

# Section 3

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

In the previous section of this Children's Sabbaths Manual, "Where Are We?" Marian Wright Edelman looked at where we are today in our nation as we face the threats of poverty and materialism, militarism, and continuing racism. She also offered a vision of a better future for our children, outlining what we must do to replace need, harm, and hate with justice, peace, and love.

Now we come to the question: How do we get there? How do we work toward realizing God's vision of justice, peace, and love that Dr. King, Marian Wright Edelman, and many before them have sought to articulate?

At the heart of the Children's Sabbaths movement are two core convictions: First, we will only get to where we need to go by drawing guidance, strength, and sustenance from our religious faith and our best understanding of what the Eternal, the one whom we call Holy, would have us do.

A second core conviction of this Children's Sabbaths movement is that we will only get there by working together. The challenge ahead of us is so great, and the needs of the children are so many, and the ones we would serve are so diverse, that it will require the hearts and hands and voices and minds of all of us, every person of faith, to help achieve the transformation of our nation's values and our care for children. We have much to learn from each other and we have much to gain from working together as we embody the beauty and diversity and gifts of God's creation.

Following you will find resources to help us get where we're going that will provide sustenance and direction for our journey to justice for all our children.

- ◆ First is an exciting new chapter called **Faith Voices**. It contains a number of brief theological reflections from a wide variety of religious traditions on the focus of this Children's Sabbath: "When Will We Hear Dr. King's Call to End Poverty in America?" The Faith Voices offer us a chance to hear anew about the vision, mandate, and resources of our own religious tradition to create a world of justice, peace, and love for our children, and to learn what the perspectives of other traditions are on the same theme. They are grouped together so you can appreciate the similarities and discover what is unique in each. Use these Faith Voices reflections to spur your own reading, reflecting, and study as you prepare a sermon, homily, khutbah or other address or as the basis of an educational session or discussion.
- ◆ Following the Faith Voices are chapters of **Faith Resources**. Each chapter offers resources for a particular religious tradition that can be used to infuse the services of worship, prayers, educational activities, and life of a place of worship in that tradition. Be sure to delve into the resources prepared for your religious tradition. Take time to explore the chapters prepared for other traditions where you may find some that would enrich your own.
- ◆ The last chapter, **Multi-Faith Resources**, provides an outline of a multi-faith service that can be used to bring together many traditions for a community-wide service, as well as a sampling of resources from traditions for which we have not provided a complete chapter.

## Faith Voices

Following you will find thoughtful reflections from leaders in a range of religious traditions, offering a perspective from their faith on the focus of the Children's Sabbath: When will we hear the call to end poverty in America? When will we replace poverty and materialism, militarism, and racism with justice, peace, and love for all of our children?

Part of the magnificence of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* experience is the opportunity to recognize the concern for children and commitment to help that is shared across religious traditions, while at the same time appreciating the uniqueness and richness that each brings to it.

Read on to deepen your understanding of the Children's Sabbath theme from your own religious tradition's vantage point and to learn more about the views of the others.

The theological perspectives, offered in alphabetical order, are:

- ◆ A Bahá'í Perspective by Glen Fullmer, Director of Communications, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, Evanston, Illinois
- ◆ A Buddhist Perspective by John Daido Looi Roshi, Founder and Abbot, Zen Mountain Monastery, Mount Tremper, New York
- ◆ A Christian Perspective by the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr., Senior Pastor, Olivet Institutional Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio
- ◆ A Hindu Perspective by Dr. Vidya Bhushan Gupta, pediatrician affiliated with New York Medical College and Columbia University, and Hindu scholar and member of Arya Samaj Hindu Community, Ridgewood, New Jersey
- ◆ A Jewish Perspective by Rabbi Jack Moline, Agudas Achim Congregation, Alexandria, Virginia
- ◆ A Muslim Perspective by Sophia Kizilbash and Afeefa Syeed, Muslim Public Service Network, Washington, D.C.



A Bahá'í Perspective by Glen Fullmer

## The Conviction to Free Humanity from Poverty and Injustice

God has provided the human race with everything it needs to live in peace and plenty. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, we have the techniques and resources to get rid of poverty—but the real question is whether we have the will. Mankind is in the grip of a paralysis of will based on the belief that conflict and aggression are intrinsic to human nature and, therefore, cannot be eradicated. A corollary is the commonly held belief that poverty is a perennial and unavoidable aspect of the human condition.

In its 1985 statement, *The Promise of World Peace*, the world governing body of the Bahá'í Faith reflected on this paralyzing contradiction in human affairs: “On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.”

All communities of faith have a profound moral responsibility and unique capacity to address this paralysis of will by tapping the very roots of human identity and motivation. They are able to inculcate the understanding and conviction—especially among our children—that human beings are inherently noble; that all are capable of exemplifying divine attributes, such as justice, compassion and altruism; and that selfishness and aggression are a distortion of the human spirit. They can also provide the social framework within which to express these virtues through specific acts of service.

From a Bahá'í perspective, the conviction that humanity now has—for the first time in its history—the spiritual capacity and material resources to eliminate the age-old scourges of poverty and injustice comes from taking a long view of the developmental stages through which humankind has passed. Mankind has gone through its stages of infancy and childhood, is now in the midst of a

turbulent adolescence, and is approaching a collective coming of age, a stage of maturity when global peace and justice are finally within reach. The spiritual diseases now afflicting the human race—materialism, racism, and prejudices of nation, class and gender—are a legacy of the immature stages of our development as a species. We are collectively emerging from the matrix of the world of nature—a world characterized by the struggle for existence, competition and scarcity—and entering a realm of spiritual values where both material and spiritual sustenance is provided for all through unity and collaboration.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son and appointed successor of Bahá’u’lláh, stated, “Among the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is man’s freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature. This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountainhead of all calamities and is the supreme affliction.”

