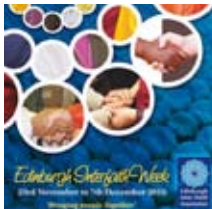


Interfaith Matters

Issue No. 6 December 2010

COMMUNITY NEWS AND FEATURES FOR EVERYONE

www.eifa.org.uk



Edinburgh Interfaith Week

Bringing people together - 23rd November to 7th December 2010



The UN General Assembly chamber in New York, where on 20 October this year, all members states joined to support the establishment of World Interfaith Harmony Week to be held each year during the first week of February.

UN in unanimous vote to create World Interfaith Harmony Week

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously established World Interfaith Harmony Week, in a vote on the 20th of October.

The resolution, which was first proposed by H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan a month earlier declares the first week of February each year to be designated as World Interfaith Harmony Week and urges all governments to play their part in

supporting and promoting its aims and objectives.

The thrust of the resolution was clearly set-out in three principal clauses, which declared that the General Assembly:

Reaffirms that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;

Proclaims the first week of February of every year the

World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs;

Encourages all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples and other places of Worship during that week based on Love of God and Love of the Neighbour, or based on Love

of the Good and Love of the Neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions.

Speaking in the aftermath of the resolution being passed, Jordan's ambassador to the UN said: "We believe this idea has the potential to do a lot of good in the world by: Co-ordinating and uniting the efforts of all the interfaith groups doing
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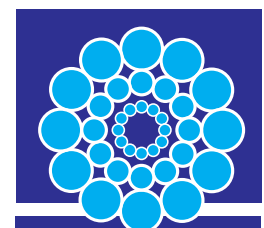
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Edinburgh
Inter-Faith
Association

Registered Charity
SCO 17622

Interfaith  Matters
digital online version
at www.eifa.org.uk

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InterfaithMatters

At grassroots, city level and wider within the Lothians there has been a tremendous growth in inter-faith encounter and engagement in the past 5-10 years. This new community newspaper is part of this growth.

For this newspaper to be truly a community project we invite volunteers from our richly diverse and experienced community to come forward to take a leading role in the development and growth of not only the newspaper but inter-faith community action. Articles in this sixth edition have been written by people from the faith communities. We welcome contributions.

Victor Spence
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Letters to the Editor InterfaithMatters

The Future of Love - a conversation between a Guru and a Bishop The Festival of Spirituality and Peace 7-30 August 2010

What is Love? Has it got a future? Is it/can it evolve? And if so, how?

Even though they came from very different traditions it was good to hear these two men talk about love and listen politely to each other without constant interruptions or argument. But the

discussion was carried on between two members of the male sex; it was carried on at a fairly philosophic and intellectual level, and they seemed to be talking to the audience rather than each other. What about the other 50% of humanity?

Might I suggest that you

organise another evening when two women talk to each other about the same topic?

I'm sure it would be quite different in both subject matter and style.

Yours sincerely

Avis Swarbrick
Dunfermline



The theme for next year's Holocaust Memorial Day, which falls on 27 January, is 'Untold Stories'.

The organisers are asking everyone in the country to think about their role in a story. Not fictional stories, but the stories of those whose lives were destroyed or changed beyond recognition by the regimes of hatred that the world witnessed during Nazi persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

There are some stories which we know, we know about Oskar Schindler, the businessman who saved 1200 Jews in Nazi Europe as his remarkable story was told in the 1994 film Schindler's

List. But for every story that we know there are millions more that we do not. The millions of people murdered in genocides are not a statistic. They were individuals. Somebody's friend. A mother. A father. A child. A neighbour. Now, HMD 2011 it is time for their Untold Stories to become part of our lives.

We all tell hundreds of stories every day. We tell the story of our values and beliefs in the way we act and behave towards others. On HMD we should all ask ourselves if we hear the Untold Stories of those around us?

We can ask if we hear the stories of the marginalised. We can listen to all of the stories within our

communities. By listening to these stories, making them part of our lives, we can bring about a change for the benefit of all.

