

This publication is a dose of chizuk based on the weekly parasha inspired by the Torah of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov zt"l

The Rebbe's Pharmacy

Chizuk and Inspiration for Today's Spiritual Illnesses

Parshas VaYeishev – Shabbos Chanukah

The highest level of truth is the unfathomable compassion that Hashem has for the Jewish people even when we're covered with the filth and temptation of the modern world.

The machlokes between the tzaddikim causes us incredible suffering.

From this week's parsha we learn what prolongs this terribly bitter exile and causes us incredible suffering: machlokes (argument) between the tzaddikim. As each generation flies by and we get sucked further and further into the garbage dump of technology, physical desire, and deep emotional brokenness, we naturally look to the tzaddikim for guidance. Perhaps they have found a way to escape the incredible darkness of the modern world? Perhaps they know how to help us find our way back to Hashem?

However, when we see the harsh and sometimes ruthless machlokes between the tzaddikim, we fall into complete and utter despair. We ourselves are in such a low place that there is no way for us to discern who is right. How could we stick our heads between the great minds of our generation and decide which one we should follow? Because of this, we don't connect to any of them, and we give up completely on trying to save ourselves from the severe spiritual suffering that we feel in the depths of our soul. We don't know whether we should turn right or left, so we just stay put. The problem is we're standing in a pile of quicksand, sinking quickly into the pit of despair.

In our heart we sometimes even question the legitimacy of the tzaddikim. If they are really true tzaddikim, how is it possible for them to have such disagreements? This is the incredibly destructive power of machlokes in the religious Jewish world.

This is the theme of the beginning of this week's parsha which describes the machlokes between Yosef and his brothers. The Torah tells us that all of the tribes of Yisroel were tzaddikim (see Rashi, Beresheis 35:22). Yaakov Avinu merited to have twelve sons who were all holy and righteous. And yet, some of Yosef's brothers wanted to kill him! How is this possible -- both in the story of Yosef and his brothers and in today's

world as well? More importantly, how are we supposed to connect to any tzaddik in our generation and rise above the filth of modern times in the face of such machlokes and confusion?

Although all the tzaddikim are true and deserve the utmost respect, there has to be one tzaddik who has reached the ultimate truth.

Reb Noson explains (Likutei Halachos, Birkas HaShachar 3:17) that according to logic, it can't be that any two people are on the same spiritual level. It is simply not possible. One of them worked harder in his avodah and reached a higher place than the other. The same is true regarding the tzaddikim. Although they are all very righteous and serve Hashem with incredible deveikus, there has to be a differentiation between them. Even though the Torah of all the tzaddikim who follow in the tradition of the Sages is true and very important to Klal Yisroel and we must honor and respect them all, nonetheless some tzaddikim have reached higher understandings of truth than the others. And there is one tzaddik who has attained the ultimate level of truth, like the Sages say (Sanhedrin 8), "There can only be one leader of each generation (dabar echad ledor)."

Thus, even though all the tribes of Yisroel were tzaddikim, nevertheless it was possible for them to go against Yosef HaTzaddik. This was due to the fact that, although they had achieved a high level of truth in their own right, nonetheless they struggled to comprehend the truth of Yosef, since it was exponentially higher than their level. Because of this, they honestly thought that Yosef was acting out of line and they must get rid of him for Hashem's sake, when in truth, his actions were simply beyond their ability to understand.

The same is true for all of the arguments between the tzaddikim throughout the generations. Just like Yosef's brothers, the tzaddikim who have lower levels of truth are completely lishmah (for the sake of Heaven) in their machlokes against another tzaddik. They truly believe that they are doing the right thing by slandering him and trying to bring him down. However, due to their lack of comprehension of the level of that tzaddik they make a grievous mistake. This is how it is possible to have machlokes even between true tzaddikim.

While the opinion of Beis Shamai is correct, the opinion of Beis Hillel has a higher level of truth.

But the main question still remains: how do we deal with the machlokes and find a way to discern the ultimate truth in order to come closer to Hashem?

The answer lies in the argument between Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel. Without a doubt, the talmidim of Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel were all tzaddikim and their machlokes was purely for the sake of Heaven (see Pir-

kei Avos). In fact, the Sages even say that, "Elu ve'elu divrei Elokim Chaim – both the words of Beis Shamai and those of Beis Hillel are the words of Hashem (Eruvin 13b)." However, if they're both right, then what are we supposed to do? Beis Shamai says that we must do the mitzvah this way, while Beis Hillel says we must do the mitzvah in exactly the opposite way. It isn't possible to follow both opinions! And who are we to pick sides and determine which one we should choose?

In truth, the Sages say that during the height of the machlokes between Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel the Jewish tradition was in grave danger. The dissonance was so great that it was as if there were two Torahs, G-d forbid. Then, a voice came from Heaven (bas kol) and proclaimed that the halacha was like Beis Hillel and settled the machlokes. Thus, even though the opinion of Beis Shamai was still true and their talmidim were still given the utmost respect, Hashem revealed to the world that Beis Hillel had a higher level of truth that was the path for the Jewish people to follow.

