



Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP
www.concord-leeds.org.uk

Newsletter - April 2020

Coronavirus

GIVEN THE CURRENT SITUATION concerning the Coronavirus pandemic, and following government advice, Concord's programme of events has been cancelled for the time being. None of the meetings previously advertised will be happening.

The AGM, which would usually be held in May, has been deferred until September at the earliest. Monday 14th is a possibility if government has given the go-ahead by then.

We have already booked the Civic Hall Banqueting Room for the Annual Peace Service on 14th October and are hoping that that event will be able to happen.

We had lined up a lot of events for the spring and summer which will now be postponed until the winter. They will include a new series on Holy Places and further discussions in our ongoing series on Attitudes to Wealth and Attitudes Towards Sexuality in different religious traditions.

Stay safe and keep well ... and enjoy the poem on the next page, circulated by our World Peace Flame friends in Garforth.

Closing meditation in the Chapter House of Kirkstall Abbey at last November's Light for Leeds event.



Lockdown

YES there is fear.
Yes there is isolation.
Yes there is panic buying.
Yes there is sickness.
Yes there is even death.

But, they say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family
around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery
to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her
number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone
to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues,
Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick,
the weary

All over the world people are
slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking
at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking
up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.

So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be
loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be
meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease
of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth
of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to
how to live now.

Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of
your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed
by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

Fr. Richard Hendrick, OFM

Buddhists in Holbeck



THOSE WHO MISSED our January visit to the new Jamyang Buddhist Centre in Holbeck missed a treat. David Midgeley gave us a superbly clear, concise and engaging explanation both of the Centre and of Buddhism.

Jamyang is a movement in the Tibetan Mahayana tradition, which first began to appeal to westerners in the 1970s and came to Leeds in 1996. The community grew slowly and has met at several locations. From 2009 onwards it was at St Paul Street in central Leeds. Eighteen months ago it bought the present building, a former clothing warehouse with a huge amount of space on two floors. Some of it is rented out. At present the ground floor provides a spacious entrance foyer, a café area and shop and a large meditation hall with a shrine. The long term plan is for the meditation hall, library and some residential accommodation to occupy the upper floor, with the downstairs area devoted to community use.

The café, which is open daily, already draws in some people from the neighbourhood—a challenging area with much social deprivation. The centre is providing support for people with mental health problems, classes on mindfulness and Tai Chi. The shop has charity goods as well as Buddhist artefacts, books and



cards. The exciting project of the Centre is to make itself a community hub for the non-Buddhist community of Holbeck as well as a place of learning, retreat, meditation and worship for Buddhists.

In the shrine area David explained the significance of the various objects and gave us a fascinating and masterly commentary on the Wheel of Life wall hanging that encapsulates the central philosophy of Buddhism. He spoke too of the connection between this branch of Buddhism and the Dalai Lama. An excellent evening!

JSS



Light for Leeds Exhibition

FOLLOWING ON FROM several successful years of Light for Leeds during Interfaith Week, museum curator and event organiser, Patrick Bourne, suggested that the multi-faith planning group could put on a year-long exhibition in Abbey House Museum. There would be displays of artefacts representing light in our faith traditions, a film on the subject, featuring local faiths and places of worship, plus a specially commissioned art installation. Throughout 2019 the

planning group, including several Concord members, met to discuss and choose the film-maker and artist as well as select and label our chosen items for display.

The exhibition, with the new Light for Leeds logo, was installed in early February, launched on February 13th with a preview for contributors, then opened to the public the following day.

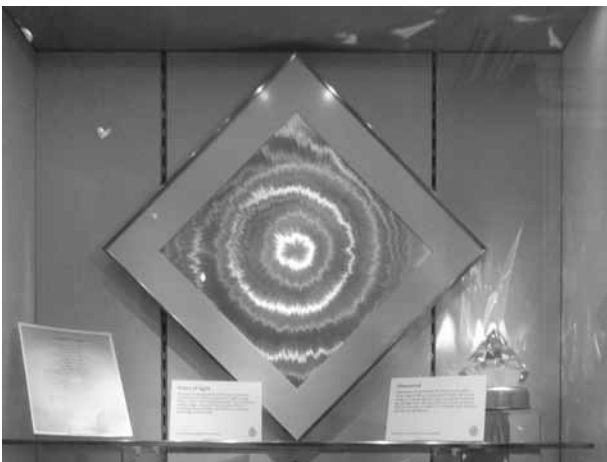
The 'light' items can be seen in cabinets in the upstairs community area of the museum; the film, including interviews with people you might recognise, features Concord's Walk of Friendship that took place in Beeston on June 16th last year, and the art installation, *Islanded*, is based on a lighthouse, a universally positive symbol of light for guidance and safeguarding.

