

Devised and Implemented by Imam Monawar Hussain

# Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme

*Empowering Pupils' through Education*

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# Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme

Piloted at Cheney School, Oxford

Supported by: Cheney School, Thames Valley Police, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Government Office for the South East, Department for Children, Schools and Families.

“I believe that what we have achieved at Cheney has been really ground-breaking. It has raised awareness of the lives that we lead, issues that our students tackle on a daily basis, and furthered understanding between different ethnic groups and cultures. It has acted as a catalyst for debate. It hasn't, in my opinion, been controversial, and it has been a really positive experience for all those involved.”

Phil Waters, Assistant Head  
Cheney School

“I have no doubt that, as a vital part of the effort to tear away the barriers of misunderstanding which exist between the faith communities in the UK, the work being done by Imam Monawar Hussain, within and beyond the Muslim community, is of major importance. He has my full support in the development of the Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme which is a pioneering educational endeavour with the potential to enrich the whole of our society.”

Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Co-Founder, Three Faiths Forum

“I have read this thoroughly and I consider it a positive, balanced, honest and transparent presentation of Islamic teachings. ....I wish it may be widely published so that it could benefit a large section of those who are keen in understanding a Muslims beliefs and way of life.”

Mawlana Shahid Raza OBE, Muslim Law Shariah Council

“This programme is very good and it is going to be very useful in making pupils aware of the teachings of Islam and will clear a number of questions which are commonly asked about Islam and its teachings. The arguments of Jihadists for launching war against non-Muslims cannot get support from the basic sources of Islam - the Qur'an and Sunnah. They are misinterpreting the text. ...this programme is very good and it is going to be beneficial to the young pupils in the schools. I wish you all the success for it.”

Professor A. A. Hamid, Principal, Muslim College

“Imam Monawar Hussain's toolkit for schools is enlightening, encouraging, informative, and easy to use. What I love about it particularly is that it is designed both to impart information and to improve understanding and relationships, and, as far as I can see, it succeeds in doing just that.”

Baroness Julia Neuberger

Thank you so much for letting me see your excellent educational programme for Cheney and beyond. It's a very timely initiative and looks first rate. I'm pleased to see how popular it has been both locally and potentially at national level. It will clearly meet a real need.

The Rt Revd John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford

## APRIL 2013 UPDATE

When I began the Oxford Muslim Pupil's Empowerment Programme (OMPEP) in 2008 I did not envisage that within a short period of time it would be highlighted nationally in the United Kingdom as a groundbreaking programme in its field to confront the evil of modern day terrorism that has ripped apart so many communities and countries in our world. As I write, the tragic loss of one of the great Sunni scholars of the Islamic world, an 84 year old – Sheikh Muhammad Ramadan al-Buti (1929-2013) – killed by a suicide bomber, with his students, in a mosque in Damascus, Syria, is just sinking in. This is tragic news indeed - he was a bulwark against the fanaticism of the extremists. I have no doubt that this form of terrorism cannot be defeated militarily alone but requires the ideology that drives it to be defeated. This can only be realised by mainstream scholars of Islam with the support of their respective governments.

Since establishing The Oxford Foundation in 2009, the following major developments have taken place:

- Major elements of OMPEP were integrated into <http://www.re-silience.org.uk>, a national programme delivered by the Religious Education Council targeting some 800 state schools. Some 30 mentors were trained to deliver training to Religious Education teachers so that they could deal with contentious issues in the classroom with confidence.
- We have made strong strategic partnerships in Birmingham, Rochdale, Oldham, Manchester, and of course Oxford, our home city.
- We now also have a strategic partnership with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. This gives the foundation access to authentic publications endorsed by major Islamic authorities condemning Terrorism and the ideology that underpins terrorist violence. We hope to disseminate the key texts via our website free of charge so that students, teachers and the layperson alike might benefit from them.
- Our relationship with GW Theatre, whose excellent play 'From one extreme to the other' we hosted at Cheney School, has deepened. We have now developed with GW Theatre, Scriptwriter Mike Harris, Barnardo's and a number of other national organisations a play exploring Child Sexual Exploitation – *Somebody's Sister, Somebody's Daughter*. This is a very powerful play and one through which we hope we will create awareness in young people around how sexual groomers operate and how they manipulate children to sexually exploit them. This is already, again, just like OMPEP making national impact. In addition, we are holding a major conference on Child Sexual Exploitation entitled, 'Safeguarding Our Children – Protecting Our Future' conference on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2013 at St. John's College, Oxford. Keynote speakers will include Sue Berelowitz, the Deputy Children's Commissioner and Professor Jenney Pearce from the University of Bedfordshire.
- We are now delivering Mentoring through Mosaic and also developing our unique 1-2-1 mentoring model primarily targeting young Muslim boys disengaged with their education and who often, without our intervention, would lead into gangs and crime.
- Capturing Histories Series is an oral history project that is under development and again has a huge national potential.

There is much more that will be reported via our new corporate website. I do however wish to note my thanks to all our volunteers (13 at the last count!), our Advisory Board for all their support throughout the last few years and a very special thanks to His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad for agreeing to become our Patron and adding to the foundation a strong international link. Please do contact us if you would like to partner with us or support any of our work.

## Updated Introduction - June 2009

The idea for the Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme (OMPEP) began some years ago at a conference in Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, exploring the theme of Religious Education in a Multi-Faith Society. I argued that it was essential that the teaching of Islam be broadened to include two main dimensions of Islam which hitherto had been neglected and their neglect had allowed the violent extremists to monopolise the whole discourse on 'Islam'.

These two other dimensions in addition to the five pillars of Islam were Kalām (dialectical theology) and Ihsān (Sūfism). Kalām provides the dimension within which the violent extremist ideology may be examined critically and defeated, through both a historical analysis and a theological critique. In the Ihsānic model we have the vehicle through which young Muslims may be empowered to contribute to British society through Art, Music, Poetry, Literature, storytelling or other forms of cultural expression. This I felt would contribute towards the shaping and development of a uniquely British Islam.

OMPEP was highlighted nationally by the UK government in the 'Learning to be Safe' toolkit and it has also now expanded to Birmingham. I have addressed numerous conferences and my engagement with parents, pupils, and teachers in other cities has enabled me to further refine the educational model. I see the following as its core components:

- I. Empowering young Muslims through an Islamic Educational Model that provides a counter narrative to the violent extremists
- II. Raising aspirations through role models and mentoring
- III. Inspiring young Muslims through Islamic Art, music, drama, storytelling, poetry and literature
- IV. Broadening the life experiences of young people through volunteering opportunities nationally and internationally
- V. Spaces for Interfaith conversation within schools
- VI. Establishing a centre dedicated to peace and reconciliation

Much of course will depend on resources but I have incorporated early this year 'The Oxford Foundation' to take the work already begun forward and to seek strategic partners in the form of schools that we would support to become 'flagships' for OMPEP and other educational programmes that we develop aimed at community cohesion from the perspective of UK's major faiths.

The foundation's advisory board includes Baroness Julia Neuberger, Sir Hugo Brunner KCVO JP, Michael Wilcockson (Head of Divinity, Eton College), Jonathan Paull (Jewish Tutor, Eton College) and Jay Lakhani (Hindu Tutor, Eton College). The board has real depth and will contribute towards the shaping of unique educational programmes for young people so that a deeper understanding between the diverse faiths may be cultivated and opportunities for safe spaces for discussion and debate maybe created within which young people from diverse backgrounds may enter into conversation with one another and therefore become champions of peace, reconciliation and mutual co-existence.

