

Interfaith Matters

Issue No. 8 August 2011

COMMUNITY NEWS AND FEATURES FOR EVERYONE

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New Baha'i centre opens

Baha'i community open first National Centre in the heart of the capital ...Page 5



Thubten Samdup, with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Dalai Lama representative to give annual EIFA 'Gandhi Day' lecture

The 2011 EIFA Annual Lecture is being held on 'Gandhi Day', Sunday 2nd October at 3.30pm in the Main chamber of the City Chambers. The day is also the U.N. International Day of Peace.

This year's talk will be given by Mr Thubten Samdup, Representative of His Holiness The Dalai Lama for Northern Europe and the Baltic States based in London. Thubten Samdup is also the Chairman of The Dalai Lama Foundation of Canada which is an International Organisation for Peace and Ethics.

Among his many

achievements, Mr Samdup was presented in October 2005 with the Unsung Hero of Compassion Award, an honour that was bestowed in San Francisco by the Dalai Lama himself.

Mr Samdup has said: 'Knowledge must be informed by wisdom—an ethical base that goes beyond self-interest. I truly believe that the basic principles for ethical living as promoted in the teachings of the Dalai Lama will find resonance with individuals and their communities. Ultimately this approach will contribute more concretely towards changing societies

from within.'

Thubten Samdup will speak on the importance His Holiness The Dalai Lama attaches on the promotion of religious harmony and the responsibility that leaders of different faiths must take in these troubled times.

Victor Spence, General Secretary of The Edinburgh Inter Faith Association said: 'This year's annual lecture will also be our 'Gandhi Day' event. It is fitting for Thubten Samdup as a Representative of His Holiness The Dalai Lama to be giving the lecture on this particular day.'

The Annual Lecture will

be followed at 6pm by a Civic Reception hosted by The Lord Provost of The City of Edinburgh.

Rabbi Davis Rose, Co-Convenor of The Edinburgh Inter Faith Association said: 'We look forward to welcoming Thubten Samdup to Edinburgh and to hearing him speak on the promotion of interreligious harmony. On behalf of EIFA I would also like to thank the Lord Provost for honouring us with a Civic Reception at the City Chambers.'

For tickets and invitations please email Vicky MacDonald at vicky@eifa.org.uk

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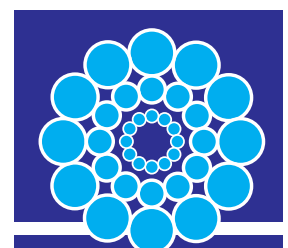
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InterfaithMatters

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 eighth edition have been written by people from the faith communities. We welcome contributions.

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Tibetan Meditation Centre receives official inauguration

Samye Dzong Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre first opened the doors of its new Edinburgh branch last September with a joyful ceremony led by Abbot Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche. Since then the centre has gone from strength to strength, catering to Buddhists and an increasing number of people from all faiths and none. Alongside the weekly programme of prayers, meditation sessions, qigong and yoga classes the centre also offers a range of monthly courses, teachings from visiting High Lamas and special events to benefit body, mind and spirit.

However, one very important element was missing, namely the official inauguration of the centre by Samye Ling's illustrious founder, Dr. Akong Tulku Rinpoche who was away in Tibet when the centre first opened. Happily this was rectified on June 18th when Rinpoche presided over a full day of ceremonies, teachings and celebrations. Guests arrived to be greeted by a multicultural spectacle of Scottish pipers sporting Samye Ling's tartan and members of Edinburgh's



Dr. Akong Tulku Rinpoche and MSP Malcolm Chisholm cut the ribbon at the official inauguration of Samye Dzong Buddhist Meditation Centre in Walker Street, Edinburgh.

Tibetan community clad in colourful national dress. Rinpoche was aided and abetted with ribbon and cake cutting duties by MSP Malcolm Chisholm to an accompaniment of live music from talented performers

of various world traditions.

