

What Terms for Middle East Peace Would Actually Work?

By Rabbi Michael Lerner

Hope for Middle East peace can be helpful if it creates pressure on both sides to take the steps in negotiations necessary for a viable peace agreement to be produced. But it can be destructive if it encourages either side to enter into agreements that it cannot sustain. Better no agreement than one that temporarily raises hopes, as happened after the Oslo Accord in 1993, only to be dashed as neither side followed through in creating the changes in consciousness needed among their own people to make the accord viable.

No matter what agreement is worked out in such negotiations like those fostered by Secretary of State John Kerry that may have fallen apart by the time you read this but which at the moment I'm writing still manages to sweep people into paroxysms of hope, they are unlikely to succeed in reality until a dramatic reconciliation of the heart takes place among the various parties to the conflict. Without such a reconciliation, even a globally popular settlement agreement (like the Oslo Accords was when it was first signed) has little chance of succeeding.

Yet that transformation of consciousness could be facilitated if the United States, European countries, and the peace movements in Israel and Palestine were to articulate and then use the extensive media power of the U.S., to popularize terms that helped people imagine what a desirable settlement could look like that would satisfy the fundamental needs of both sides.

It is crucial that these terms be articulated by all who are genuine about peace, for two reasons: 1. To help people understand why a peace agreement that does not speak to the key needs addressed in this proposal is unlikely to work and hence is less desirable than no agreement, since when that agreement fails an even deeper pessimism, despair and crediting of the "refuseniks" (those on both sides who are really against any lasting peace: Israeli settlers and their champions in the right wing secular and religious parties in Israel who want Israel to permanently dominate all of the ancient Eretz Yisrael and to either chase Palestinians out of their land or impose a regime in which those Palestinians live permanently as second class citizens; and Palestinians who follow Hamas and believe that only armed struggle can ever achieve what they seek, which is a society in which Jews live as a tamed minority) will ensue. 2. Because if these negotiations fail, we may see a repeat of the scenario that followed the failure of the 2000 Camp David negotiations, when President Clinton joined Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in putting the blame for the failure on the Palestinians, and most people, not knowing the details of the terms offered, accepted the American-Israeli version. Americans must insist that we be informed of exactly what both sides are willing to settle for, and then have in our own minds a clear picture of what a sustainable agreement would look like, in order to assess what was being offered and what was not, and hence be less likely to fall into another round of false blaming (of either side).

Tikkun's Proposal for Two States at Peace

Below is what a peace plan must involve for it to have any chance of swaying hearts and minds on all sides. Please keep this article and share it with your friends and social media.

1. The peace treaty will recognize the State of Israel and the State of Palestine and defines Palestine's borders to include almost all of pre-1967 West Bank and Gaza, with small exchanges of land mutually agreed upon and roughly equivalent in value, historic meaning, and military significance to each side. The peace plan will also include a corresponding treaty between Israel and all Arab states; this treaty will specify recognition of Israel, promise full diplomatic and economic cooperation among these parties, and accept all the terms of this agreement as specified herein. It will also include a twenty-to-thirty-year plan for moving toward a Middle Eastern common market and the eventual establishment of a political union along the lines of the European Union. This could entail building a federation between Israel and Palestine, or between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan—a plan originally proposed by Israel's president Shimon Peres. *[Explanatory note: Israel has never specified its borders. It must do so now. Palestinians and many in the Arab world have never accepted Israel's legitimacy. They must do so now. Everyone in the Middle east would benefit from Middle East common market, if and only if it were to operate within the most advanced guidelines of environmental sanity,]*

2. Jerusalem will be the capital of both Israel and Palestine and will be governed for all civic issues by an elected council in West Jerusalem and a separate elected council in East Jerusalem. The Old City will become an international city whose sovereignty will be implemented by an international council that guarantees equal access to all holy sites. This council's taxes will be shared equally by the city councils of East and West Jerusalem. East Jerusalem and its residents will be part of the Palestinian state and West Jerusalem and its residents will be part of the State of Israel. *[Explanatory note: Much of the talk about Jerusalem being “the Eternal Capital of the Jewish State” is based on the historical memory of the Jewish people preserved in its religious texts and prayers. But that “Jerusalem” did not include much beyond the borders of the Old City—not West Jerusalem and not East Jerusalem. So those parts outside the Old City are reasonably allocated according to the populations of Israelis and Palestinians as they were before the Israeli government started to encourage and fund West Bank settlements for ideological and military purposes. A plausible date upon which to base this assessment would be the late 1980s, before that massive expansion of “Jerusalem” by settling Jews in traditionally Arab parts of East Jerusalem had begun in full. On the other hand, there are parts of Jerusalem which were Arab villages before 1948 which were subsequently settled by Israelis before the last 1980s, and these quite will remain as part of Israel.]*

3. Immediate and unconditional freedom will be accorded to all prisoners in Israel and Palestine whose arrests are connected in some way to the Occupation and/ or resistance to the Occupation. Those who have been convicted of murder by a jury of their peers will be turned over to the government of their own people for further incarceration. *[Explanatory Note: Tens of thousands of Palestinians were arrested and*

often held without charges for weeks or months before being released, and some remain in this condition until there has been a general release of all Occupation-related prisoners.]

