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Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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That man should not resist evil, 1952.

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WHERE JUDAISM DIFFERS

IV. That Man Should Not Resist Evil

"That Men Should Not Resist Evil" sounds like a strange, almost a preposterous doctrine, and yet it was widely held and advocated by religions and by schools of philosophy from earliest times to the present. Our Western world became sharply aware of this doctrine through the teachings of Jesus, but it was known in the ancient world of Greece and Rome before the time of the master of Christianity, and it was known more especially in the religions of the Orient. The founder of the Stoics, Zeno, in the 4th century before the common era, preached such a doctrine of non-resistance to evil. Lao-tse in the 7th century before the common era, the founder of Taoism, one of the three principal religions of China today, the other two being Confucianism and Buddhism - Lao-tse taught that the ideal inner state for man is freedom from all desire, and that the ideal conduct for man is non-action. Man should seek the stillness of his inner being, and therefore, should avoid all positive action, all effort, even if it is directed towards the suppression or the abolition of evil. "Equable indifference" to all things, good or bad, he maintained, was the ideal attitude for a wise man to take. Everything will come out right of itself in the long run.

Buddhism, which was founded on a thoroughgoing, dogmatic pessimism and unmitigated discontent with the world and with human life itself, and which set as its object the release of man from the toils and the trammels of existence - Buddhism likewise preached a doctrine of non-resistance to evil. There is no point in trying to improve this world, for this world is ineradicably bad, irremediably evil. No happiness is possible in this world. Life is just a weary cycle of change. More or less, the same attitude towards life and human existence is found in the older religion of Hinduism which Gotama, the Buddha, in the 6th century before the common era, came to reform. Hinduism maintained, too, that life is "emptiness", life is vanity, life is a "mirage", a shadowy deception. It has no reality, no identity,

no value, and the wise man comes to understand that this is so and seeks the way of escape from this delusion into the peace of the source of all being from which he came.

For our Western world this doctrine of non-resistance to evil finds its classic expression in the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus, which sermon ~~xxx~~ is by way of being a compendium of the ethical teachings ascribed to him.

You have heard that they were told: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth! But I tell you not to resist evil or injury; but if anyone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also; and if anyone wants to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat also. And if anyone forces you to go a mile with him, go two miles with him. You have heard that they were told: You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for your persecutors. . . .

It should be noted in this connection that nowhere in the Old Testament is there any command "to hate your enemy". On the contrary, as we shall see, the Bible admonishes men time and again to forgive and, above all, not to take vengeance. The Old Testament does not command men to love their enemies, for this is a psychological impossibility.

Again, it should be noted that the Biblical injunction, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", was in reality a formula intended to limit the extent of punishment for an injury inflicted. It was a mitigation of the primitive and unrestricted practice whereby the offended party could decide for himself the degree of retaliation. In this law there was a distinct advance to a higher moral system where the law stepped into determine the degree and adequacy of retaliation. And of course, centuries before the time of Jesus the law, "an eye for an eye", had already been interpreted by the schools of jurisprudence in Israel to mean adequate monetary compensation for an injury inflicted. Jesus, of course, who studied in the Hebrew schools of his day, knew that as well as anyone else.

But to return to the heart of the matter, Jesus taught here a doctrine of thoroughgoing non-resistance to evil. In his mystical outlook the world was fast coming to an end. There was no point in resisting evil, for with the rapidly approaching millenium and the establishment of God's Kingdom which was near at hand, all evil would automatically cease. And the task of man, therefore, was not to fight evil, but to prepare himself for this new age and this new world by cleansing and purifying himself as rapidly and as thoroughly as he could so that he would be spared the birth-pangs of the Messianic age, the screening and the winnowing of the wicked, and would be privileged to enter this approaching Kingdom of God.

And it was in keeping with this overwhelming conviction of his, concerning the imminence of the end of the world, that Jesus also taught his followers:

Do not worry about life, wondering what you will have to eat or drink, or about your body, wondering what you will have to wear. Look at the wild birds. They do not sow or reap or store their food in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them... See how the wild flowers grow. They do not toil or spin, and yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendor never dressed like one of them. . . But you must make His Kingdom and uprightness before Him your greatest care, and you will have all these other things besides.

Now, the early Christians followed literally these teachings of their Master. They practiced non-violence and non-resistance. They offered no resistance even to their persecutors. They would under no circumstance bear arms in war. They even refused to hold civil office in the Roman Empire because that might involve them in the coercive practices and the exercise of police power by a political government.

By the 4th century, however, following the conversion of Emperor Constantine and the consequent rapprochement between the Christian Church and the Roman state, this doctrine of non-resistance, non-cooperation and absolute pacifism fell into disuse, although the tradition of it persisted throughout the subsequent centuries, and from time to time it reappeared as a challenging Christian doctrine with certain sects, certain very noble sects, like the Cathari and the Waldenses in the Middle Ages, who shrank from the use of any force whatsoever; or like the Moravians and the Dukhobors and the Quakers of more recent times; and it reappeared also in the teachings

of some outstanding individuals from time to time; perhaps the most prominent of them all was Leo Tolstoi.

