

**5th Annual Edinburgh International
Festival of Middle Eastern
Spirituality
and Peace, Edinburgh, Scotland,**

**Saturday 1 March 2008
- Tuesday 11 March 2008.**

**A Report By
Neill Walker.**

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1. General Introduction and Background to the Festival.

From Saturday 1 March - Tuesday 11 March 2008 the 5th Annual Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace, MESP 2008, brought together a distinguished list of artists, scholars, grassroots spiritual activists and speakers.

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr led the field of speakers in the 2008 Middle East Festival.

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr gave the 2008 Middle East Festival Lecture on 'Spiritual Approaches to Peace and Ecology in the Islamic World,' and he gave a workshop on 'Sufism: Doctrines, Practices and Historic Manifestations.'

The 2008 Middle East Festival had a greater emphasis on day workshops, since day workshops offer greater scope for experiential sharing and participation, and this appears to be the preferred format among those who are attracted to the Festival.

The two organizations who organize this Festival, namely, the Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace, EICSP, (NB: the EICSP has taken over the work previously done by the EICWS) and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL, have contributed major in-kind support for this Festival, and without their major networking, planning, management, and coordinating role this Festival would not have been possible. The Festival is a joint initiative of these two organizations, among their projects and initiatives, and is co-directed by Neill Walker, on behalf of EICSP, and Dr Neil Douglas-Klotz, on behalf of EIAL.

2. Festival Ethos.

During the 1970s and 80s, many people were involved in the citizen diplomacy movement that sought to bring citizens of the UK and USA in contact with citizens of the USSR. As those who participated discovered then, what we don't yet know about each other may be much more important than what we do know, or think we know. Stereotypes break down in the actual presence of another person like ourselves. Citizen diplomacy also created the context for later political change. This diplomacy began when those who engaged in it were willing to really meet the "enemy," deliberately laying aside the preconceived ideas they held of each other.

Throughout the history of the Middle Eastern spiritual traditions, the mystics and prophets have often offered points of view contrary to the prevailing mainstream. From Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross in the Christian tradition to the Sufis al-Hallaj and Suhrawardi in the Islamic to the historical prophets of the Hebrew bible, they have often suffered for it. In modern times,

prophets and mystics continue to offer their voices for new, non-violent solutions to conflict, even when these opinions subject them to criticism or danger.

One of the purposes of the Festival and Conference has been to show that a great range of opinion exists not only between traditions but also within each. The idea that any one group or person can claim to speak for the totality of any religion or spiritual tradition seems greatly outdated in a multi-cultural society, and many scholars of religious studies or comparative spirituality today prefer to speak, for instance, of multiple Christianities, Judaisms and Islams. The media's tendency to want to stereotype any particular tradition or religion or to quote a single "Christian," "Jewish," or "Islamic" opinion on any issue has often hampered more than helped religious and interreligious understanding.

As organizers we are seeking to engage a progressively wider and more diverse range of contributors who have been working with spiritual tools in the fields of non-violent conflict resolution and world peace. No speaker represents the totality of any tradition. Likewise, no religious group or organization, or the Festival organization or sponsors, should be identified with the opinions of any speaker, whose opinions remain his/her own. One of the primary principles of the Festival is that all mystical and prophetic voices for non-violence and peace should be allowed a hearing, without censorship or prior vetting by any religious group or organization.

Many complex political and ethical issues face religious leaders and organizations today. Speakers may hold various personal points of view on these subjects; however, we have asked that they focus their talks and presentations on spirituality and spiritual approaches for peace, as there are many other forums in which to discuss other, better known political and ethical issues. The Festival and Conference themselves take no fixed position on any political, ethical or cultural question. We intend to create a forum in which we can listen to each other deeply and learn with an open mind and heart.

The Festival grew out of a small conference of Jewish and Muslim peacemakers from the Middle East which, coincidentally, took place on the day war broke out in Iraq on 20 March 2003.

Our inaugural Festival and Conference in March 2004 brought together at least three different kinds of presentations. First, we learned from each other about our shared traditions, as well as those that form the unique voice of any one of us. Second, we heard from those who have been active in peacemaking on a spiritual basis on the ground in the Middle East. Among those we heard from included Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari, who have promoted ancient Middle Eastern rituals of forgiveness and reconciliation (called Sulha) in their peace work in Israel and Palestine. Third, we invited participants to share in the musical and devotional spiritual practice presented, in order to gain an experiential view of the traditions we discussed. Simply knowing facts (or presumed facts) about another does not become real meeting without such an experience. The

spiritual practices shared by participants included chant, shared prayer, sacred movement, meditation and Dances of Universal Peace.

