

Statement: Dr. Debbie Weissman

I'm honored to be here. I believe that one can be a moderate or liberal nationalist and still a globalist, and I believe that the UN was one of the important institutions created in the wake of the Second World War. I am speaking as an Israeli Jew who has spent the last 46 years living in Jerusalem and trying to educate and work for peace.

Some of my fellow Jews who talk about peace are referring to some ideal, messianic peace as described in the Prophetic visions of the End of Days, when "the lion will lie down with the lamb." (Isaiah 11:6) It is difficult to reconcile these prophecies with the kind of partial, fragmented reality represented in the actual, yet-to-be-redeemed world in which we live in the present. One of the exceptional rabbis in Israel today, former Member of the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and sometime-member of the Cabinet Michael Melchior, has suggested that we should be striving for a "piece of peace."

In line with the common adage that "the perfect is the enemy of the good," sometimes the very prophetic messages that inspire us to work for peace in the long run, can get in the way of actually achieving some modicum of peace in the short run.

The Hebrew Bible (known to Christians as the "Old Testament") begins with eleven chapters about the creation of the world and the origins of humankind, way before coming to the first Hebrew, Abraham. Before the covenant made with Abraham's descendants (Genesis 17), we read about the Rainbow Covenant made with the children of Noah (Genesis 8:21-9:17.) Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a contemporary scholar in Israel, commenting on the discussion of the rainbow symbol in the *Talmud*, adds, "...the very form of the rainbow, not like a bow of war aimed at the earth, is in itself an indication that the rainbow is not a sign of war, but, on the contrary, a symbol of peace." Thus there seems to be a connection between a universal covenant and the concept of peace. The Prophets gave us visions of a better world in the future, in which "Nation shall not live up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore"(Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3). This statement of course appears on the UN building in New York.

The Jewish theological basis for universalism is the belief that all human beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27.) In the *Mishnah*, we find the following very important passage:

"Therefore but a single person was created in the world, to teach that if anyone has caused a single soul to perish, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had caused a whole world to perish; and if anyone saves a single soul, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had saved a whole world. Again, but a single person was created for the sake of peace among humankind, that none should say to his fellow, 'My father was greater than your father;'... Again, but a single person was created to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One, blessed is He; for people stamp many coins with one seal and they are all like one another; but the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, has stamped every person with the seal of the first man, Adam, yet none of them is like his fellow. Therefore every one must say, 'For my sake was the world created.'" (*Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5.*)

Thus, the Biblical story of the creation of the human being in the image of God is the basis for the ultimate worth, equality and uniqueness of all people. This is probably the most important basis of respect for the Other, which lies at the heart of peace education. Human diversity is a manifestation of God's greatness.

Finally, a Rabbinic statement teaches, "Who is the greatest of heroes? The one who turns his enemy into his friend." (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan 23.*)

With an apology to the great English author Jane Austen, who wrote the classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, I have written about education for what I call, "Pride without Prejudice." I believe that all people should be encouraged to have self-esteem and pride in their own identity, religion, language, culture, and so on. At the same time they have to have respect for the identity, language, and religion and culture of the Other. . We can perhaps quote here the famous dictum of the first-century sage Hillel: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?" Thus, we must strive for a balance between ourselves and others, between the particular and the universal.

Such a world, we believe, can be brought about by human action, abetted by divine intervention. The belief that it can come partially through human action is a shield against despair; the belief in the need for divine intervention, a shield against hubris.

Sometimes it is precisely when people feel that their own identity is under attack that they respond violently. A quotation from Michael Walzer's important essay, *The Thick and the Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, "When my parochialism is threatened, then I am wholly, radically parochial...and nothing else.... Under conditions of security, I will acquire a more complex identity than the idea of tribalism suggests." (p. 82.)

The contemporary phenomenon of global terrorism is undoubtedly exacerbated by feelings of

insecurity as described above. Our goal, then, should not be the eradication of group identities but their empowerment through ensuring the safety and security of the different groups.

Thus, we are faced with the serious educational challenge of developing a model for religious education that is dialectical—that strengthens the particular identity and commitment of the group and its members and, at the same time, tries to inculcate within them a respect for the Other and the Other's faith, an openness to different cultures, an awareness that we are all human beings, of equal worth.

And one final point:

Peace doesn't necessitate the end of debate and discussion. The Hebrew word, *machloket*, which means "controversy", is a positive concept within the Jewish tradition, the hallmark of Rabbinic literature.

A 20th century Jewish philosopher and mystic, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook wrote,

"Some err and think that world peace can be built only through total consensus...But the truth is that real peace, on the contrary, can come to the world only through precisely the multiplicity of peace, and this is when all sides and opinions come to light, and are proven to each have their own place."

Thus, our goal is unity, not uniformity. Unity can come out of the celebration of diversity. We have many commonalities, but we must also respect our differences.