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EUROPEAN BUDDHIST

magazine

In 2025 we
celebrate the
50th anniversary
of the EBU!

CREATING
PEACE FROM
WITHIN



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ENJOY
THE
PEACE



Shaping the Identity of European Buddhism.

By Stefano Davide Bettera



The year 2025 will be a special one for the European Buddhist Union: it will mark the **50th anniversary** of our union. The 50-year anniversary calls on us to reflect on the current state of Buddhism and the future perspectives and challenges that lie ahead, both in the near and distant future. The central question is, therefore, what kind of Buddhism can we imagine for the future? Is it already possible to identify the features of what may come in the coming decades? In short, can we truly begin to speak of a Western Buddhism capable of addressing the most pressing issues emerging from society and providing possible interpretative keys to its complexity?

Over the past fifty years, Buddhism has established a solid presence in Europe, evolving into a rich and diverse phenomenon. It encompasses various branches and interconnections from different Asian Buddhist traditions. However, Buddhism's unique

ability to transcend traditional categories—whether as a religion, philosophy, practice, or lifestyle—offers Europe something even more profound: a sensibility, an understanding, and an existential stance that resonate with a broad spectrum of individuals. This includes not only practitioners but also intellectuals, researchers, activists, and sympathizers whose worldviews have been profoundly shaped by Buddhist teachings.

From this complex landscape, we wish to begin by imagining what European Buddhism might look like fifty years from now. That's why, the EBU will organize a day of reflection and dialogue titled **"Buddhism 2075: Shaping the Identity of European Buddhism."** The conference will take place in Vienna on April 25 next year, preceding our annual general assembly, which, as every year, will bring together all our members from across Europe. The conference will have a dynamic format, favoring debate over monologues and encouraging interaction between speakers and the audience. ►

► This exploration will guide us in understanding the evolving identity of European Buddhism in an era of profound cultural, technological, social, and political transformation. The first and perhaps most compelling question we will ask is: does a distinctly European (or Western) form of Buddhism already exist? Are we witnessing a process of cultural adaptation in Europe, similar to how Buddhism historically integrated with local cultures across Asia? How far along are we in this process, and what changes when the cultural backdrop is modern, rooted in secularism and scientific thinking? These questions naturally lead us to explore the relationship between Buddhism and science, beyond superficial reconciliations. This isn't just a matter of academic debate but touches on how these ideas shape the genuine inner lives of practitioners. How strongly should contemporary Buddhism remain connected to its traditional roots? And how much should we embrace its inherent capacity for renewal—its anti-dogmatic, critical, and non-metaphysical spirit?

This also raises questions about Buddhism's original monastic vocation, which has remained central but has not been its only historical expression. While monasticism has always been a strong component, Buddhism has also flourished among lay practitioners and across various cultural contexts. Does European Buddhism still need monasteries, or should it evolve into new forms that reflect the needs of contemporary practitioners?

Additionally, how should Buddhism engage with the pressing social issues facing democratic Europe, where increasingly polarized debates divide liberal and conservative ideologies? Examples such as gender equality, racism, social inclusion, and bioethics are just a few of the many issues that dominate public discourse today. Other critical areas include environmental ethics, freedom of expression, and the challenges of migration. These are complex questions with significant identity and political implications. Should European Buddhists take a stand on these matters, or should Buddhism remain outside such debates, to avoid the risk of being shaped by the biases of contemporary society?

And finally, the most important and challenging question: is it possible to find common ground, a shared foundation among the various forms of Buddhism that have taken root in Europe? These different forms already coexist in the same cities and within national and transnational Buddhist unions. But can they not only coexist but also foster a deeper sense of unity and collaboration within these shared spaces? This invites us to consider the still-untapped potential for a truly unified Buddhist community. Perhaps this is where we should begin—laying the foundation for a spiritual and ethical perspective capable of contributing to the course of the new millennium. 🧘

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Picture: pexels-kimchen-lach-310271108-19217347



Stefano Davide Bettera
European Buddhist Union
President



Stefano Davide Bettera is a writer, philosopher and journalist. He alternates his work as an author with teaching.

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Editorial:

Creating Peace from Within

Peace is something we all need—in our surroundings, our countries, and across the globe. Yet to create lasting peace externally, we must first cultivate it within ourselves.

“Creating Peace from Within” is one of the fundamental principles of Buddhist practice. Retreats, which offer moments of stillness and reflection, are invaluable steps on the journey toward inner peace. Jake Lyne explores this transformative process on page 26.

Fostering peace and harmony in society is also a key goal of interfaith dialogue and collaboration among faith communities. In this issue, we gain insights from prominent religious leaders: Chief Rabbi Albert Guigui (p.10), Archbishop Nikitas (p.14), and Carlo Luyckx (p.22). Additionally, Vincent Depaigne (p.18) delves into the significance of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, which enshrines interfaith dialogue as a cornerstone of the European Union’s vision.

We’re also excited to introduce a new section: “News from the EBU.” Here, you’ll find updates on current events and dynamic projects shaping the European Buddhist Union’s work.

Looking ahead, the EBU will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year—a milestone we plan to honor in grand style. On page 4, President Stefano Bettera offers a sneak peek at the celebratory plans.

We hope you enjoy this issue and find inspiration within its pages!

Ron Eichhorn



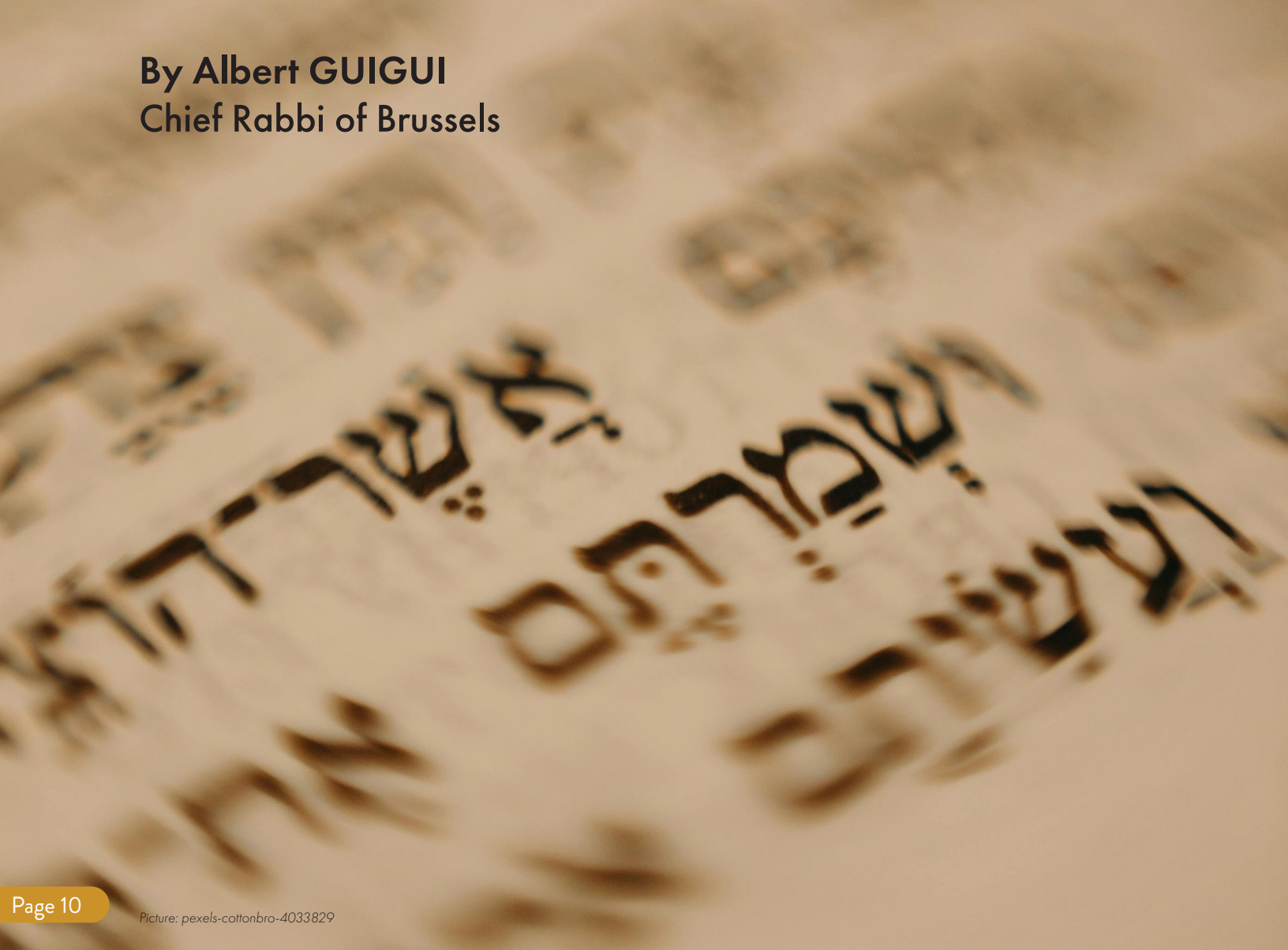
Ron Eichhorn is the husband of Miriam and a practicing Buddhist for over 35 years. He is a former president of the EBU, serves as abbot of the Berlin temple of the Yun Hwa Sangha, and is active in interfaith initiatives on an international level. Ron is a professional film director and also makes Natural Wine in Vienna. In his spare time, he started to do pottery and likes to go sailing.

