



Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

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NEWSLETTER

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Summer 2014 - Spring 2015

Issue 19

Since our last Newsletter we have:

- Published and distributed in March our 18th Newsletter
- Visited on 10th April the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral and Centre at Stevenage
- Combined, on Tuesday 15th July, our AGM with a visit to the Princess Alice Hospice at Esher
- On Tuesday 5th August, visited the Ismaili Centre in South Kensington
- On Monday 25th August attended the Shinyo-en Open Day and 'Light Floating Festival'
- On Monday, 1st September, visited the Sikh Gurdwara in Southall
- On Tuesday 30th September, at the EMF Centre, Thames Ditton, enjoyed and discussed presentations on 'Aspects of Buddhism'
- Held our annual Gala on Saturday 18th October in the Joyce Grenfell Centre, Claremont Fan Court School, Esher
- On Sunday 2nd November, taken part in presentations and discussions in the Mercer Close Centre on the significance of Abraham/Ibrahim for Jews, Christians and Muslims
- On 27th January, 2015, visited the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) in Thames Ditton
- Further developed, in conjunction with the Walton Churches, the Walton 'Street Angels' scheme, and discussed the setting up of a further scheme for Weybridge
- Continued to meet the demand for our 'Insights into Faiths' booklets and to work on an expanded version in one volume
- Continued our research into introduction and inclusion of newcomers to Elmbridge who do not speak English and come from other faiths and cultures
- Been represented on the Independent Advisory Group to Surrey Police, Brooklands Radio, Voluntary Action Elmbridge (VAE), Elmbridge Equality & Diversity Forum, Elmbridge Community & Safety Partnership (EC & SP) and Surrey SACRE

Our work during this period has been supported by a grant of £800 from Elmbridge Borough Council

Thursday, 10th April, 2014 - Visit to the Coptic Centre and Orthodox Cathedral of St George at Shephalbury Manor, Broadhill Way, Stevenage, Herts



Introduction

This was our second visit to the Cathedral of Saint George, the previous one having been five years ago almost to the day. As usual, we hired a coach. The group numbered 22, with a few Baha'is from Stevenage and St Albans joining us at the Cathedral. We were welcomed warmly, and this added to the glow of a warm sunny April day.

HG Bishop Angaelos welcomed us in a small lecture room overlooking the inside of the Cathedral, and his address was very different from the one he gave us 5 years ago, but effectively complemented the previous one. It was also an example of putting religion and deep faith into real world practice, demonstrating the high values that need not be compromised to achieve the love and unity desired by Jesus Christ, and indeed, all other divine scriptures and messages.

His Grace started by mentioning the excellent relationship he shares with other faiths and religious leaders in the United Kingdom. He described the Coptic Centre as functioning in two capacities. It serves the local parish but is also a hub of activity that utilises its resources to impact and empower various sectors of the national and international communities.

The term "Copt" actually means "Egypt" or "Egyptian", so that we could have a "Christian Copt", a "Muslim Copt" and so on if we wanted, but in practice the word Copt refers to Egyptian Christians, a presence that goes back to between 50 and 60 AD, having been established by St Mark, the Apostle. This presence was unimpaired until the present, and in the 1st Century the Coptic Christians constituted about 85% of the population of Egypt.

Islam was introduced to Egypt in the 7th. Century and for about 200 years there was a benevolent co-existence, and a Pharaonic/Christian/Arabic/Islamic environment was created. This did not last as the Coptic language was subsequently outlawed, and the Coptic community dwindled to about 15% of the population. The policy was that Copts had three options: pay a "Jizia" (or tribute) and attain protected status, convert to Islam, or suffer death.

The 15% proportion of Copts in Egypt has prevailed until the present, and while there has been some emigration, mostly to the West and Australia, that did not amount to mass migration, and 90% of Copts are still in Egypt, with about 10% elsewhere. The Copts contributed greatly to life in Egypt, and indeed established "**monasticism**" as a way of life that has been emulated ever since. The original Monastic was St. Anthony in the 4th Century AD.

The Coptic Christians were very active in the ecumenical movement of early Christianity, and played a prominent part in the Council of Nicea. The creed was actually drafted by the Coptic Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria.

The Coptic Calendar is different from the Gregorian calendar which we use, and starts in AD 284 honouring the hundreds of thousands (maybe even millions) of martyrs in early times.

Current engagements and activities

Bishop Angaelos described his dedication and involvement in Interfaith dialogue, nationally and internationally. He is in regular meetings and communication with other Christian Leaders, Muslims, Jews, Hindu, Buddhists, Bahá'ís, the British Parliament (both houses), but he has a keen interest at present in the International Movement for Religious Freedom. He compares the need now for religious freedom as equal in importance and magnitude to the need in the past for freedom from slavery. While religions should never be political, they nevertheless should act as the moral compass for human endeavour.

