

Peace

by
Barry Oshry

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Characters

David, a rabbi in his mid-fifties

Deborah, his daughter in her late twenties

*The setting is a small, comfortable den, two arm chairs, a table between them, on which is a lamp, two books, one which might be a prayer book, an opened magazine, and two lighted memorial candles. Deborah, a woman in her late twenties, dressed carelessly in faded jeans and plaid shirt with the tail sloppily hanging out, her hair in disarray, is seated in one of the chairs; her arms are tightly folded across her chest and her legs crossed firmly at the knees. She is angry and keeps her stare averted from her father, David, who stands behind her turned away. David, a man in his late fifties, is dressed in black well-pressed pants, a starched white shirt, dark tie, and sweater vest. In the background we hear music, Shalom Aleichem ("Peace Unto You.") * The music fades and we hear, from offstage, an older woman's voice. "Enough, you two enough! Come... dessert...come!" She is ignored.*

David

You have nothing to say?

(Deborah neither speaks nor moves; she continues to stare straight ahead, tightly folded in on herself.)

It's not enough that you dishonor the table. Me...your mother.

Deborah

(straight ahead, dismissive) Ma doesn't care.

David

* *Shalom Aleichem*, an instrumental with Andy Statman and David Grisman would be perfect. **Songs Of Our Fathers**, Acoustic Disc, 1995.

She cares. She doesn't show. Her heart breaks. (*Looks with disapproval at Deborah's attire.*) To come like this. Dressed for what...for what...a...picnic? You do this deliberately? To taunt me?

Deborah

This is how I dress.

David

For Rosh Hashonah this is not how one dresses. You know but... but still this is...no...(*Shakes his head, he has no words.*)

(*pained silence*)

Deborah

(*firm*) This is how I dress. (*Turns to face him, pokes at her chest.*) This...this is me. See *me!* See me for who I am. That ought to be enough.

David

I see, but seeing is not understanding. To be you means you dishonor *me*, your father?

Deborah

Please. I *disagree* with you, is that dishonor?

David

Disagree, but...in the middle of my....

Deborah

What?...your (*sarcasm*) sermon?

David

My homily. With the whole family. To blurt out, in the middle, what you said.

Deborah

(*not apologetic*) So I'm sorry. It was a little strong.

David

A little strong! What you said. To your father, in front of your aunt your uncle, the grandchildren. To your father, in the middle, you bang your fist on the table ...the good china... you leap up like a..like a jack rabbit...and then, out it comes...you say...you say...(pained) *that!*

Deborah

(*relenting*) I'm sorry. Really, dad, I am sorry.

David

(not mollified) Sorry. Like you stick a knife in one's heart, and then say 'I'm sorry.' That clears it up? No wound, no blood, nothing. I'm sorry. *(Shakes his head.)* No, that is not enough. Not enough.

Deborah

What you said. About peace. I just couldn't stand it. *(pleading)* But, please, I don't want to get into it again.

David

You're against peace?

Deborah

There's no point.

David

(Confused) To peace?

Deborah

To *talking*.

David

Talking is good.

Deborah

Talking is easy. Listening is hard. Listening to *me*. *My* opinions. They don't get through to you. They never have. So why talk?

(David gestures for her to talk. She shakes her head.)

I'm afraid if we talk, it'll start all over. Must we talk?

David

Talk.

Deborah

(big breath) Dad, there is no peace with the Palestinians. It's as simple as that. How many bombings will it take to convince you?

David

We provoke, they bomb. Maybe...

Deborah

What?...Maybe?...If we stop, they stop. No, we *have* stopped, they bomb. (*She points to the magazine she's been reading. And she loses her calm.*) This, this is just...just bullshit! ...And you read this stuff.

David

I read lots of...*stuff*.

Deborah

You just won't see it. You *refuse* to see it.

David

And you...

Deborah

(*beating her chest in mock penitence*) This self-hate. As if this mess is *our* fault.

David

Since when can't a Jew examine himself?

Deborah

Why now? Ask yourself that. Why all this self-flagellation *now*? Fifty years you lived with this, but now...

David

You have the answer?

Deborah

I *have* an answer, but you won't hear it.

David

Let's hear it.

Deborah

(*Big breath*) Terrorism. Terrorism has won. Blow up a few busses. Murder a few innocents. Kill children in school. Burn down a synagogue. And how do *we* Jews respond?

(*Grabs angrily at the magazine on the table; slaps it.*) He (*referring to the article*) says 'Oh, how we've failed. Oh, what bad Jews we are.'

David

Is it wrong to consider our part in this?

Deborah

(*Stops, furious*) Yes, yes, yes, godammit it *is* wrong. What? Hitler murders six million Jews, and we're supposed to say, 'Gee, what did we do to provoke him?' That is the (*screams*) *bullshit!* (*as she violently flings the magazine across the room.*)

(Off stage woman's voice. 'Are you coming already? Come, David, Deborah. We're waiting.')