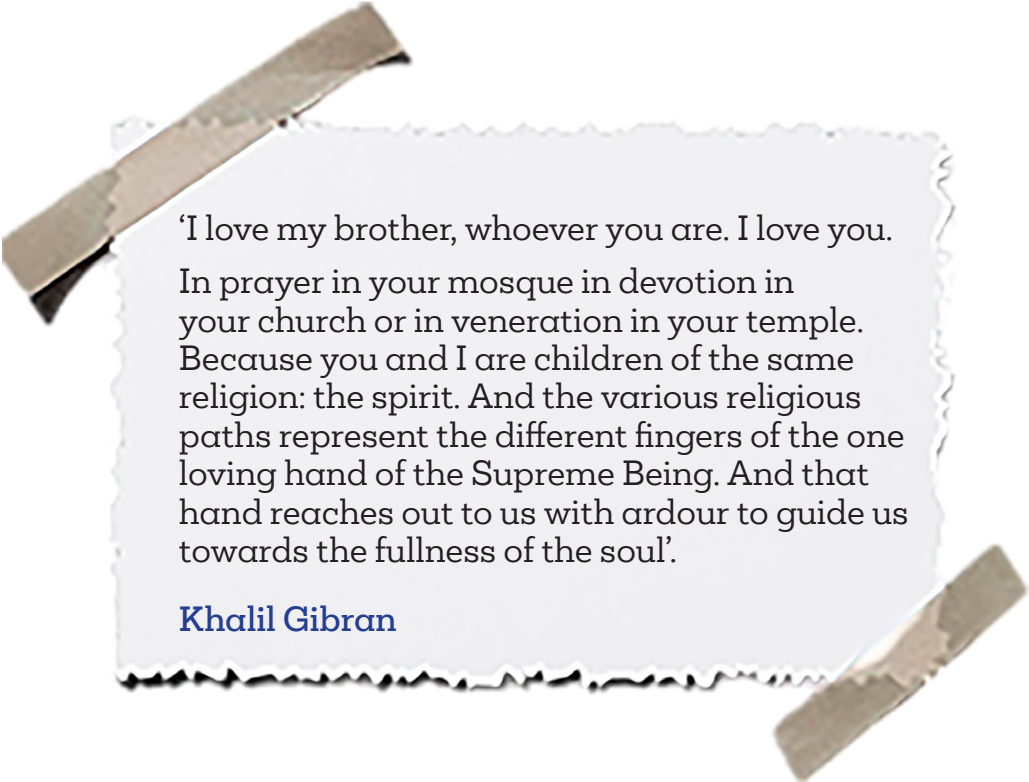




Inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue: challenges and realities

By Albert GUIGUI
Chief Rabbi of Brussels





'I love my brother, whoever you are. I love you.

In prayer in your mosque in devotion in your church or in veneration in your temple. Because you and I are children of the same religion: the spirit. And the various religious paths represent the different fingers of the one loving hand of the Supreme Being. And that hand reaches out to us with ardour to guide us towards the fullness of the soul'.

Khalil Gibran

Inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue is first and foremost a spiritual attitude. It is a spirituality that leads us from rejection to acceptance, from categorisation to understanding, from the disfigurement of others to respect, from condemnation to mercy, from intimacy to concord, from competition to complementarity, from antipathy to encounter and from hostility to fraternity. So one of the greatest merits of inter-religious dialogue is precisely to break down the barriers between people, to enable them to meet and discuss, to unite, to esteem and appreciate each other. This knowledge implies acceptance of the differences that assign each person his or her own path. We have to accept the Other as they are and not as we would have liked them to be. This is what Emmanuel Lévinas calls *the Epiphany of the Other*.

To dialogue with the Other is to know him and recognise him in the fullness of his responsibility, and to welcome him as a completion of ourselves rather than as an adversary, competitor or enemy. There is no doubt that fanaticism in its various forms, in the name of God, religion, nation, faith, land, ethnicity or language, as well as in the name of cultural and social belonging, is the number one enemy of dialogue.

Dialogue is the means by which we become aware that we are not alone in our dealings with other people and with God. God was the first to seek dialogue. It was He who began to speak to man after creating

him. It was He who sought out Adam, in despair at having eaten of the forbidden fruit, and Cain, who had killed his brother. God did not abandon his creatures to their oppressive silence. He called on his creatures, capable of the worst and the best, to enter into dialogue with him. And God said to Adam, 'Where are you?'¹.

True dialogue involves understanding, making an effort to understand the partner on their terms rather than ours. It involves sharing, bringing to the dialogue our deepest convictions, even if they are potentially painful for the partner. Dialogue therefore means introducing differences into relationships of mutual respect and trust. ►

¹ Gn. III, 9

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One of the greatest merits of inter-religious dialogue is precisely to break down the barriers between people, to enable them to meet and discuss, to unite, to esteem and appreciate each other.

- Dialogue should enable individuals to draw mutual enrichment from their differences, to make each other more fruitful. There are no winners or losers, but human beings who emerge from this experience renewed.