By listening and telling stories we have not heard before - whether they are from our communities or those of people or towns destroyed during the Holocaust, Nazi persecution or in other genocides we can understand the need to live in a society which values difference and does not discriminate against anyone based on their race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or gender.

More information and educational resources on HMD can be found at: www.hmd.org.uk.

Lively Interfaith dialogue

Around 35 people recently attended a lively and engaging Interfaith Conversation on Islam at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral with Imam Sohail Ashfaq from Blackhall Mosque as the guest speaker.

Those who attended were given a hand-out on some similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity to provide a context for the discussion

that followed Imam Sohail's comprehensive and informative introduction. The evening included an opportunity for people to get together in groups to discuss what they had learned and put forward their questions for discussion to Imam Sohail.

Feedback from the event was very positive with the majority of respondents i.e. 60% rating the event as

"Very Good", 40% rating it as "Good" and a resounding 100% saying they felt more confident discussing inter-faith issues as a result of attending the event which was organised by the Edinburgh Interfaith Association in partnership with St Mary's. This was the first in a series of Interfaith Conversations to be held at St Mary's over the next few months.

Fiona Park

From page 1

positive work with one focused theme at one specific time annually, thereby increasing their collective momentum and eliminating redundancy.

(2) Harnessing and utilizing the collective might of the world's second-largest infrastructure (that of places of worship — the largest being that of education) specifically for peace and harmony in the world: inserting, as it were, the right 'software' into the world's religious 'hardware'.

(3) Permanently and regularly encouraging the silent majority of preachers to declare themselves for peace and harmony and providing a ready-made vehicle for them to do so. Moreover, if preachers and teachers commit themselves on the record once a year to peace and harmony, this means that when the next inter-religious crisis or provocation occurs, they cannot then relapse into parochial fear and mistrust, and will be more likely to resist the winds of popular demagoguery."

Victor Spence, General Secretary of the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association expressed his delight at the establishment of World Interfaith Harmony Week, adding: "This is a major step forward for inter-faith work around the world. Here in Edinburgh we already have our own well established inter-faith week. But we now have the opportunity to be part of a global event working for peace and harmony across religions and cultures. I believe we should seize that opportunity and that we should move our own inter-faith week from its current slot in late November to the first week in February and be part of this truly global event."

A website has already been established to encourage and support the development of this work at www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com, where resources may be shared and news of events posted.



Wege Singh

Distant echoes

I had the privilege of attending the Service at St Giles Cathedral earlier this month for the 450th Commemoration of the Reformation which was in itself a historic moment. This moving service and being in St Giles brought back a 25 year old memory of a time I accompanied my late father Sardar Karnel Singh Landa to the Cathedral for one of Edinburgh's earliest inter-faith services.

From a group of different faith representatives my father was asked for a Sikh contribution. He decided to call out loud the words 'Nanak Naam Chardi kala Tere baneh Sarbat da Bhala - Jo Bole So Nihal - Sath Siri Akal' that we do at all Sikh community gatherings.

These words mean 'Nanak proclaims through the creators grace may all creation live in high spirits and peace' whom so ever calls out these words, shall be fulfilled and it is also a call to action or duty, the Sikh slogan or jaikara) expressing ebullient religious fervour or a mood of joy and celebration, is an integral part of any Sikh service.

As I stood there in St Giles in prayer and reflection I heard the distant echo of my father Sardar Karnel Singh Landa; an inspiration for my commitment to interfaith engagement.

Wege Singh
Vice President
Guru Nanak Gurdwara

The Reformation and beyond



Representatives of all Edinburgh's faith communities with the First Minister in the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle at the conclusion of the day's events.

The legacy of the Scottish Reformation was marked with a day conference organised by Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church, followed by a service of worship at St Giles in the evening.

The theme for the conference was, *Scottish Reformation - Marking the Legacy, Imagining the Future*.

Held in the Storytelling Centre on the Royal Mile, the conference was opened by Archbishop Mario Conti with the initial address by The First Minister Alex Salmond.

