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The End of Shemoneh Esrei: Praying For Peace

טוב יהי' לברכנו ולברך את כל עמך ישראל בכל עת ובכל שעה בשלומיך, ברוב עוז ושלום, ברוך אתה ה', המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום - The conclusion of the *Sim Shalom* blessing, and the end of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, concludes with the words, "And may be it good to bless us, and to bless all of Your nation Yisrael, at every time and every moment, with Your peace, with much abundance of splendor and peace; Blessed are You, Hashem, Who blesses His nation Yisrael in peace."

The beginning of the blessing was about *shalom* (peace), and the end of the blessing is also about *shalom*\peace. The blessing of the *Kohanim*, which immediately precedes *Sim Shalom*, is also a blessing for peace. The very last words of *Shemoneh Esrei* are also about peace: "He Who makes peace in His high abode, will make peace upon us."

Peace and The Beis HaMikdash

Concerning the days we are in - the Nine Days, where we mourn the destruction of both the first and second *Beis HaMikdash* - the Gemara[1] states that at a time when there is peace, there is joy in Yisrael, and the fast of the "fourth and fifth month" (the fasts of the 17th of Tamuz and *Tisha B'Av*) will be turned into joy and festivity. The mourning and sadness of the Nine Days is only an expression of its external layer. The inner essence of these days is the *avodah* upon us to transform them into days of joy. *Rashi*[2] says that when there will be a time of peace, when the nations of the world are not attacking the Jewish people, these days will be transformed from days of mourning and sadness to days of *simcha*.

"*Yerushalayim*" is rooted in the words "*yarei shalem*" (awe of perfection\completion), which is also rooted in the word "*shalom*". The Jewish people are called "*Shulamis*", which is also from the word "*shalom*". The first *Beis HaMikdash* was built by Shlomo, whose name is also from the word "*shalom*". The Sages state that Shlomo is called so because he was like "the King whom peace belongs to." The Sages also state that in the time that King Chizkiyahu lived, the *Beis HaMikdash* could not be destroyed, because it was a time of *shalom*.

Thus, it is *shalom* that upkeeps the *Beis HaMikdash*. The root of the *Beis HaMikdash* began with *shalom* ("Shlomo*shalom*"), and it was kept existent through *shalom*. Chazal say that *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred) destroyed the second *Beis HaMikdash*,[3] and this is all stemming from a lack of *shalom*. The sin of *lashon hora*, which is very rampant in our times, is entirely an offshoot of *sinas chinam*[4], and *sinas chinam* is rooted in the absence of *shalom* in our times.

The Two Roots of Strife

There is a *Midrash* that says that before Hashem create the word, *shalom* (peace) requested of Hashem, "Do not create the world, for the world is entirely a place of *machlokes* (strife) and dissension.

Why, indeed, is there so much *machlokes* (strife) in the world? There are two main obstacles that prevent *shalom* in the world.

One obstacle to *shalom* is when there are "*chilukei de'os*", difference of opinions. Two people think differently and they can get into an argument about something. This kind of argument is rooted in the "*de'os*", the opinions and beliefs, which are located in our brain. They are more intellectual arguments in their nature.

Another root of arguing and strife stems from the various unfixed *middos* (character traits) that are present in our heart.

Mental Bribery

Most of the strife rampant in today's times are stemming from the second reason: a lack of refined *middos*. The Sages state that in Heaven, there is no strife, for there is no jealousy or any other negative character traits amongst the angels. This implies that it is negative *middos* which are the source of strife; therefore, we, who live on this world, are affected by strife, for we do have a struggle with negative *middos*.

Many people get into arguments simply because they have a degree of low self-worth about themselves. But there are also many arguments which break out due to various *middos* that lay dormant in the heart, which end up bribing the brain's thoughts and thereby form various beliefs, which eventually lead to entering into arguments and dissension with others.

There is a concept of bribery in our own psyche (*shochad*). The Torah forbids giving any form of *shochad* (bribery) to a judge; once a judge takes the bribe, even if he is very wise, his brain becomes a bit warped, and it sways him from thinking honestly. Just like there can be monetary bribery, so can there be 'mental' bribery. One might have jealousy or hatred in his heart towards someone, and this can sway his mind, causing him to adapt certain beliefs and to allow himself to fight with others.

So the justification for entering into an argument with another is usually stemming from something unrefined in one's heart, which passes into his brain, where the brain's thoughts develop new thought patterns that follow these newly formed "*de'os*" (beliefs). One then comes up with all kinds of seemingly "logical" arguments against others as his many "*de'os*" are formed. All of these "*de'os*" are not actual "*de'os*"; rather, they are stemming from a bribed psyche, from unrefined *middos* that lurk in the heart.

