



## Peace in the Holy Lands?\*

*Israel and Palestine, the Middle East*

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I have been back and forth in the peace movements, observing since 1948, listening to as many sides as I could. What follows is a selective summary of what I have heard, seeking some constructive synthesis.

None of the past formulas seems adequate, given the facts on the ground. The November 29, 1947 partition plan is the foundation of international legitimacy, but this was flawed from the beginning, about to be rescinded, never accepted by the Arabs, and accepted by the Zionist organization only tactically, as Ben Gurion said, until the Jewish State was strong enough to take the rest of the land, which was done in 1967. The two-state solution and the Palestinian “historic compromise” of 1988, recognizing Israel and accepting 22% of old Palestine as the basis of a new Palestinian state, hardly seems viable, with Palestine now redivided by bypass roads and settlements and security areas. The Oslo declaration of principles still exists, but the “peace process” has failed all its confidence-building steps toward a final status agreement. Reports from Camp David notwithstanding, there was no viable proposal on the table from the Israelis, neither about Jerusalem nor about refugees nor about settlements, when

the process broke down.

The blood of hundreds of martyrs, soldiers, and innocent bystanders, the agony of thousands of injured, outrageous, atrocious, criminal acts committed, the emergency and anger of a nation fearing for its survival, and of

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people demanding their freedom . . . there is no going back to where things were; a new deal is needed.

The peace is not going to be simple, except for the turn of heart that can make it possible. The human heart knows no bounds—once it is opened.

### **Dream and Tragedy**

My perspective is a blend of what I have heard and seen, tending to see sides closer together than they sometimes see themselves, especially in this fever of war. I have been inspired experiencing the love and comradeship that exists across apparently unbridgeable divides.

My peace dream, if I could dream it into reality, would be to see the beautiful holy lands’ culture of hospitality reaffirm itself, reversing the separation and exclusiveness between Israel and Palestine, highlighting an eventual cooperative commonwealth, embracing both Israel and Palestine, and all the region, and the world.

Where is my heart in this tragedy: when two rights collide and struggle both for coexistence and mutual exclusiveness? It need not have happened this way. Better leadership was possible, more honest, more inclined to peace and friendship. Blood on the ground represents a failure of politics and politicians. As a Jew, I am obliged to work for peace, to advance justice, to save lives. As a Kohen, of the priestly family, I want my religion and traditions to be honored, to become a light to the nations. As a person, I cry, I rage, I hide, I write, and organize, or try.

### **Objectives**

The objective is an inclusive agreement, leading to, creating and describing a just, enduring, comprehensive peace, providing security, respect and economic improvement for the Palestinians, Arabs and Israeli Jews, and everyone in the Middle East, affirmed and underwritten by all parties to the

conflict.

A peace must reorganize and permit the visions of both peoples, Jews and Palestinians, to be realized in their fullest, yet neither at the loss of the other.

The ultimate objectives are personal safety, well-being, sustainable communities and societies, and a relative and increasing prosperity for everyone: a wider justice and freer life for all.

People of faith should be able to practice and live their faith without fear of interference.

### **Context**

A context is needed. This Holy Lands war now is not a separate war. It is a continuation of the unresolved struggles of the last century, the division of markets, and the process of imperialism and colonization, the second world war, decolonization, self-determination, globalization, humanization, etc. It is imbedded in the Middle East as a region and world politics as a whole. Many heroes and villains have left their mark who are neither Jewish nor Israeli nor Arab nor Palestinian.

A central responsibility rests on European anti-Semitism, which produced the Zionist political movement, organized to flee Europe and the coming holocaust they foresaw in some shadowy way, and that came indeed, hand in hand with fascism. European history and the mythology and practice of white supremacy produced, among other things, the Jewish imperative to have a safe place and never again be subject to the murderous malevolence of anyone: Jews would protect Jews; Jews would look out for one another. In this spirit, 19th-century settler colonialism and 1st-century prophetic, rabbinic prayers for return to the homeland converged to "go up" to invade Palestine, buy land titles from absentee landlords, talk about displacing and transfer of indigenous populations; and then, in resistance, there was blood and betrayal, back in 1929 and 1936 and then there was war with the British and then terrorism and more terrorism, and grievances multiplied and magnified, and war followed upon war, and uprising upon uprising, and now how do we untie the Gordian knot, unweave the web of war and imagine peace?

Early Zionists believed, or hoped,

of the Palestinians: "The old will die and the young will forget." This self-deception allowed the founders of Israel and their successors to avoid many questions that are now demanding resolution. The old will never die because the young will always remember. For both Jews and Palestinians, some are dead, some are living, most have not yet been born. The land was not, is not for sale, even if Jews arrive from all corners to come home and claim a share, after being historically exiled by the Roman empire and its

## *When two rights collide . . .*

armies in the year 70 C.E.

Land cannot these days be acquired by conquest. The peace now requires a voluntary acceptance of a mutually beneficial agreement about justice and hospitality in the land: As Abraham and Abimelech agreed long ago, not to deal falsely with one another and to remember kindness . . .

### **Regional Peace**

The Middle East as a whole must become a zone free of weapons and mass destruction, nuclear, chemical, biological, and space weapons. A system of inspection and transparencies is needed to remove offensive capacities from the militaries of the Middle East.

Multilateral discussions on these topics must proceed as part of the overall peace process.

A system of collective security is needed, with international guarantees and United Nations presences, to insure the defensive security of all states, peoples, autonomies and communities.

