

IFW NEWS



Interfaith Wolverhampton's vision

is to promote mutual respect and shared commitment to the common good by the City's diverse communities.

We aim to dispel hatred and misunderstanding through dialogue and friendship.

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In this Issue

It has been a frenetic, turbulent time of the year with the General and local Elections generating a lot of excitement and uncertainty. Now that we know the results of these elections, we offer a much-needed space for reflection and contemplation.

In this issue, we have various colleagues talking about their individual faiths, the cardinal beliefs and practices, which resonate with their innermost heart and soul. Their endeavours go straight to the principles which have found a welcome niche in their thinking and which largely underpin the architecture of their daily life. You will find articles on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jewish Faith, Islam and Sikhism letting in a refreshing breeze of insights, and deeply-held convictions.

The diverse ways in which some colleagues have found their experience of working with Interfaith Wolverhampton enriching is the theme of some short contributions. I hope these shorts will chime in with

your personal interaction with people of other faiths or none.

We always welcome your feedback on any aspect of the newsletter. If you have something interesting and relevant to share with our readers, please do contact us; your contribution will be much appreciated.

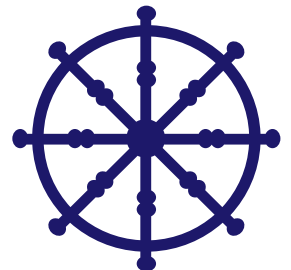


Editor
Sehdev Bismal MBE

Editorial Board
Sehdev Bismal
The Reverend David Wright
Erik Pearse

Today's World and Buddhism

I find Buddhism a very special, unique and interesting religion which is based on science and truth. " Buddhism is a non-aggressive, moral and philosophical system expounded by the Buddha, which demands no blind faith from its adherents, expounds no dogmatic creeds, encourages no superstitious, rites and ceremonies, but advocates a golden mean that guides a disciple through pure living and pure thinking to gain a supreme vision and deliverance from all evil This vision is called the Dhamma and is popularly known as Buddhism." (Narada, 1982, Buddhism in nutshell)..



The founder of Buddhism was the Buddha, whose name was Siddhartha and a family name Gautama. He was born on the full moon day of May, 623 B.C. in North India at Lumbini (currently in Nepal). His father, King Suddhodhana was the ruler of Sakyas kingdom and mother was queen Mahamaya. At the age of sixteen, Prince Siddhartha got married to a beautiful and devoted young princess named Yasodhara. He had every luxury of life at his disposal. However, he realised the true nature of life and suffering. After the birth of his only son Rahula, at the age of 29, he left his palace and became an ascetic to find out the solution to all-pervading suffering. At the age of 35, after six years of self practice, he achieved the highest goal of Nibbana,



the ultimate truth, the intuitive knowledge, and became Buddha, the enlightened one.

His main teaching was the four noble truths: (i) the suffering, (ii) the cause of suffering is craving, (iii) The way of elimination of craving, (iv) The eightfold path or the middle path which avoids extreme practice of self indulgences or self mortification including, Right Understanding, Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The Buddha delivered eighty four thousand discourses throughout his life in a book called "Tipitaka". However, the teachings could be summarised "Not to do evil, cultivate good and purify one's mind, this is the teaching of all the Buddhas." (Dhammapada). The Buddha said, "Any kind of action whether physically, verbally or mentally, that hurts others or yourself is an evil action." Whereas action which is beneficial to self and others is a good action. Purifying the mind is important because the mind is the centre for every action as the body follows the instructions of mind. Practising meditation helps to eradicate the impurities of mind and brings purity, calm and happiness.

Currently, Mindfulness meditation has become popular in many fields such as, treating mental health related illness, enhancement of teaching and learning skills, for peace and happiness in everyday life. Ultimately it leads to achieving the highest goal of nibbana, the enlightenment. Buddhism teaches us to become self dependent and not to rely onto others for salvation and freedom. It is said "be your own island". In another verse it is said "By oneself alone is evil done, by oneself is

one defiled. By oneself alone is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself. No one can purify another." (Dhammapada).

