

# MORASHAH

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Weekly *Parshat HaShavuah* Series

Rabbi Dr Pinchas Klein

### Parashat Pinchas

Peace is a beloved and a beautiful dream for humanity. In Hebrew, Shalom is the ultimate word. In our liturgy we ask for peace at the end of all our prayers. Three times a day we ask God in the last blessing of the Amida to bless us with peace. At the end of the grace for our meals we ask for God's blessing for peace. The last paragraph of the full Kaddish expresses the desire for peace. The last Mishnah in the Talmud says that Shalom is the greatest blessing as peace is the vessel that contains and holds all the other blessings.

There are different kinds of peace. Many years ago, someone in the Yeshivah complained to the Rebbi about the high level of noise. The Rebbi said: "you can always find peace and quiet in the graveyard." Indeed, the Torah distinguishes between the peace of the grave and the peace of life. The peace of death is *lech b'shalom*; the peace of life is *lech le'shalom*.

Our Parsha teaches us that although peace may be the last word it is not the first word. When, Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon, chose to publicly engage in intimacy with the Moabite princess; he sought the harmony of peace. Why should the Israelites, Zimri reasoned, be separate and different? Why could they not get along with their neighbors and be intimate with them? Why could they not share their religious ceremonies and worship with them? Zimri stood for the peace that obliterated differences; the peace that denied particularity, the peace that denied that there is sanctity and holiness in the world. Zimri wanted a peace that denied Israel's particular role and destiny in the world.

Pinchas rejected this vision of peace. He reminded us that although shalom is the ultimate goal; peace is not an absolute that is attained by ignoring and destroying other cardinal values. Zimri's peace is a broken peace that has no place for individuality and particularity and is a peace that leads to the grave.

God rejoiced in the unpeaceful and unneighborly zealous act of Pinchas and rewarded him with an eternal covenant of peace. Pinchas' violent act saved Israel from the peaceful path of extinction that Zimri offered.

In the trying days of the three weeks, we must take heart from the message of the Parsha. Standing up for Israel is not popular in today's world. Standing up for a state to

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be Jewish is unpopular in today's world. <sup>1</sup> In the past, it was our religious differences that condemned us to isolation, pogroms, and exile. In the rise of the scientific era, scientific and secular views regarding our racial differences isolated us and condemned us. In our contemporary era, the doctrine of "human rights" and the "peace process" condemn us as obstinate in our particularity and our self-defense.

We strive for peace. We pray for peace. But from Pinchas we learned that peace does not come by surrendering our individuality, our particularity, and our divine destiny.

One of Hashem's names is Shalom. May we be privileged to partake and experience in the peace that has God's holy name. May we be inspired to embrace our uniqueness and to strive toward our destiny that ultimately will lead to shalom for Israel and the entire world.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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<sup>1</sup> I heard the following second hand from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks