

**Rev Dr Edgar Mihas**

All hymns are from 'Sing your Faith'

**OPENING MUSIC:** [Bach - Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F major BWV 1047 - 3. Allegro assai \(youtube.com\)](#) Johann Sebastian Bach, Brandenburg Concerto No.2 (Third Movement), (02:50)

**INTERFAITH/SECULAR CALENDAR:** International Migrants Day (Monday) International Arabic Language Day (Tuesday), International Human Solidarity Day (Wednesday), World Basketball Day (Thursday), Winter Solstice Day, Yalda Night, Jewish Fast of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet (Friday).

**INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE:** (in view of persistent war and conflict) "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.".Mother (now Saint) Teresa

**OPENING PRAYER:**

As we gather here in this harbour of safety,  
We thank the spirit for fellowship and family.  
We ask that we be strengthened, restored and inspired with love.  
We ask that we may be filled with peace,  
So that as we journey onwards and upwards,  
We would pour out love and grace to others.  
We ask that our souls would catch the wind of the spirit  
So that we would take a message of hope and unity to all the earth.  
So be it.

**CHALICE LIGHTING:**

Let this light remind us of the sacred flame of life that blazes within  
Constant, yet ever-changing  
Burning, yet never consumed  
O inner light of soul and spirit  
Lead our minds to greater understanding  
Lead our hearts to love more fully  
And lead our hands to create justice. (Amen)

**SUFI PRAYER FOR PEACE:**

Send Thy peace, O Lord, which is perfect and everlasting,  
that our souls may radiate peace.  
Send Thy peace, O Lord, that we may think, act,  
and speak harmoniously.  
Send Thy peace, O Lord, that we may be contented  
and thankful for Thy bountiful gifts.

Send Thy peace, O Lord, that amidst our worldly strife  
we may enjoy thy bliss.  
Send Thy peace, O Lord, that we may endure all,  
tolerate all in the thought of thy grace and mercy.  
Send Thy peace, O Lord, that our lives may become a  
divine vision, and in Thy light all darkness may vanish.  
Send Thy peace, O Lord, our Father and Mother, that we  
Thy children on earth may all unite in one family.

**HYMN: 178** – 'Together now we join as one'

Together now we join as one  
our common faith to sing;  
to render to this pilgrim world  
our heartfelt offering.

We strive to be a fellowship  
with mind and conscience free,  
to search for truth and saving light  
in cosmic mystery.

We worship God – love's source and power;  
we celebrate the life  
that all earth's children freely share  
beyond their sinful strife.

We would, in love, serve humankind  
with caring, justice, peace;  
and with the earth seek harmony  
that pride and pillage cease.

We hold in reverence the man  
who walked in Galilee,  
who healed the sick and loved the poor –  
revealed divinity.

We welcome truth, we welcome light,  
all prophecy and song,  
whoever they be channelled through  
to all they shall belong.

**MEDITATION READING: Finding Unity, by Lao Tzu**

Those who know do not speak;  
Those who speak do not know.  
Stop up the openings,  
Close down the doors,  
Rub off the sharp edges.  
Unravel all confusion.

Harmonise the light,

Give up contention:

This is called finding the unity of life.

When love and hatred cannot affect you,

Profit and loss cannot touch you,

Praise and blame cannot ruffle you,

You are honoured by all the world.

### **SHORT STORY:** the Magic of Patience

The Bodhisattva came back as a buffalo in one of his rebirths and lived with a mischievous monkey in the forest. The monkey used to trouble the buffalo every day by either pulling the buffalo's tail, throwing nuts on the buffalo's head or jumping from the treetop on to the buffalo's back. Though disturbed by the monkey's pranks, the buffalo bore everything patiently without complaining. The other animals of the forest saw this and wondered why the buffalo tolerated all the mischief without losing his patience or scolding the monkey.

Unable to hold back his curiosity, the elephant one day asked the buffalo why he never punished the truant monkey. At this the buffalo smiled and said that he was thankful to the monkey for teaching him how to be patient. The monkey who was sitting on the tree heard this and was ashamed of himself. He came down at once to seek the buffalo's forgiveness and thereafter they became good friends.

### **UNITARIANISM READING:** what do Unitarians think of other faiths? (p.45)

#### **FIRST READING:** Leviticus 26:40-45

40 " 'But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors—their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, 41 which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, 42 I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. 43 For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees. 44 Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God. 45 But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD.' "

**SECOND READING:** extract from the Last Sermon of Prophet Mohamed

“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.”

**HYMN: 84** – ‘Justice for persons’

Justice for persons and for different nations,  
respect the diverse species in our care,  
community of life on earth sustaining,  
love for this planet which we all must share.

Compassion is the strength of love and sympathy  
letting us share another being's pain;  
creature or human, loving friend or stranger,  
love for each other is the whole world's gain.

Wisdom is insight clear, precise and thoughtful,  
searching for truth and human law refined;  
guidance from past, made ready for the future  
by the best reasoning of the human mind.

Integrity, with honour and uprightness:  
these are the qualities which form and make  
women and men, the people for tomorrow,  
those who serve others for another's sake.

Justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity,  
these are the virtues which our poor world needs.  
They'll flower tomorrow, fruit in glorious splendour,  
if we today go out and plant the seeds.