The 2005 and the 2006 Festival and Conference continued to focus on these three aspects of spiritual peacemaking, in potential and in action, in order to supplement the many other forums available for interfaith dialogue. In particular, the 2005 Conference focused on the “missing voices” often represented by mystical and prophetic voices for peace, and the 2006 Conference focused on Spirituality of the Heart.

The 2005 Festival included participation from Baha’i, Brahma Kumaris, several Buddhist traditions, most of the Christian denominations in Scotland and some international Christian traditions such as the Melkite Catholic Church, Druze (through the work of the Interfaith Encounter Association), Hindu, Sunni and Shia Islam, Ismaili, Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism, the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community, the Jewish Renewal Movement from USA, Sikhism, several traditions of

Sufism, Zoroastrianism, as well as representatives of interfaith organisations and of further spiritual movements, such as the Dances of Universal Peace, Whirling Dervishes, Mevlevi Tariqat, the World Peace Prayer Society, Subud (we had an international delegation from Subud at the Festival), Sahaj Marg, Anthroposophy, Shamanism, Goddess Spirituality, Paganism, Amma Spirituality, Radhasoami/Universal, Esoteric Christian, Christian Healing, Sanatana Dharma, Gnostic, FFWPU and others, reflecting an impressive spiritual diversity among the participants, which was further enriched by ethnic, cultural and national diversities.

In the 2006 Middle East Festival Professor Tariq Ramadan and Greek Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware led the field of speakers. Professor Tariq Ramadan gave the 2006 Middle East Festival Lecture on ‘Islam and the West in a Quest for a Just and Peaceful World,’ and Bishop Kallistos Ware participated in the conference, Pathways of the Heart, and gave the 2006 Middle East Festival Conference Lecture, ‘Acquiring Inner Peace: Prayer of the Heart in Orthodox Spirituality.’ These in turn followed on from the 2005 Middle East Festival Lecture which was given by the three times Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Abuna Elias Chacour, on ‘Spiritual Approaches to Middle East Peace.’

Jean Vanier, Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Sister Joan Chittister, Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji and Prof Bart McGettrick led the field of speakers in the 2007 Middle East Festival.

Jean Vanier participated in a five-day visit as part of the 2007 Middle East Festival, during which he gave the 2007 Middle East Festival Lecture on the subject of ‘Spirituality and the Civilisation of Love’ to an audience of some 1,100 people at the Usher Hall, sponsored by the City of Edinburgh Council; led a three-day Retreat in the City at the Gillis Centre: ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you’ to an audience of some 170 people per day; led an Education Event at St David’s High School titled ‘Spirituality and Global Citizenship’ to an audience of some 300 young people and guests; led a

Prison Event at HM Edinburgh Prison, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, titled 'From Brokenness to Wholeness'; was Guest of Honour at a dinner hosted by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; and did a thirty minute programme on BBC Radio Scotland. This visit has been widely received as a great success, and was a great inspiration for many who participated. The visit was a very good example of partnership and collaboration working very effectively, and we are grateful to our partners for their support.

Chief Rabbi David Rosen gave the 2007 Middle East Festival Conference Lecture titled 'Religion and Peacemaking in the Middle East,' with a panel of respondents consisting of Sister Joan Chittister, Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji and Dr Neil Douglas-Klotz, and participated in the two-day conference on Spirituality and Community. Chief Rabbi David Rosen was also Guest of Honour at a dinner hosted by the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, and Guest of Honour at the Middle East Festival Conference Dinner, sponsored by Sir Tom Farmer, and attended by the Communities Minister of the Scottish Executive, Rhona Brankin MSP. Chief Rabbi David Rosen also gave Time for Reflection at the Scottish Parliament as part of his visit to the 2007 Middle East Festival.

Sister Joan Chittister and Dr Neil Douglas-Klotz jointly hosted a Tent of Abraham Forum during the 2007 Middle East Festival. Sister Joan Chittister also participated in the two-day conference on Spirituality and Community at the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy Centre, and met members of the Heart of Flesh Group who meet there. Sister Joan Chittister also did a thirty minute programme on BBC Radio Scotland.

Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji participated in the two-day conference on Spirituality and Community at the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy Centre, and was one of the panel of respondents to the 2007 Middle East Festival Conference Lecture by Chief Rabbi David Rosen.

Prof Bart McGettrick gave the 2007 Middle East Festival Education Lecture titled 'Searching for Spirituality Through Education in the Middle East.'

The two-day conference, Spirituality and Community, was part of a four-day series of events, Pathways to Peace, which included Pathways to Peace Through Spiritual Dance (involving Traditional Sufi Movement, Sacred Circle Dance, Dances of Universal Peace and Aramaic Dance), Pathways to Peace Through Spiritual and Musical Practice, and the two-day Spirituality and Community Conference.

The 2007 Middle East Festival One World Peace Concert was arguably the most successful thus far, and had some 400 people in attendance. Internationally distinguished musicians and artists participating in MESP 2007 included Abdullah Chhadeh, Naghmeh Musical Ensemble, Adel Salameh and Naziha Azzouz, Canty, Nadhum Ali, Razia Sultanova, Lucineh Hovanissian, and Davod Azad.

The following motion was put to the Scottish Parliament in support of the 2007 Middle East Festival:

S2M-5411 Linda Fabiani: 4th Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace—That the Parliament supports the 4th Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace which will take place from Wednesday 7 February to Sunday 11 March 2007; supports the festival's aim to celebrate the diversity contained within the religious, spiritual, educational, cultural, ethnic and international traditions of the Middle East as well as in Scotland; welcomes the opening up of the festival this year to events in other parts of Scotland, and congratulates the organisers, the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, for bringing together people from across all the principal faith and spiritual traditions of Scotland and creating a forum for dialogue and mutual understanding among the religious and spiritual traditions, particularly at a time when negative media images and war in the Middle East are increasingly polarising opinions and exacerbating divisions among our communities.

The Festival positively affirms the diversity contained within the religious and spiritual, educational, artistic and cultural, ethnic, and international traditions of the Middle East, as well as those here in Scotland. The Festival takes no fixed position on any political, ethical or cultural question. We intend to create a forum in which we can listen to one another deeply and learn with an open mind and heart. The emphasis of the Festival is on spirituality, and on spiritual, educational, and artistic and cultural approaches to peace and mutual understanding while celebrating Scotland in international terms.

Most of the Festival events are held in Edinburgh, and we are opening up the Festival to events in other parts of Scotland. There were five main strands to the 2008 Middle East Festival, namely:

- Spirituality, and relations among spiritual and faith traditions;
- Education and audience development;
- Arts and culture;
- Celebrating the diversity of Scotland;
- Celebrating Scotland in international terms.

Festival participants were invited to shape their own experience during the Festival, and to take personal responsibility for participating as peacemakers and community builders. In particular, participants were invited to take personal responsibility for processing any conflicts or obstacles to peace that they experience, and for self-evaluating their own participation as peacemakers and community builders for the benefit of their wider life experience.

Conflict and obstacles to peace are of central importance in the lives of peacemakers and community builders. They hold seeds for our spiritual and creative development, and can provide energy to sustain such development. The Festival provided many opportunities to engage spiritually, creatively and

non-violently with conflict and obstacles to peace in supportive and non-judgmental environments, allowing participants the opportunity to transform conflicts and obstacles to peace into new perspectives, insights and actions.

The Festival is managed as a charitable event for wide public benefit, and all events in the Festival should reflect the Festival Equality and Diversity Ethos.

3. Festival Sponsorship and Support.

The Festival organisers would like to acknowledge and thank those organisations and individuals who have offered financial and in-kind support to this Festival. Financial support towards the Festival in general has come from the Scottish Government, the City of Edinburgh Council, the Oneness Project, the International Network for the Dances of Universal Peace, the UK Network for the Dances of Universal Peace, the Shalem Institute, the Kalliopeia Foundation, the Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace, EICSP, and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL.

In-kind support has come from organizations who we have worked with to organize specific Festival events. These numerous organizations are listed beside the specific events which they have been involved with. Further in-kind support has come from a wide range of hosting and supporting organizations and individuals.

The two organizations who organize this Festival, namely, the Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace, EICSP, (NB: the EICSP has taken over the work previously done by the EICWS) and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL, have contributed major in-kind support for this Festival, and without their major networking, planning, management, and coordinating role this Festival would not have been possible. The Festival is a joint initiative of these two organizations, among their projects and initiatives, and is co-directed by Neill Walker, on behalf of EICSP, and Dr Neil Douglas-Klotz, on behalf of EIAL.

