



Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP

www.concord-leeds.org.uk

Newsletter - April 2015

Religion the Key to Social Cohesion

Lord Singh gives an inspiring Peter Bell Memorial Lecture

THE East Room at the Leeds Civic Hall was packed to capacity by an audience of nearly 70 people for the Peter Bell Memorial Lecture, which was given by the celebrated broadcaster and journalist Indarjit Singh, Lord Singh of Wimbledon MBE. They were treated to an eloquent, lively, entertaining and heart-warming lecture on the importance and relevance of religion in today's society.

Lord Singh illustrated the ways in which society is changing and how the xenophobic insularity that was once common, and that served to strengthen a sense of cohesion and identity, is no

longer adequate or appropriate. There is a law of life, which he called 'Indarjit's Law', that when two or more people find sufficient in common to call themselves 'us', they will find a 'them', to look down on, to strengthen their sense of unity. The consequences can range from mild conflict to extreme active hatred, such as that which led to the genocides at Auschwitz, Cambodia, Rwanda and the Partition of India. Humans do not come with preloaded software of right, wrong and responsibility. Decent responsible behaviour has to be taught and learnt. Lord Singh was dismissive of the idea that



*Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi, Lord Indarjit Singh
and Dr Simon Phillips*

teaching citizenship in schools was enough to ensure that children would grow up knowing how to behave well.

Religious teachings in their true essence define fundamental truths that, unlike the law of the land, do not change with time and place. Religion aims to move us towards not only being better citizens, but also towards a better and fairer society, by taking away the obsession with self. Too often the problems of our society, such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, and binge drinking, are treated as though all they need is a change in the law to address them. Sikhs believe that our different religions should take the lead in addressing the underlying causes of our social ills, starting with our neglect of the role of the family. Religion sees marriage, fidelity and the family as central to the health and wellbeing of society. The teachings of religion constantly remind us to look to the wider implications of all we do. Lord Singh drew on his Sikh tradition to show how religion can break down divisive practices and encourage equality and a fairer society.

There was a challenge for religions too. Religions need to discard unhelpful rituals, superstitions and dated customs and practices that have attached themselves and serve to mask or distort underlying ethical teachings. That is not easy when religious texts sometimes contain xenophobic attitudes to others.

Different religions are not barriers between people, but gateways to a greater understanding and enrichment of life. Today, we have to knock down the false barriers of belief and exclusivity between religions through dialogue. In the areas where religions overlap we find common values of tolerance, compassion and concern for social justice: values that can take us from the troubled times of today to a fairer and more peaceful society.

The talk was warmly received and followed by a range of questions and comments from the audience, which Lord

Singh fielded with an elegance and ease that could come only from someone who has thought deeply and thoroughly about the place of religion in today's world and is skilled at expressing himself. The issues ranged over secularisation, the place of faith schools, how to promote real interfaith dialogue, women's equality, how far religions should change with the times, and so on.

It was good to see a diverse audience that included many who were attending a Concord event for the first time, including a sizable number of Sikhs. It was a new member, a young Sikh woman, Jaskiran Kaur Mehmi, who spoke a word of thanks, reminding us of the spirit of Peter Bell, one of the founders of Concord, in whose memory the lecture was given.

The event was chaired by the Chair of Concord, Dr Simon Phillips, and Lord Singh was introduced by the Revd Canon Charles Dobbin, Chair of the Leeds Faiths Forum. The Civic Hall provided refreshments, and Concord is grateful to the Leeds City Council for allowing the use of this prestigious location for a significant occasion which will long be remembered.



The Revd Canon Charles Dobbin chairs a joint interfaith task group of the West Yorkshire & the Dales Anglican Diocese and the Leeds District of the Methodist Church. He is currently Interim Priest at Leeds Minster, following the retirement of the Revd Tony Bundock.



Women Peace-ing Together

Concord's 40th Anniversary Banner

by Cynthia Dickinson (0758 6327 822)

THROUGH January and February the women's group has met five times in Beeston: twice at the Hamara Centre, twice at the Asha Neighbourhood Project Centre and once at St Mary's Parish Centre. As well as trying out textile techniques the ladies have been making hand prints, some of which will go on the final banner, whilst others will be included in a book to be displayed with the banner (and peace cloth and rug) in Leeds City Museum from June to December next year.

A few ladies helped to complete the rug, which has been taken by Ruth and Jenny (from Bradford Touchstone) to join 20 or so others. All these *Women Weaving Wisdom* rugs are due to have their first display in a yurt at Bradford City Hall on April 21st. The yurt and rugs will be travelling the country to go on display in a host of different venues. One of its first stops will be on Sunday April 26th when Lidgett Park Methodist Church, Roundhay LS8 1HG, will be using the yurt in their morning worship at 10.30am. The church and the yurt will then be open from 11.45am until 3.30pm, at the same time as the Arts Trail in the area. If you manage to get along, look for a bright rainbow rug with a dove in the centre.

The final series of banner-making workshops, sponsored by the Near Neighbours fund, will take place in Roundhay at the Friends Meeting House, 136 Street Lane LS8 2BW, as follows:

Monday April 20th from 10.30am till 1pm

Monday April 27th from 7pm till 9pm

Monday May 11th from 10.30am till 1pm

Monday June 1st from 10.30am till 1pm

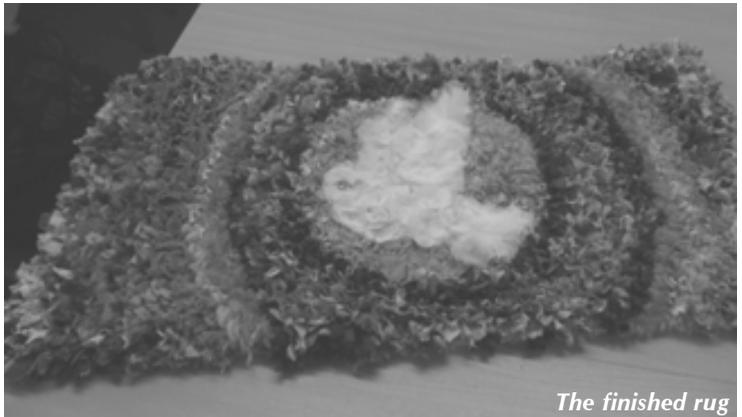
Monday June 15th from 10.30am till 1pm

Monday June 22nd from 7pm till 9pm

Monday July 6th from 10.30am till 1pm

Monday July 20th from 10.30am till 1pm

For a full report with a large collection of pictures in colour, see the Women's Group page of the Concord website



The finished rug

Leeds City Council PeaceLink Group

THE PeaceLink group, open to representatives of any Leeds organisation with a peace ethos, holds quarterly meetings in Leeds Civic Hall to share information and ideas on promoting peace in the city. Concord has been a member since 2000 and benefits by having support from the Councillors involved when booking the venue for our Peace Service. The next PeaceLink Group meeting will be on Thursday June 11th at 7pm; if your particular faith group or congregation has a peace related activity to promote, you will be welcome to attend.

The PeaceLink group's annual Olaf Palme Memorial Peace Lecture will be on Tuesday June 16th at 7.30pm in the Banquet Room of the Civic Hall. Alastair Hay, Professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of Leeds, will be the guest speaker.

**Do not overrate what you have received, nor envy others.
He who envies others does not obtain peace of mind. — The Buddha**

Leeds Faiths Forum Annual General Meeting

Held on 11th February 2015 at the Church of the Holy Rosary

IN his report on activities throughout 2014 the Chairman of Leeds Faiths Forum, the Revd Canon Charles Dobbin, referred to the success of Scriptural Reasoning sessions, work with Bridging Difference (formerly InterActive) and Interfaith Week exhibitions in Notre Dame Sixth Form College and the Merrion Centre. The Forum continues to work with 3rd Sector Leeds and represent the Faith Hub at Leeds City Council's Equality Assembly, contributing to the covenant between the Council and faith communities. Initial steps have been made towards setting up a Health Education project with the director of Public Health, aiming to supply information on health issues within faith communities and overcome barriers in accessing medical treatment. Research through Leeds University has been carried out and a health conference is planned for May 12th 2015. www.leedsfaithsforum.org



**Concord is still in urgent need of a secretary. If you can help,
please contact the Chair (see page 12) ASAP.**

Buddhist and Pagan perspectives on *Death and Beyond*

I have always been fascinated by Death and Beyond and from an early age assumed that I had led a previous life (or lives) and would be back again. Needless to say I was amazed to discover that Christianity, the faith I was brought up in, didn't share my views. I was never curious enough to research the subject so now look forward to improving my knowledge with this new Concord theme.

