

**Saturday 21st November**

**6 pm - 9 pm**

**Civic Centre  
Council Chamber  
Station Road  
Harrow  
HA1 2XF**

**An event  
to celebrate  
the diversity  
of faith in  
Harrow**

A distinguished panel of speakers from all the faiths of Harrow will talk on 'Religion and Law in a Modern Society' and answer questions about faith and belief.

Limited capacity. First come first served

**Harrow Inter Faith Council and Harrow Council's  
contribution to National Inter Faith Week 2009**



**Harrow Inter Faith Council is pleased to present  
'Religion and Law in a Modern Society'  
21<sup>st</sup> November 2009**



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# PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

**6.00 p.m. Welcome and Mayoral Address**  
Cllr Chris Mote Deputy Mayor of Harrow

**6.05 p.m. Panel of Faith Speakers**  
Chaired by Pat Stevens

**7.00 p.m. Questions and Discussion**  
Chaired by Imam Adil Farooqi

**8.00 p.m. Thanks to Panel and Chair**  
Pat Stevens

**8.05 p.m. Refreshments**

**9.00 p.m. Close**

# 'RELIGION AND LAW IN A MODERN SOCIETY'

'To the Reader

Faith terminology is full of words such as Love, Peace, Forgiveness, Salvation, Service, Commandments, Fasting, Sacrifice, Humility, Prayer, Unity and many more.

However media terminology is often replete with words like Conflict, War, Power, Defeat, Barriers, Enforce, Exploit, Arms, Control, Law, Divisions etc.

Both Religion and man made institutions are for the benefit of human beings. Is there a conflict or conciliation between the two?

There are around 200 political entities in the world called states which have civil laws and over 9 world religions and

their denominations have their Religious laws. How can both be mutually reconciled and accommodated in order to make this world a better place?

Harrow Inter Faith Council in partnership with Harrow Council has tried to reflect on this issue by convening this event on 'Religion and Law in a Modern Society' to be Harrow's contribution towards the first ever National Inter Faith Week 2009

Please give us your feedback about this event as it will help Harrow Inter Faith Council to be more productive.

On behalf of Harrow Inter Faith Council (HIFC)

# BAHÁ'ÍS AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

Baha'u'llah revealed that:

The purpose of law is to enable people to live spiritually and physically healthy lives and to contribute to the advancement of civilisation. The Laws revealed by Baha'u'llah are valid until the next Manifestation either confirms them or abrogates them. However it will be the Universal House of Justice who decides when many of the laws revealed by Baha'u'llah are to be made binding on Baha'i individuals and societies. Human laws, which address the immediate needs of society, can be changed at any point. The future civilisation envisaged by Baha'u'llah will have both kinds of law.

The purpose of religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst all the peoples of the world. It must not become a source of dissension and discord of hate and enmity. This Baha'u'llah says is the straight path the fixed and immovable foundation.

These laws serve the manifold purposes of bringing tranquillity to human society, raising the standard of human behaviour, increasing the range of human understanding, and spiritualizing the life of each and all.



As to the laws themselves, a careful scrutiny discloses that they govern three areas: the individual's relationship to God, physical and spiritual matters which benefit the individual directly, and relations among individuals and between the individual and society. A salient characteristic of Baha'i law is their brevity. They constitute the kernel of a vast range of law that will arise in centuries to come.

In addition to revealing new laws for this age, a number of doctrines and practices have been specifically abolished by Bahá'u'lláh. These include: the priesthood; the waging of holy war; asceticism and monasticism; the confession of sins.

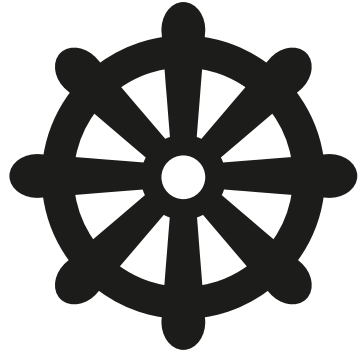
Bahá'ís take their civic responsibilities seriously and uphold the authority of established governments through loyalty and obedience to the laws of their country.

# BUDDHISM AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

In our school of Buddhism we are expected to follow the law of the land we are living in. As a minority religion, we do not interact with formal legal systems, as the more established religions must, although some Buddhists might be involved as lawyers, police, doctors etc.

