

# The Search for Authentic Peace

Throughout Jewish history, neither war nor peace really stood as concrete option for the Jewish people. The Jew, lacking political sovereignty, had no status in the international debate and the question of war or peace in the here and now did not press him for an immediate response or decision. Only the wars of the gentiles belonged to concrete historical reality, and that reality was the Jew's involuntary lot. On the other hand, the ancient wars of Israel were a matter more for theology than for politics. They took place in Scripture, either in the distant past or, at the approach of the messianic era, in the distant future. The Jew waged concrete war against the evil inclination more than he did against any historical foe. Peace too, was discussed primarily from a utopian perspective, in light of the vision of the End of Days, and it belonged mainly to the theological realm. The unity of the human race in the time to come was representative of the unity of the God, the creator of all men (that is, of monotheistic truth) and peace for humanity would come about when all its members had accepted the kingdom of God (Aviezer Ravitzky)

"Rabbi Simon said, "At the moment the Holy One chose to create the first Adam the ministering angels broke up into factions. Some of them said, "Create him;" while others said, "Don't do it." Thus it is written: "Loving-kindness and truth will meet, righteousness and peace will kiss." (Psalms 85:11)

Loving-kindness said: Create him, for he will do acts of loving-kindness.  
Truth said: Don't create him, for he is drenched in lies.  
Righteousness said: Create him, for he will do much Tzedaka.  
Peace said: Don't create him, for he is essentially quarrelsome.

What did the Holy One do? He took Truth and cast it toward the earth. Thus it is written, "And truth will be cast to the earth." (Daniel 8:12) The ministering angels said: Sovereign of the Universe, Why do You shame the leader of Your court? Let truth rise from the earth. Thus it is written, "Truth will arise from the earth." (Psalms 85:12)

The elder R Huna of Sepphoris said; While Ministering angels were arguing with one another, Hashem created Adam and then said "why are you arguing? Man is already made" (Midrash Bereshit Rabbah)

אמר רבי סימון: בשעה שבה הקב"ה לבראת את אדם הראשון, נעשו מלאכי השרת כיתים כיתים, וחבורות חבורות, מהם אומרים: אל יברא, ומהם אומרים: יברא, הדא הוא דכתיב תהלים פה: חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלוש נשקו.

חסד אומר: יברא, שהוא גומל חסדים.  
ואמת אומר: אל יברא, שכולו שקרים.  
צדק אומר: יברא, שהוא עושה צדקות.  
שלוש אומר: אל יברא, דכוליה קטטה.

מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב דניאל ח: ותשלך אמת ארצה. אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה: רבון העולמים מה אתה מבוזה תכסיס אלטיכסייה שלך תעלה אמת מן הארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב תהלים פה: אמת מארץ תצמח. ר' הונא רבה של צפורין אמר: עד שמלאכי השרת מדיינין אלו עם אלו, ומתעסקין אלו עם אלו, בראו הקדוש ברוך הוא. אמר להן: מה אתם מדיינין, כבר נעשה אדם

# Different types of "Peace"

*Peace comes from the Latin pax, meaning "freedom from civil disorder," the English word came into use in various personal greetings from c.1300 as a translation of the Hebrew shalom. Pax may refer to:the Latin word for "peace" or "treaty": Pax (mythology), the Roman goddess of peace; Pax Romana or Pax Augusta, a period of relative peace and stability in the Roman Empire (Wikipedia)*

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation and they will no longer study warfare (Isaiah 2:4)

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:4-9)

**For the sake of peace**, the poor of the heathens should not be prevented from gathering gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and corners of the field. Our masters taught: for the sake of peace, the poor of the heathens should be supported as we support the poor of Israel, the sick of the heathens should be visited as we visit the sick of Israel, and the dead of the heathens should be buried as we bury the dead of Israel.

The difference between the rabbinic and prophetic conceptions is striking. The ways of peace are clearly not peace as Isaiah or Micha envisaged it. At first sight these rabbinic laws lack the grandeur of the prophets – they are small scale, local, even prosaic. They envisage no transformation of the universe of human sensibility. They seem to be no more than pragmatism, generously conceived. They are attempts to avoid the type of kind of civil strife from which Jews suffered so often during the long night of exile. For these reasons, the ways of peace has not been seen for the innovation that it is. I believe this is a mistake. The ways of peace is in its way as original an idea as that of peace itself. We can define it. **It is a programme for peace in an unredeemed world.**

What the sages who articulated the ways peace understood was that they were not prophets. They were heirs to the prophets, continuers of their tradition, but they did not believe that they were living at the end of days. They knew that in this not-yet-fully-redeemed world, peace means *living with difference* – with those who have another faith and other texts. That is the fundamental distinction between the prophetic peace of religious unity and the rabbinic peace of religious diversity, with all the compromise, restraint and mutual respect that coexistence requires. The prophets articulated utopian peace; the sages a non-utopian programme for peace in the here-and-now. That is what is fundamental, and original, in the idea of the ways of peace...The prophets envisaged peace as it would come to pass in what Francis Fukuyama, following Hegel, called the 'end of history'. The rabbis constructed a template of peace tailored to the crooked timer of humanity. (Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World)

