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**Middle East Peace Network** 

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## 1. Introduction

At a time when the sand dunes of the Middle East are shifting rapidly and a new political order is slowly emerging, this essay provides an approach that makes the Arab-Israeli peace possible. The keystone of the strategy to achieve this peace is the defiant power of the human spirit. Napoleon was right when he said, *“There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.”*<sup>1</sup> It is this power that now enables the people of the Middle East to express defiance in fighting authoritarian regimes and demanding freedom. Defiantly they take a stand *not* merely against oppression, intimidation, and abuse, but *for* basic human rights. What we see today across the Middle East is how the human spirit is indeed mightier than the sword.

Written in the shadow of the political storm that has been sweeping the Arab world, this essay is intended to awaken ordinary citizens, everywhere, like you, out of your mood of complacency and drift, inviting you to join me in a global peace campaign where you can make a difference. This essay is directed at you—a concerned, resourceful, courageous person who does not despair at the tragic state of the Middle East, but wishes to do something about it. In this essay I call upon you to unleash your human spirit in support of peace, for this spirit is mightier than the sword of war.

I am at a point in my life that I am ready to unleash *my* defiant power of the human spirit and take a stand for peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. I am very fortunate to have a lovely wife—a tower of strength behind me—three wonderful married children, and eleven beautiful grandchildren. The love in our family is my life’s greatest blessing. Today more than ever, I believe that there is nothing more rewarding in life than to love people. I have been quite successful in making a living; it’s now time to make a difference. I have learned over the years to cultivate love within my family; it’s now time to share it with others. Love is the greatest gift one can give. **For me, the place where love is most needed is the Middle East, a region infested with fear and bloodshed. Love, I am sure, defeats fear and prevents bloodshed. Through love, we can empower the people of the region to live with greater hope and achievement. With love, we can build bridges to each other’s hearts.**

Ordinary people often feel powerless to effect change in the field of foreign affairs. We feel it is the province of governments. It’s not true! We don’t have to wait for somebody else, such as a political leader or a government, to

take the initiative to transform the nature of our relationship with our adversary neighbors across the border. In fact, it is our right and responsibility to do so, particularly when our government consistently fails in doing it. Moreover, we possess the power of overcoming any problem of human destiny, no matter how large.

Now that powerful winds of change are blowing in the Middle East, we should quickly harness those winds to uplift our spirits, to help us rise above fears, to erode old barriers that stand in our way, to shape new structures of peace, to move us in the direction of our long-sought peace. **Now, more than ever, Israelis can make a people's peace with their Arab neighbors, the kind of peace that politicians in government do not and cannot negotiate.** We can do it as long as we seize the opportunity to ride upon those popular winds and steer them towards making the desirable change.

We must make the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—considered by many to be the heart of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict—a top priority. I am truly concerned that the failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could heighten the desperation of the Arab masses. Although their unrest stems from domestic problems, history tells us that disillusioned masses, such as those in the Arab world, may likely be deflected from the misdoings of their governments to blaming Israel for the ailments of their own societies and economies. Time is of the essence.

We need to rethink the strategy of resolving the conflict and embark on a new out-of-the-box initiative before these region-wide flames destroy any chance of the Middle East peace process ever resuming. **This moment of many challenges facing the countries of the Middle East also represents opportunities, primarily for open dialogues among groups, peoples, nations, and religions.** For Israel, a small island of economic prosperity in a vast Arab and Muslim sea, it can be a golden opportunity to take a huge step towards building peace in the region.

A word of caution: *“Unless we change our direction,”* as the old proverb tells us, *“we are likely to end up where we are headed”*—towards another war. We—I mean everybody on the planet—are all on the same ship and we are going to either succeed in hoisting its sails together and charting a course that fulfills the long-held promise of peace, or we will all go down with the ship. We must prevent the Arabs and Israelis from preparing for what each says will be a “decisive” second round and give new urgency to peacemaking.

That's the message of the essay you are about to read.

## 2. Historical Overview

The Arab-Israeli conflict has cast a shadow over my life ever since my birth in 1946. My first encounter with war occurred on June 3, 1948, shortly after the declaration of the State of Israel. I was only two-years-old. Egyptian airplanes dropped bombs at the center of my hometown, Rishon Le-Zion, southeast of Tel Aviv, killing twenty-five civilians. My mother, who happened to hear the bombing noises from afar, grabbed me and ran to a nearby citrus orchard to hide from the attacking airplanes. My mother, like all Jews in those days, had a good reason to be apprehensive. On May 15, one day after the creation of Israel, the Arab armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon invaded the newly born Jewish state. Obviously, I don't remember this historical episode. But, I am sure it helped form my character, as it has done to all Israeli children. In the early days of Israel, Jews chose their neighborhoods according to their political affiliation. I grew up in a right-wing neighborhood where veterans of the Irgun underground lived. No question, my initial warlike way of thinking was molded under the clouds of war at quite an early age.

