Dear Friend,

With mounting excitement, as we approach the Second Board of World Religious Leaders Meeting in Taiwan in less than a week, we are happy to share with you the Elijah Interfaith Institute's most recent activities. We have much to report and hope you enjoy this month's *Wisdom* e-newsletter.

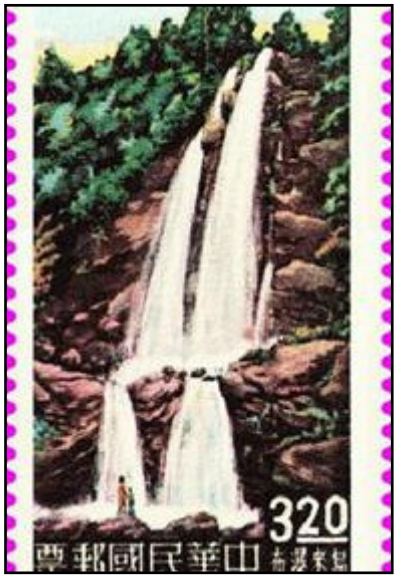
In This Edition:

- News Update – Board of World Religious Leaders Meeting in Taiwan just around the corner; Mysticism and Peace – Elijah co-sponsors conference seminar in Swiss Jesuit Center; Marrakesh Seminar – Tolerance and the Crisis of the Holy; Elijah holds first community-wide study program
- Sharing Reflections – Marrakesh Insights
- Getting Involved – A Special "Crisis of the Holy" Opportunity

Join Us in Taiwan: Live Webcast of Religious Leaders Meeting

November 28 to December 2, 2005
Visit our special webpage ("Crisis of the Holy") for more details!

News Update – Board of World Religious Leaders Meeting in Taiwan Just Around the Corner



Wu-Lai Waterfalls, Taiwan

The much anticipated Second Meeting of the Board of World Religious Leaders of the Elijah Interfaith Institute is now less than a week away. The primary topic of the Meeting is the Crisis of the Holy, a theme with which the readers of our newsletters will by now surely be familiar. In addition, the meeting, following the first meeting of the Board two years ago in Seville, Spain, will explore religious leaders concern about a major epidemic of teenage and young adult suicides sweeping Asia in the past few months.

News Update - Mysticism and Peace - Elijah co-sponsors conference seminar in Swiss Jesuit Center

The Elijah Interfaith Institute recently took a first step towards working in an area that has long held our interest - the study of mysticism as an area of encounter between religious

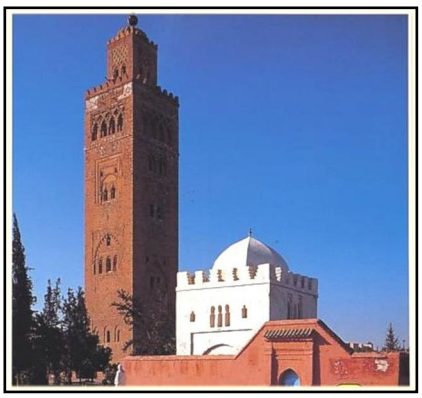
traditions. Partnering with the Lasalle Haus (Switzerland) and the Museum of World Religions (Taiwan), we designed a program that explored the relationship of mysticism and peace and in particular attempted to examine the often held assumption that the mystical dimension of religion is particularly conducive to peacemaking. Experts in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism explored the diverse understandings of mysticism as well as their potential significance for peace.

A leading question that stood at the center of our discussion: Does mysticism apply to all aspects of a religious tradition, or does it have particular affinity to some. Is it particularly relevant to concerns of piety and morality, as some suggested - in which case it could have special relevance to the concerns of peacemaking. Or does it apply to all areas of religion - ritual, ethnic, social etc., in which case its impact upon peace and peacemaking would not be as obvious. The relationship between mysticism and the different components of religion may differ from one religion to the other, thereby pointing to different relations between mysticism and peace in the different religious traditions.

The four day program constitutes an invitation to further reflection of these issues.

News Update - Marrakesh Seminar - Tolerance and the Crisis of the Holy

At the invitation of the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace, Elijah was recently involved in the planning and facilitation of a seminar that took place in Marrakesh, Morocco. The Seminar was part of a series of Muslim-Buddhist dialogues initiated by Dharma Master, Hsin Tao, Founder of the Museum of World Religions, and host of the forthcoming meeting of World Religious Leaders in Taiwan. Earlier Muslim-Buddhist dialogues include the Paris UNESCO dialogue that Elijah co-sponsored in May 2003. The Marrakesh seminar was the first Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in an Arab country and it was also the first program in which Elijah has been involved in an Arab country. Participants included Morocco's minister of religious affairs, Dr. Ahmed Taoufiq, who is also a member of our board of religious leaders, and a range of Muslim intellectuals, several of whom are affiliated with the Sufi path. The Buddhist side was represented by a Museum delegation from Taiwan and the USA. The meeting had two foci. The first was tolerance, in which the religious and theological foundations of tolerance in Buddhism and Islam were explored. The second was the "Crisis of the Holy", a theme that readers of our newsletter will recognize as a topic of ongoing discussion and concern. In this way, the meeting also served as one of a series, preparing the forthcoming Taiwan meeting. It was striking to note how close Buddhist and Muslim speakers found themselves to each other, despite profound religious differences, in their concerns for religion in today's world. The concern for discipline, the value of conquering the appetites, particularly in the face of rampant consumerism and the need to find ways of processing and integrating the



Mosque in Marrakesh

overwhelming amount of information currently available, particularly to youth, were some of the areas of convergence of concern. Beyond education and personal practice, participants discussed the value and the possibility of giving greater public and mediatic value to these traditional values, thereby making them more prominent in the public arena. This newsletter's edition of Sharing Wisdom will feature below two insights from the Marrakesh seminar. The Guerrand Hermes Foundation for Peace has been a supporter of the Crisis of the Holy think tank from its initial stages through the forthcoming Taiwan meeting.

