

# SOUTH EAST ENGLAND FAITHS FORUM

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Issue 2, March 2014

## The British Weather!

During the first months of 2014 the South East and much of Britain's coast has been subject to a degree of flooding and adverse weather many people had never before experienced. The faith communities have played a part in helping many people who have suffered loss and been driven from their homes and farms. Church Halls, Community Centres and Faith Community Centres have been made available by people from many faith communities, and other people without a particular personal faith have also helped those in trouble. Before those who are affected by the storms can resume normal life may be a very long time; and a few will never get back to their lives before the storm. It is all the more necessary that we continue to support these people both through practical and financial assistance and also by our prayers. This long period of inundation and flooding gives us a small taste of the suffering of those in other countries which do not have Britain's resources.

## Feasts, Fasts and Festivals

The season of spring is an important part of people's spiritual journey; Christians journey through Lent and Holy Week to Easter; the Baha'i twelve-day observance of Ridvan, the Jewish Passover and the fifty days of Omer leading to Shavuot. The Islamic fasting month of Ramadan brings us to the beginning of the summer. The highlights of the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice also tie in with religious observance with the seasonal changes. All lead us to associate our daily lives with the constant round of feast, fasts and festivals that our faiths help us celebrate.

## SEEFF Conference, Winchester, 6-7 June

SEEFF is planning a Conference in Winchester with the opportunity of an overnight stay in the University on 6-7 June (more details soon). On Saturday there will be the presentations and meetings followed by SEEFF AGM in the afternoon. There will be the opportunity to arrive on Friday afternoon and stay at a reduced rate in the Winchester University accommodation; we hope this will give those who may not travel on the Shabbat the availability to attend. If there are sufficient to enable the Shabbat prayers to be said this will be arranged and kosher and halal and vegetarian food will all be available. The final cost of the accommodation and the meals is being calculated, and full details will be sent out very soon. The Friday evening will enable some of us to meet socially and to visit the beautiful city.

## Events in Europe and People of Faith

Across Europe there is disturbing news about events which concern people of faith:

**Danish halal and kosher slaughter ban**  
**Belgian child euthanasia**

Information about them is freely available on the internet.

When your local Council of Faiths meets, perhaps you might be able to find time, either formally or informally, to discuss these events and their implications for religious liberty.

## SEEFF Newsletter, issue 3, 16 July

In this issue I have included reports of two recent events, and would like to receive similar reports for subsequent Newsletters. Some forthcoming events are included as well as a fairly detailed calendar of feasts and festivals, and funding opportunities.

**PLEASE SEND ITEMS FOR THE NEXT ISSUE TO ME BY 13 JULY.**

**Bede Gerrard, Chair, SEEFF**  
bjg1@waitrose.com

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# EVENTS REPORTS

## SACRED SPACES PROJECT LAUNCH 9 February

The *Sacred Spaces* Project is a collaboration between the *Wisdom* Project, based at Eton Dorney, and *Art Beyond Belief*, based in Slough. The project examines what can be identified as a sacred space, accepting that while such spaces can be places, they can also be times, objects or states of mind. It is based at Eton College, and involves young people from Eton College, and from St Joseph's RC School and Upton Court Grammar School both located in Slough.

Over the last year the participants in the project have used the medium of video to explore what makes a special space, be it a time apart, a time with others, or a time alone.

The results of the project so far were launched at Eton College on 9 February. Visitors observed a presentation and viewed individual clips:

- An interview with Professor AC Grayling (Master of the New College of the Humanities and Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford)
- Interview with Bishop Alan Wilson (Bishop of Buckingham)
- Interviews with Joe Francis (an English Teacher at Eton College)
- Personal Views (what makes a space or object sacred) by Marcus Paragpuri, and Tim Barker pupils at Upton Court Grammar School, and Joseph Boorman, a pupil at Eton College
- The Internet as a Sacred Space (a film by Harry Barnes, a pupil at Eton College, exploring online space (the internet) as a personal sacred place and a film by James Gibbons, a pupil at St Joseph's Catholic School, asking whether interaction with X-Box games can create a personal sacred space)

*Emel Soylu*

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## AHMADIYYA COMMUNITY IN THE UK Centenary Celebrations 11 February

Around 500 delegates attended the Conference, including faith leaders from various countries, politicians, and government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, academics and representatives of various NGOs. As Chair of SEEFF, I was also invited. The Conference was held at the famous Guildhall in the City of London. The theme of the event was '*God in the 21st Century*' as part of the Ahmadiyya Community in the UK Centenary celebrations.