The *Midrash* clearly illustrates this aspect that gives each individual this divine vocation. In the Talmud², a rabbi asked:

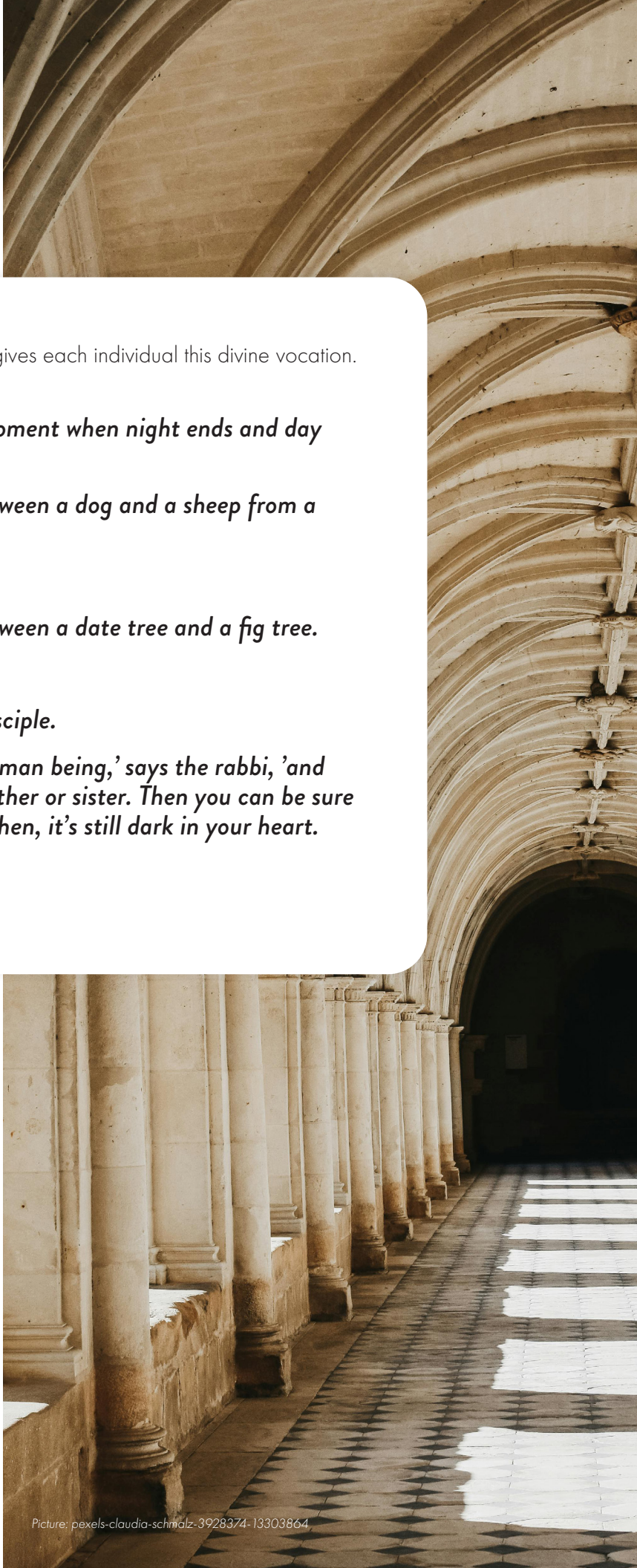
- ***How can we recognise the precise moment when night ends and day begins? One of the disciples replied:***
- ***When you can tell the difference between a dog and a sheep from a distance.***
- ***No,' said the rabbi.***
- ***When you can tell the difference between a date tree and a fig tree.***
- ***No,' said the rabbi again.***
- ***But then, at what point,' asks the disciple.***
- ***When you look at the face of any human being,' says the rabbi, 'and you recognise him or her as your brother or sister. Then you can be sure that the day has dawned. But until then, it's still dark in your heart.***

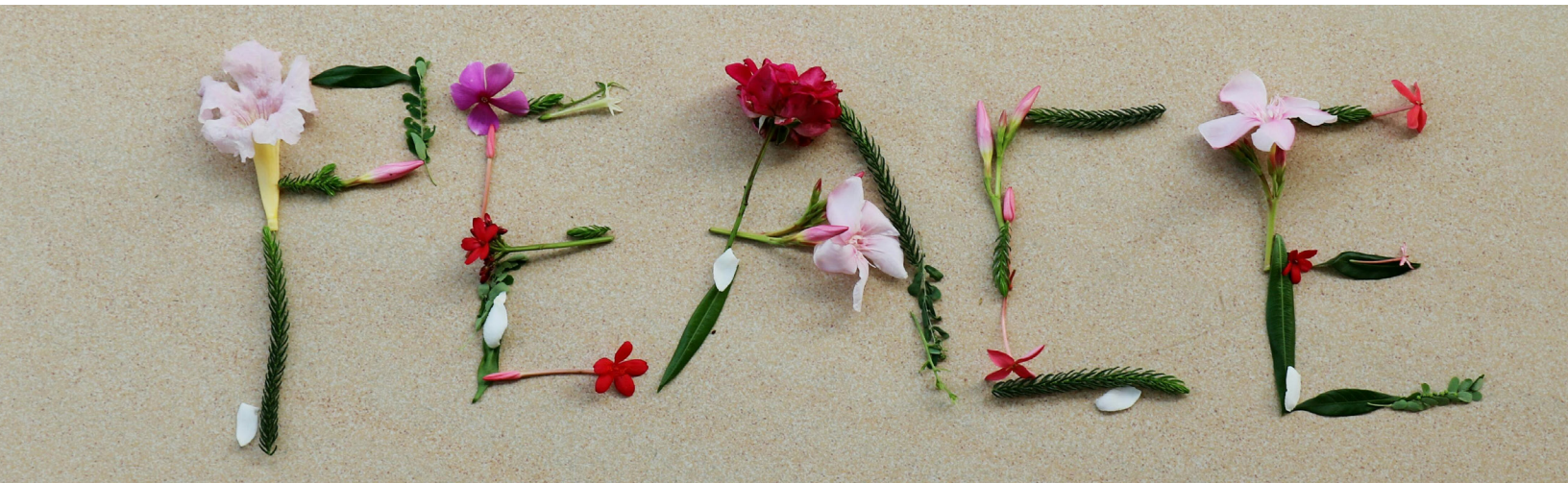
² Berachoth 9b

DIALOGUE AND COMMITMENT

What can we do to ensure that this dialogue bears fruit? This dialogue must not be the preserve of an elite. It must be able to reach the masses and raise their awareness. It is the only effective way of facing up, together, to the threat of hatred that hangs over all human groups and of which anti-Semitism is one expression.

This dialogue must be supported by ongoing, daily education and by a correct, objective perception of religions. One of the greatest merits of this dialogue is precisely to break down the barriers between people, to enable them to meet and discuss, to seek solutions to their problems together, to unite in order to ►





Picture: pexels-disha-sheta-596631-3112898

- respond better to current problems which often go beyond selfish interests.

Unity in diversity: this must be the goal of inter-religious and inter-confessional dialogue. It is the only way to push us towards renewed solidarity. But what are we seeing today? An extremely dangerous rise in racism and anti-Semitism, with the development of extreme right-wing movements proliferating throughout Europe.

Together we must fight more effectively against social injustice and prejudice, and promote a more humane and generous world, because our various religions demand that we practise mutual social assistance, respect individual autonomy, take personal responsibility, defend the weak, condemn racism in all its forms, and give primacy to Man created in the image of God.

A MASTERPIECE

The word 'Shalom', which means peace and is a leitmotif in our daily prayers and actions, derives from the verb 'lehachlim', which means 'to complement one another'. According to our sages, true peace resides only in the complementarity of one in relation to the other. True peace means reaching out to one another with the aim of training and living in harmony. A master painting with only one colour represents nothing. The beauty of a painting lies in the harmony of its colours and their juxtaposition.

Each of us must create the outline of a giant painting. It's up to each of us to start creating the most beautiful painting, the most admired painting, the painting to which the eyes of all men are drawn, the painting in which all the colours and nuances are respected. It's a long road. But, as the Maxims of the Fathers emphasise: 'You are not asked to complete the work, but you are not free to avoid it.'³ 🕯

3 II, 21



Albert Guigui has been chief rabbi attached to the Central Jewish Consistory of Belgium since 1980 and chief rabbi of Brussels since 1987. In this capacity he plays a particularly active role in associative life, in the teaching of Israelite religion course. He is also spokesperson for the Conference of European Rabbis to the European Union and correspondent for several institutes. He is the author of a large number of articles published in various books and journals.



