

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Maharal Sefer Netivas HaShalom - Notes from June 3 2007

Rebbetzin Heller June 3 2007 Maharal Netivas HaShalom

We began to talk about the word shalom and talking about the word from its actual construction, the shin, the lamed and the mem. I did not speak about this enough last time. The Maharal has a very interesting perspective on things. He maintains that if something is true, it is true on every possible level. So if something is true philosophically, it will also be true mathematically, it is going to be true aesthetically, it is going to be true at every level. What he would see would be truth being something that is whole but multileveled. If I had been listening to our class about the construct of the word shalom, I would have seen it as interesting, but not necessarily true, just interesting. But what the Maharal's thesis is is that this has to be true of the root of the word shalom, there is no other way to convey the idea. It isn't that if it had a gimel he would say this and if it had a yud he would say that, no! This is an essential picture of what shalom looks like. The same way in Chinese that the letters are actually pictures of the concepts, not pictures of sound. In English the letters are pictures of sounds. The letter b is "bu". It doesn't mean anything. In Chinese, the letters are concepts, for example the word for man looks like a little man. In Hebrew, the letters are sounds, pictures and numbers, and this takes us back to the Maharal's idea of something being defined as true on more than one level at the same time. Let's review about shalom and then we will go into maklochet.

He said that the root of the word shalom is shalaim, it is the whole picture, when each component is there in order to create a picture by the One who is known to have created the dynamic of the picture to begin with. The first letter of the word is shin and it has three lines, the idea being that the extremities of what these pieces can look like is the right (chesed, outpouring) the left (boundary making, resistance, overcoming) and something to hold them together, there is a bar on the bottom, but there is also the middle line. We said that the middle one inclines and leans toward the left because if it were in the center we would drag it toward the right because chesed is so much more attractive to us than gevurah. So the first thing is the shin is telling us that the attractive pieces of the puzzle are no less part of the pieces of the puzzle than the less attractive pieces. To concretize this, there are people who feel defensive who hear about anyone doing something that they don't do. They hear about someone giving a lot of money to charity and they say well he has so much money to begin with it's probably nothing compared to what he can give. Or, if in a particular area the women are very tzniut, one might say oh they are so frafrumt, they are so externalized, it is beyond belief, they take conformity as vitamins when they are infants. This is how people talk. The reason we talk like that is that anything that requires overcoming self is not easy to achieve and it is easier to identify ourselves away from things that require a certain kind of gevurah than it is to identify ourselves towards them.

Then look at the lamed in Shalom, it is the highest of all the letters and the reason is as we said the picture that pulls together all the myriads of pieces is Hashem's wisdom, which is above our wisdom. To concretize that, you can read in Pirke Avos that every person has their hour, then you can read this man does not have in my life, uh uh. There are people to us that seem like air, redundant, a ditto, a copy of someone just like themselves. Do we admit this to ourselves? No. Do people feel this, that some people are more relevant and some people are less relevant? Obviously we feel this. Otherwise we couldn't possibly allow ourselves to behave in public some of the ways we allow ourselves.

The last letter is the letter mem. Mem at the end of the word is closed and we completed the idea that if you have the whole picture, if the picture is impregnable, then nothing can be broken. Hence, if we have peace with each other, we can't be destroyed by enemies, there is nothing for the enemies to hold, because the most vulnerable part of the picture is part already of the most complete and beautiful part. That is what Shalom is, and we began from there to talk about makcholet.

He began by bringing a gemara –what is it like? It was compared to a pipe taking water out of the stream

and once you get the pipe on you can't turn it off. Or like water that is contained. Now we talk about this more.

