

**2nd Annual Edinburgh International  
Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality  
and Peace, Edinburgh, Scotland,**

**Friday 11 February 2005  
– Sunday 6 March 2005.**

**A Report By**

**Neill Walker**

**(With input from  
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and Alice Fateah Saunders)**

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1. From Friday 11 February - Sunday 6 March 2005 the 2nd Annual Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace brought together artists, scholars, grassroots spiritual activists, and speakers from the Sufi, Druze (through the work of the Interfaith Encounter Association), Baha'i, Ismaili, Zoroastrian and other lesser known spiritual traditions, in addition to those of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. More generally, all of the principal faith and spiritual traditions of Scotland were invited to participate in this spiritual, educational, and artistic and cultural festival of peace and understanding. The Festival is jointly organized by the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, EICWS, and the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL, and with the support of many other organizations.

2. The Festival positively affirms the diversity contained within the religious and spiritual traditions of the Middle East, as well as those here in Scotland, in justice and equality. 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 more deeply and learn with a more open mind and heart. The emphasis of the Festival is on spirituality, and on spiritual, educational, and artistic and cultural approaches to peace and understanding.

The Festival 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. Third, we invited participants to share in the musical and devotional spiritual practice presented, in order to gain an experiential view of the traditions that we discussed. Simply knowing facts (or presumed facts) about another does not become real meeting without such an experience.

3. 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, or to specific events within the Festival, has come from 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, One Scotland. Many Cultures, the Scottish Arts Council, the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, EICWS, the Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL, The UNA Edinburgh, the City of Edinburgh Council Culture and Leisure Department Celebrating Communities, and Sir Tom Farmer.

Further support has come from organisations 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 in the Festival Brochure. Further in-kind support has come from a wide range of hosting and supporting organizations.

The two organizations who organize this Festival, namely, the Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, 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 EICWS, and Dr Neil Douglas-Klotz, on behalf of EIAL. Victor Spence and Neill Walker jointly prepared the Festival Brochure.

The 2005 Festival has again been successfully managed within budget.

4. There were over eighty events in the Festival in 2005, which meant that the Festival was approximately three times more substantial than 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 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 more deeply and learn with a more open mind and heart. Without doubt, the Festival was very successful in respecting this approach, and all of the Festival events were held with a positive and respectful sense of sharing and engagement among the diverse participants involved.

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 some of the Festival events, and some events were organised in collaboration with partner organisations (these included the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services, The Scottish Storytelling Centre, The National Library of Scotland, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, The National Centre for Dance in Edinburgh, The National Galleries of Scotland, the Filmhouse Cinema, among others). This mix of approaches worked well, and allowed for a rich diversity of events, venues, and approaches. The diversity of events which resulted was widely appreciated.

5. 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 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.

This year's 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, 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 this year), Sahaj Marg, Anthroposophy, Shamanism,

Goddess Spirituality, Paganism, Amma Spirituality, Radhasoami/Universal, Esoteric Christian, Christian Healing, Sanatana Dharma, Gnostic, FFWPU, among others.

Some participants identified themselves as having an inter-spiritual spiritual identity, drawing upon more than one spiritual tradition for inspiration. Some participated in the Festival at an educational level rather than from a faith or spiritual perspective, and some participated as scholars, academics, or as interested members of the general public. 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 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, mime and clowning, etc.

Some participated as scholars, academics, educators, 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, and we had guests from USA, Canada, Australia, the Middle East, across the UK, and some countries in wider Europe. 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. Through further developing contacts with Consulates and Embassies, we are hoping to further develop participation from local people originally from the Middle East.

6. Some 3,500-4,000 people participated in the Festival this year, and many of the events were excellently received and found to be spiritually nourishing and uplifting. Among the Festival highlights included: a One World Peace Concert (19 February); a Young People Debate on Peace Education and Citizenship at the Scottish Parliament (24 February 2005); a Multi Faith and Spiritual Forum on Science, Spirituality, and Civilization (25 February); a 4-day Retreat on Jewish and Sufi Spirituality (24-27 February 2005); the Scotland-Middle East Storytelling Exchange (24 February – 2 March); a Multi Faith and Spiritual Forum on the Headscarf Debate in a Changing Europe (27 February); a Multi Faith and Spiritual Forum on the Re-Emergence of the Divine Feminine (1 March); a Day of Sharing Spiritual Practice for Peace (3 March 2005); the Festival Lecture by three times Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Abuna Elias Chacour, on Spiritual Approaches to Middle East Peace (3 March 2005); a 2-Day International Conference on Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace (4 and 5 March 2005); a Mindful Peace Walk (6 March); a Closing Concert with Latif Bolat (6 March), as well as Day Workshops and a series of films at the Filmhouse Cinema.

