

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Shmot
January 2018 / Tevet 5778

darchai.noam@gmail.com
www.divreitorah.net/darchai-noam

How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Shmot – rising above your personal concerns

This week we start reading the book of Shmot. The transition from Sefer Breishit to Sefer Shmot represents the transition from a family to a nation. While the book of Breishit focuses on the Avot and their families, the book of Shmot concerns Bnei Yisrael, the children of Yaakov who constitute the beginnings of the nation of Israel.¹

This phenomenon is supported by Rav Hutner's observation that the death of all of the Avot are mentioned in Sefer Breishit.² With the death of Yaakov in Parshat Vayechi, the book of Breishit and the story of the 'family' comes to a close. In contrast, the death of Yaakov's children is only mentioned in Sefer Shmot:

“And Yosef died and all of his brothers and all of that generation” (Parshat Shmot, Shmot 1:6)

This is because, as noted above, the book of Shmot focuses on the story of Yaakov's children as they become the nation of Israel.

However, Yosef seems to be an exception to this rule. He is the only one of Yaakov's sons whose death spans both Sefarim. Yosef's death is mentioned both at the very end of Sefer Breishit³ and also at the beginning of Sefer Shmot. It seems that Yosef straddles two generations. On the one hand he is a son of Yaakov like the other brothers, but on the other hand he is considered in some respects equivalent to the Avot.

On the one hand, Yosef isn't in the same class as Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov. We refer to the “three Avot” and not the “four Avot”. In the first bracha of the Shmoneh Esreh, we refer to “Elokai Avraham, Elokai Yitzchak and Elokai Yaakov” but we don't refer to “Elokai Yosef”. Furthermore, Yosef is not buried with Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov in the Cave of Machpelah in Chevron. On the other hand, we see that Yosef attains a status which is somewhat akin to the Avot. For example:

- Yosef is the only one of the brothers whose children, Ephraim and Menashe, become tribes in their own right. In this respect he is similar to Yaakov.
- As the viceroy of Egypt, Yosef sustains and cares for the entire family – a role more akin to an Av than a member of Bnei Yisrael.
- On each night of Sukkot we welcome one of the Ushpizin – a special visitor from amongst the greatest leaders of our history. Yosef is the only one of the 12 brothers that joins with the three Avot and has the honour of being one of the Ushpizin.

One of the disagreements that Yosef had with his brothers might be explained by his unique perspective and role in this regard. We saw in Parshat Vayeshev that Yosef reported negatively about his brothers' behaviour to Yaakov.⁴ One of the examples brought by Rashi is that the brothers would eat 'ever min hachai' (the limb of a living animal). One of the seven Noahide laws that applies to all of mankind is the prohibition of eating the limb from a live animal. We can understand the temptation to do so. In the days before refrigeration, fresh meat would not last long. If one felt like a steak, it would be a shame to slaughter an entire cow. It would be far more economical (albeit extremely cruel) to keep the cow alive and simply

¹ See the Ramban, in the introduction to his commentary on Sefer Shmot.

² This idea is mentioned by Rav Yehoshua Gefen in his article “Joseph's Strength”: <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/gl/135822018.html>, based on Rav Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Pesach, Ma'amar 49.

³ Parshat Vayechi, Breishit 50:26.

⁴ Parshat Vayeshev, Breishit 37:2.

remove one of its legs for dinner and save the rest of the cow for another time. How could Yosef's brothers commit such a cruel act?

This has been explained as follows⁵. The Jewish people have the mitzvah of Shechita (ritual slaughter). Once an animal has been shechted correctly its body may continue to move around for a short while. However this is merely an involuntary reflex. The animal is already considered to be dead and can no longer feel any pain⁶. Therefore, it is permitted to remove a limb from the shechted animal even before it stops moving. However, the law that applies to Noahides (who do not shecht their animals) is that the animal must stop moving completely before a limb can be removed. The brothers understood that they already had the status of Am Yisrael – the nation of Israel. Therefore the laws of Shechita applies and they were able to remove a limb from a shechted animal before it had stopped moving. However, perhaps because of his status as a 'pseudo-Av', Yosef saw events through this lens. Thus he viewed his generation as still being a family rather than a nation. From Yosef's perspective, it makes sense that the Noahide laws would still apply because they were not yet a nation. Consequently, he deemed the brothers' actions as 'ever <https://aish.com/yosef-and-his-brothers-the-anatomy-of-a-sale/> min hachai' and a breach of the Noahide laws that applied to them.

