

The Second Annual Edinburgh International Festival and Conference on Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace:

Missing Stories: Prophetic and Mystical Voices for Peace

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 subjects them to criticism or danger.

One of the purposes of MESP has been to show that a great range of opinion exists not only between traditions but also within each of them. 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that any one group or person can claim to speak for the totality of any religion or spiritual tradition seems greatly outdated in a multi-cultural society, and many scholars of religious studies or comparative spirituality today prefer to speak, for instance, of multiple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 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.

MESP's overriding aim is to contribute to peace through dialogue, spiritual practice, and improved mutual understanding among the religious and spiritual traditions that have arisen in what is now known as the Middle East. Accordingly MESP seeks to engage a progressively wider and more diverse range of representatives who have been promoting spiritual approaches to non-violent conflict resolution and world peace. No speaker represents, or can represent, the totality of any tradition. Likewise, no religious group or organization, nor the MESP organization nor its sponsors, should be identified with the opinions of any speaker, whose opinions remain his/her own. One of the primary principles of MESP 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, perhaps more high-profile political and ethical issues. The conference and festival themselves take no fixed position on any political, ethical or cultural question. We intend rather to create a forum in which we can listen to each other more deeply and learn with a more open mind and heart.

Hence, in summary, the MESP organization will invite talks and presentations on spirituality and spiritual approaches for peace with particular reference to the Middle East. The final decision on the selection of speakers rests with the festival organisers. Some consultation will take place with faith and spiritual traditions about the festival in general, and all such input is highly valued. However the MESP organization aspires to reflect the diversity of traditions, and to give opportunities for expression to a diversity of views, practices, and perspectives within traditions. Views expressed by potential speakers in other contexts or at other forums are not criteria for the selection or de-selection of potential contributors. While the Festival organisers aspire to create a Festival environment which is comfortable for all potential participants, some differences of outlook are perhaps inevitable, and this aspiration may not always be achievable.

Disclaimer:

The opinions expressed by all speakers at Edinburgh International Conference on Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace and during the associated Festival are their own and should not be identified with those of the MESP organizers or sponsors or with those of any particular religious organization or denomination. One of the primary principles of MESP is that all mystical and prophetic voices for non-violence and peace should be allowed a hearing, without censorship or prior vetting.