Dennis Hallam and Jay Anderson were our February speakers, giving insights into the Buddhist and Pagan thoughts and beliefs around death and what follows. There were several similarities: both faiths value spiritual progress; both share a belief in the importance of death, in acquiring positive and negative 'points', in a 'transit lounge' and a 'next life'. The details, however, differ quite markedly.

For Buddhists, the ultimate aim is to reach Nirvana; Pagans see their 'souls' as divine sparks which aim to re-unite with Divinity. Many Buddhists consider the impermanence of life as extremely

important while Pagans see death as part of the natural cycle and focus on it when celebrating the dying season. Buddhists aim to plant positive Karmic seeds through generosity, helpfulness, meditation, knowing that greed, jealousy and anger will result in negative seeds. Some Pagans, particularly Wiccans, subscribe to the idea of a three-fold return where good or bad deeds are repaid three-fold in either this life or the next.

After death the Buddhist 'soul' enters Bardo where the Karmic seeds are weighed and fate determined. Of the six Desire Realms for reincarnation, the Human Realm is the only one that gives an opportunity for further spiritual development. Lower Realms—Animal, Hungry Spirit and Hell—are increasingly more populated and more terrifying with little or no chance of escape. Most Pagans look forward to an afterlife, names of which vary according to tradition—Otherworld (Druid), Summerland (Wicca), Land of Youth (Celtic). It is

regarded as a place to rest and reflect before the next incarnation which will be human. In each life there are lessons to be learned and progress to be made on the spiritual journey. In Northern Traditions, however, Valhalla is for those who die in battle, their final, glorious destination.

Cynthia Dickinson



Qari Hafiz Muhammad Asim MBE

QARI Muhammad Asim is the senior imam at Makkah Mosque on Thornville Road, Burley, Leeds. He was born in Sialkot, Pakistan, the second of two brothers and two sisters, whose parents were Fateh Muhammad and Naseem Akhtar. Asim was spiritually nurtured in the Sunni Sufi Muslim tradition and was able to learn the Qur'an 'by heart' by the time he was 10½ years old. This in itself carries the honourable title of Hafiz —a rare achievement.

Asim's early schooling was in Pakistan. Then when he came as a boy with his parents to Leeds, he attended the City of Leeds School, where he completed his GCSEs. He subsequently attended the Roman Catholic Notre Dame School just as it changed its policy from being an all-girls school to including boys, and there he took his A levels. Asim then enrolled with the University of Leeds and graduated with an LL.B.(Hons) degree in 1999. He took a legal practice course at the College of Law at York in order to practise in commercial property law. Since 2005 he has been with the international law firm DLA Piper, who have offices in Leeds.

Simultaneously with his secular employment Asim had been learning to qualify as an imam, studying classical texts, jurisprudence, and the Hadith with an open learning course. From the time Asim was 17 years old in 1994 he was part-time assistant to his father, Professor Hafiz Fateh Muhammad Sahib, who was the principal imam for the Pakistani Sunni Sufi Muslim congregation which started out with the Brudenell Grove house mosque until the Makkah Mosque was opened in 2003. When Professor Fateh Muhammad died in 2005 Asim became the senior imam for that community.

Profile

**6th in a series of
interviews with interfaith
leaders in Leeds**

*Interviewed by Trevor Bates,
26th February 2015*



Because Asim is a full-time lawyer his duties with the Makkah Mosque are curtailed. However he does cover some prayer times of each day (including late night and early morning, which in the Summer are held at 11.30pm and 3am) as well as the Friday prayers and sermon, whilst his brother Qari Qasim, also an imam, fulfils duties and responsibilities for their mosque and community in Asim's absence.

Asim's work both with his people and for the community is increasingly recognised as quite special, working for greater harmony and cohesion, tolerance and understanding—and particularly in the multi-ethnic and inter-faith spheres of Leeds and elsewhere. For this work he was awarded an MBE in the Queen's New Year Honours list of 2012. He serves on

national and international bodies, broadcasts regularly on Muslim TV Channels and the Leeds Asian Radio and his opinion is sought by the media particularly in respect of extremism and violence. Asim has written articles relating to Islam and other topics, including ethics, criminality and taxation. He has translated into English a number of articles and partly translated a number of books on Islamic issues, and specialises in the field of the Qur'an and Islamic Finances.

