

Tantur Ecumenical Institute



Newsletter

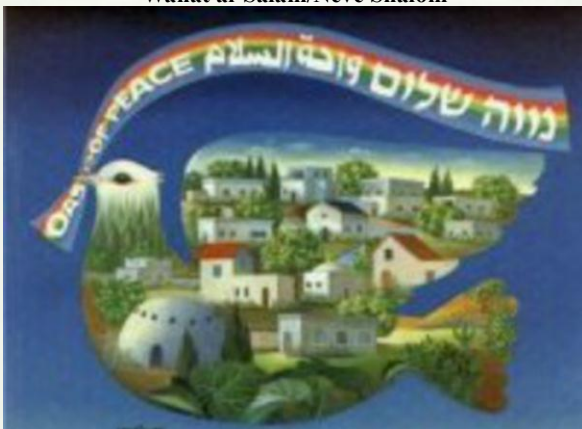
Oasis of Peace
Wahat al-Salam/ Neve Shalom

by
The Revd. Canon Dr. John Armson

Latest News and Events:

- ♣ **Oasis of Peace - Wahat al-Salam / Neve Shalom** by *The Revd. Canon Dr. John Armson, from Herefordshire, UK.*
- ♣ **The God of Surprises** by *Fr. Glenn de Cruz, C.Ss.R. from Singapore*
- ♣ **Nun on a Visa Run** by *Keith Begg (Tantur), from Limerick, Ireland*
- ♣ **A Reflection for March** by *Fr. Jeff Drane, SM, from Wellington, New Zealand*

The logo for symbolising the prospects of peace/peace in action in a region consumed by division. The Community of Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom



Not far from Jerusalem, half way to Tel Aviv, a-top a hill which overlooks beautiful agricultural plains and Latrun monastery, sits a remarkable village. It is remarkable because, although within Israel, the people of the village, by deliberate policy, are Palestinian Arabs of Israeli citizenship and Jews in equal numbers. It is situated almost equidistant from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. This village which is almost a pilot project in its own right demonstrates the possibility and indeed feasibility of developing a community system that is based on cooperation, community and a mutual respect for each tradition. Of extreme importance to this village especially in this volatile region is its non-affiliation with any political party or movement

The village was founded in the early 1970s. The population is currently around 60 families but it is hoped in the future that the village will include a total of 140 homes thus more than doubling the current amount. The village is owned by its residents and, although under Israeli law, its day-to-day business is determined by a council which also contains, in equal numbers, Jews and Arabs.

Each new would-be resident is interviewed to confirm that they understand and support the ideals of the village and then, if approved (and not all are) is allocated a plot of land. It is up to them to build their own house on it, as and when they can. (This inevitably limits the population to the 'middle classes.') The homes that have been built are dotted amongst a wonderful wilderness of trees and shrubs and wild flowers.

There is a bi-national, bi-lingual village school, the reputation of which is so good that many from out with the village (again, Jew and Arab) send their children to it, even though – unlike Israeli state schools - fees are charged. There are also educational and spiritual activities for older children and adults. All these are staffed by Israeli and Arab tutors jointly. There is no church or synagogue building, but a wonderfully domed *doumia-sakinah*, with views across the open fields below, may be used by anyone for meditation or prayer.

The peace of the village is tangible

The God of Surprises



by

Fr. Glenn de Cruz, C.Ss.R.

Meeting the Palestinians.....At a Palestinian Women's Cooperative



Fr. Glenn de Cruz from Singapore with a friend on a voyage of discovery in Palestine



Years ago, when I learnt that there was such a thing called cable TV, I was exposed to many fascinating events that were happening around the world at a push of a button. Then of course the internet revolution arrived..... that was even more amazing.

By watching the local news and cable I thought that all displaced peoples, like the Palestinians were terrorists, or violent people. This is what the media seemed to unfairly portray That is was what I saw on TV, either they were demonstrating, blowing up shopping malls, or blowing themselves up, until I met and stayed with some of them. Then I realised that like all peoples, not all Palestinians were violent or terrorists. They are like people everywhere else.

In fact I “Met God Outside the Camp”. Early in the Bible, it is written that “anyone who wished to consult the Lord would go to the meeting outside the camp” (Exodus 33:7)¹. And the Palestinians are ‘outside the camp’, with no land. It is outside the camp where we meet the Other who is different – and discover who we are and where our home really is. This Other comes to us in different guises, as guest, friend, stranger, sometimes enemy.

More than this, Jesus presents all these others who are “not one of us” as models for belief and action, the Samaritan, lepers, women, etc..., who were culturally and religiously ‘outside the camp’, during Jesus’ day. They were outside the ‘institution’. We meet God again outside the camp at the end of the Bible, in the Letter to the Hebrews: “Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people with his blood”. Let us go to him, then, outside the camp and bear the abuse he suffered” (13:12-13). I learnt that it’s important not to stereotype any peoples who are culturally and religiously different from me. Sometimes we forget that wars, treaties and conflict are about governments but it is the people’s reputation that can be tarnished as a result.....Peace is about People.

¹ “Meeting God Outside the Camp”, by Chrys McVey, O.P. East Asian Pastoral Review, 2004



Nun on a Visa Run

by
Keith Begg

One of the things that never ceases to intrigue me about life is that it is always throwing out new experiences and adventures but sometimes we are too busy with our lives to appreciate this. Life is an adventure to be embraced. One of the favourite expressions that my grandfather often quoted to us when we were growing up was “*It’s not the years in your life that count, it’s the life in your years*” and as the years go by I realise how true that is. So many people fail to see that our time on Earth is not a dress rehearsal as they get bogged down with the acquisition of material goods, being caught up in the rat race and forgetting to enjoy the simple things in life. So it was on the 24th February, I found myself travelling from Jerusalem to Sinai in Egypt on a Visa run with a Sister who has devoted many years to religious life and a Librarian with a passion for ecumenism. The goal of the trip was to get across the border from Israel to Egypt and back so Sr. M’s visa could be renewed. This would permit her to remain in Palestine to carry on her volunteer work. So we embarked on an early start that Friday morning heading south from Jerusalem. We drove alongside the Dead Sea soaking up the incredible beauty of this large salt water lake, with the rich hues of pink and red from the Jordanian Hills reflecting in its waters. We passed through arid desert interspersed with landscapes that looked like something from the moon before we arrived at our destination Eilat, Israel for the border crossing into Egypt. After a relatively easy entry we were picked up by a driver on the other side of the border. It was like entering a landscape that time forgot. Huge red sandstone hills seemed to sprout out of the ground with the foothills spilling down to the beautiful Red Sea. We passed fjords, rather like their Scandinavian counterparts, but without the lush vegetation, ancient ruins and many villages that oddly enough seemed more suited to Mexico than Egypt, with their hacienda styled designs. Except for the mountains on one side and the sea on the other we were alone on that road. We arrived at our destination, Taba to begin a weekend in what turned out to be one of relaxation and reflection. On Friday night we drank Sunrises on a balcony facing across the Red Sea where we could see the lights of Saudi Arabia glittering in the distance and the beautiful sun light over the Red Sea dissolving into its waters. Four countries converge in this small area, Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and at times it felt like you could reach out and touch them all. Indeed I had reservations about the trip. Did I want to be stuck for a weekend down in the Sinai with a Sister and a Librarian? But it is thanks to these two people that a wonderful adventure began. Sitting on the bus for the long journey down to the Israeli/Egyptian border got me thinking. As I looked out the window at the beautiful landscape all around I really began to realise that we should grab every opportunity put before us. Perhaps opportunity is God’s way of guiding us thus helping us to make the most out of our lives.

Continued Opposite

Nun on a Visa Run

Continued

If I did not take this opportunity then I would not have had time to think, to put things into perspective but most of all appreciate the good things and people I am lucky to have in my life. Sr. M succeeded in getting her visa in the end!



Beautiful colours dissolving into the Dead Sea early morning



Beautiful fjords dot the landscape from the Israeli Border to Taba Egypt



The Fjord as it is known by locals is a beautiful spot to view the Red Sea in full splendour



A Reflection for March by Fr. Jeff Drane, SM.

A group of 15 assembled on 08th February for the 6 week Program from New Zealand, Zambia, Canada, Ireland, England and the USA. Though diverse in origin and outlook they developed friendships with joy and laughter. The contradictions of Israel have been stark, from the Golan Heights to the Dead Sea, from the coldest winter days in years to balmy desert days in Judea, from viewing Israeli Walls and Settlements to experiencing their impacts on the Palestinian people, from the harshness of these Check Points to the gentle call of Muezzin at dawn. You would have to be dead within to fail to benefit from what Tantur has offered us. The lectures have given a clear outline of the geo-political history that has shaped this complex land and led to the development of the Bible, Torah and Koran but also unfortunately the current Israeli-Palestinian troubles. We got to understand how this region became the seedbed of civilization good and bad, the place of tensions between empire and self-determination, the clamor for resources in scarce environments, the seedbed of faith for so many globally in dark history. It provided a framework for critical self-analysis for us to develop better societies of faith and justice and peace when we return home.

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