

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

Autumn/Winter 2006 (Newsletter Number 7)



Since our Summer Newsletter we have:-

- Been entertained by the Jewish Orthodox Synagogue to a sampling of festival foods organised by Stan and Phyllis Conway.
- Sent information to all Faith Centres in the borough or used by people in the borough.
- Placed information in libraries, day centres, council offices surgeries, etc.
- Joined in Hindu dancing to celebrate Divali.
- Been invited to the Annual Ahmadiyya Congress.
- Been invited to the Celebration on the 40th Anniversary of Founding of the Buddhapadipa Temple in Wimbledon and the 60th Anniversary of the Accession of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyade.
- Joined Kingston Inter Faith for a curry dinner

and discussion on "Women in my Faith".

- Held our 2nd Annual General Meeting.
- Enjoyed our 3rd Gala Evening at Claremont Fan Court School.
- Provided on the 12th October a day of "Faith" Training for Surrey Police Cadets.
- Visited the Hindu Temple at Neasden.

Space will permit us to report in detail on only a few of the above.

Membership

We are always pleased to welcome new individuals as members. The annual subscription is £10, for which you will receive the quarterly newsletters and priority booking for events and visits as well as invitations to meetings.

We now have over 80 members. For enquiries about membership, please contact the Membership Secretary:

Phyllis Woodhead
01372 468783



Sampling Festival foods at the Jewish Orthodox Synagogue on 14th June 2006

Phyllis and Stan Conway kindly organised a tasting of Jewish Festival foods at the Staines Orthodox Synagogue for the benefit of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum. Phyllis prepared a delicious array of food appropriate to each of the Jewish Festivals about which she spoke. We were then able to enjoy tasting ample quantities of the various dishes. Following the tasting we were taken into the Synagogue where Phyllis spoke to us about the beliefs and practices of Orthodox Jews.

We were told that there are four main types of Judaism:

1. Orthodox (Mainstream)
2. Liberal
3. Reform (see Summer Newsletter)
4. Ultra Orthodox

As the name suggests, 'Orthodox' Jews adhere strictly to the 613 laws set down in the Five Books of Moses or 'Torah'. Men and women sit separately in the synagogue. There are no female rabbis. Food laws and the Sabbath are strictly observed.

Jewish Food Laws

Cashrut or Kosher food consists of:-

- Animals that have split hooves and chew cud.
- Fish which have fins and scales.
- Birds other than birds of prey.

It is forbidden to mix milk and meat at the same meal or to consume blood.

Sabbath (Shabbat)

Sabbath begins approximately 1 hour before nightfall on Friday and lasts until nightfall on Saturday.

Strict observance of Sabbath involves abstaining from a range of creative activities, including work, travelling, operating electrical appliances, carrying, and cooking.

In observant Jewish homes, Sabbath is a special day and is spent partly in Synagogue and in the company of family and friends. Jews wear their best clothes and eat the best food they can afford.

On Friday night and Sabbath morning, a sanctification (Kiddush) ceremony is performed over a cup of wine or grape juice. Sabbath meals commence with the blessing over two special loaves (Challah).

Traditional Sabbath Foods

Challah: Plaited bread made from a rich pastry

Gefilte Fish balls: A mixture of minced fish, egg, onions and spices is bound with matzo meal, and made into balls or patties, which are deep fried or boiled.

Cholent: An overnight casserole of beans, potato, meat, bone, onion and dumpling – cooked in advance and left in the oven on Friday before the Sabbath commences on a very low heat – to be eaten at lunchtime on Sabbath (Saturday). This is done to overcome actual cooking on the Sabbath which is prohibited.

Lockshen Pudding: Tagliatelle is boiled and mixed with egg, sugar, cinnamon and sultanas, then baked. A savoury version is made with onion, salt and pepper.

Rugalach: A small Danish pastry mixture is baked with chocolate in the centre.

Houmous: A chick pea dip.

