

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Noach
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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Noach – a fresh start

A fresh start can be invigorating. Imagine starting the day with a jog, a hot shower and a fresh cup of coffee. We step outside to a new day. The birds are chirping and we can smell spring in the air. Or for those readers in the Northern Hemisphere, it's a crisp autumn day and we feel the crunch of the autumn leaves under foot. There is nothing like that feeling of newness, the unlimited potential, the feeling that we can conquer the world!

Perhaps that was how Noach felt when he stepped out of the Ark. The world was clean and fresh. All of the evil and negativity had been washed away. Hashem presented Noach and his family with a new beginning, another chance to start again.

We are now starting a new year of Darchai Noam, our 6th year of learning together. We are also starting a new cycle of Torah reading. The Chagim are behind us and we are embarking on a new year of Torah and a new cycle of festivals. It's a perfect time to take on a new commitment for the new year.

Perhaps you might decide to learn the Parsha every week? The basic requirement for men is to read through the Parsha twice in Hebrew and once in Aramaic (Targum Onkelos). This is known as Shnayim Mikreh v'Echad Targum.¹ There is a very beautiful Ba'al HaTurim on the first pasuk of Sefer Shemot – he takes the first few words of the Pasuk and converts it into an acronym which states: “One who learns the order of Shnayim Mikreh v'Echad Targum out loud and in a pleasant manner will merit to live for many long years.”²

Or perhaps it might be more appropriate for you to take on the commitment to read through the Parsha in English with the Artscroll commentary? Or maybe you can take on learning a new commentary for this year? After learning Rashi, one can move on to the Ramban's commentary, or the Ibn Ezra, or any one of a number of commentaries. This year is a leap year which means that we have an extra month of Adar. That means that there is only one double Parsha the entire year,³ which makes the challenge of learning the weekly Parsha more manageable. Even if you already missed Parshat Breishit, it doesn't matter. You can start with Parshat Noach and catch up on Breishit next year!

The Piaseczno Rebbe⁴ gave weekly sermons to his students in the Warsaw Ghetto dealing with complex issues of faith in the face of terrible suffering. These sermons were published in a book titled “Aish Kodesh”⁵. In one of these sermons, the Rebbe discusses the difference between desire (ratzon)

¹ One can learn Rashi's commentary instead of reciting the Aramaic translation. However, it is preferable to learn both Rashi and Targum Onkelos (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 285:2).

² The first four words of Sefer Shemot are “ואלה שמות בני ישראל” (And these are the names of the Children of Israel). The Ba'al HaTurim explains that each letter can stand for a word as follows:

“ואדם אשר לומד הסדר שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום בקול נעים ישיר יחיה שנים רבות ארוכים לעולם”

³ The only double parsha this year is Matot-Masei which falls on the Shabbat of 3 August 2019.

⁴ Kalonymus Kalman Shapira 1889–1943, a Rebbe in pre-war Poland who was murdered in the Holocaust.

⁵ There is a fascinating story behind these works. Seeing that the end was near, the Rebbe buried all of his writings together with a letter asking that they be forwarded to his cousin in Israel. After the war a

and a dream (chalom). A poor person may wish that he would find a million dollars. But that is just a dream. This dream is not based on reality or dependent on any actions or hard work on his part. He does not do anything or act in any way to actualise this fantasy. On the other hand, ratzon is something that one is prepared to work for, to invest in. If someone has a strong ratzon for something, they make a plan and they put in the effort to actualise it. In that way, the ratzon can be achieved (with Hashem's help of course). Dreams alone are just fantasy, they are divorced from reality. But ratzon represents a person trying to create their reality.

As Herzl famously wrote⁶ "If you will it, it is no dream; and if you do not will it, a dream it is and a dream it will stay".

The beginning of the year is an appropriate time to take on new practices for the year ahead. Rav Dessler⁷ explains that at the beginning of the year, Hashem grants us new resources and abilities to allow us to achieve what we need to achieve for the year ahead. It would be a shame to let those abilities go to waste. Rav Dessler also writes that Hashem grants us Heavenly assistance in proportion to the effort that we put in. When the task is challenging and times are tough, if we continue to persist we will receive help from Above. In that way, anything becomes possible, as the following story demonstrates.

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel⁸ was an American-born Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Israel. In the 1980s he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease but he did not let that stop him from doing what he had to do. After his diagnosis he was appointed as Rosh Yeshiva and he built the Mir into the largest yeshiva in the world. He personally shouldered the responsibility for raising funds for the institution, raising an estimated \$500 million during his tenure. At the same time, he was willing to learn one-on-one with any student who asked. It was estimated that he studied with approximately 80 people every week. He often hosted study sessions in his home even though, due to his illness, he was often too weak to sit up in a chair and would need to lie down on a couch. He was willing to persevere despite the enormous challenges that he faced and as a result he earned great Divine assistance.⁹

Before the new year runs away, let's spend some time consolidating our plans for the year ahead. What will we achieve that we did not manage to do last year? Instead of just daydreaming, let's consider a realistic goal and work out a manageable timetable.

Let's try something this week:

1. Take the opportunity to make some plans for the year ahead. Imagine what we would like to achieve by this time next year and set a realistic goal.
2. Ignite our ratzon – focus on how much we want to achieve our goal and then put into place a practical and realistic plan to achieve it.
3. Remember that a leap year is a great time to take on a commitment to learn the Parsha each week.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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construction worker found the buried canister and the writings were forwarded to Israel where they were published.

⁶ In his book, "Old New Land".

⁷ Michtav MiEliyahu, Volume 2.

⁸ 1943-2011.

⁹ Based on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nosson_Tzvi_Finkel_\(Mir\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nosson_Tzvi_Finkel_(Mir)) and "Living Emunah 2", by Rabbi David Ashear, Artscroll, p42.

About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.darchai-noam.com. You can access this week's edition of Darchai Noam, archived back issues of Darchai Noam and other divrei Torah.

The pasuk 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, usually 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're'echa kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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