

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Terumah  
February 2024 / Adar I 5784

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Terumah – Hidden bracha

In this week's Parasha of Terumah we read about the design of the Mishkan and its utensils, including the Aron, the Shulchan (table) and the Menorah. The Parasha provides us with many details of the utensils, including their appearance and dimensions. There are many kabbalistic secrets within these details, most of which are not accessible to ordinary people like us<sup>1</sup>. But let us explore some ideas from the Ramban on one of these details – the crown that was placed around the edge of the Shulchan.

We'll start with the pasukim in the Torah:

*You shall make a Shulchan of acacia wood, two amot its length, one amah its width, and an amah and a half its height. You shall cover it with pure gold, and you shall make for it a golden crown all around.*  
(Shmot 25:23-24)

In his commentary, Rashi explains that the crown is symbolic of the crown of kingship, for the table represents wealth and greatness, as the saying goes: 'a table of kings'.

The Ramban cites Rashi and agrees with his explanation. The Ramban then explains the deeper meaning of the Shulchan. Hashem's creation of the world was a one-time creation of something out of nothing when Hashem created all of the matter and energy that would be needed for all time.<sup>2</sup> From the time that the world was created, Hashem's bracha is never created out of nothingness, but always comes as an extension of something that is pre-existing. After creation, Hashem set up the world to operate according to its established patterns. He chose not to create 'something out of nothing' anymore.<sup>3</sup> Rather, when there is a natural, existing basis from which a bracha can evolve, Hashem allows a bracha to take effect on that existing thing and cause it to increase. In this way, Hashem bestows His bracha in a more hidden way.

We see this concept in the story of Elisha the prophet and the widow.<sup>4</sup> The widow was in a desperate financial situation and her two sons were about to be taken away as slaves. She turned to Elisha for help. Elisha asked her if she had anything at all in her house. She replied that all she had was one jug of oil. Elisha told her to borrow as many vessels as she could from her neighbours and to close the door to her house. She was then to pour the oil from her one small jug into the other vessels. She did so and the oil miraculously continued to flow until all of the other vessels were full. The widow was then able to sell this oil and pay off her debts and support herself and her children from the proceeds. However, for our purposes, the relevant aspect is that Elisha did not simply provide her with oil from out of nowhere. Rather, he used what she already had. As long as there was some oil to start with, this provided a natural basis on which Elisha's bracha could then take effect.

A similar incident took place with Elisha's teacher, Eliyahu HaNavi when he blessed another poor widow with a never-ending supply of ingredients during a terrible drought: 'The pitcher of flour shall not end, nor will the flask of oil be diminished until the day that Hashem will give rain upon the land.'<sup>5</sup>

The Ramban explains that this was how the Shulchan worked. There was a requirement to constantly have Lechem Hapanim ('show-bread') on the Shulchan. This bread was replaced by the Kohanim each week.<sup>6</sup> Our material wealth and livelihood was provided through the Shulchan. The bracha of plenty attached to the Lechem Hapanim and through that, it flowed to the whole world. This was the underlying reason why there had to be bread on the table constantly, so that there was something tangible on which Hashem's bracha could attach, thus

<sup>1</sup> With apologies to any Kabbalists that happen to be reading this.

<sup>2</sup> The Kabbalists explain that on a deeper level, the act of creation was actually a creation of "nothing out of something" rather than "something out of nothing". Hashem is the only true 'something' and this world, which in some respects is an absence of Hashem, even though it seems real to us, is actually 'nothing' in comparison to Hashem.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, Hashem can create something from nothing whenever He likes. But He chose to set up the world in this way.

<sup>4</sup> Melachim II, Chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> Melachim I, 17:14.

<sup>6</sup> Vayikra 24:5-9.

ensuring that the flow of bounty into the world did not cease. The Rambam concludes that this is why the Kohanim who ate even a small piece of Lechem Hapanim would be satisfied. The small amount of bread miraculously increased in the innards of the Kohanim, in a more hidden manner, enough to satiate them.

