

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Maharal Sefer Netivat HaShalom - Notes from May 27 2007

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We have gone on at length about the trait of shalom for two reasons:

The first reason is to show that shalom includes everything, it is the all inclusive trait. Remember what we said shalom is, and I am going to review this briefly, it is when all of the pieces of the puzzle are put in the right place and the vision of the One who formed the puzzle is therefore fulfilled. So there are three things – the puzzle pieces, each of which has to retain its own integrity, their dependence upon one another since none of them is the puzzle all by itself, and finally the vision of the One who made the puzzle that is fulfilled when each piece is in its right place. In that sense, Hashem's name is Shalom (this is what we ended with last time). Shalom includes everything (it is the whole puzzle) and it has to do with the integrity of every piece. He is saying one reason that we spoke about this at such length is that by definition –Shalom is weighed against everything and therefore we had to explain how it contains everything, meaning that if you were to weigh all of the puzzle pieces they equal the concept of Shalom, which is the puzzle when all of its pieces are in place.

This is all known in divine wisdom, the midda that is called hakol is also called Shalom. Where do we have the midda of HaKol? It says in the Torah at the end of Avraham's lifetime that Avraham was old, his days had come and Hashem blessed him bakol. There are three possibilities of what bakol is. One is that he didn't have a daughter, and that was a blessing because had he had a daughter, whom would she have married? The other is that he did have a daughter because how can you say he is complete if he did not have a daughter? And the third is that he did have a daughter and the daughter's name was bakol. The Rambam speaks about this and this is a very difficult thing – how can not having something be a blessing and how can you say that Avraham did have a daughter and we have no history of who she married and what became of her? So he says both of these things have to do with the third pshat which is that he had a daughter named bakol. So he says, we are not talking about a physical daughter, but a spiritual midda that we call allegorically bat. In Hashem's self-presentation to the world, the allegory that we always use is that of a human being because we have the Divine imprint. In order to understand Hashem's relation to us we speak about different human beings.

These are called personae, faces, that Hashem presents to the world. There are five major personae. The last of which is female, or bat or the daughter. What is this about?

A person's child is the way they continue eternally in this world. Similarly the two attributes that are called the child attributes are the ways that Hashem is self-manifest in this world, in our world, another word for it is Shechina, Hashem's presence in the observable world. To understand this trait a bit, picture this.

This happened to me. I was on the bus and the woman next to me was speaking to someone across from me and the topic was someone who had gone out of business. They said Mr. So and so the day before he went out of business he was still taking orders. Now I know this person, not well, I bought things in his store on occasion. We are not talking about Atilla the Hun. I don't know what financial difficulties drove him to being dishonest, and I don't have to know. But this is lashon hara. Lashon hara is true negative information given unnecessarily. I could have two responses. The really bad response which is to listen more carefully to the conversation so that I can know what really happened, or the less bad response, which is to tune out, but this time I made the right response. I see both parties are observant and I turn to the woman sitting next to me and I said this is lashon hara and I don't have to hear this and I would imagine that your friend also doesn't have to hear it. This man has been out of business for over a year. Why do we have to hear this? And you don't need to say it. So her first response because she is a human is But it's true! He did that!. Lashon hara by definition is true. Then she was quiet and she even thanked me and that was unusual because most people would stay with their defensiveness.

It was Hashem's providence, I that I had just read in the Likutei HaMoran that when we are angry, it is because we feel the tzar HaShechina, the pain of Hashem's Divine Presence. How painful it is for Hashem Whose presence is in the hearts of each one of us, when somebody through their defenses or because of their pressures actually takes orders the day before they declare bankruptcy. How painful this dishonesty is. So we feel this pain within our own souls because we are part of Hashem. This is the part of us that says This isn't right – this isn't right. But what we are supposed to do with that feeling of This isn't right is to move towards fixing it if that is possible (which in this instance it wasn't – it was a year afterwards) or at least feeling compassion and asking for Hashem's compassion to guide the person in the right way to let the person make rectification somehow, that he give us the wisdom to judge this person favorably in order that we be judged favorably, etc.

