

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Ki Tavo  
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[darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)  
[www.darchai-noam.com](http://www.darchai-noam.com)

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Parashat Ki Tavo – A fresh new year

When our daughter stepped outside early this morning, she commented that “the air smells fresh”. The seasons are starting to change. Even though the middle of the day is still very hot, the early mornings and the evenings are starting to cool down. In the Northern Hemisphere, Autumn is around the corner.<sup>1</sup> In the Southern Hemisphere, the first hints of spring are in the air. But either way, it is a time of change, a time of newness.

In this week’s Parasha of Ki Tavo, Moshe comes to the end of his long halachic discourse. After enumerating and discussing many of the mitzvot, Moshe finishes with stirring words:

***This day**, Hashem your G-d commands you to perform these decrees and these laws ... with all your heart and with all your soul. You have chosen Hashem **today** to be a G-d for you, and to walk in His ways... and Hashem has chosen you **today** to be for Him a treasured people, as He spoke to you, so that you shall observe all His commandments, and to make you supreme over all the nations, ... and so that you will be a holy people to Hashem your G-d, as He spoke.” (Devarim 26:16-19)*

And in the next chapter, Moshe repeats the message:

*“Moshe and the Kohanim, the Leviim, spoke to all Israel, saying “Pay attention and listen O, Israel. **This day** you shall become a people to Hashem, your G-d, and you shall perform all His commandments and His decrees, which I command you **this day**” (Devarim 27: 9-10)*

Powerful words indeed. But why does Moshe repeat the words “today” and “this day” so often? Moshe said this speech shortly before his death, after 40 years of Bnei Yisrael wondering in the wilderness. It was said shortly before Bnei Yisrael crossed the Jordan River and entered the land. It was almost 40 years earlier that Bnei Yisrael had received the Torah at Har Sinai and were commanded to keep Hashem’s mitzvot.

In his commentary<sup>2</sup>, Rashi explains that every day the commandments should be viewed as new in our eyes, as if we received them today. The Torah and the mitzvot should never become stale and routine.

A well-written piece of literature can sometimes be understood on more than one level. And even some children’s stories contain some content that is clearly meant for the adult reader. The author includes some mature messages which are over the child’s head but geared at the adult reader. But the Torah surpasses all in containing multiple levels of meaning geared at varying ages and levels. It’s quite amazing. The same book is studied by young children, more mature Torah scholars, wise elders, and kabbalistic masters. And they each can understand the same words on their own level. No matter how deeply one looks into the words of the Torah, there is

<sup>1</sup> That’s ‘fall’ for the Americans.

<sup>2</sup> Devarim 16:16.

always something deeper, a different perspective, another lesson that can be learnt. One need never be bored. There is always something new and exciting to discover in the Torah. One just needs to make the effort to search.

It is usually easier to become excited about the mitzvot that occur infrequently. For instance, many may feel excited anticipation for the upcoming chag of Sukkot. In contrast, some mitzvot occur very often. It can often be more of a challenge to keep the freshness in these mitzvot. For example, we recite the Shema, the same words, at least twice every single day of our lives. The Mishnah Berurah specifically instructs us to read the words of the Shema as if they were fresh and new.<sup>3</sup> How can we achieve this when we are reciting the same words day in and day out? If we are willing to invest some effort, there are a number of methods that we can adopt. The Shulchan Aruch and the Chofetz Chaim provide us with some practical advice:

- One should pronounce the words of the Shema slowly and clearly.<sup>4</sup> If we take care to enunciate each word properly, we are more likely to pay attention to the words that we are saying and the Shema can thus become more meaningful.
- One should recite the Shema as if they were willing to give up their life for Hashem, as the pasuk says 'בכל נפשך' (with all of your soul).<sup>5</sup> Just imagine how different our Kriyat Shema will be if we preface it with a mental declaration that we are ready to make the ultimate sacrifice al kiddush Hashem. What an emotional Shema that would be.
- One should recite the Shema as if it were a new proclamation from the king.<sup>6</sup> Imagine how much care one would have to read a new proclamation from a human king. How much more does this apply when we are reading a proclamation from the King of kings.
- When reciting the pasuk in the first paragraph of Shema "ואהבת את ה' אלקיך" (You shall love Hashem, your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources), one should try to stir up a love for Hashem and really feel it in their heart, for otherwise the words they are saying seem to be untrue.<sup>7</sup> Imagine how much more powerful our recitation of Shema will be if we really feel that love in our hearts!

As the seasons change, we can feel the newness and the freshness in the air. Let's take advantage of that feeling to inject some newness and freshness into our mitzvah performance. As we lead up to Rosh Hashana, people often take on an additional small mitzva. Perhaps we can focus on injecting more meaning and kavana into one of the mitzvot that we already do. Let's choose something small and manageable that we can hold on to. Something that helps us to keep the Torah and the mitzvot fresh and new.

Let's try something this week:

1. Take advantage of the changing season to inject some newness and a boost of kavana into an aspect of our mitzvah performance.
2. Try to take on one or more of the suggestions above in relation to Kriyat Shema. Or take on any other change that speaks to you.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>3</sup> Mishnah Berurah, siman 61, seif katan 2.

<sup>4</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, siman 61, seif 1.

<sup>5</sup> Mishnah Berurah, siman 61, seif katan 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, seif katan 4.

<sup>7</sup> Mishnah Berurah, siman 25, seif katan 4, quoting the Sefer Charedim.