

# Remarks by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on Receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace

Oslo, December 10, 1994

Your Majesties,  
The Chairman and Members of the Nobel Committee,  
Prime Minister Brundtland,  
Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin,  
Chairman Arafat,  
Members of the Norwegian Government,  
Distinguished Guests,

I thank the Nobel Prize Committee for its decision to name me among the laureates of the Peace Prize this year.

I am pleased to be receiving this prize together with Yitzhak Rabin, with whom I have labored for long years for the defense of our country and with whom I now labor together in the cause of peace in our region. This is a salute to his daring leadership.

I believe it is fitting that the prize has been awarded to Yasser Arafat. His quitting the path of confrontation in favor of the path of dialogue, has opened the way to peace between ourselves and the Palestinian people, to whom we wish all the best in the future.

We are leaving behind us the era of belligerency and are striding together toward peace. It all began here in Oslo under the wise auspices and good will of the Norwegian people. It is a privilege for me to say thank you to the Norwegian people for its great auspices.

From my earliest youth, I have known that while obliged to plan with care the stages of our journey, we are entitled to dream, and keep dreaming, of its destination. A man may feel as old as his years, yet as young as his dreams. The laws of biology do not apply to sanguine aspiration.

I was born in a small Jewish town in White Russia. Nothing Jewish remains of it. From my youngest childhood, I related to my place of birth as a mere way station. My family's dream, and my own, was to live in Israel, and our voyage to the port of Jaffa was a dream

that came true. Had it not been for this dream and this voyage, I would probably have perished in the flames, as did so many of my people, among them most of my own family.

I went to school at an agricultural youth village in the heart of Israel. The village and its fields were enclosed by barbed wire which separated their greenness from the bleakness of the enmity all around. In the morning, we would go out to the fields with scythes on our backs to harvest the crop. In the evening, we went out with rifles on our shoulders to defend our lives. On Shabbat we would go out to visit our Arab neighbors. On Shabbat, we would talk with them of peace, though the rest of the week we traded rifle fire across the darkness.

From the Ben Shemen Youth village, my comrades and I went to Kibbutz Alumot in the Lower Galilee. We had no houses, no electricity, no running water. But we had a magnificent view and a lofty dream: to build a new, egalitarian society that would ennoble each of its members.

Not all of it came true, but not all of it went to waste. The part that came true created a new landscape. The part that did not come true resides in our hearts to this very day.

For two decades, in the Ministry of Defense, I was privileged to work closely with a man who was and remains, to my mind, the greatest Jew of our time. From him I learned that the vision of the future should shape the agenda for the present; that you can overcome obstacles by dint of faith; that you may feel disappointed -- but never despair. And above all, I learned that the wisest consideration is the moral one. David Ben-Gurion has passed away, yet his vision continues to flourish: to be a singular people, to live at peace with our neighbors.

The wars we fought were forced upon us. Thanks to the Israel Defense Forces, we won them all, but we did not win the greatest victory that we aspired to: release from the need to win victories.

We proved that aggressors do not necessarily emerge as the victors, but we learned that victors do not necessarily win peace.

It is no wonder that war, as a method of conducting human affairs, is in its death throes, and that the time has come to bury it.

The sword, as the Bible teaches us, consumes flesh, but it cannot provide sustenance. It is not rifles but people who triumph, and the conclusion from all the wars is that we need better people, not better rifles -- to avoid wars, to win peace.

There was a time when war was fought for lack of choice. Today peace is the "no-choice" option for all of us. The reasons for this are profound and incontrovertible. The sources of material wealth and political power have changed. No longer are they determined by the size of territory won by war. Today they are a consequence of intellectual potential, obtained principally by education.

Israel, essentially a desert country, has achieved remarkable agricultural yields by applying science to its fields, without expanding its territory or its water resources.

Science must be learned; it cannot be conquered. An army that can occupy knowledge has yet to be built. And that is why armies of occupation are passed. Indeed, even for the defense of the country you cannot rely on the army alone. Territorial frontiers are no obstacle to ballistic missiles, and no weapon can shield a nation from a nuclear device. Today, the battle for survival must be based on political wisdom and moral vision no less than on military might.

Science, technology, information are -- for better or for worse -- universal, not national. They are universally available. Their availability is not contingent on color of skin or place of birth. Past distinctions between West and East, North and South, have lost their importance in the face of a new distinction: between those who move ahead in pace with new opportunities, and those who lag behind.

Countries used to divide the world into their friends and foes. No longer. The foes now are universal -- poverty, famine, religious radicalization, desertification, drugs, proliferation of nuclear weapons, ecological devastation. They threaten all nations, just as science and information are the potential friends of all nations.