My adult life, however, took an interesting turn. I was first a soldier in Israel's wars during the 60s and 70s. I then became a scholar of Middle Eastern history, studying the Arab-Israeli conflict extensively during the 70s and 80s. Later, during the 90s, I turned into an advocate for peace, involved in building bridges of understanding between Israelis and Arabs and between Jews and Muslims. I still remember the shift I personally experienced, realizing the futility of war and recognizing my own reverence for life, not only for my life but for the lives of all human beings. This extraordinary event altered my life, causing a breakthrough in the way I saw the state of affairs between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the possibility for peace between them. I realized that for me to make peace with the enemy, I had to personally work with that enemy and make him my partner. I wanted to meet the people I learned to demonize and turn them into my friends. I clearly remember the first time it happened – shortly after the Gulf war of 1990, a little over twenty years ago, when three young Arab-Americans of a Palestinian descent came, at my invitation, to visit my U.S.-based office of Har-El Financial Group one evening. This momentous encounter led to the creation of the Middle East Peace Network (MEPN).

The members of the group who gradually joined me – all Arab and Jewish Americans, including Israelis – varied in their perspectives on the Middle East. But all agreed on one thing – the urgent need to bring about a peaceful resolution of the age-old Arab-Israeli conflict. **We discovered a new dimension, a way**

**which is neither Right nor Left, a common ground, a space for protagonists without antagonists.** We all believed that the power of the human spirit can empower us to take a stand for peace when peace was virtually absent from the Middle East. All of us were passionately committed and prepared for a long battle for the minds and hearts of both Arabs and Israelis. We sought to help them change the way they behave towards one another. We were true pioneers in the quest for peace in the Middle East. Believing that Israeli-Palestinian peace had been reached with the Oslo Accords of 1993, we expanded our work into the Jordanian arena and even engaged in intense Jewish-Muslim dialogue ([click to read old news clipping](#)). The relationship between members of our group was close. I will not forget how one night, in the fall of 1994, a group of Arab Muslim friends came to my house to offer me their condolences when my father died.

MEPN ceased operations in 1996. But, I never stopped thinking, speaking, and writing about peace. This work naturally led me to continue the interfaith dialogue as an alternative peacemaking framework. I have always regarded religion as a critical, yet ignored, track for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. **While some people use religion as a political instrument to spread division and hatred, I believe religion is all about unity and tolerance.** This premise has always been at the core of my interfaith encounters. They started when I participated in the 1993 convention of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, during which I moderated a panel of scholars and clergyman on "Building a Common Ground: Jews, Christians, and Muslims Working Together." Recently, I completed writing a book entitled *Where Islam and Judaism Join Together: A Perspective on Reconciliation*, which is soon to be published.<sup>2</sup> I hope this book would be successful in spreading the message that any serious attempt to resolve the Middle East conflict cannot ignore religion. I invite you to read [An Open Letter to My Muslim Friends](#), published in English and Arabic here on this website.<sup>3</sup> It summarizes my thoughts on the need to build bridges of understanding between the Jewish and Muslim worlds.

As a scholar of Middle Eastern history, I can't help but begin with a short historical introduction. Over the years, I have learned that crafting the history of the future is far more exciting and challenging than writing the history of the past. Even better, **the best way to predict the future, I believe, is to create it, to write your own history, to write your own narrative.** Therefore, it comes as no surprise that a new chapter in my odyssey has begun. After a lot of serious deliberations and soul searching, I have decided to return to the arena of battling for peace in the Middle East and, for that purpose, reactivate the MEPN and reassemble a new leadership team. I simply cannot stay on the sidelines, watching my beloved country, Israel, and the peoples of the region at-large, listening to the noisy drums of war. I think it's time to see both Arabs and Israelis

march to a different drum. Otherwise, I fear, we—you and I—will see how our governments (out of sheer political expedience) lose the precious inheritance entrusted upon them by our fathers and forefathers. It could leave our children with a land scorched by the flames of war. We have a responsibility toward future generations. “*Just as others planted for you,*” we learned from our sages, “*so you shall plant for your children;*”<sup>4</sup> plant the seeds of peace, not war.

It’s time for resolute action in the Middle East. It’s time to end the tragic and wasteful confrontation that has caused a generation of suffering and pain for both Israelis and Palestinians. It’s time to transform the disputed land of Israel/Palestine from a battlefield saturated with blood into a flourishing garden of economic development, human richness, and prosperity for both peoples.

