



WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY FORUM

Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion in My Faith

Sponsored by All Believers Network and
Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i

2 February 2013
Honolulu, Hawai'i

All Believers Network Mission Statement

We proclaim

Our belief that all spiritually-based religions are from the One Eternal Being and this Message was brought to us by many inspired spiritual teachers, all of whom we respect equally. We aspire to create a unity of consciousness that all Spiritual Teachings build a loving relationship between us and the Being. In our quest to reach the Being, we do not compete with each other, but only with our own egos and biases.

We affirm

(1) Our intention to respect equally the founders of all spiritual paths, understand their messages, and enrich our lives accordingly. Each founder we have studied together so far also had something complementary and unique to offer. For example, from Zoroaster, we learn of the Spiritual Light; from Hinduism's unnamed founder, the Eternal Being's multiple manifestations; from Abraham, the Being's unity; from Mahavira, pathway for purification of the soul; from Moses, the Ten Commandments; from Sakyamuni Buddha, meditation; from Confucius, living with piety; from Lao Tzu, living in harmony with nature; from Jesus, love and forgiveness; from Muhammad, universality of the Being's Message; from Guru Nanak, caste and gender equality; and from Baha'u'llah, equity and justice. (2) Our intention to seek out the founders of other spiritual paths not currently represented by our participants.

We aim

(1) To discover the common thread which runs through the teachings of all spiritual paths, including of indigenous cultures; (2) To respect religious reformers who came in more recent times to help guide humanity back onto the Path from which we got derailed by our own arrogance, ignorance, or closed-mindedness; (3) To understand the differing rituals various religions follow and marvel at this human ingenuity to try to reach the Being; (4) To rise above narrow-mindedness which divides us and embrace the principles which unite us. We cannot undo past injustices in the name of religion but can help prevent new ones; (5) To keep an open mind, visit houses of worship of various religions and try to feel the Divine Presence everywhere; (6) To enhance the experience of our respective path through this common exploration; and (7) To spread the message of unity of religious ideals with love and understanding.

Methods for accomplishing our goal

We try to (a) identify unifying themes, Spiritual principles, and laws in all religions to reinforce the concept of universality of the Eternal Message; (b) learn to apply them in our daily lives; (c) organize educational programs on these themes; (d) help develop curriculum for schools and institutions of higher learning; (e) experience other Paths leading to the same Source; and (f) encourage the formation of chapters around the world and network through the Internet.

Guidelines for respectful and constructive dialogue

In our sharing, we try to (a) neither convert nor ridicule any philosophy of life and/or spirituality; (b) discourage arguments or dogmatic statements; (c) "Keep our cool;" and (d) encourage feedback to help us improve our operational style to make this a more meaningful experience for us all.

Acknowledgements

All Believers Network recognizes the leadership of the United Nations and King Abdullah II of Jordan's Initiative for World Interfaith Harmony Week, February 2013. This is an opportunity for those of us throughout the world who are committed to a common cause for the common good to come together. It is especially appropriate for the people of Hawai'i, who are a majority of minorities and celebrates its pluralism of religion, ethnicity, and culture.

The Board of Directors of All Believers Network gives special thanks and aloha to the following organizations for their generosity in making this event possible.

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Program

9:00 a.m.	Welcome	Bishop Stephen Randolph Sykes
9:05	Invocation and Buddhism	Bishop Eric Matsumoto
9:15	Keynote	Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland
9:30	Hawaiian Spirituality	Glen Makakauli`i Kila & Christophor Edward Oliveira
9:40	Jainism	Harendra Panalal
9:50	Daoism	Lillian Chang
10:00	Unitarian Universalism	Lisa Wong Jacobs
10:10	Unity	Margie Hyatt
10:20	Sikhism	Manjit Kaur Reddick
10:30	Baha'i	Florence Kelley
10:40	Sufism	Valerie Noor Karima Payton
10:50	Seicho-No-Ie	Merritt T. Sakata
11:00	Break	
11:15	Hinduism	Raj Kumar
11:30	Christianity	Sister Joan Chatfield, M.M.
11:45	Islam	Saleem Ahmed
12:00 p.m.	Lunch	
	<i>Table Discussion: What can I/we do to promote interfaith harmony?</i>	
1:00	Judaism	Rabbi Peter Schaktman
1:15	Questions & Answers	All speakers
1:50	Discussion	<i>What can I/we do to promote interfaith harmony?</i>
2:20	Discussion Summary	
3:00	Closing Song	<i>Aloha 'Oe</i>

Aloha 'Oe

Lyrics and music by Queen Lili'uokalani

Ha'aheo ka ua i nā pali
Ke nihi a'ela i ka nahele
E hahai (uhai) ana paha i ka liko
Pua `āhihi lehua o uka

Hui

Aloha 'oe, aloha 'oe
E ke onaona noho i ka lipo
One fond embrace,
A ho'i a'e au
Until we meet again

'O ka hali'a aloha i hiki mai
Ke hone a'e nei i
Ku'u manawa
'O 'oe nō ka'u ipo aloha
A loko e hana nei

Maopopo ku'u 'ike i ka nani
Nā pua rose o Maunawili
I laila hia'ia nā manu
Miki'ala i ka nani o ka lipo

Proudly swept the rain by the cliffs
As it glided through the trees
Still following ever the bud
The `ahihi lehua of the vale

Chorus

Farewell to you, farewell to you
The charming one who dwells in the shaded bowers
One fond embrace,
'Ere I depart
Until we meet again

Sweet memories come back to me
Bringing fresh remembrances
Of the past
Dearest one, yes, you are mine own
From you, true love shall never depart

I have seen and watched your loveliness
The sweet rose of Maunawili
And 'tis there the birds of love dwell
And sip the honey from your lips

Buddhism

By Bishop Eric Matsumoto

When was the religion founded and by whom?

Historically speaking, Buddhism was founded by Sakyamuni Buddha, the former Prince Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakya Clan who was born around 550 BCE in the region today known as Nepal. The term *Buddha* is a title of respect (and not a person's name) which refers to an individual who has become awakened to the Dharma – Truth, Universal Reality and embodies Wisdom and Compassion. There are many titles of respect afforded a Buddha, the “Enlightened One” being one of the more well-known titles. In the Buddhist Tradition, Sakyamuni Buddha is not the only Buddha and especially in the Mahayana Branch of Buddhism numerous Buddhas throughout the Universe are recognized. Wisdom and Compassion, the Dharma, Universal Reality, Truth has always existed and goes beyond the confines of human history, but it took someone to elucidate it. Sakyamuni Buddha who set “The Wheel of Dharma in Motion” is revered as the Founder of Buddhism.

There are primarily two branches of Buddhism, Theravada or “The Way of the Elders,” traditionally said to be centered in South East Asia, and Mahayana or “The Great Vehicle,” found primarily in Central and East Asia. Although today, as Buddhism spreads around the globe, both forms of Buddhism can be found all around the world.

What are the basic tenets?

The most basic tenets of Buddhism are known as the “Three Marks.” They are what define Buddhism. The “Three Marks” are:

- ◆ All things are transient.
- ◆ All things are selfless.
- ◆ Nirvana is the State of Perfect Tranquility.

In other words, all things are constantly changing, there is no permanent unchanging self and there is a state of peace and serenity known as nirvana.

Other important teachings and concepts associated with Buddhism include interdependence, equality, impermanence, meditation, nembutsu (contemplating on the Buddha or reciting the Buddha's Name), wisdom and compassion, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and Six Paramitas to name a few.

The figure of a large tree can be used to explain Buddhism. Depending on one's interpretation, Buddhism is like a large tree with two or three large branches. The roots of the “Tree of Buddhism” are firmly planted in the Ground of Wisdom and Compassion (Enlightenment, Nirvana, Universal Reality, Truth, and Dharma). The tree's trunk represents the Teachings common to all of Buddhism like the Three Marks referred to earlier. The large branches on the tree represent the Theravada and Mahayana branches. According to some scholars, there is a third branch called Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism. The smaller branches of the tree are the various denominations of Mahayana Buddhism each having their own unique features and characteristics represented by how the branches are shaped and their position (relative height) on the tree. All the flowers and fruits on the branches are the same in that all Buddhists aspire for the same goal of Supreme Nirvana or Enlightenment. Finally, all the flowers and fruits eventually return to the Ground of Wisdom and Compassion where it all began and the Tree continues to grow. As the Tree grows it provides protection and sustenance

for all around the Tree. It does not matter if one is Buddhist or not, the Tree provides benefits for all life, all existence.

What are the religion's sacred texts?

In Buddhism, there is a host of sacred literature known as the Tripitaka which is a voluminous collection of sutras and commentaries including monastic disciplines. Sutras contain words or teachings that are attributed to Sakyamuni Buddha. Sutras were recorded in written form centuries after the physical demise of the historic Buddha. India has a strong oral tradition and so for centuries the Teachings of Buddha were transmitted orally. Commentaries were written by the many great Buddhist scholar-monks and nuns from not only India, but Central and East Asian countries too, which clarified and interpreted the so called original teachings found in the sutras.

A special characteristic of Sakyamuni Buddha's sharing the content of Enlightenment is that the Buddha took into consideration the capacity and ability of each individual he was addressing. This resulted in many different approaches to reach the same goal. Buddhism can also be likened to a mountain or mountain climbing. Just as a mountain has many sides, some steep, some gentle, so too does Buddhism have many sides. The goal is to reach the summit of enlightenment, but there many ways to reach that summit as in climbing a steep slope by oneself or taking the ski lift to the top. Buddhism has many sutras upon which denominations base their basic teachings and practices.

Some major sutras or groups of sutras include the following:

- ◆ Lotus Sutra which stresses that the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice is the attainment of Buddhahood/Enlightenment and that a Buddha upon attaining Enlightenment does not become "extinct" but continues to exist to share the Dharma.
- ◆ Garland Sutra which states that all things have Buddha-nature and that each phenomenon bears a relation to all other phenomenon (interdependent nature of all phenomena)
- ◆ Nirvana Sutra which identifies Buddha-nature with the final nature of reality and presents Truth as an active force working in the Universe in contrast to a static statement or description of it.
- ◆ Mahavairocana Sutra is an important sutra in Esoteric traditions of Buddhism in which Mahavairocana Buddha is presented as the Supreme Buddha from which all other Buddhas and bodhisattvas emanate including Reality itself.
- ◆ Prajnaparamita Sutras or Wisdom Sutras, one of these sutras is commonly known as the popular Heart Sutra, refers to a group of sutras that concentrate on the Perfection of Wisdom.
- ◆ Pure Land Sutras, the most famous being the Triple Pure Land Sutras, the fundamental sacred literature of the Pure Land Tradition of Buddhism which focuses on the salvation offered by the Buddha Amitayus-Amitabha (Amida Buddha) with birth in the Buddha's Pure Land of Enlightenment.

In addition to the Mahayana Sutras mentioned above, there are texts of the Pali Canon which include well-known works like the Dhammapada which is an anthology of verses from various texts of the Pali Canon.

What are their strengths and possible challenges?

It is said that there are 84,000 paths to enlightenment. While the number is not taken literally it shows that Buddhism provides a wide spectrum of thoughts and practices to suit the needs of people in its attempt to embrace all people. A challenge, then, is with so many various paths it can seem confusing. A question that may arise is, “How can one tradition emphasize meditation while another faith while still another endorses rigorous religious practices fit for an Olympic athlete and all be called Buddhism?” In the case of Buddhism, the expression “Different strokes for different folks” applies. Please recall that Sakyamuni Buddha shared the Dharma according to the capabilities and abilities of the listeners.

Most important is to find the path that you can follow and to look at each tradition as complete within itself. There is an expression in Buddhism called “Skillful means” it refers to ways and means employed to guide individuals to enlightenment. Each tradition has a method or methods with the goal of bringing the individual following that path to supreme enlightenment equal to the Buddha’s. The ultimate goal is the attainment of supreme enlightenment by all.

Another challenge is that the Sacred Literature has evolved over thousands of years some going back over 2,500 years and so some of the language and subject/topics covered by them are different from our times today. The fundamental Teachings do not change because reality is reality and does not change over time, but circumstances change and languages changes and so efforts to distinguish between the core or essence of the Teachings and non-essential elements, to express the Teachings and apply them in a relevant way for the age and times must continually be made.

How does the religion look at other religions?

As any tradition, Buddhism would say it is sharing the Truth or Ultimate Reality. This is only natural for any religion. However, at the same time, Buddhism does not condemn or persecute other religions or judge people of other religions as being evil. They may be lost in the ocean of ignorance (just as one was at one time, too), but should be accorded respect and treated with kindness and one would hope that it also be reciprocated. Hence, according to one Buddhist scholar, along the Silk Road, many different cultures and ethnic groups were able to harmoniously co-exist with this kind of Buddhist influence extending along sections of the Silk Road.

How does the religion look at Buddhists who might leave Buddhism and convert to other religions?

Buddhists would feel great sadness and lament that these individuals were not able to become fully aware of or realize the full extent of the Great Wisdom of Buddha and appreciate the Great Compassion of Buddha. However, there is always hope for there is no end to the working of Wisdom and Compassion.

How does the religion look at people from other religions who might want to join Buddhism?

Anyone and everyone are welcomed to become a Buddhist or take refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. No one is denied access to the Dharma or Teachings and Enlightenment (although some traditions do have a methodology on how guide people from a beginning stage to a more advanced stage). An interesting phenomenon that is happening is that many people retain their religious traditions and incorporate certain Buddhist perspectives like interdependence and practices like meditation into their present beliefs. We have people who claim

to be Jewish-Buddhist or Hindu-Buddhist. Buddhism has been described, variously, as a religion, a philosophy, a way of life.

How does the religion look upon women? What is their status?

Purely from the standpoint of the Dharma or Teachings, women are equal to men. Gender is not an issue when it comes to the attainment of Enlightenment. However, people do not live in a vacuum or purely Buddhist religious environment which is free of cultural values, norms and perspectives that may be at variance with Buddhist beliefs. Thus, in Buddhism, too, we have instances when the male is considered superior and women subordinate. Even Sakyamuni Buddha had to deal with this attitude that prevailed in Indian society and thus when the initial request to ask for women to be ordained was put to the Buddha, the Buddha declined. But when finally pressed as to the truth he shared that gender was not an issue and women had equal access and ability to attain enlightenment. In order to gain acceptance by the wider community some compromises were made like the fact that Buddhist nuns had many more monastic rules and regulations to follow than their male counterparts and they were subordinate to them. But this was developed and based not on the Dharma or Teachings, but cultural and societal values and perspectives. Much of Buddhism today in certain parts of the world is still male centered, but things are changing especially in America. Also, in certain denominations like Jodo Shinshu women are able to equally be the head minister of a temple and enlightenment is promised equally to all with no exceptions.

