

ONE WORLD UNDER GOD



Understanding religious pluralism that upholds America's founding principles of Truth, Justice, Equality & Freedom

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NEW YORK

July 21-August 2, 2018

The first journal from the South Asian community to promote inter-religious understanding & social harmony is promoted by Darshan Singh Bagga, a prominent New York investor/builder turned philanthropist. Titled “**One World Under God**” the paper will focus on religious pluralism that supports American founding principles of truth, justice, equality and liberty as well as freedom of religion.



Launching an Interfaith Journal

Publisher Darshan Singh Bagga congratulates Religions for Peace, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition based in New York, and its Secretary General William Vendley for successfully holding a conclave to advance a Moral Alliance among the world's religions for an "Integral Ecology" last year in Rome, Italy. We wish Mr Vendley continued success. He is our mentor in this venture.



Publisher D.S. Bagga congratulates Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding and its CEO Joyce S. Dubensky on their 25th anniversary and receiving Hofstra University's coveted 2018 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize earlier this year. Pictured at the award ceremony in New York are (L to R) Hofstra President Stuart Rabinowitz, Joyce Dubensky, Tejinder Bindra, who endowed a Sikh Studies Chair at Hofstra, and Dean Benjamin Rivkin.

Congratulations

Global Interfaith Foundation President

Mr. Darshan Singh Bagga

on the grand opening of

Bagga Plaza II in Hicksville,

and best wishes to

One World Under God Newspaper!

Wishing you every happiness

as you celebrate Independence Day and the

350th Birth Anniversary of

Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

*Thank you for seeking to strengthen
your community and Nassau County!*



NASSAU COUNTY EXECUTIVE

LAURA CURRAN

JOSEPH SALADINO
SUPERVISOR



OFFICE OF THE TOWN SUPERVISOR
54 AUDREY AVENUE
OYSTER BAY, NEW YORK 11771
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July 22, 2018

Dear Friends,

On this joyous occasion of the 242nd Independence Day and the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, I congratulate *One World Under God* newspaper on its launch and Global Interfaith Foundation President Mr. Darshan Singh Bagga on the grand opening of Bagga Plaza II in Hicksville. Together, we are building an even better community to live, work and raise a family while sharing the message of hope, peace and joy throughout the world.

These United States of America, from their earliest beginnings, have recognized the contribution of faith in our society. As a nation, we welcome all religions and all prayers. We respect every creed, and we honor the diversity of our country and the deep convictions of our people. It is important that we let our lives be characterized by kindness, patience and service to others. Let us do for others what no government can really ever do. Let us provide love for another human being; they provide hope even when hope comes hard.

Again, congratulations on this joyous occasion and thank you for seeking to strengthen faith, values and harmony in our community. May God bless you, the Town of Oyster Bay and these United States of America.

Yours truly,

Joseph Saladino
Town Supervisor

Inspired by the founder of Sikh faith

Why I am starting Global Interfaith Foundation and this journal, 'One World Under God'

By Darshan Singh Bagga



Guru Nanak Dev Ji founded it and Guru Gobind Singh Ji shaped the Sikh religion, which has become the 5th largest in the world.

In most depictions of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, you would see him flanked by two men named Bala and Mardana, one a Hindu, the other a Muslim, the only two religions around in India in his time in the 15th century. By keeping the two disciples close, the Guru was sending an inter-faith message: That there is good in every faith and we can imbibe that.

The origins of my faith, Sikhism, are steeped in inter-faith thought. The Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, that we consider the living guru, is a compilation of the writings of 32 Bhagats (saint-devotees) of different sects and castes.

So, Guru Nanak has been my inspiration in starting the Global Interfaith Foundation

and 'One World Under God' journal.

The guru's 'Sacha Sauda' (fair deal) story is another inspiration. Guru Nanak's father gave him Rs 20 to start and grow the money in some trade. The guru instead spent it on feeding some sadhus, and argued that that was money well spent. As for myself, after being blessed of undreamed of material success here in America, I have decided to give back to society, to be of some help where I can, no matter how small.

What spurred me in this direction was a near-miracle early this year. I had a stiff shoulder for nine months, which restricted movement of my arms for which doctors could not find a cause. This Vaisakhi in April while pros- trating in a gurdwara, I

thought I would not be able to get up without help and may get constrained in time to even be able to tie my turban. I prayed and beseeched Waheguru to heal my shoulder. I tried to get up and there was a crackling sound in the shoulder (evidently some entangled nerves got straightened out) and I am now as active as before. Right there I said, "Waheguru everything is yours."

The power of prayer works in mysterious ways. I believe that even the opportunity to serve is due to God's grace. A day after my shoulder healing, I was at a gathering and was told that the final work on the Plainview gurdwara being expanded and rebuilt in Long Island was held up because of lack of funds. I pledged then and there that I will give any



In 2011 I was part of the group invited to the first White House celebration of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.



Priests called granthis in Sikhism are householders. Gyani Amarjeet Singh serves in the Plainview gurdwara.

money needed for a good cause and pledged over a hundred thousand for the dome of the building and Nishan Sahib as well as the elevator. I became active in getting the Certificate of Occupancy and

guided the gurdwara administration with the town policies. We celebrated with a prayer when within 8 weeks we received the occupancy certificate. The gurdwara was opened to public on July 16.

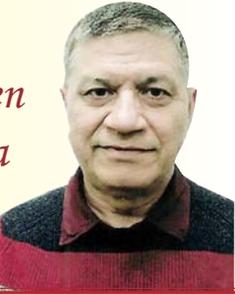


In 1999, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Khalsa we took a Sikh delegation from the Glen Cove gurdwara, of which I was the trustee, to Albany. And we got photographed with the then Lieutenant Governor of New York.



25 years ago I started to tie turbans on my two sons, Simran and Gurpreet, and this event known as Dastar Bandi to me is more important than a wedding. I saw that Paramjit Singh Bedi had done the same thing with his two grandkids as shown in the picture above. They are wearing pink clothes and turbans and standing on his sides. -- DS Bagga

By
Parveen
Chopra



TAPPING THE POSITIVE POWER OF PLURALISM

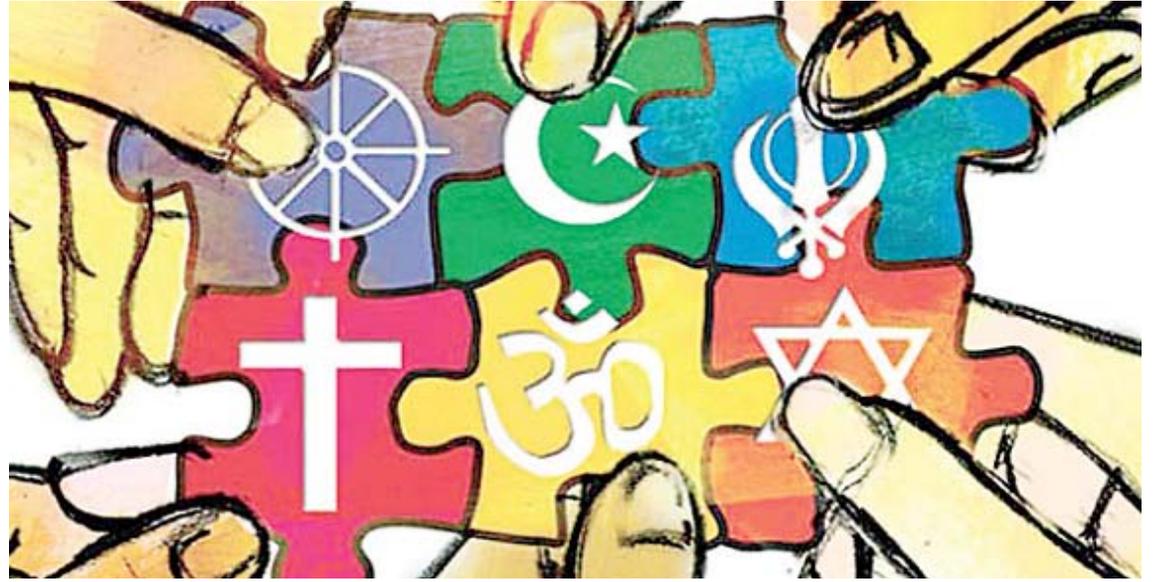
I am getting a sense of déjà vu. In India, 20 years ago I dreamt of a magazine that will take from the best of the religious and spiritual traditions of India and the world, and present the material transmuted in modern idiom and in a reader-friendly format. That project saw the light of day – as *Life Positive*. I helmed it for 10 year and it is still alive and kicking.

Fast forward to this day and this land. Some months ago, Mr Darshan Singh Bagga mooted the idea of an interfaith newspaper that will present the best and most positive, life-enhancing aspects culled from each religion. He said the paper should endeavor to promote inter-religious understanding and social harmony on the one hand and on the other, highlight religious pluralism that supports American founding principles of truth, justice, equality and liberty. Given my past experience in the subject matter, expertise in the nitty-gritty of publications as well as personal predilection, I accepted the offer to edit the new paper. It is born as 'One World Under

God' and the inaugural issue is in your hands.

We hope to receive the cooperation of leaders from all faiths, as well as the religious places and centers in New York and the surrounding areas. It is a community service and we hope to continue in that spirit. We are committed to a publication that will eschew controversy, and any iota of criticism of faiths of others. We have put together an excellent team of scholars in their individual religions who are also blessed with an interfaith outlook. We need to expand this team, for which you the reader is welcome to recommend names. On the content of the fledgling paper, we welcome comments – bouquets and brickbats both. More important, please suggest ways and means how we can improve.

A word will be in order here about Mr Bagga and his indomitable spirit. He is telling his own story on another page and musing on what propelled him to start this newspaper, a venture where the profit motive is not even on the horizon or in the back of the mind. Most people his age will like to be out



With globalization and life becoming cosmopolitan, pluralism is the future.

to pasture, hang up their boots. Lounging around the fireplace, they would rather tell stories to their grandkids of their triumphs and tribulations.

Not our Mr Bagga. He is still personally running his sprawling investor/builder business. He continues to be active in many community organizations and the running of a couple of gurdwaras.

Yet, he has the appetite and the gumption and the energy and the stamina to start a newspaper on a subject that can get contentious at the

drop of a hat.

Why? I think Mr Bagga feels that having much earlier realized his American Dream, he is now feeling compelled to give back to the community and society and the country that gave him much beyond his dreams when he landed here from India 45 years ago. He also genuinely feels that efforts needs to be redoubled to ensure that no community falls victim to ignorance about their look, culture or faith. America was built better – it IS better than that.

Now, over to you, Dear Reader, to have your say.

Parveen Chopra has accepted the assignment of editor of 'One World Under God' in addition to his day job of Managing Editor at The South Asian Times. In his early years he founded a spiritual magazine 'Life Positive' from Delhi and has also worked with India Today. He is also a trained teacher of Transcendental Meditation.

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So many dreamers come to America seeking fame and fortune. But Darshan Singh Bagga is unique in that while making his millions he left an imprint on some building bylaws that will benefit thousands of others. More significantly, he helped create the friendlier conditions for immigrants to escape discrimination and to flourish in the fabled land of opportunity.



Paving way for immigrants to flourish in the US with Sikh principles

In 1962, thanks to President John F. Kennedy, immigration was opened to professional Asians. From the Indians migrating a majority were engineers. I was an electrical engineer, Class I Officer working for the government and was ambitious. When I tried to apply for a visa to the US in 1969, it was difficult even to get hold of 10 dollars for the application fee. Luckily, they started accepting Rs 100 as application fee and I got to apply for my visa.

At that point my mother told me how my grandfather had gone to England to get work, he had cut his hair. She let me go to America on one condition that I will not cut my hair no matter what. I promised her that I won't. She gave me her blessing that I will never have dearth of work or money in the new land. How prophetic those words turned out to be!

When we landed in New York in 1970, I first stayed at YMCA. Soon we learnt that Indians found it hard to get a place to live on rent in those days. We knocked at Clinton hotel on 99th street but were turned down. Then I and a Sindhi friend approached a gentleman at a condo. I stayed behind to make myself inconspicuous. But the gentleman

saw me and said: "Sat Sri Akal" (the Sikh greeting). What surprise! He told me that his father had worked with a Sikh soldier in the British army and was conversant with my religion and community. He led us to the same Clinton hotel, of which he was the manager, and we found a place to live. At my behest almost 40 Indian immigrant families lived there for some years. So, it was my unique appearance due to my turban that gave me my first break in America.

The job market was bad those days. We would go out every day to find work. Many migrants did menial jobs to begin with. But in a bold move for me, I went to the NYC building department and secured a meeting with the chief engineer. My distinct look helped again, and I landed my first job at \$175 a week.

With perseverance and hard work I kept moving up the job ladder to senior positions at Sanderson and Porter and then Gibbs and Hill and so on. In time I started my own real estate investing and building company. The rest is history.

Today I can only laugh at the goal we used to harbor back home in India: "If I retire as a lakhpati I will consider

By Darshan Singh Bagga



(from top left clockwise) Darshan and Lovlin Bagga in Bombay before embarking for USA; the couple clicked in New York; three children are born: Gurheer, Simran and Gurpreet; 4 generations in one frame: Lovlin Bagga with her mother, Kartar Kaur, daughter Gurheer and grand daughter Gurbani.

myself lucky." A lakh of rupees is about \$1500 at today's exchange rate!

An account of my journey to success will continue in the next issues of 'One World Under God'



In 2001, traveling from Delhi to Bhopal with Manmohan Singh, Lovlin Bagga said people of his caliber should become the prime minister of India. He was not hopeful, so she said I will pray for you. Her prayer was answered in 2004.

Starring at the July 22 event of Global Interfaith Foundation



Ravi Vaidyanat, Executive Director of Ganesh Temple, Flushing, NY, to speak on Hinduism



Shailendra Palvia, Professor at LIU Post, to speak on Jainism.



Indu Jaiswal, Chairperson of the event, is also chairperson of Indian American Forum.



Renee Mehrra, TV anchor and social activist, MC of event



Gurinderpal Singh Josan, President of Sikhs in America, helped Mr Bagga organize the event



Manmohan Singh, engineer with his own construction business, helped organize the event



THE HINDU TEMPLE SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA
Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthānam



July 16, 2018

Mr. Darshan Singh Bagga
Publisher
One World Under God
1 Woodfield Lane
Old Brookville, NY

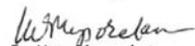


Dear Mr. Bagga,

I am glad to know that a new biweekly interfaith newspaper entitled "One World under God" and edited by Mr. Parveen Chopra is being launched on Sunday, July 22, 2018 under the auspices of Global Interfaith Foundation. A newspaper of this nature to serve and be useful to the interfaith community is long overdue and your effort to bring out this publication is laudable and very welcome. I hope this interfaith publication will be of interest to and beneficial for the interfaith community.

May Lord Ganesha bless this noble effort with success.

Yours sincerely,


Dr. Uma Mysorekar
President

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The **INDIAN PANORAMA**
EVER TRUTHFUL



Prof. Indrajit S Saluja
Editor, The Indian Panorama
July 15, 2018
MESSAGE

Dear Mr. Bagga,

It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are organizing an Interfaith event in July under your Global Interfaith Foundation.

We live in turbulent times when the world is torn apart with numerous conflicts and the vast mass of humanity is suffering because of intolerance in many spheres, ranging from religion to politics, with so many others thrown in. No part of the world appears to be free from persecution- political, religious, economic, social, cultural, etc. It is time for providing a healing touch to suffering masses.