And further, “Therefore, if we want men to scorn war and bloodshed, and establish peace and eliminate their useless prejudices, we should educate our children from a very early age, in all the schools of the world, in the basic unity of mankind. They should be protected against such doctrines as the inevitability of the struggle for existence which is particular to the animal kingdom, and an exaggerated nationalism whereby the people of other countries are considered as strangers only. Instead, the love of country and mankind as a whole, without racial, national and similar prejudices, should be implanted in their hearts.”

Racism is the most challenging issue confronting America—an affront to human dignity, a cause of hatred and division, a disease that devastates society. Notwithstanding the efforts already expended for its elimination, racism continues to work its evil upon this nation. Progress toward tolerance, mutual respect, and unity has been painfully slow and marked with repeated setbacks.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

The fundamental solution—the one that will reduce violence, regenerate and focus the intellectual and moral energy of minorities, and make them partners in the construction of a progressive society—rests ultimately on the common recognition of the oneness of humankind. The application of the spiritual principle of the oneness of humanity to the life of the nation would necessitate and make possible vast changes in the economic status of the non-White segments of the population.

Although poverty afflicts members of all races, its victims tend to be largely people of color. Prejudice and discrimination have created a disparity in the standards of living, providing some with excessive economic advantage while denying others the bare necessities for leading healthy and dignified lives. Poor housing, deficient diet, inadequate health care and insufficient education are consequences of poverty that afflict African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanic Americans more than they afflict the rest of the population. The cost to society at large is heavy.

Without conscious, deliberate, and sustained effort, no one can remain unaffected by racism's corrosive influence. No educational, economic, or political plan can take the place of sincere friendship and fellowship among the races; it is not a need that businesses and schools, or even governments, can provide in isolation from the supportive attitude of society as a whole. Both Blacks and Whites must understand that no real change will come about without close association, fellowship and friendship among diverse people. The Bahá'í writings state: "Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country."

A spiritual orientation must likewise be at the root of efforts to solve the closely linked problems of poverty and materialism. The dogmas of materialism, whether capitalist or socialist, treat man as nothing more than an intelligent animal and ignore the spiritual dimensions of his being. These dogmas have failed to satisfy the needs of humanity and, if anything, have exacerbated the conditions of inequity whereby the masses of the world's peoples sink ever deeper into wretchedness while the few enjoy unimaginable wealth.

The failure of materialistic ideologies to promote human well-being has been made abundantly clear in the field of international development. For the past half-century,

wealthy nations have poured vast material and technological resources into the development of poorer nations. The outcome has been disheartening: the gap between rich and poor has widened precipitously, and the poor are often poorer than they were in their traditional subsistence societies. One reason for this failure is the narrow view that defines prosperity only in materialistic terms. While no one can deny the importance of eliminating extreme poverty and want, even the poor will quickly identify priorities other than material satisfaction, such as family and community relationships, dignity, a place and role in society, opportunities to be of service, and spiritual growth.

The vision of the Bahá'í Faith is that extremes of both poverty and wealth will be reduced gradually as the character of individuals—rich and poor—is reformed; as global institutions begin to reflect the oneness, wholeness and reciprocity of all human relationships; and as human development is redirected towards intangible forms of progress in areas such as knowledge, science, culture, art, institutions, social relationships and spirituality. At the personal level, the key is to recognize that every human being, regardless of social or economic status, has the innate capacity, as well as the right and obligation, to contribute to the continuous advancement of civilization. Idleness and begging are forbidden to Bahá'ís, while work performed in the spirit of service is elevated to the station of worship.

Thus, the right to work, the right to contribute to society, takes on a spiritual dimension, and the responsibility to be productive applies to everyone. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others."

The accumulation of excessive fortunes by a small number of individuals, while the masses are in need, is seen as an iniquity and an injustice. Wealth is considered highly meritorious when used for the benefit of all. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.”

Thus both the poor and the rich have a role to play in freeing humanity from the tyranny of materialism. At root, the challenge boils down to education, and especially the spiritual training of children. Bahá'u'lláh said, “Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess.... The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”

Children must be reared to love all mankind, to be anxiously concerned for the well-being of all, and to aspire to lofty

and noble goals of service to the entire human race without the least trace of prejudice whatsoever. This is what Bahá'ís are striving to do in every corner of the world and in hundreds of localities across America—dedicating themselves to revitalizing their neighborhoods by offering spiritual training for children, mentoring teens to channel their energy into the arts and into service to the community, and forming study circles for adults to deepen on the Word of God and engage in practical acts of service.

The Bahá'ís of the United States celebrate the Children's Sabbath as yet another opportunity to rededicate ourselves to this long and challenging struggle, a struggle which we know will be crowned with ultimate success through the providence of an All-Loving Creator. We are in it for the long haul, and we are eager to work shoulder to shoulder with all of the Children's Sabbath partners to create a groundswell of united, visionary activity.

### A Buddhist Perspective by John Daido Looi Roshi

## Invoking Reality from *Heart of Being*

When Zen arrived and began to take root in this country, there arose a misconception about the role of morality and ethics in the practice of the Buddhadharmā. Statements that Zen was beyond morality or that Zen was amoral were made by distinguished writers on Buddhism, and people assumed that this was correct. Yet nothing can be further from the truth. Enlightenment and morality are one. Enlightenment without morality is not true enlightenment. Morality without enlightenment is not complete morality. Zen is not beyond morality, but a practice that takes place within the world, based on moral and ethical teachings. Those moral and ethical teachings have been handed down with the mind-to-mind transmission from generation to generation.

