

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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

### Terumah – There’s no place like home

This Parasha, and most of the remainder of the book of Shmot, deals with the building of the Mishkan and its associated utensils. Excluding the unfortunate incident of the Golden Calf, there are four parshiyot that deal almost exclusively with this topic.

In the introduction to his commentary on the book of Shmot, the Ramban summarises the book of Shmot as relating to the first exile of Bnei Yisrael and the redemption from that exile. However, if this is the case, then presumably the book of Shmot should end with the exodus from Mitzrayim and the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Reed Sea. It is at that point that Bnei Yisrael achieved physical redemption from the slavery of Mitzrayim. However, the Ramban clarifies that the true *spiritual* exile only really ended when “the people returned to their place and returned to the stature of their forefathers”.

This clarification of the Ramban seems to leave us with a question. We would assume that “their place” means Eretz Yisrael. However, when the book of Shmot ends, Bnei Yisrael had not yet arrived at Eretz Yisrael. They were still wandering in the wilderness, and did so for another forty years. The Ramban explains that when Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai and built the Mishkan, Hashem caused his Shechinah to dwell amongst them, just like He did with their forefathers. At that point, Bnei Yisrael became the Divine chariot – that is, the base on earth through which Hashem manifested His presence in the world. Only then did Bnei Yisrael return to ‘their *spiritual* place’, thereby returning to ‘the stature of their forefathers’. This is why the book of Shmot ends with the building of the Mishkan and the glory of Hashem filling it. Bnei Yisrael didn’t need to put in the effort to build the Mishkan so that Hashem would have a physical home in which to dwell. Rather, they needed to create a physical space in order to merit that Hashem’s Divine Presence would dwell among human beings.

We can learn from this Ramban that we, the Jewish people, only really arrive at ‘our place’ (that is, we are only truly at home), when Hashem’s Presence is resting among us. Indeed, one of Hashem’s names is ‘HaMakom’ (the ‘Place’). Incidentally, when we comfort mourners, we traditionally recite the formula “HaMakom yinachem etchem...” - “May ‘the Place’ (i.e., the Omnipresent) comfort you amongst the other mourners of Zion and Yerushalayim”. This name of Hashem is particularly relevant for a house of mourning because it reminds the mourners (and those visiting them) that Hashem is not to be found within the world, rather, He is ‘the Place’ in which the world is found. This finite physical world is not the true place, or home. Rather Hashem is the location of our home, and He is everywhere. The deceased hasn’t really left home, he or she remains with Hashem. This can be a source of comfort for a mourner who may be feeling alone.

Just like Hashem is not constricted by the natural realm of space, He is also not constricted by time. We see a hint to this in Hashem’s Divine 4 letter name – the letters that make up this name (Yud, Heh, Vav and Heh) are the letters that spell the words ‘past’ (Hayah), ‘present’ (Hoveh) and ‘future’ (Yih’ye). Hashem always was, He is, and He always will be. The fact that Hashem is outside of space and outside of time means that we can access Him anywhere and at any time!

The question is only whether we recognise His Presence. The very first halacha in the Shulchan Aruch exhorts us to remember that Hashem is everywhere and that we need to behave accordingly. In his glosses to that halacha in the Shulchan Aruch, the Rama quotes the pasuk “Shiviti Hashem l’negdai tamid” – “I set Hashem before me at all times” . The word “Shiviti” is a verb. This suggests that we need to actively do something in order to feel Hashem’s Presence. The pasuk calls on us to be deliberately and consciously aware that we are before Hashem at all times, and we can do this by actively “setting” Hashem in the front and centre of our minds.

Even though Hashem is everywhere, and is accessible everywhere, there are still certain places that He has designated as being more holy than other places (e.g., the Bet Hamikdash, the Kotel, shuls, the Bet Midrash, Yerushalayim, the land of Israel). Similarly, even though Hashem is Present all the time, certain times have greater intrinsic holiness than other times (e.g., Yom Kippur, Shabbat, the other Yomim Tovim, time spent in shul davening, time spent in a shiur). The Ramchal<sup>1</sup> writes that at those special times and in those special places, people are provided with a greater hashpaah<sup>2</sup> than normal and they receive more illumination, more refinement and more of an elevated status. The Ramchal also writes<sup>3</sup> that although Hashem’s Glory is everywhere, the Bet Hamikdash is the one place where it appears more intensely, allowing those who seek Him to attain a state of deveikus (cleaving) with Him. The Ramchal bases this on the pasuk “You shall seek out His Dwelling and come there”.<sup>4</sup>

Though we can benefit from the increased spirituality and holiness of those special places and times, it is reassuring to remember that Hashem is everywhere and is always accessible.

However, space and time are only two aspects of creation. The mystics teach that everything that Hashem created exists on three planes – space, time, and the soul. First, Hashem created the concept of time. Then, Hashem created space and the ‘stuff’ that exists in space. Then, He created the purpose of creation – the soul or the human being.

We have seen that even though some times and places are more holy, Hashem is accessible at all times and in all places. We can also apply this idea to the third plane of existence – the human soul. Even though some people are holier than others (e.g., the Avot, the Kohen Gadol, the prophets, the great Torah leaders of every generation), all Jewish people have the potential to reach their own highest levels of holiness. Though we can’t all be the Kohen Gadol or the Gadol Hador, we can all strive to reach our potential. We can put in the hard work to uncover the G-dly soul which is embedded deep within us and allow it to shine.

Let’s try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem gifts us with ‘booster shots’ of holiness at specific times and in specific places. We can benefit from increased holiness by accessing these times and places.
2. At the same time, we can remember that Hashem is accessible to us at all times and in all places. We just need to recognise His presence.
3. Remember that our souls can also vary in their degree of holiness. But it is up to us to put in the work and reach our potential. We can rest assured that if we work on our spiritual growth, Hashem’s holy Presence will dwell among us.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>1</sup> Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem Part II, 8:5.

<sup>2</sup> There is no accurate English translation for the word Hashpaah or its root, Shefa. It is commonly translated as influence or bounty.

<sup>3</sup> In Daat Tevunot, section 160 (see The Elucidated Derech Hashem, Feldheim, page 345, footnote 94).

<sup>4</sup> Devarim 12:5.