

WESTMINSTER INTERFAITH

NEWSLETTER

"Make me a
channel of
your peace"

St. Francis of Assisi

Issue 112

July 2019



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From the Editor

Welcome to the Summer 2019 edition of the Newsletter, which deals mainly with events in May and June, during which there were a number of important religious festivals. Throughout May, the Muslim community was fasting and praying. It was the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, which ended on 5 June with the Feast of Fast Breaking or Eid-ul-Fitr. Ramadan is also a time for almsgiving and charitable works. One way the Muslim community expressed its charity was by inviting people of other faiths and traditions to join them in breaking the fast at the end of the day. This year, practically every mosque and Islamic Centre in London, and probably throughout the country, held an Open Iftar or an Interfaith Iftar, on at least one night during Ramadan. The number of churches and synagogues offering hospitality to the local Muslim community for an iftar has also increased. For Roman Catholic guests, it was an opportunity to share the Vatican message for Ramadan and Eid, which invites Christians and Muslims to work together as brothers and sisters to build bridges between all faiths and promote a culture of dialogue and encounter.

The Buddhist festival of Vesakh also fell in May, which the Chinese Buddhist community celebrated in London on 12 May with a prayer service and a procession through Chinatown. The Vatican sent greetings for this feast too. We sent copies to various Buddhist communities and organisations and read a summary of it at the Bathing the Buddha ceremony. It invites us to promote the dignity and equal rights of women and girls.

The month of June had many Christian Festivals and Holy Days, which fell on a Sunday: Pentecost or Whit Sunday, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi and the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The Jewish community, celebrated Shavuot. On that day, Westminster Interfaith organised its annual multi-faith pilgrimage for peace and friendship in the London Borough of Merton. Much of this issue is devoted to that pilgrimage, which, according to reports, was a success. The pictures on the front cover offer an instant snapshot of the different places we visited and the people we met.

The piece on Dialogue Ripples demonstrates how an atheist can be instrumental in promoting interreligious dialogue. You may remember that Keith wrote about his experience in the Summer 2018 edition.

The Correspondence section includes useful comments on the newsletter, which I am always happy to receive.

The Calendar of Religious Festivals takes us to Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year, when the next issue will appear. Until then, we wish you a joyful and relaxing summer break.

Peace and Blessings!

Jon Dal Din

Vatican Message to Muslims

The holy month of Ramadan started on 6 May and ended on 4 June. The Feast of Breaking the Fast (Eid-ul-Fitr) was celebrated by most Muslim communities on 5 June and on the following days.

The Vatican message this year arrived before Ramadan and included Eid greetings. We sent the message to many mosques, Islamic Cultural Centres and Muslim leaders and friends. We also sent it to all the churches in Westminster diocese and beyond asking them to deliver the message and convey their own greetings for Ramadan, which some did.

We had the opportunity to deliver the Vatican message personally and even read it at one of the many interfaith Iftars we attended. It urges Muslims and Christians worldwide to build bridges of fraternity and promote a culture of dialogue and encounter. All welcomed and appreciated the message. In fact, I discovered that some Muslim communities, who had received the message, had already read and discussed it. The message is almost a summary of the Document that Pope Francis and the Grand Imam, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb of Al-Azhar, jointly signed in Abu Dhabi in February.

For the past ten years, the message to Muslims was signed by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who died in July last year. This is the first message to Muslims signed only by the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Archbishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J. Here is the message.

Dear Muslim Brothers and Sisters,

The month of Ramadan with its dedication to fasting, prayer and almsgiving, is also a month for strengthening the spiritual bonds we share in Muslim-Christian friendship. I am pleased, therefore, to take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful and fruitful celebration of Ramadan.

Our religions invite us to “remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence; to re-establish wisdom, justice and love” (cf. *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019).

We Muslims and Christians are called to open ourselves to others, knowing and recognizing them as brothers and sisters. In this way, we can tear down walls raised out of fear and ignorance and seek together to build bridges of friendship that are fundamental for the good of all humanity. We thus cultivate in our families and in our political, civil and religious institutions, a new way of life where violence is rejected, and the human person respected.

We are encouraged, therefore, to continue advancing the culture of dialogue as a means of cooperation and as a method of growing in knowledge of one another. In this context, I recall that Pope Francis, during his visit to Cairo, highlighted three fundamental guidelines for pursuing dialogue and knowledge among people of dif-

ferent religions: “the duty of identity, the courage of otherness and the sincerity of intentions” (*Address to the participants in the International Conference for Peace, Al-Azhar Conference Center, Cairo, 28 April 2017*).

In order to respect diversity, dialogue must seek to promote every person’s right to life, to physical integrity, and to fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of conscience, of thought, of expression and of religion. This includes the freedom to live according to one’s beliefs in both the private and public spheres. In this way, Christians and Muslims – as brothers and sisters – can work together for the common good.

It is my wish that the gesture and message of fraternity will find an echo in the hearts of all those holding positions of authority in the areas of social and civil life of the whole human family, and may lead all of us to put into practice not merely an attitude of tolerance but true and peaceful living together.

With heartfelt fraternal greetings, renewed esteem for our friendship, and in the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I convey sincere best wishes for a fruitful month of Ramadan and a joyous *‘Id al-Fitr*.

P.S. President Donald Trump also sent best wishes to Muslims in the United States and around the world for a blessed month of celebration. He added, “Throughout this month, we all have an opportunity to reflect on the blessings we have been given and to work toward greater fellowship with one another. Together, in the spirit of Ramadan, we can achieve a more harmonious and respectful society”.

The Big Iftar

The practice of inviting people of different faiths to join the local Muslim community to break the fast during Ramadan is not new. It is part of the Muslim and Middle Eastern tradition of hospitality. I remember when I was a student in the South of France, being invited most nights to an Iftar meal by local Muslim families in a different apartment each night. We also celebrated Eid together in the Arab bar downstairs.

Ever since the Big Iftar started in the UK, some eight or nine years ago, the number of mosques inviting people of different faiths and the local community to join them in breaking the fast during Ramadan has increased enormously. Nearly every evening, this year, during the holy month it was possible to attend an event at a different mosque. Indeed, I had invitations to break the fast at several places on the same evening, which meant that, in order not to offend, I actually attended fewer inter-faith iftars this Ramadan than in the past. There has also been a significant increase in the number of churches, synagogues and town halls offering hospitality to the local Muslim community to break the fast on their premises. Even this practice is not new because many churches and synagogues have been offering hospitality to the

local Muslim community for many years, at least on one night during Ramadan.

This year, I went to three iftars held at mosques: two in North London, one in South London and one held in a church. They were all very different. For a variety of reasons, I missed many events I would have loved to attend. Habib made sure we all knew about them. Every day, he informed us of several events taking place in different parts of London. It seemed that most mosques in London were hosting an interfaith Iftar, many on the same night. The ones I did manage to attend were very special. The hospitality was exceptional, the food was excellent and the company was warm and friendly. I met many old friends and acquaintances and got to know many new and interesting people from a variety of religious, occupational and cultural backgrounds. Like the street parties for royal festivals, participating in an iftar is an excellent way to build bridges and foster good community relations. As always, it was an honour and privilege to be there. Furthermore, they also gave us the possibility of conveying greetings from the local church and delivering the Vatican message for Ramadan and Eid, which was particularly relevant and well received. This year, it was on Universal Fraternity. It encourages Christians and Muslims to work together and treat one another as brothers and sisters of one big human family.

