

Guerrand Hermes Forum for Interreligious Study of the Mystical and Spiritual Life

A Project of the Elijah Interfaith Academy

Report on Inaugural Meeting, Marrakech, 23-26 February, 2011
Presented by Alon Goshen-Gottstein



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The Forum's *Raison d'être*

Mysticism and Spirituality occupy an important place in the lives of believers of all faiths. One often hears the claim that they, particularly 'spirituality', provide meeting points between religions. Over the past 20 years, the field of spirituality has emerged in the academic world as a discipline in its own right. Practitioners of this discipline see an important role for themselves in addressing the marketplace of ideas and in introducing responsible, scholarly and critical ways of approaching spirituality. This academic discipline holds great promise for interfaith relations



Spirituality and mysticism potentially provide an important meeting place for religions in the heart of their religious life, rather than on the common battlefield of life. They hold the promise of growth and transformation through experience, inspiration and emulation. Sharing in this way suggests new ways for religions to understand themselves, thereby enriching our view of the possibilities for interfaith relations. Little work has been done on spirituality in an interfaith context, exploring its meaning for interfaith relations and carrying over the results of such study into the community. The Guerrand-Hermes Forum for the Interreligious Study of Mystical and Spiritual Life seeks to deepen reflection on the range of questions associated with both mysticism and spirituality as bridges and meeting points between religions. It seeks to do this on the theoretical level, as well as to engage in forays into the possibility of sharing practice and experience across religious traditions. The participants in the Forum, coming as they do, from the rungs of world religious leadership, are not simply academicians and theoreticians but exponents and practitioners of these traditions. In bringing them together, one seeks to not only cultivate common reflection, but also to be open to practices from other spiritual traditions and to how they may in fact either point to spiritual common ground or enrich the experience of practitioners from other traditions and their religious experience.

Marrakech Meeting - Goals and Expectations

The inaugural meeting in Marrakech sought to lay the foundation for the long term work of the Forum. The first meeting of the Guerrand-Hermes Forum for Interreligious Study of the Mystical and Spiritual Life, accordingly set three goals for itself:

- a. To form a community of scholars and religious leaders who will engage the issues of this particular forum over the coming years.
- b. To forge a common conceptual language acceptable for all the participants coming from different religious traditions, through which these issues will be engaged.
- c. To establish an agenda and a program for the Forum's work in the coming years.

Participants

Participants at the meeting were drawn in the main from the two existing bodies of the Elijah Interfaith Institute: the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders and the Elijah Interfaith Academy. Elijah has the distinct honor of bringing together scholars and leaders from all religions, worldwide, in pioneering conversation, reflection and dialogue, addressing the theological and theoretical dimensions of the interfaith reality. The Forum is intended as a sub-group of the two Elijah bodies mentioned above. It seeks to bring together a select group within those larger bodies as a specific interest group, that seeks to deepen, over the long run, reflection within one domain, that is more closely related to broader spiritual concerns, than to specific contemporary social challenges.

Broadly speaking, half the participants at the Marrakech meeting were either members of the EBWRL or previous participants at its meetings. The other half were scholars in the field. Most of them had worked previously with Elijah, through one or more projects of the Elijah Interfaith Academy. For a small number of participants this was their first active engagement with the work of the Elijah Interfaith Institute.

A full list of participants is attached in an Appendix.



Methodology

Prior to the meeting, participants had been asked to write a short position paper, answering the following questions:

1. Are mysticism and spirituality significant common ground, between different religions?
2. What position do they occupy within the overall economy of each of the traditions?
3. What possibilities do we have to appeal to them as ways of advancing relations?
4. Do they make sharing and borrowing between the traditions possible, and are these legitimate, in the eyes of the traditions themselves?
5. Is it preferable, for purposes of our Forum, to focus upon mysticism or spirituality and how is the relationship between the two conceived?
6. What practices may be shared, how can these be shared within this group and possibly beyond it?
7. What questions should be tackled as part of a responsible exposition of these issues within interreligious context, particularly one associated with leadership?

Overall, the questions may be divided into two: questions exploring the theoretical significance of mysticism and spirituality and questions concerned with the possibility of sharing and borrowing practices between traditions. This reflects the dual emphasis of the Forum, as stated above.

