

Crafting Shalom
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Bringing Shalom to the Holy Land is a very different process from the traditional nationalist peace process that has been implemented during the modern era. Over a hundred years ago, the founder of political Zionism, Theodore Herzl wanted the Jews to have a state like any other and to join the nations of the world as equals.¹ That being said, even Herzl himself saw the importance of including religious leaders in the movement:

“We shall *first of all* ask for the cooperation of our Rabbis. Our rabbis, on whom we especially call, will devote their energies to the service of our idea, and will inspire their congregations by preaching it from the pulpit. They will not need to address special meetings for the purpose; an appeal such as this may be uttered in the synagogue. Thus it must be done. For we feel our historic affinity only through the faith of our fathers as we have long ago absorbed the languages of different nations to an ineradicable degree.”²

Herzl was clear about first seeking out the cooperation of the Rabbis due to their influence and respect within Jewish society. He knew that the Rabbis would be instrumental to the success of Zionism since they would be able to inspire the masses in the natural setting of the synagogue where Jews gathered on a regular basis. Faith is what unifies the Jewish people above all else, and the power of this faith must be integrated into the Shalom process. To begin, there needs to be an understanding of the term ‘Shalom’ in Biblical and Rabbinic thinking since this informs everything which comes afterwards. Afterwards, this article will explore religious thinkers and textual sources to promote a paradigm shift from a nationalist peace process to a faith based ‘Shalom process’ conducive to the Holy Land where it is intended. These ‘Shalom Crafters’ will be an integral part of helping Muslims, Jews and Christians live together in the Holy Land in the 21st century.

¹ Cf. Herzl, Theodore. *Der Judenstaat*. Leipzig & Vienna 1896.

² Ibid.

The word for peace in Hebrew (שלום) derives from a root denoting wholeness or completeness and its frame of reference throughout Jewish literature is bound up with the notion of שלימות, perfection.³ The etymology of the word ‘peace’ originates from the Latin ‘pax’ which means ‘compact, agreement, treaty of peace, tranquility, absence of hostility, and harmony.’ It is also the name of a Roman deity who was recognized as a goddess during the rule of Augustus. She was traditionally depicted with olive branches and a cornucopia which signified prosperity. The difference between the two terms is linguistic *and* theological. Wholeness and completeness are ideals which require fair and equitable justice. Treaties of peace and agreements can be made to benefit one side exclusively, whereas inherent in the idea of wholeness is that all sides share equally. Shalom is tied into monotheism being one of the names of God according to the Babylonian Talmud’s interpretation of Judges 6:24.⁴ Biblically, the term Shalom was a blessing and a manifestation of Divine grace.⁵ As mentioned above, Pax was a Roman goddess whose worship would have offended the sensibilities of all who follow the one God.

By the time of the Rabbinical sages, Shalom signified a “value or an ethical category, it denotes the overcoming of strife, quarrel, and social tension, the prevention enmity and war... In a great many sayings it appears in a normative context: the pursuit of peace is the obligation of the individual and the goal of various social regulations and structures.”⁶ Many of the Shalom Crafters who will be mentioned below take the idea of individual responsibility for pursuing peace very seriously and this has become a unifying principle with which a Shalom Crafter can be identified. Although most of the passages discussing Shalom in Rabbinical texts specifically deal with the internal dynamics of the community and family life, there are texts which can guide

³ Ravitsky, A. “The Concept of Shalom in Traditional Jewish Sources,” in: *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*. Ed. Arthur A. Cohen & Paul Mendes-Flohr. New York 1987.

⁴ B.T. Shabbat 10b

⁵ Ravitsky Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

how Israel is to relate externally to other nations and peoples. One of the central guiding terms is שלום מפני דרכי שלום or 'in the interest of the way of peace'. This term becomes a guiding light when determining how Israel is to relate to Gentiles and its overall scope and breadth have led many scholars to propose that this is a meta-value meant to direct the halachic process. Two Rabbinic sources which particularly reinforce this point are: "All that is written in the Torah was written for the sake of peace"⁷ and "the Eternal announces to Jerusalem that [Israel] will be redeemed only through peace."⁸ Since redemption is the overall goal of the Jewish people, pursuing peace becomes a holy endeavor of the utmost importance.

