

## Forgiveness in Islam: Promoting a Peaceful World

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### Abstract

*The paper explores forgiveness in Islam starting from the Islamic bases, forgiveness as moral response, forgiveness needs repentance, and implementing forgiveness for promoting a peaceful world. It is library research based on articles and books which discussed the topics, and the secondary data about forgiveness in Islam. It aims to expose the soft side of Islam especially its struggle for peace and harmonious life.*

**Keywords:** Forgiveness, Islam, Peaceful World.

### A. Introduction

**The whole world highly appreciated** the Grand *Imam* Ahmed Al-Tayeb of Al-Azhar and Pope Francis, leaders of **two religions, Islam and Catholic**, who met in Abu Dhabi and signed the Declaration of Human Fraternity on 4 February 2019. The two leaders of religions which had history of conflicts and wars in the past have successfully resolved their historical burdens, and they declared that religions are not the source of violence and extremism but a bridge for human fraternity. The declaration states,

Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need....

We resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood....

The firm conviction that authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence ....<sup>1</sup>

The document, then, was followed by establishing The Higher Commission for Human Fraternity with members coming from the different religions: Islam, Judaism, and Catholic. The Commission soon works for realizing the mission of the document. One valuable monument is the establishment, by the United Nation, of the 4<sup>th</sup> February as the International Day of Human Fraternity.

The same appreciation was also addressed to the two religious leaders, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani and Pope Francis, when the Pope visited Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government and the local Christians on 5-8 February 2021.<sup>2</sup> On the 6 March 2021, Pope Francis visited Najaf, where he met the Shia cleric and Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani. In the meeting taking place in the home of Al Sistani nearby the Imam Ali Shrine, the two religious leaders, Al-Sistani and Pope Francis, released a joint statement against religious extremism. Whereas Al-Sistani thanked Francis “for making an effort to travel to Najaf and told him that Christians in Iraq should live “like all Iraqis in security and peace, and with their full constitutional rights,” according to a statement released by the Grand Ayatollah's office.

The short story of the two events above wants to show the nuance of this paper which intends to highlight the significant role of religions as the bridge of peace among the human family. This paper deliberately wants to expose the soft side of religion, that is forgiveness. For lately the hard sides associated to religion are more discussed in the public sphere rather than the opposite. Radicalism

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<sup>1</sup> *A Document on Human Fraternity. For World Peace and Living Together* can be accessed in [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html)

<sup>2</sup> “Pope Francis on Iraq visit calls for end to violence and extremism” accessed in BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56282598>.

and terrorism are more blown up rather than generosity, love, hope, and forgiveness which are purely originated from religion. As a result, religion is considered a source of social problems not the solution. Religion is increasingly abandoned especially by the younger generation. The youth will find it difficult to approach and embrace religion because what they see and experience first is violence rather than peace. They associate religion as violence, radicalism, and terrorism, not hope, love, and peace. By exposing the soft side of religion, this paper hopes to fill the void.

In Islam, forgiveness is one of virtues that is strongly upheld, although according to Abu-Nimer is less explored.<sup>3</sup> In his mentioned article, Abu Nimer states that “scholars have developed conditions to determine when and how to engage in the punishment (*qisas*) of perpetrators of various crimes” but “there are few studies that focus on the conditions for forgiveness.” This paper is directed to address Abu-Nimer's concerns. It explores forgiveness in Islam in the hope that forgiveness will be a shared spirit which then becomes a significant step to promote a peaceful world.

The theme of forgiveness is very relevant today, in the times of conflict and war taking place in daily life. Conflict and war will not stop if there is no forgiveness. They happen continuously, again and again. Therefore, quoting Deborah Tannen, professor of Linguistics at Georgetown, Henderson wrote, “We humans need apologies to make it possible to continue living in groups.”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, forgiveness is a complex reality that must be studied carefully, starting from its definition, aspects, also its relation to legal and political elements. Besides, to put forgiving in daily practice takes long efforts and exercises as well. In this context, therefore, this paper is made.

After the introduction, the paper flows to some parts. Those are: method of study, breaking the chain of hate which explores the

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammed Abu-Nimer and Ilham Nasser. “Forgiveness in the Arab and Islamic Contexts. Between Theology and Practice,” *Journal of Religious Ethics, Inc.* Vol. 41. No.3 (2013), p. 475.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Henderson, *Forgiveness. Breaking the Chain of Hate* (London: Grosvenor, 2003), p. 15.

essence of forgiveness, forgiveness in Islam, how to implement forgiveness, and conclusion.

## **B. Method of Study**

The paper is library research. It studies firstly forgiveness from some aspects: its essence, efficacy, and complexities. This part more or less reviews the writer's previous research about the same topics.<sup>5</sup> Second, it explores the secondary data about forgiveness in Islam. It means that the writer does not refer firstly to the Holy Quran and Hadith, instead, the articles and other sources which discuss the topics. Then he confirms the information to the Holy Quran and Hadiths. But, because of his poor knowledge in Arabic, he uses the translation of the Holy Quran rather than the Arabic version.

## **C. Breaking the Chain of Hate**

Natural reaction if someone got violent attack from other is to reply with the same violence. Then, a similar retaliation is delivered again by the first perpetrator, and so on. The reciprocal actions will continue and never stop.

In fact, when a person is abused by another, he or she not only feels pain physically but also mentally. "Why am I being treated this way?" is the expression of mental wounds of the victim. Physical pain can be cured with medicine and other healing means. But mental illness will become grudge. It forces, then, to be vented in the form of revenge. If the revenge is done, there will be a sense of satisfaction. However, in truth, it is a false satisfaction, because the inner wounds actually are not healed. Even the inner wounds can continue to grow if there is another counter attack from the first aggressor.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Yoachim Agus Tridiatno, *Forgiveness of the Powerless. A Case of the Solo Riot in May 1998* (Yogyakarta: Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Olga Botcharova, in Woodstock Colloquium, *Forgiveness in Conflict Resolution: Reality and Utility* (Washington: Theological Center, 1996), p. 39; and Olga Botcharova, "Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy. Developing Model of Forgiveness" in Helmick, Raymond G, S.J. and Peters Rodney L., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation* (Philadelphia & London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), p. 295.

Fortunately, religions have introduced the virtue of forgiveness and encouraged people to apply it in their daily lives.<sup>7</sup> Forgiveness surely breaks the chains of hatred, revenge, and violence. In forgiveness, there is a newness and personal character in the way the victim responds violence he or she has got.<sup>8</sup> In forgiveness, the victim does not only follow his or her insting to revenge, but determines a new choice to offer forgiveness to the perpetrator. In this sense, forgiving is a personal and responsible action based on free choice. Arendt mentions that with forgiveness human being are facilitated to restore his or her wrong deeds in the past. If there is no forgiveness, human being would be trapped in the past, and have no chance to renew his or her wrong doings.

Because of its characters as personal and free choice, forgiving is the intentional act of forswearing resentment and vengeance. The forgiver deliberately chooses to forgive and not to revenge. He or she stops consciously vengeance and resentment. With his or her generosity, the victim forgives the wrong doer and stops hate and resentment. It happens that the victim's generosity is truly his or her life virtue. But, it can be his or her choice for healing his or her mental wounds. In this sense, therefore, forgiving is unconditional.

In fact, forgiving is different from pardoning and excusing. Pardoning and excusing are applied for actions which were not intentionally done. They can be done by forces of natural limitations and desires. It means that the actor did them ignorantly.<sup>9</sup> Someone says, "excuse me or pardon me" because he did something wrong by ignorance. But forgiving is applied for the wrongs which are consciously done by the wrong doer. There is bad intention in the part of the doer to perpetrate the victim. So, the forgiven act is also an intentional. It is not a spontaneous and accidental act.

In what condition is forgiveness effective? From the side of the forgiver, of course, it is effective because it comes out from the generosity and free choice of the forgiver. Even though, there is no

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<sup>7</sup> Henderson, *Forgiveness*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second Edition (London: The University of Chicago, 1959), p. 216.

<sup>9</sup>Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness. A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 5.

direct conference between the forgiver and the forgiven ones. From the forgiven side, forgiveness will be effective if the forgiven apologizes the forgiving party by expressing his or her regret and promising not to repeat the evil act. There should be contrition and repentance. Therefore, forgiveness will be ideal if the both sides, the forgiving and the forgiven conduct a conference, where the forgiven one can reveal his or her remorse and repentance, whereas the forgiving one consciously manifests his or her forgiveness. In this condition, forgiveness bears the fruit of reconciliation.