The event which attracted the single largest audience was the Festival Lecture by Abuna Elias Chacour at the McEwan Hall, the University of Edinburgh. We estimate

that there were some 600 people in attendance, and there has been excellent feedback from many people who attended this lecture.

The event which attracted the second largest attendance was the One World Peace Concert at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh. We estimate that some 500 people were in attendance on the night.

Many of the Festival events have received very positive feedback, both written and verbal, and a sample of typical feedback is included as an appendix for reference.

7. A number of approaches were adopted for promoting the Festival this year:  
10,000 Festival Brochures were distributed very widely across Edinburgh and wider Scotland. A PDF of this Festival Brochure was also widely emailed out to people;  
Extensive email publicity on specific Festival events;  
Promotion of the Festival through the Festival web site;  
Promotion of the Festival through a series of press releases;  
Promotion of specific Festival events in publicity of collaborating organisations.

8. The Festival was successful in generating a wide range of factually accurate coverage, both print and non-print media, which accurately reflected the Festival ethos and approach. There was also extensive coverage of the Festival on the Internet.

9. Some 3,500-4,000 people participated in the Festival this year, and the numbers held up well right through to the last event. The Festival organisers are particularly pleased with the spiritual, national, ethnic and cultural diversity among the Festival participants. We seek to continue to enrich this celebration of diversity in future Festivals. Some specific areas where we would like to further develop diversity are:  
bringing over guests from a greater range of Middle Eastern countries;  
further developing participation from local people originally from the Middle East;  
further developing participation from local people with a wider range of national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds;  
further developing the School education program to reach out to an even greater diversity of participants.

10. In conclusion, the Festival organisers are very pleased with the all round success of the Festival. 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 traditions which they had some familiarity with, and to experience directly how faith and the integration of spirituality in daily life is alive and well in some communities

Inevitably, in a Festival on this scale, there are some refinements to be made, and some learnings for next year. We are very pleased with the all round numbers attending the Festival. Some of the Festival events were quite intentionally designed to be for small groups where quite intimate sharing would be possible. This aspect was appreciated by those who participated. Further, in a Festival it is inevitable that some events will have a smaller audience than they would have if they were stand alone events. However, some events also attracted larger audiences as a result of being part of the Festival, with the increased publicity that they received.

Among the refinements to consider for next year include the following:  
We need to keep refining the Festival Brochure design and layout, taking into account the feedback that we receive each year.

Developing a Festival Poster, in addition to the Festival Brochure.

In 2004 many people felt that the conference registration fee was too low. We increased it in 2005, and that had an impact on numbers. In 2006 we will have a lower registration fee again, with no more than two sessions in parallel at any one time, and with a greater emphasis on keynote presentations. More specific breaks will be built into the conference schedule next time, with greater time for discussion per session.

In 2004 we digitally recorded some of the key sessions and made these freely available via the Festival website. In 2005 we have digitally recorded a significant number of the key Festival events, and we will review the format that we will make these available in. We will need to further reflect upon this aspect for 2006.

We need to ensure that all Festival venues are sufficiently warm for the comfort of participants – some rooms, even with heating on, were felt to be rather cold.

Rather than having separate morning spiritual practice sessions we will look to incorporate the spiritual practice sessions into events in general.

The hospitality offered by hosts worked very well, and perhaps we need only have between 4-6 very carefully selected people from the Middle East each year attending the Festival – we had 7 people from the Middle East this year.

Perhaps during the conference days we should have someone playing a social networking role in relation to speakers from abroad.

We may introduce some thematic streams of events next year, so that if someone is interested in a given theme being featured, then they will be able to attend a number of events associated with that theme which will be clearly marked in the Festival Brochure.

We need to review each year the balance of events between spiritually focused events, educational events, and artistic and cultural events. Some events will strongly feature two or perhaps three of these aspects.

In 2005, all of our seven guests from the Middle East came from Israel. It would be good if in future years we could diversify the Middle Eastern countries where our guests come from.

