

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



Parshas Chukas

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

Promptness in Prayer is a Condition to its Reception

Was there a possibility of canceling the decree?

We learn in this parsha about the harsh Divine decree which fell upon Moshe and Aharon in the desert after the incident of "Mei Meriva", as is written (2:12): "And Hashem said: Because you did not have [sufficient] faith in Me to sanctify My name before the Children of Israel, therefore you shall not lead this congregation to the land which I have given them." This decree was very difficult and terrible for these two sublimely holy men, but no less terrible for us.

Chazal revealed to us in the Medrash (see `Parshas Drachim' Drush 8) that had Moshe led the Jews into the land, the Beis Hamikdash would never have been destroyed and no nation could have exerted power over them.

Could this decree have been avoided or altered? Apparently not. We find in Parshas Vo'Eschanan that Moshe Rabbenu prayed profusely to have the decree changed, but in vain. If we study the Medrash (Devarim Rabbah 11:10), however, it appears that there might have been some possibility of mitigation. The Medrash states: We find in the Torah ten mentions of the decree against Moshe entering Eretz Yisrael. The decree was not sealed, however, until he saw a vision of the heavenly supreme court where Hashem said to him: It is a decree before Me that you shall not cross over, as is written (Devarim 3:27): "For you shall not cross this Jordan."

The Medrash continues with awesome words: Moshe took this matter lightly because he reasoned through a `kal vachomer', inferring a lesser situation from a stronger one, saying: "If the Jews committed such major sins, time after time, but after I pleaded on their behalf Hashem answered my prayer, therefore if I, who have never sinned before Him since my youth, shall pray before Him for myself, He will surely receive my prayer!" When Hashem saw that Moshe was taking it lightly and did not stand in prayer, He immediately leaped up, as it were, and swore by His Name that Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael, as is written (Bamidbar 20:12): "Therefore you shall not lead this congregation..." The word 'therefore' in this context is a form of oath, as we find (Shmuel I 3:14): "Therefore have I sworn regarding the House of Eli..."

R' Eliyahu Hatzorfati, one of the foremost sages of Fez (Morocco) and one of the chief disciples of the Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh (`Kol Eliyahu', Vo'Eschanan), comments on this Medrash that one can support this from the opening verse in Vo'Eschanan: "And I pleaded with Hashem **at that time**, that is, because I pleaded to Hashem then - and not before, when the decree was first issued - therefore: "And Hashem became angry with me on your account and did not hearken to me."

Promptness in Prayer Boosts its Reception

The Mashgiach from Kfar Chassidim, R' Eliyahu Lopian zt"l, derived a fundamental rule to prayer from here (`Shevivei Lev' p 175): A person should never put off his prayers but as soon as difficulties arise, he should straightaway pray to Hashem and plead that they be removed. Had Moshe prayed immediately, surely the decree would have been annulled and he would have been allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. But because he relied on his standing and thought that his prayers would surely be received even later, he put off praying and the decree was sealed.

We find this principle in the words of Chazal in `Yalkut Shimoni' (Tehillim 247 883) regarding the exiles of Bayis Rishon. When Yirmeyahu reached the banks of the Euphrates together with the exiles from Jerusalem, Nevuzradan, the Chief Executioner, presented him with two choices: the first was to continue on with his people to Bavel, and the second, to return to Eretz Yisrael.

Yirmeyahu deliberated: "If I accompany my people to Bavel, who will comfort the remnant still in Eretz Yisrael?" He therefore decided to return. At that moment, the exiles lifted their eyes to Yirmeyahu and when they saw him abandoning them, they burst into tears, as is written (Tehillim 137:1): "By the rivers of Bavel, there did we sit and weep upon remembering Zion." When Yirmeyahu heard their cries, he said poignantly, "My brothers, I call upon heaven and earth to testify that had you wept even once while you were still in Zion - you would not have been exiled!"

In light of these words we can better understand the wording "**there** did we sit and weep upon remembering Zion." He said to them in effect: Woe unto you that only there, on the riverbanks of Bavel, did you think of sitting and weeping, and not while you were still in Zion. Had you wept then, you would have been spared the many tears and sobs later on (`Haskes Ushma' - Prayer, p. 151).

Why Did Mordechai Cancel Pesach?

We would now like to understand the secret power of prayer uttered without delay as opposed to prayer offered up later on. Isn't Hashem capable of listening to prayer at any and every time? The Mashgiach of Lakewood offered a brilliant explanation. R' Matisyahu Solomon shlita said that when Hashem visits a harsh decree upon His sons, He surely does so with valid reason, primarily to arouse them to teshuvah and prayer. In other words, at a time of trouble, Hashem stands and calls out to us, as it were, out loud: "My sons, pray to Me and I will remove this edict from you." And if this is true, surely we cannot say: Wait a few days until we find the time to pray. Because if it was His will that we pray in a few days' time, He wouldn't have brought this decree upon us at this time!

