



# GROWTH

## At The SHABBAT TABLE

### PARSHAT BESHALACH

#### Like The Earth

At the conclusion of the *Amida* prayer that we recite 3 times daily, we beseech G-d: "ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה – *let my soul be like earth to all.*" Simply speaking, we are asking for Hashem to help us remain humble and not become bloated with arrogance and ego. What, though, is the significance behind this analogy of comparing ourselves to the "dust of the earth"?

R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel gave a precise, fantastic explanation. Everyone tramples upon earth, yet it still supports those who tread upon it. Moreover, it even sprouts growth that gives life to the world! With this metaphor, we attempt to internalize this reality and ask G-d to grant us the strength, courage, and resilience to likewise never withhold kindness from His creatures – even from those who slight us and cause us pain. Our role model is Hashem Himself, Who showers indescribable benevolence upon all His creations despite their shortcomings; may we, too, merit to follow His example.

#### Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei

##### Yisrael:

Ariel Ben Frida	Gavriel Ben Dina	Avigayil Bat
Tehillah	Shlomo Ben Etal	Frida Bat Yaffa
Noach Yisrael Ben Victoria Yaffa	Miriam Bat Bakol	
Chana Bat Malka	David Ben Rivka	David
Ben Tzivvia	Rena Bat Bakol	Ariella Bat Hila
Yitzhak Ben Naama	Yehoshua Ben Miriam	Zev
David Ben Sara	Rachamim Ben Shifra	Eliron
Ben Leah	Eliana Rachel Bat Shifra	Dora Devora
Bat Marusia Mazal	Yohai Shimoni Ben Daniela Odet	
Uriel Ben David	Esther Bat Frida	

"Emuna isn't about avoiding challenges.  
It's about knowing Hashem will carry  
you through them."

#### The Roundabout Path

The Parsha begins, "It happened when Pharaoh sent the people that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Pelishtim, because it was near, for G-d said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt.'"

This verse begs for explanation, as a number of questions can be raised. Firstly, why did Hashem reason that the Jews would back down when they see armed troops coming their way? The next *pasuk* states that the Jews were armed ("*chamushim*"); they were clearly ready for battle! Moreover, why here does the Torah refer to G-d as *Elokim*, which represents His Attribute of Strict Justice, whereas in last week's Torah portion, G-d is referred to using His Name symbolic of the Attribute of Mercy ("*Yud-Kei-Vav-Kei*")? And finally, the *pasuk* implies that had there been no problem of the Jews being afraid of a war, they would have gone straight to Eretz Yisrael. How is that possible? What would have happened to Matan Torah?

An amazing teacher of mine, R' Schaye Schonbrun, once shared a remarkable insight with me. A closer look at the exact wording of the verse should explain everything. The wording of the *pasuk* is that Hashem didn't want to lead them "*derech erez Pelishtim*" / "דרך ארץ פלישתים." The simple understanding is that Hashem didn't want to take them on the path (*derech*) to the land of the Pelishtim (*erez Pelishtim*). There is, however, another perspective to this verse.

Back in Parshat Vayetze, when Lavan chased after Yaakov and his family to get his *teraphim* idols back, relentlessly searching their camps to no avail, he entered Rachel's camp. As the Torah relates, Rachel hid the idols by sitting on them, and when Lavan asked her to stand up to enable his investigation, she refused, claiming "*derech nashim li* – the way of women is upon me," and that it was unbecoming of her to disembark from the camel. Although "*derech*" generally translates to "way" as in "path," *Targum Onkelos* translates it as "*orach*," which means "way" as in "conduct."

In our context, as well, *Onkelos* translates "*derech erez*" as "*orach ar'd*" – which means actual "*derech erez*" (as in "behavior/demeanor"). In other words, the Torah is testifying that Hashem didn't want to take them to the Philistine land because He didn't want their morally deprived lifestyle to have a negative influence on Klal Yisrael.

With this, we can answer all the questions raised above. Klal Yisrael indeed wasn't afraid of fighting troops on the battlefield, since they were armed. The battle that a detour was meant to help avoid was one with the *yetzer hara* that would be sparked by the negative influence of an ethically impoverished Philistine People. Thus, they went a roundabout way merely to avoid sin. And that is why G-d is referred to as "*Elokim*" here, since the matter of avoiding sin is by all means a serious one, and the strict Attribute of Justice was therefore involved. And, finally, the Jews had to have received the Torah at Har Sinai first, so that they could go into foreign territory, both physically and figuratively, and have the positive influence of the Torah protecting them from sin.

*Sometimes, in our own lives, we feel lost and confused; it may feel like we are being taken through a "roundabout path." We may be giving it our all, but nothing seems to be working. Disappointment may transition into frustration, and ultimately despair. Perhaps, G-d is indeed taking you through this route just to avoid a certain פלישתים דרך in your life that you may not even be aware of. Maybe there are physical or even spiritual pitfalls that G-d can see ahead, and in His overflowing love for you, He has you trekking through a "desert" in circles that seem to lead nowhere just to protect you. Hang on tight, because ultimately, we each have our journeys that are hand-crafted by our Creator and designed to build us into stronger, better people.*