MAJOR FESTIVALS

Many of the restrictions of Shabbat apply.

Passover (Pesach) (Occurs in spring and lasts 8 days). Any form of leavened bread is forbidden.

This festival marks the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt.

Traditional Foods:

Matzo: Unleavened bread in the form of a flat cracker. A reminder of leaving Egypt in haste and not having time to make bread in the usual way with yeast.

On the first two evenings of the Passover, a special service is held called the 'Seder' Service, when family and friends come together to commemorate the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Five different types of food are placed on a special 'Seder Plate', which

relate to various things to be remembered.

Seder Plate Foods:

Haroseth: Made with chopped walnuts, apple, cinnamon, sugar and wine as a paste. Signifies the mortar for bricks, as a reminder of the hardship during the years as slaves in Egypt

Burnt Egg: Hard boiled egg burned on the outside. A reminder of the tears of the Jews in Egypt.

Shank Bone: Raw lamb bone.

A reminder of the Pascal Lamb when the blood of a lamb was spread on the doorposts of Jewish homes in Egypt with the slaying of the first born of the Egyptians.

Parsley: A reminder of the ten plagues.

Bitter Herbs: Pieces of Horseradish (may be grated), or lettuce. Also a reminder of the ten plagues.

Pentecost (Shavouth) (Occurs in summer, 7 weeks after Passover and lasts 2 days.)

Often known as the 'Festival of Weeks' because it is held seven weeks after Passover and commemorates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Traditional Foods:

Cheese Cake: Very rich cake made with cured cheese and soured cream.

Cheese Buns: Danish pastry rolled with cheese cake mixture.

Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) (Occurs Sept/Oct and lasts 2 days.)

It is traditional to eat sweet foods, hoping for a 'sweet' new year ahead.

Traditional Foods:

Honey Cake: Normal sweet cakes made with honey.

Apple/Honey: Traditionally, before partaking of a main meal, we say a blessing for 'fruit', have a piece of apple dipped in honey, and eat this before the meal.

Tzimmis: A very sweet carrot stew cooked with potatoes, dumpling and honey.

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) (Occurs 10 days after Rosh Hashanah.) 25 hour Fast Day.

A substantial meal is eaten before the fast commences by sundown.

No food or drink of any kind is then eaten until after the fast finishes after sunset.

Tabernacles (Succoth & Simchat Torah) (Occurs 5 days after Yom Kippur and lasts for 9 days)

'Succoth' is mainly a 'Harvest' festival – linked with the Exodus from Egypt, and is followed by 'Simchat Torah' which is a particularly joyous occasion with special appeal to children. It commemorates the conclusion of the reading of the Torah.

All foods and traditional foods as already mentioned may be eaten, but wherever possible eaten in a

'Succah'. A small outside hut with a temporary roof made from greenery so that the sky and stars can be seen.

This is a reminder of when the Jews left Egypt, and lived in temporary dwellings in the wilderness.

MINOR FESTIVALS

On these minor festivals work is permitted.

Festival of Lights (Chanukah) (Occurs in winter and lasts 8 days.)

Chanukah commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Assyrians in the 2nd Century BC. Each night an extra candle is lit on an eight-branched candelabra (Menorah) until all eight candles are burning together.

Traditional Foods:

Doughnuts: As normal doughnuts – fried in deep fat oil.

Latkas: Pancakes made with grated potato, onion, egg and flour and fried in deep fat oil.

Festival of Lots (Purim) (Occurs 1 month before Passover.)

This is a carnival-like festival, commemorating how Jews in the Persian Empire were saved from the villainous tyrant, Haman, as recounted in the book of Esther.

It is a joyful festival with parties, presents to the poor, and fancy dress parades.

Traditional Foods:

Hamantashen: Small cakes made from yeast pastry into little squares with filling of poppy seed and

honey mixture, and then made into pocket shaped squares.

Purim Challah: Special rich pastry made with eggs, flour, yeast, orange juice, sugar and sultanas, and when baked, covered with 'hundreds of thousands' coloured decoration.

