Editorial

This issue of Light Over the Mountains is about PILGRIMAGE. Pilgrimage to holy places, pilgrimages to new spaces, pilgrimage within.

A pilgrimage is a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person’s beliefs and faith, or it can be a metaphorical journey into someone’s own beliefs. To go on a pilgrimage is a tradition in all religions. Pilgrimage has an ancient lineage with the tradition proceeding the Christian era by at least a few hundred years, with places of pilgrimage being mentioned in the ancient epic – the Mahabharata.

At interfaith gatherings members make a pilgrimage into the reality of other faiths, resulting in coming together in unity, struggles with understanding, the possibility to sacrifice one’s own long held views, meeting new scripture, prayer, spiritual elation, meditation and reflection.

May our readers find spiritual leadership, sacred spaces, the opportunity to reflect on God's presence in our midst, peace, nourishment, a comfortable place to rest and absorb experiences, fellowship and fulfilment herein.

Christine U'Brien, 446ubrien@gmail.com
Jim Tulip 4758 8104
Eugene Stockton 4759 1818

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 theirs.

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.

The Pilgrimage of Remembrance

A pilgrimage is a journey and the spiritual pilgrimage is the refreshing journey of the soul back to the spiritual home, beyond sound. To embark on the journey one step away from the physical world of body and form and move to a more subtle awareness of myself. All the chatter of the mind, the opinion-based commentary on life, the unnecessary, waste thoughts. I pack them up into a mental suitcase. Gently, without force, I simply choose to drop it all.

I feel lighter so I move further away from the pulls of the physical into a dimension of light and stillness. There is no sound. Silence surrounds me and I am aware simply of ‘being’. As thoughts arise, I just observe them and let them go. No comments. The silence deepens, the peace within expands and I become aware of a loving energetic vibration within the light, like me but not me. The Divine Source is connecting to me through the silence. The love of total acceptance flows, filling me with refreshment and peace. I trust and let go. Mental constricts dissolve. I am – Om, peaceful – shanti.

Continued page 2
This is the pilgrimage of immortality, the search is over. Anytime I wish I can make this pilgrimage of remembrance, I remember my stillness, the light and the Ocean of Peace: I return home.

Brahma Kumaris. Contributed by Jessica Yuille

Pilgrimage as I practice it

My first major pilgrimage, in 1998, was from Dublin to Jerusalem, 13,000 kilometres by bicycle. This was a conventional pilgrimage to a sacred place, as identified by the Christian tradition. This pilgrimage spawned a number of others. I have also ventured by human power, foot or bicycle to the other major pilgrimage destinations of the Christian tradition: Rome from Dublin, by bicycle; and by foot along the Camino (via the French Way) to Santiago de Compostella; and St Olav’s Way and by foot from Oslo to Trondheim, in Norway (Nidaros Cathedral).

Since this journey, my ideas about and practice of pilgrimage has broadened considerably. I have made a number of pilgrimages in areas. I have a passion for walking in remote areas and I have made a number of pilgrimages in areas such as the South West Wilderness of Tasmania. In these places, I sense the presence of God most acutely. In particular the mountains are places where I have what I call the ‘long vision’, where I can see to horizons unimpeded by buildings and the like. I find that when my vision is unimpeded, so is my imagination; my best ideas are generated in these remote places, which I term my ‘cathedrals’.

One does not need to venture far away, however, to go on pilgrimage in remote areas. In the past few years I have regularly led pilgrimages to Mount Solitary here in the Blue Mountains. It takes a fair amount of effort to reach Mount Solitary and participants register that they have a great sense of satisfaction in reaching the southern escarpment, which affords stunning views to the Southern Highlands. For people of the Christian tradition, I celebrate Communion in this majestic place. Probably half of the participants on these pilgrimages to Mount Solitary are from other traditions, or none, but the sense of awe at being in this wonderful place is very apparent to all.

Mount Solitary pilgrimages are undertaken usually once a month. The diversity of people who come along is one of the rich experiences of these pilgrimages, information about which can be obtained by contacting Rev. Mel Macarthur at revmel@bigpond.com

Mel Macarthur

Every step is a pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is usually defined as a journey to holy places. But the holiest place is our own pure, clear, luminous wisdom nature. Everything we seek externally, we already have and we already are. So really, there is no need to go anywhere, or do anything. The most important pilgrimage is to the innermost depths of our mind. Our external pilgrimages are only a method to bring us unto ourselves.

