
RSA/Hibbert Trust Lecture

Spirituality and global citizenship

RSA Manifesto Challenge: Advancing Global Citizenship

Speakers

Karen Armstrong

Freelance writer, broadcaster and author of *A History of God*

Dr Khalid Hameed CBE

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Chaired by: **Dr Peter Hawkins**

Trustee, Hibbert Trust

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NB

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Dr Peter Hawkins: Thank you Liz and a very warm welcome to this, the 2005 Hibbert Lecture and it's a great pleasure to welcome such a full and diverse audience. I think perhaps we're fortunate that there are no British players left in Wimbledon, which has helped us make sure we have a full hall this evening. And to welcome such a diverse audience - we have with us academics, politicians, those from the business world, from the world of social change and the public sector and from voluntary organisations. And also we're pleased to welcome people from many different faiths here this evening and from different religious practices and also those from none. You are all most welcome.

Tonight is the Hibbert Trust Lecture and the Hibbert Trust was founded in 1847 with a legacy from Robert Hibbert. His legacy was to promote creedless and liberal religion to enhance scholarship in that field and to encourage free judgement in matters of religion and matters of conscience.

From early in the Trust's history the Hibbert Trustees have established the Hibbert Lecture to fulfil one aspect of their mission. There has been a noble lineage of Hibbert lecturers, which we continue tonight. Among others, Albert Schweitzer talked at a previous Hibbert Lecture on religious factors in modern civilisation, Alistair Hardy on science and experimental faith, Bede Griffiths from India on Christianity in the light of the East and, more recently, Jonathan Porritt on bringing religion down to earth and also Rabindranath Tagore, the philosopher and inspirer of many famous people including the work of the Dartington Trust.

Now, this is our first joint lecture with the RSA and in bringing these two

quite old, traditions of the Hibbert Trust and the RSA together we're bringing together two organisations, both committed to promoting freedom of thought, cultural exchange and dialogue and social change.

The theme of this evening is spirituality and global citizenship and both speakers and I would like our engagement here with you tonight to be one of the spirit of enquiry where we address important questions together. Questions under the theme of spirituality and global citizenship such as: How can religions and spiritual groups, what can they do to enable better understanding and tolerance between cultures? How do we address the difficulties where religion has become a blockage to the peoples of the world working together? Or, how can each of our spiritual practices support us in being more fully a citizen of one world?

Now, to lead us on this journey of enquiry we are very fortunate to have two very distinguished and very different speakers, Karen Armstrong, on my left and Dr. Khalid Hameed. As Liz said, each will speak for about twenty minutes and then we will open a dialogue, first between the two speakers and then involving you in the audience. We will encourage questions that will engage everyone present in fresh thinking together, rather than questions that seek pre-cooked thoughts and expertise from our two speakers.

So, before I introduce the first speaker, let me invite each of you here tonight to think about what is your quality question in the field of spirituality and global citizenship. What is your question that is at the edge of your knowing and that which is important to you on your journey?

And I would like to invite us all just to take one moment, one minute of silence so that we can each become fully present and receptive for the work of this evening. We'll have one moment's silence.

Thank you. So let me get us underway by introducing Karen Armstrong who I am sure for many of you tonight needs no introduction. She is a brilliant scholar, writer and lecturer – probably best known by many of you here tonight for her autobiographies, the latest being 'The Spiral Staircase', which came out, I think, last year?

Karen Armstrong: Yes.

Dr Peter Hawkins: Which I do recommend is a very enjoyable and very illuminative read. This describes her journey from being a young Catholic nun to a person who is now acknowledged as an expert on many different religions and consulted by many people in different parts of the world.

She has written many other important books including, I'll mention the only two I have yet managed to read because there are many that I want to go on and read, but 'The History of God' a very deep study of the different traditions and their different approaches and a book, which I think is relevant tonight, on the history of Islam. She has also written books on Mohammad, on Christianity and its various aspects and on Buddhism and her next book will be called 'The Great Transformation' and will be a study of the axial religions, subtitled 'The World in the Time of Buddha, Confucius, Socrates' and I'm told either Ezekiel or Jeremiah – we're not sure which one will yet get the vote.

Karen has taken the area of religious study and has turned it into a

personal spiritual practice, of using her deep compassion to try and understand religious beliefs from the perspective of the participants of that faith and of that time. She has recently, since 9/11, been consulted by the United Nations and other Western governments and bodies on how to understand Islam and to better work with it. And she has also been brave enough, in many places, to go into dialogue and debate with fundamentalists of different traditions. Please will you warmly welcome Karen Armstrong.

Karen Armstrong: Thank you very much, it's a great honour to be here, giving this lecture.

We're talking about spirituality, religion and global citizenship and, if we looked at the headlines, we might imagine that these were two totally incompatible issues. What grab the headlines are the religious extremists and we hear stories, in my view greatly misplaced, about clashes of civilisation between a progressive secular West and religious people whose dogmatisms cause them to drag their feet.

Now, in particular, we hear a great deal about a phenomenon called, misleadingly I think again, 'fundamentalism'. The term is very unsatisfactory. But they are the people whom we often associate with being totally against any form of dialogue and are absolute in their views. Now, fundamentalism is very often misunderstood. Fundamentalism for one thing is not specifically Islamic. Of the three monotheistic religions Islam was the last to develop a fundamentalist strain in the late 1960s. Fundamentalism has cropped up in every single one of the major world religions in the course of the 20th

century so that we have fundamentalist Confucianism, fundamentalist Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity and Judaism as well as Islam. And fundamentalism does not mean conservative theology, conservative belief. We often say "Oh, he (or she) is a fundamentalist." meaning that they have traditional beliefs. Again, this is not, strictly speaking, the case.

Fundamentalists are in rebellion against modern secular modernity. Wherever a modern secular style government or society has established itself, a religious, counter-cultural movement has sprung up alongside it in conscious rejection.

Fundamentalists want, typically, to drag God and all religion from the sidelines to which they've been relegated in modern secular culture back to centre stage. And only a tiny, tiny proportion of fundamentalists are violent, the vast majority are simply trying to live what they regard as a good, religious life, in a world that seems increasingly hostile to religion.

