

## The dialogue partners

All partners, male and female, who participated as core members in one or more of the 14 dialogue meetings, are introduced briefly: **name**; *participation* in which dialogues; *publications* where relevant to the dialogue. It was not possible to ascribe a particular religion to all dialogue partners. Some are thus listed under „Other Worldviews“.

Each had come from different walks of life, each contributed something specific to the dialogue, experienced it differently. In the course of the dialogue, each experienced individual developments and subsequently each went his/her own way. And as far as they are still alive, they are all continuing to develop their insights from the dialogue in their immediate environment.

### From Buddhism

**Bhante Olande Ananda Maha Thera** is from Holland. He was born in 1948 in Amsterdam the son of a Jewish father and a non-religious mother. After nearly completing his University studies in economics and sociology he travelled to India twice between 1972 and 1975 in search of reality and truth, before turning to Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In 1977 he was ordained as „bhikkhu“ or monk. He lived and taught at Rock Hill and other hermitages before being assigned director of the „Pagoda Meditation Centre“ near Colombo. He is recognised as a Buddhist teacher and meditation master. He often travels the Near and Far East, North and South America, South Africa and Europe to teach courses and give talks, coming every year to Germany and the Netherlands as well. If you travel with him, you will see that he has friends everywhere.

*participation*: 3rd to 14th dialogue except for 5<sup>th</sup> (Cochin), 6th (Israel) and 10./II. (Cochin)

During the first two dialogue meetings, when **Bhante Kassapa Thera** represented Buddhism, he was deputy main monk at Denuwara and a permanent teacher at the international meditation centre Rock Hill, Wegirikanda near Gampola, Sri Lanka. At the time, he had been a monk for 20 years, a pupil of Balangoda Ananda Maitriya Mahanayaka Thera. Bhante's interest in other religions had led him to India where he spent five months in forests and mountain caves meditating and studying together with sanyasis and yogis.

*participation*: first and second dialogue (Altenhof) and 4th dialogue (Rock Hill, Sri Lanka)

**Hector Samararatne** (died 2008) grew up as son of an overseer on a tea plantation. He was employed with the postal services. He was a Buddhist lay person who practised his faith in such a way as to earn him the respect of locals and foreigners alike. In the same way he interacted with people from other religions and participated in their religious festivals. His favourite place was the Kataragama temple in Kandy which is served by a Hindu priest. When asked where he took the energy and inspiration for this, his simple answer was that he just considered it to be the right thing to do. It is typical that Catholic nuns visited him and prayed for him when he was fatally ill. The Catholic bishop also blessed him at that time. He was treasurer at the hermitage Rock Hill for many years. His brother Godwin Samararatne (died 2000) was a renowned and well-travelled teacher of meditation and interpreter of Theravada Buddhism.

*participation*: 4th dialogue (Rock Hill, Sri Lanka), and Reinhard von Kirchbach's host already during his „search journey“ in 1980

**Deepal Sooriyaarachchi** was born in Sri Lanka in 1960 and is a Sinhalese. He worked as a manager in an international pharma company before transferring to a large insurance company, whose Sri Lankan headquarters he is now managing in Colombo. As an active Buddhist lay person he has been instructing children in their faith in a „Sunday School“ at his village temple from early on. He has acquired a sound theological knowledge, gives theological talks and – on top of his private daily spiritual exercises – leads meditation groups. Deepal is married to Sunethra S. who also participated in two dialogue meetings.

*participation:* 4th to 14th dialogue, except for 6 (Israel).

*publications:* „Switching Off“ (A collection of Buddhist Articles) 2004

**Zen Master Hogen Daido Yamahata** started his spiritual journey already as a teenager when he walked through the Japanese countryside from monastery to hermitage in search of the truth. He turned to many famous teachers from the Rinzai as well as the Soto tradition. After many years of searching he met an enigmatic monk, who exclaimed in answer to an honest question after the meaning of life „This is it!“ This person later became the recognised abbot of the monastery Bukkokuji, and became Hogen-san’s life-long teacher. After more than twenty years of living withdrawn from the world, Hogen-san took over responsibility for the orphaned Soto-temple which is situated in an area of traditional agriculture not far from the Fujiyama. He still leads his simple life with his wife, children and a few close pupils. The daily routine consists of meditation, yoga, running and organic gardening. When Hogen-san is not busy with administering religious care to his village, he corresponds with many friends and pupils from all over the world, among them important artists, humanists and philosophers.

