

Westminster Interfaith

32nd Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace

**Saturday
20th May
2017**

**In
Hertfordshire
and
North
London**

Book now!

More details on
page 6 and in
the enclosed
flyer

A New Day

I started writing this Newsletter on my return from an interfaith event in Luxembourg. It was the Spring Equinox, when many faiths and cultures celebrate New Year. It was a sunny day and we greeted members of the Baha'i faith with Happy Naw-Ruz (New Day).

Next day we drove to the places of worship we would visit on our multi-faith pilgrimage for peace. No one ever expected the insane act of terrorism which took place that afternoon on Westminster Bridge. However, the response to the atrocity was immediate and massive from all sectors of society, especially from the faith communities who condemned the attack offering prayers for the victims and for London in all places of worship and at the Candlelit Vigil in Trafalgar Square. People from all walks of life, all faiths and none came out in force as a sign of solidarity that London is one and will not be intimidated by acts of terrorism.

The articles in this Newsletter reflect this level of unity that exists not just in London but throughout the world. Atrocities are being committed daily, especially in war-torn countries, but many individuals and organizations regularly shine a light of hope in this troubled world. You can read about

the young Muslim, who laid down his life to defend two female friends against so-called Islamists in Bangladesh, the Sikh who coined the 'Platinum Rule' and Nichidatsu Fujii who dedicated his life for peace and a compassionate society.

"How can life go on?" asks the Holocaust Memorial Trust. The Vatican message to Jains on developing a culture of non-violence is one way forward.

Before his death on the cross, Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven, "that all may be one". I believe that, despite the Evil which is plaguing our world and causing divisions, conflict and grief, Good will triumph in the end. So let us prepare to celebrate this New Day, where peace, charity and selfless love will be the rule, by practicing small or big acts of love every day and help build a culture of non-violence and encounter as Pope Francis regularly advocates. Just a smile sometimes will do to make someone happy.

Happy Easter! Happy Naw-Ruz! Happy Vaisakhi! Happy Spring Festival! Happy Day! May the Risen Lord shine in our lives.

We look forward to seeing you soon on our multi-faith pilgrimage.

Jon

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Westminster Terror Attack

On the day of the attack on Westminster Bridge, we were travelling to places of worship we were due to visit on our multi-faith pilgrimage for peace in May. We heard about the attack while sharing *langar* in North London Gurdwara. My wife rang to find out where we were and suggested we avoid Central London. That was going to be difficult for Sister Catherine and Sister Elizabeth, who were due to attend an International Women's Day meeting at the House of Commons that evening. Of course, it had to be held at another location.

Almost immediately, there were messages, from many quarters, condemning the attack and pledging solidarity with the Muslim community. Faiths Forum for London was among the first to react. Having circulated committee members for approval, the following message was released with 31 signatories representing most London faiths:

"We, as representatives of many of London's faith communities, deplore the terrible attack that has taken place today at Parliament and Westminster Bridge. All of our religions exalt the sanctity of human life. There is no justification for such a barbaric assault on innocent people. Terrorism has no place on our streets. We pray for the victims of this attack, and call for Londoners, and our nation to stand together at this time. We will redouble our efforts to work for peace, compassion, understanding and hope."

Then there was a call to join a Candlelit Prayer Vigil in St Martin in the Fields the next evening. It was actually held in Trafalgar Square and was attended by thousands of Londoners and visitors. It was important to see members of Faiths Forum for London and other faith organizations standing behind Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, as he condemned the attack.

5th Annual British Sikh Report

On Tuesday, 21st March, the night before the attack on Westminster Bridge, we were at Portcullis House to attend the fifth annual British Sikh Report (BSR) which was successfully launched and chaired by Jasvir Singh OBE.

It was a great pleasure and honour to be invited to such an auspicious occasion. The atmosphere was warm and congenial. It was good to meet old friends and make new acquaintances. I was impressed how every speaker, including the MPs, began their talks with a traditional Sikh greeting in Punjabi: *Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji*

Next day, more messages were released by various Borough Councils, by different faith communities and organizations, including a message from Pope Francis, expressing his sadness at the loss of life and of the injuries as well as his prayerful solidarity with all those affected by this tragedy. He also assured the nation of his prayers at this time.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster, also responded quickly condemning the atrocity. He asked priests and faithful to pray and come together in 'compassionate solidarity' and calm after attack. On the Friday, the Cardinal did just that. He joined Archbishop Justin Welby, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Sheikh Ezzat Khalifa, Sheikh Mohammad al-Hilli and Sheikh Qari Asim in a prayer vigil in Westminster to pray for the victims and for London.

Throughout London, and probably around the country, many people joined faith leaders and communities in prayer and compassionate solidarity. In Victoria, for instance, we joined the local Muslim community at Friday Prayer in the local Mosque.

These demonstrations of solidarity are very important to reassure the Muslim community of our support and to stand together against all forms of violence and hate crimes, especially as there was a sharp rise in the number of Islamophobic incidents in the days following the attack.

One week later, on Wednesday 29th March, thousands of us, of all religious traditions and none, gathered on the South Side of the River Thames and walked over Westminster Bridge to the spot where the tragedies took place. We stopped and stood together in silent prayer at 2.40pm. It was a clear demonstration that we will not be cowed by terrorism but stand together as one.

Jon

Ki Fateh. It really shows how we have progressed as a multicultural and multi-faith society.

Hosted by Pat McFadden MP, the launch was attended by MPs, Peers, government officials, leading civil servants, representatives from a variety of NGOs and interfaith charities, and over 100 members of the Sikh community from across Britain. According to the report, 13% of Sikhs say they have been victims of hate crimes since the EU Referendum, but there is also a strong sense of duty and national pride amongst British Sikhs; 69% of them

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5th Annual British Sikh Report

Continued from page 2

said they would support their son or daughter joining the Armed Forces. Other findings relate to attitudes towards Partition in 1947, the impact of Brexit upon the Sikh community, and issues affecting British Sikh women.

