

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayikra  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Vayikra – The correct approach to sins

Parshat Vayikra deals with the various types of korbanot that were brought in the Mishkan (and later in the Bet Hamikdash). Many of these korbanot were brought as atonement for sins. Chapter 4 of sefer Vayikra lists four examples of sins that may be committed and the corresponding korban required in each case. Specifically:

*“If the anointed Kohen [i.e. the Kohen Gadol] will sin...”* (Vayikra 4:3)

*“If the entire assembly of Israel errs...”* (Vayikra 4:13)

*“When a leader [of Israel] sins...”* (Vayikra 4:22)

*“If an individual person sins unintentionally...”* (Vayikra 4:27)

Notice that whereas the other three examples begin with the word “if”, the Torah introduces the case of a leader sinning by using the word “when”. This suggests that it is a foregone conclusion that a leader *will* sin.

Rashi explains that the Hebrew word for ‘when’ (‘asher’) is similar to the Hebrew word for ‘fortunate’ (‘ashrei’). Thus, the pasuk is hinting to the fact that the people are fortunate when their leaders are humble enough to admit that they have sinned, and they bring a korban for atonement.

We can ask a question on Rashi. Why is a nation considered ‘fortunate’ if their leader sins, albeit humble enough to admit his mistake? Surely the nation would be even more fortunate if they had a leader that never sinned at all! However, Rashi understands that a leader who is totally free of sin is simply not realistic. Leaders are human, not angels, and therefore by it is practically guaranteed that they will make mistakes. Indeed, the Gemara states that in the history of the world there were only four individuals that did not sin<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, these four individuals were all directly related to a great Jewish leader. This may suggest that it is easier to avoid sin when one is not involved in a leadership position. One who is actively involved in leading the Jewish people and changing the world for the better is in a much more challenging position, and is therefore almost inevitably bound to ‘slip up’ at some point. Since it is practically impossible to expect a perfect leader, the best that we can hope for is a leader that is humble enough to admit their mistakes and atone for them. In addition, a person who sins and overcomes their evil inclination and does genuine teshuva is in some respects even greater than one who never sinned!<sup>2</sup>

Most people would say that the original sin of Adam and Chava is that they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil<sup>3</sup>. However, interestingly, Adam and Chava were not punished immediately after eating from the forbidden tree. Though He knew exactly what had happened, Hashem first asked Adam “Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat?” Hashem was giving Adam and Chava a chance to admit their guilt and to do teshuva<sup>4</sup>. However, instead of admitting their guilt, Adam blamed Chava (what a chutzpah!) and Chava blamed the snake. Only after they failed to admit their sin to Hashem, were they punished and banished from Gan Eden. This suggests that the real sin for which they were punished was a failure to admit that they had sinned and do teshuva!

The Midrash<sup>5</sup> describes a discussion that took place between Cain and Adam after Cain had killed his brother, Hevel. Adam enquired about his judgement and Cain replied that he had done teshuva and his punishment was softened. Adam was shocked. “Such is the power of teshuva,” he exclaimed, “and I didn’t know!”

<sup>1</sup> Gemara, Shabbat 55b. The four individuals were Yishai (David HaMelech’s father), Kilav (David’s second son), Amram (Moshe’s father) and Binyamin (the only brother, apart from Reuven, not involved in the sale of Yosef).

<sup>2</sup> Rambam’s Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 7:4.

<sup>3</sup> The following idea was heard from Rabbi Ari Kahn.

<sup>4</sup> See Breishit 3:9-11.

<sup>5</sup> Breishit Rabbah 22:13.

Hashem does not expect us to be sin-free. As proof, we can simply look at the Shulchan Aruch. A huge percentage of halachot in the Shulchan Aruch teach us what to do when we make a mistake! For example:

- Kashrut - what happens if I use a milk spoon to stir my chicken soup? How do I kosher a utensil that was used with non-kosher ingredients?
- Shabbat – if I accidentally cook food on Shabbat, what is the status of the food? How can I move a muktze item if it was left in an inconvenient place (like in the middle of the dining room table)?
- What do I do if I find chametz in my house on Pesach?

This suggests that making mistakes is par for the course. We are not angels. Hashem created us as humans so that we can work hard to overcome our deficiencies and improve ourselves. As Rabbi Pliskin states in his book on “Courage” - one of the greatest teachers is trial and error, and this process naturally involves error. Mistakes should not be something to be ashamed of, and certainly not something to ignore or cover over. Rather, we must admit our error and do our best to do complete teshuva, including correcting any damage that was done. It is really our egos that make admitting our sins and doing teshuva so difficult. If we did not have such well-developed egos we would manage to wipe our slate clean much more regularly and easily.

*Reuven was a successful professional<sup>6</sup>. One day he made a costly mistake. His first thought was “How can I cover this up? Who can I blame?” But he knew deep down that his best course of action would be to admit his mistake and try to rectify it. He took a deep breath and reached for the phone. As he suspected, his client was not happy. Reuven apologized. He told the client that he would cancel his bill, and he offered to do whatever he could to fix the damage. Reuven managed to salvage the relationship. The client appreciated Reuven’s honesty and remained as one of his most loyal clients.*

It also takes humility for Rabbanim to change their mind on halachic rulings. There are countless examples of great Rabbis who changed their mind and admitted they were wrong. Of course, there is a big difference between changing one’s mind in a halachic ruling and committing a sin. But in both cases one needs humility to admit that one was wrong.

- There are a number of inconsistencies between the Rambam’s commentary on the Mishnah (which the Rambam wrote as a young man) and his Mishneh Torah (which he wrote later in his life). The commentators often explain that the Rambam changed his mind later in life.
- Shmirat Shabbat K’hilchata - the extremely popular and authoritative book of laws relating to Shabbat, by Rav Neuwirth, was re-published with a number of changes.
- During the winter months we add a reference to rain in the second bracha of the Amidah.<sup>7</sup> There is a controversy over how to pronounce the last word – “Geshem” or “Gashem”. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach maintained that the word should be read with a “kamatz” (Gashem). But later in his life he was shown an essay based on very thorough research which argued that a “segol” (Geshem) is more correct<sup>8</sup>. Based on this, Rav Auerbach changed his practice, and he publicised the story in one of his books.
- In Gemara Brachot, we see that in his later years, the Amora Rav retracted one of his earlier rulings about the halachot of Brachot.<sup>9</sup>

If these great Torah leaders were not afraid to admit they changed their mind, we can also learn that mistakes are a part of life. And in relation to our sins, remember Hashem created teshuva before He created the world.<sup>10</sup>

Let’s try something this week:

1. Make an effort to admit our mistakes, rather than ignore or cover them over. Be gentle on ourselves and others when they make a mistake. Remember that mistakes are a natural sign of being human.
2. When we make a mistake, have the courage and humility to admit it and try to do teshuva and correct the damage. In this way, we are actually correcting the original sin of Adam and Chava and growing into a better person.

Darchai Noam will take a short break and will return BE”H shortly after Pesach. Chag kasher v’sameach!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>6</sup> The principle of this story applies in many situations e.g. lawyers, accountants, teachers, children, friends...

<sup>7</sup> משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם

<sup>8</sup> The essay was titled בחסד חיים מכלכל שלמה. See “הליכות שלמה”, Chapter 8, footnote 54.

<sup>9</sup> Page 42b, see footnote 14 in the Artscroll Gemara.

<sup>10</sup> Pesachim 54a.