The world looks to religions to provide the much needed healing touch. Instead of being competitive, religions need to be cooperative. They all speak of human beings being children of God. And yet the children of God are so divided and take to fratricidal conflicts. There is something wrong. There is something lacking. It is for the leaders of the faiths to ascertain what needs to be done to eliminate the conflicts born out of conflicting loyalties to faiths. Let world faiths unite rather than divide children of God. I hope, the interfaith event will deliberate on the issue of peace and harmony through faiths in the turbulent world we live in.

I am happy that on this occasion, Global Interfaith Foundation is launching a newspaper, very aptly titled 'One World, Under God', with a view to promoting fraternity of human race. Guru Nanak said, "Maanas kee jaat sabhai eke pahachaanbo" (Recognize all human race as one). It's this message that faiths need to act on.

The Foundation has very wisely chosen Mr. Parveen Chopra as the editor of the newspaper. Mr. Chopra carries with him a world of experience as author and editor of newspapers and magazines, including the ones on spirituality. I am confident he will prove to be an effective agent in promoting the objectives of the Foundation and the publication.

I wish Mr. Bagga, his associates, and faith leaders attending the event, all success.

Regards.

(Prof. Indrajit S Saluja)

SUPPORTER BIOS

Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal Hofstra University



Professor Bhogal is an associate professor in Religion and holder of the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies at Hofstra University.

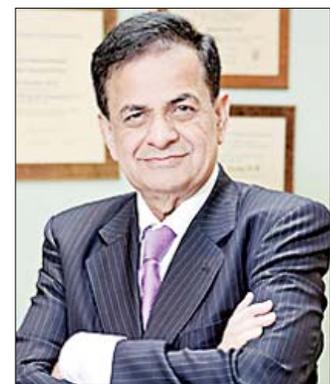
He has previously held positions at University of Derby, England, James Madison University, Virginia, and York University, Toronto.

His primary research interests are South Asian religions and cultures specializing in the Sikh tradition, particularly the Guru Granth Sahib, its philosophy and exegesis.

Secondary research interests include: hermeneutic theory and its radicalization through deconstruction; Indian Philosophy and its relation to Continental Philosophy, Mysticism, Translation and Postcolonial Studies, and the Religion-Secular and Animal-Human divides.

Dr Sudhir M. Parikh Parikh Media Worldwide

Sudhir Parikh, M.D., is a leading allergist and Padma Shri and Ellis Island Medal honoree.



He is also the Chairman and Publisher of Parikh Worldwide Media Inc., the largest Indian American publishing group in the United States.

The group publishes five periodicals – "News India Times," a national weekly newspaper; "Desi Talk in New York," a weekly serving the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region; and "Desi Talk in Chicago," a weekly serving the Greater Chicago area and the Midwestern states; "The Indian American," a national bimonthly feature magazine, and the Gujarat Times, a Gujarati language weekly. He recently acquired ITV Gold, longest running Desi network in the US.

This initiative today welcomes you and us all, the many shades of humanity, to our common journey – a path without end. Despite our many ups and downs, America remains a unique experiment in human development.

It is self-evident that humans at birth are fragile and absolutely unable to survive, much less thrive. They need collectives – families, clans, neighborhoods, townships, even nations to live, progress and create a better existence. Their connected ethos, often evolving as religions, then provides the glue that guarantees human connectivity. But sometimes, in setting this glue hardens somewhat as “Krazy Glue” and that undermines human stability. We need to remain mindful of that.

We need to take note of our strength as a people as well as of our fragility. Progress demands it; human existence depends on it.

We come to you as Americans who are also Sikh by religion. Today let's consider how these two rather weighty ideas come together in the New World.

In contemporary American society, in many ways Sikhs are the new kids on the block. Yes, we have been a presence in America for over a hundred years. That is a substantial portion of American history. But we have a checkered and relatively unknown presence here.

I see that leaving aside native Americans we are all of us -- at one time or another, in one form or another -- just off the boat. Many of you came here over two centuries or more ago; my people - a little over a hundred years. (Along with others, Sikh workers helped construct the Panama Canal in 1901-03). I came almost 60 years ago. In terms of history, the differences are like a drop in the bucket. All three, to me, are examples of just being off the boat.

Then I think of the motto E Pluribus Unum that defines us as a nation. The conversation today is about the ideas inherent in that motto. It is also about Sikhs in America.

There were Sikhs who

WALKING TOGETHER WITH THE CREATOR

By I.J. Singh

worked on the Panama Canal when it was built in 1901-04. The West was not opened by the likes of John Wayne alone - Chinese, Italian and Sikh labor had a hand in it. A pioneer Sikh served in the U.S. army in 1918, at the tail-end of the First World War.

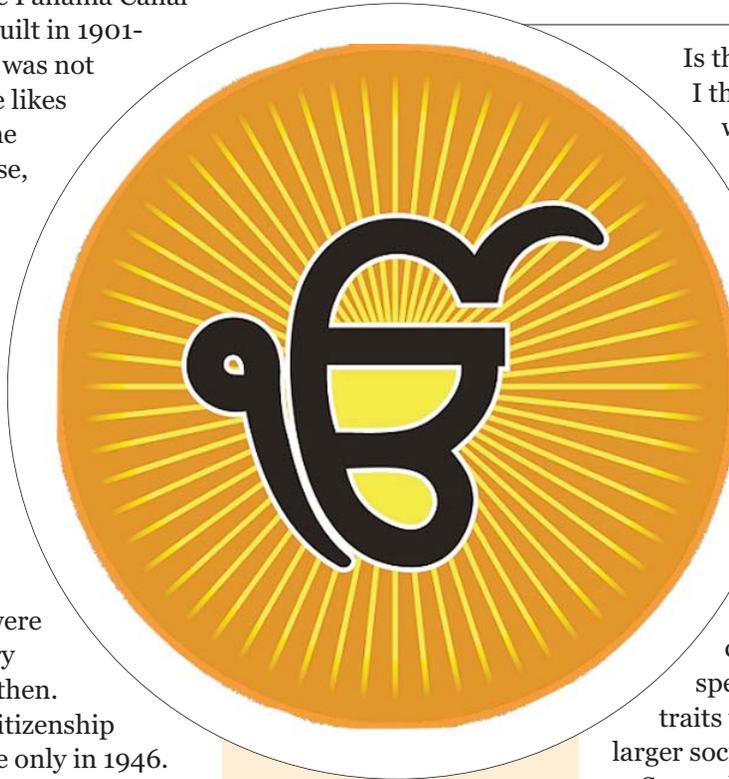
But there were discriminatory laws in place then. The right to citizenship formally came only in 1946. Immigration laws were eased only as recently as Lyndon Johnson's time as President.

Sikh numbers in this country were relatively small until the 1970's; now there are a tad less than a million. When I came in 1960, there were just 3 Sikhs in New York; I went to graduate school in Oregon where I was the only one.

From the day I landed in America almost half a century ago, the American Dream has been my preoccupation, as it is for all immigrants from anywhere. I have heard the American Dream proclaimed from all kinds of pulpits - political, religious, popular print and television. But after having been here awhile, I began to wonder what exactly we mean when we talk about being and becoming an American.

The first flood of immigrants - an estimated 18 million Europeans - came between 1890 and 1920. Israel Zangwill celebrated them in the Broadway play, *The Melting Pot*, and thus this defining expression entered our national dialogue.

The Melting Pot became our time-honored model. But in a melting pot, the units blend irretrievably into



The Guru Granth opens with an alphanumeric, "Ik Oankar", combining the first numeral, '1', with 'Oankar', a word that stands for Creator or Doer. Thus, it postulates One God - not a partisan Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh God, but one that embraces all creation. Sikhism tells us that to discover unity in the diversity of creation is to experience God. And, then, as the Sikh scripture says, "I see no stranger."

each other. The individual identity of each item is lost. This reminds me somewhat of a hostile takeover, not a model of cooperative interaction.

Is this how America is? I think not. It is a land where each wave of immigrants has added inestimable value to society. The creativity, vitality and energy of this culture come from its immigrant roots. A melting pot in which immigrants no longer contribute their special strength and traits would leave the larger society poorer indeed.

Some observers now look to a tossed salad to capture the complexity of our contemporary social reality. Yes, the individual ingredients remain recognizable - each adds to the richness of the salad - but sometimes a salad can be tossed a tad too vigorously to the detriment of the smaller ingredients. That has been our lot, post 9/11.

A mosaic may be a better metaphor. Look at how small shards that have little value as individual tiles can create an enthralling whole with much magic and considerable value to it. A mosaic offers an interactive model. In it, every little piece, no matter how small, has a place such that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. But it remains a static model.

Alternatively, I like to think of this society as a large multi-instrument orchestra. Notice that the lowly cymbals or the triangle, too, have a place. When they speak, even the naturally dominant violins and pianos listen. When the mighty and the small talk to each other without drowning the other, the conversation becomes heavenly music. That's how a rich performance is born. An orchestra, when well and wisely led, has an organic

presence to it.

The idea is of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. And there is a core of American values that defines and unites us.

This is how I understand the words - E Pluribus Unum - One from the Many! An equal place at the table for the many diverse people that make up this great nation. This is how I see our Sikh presence in this country - small but significant.

A lynch mob is governance by majority rule, but we would all reject it. We all know what happens when a majority turns tyrannical. For example, history speaks eloquently of the struggles of women, of blacks, the Irish, Jews, Germans, East Europeans, Italians and the Japanese for an equal place in this society. My people as well. As a Sikh, I point, for example, to The Asian Exclusion Act, that prevented Asians from owning land or becoming citizens until 1946. I also point to another recent instance: the targeting and profiling of Sikhs in the United States post 9/11.

A democracy mandates that the rights of even the smallest minority are equally protected. In a mosaic or an orchestra, even the smallest bit is not trampled on, but instead allowed its breathing space.

So, there are days when I hear the multi-instrument orchestra in my soul, and the "world's mine oyster" (Shakespeare). Then there are days that are not so kind. So I remain particularly sensitive to our place in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation such as this; the triangle and the cymbal among the powerful strings and the pianos are always on my mind.

In Sikh belief, as in many other spiritual traditions, the "Word" is God. Sikh scripture - the Guru Granth - opens with an alphanumeric devised by the founder of the faith over 500 years ago.

"Ik Oankar", he formulated, combining the first numeral, "one", with "Oankar", a word that stands for Creator or Doer. Thus, it postulates One God - not a partisan Jewish,

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh God, but one that embraces all creation. Sikhism tells us that to discover unity in the diversity of creation is to experience God. And, then, as the Sikh scripture says, "I see no stranger."

If I can see the oneness in the creator and creation, there is then absolutely no room left for distinctions in race, caste, creed, gender, color or national origin. Differences between "them" and "us" vanish. Equality, liberty, fraternity and justice are inherent in that oneness.

Come to think, aren't these the fundamental values of American society which starts most powerfully with "We the People?" Both societies – Sikh and American -- share concerns of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" as the basis of a progressive society in which equality, self-governance, justice, and accountability are prized. This speaks of discovering, nurturing and celebrating unity in diversity, not violently hammering the many into one. This is how I see the meaning of "E Pluribus Unum" that is our motto, and our way to a more perfect union.

Fear of the stranger is universal. In America, these fears have, at times, produced discriminatory laws. Some people fear our becoming a "balkanized" nation. Yet, clearly, American society is constantly being re-made in ways not imagined before.

As FDR told us in a different context, "we have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Emerson reminds us, "A nation, like a tree, does not thrive well till it is engrafted with a foreign stock".

The idea here is integration, not assimilation beyond recognition and definitely not pockets of isolation either.

Are we a Christian nation? This is a perennial question and would take experts many a lifetime to parse. But let me - a non-expert - offer my take on it.

Yes, the nation, in its current form was founded by Christians, and derives its values from Christian teaching and tradition. Yet, it need



Equality, liberty, fraternity and justice are inherent in the oneness professed by Sikhism. Now, aren't these the fundamental values of American society which starts most powerfully with "We the People?" Both societies – Sikh and American -- share concerns of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" as the basis of a progressive society in which equality, self-governance, justice, and accountability are prized.

not, should not, and does not diminish a non-Christian, or even an agnostic or an atheist. Hence cultural and religious diversity have a prized place in it.

Such were the values of Thomas Jefferson, clearly enunciated by him and by other like-minded Founding Fathers of this nation. The inscription "In God We Trust" on our currency, and "One Nation under God" in our Oath of Allegiance would not find approval in their eyes. In fact, they did not approve; these words were added in the 1950's.

The First Amendment pointedly has two clauses: First, that the state shall not establish a church; secondly, that it must ensure free exercise of religion. Jefferson also reminds us: It does me no harm if my neighbor thinks there are twenty gods or that there is none.

This tells me that much as it is possible to be a good Christian and a good American, or a good Jew and a good American, or even an atheist and a good American, similarly it is possible to be a good Sikh and a good American. These are not mutually exclusive ideas. This is the meaning of an equal place at the table.

The mantra these days is diversity in the workplace.

The idea is that "Religion is a

diversity issue and should be addressed in the workplace." My position is that "Religion is not a diversity issue and should not be a consideration in the workplace".

This may surprise you since Sikhs wear turbans and unshorn hair - markers of our faith. However, I wish to be hired and judged not by the turban on my head but my ability to do the job, just as a woman candidate must not be judged by her gender but only by her qualification and ability.

To my mind, the best acceptance of diversity is to go through life such that irrelevant traits such as color, gender, caste, creed, religion or national origin do not enter the equation.

Yes, Sikhs wearing the articles of their faith, including the long, unshorn hair and a turban, are making a public declaration of a private intention, but I would argue that it is not mixing of religion and public life or public space.

Clearly, there is no demonstration by any cogent logic that my public demeanor, in any manner or form, hampers society or harms another. There is no expectation here for special accommodation on the job. The workplace must remain blind and neutral in such matters.

Let me recount a brief story: It was just a day or two

after 9/11 and I was one of the few people walking about wearing a turban in New York City. I fell into conversation with a bright, educated 'white' American. And well-to-do -- his brief case was better than mine and his suit more expensive. We talked a while about Sikhs in America.

"Tell me," finally he said "your people have been here a hundred years. Why did they not leave their religion back home when they came here?" I was a bit flustered but recovered and he wanted a short answer. So I said:

"Your people have likely been here over 200 years. Tell me, when they came here, why did they not leave their religion back home. For I see no native Americans here between you and me."

It was his turn to be thoughtfully silent a moment. Then he said, "You have a point. Let's have a cup of coffee."

We did and remain friends now, so many years later.

To understand the meaning of diversity, we need to see "us" in "them" and "them" in "us". I cannot think of a better formulation of the concept of "E Pluribus Unum" than the awesome poetry of Sikh scriptural writing. It goes thus -- in translation:

"As out of a single fire, millions of sparks arise;

But fall back in the fire, to come together again.

As out of a single stream, countless waves arise;

And then return to the water.

So from God's form, emerges all creation;

To return to the One again."

The founder of this initiative today is Darshan Singh Bagga, who came here about 40 years ago. He recognizes that everyone of us owes gratitude to this society that has given us unequalled opportunities for success. And this is payback time.

I(nder) J(it) Singh was born in Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) before the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. He was educated at Simla and Amritsar in India.

In 1960, I.J. Singh came to the United States on a Murry & Leonie Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. He was awarded a PhD in Anatomical Sciences from the University of Oregon Medical School (now known as the Oregon Health Sciences University). He also earned a DDS from Columbia University.

