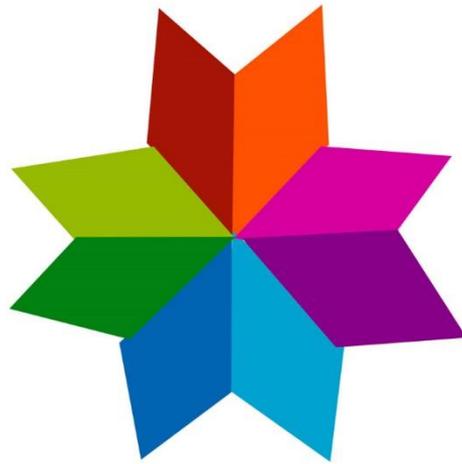


# Importance of Interfaith Dialogue from the perspective of Different Faiths

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Presented on: 29<sup>th</sup> June 2017



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**CANBERRA INTERFAITH  
FORUM Inc.**



This publication include the A Brief Overview of Interfaith with reference to the CIF event held on 29 June 2017. The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue from the perspective of the following faith groups have been enclosed in this publication.

- **Art of Living**
- **Baha'i**
- **Brahma Kumaris**
- **Buddhist**
- **Hindu**
- **Islamic**
- **Judaism**
- **Quaker**
- **Sathya Sai**
- **Sikh**
- **Sukyo Mahikari**

## **A Brief Overview of Interfaith for CIF June 2017**

“We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.” **Jonathan Swift.**

### **Prof Thomas Albert Howard: Valparaiso University**

“It is hard to find today a major city that does not have an “interfaith” or “interreligious” council or a university that does not sponsor some sort of “dialogue” among world religions. But when and where did “interreligious dialogue” begin? Most scholars would point to Chicago in 1893 when the first “Parliament of the World’s Religions” met in conjunction with the World’s Columbian Exposition of the same year”

Most things in history, however, have antecedents. If we look back in history we find many “disputations” or contrived ‘debates’, designed to prove the supremacy of one faith over another. Many such were followed by the torture or execution of the interlocuteur. Not exactly a conversation amongst equals! And one has to ask: Is ‘dialogue’ rather than ‘conversation’ the better word?

### **Rabbi Professor Lord Jonathan Sacks (House of Lords debate):**

The best way to improve interfaith dialogue ... is to create a sense of national identity so strong that it brings different ethnic and religious communities together in pursuit of the common good-not just the good for “my” group, but the good for all of us together. A nation should respect its faiths, and faiths should respect the nation. That is the only way we will achieve integrated diversity and the dignity of difference, in which we see our differences as contributions that we bring to the common good.

### **Dr Rachael Cohn (ABC RN The Spirit of Things):**

“It is a staggering fact that intolerance and ignorance often abound among the otherwise well educated and religiously observant. That is why interfaith dialogue was born. People who studied violent religious history, people who witnessed it, and who lived through its horrors, vowed that no democratic and free society should succumb to it, or foster bigotry and hatred. Understanding other traditions is an essential preventive measure, not, I hope, in a cynical exercise to "know thine enemy", but in order to enjoy the possibilities that friendship brings.

Like a genuine friendship, interfaith dialogue is a living thing, which necessitates, if it does not spontaneously effect changes in the way we view each other and the way we view ourselves. There is no genuine relationship which does not change the people involved. Indeed, there would be absolutely no reason for cultivating relationships at all if they did not transform us in some beneficial way.”

*Address given by Dr Rachael Kohn at the launch of the Women's Interfaith Network at NSW Parliament House on 22 March 2001*

### **Antonia Blumberg The Huffington Post:**

In 1962 the Catholic Church took a giant step forward in interfaith relations by convening of the Second Vatican Council. Before Vatican II, Catholics were discouraged from visiting other faiths' houses of worship -- but this all changed, particularly for the other Abrahamic faiths, especially Judaism, with the Nostra Aetate of Pope John XXIII. This document, which officially took effect October 28, 1965, acknowledged the Divine origin of all human beings and the truths present in other religions. It stated: “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a fraternal way any (hu)man, created as (s)he is in the image of God. This sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations", and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all”

## **Nurturing Spirituality and Interfaith Dialogue for Ultimate Happiness 'Art of Living'**

Art of Living Foundation is a volunteer-based, humanitarian and spiritual education organization. It was founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in 1981 that spread over 156 countries, has 64 thousand teachers and 370 million followers across the world. The courses energise people physical, emotional and intellectual health for both personal and society. The outcomes of the education is for conflict resolution, disaster relief, trauma relief, poverty alleviation, violence free, empowerment of women, prisoner rehabilitation, drug rehabilitation and refugee rehabilitation towards peaceful and quality of life.

Spiritually, we all part of the divine and are human beings. No person in the world chose their religion, race, culture, nationality, language, region, gender or profession when born. Unfortunately they have become our identity and discriminates us being all humans belongs to one family. These identities are left behind by the soul when leaving from this world. None of us know who we were before the birth and after the death.

Every religion speaks about one GOD (Generate-Operate-Demise). Hinduism primarily identifies three forms of God - Brahma (Generator), Vishnu (Operation) and Shiva (Demise). Hinduism also gave the most significant portfolios to women – Saravasthi (Knowledge), Lakshmi (Prosperity) and Durga (Defence). Hinduism promotes worshiping the nature as it represents the divine. The nature is categorised into five elements including earth materials, Water, Air, Fire and Sky. Hindu's worship the god in any form of the nature that includes soil, stone, animals, trees, rivers, mountains, etc.

