

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Lech Lecha
November 2022 / Cheshvan 5783

darchai.noam@gmail.com
www.darchai-noam.com

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Parashat Lech Lecha – The Secret of Seven

In this week's Parasha of Lech Lecha we read about Avraham's journey from his home country of Aram to the land of Canaan. The Midrash fills in some of the details of Avraham's experiences on this fateful journey.

Rabbi Levy said, when Avraham travelled about in Aram Naharayim and Aram Nachor, he saw the inhabitants eating, drinking and acting recklessly. He said, "May I have no portion in this land". When Avraham arrived at the border of the land of Canaan, he saw people weeding at the time of weeding and hoeing at the time of hoeing. He then said, "May my portion be in this land". Hashem then said to Him,¹ "I will give this land to your descendants".

The people of Canaan were certainly not righteous. The Torah tells us numerous times how wicked they were. But they understood the importance of hard work. They knew that if you want to achieve anything in life, you have to put in effort. This was in stark contrast to the lazy and carefree inhabitants of Aram. Avraham recognised this positive middah in them and he respected it.

Understanding the importance of hard work is an important middah, but it needs to be directed appropriately. The Canaanites may have been industrious, but their values were wrong and they engaged in sinful behaviour. When we are caught up in the daily grind of working hard, it is easy to forget the bigger picture – we were put in this world for a reason, to follow the Torah and improve ourselves. When one works hard, one feels they have earned a break, and deserves some entertainment and pleasure after all that effort. Pretty soon it becomes a vicious circle – we work hard in order to earn some fun, and we relax in order to be able to work hard some more.

How do we keep our focus on the big picture? Hashem sends us regular reminders through the message of the number seven. Once every seven days we have Shabbat, which reminds us that Hashem created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. This reminds us that there is a Creator and there is a bigger picture. There is a reason why we are working and what we are working towards. We are building our World to Come. Every week we have the same reminder to ensure that we don't forget this crucial message.

Isn't it interesting that the cycle of seven days does not reflect a natural astronomical event. The day follows the rotation of the Earth on its axis which we experience as the cycle of light and dark. The month follows the rotation of the moon around the sun, which we see as the cycle of the moon as it waxes and wanes. The year reflects the rotation of the Earth around the sun, which we experience as the cycle of the seasons. But there is no astronomical or empirical reason for the seven days of the week, other than to commemorate the act of Creation.

This cycle of seven appears in other places as well. The Ramban² points out that the weekly Shabbat is referred to as a "Shabbat unto Hashem"³ And the same expression is also used in reference to the 'Shabbat of years' – the Shemittah year. Just like we cease productive work on the 'Shabbat of days', we cease from working the land on the 'Shabbat of years'. Just like the Shabbat was given to us for the purpose of contemplating Hashem's deeds and meditating upon His Torah, this is also the purpose of the Shemittah year, since it is the seventh of the years.⁴ There are many other parallels between these two 'sevens' as explored below.

The Ramban quotes the Ibn Ezra who explains that the mystical concept of the days of the world is also alluded to in this concept of Shabbat. The Ramban explains that the six days of creation are representative of all the days of the duration of the world. Just like the world was created in six days, followed by a seventh day of rest, so too

¹ Breishit 12:7.

² In his commentary to Vayikra 25:2, quoting a Baraita in Torat Kohanim.

³ Shmot 20:10.

⁴ The Makor Chaim in his commentary to the Ibn Ezra on this pasuk.

the world will exist for six millennia, followed by a seventh millennium with a cessation of activity.⁵ In this way the number seven also reminds us of the ultimate destiny of the world and the coming of the Moshiach.

The Sefer Charedim⁶ teaches us that there is more to Shabbat than the day itself. The essence of the obligation to remember and guard Shabbat is that the belief in Hashem's creation of the world should be with us throughout the entire week. The obligation to remember Shabbat applies daily and constantly. But how can we ensure that this message of the number seven is infused into our mundane life and our everyday activities?

The story is told of a fox that discovered a beautiful vineyard full of juicy grapes. The only problem was that it was surrounded by a fence and there was only one hole in the fence that was too small for the fox to fit through. But he was a wily fox. He starved himself for three days to lose weight. He was then small enough to squeeze through the hole. He had a wonderful time eating grapes to his heart's content. But all those grapes made him fat again and he couldn't get out of the vineyard! So he had to starve himself for another three days until he was small enough to get out. When he told his friend (who was even smarter than he) about his escapade, his friend told him that he was foolish. He left the vineyard the same way that he came in – hungry. He should rather have thrown some of the grapes over the fence and taken them with him!⁷

We're a bit like that fox. We might enjoy the Shabbat experience during Shabbat itself and be receptive to its significance. But we often leave Shabbat the same way we came in – without much to show for it. How can we throw some of the juicy fruits from Shabbat over the fence and take them with us during the rest of the week? Here are some ideas to consider.

- **Counting the days:** the Hebrew days do not have names, rather they are called Yom Rishon ('Day 1'), Yom Sheni ('Day 2') etc. In this way, each day we are counting up to Shabbat. Every time we mention the day of the week, we are automatically reminded how much closer we are until Shabbat. Similarly, when we count the seven year Shemittah cycle, each year has its own halachot in relation to how we separate tithes, so we are forced to remember where we are holding in the seven year cycle.
- **Preparing for Shabbat:** Since we are not permitted to cook on Shabbat, we have to prepare our food in advance during the six days of the week. If we don't prepare in advance, we will go hungry. Similarly, it is forbidden to work the land during the Shemittah year, therefore one needs to prepare in advance. (Those of us in Israel with a vegetable patch or a garden had to get things in order before the Shemittah year started.) Similarly – now, in this world, is the time to prepare for the world to come.
- **The departure of Shabbat:** When Shabbat departs, we escort Shabbat with words and food – we recite the special prayer of "Vehi Noam" and "V'attah kodesh" after Maariv and we eat an extra meal known as the Melaveh Malka (literally – escorting the Queen). Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus⁸ writes that when we escort Shabbat out in this way, we retain its kedusha for the whole week. He writes that the brachot we receive from Shabbat can be divided into two categories – gashmiyut (material blessings) and ruchniyut (spiritual blessings). When we eat the Melaveh Malka meal, it enables us to hold onto the blessings of gashmiyut for the whole week. And when we recite the special tefillot after Shabbat, we are better able to hold onto the blessings of ruchniyut for the whole week.

We also escort the Shemittah year out with words and food. During the festival of Sukkot following Shemittah, the entire nation would gather together for Hakhel – where the king would read portions of sefer Devarim to strengthen the nation's emunah and remind them of the fundamental lessons that they should take with them. And those of us in Israel are still enjoying eating the holy fruits of Shemittah. Though the Shemittah year might be over, there are many delicious fruits that blossomed during Shemittah but are only now becoming ripe. We still need to treat them as kadosh and dispose of any leftovers appropriately.

Let's try something this week:

1. Make a conscious effort to have Shabbat in mind during the week. Perhaps you can set up the candles or start shopping a few days earlier than usual.
2. Make an effort to eat a proper Melaveh Malka – preferably with bread, or at least mezonot, and some hot food. And have in mind that with this meal you are bringing the kedusha of Shabbat into the week.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

* To subscribe please email darchai.noam@gmail.com

⁵ This does not mean that the Moshiach can only come in the year 6,000. We are obligated to hope and pray for the Mashiach to come every day.

⁶ P 62, no. 33 and p 79 no. 2.

⁷ This is a variation, which I heard, of a more well-known parable which teaches about man's time in this world.

⁸ Nefesh Shimshon, Shabbos Kodesh, p119.