

# Pinchas

## Peace and Priests

*Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the Kohen, withdrew My anger from upon the children of Israel when he acted zealously for Me with them, so I did not destroy the children of Israel in zealotry. Therefore, tell him that I hereby give him My covenant of peace.*

Bamidbar 25:22–12

Pinchas rushed in and murdered two people, saving the day. For this act of bravery, he was granted a covenant of peace, the *Kebuna* (priesthood). Aaron, the Kohen Gadol, was also a man of Shalom.<sup>49</sup> “Hillel taught, be of the students of Aaron, love peace, pursue peace, love others and bring them close to Torah.”<sup>50</sup> Pursuit of peace is an idea that we ought to explore; for, it would seem that peace is defined as the *lack* of pursuing. If we would all mind our own business, wouldn’t that be the ultimate peace? And what is this business about loving people and bringing them close to Torah? How does this relate to peace?

“He who makes peace in His Heavens, may He bring peace upon us, and all of Israel. Amen.”<sup>51</sup> Is there some sort of a war going on in Heaven? Why on earth is Hashem making peace there?

We are told that the name of Hashem is Shalom, peace.<sup>52</sup> The one thing that Hashem allows His written name to be erased for is peace, in the situation of a Sotah!<sup>53</sup> For, while one name is being erased, the other is being left intact! In fact, when we wish another person “Shalom Aleichem,” we are not saying “Peace be upon you,” as is often thought, but rather, “May the Divine Presence be upon you.”<sup>54</sup> Shalom is the name of Hashem. When there is peace between man and wife, Hashem rests His name with them.<sup>55</sup> Hashem is all about Shalom. Why is that His definition? And it gets even stranger, when we discover that what Hashem spends His entire day doing is “pairing people up.”<sup>56</sup> What is that about?

Herein lies the answer: The word used for “peace” in Hebrew does not translate into the English language well. The word is “Shalom.” Shalom shares the root with the word *shalem*, which means “complete.” Everything is meant to work together, in harmony. This world should function smoothly. When things conflict, they threaten Shalom. When they are in their

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49 See Radak to Malachi 2:5

50 Avos 1:12

51 From the Shmoneh Esrei prayer, based upon Job 25:2.

52 *Derech Eretz Zuta*, chapter 11, “*Hashalom*.”

53 Chullin 141a

54 See *Moses Kappai* (vol. 3, p. 78), where R. Dovid Cohen suggests this translation as the most accurate in our English idiom.

55 Sotah 17a

56 Bereishis Rabbah 68:4

proper places, they do not.<sup>57</sup> An example of Shalom in the Talmud is the kettle. Water and fire are not generally are peace with one another.<sup>58</sup> But with a kettle, the water and fire are both preserved, and both are made more useful. The hot water can then be used for cooking a soup, and so can that fire affect the water that would otherwise have extinguished it.<sup>59</sup>

Aaron had a method to bring people to Torah. He would be kind to them and love them. Later that day, when they contemplated sinning, they would think to themselves, “What would Aaron think of me if he knew? How will I look him in the eye?” And they would not sin!<sup>60</sup> Aaron saw the good in people. He saw where each one fit in. He was able to make peace in families. When Aaron died, we are told by the Torah that the entire Jewish community cried for him<sup>61</sup> – man and woman alike. This was not the case with Moshe. For, Aaron had preoccupied himself with making certain that man and wife, and two friends, would live in peace. He saw where each person could fit in. He could offer a kettle to two enemies, showing how the fact that they looked like fire and water did not mean that they could not live in peace. That is what brought people to Torah. People knew that Aaron really saw them, and how unique and special they were. And they could not sin, but rather, were brought close to Torah.

Kohanim were prone to terrible fighting. In fact, the Talmud says that “if you see a Kohen fighting, do not cast aspersions upon him the way you would on another man, for that is the nature of Kohanim.”<sup>62</sup> Kohanim are here to bring peace. Why are they prone to fighting?

Aaron, as the Kohen, was also the one who brought peace between man and God, by offering sacrifices on the altar. In fact, our Sages teach, when man was not at peace with his first wife and they would divorce, “even the altar would shed tears.”<sup>63</sup> For the relationship between man and God is only truly complete when man’s relationship with others, and with himself, is complete. Shalom means peace – when things fit together as they should. That was the power of the Kohen. The most important thing in the nature of the Kohen is the ability to make distinctions. He must distinguish, when it comes to religious practice, between one type of

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57 This idea is beautifully expressed by R. Shmuel Rozofsky in his *Zichron Shmuel*, p. 594.

