NEWS & UPCOMING EVENTS:

BEGINNING WEEK OF 13th FEB 2017:

DISCOVERING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:

The Religious Diversity Centre (Auckland) and the Waikato Interfaith Council (Hamilton) are pleased to announce an upcoming programme in their 'Raising Religious Literacy' series entitled:

"DISCOVERING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:
Exploring the diverse religious traditions contributing to New Zealand society"
Learn about the history, development and contemporary practice of the world's major religions and 'isms' throughout 2017. Each Term in 2017 will have a different focus and cover different material. Terms 1 and 2 will focus on Selected Topics in the Contemporary Practice of each of the major world religions, while Terms 3 and 4 will focus on the history and development of the world's main faith traditions. In the first half of the year we will look at selected topics in comparative world religion, focusing on a different topic during each class and looking how each religion approaches that particular topic. In the second half of the year, we will explore the history and development of each of the world religions, focusing on the Eastern Traditions in Term 3 and the Western Traditions in Term 4. Detailed Syllabi will be available at the start of each Term.

Any Term can be taken independently of the others, and there are no prerequisites for any of the Term courses.

Zealanders.

Our purpose is to foster appreciation, understanding and deeper relationships among the religious, spiritual and secular communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, and provide an independent and informed voice on religious and spiritual issues in the public sphere.

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Subscribe to our mailing list!

If you are interested in supporting religious diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand and wish to subscribe to the Centre's mailing list, please drop us an email at: <rdc@rdc.org.nz>. If you'd like to contact the Religious Diversity Centre Trust, please email <religiousdiversitytrust@gmail.com>. We'd love to hear from you!
Each Term will consist of 8 weekly classes:

**Term 1 Selected Topics in World Religions**: Week 1: Foundations and Founder Figures; Week 2: Sacred Texts; Week 3: Image and Iconography; Week 4: Prayer and Worship; Week 5: Sacred Time; Week 6: Sacred Music; Week 7: Sacred Spaces; and Week 8: Sacred Journeys and Pilgrimage.

**Term 2 Selected Topics in World Religions**: Week 1: Sacred Clothing; Week 2: Food and Ritual; Week 3: Birth and Coming of Age Ceremonies; Week 4: Marriage; Week 5: Asceticism and Renunciation; Week 6: Death and Dying; Week 7: Esoteric Traditions and Mystical Experiences; and Week 8: Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism.

**Term 3 Eastern Religious Traditions**: Starting our study with the earliest origins of religious behaviour, we will then turn our focus towards the history and development of the Eastern Religious Traditions. We will first look at the rise of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

**HOLY DAYS:**

**BAHÁ’I FAITH:**

**World Religion Day**, 15 Jan: an annual celebration of the teachings of unity found in all religions. It was established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States in 1950 as a way to encourage interfaith understanding.

**Sultán (Sovereignty)**, 18 Jan: the 17th month of the Bahá’í year. The Bahá’í calendar is a solar calendar with years composed of 19 months of 19 days each (361 days), plus an extra period of "Intercalary Days". Years begin at Naw-Rúz, on the vernal equinox, coinciding with March 20 or 21.

**Mulk**, 6 February: the 18th month of the Bahá’í year.

**Ayyam-i-Ha**, 25-28 February: The intercalary days inserted between the 18th and 19th months to complete the 365 or 366 day solar year.

**Nineteen Day Fast**, 1-20 March: A designated 19-day period of fasting each year immediately before the Bahá’í New
and the Indian traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. We will then switch our focus to both the Chinese religious traditions (Folk religion, Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism), followed by an exploration of the Japanese religious traditions (Shinto, Shingon, Tendai, Nichiren and Zen Buddhism).

**Term 4 Western Religious Traditions:**
Focusing on the history and development of the Western belief traditions, including the Rise of Monotheism and the origins of religious belief in ancient Mesopotamia, including Zoroastrianism. We will then begin our study of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, ending our discussions with other religious movements (e.g. the Bahá’í faith), and the moral and ethical ideologies of Atheism, Agnosticism, Rationalism and Humanism.