Others speakers included former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Very Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting, Rev Dr Alison Peden, from the Scottish Episcopal Church and historian, Prof Tom Devine. Also in the line-up was Prof Paul Murray, an expert in the field of ecumenism who shared the floor with Dr Kesting to discuss ecumenical relations. Each session was run along the lines of What has the Reformation done for us?

A member of the commission commented: "Such an

ecumenical event would have been difficult to conceive even some 30 years ago. Mutual distrust and suspicion, caricatures and stereotypes of each other inhibited positive relationships. Through patient dialogue on major theological issues, mutual respect and understanding has grown and developed.

"But this year alone we have seen vast strides taken in ecumenical relationships. Pope Benedict XVI came to Scotland and met the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Right Rev John Christie. The visit was a sign of the continuing work of Christ's Church in the 21st century and helped strengthen interfaith and interdenominational relations. We have learned to accept that the theological issues we disagree on are less important than those we agree on. The conference and service allow the churches to build on existing relations and helping to creating momentum to continue working together on issues of common interest. It shows that the denominations are striving to working

together in the spirit of the Lund Principle of 1952; that is, that churches should not do apart what they can do together.

"An event of this kind gives us an opportunity of healing of memories. From the past we can learn how to deal with the present. Old wounds are healed and relations are strengthened by it.

"2010 has seen three key events for the Christian Community in Scotland: the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation;

the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference and the visit of Pope Benedict XVI.


Following the joint service for worship at St Giles, which was also attended by representatives of Edinburgh's major faith communities, the Rt Rev John C Christie

Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland commented: "The Liturgy for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows was prepared by the Joint Commission on Doctrine by the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church. It was, I felt, particularly moving as the Cardinal, the Primus and myself, using the liturgy for the first time in public, led the congregation through the reaffirmation of vows and sealing its intent by repeating the words of the Apostles Creed together.

"I am certain that this was a major milestone for Scottish Churches as together we face the challenges of our times by so appropriately acknowledging our common roots and our shared faith."


The day concluded with a reception hosted by the First Minister in the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle.

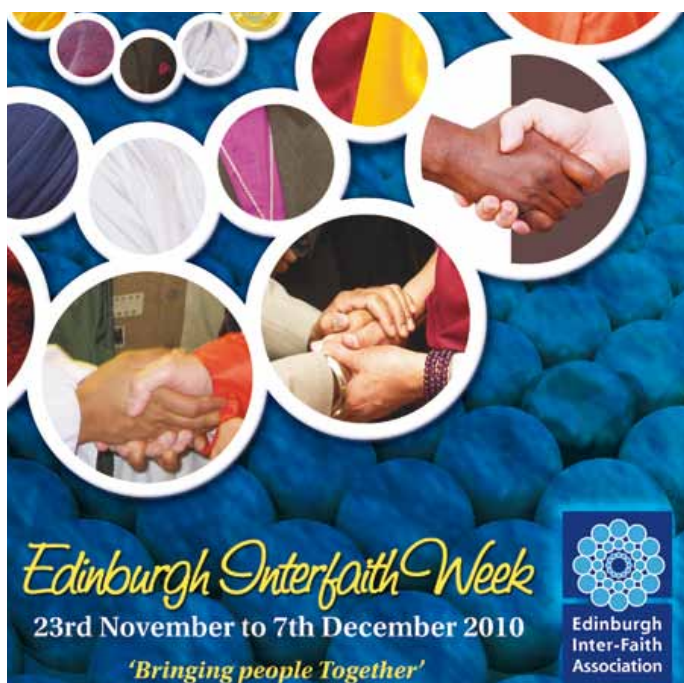
Islam Awareness Week in Edinburgh
29th November – 5th December



An opportunity for people of all religions and beliefs to come together in a spirit of understanding and co-operation. Islam Awareness Week is also about helping to build links between people, a celebration of art and culture and getting people to work together for the common good.

