

BS"D

Siyum Mesechet Berachot

Shabbat Pinchas 5784

R. Mois Navon

Thank you for joining me to complete Mesechet Berachot, today this Shabbat Parashat Pinchas. We do this amidst a long agonizing war in which we have lost many near and dear to us. Accordingly, we are completing this Mesechet in the memory, honor and elevation of the soul of Ari Yechiel (ben Miriam v'Avraham Reuven) Zenilman, HYD, who fell in battle in Gaza, Dec. 10, 2023.

Ari was a learned and loving individual. He was a young husband (age 32) and father of three. He had a degree in Philosophy Politics and Economics (PPE) from Hebrew University; and was studying for his master's degree in data science as he worked as an algorithms engineer at Mobileye. He was also Talmid Hacham who learned at YHE for 6 years and was known to always be carrying a Gemara in his hand (<https://www.arizenilman.com/>). And he was a defender of Israel. He had the moral clarity to drop his personal duties and take up the national mission of fighting against those that seek our demise.

In this sense, we could say that he was not unlike Pinchas who had the moral clarity to act on behalf of Israel's defense. And do note that Pinchas' act was not simply a one-off act of zealotry but the opening attack in the war against Midian; a war for which he is credited as being the leader in next week's parsha of Matot (see R. Bechayei Num. 31:6). But what is particularly important about Pinchas is found in this week's parsha when we read that for his act of moral clarity that Pinchas was given the "Brit Shalom," the covenant of peace. We might ask how a warrior can be given a covenant of peace, but this is only because we have lost touch with what Peace means. Peace in Jewish terms is not the modern pacifist version that has made us pay in so much blood. Peace is that which is gained through unrelenting war against evil.

David Hazony, in his *Plowshares into Swords* (Azure) written back in 1998, put it like this:

The **modern** peace idea rests on two closely-related principles, ... [1] *the rejection of the use of force* ... [2] [and] that *compromise* is the only proper means of resolving conflicts—as epitomized by Woodrow Wilson’s famous wish that World War I end in “peace without victory,” that is, without the imposition of a victor’s terms upon the defeated. It is this notion which underlies the quest for negotiated settlements in almost all conflicts today: That the key to peace is the achievement of mutual agreement, which can only occur when each party sacrifices something they previously believed to be essential. To the contemporary mindset, the true “peacemaker” is the person who is willing to put aside his own ideas of history, justice and morality—in whose name wars are inevitably fought—in the interest of goodwill and nonviolence.

According to this approach, we are to compromise, sacrifice everything we believe in to achieve some kind of peace. Hazony goes on to explain that this is not the Jewish idea of peace. But let us learn what exactly is the Jewish approach to war and peace from Pinhas as explained by R. S. R. Hirsch (Num. 25:12):

... “Brit” [is] an absolute decision of God, sustained by His Promise. So here it says a “Brit Shalom,” and thereby the concept “Shalom” – the state of the most complete harmony of all the conditions of the world with each other and with God – is declared to be a “Brit”: an absolute decision sustained by God’s Promise ... [and] is, therefore, absolutely guaranteed ultimately for the world. God places the responsibility for the realisation of this highest harmony of Peace, just on that way of thinking ... and way of acting, [that is, while God guarantees that peace will be achieved, He places the responsibility on human beings who will work to achieve it via a certain of thinking and acting; and it is a way of thinking and acting] which a world – hiding its thoughtless inactive forgetfulness of its duty under the cloak of “love of peace” [that is, the world at large has shirked its duty to bring about peace but instead hides its failure behind professions of “love of peace”] – [and it is this hypocritical world that] designates and condemns [those who do seek to achieve the divine peace] as “disturber of peace”.¹ [This is our world today in 2024,

¹ Precisely as we defend ourselves our enemies condemn us of genocide and human rights violations when it is they who note only commit, but gloat over, their genocide and unimaginable human rights violations against us. Yet the world has the audacity call us the “disturbers of peace.”