He is now Professor Emeritus of Anatomical Sciences at New York University.

I.J. Singh serves as the Overseas Editor at The Sikh Review and as the Editorial Director of Nishaan.

He is regular commentator on SikhNet and other sites. A prolific writer and speaker on his journey as a Sikh in America, I.J. Singh is the author of five collations of essays on Sikhs and Sikhi.



Sikh Gurus as precursors of democratic values of freedom and equality

Individuals and groups at times have a set of cherished values that are quite different from those of others. It is when a new set of attitudes and behavior come in to being based on their values. It is universally applicable in all spheres, social, religious, political.

I will confine myself to the sphere of religion, more particularly how Sikhism, the youngest and the fifth largest religion in the world, revolutionized the very concept of religion and created a new set of humanistic values, much ahead of the French Revolution or the American espousal of Democracy, with its attendant values of freedom and equality.

America takes pride in certain basic values, which include democracy, freedom, equality -- the ideals which propelled the French into a revolution, with the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, two years after America adopted its constitution on September 17, 1787. It took America 11 years to adopt a Constitution. But when it did, America became the first nation in the modern world to have espoused the democratic values of freedom and equality. Some 300 years before the American Independence and the French Revolution, which ushered in the humanistic values of Freedom and Equality, Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, towards the close of the 15th cen-

By Prof. Indrajit S Saluja

ture, made a fervent appeal for equality, including gender equality. The Hindu society, during Nanak's time, was caste-ridden, divided into the high and the low, solidifying into four distinct social strata - the Brahmins, at the top, followed by the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras, who came to be known as untouchables. Nanak spoke of oneness of humanity and pleaded for equal treatment to all. The Sikh religion adopted equality of all as a core value. The manifestation of it is in the sangat and pangat - all sitting together and eating together as equals. A revolutionary democratic idea, which, of course, was opposed by status quoists.

The Sikh Gurus have emphasized the concept of the equality of mankind in the sacred verses found in the Sikh holy scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak says in Japji Sahib: "Accept all humans as your equals, and let them be your only sect" (Japji 28).

Guru Nanak also spoke of women's equality with men. During those times, women were treated as inferior to men. In Sikhism, women are treated as equals and given the respect, which she should get as "mother of kings". Nanak said, "So kyon manda aakhiye jit jamme rajan" (Why should the woman who



300 years before the American Independence and the French Revolution, which ushered in the humanistic values of Freedom and Equality, Guru Nanak made a fervent appeal for equality, including gender equality. The manifestation of it is in the sangat and pangat - all sitting together and eating together as equals.

gives birth to kings be called inferior?

From the times of Guru Nanak in the 15th century to April 1699 when the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa, Sikhism had evolved into a powerful instrument of social change. The ranks of followers of Guru Nanak swelled. With Guru Gobind Singh came another change. Having realized the futility of peaceful resistance to the cruelties and injustices of the Muslim rulers and their Indian stooges, he chose to create an order of Khalsa, who will fight against the tyranny of the oppressors.

World history has no parallel to the sacrifices made by one man for the democratic values he held dear, as Guru Gobind Singh. When only eight, he appealed to his father Guru Tegh Bahadur to make the supreme sacrifice of his life to save the Hindus in Kashmir from being converted to Islam. This champion of humanity sacrificed his whole fami-

ly, father, mother, wives, four young sons, and lost hundreds of his close friends and followers, for the sake of the freedom and dignity of the common people. It flows from this belief that if all people are equal, then all paths to God, all ways of worship are also equal. Sikhs do not believe that their way is the only way and, therefore, Sikhs do not proselytize their ideology or beliefs.

Let us all strive to work for a world where all live as equals in harmony and peace, regardless of their religious beliefs.

One World, Under God.



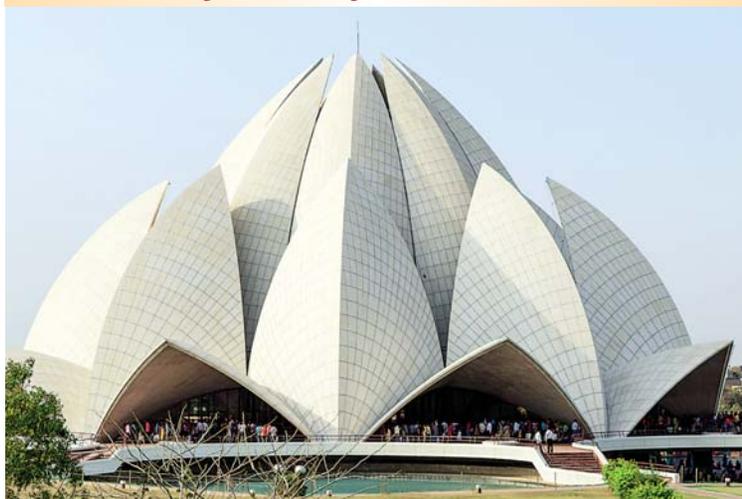
(Prof. Indrajit S Saluja is the publisher-editor of The Indian Panorama newsweekly)

BAHA'I FAITH

Revelation from God is progressive

In the mid-18th century, the Baha'i Faith was founded by Baha'u'llah, believed by his followers to be the Manifestation of God for this day and age. The religion has its foundation in the ideas that God is one, mankind is one, and all the world's religions are one (they share the same essential truth). The main spiritual message for today, according to Baha'u'llah, is unity - to see all as our family. As a result of these beliefs, a core part of the Baha'i faith is the deep understanding and acceptance that Revelation from God is progressive. That means that while the central message of God remains true and unchanged over history - and the future too - the social law is adapted to the time period and culture where it is revealed. Also Baha'is believe that the Teachers / Prophets /

By Dr Sanjida Cabot



The Lotus Temple, a Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India is an architectural marvel that attracts some 4 million visitors a year. There is no deity inside a sanctum sanctorum, but you experience silence and peace while there.

Manifestations (Baha'u'llah, Muhammad, Jesus, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, to name a few) that God sends to us only teach us humans collectively

the things we have built capacity to understand in any given day and age.

As an analogy, think of a grade school: The third

Baha'is believe that while the central message of God remains true and unchanged forever, the social law is adapted to the time period and culture where it is revealed.

grade teacher and first grade teacher have both completed far beyond third grade and can understand and perform skills learned in those grades. However, the first grade student is only able to process first grade math, and even if given a lesson in third grade math, may not fully grasp the concepts involved. Meanwhile the third grade student is ready and able to learn from a lesson in third grade math. Imagine that these aforementioned school teachers were

instead the Divinely Guided Teachers / Prophets / Manifestations teaching to the religious communities which they started. Revelation, to us Baha'is, is a layer by layer process over the whole of time itself.

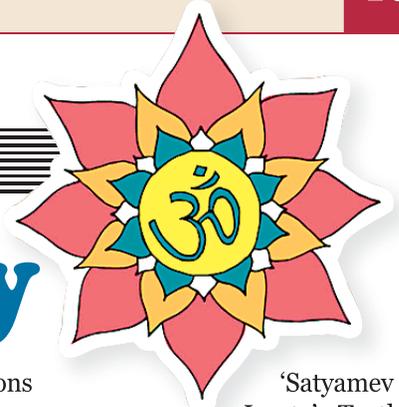
More about the Baha'i Faith at www.bahai.org.



Sanjida Cabot, MD PhD., is a Baha'i, mother of twins and practicing physician in Long Island.

The Goal of Hinduism

Realize and Express Unity



What can explain the rise of Swami Vivekananda as an intellectual and spiritual giant at a time when India was under British rule? One need to look at "Guru-Shishya Parampara", the tradition of teacher and taught. His guru Ramakrishna Paramahansa realized the same truth by practicing different religions.

Swami Vivekananda, the great Hindu monk, was not only well informed about Hindu scriptures, he had studied world religions, and his oratory skills made him a sought after speaker in USA after his famous address to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He organized residential workshops in New York and shared the human values enshrined in Hinduism that he had realized.

At Thousand Island Park, NY, he said, "Religion consists in realization. We all know as a fact that nothing will satisfy us until we realize the truth for ourselves." In the same inspired talks, he expressed the Hindu idea of respect for all religions in the following words. "I learnt from my master, ...the wonderful truth that religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic; they are but phases of one Eternal religion. There never existed many religions; there is only one infinite religion has existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can." Decades later, in 1984, Swami Shri Ishwarananda Giri, addressing the 10th Hindu Conference in New York distilled Hinduism as "the philosophy of how to connect your acts and represent a harmony, a unity."

Indeed, the core Hindu belief is rooted in harmony and oneness. Oneness of not just human beings, but oneness of all species. The concept of inter-relatedness of human beings and nature is integral part of Hinduism. In fact, the term 'Hindu' is not the original term, it is traced to its root in history that invaders, from the other side of Sindhu river, who could-

By Ashok Vyas

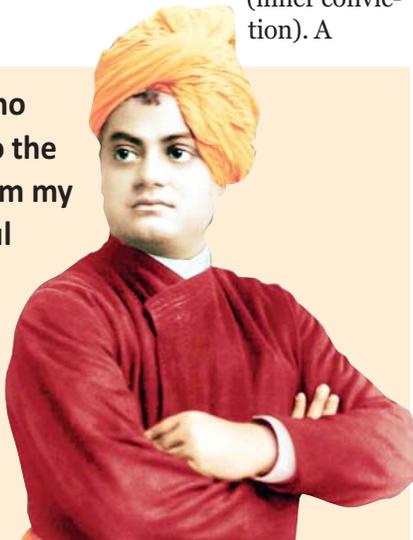
n't pronounce 'S' clearly, referred to people on this side as 'Hindus'.

There is another name for 'Hindu Dharma' -- 'Sanatan Dharma', Sanatan means eternal. Dharma is loosely translated as 'Religion' for the lack of another word that may describe the practical application of absolute knowledge and pathway to absolute bliss with creatively suggested numerous methods leading to the same destination.

Vedas, the basic scriptures providing the foundation for

The American system offers opportunities to follow one's dreams and grow to one's fullest potential. Hinduism sings the glory of each human being and lays a lot of emphasis on 'Shraddha', 'inner conviction' or confidence, because all great achievements are born out of 'faith in oneself." Lord Krishna explains various types of 'inner convictions' found in human beings and tells Arjuna that each person designs one's life as per his or her Shraddha (inner conviction). A

Swami Vivekananda who introduced Hinduism to the West, said: "I learnt from my master,... the wonderful truth that religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic; they are but phases of one Eternal religion."



Hinduism, literally means, 'knowledge' or 'to know'. Hindus live by the Vedic verse, which says, 'Truth is one, sages call it by many names.' Thus there is acceptance and respect for different paths to reach the same goal: 'the infinite'.

The principle of 'unity in diversity', relevant for India and America both, is a natural extension of the principles of Hinduism. Swami Vivekananda began his address to the Chicago parliament with the words, 'Brothers and sisters of America', eliciting a thunderous applause from the audience. They gave him a standing ovation because of the sincerity which they palpably felt in his words; his voice was oozing love and compassion and joy and fellow-feeling of being a human being beyond the boundaries of race and religion.

Hinduism is a way of designing one's life with awareness of 'who am I?' The joy of being aware of one's pure vastness enables a human being in sharing his happiness and joy with others in all situations.

superficial perception of Hinduism leads people to conclude that 'Hindus' believe in multiple gods. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Various forms of gods and goddesses represent the same 'all-pervading existence'. All these forms are rooted in 'soulful search' for 'truth of one's being' and sustains the inexhaustible reservoir of revealed knowledge. Hindus relate to God in form as well as beyond form.

The concept, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The whole world is one family) instils reverential and loving approach in Hindus for everyone.

The ultimate responsibility for your liberation lies within you and the test of your growth is ultimately found in your own heart. This gives you the ultimate authority to work out your way towards salvation, but a pre-condition is purity of mind and heart. You are taught to hold no ill-feeling and grudge against anyone because this may prevent you from realizing your expansion.

The Puranas are full of

inspiring tales with suggestions for the correct mode of living. Bhagwat Purana opens against the backdrop of a king trying to find out what is the best course of action for him in the remaining seven days of his life.

This sense of respecting time and developing sensitive and reverential relationship with all human beings leads to inner peace and joy.

The most common prayer for all Hindus begins, 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah...' -- May all beings be happy / May all beings be healthy / May everyone work with auspicious intent without any sorrow.

Hindu saints, who visit the USA from India, remind the community here to support this land of opportunities with gratefulness. Viswayogi Viswamjee Maharaj, founder of 'Viswa Mandir' at Guntur in Andhra Pradesh, concludes his talks with various chants including, 'Glory be to America'.

Swami Shri Ishwarananda Giriji writes in the book 'Sanatan Dharma': "We always believe in invoking the Divine Mother as Aditi. In Vedic terminology She is the Supreme Force. Aditi is the force of Unity. Diti is the force of disunity. We invoke Aditi, the Divine Force so that we will have the courage and inspiration to fight the forces of divisiveness. We will overcome the Daitya force. They are all there, they cannot be eliminated. That will not be democracy when we eliminate the enemy force. They should be allowed to be there, only, we should make sure they do not make mischief. This is the grand concept we have."

Hindus grow with the inherent sense of accepting various ways to reach the ultimate and thus, there is no space for rigidity. It is a time-tested tradition for ascending towards higher level of conscious and realization of truth.

Truth is given lot of importance as is having harmony between one's words, thoughts and deeds.

Mundakopinishad says,

'Satyamev Jayate' - Truth

alone triumphs. India after independence adopted it as national motto. Hinduism also says, "Truth liberates." These concepts are relevant for modern mind and life in all its complexities. Hinduism sustains the awareness of 'Timeless', without undermining the importance of the present.

Indeed, as Darshan Singh Baggaji is publishing 'One World, Under God', with senior editor Parveen Chopra, I am happy and confident that this offering will enhance the understanding amongst us about each other. Harmony is necessary for true happiness.

Hinduism also advocates harmony among different elements of nature. Hindus refer to our planet as 'Mother Earth'. We follow different rituals with prayers for purifying water, fire, air and space.

To conclude, I quote again my guru Swami Ishwarananda Giri, because what he says about Hindus resonates not just with the spirit of Bharat but also with the core values of America:

"We have a choice to make, a role to play. The Hindus have a vital role to play. For one thing we do not believe in destiny. I do not know where this idea has come into the minds of most of the Sadhakas. Hinduism does not believe in destiny. We are not a pawn in the hand of fate: we shape our destiny."

We have to find the means to discover and express this unity."

Ashok Vyas is a poet, Hindu priest and program director with ITV Gold. He has also produced many cultural and religious documentaries, depicting Hindu values for love and harmony. He is founder of Insight for Creativity LLC and can be reached at insight4creativity@gmail.com



Love and Compassion for All Beings

By Dr. Sulekh C. Jain

Jainism, an ancient and one of the largest religions of the world, is an integral part of India and the Indian diaspora. The Jain tradition, which elevated the philosophy of ecological harmony and non-violence as its lodestar, flourished for centuries side-by-side with other schools of thought in ancient India. It formed a vital part of the mainstream of ancient Indian life, contributing greatly to its philosophical, artistic and political heritage. During certain periods of Indian history, many ruling elites as well as large sections of the population were Jains.

Jainism's message of unconditional reverence for life in all forms, its commitment to the progress of human civilization and to the preservation of the natural environment continues to have a profound and pervasive influence on Indian life and outlook. Jainism, with its distinctive views on non-violence and intellectual relativity, has relevance to the life and thought of not only of this century but also for many centuries to come.