IAW programme organisers:
Islamic Information Scotland on 0141 574 4300
For events see www.iaw.org.uk





Building respect

The Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association with the support of the Scottish Government and the City of Edinburgh Council are very proud to offer this programme of events, dialogues and encounters to celebrate Inter-Faith Week 2010 in Edinburgh.

All the events are free of charge, and we thank everyone who has contributed their time and effort to make these events happen. Our work and intention is

to bring people together to strengthen or make new friendships. A special thanks to those who consistently stretch out the hand of friendship and kindness to others.

Celebration is at the heart of this programme. We believe that tolerating the beliefs and traditions of others is not enough. We seek to build respect, understand, cooperation and to celebrate the diversity around us

as the basis of a harmonious and peaceful society.

We hope Inter-Faith Week will act as a springboard for you to build relationships across the community. We all need to play our part if we want to maintain and develop a culture of respect, understanding, friendship and co-operation in our city and beyond.

Rev Donald Reid and Rabbi David Rose
Co-Conveners of EIFA

Christian Jewish dialogue

Sunday 28th November at 10.45
Inter-Faith Week Worship at St Peter's Church
St Peter's Church, Luton Place



Rabbi David Rose

To celebrate Inter-Faith Week, St Peter's Church welcomes Rabbi David Rose of The Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and Co-Convener of Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association to its Sunday Service.

Rabbi Rose will reflect on Christians In Dialogue With Jews in the 10.45 service of Holy Communion and will facilitate a discussion on the same topic in the church hall at 12.15pm until 1.15pm.

Freedom and liberty

Tuesday 23rd November at 7.30pm
A three faiths dialogue
Martin Hall, New College, The Mound

Professor Hugh Goddard,, Director of the Alwaleed bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World will chair a panel of representatives of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions in a discussion on the theme of Freedom and Liberty. There will be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions.

The panel will comprise, Dr George Wilkes, found director of the Ethics

in War and Peace Making Programme, at the University of Edinburgh; Shayk Ruzwan Muhammed, Co-founder of The Solas Foundation; and Sr Isabel Smyth, honorary lecturer for Inter-Faith Studies, University of Glasgow and founding director of the Scottish Inter-Faith Council.



Meeting the neighbours



Archbishop Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien

Meet your Muslim Neighbours
Saturday 27 November at 1.00pm
Blackhall Mosque, 1 House O'hill Road.

His Eminence Archbishop Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien will visit the new Blackhall Mosque for the first time.

We encourage Christian practitioners from across denominations in the city to join Cardinal O'Brien as

he goes to meet his Muslim neighbours.

People from all faiths and beliefs are most welcome this day to be guests of the Muslim community of Blackhall Mosque.



Meet Your Buddhist Neighbours
Friday 3rd December at 11am – 12.30pm
Samye Dzong Buddhist Centre, 4 Walker Street.

An opportunity to learn about the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Come and share a cup of tea and conversation at the new centre in the heart of Edinburgh and take some time to sit quietly in the meditation room.

Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche and Ani Rinchen Khandro outside the recently opened Kagyu Samye Dzong premises in Edinburgh's West End



Wege Singh, Vice President, Guru Nanak Gurdwara

Meet Your Sikh Neighbours
Sunday 5th December at 1.30pm
Guru Nanak Gurdwara, 1 Sherriff Brae, Leith.

The Sikh Community at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Leith invite you to come and experience Sikh worship, hear a short introduction to the Sikh faith and the Gurdwara. There will be an opportunity to ask questions and to generally find out

more about the Sikh faith. Following the talk guests will be welcome to join their hosts for some Langar, a blessed vegetarian meal served at Gurdwaras around the world and to which all are made welcome.





Just a few of the 459,000 children fed by Mary's Meals every day of the year.

Food for thought

Inter-Faith Week Community Meal
Thursday 2nd December 6.00pm, St John's Church Hall, Lothian Road

Mary's Meals now feed over 459,000 children every day in 15 countries. On the occasion of the 2010 Inter-Faith Week we would like to make a difference to the lives of children in Malawi.

