

University of New Mexico-Taos  
Center for Faculty Development

Dear Friends,

I have recently returned from an extraordinary journey to Granada, Spain, where I taught at a conference sponsored by the New York Open Center, called “The Golden Age of the Andalusia: Sufis, Kabbalists and Christian Philosophers in Medieval Spain.”

Because of my publications, I was invited to be part of a remarkable faculty of world-renowned scholars, but I had to pay my own travel expenses. Thanks to the generosity of the Center for Faculty Development, I was able to participate in this historic gathering and represent UNM-Taos in the international academic community. The caliber of thinkers and writers who were my colleagues for that week was truly outstanding. These are men and women who are changing the way the world looks at the history of religion, making ancient wisdom teachings available for a modern world desperately in need of such instruction.

The conference was held from September 15-20, 2007, in Granada, across from the ancient Alhambra palace, last stronghold of the “Moors” in Spain, symbol of 800 years of peace when Jews, Christians and Muslims all lived together in relative harmony under Islamic rule in Spain, and collaborated to create some of the greatest masterpieces of art, architecture and philosophy in human history. The purpose of the conference was to examine the ways in which this collaboration took place, in hope of gleaning guidance on how the Abrahamic religions, currently suffering such strife, might recapture the essential truths that unite them. Around 100 people from all over the world attended the conference.

My responsibilities included a plenary lecture, titled “Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross: Jewish Roots, Sufi Soil,” and a workshop, called “The Beautiful Wound: Transformation Through Suffering in the Spanish Mystics.” I also read in Spanish with world-renowned poet, Robert Bly, one evening on stage for a performance of Spanish poetry.

As an instructor of world religions, I found this conference to be especially stimulating, as well as heartening. I return to the classroom with renewed hope that awareness of the fundamental connections underlying all of the world’s faiths can heal the fractures that cause war and violence in the name of religion. Moreover, as a member of the faculty of the University of New Mexico in Taos, I believe I drew positive attention to our institution, which I hope will bring benefits to our community in the long run.

If you would like me to offer a talk on my experience, I would be happy to do so.

With my gratitude,  
Mirabai Starr