

## SOFT WORDS AND HARD FACTS

- A331
1. In the 1930's and 1940's, two brilliant thinkers gazed into their crystal <sup>balls</sup> ~~balls~~ and came to the same frightening conclusion: freedom was coming to an end. The western tradition of personal liberty was ebbing, and would <sup>soon</sup> ~~soon~~ disappear. A world-wide dictatorship would take the place of the democracies, and the heritage of freedom would be lost.

But almost as remarkable as their agreement on the death of freedom -- unless we wake up and do something about it -- was their amazing disagreement as to how this dictatorship would be achieved. These two men wrote a book each -- each one a classic of our literature -- describing two totally opposite means by which this tyranny of the future would come into being. The late George Orwell wrote 1984, in which he set that date as the probable time by which the world will be controlled by vicious men who will have gotten their power by terror and agony. The enslavement of 1984 is achieved by sadistic brutality, by keeping the people of the world in constant fear. Aldous Huxley, however, in his Brave New World, sees the enslavement of the masses coming about not by inflicting pain, but by inflicting ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> ~~equally~~ <sup>equally</sup> humiliating pleasure. Orwell's slaves are beaten into servitude; Huxley's are lulled into it. ~~The~~ Huxley's tyrants use soft words to disguise the hard facts.

While there is no doubt that our modern dictatorships use pain and brutality to keep in power -- Germany and Russia never spared the rod -- yet it seems as if the ruling circles of the world's dictatorships today are beginning to ~~revert to~~ practice rule by pleasure instead of by pain. Even our own beloved America, Huxley warns, is beginning to develop the techniques of the Brave New World -- the control of people's minds by painless means. There is the technique of dehumanizing conformity, in which people feel happy to be part of the crowd and are spared the pain of being alone and the discomfiture of differentness. Our society and its progressive immorality is approaching the prediction of Huxley that general promiscuity would be the rule, and the family unit would disintegrate and disappear. People are spared the pain of creative thought and intelligent decision by constant propaganda -- not necessarily bad propaganda, but the endless distraction of radio and TV and all kinds of entertainment which give so much ~~un~~ <sup>un</sup> ~~interrupted~~ <sup>interrupted</sup> pleasure that we do not bother with social and political and ethical problems. There is the Chemical Persuasion of "soma" or the tranquilizer with which we help avoid life's problems, & which are making of us a Milton culture. And there are the new ways of convincing people of your point of view without forcing them -- hypnopaedia, in which records are played while they sleep and suggest your view to them; and the new technique of subliminal projection by which instantaneous flashes on the screen command us to obey certain wishes of others. In other words, there exist now, thanks to modern science, a great many of the ways to control people's minds without hurting their bodies. We can now use Soft Words to adjust people to the Hard Facts of their subjugation.

2. The occasion for my mentioning these two very serious views, my friends, is the fact that this difference of opinion was anticipated, in rudimentary form, by the Rabbis of the Talmud who disputed the interpretation of one word in today's Sidra. The Torah, in describing the enslavement of Israel in Egypt, says VAYAAVIDU MITZRAYIM ES BNEI YISRAEL BEFARECH -- And Egypt enslaved the children of Israel by means of PERECH. What does that mean? R. Shmuel bar Nachmeni derives the word PERECH from PERICHAH -- back-breaking oppression, painful brutality. Whereas R. Elazar ~~believes~~ <sup>believes</sup> PERECH to be a contraction of PEH and RACH -- a soft mouth, or Soft Words. (Sotah, 11b). One considered Pharaoh's techniques to be consistently that of pain and terror; the other saw him varying his terror with PEH RACH, with the soft word. PERICHAH is enslavement with a stick; PEH RACH -- with a carrot. P.R. is the iron fist in silk gloves. Take the PERICHAH of yesteryear's Pharaoh and transpose it to tomorrow's super-modern tyrant and you have Orwell's painful slavery of 1984. Take his PEH RACH into tomorrow and you have the humiliating pleasure of the salvery of Brave New World.

