



# Forty Years Since The Second Vatican Council Central Challenges Facing Jewish-Christian Dialogue Today: A Jewish Point of View

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**On the 40th anniversary of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council - What are the Central Challenges Facing Jewish-Christian Dialogue? A Jewish Point of View. In addition some ideas about how to continue the spirit of the dialogue in Israel.**

## Forty Years Since The Second Vatican Council

Central Challenges Facing Jewish-Christian Dialogue Today: A Jewish Point of View

[Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish](#)

### Introduction

On April 21, 2004, I was invited to screen our film "I am Joseph Your Brother" by Rabbi Daniel Brenner and Dr. Katharine Henderson of Auburn Theological Seminary and Fr. Jim Loughran of the Graymoor Institute as part of my fellowship as a Graymoor scholar-at-large during the 2003-2004 academic year. Following the screening of the film, I was pleased to share some reflections on the topic: "On the 40th anniversary of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council - What are the Central Challenges Facing Jewish-Christian Dialogue? A Jewish Point of View". In addition, in the second part of my lecture, I was asked to share some ideas about how we continue the spirit of the dialogue in Israel by explaining what we in Israel are doing to make interreligious dialogue an instrument for peace-building in our part of the world. This paper will reflect both aspects of that lecture.

### Vatican II: a Revolution in the Catholic Church

There is no question that the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, was a major revolution in the Catholic Church and enabled the Church to face the modern world with new courage and commitment. Much has been written and said about this during the past four decades,

so I will not repeat what is already well documented and well-known by now.

One of the most amazing things about all the changes that were wrought with Vatican II was the central role assigned to the dialogue with Jews and Judaism in the process. Pope John XXIII's well-known response to the Jewish historian Jules Isaac (in June 1960), who traced the Church's anti-semitism to the Gospels, was to charge those who were responsible for preparing Vatican II to take up the issue of the Church's relations with Judaism as a matter of priority. And the simple gesture, accomplished by Pope John XXIII, when he greeted a Jewish delegation at the Vatican in June 1962, by saying "I am Joseph your brother" was accompanied by the Pope's descending from his throne to sit with the Jews in a simple chair. Indeed, according to historian James Carroll, "the Council's mandate to reform the Church was rooted in the history of its relations with Jews" (Constantine's Sword, p. 551).

This history has been long and torturous.. But, since Vatican II - i.e., since the beginning of the dialogue (between Christians and Jews and between the Church and all other major world religions), I would argue that we are clearly in a new era. We might call this "the new era of dialogue ". We have moved from persecution to partnership, from confrontation to cooperation, from helplessness to hope. Moreover, there is no question that the leadership of Pope John Paul II, whose recent passing is a loss for all of humanity, gave continued and consistent leadership to promoting the dialogue between Christians and Jews in ways that were unprecedented in the history of the Catholic Church, culminating with his personal pilgrimage to the Holy Land in March 2000.

## **Education through new film "I am Joseph Your Brother"**

Unfortunately the results of the New Era of Dialogue - and the revolutionary changes that have taken place between Jews and Christians in our lifetime - are not well-known enough in the world. This is why my organization in Israel, The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI), produced a one hour documentary film three years ago entitled "I am Joseph Your Brother" - with the help of a grant from the U.S. Catholic Council of Bishops - which documents this process and awakens us to the challenges for the future. This film, which was shown on ABC television in North America in Fall 2001, was premiered in Rome in October 2002 and in the "Religion Today" film festival in Trento in northern Italy later the same week and has been screened several times at public audiences in Israel and on Israel's "discovery" channel many times.

When we screened this film in Jerusalem in the presence of Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, we were privileged to hear a serious and erudite lecture by His Eminence entitled "The Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Foundations, Progress, Difficulties and Perspectives", to which I was asked to offer a Jewish response. Below, I will share with the readers of this article four of the points which I offered in this response.

### **1. Combating the problem of ignorance through education**

The number one problem that we face is ignorance. After all these years, we still don't know very much about each other. So, we need a multi-faceted, sustained and systematic educational program in many and diverse settings: schools, seminaries, teacher-training schools and universities, in the curricula of Jewish and Catholic schools, in newspapers and magazines, in scholarly journals, in conferences and workshops, in formal and informal education, in dialogues and seminars, and through the media. The film "I am Joseph Your Brother", produced by ICCI, is one way to do this. And we have now added a Learning Resource/Study Guide to accompany the film, and make it more user-friendly.

