking myself. One day sitting in a coffee shop, I had the strongest feeling that I *should* forgive the man who had caused me such misery. But it took me two years to decide to do it. How to get a ticket to Nigeria when my bank account, my house and everything had been confiscated? I had no money. Three days after deciding to forgive I was asked to represent

Somalia in a UN conference in West Africa. This enabled me to visit the former dictator, now 87 years old. I went all that way to tell him that I forgave him. As I spoke I saw the tears roll down his cheeks. I thanked God for giving me the chance to fill such a man with remorse. He said to me, "Thank you. You have cured me. I can sleep tonight knowing that people like you exist in Somalia."

Befriend fearlessly

Since that experience I have been working without any official position to bring peace and reconciliation to my country. We had no government, no judiciary, no police force, no schools. My experience of forgiveness gave me self-confidence and the realisation that I could befriend anyone fearlessly. This became my way of life. I found it is the honest way to win the hearts of others.

Readiness to apologise

Ten years ago with the help of Swedish facilitators I found the way to build friendship and trust with other Somalis through my readiness to apologise for my mistakes and my hatred. We are beginning to find a way forward to rebuild our country and recreate the administration. Through Allah, we peacemakers conceived this new approach to nation building.