ד וְשֵׁפֶט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם, וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים רְבִים; וְכָתְתוּ חַרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים, וְחֲנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמוֹרוֹת--לֹא-יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל-גּוֹי חֶרֶב, וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה. {פ}

ו וְגַר וְזָב עִם-כֶּבֶשׂ, וְנֹמֵר עִם-גְּדֵי יֶרֶבָּ; וְעִגְל וְכִפִּיר וּמְרִיא יִחְדָּו, וְנִעַר קֶטֶן נֹהֵג בָּם. ז וּפְרָה וְדָב תִּרְעֶינָה, יִחְדָּו יֶרֶבְצוּ יַלְדֵיהֶן; וְאַרְיֵה, כְּבָקָר יֹאכַל-תְּבָרָו. ח וְשֹׁעֵשֶׂע יֹנֵק, עַל-חֵר פִּתְיוֹ; וְעַל מְאוֹרֹת צִפְעוֹנִי, גְּמוּל יָדוּ הַדָּה. ט לֹא-יִרְעוּ וְלֹא-יִשְׁחִיתוּ, בְּכָל-חֵר קִדְשִׁי: כִּי-מִלְאָה הָאֶרֶץ, דִּעָה אֶת-יְהוָה, כְּפִיִם, לַיָּם מְכֻסִּים. {ס}

"אין ממחין ביד עניי נכרים בלקט בשכחה ובנפאה, מפני דרכי שלום. ת"ר: מפרנסים עניי נכרים עם עניי ישראל, ומבקרין חולי נכרים עם חולי ישראל, וקוברין מתי נכרים עם מתי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום." (גיטין: דף ס"א.)

## Visions of the Israeli Peace Camp

The Palestinians are our closest neighbors. I believe they may become our **closest friends.**”

Surely, nothing would capture the imagination of young people everywhere more than a gathering of all of us standing together -- when I say all of us, I mean all the leaders of the Middle East, all twenty of them, not one by one, but together -- and declaring the end of the war, the end of the conflict, carrying the message to our forefathers and to our grandchildren that we are again, all of us, the sons and daughters of Abraham, living in a tent of peace. We shall tell them that together, as partners, we are going to build a new Middle East, a prosperous economy; that we are going to raise the standard of living, not the standard of violence; that we are going to introduce light and hope to our peoples, to their destinies. (Shimon Peres)

We need peace in order to ‘be’ but we also need to be aware of the limitations that there will be to a future peace agreement. I know that what I’m describing here isn’t some sort of peace in which us and the Palestinians will stride hand in hand towards the sunset. It will be a peace that will be broken; a peace that will provide reasons and justifications for both sides to say – you see how it’s impossible to rely on ‘them’ and do a deal. But with a bit of luck, we may succeed in creating ‘**not bad neighborliness**’ here – more than that I don’t wish for – not bad neighborliness, that, maybe, in one hundred years or so, can lead to even deeper relations. (David Grossman)

“The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a clash of right and right. Tragedies are resolved in one of two ways: The Shakespearian way or the Anton Chekhov way. In a tragedy by Shakespeare, the stage at the end is littered with dead bodies. In a tragedy by Chekhov everyone is unhappy, bitter, disillusioned and melancholy but they are alive. And my colleagues and I have been working, trying...not to find the sentimental happy ending, a brotherly love, a sudden honeymoon to the Israeli-Palestinian tragedy, but a Chekhovian ending, which means clenched teeth compromise..”(Amos Oz, Israel, Palestine and Peace: Essays)



**Negotiating in a World of Pax:** Yitzhak Rabin, z"l, whose assassination we commemorate this week, was a reluctant peacemaker. The image of his grudging, almost pained, handshake with Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn in 1993 said much about the man. Many attribute to him larger than life qualities, and are convinced that but for his death we would now be living in a new, peaceful Middle East. But I am not sure Rabin would have shared that conviction. What was apparent, to me at least, about Rabin as a man was precisely his rootedness in Middle East reality, and his suspicion for that brand of breathless optimism that imagines that the region can be transformed instantly. What was most striking about Rabin as a leader was that his realism and hard experience as a military man was not a barrier to diplomatic action and decision; it was almost an impetus for it. For him, the determined pursuit of negotiated agreements seemed to have more to do with better positioning Israel for the rise of Iran and extremism, than with a deeply held belief in the prospect of coexistence.

I connect with this side of Rabin because - though this is one of the less popular things for an Israeli to admit - I sometimes find the word "peace" quite irritating. It seems to conjure up a vision in people's minds of a reality that for the foreseeable future may just not be within reach. As much as we may wish it to be different, it is difficult to read the headlines about Iran and terrorism, the empowerment of extremists and zero-sum diplomacy, and sustain the belief that true peace will break out any time soon. And this idea that a document on paper, however well-crafted, will usher in some utopian era in practice seems fanciful. We live in a region with powerful militant actors, dysfunctional governments, and deep, systemic problems. To speak of a "peace agreement" as a kind of cure-all is to create expectations that cannot be met. If there is a case to be made for agreements with our neighbours - and there is - it is unfortunately not because it will produce the kind of peace enjoyed on the U.S.-Canadian border. It can only be because - assuming the right agreement can be reached - it offers a chance for a reality, and a future, better than the one we know.

