

Thoughts from
Judaism

1. Community



In Judaism the idea of people living together as a community is a central part of the religion. At least ten men are needed to pray together in a Shabbat synagogue service and to mourn the dead ten men are also needed.

This is because Judaism recognises the strength of community, *kehilla* in Hebrew, in supporting each other in our day to day lives.

2. Responsibility

“To love God truly one must first love man. And if anyone tells you that he loves God and does not love his fellow-man, you will know that he is lying.” Chasidic

Living together peacefully with our fellow man is a basic requirement of Judaism. Our obligations to other men are as great or greater than our obligations to God.



*“There is none more lonely than the man who loves only himself”
Abraham Ibn Ezra*

3. Charity



“You shall not pick the undeveloped twigs of your vineyard; and the fallen fruit of your vineyard you shall not gather; for the poor and the stranger shall you leave them – I am the Lord, your God.”

Leviticus 19:9 - 10

We must think about other people when we go about our daily lives and consider those less well off than yourself as you go about your business. In Judaism there is a special word for charity, Tzedakah, and the root of the word is Tzedek meaning justice. For the rich to leave something for those well off than themselves is considered to be the “just” way to act.

4. How to give charity

“When a poor man asks for aid, do not use his faults as an excuse for not helping him.”

“Rabbi Shmelke of Nicholsburg , Unzer Alter Otzer II p99

There is a right and a wrong way to give Tzedakah –(charity). The rabbis discussed this in detail and the following passages from Maimonides explain Jewish thought on how to help others.

“The best way of giving is to help a person help themselves so that they may become self -supporting”

Maimonides

5. The order of charity

Maimonides, a physician living in 12th century, was one of the most influential Jewish scholars of all time. Known affectionately as "Rambam", he wrote a code of Jewish law, the Mishnah Torah, based on the Rabbinic oral tradition. Rambam organized the different levels of tzedakah (charity) in order of honor.

- The highest form of charity is to give help to someone before they become impoverished. Examples include gifts given in a dignified manner and providing help to find employment or to establish their business so that they never become dependent on others.
- When the donor and recipient are unknown to each other.
- When the donor is aware of the recipient's identity but the recipient is unaware of the source.
- When the recipient is aware of the donor's identity but the donor does not know the identity of the recipient.
- When one gives directly to the poor without being asked.
- When one gives directly to the poor upon being asked.
- When one gives less than he should, but does so cheerfully
- When donations are given grudgingly



6. Caring for others



A rabbi was once passing through a field where he saw a very old man planting an oak tree. “Why are you planting that tree?” said he. “You surely do not expect to live long enough to see the acorn growing up into an oak tree?”

“Ah” replied the old man, “my ancestors planted trees not for themselves, but for us, in order that we might enjoy their shade and fruit. I am doing likewise for those who will come after me.”

Ta’anit

A person must not only do what is good for himself but also for the society around him. We are all responsible for ourselves first and foremost, but also for those around us and those who will come after us. For this reason we must also care for the environment and the world that the next generation will inherit.

Hillel used to say “If I am not for myself, who is for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

Pirkei Avot

7. Visiting the sick



“These are the deeds which yield immediate fruit and continue to yield fruit in the time to come: honouring parents, doing deeds of kindness, attending the house of study, visiting the sick...”

Talmud (Shabbat 127a)