Before the event, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, Minister for Faith and Integration, said: "*On this proud day for all Sikhs, I encourage everyone from the community to embrace the findings of the report and to continue to work hard to improve all our communities.*"

Slough MP Fiona Mactaggart and the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP congratulated the BSR team for consistently producing this report and highlighting issues that can bring about change.

Following the proceedings, some of the team members spoke at length to the armed police officers standing guard outside Portcullis House and discussed issues regarding safety in London. No one ever expected that the next day, at the

same location, there would be a terrorist attack, which has shaken the country and traumatized many. Our prayers and thoughts go out to the victims of the appalling attack at Westminster.

I encourage readers to look at the report. It makes fascinating reading and offers an interesting insight into the life of the British Sikh community. The British Sikh Report is available to download from www.britishsikhreport.org

It's worth mentioning that in many parts of the country, especially where there is a large Sikh population, like Birmingham, Hounslow and Slough, there will be great processions (*Nagar Kirtan*) and celebrations for the festival of Vaisakhi, which welcomes the Sikh New Year. Because the actual day of the Festival clashes with Good Friday when Christian communities hold their traditional Good Friday Walk of Witness, Sikhs are holding their annual Vaisakhi procession on another day. In Hounslow, it was on 2nd April.

We wish all Sikhs a joyful Vaisakhi celebration and a happy and peaceful New Year.

The 'Platinum Rule'

For the past seven years, a Catholic-Sikh Retreat has been held in USA. It is organized by the Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (SEIA) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Sikh Council of Interfaith Relations. The theme for the weekend retreat in September 2016 was "Cultivating Peace in Our Daily Lives." 25 representatives of the Catholic Church and the American Sikh community gathered at the Focolare Centre in Hyde Park, N.Y. to get to know each other in a deeper way. By participating in each other's daily meals, prayer, and fellowship, the two groups were able to get a sense of each other's religion including differences between the two communities. The Director of SEIA, Anthony Cirelli, said: "This meeting was a great example of the kind of dialogue called for by Pope Francis, which is the dialogue of friendship."

After the retreat, Dr Tarunjit Singh Butalia, a scientist at Ohio State University, was conferred the Luminosa Award for Unity for his tireless commitment to peace-building and dialogue.

In his acceptance speech, Dr Butalia stressed the particular role that religion has always played in American society, precisely because it is a nation of immigrants. While former waves of immi-

grants seamlessly blended into society after a few generations, many immigrants from the last 50 years – like Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, Jains and Baha'is – want to maintain their religious identity. He said "they have made the United States one of the most cosmopolitan countries in the world."

Dr Butalia then proposed to take a step further than the Golden Rule (Do to others as you would want them to do to you," Mt 7:12). He called his version the "Platinum Rule": "Do to others as they would want you to do to them," moving beyond the assumption that other people would like to be treated the way that you would like to be treated yourself." He then invited the 130 participants to "listen more than we speak" and to never compare the "best of our religion with the worst of the others." Referring to Islamophobia, Dr Butalia remembered that all religions are interdependent on each other and that we have to stand up against discrimination against any faith. Closing, he quoted a disciple of the Sikh founder Guru Nanak: "No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with all."

adapted from Focolare and Manhattanville College websites

33rd Death Anniversary of Nichidatsu Fujii

On 9th January 2017, Nipponzan-Myohoji Buddhist Order commemorated the 33rd death anniversary of their founder the Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii, who died in 1985 aged 100 years. Nichidatsu Fujii devoted his life to peace and non-violence. He started building Peace Pagodas in 1947 as monuments to inspire peace and provide a focus for people of all races and creeds to help unite them in their quest for world peace.

The Nipponzan-Myohoji Order carry on their founder's legacy of building and looking after Peace Pagodas and Temples. We have two in England, one in Milton Keynes, the other in Battersea Park, which was inaugurated in 1985 for the Year of Peace. Nichidatsu Fujii was also instrumental in starting Peace Walks or Pilgrimages throughout the world.

Our own Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace was inspired by these pilgrimages. In fact, many people, including Brother Daniel Faivre walked from Canterbury to Battersea Park in 1985 for the inauguration of the Pagoda. There was a big commemoration event in Japan and Cardinal Vincent Nichols sent the following message of support and good wishes:

I offer my warmest greetings to all who are gathered in Japan to remember the life and works of the Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii and commemorate the 33rd year of his passing from this world. Throughout his life, Guruji (Honoured Teacher), as Mahatma Gandhi called him, prayed and worked incessantly for peace and non-violence and erected

peace pagodas throughout the world 'with the sole intention of creating a world of joy', as he himself stated in Sri Lanka on 18th January 1978. These pagodas now stand as visible signs of hope and unity in a troubled world and are cared for lovingly by members of the Nipponzan-Myohoji Japanese Buddhist Order which he founded in 1918. We have two peace pagodas in England.

In his teachings Nichidatsu Fujii said that 'those who strive to nurture compassion and harmony in their hearts and minds . . . will prosper for eternity and those without compassion will fall without doubt'. He went on to say that compassion should be 'practised and woven into political and economic systems'. These words stand alongside those of Pope Francis, who said that we should pray and work to overcome indifference and win peace by having 'a humble and compassionate heart, capable of proclaiming and witnessing to mercy' (World Day of Peace message 2016). May his legacy of peace, non-violence and harmony live on and touch the hearts and minds of all who advocate hatred, violence and destruction.

As Archbishop Arinze wrote in his message to Guruji on his 100th Birthday, quoting St Paul: '*Let us, then make it our aim to work for peace and strengthen one another!*' (Romans 14:19)

Be assured of my prayers and blessing for this very special occasion.

*Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster*

How can life go on?

