

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayechi
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darchai.noam@gmail.com
www.darchai-noam.com

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vayechi – Seeing how the pieces of the puzzle fit together

In this week's Parsha of Vayechi, we read about Yaakov ordering his affairs before he passes away. He asks his son Yosef to swear that he, Yaakov, will not be buried in the land of Egypt. Instead, Yaakov wants to be buried in the familial burial plot in Ma'arat Hamachpelah, Chevron together with Avraham and Sarah, Yitzhak and Rivka, Leah, Adam and Chava.¹ Later, Yaakov mentions to Yosef the incident of Rachel's death and her burial.²

Rashi explains the relevance of Yaakov mentioning the topic of Rachel's burial at this time.³ Yaakov was aware that his request for a proper burial may stir up feelings of resentment in Yosef. Yosef may have been wondering why Yaakov simply buried his mother Rachel on the side of the road. Why didn't Yaakov bury her with respect in Ma'arat Hamachpelah? Or at least he could have buried her in the city of Bethlehem when they got to town? Yaakov explained to Yosef that Rachel was buried specifically in that place on the side of the road because that was Hashem's will, and it was all for the best. However, at this point in time, this explanation probably made very little sense. How could it possibly be for the best for Yosef's deceased mother to be treated with such disrespect?!?

Over 1,000 years later, after the destruction of the first Bet Hamikdash, Bnei Yisrael were being led to exile in Bavel. They were distraught, presuming that this was the end of the Jewish people. The Bet Hamikdash was destroyed, the kingdom had been conquered. It seemed that all was lost.

There is a beautiful Midrash⁴ describing what happened next. Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Moshe all begged Hashem to show mercy on His people. But Hashem did not agree to change the decree. Then Rachel stepped up and asked Hashem why He was so angry. Was it because the Jewish people had brought idols into the Bet Hamikdash? Rachel pointed out that she had actively allowed Leah into her home and to be married to her intended husband, just to save Leah from embarrassment! If Rachel could allow another woman into her home, surely Hashem could forgive Bnei Yisrael for bringing foreign idols into His home. Hashem accepted Rachel's argument. He comforted Rachel and reassured her that her children would return to the land and re-build the Bet Hamikdash.

As Bnei Yisrael were led towards Bavel, they travelled along this same road that Yaakov and his family had walked over 1,000 years earlier. They passed the burial site of their “Mama Rochel”. No doubt they received chizuk, knowing that their mother was crying out for them and begging for mercy on their behalf. It was only then, 1,000 years after her burial that it became apparent why Rachel needed to be buried exactly in that place. Only then could the Jewish People finally appreciate Hashem's wisdom and Yaakov's seemingly disrespectful choice of burial plot for Rachel.

¹ Breishit 47:29-31.

² Breishit 47:7. The story of Rachel's death and burial appears in Parashat Vayishlach, Breishit 35:18-20.

³ Rashi's commentary to pasuk 7. The following description is based on the explanation brought by Rashi.

⁴ Breishit Rabbah 82:10.

This teaches us an important lesson. So many events happen in the world that are apparently random. But when we take a broader perspective, we can sometimes see why Hashem willed things to happen in a certain way.

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Since then, for almost three years, Russia and the Ukraine have been engaged in a bitter war. Meanwhile, after absorbing almost daily missiles from Hezbollah for a year, in late 2024 Israel finally responded with force. In a series of brilliantly executed operations, the IDF managed to destroy Hezbollah's leadership, put many of their elite fighters out of action and destroy most of their stockpile of weapons. Hezbollah was forced to agree to a ceasefire. But their sponsor Iran was determined to resupply them with weapons and funding to continue their evil designs. Iran had a land bridge to Lebanon, through Iraq and Syria and it would only be a matter of time before Hezbollah would be restocked. But then, a miracle occurred. In a lightning blitz, the rebels in Syria managed to overthrow the Assad regime and seize control of the entire country. One of the first things they did was seal the border and cut off the Iranian supply route to Hezbollah.

How were the rebels able to achieve such a stunning victory in such a short time? Assad was propped up by Iran (through Hezbollah) and Russia. Hezbollah was out of action and 'coincidentally' Russia was deeply entrenched in their war with Ukraine and thus unable to help. Without the support of Iran or Russia, Assad's regime crumbled like a house of cards. Now Iran's ability to restock Hezbollah is severely hampered and our displaced residents should finally be able to start returning to their homes in Northern Israel. Perhaps that is why Russia 'decided' to invade Ukraine at that time. Who knows, perhaps Hashem put the idea into Putin's head specifically at that time so as to help protect Israel's northern border!

There are many stories of hashgacha pratit (Divine providence) on a personal level, particularly in the area of shidduchim. The Gemara⁵ brings proof from throughout Tanach that Hashem arranges shidduchim. The obvious question is that *everything* comes from Hashem. So why does the Gemara single out shidduchim? The Chazon Ish explains⁶ that Hashem runs the whole world with hashgacha pratit, but usually it is done under the guise of nature. Even though everything appears natural, it is up to us to see behind nature and to realise that everything is really from Hashem. However, Hashem deliberately left one area – shidduchim – where His hashgacha pratit is more clearly revealed. Everything about shidduchim is miraculous. Many events have to take place in order for two people to meet and a shidduch to be arranged. Most married people will have a personal hashgacha pratit story about meeting and marrying their spouse. And from that we should learn that everything is hashgacha pratit.

Sometimes, we see Hashem's hashgacha very clearly and quickly. But sometimes it can take over 1,000 years to understand why things happened the way they did, like the case of Rachel's burial. And often we never see in this World how the pieces of the puzzle fit together. But Hashem's hashgacha is always there. The trick is to believe it exists, even when we don't see it.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to look out for examples of hashgacha pratit in your own life. When you see them, say thank to you Hashem and keep a record of it.
2. Even when things do not appear to make sense to you, remember that Hashem is in charge and He is running the world. And He has a plan.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

* To subscribe please email darchai.noam@gmail.com

⁵ Moed Katan 18b.

⁶ See Torah Wellsprings, Chayei Sarah by Rabbi Elimelech Biderman.