

EXCERPTS FROM CONVOCATION IN HONOR OF  
Yahrzeit of the Late Mrs. Erna Michael

One of the most significant words in the vocabulary of Judaism is: Shalom, peace. This one word has defined the highest ideal of Jewish prophets and priests, sages and philosophers. The tradition identifies Shalom as the most comprehensive of all blessings. The modern Israeli, caught up in the perpetual crisis of military confrontations, nevertheless calls out to all his neighbors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, "Shalom" -- and he does so both when coming and going.

The Talmudic tradition teaches, however, that Shalom has another implication as well. It identifies it as a kinuy or Name of God. Shalom is not only a social desideratum, it is also a theological fact. God is merciful, gracious, patient, truth -- and Shalom, peace.

Thus, the greeting Shalom or Shalom Aleichem is at one and the same time a wish for peace and a prayer which, in English, would be translated as, "God be with you" (that, indeed, is the origin of the contracted word, "Good-bye").

The relationship between these two significations of the word Shalom -- as social harmony and as an honorific designation of God -- was first elaborated by Philo. The ancient Alexandrian philosopher maintained that just as man's social experiences influence



his theology, so do his metaphysical conceptions shape his social ideals. Therefore, it is the monotheists and not the pagans who elevated peace or Shalom to the highest level of their worldly aspirations. The pagan, the polytheist, believed in many gods, and when there is a plurality of gods there must inevitably arise rivalries, jealousies, clashes between them. The competition between gods is, in fact, one of the principle sources of all mythology. The monotheist, however, by virtue of his belief in One God, posits absolute peace in the divine realms. The pagan, therefore, transfers the principle of dissension and battle from the divine to the human scene, and the monotheist attempts to enforce the heavenly ideal of peace in his earthly existence. Perhaps this is the real meaning of our prayer

הַשְׁלֵם לָנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁלֵמוֹת כְּשֶׁלֶם הַמָּקוֹמִים הַגְּדוֹלִים

"May He Who makes peace in the High Places, grant peace to us and to all Israel."

That noble lady in whose honor we are assembled here this evening, and whose name our College bears, possessed both qualities of Shalom in abundance.

Her entire personality was permeated by the ideal of Shalom as peace. She was an intelligent, alert, and highly attractive person. She was vibrant in all her ways, possessed of a finely developed social consciousness, and ready to participate in any great cause of service to her faith, to her people, to humanity. It often happens



that people who are involved in groups and organizations develop a certain hardness and harshness in order to be able to administer and lead and enforce the discipline which any organized group requires. Erna Michael, however, despite her leadership ability, remained at all times irenic, charming, and kindly. She exercised a calming affect on her surroundings and always sought harmony and peace -- Shalom.

At the same time, she was blessed with a profound understanding of the second meaning of Shalom: piety. She was religious in both outer observance and inner conviction. She genuinely believed, and her faith was ingrained. She was Jewish to the core; and while never demonstrative about her innermost piety, she was a true daughter of God, Shalom.

It is appropriate, therefore, that we of the family of Erna Michael and of the Erna Michael College, here gathered to remember her and to consecrate this hour to her memory, say of the late, beloved Erna Michael: , May Shalom be her portion forever and ever.