4. An international force will be established to separate and protect each side from the extremists of the other side who will inevitably seek to disrupt the peace agreement. And a joint peace police—composed of an equal number of Palestinians and Israelis at both personnel and levels—will be created to work with the international force to combat violence. [*The same reasoning that suggests that the Old City of Jerusalem should become an international city because of its central role in the history and religious beliefs of billions of people in the world also suggests that permanent peace in the Middle East is the concern of the entire human race, and so they should play a positive role in guaranteeing that peace for the benefit of all residents of the area.*]

5. Reparations will be offered by the international community for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, as well as to families who suffered measurable loss or incarceration in Israeli prisons during the Occupation. The amount should be generous so that, within a ten-year period, Palestinians will be brought to an economic level equivalent to that enjoyed by Israelis with the Israeli median income. The same level of reparations will also be made available to all Jews who fled Arab lands between 1948 and 1977.

6. A truth and reconciliation process will be created, modeled on the South African version but shaped to the specific needs of these two cultures. In addition, an international peace committee will be appointed by representatives of the three major religious communities of the area to develop and implement the teaching of a) nonviolence and nonviolent communication, b) empathy and forgiveness, and c) a sympathetic point of view toward the history of the other side. The adoption of this curriculum will be mandatory in every grade from sixth grade through high school. The committee should be empowered to ensure the elimination of all teaching of hatred toward the other side in schools, media, synagogues, churches, mosques and any other consciousness shaping institutions. It should also be empowered to stop teaching against the implementation of this treaty in any public, private, or religious educational institutions, media, or public meetings. [*Explanatory note: A similar strategy was pioneered by the United States in Japan and Germany after the Second World War. These restrictions on free speech should be phased out within fifty years iff the hatred and anger at each side by the other has been demonstrably wiped out in the consciousness of future generations.*]

7. Palestine will agree to allow all Jews living in the West Bank to remain there as law-abiding citizens of the new Palestinian state, as long as they give up their Israeli citizenship and abide by decisions of the Palestinian courts. A resettlement fund will be created for the following purposes: a) to help West Bank settlers move back to Israel if they wish to remain Israeli citizens, and b) to help Palestinians move from the lands of their dispersion to Palestine if they wish to be citizens of the new Palestinian state. [*It is not reasonable to expel people from their homes if they in fact are willing to live as citizens of the Palestinian state and in accord with its laws. Former Israelis living in the new State of Palestine must give up any hope or attempts to stimulate reinvolvement of the Israeli government or IDF in protecting their “rights” as they perceive them. Israel*

must accept that it has no more “right” to interfere with the actions of the Palestinian government or its court system, and it should remember that in the first decade of Israel’s existence the vast majority of Palestinians were put under martial law and had none of the rights of the rest of Israeli society. Palestine will have the absolute right to disarm settlers who choose to stay as citizens of Palestine.]

8. In exchange for Palestine’s agreeing to allow Israelis to stay in the West Bank as citizens of the Palestinian state, Israel will agree to let 20,000 Palestinian refugees return each year for the next thirty years to the pre-1967 borders of Israel and to provide them with housing. Israel will apologize to the Palestinian people for its part in helping create the Nakba in which the Palestinian refugees were created, and Palestine will apologize to the Israeli people for the acts of terror against Israelis civilians that created huge security fears for Israelis in the past decades. [Explanatory note: This number—20,000—is small enough to not change the demographic balance, yet large enough to show that Israel cares about Palestinian refugees and recognizes that they have been wronged.]

9. Full and equal rights will be afforded to all minority communities living within each of the two states, and independent institutions will be funded in each state to vigorously enforce minority rights. All forms of religious coercion, religious control over the state, or religious control over personal status issues like birth, marriage, divorce, and death will be eliminated. Each state, however, will have the right to give priority in immigration and immigrant housing—but not in any subsequent benefits—to its own leading ethnic community (Jews in Israel, Arabs in Palestine) for as long as either community faces substantial demonstrable discrimination or threats of violent assaults in other countries of the world.

This agreement, while involving substantial compromises from both sides, provides the minimum terms to satisfy both Israelis and Palestinians who truly desire peace.

Yet it is important to emphasize that these terms will not in and of themselves generate peace. In my book ***Embracing Israel/Palestine*** I explore the post-traumatic stress disorders that continue to impact both Israelis and Palestinians (and many of their Diaspora supporters) so that they are fixated on their own suffering. I believe that presenting the plan above as the plan endorsed by the United States, Europe, and the United Nations can be an important step in helping people move beyond these traumas. Another important step will be for the advanced industrial countries to launch a Global Marshall Plan that would be based on the notion that homeland security can be achieved more effectively through generosity toward the Other than through attempts at combination—a message that could eventually challenge the deep fear that each side has that by being “weak” they will be subjecting themselves to humiliation and domination by the other. That Global Marshall Plan should rightly begin with the peoples of the Middle East. And it must be not only objectively generous in terms of the aid it delivers, but delivered in a generous spirit and not a narrowly self-interested spirit.

But a lasting peace will depend not only on the implementation of these terms as specified above, but on a systematic transformation of consciousness that minimally involves the following: the ability of the vast majority of people on both sides of this struggle to recognize the humanity of people on the other side, to energetically and

persistently convey the message to the other side that they are respected and that past hurts imposed on them are deeply regretted, and that each side has as its highest goal and wish to live in peace and mutual respect with the other side. It is this opening of the heart that is the indispensable condition for any agreement to work long-term, and to the extent that the politicians and diplomats do not understand this, it is unlikely that even if they do manage to get an agreement that that agreement will be viable in the long term. Yet that kind of change of consciousness is possible, and those who seek a lasting Middle East peace need to get together to design interventions in Israel, Palestine, the global diasporas of Arabs and Jews that will help develop cadre who can pioneer this kind of educational work and advance it from the already existing (and often quite positive) small interventions to the level of societal-wide interventions.