

Redbridge Faith Forum Women's Workshop 22nd June 2016

Twenty five women from different backgrounds and faiths were given a very warm and generous welcome at the Redbridge Buddhist and Cultural Centre for a most informative and lively workshop addressing the questions 'Praying: How? Why? When? To Whom?' This, the first of a series of workshops on the topic of prayer started with excellent presentations from members of the Buddhist, and the Hindu communities ~ two of the Vedic faiths. It was good to meet up with many long standing friends as well as welcoming new comers.



Hema, Shirani and Suhasini from the Buddhist community told us that Buddhism is a means of awakening from suffering and confusion. Buddhists believe that all human beings are intelligent, worthwhile and unblemished. Life experiences result in confusion and suffering. The Buddha showed through his teachings the art of detachment from the materialistic world. They explained that there is a difference between prayer and worship. The Buddha statue, present in every temple and in Buddhist homes, is a visual aid to supporting and calming the mind, developing serenity and composure. This leads to devotees being able to focus on the looking within oneself and disciplining the mind. A ritual of chanting the Sutras is another means of calming the mind and achieving serenity. The statue itself is not worshipped; however devotees pay respect and express gratitude to the Buddha's teachings. There is a ritual which in itself is a prayer that helps the individual to focus within one self. This involves bowing - dropping one's ego, lighting a candle, surrounding the statue with flowers and burning incense to support entering into prayer - focussing the mind. The candle signifies the light of knowledge. The flower though beautiful is short lived and is a reminder of the shortness of our lives. The Buddha's teachings are the laws. They encompass five precepts: refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants. These are to be followed to achieve the goals.

Vinaya from the Hindu community also noted a difference between prayer which is personal and worship which is ritual. In saying that Hindus pray to God, she raised the questions 'What is God?' and 'How do we understand God?' In tackling these questions she clarified that Hindus believe in one God who has many attributes which are termed deities. She gave the example of describing how she could be thought of as a mother, a sister, an aunt and a member of the community but remains being 'one Vinaya'. She illustrated some of the different attributes of God. For example the deity Ganesh represents the attribute of intelligence and Vishnu the attribute of compassion and love. Different people had devotion to different deities or aspects. Hindus recognise the presence of God in all individuals. The greeting 'Namaste' means 'I bow to the deity in you'. Both meditation and ritual are important aspects of prayer in the Hindu faith.



Time was given for the women to discuss the presentations with a partner from a different faith from themselves. The presentations and discussions led to lively questions respectfully asked. The presenters responded with clarity. All present, felt they had learnt something new and had gained more understanding from the workshop. Many identified some common strands with their own faith teachings and practice. Presentations, discussions and questions and answers took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity to others of all faiths. The comment 'I feel comfortable to talk openly about sensitive issues and ask questions' was endorsed by many. Overall it was felt to be a 'fantastic' 'very informative' and 'most interesting' afternoon in the company of a 'lovely caring group'.



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.

Next Events

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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