The Conference received messages of support from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, PM David Cameron and several other dignitaries. The keynote address was delivered by **His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad**; in the light of Islam's teachings he considered what role religion could play in today's world and whether religion continued to be a force for good. Before he spoke, leaders from various faith communities sought to answer the question. They included:

**Rabbi Jackie Tabick**, Joint President of the World Congress of Faiths; **Umesh Sharma**, Chairman of the Hindu Council UK; **Rt Hon Dominic Grieve** QC MP, the Attorney General; **Geshe Tashi Tsering**, with a message from His Holiness the Dalai Lama; **Prof. Kwaku Danso-Boafo**, High Commissioner of Ghana, with a message from the President of Ghana; **Sheikh Moafaq Tarif**, Spiritual Head of the Druze Community of Israel; **Dr Katrina Lantos-Swett**, Vice-Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, who also acknowledged the role of the late Sir Chaudhry Zafrullah Khan Sahib in negotiating the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the fact that he signed it on behalf of the State of Pakistan; **Baroness Berridge**, Chair of the UK Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom, who outlined the work of the Parliamentary Group; **Archbishop Kevin McDonald**, representing the Roman Catholic Church, who also read a message of support from Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice; **Rt Hon Baroness Warsi**, Senior Minister of State at the Foreign Office.

**Event report** [www.loveforallhatredfornone.org/the-conference-of-world-religions/](http://www.loveforallhatredfornone.org/the-conference-of-world-religions/)

**Some video** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=64BV9cH1gnl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64BV9cH1gnl)

*Bede Gerrard*

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**Please send in a report of an event of yours for the next issue!**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### LONDON CITY HINDU NETWORK

The City of London Police force has opened its recruitment campaign for PCs, and is actively seeking recruits from minority communities to make the force more representative of London's communities. For those of you who may be interested, or know someone else who is, please contact the Metropolitan Police for further details. <http://content.met.police.uk/Site/Careers>

CHN's thoughts go out to those who have lost everything as a result of the recent severe weather, and we pray that those affected are able to return to their normal lives soon.

*Prinal Nathwani (Chairman CHN)*

#### EVENTS

- 19 March, Wednesday, 7.30-9.00 pm, Francis Holland School, London** *Weekly Vedanta Classes*
- 20 March, Thursday, 6.30-8.30 pm, The Hub, Westminster, 1st Floor, New Zealand House, London** *Women's Approach to Consciousness and Business*
- 21 March, Friday, 7.30-11.30 pm, The Jungle Club, Leicester Square** *Charity dinner for Great Ormond Street Hospital*
- 26 March, Wednesday, 7.30-9.00 pm, Francis Holland School, London** *Weekly Vedanta Classes*
- 29 March, Saturday, 10.00 am, Siddhashram Shakti Centre, Harrow Weald Middlesex** *Swami Vivekananda 150 Competition - First Round Regional Oratorical Contest*
- 29 March-30 March, Saturday-Sunday 7.00-11.30 pm, Hotel Verta, London** *Mumbai Mash-Up - London's Premiere Bollywood Event*

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### FAITHACTION SOUNDING BOARD MEETINGS

**March 26, 2.30-4.00pm, London.**

Join FaithAction as we celebrate local faith-based social action and innovation, and explore the role of faith groups in the community during austerity. FaithAction will also be launching the FaithLab initiative; gathering innovative faith based responses to community needs across the UK.

**Further details** TBA.

**FaithAction reception: a celebration of faith-based social action**

**Help shape our work; Let us know your issues; Find out how we can help you**

**MANCHESTER 23 April, 1.00-3.00 pm**  
British Muslim Heritage Centre, College Road  
Manchester M16 8BP

**BRISTOL 20 May 1.00-3.00 pm**  
Hamilton House, Stokes Croft  
Bristol BS1 3QY

**To book** Send your details and organisation and which event you'd like to attend to [virginia.kpayser@faithaction.net](mailto:virginia.kpayser@faithaction.net)

Places are limited and will be awarded on a first come, first served basis.

We will also be holding Accelerator Briefings for the Together in Service programme in the morning before these events.