Hawaiian Spirituality – Kanenuiakea Religious Faith and Practice

By Glen Makakauali'i Kila & Christophor Edward Oliveira

We are Hawaiian worshippers of the Kanenuiakea religion indigenous to Hawai'i. We worship in our native language – Hawaiian – with prayers and chants made in the name of Kanenuiakea. We were born into our religion so it might be called an ethnic religion. While there is no conversion of others or evangelism, others living Hawaiian values are welcomed. We are inclusive, not exclusive.

We were selected and trained in our faith by our *kumu* (teacher) Aunty Lei. Our religious practice is not exclusive. It includes all truths that we are capable of experiencing and living.

Until 1979, Hawaiian religions were persecuted as sorcery. Our sacred sites are still occupied, desecrated and access to them is controlled by others and often forbidden. Yes, religious freedom has not yet been extended to everyone in America. But other indigenous religions have had the same experience. Native American religionists experienced cultural genocide as we have. However, our *kupuna* (elders) passed our faith down to us despite all condemnation, and we have continued to worship out of the public's view. That is, until last January 29th. But our first public worship is a story explained further in closing.

At the simplest level native Hawaiian religions were divided like the worship of Cain and Abel, between those who did blood sacrifices and those who came with offerings from the land. Worship of Kane never involved human sacrifice. When Kamehameha the Great conquered the Islands and established his religion of the war god Ku as the state religion, he desecrated our Kane *heiau* (temples) with blood sacrifices. And when his state religion of Ku was abolished, we continued our worship of Kane in our heiau that had been sacred to Kane for over a thousand years. But these sacred rocks and simple rock platforms have been the target of further desecrations and even outlawed by the Hawaiian Kingdom which became recognized as a Christian nation, the first to declare itself non-belligerent and neutral. Then those who occupied our country, and the territorial, state, and federal governments of the United States of America continued to deny our right to worship according to our faith at our *wahi pana*, sacred sites.

Theologically, Kanenuiakea is a pantheistic faith. That is, everything that exists is within God or the divine manifestations of that which is beyond human knowledge and experience. Yet, our observation and experiences are honored. We own the fact that we create our religion out of our language and culture. One of our prayers acknowledges that we humans (*kane*) cannot exist without God (*Kane*) who created us, nor can God (*Kane*) exist without man (*kane*) who creates and worship what is highest and best. All manifestations of great power (*mana*), love (*aloha*) and righteousness (*pono*) are honored and worshipped. We acknowledge others' worship, and because we are inclusive of all truths, we see no reason for one to have only one faith or religion. We are universalists in our faith and practice. In fact, there were other supreme deities in the religious traditions of ancient Hawaii – Kane, Ku, Lono, and Kanaloa, each with worshippers who saw one manifestation as supreme.

We are a Gaia or Earth religion, naturalistic in our celebrations of the immanence of the sacred in all of life, especially seeing God in nature. And almost every Hawaiian word, place name, sign or symbol points us to and reminds us of the sacred. Perhaps ancient Hawai'i, especially as lived and practiced in the Waianae *wahi pana* (sacred sites) was among the most religious cultures of humankind – perhaps even as religious as ancient Tibet.

We are an oral tradition, without a sacred book of divine origin which was authored by or quoted from a God in a human language. Our prayers and chants are of human origin, memorized and passed down for centuries, coming with us on our long, open ocean journeys. And that may be where our religion was created – in the double-hulled canoes. Kanenuiakea was probably created from the aloha of those long voyages – on the open ocean where the practicality of sharing, cooperating, respecting, conserving the resources, and “managing the rolling beauty of time” (*ka’anani‘au*) all came together in our faith and practice. These values helped us turn this island canoe into a garden paradise, our *‘aina*.

Kanenuiakea is both a simple and a complex faith. It experience the sacred, divinity, in all of nature – with divine power (*mana*) manifesting as reminders of divine activity in all the elements of life. This immanence of the divine in many forms is taught to our children (*keiki*) in the songs, chants and hulas to many gods (*akua*). But there is a greater harmony (*loka’ahi*) and unity to every sphere of existence which our seers, our mystics, know as the unknowable one, ‘Io. And while our values reflect a rightness about life (*pono*), these principles have grown out of our community, the *‘ohana* (extended family) that includes all who love Hawai‘i and sustain its ways.

On January 29, 2012, we worshipped openly, inside another faith’s church, sharing of values and prayers with them. The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu has become a partner in religious dialogue to begin publicly worshipping and sharing our faith.

After 100 years of hidden worship there are real issues of guaranteed religious rights of worship. Our sacred sites are now occupied by the state, corporations, and private owners. We have never ceased worshipping at our heiau, our temples, nor ceased our celebrations at sacred sites in our mountains, valleys, springs, and ocean. Are we to continue hiding our worship? We are denied access to heiau like Kaneaki in Makaha, and our Garden of Eden, Makua. The sacred cave of our First Mother – Papa – is desecrated regularly but we have no authority or management of any of these sites. If fact, there is no sacred site of the Kanenuiakea faith that has not been occupied and claimed by others in violation of due process (a denial of the Constitutional right established by the Fourth Amendment).

The United States has condemned many nations for their persecution and denial of religious rights. For example, both China and Turkey have been cited for their confiscation of sacred sites from minority religions. Will the United States and the State of Hawai‘i return our heiau to those who have worshipped at them for centuries? And, if there cannot be immediate return, then what about guaranteed freedom of access in order to have freedom of worship?

Please include us in the faiths or religions that are protected under the First Amendment (freedom of religion and worship) and Fourth Amendment (due process concerning confiscation of sacred sites). Mahalo!

Jainism

By Harendra Panalal, M.S.E., PE

Name of the Religion

The name of the religion is Jainism. Jain is derived from Prakrit word *Jina* which means a conqueror who has complete control over his senses, and has conquered his inner enemies such as anger, hatred, passion, jealousy, etc. There are two major sects of Jainism, *Digambar* meaning sky clad *Shwetamber* meaning white clad. These two major sects are divided into several other sub-sects.

When and Where it was Founded and by Whom

The origin of Jainism dates back to 3000 BCE. It may be older than Hinduism because there is a mention of our first *tirthankara* (prophet) Rishabdev in *Rig Veda*, one of the most ancient Hindu holy scriptures.

There were twenty four *tirthankaras* (prophets), last of whom, Lord Mahavir, lived in sixth century BCE, and was a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha.

There are – at the very most – fifteen million Jains in the world, most of them in India.

Some of the main reasons why Jainism did not spread among many people is that Jainism does not believe in violence so it was not imposed upon anyone with force. There many professions such even farming which cannot be practiced by Jains. To protect themselves from being invaded by external armies, Jains often depended upon Hindus.

What are Jainism's Sacred Texts

Since classical Sanskrit is difficult for many people, Jain holy scriptures called *Agam*, *Ang-Bahya-Agam* (outside of *Agam*), and *Sutra* were mostly written in Prakrit, which is not in use these days. Scriptures were also written in Pali, Ardhamaghi and Savraseni which are also not in use today. These are, of course, translated in many present day languages. Since Jainism discourages material possessions, even holy scriptures, most knowledge was transferred orally for centuries. Around 500 CE, almost one thousand years after Lord Mahavira's Nirvana, Jain monks decided to document all this literature in writing. By that time, two major sects, Digambar (sky clad) and Swetamber (white cloth clad) were in existence. There is no unanimity among Jains as to whether there are 33, 59, or 102 such agams.

What are the Perceived Strengths, and Possible Challenges

Jainism's perceived strength is in the basic tenets of Jainism which principles are probably similar to those of other great religions in the world.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| ◆ Ahimsa | Non-violence |
| ◆ Satya | Truth |
| ◆ Asteya | Not to steal |
| ◆ Brahmacharya | To lead a chaste life |
| ◆ Aparigraha | Non accumulation of wealth |

Possible challenges are that Jainism is very ritualistic, and promotes asceticism. The primary mission of one's life is to attain nirvana or moksha which means ending the cycles of birth and death.

How does Jainism Look Upon Other Religions

Jainism looks upon other religions with respect as long as they are not in direct conflict with their basic tenets. To attain nirvana, one has to shed all his karma by leading a very righteous life. Hinduism was always more popular than Jainism but they have always lived in peace and harmony.

How does the Jainism deal with Apostates

Jainism has no bars from anyone leaving Jainism. Anyone can be a Jain as long as he follows basic principles of Jainism. Anyone can go to any of Jain temples, many of which are extremely beautiful. They have to observe some rules of modesty.

How does Jainism Deal with Outsiders who may want to join Jainism

All are welcome to join Jainism, and follow our basic tenets. Jainism has many rituals but one may follow whatever suits one's self.

Are there any Restrictions on what Women can do

Although men and women have an equal status in religion, in practice, it is male dominated society. Similar to Hindus, sons had rights to inherited property, and daughters were given dowries. Some years ago, laws of India had changed laws giving equal rights to both. Digambara believe that women cannot attain nirvana because of some of their biological functions. Our nineteenth tirthankar was Mallinath; Digambara think he was male and Shwetambara think she was female. So much for accuracy of any ancient religion.

How can Jains Move from Exclusion to Inclusion

Jainism does not bar anyone from joining, and does not stop anyone from leaving Jainism to embrace any other religion.

Unique Features of Jainism

Jainism has many unique features, a few of which are explained as follows.

1. Santhara, Sallekhana, Anshan

Concept of fasting unto death is unique to Jain tradition. Some monks still practice it. When a person feels that he has nothing more to accomplish in life, he fasts unto death. This is quite a painless way to die. This is not tantamount to suicide.

2. Fundamental Prayer Namokar Mantra and Annual Prayer

Jainism's fundamental prayer Namokar Mantra means bowing down to five great souls called Panch Parmesti, and emulate their examples. There is no mention of God and this prayer does not ask for any material things. There are many other Jain prayers. Hindu prayers are often directed to many Gods and Goddesses. Even Jainism's annual prayer Samvatsari or Pratikraman is unique in the sense that it repeatedly asks for forgiveness from all living creatures who they may harmed knowingly or unknowingly, either by thought or by word or by action.

3. What does Swastika mean?

Jainism's symbol of Swastika is shown below.

The three dots represent Jainism's path of liberation, viz., right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.



Region above the crescent of the moon represent Moksha or Siddhashila where liberated souls reside.

The four sides of Swastika represent four forms of existence, viz. first heavenly beings, secondly human beings, thirdly animals, birds, insects, plants and fourthly hellish beings.

Below swastika there is palm of a hand with a circle saying *Abimsa*. In other words, before we do any violence, stop and think. The 24 spokes in the wheel represent 24 *tirthankars*.

Jainism Internet Sites

There are many beautiful web sites to learn about Jainism, a few of which are listed below.

www.jainworld.com

www.atmadharma.com

www.jaina.org

www.jainstudy.org

www.jainsamaj.org

www.jaintirth.org

www.jcnc.org

www.jainmeditation.org

www.jainuniversity.org

Daoism

By Lillian Chang

1. The following information is on the Daoist religion.
2. Daoist religious practice dates back to Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, 4,711 years ago, while the author of the Daoist Bible, Laozi, dates back 2,581 years. The first Heavenly Master, Zhang Dao Ling (张道陵), who lived from 34 AD to 156 AD founded Daoist religion based on the teachings of Huangdi and Laozi. His teachings have been passed down 64 generations. The 64th Heritage Master has resided in Hawai'i at the Tai Hsuan Taoist temple in Honolulu and Kapoho since 1970.
3. The Daoist religion's Bible is the *Dao De Jing* written by Laozi over 2,581 years ago. Other ancient texts forming the foundation of Daoism include the *Yi Jing*, *Huangdi Neijing*, *The Art of War*, *Wenzi*, *The Zhuangzi*, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, and *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, among others.
4. The strengths of Daoism include its simplicity in following the rhythms and cycles of nature and its ability to adapt and absorb new philosophies. A weakness may include the difficulties it faces in these modern times where the works of man have taken them so far from nature. In following *Wu Wei*, the art of non-action, how far does a Daoist go in their resistance to man's pollution and the building of civilization further and further from the Dao?
5. Daoism is inclusive in its views. As Laozi mentions in the *Dao De Jing*, "Man follows earth. Earth follows heaven. Heaven follows the [D]ao. [D]ao follows what is natural" (Gia-Fu, English 1997). The great Dao accepts all things and gives them a home, therefore man, to be in accord with Dao, must do the same. It accepts all people in their various forms of belief and existence.
6. Daoism deals with apostates on an individual basis as Daoist sects often have unique sets of rules and guidelines as preconditions for membership to their temples. However, Daoism as a whole does not have a list of conditions to meet in order to be Daoist. As long as a person is following the path of nature, he or she could consider him or herself as following the Daoist way of life.
7. There are many levels of practicing Daoists. The deepest level of commitment is a life of asceticism and austerity in a monastery or hermitage. However, many people learn *qigong* or martial arts that harmonize a person's mind, body and spirit with the natural principles that Daoists follow. Likewise, there are many people who read copies and translations of the *Dao De Jing* and ponder its meanings. These are all Daoist practices. Many people in China go to temples for holidays to make offerings. Traditionally Daoism is passed from a master to a disciple in a unique and individual way that is suited to both the master and disciple. The abilities of the disciple will be drawn out and deep realizations attained through commitment to practice. Skills are honed and immersion of the self with the deeper realms of connectedness and reality are maintained in daily life.
8. There are no restrictions on women in Daoism, and in fact historically speaking the conventional view of Daoism can be seen as a woman's refuge from the primarily patriarchal society. Laozi in particular seems to express a strong preference for distinctly "feminine" virtues such as yielding, softness, fertility, and non-aggression. Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn explain Daoism's approach to women in their book *Women and Daoism*:

Cosmologically, Daoism sees women as expressions of the pure cosmic force of yin, necessary for the working of the universe, equal and for some schools even superior to Yang. Daoism also links the Dao itself, the force of creation at the foundation of the cosmos to the female and describes it as the mother of all beings. Within the

religion there is a widespread attitude of veneration and respect for the feminine, honoring the cosmic connection as well as the productive and nurturing nature of women. (2003).

9. Daoists accept all forms of natural expression including those generally accepted as “negative.” Their non-discriminatory philosophy presents itself in Chapter 2 of the *Dao De Jing*:

*Under heaven all can see beauty as
beauty only because there is ugliness.
All can know good as good only
because there is evil.
Therefore having and not having arise together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other:
High and low rest upon each other;
Voice and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow one another.
(Gia-Fu, English 1997)*

Therefore, Daoism is intrinsically inclusive in nature. Every natural form of human expression is necessary to maintain order in the universe. Not only do Daoists encourage inclusion of all races, nationalities and sexual orientations in the macrocosm, but they encourage inclusion of all forms of human expression within the microcosm of each person as well.