He gives us an axiom. Maklochet is moved by something lacking. So when two people are arguing, each one has an agenda to prove that the other one is lacking. As we explained already, shalom is wholeness. Maklochet feeds on lack and absence and because of that it can go on and on. He gives us an example. Let's hear his example of why it moves. It is the nature of anything that is full of lack that lack keeps on increasing continually. A garment that is whole (that isn't torn, that is what he means by whole) is hard to tear. But if you begin to tear it, then you can tear it easily. What does this mean? The basis of most quarrels is seeing imperfection, not seeing that this is a different shaped piece, it doesn't have all of the components – it fits into this piece of the puzzle, not the whole thing. You find what is really missing, because if the maklochet is going to continue there has to be a certain spark of truth there, and you can expand on it and expand on it and expand on it until it becomes the definitive of the person, the idea or the group. Let me give you an example of this. If you take any group, there are always going to be lacks because the good part of a person or a group has the same root as the bad part of the person or the group. For instance if someone is passionate and spontaneous, they probably are not also pedantic and precise. The dark side of passionate and spontaneous would be possibly lacking in borders. Or too expansive, saying more, or doing more than the situation requires. Precision is a wonderful thing, but the back side of it might be lack of spontaneity. Scholarship is a wonderful thing. The back side of it may be staying in the world that is academic and not letting flow down to the world of reality. Anything's good side is also its potential bad side. You can choose what to look at. You don't have to look at what is lacking, you can choose to look at what is there and see its beauty and integrity. If you choose to look at what is lacking, the nature of things is that it becomes bigger and bigger until it floods out what is there.

That is why the word machloket begins with an open mem. It is completely open, you can look at the same chisaron from many many different sides and aspects. Let's look at personal relationships, let's say you have a husband and wife and she is more spontaneous and he is more pedantic. The flip side of spontaneity might be saying too much, anger – it is the same person. He could choose to focus on that until the good part of her nature is forgotten. You are hysterical, I can't trust you, everything comes from emotion, why don't you just think? He forgot the beauty of her passion. Conversely, he is precise, he knows where the borders are, which makes him very close to truth in a certain sense. But she may focus on that he is not as spontaneous as she is, he creates a certain kind of tension, he may seem boring. You have no heart or soul. What has she forgotten? She has forgotten his goodness and precision and dedication and commitment and the fact that his word is his word. Why? Because it got flooded out by seeing things on the outside of the issue at hand.

Then it is like a chet which has a big opening on the bottom. There is room for endless fall. It is not like a hay that has an opening on the bottom but it also has an opening for re-entrance. In machloket there is a chet not a hay, there is no place for re-entrance. That is why it says quarrelsomeness is like the water pipe and it gets bigger and bigger meaning that it flows more and more. It could become from something small into a huge abyss that can't ever be closed. What would an example of this be like in our history? Look at the tragic machloket, the ones that tear people and communities apart needlessly. Invariably what happens is that the real issue is small, but what people make of it once it is put in dimion, once it is in vocabulary, becomes huge.

The other view is that it is like a camel with a bump that rises and rises, it is also like a person who sits on something immobile. The nature of a machloket is once you start, it is very hard to get rid of it. The words were said, the positions were taken, it is very hard to go back. In modern Hebrew you say get down from the tree, but it is very hard to come down from the tree. Once the positions are taken it is very hard to move.

He says we humans by nature are able to enter machloket because we are different one from another, we can look at anything that separates one person from the other and remember each person is unique, and expand upon what you have that the other person lacks, which again if you are not twins will be there or visa versa, and take positions on this where everything becomes an ikkaron, everything becomes a position and from that perspective, no two people can get on. There are people who can't tolerate someone using different laundry detergent than they use. There are people who can't tolerate – I once read in a religious periodical that ended up bringing a series of letters – the article was one of the more forgettable articles, a nostalgic reminiscence of the author's home and the beautiful white table cloth on the Shabbos table. It took two pages and as I recall it didn't say much more than that. Now comes someone else who says you have proven it once for all – Shabbos tables have to be white, so a person who has a salmon tablecloth with matching napkins and a pink over cloth and candles...that table isn't beautiful. Why? Because it doesn't convey to THAT author the vision of the table of their home where Shabbos was treasured. However, it is

conceivable that the person with the salmon colored tablecloth grew up in a different environment in which beauty had a different definition and this may be to them what is special and beautiful, and once the positions are taken, it is very hard to come down from there. There are principles involved, this one is less, that one is more, this is the narrower view, that is the wider view, this is Yeshivish, but that is more original and expansive...all over tablecloths. We are different! We are different in our middos, our backgrounds, our cultures. Is that how it should be? We have to bring all the pieces together with their individuality.

