

# RECONCILIATION IN INTERFAITH PERSPECTIVE

Jewish, Christian and Muslim Voices



Edited by

Leonard Riggio & David J. Solomon

# Reconciliation in Interfaith Perspective

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Reimund Bieringer & David J. Bolton

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About the front cover: Darug Elder Edna Watson, *Reconciliation*

Edna Watson is a Darug elder whose paintings have been recognised in Australia and overseas. In this work Edna expresses the various groups who have come to Australia with the original Aboriginal people in the centre of the circle of reconciliation. Reconciling hands point inwards and outwards. Earth columns dominate with the central circle showing a broken earth, symbolic of the current drought and the unfinished process of reconciliation. (<http://www.oaipos.org/CCIP%20Award.htm>)

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themselves) it is of great help to find someone step in and take another's place temporarily, giving the person concerned.<sup>35</sup> This temporary hat allows such a person the time to find a Jesus vicariously taking the place of the sinner who can begin to solve their problems when they and solidarity as Jesus did, whether we see effects on the level of individuals, neighbourhoods or even nations.

Understanding of reconciliation between God and man, help restore good relations, something over global and competitive world, by offering three points: 1. The insight that notwithstanding the free-will of men and women for their own actions, God who is creator and who therefore can bring about and restoration of disrupted relations. 2. The insight that we took our place in a situation with no way out, and would be given the chance to pave the way towards reconciliation. Adopting an attitude that pro-actively seeks to process of reconciliation by putting relational aspects seeking of victory for one's own standpoint, is for a constant reconsideration of the superiority of one's identity, especially one's religious identity, is extremely difficult, but when reconciliation is a goal, it was for God in relation to the people of his world every effort.

<sup>35</sup> Merkle states, that under these conditions, one can speak of 'Versöhnung', in which there is a direct proportion of viciousness. Karl-Helm Merkle, *Bekehrung*: 10-24.

## Reconciliation An Islamic Theological Approach

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"Reconciliation is better"  
(Qur'an 4:128)

This chapter aims to examine the concept of reconciliation as presented in the main sources of Islam. Before elaborating on the details of the concept itself, it is necessary to touch upon the etymology of the Islamic term used for reconciliation. First of all, reconciliation is an English word that finds its origin in Latin. It is made up of *re* which means "again" and *conciliare* which means "to meet". Therefore, the word itself means to meet again. The Islamic term that I find the most compatible is *ṣulḥ*, *ṣulḥ*, or *ṣulḥ*, a more modern Arabic term. The Qur'an mentions various derivatives of the term *ṣulḥ*. The essential meaning of the term is wholeness. The opposite term to *ṣulḥ* or *ṣulḥ* is *ḥud*, or corruption and depravity. As a noun, *ṣulḥ* can be rendered as reconciliation, peace and settlement. *Ḥud*, which can be translated as cease-fire or a temporary truce is also used. Yet *ṣulḥ* or *ṣulḥ* are the closest terms to the meaning of reconciliation.

Early scholars and linguists, for example Ibn Manẓūr al-Ḥifẓī (d. 1311) speaks of various roots of the term. He says, "*ṣulḥ* is the reconciliation of people among themselves. It is peace." He also cites that *ṣulḥ*, one of the derivatives of the term, is a name of Mecca, the holiest city of Islam, described in the Qur'an as a safe city, free of conflict and a dwelling of peaceful co-existence.<sup>1</sup> Giving such a name to the city of Mecca can be viewed as a reminder of the early reconciliation between the Prophet and his

<sup>1</sup> 'Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Manẓūr al-Ḥifẓī, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d.) Vol. 2 p. 505-517. The author takes responsibility for all translations from Turkish and Arabic used in this study.

people in the city. It is worth noting that, as it will be indicated below, the first major reconciliation between the Prophet and the people of Mecca, the Hudaibiyya Agreement, was achieved in the suburb of this city. A well known medieval Muslim theologian and linguist, al-Jurjānī (d. 1414) gives both the dictionary and the technical meanings of the term: "The dictionary meaning of the term is *muṣalāḥah* or mutual reconciliation, that is reconciliation after dispute. The technical meaning of the term is a binding agreement to end a conflict."<sup>2</sup> All manuals of schools of Islamic law and sources of ḥadīth have sections on reconciliation (*ṣulḥ*). For example, one of the well known references of the Hanafī school of Islamic law, Abū Bakr Shams al-Nīmna al-Sarakhsī (d. 1090) *al-Mabḥūṭ* has a chapter on *ṣulḥ* in which the author cites a variety of types of reconciliation. Reconciliation between the deceased and heirs, the conditions of witnesses in reconciliation, reconciliation of the payments of loans, reconciliation in robbery cases, reconciliation in criminal actions, etc.<sup>3</sup> To focus on all these aspects will be beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the focus will be on spiritual and interfaith related reconciliation.

