

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

World Peace Is in Our Hands



While attending high school, I was not overly concerned about world events, except for the Vietnam War. My fellow students and I worried about being drafted into the military and fighting in a faraway war we didn't understand.

I didn't participate in anti-war protests, but I did create an art project that expressed my feelings and hopes for peace. I carved a sign out of

wood that depicted the transformation of war into peace by removing the letter "a" from the word "war" and placing it in the middle of the word "peace."

Transformation is also a theme in this week's Torah portion, *Terumah* (Exodus 25:1- 27:19), which describes the building of a central place of worship known as the Tabernacle [מִשְׁכַּן—*mishkan*] that accompanied the Jewish people in the desert for 40 years. With its colored curtains, wooden beams, and sacred vessels, this portable Tabernacle stood for an additional 440 years in several locations in Israel until King Solomon built a permanent Temple in Jerusalem.

The service of the Tabernacle elevated its material components.

Our sages teach that the service of the Tabernacle elevated its material components and revealed their intrinsic holiness. This transformation explains why the Tabernacle, similar to other sacred objects such as Torah scrolls, was not discarded.

This act of respecting holy objects is recorded in 2 Chronicles 5:1, which states that King Solomon stored the Tabernacle and its vessels in special treasuries. Our sages (Talmud Sotah 9a) explain that these treasuries were underground tunnels beneath the Temple. Fascinatingly, recent archeological discoveries prove that these tunnels exist.

The transformation and elevation of the material world into spirituality is not limited to the Tabernacle and the Temple. Based on the passage, "*Make Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell in them*" (Exodus 25:8), our sages explain that the use of the plural "them" rather than the singular "it" alludes to the ability and responsibility of all individuals to transform themselves and their surroundings into a holy place where God's Presence can be experienced.

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While in college, besides attending classes and my continued concern about the Vietnam War, I explored my Jewish heritage. As I progressed in my learning, I discovered deep spiritual wisdom in Judaism. For example, one of the teachings I learned reminded me of the wood carving I had made in high school.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people have experienced almost 2,000 years of exile. In Hebrew, “exile” is the word [גולה–*golah*]. However, this word also hints at the path to redemption. By inserting the letter [א–*alef*] this word is transformed into the word [גאולה–*geulah*], which means redemption.

Since the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is an [א–*alef*], its numerical value is one. Therefore, the letter [א–*alef*] refers to the One God Who is the “Master [אלוף–*Aluf*] of the World.” By filling the exile with the knowledge of the one God, we help bring the Redemption and ultimately world peace.

As I contemplated the transposition of Hebrew letters, my high school artwork seemed like a premonition. However, now I had discovered the more profound Jewish secret of transforming a world of chaos and war into a world of harmony and peace.

We will know the Final Redemption has arrived because it will be accompanied by world peace.

By revealing the Oneness of God in the world through the Torah’s teachings and practices, it is in our hands to contribute spiritually toward the ultimate redemption when “*salvation and righteousness with spring up together*” (Isaiah 45:8). Consequently, Judaism believes that the messianic redemption will occur quickly and not, as some missionaries erroneously claim, divided into a first and second coming thousands of years apart.

Furthermore, we will know the Final Redemption has arrived because it will be accompanied by world peace, as the prophet states, “*Nation shall not take up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore*” (Micah 4:3), and “*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of God*” (Isaiah 11:9).

May this Shabbat provide a taste of the peace and spirituality the world will experience when the current exile is transformed into the Final Redemption.

Shabbat Shalom,

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