Since the enlightenment, there has been a core assumption that religion is the source of conflict and subsequently does not promote peace. This idea is anchored in Emmanuel Kant's 1795 essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" whose influence upon modern political thinking is widespread. "Kant's essay⁹ describes the rational, legal and moral principles on which peace may be established within and among states. In this approach, religion is seen as a divisive force, one of the ways in which nature creates differences among men; and 'these [differences] may certainly occasion mutual hatred and provide pretexts for wars.'"¹⁰ Two consecutive world wars that were fueled by secular nationalisms speak loudly to the fact that Kant was very wrong in his hypothesis of where to find the root cause of violence.¹¹

Rabbi Michael Melchior, a long-time leader of religious based peacemaking in Israel explains that "religious identity and tradition have long been considered the main obstacles to

⁷ Tanchuma Shofteim 18

⁸ Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:15

⁹ Kant, I. "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in H. Reiss (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings* (2nd ed.; trans. H.B. Nisbet), Cambridge 1991. p. 114.

¹⁰ Rosenak, Avinoam & Isaacs, Alick, "Peace Secularism and Religion" in: Yigal Levin and Amnon Shapira (editors), *War and Peace in Jewish Tradition: From the Biblical to the Present*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series p. 139. 2012.

¹¹ Georg Hegel was well known for his philosophical critique of Kant's steadfast belief in the separation of Church and state being a precondition for peace among the nations.

peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and a main factor in many of the conflicts throughout the Middle East.”¹² How a religion is interpreted influences whether or not the religion expresses itself as a force for violence or peace. Those who advocate for religion to express itself as a force for peace need to take into account various factors such as determining the role of religious leadership in conflict resolution and management. Religion contains a significant amount of cultural wisdom which has the potential to encourage pro-social behavior patterns such as promoting conflict resolution. An example of this is the ritual of *Sulha* in the Islamic tradition and the mediation role of the Rabbi in Talmudic Judaism.¹³

One of the greatest Rabbis and Jewish philosophical minds of all time was Maimonides who lived from 1135-1204. His Magnum Opus is the Mishneh Torah. In the book on Kings and their Wars 11:10-12, intended as a guide for the monarchy when it will be reestablished in the Land of Israel, Maimonides said,

“...[T]he intent of the Creator of the world is not within the power of humans to comprehend, for His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. All the words of Yeshua of Nazareth and of this Ishmaelite (i.e. Mohammad) who rose after him are only to make straight the path for the Messianic king and to prepare the whole world to serve the Eternal together. As it is said, ‘For then I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech so that all of them shall call on the Name of the Eternal and serve Him with one accord.’ (Zeph. 3:9). Thus the messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics – topics of conversations (among the inhabitants) of the far isles and many peoples...”

It should be made clear that there are many problematic parts to Maimonides’ view of Christianity in particular and how Gentiles should be treated once the Jews regain control of the Holy Land. This being said, he was humble enough to say that the Eternal has His reasons for

¹² Melchior, M. “Establishing a Religious Peace,” in: *Coexistence & Reconciliation in Israel*. Ed. Ronald Kronish. Mahwah 2015. p. 117.

¹³ “Among the Jews, the local rabbi was the mediator, often acting as an arbitrator if ‘reason’ did not prevail. Among the Arabs, an elaborate peacemaking method called ‘sulcha’ was used for all kinds of conflicts, including for crimes as serious as murder, in order to restore harmony and prevent escalation of violence through acts of revenge. These historical precedents indicate that both Israeli and Arab cultures placed a high value on managing conflict and on agreement between the conflicted parties as the basis for resolving disputes.” Zaidel, Susan “Mediation in Israel,” in: *ADR Bulletin*: Vol. 5: No. 2, Article 3. June 1st, 2002. Available online at: <<http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol5/iss2/3>>

bringing Christianity and Islam into the world and that it is not within the power of our thoughts to understand how they will function in the overall redemption of humankind.