In 2005 we achieved a good balance of male and female speakers and facilitators. This is helped by people participating as individuals. We will work to achieve a similar balance in future Festivals. Our guests from the Middle East have particularly emphasised the importance of getting a good balance of male and female presenters.

11.

The 3rd Annual Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace, Edinburgh, Scotland, Friday 10 February – Sunday 5 March 2006.

#### Announcement and Invitation to Participate

Please find below the Planning Timeline for the 2006 Festival. This has been developed to help individuals and organisations who may wish to participate in the 2006 Festival to meet the deadlines for the Festival Brochure production. Each event in the 2006 Festival will either be organised by the Festival co-ordinators, or be organised in close consultation with the Festival co-ordinators, to ensure that all of the Festival events fit within the Festival ethos and approach.

Individuals or organisations who may wish to participate in the 2006 Festival should submit a proposal by 10 July 2005. The Festival co-ordinators will give feedback on each proposal, and feedback on the practical steps required for the proposed event to be included in the 2006 Festival. For an event to be included in the 2006 Festival an agreed and accepted Festival event proposal must be concluded with the Festival co-ordinators by 10 September 2005, and finalised Festival event information must be delivered to the Festival co-ordinators by 15 October 2005 for inclusion in the Festival Brochure.

The Festival co-ordinators will be organising the lead events in the Festival. It is very important to liaise with the Festival co-ordinators on the selection of the event venue, the date and time of the event, any admission charge, the approach taken to organise the event, and how it fits into the Festival as a whole. The final decision on inclusion of an event in the Festival lies with the Festival co-ordinators, to ensure that all selected events are suitable for the 2006 Festival.

As well as publicity from the Festival Brochure, it is strongly recommended that each Festival event be publicised separately by the organiser of the event. We prefer, if possible, that venues used for Festival events will have disabled access, though we appreciate that in some cases this is not possible. The Festival itself takes up no fixed position on any political, ethical, or cultural question, and has an emphasis on spirituality, and on spiritual, educational and cultural approaches to peace and understanding. Please bear this in mind when submitting proposals.

Proposals are very welcome for festival pre-events, exhibitions and displays, education processes, school visits, visits to places of worship, visits to places of spiritual significance, workshops, talks, dialogues, forums, times for reflection, spiritual practice events, services, morning spiritual observances, intra-spiritual and inter-spiritual sharing, community building events, creative engagement events, deepening of spirituality events, events based upon open space approaches, networking events, retreats, vigils, training sessions, book launches, media events, arts and cultural events – including music, dance and movement, drama, visual arts, storytelling, poetry, crafts, film, animation, mime, clowning, etc, among others that you may wish to suggest.

We look forward to receiving your proposals for 2006 Festival events, and to working with you to bring the event to fruition as part of the 2006 Festival!

### 2006 Festival Planning

The 3rd Annual Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace, Edinburgh, Scotland, Monday 13 February – Sunday 5 March 2006, is jointly organised by The Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities, EICWS, and, The Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning, EIAL.

### Planning Timeline for the 2006 Festival

Report on the 2005 Festival sent out: 15 April 2005

Announcement/Invitation for 2006 Festival proposals sent out: 15 April 2005

Deadline for submission of proposal for 2006 Festival participation: 10 July 2005

Deadline for agreed 2006 Festival event proposal: 10 September 2005  
Deadline for finalised 2006 Festival event information: 15 October 2005  
2006 Festival Brochure finalised: 5-10 November 2005  
2006 Festival Brochure to printers: 18 November 2005  
2006 Festival Brochure from printers: 1 December 2005  
2006 Festival: Friday 10 February – Sunday 5 March 2006

### Festival Proposal Submission

Please submit your proposals for 2006 Festival participation by 10 July 2005 to the address below.

### Contribute Ideas

If you have ideas for the Festival, then please do get in contact.

### Festival Volunteering

The Festival co-ordinators would welcome offers to volunteer in the Festival.

### Festival Hospitality

The Festival co-ordinators would also welcome offers of hospitality, by agreeing to host a meal for several people participating in the Festival. This will provide an excellent opportunity to make new connections with people inspired by the Festival theme. Further, perhaps some people would like to offer to host one or more people visiting the Festival, for a day or more during their stay.

### Festival Sponsorship

The Festival co-ordinators would welcome being put in contact with potential Festival sponsors. Both financial and in-kind sponsorship would be welcome.

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