The voice within us that feels this is called Shechina. One aspect of this is called daughter – why female? A female takes in what is given and then reproduces. She takes in the sperm and then makes a baby out of it biologically.

Now let's go back to the Gemara. Avraham had a daughter whose name was bakol. Avraham gave birth to something – not physically. This is an allegory, a daughter. He planted a seed that gave birth to something bigger than itself. What is that? That is peace. He put the pieces together, he saw the picture. He was the first one who saw the picture on their own. Adam was born with awareness. He was created with awareness. Avraham had to come to this on his own. He had to look at the world and say Who made it? What do the pieces of the puzzle mean? What am I supposed to do with this? Why am I in this puzzle? This is called middas hashalom.

How is everything at peace? So all of the sages whose words we just heard last time, in which they compared shalom to many things and spoke about its greatness they are trying to explain what this seed gives birth to. That is one reason why we went on about shalom so much.

Now he is going to give us a whole other reason.

It is because this world by its nature is full of discord, so we have to hear about shalom as a possibility because the nature of this world is that there is tremendous discord. We need to be warned and rebuked that we not stumble in this midda of shalom because that is what completes everything. All of the things that read before include every aspect of peace.

There is no reason to say more, but to show us 2 things, that there is such a thing as shelamos and that every one of us can carry Avraham's torch and look for wholeness. The other is that we should be warned, that this world does not lend itself to finding peace so easily.

We have to know that maklochet is a huge thing. The energy of maklochet is vast. The same way as we have the desire to see how the pieces fit together is deeply implanted within us, the desire for discord is very powerful. We like being part of this. It gives us identity. I will give you an example.

Quite a few years ago, the religious parties divided. This happens relatively frequently. There was a presidential election. One party had a symbol and people, being partisan, had the letters on their porch. The letter that my kids wanted was gimel. They wanted me to put out a giant gimel. And I wasn't into it. I am not that partisan. So they were willing to negotiate, but I wasn't going to go for it. But then my kids said, but then we are not important. Then we are not For Something.

This is how we think, that you have to be opposed to something in order to be yourself. Now the real truth is when you are talking about things that are true (not everything is true but when you are talking about truth, the pieces of the puzzle, if they have retained their integrity) you need all of the other pieces because they are different, not because they are the same. But kids will never get this.

Because makloches is so huge and it is very destructive, when the words themselves Shalom and Makloches, what they really are is hinted as follows:

The words which we use are before a person continually, it is wholeness that is the source of peace. You have to retain your desire for the whole picture, no matter how much you guard the integrity of your particular piece, you have to remember it is part of a whole. At the risk of sounding partisan I would have to say that what I admire most about the head of the Nevee Institution is he never under any circumstances will say anything negative about another institution of Torah learning or pressure a girl to stay at Nevee because it is Nevee. He will always say that the main thing is that it is Torah and the main thing is that you are learning. And I have heard him say this more than once.

And the opposite is maklochet. In the Torah, peace is called shalom. The opposite is true with dissent. Shalom is called shalom in the Torah and in the Rabbinic writings. Conversely, in the Torah, the word maklochet is not used. In the Gemara the word maklochet is used. "Reiv" is used in the Torah, a reiv between two people. But the Gemara uses maklochet. It is because the word shalom begins with the letter Shin. In order to understand what he says next we have to understand why we care what letter it begins with. We are used to English where the name of something is a random sound of something that we can already conceptualize. The fact that the word table is related to tabla (a flat place) is very interesting but most people use the word table don't know it and are not interested in it. It is not relevant, we know what a table is and this is what we use to describe table. The word book is the sound we use to describe book. In Hebrew the words are descriptions and the letters (ot) symbolize what the word is conveying. It isn't that we know the concept of shalom and we have to have a sound to describe it so shalom is just as good as any other sound, NO. It is not coincidental. It has to be a word that begins with the letter shin. Think about the letter shin

What you see is a base and there are three lines that come out of it, one to the right, one to the left and one from the middle. That is a picture of shalom, that is the essence of Shalom, it is exactly what shalom is. There are two extremes and something that joins them, that holds them and gives them commonality while they all retain their integrity and individuality. The middle one is the one that can find commonality and can make decisions that include both extremes. There is one extreme, the other is the other extreme, and you need something to decide between them, and because the head is what needs shalom the most, an ordinary person is under the dominion of the people who are the heads of the people, the ones who rule them, and they put peace amongst the people or not. The heads don't have someone who they listen to – if there is no shalom between the leaders, then the followers are also divided. I will give you an example of this.