Imam Monawar Hussain  
Muslim Tutor  
Eton College

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009

## **Introduction - 2008**

A variety of factors have contributed to the shaping of the Oxford Muslim Pupils' Empowerment Programme (OMPEP). Firstly, my personal experiences of the mosque education system during my formative years and later as an adult. In fact it was the lack of properly structured Islamic education designed for the needs of a multi-cultural and multi-faith United Kingdom that was the catalyst for this programme. The key question for me has been: What kind of a society do we wish to shape, build and be part of? Secondly, my role as the Muslim Tutor at Eton College has allowed me the freedom to develop my ideas and insights into a broader Islamic teaching curriculum. Thirdly, the enthusiasm and active participation in debate and discussion with the pupils at Cheney School, Oxford, have contributed to the refinement of the programme. I note here special thanks to Jolie Kirby (Head) and Phil Waters (Assistant Head) of Cheney School, and Chief Superintendent Brendan O' Dowda for their complete support and dedication to making this programme such a success.

This programme remains 'work in progress' and will no doubt go through a process of further refinement over the next year as it is expanded to include other schools within the City of Oxford and nationally.

Finally, I owe a great debt to my mentor and tutor the late Shaykh Dr. Zaki Badawi KBE (1922-2006), founder of the Muslim College, who opened my eyes to the depth and the inherent diversity of the Islamic tradition. Numerous others – students, scholars and *'Ulamā* have given their time generously in discussing issues of particular concern to young Muslims and this programme incorporates the fruits of these exchanges. I note here my special thanks to Michael Wilcockson, Head of Divinity, Eton College, and Deborah Weston, Head of RS and Humanities at Mulberry School, for sharing their immense expertise in the field of religious education.

## **November 2008**

## Aims and Objectives

The main reasons for the formulation of this programme were:

- The absence of proper Islamic education for young Muslims in most UK *masājid* (mosques).
- Many young Muslims growing up in the UK have not been provided with arguments against an extremist violent ideology.
- No space within most *masājid* to facilitate open discussion, debate and explore questions of concern to young Muslims.
- Lack of self esteem and confidence often leading to poor achievement in schools.
- Absence of effective mechanisms of inspiration and cultivation of aspiration especially through lack of exposure to positive role models.
- An intergenerational gulf between parents and pupils.
- Gang culture – a source of identity for many young people, often leading to drugs and crime.

My aim was to address these issues through collaboration with local schools. We aimed to create space within the school context for Muslim pupils of 13+ years of age, that was dedicated to the discussion of issues of concern to them, whether they be questions of identity and belonging, Islamic learning, extremism, politics (foreign and national), the media, relationships or gang culture.

Parallel with these sessions was my involvement with mainstream curriculum subjects, such as History and Geography to address all pupils and answer questions relating to Islam.

The OMPEP is a broad social cohesion programme albeit with a strong component tackling violent extremist ideology. The first pilot was conducted at Cheney School, Oxford.

## The Educational Model

- To introduce pupils' to a broad Islamic educational framework encapsulated in the hadīth (a tradition; report transmitting a saying or action of the Prophet Muhammad)<sup>1</sup> of *Jibrīl* (archangel Gabriel) that defines the *dīn* (way of life; religion) of Islam as being constituted of three dimensions - *Islām*, *Īmān*, *Ihsān* – Orthopraxis (*fiqh*), *Ilm al-Kalām* (dialectical Theology) and *Tasawwuf* or *Sūfism*.
- To employ this framework to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the Islamic tradition and to show the inherent diversity within the tradition.
- To create space within schools specifically for Muslim pupils for confidential discussion, debate, learning and exchange of ideas. This enables a better understanding of issues facing Muslim pupils and the means through which these may be addressed.
- Robustly challenge violent extremist ideology in its totality by employing the above mainstream Islamic framework of *Islām*, *Īmān* and *Ihsān*.
- Empower Muslim pupils' with arguments against violent extremism through:
  - I. The exploration of the *sīrah* (biography) of the Prophet with a particular focus on the Prophet's teachings and conduct towards people of other religions and beliefs.
  - II. Challenging extremist interpretations of the Qur'ān (final revelation)

from Allah to humankind).

- III. Drawing on historical examples of mutual co-operation and co-existence between Muslims and people of other religions and beliefs.
- IV. Cultivating an appreciation for the cultural expression of faith through Music and Sacred Art.
- V. Introduction of role models and a mentoring programme.

- Inspiring pupils to greater aspiration through cultivating and instilling in them the importance of *ilm* (knowledge) as a means of greater life fulfilment and introducing them to successful Muslim role models and mentors.
- Through scrutinising local/national media coverage of Muslims, empowering Muslim pupils to engage these outlets to have their voices heard.
- Utilising drama as a means for the exploration of sensitive issues.

### **Delivery**

This programme was led by Imam Monawar Hussain. The aim throughout was to engender in the pupils the appreciation for diversity in all its manifestations and the openness and inclusivity of Islam. My aim was to draw on Islamic teachings that sought to cultivate mutual co-operation, respect and the collective good. Numerous lunchtime sessions were held and in addition I was invited to address Geography and History classes.

### **Subject Breakdown**

- I. Introduction: Aims and Objectives.
- II. The Prophet in Makkah: An exploration of Makkan Society 610-622CE.
- III. The Prophet in Makkah: Migration to Abyssinia: Drawing lessons.
- IV. The Prophet in Madīnah: An exploration of Madīnan Society 622-632CE.
- V. The Prophet in Madīnah with a particular reference to the constitution of Madīnah.
- VI. What is Jihād?
- VII. Challenging extremist interpretations of the Qur‘ān: Examining the various methodologies for Qur‘ānic hermeneutics.
- VIII. Challenging extremist interpretations of the Qur‘ān: Examining the verses relating to fighting.
- IX. Baghdad: 8<sup>th</sup> Century.
- X. Muslims in Europe: Spain - A model for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain?
- XI. A Shared civilisation: Influence of Muslim thought on Europe – al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīna, *et al.*
- XII. Exploring Identity and belonging in a world of Multiple Identities.
- XIII. What kind of Britain do you want to live in?
- XIV. Engaging the Media
- XV. Arts event.
- XVI. Major Music event by local artists.
- XVII. Role Model: Successful Muslim Merchant Banker.

- XVIII. Role Model: Successful Muslim business person.
- XIX. Role Model: PC Javid ul-Haq.
- XX. Role Model: Muslim Lance Corporal who served in Iraq.
- XXI. Visits to the Houses of Parliament and meeting Muslim MPs and Peers.
- XXII. Role Model: Muslim Musician.
- XXIII. Mentoring Programme: Shadowing local business people, professionals, local Councillors.
- XXIV. Recovery of Memory: Experiences of first generation Muslims in the UK.
- XXV. Exploring extremism through drama and story telling.

**The above maybe used as independent units to assist integration into the school timetable and different curriculum subjects such as Citizenship, PSHE, RE, History, Geography, Sociology and Theology.**

### **Evaluation:**

Feedback was conducted through Phil Waters, Assistant Head, Cheney School.

### **IMPLEMENTATON:**

#### **Stakeholders**

- Developing confidence and trust between all stakeholders – school leadership teams, parents, pupils, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police, Government office for the South East, Local Muslim leadership – Mosque Chairpersons, Academics, organisations and of course the Muslim Tutor.
- A steering committee was formed constituting all stakeholders.
- Regular meetings with stakeholders ensured regular progress updates and issues that were coming to light.
- Employing language sensitively so that no single group felt targeted was essential to avoid alienating the Muslim community.

#### **Cheney School**

- I toured Cheney School to attain a feel of the school and understand its pupil make up, ethos, and culture. Further meetings took place with Phil Waters (Assistant Head) to determine the most suitable route for implementation. We decided that it was absolutely essential that no section of the Cheney School community felt targeted and that we adapted delivery to the school community environment. We agreed that I should address each year assembly, some 250 pupils, with the aim of:

- I. Introducing myself and my work at Eton College.
- II. Introduce the programme.
- III. Invite interested pupils to register with Mr. Phil Waters, Assistant Head.

