



Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation



Fetzer Institute

GNNSJ





Artist: Bartolome Esteban Murillo, 1667, Gallery: Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain

The story of the Return of the Prodigal Son is from the New Testament, Luke 15:11-32
'The lost son returning home is welcomed with open arms by his father'

Background:

The vision behind the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is that forgiving is an activity necessary for healing and reconciliation to take place, when seeking justice and sustainable peace. The practice of forgiving can transform legacies and memories of injustice, conflicts and wars. It can liberate people from being imprisoned in their past and themselves, and allow the grace of the Divine to restore peace and harmony amongst individuals and communities.

The Charter will draw attention to the activity of 'forgiveness' which has its roots in the quality of compassion, which is the foundation for all Dharams, Religions or Faiths, and in the need for healing and reconciliation in a fractured world. It would be the logical 'next step' from the existing Charter for Compassion

<http://charterforcompassion.org> pointing us towards concrete, compassionate actions with their transformative power. A focus on tangible examples of forgiveness in

action will help to identify and promote forgiveness as an effective practical solution for conflict resolution. It would draw attention to the ability to forgive that is first experienced by us in the unconditional love of our mothers for their children and is often visible in the particular capabilities and virtues of women.

The proposed Charter will draw on values and examples from sacred texts and from different spiritual traditions¹, from religious/spiritual communities and from the lives of outstanding individuals. With such paradigms, the Charter will direct commitment and activities towards a growing practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, both in public processes and in private settings. Heroic acts of forgiveness have helped to resolve, or de-escalate, major conflicts throughout history. But forgiveness also plays an important role in sustaining harmonious relationships in the more mundane, daily lives of families and communities.

¹Examples will be drawn from the sacred texts of major world religions, such as the Torah, the Bible, the Koran, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and from other spiritual traditions,

Project Development & Coordination



Bhai Sahib, Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia

The overall responsibility of the development of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation project rests with the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, UK (GNNSJ), led by its Chairman and spiritual leader, Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia. He is a faith practitioner and visionary in the fields of faith propagation, education, intra and interfaith. A recipient of the Juliet Hollister Award from the Temple of Understanding, in 2012 he was also awarded a Papal Knighthood of St Gregory the Great (KSG). He is an International Trustee of Religions for Peace (RfP) which promotes a culture of peace in over 100 countries, Member of the Elijah Board of World's Religious Leaders (EBWRL), Member of the Fetzer Institute's Advisory Committee (FAC) on Religions and Spiritualities, a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL), member of DfID's Faith Working Group, Chair of Sangat TV Trust Board, Chair and Trustee of the Museum of World's Religions (MWR) Working Group, Patron of United Religions Initiative (URI - UK), member of Birmingham Faith Leaders Group (BFLG), Birmingham Council's Faith Round Table (FRT) and Birmingham's Lunar Society.



Dr. William F. Vendley

Co-Convenor, Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation project.

Dr William Vendley is the Secretary General of Religions for Peace, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition advancing common action for peace by working to advance multi-religious consensus on positive aspects of peace as well as concrete actions to stop war, help eliminate extreme poverty and protect the earth.

He is a member of its World Council which consists of 60 senior religious leaders from all continents. He coordinates the activities and projects of Religions for Peace's 92 national and 5 regional councils.

Dr. Vendley is a pioneer in advancing multi-religious cooperation to help resolve conflict and has been engaged in multi-religious peacemaking efforts in Syria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and other countries. Dr. Vendley is an advisor to a number of governments on matters related to religion and peace. He advised US President Barack Obama through his service on the Multi-religious Cooperation and International Affairs Task Force of the White House Faith-Based Council. He was recently appointed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as one of ten members of the US State Department's Advisory Committee on Strategic Partnership with Civil Society and is a Co-chair of the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group. Dr. Vendley is a recipient of the UNICEF Lifetime Achievement Award.

Our Mission

To foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community.

People across the globe, from all cultures and traditions, embrace love and forgiveness in daily life. These values are universally viewed as central to the fabric of humanity. Yet, the emerging global community has few institutions dedicated to deepening the understanding and fostering deeper awareness of these values. In this context, the Fetzer Institute pursues a unique role—working to investigate, activate, and celebrate the power of love and forgiveness as a practical force for good in today's world. We are interested in how people truly experience and understand love and forgiveness from their diverse points of view, especially from the perspective of their daily work in the world.



Mission & Objectives

Our mission is to promote and support peace, and a sustainable human future. We seek to contribute strategically to the resolution of human problems, in a spirit of optimism and realism. Our objective is to facilitate processes that help true human qualities to develop in the world, and for our work to be inspired by these qualities.