Buddhism is very relevant to modern times as it is based on true reasoning. Buddha said in "Kalama Sutta" that don't believe anything because you've heard someone,

Buddhism teaches us to become self dependent and not to rely onto others for salvation and freedom.

but accept only when you find it true by yourself after testing. This is a unique and special feature of Buddhism that does not believe things which are not true scientifically. The Buddha said "ehipassiko", it means don't believe but come and experience it and then accept it.

In conclusion, Buddhism teaches love, kindness, generosity, equanimity and humanity towards all living beings. If everyone develops loving and kindness towards others, there would be no war, but only love, peace and happiness around the world.

Ven. S. Tejwant

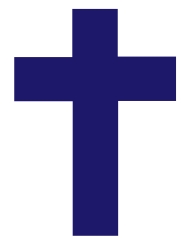
The Roots of Christianity

Born in Bethlehem, the city of David; circumcised on the eighth day; presented in the Temple as the first born male of his family as the law of Moses required; a worshipper in the synagogue. All those sound like decent credentials for a faithful Jewish man.

All those apply to Jesus and give an extremely strong clue as to where the roots of Christianity lie. Those roots lie in the Jewish faith into which Jesus was born and to which he held throughout his life. "So why aren't Christians still Jews, then?" I hear you ask.

The answer to this is not as simple as it may seem. At one level, it may be argued that whilst Jesus taught the

Jewish faith as a rabbi (a word which means teacher), he interpreted it in a way which didn't find favour with the religious authorities of the day because they saw it as challenging their inherited views and strong authority. At another level, it may be said that faithful Jews of the day saw Jesus as stretching the interpretation of the law and the prophets beyond breaking point, not least by claiming, or at least not denying, that he was the son



of God, something which would have been seen as blasphemy by the leaders and faithful followers alike. In simple terms, for Christians Jesus is the Messiah, whilst for Jews he is not.

Either way, the New Testament section of the Christian Bible is clear that prior to Jesus' crucifixion he was warning his followers that they would be put out of the synagogues because of their allegiance to him and that after his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven this is exactly what happened. So it was that early Christian groups gradually ceased to be part of synagogue congregations and began both to meet separately and to develop their own, distinctive forms of worship.



Christians also developed their understanding of who and what Jesus is. Not only is Jesus seen as God made fully present in the world but he is also regarded as the one who, through his death on the cross, reconciled humanity to God. Following his death on Good Friday came his resurrection on Easter Day as proof that he has defeated death and offers eternal life to all who believe in him. As the Christian faith has developed, Christians are called to live as those who believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Those beliefs are to affect every aspect of our lives, and those of us who are Christians try to live accordingly, seeking to love God and others in the same, self giving way that God has shown his

love for us in Jesus.

Despite the evolution of Christianity, the Jewish scriptures, which Christians call the Old Testament, remain a vitally important part of the Bible and play a central role in both Christian worship and private devotion. That shouldn't come as a surprise because Jesus based his teaching on them. For those Christian churches which follow a shared, set pattern of Bible readings for Sundays and weekdays (as, for example, the Church of England, Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches do) there will be an Old Testament and one or more New Testament readings, as well as a Psalm, appointed for each service.

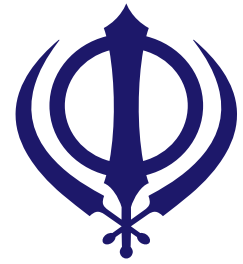
As the Christian faith has developed, Christians are called to live as those who believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come

It is possible to see, in the Reformation which split the Western Christian Church around the middle of the last millennium, echoes of the split which occurred between early Christians and Jews back in the early years after Jesus' time on earth. Whilst it is fair to say that both led to a considerable amount of friction at the time, and for some time afterwards, it is also right to say that the shared heritage between Christians and Jews is also now the basis for a deep friendship and respect. But that isn't where the story ends. Just as Christians and Jews share a common heritage in their rootedness in the scriptures which they share, those scriptures have a central role in Islam too and mean that Christians, Jews and Muslims are all referred to as "people of the Book". As such, there is a deep sense of fellowship between all three faiths because of their shared heritage.