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Unitarian Universalism

By Lisa Wong Jacobs, J.D.

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

Unitarian Universalism (hereinafter “UUism”) was formed from a merger of two historically Christian denominations based in the United States, which were the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. This merger between the Unitarians and the Universalists occurred in the year 1961, but both Unitarianism and Universalism go way, way back. Unitarianism emerged in the Kingdom of Transylvania in the year 1568 with the Edict of Torda. Transylvania was the first country in recorded history that attempted to guarantee religious freedom. A couple of persons associated with early Unitarianism include Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake by John Calvin, and Francis David, who died imprisoned by Protestants. These folks radically rejected all attempts to coerce orthodoxy and died in furtherance of their steadfast beliefs in religious freedom. Universalism theologies go as far back as the time of around 220, with early Greek Church theologian Origen of Alexandria, and then later, around 372, with Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa. Universalism is based upon the doctrine of universal salvation through Christ, and universal salvation is for everyone, regardless of who is labeled as “Christian.”

Primary sacred texts

Unitarian Universalists (hereinafter “UUs”) respect the important religious texts of all religions, and all of these texts are not infallible guides or exclusive sources to truth. All sacred texts have value, but they are understood within the cultural and historical context in which they were written. Contemporary works of science, art, and social commentary are valued as well. UUs maintain that “revelation is not sealed,” and spend their lifetimes on their spiritual journeys discovering with their senses fully open, taking in the “spirit of life” everywhere they go.

Strengths of these texts

These texts report on human religious experiences, which includes the following: accounts of wisdom, both in word and deed; reports of direct experiences that transcend mystery and wonder, and even expose human limitations.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

No religious text is infallible. The religious texts should encourage critical thinking and analysis. The content of these texts and the experiences they report and evoke should be interpreted in the light of current knowledge and understanding.

Passages of exclusion

UUs interpret any passages of exclusion in any religious text as reflecting the cultural biases of the time, so those passages suggesting exclusion rather than inclusion are normally rejected.

Passages of inclusion

UUs interpret any and all religious texts to be the most inclusive in meaning as possible. For passages within religious texts that are literally inclusive, that language and meanings within the words are seen as some of the deepest insights of the human religious experience.

How UUism looks upon people converting into the religion

People who embrace UUism are welcomed openly and enthusiastically. Converts from other religious backgrounds, more often than not, come from more fundamentalist and dogmatic faith traditions, and they find our non-creedal approach to be a breath of fresh air. On the other side of the spectrum, there are some who find UUism after having been “unchurched” prior to finding us. These folks are typically among the “spiritual but not necessarily religious” persons who were probably UUs all along, but just did not know it, until they found us.

How UUism looks upon apostasy, or departing from UUism

UUism is the complete opposite of a “cult” in the sense that not only do we wish apostates well, but we also encourage them on their continued journeys, where-ever that may be and lead them. If they have found another religious home that feeds their spiritual growth, or another community that sustains and supports them, UUs think that that is fine. Those who depart from UUism are always welcome back openly and without conditions.

How UUism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

UUs are fully supportive of UUs marrying persons of other faiths. For couples who come from different religious traditions or from a secular humanist perspective and who wish to marry, UUism is often chosen as the common ground in order to accommodate and respect both parties.

How UUism views the status of women

Historically, UUs have been very active in a number of social reform movements, including the women's movement. Susan B. Anthony, who was a Unitarian and a Quaker, was extremely influential in the women's suffrage movement. UUs practice full equality of the sexes. UUism was the first denomination to ordain women as clergy, and more than half of the current clergy are female.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ◆ Prayers: Many UUs do not “pray” in the traditional sense – most UUs do not think that prayer alters the ontological structures of the universe. Rather, those UUs who do “pray,” or silently reflect or meditate, feel that doing so changes them (rather than someone or something outside of themselves) and helps them be more present, caring, and loving to others.
- ◆ Holy Days, or Holidays: UUs love holidays, and we get to celebrate everyone's holidays. It is amazing how the different holidays within the diverse cultures and traditions all seem to celebrate shared values.
- ◆ Heaven and Hell: Most UUs choose not to be overly concerned about most concepts concerning an after-life, such as Heaven and Hell. With respect to the concept of Heaven, most UUs are more concerned about working together, in this life-time, to bring about a more peaceful “heaven-like” existence to all sentient beings. UUs reject the concept of Hell – those of us who believe in God or Divine Spirit feel that the essence of Divine Spirit is unconditionally loving and would never subject anyone or anything to eternal suffering.

Special features of UUism

UUism is a non-traditional religion in that it is deliberately without an official creed or dogma – instead, as a religious community, UUs work to affirm and promote seven principles, which are the following:

1. We affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. We affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
3. We affirm and promote acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. We affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. We affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and
7. We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

How UUs can move from exclusion to inclusion

Although UUs strive to welcome all in furtherance of our principle to affirm and promote the inherent worth dignity of every person, because we are such a progressive religion, those folks with very intolerant beliefs and practices would not likely feel comfortable regularly taking part in a UU community, although I do think that we do try our best to include them, rather than exclude them.

Summary of UUism

The Mission Statement at the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu reads, “We are a Unitarian Universalist community, inspired by our Principles, boldly growing compassion, justice, and joy.” UU religious communities come together to keep one another alive and growing intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. UUs strive to help one another grow and nurture our own unique religious identities, out of our own experiences, and in the light of the best of what the many religious traditions have to offer to all of us.

Unity

By Margie Hyatt, LUT

For more than 100 years Unity has been teaching that all people can improve the quality of their lives through thought and right action. While founded as a spiritual movement of practical Christianity, Unity is an inclusive faith that welcomes diversity of belief.

Unity is a link in the great educational movement inaugurated by Jesus Christ; our objective is to discern the truth in Christianity and prove it. The truth that we teach is not new; neither do we claim special revelations or discovery of new religious principles. Our purpose is to help and teach mankind to use and prove the eternal Truth taught by the Master.

Charles Fillmore

Unity's Co-Founders: Charles & Myrtle Fillmore

Arising from a profound prayer healing experienced by Myrtle Fillmore, Unity began as prayer gatherings in the home of Charles and Myrtle. Attending a lecture in 1886 Myrtle heard the speaker say, "You are a child of God and you do not inherit sickness." Told by doctors she had only six months to live, that statement sparked Myrtle's imagination, she left the talk with a stronger faith in God and she began to work with the new prayer ideas presented in the lecture.

That simple beginning of prayer, the basis for Myrtle's healing experience, continues still in Unity as Silent Unity, a prayer ministry available to anyone 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, by phone, letter or email. The original prayer ministry, begun in the Fillmores' living room as the improvement in Myrtle's health was noted by friends and family and they asked what she was doing, developed into an educational movement that became a denomination within the Christian faith. The movement began organizing churches in the 1930s.

Unity's Basic Teachings

From *The Five Principles: A Guide to Practical Spirituality* by Rev. Ellen Debenport:

1. God is Absolute Good, everywhere present.
2. Human beings have a spark of divinity within them, the Christ spirit within. Their very essence is of God, and therefore they are also inherently good.
3. Human beings create their experiences by the activity of their thinking. Everything in the manifest realm has its beginning in thought.
4. Prayer is creative thinking that heightens the connection with God-Mind and therefore brings forth wisdom, healing, prosperity and everything good.
5. Knowing and understanding the laws of life, also called Truth, are not enough. A person must also live the truth that he or she knows.

The Bible as Primary Text

The Bible is the primary sacred text in Unity. Charles and Myrtle believed the pure teachings found in the life and lessons of Jesus of Nazareth held the ideas and pattern for living in God

consciousness, for living in wholeness, health and abundance. Modern Bible scholarship reflects the problematic issues of accuracy, consistency and veracity of this beloved text. Rife with stories of both inclusion and exclusion, the Bible reflects the journey of humankind's relationship with God. Mr. Fillmore might have appreciated the Buddhist analogy: my finger can point to the moon, but the finger is not the moon. The Bible can indeed point us in the direction of God, but it is not God.

The Unity lens for understanding the Bible and its wealth of spiritual truth is metaphysical interpretation of the text. Not to see it as literally or historically accurate, but to understand that the stories reflect humankind's developing and maturing relationship with God. Whether or not a story is literally, factually true, great truth can be found in the story. We are in each story, and each story is in us.

The influx of new thought is always necessary to life, and he who writes a creed or puts a limit to revelation is the enemy of humanity. Truth is an unexplored domain which man can only compass step by step throughout the years of eternity.

Charles Fillmore, *Modern Thought*, first edition, 1889

Charles Fillmore, a prolific writer, also contributed to the texts regarded as basic to Unity students. Unity developed its own publishing house, originally producing a magazine, *Modern Thought*, presenting ideas of "practical Christianity," prayer and healing, and more concepts of spiritual healing and Christ-centered living that arose in the spiritual movements of the late 1800's in America; a movement that became known as "new thought" and gave rise to denominations such as Christian Science, Divine Science, Science of Mind (currently known as Centers for Spiritual Living) and Unity. Unity has published the *Daily Word*, a daily inspirational, devotional booklet for over 80 years. Unity House continues to publish authors of relevant spiritual teachings, many of them Unity ministers. Since Mr. Fillmore's death in 1948, one of the most respected and also prolific authors in the Unity movement in that latter 20th Century was Eric Butterworth.

Unity and Apostasy

As Unity does not teach the salvation of sin through Christ in the traditional Christian mold, apostasy in the traditional biblical sense is not an operational premise in our movement. It is permissible to disagree with Unity teachings, leaders, and founders; in fact, it is encouraged! Mr. Fillmore often exhorted Unity students not to simply accept what he was teaching, but to seek the wisdom of their own heart, to connect with the Teacher within, the Holy Spirit of Love. Both Mr. & Mrs. Fillmore spoke of offering what they had learned through experience, but it was important for students of Unity to take the advice, work with the teachings, and create their own connection to God in the way that worked best. Disagreement with doctrine or practice, even leaving the fold, as it were, carries no punitive action.

Members are not required to hold specific beliefs, not required to be in compliance with specific doctrine, to be in good standing. One does not have to give up membership in another church organization to belong to Unity. The founders' believed that Unity teachings and principles can be complementary to one's existing faith, beliefs and/or church membership, can expand one's relationship and understanding of God, rather than be exclusive of.

The Fillmores felt and taught that seeking the truth was a prospect best undertaken within one's own relationship with God, through prayer and meditation. That within each of us is the presence, the spirit of God, on which we can rely for wisdom, understanding, guidance. That seeking our own understanding was key to growing in consciousness toward Oneness with the Creator.

We believe that all people are created with Sacred Worth. It is imperative that our ministries and outreaches be free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, age, creed, religion, national origin, ethnicity, physical, mental ability, and/or sexual orientation. It is with Love and in celebration of our unity, in the midst of wonderful diversity, that we affirm this position.

Diversity Statement, Unity Church of Hawai'i

The Women of Unity

The role of women in Unity has always been full and complete. What we know of our co-founder is that she was a woman of strength and purpose. After experiencing the physical healing through prayer, she and Charles began the work that would become the Unity spiritual movement and she continued as a full partner in that work for 40+ years until her death in 1933 at age 86.

At the time that Unity became organized and recognized as a church denomination in the mid 1930s, the majority of ministers were women. Perhaps that was a normal development since Myrtle was a guiding presence in Unity from the beginning. It also had pragmatic roots, in what might be observed from this contemporary vantage point as sexism: the Fillmores understood that a woman who was supported by her husband would have the resources to more ably begin and support the work of growing a Unity church or center. So it was the women in Unity who were encouraged to become ministers.

Many of the early Unity authors published were respected leaders and ministers. Dr. H. Emile Cady wrote *Lessons in Truth*, the first book published by Unity. Myrtle wrote *Wee Wisdom Way*, a fable of spiritual education for children based loosely on her own personal story, and initiated a monthly children's magazine *Wee Wisdom*, which was published continuously for 98 years. Other women whose writings contribute greatly to the Unity library of teachings include Elizabeth Sand Turner, Imelda Shanklin, May Rowland, Martha Smock. Women continue to have a key presence in the roster of Unity books published. Women have been at the forefront of Unity leadership from the beginning, with Myrtle Fillmore herself a guiding light and formidable role model.

Sikhism

By Manjit Kaur Reddick, M.S.W.

Sikhism started as a reform movement by Guru Nanak (1469-1538 CE) in the Punjab area of India. He raised his voice against the caste system, status of women, and the tyrannical reign of the rulers of that time. He spread the message of One God and equality and oneness of humanity.

Sikhism became a formalized religion in 1699, with the institution of baptism ceremony and the introduction of five symbols of the faith:

1. *Kesh* - unshorn hair, sign of distinction
2. *Kanga* - a wooden comb to keep the hair clean and tidy
3. *Kara* - steel bracelet worn on the dominant hand, reminder of an endless entity
4. *Kachha* - the wearing of knee-length briefs as sign of modesty and restraint
5. *Kirpan* - a saber to be used in the cause of justice for the oppressed

These are worn by every baptized Sikh, male and female.

Primary sacred text

The sacred text and spiritual authority of the Sikhs is the *Guru Granth Sahib* (GGS). For the believer, it is the visible form of the invisible Guru.

It includes not only the writings of Sikh gurus, but also writings of 31 various seers and saints of different castes and beliefs.

The unique feature of the GGS is that the writings were done during the lifetime of the gurus.

The scripture starts with “one God.” The writings stress belief in one supreme being and oneness of humanity, devotion to God, compassion, sharing, elimination of rituals and superstitions, spiritual salvation, and unity with God.

There are no “to do” lists in the GGS. The greatest strength lies in the fact that its message transcends time and culture. Our greeting is, “*Sat Sri Akaal*” - Truth is eternal.

There are no passages of exclusion in the scripture. There are many positive references to scriptures and writings of other faiths. There is no proselytizing and clergy. The Sikh places of worship are open to all. Sikhs are not baptized at birth. Being devoted to the religion and way of life, is a conscious choice. When an individual feels inspired, decides to follow the Sikh tenets and hold the *Granth Sahib* as her or his spiritual guide, that individual voluntarily may ask to be baptized. An individual's free will determines the choice.

Status of women

There are several passages in the GGS that talk about the greatness of women and their equality to men. In one of Guru Nanak's hymns, he describes a woman as a mother, sister, friend and life long companion in her different roles. It says “how can you call woman inferior, when it is she who gives birth to kings and rulers.” In Sikh prayers, God is both the father and the mother.

Heaven & hell

Heaven and hell are not places but states of mind during the human journey on this earth. One's deeds lead one to experience the different states of mind through life.

Special features

One of Guru Nanak's hymns emphasizes the equality of all humans as follows:

God first created light and then by his omnipotence, made all the mortals. From one light has arisen the entire universe, then who is good and who is bad? stay not in illusion: the Creator is in the creation and in the creation abides the Creator. He is fully filling places. The clay is the same but that creator has shaped it in innumerable forms. There is no defect in the clay vessel nor is there any fault in the potter. The only true lord is amidst all and it is in His will that everything is done. Whoever realizes the Lord's will, he alone is privileged to be called human.

Baha'i

By Florence Kelley

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

The founder of the Baha'i Faith was *Baha'u'llah*, a title meaning the "Glory of God." He was born in Tehran, Persia, in 1817 CE and died in Akka, Palestine, in 1892 CE. Baha'u'llah revealed His mission in 1863. His forerunner, whose title was the *Bab*, meaning "Door" or "Gate," was an independent prophet in His own right, born in Shiraz, Persia, in 1819 CE and killed by a firing squad of 750 men in Tabriz in 1850 CE.

Primary sacred texts

Baha'u'llah has written more than 100 volumes which we know are authentic as they were signed and contained His seal. The most holy book is the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the "Book of Laws." Others include the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, the "Book of Certitude"; Epistle to the Son of the Wolf; the *Kitab-i-Ahd*, the "Book of the Covenant – His Will and Testament"; the Hidden Words, "the inner essence" of what was "revealed unto the Prophets of old ... clothed in the garment of brevity"; the Seven Valleys; and the Four Valleys.

Strengths of these texts

Unity and oneness – the oneness of God, the Manifestations, and Their teachings. "...The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension" The twelve major principles of the Faith are a program for what is necessary for the world in this day and age.

What are these twelve major principles of the Faith?

1. The oneness of mankind
2. Independent investigation of truth – One should decide for himself what teachings he wishes to follow and not be a member of a certain religion because his forebears were
3. The foundation of all religions is one – There's only one God and one religion of God proclaimed in different ages
4. Religion must be the cause of unity amongst humanity
5. Religion must be in accord with science
6. The equality of men and women
7. Abandonment of prejudice of every kind---race, class, color, creed, nation, sex
8. Universal Peace
9. Universal Education
10. Solution of the Economic problem
11. Universal Auxiliary Language - Everyone will learn the universal language in addition to his native tongue and so be able to converse with everyone else
12. An International Tribunal is to be established

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

Baha'u'llah's immediate successors interpreted passages of His writings that needed clarification. If anyone currently has questions about them, a query can be sent to the World Centre of the Faith for a response.

Passages of exclusion

Baha'is consider that the spiritual teachings of all revealed religions are the same. The Manifestations come at different times in world history, and so the material teachings they bring differ, progressively awakening humankind to its capacities and responsibilities. Baha'u'llah said:

Beware ... lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation....

Passages of inclusion

Baha'u'llah said:

It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold Them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendor.

Humanity is viewed as a single family whose time has come to unite as one global society.

How the Baha'i Faith looks upon people converting into the religion

As one of the teachings of the Faith is that everyone should investigate religion for her- or himself, it is inevitable that Baha'is may come from other religious beliefs, as well as from Baha'i backgrounds.

How the Baha'i Faith looks upon its followers marrying people of other faiths

One's marriage partner is an individual choice, and there are many Baha'is whose partners do not share their beliefs.

How the Baha'i Faith views the status of women

Male and female share the same faculties and are both created by God. The world of humanity has two wings – one male, the other female. If the male wing is strong and the female weak, flight is impossible. If both are strong, flight to the higher dominions of human perfection is possible.

...until this equality is established, true progress and attainment for the human race will not be facilitated.

The equality of men and women is a prerequisite for universal peace.

If education can be given to only one child and the choice is between a boy and a girl, the girl should be educated, as she is the first teacher of the new generation and, as a mother, can be the primary agent for empowering individuals to transform society.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ◆ Prayers. Prayer causes a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turns his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest hope of every soul is “to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate before his Beloved, appeal for His mercy and

grace and be immersed in the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity.” Included in the writings of Baha'u'llah are many prayers revealed for general use and for special occasions. Some are to be used daily.

- ◆ Holy days. Holy days are commemorations of specific events connected with the Manifestations – days of Their birth, Their declarations, Their deaths, and the period associated with the declaration of Baha'u'llah prior to leaving Baghdad for further exile. Holy days to be used for charity and gift-giving are the period prior to the fast and the Baha'i New Year.
- ◆ Heaven and hell. Baha'u'llah has given us beautiful teachings about the after-life which give peace both to those who are on their way and those who are left behind. Heaven and hell are not places, but our realization of the station of our souls, our nearness or distance from God, based on what we have wrought upon this earth, and the preparation for the worlds beyond.

Special features

For the first time in religious history, the founder of a world religion has, in writing, appointed His successor who, also in writing, appointed a successor and established an administrative order which functions today.

Baha'is are expected to live a chaste and holy life; say daily prayers; work, which, when done in a spirit of service, is considered to be worship; and fast during the nineteenth month of the Baha'i calendar year.

Summary

Central to the Baha'i teaching on the essential unity of religions is the belief that religion is forever evolving and is fundamentally progressive. Each religion comes to take humanity to a higher stage of development, preparing us for the next stage in our spiritual evolution, a process that will continue forever. The Bab and Baha'u'llah are the latest in the line of divine Manifestations from God to humanity.

Each of the Manifestations of God is unique. Each revelation has its own distinctive character. No divine Messenger merely replicates the teachings, the station or the mission of any other. Each One is perfect, in each One can be seen the face of God. Each One reveals a new measure of the infinite bestowals of God and each One unlocks yet more of the divine potential inherent in human beings. Each One thus builds on and affirms the One before as part of God's eternal covenant never to abandon the human world. In the words of Baha'u'llah:

This is the changeless faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.

For more information, contact: www.bahai.org or bahaihawaii.org

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Sufism

By Valerie Noor Karima Payton, M.A.

From a prayer by Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan:

*Most Merciful and Compassionate God, give us Thy great Goodness,
Teach us Thy loving Forgiveness,
Raise us above the distinctions and differences which divide,
Send us the Peace of Thy Divine Spirit, and unite us all in Thy Perfect Being.*

Name and founder

According to Postneshin Jelaluddin Loras of the Mevlevi Sufis, religions have laws that make the frame for human goodness. The mystics of all religions look to “the root of the root” of religion. Hazrat Inayat Khan encourages us to look towards “what transpires behind what appears.”

Sufism arose as the mysticism of Islam. The time of the first prophet – Adam – brought the message of God, and mysticism began. Ali, the nephew of the Prophet Muhammad, is a major mystical figure in Islam, and important to Sufis. After the life of Muhammad, there were people who would cluster together for conversation about the inner life. In time, comprehensive spiritual disciplines coalesced through masterful Sufi teachers, with the intention of guiding seekers on the arduous path of becoming a Sufi *derwish*. Although it is difficult to pinpoint its origin, Sufism is said to have begun 1200 years ago in Baghdad.

A *derwish* is one who has reached the station of ripeness as a human being. Aspirants, like myself, call each other *derwish* because of our high hopes for each other.

In the words of Sufi teacher Bawa Muhaiyaddeen:

Sufi is a clear, pure essence that has filtered and settled slowly, deep within. It is a state of stillness when the resplendence of the pure clarity of wisdom has sunk down and settled completely within its ultimate completeness and perfection.

Beliefs

Sufis believe in the beauty and the glory of God. Sufis believe in the mercy and compassion of God. They believe that the major faith traditions share the same truth, and the current which connects the prophets and teachers, who established these traditions comes from one source.

Sufis believe that God can be found in the human heart, that there is a polish for every thing in this world: the polish for the mirror of the heart is remembrance of God.

The saints interpret the teachings of religions and live by them. They love and are loved by God, and so are exemplars for those on the path.

Descriptions from 11th Century CE Sufi teachers:

Sufism means kneeling at the door of the Beloved, even if He turns you away.

Sufism is entry into exemplary behavior and departure from unworthy behavior.

Sufism is a blazing lightning bolt.

The sign of the sincere Sufi is that he feels poor when he has wealth, is humble even when he has power, and is hidden when he has fame.

Sacred texts

Many Sufis highly regard four scriptures: the *Torah*, the *Psalms of David*, the *Bible*, and the *Koran*.

Strengths and shortcomings of sacred texts

The scriptures contain a wealth of teachings for our benefit, yet it can be challenging to make good use of them to help us to come to realize in fullness our relationship to God. Differences in cultural and historical understanding, and our current low level of spiritual realization hamper us. Yet, for those who have set their sights on God-realization, every hint that can be gleaned is a priceless gift that can help us on our way. Many books have been written by Sufi teachers to help us benefit from scripture, e.g., *The Masnavi* of Jalaluddin Rumi and *The Conference of the Birds* by Fariduddin Attar. But, the Sufi understands that, on this path, more is needed than study of books: this is a path of direct experience, and for this we must learn to read God's inscription written in the human heart. It is our responsibility to explore the knowledge in this world, and yet we must look within ourselves to begin on this path in actuality.

The French Sufi, Pierre Eliot, said:

In the spiritual world, there ... are not truths which can be expressed in linguistic formulae. The real spiritual, sacred books of mankind, always find that they are characterized by contradictions. We should really see that this is a way of drawing us to an understanding that is beyond the contradictions, and a warning not to take anything literally in the spiritual world, but always to understand that we must move higher in order to see what it means. We are in front of a great temptation, that when we look at a teaching we take one thing that suits us, and that suits our particular prejudices and ignore all the things that contradict it.

A Sufi school's view of people entering the Sufi Path

In the Mevlevi school, people of all persuasions are welcome to come and go freely, their everyday life imbued with the fragrance of their experience among the dervishes. Newcomers are called *nemniaz*, or "new gift." To go deeper into the teachings, one enters the *chille*, or "1001 day training," under the guidance of a teacher. Students are encouraged to continue the practice of their own religion, and teachings from Islam are often found compatible. The *chille* involves practices such as the turn, or dervish whirling. Students may learn simple gestures of regard, like what hospitality can be. They learn how to give opportunities to others. As Postneshin Jelaluddin Loras has said, "We are sitting in the kitchen, learning to cook. But we are learning to cook ourselves." The *chille* is only a beginning, and those completing it are still only beginners on a lifelong path, with knowledge of how to work with themselves.

How Sufism views the status of women

Women are respected, however, local gender customs hold sway. Modern women have come to the forefront in Sufi schools both East and West. The new international mission statement for the Mevlevi School (the Whirling Dervishes) asserts that women teachers are to be accepted on a par with men.

Special features

Each Sufi school has its own practices. Pursuit of inner truth is given precedence over outward show of religiosity. Sufis have even been killed by strict proponents of Islamic law. At the same time, mystics from many religions have venerated Sufis, seeing in them their own reflection.

Modern universalist Sufis in America are involved in peace missions in the Middle East, Russia and in America, e.g. in the prison system. Because performing service to others is important in Sufism, Sufis can often be found in areas where human need is great, and while they are striving to be “in it but not of it” they may be frowned upon by others for associating with those people society has rejected.

Suggested readings

Can, Sefik. *Fundamentals of Rumi's Thought: A Mevlevi Perspective*. (The Light, Inc, Somerset, NJ, 2004)

Ernst, Carl W. *The Shambala Guide to Sufism*. (Shambala Publications, Inc, Boston, MA, 1997)

Fadiman, James, and Frager, Robert. *Essential Sufism*. (HarperCollins, NY, NY, 1997)

Muhaiyaddeen, M R Bawa. *Sufi: A Brief Explanation*. (The Fellowship Press, PA, 1998)

Seicho-No-Ie

By Merritt T. Sakata

On behalf of the members and friends of Seicho-No-Ie in Hawai'i, thank you for inviting me to be among those sharing a portion of our understanding, particularly because the goals envisioned by the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week seem to be well aligned with what we in Seicho-No-Ie strive to master and exemplify, and by so doing contribute to the even more just, peaceful, prosperous, and harmonious world that future generations in continuing them might inhabit.

By imagining the complicated social, political and economic upheavals that engulfed Japan and the world in 1930, it is quite understandable how the subscribers of a monthly magazine of spiritual insight begun by Masaharu Taniguchi in 1930, evolved into a non-denominational, religious group that came to be known as God's Humanity Enlightenment Movement.

I, myself, encountered and became a member of the Seicho-No-Ie over 30 years ago and have been serving as a lay-teacher for more than 15 years. And having descended from Japanese ancestors whose spiritual heritage included not only Shinto values, but both Soto Zen and Hongwanji Buddhism, lost my father at age five, attended in my teen years a Sunday school at predominantly ethnic Japanese Congregational Christian church where my Scout Troop met, claimed and was granted status as a conscientious objector on graduating from architecture school during the Vietnam Era, studied independently thereafter the *I Ching* and other eastern and western foundations of ethics and faith, it should be of little surprise to anyone that I would have found a certain resonance with the perspectives and practices of a group largely driven by lay-devotees that in recent years has come to also be known as: "International Peace by Faith Movement".

But while many of us in the Hawai'i and the United States of America are quite happy to think of SNI, its activities and organization as religion, having here adopted the styles of "church", having *not* been "born into" a SNI family and tutored by lay predecessors of prior generations, I have come to see that what SNI is and does may be better described by the Japanese term "*dojo*", which is like a martial arts studio, a "place" where "the Way" can be mastered by even the most unlikely of novices simply by diligently observing, studying, and practicing skills that happen to be being "demonstrated," "explained," and "modeled" there.

After all, by simply "being the change we want to see" in time all acquire the "faith that passes understanding" and "peace and harmony" come to prevail. As Jesus once said: *Blessed are the Peacemakers: for they shall be called the Children of God.*

Attached are selected materials from Seicho-No-Ie traditions that may in complementing your own help us all to proceed together as fellow "peacemakers."

My further impromptu comments will try to highlight various aspects that might be specifically applied to foster the goals of World Interfaith Harmony Week. Since the allotted time is limited, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to join us for dialog and study some time.

