

Is downward dog key to peace in the Middle East?



Ben McPartland

WHEN David Sye was holed up in war-torn Bosnia with no food or roof over his head, he made a promise to himself that if he ever got out he would teach yoga for the rest of his life.

In 1990 he had gone to the Balkans to cover the war as a radio journalist but after his passport was stolen he ended up having to teach yoga just to get by.

When he did eventually make it out alive in 1995, he kept his promise and is now uniting Palestinians and Israelis.

"I don't care whether they can do a certain position or not, the important thing is that they feel transformed," said Mr Sye, from Inverness Street in Camden Town.

"This is what I do. I am not saying I can change the world. I don't believe in peace in the whole world, I just believe in peace in my world."

In 2006 Mr Sye was in the Middle East giving yoga classes, and managed to overcome the tight border controls to unite two groups of his students – one from Palestine and one from Israel.

On October 18, with tensions high, he took a group of 18 Palestinians

Meet the man bringing Israelis and Palestinians together through power of yoga

over the border to the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem.

He said: "These people were desperate to meet each other even if it meant crossing the borders which were a nightmare."

"When they finally met together it was an incredible moment. Some of the Israeli women had been scared on the journey because some of their relatives had been killed by Palestinian terrorists in the past. But when they met they were hugging each other and sobbing their eyes out. That happened without the help of any politicians."

The achievement was a far cry from 47-year-old Mr Sye's regular work helping stressed-out London commuters ease their problems.

Over the past few years he has been making a point of trying to do his own little bit to help bring peace to the Middle East.

"None of us can say that peace cannot exist without politicians," he said. "Peace is possible because people want it."

"Yoga is really a middle class indulgence. I love my middle classes and I am middle class myself but yoga does have the possibilities to resolve conflicts."

"In Palestine it creates tremendous relief for those people who live in such a pressured situation. Over there it is like rats trapped in a cage. If you did that in London we would be the same."

And Mr Sye is now eager to build on his success. Thanks to some funding donated by a mysterious American tycoon, he will go back to Palestine in April armed with a band of other yoga teachers from across the world.

Over the next year around 100 trained masters of yoga will visit the war-torn area at various stages to try to ease tensions.

For more information about his venture, visit www.yogabeats.com

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Singers wanted to go back to school

SINGERS and bands who have longed to perform in front of hordes of partygoers dressed in school uniform now have their chance.

School Disco – the legendary party held at Kentish Town Forum on Saturday nights – is looking for new acts.

The controversial weekly shindig, which has infuriated local residents because of the drunken antics of the revellers, returned to

the Forum on Saturday after a month's break while the venue was refurbished.

And now organisers are looking for new singers who can entertain the masses, dressed in grey shorts or short skirts. One particular attribute they are looking for is the ability to play cover tracks.

For more information visit www.school disco.com.

Heath trees bring new life to Ireland

HAMPSTEAD Heath's oldest oak trees are to give a helping hand to urban regeneration in Northern Ireland.

Some 20 saplings from the Heath's 400-year-old boundary oaks will be planted in St Columb's Park in the Waterside district of Derry.

The oak is the traditional symbol of the city, with 'Derry' being derived from the Irish 'Doire' meaning oak grove. Catherine McGuinness, deputy

governor of the City of London's Irish Society and former chairwoman of the City's Hampstead Heath management committee, said: "We hope that these young oak trees will take root in the park to symbolise a new era of peace for the people of Derry."

Derry Mayor, Alderman Drew Thompson, said: "The donation of these historic oak seedlings is a symbolic gesture and one which we truly appreciate."