The Qur'an outlines at least three types of *ṣulḥ* and presents reconciliation together with piety and God fearing. The verse says: "Through your repeatedly swearing in Him, do not make God a hindrance to prevent you from dealing justly, from guarding yourselves against evil, and from making peace among men. God is the Hearer and the Knower" (2:224). By mentioning all these three themes together the Qur'an suggests that there is a connection between reconciliation, piety and justice, that is to say one is completing the other. Accordingly, without piety reconciliation will be superficial even if achieved. Therefore, it can be argued that reconciliation is a process of creating new relationships

<sup>2</sup> Sayyid Sharif b. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'rifāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983) p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> 'Abū Bakr Shams al-Nīmna Muḥammad bin Saḥl al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabḥūṭ* (Tashkent: Qo'ri Yozilari, 1983) vol. 20, p. 133-178; vol. 21, p. 2-62.



It is worth noting that, as it will be indicated, the reconciliation between the Prophet and the Hudaybiyya Agreement, was achieved in the A well known medieval Muslim theologian al-Qasbi (d. 1414) gives both the dictionary and the technical meaning of the term: "The dictionary meaning of the term is a binding conflict."<sup>2</sup> All manuals of schools of Islamic law have sections on reconciliation (*ṣulḥ*). If the well known references of the Hanafi school, Abū Bakr Shams al-Dīn al-Sarakhsī's *al-Mabḥūṭ* has a chapter on *ṣulḥ* in which the author discusses the conditions of witnesses in reconciliation, the payments of loans, reconciliation in criminal actions, etc.<sup>3</sup> To focus on the scope of this study. Therefore, spiritual and interfaith related reconciliation.

At least three types of *ṣulḥ* and presents reconciliation with piety and God fearing. The verse says: "Those who swear in Him, do not make God a witness for you from dealing justly, from guarding against evil, and from making peace among men. God is Knower" (2:224). By mentioning all these in the Qur'an suggests that there is a connection, piety and justice, that is to say one is not. Accordingly, without piety reconciliation even if achieved. Therefore, it can be argued that it is a process of creating new relationships

between God and human beings, between two individuals as well as between two communities. Tackling the question why piety and justice are essential elements for reconciliation, one can argue that human beings, according to the Qur'an, are on the one hand weak and forgetful and extreme wrongdoers (*ḍāllūn*) to themselves and others. And on the other hand are the *ḥakīmūn* (vicegerents of God) on earth, created in the best form (*ḥayyus-sayyidūn*). They are so important that angels bowed down before their ancestor Adam. Furthermore some of them are prophets appointed by God to convey God's message. Therefore the humans' positive and negative capacities have their own fruits, as prophets and saints on one hand and dictators and oppressors, such as Pharaoh and Abū Jahl on the other hand.

The immaturity of the human being requires some limitation to their negative potentialities. Believers of Islam, in their five daily prayers, ask God to guide them to the "straight path," a path on which they can prevent themselves from transgressions and sinful actions (1:6). To overcome weaknesses and to use human capacities properly in a balanced way constitute a great challenge for Muslims. If human faculties such as anger, desire, and the intellect are not used maturely, the great family of humanity will face destruction, corruption, conflicts and wars. Aided by divine revelation, human capacities can be limited in the proper ways, which will eventually lead to permanent everlasting reconciliation. Our world today witnesses to this reality of human nature. Being aware of this reality, the Qur'an keeps the door of hope open when it declares that there is a way to overcome all negative capabilities and situations through reconciliation with God. God prescribes mercy upon Himself to make the process an easy one. The Qur'anic verse says,

"O Muhammad, when those who believe in Our signs come to you, say to them 'Peace be with you. Your Lord has prescribed upon Himself mercy. That is, if any of you does an evil out of ignorance then repent after and reconcile, you will be forgiven. Surely God is the most Forgiving and the most Merciful' (6:54).

<sup>2</sup> al-Qasbi, *al-Mabḥūṭ*, Kitāb al-Ṭarīqah. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 130 p. 134).

<sup>3</sup> al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabḥūṭ*, Kitāb al-Ṭarīqah. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1983) vol. 20, p. 133-178; vol. 21, p. 2-62.

As long as the person is conscious, sincere repentance of any sin results in the divine forgiveness. Therefore, all sins are forgivable in this world. Speaking of the divine forgiveness in the afterlife the Qur'anic verse indicates that all sins are forgivable except the sin of denying the existence of the one and only God: "God does not forgive that a partner should be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives anything other than that" (4:48). A *hadith qudsi* (a term used for the sayings of the Prophet, which indicate that the words are related to the Prophet and the meanings are related to God) reports God as saying: "if my servant comes to Me with the measurement of the span of a hand I will draw near to him with an arm's length. If My servant comes to me with an arm's length, I will draw near to him a fathom's length. Whoever comes to Me walking, I will come to him running."<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that on the part of the human being there must be an utmost attempt to find and become closer to God. The *hadith* suggests that a small attempt on the part of humankind towards reconciliation draws a great response from God. Accordingly, the door for reconciliation between God and His servants remains open. God asks for the reconciliation of human beings because of His encompassing mercy, not because God needs this reconciliation. In fact, it is narrated that if all human beings come together to harm or benefit God, they cannot do either one at any level.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the

<sup>4</sup> *al-Bukhari*, *Tawhid* 50. 'Abu 'Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Beirut & Damascus: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1990. (For *hadith* citations I have used A.J. Weyman's style in his *Concordance et index de la tradition musulmane*. Leiden: Brill, 1956).

