

UNITED RELIGIONS

# Initiative

BUILDING GLOBAL INTERFAITH CO-OPERATION



*To my God a Heart of Flame  
To my fellow men a Heart of Love  
To myself a Heart of Steel.*

*St Augustine of Hippo*

**So why do the Gods still matter?**

Mark Tully

**Picturing Enlightenment**

The Art of Andy Weber

**Eternal Fire**

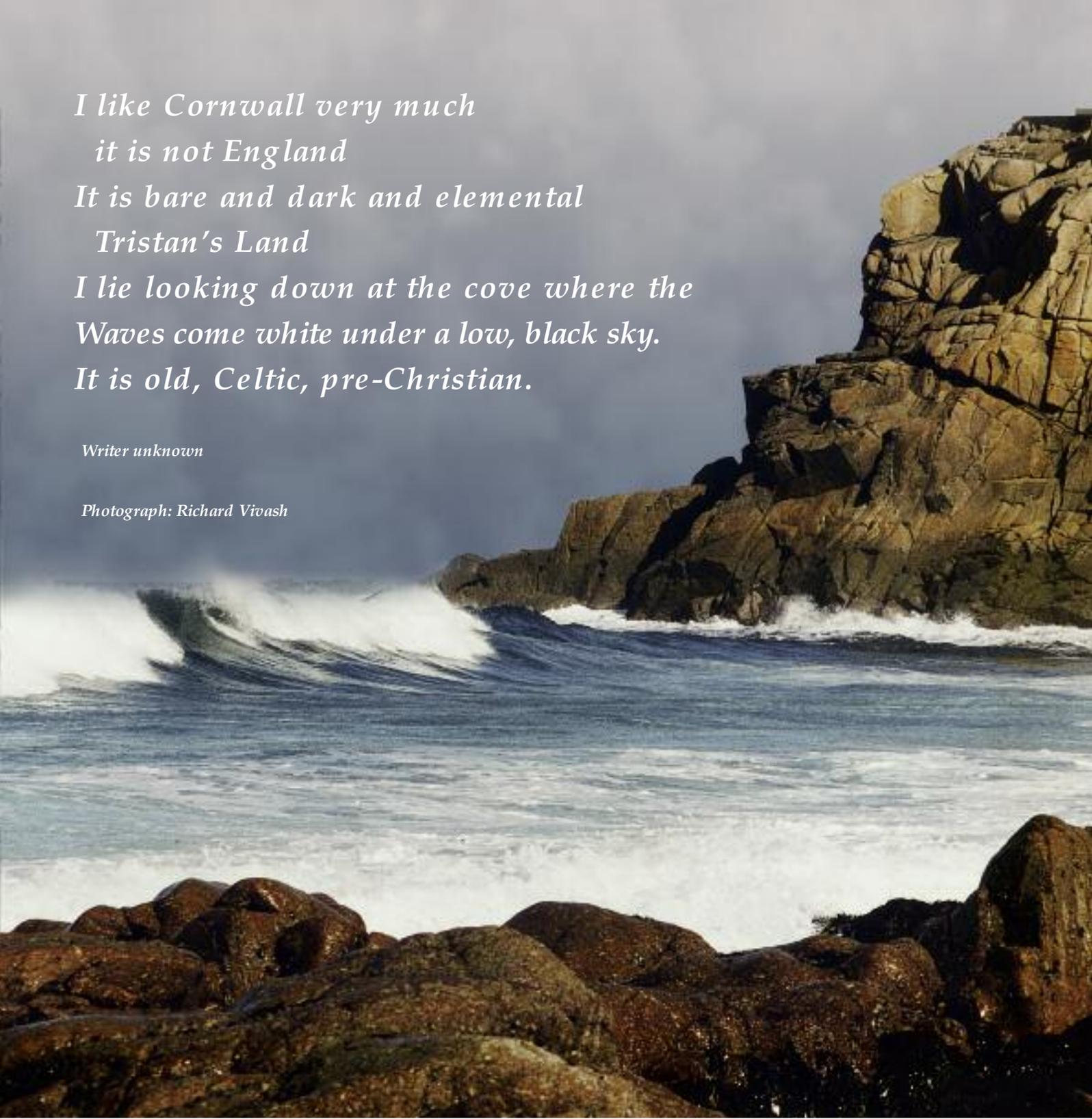
Spiritual Warmth

**Bioethics**

Shaping the Future

A FORUM OF MANY FAITHS EACH RETAINING THEIR OWN UNIQUE IDENTITY

ISSUE 13



*I like Cornwall very much  
it is not England  
It is bare and dark and elemental  
Tristan's Land  
I lie looking down at the cove where the  
Waves come white under a low, black sky.  
It is old, Celtic, pre-Christian.*

*Writer unknown*

*Photograph: Richard Vivash*

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**Aim:**

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.

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 Email: hf\_wells@yahoo.co.uk

**Issue 14** Themes: 'Forgiveness' & 'Mixed Marriage'

**Image:** The Fire Window, Manchester Cathedral Memorial to Hubert Worthington, architect and restorer of the Cathedral after bomb damage in World War II and to the suffering of the ordinary men and women of Manchester during the blitz.

THE EDITORIAL TEAM OF *INITIATIVE* IS SINCERELY GRATEFUL TO THE PRIVATE DONORS WHO HAVE MADE PUBLICATION OF THE MAGAZINE POSSIBLE. WE WELCOME AND APPRECIATE ALL DONATIONS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:*

Extract from: *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*  
by William Wordsworth

There can be nothing more awe-inspiring than the birth of a child. The 'wholeness' of a new born baby is such a precious thing to behold. It is something that can never be taken for granted or ignored. A baby's entrance into this world is celebrated, yet we must wonder at where and when does its life begin. This is a question that is fundamental to the debate surrounding stem cell research on human embryos, and its potential for therapeutic and/or reproductive cloning, the latter of which could culminate in the ultimate in a consumer

dominated western world, 'designer babies'. The informed opinions of our contributors on the theme of 'Bioethics' will undoubtedly eradicate some of the confusing rhetoric that exists in this area, and clarify from a faith perspective the extent to which such scientific research and application can be tolerated. Our Keynote Writer, Mark Tully, cautions that we have become so confident in our own ability to 'engineer' nature, to bend it to our will in whatever capacity we feel necessary, that we no longer hold it sacred. We no longer listen to the divine voice; we have overthrown the heavens and placed ourselves at the forefront of all creation. But this has not always been so, and our theme of 'Eternal Fire' reveals how the ancient tradition of kindling fire for illumination and warmth – both spiritual and practical – symbolises, and connects us to, the creative force that will lead us to truth.

Heather Wells

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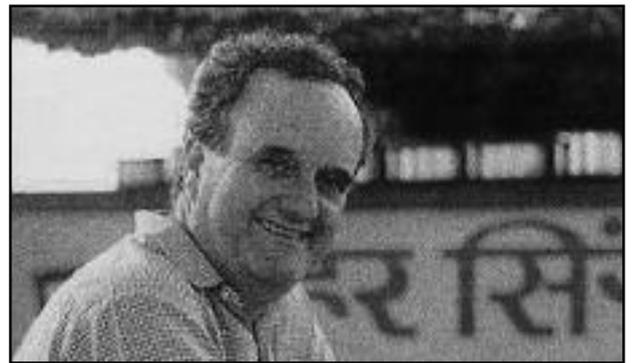
# So why do the Gods still matter?

MARK TULLY

Fire, unlike earth water or air, is an element that we make. We can create it on demand. Yet in ancient times it was respected and worshiped as a gift from the gods. Vedic Hindus went beyond that, worshipping Agni, or fire, as a God, and one of the most important Gods too. Agni was at the centre of the sacrifices which were the bridge between this world and the world where the Gods lived. It was Agni's smoke which carried the sacrifice to the Gods and Agni who fed the sacrificial offering to them. As one book I recently read put it, "Agni feeds the Gods like a bird feeds her young." The worshippers created the flame which lit the sacrificial fire, but this was far too important an action to be done in a casual or unformed manner. There had to be a ritual to create Agni and that ritual involved rubbing a stick in a wooden hole to generate a spark. That ritual of course celebrated our ability to recreate ourselves, but at the same time it celebrated the divine creativity in all nature

So for Vedic Hindus and many other ancient religions worshipping fire was a celebration of our ability to make use of nature, one of our earliest technological achievements. But at the same time the Vedic Hindus acknowledged technology's dependence on nature and celebrated it as a gift from the Gods. Fire bound together our human inventiveness, nature's creativity, and the Gods.

But in our modern lives this bond has been broken. We humans have replaced the Gods. We no longer see any need for an Agni to bridge that gap between us and the heavens because the heavens have been overthrown. We see ourselves as the creators and nature is no longer to be respected as our partner but used as our resource. When we are made aware of the dangers of this hubris, when the damage we do to nature does threaten us, we don't repent, we either close our eyes or turn to our own creativity in the belief that it can solve any of the problems nature poses.



Drawing on nature's resources to create energy has damaged the environment and threatened us with climate change. Some don't even acknowledge the threat. They claim it's just scare-mongering and behave as though nature can take the beating we are giving her. When asked whether we should be taking these risks with nature they reply, "what risk?". Others seem to believe humans have a limitless ability to solve problems, that technology has an answer for everything, and will ward off disaster.

When even the most sceptical are forced to acknowledge the fossil-fuel pollution which stings their eyes, chokes their breathing, and in the worst affected cities darkens their vision, the call is for more fuel-efficiency, not for less use of energy. So Scientists are working to replace fossil fuels with hydrogen. Now that we are being told the next generation of wars will be fought over water, technology is said to be coming up with an answer - cheap and efficient desalination of sea water. So we are persuaded to think there is no need to worry about deforestation, water-harvesting, and wasteful use of water. No one can deny that we already face a food crisis, although it's full extent is not realised. We hear about the crisis when there is a famine but we live in a world where according to the United Nations one person dies from hunger and malnutrition every six seconds. So bio-technology has the answer. The risks genetically engineered seeds pose to plant, insect, and animal diversity can be ignored. The boost to the power and pockets of multi-national corporations and the loss of power to people and the governments they elect have to be tolerated as part of the inevitable advance of globalisation, which seems to be regarded now as a law of nature.

*Fire bound together our  
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nature's creativity, and the  
Gods.*

*We humans  
have  
replaced  
the Gods*

The evidence that merely increasing food production doesn't feed the poor, that the problem goes much deeper, is ignored. We are more powerful than those Vedic Gods because we can engineer nature.

Living in India for many years I can see the benefits that our mastery of nature has brought to a poor country and the damage it has done. When I first came to Delhi in 1965 road transport was rudimentary which limited the movement of all but the elite. Now everyone seems to be on the road.

Roads have opened villages to the outside world, and made it possible to solve the problem that beset the British Raj - getting food into remote areas where there were chronic shortages. Big dams have provided power and stored water. The Green revolution in agriculture has boosted production. But at the same time roads have opened the forests to plunderers, and the mountainsides to those who hack them away concerned only about the value of the stone they can quarry, ignoring the scars they leave behind and the damage they cause. Fumes from motor vehicles have even polluted the hill stations of India, built to provide a respite from the dust of the plains. Big dams were regarded by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as the temples of his time. They have saved water and created energy but they have also deprived countless people of their land and livelihood, they are silting up far faster than expected, and they have given the impression that they are the one answer to India's water problems. But droughts have not disappeared and only now are the benefits of traditional methods of water-harvesting being appreciated again. The Green revolution has depleted the water table of Punjab, the granary of India, and excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has degraded the soil.

**So what is the answer?** Well it doesn't lie in the sterile arguments promoted by the media between environmentalists and those who believe in technology. Those arguments have led to the word 'green' all too often being greeted with derision. Environmentalists bear their share of the blame for this. They all too frequently overstate their case and refuse to listen to any opposing view. There must be a dialogue not a never-ending dispute. Neither the advocates of the technological solutions nor the environmentalists are Gods. They should both look back to those Vedic Hindus who celebrated the human ability to create fire, but recognised the need to acknowledge the roles of the Gods and nature in that success. We are at last beginning to take nature's role more seriously, and that will become more and more clear if we discuss rather than dispute our differences. So why do the Gods still matter? Can we not at least do away with them? I don't think so because they stand for the all important realisation that we humans are not Gods.

*Mark Tully is a Writer and Broadcaster, and is Presenter of the BBC Radio 4 programme 'Something Understood'. He was awarded the KBE in 2002 for his contribution to Broadcasting.*

# God's Grandeur

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.*

*It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;*

*It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil*

*Crushed. Why do men then, now not reck his rod?*

*Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;*

*And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;*

*And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil*

*Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;*

*There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;*

*And though the last lights off the black West went*

*Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs -*

*Because the Holy Ghost over the bent*

*World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

# LEARNING **G** IN THE *Manchester Cathedral*

As well as being the mother church of the Diocese and an extremely important historical building, the Cathedral is a unique resource within the city of Manchester with the potential to make a powerful contribution to the enrichment of the curriculum in both Primary and Secondary schools, and also within institutes of further and higher education, including the three universities. The aim of the Cathedral Education Department therefore is to:

- Celebrate and share the rich Christian, historic and aesthetic heritage of the Cathedral in such a way that it enhances and enriches the learning experience of all;
- Serve the needs of *all* schools, pupils and teachers, by creating effective learning opportunities that are rooted in lived experience;
- Build a bridge between the Cathedral, the Diocesan Board of Education and other education providers, both formal and informal, by initiating educational dialogue and building creative learning partnerships;

But, perhaps most important of all, our aim is to ensure that the Cathedral is seen as a resource for the whole community whereby people of all faiths or none, can benefit from the excitement of discovery and where no-one is excluded. To this end we work closely with a large number of schools where the pupils come from predominantly Muslim backgrounds, and in fact half of the 3,000 pupils who visited the Cathedral in the academic year 2003-2004 were Muslims.

These particular visits really are about 'bridge-building' with the Christian faith presented in a way that enables young visitors to make links and connections with their own faith. For example the Muezzin and the church bell both call the faithful to prayer; the eight Offices of the church can be compared with Namaz which is prayed five times a day at set hours, and the concept of the orientation of a church facing East so that worshippers face the holy city of Jerusalem has an exact parallel in Islam with Muslims facing the Ka'bah in Mecca. This fact led one child to quietly observe "we're both facing the same way" – a wonderful yet simple metaphor for increasing tolerance and harmony between the two faiths.

One of the nicest things about the role of Cathedral Education Officer is having the opportunity to visit so many different schools across quite a large geographical area. Last term I had the privilege once again to go out and about to different schools charged with the particularly pleasant task of presenting prizes and certificates to the winners and runners-up in the 2004 Schools Religious Poetry Competition.

This year we had 280 poems submitted from aspiring young poets aged between 6 and 16 and once again the standard was high and the content challenging. The prize-winning poems have been published in a short anthology which is available to download from our website. The first prize-winner for Key Stage 2 was Niamh Cavanagh a Year 5 pupil at St. Mary's RC Primary School, Swinton, and for her simple yet profound poem *The Whale's Hymn*, she was also chosen by the judges as overall winner and therefore designated Manchester Cathedral Young Poet of the Year 2004.

## Joanna Booth

Cathedral Education Officer

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## FOOD for thought

Most of our school visits end with quiet reflection in the Children's Chapel and an opportunity for children to leave a written intercession on the Children's Intercession Board and then light a votive candle.

### 'Hear my prayer'

Dear God, I pray that my mum will go on and have a better life than she is having now. Amen

Dear Allah, please take care about me and make my mum and dad be happy all the time. Please do not make my mum and dad be angry.

Dear God, Please let my mum's new bathroom be all right and to her satisfaction. She has waited so long and is quite worried it wont be right Amen

Dear Lord, please help my mum to forgive my dad for what he's done. Amen

Dear Lord, Help my Grandad not to be lonely and sad over the loss of my dear Gran. Help him to overcome his problems and live a happy life forever more and please Lord take care of him and bless him. Amen

Dear Allah, please help my teacher in mosque because he is on the life machine.

## The Whale's Hymn

*In an ocean before a cold dawn broke  
Covered by an overcoat  
I lay awake in a boat  
And heard a whale.*

*Hearing a song so solemn and so calm  
It seemed absurd to feel alarm  
For I had a notion it sang  
God's favourite hymn  
And spoke directly  
To Him.*

*Niamh Cavanagh*

Entry forms for next year's poetry competition will be sent out in October to all schools via each LEA's courier bag and to all Church schools through the Diocesan mailing at the beginning of January. The entry form is also available to download from the Education website. Closing date for next year's competition is Friday 18th March 2005.



## OPPORTUNE meetings

The teaching and learning of Religious Studies is a multifaceted undertaking. It is important to enable the students to get beyond the surface of religious practice in order to understand the core ideas as lived reality. It is tempting for students to see people who are religiously active as people who engage in an unusual, and perhaps, interesting hobby. Or, that, along with Lewis Carroll's Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* such people strive to believe 'as many as six impossible things before breakfast.' Not alone can this view be spiritually impoverishing, but also intellectually limiting. The challenge then, is to convey religious belief as an existential experience that finds its expression in lifestyle and often also in ritual.

On moving to my current school, an all boys 11-18 Grammar School, it was apparent that our students live and work in a society that lacked cultural diversity. The dominant religion is Christianity and our school finds many ways to express our cultural heritage. Our world view is received, enjoyed, and celebrated. Our students will however move from here, most to go to university, most will find they are living and working with people from very different world views and life experiences. Our young people need the opportunity to explore the world from minds, hearts and experiences other than their own.

It is for these, and other, important reasons that I felt it important to create opportunities for students to meet and discuss issues with people of many faiths. I was so fortunate to be put in touch with Jane Rasch who organizes the British tour for Tibetan monks from the Tashi Lhunpo monastery in exile in India. They visit the UK every two years and we have benefited from them giving us input into lessons, for all age groups, during their last two tours.

For our year seven pupils the monks, in conjunction with dancer Rebecca Seymour, led a dance workshop. The monks performed the 'Black Hat dance' and their translator Lobsang Gyaltsen explained the meaning of the moves and gestures. Rebecca Seymour then conducted all our year seven pupils in

a mass performance. It was remarkable how quickly so many of them picked it up. After this the boys were split in to smaller groups, each with a monk who demonstrated the mudras. A translator explained the symbolic offerings made during this prayer. Each year group had a different session tailored to their needs.

The 'A' level Ethics class focused more on the stylized Tibetan Debating and the philosophical ideas under consideration. Indeed one of the students felt uncomfortable after the session and wondered whether it was appropriate for monks to come on tour and offer us demonstrations of a clearly precious aspect of their life and learning. There is I suppose the worry that this is cultural voyeurism. I asked the student how he felt about going on tour with the school choir and singing sacred songs in European churches. He felt that was different. I was glad we had the opportunity to consider these real issues born out of shared experience with real people.

This was largely a cultural experience but one which will form a foundation stone for future years' study, the boys still remember the meaning of the gestures, not just as a set of diagrams in a book, but a spiritual expression. One year eight student later wrote **'the cultural differences were made clear right at the beginning of their presentation, when the first prayer began. This was a prayer you would not expect to find in the Cathedral... it consisted of sounds made deep in the throat and emitted with seemingly no breaths taken. This prayer was used by the monks to generate a feeling of compassion to all sentient beings. Compassion is at the heart of their religion.'**

The monks worked with all our year groups and one English class offered a presentation to the monks concerning what they had found out about Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. Our visitors were pleased, and asked for a copy, though the translator had his work cut out for him. There was also an opportunity for some of the monks to visit a string ensemble rehearsal; they were bemused by the incomprehensible pattern of sound, and yet were able to make very insightful comments about teaching and learning styles which they had encountered. We all looked at our familiar practices with fresh eyes.

