



*The Peel*

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## *Yuval Ron: Coexistence, Peace and Meditation*

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COURTESY OF [HTTP://YUVALRONMUSIC.COM/](http://YUVALRONMUSIC.COM/)

We are all in poverty—spiritual poverty. Mother Theresa was once asked to tell a reporter about the terrible poverty in India. She told him that yes, there is incredible poverty in India, but there is also incredible poverty in America. Spiritually Americans are very poor. We are attracted to things that have no spiritual content: television shows, movies, sports and politics. But a spiritual renaissance is starting. We are hungry for spirituality but don't feel connected to mainstream religion. Yuval Ron says his ensemble tries to fill people's spiritual gap.

Yuval was born in Israel and was exposed to all different kinds of music: Jewish, Arabic, Middle Eastern and Western. He went to Berkeley College of Music to study film music composition. In 2000, while working in Los Angeles as a composer for films and TV shows the Second Intifada took place in Israel. The Palestinian uprising was very violent and lots of innocent people from both sides were killed: 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis. This really bothered Yuval and he wanted to do something about it.

He decided to put together an ensemble with musicians from all three of the religions of the Middle East. Having Palestinians, Israelis, and Christians all play together and present the culture and the music in a respectful way demonstrates that we can create beauty and peace and harmony if we all work together. His goal is to promote understanding and respect and knowledge about other religions. A big obstacle for peace in the Middle East and other places around the world is that each side has different narratives and they don't understand the other

side's narrative. They are not aware of the history of misery that the other side has experienced. They only have a very partial understanding of the other side. By teaching about the culture, music, dance, history, philosophy, mysticism and religion of both sides Yuval hopes to promote a possibility of peace.

Since 2000, the ensemble has been giving people hope, strength and renewed faith in the possibility of peace. After experiencing the ensemble's music, Yuval claims, people loose their hate and feel healing. For people who were activists for peace but got discouraged, the music reignited their spark to work for peace again.

Yuval hopes to use the power of what they do to inspire more people. "I'm just one person, and by myself I can't bring any change. But if I go to 100 colleges and universities and speak to 5,000-10,000 new people every year, maybe some of those people will be inspired and carry the message, teach the songs, and engage in conversations that will eventually lead to change and create a peaceful coexistence in the Middle East."

The ensemble's music doesn't just inspire people to advocate for peace, science has proven it's good for the brain too. Yuval worked with neuroscientists Mark Robert Waldman and Andrew Goodman who wrote New York Times Bestseller *How God Can Change Your Brain*. They scanned people's brains while they meditated, chanted or prayed. It ends up that no matter what you chant or meditate or what religion you believe in it all helps the brain the same way. As long as you believe in meditation it's good for your brain. Yuval teaches people how to find a type of meditation that speaks to them. Meditation affects the brain by creating certain circuits of neurons that stay in the brain forever and change your brain for the rest of your life.

Atheists were also included in the study. They were asked to meditate on their deepest value: love, respect, honesty, the golden rule. The results showed that the brain changed in the exact same way as it did for religious people. Yuval says, "It's all about concentration, focus, and meditation. The subject doesn't matter as long as it is meaningful to you. You don't have to call it god, you can call it truth, love, honesty, respect. Whatever you believe in."

Yuval says that the secularization of young people is very liberating because it frees our minds from the dogma of religion that tells people what to think and do based on what god has told them. He argues that this is great as long as we replace it with something. It could be something as simple as a value system. As long as you don't "wash the baby away with the dirty water" and instead retain a value system that you believe in and can meditate on, being secular is just as healthy for the brain as being religious. So if science can prove reason for coexistence why can't we create it?

MARCH 14, 2014 BY THE PEEL

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