Hashem's truest characteristic is his unfathomable compassion for every single Jew.

So, what was this higher level of truth? The gemarra in meseches Shabbos (31a) describes the essential difference between Shamai and Hillel (which of course determined the continuation of the machlokes between their talmidim afterwards). The gemarra tells the story of non-Jews who came to convert to Judaism with somewhat outlandish requests. For example, one of them wanted to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot!

Upon hearing these requests, Shamai did the most logical thing to do and hit these crazy people with his stick. Hillel on the other hand, responded in a very bizarre way. He actually answered their ridiculous questions and encouraged them to convert and come under the wings of the Shechinah.

From here we see that the primary characteristic of Shamai was din—judgement. According to logic and judgement, Shamai's response made the most sense. Why should we try to invite such lunatics to become a part of the Jewish people?! On the other hand, Hillel's primary characteristic was compassion. Therefore, his actions



seem rather strange according to our logic, nevertheless Hillel had such a deep compassion for them that acted beyond the letter of the law. He recognized that, even though they were covered with the shutz and stupidity of the secular world, nonetheless, they had unbelievable kedusha inside of them and a deep ratzon to be Jews.

The more the light of the miracle of Chanukah grows from day to day, the more the tzaddikim help us to find that light even in the darkest places of today's world.

We see a similar machlokes between Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel regarding the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles. Beis Shamai states that one

We want to have incredible inspiration and deveikus in avodas Hashem even while we sit in a pool of powder-covered jelly doughnuts and greasy potato latkas smeared with sour cream. And yet Hashem says, "Yes, here you go! All you have to do is light these candles and sit by them for a while, taking in their awesome light."

must continually reduce the amount of candles by lighting eight on the first night, seven on the second, six on the third, etc, while Beis Hillel holds that one must increase the amount of candles by lighting one on the first night, two on the second, etc. Reb Noson explains (Likutei Halachos, Hashkamas HaBoker 4:16) that both of them agree that the miracle of the light of Chanukah became greater with each subsequent day. Certainly, even Beis Shamai would admit that

when the small amount of oil that was only enough for one day continued burning day after day, the longer it burned the more extraordinary the miracle was.

However, it is precisely due to the fact that the light of the miracle became greater with each day that Beis Shamai hold that we must reduce the amount of candles. This is because the greater revelation of light, the more we must hide that light and keep it away from the reach of the sinners. The more exalted the level of kedusha is, the more we must protect it from the hands of the wicked.

Beis Hillel, on the other hand, hold that on the contrary, the greater the revelation of Hashem's light in the world, the greater the opportunity we have to use that light to help the sinners to do teshuvah. It is true that we must be careful with such light and not expose in an inappropriate way, nonetheless, through the incredible wisdom of the tzaddikim it is possible for them cloth this exalted light, so to speak, and put it into vessels which can reach the people even in the lowest and darkest places and lift them up.

This is the deeper understanding of the unbelievably awesome mitzvah of lighting the menorah. By simply setting up our menorah – placing the cups, pouring the holy oil, and preparing the wicks – and then lighting the flames, we can bring the holiest light of the Ein Sof down into the darkest and most bitter places in our lives. Because of the incredible power of the tzaddikim – Mattisyahu Kohen Gadol and the Sages who gave us this

mitzvah – we have the ability to create the vessels (the menorah, the oil, and the wicks) through which we can receive the highest revelation of Hashem's light even in the places in which according to logic and reasoning His presence cannot reach – below ten tefachim.

From here we see the extraordinary compassion that Hashem has for us. Unlike the other holidays when, in the times of the Beis HaMikdash, we had to pack all of our bags, gather our entire family together and go up to meet Hashem in Jerusalem, on Chanukah Hashem comes down to us. We are too weak and too lost to be able to find our way up to Him. We are like the crazy goyim who have ridiculous requests. We want to have incredible inspiration and deveikus in avodas Hashem even while we sit in a pool of powder-covered jelly doughnuts and greasy potato latkas smeared with sour cream.

And yet, Hashem says, "Yes, here you go! All you have to do is light these candles and sit by them for a while, taking in their awesome light." This is the highest level of truth – the unfathomable compassion that Hashem has for the Jewish people even when we're covered with the filth of physical desire and temptation. This is the highest level of truth – that no matter how far we fall into the most dark and disgusting bottomless pit of the modern world, there is still amazing hope and light. Hashem is still with us! And we can find our way out.

This is why the Heavenly voice declared that the halacha should follow Beis Hillel and we must increase the candles each day in order to bring the awesome light of the menorah down into our lives. Although Beis Shamai is also correct and their opinion is also true, it is not the highest truth. The compassion of Beis Hillel is a greater revelation of Hashem's truest characteristic in the world.

