



February 2023



Dear Friends

Welcome to February's newsletter, and as it is February it is only right that our first article contributed by Dee is all about the importance and meaning of 'Love' from an Interfaith perspective. This is followed by Rasha's reflection on the world cup, then, Varsha has provided us with two interesting pieces firstly about Ganesh Jayanti and secondly concerning the importance of coconuts in Hindu rituals. Lastly, look out for an invitation from the Baha'i community.

On a sad note, in January we learned of the death of Rev Dr Peter Doble at the age of 93. Peter was one of the co-founders of the York Interfaith group and came to a meeting with Dr Mary Hayward in 2015 to speak about Interfaith roots and journeys, and the beginnings of YIG at what is now York St John University. The funeral will be held at Clifton Methodist Church, which is in on the A19 next to St Peter's School. Entrance is to the side. Friday 10th February, 12.30 p.m. followed by refreshments. All welcome.

We thank Rev Dr Michael Chester for bringing this information to our attention. It is clear those who knew Peter have fond memories to share.

Our February Meeting will be [Live](#)

at City of York Council, West Offices, Station Rise, York YO1 6GA

February 7th 7.00 - 8.30 pm

Religion and World Views:

A way to expand the boundaries of the RE classroom

Speaker - Professor James Holt, University of Chester

(Associate Professor of RE) The Church of Jesus Christ.

Chair - Penny Coppin-Siddall

Our speaker has been involved in the teaching of religion and worldviews for the past thirty years. He holds degrees from the University of Liverpool, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the University of Birmingham. His PhD developed a theology of religions and theological underpinning for interfaith relations and dialogue. James has lectured widely on issues of religion, inter-faith, and the representation of minority religions. He is the author of 'Religious Education in the Secondary School' (Routledge, 2022) and 'Beyond the Big Six Religions. Expanding the boundaries of the RE classroom' (2019) as well as an ongoing series from Bloomsbury entitled 'Teaching Religion and World views' with the first volume being 'Understanding Sikhism' (2023). James is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and has served in many leadership roles over the last thirty years. James is married to Ruth and they have four children.

A few Interfaith perspectives on LOVE -by Dee Boyle



On February 13th last year I unexpectedly had to lead a service on 'love' when the person that was due to take it could no longer do so. The title had already been publicised and so I had to keep to the same theme. I organised it so that it could be a congregational service with input from several people and also made sure that it included aspects from various faiths. I thought I would share some of those aspects with you all this year as once again February 14th approaches.

Although we tend to only have one word for all the different kinds of love, the Greeks had over a dozen words to signify different types of love. One of these was *agape*, selfless, self-giving, empathetic love, extended to all people. Later translated into Latin as *caritas*, the origin of our word 'charity', this is the kind of love of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians:13 the Christian Bible. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.' The phrase that is more often heard is 'So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love'. This leads some Christians to conclude that love is more important than faith or hope but of course we should remember that the type of love being referred to is actually 'charity'.

After the opening words we started our service with 'Candles of Love' so that we could say a few words about someone who we would like to offer words of love to. It was a way of remembering those who we had loved and lost in our family or friends and also those who we wanted to send our loving thoughts to in the community and even those out in the wider world.

Our first reading was from the Bible from Matthew (22) reminding us of the words "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". It is often said that there is no great commandment than this one and it is sometime referred to as 'the Golden rule' as it is one that many faiths also have. The second reading was by Rabindranath Tagore from his book Home and the World and was chosen by one of the congregation members. His book is both a love story but also one of political, cultural and social awakening. The next reading was by Kahlil Gibran on 'Love' and words within that reading were 'When you love you should not say, "God is in my heart," but rather, "I am in the heart of God." And think not that you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course. We included a reading from 'The Book of Joy' by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu and words within that reading were 'We people who care must be filled with joy, so that others recognise that caring, that helping and being generous are not a burden, they

are a joy. Give the world your love, your service, your healing, but you can also give it your joy. This too is a great gift.'

It was not just those faiths mentioned in the readings that shared similar words about love and so within the service I spoke about some of the others too.

