

"JACOB'S PEACE TREATY - A LESSON FOR OUR TIMES"

That the times we live in and the problems we face are abnormal is common knowledge. A generation has been raised and developed in an atmosphere where the abnormal and the unusual are the accepted pattern of living. But at the same time we must remember that these times and problems are not unique - that is, it is not the first time that mankind has been faced with such perplexing issues.

One such issue, perhaps the foremost in the minds of most people today, is that of the stand of the free world on the matter of the Korean Peace talks. Now it is not the business of a Rabbi to comment on purely political or diplomatic matters. But when matters of principle are involved, then the people have the right to know what the teachers of religion have to say about the burning issues of our time. When the propaganda machines have ceased their loud clattering and the din of the partisan shouting has been silenced, the still small voice of religion must make known its moral and spiritual judgement.

The problem of Korea, as you are probably aware, consists of a very basic conflict. On the one hand, no one likes war. Our people have known murder and killing for too long a time. We are sick and tired of guns and uniforms, of bombs and brass. Deep deep inside we have a strong and powerful yearning for peace. On the other hand, we are as insistent as ever in maintaining the strictest standards of justice. We refuse to yield on the principles of decency and humanity and fair play. This, then, is the problem we face in Korea: we can yield to the Communist terms and have Peace. But that will entail the forcible repatriation of prisoners-of-war who are afraid of returning to Communist Korea. And that, naturally, would be a terrible injustice. Or, we can insist on not forcibly repatriating them, and maintain our stand on Truth and Justice. But we shall then have no Peace. The Prophet Zachariah proclaimed: "Emess umishpat shalom shiftu bi'she'areichem" - "Truth and the administration of Peace shall you administer in your cities". Truth and Peace are both vitally important. How difficult, therefore, the conflict which the free citizens of the world face today: Truth or Peace, Truth versus Peace. Which, according to the traditions of Judaism, takes precedence?

Today's Bible reading, according to the interpretation of the Rabbis, can offer some valuable hints to the proper solution of our problem. Esau bore his brother Jacob an old grudge. He resented the blessings he received from his father, and which he, Esau, did not get. He resented his purchase of the Bechorah, the rights of first-born. He resented his favored position with their mother. When Esau left Jacob, and when Jacob left Esau, it was with the knowledge that Esau had sworn vengeance, that he was some day going to kill Jacob. When they parted, Jacob left as a pauper, he had nothing on him but the very clothes he was wearing. Now Jacob was returning a mature man - and a wealthy man. His spiritual growth was equalled by his material gains. And Jacob heard that Esau was there waiting for him. Many frightening thoughts probably ran through Jacob's head. There was his murderous brother waiting for him like a beast for its prey, vengeance burning through his hard heart. He was a brother who knew no reason and understood no sentiment. How was Jacob going to deal with him, how would he save not only his possessions, but his wives and children?

Jacob was a peace-loving man and decided to "go all the way" in order to assure peace between his camp and that of Esau. And the sacrifice of Jacob for the cause of Peace was considerable. Listen to this list of the gifts Jacob sent to Esau in order to appease him: 200 she-goats, 20 he-goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 milch camels and their colts, 40 kine, 10 bulls, 20 she-asses and 10 foals. Total: 580 assorted heads of livestock. Calculate at the present market rates! Not enough? Then listen to what our Rabbis add: "Vayikach min habo beyado mincha le'esav achiv", he gave of that which came into his hands as a gift to Esau. "What came into his hand", say the Rabbis, refers to countless gems

and diamonds, "avonim tovos umargolios". What a colossal appeasement! Jacob was certainly "going all out" for Peace!

But in a highly interesting commentary, Rashi points out that while Jacob did so very much for the cause of Peace, he yet stopped at a certain point. There are certain things he would NOT give to Esau, certain matters upon which he would NEVER yield. "Min habo be'yadomin ha'chulin". Jacob gave all he had - but only from the "chulin", only from the secular, the material possessions that he had. Not, never, "min ha'kodoshim"! Jacob never gave him of the "Kodoshim", of what was holy, he never yielded on matters of principle. Camels, bulls, he-goats, she-goats, gems, diamonds, everything - but not one iota of holiness, no compromise with one principle of his G-dly heritage! Let there be Peace, but not at the expense of Truth and Justice. Surrender the material, but never compromise the spiritual.