**REFLECTIVE ADDRESS:**

One could easily argue that prospects for peace and prosperity in the Middle East have never looked dimmer. Indeed, the last few months – if not years – have been extremely tough for the region, to say the least. From the simmering civil wars in Kurdistan, Syria, Yemen to the brutality of the Taliban in Afghanistan, not to mention the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there just does not seem to be any end to the bloodshed and misery. It is no wonder then that people both inside and outside the Middle East are pessimistic about the region's future. Indeed, as Mother Teresa said: “if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

Perhaps the situation in the Middle East will worsen even further. It is very likely that the region will see a lot more blood spilt and a lot more ammunition spent, but eventually, a new Middle East will be born – a Middle East in which people prosper and live in peace and tranquility with each other. But how can we believe this? Well, there was a time when many, if not most, people in Europe never believed that the horrendous conflicts that had raged throughout the continent would come to an end.

If one has at least some general knowledge of European history, they will know that conflicts between the various peoples of the continent have lasted far longer than, say, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The peoples of Great Britain and France, for instance, fought each other for a millennium. In fact, the two countries only achieved a genuine peace in the early years of the twentieth century. France and Germany, too, were once the bitterest of enemies. But fast forward to the late 20th century and the two countries forged an alliance that has been a key impetus for the creation and expansion of the European Union – a union that was prophesied by Winston Churchill just after World War II.

Indeed, it is remarkable that immediately after the worst conflict in European and world history, the British Prime Minister predicted that there would be what he called a “United States of Europe.” Yet less than half a century later, the European Union was formed out of nation-states that just a few decades earlier were at each others’ throats. This Union now spans most of continent’s nation-states, including some that just one generation ago were part of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, meant to wage war against the nation-states of western Europe. Now, of course, modern Europe has not been entirely free of violent conflict.

The last decade of the 20th century saw the outbreak of wars in the Balkans. Particularly brutal was the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that saw atrocities reminiscent of those committed by the Nazis in World War II. But what a difference thirty years makes, because now most of the states involved in the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s are already EU members or well on their way to EU membership. The point here is that if in just a few decades, the countries of Europe were able to go from bitter enemies to strong allies in a politically and economically integrated Europe, so too, at least in theory, can the countries and peoples of the Middle East go from being hated adversaries to becoming solid partners in a new, peaceful, and prosperous region.

But this was the vision; we are not there just yet; there is still much more violence and bloodshed to come in the Middle East. Things in the region will get a lot worse before they get better, just as they did in Europe. And then what about Europe itself? The Russian occupation of parts of eastern and southern Ukraine by Russia has lasted for almost two years so far. As we saw in the Buffalo story, patience and perseverance can work its own magic towards a more profound awareness of the erring of one's ways. But also, as Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) said, no group of people should feel superior to any other as we are all equal before the Divine. In fact, the Holy Qur'an itself points out that humanity comes from one soul (Surah, 49:1).

No authority of any kind should be allowed to impose its approach, views, or interpretations on anyone else. The Holy Qur'an is crystal clear about this: "there shall be no compulsion in matters of faith" (Surah 2:256). Today, Arabs constitute approximately 11% of the world's Muslim population, the so called Ummah. Perhaps it is a matter of time before the Arab domination of Islam comes to an end. At the same time, and despite the onslaught of extremist groups like the Taliban and many other, an increasing number of voices can be heard, voices which bring a message of moderation, peaceful co-existence, and hope.

Speaking in 2014, Dr Boutros-Ghali, a prominent politician in Egypt, a distinguished Law Professor, and a former UN Secretary General, was interviewed on France 24 and touched on similar issues. But of ISIS, which had just swept across Iraq and into Syria taking town after town in a rapid advance, Dr Boutros-Ghali was utterly dismissive, saying: "This [group] will have no real effect, because it does not correspond to the globalisation, to the new era and new technology. This concept corresponds to what happened 500 years ago – so it will have no future." Nine years later, perhaps he was vindicated, or was he?

Although at the moment it defies logic, it is highly likely that in the end, the peoples of the Middle East will join together to create a region that is free of war, free of violent conflict and free of the kind of despair that has befallen the region for so many years. Those who work for peace in the Middle East could take comfort from Prophet Isaiah's words: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

Let us hope and pray that the New Year, which is just around the corner, will usher in a period of peaceful co-existence, of mutual acceptance, of profound understanding and, above all, of hope in the Middle East and beyond. If not now, then when?

**MUSIC FOR REFLECTION:** [Alexandr Glazunov - Meditation for violin and piano \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Alexandr GLAZUNOV – Meditation for violin and piano (03:42)

**POETRY:** "Hope" is the thing with feathers" by Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -  
And sore must be the storm -  
That could abash the little Bird  
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -  
And on the strangest Sea -  
Yet - never - in Extremity,  
It asked a crumb - of me.

**PRAYER:** Prayer for faith and hope to begin

Dear God,

Where does my hope begin?

When days are dark and lost

Could hope rise up with the dawn

As colour fills my heart?

Do birds that sing sweet song

Somehow know the truth?

Is their chorus melody

Leading us to you?

Where does hope come from?

When I can not face the day.

Could hope fill each new morning

Pushing out the grey?

Do the family and friends I have

Fill up my heart with joy?

Where does my hope come from?

When I wait on you.

Yes, hope flies in with wings of truth

And changes life anew.

**HYMN: 201** – What shall we say to them

What shall we say to them  
when they all want to know  
that God is in the world and feels  
their inmost secrets glow?

What shall we do for them  
when they are in distress  
and anguish burns within their hearts  
for which they must seek redress?

What is our vision bright  
which we must show the world:  
how perfect love can cast out fear  
and life's flag be unfurled?  
We may not give up hope;  
we will not give up love.  
Our hearts are grounded in the faith,  
in one God we all move.

**FINAL BENEDICTION:**

We extinguish the chalice here that it might glow gently in our hearts. May it light our path as we leave this place. May it guide our way until we are together again.

**CLOSING MUSIC:** [בחול עקבות \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03:45) (Foot prints in the sand)

Akevot Be-chol sung by Gad Elbaz (03:45)