The position papers composed by participants were disseminated among them several weeks in advance of the meeting. A synthesis to the papers was composed by Alon Goshen-Gottstein, in an attempt to suggest some preliminary commonalities and conclusions. The papers did not serve as the focus for discussion at the Marrakech meeting. Rather, they informed our conversations as background materials. More specifically, the meeting's agenda and the questions it sought to resolve were drawn up, in light of these position papers. This was done by the project's coordinator, Dr. Piotr Sikora, together with Dr. Goshen-Gottstein. Looking back at the meeting, one can say that the core questions that were posed to participants prior to the meeting, did receive tentative answers through our discussions, as shall be suggested below.

The actual methodology for the meeting was determined, in the main, by its purpose as a planning meeting. It thus sought to achieve the three goals spelled out above, in light of the preparatory work done by participants. It did not seek to engage in the actual work of sharing insights concerning the mystical and spiritual life, as these are articulated in the different traditions. Some of this did happen, either as the conversations unfolded, or in small groups and informal settings. Nevertheless, as this was not a direct goal of the meeting, the format was also not conducive to such sharing. Most of the conversations took place within the broader group, numbering about 15-20 people (the numbers vary because of the presence of observers, who were not part of the core group). Some conversations took place in small groups, that were divided according to interests, and which sought to work out specific issues that arose in the plenary.



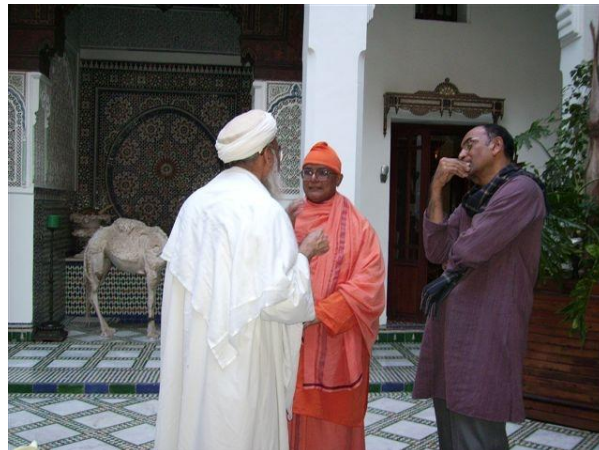
Thematic Unfolding of Meeting

Day 1

The first day sought to establish what we mean by the terms ‘mysticism’ and ‘spirituality’, how these relate to the term ‘religion’ and how we might best describe our intentions in designing the work of the new Forum. It is recognized that multiple definitions exist for both terms. A great wealth of understanding was found in the background position papers and this wealth was also reflected in conversations. Despite the diversity of theoretical positions on these questions, it was noteworthy that some kind of consensus did emerge as different positions were articulated regarding mysticism, spirituality and their relationship to conventional religion. It was recognized that there is not one correct and proper way of using these terms. Rather, we seek to agree upon a certain way of using these terms that will inform our future work. The consensus that emerged was helpful in suggesting a way of using these terms. According to this suggestion, we may begin by the *via negativa*, suggesting how mysticism and spirituality are different from other parts of religion. There are various dimensions to religion against which we may present mysticism and spirituality. These include the institutional dimension of religion and its social structures. They also include the various performances of religion, especially as these are mandated by the legal structures of the religion. This latter point was particularly obvious for religions that structure the religious life and practices of their believers by means of law, such as Judaism and Islam. But it also emerged as meaningful for Hinduism, where a strong ritual tradition exists, and where similar dynamics can be identified in relation to, and in opposition to, such a ritual framework. Thus, mysticism and spirituality are something other than these public and external dimensions and indeed they frequently appear within the tradition as an opposition and alternative to these exterior dimensions.

‘Spirituality’ was accordingly identified as that movement that takes one from the external, outward, social towards the internal, purposeful and ultimately transformative dimension of the religious life. One way of capturing its importance is by appeal to the heart, in a continuing movement towards the heart, as it informs the broader meaning of the entire religious life. Spirituality would thus be the entirety of processes, intentions, actions and methods by means of which one seeks to move beyond external performance to what is perceived as the core of the life of the religion. Spirituality may otherwise be presented as the totality of the path toward the ultimate goal of the religion.