Rev. David Wright

Interfaith and Me

It is in my nature to respect all religions, other people's beliefs and faiths, as long as they aim to make us good human beings. This underpins in my view, a viable thriving community and building tolerance, through understanding of what makes us different, whilst celebrating the core common values we all share.



The foundation of my lifelong tolerance and appreciation of all faiths was laid in my childhood. You can widen your horizons and develop your understanding by working with other people. That is how society makes progress to make the world a better place to live in

I come from a background where tolerance and understanding for others was encouraged. I learnt respect for all religions from my parents. The foundation of my lifelong tolerance and appreciation of all faiths was laid in my childhood. You can widen your horizons and develop your understanding by working with other people. That is how society makes progress to make the world a better place to live in. These are the values that my children were encouraged to believe in, and they themselves have embraced working and befriending people of all different backgrounds.

I know from my children that their places of work increasingly focus on the importance of diversity e.g. providing training on unconscious bias, and recruitment of people from all backgrounds.

When my husband and I joined the Interfaith Wolverhampton, we had the opportunity to listen to other people talk about their faith, beliefs and traditions.

We often visited other places of worship such as churches, mandirs, masjids and gurdwaras. That gave us a first-hand experience of what drives people of other faiths

As a Sikh, I have had many chances of visiting Gurdwaras but equally I have felt moved by music from other religions. Kirtan, bhajans, naats and hymns have equally mesmerized me.

I firmly believe in humanity, equality and tolerance for diversity. My Sikhi faith has taught me all these values and my interfaith contacts have reinforced them.

We can try to spread a little bit of peace and harmony by talking with and listening to each other.

Harbhajan Hayre

Hinduism: A Way of Life



I was born into a Hindu family ensconced in a secure milieu that encouraged questioning the established practices of my family faith. When I was a child, for several years I thought that voicing my reservations about the observance of rituals so commonly seen in my community somehow betrayed my disloyalty and that it might incur the wrath of gods.



At my High School, however, I became convinced that interrogating the practices of my faith was something I should not keep subterranean for my solitary moments

My time at University helped me to discover some aspects of Hinduism as very pertinent to my personal situation, resonating with my thinking. The first thing that struck a chord with me was the key role of *karma* in shaping one's destiny. What happens in life is not pre-ordained, it is determined by our thoughts, words and deeds. I found it to be a very powerful tool to guide my development and behaviour towards others not only in my career and daily life but in private, too.

The second principle that ignited my imagination was the stress on the presence of divinity all around me. The sanctity of life, the need to preserve the natural environment, to treat others with empathy and to practise non-injury to others has significantly shaped my thinking and the way I live.

Although there are several cardinal principles that one could write about, the next point that decided to reside in my mind is the open-mindedness that Hinduism has taught me. It has taught me that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all

In Hinduism there is no room for arrogance of belief, the infallibility of any one particular mode of thinking or for any fossilized blind faith systems.

genuine paths are equally valid, deserving tolerance and understanding. In Hinduism there is no room for arrogance of belief, the infallibility of any one particular mode of thinking or for any fossilized blind faith systems. It teaches me humility, willingness to learn and to revere diversity of tenets.

There are other equally significant strands that guide the Hindu way of living. The plethora of gods and deities that one comes across in temples are only manifest aspects of the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent. The idols only act as pointers to the ultimate *Brahman* who is both Creator and Unmanifest Reality. In order to reach out to *Brahman* one does not have to follow a rigid system of rituals to assert one's faith. Hinduism is a way of life, not an organised religion and this way of life is invariably described as *Sanatan Dharma* by Hindus. The whole emphasis is on conduct, deeds, actions much more than mere worship or prayers. It has helped me narrow the hiatus between belief and practice in my personal life.

Hinduism is very empowering to the individual who can choose their own way to achieve moksha, liberation from the cycle of births and deaths through a blissful union of *atma*, the soul, with the Universal Spirit, the *Brahman*. The individual cannot be saved by the benign intervention of anyone else, he/she has to work for it and break free of the cycle of karma.

