

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Acharai Kedoshim  
April 2026 / Iyar 5786

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Acharai-Kedoshim – The intention behind the act

In this week's double Parsha of Acharai-Kedoshim we learn some laws relating to korbanot, and specifically to korbanot that became invalidated. In many cases, a portion of the korban was to be eaten by the person bringing the offering and a portion was to be eaten by the Kohanim. However, depending on the type of korban being offered, there were restrictions placed on the time and location that it could be eaten. For example, a peace offering (Shlamim) could be eaten for two days - on the day that it was offered and on the following day, but it must be eaten in Yerushalayim. Whatever was not eaten within that two-day period became forbidden and had to be burned on the third day.

*“When you slaughter a peace offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it to find favour for yourselves. It may be eaten on the day that you slaughter it, and on the next day, but anything that is left over to the third day shall be burned in fire. And if it will be eaten on the third day, it is ‘piggul’ – it will not be accepted.”* (Parshat Kedoshim, Vayikra 19:5-8)

The term ‘piggul’ used here means rejected<sup>1</sup> or abhorrent<sup>2</sup>. In his commentary, Rashi clarifies the meaning of these verses. They refer to a Kohen who offered the korban with the *intention* that it would be eaten after the applicable deadline or in an impermissible place. Thus, we see that the intention of the Kohen is paramount to the korban's validity. Even if the consumption of the korban actually took place before the deadline and in the permitted place, it would still not be accepted by Hashem if the Kohen had the wrong intention at the time the korban was offered. This demonstrates the importance of intent. Two Kohanim could perform an identical offering, but their varying intentions could affect the validity of their offering. One will be favoured by Hashem and bring atonement to its owner, whereas the other may be rejected and forbidden to eat.

Intention (‘kavana’) is relevant to all mitzvot, at least to some degree. For instance, as we will shortly see, two people can carry out the identical action, but their underlying intention will determine whether the action is considered a mitzvah or an aveirah.

The Shulchan Aruch<sup>3</sup> rules that mitzvot require kavana (appropriate intent) in order to be valid. The Mishnah Berurah<sup>4</sup> clarifies that there are two types of intent:

- (1) the intent of mind in the performance of the mitzvah itself – this involves concentration on what one is saying or doing (also known as mindfulness); and
- (2) the intent to fulfil one's duty of performing the mitzvah through one's action – i.e., one consciously intends to discharge one's obligation by means of the action, in accordance with Hashem's command.

The Mishnah Berurah explains that the Shulchan Aruch's requirement for a mitzvah to have kavana does not refer to the first type of intent. All authorities agree that, ideally, one should concentrate on what one is doing while one performs a mitzvah. However, if one performed the mitzvah without this

<sup>1</sup> According to the translation of Targum Onkelos.

<sup>2</sup> According to Rav Sa'adia Gaon.

<sup>3</sup> Orach Chaim 60:4.

<sup>4</sup> 60:7.

level of mindfulness, they still fulfil their obligation.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch refers to the second type of intent – i.e. when one begins to perform a mitzvah, he is obligated to have in mind that he intends to fulfil his obligation by performing the act. If he does not have this kavana, he has not fulfilled his obligation and he will need to redo the mitzvah.<sup>6</sup>

However, there is an important qualification to this ruling.<sup>7</sup> In circumstances where the action itself is obviously being performed by the person in order to perform the mitzva, the requisite intention is implied and the mitzvah is valid. For example, if one reads the Shema during the course of tefillah, if one eats matza on Seder night, listens to the shofar on Rosh Hashana, or shakes a lulav and etrog on Sukkot, in the regular way in which those mitzvot are performed, then one will have satisfied their obligation even without consciously thinking or saying that one is doing it to fulfil Hashem's will.

Once the base level of intention is satisfied, it is the action that is most important. Two people can give tzedaka, one with the purest of intentions and the other grudgingly. Of course, it is preferable to do a mitzvah with pure intentions, however both people would satisfy the mitzvah of tzedaka.

However, in some cases, one's intention is critical. Two people can perform the same action but the intent behind that action will determine whether the action is praiseworthy or not. Rav Zev Leff gives an example of correcting a baal koreh who makes a mistake while reading from the Torah. One person might dislike the baal koreh or harbour resentment or jealousy towards him. This person may be looking for mistakes so that they can correct the baal koreh and embarrass him publicly. Obviously, this is not praiseworthy. Another person might have the purest intentions – they are only concerned with the Torah reading being perfect so that the kehilla can satisfy its obligation to perform the mitzvah of kriyat haTorah. Such a person might be pained to correct the baal koreh but feel they have no choice. Such a person is performing a praiseworthy act.

Rav Chaim Brisker explains this concept by means of an analogy. When there is a mouse loose in one's home, there are two that are keen to eliminate it – the housewife and the cat. However, their underlying motivation is vastly different. The housewife just wants to get rid of the mouse and hopes that there will never be another one in her house. The cat hopes for many more opportunities to chase mice.

Our intent can also be critically important in our interpersonal relations. When performing an act of kindness, one's underlying intention can often be clear from the manner in which the act of kindness is performed. For example, if one gives grudgingly, one can undo some of the good they have done. This can be compared to the old Yiddish proverb of a cow that gives a lot of milk but then kicks over the bucket. A person that is forced to ask for tzedakah is in a very vulnerable position and may easily feel humiliated. Giving a small amount with a smile and kind word can sometimes be more beneficial than giving a larger amount given with a sour face and impatience. If the recipient feels that someone actually cares about them it can make the world of difference.

Let's try something this week:

1. Though even minimal intent is often sufficient to satisfy one's obligation when performing a mitzva, we can always strive to improve our kavana and perform our mitzvot with full intent and active concentration.
2. When giving someone tzedakah or performing an act of kindness remember that your intent is often clear to the recipient. Try to perform the act with a full heart and a smile.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> There are two exceptions - reciting the first verse of Shema and reciting the first bracha of the Amidah.

<sup>6</sup> However, one would not repeat the bracha in these circumstances.

<sup>7</sup> Brought by the Mishnah Berurah (60:10) based on the Chayai Adam.