

Report of the Havering Inter Faith Discussion evening Feb 27th 2017

The first discussion meeting of 2017 took place at the Romford Synagogue with the topic 'The History of Our Scriptures'.

The hosts began with an explanation of the first five books of the Torah, revealed through Moses to the twelve tribes and giving laws as well as foretelling the coming of the Messiah. Genesis gives the early history, Exodus the departure from Egypt and Deuteronomy three sermons from Moses to the Israelites. Parts of these are read every Sabbath. There are other books such as Judges and those of prophets with a special place because of their gift of prophecy. Some texts were rejected (e.g. Enoch). The Ten Commandments and the Books of the Prophets are important plus other messages to the people such as the Psalms and Song of Solomon.

Sidra Naeem for Islam explained how the Qur'an began when Muhammad, who was then illiterate, was commanded by the Arch Angel Gabriel to 'Read', which, after the third such command, He could. The Qur'an updates previous books and was revealed at a time of religious neglect and perversion. Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 A. D. and was upset at what was happening with worship of idols and over 360 gods, whilst not remembering God. There was drinking, gambling, wealth and poverty with the rich forgetting what it felt like to be poor. The command to 'Read' came when Muhammad was meditating in the Cave of Hira. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic which is a development from Hebrew and Aramaic. Very early Qur'ans still survive and are the same as those published now. Key admonitions include the Five Pillars: One God, Prayer five times a day, the giving of Alms. Fasting in a prescribed month (Ramadan) of the year and pilgrimage to Mecca. The Lord's Prayer is covered in early chapters. It was revealed over the course of 23 Lunar years (610-622 A.D.), the first in Mecca and the last after His pilgrimage there. Its contents were memorised, written down and checked and agreed by those who had been present at the time. There was also mention of Hadith – sayings of Muhammad that were also accepted.

The Hindu speaker gave greetings and said that God is in everyone and we are all part of God. There is one God and though the Hindu scriptures were revealed as long ago as 1500BC-500BC there is no beginning and no end. The connection is revised at different times and God comes in different forms to save us. There are no conversions - anyone is free to follow the Hindu way of life. There are four principles: Dharma – the right way of life; Artha – purpose in hard work; Karma – desire and passion leading to marriage and children; Moksha – freedom from rebirth by charity. The scriptures dealt final destiny – mystery. The Vedas – this is only one stage in human life and progression is inevitable. Certainties – we must prepare for the eventualities of life. The Vedas and the Gita explain. Great importance is attached to charity and service – what goes with us when we die are only our good deeds.

Lakhvir Singh explained that Sikhism came at a time of the caste system in India and its Gurus were for both Hindus and Muslims. The scriptures come from God through the Gurus, the Founder being Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The Guru Granth is the Holy Book, containing the words and verses of Guru Nanak and his first nine successors, designated as such by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh. It also includes passages of non-Sikh saints, chiefly

Hindus and Muslims to show the Sikhs' respect and tolerance for other faiths. There are many prophecies of what is being found now. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is the centre of Sikh cultural and religious traditions and has doors facing north, east, south and west to symbolise that it is open to people from all directions, irrespective of caste, creed, colour or sex. The key principle is that God is One.

John Lester for the Baha'i Faith said that the first scripture happened as soon as the Bab (the Gate), forerunner of Baha'u'llah, was recognised by the first believer, Mulla Husayn when He revealed a Commentary of the Surih of Joseph in answer to the other's unspoken wish. Most of the Bab's writings concern 'He Whom God Will Make Manifest'. The Bab was martyred in 1850 and Baha'u'llah (Glory of God) received His mission whilst in prison in Tehran. His early writings include *The Hidden Words*, revealed in both Arabic and Persian giving guidance, *The Seven Valleys*, explaining the journey of the soul to God and the *Kitab-i-Iqan*, which deals with the progressiveness of Revelation through Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and the Bab and explains how each of God's Messengers is rejected by the people of the day. After declaring His station in Baghdad in 1863, immediately prior to His banishment to Turkey, Baha'u'llah wrote to the Kings and Rulers of His age to proclaim His mission and to urge them to unite, warning them of consequences if they did not. His final exile was to Akka, Palestine (now Israel) where He revealed the Kitab-i-Aqdas, His Most Holy Book giving the Laws for this age. Lastly, among His final Tablets, He named His successor, His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Baha, and laid down how the Faith should be administered, thus preventing any break-up into sects. To count as scripture Writings have to be written by Him or sealed by Him or corrected by Him.

A large and varied audience had a number of questions for the panellists and it was a very successful evening.