That is why we need a third person to make peace between two people because person A can't understand the piece of the puzzle that person B provides and visa versa, but someone outside can sometimes see it.

If we don't move from that place, and remember the differences are real, he is not saying the differences are illusory, we are not all basically the same, once the positions are taken, they are not going to move and then you are stuck!

If there is peace integrally with people, even if they were to depart from it and go to machloket, it would not be permanent, if underlying there is a view of absolute similarity. Because something that is an exception doesn't stay. So if we are really all the same and then somebody somehow became a bale machloket, invariably the positions taken formed against will disappear because the underlying truth is that we are all the same. But now we are in the sticky position where the underlying truth is that we are all different. The background lends itself to machloket.

Given who we are, our natures take us to being divided and separate. If a person stays in a machloket for a long period of time they are going to be stuck in it. In the word machloket, Reb Huna makes mention that the mem, the opening is first small, but by the time you get to chet, the opening is bigger. What is this telling us practically? It is bad enough if you can't accept another person's individuality. It is bad enough if you don't say what can I learn from this person and how can I give to this person? That is bad enough. But if you are already there and you stay focused on the difference between you and the other person, it is only going to get worse to the point where it could become irresolvable, which a huge human tragedy.

The first view is that a machloket by its nature expands. The second view is it was already big, you may not have seen it, but it was big.

After we spoke about the mem and the chet is the kof. It shows that when a person is involved in machloket, they can go in so deeply that they will end up annihilating Hashem's presence. That takes us to the problem that people get into in our times, we see it that people think that the ends justify the means, that they can do things that the Torah forbids in order to validate their side of the machloket.

Question:

How can we say that a machloket is irresolvable if we say that a machloket that is not l'shaim shemayim will not last forever.

Answer

The machloket will not last forever, but the people who are the bale machloket will die at some point and new people won't carry it on, but it is conceivable that the bale machloket will not find resolution in their own lifetime. And such tragedies have happened, and it is a huge tragedy.

He is going to speak soon – not in today's class – about machloket l'shaim shemayim. I am going to leave that alone until then. What I am saying is that people die with their differences. It is not something that hasn't happened.

I will give you an example. We have in the lives of many rabbonim a story that recurs. So and so disagrees with so and so. So and so's position is picked up by a third person who is much less than either of the Rabbonim, and the third person, in defense of his position, sees that the authorities imprison the other Rabbi. This has happened many times, The Baale Hatanya was imprisoned because of Jews. The machloket themselves could be resolved, but the people who put themselves out may not live to see it, and the place they have put themselves is self-righteousness. It can have quite tragic results.

Sometimes in a machloket a person will go against his Rav to whom he should be loyal and in that way he is going against the shechina – what is the Rav and the shechina? Isn't the Rav just a person? The reason we can make that connection is that there is a mitzvah in the Torah to go in His ways. How do you go in His ways? Chazal ask this question – how can you go in His ways? The answer is going to be to follow in His middos. That sounds very clear, but it says to attach yourself – what does it mean to attach yourself to something abstract? What does that mean concretely? The answer there is attach yourself to people who live Torah – find a Talmid Chochim who lives in the right way – that is who to attach – the midda of chanina,

grace, a Talmid Chochim who knows his limitations and has something of G-d 's grace. Be separate from that which is limiting. One example is the story of the man who was traveling and asked the Chofetz Chaim why he had no furniture and the Chofetz Chaim said he is just traveling through this world, here temporarily, just like a hotel. I am here just for now. This is something of what kiddusha is – it means trading off A because B is better. When you hear an idea from the life of a tzaddik, you don't know what it is until you see what chesed really is. It has something to do with the being able to grow, not with the giver's being fulfilled. When you look at how a tzaddik does chesed, it is a totally different picture. From that perspective one of the worst tragedies is when someone rebels against their teacher, not when the teacher went wrong of course. But where a person's ego brings them to a point of rebellion, where they want to be a bale chesed the way THEY want to be a bale chesed. Or they want to be a bale kedusha the way THEY want to be a bale kedusha. And they rebel against their Rebbe and in that way they rebel against the Shechina.