FOSTERING A SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND ACTION

By H.E. Archbishop Nikitas
President of Conference of European Churches

*T*he past decades have allowed for people of different and various cultures, identities, and expressions of life to come together and break down the barriers that have separated them for years and even centuries. This is also true in the area of religious and faith traditions. Religious leaders now gather and sit at a common table and look to learn from one another and seek solutions to the growing problems of the world in a spirit of solidarity. Dialogue and the exchange of ideas are now a firm part of the life of religious communities.

In this new and growing movement, the Eastern Orthodox Church, especially the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has taken great strides to show the world that we can live and work together in a spirit of harmony.

In the United Kingdom, following the directives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain has taken a leading role in working with other religious bodies to share from the wealth of its spiritual tradition, as well as to learn and join in the many programs that address the needs of society. While Orthodoxy is firmly rooted in the Christian understanding and meaning of truth, it finds parallel thought and expressions in other religious and philosophical traditions, including that of Buddhism. This may seem strange to many people

but the following brief comments and words will offer some food for thought.

Eastern Orthodoxy uses the expression and term “theosis” to describe the purpose of the spiritual struggle. In the Orthodox understanding of spiritual struggle and growth, it is not important to know about God; rather, it is critical to become “god-like” and unite oneself to God. While the tradition of Buddhism does not speak of a god, the following words and patterns will certainly seem familiar to many Buddhists. As human knowledge and understanding are limited and finite, it is impossible for one to come to know and grasp the infinite. The self and the ego must be put to side just as the heart must be emptied, so Truth can abide there. The following line from the Book of Proverbs is a clear understanding of this - “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways” (Proverbs 23:26). It is the heart and the soul which must struggle and ascend the ladder of spiritual progress and growth. This is a long process of cleansing and emptying of preconceived ideas and thoughts brought about by obedience, silence and sacrifice. The mind, logic and reason, though, cannot understand nor grasp the glory of God, for the created is unable to approach the Creator. This is why one can understand that he/she must move beyond the limits set by so many obstacles in life. Pride, the ego, greed, hatred and so many other vices and evil thoughts are set to the side. ►

Pictures provided by
H.E. Archbishop Nikitas



- Orthodox believe that the “prayer of the heart”, more commonly known as the Jesus Prayer, assists in this spiritual struggle. One repeats the prayer and focuses only on the name of Jesus. Assisted by breathing and other measures such as silence, incense and a prayer rope, the individual invites grace and peace into his/her life with the hope that he/she might be changed and transfigured and achieve his/her true calling.



While these practices are best defined and experienced in a monastic setting, they are also found in the daily life of the faithful. If one were to remove Christian terminology, the pattern, means and expression seem almost Buddhist. In fact, studies have been conducted to examine the parallels in the two traditions concerning monasticism and spiritual growth. Parallels to the Orthodox monastic virtues of fasting, vigilance and prayer can also certainly be found in the Buddhist rites.

These expressions of prayer, solitude, silence and spiritual struggle need to be explored, shared and studied. This is only a brief introduction and further dialogue and open doors and hearts, will allow for this. 🧘



H.E. Archbishop Nikitas

*President of Conference
of European Churches*



Picture: Albin Hillert/CEC

Archbishop Nikitas is coordinator of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Task Force on Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery, and has served as chairman of the Patriarchate's Committee on Youth as well as co-chair and steering committee member of the Elijah Inter-faith Foundation. He is currently co-president of the European Catholic-Orthodox Forum.

*Picture: pexels-axp-photography
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THE DIALOGUE UNDER ARTICLE 17 OF THE TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

By Vincent Depaigne

Vincent Depaigne: European Commission Coordinator for the dialogue with Churches, religious, philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

The Commission has developed a dialogue that is probably unique in the world. The European political institutions seek the views of religions and communities of belief in order to take their views into account in the policy-making process.

The dialogue with “churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations” was conferred by the Lisbon Treaty (Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). It is governed by general guidelines drawn up by the Commission.¹

Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides that:

1. The Union shall respect and not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The Union shall also respect the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with such churches and organisations.

HISTORY OF THE DIALOGUE

The Commission initiated an informal dialogue with churches and religious organisations in the 1990s. With his 1994 initiative ‘A Soul for Europe’, Jacques Delors, then President of the Commission, established the first formal contacts between the European institutions

and religious and non-confessional organisations. Its aim was to take into account the spiritual and ethical components of European integration and to encourage the participation of all components of civil society in the integration process, including religious and philosophical organisations.

Declaration 11 annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), which states that the Union respects the status of churches and non-confessional organisations under national law, formally recognised for the first time the importance of religious and philosophical issues at Union level. Church-State relations are a matter for the competence of the Member States of the Union. This implies not only that Member States are free to develop their own model according to their history and traditions, but also that the Union institutions are not required to conform to any particular national model of secularism or Church-State relations. Member States are nevertheless required to respect the fundamental rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, such as freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 9).

The Convention on the Future of Europe and Constitutional Treaty (2002) was tasked with drawing up a draft Constitution for Europe. Topics discussed included the role of Christianity and religion in shaping European culture and identity, the place of the Churches in contemporary society, a reference to God or Europe’s Christian heritage in the preamble to the Treaty (as mentioned in the Constitutions of several Member States), and the inclusion of the provisions of Declaration 11.

A reflection group on the spiritual and cultural dimension of Europe presented conclusions on the public role of religions and different models of church-state relations. Some non-confessional and secular

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/guidelines-implementation-art-17_en.pdf

- 
- ▶ organisations opposed any mention of any God or religion. They expressed reservations about the establishment of a formal dialogue mechanism between the Union institutions and religious or non-denominational organisations, arguing that the provision on dialogue with civil society was sufficient.

The subsequent Intergovernmental Conference in 2003-2004 adopted the final text of the draft Constitutional Treaty. As the heir to a long tradition of secularism, France, supported by Belgium, strongly opposed the idea, put forward by countries with a strong Catholic tradition, of referring to God or Christianity in the preamble to the Treaty. At the same time, representatives of religious organisations insisted on the inclusion of provisions on the status of the Churches and the opening of a dialogue with the Union institutions.

The final version of the preamble to the Constitutional Treaty contained a general reference to the role of religion in the origin of European values. The provisions of Declaration 11 were incorporated into the Treaty, which contains provisions on dialogue with churches and faith-based and non-faith-based organisations. Following the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in referendums in France and the Netherlands, the Treaty of Lisbon was adopted in 2007 and entered into force in December 2009. The provisions of Article 51 were incorporated without amendments into Article 17 of this Treaty, also known as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

In 2005, José Manuel Barroso, then President of the Commission, took the initiative to organise

an annual high-level meeting with European religious leaders. The Presidents of the European Parliament and the European Council were invited to join the dialogue from 2007. According to the Commission, these meetings allow the EU institutions and representatives of the EU's religious communities to have an open dialogue on EU policies. In 2009, the Commission decided to organise a high-level meeting each year between the three EU institutions and philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE DIALOGUE

This dialogue is unique. No other public/state institution has a legal obligation to have an "open, transparent and regular" dialogue with religions AND non-confessional organisations. The Commission has had a coordinator in charge of the dialogue since the time of President Jacques Delors.

The dialogue uses multi-level instruments – high-level meetings, regular dialogue seminars and bilateral meetings at all levels.

The dialogue is not inter-religious. The dialogue is with churches, religious and non-confessional organisations on EU policy, not inter-religious or inter-belief. It is not up to public institutions to organise civil society.