SEICHO-NO-IE CREED (*Summary*)

1. Although of various races and faiths, we believe that God (or Buddha) is Salvation for all of us.
2. We believe that God is the source of all life, and that He protects and guides us through His Infinite Love and Wisdom.
3. We believe all faiths to be the teachings of the one and the same God who changed His teaching methods to conform to different times, places and peoples.
4. We believe that God is neither cruel nor heartless so as to punish the guilty. We believe that all sufferings and difficulties are either the symbolic reflection of one's erroneous thinking or the results of self-punishment and self-destruction; that by observing our condition, reflecting upon ourselves, and changing our attitudes accordingly, we shall be able to overcome all sufferings and difficulties.
5. We shall clearly distinguish between reality and phenomena and realize that reality is always perfect and consummate but that evil phenomena result from delusive thoughts and feelings which veil perfection and make it appear imperfect. We shall always strive to overcome delusion, see only perfection, and attempt at all times to realize perfection
6. We resolve to practice *Shinsokan* (Meditation to Visualize God) at least once a day so that we may manifest *Jiso* and perfection from the bottom of our hearts.
7. We appreciate all things and all peoples as well as our ancestors and parents, who went through the difficult task of earthly life on behalf of succeeding generations.
8. We believe man to be a child of God and His highest manifestation. We shall, therefore strive to live a noble, pure, and spiritual life.
9. We believe that man possesses everlasting life and that life (spirit) lives on even after the death of the physical body. Therefore, we resolve to hold regular memorial services for the souls of our departed ancestors.
10. We make full use of the creative power of the word. We purify the thoughts of mankind, and we are in the process of launching a gigantic Humanity Enlightenment Movement designed to establish a Heaven on earth in which mankind can live in the spirit of true brotherly love

SEICHO-NO-IE PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION

I have forgiven you. You, too, have forgiven me.
I have forgiven you. You, too, have forgiven me.
You and I are one under God.
I love you. You, too, love me.
I love you. You, too, love me.
You and I are one under God.
I am grateful to you. You, too, are grateful to me.
I am grateful to you. You, too, are grateful to me.
You and I are one under God.
There is no longer the slightest ill feeling between you and me.
I pray for your happiness from the bottom of my heart.
May you be blessed with increasing happiness.
Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

SEICHO-NO-IE PRAYER FOR WORLD PEACE

God's infinite love flows into me (us),
And shines forth from me (us),
In the brilliant spiritual light of love
The spiritual light of love,
Grows and grows in intensity,
Covering the entire world,
And filling the hearts of everyone,
With thoughts only of love, peace, order,
And the Truth of oneness in God.

SEICHO-NO-IE SHINSOKAN TO PRACTICE THE FOUR INFINITE VIRTUES

Excerpted from Seicho-No-Ie Pamphlet "Shinsokan"
("Shinsokan" means "Meditation to Visualize God")

I now leave the world of the five senses and see my entire being in its totality;
and I realize that I am, as I am, the Eternal Christ.
I now leave the world of the five senses, and enter the kingdom of God
God's sea of infinite wisdom; God's sea of infinite wisdom; God's sea of infinite wisdom...
God's sea of infinite love; God's sea of infinite love; God's sea of infinite love...
God's sea of infinite life; God's sea of infinite life; God's sea of infinite life...
God's sea of infinite abundance; God's sea of infinite abundance; God's sea of infinite abundance...
God's sea of infinite joy; God's sea of infinite joy; God's sea of infinite joy...
God's sea of infinite harmony; God's sea of infinite harmony; God's sea of infinite harmony...

After meditating in this way, visualize the kingdom of God here and now filled to overflowing, like a brilliantly shining sea, with God's wisdom, love, life, abundance, joy and harmony. Concentrate totally on this scene with your mind's eye. Then continue as follows:

My mind is one with God's infinite love and the four infinite virtues of the Buddha; and it spreads throughout space; permeates the universe; and reaches out to all of mankind; seeking to remove their suffering, lessen their pain, bring ease and comfort to their lives and to grant them joy.

(While some may say that strictly speaking, Buddhism does not preach a reliance on God,) One of the Buddhist Sutras states that Four Infinite Virtues must be acquired in order to open the way to heaven. These infinite virtues refer to the four minds of infinite merit that bring salvation to all of mankind.

They are: (1) infinite virtue of benevolence, which is the mind that wants to free others from their sufferings; (2) infinite virtue of compassion, which is the mind that wants to comfort others; (3) infinite virtue of joy, which is the mind that takes joy in the joy of others; and (4) infinite virtue of non-attachment, which is the mind that releases or frees all things including the one that is most loved.

In this way, (use your mind's eye) to visualize and get the feeling that your mind now has spread throughout space (and has become merged) together with God's infinite love and that you are now viewing all of mankind below you with deep interest. Since you are (now) permeating all of space you are (truly) everywhere. So, you cannot actually be in a "higher" world looking down at a "lower" world. However, since your mental state is (now) elevated to a high plane, you naturally feel

“heavenly.” So you feel that you are watching the masses on the earth from above; and you get the feeling that mankind on earth is living a life of pain and suffering.

Therefore, while permeating space, evoke a deep love for all of mankind, and pray as above, repeating those thoughts several times to as many as ten times or more.

My mind is one with God's infinite love and the four infinite virtues of the Buddha; and it spreads throughout space; permeates the universe; and reaches out to all of mankind; seeking to remove their suffering, lessen their pain, bring ease and comfort to their lives and to grant them joy.

In time, you will feel that the suffering of all of mankind has been removed, and that their troubles have been alleviated, and that their lives have been eased, and that they have all been granted joy and happiness. Then, meditate as follows:

*All of mankind has been relieved of their suffering, their pain has been removed, their lives have been made easy, and they have been blessed with joy.
Thank you very much. Thank you very much.*

Then, visualize intently that all of mankind has been completely relieved from pain and suffering, and get the feeling that you are now leaving everything to God and become (truly and sincerely) grateful.

This is not a *Shinsokan* to seek blessings for yourself, but a prayerful meditation to remove the pain and suffering of all of mankind. Therefore, it is not egotistical in any way. As a result of which the benefits to you will be greater than in a self-centered meditation.

Hinduism

By Raj Kumar, Ph.D.

The sources of Hinduism

Among the world's major religions, Hinduism is considered one of the oldest. According to Greek reference, Hinduism started around 3000 B.C.E. There are over 900 million Hindus today.

Hinduism has no known founder. At different periods of time in the remote past, Hindu sages endowed with purified minds came to know the eternal spiritual truths that eventually were put in a four-volume collection known as *Vedas* (meaning knowledge). They believed that these truths must have come from God, the same source from which the entire creation had come. Since they realized that they were only discoverers and not creators of those divine truths, they preferred to remain anonymous. This explains why Hinduism does not have a known founder

The ancestors of the Hindus called themselves *Aryas* (noble people) and their religion *Sanatana Dharma* – the perennial or eternal religion – because they believed that their religion was based on some truths that were eternally true. They did not know the name Hinduism. Foreigners created the words Hindu and Hinduism much later. They also called their religion *Manava Dharma* – the religion for all of humankind – because they believed that those eternal truths were the common property of humankind. They were not meant only for a particular chosen race or nation.

Primary sacred texts

Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scriptures, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns and God's words and the bedrock of *Sanatan Dharma*, the eternal religion, which has neither beginning nor end. The four volumes of *Vedas* consists of:

1. The *Rigveda*, containing hymns;
2. The *Yajurveda*, containing formulas to be recited by priest;
3. The *Samaveda*, containing formulas to be sung by priest;
4. The *Atharvaveda*, a collection of spells and incantations, apotropaic charms against evils and speculative hymns.

The *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana* are considered to be revered scriptures by most Hindus today.

Strengths of these texts

The benefits of yoga (union of lower self with the higher self (creator) that originated from Hinduism have been accepted and are being practiced worldwide. Some scholars have claimed that Hinduism laid the foundations of modern scientific search in cosmogony, astronomy, meteorology, and psychology.

Shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

The caste system is deeply integrated in Hinduism. Most of the scriptures have something derogatory to say about the *Shudras*, or the “untouchables,” who are the lowest caste of people in the caste system. Although there are equal numbers of devotees for God and Goddess, the scriptures are written mostly for men and from the perspectives of men. But in *Manusmriti*, it is stated that Hindus believe that Gods reside in the house where a woman is respected and where a woman is

not treated well, all actions remain unfruitful. Most scriptures show male domination, discrimination against women, *Shudras* and others who are not Hindus.

Passages of Inclusion

Hindus believe that truth (God) is one and there are many pathways to reach God. Hindus believe that ultimate reality resides in every human soul at different levels of consciousness. The highest level is when a person says, "I am Brahman- soul." Human beings are regarded as creatures in which you have consciousness of Brahman. Similarly, the animals do not have the same consciousness and intelligence. The whole purpose of salvation (Moksha/Nirvana) is to develop this level of consciousness and this journey toward self-discovery described as freedom, which means being free from identification with the body or any form of materiality.

Passages of Exclusion

Manu, a religious teacher, classified people in four categories such as *Brahman* (scholars), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (business class) and *Shudras* (lower class and untouchables). According to the caste system in Hinduism, *Shudras* were expelled from the community and were not allowed to mingle or eat with people belonging to higher caste. *Shudras* were only allowed to do janitorial or other low paying jobs. These distinctions were established on the basis of social necessity.

At certain times and certain place, women were not allowed to remarry, live exclusively, and follow strict rules for a widow as set by the religion and society.

How Religion looks upon apostasy, conversion, and inter-marriage

Hindu scriptures do not talk about apostasy. Hinduism gives the freedom and liberty to worship any God or Goddess in any form.

Hindus do not believe in proselytizing people of other religions to Hinduism. You are Hindu by birth. Hindus can change their religion, practice Buddhism, Jainism, or Sikhism, or can become a "devotee of Krishna" like ISKCON members.

Hindus did not believe in interfaith, inter-racial, and inter-caste marriages. Hindu marriages were supposed to be within the same social system. However, men of upper caste could marry women of lower caste but not vice versa. Children from such marriages would belong to the caste of their father.

Status of women

In Hinduism, women are to be respected, revered, and generally treated with respect. A Hindu has always maintained his view that a woman should be respected and get her due as a mother, sister and wife, as stated in *Manusmriti* 3.56 – which translated reads: "whenever women are given their due respect, even the deities like to reside there and where there they are not respected, all actions remain unfruitful." The scriptures always say that in order of preference worship your mother first.

In ancient times, there was widespread of *Sati* system (woman to die with her husband), the shaving of widow's heads (to make them look unattractive), and child marriages (before a girl could be of an age attractive enough to be abducted). Hindu women did not enjoy the same sort of liberty and equality as men.

However, there is still discrimination against women in Hindu society. By Hindu tradition, a woman after marriage is supposed to move into her husband's house (which could be an extended family) and follow their family rules and obey them. Women were expected to bring dowry after marriage to

her husband. Women were to tolerate the abuses of husbands and their family members. Hindu women did not enjoy the same rights as men when it comes to inheritance. Men would be the ones to inherit any property, jewelry, cash etc., from their parents.

Today, The Constitution of India guarantees equality of status to Indian women with that of men and there are strict laws against the dowry. She inherits, by right, the property of her father on the basis of equality with her brothers. With regard to her economic rights, she can hold and acquire property and can enter public services and can take to any profession. Hindu women have the right to marry anyone from any religion and can terminate marriage if unhappy or abused by their spouse or his family members.

How Hindus moved from exclusion to inclusion

1. Gandhi abolished the caste system and encouraged Hindus of higher caste to treat lower caste Hindus as equal. Nowadays, all Hindus are treated equally in every aspect of society.
2. Treat Hindu men and women equally. Giving women the right to choose her partner, to get education, choose her profession as she desires, abolishing dowry etc.
3. Allowing people from different faiths to enter and worship at sacred temples.
4. To hold inter- religious discussions, conferences and respect each other beliefs and ideas.
5. Hindus believe that no particular religion is true that teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's pure love and light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Christianity

By Sister Joan Chatfield, M.M., Ph.D.

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

The founding of Christianity was accomplished by *Y'shua*, "Yhwh saves", (*Jeshua*), son of Miriam, or "Jesus," as the name was transliterated from the Greek *Iesous*, to be written in its Latin form and become the word used through the centuries. The word *Christ* is a designation of status, translated as "the anointed one," a word which would be heard by Jews as messiah, "the one who brings salvation." This Jesus – the Christ – was predicted in the Hebrew scriptures; and, when accounts of his origins were recorded the Christian gospels of Matthew and Luke, they included citations from Deuteronomy 18:20, Sirach 39:2b and Isaiah 49:23 and 60:5seq. These prophecies were then reaffirmed in the early Christian community writings of Paul (1 Corinthians 10:11, 15:3-4 and Romans 15:4). Thus Jesus, founder of Christianity, was announced to the world by descriptions surrounding his birth and was affirmed by the early believers as the one who came to fulfill such promises. The chronological date of his physical appearance was documented in a calendar which later marked *Anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord," (abbreviated AD in English) and the previous era was *Ante Christum Natum*, Latin for "before the birth of Christ," which – in English – is noted as BC or "Before Christ." These classifications are now reworked to BCE and CE to document "Before the Common Era" and the "Common Era," to be inclusive yet still to designate the splice of history to which the birth of Jesus the Christ attests.

Primary sacred texts

The canon of the Christian scriptures include the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the fifth "gospel" named the Acts of the Apostles, the letters to the early communities who followed Jesus, and the last writing of John the Evangelist, which is called the *Apocalypse*, or "Revelations."

Strengths of these texts

The books of the Christian scriptures are a library of texts. The "Synoptic Gospels" (those of Matthew, Mark and Luke) are considered the narrative texts with all of the variations crucial to authors and examined by scholars through each subsequent century. They were not historical writings although literalists like to reconstruct them in that form. The Gospel of John and the Apocalypse were theological writings: the first descriptive; the second poetic and mystical. The letters were written as instructive communiqués and need to be read with an understanding of those to whom they were addressed. The writings of the Christian scriptures ranged from probably the years 45-50 CE through 200 CE. By the year 325 CE, the leaders of the Christian community established a "canon," or a list of which writings would be included in the final collection. That became the official Christian scriptures referred to as the New Testament. That decision made all of the other comparable writings "non-canonical" or *apocryphal*. Among these non-canonical books, for example, was the popular Gospel of Thomas that, although definitely written during the same time frame as the others, was not included in the canon. The Dead Sea Scrolls, scriptural fragments unearthed in the 1940s, opened up new avenues of exegetical analysis for the scholars and the understanding of these texts continues to grow. Never will all the work be completed within the study of either the Hebrew or Christian scriptures because they were written for a faith community, which remains their greatest strength.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

The greatest strength becomes the greatest short coming! Because of the plethora of sacred writers, the diversity of the recipients and the believed role of inspiration which members of the Hebrew and Christian communities honor for their texts, there is no end to the amount of confusion which can occur with varied interpretations. The primary examples can be grouped into the following:

- ◆ Lifting out one passage and making it confront another
- ◆ Using one portion to prove a point without recognizing its context
- ◆ Overlooking the literary form of the original text and giving that text a literal meaning which was not intended in the original writing
- ◆ Decrying a contemporary position as untenable because it was not written about with specificity in the scripture

Passages of exclusion

The Internet lists several pages of citations from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures which appear as totally exclusionary. The only disclaimer can be that the original intent was that these words were to be understood by members of the believing community and in that context they had powers of discipline and rectitude. For example, “Only those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved” is often used to proclaim the absolute imperative of the evangelical dictum. In reality, the text for the believer can hold the exclusion if one has been given the gift of faith and then repudiates it. When the text is taken outside the believing community, however, it has a completely different tone and is thus mistakenly represented as exclusionary.

