

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Vayishlach
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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Vayishlach – don’t give up on others¹

The end of this week’s Parsha of Vayishlach deals with Eisav’s descendants. In contrast to the story of Yaakov and his children which is discussed in great depth, this is a relatively brief summary of Eisav’s offspring. Included in this description is an apparently innocuous pasuk that describes one of Eisav’s more well-known grandsons:

“And Timna was a concubine to Eliphaz, the son of Eisav, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz”
(Breishit 36:12)

A short while later another pasuk reveals more about Timna’s identity:

“...and Timna was Lotan’s sister” (Breishit 36: 22)

Towards the end of Moshe’s life, when he was giving his final instructions to Bnei Yisrael, Moshe told Bnei Yisrael as follows:

“For it [i.e. the Torah] is not an empty thing for you, rather it is your life, and through it you will lengthen your days upon the land...” (Parshat Haazinu, Devarim 32:47)

Rashi explains that Moshe is telling us that our labour over the Torah is rewarded with life itself. In addition, he teaches that there is not one empty (i.e. superfluous) word in the Torah. If learnt properly, every word will provide a reward. As an example, Rashi cites the two pasukim from our Parsha quoted above.

Rashi’s comment is based on the Gemara² which teaches that even pasukim that seem to be insignificant (like the pasukim quoted above) come to teach us important matters. Let’s explore what we can learn from these pasukim about Timna.

The Gemara reveals that Timna came from a royal family. She wanted to convert and she approached Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. However they all rejected her as being inauthentic. Timna then decided that it would be better to be a second-class citizen in Avraham’s nation rather than a noblewoman in another nation. She took the initiative, gave up her position as a princess and became a concubine to Eisav’s son Eliphaz. Rashi explains what we can learn from this pasuk – it shows us the greatness of Avraham, that rulers and kings yearned to join his family. It also teaches us how valuable and sought-after our heritage is.

The Gemara notes that Amalek, one of the Jewish people’s bitterest enemies, was created from the union of Timna and Eliphaz. The Gemara explains that Bnei Yisrael’s affliction by Amalek represents Divine retribution for Timna being rejected. In his commentary to the Gemara, Rashi explains that the Avot should have accepted Timna and allowed her to convert.

It is well known that Amalek represents the concept of doubt. The gematria³ of the word Amalek is the same as the gematria of the word safek (the Hebrew word for doubt). Amalek believes that everything

¹ Based on an idea from Rabbi Yehoshua Gefen, <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/gl/Never-Give-Up-on-Any-Jew.html?s=srcon>

² Sanhedrin 99b.

that occurs is a matter of chance. This philosophy causes Hashem's existence to be a matter of doubt. Perhaps we can suggest that the Avot **doubted** Timna's veracity and therefore, middah k'neged middah, Bnei Yisrael were subjected to Amalek who represent the concept of doubt.

Rav Moshe Feinstein expands on one lesson that we can learn from these pasukim about Timna.⁴ Avraham was the world kiruv expert. He was a pioneer in teaching people about Hashem. His whole life provided a personal example as to the benefits of following in the path of Hashem. Undoubtedly then, he (as well as Yitzchak and Yaakov) must have had good reason to doubt Timna's genuineness and veracity. And yet, Avraham was taken to task for rejecting her. Despite the Avot's reservations, there was a chance that had they accepted her she would 'come good' in the end. This teaches us the powerful lesson that we should never give up hope in any person. No matter how far someone seems to have strayed from the true path, there is always hope that they will find their way back.

Rabbi Fischel Schachter⁵ tells the story of a young girl in London who came from a respectable family. However, she started to mix with the wrong crowd and eventually went off the derech. Her only contact with Judaism was Rabbi Shachter's weekly Torah classes. Every Friday night when she came home, she would listen to his weekly class. Though she didn't care much for the Torah content, she enjoyed the jokes and the entertainment value. One day, she was having a deep and meaningful conversation with one of her friends who was in a similar predicament to her. She decided to play another lecture by Rabbi Schachter. The combination of that lecture and a particular comment from her friend caused this girl to realise that something was missing from her life. She started reversing her path and eventually she decided to devote herself to helping other youth who were struggling. Before her marriage, she called Rabbi Schachter to share her story and to thank him for his role. Humorous stories and jokes were the only link that this girl maintained to her Judaism. Yet that was enough of a link to return her to her faith.

This concept is not limited simply to bringing Jews who are off the derech back to the true path. It is relevant to many other areas of life. It could be helping a child who is struggling with their school work. It could be a friendship that has soured and needs a lot of work to get back on track. It could be a work colleague or neighbour that is difficult to connect with. It could be a student or child who is behaving poorly. The message to us is clear. We should never give up hope in another human being. And in return, hopefully others will never give up hope in us!

Let's try something this week:

1. Think about those relationships that require a lot of effort and remember the lesson of Timna – we should never give up hope in another human being!
2. Remember that doubt is Amalek. If you find yourself doubting someone's authenticity or motives, remember that they have a spark of goodness inside – and give them the benefit of that doubt!
3. Remember how precious our heritage is. In the words of Rashi: "rulers and kings have yearned to join Avraham's family". Let's remember not to take this for granted.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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³ Each letter of the Aleph Bet has a numerical value. The gematria of a word is the sum of the numerical value of each letter in that word.

⁴ Darash Moshe, Haazinu 32:47, as quoted by Rabbi Yehoshua Gefen.

⁵ This story appeared in Torah Any Times Tishrei Companion

<https://files.torahanytime.com/flash/banner/pdf/newsletter/TorahAnytime-Tishrei-Companion-5778-Digital.pdf>

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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 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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