

Interfaith Discussion: Big questions

Facilitators: Wentao, Ghazal, Reshma
Contributors: Stacy, Punita, Jannatul



Agenda

Ground rules

Land Acknowledgement

Introducing the Big Questions

Introducing the Panelists

- **Catherine Starr**
- **Imam Abdul Hai Patel**
- **Rev. Andrea Budgey**

15-min Presentation from Each Panelist

Q&A Session

Closing



Ground rules

Keep an open mind

Be respectful of one another

Intend good for one another

Keep your questions/comments relevant
to the topics being discussed

*We are not here to compare
religions/belief systems*



Land Acknowledgement

The land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Source: <https://indigenous.utoronto.ca/about/land-acknowledgement/>

Catherine Starr

Chaplain - Wiccan, Pagan Faith



Catherine Starr is the Coordinator for the University of Toronto Campus Chaplains Association and has held this position since 2010. She is the Wiccan Chaplain and supports the University of Toronto Pagan and Earth-based Society student club. While her focus are Wiccan traditions, she has experience and knowledge in many different Pagan traditions. She is an elder in several Pagan and Wiccan different traditions, including Gardnerian and NROOGD. She leads a Gardnerian coven founded in 1990 in California and continuing in Toronto since she moved here in 2001. Her passion is teaching, writing, and creating rituals. She is the creatrix of the ritual play, "Oracles from the Living Tarot". This play has been performed annually since 1998, including three performances in Europe and the 2019 performance in Toronto. Someday, she will publish her book about creating a living tarot deck. Until then, here is the reading from the Toronto 2019 presentation: <https://catstarrastraltraveller.com/oracles-from-the-living-tarot-toronto-2019/>.

Catherine is also a member of several international organizations including the Covenant of the Goddess (CoG), the United Religions Initiative (URI), Pagan Federation International (PFI), and the Parliament of World Religions (POWR).

Big Questions

- 1. Where did we come from?**
- 2. What are we doing here?**
- 3. Where are we going to?**



A PAGAN AND WICCAN PERSPECTIVE

CATHERINE STARR

WICCAN HIGH PRIESTESS AND
PAGAN ELDER

A WICCAN / PAGAN PERSPECTIVE: BRIEF OVERVIEW

- Paganism is an “umbrella” term that covers many different types of traditions
- Wicca is one of the traditions under Paganism and has many different traditions within it
- Each tradition will have different theories of the “big questions”

WHERE DID WE COME FROM: PAGAN / WICCAN PERSPECTIVE

- The Source
- Evolution
- Various mythologies
 - Greeks: Titans and battle with Olympian Gods
 - Norse: Frost Giants, the Vanir and the Assyr
 - Santeria: b
 - Birth of the Orisha

Thus it began in the first of all time: a single spark of knowing.