<sup>5</sup> The full text of the *Hadith* is as follows: 'Abū Dharr narrates from the Prophet. The Prophet narrates from God, who said, "O My servants, I have prohibited wrongdoing [ṭa'at] upon Myself and among yourselves as well. Therefore, do not wrong each other. O My servants, all of you are naked except those whom I clothed. Ask Me for guidance so that I guide you. O My servants, all of you are hungry except whom I fed. Ask Me for food so that I feed you. O My servants, all of you are naked except whom I clothed. Ask Me for clothing so that I clothe you. O My servants, all of you commit mistakes night and day and I am forgiving of all sins. Ask Me for forgiveness so that I forgive you. O My servants, you cannot harm Me or benefit Me. O My servants, if your first generations and last generations, your human beings and your jinn become as pious

conscious, sincere repentance of any sin. Therefore, all sins are forgivable except the one that all sins are forgivable except the one of the one and only God: "God does not should be ascribed unto Him, but He has that" (4:48). A hadith qudsi (a term is Prophet, which indicate that the words are and the meanings are related to God) "if my servant comes to Me with the sin of a hand I will draw near to him with servant comes to me with an arm's length, a fathom's length. Whoever comes to Me, I am running."<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that on being there must be an utmost attempt to go to God. The hadith suggests that a small of humankind towards reconciliation draws a God. Accordingly, the door for reconciliation his servants remains open. God asks for the man beings because of His encompassing God needs this reconciliation. In fact, it is human beings come together to harm or benefit do either one at any level.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the

al. 90. 'Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Bukhari, 4 & Damascus: Dar al-Kutub, 1990. (For hadith classification's style in his Concordance or indices de la tradition: Brill, 1994).

the Hadith is as follows: 'Abu Dharr narrates from the a narrator from God, who said, "O My servants, I have ng [rules] upon Myself and among yourselves as well as each other. O My servants, all of you are misled except I. Ask Me for guidance so that I guide you. O My servant, I except whom I feed. Ask Me for food so that I feed you. O My servants, all of you commit mistakes night and day and I sin. Ask Me for forgiveness so that I forgive you. O My harm Me or benefit Me. O My servants, if your first generations, your human beings and your jinn become as pious

divine willing for reconciliation between human beings and God, as well as between human beings themselves, is something that humankind, not God, needs. That is why the Qur'anic verse says, "If God had punished men for their misdeeds, not one creature would be left alive on the face of earth. But He respites them to a certain appointed time. When their time comes, they will absolutely know that God sees everything concerning His servants" (35:45). Hence, if the sinners are not punished immediately it does not mean that God lacks knowledge of their sin. In fact God sees and is able to punish, but God wants to respite and forgive if they repent before the last moment of their life. As Adam, the first prophet in Islam, fell then repented and was forgiven.

In the Islamic teaching, when Adam disobeyed God, he also fulfilled the divine destiny. It was Adam's job to ask for forgiveness for his mistake. He did ask for this and received God's acceptance of his repentance and eventually was appointed as a prophet. Whatever the evil exists in the world cannot be considered a rival of God. Accordingly, the world is not in a position to be considered a rival to God to be reconciled. God is eternally reconciled with the world because nothing in the world can be out of His control. From Islamic theological perspective God's mercy encompasses everything. Both love and mercy are very profound Islamic terms. However, instead of "God loves everyone," in Islam it is more accurate to say, "God shows mercy to everyone." Therefore, even disbelievers benefit from His bounties (i.e. food, air, water, etc.). That is why the Qur'an says: "Everything

in the heart of the most pious person, it will not increase My power. O My servants, if your first generations and last generations, your human beings and your jinn become as evil as the heart of the most vicious person, it will not decrease My power. O My servants, if your first generations and last generations, your human beings and your jinn stand on one upland and ask Me and I give the request of each of them, this will not decrease from what I have, not even as much as the amount of water a dipped needle would take from the ocean. O My servants, it is your deeds I count for you and will respond justly back to you. Those who have found goodness, let their praise go to God. Those who have found what than that should blame only their souls." (Muslim, *Shahih*, 55. Muslim bin Hajj al-Nishaburi, *Sahih al-Muslim*, Beirut: Dar 'Itq al-Turk al-'Arabi, 1950)



in heavens and earth praise God. But you do not understand their praise." (17:44) That is to say that everything praises God in its own tongue. The only creatures who do not praise God are some human beings. Compared to the entire universe, that is a very small percentage.