3. We might say, indeed, that the views of R. Elazar and R. Shmuel b. Nachmeni are not mutually exclusive, that Pharaoh tried both techniques. We know of the hard work and abominable murder of Jewish children which he imposed upon our forefathers. But he also tried PEH RACH in addition to this PERICAH. He obviously fed his slaves well -- for later these very slaves were willing to give up their newly won freedom & go back to Egypt if only for the DAGAH & SIR HABASAR, for the fish and the fleshpots and the material comforts of slavery. Pharaoh, according to our Sages, even tried psychological tricks in order to enslave the Jews. (Tanhumah Yashan, behaalotechah 23): He played on their respect for authority and their gratitude and feeling of equality. He himself took in hand the SAL UMAGREIFA, the tools of labor, and worked together with the Israelites in order to encourage them to work harder. MIYAD HALCHU YISRAEL BIZERIZUS V'ASU UMANUS IMO KOL HAYOM, the Israelites reacted with enthusiasm and worked hard with Pharaoh all day. Then, having gotten them to work as hard as possible through soft words, through playing on their sense of loyalty, he declared that this was to be their measure of work, required of them each day henceforth, under threat of torture and agony. PEH RACH -- the soft word disguising the hard facts! <sup>showing a new way</sup> ~~Brave New World!~~
4. So that our Tradition warned us much, much more than 20 years ago against the ~~the~~ double threat to freedom. We Jewshave had a great deal of experience with tyrants, both potential and real, who used both PERICAH & PEH RACH, both painful and painless techniques. And therefore not only as Jews, but as citizens of amhy lands, as American and Israelis and Frenchmen, we must be vigilant and make sure that the precious freedoms we do have are not taken away from us either by the brutality of pain or the softness of pleasure.
5. But there is more than political freedom involved in the whole concept of slavery. When we speak of AVDUS, of servitude, we do not mean only the formal act of being possessed by a human master. Slavery is a spiritual condition as well. It is areligious status. Just as the physical slave loses his dignity, so does the man whose spirit is not free. Just as the political slave has his rights curtailed, so does the slave religiously have fewer mitzvot, fewer opportunities to find full religious expression. We need not belabor the point that a man may be free bodily and a free citizen of a free country politically, and yet by giving up his religious identity and succumbing to the culture of others he is a spiritual slave, as abject as one in chains.
6. And here too, in spiritual and cultural and religious slavery, we find both techniques of PERECH -- PERICAH & PEH RACH. Historically, we have resisted with might and courage against any attempt to enstrange us from Torah, to make of us slaves to a foreign way of life, when that attempt was ~~at~~ through means of PERICAH, through violence & force. We DID survive 400 years of Pharaoh's PERICAH. We DID survive the PERICAH of Crusades and Inquisitions, the violence of Rome and of pogroms. In Communist Russia there still are nukbers of Jews who cl ndestinely teach the Holy Tongue and keep up the love for Torah. In the very heart of the Warsaw Ghetto, as we learn from the archivists, Jews studied Torah and Talmud. PERICAH Has only strengthened our stubborn will-to-live.
7. But we have not always been as strong in countering slavery by the soft word. When the Greeks tried to hellenize us by force and violence, an old High Priest who wasn't even an amateur as a general successfully revolted, and so we have Chanukah. But when Greeks gave us a ticket into hellensitic society and dangled before us the attractions of their immoral gymnasias and theatres and mystery religions -- we succumbed all too often. For 1800 years we held out against spiritual subjugation by PERICAH, but when the so-called Emancipation came and Napoleonic recognized us as a faith but not a nation and gave us his Sanhedrin -- the soft words won over countless Jews who were blinded to the hard facts of their spiritual disintegration. "Americanization," "melting pot", "integration" -- all good words and fine concepts if handled properly and with Jewish dignity. But these became the honeyed words which trapped so many into religious suicide.



8. It is to the eternal credit of our people that we taught the world to recognize tyranny for what it is over 3,000 years ago. It is to the eternal credit of Israel that she taught the world <sup>and</sup> to resist the hard fact of slavery even when concealed in the soft words of the scheming tyrant, PEH RACH as well as PERICAH.
9. And it is to the eternal credit of religious Jews, who have remained loyal to our Tradition, that we resisted spiritual slavery no matter which of the two methods used for its imposition. We who are here today are descended from a long line of people who hated slavery in every form and manner. We stand in the great tradition of the resisters of AVDUS whether through PERICAH or PEH RACH. It is therefore becoming for us to continue in our glorious tradition. We must resist PERICAH with all our resources, and every form of violence against Jews, whether the bombing of a synagogue in the South or the banning of Chanukah in the North, must evoke our determined stand. But at the same time, we must give even greater attention to the danger of PEH RACH. There is only one way to ward off the PEH RACH approach to spiritual slavery, to assimilation, the soft words of comfort and conformity and pleasurable sameness -- and that way is: education. Without education, our generations must of necessity succumb to the PEH RACH. PEH RACH thrives on ignorance of the hard facts; it grows only in an atmosphere of "am-haaratzus". That is why, my dear friends, I hope you will respond to my appeal in The Bulletin to help us enroll as many children as possible for the coming year in the beginner's class of our Hebrew School. Let us put the same courage and might and stamina we apply to defense against PERICAH to the strengthening of Jewish knowledge, the greatest defense against domination via PEH RACH.
10. EITZ CHAYYIM HI LAMACHAZIKIM BAH... Torah is a Tree of Life to those who grasp it, it provides the freedom of spirit and soul to those who study it -- and DERACHEHA DARCHEI NOAM, its ways are the ways of pleasantness, those who study Torah & live its precepts do not cannot be seduced by the PEH RACH the soft words and pleasant attractions of the hard fact of spiritual servitude. VECHOL NESIVOSEHA SHALOM, in the paths of Torah we shall find SHALOM -- peace, an honorable peace, free from the violence of PERICAH and the humiliation of PEH RACH.