In the Baha'i faith, Abdul Baha says that 'Love is the light that guideth in the darkness'. He also says, 'Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilisation in the mortal world and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation.'

Buddha says, 'True Love is born from understanding' and the idea of unconditional love is essentially what Buddhism teaches. Buddhist philosophy provides us with a simple but profound definition: 'love is a genuine concern for another person's well-being'. Genuine care. It is quite simple, if you care about someone, you love them. If someone care about you, you are loved.

One of the core commandments of Judaism is "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). This commandment stands at the heart of the central book in the Torah. The Talmudic sages Hillel and Rabbi Akiva indicated that this is the central commandment of the Torah.

Islamic teachings state that God is so loving that he recreated His attribute of love as an instinct in us. Hence that true love is part of God's love, and it is our duty to love one another truly, as indeed He loves us. They believe that without Divine Love there can be no human love.

Love in Hinduism is sacrament. It preaches that one gives up selfishness in love, not expecting anything in return.

In Sikhism, they too express their love of mankind by offering Seva or 'selfless service' to others. It involves helping others without any rewards or personal gain.

We could see by just looking at these few faiths how similar the teachings are in relation to love and the care of others.

We ended our service using words that are often included and those are 'Love is the Spirit of this Church and service is its law. This is our great covenant, to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love and to help one another'.

I gave the service the title of 'Come Together in Love' as it was something that we did that day at our impromptu service and it is also a title of one of the hymns that we sing. I feel that it is also something that we do within the York Interfaith Group on a regular basis. We come together in love. We want to dwell in peace. We want to learn about our faiths and to help one another now and seek a positive future for us all. We do 'Come Together in Love'.

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**World Cup 2022 briefing:
Morocco's pride in Islam
should inspire us all**

It is uplifting to see players practicing their religion and celebrating with their mothers on such a big global stage

Daniel Harris, Will Magee, Gregg Bakowski and Martin Belam

A World Cup Reflection by Rasha Ibrahim

Image Discription: A Moroccan player celbrating with his mother who is wearing a Muslim scarf, in worldcup 2022

The Guardian Newspaper Praises Morocco's pride in Islam in World Cup 2022; something that should make every person of faith content with. Below are some highlights from the article.

Morocco is a Muslim country, and before the last-16 penalty shootout against Spain, the players recited Surah al-Fatiha, the first chapter of the Qur'an.

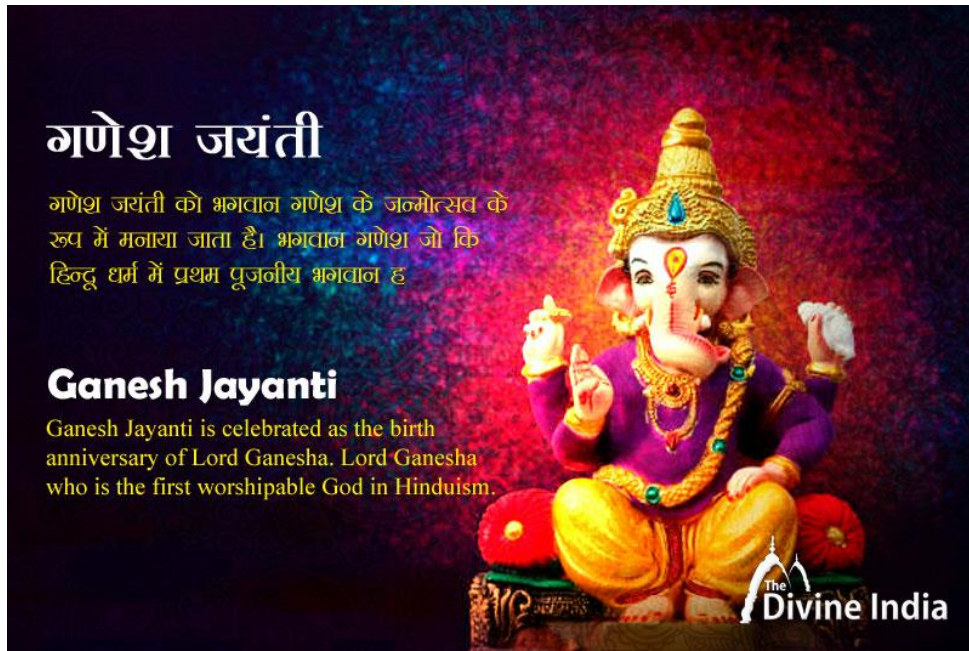
Then, after securing passage to the quarter-final and also after winning it, the squad ran to their fans and prostrated themselves in prayer – in the process, declaring to the planet not only their pride in being Moroccan but their pride in Islam, inspiring ecstatic celebrations throughout the Muslim world.

