



Dear Friend,

The Elijah Interfaith Institute has experienced a month of very mixed feelings. On the one hand, we can share with you the inspiration of our new HOPE (House of Prayer and Education) initiative. On the other, we regret to inform our readers that a beloved member of our Board of World Religious Leaders, Dr. Muhammad Zaki Badawi, has passed away.

Despite the ambivalence of the emotions expressed in this edition, we hope you enjoy this month's *Wisdom* e-newsletter.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein

Director

The Elijah Interfaith Institute

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The Vision: A House of Prayer and Education (HOPE) for All

There is no other city in the world that draws as much attention to itself, from a religious and interreligious perspective, as Jerusalem. It is a city holy to three religions, and because of that it is also deeply implicated in a conflict that draws the attention of the world. That the conflict in the Holy Land should loom so centrally in the world's mind, in a way that is



View of the Mount of Olives from the Old City of Jerusalem.

disproportionate in comparison with many other international conflicts, is largely a consequence of the religious significance of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land. Thus, even the religious traditions of Asia, for whom Jerusalem is not a hallowed city and who recognize many other important spiritual centers as their proper holy sites, find themselves concerned with the future of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The world exhibits a deep desire to bring peace to Jerusalem and its Land. The desire of so many nations to help find the path to peace in the Holy City is proof of this. The place that Jerusalem captures in the imagination of the world - both East and West - thus provides it with huge symbolic charge. A sign of hope coming from Jerusalem has special significance, and is, as such, more potent than that same sign generated from any other site. At the same time, any step, however small, towards the broadening of peace in the Holy City is itself welcome and much needed. The HOPE Project Initiative seeks to achieve both of these goals in relation to Jerusalem, as it stands in relation to the rest of the world.

The present vision, inspired by Gerald Weisfeld, grows out of an ancient prophecy, found in the book of Isaiah. According to this prophecy (Isaiah 56,7) God's Home, in Jerusalem, will be called a House of Prayer for All Peoples. In different generations these

found in the book of Isaiah. According to this prophecy (Isaiah 56,7) God's Home, in Jerusalem, will be called a House of Prayer for All Peoples. In different generations these verses could have taken on different significance. The present era, seeing world religions move from conflict and competition to increasing harmony and collaboration, provides a new framework for hearing and understanding these prophetic words.

The envisaged scope of activities of the HOPE Initiative will include at least the following areas of focus:

1. Prayer. The HOPE Center will provide a space for all religious traditions to engage in their particular activities of prayer. Praying alongside one another will thus be a hallmark of the HOPE Center.

2. Education. The HOPE Center will be a place for study. It will offer classes on the different religions as well as a variety of teaching and learning opportunities on interreligious issues and on contemporary issues, seen from the perspective of all world religions.

3. Interreligious Meetings

At present there is no site in Jerusalem that is considered the "natural" or dedicated venue for interreligious meetings, on all levels, from grassroots to high level representative interreligious encounters. As the only interreligious center in Jerusalem, the HOPE Center will provide the natural venue for such meetings.

4. Symbolic and Outreach Activities

A. As the Holy Land's only interfaith center, belonging to all the religions of the Holy Land and beyond, the HOPE Center will naturally draw international attention, and in particular draw the attention of pilgrims and visitors to the Holy Land. The desire of visiting groups to learn about the center's activities will provide an educational opportunity for sharing the center's work, but more significantly for educational sessions of an interreligious nature. In this way, the activities of the center can enrich broader publics in a direct way.

B. The HOPE Center will disseminate its programs to a broader public outside the Holy Land by means of webcasts and other modern communication means.

Sharing Reflections – We announce with sorrow and regret that Dr. Muhammad Zaki Badawi, Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders Member, Muslim community leader, teacher and theologian, died on January 24, 2006, aged 83.



Badawi, second from left, making a joint statement on September 12, 2001, with Sir Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi [of Great Britain], Lord Carey of Clifton, then the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Conner, the Archbishop of Westminster.

We would like to share with our readers an extract from the *The Times* (London) obituary:

Zaki Badawi

Zaki Badawi

AUGUST 11, 1922 - JANUARY 24, 2006

Leading voice of moderate Islam who believed passionately in interfaith dialogue and the idea of the British Muslim

FEW MEN have done as much to reconcile Islam with modernity as Zaki Badawi, the founder and principal of the Muslim College in London. And few men have played such a crucial role in attempting to find a harmonious balance between the beliefs, culture and values of Islam and secular British society. Indeed, that almost two million British Muslims are today able to define themselves as such owes much to the vision of the Egyptian-born scholar who saw, early on, that the many Muslims who settled in Britain from different parts of the Islamic world would, one day, form a significant strand of British society — which happened to be Muslim.

For years, Badawi was the unofficial — and almost lone — spokesman for Muslims in Britain who had no visible figurehead or institutional structure. Appointed in 1978 as chief imam of the London Central Mosque as well as director of the Islamic Cultural Centre, he used these influential positions in the capital to call for an Islam that fitted comfortably with British values, so that younger generations, brought up and educated in this country, would find no conflict between their faith and their civic identity as British citizens.

To him, this meant an Islam that was inclusive, moderate, tolerant and without the rancour or hostility that marked attitudes to Western values prevalent in some of the more zealous sects of Arabia and the Middle East. He therefore devoted his life in Britain to building bridges — of faith, of dialogue and of scholarship. It is thanks largely to his pioneering work in the 1990s in helping to establish a forum for the three Abrahamic faiths — Christianity, Judaism and Islam — and his tireless, behind-the-scenes work in reaching out to British society and institutions that Britain has fared so much better than other European nations with Muslim minorities in integrating its Muslim citizens. But for Badawi, Britain might have fared far less well in avoiding the social alienation that has marked relations between Muslims and the rest of society in France.

Equally, however, Badawi was an outspoken voice in upholding Muslim dignity and the true values of his faith when these came under attack. This was never more crucial than in the aftermath of the September 11 atrocities in America. And when many other leading Muslim scholars were reluctant to speak out to condemn violence or denounce terrorism, he wrote an article for *The Times* in which he insisted that taking revenge on the innocent was abhorrent to Islam. He gave a warning that no society was immune from violence, and the worst was one which donned the garb of religion. But he said the Koran emphasised that those who disturbed the peace of society and spread fear and disorder deserved the severest punishment that could be imposed.

Getting Involved – Opportunities to Contribute

For those of our readers who find the HOPE Initiative as inspirational as we do, we extend an invitation to both learn more and contribute to the project. The full HOPE proposal is available for your edification and for you to provide input. To help us cover costs, we are asking that requests for the proposal include a donation of \$20.00 or more.

Donations can be made at

<http://www.elijahinterfaith.org>

or by sending a check to our

administrative offices:

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Interreligious meditation at the Second Meeting of the Board of World Religious Leaders in Taiwan, December 2, 2005.

9554, Jerusalem

Israel

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