

The Secret to World Peace

Rabbi Shimon Zenwirth

"When a man or woman sins [to steal and swear falsely]...a man whose wife is unfaithful...a man or woman who vows to become a nazir." (Bamidbar 5:6, 5:12, 6:1)

The Ralbag explains the mysterious juxtaposition and sequence of the above three segments in this week's parsha. The ultimate goal of mankind, the Ralbag teaches, is a peaceful society, where people dwell together in security and tranquility. This is the subject of the first portion above, dealing with one who steals and swears falsely--a problem of society as a whole. This goal of a peaceful society can only be achieved, the Ralbag continues, if there is peace in the building blocks of society: the home and family. This is referred to in the second portion quoted above, dealing with an unfaithful wife--a sotah. Without peace in the home, man cannot be at peace with his neighbor. Yet even this objective of domestic harmony depends on a more basic type of peace: man being at peace with himself. This is alluded to by the third and final portion above, that of a nazir, who vows to abstain from the pleasures of wine and intoxicating beverages. One who does not restrain himself from indulging in sensory pleasures is not at peace with himself; therefore he cannot live in tranquility with his spouse and ultimately cannot dwell peacefully in society with his neighbors.

The Ralbag's penetrating analysis of the keys to a harmonious community is certainly useful in our attempts to reach this ideal state of living. However, the final step in his sequence seems puzzling. He claims that one who indulges in his physical desires is not "at peace with himself." Shouldn't a person who satisfies his body's cravings be more tranquil than one who leaves his physical yearnings unfulfilled? Why does the Ralbag characterize a self-indulgent person as one who is "in conflict" with himself?

Man was not created to be a purely physical creature. He is a miraculous blend, an intertwining of spiritual and physical, soul and body, Divine and mundane. Just as the soul cannot be at peace if the body is deprived of its essential nourishment, so too the body cannot be truly tranquil if the soul is spiritually starving. If man neglects his Divine purpose and focuses only on satiating the body's desires, he is torn with internal strife, a ceaseless tension and inner turmoil fueled by the soul's cry for spirituality, for true fulfillment and eternity. The "pleasure-seeker," so glorified in the hedonistic world around us, is, in reality, a walking battleground, body and soul locked in endless combat. To the public, he smiles and enjoys "the good life." But deep inside, a civil war rages--a restlessness gnaws away at him, giving him no peace and leaving a yawning emptiness in his soul. This strife-torn individual is incapable of living peacefully with his spouse, and cannot be a harmonious member of society.

Any intelligent and conscientious person is constantly trying to foster more peace, both within his home and in the world at large. A good place to begin is right inside ourselves, by following the Torah, increasing our spiritual intake and limiting our physical indulgence. The Torah's dictates are not only rules that guide us to perfection and earn us eternal reward in the World to Come—they are the only prescription for true happiness and inner tranquility in this world, prescribed by the Designer and Creator of man.

Shavuos Flowers

Rabbi Avi Weinrib

The upcoming Yom Tov of Shavuos is an anomaly in that it has no particular mitzvah associated with it. However, there are various customs that do pertain specifically to the Yom Tov of Shavuos. These include staying up and learning Torah throughout the night, the consumption of dairy foods, and the placing of flowers throughout our homes and shuls. In this weeks Halacha Encounters we will discuss the topic of decorating with flowers for Shavuos. There are a number of reasons for this custom as well as variations as to how it is done. The Rema¹ mentions a custom of spreading grass as a commemoration of the rejoicing felt at the time that we received the Torah on Har Sinai. The Levush² explains that being that Har Sinai was surrounded by grass, the grass we spread is reminder of Har Sinai. The Medrash³ further mentions a custom of decorating one's home with flowers and roses that have a pleasant fragrance because when Hashem spoke on Har Sinai the world was filled with a pleasing fragrance. The Magen Avraham⁴ mentions an additional custom to erect trees in the home and shul as a reminder that on Shavuos the world is judged regarding the fruits of the trees⁵ so that we should be inspired to daven for a favorable outcome. This custom was strongly criticized by the Vilna Gaon⁶ as it is in violation of *Bichukoseihem Lo Seileichu*— following in the ways of the nations, who erect trees in honor of their holidays. However, the Maharsham⁷ defends this custom as he maintains that the prohibition only applies to a "*chok*" something done without a reason, merely following blindly the ways of

¹ *O.H.* 494-3

² 494-1

³ *Medrash Talpiyos Os Dodoim*

⁴ 494-5

⁵ See *Gemara R.H.*

⁶ see *Chochmos Adam Klal* 89 and *Chaya Adam Klal* 131

⁷ *Daas Torah* 494-3

the nations. However, being that the placing of trees has the above-mentioned reason supporting it, it is not in violation of this prohibition. Furthermore, he states that the custom of the nations was to place the trees both inside and outside the home while our custom is to place trees only inside the home. It seems that the prevailing custom follows the Vilna Gaon.