*Nuala F. Power*

My thanks to Jane Rasch and the Tashi Lhunpo Monks. Contact details for the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery UK Trust (Regd. Charity No 1100175), The Round House, Netton, Salisbury, SP4 6AW, Tel: 01722 782265, Fax: 01722 782703, Website: [www.tashi-lhunpo.org.uk](http://www.tashi-lhunpo.org.uk). And we look forward to their next tour in 2006.



When I read the headline about yet another global company announcing record profit it got me thinking about what profit actually is. It took me back to my childhood in Mombasa, Kenya, when I often heard this word but struggled to understand it.

I was born and raised in a community that is renowned for its business acumen - the Jains. I remember from a very young age how business and trade were a common part of conversation among elders at weddings or social occasions. "Did you know that Mr. Amu Shah made a lot of money by importing hardware cheaply and selling it locally?" and "Chandrakantbhai was a shrewd property investor who could target prime land and make a lot of money through his skill." Profit was a common element of conversation among our fathers.

However, these conversations were often conducted at a community centre or a family celebration. There was a sense of awe, but also a degree of simplicity among these successful business men, who were also very charitable. They helped build the school that I went to, the community centre that I played in, and the beautiful temple which was a great place for me to play hide-and-seek. Profit was earned, but not hoarded. Instead, it was channelled to good courses like education, health, social and spiritual welfare. In fact, it was **embarrassing** to be rich and not charitable in our community. It seems that when business is

# Making Profit Endure



conducted within a community space, and where business men belong to a close-knit community, there is a high degree of trust and duty to one another. Profit symbolises individual success, but also encourages philanthropy.

The Tattvartha Sutra says 'charity consists of offering alms to the qualified person, for one's own benefit'. 'The giver gives with a sense of gratitude to the recipient.' True charity requires selflessness and humility. Thus today, businesses who make a lot of profit should consider ways of channelling them to deserving courses, with humility. It helps if the decision makers belong to a community and have a sense of duty and public service. If not, they need to do their homework properly, and understand the true nature of profit. Otherwise, they will leave it **all** behind.

Atul K Shah

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## A NEW BOTTOM LINE IN OUR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The Tikkun Community, an international interfaith organization seeking a world based on ecological sanity, generosity, kindness, non-violence, love, economic justice and peace, has initiated a campaign for a **New Bottom Line**. Today, most people in the world of work learn quickly that their worth and the worth of their enterprise is going to be judged by how much they or their enterprise can contribute to the money or power accumulated by the institutions for which they work. The Tikkun Community seeks 'A New Bottom Line' of generosity and caring for others.

To make that more precise: productivity and efficiency must no longer be judged solely by the degree to which any corporation or institution maximises profits or power, but also by the degree to which it:

1. supports ethical, spiritual, and ecological sensitivity and promotes the sustainability of our environment;
2. supports human beings to be loving, caring and capable of sustaining long-term loving relationships;
3. helps people overcome a narrow utilitarian attitude toward each other or toward the universe, and instead encourages them to see other people in a non-utilitarian way, and to view the physical world not primarily as something that can be used purely for human purposes but also through the lens of awe and wonder at the grandeur of creation;
4. seeks, beyond all definitions of efficiency and productivity, to shape a society in which there is time not only to Do and to Make but time also to Be and to Love: time for family, community, and spiritual exploration.

We want this New Bottom Line brought into all aspects of our public life, so that we can begin to reshape our schools and hospitals, our government, our professions, our media in ways that encourage people to see each other as fundamentally valuable and deserving of love and caring. We reject the notion that values should be kept out of public life, and instead seek to

champion the values articulated in this statement, and to encourage social change that would foster these values throughout the society. So, for example, we want schools to be assessed as successful or as failures not only to the extent that they produce students who can read and write but also to the extent that they tend to foster caring human beings who are ethically and ecologically sensitive, who excel at taking care of others and at developing their own inner resources, and who have developed the capacity to respond to the universe with awe and wonder. We want corporate charters to be dependent on their ability to prove a history of social responsibility as measured by an Ethical Impact Report. We want all of our economic and social institutions to be judged successful to the extent that they foster caring and respect for all peoples and for the planet.

To begin this process, we are organising people in professions and work places to take a first step in this direction: by creating New Bottom Line groups with fellow professionals or workers to explore the following question: What would it look like concretely in our workplace or in our profession if there were in fact this New Bottom Line so that promotions, economic rewards, worker evaluations, etc. had as a major component the concern with how well any given worker, professional or institution was doing in enhancing this New Bottom Line? The goal of these groups is to develop concrete visions of what a society would look like if it were in fact based on the New Bottom Line. The only rule we have for our New Bottom Line groups: Do not allow into the discussion the 'Reality Police'. The Reality Police are all those voices in our own heads that tell us that there is some 'they' who won't let us do this reconstructing, so there is no point in imaginatively constructing what a New Bottom Line society could look like in concrete terms.

**Rabbi Michael Lerner**

For further information see [www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org)

# STEADY FLAME

I burn  
 day and night  
 slowly, steadily  
 like a candle  
 protected from breeze  
 and winds of struggle  
 strifes and storms  
 pass by...

I burn  
 unflickering  
 unfaltering  
 melting into molten lava  
 foaming, frothing  
 and gurgling...  
 melting from within and without.

I burn...  
 my brow with burning thoughts  
 my eyes  
 with unshed tears  
 my tongue  
 with suppressed words  
 my throat  
 with hushed anger  
 my lips  
 with longing for kisses  
 my heart, with tense, pentup emotions  
 my soul  
 with anguish of waiting.  
 my arms  
 with  
 my breast  
 with heaving sighs  
 of fulfilled desires  
 and my body  
 with its own fire.

A candle  
 unflickering  
 unfaltering  
 I bore  
 a steady flame...  
 ...into the eternity.

**Kailash Gopal Puri**

Writer and family advisor to Asian Communities.

from 'Sphere'  
 2000 Dynamic Pubs. Delhi

# FIRE THE 7<sup>th</sup> CREATION

Zoroastrians are the followers of the great Iranian prophet, Zarathushtra known in the West as Zoroaster, who lived circa 1500 BCE. Zarathushtra in his sublime hymns, the Gathas, revealed to mankind that there is the One, Supreme, All-knowing, and Eternal God of the good creations - Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom, who is wholly wise, good and just. Mazda, as Zarathushtra taught, is a friend to all - never to be feared by humans who in turn should worship Him. Locked in open conflict Zarathushtra proclaimed, were the two primordial spirits, the Holy Spirit of Mazda and His diabolical adversary the Hostile Spirit.

Ahura Mazda through His omniscience knew of His own goodness and infinite Self and was also aware of the Hostile Spirit's limited strength and finite existence. In order to destroy His adversary, Ahura Mazda created an immaculate material world of the seven creations, the skies, waters, earth, plants, cattle, humans and fire to trap the Hostile Spirit. Ahura Mazda knew that the Hostile Spirit, because of its inherent destructive nature and ignorance, would attack the seven creations bringing within it disorder, falsehood, wickedness, sorrow, cruelty, disease, suffering and death.

In Zoroastrianism Ahura Mazda's finest creation is believed to be humans, the central figure in this cosmic struggle. Zarathushtra declared that it is during this period of conflict that humans through free will, should choose the path of Asha, which is founded upon order, truth and righteousness. It is every human's responsibility to fight and vanquish the Hostile Spirit through the ethical framework of good thoughts, good words and good deeds - the weapons that according to Zarathushtra, would lead to the eventual annihilation of evil.

The last creation fire is a potent symbol in Zarathushtra's revelation; it is the physical representation of Asha and a source of light, warmth and life. All Zoroastrian rituals, the performance of which is an important religious duty are solemnized in the presence of fire, the life energy that permeates and makes dynamic Ahura Mazda's other six creations. Zarathushtra was the bearer of earlier Iranian tradition in which fire was associated with truth and order. The zest from fire in Zoroastrianism became the quest for truth. The epithet for fire in the Gathas, is "the truth - strong

fire!" When this truth - strong fire burns, it symbolically reflects the inherent purity that lies within Mazda's creations. Purity is the abstract form of that, which is allied to truth, which humans as "soldiers of truth" must strive to possess. The role of fire in Zoroastrianism is veneration, therefore it is quite profound. It is through fire, that a link is believed to develop between truth and purity which is realised by the individual, gives him a gnosis of the fire of Ahura Mazda.

A Zoroastrian thus, through the veneration of fire, is able to generate an intimate communion with Ahura Mazda who is deemed to be the "Father of fire". For, within that communion, are sown the seeds of power, truth and purity. Fire enables a Zoroastrian to experience the truth when the

holy words recited from the sacred Avesta, which in themselves contain the truth are uttered. The power which is generated as result of this

"fusion" is the power that will smite the Hostile Spirit and its legions.

Humans must consciously strive to remember and rekindle the fire of Ahura Mazda which dwells deep within the heart of humans. When that happens, humans become aware of consciousness of a high order; the whole of creation then comes to light, reflecting the inherent nature of Mazda mirrored back to Mazda through Mazda's finest creation, humans.

Hence when a Zoroastrian prays to the fire, they are praying to the creation that represents life and the inherent nature of Ahura Mazda, which is

total goodness.

The consecrated fire, in Zoroastrianism, is the focal point of worship, praise and propitiation. Zoroastrian places of worship are known as Fire Temples, in which the consecrated fire is kept burning continuously! Iran being the cradle of Zoroastrianism has the oldest fire, located today in the desert of Yazd and has been kept burning continuously for over 2500 years. In India, the oldest fire has been kept burning for over 1000 years located today in a sleepy sea - side village of Udvada, 150km north of Bombay. It was consecrated by the first Zoroastrian refugees who fled Iran in the 9th century, following the Arab conquests of the 7th century which eventually led to active persecution of Zoroastrians. The Zoroastrian faithful from all over the world make annual pilgrimages to both these fires in Yazd and Udvada and others in Iran and India.



**Malcolm M. Deboo**

Information Officer and Librarian Trust Funds of Europe. Email:library@ztfec.com  
The Eighth World Zoroastrian Congress will take place in London in 2005

# Grandfather Fire

I grew up in a small town in the north of Brazil and I remember playing with children on the streets. There was no television until 1968 in my town, so, in the evenings we would gather to play on the streets. Sometimes, even having electricity, we loved to play around the fire. The fire woke up our dreams and fantasies.

Today, most of the electronics we have cause us to stay indoors. So many people have the comforts of electricity and the luxury of technologies such as televisions and computers and electronic games, and so, there seems to be little reason to be playing outside or talking on the streets with our neighbours. I remember that the fire would bring all of us together in community, although we may not have regarded it as a sacred tool.



But something has changed among some people who love to gather with others around the fire. Maybe they remember in their cellular memories the

time the first humans used to eat, sing, talk, dance, sleep and do their rituals around the fire. The fire was their sun during the dark nights. It became a Grand Father for most of the natives of the Americas. The fire has shaped part of most cultures as has the water, the air and the earth. We all began to lose our connection with our ancestral roots as people started to gather in the cities. The fire was no longer the centre of living, we could cook and read with the help of electricity, and humankind found other ways to warm up their houses. So, the fire became a kind of luxury when we would leave the cities to spend time in nature with family and friends.

Now it seems that more and more people in the big cities look for the ancient traditions where the fire was more than a tool to bring 'light' to their nights. People gather around the fire and it is being seen once again as a sacred tool. People see God in the fire and some can communicate with it, as people did in ancient times. The fire gives teachings. Most of the groups gather in a certain moon time, dependent on the event they want to celebrate. I have noticed how people respect each other around the fire. I would say that it reminds me of brothers and sisters in front of a father they respect. For some people the fire is God, for others the fire has God in it. It doesn't matter, as long as we respect it as a sacred element. Does someone tell us to respect it? No, we all know it. We just need to observe how people get involved with making of fire, and how attracted humans are to it.

Not long ago, I was in a gathering around the fire where all elders (different traditions) who were there were men and they all were talking about the importance of Grand Father Fire. Then, a woman, a wise woman, got our attention talking about the Water. She made the connection between the fire and the water and we all understood that the fire was representing the male energy, and the water the female energy. So, attending to the sacred teachings about the water, we are also bringing to our gatherings around the fire both female and male energy: all we need to balance our planet. Men need more water ie female energy in their lives, and women would deal better with their female energy if they would know how to draw on their inner fire.

Someone could ask: what about the air? The air is the element needed to light up the fire. What about the earth element? The earth is our Mother who sustains all of us, including the fire, the air and the water. A whole sacred family is surrounding us: Grand Father Fire, Grand Mother Moon, Mother Earth, Father Sky, Standing Sisters (the trees and rocks)... and us. If everybody is sacred in this family, we are also sacred. Respecting sacred beings above us, below us, surrounding us is also sacred.

So is the Fire and its power waking up once again our dreams, our fantasies and who knows, also our knowingness and interconnectedness just like it used to do when we all were children and when then we were more connected to our ancestors.

**Athamis Bárbara D'Souza**

Nanós Cós Qüê Nimque Beneshe Dodem  
(Humming bird woman from the Thunder Bird Clan)

*So much in our lives, you have  
taught us  
And through your pains, you have  
showed us the light  
The love that you give, it  
surrounds us  
The true power shines through  
with full might*

*First stanza of the poem 'Father'  
By Kavita Sohanta*

A lighted cigarette, a burning *agarbatti* (incense stick), a candle or an oil lamp flame, a bonfire, a flame on a gas cooker burner, a wild forest fire causing charring and burning are different forms of fire. But fire, which is an object of worship in many Hindu rituals, is termed 'sacred fire' because it is lit in a spiritually clean *kunda* (container) is controlled and sanctified by the chanting of prayers and mantras from the *Rig-Veda*.

From the *Shatapatha Brahmana* we learn about the nature and suitability of the ground where three fire altars are constructed for the performance of a vedic fire sacrifice. Suitable wood fuel and darbha grass along with ghee (clarified butter) are materials used for oblations which sustain and make the fire burn

'devourer of oblations', 'bright', 'seven-tongued' and belonging to all men.

In the *Samkhya System* of Hindu philosophy, two ultimate realities are *Purusha* (spirit) *Prakriti* (matter). *Purusha* is the animating force that acts upon *Prakriti* which is made manifest through the agency of the five great elements, Ether, Air, Water, Fire and Earth, to create various objects and creatures. Of the great elements, Fire and Wind (air) are connected in the establishment of the various 'sacred fires', both domestic and public.

Sacred texts give details of the making of fire altars (domestic and public) of collecting firewood, and kindling of the fire using fire sticks or drills. Details also of their location, preparation, lighting and tending.



Rajarani temple, Bhuvanavara, 12th century  
Cited: Hindu Polytheism Alain Daniélou 1964

Mango, Butea, Frondosa – Palasha, is put into the fire receptacle with mantras from *Ashwalayana Grihya Sutra*. Finally three oblations of 'cooked rice and ghee' are given to *Agni*, the Sun and ancient Sages with a prayer for blessings for the boy.

# Sacred Fire

vigorously during the ritual. Fire personified is *Agni*, God of fire. In the vedic period, there were no *murtis* or temples. The Sun God *Aditya*, was the visible manifestation of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit of Hinduism. The key mantra in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* is 'Asau Adityo Brahma'. The sun sustained life through light and warmth during the day and *Agni*, its representative, did the same during the hours of darkness. *Indra*, *Surya (Aditya)* and *Agni* are three important Vedic deities. *Agni* the God of fire (cf Latin *Ignis*) is a deity of Indo-Iranian origin widely worshiped by the nomadic Aryans of Central Asia.

More hymns are addressed to *Agni* in the *Rig-Veda* than to any other god. The very first hymn of the *Rig-Veda* (1.1) is to *Agni* where he is described as the divine priest of the sacrifice, the bestower of treasures, giver of wealth and welfare and heroic offspring, and conveyer of oblations to other gods. *Surya*, the Sun god is described in the *Rig-Veda* as the dispeller of darkness and giver of intellect and light.

The *Gayatri* verse from Book Three of the *Rig-Veda* is the most widely recited mantra in many Hindu rituals, and forms the core of Sun Worship for many Hindus. *Agni* was the personification of the three forms of fire, namely the sun, the lightning and the sacrificial fire. *Agni* was the source of the Vedas, knowing all created things, protecting men and their homes and who mediated between men and their gods. *Agni* is invoked on all solemn occasions and he is termed 'flesh eater' when established in the cremation pyre. He is described as 'smoke-forming',

The *Garhapatya*, the fire of the domestic hearth equated with *Prana* has a round altar and is situated in the West. The Eastern fire is equated with the *Apana* has a square altar and is used for oblations to gods. The Southern fire has a semi circular altar, is equated with *Vyana* breath and used for oblations to pitris and demons. These are the three important domestic fires. Other lesser fire is equated with *udana* breath on which new and full moon offerings are cooked. The second lesser fire is equated with *samana* breath.

Although there are rare occasions of the performance of the Vedic sacrifice *Yajna* the sacred fire is used in many Hindu and *Samskaras* – rites of passage or sacraments. At the impregnation sacrament a *homa* – fire worship is performed and ghee oblations are given to *Agni*, *Surya*, the moon, *Vayu*, *Vishnu*, and *Prajapati* with a prayer for a well-formed child. The *Homa*, recommended at the 'first solid food' ceremony, is rarely performed these days. Important 'sacred fire' worship is done at the *Upanayana* Sacred Thread ceremony. At the 'main homa' nine ghee oblations are given to *Agni* in atonement for the 'omission' of the childhood sacraments. The mantra of these nine offerings is *Om bhuh bhuvah swah*. Four more oblations of ghee are given, three to *Agni*, the Purifier and one to 'Lord of Creatures' chanting mantras from books 9 and 10 of the *Rig-Veda*.

*Agni* is offered worship with red and yellow powders, rice grains, flower and water, before sacred wood fuel – twigs of Indian fig trees, Pippal, Banyan, Udumber,

At a Hindu wedding *Homa*, fire is established in a clean vessel with a prayer and worship of *Agni* with mantras from the *Grihya Sutra*. Then wood fuel – twigs of Indian fig trees, Mango and Butea, Frondosa – and darbha grass are put into the fire. Then seven ghee oblations are given to *Prajapati*, *Soma* and *Agni* with a prayer for blessings for the couple.

At the 'roasted rice' *Homa* the mantras are from *Ashwalayana Grihya Sutra* and oblations of 'roasted rice and ghee' are given to *Aryaman* and *Agni* to *Varuna* and *Agni* and to the Sun and *Agni*.

At the cremation the *Agni* in the pyre is propitiated with oblations of ghee. After various offerings to the corpse are made, a prayer is addressed to *Agni* to consume the corpse and reduce it to ashes.

There are three special birthdays celebrated by many Brahman males in spite of short lifespan and death through diseases. Since World War II many diseases have been conquered through medical research. To be able to celebrate 60th 75th and 81st birthday is considered to be a bonus blessing of god and on these occasions, a *homa* is usually performed in thanksgiving.

Thus 'sacred fire' still plays an important role in major Hindu rites of passage, continuing the religious tradition started by the Vedic priests over three thousand five hundred years ago.

**V.P. Hemant Kanitkar**

Writer of plays, short stories, novels and books on Hinduism for schools.

