

Deepal. (cont'd)

a lot to finding markets to share this experience. Each dialogue has tremendously helped me in my life. The dialogue has become something real and living in my life - not easily to quantify - but there is a difference. If this can be shared, we could help people to have their own dialogue. It does not have to be only between professionals such as you, Don, Sheikh Rashid, Bhante Ananda - you know people like us who are not really professionals in Theology. But it really affects us!. We find more chances of challenges of these reality markers than a theologian would. He is in the forest; he does not have the problems that I am confronted with. He has his own problems.

If possible we should give this to the people who need it. Now we just don't have any time to think - because we are in a machine. Those really need it. They have no time to read a whole thesis. You don't find many monks dying of heart attacks, unless they go on eating what the lay supporters give in rich food in Sri Lanka! The tensions are in people like us. How to communicate this experience in tangible forms to the people who have the conflicts in day-to-day life. So I think the next horizon should be based on this pilot test. Now we know the parameters with which to measure. The next step is the real people who need it; Reinhard: I understood in all our answers, words, that we have clearly one direction, that is to go in the nearest environment in which we live and to try to share this in the everyday like; the new accent after this round talk, we try to transport these experiences to our neighbours as possible. There is an implication; this can and should be as much as possible, but there are limitations in our group. But in daily life there are no limitations. Every day should be a test if and how we can realise sharing our life together. Sheikh Rashid, it would be very helpful if you could tell us your experience of the dialogue and your vision of the dialogue.

Sheikh Rashid: "Well, I think the dialogue, in my opinion, has been a somewhat good experience for some members and for myself. I cannot say that it is for all, but for the phase of life which I am in as a Muslim mystic. For instance, the domestic informal life which you have been able to experience is different from the stricter kind of discipline which is involved in my official capacity of the life, was not possible to experience at this stage, and it would be difficult. Whether it would advance the group if they were really into intensified experience of the life I live whether it would have helped them or broken them; it could go either way. Some would have found too hard and gone away from it. Not everyone has the will to strive and to achieve the same depth of experience, but on a moderate basis, I would say, this dialogue has opened up a new page for me. I learnt, experienced a great deal. My approach towards life is going to

somewhat slightly different now. ~~xxxx~~ Most of my life I lived as an official capacity man; only the relationship on the stage was there; I did not take anybody into my private confidence, not as much as you people did with me. Now that new ~~anner~~ approach which has opened by the Grace of Almighty has established a more delicate relationship with each other. Now that is a good thing; what man sometimes needs; and from that point of view this dialogue has been of tremendous benefit to me. Now the future of the dialogue which you all seem to be worried about; you have to yourself think whether you want to institutionalise it in your country or just leave it as it is, disorganised, unofficial and once a year or so have a sort of dialogue and carry on. For myself, you see, I am already tied up in organisations, which are more or less established: multi-faith unit in Birmingham, other charitable work which is going on, Muslim-Christian relations, so Those are a sort of relationship based on academic concepts, theological; it has not gone into the depth by sitting down together and find the love I should say the peace which we have sort of established in this way. This is, in my view, outdoing all other things, because it has really gone far beyond and gives far more pleasure and confidence, humility, feeling of peace love and brotherhood. Now such a thing must not just fade away and die down, with you. We have to find a way, so that we can continue this mission, because it is beneficial. For instance, these two ladies here; in an official line they would not have had access into the mystical life - the circumstances would not have allowed them to experience the mysticism. In this way, they were able to sit with us, on a deeper footing, taking deeper interest, which has given them some understanding; and it is of great value to us, and to the rest of the society and to them. So, I would say that there are multiple reasons, for which..... - I may not be involved in the next dialogue, due to time or something else .. but my feeling is that it should continue in a more improved way, bringing in some more younger type of people, and prepare them for this dialogue, within the church circle, or out of it. When I go back now to the centre, Inshallah, I will make a fresh approach; change a little the system.

