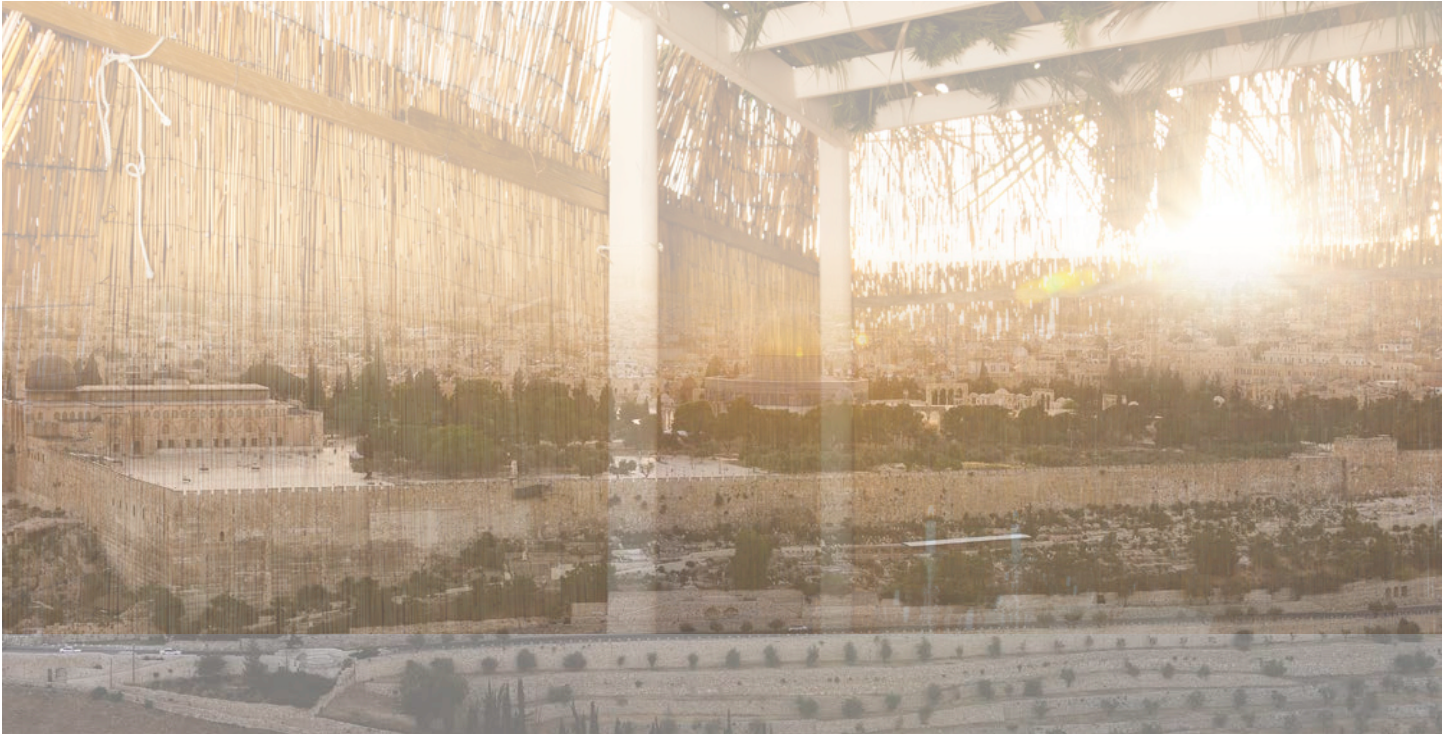


Rabbi Lamm's Drashot for Sukkot

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt"l

This sermon was delivered by Rabbi Lamm at the Jewish Center in New York City on the second day of Sukkot 5734, October 12, 1973, less than a week after the breakout of the Yom Kippur War.



PEACE IN PIECES

In speaking on the theme "Peace in Pieces," I refer not only to the fragile peace in the Holy Land that has been so cruelly shattered this past Yom Kippur, but to a related idea that in some ways is untimely and in other ways most timely.

Perhaps the whole thing can be summarized in one statement of the Midrash (*Bamidar Rabbah, Naso*) that:

גדול השלום, שאפילו בשעת מלחמה צריכין לשלום.