Jainism is a complete system with all necessary branches such as ontology, metaphysics, philosophy, epistemology, ethics and rituals. It has its own scriptures, temples (architecturally, some of the most beautiful temples in India are the Jain temples) and deities, places of worship and pilgrimage, and its own festivals and fairs.

Jainism was not founded by any one individual. It is a philosophy which developed over a long period of time. Its last prophet (called Tirthankara), Lord Mahavira, was a contemporary of Lord Buddha more than 2500 years ago. Lord Mahavira was the 24th prophet. The 23rd, Lord Parshavanatha was 250 years before him, and the 22nd, Lord Neminatha, a contemporary of Lord Krishna of the Hindus, was at least two thousand years before the 23rd prophet.

In the 20th century, the most vibrant and illustrious example of Jain influence was

that of Mahatma Gandhi. It was Jainism that made Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi into Mahatma Gandhi. The central Jain teaching of ahimsa (non-violence) was the guiding principle of Gandhi's civil disobedience in the cause of freedom and social equality.

Lord Mahavira emphasized the need for a comprehensive outlook, better known as Anekantavada or multiplicity of viewpoints. For him, there was no question of exaltation or diminution of anyone's spiritual or ideological contribution and a dissenting opinion was a natural

human tendency. The wisdom, however, lies in harmonizing the dissensions. He preached Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), Achaurya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy and equal respect to women), and Aparigraha (non-acquisitiveness) to the world. He also said that a living body isn't merely an integration of limbs, but is the abode of soul which potentially has infinite perception, infinite knowledge, infinite power and infinite bliss.

Ahimsa (nonviolence) is the heart and soul of Jainism. Jains teach and practice ahimsa not only towards human beings but also towards all nature. It is an unequivocal teaching that is at once ancient and contemporary. Jainism stresses the sanctity of all life, liberty and compassion for all,

and a tolerance of all religious views. Jainism is an elder cousin of Buddhism and as such is most akin (in philosophy) to Buddhism. Many call these two religions as two branches of the same tree.

Jainism does not teach or prescribe conversion or proselytizing from one religion to another. The only conversion it teaches is an aversion from

hatred, ego, anger, greed and deceit to inner peace, calmness and tranquility.

No religion can survive or prosper as a secluded island. Always people interact, share and learn

from each other and as a result all religions

develop some common bonds and measures.

While generally all religions have their own distinct views and beliefs about God, creator, divinity, rituals, traditions, timing and style of prayers and of religious places, yet there are many common threads that bind them together. Here is a brief look at some of those common threads:

Nonviolence: Not harming or hurting anyone is common to all religions. There are varying degrees of the concept and practices of nonviolence in other religions but Jains' non-violence is unconditional acceptance of democracy of existence to all species: human and non-human. In Christianity, seven of the Ten Commandments are based on



The central Jain teaching of non-violence was the guiding principle of Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience in the cause of India's freedom and social equality.

Jainism has strong traditions that resemble other religions: fasting, atonement, forgiveness (Paryushan for Jains, Yom Kippur for Jews, Ramadan for Muslims and Lent for Christians), charity, equality of genders, chastity, earning one's living by honest and ethical means, renunciation, detachment from daily worldly affairs, meditation and contemplation.



Though Jainism is an ancient religion, its message of reverence for life in all forms, commitment to the progress of human civilization and to the preservation of the natural environment are most modern.

nonviolence.

Jainism has strong traditions that resemble many world religions, such as fasting, atonement, forgiveness such as Paryushan (18 days) for Jains, Yom Kippur for Jews, Ramadan for Muslims and Lent for Christians, charity, building schools, hospitals for all (humans and non-humans), equality of genders (equal rights and treatment of women in all respects), celibacy and chastity (for monks, nuns and also for householders), earning one's living by honest and ethical means, renunciation, detachment from daily worldly affairs, meditation, contemplation and talking by the self with the self.

2500 years ago, Lord Mahavira preached about ecology, care for the environment and interdependence. The Jain principle of Parasparopgraha Jivanam or inter and co-dependence recognizes that all life forms in this universe are bound together by mutual support and interdependence.

Lord Mahavira said:

"One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them".

Jain cosmology recognizes the fundamental natural phenomenon of symbiosis or mutual dependence, which forms the basis of modern day science of ecology.

Seva or service to others and the afflicted is a core principle in many religions. Service is

one of the main ingredients of observation of nonviolence. Jainism's motto is "Live and Help others to live".

The key note of Jainism rings with religious tolerance, ethical purity, spiritual contentment, and harmony between self and one's environment. Its central theme is not based on some theory. Rather, it considers religion as a science of ethical practice. It conceives the human body not as a toy-machine to play with, but as a chariot on which the soul rides towards salvation. In the scheme of the Jain system, life on earth is not merely sorrowful. It is on probation to conduct itself to successfully higher and higher forms of existence. The conduct of the present life should be aimed at the attainment of a permanent state of being from which there is no return. Every soul can attain godhood i.e., supreme spiritual individuality by realizing its intrinsic purity and perfection.

Dr. Sulekh C. Jain currently serves as the Chairman and member of the Governing Council for the International School for Jain Studies, North America; and previously served as President of the Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA). He can be reached at scjain@earthlink.net



In favor of interfaith dialogue

Islam is as much an American faith as any other because out of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, 7 million (estimated in Muslim circles) live in America. They come from all social demographics and backgrounds as they represent every culture, ethnicity, race and origin. They have made immense contributions to American society, like any other community. They are professionals, businessmen, politicians, civil and military personnel, judges, law enforcement officers, Congressmen...

The Holy Quran says the answers to all human needs and problems are in Nature, the cure for all diseases is in Nature. Muslims are encouraged to investigate Nature and find solutions, no wonder then that the Islamic scholars and scientists contributed so much to the world of science and all faculties of knowledge. Robert Briffault comes to mind, who once said in his book, 'The Making of Humanity': "The debt of our science to Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries or revolutionary theories, science owes a great deal more to Arabs – it owes its existence."

To set the record straight, Islam stands against all types of violence, aggression, oppression and terrorism. According to the Quran, there is no compulsion in Islam and killing of an innocent person is like killing the entire humanity. According to the prophetic teachings: "A Muslim is the one from whose vocal and physical abuse the humanity is safe."

The best approach for the majority of peace-loving Muslims in America is to interact with the community through interfaith dialogue, workshops and seminars. Interact with neighbors, with the co-workers, parent-teacher associations and with people of other religions anywhere and everywhere and to stand together with them in thick and thin. We have work to do to bridge the gap between us and our fellow Americans.

Muslims are not new to America – they are the fabric of America who built America since its inception. Almost 30% of all slaves who were brought to the United States who built the country by their

By Dr. Yousuf U. Syed

sweat and blood were Muslims. We must present the true and peaceful nature of Islam to our fellow Americans. We must enlighten them by the true knowledge of Islam, with peace and wisdom. It must be done at the grassroots level.

We must really let them know "What the Muslims Believe." We believe in One and only God, the Creator of all that exists. Muslims believe in all the Messengers of God, which were sent to humanity. We respect them all. The Holy Quran says: "From time to time God's messengers were sent to humanity as a guide, no one was deprived of guidance from God."

Islam shows tremendous generosity towards all religions, believes in the universal

and warns against the human vices which are prohibited by the Almighty.

Every human being experiences some types of disaster or suffering, it could be financial problems, health issues or emotional problems. This is because, according to the Islamic teachings, this earth is not the place of peace, it's an examination, a test for the hereafter, a life of eternal peace to follow. Muslims believe that the calamities exist because God wants us to know who is powerful and who is powerless!

To appreciate that we are "abd" of Allah (Servant of God), we are not "The Rub" (the Creator) – The God Almighty is the creator of all that exists, we are at the Mercy



In a heartwarming instance of interfaith interaction, the first ever Friday namaz was held at the National Cathedral in Washington DC on November 14, 2014. "Let us stretch our hearts and let us seek to deepen mercy for we worship the same God," said Rev. Gina Campbell as she welcomed Muslim worshippers to the cathedral, calling it "a place of prayer for all people." (Photo courtesy AFP)

brotherhood of mankind with equal rights for men and women, rich and poor. The first constitution ever written by the Prophet Mohammad (SAS) is known as Medina constitution, or Al-Watiqua in Arabic, which is an interfaith constitution, first of its kind. Islam shows huge compassion toward the orphans, widows, and the downtrodden, sick and needy of our human family.

Muslims are required by Quranic Commandment to give away 2.5% of their annual savings toward the welfare of needy, which is known as "ZAKAT" (poor man's due). Islam is a way of life, which shows empathy, invites people toward what is allowed and permitted by Almighty God

and Compassion of our "Rub" (God).

No one has the right to question God's wisdom. He has the knowledge of His Creation. He knows best and we do not. When man suffers a calamity, he should submit to God and seek Mercy, prostrate and seek God's protection. Thus man must come to his spiritual existence, submit himself to the Will of God unconditionally by being spiritual. He must commit himself to the Creator and thus become harmless. Always willing to share God's bounties with others, he empathizes with his fellow



Muslims believe in all the Messengers of God, which were sent to humanity. We respect them all. The Holy Quran says: "From time to time God's messengers were sent to humanity as a guide, no one was deprived of guidance from God."

human beings in their times of suffering. Temporary calamity brings you close to God, it teaches you empathy and care for others. Service to man is indeed service to God.

The biggest calamity for man would be when he rejects God. Then he becomes dangerous, ruthless, selfish and falls to instant gratification and

is a test to see how people react and behave toward others -- those who have fallen victims and needed help, empathy, compassion and love. This is the time man is tested by God, how sincere is his spirituality? Has he learnt anything from religion? Does he really believe in God?

Some people are tested by allowing them worldly luxury and comfort, and to see how they behave and act. Are you being thankful to God who kept you away from suffering and calamity and granted the good of this world. The prophetic teachings remind us that justice shall be done on the Day of Judgment and the wicked will be punished and pious will be rewarded. Empathy is the key to man's salvation.

The Holy Quran says: "Righteousness is not in the strict and precise observance of the rituals. But in the acts of compassion, kindness, mercy, empathy and love".

The Holy Quran's 114 Sura God introduces Himself at the beginning of each Sura as The Most Compassionate and The Most Merciful. Not only that, God wants each of us to be compassionate and merciful toward each other as well: the Children of the One God, The Creator of one and all.



Dr. Yousuf U. Syed is a pathologist who was affiliated with the Einstein College of Medicine in NYC and many such healthcare institutions. He hails from the Hyderabad Nizam's royal family. After his retirement he has dedicated his life to serving humanity. Dr. Syed is well known for his interfaith peace efforts for the past 25 years. He is associated with several not for profit organizations, including as Chairman of the Global Interfaith Peace Mission, and Trustee of Islamic Association of Long Island / The Selden Mosque, the oldest Mosque on Long Island.

Christianity developed out of Judaism in the 1st century C.E. It is founded on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and those who follow him are called Christians.

Christianity has many different branches and forms with accompanying variety in beliefs and practices. The three major branches of Christianity are Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, with numerous subcategories within each of these branches. Until the latter part of the 20th century, most adherents of Christianity were in the West, though it has spread to every continent and is now the largest religion in the world.

Traditional Christian beliefs include the belief in the one and only true God, who is one being and exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the belief that Jesus is the divine and human Messiah sent to save the world.

The sacred text of Christianity is the Bible, including both the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament) and the New Testament. Central to Christian practice is the gathering at churches for worship, fellowship, and study, and engagement with the world through evangelism and social action.

Since Jesus and the earliest Christians were devout Jews, Christianity shares a great deal of the worldview of Judaism. Among the many Jewish scriptures found in the Christian Bible is the Book of Genesis, which includes the sacred story of the creation of the universe and the fall of humanity. The Book of Exodus relates the sacred story of Moses and contains the Ten Commandments. The Christian Bible also includes the stories of the prophets of Israel, in whose words Christians see the life and death of Jesus foretold. These scriptures, written before the time of Jesus, are included in the Christian Old Testament.

The New Testament is that portion of the Christian Bible that was written after the time of Jesus' death. The New Testament includes the Gospels, which relate the sacred story of the life and teachings of Jesus. Historically the Church has believed these stories to be literally true. In modern times, some Christians have viewed them as being symbolic. But they are sacred to all Christians because they reveal God's plan for humanity, which includes salvation and eternal life.

Worship and Devotion in Daily Life

There are some Christian practices that are broadly applicable to multiple traditions. The daily practices of prayer, devotion, and study vary significantly between denominations and will be described in the articles on those traditions.

Christians, like Jews and Muslims, seek God in their daily lives through prayer and the study of scripture. Filled with promises of blessings to those who pray in a manner acceptable to God, the

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself



All of life should be the worship of God, expressed not only in ritual and prayer, but in how a Christian lives. The Christian is transformed by God's love. The highest expression of that transformation is found in acts of love toward others.

New Testament strongly encourages prayer, providing both instructions and examples. The Gospel of Matthew contains an example of prayer that Jesus gave to his followers, setting the pattern for how to pray and what to pray for. Famously known as the "Lord's Prayer," this short text, containing many of the fundamental assumptions of Christianity, is the most influential prayer for Christians. They should approach God as a child approaches a parent, with simplicity and directness, in confidence and in love. The will of the Christian is subordinate to the will of God, and the immediate needs of the Christian are subordinate to a devout longing for God's reign.

Principles of Moral Thought and Action

In Christian teaching, worship is not limited to Sundays and other important days. All of life should be the worship of God, expressed not only in ritual and prayer, but in how a Christian lives. The Christian is transformed by God's love and is a new person, redeemed by Christ and restored to God. The highest expression of that transformation is found in acts of love toward others, or love of neighbor.

In the Gospel of Matthew, an expert

in the Torah asks Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" In his reply, Jesus cites two commandments. The "first and greatest" of these is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5, a passage found in the Torah. The second "greatest" commandment is to "Love your neighbor as yourself," also found in the Torah, in Leviticus 19:18. Not only did he isolate these as the two most important commandments in the Torah, Jesus added that "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:36-40).

Jews viewed the Torah as a gift from God, so Jesus naturally referred to the Torah to provide guidance in loving God and neighbor. Being devout Jews, the first Christians followed Jesus' example, turning to the Torah as their guide for understanding how love works in real life. Christians view the Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20, as the ideal guide to living the life that God intends.

The first four commandments guide Christians on how to love God, and the last six guide Christians on how to love others. These ten simple rules form the basic guide, given by God, to the full

expression of Christian love. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus addresses several of these commandments and intensifies their application. For example, he not only forbids murder, he calls his followers to recognize that unresolved anger also destroys others. He not only forbids adultery, but calls his followers to purity of mind and heart. However, various interpretations of these rules by the churches have imbued these rules with a challenging complexity. The Bible's language does not always adapt to changing circumstances in order to provide clear direction for living a life of love. Aware of this limitation, the apostle Paul placed great stress on faith and freedom in his epistles. Love, taught Paul, is not coerced by laws, but is freely given. The influential theologian Augustine wrote, "Love, and do what you will . . . Let love's root be within you, and from that root nothing but good can spring." If one is transformed by God's love, and loves God in return, then he or she will always find the best way to love others as well.