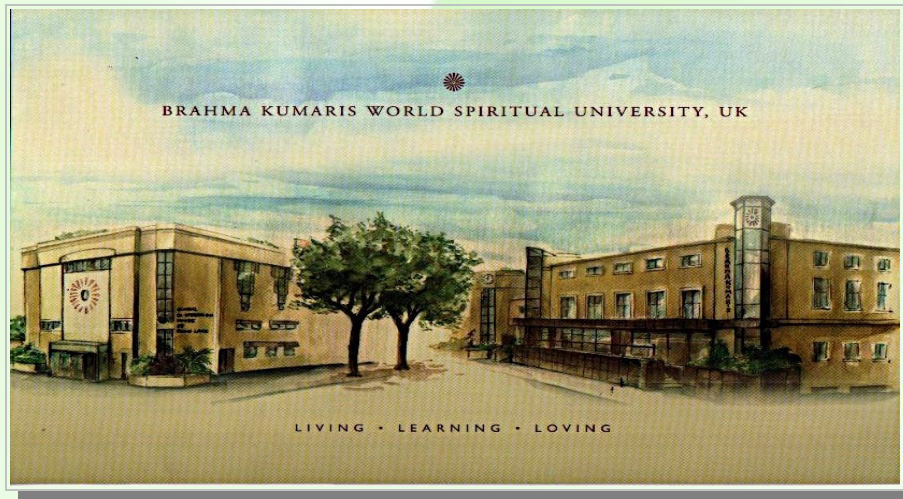
Visiting the sick (Bikkur holim) is a way to model our own behaviour after God’s behaviour (to act B’tzelem Elohim), in the image of God, because God visited Abraham when he was sick (*Genesis 18:1*)

“Poor gentiles should be supported as well as poor Jews; the Gentile sick should be visited as well as the Jewish sick; and their dead should be buried as well as the Jewish dead, for the sake of good peaceful relations”

Talmud Gittin 61a

Thoughts from
Brahma Kumaris

1. Living together



The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University UK (BKWSU) recognises the intrinsic value of every human being, regardless of age, culture, gender or race.

Students learn to bring inner harmony and balance into their lives through the practice of meditation, introspection and by developing a relationship with God.

Inner conflict finishes and there is an easiness and peace within the soul. This enables us to develop relationships with others, based on respect and humility and to have a positive influence on the world around us.

A life filled with values is a life of self-respect and dignity.

“When we change, the world changes”

2. Healthcare



The Brahma Kumaris initiated the founding in Rajasthan, India of the Global Hospital and Research Centre in the early 1990's.



It offers full in-patient and out-patient facilities as well as a very comprehensive outreach programme, treating and advising the community at large.





Thoughts from Sikhism

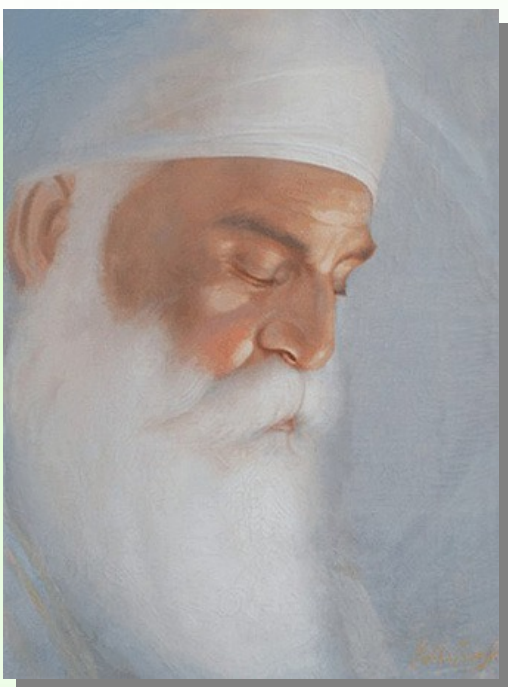
1. One God

“God formed the planets, solar systems and nether regions, and brought what was hidden to manifestation. When God so willed, he created the world. Without any supporting power, he sustained the universe.”
SGGS



“There is only one provider for all beings, and that he is God himself, whom I shall never forget to thank”
SGGS Page 2B

2. The Three Pillars of Sikhism



Guru Nanak formalised these three pillars of Sikhism: Naam Japna (focus of God), Kirat Karni (honest living) and Vand Chakna (sharing with others).

2.1 Naam Japna (Focus on God)

The Gurus led the Sikhs directly to practice Simran and Naam Japna – meditation on God through reciting, chanting, singing and constant remembrance followed by deep study & comprehension of God's Name and virtues (Gurbani the Compendium of ETERNAL truth).

The inner voice of the Sikh thus stays immersed in praises and appreciation of the Creator and the ONE ETERNAL GOD Waheguru and his WILL. The Sikh is to intuitively practice and stay focused on the True Path through every breath throughout his life. Various ways were gifted to the Sikhs to remember and tread on this path of righteousness.

To begin with and as a social habit, recite the Nitnem banis daily in remembrance of the grace and Kirpa (blessing) of the Almighty.

'Early to bed & early to rise...' is the first step towards the Gate to Sikhism.

2.2 Kirat Karni (Honest Living)

He expected the Sikhs to live as honourable householders and practice Kirat Karni – To honestly earn by ones physical and mental effort while accepting both pains & pleasures as God's gifts and blessings. One is to stay truthful at all times and, fear none but the Eternal Super Soul. Live a life founded on decency immersed in Dharam - life controlled by spiritual, moral & social values.

2.3 Vand Chakna (Sharing with Others)

The Sikhs were asked to share their wealth within the community by practising Vand Chakna – “Share and consume together”. The community or Sadh Sangat is an important part of Sikhism. One must be part of a community that is pursuing flawless objective values set out by the Sikh Gurus and every Sikh has to contribute in whatever way possible to the common community pool. This spirit of **Sharing** and **Giving** is an important message from Guru Nanak.

3. Conquer the Five Thieves



“Within this body dwell the five thieves: sexual desire, anger, greed, emotional attachment and egotism. They plunder the Nectar, but the self-willed manmukh (ego minded person) does not realize it; no one

hears his complaint. The world is blind, and its dealings are blind as well; without the Guru, there is only pitch darkness.”
SGGS page 600

The Sikh Gurus tell us that our mind and spirit are constantly being attacked by the Five Evils. These are: Kam (Lust); Krodh (Rage); Lobh (Greed); Moh (Attachment); and Ahankar (Ego). A Sikh needs to constantly attack and overcome these five vices.

Sikhs must learn to develop and harness positive human qualities which lead the soul closer to God, and help conquer the five thieves. These are: Sat (Truth); Daya (Compassion); Santokh (Contentment); Nimrata (Humility); and Pyare (Love).

4. Equality

Sikhs believe that all human beings are equal.

“We are sons and daughters of Waheguru the Almighty”.

Sikhs have to treat all peoples of the world on an equal footing. No gender, racial, social or other discrimination is allowed.

The Sikh Gurus tell us that salvation can be obtained by following various spiritual paths. Therefore, Sikhs do not have a monopoly on Salvation.

“Many Spiritual paths lead to God”.

Sikhs do not consider themselves as having a monopoly on God or a “superior” right to salvation. Sikhs do not consider themselves as the “chosen people of God”. However, Sikh scripture is probably the only known holy book that advances this message of “religious equality”, offering advice for Muslims to be better Muslims and for Hindus to be better Hindus. All faiths have the same right to liberty as a Sikhs.

“Some read the Vedas, and some the Koran. Some wear blue robes, and some wear white. Some call themselves Muslim, and some call themselves Hindu. Some yearn for paradise, and others long for heaven. Says Nanak, one who realizes the Hukam of God’s Will, knows the secrets of his Lord and Master” - SGGGS Page 885

*“Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran are false. Those who do not contemplate them are false”
SGGS Page 1350*

Thoughts from Buddhism

1. Harmony



Photo courtesy SGI-UK Archive

“No man is an island, entire of itself and it is true that throughout our lives, no matter what life-style we choose, whether we choose to take a partner, have a family or not – we exist in a web of relationships”

John Dunne

How do we live harmoniously with others? Despite humankind’s progress in the arenas of science and technology the answers to questions concerning the human heart seem to remain elusive.

The hallmarks of rich, satisfying and mutually rewarding relationships are such things as trust, respect, friendship and love. Buddhist practice offers a means of developing these inner qualities and also teaches that difficulties offer us an important opportunity for personal growth.

2. Respect and happiness

Society is increasingly fixated on finding love, but relationships can quickly founder if they are not based on respect. Buddhist practice enables us to develop deep respect for each person's unique expression of humanity including, of course, one's own. In contemporary society, respect is more usually accorded to those who have such things as status, power, wealth or celebrity, but key to successful relationships is the extent to which we are able to deeply respect and embrace the lives of the people around us, even those most different from our own.