In the past, I have attended an interfaith iftar at a synagogue but never at a church, even though I have received invitations to them. This year, the Rumi Mosque and Dialogue Centre invited me to their annual fast breaking iftar dinner on 28th May at 8pm, which their neighbours, the Edmonton Apostolic Christian Church (Sheepfold), were hosting. They had a theme, based on Holy Scriptures, titled: *'Goodness: a powerful force to overcome hate'*. Throughout the evening, everyone had the opportunity to put 'goodness' into practice. There were speeches by the local mayor, the local rabbi and Julie Siddiqui. A local Muslim doctor explained the benefits of fasting to us and how fasting helps us 'to remain beautiful all day'. Between the speeches, there were poems, a video, music and songs, which most people joined in to sing by reading the words on a screen above the stage. It was amazing to see and hear Christians and Muslims, young and old, happily singing *'I have a dream'* by Abba after a reading of Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream'. Most people joined in *'Something inside so strong'*, the South African anthem for freedom.

The musicians and singers on stage helped make the evening special. I do not think they had had much time to practice for the event. They came from both the mosque and the church. Their playing together alone made the evening special. Before the call to prayer and breaking the fast, we heard and sang a song composed by Maher Zain, a Swedish R&B singer of Lebanese origin, called, 'One Big Family'. The lyrics were particularly relevant, emphasizing the similarities between us and wondering why we fight each other. The chorus tells us that we are all brothers and sisters, just one big family.

After prayers, we had a delicious vegetarian feast. It was a wonderful evening and a fantastic way of getting the local community together.

Open Iftars

Ramadan is a time of sharing, the voice on radio 4's Sunday Programme told me. That has certainly been what I have experienced during Ramadan this year. I went to four Iftars in one week.

The first was with the Dialogue Society in a Turkish restaurant in Holborn; the next at the Finsbury Park Mosque. After that, I went to one in the Haringey Wightman Road Mosque, and finally to the Islington street Iftar in St Thomas's Road, Finsbury Park. Each was both spiritual and generous as well as fun. Each had its own individual style. Iftar in a restaurant was a first for me; Iftar hosted by a woman, as in Haringey, was another first. I had eaten Iftar in the street last year, and this year it was, once again, a meeting of faithful Muslims breaking their fast alongside locals of other faiths, and interspersed with curious people from the neighbourhood - who came out just to have a look, and stayed on to share the meal, with vegetarian option. I met and talked to an Algerian who was in London to learn English, so that he could return to work here. He was anxious to use his improving English; I, to polish up my rusting French! We both got a bit of what we wanted. On my other side was a lovely young mother, perhaps from Somalia, managing the needs of her four children as if it were no trouble at all!

At all the Iftars, there were Christians, Jews, MPs, local councillors - a very impressive array of participants and supporters - making speeches, and with one voice thanking the Muslim community for providing this wonderful way of bringing our communities together - it could not be more needed.

As I write, it is still the Holy Month of Ramadan, and I hear that there is yet to be an Iftar in Trafalgar Square and another in Westminster Abbey.

Some non-Muslims when they are invited to break the fast at the Iftar, DO indeed make the day's fast themselves. What a challenge; not one I've embraced as yet.

Sr Elizabeth 26 May 2019

Interfaith Youth Iftar

This year, the Interfaith Youth Iftar was held at St Paul's Cathedral. It was organised jointly by the Naz Legacy Foundation, St Paul's Cathedral and the City of London Corporation. I think this is the third Interfaith Youth Iftar that the Naz Legacy Foundation have organised. Previously, it held Youth Iftars at Lambeth Palace and at Archbishop's House, behind Westminster Cathedral. I believe they were the brain-child of Harris Bokhari OBE, the co-founder of the Naz Legacy Foundation. He wrote an article about the event, which appeared in the Evening Standard on 7 May. It re-appeared recently in the British Pakistan Foundation Newsletter, which I regularly receive. I was attracted by the title and I liked the article. I sought permission to print it. Here it is.

We learn to love each other when we break bread together

Holding the first ever Interfaith Youth Iftar at St Paul's Cathedral has come to mean so much, in the wake of the tragic attacks on Christian, Muslim and Jewish worshippers across the globe recently. Now, more than ever before, faith and non-faith communities must rally around one another, break bread and engage in social action together to strengthen our communities. The same old statements of support are no longer enough. Real action is now required.

St Paul's is a fitting location for such an event — and all the more poignant, given the recent fire at Notre-Dame in Paris. Built out of the ashes of London after the Great Fire of 1666 ravaged the city, it is a symbol of hope, renewal and rebirth for all Londoners.

For Muslims, Ramadan can also be seen as a time of renewal: to reaffirm the covenant made with God that entreats us to love for our neighbours what we love for ourselves. These first 10 days of Ramadan are known as the days of mercy. It is a mercy that Muslims are compelled to enact — as the Prophet said: “Have mercy on those on the Earth, so the One in the Heavens may have mercy on you.”

It is easy to think this is a mercy that is absent from our world at the moment. Yet, in the very centre of the storm, we can see the possibility of a different world. Bringing young people of all faiths and none together over food breeds not only common understanding and tolerance, but also, if allowed to flourish, mercy and love between them.

It is apt then that this event is being organised with the City of London Corporation. At once a beacon of progress and innovation as well as tradition and custom, the city holds the memory of where London has come from, but also embraces the future. Young people representing every London borough will be at the iftar later today, hearing from the Bishop of London alongside the Mayor of London, and later joined, at the Guildhall, by the Chief Rabbi.

London's youth will share their experiences and struggles and present their ideas to our faith and political leaders to tell them how they think we can build a stronger and more cohesive London for all. With a message of hope and mercy, it will be for these young people to forge a way forward for our city and nation — to decide upon and then shape what kind of world they want to live in.

The choices are stark: inequality or fairness, division or unity, hatred or love. It will not only take courage to make the moral choices, but wisdom and discernment too.

As organisers we firmly believe that breaking barriers, dispelling misconceptions, and promoting common understanding between people of diverse backgrounds will breed courageous and wise leaders for the future. It is our hope that initiatives like this interfaith iftar will go some way to doing just that.

*Harris Bokhari OBE
Co-founder of the Naz Legacy Foundation*

34th Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace

On Saturday 8 June, from nine o'clock, pilgrims were arriving at Morden Station for the start of the 34th Annual Pilgrimage for Peace and Friendship in the Borough of Merton. Many went into a local café for breakfast, others gathered in the open space outside Merton Civic Centre, where we had planned to meet. Lisa started to hand out pilgrimage booklets immediately and Maria was busily taking photos. At 9.30am, on the dot, Councillor Janice Howard, the newly elected Mayor of Merton, arrived to greet us. She could not stay long because she had another appointment elsewhere. However, she welcomed us warmly, thanked us for coming to Merton and wished us well. She stayed for a short while to chat to people. We offered her a small gift. Maria took pictures.