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And the Bible adds with a touch of Prophecy: "vayetsav gam es ha'sheni gam es ha'shelish and Jacob commanded also the second and third delegations he had sent to greet Esau, "gam es kol haholchim acherei ha'adarim", and all those who followed the droves, his children and children's children to the end of days, he taught them a way of life, "ka'davar hazeh tdabrun el Esav be'motzaachem oso", this same way shall you speak to the Esaus wherever and whenever you meet them, the same rule that Peace requires the greatest of material sacrifices, but never never "min hakodoshim", never must Truth or Justice or Principle be compromised, even for the sake of Peace, no matter how great your desire for it.

So that, my friends, Jacob's peace treaty is certainly a great lesson for our times. If Peace conflicts with Truth, Peace must go and Truth must prevail. Such is the moral decision of Judaism, and it is a decision binding upon all descendants of Jacob. And, therefore if today the Free World is faced by this conflict, Korean Truce versus forced repatriation, Peace versus Truth and Justice, it is the principle of Truth and Justice which must win. We American Jews can feel happy and secure in the knowledge that the position taken by our government on this crucial and tragic issue is in the best traditions of Jacob and Judaism. John Ruskin once said: "You may either win your peace or buy it: win it, by resistance to evil; buy it, by compromise with evil". We are determined to win it, not buy it. "min ha'chulin velo min ha'kodoshim".

But not only in the field of international relationships, but, especially, does in matters of religion does this great principle hold true. To say that Traditional Judaism, or Orthodoxy as it is called, has not yielded to the spirit of the times, would be an untruth. Well, you might then ask, what separates us from the Conservatives? And the answer is simply this: we have yielded "min ha'chulin", they have yielded "min ha'kodoshim". We have changed our modes of dress - no Rabbi one hundred years ago would dress as I am now dressed - and they have yielded on Shabbos. We have yielded on the long beards; they have yielded on Taharas Ha'mishpacha and Mechitza. Thus both have made Peace with circumstances; but the orthodox Jew has done so at the expense of the "chulin", the exterior, the material, the unimportant, while the conservatives have compromised the "kodoshim", the holiest of our traditions and our principles, the most sacred and basic parts of Judaism. The Conservatives have compromised Truth; we have compromised all about Truth, but not Truth itself.

A Hassidic "vort" very piquantly illustrates this point. In the Ethics of the Fathers, we are bidden to emulate our ancestor Aaron who was "ohev shalom ve'rodeph shalom", who loved peace and pursued peace. Why both, asks the Hassidic teacher, why both "love" and "pursue"? Because, he answers, both are necessary. When Peace is at one with Truth, not in conflict with Justice, then the Jew, like Aaron, must be an "ohev shalom", a lover of Peace; but if Peace conflicts with Truth and detracts from Justice, then you must be a "rodeph shalom", a pursuer of Peace, "pursuing" not in the sense of trying to achieve it, but "pursuing" in the sense of chasing it away, in the sense of driving such Peace from before you. "Ohev shalom ve'rodeph shalom" - sometimes love it, sometimes chase it away.

The problems we face are momentous and heart-breaking. Our earnest prayer is that we shall be able to gain a Peace consistent with our humane and G-dly principles. But if, "chalilah", that is impossible, then the G-d of Jacob is our witness that our ways shall be the ways of Truth and our methods the methods of Justice.

Benediction -

O God who makes Peace on High, give, we pray,
Peace to us. But-peace, only when it is consistent
with Truth & Justice. Give us the wisdom
and insight ~~to~~ so that the smoke
from the pipes of peace shall
not cloud ^{our} ~~the~~ vision of the Truth.
Amen