

Peace and Wholeness

- *shalom* as the basis for ethical action

SHALOM INSPIRATION

Peace and *shalom*

'Peace'¹ is the foundation of all values, and the vision, hope and dream of most human communities around the globe.² Yet, in reality, it is often the most elusive. It is usually seen as the absence of war, but in fact that tells us almost nothing about it. It is frequently spoken of in such general terms that it is reduced to a vague ideal with little that is solid to grasp. There are reasons for this, but it does not have to be like this. 'Peace' is a concept that needs clothing and then living!

People of different cultures and beliefs understand peace in contrasting ways because of their varied worldviews. An authentic Christian understanding of peace is deeply rooted in the biblical text, and especially the Hebrew scriptures of the Jewish people. The Hebrew word that embodies the concept of peace, and is most frequently translated by that word in English, is *shalom*.

Discovering *shalom*

We usually first encounter *shalom* as a greeting, "*Shalom aleichem*" ("Peace be upon you"); an oriental phrase with as common a currency as the loose change in a merchant's money belt. It appears so insignificant, constructed from just four Hebrew consonants:

ש
ל
ו
ם

However, all the time *shalom* is like:

- **A key:** Imagine turning it in a lock that opens to reveal a limitless treasure; *shalom* is a cipher that holds all the secrets to the meaning and the purpose of creation;
- **A seed:** Imagine showing a tiny acorn to a child, would they guess that it contains within itself all the genetic material from which a mighty oak tree will grow?

¹ Clearly a strong argument could be made for 'love' being the primary value, and from the perspective of an individual person this may seem to be so, given its strong presence in story, song and individual experience; however, we shall argue that 'love' needs 'peace' to create the framework within which it can flourish best, and that 'love' is in fact the expression of 'peace' at its most personal and intimate.

² '... peace is therefore deeply embedded in the teachings and doctrines of the major religious traditions of the world ... each of them has proclaimed peace – as an ultimate value, not only as a hallmark of the final eschatological goal that humans could and were destined to reach, but also an individual mental and collective social state that is always worthy to pursue.' See Perry Schmidt-Leukel in '**Part of the Problem – Part of the Solution**': **An Introduction**' in '*War and Peace in World Religions*' SCM Press 2004 p 3



- **A crack:** Imagine a dark corridor with an ancient timber door at the end; sunlight streaming through a crack in the wood reveals a breathtaking landscape beyond.

So *shalom* begins with unexpected simplicity, but hidden beneath the folds of its common cloak are wrapped the very mystery, majesty and destiny of God.

Shalom begins with a simplicity that a child can understand yet it has ultimate perspectives that are mind-bending! It has enormous physical and intellectual implications and yet its primary challenges are moral and spiritual. It runs throughout the biblical text and creates the framework within which the totality of everything: physical and spiritual, human and divine find their eternal destiny; while at the same time having thrilling and disturbing implications for Christian understanding of action today. In the light of all this, the fact that *shalom* is usually translated by the English word 'peace' is only satisfactory if our understanding of the word 'peace' is infinitely expanded and totally reshaped (as we shall see below). In every conceivable sense *shalom* truly is the secret of the universe!

Visioning *shalom*

Looking up, holding these four ordinary little Hebrew consonants in our hand, our gaze is taken through the pages of the biblical text, into an expansive and incredible vision of the future, towards an age of peace when God's *shalom* will reach to the outer limits of being and existence, saturating every fibre of the cosmos with freedom and joy:

'The wolf shall live with the lamb,
 the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
 the calf, and the lion and the fatling together,
 and a little child shall lead them.
 The cow and bear shall graze,
 their young shall lie down together;
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
 and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
 They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea'.
 (Isa 11:6-9)

As we look closer, we notice that inseparably linked to this awesome vision is a figure of a person uniquely anointed and empowered by God to establish this age of *shalom* with a just and liberating rule of peace. The Christian community recognises this individual as Jesus the Messiah:

A child is born to us! A son is given to us!
 The right to rule
 has been laid upon his shoulders;
 His name will be
 "Wonderful Counsellor", "Hero God",
 "Father of Eternity", "Prince of Peace".
 Of his all embracing kingdom
 and of his peace there shall be no end.
 (Isa 9:6-7)



But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off
have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
For he is our peace;
in his flesh he has made both groups into one ...
So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off
and peace to those who were near;
for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.'
(Eph 2:13-18)

For Christians Jesus is *the* peacemaker both incarnating and demonstrating *shalom*.

We hear Jesus clearly saying:

'Blessed are the peacemakers
for they shall be called the children of God'
(Mt 5:9)

As the archetype of this declaration Jesus demonstrates being *the* 'child of God' by *his* peacemaking, and as such becomes the model by which all others demonstrate whether or not they are also children of God by *their* peacemaking.

The biblical picture is quite clear; 'God's rule', the 'kingdom of God', is a kingdom of peace. It is only present to the extent that *shalom* is present, and where God's kingdom is present it is evidenced by *shalom* in all its aspects and qualities. Peace is the earthly expression of all the qualities of God's heavenly dwelling place:

Of his all embracing kingdom
and of his peace there shall be no end.
(Isa 9:6-7)

"For the kingdom of God is ...
justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'
(Rm 14:17)

'Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'
(Mt 5:9)

All of this, however, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to encountering the fullness of hope that the vision of *shalom* brings.³

SHALOM RADICALISM

Sourcing *shalom*

Shalom is radical! Now the word 'radical' may be both an overused and devalued word, but it is the only one appropriate here. It is shaped from the Latin *radix*, meaning 'root', and is directly connected to the idea of a tree. It has *two* main senses:

³ This understanding is developed in much more detail in the Workshop unit: '*Re-Imagining Hope: living at the edge of time.*'



- **'Going to the root'**; discovering what is foundational, fundamental, original, inherent, essential and primal. There is something deep, dark, earthy, hidden and mysteriously wonderful in this sense of the word;
- **'Flowing from the root'**; encountering what brings structure, nourishment, security, growth and fruitfulness. There is something profound, life giving, energising, ethereal and eternal in this sense of the word.

A great tree has symmetry. Branches reach high and visible above the ground, matched exactly by its root system deep and hidden beneath the earth. This is a wonderful picture of reality. For everything that makes up the visible world there is a depth that is invisible; also, the visible is totally dependent on the invisible for its existence and meaning. These are not two parallel universes, but *one* completely integrated whole. It is in this context that we must understand *shalom*.

Every true expression of peace, whenever, wherever and however it occurs, is always wonderful and to be celebrated. Nevertheless, *how* peace is actually understood is significant - we have already said, 'People of different cultures and beliefs understand peace in contrasting ways because of their varied worldviews'.⁴ Most people begin by seeing peace in essentially practical terms and primarily as the absence of war. In contrast a biblical Christian understanding of peace is truly radical; because the roots of *shalom* are seen first and foremost as spiritual, embedded in the divine, yet at the same time very physical and practical.

To proclaim the single word, "*Shalom!*" is to proclaim the totality of *everything* that is true about God:

▪ ***Shalom* is God's character:**

- God's name, and the whole character of God's kingdom, is peace - this truth is declared throughout scripture from Gideon's altar cry, "*Yahweh-Shalom*" onward;⁵
- Isaiah proclaims Yahweh as the creator of *shalom*;⁶
- Job sees *shalom* as the environment of God's dwelling place; the heavenly spheres.⁷
- The New Testament is replete with references to 'the God of peace';⁸
- The author of Hebrews sees peace and holiness as inseparably intertwined, they are both to be sought and pursued.⁹

▪ ***Shalom* is God's gift:**

- God is the source and fountain of all *shalom*;¹⁰
- Yahweh blesses his people with peace;¹¹

⁴ Page 2

⁵ Jg 6:24

⁶ Isa 45:7

⁷ Job 25:2

⁸ Rm 15:33; 16:20; 2Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1Th 5:23; 2Th 3:16; Heb 13:20

⁹ Heb 12:14

¹⁰ Each and every biblical reference to 'the God of peace' makes this quite clear.

¹¹ Ps 29:11



- *Shalom* is God's gift to all people near and far; ¹²
 - The Lord desires *shalom* for his people; ¹³
 - All God's instructions and commands are pathways to *shalom*; ¹⁴
 - Even to die is to be enfolded in *shalom*; ¹⁵
 - In the New Testament the word 'grace' (Gk *charis*), 'a gift of extravagant goodness', is frequently linked with the 'peace from God'¹⁶
 - An ancient rabbinic prayer speaks of Yahweh as the one 'who spreads the tent of peace upon his people'.
- ***Shalom* is God's goal:**
- *Shalom* is to become both the habit and habitat of God's people; ¹⁷