We are indebted to Stan and Phyllis for donating proceeds of the evening to EMF and for providing information for the above article.



Annual General Meeting held on the 20th September 2006

The meeting was attended by the Mayor and Mayoress and about forty members of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum.



The Chairman, Dr Nabil Mustapha, reported on the events of the previous year and the secretary, Geoffrey Morris, spoke about the developments which had been enabled by the grant from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and of plans for the future, including in particular, plans to involve young people.

Copies of both talks and of the Treasurer's Report were printed in the Annual Report circulated at the meeting. Further copies are available on request.

Following refreshments of Thai food, there was an opportunity for suggestions for future activities. Key suggestions which emerged were:-

1. The settings up of informal mixed-faith "house" groups.
2. A separate organisation for young people.
3. A conference of Multifaith education.
4. An annual Multifaith "Act of Prayer".
5. A joint social or international project.
6. A visible presence at local events.
7. More talks about the beliefs of different faiths and the traditions of different faiths. (Margaret Hicks kindly offered to let us see the new SACRE curriculum when it is produced.)
8. An invitation to Humanists.
9. Discussions with extremists (However, a moderate Imam present at the meeting felt that extremists would not be prepared to enter into a productive discussion.)

These proposals have now been passed to a sub-committee. The problem is to find people with time to put

them into effect. **Would you like to volunteer?**



Indian Festival Dancing – 29th and 30th September, Tolworth Recreation Centre

Councillor Shweta Kapadia invited our members to join in dancing at the Tolworth Recreation Centre. Those who attended on either evening thoroughly enjoyed this vibrant, colourful participative event.



Annual Gala Evening held on the 7th October

Claremont Fancourt School once again kindly hosted our Annual Gala night of music, dance, fine food and friendship. We are most grateful to Mrs Farrar, Principal of the school, Mr. Insall-Reid, Headmaster and Linda Alanko, Head of Religious Education at Claremont, for their most generous hospitality and support.

Guests mingled and shared conversation whilst enjoying delicious food donated by members of our faith communities. We are grateful to Phrakru Lom, from the Buddhapadipa Temple for arranging Thai food. EMF members Phyllis and Stan Conway prepared and delivered Jewish food, even though they were unable to attend the Gala on their Sabbath. We also had Zoroastrian food, Middle Eastern cuisine, Indian and Chinese food and

contributions from our Christian members. Thank you to everyone for making this year's Gala food a memorable banquet of delights!



The Gala evening provided a varied programme of entertainment and we were delighted at the enthusiastic response from our members. Guests were enchanted by the singing of Claremont pupil Jade Matthews and dancing of the O'Connor School of Irish dancing including three-year-old Tara.

The multi-cultural theme of our entertainment was enhanced by Farhad and Farzad Raasti who played santoor, drum and violin and the delightful dancing of the Chinese YaoGu (Waist Dance) Troupe.



We were also most fortunate that Dr Ananda Gupta was able to join us for a second year.



He brought with him an exquisite Indian dancer and an inter-



nationally acclaimed drummer with both of whom he had recently performed at the British Museum and other London venues. We are grateful to Councillor Bose-Mallik, one of our members, for introducing the group which she joined in a programme of classic Indian song and dance.



The Gala provides us all with the opportunity to share time with family and old friends, make new friendships and strengthen the links in our community.

Thank you to everyone who made the event possible – see you next year!



Visit to the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (Hindu Temple) at Neasden on Saturday 11th November, 2006

The following is based on an article written by Eric Williams for his Parish Newsletter:

'WARM WELCOME AT NEASDEN TEMPLE

In the early 1970s His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader of the Swaminarayan Hindu sect came to visit his small but growing group of followers in North London, where they had bought a semi-detached house as a place of worship.

He predicted precisely and accurately that the first traditional Hindu temple or 'Mandir' in Europe,

built according to the ancient methods, would be inaugurated in Neasden on 13th August, 1995, and so it was!

