



**Please join us on Wednesday October 6 at the Truc Lam Monastery
11328-97 Street at 7:30**

Master Tay Phap Hoa will lecture on Buddhism. Refreshments will be served.

Annual General Meeting

On June 2 we held our 14th annual meeting at the Bharitya Cultural Society. We are pleased to announce that Rev. Don Mayne has become an honorary board member and there are three new board members: Helen Chan-Park, Rabbi Carmit Harari and Dr. Simon Lasair. Since then long-time member Dr. Teja Singh has moved to Toronto and Dr. Lasair has taken a teaching position in Saskatoon, we wish them both all the best.

After the business was conducted Priest Pankaj Dixit gave a lecture on Hinduism.

Two weeks later our new executive was elected: Rabbi David Kunin, president; Jagjeet Bhardwaj, vice-president ; Avau Fast, secretary; Nasim Kherani, treasurer, and Len Gierach, past-president.

Calendars, Peace Posters & Books



The 2011 Multifaith Calendar is in stock, still \$16.00 (no GST), still beautiful and a wealth of information. In March we announced our own

posters and booklet on the theme of peace from many different religions. They are proving to be very popular, in fact we have to reprint the book. Please keep them in mind as gifts, for your classroom or office, etc.



In April our Lunch & Learn speaker was Nicholas Wickenden, his topic was Christian Science. He spoke of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Church of Christ, Scientist, its early

history in the States, and gave examples of how it slowly gained acceptance after a modest beginning. Eddy also started a newspaper in 1908, The Christian Science Monitor. It is still widely circulated, covers international and US current events and includes a daily religious feature. The audience had many questions which were ably answered.

In May Marge Friedel, a Metis elder, shared her own journey into native spirituality from a traditional Roman Catholic upbringing. Her lineage has been traced back to 1795; she explained that there are 640 prairie tribes, many of which have treaties, but the Metis still have few rights. She works at the Indigenous Elders Resource Centre and is a founder of the Amiskwaciy Academy, and much of her time is devoted to helping native students succeed in school since she realizes that is the key to their future. Referring to the devastating impact of the loss of the buffalo, she said that now, "Education is our buffalo".

Our June speaker was Solomon Rolinger, his topic the founding of the Phoenix Multifaith Society for Harmony. The Phoenix is similar to our Interfaith Centre, but was founded with links to the Edmonton Police Service's Hate & Bias Crimes Division, and has only Jewish, Christian and Muslim members.

In August Shaykh Deen Zak Sheikh spoke about the spirituality of fasting as Muslims around the world prepare for Ramadan. He explained both the physical aspects and requirements, but also its meaning and the sense of accomplishment and solidarity achieved by making this sacrifice.

In September hospital chaplains Rev. Elaine Nagy and Rev. Paul Bergen spoke about

the spiritual side of health care in Alberta. They gave a brief historical overview, going back almost 60 years and beginning in the mental health field long before we had reached our current understanding of the necessity of an integrated approach, the realization that patients' spiritual needs must be considered as well as the physical. They also outlined the evolution of their roles within the entire complex health care system, including their union or non-union status, and how much depends on the importance placed on their work by hospital administrators.

Our upcoming Lunch and Learn programs will be:

Monday October 18; Kelly Sloane, Executive Director of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, will talk about that organization.

Monday November 8: Rev. Patrick Campbell from the Centre for Spiritual Living, will talk about his ministry.

Monday December 13: Rev. Audrey Brooks' topic will be "Santa Claus, the Wild Man".

All sessions at noon #113, 11148-84 Avenue, entrance through the back door in the alley across from Tim Horton's, bring your lunch if you like, drinks provided, \$2.00 donation gratefully accepted.

Cuban Visitors

On August 10 we helped host a group of young Cubans and their adult companions. Several of our board members attended and gave an outline of the history and activities of the Centre. The visitors told us about themselves, and were very impressed by the religious diversity of Edmonton, coming as they do from what is almost a mono-culture. The need for translation was a bit labourious but in spite of that it was an enjoyable evening.

Journeys of Our Faiths



We have begun a new project in partnership with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace & Human Rights and

Racism Free Edmonton. It is a series of visits to places of worship, and the first was the Al Rashid mosque on August 12. Most of the visits are going to be planned at the time of services, but we made an exception for the mosque since there can be up to 2000 people in attendance and the sermon is in Arabic. Instead 16 of us had an hour and a half tour of the building and an in-depth exchange of information and questions and answers.