Our life is a journey towards self-discovery. We can look at our life as a pilgrimage, and the stages of our life as the stations of learning, rest, relaxation; giving rise to understanding, insight, realisation...

Perhaps we have travelled physically to far-away places, or we have travelled mentally through our imagination. All of us have travelled through relationships with other people from the moment we were born. But however and wherever we have travelled, we have been transformed by the journey.

We can recall our travels and bring forth the memories of our feelings, thoughts, experiences. How did our journeys change us? What did we bring back with us that we did not have before? What has made our journey valuable and unforgettable?

Not all journeys are easy and pleasant. Perhaps we have had to face various obstacles: physical dangers, harsh weather conditions, illness, separation from the loved ones, spiritual challenges or maras (demons) as the Buddha did on his path to Awakening. Leaving people and things behind, not knowing whether we will safely return to them or whether they will wait for us. We asked of ourselves to be fearless and to tread where we had not tread before. But whether blissful or painful, these experiences have always brought us one step closer to our true nature.

Let us rejoice that – having made an external or internal pilgrimage – we have overcome the obstacles that life has thrown our way, become stronger, more resilient, more experienced, humbler and wiser.

Leonarda Kovačić

Catalyst Reflection Morning

The next reflection morning will be held on Saturday 19th November at Sacred Heart Parish Hall, Blackheath 10am-1pm

All most welcome, no need to book and morning tea provided

Loretta Brinkman will lead the morning – Between the Lines: Take some time to open the pages of your own story and discover the mystery of you!

Loretta is the Director of Mission at St Joseph’s Hospital, Auburn

Enquiries Carmel 0417 474 850
BEING WITH ULURU: a God inside
By I-LING CHEN PhD Candidate, University of Queensland

Many Taiwanese backpackers had meditative and mindful experiences during their visit to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

A meditative and mindful experience is about being in the moment, aware of the surroundings but not being judgmental about them.

This type of experience is preceded by viewing “big nature”, awe inspiring scenery and the transient beauty of a sunset or sunrise.

Visitors who had such a mindful experience often reported personal benefits such as relaxation, personal insights and vivid memories.

The landscape and nature of Central Australia is very different from that previously experienced by Taiwanese people and adds to their appreciation, engaging them in contemplation.

Research by the university involved in-depth interviews, and the visitors told interesting stories about their experiences.

One visitor described their four-hour long walk around the Rock during the heat of the day. They reported that Uluru represented a magic place pregnant with life: “I felt like I was on a pilgrimage around the huge rock and its surrounding environment.

“During my trek I felt the ‘The Rock’ was not only a stone but also a live entity, there were trees on it!

“It was unexpected and amazing that the bare rock could allow life to survive. There were pools and a whole ecology.

“Although I didn’t totally understand the history of the rock, I did think that there was a deity inside the rock, and that was the reason why the rock is so holy to the Aborigines because it is a place that is pregnant with new life.

“The thought triggered devout feelings in me, and I walked around the rock rather than climbed on it. I cherished the magic power embodied in the rock.”

A second visitor reported that among the most beautiful ways they found to experience the beauty of Uluru was from the lookouts, especially during sunset and sunrise. The changing beauty engaged them and led to a sense of relaxation and calmness: “Watching the sunrise in front of Uluru was a special experience; like looking at a performance.

“The rock was like a leading actress waiting for the sun to uncover her. The other lights and shadows were like the director, conducting the rock’s actress to display her different looks. I could feel the actress – the rock – was speaking.

“I really concentrated on the changes during the sunrise. It seemed like a spiritual art performance on a stage that was different from looking at a picture or books.

“I felt peaceful, beautiful, and nothing interrupted me. It was beyond my understanding and imagination, and gave me a sense of peace and ease.”

The travel to Uluru for Taiwanese backpackers awakened their senses and provided a rich experience that may be quite different from how it is traditionally “sold” to Australian tourists.

Most of the backpackers I interviewed were aware of the sensitivities of the local peoples and engaged with the destination.

In talking to visitors about Uluru, we should be aware that they may see it in different ways from what we are used to.


