

Seeds of Peace: Solidarity, Aid, and Education Shared by the Gülen Movement in Southeastern Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This presentation with images, interviews, and information from a research trip in Şanlıurfa, Harran, Mardin, Mazıdağı, Derik, Boyakını, Mıdyat, Hasan Keyf, Batman, Binaltlı, Bismil, Diyarbakir and their surrounding areas will explore the peacemaking efforts of members of the Fethullah Gülen movement. Fethullah Gülen's concepts call for understanding, tolerance, dialogue, and compassion.

People have been economically disadvantaged and some of those of Kurdish background have not been content with the dominance of Turkish culture. With these challenges, incidents of violence and PKK terrorism developed and the Turkish military brutally responded. Over 37,000 have been killed since 1980. Members of the Gülen Movement have responded by providing economic assistance where there is hardship, furthering education, and especially encouraging the education of girls. In the Turkish national census in 2000, 39 percent of the women in the southeast area were classified as illiterate.

Much assistance has been given through the solidarity and aid organization, *Kimse Yok Mu*. Women have had influence in the founding and development of the organization. *Kimse Yok Mu* (meaning "Is Anybody Out There?") and its

partner organizations respond to people's needs after natural disasters, and they help the needy get health care, clothing, and food. The organization has developed the concept of "sister families." If a family is in need, another family assists them. Already there are over a thousand "sister families." For the Feast of Eid last year, over 18,000 people of the west personally visited and took food to people of the east. Constantly in Islam, the Creator is spoken of as "compassionate and merciful." Compassion is the nature of God and the invitation to humanity. Gülen invites his followers to share the compassion of God which can be seeds of peace

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"Establish, all of you, peace" (Qur'an 2:208)

Fethullah Gülen emphatically teaches those words of the Qur'an that all are to be peacemakers. How do people do this? Gülen's writings on democracy indicate some seeds of peace:

The Prophet says that all people are as equal as the teeth of a comb. Islam does not discriminate based on race, color, age, nationality, or physical traits. The Prophet declared: "You are all from Adam, and Adam is from earth. O servants of God, be brothers [and sisters]." Those who are born earlier, have more wealth and power than others, or belong to certain families or ethnic groups have no inherent right to rule others." Islam also upholds the following fundamental principles: 1. Power lies in truth, a repudiation of the common idea that truth relies upon power. 2. All rights are equally important, and an individual's right cannot be sacrificed for society's sake. Islam considers a society to be composed of conscious individuals equipped with free will and having responsibility toward both themselves and others. (Gülen 2006a: 101)

In southeastern Turkey, there has not been peace. Over 37,000 people have been killed since the early 1980's. In October 2007 thirty more were killed. Gülen has urged his followers to analyze the roots of unrest, discrimination, and the lack of educational and

economic opportunities. He urges his followers to do good works to transform the challenges and bring justice and peace. This paper will interweave some descriptions of those challenges and many examples of the attitudes and actions of persons inspired by Gülen which are seeds of peace being sown on grounds where there have been fires of violence. In some places, the plants and fruits of these seeds are already visible. The attitudes and actions of participants in the Gülen movement in the southeast could be models to use in other places of unrest in the world. Teaching ethics and spirituality can often be done more effectively with narrative, the stories of people, than through abstract words. The examples are from conversations and information on a research trip in Şanlıurfa, Harran, Mardin, Mazıdağı, Derik, Boyakın, Mıdyat, Hasan Keyf, Batman, Binaltı, Bismil, Diyarbakir and their surrounding areas.¹

Seeds of Peace Sown by a Sister Family in Diyarbakir

“If we don’t do this, who will do it?” Arzu Balık replied when asked if she was afraid of going into the crowded dilapidated slum of Diyarbakir. “If we don’t go, people will stay separated. If we improve relationships, we all benefit. Before my husband and I started coming here, this poor family did not have hope for the future. The first time I came here, I was ashamed. Why haven’t I been aware of how some people are living in our city? Shame was my feeling, not fear. We are humans together. Then we brought our 10- and 8-year-old sons. When they saw how little these four children have, our boys said, ‘We won’t forget.’” Arzu and her husband, Behçet Balık, with their sons, Bekir and Muhammed, are among a thousand “sister families” initiated by the Kimse Yok Mu Solidarity and Aid Organization in Turkey. This group has been developed by persons inspired by Gülen. Arzu and Behçet were visiting Raife Doğanar, whose husband, a shepherd, was watching his flock in the mountains when he was killed by a landmine. Doğanar brought her 9-year-old daughter, Azize, and her sons, Esra, 8, Ertan, 5, and Mohamed, 1 1/2, to the city so they might have more possibilities. Instead they had more hardships until Kimse Yok Mu heard of their needs. The violent death of Doğanar’s

husband can be added to the list of about 37,000 people killed since 1980 when the PKK, an extremist organization of Kurdish people started using violence to get attention.