58 There was one exception. See Rashi to Shemos 9:24, quoting Shemos Rabbah, where we are told that fire and water “made Shalom” to produce the plague of hail, which consisted of fire inside the ice.

59 In fact, R. Moshe Sofer in *Derashos Chasam Sofer* (p. 285) writes, “The Shalom of the non-Torah-informed person, the *am haaretz*, is in fact only heading for dispute, while the disputes of Torah students lead directly to peace. Thus, the *gematria* of *Shalom rav*, abundant peace (as in Tehillim 119:165), which is 378, is the same as that of *machlokes!*”

60 *Avos Dirabbi Nosson*. See Bertinoro to Avos 1:12.

61 Bamidbar 20:29

62 Kiddushin 70b

63 Gittin 90b. See Meiri to Sanhedrin 22a, where he explains that this is only when there was no good reason for divorce. He further explains that it is the altar that cries because even the items that would otherwise help him cleanse himself now turn on him. *Toras Chaim* there writes that since Adam and Chava were created from the site where the altar would eventually be built, one who does not relate properly to his wife disappoints the altar. See also Bereishis Rabbah 18:5, regarding scorned women who would come and cry at the altar. See also the comments of Malbim, Radak and others, to Malachi 2:13. See also *Zohar*, vol. 1, 254a, that connects the altar to a wife, as well as in vol. 2, 102b and 254b, where it connects the *tzela* (side) of the altar, to the *tzela* of Adam that was then turned into Chava.

*tzaraas* and another,<sup>64</sup> and more importantly, he must distinguish when it comes to how he views the world. He must see where each person fits in. Those who can see many distinctions, differences, will be prone to fighting, but they are the only ones who can ultimately see and find Shalom. The old cliché, “When there are two Jews, there will be three opinions,” is, in fact, our key to Shalom.

Pinchas’s place in history is defined in this Parsha. He knew who he was, while others did not quite understand him. The Talmud<sup>65</sup> tells us that people mocked him, “Look at the son of the fatter, whose ancestor fattened cows for idolatry [his mother was a daughter of Yisro].” Therefore, the Torah here came to establish his ancestry, “Pinchas was the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the Kohen.” And Pinchas was given his reward; it was an inheritance, an eternal covenant, “for himself and for his children.” The daughters of Tzelophchad, appearing in our Parsha, also have a similar story. They emphasize that their father was righteous, and did not cause any others to sin in his death, as did the assembly of Korach.<sup>66</sup> The Torah emphasizes that they are from the family of Yosef, to teach that they acted like Yosef – just as he loved the Land of Israel, by asking for his bones to be buried there, so did his granddaughters continue loving the Land of Israel.<sup>67</sup> And as a result of their behavior, the Torah not only gives them an inheritance, but teaches the entire section of inheritance law in their honor.

When we connect to who we are, and where we come from, then our children can continue in that path, for we have something to offer them. It is both fascinating and at the same time devastating to note how the denominations in Judaism who have not connected much to what our ancestors have contributed to Judaism, and have not followed its precepts in the same way that they did, have been wildly unsuccessful in passing on those values to their children.

Pinchas was a Kohen, as Aaron was. The Kohen makes distinctions, and finds the place for everything. When things find their right place, rather than just any place, they create a vision of peace. Like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle coming together, in harmony and clarity, is the power of Shalom. Shalom is something that often must be pursued. If we just let things be, that will not be peace, but confusion; for, things will not function, they will be out of place. Aaron loved peace, as did Pinchas, and so, Pinchas was even prepared to kill for it. War can sometimes be the only path to peace. Everything must find its place. That is how God spends His time, arranging things, helping people and things find their places, their spouses, their talents, their homes. He spends His time helping nations find their places, and species and even planets find their balance. His name is Shalom, and may He bring Shalom upon us, and all of Israel. Amen.

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64 Vayikra 13:14.

65 Sanhedrin 82b

66 Bamidbar 27:3–4; see Rashi there.

67 Rashi to Bamidbar 27:1