*participation:* 8th dialogue (Takamori) and 10th/II. dialogue (Cochin)

*publications:* „On the open way (A song of dawn’s breeze / The other shore / Questions and answers / My own question - a boundless dream)“, Jiko Oasis Books, England 1991

## From Christianity

**Harry Haas**, born in 1925, grew up in a catholic environment in The Netherlands and became a priest. As a student pastor he participated in German Protestant Church Days and contributed significantly to „church services in new form“. His second home became Sri Lanka where he worked tirelessly as „interpreter of culture“. His access to the hearts of people was mysticism. Outside the institution of the church he campaigned for development aid, the marketing of rural produce at fair prices and for gentle tourism in the mountain regions of Sri Lanka. He died here, in Bandarawela, in 2002.

*participation:* 4th dialogue (Rock Hill, Sri Lanka)

*publications:* „Harry Haas erzählt Jesusgeschichten“ (Harry Haas tells stories about Jesus); Eileen Candappa/Harry Haas: „Gemeinsam kochen“ (Cooking together, a workbook for families and groups); and „Herzhafte Mahlzeiten“ (Hearty Meals, an Asian recipe book for hospitable people, 1983); „Aroma und Appetit“ (Flavour and appetite); „Gespräche in Saigon“ (Talks in Saigon)

**Helga Hergenbahn** came across the Living Dialogue as a tourist on the ferry from Lombok to Bali. At the time, she had a small boutique in Heidelberg (Germany) and was very interested in people and religions. She was mostly a silent listener but contributed to the dialogue with her questions and unaffected views. With her special eye for pictures and faces

she contributed the most beautiful photographs to the dialogue. Helga is married and lives in St. Leon.

*participation:* 11th-13th dialogues (Bali, Cochin and Wulfshagen)

**Reinhard von Kirchbach** has realised his „dream“ with the Living Interreligious Dialogue. Life and *publications* are documented in other sections of the website.

*participation:* in all 14th dialogues. Because of illness, however, he was able to participate in only the second half of the 4th (Sri Lanka), in the last few days of the 9th (Lunel) and with reduced powers in the 13th (Wulfshagen).

**Michael Möbius** was born in what is now Tanzania in 1937 and has lived in Germany from when he was ten. After studying theology in Bethel, Tübingen, Berlin and Kiel he did his curateship with Reinhard von Kirchbach in Gettorf to become community pastor in Hütten, Flensburg-Mürwik and Neumünster. Since 1999 he is retired and lives in Flensburg. He is married to Christa M. and has three grown-up children. From the early 1980s Michael Möbius has been active in the interreligious dialogue with Reinhard von Kirchbach. Additionally he has been active at the community level in dialogue groups with Muslims in Neumünster and Flensburg. He was chairman of the committee for Christian-Islamic dialogue of the Centre for World Mission and Ecclesiastical World Services of Nordelbia (NMZ).

*participation:* 4th dialogue (Sri Lanka), 6th-8th dialogue (Israel, Pakistan, Japan); 10th/I. dialogue (India); 12th and 13th dialogue (India and Wulfshagen)

*publications:* article on Christian-Muslim celebrations in „church services in special places - in special times. Alternative church services in tried examples“ Schlüter, Bernd (ed.), Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2003; „Ich glaube den interreligiösen Dialog“ editor together with H.-Chr. Goßmann, Traugott Bautz Verlag 2008

**Donald Nicholl** was asked by Ms. Mary Hall, director of the Multi-Faith Centre Selly Oak in Birmingham, to participate in her place in the 7th dialogue in Pakistan. Born in 1923 in Halifax, England, he grew up in modest circumstances. With the help of a scholarship he was able to become a historian with a focus on the middle ages. Among other assignments he served in present-day Pakistan as a young soldier during the second World War. He converted to Catholicism and taught, having meanwhile become a professor, at several universities, for example at Santa Cruz, California. Between 1981 and 1985 Donald Nicholl was principal of the Institute for ecumenical studies „Tantur“ near Jerusalem. Having cherished a closeness with ordinary people he contributed his rich experience to the dialogue at Bathroi. He was always engaged in charitable tasks as well, and taught, for example, church history to the „missionaries of love“, the order of Mother Teresa in London. He died in 1997.

