

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Terumah
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Terumah – choosing the appropriate middah

In this week's Parasha, Hashem instructs Moshe to ask Bnei Yisrael to donate certain materials for the Mishkan. No-one was obligated to donate¹. Each person was free to give as much or as little as they chose.

The Nasi'im (princes) of the tribes had a wonderful opportunity. As leaders, they could set the example by being the first to fulfil this mitzva of donating towards the Mishkan. However, they stepped back and allowed the rest of the people to donate first, offering instead to cover any shortfall. This sounds like a generous offer. But was it the ideal decision?

We will see that the Nasi'im are criticised for their decision. Though they were planning to donate the shortfall for the Mishkan, in the end there was no shortfall! The rest of the community donated everything that was needed. There was only one exception - the special precious stones that no-one else had in their possession and therefore no-one else was able to donate. In Parashat Vayakhel (which we will read IY"H in 3 weeks' time), we will learn that the Nasi'im donated these precious stones for the Kohen Gadol's uniform². However, in that pasuk, the word 'Nasi'im' is written as 'והנאָם', which is lacking the letter yud. Rashi explains that missing a letter signifies a rebuke for their behaviour. Because they were 'lazy' (Rashi's description), one could suggest that their name was spelt in a 'lazy' manner, without the letter yud.

It is difficult for us to judge the Nasi'im. For most of us, making such an offer to cover any shortfall in response to a request for donations is a high level to achieve. But evidently, at their exalted level, the Nasi'im demonstrated a shortcoming. They should have exhibited more zerizut (alacrity) to perform this special mitzva of donating to the mishkan.

Of course, Hashem didn't really rely on the people to donate their possessions in order that the Mishkan could be built. Obviously, Hashem does not need our donations. Rather, in His kindness, Hashem was giving Bnei Yisrael the precious opportunity to be involved in the building of the Mishkan. That's why the request to Bnei Yisrael was phrased as follows: "Speak to Bnei Yisrael and have them **take** for me an offering..."³ We would have expected the request to be phrased as "give" not "take". However, this phraseology reveals that donating to the Mishkan was actually an *opportunity* for Bnei Yisrael. By giving financially they were taking spiritually.

The Mesillat Yesharim provides us with a list of character traits that we should seek to acquire in our service of Hashem. The character traits are provided in a particular order based on a Baraita in the name of R' Pinchas ben-Yair. Alacrity is the second character trait in the list. The Mesillat Yesharim guides us as to how to move up the list of character traits – from watchfulness to alacrity, cleanliness of sin, abstention of improper practices, purity, piety, humility, fear of sin and finally holiness.

The Hebrew word for character traits is 'middot'. This has the same grammatical root as two other Hebrew words: 'madim' (uniform) and 'midah' (measure). There are no coincidences in Lashon Hakodesh (the holy language). If a Hebrew word is grammatically related to another Hebrew word it means that there is an intrinsic connection between those two words⁴. There must be something that we can learn from the words 'uniform' and 'measure' that we can apply to the idea of character traits. Let's consider this in further depth.

Uniforms: We wear uniforms at certain times and when attending particular places. When it is no longer appropriate, we take our uniforms off. For instance, a child that goes to school will wear a uniform while they are

¹ There was also a compulsory component of the donation – silver shekels for the foundations of the Mishkan. However most of the materials were donated freely.

² Shmot 35:27.

³ Shmot 35:2.

⁴ Of course, this only applies to 'authentic' or Biblical Hebrew and not modern Hebrew or slang.

at school. A worker will wear his or her uniform or appropriate work attire while they are at work. There is a different uniform for playing sport. We also have a uniform (special clothing that is set aside) for Shabbat and Yom Tov. We choose the uniform that is appropriate and we change our clothing as needed.

Character traits should be similar to a uniform. We should be able to 'wear' the appropriate character trait for each situation. For example:

- Sometimes it is appropriate to act with alacrity (e.g. when running to perform a mitzva). At other times it is appropriate to be more cautious (e.g. pausing and thinking before reacting with anger).
- Sometimes it is appropriate to act with generosity (e.g. when giving tzedaka to a needy person). At other times it is appropriate to withhold (e.g. when one does not have enough money for their own needs, or when it is known that the person asking for the money will use it inappropriately).

Measure: Character traits are also linked to the concept of measurement. Each character trait is only appropriate and ideal when exercised with the appropriate measure. For example, sometimes it is appropriate to be demonstrate kindness by giving someone a lot of time and assistance. At other times it is appropriate to be less generous with our time (e.g. if we help our children too much, we may stifle their growth and inhibit their independence).

Ideally, we should work on ourselves to the point that we are in a position to decide what Middah to use in each situation and to what degree the middah should be exercised. In order to achieve this, we need to be in control of our emotions and our actions.

Chovot Halevavot⁵ lists a number of character traits and instructs us as to the occasions on which they are appropriate to be used. We see that all of our character traits can be appropriate in different times and places. Mercy is appropriate for the needy and the poor. Ruthlessness is appropriate when taking vengeance against the wicked. The traits of anger and pride should generally be avoided, but even they can be appropriate in small measure in certain specific circumstances. For example, anger is appropriate when falsehood prevails over truth. Pride is appropriate when meeting those who deny G-d, so that we clearly indicate our opposition to their views

Pride may also be appropriate to encourage one to avoid sin. When faced with a temptation to sin, it can be helpful to stir up one's pride and say to oneself "That action is beneath me. I am too good for that!"

The Nesi'im were criticized for failing to have the appropriate measure of alacrity. Alacrity is often the appropriate middah to demonstrate when doing a mitzva. As the children learn in kindergarten – "when a mitzva comes your way, you do it straight away". By exhibiting alacrity, we demonstrate our attitude towards the mitzva, and ultimately to Hashem and the Torah.

When we are faced with the opportunity to do a certain mitzvah, we can pay attention to our measure or middah of alacrity. Consider the following scenario as an example:

Chaim finally comes home after a long hard day at the office. He feels exhausted. He collapses into his favourite chair and starts to read the paper. His wife comes and asks him for some help but he says "maybe later". Then his child asks him for help with homework but he says "see if Mummy can help you". Then the phone rings – it's an important client with an urgent request. He jumps out of his chair and races to the phone. He then spends the rest of the evening working furiously in his study to give the client what is needed.

The enthusiasm and speed with which Chaim performs his actions, reveal a lot about his priorities in life.

Let's try something this week:

1. Be aware of when we naturally exhibit the character trait of alacrity.
2. Be aware that those mitzvot where we struggle to show alacrity are often exactly the areas that we need to work on most. This is our point of growth.
3. Try to plan in advance how we can summon up more internal fire and enthusiasm to do Hashem's will in this area.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁵ Duties of the Heart, a classic mussar work by Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda, who is believed to have lived in Spain in the first half of the eleventh century.

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About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.darchai-noam.com and www.parshasheets.com. You can access this week's edition of Darchai Noam, archived back issues of Darchai Noam and other divrei Torah.

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, usually 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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