### 3. Using Two-Track Diplomacy

As we all know, there have been several attempts in the last two decades to reach a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The last round of peace negotiations between Israel’s Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Mahmoud Abbas resumed in early September 2010 under the auspices of U.S. President Barack Obama. But it collapsed two months later. This speedy conclusion was not surprising to me given Israel’s striking shift to the right and, on the Palestinians’ side, the weakness of its leadership and the schism between the West Bank’s secularist led-PA and the Islamist group Hamas that governs the Gaza Strip. More importantly, however, are the huge psychological and ideological barriers separating the Israelis and the Palestinians. The suspension of the peace talks by the PA, in reaction to Israel’s refusal to renew a moratorium on Jewish settlement construction in the West Bank, is clear evidence of those impeding barriers and the consistent failure of all American administrations to recognize them.

With direct Israeli-Palestinian talks broken down, apparently irretrievably, and the negligible chances of their revival during Netanyahu’s remaining two-years in office, there is a need for a new approach. **Recognizing the magnitude and complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the evidenced limitations of traditional diplomacy (known as Track I), I propose to enhance the peace process by adding a nongovernmental peacebuilding component (known as Track II) to the peace efforts.** It suggests that in this warring region, both tracks—“*peace from above*” (Track I) and “*peace from below*” (Track II)—are needed in order for peace negotiations to succeed. This full peace is possible only when both tracks are employed. Either by itself is not enough. For the Dove of Peace to fly out of its “cage” and soar high in the Middle East

skies, both wings—Track I and Track II—must act together, interact for an enhanced effect.

Specifically, I suggest that rather than wait for another round of talks that in all probability will end, like always, in an anything-but-peace process, both parties should begin immediately with the pre-negotiation phase proposed in MEPN's **Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding Initiative (IPPI)**. This massive, well-organized, well-financed campaign is designed to help impact public thinking in the region, particularly among Israelis and Palestinians, about the possibility of achieving a final settlement of their dispute. During this phase, Track II intermediaries, using a variety of unconventional methods that “vaccinate” the environment and engage in a peacebuilding process on multiple fronts, will prepare the stage for Track I negotiators to finalize a formal peace agreement. Yes, this two-phase process takes more time, and given the creeping reality on the ground, quick-fix solutions are always more desirable. But, there is simply no other way.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Two arguments must be made:**

**The first is at the core of the IPPI: Though recognizing that foreign affairs are the traditional province of governments, I believe that the prevailing view that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved through traditional diplomacy alone is flawed.** Diplomacy does serve the function of settling international conflicts, but in the Middle East it has shown little promise. What we see is that when diplomacy fails the solution is more diplomacy. The ongoing missions to the region by Senator George Mitchell, the special envoy of President Obama, and of the Quartet Representative Tony Blair, who has been concentrating on Palestinian state-building, are a good start and one step forward in building bridges between the parties to the conflict. But nothing spectacular is likely to happen. These conventional diplomatic missions and the politically coercive inducements employed by the American administration during the process cannot bring the two sides together, nor can they cause a breakthrough strong enough to cut a workable deal. Unless peacebuilding takes place not only at the level of state institutions but from the bottom-up in all levels of society, state-building from the top-down may not be effective. Peacebuilding and state-building are mutually reinforcing processes.

**The second interrelated argument: The entrenched notion that another round of talks will generate the desirable document, which will give birth to the genuine peace we seek, is absurd.** So is the thought that the age-old bloody feud between the Israelis and the Palestinians can miraculously end instantly with one set of signatures by their leaders, without a serious peacebuilding and peacemaking effort, without an infrastructure of peace in place. It is tragic to continuously ignore the undeniable argument that every peacebuilding and



peacemaking effort we expend *today* becomes a contribution to end the conflict tomorrow. "*It should never be forgotten,*" stated King Hussein of Jordan in his address to a joint session of Congress on July 26, 1994, "*that peace resides ultimately not in the hands of governments but in the hands of the people, for unless peace can be made real to the men, women, and children of the Middle East, the best efforts of negotiators will come to naught.*"<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. The Urgent Need for a New Paradigm

Clearly, what will open the space for creative solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and enable existing solutions to work is not just a missing step or solution. What is needed is a new paradigm. **What is the nature of the new paradigm? It is a special climate or an "ecology of peace." It is the collective sum of all social, economic, environmental, cultural, and psychological conditions that best inspires the development of a consciousness that will keep leaders from remaining stuck in their belief systems. This will free their powers of exploration and ability to discover new opportunities for peace.**

Within such a paradigm, peace becomes woven into the fabric of everyday life. Such a climate will create the internal dynamism necessary to increase the probabilities and favorable consequences of peace. Such a climate will encourage the political leaders to give up their traditional "*peace through strength*" strategy and adopt the concept of "*strength through peace*" instead. Many of today's "peacemaking" diplomats were once war-making generals. For them, to rephrase Carl von Clausewitz's famous line, peace is nothing but "*a mere continuation of war by other means.*"<sup>7</sup> In this new paradigm, however, political leaders will shift their thinking.