4. Approach Taken to Organising the Festival.

There were over eighty events in the Festival in 2005, an increase of at least three times over the offerings of the 2004 Festival in terms of content. Spiritual practice was woven into many Festival events to allow the spiritualities under consideration to be present to direct experience. The Festival in 2006 had some 140 events, and achieved a consistently very high quality, and was well attended throughout. The 2007 Festival had some 120 events, with many of the events achieving a very high quality. The 2008 Festival was a transition event, in which we shortened the duration of the Festival, and including pre-events, we offered some 50 events.

The Festival takes no fixed position on any political, ethical or cultural question. The intention was to create a forum in which we can listen to one other deeply and learn with an open mind and heart. Without doubt, the Festival was very successful in respecting this approach, and the Festival

events were held with a generous and respectful sense of sharing and engagement among the diverse participants involved.

Relative to the 5 strands of the Festival there was a submission process, open to all, for individuals and organisations to submit proposals for consideration for possible events in the Festival, and for suggesting possible speakers or facilitators. There was also an invitation process whereby the Festival organisers invited participation.

The Festival organisers took a lead in organising most of the Festival events, and some events were organised in collaboration with partner organisations. The externally organized events were predominately scheduled as pre-events. This mix of approaches worked well, and allowed for a rich diversity of events and approaches. The diversity of events which resulted was widely appreciated.

5. Diversity of Participation in the Festival and Attendance at the Festival.

Everyone participates in the Festival on an individual basis, and this allows participants to make presentations and share experiences which reflect their own unique insights and perspectives. This approach can also allow for a rich diversity of approaches and perspectives, e.g., from people associated with one faith or spiritual tradition, and it can allow for a reflection of diversity within faith or spiritual traditions. This approach is also essential in the day workshops, where people tend to share deeply from their own life experiences. This also ensures that the opinions shared by participants are not identified with the Festival, the Festival sponsors, the Festival organisers, or with a given faith or spiritual community, but are clearly understood as individual contributions.

Some of the most memorable sharing took place in the day workshops, with participants sharing deeply from their own life experiences, and listening deeply and supportively to the sharing of others. There was also a sense among some participants that the Festival provides 'temporary community,' and this is greatly appreciated by many participants.

The 2008 Festival had a similar level of spiritual and cultural diversity among the participants to the 2007 Festival.

Some participants identified themselves as having an inter-spiritual spiritual identity, drawing upon more than one spiritual tradition for inspiration.

Some participants identified themselves as having a spiritual identity based upon a spiritual practice outwith any faith or religious framework of belief.

Some participants identified themselves as having a secular identity, and some identified with a secular spiritual identity.

The Festival welcomes a diverse range of modes of participation in an attempt to reflect and celebrate individual insights and experiences, to allow for hidden or marginalised voices, and to celebrate diversity and difference. We also seek to establish common ground where it exists.

Some participated in the Festival at an educational level rather than from a faith or spiritual perspective.

Some participated through artistic and cultural forms of expression, and there was a wide spectrum of artistic and cultural forms of expression in the Festival, including dance and movement, drama, poetry, film, music, storytelling, visual arts, printmaking, photography, etc.

Some participated as scholars, academics, educators, students, education officers, lifelong learning students, or as interested members of the general public. The Festival explores different access routes into the Festival so that people can participate on the basis of a wide range of identities.

There was also a wide range of nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures represented among participants in the Festival, and among Festival speakers.

The Festival was also successful in attracting attendance from a rich diversity of participants who are now resident in Scotland, but originally from other countries, and we had a good participation from local people originally from the Middle East.

Within Scotland, people participated in the Festival from most corners of the country.

Many of the events were excellently received and found to be spiritually nourishing and uplifting. Many of the Festival events have received very positive feedback, both written and verbal. As always, feedback will help us to refine the process where appropriate.

6. Some Highlighted Events Associated with the Festival.

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr gave the 2008 Middle East Festival Lecture on 'Spiritual Approaches to Peace and Ecology in the Islamic World,' and he gave a workshop on 'Sufism: Doctrines, Practices and Historic Manifestations.'