I mentioned in the previous newsletter that the exhibition will be there for a year, until 24th January 2021 I just hope there will be opportunities for you to pay a visit before this year is out. The Abbey itself is well worth seeing and Abbey House is a delightful little museum. Our Light for Leeds exhibition is the icing on the cake.

I took some photos but had difficulty as the room was rather crowded., and they look much better in colour; have a look on the Concord website.

Cynthia Dickinson

Left: Christianity, Brahma Kumari





Above: Humanist, Sikh and Hindu display
Below: Lighthouse installation



Above: Jewish display



Above: World Peace Flame



Below: Pagan display



Interfaith Theology

Hendrik Vroom, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the Free University, Amsterdam, argues in Religions and the Truth that religions are multi-centred world-views. Thus it is questionable whether it is possible to speak of a single phenomenon occurring among all religions. Rather, each faith contains basic insights through which adherents believe they experience the transcendent.

1. It is incorrect to characterize religions in terms of a single basic conviction; there are a number of basic insights in which people believe they experience the transcendent. The truth claims of religion are therefore not monolithic and uncompromisingly opposed, but they display family resemblances, showing both similarities and differences.
2. Each tradition has an idea of the transcendent, of humanity, and of the world, which has emerged from such basic insights. The configuration which the basic insights receive in a tradition is attained in a hermeneutical process which colours the basic insights. Corresponding beliefs from one tradition cannot, therefore, simply be equated with those from another tradition.
3. Since people have different insights concerning the nature of the transcendent, man and the world, the question of truth is at stake; people claim that they know reality as it really is.
4. Conflicting views do not eliminate the fact that people agree on a number of points. Examples already mentioned concern the createdness of the world, dependence on grace, the necessity to transform one's ego, and the emphasis on a benevolent disposition towards fellow beings. This mutual concurrence is often not a matter of assent, but of criss-cross family resemblances. Religious phenomena resemble each other closely, yet they remain different. One must take into account that such similarities do not always apply to each religion as a whole, but to particular currents within a tradition which may resemble a current in another tradition
5. The verdict which one has about other religious traditions is implied in one's own view. It is said, for instance, that the kingdom of God comes by love and self-sacrifice, there will be little appreciation for some Islamic currents which teach the idea of holy war. It is believed, as in many Hindu and Buddhist currents, that every person must break his karma by way of so many lives, one will not have much confidence in Christians who see the church as an institute of salvation. One's own view naturally determines

one's appreciation for other traditions

6. The criteria for the assessment of religious truth claims are not of such a nature that what is true and what is untrue can be established inter-subjectively. The criteria do, however, offer minimal requirements which religious claims to truth must meet. The decisive demands are that they do justice to experience and that they disclose the fact that they speak concerning the transcendent. The problem is that religious experience pure and simple does not exist; experience is always interpreted. Traditions nurture certain interpretations. The discussion about the truth of religious insights is therefore concerned with experiences together with their interpretation.
7. When discussing beliefs, the role which doctrine plays in a tradition must be taken into account, as well as the distinction between two levels of religious knowledge. All traditions possess beliefs, even though the heart of religion everywhere is lived faith (*religio vera*). The formulation of belief springs from lived faith and cannot be separated from this experiential basis. Discussion of beliefs which one has not lived remains something outward and superficial. As a consequence, those who state that interreligious dialogue is a process are right, and those who believe that the assessment of beliefs is a matter of public, philosophical and academic study err, even though religious studies and the philosophy of religion can play an important role in such dialogue
8. Since people claim to know something about the nature of the transcendent in stating their religious beliefs, and about the right interpretation of the world and of man, they are not only different and (perhaps) in conflict, but can also be complementary. Just as religious traditions take stock of the reality presented by the exact sciences, they can likewise take into account each other's insights. They can, at least, apply, integrate interpretations from other traditions into their own world-view. This integration is not adaptation to a single centre of integration or basic conviction, but integration within a configuration of basic insights.
9. Since religion has a number of aspects, differences of opinion about certain beliefs can be accompanied by agreement in respect of particular moral convictions. Differences of opinion do not exclude mutual respect and cooperation. (pp. 383-5)