“Faith is not the clinging to a shrine but an endless pilgrimage of the heart.” — Abraham Joshua Heschel

John Bunyan (Pilgrim’s Progress)

Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather.
There’s no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.

Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories
Do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright,
He’ll with a giant fight,
He will have a right
To be a pilgrim.

Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit,
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
He’ll fear not what men say,
He’ll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.

A Scriptural Way of the Cross
Terence O’Donnell, Eugene Stockton

The Stations of the Cross painted by Terence O’Donnell from Our Lady of the Nativity Church, Lawson are here reproduced, together with appropriate prayers for public devotion.

Ideal for meditation during a Pilgrimage.

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VISIT TO JERUSALEM

A pilgrimage can be defined as visits to sacred sites. Sometimes great hardship and expense can be part of the experience, especially in days gone by when many pilgrims would have travelled on foot or horseback. However, for myself, I made a trip to Jerusalem with my parents which was just a weekend jaunt.

In 1956 I was living with my parents in Cyprus, when my father relieved a colleague who lived in Damascus whilst he and his wife went on leave for about 5 weeks. My mother and myself accompanied him on this trip. I was then in my early teens and, of course, it was a very exciting excursion with a short flight to Beirut and then by car to Damascus.

During our time in the Syrian capital, my father took advantage of a long weekend for us to travel to Jerusalem by taxi. By taxi I mean a big American car of the 1950's which held a number of passengers. I cannot remember precisely how many, but there were 2 or 3 other passengers besides us – it was the equivalent of today’s minibus.

We must have started off early in the day as we had lunch in Amman, Jordan, before crossing the River Jordan and making our way up the steep twisting road to Jerusalem, from one of the deepest places on earth to the hills on which Jerusalem stands. In those days the boundary between Jordan and Israel divided the City of Jerusalem with the Old City on the Jordan side.

We stayed in the YMCA outside the city walls, but were within walking distance to most of the sites we wished to visit. My father had been stationed in the area during WWII so knew his way around.

In those days there were not the masses of pilgrims and tourists that there are today. We visited the main sites of the Holy Sepulchre and the Via Delorosa, plus the Mount of Olives.

We also were able to visit the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. My father having been there during the War took us also to the Wailing Wall. As I remember it, we went through a doorway near the Al-Aqsa mosque and down steps to the Wailing Wall which was in a narrow street with houses on the other side. We were the only people there apart from a guard. These houses have since been knocked down to make way for a large area for Jewish worshippers and other visitors at this sacred Wall. Bethlehem was also in Jordan at that time, but because of the boundary with Israel we went a long way round in a taxi. This was well worth the visit to see the site of Jesus’s birth and also the Field of the Shepherds.

Contributed by Christine U’Brian

Another site we visited was the Garden Tomb, Though it may not be the tomb of Christ which is in the Church of The Holy Sepulchre, it does give one a good idea of what his tomb would have been like. This tomb is at the base of a cliff and the area has been made into a garden and is a quiet place for reflection.

Damascus too can be a Christian pilgrimage site to visit with its association with St. Paul. St. Paul was travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus in his persecution of Christians when he was converted through a vision of Christ a few miles from the City. In the old Souk there is still a Street Called Straight where St. Paul stayed and we were shown a window in the City wall from where he escaped.

It has been sixty years since this trip took place, but I still remember it quite vividly and am alarmed at the damage that has been done in the last few years to the historic City of Damascus.

Contributed by Christine U’Brian

The Deep Within
Towards an Archetypal Theology
Eugene Stockton

An examination of the influence of deep consciousness on our religious expression, opening out to mystical prayer. This study, from a Christian perspective, is relevant to all religious traditions.

$15.00 plus postage and handling

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The street called Straight in Damascus (the Via Recta).
Photo by Ferrell Jenkins.
THE MUSLIM HAJJ

Hajj refers to a Muslim’s pilgrimage to Mecca and is one of the five pillars of Islam. At least once in his or her lifetime, each Muslim is expected to undertake this pilgrimage to the sacred city of Islam. This holy journey is called the hajj in Arabic. While a visit to Mecca is beneficial any time of the year, it must take place during the month of Dhu al-Hijja (the last month of the Islamic year) to fulfill the requirements of the hajj.

