

Judah Maccabee's Nobel Peace Prize Speech

Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt
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Ladies and Gentlemen of the Nobel Prize Committee I would like to thank you for bestowing upon me this prestigious honor. I am humbled and deeply grateful to you for recognizing the significance of the victory we have recently won against the Selucids. I accept the award today not just for myself, but on behalf of my brothers and my late father Mattathias who inspired us, as well as all those who fought with us.

I come here from Jerusalem where we just lit a small cruse of oil in the Temple after cleaning things up and holding a ceremony of rededication. We are hoping the light will last a few days. If we can get it to last 8 days, some say it will be a real miracle.

I recognize at the outset that some have been critical of the Committee for their selection. There will be those who find it ironic that this prize would be bestowed upon a man who led fighters in battle. But in making their decision, the members of the Nobel Prize Peace committee recognize that there are times when it is necessary to resort to force to fight for important principles and to procure a secure peace. War has been with us since the beginning of time, and I fear and suspect that this will not be the last one to be fought. Yet we must never stop wanting and working for peace.

As a small minority living in the province of Judea our people faced a difficult choice and were presented with few options. The Syrian Empire and its cruel king Antiochus Epiphanes attempted to impose their will upon us. They desecrated our holy sites, destroyed our places of worship, ruthlessly attacked us and wanted us to give up our unique teachings to conform to their ways. There were those among my people who wanted to go along with them and were willing to adopt the Greek way of life.

Yet my brothers and those who joined us realized that to do so would mean cultural genocide, (a word that will be invented in about 2,000 years) and would have resulted in the end of our religion, our people and our way of life. Quite simply, we were not willing to allow this to happen.

To quote from a future president of a nation who will one day address this body, "To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason."

Our people, the Jewish people have taught the world many important lessons about the importance of peace and how and when to wage war. Our ancestor Moses understood the complexity of the relationship between war and peace. He taught us to be like his brother Aaron, to always pursue peace. Not just to seek peace, but to pursue peace.

Our rabbis are currently beginning work on developing the liturgy that will become the standard form of prayer for our people and which we hope will last and be used for thousands of years. Although their work is not yet complete, I am free to let you know that the liturgy committee recently made an important decision: We will include two prayers for peace, *Sim Shalom* and *Shalom Rav* at the end of each service. (The music

committee has already come up with a number of ways to sing the two different prayers, so we think it will be a hit.) These are but a few examples of our passionate desire to bring peace to the world.

And yet we must have a sober view of reality. There are some who will not respond to reason and who will ruthlessly repress and oppress their own people as well as others. They will pursue their goals of domination and brutally seek to impose their will on unwilling subjects. Are we to allow force to be used by those bent on destruction against the good or the innocent? Inaction can be disastrous and lead to even worse consequences. While negotiations must always be the first course of action, it must not be an end in and of itself, for peace is much more than the absence of war.

In our recent conflict for example, when our people were attacked on Shabbat we were confronted with a difficult dilemma. The enemy knew of our traditions and of our commitment to pursuing peace and of our reluctance to raise arms, especially on the holy day of rest. Typical of their cruelty they assumed that we would be passive and not resist. Our rabbis debated and concluded that there are times when it is justified to take up arms in self defense.

One day a recipient of this same Peace Prize, one who has come to understand that there are times when war is necessary may even say something that our sages would teach. "I understand why war is not popular, but I also know this: The belief that peace is desirable is rarely enough to achieve it. Peace requires responsibility. Peace entails sacrifice...We can acknowledge that oppression will always be with us, and still strive for justice."

Concepts the Jewish people have taught the world, and which that future American president will express, (even if he doesn't acknowledge that the source is the Torah,) is the concept of a "just war" as well as of the importance of sparing civilians from violence. Our soldiers abide by a concept we have introduced to the world, known as *tohar neshek*, the purity of arms. We are proud to maintain that principles of morality must be followed, even when waging war. All of these notions are found in our sacred scroll, the Torah, and are being expanded and refined by our sages as we speak.

Our people understand all too well that there is a delicate balance between peace and war. I close by citing the words of the prophet Zechariah. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." Let us hope and work for a lasting peace, a peace predicated upon respecting the rights of all. "*Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu ve'al kol yisrael*: May the One who makes peace in heaven bring peace to all of Israel", and to all the world. And may God's work be our mission.

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