Hendrik Vroom, *Religions and the Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989): quoted in Dan Cohn-Sherbok's *Interfaith Theology: A Reader* (OneWorld, 2001)

Buddhist and Bahá'í Attitudes Towards Wealth

THE 2020 NEW SERIES in Attitudes Towards Wealth in World Faiths began with the Bahá'í and Buddhist perspectives presented by Mark Hellaby and David Midgeley. This took place at Roscoe Methodist Church on the 11th February 2020 with approximately 20 participants. After a lovely welcome by the Methodist hosts, the Revd David Randolph-Horn, chair of the event, invited participants to join in a moment of silence.

Mark Hellaby (above), representative of the Bahá'í Community, eloquently enriched his presentation with Holy Writings from the Bahá'í Scriptures to cover different principles under the topic of Wealth. Wealth was firstly explained as having both material and spiritual forms. Materially both shall perish: "should prosperity befall thee, rejoice not, and should abasement come upon thee, grieve not, for both shall pass away and be no more". Therefore, we should not attach ourselves to either. In this light, poverty as in detachment from this world is seen as a divine richness – poor in the things of this world and rich in things of God's world: "to be poor in all save God is a wondrous gift, belittle not the value thereof, for in the end it will make thee rich in God". Spiritually, poverty is an imperfection to wealth the same way weakness is to strength. As one of the Bahá'í daily prayers reveals: "I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness, and to Thy Might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth".



Following on from that Mark presented the principle of detachment from physical wealth reflected by acts of generosity – "be generous in prosperity and thankful in adversity...". For wealth to be perceived as a blessing, it needs to be accompanied with detachment: "deprive not yourself from His wonderful bounties". Interestingly, material wealth is necessary provided it is appropriately acquired. The wealth Bahá'u'lláh recommends is the one owned by a livelihood, through crafts and professions: "it is incumbent upon you to engage in one profession" as service to mankind, and then one is asked to spend their riches "on himself, his family and the poor" as "to give and to be generous are attributes of Mine".

The station of giving is the greatest of stations, the best way to give thanks, show gratitude, is by giving. Spending one's wealth on the poor implies a duty of care. The poor too who give generously will be rewarded – "place your trust in God...".

Finally, the abolition of the extremes of poverty and wealth was presented as one key principle of the Bahá'í Faith. Building on from the principles shared above this implies that rules and laws should be regulated. And an overall measurement of 'moderation in all things' applied. In the Bahá'í Faith there is also what is known as the law of Huququ'llah, the Right of God, as means of purification of one's wealth by offering 19% of an individual's surplus to the Cause and this is then used for charitable purposes.

The following quotation of Bahá' u'lláh summarises the various points made on our relationship with wealth: "Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves".

David Midgeley started to share the Buddhist perspective by making a parallel with what had been described by the Bahá'í perspective particularly on the points of moderation and detachment. On moderation, David shared the belief that 'the path to enlightenment is the middle path between extremes'. Suffering has causes and everything that occurs has a cause. There is an entrenched belief in Buddhist causality, known as Karma, which is qualitative in its essence and relates to experiences fundamentally based on two types of mental states and actions that lead to opposite actions and thoughts: happiness as a virtuous state and suffering as a non-virtuous state.

Wealth, however contrary to what we are led to believe in current society, does not lead to happiness. That association leads us astray. Bearing this in mind, David moved on to describe the theory of attachment. The fixed idea that the external cause (wealth) will lead to happiness describes an unhealthy attachment which will in turn lead to suffering instead. David at this point, enlightened us on the root causes of suffering, also known as delusions: attachment, hatred and ignorance. Followed by the ten non-virtuous actions which are very much aligned with the spiritual principles of most religions such as the Ten Commandments, *e.g.* 'thou shall not kill'. These ten non-virtuous actions create negative karma leading to suffering: killing, harming, stealing, sexual misconduct, coveting, ill will (prejudices) and four actions of speech *i.e.* lying, harsh speech, idle gossip, creating disharmony with our speech. Motivation for the actions is of the most importance. Central emphasis should be given to looking within the motivations for everything one does and to seeking

inner wisdom to decide ethical and moral dilemmas of right and wrong and, in particular, what actions will lead to the path of happiness.

