

Introduction

Each year the Pardes Hannah community selects a theme to guide us through the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe). Community members reflect on this theme, and at various points during the services, share some way its key concepts have resonated in their lives. It is one of the ways that we, as a community, do *heshbon nefesh* (spiritual account-taking) for the year past, while opening up new personal and communal “heart-space” for the year that is a-borning.

This year’s theme (as decided upon by our steering committee) is particularly apt: **Shalom, Large and small.**

The word *shalom* is a prime example of the rabbinic notion of *ha-mu'at ha-mahaziq et ha-merubbeh*, the small thing (or the simple word) that contains multitudes—whole worlds of meaning and possibility. On the one hand, *shalom* in Hebrew is “small”: a compact expression of well-wishing when two meet or when one person takes leave of the other. Yet even here the small can loom **large**: think of the *shalom* of parting lovers, or the goodbye at a beloved’s deathbed—a blessing of tranquility offered to (or by) s/he who is departing from the world. (Sometimes of course, this *shalom* is implicit rather than spoken: a breathy kiss or a hand-squeeze, or a pregnant silence.) Who among us has not uttered *shalom* in ways both mundane and fateful over the past year: said hellos to friends old and new, started off the day with an affirmation to a housemate or sent *da"sh* (*drishat shalom*: seeking good for the other) in parting? Who has not said a fateful goodbye to a friend who is moving away or has crossed over, bidden a “final” farewell to a parent, a partner, a beloved teacher, a pet, and the list goes on...Our biographies are composed of such small-yet-decisive moments, day after day after day. In spiritual practice, it is important to pay attention to these small-yet-large movements... *ha-mu'at ha-mahaziq et ha-merubbeh*.

Sometimes the addition of a second word nudges the simple greeting into a more resonant (or specific) sphere of meaning: *shalom u-v'rakha* (peace and blessing); or *shabbat shalom*, which I translate as: May the blessing of Shabbat-love come to you in waves, may you know deep rest and connection, moments of conviviality and playfulness, love-making; may you, nay-may-we-all be-lifted-up so that our *neshamot* can unfold in safe space, so we can live from our largest selves. Oh yes, and may we sing and laugh together, eat amazing food, even though it be gluten-free, and may we merit to breathe more deeply together and in the presence of the divine. May we, who are always seeking *More*, merit to live from *Enoughness*—to come Home. And by the way, would it kill you to pass the cholent already?...Yes, something like that :-)

Shalom is both a verbal and an embodied greeting, a turning towards the Other in love, and if not in love than at least in civility and caring: signaling that I wish you (the Other) only well, not harm. One of my favorite ritual gestures is the *Mizrahi* (Middle Eastern Jewish) custom of turning to one’s fellow congregants during the recitation of the *hatzi qaddish*, and bowing/gesturing with welcoming hands *yehei shelama rabba*, may a great peace come to you and to all who are present. (*Shalom* here takes on a communal dimension, indicating that things are sufficiently whole in the body politic, that everyone in the qahal—congregation—can proceed with her individual prayers.)

While often translated as peace or well-being, the word *shalom* etymologically connotes “wholeness,” *shelemut*. This can be a simple whole, but perhaps more intriguingly, a complex whole, as well. To give an example from the innovative mystic, Avraham Isaac Kook, 1865-1935. Commenting on the mishnaic phrase *rav shalom*, “great is peace,” Kook notes that the word for “great” used here (*rav*) provides a shade of meaning not found in its synonym, *gadol*. For *rav* is related to the word **riv, argument or clash of opinion**. A *great* peace, he notes, is not one where unanimity reigns, or where there is *tekhunah ahat*, a single color or hue, but rather where a profusion of flowers bloom, a rainbow of interpretations unfold, including some which seem to clash with and contradict others. A *rav* (*master teacher!*), Kook adds (extending the Hebrew word-play), is one who can find ways to include and integrate the diversity, to find a place for each offering, and to bring them to a dynamic whole. A “*rav*” *stretches to accommodate many truths, holding them in a single capacious vessel*. (Words that resonate deeply, and challenge me, in these trying times of war and enmity...but also, possibility.)