News Update – Elijah holds first community-wide study program (picture caption: Sharon Interfaith Action Group)

While Elijah has developed a reputation for scholarly excellence and for work with world religious leadership, its vision and development plan include dissemination of its work on a communal and congregational level. Elijah was privileged to hold its first community based study program in Sharon, Mass., on November 13. The Sharon Interfaith Action Group is a coalition of almost all religious communities based in Sharon. It has a particularly active section working with youth. Rabbi Meir Sendor, a long time teacher and lecturer at Elijah programs is member of the group and facilitated the partnership with the local interfaith community. The program was Elijah's first opportunity to test out its study units on the attitudes to members of other religions. These study units were developed as part of the dissemination of the think tank papers, on this topic, prepared for our first meeting of the Board of World Religious Leaders, in Seville, 2003. The study day included special preparation and facilitation provided to local clergy, public panels, featuring local clergy and discussion groups, moderated by the youth of the Interfaith Action. This was the first time Elijah-based discussions were facilitated by high-school level participants and provides interesting indication of the possibilities of integrating this age group in future congregational work. Participants in the program acknowledged the method and content provided by Elijah took their discussion to depths they had not previously experienced.

Sharing Reflections – Marrakesh Insights

Two intriguing insights to share from the Morocco meeting…

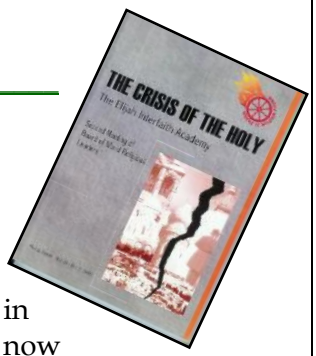
Faouzi Skali, director of the Fez Festival of Sacred Music, shared with us the following story, which is relevant to the overall concerns of relations to the other in today's globalized world. The lessons of the following story to the activities of interreligious dialogue need not be spelled out. The question speaks for itself.

Mulla Nassaroudin is a semi-legendary, semi-humorous figure. His tales, entertaining as they are, speak to profound truths. The story tells of Nassroudin's visit to the fair in the big city. Visiting the big city made Nassaroudin extremely anxious. What would be the effect of the encounter with so many strange and unknown people? More than anything, he feared he would somehow lose his sense of self, or identity, by intermingling with so many people. How could he be sure he would still be himself, following the encounter with so many unknown people? Going to bed at night, he devised a plan. He would tie a red ribbon around his big toe. If the ribbon would still be around his toe in the morning, then he would be secure in the knowledge that he was indeed himself. Fate would have it that one of his neighbors observing this odd act was puzzled by it and decided to see what

would happen if he untied the ribbon. He proceeded to do so and to tie the ribbon on the toe of one of Nassroudin's sleeping neighbors. In the morning Nassaroudin was horrified to see that the ribbon was gone and besides himself at the sight of the ribbon tied on the toe of another person. Rushing to him, he exclaimed - If you are me, then who am I?

Those engaged in interreligious dialogue are often challenged as the value of their work. To what extent can they really stem the tides of violence, raging inside their own religion. And if not, what is the purpose of like-minded people speaking to each other. In this context, it was very interesting to encounter a concept that is would naturally only emerge in a country on the border of the desert, such as Morocco. Those living on the desert's border must fight against the spreading of the desert. This is done by planting palms. The palms thus constitute the frontier that prevents further spreading of the desert. Egyptian reformers of the early 20th century already applied this notion to education in general. In the context of interreligious relations, this notion can provide a powerful metaphor of one important aspect of what dialogue and education can do. They are like planting palms, preventing the further spread of the deserts of ignorance and violence.

Getting Involved – A Special "Crisis of the Holy" Opportunity



For a limited time only we are delighted to be able to offer recipients of our newsletter the opportunity to receive a copy of "The Crisis of the Holy". This ground-breaking work in interfaith dialogue, developed by a think tank of eminent interfaith scholars, was produced especially for the Second Meeting of the Board of World Religious Leaders, being held in Taiwan, November 28rd through December 2nd, 2005. We are now offering, to all donors who contribute US $20.00 or more to the Institute's ongoing activities, a free official copy of this publication in acknowledgment of their support.

Donations can be made at http://www.elijah.org.il/participate/donate.shtml or by sending a check to our administrative offices:

The Elijah Interfaith Institute
10 Caspi Street
93554, Jerusalem
Israel

The Elijah Interfaith Institute is a 501(c) (3) organization. All donations are US tax-exempt.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein
Director
The Elijah Interfaith Institute