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This was Reinhard, a Mystic and a great Sufi of our time

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Hello, I am Sheikh Mahmood H. Rashid and I am welcoming you to the Book of Provost Reinhard Kirchbach, his work in the field of Inter-religious Dialogue and dedication to the Lord of the worlds. Before I can take you in depth philosophy of multi-faith you may want to know some things related to my work and events which brought me and Reinhard together.

I am a Sufi Sheikh descending from the Naqshbandi Sufi Order and it places me in a thirty seventh position of successor in a Spiritual line from Prophet Mohammad (peace of Allah be upon him), I was born in 1948 in Azad Kashmir which is related to Pakistan and I have a resident and a Centre there. And I have a resident and a Centre in Great Britain called Islamic Cultural Study Centre and this is where most of my educational, spiritual and theological work is done. Because of its variable system, Islamic Cultural Study Centre earned a great deal of popularity in Britain and particularly in Birmingham.

During the period of sixties and seventies, Birmingham was notorious for racist riots and violence. This prompted the attention of Institution to do something for the benefit of community in order to neutralise the serious effects of racism and bring communities closer to each other so that a happy and healthy environment can be achieved. It was not only Birmingham where hate, resentment and dislike had been in action but many other towns and cities in Britain had degenerated, many peoples were faced with a very humiliating Situation.

In view of these multiple community Problems and aggression appeared a small diva (lamp) of light at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham and Multi-Faith Unit was established under the Directorship of Dr. Mary Hall, a catholic faith woman. She was very peace loving and also very intelligent. In reality she was the pioneer of Multi-Faith movement in Birmingham which reflected onto whole of Britain and then in mid-eighties people from other parts of world came to Birmingham to study and participate in multi-faith activities. These short and sharp course brought awareness and learning to respect other people religion and their rituals.

As Islamic Cultural Study Centre was well known in Britain for its Sufi Way (a path of love, peace and purity), we were invited to be founder members of the Multi-Faith teaching and training. This philosophy began to change the image of Birmingham city and country as a whole and people became more friendly and understanding towards each other

As I was founder member of the Multi-Faith unit, in 1986 a special lecture was designed by me to be deliver to multi-faith group training with Dr Mary Hall, The title of this lecture was Mystical Approaches to Islam. As our Centre's capacity was small a hall at the leisure centre

was booked to host the special guests and deliver the spiritual lecture via Sufi understanding. I had composed the lecture to meet the international Standard of visiting scholars in search of human harmony. In early stages some people were critical and cautious of multi-faith learning in case it defects their faith, but in reality it added on the strength to individual believer and had given deeper insight of spirituality in their own and other faiths.

In my lecture I tried to enlighten the gathering by taking into the composition of mankind as revealed in the Holy Qur'an then highlighted the major books of revelation followed by the people of the Book. I also introduced the philosophy of Rumi, the three points which he had assigned as Shariah (Knowledge of divine law), Tariqa (its practise) and Haqiqa (the resulting force of reality) which is acquired through sincere devotion. In view of the mystical approaches God has given a choice to each individual "Whoever so wishes can take a course unto his Lord", an open Option, there is no compulsion in this sphere. It has to be an inward love to move forward in the divine direction.

There were number of things which I discussed through mystical philosophy and some of them were, The phases of the Qur'an, duty to God, seeking of help on the divine path, an inner strive, stages of nafs (ego centrism), the philosophy of Mansur Al-Halage, the saying of Prophet Mohammad (peace of God be upon him) related to communion, the approaches to God through Zikre (remembrance). The benefits of Divine worship etc. Finally I concluded my lecture with wording from the Qur'an: "Blessed is He in Whose Hand is the sovereignty, and He is able to do all things. Who hath created life and death that He may try you, which of you is the best in conduct; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving." (Al-Qur'an 67:1,2).