Most of the strife and fights that go on today (both in the outside world as well as within our own sheltered society) are not stemming from a difference in *de'os*; rather, they stem from unrefined *middos*.

There is a big difference, however, between the kinds of arguments that break out within the Jewish people, with the arguments that take place amongst members of other nations of the world. Those who are not of the souls of the Jewish people don't care at all about having good *middos*, so they see no problem in getting into strife with others. The souls of the Jewish people (all except for the '*Erev Rav*'), by contrast, are in essence pure, and therefore we have the Divine gift implanted in us from Hashem to be able to fix and purify our *middos*. This applies to every single Jewish soul.

It is just that sometimes, there is a little bit of jealousy or some other bad *middah* that remains unfixed in the external layer of a Jew's soul, and this can cause inner bribery to his psyche, which leads him to form various erroneous beliefs and thereby justify getting into fights with others.

Difference of Opinion

A second root of strife stems from a problem in the very *de'os*. This is less common than the above-mentioned reason discussed until now, and it is almost always never the reason that motivates people to enter into *machlokes*, because as we explained, it is usually unrefined *middos* that cause a person to enter into *machlokes*. But we will discuss it here anyway, so that we can have a fuller picture of this topic.

If one gets into an argument due to a difference in *de'os*, the argument can only be conducted properly if it stays at the level of *de'os* and doesn't become personal. Such an argument is the kind of argument which the Sages describe as an "argument for the sake of Heaven", which can be effective. However, even when this is the case, it often ends up becoming personal.

The Gemara^[5] says that normally, the mitzvah to help another unload his donkey takes precedence to the mitzvah of helping another load the donkey, because unloading the donkey alleviates the donkey from *tzaar baalei chaim*. However, the Gemara says that if one sees his friend about to unload his donkey, and he also sees his enemy about to load his donkey, he should go help the enemy first, so that he can overcome his natural will.

Tosafos asks: What kind of enemy are we talking about? We aren't talking about a person whom a person simply hates, because this is prohibited. *Tosafos* answers that we are speaking about an "enemy" that one is permitted to hate, such as a person who sins deliberately in public and he doesn't accept rebuke. But *Tosafos* asks, if this is an enemy whom we have a mitzvah to hate, why must a person overcome his hatred towards him? *Tosafos* answers because although the person hated him originally because there was a *mitzvah* to hate him, by now it has become personal hatred. Therefore, there is a *mitzvah* upon the person to overcome this natural hatred that has developed, and deliberately help the enemy.

In other words, the hatred has spread past his *de'os* and it has by now entered the realm of his *middos*. In this case it was a *mitzvah* to hate the person, yet even a motivation that stems from a *mitzvah* can turn into a bad *middah*.

This shows us the depth that is behind strife, fighting, and war. Most of the arguments in the world are due to a problem in the *middos*, not in the *de'os*. Very few arguments are due to a difference of *de'os*. Even when the argument originally stems from a difference in *de'os*, it usually bribes the mind's thinking patterns, and then it simply becomes bad *middos*.

Thus, we can now understand the depth of the *Midrash* that peace requested of Hashem that the world not be created, for the world is entirely strife.

Checking Your Motivations

Anyone who finds himself getting involved in a fight or argument with others needs to clarify: Is this an argument stemming from my *de'os* (beliefs), or is it perhaps an issue of *middos*? Usually, upon some reflection, a person can discover that it was a lack of refined *middos* which prompted him to get into a heated argument with others, and not simply his *de'os*. After all, who can say he is so pure that all of his arguments with others are entirely due to *de'os* and not to his *middos*....?

When a person allows himself to stay in a *machlokes* and keep passionately to his beliefs as he

argues his points with others, this usually gets out of hand, causing him to lose both this world and the next - like what happened with Korach and his assembly, who lost everything, because they couldn't let go and leave the *machlokes*.

Only a very great and purified person can enter a *machlokes* and retain his good *middos*. Ordinary people are not strong enough in their souls to be unaffected by *machlokes*. Even when a *Gadol* has to be involved in a *machlokes*, he keeps checking himself to see if it's affecting his *middos*; he doesn't stop suspecting himself of ulterior motives.

A truthful person keeps suspecting himself of his motives. Even if he knows that his opinion was right, he suspects that perhaps by now it is becoming more personal.

Hashem knows what's going on in each person's heart when he argues with others. There is almost no one in the generation who is fitting to enter a *machlokes* without getting affected by bad *middos* along the way, therefore, it is forbidden for anyone to enter a *machlokes*!

The deeper and more truthful a person is, he is aware of the subconscious motives, and surely his conscious motives. If one discovers that his bad *middos* are fueling his desire for *machlokes*, he must step back from the *machlokes*. When one realizes what we are saying here, he runs from *machlokes* as if it's a fire. This is no exaggeration; it is reality to anyone who realizes this.

