

# Words of welcome to Prof. Stephen Hawking

by Rayek Rizek, December 12, 2006

Good morning, boker tov, sabah elkhare.

Welcome, Ahlan Wasahlan, Brokhim Habaeem

My name is Rayek Rizek. I come originally from Nazareth and I have joined this Community 23 years ago. Presently I am serving in the position of the mayor of Neve Shalom/Wahat Assalam. I was asked by my physicist friend and neighbor Cobi Sonnenschein to welcome you - a suggestion which I have accepted with much joy.

Dear Mr. Stephen Hawking, it is a great pleasure for me personally and for all the inhabitants of Wahat Assalam/Neve Shalom to have you as a guest between us.

I know that you are here today to share with the respected crowd your most recent thoughts, and I know that they are very impatient for that, but please allow me after welcoming all of you just five minutes to introduce you to some facts about my community.

**First**; this is the only place in Israel Palestine where Jews and Palestinian Christians and Moslems chose to live together in order to provide an example for all people about what could be possible in spite of the differences if we are willing to recognize each other as equals.

**Second**; Neve Shalom/Wahat Assalam would not have been here as it is today if it was not for one great, courageous and humble person by the name of Bruno Hussar the founder of this huge project from nothing.

**Third**; Wahat Assalam/Neve Shalom would not have materialized if it was not for the unusual generosity of the brothers of the nearby Trappist monastery of Latrun who donated the land.

**Fourth**; Neve Shalom/Wahat Assalam would not have been a reality if it was not for the commitment and financial and moral support of many friends within the country and abroad.

**Fifth**; Wahat Assalam/Neve Shalom would not have been a reality if it was not for the courage of those people who chose to join Bruno Hussar in spite of all the excuses, which most people either consciously or unconsciously shackle themselves with in order to cover up for their weakness and hesitancy.

These are people who have chosen to take the lead and to live the peace now since they cannot tolerate anymore the excuses of the politicians.

I do not claim that we are so perfect but at least we have taken the challenge, and I am sure that we as parents have made the best choice for our children who play together not as Jews and Palestinians but as friends.

Our story here is not only about a community where Jews and Palestinians live and bring up their children together, but it is also about a place that has been offering the chance for tens of thousands of people formally and informally to meet, to talk, to share and to learn about each other worries and wishes.

This has been possible through the different institutions and facilities which we have founded through the past thirty years, such as the bilingual primary school, the school for peace, the spiritual centre, the guest House and also the swimming pool. In addition we have been holding and hosting many other activities and events where the last was the concert of Roger Waters of the Pink Floyd which was held here on June this year with the presence of more than seventy thousand people.

Dear Mr. Hawking: You are one of those people who has not only been teaching us and also sharing with us your thoughts about our mysterious universe and about our place in it, but also about what a person can achieve in spite of all the difficulties. This is what I believe is what we here in Neve Shalom/Wahat Assalam share with you. We are both stories beyond excuses.

I am one of those people who believe that we are a product of the evolution of the universe from energy to matter to intelligence, from nothingness to perfection. And whether there was or there wasn't something that gave an order or intervene in this process, I believe that this should not cause any confusion regarding our role on this planet. This role should mainly be about complementing the evolutionary process. Not only through uncovering its secrets, but also through promoting values, that will help in turning it to a much more secure, hospitable and optimistic place.

These values are about:

Love rather than hate

Forgiveness rather than revenge

Tolerance rather than fanaticism

Caring rather than indifference

Support rather than hindrance

Humility rather than arrogance

Sharing rather than greed

Inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness

The issue about living with these values is about achieving peace with ourselves, which took me many years to understand that it is the condition that will enable us to make peace with the others and with our surrounding beyond geography, religions and nationalities.

Once again Mr. Stephen Hawking, thank you for this visit which will make the 12<sup>th</sup> of December/2006 a very special and memorable day in the history of the Oasis of Peace, a day when Stephen Hawking was here.

We love you.