

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Lech Lecha  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Lech Lecha - 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 the shepherds of Avraham and Lot. With Lot's support, Lot's shepherds 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 would be a negative influence on his own family. He ultimately decided that it was necessary for their families to separate.

By examining Avraham's interaction with Lot in relation to this conflict, we can learn some lessons about interpersonal skills. Let's have a look at Avraham's approach:

*“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.”* (Breishit 13:8)

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

In contrast, when faced with a problem many of us may be tempted to remain silent, especially if we are the type of person that likes to avoid conflict. It can take courage to tackle an 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 against Shimon. 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.

The Torah teaches us that we are not allowed to harbour resentment towards a fellow Jew in our hearts.<sup>1</sup> In harbouring this resentment, Reuven can be committing a number of sins, including the sin of 'do not hate your brother in your heart' and potentially the sin of Lashon Hara.

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

<sup>1</sup> See Vayikra (19:17) and Rambam, Hilchot De'ot (6:5-6).

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 proper approach is: “You shall surely rebuke your fellow”.<sup>2</sup> 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 Reuven points out his issue with Shimon regarding the tools 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 direct communicative 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 create a bond and be positive.

The Rambam<sup>3</sup> cautions 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, but rather to regain peace of mind.

However, just because we are open and communicative, this does not mean that we have to maintain or increase regular contact if that is not appropriate. In the case of Avraham and Lot, Avraham realised that physical separation of the two families was the best possible solution to the dispute. That was an extreme case but it was justified in Avraham's circumstances.

We can learn from Avraham that in extreme cases or cases involving strangers, cutting ties might be the wisest and most peaceful solution. Our first duty is to protect ourselves and our family from harm.

However, 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. Try to overcome any tendency towards holding a grudge by working on valuing peace, preparing our words and then approaching the other person with our concerns.
3. If appropriate, assess whether the person in question has to remain in our life, and if not, be willing to cut ties to protect ourself and our family and to maintain the peace.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>2</sup> The continuation of Vaykira (19:17).

<sup>3</sup> Hilchot De'ot 6:6.