

# Tantur Ecumenical Institute

## Newsletter

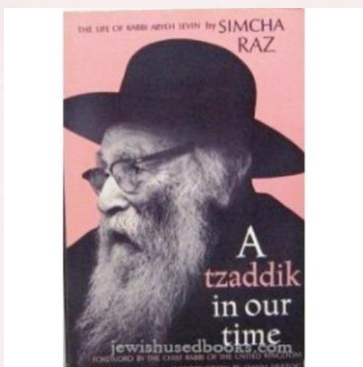
David Nicholl, Saint Francis and the Rabbi  
by  
David Andrews-Brown

### Latest News and Events:

- **David Nicholl, Saint Francis and the Rabbi** by *David Andrews-Brown* currently residing in *France*.
- **Tent of Nations - A Parable in Action** by *Rev. Dr. Michael Hurley* based in *Dublin* originally from *Co. Cork, Ireland*
- **The Spilsbury's Family Sabbatical at Tantur** by *Bronwyn Spilsbury* from *Calgary, Canada*
- **A Reflection for June** by *Revd. Michael McGarry*, (Rector of Tantur 1999-2010) based in *New York, USA*



A Tzaddik in Our Time by Simcha Raz convinced David Nicholl's that he, St. Francis and Rabbi Raz indeed share kindred spirits.....



When Donald Nicholl, who was Rector at Tantur from 1981 to 1985, was 18 years of age, he encountered two groups of people who were to influence him a great deal, and who, he came to believe, shared a spiritual affinity. These were the Franciscans, who follow St Francis of Assisi, and the *Hassidim*, the pious Jews of Eastern Europe, whose founder was a man called the Baal Shem Tov or *Master of the Good Name*.

The Hassidim, he said, “thought that in order to come closer to God, you had to find out where the suffering in the world is because it is God who is suffering in those who suffer.” In that, some such Hassidim were able to remain joyful in being beaten for their attempts to relieve suffering, Donald soon drew a parallel with St Francis who, he said, “tells us that true joy is when you are able to be beaten, and thrown out by people, and still remain at peace and full of joy.”

In Donald's first visit to the Holy Land, he imagined that in walking through the old City, Franciscan friars would look at passing Hassidic Jews and laugh, recognizing each other as kindred spirits and “fools for God.”

“Well, of course, this doesn't happen in Jerusalem!” he told me smilingly in a radio interview sometime in the 1980s. “So I was disappointed – I don't mean disillusioned, because the world's a strange place, but anyway, I was disappointed. And then I recovered from my disappointment through the grace of a strange meeting I had at Christmas 1978.”

This happened when Donald found himself alone on a wintry day in the cathedral of Santa Fé, capital of the American state of New Mexico. He took from his backpack a book titled *A Tzaddik in Our Time* by Simcha Raz. This is the biography of a saintly Lithuanian rabbi, Ayreh Levin, who lived in Jerusalem for many years and expressed a simple and marvelously effective concern for the poor and imprisoned. Looking up from his reading and seeing, in the cathedral sanctuary a statue of St. Francis, and an image ‘the Crucified One’, Donald was quietly and unshakably convinced anew that all three, Ranni Ayreh Levin, St. Francis and ‘the Crucified One’ did indeed share a kindred spirit. Having recently read *A Testing of Hearts*, Donald's account of his years at Tantur, I am convinced that Donald too shared this spirit.....

*(David Andrews-Brown is a freelance writer and broadcaster.)*

## Tent of Nations – A Parable in Action

by

Rev. Dr. Michael Hurley

### The Tent of Nations – A Cornerstone of peaceful resistance



“We Refuse to be Enemies”

Daoud at the Entrance Gate to the Tent of Nations.



The Tent of Nations is a family run farm of about 100 acres. It has very poor soil and is set on a hilltop about 950 meters above sea level south west of Bethlehem in the Palestinian West Bank. Here Daher and Daoud Nassar live in their shack like home. Previously, their father and grandfather lived in a cave nearby, while they ‘farmed’ the land. As the brothers look towards the surrounding hills, two Israeli settlements are visible to them. They know that the Israeli government also wants them to evacuate so it can build another settlement. They live with uncertainty, not knowing when or how it will next attempt to expel them.

Ever since 1991, the Israeli authorities have used various methods to obtain the farm at Tent of Nations e.g. declaring it as state land, cutting off access to electricity and water, and intimidation, harassment and bribery of the owners. They continue to do so, even though the land was registered with the Ottoman government in 1916, and has been continuously used as a farm ever since. Daoud summed up the motivation for the struggle against injustice, ‘the land is our mother and we don’t turn our back on our mother’. The issue for the brothers is simply the right to live in their ancestral home and land.