But, forgiveness does not always require reconciliation. Worthington reminds that forgiveness is mental and moral stance of individuals, whereas reconciliation is relationship between individuals. "Forgiveness and reconciliation are obviously related, but separated processes."<sup>10</sup> For healing therapy, the generosity of the victim to offer forgiveness is enough. It has released the victim's mental burden. Although in this situation, the injured party is still "fated to live with a limited measure of moral satisfaction, of anger forsworn, and reconciliation."<sup>11</sup> In the religious context, the request for forgiveness from the sinner or the perpetrator is submitted to God in a religious ritual and there is no direct meeting between the sinner or the perpetrator and the victim.<sup>12</sup> However, spiritually there has been reconciliation in the part of the sinner or the perpetrator because of God's forgiveness.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the process to arrive at an attitude of forgiving is very long and requires serious effort. Joanna North and Right states that the process of forgiveness requires steps for shifting perspectives in viewing oneself.<sup>14</sup> The injured party proceeds to view himself or herself from the perspective of the perpetrator in order to understand

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<sup>10</sup> Everett L. Worthington, Jr., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Theory and Application* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> Griswold, *Forgiveness*, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> In the Catholic tradition, Sacrament of Reconciliation is conducted by the sinner in front of the ordained priest representing the merciful God and Church.

<sup>13</sup> Idi Warsah, "Forgiveness Viewed from Positive Psychology and Islam," *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal*. Vol. 3, No. 2 (2020), p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Joanna North, "The 'Ideal' of Forgiveness: A Philosopher's Exploration" in Robert D. Enright and Joanna North (editors) *Exploring Forgiveness* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 29.

why the perpetrator committed the violence upon him or her, until finally he or she can forgive. On the other side, the perpetrator must also proceed to be able to see himself or herself from the perspective of the victim in order to understand how painful the suffering of the victim is. Thus the perpetrator also dares to admit his or her wrongs and then apologizes and repents. Thus, forgiving does not mean forgetting.<sup>15</sup> Ricouer states the need for a "mourn" process in order someone can reach the willingness to forgive.<sup>16</sup> One's courage to forgive, according to Riouer is so extraordinary, that it needs for divine intervention.

There are still other questions related to forgiveness. For instance: Is it possible the forgiver substituted by his or her family because the true victim as forgiver has died? Is forgiveness effective if there no remorse and repentance? Is it possible political and social forgiveness? But these questions are out of the paper's concern.

In the end of this passage, the writer will give short conclusion regarding the essence of forgiveness. Forgiveness is moral response. It involves the responsibilities of the forgiver and the forgiven, the victim and the perpetrator. The forgiver or the victim is responsibly offering his or her forgiveness. Whereas, the forgiven is responsible for his or her wrongs that had been done which is revealed in regret and repentance. In this sense, forgiveness is different from pardon and excuse.<sup>17</sup>

## **D. Forgiveness in Islam**

### ***The Islamic Bases***

Islam highly upholds the virtue of forgiveness. Its foundation and source is God Himself who is the most forgiving.<sup>18</sup> In Islam,

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget. Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ricouer, "Can Forgiveness Heal?" in Hendrik J. Opdebeck (ed.), *The Foundation of Application of Moral Philosophy, Ricouer Ethical Order* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Tridiatno, *Forgiveness*, p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> The explanation about this topics are mostly taken from <https://www.islamicity.org/11211/forgiveness-and-repentance-in-islam/>; Michael E. McCullough *Forgiveness Theory, Research and Practice* (New York: The Guilford, 2000), and Abu Nimer, *Forgiveness*, p. 476.

there are names of Allah which confirms that He is generous and merciful. Here will be mentioned that names.