After the lecture an informal discussion and personal introduction began. During the course of this action Dr Mary Hall said: Sheikh Rashid let me introduce you to some one special, she brought a tall man, neatly dressed, very handsome looking with smile on the face and pointed this is Reinhard Kirchbach from Germany he is a very important man. At this point we moved our hands forward and had a good hand shake and embrace of cheeks touching, with bit of laughter and welcoming words to each other.

So brothers and sisters, the readers of the Provost Reinhard Kirchbach book this was my first contact with Reinhard. During our conversation I realised that we had many things in common and Reinhard took my address and contact telephone number so that we can be in touch again. Although from my point of view this was an honorary gathering for the international visitors, it resulted in a broader communication and stronger relationship with members of other faiths committed to reciprocated respect and human harmony,

Few months later I received a letter from Reinhard in Germany expressing his interest in holding the inter-religious dialogue in Kashmir at my place in Bathroi, a remote place in the hills of Kashmir at the banks of the Mangala Reservoir. I was greatly surprised and of course pleased at the same time. Through our communication with each other we agreed on following year i.e. we could hold an inter-religious dialogue in Kashmir in April 1987 for 24 days. So we began to make preparation for this unique event. In the past no such event had

been arranged in Kashmir. It was agreed that this dialogue will be between Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu Partners. It will be dialogue based on principles of living in the same residence with the freedom of practising their own individual meditations or they could independently join collective meditation or discussions without the involvement of persuasive ideas. Gradually I began to make my preparation to depart for Kashmir so that necessary arrangements can be made prior to the arrival of Group. Our disembarkation point was Islamabad, Pakistan. This where, I travelled to from Kashmir to personally receive Provost Reinhard Kirchbach and some other partners of the Inter-religious dialogue.

On arrival at our base in Bathroi, Reinhard looked at the simple country house and turned around to other participants from abroad and said: we didn't expect this, indicating that it's very beautiful, He was full of happiness to find the suitable place for our inter-religious dialogue a place which had the calmness and tranquillity, necessary environment for meaningful concentration and understanding of other faiths. Within few days the whole group had arrived and we began to familiarise with each other

This inter-religious dialogue had taken place between nine people belonging to three different faiths. The other participants were, Michael Mobius from Flensburg Germany, Halima Krausen, Hamburg, Germany, Peter M. Fromm, Germany, Professor D. Nicholl, Britain. Ven. O. Ananda, Sri Lanka, Deepal Sooriyaarachchi, Sri Lanka and Shanti Haltmar, France. Each person participating had some experience in the past in an inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue, but from my personal experience those dialogues were mainly directed from an institution as a learning process to advance some of the theological ideas and values, where as this dialogue designed by Reinhard was based on the principles of living together, a close relationship with members of other faiths, having a mutual respect and recognition for each others faith.

Since I was hosting the group, I was asked by Reinhard Kirchbach to enlighten them with explanation of my personal faith, belief and Spiritual order. Indicating that this would provide confidence and incentive to participants and make them feel at home. So in the early stages of the inter-religious dialogue I placed light on the faith, Development of Lata'if (light particles which circulate in blood streams), the rule of the prophets, Surrender, Tahara (purity) outer and inner, Kamal Insan (Perfect human being) and Murraqba (Sufi technique for meditation). These informal talks and discussion brought participants very near to Sufi theosophy, an understanding towards the Spiritual path of Islam.

Our inter-religious dialogue was mainly motivated by mystical dynamics and transcendent philosophy, every thing was much more away from mechanical actions. During one of the morning Session I highlighted three dynamics of Zikre (remembrance of God) in state of Murraqba), i.e. meditation and idea behind three types of dynamics, chanting, silent breath and the core of heart. In response to this Reinhard added his philosophy and gave comparison of sufi mystics with early Christian mystics. Reinhard quoted: "Let the memory of Jesus combine with your breath. Then will you know the profit of silence" Ones love of God should run before the breathing. Free of all thoughts, at all times, constantly and without ceasing, it breaths Christ Jesus.