Of his all embracing kingdom
and of his peace there shall be no end.
(Isa 9:6-7)

'Glory to God in the highest,
and upon earth peace'
(Lk 2:14)

These, and many other scriptures, make it quite clear that *shalom* is both the centre and the boundary of all that God is, the entirety of what God has to give, and everything that God plans to achieve.¹⁸

All the strands of Yahweh as the source, the giver and the goal of *shalom* are woven together beautifully in Aaron's priestly blessing:

"May Yahweh bless you and keep you.
May Yahweh let his face shine on you
and be gracious to you.
May Yahweh lift up his face to you
and bring you *shalom*."
(Num 6:24-26)

¹² Is 57:19

¹³ Ps 35:27

¹⁴ Pr 3:17 cf Ps 119:165; Isa 54:13

¹⁵ Cf Gen 15:15; Isa 57:2, however, there is no *shalom* for the wicked (Isa 48:22).

¹⁶ Particularly every letter attributed to Paul (and others) begin with the words 'grace and peace' Rm 1:7; 1Cor 1:3; 2Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1Th 1:1; 2Th 1:2; 1 Tm 1:2; 2Tm 1; 2; Tit 1:4; Phm 3; 3Jn 3

¹⁷ Isa 32:15-20; Ps 122:6-9

¹⁸ Again, this theme is developed in much more detail in the Workshop unit: '***Re-Imagining Hope: living at the edge of time.***'

SHALOM INSIGHT

Understanding *shalom*

It is important that we now try to understand the fundamental concept of *shalom*. However, the biblical text suggests that we should be cautious in our expectations:

The peace of God,
which surpasses understanding
(Phil 4:7)

The reality is that the concept of *shalom* presented in scripture is so profound that any understanding that we gain will be limited; but we will do our best nonetheless!

So many fundamental themes converge in the concept of *shalom* that it truly can be described as the central biblical idea:

- ‘... a word with such common use, yet filled with concentrated content far above the average conception’ (Gerhard von Rad) ¹⁹
- ‘... the core of biblical faith’ (Perry Yoder) ²⁰
- ‘... the most inclusive of Christian virtues’ (John Macquarrie) ²¹
- ‘*Gadol hashalom*’ - ‘peace is the highest of values’ (rabbinic declaration) ²²

There is an ancient rabbinical legend that tells how God created every single blessing that was ever going to be created. There they lay in a huge pile. God needed a container - a bag, box or jar, in which to put them - but could find nothing, so God created *shalom*.

Shalom as completeness

The Hebrew word *shalom* is used as a noun 236 times in the Hebrew scriptures,²³ and its Greek equivalent *eirene* ²⁴ is used exactly 100 times in the New Testament.

¹⁹ Gerhart Von Rad ‘*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol 2 article ‘Eirene in the OT’* Eerdmans 1964; 402

²⁰ See Perry Yoder ‘*Shalom: the Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace*’ Faith and Life Press 1987; 7

²¹ See John Macquarrie ‘*The Concept of Peace*’ SCM Press 1973 p1; also ‘*Three Issues in Ethics*’ SCM Press 1970; 66

²² See Rabbi J Milgrom ‘*Let your love for me vanquish your hatred fro him*’ in DL Smith-Christopher ‘*Subverting Hatred*’ Orbis Books 2007;156

²³ It is also used as an adjective 28 times, as a verb 119 plus many derivatives: these statistics come from Eisenbeis and are quoted by Erich Dinker in ‘*Eirene – The Early Christian Concept of Peace*’ in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) ‘*The Meaning of Peace*’ (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001; 73

²⁴ It is very important to remember that when the New Testament writers are using the word *eirene* they are always meaning *shalom*:

- It is significant that in most cases, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the ‘Septuagint’ (the LXX c 200 BC) *shalom* was almost always translated by *eirene*;
- Remember that it has been insightfully observed that ‘the Greek of the New Testament is spoken with a Hebrew accent’, unless it is quite obviously not the case; therefore the ideas and concepts that lie behind the Greek word are those that are rooted in the Hebrew scriptures and not those common to the classical Greek world;



Shalom is formed from a verb that has as its root-meaning: 'wholeness' 'completeness', 'intactness', 'holistic', 'integratedness' - everything fitting perfectly together.²⁵

The verbal form is *shalem* and has the sense of - 'to make something complete', 'to finish', even 'to make an end of'²⁶. Like an artist finishing their masterpiece: the last dab of paint on the canvas or the final chip of the chisel on a sculpture, then standing back to admire the moment as the dream becomes reality; or a composer hearing their symphony for the first time after years of working or imagining in silence – quite exquisite!²⁷

Shalom vision

Shalom is the highest and most inclusive, in fact the all-inclusive, value. As a Jewish scholar has observed, *shalom* is 'the presence and continual growth of all creative human powers ... Within that ethical totality called 'peace' or 'wholeness' all other human virtues and values are therefore subsumed. In such texts, to which many others could be added, truth, justice, righteousness and grace are all collapsed into one value, and other moral values could easily be conjoined ... peace is the word that designates the achievement of all human values in concert ... when any significant one of them is left out not only will peace fail to be achieved, but also the others may, for lack of balance, easily come in conflict with one another'.²⁸

Shalom strongly emphasises the material side with the sense of 'well being'; people having their physical needs met and satisfied. They are cared for and supported practically. It is first and foremost a declaration about relationships.²⁹ It expresses, 'every form of happiness and free expansion, but the kernel is the community with others ... it comprises

- This is particularly true in terms of *eirene*, which along with the Latin *pax* understood 'peace' primarily as 'a truce'. This implies a belief that the universe is essentially and fundamentally violent, occasionally you could obtain a few months or years of 'peace' but inevitable everything would once again collapse back into violence, which was the 'default' position. This is based upon the 'myth of redemptive violence' and the complete opposite of the biblical understanding of *shalom*.

- It is interesting that it is only under the Roman emperor Augustus (just prior to the birth of Jesus) that the Pax cult was introduced into the Empire; with *pax* being the gift Rome brings to other nations and *concordiam* to be nurtured within the state itself. However, the significance of this, especially for the gospel will be drawn out in more detail below. For a detailed study see Klaus Wengst '**Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ**' SCM Press 1987.

²⁵ Cf the Akkadian word *salamu* – which means 'to be faultless, healthy, complete', and the Amorite texts from Mari where the word *salimum* has the sense of 'reconciliation' and 'agreement'.

²⁶ It is intriguing to reflect on the possibility that Jesus' dying words on the cross, "It is finished!" may have been an Aramaic form of the Hebrew *shalem* and therefore essentially *shalom*.

²⁷ There is a story told of the English painter JMW Turner (1775-1851) finishing a canvas and sending it to a reputable gallery in London for display. On opening the canvas the curator saw a wash of colour but nothing but nothing that could be made sense of. On the morning of the unveiling the enthusiastic crowd were also puzzled. Suddenly Turner, standing unrecognised at the back of the group, steps forward with a small brush and tiny pot of red tint, with which he proceeds to paint in a dramatic red sail at the centre of the picture, which brings the whole composition together – that would have been a true *shalom* moment in miniature!

²⁸ S Schwarzschild '**Shalom**' in M Polner and N Goodman '**The Challenge of Shalom: The Jewish Tradition of Peace and Justice**' New Society Publishers 1994; 17-18

²⁹ It is suggested that the original sense of *shalom* was 'the wholeness, or completeness, or intactness of the community' in fact 'the small circles of human community' so Claus Westermann in '**Peace (Shalom) in the Old Testament**' in PB Yoder and WM Swartley (Ed) '**The Meaning of Peace**' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001; 41, 47



all the Israelite understands by 'good' ... (the one) who has *shalom* has everything because it implies all the harmony and happiness which anyone can take. Therefore peace is first and last in life.'³⁰

Shalom understanding begins in the small circles of human community but is soon discovered to be the fundamental character of the universe. It is the essential 'wholeness' of everything! Its roots and structure are made up of relationships of infinite variety and number, all fitting together and expressing themselves in perfect harmony. It sees, not only human society, but also the whole of creation, as it ought to be, experiencing completeness, unity and fullness. We have seen that God is the source and fountain of *shalom*; the foundation of all things and that *shalom* is the divine essence. God has brought all things into being, and 'wholeness' hallmarks ultimate destiny - that end to which all things are heading as God's purposes perfectly unfold. *Shalom* is the overarching vision against which *all* biblical truth needs to be seen.

Wild *shalom*

We have already seen that the English word 'peace' is completely inadequate to translate *shalom*, unless what is understood by 'peace' is completely re-minted in people's thinking and understanding.³¹ We want to use the word 'peace' because it is the most widely used word to express what we have recognised as the foundation of all values, yet at the same time most people's popular conception of 'peace' has simply become:

- **'Personalised'**: my own deep inner feeling of peace;³²
- **'Pacified'**: a nice, comfortable, relaxed and tranquil experience;
- **'Marginalised'**: peace seen as primarily as the absence of war;³³
- **'Idealised'**: a goal to aim for, but not a realistic expectation.³⁴

Shalom, in contrast, cannot be domesticated like this. The 'wholeness and 'well-being' of *shalom* may well know quiet, rest and reflection, but it is a 'peace' that has nothing passive about it! Every fibre of *shalom* is vibrant, pulsating with life and energy. It embraces every

³⁰ Johannes Pedersen '*Israel: Its Life and Culture*' (Vol1) Branner and Korch 1926; 313-314.

³¹ This is not just true of the English word 'peace', Jacob Levy says that *shalom* is 'a word which because of its ambiguity can scarcely be translated into any other language, and Ludwig Kohler says, 'To translate *shalom* as 'peace' is a makeshift.' – both are quoted by Erich Dinker in '*Eirene – The Early Christian Concept of Peace*' in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '*The Meaning of Peace*' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001; 73 footnote 4.

³² 'Personhood' like *shalom* is about the totality of integrated wholeness - As Claus Westermann says, '*Shalom* should not be used when what we have in mind is inner peace ... Applying the word *shalom* to an inner outer sphere of existence – 'outer struggle, inner peace' – is quite unthinkable ... it is not *shalom* ... *shalom* can only be present when the totality of existence, both inner and outer, is complete and whole'; in '*Peace (Shalom) in the Old Testament*' in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '*The Meaning of Peace*' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001 p 43.

³³ We shall have much more to say about this later on in this session.

³⁴ Sadly we see this reflected in the observations of a respected Reformed Jewish scholar, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, in '*War and Peace in Judaism*' in Perry Schmidt-Leukel (Ed) '*War and Peace in World Religions*' SCM Press 2004 p 89-94,97.



activity in the universe and gives it creative quality. It has an inherent zeal and zest, which is almost impossible to translate. It exudes:³⁵

- 'Extravagant sufficiency'
- 'Energised wholeness'
- 'Dynamic tranquillity'
- 'Integrated diversity'
- 'Resonating relationships'
- 'Exuberant fecundity'³⁶
- 'Explosive calm'

The nature of *shalom* is such that to encounter it is both traumatic and cataclysmic; it is probably best described as '*shalom-shock*'.³⁷ We see this dramatically illustrated in the person of Jesus' who comes 'proclaiming *shalom*'. Everything about him in his life, death and resurrection confronts people with *shalom* in a way that disturbs and challenges. Just two of many possible examples:

- The sincere young man (rich ruler) comes to Jesus asking to be a disciple, being told to sell all he had and give to the poor: 'At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions'.³⁸
- The cross is a scandal – 'but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block (in Gk *skandalion*) ...'³⁹

Shalom encompasses everything and expresses itself in every possible way. It clothes itself in the rare and purest forms of spirituality, while at the same time being more tangible, material and physical than seems possible to experience. No wonder it surpasses understanding!

SHALOM INTERPRETATION

Interpreting *shalom*

I will make peace your governor
and integrity your ruler
(Isa 60: 17)

We have seen that *shalom* holds within itself a whole cluster of convictions about God, creation and humanity. Each is interconnected, flowing into one another. Each must be seen in the light of the whole. This being so, while interpreting *shalom* is not easy, it is absolutely vital.

The first thing to note is that *shalom* is always relevant in every sphere of experience and existence:

³⁵ These are phrases that I have coined over the years to try and capture just something of astonishing power that *shalom* understanding generates, but even these deliberately provocative phrases don't begin to get close!

³⁶ 'Fecundity' is fertility, fruitfulness, teeming with energy, creativity, life giving, prolific and very much more!

³⁷ Another phrase I have created in an attempt to communicate the creative and challenging energy of *shalom*.

³⁸ Mk 10:17-22; cf Lk 18:18-30.

