

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

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayakhel, February 2014

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Vayakhel – Forgiveness

In this week's Parsha of Vayakhel, we read about the building of the Mishkan and its implements. Many of the details in this week's Parsha parallel Parashat Terumah which we read three weeks ago. Parashat Terumah contains Hashem's commandment to build the Mishkan and its implements and it provides lots of measurements and details. This week's Parsha contains a description of Bnei Yisrael actually building the Mishkan and its implements and it repeats many of the same measurements and details.

This week's Parsha can be seen as the fourth Parsha in a series of five, as follows:

1. Terumah – Hashem's commandment to build the Mishkan and its implements
2. Tetzaveh – Hashem's commandment to make garments for the Kohen Gadol
3. Ki Tisa – The sin of the golden calf
4. Vayakhel – Bnei Yisrael build the Mishkan and its implements
5. Pekudai – Bnei Yisrael make the garments for the Kohen Gadol

Rashi, the great Torah commentator, has relatively little to say for Vayakhel and Pekudai. He mainly refers back to his commentary on Terumah and Tetzaveh (see Rashi on Shmot 35:5).

In general, the Torah is very economical with its use of words. Yet, here the Torah spends 211 verses re-describing the process of building the Mishkan. Why? Surely these pasukim could have simply been replaced with one verse: "And Bnei Yisrael built the Mishkan and its implements as Hashem commanded".

Some commentators¹ have suggested that the answer lies in the events described in Ki Tisa, the sin of the golden calf, which is sandwiched between Hashem's commandment and the actual building of the Mishkan. Due to the gravity of the sin, one might suppose that Hashem did not completely forgive the Jewish people. Perhaps the Torah repeats all of the details to show us that Hashem's forgiveness was absolute and complete. Despite Bnei Yisrael's enormous sin, Hashem still allows them to build the Mishkan exactly as He had originally intended before the sin. This message of complete forgiveness would not have been conveyed as clearly if the description of the building of the Mishkan in Vayakhel and Pekudai was replaced with a single passuk "And Bnei Yisrael built the Mishkan and its implements as Hashem commanded".

It is difficult to imagine a more heinous sin than idol worship at the foot of Har Sinai, so soon after Hashem Himself had commanded us not to worship idols. Yet Hashem completely forgave Bnei Yisrael.

¹ I heard this idea many years ago in a dvar Torah at the Bogrim minyan in Melbourne. Unfortunately I do not remember the person from whom I heard it. The Brisker Rav says something similar.

As we have learnt previously in Darchai Noam, an important principle of Judaism is that we should strive to emulate Hashem and to walk in His ways (Sefer HaChinuch mitzva 611). Thus, if Hashem can completely forgive Bnei Yisrael despite their heinous sin, then we should strive to forgive in our own lives to the same extent.

But complete forgiveness can be difficult to achieve. For instance, if someone harms us in a vindictive, deliberate and pre-meditated manner, how can we feel complete forgiveness?

Rabbi Akiva Tatz provides some good advice. He reminds us that Hashem runs the world in a manner of middah k'neged middah (measure for measure). The way that we act is the way that Hashem acts towards us. If we can find it within our heart to forgive our fellow for a sin that really doesn't deserve to be forgiven, then we can legitimately ask Hashem to forgive us for our sins that really don't deserve to be forgiven.

This idea provides us with a strong incentive to forgive others, even when it is difficult to do so. If we want Hashem to fully and completely forgive us, first we must fully and completely forgive our fellow. If we merely forgive our fellow superficially, while harbouring resentment in our hearts, then Hashem may not completely forgive us for our sins either.

But practically speaking, how can we forgive people who have hurt us? Rabbi Twersky provides us with some very practical and sensible tips in his book "Forgiveness - Don't let resentment keep you captive". For example, he suggests that you repeatedly imagine the person that you wish to forgive standing next to a person that you love very deeply. After a while, the positive feelings that you have towards the person that you love should rub off onto the person that you are trying to forgive.

The month of Elul and Yom Kippur is about seven months away. However, if we start working on forgiveness now, then during Elul we can turn to Hashem and ask him to forgive us for our sins with a pure heart.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remind ourselves how forgiving Hashem was to Bnei Yisrael after the sin of the golden calf. Think about the sins that we have done towards Hashem and how much we yearn for them to be forgiven.
2. Think of somebody that we are struggling to forgive.
3. Work hard on completely forgiving the person that has wronged us. Perhaps use some of the tips and guidance in Rabbi Twersky's book to assist us. Even if we forgive them for non-altruistic reasons (eg so that we can be forgiven by Hashem for our sins) this is still a good start.
4. Try to do something tangible to demonstrate our forgiveness, for example make contact with them.

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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