

Palestine – Is there a Peace Process after 18 years? - Should Jerusalem become an open City? By Heinrich Eliyahu Benedikt

“I will restore Jerusalem with law and raise her with righteousness!” (Yeshayahu)

Dear Mr. Chairman, dear and respected dignitaries, panellists and audience; I greet you with great respect and love from the depth of my heart and bow to the one spirit which is worshipped in all temples, synagogues, churches and mosques and which is dwelling in the chest of all of us.

As you may know, I am a philosopher and educator and the founder of an international initiative for peace and coexistence in the Middle East with a special focus on Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. I have built international bonds and coalitions between educators, political and religious leaders all around the world to work for a raised consciousness and human awareness on this globe. As for a workable solution for the Middle East conflict, we have different scenarios and models at hand, whose realization yet fully depend on **where we arrive with each other in our efforts for mutual understanding and** (trustworthy social, interreligious and political) **agreements**. No matter what solution or model we might chose, it will depend on our ability of reaching a state of **mutual trust and reliability in keeping word with each other in the settled agreements – whatever they may be**.

Dear audience, you may know that I am quite critical about our politics in Israel, and as Israeli, I also have to admit that I am deeply ashamed about the ignorant and arrogant attitude of our Government and its endless provocations towards Palestinians, yet I cannot accept the repeated one-sided blames from the side of the Muslim World, which are not based on truth and cannot lead to progress in making peace.

I came here in an attitude of reaching out for an honest and truthful look on our situation and fostering bonds of trust between all of us who are really seeking a practical solution for peace and coexistence in the region. Still, I do not want to present myself in my role or function as an educator or spiritual guide, but simply **as a human being in search for dignity**. In this attitude I want to express my special joy and gratitude about the presence of HRH Prince Turki and Mr. Altwajri, two men whom I have learned to respect for their straightforwardness and integrity.

Day by day we are worldwide confronted with new problems and challenges which threaten our lives and even the survival of humanity as a whole not only in this region but everywhere on this globe. If we seek for the cause we find **a single universal root and that is dishonesty and moral corruption**. Reflecting all the recently revealed facts and figures about the variegated social, financial, political and even religious institutions, we are witnessing how God is bringing up and laying open all kinds of corruption and dishonesty in our world today. This is happening in each and every section and sector of life everywhere in the world and we see and experience this phenomenon in the realms of **finance, in politics, business, family affairs and even our own minds**. Time to hide and to get away with cheap excuses for our infidel and dishonest actions is over.

Seeking for peace, dignity and a worthwhile human existence we have **to get to the roots** of it and inquire our own patterns of self-rectification and hidden attitudes of turning truths and facts into self-defending and rigid systems of rationalization, biased thought, belief and action. Scriptures say: “Peace is a reward of righteousness”. But righteousness and integrity are based on our being honest with ourselves and with each other. **Only if we stop with these**

patterns of self-betrayal and blaming the other instead of taking responsibility for our own inner world of feelings, thoughts and actions which mould our lives and destinies we will once more get in line with cosmic moral law and ultimately in tune with God and his plan.

God wants to rule the world and our own lives through our hearts. But this is only possible if we become honest with ourselves and with each other. This is the issue which I want to stress here, because otherwise we will fall back into circles of blame and offence which definitely will not lead us towards dignity and peace, but to the outworn patterns of hatred, offence, war and unending hurt and destruction.

I will not get into politics, nor will I get into religious or ideological argument, nor into the usually performed blame game nor that of self-justification. I also will neither take the role of the innocent victim, nor that of a blame-goat, nor that of self-justification, nor that of the bad guy. I will simply try to show the discrepancy between the ways of honesty and dishonesty and their impacts on our personal and collective lives.

