



## Nasso 2022

### Peace Redux

5 minute read | Straightforward

For most of history, the utopian ideal that most cultures and societies strived for has been domination, subjugation, and victory; the pages of history are written in the blood and tears of conflict.

In stark contrast, Judaism's religious texts overwhelmingly endorse compassion and peace; love and the pursuit of peace is one of Judaism's fundamental ideals and is a near-universal characteristic in our pantheon of heroes – בקש שלום ורדפהו. R' Jonathan Sacks notes that the utopian ideal of peace is one of Judaism's great original revolutionary contributions. As Rashi says, all the blessings in the world are worthless without peace.

Avos d'Rabbi Nosson suggests that the mightiest heroism lies not in defeating your foes, but in turning enemies into friends. The Midrash says that the world can only persist with peace, and the Gemara teaches that all of Torah exists to further peace – דְרָכֶיךָ דְרָכֵי-נְעָם; וְכָל-נְתִיבוֹתֶיךָ שְׁלוֹם. Peace features prominently in the Priestly Blessing, and the visions of peace and prosperity in the Land of Israel – וְנִתְתִי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ / יִשָּׂא הַ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וְיִשָּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם –

We ask for peace every time we pray and every time we eat – שִׁים שְׁלוֹם / עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו – Wishing for peace has been the standard Jewish greeting for millennia – שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם. Peace is ubiquitous in our lexicon, and it's not a trivial thing.

We all know peace is important, and peace sounds great in theory, but uncomfortably often, the reality is that peace is too abstract, too difficult, too distant, and too remote.

What does peace look like practically speaking, and how do we bring more of it into our lives?

Before explaining what peace is, it's important to rule out what it's not. Peace is not what many or most people seem to think.

Peace doesn't mean turning the other cheek and suffering in silence. Your non-response to conflict contributes to a lack of overt hostility that is superficial and only a negative peace at best. Sure, there is no external conflict, but everyone recognizes that conflict is there, even if it's unspoken and even if it's only internal. It's a position of discomfort and resentment – possibly only unilateral – and it may genuinely be too difficult or not worth the headache to attempt to resolve. Be that as it may, that is obviously not what peace is; it's not a state of blessing at all. It's the kind of status quo that lasts only



as long as sufficiently tolerable, but it's a lingering poison that slowly suffocates; it's only a ceasefire or stalemate, it's certainly not peace.

Peace also isn't the lack of conflict that stems from being weak and harmless. It's not good morality if you don't fight when you're meek and harmless. You haven't made that choice; you simply have no alternatives. Pirkei Avos is dismissive and disdainful of people who don't stand up for themselves – אַם לֹא יִמְצֵא אִישׁ אֶת אֵפוֹ לְהִלָּחֵם עִירָא, In a world of pacifists, a bully with a stick would rule the world. There's nothing moral about being harmless.

There absolutely are moments the Torah requires us to stand up for ourselves and each other; authorizing and sometimes even mandating aggression as just and necessary – עֵת לְאָהֳבֵיךָ לְשֹׂנְאֵיךָ, עֵת לְמִלְחָמָה וְעֵת לְשָׁלוֹם. In the story of Balak and Bilam, Pinchas restores peace through an act of shocking public violence, and yet he is blessed with peace for restoring the peace; his courageous act makes him the hero, and not the people who were above it all and didn't want to get involved.

But we do not value or respect strength and power for its own sake; the One God of Judaism is not the god of strength and power and is firmly opposed to domination and subjugation. Our God is the god of liberty and liberated slaves, who loved the Patriarchs because of their goodness, not their power, who commands us to love the stranger and take care of the orphan and widow. So being powerful and strong doesn't mean you go around asserting yourself, bullying and intimidating people; but it does mean that if someone threatens you and the people you love, or the orphans and widows in your community, you are equipped to do something about it. Carl Jung called this integrating the shadow, making peace with a darker aspect of yourself. When you know you can bite, you'll rarely have to.

R' Shlomo Farhi teaches that peace is more than a state of non-aggression; peace is a state of mutual acceptance and respect. Peace does not require the absence of strength and power; peace is only possible precisely through the presence and proper application of strength and power – they are prerequisites – ה' עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן, ה' יְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם – Peace requires us to cultivate the inner strength and courage to allow others to get what they need.

In Isaiah's hopeful visions, today featured prominently and optimistically on the wall of the United Nations building, world governments disband their armies and repurpose their weapons into agricultural tools. In this utopian vision, it's not that states are too weak to defend themselves, a negative peace with no violent conflict; it's the opposite. It's a vision of positive peace; complete and perfect security with mutual respect and tolerance, where states will resolve differences peacefully without resorting to hostilities.