Classical diplomacy and strategy were aimed at identifying enemies and confronting them. Now they have to identify dangers, global and local, to tackle them before they become disasters.

As we leave a world of enemies, as we enter a world of dangers, the future wars which may break out will not be, probably, the wars

of the strong against the weak for conquest, but the wars of the weak against the strong for protest.

The Middle East must never lose pride in having been the cradle of civilization. But though living in the cradle, we cannot remain infants forever.

Today as in my youth, I carry dreams. I would mention two: the future of the Jewish people and the future of the Middle East.

In history, Judaism has been far more successful than the Jews themselves. The Jewish people remained small, but the spirit of Jerusalem -- the capital of Jewish life, the city holy and open to all religions -- went from strength to strength. The Bible is to be found in hundreds of millions of homes. The moral majesty of the Book of Books has been undefeated by the ups and downs of history.

Moreover, time and again, history has succumbed to the Bible's immortal ideas. The message that the one, invisible God created man in His image, and hence there are no higher and lower orders of man, has fused with the realization that morality is the highest form of wisdom and, perhaps, of beauty and courage, too.

Slings, arrows, gas chambers can annihilate man, but they cannot destroy human values, the dignity and freedom of the human being.

Jewish history presents an encouraging lesson for mankind. For nearly four thousand years, a small nation carried a great message. Initially, the nation dwelt in its own land; later, it wandered in exile. This small nation swam against the tide and was repeatedly persecuted, banished, downtrodden. There is no other example in all history -- neither among the great empires nor among their colonies and dependencies -- of a nation, after so long a saga of tragedy and misfortune, rising up again, shaking itself free, gathering together its dispersed remnants, and setting out anew on its national adventure. Defeating doubters within and enemies without. Reviving its land and its language. Rebuilding its identity, and reaching toward new heights of distinction and excellence.

The message of the Jewish people to mankind is that faith and moral vision can triumph over all adversity.

The conflicts shaping up as our century nears its close will be over the content of civilization, not over territory. Jewish culture has lived over many centuries; now it has taken root again in its own soil. For the first time in our history, some five million people speak Hebrew as their native language. That is both a lot and a little: a lot, because there have never been so many Hebrew-speaking people; but a little, because a culture based on five million people can hardly withstand the pervasive, corrosive effect of the global television culture.

In the five decades of Israel's existence, our efforts have focused on re-establishing our territorial center. In the future, we shall have to devote our main effort to strengthen our spiritual center. Judaism -- or Jewishness -- is a fusion of belief, history, land and language. Being Jewish means to belong to a people that is both unique and universal. My greatest hope is that our children, like our forefathers, will not make do with the transient and the sham, but will continue to plow the historic Jewish furrow in the fields of human spirit, that Israel will become the center of our heritage, not merely a homeland for our people; that the Jewish people will be inspired by others, but at the same time be to them a source of inspiration.

The second dream is about the Middle East. In the Middle East most people are impoverished and wretched. A new scale of priorities is needed, with weapons on the bottom and regional market economy at the top. Most inhabitants of the region -- more than sixty percent -- are under the age of eighteen. The Middle East is a huge kindergarten, a huge school. A new future can be and should be offered to them. Israel has computerized its education and has achieved excellent results. Education can be computerized throughout the Middle East, allowing young people, Arabs and others, to progress not just from grade to grade but from generation to generation.

Israel's role in the Middle East should be to contribute to a great, sustained regional revival:

- A Middle East without wars, without enemies, without ballistic missiles, without nuclear warheads.
- A Middle East in which men, goods and services can move freely without the need for customs clearance or police licenses.

- A Middle East in which every believer will be free to pray in his own language -- Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, or whatever language he chooses -- and in which the prayers will reach their destination without censorship, without interference, and without offending anyone.
- A Middle East where young men and women can attain university education.
- A Middle East where living standards are in no way inferior to those in the world's most advanced countries -- may I say, a Middle East very much like Scandinavia.
- A Middle East where waters flow to slake thirst, to make crops grow and deserts bloom, in which no hostile borders bring death, hunger, despair or shame.
- A Middle East of competition, not of domination. A Middle East in which men are each other's hosts, not hostages.
- A Middle East that is not a killing field, but a field of creativity and growth.
- A Middle East that honors so much its history, that it strives to add to it new noble chapters.
- A Middle East which will serve as a spiritual and cultural focal point for the entire world.

While thanking you, for the Prize, thanking the many people in uniform and civil dress in many nations, for arriving to this moment of happiness and hope, I believe that all of us remain committed to the process. I thank my family that stood behind me for such a long journey, and are convinced, as I am that this is the best option.

We have reached the age where dialogue is really the only way to run the world.

Your Majesties, ladies and gentlemen, May I wish all of you a Happy New Year, a year of hope and peace.

Thank you.