Qari Asim sees among his priorities the following:

- in the wider society and throughout the UK to enable Muslims to contribute to building up the community;
- engaging young people
- empowering women both within Muslim society and the local community.

He also says that to be a good Muslim means being a good citizen. Faith is a unique passion, and can become distorted if it is not channelled into service, both for the Muslim community and for the wider community. People of faith must reach out to the secular and commercial world and mosques are most effective when they become 'service providers'.

Young Muslims from Makkah Mosque are encouraged to help people with shopping, with cleaning the streets, buying and preparing food to give away to people on the streets, and work in conjunction with St George's Crypt. The womenfolk of the mosque have their own Management Committee which deals with the women's affairs at Makkah Mosque. There is gender equality in Islam but separate responsibilities by tradition. Asim says that there is no demand for women imams at present. Women can play an important role in the mosque and community by, for instance, becoming muftis (religious law advisers).

Makkah Masjid has daily Qur'anic classes and Sunday Supplementary School, for children and teenagers. The

sessions are held every day 4 – 6pm, and provide teaching for some 100 – 250 young people.

Asim sees his personal ambition in helping to inspire other imams to become dynamic and vibrant activists, to enable Muslim institutions to shape their communities' policies to spread social justice, and to prompt generosity and caring.

In July 2014 the Leeds Metropolitan University (now Leeds Beckett University) awarded Asim the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws for his contribution to public life, recognising both his 'invaluable contribution to his local community' and his work as 'a distinguished figure in the field of improving inter-faith relations at an international level.' A press release noted that he is a member of the Government's Anti-Muslim Hatred working group, which involves active participation in setting the Government's agenda for tackling issues facing British Muslims. Qari was also recently part of a delegation of some of the most influential Muslim leaders from across the globe invited to a conference hosted by the Abu Dhabi Government aimed at improving inter-faith relations worldwide.

In response to the award Asim said, 'My role as a lawyer and as an Imam may at first appearance seem very different but actually they have a lot of common elements—that is helping people to resolve their issues. Both roles are challenging and also emotionally stimulating. I see it as an absolute honour to be as a conduit between people and their Lord and that's something that's phenomenally humbling to me.'

Asim is married to Shabana, and they have three children under six years.

Qari Asim views Concord as a 'fantastic organisation which has made a successful journey in the realm of interfaith before it was taken up in the political arena.' He applauds the practice of constantly bringing people together, and happily stands shoulder to shoulder with Concord in facing problems and being in rapport with Concord's aims and practice.

Interfaith Responses to Current Affairs

VARIOUS conflicts in the Middle East have dominated news headlines over the past couple of years, and the development of Islamic extremism has been a growing concern for governments and populations in Europe. Violent actions performed in the name of Islam have produced strong reactions both from non-Muslims and from Muslims who reject violence, especially when those events have happened in Britain or Europe. Those of us who care about interfaith dialogue and desire to see more involvement of religion in political and social life are often worried by the dangerous trends that lead to suspicion, division and conflict rather than to understanding, respect and peaceful cooperation.

In January 2015 members of an Al-Qaeda Islamist group forced their way into the offices of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and killed 11 people, injuring 11 others. Their attack was revenge for *Charlie Hebdo's* publication of cartoons caricaturing the Prophet Muhammad. The attackers were eventually caught and shot by the police, but only after a long and dangerous pursuit. In the meantime other attackers had killed a policeman and taken several people hostage at a kosher supermarket. Widespread demonstrations took place across Europe afterwards in support of *Charlie Hebdo*, and there was much debate about the freedom of the press and whether there should be any limit placed upon it.

Inter Faith Network

The leaders of the Inter Faith Network have issued a series of statements in the last year in an attempt to give a measured, irenic response to these and other events. These are extracts from some of them. The full messages and statements can be found at: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/statements-and-messages>

Importance of Dialogue

Extract from Message from the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of IFN to member bodies, 4 Aug 2014:

There are ... times when events in other countries with which we have links or about which we have concern have an impact on our relationships here.

These may be events, past or present, about which a community or communities have strong feelings: particular attacks or periods of persecution or even genocide; 'one off' but deeply disturbing episodes; or ongoing actions – military or civilian – affecting the lives of many, within and across borders. The roll call of such actions in recent times is long and the impact reverberates.....