In this talk I want to introduce a fundamental Buddhist teaching.... that of the “oneness of the person and the environment” as a way of exploring the relationship between Buddhism and the law. This oneness leads to an understanding of the presence in ourselves, society and our world, of three poisons - greed, anger and stupidity. Our task as Buddhists is to transform these three poisons into the three great attributes of the Buddha - courage, compassion and wisdom.

If as a society we set the possession of wealth and power as the most important achievements, it is obvious that many will not be able to reach these goals, and they may stay in the



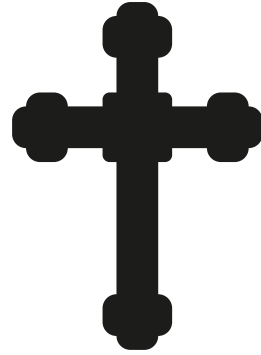
region of these three poisons, living in the suffering of chaos and despair. If however, the transformation to courage, compassion and wisdom is made, there will be the potential to use these attributes to improve the environment for all - in law, education, housing, health etc. We can strive for this just because of the understanding that the person and the environment are inseparable.

# CHRISTIANITY AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

Synopsis of talk from the Christian viewpoint

The law in the United Kingdom is based on Christian law but it didn't arrive ready made. Much that we take for granted today was born of good people persevering for many years for what they believed was right. A great many of these people were Christians who did not see that their so called 'Christian' country was living up to Christ's commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and might and to love your neighbour as yourself.

The whole point of the Christian faith is that it has at its centre relationship, not law. It is relationship with God that changes our hearts. Basic Christian theology teaches that law condemns because human beings are so wayward that we can never manage to keep God's law. So Jesus came to preach a gospel of forgiveness, that all who turned to him and repented would be saved, not by keeping God's law (that would come later) but knowing that God had taken away the terrible burden of sin once and for all.



Ironically, however, our theology teaches that we need law. Until we had law we didn't know we sinned. So God gave us law in order to recognise that we sin, in order in turn to recognise that we can do nothing about our sin, in order to turn to God and say, "Help!"

It is perhaps this constant reliance on God that changed a few peoples' hearts in the past so that they strove to press the law of the land to follow the law of God. As society changes so law must adapt but the love and care of God for his world never does. So we ask what the past can teach us as we address the question of religion and law in a modern society.

## The Original Dharma

Understanding the divine laws of the universe and the natural qualities of truth, non-violence, purity, love and respect and abiding by them human beings were completely righteous, prosperous and civilized.

When the original was forgotten we became addicted to scriptures, rituals and ego such that Religious Rivalry enslaved us making us intolerant, unfaithful, greedy, peace-less, divisive and violent.

Currently, the external laws of the world have failed to stem all oppression in the world.

Respecting and observing again the caring compassion of natural laws of the soul will alleviate current emotional bankruptcy and renew once more Universal Happiness.



# HUMANISM AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

Humanists do not believe in any gods or other supernatural beings and feel no need to abide by religious creeds or laws. We believe that people can have individual responsibility to lead ethical and moral lives without having to be told how to behave by ancient religious texts or dogmatic leaders. Whether people have been born in the UK or choose to reside here, they should abide by the national (and international) laws and should acknowledge the equal rights of all individuals. If individuals disagree with any particular laws, there are legitimate ways to demonstrate this and work to get them changed.

Humanists accept that religious beliefs may make some people happy and we do not oppose religions, as long as they do no harm, nor advocate harm to other people. However, if any of the religious laws are in conflict with the law of the land then we will find them problematic. This includes any form of discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, religious belief or lack of religious belief and anything else which infringes the Human Rights Act. Possible problem areas for Humanists



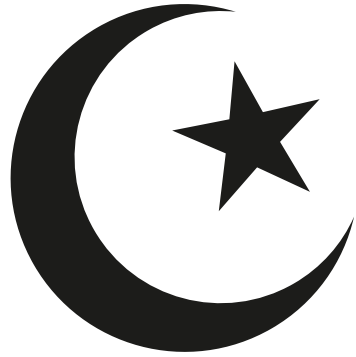
include religious/cultural demands that women must dress in certain ways or marry against their will, religious objections to Coroner's autopsies and inquests and the ritual killing of animals without previous stunning. We abhor any form of violence carried out in the name of religion. We are also concerned about religious discrimination by faith schools in relation to staff employment and student selection and about the proposed running of particular social services by religious groups which may involve religious coercion of vulnerable individuals.

