

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נעם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayechi  
January 2026 / Tevet 5786

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Vayechi – Bread in your basket

In this week's Parasha of Vayechi, we read about the death of Yaakov Avinu. When Yaakov is lying on his deathbed, he calls his sons together for a parting message:

*“Yaakov called for his sons and said, “Gather and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days.”* (Breishit 49:1)

Rashi explains that Yaakov wanted to reveal to his sons when the Moshiach would come at the end of days. However, Yaakov does not do so. Instead, he blessed his sons and instructed them about his burial. He didn't reveal any information about the “End of Days”. The Midrash<sup>1</sup> explains that Yaakov intended to reveal to his sons when the Moshiach would arrive, but Hashem didn't want him to do so. When Yaakov tried to reveal this information, Hashem's Shechinah departed from Yaakov, causing him to forget the information and thereby preventing him from doing so. Why would Hashem not want Yaakov to reveal this information? In order to explore this issue, we need to explain a concept known as ‘pat b'salo’.

The Gemara in Yoma<sup>2</sup> describes the service that was performed on Yom Kippur in the days of the Bet Hamikdash. Part of the service involved taking two identical goats. One of the goats was offered as a korban to Hashem. The other goat was taken to a cliff located twelve mil<sup>3</sup> outside of Jerusalem (known as Azazel). The goat was thrown off the cliff. This was one of the highlights of the Yom Kippur avodah. When the goat was thrown off the cliff, a strip of red material would miraculously turn white, as a sign that the sins of the Jewish people had been forgiven.

One person was designated in advance for this important job of taking the goat to the cliff. The Mishnah describes the trek to the cliff. Ordinarily, it is forbidden to travel beyond two mil from the perimeter of a city or village on Shabbat or Yom Kippur<sup>4</sup>. This boundary is known as the techum.<sup>5</sup> In order to solve this problem on Yom Kippur, a series of huts were set up intermittently along the way to extend the perimeter of the city. Consequently, the man was halachically allowed to take the goat all the way to the cliff.

At each of these huts, people were stationed to encourage him. They would say to him, “Here is food and here is drink.” It was similar to the people who line the streets during a fun run to cheer and encourage the runners.<sup>6</sup>

But there is an obvious problem with this Gemara. The event took place on Yom Kippur when we have to fast. So why were the people even offering this man food and drink?!?

Actually, the Gemara goes on to say that none of those designated to take the goat ever had a need for this food and drink. So what was the point of offering it to him? The Rabbis here reveal a very profound insight into human psychology. It involves a concept that the Gemara refers to as ‘פת בסלו’ – ‘bread in his

<sup>1</sup> Breishit Rabba 98:2 and see also Gemara Pesachim 56a.

<sup>2</sup> Daf 67a.

<sup>3</sup> Approximately 12 kilometres.

<sup>4</sup> It is permitted on other Yom Tovim.

<sup>5</sup> People who live in large cities rarely come across this halacha in day-to-day life. But it is very relevant for those who live in smaller villages. And even those who live in big cities need to be aware of this halacha when they travel to more remote areas.

<sup>6</sup> I can't help thinking of the City to Surf – the iconic run from the Sydney CBD to Bondi Beach. The distance of this run is similar to the trip taken by the man with the goat. The City to Surf will never be the same again...

basket'. The Gemara explains that you cannot compare the hunger of one who has bread in his basket to the hunger of one who does not have bread in his basket.

To explain further, the man who was schlepping the goat 12 kilometres to Azazel on a fast day surely felt hungry and thirsty. However, the mere knowledge that he had food and drink available if he really needed it, actually helped him to overcome this feeling of hunger and thirst. If he would not have this 'bread in his basket', he would have felt his hunger and thirst more intensely.

This concept of pat b'salo comes up a number of times in the Gemara. In another context<sup>7</sup>, Rashi expands the concept. He explains that in order to benefit from the psychological effect of pat b'salo, one does not need to actually have 'bread in one's basket' at that point in time. It will still take effect as long as one has a clear timeline and a guaranteed process in place. In other words, if one expects that they will have 'bread in their basket' at a certain point in the future, this is enough to help them feel their hunger less intensely.<sup>8</sup>

We can now revisit the incident at the beginning of our Parasha. Yaakov wanted to reveal the 'End of Days' to his children. We know that the ultimate redemption will eventually arrive. We have been told this many times by the prophets as recorded throughout Tanach. (As one example, take a look at the beautiful pasukim at the end of the Haftarah from last week.<sup>9</sup>) The fact that we are promised that the redemption will occur is a gift, it gives up hope and reassurance. But we have no idea when the redemption will take place.

Yaakov wanted to go one step further and actually reveal to his sons exactly when the long exile would finally be over. If they knew when the Moshiach would arrive, it would be easier for them to cope. But Hashem disagreed. He did not want Bnei Yisrael to know exactly when the end would be. He wanted Bnei Yisrael to retain an intense hunger for the geula. To be like a hungry person with *no* bread in his basket.

Why does Hashem want this? Because even though there is a set, unconditional time by which the Moshiach must come, there is also the possibility that the Moshiach can arrive earlier than this set time.<sup>10</sup> How so? We can hasten his arrival through good deeds and Torah study. Hashem does not want us to be complacent. He wants us to yearn passionately for the geula and to be incentivised to do whatever is in our power to bring the Moshiach sooner.

In the song Maoz Tzur, which we sang recently during Chanukah, the second last line contains the words: 'ואין קץ לימי הרעה' ('There is no end to the days of evil'). This obviously can't be understood literally. It is poetic, and it really means '*it feels like* there is no end to the days of evil'. This is how someone feels when they do not have 'bread in their basket'.

The Moshiach is just waiting to arrive. The Gemara<sup>11</sup> tells the story of Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi who met Moshiach and asked him when he is coming. He replied, 'today'! But when the day passed without the Moshiach arriving, Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi complained to Eliyahu HaNavi that Moshiach lied to him. Eliyahu explained that he meant: 'Today, *if* you heed His voice'. In other words, if we merit it, the Moshiach can come even today!

Hashem prevented Yaakov from revealing the 'End of Days' to ensure that we are hungry for the Moshiach to come, so that we will try to do whatever we can to bring him as soon as possible. May that day come quickly, bimhera b'yameinu!

Let's try something this week:

1. Look around and notice what is happening. On the one hand, there are horrific acts of antisemitism all around the world. On the other hand, we have been witnessing open miracles on a daily basis in Eretz Yisrael. Realise that the geula cannot be far! Let this be a source of comfort.
2. Think: what can I do to hasten the arrival of the geula?

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>7</sup> Kiddushin 22a.

<sup>8</sup> This is based on Tosefot's explanation of Rashi (ד"ה שלא ילחצנה במלחמה). It seems that Tosefot does not agree with Rashi's position.

<sup>9</sup> Yechezkel 37:24-28.

<sup>10</sup> Gemara, Sanhedrin 98a.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.