

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Terumah, February 2016

darchai.noam@gmail.com

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Terumah – feeling whole

In this week's Parsha of Terumah we learn about the plans for the building of the Mishkan - the portable sanctuary that accompanied Bnei Yisrael during their travels throughout the desert. The parsha contains many intricate details about measurements and materials that were used in the construction. Though an architect might get a lot of pleasure from studying this Parsha, the rest of us may find it difficult to understand the relevance. In truth, however, there are countless lessons that can be learnt.

The Torah cites many measurements for the Mishkan and its vessels and most of them are whole numbers. For example, the altar was 5 amot x 5 amot and 3 amot high. However, the Aron (the Holy Ark which housed the 2 tablets of the 10 Commandments) was made up of numbers that were not whole. It measured 2.5 amot x 1.5 amot and 1.5 amot high.

The Shlah Hakadosh¹ explains that the Aron contained the tablets that Moshe brought down from Har Sinai, a reminder of the covenant of Torah between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. Therefore the Aron is analogous to the Torah scholar who carries the Torah within him. The 'broken numbers' of the Aron's measurement remind us that the Torah scholar must remain humble and avoid becoming arrogant. Interestingly, the first set of luchot which were fashioned by Hashem Himself were also broken and they were holier than the second, unbroken set.

The Gemara (Chullin 89a) teaches us that it is specifically the trait of humility that Hashem favours in Bnei Yisrael.

"Hashem said to [Bnei Yisrael], my children, I desire you because even when I grant you greatness you diminish yourselves before Me. I gave greatness to Avraham and he said: 'I am dust and ashes' (Breishit 18:27). I gave greatness to Moshe and Aharon and they said: 'What are we?' (Sh'mot 16:7). I gave greatness to David and he said 'I am a worm and not a man' (Tehillim 22:7)"

The Mesillat Yesharim² - a guide book to internal spiritual work, lists a number of important middot that we need to work on. The book progresses from level to level, explaining how to achieve each stage. Humility is presented as one of the highest levels. Ironically, perhaps it is precisely those people that have climbed so high that are most at risk of arrogance and pride.

The Mesillat Yesharim provides us with a practical example of how to achieve humility. An intelligent person needs to acknowledge that their intelligence is just part of their G-d given nature. It is a gift bestowed by Hashem that can be taken away at any time. Therefore, conceit and haughtiness are irrational. One who is wise has an obligation to use their

¹ Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Horowitz, 1565 –1630.

² The mussar classic by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto.

wisdom to help others. As with any other blessing that Hashem has bestowed on us, being arrogant is simply foolishness, and represents a failure to recognise Hashem's hand and control.

It is worth repeating a parable that we brought recently in Darchai Noam.³ The story is told of a courier that is delivering a cargo of precious jewels. He proudly shows off his 'wealth' to his family and friends. However the courier is acting foolishly. Everyone knows that the precious jewels do not belong to the courier. He has merely been entrusted with them and instructed to deliver them to their destination. Similarly, we have been entrusted with our positive attributes and instructed to use them for a positive purpose. The Gemara⁴ teaches us that the only thing that is in our control is our Yirat Shamayim, our fear of Heaven.

To achieve humility, the Mesillat Yesharim also recommends being averse to positions of authority, always showing respect to other people and fleeing from honour.

The story is told of the man who went to his Rabbi with a question. "We learn in the Gemara (Eiruvim 13b) that 'one who pursues honour, honour will flee from him; one who flees from honour, honour will pursue him'. Well I've been fleeing from honour for a long time but I'm not receiving any honour. Why not?" The Rabbi replied: "That's because while you are fleeing from honour you are busy looking over your shoulder to check whether honour is following you!"

Genuine humility can be difficult to achieve. Some people take pride in how humble they think they are. It's like the old joke about a man sitting in shule and trying to work on his humility. He would repeat to himself over and over again: "I'm a nothing. I'm a nothing". Another man thought this was a good idea. He sat down next to the first man and did the same thing. The first man looked at the second man with disdain and said "Look who thinks he's a nothing!"

Finally, the Mesillat Yesharim teaches us that the best way to achieve humility is to take a cold, hard look at ourselves and our flaws. Honest reflection will reveal that we have a lot to be humble about!

Note that when it comes to looking at others, we need to overlook other people's flaws and give them the benefit of the doubt. Our egos encourage us to be gentle and understanding when it comes to ourselves and yet be critical of others. The truly humble person will be able to switch this around.

Let's try something this week:

1. Honestly reflect on our own level of pride and what we are proud of. Then remind ourselves that all of these attributes are merely part of the blessings that Hashem endowed us with.
2. Remember that the only thing that we can truly achieve is our Yirat Shamayim.
3. Recognise our gifts that Hashem has bestowed upon us and try to use them properly in the manner that Hashem would want.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

*** **

³ Parshat Vayetzei, November 2015.

⁴ Brachot 33b.

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're'echa kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

If you know someone who might enjoy receiving this email please feel free to pass it on to them or email me their details so I can add them to the subscription list.

You are welcome to use the content of this email in any way that will help to spread the learning of Torah. However please attribute credit appropriately.

Many of the ideas that I use in Darchai Noam are based on ideas that I read or heard from various sources. Where possible I try to quote the source. However in some cases I cannot recall the source. For that I apologise. If I do discuss an idea that I heard from somewhere else, any errors are purely my own.

How to subscribe or unsubscribe

If you would like to subscribe or unsubscribe to Darchai Noam, please send an email to darchai.noam@gmail.com with the word 'subscribe' or 'unsubscribe' in the subject.