

Shal:m

Rabbi Basil Herring.

If one looks carefully at the klaf of the Torah, one finds is an unusual variation in the text of the Torah in the letter vav of the word shalom. It is a vav ketia, a bridged vav, i.e., instead of the usual single line of a vav, it is divided in two, with a thin hairline connecting the top and the bottom of the letter. It is as if there are two vavs, one on top of the other. What, we may ask, is the significance of this strange configuration of the vav in the word shalom?

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and on the oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it, were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British fleet, would carry on the struggle, until in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Those historic words, spoken in the British House of Commons on June 4th 1940 by Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England, in perhaps the darkest hour of the war against Hitler, bear particular significance and irony today. For they bespeak an absolute determination to fight evil to the death without a scintilla of compromise, even as, paradoxically, they embody an unwavering faith in ultimate peace at the end of a long, hard, and perilous road. And of course, they personify the cross-Atlantic alliance between England and America that through total determination and self-sacrifice defeated the forces of tyranny, and brought about a generation of relative peace.

How striking the contrast, therefore, to the pathetic pronouncements that have emanated these days past from England's current Prime Minister in response to the shameless aggression and war crimes of the Serbs of Bosnia. And how pitiful the vacillation of our own President, who sullies the honor of this country by spinelessly standing by in the face of the aggression of those who have inherited the mantle of war criminals, a little more than a half-century after the defeat of Berlin. Can you imagine how a Clinton in the White House in 1940 would have reacted to Churchill's appeal to the new world to rescue and liberate the old? The Europeans would have gotten sympathy, but little else. In today's world, sadly, with all the military power available to the Western powers and one so-called Super Power, small countries and minority groups themselves had better be warned: you better be prepared to take care of yourselves, for you can rely on no one to come to your aid in the crunch. And while some might say that the Bosnian Serbs are in no way a threat comparable to that of Hitler in 1940, none can deny that it is a test case, an instructive litmus test indicating the current state of mind of the West when it comes to thwarting aggression of any kind. If they cannot get their act together and stand up to the Serbian Chetnicks, who can they stand up to?

But it is not just the politicians who are guilty. It is the intellectuals of our day too. How else explain the astonishing British revisionism of recent years that accuses Churchill of destroying

the British empire because he refused to negotiate a settlement with Hitler in 1940, as Neville Chamberlain attempted to do in 1939. How sad that the new hero of many historians is not Churchill, but the very Chamberlain who, deluded by the hope of "peace in our time," avoided confrontation with Germany and clung to the seductive mirage of peaceful coexistence with Hitler, until it was too late. And we do well to recall that even then, back in the thirties, Churchill's dire prognosis of German intentions was a lonely voice. Many, including King George VI and his court, were enthusiastically pro-Chamberlain, and hostile to Churchill, throughout the thirties, and at least until the beginning of the war. How easy it is to forget, in hindsight, that in the late 1930's many argued that the Germans were after all a cultured European nation, that many of them were decent fathers and mothers, who had legitimate gripes against the Treaty of Versailles signed only 20 years earlier. Much of western enlightened opinion felt that with just a few adjustments of international borders, and relatively minor concessions to Herr Hitler, peace with Germany was within grasp. Only time, of course, proved how wrong they were.

But much as we should be concerned over the isolation and ongoing tragedy of the Bosnians, my primary focus today, is not for the Moslems of Southern Europe, but rather for the Jews of Israel. For there is reason to fear that the self-same longing for peace, that is so much the basis of the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians, and all that has transpired in the last several years since then, may have lost the Churchillian perspective. Well can we understand the absolute fatigue of so many Israeli's, at the prospect of endless wars. And we can surely appreciate the longing to be at peace with its neighbors, to be able to travel across borders without having to fly across oceans, and to take a inner-city bus without having to check first under the seat for a terrorist's parcel bomb. No wonder so many Israeli's at first embraced the accords with enthusiasm and joy. Who, after all, could be against peace with the Arabs? But that was a long time ago, and in the interim, much has changed. Israel has made compromise after compromise, allowance after allowance, overlooking promises vitiated and trusts betrayed. And all of it has led to critical events scheduled for the coming week or weeks, i.e., an agreement with the Palestinians whereby the Israeli army will withdraw from large sections of Judea, leaving large Arab populations under the control of Palestinian police, and the outline of an agreement with Syria, whereby Israel will withdraw from most of the Golan, leaving behind American and international forces to keep the peace.