With that comes the principle of renunciation. To follow the Buddhist path of renunciation would be to give up, to let go of material things and one may choose to do that at some point in their life. In principle renunciation is a combination of moderation and detachment in realising that we already have everything we need, that what we have already is good. Like Bahá' u'lláh's teachings, Buddha advocated that people acquire their wealth through honesty. And what one receives one should give back. Therefore, what creates happiness is acting in ways that benefits others.

In open dialogue with one another we discussed prescriptions to become detached or to get rid of one's riches in order to abolish the extremes of poverty and wealth. We also had the opportunity to expand our understanding on how both communities are distinctively financed. In the Buddhist community there is the tradition to give offerings to the Sangha. Making these offerings will ultimately benefit one's soul and attract positive karma. In countries such as Tibet, China, Burma, and Korea, Buddhist buildings and living are supported by the governments and/ or rulers and begging for voluntary offerings is traditionally practised. In the Bahá'í community donations are only accepted by Bahá'ís, donations are given voluntarily and are part of an individual relationship of the person with God.

It was delightful to hear that, in essence, both Bahá'í Faith and Buddhism value the importance of detachment, moderation and above all generosity. The spirit with which offerings are given *i.e.* with radiance, joy, humility is of the utmost importance rather than the amount given. And they both equally advocate that selfless giving contributes to the enlargement of the heart and the spirit.

Raquel Silvestre

Carbon Conversations

THE CLIMATE CRISIS is still with us and still needs to be addressed. One of the ways this can be done is by engaging in Carbon Conversations, a specially devised series of meetings for participants to talk about the issues in a constructive way.

In November and December 2019 Jay Anderson and I attended such a series then followed it up with the Facilitator course in January this year. Our facilitators were Jemima Parker of LCI and Anita Shaw. Topics under discussion included: Looking for a low-carbon future; Energy at home and work; Travel and transport; Consumption and waste; Talking with friends and family.

Jay and I will be leading a Taster Session on a low-carbon future at Concord's Annual General Meeting, which has been postponed until (maybe) September. Meanwhile you might like to find your carbon footprint by using the simple on-line calculator at <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk> then see what you need to do to reduce your carbon emissions.

I have a Catholic friend in Brighton who sent me a 12-page booklet she picked up in church. *Journey to 2030 - the Year of the Cockerel* is intended as a wake-up call for congregations to take notice of the Papal Encyclical, *Laudato Si'* - care for our common home. Although it is Christian-based it has plenty of good information and advice whatever your faith. And I have a pdf version that I could e-mail to you if you drop a line to concordwomen@phonecoop.coop

Cynthia Dickinson



Faith in Fairtrade

FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT takes place every year during the last week of February and the first week of March. It is a time when Fairtrade towns, cities, regions, churches, synagogues, mosques and schools try to do a bit extra in their efforts to promote Fairtrade and its impact on those who produce our food, drink, clothes and other commodities.

This year the focus has been on cocoa farmers, particularly women. In Leeds we had a Schools Conference in the Civic Hall where primary and secondary pupils came to lead and/or take part in workshops that were educational, inspiring and great fun. The children are from different backgrounds, faiths and cultures but they share a common goal - working towards social justice, globally and locally.

Leeds has been a Fairtrade city for 16 years and is proud of its Fairtrade schools, businesses and places of worship ... but could do with more. And that means more individuals; Fairtrade is a grassroots organisation. It starts with people like you and me, looking for Fairtrade tea, coffee, sugar, orange juice ... then persuading our place of worship and meeting groups to make the change.

For more information about Fairtrade, see <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>

To find out about Leeds activities check our website: <https://www.fairtradeleeds.org.uk/>

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Youth Perspective
**Language of
Heaven**
by Belal Ahmed

THE UNDERLYING METAPHORS of language can reveal the state of the collective consciousness. A language obsessed with grasping concepts, to paying attention to this or that, to defending and countering arguments, is a language based around a spiritual state of greed, possession, ego, and combativeness. A language centred around higher states, of beauty, love and wisdom, of essentially poetry reflects our better angels.

It does start with the individual and our relationship with each another. How we speak to one another plays a larger role in creating the future than we can probably comprehend. It's less about trying to get our point of view across, and more about making sure that the road of communication between one another is built on trust and love. There is no need to build trenches and become so defensive. Rather we are sending gifts to the world with our every action.

A difference between East and West, at least from the perspective of the East, is that the East philosophises from a wider spectrum of consciousness than the West. The West focuses on that level of consciousness which seeks to possess and manipulate matter. This focus of the West allowed the scientific enterprise to flourish, however, its technical language, concerned with materialism and commerce, began to inculcate into metaphysics and society at large.