With good reason. There is no World Cup of discrimination nor should there be – every minority and every ethnic group has its challenges, and the way these are overcome is with unity not rivalry. But anyone whose eyes are prepared to see knows that Muslims are persecuted in many nations, whether by discrimination when seeking employment, backhanded insults and equivocations in news reports, or outright violence. And as with many forms of prejudice, it is women who often bear the brunt.

So to see Moroccan players paying homage to Allah before applying Allah's teaching to pay homage to their mothers – who were wearing hijab! At the game! On global television! – was not only beautiful, moving and uplifting, but important, crystallising the crux of international competition: to learn about different cultures; to share love by celebrating difference; to make the world a better place. Amin.

The full article can be accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/dec/14/world-cup-2022-briefing-moroccos-pride-in-islam-should-inspire-us-all?fbclid=IwAR2fkclmjvnteRrOsWAIrVvNeOVsfXktrwbLxLKR-vynpdqWLE2Jw51IQJk>

Ganesh Jayanti



गणेश जयंती

गणेश जयंती को भगवान गणेश के जन्मोत्सव के रूप में मनाया जाता है। भगवान गणेश जो कि हिन्दू धर्म में प्रथम पूजनीय भगवान ह

Ganesh Jayanti

Ganesh Jayanti is celebrated as the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha. Lord Ganesha who is the first worshipable God in Hinduism.

Ganesh Jayanti is celebrated as the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha. Lord Ganesha who is the first worshipable God in Hinduism and is the youngest son of Mother Parvati and Lord Shiva. Ganesh Jayanti is also known as Magh Vinayak Chaturthi and Til Kund Chaturthi.

According to the belief of South India, Ganesh Jayanti is celebrated on Shukla Chaturthi during Magha lunar month according to Hindu date and currently falls in the months of January and February in the Gregorian calendar.

Ganesh Jayanti is mainly celebrated in the coastal regions of Maharashtra and Konkan during the month of Magha. In most parts of India, the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha is celebrated during the month of Bhadrapada and is known as Ganesh Chaturthi. Similar to Ganesh Chaturthi, Madhyahna Vyapini Purvavidya Chaturthi is considered as Ganesh Jayanti.

Ganesh Chaturthi is one of the most celebrated festivals in Maharashtra, although it is not unanimously celebrated as the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha. During Magh month is Ganesh Jayanti which is considered as the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha.

Coconuts are offered to the Gods and are very important in Hindu rituals

Coconut is one of the most important parts of Hindu pujas, festivals, marriage ceremony and other spiritual, religious events. But why is it so important?



Coconut is an indispensable part of Hindu pujas and rituals. It is placed on the Kalash (filled with water and worshipped during pujas) and finds a sacred spot on the altar too. In addition, the Archana Thaal (platter consisting of various offerings) in temples also has a coconut

Furthermore, coconut is referred to as Shri Phal or a divine fruit or God's fruit. But why are coconuts so essential, and why are they offered to the deities?

Various **reasons** make coconut an inseparable part of our traditions. Here are some of them:

Trinity power

The coconut represents the Hindu trinity of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the protector) and Mahesh (the destroyer). Hence, the significance. Devotees pay tribute to the three Gods by treating the coconut as an object of worship. Thus, they seek the blessings of the trinity.