## ISLAM AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

The Arabic word for Islamic Law is Sharia meaning 'way of life'. The online encyclopedia – Wikipedia states that 'Islamic law is now the most widely used religious law, and one of the three most common legal systems of the world alongside common law and civil law. During the Islamic Golden Age, classical Islamic law may have influenced the development of common law, and also influenced the development of several civil law institutions.'

Mohammed Salam Madkoar explains the theoretical assumptions of Islamic Law:

*In order to protect the five important indispensables in Islam (religion, life, intellect, offspring and property), Islamic Law has provided a worldly punishment in addition to that in the hereafter. Islam has, in fact, adopted two courses for the preservation of these five indispensables: the first is through cultivating religious consciousness in the human soul and the awakening of human awareness through moral education; the second is by inflicting deterrent punishment, which is the basis of the Islamic criminal system...."*



Many people, including Muslims, misunderstand Sharia. It's often associated with the amputation of limbs, death by stoning, lashes and other medieval punishments. There is far more to Islamic law than deterrent capital punishment.

One example where Islamic law is growing at an estimated 15 percent annually is Islamic banking and finance. Central to this field is *riba*, the charging or payment of interest, banned under Islamic law. CA 2008 report by the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions estimates the Islamic banking industry to stand at \$442 billion. The industry is small in comparison to the global market, but may grow as some non-Muslims are turning to sharia-compliant services. Some of the ethically minded are also switching over to sharia-compliant investments.

## JAINISM AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

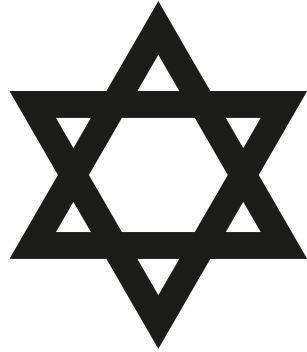
There are laws and there are rules but when it comes to Religious beliefs, how can we make sure that what we term or define as a Religious Law has any binding influence on a person who belongs to that particular religion?

People do have set of beliefs and ideas. Religious people go one step further and take the scriptural guideline as the Law within the parameters of their religion. Jains are very strict as far as their code of conduct is concerned. They have got a very strict guideline for behaviour, diet practices and rituals. Even the distribution of temple fund is strictly governed. It is interesting to study how the modern Jains take some of the old principles and try to implement them. Vinod Kapashi will briefly explain this topic and will elaborate on Jain values as seen by people of other faiths.



## JUDAISM AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

Judaism has a unique perspective based on 2,500 years of Jews living as minority groups in other societies. "Pray for the peace of the country in which you live" said the prophet Jeremiah," and our rabbis taught "The law of the land is the law." This very important statement indicates a belief that God is not the only authority for law. Secular law also has its place. What are its essential requirements? Civil law has to safeguard human rights, particularly the right of equality before the law. When we see through history how often legal systems based on one religion have discriminated against those of other faiths, we could formulate a modern Jewish view in the words of Rabbi Dr Norman Solomon, that "God believes in secular government."



Over the last forty years, there have been situations where the observance of Sikh religious codes and the civil law have created difficulties both for the adherents and for the public and private enterprises. For example, the wearing of the five articles of faith usually referred to as the Five Ks which are - Kes, Kanga, Kara, Kirpan and Kachhehra/kachha. These are the essential requirements for an initiated Sikh male or female. Men also wear a turban, though some females do it too. The wearing of all these have a special meaning; i.e. the keeping of the sanctity of hair - not to cut it, wearing a small comb in it for keeping the hair tidy. The steel bangle-the kara is a reminder of the divine, who has no beginning and no end, it is mainly worn on the right hand to remind us of our covenant to do good and not to engage in immoral practices, the kirpan, a small steel dagger or sword, a symbol of protection and blessing and the last one, especially designed and tailored shorts, a symbol of chastity and commitment.

For the Sikh family, a Sikh wedding ceremony is essential but not all gurdwaras are registered for the civil ceremony, which may mean two events and additional costs to comply with



both civil and religious laws. Civil marriage registration has importance in the law of the land. 'A Sikh should marry a Sikh' is not always possible in a secular society.

The three Sikh principles of nam japna, meditation and prayer, kirat karni-earning an honest living through hardwork and wand chhakna- sharing with others and service to others enable a Sikh to be a better citizen. There in lies the compassion and responsibility towards the divine, us and society at large.

Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scripture points to the way of life in these words: 'Truth is uppermost but more important than the truth is truthful living.'