At 9.45, we set off for the next venue, the Baitul Futuh Mosque. It was not far but we were a mixed bunch of about 100 pilgrims and there were roads to cross so we divided into groups led by stewards wearing high visibility tabards. William led the way, stopping occasionally to see everybody was keeping up and waiting to cross roads. His scouting background was evident and useful. Of course, our venerable Japanese Buddhist monk, Bhikhhu G. Nagase, who missed the pilgrimage last year, was also there, at the head of the procession, beating his drum and chanting. The other stewards, Rod, Qaisra and Sister Catherine followed with their groups.

The welcome at the Baitul Futuh Mosque was very friendly. There were many volunteers, who came to assist and offer us refreshments and later accompany and guide us on the visit to the mosque. When everybody had taken refreshments, we were welcomed officially and given a brief introduction to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and an explanation on the visit. We divided into groups with a different guide and followed different itineraries around the mosque. This gave everybody the chance to ask questions and feel involved. However, it meant, we could not gather to go on to the next venue. Fortunately, everybody had a pilgrimage booklet and the stewards knew the plan, so we all managed to find the bus stop and catch the 93 bus to the Thai Buddhist Temple and monastery.

Pilgrims arrived in groups, all at different times. We all shed our shoes, entered the Shrine Hall and sat on the floor. PM Bhatsakorn Plyobhaso welcomed us warmly and handed over the explanation of the temple artwork to a volunteer. He then led us into a short period of meditation, which was so simple yet so effective. We thanked him and offered him a gift of one of Brother Daniel's books on the environment. As we were all gathered in one place and could be heard, we invited a member from Sachkhand Nanak Dham to address us. This Sikh group has been providing lunch for the pilgrims for the past 30 years. They are very much part of the London People of Faith for Peace, even though they are based in Birmingham. We gave them a small original icon of St Francis of Assisi to commemorate his encounter with the Sultan of Egypt 800 years ago.

We ate the tasty vegetarian lunch in the grounds, around the little lake. Fortunately,

it did not rain, as predicted. Some people explored the grounds and what used to be a Japanese garden with little bridges crossing streams and a meditation walk with stupas all along the route.

By the time we finished lunch, we were back on time and set off together to St Mary's Church further up the hill. At one point, on the way, we stopped, at a crossroads, to admire the view of London and take pictures.

Rev'd Nils Bersweden was at the door of St Mary's. He looked very pleased to see us and gave us a very warm welcome, which included getting the organist to play as we entered the church. He told us about so many different and interesting aspects of the history of the church, the artwork and the community. He also spoke about the Christian faith and led us in a prayer. The pilgrims were very happy and pleased. They found his words inspiring and reassuring.

After some group photos, we headed off downhill and followed the Wimbledon Park Heritage trail, passing an Artesian Well and the Wimbledon Park Golf course. It was a long, but fairly pleasant walk along the side of the Park, almost like being in the countryside. We stopped briefly, on the steps, at the entrance to the park for a group photo. Then, onto Christ the King Catholic Church and Wimbledon Mosque, where Imam Shoaib Vawda welcomed us and shared aspects of his faith and of the local Muslim community. He invited us to a wide choice of refreshments: sandwiches, hot samosas—to die for, cakes and drinks. It was more than we expected. A cup of tea or a glass of water is all I had asked for. But this is so typical of Muslim and Middle Eastern hospitality and we were grateful.

There were a number of options for the journey onwards. Most opted to walk. A small group chose to go by bus. A few needed to leave. Although it was quite a distance to the next venue and we had a mixture of brisk, moderate and slow walkers, we arrived at the Ghanapathy Hindu Temple a long time before those who opted for the bus. Nevertheless, our hosts, especially Geeta, were excellent and our visit to the beautiful temple was very special and memorable. People were impressed with its involvement in projects with the local community. The Hindu priests introduced us to a Hindu ritual and blessed us. In the Sai Mandir, two children chanted beautifully a selection of devotional multi-faith songs. The local volunteers offered us a hot meal, which was most welcome because it was getting late. As a token of our appreciation, we left our hosts a diptych of St Francis and Pope Francis, which we thought they could place with the other icons in the Sai multi-faith meditation room.

Many pilgrims were feeling tired. Some had a long way to go home. Everybody went home happy, well-fed yet a bit exhausted. All came to thank me for a well organised, interesting and spiritual day. It seems our hosts at the different venues were also happy with our visit. They saw the value of these pilgrimages, which help bind people of faith together, whatever their age, sex, traditions or culture.

Impressions on the Pilgrimage

We truly enjoyed the pilgrimage on Saturday. Your prayers for no rain and a good turnout were answered. We had wonderful interactions with so many who walked alongside us, which will undoubtedly lead to other interfaith activities. I am sure our paths will cross again. May God be with you and your ministry. Your new friends.

Mark & Susan Dransfield

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

I want to say how well organised and thoughtful the pilgrimage was in so many ways. Firstly, it made me think in a greater depth about the similarities that all these faiths have. The greatest similarity is the central theme of love. The strong desire to promote, to spread to work on love between ourselves and others. Secondly, the thoughtfulness and the gentleness with which we were welcomed and spoken to was very touching. The thoughtfulness that was involved in the serving and preparing and sharing of food added to the warmth and love of this pilgrimage.

I also know that when we humans want to build a place of worship we go to great lengths and involve artistic beauty, which is another similarity that we share. It was certainly evident in the temples, mosque and church that we visited on the day.

What a precious gem this pilgrimage is and more so since it was my first one. Long may the gem shine and glow for years to come and be a light in times of darkness.

Marcellina

The multi-faith pilgrimage was very interesting and informative. I met people from all walks of life, who came from various parts of London as well as outside London. They were very friendly and were genuinely interested to hear about each other's faith and place of worship. Some were on the pilgrimage for the first time, while others have for many years.

I learned at the Baitul Futuh Mosque that there are 73 different Muslim faiths. I always thought there were only 3 or 4 Muslim faiths. The Baitul Futuh actually believe that the Messiah has come, and their motto is "Love for all hate for none".

At St Mary's church, I was particularly impressed by its history. The interior of the church has remained practically the same over the centuries.

The Buddhapadipa Buddhist temple shrine hall was a sight to behold with its beautiful gold painted Buddha and the story of his birth and life painted on the walls. I was impressed by the tranquil garden and lake.

I enjoyed our walk through Wimbledon on our pilgrimage, admiring the lovely gardens and the magnificent view of London from the top of the hill. It was a very enjoyable day. I learned about the different religions and beliefs. They all agree about coming together with peace and love.

Meghan

Walking the Earth like Brothers and Sisters

To be truthful, even though I understand that most images of heaven and hell are simply analogies, I find some of the images, even of heaven, are not to my liking. On Saturday 8th June 2019, however, I experienced the closest to my ideal analogy for heaven. A diverse group of people walking together to a variety of places of worship and communities. Whilst finding out about the faith and practices of the worshipping community we paused for prayer and reflection. All the places of worship made us most welcome and said, we may be of a certain faith but basically *“we are of one mind, one heart, one spirit, one voice.”*

It was 34th Annual London People of Faith Pilgrimage for Peace and Friendship, which had taken place since May 1986. Some of the 120 people taking part on Saturday had supported Brother Daniel Faivre SG on that walk and subsequent walks. The passing years have taken their toll on our bodies but the spirit seemed not to waver. A spirit that was renewed with the love from others on the walk and the community of worshippers, within each place of worship we visited or had hoped to visit. The walk was difficult, particularly when walking uphill but as Brother Daniel said, *“there is nothing like a good walk to stimulate thought and fuel imagination.”*

It was also the weekend of Pentecost and Shavuot. One of my favourite images was of people walking out of a place of worship, with Light in order to share it. We were told, that on the following day the congregation, at St Mary’s Church, would all light a candle, from the Pentecost candle, and then take the Light out into the world. This seemed connected to the experience we, later, had at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple where priests lit another flame and shared the Light.

The walk:

We gathered outside the Merton Civic Centre where the Mayor, welcomed us to the Borough. Then old friends and new went to our first place of worship which was Baitul Futuh Mosque. Someone recalled the building being a dairy and there was building work being undertaken due to a fire in 2015 but it did not affect the welcome. We split into three large groups and shown around the building after hearing a talk and refreshments.

I would like at this stage to thank London transport for the bus that reduced our walking to the next stop, the Buddhapadipa Temple on Calonne Road. The temple was a sanctuary of calm with a beautiful garden where you could see and feel nature at its best. We also saw humanity at its best when SND provided us with a healthy and plentiful lunch, which we ate seating in the grounds. I enjoyed some inspiring conversations and people asked for details of our walk. I hope that they and others will join in subsequent walks.

After lunch, we walked up a hill, because St Mary's Church is on one of the highest points in London. Some great views and the church's congregation has included William Wilberforce, leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. Then onto Wimbledon Mosque where, once again, we were welcomed with more food especially samosas. The last stop of the day was a Hindu temple that has been doing a lot of work with the local health authority. Projects have included healthy eating and mental health. At the Sai Baba education project, two of the children sang or chanted prayers from a variety of different faiths. We were then invited to share another meal.

The other side of the coin.

It seems preferable to avoid talking about hell because; one way to dispel the darkness is to shine a light. However, I was asked to share the negative as well as the positive. When I was first asked, I jokingly said, "there were too many samosas."

Joking aside, the walk was also a reminder that despite the Love and Light we all wanted to share, that the other side of the coin is visible in places and communities around the world. Baitul Futuh Mosque, the first place we visited was home to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community who has had to establish its headquarters, in the UK because of persecution. William Wilberforce, leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade, successfully fought a campaign to end Slavery, but modern slavery still exists throughout the world. There are other examples which just add to the many "reasons, we carry on making these pilgrimages. It is those people, who are arrogant about their beliefs and who tend to foster hate and division, that we need to reach and help them see that hatred will not help to make the world a better place, but only lead to conflict, distrust and division. The forces of Evil can only be eliminated by Love, and, unfortunately, that may also lead to rejection and persecution in this power-hungry world."

Like Martin Luther King, Brother Daniel and my new family, I have a dream that one day we will "*learn the simple act of walking the earth like brothers and sisters.*" Amen, Ameen, So be it!

Qaisra Khan

Hounslow Peace Walk and Peace Pagoda

Saturday, 22nd June was a particularly busy day. It was the end of Refugee Week and the Great Get Together Weekend. Other significant national and local events were also taking place that weekend. For us, who are involved in interfaith dialogue in London, Hounslow Friends of Faith were holding their annual Inter Faith Walk for Peace and Friendship and the London Peace Pagoda was celebrating its 34th Anniversary.

Originally, I did not think I would make any events. I had planned to attend an interfaith conference in Rome. In the end, I decided not to go. We had too much on already. One of our son's was moving house. He needed help and I had parish commitments. My wife and another son went to give him a hand. Perhaps I should have joined them but I had promised that, if I did not go away, I would join part of the Interfaith Walk and go to the Pagoda, where we have offered a prayer for peace for many years. Although not labelled as such, in a way, both events fitted well into the model of the Great Get Together.

The Peace Walk

A mixed group of people of different ages and faiths took part in the Hounslow Friends of Faith (HFOF) Annual Interfaith Walk of Peace and Friendship. It started at 11.15am at the World Zoroastrian Centre in Feltham, where, among other things, the group witnessed a traditional fire ceremony. The next stop was Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, the Gurdwara in Martindale Road, Hounslow, which I have been to before. We also had lunch there in the Langar Room. The food and service were fantastic. Volunteers walked up and down the aisles, between the tables, where we sat, making sure we lacked nothing and giving us second and third helpings, if we wanted, of anything we fancied. It was good to stop and chat with local Sikhs and meet old friends and many new ones.

After lunch, we gathered in the car park and set off for the Islamic Integration Community Centre. I think, we were running a bit late and I had to leave to get to the London Peace Pagoda, where I usually recite a Roman Catholic Prayer for Peace. The group carried on to St Mary's Church, Belmont. I am grateful to David Baldwin who sent us an album of photos of the event. It felt like I had been there all day.

Towards the Pagoda

Fortunately, the Gurdwara was close to Hounslow West station on the Piccadilly Line so I was soon on a train going towards central London. It was packed with people and luggage coming mainly from Heathrow airport, so I had to stand all the way. It was quite stuffy but we soon reached Hammersmith, where I changed onto an almost empty District Line train to Sloane Square. A short bus ride to Battersea Park and a brisk walk along the River Thames and I was soon at the Pagoda.

At the Pagoda

I had just missed the prayers. However, Sister Catherine said she was going to be there anyway. I immediately looked for her among the crowd of spectators and contributors but I could not see her nor could anybody else who knew her. Bhikkhu Nagase informed me she had offered some prayers but the sound system was not working when she spoke. He apologised. I carried on looking for Sister Catherine, listened to some very interesting peace talks and spoke to lots of people. We paused for refreshments and prepared for the devotional music and dance, when Catherine appeared. She had been sitting on a bench, across the road from the Pagoda, in the

sunshine, because it had turned a bit cold. Catherine had never been to the anniversary celebration before. She was quite enthusiastic about it. She explained how the sound system had packed up when it was her turn to talk but felt that she had projected her voice sufficiently for everybody to hear. She had chosen to read a poem by Terry Waite and a Pax Christi prayer for Peace, whereas the Anglican contributor read the Peace Prayer of St Francis of Assisi, which I was hoping he would not because I had also planned to use one of St Francis' Prayers. I wanted to introduce the prayer by saying something about St Francis' encounter with the Sultan of Egypt in 1219, while Christians and Muslims were fighting each other. It was probably one of the first examples of interreligious dialogue and Christian-Muslim encounter.

Just as well, I arrived late and Sister Catherine could use a poem by an Anglican/Quaker as the Catholic contribution. Is that a good example of ecumenism? Here are the words not written in verse.

