

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

Summer 2006 (Newsletter Number 6)



Since our Spring Newsletter we have :-

- Received a grant of £750 from Elmbridge Borough Council to enable the further development of our Web Site.
- Received a £5,000 grant from the Home Office 'Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund'.
- Held an 'Aspects of Islam' meeting on the 26th April.
- Visited the Weybridge Reform Synagogue on 9th May.
- Visited the Walton Fire Station on the 31st May.
- Had two of our committee members receive training organised by Elmbridge Borough Council on creating and linking web sites.
- Had two of our committee members attend the South east Regional 'Link Meeting' organised by the Inter Faith Network.

Accounts of these events follow shortly.

In the meantime our normal work has continued, including in particular, working with the Police Independent Advisory Group.

Capacity Building

The purposes for which we have been given the Capacity Building Fund Grant can be summarised as:-

1. Publicity - including the costs of printing material and enlarging our circulation.
2. Registration as a charity.
3. Developing our programme of events and involving young people.
4. Payment for secretarial, PR services and other office costs.
5. Reimbursement of expenses.

The impact of the CDF Grant has already been dramatic.

We have compiled a list of places in the Borough or used by people from the Borough to which we hope to send Newsletters, flyers and other contact information. The list includes Places of Worship, Libraries, The Civic Centre,

Doctors' and Dentists' Waiting Rooms, Day Centres and Housing Trusts.

They should receive a copy of this Newsletter and hope that they will agree to display it and additional information.

We should welcome advice on any omissions or other contact points.

We shall bring a formal proposal of our Registration as a Charity to the AGM.

In order to improve our service to young people we have invited Kathryn Greenwood, aged 18, to join our Committee Meetings.

We have agreed to use the services of Mrs Irene Greenstreet on an 'as needed basis'.

Most importantly our programme of activities since the last Newsletter has expanded to the point where we do not have room to give a full description of all of them in this Newsletter.

Committee Members have been reluctant to claim re-imburement for postage, print cartridges etc. As usage has increased we have now asked them to do this.

Membership

We are always pleased to welcome new individuals as members. The annual subscription is £10, for which you will receive the quarterly newsletters and priority booking for events and visits as well as invitations to meetings.

We now have over 80 members.

For enquiries about membership, please contact the Membership Secretary:

Phyllis Woodhead
01372 468783



Phrakru Lom on Buddhism

Phrakru Lom has been an inspired and loyal member of the Elmbridge Multifaith Forum since its inception, but he feels it is now time to retire. We are most grateful for all his help and the welcome that we have always received at the Buddhapadipa Temple in Wimbledon.

He has kindly sent us the following article on Buddhism which we shall incorporate into our website:

“What is Buddhism? In one sense it is the Teaching of the Buddha, (known as Dharma-Vinaya). It is a religion, a philosophy and a psychology. Some regard it as the Teaching of Enlightenment.

It can be viewed from many aspects.

As the Buddha's ministry lasted for 45 years Buddhism consists of 84,000 discourses. The discourses are divided into three divisions :

1. Rules.
2. Discourses.
3. Psychology.

Buddhism has 3 parts:

1. Original message of the Buddha.
2. Its development.
3. Supplemental additions.

The additions arise from tolerance of Buddhism. As it gently flows into one country after another it tends to adopt some local beliefs, however crude. For instance, in Southeast Asia the worshipping of nature-spirits continues side by side with the later Teaching of the Buddha, whereas in China and Japan the Confucian, Taoist and Shinto beliefs play a part in Buddhism.

Buddhism is a way of life. Its teaching is as relevant to the world today as it was 25 centuries ago when the Buddha began to teach. He said that after his death the Dharma-Vineyard (the Doctrine and Rules) he had laid down would become the Teacher. He stated: "Whoever sees Dharma also sees him. Whoever sees him also sees the Dharma." Buddhism places great emphasis on daily practice for happiness and peace. It encourages people what to do rather than what to believe. It teaches that Truth is a personal experience that you cannot find from a book, neither is it a formula that someone can hand to you.

