

THE BIRMINGHAM POST

Weekend reflections

in partnership with WMFF and BCF

7 April

Celebrating Easter

When I was a child, in a family of five boys, Easter eggs were hard boiled and hand painted. In Germany jelly sticks, which melted on the hot shell, made the colouring more exciting.



Recently I was presented with an egg with the pattern of a fern on the shell. Boiled in with red union skins, with the fern leaves tied to the egg, it patterned beautifully.

Much of the excitement at home was the egg hunt through house and garden, collecting the eggs for tea. In some communities the eggs are then

rolled down a slope to see which goes the furthest unbroken, but in our home “jarpies” was the game. Eggs were bashed, sharp end and blunt end, until a winner was declared; then tea began.

But why these eggs, ‘paste’ or chocolate, fair trade or Quaker, at Easter time? If we add in lambs and chicks and spring flowers we begin to have a collection of symbols or signs of new life. Go into the church, which gives us this Easter festival, and you find an empty cross, sometimes decorated with spring flowers, an Easter Garden and in the midst a Tomb, empty, stone rolled away with the great Easter shout - “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!”

This new life has to do with Christ’s spirit of love set free to work in our world. So while enjoying our eggs, let’s celebrate new life at the same time.

Bill Anderson is Chair of the Birmingham District of the Methodist Church.

14 April

A message on Vaisakhi

The festival of Vaisakhi, named after the month on the first day of which it takes place, is celebrated by Sikhs everywhere today.

In a world full of misery, suffering, crime and evil, people think that material items are what bring happiness and contentment for themselves and their families, without realising that it is one's own deeds, whether good or bad, that will be judged by God.

What a person has sown in their life is what they will reap later. If they want to be spared from evil ways and suffering, then they should have faith in God and seek the guidance of holy people in their faith. It is only with God's blessings that a person will have success.

Saints are sent into this world with the blessings of God and they perform their duties and are of benefit to all on this earth. Saints help and guide people and in sharing their problems show by example the correct path to follow.

God is the creator of all. If we accept His teaching, then perhaps some of the conflicts and disputes that we see and hear about every day may stop and we can all live together on this wonderful earth. We should remember the sacrifices made by our Teachers, Prophets, Saints and Gurus so that we may live better.

This day promises us that, if we live a life following God's way, then we will receive His blessings and He will be with us in all that we do.



***Jatinder Birdi**, is Chair of the Warwick District Faith Forum and works as a tax specialist in Leamington Spa. He is one of the organisers of the Leamington Babe Ke Gurdwara, and of the gurdwara still under construction on Hockley Hill in Birmingham (see photo above).*

21 April

A Testimony

Having been asked to support a project in South Africa, I studied the region's social history and later attended a retreat for internal renewal. Its culmination was a time when I repented for my life's misdeeds.

Feeling that Heaven's door had only slightly opened for me, I asked God, "What more should I repent for?" The answer came instantly, "For the sins of the white man against the African people."

I repented for the way my race had so awfully mistreated the people of Africa, especially for the Slave Trade. God's doorway opened wide and uncontrollable sobs of sorrow flowed from the depth of my being. I could feel the anguish that slavery had caused its victims; could feel the pain God felt over the suffering of his children.

In awe, I left there with the desire to share my experience with someone of African descent and express my sorrow for the sins of my countrymen. In South Africa, I related my experience to a black congregation. Repenting before them, they embraced me in a group huddle and deep communal tears of restoration were shed. Something invisible in the air changed and we felt very close to one another.

I was called to share this testimony on other occasions and, each time, tears flowed and others were touched and relieved of some weight they had been carrying. I thank God for touching my life in this way, and I hope that my experience might inspire others.

Tom Pritty is a magazine editor, song writer and member of Birmingham International Council. He lives in Bournville and attends services at the Universal Peace Federation centre in Handsworth, where he is a lay-teacher and guitarist. The photograph is of the slavery monument at the former shipment depot on the Senegalese island of Gorée.



28 April

Our humanity is one and our struggle is one

Too often we hear Jihad translated as holy war, but the expression is not to be found in the entirety of the Noble Quran. Even human beings or places are not described as holy let alone war. Places are sanctified, people are elevated in status, but only God is described as Holy. Jihad is a struggle of the heart, mind, body and soul, but it is against one's ego, and against oppression and injustice to the poor and weak.

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well acquainted with all that ye do (Quran 4:135).

When it is said to them: "Do not spread corruption on earth," they answer: "We are but improving things!" Of a surety, they are the ones who are spreading corruption, but they perceive it not (Quran (2:12-13).

Do we not find the echoes of this in our world? Pharaohs used their armies to oppress the poor and the weak, but our oppressors are sophisticated; they use the modern weaponry of debt, spin, lies. Oppressors do not see us as Muslims, Christians or Jews; they see only profit and power. We are all pawns in their games. Our suffering is one, our humanity is one and our struggle is one.



Amra Bone is Chair of Coventry City Circle and a member of the West Midlands Faiths Forum Executive. She is also co-director of Knowledge Engineers Ltd and represented Britain in badminton at the 2001 International Muslim Women's Games. *The montage is one of the winning entries from the 2005 Spirited Arts RE competition and depicts the first revelation to the prophet Mohammed.*