Truth and truthfulness is the basis of integrity and all other values. Where there is no truth, there is neither love, nor peace nor integrity. No truthfulness – no love. No truthfulness – no justice. No truthfulness – no peace. **Only if we stop the game of self-betrayal and start confessing our lies and twistedness, we enter the road to restore trust, mutual respect, integrity and peace.**

Let me give you a personal example. I am a widely respected educator and spiritual guide living in a very blessed relationship with my wife. Some time ago – after many years of self-inquiry, spiritual striving and guidance of many seekers – my wife confronted me with patterns and attitudes of superimposition, control and even psychological tyranny which were totally opposite to my self-image as a loving, caring and tender husband. I have to say that she has a very open, strong, soft and loving nature. Out of her genuine love and intimate closeness with me she tried for long to confront me with several attitudes of myself, which caused her pain and inner suffering. For a long time I was unable to accept her feedbacks and being able to really hear and see and take to my heart what she said. Usually I would have responded in a tone of proud conviction: **“No that is not so.”** Often I found myself turning her words around and making her feel guilty, so that she would end up not only with the hurt I have caused to her, but even swamping her pains with the blame I have put on her. It took too much time – and I owe it to her patience and loving endurance – that I suddenly was realizing that my pride made me blind to see her and realize my toughness and psychological tyranny towards her. I became aware that all this was a pattern of self-betrayal based of an idle or conceited self-image. Thanks God and her loving instance, my eyes were opened and I could see the shameful truth about myself. This was very painful, but finally a deep relief from an inner prison and a much deeper opening of my heart towards my beloved wife.

The teaching I drew from this experience was, that **the more sophisticated we are, the more sublime are our patterns of mental corruption.** Usually we justify our inner twistedness and self-betrayal with moral arguments. We cover our innermost abyss of darkness with a beautifully polished personality woven of moral imperatives and logics of psychological economy. This is a great trap and the cause of a lot of blind spots.

The intimate relationship between husband and wife for me is the measure and model of how societies, nations as well as national and international, cultural and intercultural relations work or don't work. As said above: Being in tune with God and His righteousness, we are rising to an inner state of blessedness, leading a divine (happy and all-over prosperous)

life and coping with all challenges of the outer and inner worlds in just and wise manners. What is true on the level of personal relationships is also true on the scale of international and intercultural relations. **And the leaders and decision makers – political, social and religious as well – are the living examples for our civil society even whole nations.** They are models for their people and inspire them to live and act after their likeness. That is to say: I believe we – who we are gathered here as the representatives of our people – bear the responsibility about our own truthfulness and life not only before God and our conscience, but also before those whom we are meant to inspire and lead.

If we analyse the media today, no matter if Israeli, Arab or international, we find a lot of insult and mutual blame and manipulation, but hardly any truth or even impartial analysis of facts. The usual pattern we live is: “I am right – you are wrong”, “I am good – you are bad”, I am the good guy and you are the bad one. It is the course of our worldly corrupted minds today to always escape truth and honesty, and fall into the traps of self-defence, blame, and self-justification. And it is exactly this pattern which makes us finally ending up in the stagnant attitude of “that is the course of the world” leading us into unending circles of rationalizations and blame and on political levels to those of revenge or retaliation.

On the other side we have the proof of the few who dared to take refuge in honesty, truth and trust in God’s ways. To name only a few examples let me remind us of the challenging attitudes and initiatives of non-violence and truth taken by people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela. They overcame injustice, enmity, hostility, and suppression by ending the game of blame and retaliation and building a new life on truth and self-inquiry. **They put truth higher than their own lives and personal privileges and thus became immortal.**

The day **Mikhail Gorbachov** stood up confessing before the whole world that the Soviet Union did wrong the whole threat-game of the cold war instantly ended.

The day when **Anwar El Sadat** dared to go to Israel to offer a fair proposal for peace and coexistence he laid the foundation for the return of captured land and for a mutual peace and diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel.

When **George Bush Sen.** called for war with Iraq in 1990 a humble Imam in Germany made a wise comment. He said: **Everyone goes to pray for God’s blessings in his undertakings;** George Bush prays in a church in Washington, Saddam Hussein prays in a Mosque in Tikrit, but where is the man that inquires his heart for his motivation and his conscience for truth, if what he intends would be just and honest before God and the world.