- Jolie Kirby addressed School Leadership Team to ensure staff were briefed about the programme.
- This should not be a route to proselytising.

### **Outcomes**

- Some 1,000 Pupils were addressed and introduced to the programme.
- First Meeting – We were expecting around 15-20 pupils but some 45 boys attended. An excellent session. The girls had arrived but did not attend because the class was full.
- On occasions separate classes for Muslim boys and girls have worked better.
- An amazing and very mature exchange has taken place with the pupils.
- Numerous lunchtime sessions have been held – all voluntary participation.
- Have led discussion regarding Islām in mainstream curricular subjects such as History and Geography. This was accompanied with excellent Q&A sessions.

### **Emerging Themes**

- What is Islām?
- Religious Authority, Shi'a/Sunnī divide, Wahhābī, Salafī, etc.
- What is Jihād?
- The war in Afghanistan & Iraq, UK citizens fighting in these war zones.
- Sharī'ah.
- Hijāb.
- Modern Culture & Islām.
- Media – Islamophobic perceptions of Muslims.
- Identity & Belonging.
- Islamic History, especially *Sīrah* of the Prophet, 8<sup>th</sup> Century Baghdad and Islāmic Spain.
- Women & Islām.
- Suicide bombings.
- Importance of Muslim role models.
- Need for mentoring.

### **Pupil Feedback**

“He teaches us things that you don’t hear in the media...the media says that Muslims spend their time killing people.”

“It’s been good learning things about our religion and getting together to talk about Islam.”

“It’s good to talk about being a Muslim.”

### **Exploring Extremism through Drama: A play by GW Theatre ‘From one extreme to the other’ at Cheney School, Oxford.**

This is an excellent play exploring themes dealing with extremism (both religious and far-right) and the arguments extremists employ to attract vulnerable people. It was highly recommended to us and PC Javid ul-Haq, Thames Valley Police, travelled to Manchester especially to watch this play and feedback. He has been critical in liaising

with GW Theatre and organising the event. Following the play a 'hot seating' session with two of the main characters was set up so that pupils could question the actors. The groups were then divided into 8 classes of 30 pupils to discuss the following topics:

- Jihād
- British foreign policy
- Identity & Belonging
- Islām and Women

The group discussions were very positive and engaging. It is also possible for some schools that are predominately white to use the play to combat far-right extremists. Pupil feedback was provided to me by Phil Waters, Assistant Head of Cheney School:

“Well written and thought-provoking. The ideas were well communicated.” [Kate]

“Simple style dealing with complex issues; it was well-pitched.” [Sneha]

“Subtle yet bold messages.” [Islam]

“Highlighted key issues that we face in today’s society.” [Joe and Lucy]

“Worth doing.”  
[Abdul]

“I believe that what we have achieved at Cheney has been really ground-breaking. It has raised awareness of the lives that we lead, issues that our students tackle on a daily basis, and furthered understanding between different ethnic groups and cultures. It has acted as a catalyst for debate. I also think that we have achieved a very positive outcome with a minimum of fuss. It hasn’t, in my opinion, been controversial, and it has been a really positive experience for all those involved.”

[Phil Waters, Assistant Head]

### **Next Steps**

Following the successful pilot of this programme at Cheney School our aim in the year commencing September 2008 to March 2009 will be to:

- Mainstream the programme into the timetable of Cheney School so that all pupils are engaged in a systematic and sustained manner.

- A 6<sup>th</sup> Form conference is also being organised by Head of RE at Cheney covering the theme of RE Post 9/11.
- I have introduced the programme to Oxford Community School in September 2008 by addressing some 1400 pupils through year assemblies. I am now seeking ways with Mrs. Daphne James, Deputy Head, of embedding the programme within the school timetable.
- A Head Master from a large secondary school having attended our conference at the Oxford Brookes University's Westminster Institute of Education, Harcourt Hill, on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2008 has also shown interest in participating in the programme. We will this year seek to introduce the programme to his school with the aim of mainstreaming late next year.
- Contingent upon the support available and subject to agreement with stakeholders I would like to recruit a suitably qualified Muslim Tutor to assist with the workload.

# **Towards a Counter-Narrative**

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### TOWARDS A COUNTER-NARRATIVE

#### Q.1 What is Islām?

In a rigorously authenticated hadīth of the Prophet Muhammad called hadīth of Jibrīl (reported in *Sabīh Muslim*), the Prophet defined Islām as constituting three dimensions – Islām, Īmān and Ihsān. Islām is to testify there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to perform the Salāh, to give Zakāh, to fast in the month of Ramadhān, and to perform the Hajj, if one is able to. Īmān or faith is defined as belief in Allah, His Angels, His Revealed Books, His Messengers, the Day of Judgement, and in destiny, both the good and the evil. Ihsān or perfection of faith is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you see Him not, know that He sees you.

Islām refers to what is technically called *fiqh* (Jurisprudence) or orthopraxis. Over the first three to four centuries Muslim scholar jurists developed a complex and sophisticated methodology (*Usūl al-Fiqh*) for the derivation of the Islamic Sacred Law (*Sharī‘ah*) from the two primary sources of Islām - the Qur‘ān and Hadīth. This is counter to the extremist methodology that is literalist and is selective in terms of the sources it employs. There are four major Sunni schools of *fiqh* – The Hanafī, Shāfi‘ī, Hanbalī and Mālikī. The Ja‘farī are the largest Shi‘ī school of *fiqh*.

During the caliphate of ‘Alī (599-661 CE) may Allah be pleased with him, the fourth rightly- guided caliph, the Muslim community began to experience certain political and theological ruptures. These were accentuated by the penetration of Hellenistic philosophy, questions revolving around leadership of the Muslim community, nature of the Qur‘ān, faith, salvation and membership of the community. The debates around these areas of contention gave birth to the science of *Ilm al-Kalām* or dialectical theology. This therefore is the historical unfolding of the second dimension of Īmān over the first few centuries. The two major Sunnī schools of theology are called Ash‘arī and Māturīdī.

It is within this dimension that we may discuss the very earliest violent extremist movement within Islām, that of the *Khawārij*, seceders. They embodied virtually identical characteristics to contemporary terrorist and violent extremist groups. For example:

- Their reading of the Qur‘ān was literalist.
- They restricted themselves to select hadīth.
- Rebelled against central Authority.
- Separated themselves from the community of Muslims.
- Arbitrarily declared Muslims non-Muslim (*Takfīr*) and therefore justified the shedding of their blood.
- Justified the killing of civilians.
- Were responsible for the murder of Caliph ‘Alī.

This allows us an Islamic framework within which a violent extremist ideology may be examined, discussed and defeated.

The third dimension is one of Ihsān, excellence. This is to bring about a synthesis of the first two dimensions of Islām and Īmān within the human being so that one’s whole being is fused with beauty, goodness, harmony, kindness and excellence. The Qur‘ān states:

“Do what is beautiful. God loves those who do what is beautiful.” [Q. 2:195]

“Pardon them and forgive; God loves those who do what is beautiful.” [Q. 5:13]

“They shall have whatsoever they want with their Lord – that is the recompense of those who do what is beautiful.”  
[Q. 39:34]

The root with its various derivatives has been employed some 194 times in the Qur‘ān. Just as the other two dimensions evolved historically into specialist fields of knowledge, the dimension of Ihsān is referred to by the term *Tasawwuf* or Sūfism. Its vocation and discipline is the perfection of character so that the human being may truly realize his or her role as the khalīfah (vicegerent) of God on earth. There are numerous schools (*turuq*) of Sūfism with their particular vocabulary, practices and theosophical outlooks. Some of the major schools are the Naqshbandīyah, Qādirīyah, Chishtīyah and Shādhilīyah.