Normally our monthly community meal is free or by donation. We will have a £6.50 ticket for this community meal and it is hard to believe that the £6.50 will feed a child in Malawi

for a whole year through the great works of the Scottish based charity Mary's Meals. See www.marysmeals.org

For advance tickets go to www.hubtickets.co.uk or call 0131 473 2000

In Conversation on 'Faith & Work'
Thursday 2nd December – 7.30pm
Colinton Parish Church, Dell Road



Charlie Miller

Church of Scotland Minister and City Councillor, Rev Ewan Aitken will chair a conversation with successful city hairdresser Charlie Miller on how his beliefs and values influence his working life and business.

Charlie Miller has been

deeply influenced by Christianity and Buddhism as well as new thought on an integral spirituality and integral living. Charlie Miller refers to himself as a spiritual nomad and Ewan Aitken will explore with Charlie the influences on him and how they shape his life and work.



Rev Ewan Aitken

Festival of light

Saturday 4th December at 3pm
St Mark's Unitarian Church, 7 Castle Terrace

Three religious communities, Unitarian in Edinburgh, Sukkat Shalom - the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community and the Wild Geese Sangha of Interbeing Buddhists celebrate our sharing of the sacred space of St Mark's.

The theme of the service will be light, and it will include the lighting of the Hanukkah candles, the chalice of the Unitarians and meditative lights of the Buddhists.

People of all faiths and none are warmly invited to this service.

Getting to the heart of religion



An introduction to The Heart of The World's Religions: A Model for Understanding

Monday 29th November 7.30pm
St John's Church Hall, Lothian Road

Rev Prof Frank Whaling, Emeritus Professor of The Study of Religion and President of the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association will give what promises to be a fascinating overview of the world's great religions. This event is a free introduction to a 10 week course starting in February 2011.

Each session of the course will include :

1. The basic concepts of each faith tradition using a structure based on the 'Model of Religion' by Prof Frank Whaling.
2. What for each speaker is the heart of their faith tradition & its contribution to One Scotland.
3. A brief experience of a spiritual / ritual practice meditation from each tradition.

In the course of ten weeks, participants will have the opportunity to explore and deepen their knowledge of the rich diversity of the major religions including: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Paganism, the Baha'i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism

The course will run for 10 weeks from 8 February. For more details contact Katherine on 0131 228 8146 or by email at katherine@eifa.org.uk.

Monday 6th December from 6.30pm

St Columba's Hospice
LIGHT A LIGHT 2010
Making Every Minute Count

The lights on the Tree of Remembrance will be lit in a ceremony that starts at 6.30pm on Monday 6th December in Charlotte Square Gardens. We all look forward to seeing you there.

Immediately after the **light a light ceremony** there will be a **Service of Remembrance** at St John's Church on Princes Street. Hot drinks and other goodies will be on offer.

To Light a Light on the St Columba's Tree of Remembrance visit our website www.stcolumbushospice.org.uk or **0131 551 1381**

Festival adopts gold standard

I am sitting in a coffee bar on Lothian Road drinking enough coffee to keep me awake for hours and facing me are two men with smiling faces radiating satisfaction and contentment.

I have arranged to meet Donald Reid and Tom Lea to discuss with them how they felt the Festival of Spirituality and Peace had gone. "Absolute vintage, there was much more buzz this year and the programme attracted more people" enthused Tom, "a good, solid experience" reflected Donald, "the balance was good and there was an overall feeling of coherence. We celebrated the world's faiths through the prism of the Golden Rule and the performance events too conveyed the spirituality of the peoples".

The Festival which is a partnership between St John's and Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association, attracted more newspaper publicity than in the previous nine years put together, thanks to Victor Spence Festival Co-Director. A large proportion of Radio 2's Good Morning Sunday (hosted by Aled Jones) was also devoted to a very positive report on the Festival.

Figures are notoriously difficult to calculate but Donald reckons that attendances were up by about 25%. This means that, including the many free events, something like 25,000 people passed through St John's doors.

