

Earth Caravan Middle East 2017

earthcaravan.jp/en

The Earth Caravan is a global interfaith organization whose mission is to share peace, happiness and healing in the world through words, art, music, shiatsu therapy and interfaith prayers. The Caravan started in 2015 and every year travels to cities and places around the globe, sharing our strong message of peace, hope and ways of living to help heal the wounds of war, violence and disaster.

The mayor of Hiroshima has given the Caravan special permission to bring the Hiroshima Peace Flame on the Caravan's voyage from Japan, to North America and the Middle East. The Peace Flame was taken from one of the flames that burned after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945.



The Caravan was conceived by members of Tao Sangha, a Buddhist nongovernmental organization founded by the internationally renowned Buddhist priest and master of Tao Shiatsu, Ryokyu Endo.

Previous years

The Earth Caravan was first launched in 2015. The motivation to create this project was, and still is, to

express the yearning and wish of the Tao Sangha members to meet people around the world and to share with them the joy of the path, in which a spiritual development is practiced by recognizing and holding the ego and by a wish for happiness for all beings.

Year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of dropping the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, leaving a "consuming fire". The flame was kept for 70 years, and this very fire used to light a special torch, which accompanied the first caravan journey through Europe, Palestine and Israel.



Tao Sangha is a global community which has centers in Europe, Japan, America and [Israel](#); The Caravan began its journey in Japan, passed through the centers in Europe, visited Dachau and Auschwitz death camps, and eventually arrived to Israel and Palestine, carrying the fire of Hiroshima. This fire was maintained in Austria throughout the year 2015, and in 2016 was transferred again with

the Caravan to Israel and Palestine. Since then, it has been preserved in Bethlehem by the [Holy Land Trust](#) organization.

In all three journeys conducted to this very day, the Caravan participants are delegations who bring with them the cultural treasures, talents and abilities to make people happy, share and give to the people and communities they meet along the journey. The sharing and giving



go through a variety of channels: music, rituals, food, play, awareness-raising workshops, awareness of the world of Ki ("Chi" in Chinese), expansion of our heart and others, and Tao Shiatsu treatments.

Earth Caravan 2017 activities in Palestine & Israel

The 2017 Caravan left Japan directly for Israel and Palestine, with 30 participants, most of them from Japan, some from Austria and Canada.

Summer Camp in Mishor Adumim

The Caravan landed in Israel on August 1st, and immediately and spontaneously was asked to come and delight the Bedouin children of the Jahalin tribe in Mishor Adumim. At a summer camp organized by Christian nuns and Rabbis for Human Rights organization, the Caravan participants rejoiced at the local children with music, dance, acting and Origami creating.



Accompanying Bedouin Shepherds in Jordan Valley

On August 2nd, a Jerusalem tour was conducted in order to better understand the complexity and challenges faced by the residents living there, both Palestinians and Israelis.

The tour took place in the Jordan Valley, starting with



an encounter with Bedouin shepherds from the Auja area, where the Israeli army is preventing them from entering their natural grazing areas. At a temperature of 45 degrees, with all the grass dry and thin, we witnessed a situation where, for no apparent reason, the army is limiting their habitat areas

A Photovoltaic System in the Village of Al-'Aqaba

We continued to al-'Aqaba, a village which today numbers 35 families. A large percentage of its residents left the area in 1967, after the area was defined as a military area and after the army's training in the area resulted in the killing and injury of many residents.



Organizations and governments have helped the village during the years ever since, and today the village is a charming and well-kept community, with an excellent education for the children. The village is also one of the only places in the Jordan Valley which has built and manages a hostel that can accommodate 30 people. The local economy in the village is run as a cooperative by its residents, and in addition to the hostel, it is based on a factory for packing herbal tea bags and producing a fine cheese and yogurt. We added a painting of our own to the village walls, which are decorated with great charm, and also gave some Tao Shiatsu treatment.. We were happy to stay in the hostel and thus both support the economy of the place and enjoy their wonderful food.



As a result of the Earth Caravan's visit a photovoltaic system could be established providing electricity for a family on the border of the military zone. Due to the fact that they didn't have light in the night, they were frequently attacked by gunfire. Now the family lives in safer circumstances and the children have light to read and study after dark.

Rehabilitation of a Water Well in Jordan Valley

At the break of dawn on the 3rd of August an expedition of local shepherds, Earth Caravan Members and Guy Hirtzfeld from the peace organization Taayush set out from the Village of Al-'Aqaba helping the shepherd community in the area to clean and restore one of the surrounding water wells. According to international law, all water



sources in the occupied West Bank belong to the occupied residents of that territory and only a small part of that water may be used by Israel.

In actual fact, Israel has taken over all the water sources in the Palestinian Jordan Valley. On of the of the first edicts signed by the Commander of the West Bank on August 15, 1967, forbade the Palestinians to use water sources without permission, throughout the West Bank. In 1995 these limitation werde anchored in an interim agreement that forbade the Palestinians to increase the number of water wells in the Palestinian Jordan Valley. At present the Palestinians operate 89 wells in the Palestine Jordan Valley of the 209 wells they operated prior to 1967. The domestic water allocation for one Israeli settler in the Palestinian Jordan Valley amounts to 487 liters a day, the average domestic water consumption of Palestinians, on the other hand, amounts to 61 liters a day. The World Health Organization recommends the minimum amount of 100 litres of water a day per person. These numbers are taken from the report Daphne Banai from the human rights organization Machsomwatch.org presented to us.