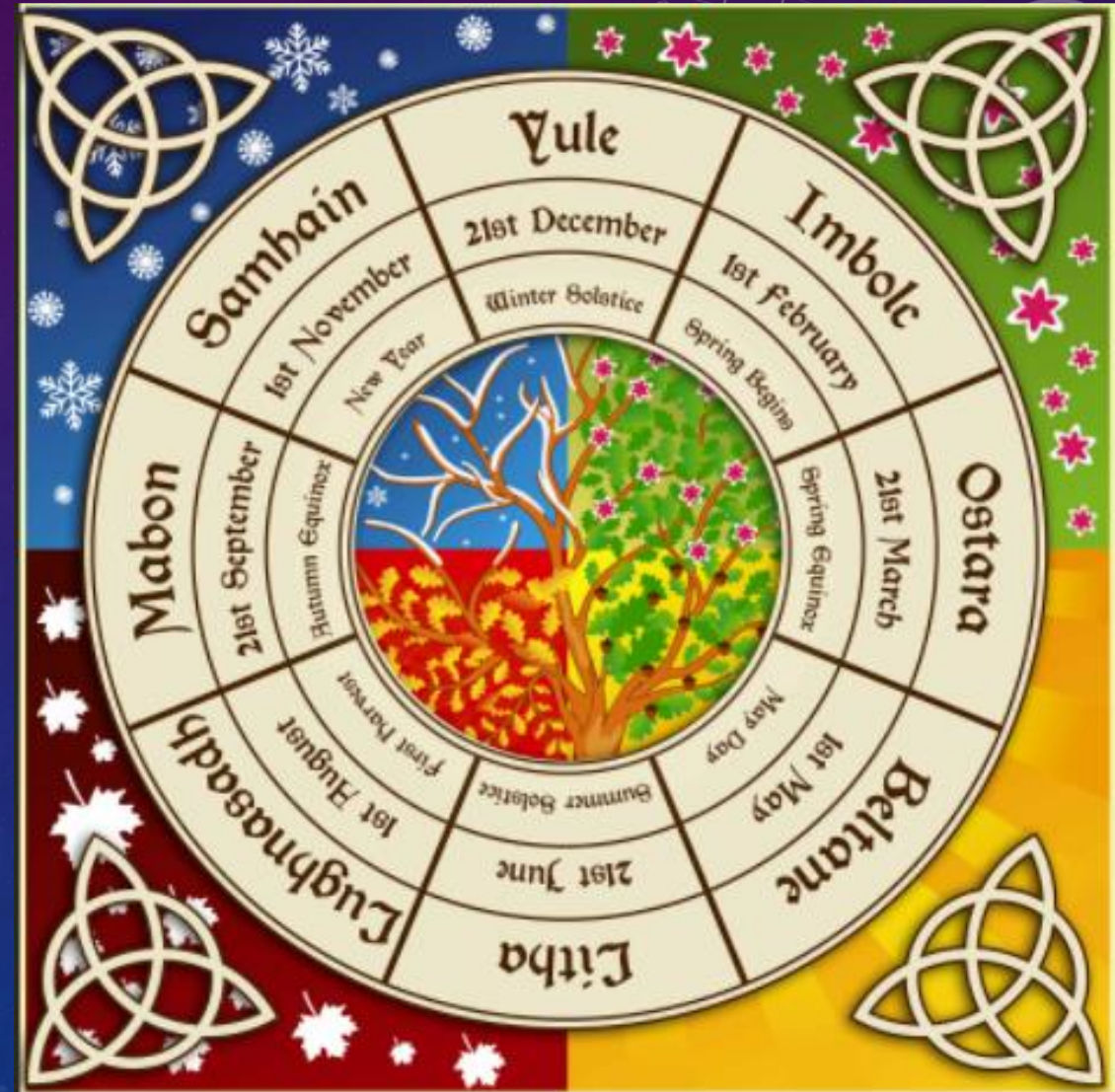
But the light does not stay single. First the Great Mother and then Her Consort start their cosmic dance.

From the two come the Elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

From them all life comes forth.

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE: PAGAN / WICCAN PERSPECTIVE

- Wheel Of the Year
 - Seasonal Rituals
 - Feb. 1 is Imbolc, Candlemas or Bridget's Day
- Ethics:
 - 'An it harm none, do what you will (Wicca)
 - Love is the whole of the law (Western Occult Traditions)
- Practices
 - Honouring the Gods, Nature and Ancestors – all life is sacred
 - Mystery Traditions, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries
 - Norse Virtues
 - The Great Work from Western Occult Traditions



WHERE ARE WE GOING AFTER DEATH: PAGAN / WICCAN PERSPECTIVE

- No concept of Heaven or Hell or the judgement of souls
- Concept of Re-birth: To be reborn at the same time and place as those we have loved before
- Some places for the afterlife
 - Summerland or Avalon, Isle of Apples
 - Elysium Fields
 - Valhalla or Hella's Realm
 - The Underworld
 - The Source

Lo, there do I see my father,
Lo, there do I see my mother,
And my sisters and my brothers.
Lo, there do I see the line of my
ancestors

Back to the beginning,
Lo, they do call to me
They bid me take my place among them
In the halls of Valhalla
Where the brave may live forever.

Dr. Abdul Hai Patel

Chaplain - Islamic Faith



Imam Abdul Hai-Patel holds a Doctorate degree from the Canadian Institute of Islamic Studies and is currently a Director of Inter Faith relations. He has been serving as an Imam and Community Leader for 52 years in Canada. He is also the current Vice President of the Canadian Multifaith Federation (formerly Ontario Multi Faith Council); a Founder and Patron in Chief of Muslim Children Aid and Support Service; and of Ansaar Foundation for addressing poverty & homelessness in Toronto; among many others. He is a regular speaker in national and international conferences and has served in various capacities on Boards of Hospitals, Social Services and Community Legal Clinics as well as International development and relief organizations. This includes the Toronto District School Board for Scarborough, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the Advisory Committee of Ontario Law Commission on End of Life Care and Capacity for Decision making and Guardianship in Palliative Care, the Flemington Community Food Bank, and the Interfaith Committee and Chaplain for 2015 Pan Am & Para Pan Games in Toronto.