Moving flowers from place to place

There are a couple of issues that come into play in regard to moving cut flowers from one place to another. The first issue is whether or not there is a problem of muktza on such flowers. The Shulchan Aruch⁸ says clearly that branches of a tree are muktza unless designated for a function on Shabbos. The Mishna Berura rules that branches that were cut to enhance and beautify one's home are not muktza. The fact that they were designed to decorate and beautify one's home is in itself a function and precludes it from being muktza. A second issue relates to moving flowers that have not yet fully opened. As we will see, one of the issues of placing flowers in water on Shabbos or Yom Tov is the fact that doing so causes the flowers to open. Although Zoraya [planting or facilitating growth] is limited to items attached to the ground, nonetheless the Rabbonon forbade placing flowers in water as it can be perceived as facilitating growth. The question arises as to whether moving the flowers and causing the water level to rise would in fact cause them to open sooner and be included in this issur d'robonon. The Poskim rule that one may move even unopened flowers on Shabbos or Yom Tov⁹. There are Poskim who maintain that one should be stringent and move the vase slowly to avoid causing the water level to rise.¹⁰

Placing flowers in water

Once a flower is detached from the ground it is no longer a living plant. Consequently, there can no longer be an issue of planting with detached flowers. However, as mentioned above, the Rabbonon forbid the placing of flowers in water on Shabbos for the following reasons. Regarding flowers that have not yet fully opened, placing them in water would cause them to fully open which can be perceived and is

⁸ O.H. 308-20

⁹ R' Shmuel Fuerst Shli"ta, *Nishamas Shabbos* Volume 3-243

¹⁰ *Sefer Shalmei Yehuda* 3-10 in the name of R' Elyashav Shli"ta

similar to planting.¹¹ Additionally, the Rabbonon forbid the actual filling up or adding of water to a vase for flowers since they felt this involves undue exertion which can detract from the aura of Shabbos and resembles weekday activities.¹² Based on the second reason, one may not fill up a vase even for flowers that are fully opened. There is a dispute among the Poskim whether one may place fully opened flowers into a vase that was filled before Shabbos began. If one forgot to place his flowers in a vase that was filled before Shabbos, he may rely on the lenient opinion and do so on Shabbos.¹³ According to all opinions, one may return fully opened flowers into water where they had been and were subsequently removed.¹⁴ There is a slight difference between Shabbos and Yom Tov in this matter. As mentioned above, one may not even add water to a vase with flowers on Shabbos. On Yom Tov, however, one may add water to a vase containing opened flowers¹⁵. Nevertheless, one may not empty out and refill the vase with fresh water.¹⁶

Smelling Flowers

We are familiar with the concept that one may not take pleasure from this world without first reciting a blessing and thanking G-d for the item. This rule applies to smell as well. However, the Halacha is that one only recites a blessing when the item was placed in that location for the purpose of giving off a scent. If there was a different motive, even though the item may emit a pleasant fragrance no blessing is required. However, if one takes it into their hands to smell it then a blessing is required¹⁷. Flowers generally are placed in the home for their pleasing appearance, rather than for their scent. Hence, unless one took the flower into his hand with the intention of smelling it, no blessing is required. If one did take hold of the flower to smell it, the following blessing would be recited. On leaves or flowers of trees the blessing is Borei Atzvei Bisomim. This would include roses, carnations, jasmine and honeysuckle. On grasses, herbs or flowers that grow from the ground the blessing are Borei Isvei Bisamim.

¹¹ *O.H.* 336-11

¹² *M.B.* 336-53

¹³ *Shar Hatziyon* 336-48

¹⁴ *M.B.* 336-53

¹⁵ *Nishamas Shabbos* 3-242

¹⁶ See *O.H.* 654

¹⁷ Based on *O.H.* 217-1, *M.B.* 1