Islamic teaching encourages humans to imitate God. Therefore, since God is the most forgiving and accepts the sins of His servants and makes reconciliation with His servants, humankind should do the same. In Islamic law there are two distinctive rights—in other words, there are two spheres of rights: the rights of God and the rights of human beings. If someone transgresses to the rights of God, they should ask for forgiveness from God and know that God is the most Forgiving. God promises that He accepts sincere repentance. According to Islamic law, when someone transgresses on the rights of human beings, if this transgression is financial, one has to reimburse that particular human being. If it is spiritual or related to other aspects of life, one has to continue asking him/her for forgiveness until he/she consents to the forgiveness. If the victim dies and there is never a chance to ask for forgiveness, one should constantly ask God to give that person great rewards so that the individual will not prosecute the doer in the presence of God in the afterlife, where He is the only Judge.

The Qur'an praises divine ethics and asks human beings to follow these ethics as presented in the above mentioned verse (6:54). For this particular verse, scholars of Islam present certain historical events as a part of the occasion of this revelation. According to 'Abd al-Muhaimin al-Turki (d. 923), the famous medieval Muslim theologian and commentator on the Qur'an, this verse was revealed on the occasion when a group of people visited the Prophet and told him that they committed deadly sins. They were afraid that they would not be forgiven. Upon this visit the verse was revealed to the Prophet to give hope to the sinful regardless of the number of their sins. Al-Tabari also narrates that a group of the companions of the Prophet wanted to excommunicate this sinful group who visited the Prophet. Yet the revelation of the Qur'an asked the Prophet to not make them hopeless and let them know God will

forgive them if they make reconciliation.<sup>6</sup> One can see in this specific verse on forgiveness an example of reconciliation with God as well as with the community. The Prophet, in one of his famous hadith said: "The one who does not show mercy to God's creatures will not receive the mercy of God."<sup>7</sup>

As the above mentioned verse indicates, one of the important aspects of reconciliation between men and God is repentance (*tauba*). It is also the most important initiative step in Islamic spirituality. One should ask God for forgiveness on a daily basis to prevent the accumulation of sin in the individual's spiritual life. The Prophet, to be an example for his community, used to ask forgiveness seventy times a day. He would say: "My Lord forgive my misdeeds that I have done in the past and that I will do in the future. And forgive what I have done secretly and what I have done openly. You are the First, You are the Last and You are the Powerful over everything"<sup>8</sup>. Through one of His ninety-nine names, al-Tawwib, God accepts repentance from people even if they repent at the last moment of their lives. Islamic teaching says that people should not delay their *tauba* to the last moment since they might not have a chance to do it then. However, people should never be hopeless. One can repent anytime and any moment, but there are certain times that are considered more valuable for the acceptance of repentance.

The time after five daily prayers and the occasion of the Hajj (pilgrimage) are said to be the best time and spaces for repentance. A tradition says that if one performs the pilgrimage and repent from one's sins on the Mount of Arafat, all of his/her sins are washed out as if they are innocent like a newborn baby. Making such reconciliation with God, one returns from the Hajj to the normal life with a new spirit of responsibility before God as well as communal solidarity and awareness of the rights of others.

<sup>6</sup> 'Abū Ja'far al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ḥiṣṣ al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd al-ḥalīm bin 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, (Beirut: Dār 'Alam al-Kutub, 2005) vol. 9 p. 272-276.

<sup>7</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Taushid*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Dar'ul-Im*, 60.

(pilgrimage) are said to be the best time and spaces for repentance. A tradition says that if one performs the pilgrimage and repent from one's sins on the Mount of Arafat, all of his/her sins are washed out as if they are innocent like a newborn baby. Making such reconciliation with God, one returns from the Hajj to the normal life with a new spirit of responsibility before God as well as communal solidarity and awareness of the rights of others.

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<sup>7</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Taushid*, 2.

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low these ethics as presumed in the above interpretation. For this particular verse, scholars of Islam present certain historical events as a part of the occasion of this revelation. According to 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (d. 913), the famous medieval Muslim theologian and commentator on the Qur'an, this verse was revealed on the occasion when a group of people visited the Prophet and told him that they committed deadly sins. They were afraid that they would not be forgiven. Upon this visit the verse was revealed to the Prophet to give hope to the sinful regardless of the number of their sins. Al-Tabarī also narrates that a group of the companions of the Prophet wanted to excommunicate this sinful group who visited the Prophet. Yet the revelation of the Qur'an asked the Prophet to not make them hopeless and let them know God will

Such a piety paves the way for the second level of reconciliation, the one between human fellows. The Prophet strictly prohibits abandoning talking to someone for more than three days with whom there is conflict. The Prophet states: "It is not allowed for men to abandon his brother more than three nights in a way that they meet and one turns to one direction and the other turns to the other direction. The best of both is the one who starts with a greeting of peace."<sup>2</sup> In other words, in order to please God, one should make reconciliation with human fellows with no delay. One can see the echo of this prophetic saying in the Gospel of Matthew (5:23-24) when Jesus says that gifts to God will not be accepted until you have made reconciliation with your brother.