One of the things that has happened in our day that could not have happened two hundred years ago, it is so beautiful that we live to see this, are the trips that have been made in recent years by the Gerrer Rebbe and Rav Shteinman. Neither of these people are people who are bored and want to travel in order to fill up the days. These are people with unbelievable schedules. But they make a point of traveling together to give strength to the various communities in the world. Recently they were in France and Belgium, there is a plan to go to England I have heard. Now I want to point out what this isn't. This isn't that Reb Shteinman suddenly decided that chassidus is the way to go and that he will be eating kugel in the shteibel next week while singing Yishehu B Malchuscha. This isn't going to happen. It isn't that the Gerrer Rebbe decided that the Litvaks were right all along and that at the next tish he is going to make an announcement no more singing – take out your gemaras. It isn't going to happen. What they have decided is to retain their individuality of approach but to point out by physical example of the enormous respect they show each other that it is okay, that they are both people of Torah. Their little arguments are only about who should speak first, who should get more kovod, each one wanting the other one to precede them. At one point I remember in the entourage, it was who should get off the plane first and Reb Shteinman said to the Gerrer Rebbe you must go out first. So the Rebbe went out first and he said, I am your welcoming committee Reb Shteinman. It is beautiful. This is the letter Shin. This is how it should be, this is what it should look like. It doesn't mean amalgamation. It means retaining individuality on the basis of truth. So the shin in its classical symbol would be Avraham, chesed on the right, Yitzchak, gevurah on the left which always has to do with overcoming and restraint, and Yaakov, the person of Torah between them. This is called tifereth or beauty which is very related to shalom. If the leaders are at peace then the people will be at peace.

Therefore it isn't just one letter but there have to be the two extremes. Again, picture the shin, with the two sides and the middle, but the middle is not straight. It inclines a little to the left. If the right side is always the stronger and more appealing side, we like chesed a lot better than we like din, is this not so? Chesed is very appealing and din is far less appealing. Talking about self-conquest is never going to get the same kind of audience that talking about kindness will get.

In order for there to be peace between them, the middle player has to move a little towards the left, the side of din, to combat the inherent pull that the right side has. If it would go to the right side, it would just create more maklochet. Why? Because the nature of the bigger one, the side of chesed, is to say that the smaller one, the side of din, is the cause of maklochet...you are petty and nitpicky. So that is the side that needs more validation, which what people actually say. The right, chesed, is always more popular. Overcoming self, self-sacrifice, is always harder and if you don't validate that, then that can be reduced in people's eyes as being thought of as unimportant and there is more maklochet. Therefore the middle one has to move toward the left to show its beauty, to show its merit. So, a practical example of this would be, in our day, if you want to inspire someone, you have to work very hard to remind people that self-transcendence is a value, that tznius and humility are values. You don't have to tell anyone that doing is a value, that being there for someone is a value. They got that. It is when you validate the left that there is complete peace. But Shin isn't the only letter.

The next letter is lamed in the word Shalom. The lamed goes high, it is the highest of all of the letters. Peace comes from a higher place. Who knows what the puzzle should look like in the end? Only Hashem. We can know where we fit in and sometimes we can feel how dependent we are on others and the beauty of who they are but from where we are, we don't see the whole puzzle. To make peace, you have to be willing to say I don't see the whole puzzle. You have to look above.

Nothing is higher than shalom because it is the purpose for which everything was created. The only way the Jews will ever have peace between them (and we won't have peace in the world until Moshiach comes by the way) but even between ourselves, we are not going to have peace until we are all dovek in Hashem, until we can let go of seeing our own individual piece of the puzzle as being the only thing that matters. We have devekus in Hashem when we see the interdependence and we see the beauty of His picture and even when we don't we trust that there is beauty in this picture as it emerges. Then we will have peace. Therefore peace between them goes to the highest heights and this is what causes shalom, when people rise above themselves.