How Christianity looks at people converting into the religion

The category of “convert” is well used within Christianity but in varying degrees across the broad spectrum of the centuries. The early Christian community was a defined fellowship which welcomed members who accepted the basic tenets, “One Faith, One Lord, One Baptism.” It became more convoluted after Constantine declared Christianity as the “official religion” of the Roman Empire (313 CE) and, as a result, members were not included by a belief statement but a national or familial reality. Consequently, infant baptism, within a family became the pattern, instead of the adult baptism with each person making her or his own profession of faith.

How Christianity looks on believers leaving the religion and following some other religion

Personally, I consider it sad when one leaves one’s religious family but usually bear in mind that perhaps the individual has not truly understood or responded to the full richness of that tradition. Unfortunately, some leave because of having been hurt by the religious expressions or actions of others including the leadership. It seems clear that there is such a thing as “church abuse,” which is not talked about and not the domain of any one group; yet, it is certainly something needing to be addressed.

How Christianity looks on persons marrying those of another faith

The diversity of the world's population and the dispersion of the religious community has made changes for Christianity. Although preference might still be given to those of similar traditions, the Roman Catholic Church, for example, has developed a program of instruction for the non-Catholic partner and the expectations of the education of the children has been relaxed since its Second Council of the Vatican (1962-1965 CE).

How does Christianity view the role of women?

History documents wonderful stories of valiant and accomplished women but the Christian Church – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical – hardly has a stellar record in this regard. To quote my grandmother, “It’s a man’s world and a woman’s heaven, and the men who don’t mind that will enjoy being there with us.”

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ◆ Prayers. Christian prayer has its first lesson from its founder: “When you pray, pray thus ... Our Father,” a prayer that comes down through the twenty centuries in slight variations of translations but preeminently with the same lesson. Accounts of praise, petition, gratitude, and mystical prayer abound with individuals learning how best to speak with the God of their heart and how best to pray in community during rituals and celebrations.
- ◆ Holy days. Holy days exist in measures throughout the calendar year, more prominent and celebrated in some Christian families than others. The seasons of preparation for the great feasts – Advent for Christmas and Lent for Easter – reinforce the concept of “getting ready for” the celebrations.
- ◆ Heaven and hell. Heaven and hell have remained as theological realities within Christianity but have undergone a theological revamping as the dimensions of spirituality have been advanced. The reward and the punishment exist in the Christian religion as, they do within the interactions of the human community, but not in the former explanations of my own childhood which had more of an emphasis on fear and loathing. Since the renewal within Christianity that began in the 1960s, the concepts of the mercy of a loving God – as father and friend – is more prevalent.

How Christians can move from exclusion to inclusion

Christians have a history of exclusion, even within the faith tradition itself for many of the reasons already presented. The opportunity for the followers of Christ to move to be inclusionary is truly to follow Jesus’ own example of welcoming those who were not among the Hebrews: the Gentiles and persons of who were looked upon as the outcasts of society. Following the wisdom of Saint Francis of Assisi, Christians need to:

Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words.

Islam

By Saleem Ahmed, Ph.D.¹ and M. J. Rumi, M.S.

Islam is probably the most controversial religion in the world today – due primarily to questionable acts of some Muslims. For example, extremist Muslims targeted Jews, Christians, and “Infidels” for cold-blooded murder in Algeria recently; they’ve similarly targeted Christians in Egypt, Mali, and Pakistan; and Hindus in Pakistan. In Sunni-dominated Pakistan, they have also targeted Shias and Ahmadiya (a Muslim sect ex-communicated in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan).

Is this a problem with the religion, founded by Abraham centuries ago and completed by Muhammad in 632 CE? Or is it with followers? We believe the problem is with a misinterpretation of some passages in the two primary Muslims information sources: Qur’an (sacred text), and Hadith (Muhammad’s sayings and actions). Here are some relevant points for consideration:

Qur’an’s strengths

(1) It is written in beautiful, poetic, and classic Arabic. That it was revealed through the lips of an illiterate Muhammad, is considered miraculous; (2) It affirmed, 1,400 years ago, many natural laws, “discovered” only recently by science. These include: (a) The “Big Bang” theory of creation; (b) The “floating” of all heavenly bodies in space in fixed orbits; (c) The continuing expansion of the universe; and (d) The aquatic beginning of life.

Qur’an’s perceived shortcomings

However, the book also carries mixed signals. For example:

Regarding Jews and Christians

- (a) “Do not trust Jews and Christians” (Qur’anic verse 5.51);
- (b) “Jews & Christians are People of the Book’, you can eat & intermarry with them” (verse 5.5).

Regarding pagans

- (a) “Fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them. Seize them, beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war” (verse 9.5);
- (b) “If a pagan seeks asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God; and then escort him to where he can be secure” (verse 9.6).

Reasons for these mixed signals

A. Collection Phase

1. Evolving message: Although the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad over 23 years (610-632 CE), it is neither arranged chronologically, nor does it explain the context of revelations. While the spiritual message remained unchanged throughout, the temporal message evolved as Muhammad’s status changed from fugitive in Mecca seeking followers to commander-in-chief in Medina leading Muslims against great odds, to a statesman leading a nation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims – in peace – shortly before his death.

¹ Summarized from Ahmed’s book, *Islam: A Religion of Peace?* (2008).

2. Changing transcribers and undated notes: Muhammad was illiterate. Thus, whenever he received a revelation, he would ask any literate person available to take notes. About 20 transcribers were involved during those 23 years. But none of these notes carried dates.

3. Putting all verses together: After Muhammad died, caliph Abu Bakr asked Zaid to gather all verses in one book. Zaid reports, “I compiled the Qur’an from (people who wrote verses on) the leafless stalks of the date-palm tree, and on leather, hides and stones; and from individuals (who had memorized verses . . .).”

B. Compilation phase

Random method of compilation: With a random collection of 6,200 verses in front of them – some on stones, some on leather, some on date palm tree stalks, etc. – the Qur’an’s two compilers (Zaid and Uthman) faced a challenge in deciding which verse gets placed where (except for verses revealed together). This resulted in the Qur’an we have today, with zealots following one “type” of message and liberal Muslims, the opposite “type.”

C. How can we make sense out of these mixed signals?

Fortunately, Qur’anic verse 2.106 clarifies that later guidance on any subject superseded earlier guidance. But, with verses not being arranged chronologically, how do we know which is the later guidance” on any subject? Fortunately, the earliest extant book on Muhammad, written by Ibn Ishaq, within 150 years of the prophet’s death, provides the chronology for many revelations. I learned, e.g., that verse 5.51 (“Do not trust Jews and Christians”) was revealed around 625 CE, shortly after Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, but still faced danger on all sides. And verse 5.5 (“Jews and Christians are people of the book with whom you can eat and intermarry”), was probably part of the very last guidance he received in 632 CE, shortly before his death. By then he had conquered Arabia and no longer faced danger. Similarly, verse “Fight and slay the pagans” (verse 9.5) was revealed in 631 CE, after Muhammad returned from an extended expedition to Tabuk and discovered that some pagans of Medina had created an anarchy during his absence. But shortly thereafter, he received the inclusionary verse 9.6 pardoning pagans who sought asylum. Thus, inclusionary verses 5.5 and 9.6 superseded exclusionary verses 5.51 and 9.5.

Similarly, my research shows that the order for veiling by women was superseded by the order for “modest dressing” by both men and women; and the order of death for adultery was superseded by the order to seek God’s forgiveness. Messages assigning an “inferior role” to women were superseded by other verses emphasizing equality between the sexes. Similarly, the earlier messages of punishment were superseded by later messages of forgiveness.

Looking ahead: moving from exclusion to inclusion – interfaith harmony

The Qur’an also clarifies the universality of God’s message. For example: (1) “God sent messengers to all people (with the command): Serve God and eschew evil” (verse 16:36); (2) “To those who believe in God and all His messengers and make no distinction between any of His messengers, God shall soon give them their due reward” (4:152); (3) “God sent messenger before you (O Muhammad). Of them there were some whose story God has related to you.” (40:78); (4) “Nothing is said to Muhammad that was not said to messengers before him” (41:43) (5) “To every people God sent a messenger” (10:47); and (6) “Those who believe (in the Qur’an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians, and any who believe in God and the Last Day and work (in) righteousness – shall have their reward from God” (2:62).

Similar message in Hadith: “God has sent 124,000 messengers from the beginning of time (all over the world), all of whom must be honored equally.”

The inclusive nature of the Qur’an is also reinforced by the findings of our recent survey which showed the remarkable similarity in the way followers of various religions perceived their respective Reality: As Eternal, Formless, Genderless, Flawless, Wise, Compassionate, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, Omnipresent, Unique.

Question: Isn’t this also the way in which you perceive your Reality?

Thus, whether Islam is religion of exclusion, violence, and gender inequality, or of inclusion, forgiveness, and gender equality depends upon which Qur’anic verses and hadith one follows.

Conclusion

Regarding the “Realities” revered in various religions, we draw the following conclusions:

- (1) With similar qualities, it must be the same Reality in all religions;
- (2) Thus, followers of all spiritually-based religions are on Converging Paths to God.

Task ahead

We need objective research by followers of all religions to understand why any “exclusionary” passages occur in their sacred texts, and to discuss how these should be reinterpreted today.

Let us honor all God’s messengers and understand the harmony in their spiritual message.

Then we’ll move from exclusion to inclusion and promote interfaith harmony.

Judaism

By Rabbi Peter Schaktman²

When and where was the religion founded, and by whom?

The faith tradition that is today referred to as “Judaism” finds its roots in the texts and traditions of the ancient Israelites who are believed to have lived in the Fertile Crescent some three thousand years ago. Critical literary and archeological scholarship suggest that, over many years, this people was the first to successfully make the transition from polytheism, that is, the acknowledgement and worship in varying degrees of multiple deities, to monotheism – the belief that there exists only one deity in the universe. Symbolic of that commitment to monotheism was the entrance of this people into a covenantal relationship with the deity they identified as the One, following their liberation from slavery by God.

But while rooted in this sacred history, the religion of Judaism as we know it today is the result of a process that began in the second century BCE and continued for some 900 years. It was during this period that those scholars and interpreters who are simply referred to as “The Sages” were engaged in a massive interpretive project that in effect, created the religion that today we call “Judaism.” Those inheritors of the Israelite traditions who rejected the interpretative authority of the Sages in favor of an exclusive focus on the *Tanakh*, or Hebrew Scriptures, came to be known as Karaites, and are virtually extinct today.

Primary sacred texts

The primary sacred text of Judaism is the *Torah* (“instruction”), which sets forth the sacred history of the Children of Israel, perhaps the most common term used within it to refer to those who would ultimately be called “Jews.” The *Torah*, also referred to as the Five Books of Moses or the Pentateuch, comprises the first five books of what Christians refer to as the “Old Testament” (i.e., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Ezra is credited with redacting and setting the final form, order and wording of the text of the *Torah*, traditionally understood to have been given to the Israelites by God through Moses, in 444 BCE, some time after the return of the Israelites to the Holy Land from their captivity in Babylon.

With a slightly lesser degree of sanctity, *Nevi'im* (“Prophets”: Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.) and *Ketuvim* (“Writings”: Psalms, Job, Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, etc.) supplement the *Torah*, and comprise all the rest of the books that more or less comprise the Christian “Old Testament.” This compilation of sacred texts is referred to in Judaism by the acronym *Tanakh* (for *Torah-Nevi'im-Ketuvim*). It should be noted that I use the term “Old Testament” solely as a reference; the term itself is an entirely Christian term insofar as it assumes another, “newer” testament, an idea which is completely absent from and alien to Judaism.

As I've already mentioned, the bulk of the religion known as Judaism developed following the completion of the texts that comprise the Hebrew Scriptures. Traditional or so-called “orthodox” views of this development hold that the interpretative commentaries developed after the *Tanakh* are based on the revelation of the Law to Moses at Sinai, and thus also sacred texts, an “oral law” to supplement the “written law.” Included under this rubric of “oral law” are the *Talmud* (a compilation of the laws of Judaism as extracted from the *Torah* [*Mishnah*]) with a running commentary and critical apparatus discussing and applying the laws in their context [*Gemara*],

² Adapted from statement written by Gregg Kinkley, Ph.D., J.D. for the 2005 Annual Interfaith Symposium. The majority of the text is Gregg's but I have made some significant changes.

compiled and finished around 600 CE), the *Shulchan Arukh* (a codex of laws of daily and practical application for the observant Jew, compiled around the mid-1500's CE), the *Mishneh Torah* (a more philosophical exegesis of Biblical law by Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides, written in the late 1300's CE), and various other exegetical, homiletical and legal texts developed over hundreds of years in a variety of communities in which Jews lived.

Strengths of these texts

The abiding strength of the *Torah* is that, rather than being merely a collection of laws or a book of sacred myths, its moral guidance is woven through a continuing story, giving context and currency to the laws which the *Torah* sets forth. The *Torah*, through relating the story of the family and generations of Abraham, shows how tragedy, cupidity, lust, favoritism, and degeneracy mark the generations that follow, and how love, respect, justice, charity, and reverence for God can reward the practitioner with a better current life.

The strength of the exegetical texts, such as the *Talmud* and the *Midrash*, is that they explain in more concrete terms and with specific examples the deeper meanings that sometimes the *Torah* will only hint at. Beginning from the premise that the *Torah* is the unchanging and fundamental law (like the United States Constitution), the *Talmud* interprets those principles to the present day and explains through an involved expository style with a finite number of exegetical principles how to draw more meaning, guidance, and currency from the corpus of existing laws. They also offer a fascinating window into the changing social, legal, philosophical and spiritual challenges faced by the evolving Jewish community over the long arc of their development.