According to such an understanding, ‘mysticism’ is what one arrives at, upon reaching the core. It is often characterized by a realigning of balance and perspective, where the actor encounters something beyond and is, or feels herself, no longer exclusively responsible for what transpires in the spiritual movement. Mysticism is accordingly an intensification of the spiritual life, as it reaches a point of encounter, or as it reaches a goal, the goal. ‘Mysticism’ and ‘spirituality’ may thus be placed on a continuum, with mysticism as the intensification and fulfillment of the path, entered through spirituality. According to this description, both mysticism and spirituality are domains in which the Forum should engage. As they form a continuum, they cannot be strictly separated from one another.



The working definition proposed here was found to be helpful, possibly congenial, even for thinkers and practitioners of traditions for whom these were not native terms, who could approach their traditional materials in light of the categories and terms defined here. In fact, one of the main issues with which we struggled was the very use of these terms, and the concern as to whether they were overly influenced by the Christian framework, wherein they were originally conceived. What was refreshing about our discussions was the fact that many of the voices that contributed to the consensus came from non-Christian traditions, thereby making the consensus itself an interreligious process, rather than the oft-feared alternative, according to which all traditions conform to the standards, terms and definitions of one governing tradition, usually Christianity. The definition we arrived at relied on structural similarities in the process of the spiritual and mystical life, rather than on the specific content of faith of the traditions. This allowed us to address concerns voiced by Buddhist participants, who could not relate to 'God' as the goal and focus of the spiritual and mystical process. By identifying a common structural process, we could identify what it was we were talking about, across our traditions, thereby identifying significant commonality, while placing aside the many divisions that distinguish one faith from another and, above all, the distinction between theistic and non-theistic traditions.

Recognizing the structural similarities between the religions allowed us to conclude that spirituality and mysticism can also be approached as important expressions of what it means to be human. This means that we can approach spirituality and mysticism not only from the angle of the faith content and how they are understood by each of the traditions but also from the angle of the deeper meaning of our common humanity.

The definition at which we arrived had an important advantage, or affinity, from the perspective of the Elijah



Institute. Elijah's logo is a circle, with spokes working their way to the common center of the wheel. As one of the participants was presenting the above understanding of religion, spirituality and mysticism, he inadvertently drew Elijah's logo. Religion was represented by the outer rim of the circle. The spokes leading inwards were identified with spirituality. The heart of the circle was mysticism. While this does not resolve the question of whether the different religions, using different spiritual means, meet at a common core, it does suggest an analogous process, whereby the different religions follow a similar structure, by means of which they approach what they recognize as the center.

Elijah's logo is actually of such a circle on fire, suggesting dynamism and rotation of the wheel. This was itself an important dimension of our conversations. It was recognized that the circles we had been drawing, in an attempt to gain clarity on the various uses of the terms, were all static, and that we were in fact talking of processes. Accordingly, the question was posed as to whether it was appropriate to talk of 'mysticism and spirituality'. As noted in some of the background papers, long before these terms were nouns, they served as adjectives of the spiritual life. In an attempt to capture the dynamism of the process, we thus wondered whether it might not be more suitable to the nature of our enterprise to talk of 'the mystical and spiritual life', rather than of 'mysticism and spirituality'. In an attempt to do justice to the dynamic nature of mysticism and spirituality and to the fact that they are processes, rather than 'isms', we have chosen to refer to them from hereon as 'mystical and spiritual life'. Reference to the name of the Forum, as in the title of the present report, has been adjusted accordingly.

Day 2

Day 2 sought to identify our target groups, and whom a project such as ours could serve. We identified four possible target audiences.

These were:

- A. Addressing society and its ills.
- B. Addressing members of other religions, in an attempt to recognize commonalities.
- C. Addressing those who are spiritual, but not religious.
- D. Addressing members of our own religions, whose practices lack spiritual vitality.



We broke into small discussion circles to examine each of these four areas. Following the reports from the small groups, the plenary discussed each of the potential target audiences. The following is a summary of what the day's discussions yielded.