As part of Edinburgh's Festival of Spirituality and Peace, Samye Dzong is offering two Introduction to Meditation workshops led by the Centre's director Ani Rinchen Khandro on Sunday August 21st, and repeated on Sunday August 28th. These will give opportunities for beginners, or those wishing to refresh their practice, to learn how letting go of stressful, habitual thinking can relax and refocus body and mind.

Samye Dzong's new Autumn/Winter Programme starts on Monday September 5th and continues throughout the year with weekday evening sessions and monthly weekend courses as detailed on the website at www.edinburgh.samye.org.



Norwegian Tragedy

As people of faith in Edinburgh we are united in our shock and revulsion of the tragic events that have unfolded in Norway. The loss of so many innocent lives, especially of those so young and with such great potential, has greatly saddened us all. Our hearts go out to the bereaved families and our prayers are with them and those injured, as well as with all of the people of Norway. These horrible events should bring home to us the simple truth that while there is good in all people and religions, conversely no people, religion or race is immune from being capable of committing the most heinous crimes. It thus behoves us all to redouble our efforts to increase understanding and co-operation among the different peoples and religions



Rabbi David Rose

of the world, and perhaps most importantly, among the different groups making up our own society. Only by building a world worthy of the Divine image in every human can we provide a clear answer to the worldview that inspired this crime as well as provide a lasting memorial to those who perished.

Rabbi David Rose
Co-Convenor, EIFA



Muslim for a Month

A Spiritual Journey into the heart of Islam

Muslim for a Month is a cultural, spiritual and religious immersion program that gives people the opportunity to experience life in a moderate Muslim country and learn about the religion from the inside. Regardless of the program name, the experience offered is actually a nine day program which includes a diverse program of learning.

Right in the heart of Istanbul, Turkey, where throughout history many different religions and cultures have met and lived together where Europe and Asia are symbolically connected by two bridges over the mighty Bosphorus river.

The program is hosted by Islamic scholars and peace activists in Turkey who operate projects that establish intercultural dialogue and interfaith cohesion. The program is

co-presented with social enterprise organisation, Blood Foundation, who have been running a similar program in northern Thailand on Buddhism for the past three years. This program in Istanbul aims to break down prejudice, allowing participants to gain a better understanding of Islamic belief, getting acquainted with its practices and trying to understand their meaning in the context of the religion of Islam.

To achieve these goals participants attend lectures on Islam and its practices as well as an introduction to Sufism and the renowned Islamic writer and poet Mevlana Rumi. Several trips to holy sites are also included and participants are taught the basics of and invited to join in communal prayer, ablutions and fasting.

On the cultural side participants experience the richness of Turkish history by visiting relevant historical Turkish sites in four different cities in Turkey. They will meet, eat with and engage with the wonderful Turkish people, enjoying their hospitality that goes far beyond anyone's imagination. It is a truly wonderful opportunity to share ideas with local people about faith, food, culture, history and even sport!

This is a beautiful shared experience where you could be confronted with your own beliefs and those of others and where the confrontation of these beliefs can be the catalyst for greater understanding, dialogue and interfaith connectedness. For more information about the program and to book

Ben Reisman

Sharing family values



Micheline Brannan (Jewish), Rev Anderson Jeremiah (Episcopalian), Shabnam Hussain (Muslim), Ruhy Parris (Bahai), Arlene Fraser LDS, President Alan Freed LDS

To mark National Family Week the Edinburgh Inter Faith Association partnered with The Latter Day Saints to facilitate a successful multifaith panel event.

Representatives from Holy Corner's Scottish Episcopal Christchurch,

The Hebrew Synagogue, Blackhall Mosque, The Edinburgh Bahai Centre and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day-Saints shared their respective traditions family values. This was followed by a lively open discussion with questions from the multifaith audience.

Send us your news

We would like to receive your contributions to this community newspaper. Send us your letters, news, event listings or articles from your group or community to: editor@eifa.org.uk



Edinburgh
Inter-Faith
Association



Orthodox Jews seek Christian dialogue

After collaborating and working with various Christian organizations, leaders, and scholars over the past three years, the leaders of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation (CJCUC) in Efrat and Jerusalem have released a statement of A Jewish Understanding of Christians and Christianity. CJCUC is the first Orthodox Jewish entity to engage in dialogue with the Christian world.