And now we are up to the last letter of the root of shalom which is the final mem, which is called mem stuma, the closed mem. The mem is closed, it has no opening (like a non-final mem). It is like it has a fence on all four sides. Not like an ordinary mem that has a little opening. It has a wall on every side. Real Shalom is something closed. There is no room for someone to take over if there is real peace. What does that mean concretely? That would mean, the way people like to put pepper in the stew. I will give you a true story. As some of you know one of the great Rebbes in Eretz Yisroel is the Amshener Rebbe, a person of enormous insight, very caring. He is a person who says of himself I am Tefillah. He can pray Shemonah Esrai six hours on an ordinary weekday. He doesn't talk much about himself at all. He will hear the other person and respond to them but once he had something escape from his mouth. He was making havdalah, and havdalah for him could be easily two hours. Most of the time he was silently standing, just holding the cup. Somebody said, why are you holding the cup, what are you thinking, what are you saying? He said for a moment, I could see from one end of the world to the other. So why am I telling this to you? Because by the nature of things, he can't be punctual on our time. Sometimes the prayers run into each other, shacharis leads into mincha, maariv is already in the morning. He is offtime by our concept. And he doesn't allow his Chassidim to do this by the way. Somebody who likes a little pepper in the stew, likes a little action, went to Rav Shach when Rav Shach was alive, and said have you heard? And Rav Shach said what are you talking about. And he said, there is a so-called tzaddik in Yerushalayim that does not keep the shulchan aruch. Rav Shach said what are you talking about? So he said, you know the Amshenever Rebbe, and he said yes, look what time he davens, why his mincha can be way after shkia, you know. So here is what Rav Shach said. There is a mishna in Pirke Avos that says mitzvah gerrera mitzvah and avera gerrera avera. One mitzvah drags in another mitzvah, and a sin drags in another sin. So he said, if this is an avera, there is going to be a result. A sin leads to another sin, so when he does the next sin, be sure to tell me. Okay? That is what we mean when we say a closed mem. A person who is a person of peace does not open the wall for maklochet. Doesn't open the wall. Now that doesn't mean sticking your head in the ground like an ostrich, that is not seeing the whole picture at all. But a person who cares about the whole picture is not going to open up to maklochet.

He says peace is so great that even if we worship idols but we have peace with each other, Hashem says, so to speak, that the accuser can't touch them. But when they have divisiveness between them, when their hearts are divided, then they will be held guilty. This is what is taught by the closed mem. It is closed from all four sides, you don't have to let in any negativity if you want shalom. Correction yes, negativity no. So how do you know where the line is? If you want to correct someone, who do you talk to? The person that you want to correct. How do you talk to them? In accordance with the halacha. You don't bring in other people and even at the times when it is necessary to bring in another person, you have to do it in a way that you are not opening up to maklochet, which in our days tragically, people are so maklochet addicted. I was once at the Torah Umesorah convention and a very important Rav was speaking and amongst the things he said is that he once got up and someone said Why did you sign it? And he said, sign what? And he said the posters against so and so. And he said what posters. What had occurred that somebody that is sure that he is right and likes maklochet photocopied a different letter on a different issue, pasted a letter concerning a different issue, and through computer graphics made it look as though the signature was on the second letter. Now the person who did this no doubt thought he was right. But that is a bale maklochet. Even if he was right, if this Rav decided not to sign his name, that is because he could see the harm done by maklochet even greater than the good done by taking an opinion on one side.

Something similar happened to Rav Orbach. When the Degel HaTorah political party was founded, Rav Shach wanted his approbation. Rav Orbach said I don't sign anything political. So Rav Shach came himself personally saying you have to sign, it is necessary for klal yisroel which is clearly the truth at the time. But Reb Shlomo Zalman Orbach's opinion was that no matter how much that is true, the damage that is done by

maklochet which inevitably happens when a new political party enters the scene, is so great that the words he used is speak to stones, to the tree. I am not signing anything political, and he didn't.