Kimse Yok Mu becomes aware of a disadvantaged family, then seeks a privileged family willing to be a “sister,” then the organization mentors and helps promote communication between the pairs of families. Arzu makes it sound simple: “Humans need relationships. If we could all cooperate with each other, there could be peace in the world.”

Since Arzu and Behçet Balık have gotten to know Doğanar’s family, they have obtained furniture for them and provided rent money. Arzu explained, “Then we went to businesspeople and others to help. We are working to get health care for the children.” She laughed and added, “Now that our neighbors have heard of this, they also want to be a sister family.”

The Balıks start at home. “We try to teach our children because the new generation is our hope.” Their 8-year-old son, Muhammed, repeated a song, “We can give half of our toys. We can give half of our apple. Then we can give all.” Kimse Yok Mu has developed a children’s magazine called *Kumbara*, that is *Kind Kid*. With delightful stories, *Kumbara* informs children about children in different parts of the world. It shows how Kimse Yok Mu is trying to help. The stories and activities invite the children to solidarity and compassion. Young Muhammed was an example of moving beyond the self-centeredness of a child to generosity.

CHALLENGE 1. ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

As was mentioned, Raife Doğanar’s husband is among the 37,000 killed in the areas of Turkey with a predominantly Kurdish population. Why has there been so much suffering? About twenty-five million Kurdish people live in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, and Turkey. Many farm and care for sheep and goats and live in mountainous regions. About half of them are in Turkey and they make up 20% of the Turkish population. After World War I, in the Treaty of Sèvres

signed by the Allied Powers and Turkey in 1920, a section said that if a majority of the Kurdish population wanted to apply to the League of Nations to be recognized as a separate country, they might do so. The Treaty of Sèvres was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 which did not have the same provision for the Kurds. Kurdish identity has been feared by the Turkish government. M. Hankan Yavuz wrote, "After 1924, Mustafa Kemal implemented a series of reforms to create a homogeneous secular nation-state by subordinating Kurdish and Islamic identities into a state determined and regimented ethno-linguistic Turkish nationalism. These reforms, known as Kemalist, sought to disestablish and control religion to create a newly disciplined and obedient nation." (Yavuz 2006b: 230) Nicole and Hugh Pope have written, "Local Kurdish names of villages were changed to anodyne Turkish equivalents. Fines were introduced for speaking Kurdish in public." (Pope 1998: 251) In efforts to stamp out Kurdish identity and a sense of family or tribal groups, it was forbidden to use Kurdish first names.

Through the years, the Turkish government has distrusted many of the people of the southeast because they are of Kurdish background. Also some of the population is of Arabic descent and speaks their language. People of the east have had limited educational or economic opportunities. While the west and north of Turkey have developed and prospered, parts of the east, south, and southeast are like "third world" countries. Some ethnically Turkish regions of the country have been left behind. For example, Gülen has given the example of his home village which is ethnically Turkish not having any opportunities. In light of various challenges, there has been Kurdish discontent. Nicole and Hugh Pope noted that it is "easy for Westerners to romanticize the harsh life of remote Kurdish villages. Thousand of hamlets are buried under snow and cut off from the world for months at a time in winter. Blood feuds divide families and tribes for generations. Lack of health facilities, difficult terrain and poor soil mean that only the fittest survive." In 1989 the "worst-off province with a majority population of Turkish Kurds, south-eastern

Hakkari, had just one-tenth the average income of the richest province, Kocaeli, near Istanbul.” (Pope1998: 252)

Kurdish efforts to develop political parties have often been suppressed by the government which has harassed or imprisoned people for “crimes of opinion.” Extremist Kurdish people formed the PKK in 1974 and spoke of having a separate country of Kurdistan. In the mid-1980’s the PKK, began using violence to get attention with guerrilla warfare, kidnappings, and suicide bombings. The state sent many soldiers to the southeast and then got “Village Guards,” that is local Kurds, to keep members of the PKK out of their villages. The Kurds were sometimes ordered to be a part of the Village Guard. Sometimes humiliating mass punishment was used in the villages. (Pope 1998: 262)

A twenty-three year old, Husnu Saner Narman, who had grown up in a village in the Bingöl area, said, “When I was small, the PKK would come to our home in the middle of the night and tell my father to give them food or they would kill him.”

Both during the Ottoman period and that of the young republic, the government often relocated people that it did not favor. “In the late 1980’s, the authorities had started again to empty, burn down or blow up isolated Kurdish villages. Each individual evacuation had a different cause: punishment for sending food to the PKK, for not joining the Village Guard militia, for having children in the PKK or simply because the villagers had left, fed up with being caught in the cross-fire. The state policy gradually became harsher still.” (Pope 1998: 273) Some people fled to the west and others to larger towns or cities in the southeast. The military destroyed about 3,000 villages and this created over two million refugees. As has been said about 37,000 people were killed. (BBC) The Turkish government has abused human rights and been accused of torture in its treatment of those suspected of sympathy towards the PKK.