Importantly, we need to speak for the whole of humanity. "If I speak only for the Christian communities, then I am not a Christian", Bishop Angaelos said.

Reflections on the situation in Egypt

As would be expected, HG Bishop Angaelos expressed his concern for Egypt. He said that it has been going through a lot of change since 2011, when the uprisings were started by people who wanted change but did not know exactly what change. Political leadership, such as existed, was weak, and all other leadership was suppressed. The media's role was not helpful as it was directed not towards informing but rather towards indoctrinating. The 12 months of President Mohammed Morsi were catastrophic, and the statistics of rise in chaos, corruption, crime, the industry of abduction and ransom, aggression to women in public and private, the

destruction of churches, killings and burglary, created a near total collapse of society. There were 5500 demonstrations during the year, the economy plummeted and the police all but disappeared from the scene. The Army, while on standby, was really not prepared for internal security roles, as it is normally responsible for the protection of the nation from outside aggression.

Interestingly, while the Copts were persecuted and their churches burnt down, their reaction was totally in keeping with their Christian teachings of loving your neighbour, and giving love in exchange for aggression. Any aggressive action would have generated an equal or even more intense aggressive reaction. It should be noted that attacks were not only on Christians, but also on Muslim minorities such as the "Sufi's", the Shi'ites, and others.

However, Egypt is now a little more settled, and the people are looking forward to the coming elections. Egyptians value their votes, but poverty can influence their actions.

Some basic facts

Bishop Angaelos described the Coptic Church as "Monophysite", with the Divinity and Humanity of Christ being of one corporate Nature and indivisible.

Only men can be priests, and they may be married, but bishops are monks and remain celibate. Marriage is given by God, and so the priest puts the ring half way onto the finger, and then the spouse puts it further. Same sex marriage is not condoned.

Discussion

Amongst the questions asked, was one about the head cover the Bishop was wearing. It has six crosses on either side of the head representing the twelve Apostles, and one at the back, representing Jesus Christ as the "Shepherd". The stitched division in the middle signifies the work of the Devil in tearing the believers asunder, but they indicated the strength of their faith and "stitched" it back.

The shape of the Cathedral is like the Cross. The arches in the ceiling are a simulation of an ark (Noah's salvation). Cathedrals can also be round (signifying endlessness) or oval (signifying the Ark of salvation).

To conclude

HG Bishop Angaelos was thanked most fervently, and many of our group expressed their admiration of his address.

We then enjoyed tea, coffee, and biscuits to supplement our picnic lunches. We thanked our young lady host, and made our way back in what was a very smooth and uneventful journey.

Nabil M Mustapha

**Tuesday 9th July
Annual General Meeting
and visit to the Princess Alice Hospice in Esher**



Present

The Mayor and Mayoress of Elmbridge, Councillor Barry Fairbanks and Mrs Gill Smith

Executive Committee Members

Nabil Mustapha (Chairman and Trustee)
 Geoff Morris (Secretary and Trustee)
 Leonard Beighton (Treasurer and Trustee)
 Rashid Laher (Trustee)
 Kauser Akhtar
 Chuyuen Corfield
 Jackie Foster
 Chandra Gupta
 Nazir Malik
 Pushpa Patel
 Nadim Vanderman

Members and Friends

Michael & Debbie Banks	Rushna Master
Joya Bose-Mallik	John Molloy
Ruth Bradbury	Steve Nolan
Michael Elson	Gail Partridge
Stella Eusebio	Lindsay Sainsbury
Alan Foster	H & C van Roest
Shandri Gupta	N & T Vanderman

1. **Contents of the Minutes:** At the AGM in 2013, it was decided unanimously that there was no need to repeat in the minutes the papers prepared for the AGM, including, in particular, the reports of the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer and the Accounts. The Secretary is prepared to send copies of these to any who wish.
2. **Adoption of Accounts and Appointment of Examiner:** The examined accounts were unanimously adopted, and the meeting expressed thanks to the examiner, Mr. Nadim Vanderman, ACMA, who agreed to be the examiner for the coming year.
3. **Election of Officers and Committee:** The existing officers and committee were unanimously elected 'en bloc'.

After the AGM refreshments were provided, and Dr Steve Nolan, Chaplain to the Princess Alice Hospice, showed us round the hospice facilities in two groups followed by a talk . . .

Introduction

Dr Nolan described the hospice concept as that of providing care, and quoted the wisdom of Marcus Cicero (106-43BCE) that "where there is life, there is hope". Hospices developed from medieval shelters provided by monks for pilgrims as a religious rather than a medical duty. They formed the basis of what became hospitals after King Henry VIII (1491-1547) ordered the dissolution of monasteries. Philanthropists such as Sir Thomas Guy (1644-1724) carried on the good work in building and expanding Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals. However, apart from hospitals, the spiritual instinct of caring for the dying remained mainly in the hands of the so-called 'Sisters of Charity'.