As the Ohr HaChaim notes, the word for peace is cognate to wholesomeness, a holistic and symbiotic harmony of constituent parts – שְׁלוֹם / שְׁלֵמוֹת.

Peace isn't a lack of external conflict, and it doesn't even necessarily mean a lack of conflict at all. Even in Isaiah's visions of a peaceful future, does anyone seriously think husbands and wives won't still sometimes disagree about whose family to spend the holiday with? Which school to send their kid



to? That organizations won't have internal disagreements about budget or direction? Then and now, humans are human; we are not robots, and inevitably, we will have our differences! But if peace simply means that those differences can be accepted or settled peacefully, then perhaps peace isn't the unreachable idealism we may prefer to imagine. It's just about putting in the effort to learn to live with our differences.

Ralph Waldo Emerson quipped that nobody can bring you peace but yourself. When you feel secure, you'll have security. It takes benevolence, confidence, and unshakeable strength and power; those come from within. If you do not have peace, it's because you are not yet at peace.

There is a very good reason that envy figures as one of the most important things God has to say to humans – וְלֹא תִקְמֹד. As our Sages guided us, who is wealthy? One who celebrates and takes joy in what he has – אֵינְהוּ עֹשִׂיר, הַשְּׂמֵחַ בְּהַלְקוֹ. One interpretation even inverts the plain reading, from celebrating what you have, to celebrating what he has – בְּהַלְקוֹ. Someone else's prosperity and success don't make your own any less likely, so be happy when someone else gets a win because yours is no further away. The Ksav Sofer highlights that this is the Torah's blessing of peace; an internal peace of being satisfied and living with security, happy for both yourself and for others – וְאַכְלֵתֶם לְהַמְכֵם לְשַׂבַּע וְיִשְׂבַּתֶם לְבֶטֶח.

If we value and desire peace, we must first regulate and then free ourselves from looking at others with grudges, grievances, and jealousy. As one comedian said, the only time you look in your neighbor's bowl is to make sure they have enough. When other people's achievements and success no longer threaten us, we can develop lasting and peaceful co-existence and harmony. The differences are still there, but it's not the other person that changes at all; it's how you look at them. Your dream of peace starts with you, and it's an important step that bridges the world we live in with the ideal world of tomorrow. If you cannot accept others, it's because you haven't yet accepted yourself.

What better blessing could there be than to live in balanced harmony with yourself, to be completely secure and at peace? To wholly embrace your differences with your spouse, your parents, your siblings, your relatives, your neighbors, your community, your colleagues, and ultimately, everyone you meet? And if we infused our notion of peace with any momentum, maybe the whole world could experience it too.

So, of course we ask for peace every day! In every prayer, and every time we greet someone. As the Gemara says, peace is the ultimate container for blessing, and it's intuitive; we all know it's true.

We just have to live like it!

## **Achdus; What Is Unity?**



< 1 minute | Straightforward

At the inauguration of the Mishkan, the princes of each tribe offered a sacrifice. The Torah records what each prince offered separately, despite being completely identical, and they delivered the twelve sets of gifts on six wagons:

וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת קַרְבָּנָם לִפְנֵי ה' שֵׁשׁ עֶגְלוֹת צֹב וּשְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵי בָקָר עֶגְלָה עַל שְׁנַיִם הַנְּשָׂאִים וְשׁוֹר לְאֶחָד וַיִּקְרִיבוּ אוֹתָם לִפְנֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן – They brought their gifts before the Lord: six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for each two chieftains, and an ox for each one; they presented them in front of the Mishkan. (7:3)

The Sforno understands that the six wagons were a perfect act of unity. This illustrates that each prince's gift, while the same as the others in substance, retained a sense of individuality.

Unity cannot require an individual to be subsumed into a homogenous, uniform entity; this would entirely compromise the individual.

It cannot be that the way to accept another person is when they are just like you.

However, this begs the question; for the ultimate display of unity, why not merge all the gifts into one wagon?

R' Shlomo Farhi suggests that something done as a display is only a display! Unity is not an ideological principle; it is practical, grassroots, and organic. One individual has to get on with another individual specifically! The example set by the princes is perfect – it is not institutional or societal; it is personal – human to human.

Unity means actually identifying and sharing a common bond and spirit with something – not the display.

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*I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.*

*I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.*

Neli

*PS If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?*



## TorahRedux

**Redux:** *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.