Reinhard: A question arose: we should take into our own hearts as much the belief of our brothers and sisters, so we had to go around - Europe, Christian etc. Could you imagine, that, for example that if once this dialogue would be in e.g. Ananda's hermitage to go deeper into the Buddhist way of life, could you think that you will be within there and to share his life as he tried to share yours.

Sheikh Rashid: Well, this is what I was saying; this certainly has the benefit and the flavour, but as I said, it may not be possible for me to enter into dialogue of this nature, you know, but I have learnt something

from it, to make certain changes in the structure within the work I'm doing, you see? To modify my life. But I know that I could not carry on (in this dialogue) because my life is far too much intensified into the mystical side and it requires a very rigid and hard discipline. Now, because you are here, I want to make it as far as possible informal, but it might not be possible for me to reduce them the next time, because of the circumstances. The field, you see, is increasing for me all the time. I need far more time for my intense meditation and my intense cycle of the various names of the Almighty God, etc. This, I would not find accommodated in any of the circles anywhere, other than what I do in England. There you make a lecture, finish and retire into your own private sort of isolation and carry on your work. There is no other way. But certainly, there will be some changes in me when I go back; because I have learnt, to be more human (smiling). That is something which I will take away with me this time now.

Reinhard: Thank you, it is a clear answer.

Sufi: But you never know how things go, but it seems difficult for me, because of the different things which I do for myself day and night. It requires now a massive effort, and if I slip off, I am in a problem, which I cannot risk. (A delegate may be possible). But it may be hard for you to accept, but when you become more advanced into the mystical circles, then it becomes more and more difficult to sit and listen to things you see, because of the time factor.

Reinhard: For myself it is a question: what do you want - to go on with your own experience, or will you lose everything to... and to begin on the Lord's earth, to receive what he will give in the whole mankind community? And my personal view is, I would like to decide to be in this whole community of mankind or try to be in this endlessly differentiated body of mankind, as a new creation of the Lord and to receive this, which the Lord commands now, for this phase of evolution of the earth. And for me it has a pattern that the Lord is saying: I will guide you and my Grace is enough for you. With the courage you can reap what you have gained. And let alone this Grace be upon you all, your guidance, because I am in the midst of human; I am always your refuge and I will not abandon you. So, in this direction I would for my own try to go some steps. It also seems to me a kind of new humility, yes.

Sheikh: Mashallah.....

Reinhard: As I understood from the Buddhist tradition, the Bodhisattva made a decision not to go over the wall to Nirvana, but to go back to the people and to live with them till they also can go over (to Nirvana). That is a very helpful story or pattern for behaviour.

Sheikh: Mashallah.... beautiful.....

Ananda:

Ananda: One can choose in a way, whether one would just want to find salvation for oneself - that is one line; make a tremendous effort and achieve the goal in this very life; or, to choose the path of the so-called Silent Buddha (Pacchekabuddha), at a period when nobody has heard of the Four Noble Truths, find it for yourself, but you have to keep it to yourself,; you aren't able to communicate it to others. That is a limited goal, but comes with great effort, without hearing the Truths from other Prophets. Or, the Bodhisattva path, where one willfully closes off the door or the path; one can either step out, out of compassion for all the suffering beings, one chooses to remain with all the suffering beings, continue in the world until even the last blade of grass will have found enlightenment because of helping, charity, compassion, meditation etc.

Donald: If we are going to go further with this sort of mystical thing, we have to realise, that none of us has a monopoly over what is meant by mysticism, I mean; someone like Mother Theresa spends all day looking after dying people. Some people say: Oh, you are an active order, as opposed to a contemplative order. She says: No, we are a contemplative order; we find the image of God in every person whom we serve.

So I don't believe that there is this gap between the mystical and the active. Wherever you turn, there you find the face of God. And where else could you do that so far from fantasy as when you are working day after day, night after night when you are working with people who are eaten up by leprosy or whatever. That reality enables your contemplative life to be real and not fantasy. To begin with, one has to see, that there are different ways of seeing the mystical path.

