

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Sh'lach (Bamidbar 13:1–15:41)
June 2019 / Sivan 5779

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Sh'lach – The mitzva of Challah

In this week's Parasha of Sh'lach we are introduced to the mitzva of Challah.

“Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying “Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When you come into the Land to which I bring you, it shall be that when you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set aside a portion for Hashem. The first portion of your dough, you shall separate challah [a loaf] for a gift... From the first of your kneading shall you give a portion to Hashem, for your generations”. (Our Parasha, Bamidbar 15:17-21).

This halacha teaches that when preparing dough, one must separate a portion and give it as a gift to the Kohanim¹. The separated portion must be kept ritually pure and must be consumed by a Kohen who is pure. However, since the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash, we are all considered to be impure, and we currently have no way to become pure², so the portion is burnt instead and then discarded. This separated portion is referred to as ‘challah’.

Many Jewish women try to perform this mitzva on a weekly basis when they bake loaves of bread for Shabbat. In fact, that is the reason why these loaves themselves are called “challah” – as a reference to this important mitzva of separating challah from the dough.

There are a number of mitzvot which require Bnei Yisrael to give “gifts” as part of their agricultural endeavours in the Land. These included separating tithes and leaving various parts of their produce for the poor. Historically, these mitzvot generally only became obligatory when the Land of Israel had been completely conquered and apportioned among the tribes. However, the mitzvah of Challah is unique in that it began to apply immediately upon Bnei Yisrael's entry into the Land.

Until they entered the Land, Bnei Yisrael were living off the manna, the miraculous bread that Hashem provided for them each day. However, once they entered the Land, Bnei Yisrael became governed by the laws of nature. Thus, they would need to start making their own bread. This involved much effort and many steps, including ploughing, sowing, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, grinding, kneading and baking. Whereas the manna was undoubtedly provided directly from Hashem, Hashem's role in the production of regular bread was more obscure. Due to man's efforts and involvement in the production process, there was a greater risk that man may overlook Hashem's ultimate involvement. They may forget that the end result was still a gift from Hashem. The more effort that we invest into our endeavours, the more likely we are to believe that it is our effort that causes the results. Our hishtadlut (personal effort) obscures Hashem's control and His kindness.

There is a very important link between the mitzvah of challah and the manna which fell daily in the Midbar. The obligation to separate challah from a batch of dough only applies if the dough is a certain minimum quantity. How much is that quantity? One omer – which is exactly the quantity of manna which fell each day

¹ According to Torah law, this halacha only applies to dough that was formed in the land of Israel. According to Rabbinic law the halacha also applies outside of Israel. These days, while the majority of Jews live outside the Land, the requirement in Israel is also only Rabbinic. However, in a number of respects we are more lenient with this halacha outside of Israel.

² In order to become ritually pure, we require the ashes of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer), which will be returned to us in the times of the Moshiach.

for each Jew.³ In this way, every time that we separate challah, we are reminded of the manna which fell for us in the Midbar. This link can serve to remind us that just because we are investing physical effort into our sustenance, Hashem is really the true and only Source.

Truly internalising this message has the power to reduce our stress and worry related to earning a livelihood. If we understand that Hashem will give us what we need just like He provided us with the manna, then our involvement in earning a living, while still necessary, can become less central in our lives.

There are other important lessons that we learn from remembering the manna. For example, the manna didn't fall on Shabbat, but Hashem gave us a double portion on Friday to cover our needs for Shabbat. Similarly, we are commanded not to work on Shabbat, but we don't have to be concerned that this will reduce our earnings. Hashem makes sure that we receive what we need in advance.

Perhaps the most powerful message of the manna is contained in the following pasukim which describe what happened in the Midbar when the manna fell for Bnei Yisrael:

"Bnei Yisrael did so and they gathered [the manna], some gathered a large amount and some gathered a small amount. And they measured it with an omer, and whoever gathered more did not have extra and whoever gathered less was not lacking. Each one had gathered according to what he eats." (Parashat B'shalach, Sh'mot 16:17-18)

Consider this remarkable idea. Some of Bnei Yisrael tried to gather as much manna as possible. Others just put in the minimal effort and gathered a little bit. Yet, despite their varying efforts, when they came home and measured what they had, they discovered that they all ended up with exactly what they needed.

This message is directly relevant to us. Though we must put in effort to earn our income, regardless of how much effort we put in, Hashem always ensures that we each end up with exactly what we need and what is best for us. Rabbi Ashear describes hishtadlut as like a tax – everyone is fined and must pay, but it doesn't actually determine our level of income.⁴

Every time that we perform the mitzva of separating challah, we can try to recall the miracle of the manna and try to internalise these important lessons. Even if we don't have the merit of performing this special mitzva, every time that we eat kosher bread we can remember that challah was separated from it before it was baked, and internalise the message this way.

No matter how much time and effort we currently dedicate to earning a parnasah, Hashem has already decided the end result and how much is appropriate for us. This was already decided at the previous Rosh Hashanah.⁵ Thus, we can afford to spend a bit less time at work and a bit more time working on our spiritual endeavours. We are guaranteed by Hashem Himself that our take-home salary will not suffer. The main thing we need to in order to 'cash in' on this Torah truth is emunah.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to perform the mitzva of challah regularly, especially in honour of Shabbat.
2. When separating challah, remember the connection with the miraculous manna and the important lessons that still apply to us today (e.g. remembering that Hashem is in charge of our income, regardless of how much effort we invest).
3. Visualise Hashem handing us our salary each month with exactly the amount that we need. Re-channel any latent worry about parnasah towards doing an extra mitzvah or Torah learning.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Ledder

³ This is a measure of volume which translates to approximately 1.6kg of regular flour. If using less than this quantity but more than 1.23kg of flour one should separate challah without a bracha. The exact weight varies depending on the type of flour being used. Ask your Rabbi for clarification and to assist with the various details of this mitzva.

⁴ Living Emunah, Achieving A Life of Serenity Through Faith, Vol 2 by Rabbi David Ashear, Artscroll.

⁵ See Gemara Masechet Rosh Hashanah 16a. The Gemara teaches us that one's yearly income is set every Rosh Hashanah. However, this excludes what is spent for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Torah education for one's children. We can spend more than our budget on these items (see also Gemara Beitzah 16a).