Vision for Society

Christianity is an eschatological faith that seeks the coming Kingdom of God. Deeply rooted in Judaism, Christianity shares the Jewish expectation of a final day of judgment, called the Day of the Lord. On this day, humanity will see God or God's representative, the Messiah, and all injustice will be brought to light in a final reckoning. Once injustice has been exposed and punished, God's perfect justice will prevail. The New Testament writers share this expectation, with the characteristic Christian belief that it is Jesus the Messiah who will return in judgment. On the day of his Second Coming, also referred to as the parousia, Jesus will return not as a poor and obscure teacher, but in glory as a King, and like the kings of Israel, will judge everyone according to their deeds. The world as we know it will end, and the Kingdom of God will be fully realized.

While the final judgment will arrive in one great cataclysmic moment at an unknown point in the future, Christians believe that God also judges them throughout their entire lives. Jesus taught that while the Kingdom of God would come at an unknown time, it is also present in the here and now for those who are ready to take part in it. The Kingdom of God is "at hand" (Mark 1:14), "in your midst" (Luke 17:20), and "within you" (Luke 17:21).

Jesus taught that while the Kingdom of God would come at an unknown time, it is also present in the here and now for those who are ready to take part in it. The Kingdom of God is within you, teaches the Bible.

Compiled from Patheos.com, non-denominational, non-partisan online site that provides information and commentary from various religious and nonreligious perspectives.

As per Judaism, God is the single creator and animator of the world. God granted humanity the gift of free choice. When people follow His ways (as outlined in the Torah), God rewards them, here or hereafter.

Judaism is defined as the totality of beliefs and practices of the Jewish people, as given by God and recorded in the Torah (Hebrew Bible) and subsequent sacred writings of Judaism.

Jewish people believe by definition that God is the single creator and animator of the world.

God is everywhere and has no properties (for that matter, neither is He really a “he.”) In Jewish belief, God is the invisible force behind everything that happens and knows everything, past present and future.

God granted humanity the gift of free choice. When people follow His ways (as outlined in the Torah), God rewards them. These rewards can be in this world, as well as in the world to Come, which comes after death.

Just as every individual works hard toward achieving personal perfection through following God’s ways, so is the entire world heading toward a time of eternal peace and plenty. This time is known as the era of Moshiach (or Messiah). During this time, Jews will return to the Land of Israel and rebuild the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. A most amazing feature of this time is that death will cease, and the dead will be brought back to life.

The Story of Judaism

The story of the Jewish people begins with God creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh. Then, He chose Abraham and his children to become His special nation who would dwell in a special homeland (Israel).

After a 210-year stint of slavery in Egypt, God took His people to Mount Sinai, where he made a covenant with them and gave them instructions for life. After 40 years of wander-

Understanding Jewish Faith

ing, the Israelites entered the Promised Land. In time, they built a Holy Temple (Beit Hamikdash) in Jerusalem, where they could offer sacrifices and connect to God.

The Holy Temple was eventually destroyed by Roman invaders, and the Jewish people went into exile and were scattered all over the world.

But the story is not over yet. They believe that the time will come when they will once again be gathered in their homeland with a rebuilt Temple in a world that will be peaceful, Godly and perfect.

The Term Judaism

There are three names for the descendants of Abraham:

The Torah refers to Abraham as a Hebrew, and that term is commonly associated with the language of his descendants.

His grandson, Jacob, was given a second name of Israel, and that name has become closely associated with Israelite homeland. Of Jacob’s 12 sons, Judah had the role of leadership. At one point, he was the dominant tribe among those living in Israel, and the entire nation became known as Jews, and their creed, Judaism.

Sacred Texts of Judaism

Moses—the leader who led the Jews out of Egypt and to whom God communicated in the presence of the people at Mount Sinai—recorded the story of creation and the history of Abraham’s family up until his time in what became known as the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses. In addition, the Torah also contains God’s instructions for personal and communal life.

Prophets and Writings: In addition to the Torah, there are 19 other books that are sacred to the Jewish people. They are grouped into Neviim and Ketuvim (Prophets and Writings). They contain the history of the Jewish people for

From Chabad.org

several hundred years from after Moses’ death, as well as prophetic communications from great leaders of the Jewish people.

Oral Torah: Alongside the Divine traditions that Moses recorded in the Torah, there were many details and commandments from God that were communicated and preserved orally. As time went on, the sages of each generation discussed the Torah and elaborated on its principles. These discussions were eventually written down, becoming the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash.

What Jews Do

The Torah contains 613 instructions, called mitzvahs. While some of these mitzvahs pertain to the Holy Temple, others are applicable to day-to-day Jewish life. Here are some of the basics.

Shabbat: Remember that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh? He commanded His people to do the same. Every seventh day (Friday night to Saturday night)

Jewish people feast, pray and enjoy a break from everyday life. The Shabbat is ushered in with candle lighting late on Friday afternoon.

Kosher: In the Torah, God sets forth a special diet for His people. Only certain species of animal may be eaten (no pork or shellfish), meat must be slaughtered in a special way, and meat and dairy are kept completely separate. Read more here.

Prayer: Jews pray regularly to God, often communally in a synagogue. The backbone of the prayer service is a line from the Torah called the Shema, which reads: Shema Yisrael A-donai E-lohainu A-donai Ekhad. In addition to being said every morning and night, this prayer is also said as a Jew prepares to pass on to the next world.

Tallit and Tefillin: Jewish males are enjoined to wear certain “adornments,” which are most often donned during prayer. The tefillin are leather boxes that are strapped to the head and arm. They contain sacred scrolls, which contains snippets of the Torah, including the Shema. The tallit

is a four-cornered garment (often white with black stripes) worn draped over the shoulders.

When we look at the fringes (tzitzit) on each corner, we are reminded of God and His commandments.

Jewish Holidays

In the fall there are the high holidays: Rosh Hashanah (the New Year), which is celebrated with prayers, hearing the blasts of the shofar (ram’s horn) and feasts, which include the traditional dish of apples dipped in honey; Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), when Jews gather to pray and don’t eat or drink for 25 hours; and Sukkot, celebrated by dwelling in special huts called sukkahs, and taking the four kinds.

These are followed by

Chanukah, in the winter, which is celebrated with lighting a candelabra called a menorah (or chanukiah) for eight consecutive nights, and Purim, which is a joyful holiday toward the end of winter.

In the spring, Jews celebrate Pesach (or Passover), during which we get rid of all leaven (dough that has risen). Instead, matzah (a flat cracker-like food) is eaten. This is followed by Shavuot, which marks the day of the Divine revelation at Sinai, when we received the Torah.

Sacred Places of Judaism

The Land of Israel is the sacred birthright of the Jewish people. The holiest city is Jerusalem, which is the place God chose for His presence to dwell in. The holiest place in Jerusalem is the Temple Mount, where the two Holy Temples stood. Since Jews can no longer go there, the Western Wall, which hugs the western embankment of the mountain, has become the central place for Jewish prayer.

All over the world, Jews gather regularly to pray in synagogues (also called shuls). In the front of the synagogue (in the direction that faces Jerusalem), is the Holy Ark, a cabinet in which the Torah scrolls (each one handwritten on parchment) are housed.

But Jewish worship can happen anywhere, and every place can become a holy place. Do something nice and make God proud somewhere, and you’ve made that place a sacred spot.

Are There Different Kinds of Jews?

Every Jew has equal access to God. The more mitzvahs you do, the more Torah you study, and the more you work on refining your character, the closer you come to God. No individuals or organizations hold the keys to heaven.

Rabbis are learned Jews, who are proficient in key areas of the Torah. Like a doctor is qualified to give medical advice and prescribe medicine, someone who has been conferred the title “rabbi” can be relied upon to be a trustworthy and accurate conduit of Jewish tradition, belief and practice.

Article recommended by Rabbi Yitschak Hassine, West Hills Torah Center, Huntington, NY



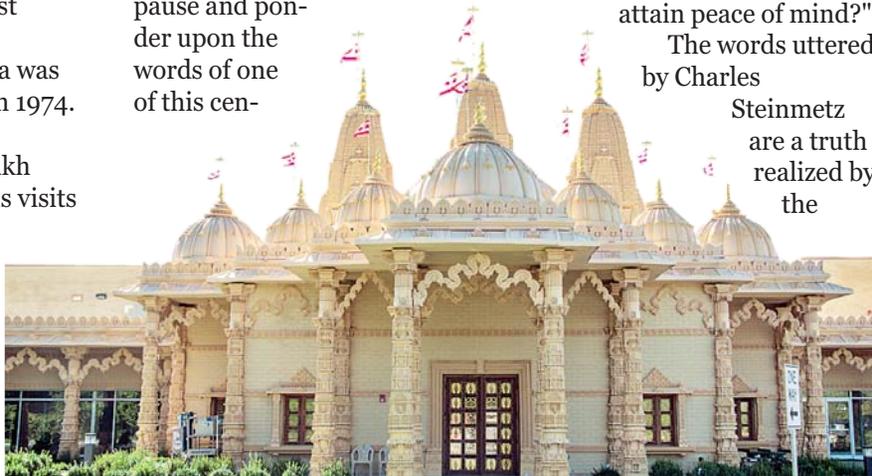
The Jewish people consider the Land of Israel as their sacred birthright. Their holiest city is Jerusalem. The holiest place in Jerusalem is the Temple Mount, where the two Holy Temples stood. Since Jews can no longer go there, the Western Wall, which hugs the western embankment of the mountain, has become the central place for Jewish prayer.

In 1970, Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan expressed his wish that swamis visit America and start satsang activities. Soon the first mandir of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha was built in Flushing, NY in 1974. With the blessings of Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his visits to the United States, the congregation grew in numbers. Thus, devotees realized the need for a larger space to accommodate the increasing population of devotees.

In 1988, Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave his blessings for building a bigger temple. A developer who was building a housing complex in Melville, Long Island agreed to give BAPS five acres of land from 18 he had purchased from Newsday. In 2012, approvals were secured and on October 9, 2016, the mandir was inaugurated with great fanfare. The 48,000 sq ft mandir includes youth classrooms, a gymnasium, and an assembly hall to host the weekly Satsang or spiritual assemblies.

A Place of Paramount Peace

The 21st century has brought with it technological advances of power and precision in the last 50 years as has not been accomplished in the past 5000 years! But let us pause and ponder upon the words of one of this cen-



Opened in 2016, the mandir in traditional Hindu temple style of architecture, the Melville mandir includes youth classrooms, a gymnasium, and an assembly hall to host the weekly Satsang.

tury's most eminent scientists, Charles Steinmetz: "Someday people will learn that material things do not bring peace or happiness, and are little in making men and women creative and powerful."

A hectic routine filled with career competition and personal ambitions, imperfect relationships, and demanding family life, leaves the average individual with an ardent craving for answers to one of life's most pressing questions: "How can I

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Long Island

attain peace of mind?"
The words uttered
by Charles
Steinmetz
are a truth
realized by
the

mandir. Faith can be our greatest strength and these places fuel our faith in God, strengthen our communities and teach our families lessons for a peaceful life.

Mandir is the name for a Hindu place of worship and prayer. The word mandir is composed of two words, Man and Dir, whose meanings are mind and still, respectively. Therefore, a mandir is a place where the mind becomes still, and the soul seeks the bliss of God. A Mandir is a center vibrant with spiritual activities such as devotion, prayers, seva, and meditation. A mandir is also an active community space where many social service activities are carried out. It is with this vision that the BAPS

constructs traditional mandirs in North America.

Under the leadership of Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1971 – 2016) and currently Mahant Swami Maharaj, BAPS and the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Melville, NY have been serving with an emphasis on spirituality, family unity, cultural heritage, and humanitarian services, child and youth development. Describing the impact of a mandir in our lives, Pramukh Swami Maharaj says: "A Mandir...inspires a higher way of life.

A Mandir...teaches us to respect one another.

A Mandir...is a place for realizing God.

A Mandir... is a place of paramount peace."



The word mandir is composed of two words, Man and Dir, meaning mind and still. Therefore, a mandir is a place where the mind becomes still, and the soul seeks the bliss of God.

AsaMai Hindu Temple & Community Center in Hicksville, NY was established in 1992 by members of the Afghan-Hindu Association. But it has become a focal point for the wider Hindu community living in and around Long Island.

The Afghan-Hindu Association is a nonprofit founded by Hindus from Afghanistan who have migrated and settled in the United States.

As a religious minority in Afghanistan, the Afghan-Hindus are accustomed to living as a close knit community. As many families migrated and settled in the US, a need was felt to establish a Temple of their own to follow and preserve their practices, culture and rituals. The original temple was opened on Bownie Street in Flushing, NY as most of the community had settled around there.

As the community grew and moved out of Flushing, the current AsaMai Hindu Temple and Community Center was established in 2004 in Hicksville, NY. This year the Afghan-Hindu Community also established an AsaMai

AsaMai Hindu Temple & Community Center, Hicksville



A major event organized by the AsaMai Hindu Temple for the last 13 years is the Annual Diwali Mela, which is attended by over 5,000 people from the tristate area.

Hindu Temple in Silver Spring, MD for people living in the Washington DC metropolitan region.

The doors of AsaMai Hindu Temple in Hicksville, its priests and services are open to all Hindus. Besides organizing religious, social and cultur-

sages of ancient India. A modern voice of this truth, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, says, "If schools will educate the mind, then who will educate the soul? Movies, clubs, and restaurants will excite the mind senses, but where will one go for peace of mind?"

Many religions in their traditions build houses of worship. Different traditions have different names for these places: mosque, church, gurudwara, derasar, pagoda, and

al events, the Temple regularly conducts discourses by religious and spiritual preachers from India and elsewhere. Regular yoga, dance, music & Hindi classes are also held by various instructors.

A major event organized by AsaMai Hindu Temple for the



AsaMai Hindu Temple & Community Center in Hicksville, NY was established in 1992 by members of the Afghan-Hindu Association.

last 13 years is the Annual Diwali Mela. It is attended by over 5,000 people living in New York counties of Queens, Nassau and Suffolk and even from New Jersey and Connecticut. The all-day mela is held outdoors near the temple and features dance, music and cultural performance. Festive atmosphere pervades with carnival rides for children, food stalls with cuisine from every region of India and vendors of arts and crafts, jewelry and clothing as well as booths of business establishments.

The Temple's banquet size hall in the basement with a professional kitchen and a smaller hall are utilized for private functions and events. Besides religious gatherings

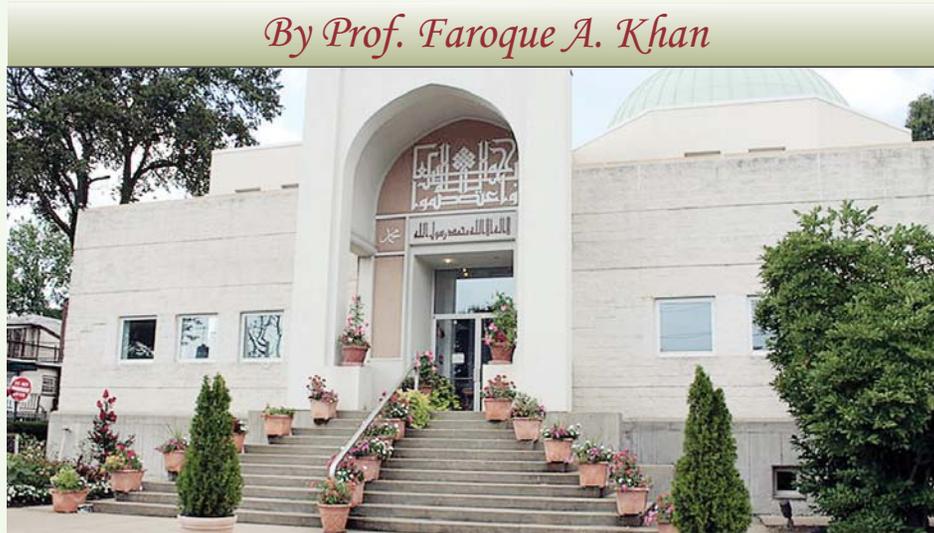
like Chowkis and Karva Chauth Vrat Katha, where over 800 patrons participate, the banquet hall is utilized for corporate events, social gatherings, weddings, birthday parties and musical concerts at a nominal cost. The premises is also used for healthcare events like free clinics, blood drives and lectures.