It is a masterpiece of exotic architecture and craftsmanship and the largest temple outside India, a stunning complex of towering white marble pinnacles and pillars, rounded domes, intricate carvings, wooden panels, statues, a pillarless prayer hall seating more than 2,000 people, sacred shrines, an exhibition and museum and a video theatre.



Some 5,000 tonnes of Carrara marble and Bulgarian limestone were shipped to India for 1,500 craftsmen to demonstrate their skills, before being transported to Neasden in 26,300 carved pieces. These were assembled like some incredible jig-saw by volunteer workers and the 750 monks – using no metal screws or reinforcing rods, each piece fitting perfectly in place.

In 1992 the concrete foundation of this vast complex was brought to the site by 1,200 lorries and poured into place in an incredible 24 hours. Within three years the temple was finished and now attracts 500,000 visitors annually.

The courtyards are of Islamic design (Haweli) and the wood

came from Burma. The carpets (on which we stood) were manufactured in Ireland and were as good as new after over 10 years of heavy usage.

On November 11, a group of a dozen of us from the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum, went for a morning visit. It was fascinating.

We were warmly welcomed and given a short talk about how the temple came to be built, the origins and development of the Hindu religion and the particular Swaminarayan Faith path, which today has a million followers worldwide, with 8,100 centres, 500 temples and 45,000 volunteers

Before the visit I knew little about the Hindu faith apart from having visited temples in my travels, usually to be bemused by their exotic and often bizarre statuary, architecture and ornamentation.

Hinduism originated in the Indus Valley in India and is the world's oldest living religion – over 8,500 years old – and claims to be the most tolerant, most resilient and most peace-loving of all religions. There was no founder, but wise men of the time claimed to achieve the ultimate experience of God through prayers and meditation.

A sophisticated civilisation existed in India as long as 5,000 B.C., with villages comprising mud-brick houses, later developing into towns of up to 25,000 inhabitants with citadels and defensive walls enclosing dwellings with courtyards, rooms and compartments, bathrooms and sewerage systems.

As early as 700 B.C. the world's first university with 10,500 students was flourishing at Takshashila in north-west India, with a syllabus of 68 different streams of knowledge and tutors in language, philosophy, medicine – including plastic surgery – politics, warfare, astronomy, accounts, music and dance.

It is claimed that the Law of Gravity was known to an Indian astronomer 1,200 years before Newton, and that an Indian discovered that the earth revolved around the sun 1,000 years before Copernicus published his theory of earth's revolution in 1543.

The Zero, without which the binary system (and computers) would not exist, was invented in India, which was also the birthplace of geometry and of what was later claimed as Pythagoras' theorem.

Sanskrit is said to be the mother of all languages as the oldest and most systematic language in history, with 65 different words for earth and 70 for water, for instance. What of Hinduism as a religion, however?

Hinduism declares that it has a heart as big as the earth – a global heart teaching peace and harmony. In India itself there are 400 regional cultures and 850 dialects thriving in unison. Hinduism claims to accept all in the concept of the whole world as one family.

All animals are cared for and respected, for Hindus care for all living creatures – 'we all share the same home, our earth'. The Hindu concept of peace extends to all nature and the whole of creation.

And what of the Swaminarayan faith which inspired and created the magnificence of the Neasden temple?

It was founded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, born in 1781 in a village in north India, embarking on a long spiritual journey. At the age of 11 he renounced his family and became a yogi or holy man, climbing the Himalayas barefoot and incredibly for three months standing on one leg meditating in snowstorms and severe weather. He performed many miracles, and by 20 years of age had established a spiritual path, initiating 500 monks of his order, building temples, instigating social reforms and creating a code of discipline.

His followers were ascetics but actively practical, wandering from village to village, carrying the message of spiritual purity and also digging wells and setting up alms houses in times of drought and famine.