*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is a philosophy of Hinduism and it means the whole earth is one family. *Vasudha* means *earth*, *Eva* means *in-deed* and *Kutumbakam* means *family*. This philosophy inculcates the entire world is one family that is the divine which comprises all religions are part of. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* statement from Upanishads is not just about peace and harmony among the societies in the world, but also about a truth that somehow the whole world has to live by some rules like a family. Just by contemplating this idea and by at least trying to live by it and practice it in our lives, we could make this world a better place.

Religious fanaticism has taken roots in many regions due to lack of spiritual education and comprehensive understanding of all religions. How can the

knowledge coming from Buddha or Jesus or Krishna or Muhammad or any other prophet be satanic?

Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar reiterated at 50th Anniversary of United Nations that all religions have three aspects: Values, Symbols and Customs. While values are the same in every religion but the symbols and customs differ. Today, we have forgotten the values and holding on to symbols and customs. Only spirituality can nourish human values. It can eliminate frustrations and bring contentment that brings happiness in life.

Spiritual education creates a sense of belongingness in individuals and the whole world. The core aim is a person learns to embrace all the religions of the world as his own and can choose to practice one without decrying the other. There is lack of education on the emotional and spiritual needs in the current system. Education to release negative emotions and manage our own mind is highly needed for a person to live in the present moment rather worry about the past and the future.

Spirit is eternal and beyond birth or death. Spirit is love beyond name and form. The spiritual education and interfaith dialogue has to enable the world to understand the interreligious customs and practice the values. When we are truly in love with Jesus, we will see Jesus in every name and form. The spiritual education has to take the persons from *somebody* to *nobody* and from being *nobody* to *everybody*. This knowledge can bring sharing and caring all over the world.

Art of Living provides the spiritual path, one need to know the way to get inner strength and peace. Breathing techniques, meditation and yoga practices can release tensions and negative emotions that help to live in the present moment. Humans either worries about the past or the future or get struck in negativity. Interfaith knowledge and spirituality can make people to be peaceful internally. The people with inner peace can spread the peace and happiness in the society and all over the world.

#### **About the author:**

Dr Krishna Nadimpalli is a community leader believes in serving humanity is serving the divine. He is serving communities through Canberra Interfaith Forum, Canberra Hindu Mandir and Art of Living Foundation to promote interfaith dialogue. He is an environmental scientist at Geoscience Australia and adjunct associate professor at University of Canberra.

## **The importance of interfaith dialogue – a Baha’i perspective**

The Bahá’í community has been a vigorous promoter of interfaith activities from the time of their inception. We owe it to our partners in this common effort to state clearly our conviction that interfaith discourse, if it is to contribute meaningfully to healing the ills that afflict a desperate humanity, must address honestly the implications of the over-arching truth that called the movement into being: that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one.

Interfaith dialogue—has the potential to transform our understanding of the world religions so their sequence, interdependence, wholeness, and unity can be realized.

Bahá’u’lláh repeatedly exhorted his followers to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.” The Bahá’í House of Worship in Sydney, for example, has hosted numerous interfaith worship services since it was opened in the early 1960s. Such associations promote unity and concord between people, creating cherished partnerships and relationships.

But, most of all, they reflect what Bahá’ís see as the true purpose of religion, which conflict, hate, and enmity distort: “That the diverse communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion.”

Interreligious dialogue is integral to the process of developing a framework that will allow for the sustainable development of world peace. Bahá’u’lláh has stated that the “essence of the Faith of God” is to prevent religious strife—an important goal of dialogue.

The Promise of World Peace, a Bahá’í peace charter, calls religious leaders to dialogue to remove the causes of religious strife by raising a challenging question: “How are the differences between the world’s religions to be resolved in theory and in practice?”

The Universal House of Justice suggests a response indicating that theological differences will have to be set aside in a spirit that “will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and

peace." The same exhortation was extended to the Bahá'í community by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who challenged Bahá'ís and others to act as a "propelling agent" to overcome obstacles to world peace.

One can argue that the Bahá'í Faith can only assume a fuller meaning when the Bahá'í teachings and practice are allowed to benefit, for example, from the metaphysical insights of Buddhism, the devotional practices of Hinduism, the Christian emphasis on the prophet-founder as mediator and savior, the Islamic stress on the sanctity of divine laws, and the importance of communal religiosity in Jewish life, just to name a few.

Bahá'u'lláh has said: "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed...Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you."

[Diwaka Prakash](#)

## **Importance of Interfaith Dialogue from the perspective of the Brahma Kumaris**

Universally, we are known as the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU), or BKs for short, and were founded in 1937 in Sindh (north-west India). Since then, the spiritual teachings of the BKs have been nurturing the core values that lie in each human being through the practice of Raja Yoga meditation and by observing peaceful principles in their own conduct. The organisation moved to its current headquarters in Rajasthan, India in 1951. It first spread its teachings outside India in the early 1970's, and now has a presence in over 130 countries.

The BKs has as its prime purpose the spreading of the message of peace, love, unity and harmony all over the world. We cannot hope to build a better world without self-improvement and, at the same

time, share a general responsibility for all humanity. The sorrow and problems apparent in the world can only be healed through the realisation of the importance of values and spirituality in life. While science has created weapons of mass destruction in the name of security and progress, at the same time, there is more insecurity through the neglecting of divine values.

It is understood that the root meaning of 'religion' is 'to join together or to re-connect' suggesting a re-uniting of the self with its source. This is the very purpose of spirituality. The BKs practice this and bring it into reality through spiritual means by realising the self through the bond of spiritual reunion with God.

The teachings of the BKs are based on the recognition of the intrinsic goodness and spirituality of every human being. Education in spiritual principles is combined with the development of inner qualities and the awakening of personal powers as a natural extension of the expression of spirituality in one's life.

