

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat B'shalach
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

B'shalach – Another approach to minor inconveniences

In this week's Parasha of B'shalach, Bnei Yisrael finally leaves Mitzrayim. The plan was that Bnei Yisrael would receive the Torah at Har Sinai and then travel straight to Eretz Yisrael. But due to Bnei Yisrael's sins (including the Golden Calf and the Meraglim), the entry into Eretz Yisrael was ultimately delayed by 40 years. However, if not for those sins, the trip to Israel would have been a short three day journey¹.

The Sfat Emet raises a question based on a Gemara in masechet Brachot.² The Gemara teaches us in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that Hashem gave three good gifts to Israel to be received through suffering – Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come. Each of these gifts is very precious and they come at a cost. Bnei Yisrael needs to experience a measure of suffering to earn the right to receive these gifts. So how could it be, the Sfat Emet asks, that Bnei Yisrael could have entered Eretz Yisrael after a mere three day journey? What about the requirement for suffering? The Sfat Emet answers with a powerful idea. He explains that even in a three day journey there was bound to be some minor inconveniences. Perhaps they would be a bit tired from the walking. Maybe they would be a bit out of breath. Packing up their tents and bags each morning couldn't have been much fun. Maybe some of them stubbed their toe on the path! If Bnei Yisrael would have realised that these minor inconveniences were from Hashem and were for the best, that would have been sufficient to fulfil the requirement of earning Eretz Yisrael through suffering.

We see that Eretz Yisrael is sometimes referred to as a gift³ and sometimes it is described as a morasha (heritage)⁴. These terms appear inconsistent. A morasha is acquired through hard work, but a gift is given for free. How can we reconcile these two descriptions? We can explain this through a parable.⁵ Imagine someone was selling a luxurious mansion worth many millions of dollars. They were selling it for a grand total price of \$100. We could say that he is “giving it away”. His response would be that he is not “giving it away”, he is actually *selling* it for a price. \$100 is \$100. It's just that the price is ridiculously low for what the purchaser is receiving in return. Similarly, to acquire the Land of Israel we need to pay a price. But compared to what we are receiving in return, the price that we have to pay is ridiculously low. If we truly appreciated the value of this gift (and the other two gifts mentioned in the Gemara – Torah and Olam Haba), we would really feel the amazing bargain that we are receiving. Then, when we experience the small amount of suffering that comes with these three gifts, we will be able to endure it with equanimity, if not joy.

¹ See Bamidbar 10:33 with Rashi.

² Daf 5a.

³ Shmot 13:11.

⁴ Shmot 6:8.

⁵ I heard this idea from my brother Oren in the name of Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed.

This Sfat Emet teaches us to endure minor inconveniences and view them as a vital payment that we need to make in order to receive Divine eternal gifts.

In Israel, there is a saying “It should be a kapara (atonement)”. If someone experiences something that is annoying or upsetting, we tell them that we hope the discomfort will function as a form of atonement for their sins, so they won’t have to experience any worse form of punishment.

The following is based on a true story told directly to me by the person to whom it happened. (We brought this story once before in a previous edition of Darchai Noam, but it is such an amazing story that it is worth repeating):

David was having a problem with the tax department in Israel. He had accidentally lodged the wrong form and as a result his tax bill was much larger than it should have been. It seemed that nothing could be done. He tried arguing with the clerk. “Are you telling me that because of this simple mistake I have to pay double tax for the month!?!” “Yes, I’m afraid so.” “And there is nothing that we can do about it?” “That’s right, but don’t worry, it should be a kapara for you.” David accepted that response that it should be a kapara.

Can you imagine someone from the ATO⁶ telling a disgruntled tax payer that their tax bill should be an atonement? Only in Israel!

When we do suffer minor inconveniences, we can try to use that as an impetus to feel closer to Hashem. It’s certainly not easy, but we can actually reach the level where we feel gratitude to Hashem for providing us with these minor forms of inconvenience in order to protect us from a worse fate. As we learn in the Gemara:⁷ “The Academy of Rabbi Yishmael taught, anyone who goes for forty days without any suffering at all has received his World [i.e., he has already received his reward and will have no further reward in the World to Come. In the West [i.e. Eretz Yisrael], they would say [about such a person], that a calamity awaits him”.

We should emphasize that we are discussing minor inconveniences here. The small day-to-day annoyances that can wear us down. If we can try to view annoyances as a kapara and try to get closer to Hashem through them, by thanking Him for the small price to pay for immeasurable reward, then this emunah will boost us immeasurably.

Furthermore, if someone can accept this suffering with love, what is their reward? The Gemara⁸ explicitly reveals that such a person will “see offspring and live long days and is guaranteed to retain their studies, as it says: and the desire of Hashem will succeed in his hand⁹”.

Let’s try something this week:

1. Try to view our daily minor inconveniences as a kapara to stave off worse occurrences.
2. Make a conscious effort to view those inconveniences as an opportunity to get closer to Hashem, by talking to Him through the inconvenience, asking for His help, asking Him that they function as a kapara etc.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁶ Australian Tax Office. Or the IRS for our US readers. Or HMRC for our UK readers. I think you get the idea.

⁷ Arachin 16b.

⁸ Brachot 5a.

⁹ Yeshayahu 53:10.