

Shimon Peres's speech delivered at the Presidential Induction Ceremony Speech at the Knesset (see bold)

July 15, 2007

Madam Speaker, you were Acting President of the State of Israel for half a year in a very difficult period. You performed your duties in an outstanding manner, one which gave rise to honour – with great courage, with much wisdom, with great concern, with great responsibility. I do not know if I would have been able to take your place, but you proved that you have your own place. Thank you most sincerely.

Mr. Prime Minister, I thank you for the privilege I had of serving in your government and under you in not simple days. Instead of heaping on praise, I will say: there is one compliment that comes from the north and that is the most correct and best summing up of the time that passed. Nice work!

The President of the Supreme Court and Israel judges, Chief Rabbis, former Presidents, Members of the Government, Head of the Opposition, Members of the Knesset present and past, former Speakers of the Knesset, Mayor of Jerusalem, Heads of Foreign Missions, Heads of the Religious Communities in Israel,

distinguished citizens of Israel, families of the kidnapped and missing soldiers, my comrades in the long road in various governments and in the defence forces, in political life, in the working settlements – my beloved family, Members of the Knesset.

I stand here today moved and appreciative of the trust you have placed in me on behalf of our people. Your trust is of value to me, it places a great duty on me, one which I, as President of the State, will carry with reverence and a deep feeling of mission. I shall be committed to nurture unceasingly those fine threads of fabric, which weave us together as a nation, when among us there are people with various opinions who fiercely fight for them. It must always be remembered that we are the sons and daughters of one Land of Israel. We do not have, and we are not looking for, another country.

You, here in the Knesset, will continue to maintain the existential polemics, as this must be so in a democratic parliament, while I will devote myself to the unifying, in order for it not be harmed in the fervour of the storm.

In my heart, today, there dwell together joy, facing the challenge you have placed on me, but also sadness at the hour of parting.

I am leaving this house – the beating heart of Israeli democracy, after having saddled its benches for forty-eight years, more than half of my life.

I loved its deafening volume, the great debates, the soul reaching tumults and the unexpected reconciliations. I know that this house is able to take historical decisions even when democracy is storming.

I know that I am now moving from the executive arm to the unifying shoulder. I am no longer the messenger of a party but a trustee of the nation, of all the citizens of the state. From this moment I will be the voices and the address for every citizen of the State of Israel, for every baby and child, for woman and man, for the poor and the elderly. My home will be open to all – my hands will be extended to each and every one.

I arrived in Israel as a young man and I was greatly privileged to serve the nation. A man ages but faith does not grow old. It renews itself all the time. As in the words of prophet Joel: "Your old men shall dream dreams – your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28)

Fifteen years ago I went to Vishniova, near Volozin, my birthplace, an Israeli cradle on foreign soil. The entire village was destroyed by fire. I stood with tears in my eyes next to the pile stones which covered the mass grave of the last Jews who were led to the synagogue built of wood and were burnt alive with their prayer shawls on their shoulders and at their head, Rabbi Zvi Meltzer, my grandfather of blessed memory.

My grandfather studied in the Volozin Yeshiva together with Chaim Nahman Bialik. He formed my life as a child. He taught me the daily page of Gemarrah.

He played sad Jewish songs on the violin. On the Day of Atonement he led the service and in his beautiful voice he read the "Kol Nidrei" prayer. To this day the prayer echoes in my ears and moves my heart.

From Vishniova I continued to Volozin to see the building of the Yeshiva, which was established in 1804. On the outside on the stones of the wall the ten commandments are still engraved.

Inside there is now a confectionary, of course, not kosher. I went to examine the gravestones, which have remained in the cemetery. They were scattered and some of them were broken. On one of them I identified the name, "Szymon Perski," a member of the family, after whom, it seems, I was named.

I stood silently and shaken opposite these childhood stones. The village in which I was born was entirely destroyed. The house in which I was born went up in flames. Only the well has remained. I tasted its water. It has not changed. But the fire completely destroyed all that was.

It seemed to me as if I heard a scream from the mouths of my grandfather, grandmother and their only son who had remained to support them.

I wished that I could I whisper into their ears about our independence and tell them about the I.D.F. about Dimona, about Entebbe. About the outstanding privilege given to their grandson to participate in the restoration of the ruins of our people, to cast true content to the oath, "Never again."

When I came to Israel, I studied agriculture in Ben Shemen. My public activities were focused on "Hano'ar Ha'Oved" (Working Youth movement). I married my wife Sonya in Kibbutz Alumot.

In 1947, a year before the War of Independence, I was enlisted by David Ben Gurion and Levi Eshkol to serve in the headquarters of the Hagannah and I moved from Alumot to the Defence Headquarters. I had the privilege, second to none, of serving under the greatest Jew I have never known, David Ben Gurion.

From him I learnt that from great destitution there is decreed great salvation. That there is nothing wiser in life than giving preference to the moral call. Also, I learnt from him that in war there is no

choice. One must triumph. And for victory, courageous people and appropriate tools are necessary. However, when the opportunity for peace is created, it must not be missed.