The dialogue is horizontal. It covers EU policies such as the future of Europe, migration/asylum, integration, education and inclusion as well as topics such as the fight against poverty, but also (in the context of external relations) freedom of religion and belief. ▶

► DIALOGUE PARTNERS

The guidelines on Article 17 adopted by the Commission specify: “dialogue partners may be churches, religious associations or communities as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations recognised or registered as such at national level and adhering to European values. There is no official recognition or registration of interlocutors at European level.”

All dialogue partners are encouraged to register in the EU Transparency Register (although this is not mandatory to participate in the Article 17 Dialogue). There are around 50 registered organisations in total, the vast majority of which are religious organisations.

THEMES OF THE DIALOGUE

The themes chosen for the dialogue focus on issues related to fundamental values and the ethical dimension of EU policies. They should reflect both EU priorities and areas of concern for the Article 17 dialogue partners.

In recent years, the dialogue has addressed issues at the heart of the EU agenda (migration, integration, the future of Europe). In 2021, the dialogue focused on the Conference on the Future of Europe. In 2022, the war in Ukraine and its consequences for the European Union was the priority for the dialogue. In 2023, the Commission convened a high-level meeting with religious leaders dedicated to the situation in the Middle East and its impact on the European Union.



Issues discussed in the Article 17 dialogue also covered the fight against climate change, artificial intelligence, the “EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion and Belief”; issues related to the fight against discrimination, anti-Semitism and racism; gender equality (including violence against women); the European labour market/ social model; the values dimension in education; the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

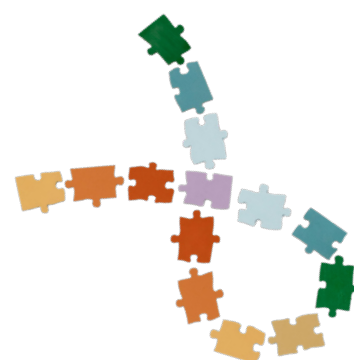
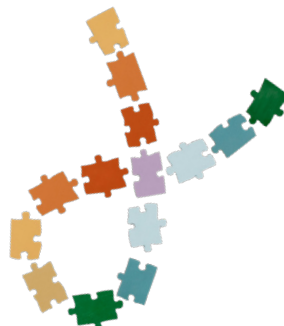
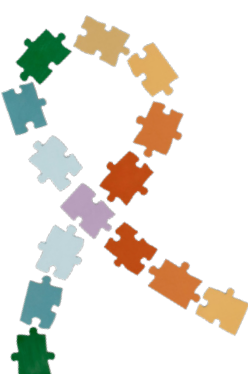
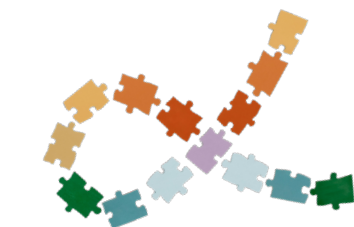
HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS

The dialogue is currently organised around two annual high-level meetings chaired by the Vice-President of the European Commission, Margaritis Schinas (the European Parliament and the Presidency of the Council are also regularly invited): one with religious leaders and the other with philosophical and non-confessional leaders.

Bilateral meetings between the Commission and some representatives of religions and non-confessional actors are also organised on specific themes.

TARGETED CONSULTATIONS

As part of the process of developing the ethical guidelines by the High-Level Group on Artificial Intelligence, consultations were organised with Article 17 partners to inform them about the ethical guidelines and receive their comments and contributions. Further consultations were organised in 2013 and 2018 on the development and implementation of the “EU Guidelines on Religion and Belief”. 🙏



DIALOGUE BETWEEN
FAITHS IS MUTUALLY
ENRICHING



DIALOGUE BETWEEN FAITHS IS MUTUALLY ENRICHING

By Carlo Luyckx

One of the most enriching experiences of my eighteen years as deputy mayor of Saint-Gilles, one of the towns that are part of the Brussels Capital Region, was the creation in 2010 of **the roundtable of interconvictional dialogue**. About forty representatives of all the churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship as well as the freethinkers met twice a year to discuss and better know each other. The Saint-Gilles roundtable was first launched at the townhall in the presence of the mayor.

Afterwards we were welcomed each time in another of the emblematic places of each spiritual or philosophical tradition. Saint-Gilles being host to over 140 different nationalities, this initiative was an exceptional way of building bridges between the communities which compose the multicultural richness of the town. I had already understood that a culture can only be enriched by encountering other cultures. This roundtable experience has largely proved that the same counts for religions and philosophies.

Having thus established longstanding relationships of trust, one day in 2018 the Rabbi of the local synagogue, member of the roundtable, phoned me to propose becoming, as president of the Belgian Buddhist Union, one of the founding members of **Emouna Belgium**, following the French example where the successful

initiative of Rabbi Pauline Bebe had been launched in partnership with the Science Po University in Paris. Together with the representatives in Belgium of the catholic, protestant, anglican and orthodox churches, of islam and of Judaism, **Emouna Belgium was launched in 2019 as a training program for priests, rabbis, imams, buddhists and people with responsibilities in faith-based or philosophical organizations.**

Each academic year of Emouna Belgium, a group of 20 to 30 participants meets twice a month to listen to speakers on different topics that are of special interest for their activities, but also take part in role-playing games, debates on themes that are usually avoided in traditional interfaith dialogue, art workshops, etc. At the end of each year starting in October and finishing in June, the students must present projects ►



Picture of the Emouna France, Belgium and Netherlands meeting in Brussels on 24 April 2023, in the presence of Queen Mathilde of Belgium.

► that are developed in small groups composed of different convictions. The result is that, as the training progresses, lasting bonds of friendship have been forged between people who normally rarely meet each other. At the end of the experience, the participants regret that the programme has already ended, and often find themselves active in projects that they had developed together.

Another important aspect is that for each of the participants, the fact of having to confront their faith or philosophy with the beliefs of the others could be seen as a significant challenge. Among the few hundreds who already had the Emouna experience in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and since this year also in Italy, nobody has lost his or her faith or converted to another conviction. On the contrary, **having to discover and try to understand the beliefs of others has proven to be a stimulus to better understand and deepen one's own tradition**, while going beyond the limited principle of tolerance to develop an authentic interest and respect for all other beliefs and philosophies. 🧘



Carlo Luyckx became Buddhist in 1971 in Samye Ling, Scotland, the first Tibetan monastery in the West founded in 1967 by Chogyam Trungpa and Akong Tulku Rinpoche. He has since then been studying and practising in the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. Having obtained in 1988 university degrees in Political Sciences and International Relations as well as in International Law at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, he became Deputy Director of BIPAR (Bureau International des Producteurs d'Assurances), a position which allowed him to have a concrete experience of the functioning of the European institutions in Brussels. Carlo is president of Belgian Buddhist Union since 2014 and responsible for the negotiations with the federal government and the regional authorities in the process of the official recognition of Buddhism in Belgium. Since 2021, he represents the European Buddhist Union to the European institutions in Brussels.



Picture: pexels-enrique-2887478



What Can Be Done About Falling into the Secondary?

By Jake Lyne



This koan plays with primary and secondary. The first (primary) teacher sends the student to a second teacher, with whom the first teacher turns out to be in agreement. No argument is made for the utility of enlightenment because enlightenment needs no apology, definition or explanation.

The secondary is the domain in which utility is relevant, and in which we encounter uncertainty, or too much certainty and all the manifestations of our ego. On retreat the normal starting point is the secondary, it is where we endeavour to meet ourselves as we really are, without flinching.

People go on retreat for many reasons: personal difficulties such as relationship problems, loss, or mental health issues; to rediscover experiences they have had in the past (which turns out to be a blind alley); to reconnect with or deepen practice; out of a sense of curiosity and enquiry; or to 'get' enlightened. The latter may be quite a common motivation, but generally people are coy about mentioning it because it can sound presumptuous.