- A. Addressing society and its ills. This was one of the more surprising of our conversations. We had not anticipated this dimension in any of our preparatory work, but it emerged as a strong consensus. Mysticism and spirituality are important not simply within the religions and between them, but also in relation to society at large. Society is experiencing a variety of crises. Consumerism and materiality are foremost among them. Tapping into the spiritual life allows us to address some of the root causes of many contemporary ills.
- B. Addressing members of other religions, in an attempt to recognize commonalities. Another way of capturing this point was by thinking of combating extremism within each of our traditions, by appeal to the spiritual and mystical dimensions of the traditions. The implied assumption here, which is the hypothesis that informs our very Forum, is that people who have spiritual and mystical lives share something in common, which allows them to recognize each other, leading to collaboration and inspiration on the one hand, and providing an alternative to forms of religious extremism that are insular and have the capacity to generate religious violence. As this touches on the theoretical foundations of the Forum, we spent much time reflecting on whether our hypothesis was justified. In particular, we reflected on whether the testimony of history supports the claim that religious leaders and practitioners identified with mysticism and spirituality are indeed less violent. It was acknowledged that the matter is complex, and in part dependent on broader historical contexts. St. Bernard and his role in the crusades might be a good case in point. However, Muslim participants

also put forth the argument that no Muslim mystic was ever the source of a religious movement in Islam that turned violent (nevertheless making a distinction between religious violence and liberation movements that draw on religious resources). One of the important contributions of the discussion was the fact that sharing and borrowing have taken place between religions. This has, in fact, been a frequent occurrence. Where we find such borrowing we must assume commonality in the spiritual life, which permits such sharing. While it would have been beyond the capacity of our Forum to make definitive pronouncements on this matter, we did conclude that for practical purposes we will continue to consider this a working hypothesis and we will remain open to testing it in future work.

C.

Addressing those who are spiritual, but not religious. Many of the position papers that were prepared in advance of the meeting attempted to address this increasing phenomenon. One of the challenges to a forum of people engaged in the study and practice of the mystical and spiritual life was whether they have a unique message to offer to those who claim to be practicing spirituality, outside the framework of religion. Specifically, would a consensus emerge recommending the spiritual and mystical life be practiced with the support and protection of religion? Surprisingly, our conversations suggested that this is not the direction the group wishes to take. The conversation represented a mixture of acceptance of forms of practice of spirituality, divorced from religion, and a recognition that in any event, those who are practicing in this way would not be receptive to an alternative vision, and hence should not serve as a potential audience. Our own testimony may end up inspiring those who belong to this camp, but they should not be considered our primary audience.

D. Addressing members of our own religions, whose practice lacks in spiritual vitality. It was interesting to learn that many of the Forum's participants shared a sense of either being on the margins of their traditions or of struggling with standard or mainline expressions of their tradition. What put them in that situation was their attempt to live their tradition spiritually, while large sections of the membership of their traditions, probably their majority, did not engage in a similar process. It was accordingly realized that our project could have impact on mainline practitioners, who might be inspired by the examples, teachings and resources that emerge from our project. However, just as in the case of those who are spiritual, without being religious, it was felt this should not be our primary target group. We noted the difficulties in approaching members of our traditions with suggestion that their observance falls short of the spiritual ideals of the tradition. This is an ongoing battle within each of the traditions, and this battle is systemic to all religions. Consequently, while there may be outcomes of our project that address the 'orthopraxic' rank and file of our religious communities, they are not our direct intended audience.



Day 3

Day 3 focused on the products we seek to achieve and how our process might advance. We considered several media and different kinds of output for our project. While there is room for academic papers, it was felt that making available resources from our traditions, that shed light and offer insight on the spiritual and mystical life, were of greater value. Elijah proposed as a model the educational units that have been put into use for other projects. These could help deliver the suggested spiritual toolkit approach. These feature primary texts, along with reflections and applications by the authors, as well as pointers and questions for continuing study and conversation. The spiritual resources would be informed by scholarship, but scholarship would not be the end goal. Elijah also shared work underway for creating databases of texts, with multiple commentaries, that allow dynamic and interactive study of classical texts. It was suggested that focusing on textual resources, drawn from the different religious traditions, would serve the long term purposes of our forum, better than academic papers. Over a number of years, a spiritual resource library would be created, that could be accessed either through the internet, or through small and inspirational individual tractates, each devoted to a core theme, reflecting the approaches of multiple religious traditions.