The Tent of Nations is a powerful contemporary parable. It reveals the challenge and significance of peaceful resistance. In standing firm, Daher and Daoud are symbols of faith. They reveal how God uses what is little in the face of great power and impossible odds. At the approach to the Tent of Nations, its motto, ‘we refuse to be enemies’, is written on a large boulder. Daher and Daoud have reasons to be bitter, but they choose to give their lifelong energies in the service of love - love for their land and also as encouragement to the Palestinian people. They explain that they refuse to see Israeli personnel as their enemies. Rather they seek to work with all people in the work of reconciliation and justice. A large sized shamrock, painted by Irish volunteers, with the words Cead Mile Failte – A Hundred Thousand Welcomes, also communicates the spirit of welcome and acceptance. The Tent of Nations appears like a contemporary version of David and Goliath, except that no one has been slain. Amid the great poverty of rocky soil, olives, grape vines, almonds, vegetables and fruit are grown. A small herd of goats, a horse, a donkey, pigeons, chickens, rabbits and dogs are also reared here. With electricity and water cut off by government policy, solar energy and rainwater are ingeniously harnessed. With little resources of its own, it facilitates arts, drama, and education for the children of the villages and refugee camps of the region. Far removed from places of power, its story reverberates around the world. It is fast becoming a center where people of different cultures and countries, and in particular young people, meet and build bridges of friendship, tolerance, trust and hope. Indeed, ‘a city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden’ (Matthew 5:14).

NOTE: Volunteer helpers and visiting groups are always welcome.

Information: <http://www.tentofnations.org/>

**The Spilsbury's Family Sabbatical at  
Tantur**  
*by*  
**Bronwyn Spilsbury**

When a family decides to go on sabbatical there are many questions that must be addressed. The obvious ones are housing, work situation, education for the kids, community, church, and opportunities to learn and grow. In coming to Tantur we found an ideal place to meet every need, and much more than we could have imagined.

My husband Paul is a professor; I serve on a pastoral team in a large Canadian church. Both workplaces offered us a six-month sabbatical and we knew that this would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our family to experience another world. We have two sons, aged 14 and 12 when we left Canada. They were young enough to have some flexibility in education and old enough to take in the benefits of travel. So we cast our eyes around the globe and wondered where we should go!

One of our criteria was that we wanted a change of culture, yet a place that felt familiar and comfortable. A place where English was widely recognized would be nice. A place that was developed enough to offer ongoing internet access would be essential, as we decided to register the boys in online school (through the Calgary Board of Education – an excellent short-term solution). We wanted a place where life would be stable yet provide variety. Where expanding our horizons wouldn't mean looking across an ocean but across the street. Where we'd meet interesting people and forge international friendships. Where we could fulfill research and study obligations, interspersed with active participation in field trips and intercultural exchanges.

So when we arrived at Tantur, to a fully-furnished apartment, well-equipped with desks and beds, internet access, space for us to live and develop personally and as a family, with community life freely offered, we felt that we'd been guided to a promised land! Of course, the fact that Tantur is in the Holy Land is part of that. Tantur, anywhere in the world, would be wonderful, but in the Holy Land it is magnificent. An enclave of serenity and community that addresses and adjusts to the political and historical realities of society here, that provides pilgrim and educational opportunities (all of which we were able to join in), Tantur became the perfect base for a family sabbatical.

We joined in with pilgrim groups and toured the country, spreading the trips out over our months here. Our boys became an integral part, adding their own flair and personality, and meeting people from all over the world. We met local grocers and businesspeople, joined in a regular church, rode the buses and enjoyed the night life at times! From day one, thanks to the welcome we received, we felt we belonged.

Every person in the family has benefitted. As adults we have achieved the research and work goals we set, thanks to the library and study facilities. As kids, our boys have had their eyes opened and their hearts exposed to the stories and puzzles of people in a whole different context – and this is reflected even in their school essays. As a family we have a memory that will last for generations to come. We've felt safe, loved, inspired, encouraged, and we give much credit for that to Tantur and its amazing community. Tantur has been the catalyst to make the holy land feel like "home." We're so grateful!

The Spilsbury Family from Calgary, Canada at the very heart of life at Tantur....you will be missed. From left to right, Elliot, Oliver, Paul & Bronwyn



The Spilsbury men folk about to create an oil/mud slick in the Dead Sea...Where is Greenpeace when you need them!



Elliot & Oliver's music talents will certainly be missed at Tantur. They could give Bob Dylan a run for his money.....



*A Reflection for June by Revd. Michael McGarry*

RECENTLY I HAD THE PRIVILEGE of speaking of my eleven-year Tantur experience at Atlanta's Central Presbyterian Church. As often happens, both when I was in Jerusalem and since, someone asked, "Well, are you optimistic as you reflect on the Arab-Israeli situation. Are you hopeful at all?" We Americans are a "fix-it" people: every problem has a solution and every solution has a *human* solution I replied, "No, I am not optimistic – my *political* judgment laments the lack of truly courageous leaders with the stature of Nelson Mandela. And neither am I hopeful...at first." For us Christians, hope is a gift, not a calculus. It is neither earned nor figured out. Like faith and love, our gracious God may bestow this *gift* of hope. And hope is a virtue only when the situation is hopeless. Despite – no, make that *precisely because the situation is hopeless*, therefore I am hopeful. During these post-Pentecost weeks, the Holy Spirit has come and I am very hopeful. Because the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Jesus, the God of all the saints since his time walks with us, not only at our baptism, or during our time in the Holy Land, but also *with us now into God's future*.

June 2012

ISSUE 15

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