Therefore the holy book of Islam presents a strong relationship between spirituality and reconciliation. Reconciliation by definition is a virtue, yet in order to have achieved this virtue, one will need other merits such as forgiveness, devoutness (*sawab*) and humbleness. Therefore the Qur'an speaks of an important tie between reconciliation and forgiveness. Islamic law gives the right of retaliation for evil committed against an individual or a community—that is to say, if someone is attacked or wronged the individual can respond in a similar way without transgression. However, the Qur'an, in a concluding remark, reminds its audience about the virtue of forgiveness: "The punishment for evil is an evil in the same way. The one who forgives and amends and makes reconciliation by doing good deeds, his reward is upon God. God doesn't love wrongdoers" (42:40).

After all, as a part of their nature, humans are more inclined towards violence. As the Arabic proverb suggests, "Destruction is easier than building" (*al-Takbiru 'Ashaf*). Therefore, the Qur'anic encouragement towards forgiveness and reconciliation is to empower the positive capacity of human nature against destruction. In fact, when one forgives, "The balance of power

<sup>2</sup> *al-Bukhari, Hadith, 62.*

thief from offender to the victim."<sup>10</sup> That is why God loves the one who forgives. The Qur'anic verse says, "Those who give all kinds of charity in both the time of prosperity and the time of adversity and those who control their anger and those who forgive people surely know that God loves those who do beautiful deeds" (3:134). One can argue that forgiveness stands at the heart of Islam, rather than response of evil with evil. As the verse indicates, the Qur'an presents forgiveness as a beautiful action that God loves. In fact, in Islam, evil is not a transferable entity. That is to say, someone cannot be accused of being evil because of the actions of others, be it from his/her family, tribe, or fellow adherents of a religion. Therefore, a Christian, a Jew or a Muslim may have committed an evil, but this action will not make any other Christian, Jew or Muslim responsible. In the sight of God, someone is not guilty because of the action of his/her relatives. This helps to create fresh beginnings in every reconciliation attempt.

Muslim commentators give a concrete example of the preference of forgiveness over revenge, when they interpret the above mentioned verse (42:40). For example, Ismail Hakki Bursavi (d. 1137) narrates the following hadith on his comments on forgiveness "On the Day of Judgment a caller will call: 'Where are those who have their rewards upon God?' In response to this call only those who have forgiven people in their worldly life would stand up to get such a reward." After narrating this hadith, Bursavi says, "working for the benefits of others is among the greatest things that make one closer to God."<sup>11</sup>

The Prophet constitutes a paragon of forgiveness for believers. He sets an example on several occasions. When he had the opportunity to seek revenge or to forgive, he preferred forgiveness and

<sup>10</sup> Peter Phan, "Global Healing and Reconciliation: The Gift and Task of Religion, a Buddhist-Christian Perspective" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26 (2006) p. 85-108.

<sup>11</sup> Ismail Hakki Bursavi, *Risā al-Riyāṣa*. (Istanbul: Maktabah East, 1385) vol. 2, pp. 94-95.

(pilgrimage) are said to be the best time and space for repentance. A tradition says that if one performs the pilgrimage and repent from one's sins on the Mount of Arafat, all of his/her sins are washed out as if they are innocent like a newborn baby. Making such reconciliation with God, one returns from the Hajj to the normal life with a new spirit of responsibility before God as well as communal solidarity and awareness of the rights of others.

<sup>12</sup> 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Tibastī, *Jāmi' al-Riyāṣa 'an Ta'wīd al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd al-Halīm 'Abd al-Muhaimin al-Tubī, (Beirut: Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 2003) vol. 9 p. 272-276.

<sup>13</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ta'wīd*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ta'wīd*, 60.

in the shari'ah, where a man and a woman are reconciled. The Qur'an praises divine ethics and adds reconciliation to low these ethics as presented in the above mentioned verse (6:34). For this particular verse, scholars of Islam present certain historical events as a part of the occasion of this revelation. According to 'Abd al-Muhaimin al-Tubī (d. 923), the famous medieval Muslim theologian and commentator on the Qur'an, this verse was revealed on the occasion when a group of people visited the Prophet and told him that they committed deadly sins. They were afraid that they would not be forgiven. Upon this visit the verse was revealed to the Prophet to give hope to the sinful regardless of the number of their sins. Al-Tubī also narrates that a group of the sinful group of the Prophet wanted to excommunicate this sinful group who visited the Prophet. Yet the revelation of the Qur'an asked the Prophet to not make them hopeless and let them know God will



reconciliation. The Prophet's mercy and forgiveness even extended to his enemies—he never took revenge. It is reported in the Islamic sources that at the battle of Ghadīr and Aḥzab, the courageous head of a tribe named Ghurās shyly approached the Prophet, and holding his sword over the Prophet's head, asked, "Who will save you from me?" Muhammad replied, "Allah!" and prayed, "O Allah, suffice me against him." In the same breath, Ghurās was knocked down by a mysterious blow he received between his shoulders, and his sword slipped out of his hand. The Prophet took the sword and asked him, "Now who will save you from me?" But the Prophet forgave him and allowed him to return to his tribe. His people were all surprised that such a courageous man could not do anything against the Prophet. They asked, "What happened to you, why couldn't you do anything?" He told them what had happened, and added, "I am now coming from the presence of the best of men."<sup>12</sup> In a story similar to this event, at the battle of Badr, a hypocrite from among his own men likewise approached Muhammad. He had just lifted his sword when Muhammad turned and glanced at him, causing him to tremble and drop the sword. The Prophet again did not take revenge. It seems that despite the fact that the Prophet faced many hardships and difficulties from his opponents, he never remembered or mentioned those events to the face of those who later became Muslims. So he might have remembered, but because of his forgiveness, he wanted to forget everything that they had done against him. For this reason, generally, in the Islamic teaching it is not a virtue to remember the evil of people; rather, it is a virtue to remember their goodness. Historically speaking, we know the story of a companion of the Prophet, Wahshī bin Harb (d. 645), who murdered the uncle of the Prophet, Hāritha, in the Battle of Uhud. After Wahshī