Such a new paradigm, for example, was generated by the historic visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977. Because of this visit, the Camp David Accords were concluded in 1978, and the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty was signed in 1979. Beginning in the late 1980s, the entire world paradigm shifted when the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union dissolved, the Berlin Wall collapsed, Germany reunified, and then in 1992, the European Union came into being.

Can we shift the paradigm of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as well? **Yes, we can.** We can despite the lack of belief in the feasibility of peace and the widespread notion ingrained in both Israeli and Palestinian societies that this dispute is existential in nature and therefore unsolvable.

## Two points should be emphasized:

**One is that a shift in paradigm is a matter of perspective, a way of seeing.** Once a new context is created around peace—out of true commitment to and experience of responsibility for peace—it shifts the meaning of the problem and fosters the necessary conditions in which peace initiatives are workable. This is a matter of choice. Viktor E. Frankl, an internationally renowned psychiatrist who lived through the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps of World War II, called this “*the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.*”<sup>8</sup> I believe this applies to the desperate circumstances of the region in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is endlessly fermenting. Choosing our perspective is fundamental to creating anything new in life, whether the life of a person, a nation, or a region. My belief is that what we intend is what we get, what we seek is what we find, and that the only limits and constraints are the ones we create through our disbelief in our power to choose. If we want to make peace possible, it becomes possible.

**The other point is that no conventional peace process will ever produce lasting results because they treat symptoms not the roots of the conflict.** At the root of the historical conflict between Israel and the Palestinians are deep-seated distrust, suspicion, bitterness, and hostility that must be overcome in order for peace negotiations to succeed. There can be no lasting agreements on the Middle East’s physical borders so long as the psychological barriers remain unbreachable. The leaders on both sides can no longer engage in the politics of wishful thinking and dwell on geographical maps, blind to the psychological “inner maps” at the core of the conflict. It is these “inner maps” that need to be reshaped before political maps are redrawn. This thought was beautifully stated by President John F. Kennedy: “*Peace does not rest in the charters and covenants alone; it lies in the hearts and minds of all people.*”<sup>9</sup> War is the product of the mind; it only looks as though it is the product of generals and weapons. Therefore, to resolve their historical conflict, both Israelis and Palestinians must learn to *change their minds about their minds*, as articulated in the preamble of the UNESCO Constitution: “*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.*”<sup>10</sup>

In reshaping “inner maps,” I am not referring to the building of intimate personal relations between negotiators and leaders. While these conditions are helpful, the experience of Oslo clearly shows that by themselves they do not change the old maps of collective beliefs. By “inner maps” I mean a new approach that addresses the need for the fundamental change of beliefs, values, myths, and ideologies—in short, all of the historically self-imposed barriers that divide Israelis and Palestinians and block peaceful solutions to their conflict. **The**

**emotional impact and heavy burden of the past can only be overcome through concrete efforts of peacebuilding and peacemaking.** Any new rounds of Israeli-Palestinian talks, without such efforts, are likely to end up where we already are.

It is equally tragic to base any future peace treaty exclusively on the old mutually agreed principle of “land for peace.” The collapse of the ill-designed Oslo process and the violence on the northern and southern borders of Israel, despite the withdrawal by Israel of its military forces from Lebanon (in 2000) and the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip (in 2005), show that this old principle is not a sufficient basis for a political settlement. This compromising concept was not convincing enough because the two sides are driven by conflicting national interests that are shaped by different historical narratives. It is obvious that the conflict has stubborn, inflammatory roots in our recent past that can no longer be ignored. We need to address those roots, those “inner maps.”

## 5. The Concept of Peace

A real peace process, I believe, will bear the desired fruits if we accept the following four basic assumptions:

### **People**

Both Israelis and Palestinians, while skeptical about the current process, are peoples eager for peace and will anxiously respond to genuine opportunities for peace when presented to them.

### **Vision**

Enemies can radically transform their beliefs and behaviors towards each other in the face of a shared powerful vision of peace in which they can begin to trust without having to first trust each other.

