

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

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayakhel / Pekudai, March 2015

darchai.noam@gmail.com

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Vayakhel / Pekudai – The meaning of the cherubs¹

In this week's double Parsha we read about the making of the Mishkan and its utensils. In his commentary to the Torah, the Ramban points out the many parallels between the revelation at Har Sinai and the Mishkan. The Mishkan was like a portable Har Sinai, reminding Bnei Yisrael of the revelation. Indeed, after the Mishkan was built, Hashem's revelation to Moshe continued in the Mishkan.

In the Holy of Holies was the Ark which contained the Luchot Habrit (the Ten Commandments). The cover of the Ark was made from a piece of pure gold. Two cherubim (cherubs) were hammered out from that piece of gold, one on each side of the cover.

The Mishkan was the place through which Bnei Yisrael developed their relationship with Hashem. When Hashem spoke to Moshe, His voice emanated from between the cherubim on the cover of the Ark (Bamidbar 7:89). The two cherubim in particular represented the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. One cherub represented Bnei Yisrael and the other cherub represented Hashem. When Bnei Yisrael was doing Hashem's will and the relationship was strong, the two cherubim faced each other. When Bnei Yisrael was not acting the way they should, Hashem became angry with them and the two cherubim would face away from each other.²

Rabbi Ari Kahn points out that the cherubim may also represent the relationship between the two first human beings - Adam and Chava. The parallels are quite clear – the cherubim were fashioned from one piece of pure gold, they were unclothed and they were in the form of innocent children. Similarly – Adam and Chava were fashioned from the same body, they were unclothed, and before their sin they were as pure and innocent as young children. When Adam and Chava were banished from Gan Eden, Hashem placed cherubim in the garden to guard the way to the tree of life (Breishit 3:23). The Torah is also called the tree of life.³ The two cherubim in the Mishkan sat above the Ark guarding the Luchot Habrit which represents the Torah.

Interestingly, the same cherubim can represent both the relationship between husband and wife and also the relationship between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. Yet, on reflection this is not surprising, as the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael is often compared to a marriage. For example, the Gemara in Taanit 26b⁴ explains that the day that Hashem gave us the Torah at Har Sinai is referred to as His wedding day. The opposite is also true. When Bnei Yisrael is unfaithful to Hashem, this is compared to a wife being unfaithful to her husband.

The prohibition against adultery is the 7th of the 10 commandments. The commentators have pointed out that the first 5 commandments (which appear on the first tablet) relate to mitzvot

¹ This week's Darchai Noam is adapted from a shiur from Rabbi Ari Kahn.

² Gemara, Yoma 54a-b.

³ Mishlei 3:18, which we recite when the Torah is raised after being read in shule. See the Artscroll Ashkenazi siddur, bottom of page 444.

⁴ Explaining passuk 3:11 in Shir Hashirim.

between man and Hashem. The second 5 commandments (which appear on the second tablet) relate to mitzvot between man and man. Each one of the first 5 commandments has a parallel in the second set of 5 commandments. The first commandment parallels the 6th commandment, and so on. Under this system the 2nd commandment (prohibiting idolatry) is paralleled with the 7th commandment (prohibiting adultery)⁵. There are many occasions in the Tanach where Bnei Yisrael stray after idols and the prophets compare them to an unfaithful wife.⁶ Both sins involve a special, sanctified relationship. Whereas an idolater is being unfaithful to Hashem, an adulterer is being unfaithful to their spouse.

However, Rabbi Kahn explains that the pure gold cherubim represent Adam and Chava before the sin – that is, they represent the ultimate potential of human beings when free of sin. What is this ideal state? To determine this, let's examine the situation surrounding their sin. Adam and Chava were not punished immediately after eating from the forbidden tree. Rather, Hashem gave them a chance to admit their guilt and to do teshuva. However, instead of admitting their guilt, Adam blamed Chava and Chava blamed the snake. Only then were they punished and banished from Gan Eden. The real sin was that they did not admit that they had sinned!

The Mishkan was the place where Bnei Yisrael would go to atone for their sins. The act of bringing a korban was part of this atonement process. The sinner would bring the sacrifice to the Mishkan (and later to the Bet Hamikdash), lean on the animal and confess their sin. But it could only work if the sinner admitted their sin.

Bnei Yisrael were so far removed from this idyllic state that they were not allowed to even look at the cherubim. Only the Cohen Gadol could enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, after sanctifying himself all day. The closest that Bnei Yisrael could get was to look at the face of the Cohen Gadol after he had seen the cherubim.⁷ This is reminiscent of the end of last week's Parsha – Moshe's face was so radiant after he spoke with Hashem that he had to cover it with a mask so that Bnei Yisrael were able to look at him (Shemot 34:33-35).

How can we seek to become closer to this pre-sin state of Eden and avoid punishment? The first and arguably most crucial step is to admit our sins. We are human. We are not angels. We do mess up. But we need to deflate our ego and admit our mistakes. Hashem knows our faults. He made us that way. He doesn't expect us to be perfect but He does expect us to admit our errors and to try our best to improve.

Pesach is coming up. It is the chag where we try to eradicate all chametz, which represents inflated egos. By starting early and tackling our egos we can get a handle on our dough before it starts to overinflate.

Let's try something this week:

1. Let's try to notice when we cover up or hide our mistakes and to learn from Adam and Chava to admit when we do wrong. The ramifications of admitting our mistakes are often much less drastic than we imagine. The hardest part is usually just the initial blow to our ego.
2. Remember that the cherubim can represent Adam and Chava as well as Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. Let's seek to remain faithful to Hashem and also to our spouses and our fellow human beings.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁵ Mechilta Yitro

⁶ See for example Yirmiyah Ch 3; Hosea Ch 2.

⁷ Rabbi Kahn compares this to a kli shaini. This is the source of the song in the Musaf service on Yom Kippur – "Mar'eh Cohen" – how majestic was the appearance of the Cohen Gadol as he left the Holy of Holies.

*** **

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.

If you know someone who might enjoy receiving this email please feel free to pass it on to them or email me their details so I can add them to the subscription list.

You are welcome to use the content of this email in any way that will help to spread the learning of Torah. However please attribute credit appropriately.

How to subscribe or unsubscribe

If you would like to subscribe or unsubscribe to Darchai Noam, please send an email to darchai.noam@gmail.com with the word ‘subscribe’ or ‘unsubscribe’ in the subject.