

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Beha'alotcha  
June 2018 / Sivan 5778

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Beha'alotcha – painful growth

This week's Parsha of Beha'alotcha begins with the commandment to Aharon to light the Menorah. If one visits the Old City of Jerusalem today, one can see a beautiful golden Menorah on display. This Menorah was built by the Temple Institute with the intention that it will actually be used in the third Bet Hamikdash. The pasuk in our Parsha describes the Menorah as follows:

*“This was the form of the Menorah, hammered work of gold, from its base to its flower it was hammered work; according to the form that Hashem had shown Moshe, so did he construct the Menorah.”* (Bamidbar 8:4)

Why did Hashem have to show Moshe a form of the Menorah? Rashi<sup>1</sup> explains that Moshe struggled to understand the description of the Menorah and Hashem therefore showed him an image. Moshe still did not understand what to do. Ultimately, Hashem performed a miracle. A block of gold was thrown into the fire and the fully formed Menorah was miraculously formed.

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> teaches that there were three things that Moshe struggled to understand and of which Hashem therefore showed him an image. The three things were as follows:

- **Menorah** – as explained above
- **Hachodesh** (the month) – how to recognise the first appearance of the new moon each month
- **Sheratzim** (creeping creatures) – how to identify the eight unclean animals

These three words (Menorah, Hachodesh, Sheratzim) hint to Moshe's name in two ways<sup>3</sup>. The first letter of these three words are Mem, Heh and Shin which re-arrange to spell Moshe. Similarly, the last letter of these three words are Heh, Shin and Mem which also can be re-arranged to spell Moshe's name!

What is the significance of this? It is a well-known idea in Jewish thought that a person's name represents their essence. Chazal teach us that when parents choose a name for their child, they are granted a small measure of prophecy. Kabbalists and great Tzaddikim can often understand the essence of a person just by knowing their name.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz explains this concept as follows. The Hebrew word for “name” is “shem” (שם). This is almost identical to the Hebrew word for “there” (“sham”).<sup>4</sup> The concept of “there” is related to our destiny, the direction towards which we are headed. Right now, we are “here”. In the future, we will be “over there”. Our name reveals the direction towards which we are headed, our destiny or our tafkaid (Divine purpose in life).

Let us apply this lesson to Moshe's name. We see that Moshe's name is spelt using the letters of the three things that he **did not** understand, rather than what he was blessed to understand. This suggests that

<sup>1</sup> Parshat Terumah, Shmot 25:31.

<sup>2</sup> Menachot 29b.

<sup>3</sup> Thank you to my brother Oren Ledder for drawing this beautiful idea to my attention. Unfortunately I could not find the original source.

<sup>4</sup> The letters are the same, only the vowel is different.

through struggling to work through or understand something we are able to grow and bring out our potential which is hidden within our name.

Upon completing a significant section of Torah study, we celebrate with a siyum – a festive meal.<sup>5</sup> There is discussion amongst the authorities as to which Torah sections are significant enough to qualify for such a festive meal. One example given is a book of the Zohar - a cryptic work written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai which contains commentary on the mystical aspects of the Torah. It is quite likely that many studying this cryptic work would not fully understand it. Remarkably, a siyum can be made on the Zohar even if one does not understand a word of what they are learning!<sup>6</sup>

This suggests that the effort and struggle and work in learning is the essence of our Torah study. We celebrate the fact that we toil in Torah, regardless of our actual understanding.<sup>7</sup>

At the siyum, we recite special prayers of thanksgiving called the Hadran. As part of the Hadran we compare toiling in Torah with physical toil:

*“We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward and they toil and do not receive reward.”*

This comparison seems strange given that people who toil in the physical world **do** receive reward, in the form of payment for their work. A parable might help to elucidate the true meaning of this verse. Imagine going to tailor and asking him to make a suit. You pick out the material that you like and he measures you up. A couple of weeks later you turn up to pick up the suit. Unfortunately, the tailor had made some drastic mistakes and he ruined the material. There is now no suit and no material! The tailor apologises profusely. He explains that he put a lot of effort into making the suit according to your instructions and he deserves payment. Of course you refuse to pay him. You agreed to buy a suit. It is irrelevant how much effort the tailor put in. You only pay him for his results, not for his effort. This can be compared to work generally in the physical world – it is the results that we pay for, not the efforts or intentions alone. In contrast, in the spiritual world things work differently. Hashem rewards us for the effort that we put in, regardless of the results. This is perhaps due to the fact that the results of our effort are up to Hashem anyway.

Humans are creatures of comfort. Thus, any toil and struggle go against our nature. However, it is only through this toil and struggle that we actually grow. Rabbi Akiva Tatz provides us with an important insight based on the following Midrash:

*“Rabbi Shimon says: ‘Every single blade of grass has a corresponding angel in the sky which hits it and tells it to grow’.”<sup>8</sup>*

Rabbi Tatz points out that the angel is **hitting** the grass and telling it to grow. He asks why the angel needs to hit the grass? Wouldn't it be nicer for the angel to speak gentle words of encouragement? “Remember to grow little one. There, there. What a clever and strong blade of grass you are”. According to Rabbi Tatz, this Midrash teaches us that growth is inevitably painful and difficult. However, what we can learn from Moshe's name being made up of the areas in which he struggled is that our painful growth and struggles define us. We need our struggles and hard work to fulfil our tefikid and reach our potential.

Let's try something this week:

1. When we are struggling with something or going through a difficulty, remember that this is how we grow and become our very best.
2. When we see someone else struggling, remember that this is how they draw out their potential and became greater. Keeping this in mind can help us to embrace the situation while simultaneously having empathy.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> A siyum is customarily done on Erev Pesach for firstborns in order that they will not need to fast.

<sup>6</sup> Rav Ovadia Yosef in Yabia Omer 1:26.

<sup>7</sup> As an aside, there is an idea that all of the Torah that we learn but do not understand will be fully revealed to us in the World to Come.

<sup>8</sup> Midrash Rabba, Breishit 10:6.

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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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