



**The 2024 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize**

**Awarded by Hofstra University, in partnership with**

**The Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Charitable Foundation**

**Professor Aaron Koller**

**(on behalf of Dr Thea Gomelaury)**

**The Award Acceptance Speech**



**Crest Hollow Country Club, Woodbury, NY, USA**

**22 April, 2025**

Dear President Poser,  
Provost Riordan,  
Dean Badowska,  
The Bindra Foundation, TJ Bindra and the Bindra Family,  
The Guru Nanak Prize Selection Committee Members,  
The Broader Hofstra Community,  
and Distinguished Guests,

I am grateful to [Professor Aaron Koller](#) for representing us as we come here not only to receive the **Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize** but also to channel the honour to whom it belongs.

Even though I cannot be with you today in the flesh, my cup overflows with gratitude as I join you in spirit.

**First and foremost**, my gratitude ascends to the Life-Giving Creator who brought us all to this beautiful occasion.

I would like to share some brief remarks about the Oxford Interfaith Forum by acknowledging those who played an instrumental role in its formation.

It would take us days, if not weeks, to adequately thank all our contributors and colleagues. But there are *three individuals* whose work will give you glimpses into the origins of our organisation.

**Before the Oxford Interfaith Forum, there was [Dr Eboo Patel](#).**

I consider him my interfaith Guru, but the most interesting thing is that Dr Patel is *unaware* of his crucial role in the formation of the Oxford Interfaith Forum.

As is known, interfaith collaboration had long been confined to the domain of religious establishments and clergy until...Dr Patel entered the interfaith arena.

I first encountered Dr Patel's work through his *Interfaith Youth Core* (now [Interfaith America](#)), when he ran a small grants programme for university members who incorporated interfaith elements into their curriculum, and engaged students in it.

Dr Patel had completed a doctorate at Oxford in Sociology of Religion as Rhodes Scholar, but here was a gentleman *without* religious office, *without* ordination or congregation, *without* a degree in Comparative Religions or Theology, not only actively engaging in interfaith collaboration himself, but also creating opportunities for those who otherwise would have been deprived of the benefits of such conversations.

I was struck by the revolutionary idea of this brave intellectual!

Thus, Dr Patel inspired the formation of the Oxford Interfaith Forum **without. saying. a single word. directly. to me.**

Dr Patel was honoured with the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize in 2012, and 12 years later, our work is recognised by the same award. This is testimony to Dr Patel's extraordinary vision and legacy. We are proud to be part of his global movement!

Realisation that the academic world, with its unprecedented resources, capacities, and willingness to contribute to this crucial field, was an underserved and underrepresented segment in the interfaith domain led me to create a nexus for **Spiritual Academia** rooted in [Thematic International Interfaith Reading Groups](#) that stands as the signature statement of the Oxford Interfaith Forum.

Oxford Interfaith Forum is *unique* in three respects:

**Firstly**, our worldwide thematic interfaith learning groups focus on *every* academic field with interfaith, intercultural, and interdisciplinary lenses.

**Secondly**, the corpus of our interfaith resources is produced by world-renowned scholars, but it is available *free of charge* to anyone *at all times* through our website, YouTube, and other platforms.

**And thirdly**, through our international interfaith learning groups, we bring the pivotal segment of the population, the next generation, into interfaith conversation, which might have never engaged in it because of their detachment from religious institutions.

All of these exemplify Guru Nanak Dev Ji's values! We are deeply honoured to be forever associated with his name and legacy.

In this process, two incredible individuals supported me as pillars.

**The first is [Professor Sebastian Brock, Fellow of the British Academy](#)**, and the universally acknowledged foremost scholar in Syriac Studies.

I owe an enormous sense of gratitude to Prof Brock for inaugurating our *first Thematic International Interfaith Reading Group*, [Eastern Christianity in Interfaith Contexts](#), which he has chaired since then. Prof Brock contributed not only his own time, expertise, and energy, but he also organised the supportive network of his former students, all of them distinguished professors worldwide.

I am delighted at the opportunity to acknowledge publicly *Malphono* Sebastian's extraordinary contributions, and thank him for his commitment and collaboration.

'Thank YOU' is an insufficient word here, but a better phrase has not been invented yet.

**The second pillar was [Revd Prof John Goldingay](#)**, a quintessential interfaith personality, and Christian Professor who devoted his life to teaching the Hebrew Scriptures. Born and bred in Britain, he worked on this side of the Pond for over 20 years before returning to Oxford just in time for the formation of the Oxford Interfaith Forum.

Prof Goldingay inaugurated our *second Thematic International Interfaith Reading Group*, [Psalms in Interfaith Contexts](#), and for nearly half a year, alternated roles between Panel Speaker and Chair of the [International Interfaith Panel Discussion Series](#), including Book Launches and other sessions.

Our gratitude to Revd Prof John Goldingay is immeasurable.

These two groups produced more, and now we run **12 Thematic International Interfaith Reading Groups** from [Art](#), [Sacred Literature](#), [Philosophy](#), and [Manuscripts](#) to [Peacebuilding](#), [Ecology](#), [Science and Religion](#), [Womanhood](#), and so on, in addition to the very popular [Book Launch Series](#), and the [Oxford International Interfaith Panel Discussion Series](#)!

The list of our contributors deserving special acknowledgements continues to grow daily, but we will have to save that for another occasion.

Finally, we express our overwhelming gratitude to the Prize Selection Committee at Hofstra University, especially **Dean Eva Badowska**, and **the Bindra family** for making the Oxford Interfaith Forum **the first non-US organisation to be honoured by the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize**, the award that in our eyes serves as **the Nobel Prize for Interfaith work**.

We share this highest honour with everyone who supports our work.

Thank you!