



Here, in the burst of the month of June 2015, I am reading the news in Kuala Lumpur on my return from an international conference of scholars on Buddhism that just ended in Thailand. My mind is alerted by two contrasting bits of news in the media. They both fascinate me in terms of the opposite behaviours of two great and ancient religions of mankind-Islam and Christianity. Contrasts and contradictions mark the landscape of reality.

My academic interests are in the sociology of religion and not so much on the intricacies of what religion says.

In the first bit of news, one observes a social context wherein questioning seems to be dangerous. I deliberately employ the term, "social context," because in both case studies the doctrinal position is that what is in the Holy Book is immutably or unchangeably true. What has changed is the social context and not the theology.

Prophet Muhammed. He was accused of rejecting the shahadah, which is the Islamic declaration of faith. Another of his alleged offences was translating two terms-fajar prayers and gusto prayers-in a way different to the orthodox hadith translation.

Wan Sulaiman is said to be a practising Muslim; but one who is prone to think a little independently about doctrinal issues. He had been, over the years, meeting with orthodox religious teachers and seeking answers to the many questions that were troubling his conscience. He is not satisfied with mainstream interpretations and has a mind of his own. He has been criticising

Our second story is from the side of the Catholic religion about the endorsement of gay marriage by a die-hard Catholic country. The Catholic Church has been all along very conservative about doctrinal issues. We have observed how the Church has defended its doctrinal platform against protection during sexual intercourse. Thousands of people have died of AIDS in Africa and in other countries; yet the Church never relaxed on what clearly is a reasonable demand for

who, despite adamant evidence to the contrary, still cling on to beliefs like creationism and that universe is only ten thousand years old!

Ireland has been regarded as a strong bulwark of the Catholic Church. Its people have been very traditional and strongly conscious of their identity as a nation. Imagine how the Irish now celebrate the passing of legislation permitting gay marriage! Ireland is the 22nd country in the world to recognise same-sex



**Making Sense**  
**Shyamon Jayasinghe**

The first story is published in the KL English Language Weekly, Sunday Mail. Written as an opinion piece by Zurairi AR it relates an instance where a devout soft-spoken 54-year-old Muslim, named Wan Sulaiman Wan Ismail from Ipoh, Perak, has been allegedly hounded by the Islamic establishment for raising questions pertaining to his religion. It is said that Sulaiman's house was raided "by Islamic enforcers," and his personal handwritten notes had been confiscated. Says Zurairi, "they went through his mobile phone and personal computer. On the same day, he was charged in the Ipoh Shariah High Court." According to the writer, Wan Sulaiman has since then been ostracised by his own family and his wife has left him. Sulaiman used to earn his living by selling biryani, but due to boycott, this small business had had to fold up.

As reported, one of the charges at the Shariah court was that Suleiman had mocked the hadith- the collected sayings of

some of the religious practices that had been followed as a matter of routine through many years. Sulaiman's argument is that many practices are not consistent with the holy scriptures.

Thus, although a critic, Wan Sulaiman has been well-within the main framework of Islam. Therefore, the issue here seems to be that he dared question. According to the writer, Sulaiman is "fond of asking questions." Shahadah is a very important part of Muslim life and it relates to the belief in the oneness of Allah and the acceptance of Muhammed as Allah's prophet. Even about such a crucial belief Sulaiman had questions regarding source to ask.

However, Wan Suleiman never got answers to his questions. Instead, he succeeded in irritating the authorities of Perak Islamic Affairs Council (JAIP) who had apparently instituted action in Court.



## WHEN ASKING QUESTIONS IS DANGEROUS AND WHEN THE DANGER IS NO MORE

the use of contraceptives. It hung on to the faith that sexual intercourse is meant by God only for propagation of the species and not for love and enjoyment. On these and many other issues the Catholic Church has had a history of repression. The Middle Ages were known as the Dark Ages because of the obstinate dominance and hold the Church did have over the intellectual life of Europeans. With the advance of science the Church has had to give way on what appeared as foolish doctrinal views. The Renaissance swept over Europe and, with it, history witnessed the progress of mankind who entered the modern age.

Yet, even into the 20th and 21st centuries Christians have been vainly trying to show its back to scientific and rational attitudes to looking at life. There are many in the Church

marriage. The broad European wind of social changes and changes to long-entrenched social values have managed to sweep across and penetrate even a once-hardliner populace.

This demonstrates how powerful ideas perceived as liberating cannot be suppressed for long. Agencies trying to block them must give way or seek alternative ways to compete with such ideas. In the case of same-sex marriage, the bund of Catholic and Irish resistance has evidently burst asunder. The Church helplessly gives in.

Within any church -Islam or Christian, Jewish or Buddhist or Zoroastrian- thinking and reflecting people alone can give it more mileage and foster the richness of human experience.



by Medhavi Weerasinghe  
**Teen Fables**

## Winter

*Winter is finally here  
So start keeping a blanket near*

*Because when the weather starts getting cold  
A cup of hot chocolate you will want to hold  
When there is snow as far as the eye can see*

*Inside is where you will want to be  
The animals are asleep snuggled in tight*

*And to find somewhere warm the birds will take flight  
It is time for a winter wonderland*

*So make sure to keep something warm planned*

The seasons are changing yet again and from this month onward it is winter!! The season where people prefer to stay snuggled inside covered in blankets while indulging themselves in foods and drinks that would keep them warm. In winter people wear sweaters and coats, or anything else that would pro-



tect them from the cold air and the darkening skies that promise rain. That being said winter is loved by many as it is the season to stay snuggled warm inside the house. In this article I will be telling you some interesting facts about the upcoming season that you may have not known before.

Winter is the season where the nights are longer, the days are shorter and the temperature gets colder. As it is winter for us here in the southern hemisphere, it is summer for those living in the northern hemisphere. Although it is common for it to snow heavily in winter, in Australia it is rare to see a large snowfall. That being said in June 2014 Eastern Australia

had experienced the biggest snowfall in a decade which had granted over 120 cm of snow. However this snowfall would not have been loved by some people, chionophobia is a fear of snow.

Speaking of snow did you know that no two snowflakes are the same? Each snowflake has their own distinct pattern and making, that being said all snowflakes have six sides to them. Did you also know that even though we see snow as being white and snow is always depicted as being white snow is actually colourless? We see it as being white due to the sunlight being absorbed by the snow. In addition this did you also know that the average snowflake falls at a speed of 3 miles per hour?

People usually think of winter as the season

to sleep in and stay under the blanket. It is actually true that people feel lazier during winter and everything seems to move slower in winter. During winter many animals such as bears hibernate to escape the cold weather. In addition to this some animals may move away from the cold weather, this can be seen when ducks fly north for the winter. Furthermore in winter most plants do not grow, however there are many seasonal fruits that grow during winter such as apples, bananas, mandarins, oranges, grapes, lemons, pomegranate and cranberries. So if you are looking for a healthy snack this winter you can indulge yourself in one of the many seasonal fruits.

Winter begins on the Winter Solstice and ends on the Vernal Equinox. The winter solstice is when the sun is the furthest away from the moon and the Vernal Equinox is when the sun is crossing the celestial equator and is moving northwards on the ecliptic. In many countries people associate snow to winter, however here in Australia winter is associated to things such as heavy rain, large winds and hail storms.

Winter is finally upon us so do not forget to enjoy this season, because if you don't you will have to wait another year it to come around again.