

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayeshev, November 2015

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Vayeshev – informal prayer

In this week's Parsha of Vayeshev the Torah's focus shifts to Yosef. Yosef epitomises resilience. Honour and power seem to follow him, no matter what the situation. First, he was Yaakov's favourite son¹. Though his brothers planned to kill him, he was instead sold into slavery. His master Potiphar then appointed him as head of his household². When he was sent to prison after being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, the prison warden appointed him over all of the other inmates³. And finally, in next week's Parsha we will learn that Yosef becomes the leader over all of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.

What was Yosef's secret? Let's have a look at Potiphar's interactions with Yosef.

And his master [Potiphar] saw that Hashem was with him, and whatever he [Yosef] did, Hashem made succeed in his hand. (Breishit 39:3).

How did Potiphar know that Hashem was with Yosef? It is unlikely that Potiphar was able to see the Divine Presence! The Midrash Tanchuma explains that whenever Yosef arrived to serve Potiphar, he recited a brief prayer asking Hashem for success. Potiphar asked Yosef what he was mumbling and Yosef explained that he was asking Hashem for help. Apparently, before Yosef did anything he prayed "Please help me succeed Hashem" and after he accomplished anything he said "Thank you".

Note that immediately after informing of us of Yosef's behaviour, the passuk states that Hashem brought Yosef success in everything that he did.

Praying to Hashem is a key to developing our relationship with Him. In the times of the Bet Hamikdash we would serve Hashem by bringing korbanot and spending time in Hashem's house. There was a rule that a person who visited the Bet Hamikdash would need to leave through a different gate than the gate through which they entered. This was a reminder that the time spent in the Bet Hamikdash should change a person. If they just left through the same gate this would symbolise that they were the same person they were when they went in. The opportunity to grow would have been wasted. A relationship is real and alive. Having a relationship with Hashem should cause us to grow and improve.

Now that we no longer have the Bet Hamikdash, the Rabbis have given us the formal prayers as a replacement. The Rabbis understood that we need regular, fixed times to speak to Hashem. If we only speak to Hashem when we feel like it, many of us would be too busy and distracted to maintain the relationship. We would probably only call out to Hashem in times of great need, or when we felt particularly inspired. Therefore men have an obligation to reach out to Hashem three times a day.⁴

But formal prayer at set times is insufficient to maintain a relationship. Imagine a husband and wife who only spoke to each at pre-arranged, set times, merely reciting a pre-planned script. Though their interactions will be regular, obviously it would not constitute a real or meaningful relationship.

¹ Breishit 37:3.

² Breishit 39:4.

³ Breishit 39:22.

⁴ Perhaps women do not have the same obligation as men because they are more naturally inclined to instinctively and informally connect to Hashem. There are different opinions as to which parts of the formal prayer service are obligatory for women. Please check with your Rabbi.

Similarly, to develop our relationship with Hashem, we have to supplement our formal prayers with informal prayers, spontaneous and heartfelt conversations like when one talks to a friend.

Rachel and Naomi were driving around, desperately looking for a place to park. Rachel called out: "Please Hashem, this meeting is so important. Let us find a parking place soon". Naomi was surprised. "Hashem is in charge of the whole world. Do you really think he cares about finding us a car park?" "Of course he does", responded Rachel. "We call Him 'Avinu Malkeinu'. He is not just our King, He is also our Father. If there is anything at all that we need we should turn to Him."

Asking Hashem for the little things is a particularly powerful way of connecting with Him. It demonstrates that we believe that He is intimately involved in every aspect of our lives, and cares about us.

Darchai Noam usually focuses on the mitzvot *ben adam l'chavero* – the mitzvot between us and our fellow man. Prayer is clearly a mitzva *ben adam l'makom* – a mitzvah between man and Hashem. However prayer can also be used to improve our performance of the mitzvot between us and our fellow man. How is this so? Because to be successful in our mitzvot *ben adam l'chavero* we really need Hashem's help.

Many of the mitzvot that we perform require a bracha. For example, before we shake the lulav or blow the shofar, we recite the appropriate bracha. Interestingly, there is no bracha for mitzvot that apply between people. We don't recite a bracha before handing over tzedaka or doing an act of kindness. There is a principle that we only recite a bracha on a mitzvah if we can be reasonably certain that we will be able to fulfil the mitzvah. That is why we say a bracha before eating in the sukkah but not before sleeping in the sukkah. We can be quite confident that we will be able to complete the act of eating, but we can't control the act of falling asleep. People are inherently unpredictable and we can never be certain that a mitzvah involving another person will be successful. We can hand over tzedaka but the recipient might refuse to accept it (for example, they might be offended by the amount that we offer them). When we try to do an act of kindness for someone we never know for certain how it will end up. That is why we don't recite a bracha over these mitzvot. On the other hand, it is quite rare for a lulav to protest and refuse to be shaken!

Though we may strive to do many acts of chesed, the end results are out of our control. Thus, in order to merit the success of our kind intent, we need to request assistance from the One who **is** in control. A short prayer to Hashem requesting divine assistance is always appropriate. "Please Hashem, help me to help my friend in the way that he needs to be helped." "Please Hashem, help me to hand over this tzedaka in a respectful manner and that the recipient should not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable". In this way we can interact with Hashem and bring Him into our lives on a regular basis.

By asking Hashem for help we will be improving our performance of the mitzvot *ben adam l'chavero* and we will be developing our relationship with Hashem at the same time! We are also ensuring that we are successful no matter what is the outcome of the particular act. How so? Because we have fortified our relationship with Hashem. That is the true definition of success – one who manages to connect with Hashem in all situations.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to speak to Hashem outside of the formal times for prayers, like one would speak to their parent or friend.
2. Before doing any act, and an act of kindness in particular, ask Hashem for assistance. Then try to remember to thank Him after the act, no matter the result.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi 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 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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