

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?

Devarim – everything has its time

In this week's Parsha of Devarim, Moshe begins his final speech to Bnei Yisrael before his death. He begins with a brief summary of Bnei Yisrael's history, starting from Hashem's instruction to leave Har Sinai and travel towards Eretz Yisrael.

Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael of the spies delivering their evil report about the land. This tragic event took place on Tisha B'Av. The anniversary of this event is commemorated this very Shabbat. Tisha B'Av should have been a day of celebration. If after receiving the spies' report Bnei Yisrael had accepted the land that Hashem had promised them we could have been celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut on this day! However, due to Bnei Yisrael's doubts and fears, the 9th of Av became a day of mourning instead of a day of celebration.

Moshe then tells Bnei Yisrael that Hashem heard Bnei Yisrael's complaints and unfounded fears about the land. He swore that not one man of that generation would live to see the land, except for the two spies that brought a positive report of the land – Caleb and Yehoshua. The rest of the generation were destined to wander in the desert for 40 years while the men of that generation died.

In a tragic postscript to this story, Bnei Yisrael realised that they had sinned and they tried to do teshuva. On their own initiative they decided to prepare themselves for war and to conquer the land. Moshe warned them not to go. They were too late. Hashem would not be with them. They did not listen to Moshe's advice and they went off to battle. As Moshe predicted, they suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Amorites.

We are struck by the poor timing of this whole episode. When Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to arise and enter the land, they didn't want to go. Subsequently, when Moshe told them not to go, they did go! They decided to take matters into their own hands and chose to enter and fight for the land on their own timetable.

We can learn from this an important lesson about timing. Everything in life is exquisitely orchestrated by Hashem to be perfectly timed. If we don't grab opportunities when they arise we can miss out. Conversely, there are times when we just need to be patient. Pushing things to occur before their appropriate time can also result in failure. It's a bit like baking a cake (or so my wife tells me). If you leave it in the oven for too little it's a flop. If you leave it in for too long, it gets burnt.

There is a well-known story about the Arizal. One Friday afternoon he announced to his students in Tzfat that they should pack their bags and travel straight to Jerusalem. Shabbat was approaching. The students hesitated. They were concerned that there was not enough time to complete the journey before Shabbat. The Arizal later taught that at that time there was a window of opportunity for the redemption. Had the students trusted their teacher, they

would have arrived in time for Shabbat with the Moshiach. But they hesitated and the window closed. They lost their chance and we missed out on the redemption.

Chovot Halevavot (Duties of the Heart) teaches us that Hashem is in charge of time. He decides when things are supposed to take place. We cannot bring early what Hashem has decreed would come later and we cannot delay what was decreed to come early¹. As Shlomo Hamelech teaches us in Kohelet (3:1) – everything has its appointed season and there is a time for every matter.

How can we apply this lesson to our lives? Consider the following scenario.

Reuven had many commitments. He was often busy. He finally managed to find a spare half hour to devote to his paperwork. However, just as he started, his 10 year old daughter came into his study to ask for help with her homework. Reuven politely told her that he was busy but he would probably have some time in a little while. Later that evening he approached his daughter and offered to help her. However his daughter had already found help from another source and did not need his time any more.

The window had closed. By choosing his own timetable over his daughter's needs Reuven had lost a chance to spend some valuable bonding time with his daughter. We generally cannot predict when such opportunities might arise. Opportunities need to be grabbed when they present themselves.

Of course this doesn't mean that we have to drop everything that we are doing whenever someone asks for our help. That would be unrealistic and inauthentic. There are certainly times when we are busy and we can't be interrupted. However, we need to be aware of what choices we are making and how important our tasks really are. It might very well be that what we are doing is not that critical and can be put off for a later time.

Sometimes the lesson that we need to learn is patience. We sometimes push to get something done quickly but nothing seems to be going right. We need to realise that life is not governed by our timetable. There is a heavenly timetable.

Timing is delicate. Timing is sensitive. Things can be measured to the precise micro-second. Who are we to decide and control such a delicate operation? Realising that Hashem is in charge and in control of when things take place may help us to live a more emuna-based and stress free life.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem is in charge of the timetable. This is especially important to remember when things are not going our way.
2. If we find that we have competing obligations, try to work out which obligations are based on our own timetable and which are governed by Hashem's preference.
3. Try to grab opportunities to bond with our family and friends when the opportunity presents itself.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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¹ Shaar HaBitachon (the Gate of Trust), Chapter 3.

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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