So in sum, this educational model challenges violent extremist ideology through:

- Exposing young people to the mainstream understanding of the Islamic tradition, its inherent diversity, intellectual breadth and depth, thereby providing an alternative to a violent extremist ideology in its totality.
- The diversity in religious praxis and the richness of Islām – different ways of being authentically Muslim.
- Through the introduction of Sūfism young people are exposed to the ethical and spiritual dimension of the tradition that seeks to cultivate excellence, is liberal, and able to adapt itself to an indigenous culture.
- Empowers young people to express themselves through Music, literature and Art thereby leading to the development of a distinctively British Islām.

## **Q.2 What is Jihād?**

This is by far one of the most misunderstood terms and the most abused in contemporary parlance. The word ‘Jihād’ is derived from the root JaHaDa and means to toil, exert with utmost effort, be diligent, meditate upon a thing, to strive and to struggle against difficulties. Rāzi, one of the leading commentators on the Qur‘ān, argues ‘that there is nothing in the word to indicate that this striving is to be effected by the sword [‘Abdul Mannān Omar, *The Dictionary of the Holy Qur‘ān*, p. 106].’ A tradition of the Prophet sheds further light on the multiple meanings of Jihād:

Imam al-Bayhaqī relates on the authority of Jābir, that when the Prophet - upon him be blessings and peace - came back from one of his expeditions he said: “You have come with the best coming! You have come from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad. They asked: “What is the greater jihad? He said: “The servant's struggle against his ego.” [Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Zubd al-Kabīr*].

From this we may deduce that broadly speaking there are two forms of Jihād, firstly, the most superior is ‘the greater Jihād’, that which is to struggle against one’s self, to overcome destructive lusts, appetites as embodied in the *al-nafs al-ammara bil-su’* (Q. 12:53), ‘the soul enjoining evil’ to

discipline it, reform it, so that it may become *al-nafs al-lawwama* (Q. 91:7-8), ‘the upbraiding soul’ and finally to achieve inner peace, *al-nafs al-Mutma’inna* [Q. 89:27], ‘the soul at peace and tranquillity.’ The Qur’ān warns Muslims to shield and protect themselves from being wholly possessed and dominated by animal passions [Q. 25:43] as this leads to utter destruction. This in fact is the domain of the Ihsānic dimension, the Sūfīs, who are the ‘doctors of the soul’, developed a whole science relating to the ‘greater Jihād’. Secondly, the lesser Jihād is that which relates to the conduct of war.

## The Greater Jihād

The Qur’ān states:

Those who exert themselves [Jāhada] do so for their own benefit - God does not need His creatures – We shall certainly blot out the misdeeds of those who believe and do good deeds, and We shall reward them according to the best of their actions.  
[Q. 29:6-7]

But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard [Jāhadu] for Our cause: God is with those who do good.  
[Q. 29:69]

And struggle [Jāhidhum] against them with it [the Qur’ān]. [Q. 25:52]

All of the above Qur’ānic verses were revealed in Makkah at the time when Muslims were under intense persecution, torture and some were killed. Despite such suffering, there was no command to respond to violence with violence but on the contrary God exhorts Muslims to patient struggle, of goodness towards others, and tolerance. In the words of one of the experts on the *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, occasions of the revelation of the Qur’ān, ‘Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidī (d. 468/1075) states:

The idolaters from among the people of Makkah were in the habit of harming the Companions of the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace. These Companions used to come always either beaten or with their skulls bashed in. They complained to the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, about this situation and he persistently told them: ‘Be steadfast, for I have not been commanded to fight’. [Al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Commentary on Qur’ān 22:39, <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?MadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=86&tSoraNo=22&tAyahNo=39&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

The verses relating to warfare were revealed much later at the time of the *hijrah*, migration to Madīnah. To elucidate the concept of the greater Jihād further, the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, has said:

“The mujāhid is he who makes Jihād against his nafs (ego) for the sake of obeying God.”  
[*Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Musnad Ibn Hanbal, Sunan al-Tabarānī*]

“The most excellent Jihād is the Hajj.”  
[*Sabīh al-Bukhārī*]

“A man asked: “Should I join the Jihād?” The Prophet replied, upon him be peace, “Do you have parents?” The man said yes. The Prophet said: “Then perform Jihād by serving them!”  
(*Sabīh al-Bukhārī*)

“What kind of Jihād is better?” The Prophet replied, upon him be peace: “A word of truth spoken in front of an oppressive ruler.” (*Sunan al-Nasāī*)

“The strong one is not the one who overcomes people; the strong one is he who overcomes his nafs [ego].” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Musnad Ibn Hanbal, Sunan al-Tabarānī*)

So the greater Jihād is:

- To cultivate virtue, such as prayer, sincerity, humility, forgiveness, love, generosity, patience, honesty, loyalty, moderation, self-restraint, discipline, courage, justice, tolerance, wisdom, good speech, gratitude, contentment, etc.
- To struggle against one’s selfish desires.
- To discipline and reform the soul from harmful characteristics, such as forgetfulness of God, anger, deceit, envy, pride, laziness, lust, greed.
- Any struggle or effort in the way of God, such as to fast, perform Hajj, to rise at dawn for *salāh* (five daily prayers), to serve one’s parents, community, society, generally to bring about positive change within and without.
- A whole discipline was developed by the ‘Doctors of the Soul’ – the Sūfīs, to cultivate the inner life of the Muslims to achieve the summit of human endeavor – the gnosis of God.

**TIPS: The above traditions have been extremely useful when employed to draw on the multiple meanings of Jihād. It is essential that pupils are encouraged to reflect and ponder on the significance of these traditions, and their possible application in their lives, communities and society.**

### The Lesser Jihād

This relates to the conduct of war. Despite the efforts of violent extremist ideologues, warfare in Islām is not a perpetual state but a means to be employed only as a last resort. Islām restricts war, promotes peace, prosperity, justice, freedom, mutual co-existence and co-operation between nations and peoples. As noted above, despite the suffering of Muslims in Makkah the Prophet sought to pursue every peaceful means to preach and propagate his message. Let us briefly outline the Muslim experience in Makkah over a thirteen year period that eventually culminated in the Divine permission to wage war:

- The Prophet propagated the message of Islām secretly for the first three years.
- Public proclamation of the message of Islām - the polytheists responded with persecution, torture and killing of Muslims, especially those Muslim converts with little or no tribal protection.
- To alleviate the suffering of the Muslims, the Prophet instructed them to emigrate to Abyssinia, a Christian land. Whose King would provide them protection and freedom to practice their faith. This is an important incident as it demonstrates the Prophet’s attitude towards other faiths and establishes the precedent that Muslims may seek refuge in a non-Islamic country as long as it allows them freedom of religion. The great irony is that Great Britain has a tradition of providing refuge to the persecuted and whereas many Muslims who took asylum in the late 1980’s lived peacefully. A tiny minority sought to abuse that freedom through propagating a violent extremist ideology, thereby radicalizing many young Muslims. To the contrary, when the Muslims of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century took refuge in Abyssinia, they would pray for the King against his enemies, Umm Salamah (c. 580-680 CE) states: “We prayed to God to help the Negus prevail over his rivals and confirm his rule in his country (*Musnad Ibn Hanbal*).” It is worth reflecting on this and the contemporary situation of Muslims in Europe. To pray and give thanks to God for Great Britain is to express gratitude to God, how often is it that we do this?
- Boycott and banishment of the Prophet and his supporters by the polytheists to the

arid valley of Shi'b. This led to starvation and great suffering of the Prophet and his supporters. It is primarily due to this that the Prophet's beloved wife Khadījah bint Khuwaylid (555-619 CE), his uncle and protector Abū Tālib (549-619 CE) died.