I did not know why Ben Gurion chose me. But I knew what he expects of me: To dare and not to regret, not to yield to difficulties, not to be alarmed by vision, not to be afraid of the tomorrow, not to be false to myself nor to my colleagues.

It was difficult to envision then that from 650,000 inhabitants we would grow to a state of 7.2 million citizens, 1.2 million of them non-Jews: Arabs, Druzes, Bedouins, Circassians, a fascinating web of human society. I knew then, as I know today, that if they do not enjoy complete equality, we will not be at peace with ourselves and with our fellowmen.

It was difficult then to envision that we would have to fight for our lives, in seven wars in two intifadas and in innumerable battles. To stand alone. With inferior numbers, and in international isolation. We never despaired. We did not lose a war. And every time we rose up again. We revived our ancient language, we established advanced social cells, such as "kibbutzim" and "moshavim". We discovered a unique ability to bloom the desert. And a brilliant aptitude for defense capability. We were innovative in industry and we progressed and were far sighted in science.

Even Israel's severe critics will not succeed in hiding her extraordinary achievements, her peaks, which rise above the skyline of history.

Almost sixty years of the State. And my heart is proud of what we have all achieved together. And of what we, as one, are dreaming of: to live in faith, to seek peace, to build a better future.

But it was a heavy price. Those who fell in battle. The bereaved families. The bodily disabled. Without the self-sacrifice shown by the Israeli Forces, we would not have reached this stage. Even today, at the head of our agenda forces, is the release of the three kidnapped soldiers: Gilad Shalit, Udi Goldwasser, Eldad Regev and all other soldiers. They are our sons and we will not rest until we see them again at home, in their homes, our home.

Also, on this festive occasion, I mourn in my heart the murder of Yitzhak Rabin. They killed a great leader for us, they hurt our hearts. And on this festive occasion, I pray for the well being of Arik Sharon, the great fighter and the courageous leader.

I did not dream of becoming President. My dream as a boy was to be a shepherd or a poet of stars. Having been elected, it is a great honour for me and I do not disparage it, to express the secret yearning and the overt goals of the nation to perform justice. To express the unifying and to respect the unique.

I know that the President is not a governor, is not a judge, is not a lawmaker, but he is permitted to dream. To set values, to lead with honesty and with compassion, with courage and with kindness.

There is nothing prohibiting the President from performing good deeds. He is entitled, and even obligated, to serve his nation, that is his people, to nurture love of the people, of the state, of all creatures. To draw closer those who are far away. To look to the faraway distance. To help the weak. To comfort the bereaved. To bring people together. To increase equality. To bridge differences. To support spiritual and scientific creativity.

The President must courageously view the entire picture and see that a price was paid for the building of the country and its vigorous growth: depletion of natural resources, ecological

damage to the landscape. And like the rest of the world, we have to move to a clean, responsible and fair economy. The most fascinating journey in the 21st century will be to return to nature its equilibrium. It is a unique opportunity for us, to harness the Israeli creativity and knowledge, in cooperation with our neighbours, so to create a new region and a new landscape for our country and in our environment. To return to courtesy, to the respect the Gospel, to the love of the book. Israel's literary achievements are no less than its scientific achievements and, similarly, they warrant assistance and elevation. To increase the interest in culture, to be considerate of your fellowmen.

It is the duty of the President to remind the generation, which is represented here in the Knesset, that it is morally responsible to those still in the cradle of their youth. To enable them to the build their own lives, properly established, nursed from the great heritage of our people and driven by the discovery of new worlds.

In fact, wisdom does not regress. And responsibility must not age. Despair has no role. And corruption can be erased. Wars are not ideals, in them the victor just as the vanquished pays a heavy price. Peace is maintained by living people who respect life.

I see the need to encourage the young generation to enter political life and the hierarchies of leadership in order to begin again. Its enthusiasm is essential for our future.

There is no place for depression. In fact, it is the Jewish people, that invented dissatisfaction. We are a people, which have never and will never reconcile ourselves to murder, to falsehood, to mastery, to slavery, to discrimination, to exploitation, to surrendering or to stand still. Since we established the state, we must maintain these principles in our country.

The 169 words of the Ten Commandments are, even today, the basis of the entire western civilization. And the social vision of Amos and the political vision of Isaiah are the compass of our path.

Yes. I believe in enlightening the world, in raising light for both people and nations. We recall that the first sentence in the genesis was, "Let there be light."

Einstein said that our motto was "chutzpah" (audacity). The "chutzpah" to undermine conventions, the "chutzpah" to renew, to create, to contribute, to rise above the existing.

The creative "chutzpah" of the Jewish people.

I am aware that there are norms. The President has to be state like. Adhere to the law, strengthen justice, help the executive arm fulfill its duties while respecting the minority. But he is entitled to deal with the desirable. The lacking. The vision.

He must encourage peace processes. Within the house. With our neighbours. In the whole region. The new era, in any case, lowers territorial borders and reduces discrimination among people. It is built more on creativity than on governing.

