



Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP

www.concord-leeds.org.uk

Newsletter - April 2013

Jewish Heritage Centre Visit

TWENTY people—members and non-members of Concord—went along to the Jewish Heritage Centre for Children on Shadwell Lane in February. The visit was free for members but, because there was a cost involved, non-members contributed £3 a head.

The newly-established centre is an educational resource designed to bring Jewish history, values and traditions to life for children and adults in an entertaining way. One area has a supermarket and kitchen display with videos (featuring children) to explain the significance of kashrut, and to demonstrate how the principle of separation is observed by, for example, using different kitchen sinks for meat and milk dishes. Another area illustrates the shtetl, a 19th century east European village in miniature,

where each building represents a Jewish festival or tradition. Here too videos at each location describe the places and activities.

We were taken finally into a small 'working' synagogue and brought up to date with Jewish practices.

Everyone agreed that the visit was a most enjoyable and worthwhile experience.



Walk of Friendship – Sunday May 5th

THIS year's Walk is a happy break with tradition. Instead of our usual Saturday morning stroll we have moved to Sunday afternoon so that we can visit one of the Leeds Synagogues—the United Hebrew Congregation—on Shadwell Lane LS17. Thanks to efforts by our Acting Chair, Simon Phillips (a member of UHC), we will end our walk there after visiting Street Lane Quaker Meeting House and the Muslim Community Centre on Shadwell Lane.

We will gather at 2.15pm in the Quaker Meeting House and the Lord Mayor of Leeds will join us at 2.30 pm. She will walk with us to the Muslim Centre but has to leave us at 3.30 pm.

The walk up from Street Lane to Shadwell Lane is fairly long, so we will need offers of help with lifts for the less-sprightly walkers. If you are going by car and are prepared to follow the procession in your vehicle either with a participant or looking to pick up anyone who seems to be having difficulty, please let me know.

We would also like assistance with safety stewarding, name-gathering and banner-holding. If any of these appeals to you, do please let me know.

We hope you will come along and join us for some—if not all—of the Walk.

Cynthia Dickenson

Walking Against Fascism

ON the day previous to Concord's Walk of Friendship the English Defence League is planning a march/demonstration on Lingfield Road, which is very near the synagogue and mosque which we will be visiting. The problem is, apparently, that a local community centre has shut through lack of funding but a group of Muslims have bought a pub opposite to turn into a new community centre, including a prayer hall. Local residents have the feeling that "our facility has been shut while they can be parachuted in to start their own". The EDL demonstration will be on Saturday 4th May, and a counter-demonstration at 11.00 am is being organised by Leeds Unite Against Fascism in support of multiculturalism. This is intended to show the people of Leeds and the EDL the group's opposition to what it calls 'the racist, islamophobic and fascist EDL'.

The Revd Charles Dobbin of St John's Church on Harrogate Road, in whose parish these demonstrations and Concord's walk will occur, has asked for Concord's support. He would like the Walk of Friendship to be extended to include his church—maybe a bit beyond—when Concord's official event is over, and invites Concord walkers to join with Leeds Faiths Forum and the North Leeds Three Faiths Group in a show of solidarity and friendship. This will be an optional extension of our Sunday walk into the area of the EDL demonstration a day after that demonstration to avoid a direct confrontation.

As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela

The Peter Bell Memorial Lecture, March 20th 2013

Learning from Seven Years' Muslim-Jewish Dialogue in Manchester

THIS year's Peter Bell Memorial Lecture took the form of a conversation between two people of different faiths and backgrounds yet with a lot in common— an Israeli-born Jewish barrister and an Asian Muslim chartered accountant.

The event was held in the very 'civic' East Room of Leeds Civic Hall, where portraits of past Lord Mayors decorate the walls. Following a welcome from our Acting Chair, Dr Simon Phillips, Cllr Neil Walshaw, Chair of the Peacelink Group, spoke briefly about Leeds as a city of peace and diversity. The Revd Tony Bundock, Vicar of Leeds, then said a few words about Dr Peter Bell and introduced the guest speakers.

What followed was a lively, personal, informative and humorous presentation of Manchester's Muslim-Jewish Forum. Taking it in turn to speak, David Berkley and Muhammad Amin told us something of their personal history, described how and why the Forum started, its aims, its achievements, its offshoots and the difference it has made.