In the midst of all this starting in the 1980’s, Gülen urgently begged his followers to help to establish peace in the southeast and east. He urged them to build relationships and organize educa-

tional opportunities. The Turkish religious leader whose ideas have inspired Gülen, Said Nursi was Kurdish and from eastern Turkey. Many respected Nursi as a religious teacher. In 1908 Nursi bravely took a petition to the Sultan asking for better education in the southeast. Under the Ottoman empire the schools started in the southeast had only Turkish and the people spoke Kurdish. Nursi explained that the only place that the Kurdish people had a chance for education was in the madrasas. He explained to the Sultan that if people would have opportunities for education in the Ottoman schools that would eliminate struggles and tensions. This education would help them to become good citizens. (Mardin 1989: 80)

Both Gülen and Nursi, as the Qur'an and the Bible and many sources of religious wisdom through the ages, recognized that the development of militarism is not the same as the development of security. Real security comes from good relationships rooted in justice and respect. Militarism can temporarily inspire fear and order, but it does not bring long term security or peace. Gülen seeks authentic security and peace. Gülen invited and inspired his friends to develop schools in places such as Van, Diyarbakir and Şanlıurfa. Tens of thousands of students, both those who have resources and those who don't, have been helped to get a quality education by the Gülen movement.

The education given by the Gülen movement has and is contributing to changing attitudes in Turkey. In 1995 a report by an Ankara university professor showed that "although not all Kurds supported the PKK, they did want respect for a separate Kurdish cultural identity." (Pope 198: 258) Bridges need to be built from both sides. The Gülen movement is helping both Kurdish people and those who may not have known or respected them.

SEEDS OF PEACE SOWN BY AND FOR FEMALES

Arzu, who was helping the widow and her children, is also part of a women's organization, Sevgi Gulpembe. This group, as hundreds

of other women's groups started by the Gülen movement, raises money to support educational expenses for disadvantaged students. Girls who have passed the challenging state examinations to be admitted to Dicle University in Diyarbakir often do not have enough money to go. (Dicle means "Tigris" -- the university is by the Tigris River.) Arzu's friends both have Kermes, "fairs," where they sell homemade food, knitting, sewing and handiwork, and they also seek monetary donations. With a laugh, she said, "We have competitions seeing who can provide the most scholarships." The organization also has set up programs on the rights of women and has gotten doctors and lawyers to speak.

The women's organization in Midyat has a store front where they regularly prepare and sell food and handicrafts to raise money which will go for scholarships and for the needy. These women who have limited education are enthusiastic about helping the next generation to have more. In the Derik area of about 42,000 people in villages and 18,000 in the town, about 90 percent of the people are Kurdish. Before the concentrated efforts of the Gülen movement to have tutoring and dormitories hardly anyone had continued in school beyond fifteen years of age.

Four hundred and sixty students attend the FEM tutoring center. After just three years, they have prepared students so well that some of them are being accepted for university studies in medicine, engineering, genetics, and business. People of the Gülen movement also sponsor a free tutoring center for two hundred students. When girls in a tutoring center in Derik were asked if they had more education than their mothers they all said yes.

CHALLENGE 2. EDUCATIONAL LIMITATIONS ESPECIALLY FOR FEMALES

While helping females get more education might seem ordinary, it is revolutionary in southeastern Turkey where girls usually dropped out of school before or as they finished five years of primary school.

According to the Turkish national census in 2000, "The most striking illiteracy rate is observed in the Southeast where 39% of women are illiterate, followed by the East and Black Sea regions where rates are 35% and 21% respectively." (Otaran 2003: 24)

In 1997 the Turkish government extended primary school to eight grades. In the eighth grade students take tests to determine what type of four year high school they may attend, general, vocational, or technical. In the last year of high school students may take the nationwide standard "Student Selection Examination." While each year more students have been having more educational opportunities, still many youth who want further education are not allowed it because of their test scores. (Higher Education Council 2006). Poorly prepared fourteen or fifteen year-old students often have doors closed to them for the rest of their lives because they did not score well. This educational system has basically reinforced the gap between disadvantaged Turks and privileged Turks whose children have had extra assistance to help them in getting a good high school and later getting admittance into a university. This system has also reinforced the gap between east and west where money has drawn more money.

On this research trip eleven Gülen-movement-sponsored tutoring centers which assist thousands of students were visited. Often they proudly displayed posters about how many of their students had done well on the challenging state exams. In these areas no one had never tested well enough to get to the next level of education and poverty has persisted in the villages and towns. Now more and more of those young people with the help of generous Gülen movement tutors, are advancing in education.

A report sponsored by UNESCO not only considered the Turkish census figures about women's illiteracy, but also the attitudes that girls are getting through school experiences: The report notes, "Another important factor in education processes regarding girls' education is the gender ratio of staff in schools. Only 3% of school principals in primary schools are women. Women constitute

44% of primary school teachers and 39% of secondary school teachers. In universities, the gender gap is still greater. The prevalence of males in the upper echelons of education, teaching more 'important' subjects such as mathematics and physics enforces the message that higher levels of knowledge are the 'domain of men' while female teachers, more frequent in lower grades, are occupied in teaching subjects such as reading or writing." (Otran 2003: 28) Frequently in the schools and tutoring centers inspired by the Gülen movement that were visited on this research trip, girls of all ages talked about how much they liked the sciences and math. Many said that they planned to go on in these fields. They had moved beyond thinking that these were male domains.