There is something profoundly religious about admitting that humanity does not have a solution to the conflict.¹⁴ It is a secular notion to believe that human beings can define and solve the problem. The second part of Maimonides source quotes the prophet Zephaniah who says that the Eternal will, “change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech so that all of them shall call on the Name of the Eternal and serve Him with one accord.”¹⁵ Changing the speech of the peoples to a pure speech is a reminder of Marshall Rosenberg’s life work in Nonviolent Communication where he called for all peoples to be conscious of their language which is the first step in crafting peace between peoples.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), one of the greatest philosophers of interreligious dialogue, comments on Maimonides’ verse above and says that:

“Christianity and Islam, far from being accidents of history or purely human phenomena, are regarded as part of the Eternal’s design for the redemption of all men... In addition to the role of these religions in the plan of redemption, their achievements within history are explicitly affirmed: Through them ‘the messianic hope, the Torah, and the commandments have become familiar topics among the inhabitants of the far isles and many peoples.’”¹⁶

Heschel is a figure whose life exemplifies what it means to be a Shalom Crafter. His iconic photograph with Martin Luther King Jr. as he participated in the Selma march has enshrined him in the history of the civil rights and antiwar movement.

“Having escaped Nazism, Heschel was acutely aware of the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. ‘In regard to the cruelties committed in the name of a free society,’ he wrote, ‘some are guilty, all are responsible.’ In announcing his opposition to the Vietnam War, he cited Leviticus: ‘Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.’ Opposition to the war, he declared, was a religious obligation, ‘a supreme commandment.’”¹⁷

¹⁴ With appreciation to Dr. Alick Isaacs for this idea.

¹⁵ Zephaniah 3:9.

¹⁶ Heschel, A.J. “No Religion is an Island,” in: *No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*. Ed. Harold Kasimow & Byron L. Sherwin. Maryknoll 1991. p. 21.

¹⁷ Dreier, Peter. “Selma’s Missing Rabbi.” *The Huffington Post*. 21 Mar. 2015. Web. 30 Sept. 2015. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/selmas-missing-rabbi_b_6491368.html>.

The themes of empathy, responsibility and justice are tools in the art of crafting Shalom.

Heschel exemplified each one of these in his life's work. He was able to empathize with the struggle of the African American through the lens of the Biblical story of the Exodus:

"At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses. Moses's words were, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to me.' While Pharaoh retorted: 'Who is the Lord, that I should heed this voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go.' The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses."¹⁸

This empathy propelled Heschel towards responsibility for upholding justice for the “other”. The Hebrew word for responsibility, אחריות has built into it a deep religious understanding for what it means to uphold this meta-value. The first letter is ך which is made up of two yuds (י) and a vav (ו). Judaism derives meaning when the numerical value of letters (known as Gematria) match other words. Two Yuds and a vav are 26 which is the same numerical value of the holiest name of the Eternal, known as the Tetragrammaton (יהוה-י). A mystical meaning can therefore be derived that the first step of Jewish responsibility is taking responsibility for ourselves being made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26). The next step is taking responsibility for our brethren (אח). Jews over the ages have taken this idea very seriously and have come to the aid of our people in the far reaches of the Earth. But we are not to stop there. The Jewish people must then take responsibility over the ‘other’ (אחר). Abraham Joshua Heschel understood this to his core. Marching with the civil rights movement for a people not his own was transformed into prayer:

"For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying."¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dreier Ibid.

By saying ‘after me’ (אחרי), Heschel led by example so that many generations of Jewish social justice activists would know what it means to take a stand. His humility in allowing others to take the lead in his life (אחריו), showed that Heschel understood the true meaning of putting the struggle before individual ego. Heschel’s exemplification of the fullness of Hebrew responsibility from the beginning to the end (א...ת), provides an example for what Shalom Crafters need to internalize and how the modern State of Israel is to address its own conflict.

