

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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

### Parashat Vayakhel – The kedusha of a shul (part 4)

This week's Parasha of Vayakhel continues the discussion of the building of the Mishkan. This week the Parasha focuses on the actual building of the Mishkan itself as well as the main utensils that were used in it. We will continue to focus on our "Mikdash Me'at" (the shul), its holiness and some of the relevant halachot that apply.

There are many stories about someone who was going through a tough time – perhaps they had difficulties with parnassah, or they had a serious medical condition, or they were struggling with their learning. As the stories go, they would walk into a deserted shul, stand before the Aron Hakodesh and pour out their heart to Hashem in tearful prayer. In some cases, their prayers were miraculously and instantly answered. A business opportunity came their way. The tumour disappeared. The student's mind opened up and he was able to understand and remember his learning. In other cases the prayers were not answered. (Actually – our prayers are always listened to and answered by Hashem. But sometimes the answer is “No” or “Not yet” or “I have something even better in store for you, just be patient”.) But the common point of these stories is that the person in question was desperate and needed to call out to Hashem. Where did they choose to go? To shul. We are so blessed to have access to shuls – a place of holiness, a Mikdash Me'at, a place that is particularly appropriate for communicating with the Creator.

In last week's Darchai Noam, we learnt that it is inappropriate to discuss certain topics in shul, such as business affairs or idle conversations. Rav Avigdor Nevenzahl<sup>1</sup> writes that this prohibition also extends to reading and writing such material. He writes that the shul should be used only for matters of kedusha. Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus discusses why it is inappropriate to read a newspaper on Shabbat<sup>2</sup> and his arguments can apply equally to reading in shul. One might argue that there is nothing inherently wrong with reading a newspaper. However, Rav Pincus explains, Shabbat is a time of special closeness with Hashem. To read a newspaper during this special time just isn't appropriate. Imagine that you invited your close friends and relatives to a Shabbat meal. Everyone is seated around the table and the meal is about to begin. Then you pull out a newspaper and start to read! Rav Pincus writes that he was once davening at a certain shul on Yom Kippur. During the tefillah the gabbai handed out newspapers to spread on the floor for when it was time to bow down. He noticed that instead of davening one person was reading his newspaper! Perhaps technically he was doing nothing wrong. But is Yom Kippur the right time to read the paper? And is shul the appropriate place to read such material?

In the Gemara, masechet Yoma,<sup>3</sup> we learn that when the kohanim would ascend the ramp to the mizbayach (altar) in the Bet Hamikdash, they would be careful to do so in a manner that would minimise unnecessary steps in this holy place.<sup>4</sup> They would ascend on the eastern side of the ramp, walk around the altar to offer the korban and then descend on the western side of the ramp.<sup>5</sup> In this way they would avoid

<sup>1</sup> Born 1935, Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh and previous chief Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem. This comment appears in Rav Nevenzahl's commentary on the Mishnah Berurah, siman 151:2.

<sup>2</sup> Nefesh Shimshon, Shabbos Kodesh, Feldheim p245.

<sup>3</sup> Daf 43b.

<sup>4</sup> I heard the following idea from Rabbi Aryeh Leibowitz in the name of Rav Hershel Schachter.

<sup>5</sup> This is based on the halacha that a Kohen who ascends the mizbayach must turn towards the right at the top of the ramp (see Yoma Daf 15b). There are kabbalistic reasons why we favour the right side. Right is the side of

walking across the width of the ramp. However when the Kohen Gadol ascends the mizbayach on Yom Kippur he would walk up the middle of the ramp and also descend in the middle.<sup>6</sup> As the shaliach of the Jewish people, the Kohen Gadol had special permission to take extra steps on this hallowed ground. But the basic rule is that the kohanim could not take more steps than necessary. We see from here that it is an enormous privilege to be allowed to walk in the Bet Hamikdash. It is not like taking a scenic stroll. One is standing in the house of Hashem. Every step has to be carefully contemplated and measured. While this rule doesn't apply to us directly, our shuls are a Mikdash Me'at. We should realise that the opportunity to spend time in shul is a great privilege. We shouldn't feel comfortable to just walk around in shul unnecessarily.

The Shulchan Aruch rules<sup>7</sup> that if one needs to enter a shul or bet midrash for a personal need, e.g. to call someone who is inside, he should first read a pasuk or learn a halacha after entering the building and only then attend to his business. This way it does not appear as though one entered for personal reasons. If one does not know how to read a pasuk or learn a halacha, he should ask a child to read a pasuk for him. Alternatively, he can just sit inside the shul first for a moment, since sitting in shul is also a mitzvah, as the pasuk states - אשרי יושבי ביתך.<sup>8</sup> The Mishnah Berurah<sup>9</sup> adds that one may not first call his friend and then read a pasuk, because then the Dvar Torah appears tafel (subsidiary).

In the first Darchai Noam of this series about the kedusha of a shul,<sup>10</sup> we learnt that it is forbidden to use a shul as a kappandria (short cut).<sup>11</sup> However, the Shulchan Aruch rules that if one enters shul in order to daven, then it is permitted to exit through the other door. Using a shul as a shortcut is disrespectful to the shul. However, once one has entered the shul to pray, there is no disrespect shown if one's choice of exit enables him to shorten his trip.

This halacha in the Shulchan Aruch is based on the Rambam and the Rif who write that it is *mutar* (permitted) to exit through a different door after one has davened in shul. However, other Rishonim<sup>12</sup> write that it is actually a *mitzva* to use a different door after davening. The fact that you are allowed to walk through another door means that you should take advantage of the opportunity to spend more time traversing the room. Leaving through a different door shows that the shul is תביב (precious) to you and that you want to spend more time there. Another reason that we can suggest for using a different door is that it shows that the experience of davening should cause us to be a changed person. If we just leave through the same door that we entered, it demonstrates that nothing has changed.<sup>13</sup>

Whether it is mutar or a mitzva to use a different door, it still teaches us about the holiness of the shul and the great privilege that we have to spend time and to walk in our very own Mikdash Me'at.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to apply the halachot we learned above, such as being more careful about what we read in shul.
2. When walking around in shul, try to be consciously aware that you are walking in a Mikdash Me'at.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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chesed, and left is the side of gevurah. We want to give precedence to chesed over gevurah. Note - there are some exceptions where the kohanim would have to turn to the left, based on countervailing practical considerations (see Gemara Sukkah 48b).

<sup>6</sup> Rebbe Yehudah is of the opinion that the Kohen Gadol would always ascend and descend in the middle of the ramp, not just on Yom Kippur.

<sup>7</sup> Orach Chaim Siman 151 seif 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Fortunate are those who sit/dwell in Your house" (Tehillim 84:5). Rav Nevenzahl asks a very sharp question: if one doesn't know how to read a pasuk or learn a halacha, but they know that they need to sit down for a moment in shul, isn't that itself a halacha? So why can't they review that halacha?

<sup>9</sup> Seif katan 12.

<sup>10</sup> Parashat Terumah.

<sup>11</sup> Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 151:5.

<sup>12</sup> The Rosh and the Tur.

<sup>13</sup> This is based on the idea that one who enters the Bet Hamikdash should always leave through a different gate than which he entered (Yechezkel 46:9).