# Tongues of Fire

Fire is not perhaps thought of as a central Christian symbol, despite its natural connotations of light, warmth and purification. Many people, unfortunately, may think first of hellfire! Yet it plays a central role in two of the church's greatest feasts, Easter and Pentecost. In the first case fire is actually kindled during worship, and in the second case it is described in the narrative of the event and represented in subsequent iconography. At Easter the symbolism of light is predominant; at Pentecost this is still present, but there is also the suggestion of flames.

Easter is the most important feast in the Christian calendar, and many churches hold their most elaborate celebration on the night of Holy Saturday. In the Roman Catholic tradition the Easter vigil service starts at dusk, and the first part of it consists in the kindling of fire with a flint, often outside the church door. The congregation hold candles, which are then lit from the new fire, and they proceed into the church, which is in darkness apart from the light from their candles. One of the clergy intones three times 'the light of Christ'. The darkness continues for the next part of the service, which is centred on the blessing of the Paschal Candle, by the altar.

Here the symbolism of light predominates. If Christ is indeed the light of the world, as the gospels say, then it would seem that this light was extinguished on the cross on Good Friday but then re-lit at the resurrection. The church's task is to continue to manifest this light to the world.

The narrative of Pentecost tells us that while Jesus' disciples were sitting together, a sound like the mighty wind filled the house, and 'there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each of them' (Acts 2:3). Hence depictions of the scene show the disciples with tongues of fire resting on their heads; and the ancient Pentecost hymns emphasise light and fire. Thus the *Veni, Sancti Spiritus* ('Come, Holy Ghost...') praise for the light divine to shine in the inmost hearts of the faithful, and for its warmth to melt what is rigid.

The image of fire conveys more, I think, than its being a source of light, for melting involves a radical change and may be uncomfortable. The philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) had an intense religious experience on the night of 23rd November 1654, one which changed his whole life. He wrote a record of it, which was found sewn into his coat after his death. It begins: 'FIRE. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not the God of philosophers and men of letters. Certitude, certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace...'

It is, however, the Holy Spirit's light that has been emphasised in subsequent Christian tradition and theology, seen as symbolising understanding. This is not surprising, given that Jesus promised at the Last Supper that the Spirit would lead the disciples to the truth. This concentration on the light of the Spirit may do something to answer a commonly noted difficulty, that we cannot adequately represent the Holy Spirit: we have to fall back on depicting a dove, a ray of light, or tongues of fire. Now the function of light is to illuminate something else, rather than itself, somewhat in the way that a portrait should tell us more about its subject than about the painter. Thus Christian theologians have said that the Spirit's function is to illuminate Christ and to lead us to him, just as the latter in turn as 'image of the unseen God' (Col.1:15) leads us to the Father; and that we need not so much a theology *of* the Holy Spirit as a theology *in* the Spirit. Similarly many of those involved in the Charismatic Movement have said that their involvement in it has led them to a deeper understanding of Christ's teaching and a fuller appreciation of some aspects of their religion, especially prayer and scripture.

What is common to the theologies of Easter and Pentecost is an emphasis on light: Christ as the Light of the World is believed to *show* us the Way, and the Holy Spirit illuminates our hearts and minds, to give us a deeper *understanding*. In our own time, many Christians are asking whether the light of Christ shines through non-Christian religions too, and whether the Holy Spirit guides *all* people to truth. But these questions bring us to the frontiers of contemporary theological debate.

**Professor Patrick Sherry**  
Lancaster University



# *Spiritual Symbol* PRACTICAL REALITY

When most people think of Paganism, fire will probably feature prominently in the images that spring to mind. They will imagine candle-lit ceremonies, torchlit processions, and worshippers dancing around or leaping over fires. They will not be wrong to do so, for these are certainly features of some Pagan ceremonies, but few perhaps will understand why this is so.

Modern Paganism has its roots in the indigenous, pre-Christian, religions of Europe. Pagan beliefs reflect a synergy of polytheistic, pantheistic and animistic understandings of the divine, and so in Paganism, spiritual truths are expressed in mythopoeic and symbolic forms rather than as doctrines. Nature is viewed as sacred, and human life seen as very much a part of the greater life of the earth. This is crucial in forming an understanding of the significance of fire.

In Pagan ceremonies, at one level a fire is simply a fire. A means of keeping warm, of heating food and serving as a social focus for family and community. These things are very important but fire is also a symbol of much more. Paganism is a religion rooted above all in the celebration of life in this living world. In the understanding of nature as filled with the presence of immanent divinity, holy in and of itself and giving rise to many epiphanies. Thus at a deeper level, a fire of human making can symbolise the sun, the source of the warmth and light which makes life possible. And at a deeper level still, many Pagans understand Fire, along with Water, Earth and Air, to be one of the four constitutive elements of reality. These are elements, not in the sense of the Periodic Table familiar to us from modern chemistry, but metaphysical qualities or attributes - each with many further correspondences - which exist in a shifting, dynamic balance with each other and help to provide a framework for our spiritual approach to life.

At this esoteric level, Fire is the energy of transformation, of vitality and will, finding expression in our lives and the world in many ways. The fire of the spirit that seeks to grow in harmony with the divine. The fire in the blood that is passionate love for each

other and for life itself. The fire in the mind that creates and renews in art, science and craft. Fire can purify or fire can destroy according to context and intention. A spiritual journey will often involve an element of walking through fire.

Pagan ceremonies can perhaps best be understood as a kind of symbolic 'language' through which we affirm our human relationship with, and honour, our Gods and Goddesses, a spiritual connection which goes deeper than anything which can be expressed solely in words because to Pagans, symbolism engages with the deep levels of mind and spirit, where words cannot reach.

Thus the Goddess Bride, or Brigit as she is also called, patron of poetry, smithcraft and healing in Celtic Pagan tradition, is closely associated with certain aspects of fire. The fire of inspiration that shapes words into mythopoeic truth, the forge-fire that draws metal from raw ores, the fire of love that seeks to mend illness and injury. All transformations that can be understood at a number of different levels through the symbolism of fire. The Goddess herself is not a symbol of fire, for deities always transcend human symbolism, but by contemplating and exploring the spiritual meanings of fire we can grow in understanding of her and of other spiritual matters.

There are many Pagan festivals linked to the turning seasons of the year, but of these it is perhaps on Yule (the Winter Solstice) and Beltane (or May Day, the first day of Summer) that fire is most prominent, both having strong solar symbolism. At Yule the sun sinks below the horizon into the longest night of the year, to be reborn and begin strengthening once more with the dawn. Pagan families often burn a specially prepared Yule-log through the night, symbolising the endurance of light through the long hours of darkness, and the promise of its return with the new solar year. At Beltane, many Pagans celebrate the beginning of summer by lighting bonfires to greet the dawn on May morning. Here too the fires symbolise the sun in the season of warmth, fertility and plenty and Pagan couples often leap across the flames to honour both the sun and what it represents. As with much else in modern Paganism, fire is both a practical reality and a spiritual symbol.

**John MacIntyre**

Scottish Inter Faith Officer  
The Pagan Federation

*Fire is the energy of transformation*



## New Moon

As great tides of  
Meaning merge and  
Life asks  
Questions that stir us to  
Depths untested,  
We pause in that place  
Beyond and  
Embrace the  
Fire-the radiant  
Blaze of  
Selfhood that stands  
Free of  
Culture  
Bondage,  
Suffering,  
Pain.

We embrace the  
Fire and find  
Renewal in the glowing  
Reflections from  
Beyond-beyond the cramp of  
Solitude,  
Loneliness,  
Anguish,  
Hurt.

We break with  
Repetition and begin  
Regeneration;  
Rising on wings of  
Passion,  
Power,  
Freedom,  
Love.

## To love the Divine

'Breath' performs the task of keeping us alive.  
Surrender your breath unto Him,  
Who breathes life into us.  
Invoke Him with every breath.

Friends, let your body mingle with the world.  
And your mind with your Lord.

The body is a corpse  
If every follicle does not invoke the name of Allah.

Imagine that your heart is a scabbard.  
One scabbard cannot contain two swords.  
The Divine and the mundane  
Cannot both find habitation in your heart.  
Purify your heart from all worldly ties.  
And only then will Allah enter (it).

Your heart is yours,  
But it does not belong to you.  
Kindle your heart  
And it will converse with you.  
Examine then the nature of truth and falsity,  
With the Divine Light that your luminous heart reflects.

Until temptations subside,  
One cannot taste of the Divine.  
When you are in pursuit of Him  
With your mind and heart,  
Not only will He be yours,  
His creation will be too.

Love is a profitable investment;  
The way to accomplishment.  
For Allah, *the Loving* is acquiescent to love.  
If patience is the drape of a lover,  
His love will come to fruition.  
If the lover's supplication is befitting,  
The love will not go unrequited.

A lover speaks through silence.  
True love is sans desire sans expectation.

Voiceless speech proclaims the lover.  
Love is deemed false,  
When you profess extreme love.

Between the servant  
And his Supreme Master  
There exists a membrane-like veil.  
Our task is to remove that veil.

'Hubb'<sup>1</sup> is that intense love,  
That can lead to the gnosis of Allah;  
Or it can lead to the love of His creation,  
(For His pleasure).

Knowledge is compulsory,  
But by no means the supreme good in life.  
Knowledge enables you to recognise  
The Divine attributes.  
But it is only love that will enable you  
To perceive His essence.  
The teacher will be a lover  
When he teaches love poetry.  
Love begets love.

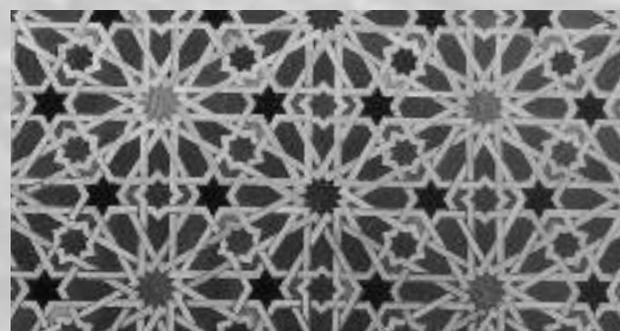
<sup>1</sup> Hubb-i-ishqi - passionate love associated with the Sufis.  
Hubb-i-aqli - rational love associated with the followers of Shariah.  
Hubb-i-imani - love of faith, a 3rd category sometimes used to explain Prophetic love.  
The basis of Syed Rashid Ahmed's Sufi teaching has been a wholesome combination of the Sunnah and the Shariah. Therefore the love he talks about combines all the above categories.  
Email:shiban9266@aol.com

# THE *Heart's* ALCHEMY

Mysticism has always pervaded all religions. The aim of the mystic is to experience that One Reality which cannot be described, to withdraw from all the forms of this world and to be occupied only with the Supreme Shaper of forms, *Al Musawwir*. The mystics of Islam have left us a unique heritage of writings which guide us along the path of love in search of the Beloved.

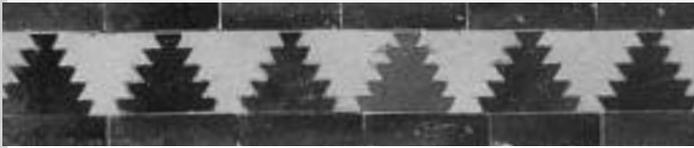
Traditionally Sufis have always belonged to Islam. I belong to one of the most traditional Sufi orders, the Naqshbandiya, whose chain of transmission goes back to the Prophet Muhammad. The Naqshbandiya are Orthodox Muslims, adhering very closely to the *sunnah* (example and tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad. Their Way is forged by association with their Sheikh. Shah Baha'uddin an-Naqshband (who gave his name to the order), said "Our way (is founded) on association and goodness comes from congregation." Sufis believe that the only way to seek oneness with the Beloved is to perfect oneself spiritually by attaining mastery over the ego. The central pivot of the teachings of our order is *Dhikr Allah*, or Remembrance of God, which cleanses the heart from its bad characteristics and frees it from all worldly attractions.

The Sufi Path, the inner, mystical reality of Islam and essence of all religions, is one of great inner beauty. It is a path to self-perfection, bringing more intensity and 'God-consciousness' into every facet of daily life. It can be called 'the practice of the presence of God.' As the inner practice progresses, and one becomes more able to extricate oneself and stand back from such negative emotions as anger, jealousy, envy, greed, and covetousness (to mention but a few), life attracts a calm order in personal and interpersonal relationships.



‘Once the mirror of your heart  
becomes pure and clear,  
You will see pictures from  
beyond the domain of  
water and clay.  
Not only pictures,  
but also the Painter,  
Not only the carpet of  
good fortune, but also the  
Carpet-spreader.’<sup>1</sup>

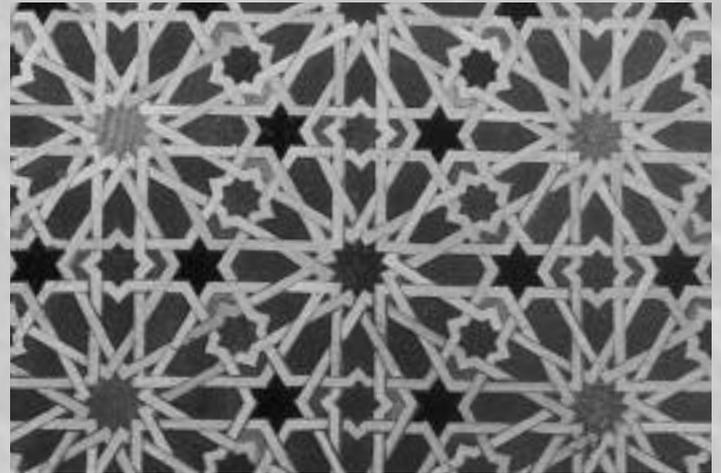
Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi



Islam means submission and total devotion to one’s Lord. Like all mystics, the Sufis are guided by their longing and love for God, which leads them forward and helps them to escape from the trammels of their psychology and of the world. Just as a moth is attracted to a candle flame and, in its passion, flies into it to become one with the flame, the Sufis have carried submission one step further. Their supreme aspiration is to be completely annihilated in God, out of pure love. In their pain of yearning and of separation, they desire only to find their way back to the Eternal Love out of which all Creation took place.

They are filled with an overwhelming longing to see the Face of God:

**‘All that is on earth  
Will perish:  
But will abide (for ever)  
The Face of thy Lord,  
Full of Majesty,  
Bounty and Honour.’<sup>2</sup>**



Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the greatest mystics of Islam, said that whatever distracts our hearts from the remembrance and contemplation of our Lord is a veil. God is hidden from us by the many veils which we set up before Him in terms of our identifications, illusions, bad qualities and false parts of our being. *The Sufis seek to attain to the highest station, the knowledge of certainty or haqqu l-yaqin*, of which we, in our normal everyday life, may only catch the tiniest fraction of a glimpse.

**‘Whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God’<sup>3</sup>** is confirmed by the Sufis, who maintain that everything, no matter how small and insignificant, emanates from God - is filled with God. Muhammad Ibn Wasi’ an advanced mystic, said: “I never saw anything without seeing God therein,” and Shibli, well-known for his ecstatic verses, went so far as to say, **“I never saw anything except God”<sup>4</sup>**. Shah Naqshband, on the contrary, took a much more sober view about union with the Beloved, asserting that God is beyond all experience that even the most advanced mystics can attain to.

**‘Spiritual knowledge is like water, it takes the colour and the shape of the cup. Allah’s knowledge is so great, that however much we take, it is like a drop of a huge ocean. It is like a vast garden, however much we have cut, it is as if we had cut but one flower.’<sup>5</sup>**

Umm Hanie’ Rebler

Special Envoy for Interfaith Dialogue and Women’s Relations for  
the German Muslim League Bonn CC

<sup>1</sup> Mathnawi II, verses 72-3 William C. Chittick *The Sufi Path of Love, The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, p.38

<sup>2</sup> Holy Qur’an, Surah 55, verses 26-8,

<sup>3</sup> Holy Qur’an, Surah 2, 115

<sup>4</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, P.147.

<sup>5</sup> Sheikh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *The Naqshbandi Sufi Way* P.179.

**EDITORIAL NOTE: JOY HODDER:**

*On the 3rd September 2004 I wrote to a Russian friend and fellow member of URI, Liudmila Khoklova to express my deep sorrow at the awful, unfolding tragedies taking place in Russia, culminating in the murder of children in Middle School Number One in Beslan. I asked Liudmila for an insight into how the Russian media had reacted, and more importantly what was her response. This is her reply:*

I am not a specialist in religious, ethnic or political issues but my thoughts are very similar to those of my friends - both our URI CC members and others. Chechen people lived through a great tragedy when during the second world war all Chechens were proclaimed “enemies” and transported to Kazakhstan, this when their men were fighting against Hitler! More

appealed to the President asking him to not only pardon, but to return to this criminal all his previous military awards! Half of the Russian population supported this appeal! This is not surprising as a substantial part of the population is infected with nationalist and chauvinistic viruses, and this complicates the problem. President Putin was spared the decision, as

Colonel Budanov himself refused to sign the appeal for pardoning.

People in the West think that the only solution to the problem is to start negotiations with Chechen leader Maskhadov. This not viable, as he is unable to control the situation or solve economic problems of the region. After Russia withdrew their troops, in accordance with

# **BESLAN** *A Political Tragedy*

than half of them died on the way. New generations remember history, and some (or many?) were brought up with the idea of revenge.

Perhaps many Chechens joined the current “freedom movement” to take revenge for the massacre of their parents and grandparents. The problem is that in different regions, but especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia many people associate Stalin’s regime with Russians, although possibly more Russians than other nationalities suffered from his atrocities (interestingly Stalin was Georgian).

This anti-Russian feeling has been exploited by various forces: Saudi Arabia and other countries are giving money, sending instructors and mercenaries to turn this fight into a religious one. In fact, Chechens are not fanatic Muslims, but certain forces are doing their best to prove that it is a religious war. The Osetin people, whom they attacked, are Christians, and President Putin and the government did their best not to turn the conflict into religious bloodshed.

The hostility of the Chechen population is enflamed by the behaviour of the Russian army, which is responsible for many cases of violence. Innocent people are sometimes arrested, tortured or simply disappear. Most of the offenders were not punished for their deeds. There was only one criminal trial: Colonel Budanov raped and killed a Chechen girl and ultimately was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. After only one year of imprisonment, the Governor of the Region

the *Hasavjurt Agreement*, Chechnya practically got independence. However, the employment situation is such that the people resorted to robbing neighbouring territories, kidnapping people (a son of my acquaintance was kidnapped) and demanding money. If people could not pay the large sum they demanded, they sent videofilms to the relatives showing how they cut fingers one by one on the hand of the kidnapped child etc. Ultimately they attacked Dagestan and Dagestanian Muslims were fighting against them. Maskhadov could not control the situation at that time, and there is even less chance that he would be able to control it now. There are many media reports showing that Chechens are ‘split’ after Beslan, and that this terrorist act was performed by some so called “foreigners” and not supported by all Chechen “freedom fighters”



Right now it is like a Greek tragedy, the war recruits more terrorists, provokes more bitterness. In Iraq, Israel and in Chechnya when war starts it is impossible to stop violence and innocent people become victims. The soldiers and officers who are supposed to protect 'constitutional order' in Chechnya are volunteers. There are not many volunteers to chose from, and amongst them are criminals, cruel people etc. Some of them rob the local population, rape the girls and kill innocent people. **Then comes vengeance, which is part of Caucasion culture - and there is no end to it.**

One of my American friends has asked me several questions, and I try to answer them:

*Q: Is there any institutional attempt in Russia to study and glorify the Chechen language (which is very interesting!) and culture in a spirit that would address their need for self-respect?*

A: Yes, Chechen has been studied by our linguists. It is really very interesting with its ergativity, but this war is definitely not for Chechen culture. One detail: when president's adviser Aslakhonov tried to talk in Chechen with terrorists, the head of terrorists (or whoever was negotiating) said that he did not understand Chechen language and asked to speak Russian.