Potential shortcomings or ambiguities of these texts

As hinted at by the existence of voluminous editions of exegetical works, the text of the *Torah* itself is often vague, designating practices with no explanation of how they should be done (e.g., “no work on Sabbath,” but what does “work” mean?); contradictory (e.g., two contradictory accounts of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis); and uneven (the redaction of the text has led modern scholars to assert a critical explanation of the *Torah* as the result of the editing and compilation of at least four separate texts, with different authorship, points of view and traditional bases). On the other hand, this ambiguity in the text serves historically as the springboard for the rabbis to promulgate their own interpretations which, for those who value an interpretative process that often leads to multiple opinions and options, is an enormous strength, but for those who seek the clarity of one “true” answer to important questions, is seen as a shortcoming.

Passages of exclusion

There are passages in the *Torah* in which God enjoins the Israelites to kill the native peoples of the Holy Land and its environs (the Jebusites, Aramites, Moabites, Amelikhites among them) because of their pagan practices, down to every man, woman, child and animal. Similarly, the great focus of Leviticus, and the consistent backdrop for much of the *Torah*, revolves around the cult of temple sacrifice, in which the daily dispatch of many animals, with blood being flung around and carcasses being burned as a “pleasing aroma to the Lord” is performed. It is understood that this sacrifice and these laws are for the Jewish people only, a people chosen by God to, by their participation in their covenant with God, demonstrate to “the nations” (goyim – or people other than the House of Israel) the uniqueness of the God of Israel. There are also a number of very problematic passages in Jewish legal literature that require that greater efforts be expended toward Jews in danger than toward their non-Jewish neighbors. It is, however, irresponsible to read these passages without

considering the historical circumstances out of which they grew, which were always characterized by harsh oppression and suffering at the hands of those under whose aegis the Jews lived.

Passages of inclusion

Inclusion as a concept and religious practice generally entered Judaism only after the final exile of the Jewish people from Judah (beginning in 70 CE and more or less continuing to this day), when after the final destruction of the Temple, service to God as an exclusive, sacrificial franchise of the Temple priests, which was typical among contemporaneous ancient religions, became impossible. The exclusivity of Israelite religion (only one people, only one Temple for only one kind of sacrifice) became extinct. It was only through a fundamental recasting of the faith by the rabbis in exile over the next thousand years that a new form, a more portable form, of Judaism evolved. This understanding of the need for more inclusivity is seen more often in the *siddurim* (“prayer books”) and other daily devotional texts, where prayer has been understood to be either a substitute for or the replacement of the Temple sacrifice, thus opening the door for religious commitment through prayer and study by other seekers, not just those who bring sacrificial animals to Jerusalem. It is also important to note that while calling those bound by the covenant to special responsibility, the Jewish tradition did not assume that those not a part of the covenant were less loved by God, or that “salvation” (understood very differently in Judaism than its more common use in Christianity) was less available to them.

How Judaism looks upon people converting into the religion

The traditional religious literature of Judaism calls upon rabbis to discourage prospective converts, based first on the point I made just a moment ago, namely, that conversion was not required to merit God’s love and second, on the reality that for most of Jewish history, conversion to Judaism was likely to lead to negative consequences for the convert, which made his or her desire suspect. It was only in 1976 that this attitude was formally challenged and a meaningful change began to occur. Today, while the Jewish community does not proselytize, those with a sincere interest in conversion are welcomed and many resources have been developed by the liberal (that is, non-Orthodox) movements in Judaism to facilitate this process of welcoming on legal, ritual and social levels.

For some, the main challenge of conversion to Judaism is the need of the potential convert to learn about the texts and laws of Judaism such that he or she is clear as to the commitment he or she will be making. This process generally takes years, as the convert will need to learn at least enough to read the *Torah* and follow the prayer service, understand how to observe the basic rituals and holy days of the tradition, and live a Jewish life, including observing the Sabbath and the dietary laws, among other things. Because Judaism is a family-based, community-based religion, it is very difficult for just one family member to convert and some rabbis will not convert someone if it in effect creates an intermarriage.

How Judaism looks upon followers leaving the religion and adopting some other religion

The simple and well-known adage is “once a Jew, always a Jew.” This means that whether you are a Jew by Birth or a Jew by Choice (note the terminology), you are a party to the covenant between God and the Jewish people and bound to “the yoke of the *Torah*,” and no amount of apostasy can change that status: at worst, you are considered transgressive or irresponsible from a religious point of view. It’s important to note here that many Jews derive their identity from ethnic or cultural sources, not religious ones, and therefore find this religious definition irrelevant. I would submit, however, that while one can be a Jew without reference to Jewish religious identity, one cannot really be “Jewish,” in the same way that someone living in the United States can live outside of the law but

still call oneself a citizen or even “an American.” There is a special term we use for Jews who embrace so-called “messianic Judaism.” That term is “Christian.”

How Judaism looks upon followers (both men and women) marrying people of other faiths

Traditional Jewish law strictly forbids the Jew to marry a non-Jew. If a Jew falls in love with a non-Jew, the non-Jew must convert or marriage cannot be sanctioned. This prohibition has sometimes led to the perception that some conversions were procured for marriage only, which has indeed been accurate in some cases, both in the traditional and the liberal Jewish communities. It is understood that quite often, intermarriage can dissipate the religious practices of Judaism, as so many of the fundamental rites of the religion are familial ventures which require quite a bit of intention and ritual commitment. Therefore, marrying a non-Jew was often seen as ipso facto making a decision to leave the faith. Some years ago, however, it was discovered that the vast majority of non-Jews marrying Jews were “un-churched,” that is, uncommitted to another faith and often quite open to exploring Judaism. By no longer treating such spouses as “spiritual enemies,” the Jewish community has helped encourage a large number of these spouses to embrace Judaism and thereby strengthening the Jewish fabric of the entire family.

How Judaism views the status of women

As in many faiths with a long history, the status of women in Judaism has evolved. There are passages in the *Torah* that suggest that women are not co-equal to men in terms of certain legal rights and religious obligations, but following the exile of the Jews from the Land of Israel and the resulting Diaspora, the culture of Judaism changed to adapt to the cultural milieu in which the Jewish community found itself. Women were on the one hand obligated to a number of gender-based religious duties while at the same time exempted from fulfilling certain commandments deemed to be “time-based” (i.e., commandments that could only be performed at certain times). Women and men were expected to pray in separate parts of the synagogue, but the rationale was given that it was because the men would have difficulty keeping their prayerful intent – a weakness of men, not women. From a modern-day, egalitarian perspective, a mixed message on the status of women is received with regard to the orthodox home: while considered intrinsically “purer” than men, and therefore subject to fewer commandments intended to safeguard against the “evil inclination,” the structure of orthodox Jewish home life relegates the woman to staying at home, caring for children and assuming a relatively passive role with respect to the outer (extra-familial) world. In the liberal traditions of Judaism, egalitarianism is a core value and not seen as incompatible with covenantal responsibility.

Prayers, holy days, and concepts of heaven and hell

- ◆ Prayers. Jewish prayer combines both statutory rituals and blessings with a spontaneous outpouring of the spirit. Jewish liturgy is enriched by the catalog of successive generations of rabbinical additions to the prayer service, each generation inspired in the knowledge that all of the House of Israel is reciting the same words of prayer in the same language at the same time: truly a communal feeling.
- ◆ Holy days. Holy days follow the Hebrew year, marked by a lunar-based calendar with seasonal corrections for the solar year (to make sure, for instance, that Passover always occurs during the spring). The Holy days generally revolve around two main periods: Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (the “Day of Atonement”), and Sukkot in the fall, and Purim (the Festival of Esther), Passover, and Shavuot (“Pentecost”) in the spring. Chanukah, usually falling in December, is a relatively late observance and commemorates the

resanctification of the Temple after its pillage by the Syrian Greeks. As with most ancient religious holidays, these holy days by and large started out as agrarian feasts, to which religious significance was added later.

- ◆ Heaven and hell. To be sure, the term *shamayim*, often translated as “heaven” or “heavens”, can be found in the Torah, as well as *Gehinnah* and *she’ol*, denoting some dark place under the earth. Orthodox, Torah-based Judaism does not recognize a “heaven and hell” in the sense usually meant by those terms, however. That is to say, “heaven” is not a place where the soul is presumed to go upon death, nor is “hell” a place that exists to punish the sinful. The rabbis have long recognized that we make our own heavens and hells on earth, but assigning a transcendent God to a single place, or a locus for a Satan with independent operating power would be considered apostasy.

Special features

Much has been made about the Jews being the “Chosen People.” Indeed, as part of our Shabbat evening service, we make a blessing over wine in part with the words “*asher bachar banu mi kol ha’amim*, (“We praise God”) who has chosen us from amongst all peoples.” This “choice” of the Jewish people by God is not the equivalent of winning a spiritual lottery: it is the vesting of the Jews with the responsibility to show all humankind how God’s laws are to be followed, to affirm God’s holiness and serve as an example. In this sense, the “chosenness” of the Jewish people is no more a conscious or prejudicial exclusion than being the older brother in a family: certain things are expected of us, and we can (and do) fail in that role.

How Jews can move from exclusion to inclusion

In its current form and practice, Judaism is at once exclusive and inclusive. Although as in many other religions there is a great deal of variation in the practice of Judaism today (the spectrum between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism is overwhelmingly broad, with many in either camp not recognizing the Jewishness of the other), generally a Jew is expected to follow certain normative practices that would tend to exclude him or her from some of the mainstream of modern life. That is the story within Judaism.

Outside of Judaism, however, Jews freely recognize that there are many paths to God, and many can gain salvation, enlightenment, or become closer to God following their own path. The focus of modern Judaism is that the Jew must follow this one path to God; others need not, indeed cannot follow that path – but they can follow other paths. Those paths are not denigrated by the Jew, if they are monotheistic and not harmful to life. This is the essence of the ability for Jews to be inclusive in the present day.

Introspection is the Hallmark of Honolulu's Interfaith Effort

Saleem Ahmed, Ph.D.

While it is easy to explain the beauties of one's own religion and/or point fingers at other religions for the world's spiritual challenges, how often do we examine our own religion critically to explore whether some of its passages might appear problematic?

The Honolulu-based All Believers Network (Belnet) undertook this stimulating discussion on February 2, 2013. Several other organizations – Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i, The Interfaith Alliance of Hawai'i, The Interfaith Open Table, Hawai'i Coalition of Religions for Peace; Institute for Religion and Social Change, Forgiveness Project, Inclusive Orthodox Church, Gandhi International Institute for Peace, Pacific Institute for Islamic Studies, Living Life Source Foundation, and the World Medicine Daoist Temple – joined as co-sponsors.

The program began with opening congratulatory remarks by State Senator Suzanne Chun-Oakland, who had sponsored Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 in 2008 promoting interfaith dialogue and asking Belnet to coordinate an international interfaith conference, One Reality, One Humanity, Converging Paths, held in 2011.

Speakers from 14 religions reflected on the topic *Promoting Interfaith Harmony: Moving from Exclusion to Inclusion in My Faith*. While speakers representing Baha'i, Buddhism, Daoism, Hawaiian Spirituality, Jainism, Sikhism, Seicho-No-Ie, Sufism, Unitarian Universalism, and Unity reported an absence of such "exclusionary" guidance in their respective religions, speakers on Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam acknowledged the presence of such passages, and suggested how these should be handled in today's society. Here is a summary of their presentations:

HINDUISM

Raj Kumar, Ph.D., President, Gandhi International Institute for Peace, Honolulu.

Passages of exclusion

The caste system, which divides Hindus into *Brahmans* (priests/scholars), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (traders) and *Shudras* (lower class and untouchables), remains deeply ingrained in the Hindu worldview. Unfortunately, most of our scriptures also have something derogatory to say about the Shudras. In fact, Shudras were even expelled from their community and not allowed to mingle or eat with people of higher castes; they were only permitted janitorial and other low paying jobs.

Also, Hindus did not believe in interfaith, inter-racial, and inter-caste marriages. Hindu marriages were supposed to be within the same social system. However, men of upper caste could marry women of lower caste but not vice versa. Children from such marriages would belong to the caste of their father.

Moving from exclusion to inclusion

Gandhi abolished the caste system and encouraged Hindus of higher caste to treat lower caste Hindus as equals. Thus, under the law, nowadays, all Hindus are treated equally in every aspect of society. This bold initiative should be reinforced at levels of that stratified society through the following actions:

- ◆ All Hindu men and women should be treated equally even in social and interpersonal interactions.

- ◆ Women should be given the right to get educated, choose their partners, and choose the profession they desire.
- ◆ The dowry custom (demanding the bride's side to provide significant economic "incentives" for the marriage) should be abolished.
- ◆ People from different faiths should be allowed to enter and worship at our sacred temples.
- ◆ Inter-religious discussions, promoting an understanding of, and respect for, each other's beliefs and ideas, should be encouraged.

Generally, Hindus believe that no particular religion is the only "true" religion. All genuine religious paths are facets of God's pure love and light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

JUDAISM

Rabbi Peter Schaktman

Passages of exclusion

There are passages in the *Torah* in which God enjoins the Israelites to kill the native peoples of the Holy Land and its environs (the Jebusites, Aramites, Moabites, Amelikhites among them) because of their pagan practices, down to every man, woman, child and animal. Similarly, the great focus of Leviticus, and the consistent backdrop for much of the *Torah*, revolves around the cult of temple sacrifice, in which the daily dispatch of many animals, with blood being flung around and carcasses being burned as a "pleasing aroma to the Lord" is performed. It is understood that this sacrifice and these laws are for the Jewish people only, a people chosen by God to, by their participation in their covenant with God, demonstrate to "the nations" (*goyim* – or people other than the House of Israel) the uniqueness of the God of Israel. There are also a number of very problematic passages in Jewish legal literature that require that greater efforts be expended toward Jews in danger than toward their non-Jewish neighbors. It is, however, irresponsible to read these passages without considering the historical circumstances out of which they grew, which were always characterized by harsh oppression and suffering at the hands of those under whose aegis the Jews lived.

Much has been made about the Jews being the "Chosen People." Indeed, as part of our Shabbat evening service, we make a blessing over wine in part with the words "*asher bachar banu mi kol ha'amim*, ("We praise God" who has chosen us from amongst all peoples"). This "choice" of the Jewish people by God is not the equivalent of winning a spiritual lottery: it is the vesting of the Jews with the responsibility to show all mankind how God's laws are to be followed, to affirm God's holiness and serve as an example. In this sense, the "chosenness" of the Jewish people is no more a conscious or prejudicial exclusion than being the older brother in a family: certain things are expected of us, and we can (and do) fail in that role.

