

Light Over the Mountains

Voice of the Blue Mountains Interfaith Group

Volume 4 - March/April 2013

Statement of Purpose for The Blue Mountains Interfaith Group

We come together as representatives of the different religious and spiritual traditions in the Blue Mountains and we seek to work together on causes of common interest, such as the Care and Celebration of the Environment.

Each of us loves our own faith while respecting others who equally love their's.

We recognize the Truth, that is a deep transcendent reality common to all, coming to us by different historical, scientific and cultural paths. We believe that we are spiritually enriched by our mutual sharing.

We are ready to share that richness more widely in the Mountains, catching a glimpse of sacred wonder in our Mountain surrounds.

Editorial

This year we are celebrating the Bi-Centenary of the Crossing of the Blue Mountains by Lawson, Blaxland and Wentworth in 1813. For 25 years the colony was hemmed into the Sydney Basin until the way was found to the rich grazing lands to the west, and eventually to the settlement of the whole continent of Australia. Remembering the historic event arouses deep reflection on other "Crossing Divides", such as Aboriginal Reconciliation, the embrace of multiculturalism and our own inter-faith dialogue. Another crossing, the reaching of the individual to the one in pain, is compassion. This is the theme for the current issue of *Light Over the Mountains*.

The Dalai Lama has stated:

"My engagement with the world's religions has convinced me that, whatever the differences of doctrine, on the level of actually living a religious life or fulfilling a spiritual aspiration, there is a striking degree of shared understanding. In particular, all the great religions stress compassion as a fundamental spiritual value. Whether it is in scriptural prescriptions for leading a good life, in the ideal of life that is admired and propagated, or in the exemplary lives of many of the remarkable individuals of different faiths, past and present, I have no doubt that compassion lies at the heart of all these religions".

Towards The True Kinship of Faiths

In the Gospels, Jesus is often described as having compassion – on the sick, on the hungry, on a leaderless crowd. The Greek word of the original reads *esplangchnithe*, a harsh word conveying the churning

over of one's stomach, a gut feeling in tune with the hurt of the other person. As Sue Searle here points out compassion goes beyond mere sympathy or empathy: it gives rise to decisive action.

The Greek noun *splangchnon*, the inner organs, the seat of feelings, recalls the Hebrew of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible). The root consonants R-H-M gives us *rehem* (womb, intestines) and then *rahamin* for compassion, tender affection, love. Another Semitic language, Arabic, uses the same three consonant root in a number of cognate words of the same range of meanings. Above all are the two pre-eminent titles of Allah.

The Qur'an opens with the invocation, which often prefaces religious instruction,

Bismillahi er-Rahmani er-Rahimi

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate"

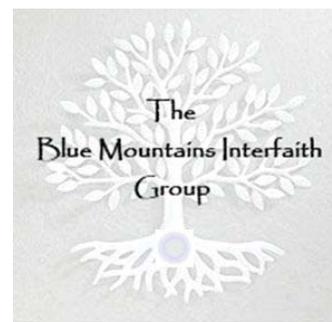
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HINDUISM
 This is the sum of duty:
 do not do to others what would
 cause pain if done to you.
Mahabharata 5:1517

BUDDHISM
 Treat not others in ways
 that you yourself would
 find hurtful.
*The Buddha
 Udana-Varga 5:18*

CONFUCIANISM
 One word which sums up the
 basis of all good conduct...
 loving-kindness.
 Do not do to
 others what
 you do not
 want done
 to yourself.
*Confucius
 Analects 15:23*

BAHA'I FAITH
 Lay not on any soul a load
 that you would not wish to
 be laid upon you, and
 desire not for
 anyone the
 things you
 would not
 desire for
 yourself.
*Baha'u'llah,
 Gleanings*



ISLAM
 Not one of you truly believes
 until you wish for others what
 you wish for yourself.
The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith



TAOISM
 Regard your neighbour's gain
 as your own gain, and your
 neighbour's loss as your own loss.
Lao Tzu, Tai Shing Kan Ying Pien, 213-218



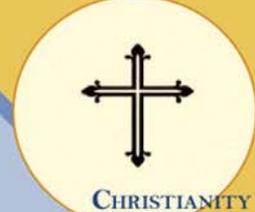
JUDAISM
 What is hateful to you,
 do not do to your neighbour.
 This is the whole Torah;
 all the rest is commentary.
Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a



SIKHISM
 I am a stranger to no one;
 and no one is a stranger
 to me. Indeed, I am
 a friend to all.
Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299



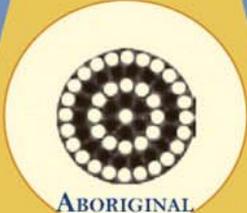
JAINISM
 One should treat all
 creatures in the world
 as one would like
 to be treated.
Mahavira, Sutakritanga



CHRISTIANITY
 In everything, do to others
 as you would have them
 do to you; for this is the
 law and the prophets.
Jesus, Matthew 7:12



ZOROASTRIANISM
 Do not do unto others whatever
 is injurious to yourself.
Shayast-na-Shayast 13:29



**ABORIGINAL
 SPIRITUALITY**
 Our identity with land is sacred and unique.
 We have a very strong sense of community.
 All persons matter. All of us belong.
Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, Dadimi



UNITARIANISM
 We affirm and promote respect
 for the interdependent
 web of all existence
 of which we are a part.
Unitarian principle



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Charter for Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred or denigrating others – even our enemies – is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women – to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion – to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate – to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures – to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity – to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings, even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

Crafted by the Council of Conscience, a multi-faith multi-national group of thinkers and leaders

Buddhist Compassion

The Buddha taught that to realise enlightenment, a person must develop two qualities: wisdom and compassion. Wisdom and compassion are sometimes compared to two wings that work together to enable flying, or two eyes that work together to see deeply.

Our compassion is our Buddha seed or Buddha nature, our potential to become a Buddha. It is because all living beings possess this seed that they will all eventually become Buddhas. “Human beings, have a great opportunity to develop their Buddha nature. Through meditation we can extend and deepen our compassion until it transforms into the mind of great compassion – the wish to protect all living beings without exception from their suffering”.

(The Dalai Lama)

A Parable

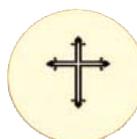
I would like to share a parable which I think demonstrates the effectiveness of compassion over sympathy and empathy. A man was walking along and fell into a pit. It was just deep and steep enough so he could not climb out. He called and called and finally someone heard him. He explained what happened and the person said, “Man, I feel your pain!” and sat down and started crying over the situation (Sympathy). Shortly another person came by, saw the first person sitting on the edge of the pit crying, heard the man calling from below and looked over the edge. The man in the pit saw him, told him what happened and the second person said, “Oh man, I feel your pain!” and jumped in (Empathy). A short time later a third person came by, saw the one sitting at the edge of the pit crying and heard the second man in the pit calling out. He leaned over and the man who first fell into the pit explained what happened. The third person said, “Man, hold on, I will be right back.” The third person (Compassion) went to get a rope and pulled both out of the pit. Everyone rejoiced! Compassion took action while Sympathy and Empathy could not see past the pit.

Contributed by Sue Searle, Christian Scientist

A Prayer

May the Spirit of Silence open our hearts to
God's transforming love;
May the Spirit of Compassion help us to feel
for the sufferings of others;
May the Spirit of Love melt the cold hearts of
those who trample on human rights;
May the Spirit of Beauty teach us to treasure
Mother Earth;
May the Spirit of Wisdom help us to learn
from spiritual teachers of every faith;
May the Spirit of Patience and Endurance
strengthen the oppressed and those
who are exiled from their homes;
May the Spirit of Courage strengthen
those who speak for those
whose voice is never heard;
May the Spirit of Non-violence bring healing,
peace and justice to those who
live in countries torn apart by conflict;
May the Spirit of Unity help us to welcome people
of every country and creed as brothers
and sisters.

