

The Meditation Room in the UN

The Meditation Room in the UN was built in 1957. Dag Hammarskjöld who then was The General Secretary of the UN planned the room. His vision was that nothing in the room would deflect the attention or disturbed the silence for those who used it. Dag Hammarskjöld believed that "We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence." This is why he felt there is a need for a quiet room, where people could withdraw into themselves, regardless of their faith, creed or religion.

Dag Hammarskjöld personally planned and supervised in every detail the creation of the "Meditation Room".

The room was opened in 1957. Dag Hammarskjöld wrote the following text to be distributed to the visitors of the room:

"We all have within us a center 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....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."

Journalist Pauline Frederick spoke about Dag Hammarskjöld and the Meditation Room in an interview for the UN Oral History Collection. " I remember very distinctly one night, when I heard that he (Dag Hammarskjöld) 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 center of the United Nations. He had a special crew of painters working on the Meditation Room that evening. 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."