

# WHAT IS PEACE?

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

In this week's parsha, the Torah portrays for us an accurate and unforgiving view of war and its personal consequences. No one who participates in a war escapes unscathed from these consequences. The ones who are killed or wounded have suffered these consequences on their very physical bodies. But even those who have survived the battle whole are affected by the consequences of that struggle.

That is the supremely important, albeit subliminal message of the beginning of this week's parsha. A Jewish soldier, who according to the ritual requirements of becoming such a soldier and being accepted for the battle as outlined in last week's parsha, a God-fearing patriotic and observant person, somehow enters into a sexual relationship with a non-Jewish woman, a relationship which Rashi points out to us will only bring him future grief and regret.

The heat and passions that war and combat engender within a person cannot be limited to the actual battlefield alone. They carry on within the psyche and body of the combatant and find different ways of expression in all other areas of human life and experience.

The observant Jew, who under ordinary and usual non-combat circumstances is scrupulously pious and moral in one's behavior, now becomes a sexual predator and enters into a physical relationship with a non-Jewish stranger. Is this not the strongest message possible that the Torah wishes to communicate to us about the consequences and effects of war!?

War requires the abandonment of personal inhibitions. That will help explain the scenario portrayed for us by this opening parsha of this week's Torah reading. Without inhibitions there can be no morality or piety.

But as all of us living here in Israel are well aware of, war is a constant state of affairs in our national and personal life. The Jewish people have been at war here in the Land of Israel for almost all of the years of the past century. These wars may not be of our choosing or our initiative but they are omnipresent in our lives and society.

And because of this difficult state of affairs, Israeli society has been affected and even shaped by the presence of constant combat and warfare. Much of the rough spots that still exist in our society - the divisiveness, the absence of mannered courtesy, the unnecessary assertiveness, etc. - are all consequences of our being in a constant state of war. Inhibitions and piety are hard to maintain under such conditions and consequences.

Peace is not merely an absence of a hot war. It is a state of mind that induces tranquility, rationality and all around general goodness. That is why peace is so exalted in the works of the prophets and throughout the Talmud and Jewish tradition. And that is why we pray three times daily that its presence should be felt amongst us. With peace - both inner and outer - such events as portrayed for us at the beginning of this week's parsha simply do not occur.

There is no people that longs for peace as greatly as do the people of Israel. May the Lord somehow bless us with the achievement of peace and thereby restore us to normalcy, piety and eternal goodness.

Shabbat 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)