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) was commemorated throughout the country with over 6000 local activities taking place on or near 27th January – anniversary of liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On this day, we remember especially the millions of people who were murdered by the Nazi regime but also the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur as well as the 'genocides' that are taking place in different parts of the world today.

This year, the HMD Trust held the Commemorative Ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in Central London, opposite Westminster Abbey. The theme this year was: **"How can life go on?"** Indeed, how can life go on after a genocide? The aftermath of the Holocaust and of subsequent genocides continue to raise challenging questions for individuals, communities and nations. How do peo-

ple react in the immediate aftermath of unimaginable suffering? How can life be rebuilt after such trauma? Is justice after genocide possible? What role do we in the UK have towards individuals, communities and nations who have survived genocide?

Author and survivor of the Holocaust Elie Wiesel has said: '*For the survivor death is not the problem. Death was an everyday occurrence. We learned to live with Death. The problem is to adjust to life, to living. You must teach us about living.*'

Holocaust Memorial Day is not only about commemorating past genocides and honouring those who died, but about standing with those who survive.

I am the Way — Revisited (4)

Reflecting on God's communicating with his creatures, the Bible's guarantor, the Church has no control over with whom God chooses to communicate. The Church is bound by the sacraments given to her by Jesus. But God is neither bound by the Church nor by the sacraments. This has an impact on whether there is the need of baptism and of visible membership of the Church. This seems to me to be a way how God somehow, yes 'in mysterious ways', reveals His plan. God always has the initiative. The creature's finite grasp, of its very nature, cannot fathom and contain the Infinite. God must enable each creature to receive his mysterious offer of love, while respecting, with infinite delicacy, the creature's freedom.

At the heart of the Christian story, grand, beautiful but still mysterious are the words "In the beginning, was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ..." Through him (i.e. the Word) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (Jn 1:1-3). For me the crowning of this astounding revelation is the further unveiling of God's being: "God is love" (1Jn 4:8). Cynics may dismiss this as a fairy tale too good to be true. But people with childlike faith (Mk 10:14) will rejoice and be glad at finding their heart's desire. Their faith will save them and the truth will make them free.

In the above paragraph, linked to the theme of what this essay is all about two facts stand out (1) that the Word, made flesh in Jesus Christ and his body the Church, is the only way to God and (2) that this way, albeit often in mysterious ways for those who have never explicitly known Christ, is available to **all** without exception. This is fundamental and all other difficulties do not impinge on its primacy. God is

the creator of all beings who are all loved and valued by Him. Jesus died for all. All have one source and one end. All are therefore related to each other in virtue of their humanity. If God, in becoming human, chose to become a Jewish male, it was not through any merit of this race or gender. The social condition into which he was born was not one of the rich or mighty but of the poor and lowly. God "casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly. He fills the starving with good things, and sends the rich away empty" (Lk 1:51-53). Pope Francis is showing us the kind of Church Jesus wants.

What saves every person is faith (Rom 3:28). In a recent interview with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on the question of justification i.e. salvation by faith, the retired Pontiff describes faith as "a deeply personal contact with God. It touches me in the most intimate fibre of my being and puts me in front of the living God with absolute immediacy in such a way that I can talk to Him, love Him and enter in communion with Him". Pope Emeritus Benedict adds two more aspects of faith: (a) its communitarian dimension (making me a member of the Church) and (b) the fact that it releases me from my loneliness enabling me to breathe, so to say, with the breath of the Spirit. This pure gift of God is offered to all without exception. It is for this reason and for no other that we were all created.

(1) See St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q.8, a. 3, ad 1

(2) "Per mezzo della Fede: Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella Predicazione della Chiesa e negli Esercizi Spirituali" pp 125-137. This is a report of a three day study organised by the Rettoria del Gesu, Rome in October 2015, Edizione San Paolo, 2016.

Southall - the town I love (6)

Among other religious groups, let us mention the Spiritualist church, which has just replaced its old prefab by a permanent structure; the Adventists, who recently bought a disused Gospel hall; the Quakers, who meet at Ramgarhia Hall; the Jehovah's Witnesses, who are as active in Southall as anywhere else.

The Unification Church has also targeted the town for its interfaith activities. One of its projects is to establish a *garden of peace* in one of its local parks.

The mainstream churches which saw their congregations dwindle, sometimes drastically, in the past, have changed significantly over the last ten years. All the churches are multi-racial. One may note, however, that there is an Urdu-speaking majority at King's Hall Methodist church. Saint John's Anglican congregation is predominantly Asian (60%). The rest represent a large variety of national and ethnic back-

grounds. A similar situation obtains at St Anselm's RC church.

Ministry - but not the priestly one in the RC church - reflects the racial diversity of the town. The movement of members from one Christian denomination to another is minimal. Incidentally, this is different in the case of larger faith groups, in particular among the Sikhs, where, when financial support is available, a number of devotees, under the aegis of a holy man, will form a separate group that will be the core of a new gurdwara. Mainstream churches have regular 'Churches Together' meetings when they share prayer and look at possible common action.

The smaller churches, together with the Baptist church - which, incidentally, is also a member of 'Churches Together' - have joined to form a different umbrella association.

32nd Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace

Saturday 20th May 2017 9.15am – 6.30pm

North London and Hertfordshire

Our pilgrimage will be in May like last year in order to avoid Ramadan, which commences on Saturday 27th May and lasts till 26th June.

Unfortunately, this year, it coincides with the Migrants' Mass at St Anthony's RC Church in Forest Gate, which means many of our regular RC pilgrims will have to choose either to go to the Migrants' Mass or come on the Pilgrimage.

This year, **we shall be travelling by coach.** We will be visiting some new places of worship as well as a few we have not been to for a long time. The focus will be on prayer and ecology.