As with the sawm (fasting), exceptions are made for those who are physically or financially unable to fulfill this obligation, and one is actually commanded not to make the hajj if to do so would cause hardship for his or her family. However, those unable to go themselves may fulfill their obligation by sending someone in their stead.

The hajj is commanded in the Quran – “And pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto God for mankind, for him who can find the way thither” (3:97) – and its rites were established by Muhammad, but Muslim tradition dates it back to Adam and Abraham, who were instructed by angels in the performance of the rites. The hajj was one of the last public acts of worship performed by Muhammad before his death.

In part, the hajj commemorates the stories of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael and it has been assigned various other meanings throughout the centuries. For many Muslims, one of the most meaningful aspects of the pilgrimage is the unifying effect of bringing together believers from all over the world to meet and worship together.

Upon arrival at the boundary of Mecca pilgrims enter the state of ihram (purity) in which they will remain throughout the hajj. Males entering this pure state don the ihram garments – two white, seamless sheets wrapped around the body – and sandals. This aspect of the rite not only signifies the state of holiness the pilgrims have entered, but it serves to contribute to a sense of equality and unity by removing visual indicators of class, wealth and culture. Requirements for women are less stringent, but they usually dress in white with only faces and hands uncovered. While in the state of ihram, pilgrims must not cut their nails or hair, engage in sexual relations, argue, fight or hunt.

When he or she enters the city of Mecca, the pilgrim first walks around the Ka’ba seven times (the tawaf, or circumambulation) while reciting the talbiya, then kisses or touches the Black Stone in the Ka’ba, prays twice towards the Station of Abraham and the Ka’ba and runs seven times between the small mountains of Safa and Marwa.

The second stage of the hajj takes place between the 8th and 12th days of Dhu al-Hijja, beginning with a sermon (khutba) at the mosque on the 7th day. On the eighth day and night, the pilgrim stays at Mina or Arafat. On the ninth day, the ritual of wuqaf (“standing”) takes place at the small hill of Jabal al-Rahma in Arafat. The pilgrim then returns to Muzdalifa, a small town within the Meccan boundaries, to stay the night.

The tenth day is Eid al-Adha (The Feast of Sacrifice), a major holiday observed by all Muslims. For those participating in the hajj, the day is spent in Mina, where the pilgrim sacrifices an animal to commemorate Abraham’s sacrifice and throws seven small stones at each of three pillars on three consecutive days (the pillars represent sins and devils). The pilgrim then returns to Mecca, where he or she once again performs the tawaf (circumambulation of the Ka’ba). The head is then shaved or the hair is trimmed, which marks the end of the state of ihram.

About 2 million Muslims complete the hajj each year. The government of Saudi Arabia has contributed significant resources to maintain the holy places and manage the crowd of pilgrims. Despite the large numbers seen in Mecca each year, only a small percentage of Muslims have fulfilled the duty. Those who have done so may add the title hajji or hajji to their names.

More Information – Mecca – Sacred Destinations
Source: http://www.religionfacts.com/hajj

Alone with none but thee, my God

Alone with none but thee, my God,
I journey on my way.
What need I fear when thou art near,
O King of night and day?
More safe am I within thy hand
than if a host should round me stand.

My destined time is known to thee,
and death will keep his hour;
did warriors strong around me throng,
they could not stay his power:
no walls of stone can man defend
when thou thy messenger dost send.

My life I yield to thy decree,
and bow to thy control
in peaceful calm, for from thine arm
no power can wrest my soul.
Could earthly omens e’er appal
a man that heeds the heavenly call?

The child of God can fear no ill,
his chosen dread no foe;
we leave our fate with thee, and wait
thy bidding when to go.
‘Tis not from chance our comfort springs.
thou art our trust, O King of kings.

NEW MEMBERS
Would you like to join our
Blue Mountain Interfaith Group?
Contact
JIM TULIP – Phone 4758 8104
Email tulipgold@bigpond.com
Pilgrimage: A Vedic-Hindu Perspective

A pilgrimage is a journey involving body, mind, heart and soul, to a sacred place as an expression of one’s devotion. It is challenging, but that very challenge and discomfort experienced evokes devotion and a deepening of one’s faith. Like all religions, the Hindu religion has many places of pilgrimage.