In the city of Derik, E.T., who owns a small furniture store had a picture of his grandfather, a judge, who came from Iraq 125 years ago. He has known the Gülen movement for the last five years and is grateful for the educational opportunities that they have given to his three daughters and son. E. T. said, "Gülen changed our minds about girls. They are important for our future. I think that girls are more intelligent than boys if they are given the opportunity." One of his daughters got an award as an outstanding math student. Two of his daughters are now studying medicine.

In many of the areas that were visited, Kurdish or Arabic is spoken in the homes so schools are challenging. Some families interpret Muslim passages praising motherhood as meaning girls should begin this at an early age. The average family in this area has eight children. Families in the villages focused on agriculture and caring for sheep and goats have not valued girls' education. The UNESCO report notes, "Preliminary analysis reveals that schools need qualitative improvement such as a gender-sensitive curriculum and teacher-training processes. Operational realities such as child labour (particularly domestic labour for girl children), opportunity and cost of education, illiterate parents and patriarchal values, etc. remain to be addressed." (Otran 2003: 30)

Many women volunteers from the Gülen movement have gone from house to house inviting parents to change their traditions and help their daughters get more education. They have spoken of the benefits and when necessary explained that Mohammed's words calling for education are for girls, as well as boys.

The importance of the Gulen movement's efforts to educate females and develop their leadership is apparent in light of the World Economic Forum's 2007 Global Gender Gap index. Out of 128 countries, Turkey was ranked Turkey 121, only better than Morocco, Benin, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Pakistan, Chad and Yemen. The report considered the gap between females and males. Damaris Kremida quotes the report, "Turkey continues to rank well below the lowest ranking European countries and displays below average performance on all four sub indexes: 118 on economic participation and opportunity, 110 on educational attainment, 87 on health and survival and 108 on political empowerment." Kremida wrote, "The lowest score of the economic participation and opportunity scores was participation in leadership professions such as legislators, senior officials and managers. Turkish women fill only 7 percent of top tier management positions, while men hold the remaining 93 percent of the pie." The life expectancy of Turkish women is 63 years in comparison to 61 years for men. Kremida noted, "Finally Turkish women got the lowest female-to-male ratios when it comes to political empowerment. In parliament, there are 5 women to every 100 male parliamentarian, 4 Turkish female ministers to every 100 male ministers." (Kremida)

SEEDS OF PEACE SOWN AMONG REFUGEES FROM KURDISH VILLAGES

"If the children do not get an education, they may become terrorists. So how do we convince the people of the value of supporting our educational projects? In the four years that we have been working here in Bismil the number of children in school improved by

80%. But in the families with extreme poverty, the situation only improved 60%," said I. B., the supervisor for the Zaman newspaper and a Kimse Yok Mu volunteer. He explained the challenging context of the town. Bismil with a population of 90,000 is 90% Kurdish and 10% Turkish. About 20% of the people are supportive of the PKK, 50% have some sympathy for the PKK, and 30% are against them. In Bismil, there are many PKK organizations.

When the Turkish military closed villages in the 1980's many people went to Bismil because they heard there was some agriculture in this area, but the people did not have the land and the space for animals as they did in their home areas. I. B. said, "Poor people from the agricultural areas began to see the rich of towns and cities. All were upset. There was no dialogue between them. The refugees would turn to drugs and alcohol. So the Gülen movement tries to create dialogue between the rich and poor. In Bismil, it has been hard. The rich are afraid and do not trust us." In this area 60% of the population is needy. Usually a family has only two rooms. I. B. laughed and said, "The average family here has nine children---how do they even remember their names!" When a son marries he brings his new wife to his family.

"Six years ago only 6 percent of the girls went beyond 5th grade, now 80 or 90 percent go on. The government said girls must go to school. Gülen volunteers visit families and encourage them and give scholarships. We are inviting youth from other towns and villages so that they can get a good high school education. Our dormitory could hold seventy. In state schools they only teach basic science and subjects. At our tutoring centers, we share ethics as well as science. The children need ethics. For example, the government put trash cans around town, but then the children stole them to sell."

I.B. compassionately said, "The last winter was very cold and the water was frozen for days. There were children without shoes and coats. When the volunteer teachers saw this, they wanted to assist with these. How could the children be expected to go to the schools

or tutoring centers? There are so many children in the streets. Many are orphans. We find children at night taking drugs.”

“The parents are not educated. I haven’t seen any parents who listen to their children’s problems. The children get shier and shier. They don’t have self confidence, so they can be led by bad friends very easily. About a third of the population leaves to work the seasonal harvests in Turkey. With the flood in 2007, much agriculture was destroyed and in 2008 we are having a drought.”