Peter: What I got out of the common attempt, especially during meditation, is the attempt of imprintment - this Allah-Hu - I tried to get the imprintment. We do not necessarily have to say Allah Hu - let it be any conviction - love and compassion, whatever; that beauty of being persuaded that our living creatures, our brothers and sister; to instill this conviction in the heart, seems to me the essence of this dialogue. That I do not lose the trust in me, that this conviction is here. The faith that something is possible; and then trying again to get it out. This mystical streaming, and converting it, bringing it in agreement with your personality; I don't want to get rid of my personality, my way of living. But I should be more aware of what is there; I should not change by being hypocritical or opportunistic or whatever. Therefore I'm very grateful that this dialogue took the path towards a really demanding sphere which I could not imagine before. I had attended conferences on mysticism, but it was a hot balloon; one puncture and shwooo. Now I know there is something and I am very grateful to you Sheikh that you let us

us in as you live, as you teach, as you lead us, as you especially open yourself up towards each of the other ones. You showed us, in your answer to Reinhard's question, that you could haven't done this. In my dreams I can also envisage that you can stand the dialogue as Reinhard envisages it, without being threatened. Being there, and say: I am Sheikh Rashid; I'm standing on such solid ground, on this mountain, and I can open my feelings, my comprehension; nothing is really questioned. Then, to find the motive for activity; not to let things fly away etc. Personally I feel very much encouraged, that I can be a little bit harder in my persuasion, you see; putting more fire under the kettle. Reinhard: You (Sheikh) gave us a gift for our life.

Sufi: Mashallah....

R: Nobody will forget this. It is a gift in our life.

Sufi: Well, you brought a tremendous love, I must admit; I fully value, but you never know; God Almighty works in various ways; maybe this time we met for a dialogue; next time we may be doing something else! The channels are open; but the main thing is: we learnt a great deal from each other.

Now you are the expert in this Dialogue (Reinhard and Peter etc.) You have gone everywhere and gained great experience; now it's up to you if you want to keep it alive or let it die a natural death. If you want to keep it alive, then you can seek advice from us, when we reach back our own basis, as to what should be the future move. Some of the things I would only discuss on that basis, you see? And be more clear on certain things.

Donald: A Jewish lady artist had a vision in the Sinai and has now the "Tent of meeting" which moves from place to place, having Jewish, Christian and Muslim symbols, and trying to have all these communities meet. Much of what is actually lacking in modern life, is actual imagination; most people go down in the same ruts all the time.

Peter: If we look at the age of this dialogue (7 years) and compare it with human growing up, it is now in its childhood (R: babyhood!); now starts the age of puberty. Now we ought to find a way through these dangerous years of not knowing where to go. It's like a thunderstorm. Can we avoid adulthood - or will it die a premature death?

Reinhard is a shy person in thinking it is just starting.

Don: Isn't the day due to end? A: It's just going on....

All agreed it's time to end the discussion which would otherwise get stranded.

The next day saw most of our group on the bed, with heavy digestive and intestinal problems - apparently from the water, which threw Reinhard, Peter, Michael, Donald, and in the end also Shanti, Halima, Deepal and Ananda for a few days - including the Public meeting on 23rd April.

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On 23rd April the Dialogue culminated in a Public meeting at the Bathroi Islamic Cultural Centre, where nearly 200 guests had gathered inside the Mosque of Sheikh Rashid.

