

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Ekev
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Ekev – The test of parnasah

*** New Gemara for beginners shiur – I am planning to start a new online shiur in Gemara for beginners. B”H I hope to start in a few weeks and the shiur will probably take place on Sunday nights (Australian time). If anyone is interested in joining please send an email to darchai.noam@gmail.com.*

In this week’s Parasha of Ekev, Moshe continues his farewell speech to Bnei Yisrael before his death. He recaps some of the trials and tribulations that Bnei Yisrael faced during their 40 years of wandering in the Midbar, including a reference to the miraculous “menu” of manna that sustained the people.

*“He **afflicted** you and **let you hunger**, then He fed you the manna which you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, so that He would make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but rather by whatever comes forth from the mouth of Hashem does man live” (Devarim 8:3)*

What was the test of the manna? Why did Hashem “afflict” Bnei Yisrael and let them hunger? The manna could not be kept overnight. If one tried to keep the manna overnight it would become mouldy and wormy. Every night Bnei Yisrael would go to sleep with full stomachs but knowing that their “cupboards” were bare. This encouraged them to have emunah that Hashem would provide them with fresh manna the next morning. The manna was a 40-year lesson in emunah for Bnei Yisrael.

Hashem also commanded that one jug of manna be set aside as testimony for the future generations.¹ Hundreds of years later, towards the end of the first Bet Hamikdash period, the prophet Yirmiyahu used this jug of manna in his rebuke of Bnei Yisrael for not engaging in Torah study. The people argued that they were too busy working and if they learnt Torah, they would not be able to earn their parnasah. So Yirmiyahu brought out the jug of manna and showed it to the people and said: “With this your ancestors supported themselves. Hashem has many agents to prepare food for those who fear Him”.²

What was Yirmiyahu suggesting? That if the people set aside time to learn Torah, they would be fed manna like their ancestors? The manna was a once-off miracle, that only occurred while Bnei Yisrael were in the desert. Rav Zev Leff³ suggests that Yirmiyahu was showing them that the manna that was preserved in the jug was still fresh and that the nature of manna is to stay fresh for many hundreds of years. So why did the manna that was provided in the midbar go wormy if it was kept overnight? Rav Leff explains that Hashem did this deliberately in order to inculcate the lesson that He is the source of all sustenance. If the people would store up the manna and keep stockpiles for future consumption, they might soon forget that Hashem provided it to them miraculously. They would start to think that it was their clever food rationing that ensured that they had sufficient food. Only by going to sleep every night with absolutely nothing would they learn experientially the lesson that Hashem was the only Source. This lesson was particularly important for Bnei Yisrael to learn before they entered the Holy Land. Inside the Land, they would have to be involved in agriculture. There was a great risk that they would start to think that it was their own hard work and clever farming techniques that ensured that they had food on the table.

¹ Shmot 16:32.

² Mechilta, based on Yirmiyahu 2:31.

³ The following idea was heard from Rav Zev Leff during his talks on Tisha B’Av 2020.

However, this important lesson took 40 years to learn. For 40 years, Bnei Yisrael were collecting the manna in the midbar and involved in experiential learning. Isn't it interesting that it took 40 years?⁴ The average working life for a typical adult is more or less around 40 years. That is how long we spend doing our hishtadlut and putting in the effort to earn our parnasah. But though we work hard (through the sweat of our brow, due to Adam's sin) Hashem wants us to retain true internal trust that everything we earn comes from Hashem only and not our own effort. Instead of waiting 40 years to learn this lesson, we can just read an account of the 40 years that our ancestors spent wandering in the desert! We can try to learn this lesson a quicker way by making the effort to have true bitachon and the right attitude while earning our parnasah.

Many people have a custom of reciting the "Parasha of Manna" every day after Shacharit.⁵ If we recite this Parasha every day with kavana, it may help to inculcate within us the idea that our livelihood truly does come from Hashem.

Sometimes, we think that we are making progress in our emunah and we think that we have the right attitude towards working for a living. But we need to investigate this very carefully. Consider the following (based on a true story):

Zach couldn't believe his good luck. He was working on a big account for the firm and he had to make a quick decision under time pressure. Luckily, he made the right decision and the client was very happy. Zach would be the first to admit that it was really just a fluke. Mike, one of the senior guys in the firm, saw it all and he was convinced that Zach was a star. Zach was thrilled. With Mike on his side his future in the firm was looking very promising. Mike was a key decision maker and Zach was confident that he would have a great performance review and a good chance for a quick promotion. However, Zach was trying hard to work on his emunah. He knew in his head that Hashem was in charge of his parnasah, not Mike. Zach tried his best to recognise that Hashem was behind it all. Every time he walked past Mike's office, he consciously said thank you to Hashem for orchestrating things to his advantage. Zach was feeling great – things were looking promising and he really felt that he was making progress with his emunah. But then disaster struck! Mike was headhunted by another firm and he left! Zach was devastated. His guaranteed promotion had evaporated. What happened to Zach's emunah?

There are different levels of emunah. Certainly, it is easier to maintain our calm equilibrium and attribute it to our emunah when things are going well. But how do we fare in the emunah stakes when things are not going our way? This requires a much stronger level of faith and trust in Hashem. Check out your reaction when things are not going so well and your parnasah is threatened. This will help you work out where you are really holding. Don't be fooled!

Most of us have to put in the effort and work for our livelihood. That is how Hashem wants it to be. But try to remember the lesson of the manna - Hashem is ultimately in charge of how much we earn and it **all** comes from Him, not from our effort. With this emunah-based attitude to our parnasah, we can hopefully approach our work with more calm and clarity and remember to also allocate some of our efforts and some of our limited time to spiritual matters.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to remember the lesson of the manna and how it applies to our jobs and our lives.
2. Have a look at the Parasha of Manna at the end of Shacharit. Reciting this regularly can provide a wonderful boost to our emunah.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁴ See Darchai Noam for Parashat Ki Tetze 5777/2017 where we discussed the mystical significance of the number 40 in greater depth. In short, the number 40 always represents a qualitative spiritual transformation.

⁵ See page 181c of the standard Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.