

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?

Korach – celebrating the downfall of our enemies

In this week's Parsha of Korach, we read about the challenge to Moshe and Aharon's leadership. Though Korach is the chief instigator, he is joined by a mixed group, including Datan and Aviram from the tribe of Reuven.

Who are Datan and Aviram? They appear numerous times throughout Bnei Yisrael's story, starting at the beginning of sefer Sh'mot.

We first come across these two characters when Moshe goes out from the Egyptian palace in order to share the burden of his enslaved brothers.¹ Moshe sees an Egyptian taskmaster striking a Hebrew man. Moshe rescues the Hebrew man by killing the Egyptian and he buries the body in the sand. The next day, Moshe sees two Jews quarrelling and he steps in to break up the fight. In response, one of the quarrellers criticises Moshe and questions his authority to intervene in their dispute.

"Do you plan to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?" (Sh'mot 2:14)

The two Jews who were fighting were Datan and Aviram. They were the ones that informed the Egyptian authorities that Moshe had killed an Egyptian. That is why Moshe had to flee from Egypt.

Rashi explains that Moshe now understood why Bnei Yisrael had not yet been redeemed from slavery. It was because they had such wicked informers as these in their midst.

The Midrash tells us that Datan and Aviram also rebelled against Moshe at the Yam Suf. When Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim Datan and Aviram had chosen to stay behind. They came with Pharaoh to attack Beni Yisrael at the Yam Suf. When they saw the sea splitting for the Jews they realised that they had picked the wrong team. They joined their brothers and came out of the sea safely with them².

The Midrash also informs us that Datan and Aviram rebelled at the time of the manna³. The manna was divine training in emunah – every day Bnei Yisrael would receive exactly what they needed for that day (except for erev Shabbat and erev Yom Tov when they would receive a double portion). Each night they would go to sleep with nothing in the pantry. In this way they would learn that all parnassa (livelihood) comes from Hashem. Bnei Yisrael were commanded to not leave over any manna until the next morning. Datan and Aviram disobeyed Hashem's command and tried to leave over some of their manna.⁴

On the first Erev Shabbat after the manna started appearing, Moshe told Bnei Yisrael that they would receive a double portion and that no manna would fall the next day. Datan and Aviram saw this as a great opportunity to "expose" Moshe as a liar. They saved some manna and hid it in the

¹ Sh'mot Chapter 2.

² Midrash Aggada and Targum Yonatan.

³ Rashi to Sh'mot 2:13 and Sh'mot Rabbah 1:29.

⁴ Sh'mot 16:20 with Rashi.

field on Friday evening. On Shabbat morning they invited people to come with them to see that Moshe had lied and that manna had in fact fallen on Shabbat. However the birds had eaten the manna and their plan was foiled.

After the debacle of the spies which we read about last week, some members of Bnei Yisrael said: "Let us appoint a leader (instead of Moshe) and return to Egypt".⁵ The Midrash identifies these people as Datan and Aviram.

Whenever there is trouble Datan and Aviram are not far away. They were the constant nemesis of Moshe and Bnei Yisrael.

In this week's parsha, Datan and Aviram join forces with Korach to challenge the leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

Moshe knew that he was in the right and that the rebels would be punished with death.

What would we do in Moshe's situation? Most likely, we would sit back and let events unfold by themselves. Finally, the wicked Datan and Aviram would be finished.

However, remarkably, Moshe deliberately seeks out Datan and Aviram in order to give them one more chance to repent:

"Moshe sent [a messenger] to call Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, but they said: 'We will not go up.'" (Devarim 16:12)

Moshe sought reconciliation with words of peace. Rashi teaches us that from here we learn that it is not proper to persist in a dispute.⁶

We can learn the following from Moshe's behaviour:

Lesson 1: The length to which we must go to achieve shalom, even if it means humbling ourselves and giving our enemies numerous chances.

If we really think about how important the ideal of peace is, we will be more likely to go out of our comfort zone in order to achieve it. This involves work on our part, to truly internalise the importance of peace.

Lesson 2: We should never rejoice at our enemies downfall (see Pirkei Avot 4:24).

We only say a shortened version of Hallel on the last day of Pesach - our celebration is diminished somewhat because the Egyptians were killed in the sea. That is also the reason why we remove drops of wine from our cups on the Seder night when we mention the plagues.

There is a subtle but important difference between being grateful when we receive a salvation and taking pleasure from the suffering of our enemies.

Let's try something this week:

1. We should try extra hard to achieve shalom, even if it involves doing something difficult like humbling ourselves, or giving second chances to our enemy.
2. When someone that we dislike suffers, we can try to overcome the natural human instinct of rejoicing in their downfall and instead remind ourselves of how Moshe acted and try to emulate him.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁵ Bamidbar 14:4.

⁶ Rashi to the pasuk; Midrash Tanchuma Korach 10; Gemara Sanhedrin 110a.

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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