Through Buddhist practice we discover our limitless potential and, recognise that this potential is also inherent in the lives of others. We are also encouraged to take action through dialogue so that others too become awakened to the greatness of their own lives.

It may seem that effort to deepen our understanding of our inner potential is effort solely beneficial to *ourselves*, but the establishment of a deep respect and inner conviction in our own life-potential means that quite naturally we become able to interact with all others on this basis. Similarly, it may appear that the effort to engage with others in ways that enable them to awaken to their own great potential is only beneficial to *them*, but actually it serves to reinforce the tendency of respect within oneself.

Although it takes effort to elevate our own life-condition to one of respect, this effort results in increasingly rich relationships in which we are able to focus on, connect with and encourage the strengths of those around us. Establishing the desire to deepen our understanding of our own life-potential, whilst simultaneously taking action and engaging in dialogue to awaken everyone around us to their own value, is the cause for establishing a life which has happiness and respect at its core.

Thoughts from Islam

1. Equality in Islam



Islam removes all the impositions of barriers and classes amongst all societies in order to enable them to enjoy and practice legitimate and healthy relationships. Islam does not allow any form of discrimination.

“O mankind! Be dutiful to your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; fear Allah, through Whom you demand (your mutual rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (that bore you). Surely, Allah ever watches over you.”

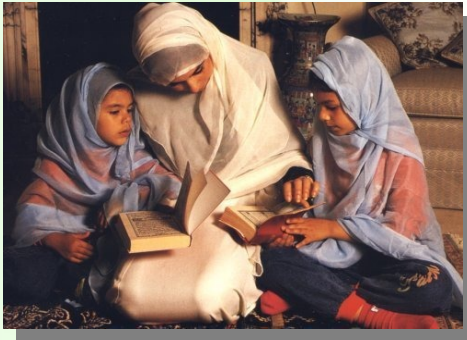
Qur'an 4:1

Islam declares all people equal in terms of human values. The only distinction between people is on the basis of service that the individual presents to his society and community. Moreover, Islam looks at the religious, social or worldly services that individuals offer to their society and community.

“...All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white except by piety and good action...”

Allah's Messenger, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

2. Parents Rights



Islam pays special attention to the family and encourages love and respect within it. The parents are the basis and foundation of the family, hence honouring one's parents is one of the best deeds and one of the most beloved actions to Allah.

Honouring one's parents is achieved by obeying them, respecting them, being humble towards them, treating them kindly, spending on them, praying for them, upholding ties of kinship with those to whom one is related through them, and honouring their friends:

“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour.”

Qur'an 17:23

The rights of the mother in this regard are three times greater than the father's, because she is the one who bears the child, gives birth to him and breastfeeds him.

A man once approached the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, *“O Messenger of Allah, who is most deserving of my good companionship?”* He said, *“Your mother.”* The man then asked, *“Then who?”* The Prophet said, *“Your mother.”* The man asked, *“Then who?”* The Prophet said, *“Your mother.”* The man asked again, *“Then who?”* The Prophet then replied, *“Your father.”* (Bukhari)

3. Neighbours' Rights

Islamic Shari'a (law) places much emphasis on honouring a neighbour, being kind with him and abstaining from any act that could harm him. Allah says:

“...And do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger...”
Qur'an 4:36

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“(The Angel) Gabriel impressed upon me (the kind treatment) towards the neighbour so much that I thought he would soon confer upon him the right of inheritance.”
Bukhari & Muslim

Know that the kind treatment should be for the sake of Allah, and not for any personal benefit. If one intends only the worldly benefits through his good treatment with his neighbour then he will not get any reward in Hereafter. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended...”
Bukhari & Muslim

Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to maintain good ties with their neighbours. The rights of a neighbour are greater than mere worldly benefits. So, fulfilling those rights strengthens communities and societies.

4. Children's Rights

Children in Islam are entitled to various and several rights. The first and foremost of these rights is the right to be properly brought up, raised and educated. This means that children should be given suitable, sufficient, sound and adequate religious, ethical and moral guidance to last them for their entire life. Allah, the Almighty stated in the Glorious Qur'an:



“O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones...”

