

The Broken Vav

by
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In the weekly Torah portion, Parashat Pinchas, Hashem extends to Pinchas the covenant of peace (*shalom*). Most scribes write the letter *vav* of the word *shalom* in this pasuk with a break. This is the only place in the Torah where a mistake, intentional or otherwise is allowed without making the Torah unfit (*pasul*) for use. One explanation of why the break in the letter *vav* is allowed is that peace (*shalom*) that is achieved through violence, even required violence, is defective, as was the case with Pinchas. Thus the word *shalom* is written in a defective manner.

I recently heard a different explanation of the broken *vav* from Rav Bienenfeld, who teaches a gamara study group that I attend. The word *shalom* without the *vav* is pronounced *shalem* which means complete or perfect. Some people are given a broken *vav* or trial in their life for the purpose of helping them to realize their potential and for turning what could have been something bad into something good. The following is a short narrative of my journey with Parkinson's and how the broken *vav* has begun to bring me a peace (*shalom*) and completeness (*shalem*), that I had not experienced until recently.

When I initially learned that I had Parkinson's disease, I wondered what I had done to deserve such a curse. Was there something that I had done wrong? Was Hashem punishing me for a sin that I had committed? This process of blaming myself, of feeling inadequate because of my fear of having committed some unforgivable sin continued for many years.

However, I was relieved to learn recently that Hashem does not work that way. He usually does not punish us in this way for our sins. Instead, when we are visited with a particular trial, as in my case Parkinson's, Hashem is trying to tell us something. We are given a broken *vav* as an opportunity to make the *vav* whole, to complete and perfect the *vav* and in the process perfect ourselves and bring a perfect peace (*shalom*) to our lives and the lives of others. In other words, what is important when a trial enters our lives is how we deal with it, and how we are able to change something that was meant for bad into something that is good; something that was lacking into something that is whole.

When I look back over the past few years of my life and how drastically it has changed because of Parkinson's disease, I see so many blessings that have come into my life. I probably never would have had the opportunity to

retire at such a young age, at the height of my career when most of my faculties are still intact. I would not have had the impetus to examine my life, change direction, reset my priorities, and do what I truly believe that I was meant to be doing at this moment in my life. I probably never would have met all of the wonderful new friends that have entered my life. I never would have had the opportunity to be involved in their lives and allow them to be involved in mine. I probably would not be teaching Tai Ji and using the years of experience and life changing gifts that Tai Ji has given me to help others deal with the trials in their lives. I probably would not have had the common sense to slow down, as Parkinson's has forced me to do, to enjoy my family and friends, to experience life to the fullest, to make everyday count as if it were my last, and to thank Hashem for the vast riches that He has provided for me to enjoy and take pleasure in.

Some of us need a broken *vav*, an incomplete *shalem* so that we can turn it into a complete *shalem* and be at peace (*shalom*) with our own selves and with Hashem. I pray that no matter how long I live, whether in perfect health or less than perfect health, that I will be judged worthy of dealing with the broken *vavs* in my life.