

# Interreligious Insight

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### On Forgiveness

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From the Qur'an, 24.22:

...so they should forgive and pardon. Do you not love that God forgives you? And God is All-Forgiving and Merciful....

Forgiveness is part of the essential nature of a believer, who constantly seeks God's forgiveness. This is the case because, simply put, one's being saved depends upon one's being forgiven. Therefore, the most important consideration for a believer is that God, his/her Lord, forgives sins. Obviously, if you want your own sins to be forgiven, then you must not hesitate in forgiving someone who has offended you and is now very sincerely requesting forgiveness. This is, in fact, the Qur'anic argument. It is made, for example, in the case of some otherwise pious believers, who are showing reluctance to forgive some wrongdoers who have developed true repentance – as in the quotation above.

Just as the door of spiritual progress for a servant (*'abd*) of God opens with an *'abd's* sincere repentance and his/her seeking forgiveness from his/her Lord, in the life of a divided community of believers things are set right through a reconciliation that follows mutual forgiveness. In fact, such a reconciliation can open immense possibilities for moral and spiritual progress within a family, on the micro as well as the macro level. *Surah Yusuf*, the twelfth *surah* of the Qur'an describes, very elaborately, the case of the divided family of the Children of Israel that was reunited through forgiveness. This of course is the story of Joseph and his brothers, also recounted in Hebrew scriptures. Joseph, who had been abused by his brothers and cast into the pit, was a believer and a great prophet of God. Like all prophets and messengers of God, he was blessed with the attitudes of indulgence, forgiveness and reconciliation. He responds quickly to their request for mercy:

*No reproach this day shall be on you; may God forgive you; He is the Most Merciful of all those who are merciful.... Then bring me your family all together. (12:93-94)*

The Qur'an consistently contrasts two opposing human attitudes, one based upon knowledge and the other on ignorance. The ignorant person has an inclination to make a false show of his/her prestige and fails to act with restraint. Knowledgeable persons, particularly those who derive their inspiration from the Divine Book, have humility and self-respect. They act with caution – with a sense of responsibility. They practice indulgence and restraint.

*When ignorant people behave fanatically towards the believers, these "servants of the Merciful God" turn away from them, saying "salam" ("peace"). (25:64)*

In *Surah* 48, “The Victory”, opponents who have based their lives on ignorance show hostility. The believers respond peacefully, with dignity, restraint and discipline. God thereby blesses them with *shechina* (God’s “presence”) (48:26) and promises to forgive their sins, declaring “You are victorious”. (48:1)

The Qur’an repeatedly underlines that the way to eliminate evil from human society is by replacing it with good. One can say that an offense has been done against me so I have a right to do equal evil and cannot be blamed. But how then is the ideal of elimination of evil from the world to be realized? The believers who have committed to be steadfast in the way of God – whose mission is spreading goodness - require a very high moral caliber! In interacting with one’s social environment, one must consistently offer something better in response than one has received. Simply put, you must return good for evil.

*And, suppose that Satan, who tries diligently to divide the human family, creating hatred among us, succeeds in provoking you and you lose your temper, then come back to God and seek God’s refuge. (41: 36)*

The Qur’anic movement aims at mending broken human relations through indulgence, forgiveness and reconciliation. The Qur’an reminds us of our covenant with God and of the human-to-human mutuality that is an essential part of this covenant. Each of us must do our duty even to those who failed to do the same for us, for if the path of replacing evil by goodness is not followed, how can what is broken ever be repaired?