In the 19th Century, the concept of separation of the "curative" medical care from the "sanctuary" kind of care for terminal illnesses, started to develop, and this led to the establishment of hospices, mainly run by nuns to start with, working independently of one another. Mme Jeanne Garnier founded the Dames de Calaire in Lyon, in France (1842) and coined the word 'hospice'. Similar institutions followed, the main ones being "Our Lady's Hospice" in Dublin (1878), St Rose's Home in New York (1899) and "St Joseph Hospice in Hackney, London" in 1905.

A major transformation of the hospice idea started with the development of St Christopher's Hospice in 1967, by Dame Cecily Saunders. A religious woman who trained first as a nurse, then as a social worker and eventually as a doctor, she realised the difficulties of terminally suffering cancer patients. She had worked for a spell at St Joseph's Hospice, but decided to establish the world's first purpose built hospice to function on the principles of combining teaching and clinical research, relieving pain and providing a holistic care.

Hospice care served on the one hand to counteract the medical tendency to regard dying as an indication of failure, and on the other hand, to mitigate the pressure towards "Euthanasia".

Saunders developed the concept of 'total pain'; the idea that pain can have physical, social, emotional and spiritual aspects. Death was not to be 'hastened', and rather to be considered a normal process, pending which relief of pain and other distressing symptoms is provided, while at the same time dealing with each person and their family/carers with respect of their worth and individuality.

The Saunders' philosophy is to help patients with strong and unfamiliar emotions, to assist them to explore meaning, purpose and value in their lives, and to offer the opportunity to reconcile and heal relationships and complete important personal tasks. A very important aspect of hospice care is the need to offer a support system for family and friends during the patient's illness and in bereavement.

Hospice chaplains aim to demonstrate that they are willing and able to be in human contact with the suffering person '*no matter what.*' He or she is someone who aims to stay with the dying person, and be someone who has no therapeutic or professional agenda.

In conclusion

Dr Nolan stressed that the value of hospice chaplains may not be in their religious knowledge or liturgical skills but rather in their ability to be '*present*' with suffering. Spiritual care, as distinct from religious care, needs a high degree of "presence" of the chaplain, as the mere presence is in itself spiritual care for the dying. The chaplain must neither hide behind the ritual of sacrament, nor should the doctor hide behind the stethoscope. Such seeming barriers of protection are to become, in fact, avenues of approach which could lead to shared of feelings and helpful communications with the patient.

Finally, Dr Nolan quoted Ram Dass:

"I started to hang out with more and more people who were dying and just learning to be with them, realising that all I can bring to them, finally, was my truth. I could not bring rule books about how to be with dying people. When I walked into the room with a person who was dying, there was just the person and me and here we are. And if I am full of hiding in roles and identities, I cut myself off from them, and they're left alone, which is the hardest way to die".

Dr Nolan ended his talk with a plug for his book: "***Spiritual Care at the end of Life***" (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012).

A lively and well considered discussion followed, demonstrating clearly the degree of interest that Dr Nolan's talk had generated. He was thanked by the Mayor and by myself on behalf of EMF, and we managed to make a small donation to Princess Alice Hospice, expressing our gratitude for hosting us and making the evening so enjoyable and informative.

Nabil M Mustapha

Visit to the Ismaili Centre in South Kensington

Tuesday 5th August

Introduction

We arrived in the coach at 11am as arranged, about twenty of us in all. We were met by our host Mr Malik Ajani, a very eloquent young PhD student, on a visit from the USA for his research. He was welcoming and immediately set about describing the centre and aspects of the Isma'ili Sect.

The Isma'ili's

Mr Malik said that there are approximately 1.6bn Muslims worldwide, mostly Sunni's, with about 10-20% Shi'ah. The Isma'ilis are a sect of the Shi'ah, and they are a 'tarika' or branch, signifying a single track.

At the entrance hall is the Qur'anic verse: ***"In the name of God, the most generous and the most forgiving (or compassionate)"***

The building was started in 1979, and a plaque of His Highness the Aga Khan at the entrance commemorates this event. The Centre was opened in 1985.

The site was supposed to be earmarked for the National Theatre, having remained vacant for a long time as a result of pressure from George Bernard Shaw for that purpose.

The whole surround, from the floor to the walls and the ceiling is a mixture of Qur'anic verses to be inculcated in people's minds, and geometrical patterns which are integral to Islamic culture. There is a sense of order and an emphasis of the eminence of God, for example the verse that states: ***"We are for God and to Him we shall return"***. Thus there is continuity with the start and the end being within the same source. At the same time, there is the concept that in whichever way you turn God will be there. Interestingly this is also found in the Bhagvad Gita. It is a symbol of humanity.