### **Process**

Peacebuilding efforts and people-to-people interactions are indispensable and necessary conditions for creating a climate for effective peace negotiations.

### **Resources**

The world possesses sufficient resources and technologies to help them create a secure and lasting peace.

These four pillars—people, vision, process, and resources—give the peace process integrity. Like the four legs of a chair, when they sit soundly on the ground, the process is solid. When any leg is ignored or missing, however, the chair becomes wobbly; the process loses its trust and strength. All four are, therefore, critical to the success of the peace efforts.

The word “peace” has unfortunately received a bad reputation. Over the years, this beautiful word has been contaminated by its modern users. This has to change. It will change when we successfully resurrect this word and give it its original scriptural meaning, i.e. wholeness, harmony, security, and well-being. It will change when the *idea* of peace is recaptured, re-branded, and liberated, so to speak, from the exclusive hands of small and marginal political groups on the Left, who are often accused of being “appeasers” or “naïve,” and becomes the *ideal* of the mainstream, and eventually of all people. When the idea of peace is transformed from a mere position held by a handful of liberal intellectuals on the fringes of the political spectrum into a belief prevalent across all sectors of society, then it becomes an idea whose time has come. **At the right moment of critical mass, when an overwhelming number of influential leaders, thinkers, and opinion-makers on both sides, have followed the “shifters” and accepted the idea of peace, and enough people from all walks of life have caught on to it, a shift will eventually occur and peace will become a reality.** Therefore, it is crucial that we ceaselessly speak the word “peace” and restore its worthy place at the forefront of the vocabulary we proudly use. Words matter. Language is a normative system. When we speak, we create. When we expand the vocabulary of peace, we expand the possibilities of peace.

A few words about the “political realism” professed by some Israeli and American self-proclaimed experts on Mideast affairs, who cynically suggest that Israel has already been enjoying a *de facto* peace, albeit cold, with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the PA. So why do we need a *de jure* peace, to be signed in Washington D.C. in the presence of the President of the U.S. and other international dignitaries and marked by ceremonial hugs and kisses? Most importantly, they argue, is that we don’t have war. What we need, they recommend, is only to preserve the current situation, the so-called *status quo*. I would like to remind these “realists” that the term *status quo* is only part of the phrase *status quo ante bellum*, meaning literally “the situation as it was before the war.” In wishfully thinking to keep the things the way they presently are, they in fact lay the ground for the next war. The *status quo* is simply unsustainable. It would be a tragic mistake to maintain the state of no-peace-no war. Such a limbo in the volatile Middle East region only breeds violence, which could easily escalate into a total war. The next one, God forbid, would bear little resemblance to the previous clashes between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This is why we, at MEPN, want to educate and practice a different kind of peace.

What kind of peace do we mean? I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that enables nations to grow and offers its citizens the opportunity to build a better life for their children. **Not an enforced peace, but peace by choice. Not just peace for us to the exclusion of others, but peace for all. Not being against war, but being for peace. Not a mere absence or cessation of war, but a virtue, a way of life, a way of thinking, a new context that unlocks the resources, the talents and the imagination of the people.** In this context, the way *to* peace is the way *of* peace. In this context, conflict resolution is not merely a process that may be culminated at the end of the road by a peace settlement. It is rather a series of well-intentioned, well-designed peace actions and interactions undertaken along the road. Peace is a never-ending process, a work of many people carried on a hundred fronts. **Peace talks do not create peace, actions do.** Arabs and Israelis can't eradicate their conflict and win peace with *words*. They have got to carry that ideal into *practice*. They have to adopt an active peace policy. They need to battle for peace as fiercely as they had waged war.

The following passages from the poem *The Peacemaker*, published in 1972 by Walker Knight, an Atlanta journalist, convey the nature of this active peace:

*Peace, like war, is waged.  
Peace is active, not passive;  
Peace is doing, not waiting;  
Peace is aggressive, attacking;  
Peace plans its strategy and encircles the enemy;  
Peace marshals its forces and storms the gates;  
Peace gathers its weapons and pierces the defense.  
The weapons of peace are love, joy, goodness, longsuffering.  
The arms of peace are truth, honesty, patience, prayer.  
The strategy of peace brings safety, welfare, happiness.<sup>11</sup>*

## 6. A Shared Vision of Peace

**A**s part of this paradigm shift, we need to recognize that we can no longer afford to wait for states and governments to achieve a lasting settlement of conflicts on their own, especially when they are consistently failing in this endeavor. **Responsibility lies equally with private citizens, who together are the beneficiaries of peace and the victims of its absence, to participate in peacebuilding and peacemaking.** Responsibility lies especially with those who live in peace to contribute to other societies that desperately need it. This reminds me of President Dwight Eisenhower's statement: *"I like to believe that*