Qur'an 66:6

Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him), also said:

“Every one of your (people) is a shepherd. And every one is responsible for whatever falls under his responsibility. A man is like a shepherd of his own family and he is responsible for them.”

Bukhari & Muslim

Children have the right to be treated equally in terms financial gifts. None should be preferred by their parents over the others. All must be treated fairly and equally. Depriving a child will be considered in Islam an act of injustice which leads to an atmosphere of hatred, anger, dismay and animosity amongst the children in the household.

5. Visiting the Sick

From the good and virtuous actions that Islam encourages is the act of visiting the ill and afflicted. When people visit each other in good health, bonds of friendship are strengthened. These visits have greater impact in times of sickness and failing health. The action of visiting the sick illustrates the empathy that Muslims are required to feel for humanity.

Visiting the sick is from the clearest signs of such mutual love, mercy and empathy. More than that, visiting the sick is a major responsibility that every single Muslim is duty-bound to fulfil. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

*“The rights of one Muslim over another Muslim are six... When you meet him, you greet him with the *salaam* (i.e. to say: “*As-Salamu alaykum*”), when he invites you, you accept his invitation, when he consults you in a matter, you give him sincere advice, when he sneezes and praises God, you ask God to have mercy on him, when he is sick, you visit him, and when he passes away you accompany him (through his funeral).”*

Bukhari

A Muslim is encouraged to be concerned with the affairs of his community and society during the three phases of his worldly existence: his health, sickness and his death. God’s Messenger, Muhammad is reported to have said:

“A visitor walking to visit a sick person will be wading in the mercy of God. When the visitor sits with the sick one, they will be immersed in mercy until his or her return.”

Imam Ahmad and Ibn Hibban

6. Charity in Islam



Charity is a way of bringing justice to society, and justice is the essence of religion. Islam has therefore made charity, that is, Zakat, obligatory and binding upon all those who embrace the faith; it has been made into an institution in order to give it permanence and regularity.

A society can flourish only when its members do not spend all their wealth on the satisfaction of their own desires but reserve a portion of it for parents, relatives, neighbours, the poor and the incapacitated.

"They ask you (O Muhammad) what they should spend in charity. Say: 'Whatever you spend with a good heart, give it to parents, relatives, orphans, the helpless, and travellers in need. Whatever good you do, God is aware of it.'"

Qur'an 2:215

There are two forms of charity in Islam: obligatory (*zakah*) and voluntary (*sadaqah*).

Oblatory *Zakah* means purification in the sense of wholesome. Giving up of a portion of the wealth one may possess in excess of what is needed for sustenance, is to "purify" or legalize it. Islam has established this as an institution to make concern for the poor a permanent and compulsory duty, such as an annual contribution of two and a half percent of one's income to public welfare and other rates for other types of wealth such as agricultural produce and jewellery.

The test of charity lies not in giving away something we have discarded but the things that we value greatly, something that we love. It is unselfishness that God demands. It may be in any form: one's personal efforts, talents, skill, learning, property or possessions.

"By no means shall you attain righteousness, unless you give of that which you love..."

Qur'an 3:92

Voluntary *Sadaqah* is a very wide term and is used in the Quran to cover all kinds of charity. Its scope is so vast that even the poor who can have nothing tangible to give can offer sadaqah in the shape of a smile or a glass of water to a thirsty person, or they may even just utter a kindly word. Good conduct is frequently termed sadaqah in the Hadith (teachings of the Prophet). Planting something from which a person, bird or animal later eats also counts as *sadaqah*. In this extended sense, acts of love, kindness, even greeting one another with a cheerful face, is regarded as *sadaqah*. In short, every good deed is *sadaqah*.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

"Every Muslim has to give in charity" The people then asked: "(But what) if someone has nothing to give, what should he do?" The Prophet replied: "He should work with his hands and benefit himself and also give in charity (from what he earns)." The people further asked: "If he cannot find even that?" He replied: "He should help the needy who appeal for help." Then the people asked: "If he cannot do (even) that?" The Prophet said finally: "Then he should perform good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and that will be regarded as charitable deeds."

Bukhari