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Badkhaman Sa'id Nuri, *Mafahim in Risālati Nūr* (Jerusalem: Nashr, 1996) vol. 1, p. 428. For various versions of this story, see al-Tabarī, *Ibid.* vol. 8 p. 233; 'Abū al-Faḥr 'Umarī bin 'Alī bin Maḥmūd, *al-Mufahhar fī Ḥadīth al-Bihar* ed. Maḥmūd Dayyib. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1957) vol. 1 p. 194.

converted to Islam, the Prophet told him that all his sins were forgiven. The Prophet himself forgave him. However, because the Prophet did not want to remember the murder of his uncle, he asked to see Wahshi infrequently. The Qur'anic verse says, "If you efface, and overlook, and forgive, know that God is the most Forgiving and the most Merciful" (64:14).

On one occasion, during the battle of Khaybar, a Jewish woman prepared poisoned food for the Prophet and his companions and she invited them to her house. Before the Prophet began eating the food he asked his companions to stop. He said, "The food told me that it was poisoned." One of the companions of the Prophet wanted to kill the woman, but the Prophet prevented him and forgave her. The Prophet asked the woman why she did this to him and she responded, "I thought if you were the Messenger of God, this poison would not harm you. If you were a king, people would get rid of you."<sup>13</sup>

On another occasion, the Prophet was hopeless in Mecca and took refuge in the city of Ta'if in the hope that the people of Ta'if would support him in his message. Instead of support, they rebuked him and encouraged their slaves and children to stone the Prophet. He narrates that day as one of the worst days of his life. According to Islamic sources, an angel came to him and said, "Your Lord asks you that if you want He will destroy all of them by throwing these mountains over their city." But the Prophet said, "My Lord, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing. There may be some good people that come from their offspring." Later, the people of this city came to Islam and the Prophet dealt with them as if nothing had happened between them. Here, the Prophet echoes what Jesus said about his persecutors, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Such forgiveness can be through an attempt of forgetting the evil of people. An individual should strive to forget in order to get

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Makalat in Risale-i Nur*, (Istanbul: Nail, 2002) vol. I, p. 414.

rid of hatred. Therefore, forgetfulness sometimes is considered a bounty from God because if you always remember the evils that people have done to you, you will be full of hatred against them. As understood from the practice of the Prophet, such hatred is not compatible with the teaching of Islam. Even today one can argue that forgetting evils that occurred in history and starting new relationships between historically rivaled groups or nations is much more compatible with the teaching of Islam. This idea does not intend to neglect the rights of the victims or deny the difficulties the victims have faced. Their rights are protected absolutely by the Divine. The perpetrators will be punished because of their wrongdoings in the afterlife. Therefore, trusting in the divine judgment and starting to establish reconciliation are among the greatest Islamic values.

As the above mentioned Qur'anic and hadith references suggest, reconciliation is a major concept in Islamic theology as well as Islamic law. For example, in the part of reconciliation with regard to criminal actions al-Sarakhsi, the famous Hanafi jurist and theologian, mentions the case of a murder and the family of the victim. He narrates a story that on one occasion, due to the lack of reconciliation from the family of the victim, the Prophet made the decision of death penalty against the murderer. The Companions saw sadness on the face of the Prophet. They understood that the Prophet was not happy about making this decision. They made all efforts to reconcile the family of the victim with the murderer by giving double the blood money. After they convinced the family of the victim to accept reconciliation, the Prophet made very positive comments about preventing the killing of another person and making reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

Another aspect of the relationship between piety and reconciliation is related to the concept of *Taqwa*, which can be translated as fear of God, respect for God or devoutness. Like forgiveness, it is also a merit in Islam. The Qur'anic verse says, "Be respectful of God and make reconciliation among you. Obey God and His

<sup>14</sup> al-Sarakhsi, *Ibid.* vol. 21 p. 9.

messenger if you are real believers" (8:1). As the occasion of the revelation of this verse suggests, after the battle of Badr, the young soldiers who were fighting in the front wanted more from the spoils of war while the older soldiers were unhappy with this. God immediately reminded them through Qur'anic revelation that they should avoid quarrelling and conflict and obey God and God's messenger Muhammad.<sup>15</sup> The verse emphasizes the importance of ending conflict between two groups of believers over property and worldly possessions—namely spoils of war. As viewed in this verse, reconciliation accompanied by obedience and respect for God is the preferred one. People who have respect for God are prone to sacrifice their personal rights for the sake of others. That is probably why the Qur'an makes a connection between devoutness and reconciliation in both communal as well as family life.