(calm again) There is no peace. Whatever you give them will never be enough. They want one thing: to...wipe...us...out. That is the only peace they want.

David

It's all so clear to you.

Deborah

(She paces. A memory comes to her from years back. She grasps her head.) Oh my god. My god. It's always been this way with you. Always, always, always. Do you remember? I remember. I came home from school. Crying. My knees are scraped raw. I have a black eye. *(Thinks.)* Do I? I'm not sure. Maybe. But, my lip...that I know...my lip is bleeding. I remember. I cannot stop my lip from bleeding. And there you are. And I am so happy to see you. You will make it right. I can't wait to tell you. About Joanie Mandlebaum... what she did. Look! See! What Joanie Mandlebaum did. That amazon thug. And what do I want? I want what *any* kid would want. I want you to go out there and kick the shit out of Joanie Mandlebaum.

David

I don't remember.

Deborah

No, no, but *I* remember. My father. Do you go out there and kick the shit out of that big thug? Do you gain justice on behalf of your aggrieved child?

David

(struggling) I just don't remember.

Deborah

For you it was nothing...an interruption...back to your books.

David

So? Your story. Finish.

Deborah

(beginning to cry) You really don't remember. Here I am wanting you to kick the shit out of that brute, and what did you do?

(David shrugs, shakes his head.)

(between weeping and laughing) You said... So, Deborah, what did *you* do to provoke her?
(incredulous) What did *I* do?

David

So what *did* you do? *That* you don't remember.

Deborah

(frustrated) Who cares. *(pause)* That is not my point.

David

No, that is not your point. It is not your point to unravel, to explore, to see what came before, and what came before that, and before that.

Deborah

(She has trouble getting this out.) You are never on my side. Never, never, never. Not once. My father. Just once I would want you on my side. Then. Now. Agree with me. Join with me. Just once see my point. *(dejected)* But no...

David

Things are not always clear to me.

Deborah

(Shouts.) Some things *are* clear!

David

Few things.

Deborah

(Shakes her head.) You see? This is what infuriates me. *(points to the magazine)* About him. About you. That it's not clear to *you*. For God's sake, how much evidence do you need! *(slowly)* Three times the whole Arab world attacked Israel. Three times, with everything they had. Was it peace they were looking for? Co-existence? Two states? None of that, and you *know* it. They were out to destroy us. That's it, simple as that. Destroy us. Wipe us out. *(pause)* O.K., so they tried. Gave it their best shot. And they failed. Three strikes and you're out. Case closed. Finished. Caput. Done. *(pause)* But not for you. Of course not. You still want to keep the case open.

David

Fine. Finished. Caput. Done. So say you're right, so now what do we do with the Palestinians?

Deborah

(coldly) We crush them. *(pause, less certain)* Oh, I don't know. I don't care what we do with them.

David

That's no answer. *(Sighs)* Do you remember when there was hope? When we had a leader who said 'How much longer can we look at those camps?'

Deborah

Don't push me on that. You don't want the answer. *(Shakes her head; this is hopeless)*
There is no coming together. *(She starts to leave.)*

David

Not good enough. A question. *(She stops)* How much longer can *you* look at those camps?

(pause)

Deborah

Honestly? I could look at them forever. You're looking at camps right now, and *you're* living with it. Here, in this country. You want a homily? Here's *my* homily.

The theme: Enough is enough. *(pause)* You win or you lose, and then it's over. The Indians...here...they fought the white man. Again and again and again. And, in the end, they lost. So now *they* live in camps. Reservations. And we live with that. You live with that. There was no accommodation with the Indians. No *possible* accommodation. No two states. It was *our* world or *their* world. And that is how it is in Israel. There is...no...accommodation.

David

Two states, side by side. That's out of the question for you?

Deborah

(Sarcasm) Oh no, I'm all for a Palestinian state. *(big gesture, pointing)* Right across the river. It's called Jordan. Just go, and if you don't like that, then do the best you can on the reservation.

(She sinks back in her chair, her anger spent. A moment of silence)

David

So now can you listen to me?

Deborah

Talk

David

(He rises, paces. His anger becomes manifest, not at Deborah but at all the murderers of innocents.) Do you think that I am so different from you? That I don't have hate in *my* heart? That I don't scream for vengeance for every act of murder they perpetrate on innocents?

(Deborah looks at him in disbelief.)

Don't you think I could kill them, bomb them, wipe them out with the same fervor as you. Hate burns in my heart. I scream for vengeance. I want to spit on their God in whose name they commit such atrocities. As a human being could I feel any other way?

So let us be clear, my daughter, in this we are the same. *(firmly)* Exactly the same.