One of the Forum's main features is that it is very much a grass roots organisation. It started in 2002 following some public meetings for Manchester Muslims and Jews who had been living side by side for many years but had never socialised. The Forum did not attempt to get representatives from the

different mosques or synagogues; it sought rather to bring together in a comfortable, safe environment people who, while appreciating their differences, wanted to get to know each other and focus on their common interests. The activities are what the members want— whether it's a picnic, a visit or a discussion on post mortems.

The other striking feature is that it is focused on the needs of local Muslim and Jewish communities, not problem issues in other parts of the world. By combating the common heresy that they were born enemies, and by exploring shared values, cultural and social ties are developing between the two communities. Meeting together, getting to know each other as friends and visiting each others' places of worship brings with it increased understanding.



One of the off-shoots has been invitations to talk to groups such as Concord and one of the noticeable differences in Manchester is that Muslim-Jewish activity is now seen as normal. With no prompting from the Forum the King David School, with its Zionist agenda, has twinned with Manchester's Islamic School for girls.

All agreed that Dr Bell would have been delighted to hear this particular presentation in his name. It embodied all that he aimed for when he put so much of his time, effort and energy into establishing and developing the Concord Interfaith Fellowship.

An outline of the lecture is on the Concord website and a printed copy will be given to subscribing members of Concord.

Pagan Rites of Passage

DESPITE the cold and ice and sleet, there was a reasonably good turnout for the Pagan Rites of Passage presentation by Jay Anderson on January 22nd. After saying a little about Paganism in general she moved on to a popular Pagan symbol, the Wheel of the Year, and briefly described its usual significance of depicting eight major Pagan festivals that track the seasons of the year and honour the Goddess and God.

Jay then linked eight festivals to stages in life while pointing out that not everyone passes through each stage in the order given—in fact not everyone celebrates each of the stages. It starts with Baby Naming when family and friends gather to welcome the child into their community. Coming of Age is generally private and gender-specific, around puberty. Initiation/dedication depends on the tradition being followed; some—such as Wicca—have formal initiation ceremonies and procedures while others have none. Handfasting is the Pagan equivalent of marriage, usually associated with Beltane, while Mid-Life is an acknowledgement of what has gone and what can change. Priest/esshood is concerned with taking responsibility of running a group; again this is not something that every Pagan wants to do. Elderhood comes in old age, an

opportunity for grandparenting and passing on knowledge. Some traditions celebrate this as 'saging' or 'croning'. Finally comes Death with the ritual of a funeral or requiem, the celebration of a person's life as the spirit moves on. Memorials are often held at Samhain, the end of October, then it's back to Yule with Re-Birth on the spiral path.



Some Reflections on the Peter Bell Memorial Lecture

by Simon Phillips

BOTH the title and content of the 2013 Peter Bell Memorial Lecture merit the highlighting of several wide-ranging messages for interfaith organisations such as Concord. As a teacher of renown himself, the sadly-missed Peter Bell would have been impressed by the reference to the term 'learning' in the title of Mohammed Amin's and David Berkley's lecture. However, he would also have applauded the many learning points both for ourselves and other organisations within Leeds and beyond that could be taken from the evening.

I have identified ten key learning points in no particular order which are, I believe, of great significance in taking our interfaith activity forward.

1. Inter-Faith Dialogue

In actual fact, the word 'lecture' was a misnomer, with Amin and David delivering a presentation which demonstrated that learning about different faiths can actually be understood through a process of talking together, recognising our similarities and differences (whether in beliefs, practice or world views), and challenging misconceptions in a spirit of open-mindedness and understanding.

2. Community cohesion

Interfaith activity forms part of a broader fabric of community engagement and relations in society. The City of Leeds is at the vanguard of this through—to cite a mere few examples—Leeds City Council's Peacelink Group, its mantle as a City of Sanctuary, and the multicultural and multi-faith City of Leeds School, home to over 70 languages at the last count.

3. Need and Urgency

Perhaps it is a reflection of our society that many interfaith initiatives may respond to particular world events or political doctrines or groups that threaten to divide rather than unite. Whether this may be developments in the Middle East, or the divisiveness of groups such as the English Defence League, only through expressions of interfaith solidarity can we counter the threat posed to religious cohesion.

4. The importance of the local shaping the global

World peace will not be solved by Concord alone (we're not that good!) or any other organisation, but through grass-roots local initiatives we can all play our part in creating that little bit of harmony and goodwill around us. After all, if a butterfly's wings can cause an earthquake, local interfaith activities can make a small, but valued contribution.

5. Focus on what unites us, not divides us

Amin and David freely admitted that the Middle East conflict did have an impact on numbers and even the mutual trust between members. However, collaboration on shared concerns and threats (e.g. ritual slaughter/shechita) can channel the focus to what we can achieve together.

6. Look to the future as well as the past

A large part of our beliefs and practices have their roots in our respective histories and traditions. We have achieved much, strengthening our own faiths, as well as our understanding of one another's faiths. However, whilst reflecting on what interfaith relations have achieved to date with Concord due to celebrate its 40th birthday in a few years, we must also look forward and reflect on what more there is to accomplish together.

7. Learn from others and learn about yourself

One of the 'knock-on effects' of interfaith activity is that by explaining the key tenets of one's faith to others, by implication one engages in a process of self-reflection and development. This is accomplished firstly by conveying how important one's belief and practice is as an individual, and secondly through having to research answers to questions that are unable to be answered at the outset.

8. The importance of engaging young people in interfaith

To quote a line from a popular song, "I believe that children are our future". Yet it is critical that interfaith activity in whatever form, and religious education more broadly, should begin at an early age and be sustained. Sadly the roots of intolerance may lie in entrenched beliefs held since childhood. The sport-based Interactive Project in Leeds, and the twinning of King David High School and the Manchester Islamic High School for Girls, are examples of how young people can be integrated into the vision.

9. Don't plan, just grow

Some organisations start out with a formal 5-year plan, or a particular model upon which activities are to be based. Whilst any organisation needs to have some kind of aims and objectives and strategic vision, interfaith is often most effective in its informal, organic form where the members themselves shape the course of dialogue and understanding.

10. Follow the 'golden rule'

This idea of loving one's fellow man and woman as oneself perhaps underpins all of the above, and returns to the first point of the importance of dialogue in aiding our understanding of what unites, rather than divides us. It also enables me to make reference to the first of Concord's new series of lectures on Ethics and Morals beginning shortly. Watch out for it!

Leeds Equalities Assembly

ON Wednesday January 30th the Equalities Assembly Hub Network—representatives from the different Equality Hubs—met with James Rogers and members of LCC Equality Team. I was there as the representative of the Religion or Belief Hub, even though the R or B Hub meetings are still 'on-hold'.

While the topics under discussion are not particularly 'faith' related, they do affect all communities, so if we want a faith voice to be heard then we need to re-establish the Religion or Belief Hub, make sure we are all included, and elect two or three representatives to attend the Network meetings with Leeds City Council.

- James Rogers, Assistant Chief Executive, started by giving the Assembly a brief update on the Council's budget cuts and their implementation with due regard to the effect these will have on different communities. Discussions on aspects of the cuts will be taking place with residents throughout the city.

- The Disability Hub is trying to get a taxi pick-up/drop-off point accepted for the new south entrance to Leeds railway station. Members of the Equalities Assembly agreed to support their request and a letter will be sent to Leeds Metro.

- The LGBT Hub has provided LC Council with its report on making Leeds an LGBT friendly city, which has been well-received by the Authority and the media.

- Feedback on the Equalities Assembly conference in November, tackling issues surrounding the Welfare Reform Act, was very positive. It was considered a great success and valuable insight into the effects of the changes. A timetable of reform implementations was handed out and we were reminded of the handy Benefit Changes booklet available.

Some churches have already started looking at ways of giving support to those who are most likely to be affected. Hub members will be asked to collect personal stories from people who suffer as a result, monitor the effects then we can work together for something better.

- The Street Light Energy Saving proposal was explained and Hubs requested a consultation workshop with LCC's lighting dept. which was organised for April 15th This was well attended by Hub representatives, some of whom arrived with very negative perceptions. The presentation by a lighting engineer followed by comments and questions

resulted in everyone adopting a positive attitude. Not only will great effort be made to ensure traffic and people safety but, as well as cutting costs, the energy saving will help to reduce the carbon footprint, making Leeds a greener, more efficient city. More consultations will take place before the first selective part-night switch off takes place, then there will be monitoring and feedback sessions.

