

*We're a part  
of the global  
community,  
merging our  
personal paths  
with the  
rediscovery of  
a path from  
the past.*

# Step by Step on the Path of Abraham

Kathy Hearn

**I**n November 2006, I was blessed to be a part of a very special and unique journey to the Middle East. We were there to support the Abraham Path Initiative, a long-term project to create a safe, beautiful and inspiring walking route through the countries of the region, retracing the footsteps of the prophet Abraham—the father of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

At its heart, the project is about fostering an alliance of civilizations above and beyond, in spite of and because of the human history of conflict and strife among the cultures, religions and traditions of the region.

Similar to El Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, the Abraham Path will invite and support personal pilgrimages, tourism, economic development, the restoration of sacred sites, cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Created and led by negotiator Bill Ury of the Global Negotiation Project at Harvard University, the Abraham Path Initiative is focused on establishing a historical route for travelers and pilgrims that will last for generations.

Our delegation for the November trip numbered twenty people representing ten different countries. It was an honor to be among this eclectic group of scholars and religious, civic, academic and business leaders gathered together for the purposes of travel and study. I was the only female spiritual leader in the delegation, and was there representing Religious Science and the Association for Global New Thought. The purpose of our trip was to meet with residents of Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel and Palestine, to share with them the vision and intentions of the Abraham Path, and to learn from them how we could help inspire and assist the opening of the route. In meetings in Sanliurfa, Amman, Bethlehem and Jerusalem we consulted with deputy

prime ministers, ministers of tourism, governors, mayors, parliamentarians, university presidents, scholars, muftis, patriarchs, imams, bishops, rabbis, business leaders and heads of many non-governmental organizations. We listened with openness to both praise for the project and appreciation for the possibilities of the path as well as to frank discussions of the significant obstacles to its realization. These challenges were not new to our ears—they fill the headlines we read and the news reports we hear daily about the Middle East. Yet hearing them spoken by the people who personally live these tensions every day brought them home to our hearts. These difficulties include historical struggles and impasses of culture and religion; conflict and violence in the region; the war in Iraq and controversy surrounding the United States' presence there; volatile and changing political situations; nonrecognition of Israel and disenfranchisement of the Palestinian people. During the six hundred miles of our travel, which stretched from Harran, Turkey, where Abraham heard the call to go forth, to his burial spot at Al-Kahlil in the West Bank, we experienced the challenges of crossing multiple international boundaries. We faced within ourselves the perceptions

of insecurity which deter visitors from touring the region. We found ourselves confronted by our own prejudices of culture, politics and religion. We had long bus rides through stretches of inhospitable desert. We wondered how a walk of this route could be done.

And yet there was so much more, all of which had to do with the spirit of the prophet Abraham and how it lives within the hearts of the people. Many of us do not have a great familiarity with Abraham, yet he is deeply loved and acknowledged by the peoples of the Middle East. And while the favorite stories of him vary among Jews, Christians and Muslims, the core values he represents—inclusiveness, respect, faith and hospitality—are shared by all three traditions. One story told about Abraham is that his tent was open on all four sides to welcome visitors from all directions. While governments and politics of the Middle East generate separation and distance, the people we met throughout our journey lived and expressed this welcoming hospitality. During a particularly tense border crossing, a young man also making the crossing turned to me and said very simply and clearly, “Welcome to Syria.” His words were full-hearted and warm without a trace of irony or the subtle anti-

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American sentiment I have experienced in other countries. Warmth, connection, friendliness and giving were our experiences everywhere in the streets, shops and holy sites. We learned not to admire any article of clothing a Middle Easterner was wearing because we would quickly be given it!

Our journey took us to extraordinary places. We began in Harran, Turkey, where Abraham initiated his walk upon hearing God's instruction to: "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the place that I will show you...and I will make of you a great nation...and you will be blessed...and all the people of the earth will bless themselves by you." We spent the night in a sixth-century monastery, Deir Mar Musa, in the Syrian desert; visited the Citadel and shopped the souks of Aleppo; meditated in the Ummayad Mosque in Damascus where John the Baptist is buried; sat in silence at the birthplace of Jesus in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem; prayed at the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem; and walked through Hebron to the burial place of Abraham.

We became friends with one another, eating lots of hummus,

eggplant and olives, and moving harmoniously as a team. We often spoke our gratitude for such an amazing experience. Each of us on the journey had, in our own way, listened to the voice of God and gone forth from our native land and into the unknown. Our faith and willingness were bearing fruit. Each one of us was a pilgrim being guided, changed and blessed by the experience.

The outcomes of the journey were encouraging. Many projects that could begin to make the Abraham Path real and practical on the ground were suggested and are in discussion in each country. The leaders with whom we met in Turkey are planning an Abraham week in the fall of this year with symposia and a walk from Sanliurfa, where there are many sites dedicated to Abraham, to Harran. Those in Jordan support the ongoing mapping and way-marking of the route through their country so that youth from around the world can participate in a walk, also this coming fall. The Association for Global New Thought will continue to encourage local community walks in the spirit of Abraham from churches to synagogues to mosques around the world.

The Abraham Path Initiative has reminded me of the power of

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an idea to manifest in human experience regardless of history and circumstance. One of the great gifts of Science of Mind to those who resolutely practice it is the deepening realization that divine reality is ever ready to become personally real to us the moment we give our attention to it. Ernest Holmes counseled us to turn away from appearances and know a greater truth than that which we are experiencing in any given moment. This practice is not to deny the facts, challenges and sufferings of human life but to shift our perception

and acceptance to the greater good that is our divine birthright and by the creative power of thought to bring that into being. In such a way we cease focusing on and endlessly re-creating that which has been. The Middle East has been and is now a place of great conflict.

And yet I know that over time, step-by-step and mile by mile, people of different nationalities, politics and religions will walk that land together in the spirit of reconciliation and understanding toward sustainable harmony, justice and joy. •



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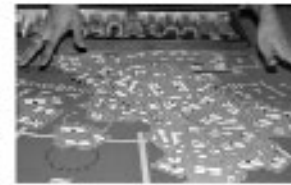
Professor Michael Starbird knows the secret of making numbers come alive to nonspecialists. He picks intriguing, useful, and entertaining examples, with questions such as: When did the most recent common ancestor of all humans live? How much should you pay for a stock option? What do you do on third down with long yardage?

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The mathematical arrangement of probability has been in the 17th century when a French gambler, Antoine Gombaud, sought the advice of mathematicians Pierre Fermat and Blaise Pascal about a game King game.

amusing St. Petersburg paradox, involving a simple lottery in which the expected value is infinite; something has to be wrong, but can you guess what it is?

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