*people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than are governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of their way and let them have it.*"<sup>12</sup> Eisenhower obviously took an extreme, unfair position by leveling strong criticism against governments and discarding their contribution to peace. But his point is well taken. Enough of expedient rhetoric and broken promises by our leaders, who are "*Crying 'peace, peace,' when there is none!*"<sup>13</sup> "*The world cannot continue to wage war like physical giants and to seek peace like intellectuals pygmies,*" Basil O'Connor bluntly stated when commenting on the unprecedented human tragedy caused by World War II.<sup>14</sup> (O'Connor was Chairman of the American Red Cross from 1944 to 1947 and its President from 1947 to 1949).

I am fully aware that achieving a real peace that fulfils the words of Prophet Hosea—"*and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the land*"<sup>15</sup>—will demand an extreme act of faith from both Israelis and Palestinians, a belief in a shared vision of peace that can bridge the wide gap separating their historical narratives. **Unless we believe that peace is possible and vital, the so-called "peace efforts" or "peace talks" are worthless.** Unless we, the offspring of Abraham—children of Ishmael and Isaac—stop looking at each other through the sight of a rifle, unless we start viewing the historical dispute through the right lenses, seeing us both live alongside of each other rather than against each other, no resolution of the conflict will ever happen. Unless we introduce a new kind of drums of peace with sounds that can be loudly heard across the great Arab-Israeli divide, the drums of war that are continuously heard in the background and foreground will be turned into a total war. Unless we give birth to visionary and courageous leaders, who would usher us into a new era of peace and prosperity, we will witness more of the same—new rounds of negotiations that end with nothing. It is time to follow the Jewish prayer, "*The Lord will give courage to his people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.*"<sup>16</sup>

**Courage precedes peace.**

Please keep in mind that, in suggesting a new kind of thinking with respect to peace, I do not call into question your own sense of patriotism, a term generally defined as the unwavering devotion to one's nation. However, many people, whose devotion to their home country is unquestionable, hide themselves behind the mistaken notion that patriotism has to be an uncritical and unqualified love for the nation. Patriotism is not blind acceptance of any official policy. Patriotism is not the automatic waving of the flag of nationalism in support of the government, without frank assessment of its conduct. True patriotism is the love of one's country deep enough to call its leaders to action. **True patriotism is the eagerness to serve, to do anything that makes a difference to your beloved country. Those in service are my true patriots.**

## 7. About Middle East Peace Network

For those who question MEPN's political ideology, let me make one thing clear. It doesn't have one. **MEPN is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with a broad vision in which both Arabs and Israelis can align.** It has no political platform, ideology, or agenda, nor is it committed to any specific policy or set of policies on Middle East affairs. As such, it takes no formal position vis-à-vis the core issues underlying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They remain to be resolved by official diplomats on the negotiating table. **The ultimate objective of MEPN is to create—through alternative avenues, such as citizen diplomatic initiatives, transnational mechanisms, and back-channels—a sustainable “ecology of peace,” a warm climate that fosters conciliatory interactions, open communications, and genuine opportunities for peace.**

The term *network* was chosen to be part of the organization's name for a reason. It is meant to be a global network of individuals and groups from all walks of life and all points of view seeking a new context in which peace is achievable. It is a diversified group of individuals who say “yes” to peace. It is an all-inclusive, broad-based framework where human interaction transcends all boundaries. It is made up of people who believe that, when it comes to peace, “right” and “left” are irrelevant labels that serve politicians, not the people. They believe instead that “front” stage is where we need to be in order to keep the pursuit of peace alive. Unlike the traditional, hierarchical, monolithic, rigid structures typical in the old context, a *network* is characterized by flexibility, self-generation, openness, cooperation, interrelationship, connectedness, volunteerism, and grass-roots support that effect change. A *network* works. It transcends old polarities and divisive distinctions. It encourages partnership and inclusivity over partisanship and exclusivity. It is a tool of transformation, a strategy for a contextual shift, a way by which small groups can transform an entire society.<sup>17</sup> **Would anyone object to this broad-based framework of network organization? No!**

Anyone who believes in the following core values should have no problem in supporting MEPN:

- Believing that peace is a continuous, active, and dynamic relationship among nations that needs to be nurtured and sustained.
- Believing that we are all part of a common humanity and all people are peace seeking by nature.
- Believing that human interaction transcends political, religious, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and international boundaries.