The seat of various Gods The three dots in the coconut symbolises the three eyes of Lord Shiva. Another belief system even suggests that the kernel (white flesh) symbolises Devi Parvati, the water signifies Ganga, and the brown shell represents Lord Kartikeya. Hence, the importance.

The human head


The coconut is also compared to a human head. The fibre is the hair, the shell is the skull, the water is blood, and the flesh represents the brain. Therefore, by offering a coconut, a devotee surrenders himself/herself or the mind and bows before the Supreme Power.

A symbol of ego

It is said that the coconut shell represents ego, the soft pulpy part is the human heart, and the water symbolises purity. Therefore, a devotee can experience God's grace only when he breaks his/her ego and surrenders before the Almighty with a pure heart. Thus, it reminds us that ego stops us from embracing the goodness all around us. Therefore, it inspires us to get rid of ignorance and embrace knowledge (God).

Represents prosperity

Coconut is available throughout the year and is one of the most readily available natural products. Hence, it signifies prosperity.



**26 Feb, 11-2pm
@ Door 84, York,
YO31 7LX**

Join us at our

Ayyam-i-Há Celebration

A time for joy, celebration and giving! Starting with a litter pick around the Groves (11-11:30am), followed by a short programme including readings, songs, children's activities and crafts. Stay as long as you like and we will end with some food and refreshments - everyone is welcome!

"The City of York Baha'i Community invites you to one of the Baha'i annual celebrations on Sunday 26th February. Please see the poster for details and for the purpose of catering, please reply to <Yorkbahais@gmail.com>, if you plan to attend.

Thank you to Sister Patricia for her work on this programme for 2023

2023 Programme: York Interfaith Group.

1. **JANUARY 10th** (n.b. second Tuesday): **The Ethics of Film-Making** - a reflection by Dr. Rasha Ibrahim.
2. **FEBRUARY 7th** Religion and World Views: a way to expand the boundaries of the RE Classroom - Professor James Holt, University of Chester (Associate Professor of RE), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
3. **MARCH 7th**: How does my Faith understand Miracles? A panel-discussion.
4. **APRIL 4th**: Sacred Books I: What are our sacred books, and where did they come from? Insights from Buddhism (Dr. Peter Harvey) and speakers from the Hindu and Sikh faiths.
5. **MAY 2nd**: **VISIT to a synagogue in Leeds is being arranged: details awaited**
6. **JUNE 6th**: PLANNING MEETING: ideas for next year's programmes, annual and in for Interfaith Week.
7. **JULY 4th**: Sacred Earth: how can we recover our bond with the natural world? Nick Morrice (Unitarian Church)
8. **AUGUST 8th** 'August Picnic' – an informal evening to share food and conversation in the Bar Convent garden.
9. **SEPTEMBER 5th**: Approaches to Prayer in different faiths.
10. **OCTOBER 3rd**: SACRED BOOKS II: Insights from the Jewish, Christian (the Reverend Dr. Christopher Collingwood) and Muslim faiths.
11. **NOVEMBER 7th**: Stories that help us grow in faith: examples from the sacred writings of various traditions.
12. **DECEMBER 5th**: AGM and Christmas activities.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS FEBRUARY 2023



1 February (Wednesday) **IMBOLC / CANDLEMAS** Pagan

Imbolc/Candlemas celebrates the awakening of the land and the growing power of the Sun. Snowdrops, which appear at this time of the year, are seen as the heralds of spring.



2 February (Thursday) **PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE / CANDLEMAS** Christian

Congregations hold lighted candles to recall the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and Mary's following Jewish tradition after the birth of a son. His recognition by the aged Simeon is expressed in the words of the *Nunc Dimittis*. Candles are blessed to celebrate Jesus Christ as the Light of the world



3 February (Friday) **SETSUBUN [Bean Scattering]** Japanese

The day for the Bean Scattering ceremony, performed both in homes and in temples.



5 February (Sunday) **YUANXIAOJIE / TENG CHIEH [Lantern Festival]** Chinese

The Lantern Festival marks the first full moon of the year and the lengthening of the days. Strings of lanterns in various designs are hung up indoors and outside as decoration.



