

The Women of the West Will Save the World

by Ronit Gabay

“The women of Western Civilization will save the world,” His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said. His prophecy was certainly demonstrated at the recent Sixth Parliament of World Religions held in Salt Lake City where many women had prominent roles; and organized the first Women’s Assembly the day before the Parliament officially began.



Religion and the History of Violence (Anchor Book, 2014).

She said that we live in a time when everything is possible and accessible, but inside, we don’t have true satisfaction. The violence in the world steams from this emptiness. It gives people “something” to be passionate about. I finally realized that we should stop focusing our effort on condemning violence, and we should focus on engaging younger

Unfortunately The Dalai Lama couldn’t attend the Parliament due to illness, but he blessed the Parliament with his presence on a live-stream screen.

More than ten thousand men and women—spiritual leaders, scholars, authors, and political activists —from 50 different spiritual traditions and over 80 different countries shared their wisdom of the different traditions. Programs included 1800 presenters, exhibitors and films.

The focus of the Parliament was “Reclaiming the Heart of Humanity: Working Together for a World of Compassion, Peace, Justice and Sustainability.” This theme was certainly felt through the kind act of service by the Sikh community who offered free lunches, the custom of Langar (dining tradition), every day to those attending. They truly demonstrated their faith through action: “We pray to remember God, and we serve to realize God.” The Langar set the tone of the parliament, bringing people together to appreciate the different traditions.

One part of the Parliament was women addressing the issues of discrimination and abuse against women. Marianne Williamson, concluded that religion hasn’t been kind to women throughout history, saying: “The passion of free thinking women has never been deeply appreciated by the great religions of the world because the passion of free thinking women raises the passion of free thinking children that grow up to be free thinking adults that are very difficult to manipulate and almost impossible to control.”

The struggle for human rights relating to women, race and religious intolerance were addressed throughout the week.

Valerie Kaur, a young Sikh speaker spoke about “revolutionary love,” the kind of love that she had experienced after giving birth to her son when she knew she was willing to die for her son. “I can’t live if someone is dying. I can’t stand by if someone is suffering.”

We are not living in a safe world, and many of those challenges, such as the terror in Israel-Palestine, and refugees escaping war and Isis are demonstrating it. Karen Armstrong, a well-known scholar and author of many books about world religions, spoke about hate and war in the name of religions. That is the topic of her new book: *Field of Blood*:

generation in doing humanitarian projects and utilizing their passion and energy in doing something good in the world.

“Kill them” (Quran); “Do not spare them” (Torah); and “Cast them into everlasting Fire” (New Testament), was title of a popular panel that looked at religious scriptures that justify violence and addressed the serious problem of terror and fear in the world. “The scriptures are violent simply because it reflects our violent nature as human beings,” said Armstrong.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb pointed out that spiritual practice is not enough to end violence: we must take action. She asked for all the abused women in the audience to stand up, which surprisingly was about 70% of the women in the room. Then she asked for those who called a hotline phone number to stand up, and only a few did. Rabbi Gottlieb is a peace activist and her book *The Trail Guide to the Torah on Non-violence* educates people about her systematic approach for peace. Her unique approach for peace in the Middle East is to act for human rights and do what you can about something you really care about. She encourages people to think globally and act locally.

I was personally moved by a unique group of Arabs, Druze, Bedouin, and Orthodox Jews from Holy Land settlements that came together to establish the “Abrahamic Reunion.” As a former settlement resident near Jerusalem, I expected to hear arguments about land rights. Instead I was pleasantly surprised to learn about sincere friendships and a commitment to support each other’s life through projects with children and social gatherings with adults. As they spoke about taking on human actions that might seem impossible, I saw the vision of creating one nation called the “Abrahamic Reunion,” reclaiming the heart of Jerusalem.

Other important topics covered were climate change, preserving natural habitat, and engaging people in collective efforts to raise awareness toward the value of the earth. There was a morning class I took where world scripture verses were read about taking responsibility to care for the earth, as it takes care of us. The indigenous people communicated

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