Rav shalom necessarily raises the question of practical ethics/*musar*: bidding us to stretch in new, unforeseen ways, to become more adequate vessels (and pursuers) of Shalom, *rodfei shalom*. Is the wholeness of peace *simple, i.e., unbroken*, or is it, on the contrary, complex and **dialectical**: the result of previous break-throughs, reversals and shatterings and attempted restorations? This latter notion is found in some hasidic teachings on Peace and *tsubrokhneit* (*brokenness*): wherein it is shatteredness that *davqa* (precisely!) paves the way for a deeper, post-naïve, wholeness. Thus the teaching of Nahman of Breslov: “there is nothing so whole (*shalem*) as the broken heart.” To which I add: the heart broken **open**.

I frequently wonder: to what extent does *shalom* imply steadfastness, and to what extent, does it necessitate compromise, a giving up of the dream for “the whole shebang.” In this dialectical *sh’lemut*, to be whole means to harbor shatteredness, to be less than (more than?) **simply** whole. (As Leonard Cohen famously put it, “forget your perfect offering...there’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”) Think here of the Arabic cognate, *islam*, to surrender, implying an acceptance before What Is. Think too of the Hebrew verb, *le-shalem*, to pay off a debt, or the Hebrew expression for reconciliation: *lih’yot shalem im X*: to be at peace/whole with someone or something, implying a degree of “letting go” or forgiveness. And consider the classic Jewish term for domestic well-being, *shelom bayit*, which necessitates both a surging forth of one’s own voice and values, **and** moments of graceful retreat, of *tzimtzum*, wherein one honors and “gives space” to the Other, who perforce sees and inhabits the world *differently*. (A favorite story regarding *shelom bayit* comes from my friend and colleague Rabbi Shawn Zevit. In his extended family, each grandparent had a favorite melody for a particular Shabbes table-hymn, without which Shabbat would be less than full Shabbat. And yet to sing the same *zemer* four times (each time with another melody) seemed excessive, a *tirkha*...To preserve *shelom bayit*, it was determined that each of the four stanzas in the song would be sung to a different one of the four beloved tunes....)

So much for compromise! At its most expansive, to wish another well, to offer *shalom*, becomes an expression of unconditional love, of letting/helping the other flourish alongside me/us. (It is at

the heart of our blessing path. Think of the *shalom* that we parents wish for our children in *birkat yeladim*, a.k.a. *birkat kohanim*, the priestly blessing of love: With our hands placed on our children's *keppelekh/heads*, feeling the rise and fall of our joint breathing, we chant: "May God lift God's Presence/Face toward you and grant you *shalom*:" an embodied wish for balance, harmony, calm wellbeing, for being seen, for protection, and for being received by God in abiding love: May you, beloved child, be blessed with *shalom*.

Turning back to our question regarding shalom and compromise (of taking less than one *could* take)¹, I would like to call your attention to a scribal oddity found in the Torah scroll, and my riff on it. In a striking Biblical passage (Numbers 25:12), God turns towards the fiery Pinḥas, who has just turned two illicit fornicators into shishkabob, and grants our zealous leader *b'riti shalom* ("My covenant of peace"). (See there for details.) Interestingly, the letter *vav* in the word *shalom* םלש, is often written with a crack in it: *vav qetu'ah*. While the scribal origins of this crack are grammatical, commentators have often given it a deeper interpretive spin. I remember discovering this cracked *vav* in the summer of 2000, when the Oslo accords were starting to unravel. I thought of the way that not only Pinḥas, but also Israeli and Palestinian warriors-turned-statesmen were struggling to break the spear-sword (*the broken vav*) and turn it into instruments of peace, as in the vision of Isaiah and Micah: "beating swords into ploughshares", or in the yet-more-far-reaching twist of Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai (d. 2000), not stopping there but continuing to beat the ploughshares into musical instruments, so that when one wanted to make war, s/he would first have to turn the musical instrument back into a farming tool! Ah, Amichai, how we miss you! At any event, I began to muse: did the wholeness of *shalom*, at least here, require the presence of some brokenness, turning the one spear-like *vav* into two smaller seedlike *yods*, in Hebrew, the most compact abbreviation for God's Name.

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I still wonder about this radical reading of mosaic law, lower case *m*: two seeds of peace emerging from the crack in the *vav*: *where the light gets in, or if you prefer, where Shalom/shelemut —blessed imperfection—breaks through.*

These musings are being written post-Tisha B'av, early August 2014, during a 72 hour cease fire between Hamas and Israel, when our thoughts about peace, large and small, loom large...and its pursuit often seems illusory, if not dangerous. We ask: not only is "peace" possible in our lifetime, but what kinds/flavors of peace might be (and are they hot or cold)? Are we even asking the right questions? What small steps might we take to help grow peace at home and abroad? And moving to the micro-level: what does it mean to wish the other *well*, to admit them cognitively and spiritually into our family? (And how do we stay the course, even if they do not reciprocate?) How much shattering can a People/two Peoples take and still trust? In our day-to-day interactions and prayers, if not on the level of realpolitik, how might we move towards *lih'yot shalem im X* (holding a posture of forgiveness and reconciliation)? And equally important: how do we maintain some equilibrium when we are surrounded by what the Izhbitzer Rebbe called םמי זע, in Hebrew meaning both *days of rage* and *a sea of circumambient anger*?

1. in Hebrew, *la'avor al midotav*.

How do we avoid being implicated in (and taken over by) the contagious toxicity? And how do we insure that our own anger doesn't leak out clumsily, when the rage does rise in us? And when we do "blow it" and lose our settled minds (*yishuv ha-da'at*), how do we regain our footing, find *hishtavvut*, an equanimous path? (These very questions are explored in several key Torah teachings on The Ark of Calm/Practicing Shalom....at least one of which, by the aforementioned Izhbitzer Rebbe, I hope to explore with the community over the next few months.)

But have I gone all wussy here—given short-shrift to the salutary role of clarifying anger, to justice-seeking wrath and its role in helping overcome stasis/depression and helping to articulate that which needs to be said or done? These are complicated matters, and I don't have an easy answer. Still, I am ineluctably drawn back to a teaching of Arthur Waskow, a prophetic figure in our midst who seeks to balance his moments of anger over injustice with a deeper, rebalancing calm... Asking why the Holy One chose Noah (lit., the "restful one") to restore the world, to lead it beyond hatred, Waskow replies: **perhaps only a restful one can make peace.**

And I add, pondering the deep gift of *menuḥah/Rest* that our tradition celebrates: what clues about practicing *shalom* emerge from our weekly practice of Shabbat? (Breathe in: Shabbat...Breathe out/back into the world: Shalom)

In closing, *mayseh she-hoyo*. Let me share the story of another friend and former Ann Arborite (Rabbi Nathan Martin) who once greeted one of his teachers in the bathroom of the Hebrew University library, "Shalom Professor X!" The instructor nodded silently. Only when the two had left the bathroom did the professor respond in kind, "*shalom*," adding: "I didn't mean to ignore your greeting. It's just that *shalom* is one of the great Names of God, and I don't utter it casually in a place of seeming uncleanness." While I am not sure that my theology of the bathroom coheres with that of Tradition, I understand the *power* of the professor's stance. What is the great name of God if not (also) *Shalom*—simultaneously (1) a Naming towards the divine Source, held to be the very source of Peace and Well-Being; (2) a greeting or way to recognize each other as a Face of God (both seeing and being seen); (3) a phrase that contains the ebb and flow of the life-force (its coming and its going, its hello and goodbye, inbreath and outbreath); To repeat, Shalom can mean a simple **wholeness**; but so too, a wholeness that emerges out of brokenness, out of paradox. In this second schema, **peace is the vessel that holds and integrates the dynamism and roiling diversity of life**, makes it a uni-verse. And there is our praying towards Shalom, a prayer that our highest hopes and root-urges won't mean the destruction of another's dreams, or of the earth; knowing that we can build not only fences but bridges, making space for the other (without and within).