"So sitting down in your cell collect mind, lead it into the path of breath, along which the air enters in; constrain it to enter the heart, together with inhaled air and keep it there, but don not leave it silent and idle".

In Germany many people may not know or may have had the experience of meeting and knowing Reinhard as a Christian mystic of our time, trying to find a way forward for the whole of humanity, in this struggle opening our minds for a common philosophy which could awaken and unite the human race. Other partners of the dialogue equally as much dedicated their time and effort and made their point of view heard, but since this book is dedicated to Reinhard Kirchbach, we will by the will of God maintain our course of action on these lines.

In Azad Kashmir, Reinhard was seen as a hero and was greatly respected and many visitors came to see him and at the same time show their loving welcome to him. On one occasion while on a visit to Mirpur city, Reinhard offered the prayer and said: Praise to Thee, Whose name is beyond all names. Each of us have to transcend our own self (nafs), our own name to realise that which is beyond all names—Allah, Christ, Om, Dhamma, the absolute, are still the names, which trigger off in our intellect associations, which belong to our own religious personal conditioning. The total surrender to that which gives complete freedom and security - not the freedom to that which one likes, which is to be imprisoned in one's own conditioning and false security of belief and dogma, based on conjecture.

This was a brief Statement made by Reinhard, an indicator for the group to move towards more constructive grounds with broader aspect in life rather than an exclusive attachment to ones own precarious and selfish ideas. There was a time of frustration amongst some members of the dialogue and a concern of weakening their faith, but, it did not matter how much or whatever the worry was, Reinhard expertly guided the group onto its original track of experiencing the living dialogue. It was a simple thing, people trying to understand the nature of it, which could be adapted to local requirement. This was a dialogue not based on the speeches but about interaction of multi-faith people face to face while living together, eating the simple food. It was the good will of the people prevailing through tolerance and appreciation of each other. The conflicting elements, such as hate, dislike, humiliation of other partners was not taken on board.

Eventually, I noticed that the group as a whole was committed to this cause of human relation and we were all trying to serve One God with variable methods of approach to His Divine majesty. No doubt! In the way of approach some methods are more advance, than others and are more effective in producing the desired effect. This dialogue was not about conversion of faith, but rather an understanding of other faiths in practical life, and of course traditions and cultural barriers were not an obstacle to our intention for moving forward.

During one of the evening I had the opportunity to introduce dialogue partners to the mystical stages of the heart. Since this introduction was slightly scientific as well as mystical, it took us to another dimension of our own anatomy. I mentioned to the group that from Islamic

theology we learn that there is Qalbe Saleem (pure, emptiness), Qalbe Munib (heart full of love and light of faith) and Qalbe Shahid (witnessing heart), the heart which witnesses the Glory of God.

These mystical stages of one self, which are motivated by inner dynamics, unveils to human man closer relationship with their Lord. In affect are biological and chemical changed (changes?) which occur during the processing of the heart or while being condition to higher spirituality. This also has another dimension of poetic inspiration and thought waves which enable man to communicate with nature of other matters in the universe and their purpose of fulfilment.

As the word of our dialogue spread across Kashmir and some parts of Pakistan, we began to receive more visitors from all spheres of life. This was a some what strange to many people that a German church lender can have interest in visiting the remote part of Kashmir. In the village itself we have a small mosque belonging to my ancestors time, located next to my great grandfather's house. My great grand father, he was a man of knowledge and wisdom and fully dedicated to reading of the Qur'an, he was called Fazal Din Thekedar and was educated in Urdu, Arabic reading of the Qur'an, English and Farasi, he was very upright and treated with great respect in Kashmir. Reinhard was a frequent visitor to this family mosque while in Kashmir. About *one* mile from this small mosque construction work was going on a much larger project to accommodate the growth of community and cater for the main part of the region.