1. **Al-Ghafoor** (الْعَفُورُ, the most forgiving). Based on the Arabic word “ghafara” meaning “to excuse,” “to pardon,” “to remit” and “to forgive,” this name shows that God does all these things. This name is referred to more than 70 times in the Holy Quran. It seems that God as the most forgiving is emphasized. God may forgive all sins for whomever He wills. But one thing excluded in the Quran (4:116) is the Shirk (without repentance). God does not forgive the sins of someone who associates something with God.
2. **Al-Afuw** (العَفُوُّ, the Pardoner). This name is written five times in the Quran, although the concept of forgiveness as ‘*afuw*’ can be found 35 times in the Holy Quran.<sup>19</sup> Based on the Arabic word ‘*Afw*’ meaning “to release,” “to heal,” “to restore,” “to remit,” this name affirms that God releases His people from the burdens of punishment because of their sins. He also heals and restores His people’s pain and honor because of their sins. Sometimes, the names of Al-Ghafoor and Afuw are used together in the Quran.
3. **Al-Tawwab** (التَّوَّابُ, the Acceptor of Repentance). This name reveals that God always accepts the repentance of His people. Many times the people commit sins and repent, God always repent them, unlimitedly. This name emphasizes how the Almighty God is very generous. This name is mentioned 11 times in the Quran.
4. **Al-Haleem** (الْحَلِيمُ, the Clement). This name shows that God is not easy to judge and punish. He always gives time to His people to return to Him from their sins. He is very patient. This name is mentioned fifteen times in the Holy Quran.
5. **Al-Rahman and Al-Rahim** (الرَّحْمَنُ and الرَّحِيمُ, the Most Merciful and Compassionate). This name is the most frequently used in Quran. The attribute of Al-Rahman is mentioned 57 times and Al-Raheem is mentioned 115 times. These names indicate that the Almighty is merciful.

As written in the Holy Quran, the most forgiving God encourages and teaches His people to do the same. Many verses of

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<sup>19</sup> McCullough, *Forgiveness*, and Abu-Nimer, *Forgiveness*, p. 476.



the Quran state that human being must do forgiveness in various contexts of life. Some examples will be presented here.<sup>20</sup>

In the Holy Quran (24:22), the Allah Almighty says, “ ...And let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” (Quran 24:22). This verse is actually addressed to those who have advantages in terms of wealth who “vowed not to give aid to the poor and those who devout to Allah.” But this also applies to everyone to always forgive, because God Himself is most forgiving.

In another verse, the Allah Almighty says, “The reward of the evil is the evil thereof, but whosoever forgives and makes amends, his reward is upon God.” (Quran, 42:40). This verse emphasizes that those who conduct forgiveness and do the good things get a reward from God Himself. The reward from God of course is the most valuable.

The Almighty God also says in another verse of Holy Quran, “That [is so]. And whoever responds [to injustice] with the equivalent of that with which he was harmed and then is tyrannized – Allah will surely aid him. Indeed, Allah is Pardoning and Forgiving.” (Quran, 22:60). From this verse, can be highlighted that the Almighty God is the most forgiving and merciful. His people must seek forgiveness from God, then must be willing to forgive one another.

The Prophet Muhammad (“Peace be upon Him” here after PBUH) excellently embodies the forgiveness in his sayings and deeds. Some examples are usually referred to.<sup>21</sup> As reported by Abdullah Ibn Amr, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, “Be merciful to others and you will receive mercy. Forgive others and Allah will forgive you.” It means that if we forgive others, Allah will forgive us. Therefore, we must be kind to our neighbour, then we will get love, forgiveness from the Almighty God. Besides, Abu Abdullah Al-Khadali reported when he asked Aisha about the character of the

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<sup>20</sup> In explaining this part, I also refer to online source from <http://www.quranreading.com/blog/importance-and-benefits-of-forgiveness-in-islam-learn-from-quran-and-sunnah/>

<sup>21</sup> The writer takes the explanation from the online source which can be accessed in <http://www.quranreading.com/blog/importance-and-benefits-of-forgiveness-in-islam-learn-from-quran-and-sunnah/>

Messenger of Allah (PBUH) Aisha said, “The Prophet was not indecent, he was not obscene, he would not shout in the markets, and he would not respond to an evil deed with an evil deed, but rather he would pardon and overlook.”

There are some historical events which are usually cited as the examples of forgiveness done by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).<sup>22</sup> First, when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) forgave the people of Ta’if. “When he went to Ta’if to preach the message of Allah, its people mistreated him, abused him and hit him with stones. He left the city humiliated and wounded. When he took shelter under a tree, the angel of Allah visited him and told him that Allah sent him to destroy the people of Ta’if because of their sin of maltreating their Prophet. Muhammad (SAW) prayed to Allah to save the people of Ta’if because what they did was out of their ignorance.”

