

Redbridge Faith Forum Women's Workshop 22nd November 2017

Thirty five Women from a range of faith communities met for a lively and informative workshop at the South West Essex & Settlement Reform Synagogue (SWESRS) on Wednesday 22nd November. The theme for the workshop was '**Weddings~ ceremony, custom and tradition**'. Excellent presentations were given from two faith communities: Jewish and Sikh. This session of the Redbridge Faith Forum's (RFF) Women's Workshop followed an earlier one on the same topic with presentations from the Baha'i, Buddhist and Hindu Communities. It will be followed in February with a session from the Christian and Muslim traditions.

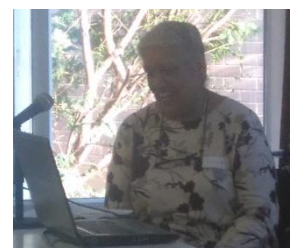


JEWISH MARRIAGES:- Mitzi Kalinsky a cantor from Sukkot Shalom Synagogue opened the workshop explaining the there was a wide spectrum of weddings within the Jewish community, ranging from Orthodox to Reform, and Liberal traditions. We were blessed in having women from the Orthodox and liberal communities, two of whom were Rabbis, to confer and expand on teachings. We heard that the betrothal and marriage are on a practical level a contract, protecting the rights of the woman.



Spiritually, couples become one, finding their soul- mate. This is a concept from the creation story from the Torah, where the original one androgynous human was divided. Humans continue to search for their 'other half'. The marriage is primarily about partnership as well as for the procreation of children. It is a relationship in holiness. Ancient liturgy reflects on holiness, respect and loyalty. Same sex marriages in Progressive denominations, (not permitted in Orthodox Judaism) reflect the importance of 'relationship'. A member of the Jewish community is commissioned as a registrar and so the marriage will be both a religious and civil ceremony. It is usual, although not strictly necessary, for a Rabbi to officiate. It is accepted that a marriage may break down and divorce is permitted. In order for remarriage however there must be both Jewish and Civil law divorce proceedings. Interfaith marriages are not accepted in Orthodox communities, although now a days in Progressive communities blessings are permitted for dual heritage couples who plan to build a Jewish home and raise their children in the Jewish tradition. It is expected that the non-Jewish partner attend the marriage preparation sessions with their partner. The passing on of the Jewish line is traditionally through the mother. However, equilineality, the passing on of Jewish status through either parent, is now practised in Progressive communities along specified guidelines.

SIKH MARRIAGES:- Parminder Kaur Kondral, a local hospital chaplain and Member of the Sikh Women's Alliance gave an equally informative presentation on the Sikh traditions. The Sikh marriage ceremony was instituted by Guru Anand Karaj. Anyone baptised as Sikh can officiate. A marriage is based on spiritual relationship – more than sexual. Marriages



can be arranged by families but the bride and groom can refuse. There are no caste, creed or language barriers as long as each partner is a Sikh. It is important that there is no close blood relationship so the names of the parents and grandparents of both bride and groom are examined carefully; the marriage will not take place if there are any repetitions/ duplications of family names. There are many pre –wedding traditions where relatives of the bride and or groom take the lead. Generally the wedding ceremony will take place in the Gurdwara. Verses from the scriptures - Guru Granth Sahib - are sung (tradition is that the sacred verses are sung between 9 and 12 noon). It is possible for a wedding to be conducted at a different venue providing the Guru Granth Sahib is respectfully installed. During the marriage ceremony the couple walk around the Guru Granth Sahib four times; this part of the ceremony is what makes the marriage not sexual contact. Blessings are given from the Gurdwara community, the parents and elders. Sikh couples are expected remain faithful; prayers are said for the couple’s long life together: ‘Have one soul in two bodies’. If there are difficulties within the marriage the elders offer support, guidance and counselling. If resolution is not found civil divorce is accepted.

After each presentation there was good time for the many questions which were answered fully with women in the group of the same faith contributing and adding to the presenters’ responses. In small animated groups the women reflected on what they had heard and what they found new. All agreed that this was an exceptionally interesting and informative workshop with great respect shown for each other’s beliefs and practices. One Baha’i woman commented that her faith extolled the ‘unity of mankind’; she said she had seen this at this meeting and happiness that there was. It was a lovely note to finish on. Having said that Rabbi Lisa invited all who had time to visit the synagogue. She gave a very full and welcomed input on the scrolls and how they are made, used and venerated. It really was a much appreciated welcome!



The completed evaluation forms confirmed that everyone attending had found the topic and workshop contents interesting and informative and are looking forward to continuing the theme by hearing from other faith speakers at the next workshop.

“Nice that people want to learn, discuss & understand”

“Excellent workshop well prepared & informative presentation & good time for discussion; Fantastic”

“I have learnt many different things about Jewish & Sikh wedding, Fantastic well attended event!”

Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF) is a registered charity (number 1118765) and an independent organisation whose aims are to:-

- bring together representatives of different faith communities in order to gain mutual understanding and promote social cohesion
- give Faith Communities in Redbridge a collective voice by identifying and addressing issues that affect residents.

For more information contact RFF on 020 8708 2478, visit website www.redbridgefaithforum.org or email faith.forum@redbridge.gov.uk

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