In partnership with The Witherspoon Institute in Princeton New Jersey, CJCUC recently publicized their scholarly work at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem and at Yale University on the topics of "Covenant & Mission" and "Hope & Responsibility in the 21st Century." In addition, CJCUC has collaborated with scholars connected with the Hebraic Heritage Christian Center in Atlanta, GA, in discussing the issues of "Evangelization" and "Jewish Understanding of Christianity."

CJCUC's Founder Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin said, "This statement only represents the view of our center but should also be used as a catalyst for other orthodox Jews and Jewry worldwide to consider fostering relationships with Christian communities. Leaders within the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches as well as the non-denominational movements of Evangelical Christianity have become sincere friends of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. It is vital that we strengthen our relationship with them. We are certain that through these relational dialogues we will find far more which unites us than divides us."

The complete statement can be read at www.cjcuc.com. A key paragraph states:

Jewish and Christian theologies are no longer engaged in a theological duel to the death and therefore Jews should not fear a sympathetic understanding of Christianity that is true to the Torah, Jewish thought and values. In today's unprecedented reality of Christian support for the Jewish people, Jews should strive to work together with Christians toward the same spiritual goals of sacred history—universal morality, peace, and redemption under God—but under different and separate systems of commandments for each faith community and distinct theological beliefs.

Foster Carers urgently needed says City Council

The City of Edinburgh Council Family Based Care Recruitment Team is on a drive to recruit more carers especially those from a black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Running on the back of the successful campaign, Foster Me Foster Us, their next campaign starts on 22 August and runs until 18 September with information stands and drop in mornings planned at McDonald Road library. The team are hoping people will drop in to the library between 10am and 1pm on Thursday 1 and 8 September to hear more about how they can help to look after Edinburgh's children.

As well as the library, they will be at this year's Mela, and sponsoring the Community show on Radio Ramadan, which is on from 3 to 4pm. Adverts will be



Could you be a foster carer to children in need?

in newspapers and on bus stops and flyers and posters will be given out to businesses on Leith Walk to help publicise events at the

library.

Council's Foster Care's recruitment team leader is Andy Thomson. He said: "We urgently need foster carers to provide care for children who cannot live with their own families, sometimes for weeks, months or for the rest of their childhood.

"Children and carers come from all kinds of ethnic, religious, cultural and language backgrounds. We're especially looking to recruit black and minority ethnic or mixed ethnic carers to look after any child but who will become a valuable resource for children who share these backgrounds"

So if you have an interest in caring for children and want to find out more about the service, they'd really like to hear from you. As well as making a real difference to a young person's life, you'll receive a fee, training and support.

For more information, take the next step and call 0800 174 833.

Or visit us online at "www.edinburgh.gov.uk/fostering

One of the posters for the Foster Me Foster Us campaign.

Baha'i community opens national centre in the heart of the capital

The Edinburgh Baha'i community had the privilege of sharing the occasion of the opening of its new Baha'i Centre on the 23rd of May with representatives of many different organisations in Scotland, including the Scottish Government and the Edinburgh Interfaith Association. Dr Maureen Sier, member of Baha'i Council for Scotland officiated the evening programme. After a beautiful musical devotional programme of prayers and readings put to song, Mr Kenny MacAskill, Minister for Justice gave the opening address. This was followed by Maureen Sier giving a short introduction about the Faith's tenets. Dr Sepideh Taheri, chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Edinburgh then gave a short account of the visit to Scotland of Abdu'l-Baha, the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith, and one of the key figures of the Bahai faith as the appointed interpreter of his father's words. This historic visit in 1913 came at the invitation of Mrs Jane Whyte, wife of the Rev Dr Alexander Whyte, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church



Architect Oliver Chapman chats with Imam Sajjad Asim

of Scotland and principal of New College, who had previously met Abdu'l-Baha, in the prison city of Akka in the Holy Land.