One of the key things about my faith is its deeply felt need for peace, peace within oneself, being at peace with

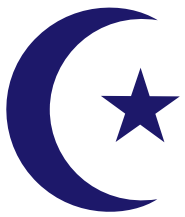
the rest of the world and harmony in nature. The prayer that reverberates in my mind in moments of stillness centres on the imperative for peace:

*Aum dyauḥ śāntirantarikṣaṁ śāntiḥ
pṛthivī śāntirāpaḥ śāntiṣadhyāḥ śāntiḥ
vanaspatayaḥ śāntirviśvedevāḥ śāntirbrahma śāntiḥ
sarvaṁ śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ
sā mā śāntiredhi
Aum śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ
=Yajurveda 36:17*

*May peace radiate there in the whole sky as well as in
the vast ethereal space everywhere.
May peace reign all over this earth, in water and in all*

*herbs, trees and creepers.
May peace flow over the whole universe.
May peace be in the Supreme Being Brahman.
And may there always exist in all peace and peace
alone.
Aum peace, peace and peace to us and all beings!*

Sehdev Bismal MBE



Muslims and Interfaith Work

We live in a diverse country composed of varied religions and cultures. Truth is, an average Muslim will probably have at least one non-Muslim friend or acquaintance.

In order for a Muslim to grow into a responsible citizen, one should be active in interfaith work. Involvement in interfaith work is a good way to prepare us to live in a diverse world as it enhances our leadership skills at the same time.

Interfaith work refers to the merging of diverse cultural, traditional and religious groups to promote the common good for all through the encouraging of mutual cooperation instead of conflict in society. Interfaith work denotes working with leaders and members of different religious faiths in order to promote greater understanding, respect and to reduce prejudice among various religious groups in our communities. This movement enables Muslims to explore differences and similarities with members of other religious faiths. It is also a good for Muslims to explore relevant social issues concerning all religious groups.

Every Muslim has an important role in society. They should participate in activities that are beneficial to their fellow Muslims and the community as a whole. By involving ourselves in interfaith work, our interfaith literacy will be enriched and will help us to possess positive perspectives of different religious communities. Through interfaith work, Muslims can enhance skills to build positive relationships with people of diverse religious convictions and actually deepen and enrich their own faith.



Khalid Akhtar

What does it mean to be a Muslim?

At a meeting not long ago, held in Wolverhampton, of some Black Country Church Leaders, I was present (as an invitee) as the Black Country Faith Representative on the Black Country Consortium.

During individual self-introductions I said 'I am Harun Rashid and I am a fundamentalist Muslim' when all eyes turned towards me with a worried look on them. Only one of those present was smiling, as he knew me personally. After a little pause, I continued 'but I'm not a terrorist'.



The press and the media have either unwittingly or deliberately misinterpreted the term fundamentalist in Islam and identified it with terrorism and violence and depicted Muslims as terrorists. I call myself a fundamentalist Muslim because I believe in the fundamentals of Islam and have been trying all my life, public and private, to inculcate them in my day-to-day living as a human being.

The core message which is clearly specified in the Holy Qur'an for all Muslims is to try their utmost to implement in their daily life the fundamental attributes of Islam such as honesty, integrity, kindness, helpfulness, hospitality, charity, generosity, mercy, truthfulness, love, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, peacefulness, justice, fairness etc.

Islam is based on five pillars, the first of which is faith in the one invisible Creator, Sustainer and Cherisher who alone is worthy of worship. 'He begets not nor is He begotten'. Faith also includes all His revelations such as the Psalms of David, the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an which is the last and final one, all his messengers such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and

Muhammad the last one
(Peace be upon them all).

The second pillar is prayer five times a day. The first prayer is before sunrise, the second one after midday, the third one in the afternoon, the

A fundamentalist Muslim is a good Muslim and a good Muslim is a good human being, with malice towards none but charity for all.

fourth one immediately after sunset and the final one before midnight.

The third pillar is fasting the whole month of Ramadan between sunrise and sunset.