In his lecture, Cardinal Kasper reviewed some of the history of Catholic statements on Jews and Judaism made by the Church during the past 35-40 years. The truth is that the Church has done

much more to educate their people about Jews and Judaism than we Jews have done about Christians and Christianity (this is, no doubt, due to the asymmetrical nature of Jewish-Christian history, and the fact that Judaism is more integral to Christianity than the reverse). In any event, they (the Catholic Church) have felt the imperative to change their curricula, and we Jews have not. At least not yet. In my humble opinion, this cannot continue this way.

It seems to me that it ought to be impossible for Jews to continue to teach about Catholics - or Christians in general - in a pre- Vatican II way, just as it would be inconceivable for Catholics to teach about Jews in a pre-Zionist or pre-Israel fashion. We Jews - in the Diaspora and in Israel - will have to do much more in the future to educate our communities about the revolutionary changes in Christian thinking on Jews and Judaism in recent decades.

## **2. Obstacles to the Dialogue**

There will be obstacles to the dialogue, such as:

*Understanding better the period of the Holocaust.* If the document *We Remember*, which was published by the Holy See in March 1998, is not the last word by the Church on this subject, then this means that we will need to continue to confront this subject together in serious and substantive ways. It will not go away. It is too central to the Jewish psyche and soul. So, we will need to ask: Will there be further Catholic reflections on the *Shoah*? When? What kind of reflections? Historical? Theological? Educational? What will be the next steps?

*The need for opening the Vatican Archives to ascertain historical truth.* Cardinal Kasper has reiterated a number of times the commitment of the Catholic Church to consent to the access of the Vatican Archives "as soon as the reorganizing and cataloguing work is concluded."

This is a new statement, and it needs to be heard in the Jewish world. The Holy See now agrees to open its archives. If it is no longer a question of whether, but "when?", we can only hope that this will be sooner rather than later. Indeed there are now signals from the Vatican that this is in fact beginning to happen.

*The potential beatification of certain popes* of the past is a serious issue casting a giant shadow over the dialogue in the present as well as for the future. History continues to haunt us. But, I believe that we should not focus only on the obstacles. This has too often been the case in recent years. This is what the newspapers want to hear. This makes the news. But it is not the essence of our dialogue.

We should not allow ourselves to be mired in the past. As we pursue historical study - and we will need to find a way to do this that will be agreeable to both sides of the dialogue - we need to move forward with our dialogue, in a serious and systematic fashion.

Despite the existence of well-known issues of contention - and some definite differences of opinion as to how to ascertain truth, especially about the past - we need to continue to talk with one another. Indeed, I would argue that one of the great achievements of the dialogue in the past 40 years is that we can now talk with each other - honestly, openly and constructively - about the issues that concern our two faith communities in ways that were inconceivable in the past.

## **3. How to move forward**

We need to develop a genuine interreligious dialogue; a dialogue based on mutuality, and the existential need to learn about each other and from each other in order to be able to live together in the same world.

This has not always been the way it has been in the recent past. All too often the dialogue between Catholics and Jews (and other Christians and Jews) has been asymmetrical, based on our very asymmetrical history. We Jews were continually prodding the Catholics to make all kinds of statements: to denounce anti-Semitism (which they have now done countless times), to recognize the State of Israel (which was done formally at the end of 1993) and to issue a statement on the Shoah (which was done in March 1998 in *We Remember*).

Only five years ago, in the year 2000, did some creative and courageous Jews - mostly rabbis and academics and mostly in North America and in Israel (including yours truly) - finally issued the *Dabru Emet (Speak the Truth)* statement. This is a revolutionary document, and more ought to be known about it in the United States and around the world. We translated it into Hebrew and held a conference about it in Jerusalem a few years ago.

This new era of reciprocity will inevitably lead us into theological territory. We need not be afraid of this. We need to learn about each other's basic beliefs - as is increasingly being done in new dialogues and seminars and conferences in recent years - if we really intend to understand one another.

