

The Many Faces of Peace

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Numbers Rabbah 11:7

“*May God lift up God’s face to you and grant you peace*” (Num. 6:26). Great is peace, since **for the sake of peace the Holy One altered a statement**. When God reported Sarah's statement to Abraham, He quotes her as saying, "Indeed, shall I who am old bear a child?" (Gen. 18:13), when in fact she had said, "My lord [Abraham] being old" (v. 12). Thus, to preserve domestic peace, [God] omitted Sarah's slight upon her husband.

Great is peace, as we see from the law concerning the wife accused by her husband of infidelity. In order to clear her from suspicion and thus restore peace between them, **the Holy One commanded us to blot out with water the divine name**, which was written on a scroll with all holiness, and thus make possible the ordeal of the bitter waters as described (in Num. 5:23).

R. Eleazar says: Great is peace, for the **prophets have taught** our people to care for nothing as much as for peace.

R. Simeon ben Halafta said: Great is peace, for no vessel holds blessing so effectively as peace; as Scripture says, “The Lord will bless [God’s] people with peace.” Likewise, in the priestly benediction God concludes with peace, *And Give You Peace*. This teaches that **other blessings in themselves are of no avail unless peace goes with them**.

R. Eleazar Hakappar says: Great is peace, for the **conclusion** of the whole of the Eighteen Benedictions is a prayer for peace, and the **conclusion** of the priestly benediction is a prayer for peace.

Great is peace, for it was **given to the meek**; as Scripture says, “But the humble shall inherit the land, and de3light themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalms 37:11).

Great is peace, for it **outweighs everything else**. We say in our morning prayers: [God] make space and creates everything”: thus, if there is not peace, there is, so to speak, nothing left in creation.

R. Eleazar, so of R. Eleazar Hakappar, says that **even if Israel serves idols**, as long as peace reigns among them, the Holy One, as it were, says about them: “My servant for punishment, Satan, shall not touch them,” as Scripture says, “Ephraim is joined to idols; yet let him alone: (Hosea 9:17). But what does it say of Israel when they are in

conflict? “Their heart is divided: now shall they bear their guilt” (Hosea 10:2). Thus, peace is a grand thing, and quarrelsomeness is hateful.

Peace is a grand thing, for **even during war peace is necessary**; as Scripture says, “When you draw near a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it” (Deu. 10:10). Scripture also says, “I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon...with words of peace” (Deu. 2:26), and it says, “Restore those cities peaceably” (Judges 11:13).

Great is peace, for **even the dying need peace**; as Scripture says, “But you will go to your fathers in peace: (Gen 15:15); and it says, “You shall die in peace” (Jer. 34:5).

Great is peace, for it was **given to those who are repentant**; as Scripture says, “Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near, says the Lord who creates the fruit of the lips” (Isaiah 57:19). Peace is thus granted to those who, though by their acts they previously removed themselves from God, now bring themselves near to [God] and express their wrongs in confession.

R. Meir says: Great is peace, for the Holy One created no more desirable attribute than peace and it has been **given to the righteous**. When a righteous man departs from the world, three groups of ministering angels welcome him, and each does so with a greeting of peace. The first says, “Let him enter into peace”; the second says, “Let them rest [peacefully] in their beds”; and the third says, “So it is for each one who walks in uprightness” (Isaiah 57:2).

Great is peace, for the Holy One created no attribute more desirable than peace, and it has been **withheld from the wicked**. In the hour when a wicked man departs from the world, three groups of destroying demons confront him. The first says, “There is not peace.” The second says, “Says the Lord concerning the wicked” (Is. 48:22). The third says, “You shall lie down in sorrow” (Is. 50:11).

Great is peace, for it was **given as a reward for devotion to Torah and good deeds**. As Scripture says, “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments” then the reward is “And I will establish peace in the land” (Lev. 26:3,6).

Great is peace, for it was **given to those who love the Torah**. As Scripture says, “Great peace have they that love Your law” (Ps. 119:165).

Great is peace, for it was **given to those who study the Torah**. As scripture says, “All your children shall be taught by the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children” (Is. 54:13).

Great is peace, for it was **given to those who practice *tzedakah***. As Scripture says, “The practice of *tzedakah* shall mean peace” (Is. 32:17).

Great is peace, For **God is called Peace**. As Scripture says, “The angel said: The Lord is Peace” (Judges 6:24).

Great is peace, for **even the angels in Heaven need peace**, as Scripture says, “[God] makes peace in the high places” (Job 25:2). Can we not extrapolate: If peace is necessary in Heaven, a place where there is no hatred or enmity, how much more so is it necessary on earth, a place where all sorts of conflicts are found!

Observe now, said R. Simeon, that **the way of the Holy One is not like the way of a mortal**. If a mortal king goes to battle, he goes accompanied by armies and legions, but when he goes on a peaceful mission he goes alone. That is not the way of the Holy One. When [God] goes on a mission of peace [God] goes forth with armies and with legions. As Scripture says, “[God] makes peace in the high places” and after that it is written, “can [God’s] armies be numbered?” (Job 25:3). It also says, “The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them in holiness as at Mt. Sinai” (Ps. 68:18). And Scripture says, concerning the revelation at Sinai, “Thousands, thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Daniel 7:10). But when the Holy One goes to war, [God] goes entirely alone; as Scripture says, “The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name” (Ex 15:3). That teaches us that [God] fights by [God] Name alone and requires no aid. It also says, comparing wine to the blood of the battlefield, “I have trodden the winepress alone” (Is. 63:3). You find that when the Holy One inflicted punishment upon the evil Generation of the Flood, [God] did so entirely alone. As Scripture says, “I, even I, do bring the flood waters” (Gen. 6:17).

Similarly, [God] punished the men of Sodom single-handedly. As Scripture says, “Then the Lord brought a rain upon Sodom (Gen. 19:24). The same was the case when [God] punished the Egyptians. As Scripture says, “The Lord smote all the firstborn” (Ex. 12:29). [God] likewise punished the Amorites single-handedly. As Scripture says, “the Lord cast down great stones from Heaven upon them (Joshua 10:11. He also punished Sennacherib single-handedly. As Scriptures says, “The angel of the Lord went forth, and smote the camp of the Assyrians” (II Kings 19:35). Is the case of an angel different? It is not, for an angel is an agent and a legal agent is, according to Jewish law, considered on par with the principle.

Peace is a precious thing, since **for all the deeds and meritorious acts which our father Abraham accomplished the greatest reward given him was peace**. As Scriptures says, “But you shall go to your fathers in peace” (Gen 15:15). Likewise in

the case of our father Jacobs you find that he sought peace from God. As Scripture says, “So that I may come back to my father’s house in peace” (Gen. 28:21). So, in the case of Aaron, and the priestly family descended from him, you find that he was praised by God mostly for peace. As Scripture says, “My covenant with him was one of life and peace” (Malachi 2:5).

You find likewise that the **Torah was compared above all to peace**. As Scripture says, “All her paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:17). Thus, you also find that the Holy One comforts Jerusalem, above all else, with the promise of peace. As Scripture says, “And My people shall abide in a peaceable habitation” (Is. 32:18). Similarly, [God] punished Ammon and Moab only by depriving them of peace. As Scripture says, “You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity” (Deu. 23:7). And Israel is blessed every day with peace. As Scripture says, “*May God lift up God’s face to you and grant you peace*” (Num. 6:26).