The name 'AsaMai' comes from the AsaMai Temple (Goddess of Hope) based in the foothills of the AsaMai mountain at the end of the Hindu Kush range in Kabul, Afghanistan for over 5,000 years. The Temple is believed to be very sacred and is integral part of the Hindus and Sikhs remaining in Afghanistan.

The Interfaith Institute of the Islamic Center of Long Island

In 1992, Islamic Center of Long Island (ICLI) in Westbury, NY received a call from the office of Rabbi Jerome Davidson at Temple Beth El in Great Neck, NY inquiring about the presence and willingness of LI Muslims to engage in a conversation with them. The late Br Ghazi Khankan and I visited Temple Beth El and thus began the dialogue –American Muslims and Jews in Dialogue (AMJID). This ground breaking unique initiative was presented at many local and national meetings and received several awards and news media write ups. Details of AMJID are available in the book ‘Story of a Mosque in America’.

Post-9/11, the late Monsignor Thomas Hartman did not like the way the media was depicting Muslims -- he wanted to present the Muslims he knew and worked with. Father Tom’s initiative and willingness led to the TV program ‘Our Muslim Neighbors’, which presented 20 half-hour segments on Telecare, which was widely shared on the Catholic TV channel. The show addressed the frequently asked questions. Rabbi Gellman and Father Tom visited ICLI and asked key questions regarding the role of the Mosque in Muslims’ life - that was the first episode. Subsequent episodes addressed the role of women, scriptures, prophets, terrorism, etc. These



By Prof. Faroque A. Khan

The Interfaith Institute was started in 2015 from the ICLI in Westbury, NY.

20 programs are available on ICLI web site—www.icliny.com.

During this time period ICLI hosted many programs for the Elderhosteler’s and responded to numerous invitations from churches, synagogues, schools, and addressed questions about Muslims and Islam with a major focus on terrorism.

The ICLI board approved the creation of a unique Interfaith Institute (IFI) and it was started in 2015. While there are many interfaith initiatives around the country and even globally, we are not aware of any which exists under the umbrella of an Islamic center. The unique feature of this IFI is

that the advisory board includes members of other faiths. Under the watchful eye of the advisory board, IFI has held many impactful events since 2015.

Two examples: IFI in 2016 recognized Prof Larycia Hawkins and in 2017 recognized Prof Diana Eck for their pioneering impactful work in advancing interfaith work. On Oct 7, 2018 at the third annual IFI awards event the focus will be on the Jewish-Muslim relationship past and present.



Prof Faroque Ahmed Khan is the Chairman, Interfaith Institute Board of Trustees and member ICLI Board of Trustees. In 2015 he helped launch the interfaith institute of the Islamic Center of Long Island. Dr. Khan and his wife Arfa are founding members of ICLI in Westbury, NY, which since 1984 has striven to be a center of excellence for developing and sustaining a progressive, vibrant Islamic community and a nurturing environment for the society at large.

Dr. Khan graduated from Government Medical College in Kashmir. He served as Chairman of Medicine at Nassau University Medical Center from 1987 to 1999. He was appointed professor of medicine at Stony Brook and became the first Muslim awarded Mastership in American College of Physicians (ACP). He has been a Regent of the ACP, President of Nargis Dutt Memorial Foundation, President of the Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA) and has served on the Majlis Shura of the Islamic Society of North America. In October 2014 the Long Island Council of Churches bestowed the Community Service award on him.

Congratulations to Tanenbaum for winning 2018 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize



Tanenbaum CEO Joyce S. Dubensky making her acceptance speech at Hofstra

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, a non-profit that promotes religious understanding in schools, workplaces, health care settings and regions of armed conflict across the globe, received earlier this year Hofstra University’s 2018 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize.

Tanenbaum CEO Joyce S. Dubensky received the honor from Hofstra’s President Stuart Rabinowitz at a gala ceremony in Garden City, NY. Through its Peacemakers in Action Network, Tanenbaum

facilitates and supports collaborations by a network of individuals from varied religious traditions who promote grassroots and interfaith peacebuilding efforts in armed conflicts around the world. The Network currently consists of 28 individuals

from 23 regions. “Tanenbaum is an extraordinary organization that embodies the principles of Guru Nanak,” said President Rabinowitz. “Tanenbaum empowers people with concrete strategies that lead to greater religious understanding and inclusion in societal institutions.”

Tanenbaum is also an inaugural member of the now 330+ participant CEO Action Diversity and Inclusion movement, and is in the third year of its public education campaign Combating Extremism,

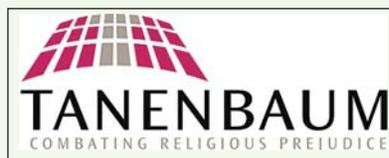
which aims to dispel stereotypes, inspire interreligious respect, and provide trustworthy information about current religion-related issues.

The \$50,000 Guru Nanak Interfaith

Prize is bestowed every two years to recognize significant work to increase interfaith understanding. The first Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize was awarded in 2008 to the Dalai Lama.

“Receiving the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize is an honor of the highest order,” said Tanenbaum CEO Joyce S. Dubensky. “To be recognized as an advocate for the same values embodied by Guru Nanak—justice, equality, respect and compassion—is an affirmation of everything Tanenbaum seeks to achieve.”

The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize was established in 2006 by Ishar Bindra and family. It is meant to encourage understanding of various religions and encourage cooperation between faith



communities. Guru Nanak believed that all humans are equal, regardless of color, ethnicity, nationality or gender.

In September 2000, the Bindra family endowed the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies at Hofstra University in honor of the family’s matriarch.

Tejinder Bindra, speaking on behalf of the Bindra Family, noted when the award was inaugurated that Guru Nanak espoused a message of universal brotherhood at a time of increasing religious intolerance during 15th and 16th cen-

tury India. “It is in this spirit that the Guru Nanak Prize was initiated,” Bindra said. “If one can experience that universality then there is absolutely no room left for differences in race, color, caste, creed, religion or gender, and then as the Sikh scripture tells us ‘I see no stranger’.”

“The awardees may or may not be Sikh and may represent any of the multitudes of faiths or, for that matter, even no particular faith at all,” he said. “It is their dedication that brings humankind to their shared destiny, common purpose and roots that they honor.”

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding was founded 26 years ago by Dr. Georgette F. Bennett, in memory of her late husband, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, a humanitarian interfaith leader.

Richmond Hill Gurdwara

The first Sikh temple on East Coast



The gurdwara is run by Sikh Cultural Society, which also organizes the annual Sikh Day Parade in NYC around Vaisakhi.

Around 1970 there were about 40-50 Indian families, Sikh and non-Sikh, in New York and we used to meet in the basement of a school in Flushing. We would have a prayer session and communal meal, prepared by each family taking turns. It became a community hub and networking place where we helped each other and particularly the new immigrants to find work or habitation. Already working as an engineer, I always proffered help in this regard.

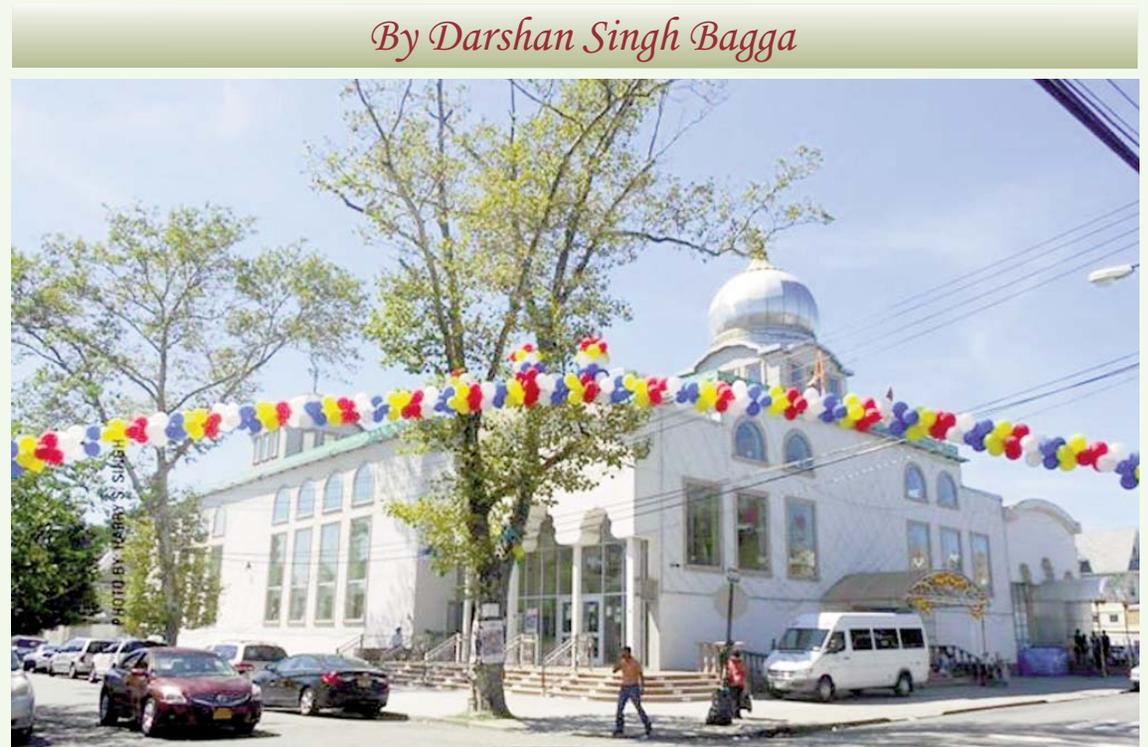
Soon we lost use of that school basement and realized that we must have our own gurdwara. Sardar Harbans Singh, called the father of Sikh community in the USA who had settled well in the city long back, became the biggest contributor to a gurdwara building fund we raised. With that money we purchased an old church building at \$65,000 on the condition that the original structure will be retained.

So in 1972 history was made when the first major gurdwara

(Sikh temple) on the east coast was opened in Richmond Hill in Queens. Initially, devotees brought cooked food from outside. But soon we had our own in-house kitchen, as langar (free kitchen) is a tradition in every gurdwara. The gurdwara, near JFK airport, soon provided a place of refuge and spiritual harmony for people from all walks of life, not just Sikhs, particularly the new arrivals.

However, in a tragic incident in March 2002, a fire of unknown origin ripped through the old building. But shortly after in 2004 the construction of the new building started for which Sikhs from here and around the world provided monetary help.

I too was approached around 10 years back because a loan to complete the project they had applied from a bank in Suffolk County was not coming through. As the Vice President saw the men with turbans walk in he asked them if they knew Darshan Bagga. They told him that I was the founder of this



From 8,000 sq feet in 1972, the Richmond Hill gurdwara's built up area has expanded 10 times to now approximately 80,000 sq ft.

gurdwara in the beginning and he asked to speak with me. The manager of that bank knew me as I had taken a loan from that bank a long time ago. On the manager's advice I deposited a million dollars in the bank and without collateral, the loan for the gurdwara was approved within a week. This loan of 3 million dollars expedited the construction. That was the happiest moment of my life.

Now the Richmond Hill gurdwara on 118th Street is appraised at \$20 million and is one of the biggest Sikh temples in the United States. From approx. 8000 sq feet in 1972, its built up area has grown 10 times to now approx. 80,000 sq ft.

It is run by Sikh Cultural Society, which also organizes the annual Sikh Day Parade in NYC around Vaisakhi.

I believe that the gurdwaras become a platform for the Indian community to network with each other and this was a major reason why I pursued the committee to buy the gurdwara as engineers in the beginning years were in dire need of a job. Also to invite politicians to tell them about Sikhism, about our founder Guru Nanak's universal teachings of kirat karo (honest labor) and vand chhako (sharing your good fortune with others).

Details of the efforts will continue in the next issues of One World Under God

Pillars of the Gurdwara

They brought their unique talents to bear on the success and expansion of the Richmond Hill gurdwara.



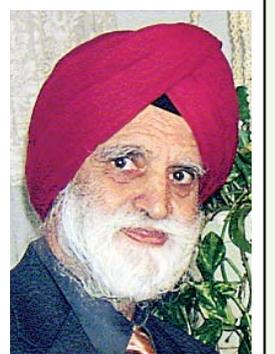
Harbans Singh (1922-April 2018) called the father of the Sikh community in USA, with his wife Harbans Singh Kaur.



Dr. Rajinder S. Uppal (left), seen here with KR Narayanan (later India's President) ran a free medical clinic in the Richmond Hill gurdwara in the early years.



Darshan and Lovlin Bagga



Prof. IJ Singh

Global Interfaith Foundation announces Inaugural Student Scholarships

The Global Interfaith Foundation, endowed by Lovlin and Darshan Singh Bagga, has decided to bestow 10 scholarships to the graduating students of Hicksville High School every year. For 2018, the high school gave recommendations and the following 7 students are each receiving the \$2000 scholarships:

1. Ernesto Marinero (attending a vocational BOCES program)
2. Srishti Tyagi (valedictorian of the Class of 2018)
3. Navneet Lingala (based on community service and a STEM program he started at the Hicksville Library for young children)
4. Ajith Adithya (based on community service and a STEM program he started at the Hicksville Library for young children)
5. Michelle Sauerland
6. Brandy Diaz
7. Salaiha Mughal (will be attending Cornell University)

The following 3 students were selected to receive the \$500 scholarships.

1. Medjie Chery
2. Jamie Kitanoff
3. Esterfanie Arrue

Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara, Hicksville

Afghani Sikhs efforts bear fruit

By Parveen Chopra

In 1990, thousands of Hindus and Sikhs living in Afghanistan had to flee the country, which fell to the Taliban and civil war erupted. They were scattered all over. About 100 families came to New York and settled in the Hicksville area. Initially they used to have gatherings at somebody's residence, particularly to celebrate gurburabs (birth anniversaries of Sikh gurus) and even akhand path. They also frequented the Plainview or Glen Cove gurdwara, recalls Harcharan Singh Gultai, secretary of the gurdwara.

Soon they felt the need to have their own gurdwara and this current site was selected. A committee of 21 was formed to work on raising the funds, out of them 11 were trustees who each gave \$21,000. In



A view of the main hall with devotees listening to gurbani, and the langar hall that serves free meals to all irrespective of religion.

2009 over \$200,000 was raised but more money was required. A word went out and contributions came in from the Afghan Sikh sangat (community) from as far as London, Moscow, Dubai and Ireland. The gurdwara in downtown Hicksville was

opened to public in 2010.

In the basement the kitchen was set up next with contributions from local devotees. Now langar is open to people of all religions, and is availed by many including students and Americans.

Now over 700 families, even



non-Afghani Sikhs, are regulars at the gurdwara and they include sahadaris (who do not wear turbans but believe in Guru Nanak). Sindhis actually go to the Hindu temple and frequent the gurdwara also. And all make use of the premises for marriages, birthdays

and mourning sessions, etc.