We need to study each other's central ideas, such as: creation, revelation, redemption, justice and peace, salvation and messianism, sacred place (e.g. the Land of Israel) and sacred time (the Shabbat and the holidays), universalism and particularism, and much more. And we need to study each other's texts and systems of interpretation, the way each tradition has read and learned to live by its sacred texts.

In so doing, we will learn what unites us and what divides us. We don't have to agree on everything. This would be superficial and simply wrong. Indeed, this is too often one of the pitfalls of interfaith dialogue. Rather, we need to discover in which areas we are distinctive and unique and in which areas we share much in common (in what is sometimes called the "Judeo-Christian tradition").

#### **4. Common Action/Tikkun Olam: How do we move from dialogue to action?**

One of the great challenges we face together is the need to take action together in areas in which we already have reached some agreement, such as the need to preserve the environment. We share God's earth; we are partners with God, stewards for his Creation, and we need to work in common cause to protect what we have been bequeathed.

We can develop more areas of agreement on important topics, like human dignity and human rights, as well as justice and peace issues around the world. We ought to work for justice and peace side by side wherever we can, in as many places in the world as possible.

We have a real task to work on together. Not dialogue for dialogue's sake, but dialogue for *Tikkun Olam*, for repairing the world. (Interestingly, in documents produced by the dialogue, the Catholics have even adopted this Jewish/Hebrew term of *Tikkun Olam* in their writings).

In the part of the world in which I live and work, Israel and the Middle East, this is more important than ever before. Religion - and religious leaders - have a very bad reputation in the Middle East (and other places) and for good reason. They are all too often perceived (not incorrectly) as supporting violence and terrorism, or war or occupation. We need new voices, an alternative vision, to the ones people see daily on their television screens and hear on their radios, religions

and religious leaders who will speak out loud and clear with a vision of justice and peace for all and not just for one side of the conflict or the other.

In this regard, may I say that this process of common action - of *Tikkun Olam*, Repairing the World - is not just the business of Jews and Christians. Indeed, leaders and communities of the major World Religions can and should work together on this. Because I believe so strongly in this, I was happy to respond positively to the invitation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, chaired by Cardinal Francis Arinze, to participate in a two day consultation at the Vatican in June 2002, on the subject of "Religion and Peace" (and I went to Rome again in January 2003 for a follow-up meeting in which religious leaders from different parts of the world shared texts from different religious traditions about war and peace). Together with representatives of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim traditions, Jews and Christians considered ways and means of involving religions and religious leaders much more than had been done in the past in resolving and managing conflicts in various places in the world. In my view, nothing could be more important.

Furthermore, if we don't do this, our religions will quickly become irrelevant and out-of-date and perceived correctly by people around the world as otherworldly and insignificant. This, therefore is one of the main challenges confronting the Jewish-Christian Dialogue in particular and the interreligious dialogue in general around the world: the need to bring the prophetic voice of religions and religious leaders to speak out - and to act - for peace in our world. The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) - with which ICCI in Israel is affiliated as the Israel chapter - is one of the main catalysts in the field of interreligious dialogue moving us from theory to practice, from talk to action, catalyzing religious leaders to engage in peace-building efforts in their own countries and communities. More needs to be done in this direction by all of us engaged in interreligious dialogue. Coming to team about and encounter the other is the necessary first step. But, learning to live together in peace is the critical next step that can no longer be put off until the future.

This is, in fact, the major goal of the programs of ICCI in Israel. Not dialogue for dialogue's sake, but dialogue that will enable the peoples of Israel and the Middle East to learn how to live in peaceful coexistence together, both within the State of Israel, and within the region as a whole.

How do we do this?

## **Background: Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding**

For the past 14 years, within ICCI - The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel - we have been promoting peaceful relations between people. We have developed new and unique interreligious dialogues whose overarching goals are to be in the service of peace and reconciliation. Our new and often groundbreaking dialogue initiatives are aimed at developing a new culture of peace, with the focus on promoting peaceful relations between people, that is so desperately needed in our part of the world.

