

Parashat Bechukotai 5776, 2016:

*Shalom: The Purpose of the Entire Torah*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* presents *shalom* (peace) as one of the greatest rewards that we will receive when we live lives dedicated to Hashem's holy Torah: "And I will grant peace in the Land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten [you] ... and no army will pass through your land." (*Sefer Vayikra* 26:6, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Significantly, this statement is preceded by these *pasukim* (verses):

If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, I will give your rains in their time, the Land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your food to satiety, and you will live in security in your land. (26:3-5)

In a very real sense, this passage serves as a preamble to our *pasuk*, with its focus upon the promise of a robust physical existence in our Promised Land. As such, it emphasizes ample rain, bountiful produce, abundant fruit, vast quantities of grain, great amounts of wine and "food to satiety." At the same time, however, the phrase, "and you will live in security in your land," seems to be almost an afterthought. Therefore, the Torah utilizes our *pasuk*, "And I will grant peace in the Land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten [you] ... and no army will pass through your land," to underscore the importance

of peace in our land. Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself on both the Talmud and Midrash, expands upon this idea in the following fashion:

**And I will grant peace:** You might say, “Here is food, and here is drink, but if there is no peace, there is nothing!” Scripture, therefore, states, after all this [blessing], “I will grant peace in the Land.” From here, [we learn] that peace is equal to everything else. And so, [too, this is illustrated in our morning prayers,] when we say: “[Blessed are You, O L-rd... ] Who... makes peace and creates everything” [a paraphrase of the verse] (*Sefer Yeshiyahu* 45:7).

In a word, Rashi is teaching us that all the bounty of the world is as naught without *shalom*, since “it is equal to everything else.” Little wonder, then, that the word, “*shalom*” is found over a dozen times in the Five Books of the Torah, and many hundreds of times in the words of our Sages.

One of the clearest sources within Rabbinic literature that speaks of the ultimate import of *shalom* is found in the Rambam’s (Maimonides, 1135-1204) *Mishneh Torah*:

If [a person has the opportunity to fulfill only one of two *mitzvot*,] lighting a lamp for one’s home [i.e., Sabbath candles] or lighting a Chanukah lamp - or, alternatively, lighting a lamp for one’s home or reciting *kiddush* [over wine] - the lamp for one’s home receives priority, since it generates peace within the home (*shalom bayto*).

Herein, given its overarching significance, *shalom bayit* trumps both the lighting of the Chanukah candles and the recitation of *Kiddush* that ideally should be said over a glass of wine. Maimonides’ straightforward halachic presentation, however, does not complete his discussion of *shalom*. Instead, and quite uncharacteristically, he poetically praises the singular significance of peace:

[Peace is of primary importance, as reflected by the *mitzvah* requiring] G-d’s name to be blotted out to create peace between a husband and his wife [in the *Sotah* rite]. Peace is great, for the entire Torah was given to bring about peace within the world, as [Sefer Mishle 3:17] states: “Its ways [i.e. the Torah’s] are pleasant ways and all its paths are peace.” (*Sefer Zemanim, Hilchot Megillah v’Chanukah*, 4:14, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, underlining my own)

Long ago, Iyov declared, “He [G-d] makes peace in His heights.” (*Sefer Iyov* 25:2) At some point and time, our Sages added to Iyov’s statement until we have the present-day closing words of many recitations of the *Kaddish*: “[May] He Who makes peace in His heights, may He, in His compassion, make peace upon us, and upon all the Jewish people.” (Translation, *The Artscroll Siddur*, with my emendations) Today, in the shadow of the Holocaust, and in the midst of an explosion of nearly universal vitriolic anti-Semitic diatribe, we long for Hashem’s compassion and mercy, and the fulfillment of this prayer, and our *pasuk*, “And I will grant peace in the Land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten [you] ... and no army will pass through your land.” May this time come soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom,

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://YUTorah.org) using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik’s](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.