

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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

Shmot – Happy in his heart

In this week's Parsha of Shmot we read about Moshe's inauguration as the leader of Bnei Yisrael at the burning bush. Moshe was reluctant to take on the role and the Midrash teaches us that Hashem spent a full week convincing him¹. Moshe's final argument against the appointment was that Hashem should rather send Aaron, Moshe's older brother. Aaron was the current leader and he was apparently the obvious choice. At that point Hashem insisted that Moshe accept the appointment and he told Moshe that Aaron would support him and be happy for him.

And Hashem's wrath was burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that he will surely speak, and behold, he is coming forth toward you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart."

Sibling rivalry and jealousy featured prominently in sefer Breishit. It started with Cain murdering Hevel, then Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav and finally Yosef and his brothers. However, by the end of Sefer Breishit, the trend came to an end with Yosef's children. When Yaakov gave the primary blessing to the younger Ephraim, his older brother Menashe was not jealous². The beginning of Sefer Shmot continues this new trend when Aaron did not become jealous of his younger brother, even though Moshe had effectively usurped his role as the leader of Bnei Yisrael.

Hashem's conversation with Moshe reveals that not only was Aaron not jealous of Moshe, he was genuinely happy for his younger brother and he sincerely rejoiced in his heart. There is an interesting Midrash³ which says that if Aaron had realised that the Torah would record his positive reaction to Moshe's appointment, he would have done even more. In the words of the Midrash, "he would have greeted Moshe with musical instruments and dancing". The Midrash makes a similar comment in two other cases:

- Reuven convinced his brothers not to harm Yosef but rather to throw him into a pit⁴. Reuven planned to come back later and rescue Yosef, but in the meanwhile the other brothers sold him as a slave instead. The Midrash notes that had Reuven known that Hashem would write in the Torah, "Reuven heard and he rescued [Yosef] from their hand" then Reuven would have done even more, "He would have grabbed Yosef and carried him back to his father [Yaakov] on his shoulders".
- When Ruth was collecting grain with the other poor people to feed herself and Naomi, Boaz gave her food to eat. The Midrash comments that had Boaz known that the Tanach would record, "And he tossed [Ruth] roasted grains"⁵, he would have done even more, "He would have served her a feast of fatted calves".

This Midrash seems to suggest that Aaron, Reuven and Boaz would have made more of an effort due solely to the positive publicity. As long as their act was anonymous, they would suffice with doing a little bit of good. However, had they known that their act would have been exposed to the public, then they would have extended themselves further. Yet surely these great Tzaddikim are not affected by honour and reputation in the way that the simpler reading of this Midrash suggests! How can we understand this Midrash?

I was excited to read an article by Rabbi Yissocher Frand⁶ that explains the meaning of this Midrash. Rabbi Frand clarifies that Aaron, Reuven and Boaz were not entirely sure that they were doing the right thing at the

¹ Rashi to Shmot 4:11.

² See Parashat Vayechi, Breishit chapter 48.

³ Ruth Rabbah 5:6.

⁴ See Parashat Vayeshev, Breishit 37:21-22

⁵ Ruth 2:14

⁶ Rabbi Frand's article is available on the Aish Hatorah website: <https://www.aish.com/tp/i/rabbi-frand/566223441.html>

time. Therefore, they acted in a more restrained manner. Had they been gifted with clarity, and had they known that Hashem endorsed their actions, they would have acted to the full degree possible.

- Reuven thought he was right, but he was not absolutely certain because he was up against nine of his brothers, each of whom was a great scholar and very righteous.
- Boaz could intuit that Ruth was a very special person who deserved his attention. But perhaps he was afraid that his actions did not look proper. He was a respected elder and she was a much younger single woman in a vulnerable position.
- Aaron was genuinely happy for Moshe. But Aaron was the current leader of the Jewish people and Moshe, as his younger brother, should be showing honour to him. The people might think it inappropriate for their leader to show so much honour for his younger brother.

With this explanation we can read this Midrash as actually being complimentary! In each of these cases, Reuven, Boaz and Aaron forged ahead with their actions, despite the lack of clarity and despite the external pressures and the risk of negative appearances. Had they known that Hashem Himself agreed with their approach and gave His stamp of approval, they would have been able to fully express their feelings and act even more decisively.

The Gemara⁷ tells us that Aaron's reward for his lack of jealousy and genuine happiness at seeing Moshe's rise to greatness was that he merited to become the Kohen Gadol and wear the Choshen Mishpat (breastplate). The Choshen Mishpat allowed the Kohen Gadol to communicate directly with Hashem – if a question needed to be asked, the letters on the breastplate would light up to spell out the answer. Because Aaron was happy in his heart, he merited to wear the Choshen Mishpat over his heart.

The Midrash goes on to inform us, that just like Aaron, Reuven and Boaz, when we do good deeds they are also recorded for posterity. Eliyahu HaNavi writes them down and the Moshiach and Hashem Himself seal it with their own hands.⁸ And all will be revealed in time to come.

However, only we and Hashem know what is really going on in our hearts. (And sometimes even we ourselves are not fully aware!) To be truly and genuinely happy for another can be difficult. It is human nature to feel a tinge of jealousy when another person succeeds and we do not. How can we overcome this tendency and follow in the footsteps of Aaron? Here are some suggestions:

- If another person achieves a position of leadership, remember that with authority comes responsibility. Would you really want to have such responsibility? Perhaps you should feel grateful that someone else has taken on such a challenging role.
- Remember the old saying⁹: "Everyone has their 15 minutes of fame". Everyone has their turn to succeed. We should not begrudge our friend their time in the limelight and in return hopefully they will be happy for us when we have our time.
- Contemplate Aaron's phenomenal reward for his genuine happiness for his brother. If we can overcome our nature and be genuinely happy for another, we too will be rewarded.
- Remember the end of the Midrash – all our thoughts and deeds will be recorded for posterity. How great will we feel when the record attests to our genuine good wishes for our friend's success.
- Ask Hashem to help you feel genuine simcha for another's good fortune. Even if we don't currently feel it, we can 'want to want' it. We can ask Hashem to help us fire up this latent ratzon.

Let's try something this week:

1. When we hear of another's success, try to be aware of how we feel in the depths of our heart.
2. If there is even a hint of jealousy or ill will, try to use some of the tips suggested above (or any other tips that you can think of).

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁷ Shabbat 139a.

⁸ Midrash Ruth Rabbah 5:6, based on Malachi 3:16.

⁹ Actually, it's not such an old saying. It apparently only dates back to the late 1960s: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15_minutes_of_fame