

May 23, 2008

Shabbat Shalom!

Passages that include the imagery of war are inevitable in the Torah, almost in the same way that there is always, unfortunately, an armed conflict being fought somewhere in the world at any moment. The beginning of this week's portion, Bechukotai, speaks of the blessings that the Israelites would enjoy if they followed the divine commandments. One of those benefits was stated as follows: "I (God) will grant peace in the land, and you need not be afraid...Your army shall give chase to your enemies....Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand, your enemies shall fall before you."

I am always more comfortable understanding these passages in a metaphorical sense. This week, the news Israel and Syria have been involved in ongoing peace talks, mediated by Turkey, slightly changed my perspective. It is as if the words of Ecclesiastes, "There is a time for war, and a time for peace," have been realized in this new way in which Israel and Syria are engaging each other. The Israeli-Syrian relationship has been marked by wars in which Israel was outnumbered and did "give chase," but that backdrop is now what fuels discussions that will, hopefully, enable Israel and Syria to inch closer to a time when "no one need be afraid."

In our lives, there may be battles, not in the context of war, but in our relationships. Most of these conflicts result from disagreements handled not as partners, but as adversaries. Such struggles and divisions have a way of taking on a life of their own, and even being thrust upon people who weren't part of the original situation. We can see that happen all over the world, but also in contexts that we know too well. Perceived threats, past or present, may make us feel guarded, or cause us to "strike back" in some way. In any situation, there can still be a promise of peace, a time when no one need be afraid. That takes a willingness to let go and look forward, and to be cautious when it seems warranted and necessary. So let us seek the best wisdom from our heritage, from those around us and from inside of us that can lead us to a sense of confidence, partnership and peace.

**-- L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.**