

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Terumah – it’s good to be home

Most of the remainder of the book of Shmot deals with the building of the Mishkan and its associated utensils. Excluding the unfortunate incident of the Golden Calf, we have four parshiyot that deal almost exclusively with this topic.

In the introduction to his commentary on the book of Shmot, the Ramban summarises the book of Shmot as relating to the first exile of Bnei Yisrael and the redemption from that exile. If so, one would think that the book of Shmot should end with the exodus from Mitzrayim and the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Reed Sea. It is at that point that Bnei Yisrael achieved physical redemption from the slavery of Mitzrayim. However, the Ramban explains that the true spiritual exile only really ended when “the people **returned to their place** and returned to the stature of their forefathers”.

At first glance this statement seems strange. When the book of Shmot ends Bnei Yisrael had still not returned to ‘their place’ (presumably the Land of Israel). They were still wandering in the wilderness and they were destined to do so for another 40 years. The Ramban explains that when Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai and built the Mishkan, Hashem caused his Shechinah to dwell amongst them, just like He did with their forefathers. At that point, they became the Divine chariot – i.e. the base on earth through which Hashem manifested his presence in the world<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, Bnei Yisrael returned to ‘their place’ and returned to ‘the stature of their forefathers’. This is why the book of Shmot ends with the building of the Mishkan and the glory of Hashem filling it.

The Ramban is teaching us that we have only really arrived to ‘our place’, (that is, we are only truly at home), when Hashem’s presence is resting among us. Indeed, one of Hashem’s names is ‘HaMakom’ (the ‘place’). For example, when we comfort mourners, we traditionally recite the formula “Hamakom yenacham etchem...” - “May ‘the Place’ (i.e. the Omnipresent) comfort you amongst the other mourners of Zion and Yerushalayim”. This name of Hashem is particularly relevant for a house of mourning because it is reminding us that Hashem is not to be found within the world, rather, He is ‘the Place’ in which the world is found. He is everywhere and everything. This can be a source of comfort for a mourner who may be feeling alone and abandoned.

Just like Hashem is not constricted by the natural realm of space, He also exists outside of time. We see a hint to this in Hashem’s Divine 4 letter name – the letters that make up this name (Yud, Heh, Vav and Heh) are the letters that spell the words ‘past’ (Hayah), ‘present’ (Hoveh) and ‘future’ (Yih’ye). The fact that Hashem is outside of space and outside of time means that we can access Him anywhere and at any time! The question is only whether we recognise His presence. The very first halacha in the Shulchan Aruch exhorts us to

<sup>1</sup> Midrash Breishit Rabbah 47:6, brought by the Ramban.

remember that Hashem is everywhere and that we need to behave accordingly. The Rama<sup>2</sup> quotes the passuk “Shiviti Hashem l’negdai tamid” – “I set Hashem before me at all times”<sup>3</sup>. This calls on us to be deliberately and consciously aware that we are before Hashem at all times.

Even though Hashem is everywhere, and is accessible everywhere, He has selected certain places that are more holy than other places (e.g. the bet Hamikdash, the Kotel, shules, the Bet Midrash, Yerushalayim, the land of Israel). Similarly, even though Hashem is outside of time, certain times have an inherent holiness more than other times (e.g. Yom Kippur, Shabbat, the other Yomim Tovim, time spent in shule davening, time spent in a shiur). We can benefit from the increased spirituality and holiness of those special places and times. But at the same time, we also need to recognise that Hashem is everywhere and is accessible at all times.

However, space and time are only two aspects of creation. The mystics<sup>4</sup> teach that everything that Hashem created exists on three planes – space, time and soul. First Hashem created the concept of time<sup>5</sup>. Then Hashem created space and the ‘stuff’ that exists in space. Finally, He created the purpose of creation – the soul or the human being. Bnei Yisrael put in the hard work of building the Mishkan, not so that Hashem would have a physical building in which to dwell, but rather so that He can dwell amongst human beings.<sup>6</sup>

We have seen that even though some times and places are more holy, Hashem is accessible at all times and in all places. We can also apply this idea to the third plane of existence – the human soul. Even though some people are more holy than others (e.g. the Avot, the Kohen Gadol, the prophets, the great Torah leaders of every generation), all people have the potential to reach the highest levels of holiness. Though we can’t all be the Kohen Gadol or a great Tzaddik, we can all strive to reach our potential by putting in the hard work of accessing our G-dly soul that is embedded deep within us and allowing it to shine.

Let’s try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem gifts us with certain ‘booster shots’ of holiness at specific times and in specific places. We can benefit from increased holiness by accessing these times and places. At the same time, remember that Hashem is accessible to us at all times and in all places.
2. Remember that the human soul is the third plane of creation and is also holy. We can rest assured that as long as we work on our spiritual growth, Hashem’s holy Presence will dwell among us.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>2</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 1:1

<sup>3</sup> Tehillim 16:8.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Sefer Yetzirah.

<sup>5</sup> The first word in the Torah is Breishit “In the beginning”. Some commentators point out that this alludes to the creation of time.

<sup>6</sup> See Shmot 25:8.

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The pasuk 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.

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