

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayakhel (Shmot 35:1-38:20)  
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This week's Darchai Noam is in memory of the late Ephraim Zerach ben Yaakov Altschul z"l, the father/father-in-law of our dear friends. May his neshama have an aliya and may his family have long life and no further sorrow.

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Vayakhel – Forgiveness

In this week's Parasha of Vayakhel, we read about the building of the Mishkan and its implements. Many of the details set out in this week's Parasha parallel Parashat Terumah, which we read three weeks ago. Parashat Terumah contains Hashem's commandment to build the Mishkan and its implements, including the specific measurements and details. This week's Parsha contains a description of Bnei Yisrael actually building the Mishkan and its implements and many of the measurements and details that were already included in Parashat Terumah are repeated here.

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 actually build the Mishkan and its implements
5. Pekudai – Bnei Yisrael actually make the garments for the Kohen Gadol

The great Torah commentator, Rashi, adds relatively little commentary on Vayakhel and Pekudai. He mainly refers back to his commentary on Terumah and Tetzaveh<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>. Why? Surely these pasukim could have simply been replaced with one single verse: "And Bnei Yisrael built the Mishkan and its implements as Hashem commanded"!

Some commentators<sup>3</sup> have suggested that the answer lies in the events described in Ki Tisa, the sin of the golden calf. This event is sandwiched between Hashem's original commandment to build the Mishkan and the actual building of the Mishkan. Due to the gravity of the sin, one might presume that Hashem did not completely forgive the Jewish people. Thus, to counter this erroneous presumption, 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. Perhaps the message of Hashem's 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 just a single pasuk "And Bnei Yisrael built the Mishkan and its implements as Hashem commanded".

<sup>1</sup> See Rashi on Shmot 35:5.

<sup>2</sup> This includes the pasukim in Parashat Vayakhel and Parashat Pekudai.

<sup>3</sup> 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 makes a similar comment.

It is difficult to imagine a more heinous sin than idol worship at the foot of Har Sinai, especially so soon after Hashem Himself had commanded Bnei Yisrael not to worship idols. Yet, the fact that this week's Parasha painstakingly sets out all of the details of Bnei Yisrael's building of Hashem's sanctuary may be evidence of Hashem's complete forgiveness of Bnei Yisrael.

What can we learn from this? An important principle of Judaism is that we should strive to emulate Hashem and to walk in His ways<sup>4</sup>. Thus, if Hashem can completely forgive Bnei Yisrael despite their heinous sin, then we can learn to forgive in our own lives, ideally to the same extent (i.e. complete forgiveness).

Yet it can be difficult to achieve this level of complete forgiveness in practice. For instance, if someone harms us in a vindictive, deliberate and pre-meditated manner, even if we say that we forgive them, how can we feel complete forgiveness in our hearts?

Rabbi Akiva Tatz<sup>5</sup> teaches some good advice on this issue. 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 hearts 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.

However, if we merely succeed in forgiving our fellow superficially, while harbouring resentment in our hearts, then Hashem may not completely forgive us for our sins either.

Though this idea provides added incentive to try harder to forgive, what can we do to help us achieve this state of complete forgiveness of those who hurt us badly? 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 one repeatedly imagines the person that they wish to forgive standing next to a person that they love very deeply. After a while, the positive feelings that you have towards the person that you love may rub off onto the person that you are trying to forgive.

In addition, like with everything else, we can turn to Hashem and ask Him for assistance. We may not want to forgive someone, but at least we can "want to want" it<sup>6</sup>. And then we can ask Hashem to help us get to the next level.

Forgiveness is a process. It involves the heart which is gentle and gradual. The month of Elul and Yom Kippur are about seven months away. However, if we start working on our process of forgiveness now, then hopefully by the time that we get to Elul we will be able to turn to Hashem and ask him to forgive us completely for our own sins, middah k'neged middah.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember how forgiving Hashem was to Bnei Yisrael after the sin of the golden calf. Think about all of 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. Even if we forgive them for non-altruistic reasons (e.g. so that we can be forgiven by Hashem for our sins), this is still an excellent start.
4. Try to do something tangible to demonstrate our forgiveness of the person, for example make contact with them.

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<sup>4</sup> Sefer HaChinuch mitzva 611.

<sup>5</sup> Heard in one of Rabbi Tatz's recorded lectures.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Tatz discusses the idea of "wanting to want".

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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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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Many of the ideas that I use in Darchai Noam are based on ideas that I read or heard from various sources. Where possible I try to quote the source. However, in some cases I cannot recall the source. For that I apologise. If I do discuss an idea that I heard from somewhere else, any errors are purely my own.

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