



Third-party peacemaking – a Jewish manual for mediation

IS JUDAISM a religion that promotes peace? Are there models in the Jewish tradition of peacemakers who are models for us today? And are there religious Jews in Israel who are promoting peace in constructive and consistent ways?

For comprehensive answers to these questions, I recommend a serious and systematic new book by Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth entitled *Third-Party Peacemakers in Judaism: Text, Theory and Practice*. Roth teaches in the program of Conflict Resolution, Management and Negotiation at Bar-Ilan University, and is also a Modern Orthodox rabbi. In addition to teaching and doing research at his university, Roth is director of the Religious Peace Initiative of Mosaica, an NGO founded and led by Rabbi Michael Melchior.

This new book is a groundbreaking work of scholarship as well as pragmatism. Its uniqueness is that Roth is applying much of what he has learned through his teaching and research to his current work as a religious peace activist. The integration of these two strands of his professional identity is what makes this book special.

While a scholarly book, it is also intended for rabbis, educators and laypeople, as well as conflict resolution practitioners (don't we all do some conflict resolution in various aspects of our lives?) who can find in this book sources of inspiration and wisdom for working in the field of "third-party peacemaking."

This term – a new term for me – is ex-



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Rabbi Daniel Roth and Sheikh Raed Badir of Mosaica's Religious Peace Initiative.

plained carefully in the introduction, in which Roth lays out the many roles that a third party can play when he or she intervenes in a conflict situation:

This includes the role of mediator, in which the third party works together with both sides in conflict for the purpose of bringing them to a mutually agreed-upon, non-coercive compromise agreement; the role of reconciler, where regardless of whether there is a formal agreement solving the problem between the sides, the third party reconciles between them and helps reestablish and heal their relationship; the role of equalizer, in which the third party uses its status to bring the sides in conflict to the table to ultimately make peace, the role of coach, advising one of the sides how best to engage in the conflict, the role of anger-absorber, and the role of guarantor to keep the peace and make sure it holds up.

Clearly the role of a third-party peacemaker is complex and multi-faceted. But it

is becoming more and more important for mitigating and managing hatred and violence and for resolving conflicts.

What is even more fascinating is that third-party peacemakers have existed in the Jewish tradition for a long time, but most of us didn't know this. It appears that there were many cases of this phenomenon in rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, the majority of this book features 36 cases of these peacemakers, which can be found in rabbinic literature from the third to the 19th centuries. Each of these case studies represents one example of a third party attempting to make peace between two conflicting parties.

Perhaps the most famous of traditional Jewish peacemakers is Aaron. It is not surprising therefore that Roth devotes an entire chapter to the various rabbinic legends dealing with Aaron as the pursuer of peace in classical rabbinic literature. In this chapter, he not only focuses on Aaron's identity as the ideal peacemaker in Judaism, but

also brings many stories of his peacemaking methods.

But Aaron is not the only peacemaker in Judaism. Roth also brings stories about other famous Talmudic personalities, such as Rabbi Meir, and Bruria, a famous female personality in the Talmud.

In each of the 36 case studies, Roth brings three questions to bear: 1) Who are the various third-party peacemakers and what are their methods of peacemaking? 2) How do they compare with each other, and other religious and cultural models of third-party peacemaking? and 3) what are the practical implications of these cases for peacemaking today?

As a practitioner of peace building for many years, I found this third layer of particular interest. At the end of several sections throughout this book, Roth added a short addendum which he called *practical implications for third-party peace building today*. In these short mini-essays, he shares reflections based on his experience over many years using these cases in various settings in educational programs, conflict resolution trainings, academic courses and fieldwork. These potential practical implications provide for a theory and practice of Jewish models for peacemaking today.

Let me give you an example.