It starts with the small opening against the Rebbe until it enlarges against Hashem and His directives. It gets bigger and bigger. Who argues against his Rebbe is as though he argues against the Shechina.

The Baale machloket goes higher and higher – in order for the machloket to maintain itself there has to be some principle that is real or not real, but if there is no principle, the machloket will fade. This is why our worst machloket is the machloket where there is corrupted principle. Let's look at the classical example – the rise of Reform Judaism – where Mendelsohn's points, and he meant well, that the religion isn't drawing in the young people (which was true at the time) and therefore changes have to be made (which is true as I will explain in a moment.) That lead to others making the line of what could be changed and what could not. Rav Hirsch knew what changes could be made, changes that had to do with style and not concepts, that had to do with externalities and not ritual and not minhags. He understood because he was in line with Chazal and Torah of his time. But the next generation after Mendelson, who lived and died shomrei mitzvah, but the next generation took the opening that he opened –there have to be changes- and they made it much bigger –they hated halacha with a passion. When you read the history of Reform in America and you read the Pittsburg platform, which was so extreme that it is beyond belief, kashrus was encouraged NOT to be kept. It isn't because you don't wear a kippah because you are afraid of the relationships you will have with the non-Jews, you SHOULD'N'T wear a kippah because it separates you from the non-Jews. It now became a principle – it was a lamed – which is quite tragic.

The next letter is kuf. The end result of machloket is descent into Gehinnom. Look at the kuf, it's tail goes all the way down, which you don't find in other letters that are not end letters, like chof sofeis. You don't have this tail. What is Gehinnom, as the Maharal says many times, Gehinnom is absolute absence of G-d. That is where Friedlander found himself in his own lifetime. No sense of G-d. It was gone. Once a person moves up to lamed in rebellion against your rebbe and the Shechina, the next letter is kuf, to be sunken into Gehinnom. This is what happened to Shabbatai Tzvi and his disciples. When you read about it, he no doubt believed what he was saying, but he was always a bale machloket, a small opening, against those of his times. But if you look at his disciples, the vulgarity, you can see the Gehinnom and this affected Shabbatai Tzvi in his lifetime.

There is nothing that a bale machloket is prepared for except Gehinnom. This is taking him to greater and greater separation from G-d. Now a medrash – it doesn't say ki tov on the second day of creation. Now let's look at the word sheni –which means difference, shoni. Shoni is never good in essence, it is only good when the shoni is used well, when it is part of the davar shalaim. Rebbe says on the second day Gehinnom was created. Gehinnom is the consequence of the tragic mixture of ego and shoni (affirmation of self above all others). That is what Gehinnom is in essence. It doesn't say ki tov because machloket was created on the second day. Both Gehinnom and machlokes are the same thing. This is how we understand the Korach story much better. The Zohar tells us that if Korach had not been a bale machloket, what would have happened to him? He had a huge soul. Being a Levi didn't speak to him – there would have been a position called a Levi Gadol just like a Cohen Gadol. That is who Korach should have been. But what? He didn't look to see and what is G-d's picture of the puzzle. He only felt his own personal frustration of not fitting in, compounded by his vision that Shmuel would be his descendant.