**Details** 0845- 094 6350; @FaithActionNet; [info@faithaction.net](mailto:info@faithaction.net); [www.faithaction.net](http://www.faithaction.net)

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### SHARED VALUES, FAITH AND DISABILITY NATIONAL SEMINAR

**Tuesday 8 April, 9.30am-3.30pm**

**Nishkam Centre, 6 Soho Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B21 9BH**

You are warmly invited to attend this seminar which has been funded by 'Near Neighbours', bringing together various faith communities and families with disabled children and young people. At the seminar, issues impacting on **Faith and Disability** will be discussed and the important role of faith communities providing support and inclusion to their local families with disabled children and young people.

**The Seminar aims to**

- Increase understanding, awareness and recognition of disability amongst faith communities

- Provide an opportunity to bring faith communities together and reflect on shared universal values, how they can be put into practice ensuring the spiritual and cultural needs of families with disabled children in their communities can be supported
- Share learning and good practice of faith communities supporting families with disabled children and young people, and supporting their inclusion

**Presentations, workshops and discussions**

- Discussing and sharing key references to faith religious doctrines in regards to references to disability, providing positive messages
- Families sharing their experiences of having a disabled child and the challenges of being involved in their respective faith communities
- Removing the barriers, and improving the experiences of families with disabled children access their faith settings and activities, providing inclusivity
- Identifying how faith communities are supporting disabled children, young people and their families and what more could be done
- Looking at how we can work together to increase the awareness and understanding regarding disabilities in our faith communities
- Discussing the potential role of faith communities is in supporting disabled children, young people and their families

Faith and disability is an area which has been too often overlooked. Your support can increase the inclusion of families with disabled children and young people to faith settings and their personal spiritual journey.

**To book your place at this event** please contact; **01902-399 888 / 01902-711 604**

## **SUNDAY EVENING TALKS London Inter Faith Centre**

**SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IN THE 21ST CENTURY** Sundays, 6.00-7.30 pm

**London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG**

**18 May Dr Gavin D'Costa** *Pope Francis on Spirituality and Interfaith Relations*

**2 November Revd Marcus Braybrooke** *From Interfaith to Interspirituality*

**Further details** [www.londoninterfaith.org.uk](http://www.londoninterfaith.org.uk)

Entrance Free / Suggested Donation £5. Light Refreshments Available

## **OXFORD FRIENDSHIP WALK OF FAITHS**

**Thursday 12 June, 5.45-8.00 pm** [www.oxcof.org.uk/](http://www.oxcof.org.uk/)

Join us as we walk from the Oxford Jewish Centre in Jericho, via the Churches of St Giles and St Mary the Virgin in the High Street, to the Central Oxford Mosque in Cowley. This annual Walk has taken place since 2002. It is a sign and witness to the city and the world that people of all faiths and none can walk peacefully together and share food and friendship.

There are pauses for prayers and meditations from many faith traditions on the way. Halfway refreshments are provided by Christians in Radcliffe Square, and the Walk concludes with the sharing of food at the Mosque prepared by the Moslem and Jewish communities of the city.

**Reports and photos of previous Years' Walks** [http://www.oxcof.org.uk/?page\\_id=109](http://www.oxcof.org.uk/?page_id=109)

## **34th CONGRESS OF**

### **THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

You are invited to join over 300 delegates to the August 2014 IARF Events in Birmingham

### **CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

**24-27 August, Sunday-Wednesday, Elgar Hall of the University of Birmingham**

**Karen Armstrong** will deliver keynote address to Congress

**His Grace Bishop Angaelos**, General Bishop of Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom, will give the plenary address on the topic ***How Not to Liberate the World***

There will a parallel young adult programme which will join us on

visits to Religious Centres in Birmingham including the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (which fed 5,000 at the Barcelona Parliament of the World's Religions).  
Preceded by **The International Association of Liberal Religious Women Congress**

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## **RAISING OUR VOICES FOR CHANGE TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

**20-23 August Principal venue: Jurys Inn Birmingham**

**Details** Richard Boeke for the IARF Congress Host Committee [www.ialrw.org](http://www.ialrw.org) or [www.iarf.net](http://www.iarf.net)  
**To join the British Chapter of IARF** Please send your cheque for £15 or more to IARF BRITISH CHAPTER c/o Jeffery Teagle, Treasurer, 15 Lordsfield Gardens, Basingstoke RG25 3EW

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## **GLOBALISATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD INITIATIVE**

[www.GCGI.info.org](http://www.GCGI.info.org)

**1-4 September, Monday-Thursday, Waterperry House near Oxford**

Includes a dinner at Harris Manchester College, honouring Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh, Leader of the Guru Nanak Nishkam.

