

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

Tetzaveh, February 2016

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Tetzaveh – towards better Tefillah

In this week's Parsha of Tetzaveh we learn about the special clothes worn by the Kohen Gadol. One of the items that he wore was the Choshen Mishpat – the breastplate which contained twelve precious stones. Each stone was inscribed with the name of one of the 12 tribes. The breastplate was folded in half to form a pocket. A slip of parchment containing secret names of Hashem was inserted into this pocket. The Choshen Mishpat was used in order to ask Hashem questions. The Kohen Gadol would pose the question and Hashem would send His answer via the letters on the stones which would light up in response.

However, the letters that lit up could be ordered in a number of different ways. The Kohen Gadol required Ruach Hakodesh (Divine Inspiration) in order to read the letters in the correct order. The Ramban explains that the Kohen Gadol would meditate on the names of Hashem, and this meditation would inspire him to read the luminous letters in the correct order.

The Choshen Mishpat plays a role in the famous story of Chana's prayer.¹ Chana was childless for many years. Together with her husband Elkanah she would travel regularly to the Mishkan in Shiloh. Elkanah would deliberately take a circuitous route so as to encourage as many people as possible to join them in the pilgrimage. At the Mishkan, Chana would pour out her heart in prayer to Hashem, begging Him for a child.

The Tanach recounts an episode when Chana was praying to Hashem with unusual fervour. Eli, the Kohen Gadol of the time, observed Chana's demeanour and thought her to be a drunkard. The Vilna Gaon explains that 4 letters lit up on the Choshen Mishpat – ה, כ, ר, ש. Eli read the letters in the wrong order as spelling the word 'shikorah' which means a drunken woman. The letters should have been read as 'k'Sarah' (which means that Chana was righteous like Sarah Imenu) or as 'k'sheirah' (which means a worthy woman).

Chana explained to Eli that she was not drunk. Rather, she was an aggrieved woman who was pouring out her soul to Hashem. Eli told Chana to go in peace and gave her a bracha that her prayers should be answered. Chana's prayers were answered. She was blessed with a son, Shmuel the prophet, whose greatness was compared to that of Moshe and Aaron². Shmuel would go on to lead the Jewish people, eventually anointing Shaul Hamelech and David Hamelech.

From this incident of Eli's interaction with Chana, the Gemara in Brachot³ derives many important laws about the appropriate way to pray and about interpersonal relations. Let's look at some of those laws.

- The passuk says: "*Chana was speaking in her heart*"⁴. From here, the Gemara derives that one who prays should direct their heart towards Hashem. This might seem obvious in theory, yet many of us can stand in shule praying without even thinking about Hashem (let alone moving ourselves to a level of heartfelt emotional connection to Hashem)!

¹ Shmuel I (1:12-17)

² See Tehillim 99:6.

³ Brachot 31a-31b.

⁴ Shmuel I 1:13

- The passuk said that Chana's lips moved but her voice was not heard. From here the Gemara derives that in our pinnacle of davening, the Shemoneh Esreh, we need to pronounce the words with our lips, but we should not raise our voice.
- Eli accuses Chana of being drunk and chastises her. From here we learn that we are not permitted to pray while drunk. This law is very relevant for the upcoming festival of Purim. (Those who do drink on Purim should make sure that they daven Mincha before the seudah, and then daven Maariv late once they are sober.)
- When Eli realised that he was mistaken he told Chana to go in peace and gave her a blessing. From here we learn that if you mistakenly accuse someone, it is appropriate to placate them and to also give them a blessing.
- When Chana returned to Eli with her son Shmuel, she said: "I am the woman who **stood with you** here, praying to Hashem". The Gemara notes that Chana and Eli were both standing. From here the Gemara derives that it is prohibited to sit within 4 amot (about 2 metres) of someone who is praying the Shemoneh Esreh. According to the Ritvah, the reason for this prohibition is to demonstrate respect for Hashem's Shechinah which rests in the 4 amot surrounding a person who is engaged in prayer. Alternatively, the Tur explains that someone sitting near a person who is praying and acknowledging Hashem's kingship is giving the impression that they do not care to do the same. In contrast, a person who is themselves engaged in prayer (e.g. reciting the Shema) is allowed to sit.⁵

Darchai Noam usually focuses on the laws that are ben adam l'chavero – improving relationships between people. In contrast, prayer seems to be exclusively ben adam l'makom – between people and Hashem. However, as we have mentioned in previous editions of Darchai Noam, prayer is actually a critical component of our interpersonal interactions. While we are responsible for putting in effort, the success of all of our endeavours is determined by Hashem. We need to pray to Hashem and ask Him to grant us success. This prayer for success is even more vital in relation to our dealings with each other, because the success of our actions depends on other people and their reactions. If we want to do a good deed or help someone out, we need to understand their needs. People can be very difficult to understand. (It is difficult enough to understand ourselves, let alone each other!) We need to pray for Divine assistance to improve our middot and to successfully interact with each other in a peaceful and pleasant manner.

We pray to Hashem formally at least 3 times a day. It is one of the ways that we develop our relationship with our Creator. However we should also connect informally with Hashem throughout the day. Prayer is called "Avodah" which means work. Successful prayer requires hard work. Let's use this week as an opportunity to focus on improving the quality and kavanah of our prayers.

Let's try something this week:

1. Focus on how well we pray. Do we think about Hashem? Do we know the laws of prayer? Do we concentrate on the meaning of the words? Do we bring ourselves to heartfelt emotion? Do we pour out our heart and soul and thereby show Hashem how intimate and comfortable and honest we feel in His Presence?
2. Ask Hashem for help in our performance of the mitzvot ben adam l'chavero. This request can be made during our formal prayers (e.g. during the bracha of Shema Koleinu in the Shemoneh Esreh) or informally at any time we feel. Hashem is always ready to hear us if we want to approach Him.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁵ See Artscroll Gemara Brachot, footnote 30 on page 31b4.

About Darchai Noam

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parashah relating to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l're'echa kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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