

Festival Model

AIM - The Model which is developing for the Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace is both spiritual and interspiritual in nature.

MEANS - Involving conferences, talks, dialogues, multi faith and spiritual forums, retreats, workshops, spiritual practice events, deepening of spirituality events, open space events, networking and social gatherings, exhibitions and displays, book launches, education processes, school visits, visits to places of worship, visits to places of spiritual significance locally, vigils, training sessions, services, times for reflection, media engagements, hospitality events, service events, arts and cultural events – including film, theatre, music, dance, movement, storytelling, poetry, visual arts, and mime and clowning, among others.

FORMS - A wide range of spiritual practices will be experienced throughout the Festival. This includes not only spiritual practices such as Jewish Meditation, Sufi Zikr, Christian Prayers of the Heart, etc, but we will also explore forms of spiritual practice such as hospitality, service, deep listening, mindful walking, mindful eating, as well as spiritual forms of art and culture. As an example of the latter includes Samuel Lewis's vision of the Dances of Universal Peace which was seen as part of his "peace through the arts" program. In a letter to Sara Morgan, he wrote, "We may seem to be about music and dancing, but my real work is peace on earth."

SPACE - A wide range of spiritual spaces will be experienced throughout this Festival, not merely physical spaces, but also including a wide range of spaces of spiritual practice. Further, the Festival invites that we each make space, or allow for space, within ourselves, within our relations, and within our communities for the necessary and sufficient conditions for the awakening of peace.

TIME - Looking deeply into the present, supported by forms of spiritual practice, the necessary and sufficient conditions for the awakening of peace can be realised, and the spiritual presence of peace and joy can then be deeply experienced, and shared, in the present.

PROCESS - We are invited to share in the process of awakening and cultivating peace and joy within and around us, supported by forms of spiritual practice, with an open and receptive mind and heart.

ETHOS - 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 rather 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 approaches to peace. We aim to manifest the spiritualities under consideration to direct experience, and to awaken and share the spiritual presence of peace and joy within ourselves, within our relations, and within our communities.

The Festival will bring together at least three different kinds of presentations. First, we hope to learn from each other about our shared traditions, as well as those that form the unique voice of any one of us. Second, we will hear from those who have been active in peacemaking and peace-awakening on a spiritual basis on the ground in the Middle East. Third, we invite participants to share in the musical and devotional spiritual practice presented, in order to gain an experiential view of the traditions we discuss. Simply knowing facts (or presumed facts) about another does not become real meeting without such an experience.

FACILITATION - Spiritual facilitation is particularly encouraged, awakening and cultivating the spiritual presence of peace and joy, and supported by forms of spiritual practice.

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES - This presents the challenge and the opportunity for the spiritual practices to step out of their envelopes of comfort and interact with, and influence, the wider culture of inter-faith and interspiritual peacemaking and peace-awakening.

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE EDUCATION - This presents the challenge and the opportunity for Peace Education to develop a greater emphasis on peace-awakening through spiritual and interspiritual practice, a greater awareness of the necessary and sufficient conditions for peace-awakening, and space and time for the spiritual presence of peace and joy.

OFFER FROM US - What we have to offer is an emphasis on spirituality and interspirituality, not merely as "fuel" for peace activism, but as part of the peacemaking and peace-awakening process itself.

CRITIQUE - Almost all inter-faith work today emphasizes talk and dialogue. While important, this has been going on for decades and we need more to address many of the critical issues of contemporary society.

Too often the metaphor of 'peacemaking' and 'peacebuilding' refers to external conditions for peace. While important, we now need a greater emphasis on peace-awakening through spiritual and interspiritual practice, a greater awareness of the necessary and sufficient conditions for peace-awakening, and more space and time for the spiritual presence of peace and joy.

ESSENCE 1 - In order to really understand another person we need to meet them deeply, to get to know that person, and, in short, to share spiritual practice with them, not merely engage in isolated bubbles of "dialogue," only engaged from the neck up.

ACTION 1 - The Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace was envisioned from the start as a different kind of meeting place. We are not merely bringing presenters who understand the above approach, but also ones that can benefit from being exposed to it, by meeting other peacemakers and practitioners of peace-awakening.

ESSENCE 2 - All real meetings are deeply spiritual, if we allow space and time for them to be so.

ACTION 2 - In addition, we are allowing space and time in the process not merely for "mainstream" representatives of various religious traditions, which is the usual approach of inter-faith work, but also voices "from the fringes" - the mystical and prophetic voices that have always brought forth solutions and ideas outside the box of what is thought possible.

Although Scotland may seem far away, for many, at the fringes of centres of power, it is for this reason just the sort of neutral space where diverse voices and spiritual practices can feel safe meeting.

AIM - Following in the spirit of Enlightenment innovation in Scotland this Festival aspires to develop new models of spiritual and interspiritual practice for peace.

