

Security, dignity and other needs ...

The other day, on a television program mercifully devoid of sound-bites, I watched Henry Kissinger being interviewed by Charlie Rose. The conversation had been precipitated by another iteration of 'failed' peace initiatives, in that space of turmoil we refer to distantly as 'the Middle East'. The unrushed format of this interview, allowed Kissinger to paint a word picture of his understanding of the dynamics undergirding this long-standing, on-going conflict.

I wish I'd taken notes, then I could use his words, but I didn't, so these are my 'impressions' of what he said. While he admitted to having no clear solution himself, Kissinger observed that any attempt (and in this round it had been the Israelis and the U.S.) to 'impetuously press' for a solution that would 'install the reign of instant peace', would inevitably fail. That it seemed the way TOWARDS peace - shalom, unity, wholeness - would require many more small, patient steps.

There are two words Kissinger used that HAVE stuck with me. As a true negotiator, he spoke of the underlying needs of the parties involved. He theorized the Israelis are seeking SECURITY, while the Palestinians search for DIGNITY. Very powerful words, carrying images with which we can all identify.

While there are many things on which Henry and I would disagree, as I've lived with these ideas, on this one we are in agreement! Security and dignity truly are prerequisites for lives of peace and creativity. It seems to me though, that the key question for Israelis, for Palestinians, indeed for all of us, is this - "From where do we expect to receive these basic raw materials for constructing our lives?"

It is SO easy to believe that I can be safe ONLY if YOU promise that you will do nothing to harm me. Or that, IF ONLY you would notice and appreciate my true character, then I would feel great! And OF COURSE, because as humans we are created to live in community, we long to be truly known and cared for by those who play significant roles in our lives.

But since we are all finite and fallible human beings, as long as I require someone else to provide for my security, or give me dignity, I put myself at risk. There is NO WAY (despite the best of intentions) that another can guarantee to NEVER hurt me, or ALWAYS appreciate me. Somehow, in order to be safe in this world, I have to come to know (as Victor Frankl in the Nazi death camp recognized) that I carry meaning and purpose inside of me. That regardless of my external circumstances, no matter what

others say or do, I AM of great value - I have been created for a purpose, I have a gift to give to the world. It is in the dignity provided by knowing THIS that I can be secure.

Like peace in the Middle East, this understanding is unlikely to be the result of a 'joint declaration', and it certainly won't occur in an atmosphere filled with fear. It WILL though, become our reality as we learn to know and love ourselves, and create for ourselves a gentle environment within which we can discover and hone the unique gifts each of us has to share with the world.