

**Parshat Pinchas:
Truth and Peace**
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Class of 2015

These days of Bein Hametzarim – the three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av -- reminds us to go back to the pasuk in Zecharia that talks about fast days becoming days of joys:

"So said the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Yehuda joy and gladness, and cheerful seasons; [therefore] you shall love truth and peace." (Zecharia 8:19)

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת צוֹם הַרְבִּיעִי וְצוֹם
הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה
לְבֵית יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים
טוֹבִים וְהָאֶמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אָהָבוּ. " (זְכַרְיָה
ח, יט)

Zecharia instructs us that we should make fast days and days of mourning into joyous days - through love of truth and peace.

Truth and peace on face value seem to be contradictory; they do not stand together easily. In order to maintain peace, sometimes we must put truth in the backseat. Indeed, when Aharon is famously described in the Mishna (Avot 1:12) as "a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace" we learn that for the purpose of making peace, it is sometimes necessary to stretch the truth. As Avot D'Rabbi Natan¹ famously tells the story of Aharon going to two friends who had a fight and telling each of them how much the other side wants to make peace with the other. We see that Aharon was not so strict about the truth in order to create peace.

Truth on its own often does the opposite of bringing peace. One who is occupied with his or her own righteousness and truth leaves no room to see anyone else's perspective or to allow peace to enter and rise alongside the truth.

In addition to being in Bein HaMetzarim, we also read Parshat Pinchas this week that connects us to those same values.

Pinchas is a parsha of truth. When Pinchas rises up with a spear and kills Cozbi bat Tzur and Zimri ben Salu as they were committing the sins of adultery and Avoda Zara, he does so in the name of justice, in the name of the truth of God's law. He does so to uphold a principle. Can you imagine an intimate act, especially one that is forbidden, being performed in public? Pinchas rises up out of the congregation and employs extreme violence against Zimri and Cozbi, fired by his zeal for the truth.

But Parshat Pinchas is also a parsha of peace.

In the story of Pinchas, God grants Pinchas a covenant of peace:

¹ (באבות דר' נתן (הוספה ב לנוסחא א, פרק ח, מהדורת שכטר, עמ' 163)

And so it is said that I give him my covenant of peace.

כֵּן אָמַר ה'נִי נָתַן לוֹ אֶת בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹמִים

The Ha'amek Davar explained giving a peace covenant to the zealous Pinchas is a balancing tool, an immunization against the possible spiritual damage caused by zealotry. This is not a reward as the simple meaning of the verses may seem to suggest, but rather, as the Ha'amek Davar writes: "[God] blessed him with the attribute of peace, that he should not be overly strict and become angry... that he should always be at ease and endowed with the attribute of peace." (Ha'amek Davar 25, 12)

From these words of the Ha'amek Davar it again appears that truth is the opposite of peace; that peace restrains truth. The price of peace is a compromise of truth, giving up on the stance of justice.

But is it? Does peace come to balance truth? Can the values of peace and truth coexist, or do they only contradict one another?

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (82a) brings 3 perspectives of why Pinchas did what he did. One of them is in the name of R' Eliezer:

Rabbi Yitzhak says that Rabbi Eliezer says: He saw that an angel came and destroyed among the people in punishment for the sin of Zimri, and he realized that he must take immediate action to ameliorate the situation.

The Gemara explains that the destruction of the people probably refers to the plague that killed 24,000 people, וַיִּהְיֶה אֶחָדִי הַמִּגַּפָּה. So, Pinchas' stabbing of Zimri and Cosbi was not because he was acting as a zealot for God, but rather because he cared about Am Yisrael. Understanding that the actions of Zimri and Cosbi were the cause of the plague, Pinchas sought to stop them so the plague would stop.

The Gemara continues (82b) again in the name of Rabbi Eliezer:

"And Pinehas stood and wrought judgment and the plague was stayed" (Psalms 106:30). Rabbi Elazar says: It is not stated in the verse: And prayed [*vayitpallel*]; rather, it is stated *vayefalel*. This teaches that Pinehas, as it were, wrought judgment [*pelilut*] with his Creator.

ויעמד פנחס ויפלל (תהלים קנ.)
 ל), אמר רבי אלעזר ויתפלל לא
 נאמר אלא ויפלל מלמד כביכול
 שעשה פלילות עם קונו

The story of Pinchas actually, with the help of this *sugia*, opens up the possibility that truth and peace can coexist. While it is common to think that Pinchas killed Zimri and Cosbi in the name of the Truth of God's laws, here we learn that there is a different opinion which holds that he did so out of care and love for the nation and maybe against God, in the name of love to the nation.

The story of Pinchas actually opens up the possibility that truth and peace can coexist. While Pinchas killed Zimri and Cosbi in the name of the truth of God's laws, he also did so out of care and love for the nation. Pinchas' actions were those of peace intertwined with truth. This stands against

the idea that these two values need to stand separately. *האמת והשלום אהבו* refers to both of them all together.

This has also arisen in our tradition in the context of the two famous halakhic schools: Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai.

Beit Shammai's opinion was that the highest priority must be God's law, and therefore, that truth takes precedence over peace. In contrast, Beit Hillel strove to be involved with those around us here on earth and to enable people to be able to live according to the halakha. They were prepared to live with compromise, even a compromise of principles, rather than issue rulings difficult for human nature to accept. In their opinion, peace came before the truth.

And indeed, it was ultimately determined that the halakha goes according to Beit Hillel. This does not mean that their ruling was more just or correct than that of Beit Shammai, but rather, that in practice we should adopt their approach because the nature of their rulings considered the limitations of reality and of the people actually practicing the halakha.

Perhaps the lessons we can learn from Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai is that peace and truth can coexist.

In Massekhet Yevamot, the Gemara relates that Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai disagreed vehemently about the status of women in marriage in a number of halakhically complicated situations relating to marriage and divorce. Nevertheless, Beit Shammai did not abstain from marrying women from the families of Beit Hillel, nor did Beit Hillel refrain from marrying those from Beit Shammai. This teaches us that they showed love and friendship towards each other, putting into practice that which is written: "You shall love truth and peace". (Yevamot 14b).

A lack of peace brought about the destruction of the Temple. The ideological disputes, and the contradictions in truth caused a lack of peace. Truth and peace must find a way of co-existing, despite the contrasts between them.

We should strive for truth, but act out of peace, just like Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai.

In order to bring redemption to the world, we must understand that it is our responsibility to embrace this dialectic, both ours and that of others. Only then will the great change that Zecharia speaks of take place; only when we are sensitive to the struggle that exists between truth and peace, will there be a chance that the days of mourning will become days of joy.



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