"Who speaks for traditional Islam: the Islam lived for centuries by theologians and jurists, by philosophers and scientists, by artists and poets, by Sufis and simple people of faith throughout the Islamic world during fourteen centuries of Islamic history--the Islam which is in fact still followed by the vast majority of Muslims from the Atlantic to the Pacific? There may be still many who speak privately for this tradition but there are only a few writers and, among these few, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is pre-eminent."

--Charles Le Gai Eton, author of *Islam and the Destiny of Man*

"Nasr is one of the major intellects of our day....I know of no one else who is as solidly grounded in both authentic Islam and the complexities of the Western mind."

--Huston Smith, author of *The World's Religions*

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Short Biography: Prof Nasr was born in 1933 in Tehran, Iran in a family of educators and scholars, his father having been one of the founders of the Persian educational system. Consequently, he received the best classical Persian and Islamic education during his early years in Tehran. He later came to the West to finish his secondary education at the Peddie School in New Jersey and after graduating as the valedictorian of his class, he went to MIT where he studied physics and mathematics and graduated with honours in 1954. Meanwhile, his interest turned to an ever greater degree to philosophy and the history of science and he transferred to Harvard University to pursue graduate studies first in the field of geology and geophysics in order to acquaint himself with a descriptive as well as a mathematical science, and finally in the field of the history of science and philosophy in which he received his doctorate from Harvard University in 1958 with specialization in Islamic cosmology and science. From 1958 until 1979, he was Professor of the History of Science and Philosophy at Tehran University and for several years the Dean of the Faculty of Letters and for sometime the Vice Chancellor of the University. He also served for several years as President of Aryamehr University in Iran. In 1962 and 1965 he was Visiting Professor at Harvard University and in 1964-65 the first Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut. He was also the Founder and first President of the Iranian Academy of Philosophy.

In 1979 Prof Nasr migrated to the United States where he became first the Distinguished Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Utah, then from 1979 to 1984 Professor of Islamic Studies at Temple University. Since 1984 he has been University Professor of Islamic Studies at the George Washington University. Prof Nasr has lectured widely throughout the United States, Western Europe, most of the Islamic world, India, Australia and Japan. He has also given several major lectures such as the Azad Memorial Lecture in India, the Iqbal Lecture in Pakistan, the Charles Strong Memorial Lecture in Australia, the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and the Cadbury Lectures at Birmingham University in England. He has also been for ten years a member of the Directing Committee of FISP (Federation Internationale des Societes Philosophiques) and a member of the Institut International de Philosophie. Prof Nasr is the author of over thirty books and over 300 articles. His works concern not only various aspects of Islamic studies but also comparative philosophy and religion, philosophy of art and the philosophical and religious dimensions of the environmental crisis. See: www.nasrfoundation.org/

Summary for the 2008 Middle East Festival Lecture

“Spiritual Approaches to Peace and Ecology in the Islamic World”

'Before turning to the subject of this lecture itself, we must clarify the meaning of the term "spirituality" in the context of Islam, and why spirituality is related to peace and the environmental crisis. The goal of life in Islam is the establishment of equilibrium with God, within each human being, within society at large and with the world of nature.

While the immediate experience of life is combined with strife, the goal is to attain peace through the practice of spiritual striving, which Islam calls the greater jihad. Our primordial nature (fitrah) was at peace with itself and the natural world and no peace is possible for fallen man except through return to that nature and that inner peace which means also being at peace with God.

Islam, in fact, views nature not simply as a domain of strife but also that of harmony and equilibrium that dominates over all forms of apparent strife and violence. Virgin nature is for Muslims a reflection of paradise and traditional Islamic civilization has displayed remarkable harmony with nature as one can see in its architecture and urban design.

The present day Islamic world is not, however, still living in a world in harmony with the environment and even within itself. With the introduction of modernism and reaction to it in the form of "fundamentalism," tensions have been created within Islamic society between these forces as well as with traditional Islam, not to speak of forces from the outside which threaten Islam on every level. Moreover, modern technology and industrialism, which are the main causes of the global environmental crisis, are followed and propagated widely and usually blindly within the Islamic world by both the modernists and the "fundamentalists," whatever differences they have in other domains.

The task before the Islamic world today is to re-discover the traditional Islamic attitude towards nature and the relation between inner peace, social peace and harmony with nature. Moreover, this must be carried out under pressure of forces from the outside over which the Islamic world has no control. Until quite recently Islamic society, like other non-Western societies, was impervious to the environmental crisis and its relation to the spiritual foundation of individual and social peace. But now there is ever going awareness of this issue, providing some hope in an otherwise grim situation.'