6 * February (Monday) **TU B'SHEVAT** Jewish

A popular minor festival which celebrates the New Year for trees. Jewish tradition marks the 15th of Shevat as the day when the sap in the trees begins to rise, heralding the beginning of spring. It is customary for Jews all over the world to plant young trees at this time and to eat fruit produced in Israel.

* Jewish festivals commence at sunset on the evening of the day prior to the date shown.



14 February (Tuesday) **ST VALENTINE'S DAY** Christian / National



15 February (Wednesday) **PARINIRVANA [Nirvana Day]** Buddhist

Mahayanists mark the final passing away from this world of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara, India, at the age of 80. Pure Land Buddhists call this Nirvana Day.



18 * February (Saturday) **ISRA AND MI'RAJ [The Prophet's Night Journey]** Muslim

This marks the night journey of the Prophet Muhammad through the heavens to the presence of God, when the command that Muslims should pray five times a day was given to the Prophet. The rock

from which the Prophet ascended is now in Jerusalem's 'Dome of the Rock'. Muslims mark this night by reading the Qur'an and saying additional prayers.

* Muslim festivals begin in the evening before the Gregorian dates shown in this calendar.



18 February (Saturday) MAHASHIVRATRI [Great Shiva Night] Hindu

This is the night on which Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance, leading from creation to destruction. Many Hindus fast at this time. All night prayers focus on Shiva and his shrines and statues. Milk is poured on his symbol, the *lingam*.



21 February (Tuesday) SHROVE TUESDAY Christian (Western Churches)

'Shrove' relates to absolution from sin. Nowadays it is a day for eating and enjoyment. In Britain it is called 'Pancake Day', as pancakes use up all the rich foods before Lent. Elsewhere it is known as *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday), and is a time for carnivals and fairs.



22 February (Wednesday) ASH WEDNESDAY Christian (Western Churches)

This first day of Lent recalls the temptations Jesus faced for forty days in the wilderness. In Catholic and some Anglican churches, worshipper's foreheads are marked with a cross of ash made from burning the palm crosses of the previous year – hence 'Ash Wednesday'.



22 February (Wednesday) FIRST DAY OF LENT Christian

This is the beginning of the Lenten Fast, which involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter. Unlike the Western tradition, where Lent begins on the Wednesday before the first Sunday of Lent, Eastern Churches start Lent on the Monday before the first Sunday.



27 February (Monday) THE GREAT FAST Christian (Orthodox)

This is the beginning of the Lenten Fast, which involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter. Unlike the Western tradition, where Lent begins on the Wednesday before the first Sunday of Lent, Eastern Churches start Lent on the Monday before the first Sunday.

And finally, A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

As Chair, I continue to value your membership and my aim for 2023 is to continue to expand our network through mutual respect and shared values for a better and inclusive York.

Avtar Matharu	Chair
Dee Boyle	Vice-Chair and special responsibility for planning Interfaith Week
Penny Coppin-Siddall	Secretary
Daryoush Mazloum	Treasurer
Rasha Ibrahim	Press and Publicity Officer
Anne Castle	Member with special responsibility for our monthly newsletter
Varsha Gulati	Member
Sister Patricia Harris	Member (Christian Faith) with special responsibility for planning our annual calendar of meetings

As York Interfaith Group continues to expand we are always looking for additional support. If, you would like to assist or shadow any of the above roles then please do not hesitate to contact me. Your skills and expertise would be most welcome.

Your feedback is very important us. We constantly try to improve our service so that we can best support your needs and those of your faith. You can contact and/or follow us via:

Facebook	York Interfaith group
Instagram	@yorkinterfaith
Twitter	@Yorkinterfaith
email	yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com

If you would like to contribute an article or advertise an event in our March Newsletter, please email yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com or send direct to am.castle@btopenworld.com **by February 16th to guarantee inclusion.**

Wishing you all the very best for the month of February.

Avtar Matharu, Chair, YIG