

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vayechi – Don't be jealous

Many parents have the beautiful custom of blessing their children every Friday night. The standard text includes the blessing given by the Kohanim. Daughters are also blessed that they should emulate our Ima'ot - Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. Sons are blessed that they should emulate Ephraim and Menashe. The question is obvious. Why don't we bless our sons that they should emulate the Avot – Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov? What is so special about Ephraim and Menashe?

The answer lies in this week's Parasha of Vayechi. We read about the bracha that Yaakov gives to his grandsons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov instructs his descendants (i.e. us) to also bless their children in the name of Ephraim and Menashe. The commentators suggest a number of reasons for the special status of Ephraim and Menashe. For example, Ephraim and Menashe were born and raised in Mitzrayim, with all of its negative influences. Yet they still managed to hold firm to their faith and were worthy enough to rise to the same status as Yaakov's children and become tribes in their own right. This is very admirable and certainly something that we want our children to emulate.

Another reason suggested by the commentators is that Ephraim and Menashe were two siblings that had an excellent relationship, without a hint of jealousy. Unfortunately this was not so common.

We learn that Yosef brings his two children to visit their grandfather and receive a blessing before Yaakov passes away. Yosef positions them so that first-born Menashe is on the right side of Yaakov to ensure that he receives the primary blessing. Yaakov deliberately crosses his hands to give the younger son Ephraim the primary blessing instead. Yaakov explains that Ephraim is destined to be the greater brother. And in fact we see that Yehoshua (from the tribe of Ephraim) is the successor to Moshe and he leads Bnei Yisrael into the land of Israel. Later in history Ephraim becomes the leader of the Northern kingdom of Israel after the Jewish kingdom splits into two.

Yosef is understandably concerned about Ephraim receiving the primary bracha ahead of his older brother. Yosef had first-hand experience of his brothers' jealousy – it almost cost him his life and he was sold into slavery. Yosef was the last in a line of sibling rivalry and jealousy where the younger son was favoured over the older. His father Yaakov had to deal with Eisav and his grandfather Yitzchak had to deal with Ishmael. We can trace this phenomenon back to the very first brothers - Cain and Hevel. That was another example of the younger brother receiving favourable treatment and the older brother being jealous. In that case, the consequence was murder.

Yet, uniquely, there is no record of enmity between Ephraim and Menashe. They understood that they each had a unique role to play and jealousy did not intrude.

In contrast, we all suffer from jealousy. It's a difficult middah to overcome. Analysing jealousy from a Torah perspective may assist us in working on this trait: Hopefully the following ideas will help:

- Hillel teaches us that "the more possessions, the more worry" (Pirkei Avot 2:8). This is a very real phenomenon. We have to ask ourselves whether the cost of our possessions (ie the additional worry and the extra hours spent at work to earn the required money) is worth the benefit (ie the usually fleeting satisfaction that comes from acquiring something new).

- There is a famous story about a rich businessman that visited the Chofetz Chaim in his home in Radin. The businessman was struck by the lack of furniture. He couldn't help himself from asking the Chofetz Chaim where all of his possessions were. The Chofetz Chaim responded by asking the businessman where his possessions were. The businessman responded that he was just passing through Radin so he didn't bring his possessions with him. The Chofetz Chaim said that he too was just passing through this world, on his way to the World to Come.
- It is interesting to note that some forms of jealousy are permitted and even encouraged. In Darchei Noam for Parashat Toldot we discussed the concept of kinat sofrim (jealousy amongst scholars). This refers to being jealous of other people's spiritual accomplishments. When Rachel was barren and Leah already had 4 children, the Torah states that Rachel was jealous of Leah (Breishit 30:1). However, Rashi explains that Rachel envied Leah's good deeds by which Leah merited to have children. Kinat sofrim is permitted (and perhaps encouraged) because it can stimulate us to work on our middot and mitzvot in order to become better people.
- Jealousy is exacerbated by the finite nature of the physical world. If one person possesses a physical object, this means that another person cannot simultaneously possess it. However, in contrast, the spiritual world is infinite – there is no limit to what we can achieve. Perhaps that is why we are permitted and even encouraged to be jealous of other people's spiritual accomplishments, but not their physical possessions. If we actively retain our focus on the spiritual world, then the material world may be less likely to draw us into feelings of jealousy towards other people and their possessions.
- Jealousy is the 10th of the 10 commandments. However it seems a little out of place. The rest of the 10 commandments deal with big issues like belief in Hashem, idol worship, kidnapping and murder. Jealousy appears mundane and benign by comparison – it is almost universal and it doesn't seem to hurt anyone. So why is it in the 10 commandments? The 10 commandments start off with the obligation to believe in Hashem. This involves believing that He is one and that He is totally all-knowing, all-powerful and absolutely good. If we truly understand this in our hearts, then we understand that Hashem provides us with exactly what we need when we need it and that everything that happens to us is for the best. If we truly internalise this message, we would not feel jealous of anyone else because we would know that we don't need anything other than what Hashem has given us. Essentially, jealousy is a direct result of not fully adhering to the first of the 10 commandments. By observing the 1st commandment properly, the 10th commandment will flow more easily.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to notice when we feel jealous of other people.
2. Remind ourselves that Hashem is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good. He ensures we have exactly what we need. If somebody has something that we don't possess, that is because they need it and we don't. If we really need it and it is appropriate for us at that time, Hashem will make sure that we have it.
3. Compare ourselves only in relation to how successful we are in spiritual endeavours. Try to emulate other people whose observance in mitzvot, middot or Torah learning is ahead of ours.
4. Remind ourselves of the temporary nature of this world and the limitless potential of the World to Come. Our spiritual accomplishments are our only real possessions. We can take them with us to the grave and they are ours forever.

Shabbat shalom,

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