

# Nourishment for the Neshama

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**Tuesday, June 26, 2007**

## Maharal Sefer Netivas HaShalom - Notes from June 25 2007

Rebbetzin Heller June 25 2007 Sefer Netivas HaShalom by the Maharal

Notes taken from class given at [www.naaleh.com](http://www.naaleh.com)

We spoke a great deal about shalom. The question that we are going to talk about today isn't what it is, or how important it is, or even how to achieve it, but what we are going to talk about is how there are different places and different relationships that demand shalom.

There is a certain level of shelamos that we have to have within our own households, another level in our relationships to the people we care about, our friends, and a third, with people in general. We are going to talk about these three levels.

Before we go there I am going to talk about shalom within ourselves. A person is complex. We have minds, emotions, and we have bodies. Being at peace with yourself means that at the deepest level all three of those are going in the same direction, that there is mutual respect between them. What that means is that a fragmented person, a person's whose mind is here but their feelings are somewhere else, and their bodies are still doing a third thing, and there is no respect- meaning that the body is in denial of the mind's dictates and the mind doesn't admit that the emotions even exist. This happens tragically. Before we go into our relationships with others, I want to briefly talk about what the relationship should be from the mind, to the emotions to the body.

The mind is meant to be the first in this paradigm. That means our emotions are always altered by our thoughts. Let me give you an example of what I mean by this. Let's say it is an extremely hot day, and let's say you have to wait 25 minutes for the bus. You may be hot, you may be irritable and when the bus comes it is crowded, and someone pushes you and says move, move. And you find yourself answering them back in kind. What thought was there before? The thought that you might not be aware of if you don't train yourself to notice your thoughts would be a feeling of vulnerability and a need to defend yourself. We can't always control the initial thought. What we can control is how long to stay with it and where to take it. Our thoughts are so ephemeral and move so quickly that an appropriate image is like a rider going on a horse that they can barely control through a field. But the fact is that we can control it. Once we control our thoughts, because you are where your mind is, then your feelings will be under control as well, and it is this combination of thought and feeling that will control what you actually do. When a person reaches that level, then they can be at peace with themselves.

Most of us have ups and downs, which is why we are not always at peace with ourselves. So a critical addition is adding to ask Hashem to give us peace.

Now with that, let's go into other relationships.

The perek mikonet, which is in Bava Batra: Achitofu commanded his son three things before his death. You may recall Achitofu was the person who was Dovid's friend who betrayed him. Don't be in machloket, don't rebel against Dovid's kingdom, and on the day of atzeret, that is the time when you have to already choose seeds for planting wheat next time. That is the time when a person should select seed because that is when they will be successful in doing so. You have to ask Why are these the three things that He is commanding more than anything else? It is because Achitofu, who was a great talmid chochom (don't forget that) he saw how entwined he was through the machloket that he had, and where this machloket brought him. There is nothing that could have brought him to this terrible situation where his despair (in Shmuel he choked himself) and therefore he warned against this. What we are going to begin to understand now is why and how Achitofu ended up where he was. His warnings have more credibility than anyone else's because he tasted it, there is no wise man who is wiser than someone who actually is experienced.

Therefore he said, do not enter controversy, because it is the essence of evil. So he told them this in order for them to realize that avoiding machloket is not passive, it is something active. You have to actively be careful and entuse yourself to pursue peace if you don't want machloket. What he is saying is that the natural state of affairs if you do nothing is that you will be drawn into machloket. You have to move against the natural flow of one's own nature and the flow of events that surround oneself to avoid machloket. And this is very great.

To understand this more, because we are all individual and because we are living in Olam HaSheker and Olam Ha Pirut, we are living in a world that is false and divisive, we loose track of the fact that everything has one source and an assigned place. Life naturally leads to machloket if you don't watch yourself. There is an Arabic parable which says it is us against the others, it is my tribe against the other tribes. It is my extended family against the other extended family, it is my family against the extended family, its' my brothers against the family, it is me against my brothers. What this means is that a person should be careful of Ishmael, don't fall into their hands because it is hard, it is hard because their essence is to be focused on chiluk, oppositional to us. We want to see unity, we want to see things in terms of one cause, we want to find commonality, and their natures take them away from that.