The Buddha advises people to seek ultimate Truth and to test its validity in the light of their own experience and judgement. Once when he arrived at a village called Kalama, a villager asked him: "Lord! How do we get at the truth and know the Law (Dharma)? Is it from the books? Or is it because

the sages confirm that such and such is Truth or Dharma?" "Look, you people of Kalama", replied the Buddha. "Truth is not what is presented in the books and neither is it what is asserted to be thus by the wise men. Nor is it Truth because it is confirmed to be so by the sages. Even what I as the Buddha say unto you, you should not merely take for granted. Only when it accords with your own experience, and you find it true, only when it leads you towards the end of suffering, should you accept it as the Truth."

Buddhism does not attempt to solve the problem of the primary origin of all things. When asked by a sceptical monk whether the existence of the world is eternal the Buddha made him no reply. The reason was that he considered that inquiry was unlikely to be profitable. He advised the monk not to waste his time making such an inquiry.

Buddhism takes as its ultimate fact that the world exists as do sentient beings living within it. It also holds that everything is affected by the Law of cause-and-effect, and that all things are constantly though imperceptibly, changing. There is no place where this Law does not operate, even heaven or hell. Every conceivable and compounded thing, both visible and invisible, is without a separable and permanent self (anatta). Anatta means nothing on earth and in heaven is under the control of anyone. When change comes, all things change.

Nowadays there are two schools of Buddhism: Theravada school which is practised in Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, etc. and

Mahayana school which is practised in Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, etc.

For a family life Buddhism advises people to refrain from killing, from stealing, from committing sexual misconduct, from wrong speech i.e. four letter words and from intoxicating drinks and drugs. There are more rules for a monastic life. Devout Buddhists often train themselves by following the Threefold Training

1. Not to do evil deeds
2. To do goodness
3. To purify the mind.

In plain words Buddhism advises three things: "Find the Truth of all things yourself, check it again and again yourself, practise it yourself." Then you yourself experience or see the Truth so that you have unwavering confidence.



"Aspects of Islam"

55 people of mixed faiths attended an "Aspects of Islam" evening at Churchgate House, Cobham. The meeting was addressed by Imams Zymer Salihi and Mehmed Stublla from Kosova and they brought with them Molana Hamshu Hak, who had trained with them and was on a visit from Pakistan.



The event formed part of the EMF programme aimed at increasing awareness of various Religions and Faiths and breaking down barriers and misunderstandings.

The subject was arranged in response to requests by so many of our members who expressed ignorance and bewilderment regarding the different sects of Islam that we hear about constantly especially in the current national and international climate and world affairs.

As our Imam visitors were from Kosova, the young people of St. Andrew's Church had provided a very ample buffet, including Balkan dishes. It was suggested that visitors might like to make donations towards the re-employment of a school teacher for English at a school in Kosova, built with the help of donations from local people, including Rotary Clubs, Epsom College and St. Andrew's Youth. The school no longer has the funds to employ the teacher, whom the young people met during a visit in April 2005.



Introduction:

The introductory address by Geoff. Morris, our secretary, described the history of the association with Kosova. Immediately following the end of hostilities, a charity was set up with the name of LASEDAK (London and South-East Direct Aid to Kosova). Over £140,000 were raised as well as aid in kind, and enabled, amongst other projects, the building of 2 new primary schools in the very poor mountain areas. Pictures were shown of one of the schools, with classrooms named after major sponsors.

Kosova is no longer a focus for major rebuilding and the big agencies have withdrawn. However, St. Andrew's and local Rotary Clubs are concerned to continue necessary support to the children they have helped. Young people from St. Andrew's have raised money by holding events, and they have been out to Kosova, where they have established

lasting email exchanges with local children.

Geoff mentioned that it was in the course of the work in Kosova that he got to know Imam Zymer Salihi and his colleague, Mehmed Stublla. He then introduced Imam Zymer as the main speaker for the evening.

Imam Zymer Salihi:

Imam Zymer recalled that he and Imam Mehmed had first met Geoff when a 3 year old child, accompanied by his Mother who was a deaf mute, had been refused re-entry to Macedonia after a life-saving operation on the child in the UK. They were put on a plane back to Gatwick without the friends who had accompanied them. Fortunately Geoff was able to contact Zymer, who immediately went to Gatwick and looked after the couple whilst Geoff dealt with BA, immigration, the Macedonian Government and the media.



Zymer started his address by describing the "Abrahamic" line that has given the world the Revelations of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed.

