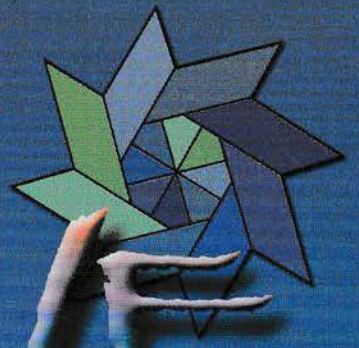


UNITED RELIGIONS

INITIATIVE



Building Global Interfaith Co-operation

*Prayer must mean putting
our very soul upon our
hands, Offering it to God.*

Babylonian Talmud

Soul Songs

Prayer and Meditation

Re-crystallizing society

Middle East Encounters

Mythical Mandalas

A Kaleidoscope of Culture



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The aim of *Initiative* is to open windows on world religions, beliefs and practices in the hope that this will foster understanding and thus reduce religiously motivated violence.

Statement:

Whilst the contents of this magazine will be in accordance with the Purpose and Principles of URI there will be freedom of expression.

Contributions:

We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, illustrations and responses so that *Initiative* reflects the religious communities it serves. Editorial guidance can be obtained from Heather Wells, PO Box 110, Lancaster, LA2 6GN

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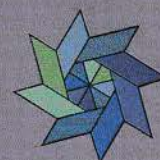
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I am writing this editorial in what is called One World Week - a well-established development education programme that seeks to highlight the common bond that unites us all as dwellers on planet earth. This is a timely reminder of where our responsibilities should lie, and the practical and spiritual outcomes of action can be life transforming for all those involved. As I contemplate the pages of this issue of *Initiative* I am conscious that each of the writers are reaching out beyond themselves in a profound way to bring about universal peace. They are each conveying, in the language of their own tradition, meanings and forms of prayer and meditation. Some speak of silence and quiet contemplation, others of chanting, music, colour and dance. Some convey the heartfelt yearning to be close, or at one, with the Divine, to grow and flourish in the light. While others seek to control and perfect their mind, serving the world with loving kindness, compassion and wisdom. All encapsulate the desire to share some of the treasures embodied within each of their religious and cultural traditions - and move us all closer to the unity we seek. A unity that does not negate the vital differences in the individual spiritual paths that we take, but one that creates understanding and acceptance of the human spirit within.

Heather Wells

For further information on One World Week see: www.oneworldweek.org

Guaymi dawn song:

*Let my life be like the rainbow,
 whose colours teach us unity;
 Let me follow always the great circle,
 the roundness of power,
 One with the moon and the sun,
 and the ripple of waters,
 Following the sacred way of honour,
 a guide and protector to the weak....
 And let me remember always the Great One,
 the Lord of Dawning,
 Whose voice whispers to me in the breeze,
 whose words come to me out of all
 the circle of life, and whose command is
 like the thunder:
 'Be kind, be kind, be brave, be brave,
 be pure, be pure, be
 humble as the earth, and be as
 radiant as the sunlight!'*

Cited: Transcendence: Prayer of People of Faith
 Collected and edited by Daniel Faivre 2001
 Pub. Westminster Interfaith

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Purpose of URI:

The purpose of the URI is to promote enduring, daily interfaith co-operation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. For further information please visit our website: www.uri.org.uk

- 1 We are a bridge-building organisation, not a religion
- 2 We respect the sacred wisdom, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition of each religion.
- 3 We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.
- 4 We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their own tradition.
- 5 We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.
- 6 We give and receive hospitality.
- 7 We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate.
- 8 We practice equal participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI.
- 9 We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.
- 10 We act from sound ecological practices to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations.
- 11 We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts.
- 12 We welcome as members all individuals, organisations and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
- 13 We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties.
- 14 We have the right to organise in any manner, on any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
- 15 Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that represent fairly the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.
- 16 We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
- 17 We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part, and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts.
- 18 We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information.
- 19 We are committed to organisation, learning and adaptation.
- 20 We honour the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Bylaws and related documents in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles and the spirit of the United Religions Initiative.
- 21 Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytised.

The Mirror



*Prayer
is an excellent
way of
transforming the
fabric of our
thoughts.*

Most religions are about our relationship with someone other: God. Buddhism is different, being solely concerned with the discovery and liberation of one's own mind. Buddhist prayer is a way of training and changing the mind. It is an inner conversation between confusion and lucidity, between busyness and peace, between the self-centred and the compassionate. Mind is considered king, ruling body and speech. Behind all we say and do, there are always thoughts, intentions. Sometimes these are obvious, big, loud thoughts that shout in the head. Sometimes they are subtle, normally imperceptible, subconscious motivations. The more the workings of mind are laid bare under the spotlight of meditation, the more one realises that how we think determines all our life activity. Changing mind, changes everything.

Prayer is an excellent way of transforming the fabric of our thoughts, a fabric woven and dyed through a haphazard consequence of everything that happened to us in this life: the transmission of values from our parents, from school, the media and so forth, as well as through the influence of all the ups and downs of personal experiences. The mind, before prayer and meditation, is not under control. Like a kitten, it darts about in a very haphazard way. Most people do not realise this and think themselves more or less under control; until they start meditating. Only then do they realise that they are incapable of keeping the mind where they want it for much more than half a dozen breaths. Then it wanders off into memories of the past or plans for the future. It gets angry when one would rather not be an angry person. It has desires and fantasies, fears and hopes,

Holy Island

Centre for World Peace and Health
Website: www.holyisland.org
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Power of Mind

by Ken Holmes

that one would rather not own up to. It can get jealous, depressed and impatient. It can be unkind, selfish and confused. Few people want any of these things but they are there willy-nilly, as a result of personal history. No one can go back and change the past but one can, from now on, decide to programme one's mind's future as much as is possible. Prayer is the way to do this. Prayer is organised thinking: skilful, positive thinking which will gradually reshape the mind in the way one wants it to be.

Buddhist prayer is not a request to a God for help. It is taking responsibility for one's own mind by doing what is necessary to help it evolve, through repeated, sincere thoughts, intensely meant. Some of these thoughts are for the universal good, wishing peace, compassion, happiness, prosperity and harmony to the world; sometimes also wishing to take the suffering of others on to oneself and to give them in return all the happiness one has ever known. Some thoughts are for purification of oneself, building up a positive motivation which will help one reduce and eventually eliminate the five poisons: anger, pride, jealousy, desire and ignorance. Some are aimed at opening up the positive qualities latent in mind, by recalling the love, compassion, wisdom and power of the Enlightened Ones, and aspiring to these oneself, knowing that each and every living being has them locked up deep within himself or herself, as the universal potential we all share.

'Working with one's own mind' does not just mean readjusting the personality one is now. That is but a drop in the ocean of mind's potential: a few passing waves on its surface. To discover and let unfold the profound blessing in the ocean's depths - universal love and wisdom - one needs to meditate. Prayer is a great aid to meditation and a vital

part of it but it is limited to thoughts and words. Meditation itself goes way beyond thought and the abilities of the intellect. It carries one through the myriad realms of 'spiritual' or 'religious' experience and on from there through unimaginable purity and peace into mind's total perfection.

Meditation must be learned under a very competent teacher. DIY meditation is dangerous. Your mind is all you have. It needs to be treated well. It is hard to change, slow to change and not easy to understand truthfully. It can be very tricky and it prefers illusions to facing up to itself. The first stages of meditation help us bring the mind to some experience of peace and stability. The constant, thorough work of regular meditation gradually, gently and lovingly diminishes the unwanted parts of the psyche and gradually installs deeper, more stable peace; an inner calm which gives the distance and space needed to know oneself, work with one's past and prepare the future. If meditation practice progresses well, this peace becomes an integral part of oneself and the basis for further development of deep insight, which one might compare to peeling away layers of cloth concealing a light. As finer and finer layers of the psyche are discovered and shed, each in their turn, so does one come closer to the brilliant presence of the timeless, limitless perfection which underpins everything and everyone. At the end of the long journey of meditation, there is nothing left but that. The illusion of self, which never really was, is no more. All that remains is an infinite ocean of loving compassion and all-knowing wisdom that reaches out to help all beings.

*Prayer
is a great aid
to meditation and
a vital part of it
but it is limited to
thoughts and
words.*

Stories we live by.....

If you want to meditate, one of the best places is a cemetery. Some tombstones have wonderful lines. On the tomb of Martin Luther King we read, "free at last, free at last." Near the end of one of his last sermons King says, "Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator - that something we call death."

Some say that religion is the response to the fact that we are going to die. Instead of seeing religion as the response to knowing we are going to die, Unitarian Universalist President John Buehrens put it in terms of which story do you live by? He wrote, "For many years I summarized the religious question as:

WHAT KIND OF STORY ARE WE IN?"

What kind of story do you believe we are in? Are we in an ethical story? Is virtue rewarded? Do we live in a universe with a God who rewards the just and punishes the unjust? What can we trust today? On the last weekend in January, Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates was in Davos, Switzerland, meeting with a World Summit of Business Leaders. They were discussing the breakdown of the most important element of business. Not PROFIT! The theme of the meeting was TRUST. We live in a world in which the old standards of trust are breaking down. How do we create a world community of trust? What sense does it make to promote a common ethic when terrorists or war may destroy our lives and even our world?

