

# DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

## “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Tetzaveh  
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[darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)  
[www.darchai-noam.com](http://www.darchai-noam.com)

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Parashat Tetzaveh – The kedusha of a shul (part 2)

This week's Parasha of Tetzaveh focuses on the instructions pertaining to the utensils to be used in the Mishkan, and in particular the special clothes to be worn by the Kohen Gadol and the Kohanim while performing their service. As we noted last week, while the weekly Parshiyot focus on the Mishkan, we will focus on our “Mikdash Me'at”, the shul - its holiness and some of the relevant halachot that apply.

In last week's Darchai Noam we brought the Bach's<sup>1</sup> opinion that shuls should be built with two physical doors. In other words, to enter into the shul, one would need to pass through an outer room or hall/foyer. We suggested that this allows the shul to fulfill its twin roles as a place of prayer and a place of communal gathering. Prayer takes place in the 'inner sanctuary' while the outer room can be used for other communal and social activities.

The Bach himself however provides a different explanation for this practice. He explains that this practice will serve to clearly demonstrate an important difference between Judaism and avoda zara. With avoda zara, the 'priest' represents the populace and only he is permitted to enter the inner sanctum. The general public has to wait outside while the priest approaches the 'god'. However, in Judaism, every individual has the right and privilege to walk right in to the inner sanctum of the shul (which is demonstrated by the requirement to walk through two doors) and stand before Hashem in prayer. Though in the Bet Hamikdash itself certain roles can only be fulfilled by the Kohanim, and though we need Rabbis to guide us and make sure we are on the right path, on a day-to-day basis we can all speak to Hashem directly. Unlike with a priest, each Jew can approach Hashem in direct personal prayer without need for an intermediary. And the shul is the best place for us to approach Hashem directly.<sup>2</sup>

#### Entering shul

Given the importance and holiness of the shul, it is inappropriate to barge in without some preparation. Just like one wouldn't barge into a king's throne room without making sure that they were dressed appropriately and pausing to gather their thoughts. We saw last week that one should not start praying immediately upon entering the shul. Rather, we should allow some space and time – we should pause to gather our thoughts for at least a moment, and we should not daven right near the door.<sup>3</sup>

As we enter the shul, there are some special pasukim that should be recited.<sup>4</sup> These pasukim help us to appreciate the sanctity of the shul and assume the right frame of mind.

The first pasuk is one of the blessings recited by Bilaam (when he was trying to curse Bnei Yisrael):

*How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places O Israel.* (Numbers 24:5)

The Sages interpret this praise of Israel as a reference to its tents of learning and prayer.

Following this pasuk is a collection of verses from sefer Tehillim. They express love and reverence for the shul that, in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash, is the place where Hashem's glory resides among Israel.<sup>5</sup>

*As for me, through Your abundant kindness I will enter Your House; I will prostrate myself toward your Holy Temple in awe of You.* (Tehillim 5:8)

*O Hashem, I love the House where You dwell, and the place where Your glory resides.* (Tehillim 26:8)

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Yoel ben Shmuel Sirkis (1561 - 1640).

<sup>2</sup> This is not to discount the importance of “bringing Hashem in” to all aspects of our daily life and calling out to Him throughout the day. However we are focussing here on formal prayer with a minyan. The best place for such prayer is in a shul.

<sup>3</sup> Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 90:20.

<sup>4</sup> See Page 12 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur. (Memory tip: there are **12** tribes, and as we enter shul we should focus on the fact all 12 tribes of Israel should be united.)

<sup>5</sup> See footnote on page 12 of the Artscroll siddur.

*I shall prostrate myself and bow, I shall kneel before Hashem my Maker. (C.f. Tehillim 95:6)*

*As for me, may my prayer to You, Hashem, be at an opportune time; O G-d, in your abundant kindness, answer me with the truth of Your salvation. (Tehillim 69:14)*

The custom is to bow our heads when we mention the act of bowing in these pasukim. The physical act of bowing helps us to feel appropriately humble.

Meditating on the meaning of these pasukim can help us to get into the right frame of mind as we enter into the shul and prepare ourselves to begin prayer.

If someone is running late to davening and does not have time to recite these pasukim, he should at least have the message of the pasukim in mind and bow his head upon entry.

### **Maximising our time in shul**

When we have a minyan of at least ten men, Hashem's Shechinah is present and so we are permitted to say "devarim sheb'kedusha", like Kaddish, Barchu and Kedusha. One should strive to arrive to shul early, and it is particularly meritorious to be amongst the first ten people to arrive so that you can greet the Shechinah.<sup>6</sup> Those who arrive amongst the first ten will receive a reward equivalent to all the people who arrive afterwards!<sup>7</sup> Even if one is not amongst the first ten, it is worth trying to get to shul as early as one can so that one arrives as close as possible to the time that the Shechinah arrived.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, when we finish davening, we should not be in a rush to leave shul. The Mishnah Berurah<sup>9</sup> writes that if one has the ability to wait, they should try to be amongst the last ten men to leave shul. He brings two reasons for this praiseworthy practice. Firstly, the Shechinah departs when there is less than a minyan, so one should try not to be the cause for the Shechinah to depart. Secondly, the mere act of just sitting in shul is itself a mitzva!<sup>10</sup>

### **Leaving shul**

When leaving shul, there is also a prescribed procedure to be followed. The Artscroll siddur<sup>11</sup> brings a number of pasukim that should be recited as we leave shul. These pasukim contain themes that are appropriate for one who is about to leave the sanctity of the shul and go outside to the wide world. The Artscroll siddur instructs as follows:

Firstly: sit down for a moment and recite the first pasuk.

Second: stand and recite the second pasuk.

Third: One should walk backwards towards the door<sup>12</sup> as if taking leave of a king. One should pause at the door and bow towards the Aron and recite the third pasuk.

Finally, the Artscroll siddur includes a special tefillah for Divine assistance to be recited if one is going off to work.

Even if one does not have time to recite all of these pasukim, they should at least try to perform the actions – sit briefly, walk backwards as if taking leave of a king, pause at the door and bow. That is the appropriate way to leave a shul.

In a previous Darchai Noam, I mentioned the practice of a particular person that I often daven with. Before leaving shul, he sits down briefly. He doesn't learn anything in particular, he is just careful to physically sit down before leaving shul. This worthy practice demonstrates that one wants to stay in shul for longer and that it is difficult to leave.

B'ezrat Hashem next week we will focus on the halachot that apply while we are in shul.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to practice the procedure discussed above when entering a shul.
2. Similarly, when leaving shul, try to leave properly and with respect.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>6</sup> Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 90:14.

<sup>7</sup> Gemara Brachot 47b.

<sup>8</sup> Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 90:18.

<sup>9</sup> 93:1, quoting the Seder HaYom.

<sup>10</sup> But of course one shouldn't use this extra time to engage in idle talk or light headed behaviour. B"H we will focus on those halachot next week.

<sup>11</sup> See page 181i of the standard Artscroll siddur (the last page of the Shacharit section, just before Birkat Hamazon).

<sup>12</sup> See the Rama's gloss on the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 132:2.