Our Interreligious Council was founded almost 14 years ago, on January 16, 1991, on the eve of the first Gulf War. With gas masks in hand, about 23 people assembled in the basement of the Ratisbonne Seminary, in the center of Jerusalem, to form a new coalition to promote interreligious understanding. Now, more than 14 years later, we have 70 member organizations - Jewish, Christian, Muslim, ecumenical and interreligious - from all over Israel, involving hundreds and, by extension, thousands of people throughout the country.

Via various networks, we have established a wide variety of programs to promote mutual understanding through education among the members of the major faith and national/ethnic groups in our country and region: Jews and Arabs, if you look at the conflict in national or ethnic terms, or

Jews, Christians and Muslims, if you look at the conflict in religious categories of faith communities. It's a well kept secret. I suspect that most of the readers of this article have never heard of us or about our programs. Reports of our activities have rarely been in the newspapers; nor have they appeared very often on the nightly news, not on CNN or ABC or BBC. Why? The answer is that we don't kill any one! And, thank God, we haven't engaged in any scandals. Therefore, we're not in the news very much.

Nevertheless, the work of interreligious education for peace goes on every day, in often quiet off-the-record peaceful educational programs. How do we do what we do?

- By promoting dialogue, not destruction
- by fostering coalitions and cooperation, not confrontation
- by building genuine relationships between people, based on mutual trust
- by engaging in common action projects for the good of all concerned, such as the preservation of the land of Israel which we all share (we all drink the same water and walk in the same valleys)
- by learning each other's sacred texts in a spirit of open inquiry and sharing in carefully facilitated dialogue groups.

Rather than remain general or theoretical, I want to give some examples of dialogue groups:

**KEDEM**, a Hebrew acronym for Kol Dati Mefayes, Voices for Religious Reconciliation, is a new groundbreaking program established in 2003 and now entering its third year of operations, thanks to generous grants for the past three years from the Federal Republic of Germany. This ambitious and innovative program brings together local grass-roots Arab religious leaders in Israel: imams, sheikhs, kadis, and priests with rabbis from all over Israel to meet in dialogue and to draw up plans for concrete projects which bring about mutual understanding and reconciliation between Arab and Jewish citizens of the State of Israel. KEDEM has now recruited another group of 14 religious leaders to join the project and by 2006, the plan is to have a third group of 14 participants, thus totaling 42 grass-roots religious leaders, Jewish and Arab, who will spread a message and a method of religious reconciliation through their educational institutions in networks, including high schools, yeshivot, teacher-training colleges, adult education institutes and synagogues, mosques and churches in Jewish and Arab communities throughout Israel, and between communities.

Two years of activities of KEDEM culminated in the first annual KEDEM conference, which was held on December 29-30, 2005 at a hotel at the Dead Sea and at a hotel in Jerusalem. All members of the KEDEM team of 2004 (7 rabbis and 7 Arab religious leaders, 6 Muslims and 1 Christian) and of the past year (with the exception of one rabbi who could not attend for personal reasons) attended the two day conference. In addition, one of the major decisions of the KEDEM group was to invite 14 new potential members of KEDEM (or KEDEM #2) to attend the conference to learn what KEDEM was all about and to see if they would be interested in becoming participants in KEDEM in 2005. Seven new rabbis came and four new Muslim religious leaders. The participation of these potential new members was energizing and encouraging; most of them want to become participants in KEDEM in 2005. Their response to the message and method of KEDEM was extraordinarily positive.

One of the most amazing parts of the KEDEM project during this past year has been a near 100% retention rate of participants in the process. All KEDEM participants feel that they are involved in a personally transformative dynamic process, which will become more important for their communities and for Israeli society over time.

The seminar at the Dead Sea focused on 3 elements that have become the building blocks of the KEDEM method:

1. *Developing and strengthening personal relationships among the Jews, Christian and Muslims in the group.* This was done in the formal sessions, in small getting acquainted groups, as well as over meals and coffee breaks.
2. Learning about each other's religions. This was accomplished by presentations about the new KEDEM Institute for Learning and Reconciliation, both for the whole group, and in uni-national group meetings, in which intensive learning and discussion took place among the members of each separate group (rabbis in one group, Arab religious leaders in the other). Learning about each other's religions and core values is one of the most important building blocks of the KEDEM experience. It is new and dynamic to most of the participants of the group, who have never participated in such a sustained, serious and substantive interreligious learning experience until they joined KEDEM.
3. Discussions about core issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This was done on the second morning of the conference through a dramatic and intensely moving panel discussion, in which 2 outside persons spoke about why they felt that the dialogue with The Other was not a good idea and 2 KEDEM participants responded by very personal and poignant presentations about why they felt that there was no alternative to this dialogue and to seeking ways to work together for the benefit of all citizens of Israel: for those in the Jewish majority and for those in the Arab minority. This session was certainly one of the climaxes of the conference and one of the highlights of the past two years of KEDEM. It became clear from this discussion that members of KEDEM have felt that these discussions on core issues are important for their development of trust and good working relations with each other.

The final session of the conference at the Dead Sea was an opportunity for members of KEDEM and for newcomers to share their personal reflections about what they have gotten out of the KEDEM process during the past year (or two, for most of the participants) and to offer ideas for continuing and improving the KEDEM program for the future. Their comments and suggestions are being collated for planning KEDEM programs for the coming year.

After the conference at the Dead Sea, the group traveled to Jerusalem for the First Public KEDEM Interreligious Symposium, held at the Olive Tree Hotel in East Jerusalem. The reception and symposium were well attended (over 150 people, including Jews, Christians and Muslims, from East and West Jerusalem). It was a festive occasion. One of the people who attended the evening called it "a triumph" for KEDEM. Indeed, it was a unique and important opportunity for KEDEM to be presented to the Jerusalem public. In addition to speeches by the Papal Nuncio to Israel, Msgr. Pietro Sambini, and by Rabbi Professor Marc Gopin, who was a visiting scholar at the conference, four members of the KEDEM team spoke publicly for the first time about how important the KEDEM message and method is for themselves, their communities and for Israeli and Palestinian societies as a whole. It was a remarkably meaningful and poignant conclusion to a year filled with progress and possibilities for the future, in the difficult context of the ongoing conflict in the region, which impacts all of our discussions and activities.

**The Jonah Group:** ICCI sponsors the only sustained (over many years, more than a decade by now) indigenous Jewish-Christian Dialogue group in Israel/ Palestine, which is called the Jonah Group. The group, which is co-led by Bishop Munib Younan, the Palestinian Lutheran Bishop of Jerusalem, and myself, brings together Palestinian Christian clergy and educators with Jewish clergy and educators to study each other's sacred texts and to form a network of caring and compassionate listening on issues of common concern. One of the fruits of our dialogue, which had led to a relationship of friendship and trust over many years, was a lecture tour that we embarked on together with a Muslim colleague to the United States three years ago, to spread a message of hope and reconciliation among Jewish and Christian audiences (we spoke in churches as well as synagogues). Since then, we have frequently offered briefings and dialogue sessions for visiting groups from around the world who come to Israel/Palestine to meet people engaged in peace-building in our land. In addition, the Jonah group continues to meet to study texts together

and to discuss ways and means of encouraging a just peace in our part of the world.

**Jewish-Muslim Dialogue.** We recently completed our third year of a unique Jewish-Muslim Dialogue. For 18 months, we brought together 15 educators, Muslims and Jews, to study texts (from the Bible and the Koran up to and including modern Hebrew and modern Palestinian poetry) and engage in difficult discussions on the theme Land and Identity. The educators in this group, who were both secular and religious on both the Arab and the Jewish sides, prepared texts for discussion each time the group met. After studying the texts in small mixed groups, the whole group was brought together for a carefully facilitated discussion, based on the themes raised by the texts. These discussions were usually multi-layered and rich in personal and collective meaning for all the participants involved. By using this method, we learned that some of the most difficult issues can be discussed among Palestinians and Jews with substance and sensitivity in a genuine attempt to come to hear and understand the narrative of the Other. We are currently editing the presentations into a book for publication in Arabic and Hebrew for use in educational settings in Jewish and Arab education in Israel.