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**CLASS DATES AND TIMES:**

**Auckland:**
Classes will meet on Monday nights

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**BUDDHISM:**

Chinese/Vietnamese/Korean New Year 4715 (The Year of the Rooster), 28 January: The first day after the new (dark) moon is a religious and cultural festival celebrated by Chinese, Vietnamese and Koreans of Buddhist and other backgrounds as New Year's Day for the year 4715 (Year of the Rooster) in the

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**Naw Ruz, 20 March:** The seventh greatest festival, "New Day" is the first day of the Zoroastrian/Persian and Baha’i New Year. It falls on the spring equinox and symbolizes the renewal of the world after the winter. For Zoroastrians, Naw Ruz also celebrates the creation of fire that is symbolic of Asha, or righteousness. It is also the day on which Zarathustra received his revelation.

**Ridvan, 20 April–2 May:** Commemorates the 12 days that Baha’u’llah spent in the Garden of Ridvan in the last days of his exile in Baghdad, during which time he proclaimed himself as the one announced by Bab. Work is suspended for the first, ninth, and twelfth days.
from 7:00-9:00pm, and will be held in the Religious Diversity Centre classrooms at the University of Otago House, 385 Queen Street, Auckland. Parking is available in the Wilson Car Park underneath the building.

**Term 1 dates**: Mondays 7-9pm, beginning 13 February, ending 3 April 2017.

**Term 2 dates**: Mondays 7-9pm, beginning 8 May, ending 26 June 2017.

**Term 3 dates**: Mondays 7-9pm, beginning 31 July, ending 18 September 2017.

**Term 4 dates**: Mondays 7-9pm, beginning 23 October, ending 11 December 2017.

**Hamilton**:
Classes will meet on **Thursday nights** from 7:00-9:00pm under the auspices of Fraser High School's Adult and Community Education (ACE) programme, and will be held at **Fraser High School**, 72 Ellicott Road, Hamilton. Free parking available at Fraser High.

**Term 1 dates**: Thursdays 7-9pm, beginning 16 February, ending 6 April 2017.

**Term 2 dates**: Thursdays 7-9pm,
beginning 11 May, ending 29 June 2017.

Term 3 dates: Thursdays 7-9pm, beginning 3 August, ending 21 September 2017.

Term 4 dates: Thursdays 7-9pm, beginning 26 October, ending 14 December 2017.

COST & REGISTRATION INFORMATION:

Auckland class (Monday evenings):
Waged: $95 per term course cost
Unwaged/Students/Seniors: $65 per term course cost

Registration for the Term 1 can be completed by emailing
<religiousdiversitycentre@gmail.com>. Please bring a cheque made out to the "Religious Diversity Centre Trust" to the first night of class. We are working to get a payment and registration button up on the RDC website at <www.rdc.org.nz> but this may take some time. When the payment buttons become available on our website, payment, along with a valid credit card, Christmas, while Eastern churches emphasise Theophany or Epiphany.

Lent, 27 Feb through 7 April: In Orthodox churches, the first day of Lent marks the beginning of the Great Fast, the final six weeks of a 10-week period leading up to Holy Week and Easter (Pascha). In the churches that follow the Gregorian calendar, Lent is a six-week observance (40 days excluding Sundays) beginning with Ash Wednesday and culminating in Holy Week. It is a time of repentance and sacrifice in preparation for Easter.

Ash Wednesday, 1 March: A special day of repentance observed by Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians to mark the beginning of Lent, the 40-day period (excluding Sundays) of prayer, repentance, and self-denial preceding Easter. The name derives from the practice of marking of the faithful with ashes to signify penitence.

Anniversary of the Founding of the Church (LDS), 6 April: Annual World General Conference of the Church of Latter Day Saints held on Saturday and Sunday closest to this date each year.

Palm Sunday, 9 April: Celebrates the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, marking the beginning of Holy Week that culminates in Easter or Pascha. In some churches, Palm Sunday is combined with the anticipation of Christ's death and so is also known as "Passon Sunday."

Orthodox Christians often observe this Sunday on a date different from the date on which Protestant and Roman Catholics observe it.

Holy Thursday/Maundy Thursday, 13 April: Commemorates the institution of the Lord's Supper/the Eucharist by Jesus prior to his arrest and execution.
can be made on-line while registering for the course.