How did Yosef merit to rise above his brothers and almost achieve the status of the Avot? We can suggest that Yosef's main achievement was that he was able to put aside his personal concerns and focus on the bigger picture and the needs of others. This can be seen in at least three examples:

- Yosef's remarkable ability to overlook his brothers' terrible deeds to him and his ability to see the bigger picture: "But now don't be sad, and don't let it trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that Hashem sent me here before you".⁷
- Why didn't Yosef contact his father during his 22 year absence? Many commentators have struggled with this question and a number of answers have been suggested. Some commentators point out that if Yosef would have sent a message to his father about what happened, his brothers would have fled from the embarrassment. It would have destroyed the family. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch states it as follows: "What would Yaakov gain in getting one son back, if in the process he would lose ten?"⁸ To be reunited with his father would have been a wonderful outcome for Yosef on a personal level but it could have had tragic consequences for the family. Therefore Yosef chose to keep quiet.⁹
- When Pharaoh brought Yosef out of prison and asked him to interpret his dreams about the cows and the wheat, he said "I heard that you know how to interpret dreams". This was Yosef's chance to finally be released from prison and perhaps receive a generous reward. It would be perfectly understandable for Yosef to engage in a little "marketing" and talk up his talents.¹⁰ However, Yosef put aside his chances of personal success and used this as an opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem. He replied: "I can't do this. Hashem will give you the answer in relation to your welfare".¹¹

Let's try something this week:

Let's try to emulate Yosef and look for opportunities to focus on the bigger picture and the needs of the klal (the community) rather than our own personal needs.

⁵ See article by Rav Zev Leff: <https://aish.com/yosef-and-his-brothers-the-anatomy-of-a-sale/>

⁶ This is similar to the tail of a lizard that will continue to move around after being removed from the lizard. It is also similar to a chicken whose head has been removed that can remarkably continue to run around the yard for a little while (hence the saying "running around like a headless chook"). This is explained scientifically as follows: a neural network in the spinal cord is pre-programmed to direct the muscles in various frequently used movement patterns: <http://sciencenordic.com/why-do-headless-chickens-run>

⁷ Parshat Vayigash, Breishit 45:5.

⁸ Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, commentary on Breishit 42:9.

⁹ This idea was brought by Rabbi Ari Kahn in "The Beauty of Joseph": <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48909612.html>

¹⁰ This idea is brought by Rav Yehoshua Gefen in the article quoted above.

¹¹ Parshat Miketz, Breishit 41:16.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

*** **

About Darchai Noam

Darchai Noam is available online at www.divreitorah.net/darchai-noam. You can access this week's edition of Darchai Noam, archived back issues of Darchai Noam and other divrei Torah.

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.

If you know someone who might enjoy receiving this email please feel free to pass it on to them or email me their details so I can add them to the subscription list.

You are welcome to use the content of this email in any way that will help to spread the learning of Torah. However please attribute credit appropriately.

Many of the ideas that I use in Darchai Noam are based on ideas that I read or heard from various sources. Where possible I try to quote the source. However in some cases I cannot recall the source. For that I apologise. If I do discuss an idea that I heard from somewhere else, any errors are purely my own.

Darchai Noam is available online at www.divreitorah.net/darchai-noam. You can access this week's edition of Darchai Noam, archived back issues of Darchai Noam and other divrei Torah.

How to subscribe or unsubscribe

If you would like to subscribe or unsubscribe to Darchai Noam, please send an email to darchai.noam@gmail.com with the word 'subscribe' or 'unsubscribe' in the subject.