- The Prophet sought a new place of security and freedom and therefore visited al-Tā'if, a city some seventy miles from Makkah. Al-Tā'if was not responsive, he was chased by a stone throwing mob, left injured and bleeding. The Prophet returned deeply disappointed. He could not enter Makkah because he no longer enjoyed any tribal protection, so he sent a message to Mut'im ibn 'Adī, who agreed to provide him with protection. This again is evidence against the extremists who argue that Muslims cannot seek support or help from non-Muslims, if that were the case, why would the Prophet do so on numerous occasions?
- Chiefs of various clans of Quraysh plotted to kill the Prophet. They agreed to nominate a man from each clan, so that the responsibility for the killing would be shared and with the Prophet's clan not being strong enough to retaliate, they would pay compensation and thereby also achieve their goal of eradicating the Prophet.

The above demonstrates clearly that the Prophet sought to employ every peaceful means for the propagation of his divine mission. However, as a final resort the Prophet was forced to leave Makkah to save his life and the community from perishing. The first verses giving permission to fight were revealed shortly after:

Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged, and God is indeed able to give them victory; those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, "Our Lord is God" – for had it not been for God's repelling some men by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques, in which the name of God is much mentioned, would certainly have been destroyed. [Q. 22:39-41]

These verses in combination with those cited below provide the proper Islamic perspective on war and its conduct:

- To preserve and protect individual liberties such as right to freedom of religion, life, intellect, family, property, note also the mention of religious places of worship other than Mosques in the 'permission' verses above. It is pertinent to add here what 'Umar (581-644 CE), the second of the rightly guided Caliphs agreed with the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 15 A.H. / 636 C.E:

This is the assurance of safety (*aman*) which the servant of God 'Umar, the Commander of the Faithful, has granted to the people of Jerusalem. He has given them an assurance of safety for themselves, for their property, their churches, their crosses, the sick and the healthy of the city, and for all the rituals that belong to their religion. Their churches will not be inhabited [by Muslims] and will not be destroyed. Neither they, nor the land on which they stand, nor their crosses, nor their property will be damaged. They will not be forcibly converted.... The people of Jerusalem must pay the poll tax like the people of [other] cities, and they must expel the Byzantines and the robbers.... [Joseph E. B. Lumbard, *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, p. 18].

- In self defense, the Qur'ān further states:

Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors. [Q. 2:190].

In commentary, Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687 CE), states: "(Fight in the way of God) in obedience of God whether in the Sacred Precinct or in other places (against those who fight against you) **against those who**

**initiate fighting against you**, (but begin not hostilities. Lo! God loveth not aggressors) **He does not love those who initiate fighting whether in the Sacred Precinct or in other locations.** [*Tannīr al-Miqbās min Tafīr Ibn 'Abbās*, commentary on the Qur'ānic verse 2:190,

<http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=2&tAyahNo=190&tDisplay=y&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) CE states, “Islamic warfare is always defensive, because the basis of relationships with the non-Muslims is peaceful co-existence (*musālamah*); if one reflects deeply on the causes of the Prophet’s military expeditions, one will find that all of them were of this type. [Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Tabāwī*, p.92].”

It is interesting to note here that article 51 of the United Nations Charter also allows nations the right to collective self defence if attacked:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security. [http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

As signatories to the charter many Muslim nations have and do participate in peace keeping missions and also to enforce international peace and security through the aegis of the United Nations. Would offensive war be permissible in certain circumstances? For example, to alleviate persecution and suffering from an oppressive ruler? Some scholars have argued that if *all other means* have been exhausted, than it maybe permissible to fight to confront injustice and liberate human beings from oppression, they cite the following Qur’ānic verse in support:

And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)?- Men, women, and children, whose cry is: “Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will protect; and raise for us from thee one who will help!” [Q. 4:75].

- Qur’ān restricts war. The Qur’ānic verse 2:190 actually establishes limits in the conduct of war; these are not to kill non-combatants, women, children, monks, rabbis and priests. Also not to destroy crops, trees or kill animals (except for food). In seventh century Arabia, fighting took place with swords and arrows, whereas contemporary warfare employs devastating weaponry that does not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, so under these circumstances to sanction war under Islamic law could only be justified in the most extreme cases and only as a last resort.
- War is not to be waged as a tool for the forced conversion of others as the Qur’ān states:

There is no compulsion in religion. [Q. 2:256].

- War is not a perpetual state, the Qur’ān states:

And if they incline to peace, do so and put your trust in God. Even if they intend to deceive you, remember that God is sufficient for you. [Q. 8:61-2].

A central question in this area that is often neglected but needs to be explored deeply with young people is: Who should declare war? Should it be the local Imām, the local community leader, a Jihādī group, or a military commander? Who has the right under the

Sharī’ah to declare war? What are the consequences when individuals or groups begin to appropriate this authority? This is a critical discussion that must take place within the classroom context. In my submission – anarchy, confusion and the shedding of innocent blood is one of the consequences of a collective failure of Muslim leadership to educate the young about the importance of respecting authority. The decision to wage war ultimately and unequivocally lies with the government of the

day. Anything contrary would be an invitation to societal instability and a state of *fitna* (corruption, sedition).

A significant document known internationally as the Amman Message that addresses these core questions was released on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2004 by H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in Amman, Jordan. His Majesty sent 3 key questions to the leading Islamic scholars of the world. These questions were:

- I. Who is a Muslim?
- II. Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)?
- III. Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)?

In 2005 H.M. King Abdullah II convened a meeting of 200 leading Islamic scholars representing 50 countries to address these key questions. In Amman, the scholars unanimously issued a ruling on three fundamental issues (which became known as the "Three Points of the [\*Amman Message!\*](#)):

- I. They specifically recognized the validity of all 8 *Mathbabs* (legal schools) of *Sunni*, *Shi'a* and *Ibadhi* Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true *Salafi* thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
- II. Based upon this definition they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
- III. Based upon the *Mathabib* they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.

This was ratified by the Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) and a number of other Islamic scholarly assemblies. In total over 500 leading Islamic scholars from different parts of the world have endorsed this document, which means it becomes binding upon each and every Muslim because there is scholarly consensus upon it.

The Qur'ān clearly states:

O you who believe, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. [Q. 4:59]

All the classical books of law give the Imām (leader, ruler) the right to declare war. In contemporary parlance, with the emergence of nation states and the end of the Caliphate, that right belongs to the government of the day and no one else. Violent extremist groups that seek to topple governments through the use of violence are declared rebels (*al-baghy*) in Islamic law and the government has the right in Islamic law to confront and defeat them.

### **Misinterpreted Verses**

Certain Qur'ānic verses are employed by violent extremists to justify wholesale killing of civilians in the west. I shall briefly discuss them below:

#### **And slay them wherever ye find them [Q. 2:191]**

This verse is often cited in extremist material and employed to justify wholesale killing of civilians, irrespective of whether they be combatants or non-combatants. It is important here to remind the reader that those individuals and groups who declare war on fellow citizens and the state are referred to as rebels (*al-baghy*) under the Islamic law, so the very legitimacy that they appeal to from the Qur'ān and hadīth does not in fact exist. The above verse 2:191 when placed within its context reads:

Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! God loveth not aggressors. **And slay them wherever ye find them**, and drive them out of the places whence they drove

you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you (there) then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers. [Q. 2:190-191].