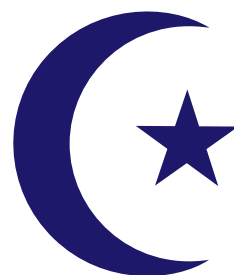
The fourth pillar is almsgiving, that is giving in charity 2.5% of one's annual savings.

The fifth pillar is pilgrimage to Makka once in a lifetime if physically, mentally and financially possible.

Adhering to the five pillars, all Muslims should be inspired to turn into good Muslims by inculcating in their day-to-day life the fundamental attributes of Islam as stated above.

The core of Islam is 'tawhid' – a firm and unequivocal belief in the absolute uniqueness of God who alone is to be worshipped and obeyed by all, according to the guidance given in the Qur'an. This belief is the essence of Islam.

A common error about Islam by some people is the concept that it is merely a 'religion' with rules and rituals to be followed and performed. The fact is that Islam is more than a 'religion'. It is a complete way of life –religious, social, political, economical, moral and spiritual. The Qur'an is the final divine guidance for all mankind, dealing with all aspects of life, both private and public.



Prayer is the heart of religion and faith for all Muslims but how should they perform it and what words should they use to convey their yearnings and feelings? The first and the opening Surah (Chapter) in the Qur'an is the answer. This Surah sums up our faith, our hope and our aspirations in things that matter. For any act of worship or prayer, all Muslims have to recite this Surah through which they assert the uniqueness of God and seek his guidance for following the right path and avoiding the wrong one. The rest of the Qur'an is an answer to this prayer as to how to become a good Muslim and thereby a good human being.

Every Muslim is required to bear in mind that we are here on earth only for a short spell of time, going through a test set by God. We must also remember all the time that all our possessions including knowledge, skills, wealth and everything else belong to God and are given to us by Him on trust for a short period of time for the use of our benefit and need without any extravaganza, misuse, waste or hoarding. Whatever we do not need must be shared with humanity.

All Muslims believe that the knowledge of God's code of life has been communicated to man from the beginning of His creation. Man has been given a conscience and an intellect as well as the gift of perception of right and wrong. Therefore there is no scope for the Muslim to plead ignorance.

Throughout the history of mankind, God has chosen some men known as prophets or messengers to spread the same basic message of the Oneness of God who alone has to be worshipped and obeyed and perform good deeds and refrain from bad ones.

Muslims therefore believe that Islam is not a new religion. All prophets, beginning from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jesus and all others and finally Muhammad (may peace be upon them all) were all Muslim and were

trying to persuade human beings to submit to God's will, obey Him and be human.

Although the five pillars mentioned above are compulsory, Islam is not simply a religion of ritual. As stated above, Islam provides guidance on all aspects of life, including personal conduct, formal worship, good behaviour, treatment of family, companions, communities and the society at large.

Islam requires the utmost honesty, integrity, trust, dedication, commitment in business transactions, in performing day-to-day duties in whatever capacity, in giving evidence or in any other act.

There are certain prohibitions in Islam, which are for the good of all people. Muslims are required to be kind towards their relatives and neighbours and care for one another through generosity and helpfulness. The needy, no matter who they are, must be provided for and helped by Muslims.

For all Muslims, the motto should be 'service above self' and therefore they should be upright people in society and must always try to perform good deeds and avoid wrongdoing and constantly bear in mind that life is a test and that one day they will have to account for their actions.

Terrorism or violence has no place in Islam. The Qur'an unequivocally states that killing one human being is killing the whole of humanity and saving one innocent human being is saving the whole of humanity. A fundamentalist Muslim is a good Muslim and a good Muslim is a good human being, with malice towards none but charity for all. This belief has been guiding me as a Muslim all my life, in everything I have done and all I still do.

Harun Rashid

Benefits of Interfaith Board Membership

I have been a member of Interfaith Wolverhampton since Autumn 2005 after reading an advert in the Express and Star. When I visited the Interfaith office, I was welcomed by Jim MacManus, and later on, invited by Erik Pearse to join the board in Spring 2009.