We learned that Abdu'l-Baha and his companions arrived at Waverley Station on 6th January 1913 where they were greeted by the Whytes and a company of distinguished Edinburgh citizens and escorted to the Whytes' residence at 7 Charlotte Square – a house later chosen by the Scottish Trust as an example of Georgian architecture

and today open to the public. A portrait of Abdu'l-Baha hangs in the Georgian house.

His schedule was full and varied, and included receiving visitors, touring the city, visiting an orphanage, meeting with university students, speaking to packed audiences in 3 public events, and attending a concert.

Sir Patrick Geddes, the eminent social and cultural reformer, said of Abdu'l-Baha's visit:

"His friends may fairly congratulate themselves

on his reception in every case... for though all over the world old controversies are dying out, old hatreds abating, and though the need for reconciling us with the past and leading us onward into a renascent idealism, permeating modern life and directing its progress, is being widely felt, it is doubtful if any of our Western preachers, men of science, of affairs, has yet learned to give so simple, direct and categorical a statement of all this, as in this long-mediated, simply-stated, teaching of Abdu'l-Baha."

The evening concluded with a prayer recited by a young person, and the guests were served refreshments while enjoying lively conversation and fellowship with each other. Many friendships and connections were forged in the evening, which was considered by every one to be a great success.

The Baha'i community is very grateful for the support and encouragement it has received especially from EIFA and hopes to be able to host many interfaith events at its new centre in the future.

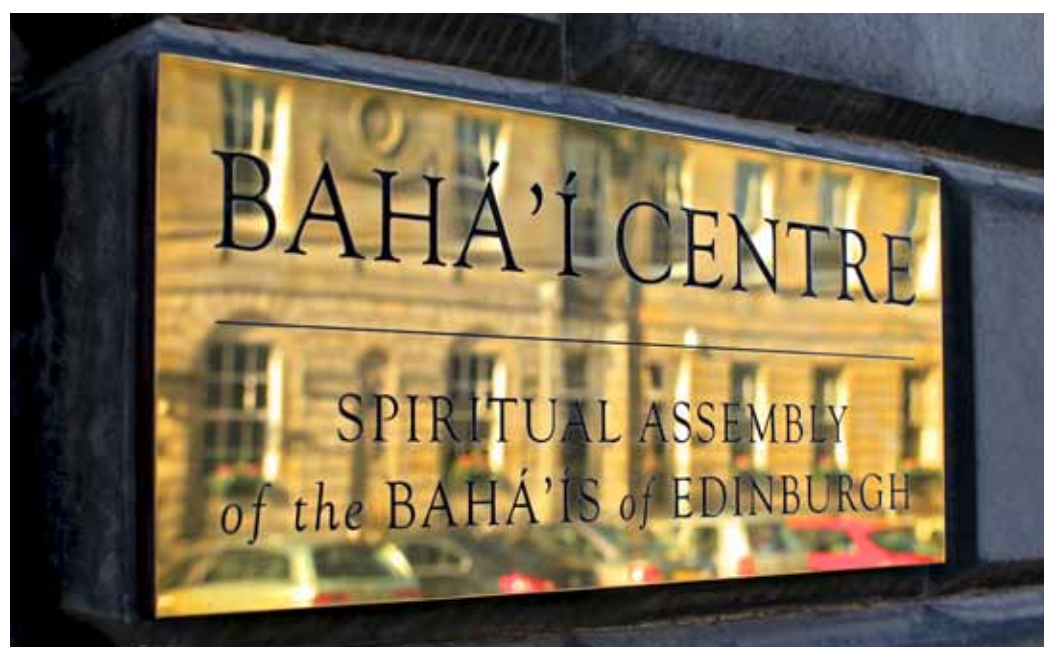
Peace on Earth

"The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens," wrote Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the mid-19th century. "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self."

These simple but potent exhortations provide a blueprint for action for many Baha'is, who represent roughly 2,000 cultures and ethnicities around the world. For some Baha'is, myself included, the principle of the oneness of mankind serves as both a cornerstone of spiritual belief as well as a motive behind one's work.