After several Urdu poets had recited their beautiful Poetry and songs in a language which was unintelligible for us, but which had so much feeling of expression to them that we were fascinated, Sheikh Rashid introduced a famous teacher/ trainer of Imams from another

part of Kashmir, who also spoke in Urdu. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Sheikh Rashid spoke:

"All praise be to Allah who has brought us together. I hereby, on behalf of all Muslim brothers, welcome the Dialogue team who has come to experience the Islamic life in Azad Kashmir. It takes a great deal of courage and will to travel to a country with which one is not familiar. Azad Kashmir has a long history of tolerance and mystical tradition. Kashmir is in some way modern and in some way ancient. To span a bridge for future communication and friendship, brought by the right honourable Reinhard and his team is most welcome. And we hope that our relationship will develop closer and closer in view of the search of the divine truth and understanding of each other. This was my first experience of Dialogue which continued for three weeks. Dialogues in the past lasted only for a few hours. The remarkable understanding of the Oneness of God by the members secured the future of Dialogue and had brought the participants closer to Islamic mysticism. I have learnt a great deal from this dialogue and developed a personal relationship with each member, so I welcome you with my heartwarming greetings and may Allah have peace upon you - A-Salam!"

"Donald Nicholl: Peace be unto you. I want to first of all thank God for bringing us all together in this Dialogue, for without God we can do nothing. Secondly I want to give thanks to someone whom you do not know." Donald then recalled how an old Muslim man had helped him during his first visit to Pakistan during the second world war and who had shown him the way of friendship and brotherhood of Man. This old man had shown him that we all worship the same God. "That was my first lesson in dialogue. He taught me the way of friendship. Why have we come to Bathroi from many thousands of Miles away? The answer is: Peace. All major religions talk of Peace. Islam speaks of peace. Jesus spoke of Peace. In Judaism they speak of Peace. Amongst the American Indians they smoke a pipe of Peace etc. So why is it that each one of us lives everyday with the threat of war on us? There are two main threats to peace: 1. the threat of nuclear warfare; 2. Pollution, both of which could destroy both the human family and the earth.

In this very day Muslims are killing Muslims, Christians are killing Christians, Hindus are killing Buddhists.

According to Islam, man is meant to look after Creation.

The great joy for me to come to Bathroi is to see that you live by the tools which plow the earth, you look after the land properly; you go to the grave of your ancestors, you keep the good air here and you have treated us with great hospitality. I thank you and hope that the rest of the world will also learn how to live in this way. The great point of the dialogue which is being held is that all of us here have tried to see how the different religions in the world can find the teaching within their traditions which enabled us to live in peace. Thank you for the peace which you have given me and my friends in Bathroi and Dadyal; may peace be with you

'Allah-Hu, Allah-Hu, Allah-Hu.....' sounded in appreciation.

"Māsh'Allah!"Sheikh Rashid explained that our Dialogue leader Reinhard had not been well and therefore unable to attend. Therefore Peter was asked to interpret Reinhard's thoughts and feelings on the Dialogue.

"Azad Kashmir, her people, her spirit, her kindness and especially the wonderful hospitality has embraced us. From our leader Reinhard comes his wholehearted saying: Peace be with you!

Reinhard von Kirchbach developed the idea of the interreligious dialogue throughout his career as a church leader. He concluded that it is absolutely essential and necessary for maintaining love, kindness, peace and respect towards each other by actually carrying out a dialogue where people of different faiths, origins, cultures and professions live together and tolerate each other under the light of God." Then Peter gave a short history of the Dialogue, about the different countries and religious environments in which it was held. "Sheikh Rashid, our friend and brother has invited ^{us} to this 7th dialogue to his home in Bathroi just next to this Islamic Cultural study Centre. May this centre be blessed and its works be beneficial to all mankind! May it be a place for future dialogues. It is a place where we have experienced and deeply felt trust in each other's faith, while not questioning one's own belief; where we found and attained a deeper understanding of "surrender"; where the fullest effort was requested from our hearts in order to respond to the Almighty's call for unity. All this would not have been possible without Sheikh Rashid's kind invitation and sincere awareness that we must strengthen our will and ability to truly say: 'Friend and brother' to each other, regardless of our national differences. He took us on a penetrative path into Islam. We thank you very much, Sheikh Rashid, for entrusting your faith unto us for making this dialogue possible and supporting it with all your

strength, in and with your spirit. Despite the effort you invested in the dialogue you did not evade the risk any encounter with other religions may hold. Sheikh Rashid, may the Almighty bless you and your deeds ! As a conclusion, I would like to recite a poem by Reinhard von Kirchbach:

....."As He is leading the entire mankind, He is expecting that each of us turns more deeply towards Him, and in doing so, turns towards his neighbour. I hope that drawing nearer together contains a quality of growth which we yet can scarcely foresee. I hope that God will help mankind to advance one step, regardless of all contrasts. I hope that by affirming these contrasts they will be transformed to a ray of hope and that a new era of relations will result in the lives of man. Thank you, and Peace be with you!"
"Māsh'Allah! God bless you!"

Halima's speech was inaudible to the microphone, but she had definitely broken a record by addressing a crowd inside a Mosque!

Michael Möbius: "I am an ordinary Christian priest and I am used to speak every week to Christians. My problem has been for many years, that everybody who has a faith sees all the world through the eyes of his faith. For me, I am seeing the whole world, the whole universe through the eyes of a Christian, through the eyes of a reader of the Bible. I know that Muslims see the world or the whole universe through the eyes of Qur'an readers, through the eyes of those who have surrendered to Allah. How can people live together, who live in different worlds ? My aim in coming here was to learn to see the world with your eyes. You may say it is impossible: how can a Muslim see the world with the eyes of a Christian ? How is it possible ? Only if Muslims open their heart to me....and fit some space of their own belief becomes space in my heart. When I now return home and I see Muslims, foreign labourers, in my town, I see the world as one. There is no such thing as a Christian world, a Muslim world, a Buddhist world. I see the world with my Christian eyes, but in this eve I have your eye, and I think the horizon I see will be wider. Thank you for this gift!"

Anandha's speech: "Brothers of one world. We have come to Azad Kashmir now about three weeks ago and it seems already about half a year! It is not a strange place to us any more, because from the very first day we have found that through the introduction to the people of this area by Sheikh Mahmood Hussain Rashid we have become part of your society. But not only through his introduction: while walking through the fields we would meet men and children, greeting us with 'A Salaam Aleikum!' and a handshake and loving kindness in their eyes. So, we have been introduced to Islam by "diving into it from the deep

deep end" so to speak. Sheik Rashid has given us the introduction into the Sufi way, the mystic way, the spiritual side of Islam, by introducing us to the "Allah-Hu Zikre", by coming from the head to the heart and opening up to Love, Light, strength and Peace, which the Almighty is showering upon us, according to your faith. Now, in our Buddhist tradition Loving kindness or universal brotherhood is one of the pillars on which the Buddha's teachings are based. In one of the Suttas or discourses the Buddha says: Just as a mother protects her only child with even her own life, with such intensity of love you should extend loving kindness to all beings, nearby, far away, visible and invisible, human and animals and to all creatures. I think this Love and Light we find in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in the Islamic tradition and in the Buddhist tradition. So there is a great Tradition of seeing Oneness among all creation among all the great seers of the world, all Prophets have revealed it. But we, in our ignorance, sometimes look only at the small traditions and forget about the great Tradition which is the everlasting, universal Law. So we have to tune into this Universal Law in order not to get into quarrels about differences but rather we should merge, within our own hearts into the Love, Light, strength and Peace. I think it is in the Christian tradition where it is said: the Kingdom of Heaven is within you. And by going into ourselves and by calming our minds and opening up, surrendering our self of 'Nafs', not become selfish, but really unselfish we can clean our mind, have a pure heart and face the world with innocence, so that even though there are differences and difficulties between people, these will be vanishing before our own eyes and we will feel at home not only in Azad Kashmir, but in the whole world, wherever we go. So I hope that this Islamic Cultural Centre which has been started by Sheikh Rashid will be flourishing and will be attracting many people to find that Peace within. May it spread all over the world, so that everyone can be happy. Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhi tattā - May all beings be well and happy! "