And I remember the day, when **Itzhak Rabin** was buried after being murdered by a fanatic Jew, Palestinians were kneeling and crying before his picture posted at walls in Jerusalem.

When **Nelson Mandela** came to power in South Africa and renounced to take revenge after decades of tyranny executed by the Burs against the native black Africans, who were treated like slaves, and installed the truth commission as a response, it was a perfectly unprecedented act of humanity in the history of mankind, which demands a lot of respect and after-thought.

I remember the open comment of the **Belzer Rebbe**, Rav Yisachar Dov Rokach, a most revered orthodox Rabbi, in which he has issued a blistering condemnation of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his government, which he said had made unbearable mistakes

which even led to bloodshed. He stated clearly that the policy of Israel should stay with the injunction not to provoke the gentiles [– and definitely not the Palestinians].

In the same way it was opening the hearts on our side, when **Dr. Ghazi Hamad**, the former spokesman of the Hamas Government in Gaza, waged scathing criticism, blaming the Palestinians for turning the Gaza Strip into a lawless and violent place. He said: “I am not defending the occupation, but I want to stop at our mistakes, which we are accustomed to blame on others.” ... “Anarchy, wanton killing, land stealing, thuggery ... is the occupation responsible for all?” he asked, saying that the Palestinians should stop espousing conspiracy theories which “limit our thinking.”

“The reality in Gaza today is one of neglect, sadness, and failure” he said, „... the land is full with anarchy, corruption, thuggery, and gang killings. Isn’t building the homeland part of the resistance?” ... “Let’s admit to our mistakes, let’s do some logical soul searching and place the interest of our people before us and say honestly – We were right here and we erred there.”

On what ever side we are, to whatever nation, tribe or group of people we belong, it is not our belonging, but our attitude and awareness, which makes the difference before God and our conscience deep within. Therefore in my eyes the present world crises and especially the Middle East Conflict is not a matter of belonging, cultures or religion, but a matter of truthfulness and integrity. For me it is not a conflict between races, nations or cultures, not between Jews and Muslims, Israelis or Palestinians and the like, but between attitudes and truthfulness, between light and darkness in our thoughts, words and actions! God calls for truthfulness and peace in our thoughts, words and actions. **He calls us to build coalitions between people of integrity and good will which go beyond the borders of nationality, mentality, culture or religion.**

The reality of unconscious relationships – be it in our partnership or marriage or on a rather bigger collective scale – **expresses itself in endless conflicts between our (often unconscious) claims of control over the other (based on fears) while simultaneously demanding the untouchable right of self-determination, independence and freedom for ourselves and vice versa.** This circular conflict can only be ended by self-inquiry and open confession of our fears finally leading to mutual understanding and trust. As long as we will not get into such a state of understanding and trust, we will not be able to let go of our defense mechanism of claims and control.

As I said before, I will not go into concrete models and solutions, because the solution which can be adopted and realized will depend on where we arrive with ourselves and with each other. Many intelligent people and organizations of good will have developed and proposed different pragmatic scenarios, approaches and models and we have all of them at hand. **What is lacking** is the psychological and realistic approach with each other to get into a process of building mutual understanding and trust and thus moving towards a state of readiness and ability for cooperation. To get ahead and along with each other in any way or direction we have to start open talks and encounters with ourselves and each other **putting our inner positions of trust and mistrust, claims and disclaims, fears and rejections on the table.** We have to start to openly clarify, admit and question our projected stereotyped images of the other, our hidden motives and intentions, sympathies and antipathies, fears and expectations, claims and blames, instead of presenting ourselves with the rigid ever repetitive self-definitions we know from each other and thus losing ourselves in cosmetic self-presentations and closed systems of self-justification, which can lead only into dead ends.