*Q: "Russianization" is certainly not the answer.*

A: They have all been 'Russianized' long ago and speak Russian like Russians. Nobody prohibited them from developing their language and culture, but it is impossible to do this during a time of war.

*Q: Collective punishment is not the answer. (I wonder if anything could be done to address the problem of the so-called 'Black Widows' — the embittered Chechen women who have lost their menfolk and seem to be the perpetrators of some of these suicidal terrorist acts. Apologize maybe? Beg forgiveness? But speaking of Chechen culture, maybe vengeance is part of it?)*

A: I am not sure that the women-perpetrators of suicidal terrorist acts are all embittered Chechen women. Some are told to do it by elder brothers or fathers. (One of such girls did not want to die, so she went to FSB and told her story). Some may fight for the ideal. Among terrorists in Beslan there were Chechens, and now their wives become widows. But who is going to apologize and beg forgiveness? Maybe the widows of Alpha group officers who died defending the children? Or the parents of murdered children?

The only thing we all understand is that when violence starts there is no end to it. Some solutions to the Chechen problem: to develop economy in this region so that everybody could find work, to change the attitude of the army to the common people of Chechnya (something is being done in this direction, but we do not know the results yet): to catch and arrest all corrupted officers who sell weapons to terrorists and all administrators who steal money spent by the central government on the reconstruction of this region: compensations to those whose houses were destroyed during the war, reconstruction of schools and hospitals etc.

For this, we must get rid of corruption in our country, to persuade people to eradicate nationalistic and chauvinistic tendencies; Tighten border controls to improve security against those people who would exploit the situation. There is much to be done - easy to plan but very difficult to do. The only good thing we can take from this present situation is that the Beslan tragedy has not turned into a religious war between Christians and Muslims. **Ordinary people are tired of war.**

*Liudmila Khoklova*

*How can we believe that this was not a terrible dream,  
That I didn't see blood and hear moans,  
That only a thunderstorm cracked the skies above Beslan,  
How can we believe that everyone was bathed in their tears?*

*How can we believe that so many hopes went unrealized,  
That bitterness and malice form the lump in our throats,  
That machine guns replaced the peal of the school bell,  
That the first lesson for many children became their last?*

*How can we believe that beauty will save our world,  
That good in this world is greater than evil,  
That a child is born into the world for happiness,  
How can we believe? Who will give me the answer?*

*Anonymous  
Reflection of a survivor of the Beslan Tragedy*

# A Colourful Unity



*Sagrada Familia Barcelona*



*St Basils Moscow*

Over a decade ago I decided to follow a dream. I gave up my job, sold my house, car and all my possessions, packed a rucksack and set off around the world to paint forty of the most revered places of worship. My dream evolved from a belief that all spiritual sites share a common purpose, vision and beauty. As an artist I wanted to convey this unity through the brightness of colour.

Although I have never considered myself a religious person I have always been aware of something 'other' – something greater than humankind, a higher being, a positive guiding force. It seems to me that when I have not ignored, but consciously acknowledged this force, it has energised and inspired me. It was this sense of empowerment that gave me the courage to begin to think that I might realise my dream, and I gained the nerve to embark on what was actually a very demanding project.

By 1996 I had visited sixty of some of the most well known religious sites in over forty countries, from golden temples to modest churches, from ancient monuments to contemporary cathedrals. By 1997 I'd completed forty oil paintings taken from sketch drawings, photographs and research materials collected on my journey. Since 1998 they have been exhibited at venues throughout the country and have been viewed in total, so far, by over 30,000 people.

Some people may argue that there is little, or no time for art when so many difficulties abound in day to day life, not to mention the problems that exist on a global level. Yet I would say that one of the main characteristics of art is the power to prompt thought and understanding of another's perspective. Perhaps then mutual respect can follow. Celebrating and valuing difference is crucial to social harmony. In Brent where I live we celebrate Diwali alongside Ramadan, St. Luke's Day and United Nations Day. Festivals that could present difficulties without mutual understanding and respect - human qualities that generate a sense of peace.

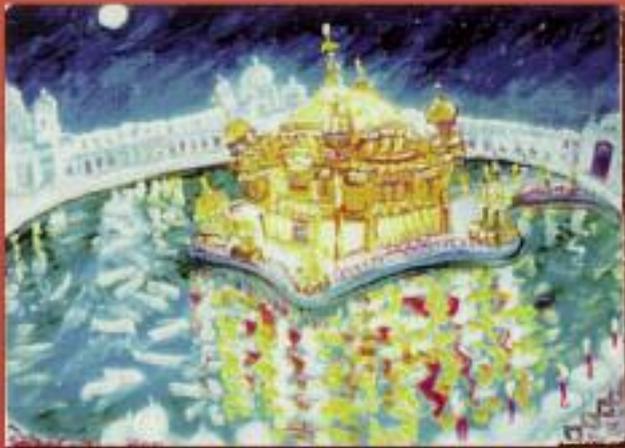
I recently completed an arts degree at Birkbeck College London, involving two summer schools at the Slade School of Fine Art. Then at the London Interfaith Centre I joined others to look at theology, myth and traditional practice of the world's major faith systems. One of the most important things I have learned is that art helps to unify.

*Jerry Gordon*

Jerry Gordon is writing a book on his art projects. For further details or to arrange an exhibition, art workshop, slide-talk please see: [www.gordonart.co.uk](http://www.gordonart.co.uk) or contact: [jerry@gordonart.co.uk](mailto:jerry@gordonart.co.uk)



*Dome on the rock, Jerusalem*



*Golden Sikh Temple, Amritsar*



*Golden Hindu Temple, Varanasi, India*



*Sanctuary of Aphaia*

# PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

## *The lingering impressions of a Sikh woman*

It seems like the dim and distant past as the mists of time have descended on the memories, what remains are some vague and some not so vague recollections; some thrilling experiences and some hairy ones; generosity and welcome, yet the tightness of security in a variety of venues across Barcelona; friendships formed across faith frontiers and the noontime and evening processions of diverse humanity wearing clothes of different cultures, religious traditions and hues walking in small groups to the parliament by the sea and to the Guru Nanak's langar have an enduring imagery which will stay with me for a long time to come.



*Baba ji Mohinder Singh humbly responds to a request by an interested questioner on the floor of the Exhibition Hall. Photo: Ajit Singh*

It was good that the reputation of Barcelona as a city which hosted the Olympics successfully was enhanced further by its hosting of the Parliament of the World's Religions. It also received a new title, 'The Holy City' as Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh ji, the spiritual leader of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, of the Sikh Community in Britain described it. His organisation's dedication to the selfless service and hospitality to everybody with loving kindness and delicious food for the whole period of the parliament, brought what was simply a heaven on earth. The sewadars, the volunteer servers, young and old, high and low, rich and not so rich, about three

hundred of them, worked round the clock to serve meals to 7000 to 8000 people as many times as they chose to visit the Langar, the community food serving hall, day or evening. Mrs Sharan Ahluwalia and Mrs Baldev Kaur led this temporarily erected food preparation and feeding centre with tremendous acumen and resourcefulness, exhorting volunteers to work with their hands and at the same time to recite Sikh prayers aloud, "Satnam Waheguru", the true Wonderful Lord, continuously. Thus the preparation was not just the chopping of vegetables and fruit, or the making of rice or different types of bread and chappatis, but the mixing of work, spirituality and prayer, an enrichment beyond the social and moral domains of hospitality. What an uplifting experience!

There was a very good pictorial exhibition about Sikh history and religion in the hall next to Gurdwara. The first continuous reading of the Sikh scripture over 48 hours on the site indeed was an emotional yet celebratory occasion, dedicated to the success of the Parliament, the four hundredth anniversary of the installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the holy scripture in the Harimandir Sahib, popularly known as the Golden Temple and in the memory of Baba Puran Singh ji, the founder of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha. People who made significant contributions to the Parliament and to the inter-religious understanding were honoured in the traditional Sikh way by the gift of a scarf placed around the neck and a memento of the event. Musical events and discourses were also held every day in the seaside tent city, created by the Sikhs.

I found myself wanting to attend many exciting morning observances, inter-religious and engagement sessions but they seemed to be at the same time. I found the panel discussions particularly about the issues of plurality interesting and worthwhile, giving me further food for thought. The opportunity to meet Sikh and other scholars and to debate ethical and moral issues was most welcome. Talking to people at various places and especially taking my turn to cover the International Interfaith Centre Stall at the Forum, enabled me to converse with people on interfaith issues. The Centre had a questionnaire for attendees to seek their views about religion. Those who completed found themselves getting a peace knapsack as a reward. As the questionnaire was in English, those who could not fully understand but were committed persevered and completed them with some help. I have been told that 800 questionnaires have been returned. Their analysis should provide us with a good view of how those who came to the parliament, think about such issues.

One day while I was at the IIC desk a woman approached me, asked my name and put in my hands three books she had brought from the United States. This was totally unexpected and all I could ask was, "Are you sure they are for me?" She said, "Yes, because I've heard about you". She walked off as I said "Thank you". I am still trying to work out what inspired her to seek me out in this way.

Another encounter! We were waiting for the taxi just after midnight after the great cultural event at the Sagrada Familia. There were four of us, two couples. Taxis, few and far between, those which passed by had passengers. Then three young women, who were on the opposite side of the road, and who had also come from the show, saw us waiting for quite a long time, offered to take us to where we were staying. Although we said that we were prepared to wait, they insisted telling us that they knew the difficulties of getting a taxi at that time of the night. Two of them stayed behind while we were taken by the third young lady car driver to where we were staying, which we learnt later was in a totally different direction to where they lived. Our grateful offering of payment remained unaccepted. What a great act of compassion! What selfless service!

The images that have a lasting impact upon me of the parliament are not the grand displays and events, though of enormous value in themselves but the extraordinary acts of love and kindness of ordinary human beings.

*Charanjit AjitSingh*



*People partaking in Guru's Langar. Photo: Ajit Singh*

The Parliament of the World's Religions, took place in Barcelona from the 7th to the 13th of July this summer. The Parliament acted as a forum for people of all religious and cultural traditions from around the world to meet and share stories and concerns about conflict, violence and injustice in the world, and how as groups, or individuals, they might go about building 'Pathways to Peace'. Each day there was a programme of events, lectures and workshops. The variety on offer was vast, ranging from the academic and political to the arts and personal stories.

On arrival at the Parliament site I was amazed at the multicultural spectacle that met my gaze as people from all over the world paraded in religious costumes and national dress. The arena resembled a futuristic film set where all forms of life in the universe meet to debate pressing matters of concern regarding the future of the universe. I have to say that I was apprehensive about attending this Parliament. Firstly because I knew it was going to be busy and I have a dislike of being in huge crowds, and secondly because I knew that this gathering would attract a certain type of religious entrepreneurialism that I find irritating. My apprehensions proved well founded and after two days of observing and listening I felt I had exhausted my tolerance level of what seemed to be a 'religious circus'. No longer could I go on listening to people pontificating and talking of a 'peace' that took the form of 'pink fluffy clouds'. I had switched off mentally – deafness descended!

But my experience of the Parliament took a turn for the better when, at the end of the second day, I drifted along to a 'Conversation Café' run by the Foundation for Global Community. Much to my surprise I began to warm to the people around me, my hearing switched on again and I started to listen. Many people there, like me, expressed a tiredness of the 'circus' element of the Parliament. They were finding it hard to navigate their way through the huge programme of events, trying to find practical and well grounded topics that were of interest and would be of use to them in their lives when they went back home.

2004  
PARLIAMENT OF THE  
WORLD' RELIGIONS  
BARCELONA | JULY 7 -13

**Pathways to Peace:**  
the Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment.

By the end of the week I too had become more selective and was better able to choose events and meet people that would stimulate my 'listening'. I realized that listening is not just about what you hear with your ears, it's also about what you hear and feel with all your other senses. It's a profoundly personal/personality thing. I did not like the sound that resonated from the 'sight' of the religious circus. It interfered with my auditory listening, and made me feel restless, unsettled and not at all peaceful.

On the whole the Parliament for me was an invaluable learning experience; I met a lot of great people from all over the world and listened to stories about their lives (sad and funny), their work, their families, their fears and their hopes for a more peaceful future. I have forgotten the pomp of the occasion. What remains in my memory is the faces of those I met and the stories they told. I can make no grand or showy claims regarding Pathways of Peace: the Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment. But I can make a small commitment to pass on the stories and ideas I shared to wherever they are relevant in my day to day life. I hope that they might make a small difference to the listener – and who knows maybe a small contribution to world peace.

*Lorna Douglas*

# just another day



For 25 years I've been pointing cameras at people for a living, but some 10 years before that I was given a camera as a Christmas present. I have no idea what possessed my mother to buy me such a thing. My mum and I lived in my Gran's house for many years and as I was the only male with two women I tended to be spoilt rotten, and getting, within reason, most toys I coveted. **But a camera!** Did I ask for it? I don't remember!

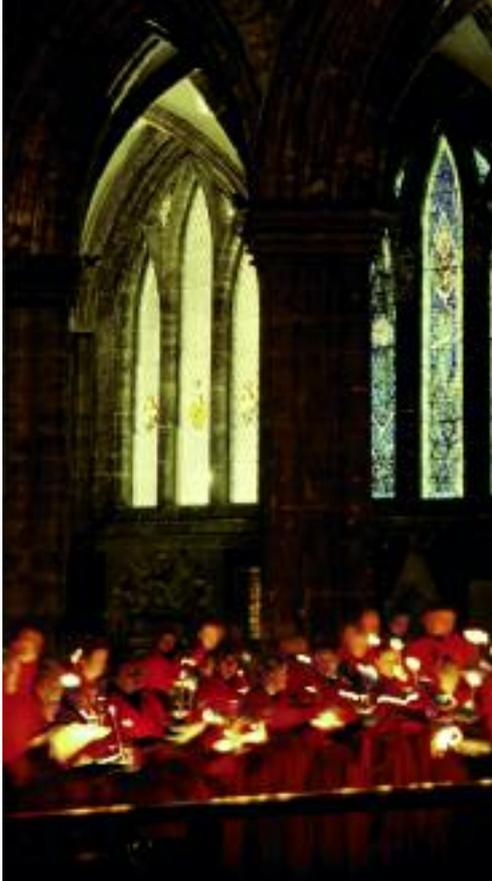
As I look back it seems a strange choice of present, even if the camera was only a cheap little plastic model, film and processing are expensive and both my Gran and mum were out working in local factories so money wasn't normally available to squander on such items. As an adult I discovered my mum's brother had done quite a bit of photography as a hobby and to make a bit of cash on the side, I can only surmise that I had indicated an interest in my uncle's "hobby" and he agreed to supply film and processing, or at least help. Sadly my mum and uncle are both dead so now when I would like to ask "why a camera?" no one can tell me. After a day or two of pointing and clicking, the camera fades from my memory and I've no idea what became of it or any photographs I might have taken....



**VAISAKHI - St Andrews Drive, April 2002**  
*This lady is showing respect to the Nishan Sahib (Sikh flag). This saffron coloured flag is found at every Sikh gurdwara (Sikh temple). Each year, during Vaisakhi the flag is lowered and re-decorated by the community.*

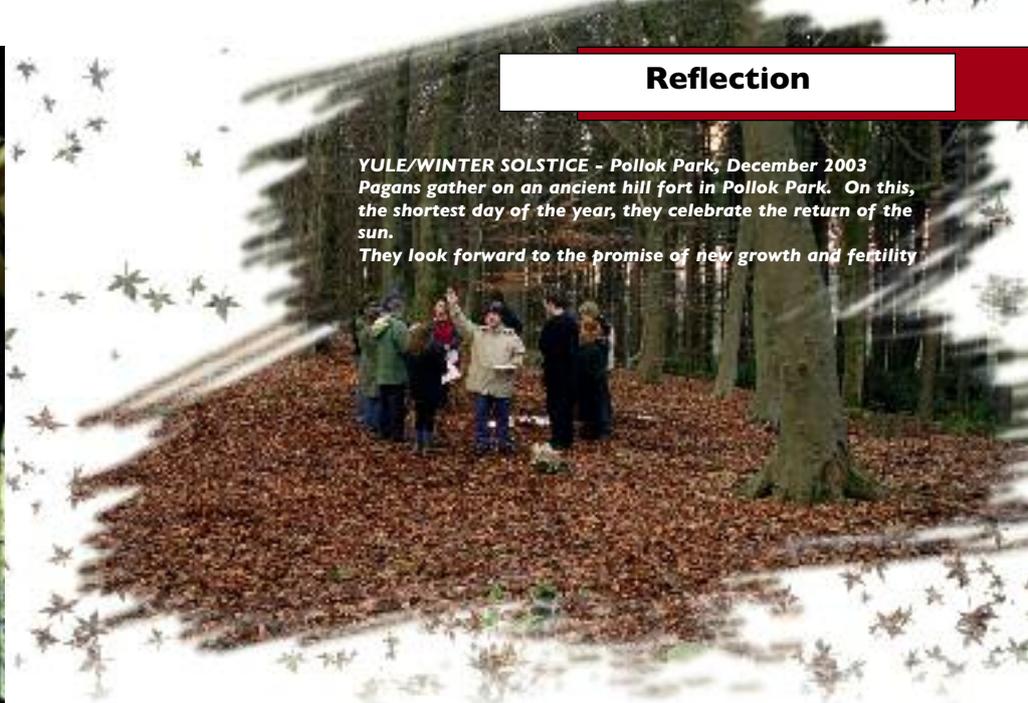
**ADVENT SUNDAY - Glasgow Cathedral, December 2002**

*The Cathedral Choir prepares to process around the Cathedral in candlelight. Advent Sunday is the beginning of the Christian year. Candles symbolize Christ, whose birth lightens the darkness.*



**Reflection**

**YULE/WINTER SOLSTICE - Pollok Park, December 2003**  
*Pagans gather on an ancient hill fort in Pollok Park. On this, the shortest day of the year, they celebrate the return of the sun. They look forward to the promise of new growth and fertility*



**PASSOVER/PESACH - Newton Mearns, April 2004**

*A Jewish family gathers for a meal to celebrate the Exodus out of Egypt. This story is told during the meal by a set dialogue between the adults and the children. The story is also told by the symbolic food on the Seder plate at the centre of the table.*



As a Museum Photographer my job is a strange one, but probably the most fun I could ever have had in a career and I love my job with a passion. One day you are photographing a dinosaur bone for an academic publication, the next you have a Rembrandt in the studio being photographed for a poster or publication. Then the day after that you are introducing yourself to a rabbi, prior to him introducing you to the bride and groom and dozens of family and friends at a Jewish wedding as the 'Photographer from the museums'. This confuses and amuses people in equal amounts "he's here to photograph you, you old antique" is a popular comment. On projects like "Just another day" and last years "Faithfully Yours" I photographed dozens of different festivals, rites of passage and celebrations, people are always a little wary when they first see you with a camera, but a smile and if possible a reassurance about who you are and why you are wandering all over the place in the middle of a

ceremony seems to put most people at ease. I have many favourite photographs from these exhibitions, the little teddy bear hanging from a tree in the grounds of a crematorium, an old soldier shedding a tear at the cenotaph, but one I like very much is a group of nursery kids holding up Easter eggs and wearing Easter bonnets they had just made, compositionally not my strongest image but it still makes me smile. And so I hope my photographs can help people to think a little more about other faith communities who live and work and pray around them, learn a little about these people and accept them as friends and neighbours or, best of all for me, even if they just make you smile.

