DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Shmot, January 2016

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Shmot – certainty and doubt

In this week's Parsha of Shmot Moshe is assigned his role as the saviour of the Jewish people. Hashem gives Moshe his job description at the famous scene at the burning bush. Let's investigate the beginning of that interaction.

> "**Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yitro his father-in-law**…he guided the sheep far into the wilderness…An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush. Moshe thought "**I will turn now and see this great sight**. Why doesn't the bush burn?" **Hashem saw that he had turned aside to see** and G-d called out to him from within the thorn bush and He said "Moshe, Moshe" and he replied "Here I am". (Breishit 3:1-4)

The Torah doesn't waste any words. So why does the Torah tell us that Moshe turned aside to see what was happening with the bush? Hashem notices that Moshe has 'turned aside to see' and that seems to be the prompt for Hashem to begin speaking to Moshe. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky explains that Moshe was chosen to be leader because he turned aside to see the bush! This act of Moshe turning aside to see must be significant and must teach us a lesson. What is the meaning of 'turning aside to see'?

One suggestion[1] is that Moshe was struggling to work out what was the right thing to do. Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yitro his father-in-law at the time. That means that he was responsible for the welfare of the flock. He then noticed an angel of Hashem and a strange sight that suggested something supernatural. He understood that this strange sight contained an important Divine message for him. Yet he also felt an obligation to his father-in-law not to neglect his shepherding duties. If Hashem was truly sending him a Divine message, could he pass up on such an opportunity? But what about the sheep? Moshe went back and forth struggling to work out what was the right thing to do. Hashem noticed his struggle to do the right thing and rewarded Moshe with the Divine revelation in that merit.

There is a very important lesson here for us. Moshe tried his best to work out the right thing to do. There was no clear cut answer. Both approaches had strong arguments. But it almost doesn't matter which answer was chosen. What is important is that Moshe genuinely tried his best to reach the right answer.

Certainly, there are cases where there is a right answer and wrong answer. But there are many cases where there is no clear answer. That is the nature of the world that we live in. The same set of facts can have multiple interpretations. We have to learn to live with that doubt.

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[1] This is based on an idea that I heard from Rabbi Garfunkel at Ohr Yisrael.

This idea has a fascinating implication in the halacha. For a Bet Din to rule in a civil case it is sufficient for there to be a simple majority of one. However, to find someone guilty of a crime there needs to be a majority of at least two. This makes sense because we are reluctant to find someone guilty unless we are certain that they did the crime. The greater the majority, the more confident we are that the person is really guilty. Therefore, if the great Sanhedrin of 71 judges finds unanimously that someone is guilty of a crime then we should be super confident that the person is guilty, right? Wrong! Remarkably, if the decision is unanimous the person is acquitted! Why is this so? If 71 judges are looking closely at one set of facts, at least one of those judges should find a different interpretation of the facts and find that the person is innocent. If the decision is unanimous, that means that there is a fairly good chance that there is something wrong with the decision. Perhaps the judges just assumed the man was guilty without sufficient analysis. Or perhaps some of the judges were merely swayed by a persuasive leader to follow the majority. Either way they haven't worked or struggled hard enough to reach their decision.

The world is not black and white. When we look at the world we interpret it through our own eyes in a subjective manner. Our job is to do our best to put aside our personal biases and to the best of our ability try to work out which way Hashem wants us to behave in each situation that He puts us in. Hashem wants us to struggle. In sefer Breishit which we have just completed we see that all of the great Torah characters struggled. Theirs was not a straightforward life. Our struggle is to do what is right in Hashem's eyes. That is our avoda, our service to Hashem and that is what Hashem created us to do.

The following story provides an example of making a decision while keeping Hashem clearly in mind. The Stropkover Rebbe was looking to buy an apartment. He narrowed the choice down to two. Each of the apartments had pros and cons and it was difficult to decide which apartment was superior. Ultimately the Stropkover Rebbe chose one of the apartments and he was adamant that it was the right choice. When he was asked why he chose that apartment, he explained that it had precisely 26 steps leading up to the front door. The gematria (numerical value) of Hashem's 4 letter name is also 26[2]. Thus the Stropkover Rebbe would be reminded of Hashem every time that he entered or left his apartment.

Let's try something this week:

1. When we are presented with a situation that is new, we can try to stop and contemplate what Hashem would like us to do in that situation.

2. If we find ourselves faced with a difficult choice (even a small, everyday choice) that causes us to feel indecisive, avoid berating ourselves for our indecision, but rather recall that Hashem, wants us to struggle, to ponder, to wander what He wants.

3. Remember the importance of tolerance. Our way of looking at the world is not the only way that is legitimate. Other people may have a different approach but their approach could be just as correct as our approach.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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[2] י = 10, ה = 5; ו = 6; ה = 5. 10+5+6+5=26.