

**Peace**  
**Rabbi Jay M. Stein**  
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**Kol Nidre 5768**

One morning I was walking past the bathroom in our home and from inside I heard “*Modeh ani lifanecha.*” Though not the most appropriate place to be offering this wonderful prayer, it was still a wonderful sound. Our daughter had learned to begin her day with a song and she taught me to start my day with a song as well. She taught me that when life robs me of my song, all I have to do is reclaim it. I often have preschool student classes come visit me in my study. After a few minutes of talking about what they have found there, I usually put on some music really loud and we begin to dance. I want their association with me and my study to be the joy of dance and song. David teaches us “*Tamid tihilato b’fi*” (Psalms 34:2) at every time and every hour we must have a song in our hearts.

I'm going to teach you a new word today in Japanese -- the word is *hayawa aha* ;  
...in Spanish the word is *paz*  
...in Russian the word is *mir*  
...in Italian the word is *pache*  
...in Arabic the word is *Salem*....  
...in Hebrew the word is *shalom*....  
...in English the word is Peace

It's a word that's on our minds. This week at a party, three different people on three separate occasions wanted to talk to me either about Iraq, 9/11 or the Middle East. It seems to be on everyone's mind. We talk about it, we read about and we hear about it. Peace is a word so often used without result that I'm not sure we even know what the word means. Sometimes I think we've stopped working towards peace and are just working towards a cessation from the violence. We all know the absence of violence is not peace - but it is a step. Remember this short phrase: *When the power of love overcomes the love of power then the world will know peace.*

In this age of personal searching and spirituality we hear the phrase, almost to a nauseating affect, of inner peace. I'm not sure people would know it if they stepped on it. We have images of Buddhist monks who sit on the tops of mountains in a robe, while the temperature outside is below zero, yet they are not shivering because they have achieved an inner peace. But what is it? What does it mean and how do we get it?

The Hebrew word *Shalom*, sounds so similar to the word in Arabic, *Salam*. It means to become whole--much like the term the insurance industry uses referring to paying out compensation for lost property. If one loses a portion of their home in a fire, their insurance company is said to make them whole again, as if to suggest a company can replace all our material possessions and that would make everything alright. This suggests all that matters to people are TV sets and/or jewelry. What about the loss of the items our children made in kindergarten?

What of engagement rings and family heirlooms that can never be replaced, will the company make you whole with that? Please realize what makes us whole is a force we call Rock and Redeemer, not the Prudential Rock.

There are events that shake us and force us to question even the most elemental aspects of our lives. A relationship collapses; the loss of a loved one either naturally or tragically occurs; careers change either through our own choice or through circumstances beyond our control; or illness either or both physical and emotional takes its toll; all these events can throw a wrench in the machinery of our existence. Sometimes we have nothing that describes the uneasiness in our lives.

We wake anxious, we find ourselves feeling tense. For some, it exhibits itself in a loss of appetite and for others an increased appetite; for some it can be a loss of sleep, while others find solace only when they sleep; some find it hard to breathe and some need medication just to help them get out of bed each morning; and some turn to yoga and other forms of meditation as well as other remedies of the Eastern world. It's certainly clear that lack of inner personal peace has had an impact on our world as we're experiencing unprecedented strife today. We no longer need the news outlets to remind us of how things truly are as we can see our soldiers fighting in Iraq. This never leaves our minds. So remember this short phrase: *When the power of love overcomes the love of power then the world will know peace.*

However, if you think we're the only ones feeling this, we aren't. In 2007 we have witnessed an almost unrelenting barrage of violence in nearly every region of the world. We watch children in London and Belfast who are afraid to go to school because of explosions around them. It could be in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, the Former Soviet Union or China and it's also happening in our homeland, the Promised Land, the land of Israel. The violence is no longer in the periphery, Sederot is bombed daily.

This alone has made the entire country and, subsequently, the entire Jewish world, edgy and nervous with unrest that we haven't felt in nearly a decade. We realize that, even in this great country, terrorism could be moving closer to our shores, just like on 9/11. We now listen carefully when Michael Chertoff, the US Secretary of Homeland Security says, "Al-Qaeda's operating capabilities are at their strongest level since the September 11, 2001 attacks--" whether he's an alarmist or not. All over the world, Jews have learned to live with the growing brutality and now it's even true in America, the land of the free and home of the brave.