The BKs actively participate in interfaith dialogue around the world. We have significantly contributed to the gatherings of the World Parliament of Religions, and many other interfaith events world-wide. This participation is an expression of our belief that there is one God, the Supreme Being, and each one of us is a child of God, a spiritual being. While each of us is a unique being following our own individual path, we are all part of God's family. By participating in interfaith dialogue, we believe that we are contributing to, strengthening, and promoting spiritual values in a practical way. Through

discussion of our beliefs and rituals, we become informed. Knowledge is a peaceful way to overcome ignorance, often the source of hatred and conflict in our world.

Here in Canberra, the BKs have been actively associated with interfaith dialogue since the early 1990's when a group of representatives from various faiths held a 'mini' World Parliament of Religions, inspired by the WPR event in 1992.

We see interfaith dialogue as a way of showing to the world that while we may be following different faith paths, there is unity through the appreciation of differences. The unity comes because we are all making effort to live our lives based on spiritual values in the belief that this will bring about a better world. Spirituality promotes religious tolerance. All major religions of the world aim to establish the universal values of peace and love.

[Robyn Horton](#)

[I have been a student of the Brahma Kumaris for over 30 years, studying and teaching Raja Yoga meditation and related courses in spiritual development eg positive thinking, stress management.](#)

## **The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue – A Buddhist Perspective**

Interfaith dialogue is particularly important and relevant to Australia, given our society is pluralistic, multicultural and is home to multiple faiths. Dialogue promotes positive interaction, collaboration and harmony between people of different spiritual faith traditions. It involves listening to other religious/spiritual viewpoints respectfully with the goal of understanding their views and values.

Of course, there are differences between faith traditions, in particular their worship, rituals and belief systems. For instance, there is no general agreement in relation to issues such as what was the origin of the universe; what is going to happen after death; or what is going to be the end of the universe. However, these issues are quite speculative and actually have little relevance to us in day to day life. What is important is the present moment and the complex problems and conflicts that we are currently facing. Therefore, it is far more beneficial to set aside differences and highlight the commonalities between different spiritual faith traditions: that is, they all seek to improve the situation of humanity and make life better for everyone by teaching people to follow ethical behaviour and a path of love, compassion and forgiveness.

Buddhism welcomes dialogue with other religions and considers that there is inherent truth in all pathways that relieve human suffering. Although Buddhism, unlike many other spiritual faith traditions, is non-theistic, this should not be an obstacle to dialogue between Buddhism and other faith traditions. According to Buddhist teachings, by encouraging loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity and non-violence, we can extend the ideals of peace, acceptance and generosity not only to our loved ones, but also to friends, neighbours and strangers. We, Buddhists, can share these values and ideals with many different faith traditions. As the Dalai Lama once said: "I am interested not in converting other people to Buddhism but in how we Buddhists can contribute to human society, according to our own ideas."

As an active member of the Canberra Interfaith Forum since its formation in 2010, I have had the opportunity to interact with people of different faith traditions, visit their place of worship and learn to respect teachings and practices of other spiritual faith traditions. The more I interact with diverse faith groups and different communities, the more I gain a better understanding of their faith traditions and cultures. I have realised that there

are many commonalities between different faith traditions which we can utilise effectively to build peace and harmony in our society.

We need to think clearly and compassionately about religious diversity and respect the teachings of other faith traditions. This is key to the appreciation and better understanding of other faith traditions and the maintenance of unity in diversity.

Dr Willie Senanayake

## **Hindu Perspective-Importance of Interfaith Dialogue**

The importance of interfaith dialogue can hardly be understated. Never has interfaith dialogue been more relevant than in present times. The world today is increasingly intolerant of the different faiths that exist and humanity has become its own worst enemy.

Dr Uma Mysorekar, speaking at the UN Special Event, on World Interfaith Harmony: Multi-religious Partnership for Sustainable Development, organised at the UN in New York at the end of March 2015 said, "The term 'Interfaith Dialogue' refers to the positive and cooperative interaction between people of different religious faiths and spiritual beliefs, with the aim of promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance and tolerance. The power of religion can be used as a major force of unification among divergent factions and hence it can play a key role in the promotion of global peace and reconciliation by bringing various groups together."

"It is a scientific approach of the Vedantic wisdom to human development that is highlighted in the motto of Hinduism, bahunya hitaya, bahunya sukhaya, which aspires for the welfare and happiness of all."

"Interfaith dialogue therefore plays a vital role in the field of cultural diplomacy by uniting faiths and by fostering reciprocal understanding, acceptance and tolerance among religious communities. Interfaith dialogue can in this way breakdown walls of division and barriers that stand as the center of numerous wars, with the objective of achieving peace.

The statement made at the DIALOGUE ON INTERFAITH COOPERATION in Yogyakarta, 6-7 December 2004, hits the nail on the head. Among other things, the statement highlighted the fact that, "when ethnic and religious prejudice was compounded by economic and political rivalry, conflict was inevitable. .... the solution was not to deny the reality of our differences, but to affirm a deeper, greater and more important reality – our common humanity."

In an article on the interfaith website of the "Western Hindu", the author has summarized the Hindu approach very clearly. He states:

"Dialogue has always been important in Hinduism. Many of the Upanishads (religious texts) take the form of a dialogue, discussing philosophy from different points of view. Many of the Hindu saints were renowned for their debate and dialogue, frequently changing their opinions as a result. In the Manisha Panchakam, Adi Shankara starts by asking an outcast to move aside, and ends up concluding that when one knows God, then caste is irrelevant, and that the outcast is Shiva himself. Satsang (literally meaning true company), is respectful dialogue among devotees along with reflection and meditation. This is positively encouraged by many Hindu lineages.