Apart from a couple of places in North London, which are fairly close to each other, the venues in Hertfordshire are quite far apart and not that easy to reach by either public transport or on foot. However, it will give us plenty of time to reflect and talk to one another. I think it's going to be an exciting and interesting pilgrimage.

We are hiring two coaches. It means places will be limited to about **100 passengers.** It will be necessary to book and pay for a seat in advance. We reckon **£15 per person** will cover costs. We can make a slight reduction for group bookings. Call me for details. When you consider that a one day travel card in London costs about £12.50 and you have to walk and change regularly to get from A to B, £15 to travel comfortably by coach through North London and the Hertfordshire countryside is quite reasonable. Refreshments will be provided at most places, but bring a bottle of water for the journey anyway. Lunch and evening meal is included.

Having visited all the places of worship by car, we have decided that we shall meet and board the coaches at Our Lady of Lourdes RC church, New Southgate and end at North London Gurdwara. Both venues are close to Arnos Grove Station (Piccadilly Line) and New Southgate Station (Great Northern).

Parking at Arnos Grove Station Car Park is £2.00 per day in Station Car Park on Saturdays.

By Public Transport

To Arnos Grove: take Victoria Line to Finsbury Park, change onto Piccadilly Line towards Cockfosters and alight at Arnos Grove. Turn right out of the station, cross Bowes Road; Our Lady of Lourdes Church is about 100 metres on the left.

To New Southgate: trains from Moorgate, Kings

Cross and Welwyn Garden City. Exit New Southgate Station. Cross Station Road. Turn left on Friern Barnet Road then right on Bowes Road. Our Lady of Lourdes church is about 200 metres on the right.

Buses to Arnos Grove or New Southgate

34 Barnet Church – Walthamstow Central;

184 Barnet – Turnpike Lane;

221 Edgware – Turnpike Lane;

232 Brent Cross (Highfield Ave) – Arnos Grove;

251 Edgware – Arnos Grove;

298 Potters Bar - Arnos Grove

382 Mill Hill East—Southgate

From Hemel Hempstead, take Green Line Coach to Brent Cross, then 232 Bus to Arnos Grove. It takes about 20 minutes from Brent Cross to Arnos Grove. Or take fast train to Euston, then Victoria Line to Finsbury Park and Piccadilly Line to Arnos Grove.

From Watford Junction, take fast train to Euston, then Victoria Line to Finsbury Park and Piccadilly to Arnos Grove. It takes about 1 hour. Bus 142 to Brent Cross and 232 to Arnos Grove takes 1h. 20.

From all other parts of London, head towards Finsbury Park and follow directions above.

Timetable

9.15-9.40am Gathering at Our Lady of Lourdes, RC Church, 373 Bowes Road N11 1AA

09.40am Depart by coach for **Baha'i monument in New Southgate Cemetery, Brunswick Park Rd, London N11 1JJ**

10.15am Depart for **Jain Derasar, Oshwal Centre, Coopers Lane Road, Northaw, Herts, EN6 4DG**

11.45am Depart Jain Temple

12.05pm Arrive **Christ the King RC Church / Centre for Spirituality** Bramley Road, N14 4HE

12.50pm Lunch provided by **Sachkhand Nanak Dham International (SNDI)**

1.45pm Depart for **Palmers Green Mosque, 30 Oakthorpe Road, London N13 5JL**

3.00pm Depart Mosque

3.40pm Arrive **Bhaktivedanta Manor, Hindu Temple, Hilfield Lane, Aldenham, Herts WD25 8HE**

4.45pm Depart Bkaktivedanta Manor

5.20pm Arrive **Nanak Darbar - North London Gurdwara, 136 High Road, London N11 1PJ**
Prayer, Talk, Langar

(About 30 miles Round trip)

Please book early to reserve a seat on the coach.

Vatican Message to Jains

Christians and Jains: Together to foster practice of non-violence in families

MESSAGE FOR MAHAVIR JANMA KALYANAK DIWAS 2017

Vatican City

Dear Jain Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you its warmest felicitations as you celebrate the 2615th Birth Anniversary of Tirthankar Vardhaman Mahavir on 9th April, this year. May this festive event bring happiness and peace in your hearts, families and communities!

Violence, with its many and varied forms, has become a major concern in most parts of the world. So, we wish to share with you on this occasion a reflection on how we, both Christians and Jains, can foster non-violence in families to nurture peace in society.

Causes of violence are as complex and diverse as its manifestations. Not so infrequently, violence stems from unhealthy upbringings and dangerous indoctrinations. Today, in the face of growing violence in society, it is necessary that families become effective schools of civilization and make every effort to nurture the value of non-violence.

Non-violence is the concrete application in one's life of the golden rule: 'Do to others as you would like others do unto you'. It entails that we respect and treat the other, including the 'different other', as a person endowed with inherent human dignity and inalienable rights. Avoidance of harm to anyone in any way is, therefore, a corollary to our way of being and living as humans.

Unfortunately, refusal by some to accept the 'other' in general and the 'different other' in particular, mostly due to fear, ignorance, mistrust or sense of superiority, has generated an atmosphere of widespread intolerance and violence. This situation can be overcome "by countering it with more love, with more goodness." (Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 18 February, 2008).

This 'more' requires a grace from above, so also a place to cultivate love and goodness. Family is a prime place where a counter culture of peace and nonviolence can find a fertile soil. It is here the children, led by the example of parents and elders, according to Pope Francis, "learn to communicate and to show concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not

by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness" (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016, nos.90-130). Only with persons of non-violence as members, can families greatly contribute to making non-violence truly a way of life in the society.

Both our religions give primacy to a life of love and non-violence. Jesus taught his followers to love even their enemies (cf. Lk 6:27) and by His eminent example of life inspired them to do likewise. Thus, for us Christians, "nonviolence is not merely a tactical behaviour but a person's way of being" (Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 18 February, 2008) based on love and truth. 'Ahimsa' for you Jains is the sheet-anchor of your religion - 'Ahimsa paramo dharmah' (non-violence is the supreme virtue or religion).