Marcus Braybrooke



CHRISTIANITY

In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Jesus, Matthew 7:12

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32 TNIV

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

1 Peter 3:8 TNIV

Fourth Mindfulness Training: Awareness of Suffering

Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering. We are committed to finding ways, including personal contact, images and sounds, to be with those who suffer, so we can understand their situation deeply and help them transform their suffering into compassion, peace and joy.

(*Interbeing* by Thich Nhat Hanh)

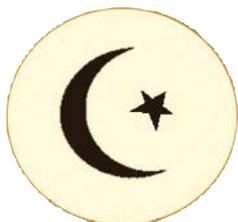
Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim

The Qur'an opens with the invocation of the two pre-eminent names of Allah. Both are derived from the verb *rahima* "to love, to show tenderness and mercy". The two nouns are not merely the repetition of the one attribute for the sake of emphasis, but the pairing of two different attributes.

Rahman conveys the idea of fullness and extensiveness, and indicates the greatest preponderance of the quality of love and mercy, which comprehends the entire universe. *Rahim* denotes the idea of constant repetition and giving of liberal rewards to those who deserve it.

Ibn al-Qayyim: *Rahman* circumscribes the quality of abounding love inherent in and inseparable from the concept of God's Being; whereas *Rahim* expresses the continuous manifestation of that grace in, and its effect on, His creation, i.e. an aspect of His activity. (*Manar* 1, 48).

Shaykh Ibrahim Ansari: *Rahim* is God making contact with you. *Rahman* is general: it is broad and active; *Rahim* is specific: it is more directing of mercy. They work as a pair, like Mother and Father. All things come from *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim*: they are the progenitors of the universe (*Getting out of the Way: Living Sufism* p.58-9).



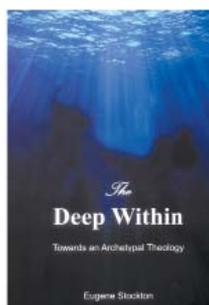
ISLAM

Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.

The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith

God, the Exalted, says: "Therefore, as for the orphan, do not oppress (him). And as for him who asks, do not chide (him)".

(*Quran* 93:9-10)



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The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying by Sogyal Rinpoche, one of the foremost interpreters of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.

HOW TO AWAKEN LOVE AND COMPASSION

Loving Kindness: Unsealing the Spring

When we believe that we don't have enough love in us, there is a method for discovering and invoking it. Go back in your mind and recreate, almost visualise, a love that someone gave you that really moved you, perhaps in your childhood.

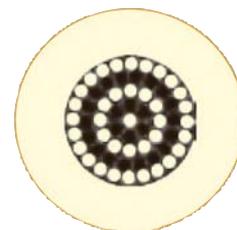
Traditionally you are taught to think of your mother and her lifelong devotion to you, but if you find this problematic, you could think of your grandmother or grandfather, or anyone who had been deeply kind to you in your life. Remember a particular instance when they really showed you love, and you felt their love vividly.

Now let that feeling arise again in your heart, and infuse you with gratitude. As you do so, your love will go out naturally to that person who evoked it. You will remember then that even though you may not always feel that you have been loved enough, you were loved genuinely once. Knowing that now will make you feel again that you are, as that person made you feel then, worthy of love and really lovable.

Let your heart open now, and let love flow from it; then extend this love to all beings. Begin with those who are closest to you, then extend your love to friends and to acquaintances, then to neighbours, to strangers, then even to those whom you don't like or have difficulties with, even those whom you might consider as your "enemies" and finally to the whole universe. Let this love become more and more boundless. Equanimity is one of the four essential facets; with loving kindness, compassion, and joy of what the Teachings say form the entire aspiration of compassion. The all inclusive, unbiased view of equanimity is really the starting point and the basis of the path of compassion.