Let us explain this concept with a parable. A magician wishes to impress his crowd with a 'magic' trick. First he shows that there is nothing up his sleeves. Then he waves his magic wand and recites 'Abracadabra'.<sup>7</sup> Then, with the aid of smoke and mirrors, and sleight of hand, he 'miraculously' pulls a rabbit out of his hat. This looks like an open miracle! Something created out of nothing! Now imagine another magician who is somewhat less popular. He places a bowl of oats on the table in front of the audience, mumbles some magic words and waves his wand. Ta dah! But nothing seems to have happened. The audience looks non-plussed. The magician then explains that if they would carefully measure the contents of the bowl, they would see that it now contains 20% more oats than it did before!

In this world, Hashem chooses to act in a hidden way. The Hebrew word for 'world' (olam) shares a root with the word 'helem', which means hidden. This alludes to the idea that Hashem is hidden in this world. This makes it more difficult for us to 'see' Him, thus allowing us to have free will. If Hashem would perform open miracles all the time it would be impossible to deny that He was involved. But if He rather increases something that is already in existence, this miracle is less noticeable and those that want to deny Hashem (and consequently avoid the obligations of the Torah), are more easily able to do so. For example, they can deny that there was any increase and explain that perhaps they didn't measure accurately the first time.<sup>8</sup> By acting in a hidden manner, Hashem allows us to have free will. But this also means that when we do manage to see and acknowledge Hashem in the situation, our reward is so much greater, corresponding to the greater level of difficulty.

Similarly, our parnassah comes from Hashem, but it comes in a hidden manner. Hashem wants us to put in the hishtadlut (effort) and perform work and thereby make it appear natural. But in reality, our work is simply a tax which must be paid to open up the channels through which Hashem's bounty can flow. By doing our work, we provide something tangible through nature and Hashem then increases it in a hidden manner.

We see this concept reflected in practical halacha. The Shulchan Aruch<sup>9</sup> rules that one who has not yet counted his grain can daven for it to increase in quantity. But once he has counted the grain, it is no longer permitted to ask Hashem to increase it. The quantity has already been established and we are not allowed to daven for nature to be overturned openly. To ask Hashem to increase his grain at that time would therefore be a prayer in vain. Perhaps this is a reason to be a bit less precise with our financial records!<sup>10</sup>

(Actually, on second thoughts, we do need to be precise with our accounts, so that we can accurately calculate the 10% (or 20%) maaser money for tzedakah.)

This concept also underlies one of the halachot of brachot. One who enjoys this world without reciting a bracha is compared to a thief.<sup>11</sup> A thief is someone who misappropriates something against the wishes of the owner. Hashem owns everything in the world, and He gives us permission to enjoy the fruits of His world, but we must recite a bracha before we eat. If we eat an apple before reciting a bracha, we are in effect misappropriating the apple, and that is a form of thievery. But the Kabbalists explain this concept from a different perspective. They explain that when we recite a bracha, we are asking Hashem to replace the food that we are about to eat. And He listens. Thus, if we take and eat an apple without replacing it, that would be misappropriating the apple. So we must recite the bracha before we eat, in order for there to be something on which the bracha can attach. Once the apple is eaten, it is too late for the bracha to take effect and too late to replace the apple. If we don't pay back the apple (by reciting a bracha), we have in effect stolen the apple.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem acts in a hidden manner in this world which makes it more difficult for us to notice His miracles and kindnesses.
2. We have to search harder to find Hashem in this world, but we can rest assured that our efforts will be rewarded.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>7</sup> Today's interesting fact: 'Abracadabra' is actually based on Aramaic words which mean "I create" (A Bara) "as I speak" (c'Dabra or 'Dibbur') which is what Hashem did when He created the world through speech, something from nothing.

<sup>8</sup> In the story with Elisha, the miracle of the oil was certainly noticeable, that is why Elisha told the widow to close her door before she started pouring, so no-one else would see. But the principle is the same, the bracha could only attach to something that was already in existence.

<sup>9</sup> Orach Chaim 230:2.

<sup>10</sup> But please check with your LOA (Local Orthodox Accountant) before making any changes to your financial record keeping procedures.

<sup>11</sup> Brachot 35b.