

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Beha'alotcha  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Beha'alotcha – Understanding your true ratzon

In this week's Torah portion of Beha'alotcha we read about the first Pesach offering of Bnei Yisrael since their redemption from Mitzrayim. Certain people who were tamei at the time of the giving of the korban were precluded from participating. They were impure due to the performance of a mitzva<sup>1</sup> and they were disappointed that they could not participate in this sacrifice. They complained to Moshe and Moshe asked Hashem what to do. Hashem told Moshe that would have another chance to offer the korban Pesach a month later, thereby instigating Pesach Sheni. Rashi<sup>2</sup> explains that this law of Pesach Sheni would have been given through Moshe, but this group of people merited that the law would be given through them because of their pure intentions to do the mitzva.

Later in Bamidbar, we see a similar scenario in the story of Tzelophchad's five daughters. According to the halacha, land is inherited by the sons. However, Tzelophchad died with no sons. Tzelophchad's daughters had such a strong love for the Promised Land that they wanted to inherit a portion from their father. Again, Moshe asked Hashem what to do and Hashem taught Moshe the laws of inheritance in a case when there are daughters but no sons. Because of their pure intentions to fulfil the mitzva of settling the land, Tzelophchad's daughters merited these laws of inheritance being taught through their initiation.

The importance of the purity of our motives is highlighted in a story told by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon about a halachic question that he received from soldiers during the 2014 Gaza War. These soldiers wanted to know how they could pray while in their tanks. The soldiers had to reside in their tanks for long stretches of time, they could not leave the tank in the middle of battle to relieve themselves. But it is forbidden to pray in the vicinity of a disgusting smell, such as urine. On hearing the question, a colleague of Rav Rimon remarked: "I don't understand the problem. This is a clear case of 'oness' – they are not allowed to pray in these circumstances, so they are exempt from the obligation to do so." "You don't understand", replied Rav Rimon, "these people *want* to pray. They are asking me to find a way to allow them to do so!" Rav Rimon came up with a creative solution for these soldiers involving a box and some air freshener.

Another story concerns two famous brothers – Rebbi Elimelech of Lizensk and Rebbi Zushe of Anipoli. Once, in their travels through Eastern Europe, they were mistakenly thrown into prison with a group of thieves. As the afternoon progressed, Rebbi Elimelech realised the time and he mentioned to his brother that it was time to pray Mincha. Rebbi Zushe told him that it was forbidden to pray in the presence of a bucket that was functioning as a smelly toilet in the middle of the cell. Rebbi Elimelech became upset when he realised that he would have to miss out on

<sup>1</sup> According to different opinions, these people were tamei either because they were responsible for carrying Yosef's coffin, they had removed the bodies of Nadav and Avihu from the Kodosh Hakodashim, or they had attended to the burial of a met mitzva. It could be that there was a group of people consisting of all three cases.

<sup>2</sup> Bamidbar 8:7.

Mincha. "Why are you upset?" asked Rebbi Zushe. "The same G-d who commanded us to pray also commanded us to not to pray when the room is unfit for prayer. Normally you serve Hashem by praying to Him. Now you can serve Hashem by *not* praying!" Upon realising this, Rebbi Elimelech became very happy. The two brothers felt so overjoyed that they were serving Hashem in the best way possible under the circumstances that they started dancing! Hearing the commotion, the guards came in to see what was happening. The other prisoners told the guards that the two brothers seemed to be celebrating the bucket in the middle of the room. The guards snickered: "We'll show those crazy Jews!" and they removed the bucket. Ironically, the two holy brothers were then able to pray Mincha without the stench.

It is often very difficult to work out what our true motivations are. There are usually a number of motivations behind each action. Some of those motivations are pure, and some are less so. For example, the impure people who missed out on the korban Pesach may have felt bad about missing out on the delicious barbecue and the enjoyable feast on the night of Pesach. Tzeloachad's daughters could have been complaining because they wanted personal wealth. By introducing new laws through these groups of people Hashem Himself was testifying that their intentions were in fact pure.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we are prevented from carrying out a mitzva that we are supposed to perform. How do we feel about that? Are we disappointed or relieved? And even if we are disappointed, it may be helpful to ask ourselves what is the true source of our desire to perform the mitzva? Is it to serve Hashem or is it to serve ourselves?

On the one hand, we should desire to serve Hashem, like the impure people who wanted to offer the Pesach korban and the soldiers in the tank that wanted to pray. But on the other hand, we must sometimes accept that Hashem puts us in certain situations for a reason and we have to serve Hashem to the best of our ability in the circumstances in which we are placed, like Rebbi Elimelech and Rebbi Zushe. It is often difficult to know which approach is correct. However, one thing is certain, if our ratzon comes from a **true** desire to serve Hashem then Hashem knows this and ultimately we will be rewarded with only good. But if our ratzon comes from a desire to serve ourselves, then there is room for improvement.

We are human. Whenever we make a decision there is always a mixture of motivations, some of which come from a pure and selfless place, and some of which come from a less pure place. For example, if Reuven decides to stay back late in the office, he may be motivated by any one or more of the following motivations:

- a fear of losing his job;
- earning extra money so that he can support his family;
- avoiding helping his wife put the kids to sleep; or
- a desire to upgrade his car so that he can keep up with his next-door neighbour.

How can we discover our true motivations? This ultimately requires introspection, honesty and hard work. There will always be a mixture of motivations driving every decision, but we can choose to slowly, gradually and patiently sort through them, identify them and work on strengthening the pure ones.

Let's try something this week:

1. Set aside time to honestly, openly and thoroughly examine our motivations for our desires to perform mitzvot and other actions.
2. Ask Hashem for assistance in strengthening our pure motivations, and patiently and gradually try to act from a purer place.