You will find that this practise unseals a spring of love, and by that unsealing in you of your own loving kindness, you will find that it will inspire the birth of compassion. For as Maitreya said in one of the teachings he gave Asanga: "*The water of compassion courses through the canal of loving kindness.*"

Contributed by Pamela Crocci



ABORIGINAL SPIRITUALITY

Our identity with land is sacred and unique.
We have a very strong sense of community.
All persons matter. All of us belong.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, Dadirri

My Neighbour?

The second great commandment, flowing from the first (“Love God with all you have”) is “love your neighbour as yourself” (or as the Dalai Lama would add “because he is yourself”). Who is my neighbour? Jesus explained in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He, a foreigner in an unfriendly country, went to the aid of a mugged man. He saw his neighbour as one nearby in need of help, regardless of race or religion. His compassion moved him to take practical measures, at whatever cost to himself, to ensure the well-being of his neighbour.

Luke 10:25-37

The Prayer of St. Francis

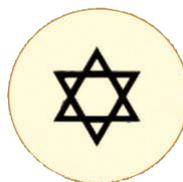
Let us pray.

Lord, make us channels of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

We go in peace to love and serve.



Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me (Mark 9:37).



JUDAISM

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary.

Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a

“The existence of the entire world then depends on this virtue [Our capacity to imitate God’s compassion and other positive attributes]. Hence, whoever follows in this path will bear the Divine image on this person; while whoever refrains from exercising this virtue and questions himself, ‘why should I do good to others?’ removes himself from God, the Blessed One”.

“Loving Kindness” by the Chafetz Chaim, chapter 2

Compassion in Judaism

Compassion is held to be one of the central foundations of Jewish teaching. However, like so many of our fellow travellers, time and again we fail in our quest to live a loving and compassionate life. Many reasons contribute to our failure in this regard, but none is more compelling than our inability to recognise our own woundedness which, in turn, gives rise to an inability to treat ourselves and, by logical extension, others, with compassion and understanding.

Unless we are able to see with clarity, the pain, the sorrow and the darkness that dwell inside us all; unless we are able to accept the existence of our wounds and open them to the light of eternal love and compassion, we continue to project them onto others and the cycle of suffering continues. When this occurs, we find compassion difficult, if not impossible.

It is no coincidence that Jewish (and other tradition’s) teachings speak of the need to treat others as we, ourselves, would wish to be treated. That treatment must begin with oneself - not self-justification, not absolving self from responsibility to act with love towards others - but simply with the recognition and honest admission of our own need for compassion. Only then can we truly integrate the practise of compassion into our lives, rather than paying lip-service to a lofty ideal.

Contributed by Angie Moore

Depiction of Compassion

Here is portrayed Tara or Kuan Yin, the compassionate Bodhisattva, ‘who listens to every sound’ especially the cries of the poor or suffering, without responding in action:

Instead, she sits in silent meditation, losing the ego and finding true wisdom at the very core of her being. She at the same time finds the true self, the universal self which embraces the whole world. Indeed through compassion she *becomes* the whole world in an experience of non-dualism.



Asian Christians use this figure for Mary, the Mother of Mercy.

Wisdom is also portrayed, locked in embrace (Yab Yum), with Compassion (*upaya*, skill in means, her “other” face). This is the continual interplay of wisdom and compassion, which characterises one’s mindfulness of the universe.





CONFUCIANISM

One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct . . . loving-kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.

Confucius Analects 15.23

Mercius said: "All men have the mind which cannot bear [to see the suffering of] others. Now, when men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they all have a feeling of alarm and distress, not to gain friendship with the child's parents, nor to seek the praise of their neighbours and friends. From such a case, we see that a man without the feeling of commiseration is not a man".

Mencius, 2A:6. See Wing-tsit Chan (ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) (hereafter *Source Book*), p. 65.



