

Interfaith Seminar Report:

**“ Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye, An Interfaith Bhajan (Hymn),
Mahatma Gandhi, An Interfaith Prophet”**

On Saturday, February 23rd, 2019

At Jewish Temple Tikvah

New Hyde Park NY

Mission statement:

Interfaith dialogue to foster interfaith harmony, understanding, and acceptance to break the walls of hate, violence, war, injustice and selfishness and to promote a just, sustainable and peaceful world.

We were also celebrating the 150th Birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and his message of nonviolence, interfaith harmony and peace.

Background :

I had the good fortune of attending and witnessing a wonderful interfaith convention, “2018 Parliament of the World ’s Religions” in Toronto Canada in November 2018.

I was also an invited speaker in two seminars.

After listening to the message of interfaith harmony by distinguished international spiritual speakers, I was deeply motivated to take the message home and spread it to the best of my abilities.

After attending a webinar hosted by **Aftab Ahmed, the manager of the King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize**, about a special in-depth look at the history of World Interfaith Harmony Week, how it came about and the prize selection criteria for WIHW events, it was unequivocally decided to host an interfaith seminar.

Organizer and Moderator:

Narendra C. Bhalodkar MD, FACC

Concept of the Seminar:

Since early childhood, I was impressed by the Bhajan (Spiritual Poem, Hymn) “ Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye” written 500 years ago, by a Saint from India, Narsinh Mehta. **(Please see attached)**

Attributes of a benevolent, “Saintly” or “Godly” person always were revered by me. It was also a favorite bhajan of Mahatma Gandhi.

He used to have it recited during his daily evening prayers prior to his lectures.

Gandhiji liked this bhajan because the values described in this bhajan are also the fundamental basis of most of the religious scriptures.

Hence, this inspired me to plan this interfaith dialogue with spiritual scholars of various faiths to enlighten us how the scriptures and teachings of their faith relate to this Bhajan.

Leaders from various faiths and religions such as Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Jain, Sikh, Unitarian Universalist, Science of Spirituality, and Buddhist were invited.

This dialogue clearly highlighted that there are more commonalities between all religions and faiths than differences and emphasizing on harmony of religions and unity of existence is the only way to make our world just, sustainable and peaceful for all.

Advertisement and Attendance:

It was attended by 180 to 200 people from various faiths and religions.
(see attached pictures)

Program's email invitations were sent by various organizations of different faiths and cultural organizations amounting to 5000+ invitees. Included in the invitation was the "Flyer", the Bhajan (Hymn) and its English translation as well as the mission and purpose of the seminar which was to spread the message of interfaith understanding, harmony and peace based on the **principles advocated by the Parliament of the**

World's Religions and Word Harmony Interfaith initiative of the United Nations.

Below is the “ FLYER” sent via email to all invitees and also large size posters were displayed at various local shops in the neighborhood.



You are cordially Invited to

Interfaith Seminar

*Interfaith Bhajan: “Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye”
Interfaith Prophet: Mahatma Gandhiji*

Commemorating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhiji in conjunction with World Interfaith Harmony Week: Officially Observed by the United Nations. WIHI is an independent initiative, the Parliament is a partner in observing worldwide.

Date: Saturday, February 23rd 2019 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm



Venue:

Temple Tikvah

3315 Hillside Ave, New Hyde Park, NY 11040

Ph: 516 746 1120

Ample car parking available on the rear of the Temple.



Representatives of various faith will share their views and understanding the relevance of the message by our Universal Interfaith Prophet, Mahatma Gandhiji's “Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye, An Interfaith Bhajan,” and its significances in their faith and in modern day of multi-cultural society.

