

Inner Voice

"Meditation is a process that cleanses the mind of impurities. It cultivates such qualities as concentration, awareness, intelligence and tranquility leading finally to attainment of the highest wisdom."

U THANT,

SECRETARY-GENERAL, 1961-1971

"The explanation of how a man should live a life of active social service in full harmony with himself as a member of the community of the spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom 'self surrender' had been the way to self realization, and who, in 'singleness of mind' and 'inwardness' had found the strength to say 'yes' to every demand, which the needs of their neighbors made them face, and to say 'yes' also, to every fate that life had in store for them, when they followed the call of duty, as they understood it. 'Love' that much misused and misinterpreted word, for them, meant simply an overflowing of strength with which they felt themselves filled when living in true self-oblivion. And this love found natural expressions in an unhesitant fulfillment of duty and in an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brought them personally of toil and suffering or of happiness. I know their discoveries about the laws of inner life and of action have not lost their significance."

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

SECRETARY-GENERAL, 1953-1961



The fresco in the Meditation Room is a gift of the Marshall Field Family in his memory. It was ordered by Dag Hammarskjöld from his artist friend Bo Beskow. The etching on the entrance wall by Robert M. Cronbach is a gift of the National Council for United States Art.



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Room For Meditation at the United Nations



THE UNITED NATIONS MEDITATION ROOM

is open to the public

9:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday

10:00 am to 4:30 pm, Saturday & Sunday

(Closed on weekends, January & February)

The entrance is located to the right of the information desk in the UN visitors' lobby.

United Nations, 1st Ave., 46th St., New York

"We all have within us a centre of stillness surrounded by silence. This house, dedicated to work and debate in the service of peace, should have one room dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense. It has been the aim to create in this small room a place where the doors may be open to the infinite lands of thought and prayer".

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

SECRETARY-GENERAL, 1953-1961

About The Meditation Room

In the original plan for the new Headquarters, a tiny room, opened on 14 October 1952, had been provided as a place dedicated to silence, where people could withdraw into themselves, regardless of their faith, creed or religion. But Dag Hammarskjöld wanted something more dignified. In his efforts he was supported by a group, the "Friends of the UN Meditation Room", who combined their efforts and provided the money for a room worthy of a world organization. The work on the room began, and Hammarskjöld personally planned and supervised in every detail the creation of the "Meditation Room".

"There is an ancient saying that the sense of a vessel is not in its shell but in the void. So it is with this room. It is for those who come here to fill the void with what they find in their centre of stillness."

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD
SECRETARY-GENERAL, 1953-1961

Journalist Pauline Frederick gave another example of Hammarskjöld's interest in an interview for the UN Oral History Collection. She recalled:

"I remember very distinctly one night, when I heard that he had been working most of the night, and about two o'clock in the morning, he called some of his aides in, and they assumed that there had been some bad news from one of the fronts where the United Nations Emergency Forces were then located. But he said, 'I want to go down to the Meditation Room'. And he took them down to the Meditation Room, and it was about, as I said, two o'clock in the morning, and there he spent considerable time directing the painters to put just the precise coat of paint on the walls of that Meditation Room, so the light would be just as he wanted it. So he had a very close feeling about the spiritual. And he felt that it should be the centre of the United Nations."

"He said, 'We want to bring back, in this room, the stillness which we have lost in our streets, and in our conference rooms, and to bring it back in a setting in which no noise would impinge on our imagination'."

Hammarskjöld banned chairs and replaced them with benches. In the centre of the room he placed a six-and-half-ton rectangular block of iron ore, polished on the top and illuminated from above by a single spotlight. This block, which was a gift of the King of Sweden and a Swedish mining company, was the only symbol in the Room. In addition, an abstract mural, a composition of interlocking geometric patterns, was ordered by Hammarskjöld from his artist friend Bo Beskow. The room was re-opened on 11 November 1957. Hammarskjöld wrote the following text to be distributed to the visitors of the room:

"We all have within us a centre of stillness surrounded by silence. This house, dedicated to work and debate in the service of peace, should have one room dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense. It has been the aim to create in this small room a place where the doors may be open to the infinite lands of thought and prayer."

"People of many faiths will meet here, and for that reason none of the symbols to which we are accustomed in our meditation could be used."

"However, there are simple things which speak to us all with the same language. We have sought for such things and we believe that we have found them in the shaft of light striking the shimmering surface of solid rock."

"So, in the middle of the room we see a symbol of how, daily, the light of the skies gives life to the earth on which we stand, a symbol to many of us of how the light of the spirit gives life to matter."

"But the stone in the middle of the room has more to tell us. We may see it as an altar, empty not because there is no God, not because it is an altar to an unknown god, but because it is dedicated to the God whom man worships under many names and in many forms."

Unless there is spiritual renaissance, the world will know no peace."

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD
SECRETARY-GENERAL, 1953-1961

"The stone in the middle of the room reminds us also of the firm and permanent in a world of movement and change. The block of iron ore has the weight and solidity of the everlasting. It is a reminder of that cornerstone of endurance and faith on which all human endeavour must be based."

"The material of the stone leads our thoughts to the necessity for choice between destruction and construction, between war and peace. Of iron man has forged his swords, of iron he has also made his ploughshares. Of iron he has constructed tanks, but of iron he has likewise built homes for man. The block of iron ore is part of the wealth we have inherited on this earth of ours. How are we to use it?"

"The shaft of light strikes the stone in a room of utter simplicity. There are no other symbols, there is nothing to distract our attention or to break in on the stillness within ourselves. When our eyes travel from these symbols to the front wall, they meet a simple pattern opening up the room to the harmony, freedom and balance of space."

"There is an ancient saying that the sense of a vessel is not in its shell but in the void. So it is with this room. It is for those who come here to fill the void with what they find in their center of stillness."