

DARCHAI NOAM**Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם**

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Pekudai, February 2014

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Pekudai – Be aware of how you affect others

This week's Parsha of Pekudai, the last Parsha of sefer Sh'mot, sets out the Kohen Gadol's special garments. The Torah provides lots of details about these garments and there are many lessons that can be learnt from them. However, this week we will explore the bells that were attached to the Kohen Gadol's clothes and their symbolism.

Attached to the hem of the me'il (robe) were a number of golden bells (Sh'mot 39:25). As the Kohen Gadol would move, the bells would ring. The Ramban explains that the purpose of the bells was to announce the Kohen Gadol's presence before entering into the Kodesh Hakedoshim, the holiest part of the Bet Hamikdash. It would be inappropriate for the Kohen Gadol to enter unannounced. This teaches us an important lesson in how to behave – the importance of respecting people's privacy.

The Gemara¹ teaches seven pieces of advice that Rabbi Akiva gave to his son Rabbi Yehoshua. The third piece of advice was: "do not enter your own house suddenly (ie without knocking) and all the more so your neighbour's house". The Rashbam explains that they may be doing something that requires privacy. The Rashbam states that the source of this idea is the bells on the Kohen Gadol's hem. In addition, the Midrash² says that Rabbi Yochanan made sure to clear his throat before entering Rabbi Chanina's house to ensure that he was not invading anyone's privacy.

We are all entitled to our own privacy. We may feel uncomfortable if people disturb us without warning. Even if we are going into our own house or our own room, other family members may not appreciate being disturbed without warning. Thus we should emulate Rabbi Yochanan and make some noise before entering even our own house to give the inhabitants some forewarning. Perhaps you could fumble with your keys, knock on the door or call out as you approach.

However, it is important to remember to tailor these lessons to the specific needs of our family. We are trying to ensure that the people in the house do not feel uncomfortable. Sometimes, in order to fulfil Ahavat Yisrael (loving our fellow Jew), we need to change the way we behave because of the effect that our behaviour has on others. Consider the following scenario:

¹ Pesachim 112a² Vayikra Rabbah 21:8

Avraham learnt this Torah lesson about forewarning his family and he decided to take on the idea. Every time that he walked into his house, he would make sure to knock on the door to announce his arrival. His wife Chana seemed slightly annoyed at this behaviour. When they discussed the issue, Chana explained to Avraham that whenever he knocked she thought that a stranger was at the door. Chana might not have been dressed in an appropriate manner to greet a stranger but she was very relaxed about greeting her husband. Whenever she heard the knock she would begin to prepare herself to greet a stranger. With communication they realised that a more appropriate solution for their family would be for Avraham to let Chana clearly know that it is "only him". Avraham decided to modify his behaviour. Now, as he approaches the house he calls out that he is home or he whistles a trademark whistle thus alerting Chana that it is only Avraham. Chana is a lot more comfortable with this approach.

The lessons that we can learn from the Torah, such as learning privacy from the Kohen Gadol's bells, are extremely valuable. However we must apply them appropriately to our own individual circumstances. We need to be aware of how our behaviour is affecting those around us. In the story above, Avraham's behaviour was based on the pure motivation of respecting his wife's privacy and making her feel comfortable. However, ironically, his way of implementing this Torah ideal was having the opposite effect and making her feel uncomfortable.

It requires effort on our parts to determine how our behaviour is affecting others. Firstly, we need to try to put ourselves into the other person's shoes and try to imagine how they feel. Secondly, we need to be sensitive to the other person's cues. Some people are naturally better at this. If you are unsure then it is often best to ask the other person. Our ability to fulfil 'V'ahavta L'reiacha Kamocho' (loving one's fellow as oneself) is determined to a large extent on effective communication with those around us.

There are two lessons for us to focus on this week: the importance of respecting people's privacy and being sensitive to how our behaviour makes other people feel.

Let's try something this week:

1. When entering any inhabited house or room, even our own, make sure to announce our arrival by knocking on the door or making an appropriate warning noise.
2. Before adopting any piece of advice relevant to 'Ben Adam L'chavero' (mitzvot between us and our fellows) – try to be aware of how our behaviour will make other people feel. Check with the people involved whether they are comfortable with our chosen method. Communicate, discuss and modify accordingly.

Chazak Chazak Venitchazek!

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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