(pause)

But, in my heart there is something else. Another voice. A Jewish voice.

Deborah

(mockingly) Tikkun.

David

Tikkun. An obligation...to heal the world. *(gestures assembling, bringing together)* To assemble the broken vessel. To heal, to not destroy.

Deborah

They do not want healing.

David

Ah. *They*. So now we come to it. The haters' favorite word. *They*. Who is this *they*?

Deborah

Don't play with me, father. Palestinians, of course.

David

Allow me to play. And who are *we*, Deborah?

Deborah

You and me?

David

You and me.

Deborah

Father and daughter?

David

And what else? *(a touch of impatience)* What is this whole discussion about?

Deborah

Jews. That's what you're getting at. We are Jews?

David

Precisely. You and me, Jews. Quite different. I a lamb to slaughter, and you fighting to the death. *(pause)* Still, Jews.

Deborah

I'd never deny it.

David

Good. *(Mimes the following, bent over like an old pious Jew)* And he with the long black coat, his big floppy hat, curls hanging down, mysterious fringes dangling from his jacket. Him, also a Jew?

Deborah

Also a Jew.

David

(sing song with Deborah indifferently nodding her head after each line) And the one who never sets foot in the synagogue? A Jew, yes? *(She nods.)*
And the one who keeps strictly kosher. A Jew. *(A nod)*
And the one who can't live without his pork and his bacon and eggs. Also a Jew? *(A nod)*
We are quite a mixed bag, aren't we?
Believers. Non believers. *(nod)*
Lovers of peace, lovers of war. *(nod)*
Babies. Old women. *(nod)*
Republicans, Democrats. All Jews. *(nod)*

(The following thought causes him to choke up.) Hitler *(gasps at the thought)* – *(aside)* Uh! He should burn in Hell – he had it right. It makes no difference. We were all *his* them. Wipe....*them*...out.

(Deborah shakes her head, eager to dispute.)

(He gestures her to stop.)

You see, I have trouble with this whole idea of *them*. It pains me to hear a Muslim says he hates Jews, he hates Americans. *That is one hell of a variety of humanity to hate.*

And I have trouble with *you* when you talk about *them*.

Deborah

There *is* a difference.

David

(angry and slowly) There is no difference! *(beat)* Everyone...*Everyone* believes that for them it's different.

Deborah

Am I to be treated to another homily?

David

(firm) Deborah. I see you. *(pause)* And I love you.

(pause) Now, see me.

David

(Mocks himself, speaks slowly as in a homily.) This I believe. *(pause)* In the beginning God created Man, and in Man's heart he placed equal measures of peace and war. And then he retreated...and watched. And that is all God did.

Deborah

Must be fun for him, watching us kill one another.

David

Or painful. Or maybe that's not *his* business.

(Off stage woman's voice. 'When will this end?' Deborah and David laugh.)

My thought is this. Life is not about *them*. It cannot be. When we die, who will ask us about *them*? Ours is another challenge. A choice. That is all God gave us. A choice. A very big deal. A choice to fill one another's hearts with war or with peace. We are the ones who shape the balance. With our actions.

We create war in the hearts of others. Or we create peace. As much as others make me hate and cry out for vengeance, I cannot let them do that to me. And if I do, *they* have won. No.

We create...*(David stops; it is as if he has just let in the implications of what he has just said.)*

(He paces, pained) I remember.

(She looks at him, frightened at this change of tone.)

Oh, Deborah, Deborah. I am so sorry.

Deborah

What?

David

Joannie Mandlebaum.

Deborah

That thug?

David

That thug. *(pause)* I should have done something.

Deborah

(enthusiastic) Kick the shit out of her?

David

(shrugs, that's not quite what he had in mind) Something. *(pause)* For my daughter. I should have done *something*.

(She nods, sobbing.)

For the Deborah I loved then even as I love you now. *(Light)* Even though you come, on Rosh Hashonah yet, dressed like a...like a...hippie. And even though you interrupt my sermons with....*(painful)* well...what you said.

(The music comes up softly. "Shalom Aleichem.")

(Goes to the chair, helps Deborah rise; they stand looking into other's face.)

About what I said...about peace. You are not convinced.

(pause)

Deborah

(She shakes her head, ponders) What I think is this. You are right. *(beat)* We create peace, we create war. *(pause)* You are right. But *(shaking her head despondently)* my fear is this: that in the end, being right won't matter.

(pause)

David

(ponders, shrugs) I suppose it depends when the end is.

(Offstage woman's voice. "Last Chance.")

(Deborah puts her arm around her father.)

Deborah

But it was a good sermon, Papa.

(They exit, David first, then Deborah. At the door Deborah pauses and makes an effort to tuck in her shirt tails.)

("Shalom Aleichem" comes up louder and we hear the offstage sounds of laughter.)

Lights out