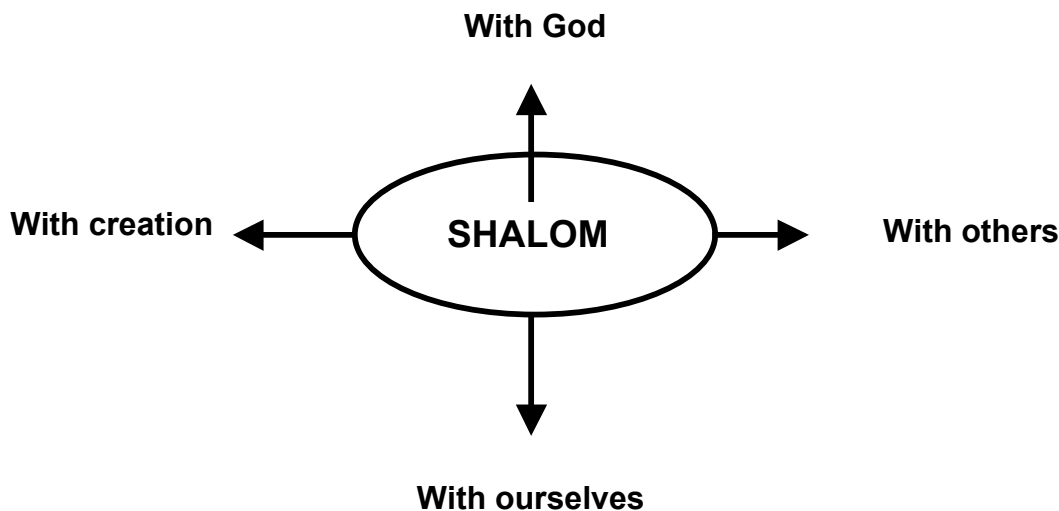
³⁹ 1Cor 1:23: notice Jesus makes 'peace through the blood of his cross' (Col 1:20) - *shalom* is a scandal!





personally
domestically
locally
regionally
nationally
internationally
globally
cosmically

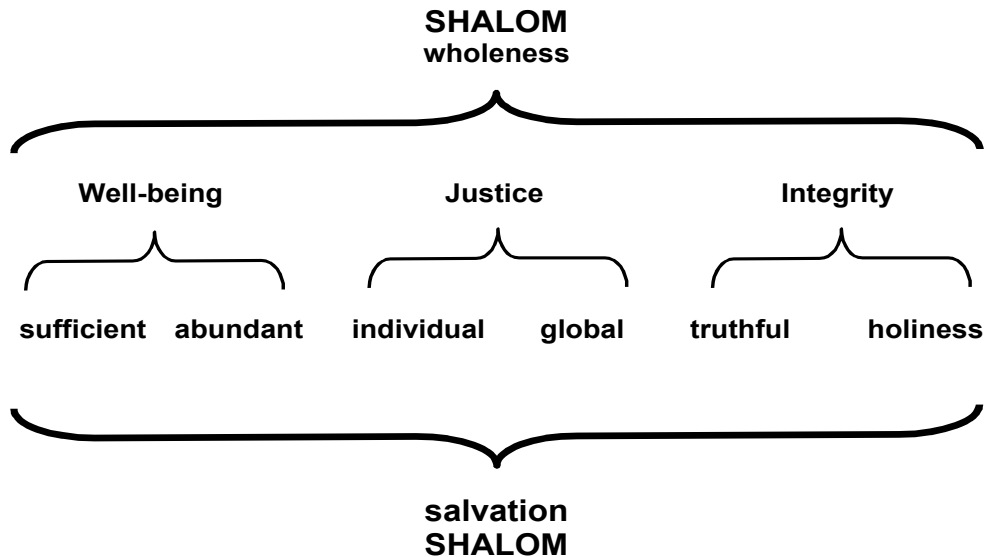
It is also essential to recognise that *shalom* touches, embraces and energises every possible relationship. We are to live in *shalom* with God, with every other human being, with the whole of the natural world (living and inert), and with and within ourselves:



The exciting fact is that when it comes to applying *shalom* in a practical way to everyday life the biblical text gives us a very clear means by which to calculate whether or not *shalom* is actually present. Imagine it like a 'measuring-rule' or a 'plumb-line' that we can hold against any situation or circumstance and see if in fact *shalom* is present. This means of measuring is shaped from three primary values and qualities that lie at the heart of *shalom*; almost like a three-fold intertwined cord.⁴⁰ Each strand bringing out a major

⁴⁰ These three primary characteristics of *shalom*, and the way I have presented them, are broadly based on drawing together ideas originally found in Perry Yoder '*Shalom: the Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace*' Faith and Life Press 1987; 10-23 and Claus Westermann in '*Peace (Shalom) in the Old Testament*' in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '*The Meaning of Peace*' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001; 37-70.