There are four major sites of pilgrimage. The main one and most visited is the Vaishno Devi cave in the lower Himalayas, the Trikuta Mountains at 5300 feet, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The distance to the cave from Katra, the main town, is 61 km and the last 13 km have to be done on foot. The entrance is a narrow tunnel with a cold stream which pilgrims wade through to reach the sanctum.

The next major site of pilgrimage dedicated to Durga is Varanasi where there are two temples dedicated to Durga. The Durga Mandir was built in the 16th century and the Durga Kund in the 18th century AD. The other two major sites of pilgrimage are the Chatturpur Mandir in Delhi and the Jvalamukhi Temple in Kangra, Northern India.

Places of pilgrimage increase one’s devotion and commitment to one’s faith, whatever one’s religion. Religion is merely a cultural mechanism for a personal approach to the Divine. As humans, we all share the awe and reverence associated with these places of pilgrimage. The sense of the sacred is found in all religions. By appreciating this desire of all religious traditions to connect with the Divine, in whatever form, through pilgrimage, respect for and harmony between religions can be achieved.

May there be Peace.

Contributed by: Ben & Susan de Silva

The Uniting Church in Australia:

To be a pilgrim, the dictionary tells us, is to journey, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of devotion. What the dictionary does not say is that to be a pilgrim is to be open to experience along the way. Pilgrims are ‘people of the way’.

The Uniting Church of Australia sees itself as a pilgrim church. Founded in 1977 when the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist church traditions combined, the Uniting Church (‘Uniting’: knowing that it is not complete) is notable for its openness to experience along the way, sensitive to the needs and values of society, looking for relationships among the different church traditions and responding to the multi-cultural conditions of the modern world. It finds it has much to learn from world religions other than Christianity.

The Uniting Church rejoices in the leadership that Pope Francis has been giving to people of all religious faiths. His meeting today with other religious leaders at Assisi points ahead to a modern goal for pilgrimage, for hope and prayer, and to a sacred place where all one day may express their devotion.

Jim Tulip

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

The Way (or Stations) of the Cross is a devotion of the Passion of Christ. In Catholic tradition the Way of the Cross consists of prayers and meditations on fourteen occurrences experienced by Christ on His way to the Crucifixion and burial.

During the time of the crusades (1095-1270) it became popular for pilgrims in the Holy Land to walk in the footsteps of Jesus to Calvary. In the later Middle Ages the Stations of the Cross became a popular substitute pilgrimage throughout Europe after the Moslems recaptured the Holy Land.

Devotional manuals about the Stations date from the 16th century. Particularly the Franciscans, who obtained a special indulgence from Pope Innocent XI, in 1686, for those who performed the devotion, fostered the popularity of the Stations of the Cross. Originally conducted outdoors, the Stations were allowed inside churches in the mid-18th century. Pope Clement XII in 1731 settled the number as fourteen. Today images of the Stations are a familiar feature in Catholic churches.

Pope John Paul II on Good Friday in 1991, and again in 1994, officiated at a Scriptural Way of the Cross, in the Coliseum at Rome. The traditional number of Stations is retained, but the events recalled are those referred to in the Scriptures, and have the advantage of providing a Scriptural reading upon which to meditate. Bishop Julian Porteous 2004.

(Taken from A Scriptural Way of The Cross by Terence O’Donnell and Eugene Stockton)

Eugene Stockton Sunset Rock, Lawson

Coming Event

Our Spirituality, Our Land
Sunday, 6 November, 2.30 to 4.30pm
at the Brahma Kumaris Centre
for Spiritual Learning
186 Mt. Hay Road, Leura

Come and join in a multi-faith gathering, sharing our spirituality, in reflection and ceremony.
This year the theme will be pilgrimage.
It will also include an Aboriginal smoking ceremony, Buddhist and Vedic chanting, meditation, prayer and song and dance.
The program is free of charge – all welcome.
Bring a hat and sunscreen. Afternoon tea provided.

Contributed by: Ben & Susan de Silva
Pilgrimage:

Any pilgrimage, like the Buddha’s teachings themselves should be good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end.

I also think that a pilgrimage should be easy. The easiest of pilgrimages is to think of a sacred place such as Bodh Gaya, St Peter’s in Rome or Mecca and just go there. There are many tourist groups that will assist you. The thing is, the destination (whilst important) is in my view not as significant as other factors.

