

HILLEL'S JOSEPH MEYERHOFF CENTER OF JEWISH LEARNING

PRESENTS:

MY TRUTH or OUR PEACE,
YOU CHOOSE!!

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Values of our Fathers

INTRODUCTION

We live in an age of competing truths. Often, in the Jewish community, much of our strife can be attributed to this fact. Generally, it is perceived that this is a "contemporary" problem, another affliction of modernity. In fact, the most enduring quality of religion in general and Judaism in particular is that "competing truths" have always been part of the landscape.

Take a look at these sources and, in the back of your mind, imagine a table of Jews with competing truths. Some protecting what they perceive as the real Judaism, while others who believe differently, demanding an equal role as decision makers at the table of Jewish policy. Is it a value for these people to sit and get along? Does the ancient Jewish tradition have any insights on how we should confront this challenge? The following sources will not provide answers to specific problems, but they will give guidelines for how a conversation between competing truths may take place as they deal with the question,

"Should you swallow some of your truth for the sake of peace?"

YOUR MISHNAH NAVIGATOR₁

The first chapter of *Pirkei Avot*, *Values of Our Fathers*, the most well-known collection of rabbinic ethical perspectives in the Talmud, opens with a history of how the oral law was transmitted, the following is the opening statement.

(ב) שמעון הצדיק היה משירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר על שלשה דברים העולם עומד. על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים:

Simeon the Righteous was one of the last of the men of the great assembly. He used to say: The world stands on three things: The Torah, Divine Service, and the practice of kindness.

YOUR NAVIGATOR₁ AGAIN

The next statement concludes the first chapter in *Values of Our Fathers*. Compare and contrast these two statements. Can both statements be true? How?

VALUES OF OUR FATHERS END OF CHAPTER ONE

רשב"ג אומר על ג' דברים העולם קיים על הדין ועל האמת ועל השלום

Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel said, "The world is sustained by three things, by justice, by truth and by peace."

YOUR MISHNAH NAVIGATOR

Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel's statement also appears in another Talmudic tractate which has a chapter that serves as an anthology for what the Talmud says about peace. The anthology is appropriately entitled פְּרֶקֶת הַשְּׁלוֹם, "The Peace Chapter". In this chapter, Rabbi Muna interprets the source you have just read. Did you understand the source the same way, or did you understand it differently?

After you have pondered this, take a look at the next paragraph which is also taken from the Peace chapter. Does Bar Kapara's statement agree or disagree with what Rabbi Muna said? Which statement resonates with you?

Perek Hashalom, The Peace Chapter

א"ר מונא ושלשתן דבר אחד הן נעשה הדין נעשה אמת נעשה שלום ושלשתן בפסוק אחד נאמרו שנאמר (זכריה ח) אמת ומשפט שלום שפטו בשעריכם כל מקום שיש משפט יש שלום (וכל מקום שיש שלום יש משפט)...

Rav Muna said: These three things are actually one. When justice is done, truth is served and peace is achieved, as it is written:

"These are the things that you shall do; Speak every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." (Zechariah 8:16)

Wherever there is justice there is peace (and wherever there is peace there is justice.)

...אמר בר קפרא גדול השלום שכן מצינו שדברה תורה לשון בדאי כדי להטיל שלום בין אברהם לשרה שנאמר (בראשית יח) ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר וגו' ואדני זקן ולבסוף כתיב ואני זקנתי

Bar Kapara said, "How great is peace that even the Torah has stretched the truth in order to bring peace between Abraham and Sarah, as it is written, "And Sarah laughed to herself saying...my master is old..." (Genesis 18) And later it is reported, [that she said] "And I am old." [instead of "my master is old"]

YOUR GENESIS RABBA NAVIGATOR

Look at the next paragraph which explores another aspect of peace. The word שְׁלוֹם "shalom" has many connotations, but it is fundamentally rooted in the Hebrew word שָׁלֵם "shalem" which

means "complete", or "fulfilled" or "whole". What conditions are required before we can have the peace that is presented in this statement of *Genesis Rabba*?

Genesis Rabba 38:6

רבי אומר גדול השלום שאפילו ישראל עובדים עבודת כוכבים ושלום ביניהם אמר המקום
כביכול איני יכול לשלוט בהן כיון ששלום ביניהם שנאמר (הושע ד) חבור עצבים אפרים הנח לו
אבל משנחלקו מה הוא אומר (שם) חלק לבם עתה יאשמו הא למדת גדול השלום ושנואה
המחלוקת

Rabbi said: How great is peace, for even if Israel practice idolatry but manage to maintain peace among themselves, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, so to speak, 'I have no dominion over them since peace is with them ';

For it is said, "Ephraim is *united* in idol-worship; let him alone (Hos. 4:17)".

But when their hearts are divided, what is written?

"Their heart is divided; now shall they bear their guilt. (Ibid 10: 2)." So, here you learn how great is peace and how despised is discord.

YOUR TALMUD & MIDRASH NAVIGATOR

Are truth and peace necessarily opposite?

What is the value of unity, if it's for an immoral purpose?