At the start we should address this presumption. Chan Buddhism, the tradition in which I practice, is a Mahayana or bodhisattva tradition. The four great vows of a bodhisattva are translated in various ways in English. In our tradition:

- I vow to deliver innumerable beings**
- I vow to cut off endless vexations**
- I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma**
- I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood**

A Koan:



Mihu had a monk ask Yangshan, “Do people these days need enlightenment or not?”

Yangshan said, “It’s not that there is no enlightenment, but what can be done about falling into the secondary?”

The monk went back and reported this to Mihu.

Hu deeply agreed with this.



In the last of these caution is set aside, the vow of supreme Buddhahood is boldly asserted. Yet to want enlightenment is a problem of the grasping mind and therefore a contradiction. However, there is a world of difference between a vow, or dedicating oneself to the path in a spirit of giving, and a desire, or wanting a form of status in order to enhance or secure the self. The fact that these vows are unattainable makes them suitable as vows for a lifetime of practice, but remember...“it’s not that there is no enlightenment.”

One of the joys of retreat is silence, disconnection from all forms of media, especially social media and smart phones and from reading, writing and speaking. But we are social beings and when we are not talking to someone else most of us talk to ourselves. Since we are freed from our normal routines, habits and



► responsibilities, 'I' can become a central theme. How am I doing? How I am feeling, the pain in my knees, how everyone else seems to be doing in comparison to me, what people think of me, what I think of them, what I think of the food, how tired I am, how good/bad a meditator I am. How am I supposed to meditate, am I doing it right? What someone said to me, what I should have said to them etc. etc.

Maybe this I-centricity gets noticed and if so it is a bit of a breakthrough, there is the possibility of some perspective. From only being subject, the mind might also become object and may begin to settle down.

People's experiences of retreat are quite different from each other. Some people experience great difficulty others encounter very little hardship. And it can vary from one retreat to the next. How people approach a retreat also varies greatly. I remember when I started to train as a retreat interviewer, being surprised at how

different each person was in interview. I had presumed that most people approached meditation interviews the way that I did.

There are many blind alleys that the mind can get lost in. One of the reasons that some people are qualified to lead retreats is that through long experience, they have fallen into most of the traps themselves and so are able to detect practice problems in others and be able to offer guidance based on empathy.

Rebecca Li, author of 'Illumination: The Buddhist Method of No Method' calls these traps 'modes.' They include harshness to self, perfectionism, craving for enlightenment, getting into trance, aversion to practice, intellectualising, quietism and 'forgetting emptiness' which means having fixed ideas about a final destination of practice. Roughly, these can be grouped as avoidant modes, hypercritical modes and grasping modes (the three poisons). These tendencies are ►



► revealed on retreat, but manifest in myriad contexts in everyday life. Retreat is a microcosm in which unhelpful habits of mind become easier to see. Paradoxically, in retreating we bring ourselves into clearer view.

Experiences on retreat are common, especially as the 'modes' recede from view. Anyone who has read about Zen will have read about experiences of expansiveness, oneness, wonder, joy and, more rarely, seeing the nature (enlightenment). On our retreats we sometimes recite a liturgy called 'On pursuing that which has no tracks.' It was written by our late Teacher John Crook and is based on Dogen's Fukazazengi. In one line it says 'There is no point in sifting and searching for another's insights.' Retreat is intensely personal and people see what they need to see, not what someone else has seen (necessarily), nor on what they have seen themselves previously.

If people practice sincerely, and most retreat participants do, some shifts in mind state come about purely by virtue of the intensity of meditation practice, withdrawal from normal habits and the ongoing attempt to be present. This may not be realised, it might even seem that the retreat is 'going badly', but that is merely a judgement. In reality mind states shift and the experience is often pleasant. But the shifts are not permanent, they slip away after the retreat is over. Letting them go gracefully is another practice, akin to the practice of gratitude. Letting good experiences go gracefully is a training in letting go of grasping and embracing freedom. It also makes it easier to pick up the practice of retreat in the future.

But do people these days need enlightenment or not? Many people who come on retreat are deeply troubled by the horrors and cruelty of war, by the harm being done by climate change and overconsumption to people, forests, other animals, fish, birds and insects, and the threat of nuclear extinction. These concerns are not so often raised on retreat, though there are retreats that make the direct connection, for example the Triratna Earth Sangha retreats and the Zen Peacemakers Auschwitz-Birkenau Bearing Witness Retreat.

These realities are part of the background to 'do people these days need enlightenment or not?' This question is one side of a profound dialogue embedded in the koan of the monk, Mihi and Yangshan.

'There is no problem with enlightenment' is the response, an echo of the question.

What is the meaning? To settle easily for either or for both is heartless, and is not a solution.

The koan raises profound and unsettling questions for all of us, and for the practices and ways of Buddhism in general. What is the relationship between retreat, our practice, our empathy and kindness, and a world in crisis?

What can be done about falling into the secondary and facing the world in which we live?

Let your mind stop, pay attention and in this moment you can enter the inquiry of retreat without going anywhere. 🧘



Jake Lyne

Teacher with the Western Chan Fellowship



Dr Jake Lyne is an experienced Chan Retreat Leader with the Western Chan Fellowship and a retired Clinical Psychologist. He is one of the coordinators of the EBU Ecodharma Network and seeks to raise awareness of the extreme seriousness of the risks we and all species on earth are facing, and therefore of the need for urgent and determined action. He is married to Jan, who shares his interest in ecodharma, and they have three grown up children. In his leisure time he is interested in sailing and astrophysics and runs marathons for charity.

WHAT'S THE EBU BEEN DOING LATELY?

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THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS (ECRL)

By Ron Eichhorn

NEWS
FROM
THE
EBU!

The European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) was established in 2022 in Norway as a platform to enhance open and trust-building dialogue between senior religious leaders of different faiths across Europe. It is a founding member of Religions for Peace Europe, and a forum of senior leaders from the primary religious traditions, who work together to advise and act together on matters of common concern.

The council draws on the spiritual, ethical and moral wisdom and resources of the world's great religious traditions and leaders in order to support the building of peace, social harmony and security throughout Europe and the wider world.

The relevance of religion to many of the problems evident in Europe today makes its motto, **"different faiths, common action"**, more relevant than ever.

At the last meeting in September 2024, Bishop Kari Mangrud Alsvåg has been elected as president, following Rev. Thomas Wipf. Ron Eichhorn, former president of EBU, was elected as one of the Vice-Presidents.

As the strategic goals for the next years, ECRL has identified the necessity to advocate for freedom of religious practice and belief and addressing the challenges of integration and migration as well as the social and economic inequities in Europe. 🧘

NEWS
FROM
THE
EBU!

Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue

By Gabriela Frey & Dr. Thea Mohr

Representing the EBU at the Council of Europe

In a world where fears are reinforced by conspiracy theories (fake news), anti-democratic propaganda, prejudices, discrimination and growing hatred towards ethnic and religious minorities, constructive cooperation between people of different religions and beliefs, religious representatives and civil society is more necessary than ever.

Genuine, inclusive inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue must be developed as a matter of urgency. A platform for ongoing dialogue is therefore needed as a sustainable process for strengthening democratic and peaceful coexistence and preventing discrimination, violence and extremism.

With this in mind, I joined forces with other faith-based NGOs in April 2021 to launch the Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue. Its members come from a wide range of faith-based and non-denominational NGOs and collaborate with partners and experts in the religious and cultural fields across Europe. The mandate of the committee was again extended until 2027 by the Conference of INGOs at the Council of Europe.

The main objective of the committee is to establish a permanent, stable and formally recognised platform for inter-religious, inter-convictional, democratic and equality-based dialogue within the Council of Europe.