dimension of *shalom*'s practical meaning. On most occasions the Bible tends to refer to the experience of people, but *shalom* of course also refers to the whole of creation. In the diagram below, the three key terms (well-being, justice and integrity) have been carefully chosen to take account of this reality. Also notice how they flow from their source as 'wholeness' and are consummated as 'salvation'. Remember that in reality *shalom* is only truly present to the extent that all-three dimensions of well-being, justice and integrity are present:



▪ **Well-being:**

Physical well-being is the most frequent biblical meaning of *shalom*.⁴¹ The whole sense of material prosperity is essential to *shalom*; every person should have enough food to eat, clothes to wear, a home to live in, able to provide for themselves and others, enjoy physical health, feel secure – and so on. It has been significantly said that 'A person is bereft of *shalom* when one's human dignity is denied'⁴² People should have sufficient, succeed and be safe; want and failure are not the norm:

'For thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will extend *shalom* to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip, and dandled upon her knees.
As one whom his mother comforts,
so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
(Isa 66:12-13)

⁴¹ **Some references about *shalom* as well-being are:**

- About people (cf Gen 37:14; Est 2:11; 1Sa 17:18; Ps 28:3)
- About situations (cf 2Kg 5:21-22; 9:11; 2Sa 18:28)
- About blessings (cf Nu 6:26; 1Sa 1:17; Rm 1:7; Ep 6:23)
- About coming and going (cf Gen 28:21; 2Sa 15:27; 19:24)
- About physical security (cf Lv 26:6; 1Sa 20:21; Lk 11:21)
- About success in battle (cf 1Kg 22:27-28; Jr 43:12; Jg 8:9)
- About the future (cf Jr 33:6,9; Ps 73:3)

⁴² Claus Westermann in '**Peace (*Shalom*) in the Old Testament**' in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '**The Meaning of Peace**' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001; 46

God's blessing is having abundance⁴³. It moves along a continuum between 'having sufficient' (okay) to 'having abundance' (super).

It has been suggested that the greeting, “*Shalom!*” may originally have been a question, “*Shalom?* – Is everything well with you?” “Do you have enough?”⁴⁴

Our role of ‘dominion-meekness,’⁴⁵ as God’s servants and nature’s companions within creation, requires that we live in such a way that everything, which shares life with us or has been created for beauty and presence, enjoys well-being.

▪ Justice

Social justice is central to a biblical understanding of *shalom*.⁴⁶ The emphasis is on positive human relationships, relationships as they should be. The Hebrew word for ‘justice’ is *mishpat* ‘to put everything right’. It moves along a continuum between ‘personal’ and ‘global’ justice. There should be just and health giving relationships between individuals and between nations, as a present reality and a future hope.

‘ ... choose able men from all the people, such as fear God, men who are trustworthy and who hate a bribe; and place such men over the people as rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. ... And let them judge the people at all times; every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves; so it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ... If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their home in *shalom*.⁴⁷

‘I will make your overseers *shalom*
and your taskmasters righteousness’
(Isa 60:17)

Our role of ‘dominion-meekness,’⁴⁸ as God’s servants and nature’s companions within creation, requires that we live in such a way that everything, which shares life with us or has been created for beauty and presence, experiences justice.

⁴³ It is important to make clear that this has nothing whatever to do with popular contemporary so-called ‘Christian’ notions of ‘prosperity teaching’ where individuals believe as a matter of faith that they are entitled to significant wealth as a sign of God’s blessing. *Shalom* prosperity is always looking for the other, the poor and the needy, to receive material blessing, possibly even at the expense of myself.

⁴⁴ The Chinese have a greeting, “Have you eaten?” that has the same sense to it, the concern for a person’s physical wellbeing.