Gospel Reflection

Lord, when was it that

We saw you hungry and gave you food?
We saw you thirsty and gave you something to drink?
We saw you a stranger and welcomed you?
We saw you sick and took care of you?
We saw you in prison and visited you?

'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

DAOISM

In meditation, go deep in the heart.
In dealing with others, be gentle and kind.

Dao De Jing 8 (Lao Tsu Tao Te Ching, translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jain English, 1972)



HINDUISM

This is the sum of duty: do not do to others that would cause pain if done to you.

Mahabharata 5:1517

A person who believes that all are his soul-mates and loves them all alike, never feels lonely. The divine qualities of forgiveness, compassion and service will make him lovable in the eyes of all. He will experience intense joy throughout his life.

YAJUR VEDA. 40.6, The Holy Vedes, Pandit Satyakam Vidyalkar, International Veda Trust, 1983, Page 261



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March 16 *Sheila Upjohn*
All shall be well – God's Answer
to Julian of Norwich

April 20 *Sr Leone Pallisier osu*
Encounters with Women in the
Gospels

May 25 (4th Sat) *Trish Watts*
Wild Creative Spirit

WINTER BREAK

September 21 *Barbara Smith*
God as Gift and Present

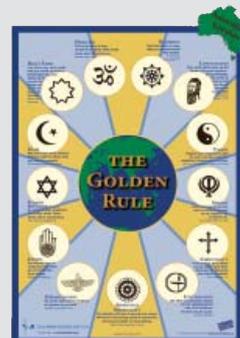
October 19 *Dr Tim O'Hearn*
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Witchcraft/Wicca

Frequently asked Questions

Q: What is a Witch/Wicca?

A: A practitioner of a nature-based religion and follows the seasonal cycles. A Wiccan/Witch believes that the divine exists within them as well as outside, and feels a direct connection with the God/des. Wiccans/Witches come from all racial, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. What we share is a loosely structured system of beliefs largely known as “Wicca”. Wiccans follow a code of conduct called the “Wiccan Rede” (An it harm none, do as thou wilt). Not all pagans are Wiccans, but all Wiccans are pagans.

Q: Are there “Black Witches”, “White Witches”, good or evil Witches?

A: Witches are just Witches. As far as “good/White” or “evil/Black” Witches are concerned, as in any religious group, some are good and some are bad. We believe that each human is responsible for their own actions. To us, evil is a choice, a bad one, that someone might make, not an deity to blame our actions upon. If someone chooses to do evil, we believe they will be punished by the laws of karma. Also, if one is working for the good of others, the same laws will reward them. What goes around comes around. The majority of Witches believe in reincarnation, and that karma can follow a person from life to life. This helps to explain why terrible things happen to people.

Q: Do you worship Satan?

A: Satan is a part of the Christian/Jewish/Muslim religions. Since we are neither Christian, Jewish nor Muslim, we do not recognize the existence of “Satan”, so it would be impossible for us to worship him/it.

Q: So why do you use that “Satanic” symbol, the Pentagram/Pentacle?

A: The pentagram, or five pointed star, is not satanic. It has been used for ages to symbolize many things. To modern Witches the pentagram means the five points correspond to the elements Air, Earth, Fire and Water with the top point corresponding to Spirit. The pentagram in a circle may represent a human with their legs and arms outstretched, surrounded by universal wisdom.

Q: Do Witches cast spells?

A: Yes. Spells are just active prayers. Spells, much like prayers, are used to as a catalyst to create change in one’s own life or the life of a loved one. Prayers are a petition to Deity to create the change. Spells are used to connect with our own divine selves, and use our own energies to create the change. Wiccans/Witches generally will not do a spell for anyone who has not asked and given them their permission. Spells such as those which use love magic to gain a specific individual, or curses, are considered “manipulative”. Any manipulative that goes against the free will of another is considered wrong.

Q: Why would anyone want to be Wiccan?