Our conversation then moved to the next level, where we tried to identify what might be topics in which we should engage, with special attention to what might be good starting points for the project. Close to 300 various, though clearly overlapping, topics were suggested in the first round. Following rounds helped narrow the topics to some preferred ones. In view of the fact that we were planning the first year of work, and that we seek to involve scholars present in continuing work, we felt it was best to choose one or two topics, so that we can be successful in modeling how the project might advance, and how scholars can collaborate between now and the next meeting.



The two topics chosen were:

- a. Entering the spiritual life - what are the dynamics and processes that drive and inspire the entry into the spiritual life? How does one begin the movement from the outer rim of the circle, representing external religious practice, to the inner heart of the circle? How do our religions conceive of this movement? Our religions have various terms to designate this process, such as *metanoia*, *teshuvah*, entering the stream and more. Working on sources that focus on this point of transition seemed an appropriate starting point for the actual work of our Forum.
- b. The spiritual life and daily life. Many suggested that this might provide an important point for reflecting on the spiritual life. How is the spiritual life expressed in, balanced with, or otherwise related to, daily life? What are practices that ground it, routines and rhythms that support it and wise counsel that facilitate the integration of spiritual and, or spiritual in, daily life.

In addition to the study and gathering of sources, some felt that it would be appropriate for our project to offer joint workshops and teachings on the theme of spirituality. Questions were raised concerning what the message might be, and how to avoid the possibility of such workshops simply being spiritual supermarkets, allowing the individual to shop at any religion she likes. Some participants suggested fora that already exist, wherein such collaborative teachings might take place. For example, Sheikh Kabbani welcomed the idea that the teaching camps that his organization run might feature such a collaborative workshop. An additional idea that was raised was holding interreligious retreats for religious leaders. Workshops targeted at this group would avoid some of the difficulties mentioned in the discussion. The Good Heart Seminars with the Dalai Lama could provide a possible model (teaching, meditation, commenting on one another's scriptures). Finally, members signed up to working groups, on one of the above mentioned topics and on the idea of collaborative spiritual teaching.

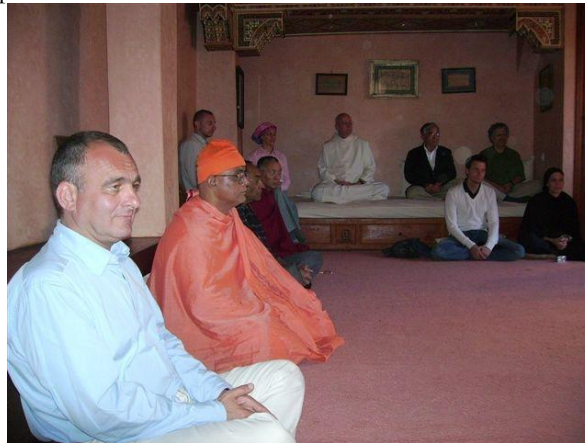


Day 4

Day 4 was devoted to sharing of spiritual practices. We had engaged in such sharing at various points throughout our meeting. Friday was particularly intense in this way. We joined Sheikh Kabbani as he made a pilgrimage to the seven saints of Marrakech. It is a tradition of old that the visitor to Marrakech first visits these seven saints and only then takes up his business. Nowadays, non Muslims are not allowed to enter Muslim religious sites. It therefore required special permission from Morocco's minister of religious affairs (Dr. Ahmed Toufiq, a member of Elijah's Board of World Religious Leaders and a close personal friend of Mr. Hermes), for the entire interreligious assembly to join in this pilgrimage.



Following this visit, participants shared in the celebration of the Shabbat, first in a rooftop ceremony, followed by a traditional ritual Shabbat meal. Saturday morning featured a Jewish ceremony of singing and chanting from the Psalms and a session of Tibetan Buddhist meditation. One should mention that during the seminar we also practiced Dhikr with Sheikh Kabbani, together with a mixture of scriptural and silent meditation, led by Fr. Laurence Freeman. And one must not forget that a constant meditative dimension was added through the musical interludes offered by Rabbi Daniel Kohn's clarinet. These opened and closed most sessions, creating a space of inspiration and longing that reminded us of the higher aspirations that inform the lives of all participants in the Forum.



