

Jerusalem Interfaith Forum Promotes Peace Education

Nurit Hirschfeld
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Netanya, Israel—For its March 2015 meeting, the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum visited the city of Netanya and was warmly welcomed by Rabbi Edgar Nof and his Netan-ya Congregation community.

Forty-five participants gathered in the local synagogue on March 12 to discuss practical initiatives for peace education.



The event opened with welcoming remarks by Mrs. Sara Guri, the chair of Netan-ya Congregation, followed by songs and a prayer for peace by Rabbi Nof. Within such a wholesome and friendly atmosphere, forum members shared their thoughts about various education and peace projects.

Rabbi Nof said that the activities of the forum can inspire and influence many by providing a proper direction. He emphasized the moral obligation of the Jewish people to be sensitive to the suffering of others.

Father Masoud Abu-Hatoum from the Wedding Church of Kafr Kanna spoke about the responsibility of religious leaders to promote and educate for peace. He said that it is a legacy we must leave for coming generations: "We are all living under the same sky; we are heated by the same sun; and our flowers blossom in the same season. We should not allow hatred to prevail. We should learn to live in peace."

Sheik Samir Aasi, from El-Jazar Mosque in the city of Acre, said that we should keep religion in our everyday lives: "To live for the sake of others in the neighborhood, in the street ... to forgive, to overcome our resentments—this is what we should do, and this is how we should educate the young generations." He said he strongly believes that peace is closer than ever before; the fact that there is indeed evil like that done by the rebel group Islamic State exposes clearly what is right and what is wrong. "We must do and be active for peace. Young people want to live; they don't want wars! War destroys. Peace doesn't destroy anyone. We must do. We must search and find any possible way to promote peace."



Rabbanit Esther Bar-Dea, wife of the chief rabbi of the city of Ramat Gan, said that we are all created by God who gave us the ability to talk. Since God gave us words, we should learn about one another through dialogue with each other.

Mrs. Karima Katili from Acre suggested a peace project for women: Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Druze women would visit schools and speak with children about loving one another. Also women can visit mosques, synagogues and churches on holy days to respect and show love to each other.



Dr. Yossi Hatab, a psychiatrist from Jerusalem, said that peace is not a goal in itself but rather is a means to achieve a healed world (Tikun Olam). Dr. Hatab said that it was important for every nation to recognize any pain and suffering it has caused to religions and peoples. He also spoke of his support and

encouragement for interfaith activities which help create meaningful experiences for children—such as meeting other children from diverse religions and countries.



Rabbi Reuven Haskin from Jerusalem said that God can speak and talk from the mouth of every person, regardless of his religion. "We understand that spiritual existence is more important than the physical one, and yet in the Western world we are very much attached to the physical." He is fascinated with places like India—curious to learn and see how people live a "simple" life. "I believe that we can benefit from studying together—each religion about the other. We can share our questions and learn many things from one other."



In the opinion of Rabbi Yaakov Luft from Mevaseret Zion, the diversity found in Israel—having so many religions and languages—provides us with the chance to elevate ourselves. It makes us better people because we are challenged and thus learn more about our faults and qualities. He concluded: "Diversity is not a curse—but a blessing; and this is how we should see it."

Rabbi Erwin Birnbaum spoke of his experience of teaching Druze high school students about the Jewish Holocaust. He was highly impressed by their interest and expressed appreciation for Sheik Aasi, who spoke about his visit to Auschwitz.



Significant in presence was also the Rabbi Adam Zeff from the United States, who spoke about the importance of learning about other cultures and religions, and told about his personal studies of the Arab language and of Islam.

Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, director of the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum, closed the forum with a reading from the First Peace Message of UPF Founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon:



"What is a life of true love? True love is the spirit of public service. It brings the peace that is at the root of happiness. Selfish love is a mask of the desire to have one's partner exist for one's own sake; true love is free from that corruption. Rather, its essence is to give, to live for the sake of others and for the sake of the whole. True love gives, forgets that it has given, and continues to give without ceasing. True love gives joyfully. We find it in the joyful and loving heart of a mother who cradles her baby in her arms and nurses it at her breast."

Participants stayed long after the formal meeting finished, enjoying the meal offered by Rabbi Nof and his congregation. The good atmosphere and high spirit brought spontaneous singing and dancing from some of the guests, and the words of "Peace be upon us by God" (Yaase shalom) filled the synagogue and every heart.