**Jim Dunn**



**EID UL FITR - Shah I Noor Restaurant, November 2003**

*The end of Ramadan is a time for family and food. New clothes are worn and children receive gifts.*

*The traditional greeting is 'Eid Mubarak', a happy and blessed Eid!*

## Youth Initiative

The second annual Retreat of the Respect Youth Group was held on the weekend 29th-31st October. Twenty-eight young people (21-35 years old) of nine different faiths (Christian, Jain, Muslim, Sikh, Jew, Baha'i, Hindu, Brahma Kumari, Buddhist) came together, prayed together, sang together, sat together, walked together, talked together, created together and shared together during these precious few hours. We discovered many beautiful shared beliefs and we rose to the challenge of confronting those areas where we did not agree. Many friendships were both renewed and created, with the total assurance of common activities in the future. This weekend was truly a blessing on all.

## truly a blessing

*"Service to humanity is service to God. Let the love and light of the Kingdom radiate through you until all who look upon you shall be illumined by its reflection. Be as stars, brilliant and sparkling in the loftiness of their heavenly station." - Abdu'l-Baha'*

*Marguerite Sabour*

## URI Encounters

# The Viva Rio

In 1993, fear and indignation gripped residents of Rio de Janeiro. Amidst political tensions, economic losses and social crisis, the population was profoundly shaken by a series of kidnappings, the murder of eight street children in front of the Candelaira Church, and the wholesale killing of twenty-one people in the Vigario Geral *favela*.

In response to these shocking events, residents of Rio organised a city wide demonstration for peace. At 12 noon on December 17th of that same year, thousands of people dressed in white and paused for two minutes in a silent call for peace. On this day Viva Rio, a non-governmental non-profit organisation, was created to stimulate individuals, associations and companies to build a more democratic and

just society.

From that day on Viva Rio has organised peace campaigns and social projects with widespread support of residents of Rio de Janeiro. Many projects are directed specifically at youth, who are most vulnerable to violence and social risk. Today, Viva Rio works together with local organisations in some 350 *favelas* and other low-income communities to overcome violence and social exclusion throughout Rio de Janeiro.

See website: [www.vivario.org.br/english](http://www.vivario.org.br/english)

*Andre Porto of Viva Rio writes:*

## Brazil in cash-for-guns amnesty

Brazil has the world's fourth-highest murder rate with 40,000 gun-related murders last year.

### **But now the nation is getting disarmed!**

In July 2004 the Brazilian government initiated a project to buy firearms from its citizens as part of a drive to reduce violent crime. Payments range from \$33 for a pistol to \$100 for an assault rifle. Anyone can hand in a weapon before the end of the year without fear of being questioned or charged with illegal possession.

I am delighted to report that within ten days of launching the project 12,000 guns had been surrendered by the population and approximately 200,000 guns have been collected and destroyed. In the headquarters of Viva Rio in Rio de Janeiro alone 2,300 firearms have been handed in.

To disarm is a spiritual act that brings great relief and liberation. Many people describe it as a 'healing' after they see the gun they have handed in be hammered to destruction. Many cry!

A new development is that Viva Rio, United Religions Initiative, National Council of Catholic Bishops and The National Council of Churches are working in partnership to

spread the network of Churches of Disarmament throughout Brazil. We are lobbying to extend the campaign from December 23rd 2004 to October 2005, when all Brazilians will vote on the complete banning and selling of guns. If that happens, and we already have a good response from the Minister of Justice to extend the campaign, our dream is to have, next year at least, one thousand churches and other religious centres collecting and destroying guns from all over our country! There are no better places to do it!

I cannot share in words how happy I personally feel about this current initiative because we have struggled for ten years in this cause. I believe that it is possible to make peace. It needs dreaming together, working hard within our society and against our own ego-centric selves. The whole world is in pain, children are screaming, bombs and guns are blasting every day. **But shadow times demand bright visions and oceans of compassion.**

We at Viva Rio are filming and documenting this whole process in order to share this story of hope with the world.

Daily update: [www.desarme.org](http://www.desarme.org) & [www.armanao.com.br](http://www.armanao.com.br)

# From Ganesha to God



I would like to share with you my personal story on how I became involved in the network of Sweden's Multi-religious Guides.

I was born in Mumbai in India. When I was almost two years old I was adopted by my parents and brought home to Sweden. I do not know much about my background for example, my religious background. However, as long as I can remember I have been very spiritual. My parents are Christian, Lutherans, in a typical Swedish kind of way, and my family goes to church occasionally. In my room during my teenage period I had a large poster depicting the Hindu God Ganesha. I believe it is most logical to assume that I was born a Hindu and that the Ganesha poster was an act of trying to return to my spiritual roots.

As I was growing older, I became more and more interested in the Christian image of God. After graduating from high school I started to study theology at the university of Uppsala. The years in Uppsala have been very happy, fun and exciting but also sometimes quite confusing and sad. Now, when I have almost finished with the programme, I definitely recognise myself as a Christian but I am also very open-minded towards other religions, since I believe that the gospel preaches tolerance, respect and love between people. Today I am convinced that I want to become a minister in the Swedish church.

My point is that the society and family that you grow up in will in many ways influence your image of God and your choice of religion. I totally respect people with other religions, since I realise I actually could have been one of them and equally they could have been in my situation.

## one of sweden's multi religious guides

As a student in theology I made contact with an exhibition named: *God has 99 names*. I became a guide to this exhibition and had the opportunity to talk with people about the six world religions represented in Swedish society; Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism - on six different main subjects: time, food, celebrations and parties, clothes, temples, death and religious dialogue. These are daily life themes, that everyone can relate to, with or without any specific religious belonging. The exhibition has been travelling around in Sweden and wherever it has been people from the different religions are educated to guide it.

Collaboration between Sensus and World Wide Wisdom resulted in the foundation of the network called Sweden's multi-religious guides in January 2003.

Since most of the guides don't have the exhibition to refer to while spreading the knowledge about religion in Sweden, Sensus have produced a package containing literature and materials on the six religions. This is a convenient way to

transport and convey religious teachings to schools, companies, churches and other groups that welcome us. It is a tool that helps us to address people's curiosity about religion.

For me this is an excellent part-time job beside my studies. When I work with the network I believe that I'm also working for a better Swedish society. I also believe that I, as well as all Swedish people are responsible for creating a peaceful climate where religious dialogue can flourish.

**Mika Wallander**

Mika.wallander.sensus@folkbildning.net

## Maybe a trip to Britain

A smaller group among us are now looking at a possibility for us to visit Britain. Since Britain is a country like Sweden that encompasses many different religious groups, we think that it is important for us to be further educated, collaborate, share experiences and knowledge in working within a multi-religious country.

Do you have any recommendations or advice for us? Is there perhaps a similar group or network somewhere in Britain?

Is there any interest in constituting a group that sometime in the future can take part in a Swedish - British exchange programme?

We would be happy to hear from you!

For further information or if you can help us in any way please contact the network co-ordinator:  
**Lisa Trovik at Lisa.trovik@sensus.se**

## VAISAKHI DAY



The beautiful front glass window of the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall, Middlesex was commissioned to depict the creation of The Khalsa (Order of the Sikhs) on Vaisakhi Day 1699.

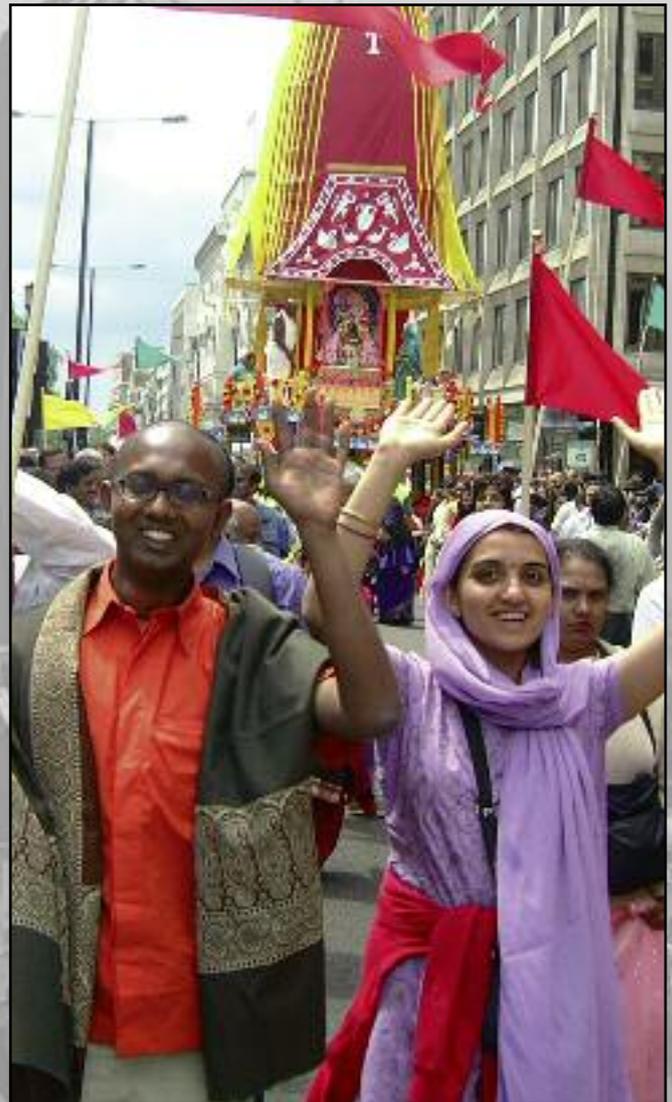
On that historic day Guru Gobind Singh Ji prepared Amrit (nectar) stirred by a Khanda\* and requested, as a test of devotion, five volunteers to offer their heads. The five Sikhs who volunteered are known as the Panj Pyare (the five beloved – the first five members of the Khalsa - Order of Sikhs - who were baptised by the Guru). The saffron bands seen in the window reflect the brave spirit of each of those five Sikhs.

\**Khanda* is a two edged sword which signifies both the spiritual and the temporal powers of the almighty God and the symbol of His oneness.

## Rath Yatra:

Dancing devotees, singing songsters in saffron and hundreds of chanting cherubic faces. The annual Hindu festival of Rath yatra (popularly known in the West as the 'car festival' or the carnival of chariots) was celebrated in London on Sunday, 20th June 2004, a day after its famous take in the Orissan town of Puri in India.

Organised by UK's International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) for 36 years now, the London Rath yatra is unofficially acknowledged as the largest and grandest manifestations of the centuries old Rath yatra festival outside India. The major highlight of the festival is the stepping out of *Lord Jagannath* from his temple, along with elder brother *Balabhadra* and sister *Subhadra* on their ritualistic annual nine-day holiday visit to aunt *Gundicha's* temple. According to *Jagannath* lore *Queen Gundicha* was the wife of *Indradyumna*, the erstwhile king of *Kalinga* credited of building the original *Srimandir* or the *Jagannath Temple* in Puri.



*Dancing and singing through the streets of Central London*

# A celebration of love, legends and the Lord

Puri's Srimandir is revered as one of the four most sacred pilgrimage centres of the Vaishnavite Hindus, (followers of Lord Vishnu-Krishna), where Lord Krishna resides in his latest manifestation on earth as Jagannath (Lord of the Universe). Jagannath is the dark Lord - the dark colour of his countenance can be considered either as absence of any colour or as the mingling of all colours in one. His is the darkness of Krishna - a most pleasing and captivating darkness that makes the gopis (Krishna's childhood female playmates), the bhaktas (disciples) and even the gods and goddesses pine for a glimpse of his pretty countenance.

However, numerous other mythical interpretations and stories are associated with the legend of the Rath yatra. Prominent among which is the playful kidnapping of King Krishna by his childhood cowherd friends of Vrindavan. In his adulthood Krishna went on to become a king and was thus parted from his childhood friends, who were simple villagers. However, on subsequent visits to Krishna's kingdom they couldn't relate to his new regal aura and longed for the mischievous cowherd boy they all knew and loved. So they tried to bring Krishna back to Vrindavan on a cart, so that they could once again be close to him, while the Lord splurged in the company of his favourite folk. On a symbolic note, Lord Jagannath's choice of a dark visage too connotes his closeness to the masses, the dark skinned aborigines (the savaras) who first used to worship him as Nilamadhava, before he was discovered and reinstalled in the temple of Puri by King Indradyumna.

Symbolisms and fables apart, the event of the Rath yatra is thus the celebration of the crumbling of barriers between the Lord and his followers. Usually in India, deities in the temple are supposed to be defiled and dishonoured by the touch of the common man and only the priests enjoy personal access to them. The uniqueness of Lord Jagannath's Rath yatra emerges as a challenge to that Brahmanical hegemonistic notion of access to Gods being the sole monopoly of the priests. During the Rath yatra thousands of devotees jostle with each other touching and hugging their beloved God.

**This feeling of oneness of the God with his devotees is in fact central to and is the core of Jagannath (or Krishna) consciousness signified through the absolute and total humanisation of the God.**

Hence, while no Hindu is alien to his religion's multifarious festivals and celebrations, the Rath yatra stands tall as one of the leading festivals in the Hindu religious calendar in its all encompassive message of universal brotherhood, love and celebration.

Hailing very close from Puri, the seat of the legend of Lord Jagannath and the largest Rath yatra celebrations in the world (this year the event saw the participation of a record 800,000 devotees), attending the London Rath yatra was a humbling experience. At the end of the day the outflow of genuine emotions and devotion evoked at London's Rath yatra did evoke the same feelings of joyous awe one experiences through the size and grandeur of the celebrations back home in Puri. Singing and dancing together with just connected strangers irrespective of race, colour, nations and social distinctions from all over the world, finally dawned upon me the true essence of the festival as never before.

Indeed, spirituality and religiousness is something that comes from within, just like that spontaneous skip of the feet to the tune of the 'Hare Krishna Hare Rama' mantra, that had the near 15,000 gathering of marchers and others joyously dance along side the rolling chariots, their spirits buoyed further by the occasional rain bursts. Every participant for sure that day collected his fond nugget of memory - For the Vaishnavite devotees the yatra was definitely another cause for spiritual celebration, for the local Indian population it was nostalgia relived, for the bystanders and tourists a memorable photo feature and for my fellow journalism students an educative cultural experience of a lifetime.

The near three hour long procession accompanied by floats, singers, musicians, and dancers saw the participants happily pull along the three 40-foot high colourful chariots from Hyde Park Corner to Trafalgar Square through the busy streets of central London's concrete skyline. The festivities culminated at Trafalgar Square with free Satvik (vegetarian) food for all and stage shows featuring performances by the Nitai Dance group, classical Odissi dance, and devotional music by the Hare Krishna Festival Troupe.

The concept of the festival which was brought to London in 1969 by ISKCON's founder-acharya Srila Prabhupada is now held in more than two hundred cities all over the world, though their duration varies between one to four days.

*Piyush Roy*

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I have recently been asked by one of my beginner Yoga students, "Why haven't we been learning about the Chakras yet?". This question prompted the eternal dilemma of a Yoga teacher, and has been plaguing me for a very long time: "what is and what is not appropriate to teach and to whom?"

In our fast moving world of IT, masses of information is widely available on any subject. This is marvellous for the eager and enquiring mind and should be applauded. At the same time anyone can publish anything and often, rather than being better informed, we become more confused. The esoteric theory of Chakras can be a case in point.

How could this ancient Tantric idea, traditionally passed down in secrecy only to the initiated, penetrate so widely into our modern Western Society?

The scope of this article allows only a glimpse of the background to the Chakras-concept and attempts to illustrate its complexity, and difficulty with the variety of its interpretations.

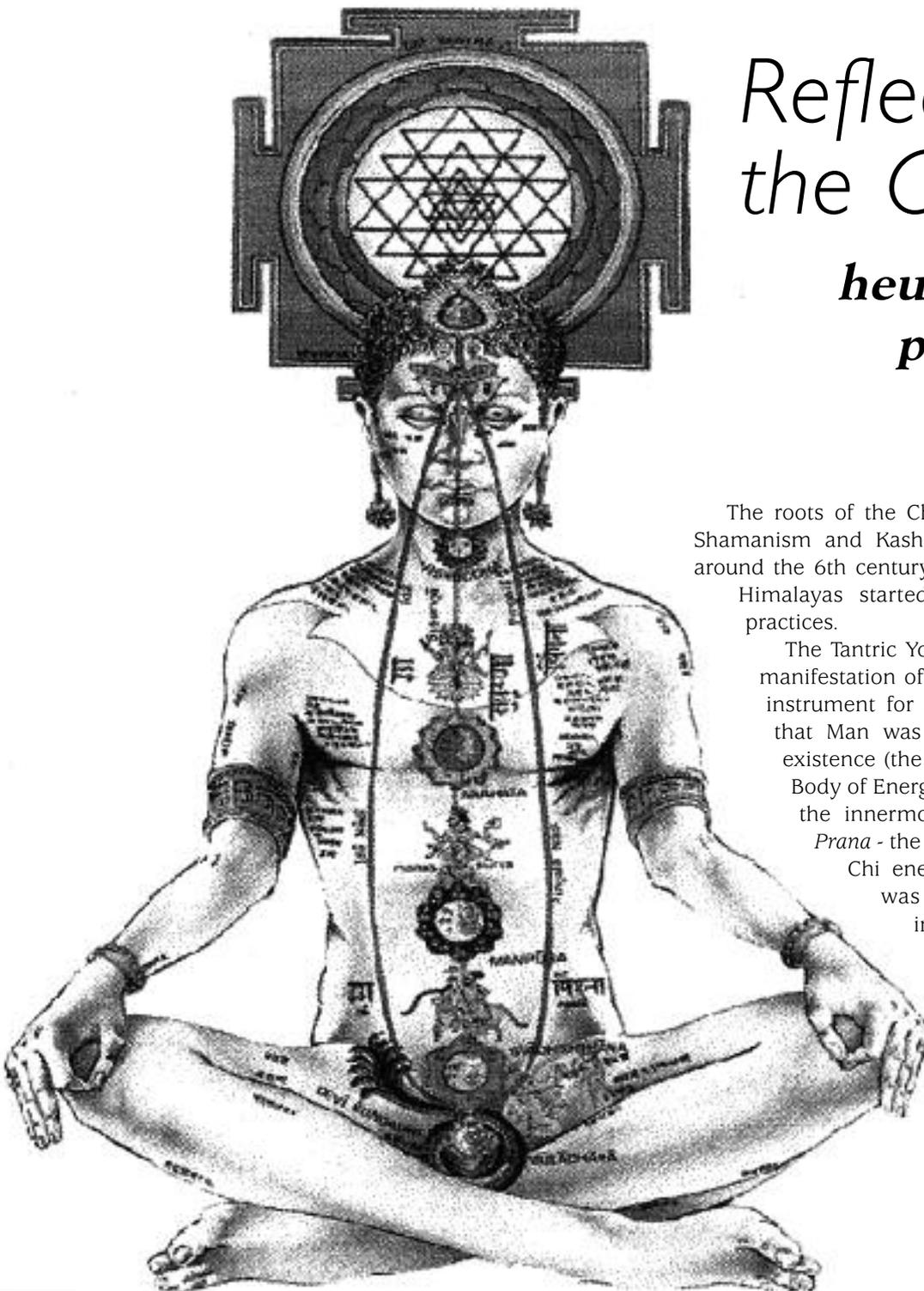
The word Cakra/Chakra comes from the Sanskrit root of CAR = to move, and has been adopted into the English language as 'wheel', but apart from this secular meaning, there are at least 4 other esoteric connotations, one of which is relevant to our enquiry. This one describes Chakras as *psycho-energetic vortices of the Body of Energy*. Can one successfully contemplate the idea of 'psycho-energetic vortices' and what is 'the Body of Energy'?

