

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Tzav – second chances

In this week's Parsha of Tzav, we continue to learn about the different korbanot that were brought in the Mishkan, and later in the Bet Hamikdash. A number of these korbanot were brought to atone for different types of sins. For example, the 'Chatat' (sin offering) and the 'Asham' (guilt offering) are discussed in this week's Parsha. Let's explore the idea of offering sacrifices to atone for our sins.

Before the animal used for the korban is lead off to be slaughtered, the penitent sinner bringing the korban needs to lean on the animal with all of his strength. Symbolically, it is as if his sins are being transferred to the animal. The sinner then watches the animal being killed. The intention is to make the sinner realise that due to their sins, they should really be the one being killed as a punishment. However, Hashem in His mercy allows an animal to be killed instead. This should be a very emotional experience for the owners of the korbanot, serving to encourage them to do proper teshuva.

When the Torah describes korbanot, it often uses an unusual phrase that appears repeatedly:

'Raiach Nichoach La'Hashem' – 'a satisfying aroma to Hashem'.

Why does the Torah describe korbanot as a satisfying aroma to Hashem?¹ Many of us (except perhaps vegetarians) can relate to the idea of smelling meat roasting on a barbecue. But why do we refer to Hashem as enjoying the smell of the korbanot?

Imagine coming home from a hard day at work. Exhausted, you open the front door and are met with the aroma of your favourite dish cooking on the stove. Immediately your spirits are lifted and your mouth waters as you anticipate the delicious meal. But then imagine if for some reason you could not partake in the meal! Would you be satisfied with a smell alone? Of course not! The smell on its own is not sufficient. In fact, smelling something delicious without tasting it is cruel. The food is the main event. The smell represents merely a prelude to the meal itself.

The same principle applies to a korban. The sinner is required to bring a korban as part of the teshuvah process. However, a korban on its own is insufficient to atone for sins. The korban is simply a 'satisfying aroma', analogous to the sense of smell that can detect something that is yet to come. The korban is a preliminary step, showing Hashem one's pure intentions to do sincere teshuvah and mend our ways going forward. The ultimate purpose of bringing the sacrifice is to reconcile one's relationship with Hashem, in order to do teshuva and improve for the future.

We have seen that offering a korban, together with sincere teshuva, offers the sinner a second chance. This process allows the sinner to avoid being punished for their sin as they truly deserve. Instead, in Hashem's mercy, they are given another chance to rectify their relationship with Hashem and return to their pure, pre-sin state.

Hashem repeatedly provides us with second chances. For example, Pesach is almost upon us (as you are no doubt aware!) What would someone do in the times of the Bet Hamikdash if they were unable to offer the korban Pesach? They are granted a second chance one month later with Pesach Sheni. We can try to learn from this and, like Hashem, try to treat others with mercy and give them

¹ This idea is based on "Ma'asei Hashem", by Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi. See last year's Darchai Noam on Parshat Tzav for a more detailed discussion.

many 'second chances'. If we treat others compassionately and give them second, third, fourth chances, we hope that Hashem will treat us likewise, middah k'neged middah. How can we do this practically? Here are some approaches to consider.

- The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (1:6) teaches us that there is an obligation to judge everyone favourably. The usual translation of this Mishnah is: "Judge every person favourably". However some commentators point out that the literal translation is actually "Judge the **whole** person favourably". This suggests that whenever we judge another person, we must take into account the whole person. What is "the whole person"? We have to consider a large number of factors that are relevant to why the person is acting the way that they are, including their history, their predispositions, their emotions, what happened to them earlier that day, their upbringing and what is going on in their hearts and minds. We cannot truly judge a person accurately unless we take into account all of these relevant factors. And since this is clearly impossible for us, as mere mortals, to do, this means that we can never truly and accurately judge another person. Therefore, the preferable approach is to give others the benefit of the doubt.
- The Torah teaches: "You shall do the just and the good" (Devarim 6:18). Rashi explains this as meaning that we should try to compromise and act 'lifnim mishurat hadin' which means beyond the strict demands of the law. This means that we should not be concerned with enforcing our strict rights under the law, but should rather try to be compassionate and merciful. For instance, if a poor person negligently causes damage to our property, we should not insist on extracting the full amount of compensation that we are halachically entitled to.²
- We should try to be a 'vatran' (i.e. someone who is 'mevater', or someone who gives up their desires for the good of others). For example, if two people are arguing over the last remaining parking spot, one of them can be 'mevater' by saying "that's OK, you can take the spot". We each have many opportunities to be mevater throughout the typical day. However, it can be challenging to do so, especially if we are confident that we are in the right. It may help to remember that we are sometimes better off over all if we don't strictly enforce our rights. Sometimes we have to pay a high price in order to enforce our rights, for example having to cope with arguments and stress. This reminds me of a famous (probably mythical) epithet on a headstone:

*Here lies the body of George O'Day.
He died defending his right of way.
He was right, dead right as he rode along,
But he is just as dead as if he were wrong.*

Let's use the korbanot, the teshuva process and Pesach Sheni to remind us to emulate Hashem and give others second chances. Remember. The way that we treat others is the way that Hashem treats us, middah k'neged middah. If we strive to give others the benefit of the doubt, act lifnim mishurat hadin and are mevater, then hopefully Hashem will act the same way towards us.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that it is natural for humans to sin and we are able to avoid the full punishment if we do teshuva.
2. We can try to emulate Hashem and give people second chances.
3. We can act compassionately and in a forgiving manner by being mevater, judging others favourably and holding back from enforcing our full rights against each other.

Shabbat Shalom and Pesach kasher v'sameach, Rabbi Ledder.

The next edition of Darchai Noam will B"H be for the week of Parshat Tazria/Metzora (29 April, 3 Iyar).

² See the case of Rabbah and his porters brought in the Gemara, Baba Metzia 83a.

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About Darchai Noam

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 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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