

**In the Shadow of War,
Peacemakers Visit to Edinburgh Raises Surprising Hopes
by Neil Douglas-Klotz (Saadi Shakur Chishti)**

During the third week of March, we helped sponsor a talk by two friends from Israel, Eliyahu McLean and Ibrahim Abu El-Hawa, about their peacemaking efforts there. I believe that some of you have met them in their previous tours. I met Eliyahu two years ago when we were in Israel, after he had written saying that he used my book *Desert Wisdom* (see www.abwoon.com) regularly in his work with public rituals for peace.

The talk occurred at the Friends Meeting House here in Edinburgh on the day that the Iraqi war began. As you can imagine, there was a great deal of anger in the room, and our friends did not hide the amount of pain and suffering that they expected to come from it.

Despite this, they shared a great deal of life energy--*hayy* (or *chayye*)-- as well as hope and joy about the work they are doing. The packed audience that attended the talks heard of a number of surprising initiatives for peace in that troubled land, including a Hamas Muslim sheikh who is working with a rabbi from the West Bank Settlements.

The visit was sponsored by the Edinburgh International Center for World Spiritual Traditions and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning and Conscious Living, the group that Kamae and I founded here for our local events. I introduced the two and led the assembled gathering in a peace chant taken from our Dances to begin things.

Eliyahu said that his work was based on a twenty year process of reconciliation with his Jewish heritage, during which time he worked with both orthodox and liberal representatives of the tradition in Israel, many of whom he has introduced to Muslim sheikhs and imams. He has traveled extensively representing interfaith efforts in Israel and abroad at conferences sponsored by UNESCO and other groups. He reported that the basis of the work of his “peacemaker community” in Israel was “not knowing—that is, giving up any fixed idea of how reality should be.”

“One of the problems in the Middle East,” he said, “is that everybody knows how things should be, to the extent that no one is willing to listen to anyone else and their truth. Rabbi David Harman has called Israel ‘a tyranny of certitudes,’ but that could apply to the whole world.”

I had not previously met Ibrahim, a devout Muslim in his 60's. His family has lived in Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives for no less than 1400 years. A very unassuming person of great heart, he had been active in peacemaking between Jews, Christians and Muslims for most of his life. He met Eliyahu during the beginning of the uprising (*intifada*) that occurred more than two years ago.

“I was looking for someone to work with,” he said, “to represent the cause of peace in our country, and I met Eliyahu. Since that time we are brothers—or father and son. We are all seeds of Adam and Eve, and we are all first cousins, the seeds of Abraham. God chose us to be in this land, and we have to be here. We don’t have a choice: we have to live together.

Neither Eliyahu nor Ibrahim glossed over the pain each side has suffered or the difficulties they face. Each has lost friends or relatives due to either terrorist bombings in Israel or Israeli army action in the

West Bank and Gaza strip. Yet both believed that actual reconciliation was possible.

As an example of this McLean mentioned the example of a key leader and sheikh in the militant Islamic Hamas movement who has been working behind the scenes with a rabbi from the heavily armed West Bank settlements. They believe that through ancient processes like *hudna* (ceasefire) and *sulha* (reconciliation), which have been respected in both communities for generations, a common ground for peace can be found. Such a process, says Eliyahu, would be similar to the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in South Africa that followed Nelson Mandela's election as president. He showed a video of such reconciliation gatherings between Muslims and Jews that have been held the past two years in Israel. The largest conference to date is scheduled for the end of June.

"People ask me," said Eliyahu, "'Are you right wing or left wing?' I reply, 'It takes two wings to fly.' We have got to find underlying unity between people on all different sides. Many Palestinians and Israelis I have talked to have a deep sense of mourning, because there was seemingly such hope two years ago. This beautiful, sacred land has become in the eyes of the world *ard il hurub*, or in Hebrew *eretz ha-milchamot*, the land of war."

"People who have never been here," said Ibrahim, "think there is a wall between the Arabs and the Jews and that we are both dangerous people. To the world we have a special word: 'Leave us alone!' We are both really good people, if the world will leave us alone and stop selling us weapons. The same guns are in both hands, Palestinian and Jew.

"We welcome everyone to our home, to our land. I live in a safe, peaceful home. Always I have Jews and Christians from around the world visiting me and my family....We have a lot of love, which we

have learnt from our religion, love and peace. A lot of goodness has happened in the land between Jewish and Palestinian brothers, the seeds of Abraham. Often when there is a curfew, Jews take food and help, and hold demonstrations to protest the curfew. They go and share with one heart, one body, hand in hand to bring support to their brothers, the Palestinians.

“To carry the word of truth,”, he said, “you have to live with people, not just pick it up from TV, radio and newspapers. When you know the way of life of the people you are talking about, you will talk from your heart not from your mouth. People need to visit and live with people, eat their food and drink their water and smell the same air. Then you will bless the ground, Mother Earth, and the pain of the other, with love.”

Clearly after this terrible war is over, we will have our work cut out for us, but it is the same work as before, the same message. I couldn't put it any better than Ibrahim himself. Eliyahu and Ibrahim use the Dances of Universal Peace in their work and consider process and rituals like them essential in their peace work.

In their one-day visit to Edinburgh, approximately 150 people heard the two speak. Their tour so far has taken in England, Scotland and will proceed to Ireland before they return to Israel.

The two sponsoring organizations plan a future conference on Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace, to include representatives from both the Middle East and the U.K. To be notified of the event, please write to: Neill Walker, EICWS, 4 William Black Place, South Queensferry, Edinburgh, EH30 9PZ Scotland. UK. Office: +44 (0)131 331 4469 Email: njwalk790@hotmail.com

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