

Jewish Peacemaking: Wisdom for Transforming Conflict between Individuals and Communities

A Presentation for the Valley Beit Midrash

Rabbi David Jaffe

Source 1: Mishna Uktzin 2:12

אמר רבי שמעון בן חלפתא, אין לך כלי שהוא מחזיק ברכה אלא שלום, שנאמר "ה'--עוז, לעמו ייתן; ה', יברך את עמו בשלום" (תהילים כט,יא).

Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta said: Shalom is the best vessel for holding blessing, as it says, "G-d gives G-d's people strength, G-d blesses G-d's people with peace." (Psalm 29:11)

Source 2: Psalm 85:11

Lovingkindness and Truth meet;
Justice and Peace kiss

חֶסֶד-וֶאֱמֶת נִפְגָּשׁוּ צֶדֶק וְשָׁלוֹם נָשָׁקוּ

Source 3: Mishna Avot 1:12

הלל אומר, הוי כתלמידיו של אהרון--אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה.

Hillel said: Be like the students of Aharon – Love peace, pursue peace, love all people and bring them close to Torah.

Source 4: Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (d. 1508, Venice), Nachlat Avot 1:12, Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth translation

> And indeed in words of *shalom* (peace), that Hillel mentions in our Mishnah, and in all places that *shalom* is mentioned in Scripture, the commentaries thought that its meaning is always [about] agreement between two conflicting parties… And therefore they explained "a lover of *shalom* and a pursuer of *shalom*" [as follows:] that a person should make peace between his/her friends who are fighting…

As if the matter of *shalom*, according to them, does not happen, unless there is a fight and conflict beforehand. This is like saying "there is no string without a hole."

And behold they (the other commentaries) did not know the great value of *shalom*, and they did not see its preciousness and the splendor of its greatness, since in addition to it being said with regard to the agreement between conflicting parties, as they thought, behold *shalom* is also said, other than (in the context) of fighting and conflicts, (with regard to) the common good, and (with regard to) the agreement of people and their mutual love, which is the necessary component in the gathering of a nation, and it is the string that ties together and combines everything.

Source 5: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Reflections of the Rav, p. 55 -7, Justice

"…. In dealing with imperfect man, we posit that no man is totally wrong or right and that, in a case of the litigants, both are partially right and wrong. The application of din (judgment) can only take account of obvious surface conditions; it fails to perceive subtleties underneath, which dilute our certainty about the right and the wrong of the litigants. Each has some responsibility for the situation and is partially guilty of the misunderstanding, for misleading innuendoes, and for contributing indirectly to a climate in society which places others at a disadvantage. Strict justice deals with plain facts and salient reality; real responsibility however goes much deeper and is obscured from the scrutiny of the court. Metaphysically, no one is entirely absolved in situations of conflict. *Tzedek (justice)*, therefore, is truly realized only through *peshara (compromise)*, which declares the parties both winners and losers. Thus, *Pesharah (compromise)* is not only socially desirable… but it is also morally just. The principle of *tzedek (justice)* demands that *mishpat (court rulings)* reflect the existential condition of man's inevitable imperfection."

Source 6: Avot D'Rebbe Natan, ch. 12 Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth translation

When two men were in a conflict, Aaron would go and sit with one of them. He would say to him, "My son, look at your friend, [look at what he is saying], he is tearing at his heart and ripping his clothing. He says, 'Woe is me, how can I lift my eyes and see my friend? I am ashamed before him, for it is I who wronged him.'" And he [Aaron] would stay with him until he removed all of the jealous rage from his heart.
And Aaron would then go to the other man, and say, "My son, look at your friend, [look at what he is saying], he is tearing at his heart and ripping his clothing. He says, 'Woe is me, how can I lift my eyes and see my friend? I am ashamed before him, for it is I who wronged him.'" And he [Aaron] would stay with him until he removed all of the jealous rage from his heart.

And when the two would finally meet, they would hug and embrace and kiss each other. Therefore it is stated, They wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel (Numbers 20:29).

Source 7: Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Lekutei Moharan 1:64:4

"There is a quality to disagreement that relates to the creation of the world.
The essence of the creation of the world comes about through the "empty space."
Without this empty space everything would be one, endless unity.
There would be no room for the creation of the world.
Therefore, the light was withdrawn to the sides creating an empty space
Out of this empty space all creation happens…

Source 8: Mishna Avot 5:17

Every dispute that is for the sake of heaven in the end will sustain.. And that is not for the sake of heaven will not sustain. Which is a dispute that is "for the sake of heaven?" – This is the dispute between Hillel and Shammai. And that isn't "for the sake of heaven?" – This is the dispute of Korach and his community.	כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים ושאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים אי זו היא מחלוקת שהוא לשם שמים זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי ושאינה לשם שמים זו מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו:

Source 9: Genesis Rabbah, chapter 24

בן עזאי אומר זה ספר תולדות אדם זה כלל גדול בתורה, ר"ע אומר

(ויקרא יט) ואהבת לרעך כמוך, זה כלל גדול בתורה, שלא תאמר

הואיל ונתבזיתי יתבזה חבירי עמי הואיל ונתקללתי יתקלל חבירי עמי,

א"ר תנחומא אם עשית כן דע למי אתה מבזה, בדמות אלהים עשה

אותו.

Ben Azzai says: “This is the book of the generations of humanity”[meaning that humanity is created in the Divine image] – this is the great principle in the Torah. Rabbi Akiva says, no - ”Love your neighbor as yourself.” is the main idea of the Torah. [The rabbis in the midrash then challenge Rabbi Akiva and say the problem with Rabbi Akiva’s opinion that “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself” is the main idea is that if someone feels shamed maybe they will think,] “If I am shamed, I will shame my neighbor with me; If I am cursed I will curse my neighbor with me.”Rabbi Tanhuma, says, “Know that who you put to shame is in the likeness of G-d.”