I asked what they regarded as the highlights. Simon Callow talking about his mother's dementia seemed to liberate people in the audience to share their own experiences, "a genuine dialogue emerged" said Tom. Richard Moore, who was blinded by a rubber bullet on 'Bloody Sunday' was "just the sort of person the Festival should be giving a platform to and the former Roman Catholic priest Oliver McTernan, who now works on conflict resolution, was described by Donald as "an incredibly wise man I wish we could spend three weeks with him". Richard Holloway's contribution was described as a "compelling tour de force" and other speakers were recognised as making a real impact on the Festival and developing the theme in really creative ways. It was perhaps a sign of the Festival's growing importance in the city that the Justice Minister Kenny



Richard Moore, accompanied by Victor Spence (FOSP Co-Director) shares his story with senior pupils from St Thomas of Aquinas RC High School.

MacAskill had asked to come back and share in the opening ceremony.

But it was not all about the spoken word. Both had special words of praise for the drummers – "wonderful" said Donald whilst Tom commented "it was so good to see so many people coming every night and coming out really energised, every time I went it lifted me up". The South Korean singers came in for praise too – "so pure and beautiful" and their rendition of a song by The Proclaimers went down really well! The Japanese tea ceremony was described as "magical".

One thing that I wasn't expecting was when they said how important the morning prayers were in the chapel each day at 9.15am. This is the regular prayer time for St John's clergy and others, but during the Festival Buddhist monks joined them and would add their own chants to their prayers. They came to one of the 10.30am services on Sunday and their presence obviously made

quite an impact on many people.

Apart from all this the Festival also raised money to support the work of Faith in Older People and an orphanage in Georgia as well as the festival's own chosen 'good causes': The Welcoming Project and for the production of educational materials on the Golden Rule for use in schools. We were drawn together in St John's but were always being encouraged to look outward to a world in need.

At the heart of everything were the 30 or so volunteers. "Intergenerational, multi-faith and international" who created a sort of nucleus community at the heart of a transient Festival. And then there were the staff members, tired and exhausted by the end, but really happy that things had gone so well. There are always things that go wrong, I suggested, and I wondered if there were any great problems or disappointments. "Yes" sighed Donald, "we were really sorry that the

Ugandan musician Andrew Kalyowa Kagumba was unable to come as two of his relatives had been injured in the terrorist bomb attack in Kampala. That reminds us of the sort of world we are living in." It does indeed and to my mind underlines why it is so important that we have a Festival of Spirituality and Peace.

And what of the future? A theme has already been chosen for the next Festival and ideas are slowly taking shape. For the moment though there is a time for reflection and also for recognising the enormous amount of hard work that so many people put into this Festival. It has become an important part of EIFA's and St John's work and witness and we who merely attended are greatly in their debt. Thank you!

I left the coffee bar wishing that there could be a re-run and that I could now book-in for all those events that I had missed. this time around.

Malcolm Goldsmith



The Korean group 'Ariul' were a major hit at this year's festival with their fusion of western and eastern music played on traditional Korean instruments.



HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal of Saudi Arabia signing for his honorary degree as HRH Prince Philip, Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh looks on. The centre is funded by the Prince's Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation. (Photo courtesy of the University of Edinburgh)

Benefactor opens Alwaleed Centre

The University of Edinburgh's Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World was formally opened in March this year by HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh (pictured). The Centre works closely with the university's Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, which has a very distinguished 250-year history, but the Alwaleed Centre is primarily focused on outreach work throughout Scotland and the UK.

The centre aims to improve the knowledge and understanding of Islamic civilisation and of Muslims in Britain among policy-makers, the general public and students of all ages through a comprehensive educational outreach programme, and by helping to

integrate the study of Islamic civilisation into the school curriculum.

The Centre also has a distinctly international flavour as it is part of a network of six centres based in the UK (Edinburgh and Cambridge), the USA (Harvard and Georgetown) and the Middle East (Cairo and Beirut).

