

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Beha'alotcha (Bamidbar 8:1–12:16)  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Beha'alotcha – Dealing with despair

This week's Parasha of Beha'alotcha begins with the promise of great things to come. The final preparations are being made before the triumphant march to the Land of Israel. The people are camped in formation, the Leviim had been selected for their special role in serving Hashem, the Pesach sacrifice had been brought. Moshe was commanded to fashion two silver trumpets to summon the nation to travel and to be used in the battles against the inhabitants of the Land. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of Iyar, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year after leaving Mitzrayim, the people began to journey. They must have been such a glorious sight as they began to march, tribe by tribe, under their banners. They were scheduled to arrive at their destination – the Promised Land – in a matter of days.

But it was not to be. Something went wrong. The people began to complain. It is not even clear what they were complaining about. They were just “seeking a pretext”, looking for problems. First, they whinged about the journey. Then they whined about the menu.

It is difficult to understate the enormity of this tragedy. The people had just been rescued from Mitzrayim and miraculously walked through the sea which split for them. They experienced the Divine Revelation and received Hashem's holy Torah at Har Sinai. They were given the role of being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation and teaching the World about Hashem. Now they were just about to commence the final march to the Promised Land where they could begin to fulfil their national purpose. And yet they began to complain and despair.

*Moshe heard the people weeping with their families, each one at the entrance to his tent. Hashem became very angry and in the eyes of Moshe it was bad”.*  
(Our Parasha, Bamidbar 11:10).

Moshe had already dealt with the Sin of the Golden Calf. But this latest problem was the straw that broke the camel back. Moshe, the greatest leader of our nation, hit the depths of despair.

*“Moshe said to Hashem “Why have You treated Your servant so badly? Why have I not found favour in Your eyes that You place the burden of this entire people upon me?... I alone cannot carry this entire nation for it is too heavy for me. If this is the way You treat me, please kill me now if I have found favour in Your eyes, so that I not see my evil”.*  
(Our Parasha, Bamidbar 11:11-14)

This episode shows that even Moshe Rabbeinu goes through difficult times and starts to despair. When we read this episode, it can provide us with a measure of comfort. Everyone faces difficult times, but they eventually pass.

The Torah is a repository of psychological wisdom.<sup>1</sup> It is amazing how many modern-day mental health issues and clinical practices are sourced from the Torah and in Jewish writings. For instance, Rosmarin and Haimoff write about the cyclical nature of depression. They quote Rav Wolbe:

<sup>1</sup> See “The Torah is a repository of psychological wisdom”, an article by David Rosmarin and Saul Haimoff, published in Inyan magazine, 11 April 2019. The following ideas are based closely on this article. Rosmarin and Haimoff are planning to publish a book on this topic titled “Torah Handbook of Mental Health”.

*“It is natural to have good days and bad days. The knowledge of this simple fact alone has the power to assuage a lot of despair and sadness.”<sup>2</sup>*

Rav Wolbe is teaching us that emotions are cyclical. Everyone has periods of sadness. Accepting this as a fact of life can be therapeutic. Rosmarin and Haimoff continue:

*“The best approach to take when one is feeling sad is to accept the “bad days” as par for the course, and to remain engaged and active until the “good days” return. This is because mood states don’t last forever; they ebb and flow like waves of the ocean, and you just have to ride them out.”*

There is a well-known story about the wise King Shlomo and his adviser Benaiah ben Yehoyada.<sup>3</sup> King Shlomo wanted a special ring with an amazing property “If a happy man looks at it, he becomes sad, and if a sad man looks at it, he becomes happy.” After six months of searching, Benaiah asked an elderly Jewish merchant for help. The elderly man took a plain gold ring and engraved three words on it: “גם זה יעבור” (“This too will pass). Benaiah brought this ring with its message to King Shlomo. The message is clear. No matter what one is experiencing, no matter how good or how bad things are, it will pass. Keeping this thought in mind can help us to keep our emotions more balanced and avoid becoming too extreme.

How did Moshe conquer his despair?

### **Lesson 1: Talk about it**

When Moshe hit a point of despair, instead of keeping it to himself, he spoke about it. He articulated his feelings. Though some of us find this initially difficult to do (especially males!), it can help us to process our emotions and lighten our load.

### **Lesson 2: To Whom do we turn**

The most important aspect of Moshe’s response is not what he said, but to Whom he said it. “Moshe said to Hashem...” Moshe knew *where* to turn. Only Hashem can be relied upon unconditionally. And Hashem responded immediately. Moshe needed help desperately, so Hashem gave it to him.

*“Then Hashem said to Moshe: “Gather for Me seventy men of the elders of Israel... and they shall stand there with you [to help you carry the burden]”. (Our Parasha, Bamidbar 11:16).*

When we feel despair and share our load with Hashem, we are benefitting no matter what the outcome. Why? Because we have acknowledged that Hashem is the source of everything and that only he can provide true salvation. And we have increased our emunah and our connection to Hashem.

Let's try something this week:

1. When things are tough, try to keep in mind the teaching “Gam Zeh Ya’avor – this too will pass”. This is part of life and it happens to all of us.
2. Talk about your problems with others. It helps.
3. Turn to Hashem. You can rely on Him and become closer to Him this way.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

<sup>2</sup> Rav Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Volume 1, p35.

<sup>3</sup> In truth, this story, or a variation of it, appears in a number of sources, and its origin is quite murky. Nevertheless, the message is powerful and very relevant.