As believers rooted in our own religious convictions and as persons with shared values and with the sense of co-responsibility for the human family, may we, joining other believers and people of good will, do all that we can, individually and collectively, to shape families into 'nurseries' of non-violence to build a humanity that cares for our common home and all its inhabitants!

Wish you all a happy feast of Mahavir Janma Kalyanak!

Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran

President

H. Ex. Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J.

Secretary

N.B. Jainism is an ancient religion that originated on the Indian subcontinent. It belongs to the group of Dharmic religions, who think about both the universe and individual lives in cyclical terms – i.e. a constant movement through "descending" and "ascending" ages, and a cycle of re-birth for each individual (with the ultimate aim of escaping this cycle). It is comparatively small in numbers, with around 6 million Jains worldwide, and only about 30,000 in the UK (larger centres can be found in Leicester, and near London in Potters Bar).

The festival of Mahavir Jayanti celebrates the life and birth of the 24th Tirthankara (spiritual leader) of the Jain faith, Lord Mahavir, who is believed to be the final one for the current age. Born in the 6th century BC, he spent 30 years travelling to spread the Jain faith, and Cardinal Tauran's message picks up on one of his most central teachings, non-violence (ahimsa).

Luxembourg

I was invited to talk about interreligious dialogue to a deanery in Luxembourg by some MA students I met last year, who came on an interfaith visit to London and Southall in May last year. They were really impressed by interfaith cooperation and activities over here and wanted to have some of the same in Luxembourg. The students organized everything, which involved a conference on Friday evening and preaching at Mass at different churches on Saturday evening and the main church in Mersch on Sunday morning. They also organized a visit to the main town of Luxembourg, which proved very interesting.

One thing which struck me about the people I met, of all ages and backgrounds, was their ability to switch from the national language, Luxembourgish to French or German as if it was just one language. Some could add English almost just as easily. It is a real gift and probably one of the reasons why Luxembourg has been able to adapt, keep a distinct identity and remain independent over the centuries. The people I met were also very open and welcoming. It was a pleasure to be there.

I was a bit concerned about my input because they wanted me to give the talks in one of the official languages. I opted for French but I was not convinced I could handle that effectively, even though my French is not bad.

The conference was held in the main church in Mersch. Fr Felix, the dean, welcomed me and helped me set up the power point presentation. He showed me the 'desert' he had set up for Lent and 'Jacob's Well', which was going to feature at masses that weekend. In the church, there was

also an exhibition of people at prayer, which was put together by a local photographer and was set up especially for the conference. It showed about 20 groups from different faiths at prayer. It was very interesting.

At the conference, which was fairly well attended, I spoke about Religions in the UK and in London, especially the situation in Southall, which allowed me to talk about Brother Daniel and his contribution to interreligious dialogue, including the start of the annual multi-faith pilgrimage for peace, which the participants wanted to know more about, so we looked at a couple of Power Point presentations of past pilgrimages. They are keen to do something similar in the area, although at the moment, there are not too many non-Christian places of worship in Luxembourg, but I'm sure they'll figure something out.

Saturday, I visited the old and new town of Luxembourg, which is separated by a deep valley, over which they have built a most impressive red bridge. It drizzled all day and I think I caught a chill, because in the evening I had a terrible sore throat and wondered if I was going to affect my talks. It didn't.

I had been asked to give the homily at three Masses at three different churches and talk about interreligious dialogue. At least, that's what I understood, so I set about putting some thoughts together in French. Fortunately, it was Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well. The story lent itself well for talking about dialogue in general and interreligious dialogue in particular. Lots of people were interested and many came and shared their experiences of interfaith encounters. They would like me to go back again. I probably will.

Mother Teresa Prize goes to Muslim

Mother Teresa was always admired across religious divides, so it seems only fitting that an international prize named in her honor went to a Muslim who died in Dhaka, Bangladesh, trying to save two female friends from a terrorist attack.

On Nov. 20, the family of 20-year-old Faraaz Hossain was presented with the 2016 Mother Teresa International Award for Social Justice during a Mumbai ceremony.

Hossain, a student at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, was visiting family back home in Bangladesh when he was caught up in the 10-hour hostage crisis on the evening of July 1. When gunmen professing loyalty to the Islamic State insisted on separating Bangladeshis from foreigners, by offering a test as to who could re-

cite verses from the holy Quran and who couldn't. Hossain passed and was given a chance to leave but refused to desert two female friends. His body was later discovered with wounds suggesting he had tried to fight back against his assailants.

He has since become a symbol of Bangladesh's resistance to extremism, with posters around the country insisting, "Faraaz is Bangladesh!"

The ceremony was organized by the Harmony Foundation whose President said: "This Year we celebrated the Sainthood of Mother Teresa, and we chose to honor all those who have sacrificed and selflessly served humanity in the spirit of Mother Teresa."

adapted from Crux Now

Naw-Ruz

The Baha'i New Year, or Naw-Ruz, which means "new day" in Persian, is celebrated by Baha'is around the world each year on the date of the Spring Equinox (21st March). It is the only Baha'i Holy Day with no direct relation to the life of a Messenger of God.

Its origins are unknown but it obviously began as a pastoral fertility festival. Since ancient times it has been the great national holiday of Iran, the only holiday celebrated by more than one religious group and throughout Central and Western Asia. In countries under Soviet rule the celebration of this spring festival was generally unofficial, and at times even prohibited, so now it has been re-instated with massive joyful celebration in many countries. It is often known as the Central Asian Spring Festival. Essentially, for all faiths and cultures, the Festival is about peace, charity and love.

