

PARASHAS PINCHAS

Peace Without Conjunctions

Peace is the ultimate blessing of the Jewish people. When we are at peace, we have everything. When we are not at peace, we have nothing. Indeed, the concluding statement of the Talmud is that Hashem found peace to be the only vessel capable of preserving the blessings of the Jewish people.

But how is all this peace meant to come about?

In this week's Torah portion, we read that Hashem sealed a covenant of peace with Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, as a reward for his zealous defense of the Torah. For all future generations, the priestly descendants of Pinchas would be the guardians of the peace. By serving as role models and arbiters, they would spread peace among the Jewish people.

The commentators draw our attention to an unusual aspect of the lettering in these verses. A close look into the Torah scroll at the word for peace, *shalom*, reveals that the third letter, the *vav*, is broken across the middle. Why is this so?

The commentators explain that there are two distinctly different levels of peace. On a more prosaic level, peace exists when people reach an accommodation for reasons of expediency. It may be that they are working together in order to reach a common goal by putting aside their differences and concentrating fully on their objective. Or else, they may simply find themselves living together in close proximity and therefore find it necessary to tolerate each other. This is a no more than a superficial peace imposed from without, a marriage of convenience.

There is, however, a higher form of peace which comes when distinct and separate individuals develop a profound sensitivity to each other's thoughts and feelings, when they learn to become perfect complements to each other. Far more than an expedient accommodation, this peace results from the bonding of two individuals into one organic whole. It is a marriage of love.

Ideally, the first form of peace leads to the second. What starts as a marriage of convenience blossoms into a marriage of love.

The different forms of peace are reflected in the Hebrew word *shalom*, peace, which is formed by adding the letter *vav* to the word *shalem*, complete. In the Hebrew language, the *vav* serves as a conjunction, a point of connection between two disconnected entities. There is a peace which is based on the *vav*, a conjunction of the

disconnected. In its pure form, however, peace derives from a sense of completion or wholeness, a sense of perfect harmony and fusion. In its pure form, it jettisons the *vav* and becomes *shalem*, complete.

One of the missions of the priestly caste is to promote peace among the Jewish people, but a simple peace of accommodation is not enough. The ultimate goal must be to create a harmonious fusion among the Jewish people so that they become one organic whole. Therefore, the letter *vav* in the word *shalom* is broken, to indicate that peace founded on a conjunction is inadequate. Pure peace is *shalem*, complete.

An elderly sage brought his wife to the doctor.

“What seems to be the problem?” asked the doctor.

“Well,” said the sage, “whenever we walk more than a short distance we feel very fatigued and often experience shortness of breath.”

“Indeed?” said the doctor. “Are you telling me that both of you have the same symptoms?”

“Oh no,” said the sage. “I feel perfectly fine. It is my wife who is ill. But when she becomes fatigued and out of breath, I feel as if I am suffering as well.”

In our own lives, we all yearn for the gift of peace which will allow us to savor life's blessings. But what sort of peace do we seek? A peace of accommodation and expediency may give us some respite from the hurly-burly of existence, but in the end, it is superficial. Deep down, we are still at odds with the world around us. All we will have accomplished in doing is putting a lid on it. Our true goal should be to achieve a deeper peace, a peace that connects us with our people, our world, our Creator, a peace that enriches us with the transcendent serenity that comes from the sense of being complete.