



# Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP  
[www.concord-leeds.org.uk](http://www.concord-leeds.org.uk)

Newsletter - April 2019

## Concord Summer Outing

**A** NEW permanent public museum on the Holocaust was opened at Huddersfield University last September. The exhibition strikes a powerful warning note about the perils of anti-Semitism and all forms of racial prejudice by telling and illustrating the story of Nazi persecution of the Jews, culminating in the Holocaust. It is based around the stories of survivors who made new lives in the North of England and includes evocative artefacts from the camps.

David Randolph-Horn and Hilary Curwen have been to see it and have said it is excellent, and that Concord should make a visit. Entrance for individuals is free. There is wheelchair access and lots of interactive video connecting to Yorkshire based survivors. There is a 12 minute film that is good and a sung lament at the end which David found powerful.

**We intend to visit on Wednesday 14th August from 11.45 to about 13.45, including a sandwich lunch from the**

museum's cafe, or bring your own packed lunch.

You can make your own way there and meet at the museum (Queensgate, Huddersfield HD1 3DH), or travel together on the 11.06 train from Leeds. The journey takes 20 minutes plus a 10 minute walk. Rail fare is £6.60 which reduces to £3.80 with a West Yorkshire Metro pass and a rail pass. There are frequent trains back.

Please let David know if you are coming so that we can have a rough estimate of numbers, as fire regulations limit capacity to 50. You can contact David on 0113 229 7546 or email [davidhrh23@outlook.com](mailto:davidhrh23@outlook.com)



## Some Perspectives on Being Jewish in Leeds Today

**O**UR HOSTS at Sinai Synagogue were very upbeat about life for Jews in Leeds today when they spoke to our March meeting. The event was organised by three of our Jewish members: Val Mogendorf, Hannah Bloom and Hilary Curwen, and it was Hilary who (very ably) chaired it.

The meeting began with a silence in respect for the Muslims who had been murdered by a white supremacist gunman in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Lisa Baker, the President of Leeds Jewish Representative Council, then explained the work of the Council, organising and co-ordinating events for the community of around 10,000 Jews in Leeds. It is the third largest Jewish community in Britain after London and Manchester, and the resources for supporting Jewish life and community here are very good, including several synagogues, sheltered accommodation, a community centre and a welfare board. The youth campus provides a nursery, a primary school and a high school, as well as leisure activities like football, scouts and guides. There is good collaboration in the community, and kosher foods are readily

available in all the big supermarkets as well as Jewish shops.

Ellie Ruhan is the Programming and Events Director of Makor, Leeds, which is the Jewish cultural organisation for Leeds and York. She is of the third generation of Leeds Jews. She explained that there is a diversity of levels of observance among Jews, attendances at synagogue having dwindled over time. Most Jews observe the High Holy Days. A growing number identify themselves as cultural or secular Jews, but their Jewish identity remains important to them, and there is a strong sense of community binding them together as a family with other Jews all over the world, and especially with Israel. Makor organises events for the religious festivals and Israel's birthday, an arts festival, interfaith events and visits to schools to teach children about Jewish life.

Judge Robert Bartfield grew up in Leeds and remembered when the Jewish community here was more than double its present size. He admitted to feeling a bit pessimistic sometimes about the declining attendances at synagogues and thought that the length of the services (up to three hours) was not helping. Nevertheless, he

*Lisa Baker, Hilary Curwen, Ellie Ruhan and Robert Bartfield*



too thought that Leeds was a good place to be a Jew because there was so much mutual support. He gave a brief and interesting outline of his own background from growing up in Chapeltown and keeping his Jewish identity through his years at Leeds Grammar School and then West London. There is a tension between wanting to keep close together in one's community and wanting to reach out and contribute to the wider world.

The speakers then responded to questions from members of the audience about a range of issues. Antisemitism and the increase of hate crimes is a concern, but the synagogues are well protected by a trust. The Hebrew language is taught

in the synagogues and the Jewish schools ensure that children know and understand the basic prayers. Jewish identity is kept very much alive by family rituals, food and festivals practised culturally if not religiously. Wherever Jews go they can be sure that other Jews will welcome them and they will be well fed!

It was surprising how much ground was covered in just over an hour, which passed very quickly. It was a very well organised, illuminating and positive session, much appreciated by the audience. It ended with some very nice refreshments. Many thanks to the organisers, speakers and synagogue authorities for giving us such a good evening. JSS

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## **Leeds City Council Peacelink Group**

**A**T PEACELINK meetings, alongside peace groups such as the World Peace Flame, CND and Leeds Coalition Against the War, there are several faith related groups including Concord, Leeds Quakers, Brahma Kumaris and Churches Together, as well as groups that are concerned about poverty and justice such as Leeds Debt Forum, Leeds Development Education Centre and Fairtrade. Any group or organisation with an ethos of peace and social justice is welcome to send a representative.

There have been two Peacelink meetings so far this year, in January and April, when members of the various organisations reported on their activities and publicised forthcoming events. We heard that Churches Together in LS13 used the World Peace Flame at their Remembrance Service; Garforth WPF had a very successful peace lantern walk in November and will be celebrating the second anniversary of the Flame's installation on April 27th.

Churches Together also brought to our attention the Wave of Peace on September 21st, UN International Peace Day. The idea is for people around the world to observe a minute's silence at 12 noon, so the 'silence for peace' will travel around the globe.

I was able to promote Concord's Annual General Meeting talk on Climate Change in May and our Walk of Friendship in June.

The Leeds International Peace Lecture in February this year, given by Professor Paul Rogers, was entitled *Routes to Peace in an Uncertain World*. In his talk the main causes of conflict were outlined as economic, environmental and security related. The routes to peace could be achieved by regulating the economy to achieve equity, dealing effectively with climate change and moving away from the idea that security depends on keeping the status quo. Rather than stick with the notion of 'Great' Britain we should put more effort into international co-operation and peace-keeping. The event was well attended and the talk was very well received.

The 74th anniversary commemoration of Hiroshima & Nagasaki will take place in Park Square on Friday August 9th from 10.30am, everyone is welcome to come along.

Anthony Clavane, author, journalist and playwright, is booked to deliver the 2020 Peace Lecture.

*Cynthia Dickinson*

# An Evening of Poetry

ON FEBRUARY 18<sup>th</sup> Concord hosted an evening of poetry at the Quaker Meeting House. Around 30 people came along for a calm evening to share the spoken word, poetry and words of prayer and reflection from various works and theologies and religious scriptures. The event was organised by Joyce Sundram and chaired by Imam Adam Aslam. Friends were invited to perform or recite their contributions, which were interspersed with three intervals during which the

for religious thought and ideas in a historically intolerant time, such as poetry or quotations from religious scriptures, as demonstrated by our Concord Executive member Gurmukh. Poetry is important as it captures emotion within a few words. Good poetry, although subjective, does that in that it ignites emotion and captures the human experience in a short space of time.

Our youngest performer was a young man by the name of Zeeshan Ahmed, aged 14, who contributed a series of self-written love poems, which he wished to share publicly for the first time as part of an accredited self development course he was undertaking, which challenged him to write and perform poetry for the night. Zeeshan also spoke about how he was able to overcome emotional heartbreak, family expectations and challenges that come with being a teenager by channelling his anger and his love onto the page, which he called his self-love poetry. It was fantastic to see such confidence and maturity from our youngest participant.



definition, value and the importance of poetry and the sacred word was discussed.

Contributions ranged from a Catholic prayer book to extracts from a book of world poems. Contributors included John Nottingham, Una Parker, a theatrical monologue by the Revd Dr David Randolph-Horn, which added warmth to the evening, and an acclaimed and published Leeds-raised poet by the name of Sitara Khan who read two self-written pieces, one of which captured the motions of Sufi devotees known as the 'whirling dervishes' whilst also pondering the Islamic attributes of God.

The group discussed how poetry as opposed to spoken word offered a sanctuary

Whether self composed or selected from a text, short or long, the plethora of personal contributions really set a scene of sharing words of peace and being in reflective company, in the Concord manner.

*Mohammed Aslam*





Poetry evening: see previous page

## Women Peace-ing Together



**T**HE CONCORD textile group is still meeting at 10.30 on the first Monday of the month at the Arts Library in Leeds Central Library. Currently we and Nisa Nashim are knitting baby clothes and blankets for a Christian charity called Baby Basics. They are based at St Paul's and supply a Moses basket full of 0-3 months essentials to needy mothers who are referred to them by midwives and social services.

*Hannah Bloom*

## Nagar Kirtan, Baisakhi Celebrations 20th April Leeds Sikh Temple

**T**HE NAGAR KIRTAN parade journey to Millennium Square called at a number of other Sikh places of worship en route. The parade is always led by Sikh flag bearers and the Pang Pyara (five faithful ones) followed by the Guru Granth Sahib carriage, with kirtanas singing stanzas of praise of God (Waheguru) from Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Sikh Scriptures). Langar is available for all the people who attended, not just Sikhs. It was well attended, and this year the Lord Mayor of Leeds joined in. It was a warm dry sunny day.

After a gatka (Sikh martial art display) by a group of Sikhs from Manchester, the Nagar Kirtan then headed back to the Sikh Temple at Chapeltown Road.

*Gurmukh Singh Deagon*



# Exploring My Spirituality or Faith

ON APRIL 11<sup>th</sup> members of the Concord Executive the Revd Dr David Randolph-Horne and Imaam Adam Aslam hosted an interactive and musical workshop on 'Exploring My Spirituality or Faith'. The idea originated as a topic of interest covered in Dr D's PhD thesis (as he was known on the evening), which was combined with Adam's experience as a chaplain within a university and youth club setting.

A diverse audience of twenty young participants aged 14 to 25 were in attendance at the Priestley Hall at Mill Hill Chapel, from individuals self-identifying as conservative Muslim, or dual monotheistic faith, Unitarian, Christian, as well as atheists and former members of a

parent faith. The workshop aimed to offer a safe space in which participants were able to work in groups, accompanied by an older facilitator, to explore three key questions of self-reflection. These included the following:

- 'Do you have a spiritual journey to share? — or perhaps you'd like to share what spirituality faith means to you
- 'What do you include in your definition/focus in a spiritual attitude to life?'
- 'How does your spirituality affect your identity? Do you have doubts as a result? Please share.'

Certain participants confessed that they



had never been able to feel safe enough to disclose their fall from faith, their feelings towards the practice of their parent's faith, and felt challenged to define their own spiritual identity, which is fluid, at times naïve. Faith can be taught, or experienced as spirituality, the essence of one's faith.

Threaded throughout the discussions were performances by Pariss Elektra, a singer-song writer and professional performer in the Hare Krishna tradition. Pariss shared her channelling of self-identification and self-worth through her songs of praise which she had written and performed using the guitar and the beauty of her spectacular voice. Her combination of soul music with contemporary RnB had the young people up on their feet and even the good Rev was transcended by her rhythm.

Baha Tashani (aka Mr B.O.T.), TV/radio presenter, musical lyrical activist, and a Sunni Muslim also performed, sharing personal experiences of his youth when he

had explored and at times felt at a distance from his faith. His piece 'I'm a sinner' has a recurring line 'how do they program us, like apples and banana.' Guests continued to question and attempt to work out the meaning of that particular verse.

Clearly song and music offer a strong sense of emotional bond between a story teller and their audience, between individuals sharing personal challenges with faith and the institutions in which those faiths and spiritualities are fostered and nurtured.

We are grateful to six individuals from the Concord Executive for their support in facilitating and encouraging fruitful conversation between the mix of young people on each table of four or five, and, in particular, to chapel minister Joe James, who both acted as host and also slaved away in the kitchen prepping rice and preparing the piping hot buffet. Hats off to the one-man kitchen machine.

*Continued overleaf*



**Exploring My Spirituality or Faith - Continued from page 7**

We are equally grateful to the Leeds Muslim Youth Forum and Leeds Street Team, youth outreach organisations based in Leeds 8, for helping to sponsor and host the event. We believe it is important to consult young people when designing an interfaith event targeted at their

demographic, which in return resulted in very positive feedback throughout the night with particular gratitude for the slap-up vegetarian Asian buffet which naturally offered further time for sharing of ideas and emotions. As we brought the evening to a close, numbers were exchanged and friendships were being formed. We look forward to facilitating further interfaith and intercultural dialogue on the back of this experience.

*Mohammed Aslam*



**My religion is very simple.  
My religion is kindness.**

*Dalai Lama*





## Secretary Required

**C**ONCORD needs a voluntary honorary secretary to share the administrative work of running Concord with the chair or co-chairs, the minutes secretary and the editor. The secretary needs to be a member of Concord, and would become an officer of Concord and a trustee. He/she would be expected to attend four 90-minute Executive meetings a year.

There is a very small amount of correspondence to be dealt with, mainly by email these days, including convening Executive meetings.

The person appointed needs to have good English spelling, punctuation and grammar and the ability to edit other people's writing. He/she should be skilled at using such publishing programmes as Microsoft Word and Publisher to create programmes, posters, AGM papers, etc, and a flair for graphic design would be a great bonus. Access to printing facilities would be an advantage, though not essential.

Willingness to help with the mailing of the newsletter and other papers three times a year would be appreciated.

If you have the skills and experience and can spare a few hours to help, please **contact John Summerwill (ring 0113 269 7895 or email [chair@@concord-leeds.org.uk](mailto:chair@@concord-leeds.org.uk))** to discuss what is involved.

**Quaker Wanted** The Concord Executive would welcome a Quaker member. We meet about four times a year for a 90-minute meeting to make decisions and plan the events that make up Concord's monthly programme. If you are interested, please contact John Summerwill (see contact details above).

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## *Interfaith Bodies in Leeds*

### Concord Interfaith Fellowship

**C**ONCORD Interfaith Fellowship was established over 40 years ago. It is an organisation for individuals who live in Leeds and the surrounding areas. Its primary aim is to improve the religious literacy of its members, through hosting events about individual faith groups, similarities and differences between those groups and their scriptures, beliefs and practices, and foster friendship, respect and tolerance between the many faiths in Leeds.

### Leeds Faiths Forum

Leeds Faiths Forum came into being over 20 years ago, as a strategic umbrella organisation to represent faith organisations within Leeds. It provides an independent point of contact for public and private organisations in Leeds to consult on matters regarding faith and belief. As such, the members who sit on its Executive Board do not primarily represent

themselves but the faith community to which they belong. In order to sit on the board, each individual has to be nominated and approved by their faith organisation.

### Leeds City Council's Religion or Belief Hub

A relative late-comer to the interfaith scene of Leeds, the Religion or Belief Hub was established by Leeds City Council primarily to meet the responsibilities assigned to it by the Equalities Act 2010, in acknowledging the specific needs of citizens who have particular protected characteristics, including Religion or Belief. (Other Hubs also exist for citizens who have disabilities, are elderly, are BME, are LGBT+, are Female (Women & Girls) or identify as Carers). The Religion or Belief Hub is open to any individuals of religion or belief who wish to engage with the Council and the delivery of services it provides, as well as the public and private organisations with which it works closely for provision.

*Jay Anderson*

# Interfaith Theology

*Huston Smith, a leading figure in the history of religions, served as a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. In The Illustrated World's Religions, he argues that the wisdom traditions of the world's faiths provide a framework for understanding the unity of all things and their estimable worth as well as the mystery of the world.*

LOOKING BACK on the road we have travelled, three questions suggest themselves. We have met the world's religions individually; how should we configure them – see them as related to one another? Second, have they anything to say to the world collectively, in concert? And third, how should we comport ourselves in the world they make pluralistic?

