

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Metzora, April 2016

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

### Metzora – Shabbat HaGadol

This week is Shabbat HaGadol – the Shabbat before Pesach. The Shulchan Aruch<sup>1</sup> explains that this Shabbat is called Shabbat HaGadol because of a great miracle that happened on that day.

The Tur<sup>2</sup> elucidates the background to the story. On 10<sup>th</sup> Nissan, before Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, they were commanded to take a young lamb or goat and put it aside for the korban Pesach. The Midrash<sup>3</sup> expounds that Bnei Yisrael took the animals into their houses and tied them to their bedposts. The sheep was the Egyptians’ god so desecrating their god was a great act of courage and faith on the part of Bnei Yisrael. The Egyptians were obviously furious at this behaviour. But the miracle that took place was that not one Egyptians retaliated. The exodus took place on a Thursday. This great miracle took place 5 days before the exodus, which was Shabbat. Thus the Shabbat before Pesach is called “Shabbat HaGadol”.

The Taz<sup>4</sup> points out that it is unusual that we don’t commemorate this miracle on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. We usually commemorate important events based on the date, not on the day of the week upon which it occurred. The Taz explains that another great miracle occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. When Yehoshua led Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael after wandering in the desert for 40 years, the Jordan River split to allow Bnei Yisrael to cross. This wondrous miracle, reminiscent of the more famous splitting of the Reed Sea, reminded Bnei Yisrael that Hashem was still with them and put the fear of God (literally) into the hearts of the Canaanite occupants of the land. This miracle also took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. In order not to confuse the two miracles, it was decided that the miracle of the korban Pesach would instead be commemorated on the Shabbat before Pesach. Perhaps another reason is that we like to spread out our simcha over as many days as possible so as to maximise our joy. When it comes to sad days we prefer to minimise the sadness – for example we commemorate many sad events on the one day of Tisha B’Av.

However we may be left wondering why it was the miracle of the korban Pesach that was ‘pushed off’ to Shabbat? That miracle took place before the miracle of the splitting of the Jordan River. So why wasn’t the later miracle moved to Shabbat? I would like to suggest that it is important that the korban Pesach miracle is specifically commemorated on the Shabbat before Pesach for another reason. From this we can learn an important principle about our avodat Hashem at this time of year.

There is a basic kabbalistic principle that the beginning of any process contains within it the seeds of the end of that process. For instance, we sing in Lecha Dodi on Friday nights “Sof ma’aseh b’machshava t’chila” – “last in deed but first in thought”. We see this principle throughout creation, in both the physical and spiritual spheres. For example – a fertilised egg contains all of the DNA, it just needs to be unpackaged. Similarly, Shabbat is not just the end of one week, it is the launching pad for the week ahead and it contains within it the seeds of the coming week. We also sing in Lecha Dodi “For it [Shabbat] is the source of blessing”. The Zohar teaches that all the weekday blessings and

<sup>1</sup> Orach HaChaim 430:1

<sup>2</sup> A Halachic code authored by R’ Yaakov ben Asher (1270–1340). The four-part structure of the Tur and its division into chapters (simanim) was used as the basis for the Shulchan Aruch.

<sup>3</sup> Yalkut Shimoni, Bo 191

<sup>4</sup> A significant commentary on the Shulchan Aruch written by R’ David ha-Levi Segal (1586–1667).

success come as a result of the Shabbat's holiness.<sup>5</sup> Each Shabbat contains within it the energy for the week ahead. That is why, for example, we bless the new month on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh; we commemorate Shabbat Teshuva on the Shabbat before Yom Kippur; and we have a tradition to read part of the Haggadah on the Shabbat before Pesach (which is Shabbat HaGadol).

If we commemorated the miracle of the korban Pesach on 10<sup>th</sup> Nissan then in some years it will fall in the same week as the first day of Pesach and in other years it would fall in the previous week. By commemorating the miracle on Shabbat HaGadol we ensure that it always takes place on the Shabbat before Pesach. As we learnt, the Shabbat before Pesach already contains within it all of the energy for the upcoming festival. So what is the link between Shabbat HaGadol and Pesach?

A major theme of Pesach is that Hashem fought for us and we remained passive<sup>6</sup>. Spiritually we were on a very low level (the 49<sup>th</sup> of 50 levels of impurity) and yet Hashem granted us redemption. All of the plagues and great miracles that took place were purely the work of Hashem. Even the Egyptian soldiers recognised this when they said "Hashem is waging war for them [Bnei Yisrael] against Egypt"<sup>7</sup> just before they drowned in the sea. Bnei Yisrael were merely required to walk across the sea. [As an aside, in contrast, the festivals of Tishrei have the opposite theme – Bnei Yisrael is **actively** involved in the teshuva process. Nissan is the time that we are passive and Tishrei is the time that we are active. We see the same themes in nature and the agricultural cycle. Pesach is in the spring when the plants start to blossom apparently all by themselves with no human effort. Tishrei is in the autumn when we bring in the crops after a long season of working the land.]

However there is a danger that we may erroneously assume from the great miracles of Pesach that we can just take it easy and not worry about our spiritual level and Hashem will miraculously save us. Thus Shabbat HaGadol teaches us that even though Hashem fights for us, we still have to take the first step. Bnei Yisrael demonstrated emunah by taking the lambs right under the noses of the Egyptians. We only have to make an opening the size of the eye of a needle and Hashem will open for us a gaping hole that loaded wagons can fit through.<sup>8</sup> The taking of the lambs might only be a tiny step compared to the miracles granted to us but it showed real emunah. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to take that step in order to merit the miraculous redemption.

We see the same message in the special Haftorah that we read this week for Shabbat Hagadol:

*"...Return to Me and I will return to you..."* (Malachi 3:7)

Hashem wants to return to us. But He is waiting for us to **first** return to Him. Hashem is waiting to come to our aid and to redeem us but He just wants us to initiate the process.

Let's try something this week:

1. On Shabbat HaGadol, contemplate the enormous act of emunah that Bnei Yisrael demonstrated. Remember their reward – they were finally granted freedom from the land of Mitzrayim. They set a precedent and we are blessed to have it as an example to follow.
2. In whatever area that we are working on, daven to Hashem and ask Him for assistance. Then summon every vestige of emunah and courage and act on that emunah. Remember – it's up to us to take that first step.

Shabbat shalom and Pesach kasher v'sameach, Rabbi Ledder

The next edition of Darchai Noam will B"H be a week after Pesach (for Shabbat of 7 May / 29 Nissan).

<sup>5</sup> Artscroll Siddur (Ashkenaz), footnote to Lecha Dodi, page 317.

<sup>6</sup> While cleaning the house for Pesach we certainly don't feel like we are being passive. In the physical sense it is a lot of work! However the Kabbalists teach us that in the spiritual realms Pesach is a time when Hashem is active and we can accomplish a lot with very little effort on our part. (Heard in a lecture by Rabbi Akiva Tatz.)

<sup>7</sup> Parshat B'shalach, Sh'mot 14:25.

<sup>8</sup> Midrash Shir Hashirim 5:2.

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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 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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