

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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

Parashat Behar – The end of our tefillah

This week we read Parashat Behar in chutz l'Aretz and Parashat Bechukotai in Israel. We will continue with our series on tefillah. Tefillah is one of the three pillars on which the world stands¹. There is so much more we could say about tefillah. But this will be our last edition in the series on tefillah. This week we will focus on the last part of davening and we will conclude with a practical idea to help us to increase our kavana.

Three steps back

After we finish the Shemoneh Esreh, we bow and take three steps back.² We should be careful to do this properly because we are taking our leave from Hashem. We start stepping back with our left foot to indicate that stepping back is difficult.³ We stay in a bowed position as we are stepping back as a demonstration of deference. After taking three steps back, we bow to the left (which is the right side of the Divine Presence which is opposite us), and then to the right and then straight ahead, like a servant taking leave of his master. As we bow, we recite the well-known request for peace (עושה שלום במרומיו). Afterwards, we recite a tefilla for the replacement of the service of the Bet Hamikdash. Since tefilla replaces the korbanot, we ask for the Bet Hamikdash to be rebuilt so that we will be able to perform the true service.

Additional passages after tefillah

As we have noted earlier, it is preferable not to be in a rush to leave shul. By staying behind for a few moments, one demonstrates that it is difficult to leave. If one has time, there are some important extra passages that can be recited. The siddur includes a number of pasukim and prayers that are recommended to recite after Shacharit.⁴ Let's explore some of them briefly.

The Six Remembrances

The Torah commands us explicitly to always remember six things. Some authorities advise that the relevant pasukim should be recited every day to ensure that we fulfil this mitzva. The Artscroll siddur includes these pasukim immediately after Shacharit.⁵ A busy colleague told me that he often has to rush to work after Shacharit and doesn't have time to read all six pasukim. Instead, he just reads the titles printed in the siddur above each pasuk. It only takes him mere seconds to scan all six headings and he thereby manages to briefly remember each of the six things every day.

The six remembrances, together with a suggested brief thought that can be pondered when mentioning each of them, are as follows:

- **Yetziyat Mitzrayim** – remember how fortunate we are that Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim, and how as a consequence we have an obligation to serve Him.
- **Har Sinai** – we were chosen as the only nation to stand at Har Sinai and receive the Torah!⁶
- **Amalek** – the gematria of Amalek is the same as the gematria of safek (doubt). If we can work on removing doubt from our hearts, we will be taking a small step in defeating Amalek.
- **The Golden Calf** – remember the terrible sin that Bnei Yisrael committed. And Hashem still forgave them! It is never too late to repent, Hashem is always waiting for us to return to Him.

¹ Pirkai Avot 1:2

² Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 123:1.

³ Mishnah Berurah 123 seif katan 13.

⁴ Starting on page 176 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.

⁵ Page 176.

⁶ See the Tur Orach Chaim siman 47.

- **Miriam's punishment** – this event reminds us the importance of guarding our tongues and avoiding lashon hara.
- **Shabbat** – Shabbat is the focus of our week and is equal to all other mitzvot of the Torah. All week we should be remembering and looking forward to Shabbat.

The Rambam's 13 principles of faith⁷

According to the Rambam, these are the 13 fundamental principles of faith that every Jew must believe. If time permits, it is highly recommended to read these slowly and carefully and pay attention to their meaning. At a minimum, try to pick at least one or two each day to recite and contemplate.

Parshat HaMan⁸

This passage from sefer Shmot describes the Man that miraculously fell from Heaven and fed Bnei Yisrael during their 40 year sojourn in the midbar. There is a tradition that one who recites this passage every day will not lack parnasa (livelihood). Though reciting this passage every day will not guarantee to make you rich, it will surely help to boost your level of emunah and remind you that all of our livelihood comes from Hashem!

Parting advice – Increasing our kavana

Practically speaking, how can we increase our kavana? How can we turn around a habit of many years of rushing through davening without concentrating on the words?

Let us revisit some wonderful advice from Rav Moshe Weinberger.⁹ He suggests that each week, on Motzai Shabbat, we choose one passage from davening to be our focus for the coming week. We should spend some time reading up about that passage, reading the commentaries, perhaps checking out the source of the words in the Tanach and understanding their meaning. For the rest of that week, we should dedicate a little more time than usual to focus on that passage during our davening. The following week, we should choose a different passage to focus on. In this way, we can ensure that at least one part of our tefillah has kavana.

However, note that as with any new positive initiative, the going may be challenging, particularly at the beginning. The Yetzer Hara may test us to see just how much we want to grow. For example, someone I know decided to try this idea and chose a particular section in the Amidah to focus on. Each time that they started the Amidah, they reminded themselves that their special passage was coming up and they tried very hard to concentrate. But it seemed that the harder they tried, the less concentration they had. Inevitably, before they realised what was happening, they found themselves stepping out of the Amidah without having focused on their special passage! One solution to this problem is to include a bookmark or a paperclip in your siddur as a reminder. It can also help to use a sticky yellow note or to write some notes in pencil in the margin of the siddur with some key ideas to focus on.

If one adopts this approach, something remarkable might happen. Imagine going to visit a new friend, and on the way you bump into an old friend. You are delighted to meet them and you stay a little longer than expected to catch up with them. Similarly, you might be planning to give special attention to a paragraph in the Shema this week. But then you reach the passage in Pesukai D'zimrah which was your focus for last week. You can't help lingering over that passage as well, for old-time's sake! After practicing this technique for a while, your davening will be littered with these places which have special meaning for you, encouraging you to pause and increase your kavana numerous times throughout your tefilla.¹⁰

Which passage of davening will you choose to focus on this week?

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to stay back at shul after davening for just a few extra moments and check out the extra passages in the siddur that we cited above.
2. Try to put Rav Weinberger's advice into practice by choosing a special passage to focus on each week.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁷ Page 178 of the Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.

⁸ Page 181c of the Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.

⁹ We mentioned this advice in Darchai Noam, Parashat Vayikra 5778. See there for more details.

¹⁰ For more beautiful ideas about prayer, I recommend the Artscroll "Praying with Fire" books.