

## DARCHAI NOAM

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

(Mishlei 3:17)

Tetzaveh, February 2015

[darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Tetzaveh – Equal opportunity

In this week's Parsha we read about the special garments that were to be made for Aharon and his sons.

*“And you shall bring near to you Aharon your brother and his sons from among Bnei Yisrael to serve me as Kohanim – Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon. You shall make holy garments for Aharon your brother, for honour and glory.”*  
(Sh'mot 28:1-2)

Aharon and his sons were singled out for special treatment as Kohanim. They were to be given special clothes that represent their new status as the holy priests. This status of Kohanim is preserved for all time, merely because the Kohanim happen to be descendants of Aharon.

At first glance, this sounds a little unfair. Why should people be singled out for special privileges just because they happen to be born into a particular family? This concept of lineage dictating honour and prestige seems contrary to our modern notions of equal opportunity. Why shouldn't everyone have the chance to be a Kohen? Surely this role should be awarded to those who are most fitting for the role.

How can we reconcile our desire for fairness with the idea that some people are just lucky enough to be born as Kohanim?

Let's examine the concept of equal opportunity in more depth.<sup>1</sup> People are born with different talents and skills which dictate their ultimate status and influences their role in life. It's true that we can learn new skills and improve ourselves, however many of our attributes are inherited from birth, just like our lineage. Studies show that the average CEO of a company is taller than the average non-CEO. We have to physically look up to people who are taller than us. It seems that we look up to them in other ways too and they are more likely to take on positions of leadership. Is that fair? Some people are born blind or handicapped and it is physically impossible for them to fulfil certain roles. Is that fair? Perhaps equal opportunity is not so fair after all.

In the Gemara (Horayot 13a), the Rabbis teach us that honours are to be bestowed according to a person's accomplishments in life:

*“The Mamzer who is a Talmid Chacham takes priority over the Kohen Gadol who is ignorant”.*

Yet this does not seem to take effect in practice. The Kohen Gadol attracted much more respect than a Mamzer! The answer lies in the World to Come. In the World to Come things are very different because Hashem assesses our achievements by taking into consideration our circumstances. Our deeds are assessed based on the extent to which we have reached our unique potential in our given circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a shiur from Rav Nosson Weisz.

In Parshat Nasso, we learn about the different jobs that were assigned to the Leviim in the Bet Hamikdash. Some of the Leviim were gatekeepers and others would sing in the choir. The Ramban, in his commentary to Parshat Nasso, teaches us something amazing – if a Levite does the job of another Levite he is chayav mita (liable to the death penalty)! Imagine, a Levite from the choir sees his friend struggling to close a heavy gate and he offers to give him a hand. This is absolutely forbidden! This is my job and that is your job. Even if it is less efficient, it doesn't matter. The Leviim were assigned a role that they could not change.

We can learn from here that we each have a unique role to play in Hashem's world. Hashem placed us into our particular circumstances for a reason. He also gave us what we need to achieve our task (though we may not realise what our task is, or appreciate our skillset – this can be a lifelong avoda). Our job is to do the best that we can in our role. If we are born as a Kohen then our job is to be the best Kohen that we can be. And if we are not born as a Kohen, then this means that we have a different role to play.

Fully internalising this message will enable us to avoid comparing ourselves to others or becoming jealous. We have the resources that we need in order to complete our own tafkid (role). Yearning to have someone else's resources, or to fulfil someone else's role, is not only futile but detrimental.

Hashem only judges us based on how we measure up compared to our own potential.

On the one hand, this is quite a reassuring idea. We are not judged based on how we compare to other people, because we all have different circumstances and a different role to play.

On the other hand, this can be quite daunting because we can never know what our potential is and when we have reached it. No matter what we have achieved, there is always more that can be done. Rabbi Akiva Tatz tells of the martial arts fighter who has just won the world championship. As he walks away from his final fight, he is heard muttering under his breath "still many mistakes".

After our 120 years in this world, we will be shown an image of who we could have been and what we could have achieved had we reached our potential. It is worth bearing in mind the famous story about Reb Zusha on his death bed. He was concerned about the questions that they would ask him when he gets to the Heavenly Court. He was not concerned about being asked "Why weren't you like Moshe or Avraham". Because he was not Moshe or Avraham. He was concerned about being asked "Why weren't you like Reb Zusha!"

The Vilna Gaon teaches that the biggest pain we can experience is finding out just how much more we could have achieved with our potential. To narrow that gap as much as possible we need to focus on who we are, what resources Hashem gave us and what we are capable of!

Let's try something this week:

1. When we see others that have something that we are lacking (eg more wealth, more honour etc) we can rest assured that Hashem provides us with exactly what we need to fulfil our own unique role.
2. Try to focus on what we have achieved and how close we are to reaching our potential. Try to narrow the gap between our potential and our actual deeds as much as possible!

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi 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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