They were pledged to celibacy, owned nothing, had no attachments whatever, no concerns about food and comfort and subdued the ego in deep humility. Vows enjoined them:

- Do not steal
- Do not eat meat
- Do not drink alcohol
- Do not commit adultery
- Do not indulge in an impure life.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also left a collection of spiritual discourses and a catechism which gave answers to such problems as overcoming depression, how to identify real friends, calming anger, subduing ego and jealousy,

developing faith, recognising a true teacher and how to realise God.

His successors have been enlightened Gurus, not elected or selected but divinely revealed. The present head of the faith, now aged 86 - and who happened to be visiting Britain at the time of our visit to Neasden – leads a life of celibacy without personal wealth or comfort. He travels the world helping to inspire people to a better way of living. We were told that he has already counselled 810,000 people personally, read and replied to half a million letters, visited 15,500 villages and sanctified 250,000 homes.

Photographs in the exhibition at Neasden show him with world leaders, including our Royalty, many of whom have been welcomed to the Neasden temple.

He will nominate his successor at his death and will leave a devoted following of more than 5,000 families in more than 30 centres in Britain alone.

Achievement of world peace is the movement's highest aim. It was a fascinating encounter with a faith which in many ways echoes our own.

I brought new and more joyful emphasis to the opening recitation of the Creed at the eight o'clock service next morning. Eric Williams

Some brief notes on Hinduism:

It started around the Indus River, hence the name. There is no single founder but a massive volume of literature, 'The Vedas', mainly written in Sanskrit. Additions were made over the years by various

scholars. There are 216 "Commandments" as compared with the "Ten Commandments" given to Moses.

Major beliefs of Hinduism come under 9 headings:

Parabrahman: There is one supreme all-powerful God. He is the creator, has a divine form, is immanent, transcendent and the Giver of Moksha.

Avatarvad: 'The Manifestation of God on Earth.' God himself incarnates on earth in various forms to revive Dharma and grant liberation.

Karmavad: The soul reaps fruits, good or bad, according to its past and present actions, which are experienced either in this life or future lives.

Punarjama: Reincarnation. The immortal soul is continuously born and reborn in one of 8,400,000 species until it attains liberation.

Moksha: The liberation of the soul from the cycle of births and deaths, to remain eternally in the service of God.

Guru-Shishya Sambandh: Master-Disciple Relationship. Guidance and grace of a spiritually perfect master, revered as the embodiment of God, is essential for the aspirant seeking liberation.

Dharma: That which sustains the universe. An all encompassing term representing: divine law, law of being, path of righteousness, religion, duty, responsibility, virtue, goodness and truth.

Ved Pramana: Scriptural authority of the Vedas. All Hindu faiths are based on the teachings of the Vedas.

Murt-Puja: Image worship. Consecrated images represent the presence of God which is worshipped. The image is a medium to help devotees offer their devotion to God.

At present Hindus comprise 13.7% (765,351,710) of the world's population, residing in 150 countries.

The word "Guru" is a dual word: "Gu" meaning darkness, and "Ru" meaning taking away. Thus, the Guru is the authoritative medium through whom the person is taken away from darkness and into light. Every Hindu has the right to follow his preferred "Guru".

Hindus are non-violent and vegetarian so as to cause no harm.

We found a lovely "mantra" in the exhibition that states: 'In the joy of others lies our joy. In the progress of others lies our progress. In the good of others lies our good.'



Website

We have carried out an update of our website with the help of the grants from Elmbridge Borough Council and the FCCBF.
www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk.



Future Activities

A visit to the Sikh Gudwara (i.e. Temple) in Hounslow is planned for the 8th February 2007 at 7.30p.m.

Those who can come are asked to inform the Secretary, so that we can organise transport.

Aspects of Hinduism

Following the impressive visit to the Hindu Temple at Neasden we hope to organise a talk by a Hindu speaker at a date to be announced.

AGM follow up

We hope shortly to put into effect some of the ideas put forward at the AGM.



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