So, shalom: large and small, goal of our largest yearning and that at which we practice at daily. And so, given all this, it is no surprise that the concluding teaching in the mishnah invokes the radical gift of Shalom (as the most perfect vessel to hold blessing and the flow of nurture): אמר רבי שמעון בן חלפתא, לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום. Said Rabbi Shimon ben Halafta, the Holy One could not find a more perfect vessel to hold blessing (Israel's blessing) than peace..."

By way of prayer:

Yehi shalom be-heilekh, shalvah be-armenotayikh:

May peace come to our outermost ramparts, may tranquility come to our innermost palaces.

May peace come to the places where we encounter the external world, and may peace form a sanctuary within.

May peace come to those places where we project power, and may those who exercise power (in their palaces) be able to take a deep breath before sallying forth.

(Psalm 122:7)

And from the Qaddish:

Yehei shelamah rabbah min shemayya ve-hayyim aleinu ve-al kol yisrael [some add:] ve-al kol yishma'el) ve-al kol yoshvei tevel...

May a great and unlikely peace come from our highest regions, and from the divine source; may it and its gift of Life, come to us, in ways small and large, to the entire people Israel (to all those who wrestle with God)...to all Ishmael (all those who strain to hear God), and to all denizens of this earth-plane. **Ve-nomar**, and let us say, and let us find new ways to conceive and body forth...**Shalom: large and small.**

I hope to see you all over the course of this year, 5775: at our Pardes Hannah tefillot/services and in our Torah-Study and Acts of Social Engagement; and I hope to see you healthy and well, out and about. Much love to you and yours...

לשנה טובה תכתבו

(Rabbi/Reb/Hair Doctor-Professor) Elliot Ginsburg

SOME TAKHLIS QUESTIONS/THEMES TO PONDER, PEACE: LARGE AND SMALL...

(1) Saying Goodbye and Hello: leaving a job, entering a new one; leaving one life-stage/relationship and entering another; leaving one location and entering a new one. What have we lost and gained in the transition? What is it like to dwell in liminal space, betwixt and between, having left one place and not yet entered another? What new possibilities have been opened by the leave-taking or the entering? How has this transitional process been like moving between one year and the next/entering the Yamim Nora'im?

(2) The passing/death of a loved one/teacher. Some of us lost a significant other, a partner, a parent, a child, or crossing species-lines, a beloved animal member of one's family (formerly known as one's "pet," pooch, kitty, ferret...). You may wish to reflect on the process of passing, of what it was like being with another at the moment of passing; of preparing for death; or the shock of a sudden passing. You might reflect on the ebb and flow of grieving; of celebrating a a life; of being so sad and so proud at the same time. We who have witnessed "good deaths"; what typifies them? How might we begin preparing for our death right now?

What gifts have we received from those who have passed? And which gifts do we not want to accept or take on?

Speaking on a personal note: Many of us have been grieving the recent loss of our beloved teacher, Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. We have been asking: what is his legacy? How

has he changed our lives, our ways of viewing and practicing Judaism, of embracing a deeply rooted yet global spirituality? (How would the world/our Judaism be different had Reb Zalman not been here: if not for Zalman Schachter-Shalomi....) And: What have we been called/deployed to do, now that he has passed? How do we step up? And how do we as a community nurture each other at this time of loss and transition?