So, it's clear the impact of individual unrest on the national consciousness and vice versa is palatable. When individuals are unhappy, it impacts the society as a whole. Our political discourse has turned uncivilized because we are truly afraid--afraid for our soldiers in harms way, afraid for ourselves. When a society is unhealthy, the people within that community are certain to suffer. We cannot ignore the person who decides his life isn't worth living anymore so he straps a keg of dynamite to his chest and attempts to walk into a crowded nightclub. You have to imagine that, not only is there a significant religious fanaticism at play, but personal life has become so desperate that nothing seems too crazy.

We have an abundance of crazed people who impact society in such a way that they create a seemingly sick environment for the rest of us. [Seung-Hui Cho](#) killed 32 people and wounded 25 others before committing suicide at Virginia Tech, making it the deadliest shooting in modern U.S. history. From this, our country is left with a gapping wound.

Is there ever anything positive from the senseless wasting of life? One person, without a sense of ease, can be subject to turmoil that can drive him to violence, leaving the society as a whole, diminished. The relationship between the individual and the society is symbiotic so what happens to one happens to the other. What people feel as a single entity manifests itself in the surrounding culture and vice versa.

Will finding more terrorists and capturing them give us a greater sense of security?

I think not. That's why it's called "terrorism." Every time we step foot on an airplane, we think of the horrific possibilities, whether we are paralyzed by those fears or not.

That is why we come together to pray for peace. We pray for peace in our personal lives, we pray for peace for our brothers and sisters in the holy land, and we pray for peace throughout the world. What affects one certainly affects the other. I'm not so naive as to think the reason why the United States continues to

support the efforts of Israel, choosing them repeatedly over the ever increasing pressure of the Arab world, is because it's in our own best interests. Don't think for a moment that America will abandon its support for Israel, for now American and Israel are blood brothers as both of our bloods have been spilled by a mutual enemy – and know we will not be torn apart. Know our resolve is strong. Peace in that region and the strength of Israel means greater stability around the world.

Therefore, we pray for a comprehensive lasting peace. Words which have been the marker of our prayers, long before they were coined by Dennis Ross or Colin Powell and their spin masters, we've said, "*Sim Shalom baolam.*" We have asked God for peace throughout the world. Only a generation ago the word *Baolam* was not a part of that prayer, but we, in the Conservative movement, took the bold step of amending the text to include it because the word *BaOlam* means "throughout the world." We understand the necessity of a comprehensive peace, a peace extending throughout the world and we're all connected in the great global community that we currently inhabit but, we too, feel it in our corner of the world--our nation has been shaken.

So, we pray to God for relief from the suffering caused by war. Not just in Iraq, not just on our streets and not just in our country, but throughout the world, because what happens over there, where ever "over there" is, we know can happen here. Not only because we have to dispatch troops to another corner of the world to help keep the peace but because this places our soldiers in harms way, and the truth is we need our soldiers on our own streets and our air force protecting our own skies.

So, we must add the word *Baolam* to our prayers. We can no longer live the isolationists' ideology. We can no longer believe that we can create an insular world, which protects us from outside influences and forces that chip away at the serenity we work so hard to establish. We must say the words... pray the words...feel the words...by asking God to "*Sim Shalom BaOlam,*" ...to establish peace on earth and everywhere people live. We must pray for it, we must work for it and we must do it now, because the violence throughout the world is ever more brutal and ever more vicious and it's way too close to home. It was once said, "Nobody would be fool enough to desire war over peace, for in peace sons bury their parents, while in war, parents bury their children."

How many parents have buried their children this year? We must stop the bloodshed and we must do it for all time. The second most influential prayer for peace, speaks not only of the first catch phrase for peace, a comprehensive peace,

but of the second cliché, a lasting peace. In the parallel prayer for peace found in the evening liturgy, which is actually substituted for the *Sim Shalom* prayer in the *minha* and ma'ariv service, is called *Shalom Rav*, "May there be a great peace."

Clearly, the reference is placed in direct correlation to the morning worship and it suggests a peace that endures, a peace that not only spans all places but cuts across all time as well.

The application is clear. Warfare waged in one generation is carried through to the next. The baggage, as a result of the loss of life caused by certain people, is remembered by their children. You can imagine that the ethnic cleansing that took place in Bosnia will not soon be forgotten, just as we are weary of the new generation of Germans. Does it mean that we certainly perpetuate the same crimes they have committed against us? I hope not. Is it possible? Absolutely. It takes a colossal effort to stem the wave of aggression that has the Western world and Islam entangled. We pray to stop the cycle because when violence ends, and violence must end in order for peace to begin...with time comes confidence and confidence brings a sense of trust, but it must start somewhere and it must be sustained. "*Sim Shalom Baola*," asks for peace throughout the world. *Shalom rav* requests a durable, lasting peace. However, terrorism robs us of the confidence necessary for a tranquil life to return and be sustained.

We are a people obsessed with peace because we understand that peace is the key ingredient to survival. Ours has been a struggle with existence from the very first days when Abraham made a commitment to ethical monotheism.

So, to the people, like Christopher Hitchens, who claim that religion is the source of all warfare, and to the people who say that organized religion has been the cause of most wars resulting in the greatest loss of life, I say, "You must be kidding." It is not religion that causes the bloodshed, it is the misunderstanding thereof. We must understand that it is not religion but it's religion gone awry.

We must be truthful with ourselves, for as Joseph Telushkin writes in his book, "Jewish Wisdom," based on a statement from the Genesis Rabbah, "If people fear to offer criticism lest it lead to a rupture of peace, that itself proves that peace is false." We must be honest with each other if we are to survive and to flourish, but we must be careful. The moderates must speak out against the extremist. We must be honest with each other, but we must also understand there is a fine line between honesty and hatred and all too often we have crossed that line. We must demand our leaders stop the degradation of dialogue and raise us up.

In the words of Martin Luther king Jr., "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools." If we are unable to find peace within ourselves we will certainly self destruct; if we are unable to find a unity with our people we will certainly die; and if we don't learn to get along with our neighbors we will certainly end up killing each other.

From the earliest of ages we learn to communicate with each other. At first we cry. Thankfully, the experienced parent can tell what our different cries mean. Then we develop a skill with language. We have cried this year and next we need a new vocabulary. Events as catastrophic as what we've felt require new language - a verbiage of understanding and compassion, words of empathy and concern. We need non-verbal communication that is not violent. We must not become aggravated by the speechlessness with which we have been stricken. It will come--so maybe until then we can hum a tune.

One last story about one of our children. Missy and I were driving somewhere with only Yasmin in the car. I don't know how it happened, it just did. We were talking about I don't know what, and we hear her in the back seat singing. So Missy and I became quiet so we could hear what she was singing. This is what we heard. "Love, love will keep us together, you and me babe whenever, some sweet talking girl comes along singing this song." She is singing Captain and Tennille...and she knows all of the words. Turns out we have this karaoke game at home and she has learned a series of classic Billy Joel, Police and Captain and Tennille songs. How wonderful to hear her singing. We all love to sing and singing is good for the soul. Singing is cathartic, singing helps us to hear and singing helps to get the message out. So, if you are going to make a difference this time, if you are going to change your life, if you are going to feel the power of God, then you are going to have to sing with me. Singing raises the expectation for change, and the only way change will come is if you expect it. Today I am going to ask you to imagine the world differently--and you are going to have to sing.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel one said that, "You can't be a Jew unless you sing." So, there are two more songs I want to sing today, before we make our way back to the liturgy. It sings about peace in terms which cannot be ignored. So, please sing it with me if you know it.

"If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning, I'd hammer in the evening all over this land. I'd hammer out danger, I'd hammer out warning, I'd hammer out

love between my brothers and my sisters all over this land.

If I had a bell, I'd ring it in the morning etc...

If I had a song, I'd sing it in the morning etc...

It's the hammer of justice, it's the bell of freedom, it's a song about love between my brothers and my sisters all over this land...

...and one more "*Oseh shalom bimromav*"...

I pray the song in our hearts returns - that the messianic age upon us regains its momentum and that we find a peace that will endure, a peace that is built piece by piece.

*Good Yontiff*