Peace

Peace is the fragile meeting of two souls in harmony. Peace is an embrace that protects and heals. Peace is a reconciling of opposites. Peace is rooted in love, it lies in the heart, waiting to be nourished, blossom and flourish, until it embraces the world. May we know the harmony of peace, may we sing the harmony of peace, until in the last of days, we rest in peace. (Terry Waite)

I stayed to listen to some music, songs and dancing, but had to leave before the end. I had an appointment at our church to help sort out arrangements for another important event: the 40th Anniversary celebrations of our parish priest.

Bathing the Buddha Ceremony

Vesakh / Hanamatsuri is the most important feast for Buddhists. Sometimes informally called "Buddha's Birthday", it actually commemorates the birth, enlightenment and death of Gautama Buddha and is celebrated on different days in different countries. Many celebrated the feast on 19 May.

In London, the Buddhist community celebrated Buddha's Birthday with the annual 'Bathing the Buddha' ceremony in Leicester Square Gardens on Saturday 12 May. It turned out to be a beautiful day, despite the forecast for rain. Both Buddhists and Christians had agreed to pray for good weather. Our collective prayers were answered, so we got off to a good start. Just to be on the safe side, the organisers decided to hold the 'Bathing the Buddha' ceremony before the procession through Chinatown. Last year, we had to abandon the ceremony because of a sudden downpour. This year, it all seemed to go smoothly with fine weather until the group photos when the heavens opened and a shower of hailstones rained down upon us forcing us to run for cover and wait for the shower to stop, which did not take long.

For the procession, we took a slightly different route through Chinatown because big concrete barriers in the road hampered the way. They were probably there to prevent a terrorist attack in a crowded area. Nevertheless, many tourists, well-wishers and local people came to watch the colourful display led by the Chinese Dragon, a statue of the Buddha, the different groups of Buddhist nuns and monks, the mayor of Westminster and other dignitaries. As usual, at the end of the procession, we went to a local Chinese restaurant for a tasty and abundant vegetarian lunch, where we sat and chatted with the participants. It was there I found out that Ruth Bush, a local Westminster councillor, who has supported interfaith activities for many years, had just been elected Mayor for the year. We wish her every success in this new role.



Probably for practical meteorological reasons, this year, there were only three speeches, which included a contribution from Westminster Interfaith. As last year, Sister Catherine and I did a double act in reading the Vatican message for Vesakh. We did not read the whole message, but relevant extracts from it. The nuns of Fo Guang Shan Temple had thoughtfully included the message in the service programme for the day, so people could refer to it as we read.

The message invites the world's Buddhists and Christians to work together to uphold and promote the dignity and equal rights of women and girls. The message is inspired by the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, which Pope Francis and Grand Imam Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayeb of Al-Azhar both signed in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019. Among several issues, the document includes an important call for people everywhere to promote the dignity of women and children.

The full text of the message is available on the Vatican and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Websites or Google: 'Vatican Message to Buddhists 2019'.

Dialogue Ripples

What follows has been a short burst of activity, but it all had its roots planted some time ago and this is potentially leading to some very exciting areas for dialogue.

I have been an atheist for nearly 50 years now and after some investigation about Humanism a few years ago, realised that this probably better described my approach to life. I am married to a Catholic and this can often bring questions from others about how our marriage works with two quite different beliefs.

In mid-May, my wife and I were asked to give a little talk about the experience of living with someone who has different beliefs, to a group involved with the Foculare movement.

I felt that my contribution would be best served by firstly giving a brief talk about Humanism (since many people are unfamiliar with this), which resulted in many positive responses and an invite to give a longer talk to a local Catenians' group. There was some discussion about a donation from the Catenians for my time, which was a surprise (more on this later).

On the following Tuesday, I went with my wife, to a meeting of the local church groups to discuss how we could work together with the aim of settling a family of refugees from Syria. This is in the very early stages and many months of work are still needed, but I went with my official "Chair of Lancashire Humanists" hat on to show that we want to work with other groups to achieve something worthwhile.

Two things arose from the discussions for me. Firstly, we identified that one of the potential major issues would be language. Not knowing what language skills the family would have, we needed to plan for people with no English. Since our village (and surrounding area) is almost 100% white English, we thought that there was not much chance of local volunteers having these language skills. That would mean relying on paying for a professional service (no doubt this will be needed for a good portion of support anyway). I wondered if the Muslim community in the larger area would be able to help. If the family involved were Muslims then some additional support would be useful (especially with appropriate information on the best place for worship and some possible food options). So I reached out to a contact from the Dialogue group that I was part of 18 months ago. This group had held a short series of planned discussions, which involved Humanists, Christians and Muslims.

The coordinator of that group (Abdul) was amazingly supportive in his response. He is reaching out to find contacts in Preston to help us and also offered me a chance to give a talk about Humanism at a Muslim school in Bolton.

The other thought I had was to ask the Catenians if the donation they were offering could be made direct to the fund to help support the refugee family. This has been agreed and I hope that the talk gets the approval to go ahead, so we can add this piece to the puzzle.

A potential spin-off from the contact with the Muslims from Preston that I am very excited about, is that this could start to build some relationships between the people of our village and the Muslim communities in Preston - something that certainly does not appear to exist now. Once we have some contacts, I would expect that they become part of the wider community effort to support the Syrian family and who knows where all this may lead to. At the very least, it should help build understanding and reduce fears.

So one five-minute talk has been just the first part of a busy few days. The potential consequences could be very rewarding and I hope that this is true for all involved.

Keith Pennington

Correspondence

Many thanks for the latest newsletter, and many congratulations on both its style and substance. You manage to include a great deal of importance in a very attractive way. Wishing you a very joyful Eastertide.

John O'Toole

I have just finished reading ALL the May issue of the WIF newsletter. Excellent and thank you so much. It is so rich with news of so much that is being done to promote harmonious interfaith relations. I cannot pick one article and leave others. They all give me great hope and joy. Among all the disquieting tragic events of our day world-wide and in the UK, the proliferation of knife crime, child abuse, arson and all kinds of scandals plus the disaster of our political system, the much good that takes place such as that you report does not hit the headlines. So thanks once more.

Unfortunately, because of my age I cannot be with you for the 34th annual pilgrimage. I shall be thinking of you all on the 8th June. Give my regards to all if you find an opportunity.

Reading the 2019 New Year Honours list, I see the name of Vinod Kapashi. I know him well. He must be quite old now. I remember visiting him at his house and being treated with refreshments. I think he had written a book entitled: Jainism, the First Step.

Did you see Michael Barnes got an award? Who is the replacement for Cardinal Tauran?

Alfred Agius

Reply: *I was aware Michael Barnes SJ received the Hubert Walter Award for Reconciliation and Interfaith Cooperation from the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace on 4 April. He was one of 8 recipients. Congratulations! I shall write about it in the next issue.*

So far, no one has replaced Cardinal Tauran as President of PCID at the Vatican. Archbishop Miguel, the Secretary, is carrying on the work and doing a great job.