There is almost no one in the generation who can fight purely for the sake of Heaven. Although we see a lot of misguided hotheads who don't listen to these rules, that doesn't make it right. One must realize that *machlokes* is a total contradiction to our pure essence. Since most of us do not know if the desire to enter the *machlokes* is stemming from *de'os* or *middos*, we must assume that it stems from bad *middos*, and thus stay away totally from the *machlokes*.

Even if we have to choose sides in a *machlokes*, that should only be in the actions we do. We have no choice when it comes to this part; we have to act like one of the sides. But even when this is the case, in our own heart, we need to feel separate from the entire *machlokes* and that we have absolutely no connection to it.

And even if a person enters a *machlokes* due to a difference of *de'os* (which it is almost never the case, as we explained), he must suspect himself that it has festered and that it has become bad *middos*; unless he is on the level of Dovid HaMelech who said "*My heart is emptied from within me.*" Even if it is a *machlokes* towards a wicked person whom it is a *mitzvah* to hate (which is not such a simple matter in our times), if the *machlokes* is allowed to simmer and fester, it eventually becomes bad *middos*. What started out as a difference of opinion becomes strife and hatred.

If one who is totally clear that his differences with another comes from *de'os* and he is very afraid that it will lead to bad *middos* and he makes sure to keep checking his motivations, he is one who fears Heaven, and he is the kind of person who can maybe survive a *machlokes* and remain unscathed. Anyone who is not like this should stay away from *machlokes*, and that is the case with most people in the world.

Increasing Our Love For The Jewish People

It doesn't matter what kind of Jew we are dealing with and which type of community he comes from and what his background is: we must make sure we don't allow ourselves to enter strife.

Don't enter a communal *machlokes*, and stay away from even private *machlokes*. Always suspect yourself of bad *middos* motivating you. It takes much wisdom and prayer to enter a *machlokes* and come out unaffected. Even if staying away from *machlokes* will make you lose money or your status

or your honor, be prepared to lose it, rather than enter a *machlokes* and lose both worlds.

Instead, awaken your *ahavas Yisrael* (love of the Jewish people) towards every Jewish soul. Don't only love Jews in your community, who represent your beliefs and whom you see eye-to-eye with. Rather, you must love every single Jew, without exception, whether it is a truthful Jew or a misguided Jew, whether it is an observant Jew or whether he is off the *derech*, or whether he's half-*frum* or three-quarters *frum* or a quarter-*frum* or whether he's totally far from our *derech*. Whether you agree with him or whether you don't agree with him, love him in your heart.

If one can do that, he can survive this generation, and if not, he will almost definitely lose both this world and the next. In today's times, strife is filling every place in the world; it affects every community and every corner, *rachmana litzlan* (may G-d have mercy). Therefore, one must keep awakening *ahavas Yisrael* towards all other Jews, even towards those who are on a totally different side.

Make sure that you never fall into the pit of bad *middos*. Keep remembering the words of our Sages that peace didn't want the world to be created due to all its strife. The world we live in is an "*alma d'piruda*", a "world of disparity", and in the End of Days which we are in, where we at the end of the end, the *pirud* (disparity) grows more and more^[6]. We are very dispersed amongst our own people; and there is disparity amongst us, in every sect of Judaism and in every corner (may G-d have mercy on us).^[7]

When one lives likes this - when he makes sure to keep awakening *Ahavas Yisrael* towards all Jews and he is making sure to stay away from all traces of strife - he is one who can ask Hashem to bless us with peace at all times, as we say here in the end of the blessing of *Sim Shalom*, **בכל עת ובכל שעה בשלומיך**.

In summary, there is strife in our world every moment, everywhere, from in front and from behind us, and that is why we pray to Hashem specially that there be peace at all times and at all moments. Thus we need to keep running away from strife more than ever, and to instead keep awakening our love for all Jews.^[8]

In Conclusion

When all of the Jewish people will touch upon this point, this will be the peace that comes to the world, and it will be fully realized how "Torah scholars increase peace in the world".^[9] Then we will see, speedily in our days, the time where Hashem will bring peace upon us. There will be peace at last in Yerushalayim, and then we will merit the rebuilding of the final and complete *Beis HaMikdash*.

Amen, Amen, and Amen.

[1] Rosh HaShanah 18b

[2] ibid

[3] Yoma 9b

[4] (Editor's Note: See *Sefer Chofetz Chaim – Hakdamah*)

[5] Pesachim 113a

[6] See ***Fixing_Your_Wind_020_The_Desire_For_Compensation***

[7] Refer to ***Purim_067_Achashveirosh_and_Haman***

[8] See ***Getting_To_Know_Your_People_05_How_To_Hate_Evil_and_Aspire_For_Unity***

[9] Berachos 64a

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