Peace must become a commitment and priority for all states, peoples, autonomies and communities, kings, prime ministers, patriarchs and parliamentarians in the Middle East.

The measure of future leadership in the Middle East is an affirmation of this commitment, a rejection of violence, and continuing calls for return to the negotiating table.

A meeting of all heads of state and interested parties should be gathered to affirm this commitment.

### **Living Together**

A Palestinian peace activist said to my wife, Odile, and me, when we were on our Megiddo Peace Project mission in the Spring of 2000, "Peace will be possible when the Israelis decide they are willing to live with the Palestinians; after that other questions will be easy."

Palestinians also have to be willing to give up the war and the enmity and accept living with Jews.

"Acceptance and respect of Jews" is a command of Koran. Surely the prophet would have anticipated the eventual return of the Jews; place should be made for them.

"One law for ourselves and those with whom we live" is a command of Torah, likewise not to move one's neighbor's boundary post, and never, even in time of war, to uproot olive trees, or citrus or almond or palm.

"Jubilee," the relief from oppression, the freeing of prisoners, the redistribution of land and cancellation of debts, to reestablish the foundations of justice, is a periodic necessity, called for by Jewish tradition.

Great teachers have preached in all traditions the sanctity of life, not to kill, to live in peace.

These preachings and teachings, traditions, laws and commands impelling toward peace need to be amplified, repeated, taught to children, broadcast through the grapevine and media and internet, so no one will not have heard.

### **International Law**

International law is ultimately the governing law in the Middle East as everywhere in the world: the charter of the United Nations, the universal declaration of human rights, Geneva convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, the conventions against all forms of racial discrimination, against discrimination against women, against torture, against genocide, for civil and political rights, for social, economic and cultural rights, and the rights of children, and the relevant United Nations General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. This is the body of international law as it applies to Israel and Palestine.

The ultimate judicial authorities are the world court and the international criminal court.

The agreement reached among the parties should be affirmed in a new United Nations resolution, superceding, interpreting, and going beyond the existing resolutions 181, 194, 242, 338, etc.

### **The Spirit of Peace**

A process of “truth and reconciliation” must be part of a comprehensive peace agreement.

Some experiences of recognition, apology, confession, remorse, reeducation and amnesty are needed to provide a moral equivalent of revenge and an acceptable way to settle blood feuds.

All religious authorities in the area should be invited to a convocation or conference to discuss and formulate and initiate the practice of religious rituals viewed as necessary in different traditions to cleanse the land of blood, to redeem the blood of the Palestinians, to redeem the blood of the Jews, to redeem the blood of the brother who cries out from the land, the blood of all the sufferings of all the wars in the world that is symbolized in the Holy Lands.

A mutual toleration of all religious traditions is needed in the Holy Lands: Jew, Christian, Moslem, Druze, Sufi, Samaritan, Bahai, Buddhist, Sikh, and also those faiths of the travelers and

pilgrims who come from the ends of the earth.

The “Canaanites” and the humanists also share in the spirit of peace, one representing rights rooted in the continuity of the land, and the other as world citizen, voicing interests of all humanity and all species.

There are also guardians of the spirit, healers, wise people, sages who help clear the mind, and focus energy, and facilitate unity and harmony, guide meditation and serve universal peace, beyond the beyond; these too have place in the peace making.

In peace there is no superior religion. There is a mutual longing for union with G-d, with Allah, the Great Spirit, the larger soul, the unnameable, the beloved . . .

Until we know and learn with our mother’s milk the thousand names of G-d, we are all here still to learn. Each path has its teaching toward truth, how to live in peace, how to honor our parents and elders, how to establish justice, how to resolve conflict, how to share, care, give and forgive. Peace seekers should be counting the names of G-d, helping humanity get to a thousand and see the one.

Shards of fragmented divinity schools seek to recombine, to find one another, to converge, to cooperate, to make public and more collective our

varied bodhisattva missions, repairing and healing the world.

### **A Turning of Hearts**

For any peace like this to be possible, it will require a change of hearts, an opening and turning. Hearts on both sides are hard. All sides have suffered and suffer still. The pain goes across generations.

The last word of Jewish prophecy anticipated and urged a turning of hearts, of the parents to the children, of the children to the elders . . . otherwise will come, inevitably, a next war and yet greater destruction and a curse on the land.

Peace seekers must concentrate on, besides basic principles of a principled compromise, the turning of hearts without which the parties may never see how close together they and we all really are and can be, and how good peace could be when everyone wins.

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\*This article was excerpted from more elaborated writings addressing specifics of a “what would work” peace proposal. These writings are available by contacting the writer at 531 Third Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Alan Haber works with his wife, Odile Hugonot, on the Megiddo Peace Project, see [www.umich.edu/~megiddo/](http://www.umich.edu/~megiddo/).



### **Megiddo Peace Table**

Built with the vision of a peace meeting to end all wars, this table served a whole generation of a family to grow and resolve family conflicts and eat together and socialize and do the bills, etc.; and it was blessed by clergy of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, breaking bread and praying together.

It served as the opening peace table at the 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace conference, the world’s largest-ever peace meeting. Nobel Peace Prize winners Desmond Tutu (Nobel Laureate 1984), Rigoberta Menchú Tum (Nobel Laureate 1992) and José Ramos Horta (Nobel Laureate 1996) sat around the table moderated by David Andrews of Ireland.