

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Pinchas, July 2016

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Pinchas – lessons from leadership

In this week's Parsha of Pinchas, we read about Moshe's request for Hashem to appoint a suitable leader to guide the Jewish people after Moshe's death.

Hashem said to Moshe: “Take to yourself Yehoshua bin Nun, a man in whom there is spirit and lean your hand upon him... Moshe did as Hashem had commanded him. He took Yehoshua and stood him before the Elazar the Kohen and before the entire assembly. He leaned his hands upon him and commanded him, as Hashem had spoken through Moshe.”
(Bamidbar 27:18, 22-23)

We can learn a variety of lessons from this short passage.

Generosity

Rashi points out that Hashem commanded Moshe to lean his hand (singular) on Yehoshua yet Moshe acted with a 'good eye' i.e. generously. He used both hands and made Yehoshua like 'a vessel that is full and brimming over, and filled him with his wisdom generously'.¹

This teaches us the proper way to give. When giving someone a gift, we should do it properly and generously. Generosity is not limited to the act of giving but emanates from the heart (i.e. a generous spirit). How can we foster a generous spirit? The secret is to be satisfied with what we have and to truly believe that Hashem gives us what we need. That way we feel no need to hold back.

One way to increase our satisfaction with what we have is to make a conscious effort to show appreciation and be grateful. Focusing on what we do have (and not on what we are lacking) may help us to give easily with a full heart and to not hold back.

Many psychological studies show the benefits of expressing gratitude. One such study² asked a group of young adults to keep a daily journal of things for which they were grateful. Another group kept a journal of things that annoyed them. A third group were required to keep a journal of reasons why they were better off than others. The group that kept the gratitude journal showed greater increases in determination, attention, enthusiasm and energy. This clearly shows some benefits of gratitude. It also demonstrates that simply recognising that we are better off than other people, though a stepping stone, is not sufficient. Feeling appreciation for what we have is crucial to changing our brains (and thus our hearts) and will help us to foster a generous spirit.³

The importance of consistency

Hashem chose Yehoshua to be Moshe's successor, despite the fact that he was not the greatest of Moshe's students. For instance, In Parshat Sh'lach, the Torah lists the twelve men that were to be sent to spy out the land of Israel⁴. The Ramban points out that these men were listed in the order of their personal greatness. Yehoshua is only listed fifth in the group and Calev is listed third. What

¹ Rashi to Bamidbar 27:22.

² Emmons and McCullough, 2003

³ Alex Korb, PhD, a neuroscientist at UCLA and author of “Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time”

⁴ Bamidbar 13:4-15.

quality did Yehoshua possess that may have led Hashem to choose him over others? Hashem chose Yehoshua because he was consistent. He was constantly in Moshe's tent to learn Torah (see Shemot 33:11). The Midrash teaches that Yehoshua was always the first one in the Bet Midrash in the morning setting up the benches and the last to leave at night, after tidying up. His consistency was rewarded with the greatest gift – leadership of Bnei Yisrael.

From Yehoshua we can learn the power of consistency in our own avodah. One of our most important tasks in this world is to improve our middot. Acting in a regular, consistent manner, whether we feel like it or not, increases the chances of our positive middot sticking and helps us to not be governed by our instincts and desires.

How to be a good teacher

Rashi quotes a pasuk to explain why Yehoshua deserved to be Moshe's successor⁵. However Rashi only quotes part of the pasuk: *"He who guards a fig tree shall eat its fruit..."* (Mishlei 27:18).

However the second half of the verse which is not quoted is actually more relevant: *"...and the guardian of his master will be honoured."*

Yehoshua deserved to be Moshe's successor because he was "the guardian of his master" and therefore he "will be honoured".

Rashi often quotes a snippet of a verse or a brief reference to a Midrash. In such cases we are more likely to make the effort to look up the original source ourselves. Rashi was a master teacher⁶. He encourages us to put in the effort ourselves. By being actively involved in the learning process we are more likely gain a deeper understanding and also to remember the material. And we never know what else we might discover while looking up the original source!

The importance of submission⁷

Hashem instructed Moshe to lay his hand upon Yehoshua. This means that Yehoshua had to lower his head in submissiveness to his teacher. The Gemara⁸ compares the appointment of Yehoshua to the granting of semicha (the laying of hands) when ordaining Rabbis.

Each new generation of Rabbinical leadership needs to apply the Torah to the times in which they live. This means that the halacha needs to be applied to modern circumstances that did not exist in earlier generations and the Rabbis need to teach Torah in a way that speaks to the current generation. However, ultimately Jewish leaders need to remember to be submissive and respect the authority and greatness of previous Rabbanim. They are simply a link in a chain that reaches all the way back to Moshe. They must have the middah of Hod (submissiveness). They must look back to their teachers and be guided by the previous generations as to how to act appropriately.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to keep a gratitude journal. It takes effort! But by regularly listing in detail all of the blessings that Hashem bestows on us we are both enhancing our chances of being generous to others and our powers of consistency!
2. Remember from Rashi how to be a good teacher. This is relevant in many areas of our lives, not just in the teaching profession e.g. our role as parents or our role as leaders in the work force.
3. Remember to submit to a higher authority and always remember from where we came.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁵ Rashi to Bamidbar 27:18.

⁶ This idea was suggested by Dr Avigdor Bonchek, author of "What's Bothering Rashi".

⁷ Based on footnote to Bamidbar 27:18 in Artscroll Stone edition Chumash.

⁸ Sanhedrin 13b.

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Note: as the majority of our readers are located outside of Eretz Yisrael we will be following the calendar of Parshiyot for L'Aretz.

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About Darchai Noam

The pasuk 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 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're'echa kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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