The Buddhist precepts form one of the most vital areas of spiritual practice. In essence, the precepts are a definition of the life of a Buddha, of how a Buddha functions in the world. They are how enlightened beings live their lives, relate to other human beings, make moral and ethical decisions, manifest wisdom and compassion in everyday life. The precepts provide a way to see how the moral and ethical teachings in Buddhism can come to life in the workplace, in relationships, in government, business, and ecology.

The first three precepts are vows to take refuge in the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Buddha is the historical Buddha, but at the same time Buddha is each being, each creation. Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha, but at the same time Dharma is the whole phenomenal universe. And Sangha is the community of practitioners of the Buddha's Dharma, but at the same time Sangha is all sentient beings, animate and inanimate.

The Three Pure Precepts are: “not creating evil,” “practicing good,” and “actualizing good for others.” The Pure Precepts define the harmony, the natural order, of things. If we eschew evil, practice good, and actualize good for others, we are in harmony with the natural order of all things.

Of course, it is one thing to acknowledge the Three Pure Precepts, but how can we practice them? How can we not create evil? How can we practice good? How can we actualize good for others? The way to do that is shown in the Ten Grave Precepts, which reveal the functioning of the Three Pure Precepts. The Ten Grave Precepts are: 1) Affirm life; do not kill, 2) Be giving; do not steal, 3) Honor the body; do not misuse sexuality, 4) Manifest truth; do not lie, 5) Proceed clearly; do not cloud the mind, 6) See the

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

perfection; do not speak of others' errors and faults, 7) Realize self and other as one; do not elevate the self and blame others, 8) Give generously; do not be withholding, 9) Actualize harmony; do not be angry, 10) Experience the intimacy of things; do not defile the Three Treasures.

The Sixteen Precepts—taking refuge in the Three Treasures, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Grave Precepts—are not fixed rules of action or a code for moral behavior. They allow for changes in circumstances: for adjusting to the time, the particular place, your position, and the degree of action necessary in any given situation. When we don't hold on to an idea of ourselves and a particular way we have to react, then we are free to respond openly, with reverence for all the life involved.

When we first begin Zen practice, we use the precepts as a guide for living our life as a Buddha. We want to know how to live in harmony with all beings, and we do not want to put it off until after we get enlightened. So, we practice the precepts. We practice them the same way we practice the breath, or the way we practice a koan. To practice means to do. We do the precepts. Once we are aware of the precepts, we become sensitive to the moments when we break them. When you break a precept, you acknowledge that, take responsibility for it, and come back to the precept again. It's just like when you work with the breath in zazen. You sit down on your cushion and you vow to work with the breath, to be the breath. Within three breaths you find yourself thinking about something else, not being the breath at all. When that happens, you acknowledge it, take responsibility for it, let the thought go, and return to the breath. That is how you practice the breath, and that is how you practice the precepts. That is how you practice your life. Practice is not a process for getting someplace; it is not a process that gets us to enlightenment. Practice is, in itself, enlightenment.

It is one thing to study the precepts, but the real point of practice is to be the precepts through and through, to manifest them with our lives. The precepts are a sword that kills and a sword that gives life. The sword that kills is the absolute basis of reality, no-self. The sword that gives life is the compassion that comes out of that realization of no-self. The precepts are the sword of the realized mind.

The precepts need to be understood clearly from the literal point of view, from the perspective of compassion and reverence for life, and from the absolute, or "one-mind," point of view. Their richness is wasted if we see them simplistically as a set of rules, a list of "dos and don'ts." They

are not meant to bind but to liberate. In fact, they define a life that is unhindered, complete, free. What the precepts do is to bring into consciousness that which is already there.

When one only reads about Buddhism, one can come to the conclusion that Zen is amoral, that it considers itself above morality and does not address itself to ethical teachings. That is the view of a person standing on the sidelines, only involved intellectually. Those who truly embrace this practice cannot help but see the intimacy between the Buddhadharma and a moral and ethical life. It is intrinsic to the teaching itself. The life of the Buddha is the manifestation of compassion, but if we do not engage it, it does nothing. It all depends on us. To stand on the sidelines merely thinking about practice is self-styled Zen. For the teachings to come alive, they have to be lived with the whole body and mind.

I feel that because we put such an emphasis on the precepts, we have a moral obligation to do something about that misconception concerning Zen and morality. There are thousands of Zen practitioners in our country, many thousands who have received the precepts and taken refuge in the Three Treasures but who don't really know what they've done. They have no idea what the precepts mean.

Ask yourself what it means to take refuge in the Three Treasures. What is refuge? What, really, are the Three Treasures? We say "Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha," but what does that mean? Those are the words. What is the reality of Buddha, of being one with the Buddha, being one with the Dharma, being one with the Sangha? It is not some idea. It is a reality, a state of consciousness, a state of being. It is the state of being in harmony with the moral and ethical teachings.

We live in a time period of considerable moral crisis, with an erosion of values and a fragmentation of meaning prevalent throughout the fabric of the society. The crisis impacts on us personally, as a nation, and as a planet. The injuries that we inflict on each other and on our environment can only be healed by sound moral and ethical commitment. That doesn't mean being puritanical. It doesn't mean being "moralistic." These precepts have a vitality that is unique in the great religions. They are alive, not fixed. They function broadly and deeply, taking into account the intricacies and subtleties of conditions encountered.

There is so much to learn. The precepts are incredibly profound. Don't take them lightly. They are direct. They are subtle. They are bottomless. Please use them. Press up

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

against them. Push them. See where they take you. Make them your own. They are no small thing, by any measure. They nourish, they heal, and they give life to the Buddha.