Invited Speakers:

Dr. Narendra Bhalodkar - Hinduism,

Rabbi Randy Sheinberg - Judaism, Rev. JoAnn Barrett - Christianity,

Dr. Panna Shah - Jainism, Dr. Faroque Ahmad khan - Islam,

Rev. Ami Bhalodkar Haque - Buddhism,

Ms. Renee Mehrera - VP Science of Spirituality Club at the UN,

Rev. Ned Wight - Unitarian Universalism,

Sri. Surinder Singh Chawla - Sikhism

Dr. Bhadra Shah, Vice Chair - Parliament of the World's Religions,

Sri. Sridhar Shanmugam, Founder, Sarvamangala Shri Saneeswara Temple - NY

Please join us for Tea & Snacks at 2.00 pm, The Program will start 2.30 pm SHARP

Admission is free - However, Registration is requested .. Please RSVP:

Rabbi Randy Sheinberg office@templetikvah.org, Rev. JoAnn Barrett - revjoab@aol.com

Dr. Narendra Bhalodkar - nbhalodkar@yahoo.com

Shri. Sridhar Shanmugam - temple.navagraha@gmail.com

Besides e-Blast invitations it was also listed in national Indian news paper

“India Abroad” in the “ Happenings” section.

It was our pleasure to see 180+ attendees from various faiths were able to participate in the seminar and the message of interfaith harmony and peace reached to 5000+ invitees via email.

We were blessed that,



**Audrey Kitagawa, Chair,
Dr. Bhadra Shah, Vice Chair and
Bruce Knotts, trustee**

of the “Parliament of the World’s Religions” graced the occasion and praised our event. (Please see their testimonies)

Anchor/producer of TV Asia Channel Ms. Renee Mehrra interviewed Dr. Narendra Bhalodkar and several attendees to air on their show “Community Round Up.”

Reports of the seminar has also been sent to various new papers.

Seminar proceedings:

Each attendee was given a print out of the Bhajan with English translation.

वैष्णव जन तो तेने कहिये जे पीड परायी जाणो रे पर दुःखे उपकार करे तो ये मन अभिमान न आणो रे. ॥४॥	वैष्णव जन तो तेने कहिये जे पीड परायी जाणे रे । पर दुःखे उपकार करे तो ये मन अभिमान न आणे रे ॥	vaiṣṇava jana to tene kahiye je pīḍa parāyī jāṇe re, para duḥkhe upakāra kare to ye mana abhimāna na aṅe re	Call those people Vaishnavas who Feel the pain of others, Help those who are in misery, But never let self-conceit enter their mind.
सकल लोकमां सहुने वंदे, निंदा न करे केनी रे वाच काछ मन निश्चळ राखे धन धन जननी तेनी रे. ॥१॥	सकळ लोकमां सहुने वंदे, निंदा न करे केनी रे । वाच काछ मन निश्चळ राखे, धन धन जननी तेनी रे ॥	sakaḷa loka māṁ sahune vande, nindā na kare kenī re, vāca kācha mana nischala raakhe, dhana dhana janantī tenī re	They respect the entire world, Do not disparage anyone, Keep their words, actions and thoughts pure, The mother of such a soul is blessed.
समदृष्टि ने तृष्णा त्यागी परस्त्री जेने मात रे जिह्वा थकी असत्य न बोले परधन नव जाले हाथ रे. ॥२॥	समदृष्टि ने तृष्णा त्यागी, परस्त्री जेने मात रे । जिह्वा थकी असत्य न बोले, परधन नव जाले हाथ रे ॥	sama-dṛṣṭi ne tṛṣṇā tyāgī, para-strī jene māta re, jihvā thakī asatya na bole, para-dhana nava jāle hātha re	They see all equally, renounce craving, Respect other women as their own mother, Their tongue never utters false words, Their hands never touch the wealth of others.
मोह माया व्यापे नहि जेने, दृढ वैराग्य जेना मनमां रे राम नाम शु ताणी रे वागी सकल तीरथ तेना तनमां रे. ॥३॥	मोह माया व्यापे नहि जेने, दृढ वैराग्य जेना मनमां रे । रामनाम शुं ताळी रे लागी, सकळ तीरथ तेना तनमां रे ॥	moha māyā vyāpe nahi jene, dhruda-vairāgya jenā manamāṁ re, rāma-nāma shu tāḷī lāgī, sakaḷa tīratha tenā tanamāṁ re	They do not succumb to worldly attachments, They are firmly detached from the mundane, They are enticed by the name of Lord Rama , All places of pilgrimage are embodied in them.
वणलोभी ने कपट रहित छे, काम क्रोध निवार्या रे भणो नरसैयो तेनुं दर्शन करतां कुण ओकोतेर तार्या रे. ॥४॥	वणलोभी ने कपटरहित छे, काम क्रोध निवार्या रे । भणे नरसैयो तेनुं दरसन करतां, कुळ एकोतेर तार्या रे ॥	vaṇa-lobhī ne kapaṭa-rahita che, kāma krodha nivāryā re, bhaṇe narasaiyo tenuṁ darasana karatām, kuḷa ekotera tāryā re	They have forsaken greed and deceit, They stay afar from lust and anger, Narsi says: I'd be grateful to meet such a soul, Whose virtue liberates their entire lineage.

