

FRAGILE PEACE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha of Pinchas contains one of the anomalies in the script writing of the Torah. God promises Pinchas the blessing that "My covenant of shalom - peace" be with him and his descendants. The Hebrew word shalom as written here in the Torah has a vav ktia - the Hebrew letter vav written in the word shalom is split and incomplete. Usually a split or incompletely written letter in the Torah renders the Torah itself as unusable and needing repair. But here it is the tradition of the Torah itself that the letter vav itself remain split and incomplete without this affecting the usability and validity of the Torah scroll itself. I have mentioned this matter in previous essays of mine on the parsha of Pinchas but I now wish to concentrate on an insight that recently came to mind regarding this split vav. We all know that there are endless faces and depth to the words of the Torah and that therefore many insights are always contained within one word or even one letter of the Torah. Thus all insights into Torah, based on the framework of the Oral Law and the great commentators of Israel throughout the ages are valid and instructive. The idea that I wish to advance regarding the split vav is very simple but I feel it to be the essence of truth. Namely, that peace is very fragile, almost always difficult to maintain and it requires great effort to keep it together. All of human history bears out this fact. True peace, whether in the home, the family, amongst neighbors, in the synagogue, in the community and certainly between nations, is very hard to achieve and even more difficult to maintain.

The Torah wishes us to be aware of the difficulty in achieving and maintaining peace. Peace is not achieved with glib phrases, populist slogans or even just good wishes and sincere intents. It requires great sacrifices, sensitivity to others, patience and vision as to the future and the possible consequences of current behavior, speech and decisions. And even if peace is achieved it is always a vav ktia - a fragile, split, easily ruptured state of being. Pinchas' act of zealotry hardly seems to be the proper prelude for the Lord granting him the blessing of peace. But the vav ktia teaches us that God warns Pinchas that this act of zealotry is not to be a permanent policy of Jewish behavior. The self-same sense of risk and sacrifice that Pinchas invested in his act of zealotry now has to be channeled into the achievement of peace and its continued maintenance. One has to realize how the peace in a family and a community is always threatened by the petty things of life that taken too seriously rip us apart and leave us without peace or serenity of soul and personality. Pinchas will become the kohein gadol - High Priest - of Israel. His task will be to emulate his grandfather, Aharon, to love peace and pursue peace. He will be unable to do so successfully if he does not first realize the difficulty and fragility of achieving and maintaining peace. Only then will there be a reasoned and

successful pursuit of peace become possible.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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