**Hamilton class** (Thursday evenings): A single registration fee of $70 (GST inclusive) applies. Course details and on-line registration and payment can be made at Fraser High School's Adult and Community Education (ACE) site at <www.fraser.school.nz/comm-ed/category/-wellbeing-lifestyle>.

**Lecturer:**
The classes will be taught by Todd Nachowitz, PhD. Todd is a part-time lecturer in the Studies in Religion programme at the University of Waikato where he teaches two introductory courses on Comparative Religion, and co-teaches with Prof. Douglas Pratt additional courses in religious studies. He is also the Centre Establishment Coordinator of the Religious Diversity Centre, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Waikato Interfaith Council. Todd has lived and worked in the United States, India, Pakistan and Nepal and is a specialist in comparative

"Maundy" is derived from the Latin text of John 13:34, in which Jesus gives a *mandatum novum* (or 'new commandment'). The date observed by Protestants and Roman Catholics differs from the date observed by Orthodox Christians.

**Good Friday,** 14 April: Commemorates the Passion of Jesus Christ, i.e., his death by crucifixion. Observed as Holy Friday by Orthodox Christians on a different date from the one observed by Protestants and Roman Catholics.

**Easter Sunday,** 16 April: Celebrates the resurrection from death of Jesus Christ. It is the oldest and most important festival in the Christian year and initiates the 50-day period culminating in Pentecost. Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians often observe Easter on a different date than Orthodox Christians.

**HINDUISM**

*Makar Sankranti,* 14 January: marks the transition of the sun into the zodiacal sign of Makara (Capricorn) on its celestial path,[2] which is the first change in the zodiac after the winter solstice and is the first day of the month of Magha. The festival is celebrated in various parts of
MONDAY 30th JANUARY 2017: THE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY CENTRE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND (RDC) LAUNCHES ITS WEBSITE:

The Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand (RDC) is pleased to announce the launch of its website at <www.rdc.org.nz>. The site gives information on our recent public launch by The Rt Hon Helen Clark in the Indian subcontinent to observe the day which marks the shift of the sun into ever-lengthening days. The festival is a seasonal observance as well as a religious celebration.

**Basant Panchami**, 1 Feb: A North Indian celebration, Basant Panchami is associated with Saraswati, the Goddess of Wisdom and Learning, and with Lakshmi, Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity.

**Mahashivaratri**, 25 February: Mahashivaratri is dedicated to Shiva, one of the major deities to whom Hindus direct their devotion. The night before the feast, Hindus recite texts, sing and tell stories in honour of this God whose dynamic cosmic dance creates, destroys and recreates the world.

**Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti**, 28 February: Celebrates the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, guru of Swami Vivekananda.

**Holi**, 13 March: A joyous spring Hindu festival that is dedicated to Krishna in some parts of India; in other parts of India, it is dedicated to Kama, the God of Pleasure. People throw colored water or colored powder in celebration.

**Ramanavami**, 5th April: Celebrates the birthday of Rama, the seventh incarnation of the God Vishnu. The Ramayana, one of the Hindu epics that tells the story of Rama, is read during the previous eight days.
Wellington (March 2016) and our Auckland event with Swami Agnivesh (September 2016). The website also details the launch of our first public programme, a evening Adult Education class entitled "Discovering Religious Diversity". The site will expand as new programmes develop.

NEWS:

RDC HOSTS AUCKLAND LAUNCH EVENT WITH SWAMI AGNIVESH IN SEPTEMBER 2016

Swami Agnivesh, a noted global leader in the world of interreligious relationships, gave the keynote address at the Auckland Launch of the Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand. Launched in Wellington earlier this year by the RDC's Patron, Helen Clark, the Diversity Centre recently marked its presence in Auckland with an evening event on Thursday 1 September 2016.

A Vedic scholar and teacher, Swami

ISLAM:
Laylat al-Isra’wa al-Mi’raj (Mi’raj al-Nabi), 23 April: Commemorates the ascension (al-Mi’raj) of the Prophet to heaven following his night journey (al-Isra’) from Mecca to Jerusalem and his ascent to heaven and return the same night. Begins at sundown.

