

## 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?

## Noach – when was the world created?<sup>1</sup>

In this week's Parsha of Noach we learn the famous story of Noach and the Ark. The Parsha relates a chronology of events from when Noach is informed of the future flood, the 120 years he spends building the ark and the various events which take place during the flood, while Noach, together with his family and the animals, are safely in the Ark.

When the Torah describes the various events, it refers to the months of the year by number eg. "the second month" (Breishit 7:11) and "the seventh month" (Breishit 8:4).

However this causes some uncertainty as to the time that the events took place. We don't know for certain which month is the "first" month so we don't have a clear frame of reference. Rashi mentions this issue a number of times in his commentary. For example, Rashi's commentary to Breishit 7:11 which describes the beginning of the flood:

*"In the six hundredth year of Noach's life, **in the second month**, on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month, on that very day, the springs of the deep were split and the heavens opened up."*

Rashi brings two opinions as to what is meant by "the second month". According to Rabbi Eliezer, the second month is Cheshvan (the month that we are about to begin). According to Rabbi Yehoshua the second month is Iyar. The dispute turns on whether the 'first month' is Tishrei or Nissan. According to Rabbi Eliezer the world was created in Tishrei and therefore Tishrei is the first month. According to Rabbi Yehoshua the world was created in Nissan and therefore Nissan is the first month.

This might be interesting for a historical scholar, but how is it relevant to us? What lesson can we learn?

Twice a year we "sing l'shana haba b'yerushalayim" (next year in Jerusalem) – the end of Yom Kippur (which is in Tishrei) and the end of the Pesach Seder (which is in Nissan). When we say next year in Jerusalem, we are actually referring to the rebuilt Bet Hamikdash and Hashem's presence. In effect we are asking for the Moshiach to come. Why do we make this request specifically at these times? It relates to a dispute brought in the Gemara<sup>2</sup> as to when the final redemption will occur. Rabbi Eliezer says the redemption will occur in Tishrei and Rabbi Yehoshua says Nissan. This parallels the dispute brought above as to when the world was created.

The theme of Nissan is that Bnei Yisrael are passive recipients of Hashem's kindness and miracles. Historically, this is the time of the redemption from Mitzrayim. Hashem rescued us from Mitzrayim with open miracles and Bnei Yisrael were quite passive. We see the same theme in the yearly agricultural cycle. In Israel, Nissan is the time of spring. After a long winter with no vegetation all of a sudden the plant world starts to blossom, without the need for human involvement. It is a gift from Hashem.

<sup>1</sup> Some of the ideas in this week's Darchai Noam are based on a talk by Rabbi Kennard.

<sup>2</sup> Rosh Hashana 11a.

In contrast, the theme of Tishrei is that Bnei Yisrael does the hard work. Historically, Yom Kippur is the day that Moshe came down from Har Sinai with the second set of luchot. This set of luchot was man-made (ie carved by Moshe) and it was only granted after Moshe's supplications and Bnei Yisrael's teshuva following the sin of the Golden Calf. Yom Kippur is the culmination of a period of soul searching, teshuva and hard work. Agriculturally, Tishrei is the time that crops are gathered in, after a long season of working the ground - sowing, planting, fertilising and harvesting.

Remarkably, we see the same themes in the two opinions about the coming of the Moshiach<sup>3</sup>. Rabbi Eliezer who holds that the world was created in Tishrei and that the Moshiach will come in Tishrei, also holds that the Moshiach will only come if Bnei Yisrael do the hard work of teshuva. Rabbi Yehoshua who holds that the world was created in Nissan and that the Moshiach will come in Nissan also holds that the Moshiach will come even if Bnei Yisrael does not do teshuva. According to Rabbi Yehoshua, Hashem will save us even if we are passive, just like He did in the exodus from Mitzrayim.

The Ramban reconciles the two views and explains that Bnei Yisrael will definitely be redeemed. The question is whether Bnei Yisrael will take the initiative to do teshuva (ie Rabbi Eliezer and Tishrei) or whether the teshuva process will be forced upon us by Hashem (ie Rabbi Yehoshua and Nissan).

Interestingly, the Shem Mi Shmuel explains that the names of the two Rabbis provide a clue as to their opinion on this matter.

- The name "Yehoshua" means salvation – Hashem will save us, like He saved us in Nissan at the time of Pesach.
- The name "Eliezer" means Hashem is my helper - this suggests actively working together to get the job done. Hashem will help but we need to be active, just like we are in the time of Tishrei.

This difference of opinion is reconciled by the Gemara<sup>4</sup> which explains that there are two ways that the Moshiach can come. It can come early, if we merit it through our actions (which relates to Tishrei) or it can come "in its time" if we are passive (which relates to Nissan).<sup>5</sup>

We are now at the culmination of the Tishrei season, the season of hard work. Let's seize the momentum of this time period and continue to actively work on ourselves and our relationships with others. Then, when Nissan rolls around, we can bask in the season of miracles knowing that we have worked hard to grow.

Let's try something this week

1. Let's keep the momentum of Tishrei going strong. Try to take something out of the Tishrei Yom Tovim as we enter into Cheshvan with its lack of festivals.
2. Let's think about whether we just want to sit back and wait passively for Hashem to save us eventually, or whether we would prefer to take an active stand in our own future and work hard to bring forward the redemption.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>3</sup> Sanhedrin 97b.

<sup>4</sup> Sanhedrin 98a.

<sup>5</sup> This doesn't mean that the Moshiach can only come in Tishrei or Nissan. We are obligated to wait for the Moshiach every day. But there are two ways that the Moshiach can come – the 'Tishrei' type of Moshiach or the 'Nissan' type of Moshiach.

## **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 parsha 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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