In September that year I attended the AGM, met some very good people from nearly all the faiths in Wolverhampton, had dialogue with all of them, and decided this was an excellent opportunity to increase my

knowledge of other faiths and how the practice of each was carried out first hand rather than just reading about them. I continued attending Board meetings, started shadowing Erik, learning about who was doing what in

the organisation. I also started attending other board meets, including the homeless forum, and City Centre Churches Engage, amongst them. I went on visits to local and afar places of worship, where guides would be on hand to give talks on and about that place. I joined in prayer meetings, meditations and developed talks with other members. I went with Mike to school visit presentations, liked them enough to learn how to do them.

An opportunity to gain even more knowledge and experience presented itself through a course on being an interfaith guide late in 2010, on which I was lucky enough to secure a place. We were given reading materials, went out to places of worship to look at their layouts, and develop scripts of presentations, and later actually carry out presentations to other members on the course. All in all, it has been a highly enjoyable experience with IFWton and continuing to be so too.

Jaswinder Chagger



My Jewish Faith

I remember as a child, after a family Seder (Passover feast) asking, "Grandpa, do you believe God exists?" He replied simply, "Oh, I don't know about that." Clearly such a question was nothing much to do with being Jewish, at least not in my family. So what was being Jewish about and what part did faith have to play?



Well it turns out, not much. Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is in conversation with the author Howard Jacobson. (Ref: The Case for God? (Part 1 of 2)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXPA0BGSWLI>

For me, the Jewish faith is neither chosen nor affirmed. I find myself to be part of a tradition that is about deeds. The underpinning theme is a sense of duty to attend to the world (Tikkum Olam – literally 'repairing the world').

They are talking about the relationship between Jews and God, a relationship that they compare to a tempestuous love affair, sometimes difficult, sometimes painful but also uplifting. Suddenly Howard Jacobson asks, "And this god with whom you describe our love affair, are you sure he is there?" Jonathan Sacks seems momentarily taken off guard, composes himself and then replies, "I ... well you know that I believe that faith isn't certainty. Faith is the courage to live with uncertainty. Judaism is a refusal to give way to despair. That is why I stake my life on that hope that the call God gave us at the beginning of history was the call worth following." Like my grandpa, he does not answer the question either.

I remember a less friendly exchange between these two when Howard had made it clear that he was not interested in ritual observance, attending synagogue and the like. Jonathan was explaining that Howard would be welcomed with opened arms back into the community if he so chose. Howard, with no little anger, responded making two clear points - I have never left the Jewish community and I have no choice whether or not I am a member of it for I am a Jew.

For me, the Jewish faith is neither chosen nor affirmed. I find myself to be part of a tradition that is about deeds. The underpinning theme is a sense of duty to attend to the world (Tikkum Olam – literally 'repairing the world'). In my parents' generation – mainly secular

Jews – this meant being active in politics and the trade union movement - fighting for social justice. To not be engaged and active in the community at large was to be negligent. The Jewish obligation was as simple as that.

The Jewish tradition is argumentative, rigorous and intellectually demanding. For example the Jewish philosopher Maimonides' (1135 – 1209) writes brilliantly about charity (tzedakah) making us think carefully not just about giving but the morality of how we give. Maimonides unpacks charitable acts into a hierarchy of eight levels – the highest is working in partnership and enabling the recipient to become independent – the lowest is giving out of pity.

So the Jewish tradition gives me an obligation to act and a toolbox of carefully developed arguments and analyses of the morality surrounding those acts. I know I will always have more to do and more to study to better understand how to act in the best way. If this feels overwhelming, then, one is reminded that of Jonathan Sacks words 'Judaism is a refusal to give way to despair.'

I should say that my take on Jewish faith is mine. There is no intention to make this representative of the Jewish community. In any case, as David Ben-Gurion is said to have quipped, 'Put two Jews in a room and you will find three opinions.'

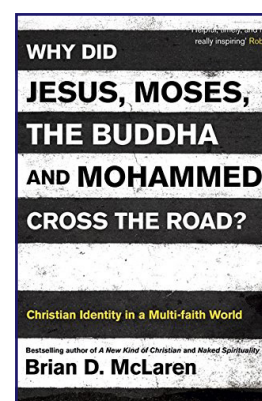
Martin Gomberg

Treasures of the Ivy Gutridge Collection

(Located in the Faith Section in the Central Library)

Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed cross the road?

