

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Metzora
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Parashat Metzora – The eyes, the heart and the imagination

This week's Darchai Noam is l'iluy nishmat my late mother, imi morati Hinda Miriam Bat Yehoshua, whose 12th yahrzeit is this Tuesday, 4th Nissan. May her neshama have an aliya.

This week we read Parashat Metzora which continues to deal with the laws of tzora'at and the way in which one struck with tzora'at could become purified and permitted to return to normal life and be involved in matters relating to the Mishkan. We will continue with our series on tefillah, which replaces the offering of korbanot today.

The eyes and the heart

Last week we focused on how to position our body during tefillah. We discussed the positioning of the legs and hands. This week we will finish that topic by focusing on the eyes and the heart.

The Gemara¹ discusses a debate between Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi about where one should look while davening. One of them said that one should direct his gaze downwards while praying because the Divine Presence rests in Eretz Yisrael and one should direct his gaze to the sacred land when praying. The other said that one should direct his eyes upward based on the pasuk² which states: “Let us lift our hearts with our hands toward G-d in Heaven”. While they were debating, Rabbi Yishmael joined them and resolved the dispute in the name of his father Rabbi Yosi: One who prays should direct his eyes downward and his heart upward in order to fulfil both verses.

The Tur³ explains the idea of looking down - we should bow our head a little so that our eyes are down towards the ground and imagine that we are standing at the Bet Hamikdash and looking down. The Darchai Moshe⁴ explains the idea of directing our heart upwards in the name of Rabbeinu Yonah – while davening one should imagine that he is in the Heavens and above all of his earthly needs and pleasures. The Mishnah Berurah⁵ adds that if one raises their head and their eyes as if they are looking at the roof, the angels make fun of him. The acharonim write that one who does not close his eyes during Shemoneh Esreh will not merit seeing the Divine Presence when he dies. But if one needs to open their eyes to read from the siddur that is not a problem. In practice, one should do whatever helps them have more kavana – either close their eyes or read from the siddur.

We see that there is an apparent tension between looking down and being humble on the one hand and imagining that we are at the heights of spirituality on the other hand.

The Bet Yosef⁶ notes an apparent contradiction between this halacha (requiring one to look down) and the halacha brought in siman 90:4 which requires one to daven in a place with windows. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that the windows are for the purpose of fresh air so that the place is comfortable and one can have proper concentration. However, Rashi explains that the windows are for the purpose of looking to Heaven to increase one's inspiration.⁷ How can one look out of the windows when one should be looking down? The Bach explains that one should look out the window towards Heaven *before* davening, in order to subdue his heart. The Bet Yosef explains that one should *glance* outside if necessary (even during davening), to stir up one's kavana. Rav Kook adds a novel understanding – he suggests that windows remind us that there is a world outside of the shul. Therefore, when davening, we shouldn't just focus on our own needs but also daven for others.

¹ Yevamot 105b.

² Eicha 3:41.

³ Orach Chaim siman 95.

⁴ Written by the Rama, Rabbi Moshe Isserles.

⁵ Orach Chaim siman 95, seif katan 5.

⁶ Siman 95.

⁷ There are actually very deep kabbalistic reasons for davening in a room with windows. R' Yona and Rashi are providing us with additional, practical reasons.

In summary, when davening:

- One should daven with their eyes directed down and their heart directed upward. This means that one should imagine that they are standing in the Bet Hamikdash, and simultaneously that they are in the Heavens and have risen above their earthly needs.
- It is a good practice to look outside at the Heavens before tefillah to subdue one's heart.
- One can certainly open their eyes during the Amidah in order to look in the siddur. But one should not look upward and should certainly not look around the room!

Imagination

Imagination is a very useful tool in davening. We already noted above that while davening one should *imagine* that they are standing in the Bet Hamikdash and also *imagine* that they are in the Heavens and above their earthly needs. There are a number of other examples where we can use our imagination to assist our davening.

The Song at the Sea

On the last day of Pesach⁸, we commemorate the miraculous salvation of Bnei Yisrael at the splitting of the sea. Bnei Yisrael, led by Moshe, chose this time to burst into a song of praise for Hashem⁹. This so called 'Song at the Sea' (Shirat HaYam) is one of the 10 great songs that will be sung by the Jewish people.¹⁰ Shirat HaYam is the final portion that we read at the end of Pesukai D'zimrah – the verses of praise that we recite before the Shema in Shacharit.¹¹ The Mishnah Berurah¹² writes that we should recite this song with great joy. He adds that one should *imagine* they are crossing the sea that very day. He teaches that one who reads this song with joy will be forgiven for his sins! When we reach Shirat HaYam in our davening, we should pause before this passage and *imagine* that Hashem has just split the sea for us and we are walking through it on dry land. When we recite the Song, we should *imagine* that we are thanking Hashem as He has just performed this amazing miracle for us.

Kedusha

Look at the amazing words of the Mishnah Berurah about what takes place when we recite the kedusha during the chazan's repetition of the Amidah. These words speak for themselves:

*Hashem has no greater pleasure than when we (Hashem and Klal Yisroel) look at each another during the recitation of kedusha.*¹³

There is a disagreement whether one's eyes should be open or closed during the kedusha. The Mishnah Berurah¹⁴ cites the Magen Giborim that our eyes should be open. We should *imagine* that we are looking up into the Heavens and Hashem Himself is right there looking back at us!

B'ezrat Hashem we will continue discussing the faculty of imagination in relation to davening in the next edition of Darchai Noam, which will be after Pesach.¹⁵

Let's try something this week:

1. When davening, remember to direct your eyes down and your heart up and glance out of the window at the Heavens before davening.
2. Try to use your imagination when davening – especially at key times such as Shirat HaYam, the Amidah and Kedusha.

Darchai Noam will take a short break until after Pesach. Chag kasher v'sameach to all readers!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁸ Did I mention that Pesach is coming soon?

⁹ Miriam also led the women in song.

¹⁰ The list of the ten songs is provided by the Mechilta d'Rebbi Yishmael 15:1:1. The Song at the Sea is the second song. The first song was sung by the Jews in Egypt on the night of Pesach. The tenth and final song will be sung when the Moshiach comes.

¹¹ On Shabbat and Yom Tov there are additional portions added after the Song at the Sea.

¹² Siman 51, seif katan 17.

¹³ Mishnah Berurah, Siman 125 seif katan 5.

¹⁴ Ibid, seif katan 6.

¹⁵ I always try to keep Darchai Noam to one page, and there is a limit to how much I can reduce the font size!