



Interfaith Meeting "AJUDA EM DIÁLOGO" ("AJUDA IN DIALOGUE") REPORT

INTRODUCTION

In a time of tensions and major changes in the frameworks of social life, one of the greatest challenges of contemporary times is the recovery of universal spiritual values. As the religious universe is a privileged vehicle for the transmission of these values, it is fundamental that respect for diversity, dialogue and cooperation be present in their practices, thus contributing to the construction of more conscious and mature citizen communities capable of responding more effectively to current challenges. Aware of this need, the Department of Science of Religions of the Lusophone University, in partnership with Dialogar - Association for Integral Education and Spirituality, and the Parish of Ajuda (Lisbon), have joined the initiative of the World Interfaith Harmony Week held on February 11, 2018, and together organized the interfaith "Ajuda in Dialogue" event. In the Garden das Damas, a singular and charming space of the Ajuda Parish in the city of Lisbon, the event focused on the main world religious traditions, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism, as well as other tradition like some of the oldest, such as the Polytheistic Traditions and the Candomblé and Yoruba traditions, to most recent ones, such as the Bahá'í Faith, Spiritism, and Brahma Kumaris.

The academic presence was provided by the Center for Research in Cosmovisions and Spiritual and Religious Worldliving (CICMER) of the Area of Science of Religions of the Lusophone University with the participations of the Research Line in Islamic Heritage and Spirituality, the Asia Cosmovisions Research Line, and the Observatory for Religious Freedom.

Conscious that interreligious dialogue does not happen in isolation but arises as a consequence of the capacity for perception and appreciation of all the inner and outer dialogues that connect us to life, the universe and ourselves, we have tried to make the program of this meeting and holistic space, promoting experiences relevant to integral education and health, such as: contact with nature, music, meditation, food and self-knowledge. As we remember the essential role of Education, in forming solid foundations for these dialogues, the meeting also included activities for children and a moment of reflection on "How to prepare the new generations for Interreligious Dialogue".

At the end of the day, organizers and participants expressed the feeling that this was an extremely enriching day, in which together we were able to overcome differences and build bridges of communication, understanding and cooperation.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

February is Winter in Portugal ... the day was born gray and rainy, but the energy and beauty that were felt in the Garden das Damas in Ajuda National Palace, appealed to the celebration of life, diversity and connection.



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Just before the opening of the event, nature presented us with the gift of rain, so the assembly of the sound was delayed by 30 minutes.

In order not to compromise the schedule, the "Sanāthana Dharma, Vedas and Ecologia" lecture was suppressed with the understanding of the speaker, Professor António Faria from Universidade Lusófona, who would later participate in another activity.

After the welcome given by the organization, the meeting began with an open Tai Chi class, by Mestre António Miranda. Through this martial art also considered meditation in movement, participants had the opportunity to experience a practice of self-discovery that leads to full consciousness of body-mind unity, bringing physical, psychological and spiritual benefits.



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The program continued with the lecture "Islam here so close: points of encounter between Islam and Christianity", by Professor Fabrizio Boscaglia, researcher at the Lusophone University of Lisbon. Misunderstandings, sadly consolidated by the sad events of recent times, which have nothing to do with the true spirit of the Islamic religion, have been clarified. We realize that it is much more that unites us to the Muslim communities than that which separates us.



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Fedross Imani, a professor, writer, painter and musician, gave us a wonderful concert of the Psalter, a string instrument, whose origins date back at least 300 BC, when it was used to accompany the psalms. We listen to music from various nationalities, including Portuguese, Iberian and Oriental works.



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"Demystifying Spiritism," was the lecture that followed, by Dr. Fabiana Fão, an experienced spiritist speaker, responsible for basic and advanced courses in Spiritism. We perceive the foundations of this doctrine, which was born in France at the end of the 19th Century. The information constituting it was given by spiritual entities of all religions, having been obtained through mediumship, by rigorous experimental methods, under the guidance of Allan Kardec



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Ana Madeira, Priestess Scotia of the Portuguese Polytheistic Congregation / Pagan International Federation, then delighted us with the admirable mythological tale "Filémon and Báucis", which enchanted an audience of all ages. Traveling to ancient Greece, we remembered the power of humility, gratitude, trust, solidarity and compassion.