In the centre there is a water feature, and water is another spiritual symbol as in baptism, conferring blessing and purification. But another characteristic of water is that it can go round obstacles, and this symbolises the need for humbleness and flexibility. All these symbols are shared with Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

Design of the Centre

The building was designed by Casson Condor Partnership, and the garden by a Japanese firm with input from a German Muslim and a Pakistani artist. The emphasis is on ***diversity*** in the representation, with people from all over the world. There is a mixture of Pentelic (white Athenian) marble and blue (Bahia, Brazilian) marble. Blue is characteristic of Shi'a Islam. It is said to have been Ali's favourite colour.

The ceiling appears to be dropping stalactites, and this in itself is a symbolic reminder of the Cave of Hira where the Prophet Mohammed first received His revelation from the Angel Jibriel (Gabriel).

The Aga Khan was closely involved with the design, and Martha Nouzhan worked out the internal design to offer various possibilities and facilities for all kinds of people.

There is a portrait of the fourth Aga Khan, the grandfather of the present Aga Khan who, apart from being the religious leader of the Isma'ili Muslims, was also the Chairman of the League of Nations. He is considered the 49th Imam in the line of the descendants of the Imam Ali. The portrait is a mosaic of small blue Lapis Lazuli stones from Egypt. It is a stone supposedly imported from what is now Pakistan about 5000 years ago, and the Egyptians consider it a symbol of eternity, because the more you touch it the more it is maintained.

Lighting

There are three types of lighting:

- nocturnal lighting
- artificial lighting: creating geometric patterns on the floor
- the windows, which have bevelled glass that deflects the view from outside but maintains it from inside. It also helps suppress outside noise

The Mezzanine

Light is the theme of the mezzanine. The specially calligraphed Qur'anic verse on the wall panel is: "**God is the light of the heavens and the earths**". The wood panels are oak, and the chandeliers just make for 'light upon light' and are similar in shape to those of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul.

The Garden

The garden is laid out in a manner that symbolises Paradise. There is the fig tree, symbol of peace and knowledge, and the four streams symbolise milk, bounty, wine, and honey that the righteous will find in Paradise.

The Muslim physician/philosopher Avicenna was reputed to have walked in a garden to counteract depression.

The streams in the garden produce a soothing sound that distracts from the sound of the traffic outside.

There is a variety of flowers and shades of green

Sympathy with the surroundings of the Centre

The building was designed so as not to interfere with the surrounding existing edifices.

So, there are five floors DOWN, not up. This also means that the garden can be seen from around, so that the meeting room gets some light from it as though 'paradise comes to you'.

The idea of Service

The idea of service is integral to the Isma'ili's. There are two main institutions:

- The Jama'ati Institute
- The Aga Khan Development Network

The various activities are undertaken by volunteers, especially to the so-called 'Golden Club' known in UK as 'Senior Citizens'. But over the worldwide communities there are bigger projects, such as AL Azhar Park in Cairo and the Aga Khan Hospital in Pakistan. Overall US\$ 600 million a year is earmarked for such projects, and they are aimed at all people.

The Imamate

Ali, the Son-in-Law to the Prophet Mohammed is, in His relation to Mohammed, also considered to be the equivalent of Aaron in His relation to Moses. So while the law was not given to Aaron, He had to interpret the law after the passing away of Moses. Similarly, Ali is the figure entrusted to interpret the law after the passing away of the Prophet Mohammed.

However, after the passing away of the Prophet, Abu Bakr El Siddique was chosen as the first Khalifa (or successor), then Omar Bin Khattab, Othman Bin Affan, and only after the third Khalifa was Ali Bin Abu Taleb chosen.

This created the major schism in Islam between the Sunna (the traditionalists) and the Shi'a (followers or supporters of Ali) also called Ahl El Beit (members of the Household (of Mohammed)).

According to our guide he considered this schism as being about authority, not about theology.

Thereafter, the Shi'ites followed successive Imams from the lineage of Ali. The sixth Imam was **Ja`far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq** (702–765 CE). He was an intellectual, and he had several children, the second being Isma'il who became the seventh Imam and gave his name to the Isma'ili's. Another brother was Malik who established the Sunni 'Maliki' school of thought.

In turn the lineage goes on to the 'Twelvists', a total of twelve Imams. The twelfth, **Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdī**, according to tradition is hidden, not dead, and will remain hidden until 'The Christ's return'.

The intellectuality of Sadek & Malik produced the four major 'Schools of Thought', although they remain part of Sunni Islam: the Maliki, the Hanballi, the Hanafi, and the Shaf'ie.

However, the Isma'ilis follow the Ja'afari School with emphasis on esoteric understanding of Scriptures, and a Sufi tradition (Sophism or mystical).

Essentials of Isma'ili Islam

The central issue of Islam is acceptance and consent; that is choice. Even at the time of Mohammed there was '*No compulsion in religion*'. In Isma'ili there is no set theology. Each Imam changes the thoughts according to circumstances. The reason for the separation of the different followers was most commonly the element of persecution. Otherwise there would have been no separation.

