

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Tetzaveh  
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How can the Parasha 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 to ask Hashem questions. The Kohen Gadol would pose a question and Hashem would send His answer via the letters on the stones which would light up with the 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 at the time, observed Chana's demeanour in prayer and presumed her to be drunk. The Vilna Gaon explains that 4 letters lit up on the Choshen Mishpat – ש, ר, כ, ה. However, Eli read the letters in the wrong order, to spell the word 'shikorah' which means a drunken woman. However, 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 then 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 Aaron<sup>2</sup>. Shmuel would go on to lead the Jewish people, eventually anointing two kings of Israel - Shaul Hamelech and David Hamelech.

From this incident of Eli's interaction with Chana, the Gemara in Brachot<sup>3</sup> derives many important lessons about the appropriate way to pray and also about interpersonal relations. Let's look at some of those lessons.

- The pasuk says: "*Chana was speaking in her heart*"<sup>4</sup>. 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)!

<sup>1</sup> Shmuel Aleph (1:12-17)

<sup>2</sup> See Tehillim 99:6.

<sup>3</sup> Brachot 31a-31b.

<sup>4</sup> Shmuel Aleph 1:13

- The pasuk 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.<sup>5</sup>
- 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 had been mistaken, he told Chana to go in peace and gave her a blessing. From here, we can 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". From here, the Gemara notes that Chana and Eli were both standing. The Gemara then derives that it is prohibited to sit within 4 amot (about 2 metres) of someone who is praying the Shemoneh Esreh. (According to the Ritva, 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.<sup>6</sup>)

Darchai Noam often focuses on the laws that are ben Adam l'chavero – improving relationships between people. In contrast, at first glance it may seem that prayer is exclusively ben Adam l'Makom – between people and Hashem. However, prayer actually also plays a critical role in our interpersonal interactions. The success of our actions depends on other people and their reactions. For instance, 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 others in a peaceful and pleasant manner.

One of the mitzvot that we are rewarded for both in this world and the world to come is absorption in prayer.<sup>7</sup> On typical days, we pray formally to Hashem three times a day. Prayer is one of the ways that we develop our relationship with our Creator. However, we are not limited to formal prayers. We should also try to connect informally with Hashem throughout the day. Prayer is called "Avodah" which means work. It takes hard work to reach heartfelt prayer and to fully absorb ourselves in prayer. Let's use this week as an opportunity to focus on improving the quality and kavana of our prayers.

Let's try something this week:

1. Focus on the quality of our prayer. 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 close we feel to 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. Hashem is always ready to listen to us, especially when we beseech Him with a goal of shalom with others, which is in accordance with His will.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> One should pray just loudly enough so that they can hear themselves (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 101:2).

<sup>6</sup> See Artscroll Gemara Brachot, footnote 30 on page 31b4.

<sup>7</sup> See page 16 of the standard Ashkenaz Artscroll siddur.