Recently, I was formally installed as new minister of a Unitarian Church in Horsham, south of London. I followed my wife, who had been minister there for six years. Speaking in the service were three friends from the World Congress of Faiths, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, and Rabbi Jacqueline Tabick. I also invited local clergy to participate in the induction service. The response was that they voted to shun the service. While two attended as individuals, there was a group decision by the Ministers Fraternal not to have any official participation in such an interfaith service. My own initial rage at being shunned helps give me empathy for the Muslim, the Hindu and the Jew who are also shunned. It reminds me of the words of Oscar

Hammerstein II,

*"You've got to be taught to be afraid
of people whose skin is a different shade,
of people whose eyes are oddly made,
You've got to be carefully taught."*

We used to think the world is getting better and better. Sadly, being shunned is part of a rising tide of fundamentalism. Many people who are frightened and distrustful, feel they can only trust those who share rigid religious convictions, liberalism is seen as the enemy. Christian, Islamic and Hindu fundamentalists are all quite different, but they have the same characteristic response to the challenge of our multi-faith world: "rejecting, condemning and opposing all those who project apparent criticism against them." *

The World Congress of Faiths is one of over a dozen organizations that work to build trust between traditions. In dialogues, such as at the Leicester WCF Conference, and the recent IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom) Congress in Budapest, we build "trust" and "friendship" between faith communities. We learn from the spiritual practice of one another. We need both international and local interfaith encounters to build trust. To overcome the fear and the 'shun'.

In January 2003, my wife and I had the privilege of being at an IARF/WCF Conference at Palm Springs, California with Huston and Kendra Smith. Huston challenged us that ETHICS, even a Global Ethic, is not enough: ethics are like stop lights. For our human community to flourish, we need virtues, which are green lights: the go signals!

Some of you will remember the book, *Honest to God*, by Bishop John Robinson. Over a year ago I heard a talk by his widow, Ruth Robinson. She told us her new version of Saint Paul's three virtues, "faith, hope and love." She spoke of "trust, hope and compassion". Along with "gratitude and humility", I can think of no better virtues for our multi-faith world.

TRUST - Being trustworthy. Not just blind faith in some ancient creed. But the nurturing of relationship in community.

HOPE - Some vision of the future worth living for. Not





Mural at World Council of Churches, Geneva 2002

that you know it is going to happen, but that you love this world enough to try to save it from the fools who are willing to destroy it. As Reinhold Niebuhr said, "My thinking and knowing are pessimistic, but my willing and hoping are optimistic."

COMPASSION - active love that reaches out in generosity, that forgives when people do not live up to expectations. That includes forgiving yourself.

In our multi-faith dialogue, we have learned that while we share a common humanity, all religions are not the same. This is good, in that we can learn from one another. By knowing another religion, we can enrich our own. We can enrich our prayer from Buddhist meditation, and our physical health from Hindu Yoga. But we do not have to lose our identity - we can taste salt without becoming salt.

Think of the religious landscape of our planet as a mountain with many paths. In the old theology, only one path led up to Heaven. Early 20th Century religious teachers like William Ernest Hocking saw many paths up the mountain, but found that the mystic from whatever tradition will recognize another mystic. Thus, all religions meet at the top of the mountain. The Hawaiians also tell us "The Mountain has many paths."** But in the Hawaiian tale, while we are all on the same mountain, one path may end at a waterfall, another path may go down to the ocean, yet another path may end in a cave. A path may lead to a village of friends or to solitude. Our paths may be different, but we have a common task - to preserve the mountain - and to do that we are called to overcome the 'shun'.

The mountain is our planet, the one reality on which human life will depend for many centuries.

From our planet we look out to the stars.

The Universe is not Christian or Jew,
Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu.

There are many paths, but one Reality.

From the Universe, a Cosmonaut looked back at our planet and wrote,

The earth was small, light blue and so touchingly alone...

This is our home which must be preserved like a holy relic!

Richard Boeke.

Secretary, World Congress of Faiths
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* John Cobb, *Being Open to the Wisdom of Others*, article in *Dharma World*, Jan/Feb 2003

** Gwen Griffith-Dickson *The Mountain has many paths* lecture at Essex Hall, 21.3.2002



A Peaceful Heart

Peace in the world requires prayer and action. Peace-builders need the renewing energy of a peaceful heart. Those who, in inner meditation, discover inner peace will be restless until all people are in harmony.

One of the surprises in preparing the anthology *1,000 World Prayers* was to discover how many people known for their prayers were also active in the struggle for peace and justice, and indeed how many were imprisoned or even put to death for their faith. The twentieth century illustrated in a remarkable way that the life of prayer and of social activism go together. Those who chose the path of prayer became social activists. Gandhi said *"If I could find God in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. I know I cannot find God apart from the service of Humanity."* Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, who became increasingly involved in peace work and a concern for social justice said,

"the contemplative person unmask the illusion and falsehood of the world and sees the world as God wants it to be."

Those who committed themselves to peace-work discovered that prayer was essential. Mairead Maguire, co-founder of the Peace People in Northern Ireland and winner, with Betty Williams, of the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize, once asked Mother Teresa for advice: *"Pray, pray, all the time, never cease to pray"* was her answer. Mairead herself says, *"Learning to be still and peaceful is our daily work, a lifetime's work."* Similarly, Giasuddin Ahmed, who during the Bangladesh war of independence worked with the refugees, on his return home he concentrated on deepening his life of prayer. He recognised that a deeper awareness of Allah and becoming more true and forgiving was the way effectively to overcome violence.

In the search for inner peace, we now have available to us the spiritual treasures of the world, thanks to the work of scholars and translators.

As communities we still seem reluctant to share our particular inheritance, but as Madame de Stael said, *"To pray together, in whatever tongue or ritual, is the most tender fellowship of hope and sympathy that people can enjoy in this life."* Many people involved in interfaith work, however, are reluctant to share the experience she described so appreciatively. It is not, I believe, a watering down of any religion to pray together, but a meeting in the depth of the Spirit.

I have as a treasured possession "Every Nation Kneeling", a service compiled in 1937 by Will Hayes, held at the Unitarian Church in Chatham where, when we lived in the Medway Towns, the local interfaith group used to meet. The World Congress of Faiths arranged an "All-faiths" service in the year of the Queen's coronation, and for many years held an annual service. Now Commonwealth Day is marked by a Multifaith celebration at Westminster Abbey. This year, for

the first time, Belfast Cathedral hosted an Interfaith celebration to mark the visit of the Peace Council and Tenth Anniversary of the Northern Ireland Faith Forum. It was inspiring in a city so often associated with sectarian strife to see people of many faiths exchange greetings of peace.

If such events are still rare, the individual of whatever faith can enrich his or her spiritual journey by drawing upon many books of spiritual inspiration. Those who are committed to a particular path gain in appreciation of other paths, and the spiritual seeker becomes aware of a vast throng of fellow pilgrims.

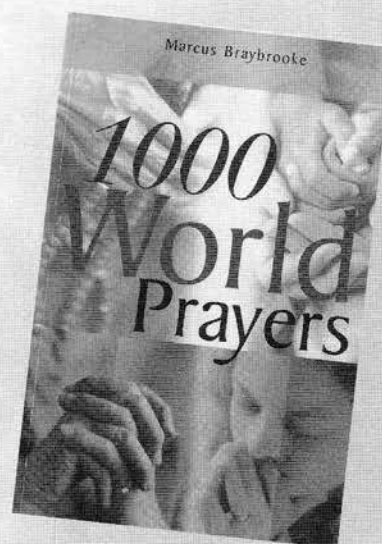
Again and again, spiritual writers of many traditions emphasise the importance of silence. We need to learn to still the body and quieten the mind. As we go deep within we discover a oneness with the Source of All Life in whom we are in harmony with all beings. Sir Francis Younghusband, the founder of the World Congress of Faiths, said of one of his mystical experiences, *I felt as if I were in love with every man and woman in the world.*

Long ago Evelyn Underhill, a writer on Mysticism, said *Religions meet where religions take their source - in God.* Members of the different religions will also be united if they meet in Spirit and in Truth. If they do so, they can be a vital force for unity and peace in an increasingly violent and polarised world.

Only as our vision of the divine purpose is renewed will we find the energy to maintain the struggle for peace and justice. Only as we ourselves become people of peace will we be effective in our work.

Marcus Braybrooke

Marcus Braybrooke is Editor of several books of prayers and meditations from around the world. Bridge of Stars and Lifelines are published by Duncan Baird; 1,000 World Prayers is published by John Hunt Publishing Ltd. He is now preparing 365 Meditations for a Peaceful Heart in a Peaceful World.



Prayer-language

I was born into a family who had little or no interest in God or religion. Mum and dad - kind, hard-working, ordinary sort of folk - therefore felt something worrying had happened to me when at seventeen I declared that I had 'found' God and was going to become a Bahá'í! Along with my 'discovery' that God existed came an overwhelming desire to communicate with whatever it was that had suddenly captured by heart and soul. Prayer became a big part of my life.