From a cursory examination, once placed within the preceding and following verses we discover that the Qur'ān itself provides the context. In this instance the Qur'ān lays down:

- Rules relating to warfare, this verse specifically restricts the fighting to only combatants (see also section on 'What is Jihād?'). Ibn Kathīr (1301-1373 CE) states:

This Āyah means, 'Fight for the sake of Allah and do not be transgressors,' such as, by committing prohibitions. Al-Hasan al-Basrī stated that transgression (indicated by the Āyah), "includes mutilating the dead, theft (from the captured goods), killing women, children and old people who do not participate in warfare, killing priests and residents of houses of worship, burning down trees and killing animals without real benefit." This is also the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās, 'Umar bin 'Abdul-'Aziz, Muqātil bin Hayyān and others. [[http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=234](http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=234), accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

- Muslims have the right to fight to drive out the polytheists from the place that they drove them out – that is Makkah and the Holy Sanctuary. Muslims were not sure whether they were permitted to fight within the holy sanctuary; this verse permits them to fight back in self defence and does not in any way allow for the killing of civilians as violent extremists interpret it.
- The context further restricts this to the Makkan polytheists, who had forced the Muslims out of Makkah. It therefore cannot be applied to Christians, Jews or others. When considered conterminous with the commentary of Ibn Kathīr, the misinterpretation is obvious, he states:

(And kill them wherever you find them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out.) meaning, 'Your energy should be spent on fighting them, just as their energy is spent on fighting you, and on expelling them from the areas from which they have expelled you, as a law of equality in punishment.'  
[[http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=235](http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235), accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

Think and reflect upon this! Do suicide bombs discriminate between combatants and non-combatants? Remember too that the primary objective of the Sharī'ah is the preservation of life and the murder of one human being is seen as tantamount to the killing of all humanity. Suicide bombing, taking of innocent life, can never be justified by the Qur'ān!

**When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you find the polytheists, kill them, seize them, besiege them, ambush them. [Q. 9:5].**

This is also one of the favourite verses of violent extremists (religious and far-right) both to justify either violence towards non-Muslims or for Islamophobes to show that Islam is a violent religion. Once again when we examine the verse within its context that is to read the preceding and following verses we discover that it provides an answer for its critics itself.

A release by God and His Messenger from the treaty you [believers] made with the polytheists [is announced] – you [polytheists] may move freely about the land for four months, but you should bear in mind both that you will not escape God, and that God will disgrace those who ignore [Him]. On the Day of the Great Pilgrimage [there will be] a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all people: 'God and His Messenger are released from [treaty] obligations to the polytheists. It will be better for you [polytheists] if you repent; know that you cannot escape

God if you turn away.’ [Prophet], warn those who ignore [God] that they will have a painful punishment. As for those who have honoured the treaty you made with them and who have not supported anyone against you: fulfil your agreement with them to the end of their term. God loves those who are mindful of Him. **When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you find the polytheists, kill them, seize them, besiege them, ambush them** – but if they turn [to God], maintain the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, let them go on their way, for God is most forgiving and merciful. If any one of the polytheists should seek your protection [Prophet], grant it to him so that he may hear the word of God – then take him to a safe place – for they are people with no knowledge. What sort of treaty could these polytheists make with God and His Messenger? As for those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque, so long as they remain true to you, be true to them; God loves those who are mindful of Him. [Q. 9:1-7].

- We note that the verse employed by violent extremists in fact appears much later and the preceding verses place it within its context of revelation. Through examining it within its context we comprehend its true meaning, whereas through isolating it from its context, it is clearly misinterpreted.
- It applies to the Makkan polytheists specifically and therefore is not a general command.
- The polytheists had breached the treaty of Hudaibiyah and these verses declared the severance of that treaty between the Muslims and the polytheists of Makkah.
- It gives the polytheists who have breached the treaty four months before the commencement of any hostilities.
- However, the verse commands the Muslims to honour their treaties with those of the polytheists ‘who have not supported anyone against you,’ that is those who have honoured their agreements. So in fact it is not a declaration of war against all non-Muslims but restricted to those who had broken their treaty with them.
- The Prophet is to grant protection to those polytheists who seek his protection and also to transport them to a ‘safe place.’
- Qur’ānic verses 12 and 13 elucidate further the Makkan polytheists’ failure to honour treaties, their persistence in aggression against the Muslims and that Muslims had no choice but to confront and defeat their aggression.
- When we study the biography (*sīrah*) of the Prophet we discover that in reality the conquest of Makkah was achieved without a battle.

### Q.3 What does Islām say about suicide bombings/self sacrifice killing civilians?

Islām is the religion of equilibrium and deplors extremism. The Prophet on one occasion repeated three times “*Halaka al-mutanatti’ūn* - Extremists shall most certainly perish (*Sabīh Muslim*).” At another point the Prophet said:

The religion is easy and whosoever will deal with religion harshly, it will defeat him. So be straight, follow the middle course, give good news and make use of the morning, the evening or part of the night (in prayer and remembering Allah).

[*Sabīh al-Bukhārī*]

Avoid extremism, for people have been led to destruction because of extremism.

[*Musnad Ibn Hanbal*]

One of the great tragedies of our times is the usurpation of religion by extremists and this is why the Prophet had warned Muslims about those who were extreme in religion.

As for the phenomena of suicide bombings this has no precedent in mainstream Islām. Life is sacred. The Qur’ān informs us the taking of a single innocent life is as it were to take the life of the whole of humanity [Q. 5:32]. Suicide is *harām* as the Qur’ān states:

And spend [freely] in God's cause, and **let not your own hands throw you into destruction;** and persevere in doing good: behold, God loves the doers of good. [Q. 2:195].

The Prophet states:

Whoever commits suicide with a piece of iron will be punished with the same piece of iron in Hell. Whoever commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in Hell [forever], and whoever commits suicide by stabbing shall keep on stabbing himself in Hell [forever].

[*Sabīh al-Bukhārī*]

It is unlawful to inflict harm upon yourself and others. [*Al-Mustadrak of al-Hākim*]

Suicide therefore is a grave sin in Islām. As for the killing of civilians it is considered murder as any declaration of war is the right of the relevant authority and not the prerogative of individuals or groups. Both suicide bombing and killing of civilians is a grave crime against the Sharī'ah.

Furthermore, God created Ādam, breathed into him of His spirit [Q. 38:71] and honoured him and his progeny [Q. 17:70]. The human being is the vicegerent of God [*khālīfah*] on earth and the best of all creation [*ashraf al-makhluqāt*]. The sanctity of the human body is the same irrespective of whether dead or alive. The Prophet has said, 'Breaking a bone of the dead person is like breaking one while he is alive [*Musnad Ibn Hanbal, Sunan Ibn Mājah, Sunan Abū Dā'ūd*].' A juristic maxim states, 'The dignity of a deceased person is the same as if he or she were alive.' This being the case, how can the destruction of the body through detonating explosives be ever justified?

Following the battle of Uhud, the Makkan polytheists had grievously mutilated the bodies of many of the Muslims who had fallen in battle. When the Prophet saw the body of his uncle Hamzah (d. 625 CE) gravely mutilated, he was deeply angered. However, the Prophet instructed his companions not to reciprocate this act but instead informed them, "When one of you striketh a blow, let him avoid striking the face... for God created Adam in His image." [Martin Lings, *Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources*, p.191].

Think, reflect and ponder on these traditions. In the light of the above, the human body is a trust [*amānah*] from God, it is honoured and of immense inherent dignity, to destroy it is a grave sin [*kabā'ir*] in Islām and it is graver if civilians – men, women and children are killed.