Now, fundamentalism is a religiosity that is rooted in fear. Every single one of the fundamentalist movements that I have studied, be it in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which is where I concentrated, is convinced at some gut level that modern secular society or the modern secular world wants to wipe them out. And this is not always completely paranoid if you reflect that Jewish fundamentalism, for example, took two major steps forward, one after the Nazi holocaust, when Hitler had tried to exterminate European Jewry and, secondly, after the 1973 war of Yom Kippur when Israel felt vulnerable and beset in the region and feared for its survival. Now, it's also the fact that every single one of the

fundamentalist movements, nearly every single one began by the experience of being attacked by either their liberal co-religionists or by secularists. And fundamentalism has developed, therefore, in a kind of symbiotic relationship with a secularism or modernity that is experienced as intrusive and aggressive. So there is great fear when fundamentalists often feel that they are fighting for survival and when people feel that that's when they can lash out violently and be 'agin' everything.

Now the more global our world becomes, some people like myself find that liberating and invigorating. I love being modern, I can imagine no other period in history when, as a woman, I would have felt remotely comfortable. But I've lived an extremely privileged life. I have never been seriously hungry. I have never feared a knock at the door. I have always been able to write and say exactly what I choose. This puts me in a very small minority globally. And so for some people, like myself, who've been empowered by modernity and by secularism – the first secular republic was the United States of America, which is now, I have it on good authority, the second most religious country in the world after India – so secularism can be good for religion but in other parts of the world (and I haven't got time to go into this now) it has been experienced as invasive and aggressive. To give you just one example, when Ataturk secularised Turkey he closed down all the Madrasses, abolished the Sufi orders and force the Sufis, the mystics of Islam who had always played a major role in the spiritual and religious life of Turkey, he forced them

underground and compelled all men and women to wear Western clothes because these modernisers wanted their people to look modern, no matter that the vast majority of them had no understanding of Western modernity and were bewildered by the changes.

So secularism, which for us in the West was able to proceed slowly, gradually and incrementally over a bout 300 hundred years so that we could gradually develop our secular and democratic institutions has been imposed in far too accelerated a manner and because of the speed with which these people have to modernise secularism is often experienced as an attack and not as the wonderful, liberating thing that I have found it myself.

Now, fundamentalism often, in its rage and fear, often distorts the tradition that it is trying to maintain by over-emphasising those belligerent aspects of the tradition and the scripture and down-playing those that speak of compassion. And it's also true that whereas the more global the world becomes, the more, how can I say, nationalistic, tribal other sectors become in fear. We're seeing an outburst of nationalism in our time. We now have a Scottish and a Welsh Parliament, for example, which we didn't have before, in order that people don't feel lost in this huge global village in which we now live. People want to assert their identity and in some forms fundamentalism is a different kind of nationalism – a way of asserting an identity that feels about to be swamped. And so when we're talking about the fundamentalist riposte what we need to recall is that history shows that the more a fundamentalist movement is attacked the more extreme it will become. That's

not to say that will always be the case in the future but it has been the case up to now. What is needed, on all sides, on their side as well as in ours, for their side is to recover the compassionate core of their tradition and on the secular side to rediscover the core of compassion on which we pride ourselves – compassion and tolerance somehow because aggression is counter productive. It makes for the clash, it revs up the clash – so-called clash of civilisations.

Now, the book that I've just finished that Peter mentioned deals with the Axial Age. It's the period from about 900 to 200 BCE, when all the major traditions that have continued to nourish humanity came into being at roughly the same time in four separate regions of the world, in China, India, Israel and Greece. I haven't got time to go into it now but I think they have something important to say to us tonight and today.

Why? Why should we go back to these ancient faiths? Because they were the experts. In this period of history, not so much in Greece, though they have made some wonderful contributions, but especially in India, China and Israel, people worked as hard to find a cure for the spiritual ills of humanity as we do today trying to find a cure for cancer. We don't spend as much energy re-hashing, looking, examining, experimenting with our religious and moral traditions and we've rarely gone beyond these insights. At various transitional moments in history people have gone back to the Axial Age and hence you can see Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam as secondary, wonderful and marvellous secondary flowerings of the original Axial Age spirituality in

Judaism, which got truncated and finished too early because of the tragedies of history.

These people, as I say, they are the experts and what has intrigued me is that none of them were interested in doctrines or metaphysical beliefs. We're always hearing about how people's beliefs have become, I agree, a kind of idolatry. But many of the Axial sages that said that theology and metaphysics, if misunderstood, could be an absolute hindrance on the spiritual quest and be more about egotism by introjecting your own ego into your various theological opinions than about the spiritual quest. A religion was not about accepting certain creedal, metaphysical propositions, it was about behaving in a way that changed you. And every single one of these traditions grew up in a society like our own that was torn apart with violence on an unprecedented scale. Iron weaponry had been discovered so weapons became more serious and wars more horrific than ever before. A new market economy was in its infancy and people were preying on one another aggressively in the marketplace. And in horror at this aggression the Axial sages all turned in to find the root causes of violence in the human psyche. In every single case the catalyst for religious change was revulsion with violence and I think you can see something of that, I know Dr. Hameed, who will be talking about Islam, that was also certainly the case with Islam, which took place at a time when tribal violence had risen to a crescendo, a horrifying crescendo in Arabia in the 7th century.

So, every single one of these movements, to a greater or lesser extent, adopted the theology of non-violence and, insofar as they adopted

that, the more thoroughly they adopted the non-violent ethic the deeper they went into the Self. Non-violence was at the root of the whole transformation. Yoga, for example in India, which was a great discovery of the Axial Age, you were not allowed to do a single yoga exercise, you were not even allowed to learn to sit in the correct position until you had mastered a five point ethical discipline, which began with non-violence and that didn't mean just not killing things it meant not swatting even an insect. It meant not even betraying impatience on your face or speaking an irritable word. Until that was second nature to you your guru would not allow you to do a single yogic exercise and yoga, which in the old days in India had meant the yoking of the draft animals before a military raid, the word 'yoga' means 'yoking', it now meant a 'yoking' of all the powers of the mind in order to conquer the ego, which the Axial sages all said was what kept us from the divine.