Naw-Ruz is also celebrated by Zoroastrians and often in parts of countries where branches of Shiite Islam can be found – though there's a difference between the Baha'i Holy Day of Naw-Ruz and the Persian holiday of Naw-Ruz, the theme of celebrating a new day remains the same. The Jewish festival of Purim is also said to have been adopted from the Persian New Year, and Naw-Ruz is celebrated a lot like the Christian Easter, with many

symbols indicating spring and renewal.

For Baha'is, Naw-Ruz marks the end of the 19 day month of fasting, and it's a joyous time of celebration. It's also one of the Baha'i Holy Days on which work is to be suspended.

A week or so before the holiday lentils are placed in a dish to sprout into a mass of green blades. On the day of Naw-Ruz the family gathers in new or freshly cleaned clothes. The table is decorated with fruit, cakes, coloured eggs and other treats, as well as symbolic objects such as a holy book and a mirror. Among the best known customs is the haft-sin - the 'seven S's'. Seven objects beginning -- in Persian -- with the letter 'S', such as hyacinths, apples, lilies, silver coins, garlic, vinegar and rue, are decoratively arranged on a table. A great deal of time is spent exchanging visits with friends and relations. The celebrations end on the thirteenth day of Naw-Ruz with a picnic in the country. The sprouted lentils are thrown into running water, carrying away the bad luck of the previous year.

UCL has been organising an event every year to celebrate the Spring Festival since 2010, often with folk music and dance performances, delicious cuisine and a great exhibition hall filled with a variety of national souvenirs and costumes.

Courses and Events

Ammerdown Centre

Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Somerset, BA3 5SW7 Tel: 01761 433709 Fax 01761 433094

www.ammerdown.org

For program of courses see website or contact Sarah Chabowska, email: centre@ammerdown.org

Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter

34 Chepstow Villas, W11 2QZ

Tel: 020 7727 3597 / 020 7313 8286

Lots of interesting talks, films and events, contact Sion Centre for programme details

E: SionCentreforDialogue@gmail.com

www.sistersofourladyofSION.org

Westminster Cathedral Interfaith Group

Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace, SW1P 1Q. Every 3rd Wednesday [4-5pm] Speakers from different faiths discuss Pope Francis' encyclical on the family: *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) Contact John Woodhouse 0790 8888 586 by text;

E: woodhousesopten@btinternet.com

April 19 Revd Dr Ashley Beck (Programme director Pastoral ministry St Mary's University Twickenham)

May 17 Rose Hickman (Community Partnerships Co-ordinator The Passage)

June 21 Jeremy Rodell (British humanist association)

Westminster Faith Exchange Children's Art Competition 2017 is open for entries until Monday 15th May. Theme: 'Being Alone' Details from www.westminster.gov.uk/faithexchange

South London Inter Faith Group

12.30-2pm. Meetings with Lunch on last Thursday of the month at Streatham Friends Meeting House, Roupell Park Estate, Redland Way, SW2 3LU.

Details: secretary@southlondoninterfaith.org.uk

North London Interfaith Discussion Group

meets monthly Contact: Sister Elizabeth 0207 272 8048

Bathing the Buddha Ceremony,

Saturday 13th May 12.30pm Leicester Square Gardens, London

London Peace Pagoda Battersea Park

Saturday 17 June 3-6pm 32nd Anniversary of Peace Pagoda with chanting from various Buddhist traditions, multi-faith prayers, various speakers and multi-cultural celebrations. Venerable G. Nagase, c/o Park Manager's Office, Battersea Park, Albert Bridge Rd, SW11 4NJ. T: 020 7228 9620

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Courses and Events

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Nipponzan Myohoji Peace Pagoda,

Brickhill St, Willen Lake, Milton Keynes MK15 0BG
T: 01908 663 652

Sunday 18 June 10.30am-3.30pm 37th Anniversary of Peace Pagoda, includes Buddhist ceremony, multi-faith prayers, various speakers on anti-nuclear activities and non-violent action and multi-cultural celebrations. Lunch provided.

Stafford to London Prayer Walk

25th May - 3rd June 2017 God loves the NHS

Tuesday 30th May – Northampton - Milton Keynes
Service in MK Hospital chapel: **6pm**

Wednesday 31st May – Milton Keynes - Luton Morning prayers in MK Hospital chapel: **8am** Find out more at: www.nhsprayerwalk.co.uk

Christian Muslim Marriage Support Group

Usually meets in Fulham. Contact Rosalind or Heather confidentially through the inter faith marriage website: www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/185782491456844/>

St Ethelburga's Centre

78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG; T: 020 7496 1610
www.stethelburgas.org; E: enquiries@stethelburgas.org

London Interfaith Centre

125 Salusbury Rd London NW6 6RG
Enquiries to info@londoninterfaith.org.uk
Check on the website: <http://londoninterfaith.org.uk/>

The Meditatio Centre

St Mark's, Myddelton Sq London EC1R 1XX
E: meditatio@wccm.org; T: 020 7278 20170

International Conference on Caste Discrimination

9th and 10th May 2017, 10am - 5pm, Amigo Hall, St George's Cathedral, London Rd, London SE1 6ER
Additional information on St Anselm's parish website: < <http://stanselmchurchsouthall.com/cancad/> >

Faiths In Tune faithsintune@gmail.com

21 May 2017 6th London Interfaith Music Festival at the British Museum

15/16 July 2017 2nd Berliner Festival der Religionen

Central London Inter Faith Meetup

Westminster Quaker Meeting House,
52 St Martins Lane WC2 N 4EA
Every Friday from 6.50pm website: <https://www.meetup.com/Central-London-Inter-Faith-Meetup>

Drop In Silence, 5.30-7pm Details: DropInSilence.org;
Kensington Council of Churches
Kensington United Reformed Church
Allen Street, London W8 6BL

Three Faiths Forum

Contact: Phil Champain, The Director, 3FF, Star House, 104 Grafton Road, London NW5 4BA

Ham Faithful Friends

Contact: Diana Mills [dianamills@phonecoop.coop]

Hounslow Friends of Faith

<http://www.hounslowfriendsoffait.org/>

T: 020 8560 5887

E: info@hounslowfriendsoffait.org

Pax Christi

Further details, contact: coordinator@paxchristi.org.uk

Marylebone Scriptural Reasoning

Contact: <marylebonesr@gmail.com>

18 April 7-10pm Portcullis House Liberation

13 June 6.30-9pm Westminster Abbey Difficult Texts

18 July, 6.30-9pm Sin & Repentance Regent's Park Mosque

Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group

www.whifgroup.co.uk

Contact Paul Gateshill: paulghill@hotmail.com

The Islamic College

33 High Road, Willesden London NW10 2SW

+44 (0) 20 8451 9993; E: info@islamic-college.ac.uk

London Central Mosque

146 Park Road London NW8 7RG

Contact: Interfaith and Visits Coordinator T: 0207 725

2212 E: visits@iccuk.org

Dialogue Society,

30A Drayton Park, London N5 1PB

Phone: + 44 (0) 20 7619 0361

Web: www.dialoguesociety.org

Scarboro Missions Interfaith Dept.

2685 Kingston Rd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M1M

1M4 Tel. 416-261-7135 ext. 296

www.scarboromissions.ca Lots of useful resources,

Contact Paul McKenna or check website.

Soul of India Tours

79 College Road Harrow HA1 1BD T: 020 8901 7630

E: enquiries@soulofindia.com Lots of interesting faith and cultural tours in India.

A Reminder!

Annual Subscription / Membership to Westminster Interfaith Newsletter

If you have not sent your annual contribution to support the printing and postage of the paper Newsletter, please send a cheque made payable to *Westminster Interfaith*: £15 for UK postal subscribers; £25 for overseas postal subscribers and a contribution for email subscribers would be helpful. Send a cheque with your details to Jon Dal Din, Westminster Interfaith, Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street, London SW1P 1QN. Many thanks.

Calendar of Religious Festivals

- 1 May** **BELTAIN** *Wiccan/Pagan/ Druid* The wheel of the year continues to turn and spring gives way to summer. Many pagans celebrate Beltaine by lighting fires and leaping over them, and/or with maypole dances, symbolizing the mystery of the Sacred Marriage of Goddess and God
- 2 May** **YOM HA'ATZMA'UT** *Jewish* commemorates the declaration of independence of Israel in 1948.
- 10 May** **VESAKHA PUJA/WESAK/BUDDHA DAY/BODHI DAY** *Buddhist* Theravadin Buddhists celebrate the birth, enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and final passing away of Guatama Buddha. Mahayanists have separate days for each event.
- 13 May** **THE NIGHT OF FORGIVENESS/LAILAT-UL-BARA'AH (14th Sha'ban)** *Muslim* **BIRTHDAY of 12th IMAM, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi** (Shi'a) On 14th Sha'ban, 8th month of the Muslim year, 2 weeks before Ramadan, Muslims seek forgiveness for their sins and spend the night in prayer.
- 14 May** **LAG B'OMER** *Jewish* The *Omer* period of 49 days, lasting from Pesach to Shavuot, is a time of sadness, relieved on this, the 33rd day, which recalls the end of a plague in Roman times. Many weddings take place, since they are not permitted during the other days of the *Omer*.
- 14-20 May** **CHRISTIAN AID WEEK** *Christian* Initiated in 1945, this week is devoted to fund raising by members of various churches to help the needy throughout the world, regardless of religion or race, in over 60 countries, to improve their own lives and tackle the causes of poverty and injustice.
- 23 May** **ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF THE BAB** (*Baha'i*) The *Bab* heralded the arrival of Baha'ullah and was co-founder of the Baha'i faith. He first declared his mission in Persia in 1844. He inaugurated the Baha'i calendar which numbers itself from the year of this declaration.
- 24 May** **ZARATOSHT NO DISO** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai; Parsi)* **26 December** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* The death anniversary of the Prophet Zarathushtra is a sorrowful occasion. Tradition records that this is when he was assassinated at the age of 77. It is customary to visit the Fire Temple, participate in special remembrance prayers (to him and to the *Fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors), and ponder upon the *Gathas* or Hymns of Zarathushtra, which embody his message to humanity.
- 25 May** **ASCENSION DAY** (40th day after Easter) *Christian (Western Churches) and Orthodox (Some Catholic Churches celebrate it on the following Sunday, 28 May.)* It commemorates the last earthly appearance of the Risen Christ, who ascended into heaven in the presence of many witnesses.
- 27 May to 25 June** **RAMADAN** *Muslim* Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Fasting (*sawn*) is one of the 5 pillars of Islam. It is the holiest month of the year. Muslims dedicate themselves to spiritual renewal, prayer and intensive devotional reading of the *Qur'an*. The fast is traditionally broken each evening by taking dates and water. During this month, the Prophet (pbuh) received the first verses of the *Qur'an*.
- 28 May** **ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASCENSION OF BAHU'LLAH** *Baha'i* Commemorates the death of Baha'u'llah at Bahji, near Acre, in 1892. His shrine there is the place towards which all Baha'is face when praying.
- 30 May** **DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL/DUANWUJIE/TUAN YANG CHIEH** *Chinese* Boat races between slim rowing boats shaped like dragons. People also go down to rivers to picnic and celebrate on boats. Originally commemorated the suicide by drowning of poet and statesman Ch'u Yuan in 279 BCE.
- 31 May to 1st June** **SHAVUOT / FEAST OF WEEKS / PENTECOST** *Jewish* a two day festival which falls seven weeks after Pesach. It celebrates the revelation of the *Torah* to Moses on Mount Sinai, and marks the time when the first harvest was taken to the Temple. Synagogues are decorated with flowers and dairy foods are traditionally eaten. For Orthodox Jews work is not permitted throughout the festival.
- 4 June** **PENTECOST** *Christian (Eastern Orthodox Churches)* often seen as the 'birthday' of the Church, since this is when the disciples of Jesus first proclaimed the Gospel after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is named after the Jewish festival day on which this event happened.
- 11 June** **TRINITY SUNDAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* In the West, it is celebrated on the Sunday after Pentecost (or Whitsunday). Christians reflect on the mystery of God, who is seen as One but is understood in and through God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate All Saints at this time*).
- 15 June** **CORPUS CHRISTI** *Christian* celebrates the institution of the Eucharist. It falls 60 days after Easter, on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Many Church now celebrate it on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. Processions of the Blessed Sacrament are common.
- 16 June** **MARTYRDOM OF GURU ARJAN** (1606) *Sikh* The fifth Guru was executed on the orders of the Moghul Emperor, Jehangir, for refusing to pay a fine. Guru Arjan made the first compilation of the Sikh Scriptures, called the *Adi Granth*, and supervised the completion of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. A *gurpurb* is held on this day including a continuous reading of *Adi Granth*.
- 18 June** **LAILAT-UL-QADR / THE NIGHT OF POWER / HONOUR / DIGNITY** *Muslim (Shi'a)* On this night in 610 CE the prophet Muhammad received his first visit from the angel Jibril (Gabriel) and his revelation of the *Qur'an*. Many Muslims spend the last ten days and nights of Ramadan secluded in the mosque, praying and studying the *Qur'an*.