⁴⁵ Cf Gen 1:26,28; Zec 9:10, Mt 5:5 et al

⁴⁶ **Some references about *shalom* as justice:**

- Between friends (cf Jr 20:10; Ps 41:9; Acts 24:2; Rm 14:19)
- Between nations (cf 1Kg 5:12; Jg 4:17; Is 54:10)
- Because of harmony (cf Mt 10:34; Lk 14:32; Acts 7:26)
- Because of righteousness (cf Is 32:16-17; 60:17-18; 54:13-14)
- Basis of future hope (cf Is 9:1-7; 11:1-9; Jr 23:5-6)

⁴⁷ Ex 18:21-23

⁴⁸ Cf Gen 1:26,28; Zec 9:10, Mt 5:5 et al



▪ Integrity

Personal integrity is the character of the person expressing *shalom*.⁴⁹ It is a moral and spiritual uprightness and holiness, it is *not* some an inner 'peace of the soul', but a visible tangible stature:

Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Depart from evil, and do good;
seek *shalom*, and pursue it.
(Ps 34:14)

'May the God of peace personally
sanctify you entirely'
(1Th 5:23)

Each individual is to be fully integrated within themselves, displaying the character of God in their thoughts and actions. This is understood more completely as the new covenant unfolds. In Indian culture the word for 'peace' is *shanti*, which conveys the idea of 'a person fully integrated within themselves and to the depths of their being, in complete inner harmony (physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual)' – this would parallel very closely to this understanding of this aspect of *shalom*.

Our role of 'dominion-meeekness',⁵⁰ as God's servants and nature's companions within creation, requires that we live in such a way that everything, which shares life with us or has been created for beauty and presence, experiences integrity.

So *shalom* is *only* present to the extent that material needs are met, there is justice in relationships and integrity in personal character. It has been insightfully observed:

'In a society where there is no war, where everything is conducted peacefully without conflict, there is still no *shalom* if the people are starving or if disease reigns. On the other hand when there is nothing lacking for well-being, when all live sumptuously and joyously but the society is under a heavy yoke of some sort, then that to is not *shalom*. *Shalom* as the well-being of a community always includes all circles, all aspects of existence'⁵¹

It is for this reason that we need to heed the biblical warning; beware of those who cry:

"Peace, peace",
when there is no peace'
(Jer 6:14)

⁴⁹ **Some references about *shalom* as integrity:**

- Bringing peace: honest (cf Ps 34:14-15; 37:37; Zec 8:16; Rm 8:6; 14:17; 15:13; Gal 5:22; 2Tim 2:22; 1Pt 3:11; 2Pt 3:14)
- Being at peace: blameless (cf 2Kg 5:9)

⁵⁰ Cf Gen 1:26,28; Zec 9:10, Mt 5:5 et al

⁵¹ Claus Westermann in '**Peace (*Shalom*) in the Old Testament**' in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '**The Meaning of Peace**' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001 p 48

All-embracing *shalom*

Quite simply *shalom* is salvation in the most complete sense. Erich Dinker observes 'From the beginning one is confronted with whether to translate *shalom* as 'peace' or 'salvation'.⁵² *Shalom* is a declaration of how things should be and it is an affirmation of how things shall be.

We have seen that *shalom* touches the heart of the individual, but that it does so from the centre of God's purpose for both society and the cosmos. It is everything holding together in harmony; all peoples, all social structures, the whole material universe. It is at the centre of all things; it cannot be marginalised. Because it demands that all basic needs are met, that justice is established everywhere and that the human heart displays integrity, it is nothing short of full salvation.

The words of Yahweh are words of peace,
peace to his people and his loyal servants
and to all who turn and trust in him...
Love and truth have embraced,
justice and peace have kissed each other.
Truth has sprung up from the earth,
righteousness reaches down from heaven...

Justice makes a path before him,
his footsteps bring peace.
(Ps 85:8,10-11,13)

Questions & Reflections

1. Do you think that we are correct in describing *shalom* as 'the secret of the universe'? What would be your arguments 'for' and 'against'?
2. What vision does *shalom* give us? How should *shalom* influence our lifestyle?
3. In the light of this understanding of *shalom* what does authentic peacemaking require and what kind of person ought a peacemaker be?

Reading and Resources

W Brueggemann '**Peace: Understanding Biblical Themes**' Chalice Press 2001
S Hauerwas '**The Peaceable Kingdom**' SCM 1983
J Macquarrie '**The Concept of Peace**' SCM 1973
U Mauser '**The Gospel of Peace**' John Knox Press 1992
J Yoder '**He came Preaching Peace**' Herald 1985
P Schmidt-Leukel '**War and Peace in World Religions**' SCM Press 2004

⁵² In '**Eirene – The Early Christian Concept of Peace**' in PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '**The Meaning of Peace**' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001; 74



P Yoder '***Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice & Peace***' Life & Faith Press
1987
PB Yoder & WM Swartley (Ed) '***The Meaning of Peace***' (2nd Ed) IMS Elkhart 2001
K Wengst '***Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ***' SCM 1987

