



BRIT SHALOM
Toward a Covenant of Peace in the Middle East
December 2003

*For the mountains may disappear, and the hills crumble,
but My faithful love will never leave you,
My covenant of peace, my promise of well-being
will never disappear, says the EverPresent, who has mercy on you.
...Isaiah 54:10*

Jewish tradition upholds the sacredness of life. With reverence for all humanity, Kehilla Community Synagogue of Berkeley, California enters into this brit, or covenant, toward peace in the Middle East. We express herein our deepest concerns and greatest hopes for the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

We present our vision with an intention to open hearts and encourage dialogue among all who are concerned with strife in the Middle East. Our vision is founded on the wisdom of the Hebrew prophets, the Jewish philosopher [Martin Buber](#), and leaders of non-violent struggle throughout the world.

Shema: A Call for Reconciliation

Jews and Palestinians alike have suffered from oppression and violence. Yet both peoples are so plagued by fear that they fail time and time again to see the other's plight. Neither society has fully acknowledged the history of the other or taken responsibility for pain inflicted on the other.

A resolution to the Middle East conflict depends on listening and understanding with an eye toward reconciliation. Both peoples must consider the other's sorrow and dreams.

May people of all faiths mourn together the tragic deaths of every woman, man and child who has died in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. May all acknowledge the great pain in their own hearts.

By this covenant, we commit ourselves to help foster reconciliation. In that spirit, we acknowledge that Palestinians have lost much of the land where they lived for centuries, first by the United Nations partition of Palestine in 1948, and later by Israeli military victories. We see that Palestinians have been frustrated in their attempts to restore some of this territory through peace negotiations, and that this

frustration has sparked resistance, both peaceful and terrorist. Though we condemn violence in all forms, we do not ignore its roots.

In the same spirit, we recognize that Jews established the state of Israel in answer to a history of oppression—the Holocaust in particular, as well as the subjugation and genocide of Jews over centuries across Europe, the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East. We perceive that in recent years, terrorist actions have intensified the fear of Jews for their survival as a people.

We plead with those concerned for Middle East peace to initiate spiritual and educational programs that encourage constructive dialogue. Israelis, Palestinians, American Jews, Palestinian-Americans and caring people of all backgrounds can contribute by participating in such programs. There are a number of well established models for listening and dialogue, including [Non-Violent Communication](#), [Principled Negotiation](#) and [Compassionate Listening](#). In fulfillment of our covenant, Kehilla offers educational materials and training to all who wish to engage in study, dialogue and action toward peace.

Programs for constructive dialogue would affirm each people's longing for a secure homeland. They would provide an opportunity for participants to learn about one another's experience. They would encourage Israelis and Palestinians to place their national narrative into a broader, common narrative. In this way, both peoples might see their plight in all its complexity, and understand the part they have played in their own difficult history.

Such programs would be bring to light the common origins of Jewish, Muslim and Christian cultures, so that we might move toward a future free of poisonous antagonism among these groups. Stereotypes that disparage Jews or Arabs would meet their challenge, so that, in their place, a vision of common humanity might emerge.

We encourage all who are concerned for Middle East peace to promote training for Israeli and Palestinian leaders in methods of constructive dialogue and negotiation. Each partner in dialogue would listen with respect and a genuine intention to understand the concerns of the other. The partners would seek to identify common interests; their highest aim would be to arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement. Only when Israeli and Palestinian representatives see themselves standing on the same side—the side of justice and peace—can they examine reasonably the issues that have so long divided them.

We encourage Israelis and Palestinians to build bridges of cooperation in politics, economics, culture, education and spiritual life. May people, ideas, and resources flow freely between the two peoples.

May leaders in Israel and Palestine draw deeply upon the wisdom and experience of women. May women be fully represented at every level of civic leadership and peace-building.

A Call to Renounce Violence

We pray for justice for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The cycle of violence stands to continue unless both peoples are free to pursue their national aspirations.

All those who support the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must renounce violence. To pursue justice and sovereign rights, there must be a halt to all violence and vengeance without preconditions, limits or terms. Military action, suicide bombings, collective punishment and retribution all constitute violence and vengeance.

Palestinians cannot secure a state by the destruction of the Israeli state or by violence against its people. Such means are morally reprehensible and stand only to increase the anguish of both peoples. Likewise, it is futile for Israel to rely on military might to secure its peace. Continued occupation of land captured by Israel in 1967 is unviable for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Any consideration of removing or diminishing the Palestinian population by transfer away from Israel or Palestine is immoral and ultimately constitutes a threat to Israeli security.

Religious extremism has no place in the pursuit of peace. Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders must disavow any claim of an exclusive right to the Holy Land. In accord with the scriptural teachings of all religions that trace their origins to Abraham, these leaders must reject the notion that their religion or God sanctions ethnic cleansing, transfer, genocide or taking of land by force.

In closing, we affirm these principles:

- To revere all life and grieve every death
- In the face of fear or differences, to listen with respect and a true intention to understand.
- To promote constructive dialogue among all those with a concern for the Middle East.
- To build bridges of every kind between the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

By genuine dialogue, may we transcend the fear, anger and hatred that shackles our hearts. May we cultivate faith in the underlying Unity of existence and the virtues that flow from such faith: non-violence, reason, trust and lovingkindness.