

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Maharal Sefer Netivos HaShalom -Notes from Rebbetzin Heller class May 20 2007

Rebbetzin Heller May 20 2007 Maharal Netivos Shalom

We spoke about last time that the nature of discord is that people are looking for their vitality, and instead of getting it through shelamos and wholeness, they get it through plowing and planting discord and we are going to continue with this.

He quotes the Gemara – The Gemara says that it is forbidden when greeting your friend in the bath house (in earlier times they did not have private bath houses, they had group bath houses) to greet your friend by saying Shalom. Rather, you should say good day and the reason for this is because it says “And he called to Him (to Hashem) Shalom” meaning that Shalom is one of Hashem’s names. This tells us how great shalom is, how great wholeness is, how great peace is because it is one of Hashem’s names. Of course it is one of Hashem’s names, in light of what we learned last week, how could it be other? Every day we say “Hashem Echad.” We say Hashem Echad we don’t mean that He is one compared to two or three possible gods. If we are talking about G-d at all, we are talking about infinity, and you can’t have two infinities – where would one begin and the other one end? So, Hashem’s name has to be whole, Shalom, inclusive of every possible thing.

He says something very interesting. We are allowed to say the word truth in the bathhouse even though truth by definition is the whole picture. We can’t say shalom but we can say emett. What is the difference? What he says, quoting the Gemara, is that emett is the stamp of Hashem but Shalom is the name of Hashem. What is the difference between a stamp and a name? A stamp – if I were to have an imprint on something – it is here. We could look at “A” and conclude that I have been there, but you are not seeing me. You are seeing where I left my print. Similarly the world is a place where you can see, by seeing all of the dimensions that are there, something of Hashem’s truth, even though ultimately this world is called falsehood because we don’t see, the more you look at the world, the more truth you can see. But when you are looking at the world, or other people or at yourself, you are looking at something other than Hashem in order to see truth. If I see Gloria and say hi, I am saying hi to Gloria directly not through how I might perceive her. Similarly, Shalom is not just the picture of wholeness, it is the source of wholeness.

Shalom is the name of Hashem is therefore forbidden to say in the bath house, and certainly this requires a reason, why is Hashem’s name peace more than truth? The reason (more deeply to understand Hashem’s name is Shalom) when you look at the world, the world is full of opposites. Everything in the world requires a hidden hand to make harmony between opposites. Hot and cold, high and low, gravitational forces and antigravity, everything is based on contrasts and opposites, male and female. So the hidden hand is the hand of Hashem that joins them all together.

The reason why Hashem can draw them together is because He is there in all of them, so the common denominator between hot and cold, male and female, black and white, is Hashem’s vitality and force that joins them.

He is the form of the world. All of the opposites are meant to come together like a giant puzzle and give us a picture of who Hashem is. So if you understand this in the spiritual sense, order is enormously important, it means respecting the integrity of every person, of every object, seeing that it’s boundaries are there for a reason, and seeing that it is part of the whole is the most important thing that there is. Discord is the result of not seeing the value of all the pieces, and that is the opposite of shalom.

This is what is meant when it says we call Hashem Shalom.

Hashem is the final form that the world takes, the final picture. What this is like is when you put together a

puzzle that has many many pieces. In Israel there are 20,000 piece puzzles. If you don't see the picture on the box, you can't put the puzzle together. The Torah is like the picture on the box. The Jewish people, who live Torah, are meant to be a living picture of the people on the box. But the actual picture, what is it a picture of? It is a picture of Hashem's will and wisdom. You only see this when every piece of the puzzle is in order. Hashem is the final form that the world takes.

Hashem includes all things. He binds and unifies everything. The relative place and beauty of every thing comes when Hashem's will is manifest through that object. This is peace in essence. Hashem is peace, He puts all the pieces together and gives some kind of commonality and purpose. Let's say you are a teacher and you have a class full of kids. You are going to have some kids who can't sit still and wants to be busy. He needs a lot of structure. You might have another child who needs to hear it several times, which makes the first child crazy. Then there is the genius who hears it the first time and wants to go on, and then everyone else. So who do you talk to? You have to find the part of you that is like Hashem and talk to everybody. You can't exclude anyone.

Last week I heard Rabbi Wallerstein speak, and people asked him what is your target audience? Street girls? Frum girls? 18-19? Older? Who do you want? He said he doesn't believe in a target group. That is a person who can see shalom.