The Revelation of Islam is based on the Qur'an and the "Tradition" (Hadith), together with examples gleaned from the life of the Prophet

(Sunnah). The fundamentals of Islam are based on the 5 pillars:

1. The belief in the One God, the Messengers of God from Adam to Mohammed (Peace and blessing be upon Him) who is the Last Messenger of God.
2. Prayers (Worshiping One God five times a day.)
3. Zakat (Charitable Tribute)
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadam
5. Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

The fundamentals of Islamic belief are based on 6 pillars of faith.

1. Belief in One God
2. Belief in the Angels
3. Belief in Divine book
4. Belief in All Messengers
5. Belief in the Hereafter
6. Belief in Divine Destiny

Zymer then stated that in the time of the Prophet Mohammed there were no sects among Muslims. The division between Shiah and Sunni dates back to the death of Prophet Mohammed over the question who was to take over the leadership of the Muslim nation.

The two basic divisions remain.

1. The Sunni Moslems who consider themselves to be traditionalists, (according to the Book), and are the largest denomination of Islam.
2. The Shi'ites, who claim to be supporters of Ali (Bin Abi Taleb), the son-in-law of the Prophet. It is recorded that Mohammed said: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate).

Politics created the schism. Following the death of the Prophet there was some controversy regarding the succession, the "Caliphate". There was a succession of three caliphs (Abu Bakr El Siddiq, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, Othman Bin Affan), and they were all short lived. Only after that was Ali declared the Caliph. Shi'ites believe it should have gone to Ali in the first place and should then have been from within His lineage in perpetuity.

A minor other difference between Shi'a and Sunna is that in Sunna the prayers have to be 5 times a day, while for the Shi'ites, they can be amalgamated into 3 prayers. The Shi'ites are concentrated in Iran and Iraq.

Later groups within Islam started forming, such as the "Bakhtiari's" who are 30% Sufi Shi'ites in Albania. They believe in the "Mehdi" who will come at the appointed time and rule the world. This is when religious harmony and peace will disappear, and there will be struggles leading to tyranny. Then there are the "Wahhabi's" this group is the strictest. It was

founded in the 18th Century by Mohammed Ibn Abdel Wahab who preached strict adherence to the Qu'ran. The Wahhabi's were politically motivated, but used religion to justify their movement. They later changed their name to "Salafi's" claiming to imitate the first generation after the Prophet Mohammed. The generations after the early Muslims are known by the Wahhabis as "Khalafis". They believe they are the purest and most spiritual. Wahhabi's have the most narrow and most extreme interpretation of Islam and are thus very political. The Wahhabi movement killed about 5000 Shi'ites in Iraq in the process of stamping its authority. This is how they acquired territory.

The Wahhabi's sent emissaries to other places. In Europe, Asia and Africa i.e. in Europe to Bosnia, Kosovo & Macedonia, where previously there was harmony between Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Christians of all denominations. This is when the problems started there. They considered any land to be either a "land of peace" (Islam) or the "land of war" (non Muslim). There should be no dealings between the two according to the Wahhabi's. Their teaching is that of hatred.

Imam Zymer believes that religion is meant to bring out the best in people, the spirit, and not just deal with punishment and retribution. People interpret the "non-fixed" texts. Mohammed was not for punishment, but mercy. "We have sent you as a mercy to all creation"

The Ahmaddiyya: This was started in Pakistan in the Indian subcontinent by Mirza Gholam

Ahmad. He considered himself a new "prophet". His movement, however, is banned by law in many Muslim countries. The Ahmadi's have two main differences from mainstream Islam:

1. They believe that Jesus will not return.
2. Messengers will keep on coming, but they will not be "Book bearing" prophets.

Imam Zymer concluded by reiterating the message of peace and conciliation that should characterise all religions.

Questions and Discussion

The address was followed by some questions, and it was obvious that all had thoroughly enjoyed the evening and benefited from it very much. The atmosphere was very cordial and the attendants included Sunnis, Shi'ites, Ahmadi's, Christians of various denominations, Baha'is, and perhaps some agnostics. The spirit pervading was, however, distinctly one of mutual respect and friendship.

The food was so plentiful and varied a real novel experience to many. It was mainly Kosovan/Bosnian cuisine. The St Andrew's Church members who served us did so with so much love and dedication, that all present could not thank them enough.

Significantly: The collection netted about £500, a whisker under that needed for the teacher of English. It is felt that that appointment is now all but secure.

The total present was over 50. The hall was full.