The Edinburgh Alwaleed Centre will be hosting regular seminars, school visits and other events in Edinburgh and beyond. If you are interested in learning more about Islamic civilisation, Muslims in Britain and the relationship between the world of Islam and the West then you can contact the centre: thealwaleedcentre@ed.ac.uk or visit the website for more information: www.alwaleed.ed.ac.uk.

Tom Lea

FEATURED FESTIVAL

Shedding light on Hanukkah

Every year between the end of November and the end of December, Jewish people around the world celebrate the holiday of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. Hanukkah begins on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, but the starting date on the western calendar varies from year to year. The holiday celebrates the events which took place over 2,300 years ago in the land of Judea, which is now Israel.

There was a Syrian king, Antiochus, who at that time ruled Judea. The king ordered the Jewish people to reject their God, their religion, their customs and their beliefs and to worship the Greek gods.

There were some who did as they were told, but many refused. One who refused was Judah Maccabee. Judah and his four brothers formed an army and chose as their name the word "Maccabee", which means hammer. After three years of fighting, the Maccabees were finally successful in driving the Syrians out of Israel and reclaimed the Temple in Jerusalem. The Maccabees wanted to clean the building and to remove



the hated Greek symbols and statues. On the 25th day of the month of Kislev, the job was finished and the temple was rededicated.

When Judah and his followers finished cleaning the temple, they wanted to light the eternal light, known as the N'er Tamid, which is present in every Jewish house of worship. Once lit, the oil lamp should never be extinguished.

Only a tiny jug of oil was found with only enough for a single day. The oil lamp was filled and lit. However, a miracle occurred and the Menorah stayed alight not for one day, but for eight

days, until new oil could be made to keep the light going.

Jews celebrate Hanukkah to mark the victory over the Syrians and the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple (the word Hanukkah means "rededication"). The Jewish victory celebrated on Hanukkah was primarily a religious victory, it ended the suppression of Judaism but the Jewish state continued to be under Greek political control to a large degree. (Ultimately, the Chashmonaim (Hasmoneans) did succeed in attaining political independence for the Jewish nation, but this was a long process and was not completed until some time after the death of Yehuda HaMakabee.)

The Festival of the Lights, Hanukkah, lasts for eight days to commemorate the miracle of the oil, and not the military victory. Jews are forbidden from glorifying war.

In Scotland, families celebrate Hanukkah at home. They give and receive gifts, decorate the house, entertain friends and family, eat special foods, and light the holiday menorah.

Religious calendar



Thursday 2 December
Hanukkah (Jewish)

Festival of lights
(see featured festival above)



Tuesday 7 December
Al-Hijira (Muslim)

Islamic New Year.



Wednesday 8 December
Bodhi Day (Buddhist)

Celebration of Guatama's attainment of enlightenment.



Tuesday 16 December
Yule (Pagan)

The winter solstice, when the sun child is reborn. The pagan new year.



Saturday 25 December
Christmas (Christian)

Celebration of the birth of Jesus by western Christians



Wednesday 5 January
Birthday: Guru Gobind Singh (Sikh)

He instituted the Five Ks and established the Order of the Khalsa.



Friday 14 January
Makar Sankranti (Hindu)

Celebrates the sun's journey into the northern hemisphere.



Thursday 20 January
Tu B'Shevat (Jewish)

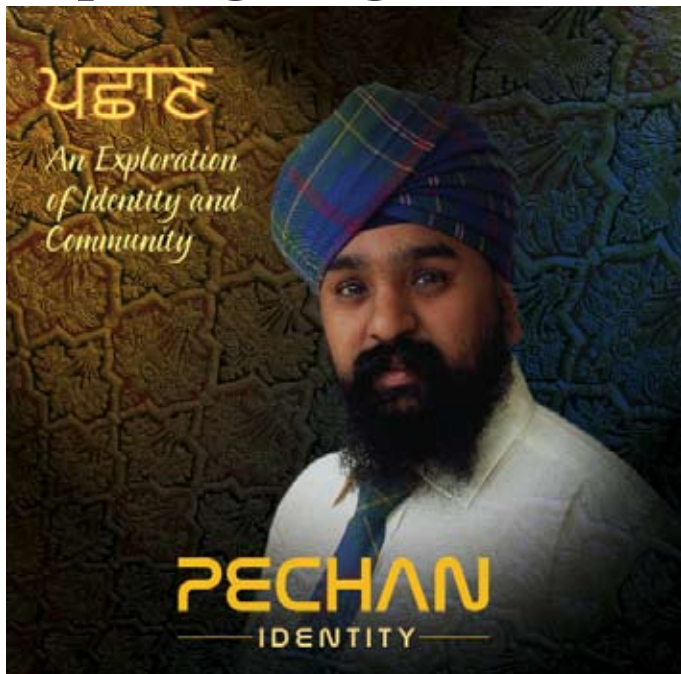
Jewish New Year for trees.

