

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Behar, May 2016

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Behar – Hidden sins and hidden mitzvot

This week’s Parsha of Behar contains a number of prohibitions, three of which are followed by the words “and you shall fear your G-d”. Rashi explains that these prohibitions are hidden matters in that only the perpetrators themselves really know whether they are committing these acts for the right reasons or with selfish motivations. With regard to these mitzvot, people can easily fool other people into thinking that they are acting with pure intentions, when in reality they are only serving themselves. Therefore the Torah reminds us to fear Hashem because Hashem always knows the truth.

The three prohibitions from this week’s Parsha are as follows:

- *“Do not harass one another, **and you shall fear your G-d**, for I am Hashem your G-d”* (Vayikra 25:17). Rashi explains that this prohibition relates to verbal harassment. One should not give his fellow inappropriate advice that is self-serving. Imagine that Reuven asks his neighbour Shimon whether it is a good time to sell his field. Shimon secretly wants to buy the field so he advises Reuven to sell it. If anyone were to challenge Shimon, he could easily claim that he was giving Reuven the best advice that he could. No-one else would know that in his heart Reuven had evil intentions. No-one else knows except for Hashem!
- *“Do not take from him [Your fellow Jew] interest or increase, **and you shall fear your G-d**, and let your brother live with you”* (Vayikra 25:36). This is the prohibition against charging ‘ribit’ or interest when lending money to another Jew. It is permitted to charge interest when we lend money to a non-Jew and to pay interest when we borrow from a non-Jew. Rashi explains that a person could falsely claim that the money that he was lending to a fellow-Jew was not his own money but belonged to a non-Jew and therefore seek to charge ‘permissible’ interest. The lender would be ignorant of the fact that the money really belonged to the Jewish lender. However Hashem knows the truth.
- *“You shall not subjugate him [a Jewish slave] through hard labour, **and you shall fear your G-d**”* (Vayikra 25:43). Rashi explains that this prohibition relates to purpose-less work that is assigned to the slave merely to torment him. The master could easily claim that the work was actually for a purpose and the slave would never know what the master’s true intentions were. But Hashem knows what is inside the master’s heart.

In Parshat Kedoshim the Torah also included this reminder “and you shall fear your G-d” when it instructs us to respect our elders: *“You shall rise before an old person and you shall honour an elder, **and you shall fear your G-d**, I am Hashem* (Vayikra 19:32). This requirement to respect our elders includes an obligation to stand up in their presence. This mitzva also contains a hidden component in that people can easily pretend that they did not see an elderly person walking in and thereby avoid the requirement to stand up. But we cannot fool Hashem or hide our true motives from Him.

In each of these cases, we may be tempted to sin because it is easy to hide the truth from others and thereby escape notice or judgement by other people. No-one else knows what is going on

inside the person's heart. This is why the pasuk reminds us to fear Hashem in this context. Hashem cannot be fooled. He knows what a person is really thinking. Reminding us to fear Hashem can help encourage us to avoid sinning in these areas.

However, this same principle can work the other way as well. By remembering our love for Hashem, we may be encouraged to do hidden good deeds. Instead of needing other people to be aware of our good deeds, our love of Hashem should be sufficient reward because we know that He knows.

Here are some powerful reasons to do good deeds privately:

1. The receiver might feel embarrassed if they know that we are the ones who helped them.
2. We strengthen our middot such as self-discipline, gevurah (strength), and anava (humility).
3. In some circumstances, the reward that we receive in the World to Come can be greater if we keep quiet about our good deeds.
4. We show Hashem that we acted l'shem shamayim – for His sake and not for any gratitude, honour or recompense from other people. This in turn strengthens our bond with Him, which is the greatest pleasure.

The following story illustrates the benefits of avoiding boasting about our good deeds:

In the city of Tzfat there once lived an extremely pious and humble Jew. He reached such a high level of purity that he merited a visit from Eliyahu HaNavi. One night as he was reciting Tikun Chatzot (the lamentation over the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash that is recited at midnight), Eliyahu appeared and offered to reveal to him secrets of the Torah. But there was one condition. This man had to share with Eliyahu the particular good deed that he did on the day of his barmitzvah that merited the visit from Eliyahu HaNavi that night. The man refused to reveal his deed. The good deed that he did was l'shem shamayim (for the sake of Heaven) and he wanted to keep it a secret, between him and Hashem. The man was willing to forfeit the opportunity to learn the secrets of the Torah for the sake of keeping his mitzva private. Eliyahu was forced to return to Heaven. There was a huge tumult in Heaven that night. How could this person pass up the opportunity to learn with Eliyahu HaNavi? His purity and piety was awesome. It was decided that Eliyahu should return the next night to teach him deep secrets of the Torah, despite the man's refusal to reveal the nature of his good deed. The man became a hidden tzaddik. When he died, his reward was that his soul would be re-incarnated as the Baal Shem Tov.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem knows our true motives and can see the truth always so we should act honestly and fear Him.
2. Look out for opportunities to do hidden good deeds.
3. Celebrate the benefit of doing good deeds secretly and keeping them simply between us and Hashem.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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Note: as the majority of our readers are located outside of Eretz Yisrael we will be following the calendar of Parshiyot for Chutz L'Aretz.

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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're'echa kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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