True peace has three faces, three things that draw us away from shalom in these situations. The first is shalom bayit, peace with your wife (who is called your house). The second is the peace one has with one's companions and friends. And this is going to be a reflection of the peace that he has within himself. And the third is with other people, that he should not find controversy with them.

This third one comes from having respect for the government because the government brings peace amongst the people. The government is the voice of the people, in an ideal and spiritual sense. Dovid HaMelech, who is our paradigm of a perfect King, was perfect because he had no self, he could be the voice of the people in their highest sense. Conversely, in elected governments, oftentimes the governing forces are the voice of the people and they are weakening in a sense. When you have politicians who make promises – elect me and you will get this, or that, --it appeals to people's level of money and kovod, but it rarely appeals to their highest selves. But when it does, then the government has an enormous power of bringing about achdus for the good or for the bad, I want to point out. In spite of all of his terrible moral failings, President Roosevelt spoke to the American people in which they felt their higher self manifest to the point that they were blind to his moral failings. He was a womanizer, an anti-semite, but people didn't see it. Kennedy similarly spoke to the higher part of the American people. Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country – he touched something. Ronald Reagan touched something.

In terms of shalom bayit, he is saying something else...he says choose wheat seeds. When a person doesn't have peace at home, it is because he doesn't have wheat. The Gemara says a man brings wheat but you can't eat wheat, a man brings flax, but you can't wear flax. What does the woman do? She takes the wheat and turns it into bread and the flax into clothes. Stands him on his feet and brings life to his eye. So his role is to provide. Now this provision is not just material, it is on all levels, and so wheat is used oftentimes as a symbol of chochma. The gemara says, what fruit grew on the tree in the garden of eden and one of the answers is wheat. Wheat is a symbol of chochma is in order to turn wheat into bread you need human ingenuity and an animal would never dream this up. A child begins to show intelligence when he can begin to digest wheat. So man, if he wants shalom bayit, must bring wheat into the home. He has to bring something. Otherwise his wife, who has the desire to build, will have nothing to build with. Let's say you are the wife, which is not where the Maharal is taking us right now, what do you do if your husband doesn't have what you want – he is not earning enough money or he is not wise enough or he is not emotionally sensitive enough – or he is not and he's not and he's not. Realize the only complaint a woman can validly have against her husband is he doesn't give what he does have. You can't give what you don't have, so if his job gives him x amount of money, he can only give that money. If his mind only takes him that far, he can only give you what his mind takes him towards. But you can ask Hashem, Hashem has no limitations. He can open His Hand and give anyone anything. If your husband is giving you what he has, daven to Hashem that He should give your husband more.

Perek chazav. A man should always see that there are crops in his home, because there is no fighting except about wheat. Hashem makes your borders peaceful and the cream of wheat shall satisfy you. It is holding back this wheat that brings about a parnasa. On a simple level what that means is that having money makes it smoother. You can ask Hashem to give your husband hatzlacha and shefa. And now he is taking us deeper, to take away this machloket he is going to tell us through his hand and his wisdom, on atzeret is the time. There are two days that are called atzeret, one is Shavuot and the other is Succos. Shavous is the time of the wheat harvest but it is also the time of matan Torah so to have the shefa of wisdom to bring into the house, the time to develop that is on Shavous. As you know, Succos is also called Atzeret, even though this is not the intent here, so the last day is simchas Torah, which can also bring shefa into the house.

The second kind of peace is that there should not be renewed machloket between a man and his fellows, his brothers. Achitof said may you have no machloket between this one and that one. You should not have machloket, when you have quarrels with other peoples, and the intent is that you will surely have quarrels. But there are some people who will always have quarrels on a regular basis. If it isn't their family, it is their neighbor, if it is not their neighbor, it is their boss, if it is not their boss, it is their co-worker or the person sitting next to them. The problem is that such a person does not feel whole within themselves. So they are looking to the other person to give them a feeling of wholeness which doesn't happen, and then they are angry at that other person. I will give you an example of this. Envision this situation. If a person for whatever reason doesn't feel whole within herself, she has a job, she is a teacher. At the end of the year, her class gives her a present, not worth much money, not with great sentimental value, and she is terribly upset. Where is that coming from? It is not because they did not spend the money to acknowledge her, it is because she does not have inner acknowledgement of herself. If she had inner acknowledgement of herself, she wouldn't need other people to tell her she is okay. Imagine trying to give Reb Elyassef a certificate of merit. Is that an image that comes to mind easily? This is from the people of Yerushalaym to you along with a gold watch. And Thanks for over sixty years of faithful service – it would be a joke. When people want that sort of thing it is because they don't feel the shelamos within themselves.