For instance, I once met a person at a particularly sacred place who was drunk. Clearly, their path led them to their destination but their method or path seemed to need some refinement! So any pilgrimage is much more about the path and the process of getting there than the destination.

Other people think they have to save up some money or gather a group of others or do all sorts of things before they can begin their pilgrimage. Such people don’t understand that a pilgrimage, any pilgrimage, can only start from where you are right now and that you will never have any other resources than what you already have right now.

To my mind there is a basic contradiction that lies at the heart of any pilgrimage. That is, any pilgrimage must have a beginning, a middle and an end, and we know from the Buddha’s teachings that any activity related to impermanence is by and large unsatisfactory. What we really want from a pilgrimage is an experience that will enable us to transcend in some way the limitations of beginnings, middles and ends.

Really, whether we like it or not we are already on a pilgrimage. We are all born, we are all travelling on the same river that will take each of us to our own death. We know this. We cannot avoid this. The only thing we can do is make the pilgrimage from birth to death as painless and as meaningful as we can and then not reach our destination as a drunk or worse!

So if we know this and take this issue of pilgrimage seriously: we ride the rapids of the river and enjoy the quiet places or perhaps even relax on some peaceful lake on our way to our inevitable destination. With a clear mind and purposeful actions we can have the satisfaction of knowing that we have mastered the river of life and freed ourselves from the tyranny of fear of what might follow.

Perhaps it might make you feel more comfortable to think that there is some divine hand guiding your every move and reaction while you complete your pilgrimage or that there is some welcoming place for you to go to once this life’s portion of the pilgrimage is completed. I think it is easier for many people to think this way rather than not think this way, but really I don’t think it matters so much.

If we think like this then there is something we can be very sure of. That is, that every person we meet, whether good or bad, helpful or unhelpful, is on the same pilgrimage irrespective of what he/she might believe. Belief isn’t so important. Rather just knowing that everyone who is, who has been or who will be in the future . . . they all travel the same path and have the same needs. There isn’t so much to believe; rather there is just so much to observe and respond to instead.

Each of us is capable of so much and it is our very nature that we are capable of helping others. So surely this is the pilgrimage of life. Firstly, to know where we start from by knowing just who we are and what we might be able to do. Secondly, we can skillfully adapt to our circumstances as we find them and use them for maximum benefit and then, thirdly, we can reach our destination of realising that things are just fine as they are right now.

The true pilgrimage is a path of understanding that begins with knowing that we are not separate from wherever our bodies happen to be at any particular time. We may as well become comfortable with this notion because there is no possibility that we will die anywhere else other than within our own body.

Once we gain a little acceptance of this we can start to think of our perceptions of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. We begin to value each and every perception as unique in the universe and precious not because it is mine but because this is what human experience is. That uniqueness and preciousness is also tinged with poignant sadness because we must understand that this pilgrimage along with this body and all these perceptions must surely end.

So let me ask you, since you are already a pilgrim, will you retract from the reality of the pilgrim’s path that you have already begun or will you see it for what it is and walk on without fear, with a faith based on the fact that all beings are pilgrims and the confidence that our own nature is such that we can overcome any obstacle.

How can we know this? How can we overcome all these obstacles and difficulties that for many people only ever seem to increase in their lives? Well, the answer lies in the ability to distinguish what “seems” from what “is”. If we take up the challenges of life and shape that life as a pilgrimage, then, no doubt, we can overcome any obstacle.

I am not asking you to believe me. I am asking you to try this out for yourself. If you want to know where to start, then you can start where you are right now. If you can do one task, even just one, that is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end, then surely you must develop an appreciation for joys that go beyond such beginnings and endings. So if you can do it once in some minor matter, then surely it must be possible to train yourself and apply these very principles to all aspects of your life.

Before you know it you will have reached your destination and know that you have lived a life that is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end. How can that not be a happy outcome and a meaningful pilgrimage?

There is only one destination for our pilgrimage that has any real meaning. That is how do we find and realise our best selves, in whatever way we might understand this?

Source: Tenzin Lektsok, an Australian monk ordained in both the Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. He is affiliated with the Sakya Tharpa Ling (Tibetan Buddhist Centre) in Sydney.

Contributed by: Leonarda Kovačić

“The essential practices of pilgrimage are to go on the journey with an open heart, a mind that is curious, and a body that is ready to meet the elements.”

Roshi Joan Halifax, an American Zen Instructor.