Such situations give rise to strong differences of view about what is just and right and they bring with them anxiety, pain – and anger. At these times, our bonds of friendship and trust – long in the making – are tested. It is hard to keep communication open and to continue to be willing to be in dialogue but it is vital to do so and to continue to support each other's right to differ in opinion and to be willing to make our case with courtesy and respect for the other.

Religions Misrepresented

Extract from Message from Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of IFN to member bodies, 12 August 2014

Extreme actions taken by groupings overseas, such as ISIL, claiming to be in the name of a religion, can sometimes be taken to represent the true face of that religion, fanning flames of prejudice here as well as elsewhere. There is evidence that this is happening. Images of brutal deaths become fused in the minds of some not just with the perpetrators but with the religion in whose name they claim to operate. The work of continued explanation and correction of misrepresentation and misunderstanding through the media and in personal encounter is critically important.

It is hard but vital to keep communication open and to continue to be willing to be in dialogue. It is likewise vital to stand up for the

safety and security of each other's faith communities; to offer, side by side, humanitarian succour to the vulnerable and needy; and to seek ways, whenever this is possible, to find a common voice on human rights and on issues of justice and compassion....

Commitment to Common Good

Extract from Co-Chairs' New Year message to member bodies, 8 January 2015

In the UK, we are fortunate to have a generally strong record of community relations and inter faith engagement but this can never be taken for granted and echoes – from near as well as far – of destructive responses to dealing with difference are always of concern.

IFN's vision is of a society where there is understanding of the diversity and richness of the faith communities in the UK and the contribution that they make; and where we live and work together with mutual respect and shared commitment to the common good. With our member bodies, we work to that end, like many others here, elsewhere in Europe and around the world.

The Charlie Hebdo Affair

Extract from Statement by the Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of IFN, 21 January 2015

The recent murders in Paris, as well as reported rises in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim comments and attacks in the UK and more widely in Europe, have brought in their wake increased anxieties about the safety of Jewish and Muslim communities. In the case of manifestations of violent extremism and terrorism they have brought anxiety about the safety and wellbeing of all communities and of our society overall.

There is, and will be, debate about best ways to respond to these disturbing developments, as well as to the implications of others around the globe. At an immediate practical level, however, where communities feel their very safety is under threat, mutual support is vital. Inter faith initiatives are fundamental to achieving this and play a crucial role alongside that of the emergency services

and other secular agencies working to ensure public safety. ...

The Inter Faith Network for the UK works to increase understanding about and between faith communities and to encourage and support good inter faith relations. As part of this it has always underlined the enormous importance of the contribution which faith communities make to British society – and also of their engaging and being engaged with well by wider society.

... Britain would also not be Britain without our continuing commitment as people of different faiths, within its four nations, to finding ways to live together well – including with those of non-religious beliefs - and continuing to work together to shape our society in the light of our shared values while retaining the integrity of our religious beliefs and appreciating the positive dimensions of diversity.

Leeds Faiths Forum

The events also prompted a statement from the Revd Charles Dobbin, Chair of Leeds Faiths Forum, on behalf of the Forum:

Leeds Faiths Forum represents people belonging to the nine principal faiths in Leeds, and we wish to express our horror and revulsion at the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, the police and the Koshier supermarket, seeing them as attacks on free speech so hard won, religious freedom and tolerance, which are so central to our society's values.

We believe that with free speech comes the responsibility to use it wisely, whether this concerns intrusion into privacy or satirising of religion. We urge mutual respect in the media and reject the mockery of what is deeply important and precious to the different Faiths. We have grave concerns about the potential of these recent incidents to polarise our society. So in the context of this and also other atrocities which misuse religion, we urge all faith communities to stand shoulder to shoulder so as to bridge difference not by violence, but by means of understanding and cooperation.

Concord Anniversary Book Project

THE book is steadily taking shape. The Project Group has met five times already, and is likely to meet more frequently as the year progresses. Seven chapters are in their final stages and two chapters are in the process of being compiled. The Appendices are likely to contain several historical documents and listings of people who have held office involved with the story over the years. We have chosen nine Profiles to be included, selected from those which have previously appeared in our Concord Newsletter, one from each of our nine faith communities. Additional profiles have been compiled about three visionary pioneers influential in the story.

Fabian Hamilton has agreed to write an introduction to the book in addition to Simon Phillips writing the Preface.