“We have both the SUR tutoring center with children who can pay and then in an area with greater need we have EHIDER, a free tutoring center for about 350 students. Our goal is to expand our free center so that it can take a thousand students. We create hope for them. We invite parents to the center for education and ask how we can help, but the parents here are not interested. We want to create a new generation.” Considering that much of the population is refugees from the villages who fled the killing but still hold the trauma, the Gülen community is doing a remarkable job bringing healing and hope.

SEEDS OF PEACE: A MODEL OF DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

Gülen teaches a passage of the Qur’an which invites humans to recognize God’s gifts and to gift others, “spend in the way of God and to the needy of the pure and good of what you have earned and of what We bring forth for you from earth” (2:267); (Gülen 2006a: 101) Kimse Yok Mu Solidarity and Aid Organization promotes generosity.

During the earthquake that hit the Marmara Region of Turkey, August 17, 1999 which killed 20,000 people, both buried victims and relief workers cried out, “Is anybody there?” Sometime after the tragedy, Samanyolu television network in Istanbul wanted to help facilitate continued charitable work and a woman began a show called, “Is anybody there?” This work was organized as the “Kimse Yok Mu Foundation” January 3, 2002, and was recognized

by the state as a non-profit organization in 2004. This organization acts as a bridge between people in need and those who wish to help. Direct assistance is given, but also there is systematic analysis of the causes of problems and efforts to address these.

In 2004 during the month of Ramadan, Kimse Yok Mu began hosting iftar dinners and these have continued to grow. Dinner tents were set up where tens of thousands of people have been served. Also food and supplies have been given to the needy. This not only happened in Turkey, but also in Africa, Palestine, Lebanon, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

Within Turkey victims of a series of floods in 2006 received assistance. We meet some of these people in the Mardin, Batman, and Diyarbakir areas. We heard heart-wrenching stories of last contacts with wives, children, and mothers before they were drowned in the raging waters. Eighty families made homeless by a flood in Batman were assisted in getting apartments.

In 2007, Kimse Yok Mu reached out to people in 42 different countries and 34 cities in Turkey. While it is not unique as a non-profit solidarity and aid organization, its strong emphasis on personal relationships is a model. Helping the poor is not enough. Dr. Figen Es, a successful woman microbiologist in Istanbul who volunteers, says, "A main purpose of Kimse Yok Mu is for the rich and poor to know each other." She takes this responsibility seriously and has recently gone to meet the people of the village that Kimse Yok Mu built for the destitute near Darfur, Sudan. Es is enthusiastically showing friends pictures of the school, hospital and homes to build interest and support for this project. She repeats Mohammed's question, "If my neighbor is hungry, how can I sleep?"

People with no religious affiliation support this humanitarian organization. Kimse Yok Mu also invites religious people to realize that working with them can be considered part of the Muslim religious duties, such as zekat (giving 2.5% of one's income to the needy), sacrifice, and alms. While having a professional paid staff, Kimse Yok Mu is able to accomplish so much because of its huge

network of volunteers. This flows from the basic concept that those who reach out to help others will find meaning, satisfaction, and joy. This is especially true if one can have personal contact and develop a relationship with them.

The Balik family mentioned at the beginning is in the Kimse Yok Mu “sister family” program, the first of its kind in Turkey. A “sister family” accepts the responsibility of companionship a needy family. They listen to the problems of the family and help them find solutions. Kimse Yok Mu booklet explains, “Humans need humans, all the rest is insignificant. No wealth can hold the hand of an old mother. The most luxurious furniture knows nothing of listening to one pouring out his heart. Humans need humans, the rest is details.” (Kimse Yok Mu 2007: 31) As some people in Turkey are becoming more prosperous, Kimse Yok Mu is inviting them to reflect on the source of true satisfaction, realizing their common humanity with the less fortunate. A group of professionals in Istanbul touchingly described how much meaning they find in volunteering with Kimse Yok Mu. Many of the leaders are women.

CHALLENGE 3. LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EAST

A number of times this paper has mentioned appeals to business people and other professionals to assist with educational or charitable projects. The Gülen movement has appealed for charity, but it has also mobilized for justice in the economic dynamics of Turkey. Bulent Aras and Omer Caha have written “A strategy begun as early as the 1920s aimed at creating a native bourgeoisie. The result was a social group that received special incentives and protectionist measures. Some enormously wealthy industrialists emerged with strong links to part of the state bureaucracy. Given the state’s willingness to give these wealthy industrialists control over the Turkish economy, competition has been prevented from developing and the political will of the people has been rendered

ineffective and even meaningless with respect to influencing economic policy.” (Aras and Caha 2003: 151) Since about 1990 Gülen-inspired business people have been developing broader bases of opportunity that have been helping disadvantaged people and areas. Some of these business people have formed an umbrella organization called TUSCON which has helped give opportunities and build networks. Yavuz suggests that many persons and groups which have brought ideas about economic justice from Islamic ethics have helped in building a fairer economy in modern Turkey. (Yavuz 2004c: 278)

