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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

On the Air with Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

From Ha-Rav's weekly radio programs in Israel

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Proper direction for prayer

Q: Which direction should we daven in our shul in which the Ark faces south but Jerusalem is in the east?

A: Quite simply, one must face Jerusalem when praying (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 94:1-2). But everyone must also pray in the same direction. If some people daven in one direction and others daven in another direction, this does not look good. There were many times that Shuls in Exile were not in the direction of Jerusalem because of building restrictions. For example, there were shuls in which the non-Jews did not agree to have the door facing a certain street, since it was the main street and it had a church on it. They therefore demanded that the door face a different direction and it was not always possible to have the Ark opposite the door because it would be disturbing to have people coming in and out during the davening. They therefore placed the Ark in the opposite direction and they prayed in that direction. This is not the end of the world, since there are opinion in the Gemara that we should pray in other directions: One opinion in that we must daven towards Jerusalem and the Temple (Berachot 30a), another says we should pray towards the west because the Shechinah (Divine Presence) dwells in the west and still another says to face south because of the principle "One who desires wisdom should go south" (Baba Batra 25a-b). In this case, the shul can daven towards the Ark or Jerusalem or even on an angle not to be disrespectful to either, but they should decide and all pray in the same direction.

Tachanun on the day of a "Hatafat Dam Brit"

Q: If a child is born already circumcised, do we recite Tachanun on the day of the "Hatafat Dam Brit" (the drawing of a drop of blood since the circumcision cannot be performed)?

A: It is not recited, since this is a day of joy. It is true that the actual mitzvah of a Brit Milah is not performed; we are nonetheless doing what we are commanded to do. The law is the same as for a Brit Milah.

Hashem hiding His Face

Q: Why do we say that Hashem hides His face in the world (Hester Panim) when Hashem is everywhere?

A: Hashem can be found everywhere, but He sometimes hides. When one hides, he is there but we cannot see him. This means that everything which occurs in the world is under Divine direction, even strange events such as destructions, but Hashem is hiding. The Torah says: "I will surely hide My face" (Devarim 31:18). "I will hide" – He is there but we cannot see Him. "He was standing behind our wall, observing through the windows, peering through the lattices" (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:9). The Shechinah (Divine Presence) is always there but there are different levels. For example, Pirkei Avot says (3:6): If ten people learn Torah the Shechinah rests among them...and where do we learn that even five?...and where do we learn that even three?...and even two?...and even one? If the Shechinah is found with one person learning Torah, then why does the Mishnah have to begin with ten people – go directly to one person? Answer: there are different levels of intensity by which the Divine Presence is found in a particular place. There is a level of the Shechinah dwelling when we are in our Land during the Redemption. There is a level when we are in Exile which is called "Shechinta Be-Galuta – the Shechinah in Exile." When the Temple is standing, the Divine Presence rests among us more, and when the Temple is not standing less so. Hashem is now slowly returning His Divine Presence to Zion. We are in an intermediate stage. He is hiding His face, because there is suffering and pain, and it is impossible to say that we have reached the complete Redemption. But we are not in Exile – pursued, plundered and murdered. In the Haggadah of Pesach, we say: "The day is approaching which is neither day nor night" (from the song "U-vchain Va'yehi Ba-chatzi Ha-liela" at the end of the Seder). It is like twilight, there is both darkness and light at the same time. Even though we are certainly waiting for the day which is completely "day," we know that the Redemption comes "slowly, slowly."

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