The beauty of the prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í faith, entranced me and I suddenly found myself with access to a wonderful spiritual language. So thrilled was I by my new found 'prayer-language' that I often took myself to my room and prayed long and hard and probably loud. One day my poor mother knocked on the door and in a worried voice asked me to stop speaking to myself so loudly as it disturbed her and made her feel that I had lost my marbles completely. It didn't take me long to realize that enthusiasm needed to be tempered with wisdom, and that prayer need not always be 'in words, but rather in thought and attitude' * also.

Prayer is an indispensable part of life for a Bahá'í. The Bahá'í writings state that 'prayer bestows life', that prayer 'brings joy', that prayer can 'heal body and soul', that prayer is one of the ways we can 're-create ourselves' and perhaps most importantly that prayer is our communion and association with God. Daily communion with God is a Divine routine - one it would be hard to imagine life without.

Although Bahá'ís are free to use their own words in prayer, many also choose to recite prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh or his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá as they capture something mystical and magical about humanity's longing for spirituality, and the beauty of the words touch parts that ordinary words seem just too ordinary to reach - and they also cover just about every conceivable human situation.

A Bahá'í should also recite an obligatory prayer on a daily basis. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed a choice of three obligatory prayers and people are free to choose the one that suits them. I remember the first time I chose to recite the long obligatory prayer [the other two are medium and short], it's a prayer that requires movement - stretching one's hands out to God, bowing ones head to the floor in humility before

God, and sitting meditatively with hands upon the knees awaiting the blessings of God - praying and moving was something entirely new to me and this involvement of my whole body in worship and praise was truly inspirational.

It seems odd to me now to think of such an inspirational act as 'obligatory' - Bahá'u'lláh seems to be opening up doors of delight and saying it is a duty to enter and enjoy. Nevertheless the word obligatory does indicate that every Bahá'í must take time out from their busy lives to remember God - an obligation that is light to bear.

The obligatory prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face towards God and expressing devotion to Him.

However, prayer has become so much more to me than obligation or even delight - it has weaved its sacred thread through my life in times of birth, death, decision-making, sadness, and hope - it's one of the greatest gifts of God - a gift that Bahá'is the world over give thanks for.

Maureen Sier

* Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, in J. E. Esslemont; Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, p.94



Painting: *God's Jewels* by Marie Binder

The Mantra of Meditation



Meditation is not the mysterious thing it is sometimes made out to be. Meditation means to focus the mind on something, but there are different results of our different 'meditations'. Sometimes our musing is productive, sometimes neutral and at times destructive.

In some religious traditions meditation and prayer are practically synonymous, with both being immensely personal experiences. Hinduism encourages everyone to engage in meditation and prayer because of the peace and introspection it awakens in our often turbulent lives. Within Hinduism there are many different traditions which can bring different results depending on the absorption, interest and focus of the practitioner.

There are also different levels of commitment within each tradition - some followers live at home with their families, while others take on a life of celibacy, austerity and penance. But even within each social group there are distinctions and levels of religious and spiritual advancement. Someone who prays for worldly possessions would not be considered to be on the same level of spiritual development as someone who prays to be freed from worldly desires, or someone who prays for love of God. They all may be praying/meditating intently and with concentration, but their requests would yield different results.

In the Vaishnava tradition, one of the major branches of Hinduism where the form of God is worshipped as Lord Krishna, **meditation forms a very important part of worship and everyday life.** One well-known branch of Vaishnavism in the west is the Hare Krishna movement, or ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness). This is a particular branch of Vaishnavism that stresses different forms of meditation for the spiritual upliftment of its followers.

The spiritual meditation of the Vaishnavas comes in different forms. There is the personal perspective where the individual quietly chants a given prayer-mantra to himself or herself using prayer beads to count out the number of mantras recited. There is also a more outgoing form of meditation that engages everyone, where the prayer mantra is sung and accompanied by percussion instruments. This form of 'meditation' although strange

to many European minds is considered very powerful because it easily, naturally and fully engages all the faculties of the worshipper. Thus the person is not so easily distracted from the activity of meditation as is the case in personal silent prayer and meditation.

In Vaishnavism there are different prayer mantras that can be chanted, the most popular and most effective being the Hare Krishna mantra:

**'Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna
Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama
Rama Hare Hare.'**

This mantra-prayer is made up of two extra names in addition to that of Krishna (the all attractive one). These names also refer to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna. 'Rama' refers to God's quality as the reservoir of all pleasure and 'Hare' refers to the pleasure energy of God. These three names that Vaishnavas use for God are interesting in that they refer to qualities of the Supreme Father as being the most attractive person and the source of all pleasure and happiness.

Vaishnavism teaches that all souls, no matter who they are, are eternal servants of God. The soul is considered an eternal principle that cannot be harmed or transformed in any way. In its natural spiritual condition the soul loves and serves God throughout eternity. It is only our stubborn refusal to love God that separates us from Him and His love for us. As our natural position is to serve and love God, His natural position is to protect and love us. As soon as we turn to Him and surrender to Him in love then we assume our natural and eternal spiritual nature.

The process that Vaishnavas practice to revive their lost spiritual relationship with God (Krishna) is mantra meditation. This process although very simple is also very powerful. This is because as God is absolute so His names are also absolute. By chanting His names we thus associate with Him directly and therefore become purified by His pure presence. When spoken or chanted this Hare Krishna prayer-mantra should be accompanied by the inner mood of supplication where the supplicant is asking God (Krishna) to, "Please engage me in Your service".

Genevieve Brewster
Sanskrit name: Kancana-vali dd

The Cave of the Heart

*In this
silence our
solitude is
embraced by
the solitude
of God*

The call to contemplative prayer, the prayer of the heart rather than of the mind, is found in most religious traditions. For Christians it is found in the life and teaching of Jesus who spent long hours in solitary prayer and told his disciples to use few words in prayer and to retire to their room, shut the door and pray to the Father in secret.

Entry into one's room in this instance is not so much a physical activity as an interior movement to the heart, the cave of the heart, a journey to one's centre. Christians believe that in the depths of their being their spirit encounters God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This divine presence within is constant but our awareness of it may not be so. At times of prayer we seek to be more aware, to open ourselves to the loving, healing, enlightening presence of the divine and in so doing to forget ourselves, to die to self as Jesus instructed us to do. The death to self is the death to the false self, the masks, the roles we assume to cope with life. Such stripping back can be painful so the journey in prayer calls for courage and perseverance as Jesus taught in his parables of "The Importunate Widow" Luke 18.2-5 and "The Friend at Midnight" Luke 11.5-8

The struggle that this journey to one's centre can entail is illustrated vividly in the stories of the desert fathers and mothers of the 4th century, men and women who sought God in silence and solitude. Individuals flocked to these hermits to learn how to pray. One such was John Cassian who died around the year 435. In his 10th Conference he describes the method of prayer taught him by the monk Isaac. It is a very simple method: all that is called for is the repetition of a line from Psalm 69.2: **"Come to my help, O God; Lord, hurry to my rescue."** This way of meditating with a word or phrase is also recommended by the 14th century author of "The Cloud of Unknowing" Among Orthodox Christians it is found in the practice of the Jesus Prayer, the constant repetition of the words: **"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."**

This tradition of contemplative prayer, meditating with the help of a single word or phrase, appears to have been largely lost in the predominately cerebral west where meditation came to be understood as mainly an activity of the mind rather than of the heart. It was, however, rediscovered in the latter part of the last century by a Benedictine monk, John Main. So important did he believe this form of prayer to be for our world today that he devoted the last ten years of his life to teaching and encouraging others to embrace this way of making the inner journey.

John Main's teaching on prayer, drawn from the Christian Scriptures and the Desert Fathers and his personal experience of being taught to meditate by a Hindu swami, is very simple, but demanding. It is a discipline rather than a method. He advocates sitting still with upright back and eyes gently closed; a relaxed but attentive position. One then interiorly repeats a sacred word or phrase, known as a mantra. The mantra that John Main recommends is **maranatha**, ("come Lord Jesus, come") said as four syllables of equal length. The mantra needs to be repeated continuously throughout the period of meditation. One returns to it gently whenever becoming aware that the mind is wandering.

This repetition of the mantra may sound rather mechanical but it is a valuable tool for entering into silence, the silence of God. In this silence our solitude is embraced by the solitude of God, we arrive at union with the divine, caught up in the ceaseless prayer of Jesus to the Father. When this occurs we are no longer saying the mantra, but the moment of becoming aware of the silence it is no longer silence and so it is necessary to return to the faithful repetition of the mantra. In time the sacred word becomes rooted in our being and, as it were, says its self. Our task is to listen attentively to it sounding in the depths of our being. John Main compared it to a bell ringing in the depth of the valley, which becomes fainter as we climb the mountain.

We are invited to take up this discipline twice a day for about 30 minutes, morning and evening, and thus, by silence, stillness and simplicity, enter the cave of the heart.

Sr. Zela Proctor



The 'I' within

*In silence,
we connect
and commune
with the
Divine*

Meditation is a natural state of being. Consciously or not, we all experience this state from time to time. Moments of solitude, daydreaming, being absorbed in nature's beauty - these are all forms of meditation. The aim of a meditation practice, however, is to bring this state of being under conscious control so that deeper and potentially life-transforming experiences can become systematically available.