Strong Scottish Muslim and Sikh identity highlighted

Dialogue and Mutual Understanding is the theme of the UN International Year of Youth from August 2010 to August 2011

It is therefore appropriate that during the year, as part of its Equality and Human Rights programme, NHS Lothian will be promoting the rights of children and young people, in particular working on effective engagement and dialogue.

Among its activities will be a series of exhibits highlighting the participation and role of children and young people in society. The first of these is Edinburgh Inter Faith Association's 'Identity' exhibit. The exhibit will be displayed across NHS Lothian locations beginning with the headquarters building, Waverley Gate. From there the exhibit will move



The covers, Sikh (above) and Muslim (below) of booklets compiled as part of the identity project.

to prominent areas of the main hospitals.

Jim Robinson, Equality

and Health Improvement Facilitator, University Hospitals Division, NHS Lothian said: "The aim of these exhibits is to highlight the positive contribution children and young people make to Scottish society".

Victor Spence, General Secretary of The Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association said: "The 'Identity' project has been one of our most successful in recent years. We are especially grateful to the young Muslim and Sikh men who participated and to the other stakeholders including The Scottish Government, the City of Edinburgh Council, Lothian & Borders Police, The Pumphouse Trust, The Robin Leith Trust and the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association."



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Dialogue Matters

In the previous issue, Sohaib Saeed discussed the importance of listening as a pillar of constructive dialogue. Here, he elaborates on the significance of questions



Sohaib Saeed

To be or not to be: that was the question for one troubled prince. Identifying the question is a skill with which people are gifted to varying degrees. We have all heard rants concluded with: "Sorry...what was the question again?"

In a dispute, the usual way is to declare the wrong-headedness of the opposing camp. The way of enquiry, however, is to ask: "What is the question here?" For example, the Lilliputians could have asked themselves: should an egg be attacked from the big end or the little end?

Questions are cures; answers are antidotes. Our first two pillars of dialogue were humility and trust: asking demands the humility to admit you don't know it all, and it demonstrates that you have sufficient trust in the one you are questioning.

There is no such thing as a silly question, at least when it is sincere. What's silly is to wonder something and never seek answers. Much sillier is to be satisfied with ignorance and build suspicion and hatred upon it. I'd much rather someone put a hard-hitting question to me, than rashly assume that I'd have no answer.

We can even learn from the kinds of questions

people ask us. We realise what is unclear in our own presentations, and sometimes we read between the lines and understand what is really bothering the questioner. If this leads us to be clearer and more relevant, all the better.

Q: When is a question a weapon? A: When it's loaded. ("When did you start beating your wives?") We all fancy ourselves as Jeremy Paxman sometimes, but real enlightenment comes from asking questions that cause both parties to think more deeply and search for truth.

Some questions are essential tools of dialogue, such as: "What do you mean?" And even, "So?" We should think about what answers we might give if the questions we put to others were instead directed at us.

Naturally, asking has its etiquettes. Don't ask if you're not interested in listening to the reply. Don't use questions as cannonballs to bury your opponent under a barrage. Strive for brevity and precision to give people the best chance of addressing your question. In short: ask as you would like to be asked.

An archive of columns is available at Sohaib's website: www.dialogic.ws