When he says don't have quarrels with Dovid's malchus it is again because the government as we said. A person should pray for the government as it says in Pirke Avos because if it weren't for fear of the government we would eat each other alive. Which is what we see. Several years ago New York had a particularly liberal mayor and he put a lot of constraints on the police which led to a huge upswing of crime. Someone asked Rabbi Avigdor Miller what he thought the answer was to the problem of increasing crime in NY was, and the desired answer from that person's perspective would have been to move to the suburbs or whatever, but he didn't say that. Give the Irishman back his stick. What could be less politically correct than that? Nothing. But I want you to know when another governmental ruler said we will have zero tolerance, which is another way of saying the same thing, not physical but legal, but it is the same statement, crime went way down. The fact is we are not all that altruistic, and fear of the government, not just when the government appeals to our ideals, but when they are not tolerant of things that they shouldn't tolerate, then we tend to live better lives which is one of the great tragedies of liberalism. With liberalism you have the government appealing to our higher side – you should be loving, tolerant, kind, givers, compassionate – without saying you can't be kind and tolerate cruelty at the same time. You can't be generous and tolerate theft. It is a problem.

He said don't rebel against King David's kingdom. And this would cause an end to machloket and the establishment of peace. Now he specifically mentions Dovid's malchus because Dovid was the epitome of what a king should be and therefore Hashem gave him malchus. With other governments, even Shaul, whose government was still better than governments we are familiar with, there will be machloket because they don't rule perfectly which leads to conflict. The rule, these three commandments, are parallel to the three kinds of quarreling from which people have to distance themselves in order to bring about peace.

The first is shalom bayit and that is the first. He reiterates, that is what brings about peace. If you don't have peace and your husband is giving you what he has, ask Hashem to give him shefa. He can't give what he doesn't have. Conversely, if I am addressing the man, your wife isn't doing what you want, give her more, don't hold back. Realize also that it is within human nature that a person wants to feel that they are doing what they do. So for a man to give, a woman must be happy in receiving. For a woman to build, there has to be recognition that he can't do anything unless she turns what he brings into something.

The second one, man to his brother, don't be involved with machloket with those that you love, with your brother, with yourself. And the third is peace that can affect the whole people and without this people eat each other up.

Therefore, don't rebel against Dovid because when you have a king like Dovid people don't eat each other alive. Why? Because he also brought out what was good in people. It was a combination of two things. When you look at political movement, everyone talks politics now and again. This is what the government should do, they should do this or that. I also talk politics sometimes. The terrible mistake the government made with the expulsion from Gush Katif...all you have to do is press me this lightly and I am already talking about that. The fact is that you have to still recognize that any government is better than anarchy but that the kind of government that we want is not going to come through this system. The kind of government that we want is going to be Malchus Bais Dovid, not an elected government, because an elected government not only reflects the higher side of people, but their lower side as well and usually has no sense of morality as its guide.

Malchus Bais Dovid could bring peace to Israel. It is about this that it says that Hashem will put peace upon