ESSENCE 1 - In order to really understand another person, we need to meet them deeply. When we have such deep meetings, we experience each of them as 'real', as a genuine

encounter. Such feelings of genuineness tell us that the encounter was also spiritual. Every real meeting, every meeting which can allow us to get to know others, to understand them, is spiritual.

ESSENCE 2 - Real meetings cannot be just made to happen - they need space and time. In true meeting we come alive to each other, what is personal to us becomes real to the other, what matters to them becomes of concern to us. This requires more than talk. Space and time for true meeting is made by practice, by shared spiritual practice. So much talk, even when well-meaning, remains empty, isolated bubbles of defensive 'dialogue' outside the space and time of spiritual meeting. Acting purposefully together can put us inside the space and time of spiritual meeting, side by side, perhaps hand in hand, advancing.

ESSENCE 3 - Peace, too, cannot be just made to happen. Just as in true meeting we come alive to each other, so in true meeting peace awakens in us. A Festival of Peace is a delicate flowering of interdependence: first there is the space and time, then there is the deep meeting, the understanding, the concern, the sharing, then there is the awakening of peace as part of the spiritual presence of each person to every other person.

AIM - The Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace aspires both to be a new model of peace festival and to develop new models of spiritual and interspiritual practice for peace. Awakening once more the spirit of Enlightenment innovation in Scotland, we offer space and time in which spirituality and interspirituality is not merely 'fuel' for peace activism but inherently part of the peace-awakening process itself.

As a new model of peace festival, the emphasis placed on 'awakening' peace in a shared space and time is also a challenge to spiritual practices to step out of their envelopes of comfort and address themselves courageously to the surrounding culture. Inter-faith and interspiritual peace-awakening is a powerful dynamic in today's world, for which we can all be grateful. But almost all inter-faith work today emphasizes talk and dialogue, as it has for decades. Is there not a better way? Could we not imagine a space and time where spirituality and interspirituality are the essence of all meeting? and where the dialogue is within the encounter, not about the encounter? To address the constantly changing issues confronting the modern world we need to rethink, reassess, and innovate.

ACTION 1 - The Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace was envisioned from the start as a different kind of meeting place. The presenters we are bringing not only understand the above rationale, but also wish to benefit from active participation in the process. They are committed to awakening peace through genuine meeting with other peace-makers.

ACTION 2 - In addition, we are making space and time in the process not merely for 'mainstream' representatives of various religious traditions, which is the usual approach of inter-faith work, but we have also invited voices 'from the fringes' - the mystical and prophetic voices that have so often brought solutions to situations in which peace seemed locked out.

MEANS - The Festival offers an abundant diversity of means to achieve the awakening of peace. You may participate in conferences, talks, dialogues, multi-faith and spiritual forums, retreats, workshops, spiritual practice events, vigils, training sessions, services, times for reflection, deepening of spirituality events, open space events, networking and social gatherings. You can go on school visits, visits to places of worship, and visits to places of spiritual significance locally. There will be exhibitions and displays, book launches, education processes, media events, hospitality events, service events, arts and cultural events – including film, theatre, music, dance, movement, storytelling, poetry, visual arts, and mime and clowning, among others.

FORMS - A wide range of spiritual practices will be experienced throughout the Festival. This includes not only spiritual practices such as Jewish Meditation, Sufi Zikr, Christian Prayers of the Heart, etc, but we will also explore forms of spiritual practice such as hospitality, service, deep listening, mindful walking, mindful eating, as well as spiritual forms of art and culture.

Emblematic of the latter is Samuel Lewis's vision of the Dances of Universal Peace, part of his "peace through the arts" programme. In a letter he wrote, "We may seem to be about music and dancing, but my real work is peace on earth."

PLACE - Scotland may seem far away from where peace-awakening is most urgently needed. In reality, such a place may have the greatest potential to offer what is so hard to find at the centres of power: a neutral space where diverse voices can all be heard, where manifold spiritual practices can safely meet.

Notes

1. Taking into account the diversity of spiritualities, and the experiential richness of spiritualities, we have quite intentionally not defined spirituality, since we do not want this diversity and richness to be merely interpreted in terms of one definition. Further, there are also many possible approaches to definition itself.
2. The notion of 'neutrality' used above is a partial notion of neutrality, and not an absolute notion of neutrality. Arguably, there are no absolutely neutral spaces.
3. The notion of 'Enlightenment' that we are referring to here reflects a contemporary discussion and aspiration within Scotland for a neo-Enlightenment, through engaging with and reflecting upon the critical issues of contemporary society. This Festival Model statement indicates that spirituality and interspirituality have their contributions to make to this endeavour.
4. This Festival Model statement is intended to be read alongside the Festival Diversity statement.