# ZOROASTRIANISM AND THE LAW IN MODERN SOCIETY

During His meditations, Zoroaster thought out the five main principles of Life.

(i) Unity, (ii) Goodness, (iii) Non-violence, (iv) Charity, (v) Purity.

He emphasize that Unity is Peace. Zoroaster chooses the Fire as the symbol of Enlightenment and Unity.

In the 2nd part of our Jashan ritual, we bless the ruler of the land for protecting and looking after his people with his wise laws. In this way religion, acknowledge the civic laws of the land.

Living in British society it is inevitable that we will pick up what it has to offer but we must make sure we balance this with what religion has to give. Every culture has something special to offer us. It is extremely important to give proper religious education to our children. There is nothing worse than our children grow up with conflicting feelings as to who they are. Children need to have pride in their religion, history and culture so they do not shy away from it.

From Zoroastrian point of view one might ask is the Zoroastrian culture so very different from the British culture we



find ourselves in. Certainly, our religion is different. So too are the various customs and ceremonies we perform; the food we eat and the dress some of us wear on certain occasions. It is these things will make the difference.

Civil Laws in Modern Society are there for the protection of citizens but in most of the laws there are always some loopholes by which guilty persons can walk away and nothing can be done about it... In contrast, religious laws based on truth, righteousness, justice always shine out.

I conclude with one of Prophet Zoroaster's cardinal laws given to His followers:

Happiness comes to him who gives Happiness to others. Only through love and service for others can one gain Divine strength and fulfil God's plan.

## MIND IN HARROW

Religious practice and religious experience are given different values by society. Religious practice is ubiquitously considered a virtue, whereas religious experience may be feared or misunderstood.

There are examples where religious experience was respected, for example in 1837 when Florence Nightingale heard the voice of God, telling her to set up hospitals for the sick, she listened. Or over 3,000 year ago, when Moses saw the Angel of God in a burning bush, who gave him a strategy for helping his people out of oppression. This is accepted, as are visionaries like Saint Bernadette, who saw the Virgin Mary at Lourdes in 1858, in a place which has now become a centre of pilgrimage and healing for sick people.

The University of Wales in Lampeter holds an archive of over 6000 Religious Experiences, and I conducted a study there, of experiences that were said to warrant psychiatric attention. My findings: that responses to auditory and visionary experiences were ad hoc, and depended on the beliefs system of those around the experiencer, like family, religious leaders, or doctors. Religious experience was stigmatised, and people kept silent about it.



I wonder if our inability to listen, to those who've had religious experiences about what happens in life, on death and beyond, inhibit our understanding of justice and truth? Does our suppressed understanding about the nature of human existence, allow materialism to flourish together with aggression in the name of law and order?

Mind in Harrow is running the 'People Like Us' project, funded by NHS Harrow. We facilitate seminars and discussions with community and faith groups, in churches, temples and mosques, and in private or NHS hospitals. Why? We want to develop a two way understanding, of cultural beliefs about religious experience, and NHS beliefs about the benefits of health care and early intervention for mental health. Why should we work together? We want offer a forum for discussion about mental well being, and explore appropriate practices in a modern society. Let us talk about ways we can collaborate with each other.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Harrow Inter Faith Council (HIFC) wishes to acknowledge all those who contributed towards this booklet.

Special thanks are due to our panel of speakers - Edit McCathie, Suzanne Rees Glanister, Rev'd Alison Christian, Dr Ray Bhatt, Dr Julie Crow, Umami Merali, Dr Vinod Kapashi, Rabbi Michael Hilton, Charanjit AjitSingh, Ervad Rustam Bhedwar, Dr Natalie Tobert.

HIFC members, executive committee members Chairman Imam Adil Farooqi, Treasurer Michael Carmody, Secretary Martha Besser and Reehan Mirza from Harrow Council for presenting 'Religion and Law in a Modern Society'

The partnership team for organising and funding the event.

Harrow Inter Faith Council, Harrow Council, and, all Faiths for publicising this event.

Michael Carmody Martha Besser and Mihiri Kotalawela for organising refreshments

Cllr Chris Mote Mayoral address

Chairpersons Pat Stevens and Imam Adil Farooqi

Thank you all for attending this event and taking time to read this booklet.

For further information on HIFC activities please contact the HIFC Secretary Martha Besser Tel: 020 8863 3424 or e-mail: mbesser1@hotmail.com

This publication was compiled by Martha Besser and edited by all faith speakers