

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Miketz  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Miketz – Giving the credit to Hashem

In this week's Parasha of Miketz we read about Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh had his famous dream about seven lean cows consuming seven fat cows and seven withered ears of grain consuming seven healthy ears of grain. None of Pharaoh's magicians or wise men could properly interpret the dream. Then Pharaoh's cupbearer remembered the young Jewish prisoner who had a knack for interpreting dreams. Yosef was rushed from prison. He was given a haircut and a change of clothes and brought before Pharaoh. This was a defining moment in Yosef's life – he was about to be catapulted from a lowly slave and prisoner to second in charge of the world superpower.

Let's examine the conversation that took place when Yosef was first presented to Pharaoh:

*And Pharaoh said to Yosef, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no-one who can interpret it. And I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it."*

*And Yosef replied to Pharaoh, saying "It is beyond me [to interpret dreams]. G-d will answer in relation to Pharaoh's welfare". (Our Parasha, Breishit 41:15-16)*

This was Yosef's golden opportunity to shine in Pharaoh's eyes. It seems that he didn't even have to actively sell himself. All he needed to do was smile and nod, as Pharaoh already thought very highly of him. However, Yosef's humility and his attribute of emet did not allow him to take the credit for his ability to interpret dreams. That credit could only be attributed to Hashem. So Yosef went out of his way to make a kiddush Hashem, ensuring that Pharaoh was not under any misapprehension as to the source of his gift of dream interpretation. And we see that his humility did not prevent him from rising to the highest of heights.

We can contrast Yosef's response with the response of Shmuel HaNavi when he first met Shaul. Hashem had instructed Shmuel to anoint Shaul as the first king of Israel. Shaul came to see Shmuel in relation to another matter. Not recognising Shmuel, he approached him to ask for directions:

*"And Shaul approached Shmuel inside the gate, and said, "Please tell me, which is the house of the seer (prophet)?"*

*And Shmuel answered Shaul and said, "I am the seer, and you shall eat with me today. I will send you on your way [tomorrow] morning and all that is on your mind, I will tell you" (Shmuel I, 9:18-19).*

Later, Shmuel is subtly rebuked by Hashem for this response to Shaul. Hashem sent Shmuel to anoint a son of Yishai as the next king of Israel and Yishai introduced his sons to Shmuel. Shmuel is certain that Eliav, the oldest son, must be the chosen one. But Shmuel was wrong. It was Yishai's youngest son, David, who would be the future king. Hashem told Shmuel:

*"Don't look at his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. For it is not as man sees. Man only sees what is visible to the eyes while Hashem sees into the heart". (Shmuel I 16:7)*

In his commentary to this verse, Rashi explains that this was a subtle criticism of Shmuel:

*“Even though you called yourself ‘seer’, for you said to Shaul “I am the seer”, here I inform you that you do not see.”<sup>1</sup>*

We need to remember that any criticism of the prophets and other great tzaddikim of the past must be placed in the proper perspective. In most cases, such actions are only considered amiss because of their extremely high spiritual level. If our Sages did not alert us to this criticism of Shmuel, we probably would not even notice that there was a problem with his statement to Shaul. It is only due to Shmuel’s very high level that he was expected to have such a level of humility and that this be reflected in his words.

The angels that came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities<sup>2</sup> were faulted for a similar mistake. The angels warned Lot to grab everything and run because “**we** are about to destroy this place”. Rashi<sup>3</sup> points out that this statement was a sin for which the angels were punished! In using the term ‘we’, the angels seemed to be taking for themselves the full credit for the destruction. Their punishment was that they were not allowed to leave the area until they admitted that actually the matter was under Hashem’s authority and not their own. (The idea of angels committing a sin, which implies that they have free will, may sound surprising. However, a deeper analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this article.) This reveals that even angels can be criticised for insufficient humility and for failing to recognise Hashem’s ultimate control.

The Torah testifies that Moshe was the most humble of all men. That is why he was our greatest leader.

*“The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more so than any other person on the face of the earth.” (Bamidbar 12:3)*

Why is humility so important? Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said as follows:<sup>4</sup>

*“...the study of Torah is an act of surrender... That’s why Chazal [the Sages] had to emphasize so many times the importance of humility... and that the proud person can never be a real scholar, only the humble person. Why is it necessary? Because the study of Torah means meeting the Almighty. And if a finite being meets the infinite, the Almighty, the Maker of the world, this meeting must precipitate a mood of humility. Humility results in surrender.”*

Rav Soloveitchik was discussing Torah study in particular. However, the same principle applies whenever we encounter Hashem. Whenever we perform a mitzvah, or whenever we even think about Hashem, we are engaging with the Infinite, and that demands humility.

We all have our unique strengths. However, we must learn from Yosef to recognise that all of our talents and powers come only from Hashem.

Let’s try something this week:

1. Focus on something that we naturally excel at and then recognise that this is a gift from Hashem.
2. Try to notice when we have feelings of arrogance and make a conscious effort to work on being more humble, by attributing everything we have to Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>1</sup> Rashi’s commentary to Shmuel I 16:7.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 19 of sefer Breishit, Parshat Vayeira.

<sup>3</sup> In his commentary to Breishit 19:22, Parshat Vayeira, based on the Midrash in Breishit Rabbah 50:9.

<sup>4</sup> In an address to the Rabbinic Alumni of Yeshiva University, delivered on 19 June 1975. Quoted taken from “Torah Chazal Science” by Rabbi Moshe Meiselman, Israel Bookshop 2013, p713.

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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, usually 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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