**Women's Dialogues and Social Action.** During the past three years, we have begun a new Women's Dialogue Program with Palestinian and Jewish women from different parts of Israel. The Jerusalem group, which is now meeting for its fourth year, is currently producing a book on its experience, to be shared with women's organizations around the world through the Women's Dialogues Program of the WCRP, the World Conference of Religions for Peace (ICCI serves as the Israel chapter of WCRP). During the past year, two new groups have emerged, one in the center of Israel (in the Vadi Ara area) and the other in the Lower Galilee). Each group has its own dynamic and chooses what it wants to study and discuss. The fact that these groups have been meeting during the ongoing violence of the past four years represents a small sign of hope for the future. In particular, the fact that Palestinian women, Christian and Muslim, have been meeting Israeli Jewish women in each other's homes in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, often in very difficult and trying circumstances, is rather remarkable. Credit must be given to ICCI's Program Director, Ms. Sarah Bernstein and her Palestinian co-coordinators of these women's dialogues, Ms. Hanan Abu-Dalu and Ms. Hanadi Younan, for their perseverance and dedication to providing a forum for women's voices for peace-building to be heard.

**Educating About Each Other:** During the past several years, we have begun some new educational initiatives to enrich our understanding of one another, as Jews and Arabs living in the same society, such as a new teacher-training course co-sponsored by the Schechter Institute for Judaic Studies (affiliated with the Masorati/ Conservative Jewish Movement in Israel) and ICCI, on "Common Values - Different Sources" in the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions. Three years ago, fifteen Jewish and Arab educators from the Jerusalem area met regularly for a full year. And this year, 2004-2005, we planned and implemented a new teacher training course for principals and teachers in two neighboring communities outside of Jerusalem - Mevasseret Zion and Abu Ghosh - on the theme of "Relating to the Other in our Society - Problematics and Possibilities". The idea behind this "twinning arrangement" is to influence the school communities (and not just the teachers) to engage in systematic change in the future. This group has just completed its training course, in March 2005, and the initial reactions of the participants have been very positive. A new course will be planned for next year.

**Understanding One Another: The Use of Film For Coexistence Education.** Palestinian educators and Jewish educators engaged in a two-year process of reflection and analysis, which we began in 2003 with a focus group which met regularly at the American Center in Jerusalem. The group viewed and analyzed Israeli and Palestinian films, trying to choose those that would be most appropriate for coexistence education and for helping both Arabs and Jews understand better the complex weave of relations between us. During the second year, 2003-2004, ICCI planned and implemented interactive workshops that helped us sharpen the issues and ideas that became part



of a new booklet for educators in the field in Israel. The workshops were offered at Beit HaGefen in Haifa and were organized with the cooperation of the Network of Organizations for Jewish-Arab Coexistence in Israel.

In this booklet - which has now been published and is available in English, Hebrew and Arabic for educators in Israel, Palestine and abroad - we have chosen to focus on ten films. These films have been chosen specifically to reflect a variety of themes and issues centering on the topic of "Understanding the Relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel" and at the same time, to reflect a wide variety of filmmaking approaches and styles. We also searched for films that would be appropriate to different audiences; there are animated films for younger groups, films for youth, young adults, and staff training. Some are more complex and some are more controversial in their subject matter.

This booklet (and the films described therein) is primarily designed for use by educators, both formal and informal, in the field of interreligious and intercultural relations and education for peace and coexistence in Israel. Educators from diverse organizations in this growing field, who participated in our film workshops last year, shared with us their feedback as to the importance of the use of films such as these in their work with Jews and Arabs in Israel. Film is a unique tool in providing a window into understanding the other in a society where people live mostly separate lives. These films and the accompanying written materials can enrich the learning process that is already going on in dozens of educational settings in both Arab and Jewish sectors of Israeli society.

This booklet can also be used for those working in dialogue in the Diaspora, for those wishing to understand the complexities of the relations between Arabs and Jews, and for those Jewish Christian/Muslim dialogue groups who wish to discuss sensitive issues of Arab-Jewish relations in the Middle East. One cannot adequately educate about Israel in the Diaspora - whether in Jewish educational settings or in interreligious frameworks - without addressing the issues raised by these films in a substantive, significant and serious manner.

This important educational project was funded by The Abraham Fund Initiatives and by the Public Affairs Office of the Embassy of the United States to Israel. I share these concrete examples with you to give you the sense that we in Israel/Palestine do all this - and much more - because we believe that we need to keep hope alive, even in dark and difficult times, and because we refuse to give in to despair, which is easy and enticing sometimes, by doing nothing. Indeed, we believe that we have a huge educational challenge ahead in the years to come.