Now, he thought that this machloket was against Moshe, against Moshe's negiyos, that Moshe wasn't big enough to see the puzzle, that he (Korach) could see the puzzle better than Moshe. What does Chazal tell us the real truth is? The truth that he himself might not have been aware of, that these feelings only came to him after Elitachon was appointed the nasi of the tribe. Elitachon was the son of the younger of the brothers. He was in line, and Elitachon was after him. No one cares about Elitachon. In Korach's debate did he even mention Elitachon? He spoke instead about principles.. But what drove Korach to it is that, and he himself may not have known it, he was jealous of Elitachon. It was the pain of his being crushed into acknowledging that the piece of the puzzle that he thought was his wasn't his. It was the only issue. So what happened next? He had to get others to validate him – 250 others. He speaks principles. Does he

mention Elitachon? Of course not, because that wouldn't be a lamed, that wouldn't draw anybody. It wouldn't sound good, there would be no principle. What was his punishment? Again the demonstration – will his ketoras be accepted or not, and finally the earth opens for him. He could have been destroyed in many ways. By plague – this was unique to show that machloket equals Gehinnom. That is what Gehinnom is. Gehinnom is the absence itself. Therefore the name of Gehinnom shows what it really is, the place of perishing, the pit, and all of the other names.

That is why the kuf comes after the lamed, the height of the lamed – rebellion against the Rebbe and then the Shechina- then the Shechina is what brings a person all the way down. The greater the height, the greater the descent. The foot of the kuf goes all the way to the bottom to teach you this thing. That the essence of Gehinnom is for people who are involved in machloket. They find themselves more and more involved in their own ego and less and less relating to G-d on any level whatsoever.

This is what a machloket is about in its worst sense.

Now we are up to the last letter the taf. The last letter is the sort of machloket we are discussing today, ordinary every day machloket, within ourselves, within different aspects of our personalities, where certain parts of our personality want to destroy other parts. The machloket of the body and mind, the heart and the conscience. Then there is machloket in the family where a person's sense of self is so big that there is no room for someone else to have a role. Where the wife has to be both parents, the child has to be a child and a parent. It is like gehinnom when machloket is in a family. G-d is not there! When you look at any family, any family has bad moments. When you isolate the bad moments, where is Hashem at that moment? Nobody hits a child after davening. First, you have to get Hashem out of the picture and then your ego can take it the rest of the way so from that perspective there is no place for it to go. A machloket in one's home can lead to disintegration of the home unless something can come in to stop it. A machloket within oneself can lead to disintegration of the personality unless something comes in to stop it.

Then there are machloket between Am Yisroel, and I am only talking now about people who believe in the Torah. Within our groups, basic things are not taken for granted. For example, the city of Beit Hair in Israel (whose mayor happens to be my nephew) he learned in Reb Zimmelman's yeshiva, which views itself as the Vilna Gaon's heirs. Nonetheless, as mayor, he saw the Chassidim had money for their buildings and schools and communal lives. Do you think no one ever said, Why are you giving them money? Of course he heard that. Where is it coming from? If this is my piece of the puzzle and it is good, how can that piece of the puzzle have any value whatsoever.? It never ends. This is the sad story of politics. If you move this into ideological things with people who are not frum, the tragedy is that we don't have machloket with them, they have machloket with us because they are looking for Hashem and they don't know how to find Him.

Every machloket takes you to finalization, the end, meaning it doesn't go to a new address. Machloket burns itself out after awhile and becomes irrelevant, because the further a person descends into Gehinnom, the less truth (and remember there might have been a small opening of truth) the more ridiculous the machlokes becomes, to the point that no one cares about it, it becomes irrelevant. This is why when you read the Kuzari or books from that era, we see how the authors go on and on about people who have fallen into the traps of various Islamic heresies (the Karaaites) what are you doing when you read those pages? I know what I do – I skip those chapters. Who cares about it – they are irrelevant and forgotten. Who are they? Who cares? That is the nature of machloket, it burns itself out after the Gehinnom stage. First the small opening then the big opening, then the exalted idea that grabs onto spiritual energy (but G-d is out of that picture and it is fueled by ego), which leads to Gehinnom (once it is there it inevitably becomes irrelevant) and it is forgotten.