In fact, most "peace agreements" do not really presume to establish peace in its broader sense. They do not try to reconcile grand historical narratives or produce deep bonds of friendship and cooperation between erstwhile warring peoples. Generally, they are technical documents. They focus on things like the military redeployment of troops, the composition of constituent assemblies, or the demarcation of a border. Even when done right, they tend to be less like exhilarating marriage ceremonies than unsatisfying divorce agreements, where bitter and scarred parents try, against odds, to make things less painful for their children. We place too much weight on these negotiated agreements, and on the shoulders of the negotiators themselves, if we expect some form of words on paper to deliver salvation. Even at best, an agreement does not create peace; it creates the space for peace to grow. It creates a framework for the real potential engineers of peace - the teachers, the parents, the spiritual leaders, the children - to fashion a new reality and mindset

over time; and for the extremists to gradually become unappealing and marginalized. This is, of course, not the way leaders generally talk about negotiated settlements. More often than not, we are promised the dawn of some new age. The disillusionment associated with what can actually be reached and the rejection of what is on offer often follows. Rabin's legacy suggests that we may do well to shed this Messianic pretension. This language belongs to the age of Exile. When shaping your destiny is out of your hands, you can allow for the comfort of grand, unreachable visions to ease the long dull ache of your current predicament. But the real work of a sovereign State has more to do with improving the lot of its people than with revolutionizing it. And an imagination that is not grounded in reality can act as an obstacle to quality decisions, not just because the perfect can be the enemy of the good, but also because the good can be the enemy of the simply preferable.

This is not to say that agreements we reach with our neighbours should not bring real dividends. These agreements must produce, and must be seen to produce, a net advance in our interests and values (relative to the status quo). They must link somehow to our higher aspirations and our long-term prayers for a true peace. But they need not be all things to all people. They need not live up to some Romantic ideal that dreams can become realities overnight. They can and will be messy and sub-optimal even when they are the best alternative available. It is said that at the conclusion of the Dayton Accords that brought an end to the war in Yugoslavia, the Bosnian leader, Alija Izetbegović, gave a speech in which he sought to justify the agreement to his people. But he did not try to convince them that some epic peace had been achieved. "This may not be a just peace", he conceded, "but it is more just than the continuation of war." In this same spirit, Rabin's legacy suggests both that we must believe in the promise of peace, but also that we must make that promise believable. In honouring his memory, and advancing Israel's interests, we could do worse than give more space for this kind of sentiment in our discourse and our decisions. (Tal Becker)

# The Dangers of Absolute Values

Liberty, in whichever sense, is an eternal human ideal, whether individual or social. So is equality. But perfect liberty (as it must be in the perfect world) is not compatible with perfect equality. If man is free to do anything he chooses, then the strong will crush the weak, the wolves will eat the sheep, and this puts an end to equality. If perfect equality is to be attained, then men must be prevented from outdistancing each other, whether in material or in intellectual or in spiritual achievement, otherwise inequalities will result. Similarly, a world of perfect justice - and who can deny that this is one of the noblest of human values? - is not compatible with perfect mercy. (Isaiah Berlin)

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“For life to be liveable, truth on earth cannot be what it is in heaven. Truth in heaven may be platonic – eternal, harmonious, radiant. But man cannot aspire to such truth, and if he does, he will create conflict not peace. Men kill because they believe they possess the truth while their opponents are in error. In that case, says God, throwing truth to the ground, let human beings live by a different standard of truth, one that is human and thus conscious of its limitations. Truth on the ground, is multiple, partial. Fragments of it lie everywhere. Each person, culture and language has part of it. None has it all.” (Jonathan Sacks)

What potential options and dangers does this demand for perfection present when faced with a historical reality that is not devoid of tensions, interests and enmities, when it encounters a historical realization moulded by the partial, the gradual, and the contingent? When peace is discussed in a utopian framework, in light of a perfect vision, does this increase its cogency, its real demands within the concrete political context – or may it, perhaps neutralize peace as a normative value, annulling its real immediate claim on the present era? On the one hand, the exalted status assigned to peace embodies a positive ethical potential: it guides man to strive, in any kind of circumstances, for the ultimate perfection of man and society ...on the other hand, this perfect image of peace demands a price, for it may take a dim view of anything that is not perfect, complete and ultimate, that does not beat swords into ploughshares and create an ideal state of harmony. Will the Jewish people, in its encounter with historical, earthly reality, in a time when the Messiah still tarries, be able to realize a concept of peace that is not taken from the realm of the absolute? And if it is able to do so, will this necessarily mean a relinquishing of the utopian horizon that has moulded the people's consciousness since time immemorial, a betrayal of classical images and visions? The answers will not be found in any legal or philosophical sources, they are nowhere engraved upon the tablets.

(Aviezer Ravitzky)