### Atonement

#### *Realizing Responsibility*

*All evil karma ever committed by me since of old,  
Because of my beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance,  
Born of my body, mouth, and thought,  
Now I atone for it all.*

Many rites of passage that take place in the context of Zen practice include the Verse of Atonement near the beginning of the ceremony. The Verse of Atonement, or At-one-ment, creates a pure and unconditioned state of consciousness. It introduces an attitude of mind conducive to entering and engaging a new way of being, a mind receptive and open to transformation.

Engaging the precepts as one's life is a serious matter. When we vow to maintain them, making a commitment to manifest our life with the wisdom and compassion of the Tathagata, we enter a new and different realm. In that passage, the Verse of Atonement establishes a clean slate.

The spiritual search begins when we open our mind and heart, raising to consciousness the inherent possibility of completely realizing this human life. We call it raising the bodhi mind. This raising of the bodhi mind simply means seeing, hearing, feeling, experiencing, and realizing in ways that were not even imagined before. It means opening the doors of perception and awareness.

Usually, out of that transformation and opening emerges practice. And practice is doing. Practice means commitment and action. We are no longer observers standing on the sidelines. We become participants.

With practice—the doing, the commitment, the action—there comes discovery and realization. As a result, the precepts begin to be actualized as our own life. We make conscious, in a very personal way, the identity of the life-stream of the Buddhas and ancestors with the life-stream of all sentient beings. Not the life-stream of the Buddhas and ancestors in identity with our life-stream alone, but the life-stream of the Buddhas and ancestors in identity with all sentient beings, which, of course, includes oneself.

Real atonement takes place only when the bodhi mind has been raised and practice is engaged. When that has happened, we're dealing with a very powerful spiritual

magnet that attracts everything into the sphere of practice. Raising the bodhi mind, practice and enlightenment thus become one reality.

*All evil karma ever committed by me since of old.* Every cause has an effect, and every effect is the next cause. But we should always appreciate the fact that cause and effect are one; they are not two distinct events. Cause does not precede effect, and effect does not follow cause. This is why karma does not move in only one direction. Remarkably, it moves backward in time and space as well as forward in time and space. It permeates the ten directions.

*Because of my beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance.* Greed, anger, and ignorance are the three poisons. They are the basis of evil karma. Transformed, they become the three virtues—compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment, and these qualities are the basis of good karma. They describe a way of being in harmony with the nature of all things.

*Born of my body, mouth, and thought.* Body, mouth, and thought are the spheres of action where karma is created, both good and evil. What we do with our bodies, what we do with our words, and what we do with our thoughts, all lead to consequences, all establish specific karma. We should appreciate this fact thoroughly.

Body language speaks outwardly and inwardly. When you clench your fists and grit your teeth, you create anger mentally and physically. When you place your hands in the cosmic mudra, you create a state of consciousness that reflects introspection and peace. What we do with our bodies is who we are. It is for that reason that the posture of zazen is so important.

When we bow, we manifest the body karma of the three virtues. When we gassho we manifest the body karma of the three virtues. It is nearly impossible to communicate the meaning of this in words. Most of it is a process of personal discovery. If you just sit cross-legged and make the cosmic mudra with your hands, you may appreciate how that mudra affects your whole being, how it can turn your attention inward to the deepest aspects of yourself. There are other mudras, some that turn you outward, toward the world, but all of them are about the karma of body.

Words are also karma. What we say has a tremendous impact on our lives and on the world around us. When we vow to attain the Way, we connect with the karma of that vow. In chanting the name of the Buddha, we are one with the Buddha. There is no separation. On the

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

other hand, “God, give me a Mercedes” creates an immediate separation. When our words are motivated by compassion and wisdom, they manifest as wisdom and compassion. When our words are motivated by greed, anger, and ignorance, that’s what they manifest. When we express goodwill, we create the karma of goodwill. When we express anger, we create the karma of anger.

There is also the illusive karma of thought, which is all too often unrecognized. Thought, in and of itself, has the ability to transform. Actually, transformation can occur in all three spheres, but generally we pay little attention to the cause-and-effect power of thought. We think it is a very personal, invisible process, and that nobody knows about it. But thoughts radiate like signals from a telecommunication satellite. We project what we are thinking in hundreds of ways. What we think touches the world and it touches us.

When thoughts move inward, and these thoughts are thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance, we end up chewing up our own bodies. We end up destroying ourselves. This happens on both an individual and a collective level.

Sometimes it is easy to see this in people’s faces; somebody who is 50 years old looks 100; somebody who is 100 years old looks 50. Why? It is about body, mouth, and thought. It is karma that creates who we are, how we live our lives, how we relate to each other, and how we relate to ourselves. It is that simple and that important.

*Now I atone for it all.* When at-one-ment takes place with the whole body and mind, you have created a state that is pure and unconditioned. Spiritual realization and moral action are one reality. They are interdependent—just like cause and effect. Enlightenment is not beyond good and evil, as popularized Zen would have us believe. It is rather a way of using one’s body and mind and living one’s life with a clear and unequivocal moral commitment. Enlightenment is realized and actualized not only in the realm of good and evil but also within all dualities, and is at the same time not stained by those dualities. To realize the Verse of Atonement is to enter the practice of the precepts with the whole body and mind, prepared to make the enlightenment of all Buddhas, past and present, one’s true self.