Whilst we have a few 'Memories' in hand, we still urgently need another dozen or so to give the story a more homely and domestic flavour. If you have memories of Concord's early decades to share, please get in touch (details below).

We are in the process of selecting 20/30 images to illustrate the story, whilst a design for the front cover is being considered. The book is likely to be about 150 pages plus images and ready to pass on for printing later in the year.

A preliminary enquiry has been made with Peepaltree Press, Leeds, and they have expressed a willingness to be instrumental in getting the book printed for us. No costs have been considered as yet until we are nearer a final stage.

It will be necessary to apply for an ISBN number to be given for our publication, and we are considering applying for financial assistance to help us to keep the price down, attractive enough for a wide market.

Trevor Bates

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Spring is in the Air

A reflection by John S. Summerwill

I am writing this on Easter Monday, a warm day of glorious sunshine making vibrant the 'host of golden daffodils'.

Holy Week and Easter are the high point of the Christian Year, and far more important than Christmas. Good Friday, which seems so inappropriately named since it commemorates the death of our founder, is 'good' because it speaks to Christians of the depth of God's love for humanity. In conventional Christian thought Christ's death was for the good of mankind. Quite how it works is a matter of theological controversy. Evangelical Christians see it as a necessary punishment for the sins of all the world borne by Jesus on behalf of everyone else. Liberal Christians like me object, thinking that a god who would require or be satisfied with the punishment of a substitute would be unjust and immoral. We see Christ's death as a supreme example of self-sacrifice and forgiveness of enemies that all should follow. Another view is that it was a conflict between God and the Devil, which God decisively won, showing that evil can never conquer love.

So long as we focus on how the death of Jesus can benefit humanity there is something here that Christians can with a good conscience share with people of other faiths. Nevertheless, this is very dangerous ground because it has over millenia been a flashpoint for conflict with Judaism. The New Testament was written at a time when relationships between the emergent Christian communities and the synagogues in which the first Jewish Christians had worshipped were bad and getting worse. There are anti-Jewish biases in the gospels, with that of John in particular always characterising the enemies of Jesus as 'the Jews', and with Matthew's Gospel blaming the whole Jewish race in perpetuity for the death of Jesus. The antisemitism that has flowed from this over the centuries has been thoroughly unjustified and shameful.

Only in our time, when the Nazi Holocaust has showed where that hatred leads, have the Christian churches at last come to some penitence and sensitivity and stopped praying on Good Friday for God to convert all 'Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks'. Nowadays prayers on Good Friday tend to be for relief for sufferers—particularly those who suffer unjustly—all over the world, including those caught up in the violence in the Middle East and in Africa, whether they are Jews, Muslims, Christians or of any other faith.

Easter is controversial too, within Christianity as well as in relation to other faiths. Conventional Christians insist that the rising of Jesus from the dead was an event in history and its uniqueness as a miracle proves his identity as Son of God. Although that view is still widely held in all Christian traditions, it is no longer unusual or shocking to find even bishops and priests who see the resurrection not as history but as a powerful and valuable myth, an affirmation that by God's grace good finally triumphs over evil and a reassurance that we shall live again after our own death.

The traditional view is inevitably a major barrier to interfaith agreement. The claims of Christians about the resurrection lay at the root of the separation from Judaism in the beginning. Islam holds that Jesus was still alive when taken from the cross: he did not die, so he did not rise either. Islam firmly rejects as *shirk* any idea that he was God or the Son of God. A modern liberal understanding of the resurrection cannot abandon altogether the doctrines about Jesus that are central to Christian faith. It may, though, enable us to find common ground for interfaith dialogue in the universal human desire to see wickedness and death defeated and goodness and life affirmed.

It is no accident that these Christian celebrations occur in Spring, the time around the equinox when, in the northern hemisphere, the hours of daylight increasingly exceed the hours of darkness and new life bursts forth in the natural world. It happens now because the original

events occurred at the time of the Jewish Passover, invariably in Israel a Spring festival. The Christian narratives draw extensively on the Passover traditions. The Christian eucharist reflects the Passover meal as well as Shabbat observances. The Passover theme of freedom from slavery is taken up by Christianity in relation to liberation from sin and its consequences. Judaism itself borrows from older traditions, for it is thought by scholars that Passover is a grafting of the Exodus story onto Canaanite (i.e. 'Pagan') agricultural festivals marking the natural cycle. The unleavened bread probably comes from the Spring celebrations of a settled farming community offering the first of the new barley harvest to its deities. The paschal lamb was probably the thank offering for the new lambs in a nomadic community of shepherds. Just as Christmas interweaves the story of the birth of Jesus with Pagan midwinter themes, and All Saints reworks Halloween, so Easter and Passover give a theological spin to the festivities of Spring.

