

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Sh'mini
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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Sh'mini – how to have a good fight

In this week's Parsha of Sh'mini¹, we read about a disagreement between Moshe and Aharon. When two of the greatest people that ever lived have a disagreement, it is worthwhile studying the details of their interaction. There are sure to be many lessons that we can learn and apply to our own disagreements. The first lesson that we can extract is that even great Tzaddikim have disagreements!

Hashem had told Moshe to command Aaron and his sons to offer certain korbanot on behalf of Bnei Yisrael and to eat the korbanot within the Mishkan. This process would bring atonement for the people. However, before the korbanot were offered two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, died². The timing of the death meant that Aaron and his remaining sons (Elazar and Itamar) were still in the period of mourning when the korbanot were offered. The following rendition of the disagreement is based closely on the relevant Pasukim³ with some explanations from Rashi woven in.

Moshe inquired insistently about the male goat sin offering and behold it had been burnt. Moshe had two questions – why did you burn the Rosh Chodesh offering? And why did you eat the other offerings? Your actions are contradictory! Moshe was angry with Elazar and Itamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and he said “Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the holy place [i.e. in the Mishkan]? Because this offering is holy of holies, and Hashem has given it to you to gain forgiveness for the sin of the community, and to atone for them before Hashem. Behold, its blood was not brought into the Sanctuary within [which would have caused the korban to become disqualified and thus forbidden from being eaten]. So you should surely have eaten it within the Holy as I had commanded.

Aaron said to Moshe: “Was it they [Elazar and Itamar] who offered up the sin offering and burnt offering before Hashem? As mourners on the day of the death of their brothers they are not allowed to offer a korban. Rather it was me [Aaron, the Kohen Gadol] who offered the korbanot and a Kohen Gadol is allowed to offer korbanot even when they are in a state of mourning. Now that such tragic events befell me [i.e. the death of his other two sons], were I to have eaten today's sin-offering would Hashem have approved?

Moshe heard Aaron's argument and it pleased him.

Aharon and his remaining sons were classified as “onanim” (mourners on the day of the death of their loved ones). According to the Halacha, a Kohen Gadol who is an onen is still allowed to serve in the Mishkan but he is not allowed to eat from certain types of korbanot. There were two categories of korbanot that were to be offered that day. There were special korbanot that were offered one time only as part of the inauguration of the Mishkan. These korbanot could be eaten by Aaron and his sons even though they were in mourning. However, the Rosh Chodesh offering was a regular korban that was to be brought every month. Aaron understood that the specific command at this time to eat of the korbanot (even though they were in mourning) only applied to the special inauguration korbanot but

¹ For those in Israel Sh'mini was last week's Parsha.

² See the beginning of Parshat Sh'mini where the death of Nadav and Avihu is brought (Vayikra 10:1-7).

³ Vayikra 10:16-20.

did not apply to this Rosh Chodesh korban. This distinction formed the basis of their dispute. Moshe failed to appreciate the distinction between the two categories of korbanot and he became angry at their failure to eat from the Rosh Chodesh korban.

The following are some of the many lessons that we can learn.

When to get angry

Moshe rarely became angry. When he did, it is notable that his anger was on behalf of Hashem. We can learn from this that anger may be appropriate, but only on Hashem's behalf, not in defence of our own position. That is an appropriate time when one should express anger. Note, however, that even here we see that Moshe made an error because of his anger⁴. The Malbim explains that if Moshe would not have been angry he would have thought through the facts more clearly and would have realised that Aharon and his sons had acted correctly. The more correct approach would be to only show anger on the surface but not to feel it within.

Furthermore, if we are only becoming angry on Hashem's behalf and for the pursuit of His truth, then if we realise we that we made a mistake and are therefore no longer acting for the pursuit of Hashem's truth, we should immediately cease feeling and acting angry (see the last lesson below).

Showing respect

Moshe addressed his accusation to Elazar and Itamar. However, his nephews remained silent. It was Aaron who eventually responded to Moshe. Rashi explains that it would have been disrespectful for Elazar and Itamar to speak up in the presence of their father and also to answer back to their teacher Moshe. By not answering it would appear that they were ignorant or had erred. Nevertheless, it was more important to them to show deference than to show their defence to Moshe's accusation.

How to state your claim in a gentle and respectful manner

Aaron knew that he was right. He could have stated clearly and emphatically the reason for his decision and the fact that he was acting appropriately. However, he chose to answer Moshe in a gentle and respectful manner. He spoke in a questioning format – “[Had we eaten the Rosh Chodesh korban while in a state of mourning] would Hashem have approved?” In this way, Aaron managed to convey his position without directly contradicting and challenging Moshe.

When you are wrong – admit it immediately

The last pasuk of this passage is clear and to the point⁵. Moshe immediately concedes that Aaron is right and he agrees with him. And that was the end of it. There was no ego involved. There was no offense taken. Moshe didn't say “How dare you make a decision like that without consulting with me.” Moshe was the greatest teacher of all time. He was the one who taught Torah to Bnei Yisrael. And yet when his brother Aaron found a flaw in his logic and corrected his understanding of a Halacha, Moshe readily gave in and acknowledged Hashem's truth. The pasuk says that Moshe was ‘pleased’ with Aaron's argument. We see from here that Moshe's sole motivation was to ensure that Aaron and his sons were serving Hashem properly and there was nothing personal involved.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember these lessons that we extracted from the dispute between Aaron and Moshe and try to apply them the next time that we are involved in a disagreement.
2. When involved in a dispute, try to put aside our own honour and just focus on discovering Hashem's truth and what He wants.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁴ Midrash Vayikra Rabba 13:1.

⁵ “Moshe heard Aaron's argument and it pleased him.”

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About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.divreitorah.net/darchai-noam. 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.

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