### A Christian Perspective by the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr.

## Dr. King Speaks to the Twenty-First Century

Forty years ago Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., challenged our nation and each of us individually to take a critical look at poverty, militarism, racism, and violence. We were not only asked to look at the above issues but to unite in “a coalition of conscience” and pursue a course of non-violent direct action to change the direction of our nation.

Dr. King saw a devastating relationship between the Vietnam War and the Johnson Administration’s war on poverty. The two were irreconcilable in resources and execution. The same is true today with the war in Iraq and the pursuit of a sane and humanitarian domestic policy.

We cannot pay for this tragic war in Iraq and fix our broken economy at home. Every dollar spent in military extravagance in Iraq robs a child, a family, a school, a farm, an urban area, a critical health need, and a job opportunity. The military-industrial complex that President

Eisenhower warned against a half-century ago has grown in gigantic leaps. The military-industrial complex is our government’s primary and continuing commitment. If this is not corrected with reason and great judgment, it will eventually weaken our economic base beyond repair.

Poverty is creating a permanent underclass. This underclass is the groundswell for gangs, crime, and violence. It will not be possible to imprison millions of men, women, and children as a means of profit, so-called safety, and political self-interest on an ever-increasing basis. If we insist on doing this, our nation will become a police state in the name of security and protection.

If we seek to eliminate poverty with the kind of commitment with which we put a man on the moon, fought World War II, and rebuilt Europe and Japan, we could save our future in the next two decades.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

Domestic violence, racism, poverty, and war are tearing our nation apart. The great challenge is seeing these in their inter-connections as Dr. King did. Too many of us can see only one part at a time, and that part in a dim and blurred form.

Love and justice must be united in holy wedlock. Peace, justice, and equity must kiss each other as eternal friends.

We can hear Dr. King speaking across the decades, saying: “We are going to win in this struggle because William Cullen Bryant was right: ‘Truth crushed to earth will rise again.’”

“We are going to win because the moral arc of the universe is wide but it bends toward justice.”<sup>14</sup>

As we seek love, protection, health, justice, and quality education for our children, we can hear Dr. King speaking from Oslo, Norway, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, saying: “I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.”<sup>15</sup>

This is the urgent message for the twenty-first century.

### A Hindu Perspective by Dr. Vidya Bhushan Gupta

## Social Justice in Hindu Tradition<sup>16</sup>

**T**he Hindu philosophy of Vedanta, or monism, proposes that everything in this world is God. According to this philosophy, God is the ocean and an individual soul is a wave of this ocean, having a temporary identity of its own, but a part of the ocean.

According to the alternative philosophy dvaita, or dualism, God and man are separate; man is like a clay pot filled with water that comes from the same ocean that God is. The essential life-giving principle or consciousness of everyone is the same.

Both these concepts should result in a collective consciousness enabling us to empathize with others' pain and sorrow. Because we are not similar, but same, we should not hesitate to extend ourselves to help others.

However, there is a wide contrast between lofty ideals of Hindu philosophy and Hindu social behavior. The rampant poverty and squalor in India, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the callousness of the rich toward the poor belie the high principles of Hindu philosophy.

Whereas individuals yearn for self-realization, moksha, a collective consciousness that should arise out of the philosophy of monism is lacking. Every New Age Hindu preacher sets up a shop to teach his own technique for self-realization, with yoga and meditation as its staple. Few serve the poor, sick, downtrodden, and destitute.

If we are all part of the same whole, individual salvation is meaningless without salvation of the whole. How can the arm be free if the leg is still trapped in the world?

Social responsibility should be a part of Hindu credo. Compassion (*daya*) and liberality (*dan*), the two principles of Hindu dharma or righteous conduct, should not be driven by pity and sympathy or be condescending—sort of like throwing crumbs to the poor.

Every Hindu should empathize with others in need, because they are only superficially others; in truth they are part of the same God.

Swami Dayananda, founder of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement of the 19th century, laid down social

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution,” National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., March 31, 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Quest for Peace and Justice,” Auditorium of the University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, December 11, 1964.

<sup>16</sup> Reprinted with permission © 2000, *The Record* (Bergen County, N.J.), Vidya Bhushan Gupta.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

action as part of his ten principles that he wanted every Hindu to follow. No one, he argued, should be content with his or her own well-being, but rather should strive for common good.

The Swami said that yoga, union with Godhead, and yagna, sacrifice, are twin pillars of Hinduism. He advised every Hindu to perform five types of sacrifices every day: two for self-fulfillment and self-realization and three for others—for parents, guests, and other people, livestock, and the environment.

He advised Hindus to learn in this matter from Islam, in which fitr or liberality is part of the creed, or from Christianity, in which the preacher directly serves and counsels the poor.

It may be argued that, in a secular state, social justice is the responsibility of the state while the church provides moral and spiritual teaching for its members. This may be true in developed countries where civic and social institutions are well-established, but in developing countries—such as India, where social and civic institutions are still inefficient, and religion plays a major role in day-to-day life—religion should work for social justice.

In both developed and developing countries, religious leaders should create awareness of the issues and create the right climate for social action. They can have an impact on the religious convictions of the politicians and their constituents.

Hindu religious leaders, besides preaching about individual salvation, should work to end disparities among people due to social status and gender; raise consciousness about AIDS; and work to eradicate child labor and dowry. They should support visually-impaired, hearing-impaired, and mentally disabled individuals in America and in India.

Two sister Hindu organizations in Bergen County, the Hindu Samaj and the Arya Samaj, have made a good beginning in this respect by supporting orphans in India through an Indian organization, Sewa Bharati.

I hope that all Hindu organizations in the United States will incorporate social spirituality into their agenda and inculcate a tradition of volunteerism in their members. Only then will they be true to their credo: “Whatever is in this world is God; therefore, do not covet.”