Observing the world in all its disarray and then believing, sometimes as an act of faith, that there are perhaps better alternatives is not altogether an easy proposition. As individuals, we face a collective action problem, where well-meaning efforts amount to little when not joined by many others.

This leads many people to view the prospect of world peace as simply wishful thinking, particularly when held against the evidence of the daily front pages. And who can blame them? The world's most powerful nations show only tentative signs of wishing to work together for the collective good, while sending clear messages to their citizens and neighbours that national interest must be preserved above all else. Could it be that the end result of human progress over thousands of years is simply to end up with a sub-optimal outcome because we cannot overcome the prisoner's dilemma?



Faith, Hope and Reality

The Festival of Spirituality and Peace 2011



This year's festival will feature a Sitar concert amidst an eclectic offering of world music.

From Saturday 6th August to the Monday 29th August, the Festival of Spirituality and Peace will once again be tackling the important questions of life: What happens when science meets religion? When East meet the West? And when faith meets reality? All are asked with a pinch of hope!

The backbone of the Festival is 23 conversations with insightful speakers from around the world. These are taking place both in St John's Church, Princes Streets and around Edinburgh.

We are delighted to announce that the Imam Feisal Abdul Raul, founder of the Cordoba Initiative in Manhattan and visionary leader of the so called

'Ground Zero Mosque' will join us to talk about Islamophobia in the US and the effects of 9/11. Other topics under discussion will be the dialectic between science and spirituality, sexuality and religion and the possibility of peace in our time.

The Festival of Spirituality and Peace is also playing host to some of Edinburgh's and the world's finest performers.

We are excited to welcome back Tokara Takio drummers from Japan and Coreen Scott from closer to home. Other highlights include a Sitar concert, Persian bands and an explosive Science cabaret. There will also be a

wide range of classical music with which you can escape from the hustle of the festival. We even have a range of children and family events featuring an animation workshop.

Around St John's there will be thought-provoking art exhibitions and places to enjoy refreshments. With twice as many events this year, there really is something to suit everyone. Please come and feed the body and the mind at one of this summer's most diverse festivals.



Police survey ethnic minorities in the ranks



A survey of Lothian and Borders Police's 3025 officers has found that 43 officers classified themselves as belonging to an ethnic background other than white, and 58 said they had religions or beliefs other than Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic or Other Christian.

Among the 1257 police staff members, A dozen staff said they belonged to ethnic minorities and 15 to non-Christian religions.



Domestic Abuse Together we can stop it

Faith communities networking event

Thursday 29th September 2011, 10am - 1pm
The Melting Pot, 5 Rose Street, Edinburgh

We are delighted to invite you to join a networking event organised as part of the faith strand of the Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) campaign DOMESTIC ABUSE – TOGETHER WE CAN STOP IT.

This event, which fits with our campaign aim of encouraging all communities across Scotland to take action against domestic abuse, has been organised as a direct result of consulting with faith communities.

The aim of the faith group campaign is to build and add to the capacity of faith groups to address and respond to domestic abuse through:

- Connecting people
- Providing resources
- Building activism

At the event we will:

Launch the faith communities section of our campaign website

- Launch the '10 things faith communities can do to stop domestic abuse' resource
- Consult on resources we

hope to develop in the future

- Hear from our STOP IT Campaign Coordinator on her work with young people
- Discuss and explore how we can continue to provide support to faith communities working in this area.

Importantly the event will provide an opportunity for networking with other similar individuals and groups. We hope you are able to take part in this exciting opportunity to work together, share ideas and raise awareness about domestic abuse.

Tea and coffee will be available from 10am, with the event starting at 10.30am. Lunch will be served at 12.30pm. If you are able to attend please RSVP no later than the 19th Sep 2011 to Fiona Buchanan on 0131 226 6606 or by email at fiona.buchanan@scottishwomensaid.org.uk.



