

Jerusalem Interfaith Forum's Meeting on Forgiveness, Repentance and Revival

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Jerusalem, Israel -- Twenty-four members of the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum were warmly welcomed in the sukkah of Rabbi Yaakov Luft, who dedicated the meeting to his late wife, Ariel Luft. Because the meeting was in the month of September, when Jews, Muslims and Druze are celebrating New Year days with prayers and introspection, the subject of the meeting was forgiveness, repentance and revival. It was also the occasion to observe UN International Day of Peace.

Following opening greetings and remarks by the director of the forum, Mrs. Miri Kamar, the religious leaders were invited to contribute their insights to the discussion.

Rabbi Luft mentioned the importance of repenting and forgiving every day, explaining that the Jewish New Year holy days include Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, to assure we remember the importance of the subject. He also spoke of the vision of the Garden of Eden, to which we must aspire.

Father Zion, head of the Ethiopian Church in Israel, which is also observing holidays of new beginnings, talked about the importance of becoming closer to God through committing to improve ourselves in the coming year.

Sheik Samir Aasi, former imam of the Al-Jazzar mosque in Akre, emphasized the importance of respecting the other as part of respecting God. Through prayer, receiving the forgiveness of God may not be so difficult for us, but to receive the forgiveness of our neighbor or friend is more difficult. Sheik Aasi

mentioned that to stand purely in front of God, Muslims going to Mecca must cleanse themselves by going to the people whom they have hurt and asking for their forgiveness.



Rabbanit Ester Bar-Dea talked about the need to overcome the evil parts of the ego in order to forgive and repent, in addition to empowering the good parts of the ego that enable us to be creative and productive.

The Jerusalem Forum was hosting young representatives of Japanese religions and traditions, in particular Buddhism. This was very uplifting and refreshing for the participants because the Forum usually focuses on the Abrahamic religions.

Rabbi Menachem spoke at the end of the discussion and expressed his gratitude to the gathering. He said that we must know and respect the "other" as they are, not trying to change them or control them; therefore, meetings such as this one are very important.

Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, secretary general of UPF-Israel, read the following words of UPF Founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon:

"If your friend or even your spouse commits any mistakes, you must feel like forgiving him, saying to yourself that "It is my responsibility to have let her or him do that." Every sin, every mistake of theirs is nothing if you take the responsibility for that. On the other hand, those who sinned or committed mistakes must be frank in confessing their sins and mistakes. Do you understand what I mean? From this viewpoint, you must criticize and analyze yourselves. Are you like that? This is a great thing, and this is the knack of how to become a godlike man."
-- From "Human Relationships," March 9, 1975

The discussion concluded with the remarks of Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, the president of UPF-Israel, who referred to the words above and emphasized the vertical common point of all religions, the parental figure of God, who makes us all. We are "One family under God." As brothers and sisters sharing the same parent, we can repent and forgive, with our eyes and hearts tuned to God.