*participation:* 7th dialogue in Pakistan

*publications:* here only: „The Testing of Hearts“ (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), published posthumously. Regarding his numerous publications we point to the internet.

**Fr. Vincent Shigeto Oshida**, OP was born in 1922 in Japan and said about himself that he was a Buddhist who had met Christ. He became a Dominican in 1951. Later he founded a small community in the village Takamori in the Japanese Alps, where he lived with the members of his community in solidarity with their neighbours. They cultivate(d) a lifestyle of manual labour, extensive Zen-meditation, a great openness for guests and a Christian liturgy of impressive simplicity. While Fr. Oshida may be rightfully called a pioneer of interreligious dialogue, he preferred the phrase „a meeting at the depths“ to „dialogue“,

because he did not like to attach too much meaning to words and phrases. He died on November 6th, 2003. As far as we know, the community at Takamori still exists.

*participation:* 8th dialogue at his place in Takamori, Japan

*publications:* „Zen: The Mystery of the Word - and Reality“; „Evangelisation and Inculturation“; about Fr. Oshida: „The Breath of God - To Zen-Centre of Soan, Japan“, Bulletin 10, February 1981. The papers can be found at:

<http://www.monasticdialogue.com/au.php?id=491>

**Annemarie Winter** (died a few years ago) worked in the Lutheran church in Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), teaching leaders of women's groups in the congregations around Hamburg. She held a diploma in pottery and was particularly interested in the study of foreign religions. She visited Turkey four times and India once. Her knowledge of Indian cooking was a blessing for the dialogue guests from the East.

*participation:* first through third dialogues at Altenhof

**Gisela Gräfin von Zech-Burkersroda** was a granddaughter of the German Reichschancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg and a sister-in-law of Reinhard. Born in 1919 as the daughter of a diplomat she spent most of her childhood abroad. During the war she served as a nurse on the frontline. Workcamp and captivity followed. Gisela Gräfin von Zech became a teacher and specialised in working with mentally disabled children. In recognition of her self-sacrificing work she received the German cross of merit (Bundesverdienstkreuz) in 1976. During her retirement she worked for the „village seniors“, elderly and lonely residents of the olympic village in Munich. She died in November 2003.

*participation:* first and second dialogues in Altenhof.

## From Hinduism

**Govind K. Bharathan** was born in India in 1939. After completing his degree in economics and law in Madras [Chennai] he worked as a sales manager of an oil firm for a short time, and in the management of a tea plantation in the Nilgiri mountains for five years. For more than 30 years he has worked as a lawyer at the High Court in Cochin in the Indian Union state of Kerala. He actively supports a reformed Hinduism, is a devotee of the guru Shri Sathya Sai Baba, leads religious groups, approaches the public through lectures and writes publications. He is married and has three grown-up sons.

*participation:* 1st - 3rd dialogues (Altenhof); 5th dialogue (Cochin); 8th dialogue (Takamori); 10/I. and 10/II. dialogues - 14th dialogues (Cochin, Bali, Cochin, Wulfshagen, Pisselberg)

*publications:* „A drop of the Ganga (a capsule of Hindu Philosophy and Culture), Cochin 1980; „Reinhard's Dream (the Altenhof Experience)“; Cochin 1981; „From the Attic“; „More from the Attic“; „The Yoga and You“; „All Your Life (Encounters with the mystic reality of the here and now)“

## From Islam

**Halima Krausen** was born in Aachen (Germany). Her family was Protestant from her mother's side and Catholic from her father's. At the age of 13, she found the most convincing answers to her questions regarding unity and plurality in Islam. While still at school she learned Arabic and started to study from books, later with scholars from different schools of

thought and on travels in Europe as well as in the Orient, sometimes alone, sometimes with her husband as a very inspiring partner. She has lived in Hamburg since 1982: university studies (Islamic studies, theology and comparative religious studies) and studies with Imam Razvi (Islamic law, theology and philosophy), as well as participation in Razvi's work towards a German-speaking Muslim community.