### A Jewish Perspective by Rabbi Jack Moline

## CDF Children’s Shabbat 2008: “When Will We Hear?”

Last spring, a series of unanticipated events brought me into contact with a college friend after almost 35 years. After a brief exchange of email, I picked up the phone and called, and we spent time catching up on our entire adult lives. To our amazement, our lives had intertwined in many ways, but never in the same place at the same time. At the end of the conversation, we pledged to see each other the next time we were in the same town. My friend said, “How will we recognize each other? I am not 22 any more.” I replied, “You’ll always be 22 to me.”

It is a sweet story in the proper context. Our tradition even provides a liturgical response to such a reunion: We are to recite the blessing that acknowledges God’s power to raise the dead, for if a friend is out of sight and out of mind for long enough, it is as if he or she is dead to you.

Last spring, I was caught unaware of the fortieth anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination. I would be hard-pressed to tell you why I was surprised to be

reminded that it had been so long, but the many stories that filled the media about that moment a lifetime ago rekindled memories in me I had pledged—many times—not to forget. I was 15-years-old when he was murdered and not particularly aware of the civil rights movement. But my consciousness was raised, as they say, and Dr. King took on a timelessness for me that has grown increasingly significant in my attempt to nurture my conscience.

Yet, as I think about it, I wonder if Dr. King and his times, like my college friend, remain stuck in place. It is certainly a human inclination to cling to memories of significance, and, in fact, part of our own sacred tradition to preserve moments in the past and rehearse them as they were at those times in these days. However, when the lesson is about progress, we do a disservice to that lesson to replace inspiration with nostalgia. The legacy of a great leader is not in our past, but in our future.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

Our teacher Moses lived 120 years, more than three times as long as Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King found inspiration in the life and teachings of our first rabbi and prophet. Neither he himself nor I would suggest an equivalency, but in one important way Dr. King's rhetoric drew on the life of Moses. He understood the iconic status of climbing to the top of the mountain. It informed the tragic cadence of his speech on that last night in Memphis. And as a result, for those of us whose memories include the news of his assassination, Dr. King stands yet upon that mountain looking into the Promised Land.

But Moses climbed another mountain as well. Forty years earlier, he ascended Mount Sinai and received God's revelation. Minimalists among us suggest that the content of that experience was the Ten Commandments. Maximalists affirm that all of the Bible—indeed, all of Jewish learning—was imparted to Moses on those heights. Whichever place along that continuum you may find yourself, one thing is clear: Moses began a process on Sinai; he did not capture revelation once and forever. The Israelites began their understanding of it with the teaching of Moses, but forty years later, only stood poised on the edge of the Promised Land as Moses looked on.

I sometimes worry that we are all so enthralled with the image of Moses gazing wistfully across the Jordan River that we remain with him there to imagine what is yet to be. From that perch, the beauty of the land as seen from a distance obscures the hard work—the very hard work—that the Israelites faced in creating a just and faithful society. Too many of us heard the words from one mountaintop and saw the promise from another mountaintop and stopped in our tracks.

It would have been as if we read the Five Books of Moses and considered them all there was to know. We would teach the words of Torah as if there were no other teachings to go along with them.

Imagine if we read the story of how Miriam and Aaron had spoken negatively about the Cushite woman who was the wife of Moses (Numbers 12:1). "Cush" was in Africa, and Moses' wife was therefore Black. Miriam and Aaron were reprimanded by God for speaking negatively of Moses, but not for speaking ill of his wife. Had we stopped before experiencing the rest of the Bible, we might think dark-skinned people were less loved than we. Yet, generations later the prophet Amos amplifies the message by reminding us that God considers the Children of Israel to be the same in God's sight as the Children of Cush (9:7).

And lest there be any question whether that comparison be good or bad, the endearing Song of Songs affirms of the most beloved of women, "I am black and beautiful (1:5)."

Imagine that if we had stopped short in our journey, we might consider race to be the measure of the person.

Imagine if we had read instructions in the Book of Deuteronomy that began "When you go to war... (21:10)" and come to the conclusion that the Torah posited a world in constant conflict. Had we stopped before experiencing the rest of the Bible, we might never have heard the prophet Micah exclaim his vision of God's intention for the world: Every person shall sit beneath his vine and her fig tree and none shall make them afraid (4:4). And lest there be any question about whether such idyllic fantasy be happenstance or design, the Psalmist describes the desire that "there be peace in your palaces and calmness in your fortresses. For the sake of my brothers and friends, let me say that you shall have peace; for the sake of God's house, I seek only this good for you (122:7-9)."

Imagine that if we had stopped short in our journey, we might consider the militaristic life our ideal.

Imagine if we had read the admonition in Deuteronomy that "the poor shall not cease from the land (15:11)" and nodded sadly and knowingly that it was simply God's will that some were to live in poverty while others lived in plenty. Had we stopped before experiencing the rest of the Bible, we might never have heard Isaiah instruct us against the materialism of even our religiosity by offering these alternatives to our ritual devotions: Share your bread with the hungry; take the homeless into your home; when you see the naked, clothe him! (58:7) And lest there be any question that only the pious were so obligated, the most raucous book of our Bible, the Book of Esther, formalizes that even in the midst of our political and economic plenty, we must provide for the poor (9:22).

Imagine that if we had stopped short in our journey, we might believe it our duty to maintain the poverty in our midst.