Second, when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was attacked by eighty people in Hudybiya and his followers captured them, but the Prophet commanded to release them and send them back to the camp. Third, after the Makkah victory, the enemies of the prophet asked forgiveness from him, and the Prophet Muhammad said, “Today I shall say to you what Joseph said to his brothers, ‘No blame on you today. Go, you are all free.’” Here, the prophet referred to Prophet Yusuf (PBUH) as mentioned in Quran 12:92. Fourth, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) forgave a woman who had caused the murder of his uncle Hamza. She mutilated the body and chewed the liver. But the prophet forgave her after she accepted Islam. Even the prophet forgave the slave, Wahshi, who killed Hamza in the Uhud battle.

Fifth, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) forgave Abdullah Ibn Saloul, a man who fought him and opposed his message in Quraish. He was also the source of rumor against Aisha, his wife. But when the son of the man asked forgiveness from the prophet, he forgave him. Even he prayed for him when the son asked him to pray for his father.

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<sup>22</sup> The writer takes from Abu Nimer, *Forgiveness*, p. 479.

The examples of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in committing forgiveness emphasizes that the virtue of forgiveness is very strongly upheld in Islam.

### *Forgiveness as moral response*

As mentioned in the previous passage, forgiveness should be distinguished from pardon and excuse, because forgiveness must include moral and personal characters. In Islam, this point is also underlined.<sup>23</sup> There are two types of forgiveness. The first is forgiveness done by someone when he or she is unable to take vengeance. It means that he or she does not have free choice, or he or she is under-pressure. In this situation, it is not forgiveness. The second is forgiveness conducted by someone when he or she has power to take revenge. It means he or she has a choice to grant forgiveness or not. This is the true forgiveness mentioned above. It is also forgiveness truly upheld by Islam.

Here are some examples which emphasizes the matter:

Ali (a.s) said: The most deserving person to pardon others is the one who is most powerful in punishing others". In his last will while addressing Hareth Hamedani, Ali (a.s) stated: "Subdue your anger and forgive a guilty person while you are in power." When you gain power over the enemy, consider forgiving him as a sign of your gratitude for your power. Besides, Imam Sadeq (a.s) stated: "Pardoning others while one is in authority is consistent with the policy of the prophets and the abstemious people."<sup>24</sup>

From the quotation, it is very clear that forgiveness in Islam is truly done as free choice, when someone has power to forgive or not, even when someone has power to revenge. Forgiveness is not done by force, but voluntarily and unconditionally. That is why it is understandable that committing to forgive is very difficult. It needs struggle to diminish the carnal desires and to prefer the spiritual power. Therefore, the ability to forgive is considered the divine grace in religions. There is divine intervention to someone to be able to

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<sup>23</sup> This explanation is taken from online source accessed in <https://www.al-islam.org/forgiveness-islam/forgiveness-islam>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

forgive. In the Holy Quran, it is mentioned that the Almighty Allah recommend His people “the restraint of anger”. Even to the Messenger of Allah, the Almighty God “warns him against paying heed to satanic temptations which are the biggest barrier before man in performing good deeds. To save His messenger, Allah commands him to seek refuge in him.”

### ***The Need of Repentance***

The Almighty Allah is merciful. He is willing to forgive His people unconditionally. But it does not mean that forgiveness does not need repentance. Referring to Mahmoud Ayoub (1997), Abu Nimer wrote that “repentance for sins against another person should be accompanied by restitution and a request for forgiveness, and must be earnestly sought or else exacted on the Day of Judgment”<sup>25</sup> The name of Allah as the Al-Tawwab ( التَّوَّابُ, the Acceptor of Repentance) implies that repentance is strongly needed. It also indicates that even the sinner or the perpetrator needs extra-effort to be able to recognize his or her fault and return back to the truth. Even, it is needed the grace of God to encourage the sinner or the wrong doer to repent.

In Islam there is a term *tawbah* meaning ‘turning toward God.’ *Tawbah* is crucial step in the process of forgiveness as indicated in the Holy Quran, “O my servants, who have been extravagantly severe with themselves, despair not of the mercy of God, for surely God forgives all sins” (Q. 39:53). Surely, God forgives all sins. But to be humble by doing *tawbah* is strong manifestation of apology and deserves to receive the grace of God's forgiveness.

### **E. Promoting A Peaceful World**

It is very clear that Islam seriously struggle for peace and harmonious living. But lately there is tendency to associate Islam with violence, radicalism and terrorism. Therefore, the challenge is how to realize the spirit of Islam widely in the society. Among others, is making forgiveness a shared spirit. After that, promoting a peaceful world should be done.

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<sup>25</sup> Abu-Nimer, *Forgiveness*, p. 477.

