

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Bamidbar
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Bamidbar – What is my job?

This week's Parsha of Bamidbar begins with the census of Bnei Yisrael. It continues by discussing the formation of the tribes as they travelled through the desert. The tribe of Levi are counted separately, and they are positioned in a place of prominence in the centre of the camp. The Parsha ends with the allocation of certain special jobs to the Leviim. This week's Parsha focuses on the family of Kehat, one of Levi's three sons. (Next week, Parshat Naso teaches about Gershon and Merari, Levi's other two sons.)

The role of the Leviim was to transport the parts of the Mishkan as Bnei Yisrael travelled through the desert. The Torah allocates the various parts of the Mishkan to the various families of the tribe of Levi. In his commentary to the Torah, the Ramban explains that each individual Levite was allocated a precise responsibility – for example, this person shall carry this number of planks and that person shall carry this number of bars or pillars. It was forbidden for one Levite to pass on to another Levite his particular responsibility.

The Leviim were also assigned various other jobs relating to the Mishkan and the Bet Hamikdash. Some were assigned to the choir that sang while the Kohanim performed their service. Others were designated as gate keepers. Others had various administrative tasks related to the running of the Bet Hamikdash. The Ramban teaches us an astounding halacha – a Levite who performed a task that was not assigned to him was liable to the death penalty!

Imagine the following scenario. Young Chezki Levi was a singer in the choir at the time of the Bet Hamikdash. His neighbour, Mr Levi Senior was assigned the job of gatekeeper. On his way home from work one day, Chezki noticed Mr Levi Senior struggling to close a heavy gate. Chezki offered to give him a hand. “Back off!” shouted Mr Levi Senior. “Don't touch this gate! This is my responsibility, not yours. If you help me you will be liable to the death penalty!”

How can we understand this strange halacha? What is the harm in a young, strong Levite helping his older friend to close a heavy gate?

It seems clear that Hashem does not just want the Leviim to get their jobs done as quickly and efficiently as possible. The Leviim were each Divinely assigned a specific role for a reason. Their job was to fulfil that role to the best of their ability.

Similarly, Hashem gives each of us a unique role to play in His world. Hashem placed us into our particular circumstances for a reason and trusts us to use all of our resources to achieve our tafkid. We must trust Him that He has given us what we need to achieve our task. Our job is just to be the best we can in the role that has been assigned to us, and not to compare our role to someone else's role.

We often find ourselves in situations that we would prefer not to be in. Instead of complaining or trying to pass the responsibility on to others, we need to realise that Hashem has put us into this position for a reason and He has given us all the tools and abilities that we need to succeed.

Reuven came home from a hard day at work, and he was looking forward to relaxing. But when he came home he found the house in a mess and the children crying. His wife looked frazzled. Reuven's job is to forgo his relaxing evening and help his wife to restore order. And to do it with a smile.

Sometimes we think that we have a particular role to fulfil. It might even be a very noble role and we are certain that Hashem would approve. But Hashem has designated a different role for us.

Shimon finally sat down in his study with his Gemara. He was behind in his Daf Yomi shiur, and he finally had some spare time to catch up. As soon as he opened the Gemara, his daughter came in with a request for help in her school assignment. Shimon had to work hard to control his temper. He had presumed that his role was to learn Torah, but then he realised that Hashem had other plans for him. His job right now was to help his daughter with patience and a full heart.

Mrs Klein carefully carried the steaming hot meal into her car. She was on her way to deliver a chesed meal to an elderly acquaintance who was unwell. Unfortunately, the car would not start. Mrs Klein had to organise for a friend to deliver the meal and she spent the rest of the morning waiting for roadside assistance. She thought that her role was to deliver the meal herself, but perhaps her role was actually to hone her middah of patience and to allow another person to share the merit of carrying out this particular act of chesed.

It takes a lot of emunah and humility to be content with the various roles that Hashem assigns for us over our lifetime. Hashem decides what is best for us and we are not in a position to question Him. Truly serving Hashem means doing what He wants us to do and when He wants us to do it. Even if we are thwarted from doing a mitzvah, we must realise that this is still Hashem's will for us. Feeling angry that we are missing out on a chance to do a particular mitzvah demonstrates that we are really doing what we want to do instead of doing His will.

We also should not look down on other people that have what seems to be a lowly or unimportant job. They too were given their role by Hashem.

The upcoming chag of Shavuot reminds us that there is one role in particular that Hashem has given to all of us. We all have the job of cherishing the Torah, learning it, keeping its mitzvot and doing our best not to transgress it. To the best of our G-d-given abilities.

Let's try something this week:

1. The next time that we find ourselves in a role that we don't relish, try to remember the lesson of the tasks of the Leviim – Hashem allocates our particular tasks to us deliberately and our job is to serve Hashem on His terms, not ours.
2. Remember that Hashem gives each of us the tasks that are most appropriate for our neshamot, and He has given us the unique set of skills required to carry them out.