It stays with those people because their whole identity is tied up with that machloket. They have no other identity past a certain point. If there is resolution, they don't know who they are! So resolution is impossible for them. But the issue itself will be forgotten, so the bale machloket will be stuck spending his life alleiged to an irrelevant issue. There is no return to peace. Hashem will not give them renewed vitality because once they go into this stage of Gehinnom, Hashem is not going to give them the strength to stay there are grab others to there. This is why all machlokes past a certain point become irrelevant. In our own times we can see irrelevant machloket. Not that long ago, secular Zionism was a hot issue. How do you feel about the State? And there are people whose entire definition became who they aren't. Secular Zionism has burned itself out. It is a non-issue. The people who were seeking to define themselves against Torah by being Zionists no longer exist. The ideology is dead, gone. It started with a little opening against Gedolai Torah of that time, whereby they were maintaining that in order to survive as people we had to redefine what being a Jew is, it expanded into something huge where they did battle against any definition of a Jew OTHER than settling the land, it became a matter of principles NOT to keep mitzvahs, it had enormous spiritual vitality and energy at one point – the anti-Torah phase of life. But it ended up in Gehinnom,

lifeless. It is irrelevant, uninteresting. So the secular Zionists who are around today aren't by and large anti-religious, they are instead anti-anyone who impedes upon their comfort level. They don't want Shabbos observed because they like going to the beach. The old die-hard ideologues are gone. So the people who waste their lives fighting against them are making a tragic error. The machloket has ended, they are defeated, it is time to go on to something else.

I don't want to sound like I am saying something that I am not. I am not saying that people who opposed Secular Zionism when it was a vital force were wasting their lives. What I am saying is that what we lived to see is that the machloket ends, this is no longer a relevant battle, just liked doing battle against the Karaaites is no longer relevant. Any more than Yaakov Frank who was an apostate Jew who believed that Judaism and Christianity could be resolved in his time, talking about fighting against him is irrelevant.

Hashem will nullify all machloket completely, all of these falsehoods will be irrelevant, dry as dust and we have seen a lot of this in our own times. This is what you have to say and there is no reason to go on with this. Our eyes tell us this – the hot issues of yesterday are boring today. No one wants to re-hear about why cousin Martha and cousin Matthew divorced 30 years ago. It is irrelevant. So what is the point in knowing how irrelevant machloket is. The point of knowing that is that there is a fine line between defending truth and being a bale machloket is a fine line that we often do not negotiate very well. We start with thinking that I have the right to be me, I see the whole picture, here is how things should be, without even noticing that there is a little bit of an opening on the bottom here. When you find yourself doing battle against people who have an opinion different from yours, or doing battle within yourself, before you end up opening the door so wide that you can't close it again, or making it leshaim shamayim, do yourself a favor. Speak to people who are authentic Daas Torah. What does Daas Torah mean? It means a person who has learned enough Torah to know what the big picture is. Are they perfect, no they are not perfect. Could this be a cop out? Yes for some people it could be a cop out. But the same way you go to an expert for anything that requires expertise – you have to go to Daad Torah to know who the bale machloket is and who is the defender of truth, how much you should be involved and how much you should not be involved, when it is appropriate to decide that involvement is necessary and when it is appropriate to say that involvement is not necessary. Interestingly, sometimes what you find is that people who define themselves as being anti-machloket have also taken an opinion – that both sides of the machloket are equally false, that is also an opinion. So if you are saying that the two sides have some merit, you have to consult, to know whether you are arrogantly creating a third position, in which case you end up saying I hate people who are involved in machloket, which isn't where you want to be.

I am going to conclude that Hashem should bless us with clear eyes and appreciation of truth, in others and in ourselves, and we should have a sense of what is real shalom, and the wisdom to be people with a sense of shelamos who are willingly to go authentically high and in whose merit Hashem will give us the closure and wholeness that will protect us from all of the enemies, even the enemies within us. That is my bracha. We have finished the first chapter, and in the coming chapter we will talk about how to pursue peace. Now that we know what peace and machloket are, we are going to get into the practical and real discussion of the pursuit of peace.

Until then.