Actually, the Muslim tradition of forgiving during the Eid ul-Fitr celebration has become a tradition of the widest community in Indonesia. In this celebration, all families – Muslim and non-Muslim – visit each other, while expressing apology and forgiveness by saying “*mohon maaf lahir batin*” (I apologize for my mental and physical faults). Even though this celebration seems very formal and has not yet manifested the deepest forgiveness, optimistically it can be developed into the true expressions of forgiveness. Furthermore, the practice of forgiveness in its true sense can be realized in certain communities. Of course, it requires serious exercises as described above.

In addition, it is very important to expose Muslim leaders who have truly lived the spirit of forgiveness so that they can be used as examples for the communities. This paper will expose two Muslim figures at the international level who have carried out the spirit of non-violence and forgiveness. They are Abdul Ghafar Khan from Pakistan and Dr. Yusuf Omar al-Azhari from Somali. They can become examples of how implanting the Islamic spirit of forgiveness in the social life.

Abdul Ghaffar Khan was born on 6 February 1890 at Utmanzai (Charsadda) district Peshawar from a rich family, Bahram Khan, a well-to-do landowner of Mohammadzai clan. He was a devout muslim. Since his early years, he had been sent to the local mosque to take lessons in the Holy Quran. He did well his education in the primary and secondary school. Even he was offered an opportunity to follow his brother, Abdul Jabbar Khan, to study in London, England. But his mother did not allow him to study abroad. Therefore, Khan dedicated his whole life for the Pashtun community. In 1910, he opened a *madrasa* (muslim school) in his hometown which later was dismissed by the British government. Then, he joined the independence movement of Pashtun. In 1921, he established a social organization called *Anjuman-e Islāh-e Afghānia* (Afghan Reform Society), and the youth movement *Pax̄tūn Jirga* (Pashtun Assembly) in 1927. In 1928, Khan did the Islamic Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. After his return from Mecca, he founded the Pashto-language monthly political journal *Pax̄tūn* (Pashtun). Finally, in November

1929, Khan founded the *Khudāyī Khidmatgār* (Servants of God) movement, which was his vehicle to realize his non violent movement which strongly applied the Islamic principles.<sup>26</sup>

*Khudāyī Khidmatgār* took as the pattern of its social struggle the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions during the Mecca war. How the forbearance of the Holy Prophet and his companions in dealing with the attacks of the Meccans on Muslims became a model for being patient and tolerant. Therefore, non-violence, forbearance, and tolerance were strictly kept. The volunteers were taught not to retaliate, even if humiliated, also not to carry weapons. Khan believed that non-violence was more effective than guns. Using violence will invite more violence. This will bring greater suffering to the Pasthun community. The fact was the members of *Khudāyī Khidmatgārs* incredibly increased. It reached 25.000 members. Khan also emphasized the open membership to all, irrespective of any discrimination of caste, community or religion. Hence, great number of non-Muslims joined the *Khudāyī Khidmatgār*. Besides, he also kept the communal harmony in the province.

He once said:

My religion is truth, love and service to God and humanity. Every religion that has come into the world has brought the message of love and brotherhood. Those who are indifferent to the welfare of their fellowmen, whose hearts are empty of love, they do not know the meaning of religion.

The complete history of Khan is not the paper's concern. The paper just want to show the success of Khan in carrying out the Islamic principles of forgiveness and non-violence in the socio-political arenas. Of course, Khan's struggle is a story of suffering. He spent 40 years of his life in prison, even at the age of 90. Finally, he died in 1988 at the age of 98 years. Thousands of Pasthun accompanied him with prayers and tears in his funeral celebration. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

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<sup>26</sup>Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah. "Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Khudai Khidmatgars, Congress and the Partition of India" *Pakistan Vision* Vol. 8 No. 2 , pp. 86 – 115.

The second figure is Dr. Yusuf Omar al-Azhari who introduces himself as 'peace-maker and reconciliation promoter' from Somalizi.<sup>27</sup> He was born in 1940 into a wealthy family. He got his doctorate in political and international law at Mogadishu University. He married Kadija, the daughter of Abdu Rashid Sharmarke, Prime Minister, who later became the second president of Somalia. Al-Azhari was appointed senior diplomat in Bonn and then Ambassador to the USA.

