

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat B'shalach  
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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 B'shalach – Practical Emunah

In this week's Parasha of B'shalach, we read of the open miracle of the splitting of the Sea. After Bnei Yisrael came through on dry land, and the Egyptian army was drowned, Bnei Yisrael sang the Song of the Sea – a song of gratitude and praise for the miraculous delivery that Hashem had wrought.

Moshe led the men in song. Separately, Miriam led the women in song.

*Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the tambourines in her hand and all the women went forth after her with tambourines and with dances. (Shmot 15:20)*

The obvious question is - where did the tambourines come from? Bnei Yisrael had been slaves in Mitzrayim and presumably it was uncommon to have musical instruments lying around a slave's house. The Midrash<sup>1</sup> asks this question and provides us with the answer:

*From where did they have tambourines in the Midbar? The Tzaddikim had promised them that Hashem would perform miracles and wonders when they left Mitzrayim and therefore they decided to take tambourines with them.*

It seems that when Bnei Yisrael were instructed to ask their Egyptian neighbours for precious items before they left,<sup>2</sup> the women didn't just think about accumulating wealth, they thought to ask for musical instruments as well. They had such emunah that Hashem would save them with more miracles and wonders that they also wanted to take musical instruments in order to thank Him. That is practical emunah, or bitachon. Their belief was so strong that it was reflected in their actions. And that emunah itself created a positive feedback loop so that it caused all of Bnei Yisrael to merit being saved. As the Gemara<sup>3</sup> teaches us, Beni Yisrael were redeemed in the merit of these righteous women who were in that generation.

We also saw that Bnei Yisrael had bitachon before the tenth plague, when they all obeyed Hashem and slaughtered a sheep or goat and painted the blood on their doorposts. The sheep and goats were worshipped by the Egyptians, so this posed a grave risk. But Bnei Yisrael had perfect faith that Hashem would not allow them to be harmed and this faith was reflected in their actions. Again, this faith was enough to merit miracles. As Rashi states on the pasukim just before the splitting of the sea:<sup>4</sup>

*"...the sea does not stand as a barrier before them. The merit of their forefathers, and of themselves, and the faith they had in Me when they went out [of Egypt] are sufficient to split the sea for them."*

We have seen that when our emunah is strong enough, that emunah can provide us with the merits for our salvation. But when it is not strong enough, we may not merit being saved. Consider the story of the death of Avraham's brother, Haran. Avraham was cast into a fiery furnace by Nimrod for refusing to worship avoda zara. The Midrash<sup>5</sup> tells us that Avraham's brother Haran watched from the sideline, hedging his bets. He decided that he would see what happened to Avraham before deciding whose team to join. When Avraham miraculously emerged unscathed, Haran declared that he was on Avraham's side. He willingly chose to be thrown into the fiery furnace, which is quite a remarkable level of emunah. But he perished. His emunah was not strong enough to warrant a miracle and save his life.

Much of what we do, day to day, is also based on bitachon. We believe, and therefore we act in a certain way, commensurate with that belief. For instance, after the destruction of the second Bet Hamikdash, Rabban

<sup>1</sup> The Mechilta, quoted by Rashi.

<sup>2</sup> See Parashat Bo, Shmot 11:2.

<sup>3</sup> Sotah 11b.

<sup>4</sup> In his commentary to Shmot 14:15, based on the Mechilta.

<sup>5</sup> Breishit Rabba 38:13, quoted by Rashi in his commentary to Breishit 11:28.

Yochanan ben Zakkai made a number of decrees for the purpose of Zecher l'Mikdash (remembering the Bet Hamikdash), including the requirement to shake the lulav every day of Sukkot as they used to do in the Bet Hamikdash (and not just on the first day of Sukkot as was done in other places). All such acts are not just remembering times gone by. Rather, the action is a practical demonstration of our faith that the glory days of the Bet Hamikdash will return.

We see this clearly in a remarkable fashion in one of the decrees that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai made after the destruction – the decree relating to Yashan and Chadash (old and new grains).