Brahma Kumaris (BK) Raja Yoga meditation teaches that there is a natural royalty in us, capable of bringing strength and beauty into our behaviour and relationships. It allows each of us to get to know God, and to love God, so that it remains easy for us to remember God no matter what else we may be doing, as lovers remember one another however far apart they may be. Thus, it is a meditation that can be practised any time, any place, anywhere; alone, or in a large gathering. It requires no artificial postures, chanting or expensive courses. It is a meditation that is carried inside ourselves, so that we can practice it not just when we are sitting quietly, but also as we continue to fulfil our daily tasks and responsibilities.

The inner journey of BK Raja Yoga meditation starts with a very simple step. This is to visualize the essence of the self as a tiny star, situated between the eyes at the center of the forehead. This is the 'I' within who thinks, feels, dreams, understands, interprets and responds to the physical world around me. When we allow our consciousness to rest in this awareness of being a point of light, we encounter the beauty of our own inner being, and we find ourselves drawn more and more to the truth within. Even a few moments of this is very refreshing.

As with the self, God is also visualized as a star - a singular source of consciousness, non-physical and eternal. However, whereas the natural wisdom and goodness of human beings has often become depleted, this One is understood and experienced as being totally giving, radiating a divine light that is like an energy of truth. When we become introspective, see ourselves as beings of light, become aware of the Supreme Light and allow ourselves to become absorbed in that light, truth returns into our own being.

In today's frenetic times, where we have so often forgotten to take care of either mind or body, meditation is a means of enabling God's healing power to restore us to wholeness. In silence, we connect and commune with the Divine; we learn to draw on God's love and wisdom. God's light and love reach the soul and the pains and wounds we are carrying begin to heal.

When attention goes inside in this way, a memory

begins to stir of a deep connectedness to all of life lying behind the physical differences. We are returned to the gentler, generous side of the human personality, which the harshness of today's world tends to make us neglect or forget. Mundane concerns lose significance, mental noise reduces and our higher nature emerges. In a world beset with difficulties, the positivity generated by this creative use of the mind gives our hearts the strength to cope. Amazingly, feelings of worry, anger, fear or hopelessness come to be seen as unnecessary. Letting go of those negative habits of mind and embracing God's positive energy becomes a solution in itself.

The path of meditation does not have to cut us off from others, as some believe. Instead, by liberating us from negative influences, it increases our ability to be ourselves, and to serve and co-operate with others. Our understanding and perception open up so that we begin to take charge of our feelings, emotions and future.

Meditation is not difficult, and it costs nothing. All it requires is our intention - our will. If we are willing to learn to meditate, to understand a few basic concepts and to give the time and commitment to practicing them, our lives can be transformed in a very natural and simple way.

Sr. Jayanti

Edited and adapted from the introduction to "God's Healing Power: How Meditation Can Help Transform Your Life" by Sr. Jayanti, European Director of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, published by Penguin Books.



An Inner Yearning

'In the Remembrance of God Do Hearts Find Satisfaction'.... *

Guided by an inner yearning and love for God, the Sufis strive to become one with Him through prayer, meditation and by 'polishing the mirror of their hearts'. As well as carrying out superogatory spiritual exercises, vigils and fasts to purify themselves, so that the Lord will enter 'the chamber of their hearts' **, these mystics follow the orthodox outer rituals of Islam. These include the affirmation of faith; the five canonical prayers at prescribed times each day; fasting in Ramadhan; the pilgrimage to Mecca and alms-giving.

A Prophetic tradition says 'Ritual prayer is the key to Paradise'. Indeed, many of the earlier Sufis asserted that ritual prayer would bring them closer and even unite them with God. A state of purity is required for the prayer. This, simply described, consists of washing one's hands, the face and neck, the arms up to the elbows and the feet while uttering 'in the Name of God the Merciful and Compassionate'. The prayers are a form of physical meditation and each movement has a significance. When we prostrate and put our foreheads on the ground, our hearts are higher than our intellects, thus heightening and opening the emotional and inspirational side of our nature. When we turn our heads from right to left at the end of each cycle we greet our accompanying angels with '*as-salamu aleikum wa rahmatullah*', (peace be upon you and the mercy of God).

The five daily prayers consist of *rakahs* (bowing), which are movements accompanied by the recitation of holy texts in praise of Allah. We stand before the 'King of Kings' as though He were present in front of us, then bow from the waist, prostrate and sit back on our knees. Each of the daily prayers is celebrated in this form, but in a different sequence. The variation is important, for through it awareness and concentration are developed. The aim of prayers at a given time is the turning away from worldly pursuits towards the worship of the One, in the full consciousness of our being. In this way, our day is broken up between the mundane and the spiritual. In the silence accorded to prayer we become less identified with everyday considerations. This gives us an inner centredness throughout the day, so that we realise what is truly important. Our whole way of life can then become a prayer of boundless gratitude to our Creator.

The Sufi *Dhikr* or Remembrance of God is another form of meditation. The *Dhikr* consists of the invocation of the

Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God, either silently or in unison with others. *Dhikr* is a spiritual method of concentration, carried out either alone, silently, or in a group under the direction of a Sheikh or Master. The Name of God, Allah Allah, or *la ilaha illa Llah*, (there is no God but Reality), as well as His Attributes, like *Ya Halim* (O Gentle One), *Ya Salam* (O Peace), *Ya Quddus* (O Patient One) are invoked.

There are variations in the *Dhikr* ceremonies of the different Orders, too. The *Mevlevi* Dervishes turn in a whirling dance after their Master, the thirteenth century mystic Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi. As they turn the dervishes chant *Allah Allah* deep in their hearts. Other brotherhoods, like the *Qadiriyyah* and *Shadhiliyyah* orders, celebrate a more robust and energetic ceremony where they sway backwards and forwards and from side to side, clapping rhythmically as they intone the Holy Names and texts. This is called a *hadrah*: a sacred dance for the worship of Allah. The *Naqshbandiyah*, on the other hand, perform a sober devotional ceremony without movement or dance, where the Holy Names are chanted, as well as Qur'anic verses. Musical instruments like the '*oud* (lute), *tabla* (drum) and the *ney* flute are sometimes played. States of trance, heightened perception, ecstasy and a feeling of 'at-oneness' with the Creator, as well as love for the the whole of creation, may be experienced during *Dhikr*.

Breathing is a very important aspect of *Dhikr*. According to tradition the breaths of an entire lifetime are counted. All those taken in the consciousness of His Presence are alive; the rest, breathed in and out heedlessly, have been for nothing. This has an implication for our daily life, too, for if we try to live it in recollectedness and remembrance of the Creator, rather than squandering it, our whole existence can become a prayer.

Umm Hanie' Rebler

Special Envoy for Interfaith Dialogue and Women's Relations for the German Muslim League in Bonn

* The Holy Qur'an, Surah 13, verse 28 (Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Dar al Arabia, Beirut, Lebanon.

** 'Go sweep out the chamber of your heart.

Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved.' Shabistari, Sa'd al-Din Mahmud The Garden of Mystery, Tr. By E.H. Whinfield, London, 1880. Photo: R. Boeke



Loving-Kindness

Buddhism is sometimes called "the religion of kindness". The Buddha taught four modes of kindness towards others. These four modes are in ascending order of excellence and *Metta*, Universal Loving-kindness, is the highest of them. In spite of that high position, *Metta Bhavana*, the Meditation on Universal Loving-kindness, is one of the first meditations taught to a beginner joining a Theravada Buddhist Group, or attending a Theravada Buddhist *Vihara* (temple). *Metta* is called *appamana*, immeasurable or illimitable, and it arises spontaneously in an aspirant to buddhahood (a *Bodhisatta*) as the penultimate stage to *Nibbana*, enlightenment. The four modes of kindness are called the four *Brahma Viharas*, Divine Abodes. In Pali, the language spoken by the Buddha, the word *Bhavana*, translated into English as meditation, really means *the cultivation or development of the mind*.

The first *Brahma Vihara* is *Metta*. In *Metta Bhavana*, Loving-kindness is extended to all living beings everywhere, without exception. They include humans, animals, beings living in the air, beings living in water, beings living in heavenly planes, and beings living in woeful planes. Along with *Metta Bhavana*, beginners are taught Buddhist Morality (*Sila*), because, apart from purifying the mind and making it a fit instrument for meditation, the moral precepts taught in Buddhism are all based on kindness.

The second *Brahma Vihara* is *Karuna*, Compassion. Unlike *Metta Bhavana* which is all inclusive, *Karuna Bhavana*, Compassion Meditation, is more selective, and is extended to those who are worse off than you. *Karuna* wells up in our hearts naturally when we see or hear of people undergoing great hardship and suffering.

The third *Brahma Vihara* is *Mudita*, Sympathetic Joy. *Mudita Bhavana* is also a selective one and somewhat more difficult than *Karuna Bhavana* where we extend compassion towards people who are worse off than ourselves. *Mudita Bhavana*, the meditation on Sympathetic Joy, is extended to people who are better off than we are. Here we come up against the resistance of envy and jealousy. If someone else gets promoted over one's head it is difficult to feel joyful about it.