A lot of religiosity today, as well as a lot of politics today, is fuelled by ego. You can see extreme nationalism or patriotism as well as extreme religious chauvinism as collective egotism – something that gives you a wonderful buzz and, a lot of times, religious people want to be right rather than compassionate. I sometimes think that if everybody got to heaven some people would be really miffed because what would be the fun of heaven if you couldn't look down and find the people who'd been excluded below? What they put forward, the Axial sages, every single one of them, said that compassion was the key. Compassion doesn't mean feeling sorry for people or

feeling pity for people but to feel with the other, to learn to dethrone yourself from the centre of your world and put another there and this would be not only the test for any religiosity but it would also be the means of entering into enlightenment. Confucius was the first to propound the Golden Rule. In the late 6th, early 5th Century he was the person who equated religion with compassion – it was compassion just as for Mahavir, the founder of the Jains religion was non-violence. It wasn't about theology, it wasn't about going to heaven, it wasn't about defining what you meant by the divine or the sacred, it wasn't about being right it was about, says Confucius, human-heartedness, the exercise of compassion and it was he who formulated the Golden Rule 'Do not do to others as you would not have done to you'.

Later, much later, all the Axial sages had their own version of this. Rabbi Hillel, the older contemporary of Jesus, was once asked by a Pagan to define the whole of Judaism while he stood on one leg and Hillel said "That which is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour. That's the Torah, the rest is commentary, go and learn it." Jesus, you can see as a man of non-violence, he also propounded a version of Hillel's Golden Rule and this whole spirit informs the Koran too.

That demands, as I say, the dethronement of the ego. Confucius said the Golden Rule was fuelled by what he called (?), likening to yourself, looking into your own heart, discovering what it was that gave you pain and refusing under any circumstances to inflict that on anybody else.

But they all went one step further, the most outstanding sages, and said

that it was not enough to simply be filled with compassion for your own community, you had to extend your outreach "to the ends of the earth" as the passages says in 2nd Isaiah. You have to have what the Chinese philosopher Mozi called (?) - concern for everybody. Not just your family, not just your tribe, not just your nation but concern for everybody. The priestly author of Leviticus makes the ruling "If a stranger lives with you in your land do not mistreat him. You must treat him as one of your own people and love him as yourself ." (?) again, "For you were strangers in Egypt." That was the key, "You were strangers in Egypt." to use your suffering and pain, not as a source for further cruelty but to understand the pain of others and the Greeks, this was their great contribution to the Axial Age, was that they put suffering on stage in the great tragedies and the chorus would cry out to the audience to weep for people like Pericles and Oedipus, who had done abominable things that in real life would make us retreat from them in horror. Aeschylus, after the great Persian wars, wrote a play called 'The Persians', which saw the battle of Salamis from the Persians' point of view.

A few years earlier the Persians had smashed their city to smithereens but in Aeschylus's play, a few years later, they are treated with respect and seen to be sisters or brothers of the Athenians and shown not as a defeated enemy but as a people in mourning – to feel with the other.

So the Buddha devised a system of meditation, of special form of yoga by which, and he said lay people could do this as well as monks, they could send out waves of benevolence to all the four corners of

the earth – not omitting a single creature, even a mosquito from their radius of concern. And you had to carry that out into action, it was a constant progress. It was no good, as the Buddha said as he wandered through his monastery and found a monk who had dysentery who had been left alone for three days by the other monks, who'd been so lost in contemplation and sending out their waves of goodwill to the four corners of the earth they hadn't noticed their brother under their nose, that it demands a radius. Jesus said "Love your enemies." in the same spirit and by that he didn't mean that we were supposed to be filled with waves of soggy affection for the likes of Hitler or Osama bin Laden but that we had, somehow, the word 'love', especially in Leviticus is a legal term, Leviticus is when he says "Love the stranger." This is a legal text, he doesn't mean you to be filled with warm feelings of tenderness, the word 'love' was used in international treaties. It demanded that, it was a legal term that demanded that you gave practical help to other people. OK, I realise I'm coming to the end. So, 'love your enemies' meant that you were willing to put your concern where there was no hope of return.

Right, the Axial Age occurred at a time when people were discovering individuality. Individualism - the individual person was coming to the fore. In the cities, in the market economy the individual person was beginning to take precedence over the old tribal ethos where people had to define themselves in a communal way and the Axial Age was dealing with the clash of competing egos. Once, a king came to the Buddha and said that he and his wife had been

having a discussion and that both of them believed that nothing was dearer to them than their own selves and the Buddha said "Right, if you feel that, remember that everybody else feels the same and therefore treat the self of the other with the same respect as you treat yourself."

Now, we are in a different challenge. We're still having difficulties with dealing with our own individual egos, we still have, in our radius of concern, to deal with that annoying sibling, that irritating colleague and our ex-wife. This will be a training ground for learning to understand the other that is further away. But we must now apply this globally because the challenge of our time is that we are living in a global world, that the old nationalisms are breaking down, that we live in one world, whether we like it or not. What happens in Afghanistan or Iraq today will, almost certainly, have repercussions now in New York or London tomorrow. This is one world, we're joined technologically, economically, if one people go down it will ultimately have reverberations on the entire globe and we have to recognise this. The Axial spiritualities tell us to apply the Golden Rule, to treat every nation, no matter how obscure or rebarbative, as though they were as important to ourselves and "Do not do to your neighbour what would you would not have done to you.", to quote Hillel. That's the Torah, that is religious teaching and the rest is commentary and now our task, as Hillel said, is "Go and study it." Thank you.

Dr Peter Hawkins: Thank you very much, Karen, for a brilliant and illuminating talk. We're now going to take that deep richness of the study of the Axial Age and deep scholarship

into dialogue with the world of today and the world of how do we bring young people and how do we bring organisations into working together? We are very pleased to welcome Dr. Khalid Hameed, who recently was the recipient of this year's Sternberg Interfaith Award. Dr. Hameed CBE is Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Cromwell Hospital, he is also Chairman of the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council and of the Asian Policy Group, which advises on ethnic minorities. He is Chairman of the Non-resident Indian Institute of the United Kingdom, which promotes understanding of people of Indian origin living in the UK and he was appointed CBE in 2003 with the award being given by Mr. Trevor Phillips, the Commissioner for Racial Equality.

Dr. Hameed, besides having a busy professional life, contributes very widely to the interfaith harmony by lecturing, participating and providing opportunities for training and educating young people from all faiths, particularly through his work with the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council. So I'd like you to welcome, to provide the other side of tonight's dialogue, Dr. Hameed.

Dr. Khalid Hameed: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great privilege and honour for me to address you this evening, particularly after such a formidable talk from our good friend, Karen Armstrong. Batting after her one feels, as a club cricketer, called for Test match at short notice.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, one of the most divisive elements in our present day lives is religion. This was never meant to be so, but extremists in many faiths are bent upon exploiting religion for their own nefarious political agendas.

As we know, religion can be a force for peace or war. It can heal or hurt. It can create or destroy on a scale unimaginable to previous generations. History has recorded enough bloodshed in the name of religion. Moses, who led his people from slavery to the brink of the promised land gave them a choice. He said "See, I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse, therefore choose life so that you and your children may live."

When extremists inflict violence on society in the name of religion it is often the innocent who are the main victims. This must be resisted by the community at large. Voices must be raised in protest. We must withhold the robe of sanctity when it is sought as a cloak for violence and bloodshed, even if the perpetrators are from our own faiths.

Ladies and gentlemen, though there is much warmth and friendship here this evening, there is also much fear and hatred outside, yet we cannot be discouraged. There is enough commonality in world religions to enable us to reach out to our fellow humans. This is especially important because our faith is dead if we do not reach out to others. Let us remind ourselves of the story of Abraham, which is full of hope. At the end of the story Abraham brought his sons together in reconciliation.

Most of us here, this evening, live and work in the United Kingdom. I must, first of all, voice my gratitude to this country, like many of you, I am grateful to this great country for the opportunity that we have received to fulfil our objectives and goals. But, there is a shadow cast on our community relations in this country.

The events of September 11th brought that into sharp focus. On that fateful day the killing of thousands of innocent people created a great paradox for Islam. A religion which sees itself as a religion of peace was associated with murder and mayhem. Voices were raised and questions were asked. Do Muslims hate other faiths? Is Islam mainly the religion of fanatics? Are we to witness the start of a clash between Islam and other faiths? As these questions reverberated for many Muslims this was a time of challenge and despair.

I was born into the Muslim faith and brought up with the guiding principles of Islam, which I find now in serious conflict with the activities and utterances of some of the extremists in my religion. I am sure that the question in the minds of many Muslims must be "How does one respond to this serious threat?"

As responsible citizens we need to put our house in order and convey the true message of Islam, which is of peaceful and harmonious living with our neighbours. The accepted teachings of Islam, which has prevailed throughout the centuries are based on a belief in peace and compassion. It is appropriate to say that terrorists are evil, regardless of what religion they belong to. In today's world each community and continent is faced with this problem in some shape or form. The terrorists are a tiny minority, the majority in the world, including Muslims, condemn them. A friend said to me the other day "It's all very well for you to say they are a tiny minority but it's only a tiny number of people which can destabilise a community, that is the problem." The 1.5 billion Muslims who live in this world are mostly peaceful and law abiding, they also make good

neighbours and exercise responsible citizenship and resent being stigmatised with negative religious profiling, which is inflammatory.

Human history is full of episodes involving every religion, of misguided believers responsible for the slaughter of fellow humans on the altar of religion. Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks states, and I quote "We are occasionally misled to believe that if faith is what makes us human then those who do not share our faith are less than fully human." From that equation flowed the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Jihads, the Pogroms, the blood of human sacrifice through the ages. From this logic, when substituting race for faith, came the Holocaust and the ethnic cleansing that we saw recently in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, humans have demonstrated their genius for creativity, however, in spite of all our glorious achievements we have lost none of our ability to destroy and kill with impunity. In anticipation of this frailty Islamic ethics forbid any attempt at extinguishing life and I quote you a verse from the Koran, which every Muslim must obey "If anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the lives of all mankind." There is equally, in many faiths, clear instructions against taking your own life with the act of suicide. The Hindu holy book says "One should help oneself and not kill oneself." And the Koran states "Do not kill yourself as God has been to you most merciful." And, therefore, kidnapping, hijacking, torture and killing of innocent people in buses, bazaars, aeroplanes, schools, places of worship, wherever, is totally un-Islamic and against the teaching of the Koran and all other world religions.

Globalisation and its implication on the individual is giving rise to a mixture of anger and incomprehension. Those living in poor countries have an overriding fascination with Western affluence. In response, the West erects barriers to protect its borders. This leads to a frantic effort from those outside the barrier to get in to improve their lifestyles. Globalisation acting as a catalyst in this process creates a challenge to the identity of the migrant. Families are split apart as individuals leave home to look for employment, sometimes never to return. There is a crisis for the individual in an unwelcoming and alien culture. For the migrant, caught up in all this, religion becomes very important as a source of identity. In this vulnerable state if he is exposed to unscrupulous, radical, influences the outcome can be harmful for both the individual and the State.

In the vision of the modern thinker trade would do for a man what politics could not, that is tame passions and change the outlook of man from aggression to consumerism and production, integrating nations for mutual benefit from trade and finance. All these notions, however, do not answer man's curiosity about himself. His sense of comfort, however, is well manifested in his loyalty for his tribe and community. Economics does not explain his quest for self-knowledge and identity. Religion answers this human dilemma. No other system explains, as religion does, our reason for being on this planet. However, in spite of the influence of religion, most societies have been suspicious of and aggressive towards strangers – we heard Karen mention this. This leads to the harnessing of negative emotions which excites people through emotive

appeals of the loss of jobs, schools and homes etcetera.

And, therefore, can I as a Muslim recognise God's image in a stranger who is not a fellow Muslim? That is, can I see God's image in a Hindu? In a Sikh? Or in a Christian or a Jew? Islam tackles this confusion by saying to the Muslims in the Koran to respect all of God's creation, regardless of their religion or method of worship and I quote from the Koran "O you men, we have created you, male and female, and I have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another so the noblest of you in the sight of God is the best for conduct." Other faiths have similar advice and interface with some of the problems of strangers. The Hebrew part of the Bible commands, and I quote, Karen has mentioned this, it's worth mentioning again "When a stranger lives with you in your land do not ill treat him. A stranger who lives with you should be treated like the native boy. Love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." From the ancient Hindu scriptures comes this advice "This man is ours, that man is a stranger. Discrimination of this kind is found only amongst mean-minded people. Those who are noble, to them the whole world is one family."

E W F Tomlin, writing on Henry Burkson(?) in 'The Great Philosophers' mentions two kinds of human societies, one in which morality is imposed through pressure and, therefore a closed society, and the other in which it is imposed through attraction and is therefore an open society. The religion of this closed society is static, whereas the religion of the open society is dynamic, of which the finest flower is mysticism.

Mysticism has its roots in many faiths but Sufism is Islam's tolerant mystical and universal philosophy. This philosophy is summed up in a prayer from the Naqshbandi Order, associated with Bahauddin Naqshband, the saint of Bukhara who lived in the 14th century. It could be the prayer of any religion, anywhere in the world, and I quote "O my God, how gentle art thou with him who has transgressed against thee. How near art thou to him who seeks thee. How tender to him who petitions thee. How kindly to him who hopes in thee." Although the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) is the Sufis' ultimate model other spiritual figures, which include Abraham, Moses and Jesus also mould them.

For me, personally, the message of Sufism, of compassion, humility and universal love is attractive and inspiring. Their message of 'Assalamu Alaikum' – 'Peace with all' has endeared it to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It appeals to all sects and social classes. Mullah Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the greatest Sufi and mystic poets, embraces in this teaching the whole human race without distinction of caste or creed. He looks at all the faiths with the same love as his own faith. In his classic discourse on the form of worship translated by Jonathan Star he says "I looked upon every cross in every church, yet He was not there. I went to the temples of India and the shrines of China, yet He was not there. I scaled the distant peak of Mount Qaf only to find the empty nests of the Phoenix. I visited the Ka'be(?) but he was not in that sacred site amidst pilgrims young and old. I read the books of Avicenna but His wisdom went beyond all the words. I went to the highest courts within the distance of 'two bow

lengths' but He was not there. Then I looked within my own heart, and there I found him - He was nowhere else."

On a broader plane, humanism and universal love for all God's creatures is central to Sufi teachings and, rightly, in the age of globalisation, our world needs mutual understanding and tolerance. A great teacher and leader of the Sikh religion, Guru Gobind Singh, taught the commonality of religions and the oneness of God. He mentioned that the Ram of the Hindus and the Rahim of the Muslims were the same and the various scriptures of the main religions of the world pointed to the oneness of God.

In our midst this evening there are many, I am sure, who are concerned about the legacy we will leave behind for young people of today who will take the responsibility from our generation as the next set of guardians of the civilised world. My ongoing work with the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council has amply demonstrated to me that it is these young people to whom we need to leave a legacy of peace and brotherhood on which they can build a happier world of the future.

Ladies and gentlemen apart from our own faiths we should study and respect other philosophies, thoughts and religions. This is important because what hurts people the most is disrespect shown to the things that they cherish and the faith that they follow. Amongst the many wonderful teachings of the Hindu religion, which I discovered on a visit to the Indian Institute of Culture, and with my friend there, Dr. Nundcomara (?), I came across a prayer in Sanskrit,

which I want to share with you. I shall recite this prayer with the customary Muslim invocation of the blessing from God 'bismallah ar rahman ar rahim', which means 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful' and now I revert to the English translation of this prayer in Sanskrit, and I quote "May there be peace in the celestial region. May there be peace in our skies. May there be peace on our earth. May there be peace in the waters. May there be peace in the plants and forests and may that peace be mine also." And, ladies and gentlemen, I also pray that may all of you have that peace too. Thank you very much.

Dr Peter Hawkins: Thank you Dr. Hameed, for which, I am sure you will agree, was not the performance of a club cricketer – more a Gavaskar performance.

We now take these two very rich offerings into a process of dialogue. I think you'll all agree tonight we've had two talks that were from very different perspectives, some very important themes. The theme that Karen started us off with, around how do we understand the psychological, the personal and the collective roots of fundamentalism and how do we respond to fundamentalism with compassion rather than judgement? We had the theme echoed by both speakers about how do we engage with a stranger and have concern and compassion for the stranger at our door or arriving on our land. And, from Dr. Hameed, the theme of how do we take responsibility for the sectarianism in our own faith and in our own community? What can we do to be a person who is attending to our own egoism, our own fear so that we can also work with the fear that is in our own community and the seedbed, as Karen

put it, for future sectarianism and hatred?

So I'd like, perhaps, to at least invite the two of you, to begin with, to at least ask something about your responses to each others' talks, particularly to take up that issue how can we engage with our own communities and the fear in the roots of fundamentalism and sectarianism that are there and bring the movement from fear to compassion for the stranger? So some response from both of you to that would be very welcome.

Karen Armstrong: Well, it's a very large question that you've asked and how do we do this? First, what I welcome about Dr. Hameed's talk was its self-criticism and the Axial Age, again, insisted that before you began by criticising other people and getting other people to put their own house in order, you had to begin with yourself. The Prophet Ezekiel, for example, at a time when the Jewish people had suffered massive State violence from the Babylonians, spoke about and condemned the violence that Israelites were inflicting upon one another, about the internal violence. So, self-criticism always. Now, that includes us and it includes this, I get really dispirited on my rounds with the way people eagerly jump with flashing eyes and delight in their voices at anything they can say wrong about Islam. There's an awful, lustful, enthusiasm to put the worst construction on things, which is most unattractive and, again, start again with yourself and with our own culture. Also, let's not be unaware that there are secular fundamentalists too who have as bigoted and inaccurate a view of religion as some religious fundamentalists have of secularism

'religion should be stopped'. I can't count the number of taxi drivers who, when they hear what I do for a living, inform me – there's no doubt in their mind – that religion has been responsible for all the wars. And let us look at some of our own policies, our own foreign policies that have helped to make this mess. It's not just come out of the blue, it's been simmering for a long time. So, I really welcome the self-discipline, self-criticism in a creative way. One thing I think we can do is look critically at all our scriptures. One thing that the sages of the Axial Age did was the Indian ritualists took systematically, in the 9th century, as far as they could, all the violence out of their cult. And we've all got these difficult scriptures that people misuse and before we start pointing at the Koran, if we're not Muslims, let's have a look as some of our own scriptures or our own secular pundits and see what they have to say and see how we deal with these difficult scriptures in our own...and have a look, critically, and see how these have been used and abused throughout history to create irreligion, to create a horrible perversity of everything that religion is supposed to be. So, I think we could make it a kind of worldwide effort where we look together at all our difficult scriptures and see how to deal with them, in a sort of practical way.

Dr Peter Hawkins: So, if I could respond also with what are the practical steps for addressing the fear and addressing difficulties around moving to compassion?

Dr. Khalid Hameed: I think, Mr. Chairman, it's a two-way traffic. As you heard me, Muslims are prepared to look to themselves and see what they are doing or not doing. At the same time the atmosphere of the culture in

which they are living, particularly if you are talking of the United Kingdom or the West, is not something which is ideal for the best in the human being to come out and there is a drip by drip, I use a medical term here, a drip-feeding into the minds of people of Islamophobia. The media has not been very helpful. Anything critical that they observe in the Muslim community is splashed. I hear this, I hear this from a lot of Muslims who are reasonable people, who are what I would call liberal, moderate, Muslims. So, this is a problem of the environment. The environment in the West, which has over 20 million Muslims now living, is and has not been, very friendly to the Muslims as strangers in a new land. I think we can do something about this.

And the other thing is education. Muslims are badly educated and if you look at the statistics you will find that at the bottom of the pile, amongst the Muslim community, the worst boys that fare in school examinations are from Pakistan and Bangladesh. On the other hand, very encouragingly, the girls are doing very well, but the boys are not. And you see the prison population and you see how the Asian community, which used to be hardly present in British jails is now very well represented, mainly by Muslims. Those are the two areas which I believe a very important, education and the environment.

Dr Peter Hawkins: Is Peter Soulsby....

Peter Soulsby: Here.

Dr Peter Hawkins: As somebody who was a politician in the heart of multi-cultural Leicester could you

make a comment, just to pick up on Dr. Hameed's last comments.

Peter Soulsby: Well, I will do my very best to respond to two very excellent contributions this evening which I am sure I join with others in the audience in saying were enormously impressive.

Just to say I am a politician, as you've announced. I happen to be a Member of Parliament for a very multi-cultural city, that of Leicester and I have to say that in that city we see some very challenging issues between those of different faiths and, indeed, of no faiths at all. We also see some very encouraging things happening and I think that it is too often the case that what we tend to focus on are the negative experiences in many of our cities and between many of our communities without recognising the very positive things that are happening alongside of those negative experiences. Certainly in my city, as I'm sure in many others of those who are here this evening, there are some very good examples of people of all faiths realising that they don't have a unique claim to truth and to the right and recognising that in our local communities, as in our global community, we can only hope to progress together peacefully if we understand each other and if we are in dialogue with each other. That's certainly one of the most encouraging things I see in my own city that is in such sharp contrast to some of the things that occurred and are, apparently, the situation in some other places where there is talk of parallel communities and people never meeting. It is certainly the dialogue between communities, the discussion, the understanding that is developing that I find encouraging alongside of some of the very

depressing and very challenging things that we also face. Thank you.

Karen Armstrong: Thank you for that. I agree that we tend to highlight the negative so often. But here, you see, is a concrete opportunity for the Golden Rule. Would we like these negative things said of us or ourselves? If we say 'no' and desist, then I think we'd get an enhancement of being and I wish that the religions, instead of often the spokespeople, nobody here I'm sure, but often the spokespeople tend to concentrate on peripheral aspects of the faith – what people should believe, what kind of contraception they can use, whether women or gay people can be bishops, instead of the Golden Rule, compassion and charity, benevolence toward the other, because this is what we need at the moment. And I think part of the trouble is its media, is that the good things don't make a good story. Nobody wants to hear about some people prayerfully going of to the mosque and going home to supper. No, they want to hear something spicy, that alights that egotistical, and here we come back to the ego, fire in us to say 'they are awful and we are great', because we often enhance our sense of self by denigrating the other. So I think again it's coming back to this core of religiosity, which is the Golden Rule, that we can apply, I was going to say even in Leicester, but even in the interstices of reading our newspapers and in dealing on a day-to-day basis with these often dispiriting issues.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Dr. Hameed.

Dr. Khalid Hameed: Well, Chairman had asked earlier "What are the practical steps?" and I put this to all of you, reminding myself that it's

not a long time ago that I was at a dinner and there were the generals, British Army, and a very senior Police officer along with other people and they asked me this question "What should be done?" My response was: "What do you want to do? Do you want to help? If you want to help let me ask you a question and the question is 'Which one of you around this table'", we were eating, "'can remember, in a very distinguished career, at least spanning 20 or 30 years, that you appointed somebody in your organisation who was a Muslim?'" And I ask you this question because 15 years ago I appointed my Chairman, at the hospital where I worked, from the Jewish faith and I appointed my PA, who is still with me today, 22 years ago, who is from the Jewish faith and these two have moulded and helped my career. So, trust. Please trust. If you want to help start trusting. That is a practical step, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you.

Karen Armstrong: Also, don't allow these bad things to come out because they might ease your heart to say 'women shouldn't wear the veil' or 'Muslims are all aggressive' etc. It may ease your heart but it won't help. It may ease your sense of ego but historically we know that these things simply, as I say, increase the problem rather than improve it. So (?), concern for everybody, what these Chinese sages were saying was that good behaviour will benefit you and good behaviour to people in other parts of the world or in foreign communities in our own midst, and that includes fair conversation at all times, will benefit the whole community, including ourselves.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you. Let me take from that point and open it up more widely to the floor.

Julian Filochowski: My name's Julian Filochowski For the last 20 years I was directing an organisation working overseas, Cafod International Development Agency. One of the highlights of the 20 years was working jointly with Islamic Relief in response to the problems in Afghanistan after the bombings.

I would like to ask both of you in this context we have today, where there's fear around, how you feel about going down this legislative route to outlaw fermenting a religious hatred, whether you think this will actually remove fear or whether actually it will engender much greater antagonism and will strengthen extremist groups of many different religions.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Before I go to the two speakers, is there anybody else who had a question which related to that or a statement that related.

Sidney Shipton: Yeah, my name is Sidney Shipton. I'm a Fellow of the RSA but I want to speak in a different capacity as Co-ordinator of the Three Faiths Forum, of which both our distinguished speakers, who've given us excellent presentations, are active members. The Three Faiths Forum is an interfaith organisation and there are many interfaith activities that are taking place today, in fact there is a growth of interfaith activity and this is something which I would like to suggest is, in fact, partially the answer to the answer to the problems that are being faced. The ignorance and I think that Dr. Hameed mentioned this before, the ignorance of other faiths

by people. When I speak to various groups, whether they be Jewish, Christian, Muslim or mixed, I always ask a rhetorical question "How many friends, how many acquaintances, how many people do you know of other faiths?" Because people live in their own self-imposed ghettos and therefore there is this ignorance and I think that that is an important....May I, while I'm on my feet make just one other point?

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Briefly, very briefly.

Sidney Shipton: A very brief point and that is I also feel the word 'fundamentalism' is wrong. I think that anyone who believes in a religion believes in its fundamentals. It's taken on the wrong interpretation. What we're talking about is extremists within religion and those who pervert religion towards their own ends with the wrong interpretations.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you. Let's take those two together, so we have something about how do we promote interfaith dialogue but also is it right to be intolerant of intolerance? Should we legislate against it? Would either of you like to respond to those two issues?

Dr. Khalid Hameed: I think it's about 18 months or so that a friend sent me the Hansard which had the proceedings of the Bill in the House of Lords for this particular purpose that our friend has asked the question and I clearly remember there were several speakers but two outstanding speakers, one for and one against. Both were friends. So, I couldn't make up my mind who to support. And I'm still there and this is coming up again and one would like to listen to the discussions on both sides, whether freedom of speech will

be curtailed or whether those who are at the extreme edges of any faith will have the opportunity to strike at any faith, at any religion because there are no laws to protect. So that is a question. I'm sorry, I don't have a straight answer. I still haven't made up my mind so please be patient and let us listen to the debates and some of those debates are really, really mind boggling, they are terrific.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Karen.

Karen Armstrong: I think I'm in your position too. I veer from one to the other. I have fears that by legislating against it, it will drive people to become more irritated, extreme, and militant in their freedom. The trouble with us all is that we don't see that freedom carries responsibilities, that it's not just an ability to blow your mouth off and say whatever you choose. We need education in freedom, what it means and freedom carries severe responsibilities. I can imagine all kinds of writers, and I've been with pen activists on this, who think that they've got a right to say anything they want about religion and, however negative it is, people have got to take it, this is taboo. And I think, really, that we're in such a perilous state that we can't allow ourselves to blow our mouths off this way but legislating, I fear, will drive all that underground. But it's difficult because freedom of speech for us as moderns and as secularists this is a sacred value and when it's undermined we feel as outraged as threatened perhaps as a Muslim might have felt about 'The Satanic Verses' – profoundly hurt at some core of his or her being. And as we learn to live together, see here we come back to global community, we're going to have these clashes of sacredness, of

things that are sacred and inviolable. Sacred doesn't mean supernatural, of course, it means something that is absolutely precious, un-negotiable and inviolable. So, as we learn to live together we have to learn to negotiate these clashes but I'm not sure that legislation can do it but, I'm like you, I keep changing my mind.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Could I perhaps then also open it to the floor. Is there anybody else who would like to make contribution about this issue or the clashes of sacredness?

Michael Truop: Yes, my name's Michael Truop. I'm a Fellow of the Society but I also run a company, we employ about 40 people and it is a complete mix of lots of different nationalities, religions etc. But, having listened to the speakers, I feel almost impelled to launch a defence of secularism because the thing that makes the atmosphere in our company work is the fact that, actually, everybody is pretty secular, even those with a belief, which is a small minority of the employees, actually do not hold very strongly to their religion and, over the years, we have all heard people defending religion by reference to the essential philosophy of that religion. To my mind religious structures are power structures – they're political structures and they're just like the political structures of states and the power's activities, the power politics, are more or less the same. So, I am concerned that there should be a voice that actually says "Well, secularism is actually proving pretty effective at eliminating many of these issues." rather than necessarily retreating into an era, which I think is probably mythological when people did concentrate on the philosophical underpinnings of the religion rather

than the social orders that the priests of whatever religion had as a power agenda.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you. So let me hold that and take two more comments then we'll come back to the speakers, one here and one somewhere in the middle.

Susan Reed: Thank you. I am Susan Reed, a Fellow of the Society, I'm also a philosopher and I'm also a practising Christian, although I'm not Christian in the sense that most people would categorise that word. I'd say I'm a practising ecumenist, probably. And I stand up in church every Sunday and I say; "I believe in one God." and I don't see why so many people think that that one God is somehow different for the Jews, the Muslims or anybody else. It is one God that I believe, is the thing and also I believe in the Christian teachings completely is that perfect love casts out all fear and what I think we are in today is a totally fear based society. We are always afraid that somebody else is going to take something away from us. We fear loss, we fear otherness and it is this great fear that we have got to get rid of and if you have faith, as I believe, God is always good – there is no reason for fear, but it is having that faith and this is what I think is the difference between being a believer and an unbeliever and so I would hope that we could have a much more believing society in which there is a real spiritual recognition. This lecture was about spirituality but we haven't heard much about spirituality. We've heard a lot about religion, which I agree totally with the last speaker, is now becoming a power structured aspect in many of those things. But real spirituality is just about

having faith that there is a God, and I'm not it. Thank you.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you. One person in the middle, then one at the front and then we must come back to the two speakers. Just two last comments, yes?

Myrna Michell: Hello, I'm Myrna Michell and I'm here as a ministry student for the Unitarian of Free Christian Churches, I'd like to be able to combine those two comments or bring them together a little bit. Something that Karen spoke about earlier and she used the term 'global community' and also looking at your book, the recent one, 'Transformation'. I'd just like to give what, I think is a 'good news' comment, a couple of weeks ago there was an item in the Independent Newspaper by a Burmese journalist. He was not only reminding us that it was the 60th birthday that day of that charismatic Burmese leader, whose name I maybe can't pronounce, Suu Kyi, he was actually imploring Western governments not to go down the route of sanctions against that oppressive regime in the way that we had the same conflict in the early 90s as to what we would do with Iraq. He's saying that we should place that government, embrace it within the political scene of the Far East, so that it transforms and becomes a better government for the people and that, I feel, actually combines the outer and the inner and I wonder if that feels relevant to you.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: That's very helpful. One very brief comment from here and then we must come back to the two speakers.

Penny Sophocleous: My name is Penny Sophocleous. I'm an Executive Coach. I was brought up as a Greek

Orthodox, however, having lived my life and done a great deal of research I would say I am personally a spiritual person rather than I have a personal religion of any denomination and I think what both speakers seem to be asking for, and I think I would ask for, is much more personal spirituality because every moment one breathes and lives and acts one is expressing one's spirituality. The level or quality of that spirituality is what characterises that person, whether they are a global citizen, whether they are a national citizen, whether they are a local citizen or whether they are a religious person of a particular denomination or other because my researches suggest that all religions say the same thing. All religions say the human and their behaviour denotes what is spiritual or not.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: So, let me take that back to our two speakers. How can we have a personal religion and also act to influence our own communities and welcome a stranger? Because I think those are the three issues we have on the table.

Karen Armstrong: Well, personally, I don't see the problem. Spirituality is, in my view, altruism. It's about dealing with living the Golden Rule, every second of every day and I agree with the gentleman about the leaders who are often just religious politicians and politicians as a breed are not generally known for their lack of ego and very often, just as a political leader has to defend his or her party above all else, this is not religion, it's not spirituality. This is some kind of ego at work here.

Karen Armstrong: But, in other parts of the world what we have looks like heaven, frankly, and what I was trying to say in my talk was that some

forms of secularism that have been imposed far too rapidly have been pernicious. If Iraqis, for example, their experience of secularism has been Saddam Hussein and so we must realise that, like any human enterprise, like religion, secularism also has its problems and its failures and we can't judge our privileged experience of secularism with the much more problematic experience that others have. I'm not quite happy always about this distinction between religion and spirituality. You know as though I'm a spiritual person, some kind of free floating...I am a free floater, actually, I mean I see myself as a religious freelance and I write and am nourished....I'm in recovery from a bad religious experience in my youth and have healed myself by the study of all religions, which I agree with you, they are so profoundly at one and it tells us something about the human spirit. But religion also means commitment, 'religio' it means 'what is that which binds you?' and you have to stick at the Golden Rule, day by day, hour by hour.

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you.

Dr. Khalid Hameed: I don't know whether I am spiritual or religious, perhaps a bit of both. My own journey into self-discovery, even through some difficult philosophies, like Zen Buddhism, which you probably know far more than I do, has not been complete at all. But whatever I am as long as I am a good citizen, a good human being, is what matters. You can have self-gratification and say all sorts of things about oneself and look in the mirror and say "I am the most handsome person in the world." but, this evening, and for me, this audience is one of the most accomplished audiences that I have had the privilege to speak to.

Now, you are all, including our Chairman, great teachers and our role, my role, Karen's role, our role is to stir the waters, create a ripple effect, put some thoughts into your minds and when you go out and you talk to five, ten people in your sphere of influence the message goes out and it's very helpful – believe you me it is very, very helpful. I have talked to people who have come out of meetings like this and they've come back to me and said: "Never thought of these things for a long, long time. Thank you for reminding us."

Dr. Peter Hawkins: Thank you. So somewhere there is the message we can all take responsibility for our own self-criticism rather than criticism of others, we can all take responsibility for the ripples, I think I heard you say, for the ripples that we put out. May I, on your behalf, thank our two excellent speakers, also to thank you for being present tonight, all of you and for the quality of your attention and engagement and contributions. To also thank the RSA and my fellow Hibbert Trustees for making this evening possible

The Hibbert Trustees, when they meet, sometimes use the 19th century and 18th century toast "To civil and religious liberty throughout the world." which I think has been very much the spirit of this evening. And I would like to end this evening with some words from a previous Hibbert lecturer, Rabindranath Tagore, which I think might be appropriate on this eve of the meeting that will take place between the world leaders shortly in Scotland, where they face the challenges of how they overcome their egos, I think Karen would say, but the greater challenges also of how they make poverty history, the

challenge of global climate change and the challenge of what they do to create greater understanding between the peoples of the world. Tagore writes "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high. Where knowledge is free. Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow, domestic walls. Where words come out from the depth of truth. Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection. Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit. Where the mind is led forward by ((thee ?)) into ever widening thought and action. Into that heaven of freedom let my country awake." And I think we should, perhaps, add to that this evening: "To that heaven of freedom let all the citizens of this globe awake." Thank you.