

## Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Noach, October 2013

Welcome to this week's issue of Darchai Noam.

### You are actually even better than I said you are!

This week's parashah of Noach contains an interesting anomaly.

In Breishit 6:9, Noach is described as "a righteous man, **perfect** in his generations".

However, when Hashem speaks directly to Noach (Breishit 7:1), he says: "for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before me in this generation".

Rashi notes that Hashem leaves out the word 'perfect' when he praises Noach to his face.

Based on this inconsistency Rashi teaches us an important prescription for praise:

*"We give only a portion of a person's praise when in their presence and all of their praise when not in their presence".*

We learn that if we are praising a person while that person is present, we should tone down the praise. In contrast, behind a person's back, we can praise them to the full extent. (However it's important to note that even when the person is not present, we need to take care that our praise does not encourage lashon hara (negative speech). For example, we shouldn't praise someone in the presence of their enemy.)

Why is there such a distinction? Why do we need to tone down someone's praise if they are present? One reason is to avoid the person feeling ga'ava (pride). If we praise someone excessively, they might start to think too highly of themselves. Pride is considered a very negative trait in Judaism, one of only two character traits that the Rambam considers unhealthy, even in moderation. (Anger is the other one.)

I would like to suggest another reason for Rashi's prescription for praise. Consider the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: Daniel Levy is too excited to go to sleep. He is waiting for his parents to come back from parent teacher night. He is expecting a good report. In the past he often misbehaved and the teachers were generally unhappy with him. But this year he turned over a new leaf and made a real effort to behave and apply himself in his studies. When his parents finally come home, he runs to the door to greet them and to hear what his teachers had to say about him. As he thought, the report is quite positive. But to be honest, Daniel is a bit disappointed. He really made an effort this year and he expected his teachers to be very happy with him. The feedback is not as glowing as he thought it would be.

Scenario 2: Miriam Levy is on the social committee at her local shule. She was the driving force behind the recent fund raising event and she was very proud that the event was a huge success. However, at the end of the event, the president of the shule thanked the organisers, and Miriam barely got a mention. The president mentioned her name towards the end of the list and didn't single her out for any special praise. Miriam feels short-

changed. She made by far the biggest contribution and she feels that her effort has not been recognised appropriately.

We all like to receive compliments. It's human nature. But sometimes we are disappointed when the praise provided is not quite as glowing as we expect it to be. But imagine if we all behaved according to Rashi's prescription on praise. Then we would be aware that any praise we receive has been watered down. We would know that the person giving the praise actually thinks even more highly of us than it appears from his words.

Let's try something this week:

1. When someone praises us, if the praise is lighter than we would have preferred, make an effort to restrain any feelings of resentment or indignation (which are really mild forms of anger). Rather, try to recall Rashi's prescription on praise so as to avoid disappointment.
2. Spread the word about Rashi's prescription on praise to as many family members and friends as possible. And remind them again when you praise them. Then when we praise them the person might understand that we actually think even more highly of them than we said.

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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