To the question of configuration, three answers come to mind... .

The first holds that one religion is superior to the others. There is nothing in this book to suggest that this is the case; but equally, nothing that argues against it, for comparisons have not been its province.

A second and opposite position holds that religions are basically alike. Their differences are incidental compared with the towering truths on which they unite. This appeals to our yen for togetherness, but on inspection it proves to be the trickiest position of the three. For as soon as it moves beyond vague generalities – 'every religion has some version of the Golden Rule' - it founders on the fact that the religions differ in what they consider essential and nonnegotiable.

A third conception likens religions to stained glass windows that refract sunlight in different shapes and colours. This analogy allows for significant differences between the religions without pronouncing on their relative worth. If

peoples of different cultures have different temperaments, God may have taken those into account in addressing them.

Leaving to the reader to configure the religions as seems appropriate, we proceed to the second question. Have they anything to say to the world concertedly - in a single voice? (p, 245)

Mortal life gives no view of the whole; we see things in dribs and drabs, and self-interest skews perspective grotesquely. It is as if life were a great tapestry which we face from its wrong side. This gives it the appearance of a maze of knots and threads that look chaotic. From a purely human standpoint, the wisdom traditions are the species' most prolonged and serious attempts to infer from the hind side of life's tapestry its frontal design. As the beauty and harmony of the design derives from the way its parts interweave, the design confers on those parts a significance they are denied in isolation. We could almost say that seeing ourselves as belonging to the whole is what religion – *religio*, rebinding – is. It is mankind's fundamental thrust at unification.

The first motif – unity – leads to a second. If things are more integrated than they seem, they are also better than they seem. Paralleling the astrophysicists' report that the world is bigger than it looks to our unaided eyes, the wisdom traditions report that it is better than it feels to our unregenerated hearts. And in comparable degree we should add, which means that we are talking about light years. Yahweh, God and Allah; T'ien and the Tao; Brahman and Nirvana, carry the signature of the *ens perfectissimum* – perfect being. This perfection floods the wisdom traditions with an exuberance nowhere else to be found ... .

To the unity of things and their inestimable worth, the wisdom traditions add (as their third surmise) mystery. Murder mysteries have debased that word, for detective mysteries are not mysteries at all for having solutions. A mystery is a special kind of problem which has no solutions because the more we understand it, the more we see that we don't understand. In mysteries, knowledge

and ignorance advance lockstep. As known unknowns become known, unknown unknowns proliferate; the larger the island of knowledge, the longer the shoreline of wonder ... .

Things are more integrated than they seem, they are better than they seem, and they are more mysterious than they seem; this is the vision that the wisdom traditions bequeath us. When we add to this the baseline they establish for ethical conduct and their account of the human virtues, one wonders if a wiser platform for human life has been envisioned. At the centre of the religious life is a particular kind of joy, the prospect of a happy ending that blossoms from necessarily painful beginning, the promise of human difficulties embraced and overcome. In daily life we have only hints of this joy. When they arrive, we do not know whether our happiness is the rarest or the commonest thing on earth, for in all earthly things we find it, give it, and receive it, but cannot hold onto it. When we possess those intimations, it seems in no way strange to be happy, but in retrospect we wonder how such gold of Eden could have been ours. Religiously conceived, the human opportunity is to transform epiphanies into abiding light. (p. 248)

If one of the wisdom traditions claims us, we begin by listening to it. Not uncritically, for new occasions teach new duties; but nevertheless expectantly, realizing that it houses more truth than a single lifetime could fathom, let alone enact.

But in addition to our own traditions, we listen to the faith of others, including the secularists. We listen first because our times require it. Daily the world grows smaller, leaving understanding the only place where peace can find a home. Those who listen work for peace, a peace built not on religious or political hegemonies, but on mutual awareness and concern. For understanding brings respect, and respect prepares the way for a higher capacity, which is love. (p. 249)

*Huston Smith, The Illustrated World's Religions (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994).*

## **Join in the Round-the-World Wave of Peace** **21st September**

**H**OLD EACH OTHER together at 12noon for a one-minute silence

The UN International Peace Day is celebrated annually on 21st September as a way of "strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples". The theme for 2019 is yet to be announced, but will be posted on <https://www.awarenessdays.com/awareness-days-calendar/international-day-of-peace-2019>, where a planning toolkit can also be downloaded.

This is a great opportunity for local action to bring people together, however briefly, in a commitment to peace. Around the world, the day is marked in different ways: peace feasts; peace conferences, peace poles, simple get-togethers.

Whatever local groups may think of doing, it is suggested that we all come together in our local communities and join in the global Wave of Peace – a one minute silence at 12noon local time. We can do this anywhere, with any group large or small. This is not a faith-only event, though it may be faith-led in many places. Can we make a circle of peace around Leeds this September, joining together with friends in local community organisations, in local churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, gurdwaras? Perhaps local shoppers could be encouraged to join in. Set up your own World Peace Flame, with help from the Garforth World Peace Flame group at [bethepeace2017@gmail.com](mailto:bethepeace2017@gmail.com).

In Bramley, for example, in addition to a gathering on Saturday 21st September for the one-minute silence at noon, there will be a Service of Words and Music on the theme of Peace on the next evening, Sunday 22nd September. Details will be posted on the Bramley St Peter's website nearer the time. Visit [www.bramleyparish.org.uk](http://www.bramleyparish.org.uk).

