

Address to Seton Hall University

by Shimon Peres

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, John, the president of this great university, the dean of the faculty. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a great honor, and I am very grateful for this expression of respect, which I am not sure I deserve.

The dean of the faculty put before me an impossible task. He said, “Why don’t you tell the students about your own experience, your own example?” I am not sure that I can serve as an example, so I will not tell you about myself, but I can tell you about what I think an example should be, and maybe give some advice to the students.

Basically, if I have to describe leadership, I shall quote the poet who said, “To lead is to love, and to love is to love the man as he is. Leaders should love everyone despite their character.”

But I can advise you from my own experience on other points. Number one, each of you possesses much more than you think. All of us use just a part of the great potential that we possess. In ancient times, people accumulated their wealth, their experience. In modern times, you have to explore your merits. To imagine is more important than to remember, because the world is constantly changing. So take yourself in your own hands. Success will not fall from heaven, but you have the capacity in your own self.

All throughout history we cultivated the land, improved the land, enriched the land. As poets have said, “I gave to the land more than the land gave to me.” Nowadays, we have to cultivate the man. Take yourself very seriously, do not postpone it for a later age. Develop the person you have inside you by working hard.

The other advice that I can give to each of you is that you can be great only if you will serve a cause that is greater than yourself. You are as great as your cause, but you are very small when you serve only yourself. And each of us can serve great causes.

And again, never give up. When you think the cause is lost, you may be just five minutes from victory. You have to go on and on. When serving great causes, you should always take into consideration that great causes come with great difficulties. You are as great as your cause. You are as great as your attempt.

Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister of Israel and Nobel Peace Laureate, visited Seton Hall University on September 29, 2004.

You have to do it. You are living in a revolutionary age. Before our eyes, humanity is being changed. For thousands and thousands of years, we lived on an economy of land. Land was the source of our existence and the reason for our wars. Since land was so important, we had to defend our land, extend our land, and fight for land. A whole history was written in red ink because the importance of land called for borders, divisions, sovereignty, and separation.

In the second part of the twentieth century, we went from an economy of land to an economy of mind. The mind does not require walls or borders or hatred or conquest. It only needs discovering, investment, learning.

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Moving from an economy of land to an economy of mind created what we call globalization. Globalization is not an ideology, it is a consequence of this change. Mind and knowledge, science and technology; these do not have, do not need, do not permit any borders. It is really when you form your knowledge, not the expanse of your land, that makes a nation strong.

In the future, great nations will be judged by great educational systems, not by great armies. A country or a community that has the best educational system will be the country that excels in the long run.

The most important thing in life, and the most difficult, is peace. Peace is not natural or normal, peace is an attempt, an effort to improve life. Maybe the most difficult part of life is a relationship, either in family life or national life, because it is a meeting of different characters. If each of them wants to win, you will have conflict. If you use diplomacy, you will have peace and love.

The art of diplomacy is to enable peoples to live together in spite of their differences. The real meaning of modern democracy is not just to allow every person to be equal, but to allow every person equally to be different. We have to live without any fences.

Now let me say a word, I feel I have to, about the United States of America, and all of your concerns about the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I saw the cadets here, and I understand that some of them may go soon to fight in Iraq. You are concerned, your parents are concerned, and it is not an easy experience.

But there is one thing about America; the United States has participated in many wars; not to win land, oil, or water, but to ensure that people can live in freedom and in peace. Twice in the twentieth century you have sent your boys to participate in world wars. You won the wars, you won the lands, and you gave back everything. You won the war against Japan, controlled Japan, and then handed back to the Japanese an improved country. You enabled the Germans to get rid of Nazism, and then returned to them an improved Germany. Never did the United States use its might or victories for a selfish purpose, and you have paid the price.

We entered the twenty-first century hopeful that with science and technology, we would not need war. War in the twenty-first century is a surprise, and signals a different world. It is not organized by nations, it does not have armies, it does not carry flags, and yet it is very dangerous.

There is nothing more dangerous than suicidal bombers that arrive from nowhere, ready to kill children, women, and elderly persons without hesitation. And God forbid that they will get a hold of weapons of mass destruction.

It so happens that the United States is, today, the only nation that has the might, the will, and the responsibility to stop terrorism. I have many friends in Europe who criticize the United States, and I tell them, gentlemen, what is your alternative, to let extremists go? To let them get a hold of nuclear or biological or chemical weapons? And what then?

If Europe had been ready in time and fought in time against Hitler, maybe the whole fate of Europe would be different. And I believe every honest man, no matter where he is, is convinced that, again, the United States is not fighting for material gains, but for defending, at a high cost, the freedom and future of all humankind.