Upcoming Visits:

Sunday, September 19 at the Hindu Cultural Centre at 14225-133 Avenue, 10 a.m.;

Tuesday, October 19 at the Baha'i Centre, 9414-111 Avenue, 7:30 p.m.;

Sunday November 14 at the Siri Guru Sikh Gurdwara, 14211-133 Avenue, 11 a.m.;

Saturday December 11, Beth Shalom Synagogue, 11916 Jasper Avenue, 9:30 a.m.

Fund-raising Possibility

Finding reliable and secure funding to keep the Centre running is a constant challenge. Those who read the financial statement in our annual report may have noticed that we accomplish an amazing amount of activity with a very small budget, mainly due to the hard work and commitment of our board. Many other non-profit societies have a casino every 18 months or so, in two days they can clear about \$70,000.00. We have never seriously considered this due to misgivings about moral issues. But, as our costs inevitably increase and some provincial and federal grants become less certain, we are taking

another look. We are aware that much of the provincial money we have received in the past years has included a large measure of revenue from various forms of gambling.

It is just an idea at this stage but we are concerned to know what our members think. Please let us know your thoughts about this.

"In Pieces"

On Thursday evening, September 2, almost one hundred and fifty people gathered at the Ashbourne (Garneau United Church) to watch a new documentary about Jewish and Muslim relations in Edmonton. The film-makers are U of A students Rabia Sheikh and Maigan van der Giessen, and they explored the tensions between their two communities, possible reasons for them, and the potential for improved dialogue and the creation of meaningful relationships. Their conclusion seemed to be that ultimately the issues that divide them are political and not necessarily religious. The audience reflected on the message and discussed their own experiences in Edmonton. Then, as the sun set, all joined the Muslim attendees in breaking the Ramadan fast with a wonderful meal they generously provided. Dining together provided a chance for continued conversation, and many noted that this event was an important opportunity for members of many communities to meet and interact. We look forward to learning from one another and growing together.



Interfaith board member Zak Sheikh explained Ramadan and the significance of the fast year, and that both Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and the Eid, the Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramadan fell on the same day.

Celebrating Our Faiths

Our joint program with the City continues: in March the Unitarian Universalists had a display explaining their beliefs and



history; in May the Jewish community had artifacts and explanations for life-cycle events in their tradition; in June the Sikhs commemorated the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji by telling the importance of his life and work; in July there was a display in conjunction with the Jade Buddha World Tour; in August the Hindus celebrated the Birth of Lord Krishna with song and dance.

Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR)

From May 16 to 19, Len Gierach, Rob Hankinson and Netta Phillet from the EIC, Chaplain John Dowds and Ellen Finn from the City of Edmonton, Rick Chapman from the Inner City Pastoral Ministry, and Lewis Cardinal went to Chicago to observe the bid process for a city to host the PWR. When Rob, Rick and Lewis returned from the recent PWR in Melbourne, Australia in December 2009 (see our January 22 newsletter), they approached the City with the idea of Edmonton applying to hold the 2019 PWR. At the time there were already seven cities in the running for 2014. The city was

interested and therefore sent the seven of us to Chicago. When we arrived the number of cities



actually there to bid was down to three: Brussels, Belgium; Dallas/Fort Worth, USA; and Guadalajara, Mexico. We were also told that if we wished to change our status from auditor to bidder they would welcome us. After much discussion the Edmonton team decided that we would remain auditors.

It was a very busy four days, we learned a great deal about the wonderful event that is the PWR, and we all look forward to seeing how the bids unfold.

Genocide Memorial Garden – Sunday July 4

For the second year Rev. Audrey Brooks led a memorial service at her house to commemorate victims of genocide. This year centre members' David Kunin and Lewis Cardinal helped officiate. A variety of speakers placed stones in memory of some of the millions who have lost their lives to hatred and intolerance.

NAINConnect 2010

Board members Rob Hankinson, David Kunin, Dan Mayne and Teja Singh attended the NAINConnect in Salt Lake City This summer. During the conference Rabbi Kunin participated in a session on the underlying motivations of dialogue, these are his remarks.

I have always been suspicious of meta-narratives within most contexts, but especially within the context of Religion and the interfaith movement. Often, it seems, we are so happy to find similarities – be that about ethics, values or very broad concepts of the divine – that we stop there because we feel we now have found the essence, and that religions have an ultimate similarity and universality. Yet, when and as we try to create this metanarrative, perhaps instead of better understanding religion – and finding a place of cooperation and understanding – instead we are creating a simulacra of religion, and our broad taxonomies, which give us comfort,

instead of helping us understand each other are masking the individualities that make us what we are.

In this context, I have to note, that I distrust all meta-narratives, and even find dangerous all taxonomies such as "Religion," "Movement" and "denomination" as each also mask the individual and can lead to misunderstandings and broadly conceived stereotypes. For me a *weltanschauung* - world view - is most useful, when it is most narrowly constructed, taking in all of the complexities of identity construction. Even the concept of family, as I construe the topic of this conference, is too narrow for me, I might identify clan (using an anthropological definition) as somewhat more useful. A clan, as a group of distinct families, even with little in common - even genealogically - who are brought together by an eponymous mythological figure who in most cases may never have existed.

Mata-narratives are dangerous because they create a false sense of universality, and even more appear as a neo-colonialist attempt to fit everything in to a neat scholarly or political mold. Would it be so terrible if a religion did not have a version of the Golden Rule (or Green Rule, or what ever)? The idea of the Golden Rule is a Western, especially Christian, religious concept, and the search for it in other traditions often seems to be an attempt either to say more or less benignly, "Isn't it wonderful that you are all like us (religions are really all the same), or more dangerously "We have the truth and we will find it or impose it wherever we go."

I value the local, particular and tentative. When I participate in Interfaith activities I am interested in seeing and understanding the other, not in creating a grand narrative which brings us all together. I think that real peace will come only when we value the other without any interest in making (or seeing them) them like ourselves. I do not look at interfaith activities to change my or the other participants beliefs (except perhaps about values like respect and peaceful understanding). I look at all of us as

spokes people of the "Other" (what ever that may be) that is beyond an understanding or concept of "truth."

My model of interfaith, than, is not about transformation but instead is about understanding and respect. I draw (or at least find comforting support) of my model from my religious tradition. It creates a view of dialectic very different from the philosophers and Hegel, one where there is no synthesis, but instead a multiplicity of possible theses - a form of dialectic that always respects the contingent and contextual.

In a text from the Jerusalem Talmud, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai (two major schools of thought in the early rabbinic period.) argue for three years about the correct way to say the Shema. The House of Hillel says it should always be said while seated and the House of Shammai says that in the morning it should be said while standing up. At the conclusion of the passage a heavenly voice (Bat Kol) says "These (words) and these (words) are both words of the living God. But the halakhah (law) is according to the House of Hillel." The text shows that all sides in discussions and arguments for the sake of heaven speak with the words of God. The text adds "the law is according to the House of Hillel," merely to enable people at that time (contingent and contextual) to know how they were expected to act.

The text from the Babylonian Talmud is very similar to the text in the Jerusalem Talmud. The main difference of interest here is the conclusion. After stating that the law is according to the House of Hillel, the text adds an explanation for this decision. If both [the words of the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai] are "the words of the living God," why did the House of Hillel merit that the law be according to their opinions? It was because they were gentle and kind, and quoted the words of the House of Shammai when they gave their own decision. They even put the words of the House of Shammai before their own words. It is notable to me that the Talmud gives an ethical or event

esthetic rather than a legal rationalization for accepting the ruling of the School of Hillel over the School of Shamai.

We live in a world with a multiplicity of unique world views. It may not be comfortable to move away from the grand narratives that we have sought to unite us and hoped would create peace but instead merely conceal the particular. But as we move away from ontological certainty to the absence of any centers maybe we will be able to truly see that each of us speaks with the words and ideas of an "Other" which is beyond all definition.

Upcoming events at City Hall

Wednesday Sept. 29 at noon, with the Muslim community, "Preparation for the Haj (Pilgrimage to Mecca)";

Wednesday November 10, the Baha'is invite us to celebrate the birth of their founder Bah'u'llah. All welcome at both events, refreshments will be served.

This Year at Centre

Wednesday, September 29th @ Noon

Wednesday, October 6th @ 7:30 PM

Monday, October 18th @ Noon

Monday, November 1st (all day)

Monday, November 8th

Wednesday, November 10th @ Noon

Wednesday, December 1st @ 7:30 PM

Monday, December 13th @ Noon

City Hall Muslim Display Launch

General Meeting at Truk Lam Monastery

Lunch and Learn, Kelly Sloane

Opiate of the Masses?

Lunch and Learn, Rev. Patrick Campbell

City Hall Baha'i Display Launch

Centre Open House at the Ashbourne

Lunch and Learn, Rev. Audrey Brooks

Edmonton
Interfaith Centre
 for Education & Action

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