Because peace is a consequence of seeing Hashem as the final form that the world takes, it is not one of the puzzle pieces, it is Hashem Himself. It is not what He made, it is what He is, and this is what we mean when we say His name is Shalom. Shalom describes who He is in essence. Since it is the last thing, in a certain sense, it is what Hashem signs off with. When you look at when there is peace, you look at Hashem as the One who holds everything together. Every so often we have beautiful moments, when everyone is together. It is one of the things that I like best about going to Malon on Lag B'Omer. Everyone is there. The pushing, the craziness, that is what I like the most because everyone is there, and they are there for one reason, because Rab Shimon said I am there for everyone, and it drives people there.

Our Sages hinted to this in Midrash. Maharal brings something else to expose this more deeply. He quotes the sages to say peace is great because if all the benefits and comforts that Hashem brings to Israel, He feels it with the word Shalom. You see this in the Shema. He spreads out His succah of peace. Ose Shalom in Shemonah Esrai. In Bircat Kohanim as well. And in korbonos, because tefillah is instead of korbonos. The korbon elevates the world to a place that is closer to Hashem. A bracha takes Hashem's presence from above to below, and a korbon moves Hashem's presence from below to above. A bracha is a "male" element, and the korbon is the "female" element. We have already said how shalom is there in brachot. How is there in korbonos?

It says when Hashem is presenting all of the korbonos in Vayikrah, this is how to bring korbon olah. Mincha, gift. Chata, etc. and the last is the peace offering, shalomim. A korbon that incorporates everyone together. There were some offered just on the alter, and also the kohanim were given portions. But a shalomim was offered on the alter and some given to the kohanim, but the person who brought the korbon also got a significant portion of the animal offered. In fact in ancient Yerushalayim there was a bbq area where the person could eat the korbon with pita bread and celebrate Hashem's divinity in giving. That was called Shalomim.

This has to do with the pattern of korbonos in a general way. Similarly when each one is mentioned individually, the last one is Shalomim, and when it mentions it, how do we know that this is also true with other offerings? Later in Bamidbar, this is what we should do for Hashem on the holidays. It finishes there with Shalomim. Now he explains it.

Hashem's name and that which has everything in common also means that everything has an order. Why are there so many different detailed sacrifices? The idea is that everything in the world is purposeful and specific, so that this sin affects us in this way, and that sin affects us in a whole other way. This animal hints and allegorizes some spiritual aspects that we have that can be elevated. This same animal actually parallels some aspects of who we are. Everything is defined and specific. This holiday is not like that holiday. Because of this, not only are the korbonos having something in common, which is that they are all offered to Hashem, but that they are all specific. This means that every single one of them has a boundary. This goes back to a broader and deeper picture of what Shalom is. Shalom does not mean amalgamation, the melting pot is not shalom. The melting pot is the enemy of shalom. Shalom means that everything maintains its individuality and integrity. Everything is valued as itself. The boundaries that surround everything are valued. But they all come together to make one puzzle. So the worst thing that happens is when you get into the mindset of saying this piece is more important than that piece and therefore ...this piece is necessary and that piece can be pushed aside.

Let's go back to the classroom example. One of the great tragedies of our time is that our schools have become exclusive. I remember when I was a student in Bnei Brak, someone told me about the early days of education in Israel. He would go knocking on doors. He had seen the destruction in Europe and he knew how much had to be built in Israel. He would plead with the parents to please give your children a Torah education. It was hard for them. The reason it was hard is that the secular party saw religion as the enemy. At that time (the late 50's and then 60's) there was one large labor union that incorporated all of the others. The large union was called Histadrut. A person who is a member of the Histadrut who was found to be sending their child to a religious school would be expelled from the Histadrut. You could say, how could they possibly find out, isn't voting anonymous? Here is how they found out. In those days, there were ballots, secret ballots. Let's say there were 500 people in a few blocks. It is clear that if there are 10 who send to religious schools that some of the schools, they were scared for their jobs. Some lost their jobs – it wasn't an idle threat. When he was knocking on doors, it is because he valued every child. Now when I went to school in Bnei Brak he would look away from the fact that if there were girls over Bat Mitzvah, their skirts were too short, but he looked away. He knew that if they outgrew the skirt, they had no money to buy the new one. It wasn't that they didn't learn tznius. These families could not put bread on the table. So he looked away. We have gotten so far from that, and it is easy to blame the schools, but I want to tell you how the schools are exclusive. It is because the parents not the school masters, want to send their children to school where the school is seen as having the highest status because only people who fit a certain mold are accepted and if a person doesn't fit that mold they are rejected. They should go to the other school the veggie bin. We will never have peace with ourselves if we can't accept that other people are okay. Another thing that typified schools when I was there (1956) special ed had not developed all that much, but there were schools that were for retarded children. Reb Vovl wouldn't let schools reject Downs children. He said it is good for the other children to help the children with Downs and to be kind to them and to extend themselves to them because they are precious and important. There is space for every person on the spectrum. We have to be more open and less rejecting.

