

Becoming Agents of Change

A young articulate man was talking about how he was working with teenagers in the inner city and training them in leadership skills. He spoke with confidence and convincingly about the successful leadership programme in Sheffield. Later on from the same stage I listened to an old man who had brought about sea change in the reputation and the working habits of thousands of taxi drivers in Rio de Janeiro. Then two men from America presented a workshop on their work in Richmond, Virginia. They talked about the “hope in city” project and how they initiated reconciliation amongst the black American and the white.

For seven memorable days I was amongst some remarkable people in Caux (Switzerland). The uniting factor was how to bring about a positive moral change in society. Yes! There were men and women, old and young, from the East and West who all shared the common values of unselfishness, purity, generosity and forgiveness. Privately I met several most interesting people; a Greek orthodox priest, an Ammonite priest, a Russian orthodox priest, a dentist from India, a Lebanese Christian. All had wonderful stories to tell about their “initiatives” of change. It was an exhilarating experience to see so many people committed to creating an unselfish society. For a long time my impressions of the West have been very negative, especially about their ability for moral and spiritual regeneration. However, I now feel reassured that the West too has people who have the capacity to transform a materialistic consumer based society.

Small children were busy colouring “bismillah” written in beautiful calligraphy. A young teacher was encouraging them. In a larger room, teenagers and adults were listening attentively to a talk on “Quranic Arabic”. A young eloquent speaker was extolling the virtues and the beauty of the Divine language. Outside, under a giant Cedar tree, toddlers were playing and running about.

Some sixty people had come to “The Wilderness Centre”, an old mansion on the top of a hill overlooking a splendid scene of rolling hills, forest and a meandering river. This was the annual five-day family tarbiya camp organised by the Karimia Institute. Here it was like a large family where everyone was committed to learning, enjoying themselves and sharing with others.

In a spacious room in an inner city community centre, some thirty teenagers are listening attentively to a Shiekh talking about the Seraph. He describes the beautiful character of the Messenger (SAW) and paints a picture of a perfect model. This two week long programme starts from 9am till 5pm. An intensive programme of Islamic learning covering subjects on family life, early Islamic history and leadership.

The above three events took place in different places, were attended by different people, but all shared one common good, that of bringing about a change. A change in oneself and those around. A change that will make a positive and lasting impact. The people were diverse too, Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. People who displayed generosity and were eager to serve humanity and help to bring peace and reconciliation to the world. These are small steps but very significant ones.