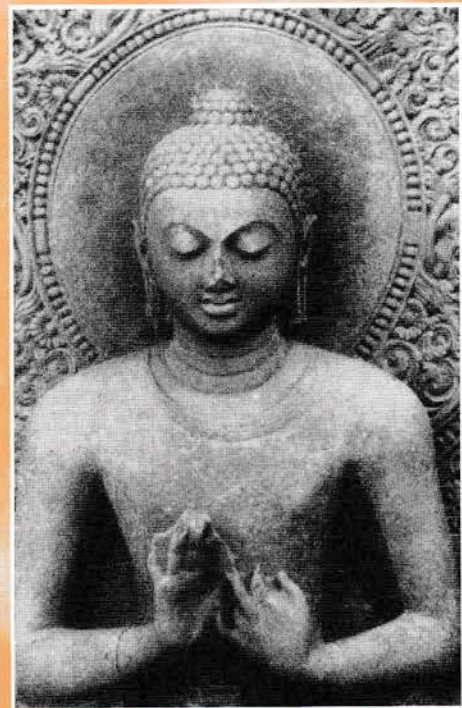
The fourth *Brahma Vihara* is *Upekkha*, Equanimity. Here we go into deep waters, because *Upekkha* is the zero point between attraction and repulsion. *Upekkha* is in fact a synonym for Enlightenment itself. The enlightened person does not deliberately have to practise Loving-kindness, Compassion, or Sympathetic Joy. The enlightened person is an embodiment of all these qualities. Unusually, the Buddha said that the love of a mother for her only child is the closest equivalent one can come to when describing *Upekkha*, Equanimity. A mother has unconditional love (*Metta*) for her child. She has compassion (*Karuna*) towards her child. When the child enjoys success in any field, she feels

unselfish joy (*Mudita*) even though she herself may never have enjoyed a similar success in her own life. And when the time comes for the child to leave home she lets go of the child (*Upekkha*).

Let us now examine the high position *Metta* holds in the scale of kindness. Some people are, consciously or unconsciously, on the path to Buddhahood. They have, to a small degree, certain qualities that enlightened people possess. Such people are potential *Bodhisattas*. The Buddha has identified ten such qualities and called them *Dasa Paramitas*, the Ten Perfections. Life after life the *Bodhisatta* brings these qualities along with him. They have a snowball affect which have their final flowering in enlightenment, *Buddhahood*. The Ten Perfections are: (1) *Dana*, liberality (2) *Sila*, Morality (3) *Nekkhamma*, Renunciation (4) *Panna*, Wisdom (5) *Viriya*, Energy (6) *Khanti* Patience, Forbearance (7) *Sacca*, Truthfulness (8) *Adhitthana*, Determination (9) *Metta*, Loving-kindness (10) *Upekkaha*, Equanimity.

Metta, Loving-kindness, is the penultimate step to Enlightenment. *Metta* is taught to beginners because its mastery is effortless. In Enlightenment, all effort ceases.

Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada)



A service of the heart...

Ask a Jew about "prayer" and he'll tell you what he wants and needs, much like anyone else. He possibly believes that modern man, controlling much of the environment, has little need for prayer. However, in traditional Jewish teaching, the commandment to pray is no less binding and beneficial today. Prayer is not just an aspect of religious ritual, but the expression of a religious impulse to reach G-d and relate to Him, just as in Temple rituals years ago.

The *TALMUD* defines man as

'the creature that prays.'

Its teaching applies equally to casual observers and non-believers. Prayer is central to man's life; his soul and intelligence distinguish 'man.' His 'soul' is whatever matters to him most. Wherever he puts his faith is a form of prayer, whatever his vocabulary. So for a Jew, prayer should be an introspective process of clarification, discovering what he is and what he should be, and how to achieve the change. Indeed, the *TORAH* expresses the commandment to pray as a service of the heart, not the mouth, emphasising the inextricable link between observance of *TORAH* commandments and prayer to G-d.

The Hebrew for prayer is *tefillah*, whose root means to judge or differentiate. Hence prayer is said to be the soul's yearning to define what truly matters. Of course G-d already knows man's desires and deficiencies, so the true purpose of prayer is to help him develop proper perceptions of life and become worthy of G-d's blessing. Prayer is a process of self-evaluation. A Jew, like everyone else, needs to know "where he stands" in order to grow: he has to hold up his feelings, attitudes and actions for scrutiny. Judaism sees life as a steady stream of opportunities to learn, grow and change, known as *tikkun ha-middot*, loosely translated as "working on yourself." If prayer is committed, it provides the medium to effect personal growth.

The most representative form of the human soul is intelligent speech, through which man can praise G-d and articulate the wisdom of His *TORAH*. A successful prayer enables G-d to come closer to Israel and to respond to Israel's attempts to serve and sanctify Him. Prayer also preserves and nourishes the indispensable private domain of heart and soul, in which man should meditate on the ideas expressed in his words.

The language of prayer is Hebrew, which G-d used in creating the universe. Hence its name The Holy Tongue. Combinations of the 22 sacred letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the *Aleph-Beis* - as formulated by the masters who composed the prayers - can arouse forces beyond our imagination. But to accomplish this, words must be articulated. Ideally a supplicant should strive to understand

prayers in their original, holiest form. But, if Hebrew would be incomprehensible, the Sages sanction prayer in another language, recognising the need for emotion and *kavanah*, concentration or devotion in prayer.

Public prayer is preferred to private prayer, because God's purpose of helping all His creation can only be achieved by pleading for the greater good of all Israel and all the world. Jews are one people and one family inexorably bound together. That doesn't denigrate the prayer of a lone individual, thinking of his family, his bank overdraft, himself. But modern man should realise that his strength is only made possible by G-d and he needs prayer. Prayer is G-d's gift to help man mine nuggets of truth so that he can understand himself and his role, and thereby enable Him to bless him.

Johnny Cohen



'Ramadan Kareem'

'Ramadan' is the month of spiritual nourishment and enrichment - provided the opportunity is not missed. As the representative of The Muslim Council of Britain on the National Council for the Welfare of Muslim Prisoners I have recommended to Prison Authorities that they be especially sensitive to the needs of Muslim prisoners during this time. I feel that every effort should be made to ensure that they are not deprived to take benefit of the blessings of this month.

'Ramadan' is the ninth month of the Islamic (Lunar) Calendar. It is a blessed month for Muslims for various reasons. The first revelation of The Qur'an (the Scripture for Muslims) was sent down in the month of Ramadan in AD 610. It is believed that '*Laylatul Qadr*' or 'The Night of Power and Glory', the event in Islamic history which marks the first Qur'anic revelation falls on either of the odd number nights of the last ten days of Ramadan starting from 21st Ramadan. This night is also called '*Laylah Mubarakah*' or the 'Blessed Night'.

During this month the gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of Hell-Fire are closed; so there is less distraction from the material world and its destructive elements: indeed a Divine gift of mercy for humanity. Hence all Muslims are urged to consciously and actively seek repentance of Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of the Universe for all their sins and wrong-doing of which they are aware and others that they may not be aware of. It is the season to take stock of one's lived life and endeavour to be a better person.

Appropriate resources and opportunity such as a congenial social environment should be provided to the Muslim prisoners so that they are encouraged to make good use of their time in plenty of congregational and individual prayers. They should receive Islamic moral guidance from Imams and invited scholars on the wisdom and practice of the month of Ramadan. They should be encouraged to focus on the necessity of repentance, reflection and introspection that will help them to strive to become a better person. If possible, the ritual is best aided by study circles, Islamic educational videos or documentaries and group discussions facilitated by a learned Imam or a scholar.

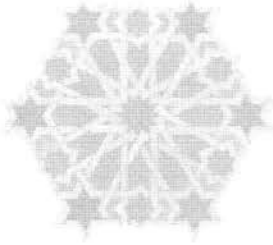
'Sawm' or Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is both a physical act and a mental act of worship. It is an obligation for adult Muslims to observe the Fast. Together with physical abstinence for most part of the day,

Muslims are urged to exercise self-control and strict self-discipline for spiritual benefit. Five things break the fast of a Muslim: lying, backbiting, slander, ungodly oaths and looking with passion. So added care needs to be taken towards proper conduct if fasting is to be observed in the true spirit. Other conditions would nullify the fast, such as injection used as a substitute for food or anything entering the body. If however, someone eats or drinks by mistake during the fasting s/he should continue to fast as such forgetful acts do not break it. If in doubt, the Prison Imams should be consulted to clarify such matters.

All Muslims who have reached the age of puberty are required to fast unless they are ill; frail due to very old age or health reasons; undergoing treatment; on medication; are travelling long distances; and pregnant and menstruating women and those who have just given birth or are breastfeeding. Able bodied adults are required to make up for the missed fasting at another time of the year which suits them, and preferably before the next Ramadan. There are other ways in which one can make up for not being able to fast. In Islamic Law it is a serious sin to break fast intentionally and without any valid reason. One is required to fast for two months for every single broken fast done intentionally. So Muslim prisoners who are in good health should get the necessary support to observe the Fast.

