

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Yitro  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Yitro – Speaking in the listener’s language

In this week’s Parsha of Yitro, we read about the revelation at Har Sinai. It is the only time in the history of the world that Hashem appeared to an entire nation. It may be difficult for us to appreciate or relate to the magnitude of this event. Let us look at some of the descriptions that are provided in the Torah.

*“Mount Sinai was smoking in its entirety because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of the lime pit, and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly” (Shmot 19:18)*

It is unusual for the Torah to set the scene and provide so much descriptive language. In his commentary on this verse, Rashi explains that a lime pit was used for baking lime and apparently it was very smoky. However, Rashi explains, the mountain actually smoked much more than an everyday lime pit. Rashi learns this from another description of the Revelation that appears in sefer Devarim:

*“The mountain was burning with fire up to the heart of the heavens” (Devarim 4:11).*

If the mountain smoked more than a typical lime pit, then why then does the Torah describe the smoke at Mount Sinai as being like a ‘lime pit’? Rashi explains that the Torah wants to speak in terms that we can understand. The Torah uses an analogy that is relatable to Bnei Yisrael rather than speaking in terms of an unexperienced phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Rashi provides us with other examples where a phenomenon was described in terms that we, the Jewish people, can relate to: *“He [Hashem] will roar like a lion”<sup>2</sup>* and *“His [Hashem’s] voice was like the sound of many waters”<sup>3</sup>*.

The usage of this language demonstrates that the Torah’s goal is to ensure the Jewish people can relate to and identify with its message. We see a similar concept in the next pasuk in our Parasha:

*“The sound of the shofar grew increasingly stronger” (Shmot 19:19).*

Rashi explains: ordinarily, when people blow the shofar, the sound becomes weaker and fainter over time. However, when Hashem blows the shofar it becomes stronger and louder. Why then did Hashem start off blowing the shofar softly? He could have started blowing at maximum volume! Rashi explains that this was to let Bnei Yisrael’s ears

<sup>1</sup> Artscroll Sapirstein edition of Rashi, sefer Shmot, p230.

<sup>2</sup> Hosea 11:10.

<sup>3</sup> Yechezkel 43:2.

apprehend that which they are able to hear. The Mechilta clarifies that Hashem did not want to shock Bnei Yisrael with an unusual phenomenon.

This demonstrates Hashem's awareness and consideration of his audience. He tailors his message to suit our needs.

What can we learn from the above and how can we apply these lessons to our interpersonal relationships?

When we speak to others, we can learn to be aware of the other person's position, perspective and situation. In order to convey our message most effectively we should try to 'speak in their language', using parables or analogies they can relate to in order for our message to resonate. We should also strive to be considerate of their weaknesses and not bombard them with too much. For example, when rebuking, even if we have many matters to rebuke, we should only choose one at a time.

Consider the following scenario:

*Reuven burst in to the house at the end of the day. He had been going through a very difficult time at work over the past few weeks, but things had finally turned around for the better. He had managed to finish an important assignment and the boss was happy with his performance. He was hoping that he might even receive the raise in salary that he was waiting for. As soon as he saw his wife, he started offloading the events of the day. His wife was a great listener and he knew that she would care very deeply about what was going on in his life. However, he failed to notice that his wife was looking very frazzled. When he finally finished regaling her with his accomplishments and experiences, he was surprised that she did not seem to be giving him her full attention. If Reuven had stopped for a moment before blurting out what was on his mind, he might have noticed that his timing was not ideal. His wife was going through a tough time herself and needed him to listen to her too.*

Communicating effectively means taking into account our audience and where they are at. Sometimes it means measuring our words, tailoring our examples or delaying our message until a more appropriate time. This is one way we can be sensitive to the needs of others. Ultimately, it will help us to convey our message more effectively too.

Let's try something this week:

1. Realise that the Torah speaks in a particular language that we can comprehend.
2. Remember Hashem's sensitivity to the needs to His audience – He started the shofar blasts quietly before gradually getting louder, in order not to shock the people.
3. Try to emulate Hashem and His Torah by becoming a more effective communicator and taking into account our audience's needs and experiences.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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