As a result farmers and shepherds depend partly on small, hand crafted wells, more like water holes to provide for their animals. These wells are gradually silted by earth and need to be cleaned bucket for bucket, because heavy technical equipment is not available or not allowed to enter into the

place.

This was a real experience for Earth Caravan members to dig into the mud until fresh and clear water reappeared from the ground. Everybody was grateful to participate in the process and share the blessings of life spending water wells.



Bethlehem Street festival

Towards evening, the Caravan went south and arrived to Bethlehem. The Holy Land Trust organization from Bethlehem and the Earth Caravan Interfaith Pilgrimage have been



cooperating for 3 years, since the very beginning of the Earth Caravan's visits in Palestine and Israel, and they are totally and actively partners in the [street festival](#) held in Bethlehem. Holy Land Trust always opens its doors to the Caravan participants and gives them a deep sense of welcomed friends. From the center of the Holy Land Trust, the Caravan left for two

days to join members at the refugee camps of Haideh and Deheisheh. Everybody who liked could experience Tao Shiatsu treatments as well as intercultural exchange through music, games and talks.



We then returned to Bethlehem, to prepare the opening of the Japanese mini-festival in the Holy Land Trust center. As previously pointed out, this is the third year that the Caravan comes from Japan with a detailed and well-prepared plan to take an active and full part in the Star Street Street Festival,



which HLT organizes for the residents of Bethlehem and the economically affected local communities. But unfortunately, this year, the festival was suddenly postponed due to the tension in the region following the Temple Mount events (two Israeli policemen were murdered near the Dome of the Rock). So the Caravan quickly adapted to this unpredicted new situation. It was decided to hold for two days a mini festival for the

local population, within the space of the Holy Land Trust center. This center is located in an impressive arched stone structure including a complex of rooms, courtyards and balconies overlooking Bethlehem. All the spaces of the house were turned into points of activity and creativity: on the roof terrace floor, music and dance performances were performed by Japanese and Austrians Tao Sangha members. Traditional sushi dishes were prepared in the adjacent kitchen. On one floor below, a tea ceremony was offered, and tables were set up for Chatranga games; And in the inner rooms the Art of Origami, Kimono dressing and Calligraphy writings could be experienced. Tao Shiatsu treatments were offered on the lower floor. Prior to all of these great activities, the Tao Sangha members chanted Nembutsu and



invited everyone to join.

Interfaith prayer at Bethlehem University

A remarkable and visionary interfaith prayer chanting was organized at the Palestine Institute of biodiversity and sustainability of Bethlehem University.



After a profound and deeply moving talk about the peaceful resistance in occupied Palestine which was held by the internationally renowned Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh the interfaith Nembutsu Peace Chanting united all participants - jewish, christian, buddhist, islamic - in the common wish for the positive and peaceful future of all countries. Singing and praying the mystical words in unification to overcome human history of political and religious separation is changing attitudes. Working together in many different aspects of science, religion, economy, health service or education is changing the way we look at each other. Growing Friendship instead of nourishing prejudices is happening all along the way of the Earth Caravan.



Road Construction in the Southern Hebron Hills

On August 4th, we went to the village of Umm al-Khair, in the southern Hebron hills, where a Bedouin clan from the Joulin tribe lives. They left Israel after the Independence war in 1948, after which they came back and legally purchased some of their origin land. In 2003, an



Israeli settlement called Carmel was built just at the border to their land, without taking the local residents into account, and took over the surrounding land as if the Bedouin residents, who had already lived there, did not exist. The new Israeli community strangled the locals with the sole purpose of trying to smuggle them out of their land. They were neither given the possibility nor the means to build their lives. Any attempt to cope with the existing reality encountered hostility and violence. The

residents of the village try to organize and build shelters for children and extended families, but demolition orders are immediately applied, allowing the army and the Civil Administration



authorities to come and destroy the existing structures.

We arrived at the center of the village in the morning to help conquer a road connecting the two parts of the village, using limestone which we helped to finance. The fastest and easiest way to conquer a road is by using heavy engineering tools that are made for such tasks, but



in reality this can not be done, because once the



bedouins bring inside this territory a heavy vehicle, such as a tractor, a confiscation order and fines are immediately issued by Israeli authorities. So, with rakes and buckets, and for three hours of vigorous work, the road was put together. The event ended with a car ride by the local residents, who were encouraged by cheers, joy, music and singing.

The common activities and meetings with the Israeli and Palestine activist organizations, such as HolyLand Trust, Taayush and Engaged Dharama, Palestine Museum of Natural History or Project Hope inspired us and sowed seeds for further cooperation.

The Earth Caravan Middle East 2017 imprinted in its participants a sense of elation and inspiration from the encounters with the locals, who lack attention and love, creating infectious waves of enthusiasm, joy and creativity. Being present at the field witnessing the difficult reality of the daily coping of the Bedouin and Palestinian communities, who are connected to the earth in an organic and unique way, has made our hearts beat as one, and increased the yearning to continue to be in touch with each other and create together a bright future for all of us.



A link to the trailer album 2017, which shows pictures of the above events and activities:
[Earth Caravan August 2017](#)