So great is peace, that even in time of war, one needs peace.

Even a little piece of peace is precious beyond words.

The late Rav Kook, of blessed memory, put it this way. In our prayers we ask ופרוש עלינו סוכת שלומך, "spread over us the *sukkah* (tabernacle) of Thy peace." What is the relation between *sukkah* and *shalom*, between the booth or tabernacle which we build on this festival, and the concept of peace?

Rav Kook answers by pointing to the Halakhah, which did strange things with the commandment of *sukkah*. One would imagine that the observance is quite simple; one must build four walls, place over it the covering or *sekhakh*, and that is it. However, the Halakhah took a rather

different approach. It told us that even if there are no four walls, but only three, that is adequate. Even more: "three walls" does not mean three whole walls but a third wall, i.e., if the booth consisted only of two full walls and a small piece of a third wall, that too is sufficient. And then, by a series of legal fictions, and utilizing such abstract ideas as *lavud*, *gud ahit mehizta* and *dofen akumah*, it expanded the legal concept of *sukkah* by minimizing the requirements to the very core.

The conclusion that we derive from Halakhah is that even if one does not have a whole *sukkah*, but at least a

little piece of it, that too is good. So wonderful, so vital, so significant is the commandment of *sukkah*, that one must strive for whatever he can get of it.

So it is with peace, *shalom*. I do not know if the classical ideal of total and universal peace ever really existed. I believe it is more of a myth than a reality. One scholar calculated that from the year 1500 B.C.E. to the year 1860 C.E., there were no less than about 8,000 peace treaties that were signed, each one purporting to secure permanent peace, and each one lasting an average of two years (See H. B. Stevens, *The Recovery of Culture*, New York, 1949, p. 221). And that was before the two World Wars! I do not believe there is anyone alive today who can remember a time when universal peace prevailed. In all likelihood, we must resign ourselves to the bitter fact that this is a messianic ideal, one which will indeed not be realized until the Messiah has come. Nevertheless, so precious is peace, so great is peace, that — like the *sukkah* — even a little piece of peace is a blessing! Even *be-sha'at milhamah*, when the world is ravaged by war, we must seek the refuge of little islands of *shalom*, peace.

These bitter days, when even the illusion of peace has been shattered in the Holy Land, we must thank the Lord for the little pieces of peace, and strive our mightiest to retain them.

We must pray that even at the Israeli-Jordanian border, the uneasy peace will continue undisturbed, that the little King who had such a short memory in 1967 will remember more now, and, no matter what maneuvers he must undertake to satisfy his Arab critics, he will make sure that the border does not go up in flames.

We must pray that the friendship, peace, and understanding that currently prevails between Israel and the government of the United States will continue for a long time to come. So far the United States has proved to be a secure friend of Israel in this war. May the Almighty grant that this continue, that the superpower of which we are citizens remain steadfast and confront the enemies of Israel with determination.

Even more important is the *shalom* that prevails amongst Jews. Between 1967 and Yom Kippur of 1973, it seemed at times that the State of Israel and the Jewish people would be rent apart almost irrevocably by various struggles, factionalisms, and animosities. It is a pity that it takes a war to bring us together. But this time we must attempt to forge links of fraternity between Jew and Jew that will not fall apart when the pressures of the outside world begin to wane and ebb. This time we must resolve that we will remain secure with the feeling of powerful Jewish identity, fraternity, and brotherliness, come what may. This time we must insist that the relations between Jew and Jew remain supreme even when we are not threatened by the missiles of the enemy.

Perhaps most important of all is the peace between God and Israel. We must pray for *shalom bein Yisrael la-Avihem she-ba-Shamayim*, that we will be at peace with our Father in Heaven. I mean this in two ways. First, *our* attitude to God. We were spoiled by the Six-Day War of 1967. We won a lightning victory that stunned everyone — even the generals, who later on knowingly and foolishly bragged that they knew all along we would win a stunning victory. The fortunate trauma of total triumph did

something to the Jewish soul; it shook up Jews in Israel and throughout the world, it penetrated beneath the hardened layers of Sabra cynicism and realism, and allowed some kind of spark, some kind of historical longing, some kind of spiritual nostalgia to express itself without self-consciousness and embarrassment. What a great opportunity that was for Israel to take a giant step forward spiritually! But it was not to be, whether the fault was that of religious Jews (which it probably was) or of the inexorable pace of routine life which was quickly resumed. What is quickly won, is quickly lost. A year after the 1967 war, there was hardly a souvenir left of the feeling of spiritual exaltation which so gripped the entire country. The religious renaissance simply never materialized.