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Calendar of Religious Festivals:

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- 21 June** **MIDSUMMER SOLSTICE** *Wiccan Pagan* **SUMMER SOLSTICE** (*Alban Heruin or Alban Hefin*) *Druid* The festival of Midsummer, sometimes called Litha. The light of the sun is at the height of its power. It is a time of plenty and celebration.
- 21 June** **WORLD HUMANIST DAY** is a day for spreading awareness of Humanism as a philosophical life stance and as a means for effecting change in the world. It is also seen as a time for Humanists to gather socially and promote the positive values of Humanism.
- 22 June** **LAILAT-UL-QADR / THE NIGHT OF POWER / HONOUR / DIGNITY** *Muslim (Sunni)* See 18 June above.
- 25 June** **RATHA YATRA** *Hindu* 'Chariot journey'. This is observed most notably at Puri in the Indian state of Orissa, where processions of thousands of devotees pull huge wagons (*rathas*) supporting images of Krishna. He is known under the name of 'Jagannath', (Lord of the Universe), from which the English term 'juggernaut' comes. Krishna is attended on his journey by his brother and sister.
- 26 June** **EID-UL-FITR / FEAST OF FAST BREAKING (1st Shawwal)** *Muslim* Celebrations may extend over the first three days of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan. It is a time for making gifts to the poor (*Zakat-ul-Fitr*, the charity of the fast, must be paid before the *Eid* prayer). Now is a time for new clothes, good food, and presents for children and family gatherings. The community assembles for *Eid* prayer and a sermon at the mosque or at a large place which will accommodate the whole community of the town or village. The traditional greeting is '*Eid Mubarak*' – 'a happy and blessed *Eid*'.
- 1 July** **JASHN-E TIRGAN** *Zoroastrian* Festival is devoted to the divinity Tir. It is customary to visit the Fire Temple to give thanks to Ahura Mazda, participate in a *jashan*, thanksgiving ceremony, listen to stories, share a meal, play games, dance and make merry.
- 5 July** **BIRTHDAY OF GURU HAR GOBIND** (1595-1644) 6th Guru *Sikh (Nanakshahi)*
- 8-17 July** **FRAVARDIGAN / UKTAD** *Zoroastrian* the festival of the *fravashis*, popularly known as *Muktad* (All Souls), commences ten days before NoRuz and is the last festival of the old year. The day commences at sunrise when the immortal souls, together with their *fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors, artistically depicted as half man/half bird), are welcomed by name by the Zoroastrian *Mobeds* or *Magi* (priests).
- 8/15 July** **ASALHA PUJA** *Buddhist* Dhammacakka day – '*The turning of the wheel of teaching*'. A Theravada celebration of the First Proclamation by Gautama to five ascetics on the Middle Way, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.
- 9 July** **ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF THE BAB** *Baha'i* The Bab was executed by firing squad in Tabriz, Persia, at noon on this day in 1850. His death is commemorated at noon with readings and prayers from the Baha'i Scriptures.
- 13-15 July** **O-BON** *Japanese* A festival when the spirits of the departed are welcomed back home with feasting and dancing. Fires are often lit to illuminate their arrival and departure. Celebrations in rural areas may take place one month earlier.
- 18 July** **NAVROZE / NO RUZ** *Zoroastrian (Kadmi)* New Year's Day on the Shenshai Calendar. In 10th century a group of Zoroastrians fled from Iran and were given sanctuary by the Hindus of Western India, where they became known as Parsis (or Persians).
- 23 July** **BIRTHDAY OF HAILE SELASSIE I** *Rastafarian* This is one of the holiest days of the Ethiopian year. Wherever Rastafarians live they rejoice to honour the birthday with *Nyahbinghi* drumming, hymns and prayers.

Education

There was a question of opening a reformatory for boys and a well-known educationist was called in for advice. He made a passionate plea for humane methods of education at the reformatory, urging the founders to spare no expense in getting the services of kind-hearted and competent educators. He concluded by saying. "If only one boy is saved from moral depravity, it will justify all the cost and labour invested in an institution like this."

Later a member of the board said to him. "Didn't you get just a wee bit carried away there? Would all the cost and labour be justified if we could save only one boy?" "If it were my boy, yes?" was the reply.

From: 'the Prayer of the Frog' II by A. de Mello S.J. By kind permission of the publishers, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash Anand, India.

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