

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Acharai-Kedoshim  
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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Acharai-Kedoshim – the intention behind the act

In this week's double Parsha of Acharai-Kedoshim we learn the laws relating to certain rejected korbanot. In most cases, a portion of each korban was to be eaten by the person bringing the offering and a portion was eaten by the Kohanim. However, depending on the type of korban being offered, there were restrictions on the time and place that it could be eaten. For example, a peace offering could be eaten on the day that it was offered and the following day and it must be eaten within Jerusalem. Whatever was not eaten within that two-day period becomes forbidden and must be burned on the third day.

*“When you slaughter a peace offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it to find favour for yourselves. It may be eaten on the day that you slaughter it, and on the next day, but anything that is left over to the third day shall be burned in fire. And if it will be eaten on the third day, it is ‘piggul’ – it will not be accepted.”* (Parshat Kedoshim, Vayikra 19:5-8)

The term ‘piggul’ used here means rejected<sup>1</sup> or abhorrent<sup>2</sup>. In his commentary, Rashi explains how to understand the meaning of these verses. They refer to a Kohen who offered the korban with the *intention* that it would be eaten after the applicable deadline or in an impermissible place. Thus, the intention of the Kohen is paramount to the korban being accepted. Even if the consumption of the korban actually took place before the deadline and in a permitted place, it would not be accepted by Hashem if the Kohen had the wrong intention at the time that the korban was offered. This demonstrates the importance of intent. Two Kohanim can perform an identical offering, however if their intentions differ then the validity of the offering will also differ. One will be favoured by Hashem and bring atonement to its owner and the other will be rejected out of hand and forbidden to eat.

This concept can also apply to other mitzvot. For instance, as we will shortly see, two people can carry out the identical action but their underlying intention will determine whether the action is considered a mitzvah or an aveirah.

The Shulchan Aruch<sup>3</sup> rules that mitzvot require kavana (intent) in order to be valid. The Mishnah Berurah<sup>4</sup> explains that there are two types of intent:

- (1) the intent of mind in the performance of the mitzvah itself – this involves concentration on what one is saying or doing (also known as mindfulness); and
- (2) the intent to fulfil one's duty with one's action – to have in mind that one wishes to discharge one's obligation by means of the action in accordance with Hashem's command.

The Mishnah Berurah explains that the Shulchan Aruch's ruling does not refer to the first type of intent. All authorities agree that ideally one should concentrate while one performs mitzvot. However,

<sup>1</sup> According to the translation of Targum Onkelos.

<sup>2</sup> According to Rav Sa'adia Gaon.

<sup>3</sup> Orach Chaim 60:4.

<sup>4</sup> 60:7.

if one performed the mitzvah without this level of mindfulness, they will still fulfil their obligation.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch refers to the second type of intent – i.e. when one begins to perform a mitzvah, he is obliged to have in mind that he intends to fulfil his obligation by performing the act. If he does not have such an intention he has not fulfilled his obligation and he will need to redo the mitzvah.<sup>6</sup>

However, there is an important qualification to this ruling.<sup>7</sup> In circumstances where the action itself is clearly linked to the mitzva and one would be highly unlikely to have performed it otherwise, it is taken to be implied that the person had the requisite intention, even if there was actually no such intention. For example, if one read the Shema during the course of tefillah, if one ate matza on Seder night, blew the shofar on Rosh Hashana, or took hold of a lulav and etrog on Sukkot, in the regular way in which those mitzvot are performed then one will have satisfied their obligation even without the correct intent.

Once the base level of intention is satisfied, it is the action that is most important. Two people can give tzedaka, one with the purest of intentions and the other grudgingly. Of course, it is preferable to do a mitzvah with pure intentions, however both people would satisfy the mitzvah of tzedaka.

However, in some cases, one's intention is critical. Two people can perform the same action but the intent behind that action will determine whether the action is praiseworthy or not. Rav Zev Leff gives an example of correcting a baal koreh who makes a mistake while reading from the Torah. One person might dislike the baal koreh or harbour resentment or jealousy towards him. This person would be looking for mistakes so that they can correct the baal koreh and embarrass him publicly. Obviously, this would not be praiseworthy. Another person might have the purest intentions – they are only concerned with the Torah reading being perfect so that the kehilla can satisfy its obligation to perform the mitzvah of kriyat haTorah. Such a person might be pained to correct the baal koreh but they would have no choice. Such a person is performing a praiseworthy act.

Rav Chaim Brisker explains this concept by means of an analogy. When there is a mouse loose in one's home, there are two that are keen to eliminate it – the housewife and the cat. However, their underlying intention is vastly different. The housewife hopes that there will never be another mouse in her house. The cat hopes that there will be many more opportunities to chase mice.

Our intent can also be critically important in our interpersonal relations. When performing an act of kindness, one's underlying intention can often be clear from the manner in which the act of kindness is performed. For example, if one gives grudgingly, one can undo much of the good they have done. This can be compared to the old Yiddish proverb of a cow that gives a lot of milk but then kicks over the bucket. A person that is forced to ask for tzedakah is in a very vulnerable position and they may easily feel humiliated. Giving a small amount with a smile and kind word can sometimes be more beneficial than a larger amount given with a sour face and impatience. If the recipient feels that someone actually cares about them it can make the world of difference.

Let's try something this week:

1. Though even minimal intent is often sufficient to satisfy one's obligation when performing a mitzva, we can always strive to improve our kavana and perform our mitzvot with full intent and active concentration.
2. When giving someone tzedakah or performing an act of kindness remember that your intent is often clear to the recipient. Try to perform the act with a full heart and a smile.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> There are two exceptions - reciting the first verse of Shema and reciting the first bracha of the Amidah.

<sup>6</sup> However, one would not repeat the bracha in these circumstances.

<sup>7</sup> Brought by the Mishnah Berurah (60:10) based on the Chayai Adam.

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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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