Positive feedback in online survey for Interfaith Matters



EIFA has been using *Survey Monkey*, an online questionnaire utility to find out what our readers think of Interfaith Matters. Results are still coming in, but on the basis of the responses we've had so far, there has been a generally positive reaction to both its content and design and clear indications in that it is having an impact in increasing awareness of multifaith/interfaith activities and especially the work of EIFA.

Over 80% of respondents thought that the content was good or very good and half said that it had increased their awareness of

EIFA "a lot", with some 40% also claiming that it had increased their awareness of multifaith/interfaith activities "a lot".

Numbers aside, quite a few respondents took the opportunity to add their personal comments, which were overwhelmingly positive.



"An informative read, always enjoyed"

A new light on 'Banned Books'



The Rt Rev Brian Smith, former Bishop of Edinburgh

The National Library of Scotland is hosting an exhibition on 'Banned Books'. The NLS and EIFA are partnering on a conversation event on the censorship of books and other media for not conforming to the political, religious or moral codes

of their day.

Leading the conversation will be The Rt Rev Brian Smith, former Bishop of Edinburgh, Rabbi David Rose of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, and Mary Sharpe Advocate, a researcher in sacred sex.

This free even will take place on Monday 12th September at 6pm, National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge

Tickets can be obtained by calling 0131 623 3918 or online at www.nls.uk/events



FEATURED FESTIVAL

Ramadan - Time for reflection



Sohaib Saeed

Muslims around the world eagerly await the coming of every Ramadan, the annual season of reflection, repentance and renewal. The month of fasting begins with the sighting of the new moon, this year around 1st August, and ends with the arrival of 'Eid al-Fitr: a day of celebration and thanksgiving for the blessings of the past 29 or 30 days.

Ramadan is the month of worship and remembrance, even though these are required all year round. It is a month of training, of putting in extra effort to gain the spiritual sustenance to keep us going for the remaining

eleven months of the year. Most notable is the fasting from dawn to sunset, compulsory upon all men and women unless they have an excuse such as being pregnant or very young or old. Fasting is to abstain from all food, drink or sexual activity throughout the daylight hours, and the 'nil by mouth' rule extends similarly to smoking.

Fasting was by no means a practice born with the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), as the Qur'an instructs believers to fast "as fasting was prescribed for those before you."

In an age of faddish diets, fasting is a divinely recommended detox for body and soul. It breaks the chains of habit, especially of the destructive kind, and liberates the free will. It teaches us moderation in eating, and to value the food we are blessed with while many go without.

The value of any ritual is

seen in its effect on one's personality and behaviour. Thus the Prophet declared that "Whoever does not abstain from lying and evil deeds should know that God has no need for his abstaining from food and drink." He was also more generous to the needy in this month than any other.

Because these are values common to people of all faiths, it is quite natural that many non-Muslims opt to fast for a day or more along with their Muslim friends, tasting that little bit of hunger in order to enjoy its abundant fruits.

Sohaib Saeed



Edinburgh Central Mosque

Religious calendar

- 
August Monday 1
Ramadan - start (Muslim)
 Ramadan is the Muslim month of fasting.
- 
August Saturday 13
Raksha Bandan (Hindu)
 A Hindu Festival that celebrates brotherhood and love. Rakasha Bandhan means a thread for protection.
- 
August Tuesday 30
Eid-I-Fitr (Muslim)
 The end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, celebrated with a traditional meal.
- 
September Thursday 8
Feast of the Birth of Mary (Christian)
 Christians celebrate the birth of Mary, mother of Jesus.
- 
September Wednesday 28
Navarati - start (Hindu)
 Navarati (nine nights) symbolises the triumph of good over evil.
- 
September Thursday 29
Rosh Hashanah (Jewish)
 Jewish New Year. A two day feast during which no work is permitted.
- 
October Thursday 6
Dussera (Hindu)
 Celebrates Lord Rama's victory over the evil demon Ravana.
- 
October Saturday 8
Yom Kippur (Jewish)
 Day of Atonement - the most solemn day of the Jewish year.
- 
October Saturday 8
Birthday of Guru Ram Das (Sikh)
 Guru Ram Das was the fourth of the Sikh Gurus.
- 
October Thursday 20
Birth of the Bab (Bahai)
 The precursor of Baha'u'llah.

