

Date: 12 Av 5785 (August 6, 2025)

Torah Portion: Va'etchanan

Topic: From Redemption to Prayer

It is written (Deut. 4:7), “For which is a great nation that has an Elohim Who is close to it, as is YHWH, our Elohim, whenever we call to Him?” The Sages taught as follows: There are three required “immediacies.” (1) Immediately following the leaning of an offering is its slaughter. With regard to almost all offerings, the person bringing the offering is required to lean his hands on the head of the animal before it is slaughtered. The slaughter of the animal is to immediately follow this leaning without any delay or interruption. (2) Immediately following the washing of hands is the reciting of the blessing. That is, without any interruption or unnecessary delay between them, so as not to sully one’s hands between washing them and reciting the blessing. (3) And immediately following the blessing of redemption is the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer. The blessing of redemption is to immediately precede the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer so as to demonstrate that sincere and heartfelt prayer can bring about redemption for a person even if he lacks any other merit.

There are benefits of abiding by these three immediacies: (1) If one leans on his offering and then immediately slaughters it, he may be assured that his offering will be accepted. Slaughtering the offering immediately after the confession and the leaning impresses upon the bringer of the offering the true severity of his sin. Since the offering will then be brought with proper thoughts and intentions it will be accepted by Hashem. (2) If he washes his hands and immediately recites the blessing, he may be assured that Satan will not agitate against him during his meal. The Talmud (Berachos 42a) refers to the blessing of the Grace After Meals and to the final waters, used at the conclusion of the meal. (3) And if he recites Shema with the accompanying blessings, and immediately following, prays the *Shemoneh Esrei*, he may be assured that his prayer will be heard. As previously mentioned above, praying immediately after reciting the blessing of redemption demonstrates the power of sincere prayer. It therefore leads to increased devotion, as a result of which Hashem accepts the prayer. Alternatively, the praises of Hashem that he uttered in the blessing of redemption bring Hashem close to him, making Him favorably inclined to answer the prayer.

Hezekiah, king of Yisrael, prayed to Hashem in his sickness and distress. He concluded his prayer with the words, “and I did that which was good in Your eyes” (2Kings 20:3; Isa. 38:3). What was this “good” that he had done? The Gemara (Berachos 10b) explains that it was his practice of reciting the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer immediately following the blessing of redemption. However, it is unclear why the Gemara assumes that an unspecified reference to “that which was good in Your eyes” must perforce concern the juxtaposition of the redemption blessing and the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer.

Rav Hutner explains: Scripture states (Prov. 3:6), “In all your ways you must know Him.” This verse represents a requirement to perform even mundane activities for the sake of one’s Creator, an obligation echoed by the Mishnah in Avos (2:12), “let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven.” A person eats, he sleeps, he interacts with family, friends, and colleagues. In theory, these are non-compulsory acts. But in fact, even these elective acts include an element of obligation; specifically, with regard to one’s intent in their performance. The mundane act must be performed not merely for gain or pleasure, but with sacred intent. One does not eat simply to satisfy one’s hunger, or to gratify one’s sensory desires, but to gain strength for the *kadosh* work of the Creator through performance of His *mitzvos* and study of His Torah. Even when one performs a non-*mitzvah* act, his intention must be to serve the Kadosh Barchu.

In contemplating the ways in which one might serve Hashem, a person commonly assigns the primary position to that which is compulsory; that is, to the commandments of the Torah in which he is obligated. The sacred intent of one’s elective acts, by contrast, one relegates to only a secondary position. It is viewed as praiseworthy conduct, but it is not deemed *fundamental* to one’s service to Hashem. Rav Hutner provides another view: There is no question that one who faithfully performs his obligations is to be lauded, for he has fulfilled the Will of Hashem. However, his performance does not go beyond his obligations. One who performs even mundane tasks for the sake of Hashem, however, transcends the obligatory guidelines of the Torah, and seek to be pleasing before Hashem in *all* areas of life, even those that one might imagine are a person’s private domain.

Shalom.