

Dear Chavraya,

(Fifth Anniversary of the Iraq War)

Like a ray of sunlight peeking around the edge of a cloud, or a lone flower in an urban landscape, meaning often appears with subtlety, in Torah as in life. To live with eyes and hearts open is to be ever-present to the possibility of unexpected meaning. This week's Torah portion, *Parashat Tzav*, challenges us to look for that glint of light, for that delicate flower so easily missed. The *parasha* is primarily a dry delineation of the offerings overseen by the *kohanim*.

Even as the rabbis searched for meaning, so encouraging us to search, probing the opaque surface of *Tzav*, they offered *midrash* as the fruit of their seeking. The word *midrash* comes from the verb *lidrosh*, to search, to seek. What teaching is to be found in such a list of offerings, and what message beyond the time of their own context? The rabbis paused, and musing upon the details they taught that in the future to come, time of *Mashiach*, of swords turned into plowshares, then only the *Todah/Thank* offerings would remain, and the corresponding prayers of thanksgiving. There would be no need for such as sin offerings, because there would be no sin, and no sinners.

In the Torah's presentation of offerings, juxtaposed in purpose one to another, the rabbis saw hinted a future without strife. Not enough to offer a vision, they also taught a way to its fulfillment. The *Todah/Thank* offerings are a sub-category of the *Sh'lamim/Peace* offerings. The rabbis saw an opportunity to teach the greatness of peace. If gratitude would describe our essential relationship with God and each other in the time to come, so peace itself would be the way. In the words of pacifist A.J. Muste, "There is no way to peace, peace is the way."

Flowing from this deceptively dry *parasha*, the rabbis find inspiration to offer a lengthy series of teachings about peace. Found in *Midrash Rabbah*, each teaching begins with the words *gadol shalom/great is peace....*

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said, "great is peace, for all blessings are contained within it...." Chiskiya said, "Great is peace, for it is written concerning all mitzvot, if you see, if you encounter, if it happens; that is, if the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah comes to you, you need to do it, and if not, you don't need to do it. But in regard to peace, it is written (Psalm 34:15), *Bakesh shalom v'rodfehu/seek peace and pursue it* – meaning, seek it in your own place, and pursue it in another. Great is Peace, for peace is the culmination of all things in this world, but how do I know that this is so in the world to come? – It is said (Isaiah 66:12), *Hi'n'ni noteh eleha k'nehar shalom/Behold, I will extend to her as a river of peace....*

In the search for meaning, amidst cloud and stone, in Torah and in life, it can only be found if we are open to its possibility. So the search for peace, only to be realized if we are open to its possibility, if we actively pursue it, teaching it to our children and living it now simultaneously as the vision and the way.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor