



# YOUR TRUE MISSION IN LIFE

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF SHALOM

BY LEONARD CARR

AS HUMAN BEINGS, DEEP DOWN WE ALL LONG FOR the same thing. The busyness of everyday life usually gets in the way, and we forget what we really wish to experience in life. What we all crave is to live in a world of intimacy, truth, harmony and perfection. To feel complete, enjoy a sense of profound joy and tranquillity of spirit. We want the ability to comfortably express ourselves in an authentic way and to be properly understood by others. We wish to be embraced and loved for who we truly are. We wish to be able to realise our full potential and to contribute the best of our gifts to the world. We would ideally like to live in a world of mutual reverence, respect and co-operation. In short, what we all most want in life is shalom. Not only is Shalom what we most long for. It is the very purpose for which we were created.

When you hear the word shalom, you think merely of a nice greeting, or of shalom bayit or peace in the home. This definition does not do justice to the true meaning of shalom. Nor is it correct to think of shalom as simply a state of peace that is achieved through the elimination of conflict. The belief that the concept of shalom can be reduced to a mere passive state of tranquillity is a partial truth, and is misleading. Such a belief could lead people to believe that shalom is a state that you can acquire by passively avoiding authentic engagement with people and life's thorny issues. If you hold this belief, then shalom sounds like something that would make life more pleasant. It would be a positive aspiration and not an imperative. If you do not succeed in achieving it, then it would not seem to be the end of the world. It would seem like an impossible task for someone with a challenging personality, or for one who lives with difficult



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people. People who feel that achieving a calm, pleasant state is too difficult would simply give up and become resigned to a life of tension.

In truth, division and conflict is the end

of the world. When you become embroiled in dissention and disharmony, what you are contributing to is the return of creation to the empty, confused, dark abyss of unreality that existed before the creation of light. Conflict destroys you, your world and ultimately the world. When you actively pursue, nurture, foster and preserve shalom, you are bringing the light of truth, goodness, wisdom and ultimately life into the world that you share with others. When you pursue peace, you become a partner with Hashem in helping creation to evolve towards its ultimate perfection.

There is nothing greater or more important in life than preserving, sustaining and enhancing life itself, and this ideal is achieved through shalom. Shalom is a dynamic state. It is born out of the ongoing struggle to bring differences between people into harmonic counterpoint. Shalom can be read as 'shaleim' by just changing the Hebrew vowels. Shaleim means wholeness and completion, which also implies actualisation and perfection. From a psychological per-

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spective it could also be read as mature. It is in fact one of the names of Hashem.

There are instances where Hashem allows His name or honour desecrated for the sake of upholding the value of shalom. This shows that shalom most closely defines the essence of who Hashem is, more than any other quality. When you bring shalom into yourself and into your world, you actualise your potential to live a truly spiritual existence. Creating shalom is bringing Heaven into the physical world. If you look through the prayers in the siddur, you will notice that the culmination of all the blessings that Hashem gives us is shalom. When we bless our children, we use the blessing that ends with the blessing of shalom.

The entire creation is formed out of the harnessing together of antagonistic, competing forces, from the gravitational fields of heavenly bodies to elements like fire and water, into a coherent unity. The Kotsker Rebbe gave a profound reason for why Hashem chose the rainbow to symbolise the covenant of peace after Noah and the flood. He said it was because the beauty of the rainbow is created through the seemingly impossible task of bringing together two antagonistic forces, namely fire (light) and water, into a cohesive, harmonious relationship. What makes the universe work is that all of those forces are harnessed together in a miraculous dynamic tension.

Like heavenly bodies, each individual forms part of the dynamic universe of existence. Your personal world forms part of the world that you share with others. Being limited by the size of your world and your ability to understand yourself and life in general, your reality is always partial. No human being has the entire picture when it comes to ultimate truth. Each person's truth is therefore only a partial, incom-

plete truth. We all make the mistake of believing that our truth is more valid or complete than anyone else. This puts us in constant competition and conflict with others regarding whose truth, goals, values, aspirations, needs, desires and ideals will prevail. Shalom is therefore constantly being challenged, and is perpetually under threat. This is why we are commanded to actively pursue this quality.

Home is the place where your reality is most profoundly challenged. Home is where you feel most entitled to get your own way. It is the place where you most need to get out of your own way. The closer people are to each other the more they expect from each other and therefore the more they are likely to come into conflict and the more intense those conflicts will be. The home, being the cornerstone of society, is the most important place for shalom to be achieved. It is also the most difficult place to create shalom. That is why many prefer to go out and conquer the world than create deep positive relationships with their loved ones and immediate families. Conquest is easier than intimacy. In short, it is much easier to divide than to build unity between opposites. Creating peace in the home is the ultimate growth challenge. Investing in this challenge offers the highest returns of any investment that you could possibly make.

It is only when you look through the windows of others people's truths that you get closer to the overarching, big picture of Ultimate Truth. It is only through extending yourself to accommodate the needs, feelings, wishes, ideals and aspirations of others that you can grow out of your self-centred limited world. In so doing, you become more expansive and mature in ways that allow you to support and live in har-

mony with others. This requires, among many other qualities, humility, wisdom and generosity of spirit. Shalom is created by harnessing diversity in service of the highest ideal of bringing complete reality, perfection and truth into the world. Creating shalom is a group activity that can only be acquired through unity, commitment, tenacity and determination. After striving tirelessly to achieve shalom, you need to guard it with vigilance.

When the many diverse aspects of human experience like personality, gender, life history, generation and culture are leveraged in constructive ways, then differences become sources of creativity, richness and meaning. Stretching your capacity to perceive and appreciate the gifts and challenging aspects of others, especially those closest to you, completes you as a person and gives you the increasing capacity to create shalom in the world. It is only through adapting yourself to others through creating Shalom in yourself that you can create shalom in their world. In essence, creating shalom in the fullest sense means building a dynamic, rich, collaborative, and ultimately, harmonious world.

I invite you on a journey with me to explore the ways that you can enrich your life and create the world that you would most enjoy living in.

This series is dedicated to my beloved and revered Rebbe and father-in-law, Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein ztl, who not only taught but also embodied the principles that I am attempting to apply in this series. I wish this series to be a project, because my aim is to give you the practical tools to create the world that you most wish to live in, and one that others will want to share with you. The topics that I will cover in future articles will include:

- Appreciating your role in creating the world that you share with others
- Appreciating personality in relationship
- Qualities of character that promote shalom and their opposites
- Power, conflict and ambivalence in relationships
- The meaning of intimacy and how to achieve it
- Creating a home built on the value of shalom **JL**