Relations between Hindus and members of other dharmic religions are often very close, in many cases Hindus and Buddhists share temples (such as the Bagh Bhairav Temple in Kirtipur) and festivals. Similarly festivals at my local Mandir are frequently attended by Sikhs, and Hindus often attend festivals in the local Gurdwara. Historically we can see the interplay between dharmic religions. The Hindu school of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism

certainly had an influence on each other, and Jainism played a part in emphasising Hinduism's vegetarian tradition.

With this ongoing history of cooperation and respect between dharmic religions it is not surprising that Hindus are often at the forefront of Inter-religious dialogue and events. Swami Vivekananda's address at the World Congress of Religions in 1893 is often considered one of the best pro-interfaith speeches of all time."

Michael Stoeber wrote that, "The 1893 Parliament was remarkable, both in its magnitude and its purpose: it brought together forty-one denominations and over four hundred men and women in a forum of mutual teaching and learning. That is to say, its formal purpose was reciprocal dialogue, something rather unusual for the 19th century, when interfaith preoccupations of the time still normally focused on proselytism. Swami Vivekananda was the Hindu Ambassador at this forum. His guru and mentor, Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa, was himself an early advocate of dialogue between traditions. Sri Ramakrishna's interests in religion were truly eclectic: not only was he involved in practices of various Hindu traditions such as Tantra, Advaita, Yoga, and Vaishnavism, but he has also been noted for his interests in Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Islam, and Christianity. Indeed, his experiences of elements of these different faiths led him to advocate a common divine Reality behind the many forms of religiousness, despite the many differences between traditions.

Let me conclude with an example of the importance of interfaith dialogue which generates interfaith harmony and understanding: The Former President of India, APJ Abdul Kalam, a Muslim, was the honored guest at a Vivekananda Interfaith Dialog Day in New Delhi Sept. 10th, 2011. He said, "Friends, my pilgrimage of visiting centers of multiple faiths, has resulted in one most important mission for human life: 'What can I give? What can I give? What can I give?' .... The fight for corruption free, ethical society and good environment will have to be fought against greed and replace 'What can I TAKE?' with 'What can I GIVE?' As students, scientists, professionals (and religious people), we need to ask ourselves, 'What can I give?' I visualize the multiple religious leaders undertaking the project of harmony in every village...(through regular discussion, grass roots service, sharing festivals and education as Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Order of monks have done)."

Allow me to boldly transpose this objective on to the world stage and ask that we take this principle of service everywhere around the globe. In the words of India's Hon'ble Vice President, Mr. Hamid Ansari, "To promote real understanding, interreligious and interfaith dialogue has to be more than mere words or talk. It must include human interaction and relationships. It should be about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. It has to be a cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, at both the individual and institutional levels."

Thank you

[Arvind Gupta, Senior Protection Officer,  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\), Hindu representative,  
Integrated Cultures ACT Inc.](#)

## The Islamic Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue

Initially there were some Muslims who were opposed to interfaith dialogue, thinking that it would compromise their faith. Fortunately, their perception of interfaith initiatives have changed. More and more Muslims now see the need and the necessity to enter into and have interfaith dialogue. Today we see, with lot of comfort and hope, so many interfaith organizations have and continue to emerge. Canberra Interfaith Forum is one such vital institution.

Why dialogue with others?

The Canberra Interfaith Forum, with one of its primary objective, gives us all, irrespective of our religious belief, creed or background, the opportunity to engage with other religious traditions in positive ways, to understand and remove the many misconceptions, myths and misunderstandings about different faiths. Entering into interfaith dialogue is a duty imposed on Muslims.

From Islamic perspective, the Holy Qur'an encourages interfaith dialogue with the verse, "Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and engage with them in ways that are best and most gracious" ( Qur'an 16:125).

Interfaith dialogue also provides opportunities for Muslims to dispel the myths and misunderstandings about Islam. In involving ourselves, we need to be mindful of presenting ourselves and discussions with "wisdom and beautiful preaching" and to engage "in ways that are best and most gracious."

Those are the prerequisites qualities and the necessary approach in having interfaith dialogue. In other words respect is the key word.

Interfaith engagement is a way to build understanding, find commonalities of belief and social responsibility, and encourage one another in faith and good works. Allah says:

" Say [O Muhammad]: O people of the book, come to a common understanding between us and you, that we shall worship no one except One God that we shall take no partners with Him and none of us shall take others for Lord beside One God" (Qur'an 3:64).

Once a delegation of Christians from the Roman Empire visited Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him). He invited them to stay in his mosque and allowed them to pray there according to their traditions. In 628 AD he granted a charter of privilege to the monks of St. Catherine Monastery in Mt.Sinai to assure them of their rights as a Christian minority. The charter is very significant in demonstrating the respect and tolerance of other faith communities as exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He also stated:

No one is to destroy their [non-Muslims] house of worship, or to damage it, or to take anything from it to a Muslim's house.

No one is to force them to fight (for Muslims). Muslims are to fight for them.

If a Christian woman is married to a Muslim man, it should not take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from attending her church to pray.

No one from my nation is to disobey this covenant till Last Day."

**Any Muslim who violates these mandates is insulting both Islam and Prophet Muhammad.**

Islam inculcates the unity of mankind under the sovereignty of God, for without acceptance of this principle, there can be no practical unification of mankind. The Holy Quran says:

***"All people are one single nation" (2:213).***

O people, surely We have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you may distinguish one another; but the most honourable among you are surely the most God-fearing of you; surely God is Knowing, Aware (49:13).

