

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayakhel-Pekudai
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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Vayakhel-Pekudai – the three spheres of holiness

In this week's double Parsha of Vayakhel Pekudai we learn about Bnei Yisrael building the Mishkan and making the holy utensils and the special clothes that the Kohanim wore while serving in the Mishkan.

However, prior to this discussion, the Torah reminds us to keep Shabbat.¹ In his commentary, Rashi explains the juxtaposition – Bnei Yisrael is being told that despite the importance of building the Mishkan, it does not supersede the prohibition of performing work on Shabbat. On a practical level, we also learn the forbidden categories of labour from this juxtaposition between Shabbat and the Mishkan. The 39 categories of labour involved in the building of the Mishkan are precisely the categories of labour which become forbidden when Shabbat commences.

However, there is also a deeper relationship between the concept of the Mishkan and Shabbat. The Mishkan created a holiness in space. Shabbat creates holiness in time. And the Kohanim, who would work in the Mishkan, represented holiness among people. By mentioning Shabbat, the building of the Mishkan and the clothes of the Kohanim together, the Torah brings these three concepts of holiness together.

The mystics² teach that everything that Hashem created exists on three planes – space, time and soul. Hashem created space and the ‘stuff’ that exists in space, He created the concept of time and then He created the purpose of creation – the soul or the human being. Shabbat represents holiness in time. The Mishkan represents the holiness in space. And the Kohanim who serve in the Bet Hamikdash represent holiness amongst people. Our Parsha teaches us that there are limits to what we are able to do in this world. For example, we have a task of bringing holiness to our ‘space’. This is represented by Bnei Yisrael's role in building of the Mishkan. However, we can't do this at the expense of holiness in time. When it is Shabbat, our work in this sphere must pause.

Hashem hides Himself behind the world. That is why the Hebrew word for ‘world’ (olam) has the same root as the Hebrew word for hidden (neelam)³. One reason Hashem hides Himself is to give us free will. If Hashem's presence was blatantly obvious, then no-one would sin. However, Hashem wants us to have free will in order for us to earn our reward and to feel an associated sense of achievement. Hashem wants us to **choose** to do the right thing and thus earn our reward in the World to Come. Thus, Hashem hides Himself.

On the other hand, if Hashem were completely hidden, and there was no chance of finding Him, then we would have the opposite problem. The physical world exerts a powerful influence on us because we experience it strongly with all of our senses. If we had no chance at all of discovering Hashem, then we would have no chance of discovering the truth and living a Torah life. We would be drawn too strongly towards the physical. Hashem does not expect us to do the impossible.

¹ Parshat Vayakhel, Shmot 35:2.

² See for example, Sefer Yetzirah.

³ Heard from Rabbi Akiva Tatz.

Therefore, Hashem acts in a finely balanced manner – He conceals Himself to a great degree in this world to allow us free will. But He reveals just enough of Himself to enable us to have a chance of discovering Him.⁴ When Hashem reveals himself, we experience revealed holiness. And when He hides Himself, His holiness remains concealed. We see this phenomenon in each of the planes of creation.

- **Space.** There are certain spaces that are obviously more holy than others, like the Bet Hamikdash, the Kotel, shuls, a Bet Midrash. In contrast, there are other spaces that appear to lack any semblance of holiness.
- **Time.** There are certain days that are more holy, like Yom Kippur, Shabbat, the other Yamim Tovim, times spent in shule davening, time spent learning in a shiur. There are other times that seem to have no holiness at all, such as first thing Monday morning! However, since Hashem created time in this world, every moment has a spark of holiness, it is just more or less revealed.
- **Soul.** There are certain people that seem to exude holiness, such as the Avot, the Prophets, the great Tzaddikim, the Kohen Gadol, the Gedolei Hador (the great Torah leaders of every generation). These are the people that we should look up to as someone to emulate. However, in reality, every Jew is holy as we are all created in the image of Hashem. It is just that for some people this holiness may be covered with more layers (klipot).

Hashem wants us to be his partner in bringing holiness into the world. By acting in a holy way, we can elevate the mundane parts of the world and thus fill in the spaces that Hashem has left for us. We can literally be partners with Hashem in creation by uncovering the inherent sparks of holiness. We can strive to do this in each of the three spheres of creation.

- **Space.** We can try to bring holiness into spaces that are not usually holy. For example, we could designate a special place at home where we learn Torah (a makom kavua); or we could use our car for listening to recorded shiurim.
- **Time.** We can try to inject some holiness into mundane times. For example, while waiting in a queue, try to revise some Torah; before going into a business meeting offer a short prayer to Hashem asking for success; at dinner share some Torah thoughts or talk about good middot with our family.
- **Soul.** We can't all be the Kohen Gadol or a great Tzaddik. But we all have a spark of holiness within us. We can work on ourselves to reveal that spark more and more. Also, we can seek out someone that is worth looking up to and try to emulate their character traits. A good way to accomplish this is to choose a small area of our character that needs improvement and try to work on it every day.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem's holiness in this world resides in three spheres – time, space and people.
2. Try to be Hashem's partner in bringing holiness into the world and elevating the spaces that Hashem has left for us to fill. Look for opportunities to increase holiness in the three spheres of creation – space (e.g. listen to shiurim in the car), time (e.g. use time waiting in queues to learn Torah) and soul (e.g. choose one aspect of our character and try to work on it each day).

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

⁴ This idea was presented by the previous Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks in his Covenant and Conversation series.

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About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.divreitorah.net/darchai-noam. You can access this week's edition of Darchai Noam, archived back issues of Darchai Noam and other divrei Torah.

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 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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