Ramadan is the season of giving up; developing self-restraint, exercising patience and demonstrating will-power! The proper practice is meant to provide a complete training and rehabilitation package on purging the mind and the body of the impurities and the inconsequential and debilitating material baggage gathered in the past year. In Islam purification is half of Faith. Fasting commences from dawn to sunset and during this time one must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual activity. The drinking here does not refer to alcohol as it is forbidden in Islam at all times anyway, and the sexual activity is only permitted within a marital relationship. All these activities are permitted after sunset.

Before the fast begins each dawn a pre-dawn meal known as '*Suhur*' is taken. One can eat until just before dawn and make the intention to fast. Some people choose to have breakfast menu such as cereal and toast and tea; some have fruits and a drink; some have a light cooked meal and some even have just



a glass of milk or water. Whatever the prisoners choose to have or whatever is on offer the food should be served warm, and is not left cold from the previous evening. Following '*Suhur*', prisoners should have the facility to do ablution or '*wudu*' to prepare for the first prayer of the day known as '*Fajr*' or '*Salat-ul-Fajr*'. Some people prefer to read from The Qur'an after '*Fajr*' and before they get ready for work.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness. '*Taharah*' or overall personal cleanliness is a branch of Faith in Islam. Prisoners should be allowed and if required, taught and encouraged to keep their person including their private parts and their clothes and bed linen clean. Apart from '*wudu*' or ablution in preparation for ritual prayers or to touch The Qur'an, prisoners should have the facility to shower every day.

'*Iftaar*' is the evening meal with which fasting Muslims break their fast at sunset. It is recommended to hasten to break fast at sunset and not to delay breaking it. So the evening meal should be provided on time and preferably served at least five to seven minutes before the start of '*Iftaar*'. The normal practice is to do a small '*dua*' or supplication at the '*Iftaar*' table with the food laid out, praying to the Merciful Lord for His blessings and forgiveness and to accept our fast for Him.

'*Iftaar*' is an important meal for those who have been fasting all day. Commonly, attempt is made to grace the '*Iftaar*' table with a variety of food and drinks from dates, water, milk, juice/s, snacks, salad to a hot supper, and fruits and dessert, followed by tea or coffee. The menu obviously varies from one culture to another. Soon after the meal people pray the fourth of the five times prayer of the day known as '*Maghrib*'. Some people choose to break their fast with a quick bite to eat with dates and water etc; then immediately pray '*Maghrib*' which does not take more than 10 to 15 minutes; and then sit down to eating their meal in a relaxed manner.

Night-time is spent in additional prayers known as '*Tarawih*', a highly recommended prayer. Worshippers congregate at the Mosques every evening during Ramadan to pray '*Tarawih*' where sections of The Qur'an are recited with the aim of getting through the recitation of the entire Qur'an in the month in which it was revealed. If one is unable to pray '*Tarawih*' in a congregation s/he should pray it at home in a group or on their own. A minimum of 8 and a maximum of 20 '*rakahs*' or units of prayer are read. So its unlike the five times prayer that takes

much lesser time. '*Tarawih*' prayers take time. It is held after the '*Esha*' / '*Isha*' prayers which is the last of the five set of prayers that is obligatory on Muslims as part of their five times a day worship-ritual. So for a Muslim, evening duties during Ramadan are extended far beyond their regular routine and takes a considerable amount of time to get through. The Prison authority needs to be sensitive to the rigorous discipline of the month of Ramadan and exempt Muslim prisoners from undertaking any extra burden of work that would be physically tiring or add to their hardship.

Ramadan is not only a month of austerity but also a month of festivity; a neat balance between self-denial during its daylight hours and bounty bestowed on the fasting Muslim as darkness falls. If you visit a Muslim country in the month of Ramadan you will find it difficult to believe that most people go without food and drink for most part of the day. A typical scene at any time of day would be crowded streets and shops with festive decorations. The Festival of '*Eid*' which follows the month of Ramadan marks the end of the month-long fasting. Imagine the run up to Christmas. Ramadan celebrations and '*Eid*' shopping are just as busy and frantic! Restaurants and roadside cafes are busy preparing special food for the 'fasters'. Shops and traditional sweet shops have all kinds of attractive food on display. If you don't feast with your belly, you may feast with your eyes and nostrils. Ramadan is a month of generosity and giving and charity. People are especially hospitable to guests and have their relatives, friends, neighbours and work colleagues over for the evening feast on different days.

Prisoners both British and of other nationalities who are cut off from their natural habitat are very likely to feel demoralised when thinking of the life they have had to leave behind. To raise their morale and in keeping with the spirit of charity, generosity and hospitality that characterises the month of Ramadan it would be nice if some effort is made to treat the Prisoners with an improved diet and for the last ten days of the month with some delectable delicacies, if possible.

***Wishing everyone 'Ramadan Kareem':
Blessings and Bounty of Ramadan.***

Shiban Akbar

A Historical Report The RASTAFARI Movement In England

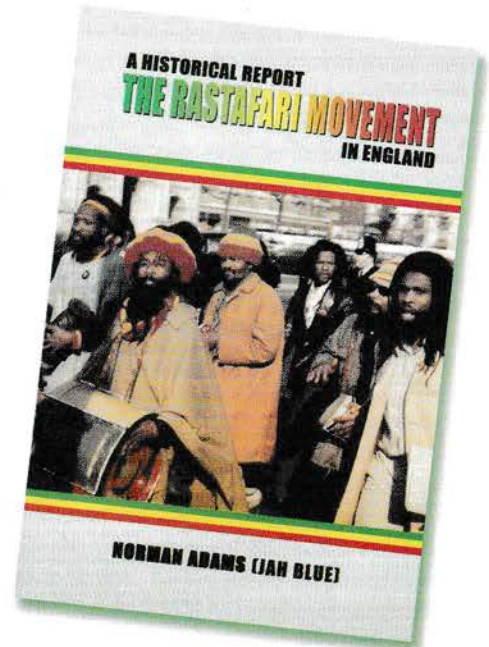
Norman Adams (Jah Blue)
GWA Works 2002

In his introduction the author, Norman Adams (Jah Blue), gives his reasons for writing his book... "to provide a primary source of material for future sociologists, educationalists, Black Youth and Rastafarians who genuinely wish to know how the early Rastafarian community developed in Britain."

The book is indeed a treasure trove of facts giving dates, times, events, organisations, names and places which chart in detail the formation and development of the Rastafarian movement in England, in which the author plays a pivotal role. The book is rich in detail and, I feel, could be the definitive work on this subject.

The emergence of the Rastafarian movement began in Jamaica and given the harsh, even brutal, social injustice suffered there, it is not surprising that religion and politics within the movement are inexorably linked. In his book Jah Blue gives details of political, economic and social functions of the Rastafari movement together with the religious beliefs held by its adherents. It is an absorbing book which, among other things, gives an insight into the deeply held beliefs of followers of Rastafarianism and lays to rest many popular negative misconceptions. The Rastafari movement is much more than dreadlocks and reggae music!

Mary Hudson



What's On



A WEEKEND RETREAT

Organised by Art and Spirituality Network, supported by United Religions Initiative - UK

THE ART OF PRAYER

ON: 21st - 23rd November 2003

AT: Micklepage, Nuthurst, Nr. Horsham, Sussex.

We will be looking at how art can be a Prayerform and Prayer an Artform. For further details contact: Adam Boulter

E-MAIL: adam.boulter@virgin.net

TEL: 07957 286360

GLIMPSES OF THE SACRED

'An exhibition of contemporary art reflecting a variety of religious perspectives.'

To be held at St. Katherine Cree Church, Leaden Hall St., London 17th - 22nd November 2003 (Open 10am - 4pm week days)

The East Window of St. Ethelburga

Editor's note:

The summer 2003 issue of *Initiative* (No.9) carries an article written by The Rt.Hon.& Rt.Rev.Richard Chartres, Lord Bishop of London which relates to the restoration of the ancient City church of St.Ethelburga following its near destruction by a IRA bomb on 24th April 1993. We featured the article on a background reflecting a stained glass window. Following a number of enquiries we have decided to give focus to the window, which, as you will see, is a vital aspect of the church's reconstruction. The window was designed by Helen Whittaker MA AMGP of Barley Studios of York and installed in October 2002.

The new window has been designed within the grid formed by the surviving medieval support system of stanchions and lug bars. It incorporates the shattered remains of Charles Eamer Kempe's 1872 window of Saints contained within alternating red and blue architectural backgrounds - Kempe's reference to the magnificent 15th century windows in Fairford Church, Gloucestershire.