**The Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also exhorts us:**

***"Listen: Verily your Lord is one. Listen: Verily your father is one. O people of God, become brethren."***

When we come to realise that every nation is the creation of the same God, we will then look upon all mankind as God's one big family. There have, however, arisen in God's family mistaken views and prejudices which keep its members apart. Their prejudices must be eliminated in order to bring peace and happiness to this family. Accordingly, the Holy Quran describes and discusses prejudices born of fanatical and religious views, prejudices that owe their origin to notions of racial superiority, and prejudices for which differences of colour and language are responsible. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emphasised:

"O Lord: Lord of my life and of everything in the universe, I affirm that all human beings are brothers unto one another."

"All creatures of God form the family of God, and he is the best loved of God who loveth best His creatures."

"Respect the ways of God, and be affectionate to the family of God."

Islam stresses in showing respect and tolerance of others at all times. Each person has the right to his/her belief and religion. ***"Let there be no compulsion in religion"*** (Qur'an 2:256). Respect others' beliefs as you expect them to respect yours. Qur'an forbids Muslim to deride a non-Muslim's religion or belief system. Allah states in Holy Qur'an in chapter 30:22:

***"And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know. And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know."***

All participants at interfaith dialogues need to stress that faith on its own does not give you salvation, deeds do. Accordingly the Holy Qur'an says:

So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer, who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness (107:4-7). And

Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve (2:112).

Closing a Session with Prayer

Sessions of interfaith dialogue should be concluded with faith-based inspiration and mutual appreciation. Prayer of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh):

"O Allah! Put affection in our hearts, set right the matters between us, guide us to the ways of peace, save us from the darkness [and turn us] towards the light; save us from all kinds of indecency, the apparent as well as the hidden; and bless our hearing, our seeing, our hearts, our spouses, and our children; and turn in mercy upon us. Indeed, You are the One who greatly accepts repentance, One who is repeatedly Merciful."

Dean Sahu Khan

## **A brief look at Interfaith Dialogue/Conversation Principles from a Judaism Perspective b'h'**

“Two friends are walking in the jungle when they hear the roar of a lion. The first starts thinking of places they can hide. The second puts on running shoes. The first demands: What are you thinking of? You can't possibly run faster than the lion! The second replies: “ I don't need to run faster than the lion. I just need to run faster than you!”

The first seeks a collective solution. The second opts for the law of survival or natural selection. Darwin understood that neither could operate exclusively for the survival of 'human society'. Survival is a part of natural selection but the collective solution is what we understand by civilization. The concept of the collective and by definition civilization, is one of the bases of interfaith.

This contrast between collectivity and the law of survival was encapsulated by the Jewish Rabbi and Sage Hillel, some 2000 years ago in his wonderful aphorism: “If I am not for me, then who? ...but if I am only for me, what am I ? ...And if not now, when?”

“The Hebrew Mishnah, the first major Rabbinic written edition of the Oral Law powerfully articulates both the value of the individual person and the equality of all people. Precisely that sacred right to life resultant from all humanity being created in the image of G-d is that which serves to make the demands on us: to respect and protect the life of the other. There can be no greater human right and obligation. Only by understanding and enacting those values will we come to an understanding of what means to be human: to value the life of our fellow human.”

The equality of all humanity is demonstrated in the account of Adam and Eve. Their marriage is the union of the physical and the spiritual, (there is no dualism here but rather integration and unity). The legends and stories which accompany the Jewish texts tell that Adam was created from all four corners of the earth and from all the colours of the earth – and Adam and Eve from the one body– emphasising that concept of both universal and equal origin in the one human. This Unity is demonstrated in a very interesting way in this explanation of biodiversity.

“The extraordinary thing we now know, thanks to Crick and Watson's discovery of DNA and the decoding of the human and other genomes, is that all life, everything — all the three million species of life and plant life — all have the same single source. Everything that lives has its genetic code written in the same alphabet. Unity creates diversity.”

“Mesopotamia, which included Babel/Babylon, was the home of the world's first empires. The neo-Assyrians developed the practise of imposing their own language, Akkadian, on the peoples and nations they conquered. Ashurbanipal II boasted that he made all peoples “speak one speech”. Sargon II claimed that he had conquered many nations “with strange tongues and incompatible speech” and caused them all to “accept a single voice.”

The “one language and common speech” of Babel was the result of ruthless imperialism. The story of Babel is a critique of imperialism, the imposition of a single culture on a plural world. It is followed by the story of Abraham, the man commanded to be different to show that God loves difference....

We can now summarise the human story as told in Genesis. There are two perennial dangers. The first is the lawlessness and violence we still see in failed and failing states that lack the rule of law. The second is imperialism, the attempt to impose a single culture on a plural world.

Read this way, the Bible teaches that G-d creates cultural diversity just as He created biodiversity. There is only one G-d but there may be more than one path to his presence. That is what makes respect between faiths both possible and necessary. It is a lesson we must never forget.”

An additional important aspect of Interfaith in Judaism is the concept of the first seven laws of Noah, a basic moral and ethical code of conduct which applies to all humanity. These Laws form the basis of civil society and hence civilisation.

There are in Judaism a number of covenants but not all exclusively with Jews. Hence, the unusual structure of Judaism. The G-d of Israel is the G-d of all humanity but the religion of Israel is not the religion of all humanity. Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks writes that Judaism although not the universal faith, is nonetheless a universalising faith. For Judaism, any righteous individual human of whatever faith has a potential pathway to the Divine.