*"I have seen the most beautiful gardens in the world, and Dr Seyyed Hossein Nasr's new book, *The Garden of Truth* reads like the archetype of those gardens. This is truly a beautiful book."*

*--Huston Smith, author of *The World's Religions**

"If the goal of the Sufi path is to remind us of what we as human beings have been all along, shaped and nurtured by God, then this book can serve as a lovely road map for those who are eager to find their destination back to their celestial home."

*--Omid Safi, editor of *Progressive Muslims**

Summary for the Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr Sufism Workshop

'Sufism: Doctrines, Practices and Historic Manifestations'

'This workshop presents a unique opportunity to study aspects of Sufism with one of the world's authorities in this subject area.

The meaning of the term Sufi is discussed along with the relation between Sufism and the Islamic tradition as a whole including the Quran, Hadith and the Shariah as well as the status of Sufism within Islamic orthodoxy in its totality.

Sufism is based on certain doctrines concerning God, man and the cosmos. Each of these will be elucidated, including the doctrines of "the oneness of Being" (wahdat al-wajud), Universal Man (al-insan al-kamil) and the cosmos as theosophy all in light, the doctrine of tawhid and the Divine Name and Qualities and the interplay of their theosophies in various combinations, in the cosmos as well as within the soul of human beings.

As for Sufi practices, they will be described to the extent that they can be made public. These practices include initiation into a Sufi order, guidance by a master, various forms of meditation and invocation, contemplation of Divine realities, spiritual retreat, spiritual gatherings and the practice of virtues. The role of Sama or the sacred concert in Sufi gatherings, comprised of music and often sacred dance is also discussed.

Although in essence above all historical contingences, Sufism does have its own history. This is outlined briefly from the early Sufi circles to the establishment of organized Sufi orders from the 12th century onward and their later development.

Sufism has also had immense influence on Islamic art. There will be brief treatments of Persian, Arabic and other forms of Sufi poetry as well as Sufi music and some reference to the impact of Sufism on Islamic architecture and calligraphy.

Finally, something will be said about the influence of Sufism on the economic and political life of the Islamic community and of ethics in Islamic society.

In conclusion, we shall discuss opposition in modern times to Sufism in the Islamic world by modernists as well as so-called reformists and fundamentalists, and the revival of Sufism in the past few decades in the Islamic world and the spread of Sufism into the West in recent times.'

Among the Festival Highlights included:

The Lesson of Divine Harmony: a Sufi Approach to the Repetition of the Names of the Divine, to the Purification of the Heart, and to the Liberation of the Soul (1 March); Love, Lover and Beloved: an Evening of Sufi Devotions and Ecstatic Music (1 March); Living Blessing: The Aramaic Lord's Prayer and the Middle Eastern Mystical Tradition of Jesus (2 March); Re-Membering the Divine Feminine (3 March); Forum of Middle Eastern Faiths: Wrecking God's

Creation?: Faith, Stewardship and the Future of the Planet (3 March); a Jewish Journey - Opening the Heart Through Song, Story, Psalms and Serenity (4 March); Mystical Poetry and the Middle Eastern Mind (4 March); Spirituality, Peace and Wellbeing (5 March); The Return of the Jerusalem Peacemakers (5 March); Spirituality in Everyday Life: An Interspiritual Retreat Day with Jewish, Christian and Islamic Peacemakers (6 March); a Jewish Journey Through Song, Music and Story (6 March); Pathways to Peace Through Spiritual Dance (7 March); The World Peace Flag Ceremony (7 March); Pathways to Peace Through Spiritual and Musical Practice (8 March); Davod Azad in Concert (8 March); a Wealth of Difference: Tapping Archetypal Sources of Wisdom and Creativity (9 March); Subud Hosted Meal and Festival Party (9 March); Sufism: Doctrines, Practices and Historic Manifestations (10 March); The 2008 Middle East Festival Lecture: Spiritual Approaches to Peace and Ecology in the Islamic World by Prof Seyyed Hossein Nasr (11 March).