Israel must, not only be an asset but a value. A moral, cultural and scientific call for the promotion of man, every man. It must be a good and warm home for Jews who are not Israelis, as well as for Israelis, who are not Jews. And it must create equal opportunities for all segments of the population without differentiating between religion, nationality community or sex.

The President must call on the religious and secular public to find, that which is common between them. He must call on the

Palestinians and on the Arab countries, without blurring their heritage, to participate in the great journey across a world built on intellect, not only on land. To provide supremacy to education.

On the future map of Israel four priorities must be marked: Jerusalem, the Negev, the Galilee and the Valley of Peace:

a. Jerusalem is yearning for momentum and is thirsty for renewal. To be the city, promised to us and holy to all believers. To be the spiritual and political center for the Jewish people and a nest of prayer for seekers of peace of all believers. To be a universal center for science and an intellectual challenge to all who come to her gates. The uniqueness of Jerusalem is also its destiny.

b. The Negev has begun to awaken. It must never be allowed to fall asleep again. The Negev makes it possible to double the settled area of Israel. We will combat the barrenness in it, just as we fought the hostility outside it. Missiles are now able to reach distant ranges, which blur the difference between the front and the hinterland. As the settlements are more scattered, the concentration of the targets of the missiles will be reduced.

The Negev enables us to harness the sun's energy and to create clean electricity for the state and to desalinate water from the sea and underground ancient water. It enables a common ground of economic relations to be formed with the three neighbours: the Jordanians, the Egyptians and the Palestinians.

c. The Galilee: its charm is renowned. It possesses overwhelming beauty. Half of the people living there are Jews and half are Arabs. This is an opportunity to create true equality for all. The Galilee invites the young generation to enrich the Galilee with intellectual energy and to establish in it clean industries, to cover it with vines and to host tourists

in it. The day will come when Lebanon will be freed of its destroyers and Syria will free it of its ropes, and from the north peace will come.

d. The Valley of peace extends along the border between us, the Hashemite Kingdom and the Palestinians. It may become a haven of cooperation between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians. All three have already given their agreement. The Arava will be an amazing tourist area. A number of artificial lakes in it are likely to make it alive and attractive. Along its length a water conduit will be built to the Dead Sea to compensate it for the loss of its water. Along the valley industrial parks will be established which will offer many opportunities of work for all the partners. In the Valley of Peace we will see how, for the first time, it will be possible to harness the economy as a bulldozer for peace. A partnership between organized Jordan and modern Israel will help the Palestinians overcome their destitution and establish their country.

I believe that politics deals with borders and the economy in relations. Good relations are likely to make possible the marking of secure and agreed borders.

The Valley of Peace is a challenge which is likely to create enthusiasm among our brethren in the Diaspora to participate in the path of a broad vision aimed at creating life and peace. It may also bring support from the Gulf Countries. It is likely to enthuse the young people, as it binds science, development and peace into one sheaf.

I intend to devote myself to promoting the relations between Israel and the Diaspora by adding an intellectual and creative dimension. And, this, alongside the encouragement of modern relations with Arab countries.

Within us there are hidden enormous creative powers in the spiritual, philosophical, scientific and cultural fields.

And deep in us is the obligation to attend to human distress in every place, the place of the poor of your people and the place of the deprived in your area.

My Friends, Members of the Knesset, Dear Guests: I was a youth and have also aged. My eyes have seen Israel in its most difficult hours and also in moments of achievement and spiritual uplifting.

My years place me at an observation point from which the scene of our life as a reviving nation is seen, spread out in all its glory. It is true that in the picture stains also appear. It is true that we have flawed and have erred – but please believe me - there is no room for melancholy. The outstanding achievements of Israel in its 60 years together with the courage, wisdom and creativity of our young generation give birth to one clear conclusion: Israel has the strength to reach great prosperity and to become an exemplary state as commanded us by our prophets:

Permit me to remain an optimist. Permit me to be a dreamer of his people. Permit me to present the sunny side of our state. And also, if sometimes the atmosphere is autumnal, and also if today, the day seems suddenly gray, the President whom you have chosen, will never tire of encouraging, awakening and reminding – because spring is waiting for us at the threshold. The spring will definitely come!

And, in conclusion, I want to express my thanks and my love to my two great-grandchildren, to my eight grandchildren, to my three children and to my wife Sonya, who joined all of us in quiet bonds of love and in heart conquering modesty.

Madam Speaker, thank you for fulfilling the role of President with wisdom and charm. You bridged a difficult period. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for the trust and cooperation, which you showed me in the period that I was a member in your government.

Dear Friends, I say to you today both "Shalom" and "Au revoir." My residence will be open to you and to all the people of Israel, already from tomorrow morning and the phone number will be available to all. I wish you, from the bottom of my heart, continued faithful service on behalf of the State of Israel and its wonderful future. I am going to serve this nation in a somewhat different way but with no less faith.

I thank the Creator of the Universe, my people and you for giving me such a great privilege. A thousand thanks.

Shalom to you, and "Au revoir" again.

Long live the State of Israel!