

## DARCHAI NOAM

### Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Vayechi – Overcoming jealousy

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

The answer lies in this week's Parsha of Vayechi. Yaakov blesses his grandsons, Ephraim and Menashe and instructs his descendants (i.e. us) to also bless our children in the name of Ephraim and Menashe. The commentators suggest a number of reasons for Ephraim and Menashe's special status. For example, Ephraim and Menashe were born and raised in Mitzrayim, with all of its negative influences. Yet, despite this, they still managed to hold firm to their faith. They were worthy enough to rise to the same status as Yaakov's children and become tribes in their own right. The gevurah (strength), emet (truth) and emunah (faith) that they demonstrated is very admirable and something that we presumably would want our children to emulate.

Another reason suggested by the commentators for why we bless our children to be like Ephraim and Menashe is because they were two siblings that had an excellent relationship, without a hint of jealousy. Unfortunately this was not so common.

Yosef brings his two children to be blessed by their grandfather Yaakov before he passes away. Yosef positions them so that first-born Menashe is on the right side of Yaakov. This is to ensure that he receives the primary blessing. However 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. Yehoshua, who succeeds Moshe and leads Bnei Yisrael into the land of Israel, comes from the tribe of Ephraim. And the tribe of Ephraim becomes the leader of the Northern kingdom of Israel after the Jewish kingdom splits into two.

Yosef is concerned about Ephraim receiving the primary bracha ahead of his older brother. Yosef experienced the harsh treatment resulting from his brothers' jealousy, which almost cost him his life and caused him to be sold into slavery. Yosef's ancestors also experienced similar scenarios where an older son acted out of jealousy due to a younger son's favourable treatment. 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.

However, there is no record of enmity between Ephraim and Menashe. They understood that they each had a unique role to play. Jealousy did not intrude or destroy the shalom between them.

Jealousy is a difficult middah to overcome. Analysing jealousy from a Torah perspective may assist us in working on this trait.

Not being jealous is the 10th of the Ten Commandments. It is the only character trait to feature in the Ten Commandments. However, it seems a little out of place. The rest of the Ten Commandments deal with big ticket items like belief in Hashem, idol worship, kidnapping and murder. Jealously

appears mundane and benign by comparison. So why is it included in the Ten Commandments? The first Commandment obligates us 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 believe this in the depths of our hearts, then we will feel content that Hashem has and will provide us with exactly what we need when we need it and that everything that happens to us is for the best. In the Ashrei prayer we recite three times a day “Poteach et yadecha u'masbiya l'kol chai ratzon” – “You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing”. If we truly internalise this message, we would not feel jealous of anyone else because we would know that we have exactly what we need. Essentially, jealousy is a direct result of not fully adhering to the first of the 10 Commandments. By observing the 1st Commandment properly, we will more easily be able to adhere to the 10th Commandment.

Hillel teaches us: “the more possessions, the more worry” (Pirkei Avot 2:8). This is a very real phenomenon. If we truly believe this teaching we will not suffer jealousy when someone else attains more possessions. We will feel content that we do not have the additional worry or burden that such a possession attracts.

Some forms of jealousy are permitted and even encouraged. Kinat sofrim (jealousy amongst scholars) refers to being jealous of other people's spiritual accomplishments. For instance, when Rachel was barren and Leah already had 4 children, the Torah states that Rachel was jealous of Leah<sup>1</sup>. However, Rashi explains that Rachel was not jealous of Leah's children but rather she envied Leah's good deeds by which Leah merited to have children. Kinat sofrim is permitted (and encouraged<sup>2</sup>) because it can stimulate us to work on our middot and mitzvot in order to become better people.

Jealousy occurs when we feel discontent with our portion and thus do not want others to gain either. Jealousy is not just wanting what someone else has, but not wanting them to have it either! Thus it 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.

The Chovot Halevavot recommends that we should look ahead of us at people who have achieved more than us in spiritual endeavours and we should look behind us at those who have less physical possessions than we do.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to notice any feelings of jealousy that we experience.
2. Remind ourselves often that Hashem is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good and that 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 do not.
3. Compare ourselves to others only in relation to how successful we are in spiritual endeavours. Re-channel any negative envy into positive energy by trying to emulate other people whose observance in mitzvot, middot or Torah learning is ahead of ours.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Allon Ledder

Chazak Chazak Venitchazek!

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<sup>1</sup> Breishit 30:1

<sup>2</sup> Gemara, Baba Batra, 21b.

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## **About Darchai Noam**

The passuk 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'reiacha kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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