you. We are going to quote a Gemara that some of you might be familiar with. There are three kinds of peace. The river, the bird and the kettle, as Rav Feldman put in his book. So those of you who read Rav Feldman's book on Shalom bayit are familiar with this. So what are these three kinds of peace? First he brings a support pesukin. The hold I will stretch forth upon her like a river of peace, as the birds fly thus Hashem will protect, Hashem will outpour. It is not telling us that there are three things that have peace, it is saying that there are three different kinds of peace. The first kind is governmental peace, and this is the kind of peace that Achitofu warned about when he said don't rebel against Dovid. This is the peace of the bird. Government is meant to rise above the people, not just voice their limitations. A bird flies above. And the shadow of its wings surround that which is below them. That is what a king is supposed to be. He is supposed to be transcendental, he is supposed to be above the people, and his vision is supposed to shield them. That is our idealized leader. Every so often the girls in Neveh ask me, they don't understand Jewish leadership, so they ask what kind of election takes place to choose the Gadol Hador, is there a convention, do we also vote? Who chooses the Gadol HaDor and who chooses who the greatest Rebbe is. So, the fact is, the way we choose leaders is the ultimate state of democracy. We choose by our feet, we see who is the person who seems to fly above and who shields us with his shadow, whose vision is higher than our vision, who is the one who sees what we don't see? That is the one we will follow. And historically we have done well by this, and the reason why is because what gives that person the ability to lead is not their charisma or personality, many of the Gedolai Hador were not particularly charismatic. Reb Elyassef for instance almost never speaks publicly. In my memory the only time I have seen him speak publicly in front of a large group was many years ago at a convention. He is not charismatic, warm, full of gestures and stories that would draw people to him. His credibility is his vision – he sees beyond what we can see. We feel shadowed by his wings because he can see beyond us. This is how we choose leadership. He is not the only great leader who is not greatly charismatic. The Vilna Gaon would hardly leave his study. What makes someone a great leader is this quality, their transcendence and their ability to lead us, that we see something in them that is more than what we see in ourselves. This is very different than democracy. In democracy, people choose leaders who ARE them, not their higher self, but their actual self.

The second kind of peace is the peace of the river. The way rivers are is that they reach out and connect different tributaries. So the streams feed into the river and the river connects one stream to another one. When you follow a long river like the Jordan, you see all these small streams and tributaries that flow from it or to it, so the river is the connective. This parallels the second kind of peace which is between a man and his brother. They have to find their common denominator, that which connects them, that which makes him look at the other and say you are me. I am her. There should not be any kind of division or separation between man and his brother, like the streams that attach together. When you are talking about finding friendship and sustaining friendship, that means you have to constantly remember what you and your friend share in common. It happens to the best of us sometimes, that you have a friend who is not there for you at the moment you wanted them. It happens. Sometimes a person experiences a tragedy and the friend doesn't know what to say so they avoid them. Sometimes a person extends themselves to a friend when the friend is in a moment of difficulty or pain or stress, and instead of being grateful, they are critical. It is easy to lose a good friendship. A good friendship can be lost over nothing. So in your mind's eye you always have to keep the chibor, the times when you felt commonality, the times when you felt attached. You have to keep them in the forefront of your memory. Remember what was good, what bound you, what attracted you in the first place even if right now it is eclipsed by the difficulty of the moment. And that is the second peace.

The third kind of peace is the peace of the pot. Now a pot only exists for one reason - to put food into it. Now when you cook, you put in different ingredients and they all improve each other. So nobody, even a simple cook, makes something that is just one thing - there is still many ingredients. There is a mixture that improves when you boil them together it tastes better and becomes one dish. If you want soup, you take the composite. Even if you are eating cholent and take only the meat, the meat still tastes from the potatoes and seasonings. Everything in the pot has the quality of all the other ingredients, certainly in baking. This is the peace between a man and his wife, where they become one, where he is providing and she is building. They are doing it together, they are not on two different planets. They are attached until they are like one body, where the arms and the legs are still acting for the body as a whole. It is like the food that becomes one thing by being cooked together in the pot. There are a lot of ways in which people misunderstand this. As soon as you talk about this is what men do and this is what women do, people perceive this as being two different planets. In some segments in society, he earns and she spends, in other segments of society, he is in the bais medrash and she is in the kitchen. But they are not connected. Her job is to make connection, to find out who he really is, not just what he provides, but his true identity. And what he provides and to make something out of that, to be the arms and the legs, to make something out of that. Also if you observe in nature, an animal and to certain degree in plant life also, there is a segment that protects and a segment that provides. The woman is the protective segment, the man is the provider. So interestingly when you look at Avraham and Sarah, Sarah was the one who knew that Ishmael should be

expelled, she was protective, but when you look at Rivkah, what you see is that she understood who Esav was and she protected Yaakov from him. When you look at Rachel and Leah, they knew that they could abandon their father's house, that they had to protect their children from that influence. Devorah did battle. So women have the ability to say no in order to protect what is while men provide what is. Women may act as joiners, articulators, while men act as initiators. So concrete shalom bayit issues, it is very easy to be simplistic and it is painful. People get into rigid role playing and they can see that it doesn't always work. A girl can go into a very religious school and she might think he should be in the bais medrash and she should be working – what if he is not there all the time? She has to make due with what he is providing at this time, he is only young, and find his will to make himself into something by being connected with him. And the same holds true in the opposite, if the woman has not yet learned how to merge her ego with her husband's ego, she treats him sometimes almost as though he is not important, as if he does not exist. He has to see that he shows her appreciation for what she builds from what he is and from what he does. It is not easy. This is the third kind of peace.