If we look into the mirror of self-inquiry and show our true faces to ourselves and each other, we will enter a process of inner growth and transformation. If we admit our failings, weaknesses and feelings and the full truth about ourselves before each other, we will even enter a process of building trust and reliability. Thus we will get to the point of good feeling for and understanding of each other and the daily reality of our complementary lives and living conditions. Only by such transparency we will become trustworthy and reliable partners in peace and coexistence.

One thing is sure and has to be understood: threat and pressure are no means to realize a worthwhile agreement, because finally we all will depend on the loyalty and reliability of our civil societies to keep the agreed upon peace and coexistence settlements and not allowing residual negative emotions which might once more kindle and continue the endless wars and battles. One cannot superimpose peace and coexistence on people or societies which do not value them and put other political or religious goals higher than the values of peace and welfare. Peace and the will to coexist have to be wanted and searched for from inside, from the bottom of the heart of the people who are concerned. Nobody else will be able to force anyone to refrain from violating rules or laws if they are not willed by the people. This means that just such a commitment is the only guarantee for a peace agreement to be kept.

As long as Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad insist on making war with Israel for their declared and not-declared hidden reasons, there is no chance for peace and well being. The same is true about radical Jews and several ultraorthodox groups and last not least about the ignorant government in our country.

Since a mutual and trustworthy peace is based on our firmly decided will to end war, neglect and provocation of and against each other and enjoy a stable settlement, threat or pressure cannot pave a way towards this badly needed achievement.

Therefore trustworthy peace agreements have to be preceded by a deep and committed inner transformation within our communities (civil societies) concerning our perception of the other, our fears, our arrogance, our political and religious claims and adhering to a process to develop mutual understanding, respect and the decided will to coexist and cooperate with each other. This is the task of all peace education, reconciliation and encounter initiatives, of advocacy and true political diplomacy. Otherwise there will not be any possibility to grant non-violence and an end of civil war or provocation and attaining a state of security in both countries.

As mentioned in the beginning we have established a strong international group of people from different areas of the region who are committed in taking any strain and personal sacrifice in their initiatives for interreligious understanding, personal encounters and dialog, practical cooperation in rebuilding our social and economic systems and thus laying a foundation for peace and coexistence, development and welfare.

If we really want peace, we need to build alliances and working teams with real personal commitments between religious and political leaders, educators and their organizations from all sides and ends of related societies and nations who are willing to go this way. For this end we have made a good start with Palestinians and Israelis and internationals. I only want to mention the joint initiatives of the **Jerusalem Peace Academy, **The Club of Budapest**, the Jerusalem based **Mosaica Institute** which is directed by MK Rabbi Melchior, the **Adam Institute in Gaza**, the **Interfaith Harmony Foundation** in Delhi and many others embracing**

even the utmost ends of Hamas and AIPAC, waqf and the Rabbanut in Jerusalem. We have paved a way for new engagements which do not depend on actual unreliable political realities, but on social movements and interreligious initiatives in Israel and Palestine and in connection with our Muslim partners all over the world. (See the paper on the Mosaica Center for Inter-Religious Cooperation)

Coming together at this auspicious meeting, I do not want to miss the opportunity to whole-heartedly pleading for your cooperation, that is to join forces and taking action in bringing about more truth into our lives and relationships and thus initiate a path of betterments for all of us in the region and the rest of the world. I especially want to make an appeal to our partners from Saudi Arabia at this panel for keeping in touch and dialogue in the issues of Israel/Palestine and Jerusalem with us. Let us make a commitment for joint efforts and initiatives. May God bless us and our honest endeavours with his wisdom and virtue, and bestow on us commitment and endurance. Thank you!

P. S.: After presenting my exposure about self-betrayal and truthfulness, an African Muslim addressed me in the toilet, expressing his appreciation and also admitting that he knows that many Muslims un... would be happy to see Israel blown up! But hardly anyone would openly speak out. I was grateful and moved about this confession and see it as an example of opening up to the “other” if truthfulness is felt and offered.

Later, after lunch, another Muslim approached me telling me that he is concerned that there is taught so much hatred in most of the Madrassas in Asia and Africa.