

DARCHAI NOAM**Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם**

(Mishlei 3:17)

Beha'alotcha, June 2014

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Beha'alotcha – Grabbing the opportunity

In this week's Parsha of Beha'alotcha, we read about the special job of lighting the menorah, a job that was reserved for the Kohanim. We then read about the ceremony to inaugurate the Leviim to their special service related to the Mishkan. The first born from every family was supposed to be privileged with the service in the Mishkan but their role was taken over by the Leviim and the Kohanim. Why did the Leviim and the Kohanim (which are a subset of the Leviim) deserve this special treatment?

The following story about the Chafetz Chaim provides an answer.

One day the Chafetz Chaim was visited by a young Yeshiva student. The Chafetz Chaim asked him if he was a Kohen. The student replied that he was not. The Chafetz Chaim then told the student that he was a Kohen. He then asked the student if he knew why he was a Kohen but the student was not. The student said that the Chafetz Chaim was a Kohen because his father was a Kohen and the student was not a Kohen because his father was not a Kohen. The Chafetz Chaim then asked the student if he knew why one of the fathers was a Kohen while the other was not. The student was not sure what point the Chafetz Chaim was trying to make. The Chafetz Chaim explained that he was a Kohen because many years ago, after the sin of the golden calf, Moshe called out: "Whoever is for Hashem, come to me". The entire tribe of Levi grabbed the opportunity and ran to Moshe. For that reason, the tribe of Levi merited to take over the role of the first born and serve in the Mishkan.

The Chafetz Chaim had a group of learned Kohanim who were studying the Talmudic section of Kodashim – which contains the laws relating to the Bet Hamikdash and its service. The Chafetz Chaim understood that the Bet Hamikdash could be rebuilt any day in which case these laws would become practical. When the Chafetz Chaim heard of the growing Jewish settlement in the land of Israel and when he heard that the land was yielding its fruit, he declared that the redemption was beginning. The Chafetz Chaim knew that it would be hard to find Kohanim who were well versed in the laws of sacrifices because the study of these laws had been neglected for a long time. The Chafetz Chaim therefore encouraged the study of Kodashim to prepare for the coming of the Moshiach.¹ That way, when the Moshiach calls, the Kohanim will again be completely ready to respond in the moment, without hesitation.

The Chafetz Chaim wasn't trying to show off to the young Yeshiva student. He was teaching him an important lesson. There will be times when the call comes out: "Whoever is for Hashem, come to me". When we hear that call, we have to grab the opportunity. If we wait too long, the opportunity can be lost.

This call has been heard throughout our history. For example, Matityahu said similar words when he began the rebellion against the Greeks in the story of Chanukah. But the call is not just heard at major historical incidents. We all have many opportunities to take a stand and do what is right. Recently, a friend of mine was out for dinner and the host family did something that was against

¹ An Angel Among Men, Slimcha Raz, Kol Mevasser Publications 2003.

the halacha. It was not done in ignorance. It was done deliberately, in order to make a point. My friend could quite easily have remained silent, but he chose to politely say something so as not to give the act his tacit approval.

There are many times when an opportunity comes our way and we have to be ready to grab it. The Arizal used to go out into the fields around Tzfat with his students to welcome Shabbat. The story is told that one Friday afternoon he suddenly asked his students to travel with him to Jerusalem. They hesitated – it was getting close to Shabbat and they weren't sure that it was wise to travel so far. Eventually they decided that if the Arizal suggested it then it must be a good idea. But by that time the Arizal said that they had lost their chance. They had a window of opportunity to reach amazing spiritual heights, but they hesitated and the moment was lost.

With our social interactions and relationships we sometimes need to act spontaneously in order to grab an opportunity to connect in a more meaningful way than usual. Often it is difficult to pre-meditate a 'bonding moment' or the opportunity to do an act of thoughtful chesed.

How can we prepare ourselves to grab these opportunities? One way is to ensure that we spend more time with the people that are important to us so that we will be there to grab an opportunity to bond when it arises.

Some people believe in the concept of "quality time". They spend many hours at work and very little time with their families. They make up for this by ensuring that the time that they do spend with their family is "quality time" - doing activities that are particularly enjoyable and which allow them to bond as quickly and efficiently as possible. However we are rarely able to predict when special opportunities will arise for connecting with our loved ones. For instance, children are often very good at living in the moment. Children have a habit of asking deep, profound questions or being ready to connect or share something personal at unexpected times. Children can be extra receptive at these times and parents have an opportunity to connect with their children in a way that is not usually possible. These moments don't necessarily happen during "quality time".

In addition, the best way to teach a child, and help them to grow into a decent, respectful adult, is by example. Being a good role model is more important than being a good lecturer. As an aside, this is a powerful incentive for parents to work on their middot. Children need to see their parents behaving in a proper manner. For this to occur, children have to be able to see how their parents react in different situations. Again, these opportunities tend to arise at unexpected times. You can't plan for them to occur during "quality time".

How can we make sure to grab as many of these opportunities as possible? The answer is simple – we need to replace "quality time" with "quantity time". That way we will have a greater chance of being around when the opportunities come up.

Let's try something this week:

1. Watch out for opportunities to do what is right. We often know deep down what Hashem wants us to do in particular situations. But if we hesitate, the opportunity can pass us by.
2. Try to replace "quality time" with "quantity time".

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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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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