From 1984 to 1988 Halima Krausen contributed to a translation of the Qu'ran into German with commentary, later she translated several Hadith and works of Islamic law. She is a founder member of the „Study Group Interreligious Dialogue“ in the department of theology at the University of Hamburg (1985). She is also a founder member of the „Initiative for Islamic Studies“ (1993). In 1996, she followed Imam Razvi after his retirement in the office of Imam and Muslim jurist. For several years now, the Islamic-Jewish dialogue has been a focus of Halima Krausen's work. Every year she is in Jerusalem and London for seminars, lectures and studies. Her connections to the USA are similarly active in this area.

*participation:* 7th dialogue (Pakistan); 9th dialogue (Lunel); 12th - 14th dialogues (India, Wulfshagen, Pisselberg). See her website:

<http://www.geocities.com/athens/thebes/8206/hkrausen/dialog.htm>

*publications:* see above, as well as many articles and essays in journals. „Geschichten der Propheten aus dem Qur'an“ (Stories of the Prophets from the Qur'an), 1982, Islamisches Zentrum Hamburg; New: „Darin sind Zeichen für Nachdenkende“ Islamische Theologie - in sechzig Freitagspredigten homiletisch entfaltet (In this there are signs for Thoughtful People, Islamic theology, developed homiletically in sixty Friday sermons) Veröffentlichungen des Islamischen Wissenschafts- und Bildungsinstituts Vol. 4, Nordhausen 2009.

**Sheikh Mahmood H. Rashid** was born in Kashmir in 1948, one year after Indian partition. He was born in that part of Kashmir which is under Pakistani administration and called Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir). He is a spiritual leader of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, in which he received his spiritual and theological education. Sheikh Rashid works among the mostly Pakistani migrants in Birmingham, Great Britain as a director of the „Islamic Cultural Study Centre“. He founded a centre with the same name in his native village of Bathroi in Azad Kashmir which he visits regularly. He shows his commitment to the interreligious dialogue abroad at Islamic world conventions and in Great Britain in working together with the Christian denominations as well as with other religions. His popular brochures on the subjects of Islamic faith serve educational as well as informational purposes.

*participation:* 7th dialogue (Bathroi, Pakistan); 9th dialogue (Lunel, France); 13th and 14th dialogues (Wulfshagen and Pisselberg)

*publications:* „A Way Forward“ (An Historical Event - 1987 or 1988, reports and pictures from the 7th interreligious dialogue in Bathroi, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan in the home of Sheikh Mahmood H. Rashid from 5th April to 1st May 1987. A video tape is available, too); „The Mystical Flashes in Hamburg“ (1987 or 1988, reports and pictures from visits of Sheikh Rashid in Hamburg with Islamic partners Mehdi and Halima, in Flensburg with Christian partner Michael and with other believers at other places in summer 1987); „The Concept of Creation in Quran“, July 1992; „Zero Hour“ (Everything thereon will pass away, 1993); magazine „Nizame Mustafa Special“ July 30th 1995 (page 5 and 6: two pictures from the 13th dialogue at Wulfshagen estate); „Brief Manifesto“, 1995 (a lecture); the same magazine from 7th July 1996 with pictures from the 13th dialogue at Wulfshagen; „The Hajj Guide“ (Pilgrimage to Makkah - 1997); „Global Islamic Da'wah“ (lecture at the International

University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, at the Islamic Leaders' Forum, 15-8-1998 to 25-8-1998. Here the influence of the dialogue on his thinking is evident).

**Imam Syed Mehdi Razvi** was born in the province of Bihar in India in 1930. The name Syed refers to a descent from the prophet Mohammed. In 1947 he had to move to Pakistan because of the Indian partition. To this day he holds Pakistani citizenship. Imam Razvi is at home in the traditions of two Sufi-orders. He completed his education as a full Muslim theologian and jurist. He has lived in Hamburg since 1954. For many years, Mehdi Razvi was Imam at the Islamic Centre in Hamburg (IZH) and taught at the university there. He retired in 1995. His successor as Imam is Halima Krausen. His participation in the dialogue with Christians has been most noticeable in Hamburg and at many German Protestant Church Days.