- Believing that peacebuilding efforts are indispensable and necessary conditions for creating a climate for effective peace negotiations.
- Believing that partnership, mutuality, and cooperation are essential ingredients for achieving an enduring peace.
- Believing that citizens have the right and responsibility to participate in formulating and furthering a strategy for peace.

## 8. Invitation for Action

So by now, you know my philosophy, my passion, my commitment. I am filled with fortitude and determination to make a powerful impact in the Middle East. But this stupendous mission is not going to be one person's journey. I don't want to do it alone. I cannot. **I invite you to partner with me as a champion for peace.** You can join me and turn the battle for peace into our common quest. Together, we can create a new paradigm from the bottom up that can shift the relations between Arabs and Israelis. Together, we can produce a new climate conducive to settling the conflict between them. Together, we can begin a new era that calls into action those in government, who are stubbornly clinging to old ways of thinking and old patterns of behavior. Together, we can craft a new environment that generates opportunities for peace. **Together, we can give birth to a new and inspiring roadmap for peace in the Middle East that doesn't have too many stop signs and that has both the map and the compass to generate the long-sought conflict transformation in the Middle East and restore hope for peace in the region.**

As an Israeli, Jew, and Zionist, I truly believe that Israelis and Jews everywhere should always be prepared to fight to defend their homeland with all their means. Clearly, Judaism is not a religion of pacifism. The Talmud specifically teaches us: *"If one is attempting to kill you, kill him first."*<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Torah instructs us: *"Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother"*.<sup>19</sup> We must be prepared to defend the lives of others, including our family and countrymen. This is why I participated in both the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. This is why my father participated in both the War of Independence of 1948 and the Sinai War of 1956. And yet, we are told by our sages that our religion does not glory in war, but lauds peace, not just wants peace, but calls to *"seek peace and pursue it."*<sup>20</sup> The Talmud dedicates an entire Chapter on Peace.<sup>21</sup> Every Sabbath, we chant in the synagogue as the Torah scroll is raised, *"Its ways are pleasant ways, and all its paths are peace."* We are taught in the Bible by Ecclesiastes (*Kohēlēt*):



*“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; [...] a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”<sup>21</sup>*

**The very last words are “a time for peace.” This phrase represents the ultimate goal in life. Now it’s the time. The moment is ripe; the challenge is ours.**

We don’t have a need for new values or morals with respect to peace, but rather for a more purposeful effort to adhere to existing ones. We can draw on our long-standing moral traditions to enrich our present challenges of formulating a new vision and strategy for peace. In my book *Where Islam and Judaism Join Together: A Perspective on Reconciliation*,<sup>22</sup> I explain that there is one universal rule, and one only, that is consistent with the idea of ethical monotheism, that can stand by itself in this warring region, in the face of the contending religious groups and apart from their creed. It is the Golden Rule—*“Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you”*.<sup>23</sup> Both Judaism and Islam prescribe this ethic of reciprocity. In keeping with a central and admirable biblical commandment, the Jewish Morning Prayer begins with the preamble, *“You shall love your fellow as yourself.”*<sup>24</sup> The Jewish preeminent teacher and scholar, Rabbi Hillel the Elder, went further by making the famous statement, *“What is hateful to you do not to your fellow: this is the whole Law, and the rest is interpretation.”*<sup>25</sup> Similarly a famous *Hadith* states, *“None of you has faith [in God] until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”*<sup>26</sup> The Golden Rule does not offer solutions, but a way to approach relationships. It does not prescribe a certain kind of treatment of others, but only the spirit in which we should treat them. It can be a starting point for a constructive dialogue between the peoples of the Middle East, between Israel and its Arab neighbors, between Islam and Judaism.

**I am looking for people who are willing to make this dialogue happen.**

- I am looking for people who pray for the eradication of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the affirmation of peace through understanding and communication.
- I am looking for people who, regardless of their personal political view, desire to see Arabs and Israelis enjoy the blessings of peace.

- I am looking for people who believe in being part of the solution to the conflict, not part of the problem.
- I am looking for people who feel that the goal of peace is the right and responsibility of every citizen, not only of governments.
- I am looking for people who believe that peace is not only possible, but its pursuit is a choice we ought to make.
- I am looking for people who embrace the popular motto, *“Let there be peace, and let it begin with me.”*
- I am looking for people who, as George Bernard Shaw stated, can *“dream of things that never were and ask why not.”*<sup>27</sup>

If you are one of those dreamers, believers, visionaries; if you believe that peace is not only possible but inevitable; if you treat the word “peace” as a verb, not a noun, and embrace the notion that *“Peace, like war, is waged”*; if you want to be a peace warrior, one who operates on the frontline of peacebuilding and peacemaking in the Middle East, **join me**. Whether you are an Arab, Palestinian, Israeli, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, you are invited to join MEPN’s dedicated team of “shifters”, peace-builders who are committed to making a difference by shifting the pervasive presence of hatred, hostility, violence and aggression in the Middle East into a climate of peace. **You, alone or together with friends, can bring an innovative and bold citizen diplomacy to the Arab-Israeli conflict arena and create there “ecology of peace.” We could not just shape the future of this region, but also shift the landscape of the broader Middle East.** This vision is attainable if you choose to believe in it. You can be part of this Peace Network.