Having read the Newsletter, I received an MBE from Prince Charles on 7th February 2019 for Services to the Judiciary & the Citizens of Wolverhampton & South Staffordshire. This was in recognition of my contribution to the magistracy & my work within the prison service, being a school governor & a member now a Vice Chair of Wolverhampton Interfaith.

Thank you for your reply, which, to be honest, I wasn't expecting at all, so thank you. I have very strong feelings about interfaith work and I replied really to demonstrate to you your work is read!

I became involved in Wolverhampton Interfaith through a fellow magistrate who was Chair at the time. I actually live outside Wolverhampton in a village where I'm a member of our local Anglican church & sing (not well but enthusiastically!) in the Choir.

I have friends & colleagues of all faiths & celebrate the basic tenets of all to love one another, live in peace, respect each other & do to others as you wish to be done to you. I volunteer in the Chaplaincy at a prison, which is a true example of interfaith work. The managing Chaplain

is Muslim but went to a RC school & a recent inspection could not believe, for example, that 100 Muslim prisoners were walking into the Faith Centre at the same time as 100 Christians holding a service in the Chapel across the corridor in harmony!

Wolverhampton Interfaith again respects all Faiths & those with none & hopefully we receive recognition for all that we do.

Jill Parker MBE

Thank you for your Newsletter. I will be joining the pilgrimage on 8 June 19 at the Morden Station and will be with you for the whole session.

People, who read the newsletter, were of the opinion that you should have given more details and comments regarding the tragedy, which took place in New Zealand, killing about 50 people and about the bombings in three Churches and 3

Hotels mainly visited by tourists in Sri Lanka. The tragedy involved around 400 people dead and about 500 people injured, which caused great hue and cry all over the world.

Pilgrimages like the one presently arranged, serve a very deep healing effect in the minds of different communities and thus help in diffusing the spread of rumours. Kind Regards

Balbir Singh Bakhshi

Committee Member

South London Interfaith Group

Reply: *I would have commented more fully about the tragedy in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, if the Newsletter had not been ready for printing. I managed to find some space at the end of the article on the New Zealand Mosque attacks to express our horror and offer our prayers for peace and reconciliation. We shall revisit these events again to highlight how people responded with love and unity to these tragedies.*

Forthcoming Events

14 July 2-4pm *Reading Sacred Places: New Approach to Interreligious Understanding* with Prof. Michael Barnes SJ. At **Sion Centre**

19-21 August *The Earth is the Lord's: Environmental Spirituality in Judaism and Christianity* with Jonathan Gorsky & Sr Margaret Sheppard nds at **Ammerdown Centre**

16 July 6.30-8.30pm
Scripture Reasoning: Relationships Al-Khoei Foundation (Brondesbury)
Email Rachel: rachel.godfrey@wls.org.uk

30 July, 3.30pm Tea ceremony at London Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple
Contact jenny@worldfaiths.org to register and for full details.

Pax Christi, CND, J&P, Peace Pagoda

6 August Hiroshima Day Tavistock Square

9 August Nagasaki Day & anniversary of Blessed Franz Jagerstatter's death. Vigil at Westminster Cathedral Crypt and Peace Walk to London Peace Pagoda for Lighting Lantern Ceremony.

3 September: No Faith in War - Stop DSEI Arms Fair 2019 - A day for Faith groups to gather in prayer and witness against the Arms Fair at the Excel Centre, London.

18 August 2pm Ware Community Muslims Eid BBQ, King George's Park SG12 7DW

16 September 10.30am-3.30pm: South East England Faiths Forum Annual Conference '12 Days to Save the Planet?' University of Surrey, Stag Hill, Guildford GU2 7XH More info and registration (by 2nd Sept) from www.se-faithforum.net

Contacts, Courses and Events

It is not possible to advertise all the courses and events nor include all the organizations offering training and events. For practical and security reasons, it is best to register in advance online. Please contact them directly or check their website. Thank you.

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2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH
Tel: +44 (0)20 7730 0410

Email: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk

Web: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk>;

Ammerdown Conference & Retreat Centre

Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Bath, Somerset
BA3 5SWT T: 01761 433709

E: info@ammerdown.org;

centre@ammerdown.org;

Lots of interesting retreats and courses, view the 2019 programme online at: www.ammerdown.org/courses Book via website or ring Tina Hartnell: 01761 433709. Email centre@ammerdown.org

Sion Centre

for Dialogue and Encounter

34 Chepstow Villas, W11 2QZ

Tel: 020 7727 3597 / 020 7313 8286

E: sioncentrefordialogue@gmail.com;

Web: www.sioncentre.org;

London Interfaith Centre

125 Salusbury Rd London NW6 6RG

<http://londoninterfaith.org.uk/> Enquiries to info@londoninterfaith.org.uk

Central London Inter Faith Meetup

Westminster Quaker Meeting House,
52 St Martins Lane WC2 N 4EA

Every Friday from 6.50pm website:

<https://www.meetup.com/Central-London-Inter-Faith-Meetup>

Drop In Silence, 5.30-7pm Details: DropInSilence.org;

Christian Muslim Forum

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

Near Neighbours

www.near-neighbours.org.uk;

Christian Muslim Marriage Support Group

Contact Rosalind or Heather confidentially through the inter faith marriage website:

www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk;

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/185782491456844/>

Westminster Cathedral Interfaith Group

Meets 3rd Wednesday of the month 4-5pm in Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace, SW1P 1QN

From Westminster Cathedral Piazza, walk to your right, past St Paul's bookshop and the school, to a fenced garden between the playing fields.

Text John Woodhouse 0790 8888 586 or

E: woodhousesopten@btinternet.com

St Ethelburga's Centre

78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG;

T:020 7496 1610; www.stethelburgas.org;

E: tent@stethelburgas.org

See events page on their website

Pax Christi

St Joseph's, Watford Way,

London NW4 4TY

Tel: 020 8203 4884

Email: info@paxchristi.org.uk

www.paxchristi.org.uk;

South London Inter Faith Group

1-2.30pm Lunch meeting on last Thursday of the month at **Streatham Friends Meeting House, Redlands Way, Roupell Park Estate, Brixton Hill, SW2 3LU**

For details contact:

secretary@southlondoninterfaith.org.uk

North London Interfaith Group

Meets monthly to discuss questions in the news about faith, festivities and practices of other faiths.