JAINISM:
Mahavir Jayanti, 9 April: Celebrates the birthday of Lord Mahavira. Born with the name Vardhamana in ca. 599 BCE, he was later given the titles of honor, Mahavira ("Great Hero") and Jina ("Conqueror" or "Victor"), a title applied also to the other Tirthankaras.
Agnivesh is President of the World Council of Arya Samaj, an Indian religious movement. He comes to New Zealand as a member of the nine-person Board of Directors of the King Abdullah International Centre for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue. This Centre, 'KAICIID' was created by the governments of Austria, Spain and Saudi Arabia. The Vatican is a Founder Observer. KAICIID is located in Vienna as a guest of the Austrian Government.

Agnivesh had a distinguished earlier career. He was Professor of Law and Management in Calcutta. He later held the position of Cabinet Minister for Education in the State Government of Haryana in Northern India. But he was to leave all this behind when he became a Swami, a champion of the most destitute, the most excluded and the most oppressed. He describes this vividly in his latest book, *Applied Spirituality*, which is available from the Religious Diversity Centre.

Swami-ji is Chairperson of the United Nations Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and Founder-Chairperson of the Bonded Labour

**JUDAISM**

*International Holocaust Remembrance Day (UN Observance), 27 January:* an international day commemorating the genocide that resulted in the death of an estimated 6 million Jewish people, 2 million Romani, 250,000 mentally and physically disabled, and 9,000 homosexual men by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. It was designated by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/7 on 1 November 2005.

*Tu B'Shevat, 11 February:* One of four New Year's Days, Tu B'Shevat (the 15th day of the month of Shevat) is the New Year's Day for Trees, and traditionally the first of the year for tithing fruit of trees. Nowadays, it is a day for environmental awareness and action such as tree planting. Special celebratory meals (Seders) include eating the seven fruits of the land (wheat and barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and honey-date), each of which symbolises a spiritual reality.

*Purim, 11-12 March:* Celebrates the rescue of the Jews of ancient Persia from a plot to destroy them as related in the Book of Esther, which is read at this time. Purim is a joyous holiday, celebrated by wearing of costumes, giving gifts to friends, giving to the poor, and socialising. Preceded by the Fast of Esther, Purim is a day of feasting. Begins
Liberation Front. He addressed the World Bank’s meeting of Leaders on Faith and Development in March, and the United Nations World Food Programme, attended by delegates from over 150 countries, in Rome in June 2016. At that meeting, the Pope gave his full support to the World Food Programme’s goal of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030. Agnivesh commented: “I've never before returned from an international meet as greatly impressed .... I volunteered to work for the Zero Hunger Challenge for the rest of my life if we were ready to go to the root causes of hunger”


Swami Agnivesh’s web site can be viewed at <www.swamiagnivesh.com/about-swamiji.php>

**Passover**, 10-18 April: Commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It is celebrated for eight days with special prayers and symbolic foods at home, starting with the Seder, a ritual meal that re-enacts that ancient deliverance and emphasizes the freedom of the Jews under the guidance of God. The first two and the last two days are holidays. Begins at sundown, April 10; ends at sundown, April 18.

**Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day)**, 24 April observed as Israel’s day of commemoration for the approximately six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust as a result of the actions carried out by Nazi Germany and its accessories, and for the Jewish resistance in that period. In Israel, it is a national memorial day.

**SHINTO**:

**Setsubun-sai**, 3 February: Popularly known as the Bean-throwing Festival, Setsubun-sai marks the end of winter and the eve of the first day of spring according to the ancient East Asian solar calendar familiar to Japanese. Beans are thrown into each
Swami Agnivesh presents his new book to Pope Francis during the meeting of the United Nations World Food Programme held in Rome in June 2016.

RDC TRUST CHAIR, JOCELYN ARMSTRONG, ATTENDS BANGKOK CONFERENCE

The Religious Diversity Centre Trust Chair, Jocelyn Armstrong, recently attended a meeting in Bangkok, Thailand (5-7 December 2016) on the role of religious leaders from the Asia-Pacific region in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to hate crimes. The Conference was sponsored by the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, and the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for...
Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

The same day that Jocelyn left for the Asia-Pacific regional meeting (which focused on the need to provide an alternative message to ‘hate speech’), she heard from one of our religious communities in South Auckland about their experience of encountering hate speech on a daily basis.