The GHFP actively

- conducts research and seeks knowledge which can help to change perceptions and promote transformation.
- initiates, supports and facilitates projects and processes that help bring people towards understanding, compassion and growth.
- creates quiet, safe and open meeting and dialogic spaces where relevant questions can be posed in an environment which can be conducive to understanding.



Dr Josef Boehle

Director, of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation project.

Dr Josef Boehle, is a researcher from the University of Birmingham. He has conducted postdoctoral research on Religions, Civil Society and the UN, and his work and teaching focuses now on Religion, Politics and Peacebuilding. Dr Boehle previously participated in a 4 year process of developing the United Religions Initiative Charter (1996-2000). He was the European coordinator of the URI from 1997-2000. The URI Charter has been distributed and is actively consulted in many countries around the world. http://www.uri.org/about_uri/charter Dr Boehle was also a coordinator of the development of the Concept Note of the Interactive Hearing with Civil Society of the 2007 High-level Dialogue of the UN General Assembly on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace.

Road Map

(1 January 2013 – 31 December 2014)

1. Setting up of advisory council

As soon as feasible, an advisory council will be established and convened to include different sectors: religious leaders, scholars and NGO leaders, amongst others.

2. Research component of the project

Research into similar charters, initiatives and best practices will inform the development of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation text and the activities associated with the Charter.

3. Project development phase

In order to start the chartering process, the first steps are:

- To establish a working group to steer the drafting process
- To consult and develop a first draft of the Charter text
- To hold a Symposium (April 2014) and develop a

network of partner organisations for launching the Charter project and for supporting associated activities

- To seek collaboration with like-minded organisations and communities

4. Project implementation phase

The Project Implementation Phase will include collecting feedback from the consultation process, holding a further consultation meeting, finalising the Charter text, developing joint activities, advancing research projects with partner organisations and launching the Charter internationally.

Communication and Outreach

Among the planned activities for outreach and communication :

- Consulting with participating organisations and individuals concerning a draft text of the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Sharing and publicising the Charter text
- Highlighting the unique focus and tangible outcomes of adopting the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Encouraging seminars and conferences
- Inviting religious communities to engage with the Charter
- Collaborating with similar initiatives/organisations
- Encouraging acts of commitments to the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation by individuals and organisations
- Establishing an annual award for outstanding examples of Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- Publicising and distributing the Charter text through a variety of web based media

Addressing Dhritarashtra, Vidura said: ‘There is one only defect in forgiving persons, and not another; that defect is that people take a forgiving person to be weak. That defect, however, should not be taken into consideration, for forgiveness is a great power. Forgiveness is a virtue of the weak, and an ornament of the strong. Forgiveness subdues (all) in this world; what is there that forgiveness cannot achieve? What can a wicked person do unto him who carries the sabre of forgiveness in his hand? Fire falling on the grassless ground is extinguished of itself. And unforgiving individual defiles himself with many enormities. Righteousness is the one highest good; and forgiveness is the one supreme peace; knowledge is one supreme contentment; and benevolence, one sole happiness.’

(From the Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva Section XXXIII - Hindu Dharam)

Outcomes and Intended Audiences of the Charter Project

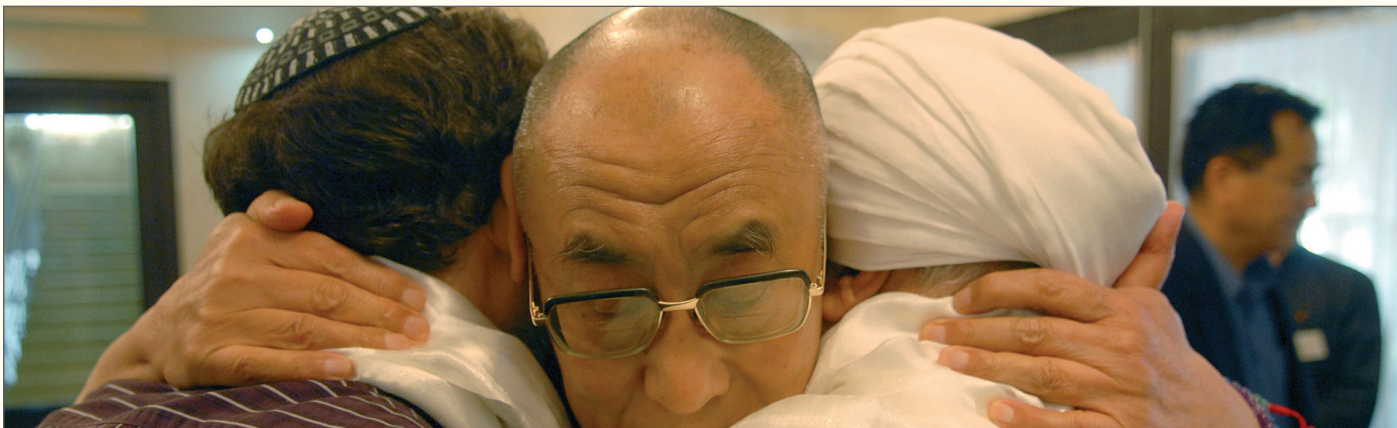
The initial targets and outcomes to be achieved have been described above under the Project Development Phase. The Project Implementation Phase will finalise the draft Charter text, develop joint activities (including further research projects) with partner organisations and launch the Charter internationally. The advisory council, as well as the international consultation process devised to draft the Charter text, will bring a wide range of expertise together. This collaborative effort will help to increase understanding amongst the participating organisations and beyond, about the awareness, motivations and conditions for a 'Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation'.