Gülen constantly encourages *bizmet*, that is service to others. This service can assist in building a peaceful society. “At the same time he argues that a person’s energy to serve comes from belief and that serving one’s society is the most important way to gain God’s favor and a place in paradise. This resembles what Weber called “in-worldly asceticism,” which was significant in the development of capitalism.” (Aras and Caha 2003:152) The Gülen movement’s economic activity and their support of education are developing an alternative economy which is upsetting the status quo and bringing greater opportunity to those of the east and southeast. As capitalism develops in Turkey, ethical questions further develop. Islamic ethics (like Christian ethics) hold that all belongs to God and humans are to share what God has allowed them to use. Can this ethical position have influence in capitalist economic systems where greed has thieved and more and more suffer from poverty? A number of individuals who spoke to us are aware of this question and repeatedly referred to the idea of sharing underlying the zekat as important in developing economies.

MORE INTENSE EFFORTS TO SOW SEEDS OF PEACE AFTER INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

In 2004, the Balık family was among those in the southeast which began to host Kimse Yok Mu volunteers from the west who came

to share at the time of the major Muslim feast day, the Eid of Sacrifice. The Eid remembers that God did not want Abraham to sacrifice his son. A sheep is sacrificed, and families enjoy the meal together. On this holiday, God's people can look beyond suffering, separation and sorrow. They can celebrate hope and bring joy. While religious groups inviting those who have more to give food to those who have less on religious holidays is not special, Yimse Kok Mu's approach has helped overcome some deep prejudices and build bridges of understanding and trust between people of the west and the east. At first the observance was mostly using money donated by people in the west, but gradually more volunteers have gone in person to visit and share. In 2006, the Eid of Sacrifice campaign helped 62,000 needy families have meat for the holiday.

In October 2007, the PKK resurfaced in southeastern Turkey using violence to get attention and the military responded. Thirty people were killed. In other parts of the country there were cries for vengeance against this Kurdish group. Fires of anger raged. On November 12, 2007, Gülen gave a talk calling for healing, unity and hope. He repeated a main theme of his teachings that the only way to lasting peace is through winning people's hearts. (Gülerce 2007) He begged people with ample means to go to the east and southeast for the Feast of Eid and get to know the people there and see how they lived. As there have been "sister families," he proposed sister villages and sister towns where people of the west would establish lasting bonds with those of the east. Young people who consider going to the mountains to join terrorist groups need invitations to good schools and job opportunities, not threats.

So for the feast of Eid, 18,073 people from the west went to 35 cities in the east to personally meet people and share. More than 103,000 families received gifts of food. Many eastern people -- such as the Baliks who do have some means -- opened their homes to the volunteers. Sometimes the volunteers went through the snow to remote villages. They saw the poor schools, the tiny homes, and they visited with Kurdish people. Many volunteers from the west

and people in the east spoke of these encounters as life-changing experiences.

In Derik E. T. who has a small furniture store said, "The most impressive thing in my life was when the Gülen movement people came here for the Eid. I saw how these business men were away from their families. I was learning to give. I saw something in their eyes. They were living what Mohammed teaches. Before people of the east and people of the west had prejudice towards each other. This has begun bridges of love between each other. The name Islam is from peace. I try to live according to Islam. I promised God I will try to do good."

E. T. continued, "Gülen has taught us, 'If anyone is suffering, I am suffering.'" E. T. gives some of his furniture to the poor and also tries to give money. He spends two days a week working as volunteer. He said, "If they call, even at midnight, I go." He is a leader in Derkoy, the partner organization of Kimse Yok Mu in the Derik area.

In the face of the fires of violence, in Bosnia, in parts of Africa, in southeastern Turkey, and in other parts of the world, persons inspired by Gülen are like spiritual firefighters according to Hüseyin Gülerce in *Today's Zaman* newspaper. When violence was strong in Bosnia, the Gülen movement started a school there and brought together Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian children giving them skills and hope to create a future together. In northern Iraq, the movement has seven schools and a hospital and is in the process of building a university to help stabilize that troubled region. Members of the Gülen community hurry to areas of violence, stand near those in danger, search for the sources, and try to build understanding. Like Martin Luther King Jr., Gülen frequently points out that hatred will never drive out hatred, only love can do that. Gülen teaches central principles of Islam -- recognize humanity as one family and treat others as one would wish to be treated.

O. A., who is the director of the aid organization in Derik, is from Samsun near Black Sea. He and his wife came to this arid and poor region two and half years ago. In the villages about 90% of

people only know Kurdish and not Turkish. “We can’t understand the language but our hearts understand each other. We form groups for the parents to do cultural activities and to learn Turkish.”