Your thoughts and suggestions would be very warmly welcomed.

Norah Gibson  
[norah.gibson@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:norah.gibson@tiscali.co.uk)

# ***Attitudes to Violence: Brahma Kumari & Sikh***

**I**N JANUARY Concord continued its series of talks on Attitudes to Violence from different faith perspectives at the Brahma Kumari Administrative Centre. We were treated to two very different presentations, one from a Brahma Kumari, Dr Jane Kay, and the other from a Sikh, Dr Jasjit Singh.

Brahma Kumaris subscribe to the view that where violence is used then violence escalates; sorrow and suffering increase with nothing being resolved. However, where other efforts are made, using reconciliation or civil disobedience, great results have been achieved but, apart from Gandhi, these are not often talked about.

Jane told us something of the Brahma Kumari response to violence in its early days as a new religious movement, when sisters and brothers were targets of violent attacks. In such instances resistance was used with intelligence, quick thinking and humour, even spiritual power.

She went on to describe the root of violence as fear—fear of loss, of failure, of aggression, of pain and of death. Sorrow, fear and violence can be seen on three fronts: science, corruption and stress.

Scientific advances may start with the intention of being beneficial to humanity but, because there is a lack of spiritual understanding, many become used in violent and exploitative ways. Corruption can be found everywhere, with large corporations focused on power and greed, failing to take responsibility for the damage they cause to the environment or for exploiting the poor and weak. Then there is stress, in the home and in society where constant financial pressure leaves people with no time for patience, love or joy.

But there is a fourth form of violence, that done towards the self: self criticism, doing things known to be harmful, causing sorrow and suffering then looking for

something or someone to blame.

Projection is one way people have of dealing pain and sorrow, 'It's not me, it's them'. Another way is by suppression or distraction. Brahma Kumaris see a third way, a spiritual response, based on who we are, spiritual beings with a physical side. To end this sorrow and to end violence we need to be filled with love and peace, which is only possible with spiritual help, time and practice.

Sikhs come from a different standpoint, seeing some violence on some occasions as justifiable. Jasjit started by giving a brief description of Sikhism, a monotheistic religion founded by Guru Nanak and explained that Sikhi is a verb meaning the active process of learning through lived experience. Sikh ethics are based on scriptural sources, particularly the Guru Granth Sahib-ji, the teachings of ten Gurus that contain universal moral teaching.

It is the ethical duty of all Sikhs to fight for justice for the weak, the needy and those who suffer injustice and to live according to natural imperative (hukam) performing their duties to the best of their abilities. For Sikhs life itself is sovereign and practice is more important than belief.

In Sikh tradition the key to violence is an ego which says 'I am' separate. Sikhs therefore aim to negate this before it becomes a disease (rog) made worse by the five moral evils. A person motivated by lust, anger, desire to possess, attachment to illusion and pride is called Manmukh, self-willed. But people who live by moral virtues of wisdom, truthfulness, justice, temperance, courage, humility, contentment, rather than simply following rules, are known as Gurmukh, Guru facing. A Gurmukh follows the principle of Miri/Piri, the temporal and the spiritual, developing and improving both self and society.

Jaasjit then posed five questions: Can

violence/killing be justified? Can war be justified? Is martyrdom acceptable? How do Sikhs view nuclear war and weapons of mass destruction? How do Sikhs respond to violence?

Violence is separation, while peace is attained by struggling against separation. As a new religion Sikhs were often persecuted and although they sometimes participated in wars they regarded killing as the last line of defence, motivated by compassion, not to protect possessions or gain power. War can only be justified as a last resort when the innocent and defenceless are under attack from oppressors. Standing by and watching the weak be persecuted, making self-preservation more important than protecting or defending others, would be regarded as a greater evil

Martyrdom, in the Sikh tradition, is acceptable only as an act of resistance

to injustice, not as a means of achieving heaven.

Individuals that carry out acts of violence must take personal responsibility, so pressing a button to kill hundreds or millions, using weapons of mass destruction, could not be justified. Sikh soldiers fight face to face, and once the enemy is injured he becomes a fellow human being, to be helped and cared for.

Homelessness, poverty and hunger are seen as social acts of violence, Sikhs respond by helping the homeless and feeding the hungry—making a difference.

Two very thoughtful and thought-provoking presentations, probably with the greatest contrast so far. But despite the differences there is an underlying similarity in that inner peace is the ultimate aim; this is something not easily achieved, something that requires help from a higher, spiritual power.

*Cynthia Dickinson*



# *Climate Change: “a drama unfolding at a theological scale”*

**T**HIS IS THE TITLE of the talk being given at Concord’s AGM on May 23rd, by my son Robert, at my suggestion. It came as a direct result of the pledge I made following the Climate Change event at Leeds Church Institute in November and the piece I wrote for the January newsletter. In my article I commented that there was nothing in the presentations to indicate a sense of urgency nor any advice on practical actions that faith leaders could make.