*participation:* first to third dialogue (Altenhof) and 14th dialogue (Pisselberg) as well as many meetings between dialogues

*publications:* „Entdeckungsreisen im Koran“ (Zwölf Lehrgespräche; „Journeys of Discovery in the Koran, Twelve discourses) - together with Halima Krausen and Pia Köppel, EB-Verlag, Hamburg 2001; „Islam und Christentum im Dialog“ (Islam and Christianity in a Dialogue, Mehdi Razvi in conversation with Horst Georg Pöhlmann), Lembeck Verlag, Frankfurt/M. 2006

## From Judaism

**Rabbi Léonard Szteinberg** was born in Paris in 1940. He is an important figure in contemporary Judaism. He is the founder of the Institute for interdisciplinary research in science and religion in Montpellier (Institut Recherche Interdisciplinaire Science Et Religion). He has organized numerous interreligious seminars on peace and human rights, including some under the auspices of the UNO, and he is in contact with politicians as well as representatives of all major religions. For about 20 years he has been meeting and maintained a correspondence with Kardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI. Here, Rabbi Szteinberg is particularly interested in a deepened understanding between orthodox Judaism and Christianity.

*participation:* 9th dialogue (Lunel, southern France)

*publications:* many articles in different journals

**Ezri Uval** comes from a family of Rabbi in Halberstadt from his father's side, from Kattowitz from his mother's. His parents came to Palestine in 1934 as newly-weds. He was born here in 1938 and grew up speaking German and in an orthodox faith. He lives and teaches in Jerusalem and is (or was) teaching Hebrew to foreign students in his capacity as a linguist. His first journey to Germany in 1983 because of his relationship with the University of Heidelberg cost him an immense effort. During two days of the 6th dialogue Ezri Uval taught recent Jewish history, distinction between religious schools and recitation of the Hebrew Thora to the group. Finally he invited us to a Sabbath service at the conservative (reformed in form, orthodox in content) synagogue he attends with his family.

*participation:* 6th dialogue (Jerusalem)

*publications:* e.g., „A Step by Step Guide to Modern Hebrew“ (together with Michael Rose)

## Other Worldviews

**Peter Fromm** from Bonn (born 1940, died 2003) represented the Humanist view point at the dialogue meetings, although he belonged to the Protestant church and grew up in a pastor's household. He was a friend of Reinhard's and worked as a marketing manager at the Institute for the Marketing of German Agriculture (CMA). He was widely travelled and had participated in the student movement in Germany and in the USA in the civil rights movement under Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in the 1960s. Peter Fromm was well-versed in art and music. He had been married to Barbara F. and had two children.

*participation:* 1st dialogue (Altenhof); 4th dialogue (Rock Hill, Sri Lanka); 6th (Israel); 7th (Bathroi, Pakistan); 9th (France); 12th and 13th (Cochin/India and Wulfshagen)

**Adelheid Aegerter**, widowed **Haltmar**, called „Shanti“ for some time, was from Switzerland and had just been widowed when she came to the dialogue at Rock Hill. She worked as a flight attendant with Swiss Air and had participated in Buddhist meditation courses in different countries of the Middle East during her holidays. With her considerable empathy she engaged deeply with the host religion at each of the dialogue meetings, especially with Judaism and Islam. Her perseverance, her sense of justice and her conscientiousness helped the conversations to depths and clarity. Her knowledge of German, English and French overcame language barriers, and her willingness to spot and tackle any domestic task opened at least a little bit the world of women, mostly barred to the male dialogue partners in Eastern countries. When she settled with her parents in Lunel, southern France, she put her experience into practice and opened her house for courses and guests. She met Rabbi Léonhard Sztainberg and became his helpful and indispensable partner.

*participation:* 4th to 9th dialogue (Sri Lanka, Cochin, Israel, Pakistan, Japan, Lunel)

Michael Möbius, February 2009  
translated by Katrin Binder, June 2009