

Relations With Other Faiths (RWOFF) Sep 09

This has been an action packed month in the world of Inter-Faith which has seen me visit no less than three events. At the 'Youth Assembly' one of the key debates was on Inter-Faith and I believe the deliverances to be made to the General Assembly 2010 by the 'Youth Delegates' will be asking for the Church to increase the Churches involvement with in Inter-Faith dialogue. This is a good indication of how positive the Inter-Faith debates were and the mood of the young people on this issue. I also concluded the current Inter-Faith Programme at Mure Kirk Church in Irvine with the Sikh speaker Ravinder Kaur. The Church had hosted previous speakers from Judaism and Islam. The minister Hugh Adamson remarked that the programme had been a tremendous success and rather than present theological challenges the congregation had felt that it had reaffirmed and strengthened their faith. The events were always well attended and it was agreed that the events had caused people to reflect on there own faith and what they held dear to them. This had sparked much positive discussion. Many people felt revitalised by the experience. Further details of Hugh's views on the programme will be forthwith on an up and coming DVD promoting such events.

This month also saw the first Christian/ Buddhist information (question time) event in Langholm which was well attended and highly educational. There was a real sense of community and fellowship. Food was provided by Sam Ye Ling (delicious I must add) and people enjoyed each others company in a relaxed atmosphere where they could ask questions of one another without feeling embarrassed. Many barriers of ignorance and misinformation were broken down between both faiths.

Last August I remembered the two year anniversary of the passing of my Grandad of whom I was very close. I had often discussed with my brothers of how best to remember him. To raise a toast perhaps, to visit the crematorium, to attend a remembrance service. I often feel that there is something more I should do to pay my respects and keep alive his memory. On researching this months featured festival of Chung Yeung I discovered a new found respect for Chinese traditions. Whether I agree with the legend they were built upon matters not. Perhaps you could indulge me by reading this article and sharing your thoughts with me on the Chinese custom for remembering past loved ones and how we too can best celebrate there lives.

The Chung Yeung Jit festival takes place on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar (October this year) and commemorates two occasions.

Chung Yeung Jit is also known as **重九** "Chung Gau" (Chung means Double and Gau means nine). Being the ninth day of the ninth month, it is the DOUBLE NINE, also means forever and is the day on which Chinese people go to the hillsides to tend their ancestor's graves, perform cleansing rites and pay their respects. They share the food they bring along, especially Chinese

cakes, *ko*, which is a homonym of the word for "top". Some believe that those who eat these cakes will be promoted to the top. They make sacrifices of special paper money and paper winter clothing, after which a picnic is held.

It also commemorates the day during the Han Dynasty (B.C. 221 - 206) when a sooth sayer, Fei Chang-fei advised a scholar, Huan Jing, to escape to the hills with his family to avoid an impending disaster. Huan Jing took the advice and went to the hillside with his family, taking food and chrysanthemum wine. When he returned home he discovered all his livestock were dead from a plague and realized the soothsayer had saved the lives of himself and his family. Legend also has it that while the villagers were safe the soothsayer killed the plague devil by tricking him into drinking some strong Chinese wine made of Chrysanthemum flowers.

From that date, Chinese people have celebrated by taking food and chrysanthemum wine to picnic on the hillsides. It is also the time when chrysanthemums are at their finest and parties would be held to admire the flowers, which are the symbols of good health and longevity.

As the number nine is regarded as being auspicious, therefore feasts, ascending a height, country walk and flying kites on the hill are part of the features of the day, which people believe will bring good luck.



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1.

Inter-Faith News

Exclusive: Controversial yoga guru to turn Scots beauty spot into Peace Island
[Sep 3 2009](#)



An indian yoga guru is turning a Scots beauty spot into his international base - and renaming it Peace Island.

Swami Ramdev has joined forces with two Scots care home millionaires to open a centre on Little Cumbrae, off the Ayrshire coast.

And his backers last night urged locals to keep an open mind about the project.

Ramdev is a national celebrity in his homeland, where he has been photographed with Bollywood stars including Shilpa Shetty.

But he is also a controversial figure. His claims that yoga can treat cancer and HIV have been blasted as "quackery of the highest order" and he has been slammed for giving "false hope to ill people".

The couple who bought Little Cumbrae, Sam and Sunita Poddar, insist that Peace Island will be an asset to Scotland.

Sunita said: "Our aim is to promote healthy living through yoga.

"The community has given us a lot, now it's time to pay back. Little Cumbrae is our way of paying back into the community.

"It is a fine thing for Scotland. I feel very proud to own this island.

"We want a centre to help people live as one with nature. We want to support and contribute."