where we fight evil in the struggle to bring peace and yet the world condemns us as disturbing the peace. They demand we cease while they allow for our evil enemies to continue]. “Peace” is something highly precious, for which everything, all one’s own rights and possessions may be sacrificed, but never the rights of others and never what God has declared to be right and good.² True Peace of men with each other rests on the peace of all of them with God. He who ... wages war with people who are against Divine Goodness and Truth is [that is, when we fight our evil genocidal enemies] – in the midst of his fight and by it – fighting for the “Brit Shalom” on earth [Again, when we fight evil, we are fighting for divine peace]. [In contrast], he who, for the sake of **so-called peace** [it is amazing that this term was used back in the 1800s and we are still living its hypocrisy], quietly leaves the field to people who are really at variance with God [the peoples of the world who allow the evil doers to flourish], his “love of peace” is at one with the enemies of the “Brit Shalom” on earth.³ [And now R. Hirsch returns to the Pinhas story]. It was not the passive standing apart of the masses [i.e., the pacifists], not even the tears of those who stood passively “weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Ohel Moed)” (Num. 25:7) ..., it was the honest brave act of Pinhas which saved the nation and restored its peace with God and His Law, and thereby brought back the basis for the real true peace on earth.

So while pacifism and compromise sound lovely and even noble, the Torah is not so deluded. We cherish nothing more than peace, but we also know what it will take to achieve it.

Appropriately Mesechet Berachot ends precisely on the theme of peace, bringing six verses on the subject.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף סד עמוד א

אמר רבי אלעזר אמר רבי חנינא: תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם, שנאמר "וכל בניך למודי ה' ורב שלום בניך", אל תקרי בניך אלא בוניך.

² You cannot sacrifice Jewish rights because you want some kind of ceasefire, you cannot forgo the divine declaration that the land of Israel is not to be traded like baseball cards.

³ Does this not name the whole “peace” camp in Israel?! Rabin, Peres, Sarid, Beilin, Shalom Achsav, et al.

R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Hanina: The disciples of the wise (Talmidei Hachamim) increase peace in the world, as it says, And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children. Read not banayikh [thy children] but bonayikh [thy builders].

Here is a statement of fact. Torah brings peace. It does so in that it is a book of moral guidance; it teaches what is right and what is wrong. It gives us moral clarity. And this is what brings peace to the world. Those that seek to increase Torah in the world are “builders” of the world, because the world can only be built on peace.

The Gemara thus continues:

שלום רב לאהבי תורתך ואין למו מכשול

Great peace have they that love Your Torah, and there is no stumbling for them.

Again, a statement of fact. Those that love the Torah have peace, for they are involved in bringing peace to the world by implementing its teachings as a moral guide. The stumbling refers to the failures of people who have not the Torah as a moral guide, who have not the moral clarity that the Torah offers.

Now the Gemara switches from statements of fact to prayerful statements.

יהי שלום בְּחַיְלֶךָ שְׁלֵוָה בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֶיךָ

Let there be Peace within thy walls and tranquility within thy palaces.

We pray for peace “within the walls” – for social harmony.

We pray tranquility “within the palaces” – for justice within the government.

The Gemara then brings two verses that pray for peace:

למען אחי ורעי אֲדַבֵּר נָא שְׁלוֹם בְּךָ

For the sake of my brethren and companions I will now say, Peace be within thee [Jerusalem].

למען בית יְקֹוֹק אֶלְהֵינוּ אֲבַקֶּשׂה טוֹב לְךָ :

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good.

In the first verse we pray for peace for the sake of our brethren – i.e., we pray for the peace of our nation. In the second verse we pray for the peace of the world, for “the house of the Lord,” i.e., the Temple is God’s dwelling place amongst mankind, His presence symbolizing a world of peace and harmony.

And finally, there is neither a statement nor a prayer but a promise, a prophecy – that this peace we so badly need, this peace without which the world cannot continue to be built, will come when God will grant us the moral clarity and resolute determination to fight as Pinhas did, as Ari did:

יְקֹזֵק עוֹ לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן יְקֹזֵק יִבְרָךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם :

The Lord will give strength unto His people,
the Lord will bless His people with peace.

הדרן עלך "הרואה" וסליקא לה מסכת ברכות.