With all this we were in a position to begin assessing the possibilities of sharing practices across religious traditions. This was the focus of a summary conversation, prior to finishing the conference at midday on Day 4. The conclusions of this conversation are tentative, in part because we had lost about 40% of our participants, who had to catch flights back home. The conversation suggested that sharing across traditions was far more complicated than we had previously considered. In fact, what seemed to work better was when certain practices or meditations were extracted from the traditions and made available to others, rather than when the actual core rituals were shared. This of course poses significant challenges. Does the act of sharing practices corrupt the process, making it something other than what practitioners within the tradition actually

practice? How can sharing of practices take place responsibly, and what is the appropriate dosage for exposure of the outsider to the riches of a spiritual tradition? The questions that arose from this discussion will continue to inform our work. They will have to be dealt with in any attempt to create a common workshop. It is fair to say that the conclusions that we reached on the intellectual level and concerning intellectual outputs were firmer than the conclusions reached concerning sharing practices. In fact, we came to the realization that the question of sharing practices and the appropriate means and boundaries for doing so should be the focus of an entire meeting, which we hope to hold in the future.

Revisiting our Founding Questions

As a way of summarizing the content of our discussions, I would like to revisit the seven questions that participants attempted to answer in their position papers. I shall not refer here to the answers provided in those concept papers, but only offer very short responses to these questions as these arose from our group discussions.

1. Q: Are mysticism and spirituality significant common ground, between different religions?

A: This remains a reasonable working hypothesis and provides a starting point for further reflection. We shall continue to revisit this issue in the course of the continuing work of the Forum.

2. Q: What position do they occupy within the overall economy of each of the traditions?

A: It was recognized that all traditions have similar structural dynamics where the spiritual and mystical lives grow from the broader practices of the religion, supported by the religion's social institutions. We also reached a consensus that it is possible to describe these as the heart or the core of the tradition, and the point to which the different traditions lead to. The metaphor of movement to the center of the wheel captures this consensus well.

3. Q: What possibilities do we have to appeal to them as ways of advancing relations?

A: The answer to this question is an extension of the answer to question no. 1. If we follow the hypothesis that the mystical and spiritual lives, as they are lived in different traditions, share structural similarities, and in many, perhaps most cases, also important substantive similarities, then study of the mystical and spiritual life can provide a means for increasing understanding and advancing relations between practitioners of different faiths.

4. Q: Do they make sharing and borrowing between the traditions possible, and are these legitimate, in the eyes of the traditions themselves?

A: Sharing and borrowing are certainly possible. As noted, they have taken place time and again throughout history. The question of legitimacy is, however, more complex. It hinges both on the question of legitimacy that a given tradition might proffer upon sharing its own resources, as well as on the question of authenticity of such sharing. Our preliminary discussion of this matter suggested it was complex and that we had not yet attained sufficient clarity with respect to what works and what does not work in this domain. One of the issues we will have to revisit is whether sharing and borrowing can be justified based on structural similarities alone, or whether they also require sharing of the substantive faith content of the religions.

5. Q: Is it preferable, for purposes of our Forum, to focus upon mysticism or spirituality and how is the relationship between the two conceived?

A: We agreed to continue to refer to both of them, with the understanding that spirituality designates the entire process of the directed, motivated and often internal approach to the spiritual life, while mysticism designates special points of contact, revelation, transformation and crossing of boundaries, wherein human action is subsumed in the work of the divine, or the trans-human. Given this working definition, we should continue to speak of both, or as we suggested alternatively, of the **mystical and spiritual life**.

6. Q: What practices may be shared, how can these be shared within this group and possibly beyond it?

A: We will have to continue exploring this question, in light of the complex experiences we had during our seminar. One tentative answer might be to distinguish between core religious practices and between specific meditations and exercises that can be more readily transported across traditions.

7.Q: What questions should be tackled as part of a responsible exposition of these issues within interreligious context, particularly one associated with leadership?

A: Our conversation did not explicitly address this issue, as formulated here. However, the discussion of intended audiences affords a good example of a responsible approach to this issue, in an attempt to discern who might best benefit from our project.

