

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

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Sh'lach – looking at the bigger picture

In this week's parsha of Sh'lach we read about the infamous mission of the spies. Moshe sent twelve princes to spy out the land of Israel. He intended them to return with a positive report and encourage Bnei Yisrael to enter the land as soon as possible. Instead, ten of the spies came back with an evil report - stories of powerful giants and a land that devours its inhabitants. The result was national hysteria. That generation was punished by being forced to wander in the desert for 40 years until a new generation was to be born who merited entering the land.

The exception to the spies' evil behaviour was Calev and Yehoshua. These two spies remained faithful and gave glowing reports of Hashem's land. They were spared the punishment that befell the rest of the spies (Bamidbar 14:30).

Calev and Yehoshua both stood up to the other spies. However, when we look closely at the narrative, we see that Calev was a lot more vocal. In contrast, Yehoshua seems to be passive throughout much of the story. Let's look at what took place (Bamidbar 13:27-14:10):

- The spies return from their mission of scouting the land.
- The 10 spies start speaking. They began with a positive report but it quickly turns into a negative report.
- Calev cleverly silences the people by pretending to be on the same side as the other 10 spies.
- Calev then makes a passionate plea in support of the land and he tries to encourage Bnei Yisrael to ascend and conquer it.
- The 10 spies then state explicitly that Bnei Yisrael have no hope in conquering the land.
- That night Bnei Yisrael wept and they decided to appoint a new leader and return to Mitzrayim.
- Yehoshua and Calev tore their clothes and told Bnei Yisrael that the land is very, very good and if Hashem wants to give the land to Bnei Yisrael they have nothing to fear.

Why did Yehoshua wait until so late in the piece to voice his support for Calev?

One possible answer comes from last week's parsha of Beha'alotcha (Bamidbar 11:24-29). Let's briefly recap the relevant story. Moshe had complained that he could not lead Bnei Yisrael by himself. Hashem told Moshe to gather 70 elders to help bear the burden of leadership. Each of the tribes wanted to be equally represented so Moshe chose 6 qualified elders from each tribe – a total of 72 people. The selected elders would participate in a lottery to see which two would miss out on becoming a leader. Two of the selected elders – Eldad and Meidad – stayed in the camp and didn't participate in the lottery. Some of the commentators suggest that this was out of humility – they felt that they did not deserve the honour. Due to their humility they were in fact chosen by Hashem and they began to prophesise in the midst of the camp.

Rashi brings the content of their prophesy. Eldad and Meidad prophesied that Moshe would die and that it would be Yehoshua that would bring Bnei Yisrael into the land of Israel. (We know, of course, that this prophecy ultimately turned out to be true.)

Perhaps that is the reason why Yehoshua was silent throughout much of the fiasco with the spies. Due to Eldad and Meidad's prophecy Bnei Yisrael believed that Yehoshua had a bias in favour of entering the land because he would become leader as a result. Perhaps Yehoshua understood that actively arguing his point would not succeed in persuading Bnei Yisrael to enter the land. Bnei Yisrael would assume that Yehoshua was being influenced by his hidden agenda and they would not be persuaded by Yehoshua's arguments. It was only at the very end when all hope seemed lost that Yehoshua felt that he had no choice but to argue his point.

When we are caught up in the heat of an argument, we may feel that forcefully vocalising our opinion is the best way to successfully convince the other side. But that is not always the best approach. If we stop and step back we may realise that holding back might more successfully achieve our aim. Sometimes, by just listening to what the other party has to say without interrupting them, or allowing them to share and verbalise their concerns, we may be able to reach a compromise.

As we learn in Pirkei Avot (1:17) "Shimon said...I have not found anything better for oneself than silence". Some commentators suggest that Rabbi Shimon learnt this from the human body. Hashem gave us two ears and only one mouth to teach us that we should listen more than we talk.

In his book about negotiation and mediation tactics, called "Getting Past No", William Ury discusses the strategy of building your opponent "a golden bridge to retreat across". The idea behind this strategy is that by helping our opponent to save face we can more easily achieve a negotiated outcome. "Saving face" means that our opponent feels that their concerns are valid and have been taken into account. Sometimes a "golden bridge" can be built by just giving the other person a chance to speak uninterrupted.

We need the wisdom to know when it is appropriate to speak and when it is appropriate to remain silent. Every situation needs to be judged on its merits and we need to constantly re-assess what is the appropriate reaction.

The practical question remains – how can we decide when it is appropriate to speak and when it is appropriate to remain silent? Perhaps the answer lies in where we place our focus. Instead of focusing on our own view and how we can convince others, we should try to focus on the other person's needs and emotional state. By tuning in to their position we are more likely to be aware of when they need our silence and when they might be swayed by a strong case.

Yehoshua understood that there is a time to remain silent and a time to speak up. Let's learn that lesson from him.

Let's try something this week:

1. When we are next involved in a difficult conversation, try to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Calmly decide whether it is better to speak or to keep silent.
2. Remember that we can often defuse strong emotions by just being a good listener and letting the other person explain their view.

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 parashah that usually relates 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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