The Aga Khan is a title given by the Shah in Iran, and in the UK the Queen conferred the titled of 'His Highness'.

One of the original Aga Khans spent enormous effort to help the poor in Iran and raised some of the masses from poverty to wealth. As an expression of gratitude they weigh him annually with gold and jewellery, and this annual source of wealth is used for services to the people in many countries.

Prayers: men and women sit in two separate areas in the prayer hall that has a capacity of 800 to 1000 worshipers. While at prayer they face Mecca in conformity with the rest of the Muslims, but actually any direction will do.

Prayer can take different forms, including meditation (*Dhikr*).

The number 5 (found in patterns on the floor and elsewhere) is significant, as it symbolises the five Holy figures: Mohammed, Fatima, Ali, Hassan and Hussein. The symbol is used by many Muslim communities in the form of an outstretched palm with five fingers in order to ward off the evil eye.

End of the visit

The group thanked Mr Malik Ajani very much for the trouble and time he took to explain in all patience and clarity all the aspects that concerned the group.

We offered our thanks, and left after about 2½ hours rather than the one hour that was scheduled in the original arrangement.



Shinnyo-en Open Day and 'Light Floating Festival'

Monday 25th August

A widespread invitation by Shinnyo-En received a very good response, in spite of the torrential rain.

The Centre in Long Ditton was full at every level, and the programme included two sessions of meditation in addition to talks about Shinnyo-En Buddhism.

EMF is proud of the fact that we have among our members, Mr John Molloy and his charming Japanese wife, as well as Mr Peter Clarke the local administrator.

As usual the hospitality was clearly in evidence; the tables were full of nibbles and cakes and there was no shortage of tea or coffee. Salient among the pastry on offer were the Japanese small balls of rice pastry with soya bean sweetened filling. The taste was delicate and distinctive.

The Mayor, Cllr Barry Fairbank and Mayoress Ms Gillian Smith were in attendance, as well as Mrs Shweta Kapadia, the Councillor representing Long Ditton. Our Chairman, Dr Nabil Mustapha was honoured with the privilege of having an audio interview for the event.

In the evening the ceremony for floating the lanterns was preceded by a period of meditation, and a prayerful session with traditional Japanese bamboo flute music. The atmosphere was distinctly one of serenity, spirituality, reflective prayer and a commemoration of our ancestry and departed family. Messages of remembrance, or messages offering a light in gratitude for the ***past***, appreciation for the ***present***, and hope for the ***future***, were written by each individual on the lanterns. The lanterns were then taken to the lake, and people were invited to push the individual lanterns to float or to watch (in view of the rain) from indoors. A lantern was specifically dedicated to remembrance of the start of World War I.

Quoting Master Shinjo, Founder of the Shinnyo Buddhism: ***"A candle offers itself to give light to people. For a place to become brighter, all it takes is for every one candle to light others"***

The view was breathtaking as well as invigorating our spirits with hope and gladness. It was an evening to be remembered and cherished.

We thank Shinnyo_En for mounting this event and for inviting us.

Nabil M Mustapha

Visit to the Sikh Gurdwara in Southall

Monday, 1st September



We were met on arrival by our guide Mr Viridi Singh, who is one of the volunteer members of the Sikh Community who undertake these duties. The welcome was sincere and warm, and on placing our shoes on the racks and covering our heads with scarves provided for the purpose, our admiring glances were immediately directed to the ornate entrance hall with high ceiling and stained glass decor.

The Gurdwara (name for any Sikh temple) is the newest in London and the UK, and the site of an original one built sixty years ago. It was inaugurated as recently as 2011. It took three years to build, and the cost of nearly £18 million was met by the Sikh Community in the UK.

The whole building is quite imposing and majestic, and stands out in that part of London with its busy roads and lively commercial activity.

Tour of the Langer

Mr Singh was proud to show us the beating heart of the Gurdwara initially, before talking about the soul and the spirit. That heartbeat is the continual provision of food within the Temple: 24 hours every day. This is made possible because of the extremely spacious kitchen included in the design, and the work of cooks and assistants (mainly lady members of the community) from 5am to 10pm.

No one could fail to notice the ubiquitous tray that can be filled with a meal that should satisfy any but the extremely hungry or, of course, the greedy. Any person can return for more if he or she so wishes.

The industry and friendliness within that vast kitchen was a joy to witness, but the larder and the refrigerated room were very impressive.

All this and the rest of the expenses of the Gurdwara are met by donations, and I am glad to say that at the end of the visit EMF made its contribution with great feeling of pleasure.

We were then shown the large prayer area where chanting, reading, music, and a spiritually vitalising atmosphere prevails. It is open all the time to men and women, with the genders occupying adjacent halves of the hall.