In one chapter, Roth discusses the meaning of the word “shalom.” In so doing he brings a wonderful commentary from the famous medieval commentator Abarbanel, who expands the usual meaning of *shalom* merely as *peace* to something much broader:

And [the other commentaries] did not know the great value of shalom, and they did not see its preciousness and splendor of its greatness, since in addition to orchestrating agreements between conflicting parties – as they thought shalom also relates, separate from the issue of fights and conflicts, to the common good, and to people’s agreements and their mutual love, which is the [most] necessary element for the gathering together of a nation; and it is the string that ties together and binds everything.

In his section on practical implications, Roth explains how this broader definition of *shalom* – referring to the well-being and harmony of the community – has been relevant to his work with educators in schools.

During my years working with Jewish conflict resolution education in schools, this notion of a more holistic concept of peace held a very powerful message: in accordance with Abarbanel’s second explanation, the entire school community must be engaged in being pursuers of peace and in cultivating a culture of peace in the school, and not simply “putting out fires.”

This has also been relevant to Roth in his work with the Religious Peace Initiative of Mosaica. He has used the Abarbanel commentary to help explain the difference between elite religious peace building and cultural-religious peace building. Elite religious peace building is one that brings together senior Islamic and Jewish leaders to discuss what a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians might look like. Sometimes, it could even involve mediating a life-threatening crisis. On the other hand, cultural-religious peace building is a more holistic kind of process, which helps to create an environment for peaceful living at the grassroots level and is not necessarily a response to a particular incident.

Roth brings a good example of this from his work as a cultural-religious peace builder in his work in *Mosaica*, which he calls the *Iftar of Mediation*:

This event brought together Islamic sheikhs, Religious Zionist rabbis, Muslim and Jewish community mediators, and others to have a festive (kosher) iftar meal [to break the fast during Ramadan] in the Bedouin Muslim city of Rahat in the south of Israel. There were no discussions of peace agreements in this gathering, but there was a lot of shalom/salaam developing between the participants.

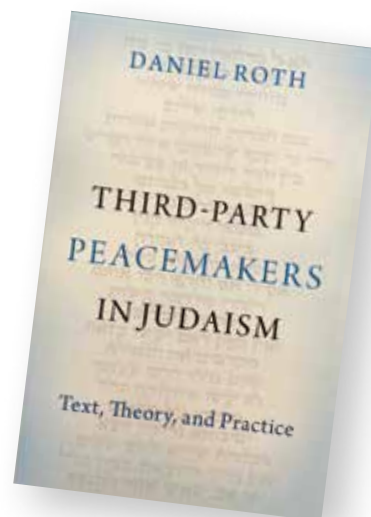
In my own work in cultural interreligious peace building in Israel during the last 30 years, I hosted and attended many interreligious events such as this one, including Sukkot Shalom (events for peace during the holiday of Sukkot), iftar meals, Passover Seders, and more, and I too found that they helped to create better religious relations among Jews, Muslims and Christians in Israel. Indeed, they demonstrated clearly that mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence are possible in Israel.

This comprehensive, well-researched, multi-layered book is a landmark for anyone interested in Judaism and peace. It is thoroughly grounded, both in Rabbinic

Judaism and in contemporary research on conflict resolution and mediation, so much so that I would say that it is sweeping in its scope.

It is also highly relevant to the existential situation of seeking peace in today’s world, whether in schools or synagogues, or between conflicting religious groups, such as Jews and Muslims in Israel and Palestine. In addition to a great wealth of research, Ross brings to bear his many years of applying this research in both educational and activist settings. He created inspiring programs to train rabbis and Jewish educators to be pursuers of peace, based on learning amazing and unknown sources in the Jewish tradition. Moreover, in recent years, he has applied this systematically, substantively and sensitively to his groundbreaking work, along with Rabbi Melchior and many others, in promoting religious peace between Muslims and Jews in conflict in our country, our region and internationally in thoughtful, serious and creative ways.

This informative and inspiring book deserves to be read by Jews, Christians, Muslims in Israel and abroad, and by all who are concerned about peace. ■



**Third-Party Peacemakers in Judaism:
Text, Theory and Practice**
Daniel Roth
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