A: People are generally drawn to Wicca for several reasons. Some people feel left out of mainstream religions because of the lack of feminine divinity. For them, the Wiccan concept of the Goddess as Mother of All Living Creatures fills that lack. As a nature based religion, Wicca also appeals to those who feel a strong need to “get back to the Earth” and places great importance on protecting the environment, which we are a part of, not apart from. People drawn to the mystical find Wicca much more accommodating as we do not see anything unnatural about psychic ability or the use of magic to create needed changes in one’s life (see Spells). Another reason is our rule (rede) “An thou harm none, do what thou wilt”. This tells us that nothing is inherently wrong (sinful) unless it harms someone, *including oneself*.

Continued page 8

Affiliated Traditions and Members

Brahma Kumaris
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See Yeung Olivia Yao

Kunsang Yeshe Retreat Centre
Venerable Tencho

Ansari Sufi Order
Shaykh Ibrahim, Yasmin Mayne

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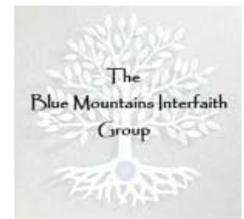
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The Thich Nhat Hanh Community
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from page 7

Q: So what do Witches DO?

A: We live. We die. Some of us have children and (most of us) pay taxes. We practice our religion without forcing it on others. Most Wiccans/Witches are not open about their religion because they fear persecution for their beliefs. There are large Wiccan churches, but most practice by themselves as Solitaries or work within small groups usually known as covens. Covens function not only as religious groups but also as extended families. We hold our ceremonies or "circles" outdoors (when we can) as we feel that being with nature brings us closer to the divinity that creates it. All that we ask is that we are allowed to practice our religion without prejudice.

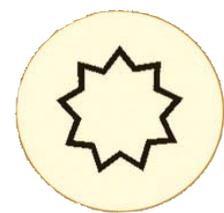
For more Information contact www.paganawareness.net.au

Book Notice

Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, Bodley Head Press, 2011

Karen Armstrong is well known for her books, *A History of God* and *The Case for God*. This her latest book is intended to contribute to "the building of a global community in which all peoples can live together in mutual respect". To this end she brought together some leaders in world religions and many others, the Council of Conscience. They reacted to a draft statement that, when revised, became the Charter of Compassion (see page 3 of this issue). Underpinning the charter is the recognition that in each major religion is a version of what is known as the Golden Rule (see page 2). This latest book is intended for individual and group reading, with suggestions for discussion, sharing and practice.

Karen starts with individuals from where they are, gradually extending their awareness to others. For example step 3 "Compassion for Yourself" leads onto "Empathy with Others", then through "Mindfulness and Action", "How Should We Speak to One Another", and finally, more difficult "Love Your Enemies".



BAHA'I FAITH

Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.

Baha'u'llah Gleanings

The Kingdom of God is founded upon equity and justice, and also upon mercy, compassion, and kindness to every living soul. Strive ye then with all your heart to treat compassionately all humankind.

Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'I World Centre, Haifa, p. 158



News Items and Advertisers

GREGORIAN CHANT

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Enquire from Father Eugene 4759 1818

CATHOLICA

We welcome people of good will who would like to join our conversation or subscribe to our daily or weekly newsletters. It is all free. We rely on donations, philanthropic support, and commissions from sales of books through Amazon, Fishpond, Garratt Publishing, Willow Publishing and the Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust to fund our endeavour. We seek to keep our website open to all people whatever their financial circumstances. Through our association with the Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust we are endeavouring to bring the work being done here in the local Christian communities to the attention of a wider global readership.

*Brian Coyne is editor and publisher of the global cyber conversation about religion and spirituality, www.catholica.com.au, based in the Blue Mountains. His wife, liturgical musician and composer, Amanda McKenna is co-publisher of Catholica.

The next edition of *Light Over the Mountains* having as its general topic "Prayer" will be published in July/August 2013, please send any copy to allan.walsh@exemail.com.au.

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