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T"01

## PARASHAS SHOFTIM

### UPHOLD THE PEACE

**"**I'm not your friend! I don't want to speak to you anymore!"

*Shloimie runs in the house and closes the door. His mother sees that he is very upset.*

"What happened Shloimie dear?"

"I had a disagreement with my ex-friend Fayvel. We had different opinions about something the teacher said. Each one of us stuck to his point of view. Things escalated, and before long, we were both angry. He insulted me. At that point, I decided to end our friendship. That's it. Our friendship is finished."

"But Shloimie dear, what about making shalom?"

"Why should I bother, Imma? It is too difficult. I have to go back to him, explain myself, listen to his point of view, apologize, and then look to compromise or give in. It is hard work to try to understand him and make him understand me. I don't think that it is worth it."

"Shloimie, may I share something with you from this week's parasha which may change your point of view?"

"Yes, Imma."

Rabbeinu Bechaye begins his commentary on Parashas Shoftim by quoting Shlomo HaMelech . 'Its (the Torah's) ways are pleasant, and all its paths are peace' (Mishlei 3:17). The foundation of the Torah – its main message – is shalom. The world was created in shalom – peaceful harmony."

"How, Imma?"

**"S**homayim (the heavens) were created first. They are called 'shomayim' because they are a combination of 'aish' (fire) and 'mayim' (water). Fire and water are two complete opposites! It is impossible for them to exist together. Yet, Hashem made peace between them in order to create shomayim. That is the meaning of the verse 'He makes peace in the upper worlds' (Iyov 25:2)."

"That is fascinating, Imma."

Rabbeinu Bechaye elaborates by giving many examples of shalom in Hashem's world. He concludes by saying that the world still rests upon shalom, as the Mishna (Pirkei Avos 1:18) relates, 'The world continues to stand because of three things – *din* (judgment), *emmes* (truth), and *shalom*, as the verse states, "Truth and justice, peace shall rule in your gates" (Zechariah 8:16)."

"How does judgment relate to peace, Imma?"

*Shoftim* (judges) who teach the Torah, and *poskin* (make legal rulings) with the clarity of pure Torah wisdom, uphold peace in the world. How? The Torah's ways are shalom. Therefore, if everyone knows the Torah, follows it, and allows its laws to settle their differences, the world will be at peace. It must be so; because that is the way that Hashem cre-

ated the world, and upholds its existence. Shloimie, if you make shalom with Fayvel, you uphold the world. If you do not, heaven forbid, you undermine the world's existence."

"Wow. I never realized how important shalom is, Imma."

Rabbeinu Bechaye adds that *shoftim* (judges) and *shotrim* (enforcement officers) were appointed to carry out the Torah. The *shoftim* were wise men who taught Torah and made *halachic* decisions. People could ask them any question and receive the correct answer. That is the first step to shalom, knowing what to do. The second step is insuring that the teachings and rulings of the *shoftim* were carried out. That was the job of the *shotrim*. The two together upheld the peace in Klal Yisrael, and kept the world going."

"Thank you Imma. I am going straight to my friend Fayvel, and making shalom with him."

"May Hashem give you great success!"



#### Kinderlach . . .

*How do we make shalom? By living according to the emmes of Torah. We are very fortunate to have wise men – great teachers of Torah – who will teach us the laws *bein odom li'Makom* (between man and Hashem) and *bein odom li'chaveyro* (between man and his friend). We must learn from them and follow their teachings. When questions arise, we must clarify them. When we encounter differences of opinion with our fellow men, we must go to these wise men who will resolve the conflict according to the emmes of Torah law. Then we must carry out what they say. Do not wait for the *shotrim* to force you to do the right thing. Do it on your own! Uphold the Torah! Make shalom! Uphold the world!*

### GUARD THE GATES

**T**he security situation was serious. Guards were everywhere. In the schools and stores, at the bus stops, banks, and simcha halls. They even set up roadblocks

and stopped cars. They were checking everyone and everything that wanted to enter. Metal detectors, frisking, checking ID cards - no security measure was spared.

**Y**ou might think that the population was up in arms over this massive inconvenience. Not true. No one seemed to mind. They knew how serious the danger was. They knew that the destructive forces had to be stopped. At all costs.

**"**Judges and guards shall you appoint in all your gates" (Devarim 16:18). The Arizal is puzzled. Why does the verse write the word "you" in the singular tense, and not the plural? These judges and guards were, after all, charged with serving all of Klal Yisrael, and not any one individual. He answers this question with a beautiful drasha from Rav Chaim Vital. Each and every Jew has several "gates" that need to be guarded. The gates of vision: the eyes. The gates of sound: the ears. The gate of speech: the mouth. The gate of fragrance: the nose. The gates of touch: the hands and feet. A person must place judges and guards at each of these gates. He has to check and evaluate each sensation that wants to enter his body and soul. The dangerous forces must be kept out. He guards his eyes from seeing impurity. His ears need protection from hearing *loshon hora*, *apikorsus* (heresy), destructive music, and mockery. His mouth cannot be allowed to speak *rechilus*, and derogatory words. His nose and hands should not smell or touch anything that will contaminate his pure thoughts. His feet should not take him to the wrong places, where the wrong kinds of people congregate. In short, a person must be his own judge and security guard on his own gates. The judge is charged with thoroughly checking everything that wants to enter, and the guard must shut the door on the bad influences. We don't mind the inconvenience. We know how serious the situation is.

#### Kinderlach . . .

*Our senses are the gates to our souls. Guard them! You would not think of swallowing a piece of dirt or garbage. It would pollute your mouth, stomach, and your whole body. Spiritual dirt contaminates your soul. There are many destructive forces out there. The big screen, the little screen, the wrong reading material, and the bad company, to name a few. They can ruin you if you let them. Be a good judge and watchman. Guard the gates.*

#### Parasha Questions:

- What gifts do the Kohanim receive? (18:3,4)
- What limits does the Torah place on a king? (17:16,17 and Rashi)
- What punishment do *Edim Zommim* receive? (19:19)
- Who is exempt from going to war? (20:5-7)