Who conducts the war? It is not a war that has a message, or a purpose. It is a war of protest. I am very careful never to say that the Muslims are in charge of the terrorists, or terrorism. But I must say that most of the terrorists are Muslims. The figures of the Middle East are 8 percent of the world population, 2 percent of the world economy, and 65 percent of the world's terrorism.

Terrorism is not run by the Muslim world, but fanatical groups within the Muslim religion. They are afraid that modernity will endanger their traditional way of life—but they cannot make a living on their traditional way of life. What is their traditional way of life, to live on the land? Agriculture has decreased between 50 to 100 percent in our time. These fanatics cannot make a living; they are poor and they will become poorer if they do not adopt a modern economy.

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What is the traditional way of life, to discriminate against women? To discriminate against women is to discriminate against our children. When you discriminate against women—and maybe the greatest achievement of the twentieth century was the liberation of women—you force them to marry at an early age, fourteen or fifteen, then they have ten or twelve children. The woman does not get a chance to be educated. By the age of twenty-five, twenty-six, she is exhausted. She cannot help her children materially or intellectually, or prepare them for a new future. So, the children become the victims of an old tradition, instead of agents of a new age.

Additionally, having unelected leaders is unacceptable, because the world is not going to step backward to the age of stone or to the age of cave or the age of land. Muslims will have to move like the Catholics, like the Jews, like the Buddhists, like

everybody else, to enter a new age and make a new promise to extend our life expectancy, make relations among peoples much more tolerant, and make our children more intelligent, more powerful, and happier in every sense of the word.

So, the terrorists then lose because they do not get that message, because they do not get the solution. It will not happen overnight, it will be costly and painful. They have a choice to stop terror. We do not have a choice but to force them to stop it—not in order to serve the United States of America, but to serve their own children, to create a better Muslim world.

You do not have to divorce being religious from being scientific. There is a heaven for the Lord and there is a sky for the satellite, and you can have both. You can trust in God and you can discover the secrets of our nature. And we have to, and this will be done.

What is holding us back, strangely, is not the future, but the past.

This is also the foundation of humanity. And according to the Bible, Old Testament, each of us was born in the image of the Lord, of God, provided that we not think that we are a God to somebody else. We are human to human, each of us possesses a God in his own soul and heart.

I can see some cracks in the Muslim position. In contrast to Iran, which is the most fanatical country today, we have Turkey, which has shown that it can be modern and Muslim, developed and religious. It can serve as an alternative to the Iranian position.

I can see Turkey changing, I can see even Libya, where there is a very unique leader, doing the same. I do not know what to call Qadhafi, some people say he is crazy, but if a crazy man makes a brilliant move, what does it matter? I know some brilliant people who made crazy moves, and I welcome the change in Libya, as well as democratic change in places like Indonesia.

So, what I am sure of is that this war will wind up, not only for the benefit of the rest of the world, but also for the betterment of the Muslim world. Many of them do understand, it is not a war against the Muslims, it is a war for everybody, including the Muslims.

I believe the same will happen in the conflict between us and the Palestinians. Actually, the paradox in this situation is that we reached an agreement about the future solution of the conflict. Both parties, together with the United States, agreed that we can only solve the conflict by having two states; a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli state. We know more or less where the border will be marked. We know more or less what will be the nature of relations between our two peoples.

What is holding us back, strangely, is not the future, but the past. Because if we agree, why do we not have agreement? And what has held us back is two basic mistakes—on our side, building a map of settlements that does not enable us to incorporate it in the name of peace, and on the Palestinian side, allowing terrorist

groups to subvert their agenda.

We need to allow enough time to correct the mistakes of the past, including the ones we created. It is difficult, it is demanding, it may take time, but I hope we will do it. I do hope the Palestinians will do likewise. We are trying to have dialogue and talk sensibly and reach peace.

So, again, we now have an unexpected war with so much suffering, and unnecessarily so. But there is a result to this strife, and there is hope for an end to it.

Since I am at a Catholic university, I want to tell you a story I heard from a Muslim educator. And the subject of the story is Jewish, so I have three religions. A rabbi asked his pupils, "What is the difference between day and night?" And one of them said, "Well, when you can distinguish between an olive tree and a fig tree from afar, the night is over." The other student says, "Well, when you can distinguish between a lamb and a goat, clearly the day has arrived."

The rabbi kept silent, so they turned to him and asked, "Rabbi, what is your definition?" He thought for a while, and then he said, "Look, when you see a woman who is not black or white, and you say you are my sister; when you see a man, rich or poor and you say you are my brother, the night is over, the day arrived." Thank you.