The gurdwara also invites raagis and pracharakas from India and elsewhere.

The major annual events organized at the gurdwara include Guru Nanak birthday that falls in November, and Vaisakhi in April.

Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Center, Plainview

By Parveen Chopra

Dr Rajinder Singh Uppal is an eminent internist and a senior member of the Sikh community who has been associated with the main gurdwaras in Long Island and Queens, including the Plainview gurdwara. He recalls how he and a couple of friends got together in 1988 to acquire a church building on Old Country Road in Plainview for \$500,000 with a loan of \$400,000 taken on personal guarantees. And the first gurdwara in Long Island opened its gates.

The good doctor is now in the limelight as Plainview gurdwara on Old Country Road reopened on July 16 after years. Many are giving credit for its second coming with greater glory than before to him. We interviewed him on his involvement with what he calls a project.

"I was approached in 2014 as the reconstruction of the gurdwara had run into financial trouble. Legal and regulatory issues had brought the work to a virtual standstill. To get the ban lifted on construction, we took our case to the federal court and pleaded that we were being discriminated against. In July 2016 we won and gained permission to build, redrawing the premises.

Now a grand opening is planned for September.



The seven houses they acquired around the gurdwara will gradually be used for holding functions by the sangat, for running amenities like a school and medical lectures. Dr Uppal remembers how from 1971 he led a free health clinic in the Richmond Hill gurdwara for some years.

Darshan Singh Bagga is all praise for Dr Uppal's administrative ability and finds the new gurdwara beautiful beyond words. Humbly, Dr Uppal says, "I feel blessed that I was found capable by the almighty to do a certain service." He says even in his medical practice, he treats patients knowing that they consider the doctor no less than God. "In the gurdwara everybody present is sangat and has to be treated with respect. As for people working with you, you have to mediate if disputes erupt to hold the peace," is his mantra.

With the Plainview project complete, he has already left the chairmanship.

The rebuilt gurdwara is bigger and beautiful

To Our Dear Friend
**Mr. Darshan
Singh Bagga**

Congratulations on
Launch of "One World Under God"

Best Wishes From
Saleem Iqbal, President & CEO



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The Holiest Places in the World

Vatican City is an independent state located within the city of Rome. Vatican City is an ecclesiastical state ruled by the Pope. The current pontiff is Pope Francis who is intrinsically the bishop of Rome and the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Since 1377, the Popes have all ruled from the Apostolic Palace, which is now the center of Vatican City. Vatican City is distinct from the Holy See, which dates back to early Christianity and is the main episcopal see of 1.2 billion Latin and Eastern Catholic adherents around the globe. There are many famous religious and cultural sites within the Vatican City: 1)



The Vatican

St. Peter's Basilica: an Italian Renaissance church. 2) The Sistine Chapel in the Apostolic Palace with the famous paintings by Michelangelo. 3) the Vatican Museums: A collection of Christian and art museums.

Venkateswara Temple is situated in the hill town of Tirumala at Tirupati in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, India. The Temple is dedicated to Lord Sri Venkateswara, an incarnation of Vishnu, also known as Balaji, Govinda, and Srinivasa.

The temple is the richest pilgrimage center after the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, of any faith and arguably the most-visited place of worship in the world. The temple is visited by about 30 to 40 million people annually on average. The Temple is constructed in Dravidian architecture and is believed to be constructed over a period of time starting from 300 AD. The presiding deity, Venkateswara, is in standing posture and faces east in



Venkateswara Temple

Garbha griha. The temple follows Vaikhanasa Agama tradition of worship. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is an independent trust that manages the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple. It is also involved in various social, religious, literary and educational activities.

Mecca in Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad and the site of his first revelation of the Quran. Because of this, Mecca is regarded as the holiest city for Islam. A pilgrimage to Mecca is known as the Hajj and it is mandated for all able bodied Muslims once in their lifetime. Today more than 15 million Muslims visit Mecca annually with most of them visiting during the first days of the Hajj. Due to the scale of visitors, Mecca has had to expand its infrastructure at the expense of losing historical structures. Mecca now houses the Makkah Royal Clock Tower Hotel, the world's fourth tallest building.

In Mecca, there is The Great Mosque of Mecca, the most impor-



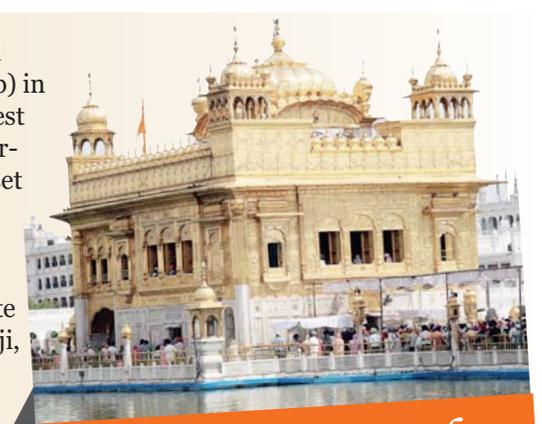
Mecca

tant mosque to Muslims. In the Mosque is the Kabba. It is the most sacred site in Islam and is considered by Muslims to be the House of God. When performing their Islamic prayer, Muslims around the world have to face in the direction of the Kabba.

The Golden Temple (official name Sri Harmandir Sahib) in Amritsar, India is the holiest shrine of Sikhs. The temple is surrounded by a sacred pool and a set of buildings including the Akal Takht, the highest religious authority for Khalsa Sikhs.

The temple was built in the late 16th century by Guru Arjan Dev ji, Sikhs' fifth guru, and a copy of the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, was placed inside the temple in 1604. Its sanctum walls were covered in marble and the dome was decorated with gold foil by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the 19th century.

With an average 100,000 visitors a day, the Golden Temple is one of the most popular holy places in the world and ranked No. 3 in India on the travellers' choice landmarks' list. The



The Golden Temple

four entrances (representing the four directions) to get into the Harmandir Sahib symbolize the openness of the Sikhs towards all people and religions. The kitchen of the temple serves free meals, called langar, to an average of 40,000 people daily irrespective of religion.

Jerusalem has been the holiest city for Jews since the 10th century BCE. It is the focus and spiritual center of the Jews. Jerusalem is a part of the Jewish religious consciousness and Jews have always studied and personalized the struggle by King David to capture Jerusalem and build the Holy Temple there. This is described in the Book of Samuel and the Book of Psalms. King David's yearnings about Jerusalem have been adapted into popular Jewish prayers and songs. Jewish people believe that in time, a new temple will be built in Jerusalem and will become the spiritual center of the world. The



Jerusalem

Western Wall in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem is one of the holiest sites in modern Judaism. This is because it is the closest point to the original site of the Holy of Holies which is currently inaccessible to Jews.

Bodh Gaya is a Buddhist religious site and place of pilgrimage associated with the Mahabodhi Temple in Gaya district of Bihar in India. It is the place where Gautama Buddha is said to have obtained Enlightenment. For Buddhists, Bodh Gaya is the most important of the four main pilgrimage sites related to the life of Gautama Buddha, the other three being Lumbini (where he was born), Sarnath (where he delivered his first sermon) and Kushinagar (where he left his body). As Siddhartha, he renounced his family and travelled and meditated in search of truth. Because austerities could not lead to realization, he abandoned them and discovered the Middle Path. The historical place where he attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree became a place



Bodh Gaya

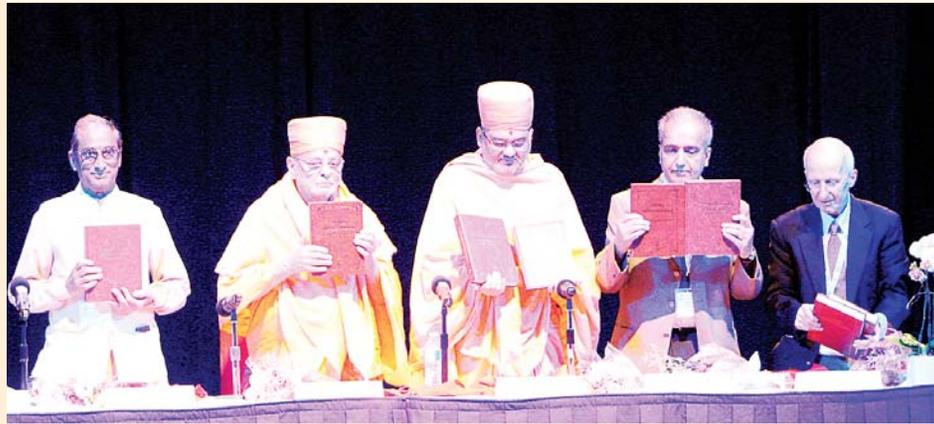
of pilgrimage. The Mahabodhi Temple here may have originally been built by King Ashoka. Its architecture is superb but its history is shrouded in obscurity. Near the temple is an 80-ft statue of Buddha in meditating posture, that was unveiled and consecrated in 1989 and blessed by the Dalai Lama.

World Sanskrit Conference in Vancouver accepts darshan from BAPS as distinct Vedanta school

Vancouver, Canada: The 17th World Sanskrit Conference, the premier international forum for Sanskrit scholars, recognized Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as the first new independent school of Vedanta since the 16th century. The recently authored groundbreaking Sanskrit works on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, the Swaminarayan Bhashyam and the Swaminarayan Siddhanta-Sudha by Sadhu Bhadreshdas of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, were also launched in the conference's inaugural session on July 9 at the University of British Columbia here.

More than 600 eminent Sanskrit scholars and educators had gathered from over 40 countries for the triennial meet to advance understanding of Sanskrit language and literature. The conference's organizing committee member, Prof Ashok Aklujkar said, "Bhadreshdas Swami is one of the most amazing personalities of the religious traditions of India that I have ever met. His scholarly genius is jaw-dropping, and his commentaries on the Prasthantrayi are a truly great achievement. Just as the Kashi Vishva Parishad acknowledged Swaminarayan Bhagwan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a distinct

Earlier, Kashi Vishva Parishad had acknowledged Swaminarayan Bhagwan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a distinct darshan in the Vedanta tradition



Bhadreshdas Swami (middle)'s works on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, the Swaminarayan Bhashyam and the Swaminarayan Siddhanta-Sudha were launched at the conference in the University of British Columbia.

darshan in the Vedanta tradition, we are honored to do the same from this platform." Bhadreshdas Swami, an eminent Sanskrit scholar and ordained swami of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, completed the Swaminarayan Bhashyam, a 5-volume Sanskrit commentary on Hinduism's three Vedic canonical texts (Prasthantrayi) – the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras –

in 2007. These three texts form the foundation for the philosophical beliefs of Vedanta traditions. In 2017, he also completed the Swaminarayana-Siddhanta-Sudha, a classical Sanskrit dialectic treatise that offers an exposition, justification, and defense of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's theological and philosophical principles.

Commented Prof Deven Patel of the

University of Pennsylvania: "Bhadreshdas Swami's Swaminarayan Bhashyam interprets the Prasthantrayi through the lens of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. In the tradition of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha, and others, he has composed these commentaries."

In the conference's inaugural address, Bhadreshdas Swami explained the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, the classical name of the distinct school of Vedanta. This darshan was revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the 19th century and propounded by Shastriji Maharaj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. He added: "The essence of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is to offer devotion to Purushottam, the supreme being, with loving servitude having qualitatively realized oneself as Akshar, who takes the form of the exemplary living guru."

BAPS is a worldwide spiritual and humanitarian organization that is dedicated to community service, peace, and harmony. Motivated by Hindu principles, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families, and individuals.

World Hindu Congress 2018 in Chicago in September

Chicago: A digital billboard placed on a main highway in Chicago flashes a message about the World Hindu Congress (WHC) every 40 seconds and has been seen, at last count, by 1.5 million drivers.

The windy city will play host to the WHC and welcome icons, thought influencers, prominent leaders and members of the Hindu community from September 7th - 9th, 2018. They will gather to connect, discuss, energize and push awareness about critical issues facing Hindus worldwide and figure ways on how the community can be globally significant and impactful.

Registration has been closed two months prior to the event due to the tremendous response. A few spots for co-sponsors are all that's left and some spots have been reserved, on a case by case basis, for delegates from countries outside or North America.

Over 2000 Hindus from across the globe and 250

The meet commemorates 125 years of Swami Vivekananda's historic Chicago address on September 11, 1893 and has been dubbed as "the biggest Hindu gathering of leaders to date."



thought leaders are expected to fly in to attend the gathering. They include heads of countries with a sizable Hindu population, top tier corporate heads from both India and the US, dynamic Hindu leaders and media personalities. RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat is one of the key speakers. Tibetan leader HH Dalai Lama, Art of Living

Guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Chinmaya Mission Head Swami Swaroopananda, Swami Brahmavihari Das, Head of International Relations from BAPS, and Pranav Pandya from Gayatri Parivar will also be present at the event that has been dubbed as "the biggest Hindu gathering of leaders to date."

The conference is being

organized by the World Hindu Foundation headed by IIT, Kharagpur graduate Swami Vigyananand. It will commemorate 125 years of Swami Vivekananda's historic Chicago address on September 11, 1893. This is the second such conference, the first was held in New Delhi in 2014.

The theme of WHC 2018 is "Sumantrite Suvikrante" – think collectively, achieve valiantly. With over 3.23 million Hindus in the US and a little over one billion worldwide, making Hindus count globally is a key issue.

Senior leaders of the organization elaborated on the significance of the conference. According to WHC founder Swami Vigyananand, wealth creation, quality education, a robust Hindu presence in mass media, Hindu leadership, unique strengths of Hindu women and Hindu organizations must be encouraged to "graduate to collective success." This, he said, is the only way to increase our sphere of influ-

ence and have a positive societal impact.

Convener Dr. Abhaya Asthana highlighted the importance of "boosting the profile of Hindus" on the world stage. Hindus, he emphasized, need to come together collectively and establish their presence, and only then can they wield their clout to make a positive difference.

The goal of WHC, Chair S.P. Kothari said, is to "make the world understand the Hindu way and view of life not just at the spiritual and social level but also at the economic and educational level" while WHC Vice Chair Raju Reddy reflected that "Hindus are viewed as great doctors, engineers and entrepreneurs, as positive role models but they need to become change makers. This requires them to be organized."

To learn about or participate in the 2018 World Hindu Congress, visit <http://whc.2018worldhinducongress.org>

The 2018 Parliament of World's Religions to be held in Toronto

Toronto: The 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions is being hosted by the city of Toronto from November 1st through November 7th, 2018 at The Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC) in Toronto, Canada.

For its 2018 theme, the Parliament draws from movements of goodwill and cross-cultural respect that are embodied in the spirit of the interfaith movement:

▶ **The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love**

▶ **Pursuing Global Understanding, Reconciliation, & Change**

The 7th Parliament of the World's Religions will feature more than 500 programs and events across six major tracks:

▶ *The Women's Track: The Dignity of Women Across the World's Wisdom Traditions*

▶ *Countering War, Hate & Violence Track: Peace and Love: Not War, Hate & Violence*

▶ *Climate Action Track: Care for Our Earth, Responsibility for Our Future*

▶ *The Indigenous Peoples' Track: The Spiritual Evolution of Humanity & Healing Our Mother Earth*

▶ *The Next Generations Track:*

Interfaith Has No Age, Youth Voices for Change

▶ *Justice: Advancing Concrete Change Toward a Just, Peaceful, and Sustainable World*

Expected attendance will exceed 10,000 persons of faith and conscience from 80 nations and more than 200 unique spiritual backgrounds. The Parliament offers programming for all, from scholars and activists to families and children - lectures to interactive cultural experiences. Participants can be individuals whose profession or personal interests lead them to the Parliament or delegations from the guiding institutions like states, universities, or religious organizations. Parliament presenters include students, clergy, interfaith leaders, scholars, Nobel Laureates, city mayors, spiritual luminaries, best-selling authors, globally-recognized entertainers, thought leaders, state actors, and more.