Tolstoi, in his thoroughgoing non-resistance philosophy, came closer to the teachings of Jesus than perhaps any modern man, not excluding Mahatma, the great soul, Ghandi. Tolstoi based himself squarely on the main teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, namely; swear not at all, resist not evil, and judge not that ye be not judged. And following his philosophy to its logical conclusion, he as much as rejected all organized political states, for the state he looked upon as the source of evil. He rejected all use of force in the administration of justice; in fact, he rejected all civilization including its science and its art. His philosophy may be said to have been a sort of Christian anarchism. His ideal society was a community of peasants and of villages where men would live in spontaneous cooperation, in no need of any external authority or force whatsoever.

Ghandi, strictly speaking, was not a non-resister. He was a passive resister. He believed in resisting evil, but through non-violent methods. He did not believe that violence was the way to overcome oppression and wrong. There were other methods - non-cooperation with the oppressing government, civil disobedience, non-payment of taxes, the boycott, the development of home industry so as not to import the products of the oppressing government, the hunger strike, the dramatic fast unto death, in order to shame the oppressor, to force him to yield.

Tolstoi, on the other hand, never advocated any passive resistance. This is quite different from humbly turning the other cheek or going two miles with your enemy if he compels you to go one. This is a form of defiance, of resistance which may or may not be effective in this or that instance, in overcoming evil. To a degree, Ghandi was successful in his method. The same idea of passive resistance underlies the strike in industrial disputes today.

Ghandi, by the way, learned this doctrine of passive resistance from a great American philosopher, Henry D. Thoreau, whose address on "Civil Disobedience" written towards the end of the 40's in the last century, Ghandi read when he was a young man and was profoundly influenced by it. Thoreau hated slavery with unmitigated hate. He also saw great evil in the Mexican War which he looked upon as an unjust war, and he rebelled against laws and institutions which tolerated these abuses and these evils. And he advocated "civil disobedience" which became the basis of the Indian civil disobedience movement led by Ghandi. Thoreau write in his essay or in his address on civil disobedience:

A minority is powerless, while it conforms, to the majority; it is not even a minority then, but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

And a generation before Thoreau the great English poet Shelley, reacting to the bloody Manchester riots of 1819, which were occasioned by the popular demands for Parliamentary reform, wrote his well-known poem, "The Mask of Anarchy", in which he advocated mass passive resistance, even if it means that the armies of the oppressors cut down with their swords and guns those who passively resist:

And if then the tyrants dare,
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and main, and hew;
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay,
Till their rage has died away.

But strictly speaking, this passive resistance is not non-resistance - it is a strategy of resistance; it is a form of war; it is a form which at times is effective and at times, ineffective. For while the violent man or the ruler or the government may be shamed into yielding by such demonstrations and such practical self-restraint, he or it might equally be encouraged to carry on with even greater ruthlessness in the confident knowledge that it will never be attacked by force. And this is to insure the triumph of injustice in the world.

Now, Judaism rejected all Oriental doctrines of non-resistance to evil. Judaism rejected all pacifist theories. Judaism taught that there is evil in the world and that it is man's duty to overcome it, if need be, by force; ~~and~~ not that force is the only way by which evil can be overcome. Judaism further taught that it is possible to eradicate the evil in the world which is man-made, which we do, which starts with us. There is evil which man cannot eradicate. Man cannot eradicate death or the sorrows of bereavement or the destructive forces of nature. These are things inherent to the very structure of human existence. But man can reduce the incidents of disease and accidents. Man can lessen pain and physical suffering. Man can certainly eradicate poverty and exploitation and war, if he chooses, which are the mainsprings of human suffering. Man can eliminate the evils of illiteracy. Man can raise the levels of education. Man can open the doors of hope and opportunity for all. Men can learn to practice brotherhood and good will and share in the blessings of equality and freedom.

Judaism did not despise the world. It did not regard human society as inherently evil and beyond redemption. It did not look upon the administration of justice and the exercise of police force on the part of a just government as evil. It did not look upon law as irksome shackles or upon life as worthless. The only voice raised in the Bible, to speak of the Vanity of life and that that which is crooked cannot be made straight, was the voice of Koheleth, the voice of Ecclesiastes. But

even here the rebuttal is given in the very text itself. "The end of the matter, all having been heard: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man."

Judaism believed in human progress and in an advancing society, and taught men how to insure progress and human advancement. Judaism believed in good days and better days yet to come, in an end of days "when men shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."

But all these things will come about not automatically, just by sitting down and waiting for them. "Everything will not come right of itself in the long run". Not at all! Man must work for it, toil and spin, and labor and sweat for it. Even the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air must hunt for their food. And as for man, "With the sweat of thy brow, shalt thou eat thy bread." "Man must go forth unto his work and unto his labor until the evening."

Over and over again we are admonished in the Bible: "And thou shalt eradicate the evil from your midst." Evil is something to be eradicated, to be gotten rid of, to be expelled, directly or indirectly, to be resisted.