Here is an enormous chiddush of the Maharal. Hashem not only draws people together but he makes the borders and separations. You don't have to become the other person to value the other person. And they don't have to become you to be valuable. They can be themselves, there can be boundaries. And you can still value them as being part of this whole.

There is true peace when nobody breaks down the other person's borders, when each person can stand independently and still be part of the whole. Part of the whole, but themselves. Everything needs shalom, meaning everything requires boundaries and inclusion. This includes the higher worlds. Hashem is what both binds them and gives them definition. He is both. And this is what is meant when you talk about Hashem's middos coming from one source. The Baal chesed, who gives forth, is also the Baal gevurah, the One who created boundaries for the sake of clarity and mutual contribution.

That is why hashem's name is shalom because it includes all of the other attributes. In order for Him to be the source of peace, you have to appreciate that He is transcendental, that He is above all reality. He is not just one reality of limits and bounds and power, like everything else. He is above all of that.

All of the things that are created need something to give them their place and to set their boundaries. What does that mean? Nothing is whole other than Hashem. Humility, recognizing that I am not the whole, I am part of the whole. We have to realize that none of us is always right. If we are in the mindset "my way or the highway" there is no room for peace not only because we don't respect the other person's boundaries, but because we don't recognize that we are only part of the puzzle.

Only Hashem is above the puzzle. Through Him comes peace for everything. And because of this, we see Him as being transcendent, above all things, not just one thing amongst others.

Now there is a third reason why Hashem's name is Shalom (1st is that He is all things and gives boundaries to all things, and that is the form that all things take, and 2nd He is also transcendent, above all things and still connected.) He is going to take us further. To sum to this place, there is an integrity to all things, we spoke about how everything has to be included, that humility means placing oneself as one piece of the puzzle amongst many, we said Hashem is transcendental, that He binds things and gives them boundaries, and He has sufficient humility that even though He is above everything He is still connected to everything.

Further then. Peace is great, and how do you see it? Hashem said, For the sake of peace. For example, when Sarah heard she was going to have a child, she said how can that be when I have grown old and my master is also old. But when Hashem repeated that to Avraham, he only said that she has grown old, no mention that Avraham had grown old. Now let's think about this. Let's say Hashem would not have changed the words. What would have happened next? Would Avraham have thrown a fit? Was he under the

impression that he was still young? Would he have fought with Sarah. NO. This Avraham and Sarah. So this is telling us something that we have to focus on but we have to have more information. A second reference. The angel who came to Shimshon's mother to tell her that she would have a child (she was barren) and when the angel didn't wanted to bring up to the man that his wife was barren, he left that part out. There is a third reference. The greatest peace, the divine name could be erased to make peace between a man and his wife. What are we talking about here? We are talking about the sotah ceremony whereby Hashem's name is written and dissolved into the water that would be drunk by the sotah.

The words of the prophets are implanted in us for the sake of peace. Peace is good because it is a vessel that receives everything else. In Israel, years ago, we went to the grocery – pick out your items – the man adds up the bill and you go. No bags. We had to bring our own baskets. If not, we have the problem. The basket is not your breakfast, it has no worth except that it lets you bring home everything else. Shalom is like the basket that holds everything together without which you have nothing.

Bircas HaKohanim ends with the word shalom to show you that all of the blessings given have their value in peace. It acts like the basket in the grocery store.

Not only does it put Hashem's blessings in the basket but it also puts our tefillah in. The humble shall inherit the earth and delight in great peace. Is it a humble person? Then it is part of the whole. Shalom is considered great because Hashem made peace and created everything. Why are we quoting all these gemaras? It shows that the Maharal is not using his own chiddushim but the underlying meaning is from many chazals about shalom, that we see all these dimensions because we have the picture in front of us. In the generation when the people are not pious, in a situation where there is maklokos - in a situation where people are otherwise b'seder but they have no room for anyone else because everyone has to be b'seder in exactly the same way, what this brings is that everything we do here brings down a parallel response from above, opposition below brings opposition above. Which is one of the reasons why the trips made by the Gerrer Rebbe and Reb Shteinman have been so beautiful because it is such a living example of two people who don't become the same person but who can bring peace down.

He goes on to something else. Not only is peace dear, but makloches is not dear. Even in war you need peace. The basic concept of order has a place even in war. There are halachos under what circumstances a person country should go to war, make peace, all of these things have boundaries. Terrible tragedies happen when people do not know the boundaries and therefore create their own boundaries. The two extremes we see in our own time are those who believe in fighting in all circumstances and those who believe in fighting under no circumstances. None of them look to the Torah and ask what are the boundaries? Even to conduct war you need this, which is why the king was supposed to consult the Gadol, after the political side gets, because the borders have to be clear and it has to be dealt with.

