

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Pinchas  
July 2018 / Tammuz 5778

[darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)  
[www.darchai-noam.com](http://www.darchai-noam.com)

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Pinchas – how to be a Holy Nation

At the end of last week's Parsha, we read about the ruthless and despicable plan of the Moabites and the Midianites. They enticed Jewish men to sin with their daughters and thus led them to idol worship. Bilaam had advised them that this was a sure-fire way to make Hashem angry with his people. And it was working. Hashem's wrath flared in the form of a deadly plague. And then Zimri, a prince from the tribe of Shimon, took a Midianite princess and publicly challenged Moshe to stop him from sinning with her. He led her into his tent in full view of the people. Such a public act by a high-ranking individual could only serve to strengthen the resolve of the men to continue sinning. Pinchas bravely ran after them and killed them both. This stopped the plague and halted the moral decline.

This week's Parsha of Pinchas, starts with Hashem praising Pinchas for zealously protecting His honour and preventing the Jewish people from sliding into a state of moral decay. Hashem rewards Pinchas for his brave act.

It turns out that Bilaam was right. He knew that Hashem despises immorality. Interestingly, immediately after we read about this incident with Pinchas, we see another hint to this idea of how precious morality is. The Torah lists all of the family groups of Bnei Yisrael who had come out of Egypt. For each family name, the Torah places the letter 'heh' as a prefix and the letter 'yud' as a suffix. For example:

*“the sons of Chanoch, the family of **HaChanochi**”* (Bamidbar 26:5)

Rashi explains that the nations of the world had disparaged the purity of Bnei Yisrael. They suggested that if they were slaves to the Egyptians for so long, then surely the Egyptian slave masters did as they pleased with the Jewish women. They slandered Bnei Yisrael by suggesting that not all of their children were legitimate. Hashem answered the nations by placing His name on each of the families (the letters 'yud' and 'heh' are the first half of Hashem's Divine four-letter name). Hashem thereby testified that the families were indeed pure and the children had Jewish fathers.<sup>1</sup>

The only exception was the son of Shlomit Bat Dibri<sup>2</sup>. This was the one case of a child born from an Egyptian father and a Jewish mother. The Midrash<sup>3</sup> explains that Shlomit was not totally free of guilt in this incident. Rashi<sup>4</sup> explains that the Torah publicises her name in order to praise Bnei Yisrael by pointing out in contrast that this was the only case of inappropriate behaviour. Remarkably, in a nation of 3 million people, there was no other similar occurrence.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the Midrash, Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4:12.

<sup>2</sup> See the story brought at the end of Parshat Emor, Vayikra, 24:10-16, together with Rashi's commentary.

<sup>3</sup> Vayikra Rabbah 32:4.

<sup>4</sup> In his commentary to Parshat Emor, Vayikra 24:11.

In the beginning of Parshat Kedoshim<sup>5</sup>, Hashem instructs Bnei Yisrael to be holy. Rashi explains that holiness means separating ourselves from immorality. But how can we put this into practice?

One practical way is to keep the laws of Yichud. In brief, it is prohibited for a man and woman to be secluded together. There are of course certain exceptions (such as one's wife, mother, grandmother, daughter, granddaughter and sister). There are other circumstances in which yichud is allowed. For example, leaving the door open to a public place will generally (but not always) help. The parameters of these exceptions are beyond the scope of this discussion (however see footnote 6 for a highly recommended course for those interested in learning these laws). Apart from the exceptions, the halacha applies even in cases where the risk of inappropriate behaviour seems negligible. For instance, even if the man and woman in question are elderly and extremely righteous, they are not permitted to be alone together. Holiness means separating ourselves from even the hint of a sin.

Some people may feel offended when they are restricted from being in seclusion with a member of the opposite gender. "Who do you think I am?" they ask incredulously! "Don't you trust me?" But that is beside the point. We need to have blanket rules in place if we want to avoid any chance of problems occurring. In fact, if we were to apply the law differently for different people this would lead to awkward and embarrassing situations. A good answer to someone who complains about the laws of yichud is to say "Of course we don't suspect you! This law wasn't intended for trustworthy and decent people like you! However, there needs to be a clear rule that applies in all situations."<sup>6</sup>

There are other cases where the Rabbis have made a blanket decree so as not to embarrass people. For example, while standing under the chuppah, a groom is really supposed to personally recite the bracha over his marriage. However, our practice is that someone else will recite the bracha on the groom's behalf. This applies even if the groom is a great Torah scholar or a chazan with a beautiful voice. This was put in place to ensure that those grooms who are unable to recite the bracha will not be embarrassed.

If we all keep the laws of Yichud correctly, we minimise the chances of immorality. There are many practical cases where issues of Yichud arise, for example with babysitters, visiting the doctor or staying back late in the office. There is usually a solution that will allow us to act in a way that is consistent with the halacha. One should discuss their circumstances with their Rabbi to clearly understand the parameters and how to act in each situation<sup>7</sup>. In that way, we can continue to be a Holy Nation and ensure that Hashem continues to place His name upon us.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to become more familiar with the laws of yichud and be aware of situations that could be problematic.
2. Remember that one way to maintain holiness is to work on separating ourselves from unholiness. We should try to separate ourselves from even the hint of a sin.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

---

<sup>5</sup> Sefer Vayikra, 19:2.

<sup>6</sup> This approach can be very useful when asking someone to do something that may cast aspersions on their honesty, for instance, insisting that they put something in writing. "I'm sorry, we have a policy. Of course the policy is not meant for people like you! But it applies to everyone."

<sup>7</sup> If anyone would like to do a short course on the laws of Yichud, I recommend Yeshivat Iyun Halacha. The shiurim are in English and they can be done from your home at your own pace. For more information visit: <https://www.iyunhalacha.org>.

\*\*\* \*\*

## **About Darchai Noam**

Darchai Noam is available online at [www.darchai-noam.com](http://www.darchai-noam.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.

If you know someone who might enjoy receiving this email please feel free to pass it on to them or email me their details so I can add them to the subscription list.

You are welcome to use the content of this email in any way that will help to spread the learning of Torah. However please attribute credit appropriately.

Many of the ideas that I use in Darchai Noam are based on ideas that I read or heard from various sources. Where possible I try to quote the source. However, in some cases I cannot recall the source. For that I apologise. If I do discuss an idea that I heard from somewhere else, any errors are purely my own.

## **How to subscribe or unsubscribe**

If you would like to subscribe or unsubscribe to Darchai Noam, please send an email to [darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com) with the word 'subscribe' or 'unsubscribe' in the subject.