About Sikhism

Mr Singh mentioned that the Sikh Teachings were initiated by the Guru Nanak about 550 years ago in India. Nine further Gurus succeeded him, and the last one decided that the Sikh Community was mature enough to create its own learned people and not need another Guru. The Sikh way of life relies on :

- Everyone must earn a living
- Remembering God's name in one's heart all the time
- Doing charity work. No charity could mean there is no God
- Believing in the equality of humankind. This emanates from the background of the caste system
- Women and men are equal. A good reasoning is: "How can you say the King is great when his mother is considered inferior"
- Respect for women as we respect our mother
- Eliminating discrimination. This is the quality we need to enable us to find God
- Sweetness: Being a sweet person
- Humility: the more humble we are, the better. The metaphor is that we have to dig deep to allow the building to rise
- There shall be no 'Ego'. An example of why this should be is the 40 million killed as a result of Nazism.
- Marriage is the cornerstone of society. This means marriage of a husband and wife. All Guru's were married, except one who died aged 8 years
- There is only one God. He is All Powerful. We are too small to know God. The metaphor is that the small fish in the ocean is incapable of knowing the ocean.
- The Universe is forever, like time. So God is 'Infinity'.

- There is no place where God does not exist, but the real place of God is in one's heart. God is in every person, and one can see God in that person.
- God is the only permanent being and everything is a gift from God, such as food, air, water, so 'what is in it for God'? Essentially all God wants from us in return is 'Love'. It is the same as we want from our children: 'Love'. To show one's love to God one should love His children, love everyone as God's child.

Asked about the Sikhs' attitude to other religions, Mr Singh said that all religions show us the way to God. We cannot know God without religion, any religion. The metaphor is that if we want education we go to a university. Any university will do. The same with religion. Sikhs do not engage in converting, but welcome whoever wants to be a Sikh.

When asked his view as to what there was before the known religions, Mr Singh said there have been other religions all the time but we have no record of them.

Discussion time: Questions and Answers

Asked about Evil, Mr Singh said that they do not believe in the Devil. We have to get over evil by being more godly. We need to control five evil qualities: 1. *lust*; 2. *rage (anger)*; 3. *covetousness and greed*; 4. *attachment to things of this world*; 5. *ego/pride*.

Karma: Mr Singh was interested to explain the concept of Karma, saying that our souls have lived past lives and we carry with them past karmas. Therefore we are the baggage of the past, that is one's actions in the past and in previous lives. Sikhs believe in reincarnation because we have previous lives. We help others even if we dislike them, because if we do not let anger dwell in our heart our body will not suffer, and God will bless us. The metaphor is that the match cannot light anything without burning itself.

Sikhs allow marriage to non-Sikhs. There is freedom of choice. Divorce is allowed if the relationship is intolerable, otherwise personal suffering will be excessive.

Asked about natural disasters such as earthquakes or a person born blind, Mr Singh said that the fault lies in the past. God is looking at every moment of our life. We are accountable for every action, and all actions will be repayable.

Structure of the Sikh Religion

Mr Singh said that the 'Holy Book', called the **Book of Life** was put together in 1800 AD. The Siri Guru Granth Sahib has 1430 pages. It is where all 10 Gurus reside. There is clergy but anyone can also preach sermons. The power of decision making resides in 5 baptised Sikhs sitting together.

Mr Singh mentioned briefly the concept of 'Moksha', when a person has achieved union with God. Then there is no more reincarnation.

The five items of uniform of the Sikh

- The hair is left uncut, as it is a gift from God
- A small comb is always carried. This is to ensure cleanliness and tidiness
- A bangle is worn, the circular shape symbolising the "infinity" of God
- Wearing a pair of shorts: for discipline (?modesty)
- A dagger: one must be a saint and a soldier, capable of defending oneself and one's folks

Sikhs do not have rituals in prayer and there is no fasting required. Anyone can give a sermon if trained adequately. There are seminaries, and the biggest is in Amritsar. Interestingly, Sikh men tend to have the name Singh attached. It means 'lion'. Women tend to have the name Kaur attached which means 'Princess'.

The visit ended with the group going to the kitchen, filling up their trays, and savouring a real Indian Sikh 'menu de jour', satisfying vegetarian curry-based dishes and a dessert. The people serving us were all ages, men and women offering a genuine 'service with a smile'.

We thanked our guide Mr Singh, and took some parting photographic snaps before jumping back (only some of us, not including yours truly), or clambering slowly into the coach for our return journey.

Nabil M Mustapha



30th September at the EMF Centre, Thames Ditton 'Aspects of Buddhism' - Presentations and Discussion

The event was arranged as part of the series to explore aspects of the major faiths, and Buddhism is certainly one of them. Those invited to speak represented the **Shinnyo-En** (Japanese sect) and the **Ch'an Meditation DDMBA London UK** (Taiwanese/Chinese sect). The response to the invitation was very gratifying, as over 40 people attended.