7. Promotion of the Festival.

A number of approaches were adopted for promoting the Festival this year:

15,000 32-page A5 full-colour Festival Brochures were distributed very widely across Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife, Glasgow, Perth and Kinross, Tayside and wider Scotland;

5,000 A5 flyers for the 2008 Middle East Festival Lecture by Prof Nasr were distributed widely across Edinburgh;

1,200 A3 and 150 A4 Festival Posters were put out across Edinburgh, Lothians and across wider Scotland;

Use of Distribution Companies, EAE and Direct Distribution, for the distribution of some Festival Brochures and for some A3 Festival Posters;

Extensive themed email publicity on specific Festival events;

Promotion of the Festival through the Festival Website, www.mesp.org.uk;

Promotion of the Festival through a series of themed press releases;

Promotion of specific Festival events in the publicity of collaborating organizations;

Promotion of the Festival through word-of-mouth and personal contacts.

8. Media Coverage of the Festival.

The Festival was widely covered online. In particular, Edinburgh and Lothians Tourist Board featured the Festival on the front page of their website, and Visit Scotland also featured the Festival on their website. The City of Edinburgh Council featured the Festival on their website. There was extensive website coverage of the Festival, and in associated newsletters. BBC Arabic had a reporter at the Festival for several days, interviewing several of the participants, for a program on the Festival. All of the coverage that we are aware of has accurately and positively covered the Festival.

9. Some Feedback.

To illustrate, with a few examples, some of the feedback on some of the Festival events, here are some quotes from participants on their experiences, for illustrative purposes:

Just to say thank you so much for your tireless organising of the MESP Festival. I really loved the way the dance day went - thank you for your part in facilitating it. And I'm glad to have finally got to one of Lee's workshops - I'm still working on stuff from that!

Margaret Christie

Tirtza and I wanted to thank you so much for inviting us to Edinburgh, and for caring for us so well, and with such attention to all the details. We hope you are all well, and that the Festival continues to be a source of God's love and light.

We had a wonderful time with you in Edinburgh.

Please God we will all be able to participate in many more festivals and events that bring peace to the world, and especially to the Middle East.

Hanna Yaffe and Tirtza Singer and Sara Singer

I had a brilliant couple of days - thank you for all the organising; efficient as always.

Rev Prof Stephen G Wright

I just wanted to say thank you for a wonderful night on Tuesday. Dr Nasr's talk was inspiring and a perfect way to end the Festival. Well done and thank you for organising it.

Saleem

Just a few words to say a big 'thank you' for accepting me as a volunteer during the MESP. I really enjoyed both the programme of events and the opportunity to meet so many delightful people.

Thank you as well for organising such an important peace initiative.

As I've already mentioned, being a volunteer at the Festival was the main 'highlight' for me - put me down as a probable for next year.

All the events I attended were worthwhile and provided me with a variety of experiences - none of them boring. I go to the Festival for a mixture of deepening in the familiar, new experiences and meeting friends old and new - this year's Festival provided all of this, so met my 'expectations.'

The day workshop I feel I gained most from was the Jewish Journey on Tuesday 4th March - the whole day spoke to my heart and it was lovely to have a young woman leading some of the practices.

The day and Lecture with Prof Nasr was also outstanding in terms of information clearly presented, his ability to engage in question/answer sessions and general 'humanness.'

I agree with you that it would be good to have all the events at the Quaker Meeting House - in terms of temporary community building it would be great if we could have food provided as well. Also, light refreshments at evening events would be welcome.

Finally - thanks again to you all for organising such a worthwhile and stimulating programme.

Stella Cranwell

Thank you for the beautiful Festival!

Carolina Cuenca

Thank you for your kind hosting of Jerusalem Peacemakers at this year's Festival. It was a good time for us and of course also enabled the subsequent UK tour, during which we were able to address a culturally and spiritually more diverse audience than ever before.

Speaking for myself, I was delighted to be there, attend some of the events and make and strengthen connections. The networking is certainly bearing fruit and I am sure there is more to emerge and I am enjoying meditating with The Sufi Book of Life.

Jane Ozanne

I want to thank you for all your kindness and hospitality on behalf of myself and Dr. Terry Moore.

Prof Seyyed Hossein Nasr

That was my honour performing there.

Davod Azad

It was a real pleasure to be there at the spiritual practice event. There is always a good cross-fertilization of ideas and new people which is such a great thing about the MESP. Well done to you too and the other organisers.

Maureen Hunter

It was a privilege to be invited. I'm so glad you liked my readings.

Jila Peacock

Thank you for all your hospitality to me during the Festival. I deeply enjoyed my time here and have a feeling I will be back.