Contact: Sr Elizabeth: 020 7272 8048;

E: eodonohoe@btinternet.com

Marylebone Scriptural ReasoningContact: marylebonesr@gmail.com;**The Faith & Belief Forum**

Formerly 3 FF (Three Faiths Forum)

Contact Director, Phil Champain,
3FF, Star House, 104 Grafton Road,
London NW5 4BA**London Peace Pagoda Battersea Park****9 August Nagasaki Day**Peace Walk from Westminster Cathedral
to the London Peace Pagoda for a Lantern
Lighting Ceremony.Contact Pax Christi (020 8203 4884)
Nipponzan Myohoji (020 7228 9620)
E: londonpeacepagoda@outlook.com**Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple**Brickhill St, Willen Lake, Milton Keynes
MK15 0BG; T: 01908 663 652;E: mkpeacepagoda@gmail.com**Ham Faithful Friends**

Contact: Diana Mills

dianamills@phonecoop.coop**Kensington Council of Churches**Chris Luxton, chrislfriends@aol.com;**Hounslow Friends of Faith**info@hounslowfriendsoffaith.orgwww.hounslowfriendsoffaith.org**Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group**c/o Paul Gatheshill,
2 Kingsley Court, Welwyn Garden City,
Herts AL7 4HZ T: 01707 695351E: paulghill@hotmail.com;Web: www.whifgroup.co.uk;**Grassroots - Luton Council of Faiths**47 High Town Road,
Luton, Beds, LU2 0BW

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Convenor InterfaithMK

E: interfaithmk@gmail.comWebsite: www.interfaithmk.org.uk**St Martin-in-the-Fields**

Trafalgar Square London WC2N 4JJ

www.smitf.org**Gandhi Foundation**Contact: William Rhind,
william@gandhifoundation.org; Web-
site: www.gandhifoundation.org;**The Islamic College**

133 High Road, London NW10 2SW

+44 (0) 20 8451 9993

info@islamic-college.ac.uk**Wolf Institute**Wesley House, Jesus Lane,
Cambridge CB5 8BJT:01223 741038 www.wolf.camb.ac.uk**Christians Aware**2 Saxby Street, Leicester LE2 0ND T:
0116 254 0770Amanda@christiansaware.co.ukwww.christiansaware.co.uk**Multi-Faith Centre (MFC)****University of Derby**T:01332 591285; E: mfc@derby.ac.uk**Brahma Kumaris**Global Co-operation House,
65-69 Pound Lane, Willesden Green,
London NW10 2HH**Westminster Synagogue****and Scrolls Museum**Kent House, Rutland Gardens,
London SW7 1BX

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For details, check website:

<http://ifwton.org.uk/diary.html>**Shrimad Rajchandra Mission****Dharampur London Spiritual Centre,**

Falconer Road, Bushey WD23 3AD

Calendar of Religious Festivals:

- 1 August** **LAMMAS / LUGHNASADH** (pronounced Loo-nassa) *Wiccan / Pagan* The Corn harvest. Pagans reap what they have sown. They celebrate the fruits of the mystery of Nature and give thanks for the bounty of the Goddess as Queen of the Land.
- 3-12 August** **FIRST TEN DAYS OF DHUL-HIJJAH** *Muslim* These days are considered to be especially holy when good deeds are particularly rewarded by God. These are the days of Hajj (pilgrimage). On 9th day, Muslims commemorate the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet (*pbuh*) by prayer and fasting.
- 6 August** **THE TRANSFIGURATION** *Christian* Commemorates the time when three disciples saw Jesus transfigured talking with Moses and Elijah, and heard a voice saying 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him.' For many Christians this confirms the divine nature of Jesus. (*For Orthodox Julian Calendar see 19 August*)
- 6 August** **HIROSHIMA DAY** *All Faiths / Japanese* commemorates all those who died when the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.
- 7 August** **CH'I HOU CHIEH / QIXIJE / HERD BOY AND WEAVING MAID FESTIVAL** *Chinese*. Based on the tale of two stars, on either side of the Heavenly River (Milky Way). A herd boy and a heavenly weaving maid who marry, get separated when she returned to heaven but are re-united once a year on this day if the elements permit, showing that the paths of love are not always smooth.
- 7-16 August** **FRAVARDIGAN / MUKTAD** *Zoroastrian (Shahenshai) 11-20 March (Iranian Zoroastrian), (Kadmi) Fravardigan festival of the fravashis, popularly known as Muktd (All Souls)* commences 10 days before NoRuz and is the last festival of the old year, when, on the first day, the immortal souls, together with their *fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors, artistically depicted as half man/half bird), are welcomed by name by the Zoroastrian *Mobeds* or *Magi* (priests). They leave the physical world after the last ceremony on the tenth evening before dawn of NoRuz. Fravardigan is the most important Zoroastrian festival after NoRuz. For many, it is regarded as their holiest festival. During these ten days Zoroastrians often take time off work, pray extensively, recite the five *Gathas*, hymns composed by Zarathustra, and ensure their houses are thoroughly cleaned.
- 9 August** **NAGASAKI DAY** *All Faiths / Japanese* commemorates all those who died following the second atom bomb dropped in 1945. Lanterns floated on water near Buddhist Peace Pagodas - one for each year since 1945. Peace activists of many faiths also remember **Franz Jägerstätter**, an Austrian lay Franciscan conscientious objector, who was sentenced to death and executed during World War II. He was later declared a martyr and beatified by the Roman Catholic Church.
- 10-14 August** **HAJJ / PILGRIMAGE TO MAKKAH** (*8th to 12th Dhul-Hijjah*) *Muslim* Muslims who can afford it, should make this pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. The Hajj brings together Muslims of all schools, races and tongues for one of life's most moving spiritual experiences. A series of ritual acts are performed by the pilgrims during the first two days of Hajj, prior to the festival of Eid-ul-Adha in Makkah.
- 11 August** **YAUM-ARAFAH / THE DAY OF ARAFAT** (*9th Dhul-Hijjah*) *Muslim* This day marks the culminating event of the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah. Muslims who are on *Hajj* spend the day in prayer on Mount Arafat to commemorate the end of the revelation of the *Qur'an* to the Prophet. Those not on *Hajj* are also expected to pray and fast.

- 11 August** **TISHA B'AV** *Jewish* Saddest day of the Jewish calendar. A full day fast is held at the end of three weeks of mourning, while reflecting on the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem. Other tragedies are also recalled, many of which have happened on this day. The Book of Lamentations is read.
- 12-16 August** **EID-UL-ADHA / FESTIVAL OF SACRIFICE (10th Dhul-Hijjah)** *Muslim* marks the end of *Hajj*. It commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ismail.
- 13-15 August** **O-BON** *Japanese (in Tokyo)* The spirits of the departed are welcomed back home with feasting and dancing. Fires are often lit to illuminate their arrival and departure. In rural areas, celebrations took place one month earlier on 13 July.
- 14/15 August** **RAKSHA BANDHAN** *Hindu* *Raksha* means 'protection' and *bandhan* means 'to tie'. Girls and married women tie a *rakhi* (amulet) on the right wrists of their brothers, wishing them protection from evil.
- 15 August** **ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY** *Christian*. This celebrates the 'taking up' of Mary, body and soul to heaven.
- 15 August** **FESTIVAL OF HUNGRY GHOSTS / ZHOHGYUANJIE / CHUNG YUAN** *Chinese* Paper objects are made and offered to aid those spirits who have no resting place or descendants. Large paper boats are made and burnt at temples to help these spirits on their journey across the sea of torment to Nirvana.
- 17 August** **NAVROZE / NO RUZ** *Zoroastrian* New Year's Day on the Shenshai Calendar. In the tenth century, a group of Zoroastrians fled from Iran and were given sanctuary by the Hindus of Western India, where they became known as Parsis (or Persians). During the twentieth century, the Zoroastrians of Iran have revised their calendar to take account of the leap year, while the Parsis of India have continued following the traditional imperial or Shenshai calendar. By the twentieth century, the Parsis of India had become the largest group in the world to practise Zoroastrianism, and in the twenty first century over 95% of Zoroastrians in the UK are Parsis. Like their Indian counterparts, they celebrate two new years – giving more time for making merry.
- 19 August** **THE TRANSFIGURATION** *Christian (Orthodox Julian calendar)* For details see 6 August
- 20 August** **THE FESTIVAL OF THE POOL/EID UL GHADIR (or GHADIR) (18th Dhul-Hijjah)** *Muslim (Shi'a)* When returning from Makkah to Medina after his final pilgrimage, the Prophet (*pbuh*), who was travelling with many followers, stopped at an oasis (the pool of Khumm) to deliver a sermon, during which he is believed by Shi'a Muslims to have raised the hand of Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, and proclaimed, 'For whoever I am his leader, Ali is his leader'.
- 23 August** **KHORDAD SAL** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai)* The Birthday of Zarathustra.
- 23/24 August** **JANMASHTAMI / KRISHNA JAYANTI** *Hindu* The birthday of Krishna is celebrated throughout the Hindu world. He is a very popular avatar or incarnation of Lord Vishnu and many Hindus fast in his honour until midnight. In the temples, Krishna is welcomed with singing, dancing and sweets. In some places, an image of the new-born Krishna is put in a cradle and special sweets are distributed.