Firstly – let's provide some background to this mitzva. The Torah prohibits eating "new grain" until after the korban Omer is offered on the 16<sup>th</sup> Nissan (the first day of Chol Hamoed Pesach). The prohibition applies to the five species of grain – wheat, barley, spelt, oat and rye. The Sefer HaChinuch<sup>6</sup> explains the important message that underlies this mitzva. Grain has always been the most important food that we eat for sustenance.<sup>7</sup> Before we may enjoy the grain crop, we first need to offer a portion of it to Hashem in order to recognise that He is the source of our all of our sustenance.<sup>8</sup> This is similar to the requirement to hold ourselves back from enjoying food until we recite a bracha.

Any grain which took root before the 16<sup>th</sup> Nissan is called Yashan and became permitted after the korban Omer was brought. Any grain which took root after this time was called Chadash, and would only be permitted the following year, after the next korban Omer was offered. (According to most authorities, this prohibition also applies to grain that grew outside of Israel, but the common custom is to be lenient.<sup>9</sup>)

So, during the times of the Bet Hamikdash, Yashan grain became permitted after the korban Omer was brought. But in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash, there is no possibility of bringing the korban Omer. Thus, according to Torah law, Yashan grain becomes permitted immediately upon daybreak of the 16<sup>th</sup> Nissan<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted that Yashan be forbidden for the entire day of the 16<sup>th</sup> and only be permitted the following day. Why did he make such a decree? Because he was concerned that people would get used to eating Yashan grain at daybreak of the 16<sup>th</sup>. When the third Bet Hamikdash is built, Yashan will once again only be permissible from after the time that the korban Omer is brought. To avoid people erring and rushing to eat the grain at daybreak, as they had been used to, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai made a practical halachic decree to deal with this issue. This decree reflects his deep internal bitachon that the Bet Hamikdash will one day be rebuilt. Every time that we wait until 17 Nissan before partaking of Yashan grain, we should remember that we are only doing so because we have emunah that the Bet Hamikdash will be rebuilt!

Many of the mitzvot that we do are to remind us of yetziyat Mitzrayim, and by extension, of the future redemption that will come. There are so many mitzvot and decrees that cause us to remember yetziat Mitzrayim. These are all opportunities for us to hold strong during the long, difficult exile and be buoyed by the fact that we will be saved again. Each time we perform these mitzvot we should see this as an opportunity to boost our emunah.

Let's try something this week:

1. Be aware of how many mitzvot are to remind us of the Bet Hamikdash and yetziat Mitzrayim. Try to internalise the message that "just like we were redeemed from Mitzrayim, so too we will be redeemed from this galut"; "just like we had a Bet Hamikdash in the past, so too we will have one again in the future".
2. Next time you are looking to buy a grain-based product – look at the hechsher and check whether it contains certified Yashan grain.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>6</sup> Parashat Emor, Mitzvah 403.

<sup>7</sup> With apologies to those with coeliacs.

<sup>8</sup> Whenever we provide a 'reason' for a mitzva it is important to point out that this is not 'the real reason', but rather just an idea that we can learn. The real reason that we perform any mitzva is simply because Hashem told us to do so.

<sup>9</sup> In Israel, grains are typically grown in the winter and harvested after Pesach, which means that most grains that season will become permitted after the 16<sup>th</sup> Nissan. However, in Europe and America, grains are also grown during Spring and are often planted after Pesach. This means that historically it has been quite difficult to keep this halacha outside of Israel.

There is a widespread custom to be lenient about Chadash outside of Israel. This is based on a number of arguments. (These reasons are beyond the scope of this article, but in brief they include – relying on a double doubt, perhaps the halacha is only a rabbinic law outside of Israel and perhaps it doesn't apply to grain grown by non-Jews.) However, some authorities question whether the lenient position is valid. The Vilna Gaon was very strongly against the lenient position.

<sup>10</sup> Rashi to Masechet Sukkah 41a.