The window depicts St.Ethelburga as an abbess, dressed in black robe and veil with the white wimple of the Benedictine order, holding her staff of office. She is shown striding across the composition as if seen through the cloister openings - her upward gaze held by the radiant vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Her cloak swirls and billows behind her, the lining embroidered with a sweeping patchwork of glass fragments salvaged from the Kempe window. From a crack in the tiled floor of the first light grows a Hazel bush, shedding leaves and fruit - a symbol of Peace and Reconciliation. The stylised Romanesque arches, columns and canopy heads set against the diamond quarrie background contain more fragments of Kempe's architectural glazing, and more pieces flank the new inscription:

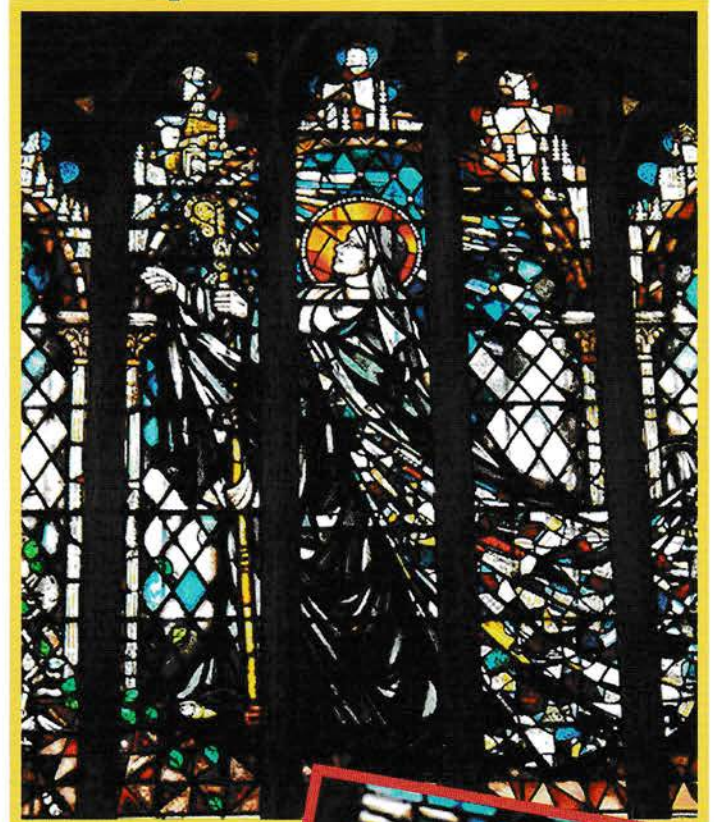
"O pray for the peace of Jerusalem"

The composition of St.Ethelburga is carried through the five existing window lights and reflects the moving forward of Faith. The fragments of the previous window remind us of the tribulations of the past but give us Hope for the future.

The Lloyds Crest, in the base section of the fifth light, acknowledges their generous support of this project.

Helen Whittaker

Part of an article featured in 'Church Building' issue 82 July/August 2003



Generating Social Cohesion

Over September 4th and 5th some ninety participants gathered at the University of Derby to examine the theme of "Promoting Positive Social Cohesion" at the second annual colloquium organised by the Institute for Social Cohesion. This year the event was jointly organised with the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby, a comparatively new body in the UK. The Bahá'í community has been a strong supporter of the Multi-Faith Centre and the principles of interfaith co-operation for which it stands.

Those attending represented a broad cross-section of the many sectors of UK society with an interest in social issues, these included; central and local government, faith communities, race equality campaigners, housing organisations, urban regeneration activists as well as representatives of public bodies, such as the police and fire services, and the academic world.

Building on the success of last year's colloquium, the 2003 event had set itself the task of identifying indicators to measure the level of social cohesion in UK cities and to see what the participants identified as areas of priority.

In preparation for the colloquium the Institute for Social Cohesion had commissioned a short film that sought to examine the break-down but also the building of social relationships in two English towns; Derby and Bradford. The film was conceptualised by the Institute but the film-work itself was done by two young independent film-makers from within the Bahá'í community. Louise Armit had overall creative and editorial control of the production, and filming was shared by her and Alex Leith. Alex also saw to the lighting of all indoors filming.

The film featured interviews with community activists and decision-makers interwoven with the views of the citizens of the two towns, chosen at random in public areas. It sought to capture the feelings and opinions of people in two areas regarding to how they relate to their community, and to let them articulate what they see as the priorities for their town. It was interesting to note the congruence of both the issues and sometimes the language that unconnected people offered when asked. The vision of social cohesion has often been dominated by issues of ethnicity, race and faith. Yet the strongest message that came through from the film seemed to relate to other issues; the disaffection of young people from society, the ubiquitous nature of narcotic substances in urban areas.

This year we were honoured to receive Fiona MacTaggart, Minister for Social Cohesion at the Home Office. The Minister focused on the idea that social cohesion is not something that the government itself can create or deliver. In the words of the Home Secretary, "...cohesion is something which people themselves generate..." Government can work to enable or to facilitate social cohesion, but it is the people within society itself who ultimately create cohesion.

A panel of experts with knowledge in such areas as immigration, policing and urban regeneration offered short interventions on how the situation in their field of expertise effected the wider patterns of social cohesion.

In the final plenary representatives from workshop groups reported back to the whole conference with suggestions for social cohesion indicators. The Institute will take this data and format it into a conference report and indicators document, which will be launched in Parliament later this year.

Daniel Wheatley

Re-crystal

We believe that, rather than being the cause of the problem, religion can and should be a source of solution for conflicts that exist in the Middle East and beyond.

In the fall of 2001 - in the wake of over a year of needless bloodshed in the Middle East and the horrifying calamity of September 11th in the U.S. - the newly-formed Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) set itself to the daunting task of building and strengthening a grassroots interfaith movement for peace, justice, and sustainability in the Holy Land and in the Middle East. Envisioning a society in which the "otherness" of the Other is not only accepted, but truly understood and respected, the IEA dedicated itself to promoting real coexistence and human peace in the Middle East through cross-cultural study and inter-religious dialogue.

In the years since its inception, the association has been amazingly successful at staying true to its principles while beginning to realize a tiny part of the society it hopes to create. In acknowledgement of its work UNESCO has recognized the IEA as an organization that is contributing to the culture of peace and as an actor of the global movement for a Culture of Peace, a United Nations' initiative.

The IEA also maintains connections and relationships with many international interfaith organizations and networks. It serves as a Multiple Cooperation Circle (MCC) of the United Religions Initiative (URI) and each encounter group of the IEA functions as a Cooperation Circle (CC) of that organization as well. It is a Member Group of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) and attends its international Congresses. The Jerusalem programs of the IEA also function as part of the Partner Cities Network of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR).

In the microcosms of ongoing dialogue groups, seminars, and study sessions, fear gives way to familiarity, ignorance to understanding, exclusion to inclusion, discrimination to tolerance and respect, and strife to harmony. The goal is not to blend all traditions into one undifferentiated group but to provide a table where all can come and sit in safety and ease, while being fully who they are in their respective religions. In this way the IEA aims to change the dynamics of a society crystallized in a culture of war into a society embedded in a culture of humanized engagement. Thus interfaith dialogue is not a goal in itself but a tool through which society can be re-crystallized into a culture of peace and harmony. By engaging ordinary people - not just their religious, spiritual, or political leaders - the IEA is creating extraordinary transformations in the way grassroots people perceive and encounter the Other - the seeds of a new crystallization capable of transforming society as a whole. The IEA believes that peace is a stool that stands on three legs: human, economic, and political. It is helping to create - encounter by encounter - the human component to that peace - the component so sorely

*the seeds of
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missed in previous peace-initiatives.

The IEA accomplishes its work through its unique programmatic method. It operates within three concentric circles of interfaith work, each with the power to grow and impact the circle encapsulating it. In the first and most pre-eminent circle - the Inner-

Israeli circle - the association focuses on the promotion of respectful relations between Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Bahá'is living in Israel. This process in turn impacts and enables the second circle - the Israeli-Palestinian circle - where the IEA works in co-operation with five Palestinian organizations across the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The work of the first and second circles aids the work of the third circle - the Middle East region - where the IEA has been a major founder in establishing the Middle East Abrahamic Forum, along with similar organizations from Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, and the PNA.

Additionally, the IEA maintains three interconnected programmatic sections. The general program is accessible to all segments of society, regardless of age or sex. Owing to the nature of many cultural religious practices in the Middle East, women are often left out of the circle of interfaith dialogue initiatives. Issues of modesty for men and women in the four faith-traditions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity, & Druze), as well as the disparity between male and female representation in each tradition's higher clergy, surround such interfaith encounters. These issues present themselves as obstacles that particularly affect female participation, resulting in the further marginalization of women from such initiatives. Consequently, it is especially important that women have their own space to come together across religious traditions and engage in interfaith peace-building work equally. The Women's Interfaith Encounter (WIE) was launched in the winter of 2001 to address this need and to rectify this potential pitfall in grassroots inter-religious work. For the women in the WIE, interfaith study also serves as a source of strength and empowerment to recognize the values and challenges they share with women outside their particular tradition.