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## **FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

### **TOGETHER IN SERVICE FUND**

The Together in Service Fund, a programme supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government and administered by FaithAction, was launched in November.

It will be making up to £160,000 available over two years in small grants of £2,000 or £5,000 to facilitate new multi-faith social action at the local level.

Grants will be available on a 1:1 match-funding basis to 'constituted bodies'.

**Closing date for the next round of applications 5.00 pm, Monday 26 May.**

**Further details** about funding, including eligibility, how to apply, and the full schedule of closing dates [www.togetherinservice.net/funding/](http://www.togetherinservice.net/funding/).

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### **CHURCH URBAN FUND MUSTARD SEED PROGRAMME**

The Mustard Seed Grant programme run by the Church Urban Fund aims to provide grants of up to £5,000 to enable churches and faith-based organisations to engage in social action, by supporting them to initiate or develop community work.

**Details of criteria for grants and how to apply** [www.cuf.org.uk/how-apply](http://www.cuf.org.uk/how-apply).

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### **COMIC RELIEF STRONGER COMMUNITIES GRANTS**

Comic Relief's grants programme now has five themes, one of which is 'Stronger Communities'. Grants for the Stronger Communities theme are managed by Local Community Foundations and range in size from £1,000 to £10,000 per year. Priority is given to small, locally-based groups or organisations in areas of disadvantage that have a clear understanding of the needs of their community and are undertaking actions as a means of addressing these needs. Anyone wishing to apply for a Local Communities grant should contact their local community foundation.

**Further details** [http://ukcommunityfoundations.org/programmes/comic\\_relief/](http://ukcommunityfoundations.org/programmes/comic_relief/).

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## **TRAINING**

### **OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ACTION**

**WRITING SUCCESSFUL FUNDING APPLICATIONS 28 MARCH, 9.30 am-4.30 pm,**  
**The Old Court House, Floyds Row, St Aldates, Oxford OX1 1SS (01865-251 946)**

Bidding for funding is extremely competitive and it is crucial that voluntary sector organisations understand what makes a successful application. This comprehensive one-day course will help you identify what funding sources are out there and take you through

the necessary steps to evidence the need and measure the outcomes of your project.

A vital course for generating income in today's tough market.

**Fee £65 members, £85 non-members**

**Details [www.ocva.org.uk/](http://www.ocva.org.uk/)**

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## **THE CONSULTATION INSTITUTE, CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE**

**The Consultation Institute, Centre of Excellence, Baystrait House**

**Station Road, Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 8AL**

### **CONSULTING THE CUSTOMER - FACT OR FANTASY?**

**Tuesday 8 April, Hotel Russell Square, London**

Despite all the books and the wise words of management gurus, companies and public bodies that genuinely consult their customers properly are rare. Far more organisations go through the motions, but those who seriously listen stand out. This roundtable is an opportunity to hear the key ingredients of best practice customer consultation - and to explore how to make it work well.

**Fee** Member £139.00 +VAT / Non-member £179.00 +VAT

**To book** 01767-318 350; [info@consultationinstitute.org](mailto:info@consultationinstitute.org)

### **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & THE GROWTH AGENDA**

**Wednesday 25 June, London, venue to be confirmed**

Amid all the huffing and puffing about the need for bigger and better infrastructure, one senses a tension between the aspirations of the growth-lobby and the protective instincts of middle England to hold what it has – and fight hard to defend its green and pleasant land. The dilemma drives the debate on fracking, wind farms, energy-from-waste plants as well as nuclear power stations, airports, roads and railways. On all these as well as housing and more local infrastructure, community groups can be vocal and formidable; they are adept at using the media, the political process and even the Courts to delay or frustrate ambitious schemes. New techniques such as social media are changing the landscape of public engagement.

How can developers and project promoters respond to these pressures?

Is strategic infrastructure planning possible with securing better support from the general public?

Can the public be consulted professionally without deteriorating into a NIMBY-style battle?

To address these and related questions, join us in a serious seminar to hear experienced and relevant speakers and to take time to consider how best to square a difficult circle as economic growth moves up the agenda.