- 27 Aug - 3 Sept.** **PARYUSHAN** *Jain* Eight days of purification, devoted to study, prayer, meditation, fasting and ending with a period of confession and forgiveness.
- 28 August** **DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD** *Christian (Orthodox) (Julian Calendar)* The passing (falling asleep) of Mary, Mother of Christ, in the presence of the Apostles, who buried her at Gethsemane where Jesus had been buried. On the third day, she appeared to them and said, "Rejoice". Mary was no longer in the grave but in heaven. The symbolism is that death is 'falling asleep' (*dormition*) followed by eventual resurrection.
- 1 Sept.** **INSTALLATION OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB IN HARMANDIR SAHIB** *Sikh* In Amritsar 1604 CE, the 5th Guru, Arjan Dev, installed the volume of scripture, consisting of the hymns of the first five Gurus plus those of other 'saint-poets'. (Hymns were added to complete the Holy Book: *Guru Granth Sahib*).
- 1 Sept.** **ISLAMIC NEW YEAR 1441 / AL-HIJRA / RA'S UL 'AM** (*Muharram 1*) *Muslim* This day commemorates the *Hijra* or migration of the Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) from Makkah to Medina in 622 CE, which led to the establishment of the Muslim community there.
- 2 Sept.** **GANESHA CHATURTHI** *Hindu* **Birthday of Ganesh**, the elephant-headed god of good fortune, son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Celebrations can last up to ten days concluding with the immersion in water of the image of Ganesh.
- 3 Sept.** **SAMVATSARI** (*International Forgiveness Day*) *Jain* This is the last day of Paryushana, which many regard as the most important festival of Jainism. It is the holiest day of the Jain calendar and many Jains observe a complete fast and spend the day in prayers and contemplation, asking for forgiveness from others.
- 4 Sept.** **FRAVARDIN MAH PARAB** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai - Parsi)* On the 19th day of Fravardin, the first month of the year, Zoroastrians visit the Towers of Silence in India (or in UK the Zoroastrian cemetery in Brookwood, Surrey) to participate in a *jashan* ceremony in memory of the departed *fravashis* (guardian spirits and souls of the community).
- 4 Sept.** **ASHURA (10th Muharram)** *Muslim* For Sunni Muslims this is one of the two days of a minor fast that the Prophet kept in his lifetime. For Shi'a Muslims this is a day when they recall a great tragedy that took place on Muharram 10, AH 61 (680 CE). The Imam Husayn (son of Ali and Fatimah and therefore grandson of the Prophet) travelling with his family and many followers was attacked by the troops of the Caliph Yazid.
- 11 Sept.** **ETHIOPIAN NEW YEAR'S DAY** *Rastafarian* called Enqutatash, or 'gift of jewels'. When the Queen of Sheba returned home from her visit to King Solomon, her chiefs welcomed her by filling her treasury with *enku* 'jewels'.
- 13 Sept.** **RABBIT IN THE MOON FESTIVAL/ZHONGQIUJIE/CHUNG CH'IU** *Chinese* This Mid-Autumn festival celebrates the moon's birthday. Traditionally, offerings of moon cakes are made by women to the goddess of the moon. Offerings are also made to the rabbit in the moon, who is pounding the elixir of life with a pestle. 'Spirit money' is bought along with incense and offered to the moon by women. They also make special 'moon' cakes containing ground lotus and sesame seeds or dates. These contain an image of the crescent moon or of the rabbit in the moon, and children holding brightly coloured lanterns are allowed to stay up late to watch the moon rise from some nearby high place.

- 20-26 Sept** **HIGAN** *Japanese* Higan marks the autumn equinox. Seven day period when the people of Japan commemorate their ancestors. Memorial services often take place at Buddhist temples, and many people visit their family's graves with special offerings and offer prayers to comfort the spirits of their ancestors.
- 21 Sept** **UNITED NATIONS DAY OF PEACE** *All faiths*
Many faiths organise interfaith Peace events.
- 23 Sept** **SHUUBUN NO HI** *Japanese* A national holiday on the middle day of *higan* (see above).
- 23 Sept** **AUTUMN EQUINOX** (*Alban Elued or Alban Elfed*) *Druid* As the shadows lengthen, Pagans see the darker faces of the God and Goddess. For many Pagans, this rite honours old age and the approach of Winter.
- 29 Sept** **NAVARATRI** *Hindu* Hindu families gather at this time to participate in circle dances associated with the goddess Durga and with Lord Krishna. Navaratri means nine nights, -
- 7 Oct.** the length of the festival.
- 30 Sept to 1 Oct** **ROSH HASHANAH** (Head of the Year) *Jewish* (New Year's Day, 5780 years from the creation of the world). It marks the start of ten days of repentance and self-examination where G-d judges every individual. The ram's horn (*Shofar*) is blown in the synagogue as a reminder of Abraham's sacrifice of a ram instead of his son, Isaac. Apples dipped in honey are eaten in the hope of a 'sweet' new year. Greeting: ***Leshanah Tovah Tikatev.***

With Thanks to Shap Calendar Group

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PROPHECY

"I wish to become a teacher of the Truth."

"Are you prepared to be ridiculed, ignored and starving till you are forty-five?"

"I am. But tell me: what will happen after I am forty-five?"

"You will have grown accustomed to it."

IMPROVEMENT

A young man squandered all his inherited wealth. As generally happens in such cases, the moment he was penniless he found that he was friendless too.

At his wit's end, he sought the Master out and said, "What is to become of me? I have no money and no friends."

"Don't worry, son, Mark my words: all will be well with you again."

Hope shone in the young man's eyes. "Will I be rich again?"

"No. You will get used to being penniless and lonely."

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