In order to develop the content of such a dialogue platform, the committee regularly organizes webinars on relevant topics. These are prepared and moderated by Dr. Thea Mohr, trainer of intercultural communication. Topics addressed are such as: Identity formation, importance of education, self-awareness as key for dialogue, religious ►



Picture: Committee-group



Picture: Gabriela & Thea at the Council of Europe

- ▶ dimension of migrants, structural discrimination of women, peace-building initiatives etc.

A new website is also being planned to make best dialog practices more visible and accessible. The aim is to create an online map of European civil society initiatives for inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue, identify existing projects and individuals, integrate them into a network, recognise complementarities and identify gaps to be filled, in order to create a resource for public authorities and

civil society organisations looking for transferable practices.

Our committee has already started to implement and live interreligious and interconvictional dialogue in the regular practice of our work. We promote mutual understanding, sharing inspiring experiences and practices of dialogue. Recognising and combating all forms of discrimination is a force for *“living together in equality and dignity”*. 🧘



Gabriela Frey - EBU Head of Delegation to the Council of Europe since 2008, the year in which participatory status was granted. Initiator and co-chair of the Committee for Interreligious and Interconfessional Dialogue at the Conference of INGOs. She has been a Buddhist for over 40 years and is a practitioner of the Tibetan Sakya tradition. Passionate about true gender equality in Buddhist communities, she founded Sakyadhita France, the French branch of the International Association of Buddhist Women, and initiated the network of Buddhist women in Europe.



Dr Thea Mohr is the author and director of numerous documentary films dealing with religious topics, especially Buddhism. She completed her doctorate in field research on Sakyadhita International, is a lecturer in religious studies and ethics and a trainer in intercultural competence. She was the director of Diakonie in Frankfurt for more than 20 years. Since 2022 she joined the EBU-team and work at the Council of Europe.



SASCE II

By Ron Eichhorn

If we look at our world today, global peace appears to be distant, which is why efforts to unite faith communities are more important than ever. The SASCE project, in which the EBU was actively involved from 2021 to 2023, is a powerful example of how personal and spiritual friendship can transcend the boundaries of belief. It is a model of how we can promote peace and de-escalation by standing together, united as believers of different faiths.

SASCE, which stands for "Safer and Stronger Communities in Europe," had financial support from the European Commission under the ISFP Fund, and became so successful, that the project has been granted an additional three years to further develop its multi-layered approach to enhancing security in and around places of worship.

This next phase, **SASCE II**, will start in 2025 and again will last for three years. One of the new initiatives will be a smartphone app which will allow worshippers to quickly and easily alert authorities in case of a threat. 🕌

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**SASCE, stands for
"Safer and Stronger
Communities in Europe."**

NEWS
FROM
THE
EBU!



Reflections, Learnings and Latest news

By David Rycroft

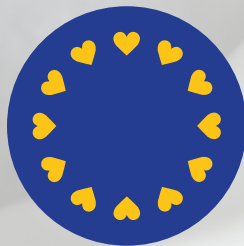
Setting the Scene and Creating Circumstances

Teach Peace aims to transmit and cultivate core human values of peace and connection in today's society, recognizing mainstream secular education as a powerful means to achieve this. The initiative emphasizes evidence-based approaches to integrate these values into schools.

Teach Peace identifies several key factors for success:

1. **Teachers as Role Models:** Students best learn values of peace and connection when their teachers embody these qualities.
2. **Training Teachers:** Teachers require thorough training to internalize and effectively transmit these values.
3. **Collaboration and Support:** A committed group of teachers, supported by senior management, must drive the initiative.
4. **The Role of a Peace Champion:** A respected staff member familiar with these values facilitates the project and acts as the liaison between the school and Teach Peace. ►

Teach Peace



► *The Teach Peace Model*

Teach Peace operates through a “middle way” approach, empowering teachers to champion peace and transform classrooms into safe spaces for cultivating connection and compassion. Teachers often feel unprepared to start such initiatives independently, so Teach Peace provides comprehensive support at every stage, ensuring projects are tailored to each school’s unique needs.

Central to the model are listening and co-design. Teach Peace collaborates with schools to match them with experienced trainers, providing tools and materials to foster peace and healthy relationships.



Picture: Teach-Peace-breathing

A Typical Teach Peace Project: Year One

While every Teach Peace project is unique, a general structure has emerged:

1. **Initiation:** Teach Peace invites interest biannually through teacher and Buddhist networks. A teacher interested in starting a project assumes the role of ‘Peace Champion’ and fills out an initial form.
2. **Feasibility Study:** Teach Peace evaluates the project’s feasibility and helps the Peace Champion present it to senior management.
3. **Cohort Formation:** Over two months, the Peace Champion gathers a group of 8–30 committed teachers.
4. **Memorandum of Understanding:** The school formalizes the project with Teach Peace.
5. **Teacher Training:** Teachers receive approximately 18 hours of training, often starting with online sessions on mindfulness and compassion.
6. **Practical Implementation:** Teachers participate in workshops to practice delivering peace-building exercises to students.
7. **Follow-Up Support:** Trainers visit schools to observe and mentor teachers, ensuring the exercises are effectively introduced to students.
8. **Student Engagement:** At least 150 students experience simple exercises, such as mindfulness of breathing and cultivating loving-kindness.
9. **Project Assessment:** The Peace Champion collects feedback through photos, interviews, and surveys to guide the project’s future direction. ►



Key Learnings from Year One

- **First-Hand Experience:** Teachers must personally experience the benefits of mindfulness and connection exercises before introducing them to students.
- **Support and Practice:** Teachers gain confidence through practice and feedback, evolving from uncertainty to competence.
- **Logistical Challenges:** Coordinating schedules and staff participation requires sustained effort from the Peace Champion.
- **Teacher Retreats:** In-depth retreats at the year's end, such as those held in Spain and Ireland, proved highly restorative for teachers, fostering individual well-being and community spirit. ►



Picture: Teach-Peace-touch



Picture: Teach-Peace-teachers

► New Developments in Year Two

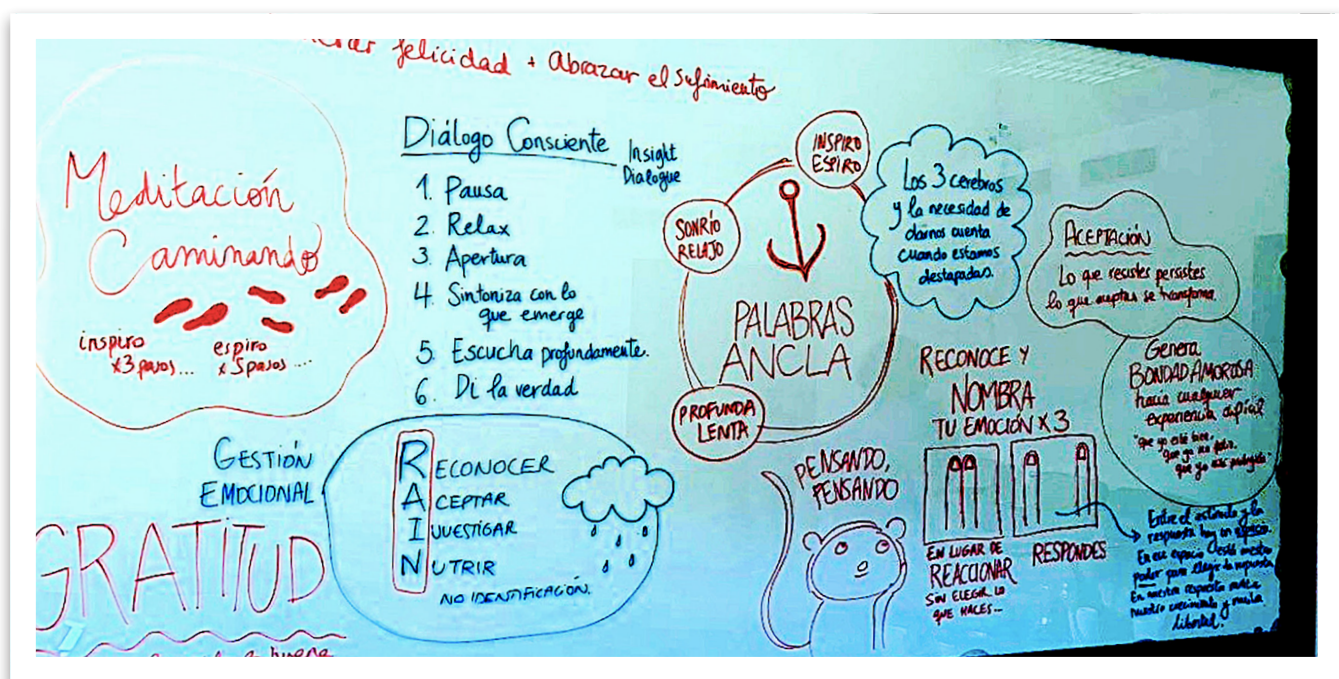
Building on its success, Teach Peace is expanding its operations:

- **Continuing projects** in Belgium, Germany, Spain, Scotland, and Ireland.
- **Initiating projects** in England, Slovenia, France, and Holland.
- **Laying groundwork** for activities in Italy and Austria.
- **Launching** a university-based project in Spain.

In Slovenia, for example, over 30 primary school teachers are participating in a customized online compassion course, highlighting the program's adaptability.



Picture: Teach-Peace-mindfulness



Picture: Spanish teacher retreat

Learn More

Teach Peace has introduced a new resource page on its website featuring articles that detail its vision and methodology. Visit teach-peace.org/articles for further insights. 🧘



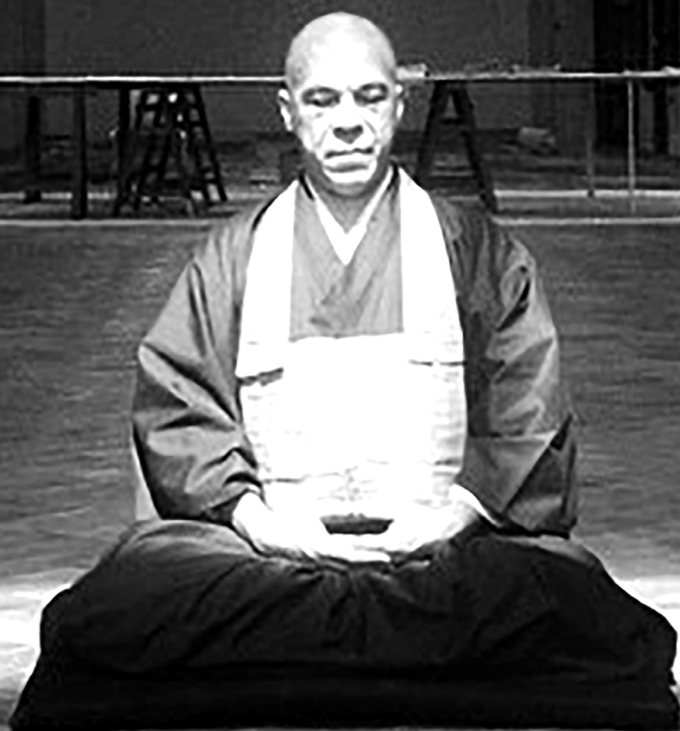
Teach Peace



Picture: Teach-Peace-class-hug

Entering the Mandala of Suffering: The Chaplaincy Course of the European Buddhist Union

By Dario Doshin Girolami



Thirty participants, 144 hours of training, 50 hours of internship, 4 modules over 2 years. These are the figures for the first European-level course for Buddhist chaplains, which began in late September. The course is the result of collaboration between the European Buddhist Union (EBU) and the Dharma Gate Buddhist University in Budapest, generously funded by the Italian Buddhist Union.

But there is more. The course is accredited by the Dharma Gate Buddhist University as an “Adult Learning Program,” and the EBU is committed to ensuring official recognition across Europe in the near future.

The pan-Buddhist training was jointly developed by the steering group of the EBU Chaplaincy Network: Rev. Dario Doshin Girolami, Kirsten DeLeo, and Keith Munnings—three experienced Dharma teachers and Buddhist chaplains from the main Buddhist traditions: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. This initiative is a groundbreaking achievement for Europe.

It is a highly experiential and practical course, strongly rooted in the Dharma, providing students with the skills, knowledge, and individual support needed to serve in hospitals, hospices, and prisons.

The training is based on a modular approach combining online and in-person sessions. The residential sessions take place in a spiritual retreat atmosphere at the Manfa Retreat Centre near Budapest. ►



*Pictures (left and right):
Dario Doshin Girolami at
San Michele's prison.*

► Students from Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Poland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Hungary meet regularly for collective lessons, individual supervision, mutual support, and meditation. By practicing and learning together across traditions, specialties, and nationalities, the training aims to build a strong and vibrant European chaplain sangha.

Topics addressed in the initial meetings include practicing the Three Wisdoms (Shruta Mayi Prajna – the wisdom of listening, Cinta Mayi Prajna – the wisdom of contemplation, and Bhavana Mayi Prajna – the wisdom of meditation) in places of suffering, and applying the Four Sublime States (Brahma Viharas: Metta/Maitri – loving-kindness, Karuna – compassion, Mudita – sympathetic joy, and Upekkha/Upeksha – equanimity) to support one’s heart in the face of pain and to help those in need. The discussions that arose were extraordinary, with participants reflecting on compassion, social commitment, and responsibility.

As I explained during the first meeting, prisons, hospitals, and hospices have an architectural structure comparable to that of a mandala: squares, triangles, concentric circles. Entering such public buildings is like entering a mandala to encounter the Buddhas residing

at its core: the prisoners, the sick, and the dying. And, as in a mandala, future chaplains must learn to elevate their awareness when entering these places of suffering—not only toward the external environment and its inhabitants but also toward their own emotional reactions.

The term “chaplain” originates from Saint Martin of Tours. While Martin was a soldier in the Roman army stationed in Gaul, one day he encountered a scantily dressed beggar. On impulse, he cut his military cloak in half to share it with the man. Suddenly, the sky cleared, and the sun began to warm as if it were summer. When Martin woke up the next day, he found his cloak restored to its original state.

The cloak (Latin: Cappa Sancti Martini) became the renowned relic kept in the oratory of the Merovingian kings of the Franks. The Christian priest who took care of the cloak in its reliquary was called a “chaplain,” and eventually, all priests serving the army were called chaplains.

Just as Saint Martin’s action changed the climate, may Buddhist chaplaincy transform the coldness of old age, illness, and death into the warmth of compassion. 🧘



Picture: Kirsten DeLeo, Rev. Dario Doshin Girolami and Keith Munnings at the Faculty of Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome



Picture: pexels-ooha-15650704



Dario Doshin Girolami. M.Phil, is a Soto-Zen priest and a Dharma Teacher in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Former Adjunct Professor of Zen at John Cabot University and of Comparative Religion at the American University of Rome, he currently teaches Buddhism and holds regular seminars at the Faculty of Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome, and teaches Meditation at Rebibbia Prison - Rome.

Picture: Marco Girolami.

Colofon



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The EBU was founded in 1975 in London and is a member of the European Council of Religious Leaders and Religions for Peace.

In 2008 the EBU obtained official participatory status with the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations at the Council of Europe.

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