“Unity among nations is within our reach. It may take effort, but by looking beyond the superficial differences, we can see the many ways that we are one. Redemption is not a far off dream, but a fast approaching reality.” Based on an address of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (R Menachem Schneerson)

A personal note: In Judaism the year 5,778 approaches. The enduring civilisation of Judaism, a tiny civilisation, has outlived the many empires intent on its destruction. I as a Jew, carry within me, the tears and suffering of my people, of my parents and theirs, and their ancestors, throughout all the generations. The story of my people is a narrative of centuries if not millennia of exile, expulsion, persecution, pogrom and Holocaust. My parents’ families were all murdered: babies, children and adults; all of them. Hatred and demonization of Jews is again on the increase. I understand the importance of interfaith communication. I understand within my consciousness and through my family history, the meaning of the absence of human rights, of the absence of peace, and of the natural human desire for justice and for peace.

The Jewish Bible teaches: Love the Lord your G-d with all your might and all your soul! Love your neighbour as yourself ! Love the stranger ! Love Peace and pursue Peace!

Deuteronomy/Devarim, the 5th book of the Hebrew Bible is about societal beatitude and the transformative power of love. Love without justice leads to rivalry, and eventually to hate. Justice without love is devoid of the humanizing forces of compassion and mercy. We need both. “

“This unique ethical vision: the love of G-d for humans and of humans for G-d, translated into an ethic of love toward both neighbour and stranger – is the foundation of civilization and its abiding glory.

It is born here in the book of Deuteronomy, the book whose reading concludes for Jews the Pentateuch/Five Books of Moses, the book of law-as-love... and love-as-law.... !”

A Parable: When a great Rabbi (Schneur Zalman of Liadi founder of Chabad) and grandfather heard his baby grandchild continually crying in a room downstairs where his son, also a Rabbi, was studying. He spoke to his son and cautioned: You must never be so immersed in your Holy texts, that you are deaf to the cries of a fellow human being!

(This brief essay has drawn very largely on many Rabbinic sources – though any errors are entirely my own)

H C Oppermann

## **A Quaker Response to the importance of Interfaith Dialogue.**

Because we belong to CIF and have so many faiths represented, I believe we can take it as a given that interfaith dialogue is important to all of us. Here, we have the opportunity of getting to know each other and in doing so we gain more knowledge and understanding of each other's faith. This is not only important for our own growth in the Spirit but also for the growth of Peace in the world. Since so much strife and conflict has been caused by religious prejudice and misunderstanding, what we can do to build bridges between different faiths is invaluable. Many people have noted that we have so much in common. Where we differ gives us food for thought and growth.

So what are some Quaker thoughts about interfaith dialogue?

In the mid 1600's The Religious society of Friends (Quakers), grew out of dissatisfaction with current religious practices within the Christian Church in England. The Quakers were Seekers after Truth in spiritual matters as Quakers are today, and these spiritual truths need to govern every aspect of daily life.

Quakers see belief "not as a collection of doctrines or of traditional observances but essentially as an experience and a way of life based on that experience."(William Oats, p41 in "This We Can Say.") What Quakers strive to do is "join with those who want to share experiences of religious truth irrespective of their source in terms of race, culture, religious affiliation or philosophy."(David Evans, p48 in "This We Can Say.") So as well as its Christian roots, Quakerism has developed to include an openness to Truth wherever we may find it. This requires reading about, experiencing and dialoguing with other Faiths, but applying discernment to that as well.

We have a little book called "Advices and Queries," which is meant as an inspirational guide for us. The following are some relevant quotes:

"Take time to learn about other people's experiences of the Light. Remember the importance of the Bible and all writings which reveal the ways of God."(no.5)

### **2. A Quaker Response to the Importance of Interfaith Dialogue**

"Do you work gladly with other religious groups in the pursuit of common goals?...Try to enter imaginatively into the life and witness of other communities of faith, creating together the bonds of friendship."(no.6)

“Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find a way to be true to it... Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people’s opinions may contain for you.’ (no. 19 )

“Within Australia and in neighbouring countries, people of goodwill seek to know and to worship God in ways other than (ours). Do we listen to their insights with open hearts and minds, recognising that we do not possess all the Truth, but only a part? Do we seek knowledge and understanding of their beliefs and the Light which is theirs?”(no.35)

The above quotes demonstrate the Quaker consciousness of the need for dialogue with other faiths but of course we need to put that into practice. Within our Canberra Quaker community we have members who have had strong connections with other faiths including Ba’hai and Buddhism. As we discuss and listen to each other we have the opportunity to gain understanding and this opportunity is close at hand. In our Meeting House, Scriptures of some other Faiths are available along with the Bible. Although we are only a small community we welcome ways that promote interfaith understanding and membership of CIF is one of those ways.

Doreen Cope

#### References:

“Advices and Queries”, Australia Yearly Meeting 2008

“This We Can Say: Australian Quaker Life, Faith and Thought”, Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Inc. 2003

## **Practice of Interfaith in Sathya Sai Organisation**

Brothers and Sisters in Divinity!

First of all I would like to clarify that Sathya Sai Organisation is not a religion. It is a spiritual organisation. It has a permanent charter that embraces all humanity, beyond distinctions of religion, caste, colour or creed. Sathya Sai Baba asks humanity to recognise and embrace all religions. A great saint in India, Swami Vivekananda said it is good to be born in a religion but it is deplorable to die without extending our understanding beyond the religion of our birth.

Sai Baba says we must recognise that all religions embody a valid philosophy of life and give authoritative guide to obtain release from existential suffering. He asks that "Each should practice his religion sincerely. A Hindu should become a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian." He says, "Let the different faiths exist, let them flourish and let the glory of God be sung in all the languages and in a variety of tunes. That should be the ideal. Respect the differences between the faiths and recognise them as valid as long as they do not extinguish the flame of Unity." Practise of Unity of Faiths and Unity in Diversity are the two fundamental tenets of Sathya Sai's teachings.