Achitofel commanded his sons to make all three kinds of peace, national peace, peace between friends, and shalom bayit. And an intelligent man, and remember that Achitofel for all of his failings was brilliant, he understands that if any of the pieces will fall together to form a puzzle, all of them have to be there. You can't be a person who is dedicated to national peace and actually achieve that if there is not simultaneously peace between you and other people. There are people who love the bigger picture and do not like the smaller picture. A person who has good friendships but who has a terrible home life does not even know what shalom is, a person who does not have shalom within himself is lacking. Shalom is multilayered, it has to do with the self, move to the home, then to friends and then to the nation. It is multilayered. If any one of these layers is lacking then the whole act is shakey, it is like the puzzle in which only some of the pieces are put in the right place. And the opposite. Lack of peace, the opposite of peace, when a person lacks peace then all sorts of lack like a domino effect happens, if you lack peace within yourself then there will be a lack of shalom bayit. If there is a lack of shalom bayit it will affect your relationships with people, and through your inability to form relationships with people, this will alter your ability to see the bigger picture. Therefore, gadol hashalom means not only is it a great thing, as we spoke about, but it is an encompassing thing, a huge thing, an inclusive thing.

Therefore we learn this from Achitofel, who was brilliant, but it isn't just his brilliance that made him an incredible teacher, it was his failure that made him an incredible teacher. He failed. There is no wise man like an experienced person, he understood that his failure to see the bigger picture, his failure to be a better friend to Dovid, his failure in his own homelife, all of his failures were intertwined, he understood it, and because of that, he used, as an opportunity in his very last moments in this world, to share this with his sons. And this is for some people a great secret, they don't get how intertwined all the layers are.

Therefore he gave this command at the time he was going to die. Now we find that at the moment of a person's death is the moment when they are credible. Because of this we see, even with Moshe who is of course very different from Achitofel, that he also saved the rebuke that he gave the people to the time of his death. The reason that Rashi says that we find this with Moshe is that people don't like hearing this again and again, but we have to realize that at least for ourselves, we have to be able to tell ourselves this message again and again. We have to have multilayered shalom that comes from within ourselves.

He had another reason for doing this – he was the cause of great machloket, which raises a question. As you know from Hilkos Teshuva, there are five steps of teshuva if you involve another person. The three usual steps are vidui, regret, and change, apologize and making good the loss. But we sometimes do things that we can't fix. Because of that I once heard a great Rav say this, the easiest damage to repair is financial damage – you give someone money and it is all over, finished. But what if you do if you do something that can't be repaired – if you humiliate someone, you can apologize but you can't rebuild their self esteem so easily. You cause machloket, you can't always put the pieces back together so easily.

I want to share with you something that happened. I had a student in Neve many years ago and she looked like a zombie, here but not there, if you know what I mean. It would not have been nice of me to go over to a strange girl and say hey you look like a zombie anything I can do for you? So I let the situation float and eventually she came to me and she told me, we were learning about teshuva because it was elul, and she said I did something for which there is no teshuva. I was a big chochom and said, oh you can always do teshuva, that is my line. She told me that she had an affair with her brother in law, her sister found out. And she said what am I supposed to do with that, say I am sorry, that is good enough? I realized I got myself into deeper waters than I thought I was getting into so I told her I had to think about it and consult. I went to Rabbi Chalkovsky at Neve, without telling him who the girl was, and I said what happened. He told me to have her go to Reb Simcha Wasserman and I told the girl that it was recommended she go to a great Rav and he will tell you what to do. She was reluctant but I talked her into it. I don't know if any of you

