

A Journey of discovery, understanding and healing

Forgiveness is an expression of tolerance and love. It is the subordination of hatred and vengeance. Forgiveness is, above all, a human necessity and a means to live.

Without forgiveness friendships end, love terminates, and eventually the beauty of life ceases to refine our senses.

Without forgiveness, no one will ever learn from a mistake or bad luck but will be blinded by retaliation and killed by pride. Lebanese student, May 1998

The purpose of this journey is to offer an opportunity to open a door to understanding and healing. A group of women, who have lost loved ones at 9/11 Ground Zero in New York, will meet a number of Lebanese who have also suffered loss due to war or terrorism.

Taking place in Lebanon, this exploration offers a doorway through which to understand the layer upon layer of history that is here; a land that stands at the gates of the Middle East and at the heart of history. Lebanon is a microcosm of human relations reflecting the depth of memory of both conflict and harmony - ancient, modern and recent - and the universality of these realities, regardless of culture or geography. It allows us to explore the ideas and intention behind the Garden of Forgiveness, *Hadiquat as Samah*, in central Beirut, and to examine the possibilities for this to happen at Ground Zero in New York and other places in the world. This visit is organized, supported and accompanied by a group of American and Arab business leaders.

Food for thought:

We have six themes:

- Ancient, historical and religious conflicts;
- The recent past within living memory;
- Personal stories from the multiple sides of conflicts past and present;
- Destruction and reconstruction (physical and emotional);
- How all these are linked through memory, whether conscious or unconscious;
- Forgiveness - as a means to release age-old and present grievances to achieve lasting peace.

This adventure aims to bring people together at a personal level; to explore the roots of conflicts and the theme of forgiveness; to understand and experience cross-cultures; and to consider what reconstruction is, both within us and in our physical world. This rebuilding process is a means to open the space for grace, to find forgiveness, to find peace, and to acknowledge the deep echoes of the past. In so doing, we pay tribute to the courage of this group of visitors who have chosen to travel to Lebanon on this occasion.

We hope they find some form of comfort and inspiration through this experience, and also enjoy the warm hospitality of the Lebanese people.

Some significant sites in Lebanon will be visited, through which the journey of understanding is explored from many angles.

Solidere's Beirut Central District (BCD), and the site of the Garden of Forgiveness (Hadiquat as-Samah), represent the essence and are where we will begin. The BCD exemplifies both the rebuilding of a city from its ashes, as well as its social fabric and communal space. The project of the Garden of Forgiveness, at the very heart of the BCD, represents the physical creation of a public space devoted entirely to supporting reconciliation and forgiveness, without which, true and enduring peace cannot be achieved.

The second day takes us to Dog River (*Nahr el Kalb*) and Byblos. They are both important ancient sites in Lebanon that have witnessed a history of over 6000 years. Dog River displays the 'visiting cards' of the successive invaders that have passed through Lebanon, while Byblos, is the ancient Phoenician port, from where, according to legend, Cadmos took the alphabet to the West and it is one of the oldest, constantly inhabited towns in the Middle East.

The South of Lebanon, Tyre, Saida, and Qana will take up the last day. Visits to these sites provide yet another way to connect to the historic and modern memory of this country's people, who have endured centuries of invasions. Bringing with them tragedies, these invaders and occupiers have sometimes left a rich heritage behind. We will also witness the important social and humanitarian work of people who have suffered huge loss and have transformed this pain into projects that contribute to the well-being of others. The visit to the ancient holy site of Qana reinforces the message of peace and forgiveness preached for centuries by prophets and holy figures who have walked this land.

During these visits, the group will have the opportunity to hear well-known and less-known figures give talks, and share views, hopes and experiences with others who have experienced loss. It is hoped that through the sharing of personal grief, we will be reminded of the essential things that we share as humans on this Earth. We can then begin to discover, understand, heal and take steps towards a more hopeful future—a future which is created by each one of us taking our own responsibility for peace...