In January I asked one of the LCI Climate Change event organisers, Dr Helen Reid, about the pledges made by the event participants, what they were, whether they have been acted on and if there would be a follow-up meeting. Maybe as a result of my questions she circulated the list of pledges with a request for information on any achievements or setbacks. This was followed a few weeks later by reports on the progress that had been made and a copy of a Faith and Climate Change Guide to help with discussions in faith communities. It is a 32-page booklet focusing on the five major faiths but with information and advice suitable for all. (If you would like a copy I can send it by e-mail.) Something that struck a chord for me was a small section on the need for scientific education and explanation, hence my suggestion for a talk at our AGM. I am hoping that Robert will explain some of the science in easy to understand terminology and give us a better understanding not only of what is happening but also what we can do.

And earlier this month I received another message from LCI:

We believe it would be a positive step to support Leeds Climate Commission by engaging in their Carbon Conversations initiative. We could set ourselves a target

of engaging 50 people in these small group discussions at places of worship over the next year. To start us thinking about all this, we are really pleased that Tony Hermann of Zero Carbon Yorkshire will speak to us as a group about Carbon Conversations. At this meeting, we will have the opportunity to reflect on our distinctiveness as people of faith in this as well. We hope you can join us:

Faith Leaders and Climate Change event on Wednesday 26th June from 6:30-8:30 at Leeds Church Institute

6:30pm Food and informal discussion about care for creation and worship

7:00pm Presentation by Tony Hermann and group discussion

Do let us know if you hope to attend: [events@leedschurchinstitute.org](mailto:events@leedschurchinstitute.org)

Finally, I have been amazed at how climate change news has taken off over the past few months. Young Greta Thunberg with her solitary SchoolStrike for Climate becoming a global phenomenon, her example now followed by millions of students; Extinction Rebellion’s mass protest in London getting headline coverage on radio and TV as well as the press; David Attenborough and even the Governor of the Bank of England are spreading the message that something must be done—we need to change.

Most faiths have published a Response to Climate Change but as yet I have not found a significant faith push for action. I hope I will soon be proved wrong.

*Cynthia Dickinson*

**“It can be helpful to think of humanity like a pearl necklace. Each human being is a pearl with distinct characteristics, but underneath there is a string that ties us all together, invisible to the naked eye.” - Gudjon Bergman**

# Sympathy with Sri Lanka

## The City & People of Leeds

**T**HE LEADER of the Leeds Council, Cllr Judith Blake, has written to the Sri Lankan High Commissioner on behalf of the City following the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks on churches in Colombo. Her letter read as follows:

Dear High Commissioner Gunasekara,  
On behalf of the City and people of Leeds I would like to express our sincerest condolences for the terrible loss of life in the terrorist attacks that took place on Easter Sunday against Christian Churches and hotels in Colombo and elsewhere.

Your Excellency we stand in solidarity with the Sri Lankan people at this difficult time. We are united in our opposition to all acts of hatred and terror. For such an attack to take place as Christians around the world celebrated one of the most important festivals in Christianity seeks to sow discord between people of different faiths.

Our thoughts are with the victims, their families, the injured and all the people of Sri Lanka.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor Judith Blake**

**Leader of Leeds City Council**

## The Inter Faith Network

The Inter Faith Network leaders also put out a statement, which said:

Following the barbaric Easter Day terrorist attacks on churches and other properties in Sri Lanka, many people in the UK have been coming together to express their condolences and stand in solidarity.

As we said after the terrorist attacks in Pittsburgh USA and Christchurch New Zealand – such attacks on places of worship are a reminder of the need to condemn extremist violence in the strongest terms and to stand together and to continue to work together with

ever greater urgency against ignorance, prejudice and hatred. Hatred targeting any community because of its faith and belief is a scourge that cannot be tolerated. There must be freedom for all communities to worship and practise their faith freely and without fear.

**The Inter Faith Network Co-Chairs and Faith Communities Forum Moderators**

## The Government

In an open letter the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government, wrote to Sri Lankans in Britain and throughout the world, saying:

The UK government stands with you and your friends and relatives at this difficult time...

Terrorist attacks like these are intended to create tension between communities. However, as following earlier acts of hatred and violence, they have completely failed to achieve the divisions they seek. Muslims around the world have expressed revulsion at the attack and solidarity with Christian communities mourning the loss. In traumatic moments such as this it is more vital than ever that that we collectively recommit to remaining united as a society and resolute as an international community, in the face of attempts to tear us apart.

The UK government is committed to tackling anti-Christian hatred around the world.... Our position is clear that all religious minorities should be fully protected, but we know that in some countries Christian communities can bear the brunt of this risk and we need to explore what more we could do across the world.

There is no evidence to suggest that churches or other places of worship here in Britain are at risk, but we urge you to stay vigilant and speak to the police if you notice any suspicious activity...

# Twining in Lambeth

**I**N MARCH the Archbishop of Canterbury invited Christian and Muslim leaders to a conference at Lambeth Palace to promote twinning arrangements between churches and mosques. Concord members Adam Aslam, Bob Shaw and Joyce Sundram were there.

Twinning partnerships already exist in some places, like the one in Kirklees promoted by Imaam Irfan Soni and the Revd Mark Umpleby.

The proposal of the conference was to give awards for three levels of partnership:

- bronze award for partnerships who pledge and undertake two annual meetings, one joint project and a respect/support for one another in times of joy and hardship.
- silver award for partnerships who pledge and undertake four annual meetings, undertake one joint annual project, arrange two congregational visits, actively promote their partnership to the wider community whilst continuing to respect each other's faiths beliefs, including in times of need.
- gold award can be achieved by undertaking six annual meetings, two joint annual projects, four congregational visits, whilst fostering a respect for each other's faith in times of need and making their partnership known to both the wider community and governing bodies. Additionally, they would agree to host, facilitate another church mosque for a study visit.