Spiritual care matters

If, as Teilhard de Chardin has said, "We are all spiritual beings trying to express our humanity," then the holistic definition of health as "a complete sense of physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellbeing" is crucial. For spirituality involves finding meaning, purpose, and hope in life. Whilst belief in organised religion may have declined, belief in a non-material part of life is still prevalent.

Recent developments in quantum physics tend to support the importance of non-material factors in our lives. Through the "interconnectivity of all matter" actions can have an effect at a distance (the "non-local effect"). It has been observed that electrical conductivity in the DNA of isolated human cells can be affected at a distance of 350 miles by the triggering of different emotions in their original donors.

Also, studies show human cells grow more quickly in a culture dish when "touched" by positive and empathetic thoughts regularly, even though the cells are not derived from the person "touching." Thus empathy can influence human DNA.

More significantly the empathetic intentions of spiritual healers have been shown to have a detectable effect on the MRI scans of the brains of recipients at a distance – another



Geoff Lachlan

"non-local effect." The part of the brain affected is also associated with the placebo response, which is now known to be our powerful inner healing drive and not just a positive psychological response towards the doctor's treatment. So whilst we do not yet have hard scientific evidence that prayer does work for physical and mental healing, the recent study above of healers sending prayers for healing to recipients demonstrates a clear pathway for a healing effect to happen.

Psycho-neuro-immunology is the science of understanding how psycho-social factors in our lives (are we loved? do we suffer discrimination? does our life have meaning, purpose, and hope, etc.) affect the functioning of our immune system through connections with the brain. So factors that affect our spirituality/spiritual wellbeing can influence our immune systems. In this way mind (and all its internal and external

influences) and body are not separated, and we should speak of the mindbody.

The evidence base for supporting the positive link between spirituality and health is mushrooming and no longer confined to the palliative care situation with the terminally ill. HIV/Aids patients with positive spiritual wellbeing have been shown to have maintained better functioning immune systems than those without.

If patients are struggling spiritually, with life having lost meaning and hope prior to significant cardiac surgery, they will not experience such a good surgical recovery and outcome. Coronary artery stenting (keyhole opening up of blocked/narrowed arteries) does not work so well in patients suffering from a sense of hopelessness.

Even today most disease cannot be cured, so "Health-Related Quality of Life" (HR-QoL) is becoming an important measure of the effectiveness of treatment. Spiritual wellbeing has now been shown to be strongly positively associated with HR-QoL, particularly with chronic long-term conditions such as arthritis, and most cancers.

The Scottish Government has stated that "...spiritual care is integral to the holistic care it provides." With 60% of patients who use the NHS being over the age of 60 years Faith in Older People has an important role to play in influencing the NHS to care for their spiritual needs. As the current financial restrictions impact on the NHS it is imperative that we strive for spiritual care not to be neglected.

Geoff Lachlan

Geoff Lachlan worked as a general surgeon in the NHS for 30 years, before joining the Scottish Inter Faith Council as Health Development Officer.

Dialogue Matters

One of the core concerns in dialogue is to find the "middle ground" – whether that is the aim in itself, or merely a necessary step towards reaching the goal of dialogue. But what is this middle ground, other than a cliché?



Sohaib Saeed

mention all those beautiful colours!

When we refuse to come onto the middle ground, we choose to be extremists. It is quite extraordinary to claim that there is absolutely no truth in the other side's point of view. At the very least, acknowledging what you agree with is a gesture that moves dialogue forward. But more than that, it helps to define where the dialogue needs to go.

Finding this common ground requires open and honest conversation, in which you are most keen to listen, and secondly to share. You pick up on ideas that you can relate to, and ask small questions that help you collectively recognise the big questions.

So, next time you catch yourself talking of your values versus theirs, try re-stating it as a shared concern which you approach differently – or as a shared value where the difference is only by degrees. If this mutual empathy with alternative views is successful, you will suddenly find yourselves ready to tread new ground together.

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