#### **Q.4 Is it legitimate for British Muslims to go and fight against British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq?**

It is not permissible for British Muslims to fight against British forces anywhere in the world. The Muslim Scholars have deduced from the Qur'ān and the hadīth five higher objectives (*maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*) of the Sharī'ah, these are:

- Preservation of Religion
- Preservation of Life
- Preservation of Intellect
- Preservation of the Family
- Preservation of Property

As British citizens we enjoy all these freedoms in Great Britain. As a matter of fact we have greater degree of freedom to practice and participate in the life of this country than many other places in the world. These rights bring with them certain reciprocal duties that we owe

towards our country, just like non-Muslim residents in Islamic countries. Now the oath or affirmation (if one does not wish to swear by God) and pledge to qualify for British citizenship is as follows:

#### **Oath of allegiance**

I (name) swear by Almighty God that on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

#### **Affirmation of allegiance**

I (name) do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her Heirs and Successors, according to law.

#### **Pledge**

I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen.

[<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship/applying/ceremony/>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

This clearly establishes a covenant between the Citizen and the State. As for those of us, who were born and bred in this country, our citizenship is automatic through one or both of our parents or through the exploration of the very nature of the concept of ‘citizenship’ we discover that it is a relationship based upon ‘rights and responsibilities.’

An examination just on rational grounds would show that we all enjoy access to free healthcare, education, social security benefits, rule of law and of course a democratic system for political participation. For society to flourish it is necessary that these rights be contiguous with duties of the citizen towards the state, mutual cooperation between persons and respect for the rule of law, Imām al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) states:

Man needs to live in society to be able to perform his voluntary actions and profitable transactions. He needs the cooperation of others in order to make his own living. He needs that cooperation in mutual defence to protect himself, his family and his property... The mutual defence and cooperation must be for a just cause and a comprehensive law. [Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dr. Mustafa Cerić, *Toward a Muslim Social Contract in Europe*, p.7].

In commentary Dr. Cerić adds, “Hence Islām is more than religion: it is law and morals. By law we mean the blueprint of a social order which denies to its members the use of private force for attaining redress and wrong, and by morals we mean man’s knowledge and will to accept principles of right and wrong in behaviour.” The atrocities of 7/7 and 21/7 are a demonstration of the consequences of the failure of citizens to reciprocate duties incumbent upon them and a failure to abide by the rule of law. For Muslims it is a religious duty, sanctioned by the Sharī‘ah that they abide by their promises, agreements and covenants:

O You who have attained to faith! Be true to your covenants! [Q. 5:1]

Ibn ‘Abbās, states with further explanation of the above verse: “fulfil the pledges that are between you and Allah or between you and other people.”

[<http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=5&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

And be true to your bond with God whenever you bind yourselves by a pledge, and do not break [your] oaths

after having [freely] confirmed them and having called upon God to be witness to your good faith: behold, God knows all that you do. [Q. 16:91]

In his commentary on verse 16:91, Muhammad Asad states: “Regarding the expression “bond with God” (‘ahd Allāh), ... The clause “whenever you bind yourselves by a pledge” has a twofold meaning: in the first instance (as in 13:20) it refers to the spiritual, moral, and social obligations arising from one’s faith in God; and, secondly, it applies to all pledges or promises given by one person to another – for, as Rāzī points out, every pledge given by man to man represents, in its essence, a pledge to God. It is to this second aspect of man’s “bond with God” that the sequence refers.”

[<http://www.altafsir.com/ViewTranslations.asp?Display=yes&SoraNo=16&Ayah=91&toAyah=91&Language=2&LanguageID=2&TranslationBook=7>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

But if they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them, except against people with whom you have a treaty: God sees all that you do. [Q. 8:72].

This verse (Q. 8:72) demonstrates the importance of upholding agreements/contracts and informs Muslims that if there co-religionists are suffering persecution they must assist them. However, they are not to assist them if they have entered into an agreement with the non-Muslim authority but must instead seek peaceful means to bring about an end to persecution. It is a particularly pertinent verse in relation to Muslims living as a minority in non-Muslim countries and clarifies the extent to which they may assist others and vice versa.

There are also numerous examples from the life of the Prophet (*sīrah*) demonstrating the obligation to uphold promises, agreements and treaties. For example, in a treaty with the polytheists of Makkah at Hudaibiyah, one of the conditions stipulated by them was that Muslims in Madīnah must return Makkah converts who took refuge in Madīnah. As soon as the agreement was concluded:

... the clank of chains was heard and a youth staggered into the camp with his feet in fetters. It was Abū Jandal, one of the younger sons of Suhayl. His father had imprisoned him on account of his Islām, fearing that he would escape to Medīna. His elder brother ‘Abd Allāh was among the pilgrims and was about to welcome him when Suhayl caught hold of the chain that was round his prisoner’s neck and struck him violently in the face. Then he turned to the Prophet and said: “Our agreement was concluded before this man came to thee.” “That is true,” said the Prophet. “Return him then unto us,” said Suhayl. “O Muslims,” shouted Abū Jandal at the top of his voice, “am I to be returned unto the idolaters, for them to persecute me on account of my religion?” ... “Be patient, Abū Jandal,” said the Prophet. “God will surely give thee and those with thee relief and a way out. We have agreed on the terms of a truce with these people, and have given them our solemn pledge, even as they have done to us, and we will not now break our word.” [Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, p.253].

Think, reflect and ponder on this. There are many lessons to draw from this alone – patience, respect for rule of law (even when we may disagree), firmly upholding pledges and covenants. This is an agreement with Makkan polytheists who had persecuted, tortured and forced the Muslims out of their homes. Has Great Britain forced us out? We have our own Mosques, schools, businesses, Muslims are in various professions, have equal rights with others, then why must we not be deeply attached to this soil and be loyal citizens? The extremists seek to sow hatred, animosity and proclaim a destructive narrative that has no place in a multi-faith, multi-cultural society.

**Does this mean we ignore injustices in the world or policies our government pursues that we disagree with?**

No, not at all! To the contrary it means we must engage, lobby, strive, express our views and be heard. We are not the only section of the society in disagreement with British foreign policy, many people throughout the world, from all faiths and backgrounds, had opposed the Iraq war.

Over 2,000,000 people protested - the vast majority non-Muslims. So when the extremists tell us that everyone is against us, this is blatantly not true! What the majority are against is the pursuit of political aims through violent means, especially the taking of innocent life. This is no different from the Sharī'ah commanding us to pursue peaceful means, that war is always the last resort (and only the prerogative of the government of the day). Did the Prophet not say 'Jihād is to speak a word of truth in front of a tyrant?' It is the Jihād of the pen or the tongue that we must pursue. We should fully and wholeheartedly participate in the life of this country and through *khidmat* (service/duty) seek the betterment of all our fellow British citizens.

### **Q.5 How should we deal with people of other faiths or of none? I was told that Muslims cannot be friends with Christians and Jews?**

Violent extremists seek to interpret verses to justify their political ideology of isolation, division and hatred. For example I recently encountered a group leafleting the public and were using a verse arguing that Muslims cannot take Christians and Jews as friends. It is interesting to note that Islamophobes use the same verse to show Muslim intolerance:

O you who believe [in the message of Muhammad], do not take Jews and Christians as friends. They are friends to one another, and the one among you who turns to them is of them: Truly, God does not guide wrongdoing folk. [Q. 5:51].

Violent extremists also use this verse to declare those Muslims who maintain good cordial relations with non-Muslims as being outside the fold of Islām (*takfir*). If they were not so selective in their readings they would note another verse at the beginning of the same chapter giving Muslim men permission to marry Christian and Jewish women [Q. 5:5]. Surely marriage embodies a level of relationship that is far deeper than friendship? On the surface there appears therefore to be textual conflict. However, this is not the case when we examine the verse in Arabic and its reasons for revelation.

