

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Pekudai (Shmot 38:21-40:38)  
March 2019 / Adar Bet 5779

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### **Pekudai – Being aware of how we affect others**

This week's Parasha of Pekudai is the last Parasha of sefer Sh'mot. It describes the manufacture of 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. This week we will explore the symbolism of the golden bells that were attached to the hem of the Kohen Gadol's robe.

Attached to the hem of the me'il (robe) were a number of golden bells.<sup>1</sup> When the Kohen Gadol moved, 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 holiest part of the Bet Hamikdash. It would be inappropriate for the Kohen Gadol to simply enter unannounced. We can derive from here an important lesson in how to behave, namely, the importance of respecting people's privacy.

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> lists 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 (i.e. without knocking) and all the more so your neighbour's house". The Rashbam explains that this advice is to avoid interrupting other people's privacy. The Rashbam teaches that this idea is sourced from the bells on the Kohen Gadol's hem from our Parasha. A similar idea can also be seen in the Midrash<sup>3</sup> which 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.

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

However, in practice it is important to remember to tailor these lessons to the specific needs of our family in order to maximise shalom bayit. Each person and situation can be different and we may need to modify our behaviour accordingly. Consider the following scenario:

*Avraham learnt this Torah lesson about forewarning his family before entering one's home. 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*

<sup>1</sup> Sh'mot 39:25

<sup>2</sup> Pesachim 112a.

<sup>3</sup> Vayikra Rabbah 21:8.

*explained to Avraham that whenever he knocked, she presumed 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 the couple realised that a more appropriate solution for their family would be for Avraham to adopt a more personal, unique sign that revealed to Chana that it was "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 his wife to his identity. Chana is a lot more comfortable with this approach.*

The lesson that we can learn from the Torah about privacy from the Kohen Gadol's bells is extremely valuable. However, we must tailor this lesson to our own individual circumstances in order to maximise our shalom bayit and enable us to put 'v'ahavta l're'echa kamocho' (loving one's fellow as oneself) into practice. We need to be sensitive to how our behaviour is affecting those around us.

It sometimes requires great effort on our part 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 than others. If you are unsure, it is often best to ask the other person outright before implementing a new practice. Our ability to fulfil 'v'ahavta l're'echa kamocho' 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 house, try to announce our arrival, e.g. 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!

P.S. This week we celebrate Rosh Chodesh Adar Sheini. Whenever there is a leap year, we have an extra month of Adar. There is a famous halacha: "Mishenichnas Adar, Marbim B'simcha" – "when Adar commences, we increase our joy". In leap years this halacha applies to both months of Adar. There are practical and halachic reasons why it is only the month of Adar that is repeated in leap years. But it is interesting to note that it is specifically the most joyful of months that is repeated. We don't, for example, have an extra month of Av (which contains Tisha B'Av) so that we can have an extra month of mourning! The lesson we can learn from this is the importance of joy in Judaism. I wish you all a month of increasing joy!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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## About Darchai Noam

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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, 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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