The program itself began with a shared Holy Communion in the Chapel followed by the sharing of a delicious vegetarian lunch in the fabulous Guard Room.

Speakers included Sheikh Abdul Hakeem Murad (AKA Timothy Winters), the Dean of Cambridge Muslim College; the Revd Jessica Foster, a lecturer at

Queens Foundation, Birmingham; Lord Nick Bourne, who shared his experience of travelling the country, meeting with interfaith partnerships and experiencing the positive result of faiths coming together through team work.

*Mohammed Aslam*





# Inter Faith Network Conference

## Peterborough Cathedral 27th March

*GURMUKH SINGH DEAGON attended this year's IFN Conference at Peterborough on behalf of Concord and this is his report.*

**T**HE EVENT was held in the 900 year old cathedral. The whole day was informative. After registration and refreshments, the conference was opened by the IFN Co-Chair Jatinder Singh Birdi with members of the local Peterborough interfaith council. The Chief Executive of Peterborough, Gillian Beasley, spoke and she was very supportive of the IFN and the third sector faith organisation. More than 40 delegates attended, most of them from the south of the country.

Peterborough is one of five areas around the country that the Government is working with to develop its local integration plans as part of its Integrated

Communities strategy.

It was really great to hear that other interfaith organisations see benefits of open days and interfaith walks as ways of encouraging learning and positive interaction between communities.

Hate crime was also discussed, including an announcement from the Home Secretary about additional funding including training for faith organisations. More details will be given in July. It is said it will be a little easier to obtain funding for the right initiatives.

After a vegetarian lunch, afternoon workshops started. There were six discussion groups. Having done your initial registration you had to select two main subjects that you were interested in and a further two as back up. After these discussion groups member the discussion group had one minute to provide feedback of subject discussed to all the delegates.

I was involved with Groups 1 and 4 and what came out of these discussions was that lots of the things we all do irrespective of which part of the country you were from are similar.

Some of the key ideas developed in the conference were:

1. Developing local interfaith organisation programmes with impact.
2. Open door and faith trails: Creating opportunities for interfaith learning.
3. Local Interfaith groups connecting with young people.
4. Dialogue amid division.
5. Making the case for importance of your work.
6. Working in partnership with other towards shared goals.

The conference closed at 16.00.

*Gurmukh Singh Deagon*



# From Organised Religion to Inclusive Religious Spirituality

*by Belal Ahmed, a religious but religiously unaffiliated and former Muslim*

## About me

I WAS BROUGHT UP in a traditional Islamic culture (Sunni, Deobandi), where I practised the religion of Islam devoutly up until I was 21 years of age. I then began questioning the dogma associated with the Islamic faith, along with its exclusivist and supernatural claims. Finding flaws in organised religion from a philosophical perspective, I left religion and took the label of an atheist. Further research into religious psychology and existentialism allowed me to become more receptive to a new perspective of religion and spirituality. Given a number of enlightening subjective experiences, I realised spirituality is a path I need to take, and metaphorical religious language is the structure that could help me navigate my way.

## What does it mean to be spiritual for you as a student exploring faith?

Personally, spirituality is what gives me meaning and direction in life. Spirituality contextualises every moment into a broader cosmic picture, and I begin to feel that everything I do is significant. However, this significance is never too overbearing since I am the reference point, and I only do what I conceive of to be manageable. Spirituality comes in many different forms, from esoteric religious rituals, to modern versions of self-help and self-love. What being spiritual means to me is being truly honest and authentic with yourself and to begin to question the stories we've been telling ourselves about ourselves, and what society has told us. Being spiritual means to know one's place in the universe, but to also see oneself in others, and others in oneself. Spirituality doesn't have to mean that one lives a minimalist lifestyle or fasts every other day. Spirituality just means that one is conscious of his/her journey into becoming a more complete human being, thus a more actualised

being. During that process, there is a lot of self-doubt, ego deaths, self-deception and paradoxes, but in the end, going through the process grants a person wisdom that no textbook could ever teach. Since the mind is overly concerned with the intellect in the modern day, it is easy to think that the intellect can know the answer to everything including the answer to "why is there something rather than nothing?" and "does God exist?" and "why is there evil and suffering?" However, these questions can be maddening if taken too seriously. Being spiritual is coming to know the answer to all of the hard questions that philosophers are still debating, except this knowing comes in the form of conscious experience.

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## *Light for Leeds and a Faith exhibition*

### Advanced Notice ....

PLANS are underway for the next Light for Leeds event at Kirkstall Abbey on the last day of Interfaith Week, Sunday November 17th . There will be plenty of things to see and do in the wonderful grounds and ancient buildings as well as different faith and interfaith stalls plus welcome refreshments in the Visitors Centre.

There are also plans for a year-long exhibition on the theme of Light (relating to faiths) in Abbey House Museum. There will be displays of 'light' objects from different faith traditions, videos of faith people sharing their stories, some films of faith and interfaith activities in the city—which could include Concord's Walk of Friendship and the Light for Leeds event. A very interesting suggestion was to have one of the installations showing daily and seasonal celebrations linked to the sun and the moon.