The Qur'an emphasizes the reconciliation between husband and wife. The verse says, "If you are fearful of a split between both husband and wife, send them two arbitrators: one from his family and one from her family. If they wish to be reconciled, God will bring them together again. Surely God is the ever Knower and Aware of everything" (4:35). In the Qur'anic teaching, family is considered the core element for a successful society. One can see a remarkable approach in this early period, about 1400 years ago, as to how the Islamic community, based on this Qur'anic verse, successfully solved conflicts that occurred among members of the family. This Qur'anic reconciliation model can be taken as a paradigm to solve modern day family disputes. In the Qur'anic model, arbitrators from both sides visit the husband and wife to guarantee the protection of the rights of both and to ensure that there can be trust on both sides.

As for a communal reconciliation the following Qur'anic verse constitutes the foundation for all Muslims. Commentators and jurists considered the following verse as the most frequently cited one with regard to communal reconciliation: "If two groups of believers fight against each other, make reconciliation (raḍḍ)"

<sup>15</sup> al-Tubai, *Ibid.* vol. 11 p. 25.



among them. If one group rejects and transgresses against the other, fight the transgressor until they submit to God's judgment. If it accepts then make reconciliation among them justly. Do justice, God loves those who do justice" (49:9). The verse initially refers to two tribes, 'Aws and Khazraj, of the time of the Prophet who were in conflict for over 100 years and occasionally fought against each other. There are some other narrations on the occasion of the revelation of this verse. Yet whatever the occasion is, the implication of the verse is clear. If two groups of people fight, there should be reconciliation. The authority should use force, if needed, to implement reconciliation. The verse espouses that the perpetrators of such acts will be punished if they avoid reconciliation, and the rights of the victim will be protected. It should be noted that the use of force to stop one group's aggression towards the other is conditional. Hence, it is always based on the condition that such a use will not create greater destruction. The Islamic principle of law indicates that when there are two evils, the lesser evil is preferred. If the use of force prevents greater evil, although it is not ideal, the authority can use it as the lesser evil. However, if the use of force creates greater evil, it should not be used at all.

In the Qur'anic terminology, as mentioned above, the opposite of reconciliation is *fiṣād* or corruption. That is why some mystical commentators on the Qur'an, such as Bursari, narrate that "making reconciliation between peoples in conflict is among the best forms of prayer and actions that make you closer to God." He narrates a saying of the Prophet in his well known commentary, "Should I inform you of something that is higher in virtue than fasting, praying and charity? They said, 'Yes, O Messenger of God.' Then the Prophet said 'To make reconciliation between peoples that are in conflict.'"<sup>14</sup> Interestingly enough, making reconciliation is considered "jihad" in Islam. The chapter on reconciliation in al-Bukhari's *al-Sahih* entitled, "The Book of Reconciliation", starts with the verse, "There is no virtue in much of their counsel except those who enjoin alms giving, kindness, and

<sup>14</sup> Bursari, *Asb al-Bayān*, vol. 9, p. 73-74.

peacemaking among people. Anyone who does these for the sake of God, 'We shall bestow upon them a big reward' (4:114). By mentioning this verse, al-Bukhari makes a connection between charity, kindness and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> Among the hadith that are cited in this chapter is the following, "to make reconciliation is a righteous act of charity." Another hadith of the Prophet says, "If you lie for the sake of reconciliation between two individuals, you are not considered a liar."<sup>18</sup> That is to say you are not a liar if you go to each party and mention the kindness and good thoughts of the other, even if it is not true, for the sake of reconciliation. However, some contemporary Islamic scholars such as Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960) would say that there is no excuse for lying in any circumstances and this hadith was a permission based upon a specific occasion and therefore the time has changed that occasion no longer exists and therefore there is no excuse for lying.<sup>19</sup>

For the Prophet, reconciliation of the people was so important that on one occasion he needed to delay his prescribed prayer in order to help reconcile people.<sup>20</sup> Barsevi refers to a Qur'anic figure, Luqman, after whom a Qur'anic chapter is named, who advises his child on the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation by saying, "My son, surely he who claims that evil extinguishes evil is a liar. To understand this, ignite two fires and add them to each other and see if either is extinguished. It is water that extinguishes fire."<sup>21</sup> He suggests that forgiveness is what

<sup>17</sup> al-Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 2.

<sup>19</sup> Nursi, in his book *Diyağın (Münasire)* and in his famous Damascus Sermon delivered in 1911 at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, modern day Syria, strongly emphasized the importance of truthfulness for Muslims. He considers the lack of truthfulness in the social lives of Muslims as one of the greatest dangers that Muslims can face. Therefore, when tribal leaders asked Nursi, "What do we need the most?" Nursi said, "Truthfulness." They replied, "What is the cause?" Nursi said, "Not lying." (see Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, [1994], *The Damascus Sermon*, Trans. Sükrü Vahide, Istanbul: Söğüt Yayınevi, 1994 pp. 34-38) (also see Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Münasire* (Istanbul: Yeni Ayra Nasyat, 1996), pp. 103-104).