In the Sai Organisation Unity of Faiths meetings, Interfaith dialogues and inter religious discussions are held all over the world. Members of Sai Organisation come from all faiths –Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Muslims and more, it is not conversion but transformation within the faith of origins that matters. There are Sai Centres in over 120 countries with their own religious, linguistic and cultural traditions, Hindu Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim. It is possible to follow His teachings and authentically retain the religion of one's origin e.g., in Tel Aviv Jews and Muslims get together regularly for study.

These two tenets Unity of Faiths and Unity in Diversity enjoin on all who follow His teachings to not confine their thinking to their geographical, racial, ethnic or religious origin but to reach out to expand their hearts and mind to embrace all. He has said "Expansion is your life." "Our love should envelop the entire world. That becomes the worship of the Lord. Then love and service become all pervasive." Rather than narrowing and constricting our love in a parochial and limited sense of confining it only to the adherents of one's own religion. He teaches that ones' religion should enable one to broaden the limit of love. He declares "Love more and more people each day - it is the duty to love, an obligation to love".

Inter religious practices can be take many forms. Interfaith dialogue and activities as is the practise in this Forum is one of the most important ways. Interfaith dialogue expands our heart and gives us deep respect for the many ways in which humanity has struggled to apprehend the Infinite, Divine Consciousness that is beyond human mind.

In the Sai Organisation there are many ways of practising Unity of Faiths and Unity in Diversity. One of the most important ways is through study circles and education in spirituality and human values as the core of all religions. Another way is for practitioners

of different faiths to join together to serve the destitute and the needy, the victims of natural or man-made disasters. We come to appreciate love and spirit of sacrifice as the common denominators of all the various religions. Similarly hospitals, hospices, massive water projects, Medical Camps orphanages and other humanitarian services in the Sai Organisation involve people from a variety of religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to join together. This is yet another form Interfaith takes in Sai Organisation.

Establishing schools and Institutes of Education in the various countries with their own cultural and religious traditions and supporting them and strengthening them is yet another way. This is the way I am involved in an interfaith activity which also is educational in nature.

Many followers of Sathya Sai Baba undertake study, for deeper understanding and appreciation of the wisdom in the scriptures of different faiths. They enrich their own faith and practise through this and develop contemplative spirituality that embraces all faiths. My spiritual practise is deeply influenced by Hinduism Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. I have learnt a lot from my study of religions as all religions teach authoritative ways for higher, nobler and more purposeful life.

All the various religious practices are for cultivating purity of heart and mind to enable better apprehension of Divinity. Sai Baba has said," All religions teach one basic discipline: the removal from the mind of the blemish of egoism, of running after little joys. Every religion teaches man to fill his being with the glory of God, and evict the pettiness of conceit. It trains him in the method of detachment and discrimination, so that he may aim high and attain liberation."

His emphasis is on the spiritual content of religion, the content that views human life as an opportunity to forge firm ties with the Omnipresent Divinity which manifests as this creation and to serve all with love. "Love all serve all".

Sathya Sai teaches that "What is important today is not what particular faith one professes, whether he is Christian, a Buddhist, a Muslim or a Hindu. The real question is how far he is a true human being. Develop therefore your human qualities."

So according to Him the essence of all religions is spirituality and learning to live in harmony with others in Brotherhood of Humanity and Fatherhood of God. The pathway to Divinity is an experiential journey. The goal of this journey is to find God. But He will not be found unless the mind is pure, the heart is broad and actions are noble. I will end with a quotation from Sai Baba

"There is only one Religion – the Religion of Love;  
There is only one Caste – the caste of Humanity;  
There is only one Language – the Language of the Heart;  
There is only one God – He is Omnipresent".

## **Importance of Interfaith Dialogue from Sikh perspective**

All world religions preach love, compassion, and humanity encouraging one to exercise self-discipline and inspiring the practise of goodwill and harmony. Yet, the world and its people are divided and torn between conflicts, animosity and religious intolerance. The impossibility of an enduring, peaceful and civilised society stems from this predicament unless various faith groups are comprehended in their proper and broader perspective. Hence, better understanding amongst people of diverse faiths is a necessity, which can be achieved via regular interfaith dialogue to allow hearty religious thinking to prosper.

Sikhism is founded on the principles of global interfaith communities and mutual inter-community respect and harmony. The founders of Sikhism, Shri Guru Nanak Dev ji have since defined and preached principles of interfaith respect, dialogue and harmony.

A Sikh by definition must respect and accept all other world religions. Further, a Sikh must protect, guard and allow the free-practise of the customs and rituals of others. Before we elaborate on the subject let us consider some remarks made by distinguished non-Sikh personalities about the Sikh Holy Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and its interfaith message:

Famous American writer and Nobel Laureate, Pearl Buck mentions in her writings that, "They [the Sikh Scriptures] speak to persons of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind."

Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, an Indian Hindu philosopher and statesman who was also the second President of India mentions in his writings, "The barriers of seas and mountains will give way before the call of eternal truth which is set forth with freshness of feelings and fervour of devotion in the Adi Granth."

Max Arthur Macauliffe, a senior British administrator of India under British rule mentions, "It [Guru Granth Sahib] nor only teaches kindness, love and honesty, but also encourages its followers to accept all human beings as one - thus diminishing all racial differences."

