

Light Insight

Processed Peace

Everyone wants peace. Every person wants to sit under his fig tree, secure that no one will come and take away his family and his money. Yet almost since the beginning of time, peace has been elusive, and often, illusory.

If there's one Hebrew word that everyone knows, it's shalom, "Peace". Shalom is the Hebrew form of greeting. Why do we greet others with shalom?

The Talmud tells us that it is forbidden to say shalom in a bathhouse, because Shalom is G-d's name, and thus not fitting to be uttered in a bathhouse.

What does it mean that G-d's name is Shalom?

Real shalom doesn't exist in this world because shalom means perfection, completion. This world was created lacking. That's the way it's meant to be. This world strives to reach somewhere beyond itself for its completion.

The Hebrew word for the earth is *aretz* — from the root *ratz*, "to run" — because this world is always running, moving towards its completion. However its completion can come only from above, from Heaven. The word "Heaven" in Hebrew is *shamayim* — from the root "sham" which means "there".

Heaven is the "there" to which this world is always running — outside and beyond itself.

This world contains many wonderful things, but perfection isn't one of them. Perfection is beyond the scope of this world.

This is why G-d's name is Shalom. G-d is the Perfection of all the things lacking in this world. Every single thing in this world finds its perfection, its fulfillment in Him. It's not here. It's above. It's "there."

The Peace Connection

In the Book of Ruth, Boaz greets the harvesters by saying "Shalom", by using the name of G-d. From here we learn that a Jew may use G-d's Name as a greeting, and it is not considered taking Heaven's Name in vain. In fact, there is an opinion that we are obliged to greet each other with G-d's name by saying "Shalom". Why should we be obliged to greet each other using G-d's name? What's wrong with "Good Morning" or "Have a nice day"?

Sometimes we look at other people and we think that we are a million miles from them. But no man is an island unto himself. When two people meet, the essence of their meeting is to make each other more complete. The fundamental

principle of interpersonal relationships is that when I meet my fellow being, I am coming to effect his or her *shleimut* (completion). That's what I'm doing in this world.

G-d placed us in a world which demands to be perfected. Our whole relationship with the world and everything in it is a "Peace Process" — a process of bringing every person and every blade of grass to a state of *shleimut* — the true definition of peace.

In Parshat Vayetze, Yaakov lays his head down to sleep on some stones. The stones all vie to be the stone on which Yaakov will sleep. The result is that all the stones gather together and become one stone. What do we learn from this? The message of the stones is that completion results from the connection of disparate entities into a single whole.

When we connect with other people on whatever level, whether in business or in love, whether in school on the bus, our entire connection between ourselves and our fellow beings must be with the intention to bring the other person to a state of completion. That's why a Jew is obliged to greet others with "Shalom". For when we seek to bring each other to a state of completion, to shalom, the world reaches its ultimate fulfillment.

And that's the real peace process.

Response Line

Masada and Suicide

Marisa Yentel wrote:

Hello, My name is Marisa Yentel, I am from Cordoba Argentina. My question is: If the Torah orders us to choose life, and this is against suicide, I wanted to know what is the Torah's point of view in relation to what happened at Masada. I wanted to know also sources on the matter. Thanks.

Dear Marisa,

It's interesting to note that the Mishna and Talmud, both written after the events of Masada, make no mention of it. I believe the reason for this is that no one really knew what went on at Masada. All we have is the account of Josephus in "The Jewish Wars," much of which is probably from his imagination.

If the Jews on Masada committed suicide only for the sake of evading capture or ignominy, then it would be forbidden. If however they were worried that they would be tortured and thereby forced to worship idols or participate in immorality, they would be justified in committing suicide. Since no one knows what their motivation was, we can neither approve nor condemn their action, and hence the Talmud's silence on this issue.

THE OHR SOMAYACH
HOME PAGE

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LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Valley of Elah

Not far from Beit Shemesh, spreading between the site of ancient Azekah and modern Kefar Zecharia, is the Valley of Elah where David slew the mighty Goliath. Named for the *elah* (terebinth) trees which grow on the surrounding mountains, this is where King Saul and the men of Israel gathered and set up their battle lines against the Philistine invaders and achieved victory through David's slingshot.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving people the benefit of the doubt

In international travel, faster is usually better. But in evaluating others, we should be wary before resorting to...

Jet Speed Judgements

A student who had spent the day visiting our yeshiva in Israel, returned to his old yeshiva in a nearby city, saying that he'd think over the possibility of transferring to ours. His decision was ultimately to transfer, and after about a week he arrived to begin his studies with us. The first morning here in his new yeshiva did not look very promising, however, when he appeared about two hours late for class. From this it seemed that he was sorely lacking in the motivation and discipline necessary to succeed in the formidable challenge of learning the Talmud. I was already mentally assigning him to the ranks of the well-meaning but under-motivated, when I heard someone say that our new friend was still suffering from jet lag after returning from the States. It seems that the week's delay in transferring to us was due to a quick trip home. So it was not laziness, but travel fatigue that was the cause of his lateness. Fortunately, I now had the opportunity to revise my overly hasty assessment of our new student, and to give him the fair chance he deserved.