

**Ameen Rihani International Symposium
Opening Remarks**

“RIHANI’S IMAGINATION LIBERATION MOVEMENT”

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We are gathered to celebrate the life and contribution of Ameen Rihani. Soaring spirits and enlightened souls have been funneled into Middle Eastern society in history through such well known visionaries like Rabi’ah al-‘Adawiyyah, Mansur al-Hallaj, Muhiyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, Jelaluddin Rumi and many other women and men. In modern times, this creative force has found expression in Ameen Rihani.

Ameen Rihani journeys through the West, observes, learns, discovers new knowledge and returns to his Lebanon. His efforts open dialogue between West and East, North and South. Ameen Rihani is an original bridge builder. He never lived on the bridge. He kept it open for others to travel.

Rihani pursues knowledge through total existential surrender. He blends passion with reason to achieve critical thinking. The Eastern mystic and the American industrialist are two poles of the same realities. Rihani blends the materialism of the West with the spirituality of the East, by causing both elements to “meet and fuse.” The most highly developed being is neither Western nor Eastern, but rather a person who combines the finer qualities of Western genius and Eastern prophet. Otherwise the materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East become narrow.

Ameen Rihani was ahead of his time. He was a remarkable futurist. He recognized that the issues facing humanity demand a new set of answers, arising from a new pattern of faith and belief. He did not believe that everything in the universe, our world, our human nature is fully accessible to scientific materialism. Many aspects of our inner reality and life remain mysterious, especially the age-old quest of the human spirit toward transcendence.

Rihani introduces us to an all inclusive epistemology. He recognizes that the deeper we go in the core of sciences, the closer we come to the fundamentals of perennial wisdom. He was an original post-modernist, post-structuralist and deconstructuralist. Rihani develops the view that human consciousness comprises both analytic and intuitive modes. He sees the individual parts of reality as well as the whole. For him the complimentary functioning of the rational and intuitive is a measure of human creativity.

Rihani opens the universe of our imagination to a broader understanding. We often think of creative power as a possession or attainment of certain special individuals. Rihani taught us that creativity has a great deal to do with how we relate to each other. When we cultivate creative powers, we gain the confidence to realize what we uniquely have to contribute.

Rihani the social critic, the political analyst and the reformer stretches our sympathy and moral imagination to include the wider human community. Like every Sufi, before and after him, through his spiritual development Rihani worked his way up the ladder of consciousness from limitation to abundance, from human opportunity to Divine proximity.

Rihani was his own light- clear, true to himself, responsive to the world around him. Free to bring his gifts into the world. He was a complete person, an affirming flame. Rihani taught us that creativity is not a professional specialty but the birthright of every human being on Earth. He taught us there are no chosen people. Every single one of us is a chosen human being capable of reflecting on the most important challenges that we face.