# Reflecting on the Chakras:

## *heuristic device or physical reality?*

The roots of the Chakra system are linked to archaic Shamanism and Kashmiri Saivism. It came to Yoga in around the 6th century CE when Tantrism from the West Himalayas started to penetrate into Indian Yogic practices.

The Tantric Yogis viewed the human body as the manifestation of the Divine and as such a potential instrument for attaining Liberation. They believed that Man was composed of 5 layers/sheaths of existence (the Physical Body of Matter, the Subtle Body of Energy, Mind, Awareness & Intuition, and the innermost Body of Bliss). The energy of *Prana* - the vital energy of the Universe (like the Chi energy in Chinese and Tao systems), was thought to exist everywhere, including the human body.



The *Prana* has many phases, forms, modifications, and aspects. (The concept of *Prana* alone is very complicated and explained in Yoga schools in various and often contradicting ways).

The Tantrics speculated that the energy in the body (the *Prana* in its modifications), could be manipulated through various Yogic techniques and practices to help in transcending the limitation of the Physical Body in order to reach the realm of Higher Cosmic Consciousness. The Chakras (vortexes of the energy) were thought of as the 'crossroads' of the important energy channels in the body, through which the energy could be controlled and distributed.

Most schools of Yoga and Tantra propose 6 Chakra centres, the Kashmiri scrolls lists 12, Vajrayana of Tibetan Buddhism lists 5 and some other schools of Yoga suggests as many as 150 existing along the main 6 chakras. The Pan-Hindu model of 6-7 chakras was adopted by most Yoga schools as a standardised model of esoteric anatomy.

***Each of the Chakras, was believed, to rotate at a specific optimal speed, in a specific direction and harmonised with a certain vibratory frequency.***

Whilst some schools of Yoga considered Chakras as merely a 'heuristic device' to aid meditation, others began to treat them as more 'real' and suggested identification with physiological nerve plexi along the spine or correlation with certain body organs (but this speculation contradicted Yogic scriptural testimony). These schools speculated that the chakras could potentially be used in Shamanic healing. Each of the Chakras, was believed, to rotate at a specific optimal speed, in a specific direction and harmonised with a certain vibratory frequency. At the same time each chakra was meant to work in concert with all the other main chakras in harmony and balance. Occasionally, this balance became disturbed and a chakra lost speed, or departed from its original position, shut down or became overactive. This disturbance had a negative effect on the body or mind balance and manifested itself as a disease. Each chakra was ascribed a particular deity, cosmic element, chant, animal, colour, number of petals in a lotus flower, etc, acting as Symbols to focus and meditated on, in order to bring the 'disturbed' chakra back into balance.

In Tibetan Buddhism the techniques of highest Yoga Tantra worked with the Chakra system in preparation and training for one's death. The Yoga of Bardo used the Chakra sites to 'simulate' death by controlling and inhibiting the movement of the 5 types of winds in the body, which acted as support of one's Consciousness. The Kagyu Buddhist lineage for example, used the Chakra system to generate heat and light through meditation so that the Clear Light nature of Mind could be experienced.

The list of speculations, interpretations and practices on Chakras could go on and offers a fascinating subject for

enquiry. In our culture the attraction of Chakras lies mainly in their potential for Mind/Body healing. Dissatisfaction with certain areas of allopathic medicine as well as the stress of modern living directs more people's attention to alternative and holistic healing as well as to ancient Eastern practices, such as the Chakras of the Pranic Body. Countless books, videos, Cds etc are now available, each giving their own version. The Chakras also provide a good marketing tool and commodity in our consumer driven culture and are fully exploited as such. You can buy Chakra bath oil, jumpers, incense, gems, candles, herbs, jewellery, cards, posters, stress management courses, computer games, etc. The contemporary description of chakras has adopted today's techno-scientific vocabulary and they are discussed as energy lights, energy transformers, soft ware, magnets, colour funnels, solar discs, floppy disks, CDs storing our DNA programming, etc, etc.

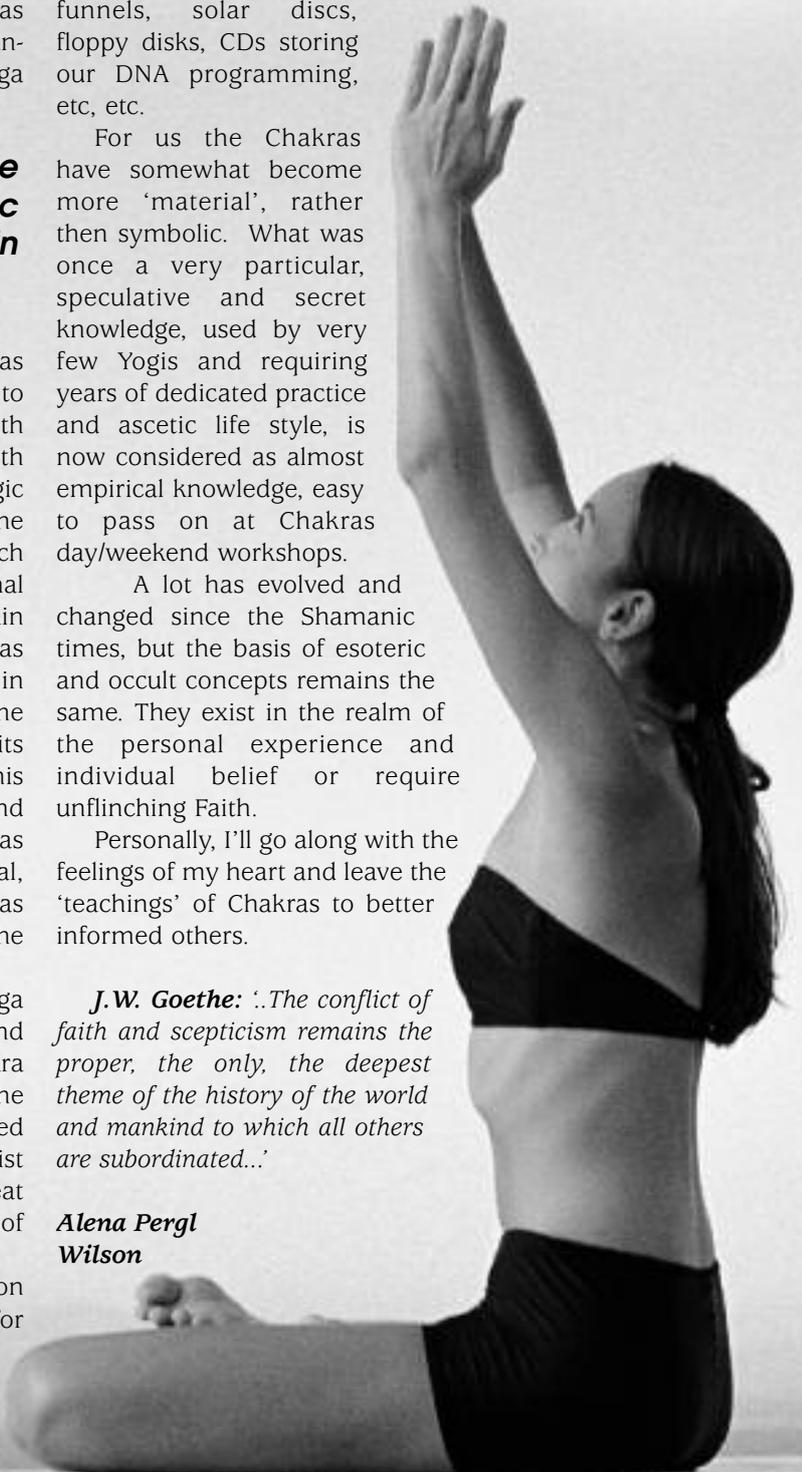
For us the Chakras have somewhat become more 'material', rather than symbolic. What was once a very particular, speculative and secret knowledge, used by very few Yogis and requiring years of dedicated practice and ascetic life style, is now considered as almost empirical knowledge, easy to pass on at Chakras day/weekend workshops.

A lot has evolved and changed since the Shamanic times, but the basis of esoteric and occult concepts remains the same. They exist in the realm of the personal experience and individual belief or require unflinching Faith.

Personally, I'll go along with the feelings of my heart and leave the 'teachings' of Chakras to better informed others.

***J.W. Goethe: 'The conflict of faith and scepticism remains the proper, the only, the deepest theme of the history of the world and mankind to which all others are subordinated...'***

***Alena Pergl  
Wilson***



# *“Let’s do something beautiful for God”*

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was born August 26th 1910 in Skopje, Macedonia. Her family belonged to the Albanian community, the majority of which were Muslim but Agnes was baptised Catholic. At twelve years old she experienced for the first time the desire to spend her life in God’s work, to give her life to Him and to let Him decide. But how could she be sure? She prayed and talked about it with her sister and her mother, and also her priest to whom she confessed her desire. She asked “how can I be sure”, he answered: “through your Joy. If you feel really happy by the idea that God might call you to serve Him and your neighbour, then this is the evidence that you have a call”. He added “the deep inner joy that you feel is the compass that indicates your direction in life”.

She was eighteen years old when she felt the decision was made - she would be a missionary for India. Taking her name in memory of Teresa of Lisieux, Sister Teresa was accepted as a novice on May 23rd 1929 in the Order of the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto in Calcutta. Two years later, after taking her first vows, she was sent to Bengal to help the Sisters caring for sick, starving and helpless mothers. She was touched by the endless misery that she saw there. On May 24th 1937 she took her final vows in Darjeeling, and was named Head of a secondary school for middle-class Bengali girls, in the centre of Calcutta. It was here where she first encountered the great slums and she could not close her eyes to the suffering of the poor people living in the streets. Her desire grew to do more for the poor.

It was with her mind filled with such thoughts that she left, on the 10th September, for a retreat in Darjeeling. “The most important journey of my life” she said. It was then that she clearly heard God’s voice. His message was clear: she had to leave the convent to help the poorest of the poor and to live with them. “It was an order, a duty, an absolute certainty. I knew what to do, but I did not know how.”

It was not until August 1948, and after overcoming many concerns expressed by church authorities, that Sister Teresa received permission to leave the Loreto community under the condition that she keep the vows of poverty, purity and obedience. She wanted to live amongst the poor and be part of them. She changed her Loreto robe for a cheap white and blue sari. She went to Patna to follow nursing training with the Sisters there. It was obvious to her that she could only help the poor in their dirty, sickening habitation if she herself knew how to prevent and cure.

Returning to Calcutta Sister Teresa went into the slums and the streets to talk with the poor and to help them. All she had was a piece of soap and five rupees but she helped to wash the babies and to clean wounds. The poor people were astonished: “who is this European woman in a cheap sari, who speaks fluent Bengali?” God was her great refuge for strength and material support. She always found the right medicine, clothes, food and a place to receive the poor where she was able to help them. Not only did the children receive sustenance and soap, but they also learned about God who is love and who, contrary to their obvious reality, really loves them.

From such humble beginnings Mother Teresa and her ‘Missionaries of Charity’ have become famous throughout the world for their devotion to the salvation and sanctification of the poor.



On September 5th 1997 Mother Teresa died. She had given herself totally, wholeheartedly, freely and unconditionally in the service of the poorest of the poor for the love of Jesus. Her memory serves to inspire others.

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See website [www.tisv.be/mt/en/life.htm](http://www.tisv.be/mt/en/life.htm)

shaping the future

*shaping the future*

shaping the future

“Today we are learning  
the language in  
which God created life.”

**Bill Clinton**

*‘Independent’ 17.6.2002*

# Cloned Embryos

Is *Faith* under the Microscope  
... or **Science**?

## Challenges and Values

Genetics, cloning and stem cell present some dramatic challenges to people of faith. These emerging technologies give humans the capability to cross what we had assumed to be fixed boundaries, and to question basic norms we have held dear. For instance, popular rhetoric elevates the human genome as “the book of Life”, as if to say here is a new and better way of reading what a human being is. Stem cells and therapeutic cloning are heralded as potential cures for otherwise untreatable diseases if only we will allow controversial embryo research. Such scientific claims make value assumptions of their own. Framed in a scientific context, they may seem valid, but do these assumptions carry over into our wider culture?

What do we see when they are scrutinised under the ethical microscope of wider understandings of human being found in religious and philosophical frameworks? Do we give way, retrench into our traditions, or engage in a two way exchange? The Church of Scotland’s Society Religion and Technology Project engages with researchers at the cutting edge of these issues as they have been emerging. We find that the bioscientific discoveries do indeed need to be placed in a wider framing of the value of the human person and human relations. We believe that Christian ethics remains a primary sources of such understanding in Europe offering many valuable insights on today’s issues, like the question of cloned embryos.

## Cloned Embryos and Ethical Problems

The first cloned human embryos were announced by Korean scientists in early 2004. Two UK proposals have received prominent media coverage for research involving cloned embryos to create stem cells that could eventually be used to help treat degenerative diseases. One is from the Newcastle Fertility Centre at Life; the other is expected from Professor Ian Wilmut’s group at the Roslin Institute. Such research is formally legal in the UK but ethically controversial. The European Commission’s ethical advisory group considered it premature and the European Parliament has voted against it. For those Christians for whom every embryo is already a human person, such research is ethically abhorrent.

Other Christians, while not seeing the embryo as ‘just a ball of cells’, note that the body naturally discards some 80% of embryos. They do not therefore equate the status of the early embryo with that of a baby, but something in process to becoming a baby, but which also may fail to develop. They might accept limited research for major human needs, but not as a *carte blanche* for all research for which researchers cite ‘for medical benefit’. Many Christians accept to some degree the present embryo stem cell research which relies on using the many surplus embryos from IVF treatments which would otherwise be destroyed. The Newcastle proposal, however, cites the eventual aim to use instead cloned embryos from a patient’s own body cells, so-called ‘therapeutic cloning’. The reason given is that these cloned embryos would be used to make replacement cells that are genetically matched to the patient, whereas cells from IVF embryos risk rejection.

### Problems with 'Therapeutic' Cloning

Other leading UK scientists have raised substantial doubts, however, about the expense and practicability of creating cloned embryos for general clinical practice. To treat the wide range of diseases for which therapeutic cloning is promoted would imply creating individual cloned embryos for perhaps hundreds of thousands of patients. This in turn might require millions of donated human eggs. The donation of intimate tissues by an invasive and sometimes painful procedure on such a scale is without precedent. It could also raise ethical concerns about pressures that might be put on women to donate. Ian Wilmut the leader of the Roslin team says that therapeutic cloning is unlikely to be practical for routine use.

Ethically there are two major objections. If only a few eggs were available, the therapies might be available only for a select few. This means that, the promotional claims justifying therapeutic cloning as a great medical breakthrough for humanity, it would in reality be a technique for those few fortunate or rich enough to have access to it. The justification for cloned embryo research for 'therapeutic cloning' is substantially undermined. In addition many Christians who could accept some use of surplus IVF embryos for stem cell research, object to the idea of creating embryos solely for the purpose of destroying them to extract stem cells. They see this as too instrumental a way of using human embryos, losing any sense that the human embryo is something more than a research tool or a resource for spare parts.

### Links to Reproductive Cloning

The initial aim of the Newcastle proposal is simply to improve the efficiency of making cloned human embryos for stem cell research, but this runs another problem. The same technology could equally be applied to reproductive human cloning. Although this is illegal in the UK and many other countries, certain maverick scientists have made much publicity of their intention to make and implant cloned embryos to create cloned babies, regardless of major risks and ethical objections. At this time it seems unwise to allow research that would make it easier for them to do so in some other country where there was little or no regulation. The UK bears a moral responsibility to the wider international community for the outcomes of its actions here. The regulatory authorities should refuse cloned embryo research applications at least until there is in place a United Nations agreement to ban reproductive human cloning. The Church of Scotland was among the first to call for such a ban in May 1997. But a formal UN proposal in 2000 by France and Germany, which carries a wide consensus, is currently stalled by an alternative proposal to ban any research use of human cloning, on which there are deep divisions.

### Alternatives - Parthenogenesis

The Newcastle proposal also aims to create 'parthenogenetic' human embryos as sources of stem cells. This involves chemically inducing an unfertilised human egg cell to divide as if it was an embryo. This is a novel and sensitive issue which was not debated in the Parliamentary debates in 2000/1 and has never been discussed much in public. Some argue it would overcome the ethical problems with stem cells derived from normal human embryos because, for fundamental genetic reasons, these parthenogenetic embryos would not be able to produce viable human offspring. Many however might find it unacceptable to sanction the use of a method which inevitably created human embryos which are so highly defective that they would not be viable. The creation of inherently unstable and defective embryos would also seem inconsistent with the concept that the embryo has a 'special status', upon which the current Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act was based.

### Cloning Embryos to study Diseased Cells

A new use of cloned embryos deserves closer examination. This is to use cloning technology to make disease state cells, first proposed by Roslin to study motor neuron disease cells, and now cited in the Newcastle case for diabetes. Cloned embryos would be created from a patient's cells, and stem cells taken from them to generate a continuous supply of the diseased cells for research. A House of Lords select committee concluded that cloned embryos "should not be created for research purposes unless there is a demonstrable and exceptional need which cannot be met by the use of surplus embryos." Speculative research is not enough justification. Are these exceptional cases? It is difficult to keep disease cells alive which are taken directly from patients, and some processes of extraction of cells are extremely difficult. The claim that this would overcome such problems requires careful medical evaluation of its realistic expectations by comparison with other options. We should not resort to the drastic step of creating cloned human embryos unless it would achieve a major medical breakthrough that nothing else could hope to achieve. This is by no means clear thus far. Many Christians hope that research into the factors involved in cell differentiation would one day enable adult tissues to be transformed into the relevant replacement cells without the need to use human embryos. Until such avenues have been thoroughly explored, cloned embryo research would seem premature.

**Dr Donald Bruce**

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# Embryonic Stem Cell Research

- *A Jewish Perspective*

**For the Jewish tradition, our bodies belong to God;** we have them on loan during our lease on life. God, as owner of our bodies, can and does impose conditions on our use of our bodies. Among those is the requirement that we seek to preserve human life and health (*pikkuah nefesh*). As a corollary to this, we have a duty to seek to develop new cures for human diseases.

The Jewish tradition accepts both natural and artificial means to overcome illness. Physicians are the agents and partners of God in the ongoing act of healing. Thus the mere fact that human beings created a specific therapy rather than finding it in nature does not impugn its legitimacy. On the contrary, we have a duty to God to develop and use any therapies that can aid us in taking care of our bodies, which ultimately belong to God. At the same time, all human beings, regardless of their levels of ability and disability, are created in the image of God and are to be valued as such.

Moreover, we are not God. We are not omniscient, as God is, and so we must take whatever precautions we can to ensure that our actions do not harm ourselves or our world in the very effort to improve them. A certain epistemological humility, in other words, must pervade whatever we do, especially when we are pushing the scientific envelope, as we are in stem cell research. We are, as Genesis says, supposed to work the world *and* preserve it (Genesis 2:15); it is that *balance* that is our divine duty.