## **Towards the Future: What needs to be done**

My father, Rabbi Leon Kronish, of blessed memory, who was a rabbi in Miami Beach, Florida at Temple Beth Sholom (House of Peace) for 54 years, always used to respond to the simple question "How are you?" with a typically Jewish/Israeli answer; *Yehiyeh tov* - "It will be good" The future is better than the past.

He believed deeply in Israel's mission as the fulfillment of Messianic redemption. And so do I. I apparently inherited this legacy from him. Looking towards the future, I believe that despite the current difficulties and obstacles in the political peace process - and there are many of them - I believe that the process will work itself out: there will be a political solution, sooner or later between Israel and the Palestinians (and between all the Arab states).

There will most likely be a two state solution: Israel and Palestine, side by side. This is the new unfolding reality that is coming about, albeit much too slowly and painfully. And then what will happen? What will we do next? Will we be prepared for the next steps? What will be needed in the

future?

What will be needed is what I call "the other peace process": the educational one, not the political one. There will be a desperate need for a massive religious and educational campaign to change the hearts and minds of the people, on both sides. The region will need a serious and systematic set of programs which will educate the next generations for the existential need to learn to live together.

This will not be easy, nor will it be quick. But it will soon become the historical and educational imperative of the new era. We will have no choice but to bring people together to learn to live in peace:

- Rabbis, imams, priests, and ministers, at the grass-roots level, as we are doing in our KEDEM project.
- Teachers, educators, headmasters, principals, assistant principals, curriculum developers, and teacher-trainers.
- Youth movement leaders, in formal educators in a wide variety of informal educational settings, such as community centers, institutes, camps (such as the "Seeds of Peace" camp, which has met every summer in Maine for the past 10 years, and now has hundreds of alumni all over the Middle East, including Israel, Palestine and Jordan), or the new camp program called Face to Face/Faith to Faith, co-sponsored by The Auburn Theological Seminary in New York and Seeking Common Ground, based in Denver, Colorado, in upstate New York, to which we have sent delegations of Palestinian and Israeli youth from the Jerusalem area during the past 3 summers. This has led to all kinds of fascinating follow-up experiences back in Israel with the youth and their parents and now increasingly their school communities.
- New textbooks, which will stop educating by ideological indoctrination but via truth and principles of reconciliation.

Through all of these dialogue experiences in recent years, I have come to learn that there are four major ingredients which make up successful dialogue programs:

1. *The dialogue must be personal*, based on forming real personal relationships between people. This is the essential first ingredient, which makes dialogue a genuine human experience rather than a theological or theoretical one.
2. *The dialogue must involve learning about the core values and the core religio-national narratives of the other person or group's religion*. In so doing, interreligious dialogue involves much interreligious learning, often based on studying the key texts of the other's tradition. Indeed, joint text-study has become an integral part of interreligious dialogue in our work in for peace-building and reconciliation in Israel and Palestine.
3. *The dialogue must deal with the core issues of the conflict*. Too often, interfaith dialogues in our country and in other parts of the world have avoided conflict and offered a neutered view of religion far from real life. We have learned that for dialogue to be transformative, it must deal with the essential core issues that we face in our conflict between Israelis and Palestinians who are seeking ways to share the same Holy Land, which will inevitably lead to painful compromises on all sides.
4. *Dialogue must lead to action*. Talk is not enough. People involved in successful dialogue projects have realized the need to transform their words into deeds. Reconciliation cannot come only through talking; it must involve redemptive and conciliatory gestures and actions, which can lead to mutual understanding and the existential reality of peaceful coexistence.

I believe that those of us who are active in interreligious and intercultural dialogue in Israel and the region will have a major role to play in this essential and long range people-to-people peace-

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building campaign. Moreover, religious and lay leadership from abroad will be called upon to help support these processes, if they believe as I do in the powerful potential of peace and the great benefits it can bring to all of God's children in the Middle East.

This lecture was delivered at the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute in New York City, where Rabbi Kronish served as Scholar-at-Large in 2004. First printed in *Ecumenical Trends*, June 2005.