If we are willing to look across our different faith traditions for the agreements rather than the differences, and if we can lay to rest the arguments, recriminations and brutalities of the past, we can surely find in this Spring season expression of much that we have in common. Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet at the Last Supper, remembered by Christians at this time as an example of humble service, may resonate with Sikhs, for whom 'sewa' is a obligation and virtue central to Sikh ethics. Jews and Muslims, like Christians, celebrate life, hoping for its enrichment now and renewal after death. Brahma Kumaris, Buddhists, Hindus and Pagans do so from a wider perspective that includes concepts of reincarnation or rebirth. For Bahá'í the Spring equinox is New Year and a time for rejoicing in the theme of Spring renewal both in nature and in the spiritual world. And we all, whatever our tradition, hope to see the ultimate triumph of freedom, goodness, justice, mercy, peace.

So, even if it is a bit late to say it, Happy Easter everyone!

Calendar of Religious Festivals

Spring - Summer 2015

Bahá'í, Jewish and Muslim festivals usually begin at sundown on the previous evening

APRIL

14 Baisakhi - New Year	Sikh
16 Yom HaShoah	Jewish
21 First Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
23 St George's Day	Christian
24 Yom Ha'Atzmaut	Jewish
29 Ninth Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í

MAY

1 Beltane	Pagan
2 Twelfth Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
Bodhi Day	Buddhist
7 Lag B'Omer	Jewish
10 Christian Aid Week	Christian
14 Ascension Day	Christian
16 Laylat al Miraj	Muslim
24 Shavuot	Jewish
Pentecost	Western Christian
Declaration of the Bab	Bahá'í
29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah	Bahá'í
31 Pentecost	Orthodox Christian
Trinity Sunday	Christian

JUNE

1 Wesak Day	Buddhist
2 Lailat al Bara'ah	Muslim
4 Corpus Christi	Christian
16 Guru Arjan Dev martyrdom	Sikh
18 Ramadan (to 17 July)	Muslim
21 Midsummer Solstice	Pagan

JULY

9 Martyrdom of the Bab	Bahá'í
10 Lailat al Qadr	Shia Muslim
14 Lailat al Qadr	Sunni Muslim
17 Ratha Yatra	Hindu
18 Eid al Fitr	Muslim
20 Chokor	Buddhist
26 Tisha B'Av	Jewish
30 Asalha Puja	Buddhist

AUGUST

1 Lammas	Christian, Pagan
1 Dormition Fast	Orthodox Christian
15 Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Catholic Christian
18 Festival of Hungry Ghosts	Buddhist
28 Dormition of the Theotokos	Orthodox Christian
29 Raksha Bandan	Hindu

SEPTEMBER

1 Installation of Guru Granth Sahib	Sikh
5 Krishna Jayanti	Hindu
10 Paryushan	Jain
14 Rosh Hashanah	Jewish
Dhul-Hijjah	Muslim
Holy Cross Day	Christian
17 Ganesh Chaturthi	Hindu
Anant Chaturdashi	Jain
22 Waqf al Arafa (Hajj)	Muslim
23 Yom Kippur	Jewish
Autumn Equinox	Pagan
24 Eid al Adha	Muslim
28 Sukkot begins	Jewish
29 Michaelmas	Christian

An Anonymous Interfaith Prayer for Peace

O God, you are the source of life and peace.
Praised be your name forever.
We know it is you who turns our minds to thoughts of peace.
Hear our prayer in this time of crisis.
Your power changes hearts.

Muslims, Christians, and Jews remember, and profoundly affirm, that they are followers of the one God, Children of Abraham, brothers and sisters; enemies begin to speak to one another;

those who were estranged join hands in friendship;
nations seek the way of peace together.

Strengthen our resolve to give witness to these truths by the way we live.

Give to us:

understanding that puts an end to strife;
mercy that quenches hatred, and
forgiveness that overcomes vengeance.
Empower all people to live in your law of love
Amen.

Read more at <http://www.beliefnet.com>

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