## Jewish Views of Genetic Materials

During the first forty days of gestation, the fetus, according to the Talmud, is “as if it were simply water,” and from the forty-first day until birth it is “like the thigh of its mother”. Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits notes that “forty days in Talmudic terms may mean just under two months in our modern way of calculating gestation, since the Rabbi’s counted from the time of the first missed menstrual flow, while we count from the time of conception, approximately two weeks earlier. Neither men nor women may amputate their thigh at will because that would be injuring their bodies that belong to God. Thus according to Jewish law, abortion is generally prohibited, not as an act of murder (the Roman Catholic position), but as an act of self-injury. On the other hand, if the thigh turns gangrenous, then both men and women have the positive duty to have their thigh amputated in order to save their lives. Similarly, if the woman’s life or health is at stake, an abortion *must* be performed to save the life or the physical or mental health of the woman, for she is without question a full-fledged human being with all the protections of Jewish law, while the fetus is still only part of the woman’s body. When there is an elevated risk to the woman beyond that of normal pregnancy but not so much as to constitute a clear threat to her life or health, abortion is permitted but not required; that is an assessment that the woman should make in consultation with the father, other members of her family, her physician, her rabbi, and anyone else who can help her grapple with the many issues involved in her particular case. Some recent authorities, including the Conservative/Masorti Movement’s Committee on

Jewish Law and Standards, would also permit abortions in cases where testing indicates that the fetus is “severely defective,” suffering from serious malformations or terminal diseases like Tay-Sachs.

The upshot of the Jewish stance on abortion, then, is that *if* a fetus had been aborted for legitimate reasons under Jewish law, then the aborted fetus may be used to advance our efforts to preserve the life and health of others. If we may and even should use the bodies of human beings to enable others to live through organ transplantation, how much the more so may we use a part of a body — in this case, the fetus — for that purpose. Using aborted fetuses to do *research* is not as directly and clearly permitted as using them for the cures themselves once they have been developed; but since aborted fetuses would otherwise just be discarded or buried, we may and should extend the permission to use them for research that holds out the hope for curing diseases and saving lives.

Stem cells for research purposes, though, can also be procured from donated sperm and eggs mixed together in a Petri dish and cultured there. Since genetic materials outside the uterus have no chance of developing into a human being, they have even less legal status in Jewish law than zygotes and embryos in the first stages of gestation, when the Talmud classifies them “as if it were simply water”. Abortion is still prohibited during that time except for therapeutic purposes, for in the uterus such gametes have the potential of growing into a human being, but outside the womb, at least as of now, they have no such potential.

In our own day, when we understand that the fertilized egg cell has all the DNA that will ultimately produce a human being, we must clearly have respect for human embryos and even for human gametes alone (sperm and eggs), for they are the building blocks of human procreation. That is, given modern scientific knowledge, we cannot simply say that since the sources of Jewish law never talk about embryos outside the womb, no law exists on the subject, and we may rule however we wish. We Conservative Jews who take an historical approach to Jewish law must take modern science into account in our decisions. For that matter, even the Rabbis who proclaimed the embryo in the first forty days to be “as if it were simply water” clearly were announcing an analogy and not an equivalence, for they say that the embryo is “*as if*” it were water, and they clearly knew that from that water a child might develop, unlike any glass of drinking water!

Still, while we should have respect for gametes and embryos, they may be discarded if they are not going to be used for some good purpose. Since they cannot become a human being outside a woman’s uterus, their status is even less than that of an embryo in the first forty days of gestation, and thus we should not prohibit simply discarding them. Moreover, when a couple agrees to donate such embryos for purposes of medical research, our respect of such pre-embryos and embryos outside the womb should certainly be superseded by our duty to seek to cure diseases.

The Jewish tradition accepts both natural and artificial means to overcome illness.

As a result, frozen embryos originally created for purposes of overcoming infertility may be discarded (presumably after the couple has had as many children as they plan to produce or has given up in that effort), but they may also be used for good purposes. One such purpose is to produce stem cells for medical research. Indeed, couples should be encouraged to donate their extra embryos for such efforts.

What about creating embryos specifically for the purpose of doing medical research? That lacks the justification of using materials that would just be discarded anyway, but creating embryos specifically for research is nevertheless permissible under one condition.

Unlike the Roman Catholic view, the problem in doing this for the Jewish tradition is *not* that it would amount to murder to destroy an embryo outside the uterus, for in that state an embryo has even lesser status than an embryo in its first forty days *in utero*, much less that of a person. Neither would procuring the sperm for “farmed” embryos through masturbation constitute “wasting seed,” for here the purpose of masturbating would be specifically to use the man’s semen for the consecrated purpose of finding ways to heal illnesses.

Procuring eggs from a woman for this purpose, however, does pose a problem. It is not so much that this requires subjecting her to an invasive medical procedure, for now eggs can be procured without surgery and with minimal risk or pain through laparoscopy. To produce the eggs, though, the woman must be exposed to the drugs that produce hyperovulation, and there is some evidence that repeated use of such drugs increases a woman’s risk of ovarian cancer. The demonstrated risks are not so great as to make such stimulation unwise for a woman who needs to do this to overcome her own infertility or even to donate eggs once or twice to infertile couples, but they are sufficient to demand that caution be taken and that the number of eggs donated be limited. Here, where the eggs will be used not for producing a child but for medical research, undertaking such risks seems even less warranted. While such risks may be undertaken to overcome a woman’s own infertility or even to donate eggs once or twice to infertile couples, assuming such risks for medical research is less warranted, especially since embryos can also be obtained from frozen stores that couples plan on discarding and possibly from some of the other new methods that researchers are now developing. Thus while obtaining embryonic stem cells from frozen embryos that would otherwise be discarded is best, embryos may also be specifically created for purposes of medical research on the condition that the woman providing the eggs for such efforts does so only once or twice.

Given that the materials for stem cell research can be procured in permissible ways, the technology itself is morally neutral. It gains its moral valence on the basis of what we do with it.

The question, then, reduces to a risk-benefit analysis of stem cell research. The articles in a recent *Hastings Report* raise some questions to be considered in such an analysis, and I will not rehearse them here. I want to note only two things about them from a Jewish perspective:

**Given that the materials for stem cell research can be procured in permissible ways, the technology itself is morally neutral.**

1. The Jewish tradition sees the provision of health care as a communal responsibility, and so the justice arguments in the *Hastings Report* have a special resonance for Jews. Especially since much of the basic science in this area was funded by the government, the government has the right to require private companies to provide their applications of that science to those who cannot afford them at reduced rates or, if necessary, even for free. At the same time, the Jewish tradition does not demand socialism, and for many good reasons, we, in the United States, have adopted a modified, capitalistic system of economics. The trick, then, will be to balance access to applications of the new technology with the legitimate right of a private company to make a profit on its efforts to develop and market applications of stem cell research.

2. As difficult as it may be, we must draw a clear line between uses of this or any other technology for cure, which are to be applauded, as against uses of technology for enhancement, which must be approached with extreme caution. Jews have been the brunt of campaigns of eugenics in both the United States and Nazi Germany, and so we are especially sensitive to creating a model human being that is to be replicated through some of the technologies that have evolved in our time and in times to come. Moreover, when Jews see a disabled human being, we are not to recoil from the disability or count our blessings for not being disabled in that way; we are rather commanded to recite a blessing thanking God for making people different.

We probably want to argue that we should value disabled human beings already born while still striving to cure disabilities. We might even want to argue that some enhancements would be good. Defining exactly where the category of disability ends and where the category of enhancement begins is itself a hard problem. While these issues are raised far more by genetic engineering than by stem cell research *per se*, it is important to underscore that my responsum only addresses stem cell research for purposes of medical cures; a discussion of the use of this or any other technology for purposes of enhancement would require another paper.

The potential of embryonic stem cell research for creating organs for transplant and cures for diseases is, at least in theory, both awesome and hopeful. We may obtain them either from fetuses aborted in accordance with Jewish law or, more likely, from embryos about to be discarded or specifically created for this purpose. In light of our divine mandate to seek to maintain life and health, I would argue that from a Jewish perspective we have a *duty* to proceed with this research.

**Prof. Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff**

*Author of Matters of Life and Death: A Jewish Approach to Modern Medical Ethics Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society 1998*

## A HINDU VIEW OF

# STEM CELL RESEARCH

The current storm over stem cell research, which gained momentum with the U.S. elections in fall 2004, was sparked when President Bush presented his stem cell policy on August 9, 2001. The plan allows federal funds to be used in research on the few dozen human stem-cell lines that already exist world-wide, but not in the generation of new ones. Many scientists felt the policy was a crippling blow to cutting edge medical research that could lead to a better understanding of diseases, and perhaps even cures. Stem cells possess in theory the capacity to replace any damaged or defective tissue in the body. The technology could be a godsend for people suffering with diseases like, juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and cancer. For example, victims of osteoarthritis whose cartilage has been severely damaged could expect to use stem cells to grow new cartilage that would repair the damaged areas. Similarly, in the case of autoimmune diseases, stem cells might be used one day to rectify defects of the immune system, such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, or to regenerate tissues injured by myositis or scleroderma.

Thus, once scientists come to learn how the body utilizes these cells to regenerate tissue, they could be in a position to make stem cells a human **'repair kit'**. This could mark a revolution in medicine and usher in a new day in health care.

Opponents of stem cell research warn of 'mounting the slippery slope', and insist that if we are to embark on stem cell research, we must guarantee its integrity. The Roman Catholic Church makes the moral argument that embryos are human beings in a nascent stage of life. The President's bioethics council (2002) questions the ethics of the research on the grounds that it treats the "seeds of the next generation as mere raw materials" for satisfying our own needs.

Morality aside, the use of embryonic stem cells is debunked on the grounds that their therapeutic benefits are merely speculative, and their use is fraught with risks to the patient, evidenced by animal experiments which sometimes show the development of tumors (teratomas).

To make our own assessment of this controversy, we must first understand the biology and technology of the research. **Stem cells serve as 'building blocks of the body'**. Their two-fold uniqueness resides in their being unspecialized cells, capable of renewing themselves for long durations through cell division; and because they can 'differentiate' to become cells with more specialized functions. Stem cells are of three types: embryonic stem cells; adult stem cells; and embryonic fetal germ cells. Our interest is chiefly in the first.

Embryonic stem cells are so called because they come from the embryo. They are 'pluripotent', having the capacity to develop into any cell type taken from the three-fold germ layers of the embryo. They can multiply indefinitely without differentiating into specific cell types. The embryos from which stem cell lines are derived are chiefly taken from surplus eggs left over from in vitro fertilization procedures and contributed with the informed consent of donors.

**The moral dilemma the Hindu faces is: How to retain respect for the embryo without giving it absolute protection.**

On the one hand Hindus believe in the spiritual creation of nascent life, which invests it with inviolable dignity and sanctity. On the other hand, Hindus break ranks with Roman Catholics and other pro-life people on the grounds that the right of life of the fetus ought not to be absolutized. In place of absolute rights Hinduism advocates competing rights and values. For instance, in a pregnancy where the mother's life is in a balance, Hindus place greater weight on maternal rights than on fetal rights.

From a Hindu perspective, the case for donating excess embryos for research in an IVF context, is stronger than the case for therapeutic abortion. In vitro fertilization brings inestimable joy to infertile couples, but it leaves them with a dilemma: What to do with the extra embryos? In the event that the couple cannot imagine throwing their embryos away, or giving them to another couple for personal reasons, Hinduism believes it would be a noble end to donate them for research, which might one day help others to have children. On a parallel track, Hinduism supports research for adult stem cells which has less moral problems.

**Professor Cromwell Crawford  
University of Hawaii, Department of Religion**

# A Bahá'í perspective on new reproductive technologies

Approximately one in every seven couples seek medical advice for difficulties in conceiving. Of these, approximately 50% will benefit from some form of assisted conception. The purpose of this article is to present an understanding of the Bahá'í perspective on the new reproductive technologies.

One of the basic tenets of Bahá'í belief is the harmony of science and religion. In essence, knowledge is one; it can be either revealed (religion) or discovered (science). Scientific advances are therefore welcomed, but as with all knowledge, can be used for good or evil. The spiritual maturity with which individuals and society use the new technologies is therefore critical. Furthermore, religion gives knowledge its life and purpose.

This purpose is ultimately not limited by this earthly experience, but is illumined by the perspective of an eternal life, which holds the key to understanding life. Bahá'ís are exhorted to marry – as a favour to themselves, and in order to have children. Sexual relations are only permissible within marriage. If one is ill, we are instructed to seek the

advice of a 'competent' physician. If a couple are unable to conceive, they should seek medical advice. It is of course at this point that Bahá'í couples are faced with treatment options which may include assisted conception. It is convenient to consider the treatments that are currently available, and the issues they raise, as those which are explicitly permitted, those which are explicitly not permitted, and finally those which are currently left to the conscience of the individual. What is permitted is any procedure which only involves the eggs and sperm of the

married couple seeking help. It is permitted to produce sperm samples for analysis,

and for treatment with say artificial insemination, or in vitro fertilisation. It is the author's understanding that as *in vitro* fertilisation is permitted, so is embryo (as well as egg and sperm) cryopreservation.

The use of the eggs or sperm from any other party (donor) is not allowed for the purposes of treatment. Also, surrogacy, in view of its far-reaching implications, is also not permitted.

## *the harmony of science and religion*

This leaves issues such as pre-implantation genetic diagnosis and screening and therapeutic and reproductive cloning, which are currently left to the conscience of the individual.

How is the individual to use their conscience to address these issues? It is after all not a disinterested conscience, but one with a vested interest – that of wanting a child, often desperately. One approach is to use the science and logic of ethics. It is acknowledged that there can be many different perspectives, but here I express my own views. They do not in any way have a claim to being authoritative, but are offered as an aid to others.

The Bahá'í Faith, in keeping with other religious instruction, repeatedly exhorts its followers to care, protect and nourish the weak, the helpless and the poor. Do human embryos come into this category? That is to say, do embryos have the same status as a mature individual; the only difference being that embryos are helpless?

In nature, only a minority of embryos which are created (estimates vary) will implant. Implantation occurs around the 6th day post ovulation. There is currently no will or drive to pour significant resources into the daily demise of millions of embryos as a spiritual imperative. Indeed to do so would necessarily remove resources from adults and children, and would need to be so justified. On the other hand, significant resources are allocated to the care of the needy and the poor, who in most political and legal constitutions are considered equal in the sight of the law and social justice. It would follow that, at least currently, embryos are not considered in the same light as vulnerable humans.

If there is no positive duty to ensure that each and every embryo is provided with the means of its survival, we may yet be under a duty not to destroy an embryo. “Thou shalt not kill”, is a universal imperative, and a Bahá'í law. The Bahá'í Faith does permit, in exceptional circumstances, the sacrifice of a fetus in cases of significant health risk to the mother, if the fetus is likely to be severely handicapped, or have a condition which is incompatible with life. It may be considered, by extension, reasonable to permit the sacrifice of the embryo for the benefit of bringing about life. In vitro fertilisation necessarily involves the creation of embryos, many of which are doomed to perish (implantation rates - the chance of an embryo implanting - in good IVF programs are between 20–30%), in addition to the currently inevitable production of embryos which are surplus to requirements.

Another quandary arises from the practice of determining the health of the embryo, and only replacing the healthy or the (chromosomally) ‘normal’ embryos - so called pre-implantation genetic diagnosis and screening. Can it be right for one embryo to be sacrificed for another? Currently embryologists determine the ‘best’ embryo(s) in order to transfer them. They use all the tools at their disposal including morphology, developmental rate etc. There is therefore a selection process involved. Genetic screening is

an extension of that screening process. The question needs to be asked whether the spiritual imperative is for any embryo with the best chance of succeeding to be replaced, or whether it is a specific embryo which must be replaced. If the former, then it would appear to be spiritually responsible to select the embryo most able to implant. If the latter, the choice would need to be justified.

It may be argued that only the required number of embryos which can be replaced into the uterus should be created. The problem with this approach is that in our current stage of scientific development we cannot reduce the number of embryos created without significantly compromising the chances of conception. If one were to rely on the IVF procedure being repeated to compensate for the reduction in number of embryos, there would be a considerable increase in morbidity and costs.

The final issue which I will deal with is the relative nature of the thoughts outlined above; and that we do not need to (and indeed cannot credibly) strive for an absolute position. An analogy is drawn from the various legal definitions of death which have existed. In practice they have not reflected a spiritual truth, but have reflected the point beyond which medical science can no longer resuscitate the body. Thus the definitions have ranged from lack of breathing, to the heart stopping, to the current definition of brain stem death. This definition may yet change again in the future, depending upon medical science. Similarly, in the past the origins of the spiritual life (soul associated life) have varied, from quickening (fetal movements being felt) to the missed period. Today we are able to observe what appears to be the very beginning of life, before the mixing of the sperm and the egg. Nevertheless, pinpointing the moment of ensoulment still evades us. The arguments at this stage centre on the issue of potential – that the embryo may develop to a stage that it can manifest the spiritual. This is an important argument, but rests outside the scope of this article.

The science of reproductive technologies in the human is only one generation old. There are many unanswered scientific questions to which the implications of the answers are currently unknown. Much of the ensuing moral and philosophical issues will become clearer as knowledge and capabilities advance.

In summary, at the current stage of scientific knowledge and development, the Bahá'í view is one in which Bahá'ís are instructed to seek the advice of a competent physician, and can benefit from the new reproductive technologies, (though this is not a requirement), as long as the eggs and sperm of the married couple are used and the embryo replaced into the genetic mother.

**Masoud Afnan**

Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and specialist in fertility at the Birmingham Women's Hospital

# faithandfood.co

On 20th September 2004 in the House of Commons, Tolerance Limited launched [www.faithandfood.com](http://www.faithandfood.com), a website that advises people where, why and what they can eat in accordance with religious beliefs. An interfaith buffet reception took place in the Jubilee Room and was co-hosted by Simon Cohen and Keith Vaz MP. Leading members of the nine major faiths in the UK and food industry experts were present.



The concept of interfaith eating, the inspiration behind [faithandfood.com](http://faithandfood.com), came to me at the Parliament of the World Religions in Barcelona 2004. After what was supposed to have been an 'interactive' workshop, ten of us went to lunch together. We sat around the table chatting and joking for about an hour. A small part of me wished they had been a bit more talkative in the workshop, but then they did not have chips and dips served there. It might be a good idea for next time! Food has this wonderful effect on people.

These strangers gave me a fascinating insight not just into their religious backgrounds and beliefs, but into themselves as people. They opened up. Sharing food helped to provide an insight into the people behind the faiths. Interfaith eating is a simple and social means of challenging the ignorance and lack of empathy that threatens religious tolerance. What a fantastic method of bringing people of different faith traditions together by bringing food to the forefront.

77% of the UK population belong to a faith. For a large proportion of these people, what they eat is determined to a greater or lesser degree by their faith. [Faithandfood.com](http://Faithandfood.com) describes the major dietary practices and beliefs of the Baha'i faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. The [faithandfood](http://faithandfood.com) Fact Files have been written by leading representatives of the different religions. The website also has a directory of food outlets where people can eat in accordance with their beliefs. In a message of support from the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone says: "I am sure [faithandfood.com](http://faithandfood.com) will help people of all faiths, or none, to find suitable places in London where they can eat together."