The research and consultation process will identify many individuals and communities for whom the act of forgiving and being forgiven has had a healing and restorative effect, as well as those who are currently in, or are

emerging from, conflict situations. The lack or absence of forgiveness and reconciliation affects people at all levels, from personal, marital and domestic realms to local, national and international arenas. Thus the primary audiences will span:

- Ordinary individuals in the context of home, family, neighbourhood and workplace and associated organisations which support, guide and govern life in these domains.
- Schools/universities/education institutions and religious/spiritual communities, which help to shape the values by which people live.
- Local, national and international guiding institutions.
- Media institutions which influence mindsets, habits, opinions and inclinations.

There are many ways to communicate the work on, and the results of, the Charter. During the chartering process a wide range of individuals and organisations will be



Embrace of Love & Respect: [L to R] Alon Goshen-Gottstein, His Holiness Dalai Lama and Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia

consulted and asked to distribute through their networks the draft charter text. A website and a range of multi-media resources will be developed. It is intended to work closely with partner organisations to reach out through media networks to a global audience.

Once the Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation has been successfully launched there will be the further need to communicate with participating organisations, and to organise joint activities. It will also create the possibility for further research projects (case studies) around aspects of forgiveness (e.g. forgiveness and political reconciliation

processes, peacebuilding and conflict resolution; forgiveness and community relations, human well-being; forgiveness and education; forgiveness and economics).

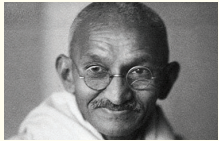
The proposed Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation also has a link to the proposed Museum of the World Religions (UK) project in Birmingham and the value-centred Religious Education work of Dr Marius Felderhof (the Director of the Museum project) at the University of Birmingham.

Selected Literature:



‘The positive proof that the aspirant is centred in God is that he ceases to hate any person or object, and that good qualities such as love, forgiveness, patience, forbearance go on increasing in him.’

Sri Anandamayi Ma (1896 – 1982)



‘Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong’

Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948)



‘As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison’

Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)



‘There is no Future without Forgiveness’

Desmond Tutu (born 1931)

R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

C. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

R. G. Helmick, S.J. and R. L. Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, Radnor (Pennsylvania): Templeton Foundation Press, 2001.

J.P. Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington: US Institute of Peace Press, 1997.

J.P. Lederach, *Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

J. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 2003

D. Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, London: Rider&Co, 1999.

M. Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, Grand Rapids (Michigan): Zondervan, 2005.

S. Wiesenthal (author), H. J. Cargas and B.V. Fetterman (editors), *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, New York: Schocken Books, 1997 (2nd edition).

E. L. Worthington Jr., *Five Steps to Forgiveness: The Art and Science of Forgiving*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2001.

E. L. Worthington Jr., editor, *Handbook of Forgiveness*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

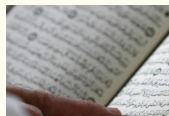


It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and not grant pardon. One should rather easily forgive and not easily grow angry, and when the offender requests forgiveness he should forgive with a full heart and generous spirit. Even if he caused him distress and committed many offenses against him, he shall not exact revenge or bear a grudge. This is the way of the Israelite people and their principled heart. [Hilkhot Teshuva 2:10, Maimonides]



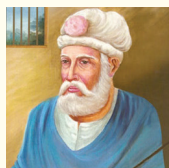
‘God, You are always forgiving, and always merciful’

[Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, eternal Guru of the Sikhs, ang.713]



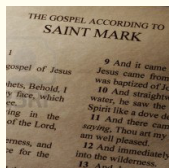
‘But if you pardon and exonerate and forgive, Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful’

[Qur’an, 64: 14]



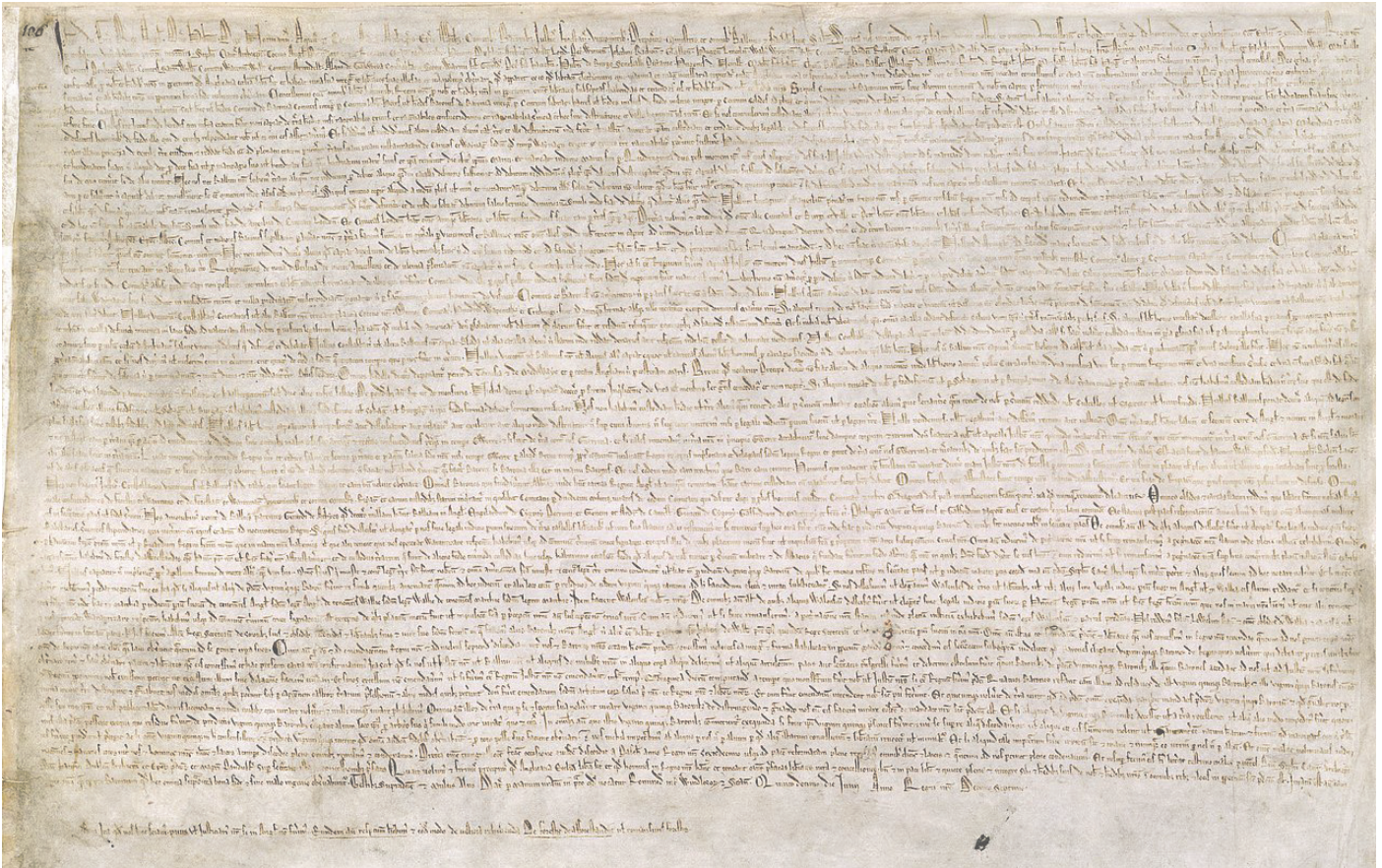
‘Where there are lies and deceit there is sin; Where there is greed there is famine, death and destruction; Where there is forgiveness, there is God himself’

[Bhagat Kabir Ji, Guru Granth Sahib Ji Eternal Guru of the Sikhs, Salok 155, ang.1372]



‘And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.’ [Mark, 11:25, New Testament]

Image: The Magna Carta (originally known as the Charter of Liberties) of 1215



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