He is a Muslim Chaplain at the University of Toronto and the York Regional Police. He is a recipient of the Governor General and Ontario Government's awards for Community Service & the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal.

Big Questions

- 1. Where did we come from?**
- 2. What are we doing here?**
- 3. Where are we going to?**



1- Where did we come from (the origin of us human beings)?

- The origin of the human being took place not on earth, but in heaven or in a spiritual world. Following verse in the Quran mentions this:
- وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ
- And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: "Verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations after generations on earth." They said: "Will You place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood, - while we glorify You with praises and thanks and sanctify You." He (Allâh) said: "I know that which you do not know." (2:30)

(Cont'd)

- After creating the first male and female human being, God had created the Souls of the entire population that will be inhabiting the earth till dooms day.
- وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ
- “[Remember] when your Lord extracted from the loins of Adam’s children their descendants and made them testify (saying): ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, we testify to it.’ [This was] in case you say on the Day of Judgment: ‘We were unaware of this.’ (8:172)

(Cont'd)

- Then God had defined the process of birth, growth of physical body where the Soul will be planted.
- (١٣) ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ (١٢). وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ
ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظْلًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظْمَ
لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ
- Verily We created man from a product of earth; (12)
Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging;
(13) Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned
We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little
lump bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then
produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the
Best of creators! (14)

(Cont'd)

- يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن تُّرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عِلْقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَّكُمْ وَنَقَرُ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشَدَّكُمْ وَمِنْكُم مَّن يَّتَوْفَىٰ وَمِنْكُم مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مَن بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا
- O mankind! if ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make (it) clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (give you growth) that ye attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dieth (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he knoweth naught.

2 - What are we doing here (purpose of life)?

- We were destined for earth, since our creation was from earth as I explained in the opening verse. The Divine Plan for life on earth has been revealed through His messengers at various times. This plan demand compliance as per this verse:
- وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ
- I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me. (51:56)

(Cont'd)

- God has Angels in His court to worship Him, then why worship is demanded from us? Human worship is in two tiers. Ritual Prayers and daily life cycle is considered worship, in accordance with Divine rules. Every good act that sustains life is considered worship. God wants us to live a healthy and harmonious life to the fullest.
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- الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا
- God has created death and life to test which one of you is best in conduct." (67:1)
- أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ
- Did you think that We had created you in play (without any purpose), and that you would not be brought back to Us?" (23:115)

(Cont'd)

- From foregoing verse, we can conclude, we were indeed created for a purpose beyond that of simply play and enjoyment in this life. We have the purpose of life that we should know and have to live life according to that purpose.

- أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ
وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا
وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ
الْعُرُورِ

- “Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children – like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion.” (Quran 53:20)

3 - Where are we going to (after death)?

- إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَءَاثَرَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ
- Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life, and We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind: for all things do We take account in a record clear. (36:12)

(Cont'd)

- Hereafter **آخِرَة** mentioned more than 100 times in Quran.
- Death is not the end of our lives; it is the beginning of our real life. Because our future fate is being decided on the basis of our present performance, we can either make use of our opportunities on earth to ensure a well-deserved place for ourselves in Paradise, or we can throw them away and condemn ourselves to punishment in Hell.

(Cont'd)

- Furthermore, the concept of the Hereafter gives a fuller meaning and purpose to the life of the believer. One who firmly believes in this concept will not give in to greed and other such worldly failings. He will not be a materialist, for he knows that this material life will surely come to an end with death, whereas there will be a whole eternity before him in the Afterlife, during which he will certainly rejoice in having paid due attention to the spiritual side of life on this earth.

Reverend Andrea Budgey

Chaplain - Anglican, Christian Faith



Andrea Budgey studied music and medieval studies (at Dalhousie and the University of Toronto), and continues to sing and play regularly with the SINE NOMINE Ensemble for Medieval Music. She was ordained priest in January of 2008, and currently serves as the Anglican chaplain at the University of Toronto (based at Trinity College), and as an honorary assistant priest at Saint Stephen-in-the-Fields. She has been involved in community outreach and advocacy for many years, and has also been a freelance writer and researcher, calligrapher, radio music producer, and concert manager; integrating arts experience and social-justice concerns into the practice of church is one of her principal interests.

Big Questions

- 1. Where did we come from?**
- 2. What are we doing here?**
- 3. Where are we going to?**





Questions from Audience



Closing Remarks