

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Vayera – just because!

This week's Parsha of Vayera begins with Avraham recovering from his Brit Milah. This was the third day after the brit, the day when the pain is most intense¹. Hashem caused the day to be exceedingly hot so that Avraham could convalesce in peace without being disturbed by visitors. However, the righteous Avraham, the epitome of kindness, could not imagine a day going by without the opportunity to do acts of kindness. At the ripe old age of 99, Avraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent, hoping that he could extend hospitality to visitors and help to spread the name of Hashem.

Then Hashem appeared to Avraham. Normally Hashem appears to a prophet for a specific purpose – with a Divine message or commandment. However, the Torah does not disclose the purpose of this Divine visit. No prophetic message is given to Avraham. The commentators noticed this and they discuss the purpose of the visit. Rashi explains that Hashem was performing the mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim, visiting the sick. In fact, we learn from this incident the importance of emulating Hashem and visiting the sick.

However, the Ramban has a different explanation for Hashem's appearance to Avraham. In his commentary to the Parsha, the Ramban explains that Hashem's appearance had no specific purpose other than to distinguish and honour Avraham. Hashem didn't have a specific message to convey to Avraham however He still honoured Avraham with a visit. The fact that Hashem visited Avraham “just because” actually conveyed a very powerful implicit message. It showed Avraham that he was precious to Hashem and that his actions were accepted favourably by Hashem.

The Ramban provides several other examples where Hashem appeared to people, not to give a commandment or a message, but rather just to acknowledge the merit that they had earned:

- Yaakov merited to see angels of Hashem and he thus knew that his actions were pleasing to Hashem.²
- At the splitting of the sea, even the simple maidservant saw a revelation of Hashem that the prophet Yechezkel didn't see.³
- After Bnei Yisrael's efforts to build the Mishkan “the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people”.⁴

Sometimes Hashem appears to us just because he is happy with us! These days we don't merit prophetic revelation. However, Hashem still does communicate with us throughout our daily lives. These messages can consist of little coincidences. Perhaps they are small and pleasant things that happens to us when we least expect it. We can easily overlook these occurrences. Or we can treat them as little messages from Hashem, reminding us that He is right there and that He cares about us.

We can also emulate Hashem in this behaviour. We can reach out to people “just because”, without an explicit purpose. In doing so, we will thereby convey the implicit message that the other person is

¹ Gemara, Baba Metzi 86b.

² Breishit 32:2.

³ Midrash Mechilta, based on Shemot 15:2.

⁴ Vayikra 9:23.

important to us and that we value the relationship. We will be acting in a manner that is 'relationship-focused' rather than 'task-focused'.

There are many practical applications of this principle. For example, we can call or visit someone simply because they are important to us. A person's day can sometimes be totally turned around just by knowing that someone cares about them and is thinking about them.

We can also use this principle to create a relationship and connection with someone new.

Reuven and Leah moved into a new neighbourhood. The local shule had a very dynamic and inspirational Rav. Reuven and Leah very much wanted to build a connection with the Rav but he was very busy and they felt intimidated. A friend advised them to make up questions to ask the Rav. These 'pseudo' questions could function as an excuse to meet with the Rav and build up a connection.

As an aside, there should never be a shortage of questions to ask one's Rabbi! Applying the Halacha to one's daily life should present one with many questions that need to be clarified.

This reminds me of a joke.

The Rabbi of the shule was very disappointed with his apathetic congregation. No-one seemed to be taking any interest in Judaism. Eventually he had enough and he decided to leave. He packed his bags and started walking to the train station. The president of the shule heard the news and ran after the Rabbi. When he caught up with him, he asked "Why are you leaving us?" "Because", explained the Rabbi, "that was the first question that anyone has asked me since I started here!"

We can also connect with Hashem in this way – in a relationship-focused rather than task-focused manner. The following true story speaks for itself:⁵

A man was struggling to focus on his davening on Rosh Hashanah. He tried everything he could think of but nothing was working. His heart just wasn't in it. At one point, his young son started tugging on his jacket and saying "Abba, Abba". At first the man shushed his son. He was having a hard enough time already trying to daven, he didn't need more distractions. But the son didn't stop. Eventually the man turned to his son and asked him what he needed. However the son just kept tugging on the man's jacket and repeating "Abba, Abba". The man understood that his son didn't need anything specific. He just wanted to connect with his father. The man then turned to Hashem and did the same thing. He called out "Abba, Abba" with a strong desire to just connect. The technique worked! The next thing that the man knew, an hour had passed and he was drenched in his own tears.

We often find it easy to call out to Hashem when we are in trouble or need something. However, we don't need to call out to Hashem only when we have something to ask for. Sometimes we can turn to Hashem and speak to Him "just because".

Let's try something this week:

1. Make an effort to reach out to other people "just because". This applies to people with whom we already have a relationship and also people that we would like to connect with.
2. We can strive to more regularly turn to Hashem and speak to Him "just because".

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder.

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⁵ I heard this story from Rav Moshe Weinberger.

About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.divreitorah.net/darchai-noam. 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 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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