With kind regards and gratefulness for all that you do in the name of peace and deep compassion.

Kelly Colbert

I got value from everything I attended. Found the work of the Jerusalem peacemakers particularly inspiring because they're creating bridges between "heavyweight" orthodox Rabbis and Imams in Israel.

The workshops were enjoyably diverse and the benefit was not just in each day's content but in the "dialectic" between them. A significant aspect was meeting remarkable participants with mutual passions. A mutual interest both in integral transformative practice and in building understanding about the Middle East.

I loved the quality of personal interaction, mutual support and empathy particularly in Mary's workshop (Goddess exploration) and in Lee's (Wealth of Difference). Lee's workshop was (for me) the most engaging of all - dynamic and well-structured - evoking new personal insights which are still resonating with me.

Stefan Freedman

Brochure beautifully produced and clear. Every event I went to I got something useful from.

Laura Schuster

Brochure informative and attractive.

Shirley Douglas

Brochure clear and well presented. Jerusalem Peacemakers made a big impression. Day of dance was the best event.

Jo Richards

Loving participating. Gained wisdom and insight. Connected with my fellow man as one family. Experienced love and healing. Validated where I am on my life journey.

Hannah Bowman

I need to have more space for spiritual exploration. It was all great! Still processing! These were all nurturing, learning experiences. I think it's great! Keep going!

Fiona Cartmell

The exploration of diversity, universality and oneness despite differences – educating people about difference.

The very spiritual feeling at the dance workshop.

Margery Mackay

10. Some Conclusions.

We were able to put on a richly varied program of events, and most of these events were found to be spiritually nourishing by those who participated, as well as intellectually stimulating and of significant educational value.

People were able to discover spiritual traditions which were new to them, to learn more deeply about spiritual traditions with which they had some familiarity, to participate in spiritual and artistic practice, to share deeply from their own life experiences, and the Festival itself was experienced by some as a 'temporary community,' a place of meeting and sharing, and for many the Festival was a source of inspiration and nourishment.

The Festival in 2008, including pre-events, had some 50 events, and consolidated many of the successes from previous years.

The 2008 Middle East Festival has been a significant success in terms of the consistent quality of the events, and the very appreciative feedback that has been received from those who attended.

The Festival Brochure was widely praised and found to be easy to use by most people, though there are always diverse viewpoints on such matters, and each year we take into account feedback from previous years in this respect.

The Festival Website was found to be easy to use, and the inclusion of online bookings was appreciated.

The registration and booking process was found to be straightforward.

The Festival Schedule was comfortably manageable. We were able to keep the costs of events at a very accessible level, and we adopted a flexible policy on registrations to accommodate to people's circumstances. We also had some bursaries for people on very low income, and for the volunteers.

All of the identified media coverage accurately represented the Festival ethos. The Festival is being accurately and positively reported in the media, and the

series of carefully identified thematic press releases that we put out is greatly helping this process.

In the 2008 Festival there were 5 strands to the Festival to allow different entry routes and participation identities. There was participation in the Festival from USA, Africa, across the UK, countries across wider Europe, and the Middle East. Within Scotland, people participated in the Festival from most corners of the country.

Learnings will be incorporated into our Guidelines for Events Submission for the 2009 Middle East Festival.

The 2008 Festival further clarified its role as a vehicle for local and international community building between diverse spiritual traditions, cultures and communities and between the internal and external experiences of the individual.

For many participants the 2008 Festival provided a 'temporary community,' and in many events, and particularly so the day workshops, we were successful in providing a supportive, caring, non-judgemental environment in which we engaged in interactive exercises, role play, rituals, deep listening and sharing about our experiences and awareness of wisdom relating to the basic elements of peacemaking and community building. Elements which some found to be important included:

Welcoming (hospitality, appreciation, rituals)
Respect/celebrating differences, acceptance/understanding and allowing/holding space
Openness of heart and mind, trust, listening, compassion, and awareness of each other
Skills or tools of peacemaking in a humane way, letting go, challenging, transforming
...

The Festival has again been successfully managed within budget.

11. Thanks.

The Festival organisers would like to offer thanks to everyone who has participated in the 2008 Middle East Festival, and to those who have supported the Festival. From speakers and facilitators, volunteers, sponsors and hosts, venues and the general public, friends and participants, we offer our thanks and appreciation.

12. Festival Contacts.

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