Which one of the tzaddikim do we hold like today? The one who can reveal the great compassion of Hashem and inspire us to do teshuvah.

With this understanding, we can begin to deal with the machlokes between the tzaddikim of our generation and search for the tzaddik who has reached the highest level of truth. The formula is really very simple: we must find the one who is able to help us to do teshuvah and come closer to Hashem!

It could be that some tzaddikim know all the teachings of the gmarrah and poskim by heart. There could be others who even understand all the secrets of kabbalah in addition to the practical halachos of the Sages. There could be those who also serve Hashem with unbelievable deveikus in their davening and mitzvos. However, if these tzaddikim are unable to help those of us who have fallen into the traps of technology and temptation of today's world find the strength and inspiration to continue to hope to Hashem and try to do whatever we can to change, then they are not the tzaddikim for us. They are all certainly true tzaddikim and we must give them the utmost respect and honor. But if they are not able to reveal the light and compassion of Hashem in such a way that can awaken us even though we've fallen beyond the boundaries of kedusha – below ten tefachim – then their truth still has a certain aspect of "Shamai" who was an amazing tzaddik but couldn't assist those who were very far away from the light of the Torah.

This is our sign. This is how we can know who we should attach ourselves to. This is the "bas kol" (Heaven voice) which is declaring who the halacha follows even in today's day and age: Whoever has such an extraordinary level of understanding of Hashem's deepest compassion that he can reveal Hashem's light to us and inspire us not to give up hope even in the darkest and most bitter times in our lives. Whoever has such incredible love for each and every Jew that he gives up his entire life to try to bring the exalted light of Hashem into

our terribly contaminated places and lift us up. Whoever can save us even from the most difficult temptations of the modern world and give us the strength to continue to try to overcome the seemingly impossible obstacles between us and Hashem. This is the tzaddik for us. This is the tzaddik who has reached such a high level of truth that he can even help those in the worst possible situations.

While his brothers pushed away the sons of the maidservants, Yosef encouraged and strengthened them.

This was the greatness of Yosef HaTzaddik. The verse says that, while the sons of Leah rejected and pushed away the sons of the maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah, Yosef ran after them to try to encourage and strengthen them. He even acted somewhat childish with them. This was one of the reasons that his brothers hated him.

From here we see the whole story in a nutshell. The sons of Leah saw that the sons of the maidservants were on a much lower level. Due to the lack of kedusha in their background, they were struggling to serve Hashem like the other tribes of Yaakov. Therefore, much like Beis Shamai, the sons of Leah thought they needed to be pushed away from the house of Yaakov in order that they shouldn't interfere.

However, Yosef saw them in a completely different light. He understood that, on the contrary, the main job of the tzaddikim is to lift up those who are struggling, even if it means that they must lower themselves from their exalted levels of kedusha. Sometimes, a tzaddik must even act childish in order to give over the light of Hashem to those who are lost in the childish desires of this world and are unable to receive the light directly from the Torah itself.

To the other brothers this behavior seemed very strange and even out of line. They couldn't understand what Yosef was doing so they thought that he was making a terrible mistake and must be punished. However, we see in the end that Yosef was right. Although the brothers had a certain level of truth and their opinion seemed very logical, nonetheless, Yosef's level of truth and understanding of Hashem was much greater, and the brothers eventually had to bow down to him and admit their mistake.

We must find our way back into the flock of the shepherd of today's generation.

So too in today's world, this is the job of the tzaddikim: to be shepherds who grow and protect their flock and don't let a single sheep get lost. This tradition started with the first Jew -- Avraham Avinu -- who gave up his life to reveal Hashem's Presence to the world and bring countless souls under the wings of kedushah. This tradition was continued by Yitzchak and Yaakov, like the midrash says on the first verse of this week's parsha: Vayeishev Yaakov be'erev megurei aviv." Although the simple meaning is that Yaakov dwelled in the land in which his father lived, the midrash explains that the word "megurei" also refers the root word of ger (convert), and teaches us that Yaakov was converting others to Judasm just like his father Yitzchak.

And our job is to search for the true tzaddik who has the ability to guide us and save us from spiritual destruction. We must learn the sefarim of the tzaddikim and see what sefer seems to speak to us in our situation and truly help us to have the courage to hope and the constant desire to change. We must visit the tzaddikim and listen to their divrei Torah, not in order to see who has the most incredible knowledge of the Torah, rather in order to see who can inspire us to do teshuvah. This is how we can escape the pitfalls of this world. This is how we can attach ourselves to the awesome light of Chanukah even the bitterness of exile.

Based on the Torah of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov zt"l and his primary talmid R' Noson zt"l, as given over by R' Nisan Dovid Kivak, Shlita. For further comments and questions, or to sign up to receive the articles by email, you may contact: leventermusic@gmail.com