

Talk given by rabbinic student Sue Morningstar for Conversations With God interfaith forum, Christmas Eve 2005, on the topic of “How do we create peace on earth, from the Jewish perspective?”

In Hebrew the word for peace, “shalom,” shares the same root as the word shalem, wholeness. Peace is not about the absence of war, but rather wholeness on all 4 levels of heart, mind, body and spirit.

There are three core concepts of the Hebrew tradition that can help us achieve “Peace on Earth”:

1. tikkun olam—repair of the world.

We are mandated to work towards peace and healing.

Our rabbis say, לא עליך המלאכה לגמור,

“ it is not up to you to finish the work,

ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה

but neither are you free to forsake it.”

We must be involved. We must never forsake the work.

And for us Jews, at this time of year, we learn from the Chanukah story how even a tiny amount of light can illuminate the darkest of times.

2. concept of gratitude—we aim to say 100 blessings a day, in other words, to be in a constant state of gratitude.

In this way, we try to recognize the awesome miracles which surround us in *every* moment of *every* day.

3. we believe we are all created *b'tzelem elohim*, in God’s image.

We look for the spark of divinity, the tzelem elohim, in each and every being we encounter.

OUR grandfather Abraham’s tent was open in all 4 directions.

Our path is beyond fundamentalism, and beyond triumphalism,

Beyond even tolerance to a place of *deep appreciation and celebration* of each other’s unique and precious gifts.

A few years ago, our community was blessed to host the Sufi Sheik Abu Saleh, from Jerusalem, may he live and be well.

His mission was and is, to bring Jews and Moslems together to celebrate our commonalities. He said:

“Is this a great Creator? Do you think such a great creator would create only one way to praise him? Of course not! Look at the forest! There are thousands of trees, plants, saplings all praising God in their own way!”

Just as an orchestra delights us with its dozens of different instruments each playing its own distinct tune, yet complementing each other to create a beautiful harmonic symphony of sounds, so does God delight in the many multitudes of paths, the cacophony of voices we use to praise her, to reach dvekut, nirvana, a state of grace.

**There is no one right pathway to God!
As we know from our own experience, when we clear cut the forest and plant a monoculture, the forest dies. God loves diversity, it is intrinsic to the success of our planet.**

To quote the book of Micah Chapter 4:3-5—which speaks of Messianic times:

**They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks,
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
nor shall they learn war any more.**

**4—but they shall sit *every person under their vine*
and *under their fig tree*, no one afraid, because the mouth of God has spoken.**

**5—for let *all people walk each one in the name of their God*,
and we will walk in the name of Adonai our God for ever and ever.**

**So on this Xmas Eve 2005, the 21st of ZIQA'AD 1426,
the 24th of Kislev 5766, I bless us that we may each take our own small step, in our own ways, towards peace & healing, in awe and gratitude
for all the blessings that surround us---**

**And may we recognize the divinity of *all* beings on this beautiful planet, each one a unique and necessary component of the whole,
the wholeness, שלום!!!**