Next Steps

- a. The present report constitutes the first step, to follow our meeting.
- b. Following it, a steering committee for the project will plan more specifically the work of scholars between meetings. The steering committee that was formed during the meeting consists of Philip Sheldrake, Ruben Habito, Anantand Rambachan, Piotr Sikora and myself. If any participant wishes to join it, kindly let me know.
- c. After putting the writing assignments in focus, scholars will be solicited to select texts, relevant to the chosen topics, and to comment on them. These texts will also be commented upon by scholars from other religions, either in preparation for the next meeting or during that meeting. These texts and commentaries will provide the core of the next meeting, and theoretical statements on these issues will grow out of the next meeting, following common study. It is recognized that the next meeting, and subsequent meetings, will be much more in the nature of 'sharing wisdom', in accordance with Elijah's tradition of holding meeting. This will also allow the inspirational content of our subject to be closer to the surface. Some of the tensions attendant upon an initial planning meeting involving multiple participants, with much of the work happening in plenary, will thereby be avoided in future work of the Forum.
- d. The 'workshop' group will hold its own consultations, on the feasibility of running joint workshops.
- e. We will also be working on a short educational video, or a series of short videos, that capture the highlights of our meeting, and use them as a platform for continuing study. Such study will be encouraged through the networks with which members of the Forum are already associated.
- f. Participants will be invited to revise their concept papers, which will be published on the Elijah's/the Forum's website.

With regard to our next meeting, there is a good likelihood that we will be joined by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness has accepted the invitation and it is now a matter of working out logistics, timing and location.

Host and Hospitality

The entire meeting and the Forum could not be envisioned without the person, generosity and inspiration of Simon Xavier Hermes Guerrand. Our host provided much more than just the means for holding our meeting. His input and substantive contribution to the meeting were constant. In the most real way, he created a spiritual space for our deliberations. The meeting took place in his home, and the beauty and inspiration that greet you at every corner of his Marrakech home are testimony to his person and to his own artistic and spiritual vision. If sacred space is a fundamental dimension of the religious life, we could almost say that the space wherein our meeting took place was a condition for its success.

Our host's connections in Morocco enriched our meeting in major ways. We were privileged to have the song troupe of the nearby mosque perform for us one evening. As noted, through his efforts on behalf of our group, we were granted special permission to go on a joint pilgrimage to the tombs of Marrakech's seven saints.

All participants in the Forum were grateful for the gracious hospitality and for the inspirational settings in which the inaugural meeting was held.

Summary of Accomplishments

The inaugural meeting of the Guerrand Hermes Forum for Interreligious Study of the Mystical and Spiritual Life achieved the following:

1. Creation of a community of scholars, committed to a common vision of working in this field.
2. Creation of steering committee to plan ongoing work.
3. Arriving at common definitions of terms and a common language by means of which future work can proceed.
4. Identifying target groups the project will serve.
5. Identifying the concrete products we seek to collectively produce.
6. Identifying the themes and projects for immediate work that best serve our long term goals.
7. Enrollment of scholars into working groups that will continue the work of the Forum, in preparation for its next meeting.
8. Identifying important questions for future deliberation, particularly with regards to the challenges of sharing spiritual practices.
9. Above all - this meeting allowed new relationships and new friendships to be forged. People, touched by people, and their spiritual lives, are the best guarantee for continuing and productive work of our Forum.



Appendix: List of Participants

Host

Mr Simon Xavier-Hermes (Morocco)

Dr Patrice Brodeur (Canada) representing Guerrand Hermes Peace Foundation

Representing the Elijah Interfaith Institute

Rabbi Dr Alon Goshen-Gottstein (Israeli) Executive Director, Forum Chair

Dr Piotr Sikora (Poland) Forum Co-Chair

Ms Peta Jones Pellach (Israel) Director of Educational Activities

Ms Therese Andrevon Gottstein (Israel) Member of Elijah Think-Tank

Invited Scholars

Swami Atmapriyananda (India)

Fr Laurence Freeman (UK)

Rabbi Dr Elliot Ginsburg (USA)

Professor Ruben Habito (USA)

Dr Muzzafar Iqbal (Canada)

Sheikh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani (USA)

Rabbi Daniel Kohn (Israel)

Metropolitan Nikitas Lulias (USA)

Dr Hedieh Mirahmadi (USA)

Dr Haviva Pedaya (Israel)

Professor Anantanand Rambachan (USA)

Professor Philip Sheldrake (UK)

Geshe Tashi Tsering (UK)

Observers/ Other Contributors

Mr Matthias Beisswenger (Germany)

Mr Abel Damoussi (Morocco)

Dr Eric Thevenet (France)