

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?

Pinchas – Everyone has their strengths

This week's Parsha is named after Pinchas – the grandson of Aaron and the hero of the moment. His actions bring an end to the plague that is devastating Bnei Yisrael.

The prince of the tribe of Shimon was openly defying Moshe and publicly sinning with a Midianite princess. Bnei Yisrael is being punished with a plague because others are involved in the same type of sin. No-one knows what to do, including Moshe. Pinchas feels an obligation to act. He remembers the halacha that a zealot is permitted to kill someone who is sinning in these circumstances. Pinchas confirms with Moshe that his understanding of the halacha is correct. Then he rises up with his spear to carry out the punishment. As a result of Pinchas' action the plague comes to an end.

Remarkably, Bnei Yisrael criticise Pinchas for daring to kill the prince of a tribe. The people are only convinced that Pinchas' actions were pure and righteous when Hashem grants him a "covenant of peace" and appoints Pinchas and his descendants as Kohanim.

This week's Parsha also contains the appointment of Moshe's successor as leader of Bnei Yisrael. Many commentators have asked why Pinchas was not selected as the leader. Pinchas had the courage and initiative to act when no one else was able to act. He took the risk of attacking the prince of Shimon. The tribe of Shimon could have risen up against Pinchas to take revenge. But Pinchas didn't care. He was prepared to sacrifice his own personal safety to do what he knew was right. Surely these are leadership characteristics.

However, Pinchas was not selected as the successor to Moshe. Yehoshua was selected. Yehoshua had different strengths to Pinchas. Yehoshua was loyal and reliable. He was always the first person in the Bet Midrash in the morning. He would prepare the room so that everything would be in order before Moshe came to teach. He was also the last person to leave the Bet Midrash every night, staying behind to clean up. When Moshe went up to Har Sinai to receive the luchot, Yehoshua came with him as far as he was allowed and then waited there patiently for Moshe to return. Hashem decided that Yehoshua's character traits were more suited to being the leader of Bnei Yisrael.

Does the fact that Yehoshua was selected over Pinchas mean that Pinchas was inferior to Yehoshua? Of course not! Pinchas was passionate about Hashem. He demonstrated the ability to act under pressure and Hashem rewarded him for that. But he did not have the character traits that were necessarily appropriate for leadership at that time.

Does the fact that Pinchas acted against the prince of Shimon while Yehoshua did not act mean that Pinchas was greater than Yehoshua? Of course not! Yehoshua just had different strengths that would shine through under different circumstances.

Everyone has unique characteristics and everyone is different. But we will all have our moment to shine. Every person that Hashem creates is created in His image. We are all

created for a reason and we are all special and unique. Even those people who don't seem to have obvious or public contributions have their strengths which will shine at the right time.

There is a true story about a boy called Shmuel which highlights this idea.¹

Shmuel had Down Syndrome. He was a regular attendant at the local shule. He usually wandered around between the congregants, interfering with people as they tried to daven. Mordechai was the Baal Tefillah in the same shule. He would regularly lead the davening and he prided himself on his ability to inspire the congregation. Mordechai always looked forward to davening on the Yamim Noraim. He would really feel the emotion of the day and tears would run down his face as he led the davening. The congregation were always moved by Mordechai's passion. One year, on Rosh Hashanah, Mordechai felt blocked. He did not know what was wrong or why he couldn't reach a spiritual high like he did in previous years. The time for davening drew near but Mordechai still could not feel his usual passion. He resigned himself to the fact that he would have to lead the davening in a cold, mechanical manner. He walked up to the amud and with a sigh prepared to begin. Before he could start, he felt a tug on his sleeve. He looked down and there was Shmuel. Shmuel looked deep into Mordechai's eyes and reached out his hand. He wanted to give something to Mordechai. It was a tissue. Being a sensitive, intuitive and spiritual soul, Shmuel had sensed that something was wrong and he wanted to help. Shmuel's simple gesture opened up the flood gates. Mordechai cried like he had never cried before, davening with more kavanah and emotion than ever before.

We may know someone who does not fit a typical stereotype or struggles to fit in socially. Someone who is struggling physically, emotionally or financially. Someone who is atypical. We can learn from this week's Parsha that everyone has a unique set of character traits and everyone will have a time to shine. Everyone has a pure neshama from Hashem and we all need each other's unique abilities in order to shine and grow. For that reason alone everyone deserves to be treated with respect and deserves our appreciation and friendship.

Let's try something this week:

1. Focus on one person you know who may not fit the 'mould'.
2. Remember that there is no such thing as 'normal'. Everyone has a unique set of character traits and they shine in their own way, in their own circumstances.
3. Make an effort to reach out to that person. Include them in your discussions, your activities, and ultimately your heart!

¹ Source unknown. Names have been changed.

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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