

Yom Kippur Chavurah Service
September 23, 2015
Written by Abigail Backer

Characters:

Truth - Marci
Justice - Bekki
Peace - Kathy
Judge/Rabbi - Rabbi London
Narrator/Counsel - Abby
Musician/Juke Box - Cantor Friedman

Setting:

This skit is written to be a 'trial' of sorts. Truth, justice, and peace are the 'defendants' and there is a judge/rabbi. The trial is mediated by a narrator/counsel who provides context and asks questions to each of the defendants.

Rabbi London will sit in chair next to white table. Truth, justice and peace will stand off to the side. Counsel will enter via the ramp.

Materials/Props:

Gavel
Costumes
Signs that say "Truth" "Justice" and "Peace" in Hebrew/English

Musician/Juke Box: All rise for the Honorable Judge Rabbi Andrea London (plays interlude)

Judge/Rabbi: Order! I call this *Beit Din*, this Rabbinic Court, to order!! Today we will be hearing the case of the Jewish People versus Truth, Justice, and Peace. Counsel, please approach the bench and present the defendants and the facts of the case. We don't have all day!

Narrator/Counsel: (enters hurriedly on ramp)

Yes, your Honor. Thank you, your Honor. The premise of this case is simple: Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel said, "The world is sustained by three things, by justice, by truth, and by peace. As it has been stated: Speak every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates. (Zechariah 8:16)

Your Honor, we live in a litigious society that requires greater distinctions and hierarchy than ever before. The Jewish people are bringing truth, justice and peace before the court to determine which among them is the most essential, the most valuable, the most pure. Today you will be hearing testimony from the three defendants - truth, justice, and peace. Our first defense will come from Truth. Truth, please tell the court about why you are the most important and universal value.

Truth:

Thank you, Counsel. Thank you, your Honor. I am happy to be here presenting my case...although, to be completely **honest**, I don't really feel it is necessary. It is clear that my foundation and connection to the Jewish people is the strongest. Moral truth and integrity are the most central values of our Jewish tradition.

An often quoted rabbinic saying ([Babylonian Talmud] *Shabbat* 55a) is: "Truth is the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He." Rashi stated that this saying refers to the Hebrew word for truth, *emet*, formed from the first letter of the alphabet, *alef*, the middle letter, *mem*, and the final letter, *tav*. The God of truth is found wherever there is truth and God's absence is felt wherever there is falsehood. The prophet similarly declares: "The Lord God is truth" (Jeremiah 10:10) and the Psalmist declares: "Thy Torah is truth" (Psalms 119:142). My defense is simple - if God and the Torah are Truth, and God and Torah are the core of our faith, then by the transitive property I am at the center of the Jewish tradition and therefore the most important.

Narrator/Counsel: You seem quite confident in your defense. May I ask you a few questions?

Truth: But of course... you know I won't lie! (Laughs ironically)

Narrator/Counsel: Excellent! Now, am I correct that you were with God at the time the world was created?

Truth: Yes I certainly was. God relies on me in many times of need.

Narrator/Counsel: Good....so you were with God at the creation of the world. Now, is it also true that you were with God moments before the creation of humankind, and that you actually argued AGAINST our creation?

Truth: Well...uh...I....

Narrator/Counsel: Come on now, Truth! Do what you do best - BE HONEST.

Truth: (ashamed) Yes, that is true...but...I...

Narrator/Counsel: Your Honor, I would submit to this court that Truth OBJECTED to the creation of humankind saying, "Let them not be created because humans are full of lies"¹ and therefore should not be held up as our most important value here today. After objecting to our creation and very existence, Adonai threw truth to the ground in anger. If God rejected the truth,

¹ Midrash Rabbah - Genesis VIII:5

then Truth and God cannot be one and the same as the defendant argued. No further questions, your Honor.

Truth: But where would we be without truth, Your Honor!? Free press, debate and voting to change leaders all increase the power of truth to change society for the better! What's more, the counsel has twisted the facts of what really happened when God created humankind and threw me to the ground. Adonai was not angry at my honest objections. God recognized the need for humans to take ownership over truth, and that is why I was thrown to the ground, as a challenge for all of humankind.

Musician/Juke Box: musical interlude - *Honesty* by Billy Joel

Judge/Rabbi: (cuts off music after a few verses)

An interesting argument. I will need to hear from Peace and Justice before I am convinced. Next defendant!

Peace: Thank you, your Honor. I am Peace and my centrality to the Jewish faith is immeasurable. "The Jewish people's desire for peace has been expressed for thousands of years in our prayers and in biblical and rabbinic sources. Peace, according to the Jewish sages, is the ultimate purpose of the whole Torah: 'All that is written in the Torah was written for the sake of peace' (Tanhuma Shoftim 18). Furthermore, peace is such an important concept in Judaism that Jews have a religious obligation to pursue it. 'Seek peace, and pursue it', seek it in your own place, and pursue it even to another place as well.' (Leviticus Rabah 9:9)

We need only need glimpse the news for a moment to see ways in which strife, conflict, and war destroy our society. ISIL. The attacks on Sandy Hook, the movie theater in Aurora and the church in Charleston. Iraq. Syria. The Holocaust....the list goes on. Each one of us knows deep down that peace is what we need the most. Sometimes truth can offend and turn people against one another. Sometimes justice isn't enough. Only peace is the most pure, universal Jewish value. What would our world be without it?

Narrator/Counsel: Thank you for that moving defense, Peace. Now it's my turn to ask you some questions. Are you familiar with the conflict in Israel the Middle East?

Peace: Yes, I've certainly heard of it. I can't see how that is relevant here, particularly since you are talking about conflict which has nothing to do with me....(laughs and then cringes)

Narrator/Counsel:

Your Honor, I would submit to the court that no peace is without struggle and with struggle there is inherently conflict. We have seen violence; hatred and bloodshed tear communities apart, for both Israel and the Palestinian people. No matter what side of this issue you are on, we know that there are people who praying for peace, hoping and waiting that the suffering will come to an end. But praying, asking, yearning for peace simply is not enough. There are underlying issues on both sides of the conflict that make reaching a lasting, sustainable peace, something

that seems almost unattainable on its own. When people feel like there have been injustices done to them, there cannot be peace unless there is justice and people feel like the resolution is fair to all parties involved. There cannot be true peace without understanding. There cannot be true peace without forgiveness. Peace by itself simply is not enough.

Peace:

Your Honor, while I am not in the business of creating conflict, I simply do not agree with Counsel! While peace may not be so easy to achieve in political conflicts, its value is still important. Between people, taking actions that maintain peaceful relationships is vital. We need only look to our Jewish texts to see the importance of peace and how maintaining peace can even supersede the importance of truth and justice. When Adonai came to Sarah and told her that she was pregnant, she said “Am I to have a child with my husband so old?” (Genesis 18:12)

But when God told Abraham the news and that Sarah laughed, Adonai told a white lie and said “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?” (Genesis 18:13). Rashi notes that ‘torah altered Sarah’s statement in the interests of peace - **mip’nei darkhei shalom** - for the sake of peace, we are instructed by Jewish wisdom to modify our statements in certain instances.’ so as not to hurt somebody’s feelings.

Honesty, while precious, is not an ultimate value. It is clear that peace is the most precious, most important value of our faith.

Musician/Juke Box: musical interlude - *Od Yavo Shalom Aleynu/Salaam*

Judge/Rabbi:

Thank you for your defense, Peace. I know that arguing is not in your nature, but you did a good job. Once again, though, I must hear from all defendants before reaching a verdict. Justice, please approach the bench.

Justice:

Your Honor, “Judaism is built on the sanctity of all human life and its inalienable dignity. Every person is unique and as such, no-one is superior to anyone else. We are called on to affirm the dignity of all; and we are required to pay special attention to those who are marginalized – the poor, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan. Included in the moral principles set out in the commandments in the Torah and in the later literature are countless rules about justice, equality before the law, loving-kindness, social welfare - ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Leviticus 19.17)”²

In fact, the sages have argued that increasing justice in the world is in fact the most important commandment of all. As it is said, “If one practices justice and righteousness, if one champions the cause of the poor, then all will be well with Adonai” (Jeremiah 22:15-16)

² <http://www.sacred.org.za/judaism-and-social-justice/>

President George Washington said, "The administration of justice is the firmest pillar of government." Justice the essence of our society because it creates a standard for what is right and what is wrong. Without justice, there would be no standard of goodness to stop people from doing wrong or to punish those who commit unlawful acts. Imagine a society without laws, courts or judges - chaos and intolerance would reign. Peace and truth are simply byproducts of a society governed by justice.

Narrator/ Counsel:

Your Honor, **clearly** we all believe in the importance of justice as we are having this conversation in a court of law. However, I think you and I both know that Justice presented an overly idealistic version of reality. The standards of right and wrong framed by justice are a nice idea, but reality is much more complicated. Innocent people are convicted of crimes that they did not commit. Unarmed youth of color are gunned down in the street by the very people who are supposed to protect them. All over the world, oppression and cultural insensitivity run rampant and no one is held accountable. True justice is an ideal to strive for, but in reality it is unattainable.

In this High Holiday season, we experience the limits of justice in a very personal way. Throughout these days of awe, we reflect on the choices we made in the past year and reconnect with our best selves. We ask our loved ones and God for forgiveness. But we know that if we are judged strictly, we'll all be found wanting. We need mercy, compassion, and understanding. Strict justice is too hard for fallible human beings. The defense rests, your Honor.

Musician/Juke Box: musical interlude - *If I Had a Hammer* - concluding verse w/justice in it

CONCLUSION

Judge/Rabbi: I have heard your testimonies today and I must say that I am very moved. Each of you has presented information proving how central these values are to the Jewish people and the very fabric of our society.

Ultimately, my decision is based on the ruling of one of my predecessors, Rav Muna who said that "these three things are actually one. When justice is done, truth is served and peace is achieved."

Today, I will not rule in favor of any defendant over another. Truth, justice and peace are all needed to create balance and harmony in our world. Court is adjourned!

Musician/Juke Box: musical interlude - *Lo Alecha*

Judge/Rabbi: The words that we just sang mean that it is not your obligation to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it. Truth, justice and peace are key values in sustaining our world. We will take this year to study them and see how we can bring greater measures of truth, justice and peace to our world.