The State of Israel needs to take these idea very seriously when considering the “others” living within its midst. Israel claims to be a democracy, yet there are 6.2 million Gentiles in territories controlled by the Israel whose rights are infringed upon in varying degrees.²⁰ It is interesting to note that this is the same amount of Jewish citizens residing in the Land of Israel.²¹ The lesson to be learned from Heschel is that there should be a Jewish moral and religious obligation to ensure equality and justice for all who reside in this Land. Understanding that this moral imperative holds the Jewish people in the Land of Israel to a higher standard than other nations is one that we should take on with pride as a characteristic of who we are as a nation. Practical ways of moving forward at this stage need to be grounded in each population group establishing relationships which in turn foster mutual interests on various levels. Marc Gopin explains that:

²⁰ There are 1.72 million Arab citizens of Israel whose claims of discrimination need to be taken seriously. Also included in this demographic are 2.75 million West Bank Palestinians ruled by a Palestinian Authority which does not represent their will and is under an occupation which inhibits their freedoms as a whole. Finally, and most tragically, are 1.73 million Gazans ruled by Hamas’ oppressive Islamic government. Although Hamas won the legislative election in 2006, many scholars believe that this occurred as a direct protest against the corruption of Fatah. cf. The Central Bureau of Statistics for the State of Israel. Accessed Sept. 30th, 2015. <<http://www1.cbs.gov.il/ts/IDf6b1de50a111c4/>>.

²¹ The Central Bureau of Statistics for the State of Israel, Ibid.

“...There needs to be a bilateral process of discovery of the respective communities. This takes on three aspects: What motivates the heart of each community, what are its highest ideals and values? What are its deepest pains and past injuries that might be shared in common with the other community? What are at least some elements of its vision for the future? The means of discovery is most important. Currently, dialogue in small and large groups needs to be extensively pursued. These dialogues should be guided by intelligent and sensitive principles of mediation, which are geared toward accommodating the cultural needs and psychological peculiarities of each group.”

To fulfill this vision of peace, I have taken upon the task outlined by Gopin very seriously. For the past five years, I have been very involved with an interreligious activist group called the Abrahamic Reunion. Dialogue occurs in small and large groups centered around celebrating Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy days. The leaders of the organization, Rodef Shalom²² Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra have incorporated “intelligent and sensitive principles of mediation” geared toward the needs of each group, which they learned from their teachers. Upon my return to the Holy Land last year, I began to study under Eliyahu to be eventually ordained as a Rodef Shalom. Part of this path entailed joining the scholarly community of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute so as to plan a conference for the Abrahamic Reunion leadership that would culminate with a conference called Visioning Interfaith Activism in the Holy Land. This occurred in June of 2015.

This amazing experience was followed up with joining an expedition to Croatia on behalf of Search for Common Ground and Outward Bound Peacemaker’s Palestinian-Israeli Emerging Leaders Program. Never before in my life has the idea been reinforced that only through direct relationship with the “other”, with whom we engage in a seemingly intractable conflict, will we be able to discover a way to transcend issues that keep us locked in old paradigms. During this expedition, I spoke at length about the Federal Republic of the Holy Land which would join the State of Israel and Palestine so that all who reside in this land feel equally represented in a just

²² Rodef Shalom means a ‘Peace Pursuer’ and is an ordination which was conferred upon Eliyahu by the late Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi z”l, the founder of Renewal Judaism and an inspiration to religious peacemakers around the world.

system of government. To bring this about, the Holy Land will need expert Shalom Crafters who can help policy makers understand the importance of interreligious dialogue that will act as the glue that can hold our people together during the transition period. These Shalom Crafters will need to be trained in conflict resolution, religious & cultural studies and political science.

John Lennon asked us all to imagine a world with no countries or religion so that one day we can all live in peace. The correct interpretation of religion should be focused as a source of moderation so I would like to suggest a slight change in the lyrics of his song to reflect the spirit of this paper:

Imagine there's no *States*
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And not just one religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace,

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one
-John Lennon "Imagine" 1971