Mr Richard Scott (Ch'an)

Mr Scott spoke about the Ch'an being essentially Taiwanese but with a significant Chinese presence. It is, as with Buddhism in general, about meditation.

He then described briefly the appearance of Buddha (Siddhartha Guatama) in Nepal, and that he was from a wealthy family who lived in luxury. However, he decided to leave his parents' palace and turn into a mendicant. In that new life he met with other mendicants.

He was trained to meditate, but meeting a girl who gave him some milk made him more determined to complete his spiritual quest. At the age of 35 he happened to sit in meditation under a Sacred Fig Tree known as the "Bodhi Tree" in Bodh Gaya in India. He remained there until he achieved "Enlightenment" (and thereby deliverance from suffering).

Mr Scott then described how the Buddha said: "I am a Buddha, not a god or a man". He transcended suffering, and therefore there was no more 're-birth' for him. The Buddha spent the next 59 years teaching, and his message reached India, China, Korea and, from there, Japan.

The Ch'an tradition belongs to the **Mahayana** tradition of Buddhism, a purist thought described also as the 'Great Vehicle'. It indicates that suffering results from misunderstanding or being misguided, and it teaches the individual how to deliver himself from suffering.

Mr Scott then talked about the **Eight noble truths**, the **Sutras**. These are the teachings that were laid down in the 5th Century BC. They are like the Bible, reinforcing meditation.

Mr John Molloy (Shinnyo)

Mr Molloy spoke briefly regarding the early history of Buddhism and the Buddha, describing Shinnyo-En as belonging to the Mahayana Buddhism way of life. He described how this is the path to enlightenment and selflessness. It is a deep wish of all beings to be liberated from suffering. Mr Molloy then said that In Japan there are three schools of Esoteric Buddhism, **Shingon, Tendai and Shinnyo**.

This is how they came about:-

Kukai (774-835) brought 'standard' Buddhism from China and started the Shingon School of Buddhism.

Saicho (767-822) brought a different strain of Buddhism (linked to mountain asceticism) from China and started the Tendai School of Buddhism.

Today the centre of Shingon Buddhism is Daigo-ji Monastery, built in 874 by Shobo Rigen Daishi. Shinjo Ito mastered all qualifications at Daigo-ji Monastery and started the Shinnyo School of Esoteric Buddhism in 1936.

The concept of Buddhism is for everyone to discover him or herself, and anyone can become a Buddha in this life. We need to release the positive karma in us, involving body, speech and mind.

Mr De Lucia (Shinnyo)

Mr De Lucia spoke about enlightenment being achieved through positive action. Moments of happiness could lead to days of happiness, and then a continuous state of

happiness. This means that the karma is the cause and the effect, whereas the "dharma" can be anything material, even such as a chair or a table.

We then were invited to join in songs to enhance meditation.

Discussion

A period of questions and answers followed the talks, and was quite searching. We all felt we had benefitted from the 'enlightening' talks, and I then thanked our speakers for the effort they made to make the evening successful.

Discussion continued over food and drinks.

Nabil M Mustapha

Annual Gala in the Joyce Grenfell Centre, Claremont Fan Court School Saturday 18th October



Young Dancers from the Kingston Chinese Association

The Gala is an opportunity for families of various faiths to come together to enjoy a variety of foods whilst being entertained by people, mainly young, of various cultures.

Guests of Honour were the Mayor and Mayoress of Elmbridge Cllr Barry Fairbanks and Ms Gillian Smith, and the Headmaster of the Senior School Mr Jonathan Insole-Reed and his wife, They were welcomed by Nabil, who then handed over to Geoff Morris who acted as MC.

The participants were invited to fill their plates and glasses and return to the tables for the first part of the entertainment, which was provided by the young dancers of the Kingston Chinese Association. It is always a delight to see the bright costumes and synchronised movements of these enthusiastic young ladies, some of them being well under ten years of age. This year we were treated to a sword dance. The dancers were followed by Jeun Jung who played a Korean Kayagum (harp).

The interval gave everyone an opportunity to collect a variety of delicious desserts. The business of queuing for food is an excellent medium for causing people to talk to others whom they have never met before!!

After the interval the entertainment continued with a Jewish Folk Group, and the Claygate Music-Hall Players who had us all singing along in best Old Time Music Hall Style.

Nabil thanked all those who had made the evening such a success, including, in particular, the Headmaster, the Bursar and all the staff of Claremont, who had prepared all the food and the drinks. Particular thanks were also given to John-Paul, who had so efficiently stage managed the presentation of the various performers and their musical requirements. Thanks also to the performers who had given their time, and to the Committee of EMF who had worked so well together. The evening was concluded by a few words of appreciation and congratulation by the Mayor, who had welcomed the opportunity for him and the Mayoress to talk with so many different people and learn about the various communities within Elmbridge and the way they worked so well together.