In 1969, his father in law, Sharmarke was killed by a general who did coup d'état his government. Five days later General Mohammad Siad Barre took the governmental power backed up by Soviet. Barre Government was the most oppressive. Because of his stance opposing the corrupted government, Azhari was taken from his position as Ambassador in USA to be arrested under emergency security measures and imprisoned for four and half months. Then he was transferred to military camp to be trained Marxism for nine months. After passing some test, he was posted respectively in Director General at Ministry of Information and National Guidance for two years and Ambassador to Nigeria in 1974. But because of his critics upon the capitalistic government, he was taken into prison in 350 km outside Mogadishu, in a cell three metres by four, where no one to talk, nothing to read, nothing to listen to. There, he was tortured by the guards daily, both physically and psychologically. He described his suffering, "I was full of anger, hatred and depression. I was completely dehydrated, all skin and bones. I lost half my weight. It is painful to recall."

The interesting experience to be exposed here is how he got spiritual power in one evening, several months after his capture. He knelt down in despair and prayed; 'God, if you are truly there, help me to have peace within myself. Give me a vision of the good purpose you have created for me.' He remained on his knees for eight hours. They felt like eight minutes. When I got up at 4am I felt light in body and soul. I had no fear. Instead a cool air of love and forgiveness had been planted in my heart.'

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<sup>27</sup>Michael Smith. 1996. Somali Peacebroker, Online accessed in <https://www.iofc.org/node/1831>; Henderson, 2003:133-137.

After this spiritual experience, everything changed in himself. He felt happy and did not suffer any more although torture and harsh treatment did not diminish. He described, “As well as a sense of God's presence, which never left him, he also found comfort in his friends': an ant, a cockroach, a spider weaving her web, and a lizard.” It indicates that spiritual experience with God relieves suffering, however great it may be. He endured all sufferings happily because he felt God's presence.

This spiritual experience was later also making Azhari dare to forgive General Barre who had tortured him. The Barre government went bankrupt, all the prisoners were released because there were no fees to pay the prison officials. Azhari was also released. When he came home, his wife and children were shocked and did not know him because he was emaciated and had a long beard. His wife believed she was seeing a ghost and fainted. After all, he had already been declared dead. It needed long time make his wife recovered.

Two years after his release, while Azhari was eating at the Mogadhisu restaurant a question suddenly popped into his mind. “Why don't you forgive that person (General Barre)?” The question bothered him for days. However, considerations also arose. “What if Barre doesn't want to apologize? How I get money to fly to Nigeria, where Barre currently lives?” Fortunately, as if it was divine intervention, the United Nation coincidentally sent Azhari to attend a conference in Dakar, Sinegal. Azhari met Barre in a small apartment in Lagos. Then, tears of remorse flowed down Barre's face when Al-Azhari expressed his forgiveness. After half an hour, Barre composed himself, “You have cured me. I can sleep tonight knowing that there are people like you in Somalia.”

Sharing his experience, Azhari said, “Our conference was turned from one confrontation and dialogue only to one of repentance. From that day on forgiveness factor has been playing a major role in the reconciliation process in Somalia.”<sup>28</sup>

The experiences of two great Islamic figures, Abdul Ghafar Khan and Dr. Yusuf Omar Al-Azhari, emphasize that Islam led the two great figures to have a spiritual experience with God. It was this

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<sup>28</sup> Henderson, *Forgiveness*, p. 136.



spiritual experience that encouraged and continues to encourage the two great figures to carry out God's commandments of love, act non-violence, and forgiveness. The experiences of these two figures, surely, can be an inspiration for humankind at large. Following the two great Islamic figures means promoting a peaceful world based on the Islamic spirit. Islam is not violence, but peaceful and harmonious living.

## **F. Conclusion**

In optimistic position, the paper concludes that a peaceful life in the world, and in Indonesia in special, can be realized. All religions have introduced forgiveness as significant way to manifest that. Islam has strongly upheld this virtue, and strongly promoted it in its teachings based on the Holy Quran and Hadith. Many strong figures even had revealed in their real lives. They fiercely struggle to reveal that in very extreme ways of sufferings. Two great figures are exposed in the paper, Abdul Ghafar Khan and Dr. Yusuf Omar Al-Azhari. Surely, there other figures that can demonstrated.

Hopefully, the paper motivates the readers seriously learn the virtue of forgiveness and put it in daily practice. Furthermore, forgiveness is made as shared spirit, and then to be promoted for harmonious and peaceful living.

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