It is not enough to love what is good; we must hate what is evil, do something about it - not resign oneself to it, not suffer it because it was so intended or because "what can I do about it?", or what's the use anyhow. The prophet Amos defined man's tasks in the face of evil: "Hate evil! Love the good! And establish justice in the gate!"

Judaism is a prophetic religion which makes men aware at all times of what is wrong in their personal lives, in their social life, in government, in international life, and then challenges them to set about correcting it - to perfect the world according to the plan of God. If you see your neighbor attacked and in danger, "do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor". Run to his assistance, even if it means endangering your own life. You dare not say, "I do not believe in violence. I believe in non-resistance", and so leave your neighbor to become a victim of violence and wickedness.

If you live in a community of slums and poverty and political corruption and crime and perversion of justice, do not accept these as fate, as inevitable; do not say to yourself it is God's problem - I will leave it to Him; or, this world is hopeless anyhow. I will think only of the next world where all wrongs will be set right. There is no use trying to do anything on this earth. This is not Judaism! This is not Judaism's conception of this world, or of man's destiny in it.

I read you the great chapter this morning of the prophet Isaiah who told his people, "Seek justice, restrain the oppressor, uphold the right of the fatherless, defend the cause of the widow." Activists! Action! Intervention will bring about a just order of things. One must resist tyrants and oppressors, wrong-doers, Insurrection and revolution are sometimes not only justified but mandatory.

We do not solve the world's problem of crime and wickedness by turning the other cheek to the smiter or by giving our coat also to him who would take our shirt. These are ideals which are not only manifestly impossible to fulfill in society, but if carried out to their logical conclusion, would destroy all society. They are ideals of Utopia or for society on the threshold of Eutopia. To follow these ideals literally is to turn the world over to the smiter, the thief, the man of greed and violence, the man who refuses to abide by the canons of a civilized society. Such men must be curbed by law and discouraged from assaults upon the peace and property of other men, and must be punished for their crimes. Jesus himself was not above venting his wrath with a lash upon the money-changers in the Temple of whose conduct he did not approve, and of promising penalties and punishments to the sinner in the hereafter.

An individual may decide for himself the degree to which he himself may wish to practice non-resistance in a matter which involves only his own interests and only his own safety, but certainly society and government cannot do it, and only as society and government protect all citizens through law and the machinery of administrative justice, against the chaos and anarchy which would ensue if criminals were

allowed to carry on their activities unchecked - only then can an individual, here and there, indulge himself in the spiritual exercise of non-resistance.

Our religion taught men to forgive wrong, wrong practiced against themselves, because along with the right of resistance is also the duty of forbearance. "A man should always be~~xx~~ willing to forgive an insult or an injury done to him," said the Rabbis. It is sometimes an act of great nobility of spirit to be patient and forbearing with abuse and insult and wrong. Certainly no one should take vengeance. "Say not I will pay back the evil that was done to me," we read in the Book of Proverbs. In the Book of Leviticus, we read: "Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." In the Book of Exodus we are commanded to help our enemy when the latter requires it. "If you come across your enemy's ox going astray, you must be sure to take it home to him." In the Book of Ecclesiasticus, written 300 years before the common era, we read: "He that taketh vengeance shall find vengeance from the Lord, and God will keep his sins in remembrance. For give thy neighbor the hurt that he hath done unto thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest." And in the Book of Enoch we read: "When you might have vengeance, do not take it, either against your neighbor or your enemy," a book written also about 200 years before the common era.

But it is one thing to be forbearing and forgiving, and it is another thing never to resist evil, but turn the other cheek to the oppressor. Judaism loved peace, but it never preached pacifism. Judaism was the first among the religions of mankind to project the vision of a war-less society, when nations will beat their swords into ploughshares and will learn war no more. Hundreds of years before any other people conceived of the idea that war is wrong, should be terminated, Judaism projected this idea. But until that hoped-for time comes to pass, Judaism did not deny men or nations the right of self-defense in war. War in self-defense is an obligatory war. It was a dreadful but inescapable necessity, and citizens must take up arms in

the face of their country or their faith. The principle of self-defense in personal life as well as in national life is the same in Jewish law: "If one comes to kill you, kill him first."

But Judaism admonished all men and all nations to seek peace and pursue it. It hated war. King David was denied the privilege of building the Temple in Jerusalem because his hands had spilled too much blood. The Temple was to be dedicated to "Adonai Shalom", the God of Peace, who as the Psalmist sang, "maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth. He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in fire."

There is no glorification of war in Judaism; there is no call to Israel to become a great military power. The noblest title given to our people was "the children of peace". Israel's hope for the future was bound up in disarmament and with an international society banded in brotherhood, united in the law of God for peace and freedom. With that end, men and nations were summoned to plan, to organize, to work for it, for it will not come about as a matter of course automatically.

And so, dear friends, Judaism, far-visioned but practical, idealistic but this-worldly, convinced that the good society is possible, but will not come to be through inaction or abdication or despair, but only through action and resolution and hope - Judaism summoned men to resist all evil, by all methods, just, practical and available, so as to hasten the day when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea; and they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My Holy mountain, when men shall live, each under his vine and under his fig tree, with none to make him afraid."