Using symbols of Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights, it is said there are two ways of spreading the light of peace: To be either a candle or the mirror that reflects it. Are you willing to kindle the light of peace in the minds of both Jews and Arabs, and spread it all over? The light of one small candle can easily expel all the darkness in the world; if you see darkness as a potentiality of light. Every dark place can be lit. You can be the candle that does it within your family, your community, your society. **When you stand for peace and hold your candle high for many eyes to see, they may light their candlewicks from you, and together the joint flame will become a torch that spreads the light of peace everywhere.** Your combined *little* efforts can make a *big* difference.

It is out of my deep sense of commitment to peace and the belief in the power of the human spirit that I invite you to join me. My invitation to you goes

beyond all partisan constraints. It suggests the introduction of a totally new equation into the Arab-Israeli conflict: All who yearn for an end to the conflict, all who support the principles of peace, all who believe that Arabs and Jews can move beyond what divides them, all who desire a brighter future for their children and grandchildren should join hands within a broad framework, where human interaction transcends all boundaries.

**So you have been invited.** As soon as you finish reading this essay, please go to the home page of this Website and [contact us](#).<sup>28</sup> You will then make a loud statement: You denounce indifference, reject complacency, express personal commitment, ennoble the quest for peace, and honor the vision of Prophet Isaiah, *“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”*<sup>29</sup> I believe in this prophetic vision. Unlike politicians, prophets never make mistakes by leaving their prophecies to be fulfilled in an unspecified time. It is our job to make sure the peace prophecies are carried out in our time, in our generation. God willing!

I am anxiously looking forward to hearing from you. Please forward this essay to your friends so that the message of hope for a peaceful Middle East touches as many lives as possible.

May God bless all of us with peace!

## 9. Endnotes

1. [www.napoleonguide.com/maxim\\_war.htm](http://www.napoleonguide.com/maxim_war.htm).
2. <http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9781137391001>; and <https://www.juancole.com/2014/05/reconciliation-judaism-possible.html>.
3. <http://www.mepnetwork.org/online-resources/publications/>
4. Leviticus, Rabbāh 208); Talmud Bavli, Ta’anit 23.
5. On multi-track diplomacy see, for example, Louise Diamond and John W. McDonald, *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1996).
6. <http://www.israel.org/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/MFADocuments/Pages/ADDRESS%20BY%20KING%20HUSSEIN%20OF%20JORDAN%20TO%20A%20JOINT%20SESSI.aspx>.
7. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/clausewitz-war-as-politics-by-other-means>.
8. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Pocket Books: NY, 1985).

9. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/united-nations-19630920>.
10. <http://www.unesco.org/new/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history/constitution/>
11. <https://baylorlinefoundation.com/walker-knight/>
12. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/dwight\\_d\\_eisenhower\\_136898](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/dwight_d_eisenhower_136898).
13. Jeremiah 6:14.
14. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/572995-the-world-cannot-continue-to-wage-war-like-physical-giants>.
15. Hosea 2:20.
16. Psalms 29:11.
17. The first to introduce “networks” as a tool of transformation was Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s* (J.P. Tarcher: LA, 1980), 213-221. The most recent work is by David Singh Grewal, *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2009).
18. Talmud Bavli, Berachōt 58a.
19. Leviticus 19:16.
20. Psalms 34:14.
21. Pēreḳ ha-Shalōm in Tractate Dērekh ’Ēretz Zuṭā’.
22. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.
23. See p. 58.
24. Leviticus 19:18.
25. Talmud Bavli, Shabbāt 31a.
26. An-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith 13 (<http://www.islamworld.net/docs/nawawi>). Cf. “None of you has faith until you love for your brother what you love for yourself,” in Sahīh Al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-’Imān, Hadīth no. 13; and, “None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself,” in Sahīh Muslim, Kitāb al-’Imān, 67-1, Hadīth no. 45.
27. [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/george\\_bernard\\_shaw\\_162023](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/george_bernard_shaw_162023).
28. <https://www.mepnetwork.org>.
29. Isaiah 2:4.