

Peace and Truth: Part-time Opponents

Tomorrow three American colonels will enter the South Korean town of Kaesong, three miles below the 38th parallel. On the lips of these men will be the greetings of *Shalom*, Peace. And a tired, weary world, whose spirit has been frozen by a Cold War and whose energy has been burnt up in sporadic Hot Wars, will wait in breathless expectancy for the results of these truce talks.

There is a beautiful modern Hebrew song called *Shalom*, The Song of the Signaller, which tells of solitary Jewish guards in the lonely desert outposts of the Negev guarding the outlying districts of the Yishuv. The refrain of the song tells of one sentinel signaling the other: *Shalom?*, "Is there Peace?", and the answer comes, *Shalom*, "Yes, there is Peace". All free men the world over hope and pray that when the three American emissaries cry out to the enemy commander *Shalom?*, "Is there Peace?", that the answer will come clearly and boldly - *Shalom*, "Yes, there is Peace".

However, I must confess that I look upon Peace with some misgivings. I feel that there is some conflict between *Shalom* and *Emet*. Does not Peace imply some surrender of Truth? If you and I are at odds about some very important matter of principle, and we make peace, we compromise - - - doesn't that mean that we have each yielded a bit of that which we hold to be the Truth? If the family doctor prescribes a tablespoon of castor oil for Junior, and Junior bitterly objects to it, Mother can make peace between doctor and child by compromising and giving Junior a dose of half a tablespoon of castor oil. Peace has indeed been established. But not enough medicine has been given to cure the child - which the doctor feels is a true necessity, while enough has been given to Junior to make him cry and grumble and groan - - a reaction which he feels is, in truth, both unnecessary and undesirable. A settlement has been made - but you have compromised the principles of both antagonists. No good has come of it for anyone.

When the State of Israel was officially established, the leaders of religious Jewry wondered whether they could, with clear conscience, become partners in a coalition government with forces of irreligion, a government in which they will be forced by agreement to carry out all cabinet policies, though they may at times be at odds with the dictates of our Faith. Should they refuse to join the coalition - - bitter internal strife would no doubt undermine the stability of the State. Should they consent and compromise with irreligious parties - - why, they would be selling their spirits for a mere mass of portfolios. What a terrific conflict this clash of Peace and Truth presented to them.

History is replete with examples of such heart-rending conflicts. When the sons of Jacob were blinded by their jealousy of their young brother Joseph, there were two opinions prevalent as to what to do with him. Reuben declared himself in favor of not harming Joseph and of returning him to Jacob. Most of the brothers held differently. They wanted to dispose of Joseph very unceremoniously by killing him. It was Judah who assumed the role of peace-maker. He proposed what seemed to him a satisfactory compromise. "Let us", he said, "sell our brother Joseph into slavery". It was this compromise which was ultimately adopted.

What an unholy error! How tragically mistaken was Judah when he thought that you may surrender the Truth for the cause of Peace. The Rabbis' estimation of Judah's action was extremely caustic. They applied to those people who praise and wish to imitate Judah's course the words of the Psalmist: וְיִשְׁבַּח אֱלֹהֵינוּ, "He who praises  
הַמְּכַלְמֵנוּ, "He who blasphemes the Lord". Indeed, by sacrificing Truth on the altar of Peace, Judah had drawn upon his head the wrath of generations.

How powerfully appropriate are the words of the Prophet Zachariah:

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ: דַּבְּרוּ אִתְּכֶם אֶת הַאֱמֻנָה וְאֶת הַדִּינִי וְאֶת הַשְׁפָּט וְאֶת הַיָּשׁוּעַ וְאֶת הַיְשׁוּעָה וְאֶת הַיְשׁוּעָה וְאֶת הַיְשׁוּעָה

"These are the things that you shall do: speak the Truth one to another; the Truth and the Judgement of Peace establish in your gates". There come times in the realm of practical life, in the gates of your own private city of experience, when you must make peace with circumstances. Living in society requires a certain give-and-take. But, warns the Prophet,

this *Peace*, this peace-making and compromising, no matter how wonderful it is, may affect only the periphery of Truth, only the outskirts of what is dear to the Jewish heart. When it comes to the Truth itself, then we are told only *ידברו כל אחד אל אחיו* "Speak the Truth one to another", the Truth itself you must constantly speak and strive for. You can compromise everything about Life; you cannot and may not compromise Life itself.