But if ever there was a time to pause and consider the implications of such accords, surely it is now! In light of the events unfolding in Bosnia, given the pathetic performance of the UN, and the inability of the powers of the West to agree on effective action against naked aggression, why should Israel make such unilateral concessions that would merely reward the intransigence of Arafat and Assad? Why for instance, if Syria has no belligerent intentions, does she now insist that Israel cannot, even after withdrawal from the entire Golan, maintain or participate in an early warning system to monitor Syrian compliance with the peace agreement? Do not such Arab demands make a mockery of the claim that they are serious about peace, that just a few more Israeli concessions here and there, will serve to nail down the peace once and for all? Where is the latter-day Churchill possessed of the clarity of vision, and the determination of purpose, to tell the Jews of Israel and the world: do not deceive yourselves; you will not be defended or saved by anyone: not by American soldiers on the Golan Heights in the face of Syrian aggression; and certainly not United Nations peace-keepers from Holland or the Ukraine

pursuing terrorists into Nablus or Kalkilya on the West Bank. As proven in Bosnia, such scenarios are wishful thinking at best. Bill Clinton, candidate for re-election, surely knows that more Americans today than ever have no stomach or tolerance for the specter of body bags unloaded at Andrews Air Force Base. Hence his waffling and indecision on Bosnia. Hence his likely response to aggression in the Middle East. Where are the spirits of Churchill and FDR, now that we really need them, not just in England and not only in America, but in Israel itself? As the midrash says of our patriarchs, *haval al de'avdin ve'lo mishtakhin!* How we miss those who are gone, but not forgotten!

Which brings me in turn, to Pinchas, and a remarkable insight of Rav Shlomo Breuer, a leader of early 20th century German Jewry, and the great grandfather of the Schwalbe and Merkin families. Pinchas it was who killed the Israelite prince of the tribe of Simon for brazenly, and idolatrously, consorting with a Midianite princess. As a consequence, God declares *hineni noten lo et briti shalom*, "I grant him My covenant of peace." Now if one looks carefully at the klaf of the Torah, one finds is an unusual variation in the text of the Torah in the letter vav of the word shalom. It is a vav ketia, a bridged vav, i.e., instead of the usual single line of a vav, it is divided in two, with a thin hairline connecting the top and the bottom of the letter. It is as if there are two vavs, one on top of the other. What, we may ask, is the significance of this strange configuration of the vav in the word shalom? The answer, says Rab Breuer is that in pursuing the cause of peace, shalom, there are two vavs. Sometimes to achieve peace you need to use one, at other time, you need to use the other. What exactly are these two vavim?

When God, on the second day of Creation split the waters, into those above the firmament and those below, the Torah omits the words "and God saw that it was good." The reason, says the midrash, is that this was the first time in history that there was division, or *mahloket*. Until that moment there was only unity, no dissent or opposition. Hence, God cannot see that it is good. But yet, when God divides light from darkness, the Torah does in fact say that God saw that it was good. But how can such *mahloket* be good in this case? The answer is found in a verse in Zechariah 8:19: *emet ve'shalom aheivu*, "truth and peace you shall love." Certainly we are to love peace. But, as in the verse, we must love truth first and foremost. As put by Rabbi Yissachar Frand of Baltimore, this teaches us that as much as we emphasize the importance of conciliation and peace, in the final analysis if that is going to compromise the truth, causing one to throw out one's principles and values, contradicting that which we know to be the truth, and that for which we stand, then we should not pursue such a peace. Unity against the truth is a lie. Peace yes, but truth first. Never peace at all costs. Thus at Creation, separating between one water and another symbolizes division for the sake of division, therefore God sees no good in that. But separating light from darkness, symbolizes the ability to discern good from evil, right from wrong, truth from lies, principle from convenience, and therefore that is a division which is indeed good, even if it causes *ma loket*, compromises shalom, or brings about disunity, anger, resentment, and internal opposition. That is why there are two vavim in the shalom of Pinchas: he for one was not misled by a mistaken notion of peace and equanimity at all costs. At the critical moment he understood that to bring true, lasting peace—it was necessary to act with righteous indignation, use violent action, even if it meant temporary division, dissent, resentment, opposition to the majority will, and the absence of peace.

We live in perilous times, an era that requires courage and wisdom aplenty. Most especially in

these fateful days for Jew, Moslem, and Christian alike, we would do well to learn the lessons of our Torah, most especially in the context of the likes of Pinchas, in his confrontation with evil, and the reward of peace granted him by God. It is a lesson that we, the people of Israel, in our synagogues, and in our communities, in our lands of dispersion and in our beloved homeland Israel, ignore at our peril.