

# Faith Junction



## End of first quarter report:

Art Beyond Belief's "Faith Junction" project which sets out to achieve video interviews across the four major faiths represented in Slough and the surrounding areas. These faiths are *Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity*. Working with Slough Borough Council's Faith Partnership, an initiative set up around three years ago, as a means of getting the faiths working together, hopefully in a harmonious way. The group has seen falling attendances at meetings partly due to a lack of focus and direction. Slough's Council for Voluntary Services has recently taken over



David Sparrow, Art Beyond Belief's Creative Director and representative on the Slough Faith Partnership

a general air of increased enthusiasm was noted. David Sparrow, as Art Beyond Belief's representative on the Partnership asked for a committee to be set up whose principal objectives would be to frame a set of core questions that could be put by the interviewing team to those who are being interviewed. The supply of interview personnel was also the responsibility of this committee. This was unanimously agreed, and a volunteer from each faith was immediately forthcoming. A date was set for the discussion of the questions, and a meeting duly held. Questions were indeed framed, and discussion on various topics produced some interesting debate. One concern was over the interviewing of women. While it was



(Above) Rev. Dr. Andreas Loewe, Chaplain, Michaelhouse, Cambridge, and Chairman of Art Beyond Belief: "In how far do you think that the beliefs of your faith community put other people off?" (Right) Dr. Henna Khan "there should be no distinction based on gender, either for those being interviewed or those asking the questions."

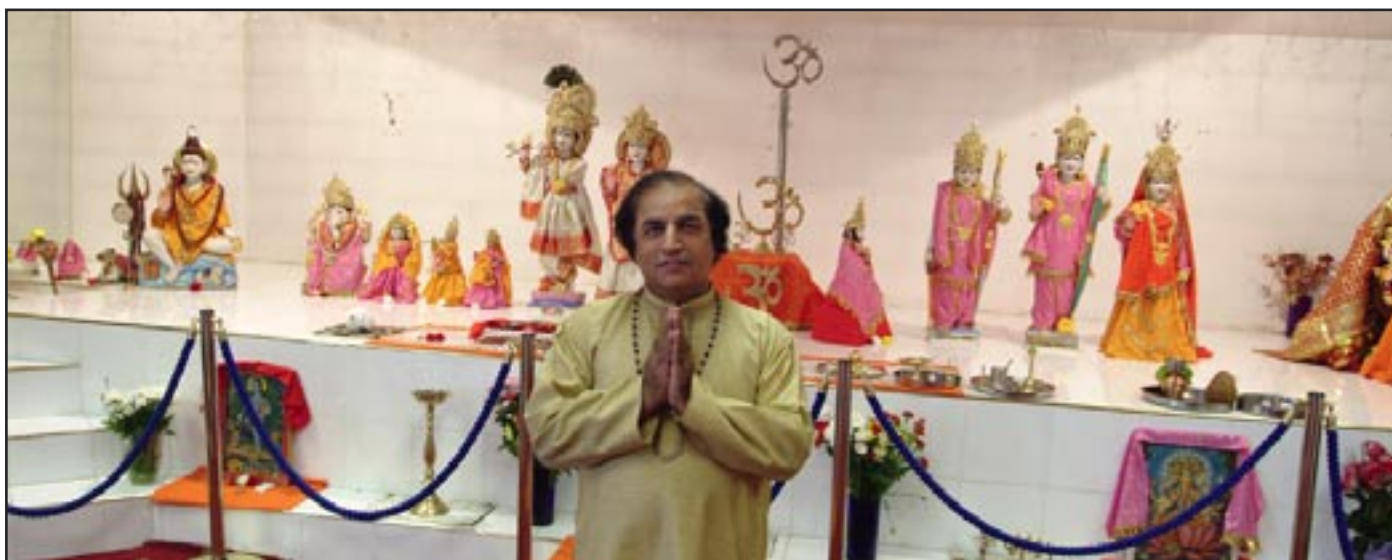
guidance of the partnership, from Slough Borough Council and was keen to work alongside Art Beyond Belief when the "Faith Junction" project was suggested as a focus for the group. Project management and overall responsibility remain entirely in the hands of Art Beyond Belief. The feeling is that

the production of the DVD interviews will be something the Partnership will benefit from, enabling an exciting event linked with the local library service to take place next summer.

The Faith Partnership agreed to support Art Beyond Belief's "Faith Junction", and at the next meeting



assumed that there would be no problem interviewing Christians of either gender; the point was raised especially with regard to the Islamic Faith, that it might be better to interview men and women together. Dr. Henna Khan, as the Muslim representative said that this was completely unnecessary, and that there should be no distinction based on gender, either for those being interviewed or those asking the questions. Representatives of



(Above) Naresh Saraswat, Priest at Slough's Hindu Temple, and representative of the Hindu Community on the Faith Junction Committee. He describes the project as "Vital, - anything I can do to assist, I will." (Below Left) - Ranjit Bilkhu represents the Sikhs on Faith Junction. She runs a company called "Cultural Insight" whose aim is to educate groups about other cultures. (Below) Christianity is represented by Rev John Newton, a retired Methodist minister, who spent some years in Pakistan and India, and is bringing this very much alive in his choice of Christians to take part in the project. "We have a very diverse selection of Christian Sects in Slough. It would be wrong to think Anglican, Catholic..."

the other faiths agreed.

The questions were agreed in principal but it was suggested that they be e-mailed to the committee and other interested parties



(a Buddhist representative was particularly interested), and the Board of Trustees of Art Beyond Belief, so that alterations and additions could be made over a couple of weeks. This proved most useful and resulted in some interesting changes being incorporated. As an example, the original questions had the following:

**10. Many people see religion as the representation of a harsh or angry God, rather than a God of love. How much are the faith communities responsible for this attitude?**

Art Beyond Belief's Chairman, the Rev. Dr. Andreas Loewe, Chaplain, Michaelhouse, Cambridge suggested:

**Question 10 uses "other people" - presumably non-believers? - who presuppose a doctrine of a God of Love versus that of a Harsh God. I wonder whether that's not muddling two separate questions. If we want to get responses as to why believers think there are so many unbelievers, could we not simply use: "In how far do you think that the beliefs of your faith community put other people off?" or, more sympathetically to the respondent, "In how far do you think that the beliefs of your faith community are misunderstood by outsiders?" If we want a response to the question about a God of love, then we should ask "Is there an idea that God is love in your faith?"**



**If so, in how far do you think that outsiders understand that this is so?"**

At the next meeting the questions were finalized and it was re-stated that these are to be the core of questions, so that scope was given for more individual questions to be asked by the interviewers, while retaining a commonality that kept a recognizable theme for all participants. Questions of medical ethics and areas of more particular theology were felt to be beyond the scope and time scale of the interviews, but might well be a subject for another project.

The next meeting towards the end of July will introduce the interview personnel to their trainers, and the interviews will commence shortly afterwards.

The bulk of time during this first quarter has been spent with the Faith Partnership and Slough's Council for Voluntary Services, as the change of direction, and adoption of the Faith Junction project has been debated, and incorporated. A domain name has been purchased - [faithjunction.org.uk](http://faithjunction.org.uk) and the site will be active by the end of July. An Interfaith event was held by the Partnership at which the Faith Junction project was introduced to the Deputy Mayor Cllr Rashad Butt.

Footnote. Art Beyond Belief projects are assigned a font as part of their logo. The font chosen for "Faith Junction" is happily called "Balcony Angels".