knew of Reb Simcha Wasserman, he was a very interesting person. He looked and acted like most people's picture of Santa Claus..short, round, jolly. He lived a terrible life, lost everything in the war, saw his father who was one of the Gedolei HaDor killed in front of him. After the war, he pulled himself together, he married, he started a Yeshiva in Paris that failed, he started several other Yeshivot all of which failed, he never had children, he came to Israel, you would expect him to be the most bitter person. He would come to Neve periodically to speak and he would come into the room with a prepared speech, he would look at the girls and smile and weep with joy and say I should see this – so many wonderful girls coming to learn Torah in Yerushalayim. That is how he was. So I took the girl there. You know how sometimes having no idea makes it sound better than that, so I loved the idea of someone else taking the responsibility off me. I took her there and I realized that as soon as we got down to his apartment that this is a mistake. I knocked on the door and his Rebbetzin answered, Mrs. Santa Claus, the snood, sweet, look Reb Simcha some wonderful girl came from the seminary. Can you imagine how she felt? I thought she was going to faint. She got us into her kitchen and sits us down at her table, she asks what we want to drink and eat, and this girl is having a hard time, and the nicer she got, the worse it was. Would you like some brownies? No, this can't be happening. He is finally ready for us, we go into the living room, he is sitting at the table, smiling and how can I help you today? Now she wasn't going to say anything, of course not, so I realized I have to talk. So I began to say, Rebbe people sometimes do things that they didn't plan on doing because today things are different from the way they used to be and this is my friend, Fran, and her sister got married – now what's the worst thing he can say now – Mazel tov- okay? No, that is not what this is, her brother in law is a very attractive man and when people are not religious and they don't keep yichud things happen that one does not anticipate and he got it. He got the whole picture, I saw it in his face. So he said, you are the teacher? So I said yes, and you don't know the Rambam, and I said no. He was short, he had a little ladder, climbs up, gets the Rambam, and reads the laws concerning a murderer. If you spill blood you have to bring life back into the world. You can rescue people. He did not make light of what she did at all. He said you did a terrible thing, which got her attention, and you can change things, you brought tuma into the world, you have to bring tahara, purity, into the world. You will get married and you will put aside money and eventually you will put this money toward building a mikvah. And you have to do this. And I want to say that this was the closest thing that I ever saw to tehillim hamaisim. She was alive. She had a future, she was going to get married, she could do things. He broke through.

The reason that I am telling you all this is is this is where Achitofu was. He could say I did a terrible thing, I did a machloket, that caused the whole nation to suffer so I am going to be the one who will tell you how to make peace. That is what he was doing.

And he thought that thus he would find peace through his death, by making peace. And that is why at that time of all of the things that he was, he was Dovid's Rebbe originally, he had a lot to say, he could have taught them secrets of Torah, but he realized in terms of what he broke, he has to fix something. He used those moments to teach them the secrets of shalom, on all three levels, at home, in oneself and letting that move towards ones' relationships to his fellow man, and shalom on a national level. He taught them all, the whole picture, of what shalom has to be. And the Maharal ends his thesis with the words. And let there be peace upon Yisrael, amen and let this be Hashem's will. So when we talk about peace for Israel, the Gemara tells us that the Jews are the most contentious of people, and amongst Jews the talmidei chochomim are the most contentious of all. So how will there be peace? The reason why Jews are the most contentious of people – we have millions of opinions on everything – you know if you tell people how many political parties there are in Israel I want you to realize that there would be far more if they weren't requiring parties to have a certain minimal level of voters- it is because we love truth and want peace. Everybody grabs onto their own piece of truth, their own vision of peace and hold onto it. Other people don't care that much so it is not an issue to them. The talmedai chochomim want truth and peace more, so they are going to be more contentious, they are going to be unwilling to let go of what their picture of what peace is. How will we ever find peace? Where is it going to come from?

This is the idea of Moshiach being a descendant of King Dovid, of Dovid HaMelech. Dovid, what held his personality together, he went through so many things in his life, he experienced almost anything a human being could experience, what held his personality together is that he searched for Hashem's will in every situation. This would be when he had power and when he had no power, when he was beloved and when he was hated, when he sinned even, to the degree that you can say that he sinned. The idea of looking for Hashem, Hashem is called Melech HaShalom, when we look for Hashem's will and try to form a more transcendent and inclusive picture, then there is hope for peace. But the place that we have to begin with is in ourselves. And the peace has to be there between our hearts, our minds and our bodies. So I am going to conclude this, which is the end of our entire thesis on Shalom, by wishing that we all be worthy of achieving this in every way, within our homes, and through this we will eventually see it within the nation of Am Yisroel, which is something approachable.