No doubt! There will be many questions answered and many will remain unanswered related to the dialogue. The religious orders in Germany will immerse into new thinking when looking at the achievement of one man. As we are going through a very dangerous phase of life, campaigns of violence, death and destruction, question would be what to do and how to do - Reinhard expresses his personal view when confronting the alien circumstances. I would like to decide to in this whole community of mankind or try to be in this endlessly differentiated body of mankind as a creation of the Lord, and to receive this as the Lord commands now, for this phase of the 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.

In contemporary world to have such an intuition is a difficult task and also acquiring the depth of understanding to which Reinhard is accredited. The love for the whole humanity could be understood in two ways, one being that the Divine Lord through His Divine mercy without physical efforts gives this holy gift of life to some one He favours and the other way is that the Merciful Lord grant intuition through experience of life and making one realise the importance of this gift to serve His creatures for His love, the sharing of Divine gift.

A day before the departure of dialogue group we held an open public gathering at the new mosque wherein all members of the dialogue made their short speeches except Reinhard as he was not well. During the last few days before leaving Bathroi Reinhard became ill and had to

send his message to the people. In my opening Speech I praised the Lord for bringing us all together to share and rejoice His Divine Blessings and further added "It takes one's great courage and will to travel a country with which one is not familiar - to span bridge for future communication and friendship. Then there were poems and other things read out and finally I led the Friday service, a farewell speech by me and a farewell service.

Reinhard spoke from his sick bed and said: "You Sheikh Rashid gave us a gift for our life, no body will forget this. It is a gift in our life".

This was the new beginning for in understanding the philosophy of Reinhard and realisation of a work which needed a universal vision as the world whether for the good or the worse was drawing closer and globalisation inevitably taking its place at a very fast speed. It should be noted that the Sufis hold universal idea of serving the Lord and loving His creatures and it was easy for me to comprehend ideas of metaphoric nature from this angle.

Our inter-religious dialogue ended with compliments and very exhilarating breaths of happiness.

On my return to Great Britain, I began to continue my work as usual in a much more sophisticated way. Few months later sister Halima Krausen invited me to Germany to give a lecture at the University of Hamburg and have tour of some other cities of Germany. After my first visit to German, my relationship with German partners who participated in inter-religious dialogues was strengthen, particularly with Reinhard. The dialogues held at Lunel in France, at Wulfshagen and subsequently at Pisselberg in Germany were of a great significant. At the Islamic Cultural Study Centre, we developed an exclusive line of literature based on the experience of inter-religious dialogue. Our first dialogue in Kashmir gave a way to Da'wat Ilallah ("A Call Toward God"), then in dialogues in Germany gave rise to "Mystical Flashes" in Hamburg, "The mirror of Eternal Life" and Nizame Mustafa news letters ("The Chosen Way"). No doubt! Many articles were written in German and other languages, but in my opinion most successful literary movement was in Britain.

We should continue this manner of dialogue meetings at all costs. If we take in depth study of these dialogues which took place in my presence and not taking into account dialogues which had taken place without my presence, many books can be written on this subject. I am keeping this document as short as possible so that the main points of the Reinhard's thinking may be absorbed by those who share the view of universal communality, that mankind is one community and we differ in relation to our personal interest, some times they are local and some times they are of nationalistic nature polarised by extremist elements.

The idea of Chain Around the World is vital for human harmony. Provost Reinhard Kirchbach is a man of very broad knowledge and wisdom, through his in depth experience of human relation. He had acquired the sense of peace, love and harmony with other faiths and beliefs and this is the treasury he left for other. He was a high mystic of his time. Before my departure from the Pisselberg dialogue and as I was leaving, Reinhard came out of the retreat

house and held my right and while walking he confirmed the Sufi Core and the rhythm of Allah Hu. I could feel his pulse engaged in the remembrance of the Lord. This was Reinhard, a mystic and a great Sufi of our time and no doubt: His legacy of love, respect, harmony, philosophy of human relation and sincere devotion to the Lord of the World continues.

Ameen.

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