He told the story of a mother whose first son joined the PKK believing that they would bring respect for their Kurdish culture, but the government forces killed him. Her next son joined Turkish army, but soon the PKK killed him. She said, “I do not know which one to cry for more . . . we must end this conflict between us.” As O. A. has learned more and more of the realities, he says, “I will spend my time here to try to create a new generation, to create dialogue. Destroying is easy, but building something new is difficult. We are trying to mend broken hearts. We emphasize instead of blaming the others, learn to understand the others.”

N. Y., who has a small grocery store, explained that an hour before our visit a PKK sympathizer had come in and tried to persuade him to side with them. He refused because the Gülen movement has helped him see alternative ways to help the Kurds. N. Y. has been giving service with the Gülen movement volunteers for two years. He was to gather sixteen volunteers from this area of the east to go to the west, to Istanbul, and talk to business people to see if they would be willing to donate and help them with these education and service projects. He said, “I never imagined that two-hundred and fifty men would be there for a dinner called ‘One Turkey.’ We were met with flowers. This broke down my suspicion about the Turkish people. They were so friendly.” He continued talking about many projects in the Derik and area and said, “Now our goal is to get more help from the business men here and to complete dormitory that will give students from the villages a chance to go to high school.”

RECONILIATION: HOW PEACE CAN GROW

“If you put God’s laws in people’s hearts, you do not need weapons for security,” said A. A., the Derik director for *Zaman* newspaper.

While his words would have seemed like simple idealism in other contexts, there in Derik with a tank parked in front of the police station, the words seemed to be an invitation to daily build positive relationships. Another tank was seen along the highway. In nearby Mardin across the road from a school helped by Kimse Yok Mu, there was an active military base that in the past was rented to the U.S. when they sided with Saddam Hussein against Iran (and supplied him with traditional and chemical weapons.) At the Diyarbakir Airport, the military planes by civilian ones are a reminder of the tensions in the area. A.A. both gathers local news and promotes the paper which has about 5,000 readers in the area.

A.A. showed us a *Zaman* article that he had written. For thirteen years two families had been feuding. Gülen movement members worked with them to reestablish communication and to reconcile with each other. The article had a picture of a large dinner party, a dinner of reconciliation with former enemies sitting down together.

Reconciliation is crucial for human coexistence and flourishing. Gülen in writing on democracy noted a passage from the Qur'an, "If two parties among the believers fight between themselves, reconcile them" (49:9). (Gülen a 101) Gülen continues to quote the Qur'an, "if they [your enemies] incline to peace [when you are at war], you also incline to it" (8:61); "if a corrupt, sinful one brings you news [about others], investigate it so that you should not strike a people without knowing" (49:6); (Gülen a 101)

A.A. spoke of their movement really trying to encourage people in attitudes of reconciliation. An elder farmer said, "If the PKK comes and asks for support now, I can't say there is conflict. Now our Kurdish language is allowed. We can be proud of our Kurdish heritage, arts, and music. We have Kurdish television, newspapers, and we can speak Kurdish. Why are we fighting?"

GÜLEN'S ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY, WISDOM TO SOW SEEDS OF PEACE

Within the Gülen Movement and the Kimse Yok organization, the Balıks as a sister family provide a good example. Balık works in the family-owned leather store with his father and brother. During the two prescribed prayer periods that occur during a workday, they take turns slipping away to the nearby mosque for about 10 or 15 minutes of prayer. This did not seem to be an obligation as much as an opportunity to reconnect with what matters, to be purified and renewed. Traditionally, the area of Turkey was Sunni Muslim, but the founders of the secular republic in the 1920s associated religion with the corruption of the Ottoman Empire. Since then, raging controversy has continued. Is religion essentially obsolete and a danger? Or can religion be relevant, contemporary and a way of promoting human dignity and ethics? The Balıks, like other followers of Gülen, hold the latter view and are sometimes criticized for this.

Gülen explains that as one unites one's will more with the will of God, and moves beyond selfishness, one finds deeper and deeper joy. Sufism offers "a practical program by which the Muslim can internalize Islamic faith so that it motivates a life of service to humankind." (Michel 2005: 78) Thomas Michel focuses on understanding the neo-Sufi spirituality that Gülen proposes. "Muslims seeking a way to live their Islamic faith in modern situations and make a positive contribution to the transformation of society find in the movement a constructive interpretation of Qur'anic teaching that stresses good deeds and service to humanity." The movement encourages, "ethically concerned individuals who are open to cooperate in building pluralistic societies and working for peace, justice, and human development." (Michel 2005: 71) Michel explains, "Gülen's Sufi-oriented spirituality is an attempt to respond to the fundamental questions faced by all conscientious modern believers: how to develop humane qualities, good behavior, love for others, enthusiasm for self-improvement, and an active desire to serve oth-

ers, to make a difference in the world, and to persevere in this desire in the face of setbacks and failures.” (Michel 2005: 78)

“Establish, all of you, peace.” This paper has given stories of how people of the Gülen movement in southeastern Turkey are sowing seeds of peace amidst challenges of ethnic discrimination, lack of education, and economic disadvantages. Authentic peace is grounded in human rights, in meeting human needs, such as food, shelter, health care, and in a sustainable environment. Betty A. Reardon who was the director of the Peace Education program at Teachers College of Columbia University warns citizens aspiring to democracy, “the conflation of national identity and military capacity is the greatest of the many obstacles to human security.” (Reardon 2008 a) The attitudes and actions of the Gülen movement harmonize with concepts of Reardon. When she was nominated for the 2001 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, she said, “Democracy, defined as the politics of tolerance, diversity and non-violence, provides the social and political context in which citizens educated for peace can work together to debate, to contend, to differ constructively about means and approaches to achieving a just peace. Legitimate democracy provides for non-violent dissent from unjust laws, non-peaceful policies and oppressive customs which violate human rights. A gender perspective on peace and other public issues brings the integral relationships among exclusion, injustice and violence to full light.” (Reardon 2001 b)

Ayşe Gül Altınay who teaches at Sabancı University did a careful study, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey*, a historical and anthropological investigation of Turkey since the founding of the nation. She raises questions that are not only helpful for clarifying systems in Turkey, but are helpful for any modern nation that says it is a democracy. Is a nation predominantly functioning in military values of defining and protecting against “the other” in contrast to democratic values of learning to understand, respect, and negotiate with all? Are militaristic values so common that they have become “normal” and invisible? Altınay

documents and analyses elements in the Turkish educational system that reinforce militaristic attitudes. Her study found that many students of Kurdish, Arab, Armenian, or Christian descent hear that they are “the other.” This reinforces insecurity and they may become angry and distrustful. At the same time the “pure Turkish” student are absorbing attitudes of fear and distrust of the others. The Gülen schools and tutoring centers by example and by word teach respect for each human being, tolerance of differences, and skills for making peace. Aras and Caha state that the community drawn together by Gulen’s ideas has “divergent ideas and people, including the poor and the rich, the educated and the illiterate, Turks and Kurds, as well as Muslims and non-Muslims. Gulen’s movement could be a model for the future of Islamic political and social activism.” (Aras and Caha 2003: 141) Sometimes people seem to belong to different sides: Kurds against Turks, Christians against Muslims, Palestinians against Israelis, whites against blacks, or indigenous against colonizers. The true difference is between those who try to solve problems through domination with psychological, social or physical violence, and those who are solving problems through invitations to the humanity, the conscience, and the hearts of others. Cowards often hide behind guns. Islam in Turkey has been influenced by the Sufi tradition which describes itself “as being based on the philosophy that all creatures should be loved as God’s physical reflection and objects of the Creator’s own love. There is no place for enemies or “others” in this system. (Aras and Caha 2003: 141) Gülen constantly invites people to recognize the other as a brother or sister in the family of God. Constantly in Islam, the Creator is spoken of as “compassionate and merciful.” Compassion is the nature of God and the invitation to humanity. Gülen invites his followers to share the compassion of God which can be seeds of peace. In this age of global challenges, we could learn from O. A. in Derik. He said, “First our in-laws tried to persuade us not to work in the southeast of Turkey. When they heard that we were determined to serve there they said, ‘If you are going there, buy a weapon.’ He and his young wife

responded, “No, we use our love to save others. We don’t want weapons. There is no gate that love cannot open. To open the gate of paradise, use love. Love is the key to open doors. We love humans because God created them.”

NOTES

- I This qualitative research is based on information gathered by the author from May 12 to June 8, 2008 with some background from these places and organizations from June 1 to 14, 2007. **Places:** Introductory information was gathered in Istanbul, then the places of research in Southeast Turkey included: Şanlıurfa, Harran, Mardin, Mazıdağı, Derik, Boyaklı, Mıdyat, Hasan Keyf, Batman, Binaltı, Bismil, Diyarbakir. **Visited these institutions started or assisted by members of the Gülen Movement:** In Istanbul: A central office of Kimse Yok Mu and branches of it in other cities, The Journalist and Writers Foundation, The Samanyolu television station, Fatih University. Three partner organizations of Kimse Yok Mu doing charitable work: Derköy in Derik, MIKAD in Mıdyat, and Oyced in Batman. Four schools: In Izmir, Şanlıurfa, a primary and a secondary school in Diyarbakir. Seven free tutoring centers and also met ten directors of village centers who were gathered for a weekly meeting. Four paid tutoring centers. Two state schools, one in Mardin and another outside of Batman, which had been helped by Kimse Yok Mu. Directors of branch offices of the Zaman newspaper in Derik, Mıdyat, and Bismil. **Had conversations with:** Three elders who have assisted for over twenty years and organized business men to donate supporting schools, tutoring centers, and other charitable works. About thirty people who are volunteers with or employed as staff with Gülen movement organizations. About twelve families who were being helped by Kimse Yok Mu or partner organizations. Translation was done by Husnu Saner Narman. I respectfully withhold the names of some people who gave us information while awaiting their review of the text. **Textual research which preceded and followed the site visits is reflected in the bibliography.**

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