**Fee** Member £179.00 / Non-member £229.00

**To book** 01767-318 350; [martinr@consultationinstitute.org](mailto:martinr@consultationinstitute.org)

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## **AND ALSO...**

**Sacred Music Radio [www.sacredmusicradio.org/](http://www.sacredmusicradio.org/)**

An internet radio station specifically designed to showcase the many varieties of sacred music from around the world. Its vision was inspired by Hazrat Inayat Khan, the founder of an interfaith charity. World sacred music shares the purpose of transcending, uniting, and elevating the human spirit. Sacred Music Radio's aim is to promote harmony between the spiritual traditions of the world by promoting this genre of music.

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# 2014 INTERFAITH CALENDAR AND INFORMATION

## APRIL

8 April

**RAMANAVAMI RAMA NAVAMI** *Hindu* Birthday of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu.

8 April

**HANAMATSURI** *Japanese Buddhist* Birthday of the Buddha, fixed by Mahayana Buddhists in 565 BCE. Pure Land Buddhists also celebrate the Buddha's birthday at this time.

12 April

**LAZARUS SATURDAY** *Orthodox Christian* In the week before the Crucifixion this commemorates Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead at Bethany, which looks forward to Christ's own Resurrection on the first Easter day.

13 April

**MAHAVIRA JAYANTI** (599 BCE) *Jain* Birthday of the last Tirthankara, or great teacher and model for Jains.

13 April

**PALM SUNDAY** *Christian* The Sunday before Holy Week (14-19 April). Recalls Christ's entry into Jerusalem, where later he would be arrested and crucified.

14 April

**VAISAKHI/BAISAKHI** *Sikh* New Year Festival. In 1699, on Vaisakhi, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the Order of the Khalsa. Five men were prepared to offer their lives when the Guru asked for volunteers.

15 April

**LORD'S EVENING MEAL** *Jehovah's Witness* Observed annually after sundown on Nisan 14. Although only a few thousand worldwide profess to have the heavenly hope, this observance is precious to all members. It is an occasion when all can reflect upon the superlative love of Jehovah God and Jesus Christ.

**HANUMAN JAYANTI** *Hindu* The festival recalls the birth of Lord Rama's supreme devotee, the monkey-headed Hanuman, whose feats figure in the Ramayana epic.

15-22 April

**PASSOVER / PESACH** *Jewish* Commemorates the liberation of the Children of Israel and their Exodus from slavery in Egypt. The highlight is the Seder meal, when the story of their deliverance is recounted. Matzah (unleavened bread), is eaten throughout the festival, as are other foods that contain no leaven (yeast).

17 April

**MAUNDY THURSDAY / GREAT THURSDAY** *Christian* Recalls the Last Supper, at which Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, and blessed bread and wine and commanded His disciples to remember Him whenever they did this.

18 April

**GOOD FRIDAY / GREAT FRIDAY** *Christian* Commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. Although essentially a sombre day, it is called 'Good' since, for Christians, it is the ultimate example of God's sacrifice when Jesus gave up His life for the world.

20 April

**PASCHA / EASTER** *Christian* The most important festival of the Christian year. Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. A vigil is kept during the preceding night and the resurrection celebrated with the lighting of candles and the greeting 'Christ is risen'.

21 April

**FIRST DAY OF RIDVAN** *Baha'i* Although Baha'is observe the whole 12 days of Ridván (21 April-2 May), they are required to refrain from work only on the 1st, 9th (29 April), and 12th (2 May) days. The first day of Ridván is the only day with a specific time for its observation: around 3.00pm, the approximate time Baha'u'llah told his followers about his mission.

23 April

**ST GEORGE'S DAY** *Christian* (c. 275/281-23 April 303 AD), born in Lydda, Palestine, a soldier in the Roman army, later venerated as a Christian martyr. He became an officer in the Roman army in the Guard of Diocletian. In hagiography, Saint George is one of the most

venerated saints in the Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, and the Oriental Orthodox churches, and is regarded as one of the most prominent military saints.

## 27 April

**YOM HASHOAH** *Jewish* The Hebrew date is 27th Nisan, kept on this date this year. Introduced in 1953, it is one of only four official days to have been added to the calendar in more than 2000 years. It is that important. Yom HaShoah is the Jewish Community's day for internal reflection, the opportunity to educate its own children, to unite in passing on the torch of remembrance, to honour the victims of the Shoah (Nazi genocide), and to recognise the achievements of its survivors and refugees who have given so much to our society.