Sunday 2nd November in the Mercer Close Centre
'The significance of Abraham/Ibrahim for Jews, Christians and Muslims' Presentations and Discussion

This event was organized by the Ahmadiyya, who invited Rabbi Danni Rich of the Liberal Jewish Movement to give a Jewish perspective and Geoff Morris to give a Christian perspective. These presentations were followed by an Ahmadiyya perspective.

Central to all three presentations was God's Covenant to give the 'promised' land to Abraham and his direct descendents on condition that all males were circumcised.

Danni Rich traced the line of Ibrahim, through Isaac and Jacob to the tribes of Israel and Judah.

Geoff Morris said that the story of the Jewish people was of interest to Christians because Jesus was a Jew and his teachings were developed particularly from Mosaic law, which he claimed that he had come to fulfil. Geoff also pointed out that Christ's mission was to all people and most Christians were 'Gentiles', i.e. not ethnically of Jewish or Ibrahamic origin.

The Ahmadiyya speaker pointed out that many Muslims, though not all, claim descent from Ibrahim.

After a pause for refreshments, general questions were put to the panel for discussion.

27th January 2015

Visit to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Thames Ditton

A report on this very enlightening visit will be in our next Newsletter

17th March 2015 in the EMF Centre

An Act of Unity in memory of the Executed British Hostages

The event was held in response to the request of the ISIS victims' relatives who wished to promote the elimination of hatred. The evening was for people of all faiths or none to celebrate charity and human kindness and to revere the sanctity of life (Attributes for which the victims stood).

This was very much a community event, and was attended by over 60 people including The Mayor and Mayoress of Elmbridge; Surrey Police Commissioner, Kevin Hurley, and his Assistant Mr Shiraz Mirza; the Chief Executive of Elmbridge, Mr Rob Moran and the Voluntary Services Support Officer, Mrs Melanie Bussicot.

After a welcome by Chairman Nabil, Michael Banks read the passage from the Guardian that had asked for this Act of Unity, and called for a brief period of meditation. Then followed short readings, interspersed with music and visual presentations representing diverse sections of our community as follows:

John Molloy - *Buddhist*

Bibas Neogi - *Hindu*

Elaine Cass - *Quaker*

Gail Partridge - *Christian*

Kauser Akhtar - *Muslim*

Nabil Mustapha - *Jewish*

Nabil then explained that he had 'stood in' to read the Jewish text because the date coincided with the Jewish elections, and was the one time when, however sympathetic, no Jewish speaker could be available. He then spoke as a Bahai.

The Mayor said that he had not really known what to expect but had felt the common strength, warmth and purpose of our community in this Act.

The evening was a great success in bringing together people of many faiths and free-thinkers. The atmosphere was sombre/reflective. The blend of music, projection, and speakers combined to deliver an unmistakable message: that our community, at least in Elmbridge, is united, coherent and appreciative of all faiths. Food was provided, just enough. So very little wastage.

The people were so reluctant to leave. The discussions around the food and between groups were really a joy to witness. Even the Mayor was so reluctant to leave. Normally, he would leave first, but this time he left almost last. Credit goes to Kate, Michael, Chuyuen, and Leonard. But also all the other members of the Executive, as each lent a shoulder in one way or another.

While the systems all worked (the laptops, the amplifier, the microphone, and the separate newly bought speakers), the hitch was that we had some minor problem with the resonance created by the microphone. Our speakers must learn to use them better.

So all in all, a big pat on our backs. I think the powers that be were very impressed. Congratulations, and thank you all.

Nabil Mustapha



The following have been agreed - dates to be announced . . .

- ◆ **Annual General Meeting** - (hopefully in June)
- ◆ **Annual Gala** - (hopefully in November)
- ◆ **The Rev Steve Nolan - Chaplain to the Queen Elizabeth Hospice, Esher** - *a Church of England Clergyman, Steve, one of our members, is responsible for providing chaplaincy to people of all denominations.*
- ◆ **Visit to the Zoroastrian Centre** - *The Centre, which we visited five years ago, is housed in a listed old Victorian Music Hall, which has been elegantly adapted to preserve its original structure, yet to accommodate the interesting features of Zoroastrian worship*

**Please let Geoff Morris know if you would like to attend any event (01932 868454)
This enables us to make appropriate arrangements for refreshments etc.**

Membership

We are always pleased to welcome new individuals as members. The annual subscription is £10, for which you will receive the newsletters and priority booking for events and visits, as well as invitations to meetings. The subscription year runs from 1st April to 31st March, and we now have over 100 members.

For enquiries about membership,
please contact the Membership Secretary:

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*The site contains back copies of our Newsletter with
articles summarising the tenets of the major faiths of the world.*

