

## Redbridge Faith Forum Women's Workshop 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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, National Co-ordinator of UK Sikh Healthcare Chaplaincy Group and General Secretary of Sikh Women's Alliance UK followed with an equally informative presentation on the Sikh traditions.



The Sikh marriage ceremony is called “Anand Karaj meaning “Blissful Union” or “Joyful Union”, which was introduced by Guru Amar Das Ji. Any Amritdhari (baptised) Sikh may perform the marriage ceremony. Guru Amar Das Ji’s quote in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji at pg 788 states: EK JOT, DO MURTI (one soul in two bodies) explains that “They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together. Rather they alone are called husband and wife who have one soul in two bodies”.

- Marriage is very important part in Sikhism.
- Some marriages are arranged by the families of the bride and groom, but both individuals have the right not to marry the partner chosen for them.
- Marriage is seen as a commitment before WAHEGURU (Wonderful Lord) and the purpose is so the individual has companionship on their spiritual path, rather than sexual pleasure.
- Marriage also brings two families together and Sikhs believe that it is important that families get on. This is one of the reasons why Sikhs encourage their children to marry other Sikhs.
- The Rehat Maryada which is The Official Sikh Code of Conduct specifies that no thought should be given to the perspective spouse’ caste, race or lineage.
- As long as both the boy and girl profess the Sikh faith and no other faith they may be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony.
- The Rehat Maryada strictly forbids any sort of dowry arrangement as marriage is not to be viewed as a business transaction.
- Sikhs are also discouraged from consulting horoscopes or following any other superstitions pertaining to determining a wedding date or time.
- There may be an Engagement Ceremony in the Gurdwara (Sikh place of workshop)
- Sikh wedding usually takes place in the morning. (The Lavan are written in RAAG SOHIEE, which should ideally be sung between the hours of 9am -12:00n). It is held in front of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Holy Scriptures).
- The Lavan explains the relationship between Waheguru (Wonderful Lord) and an individual.  
Meaning of 4 Lavan
  - First Laav: Asserts that marriage is encouraged as the best state of life for a Sikh.
  - Second Laav: Conveys the awakening feelings of love a bride has when leaving her former life, and beginning a new life in partnership with her husband.
  - Third Laav: Declares the bride's detachment from the world and outside influences, while becoming more deeply devoted to her husband wishing only to live for him.
  - Fourth Laav: Describes a spiritual union of love and devotion where no feeling of separation is possible, imparting perfect joy, and contentment.
- The couple walk clockwise around the Guru Granth Sahib Ji four times. The service ends with karah parshad (ceremonial food). Finally, everyone eats in the langar (free kitchen). Or in today’s times – have a party at a hall.
- Divorce, remarriage and cohabitation: Sikhs couples are expected to remain faithful and avoid adultery because marriage is important to strengthen family life and raise children.
- Cohabitation is not allowed in Sikhism.
- Sikhs hope that couples will stay together for life but they accept that divorce is sometimes inevitable. A marriage is a commitment made in front of Waheguru (Wonderful Lord) and cannot easily be broken. However if there is a problem with the relationship the elders in the family/community will try to help resolve the situation.
- If one of the couple refuses to try to heal the marriage the other partner asks the community (Sarpanch) for permission to divorce and remarry. In today’s day & age, we will follow the laws of the country and file for a divorce using the Legal System.
- Widows and widowers are allowed to remarry in a Gurdwara.

- The most common usage of the word "Waheguru" is in the greeting Sikhs use with each other: "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" – meaning "Khalsa belongs to Waheguru Victory is gifted by Waheguru"

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 is grateful to Comic Relief for funding this event.



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