The Qur'ān employs the term '*awliyā*' and in this instance it is mistakenly translated as 'friends'. It can also mean 'protectors, benefactors, helpers, allies, successors, heirs, guardians.' The context of the revelation would determine which of these terms were most appropriate to render the proper meaning. Imām al-Tabarī (838-923 CE), a leading classical commentator of the Qur'ān suggests that this verse was revealed during the early period of the Prophet's stay in Madīnah. At this stage the Muslims had only a force of some three hundred men, in contrast the polytheists of Makkah were some three to four times their number. So the forces gathered against the nascent Muslim community were substantial and in addition some of the Jewish tribes within Madīnah were actively supporting the polytheists of Makkah. It is within this struggle for the very survival of the Muslim community that certain Muslims sought to make alliances with Jewish and Christian tribes, so that when the Muslim community capitulated they would claim safety with those with whom they had entered into an alliance. Of course, if these alliances were permitted, one of the dire consequences would have been a collapse of Muslim unity, thereby weakening the defence against impending attack from the polytheists and the destruction of the community.

In addition Ibn 'Abbās suggests that the Muslims referred to in verse Q. 5:52 are 'Abdullāh Ibn Ubayy and his followers. These were the hypocrites [*munāfiqūn*], who were the 'enemy within' and were always seeking to plot against the Prophet, so the verse alerts the Muslims to their treacherous activities and their attempts at befriending those groups who sought the defeat of the Muslim community. Furthermore, when we examine verses that follow [Q. 5:51], we discover that the picture becomes much clearer. The Qur'ān states:

You who believe, do not take as allies those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it – whether people

who were given the Scripture before you, or disbelievers – and be mindful of God if you are true believers. When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make fun of it: this is because they are people who do not reason. [Q. 5:57-58].

In the light of the above historical context the term ‘friends’ should in fact be translated as ‘allies or protectors’ to read:

O you who believe [in the message of Muhammad], do not take Jews and Christians as allies/protectors. They are allies/protectors to one another, and the one among you who turns to them is of them: Truly, God does not guide wrongdoing folk. [Q. 5:51].

The basis for interaction with people of all faiths or of none is the following verse:

God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves the just. But God forbids you to take as allies those who have fought against you for your faith, driven you out of your homes, and helped others drive you out: any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoers. [Q. 60:8-9].

One of the consequences of the peace treaty of Hudaibiyah was greater exchange, dialogue and general interaction between the polytheists of Makkah and the Muslims of Madīnah. The above verses were revealed following an incident involving a polytheist woman from Makkah, Qutaylah. She visited her daughter Asmā’ b. Abī Bakr bearing a number of gifts, Asmā’ refused her mother entry to her house and also declined her gifts. This verse was revealed to encourage kindness and generosity towards those people who were not killing and persecuting Muslims. In commentary, al-Tabarī states:

The most credible view is that the verse refers to people of all kinds of creeds and religions who should be shown kindness and treated equitably. God referred to all those who do not fight the Muslims or drive them from their homes, without exception or qualification. [Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities*, p.26].

The term ‘tabarrū’ is often translated as ‘dealing kindly.’ To fully appreciate the meaning of this term we must examine its root ‘Barra’, by doing so we discover the depth of its meaning and the basis upon which the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims should be based. It should be based upon:

- Being just to one another. At another point the Qur‘ān states, “Let not a people’s enmity towards you incite you to act contrary to justice; be just, for it is closest to righteousness.” [Q. 5:8]. It is an obligation on Muslims to act in justice to all around them.
- Dealing benevolently with one another. A Christian delegation from Najrān visited the Prophet and when it was time for their prayer the Prophet allowed them to pray in the Mosque facing towards the east. [Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, p.326].
- Bestowing bountiful gifts.
- To keep an oath and not break promises to one another.
- Behaving with utmost courtesy at all times. On one occasion a funeral was passing, the Prophet stood up out of respect, one of the companions said that the deceased was a Jew, the Prophet replied, ‘was he not a human being?’ Islamic scholars have drawn from this *hadīth* and numerous verses of the Qur‘ān [cf. 17:70, 38:72] to argue that every human being has been honoured by God with dignity.
- Being considerate.
- Goodness of the highest order when interacting with one another.

The following *abadīth* also elucidate the Prophet’s instructions to Muslims about the basis of interaction with fellow human beings:

“People are God’s children and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His children kindly.”

[*Mishkāt al-Masābih*]

“God shows mercy to the merciful servants. Be merciful to the inhabitants of the earth and He who is in heaven will be merciful to you.”

[*Sunan Abū Dā’ūd, Sunan al-Tirmidhī*]

“[Oh Prophet] you remind us so frequently concerning rahmah even though we actually think that we are compassionate towards one another.” The Prophet replied, “But I mean rahmah to all.”

[Abū Zahrah, *al-Mujtama’ al-Insānī*, p.58]

“The believer is not abusive, nor is he a slanderer, nor does he curse.”

[*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*]

I recall one of my tutors’ from the Muslim college, Mawlānā Shāhid Razā quoting a maxim of the Sūfīs - “The *other* is my brother.” By way of elucidation ‘Ālī, the fourth of the rightly- guided caliphs has said, “The other is my brother either in faith or in humanity.” This illustrates the Ihsānic vision (the third dimension of Islām) of how Muslims have interacted with others in the past and that desperately needs to be recaptured by Muslims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There are numerous historical examples – from the life of the Prophet, to the emergence of an extraordinary civilisation in 8<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad to the flowering of a ‘great shared civilization’ – Islamic Spain. In the words of Claude Cahen:

All things considered, by comparison with other societies of the time, life does not seem to have been hard for the non-Muslim faiths. Those living on the frontiers who could have emigrated did not do so [...] Christian culture lasted [...] Jewish culture developed; the Muslim world was a cultural and economic paradise for Jews in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. The situation was one not so much of independent cultures but rather of participation in a great shared civilization. [...] In every day life there could be trades that predominated in one faith, people concentrated around their own places of worship, and so on: but there was never segregation, nor the equivalent of ghettos. [A. Bouhdiba, *The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture: The Individual and Society in Islam*, (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1998)].

One of the leading Interfaith initiatives between the Islamic and Christian world has been authored by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad. It is called ‘A Common Word’ initiative. [<http://www.acommonword.com>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013]. This provides an excellent treatment of the common ground between Christianity and Islam, both from the perspective of Islam but also contains responses from leading Christian authorities. In addition, there is also another significant document that relates to the common ground between Islam and Buddhism. [<http://www.islambuddhism.com>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

## **Q. 6 Muslims are only allowed to get low paid jobs in the UK because of anti-Muslim prejudice?**

It is true that Islamophobia and institutional racism exist in our society. This however does not mean that everyone is racist or Islamophobic. There are many employers, small and large, local authorities and other corporate bodies who are fair in their recruitment. Muslims are therefore participating in and making a substantial contribution to British life. For example, we have Muslim:

- Members of Parliament
- Peers in the House of Lord
- Businessmen and women
- Solicitors, lawyers and barristers
- Local councillors, Magistrates, and Mayors
- Teachers, chaplains in universities, hospitals and the British armed forces
- Members in the Royal navy, RAF and the Armed forces
- Surgeons, GPs, specialists

- Academics, Professors and thinkers
- Members in numerous other fields of endeavour

For example, see also this link:

[<http://artofintegration.co.uk/aoiEng/homeEng.php>, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013].

This has been part of an exhibition designed by the world famous Muslim photographer Peter Sanders and has travelled over 40 countries.

Young people need to be encouraged to reflect and think about other positive role models from within their communities. This has been an excellent means of creating an invaluable list of local resource who could be invited to share their stories of success.