

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Chukat  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Chukat – a tzaddik in a fur coat

In this week's Parsha of Chukat, we read about the law of the Parah Adumah – the red cow that was used in the procedure for purifying people from tumat met (the impurity associated with a dead body).

Ironically, the same ashes of the Parah Adumah that were used to make someone pure, made the people involved in preparing the ashes impure!<sup>1</sup> How could the same ashes cause an impure person to become pure and a pure person to become impure? Rav Soloveitchik explains that a tamei individual can be compared to a person sinking in quicksand. His rescuers inevitably become soiled in the process of rescuing him.<sup>2</sup>

But why would someone willingly get involved in preparing the ashes of the Parah Adumah if they know that it would cause them to become impure? We can answer this based on a fundamental principle of Judaism: “kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh” – all Jewish people are responsible for each other. That is why Jewish people are often willing to help each other even at the cost of self-sacrifice.

This idea is relevant to people involved in kiruv. In order to bring an unaffiliated Jew back to the right path, one may need to expose oneself to negative influences. This suggests that sometimes we may need to compromise our own level of purity to a degree in order to help our fellow Jews.<sup>3</sup>

This principle of “kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh” has a very practical application, as can be seen from a beautiful halacha.

But first we need some background to the halacha. If two or more people are eating together, one person can say the bracha over the food on behalf of the other people. The other people thereby discharge their obligation to say the bracha just by listening to the bracha being recited, provided that they all have in mind that the bracha is being recited on everyone's behalf.<sup>4</sup> However, the Shulchan Aruch<sup>5</sup> rules that this only works if the person reciting the bracha will be eating with the others. If he is not eating then he is not obligated to recite a bracha and he therefore cannot satisfy the obligation of the other people to recite a bracha. The Mishnah Berurah clarifies that this condition only applies to brachot over food and drink and the like. However, with brachot over mitzvot (such as kiddush or havdala) the principle of kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh applies. Even if I have already satisfied my own obligation for this particular mitzvah, if my friend has not yet performed the mitzvah then it is as if my performance of the

<sup>1</sup> Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvah 397. Note that the people involved in the preparations did not become impure to the same degree as the people whose impurity was being removed by the procedure.

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/tzarich-iyun/tzarich\\_iyun\\_the\\_parah\\_adumah/](http://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/tzarich-iyun/tzarich_iyun_the_parah_adumah/)

<sup>3</sup> As an aside, the extent to which one becomes involved in kiruv is a complicated and delicate question which requires much thought and guidance from a qualified Rabbi. The answer will depend on many factors, including how strong one is in their own belief, and the potential negative influences on our children.

<sup>4</sup> It is preferable, although not obligatory, for the other people to say amen to the bracha.

<sup>5</sup> Orach Chaim 213:2 and see Mishnah Berurah seif katan 14.

mitzvah is lacking. I can therefore recite the bracha again for my friend. I am responsible for my friend's obligation to perform the mitzvah.

We can learn an amazing principle from this. Our mitzvah performance is only really complete if other members of Bnei Yisrael also perform the mitzvah. This means that it is not enough for us to just focus on our own spiritual growth. We need to be concerned about the spiritual growth of each other.

The Kotzker Rebbe<sup>6</sup> once referred to someone as a "tzaddik in peltz" – "a righteous person in a fur coat". There are two options to warm ourselves up if it is freezing outside. We can light a fire or we can put on a warm coat. Whereas a fire warms everyone else as well, a warm coat only warms the wearer. Someone concerned only with their own spiritual growth can thus be referred to as a tzaddik in a fur coat.

This suggests that kiruv work to help increase others' spirituality is vital and necessary. However, we must also consider the risks associated with doing kiruv work. Just like the people involved in preparing the ashes of the Parah Adumah, the exposure to negative influences can have a detrimental effect on oneself.

It has been suggested that we can extract an answer to this conundrum from the laws of salting meat. A few generations ago, before the modern convenience of kosher butchers, most Jewish housewives knew how to salt meat. The salt draws the blood out of the meat and ensures that the meat is permissible to eat according to the laws of kashrut. The Rabbis asked whether it is permissible to salt many pieces of meat together. Perhaps the blood that is flowing out of one piece of meat will get absorbed into another piece of meat, thus rendering it forbidden? The Shulchan Aruch<sup>7</sup> rules that it is permitted to salt more than one piece of meat at a time. One of the reasons that they give is that salt causes juices to flow out of the meat for quite some time. As long as there is juice flowing out of a piece of meat, nothing else can flow into that piece, including blood from another piece of meat.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps here lies the secret to successful kiruv. If one is constantly involved in spreading the light of Judaism and teaching Torah, the spiritual juices are constantly flowing out and there is thus no room for negative influences to flow in.

The principle of kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh applies to all of us. We are all a klal, and when one part of the community suffers, we all suffer. If this applies to physical suffering, then how much more so should it apply spiritually? Though kiruv work per se may not be appropriate for all and the dangers of tainting ourselves may outweigh the benefits, we can still strive to purify others on some level. Teaching a Torah law, guiding someone to a Rav or attributing one's knowledge to a Torah source are small but real daily examples

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that we are all responsible for each other – this includes concerning ourselves with each other's spiritual wellbeing as well as their physical situation.
2. Once we satisfy our obligation in relation to a particular mitzvah, remember that our performance is still lacking until we can help others to perform the mitzvah as well.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>6</sup> 1787-1859.

<sup>7</sup> Yoreh Deah 70:1.

<sup>8</sup> This principle is known as "idi d'tarid liflot tzir, lo bala" - while the meat is engaged in giving off tzir (meat juices) it will not absorb [blood].