That is what peace is about. Something of peace is whole. There is no opening. If there is no opening then no one can overcome it, which is why when there is peace between us, no enemy could rule us, no enemy could successfully attack us, because there is no open place for accusation against us. That would mean even the sinners are part of the whole, which includes the righteous people. So the worst thing that could happen is when you disinclude people from your sense of the whole. We are us and they are a bunch of whatever. Now this is hard, I am not going to pretend that this is easy. This is hard. You have people who do terrible things. It is very hard to feel at one with them. It is easy to say that is a beautiful ideal. But if you are the one who is suffering because of the doings of that person, it is a lot harder to say with any integrity. You could play the game but to mean it? It is very hard. That is because of the tzar haShechina within us. When we feel that something is really wrong, we can't make peace with it. But we have to be willing, as Jews, to say, this person, no matter how wrong he is, is still part of me. Could there be a person who is so far beyond the pale that they have to be exorcised from the body of klal yisroel? There could be, but we are talking about people who are very far gone, the real apikorsim, not people we don't like.

All three things are hinted at in the word Shalom. Let's review what is hinted at in the word. We have the shin that joins the two sides together and has a base holding it together, and that inclines slightly to the left because the left is the less popular side. We have the lamed that shows that true peace is transcendent, that the true picture comes from Hashem and therefore there may be things we find difficult to accept but they come from a higher place. A practical example of that is in a din Torah, the good guy doesn't always win because the dayanim make their decision based on the facts presented to them. So sometimes you have a situation where the more clever of the two people succeeds in hiding evidence and the other person loses out and the dayan has his hands tied because he can't make up evidence. So realize there is a bigger picture. There is always a bigger picture and if a person is doing what is right they will get their compensation in the end, if not this way, then that way. Hashem is very great. The last letter is mem, if we are whole with each other there is no room for accusations since the wicked people become kalem for the righteous people, we are all one, there is no room for accusation and therefore we are whole. That is what is hinted at the three letters in the word shalom.

The word shalom shows what it is and therefore the word that they used, our chachamim, the word is maklochet and not reiv, and they explain the word reiv through the word maklochet. To tell us what a fight really is and how a fight really ends. The same way we learn from the meaning of the word shalom. In the word maklochet, the mem is open, it begins with He did this and it is wrong, which opens the way to accusation, especially if what you are saying is true. So instead of closing ranks, and saying the less great are part of klal yisroel as well, we say he is wrong – that opens the door to accusation. The person creates opening and breakthrough, which is the opposite of shalom, which is whole and has no opening. If you take the letter mem away from maklochet, you have the word chalik, which means piece, a fraction. You open the way to accusation and all you have left is disjointed chalakim, disjointed pieces. The chalakim may be there, but they are disjointed, they are not part of anything bigger than themselves. There is no possibility of them becoming whole even. He is going to explain now, his purpose in this gemara which we are only going to begin to explain, is talking about the nature of maklochet, to explain the open mem, the mem at the beginning of the word maklochet. It is compared to opening a faucet. When you open this, then what happens is that more and more flows. The act of opening shows what it leads to. It is like a camel's hump, a camel can take in all of this water and store it, meaning that maklochet by its nature does not dissipate. What is the water in both of these parables? Interestingly the water is the factor called heedar, the absence of reality. What keeps a maklochet going is the falsehood in it, the absence of reality. Shalaim means each piece is trying to put itself in the existent picture that Hashem wants. Maklochet means No I don't want to know from this whole picture, what picture? That is maklochet. When you look at bad maklochet, because there is maklochet that can be l'shaim shemayim that comes davka from seeing the whole picture but we will have to speak about that next time because it is too big to start today, but when you look at bad maklochet, and I will give you an example of bad maklochet. A certain chassidish group divided after the death of the Rebbe. The elder son took over being the rebbe as one would expect, but the son in law had a dream and no one doubted that he had this dream, not even the elder son, and in the dream the Rebbe came to him and said you have to be the Rebbe. So the elder son didn't contest the truth of the dream because there was no way a person of his stature would make it up, but he wasn't willing to step down either because it is his inherited role. They have no problem between them. There are now two Rebbes of this group which divided. They are fine with each other, they support each other. Who has the problem? Some of the Chassidim have a problem. They have to make a choice between the son and the son in law. I am not making this up, it is so grotesque. A husband finds he will put himself with the son. His wife's family is with the son in law. I will spare you all of the acts of this play, but where do you think it ended? In spite of both sides imploring, it ended up in the divorce court, and I will tell you why. Because it

