

A Feast of Faith being nourished by the interfaith experience

Thank you Pushpa, Lachlan and other organisers. I am really humbled that you have asked me to come here to your beautiful country. I had a chance to visit Nelson last week and see some more of your beautiful country.

Sheikh, rattle & roll

A few years ago I attended a gathering of interfaith youth in the US. It was great. For the first time I wasn't the only guy in a skirt! For the final evening program a respected Muslim scholar, Sheikh Hamza Yusuf was set to talk. I'd never heard a Muslim teaching before and wasn't quite sure what to expect. But what followed was one of the most profound and eye-opening experiences of my life. The Sheikh spoke about love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness and service. He used the language of Islam to communicate a message that resonated with me as a Buddhist. The words were new to me, but their meaning was familiar. The message he delivered was universally relevant. And I was simply stunned.

I remember turning to my friend Anna that night and saying " He sounds like a Buddhist teacher!" In fact more than that, the Skeikh carried a presence of a very **holy person**. The only other people I had met like that were Buddhist teachers.

Redrawing the Lines

It's a interesting how those holy people who truly embody their spirituality seem so alike. Look at faith hero's like Martin Luter King, Gandhi & the Dalai Lama and you will notice they share something in common. In the same way **religious extremists**, be they suicide-bombers in the middle-east or koran-burners in the American mid-west, have more in common with one another than the majority of religious people. So why do we choose to draw the lines between muslim and jew, hindu and humanist? Is there are better way of relating to one another. Perhaps as one of the great interfaith hero's of our time, Martin Luter King famously stated draw the lines who wish "**to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.**"

If we continue to draw the lines in the old way we will continue to make the same mistakes we have for centuries.

Sadly there is a movement of hateful extremism which **hijacks religion** to alienate and divide. They commonly call this fundamentalism. I'm not a big fan of the way we use this word. It seems to frame those who are **true believers** as closed-minded, extreme, distorted, radical, and often hateful. On the other hand the term **religious moderate** seems to convey a kind of half-heartedness. A diet coke version of religion. But surely those people who understand and practice the **fundamental message** of their faith are embodiments of kindness, forgiveness and compassion?

Catch you on the Flip Side

So we need to flip things on their head. Change the conversation. People need to hear **the**

compassionate voice of religion. We must create a new social movement that transforms the way religion is seen in our society. To do this we need 2 things: Firstly we must allow our traditions to flourish through us. We must **embody the qualities** we want to see. And secondly we must **redraw the lines** that currently divide us so we can identify our friends and allies of faith. So that I a Buddhist and you a Baha'i no longer see each other as different but as fellows in transforming ourselves and our world. By unlock the potential of our religious traditions to inspire and mobilize us we can create a generation of people who are **militantly generous; extremists of kindness** and **fundamentalists of forgiveness.**

[PAUSE. softly...]

After meeting the Sheikh I returned home inspired and ready to roll up my sleeves. I searched for what was going on in Melbourne and signed up for every interfaith event and program happening. I attended meetings, joined groups. But I was a little bit deflated. All around me religion was framed as just another form of cultural diversity (exhibiting religious festivals as if they were another curiosity). To my mind it was so much more. It was then I realised that this kind of religious co-operation wasn't going to happen on its own. **We had to build it.**

[VIDEO - faith in action]

InterAction

Brings young people from different backgrounds and beliefs to act together for the common good.

We have the word **action** in our name. When we were deciding what we wanted to be there was a feeling that dialogue didn't get you very far. That often you come together and yes you might have a good conversation but that didn't really translate into action. So we very consciously chose to go with a model that we call the **dialogue-of-doing.** This means that when we come together primarily to do service. The conversations still happen but they happen in the garden, or while you're painting a fence. Knowledge creates tolerance by **experience of the other fosters genuine friendship.** These friendships are resilient in moments of tension. And in the process we get to have a tangible impact with our projects, improve people's lives and make a real difference. Being **youth run** we devise our own projects and we have a certain sense of ownership over them. We learn from one another and share new ideas. We get to have load of fun! However because we are all young it also means there is often a lack of experience, particularly with organisational stuff.

How to Start? The InterAction model

- **Find** your interfaith allies
- **Look** at the world and identify what common issues concern you
- **Reflect** on how your individual faith traditions call you to act.
- **Do** something about it.

What we've been up to:

MONASH TRAINING

COMMUNITY GARDEN EVENT

IGNITE CLOTHING DRIVE

For 2011 we have some new plans: We are developing our own training program for **young leaders**. We are going to be continuing a focus on **service** taking out a food van and staffing it with interfaith volunteers to feed the Melbourne homeless. And we will be running a **campaign** around shared value of compassion! We are also looking at setting up **interAction chapters** so other people can form an interAction group.

Nivy's story

One of our founders is a young hindu woman... What her story?

Compassion is Golden

- *HINDUISM* "This is the sum of duty, do naught unto others what you would not have them do unto you." - *Mahabharata 5:1517*
- *JUDAISM* "That which is hateful to you do not do to your fellow. This is the entire law, all the rest is commentary." - *Hillel in the Talmud for the Sabbath 31a*
- *ZOROASTRIANISM* "That nature alone is good that refrains from doing to another whatsoever is not good for itself." - *Dadisten-I-dinik 94:5*
- *BUDDHISM* "Since others too care fro their own selves, those who care for themselves should care for others." *Udanavaraga 5:20*
- *JAINISM* "A man should wander about treating all creatures as he would be treated" - *Sutrakritanga 1.11:33*
- *DAOISM* "Regard your neighbours gain as your gain, and your neighbours loss as your loss." - *Tai Shan Kan Ying P'ien*
- *CONFUCIANISM* "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then their will be no resentment against you either in the family or the state." - *Analects 12:2*
- *CHRISTIANITY* "So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." - *Matt 7:12*
- *ISLAM* "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." - *Hadith of al Nawawi 13*

These ideas which are common across all major religious traditions Each religion works at promoting warm-heartedness and positive values. Considering this we begin to see that

we are not divided so strongly by religious lines as we might think. From understanding our shared values we begin to see each other as allies and friends. We really want the same thing, so how can we work together to make this happen?

Turn to the person next to you and tell them what you want to see more of in this world? What gets you fired up and passionate? And tell them what you think should be done. 2Mins!

If we can identify a shared vision we can work together to make it a reality. Acting together we are able to work at meeting a common social problems. Teaming up with your interfaith allies makes your work stronger! Serving together is a non-threatening approach to interfaith so more people will want to get involved.

What if the worlds 1billion Christians and 1.2billion Muslims decided that their work together in the world was going to be ending Poverty or Climate Change or Malaria. If that energy currently spent on suspicion on ignorance on hatred was entirely devoted to co-operation!

Opportunities

- Bringing shared values back into the conversation.
- Changing the dynamic between faith communities to one of co-operation.
- Harnessing existing resources.
- Increasing our impact by working together. **(William Cooper Story)**

Challenges

- Resistance to change from institutions
- Fear that interfaith will threaten existing faith identity
- Inability to articulate *why* interfaith is important
- Religious exclusivists and militant atheism/secularism **(HHDL story!)**

Resources

- *The Interfaith Youth Core* www.ifyc.org
- *United Religions Initiative* www.uri.org
- *Parliament of World's Religions* www.parliamentofreligions.org
- *Religions for Peace* www.religionsforpeace.org

CONCLUSION!

Our spiritual diversity is our most untapped resource for individual and social development

My Buddhist teacher often says that worlds religions are like the different items on the menu at a nice restaurant. You should get something off the menu that's going to be tasty and nutritious for you. Right now most people are stuck arguing about over which is the

best dish, and eating nothing. Well this is ridiculous! Instead, it's entirely possible to share the same table, eat our own meal and come away feeling mutually nourished. We can really enjoy the meal.

“We have inherited a big house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together - black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Moslem and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other.

This means that more and more our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. We must now give an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in our individual societies.” MLK, Nobel Lecture.

In this way I would consider myself a religious fundamentalist. So lets bring it back to basics.

I heard his call to action because like me, Sheikh Hamza is a religious fundamentalist. The **fundamentals of his religious** tradition (indeed I would say all the major religions) are principles such as peace and compassion.

NOTES:

What I want them to hear:

- religion is relevant in today's world
- youth and their allies.

Powerpoint: simple. Impactful. Fun.

Videos

JewBu's and the diaspora of faith.

Storytelling.

Being truly religious means being engaged in the world, kind, and compassionate.

Why must we work together?

The power of your story.

One of my nicknames was free-man-della

- **INSPIRATIONS:** experience made me realise that while the difference in the concepts and conventions provides different ways of accessing this essential truth.
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Matt. 5:8 Beatitudes
"All creatures are God's children and those dearest to God are those who treat his children kindly" Prophet Mohammed.

"love of all creatures is also love of God, for whoever loves the One God loves all the works that he has made." *Neisvos Olam, Ahaves Harei, 1*

- **PRACTICALSITES:** InterActions original funders were the Multicultural Commission of our state government.
There is a certain value in being **youth run**. We devise our own project and we have a certain sense of ownership over them. We learn from one another and share new ideas. We get to have loads of fun! However because we are all young it also means there is often a lack of skill within our organisation, particularly with organisational stuff. This is why interfaith allies are so important. Don't forget your golden oldies!

CONFERENCE (Sun)

- 15min presentation
- **Facilitate workshop “Are we achieving the MDG's - do they matter and why?”**
Put people into groups. Give them some time to chew into it and find out what they want to do? Be realistic. I am to give them the brief outline. Actions that young people will need to do themselves. Actions that the network themselves might take. Some solid things coming out so that then post-conference they can be sure who needs to do what?
- Panel Discussion “How can interfaith dialogue contribute to Human Rights Education?” sharing examples and suggestions.
- Evening Lecture (30-40mins?)

AUCKLAND

- I will be talking about the relationship between faith & social action. How interfaith co-operation can solve many of our common problems.
- Pretty casual style. Speak for up to 15mins. Then questions and World Cafe style conversations.
- Chat with buddhist students also while there.

What are the challenges for the next 10 years?

What are the opportunities to tap into?

How do the youth fit in?

Success stories from Melbourne. What works?

Auckland Forum on Sunday a **mixture of audience** – people who have attended a number of forums. Some with have knowledge of interfaith but no experience. Oldies as well as young ones. Majority is still Christian-based.

Do I need a Powerpoint? Data Projector? Butchers paper?

For each group give them some paper and pens to write.