## MAY

### 1 May

**BELTANE - SAMHAIN** *Wicca / Pagan* Northern and Southern hemispheres Beltane marked the beginning of the pastoral summer season, when livestock were driven out to the summer pastures, with rituals, mainly involving the symbolic use of fire, held to protect them from harm, natural and supernatural. There were also rituals to protect crops, dairy products and people, and to encourage growth. The *sí* (often described as 'the spirits') are thought to be especially active at Beltane (as at Samhain) and the goal of many Beltane rituals is to appease the *sí*. Beltane was a spring-time festival of optimism during which fertility ritual again was important, perhaps connecting with the waxing power of the sun.

### 5 May

**YOM HA'ATZMAUT** *Jewish* Literally 'Independence Day', it is the national day of Israel, commemorating the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948. It is celebrated on 5th of Iyar according to the Hebrew calendar. Yom Ha'atzmaut is preceded by Yom Hazikaron, the Israeli 'Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Remembrance Day'.

### 15-18 May

**THERAVADIN / NEW YEAR** *Buddhist* Theravāda is the oldest surviving branch of Buddhism. The word is derived from the Sanskrit sthaviravada, and literally means the Teaching of the Elders. It is relatively conservative (according to Dr Rupert Gethin, it is closer to early Buddhism than other existing Buddhist traditions). The celebration of the New Year recalls a new commitment to life.

### 18 May

**LAG B'OMER** *Jewish* A minor Jewish holiday falling on the 18th day of Iyar, the 33rd day of the Omer. The festival, celebrating mystical revelation, and marking the death of the mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, also recalls the first fall of manna. It is often celebrated with bonfires. This year Lag b'Omer falls on the evening of 17 May, and 18 May.

### 14 May

**VISAKHA PUJA - BUDDHA DAY** *Buddhist* An extremely important day in Buddhist tradition; on it the Buddha was born, and 35 years later awoke to the unexcelled right self-awakening, and another 45 years later passed away into total nibbana. The day is called Visakha Puja, since all these events took place on the full-moon day in May, when the moon is in the Visakha asterism.

### 23 May

**DECLARATION OF THE BAB** *Baha'i* Marking the inception of the Bahá'í Faith, 23 May, 1844. In 1783, Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í (1743-1826), a learned man, began, aged 40, to travel through Persia teaching that the advent of a great Day was drawing near, which would see the advent of the Qá'im, the Promised One of Islam. As he spread this message, his knowledge and wisdom impressed many clergy and secular leaders and he gathered to him a group of eager students, among them a gifted young man named Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí (1793-1843), who became Shaykh Ahmad's favoured pupil and eventual successor.

### 27 May

**LAILAT AL MIRAJ** *Islam* Mohammed's Night Journey is described in the Koran as a journey to the Farthest Mosque, in earliest traditions, the exact location was not specifically stated to be Jerusalem (scholars still debate if it was ever intended to be). Muslim tradition describes the journey as having taken place from the Kaba in Mecca to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where he ascended to heaven. On the night of Laylat al-Miraj, children are the primary focus, coming to

the mosque to be told the story of Mohammed's Night Journey. A session of prayer that also involves adults is concluded with a feast of treats.

## 29 May

**ASCENSION OF JESUS** *Christian* Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus called His apostles together on the Mount of Olives, outside Jerusalem, being taken up from there, a cloud hiding Him from their sight. As the disciples were watching Him ascend, two angels dressed in white robes stood beside them and asked why they were looking into the sky.

**ASCENSION OF BAHA'U'LLAH** *Baha'i* Commemorating the anniversary of the death of the founder of the Baha'i faith, **Baha'u'llah**, and his teachings. He died peacefully on the morning of 29 May 1892 and now lies buried in Bahji, in a shrine surrounded by a stunning garden, designed to symbolise the order of the world in the future.

## JUNE

### 4-5 June

**SHAVUOT** *Jewish* Celebrating the giving of the Torah to the Jews. The Talmud relates how God gave the Ten Commandments to the Jews on the sixth night of the Hebrew month of Sivan. *Shavuot* always falls 50 days after the second night of Passover. The 49 days between are known as the Omer.