Forty years later, poised on the edge of promise, we had only begun to understand the vision of Moses from one mountaintop to the other. To see through the eyes of Moses was to visualize what he imagined. It was up to us to realize the dream, a task we have never abandoned as we pursue a time when every child of God can live in peace and plenty.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

Forty years ago, as he climbed his last mountain, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., warned against three threats in our society: our infatuation with material goods that leaves some with much and others with none, our fascination with the power of weapons, and our insistence that skin color was somehow relevant to human rights. He warned against materialism, militarism and racism. And then he looked across the river to a Promised Land of equality, plenty and peace and reminded us that it was our time to take over the realization of that dream.

I guess it is fine—even flattering—to tell a college friend that in my mind no time has passed and that we will always be 22 to each other. But while the two of us have

married and aged and raised our children, I find myself alarmed to discover that in too many ways I am stuck on that mountaintop imagining a promise fulfilled. The poor have not ceased from the land. We have gone out to war. The dark-skinned children of God still wait for respect.

Come down from that mountaintop with me and let us cross the river into the land. Let us do the work—the very, very hard work—of meeting those challenges spoken forty years ago to create a society that will make our prophets smile and our dreamers wish to awaken.

We needn't look back to Dr. King. He was, after all, looking forward at us.

### A Muslim Perspective by Sophia Kizilbash and Afeefa Syeed

## Cultivating Socially Conscious Muslim Youth

Often when adults speak of children, images of innocence and fragility come into focus. Children are indeed some of the most vulnerable and impressionable in society, and there is an imperative to protect, educate and cultivate future generations.

The innocence that children embody, however, does not mean they are empty vessels waiting to be filled with adult-defined ways of engaging with the world. The ways in which children engage with their environment are unique and set formative views that often last the span of their lifetime.

Within the Islamic tradition, children are considered as being closer to their *fitra*, their primordial or innate nature.<sup>17</sup> This evokes a sense of purity and immediacy with how they interact with their environment. Children have not yet been conditioned to shape their behavior to function within an adult society.

### Powerful Empathy Becomes Transformative Change

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) throughout his childhood experienced extreme vulnerability and struggle. He began his life without his father and was considered an orphan. In the earliest years

of his life he was raised by his wet nurse Halima, and was raised in the Arabian desert.

Tariq Ramadan in his book, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*, describes the young prophet as sharing “the nomads’ life in the most barren and difficult natural environment, surrounded, as far as the eye could see, with horizons bringing to mind the fragility of the human being and spurring contemplation and solitude.”<sup>18</sup>

The Qur’an emphasizes his formative childhood experiences with an immediate relationship to his natural environment:

Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?  
And He found you wandering, and He gave you  
guidance. And He found you in need, and made  
you independent. Therefore [for that reason], do  
not treat the orphan with harshness, nor chide him  
who asks. But the bounty of your Lord, proclaim!  
(37:101-9)

Ramadan connects from this verse a spiritual teaching “valid for each human being: never forget one’s past, one’s trials, one’s environment and origin, and to turn one’s experience into a positive teaching for oneself and for others. Muhammad’s past, the One reminds him, is a school from

<sup>17</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1990, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2007, p. 12.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

which he must draw useful, practical, and concrete knowledge to benefit those whose lives and hardships he has shared, since he knows from his own experience, better than anyone else, what they feel and endure.<sup>19</sup>

These formative experiences from an early age led him to develop a powerful sense of empathy that served as the foundation for his transformative leadership and pursuit of justice.

### Learning as an Exchange

Children's closer relationship with their *fitra* can provide great insights and lessons to those they come in connection with. In this way, formal and informal interactions between children and elders can serve as an exchange. Elders bring a great knowledge of the world, its beauties and challenges. Children bring a less inhibited way of engaging with others and their environment and help their elders reconnect with their own *fitra*.

Tariq Ramadan further speaks of the Prophet Muhammad's love for children, and his deep felt connection with their innocence.

"The Messenger loved children, with their innocence, gentleness and ability to be present in the moment. Close to God, close to his own heart, he remained attentive to those who primarily understood the heart's language. He kissed them, carried them on his shoulders, and played with them, reaching toward their innocence, which is in its essence the expression of a permanent prayer to God.... The Messenger moreover, drew from children his sense of play and innocence; from them he learned to look at people and the world around him with wonder."<sup>20</sup>

Alongside this deep appreciation for children and their pure nature, there is a great responsibility of elders to nurture, protect and educate children. This is intimately linked in the call for justice within Islamic teachings. Elders must usher young people into the consciousness of how to address injustices in the world. They also must strive to create balance of justice in the world young people will enter.

### Striving for Justice

The call for Muslims to uphold justice is a foundational element of Qur'an. It is a justice to transcend all social bonds that should be bigger than what one demands for oneself. It should be fulfilled in respect of others at whatever cost to oneself and one's own community.<sup>21</sup> This is further evidenced in the following Qur'anic verse:

O you who have attained unto faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding justice; bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own self or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person be rich or poor. God's claim takes precedence over the claims of either of them. Do not then follow your desires lest you swerve from justice for, if you distort the truth, behold God is indeed aware of all that you do (4:135).

The Most Gracious has imparted the Qur'an. He has created humankind; He has imparted unto him [her] speech. The sun and the moon follow courses computed; the stars and the trees submit; and the skies He has raised high and He has set up the balance of justice in order that you may not transgress the measure. So, establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. It is He who has spread out the earth for [all] His creatures. (55: 1-10)

This Qur'anic verse connects the imperative for humankind to work to restore and maintain the balance of justice with the natural order of the cosmos. Farid Esack, a South African Muslim leader in the anti-apartheid struggle and an activist for social justice, explores Islam's deep commitment for justice in *The Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*. He explains, "The natural order, according to the Qur'an, is one rooted in justice and deviation from it is disorder (*fitnah*).... Injustice is a deviation from the natural order and... regarded as a disturbance in 'the balance.'"<sup>22</sup>

The responsibility on humankind to strive for and to maintain justice falls mainly on adults to restore a sense of balance to the world their children will inherit.