<sup>20</sup> al-Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Barsevi, *Risā al-Riyāṭ*, vol. 9, p. 74.

extinguishes conflicts and creates reconciliation. A contemporary echo of this sentiment is Nuzi's famous statement, "The thing that deserves hate the most is hatred itself. The thing that deserves love the most is love itself."<sup>22</sup>

At this juncture it is important to elaborate on interfaith reconciliation or reconciliation between adherents of different faiths. In the following verses we see that the Prophet was commanded by God to forgive those who were trying to deviate him from Islam.

"Many of the people of the book wanted to take you back to idolatry after you believed as a part of their jealousy towards you, despite the evident truth for them. Forgive them and be kind to them until God brings his command. God is the most Powerful over everything" (2:109).

This verse is about reconciliation between members of different faiths, particularly Muslims and a group of the people of the book. Al-Tabari narrates that there were several Jewish religious personalities such as Ka'b bin al-'Ashraf and Huyay bin 'Akhtab who were trying to discourage the believers in Islam. The Prophet was unhappy with this, but then the Qur'an came and asked him to forgive them.

There have been two events in the history of Islam that are considered important examples of communal reconciliation. The first one is the Hudaibiyya Agreement. The Prophet and his companions wanted to have their pilgrimage to Mecca, yet the Meccans did not allow them. The Prophet and his followers, over 1000 people in all, waited at the outskirts of Mecca. He asked his followers not to use violence but to wait peacefully to enter the city if they were allowed. Meccan forces came to provoke them violently. Finally they were offered an agreement. 'Ali, the cousin of the prophet, was the secretary of this agreement. In the agreement 'Ali wrote, "This is reconciliation (sulh) between Muhammad, the messenger of God,

<sup>22</sup> Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Democratic Servant*. Trans. Sükrü Vehidî (Istanbul: Söğüt Yayınevi, 1994) pp. 38-39.

and the people of Mecca." The Meccan delegations rejected the statement saying, "We do not accept you as the messenger of God. We cannot accept this statement. Just say, 'it is between Muhammad the son of 'Abdullah and the people of Mecca.'" Muhammad asked 'Ali to erase "the messenger of God" and replace it with "the son of 'Abdullah." However, 'Ali said that he could not do it because he believed that Muhammad was the messenger of God. Therefore, Muhammad himself took the agreement, erased "the messenger of God" and replaced it with "the son of 'Abdullah." The Prophet made an agreement despite the fact that the conditions were against the Muslims. For example, if a Muslim escaped to the Meccans, he or she would not be returned but if a Meccan escaped to Muslims he or she would be returned. Muhammad accepted the terms and prevented bloodshed in Mecca. This led to the entrance of Muslims peacefully into Mecca for the next year.

Later, after entering the city of Mecca victoriously, the Prophet forgave those who persecuted him for years. He said he would say what prophet Joseph said to his brothers "There is no blame upon you today. May God forgive you. He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy" (12:92). This behavior of the Prophet of Islam was something completely out of character with the norms of Arab tribal traditions. In such circumstances the norm was to take revenge.

The second example is an agreement between two groups of Muslims. In fact, the Prophet prophesied that God would reconcile two big groups of Muslims through the sacrifice of his grandson Hasan.<sup>23</sup> When Hasan was elected as the fifth caliph of Islam after 'Ali, Mu'awiyah, the governor of Damascus, did not accept him as the leader of the Muslim community. There was a possible war that would result in the bloodshed of Muslims. Hasan sent a message to Mu'awiyah and declared that he would step down and sacrifice his caliphate by giving the entire leadership to Mu'awiyah. By this reconciliation he prevented the bloodshed of thousands of people.

<sup>23</sup> al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 2.



Today, adherents of various religions need to come together and practice the tradition of reconciliation. Historical events that caused hatred among members of various religions should be buried in history and should not be a cause for the renewal of hatred. Islamic teaching with this regard can support the concept of "forgive and forget." Muslims and Christians, in many parts of the world, have lived together for centuries peacefully. Also, we have certain historical events such as the Crusades and the Inquisition that shadowed the peaceful relationships between Muslims and Christians. To bring these events and refresh them in our memories will definitely not help the process of reconciliation. This is true for Muslims and Jews as well as for Christians and Jews. Therefore, one would say that today we need to foster dialogue, and mutual understanding between adherents of various religions. We should remember that world peace can not be achieved without dialogue of religions. In a world in which hatred and conflict are dominant, it is important to remember once again, the Islamic understanding of forgiveness and sacrifice. Traditionally Muslims are expected to sacrifice for others. It is evident that such sacrifice will create a deep friendship between people. Instead of seeking revenge, they should seek forgiveness. We have the famous statement of the first caliph of Islam, Abū Bakr (d. 634), which shows the utmost level of sacrifice: "Lord, enlarge my body in the hell-fire to the extent that there will be no space for other believers to be put in."