- Other workshops to be considered include: Changes to Adult/Child social care and Welfare Reform. Each Hub will be asked to send two or three members to the workshops.

Cynthia Dickinson

Inter Faith Network Strategic Review

THE IFN has recently sent out a questionnaire to help develop its work in ways that are appropriate to our changing society. Concord's Executive Committee has made a response.

There was general agreement with the broad purposes of the IFN, accompanied by a little uncertainty and scepticism about how much benefit IFN provides for the public in general and for Concord in particular. It was agreed that the principal benefits are: receiving updates, publications and e-bulletins, being listed as an organisation, attending national meetings, having a vote at the AGM, getting help with funding, being part of wider community and having links with other groups. The creation of Interfaith Week has been beneficial.

Although we did not feel that Concord benefits from membership of the IFN we agreed that the bulletins were occasionally useful and the national meetings were very good ... but only two people per organisation could attend. Regional meetings of a similar quality would be more useful.

The IFN constitution makes membership open to four categories of organisation: national faith community representative bodies (from nine faiths only); local interfaith groups; interfaith organisations; academic and educational organisations. Concord's Executive welcomes the fact that the IFN gives equal voting rights to all member bodies regardless of size. We were generally unhappy about the 'national representative' category. Why have single faith organisations in membership? And why only nine when other faiths, eg Brahma Kumaris and Pagans, are actively involved at local level? The Executive has suggested in its response to the questionnaire that IFN should remove this category of membership, which is the source of conflict and legal challenge at the present time.

There will be a short review of the Questionnaire at our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday June 4th when we will discuss whether or not Concord should renew its membership next year.

Interfaith Calendar of Festivals

Summer 2013

MAY

1 Beltane	Pagan
2 Twelfth Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
3 Holy Friday	Orthodox Christian
5 Easter/Pascha	Orthodox Christian
9 Ascension Day	Christian
15-16 Shavuot	Jewish
19 Pentecost (Whit Sunday)	Christian
23 Declaration of the Bab	Bahá'í
25 Visakha Puja - Buddha Day	Buddhist
26 Trinity Sunday	Christian
29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah	Bahá'í
30 Corpus Christi	Catholic Christian

JUNE

5 Lailat al Miraj	Muslim
7 Sacred Heart	Catholic Christian
13 Ascension	Orthodox Christian
16 Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom	Sikh
21 Solstice, Litha	Pagan
23 Lailat al Bara'ah	Muslim
Pentecost	Orthodox Christian
25 Fast of 17th Tammuz	Jewish

JULY

5 Birthday of Guru Hargobind	Sikh
9 Ramadan begins	Muslim
Martyrdom of the Bab	Bahá'í
15 St Swithin's Day	Christian
16 Tish'a B'Av	Jewish
22 Asalhka Puja Day	Buddhist
23 Birthday of Guru Har Krishen	Sikh

AUGUST

1 Lughnassad, Lammas	Pagan
3 Lailat al Qadr	Muslim
6 Transfiguration	Christian
8-11 Eid al Fitr	Muslim
15 Assumption of the Virgin/ Dormition of the Theotokos	Christian
21 Raksha Bandhan	Hindu
28 Krishna Janmashtami	Hindu

SEPTEMBER

1 Installation of the Guru Granth Sahib	Sikh
5-6 Rosh Hashanah	Jewish
8 Birthday of the Virgin Mary/ Nativity of the Theotokos	Christian
9 Ganesh Chaturthi	Hindu
14 Yom Kippur	Jewish
Holy Cross Day	Christian
19-25 Sukkot	Jewish
22 Equinox, Mabon	Pagan
26 Shemini Atzeret	Jewish
27 Simchat Torah	Jewish
29 Michaelmas	Christian

**Leeds City Council Peacelink Group
and Leeds Metropolitan University
Olof Palme Memorial Peace Lecture**
by COLIN ARCHER (*Sec General of International Peace Bureau*)
in Leeds Civic Hall at 7.30pm
Tuesday May 7th

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