

## 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?

### Tetzaveh – what did the Ephod look like?

In this week’s Parsha of Tetzaveh, the Torah focuses on the special garments that were made for the Kohen Gadol and for the other Kohanim to be worn while they served Hashem in the Mishkan. Hashem instructs Moshe as follows:

*“And these are the garments that they shall make: a Choshen, an Ephod, a robe, a tunic of chequered texture, a cap and a sash. They shall make holy garments for your brother Aaron and for his sons to serve me [as Kohanim].” (Shmot 28:4)*

One of these special items was the Ephod. The Ephod was similar to an apron and it was worn by the Kohen Gadol over his tunic and robe. The Torah provides instructions as to how to make the Ephod.<sup>1</sup> However, the exact appearance of the Ephod is not clear from this description. Apparently, the commentators did not have a reliable tradition as to how the Ephod actually looked. They tried to work out its appearance from the description in the Torah. Rashi provides us with his view of what the Ephod looked like:

*“I have not heard, nor have I found ... an explanation of [the Ephod’s] design, **but my heart tells me** that it is belted around his back, and its width is like the width of a man’s back, like the apron which is called a ‘porceint’<sup>2</sup> which noblewomen wear when they go horse riding.” (Rashi to Shmot 28:4)*

Rashi admits that he does not have a reliable source for the appearance of the Ephod. Yet, why did Rashi write “*my heart tells me*”? And why was Rashi familiar with what women wore when they went horse riding!

There is a very interesting story behind this comment of Rashi.<sup>3</sup> Rashi was careful to guard his eyes and avoid looking at inappropriate sights. However, one day when he was walking to the Bet Midrash, he was startled and was forced to look up. Right in front of him was a group of non-Jewish noble women riding on horseback. No doubt the women were not dressed modestly. Rashi was troubled by this. He wondered why Hashem allowed him to see a forbidden sight, especially since he was trying to follow the Torah’s precept to guard one’s eyes. Later, when Rashi came to write his commentary on the Ephod, the image of the noblewomen riding their horses came back to him. This image enabled him to visualise how the Ephod must have looked. He then understood that Hashem had caused him to see this sight in order to provide him with clarity as to the appearance of the Ephod and the appropriate explanation of these verses. That is why he wrote “*my heart tells me...*”

We can learn some important lessons from this incident.

<sup>1</sup> Shmot 28:6-12.

<sup>2</sup> This is an old French word. Rashi often uses old French (which was the vernacular of his time) to explain concepts.

<sup>3</sup> This idea is from R’ Pinchas Menachem Alter (1926 – 1996), the 7<sup>th</sup> Rebbe of the Hasidic dynasty of Ger.

## Everything that Hashem does has a reason

Rashi was troubled by the fact that he saw an inappropriate sight. He could not understand how such an occurrence could have any positive benefit. However, he later discovered that this sighting was precisely what he needed to allow him to perfect his beautiful commentary on the Torah and to explain a difficult passage. As Nachum Ish Gamzu<sup>4</sup> used to say: gam zu l'tova (this too is for the best)!

Intellectually, we may realise that everything that Hashem does is for the best. However, with our limited perspective we often do not see the bigger picture and it is difficult to translate this knowledge into our hearts in order to feel emotionally and spiritually uplifted by our emunah. Sometimes, we are blessed to see how the challenge is for our best, like the incident with Rashi and the horse riders. However, in those times when we cannot see the benefits, the trick is to retain our emunah in Hashem's goodness nonetheless. This doesn't come naturally and requires us to train ourselves. When faced with a challenge, we can try to think of a creative reason for how the challenge can end up being for our best. This can be a positive and uplifting exercise.

## The importance of guarding our eyes

Rashi was troubled that he saw the noblewomen riding on horseback. His struggle reinforces just how important it is to keep the positive mitzvah to be careful with what we allow our eyes to see.<sup>5</sup> This is based on the pasuk "You shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes."<sup>6</sup> It is well known that images that we see can stay in our mind for a long time. What we see has a powerful influence on what we think. And our thoughts influence our speech and our actions. Thus, being careful with what we see can have an enormous positive influence on our behaviour and what type of person we can become. The Gemara teaches us that the Yetzer Hara exerts influence over us based on what we have seen with our eyes<sup>7</sup>.

This important mitzvah can be difficult to keep in modern society. We are constantly bombarded with inappropriate images and these images are increasingly accessible due to modern technology. In order to combat this, we should make an effort to shift our gaze to holy and permissible sights.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that everything that happens to us has a reason and is ultimately for our best. Sometimes, Hashem grants us the privilege to understand that reason (like the incident with Rashi and the horse riders). Sometimes, however, we just do not have a clue and at such times we must hold on tight to our faith.
2. Be aware of the mitzvah to guard ones' eyes. Remember that though this may be a difficult mitzvah to keep, it is a vital step in order to help us make the right choices and stay on the right path.

The next edition of Darchai Noam will be B"H for Parshat Vayakhel/Pekudai.

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameach!

Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Akiva's teacher.

<sup>5</sup> Sefer HaChinuch, mitzvah 387.

<sup>6</sup> Bamidbar 15:39.

<sup>7</sup> Sotah 8a.

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## **About Darchai Noam**

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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