# THEN PEACE HAS A CHANCE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will gives its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in the land. I will grant (Shalom) Peace in the land.... (Vayikra 26:3-6)

If you will follow My decrees: That you should be striving in Torah learning. (Rashi)

I will grant Shalom: Maybe you'll say well there's plenty of food and there's drink too but you should know that without peace there is nothing. All these things and then "I will grant you peace" teaches us that peace is equivalent to everything. And so is written "Who makes peace and creates bad" (Isaiah 45:7) (Rashi)

What is this crucial ingredient called "Shalom"? How do we define it. Sometime the Torah itself can be used as a self-referential dictionary. By observing the context of a word's use we can discern its meaning. How so?

Quoting the entire verse from Isaiah that Rashi refers to above, "Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates bad, I am HASHEM Who does all these!" the Talmud (Bava Basra 58A) infers that elements are presented in contrast to one another. Just as dark and light are opposites so "Shalom"-peace and bad are opposites.

That's sounds strange at first. The opposite of peace might be war and the opposite of bad we might presume to be good but that peace is the opposite of bad is a new angle, a different perspective on one or both of those extra big words. What is "bad" and what is "peace"?

The Chovos HaLevavos with his "Eye Hospital" analogy explains how, when untutored, people naturally miss out on perceiving the continuous flow of goodness from HASHEM, because of an intense preoccupation with and a profound misunderstanding about the tribulations of life.

"How closely they resemble in this regard to blind men who are brought to a house prepared for them with everything that could benefit them; everything in it is arranged perfectly; it is fully equipped and ideally suited to benefit them and provide for their welfare. In addition, effective medications and a skilled physician to administer them are provided for their treatment, so that their sight might be restored.

Nevertheless, the men neglect to undergo treatment for their eyes and disregard the advice of the physician who had been treating them. They walk about the house handicapped greatly by their blindness, stumbling over the very things that had been prepared for their benefit, falling on their faces; some suffer bruises, and others broken limbs.

They suffer much and their troubles are compounded. They complain bitterly about the owner and builder of the house and condemn his actions. In their eyes he has been negligent and a poor leader, and they believe that his motivation had not been to do them good and show them kindliness but to cause them pain and injury. This leads them to deny the benevolence and the kindliness of the owner."

I had a very thoughtful phone conversation just the other day with someone suffering with the subject of suffering. It's not to be taken lightly. Near the end I quoted the oft repeated phrase, "If someone wants to believe in G-d he has to explain the suffering that goes on in the world but if he wants to not believe in a Creator then he has to explain everything else." I left him with a challenge-a homework assignment to guestimate the proportion of "Goodness" to "Bad". I have not heard back from him yet! Not a bad question to ponder! Hmmm!

The situation of bad is actually a lack of harmony- "peace" not a void of good. All the ingredients for improvement and harmonious living are there whether misappropriated or not. Like navigating in traffic, when all drivers are careful and constantly mindful of their responsibilities-"following My decrees"- "striving to learn", "bad" stays home and **then peace has a chance.** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.