After welcoming guests, the seminar started with a Vedic Universal prayer from the “Vedas” the Hindu scriptures.

Dr. Narendra Bhalodkar gave a brief overview on “Life of Mahatma Gandhiji, An Interfaith Prophet” and his message of Interfaith harmony, Peace and Non- violence.

It was followed by a video screening of the Audio/video of the Bhajan,

“Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye” with lyrical meaning and translation.

Please click on the following link:


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xipue67yfPQ>

Subsequently, a scholarly discussion by speakers ensued. All of them unanimously agreed that the attributes of “Vaishnav Jan” or Saintly Person” described in the Bhajan are the basis of each faith.

Each speaker chose, emphasized and discussed 2 to 3 attributes, among many attributes of the “Vaishnav Jan” or Saintly Person” that were closer to their heart and faith.



(Please see the attached document for detailed discussion, Interfaith Speakers and their Take Home Message.)

Throughout entire seminar during Power Point Presentations following each speaker’s speech this master slide was projected.



**“Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye”
An Interfaith Bhajan**

“Mahatma Gandhi: An Interfaith Prophet”

Speeches were followed by another audio/video screening of the Bhajan,

“ Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye”

Sung by artists from 124 countries, as part of the 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi, released by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi.

Please click on the following Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvWologZHCM>

The program ended with a very interactive Q and A session.

Future Plans:

God willing, we are planning similar seminars every 3 to 4 months on various topics from all different faiths with interfaith dialogues.

Once the video recordings are edited, we will post it on You Tube to spread the message of interfaith harmony and peace worldwide.

With the overwhelming success and approval of this seminar, we have been invited to conduct the same seminar in various locations of the Tristate area in USA by several organizations.

Eventually, we may conduct this seminar throughout the USA and on international platforms.

Blessings and Duaa by attendees:

Many attendees extended their blessings and good wishes for the seminar and future events.

- 1. Here is the best Duaa or blessings one can hope for, received from Dr. Munir Shikari, a leading cardiologist, and president of Hudson Valley Cardiologists, P.C. who drove 85 miles one way to attend the seminar:**

*“Dil Badast Aawar Ke Hajje Akbarast
Az Hazaaran Kaaba Ek Dil Behtarast”*

Meaning there by;

“To Capture a heart is a Grand Pilgrimage
Making one heart happy is better than one thousand Kaabas”

2. Here are the blessings and good wishes from,

Audrey Kitagawa, Chair, the “Parliament of the World’s Religions”

“May it continue to ignite the hearts of compassion, caring and understanding of all those who attended that they in turn, may ignite the hearts of all those whose lives they touch.”

3. Here are the blessings and Duaa from **Tahera Haque and Abida Mirza (sisters)**

“We offer you our **Duaa, our blessings** that may Allah give you strength and wisdom to conduct many more such spiritual programs.”

Testimonials:

We have received numerous phone calls and emails from attendees offering their praise and feedback.

Following are a few representative samples of unsolicited testimonials.

(Please See attached document, **Testimonials from the Attendees of “An Interfaith Seminar”**)