How Jews can move from exclusion to inclusion

In its current form and practice, Judaism is at once exclusive and inclusive. Although as in many other religions there is a great deal of variation in the practice of Judaism today (the spectrum between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism is overwhelmingly broad, with many in either camp not recognizing the Jewishness of the other), generally a Jew is expected to follow certain normative practices that would tend to exclude him or her from some of the mainstream of modern life. That is the story within Judaism.

Outside of Judaism, however, Jews freely recognize that there are many paths to God, and many can gain salvation, enlightenment, or become closer to God following their own path. The focus of

modern Judaism is that the Jew must follow this one path to God; others need not, indeed cannot follow that path – but they can follow other paths. Those paths are not denigrated by the Jew, if they are monotheistic and not harmful to life. This is the essence of the ability for Jews to be inclusive in the present day.

CHRISTIANITY

Sister Joan Chatfield, M.M., Ph.D., Executive Director, Institute for Religious and Social Change

Because of the plethora of sacred writers, the diversity of the recipients and the believed role of inspiration which members of the Hebrew and Christian communities honor for their texts, there is no end to the amount of confusion which can occur with varied interpretations. The primary examples can be grouped into the following:

- ◆ Lifting out one passage and making it confront another;
- ◆ Using one portion to prove a point without recognizing its context;
- ◆ Overlooking the literary form of the original text and giving that text a literal meaning which was not intended in the original writing; and
- ◆ Decrying a contemporary position as untenable because it was not written about with specificity in the scripture.

The Internet lists several pages of citations from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures which appear totally exclusionary. The only disclaimer can be that the original intent was that these words be understood by members of the believing community and in that context they had powers of discipline and rectitude. For example, “Only those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved” is often used to proclaim the absolute imperative of the evangelical dictum. In reality, the text for the believer can hold the exclusion if one has been given the gift of faith and then repudiates it. When the text is taken outside the believing community, however, it has a completely different tone and is thus mistakenly represented as exclusionary.

How Christians can move from exclusion to inclusion

Christians have a history of exclusion, even within the faith tradition itself for many of the reasons already presented. The opportunity for the followers of Christ to move to be inclusionary is truly to follow Jesus’ own example of welcoming those who were not among the Hebrews: the Gentiles and persons of who were looked upon as the outcasts of society. Following the wisdom of Saint Francis of Assisi, Christians need to: “Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words.”

ISLAM

Saleem Ahmed, Ph.D., President, Pacific Institute of Islamic Studies, Honolulu.

Passages of inclusion and exclusion

Both, the *Qur’an* (sacred text) and *hadith* (prophet Muhammad’s sayings and action) carry passages of exclusion and inclusion, spread in various chapters, and in no particular order. Thus, for example, while verse 5.51 commands: “Do not trust Jews and Christians”, verse 5.5 emphasizes “Jews & Christians are People of the Book’, with whom Muslims can eat and intermarry”.

Fortunately, Qur’anic verse 2.106 clarifies that later guidance on any subject superseded earlier guidance. Also fortunately, the earliest extant book on Muhammad, written by Ibn Ishaq, within 150 years of the prophet’s death, provides the chronology for many revelations. I learned, e.g., that verse 5.51 (Do not trust Jews and Christians) was revealed around 625 CE, shortly after Muhammad fled

from Mecca to Medina, but still faced danger on all sides. And verse 5.5 (Jews and Christians are people of the book with whom you can eat and intermarry), was part of the very last guidance he received in 632 CE, shortly before his death. By then he had conquered Arabia and no longer faced danger. Thus, inclusionary verse 5.5 superseded exclusionary verse 5.51. This procedure can be adopted for various other mixed signals tearing the society apart.

How the Qur'an can promote interfaith harmony

The *Qur'an* also clarifies: “Those who believe (in the *Qur'an*), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians, and the Sabians – any who believe in God and the Last Day and work (in) righteousness – shall have their reward from God” (verse 2:62). And Muhammad clarified that God has sent 124,000 messengers from the beginning of time (all over the world), all of whom must be honored equally. Thus, Muslims need to reflect on the sacred texts of other religions objectively and feel God’s presence in various spiritually-based religions. Then they will be honoring God’s clarification “To those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of His messengers, We shall soon give their (due) reward” (verse 4:152) – and will be truly promoting interfaith harmony.

LOOKING AHEAD

A whole new set of relationships evolves when followers of various religions recognize the spiritual similarities transcending religions. Then, ritualistic differences are readily accepted as culture-based gestures – which might even evolve as humans transition from being Earth-based communities to becoming inter-galactic pioneers – but still revere the same Reality.

The paradigm shift in the way we look at our own religion – from unquestioned acceptance to objective analysis – and followers of other religions – from “lost souls” to fellow travelers on the path to the same Destination – can actually strengthen our own “interfaith quotient” when we view the entire humanity as followers of the same Reality.

What a wonderful way to promote interfaith harmony!

Biographies of Speakers

Saleem Ahmed, Ph.D.

Dr. Ahmed is the author of *Beyond Veil and Holy War: Islamic Teachings and Muslim Practices with Biblical Comparisons* (2002) and spiritual founder of All Believers Network. His aspiration is to appreciate the beauties of all religions and make Hawai'i renowned as the "Inter-Faith Harmony Capital of the World." His book, *Islam: A Religion of Peace?*, is now available. He is also founder of Milun (Association for Promoting South Asian Culture) which shares the region's common cultural heritage with others. After retiring from the East-West Center in 1995 (where he led its botanical pest control initiative and introduced the neem tree to Hawai'i), he currently has a "reincarnated career" as financial planner.

Chang Yi Hsiang, Ph.D.

Dr. Chang Yi Hsiang is the 64th generation Taoist lineage holder of a 2000 year old tradition inherited from the Han dynasty. She is a native of Shang Ching, Lung Hu Shan Mountain in Jianxi Province in China. She began Taoist training in the six Secret Taoist Teachings with her Master Chang En Pu at the age of six and has been teaching Qigong, Taoist philosophy, acupuncture and herbal medicine in Hawai'i, Hong Kong, China, and the Pacific Coast of the United States for over thirty years. In addition to her Taoist training, she also holds a Ph.D. in Immunology and Chinese Philosophy, specifically focusing on the *I Ching Book of Changes*.

She is the founder and director of the Tai Hsuan Foundation and the World Medicine Institute, an institute offering Masters degrees in Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine since 1974, which has recently begun offering a Ph.D. program in Taoist Medicine. She is also a visiting professor at the Beijing Medical University Department of Immunology and at Sichuan University in their Taoist and Taoist Healing program. Here in Hawai'i, she has been an assistant professor at the John A. Burns School of Medicine since 2003.

Sister Joan Chatfield, M.M., Ph.D.

Sister Joan Chatfield is the Executive Director of the Institute for Religion and Social Change. Her activities span numerous interfaith and inter-religious groups and she is a member of the Assembly of the Parliament for the World's Religions and the Executive Committee of the United States Religions for Peace. From 1999-2003 she was one of the representatives for the Maryknoll Sisters as an NGO with the United Nations in New York.

Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland

Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland currently chairs the Human Services committee. She also sits as a member on the Economic Development and Housing, Energy and Environment, Health, and Ways and Means committees. Senator Chun Oakland has served in the State Legislature for 22 years. She currently represents Hawai'i's 13th Senatorial District, which includes Liliha, Palama, Iwilei, Kalihi, Nuuanu, Pacific Heights, Pauoa, Lower Tantalus, and Downtown. She has served in the Hawaii State Senate since 1996 and as a State Representative from 1990 to 1996. Married on June 11, 1994 to Michael Sands Oakland, Senator Chun Oakland and her husband have three children: Mailene, Christopher, and Lauren Oakland. Senator Chun Oakland has four grandchildren: Mysha, Shayden, Lily and Jade.

Margie Hyatt

Margie Hyatt is a Licensed Unity Teacher and Minister of Service at Unity Church of Hawai'i. As part of the ministerial team of Unity Church of Hawai'i, Ms. Hyatt is responsible for coordinating volunteers and directing community outreach programs such as meals provided to our homeless neighbors and AIDS/HIV patients and compassionate presence to elders in nursing care and residential facilities. Ms. Hyatt teaches in the spiritual education program of UCofH, as well as the Unity National School, a ministerial education program based at Unity Church of Hawai'i. As a ministerial candidate in the Unity National School, Ms. Hyatt will be conferred the title "Reverend" at the end of this year.

Lisa Wong Jacobs, J.D.

Lisa Wong Jacobs is a Lay Minister with the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu. Lisa also works as a Collaborative Attorney & Collaborative Mediator at her own firm, to assist families involved in the traumatic experience of divorce proceed mutually in a more constructive, compassionate, and child-centered way (www.ponodivorce.com). Lisa also serves as a Board member for Sunrise Ministry Foundation, which is an interfaith non-profit organization furthering holistic healing and diverse spiritual practices. Lisa is also a Hawai'i Affiliate for ProgressiveChristianity.org, and has volunteered as a Lay Chaplain for Hospice Hawai'i.

Glen Makakauai 'i Kila, M.Ed.

A descendant of the aboriginal families of Waianae, O'ahu, Glen was nurtured in the values of Kanenuiakea. These values became the foundation for his work as a teacher, school principal, and community leader. A graduate of the University of Hawaii with a Master's in Education Administration. Presently the executive director of Marae Ha'a Koa, a cultural learning center in Waianae and *kabu* (care taker) of Kanenuiakea Heiau(s) on O'ahu.

Raj Kumar, Ph.D.

Dr. Raj Kumar is a psychologist and practices Hinduism. He contributes articles on "Religion and spirituality", in major local newspapers. He is the author of books like "From darkness to Light", "Pearls of Wisdom for Everyday Living" and "The Secrets of health and Healing". He is publishing two new books : " Anger and Nonviolence" and "Cosmic Meditation" this year. He is also the founder of Gandhi International Institute for Peace and Indian-American Friendship Council. The ultimate goal of his life is to unite religions and spiritual leaders, educate youths about nonviolence and promote World Peace. Contact info: rkumarhi@yahoo.com or visit websites: www.gandhianpeace.com.

Bishop Eric Matsumoto

Eric Matsumoto, born and raised in Kona, Hawaii and a 1977 graduate of Konawaena High School. Attended the University of Hawaii at Hilo graduating with degrees in History and Japanese Language and Culture (Liberal Studies Program), 1984 Recipient of The Crown Prince Akihito Scholarship. As a Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii Scholarship Student graduated with a Master's Degree in Shin Buddhist Studies from Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan. Ordained as a Buddhist priest of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji Denomination of Pure Land Buddhism with the Buddhist Name Dharma-Pleasure. Returned to Hawaii in 1992, serving at Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin, Honokaa, Kamuela, Paauilo, Kohala and Moiliili Hongwanji Temples until assuming the Office of the Bishop in March 2011 as the 16th Bishop of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii.

Christophor Edward Oliveira

A descendant of the aboriginal families of Waianae, O'ahu, Christophor was selected by the Waianae *kupuna* (elders) to carry on the religious responsibilities of Kanenuiakea. Presently, a student of Leeward Community College majoring in medicine, Christophor is now recording the prayers, chants, practices, and beliefs of the Kanenuiakea religion in Hawai'i.

Harendra Panalal, M.S.E., PE

Born and raised in Mumbai, Mr. Panalal received his BSE and MSE degrees in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan. He was also enrolled in the MBA program at the University of Chicago. He works for a mechanical contractor. He also serves on the Boards of several condominiums. All of his and his wife's ancestors for the past hundred years were born and raised as Jains. He is well versed in Jain literature.

Valerie Noor Karima Payton, M.A.

Ms. Noor Karima Payton is Center leader of the Mevlevi Order of America on Oahu and has studied with Sufis from Konya, Istanbul, the US, South America and Sri Lanka, and with Postneshin Jelaluddin Loras of the Mevlevi School (the Whirling Dervishes.) She is a counselor with background in clinical psychology and leads the Dances of Universal Peace.

Manjit Kaur Reddick, M.A.

Manjit Reddick was born and reared in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Living among a polyglot community of Africans, Ismailies, Isthmashries, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians and so called "non-believers," and her daily interaction with them at school, fed her curiosity and need for understanding of their various cultural and faith traditions. Currently, she conducts monthly Sikh religious services in Honolulu.

M. Jan Rumi, M.S.

Mr. Rumi is co-author of *Wising Up: A Youth Guide to Good Living*. He is a prominent business and community leader with over 22 years of diverse advisory, management consulting and industry experience focusing especially on serving the needs of health care. He is a principal of Consulting Factors International, LLC.

Merritt T. Sakata, A.I.A.

Merritt Sakata, a professional architect, is a "sansei" (third generation American of Japanese Ancestry) born in Hawai'i in 1946. For over 30 years, he has been active with Seicho-No-Ie (a "Humanity Enlightenment Movement" founded in Japan in 1930). As a SNI "lay-teacher" he guides monthly "home gatherings" at his home in Kaimuki.

Rabbi Peter Schaktman

Rabbi Schaktman received his Rabbinic Ordination from the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in 1989. Since that time, the heart of his work has been as a congregational rabbi, where he has found enormous satisfaction learning, teaching, caring for members of the community and creating new approaches to meeting the challenges of synagogue life. As a congregational rabbi, he has served congregations in Houston, Lake Charles, Louisiana, Staten Island, and Livingston Manor, New York. He also spent nine years working on the staff of the Union for Reform Judaism at their headquarters in Manhattan as a regional and national consultant in program development, synagogue management and the special needs of small congregations. Rabbi Schaktman is a proud graduate of Oberlin College, and is certified in Chemical Dependency and Spiritual Counseling. Prior to

becoming a rabbi, he also spent two years living in an Israeli Arab village as a community worker in Arab-Jewish relations. Whether in sacred worship or in a classroom, in committee meetings or youth group events or his pastoral work, the central goal of his rabbinate has been to study, to teach, and to help others find meaning in their lives through the traditions of Judaism.

Bishop Stephen Randolph Sykes, E.O.M.C., D.D.

Bishop Stephen is Orthodox Bishop of Hawai'i of the Inclusive Orthodox Church and resides in the monastic community of the Eremitic Order of Mount Carmel. He is President of The Interfaith Alliance Hawai'i. He is co-author of *Charting Your Goals: Personal Life-Goals Planning* (Harper & Row, 1988). He holds a degree in philosophy from Loyola University of Los Angeles and a Doctor of Divinity degree (*honoris causa*) from the Apostolic College of the Pacific. He is also the Webmaster for a number of Hawai'i-based, non-profit organizations, including All Believers Network.