"The significance for me of this meeting - that focused on the role of religious leaders in preventing incitement to violence - was the working partnership between United Nations leadership, the World Council of Churches and KAICIID, the King Abdullah International Centre for Interfaith Intercultural Dialogue" Jocelyn reported. "We will receive a copy of the Plan of Action to be published early this year after being discussed by five regional meetings around the world. And although atrocity crimes do not seem likely in our country we must not tolerate even subtle ‘hate speech’ and bullying in our society."

This Plan of Action will indicate how religious leaders might be supported

Zoroastrianism:

**Ghambar Hamaspathmaedem** 16-20 March: Celebrates the creation of human beings and honors the souls of the deceased.

**Naw Ruz**, 21 March: The seventh greatest festival, "New Day" is the first day of the Zoroastrian/Persian and Baha'i New Year. It falls on the spring equinox and symbolizes the renewal of the world after the winter. For Zoroastrians, Naw Ruz also celebrates the creation of fire that is symbolic of Asha, or righteousness. It is also the day on which Zarathustra received his revelation.

**Birthday of Prophet Zarathustra (Khordad Sal)**, 26 March: The anniversary of the birth of the founder of the Zoroastrian faith.
and encouraged to offer an alternative message to those public statements that might lead to the incitement to atrocity crimes.

RENOWNED WORLD RELIGIONS SCHOLAR HUSTON SMITH PASSES AWAY:

Huston, born in 1919, quietly passed away on Friday 30 December 2016 at his home at the age of 97. Huston was a well-loved religious studies scholar.
based in the United States, and taught at Syracuse University in New York State and at the University of California-Berkeley. His most famous book *The World's Religions* (originally titled *The Religions of Man*) sold over two million copies and remains one of the most popular introductions to comparative world religion today. His obituary in the *New York Times* can be read at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/01/us/huston-smith-author-of-the-worlds-religions-dies-at-97.html>. 

![Image of Huston Smith](image-url)
Become a "Friend of the Religious Diversity Center"!

Your support will help the Centre fulfill its purpose by allowing us to:

• provide high quality research, publications and resources
• provide professional development in religious diversity
• provide education and experience in religious diversity
• contribute expert advice to policy makers and media
• encourage inter- and intra-religious dialogue
• promote cooperation, friendship and peacemaking
• honour the Treaty of Waitangi.

Friends of the Religious Diversity Centre will have opportunities to consult and be consulted on matters pertaining to religious diversity and receive regular newsletters and notices of upcoming events.

The following membership categories apply for "Friend" status:

1. Make a one-off annual donation in the amount of your choice,
2. Make a regular monthly donation in
the amount of your choice to help support our on-going costs,

3. Make a major donation to the RDC Trust’s endowment fund.

**Remember:**
All donations of $5 or more are tax deductible!

**Direct Deposits:**
In our initial months of operations all donations can be made by direct deposit into the RDC's bank account, as follows:
"The Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand Trust"
Kiwibank Account No. 38-9017-0433364-00
Please email advice of your direct deposit to:
<religiousdiversitytrust@gmail.com>
along with the date of your deposit, the amount of your donation, your contact details (name, postal address, and email address), and whether or not you would like a tax receipt.

**By Cheque:**
Donations can also be made by a cheque written out to the "Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand Trust." These can be posted to
our mailing address at:
   Religious Diversity Centre Trust
   University of Otago House
   PO Box 5543
   Auckland 1141

Please remember to include your contact details (name, postal address, and email address), and whether or not you would like a tax receipt.

**On our web site:**

We plan to have an on-line payment facility for donations available on our website at <www.rdc.org.nz>. This facility should be up and running in a couple of weeks.

**The Religious Diversity Centre Trust is a registered charitable entity. Our Charities Registration Number is: CC52791.**

Please let us know if you have any events you’d like to share with us for inclusion in our next newsletter! Email us at <newsletter@rdc.org.nz>.
Contact us:

For information on us and our programmes, please check out our newly-launched website at <www.rdc.org.nz>.

For more information on the RDC and its activities, research and publications please contact the Religious Diversity Centre at <info@rdc.org.nz>, or the Religious Diversity Centre Trust at <religiousdiversitytrust@gmail.com>.

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