## Obituary

### Revd George Lovell PhD DD

CONCORD lost another member last October when the Revd Dr George Lovell died rather suddenly at the age of 89 after a period of illness.

George, the son of a miner, was born in 1929, brought up in Rishworth, Lancashire, and trained as a mechanical engineer. After his apprenticeship as a fitter with a couple of firms in Accrington, he was serving an apprenticeship in draughtsmanship when he was called up for National Service with the Royal Engineers. It was during his voyage to Egypt and stationing there that he had an evangelical conversion and became a lay preacher. Then, after completing his National Service, he began to feel a call to the ordained ministry of the Methodist Church. By this time he was married to Molly, and when he began his ministerial training in 1952 at Richmond Theological College he was the first married man to be admitted to training. He gained a BA in Theology.

George served as a minister in Carmarthen and then in two London circuits, where he became very interested in church youth work and undertook part-time training as a teacher, gaining a PGCE, followed by research for his PhD. This he did on top of a full-time active church ministry, for he was a complete workaholic and threw himself with utter dedication into anything he did.

His research interest was in church and community development through a non-directive approach. What that means, briefly, is that he believed passionately that churches and other communities function best when people listen to each other and work together cooperatively to clarify and agree their goals and priorities. The role of leaders is not to tell people what they ought to do, but to enable them to find out the solutions that will work for them in their own circumstances. It is not

easy: it requires a lot of patient analysis, reflection, weighing up of options and willingness to listen seriously to what others have to say.

In 1976, George gave up full-time church ministry (though he continued to preach and minister informally) to found, with others, a research and training organisation called Avec, where these principles were taught and used in consultations with church leaders from many churches.

When Avec folded in 1994 because of lack of funding, George was appointed as a Research Fellow at Westminster College, Oxford, where he wrote several scholarly books on Church & Community Development, which are still in use as textbooks for ongoing courses.

He retired to Leeds in 1998 to be nearer to his daughter and her family, continuing for a while to teach MA courses at Cliff College in Derbyshire. A highlight of these retirement years was the award of a Lambeth DD by the Archbishop of Canterbury in recognition of his contribution to church development across the denominations.

The death of Molly was a great blow to him. He pressed on with writing an enormous memoir of his life and work in his closing years.

George's interest in interfaith dialogue grew with his membership of Concord in the last decades of his life and was a natural extension of his convictions about dialogue, cooperation, listening to the wisdom of others, combined with a liberal Methodist theology that encourages open-mindedness. He came to reject the Church's traditional expectation and hope that one day all the world would become Christian. He recognised that God's Spirit is at work in all people of faith.

George Lovell was the kindest, most gracious and trustworthy of men, a natural pastor to whom people could easily open their heart. He is sorely missed by a multitude of people whose lives he touched.

*John S. Summerwill*



# Calendar of Festivals

## Summer 2019

*Baha'i, Jewish and Pagan festivals usually begin on the evening before the given date.*

### MAY

1 Beltain	Pagan
2 Last day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
Yom HaShoah	Jewish
6 Ramadan begins	Muslim
9 Yom Ha'Atzmaut	Jewish
12-18 Christian Aid Week	Christian
19 Visakha Puja - Buddha Day	Buddhist
23 Declaration of the Bab	Bahá'í
Lag B'Omer	Jewish
29 Lailat-ul-Qadr	Shi'a Muslim
29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah	Bahá'í
30 Ascension of Jesus	Christian
31 Lailat-ul-Qadr	Suni Muslim

### JUNE

5-7 Eid ul Fitr	Muslim
9 Pentecost	Christian
9-10 Shavuot	Jewish
16 Guru Arjan martyrdom	Sikh
Trinity Sunday	Christian
20 Corpus Christi	Catholic Christian
21 Summer Solstice, Litha	Pagan
28 Lailat al Qadr	Shi'a Muslim

### JULY

4 Ratha Yatra	Hindu
6-7 Chokor	Buddhist
10 Martyrdom of the Bab	Bahá'í
16 Asalha Puja Day	Buddhist

### AUGUST

1 Lammas / Lughnassad	Pagan
6 Transfiguration	Orthodox Christian
11 Tish'a B'av	Jewish
10-14 Hajj	Muslim
Waqf al Arafa	Muslim
12-15 Eid ul Adha	Muslim
14 Raksha Bandhan	Hindu
15 Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary	Catholic Christian
Dormition	Orthodox Christian

20 Eid ul Ghadeer	Shi'a Muslim
23 Krishna Janmashtami	Hindu
27 to Sep 3 Paryushan Parva	Jain

### SEPTEMBER

1 Hijra (New Year)	Muslim
Installation of Guru Granth Sahib Sikh	
2 Ganesh Chaturthi	Hindu
3 Samvatsari	Jain
8 Nativity of Virgin Mary	Christian
10 Ashura	Muslim
14 Holy Cross Day	Christian
23 Equinox - Mabon	Pagan
29 - Oct 7 Navaratri	Hindu
29 Michaelmas	Christian
30 - Oct 1 Rosh Hashanah	Jewish

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Editor: John S. Summerwill 0113 269 7895 [editor@concord-leeds.org.uk](mailto:editor@concord-leeds.org.uk)