The EMF Executive Committee wishes to thank, on behalf of all the members of EMF, all those who attended, those who served, those who arranged the meeting, and above all Imam Zymer and his colleagues.



Visit to the Jewish Reform Synagogue in Weybridge – 9th May

We were warmly welcomed at the Synagogue by the Chairman, Jenny Jankel, Derick Halle (a member of the EMF Committee) and Rabbi Jacqueline Tabick.

We were offered tea or coffee and a generous selection of sandwiches and cakes and invited to look at an interesting collection of Jewish books and religious objects.

After tea Rabbi Jacqui gave us a fascinating talk about Judaism.

She explained that Jewish worship had originally been centred on 'Temples' notably the Temple at Jerusalem, where priests would carry out acts of sacrifice to God often involving the slaughter of animals. Descendants of the priestly caste can be recognised today by the name Cohen.

Priests still exist but, since the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem and many other temples, most worship takes place

in Synagogues (meeting places) where 'instruction' in the Jewish Faith is given by Rabbis (teachers). During worship members of the congregation will read from scrolls containing, in particular, the Torah i.e. the first five books of the Old Testament. Scrolls are made of parchment and are handwritten. If a mistake occurs in any page the whole page must be destroyed. Not surprisingly the cost of a scroll is in thousands of pounds.

The synagogue in Weybridge is a "reform" (not reformed because the process is ongoing). The essence of "reform" is that the Jewish teaching and customs are interpreted in line with subsequent social developments. Women are therefore considered the equals of men and sit with the men in the Synagogue. Rabbis may be female and, indeed, Jacqui Tabick was the first woman Rabbi in the UK but now there are others.

We were most impressed by the warmth of our welcome and the depth of Scriptural knowledge which underlies life as a Jew.



Visit to Walton Fire Station 31st May 2006

"What on earth has a visit to a Fire Station got to do with Multifaith?" thus spake Kathryn Greenwood, the newly acquired young "adult representative" on our Management Committee.

The visit to the Fire Station was less about informing our members

about other faiths and beliefs than on developing our advisory ability towards the community.

The duty fire crew gave us a presentation on:

1. The working of the Fire Station,
2. Fire risks (e.g. arson)
3. Services to Householders (e.g. free smoke alarms)
4. Recruitment
5. The need to communicate to all sections of the population, especially ethnic minorities.

We had a fascinating day which culminated in a description and demonstration of the fire equipment. We were allowed to squirt hoses using, I hasten to add, water which was captured and recycled and, to cap it all, the brigade was called out to an emergency. Having got into their fire resistant equipment in seconds, they then had to change in a few more seconds into water protective equipment because the problem was to rescue a lady with a stroke stranded on an islet in the Thames. The remaining Station Officer pointed out how the incident illustrated the fact that they were not just a Fire Brigade but a Fire and Rescue Brigade and may in the future be called the "Rescue Brigade". We had already seen some impressive equipment for cracking open crashed cars with minimum damage to the occupants.

Our thanks go to Alan Clark, The chief Fire Officer of Elmbridge for a

most informative and enjoyable visit.



Activities in Brief

A description of the following activities will be included in our next Newsletter.

Visit to Staines Orthodox Synagogue and sampling of Jewish Festival Foods – 14th June 2006.

Invitation to the Celebrations of the 60th Anniversary the succession to the throne of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej at the Buddhapadipa Temple on Saturday 17th/18th June 2006.

South-East Regional Link Meeting for local inter-faith initiatives – 23rd May 2006.

Women in My Faith – Kingston, 20th June 2006.



Those who wish to come to any event are asked to notify the Secretary, so that we can organise catering.

Website

We continue to work on our website at:
www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk.
with the help of the grant from Elmbridge



Future Activities

Indian Festival Dancing – 29th and 30th September, Tolworth Recreation Centre

Numbers will be limited to 20 per night at a cost of £5 per head at 8.30p.m. approx.

Gala Evening – 7th October

The Annual EMF Gala Evening will take place on the 7th October at the Joyce Grenfell Centre, Claremont Fan Court School at 7p.m. for 7.30p.m.

Other Visits

There will be a visit to the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Hindu Temple at Neasden on Saturday the 11th November arriving at 10.30a.m., followed by a curry lunch. A coach will be organised.

A visit to the Sikh Gudwara in Hounslow is planned for the 8th February 2007 at 7.30p.m.



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