

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Sh'lach
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Parashat Sh'lach – Hishtadlut, patience and emunah

This week we read Parashat Sh'lach – the story of the meraglim (spies) who were sent to spy out the Promised Land ahead of the planned conquest. Ten out of the twelve meraglim came back with a negative report and managed to convince Bnei Yisrael that it was a bad idea to enter the Land. As a result of this debacle, Bnei Yisrael were destined to wander in the desert for forty years. All the adult men who had complained about the Land would gradually die during the forty years and only their children would merit to enter the land.

In the broad scheme of Jewish history, forty years is just a blip on the radar. But at the time, forty years was a lifetime, literally. Many people knew that they wouldn't live out the forty years and would not see the Land that was promised to Bnei Yisrael. But Hashem had decided and the decree had been issued. The People would enter the Land after forty years, in accordance with Hashem's wishes.

The appropriate response was patience. But unfortunately Bnei Yisrael did not have patience. Many of the people realised their error and wanted to enter the Land right away. They woke up early the next morning and declared: “We are ready to go up to the place of which Hashem spoke, for we have sinned”.¹ Moshe warned them that this would transgress Hashem's word and they would not be successful. But they refused to listen. They marched out to battle and were dealt a crushing blow by the Amalekites and Canaanites, as Moshe had predicted.

Bnei Yisrael's timing was terrible! At the time when they were supposed to march forwards, confidently, to conquer the land – they balked. But then, when they were supposed to sit back and be patient, they decided to take matters into their own hands and exert their maximum hishtadlut (effort).

Chovot Halevavot (Duties of the Heart) teaches us that Hashem is in charge of time. He decides when things are supposed to take place. We cannot bring early what Hashem has decreed would come later and we cannot delay what was decreed to come early.²

But how do we know how much hishtadlut is appropriate? How do we know when we should just sit back and have patience and emunah? This is an extremely delicate and variable matter.

Raish Lakish³ teaches us that each of the six Sedarim of the Mishnah can be linked to one of six words in a particular pasuk from sefer Yeshayahu:⁴

“And the emunah of your times shall be the strength of salvations, wisdom and knowledge; fear of Hashem, that is his treasure.”

We will just discuss the connection between the first word, emunah, and the first Seder of Mishnayot.⁵ The first word, emunah, is linked to Seder Zeraim which deals predominantly with the laws relating to agriculture. Why is agriculture related to emunah? Because the farmer plants his seeds and then has faith

¹ Bamidbar 14:41.

² Shaar HaBitachon (the Gate of Trust), Chapter 3.

³ Gemara Shabbat 31a.

⁴ Yeshayahu 33:6.

⁵ Anybody interested in exploring the link between the other Sedarim and the other words in that pasuk is invited to look at the relevant portion in the Gemara Shabbat 31a and the commentaries on that portion.

in Hashem.⁶ Agricultural work provides an excellent training ground for achieving the balance between hishtadlut and emunah. The farmer first works hard, preparing the ground and planting the seeds. But then, when his work is done, there is nothing physical left for him to do. He then prays that there will be enough rain and that his crops will grow successfully. For this part of his role, he needs to have patience and emunah.

For those of us who are not farmers, how can we know how much hishtadlut we should do? Rav Asher Weiss⁷ tries to provide some practical guidance on this curly question. Firstly, he writes, those of us who are not complete tzaddikim are commanded to conduct ourselves by employing natural means and not relying on miracles. This means that if we need parnassah, we must work. The Midrash⁸ states: "For Hashem has blessed you... If a person does work, then he is blessed. If not, then he is not blessed." This shows that doing hishtadlut through natural means draws down bracha from Hashem.

However, Rav Weiss also teaches that there is no need to over-engage in hishtadlut. Rather, one should put in the appropriate amount of effort and also trust in Hashem. He quotes the Ramchal in Mesillat Yesharim: "[I]t is not the effort that achieves the effect, rather effort is something that is required and, by engaging in it, he has fulfilled his obligation and there is room for Heaven's blessing to shower upon him. There is no need for a person to wear out his days in effort and enterprise."⁹

Rav Weiss then quotes a powerful idea from the Beit HaLevi:¹⁰ "The Torah permits hishtadlut to help one attain the level of one who has complete bitachon. And every person should adopt work and business so that it will be easier for him to trust in Hashem." Rav Weiss explains that all effort that is deemed appropriate in earning a livelihood is only to enable a person to trust in Hashem to give him the living he needs.

Rav Weiss concludes that the exact measure of hishtadlut a person engages in depends on his level of bitachon in Hashem. Nevertheless, a person must engage in natural means in every area of life. He then brings an important quote from the Bet Halevi: "If a person engages in hishtadlut beyond that which is necessary, his punishment will be that from Heaven they will increase the amount of hishtadlut that he needs, so that his livelihood will only come after much hishtadlut – in accordance with the path he has chosen".

So though the exact amount of hishtadlut necessary will vary from person to person, interestingly we can directly affect how much hishtadlut we need based on how much emunah we have and the degree to which we act upon it. The stronger our emunah in Hashem, the less hishtadlut we will be likely to engage in, and the less hishtadlut we will need as a result.

Let's try something this week:

In order to strengthen our emunah and reduce accordingly the risk of exerting too much hishtadlut, we can:

1. Be aware that the outcome is not linked to our hishtadlut. Once we have done our part within nature, we can work on our patience, emunah and tefillah.
2. Try to ask yourself an honest question – "How much hishtadlut does Hashem expect me to do now?" The answer might not always be clear. But at least if we ask ourselves the question, and try to answer it honestly, we will be on the right track, and Hashem will guide us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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⁶ Quoted from the Yerushalmi and the Maharal. Note - Rashi provides a different explanation. He says that the farmers must be trusted to separate the requisite tithes from the produce.

⁷ "On Emunah and Bitachon", Mosaica Press, 2019, p197.

⁸ Yalkut Shimoni, Devarim 408.

⁹ Mesillat Yesharim Chapter 21.

¹⁰ Parashat Miketz.