stopped being about this Rebbe or that Rebbe who have no problem with each other. It ended up being about I am right you are wrong. That is what it ended up being about. Why should I listen to you is what it ended up being about. Why should you prevail? It had nothing to do with the issue, it had everything to do with personality. That is what heedar is, and what is the heedar? It is when a person thinks I should rule. Who should rule? Hashem should rule. There is no place for that. So maklochet always means taking Hashem out of the picture by trying to put the crown where? On one's own head, which is a terrible human tragedy.

And it always gets worse, it goes on and on. He says this is the way when you enter the unreality of gaivah, it always gets worse. The question is why does it get worse. The answer is fantasy. The way Hashem made us is that we have certain instincts. One of them is survival which is positive, if we didn't have survival instincts then we wouldn't survive. We would walk into traffic, we would do all kinds of idiotic things, so He put survival inside of us. What happens is that we become involved with fantasies of extinction. When a person says I am right and you are wrong, oftentimes it is saying how could you extinct me? How could you kill me? How could you make me non-existent? My prevailing is my existence. Now nobody has the power to choose against their survival instinct. The problem that we have, and this is why heedar always gets worse and worse, is that the voice of I have to do this otherwise I'll be overcome – I shouldn't be treated this way, why should I become a shmata? Who does he think he is – it only gets worse because what the person is looking for on the deepest most subconscious level is metzius and you can't get metzius through heedar, so what people do is put more and more heedar into the pot, which is like putting more and more oil on a burning fire.

Question

How do we understand when leaders of the generation come out against each other.

Answer

I can't stress this strongly enough, shalom doesn't mean homogenization, it doesn't mean that all the pieces are the same. It means it is all pieces of the same puzzle. Here is a classic controversy regarding two leaders that are no longer with us. Rav Shach and the Lubavitcher Rebbe had oppositional opinions regarding giving away territory to the Arabs. Rav Shach maintained that in the interest in preserving life, one is obligated to give away territory, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe maintained that giving away territory would only create further endangerment to life. Here is what they both agreed upon – the Torah gave us a land that is extraordinarily precious and can't be given away for political considerations, ego considerations, personal considerations. The Torah gave us a criteria of what is important, human life since we are in G-d's image, is enormously important. This is what they agreed upon. The question was how to fulfill that. In this case, two puzzle pieces, the right and the left were not the same, which is okay. Now in one's life, one has to take a position and oftentimes we don't. It is not necessary to take a position on everything and in this particular maklochet between them, the average person has no reason to take a position because no one is asking us. But assuming that we did need to take a position, it is reasonable to go as far as your mind can take you and ask people who are close to you who know better than you who have learned more, and listen and make a decision. But you can still be respectful of the fact that the opposing opinion still values life and still values Eretz Yisroel. There was no doubt about either of those things, the question was, what has to be done in this circumstance?

I gave you this as the example because it was very heated and because the leaders are no longer with us. But in every controversy what you will find is that when it is l'shaim shemayim, there are underlying truths that both sides agree upon and that by and large we don't have to have opinions on because most of the time no one is asking us. But when we do, we do have to take a side, and it doesn't necessarily have to involve devaluing the other one. Rather, it should involve seeing where truth lies. Here is where this gets sticky. I don't want you to hear what I am not saying. I am not saying vailu vailu – because sometimes you have to take a stand on one side or the other. So sometimes the differences in the positions have to be pointed out clearly. What I am saying is this is not like an anti semite against the Jews, not at all. So because of this we have makloches that lasts and makloches that don't. The stronger the base of truth, the more enduring the maklochet because the two positions will have integral truth to them and the more ego oriented they are, the quicker they go.

Tov.