<sup>19</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>21</sup> Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide*, One World Publications, 2005, p.35.

<sup>22</sup> Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, One World Publications, 2007, p.36.

### **Cultivating Socially Conscious Muslim Youth: The Next Generation**

While responsibility to strive for justice may predominantly fall on adults, there is great importance to cultivate youth leadership. This leadership should be developed first through knowledge of self and through an integrated sense of social consciousness. It is imperative to foster this leadership in young people—helping them to identify their passions for expressing their faith through good works. These passions should be channeled into how they want to engage in their society and affect change towards a deeper realization of justice.

Four incremental elements must be part of the curriculum of Muslim schools to address the need for socially conscious students. These build on one another, and are part and parcel of the daily programs that affect both students and staff members:

1. Learn and practice Islam as the *deen*, not a religion—being Muslim in a holistic way, with an environment that supports, expects and nurtures the connections with Allah. This is the implementation of an integrated Islamic studies program whereby the practices and rituals are taught in a relevant and immediate way.
2. Learn and practice that *amal*—work—is taken seriously, whether it is the work of a three-year-old or the work of an 80-year-old. Allah expects the best from his creation, whether in reading, writing, or memorization of his words. Research, depth of understanding, and high expectations from students that exceed basic standards of state learning must be the norm.
3. Learn and practice the fundamentals of *akhwa*—brotherhood. Children must learn that skills and manners of interaction are rooted in the prophetic tradition. They are taught that most of humanity has more in common than not, and that our faith exhorts us to learn to live together in harmony and in responsibility. Students also understand that differences in faith, culture, and race are important indicators of the diversity of creation. A trained mediator teaches conflict management and resolution skills, and peace building is considered integral to good character.
4. Learn and practice the tenets of the faith inherently as *khalifa* of Allah—representatives and custodians of his creation. Students understand that the Qur'an describes the Big Bang theory, and at the same time it also speaks to us about the care that must be taken with a tree that

grows, and how the hungry must be fed. Students are exposed to environmental degradation, poverty, and basic concepts of welfare on a level of their understanding and comprehension. Given the opportunities, they themselves provide responses or solutions to what they witness.

By incorporating these elements: nurturing with the *deen*, the obligations of *khalifa*, the importance of *amal*, and the necessity of *akhawah*, a holistic approach to building the character and identity of Muslim children is formed. These four are the premise of why Muslim educators gather to teach and learn, and what *tarbiyyah*—the teaching of students with a purpose, has meant in the classical Islamic teaching.

### **Learning from the Children's March, Heeding the Call of Dr. King**

As we commemorate a great champion of social justice, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it is important to revisit, reassess and renew our commitment as Muslims to the imperative to strive for justice for our children. Dr. King warned of the three evils of materialism and poverty, militarism and racism and the role adults play in perpetuating these evils. We cannot claim that we are not affected by such inequality or that what we are doing as our share is enough. The current state of the world is rife with the three evils Dr. King spoke of, and it is our duty to heed his call and that of our Creator to work across generational lines to answer the call within Islam for justice for all.

It is also important to recognize the powerful energy youth have to spark new perspectives on evils that have plagued our world for centuries. The power of youth energy and perspective to effect change has a shining example in the Children's March as a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. In the 1963 Children's March, young students in Birmingham, Alabama, left school and marched downtown in protest of racial segregation. The horrific images of children being clubbed, blasted by fire hoses and threatened with police dogs during their protest outraged the world. After eight days, the U.S. Department of Justice intervened and came to a settlement to desegregate stores downtown.

The children's exposure to violence drew fresh criticism of Dr. King. He responded that participating in the Children's March enabled the children to have "a sense of their own stake in freedom." Involving Birmingham's children in the campaign was not a decision he regretted. In fact, King later wrote that it was "one of the wisest moves we made.

## How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship

It brought a new impact to the crusade, and the impetus that we needed to win the struggle,” helping launch the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and contributing to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>23</sup>

### **Intergenerational Leadership and Learning**

With cultivated youth social consciousness and leadership development, communities become ripe for intergenerational leadership and learning exchange. These exchanges build a deeper sense of community with respect across

generations. Sharing can be directed towards affecting sustainable social change.

Intergenerational exchanges may pose many challenges if communication lines and mutual respect for elders/respect for youth is not foundationally in place. These are challenges that must be overcome, rooted in a commitment towards building strong communities that seek to achieve change.

---

<sup>23</sup> [www.stanford.edu/group/King/about\\_king/encyclopedia/childrencrusade.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/encyclopedia/childrencrusade.htm)



## Faith Resources

With an appreciation of your own faith tradition's call to seek justice for our children and replace need, harm, and hate with justice, peace, and love, and with a better understanding of the perspectives of other faith traditions, now is the time to plan a service of worship, prayers, educational programs, or other experiences for your place of worship on the Children's Sabbath weekend that will deepen the understanding of others and inspire them to live out their faith and its call to justice and peace.

After you've planned the service of worship or other experience on the Children's Sabbaths weekend, don't toss this resource aside! Draw on it throughout the year and incorporate additional prayers, readings, or other activities into the life of your place of worship in the months to come. Use what's here to inspire you to create new resources and to remind you of other readings or passages from sacred texts that speak to our responsibility to care for children and work for justice and peace. Use or adapt what's here to make it most useful and appropriate for your place of worship. Plumb the chapter for your faith tradition and dip into others to see what's there.