By Brian D. McLaren



This is a passionate book, written by an American Christian Evangelist, addressed primarily, but by no means exclusively, to Christians in the context of a multi-faith world. It is well-researched and scholarly but the contents are quite accessible as the book is well and clearly written.



Mclaren contends that Christians' response to other religions tends to fit into one of three separate categories. The first category – *strong/ hostile* – includes those with a strong Christian identity who are hostile to outsiders, whereas the second – *weak/ benign* – includes those with a weak Christian identity which is benign (or harmless) towards outsiders. The third category – *moderately strong/moderately benign* – lies somewhere in-between. He argues passionately for a fourth category, namely one that is both strong and benign – one that in no way dilutes the teachings and example of Jesus Christ but rather brings out their inherent movement towards the other, starting with the most marginalised.

All too often, he contends, Christians have moved their focus away from Jesus Christ and, whilst calling themselves *Christians*, fail to be *Christ-like*. In his attitude to sinners, to the poor and the rich, to unbelievers, to

tax collectors and all 'others', Christ is essentially non-judgemental and he positively seeks them out, not to condemn them but to proclaim to them that they are loved and forgiven. In other words, Christ, McLaren argues, cannot be contained within a box labelled 'Christian'. He belongs to everyone, everywhere.

Christ, McLaren argues, cannot be contained within a box labelled 'Christian'. He belongs to everyone, everywhere.

In terms of inter-faith relations, this means that 'Christian proclamation is not simply a matter of pointing others to God: it is about inviting others on a *shared journey to and through God to the neighbour, the other, the enemy.*' (My italics) Just as Christianity has been profoundly (both positively and negatively) influenced by its development in the Holy Roman Empire with its integrated system of domination, subordination, expansion and assimilation, so other religions each have their own location and history with 'a unique, particular and evolving perspective from which to encounter the Spirit in a unique way'. This, for Christians, does not involve in any way diluting their own Christian faith, but sharing it with others and seeking to perceive the working of the Spirit, open to all in 'the other'.

So 'Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed cross the road?' You'll have to read the book to find the answer – I heartily recommend that you do.

Erik Pearse

What my faith means to me

On an everyday basis my core religious beliefs as a Sikh inform my ethics and attitudes towards others. Sikhi makes it essential to treat others in the same manner that I would like to be treated.

As a woman, my Sikhi makes me stronger in that it encourages me to stand as an equal to males. My faith encourages me to make the best of my life without a pompous show of achievements. Being

a woman, according to Sikhi, does not prevent me in making the most of the opportunities available to me. The Guru Granth Sahib states:

Why call her bad, from whom are born the Kings?



*From a woman, a woman is born.
Without a woman, there can be none.
Nanak, only the one True Lord, is without a woman.
(AG 473).*

Sikhi is also the way of life for me since it has no hierarchies amongst individuals. All individuals are treated equally on the basis of devotion to the Divine. Sikhi has no priesthood and no so-called orthodoxy or laity. In explaining how my religious beliefs are related