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The time came for "Buddha and Buddhism", to be present, through Dr. Bruno Antunes, member of the Portuguese Buddhist Union. Buddhism was born 2500 years ago in India, branched out to me diverse traditions that coexist peacefully, currently encompassing more than 500 million people, all over the world. The teachings and practices of Buddhism, propose a way for self-knowledge, reconcilable with other religious forms.



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Brahma Kumaris - Academy for a Better World, offered us a Workshop on "How to prepare Vegetable Milk", by Nazaré Oliveira. This Spiritual University believes that a vegetarian diet is beneficial to the development of the clarity, concentration and subtle focus that spiritual growth requires. Vegetable milks are extracted from countless grains and seeds such as flaxseed, pumpkin, sunflower, soybeans, oats, rice, walnut, almond, cashew, peanut, sesame, quinoa, etc.



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We then enjoy the Meditative Concert "Paz(C)iência" - For Peace and Patience in Us, by ZUNA. This is an excellent opportunity to experience the benefits of Planetary Gongs, among other ancestral instruments that, when touched, release harmonics that allow the immersion in an ocean of sound, in which states of relaxation, peace and harmony are reached.

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We then proceeded to the Debate on the theme "How to prepare the new generations for Interreligious Dialogue?" Moderated by Professor António Faria from the Area of Science of Religions of the Universidade Lusófona de Lisboa, who had the following speakers: António Caria Mendes - President of the Portugal-Israel Friendship Association, representing the Vision of Judaism; Nelson Vieira Lopes - Portuguese Community of Candomblé Yoruba; Isobel Andrade - Great Priestess of the Polytheistic Congregation of Portugal / Pagan Federation International; representative of the Bahá'í Faith Community of Portugal; Hugo Marques - Association "Ser Ajuda" of the Parish of Nossa Senhora da Ajuda, representing Catholicism and Mariana Vital - Observatory for Religious Freedom. Speakers responded to a number of questions on the subject by the moderator and the audience. Having been possible, to understand different visions, proposals and experiences, towards a common goal.



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Before the closing, by the representative of the Parish Council of Ajuda, the participants did a small guided meditation, by an element of the Brahma Kumaris; small messages were read calling for respect and unity among human beings, drawn from the sacred texts, oral traditions and ritual texts from religions all over the world; and small candles were lit, symbolizing the common year-long desire of 2018, full of peace and harmony among human beings, cultures and religions.



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Parallel to the activities described, the event included a permanent exhibition in small tents, of the foundations, principles and practices of the following religious / spiritualist institutions: Roman Catholic Church - Nossa Senhora da Ajuda Parish; Brahma Kumaris - Academy for a Better World; Bahá'í Community of Portugal and Politeísta Congregation of Portugal / Pagan International Federation. The organizers of the event were also able to publicize their actions in a similar way. Face-to-face clarifications were provided, posters and roll-ups were presented and pamphlets and cards were distributed. Some of the institutions also offered visitors small dynamics of reflection and self-knowledge.



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The children who visited the event were able to stay in the care of monitors, enjoying specific spiritual development activities for their age, through the "Paths of Love" Project. Stories, body expression, plastic expression, dialogues, reflection, observation and also silence were challenges used to walk the path and discover the key to the mystery that leads us to expand the soul to infinity: LOVE.



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Quality food was served, throughout the day, by the "Bosque" - Vegan Restaurant / Tea House.

At the end of the meeting, participants and organizers went to the Noble Hall of the Parish of Ajuda, for a shared snack and a joint evaluation of the event. Emphasis was given to aspects and points to be improved. Proposals were made for the future. It was unanimous to the conviction that we provided visitors with a day full of diverse and intense experiences, in a wonderful space that was to the liking of all those who did get their feel.

If it had not been for the weather, it would have been less favorable and eventually we would have received a larger number of visitors, which nevertheless exceeded a hundred and one-half. Taking into account that the motivation of the population for interreligious events is still limited in our country, we were very satisfied with the influx of an audience, attentive, interested and available to open up to new experiences.

Finally, we have consolidated the certainty that this was only the first step in a journey that we wish to continue to do together for solidarity, dialogue and peace in our society.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE EVENT

Organizers: Science of Religions Area (ULHT), Dialogar - Association for Integral Education and Spirituality, Parish of Ajuda

Location: Alameda dos Pinheiros, Lisboa

Coordinates: 38° 42' 30.20" N | 9° 11' 54.68" W

Public attendance: 100 to 150 attendees