Deepal's speech: "To-day even in remote villages one hears about other countries through radio-tv and press, but what do you hear? You get the news of war, of killing of human beings, like you and me - all over the world. The world is like a village, and the gossip is that of killing, terror, murder; so, what happens? We start to think that those national groups are killers. The good news does not get into the papers. We have started to divide: we use language, religion, colour of the skin, political ideas, to divide, for what? This is all due to ignorance. We don't look at ourselves deeper. If we did look deeper, we would see there is no difference between you and me. ('No doubt!' from the audience). When we came to Azad

Kashmir, to stay with Sheikh Rashid, we had an opportunity to get really closely in touch with Islam and Islamites. Even though I have Muslim friends in Sri Lanka, we never get to know them so deeply as we have been able here in such a short time. All these faces I see here are familiar to me, all the children I meet on the road are like my sisters and brothers whom I see in Sri Lanka. We are members of the same human family. To discriminate another because of his colour or faith is an individual's problem. We have much more in common than differences. If we look at the similarities we come together; if we look at the differences, we go away - that is the end, that is the destruction. Now we have started to come together - that is a small beginning. May all of you, may all your friends, may all your enemies, may all of us be well and happy ! May all beings be well and happy! Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhi tattā!" "Māsh'Allah; thanks very much Deeṣal"

Sheikh Rashid: "Members of the international dialogue and brothers, the cycle of life began on this earth when Adam and his wife were caused to deflect by Satan, who had them expelled from the happy state they were in. After Adam relented, Almighty promised guidance that a way of life in the light of divine guidance would be prescribed and those who follow the command of Allah, no fear or grief shall come upon them. For the communication of mankind continued in the creation and Allah revealed in the last message: "Then he sent His messengers one after another". So this guidance came in the form of the Prophets sent at various times. This shows the tremendous concern that our Creator has for Mankind. Gradually the Almighty revealed His beautiful names. In the last message through Qur'an Almighty revealed 99 names, which are called Ismau huznau. It is through these names that we call upon our Creator and try to understand our faith. Allah is the supreme name of Almighty; the others, Rab, meaning Lord, Ya Rahman, the beneficent, Ya Rāhim, the Merciful, Ya Malik, the Owner (of the day of judgement). The most frequently named in the Qur'an is "Allah" . SubhānAllah ! It is said, that: "Those who believe in Allah and hold fast onto Him, then he will call to enter into his Mercy and Grace and will lead them onto Himself." Our Prophet Mohammed - peace be upon him - was guided in the light of other prophets; so we have a real respect for other religions and we have concern for the faith of other people, and we have a genuine honour for the messengers who were before our beloved prophet.

I think to me, generally, this dialogue was a meaningful one; that the Love and affection and the message brought by Reinhold von Kirchbach and Professor Donald Nicholl from Britain and what effort I could make from the Islamic point of view to make them understand how deeply we take Islam, I'm sure we all gained a new

And I hope that this is not the ending of the dialogue, but a beginning of the dialogue with Islam and other faiths. Our arms are open for you. We welcome with open arms and whatever resources we have, whether you seek a theological insight into Islam, or you seek a spiritual insight into Islam, or you seek a practical insight into Islam. So we always keep our doors open, so that whoever would ~~wish~~ to come and share the Blessings of Almighty Allah and His Prophet with us, we are prepared for it.

Maulana Rumi said that everything in this universe is moving so systematically, that like a body, it has to have a brain in order to move and a certain force. So that force which is keeping the universe in motion and systematically, is called Allah. And to that force we surrender ourselves in order to gain everlasting blessings from Him."

Unfortunately Reinhard was still on the bed with a bad stomach but in the same high spirits as ever, and smilingly saying that it is all so well with him and that God is shaping us with his creative intelligence as the great artist, kneading a ball of clay. It is for us to resist this creative process or open up to its mystery and co-operate with its Master Plan to its culmination in the Point Omega.

AMEN - AMIN - OM - AUM - OM MANI PADME HUM ! SALAM !