We will be developing the site in partnership with the faith communities and food and drinks sector. We hope the website proves to be a valuable resource for people of all ages and backgrounds, and that it catalyses interfaith eating as a means of developing interfaith dialogue and understanding.

**Simon Cohen**

Simon Cohen is editor of [faithandfood.com](http://faithandfood.com) and Director of Tolerance Ltd. Please visit [www.tolerancelimited.com](http://www.tolerancelimited.com) and [www.faithandfood.com](http://www.faithandfood.com)

*Journalist Simon Rocker writes in The Times 23.10.04: 'Different religions can dine together thanks to online innovation'*

*'While shared table rules may help to bind members of one faith together, they can act as a barrier to associating with those of another.'*

*'Knowing what people from different traditions will or will not eat is an asset in an increasingly multifaith Britain. An innocent sherry trifle, for instance, contains several edible traps: alcohol (shunned by Muslims, Sikhs, or Bahai's); gelatin in the jelly (unless it is of vegetable extraction); eggs in the custard (off-limits to strict Hindus and Jains).'*

# An appeal for the full inclusion of Women's Voices in the Parliament of World Religions

On July 12, 2004, 70 – 100 participants of the Parliament of World Religions, Barcelona met to express concerns regarding the notable absence of a full range of women's voices and points of view that would have brought needed balance to the Parliament's dialogue about the issues of:

- access to clean water,
- the impact of religiously motivated violence on women and children,
- elimination of third world debt,
- the plight of refugees, 80 % of whom are women and children.

We have been moved to reflection and action by a spontaneous upsurge of energy caused by the desire to hear the full spectrum of women's experiences and perspectives, including that of feminists.

We respectfully offer a list of recommendations that move forward the religious commitment to the wellbeing of women, as described in the Global Ethics Statement of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions.

In conclusion, we stand ready to contribute and apply our collective expertise and first-person experience as women.

Without the adequate representation of a rainbow of women's voices, religious and spiritual dialogue will be irrelevant. It is our hope that by opening the door further to include a wider range of voices, the Parliament will enable fuller participation for all the underrepresented and marginalized.

## Recommendation to the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions:

The focus of the Parliament 'agenda' should include the gender inequality in the world's religious and spiritual traditions.

Equal numbers of women and men should be present on all programs.

There are gender issues embedded in every topic. Women's experiences often differ from mainstream interpretations. This should consistently be reflected in the presentations.

Scholars of women in religion and feminist scholars should be included in every program.

The interpretation of religious and spiritual texts from the perspective of women's and children's human rights should be given priority.

Broader criteria for selection of 'experts' must also be considered. The emphasis put upon 'experts' as a criteria for participant selection often excludes the primary concerns of women because women have been denied the opportunities for professional advancement.

Experiences from women's interfaith projects show that emphasis placed on building relations facilitates constructive dialogue. The format of programs should include, as a priority, group dialogues and the creation of space for co-equal conversations that produce collective insights.

Experts in the study of women and religion and feminist scholars should be included in every program.

Women often have less opportunity for education, employment and economic resources. This means they are less able to participate in Parliament activities. We propose that the Parliament actively sponsor women by developing partnerships that provide financial support. This also applies to other marginalized groups.

An equal number of women and men (including feminist scholars) should be members of the Parliament's governing bodies, especially the program task force and the advisors to the program task force.

**Annie Imbens-Fransen**

On behalf of the organizing committee of fourteen members  
[imbensan@xs4all.nl](mailto:imbensan@xs4all.nl)

## Principles of URI

- 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

# Missing Voices

From Thursday 19 February - Sunday 6 March 2005 the 2nd Annual Edinburgh Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace will bring together artists, scholars, grassroots spiritual activists, and speakers from the Sufi, Druze, Baha'i, Ismaili, Zoroastrian and other lesser known spiritual traditions, in addition to representatives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A special guest of the next Festival will be Melkite Priest Fr. Elias Chacour from Galilee, Israel, who has been thrice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. The Festival is again being jointly organized by the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, (EICWS), and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, (EIAL), and with the support of many other organizations.

During the 1970s and 80s, many people were involved in the citizen diplomacy movement that sought to bring citizens of the UK and USA in contact with citizens of the USSR. As those of us who participated discovered then, what we don't yet know about each other may be much more important than what we do know, or think we know. Stereotypes break down in the actual presence of another person like ourselves. Citizen diplomacy also created the context for later political change. This diplomacy began when those who engaged in it were willing to really meet the 'enemy', deliberately laying aside the preconceived ideas they held of each other.

Our inaugural festival and conference in March 2004 brought together at least three different kinds of presentations.

First, we learned from each other about our shared traditions, as well as those that form the unique voice of any one of us. Second, we heard from those who have been active in peacemaking on a spiritual basis on the ground in the Middle East. Among those we heard from included Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McClean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari, who have promoted ancient Middle Eastern rituals of forgiveness and reconciliation (called *sulha*) in their peace work in Israel and Palestine. Third, we invited participants to share in the musical and devotional spiritual practice presented, in order to gain an experiential view of the traditions we discussed. Simply knowing facts (or presumed facts) about another does not become real meeting without such an experience. The spiritual practices shared by participants included chant, shared prayer, sacred movement, meditation and Dances of Universal Peace.

The 2005 Festival and Conference will continue to focus on these three aspects of spiritual peacemaking, in potential and in action, in order to supplement the many other forums available for interfaith dialogue. In particular, next year's conference will focus on the "missing voices" often represented by mystical and prophetic voices for peace.

Throughout the history of the Middle Eastern spiritual traditions, the mystics and prophets have often offered points of view contrary to the prevailing mainstream. From Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross in the Christian tradition to the Sufis al-Hallaj and Suhrawardi in the Islamic to the historical prophets of the Hebrew bible, they have often suffered for it. In modern times, **prophets and mystics continue to offer their voices for new, non-violent solutions to conflict**, even when these opinions subject them to criticism or danger.

One of the purposes of Festival and Conference has been to show that a great range of opinion exists not only between traditions but also within

each. **The idea that any one group or person can claim to speak for the totality of any religion or spiritual tradition seems greatly outdated in a multi-cultural society, and many scholars of religious studies or comparative spirituality today prefer to speak, for instance, of multiple Christianities, Judaisms and Islams.** The media's tendency to want to stereotype any particular tradition or religion or to quote a single "Christian," "Jewish," or "Islamic" opinion on any issue has often hampered more than helped religious and interreligious understanding.

As organizers we are seeking to engage a progressively wider and more diverse range of representatives who have been working with spiritual tools in the fields of non-violent conflict resolution and world peace. No speaker represents the totality of any tradition. Likewise, no religious group or organization, or the Festival organization or sponsors, should be identified with the opinions of any speaker, whose opinions remain his/her own. One of the primary principles of the Festival is that all mystical and prophetic voices for non-violence and peace should be allowed a hearing, without censorship or prior vetting by any religious group or organization.

Many complex political and ethical issues face religious leaders and organizations today. Speakers may hold various personal points of view on these subjects; however, we have asked that they focus their talks and presentations on spirituality and spiritual approaches for peace, as there are many other forums in which to discuss other, better known political and ethical issues. The conference and festival themselves take no fixed position on any political, ethical or cultural question. We intend rather to create a forum in which we can listen to each other more deeply and learn with a more open mind and heart.

**Dr. Neil Douglas-Klotz,**

Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning,



Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari & Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McClean

(For more information on the Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace and how to participate, please see the Festival website at [www.eial.org](http://www.eial.org))

# Moon Under Her Feet: Women of the Apocalypse

by Kim S. Vidal • Published by Wild Goose Publications 2004

This book is divided into eleven bible studies, each based on verses taken from the Book of Revelation in the Christian Scriptures. The themes covered include women's prophetic voices; women's opposition to war; women's leadership; women refugees and eco-feminism. Hymns, songs, responsive readings, prayers and suggested readings are included to enhance exploration of the issues.

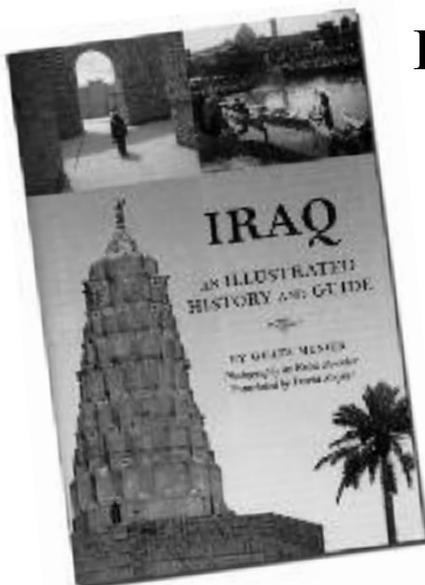
The structure of the book means that it can be read in many ways. It may be of interest to those who seek to know more about the imagery in the Book of Revelation or more generally how women are finding inspiration in their sacred writings. Groups or individuals can also use it as a resource to aid prayer and meditation on the offered texts. A detailed bibliography is provided for each session to enable further study of the biblical references and interpretations if so desired. The book has a broad awareness of social situations around the world and takes into account women's experiences in Canada, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

It is neither a prayer guide nor a social analysis, but rather both - overtly political and religious. The sessions in the book propose that women, inspired by their religious tradition, can participate in transforming situations of oppressive socio-economic and political conditions. *Moon Under Her Feet* is

not simply designed for those wishing to discover more about the Book of Revelation it seeks to raise a 'persistent resistance against all forms of oppression and exploitation, sexual and gender discrimination, degradation of human worth and destruction of the earth'.

A personal caveat: the learning objectives outlined at the beginning of each chapter are very specific. They do not seem to allow for the possibility that the individual or groups praying with the texts may come to alternative or additional understandings.

*Jennifer Sullivan*



Arris Books 2004  
ISBN 1 84437 018-6

## Iraq: An Illustrated History and Guide

By Gilles Munier translated by David Stryker  
Photography Erick Bonnier

It would be misleading to call this a 'book review', more it is an expression of pleasure and appreciation at finding this beautifully illustrated book on the shelves of the travel section of a well-known bookshop. Published initially in France just before the war the book serves as a reminder of the remarkable role Iraq has played in the history of humankind, of the warmth of its people and of the beauty of its landscape and architecture. For me, it is a symbol of hope that Iraq will one day be at peace, that its people will have the freedom to enjoy their homeland and that tourists will feel safe to explore all that it has to offer. To quote the publisher: 'Who wouldn't want to see some of the most ancient archeological sites in the world? Sip tea in a café that's been around since the Ottomans? Feel the breeze stirring the branches of Adam and Eve's tree? This is not a *Lonely Planet* style of travel book, there are no great listings of hotels or restaurants – like many homes, museums and much of the infrastructure these may well have sadly been destroyed or looted anyway – but it offers a valuable insight into the richness of the past and stimulates the imagination as to the future especially as it moves towards a democracy with elections due on 30th January 2005. My one criticism of the book, if it can be called that, is that it reflects the male culture rather too well, in that there is little evidence of the role that women have played in the history of the country or indeed in contemporary life.



# Picturing Enlightenment

## *The Art of Andy Weber*

Walk into Andy Weber's studio in Cumbria, England and you embark on a meditation. You may not mean to but you can't help it. The room is full of paintings, prints and photographs, each as intricate as the next, and all packed with visual information. You can look at them for years.

With this thought you stumble on their purpose. For these are Buddhist tangkhas. As Andy explains: "the first part of the word *tang* means recorded, or written down; the second part of the word derives from *jik*, which means alphabetic letter; when you get many letters of the alphabet written down, it becomes a *kha*, a message. Therefore tangkha means recorded message. The purpose of the painting, then is to carry the message from generation to generation, and aid meditation".

To the untrained eye, the paintings look as old as the hills of Nepal where Andy first encountered them in 1972. "In one way it is true, they are very old, and this is an iconography. So the image of the Buddha, or the deities, whether they are painted in Nepal or Tibet or America or Thailand, they all follow the same guidelines and the same rules, the measurements are the same and so it is an iconography. At the same time, the drawing of the Buddha really has to come not from the outside, but from the inside. Therefore, each one is totally original."

To the artist himself, meditation and painting are inextricably linked. His own first encounter with the tangkhas was in 1972, when he was living in Nepal, and studying Hindu philosophy and yoga. When the chance came to join a couple of Saddhus on their pilgrimage to Muktinath, he took it. On their way, he walked into a Buddhist temple, and time was arrested. "There were these mandalas on the ceiling and on the wall. It was quite early in the morning and I couldn't get out! I mean this place was like an energy chamber, it made me tremble and I thought what's the cause of this? What's the key behind those images?"

When he recounts the story now, and he must have told it a thousand times before, he still manages to convey an impression of startled wonder. It acted on him like an imperative. His desire to learn more about the tangkhas, led

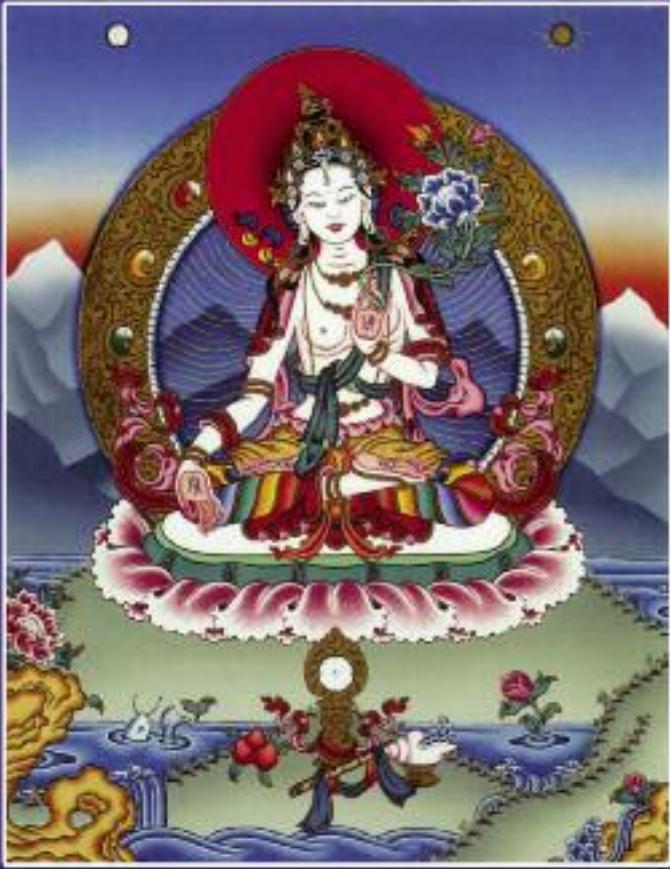
him to Dharamsala where he studied Buddhist philosophy for two years, before he even began to learn the rudiments of tangkha painting. It is a course of study, which continues to this day, despite the fact that he is now a teacher himself. It is a diligence that leaves one with a strong sense of the responsibility of the artist.

This, Andy agrees, is important. "That's why it takes a minimum of five years training, seven is more appropriate. Because you are creating images not for yourself, but for mankind. And because there is such a huge variety of images, it takes so long. There are, you see, deities and bodhisattvas, which represent every aspect of ourselves, and we humans are very complex beings. Of course, in turn all the different aspects represent a facet of the Buddha, and the ability to transform ourselves. Obviously then, you don't want to make mistakes with the iconography: millions of people use these images in their meditation, so one has to be exact. I've been doing it for twenty-nine years and three year's ago I went to my senior teacher, he was about seventy-three, and I still come there like a humble student with lots of questions."

This reverence somehow highlights the contrast between tangkha iconographer and the Turner Prize tradition of modern artist whose colour and confusion excites so much interest in the western press. "There is a simple difference" explains Andy, "one is a subjective art and one an objective art. Subjective art is when you plaster yourself all over something, whether you are using elephant dung or video screens it is all the same. You get paid a lot of money. Objective art is like iconography, some say it is not even art at all; its up to their perception, you know. But objective art has a purpose to convey a message from generation to generation."

If that explanation tends to imply that there is no comparison between the two, it is impossible to take issue with it. Standing now in front of a Weber representation of the Buddha, I do not know where to look first or longest, but I cannot look away. And the looking speaks volumes. It is not food for thought, but for life.

*Rebecca Irvine*



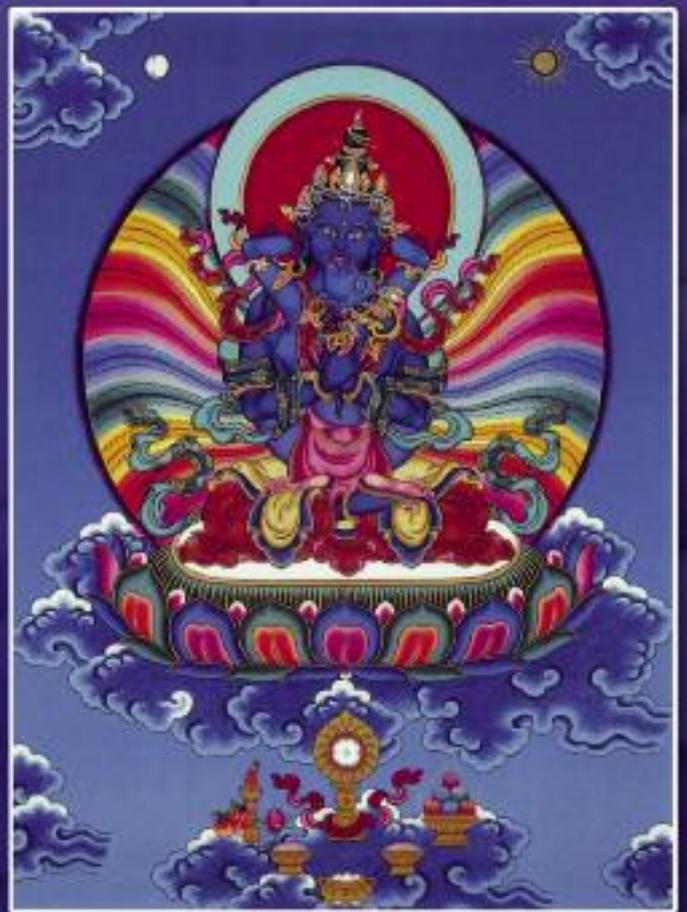
*White Tara*



*Akshobya Mandala*



*Mandala of the Five Elements*



*Vajradhara with Consort*

# Spiritual tourism

*Suspended for easy reach from the white  
chapel's black eaves, the bell strikes  
its brilliant shadow into the cracked*

*concrete of the moss-spotted yard.  
Its hush underlines the plush  
silence of the abandoned olive grove.*

*The temptation to shatter the dead  
stillness of noon in the Aegean,  
to ring out warnings of our presence*

*with one quick toll, is so clamorous  
we need refuge from our own nuisance,  
and open the iron door,*

*grateful some local saviour left  
the key in the lock, as if we  
are expected. Inside, geckos bask*

*between gold-leaf stars, all perfectly  
out of proportion on the azure ceiling.  
The larky cherubs cast into the plaster*

*altar screen, eyebrows raised, remind  
us of divine irony. Our host saint, Michael,  
jaunts through his icon, sheathed sword*

*bouncing from vine green thighs. He smiles  
when a candle's shiver shakes us:  
we have walked into someone's prayer.*

*It peals into us with bell-like urgency  
until we, of different faiths and credible  
doubts, pray for a god to hear it.*

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Rebecca, a Buddhist of 20 year's practice, is Manchester  
Cathedral's International Interfaith Poet of the Year 2004