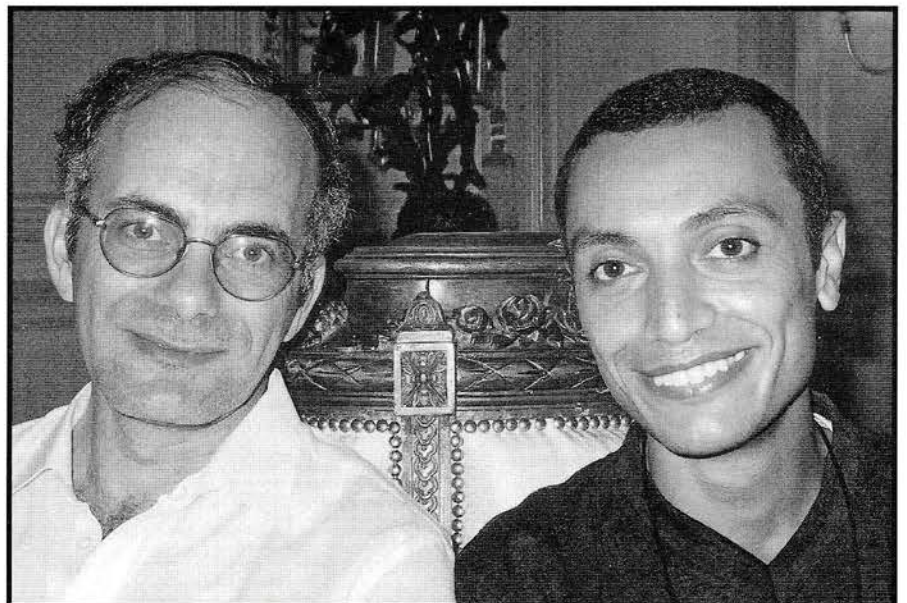
The third programmatic section, the Youth Interfaith Encounter (YIE), designs and implements programs specifically for young adults. Similar to the challenges facing women are those facing

youth. Young people's lack of religious or social authority often results in their marginalization in religious and inter-religious circles. Moreover, the dynamics of new and creative thinking that typify young people's approach to the issues are especially vital to grassroots interfaith work. In order for such a movement to truly grow and spread out of the individual encounters into society at large, it is imperative that today's youth be given the space and the opportunity to develop themselves, foster their visions for the future, and enable themselves to achieve it. The IEA responded to this imperative through the YIE in the spring of 2002.

Lastly, the IEA employs three different program formats through which it facilitates its interfaith encounters: inter-religious study sessions, multi-day conferences, and desert seminars. In bringing Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Baha'is together to study topics of relevance from their own religious perspectives, interfaith study is used to achieve two main goals. Primarily, it serves as a vehicle towards understanding, acceptance, and respect for the Other, but it also serves as a way to deepen awareness of one's own religion.

Edited by Noah Silverman

This is an extract of the Annual Report of the IEA. For further information please see: www.interfaith-encounter.org/2002annual-report.htm



Yehuda Stolov & Mohamed Mosaad - "A friendship that symbolises the global harmony we seek." HW

Yehuda Stolov one of the founders of IEA (URI MCC)
Mohamed Mosaad founder of Egyptian interfaith Association URI CC
Co-founders of Middle East Abrahamic Forum which later became URI-Middle East and North Africa

Mythical Mandalas

I love to paint: to create a new and unique artefact following many hours of research, with painstaking attention to detail and complete absorption in my chosen theme. My inspiration is taken from a variety of multi-cultural sources in order to create mixed media pieces that are rich and complex.

I am intrigued by the symbolism devised by different races and societies, and the way in which objects, natural phenomena, birds and animals are granted a special symbolic significance or imbued with magical qualities or powers. I investigate the ways in which rituals, religious events and myths have been categorised and recorded, and draw these common threads together to make artworks which combine ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, factual and mythical as a coherent image.

My new series of works, *Creations, Myths and Mandalas*, gives me the opportunity to immerse myself in the rich cultural identities of many different people. The Mandala is an aid to meditation, being made up of a series of circles and squares, each of which contain detailed images and decoration. I try to capture the depth of colour, the pattern and the symmetry which are intrinsic to the formation of a Mandala.

The Mandala composition provides a superb framework on to which images can be placed, and I have adapted this traditionally Tibetan artform to incorporate a variety of cultural references:

Mistress of the Animals is a shaped mandala inspired by a thousand year-old bronze Argentinian shield, showing an abstract figure flanked by two jaguars, and I have used a variety of media to realise my intentions.

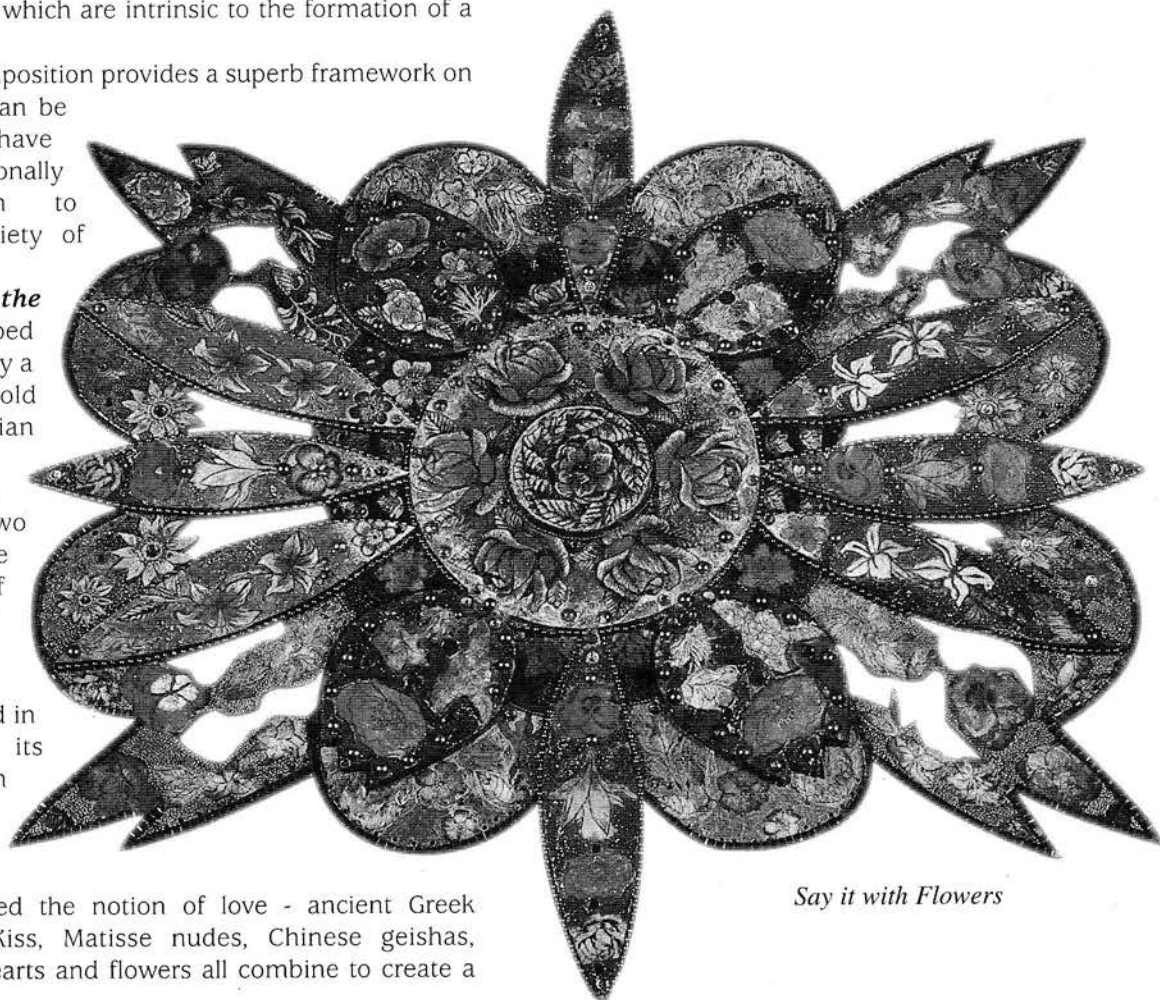
Love Mandala draws further afield in order to gather its imagery, being an exploration into the ways in which different cultures represented the notion of love - ancient Greek figures, Klimt's Kiss, Matisse nudes, Chinese geishas, Raphael cupids, hearts and flowers all combine to create a united whole.

Goddess Mandala is comprised of women from different times and cultures and the figures cohabit peacefully within the structure - Gaia, Mary and Jesus, The Sumerian White Goddess Belili, and others, are all represented on this richly decorated piece.

In a world where, it seems, many people enjoy the quick fix of manufactured passive entertainment and designer labelled consumerism, I feel that it is important to remain aware of the cultural heritage that underpins every society. It is a subject that holds an endless fascination for me.

Nikki Parmenter

Nikki Parmenter has exhibited widely throughout England, especially in the North West, and in Germany. From the 15th January 2004 The Drumcroon Art Centre, Wigan will feature her work alongside the paintings of Caroline Jariwala (featured in issue 5 of *Initiative*) and Amrit and Rabindra KD Kaur Singh (featured in issue 3 of *Initiative*). For further details of the exhibition please see website www.drumcroon.org.uk or telephone 01942 321840.



Say it with Flowers



Love Mandala



Mistress of the Animals



Goddess Mandala



*"Love is the firstborn,
loftier than the Gods,
the Fathers and human beings.
You, O Love, are the eldest of all,
altogether mighty.
To you we pay homage!"*

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