An opening ceremony for Peace Island will be held on September 27 and the Poddars want local people to attend. They have stressed that the event will be open to the public, and have promised to lay on boats to ferry people to and from the island.

Ramdev himself will be there to open the centre.

Sunita and Sam, who own care home company Lambhill Court Ltd, bought Little Cumbrae for £2million last month.

They got 684 acres of land, a 12-bedroom mansion, a lighthouse, a boat house and a jetty for their money.

The Poddars run the Patanjali Yog Peeth (UK) Trust - a registered charity and sister organisation to Ramdev's movement in India.

Their website says their mission is "to make a disease-free world through a scientific approach to Yog and Ayurved (alternative medicine)".

The site says of Ramdev: "As always, he will be promoting good health, prosperity and peace in the community."

Hundreds of Ramdev's followers are expected to travel to the island for the opening ceremony.

His critics are unlikely to be happy to see him expanding his global presence.

Mohammed Abbas, of the Indian Medical Association, has blasted Ramdev's claims for the benefits of yoga.

Abbas says that although yoga is good exercise, "it cannot be used to make ridiculous claims about curing HIV or cancer.

"This is false hope for ill people".

Another critic, Sanal Edamaruku of the Indian Rationalist Association, has called for Ramdev to be prosecuted for "peddling quackery of the highest order".

He said: "Claiming such absurdities is against the law.

"The magical remedies act of 1954 was brought in to stop people such as Ramdev promoting dangerous ideas about curing cancer and the like."

2. **Rosh HaShana Thoughts from Rabbi Arik Ascherman**
(member of the organization Rabbis for Human Rights)
18 September 2009

The Midrash tells us that Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah all suffered from infertility, and that each of them conceived on Rosh HaShana. (Tractate Rosh HaShana 10b-11a, Ta'anit 2a, etc.) Another Midraah adds Rebecca and Leah (Tanhuma VaYera 17), although Leah did not have fertility problems according to the Torah. This is one midrashic way of saying that Rosh HaShana is a time of new hope and new beginnings. "*Hayom Harat Olam*," on this day new worlds were created on both the cosmic and the individual level, with an intimate connection between the two.

Maintaining our hope and faith in new beginnings is perhaps our greatest challenge as we begin 5770. Believing is the first necessary step towards achieving.

I am known for my optimism, and have been speaking about the importance of hope long before Barack Obama. Nevertheless, many of you have no doubt detected a little less hopefulness in my tone over the last two years, and President Obama himself is now dealing with the fact that he must translate slogans into action. Many of his supporters who had high hopes – sometimes exaggerated high hopes - about the changes Obama would affect around the world, including the middle east, are learning this lesson as well.

This HAS been a difficult year in terms of human rights.

There have been successes, to be sure. Many Palestinian farmers were able to work their lands safely, villages and lands have been returned, draconian restrictions on where African refugees can live were successfully challenged, young minds were opened and challenged through educational programs, and we prevented the expansion of the Israeli Wisconsin Plan to the entire country, and a Bedouin school was built.

However, collectively and individually, we have all struggled with painful realities. I will leave to each of you to reflect on your individual struggles. In terms of human rights, some of the most painful aspects of this year for me have been the evictions in Sheikh Jarakh (E. Jerusalem) despite incredible international pressure, and the knowledge that every day refugees from African killing fields are being turned away at our border. While it will take us a few days to study it, the Goldstone Report that came out this week is another sad reminder not only of some of this year's terrible events, but that those of us who ask questions about the conduct of the war or whether the war could have been avoided by preserving the June 2008 cease fire, are a small minority viewed as traitors in a way I haven't seen for over 25 years since the First Lebanon War. As a result of our elections, we see new boldness by settlers in violating human rights, and that the Israeli security forces feel less obligated to protect Palestinian human rights as required by international and Israeli law, as well as Jewish morality. All the promises that this time Benjamin Netanyahu would be more decent to the weakest and poorest Israelis have turned out to be no more than promises, and we have a foreign minister who openly questions the loyalty of Israeli Arabs.

For all of this, there is no point in moping and feeling sorry for ourselves, any more than God tolerated Elijah the Prophet's self pity. After Elijah flees to Mt. Horeb and experiences God in the Still Small Voice, God asks Elijah why he is in a cave in the desert when he has work to do. (First Kings 19:9-15) We are not the first generation to experience challenges. Perhaps it is no accident that the hope generated by the birth of Isaac in our Torah reading on the first day of Rosh HaShana is threatened on the second day's reading by the almost sacrifice of Isaac on, before God intervenes.