In terms of American sociology, the 1950s may yet become known as the Age of the Disillusioned Young Men. In the 1930s, during the years immediately preceding World War II, America began flirting with Soviet Russia. During the War, because of the danger of a common enemy, this flirtation bloomed into a full honeymoon with the Communist countries. This peace was intended solely as a tactical agreement for mutually practical advantages. It was intended to affect only the geographic, the military and the economic spheres. It was never intended to compromise our way of life, our principles of democratic government. Yet how many brilliant and sincere, but naive, young men were there in those days who sold their minds and hearts to Marxism because they imagined that the practical settlement between Russia and America implied a surrender of the Truth. The brilliant young men of the thirties who succumbed to this false reasoning are the disillusioned men of the fifties. Ah, had they but taken to heart the words of Zachariah: *אמרו כל אחד אל אחיו*, *ידברו כל אחד אל אחיו* "Speak the whole Truth, even while executing the Judgement of Peace in your gates".

You might ask me: does this mean that Peace and Compromise are necessarily evil? Does Judaism always look down upon them? And the answer is most assuredly No. Peace is something for which pray at least three times every day of our life. It is only a matter of knowing how and when to use it. It is a matter of knowing its limits. We Orthodox Jews have compromised very often. Fifty or sixty or a hundred years ago, no Rabbi would be dressed as I am today. And no really religious layman would be dressed as you are. Fifty or a hundred years ago a young rabbi *preaching his first sermon* ~~speaking to you~~ from a pulpit such as this would not be clean-shaven. Then, a congregation such as this would not sing the Shema or chant Yehai Shamai Rabba in unison as is done today. Oh, we have compromised much **about** Judaism -- but we have not and

must not and will not compromise Judaism itself. We have compromised all around the Truth; we shall not compromise the Truth itself, not even for the cause of Peace.

ידברו כל אחד אל אחיו

ידברו כל אחד אל אחיו. "Speak the whole Truth, even while executing the Judgement of Peace in your gates".

When the American peace emissaries meet with the enemy's representatives tomorrow, the eyes of the world will be focused upon them, and the ears of the world will wait anxiously for the first whisper of Peace. A truce of some sort will probably be worked out. But the ultimate effect upon the welfare of humanity will depend not upon the men around the table in Kaesong as upon the sentiments of free men everywhere. We can again rush headlong into the catastrophe of identifying Peace with a surrender of Truth, with a degeneration of our democratic principles of government. Or, we can be level-headed and realize that this peace is a mutual agreement for the practical advantages of both parties. It is an understanding which will help save life and property on both sides of the 38th parralell. This can be an honorable peace and it can even lead to global peace if we will but understand that the truce does not transcend the limits of geographical, military and economic arrangements. In these we can compromise and make peace. But the principles of democracy and the prerogatives of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity for all men, which we hold to be truths, these we can never compromise. We may make peace with the tyrants; we must not make peace with tyranny. So it is in government, so it is in Judaism, so it is in the conflict of every man's soul with his environment. Compromise everything about the Truth, if you will; the Truth itself you must never compromise.

וידברו כל אחד אל אחיו "And these are the things that you shall do",  
ידברו כל אחד אל אחיו, ידברו כל אחד אל אחיו

"Speak the whole Truth one to another, even while executing the Judgement of Peace in your gates"

BENEDICTION:

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

O Father in Heaven, we beg of you to hasten that day when Charity and Truth will have met, and Justice and Peace will have kissed. We beg of You to give us wisdom and insight so that the smoke from the pipes of Peace will not cloud our vision of the Truth. Amen.