Even the dead need peace. What does that mean? The perfect state of being is that the components have their own integrity, its own purpose and are bonded together. The soul rises above the body but still holds the body in high regard for having been its instrument to perfect itself during the person's life, which is why we visit the keverim of tzaddikim, because their bodies still have kedusha. The mourners take care of the needs of the dead. The mourners mourn, but the time is 7 days. Everything is connected that has borders. What happens when not? There is ultimately devaluing of both parties. In India, the widow of the man who dies is burnt alive in the funeral fire. There are pictures of young women dying this way. The man who died is seen as important but they regard the mourner as having no integral value. These are two sides of one coin. Both sides – each has internal value and G-dliness. Even in death you need peace.

Reb Meir adds that when a person leaves this world, Hashem gives them the most beautiful gift of peace if they are tzaddikim. There are three different categories of angels that greet them. The idea of angels greeting them has to be understood. Angels are created by the force of our deeds. Do a good deed, create a good angel. Do a bad deed, create a bad angel. These three groups of angels are reflective of the deeds of tzaddikim. The first one says, let him come in peace. That means that he, this tzaddik, should come in peace because that is where he brought other people. The second says you can lie in your resting place in peace, which is what we said that there is peace between the soul and the body. The third, come before me, meaning that the person has a place before Hashem. It is not enough that the tzaddikim get their reward, but what they also get is acknowledgement for how they brought peace into the world. That is their beauty.

And the opposite is true of the wicked. The wicked will never have peace, because for a wicked person, who is there room for in the world? Themselves! So listen to what happens to them for this person. When they die, three groups of destructive angels greet them. The first says, Ain shalom, because of who you are integrally, there can't be peace because your nature is to push aside others. The second one says Hashem says this to rashaim – you lie down with those who have made grief. It is not about a tzaddik meeting his

ultimate fate or a rasha meeting his ultimate fate, but that holding his wishes together, the basket, his love of inclusion and boundaries (and what the rasha hates is inclusion and boundaries.)

You get the greatest peace as reward – how do you get the basket? Through having the things ready to put in the basket. Shalom comes as a consequence of loving Torah. Why? Torah gives everything its boundary. This is yours, this is mine, this is mutar, this is ussar, this tme this is tahar. These six categories which parallel the six sides of a cube tell us what the boundaries are. This is what halacha is about.

The desire to learn, the desire to know, comes from the desire to see inclusion. Just knowing boundaries is not enough, you also have to see the connecting force, each one knows Hashem.

Shalom is given to those who give tzedakah. There was a picture in the paper of all the Chabad Shlichim in Russia – maybe 70 or 80 people – and they all had something happening. A great philanthropist, whose father had been raised close to Chabad, footed the bill for the gathering. Some mention was made of this man's philanthropy. It is good to understand the need for inclusion and boundaries. Give this much to this cause, that to that. Don't keep it for you, that is not where it belongs.

He ends this by reminding us that Hashem's name is Shalom. He concludes by bringing the gemara that even the angels need Shalom. Each angel has its own name (which means it has its own boundary) and its name is the name of its shlichus, he can do that and no more. It is all part of Hashem's greater plan. Even the angels who can't be baal machloket still need a frame from above them, how to bind them together, while still retaining their boundaries. Even more so, the gemara finishes by saying from a place where there is no hatred, no despising, there has to be an outside force that brings peace. How much more so in a world where there is hatred and rejection do we need peace. We have to have the inner desire for there to be peace and the name for that inner desire is humility. I am only a piece of the whole, I have to find my place and my place isn't more important than anyone else's place. You have to be willing to learn enough Torah to know where the boundaries are. This is your place, where you have to grow. You can't impose yourself and try to fix someone by becoming them. We have in life in Bereshis that there was no rain until Adam prayed for rain. It had to be a person who could pray who could be grateful and if Hashem did not make that boundary Adam would not have been able to be Adam. He would not have been a fully developed person. At the same time that we have humility and boundaries, you also have to have inclusion, to be able to take Adam and see that he is in Hashem's image. Concretely, this should take us to a place of humility, of recognizing the other person and still having boundaries that we don't cross under any circumstances. What does it look like when it happens?

One example – there is a woman in HarNof that just adopted two orphaned brothers. Her mitzvah had been to make celebrations in her beautiful home for engagements, etc. But right now these children need a full time mother so she changed her boundaries to make room for them and to help them and she has her own place, which is where she needs to be. Someone else might say I will do it all, which means it won't get done right. Real shalom means making room for the other and for oneself and for Hashem to be included.