The last Parliament of the World's Religions was held in the USA in Salt Lake City, Utah in 2015 and the first in Chicago in 1893, made famous by Swami Vivekananda's fiery speech introducing Hinduism to the world.

Keynote speakers include

▶ **Thomas Christopher Collins** is a Canadian cardinal of the Catholic Church. He is the tenth and current Archbishop of Toronto, having previously served as Bishop of Saint Paul in Alberta and Archbishop of Edmonton. He participated in the March 2013 conclave that elected Pope Francis.



▶ **Swami Agnivesh** is a New Delhi based leader of Arya Samaj, and Former Board member of KAICIID (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue). He was awarded the Right Livelihood award, known as the Alternative Nobel, in 2004, for his work for social justice

▶ **His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje**, who heads the 900-year-old Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism



▶ **Eboo Patel** is the Founder and President of Interfaith Youth Core, a nonprofit working to make interfaith cooperation a social norm. He served on President Obama's Inaugural Faith Council.

▶ **Simran Jeet Singh** is a professor of religion at Trinity University and Senior Religion Fellow for the Sikh Coalition, a civil rights organization based in New York City.



Qawwals and whirling dervishes join to celebrate love, peace and pluralism in DC

By Surekha Vjih in Washington

They say music and dance has only one language, that of the heart. That's what it felt like in the heart of the capital city, when qawwali singers from South Asia and the whirling dervish from Turkey created a soulful atmosphere accentuating the universal language of love and spirituality.

The singers and dancers while adding their passion, created a mystical ambiance, promoting and celebrating peace, unity, love and pluralism in the world.

The concert on July 7 was organized by the Rumi Circle of Greater Washington DC, along with noted South Asian qawwal brothers, Freed Ayaz and Abu Muhammed. It was the first ever public performance by the two brothers at the prestigious Warner Theater.

Dr Azra Raza, Professor of Medicine and Director of the MDS Center at Columbia University in New York, was the master of ceremonies. She spoke on the essence of Sufism, and its effect on the world and on the theme of the evening - peace, unity, love and plural-



South Asian qawwal brothers, Freed Ayaz and Abu Muhammed performed at the event.

ism. Introducing the qawwals and the dervishes. Dr. Raza said this was an effort to bring together artists and oneness of humanity under one roof irrespective of their language, religion and race. She said brothers Ayaz and Muhammad were among the best practitioners of qawwali, a 700-year-old musical tradition of India based on the mystical Sufi poetry.

Ayaz and Muhammad, who belong to the Delhi gharana, were trained under their father Ustad Munshi Raziuddin Ahmed Khan, who was a prominent musician in his time. The two have performed

in iconic venues in dozens of countries for more than three decades.

The qawwali tradition is 700 years old. It was started by Saamat bin Ibrahim, the principal student of Hazrat Amir Khusrau - the most prominent Sufi of India.

Sufism, a mystical school of Islam, emphasizes universal love, peace and acceptance. Various spiritual paths and mystical union with the divine, originated in as early as in the 15th century by the followers of poet Rumi.

The qawwals began with Allah Hu, followed by Qaseeda



Rumi Circle of Greater Washington DC co-organized the event. Dervish dancing is traced to the Sufi poet Rumi.

by poet Mantle and then sang Aaj Rung de written by famous poet Amir Khusrau. The other songs they performed included Lal Meri Pat Rakhyo Bala Jhoolai Lalan, Man Kunto Maula, Aiy Ree Sakhi Moray Piya Ghar Aa' aiy, and Chhaap Tilak.

"We are delighted and honored to be performing at the historic Warner Theater," said Ayaz. "We hope to spread the message of peace, unity, love and pluralism through our music."

A dance called sema was presented in rhythmic circular motions, specific to the

whirling dervishes. The dance performed was to express emotions and achieve the wisdom and love of God. Said to be founded by Jalaluddin Rumi, a 13th century poet and Sufi mystic, the dance originated in Turkey as a unifying form of Sufism.

The Rumi Circle is an informal group of Rumi aficionados in the DC area and the concert was themed "Love, Lover and the Beloved".

The admission to the concert was free, so that the maximum number people could attend. The hall was packed to the capacity.

CURING THE WORLD'S PAIN

- The Interfaith Way

Few periods without a war somewhere in the world. Isn't it time for humanity to take a step forward in its development, stop the madness of war and violence, and rise up to our noble heritage as true human beings, as children of the Lord, filled with love and compassion for all forms of life? It is time to take a step forward in human evolution and learn how to live peacefully in the kingdom of God.

We have within ourselves the solution for healing the world passed down to us by the saints, mystics, prophets, spiritual teachers, and founders of our respective religions and spiritual paths. The enlightened beings from whom the religions sprang came from many countries and time periods. Yet, they brought the same solution to heal the world and bring peace: love. No representative of God on earth preached hatred. No representative of God on earth preached division. All representatives of God on earth preached love and human unity.

How did the religious founders and spiritual teachers attain this high angle of vision? How did they come to the same conclusion about world peace? The answer is simple: Truth is one. Whoever comes in contact with the Lord carries back the same truth. Only the terminology varies due to differences in language and culture. The meaning behind the terms given to humanity by the Lord through chosen messengers is to know one's self, know God, and love God's creation.

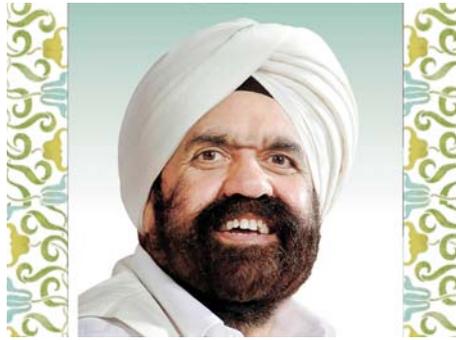
Through meditation and prayer, religious founders came in contact with God. Having attained spiritual illumination and divine revelation they devoted their lives to teaching prayer and meditation to their followers. Their compassion for humankind was great. They wanted others to attain the same divine vision of God that they enjoyed. If their messages form the basis of the religions of the world, why is the world still filled with conflict? It is time to end this insanity and violence. It is time to lay down our swords and guns, and instead offer each other flowers of love.

It is time to live up to the message of goodness and peace brought by our religious founders and spiritual teachers. We can bring about this healing by attaining the same angle of vision attained by those who gave the precepts of our religions and faiths. We too can reach the same realization of God and human oneness through meditation and ethical living.

As we meditate, we contact the divine Light of God, which brings a profound transformation within. This Light of God has been referred to in various religions.

The Sikhs call it Naam or Shabd. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Guru of the Sikhs, referred to Naam in the following prayers:

May we rise on the wings of Naam



By Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj

(the Holy Word). And:

And peace be unto the whole world, under Thy will, O Lord.

The Hindus called it Nad. In the Hindu scriptures, it is written:

Meditation on Nad or the Sound Principle is the royal road to salvation.

- HANSA NAD UPANISHAD

The ancient Greek philosophers called it Logos or Music of the Spheres. In the Bible it is called the Word. It is said in the Bible:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- (JOHN 1:1).

One of the main Buddhist mantras is: *Aum mani padme hum* (From the lotus-like light of aum, peals of thunder resound.)

In the Jewish scriptures it is said: *By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made...*

For God spake and it was done.

- PSALM 33:6, 9

Ever, O Lord, thy Word is settled in heaven...

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

- PSALM 119:89, 105

Shah Niaz, a Muslim saint has said:

The whole universe is resounding with the Sound, and thou hast only to open the door of thine ears. For opening the ears, it is sufficient to stop hearing the outer sounds. If you do this, you will hear the perpetual and unending Sound. It is infinite and has no beginning nor end, and on account is called Anhad (i.e., without any limits). Without this Word—the Eternal Sound—an expression of the Infinite, the world could not have come into existence. Hold communication with the Melodious Sound and lose yourself in it. O wise man. O God! Show me that place from where the Kalma (Sound Principle) proceedeth without Words.

And the Sufi saint, Jalaluddin Rumi, has said:

Rise above the horizon, O brave

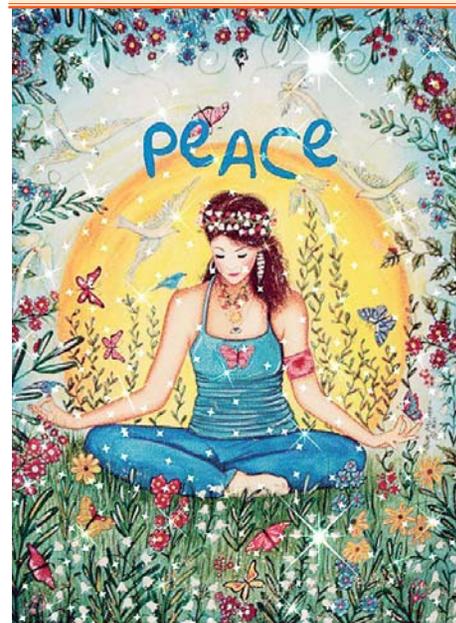
soul, and hear the Melodious Song coming from the highest heaven.

The Jain scriptures say:

Hearing the Sound resembling that of the conch and witnessing the Lotus Light like that of a newly blossomed flower between the two eyebrows, one faces his Ishta, the Satguru.

When we contact the Light of God within, we realize that the same Light of God is shining in other people and forms of life. When this realization

All representatives of God on earth preached love and human unity. How did they attain this high angle of vision? How did they come to the same conclusion about world peace? The answer is simple: Truth is one. We too can reach the same realization of God and human oneness through meditation and ethical living.



dawns, we have love for all. We recognize all as brothers and sisters in the same Lord. With this, we treat all humanity as members of our own family.

As Guru Nanak Dev Ji has said: "We are the children of one God." He has also said: "All humanity is one."

If we are leaders of a religion, a faith, a spiritual path, or congregation, or engaged in leadership positions, we must set an example. We cannot merely engage in preaching and lecturing. We must live a life of prayer and meditation, ethical living, and love for all.

To meditate, sit in a relaxed pose with eyes closed. Focus the attention into

whatever is lying in front of you. While doing so, mentally repeat any Name of God with which you feel comfortable. The repetition of the Names of God keeps the mind engaged so that no distracting thoughts can enter.

The great Christian saint, St. Teresa of Avila, called the process of meditation "prayer with attention." St. Teresa of Avila lived from 1515 to 1582 in Spain.

Her early years were influenced by the spiritual teachings of St. Ignatius and by followers of the path by Franciscan mysticism. She learned meditation from a Franciscan friar and devoted her life to spirituality.

St. Teresa called a stage reached through meditation "transport," which she described as "a sole act of the Majesty of God," in which "the soul is leaving the body." Her description of the process of the soul rising above body consciousness is similar to what saints in other religions have said and is borne out by scientists and doctors today. St. Teresa described the soul transcending body consciousness and awakening to spiritual realms existing concurrently with this realm. This process may feel as if one is rising from the body, but the soul is not going anywhere; rather it is the consciousness shifting from one state of awareness to another. The state to which she was lifted is within. In her work, Inner Castle, St. Teresa spoke of this shifting of attention as peeling layers of an onion. The layers exist within.

Meditation is changing focus from the outer onion skin to the inner layers. What will we find within? As we meditate, we see the Light of God and hear the Holy Sound Current. We discover layers of consciousness known as the inner realms of Light, consciousness and bliss.

In our hope to foster an age of peace, let us close our eyes and sit in silent prayer or meditation.

For the sake of posterity, for the sake of our children, for the sake of all we hold dear, may God bless our endeavors.

From a talk that Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj gave at the Sixth Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, in Riva del Garda, Italy. He is the head of Science of Spirituality (SOS), known in India as the Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission. SOS has hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide and is an interfaith spiritual path based on Sant Mat.

Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

The Bible (Gospel of Matthew)

Sermon on the Mount

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

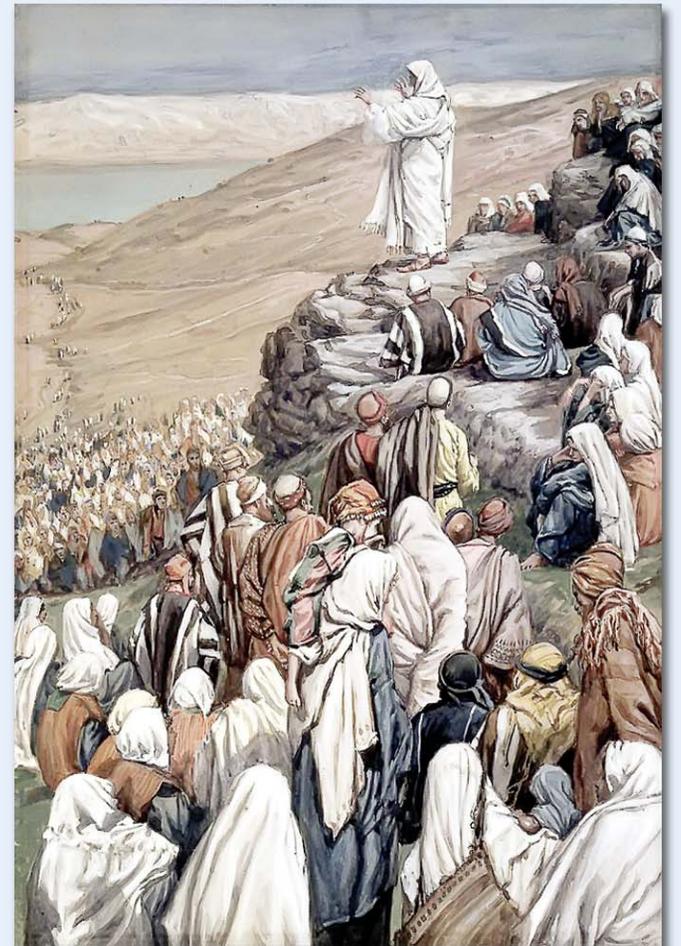
*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*



Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Bible (Gospel of Matthew)

Factoid: With estimated total sales of over 5 billion copies, the Bible is widely considered to be the best-selling book of all time. It sells approximately 100 million copies annually, and has been a major influence on literature and history, especially in the West, where the Gutenberg Bible was the first book printed using movable type in the 1450s. (Photo courtesy Wikipedia)

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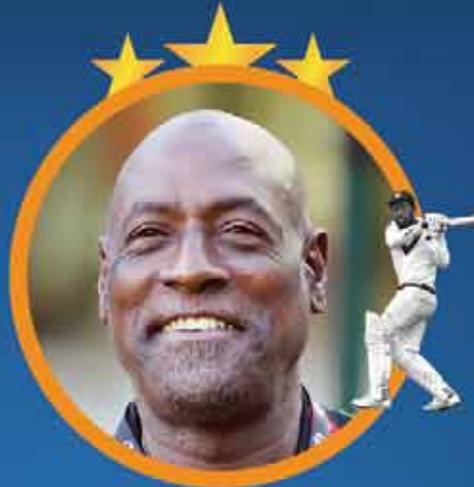


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