Guru Granth Sahib is the central religious scripture of Sikhism, regarded by Sikhs as the final, sovereign and eternal living Guru following the lineage of the ten human Gurus of the religion. A quote from the 1430 pages of the Guru Granth Sahib ji, on page 835 reads:

***"Jagat jalanda rakh le apni kirpa dhar, jit duare ubre tithe lehu ubaar..."***

This quote translates to, the world is going up in flames - shower it with your mercy, and save it! Save it, and deliver it, by whatever method/faith they seek. This verse is an endorsement and acknowledgement of all practices (including practices other than Sikhism). There are some historical facts portraying how respecting the faith traditions and beliefs of other individuals is considered a religious virtue in Sikhism.

### **Companions of Guru Nanak Dev**

For example, Bhai Mardana, who was a Muslim and Bhai Bala, who was a Hindu were two associates of Guru Nanak Dev ji. Both these companions observed their own faiths and

continued practising their respective religions while accompanying Guru ji on his travels spanning several decades. In the case of Mardana, on his death, Guru ji performed the last rites as per the Muslim custom. This demonstrates the complete acceptance and respect by the Sikh Gurus for other religions.

### **Sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur**

The ninth Guru or Prophet of the Sikhs, Guru Teg Bahadur ji accepted to be a representative of the Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) to present their case to the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb who was forcing them to forego their religious practices. Accepting to be their representative was seen as challenging the Emperor, which would result in an assured death sentence for Guru ji. Following the meeting with the Emperor, in 1675, Guru ji stood firm on presenting the human rights of Kashmiri Pandits and sacrificed his own life. Guru ji was publicly beheaded in Delhi by orders of Emperor Aurangzeb for disagreeing to change his faith. Thus, Guru ji's sacrifice also enabled the Kashmiri Pandits to continue practising their faith by preventing the Emperor exerting force upon them.

The example of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji has set a precedent and Sikhs are bound by the Guru's teaching to respect and protect the rights of all other faiths. Thus, the principle of Interfaith dialogue was established by the Ten Gurus of Sikhism.

### **Bhai Kanhaiya**

Moreover, Bhai Kanhaiya was a Sikh who established the institute of 'Sevapanthi' (service to humanity). His special mission was to perform selfless service ('sewa') to humanity with no distinction of nationality, caste or creed. In 1705 CE when on a visit to Anandpur, Bhai Kanhaiya found an area entrenched in battle with a combination of hill troops of Hindu Rajas and the Mughal imperial army soldiers 'littering' the countryside with wounded and dying people. After the frequent combats, Bhai Kanhaiya would roam around serving water to both, friends and foes who were wounded and dying.

These actions upset some Sikhs who complained to Guru Gobind Singh that Bhai Kanhaiya had been resuscitating the fallen enemy soldiers. Guru Gobind Singh summoned Bhai Kanhaiya and explained that he had received a complaint regarding his actions on the battlefield. Guru ji said, "these brave Sikhs are saying that you go and feed water to the enemy and they recover to fight again – is this true?" Bhai Kanhaiya replied, "Yes, my Guru, what they say is true. But my master, I saw no Mughal or Sikh in the battlefield. I only saw human beings and they all have the same God's Spirit". Guru ji was very pleased with the reply. Guru Gobind Singh ji blessed Bhai Kanhaiya and told the Sikhs that Bhai Kanhaiya had understood his teachings correctly. Guru ji also gave him medical balm and said "continue doing whatever you have been and in addition also put this ointment on the wounds of all who need it".

The above examples compliment the concluding prayer of Sikhs, which is chanted after all Sikh congregations, "Nanak naam chardi kalaa, tere bhane sarbat ka bhala", which translates to "Oh, Nanak! Those who know their True Identity live in excellence and ecstasy! Through the power of your Bani, may everyone in the world be blessed to live in this way".

**Amardeep Singh**

## **Sukyo Mahikari Perspective**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you very much for inviting me to talk to you tonight. I am humbled by the presence of so many eminent community leaders representing various faiths in the ACT.

We, Sukyo Mahikari, are truly grateful and honoured to be included in the ACT Interfaith Forum.

The purpose of the Interfaith Forum is not only congruent with the teachings and belief of Sukyo Mahikari, that is, to form unity in love and harmony with all people to create a peaceful world regardless of their faith, creed, thought-system or any other background.

But this Forum means much more. The Interfaith Forum is a sublime example which provides us with reinforcement, which gives us encouragement and hope, that people around the world can come together to have continual and respectful dialogues for deepening our understanding of each other, and can work together for the betterment of society, and to achieve a peaceful world, transcending all kinds of barriers including differences in tradition and system of faiths.

Our founder taught that humankind can develop a wonderful peaceful civilization on earth by harmoniously combining various traditions, different characteristics of nations and ways of life, just like creating a beautiful multi-coloured brocade woven by many hues, not a cloth made of a single colour.

The ACT Interfaith Forum provides a great example and inspiration to all the people of the ACT and broader community, as it serves as a guidepost for the future of humankind, to say that working together is possible amongst different faiths.

We are truly privileged to be a member of the ACT Interfaith Forum as it has provided great opportunities not only for us, the representatives of Sukyo Mahikari, but also for our members in the ACT, young and old, to learn about various faiths represented in the Forum, to broaden our understanding and get to know each other as fellow human beings. Such experiences and exposures to come in contact with eminent religious leaders of our community will no doubt provide a great benefit for the development of our members.

My hope is that the influence and benefit of this Forum will expand in future from the eminent leaders to many others, possibly even from different fields, including young people.

I believe your precious work of laying the foundations so far will continue to develop into the future to achieve the purpose of the Forum, and open a new future for all.

Thank you very much for all your dedication and efforts so far for this Forum. We are truly grateful for all your work and the existence of the Forum.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

May God bless you all.

Terry Quinn



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Website: <http://www.canberrainterfaith.org.au/>