

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

(Mishlei 3:17)

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[darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

**Sh'lach – Giving people hope**

In this week's Parsha of Sh'lach, we read about the tragic story of the spies.

Bnei Yisrael are on the threshold of entering Eretz Yisrael. They are now a nation. They have been redeemed from Mitzrayim and they have received the Torah. All that is left is to enter the land that Hashem had promised to their forefathers. But they hesitate. The people decide that it would be prudent to send spies to scout out the land. Moshe is not happy with the idea, however he agrees. The Midrash<sup>1</sup> explains that Moshe readily agreed to send the spies in the hope that Bnei Yisrael would see that there was nothing to hide and that they would then drop the idea.

Ten out of the twelve spies come back with their negative report about the land. Bnei Yisrael accept their report and they lose all hope. They no longer believe that they will be able to conquer the land. Even though they had seen with their own eyes the miraculous salvation and the wondrous miracles that Hashem had performed for them. Everything looks bleak and hopeless. There is talk of appointing a new leader to take them back to Mitzrayim.

Moshe once again comes to our rescue and argues in our defence. As an aside, the entire nation owes Moshe an eternal debt of gratitude for all the times that he saved our lives. Hashem agrees to pardon Bnei Yisrael, but he punishes them by refusing them entry to the land. Rather, they will wander in the desert for 40 years. The spies that brought the negative report are punished with a miraculous and horrific death. Moshe reports back to Bnei Yisrael about Hashem's decision and they mourn greatly (Devarim 14:39). They are devastated.

Bnei Yisrael decide to take measures into their own hands. They plan to enter Eretz Yisrael, insolently ignoring Moshe's warning that Hashem will not be with them. They suffer a crushing defeat. Now Bnei Yisrael feel truly hopeless. They believe that the entire exodus and all the work leading up to this moment was for nothing. They believe that they will continue to sin and that they would never make it into the Promised Land.

So what does Hashem do at this point? Hashem teaches Bnei Yisrael some of the halachot about korbanot that apply in Eretz Yisrael:

*And Hashem said to Moshe saying, speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: "when you arrive in the land of your dwelling place that I am giving you..." (Bamidbar 15:1).*

He then teaches them about the laws of challah (separating dough), again prefacing his words with "when you arrive in the land to which I am bringing you".

Why does Hashem start teaching halachot pertaining to the land at this point? Hashem sought to inform Bnei Yisrael that their children would ultimately arrive in the land. Bnei Yisrael were stuck in a negative frame of mind. By focusing their attention on these land-based halachot, Hashem was redirecting Bnei Yisrael's vision towards a hopeful future.

<sup>1</sup> Sifrei, quoted by Rashi to Devarim 1:23.

The Torah then tells us the story of the wood gatherer who desecrated Shabbat in public and was punished with the death penalty. Who was this man? Rabbi Akiva says that he was Tzelophchad<sup>2</sup>. Tosefot explain that the Tzelophchad committed the sin deliberately but he was acting l'shem shamayim (for the sake of Heaven)<sup>3</sup>. After the debacle of the spies, Bnei Yisrael were at risk of giving up on their observance of the Torah. They were in a hopeless state and they didn't believe that their actions had any relevance. Tzelophchad deliberately desecrated Shabbat after being warned not to. His plan was for his inevitable death penalty to shock Bnei Yisrael into taking responsibility for their actions. Tzelophchad sacrificed his life in order to encourage Bnei Yisrael to change their frame of thought.

Oftentimes people can become completely consumed by their problems. In their mind, the problem grows like a cancer until it becomes seemingly impossible to overcome. They become trapped in a negative and unhelpful mode of thinking. How can we help others in this situation to cope?

The story is told about Shlomo Hamelech who wanted a ring that would make sad people happy and happy people sad. Eventually, he was given a ring that was engraved with the phrase "Gam Zeh Ya'avov" (this too shall pass). No matter what difficulty we are facing, it is really only temporary. Every difficult situation will eventually pass. Adopting this perspective will help our problems to seem more manageable.

Sometimes people need a powerful wake up call to shift their thinking. Like Tzelophchad's valiant sacrifice. Sometimes they just need a fresh perspective, another way of looking at their problems. When Hashem started teaching Bnei Yisrael about the laws that will apply when they enter the land, this buoyed them, enabling them to believe that all hope was not lost. Often, such a shift can be quite subtle, yet it can have a powerful effect. A seed is planted in their mind – the idea that the situation is only temporary.

Here are some phrases that might be helpful in shifting someone's thinking in this way:

*"When this is all over, I'm taking you out for lunch."*

*"One day we will look back at this and laugh."*

*"I know someone who was in exactly the same situation as you and now he is 100% okay."*

*"Look up at the stars" - a reminder of how small we and our problems really are.*

It might take some effort to work out what will work in each case. But helping someone to shift their mindset is one of the biggest gifts we can give.

Let's try something this week:

1. Think up some more relevant and inspirational phrases that you can use. What would you like someone to say to you?
2. Look out for other people that appear to be demoralised and in need of some help.
3. When you notice someone stuck in an unhelpful mode of thinking, try to help them see a fresh perspective by using phrases which remind them of a positive future, or the temporary nature of all problems.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>2</sup> We will read about Tzelophchad's daughters and their love for the land of Israel in Parshat Matot.

<sup>3</sup> Baba Batra 119b

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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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