

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parashah help us grow this week?

Don't bottle up your feelings!

This week's parashah of Lech Lecha describes Avraham and Sarah's journey to the Promised Land. Avraham's nephew, Lot, has been accompanying them on their journey. But soon after arriving in the land of Canaan, Avraham and Lot separate.

Their separation is triggered by a quarrel between Avraham and Lot's shepherds. Lot's shepherds, with Lot's support, allowed their flocks to graze on other people's pastures. Avraham's shepherds rebuked them for this act of thievery. Avraham concluded from this event that Lot's family was a negative influence on him. He ultimately decided that it was necessary for their families to separate.

We can learn a lot by examining Avraham's interaction with Lot in relation to this conflict. Let's have a look at Avraham's approach (Breishit 13:8):

"And Avraham said to Lot: Please let there be no quarrelling between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are brothers."

When faced with a problem, Avraham takes the initiative and communicates his concern directly with Lot.

Many of us are tempted to remain silent when faced with a problem, especially if we are the type of person that likes to avoid conflict. It takes courage to tackle the issue face on.

Let us consider the case of Reuven and his neighbour Shimon. Shimon often 'borrows' Reuven's tools without asking for permission. Occasionally he doesn't return them to the correct place and Reuven can't find them when he needs them. Reuven is bothered by this but in order to avoid conflict he doesn't say anything to Shimon. Reuven convinces himself that he is acting righteously by avoiding an angry outburst. However, deep inside, he harbours resentment. This resentment often comes out in their interactions. Reuven is less friendly towards Shimon and sometimes he speaks negatively about Shimon to his family and friends. Reuven does not overtly display anger towards Shimon, but he feels hostility towards Shimon in his heart.

In addition to courage, it also takes good communication skills to directly engage with someone who has wronged us. Avraham teaches us the correct way to approach someone in these circumstances. Avraham calmly and clearly raises his concern with Lot and he uses pleasant language: *'Please let there be no quarrelling between me and you ... for we are brothers'*. When we raise a concern with our friend, there is no need for an ugly confrontation. We can speak pleasantly and let the other person know that we have an issue that needs to be discussed.

The Torah teaches us that we are not allowed to harbour resentment towards a fellow Jew in our hearts (see Vayikra (19:17) and Rambam, Hilchot Deot (6:5-6)). The proper approach is: *“You shall surely rebuke your fellow”* (the continuation of Vaykira (19:17)). Instead of bottling up our feelings of resentment, we must approach the wrongdoer and have a discussion with them. This discussion will provide the person with the opportunity to apologise or to explain their actions and/or to change their ways for the future. It also fosters an open channel of communication and shows that one party truly cares about the other person and their relationship and is willing to put in the emotional avoda (work) to prove it.

For example, if Reuvan points out his issue in a non-confrontational way, Shimon might explain his actions by saying that he saw many other people borrowing his tools and returning them haphazardly so he assumed that Reuven didn't mind. Or he might simply apologise and resolve not to do it again.

This approach enables peace to be restored. If our intention is to deal with the issue, restore peace and continue with a positive relationship, the discussion can be refreshing and positive.

The Rambam (Hilchot Deot 6:6) goes on to caution that if the wrongdoer apologises then we must forgive them. Our intention in raising the issue must be to restore a peaceful relationship. Our intention cannot be to just give the other person a piece of our mind.

In the case of Avraham and Lot, Avraham realised that physical separation of the two families was the only possible solution to the dispute. That was an extreme case but it was justified in Avraham's circumstances. In most cases, if we are brave enough to approach our fellow with our complaint, if we speak politely, and if we genuinely want to restore the peace, we should be successful in achieving an apology or an explanation and/or a change of behaviour.

Let's try something this week:

1. Pay attention to any negative thoughts or feelings of resentment that we may bear towards our friends or family and try to work out if we are actually bearing a grudge towards them in our hearts.
2. Check our motivations to ensure that we ultimately want peace and that we would happily and graciously forgive the offender if they are remorseful or apologetic.
3. If we can work out the source of the grudge, and if our motivations are proper, approach the offender in a calm and polite manner and discuss the issue with them.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Allon Ledder

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About Darchai Noam

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parashah relating to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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