Perhaps now it will be different. Most unfortunately, this is not going to be a mere 6-day war. It is going to be much more difficult. The casualties are already greater than they were in the entire 1967 war. But when it is over, and we will have prevailed (with the help of God), maybe then the slower pace of victory will produce a different attitude: not one of sudden seizures of religious insight which will, like a flash, illuminate and vanish quickly, but a slow understanding, a mature development, a profound realization that we are totally alone in the so-called "Family of Nations"; that in the long run, after we have relied upon each other as Jews, and after we have secured ourselves militarily and politically, ultimately אין לנו להשען שבשמים, אלא על אבינו שבשמים, we have only God in Whom we can trust, and with Whom we must make peace first and foremost. In the Jewish religious conception, every great event in one's life, and every great historical

event in the life of people, must lead to a *hirhur teshuvah*, to a feeling of repentance, to a reconsideration of one's way, to a change in one's spiritual orientation. I firmly believe that we were not created and brought through the entire historical process, with all its agonies, in order to be a small embattled nation which will have to fight for its very existence every few years. We were meant for greater things, for achievements that will have made all this struggle worthwhile. We were destined for something for which nationhood and independence are prerequisite, but which transcend mere political entity. So we must determine that when this war is done, it will lead to a greater feeling of *shalom* between Israel and its Creator.

But there is another side to this coin. And that is the *shalom* or peace by God towards Israel. Because 1967 produced such a brilliant and quick victory, many of us are today depressed by the slower and more agonizing pace of events. But I would not like to see despair as the only alternative to the exaltation of triumph. No, we must not, we dare not despair. It simply cannot be that we are finished as a state or as a people. For a brief few years in our living memory, God abandoned us. He turned His face from us, and we were almost wiped out. But immediately thereafter, from 1948 and on, something else happened in the relationship between God and Israel. He restored us to — if you permit me the use of the term — a Most Favored Nation Status in the

divine economy. It is a status to which we have been recalled and which is irrevocable. We can no longer afford to be abandoned. We must proceed throughout the remainder of this war and its aftermath confident in the faith that the Almighty will never again forsake us, that we shall remain the people through whom He will execute His designs for History, the People who, having been brought back to its ancient homeland, will continue to vindicate the historic promise to our forefather, Abraham.

So we strive for peace even in pieces. Every bit of it, every piece of peace, every iota of *shalom*, is precious to us.

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there we cannot expect
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Rav Kook continues with the following insight: the Rabbis of the Talmud made two statements that are fascinating. In one (Shab. 10b), they say שמו של הקב"ה שלום, the name of the Holy One is: "Peace." In the other one (Shab. 55a) they say: חותמו של הקב"ה אמת, the seal of the Holy One is: "Truth." So the name of God is

Peace, and the seal of God is Truth. What is the difference between these terms?

Rav Kook answers: a name is something that is both written and pronounced consecutively or sequentially. First you write one letter, then the next letter, and so on. Similarly, in articulating a name, you pronounce first one syllable, then the next. When you imprint a seal, however, then you do it not sequentially, but simultaneously. You engrave the seal on the paper and all of it comes out at once. Truth is a seal. It must be all or nothing. A piece of truth is a lie. A fragmented truth is a falsehood. But when it comes to peace, there we cannot expect all at once. There we must try for even a letter, even a vowel, even a syllable. We must strive even for peace in pieces.

Almighty God, spread over us the *sukkah* of *shalom*, over us and all Israel and Jerusalem. Like the *sukkah*, we are anxious for as much as we can get of the divine blessing of peace. Even little pieces of it are gifts that we cherish infinitely.

But with all this, we pray — as we do in the *Hoshanot* prayers — סוכת שלם הושענא, help us and prosper us with the *sukkah* that will be *shalem* — complete, a peace that will be inviolate, and universal as well.



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