



**Above:** Sultan Ahmadi, second from left at an OC Human Relations Commission Listening Session 6/11/2011 at the Islamic Society of OC.

## Taxi Driver Forgives Attacker

by Rusty Kennedy, Executive Director, OC Human Relations Commission

As a taxi driver, Sultan Ahmadi, worked long hours to make enough money to support his family of seven. Living in Santa Ana, Sultan Ahmadi, as many people in our community do, found peace in his life through religion.

His faith taught him, the concept of forgiveness, that although we are all sinners, our faith in God teaches us that we will be forgiven, and we should forgive those who wrong us.

As the Listening Session progressed we heard each other's names and family stories

first and it made us feel a commonality, a connection across faith, across nationality, across cultural tradition. Then we asked for the stories of their lives over the last decade.

Maybe the last decade doesn't ring a bell for you right away, but when I remind you that it was ten years ago that terrorists, parading as religious zealots, blew up the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 9/11/2001, we all remember. For some the day is indelibly marked in their lives, whether they knew someone who worked there and died, or a first responder who, when trying to help others, became the second round of victims of this heinous attack on U.S. soil.

There was also another group of victims of 9/11 whose suffering came as a result of the unleashed anger and hate that this horrendous attack set off. Although they had no connection, they were perceived to be Arab or Muslim, and they became the most popular victim of hate crime perpetrators in the 6 weeks following 9/11. More than ten times the annual hate crime incidents occurred in that six week period following 9/11 targeting those perceived to be Muslim or Arab.

The Orange County Human Relations Commission reached out this past two months to some of the Orange County residents who were the focus of this case of misdirected hate and violence, our Sikh, Muslim and Arab neighbors.

Ironically the first person murdered after 9/11 by a perpetrator who was trying to strike back against the perpetrators of this terrorist attack, was Sikh, neither Muslim nor Arab. The Sikhs are perceived to be Muslims because the men wear turbans, but their faith, the fifth largest in the world, is not Muslim. The largest faiths in the world in order are Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish.

So it was that I met Sultan and he told me of his experience as a taxi driver attacked 5 times since 9/11 because of

**What he did next shocked me. He told the police that he wanted to forgive his attacker.**

his religion, Islam. On two of the assaults that he suffered, the police were called due to the severity of the attacks.

What he did next shocked me. He told the police that he wanted to forgive his attackers.

He forgave those who attacked him because of his Muslim faith, and declined to press charges, and they were freed.

He told me this Saturday, June 11 that the Muslim faith preached forgiveness, and so he forgave those who attacked him

I was struck by the grace of this working man's embrace of what I thought to be the Christian notion of turning the other cheek. And then I realized that Islam is similar to Christianity. In fact Christians, Jews and Muslims all place faith in the Old Testament, and have more in common as Abrahamic faiths than that which separates them.

Go to [www.ochumanrelations.org](http://www.ochumanrelations.org) for more information on Orange County Human Relations programs.