### 8 June

**PENTECOST** *Christian* Pentecost is the festival when Christians celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is celebrated on the Sunday 50 days after Easter (the name comes from the Greek *pentekoste*, fiftieth).

### 14 June

**LAILAT AL BARA'AH** *Islam* The night of seeking pardon and repentance from Allah for committed sins. This Islamic festival marks the night when Allah places each person according to his or her deeds. God grants forgiveness to people who repent their sins.

### 15 June

**TRINITY SUNDAY** *Western Christian* The first Sunday after Pentecost in the Western Christian liturgical calendar. Celebrating the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the three Persons of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**ALL SAINTS** *Orthodox Christian* The first Sunday after Pentecost kept by the Orthodox Church as the day commemorating all the Saints, men and women, known or unknown, who have been added to the choirs of the Saints, and will be added, from the time of Adam until the end of the world, who have glorified God by their lives. The Apostles' Fast, begins on 16 June and ends on the Feast of St Peter and St Paul, 29 June.

### 16 June

**GURU ARJAN DEV MARTYRDOM** *Sikh* Since 1606, each 16 June Sikhs have commemorated the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru and the first Sikh Martyr. Before his arrest, torture and Martyrdom, the Sikhs had nothing to do with weapons or violence, as all the Sikh Gurus had taught the message of compassion, love, dedication, hard work, worship of one God and the commitment to peace and harmony for all the peoples of the world.

### 21 June (Summer Solstice)

**LITHA** *Wicca / Pagan* northern hemisphere Most agricultural societies have marked the high point of summer in some way. On this day, the longest of the year, usually around 21, 22 June (21, 22 December in the southern hemisphere), the sun reaches its zenith in the sky, the point at which the sun seems to just hang there without moving. 'Solstice' comes from the Latin *solstitium*, 'sun stands still'. The travels of the sun were marked and recorded. Stone circles such as Stonehenge were oriented to highlight the rising of the sun on the day of the summer solstice.

### 28 June

**RAMADAN BEGINS** *Islam* During the blessed month of Ramadan, Muslims all over the world abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs during the daylight hours. As a time to purify the soul, refocus attention on God, and practice self-sacrifice, Ramadan is much more than just not eating and drinking.

### 29 June

**ST PETER AND ST PAUL'S DAY** *Christian* Feast Day of Sts Peter and Paul, Apostles and two great pillars of the Christian Church. The first twelve chapters of Acts focus on Peter and

chapters 13-28 focus on Paul. The *Acts of the Apostles* was written by St Luke the Evangelist, as the second part of his great work written to Theophilus. The first part was St Luke's Gospel. For Orthodox Christians today marks the end of the Apostles' Fast.

## JULY

### 9 July

**MARTYRDOM OF THE BAB *Baha'i*** The Báb had been imprisoned for about three years before his death was finally ordered. All attempts to crush his fledgling religion failed and the violent deaths of many of the Báb's principal followers strengthened rather than extinguished the faith of those who remained. Muhammad Shah had not executed the Báb, but after the Shah's death his successor Násiri'd-Dín Shah ruled. Lacking experience, he relied heavily. One of his advisors, Mírzá Taqí Khan, believed that the upheavals wracking the country could only be stilled through the Báb's death.

### 13 July

**ASALHA PUJA DAY *Buddhist*** Known as Asanha Bucha in Thailand, this is a Theravada Buddhist festival, taking place on the full moon of the eighth lunar month. Also known as Dharma Day, it is one of Theravada Buddhism's most important festivals, celebrating the Buddha's first sermon in which he set out the doctrine that had come to him following his enlightenment. This sermon, referred to as setting into motion the wheel of dharma, encapsulates the teaching in the four noble truths: suffering (*dukkha*); suffering is caused by craving (*tanha*); a state (*nirvana*) beyond suffering and craving; and the way to nirvana via the eightfold path.

### 13-15 July

**OBON *Shinto* ULAMBANA *Buddhist*** The Japanese Festival of the Dead when the souls of the departed briefly return home for a while. Obon is a Buddhist tradition but in the native Shinto faith the Mitama (soul of a deceased person) Festival is in association with Obon. Although a place of Shintoism, at the Yasukuni Shrine many of the traditional Obon celebrations happen, particularly Bon Odori (dances) and Toro Nagashi (placing paper lanterns in the water). The only difference is the Mikoshi (portable Shinto shrine) which is marched up to the shrine swaying and chanting.