

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayikra (Vayikra 1:1 - 5:26)
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vayikra – Making sure others don't lose face

The first Parsha in the book of Vayikra introduces the details of the various korbanot that were offered to Hashem in the Mishkan and the Bet Hamikdash. These laws seem very far removed from our daily lives. We have not had the benefits of the Bet Hamikdash or the opportunity to offer korbanot for around 2,000 years. What can we learn from these laws that is relevant for us today?

The Parsha discusses the different types of animals that can be brought as korbanot. It first discusses cattle, then sheep and goats, and then birds. Less affluent people could not afford to offer the larger animals. Therefore, they would often bring birds as their offering to Hashem.

In relation to the preparation of the birds for the korban, the pasuk says as follows:

"And he shall split it open with its wing feathers but he shall not tear it completely apart..." (Vayikra 1:17)

The Kohen is instructed to take care to leave the bird intact and not remove the feathers. In his comment on this pasuk, Rashi quotes the Midrash¹ as follows:

"You will not find even the simplest person that is not disgusted by the smell of burning feathers. Why then does the Torah tell us to burn the feathers? So that the alter will be sated and adorned with the sacrifice of a poor person".

As Rashi explains, removing the feathers will leave the bird looking quite scrawny. Having such a small offering could be a source of embarrassment for a poor person. Thus, despite the fact that the smell of burning feathers is quite unpleasant, the Torah teaches that it is more important to try to avoid a person feeling ashamed or uncomfortable.

Interestingly, this rule of avoiding the situation where the poor person may see their sacrifice looking scrawny and feel embarrassed, is well known to everyone. The poor person that brings the bird sacrifice knows full well that the feathers are masking the true size of his offering. People who see the poor person with his bird also know this. And the poor person knows that they know it. So how exactly are the poor saved from embarrassment? However, that is how human nature works. The honour that the poor person feels from participating and fitting in more than compensates for any embarrassment that they may experience.

How can we apply this idea in our lives? Consider the following two scenarios (both of which are based on real life examples).

Scenario 1: Yitzchak is the oldest member of a particular minyan in Israel. The custom in this minyan is for the Kohanim to bless the congregation every day (which is not the case outside of

¹ Vayikra Raba 3:5

Israel). As the oldest congregant, Yitzchak was given the honour and responsibility of inviting the Kohanim to begin their blessing. His job is to call out "Kohanim" at the appropriate time. The only problem is that Yitzchak is quite old and he often falls asleep in the middle of davening. So someone else was given the honour and responsibility of making sure that Yitzchak was awake. Adam sometimes attends the same minyan and he is quite amused to see what happens. At the appropriate time in the service, someone calls out "Yitzchak" in a whisper that is fairly loud and clearly audible. Yitzchak then stands up and calls out "Kohanim". "Why don't they cut out the middle man and allow Yitzchak to stay asleep?" thinks Adam to himself. However, even though in reality Yitzchak is clearly not up to the responsibility of this task and even though he himself knows that he needs assistance, the benefit of feeling included and having an honoured role to play, outweighs any embarrassment that he might experience. It is important for Yitzchak to continue to fulfil this role and to go through the motions in order to save face.

Scenario 2: Menashe belongs to a different minyan. The custom in this minyan is that the congregant selected for Chatan Breishit on Simchat Torah would sponsor an elaborate lunch for the entire community. Menashe was not very wealthy and he was always overlooked for this honour because he could not afford the expense. One year, the committee decided to select Menashe. A few of the wealthy congregants were asked to anonymously make a contribution to cover the cost of the lunch. Even though Menashe knew that he was not paying for the entire lunch, and he was aware that other people knew that it was being subsidised, the subtle way that things were arranged allowed Menashe to participate and enjoy the role of Chatan Breishit without losing face.

Ideally, we can strive to help another without them being aware of it. However, in reality this is not always possible. Yet, even if they do know that they are being helped, it is preferable for that help to be somewhat hidden. For example, the scrawny bird that will be brought as a korban is hidden under its feathers and is not on display for the world to see. Similarly, most congregants in the second scenario did not know exactly how much Menashe had contributed for the lunch. The hidden nature of the assistance makes it easier for the disadvantaged person to save face and minimises their embarrassment.

Even in cases where the assistance cannot be hidden, like in the case of Yitzchak and the blessing of the Kohanim, the opportunity to fit in and play an important role will often more than compensates for a small amount of embarrassment. However, each situation needs to be considered carefully on a case by case basis.

We all like to fit in with other people and not stand out as being poor or deficient in some respect. Many of us also enjoy being involved in group tasks and we relish the feeling of participation and honour. By being sensitive to others' feelings and doing things in a subtle way, we can hopefully maximise these positive benefits of group participation while minimising any embarrassment.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to notice when someone is not able to take part in a group activity because of some lack (e.g. insufficient funds or skills).
2. Think about how you can subtly and sensitively assist that person to participate while still allowing them to save face.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.darchai-noam.com and www.parshasheets.com. 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, 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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