Many people in the West consequently believe that truth can be reduced to scientific inquiry, or at least that truth is best understood through scientific inquiry, accessible and comprehensible to anyone with the appropriate scientific literacy. The more deluded idea is that the arts can be hand-waved away and labelled as mere by-products of evolution, thus matters concerning meaning and god become secondary to the human pursuit of worldly success, inevitably leading to nihilism and depression.

However, there is a language beyond all languages: the language spoken by the prophets, mystics, poets, artists and lovers; the language of heaven; the language which points to the signifier of all signifiers; the language which anyone with an intuition recognises; the language which acts as a catalyst for epiphanies; the language of life, and not the language of mere facts and dead matter; the language of eternity; the language which never seems to be exhausted in its gifts; the language of complete transparency which vibrates on every level of being. Such a language is veiled by its very nature; that of subtlety of which the hard-hearted fail to comprehend. And so they say, poetry and art are not for everyone. They speak falsehood. Every being taking part in the cycle of life has a gift to share with the world, whether it's a smile or the way in which one says 'thank you'; something that reflects the truest and realest part of a person, consciously or unconsciously.

So guard the tongue and speak only that which is in the heart. Just as the persistent flow of water cuts through the hardest of rocks, so too does the pouring of the heart cut through hard-heartedness.

Calendar of Festivals Spring - Summer 2020

APRIL 2020

2 Ramanavami	Hindu
3 Laylat al Miraj	Muslim
5 Palm Sunday	Christian
8 Hanuman Jayanti	Hindu
9-11 Theravadin New Year	Buddhist
9-15 Pesach	Jewish
9 Mahavir Jayanti	Jain
Maundy Thursday	Christian
10 Good Friday	Christian
12 Easter	Christian
Lag B'Omer	Jewish
14 Baisakhi (Vaisakhi)	Sikh
19 Pascha - Easter	Orthodox Christian
21 Yom HaShoah	Jewish
First Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
Lailat al Bara'ah	Muslim
23 St. George's Day	Christian
24 Ramadan begins	Muslim
29 Ninth Day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
Yom Ha'Atzmaut	Jewish

MAY 2020

1 Beltane	Pagan
2 Last day of Ridvan	Bahá'í
7 Visakha Puja - Buddha Day	Buddhist
21 Ascension of Jesus	Christian
23 Declaration of the Bab	Bahá'í
29 Ascension of Baha'u'llah	Bahá'í
29-30 Shavuot	Jewish
31 Pentecost	Christian

JUNE 2020

1 Laylat al Kadr	Muslim
5-7 Eid al Fitr	Muslim
7 Pentecost	Orthodox Christian
Trinity Sunday	Christian
11 Corpus Christi	Catholic Christian
16 Guru Arjan martyrdom	Sikh
19 Sacred Heart of Jesus	Catholic Christian
21 Solstice - Litha	Pagan

JULY 2020

5 Asalha Puja Day	Buddhist
9 Martyrdom of the Bab	Bahá'í
30 Tish'a B'av	Jewish
31-August3 Eid al Adha	Muslim

AUGUST 2020

1 Lammass	Christian
Lughnassad	Pagan
3 Raksha Bandhan	Hindu
6 Transfiguration of the Lord	Orthodox Christian
10 Waqf al Arafa	Muslim
12 Krishna Janmashtami	Hindu
13-15 Obon (Ulambana)	Buddhist/Shinto
15 Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary	Catholic Christian
Dormition of the Theotokos	Orthodox Christian
20 Hijra - New Year	Muslim
22 Ganesh Chaturthi	Hindu
29 Ashura	Muslim

SEPTEMBER 2020

14 Holy Cross Day	Christian
19-20 Rosh Hashanah	Jewish
21 Paryushana Parva	Jain
23 Equinox - Mabon	Pagan
28 Yom Kippur	Jewish
29 Michael and All Angels	Christian

We are all being advised to change our normal routines and regular patterns of life for the greater good of the communities we live in and, in particular, to protect the most vulnerable within them. At times such as these, I am reminded that our nation's history has been forged by people and communities coming together to work as one, concentrating our combined efforts with a focus on the common goal. - The Queen

Reg. Charity No: 516339

Editor: John S. Summerwill 0113 269 7895 editor@concord-leeds.org.uk