

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Miketz – Keeping your good deeds to yourself¹

In this week's Parasha of Miketz, we learn about Yosef being transformed overnight from prisoner to the second in command of Mitzrayim, the world superpower of that day. Pharaoh is very impressed with Yosef's interpretation of his dreams. He gives the young prisoner the job of managing Mitzrayim's food supply so as to avoid starvation during the predicted famine.

Pharaoh's appointment of Yosef starts in Breishit 41:39. First, Pharaoh compliments Yosef on being understanding and wise. Then he appoints Yosef over his household and he gives him the responsibility of feeding all the people. Pharaoh then makes it clear that even though Yosef will have day to day administrative control, Pharaoh will still have the throne and be the ultimate ruler. Pharaoh then appoints Yosef over the entire land of Mitzrayim, he gives Yosef his ring, fine clothes, a golden chain around his neck and a special chariot fitting for the second in command.

At this point Pharaoh says something a bit odd. In Breishit 41:44 Pharaoh says to Yosef:

"I am Pharaoh, and without you no-one will raise their hand or foot in the entire land of Egypt".

Why did Pharaoh have to tell Yosef "*I am Pharaoh*"? Did he think that Yosef forgot who he was? The whole world knew who Pharaoh was! One of the explanations that Rashi brings is that Pharaoh was reminding Yosef that he was still the supreme ruler over the land. However Pharaoh had already made it clear to Yosef that he was keeping the throne and that he would outrank Yosef. Why does he need to tell him again?

Perhaps Pharaoh was reminding Yosef that he was the source of Yosef's good fortune. He was in effect saying: "*Just remember that everything you have comes from me. Without me, you would be nothing. Don't you forget that!*" This was essentially an ego boost for his own benefit.

Pharaoh's behaviour can be contrasted with that of the angel who visits the mother of Shimshon (the mighty Samson, the famous nazir with superhuman strength who rescued Am Yisrael from the Plishtim). The angel pays a visit to Shimshon's mother to inform her of the birth of Shimshon and to explain certain important rules governing her conduct and his nazirite status (eg she could not eat anything impure and he was not allowed to cut his hair) – see Shoftim Chapter 13. Shimshon's father, Manoach, wants to clarify some information with the angel, but the angel is nowhere to be found. Having informed Shimshon's mother of the news, he disappeared. Manoach begs Hashem for the angel to return, and the angel comes back. The angel answers Manoach's questions and then disappears again. The angel did his job and then quietly went away.

¹ The comparison between Pharaoh and Shimshon's angel is not my original idea. I read about it many years ago but I cannot remember the source. As it says in the Gemara, if you quote your sources you bring peace to the world. If anyone knows where this idea originated from I would be grateful if you could let me know.

Imagine if the angel had acted like Pharaoh. He would have hung around to tell Shimshon and his family (and anyone else who would listen) about the integral role that he played in Shimshon's leadership and the defeat of the Philistines. *"If it wasn't for me his parents wouldn't have known what to do and none of this would have been possible!"*

When we do a good deed for someone else, the real test might be how we act after we have done the good deed. Do we act like Pharaoh, or like Shimshon's angel? It is often tempting to act like Pharaoh. If we do something good, we usually want others to know about it. We are human and we enjoy the ego boost from other people knowing about and respecting our merits.

Here are three powerful reasons for why we should try to act more like Shimshon's angel - holding ourselves back and resisting the temptation to boast about our good deeds:

1. The receiver might feel embarrassed if they know, or are reminded, that we are the ones who helped them.
2. We strengthen our middot (character traits) such as self-discipline, gevurah (strength), and anava (humility). If we can manage to do this, then that's the **real** ego-booster!
3. In some circumstances, the reward that we receive in the world to come can be greater if we keep quiet about our good deeds.

The following Chassidic story illustrates the benefits of avoiding boasting about our good deeds and it will hopefully motivate us to keep our good deeds to ourselves:

Once in the city of Tzfat there lived an extremely pious and humble Jew. He reached such a high level of purity that he merited a visit from Eliyahu HaNavi. One night as he was reciting Tikun Chatzot (the lamentation over the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash that is recited at midnight) Eliyahu appeared and offered to reveal to him secrets of the Torah. But there was one condition. This simple Jew had done a very special good deed on the day of his barmitzvah and that is why he merited the visit from Eliyahu HaNavi that night. Eliyahu wanted this man to reveal to him what he did. The man refused. The good deed that he did was l'shem shamayim (for the sake of Heaven) and it was a secret, between him and Hashem. The man forfeited the opportunity to learn the secrets of the Torah and Eliyahu returned to heaven. There was a huge tumult in heaven that night. How could this person pass up the opportunity to learn with Eliyahu HaNavi? His purity and piety was awesome. It was decided that Eliyahu would return the next night and teach him deep secrets of the Torah, even though he would not reveal the nature of his good deed. The man became a hidden tzaddik. When he died, his reward was that his soul would be re-incarnated as the Baal Shem Tov.

Let's try something this week:

1. Look out for opportunities to do hidden good deeds.
2. When we do a good deed, remind ourselves that the true test actually comes afterwards – do we succumb to temptation to brag about it or can we be strong and keep quiet?
3. Remind ourselves that the good deed can be a secret between us and Hashem.
4. If we do a good deed for someone and they know about it, try to downplay our role as much as possible and avoid reminding them of our involvement.

Shabbat shalom and Chanukah samech!

Rabbi Allon Ledder

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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 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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