

**The Embroidered Glory of Peace:
Religious Pluralism and Openness to the Other**

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B'si'atah D'smayah – with the grace of God, I speak to you today,
an Israeli Rabbi - Zeh Hayom Asah Adonai, Nagilah v'Nismecha
Vo – This day has surely been decreed by God, it shall be a day of
joy and celebration!

Along with giving thanks to the Master of the Universe, I wish to
thank His Highness, the emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa
AL Thani who has opened up his tent to all of us, an oasis in of
what often appears to be a desert of *pluralism*. It is so hard, at
least in my country, Israel, to find a holy place, such as this room,
where Muslim, Christian and Jew might sit together to discuss
peacefully and respectfully how we humans might leave this world
in a better state than the ay we found it when we arrived.

I represent an organization in Israel, RIKMA – which means
embroidery, but is also an acronym for Spiritual Community
Leadership Training, and is dedicated to helping create the next
generation of Jewish religious leadership in the Holy Land. Just as
each thread used in embroidery comes together with other strands
in order to create a wonderful combination of form and color – yet
at the same time doesn't not lose it's own texture and hue – so to,
we believe, individuals come together in community, forming
something entirely new and beautiful, yet at the same time each
individual person is able to preserve her own identity, his own
character.

I also serve as the spiritual leader of Congregation Tiferet Shalom
in Tel Aviv – name chosen for our community means "The Glory
or Beauty of Peace". I would like to think that in weaving together
our spiritual community in Tel Aviv, we are somehow working
towards that allusive Peace – Salaam – Shalom. I firmly believe
that this is both possible and imperative if we are so succeed in
leaving this world in a better state than it was when we entered it.

The word Shalom in Hebrew is derived from the root that means "wholeness" – as a Jew, I truly believe that only when individuals come together – in whatever framework that might be – in respect and dignity, in a way that each may preserve his or hers own character, *texture and color* as a human being created in the image of God – only then might that *fullness – shleimut* – peace – be achieved.

My message to my students at RIKMA, some of the most talented and promising leaders of Jewish spiritual communities in Israel, my message to my congregants in Tel Aviv as well as my message to our 5 daughters –(aywahl Abul banat!), and indeed my message to you, good men and women here today, is that we live in a world of multi-faceted truth. This is not to say, that anything goes, and that all is totally subjective. Surely not! There is justice and injustice, right and wrong, good and bad.

Yet on the other hand, there are also two sides, *at least two sides*, to every story

- as there were at least two sides in the ancient biblical world between the Kingdom of Judah, who produced much of what now know as the Hebrew Bible, and the northern Kingdom of Samaria, the rest of the Israelite tribes living in the first millennium BCE, of which we know so little;
- as there were at least two sides when early Christians began to differentiate themselves from the Jews of the time;
- as there were two sides when Muslims and Christians battled over the possession of the Holy Land in the Middle Ages;
- and as there are two sides today, and have been for over a hundred years, in the strife between us Israelis and the Palestinian people.

I must confess that I was not always aware – and in many ways still not aware – of the different aspects of the truth present among my neighbors, the Palestinians. I came to Israel from the United States 32 years ago as a young man who wished to live in the land of his ancestors, and no less important, to be part of what seemed to me then, and indeed still seems in my eyes, to be the last chance for many Jews around to world, who hail from lands less liberal, less open – less pluralistic, than the city Los Angeles, where I grew up – to live their lives as Jews, without persecution.

I am not a Jew looking for authority, neither am I interested in being a Rabbi of authority. I look to my heritage for inspiration:

There is a wonderful addition to the biblical account, in the book of Exodus, of how God gave the law to the Israelite people at Mt. Sinai. The Jewish sages in the first few centuries of the common era, tell how when God spoke at Sinai, God's words reached the ears of each Israelite – man, woman and child – by way of a separate track, from God's mouth to each individual's ear in a way that each, depending on their own level, could understand and internalize the heavenly message. They were all there at one time, according to the story, yet each of them must have had a slightly different take on what went on, what as said – multifaceted truth.

Even something as simple as the eating arrangements while the Children of Israel wandered around the desert for 40 years – our scripture tells us that God fed them manna which come down from the heavens. This manna would taste different to each individual, depending upon what one was in the mood for!

And I look to the spiritual heritage of others as well for inspiration:

We read in the various Gospels of the New Testament somewhat different accounts of Jesus, his life and his teachings. Is only one of them the correct account? It is not for me to say, there are others present here who have a far better understanding of Christian doctrine, but for me, a Jew reading the scripture which is holy to so many around the world, I find a message of pluralism, one of multi-faceted truth.

And in the Quran, dealing with the prophet Jonah, I read a fascinating verse

[[10:47] To each community, a messenger. After their messenger comes, they are judged equitably, without the least injustice.

Each community – with their own messenger, each with their own message of truth.

The challenge, of course, is how do each of these various versions of the truth come together in a wonderful embroidery, RIKMA, one that leads to a vision of the Glory of Peace?

I am inspired by Psalm 150 to think of yet another metaphor for religious pluralism, one in which each musical instrument – the trumpets, the harps, the drums – come together to praise God – Yah – HalleluYah.

1 Praise the LORD...

...3 Praise the Lord with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise with the harp and lyre,

4 praise the Lord with tambourine and dancing,
praise with the strings and flute,

5 praise the Lord with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.

Just as the *SYMPHONY* of Psalm 150 is pleasing to the ear, far more than a solo, or even a duet – and certainly to cacophony, we look to God to complete us, to make us whole, Shalem in Hebrew, so too we are need of others' interpretations of God's presence to make society - whether it be here at this conference, in the State of Israel or at a Global level – whole, shalem, which is the same as Shalom, Peace, Salaam

V'chen Yihi Ratzon – May it be God's will – Insha'alah