Contributed by: Leonarda Kovačić
“The World’s Religions”

Huston Smith’s book *The World’s Religions* is famous in its account of many religions, and it famously begins with the introduction:

“I write these opening lines on a day widely celebrated throughout Christendom as World-Wide Communion Sunday. The sermon in the service I attended this morning dwelt on Christianity as world phenomenon. From mud huts in Africa to the Canadian tundra, Christians are kneeling today to receive the elements of the Holy Eucharist. It is an impressive picture.

Still, as I listened with half my mind, the other half wandered to the wider company of God-seekers. I thought of the Yemenite Jews I watched six months ago in their synagogue in Jerusalem; dark-skinned men sitting shoeless and cross-legged on the floor, wrapped in the prayer shawls their ancestors wore in the desert. They are there today, at least a quorum of ten, morning and evening, swaying backwards and forwards like camel riders as they recite their Torah. Yalcin, the Muslim architect who guided me through the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, has completed his month’s Ramadan fast which was beginning while we were together; but he too is praying today, five times as he prostrates himself toward Mecca. Swami Ramakrishna, in his tiny house by the Ganges at the foot of the Himalayas, will not speak today. He will continue the devotional silence that, with the exception of three days each year, he has kept for five years. By this hour U Nu is probably facing the delegations, crises, and cabinet meetings that are the lot of a prime minister, but from four to six this morning, before the world broke over him, he too was alone with the eternal in the privacy of the Buddhist shrine that adjoins his home in Rangoon. Dai Jo and Lai San, Zen monks in Kyoto, were ahead of him by an hour. They have been up since three this morning, and until eleven tonight will spend most of the day sitting immovable in the lotus position as they seek with intense absorption to plumb the Buddha-nature that lies at the center of their being.

What a strange fellowship this is, the God-seekers in every land, lifting their voices in the most disparate ways imaginable to the God of all life. How does it sound from every land, lifting their voices in the most disparate ways the Buddha-nature that lies at the center of their being.

Tonight will spend most of the day sitting immovable in the lotus position as they seek with intense absorption to plumb the Buddha-nature that lies at the center of their being.

The Sisters of the Good Samaritan cordially invite Interfaith members and friends to their annual

**ADVENT FESTIVAL**

Friday, 16 December in the Santa Maria Hall, Lawson
(enter via Somers Street, Lawson) from 10-12.30 pm
Preparation for Christmas with Song, Silence, Bible Readings, Discussion, Poems, Reflection and Quiet Music.
BYO Finger Food for shared lunch.
Donations would be gratefully received for the Good Samaritan Project – Building a New Classroom in Kiribati.

Enquiries
Peggy and Jim 4758 8104, Sister Jacinta 4757 2290

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News Items and Advertisers

**Community Dialogue – Living as a Muslim in Australia**

Saturday, 6 August, 2016

Thanks to the generosity of the Uniting Church, Springwood, Blue Mountains Interfaith Group held a very successful community dialogue with over 50 people to explore issues around living as a Muslim in Australia.

The dialogue was opened by Aunty Carol Cooper, to welcome us to country.

Speakers included Dr Rawaa Gebbara, Sheikh Haisam Farache and Dr Mahsheed Ansari, each giving their own perspective on this important issue. They were joined at the end by Susan Templeman, MP and George Winston of the Blue Mountains Refugee Group in a panel discussion of questions posed by the audience.

Underpinning this community dialogue was a potent implicit question about the nature of being Australian and the dissonance that can exist between the abstract values we purport and the manner by which we actively live our lives in relationship to others. It was suggested that the only way to deal with extremism was to work with the community, rather than a heavy-handed law and order approach. However, where there was evidence of a danger to the community, this had to be dealt with by the force of the law.

“For our readers . . .

We invite you to share with us in this venture. You may like to contribute items for future publications: inspiring or informative passages from your religious tradition, news items, upcoming events, book notices. Let us know how you would like to receive future issues (email, hard copy, mail?), how you might help in its distribution (by hand to friends, copies in your place of worship?).

A PDF copy of *Light Over the Mountains* is available, email Christine U’Brien, 446ubrien@gmail.com for your copy and to be on our mailing list. Please note that the contents of this newsletter are spiritual writings and that you should take care how you finally dispose of your copy.

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