The Hebrew saying based on the 13th century *piyut* "*Akhoti HaKatana*", "*Tikhleh Shana v'klaloteiah*, , *tekhal Shana v'birkotheiah*" (Let the old year and its curses end, let the New Year and its blessings begin) is not just an empty slogan. It is a reminder to all of us that miracles do happen, that doors open, and that as baseball legend Yogi Berra used to say, "It ain't over 'till it's over." If we can find the way to stay connected/connect/reconnect ourselves with the part of us that believes in the endless possibilities of partnership

between God and humanity to effect change on all levels – from the personal to the cosmic, then we will enter the new year with renewed energy, renewed hope, and renewed faith that our efforts count – that we can tip those perfectly balanced cosmic and personal scales in favour of life, of honouring God's Presence and God's Image in the world, of human rights, of human dignity, and of peace.

The message of the High Holy Day is a hopeful one. The day will come where "The righteous will be full of awe and rejoice, the upright will rejoice, and the pious will celebrate in song." (High Holy Day Prayerbook-Amidah), but there is no such thing as a free lunch. The sweetness of the honey and apples, and the "Season of our Joy" on Sukkot and Simkhat Torah are intimately connected to the process of *teshuvah* (Answering the Still Small Voice, Turning and Returning to our highest selves.) Where have we individually and collectively either been part of the silent majority, or too openly disdainful of those who think differently than us? Where have we been too willing to sacrifice our principles in the name of unity, and where have we been Don Quixotes, forgoing the achievable victories in order to maintain our ideological purity? Have we preferred to speak of our values comfortably sitting in cafes while those who disagree with us sacrifice all creature comfort to live in an outpost on a windswept hill? Have we been rude to those around us and ignored our loved ones because we were giving our all to "the cause?" Where have we thrown up our hands and given up too quickly, and where have we been so intent on the victory "just around the corner" that we have ignored the slow, long term work educating the next generation? When I see the thousands of dedicated and in many ways wonderful youth in this country who have so little regard for Palestinian human rights, or the Israeli yuppies who have no sentiment for the social solidarity upon which this country was founded, or those who no longer understand the heart of the stranger, forgetting that we were once refugees knocking on closed doors, I know why we must both work to protect human rights in the here and now, and invest in education. The problematic reality we see today is in a large part the result of quiet and patient work by others over forty years.

And so, let us optimistically, realistically and joyfully join hands anew..

In this New Year, we pray to You, God, to push us, as you pushed Elijah, to leave our holy caves and return to the tasks You have ordained for us. May we know the sweetness of being Your partners in changing what we can today, and of preparing the way for future change. May hope sustain us and empower us, as together we give birth to the world You envisioned at the outset of creation.

3. The Scottish Inter-Faith Youth Council are looking for new members. I have attached a flyer with information is attached. The youth committee is for young people aged 16 - 26 from all the major faith communities. They meet every 4 - 6 weeks to plan inter faith activities together.

The next youth committee meeting is on Monday 5th October at 6.30pm at the SIFC office in Pollokshields, Glasgow.

Inter-Faith Events

1. Saturday 26th September 2009

The Christian community of Glasgow will be holding a prayer and a silence at Holland St. Glasgow G2 at 9.30 a.m in protest against the blasphemy law of Pakistan. The march will start at 10.00am and will proceed to George Square. There will also be a prayer held there and a one minute silence for the people who cannot make it at 9.30. a.m.. If the people cannot make it to Holland St. they can make their own way to George Square.

The event is open to anyone regardless of their religious background.

If you require any further information please contact Javed Lal, Rev. George Fatedhin or Saleem Masih. Organised by: Javed Lal Rev.George Saleem Masih

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Thank you!

2. Attached a flyer for the, Annual Jewish Remembrance Day.

3. Taught M.Th in Inter-Faith Studies, University of Glasgow

Places are still available for the post graduate degree in Inter-Faith Studies at the University of Glasgow. Please see their website for more details at www.gla.ac.uk/departments/theology/research/centreforinter-faithstudies/course.

4. Annual General Meeting 2009 and 10th Anniversary of Scottish Inter Faith Council - Sunday 25th October, Edinburgh

A civic event will be held at Edinburgh City Chambers on Sunday 25th October at 2.30pm to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Scottish Inter Faith Council.

5. Launch of Inter Faith Week, Sunday 22nd November, Dundee

The launch of Scottish Inter Faith Week will take place on Sunday 22nd November from 2.30—5.30pm at the University of Dundee in the Dalhousie Building. The theme of Scottish Inter Faith Week this year is 'A Place of Home and Welcome' and is supported by local inter faith groups, the Scottish Government and Scotland's religious leaders. The week provides a chance for individuals, local inter faith groups and faith communities across the country to plan events that bring people together to promote dialogue, understanding and cooperation between Scotland's diverse religious communities.