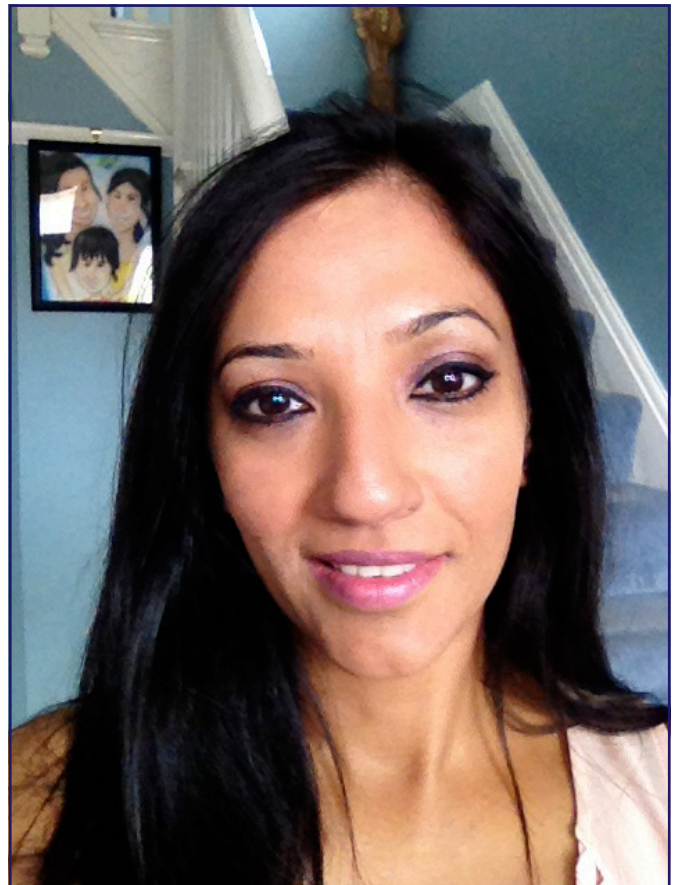


My faith encourages me to make the best of my life without a pompous show of achievements. Being a woman, according to Sikhi, does not prevent me in making the most of the opportunities available to me.

to my views about the meaning and ultimate purpose of life, again, the Guru Granth Sahib holds all the answers for me. It is comforting to me that I have the Divine presence both within me and all around me. Sikhi tells me that Waheguru has my best interests at heart and I should acknowledge the Divine Will by not relying over-heavily on material attachments. Nevertheless, I am encouraged to have a family and to provide for my children since it is the stage of the householder that my faith emphasises. Again Sikhi gives me the strength to have both a career and be a mother at the same time. When faced with adversities from time to time, I pray to God and an answer always unfolds in front of me.

The three principles of my faith, *nam simran*, *kirt karo* and *vand ke chakko* encourage me to constantly

thank the Divine for birth into the human realm and to undertake charitable work. The concept of the *Pac Khand* also reminds me that I am not a mere puppet on a string, but that I have to take full advantage of being given the golden opportunity to realise the Divine through birth into the human realm which is only one species out of the 84,000,000 species that Sikh religious philosophy highlights. For me, Sikhi is more a way of life, a *dharma*, rather than a prescribed list of rules



and regulations. In my view, Guru Nanak and many of the earlier Gurus had no scope in their teachings for exclusivist symbolism or attitudes. Their emphasis on what it means to be a good person is what gives me strength as a Sikh. For me, my Sikhi is in my heart, at this moment in life I do not see it as necessary for me personally to have an outward identity as a Sikh in order to follow the teachings contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. The very term 'Sikh' translates as a disciple, a learner, therefore, I am constantly learning about life and its vicissitudes without claiming that my way is the only way.

Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar

Dates for your Diary

Tuesday July 21st
(12.45-2.00)

Bring and Share Lunch*

Tuesday August 18th
(12.45-2.00)

Bring and Share Lunch*

Saturday September 12th

Afternoon Visits to local Places of Worship in the Pennfields area

Tuesday September 15th
(6.00pm)

Interfaith Wolverhampton - Annual General Meeting

The evening will include a talk about Thomas Merton by Stephen Dunhill, co-editor of the Merton Journal. Thomas Merton was a Christian mystic and a keen proponent of interfaith understanding; this year is the 100th anniversary of his birth

Wednesday October 18th
(7 00pm)

Dinner and Spirituality

Third of five talks, each from a different faith perspective, on Spirituality, at the Newman Centre, Church of St.Thomas of Canterbury, Tettenhall. With a meal beforehand.

Wednesday October 25th
(7 00pm)

Dinner and Spirituality

Fourth of five talks, each from a different faith perspective, on Spirituality, at the Newman Centre, Church of St.Thomas of Canterbury, Tettenhall. With a meal beforehand.

*Bring and Share Lunches will all be at 24 School Street, but the room used will depend on availability

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