(3) *Yom Yom*: daily practices of *shalom*, such as greeting another in the morning, and saying good night: how do we wish to begin our days, and end each evening? What is the role of prayer and spiritual practice at these daily pivot-points? Reb Zalman used to teach: “Gratitude upon waking, and forgiveness upon going to bed” (this rhythm is captured in the morning *Modeh Ani* and the Bedtime *Shema* prayers). Perhaps you have a story about the power of greeting another, of noticing another or being noticed... Or about the practice of letting go of excess hurt, or of “not going to bed angry.”

(4) Shatteredness and Wholeness/*Shelemut*: How have seeming curses turned into blessings in our lives? What do we learn from moments when the door to our heart is kicked in? Can we ever deepen without encountering suffering and loss, without “bad experiences”? In the words of C.G. Jung, “the only way out is through.” In kabbalistic parlance, *yeridah tzorekh aliyah*, sometimes “the descent is for the sake of ascent.” What does it mean that in the Desert, the Holy Ark, where the Shekhinah rested, contained both the whole tablets and the shattered ones. (Talmud Bavli *berachot*) Does wholeness/holiness require both? And: What is opened through the conscious peeling off the hard layers around our heart?

(5) Practicing Peace/Equanimity (esp. when surrounded by rage): how does one maintain some semblance of balance and largesse when confronted by an outbreak of hatred, anger, hurt? How do we work with our own hurt/disappointment/upheavals? What are the challenges, what are the skillful practices? How might we recalibrate and return to *yishuv ha-da’at*/settled Mind? How might we become an Ark of Calm...? And how might the Days of Awe afford an opportunity (or safe-space) to move from anger to acceptance, from judgement to curiosity, from rigidity to greater elasticity, from self-loathing to forgiveness? (Hint: it’s not easy!!)

(6) Being whole (*shalem*) with oneself. Self-acceptance. Being *shalem* with another: the power of turning and reconciliation. How to make peace with one’s erstwhile fr/enemy? How to forgive another, give up hope of having a better past?

(7) Shabbat and Shalom: Sabbath as a laboratory for living from one’s largest self, for practicing peace and deep Rest, for living in harmony with the natural world (of which we are, of course, a part.) What are the Sabbath practices that promote deeper, more restful, more joyful living?

(8) *Shemittah*: this year is the 7th sabbatical year in our agricultural cycles, a time (traditionally) of letting the land lie fallow (Sabbath for the Land), and of cancelling debts, of promoting more just distribution of wealth/resources. What might that ancient practice

mean in our society, our lives. What are both the challenges and gifts in the current way that shemittah is observed in Israel... (This, of course, was the subject of a community-wide study last year, a theme that is continuing into the coming year...)

(9) the Big Peace. How do we keep hope alive amidst the turmoil of recurring cycles of war; how do we find new ways to keep deep care/empathy (even love) alive in times that try our very souls?

and finally (10) Fill in the Blank: the canvas of possibility.

שלמות ושלום: What is Shelemut/Wholeness...See Luhot ve-Shivrei Luhot (Shattered and Whole Tablets); see the broken Vav-Spear of Pinhas...and the following poems by Mary Oliver and Leonard (ha)Cohen

The Ponds

Every year
the lilies
are so perfect
I can hardly believe
their lapped light crowding
the black,
mid-summer ponds.
Nobody could count all of them --

the muskrats swimming
among the pads and the grasses
can reach out
their muscular arms and touch

only so many, they are that
rife and wild.
But what in this world
is perfect?

I bend closer and see
how this one is clearly lopsided --
and that one wears an orange blight --
and this one is a glossy cheek

half nibbled away --
and that one is a slumped purse
full of its own
unstoppable decay.

Still, what I want in my life
is to be willing
to be dazzled --
to cast aside the weight of facts

and maybe even
to float a little
above this difficult world.
I want to believe I am looking

into the white fire of a great mystery.
I want to believe that the
imperfections are nothing --
that the light is everything -- that it is
more than the sum
of each flawed blossom rising and
fading. And I do.

~ Mary Oliver ~

And an offering from Leonard Cohen's
"Anthem":

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.