

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קלג עמוד ב

תניא:

"זה א-לי ואנוהו" - התנאה לפניו במצות;

עשה לפניו סוכה נאה, ולולב נאה, ושופר נאה;

ציצית נאה, ספר תורה נאה;

וכתוב בו לשמו בדיו נאה, בקולמוס נאה, בלבלר אומן, וכורכו בשיראין נאין.

אבא שאול אומר: "ואנוהו" - הוי דומה לו;

מה הוא חנון ורחום, אף אתה היה חנון ורחום.

A beraita:

“Zeh E-li v’aneveihu” – hitnaeh before Him bemitzvot.

Make before Him a *naeh* Sukkah, and a *naeh* lulav, and a *naeh* shofar;

Naeh tzitzit, and a *naeh* Torah scroll;

And write in it *lishmo* with *naeh* ink, and a *naeh* quill, with a skilled scribe, and wrap it in *naeh* cloths.

Abba Shaul says: “v’aneveihu” – be similar to Him;

Just as He is gracious and merciful, so too you must be gracious and merciful.

The driving force behind the anonymous position in this beraita seems to be anti-corporealism; the literal translation “and I will adorn Him” is rejected because G-d has no physical form that can be adorned. However, rather than seeing v’aneveihu as coming from a root other than *naeh*, as per Abba Shaul and many others, this tanna interprets it as reflexive; “and I will be an adornment to him” rather than “and I will make an adornment for him”.

Or at least that would seem to be the meaning of *hitnaeh*, a construction which so far as I can tell makes no other appearance in rabbinic literature. But the tanna does not go on to say “therefore do as many mitzvot as you can, so as to make yourself an adornment to Him”, but rather creates an imperative to make beautiful mitzvah-objects¹. He then extends this imperative with regard to a Torah scroll² by requiring the tools with which it is made to be *naeh*, and finally requires the wrapping for the (finished) scroll to be *naeh* as well. On Shabbat 133b, Rabbi Yehudah is cited as using the same ground to invalidate (according to most opinions) a Torah scroll in which a Divine Name was written accidentally but then overwritten *lishmoh*,

The focus on mitzvah-objects, rather than on modes of performance, seems to indicate that the actual translation here is a displacement – since one cannot adorn Him, therefore adorn His commandments. But this not only fails to account for *hitnaeh*, it also fails to explain *lefanav b’mitzvot* - in this understanding it should read instead either *hitnaeh oto al y’dei hamitzvot* or *hitnaeh mitzvotav lefanav*.

Rashi Sukkah 29b cites v’aneveihu as the reason a dried out lulav is invalid on Sukkot. Tosafot challenge on the ground that v’aneveihu can only set up a lekhatilah requirement. Rashi’s position is easily defended if one reads Shabbat 133b as invalidating a Torah scroll. However, there are other instances in which v’aneveihu

¹ I deliberately avoid using the Brisker term *cheftzah shel mitzvah* here because it is not clear, for example, that a shofar fits that category technically; it may simply be a *machshir* once we hold that the mitzvah is listening rather than blowing.

² – tzarikh iyyun whether the extension is an explanation of, or rather an addendum to, “*sefer Torah naeh*”

clearly sets up only a lekhatilah requirement, for example the position of the Rabbanan (Sukkah 11b, 33a) that the lulav, hadas and aravah should be bound together. Why then, according to Rashi, is v'anveihu sometimes a lekhatilah and sometimes only a bediavad requirement? Chatam Sofer, as cited by Encyclopedia Talmudit, suggests that the central requirement – perhaps the Biblical requirement, with everything else being a rabbinic extension – is to beautify the Name specifically, i.e. the Name as it is written in a Torah scroll. The verse would then be read “This is (the Name of) my G-d, and I will adorn it”, and follow the standard rabbinic understanding that “zeh” implies that the object is there to be pointed at. This would also explain well the beraita’s listing of so many cases related to a Torah scroll, and the requirement to beautify the scroll’s cover (and raises an interesting question lehalakhah as to whether using a beautiful etrog case, or lulav carrier, is a fulfillment of v'anveihu). But while this connects one of the cases in our beraita to the verse, it too fails to explain the phrase hitnaeh lefanav bamitzvot.

We should note here as well that on Nazir 2b the beraita reads “anaeh lefanav” (in Ms. “ei naeh”) which fits better with “v'anveihu”, but I think this is most likely an attempt to fit the context (a discussion of the meaning of an oath to be *naeh*) rather than an alternate text.

I don't have a compelling solution. Perhaps this is just an example of an otherwise unknown idiomatic form. But possibly something valuable is at stake here. Hiddur mitzvah, generally derived from v'anveihu, is the most obvious window into the halakhic significance of beauty. If we were to develop a reading which emphasized lefanav more than bamitzvot – for example, if we were to read the beraita as saying that the way to “adorn G-d” is to create beauty in His presence (with mitzvah-objects useful, but not comprehensive, examples of when He is present – note that, contrary to my translation above, the beraita encourages the making of beautiful things, not their use), we would have found a basis for halakhically valuing art, or at least art aimed at creating beauty) in its own terms. This is I think a major desideratum.

One final note – above I have sometimes avoided translating *naeh*, and sometimes translated it as adornment. This is not intended as a theological psak; it may well be that *naeh*, or *naveh*, or *naaveh*, refer e.g. to a sense of fitness that is not the same as beauty.

Shabbat Shalom vchag sameiach!

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