This principle can also explain to us what is written in Megillas Esther: after the decree which Haman formulated was sealed on the 13th of Nissan and Queen Esther sent a messenger to Mordechai saying: "Go and assemble all the Jews..." (4:16), Mordechai did not hesitate a moment but immediately, "And Mordechai passed and did everything which Esther had commanded him (ibid 17). The gemara explains (Megillah 10:1): Mordechai passed over the first day of Pesach and ordained fasting and prayer instead of observing the mitzvah of the day by eating matzah.

One might stop and wonder why it was so important for him to pray immediately, so much so that he saw fit to override Pesach.

According to the above principle, we can understand this very marvelously: Mordechai made a reckoning: if Hashem had not wanted us to override the mitzvos of Pesach, He would surely have waited until after the first day of Pesach rather than having the decree sealed on the 13th of Nissan. But He wanted us to cry out and weep before Him right away, even if it meant temporarily superseding Pesach. This being true, Mordechai immediately set out to round up all the Jews in fasting and prayer. And because they did so with alacrity, Hashem hearkened to their prayers and saved them (`Matnas Chaim' p 165).

Preceding Prayer to Active Effort

In the 'Drashos Maharam Banet' (Pesach Drush 3) he quotes the words of the Rambam (Taaniyos 1b). "At the time that trouble comes and they pray about it... everyone should know that their evil deeds have brought it upon them. This will cause and enable them to remove the source of trouble." From the wording of the Rambam we can infer that there is a special aspect to praying immediately upon the onset of calamity. The Maharam Banet explains that the Rambam directed his specific wording to those people who first seek to save themselves from the danger/threat through natural means and ways and only after their efforts fail do they begin to pray.

David Hamelech addressed his words in Tehillim (107:4-6) to these people as well: "They wandered lost in the wilderness... they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried to Hashem in their trouble; He delivered them from their distresses." David rebukes those men who did not pray immediately when faced with trouble, right

from the start when "they wandered lost in the wilderness." At first they relied on their supplies of food and water and only remembered to cry out to Hashem when these were depleted.

Amen in This Parsha

It appears that from the pasuk (20:12), "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify My Name before the eyes of the Children of Israel..." that the charge against Moshe and Aharon was that their not speaking to the rock but hitting it instead displayed a lack of emunah.

The 'Megale Amukos' writes in Parshas Vo'Eschanan that the nucleus of emuna lies in answering 'Amen'. This being so, it is interesting to find a hint of the word precisely in the incident of Mei Meriva in two adjoining verses. Since we are too small to understand that minute iota of lack of emuna, the Torah sought to allude to it through the final letters of the verse: "Shimu nA hamoriM hamiN... " and "YaaN lO he'emanteM... " ('Niflaos MiTora-seicha': Amen).

Amen for Pardon and Atonement

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

The Ineffective Tears

The time: the tail end of the first World War. The winds of war are slacking down, the victorious sides have begun negotiations leading to the signing of various complex peace treaties and the drawing of new national borders, favoring the different rulers rather than their citizens. The new circumstances have caused citizens of one country to suddenly become subjects of a different one. The new borders have even split a city into two different nationalities.

This is exactly what happened to the town in our tale. The repercussions of the war severed the dead from the live where the town itself where its houses and streets remained under the rule of one country while the cemetery at its outskirts changed hands and now belonged to a different sovereignty.

This strange situation demanded a quick solution. What would happen if someone suddenly died? Where would they be buried? The question was brought before the trustees of the community and from there, to the local rulers and then referred to the ministry responsible for a consensus between the two bordering countries. Jewish activists shuttled from one authority to another, explaining, preaching and beseeching, and padding pockets here and there with bribes.

The decision arrived at was that the cemetery would remain in the hands of the new rulers while the town would revert to its former sovereign power. But out of consideration with the Jewish population and its needs, in the event of a funeral, free transit would be permitted between both places without the need for formal documents or security checks for the deceased and ten escorts alone. This would be in effect for a limited few hours. Orders were transmitted to all the border officials.

Strangely enough, a 'plague' seemed to have broken out in the town following this ruling. At first the flow was a mere trickle but very soon, there was a flurry of funerals. Unidentified bodies swarthed in white taleisim passed under the noses of the border guards without anyone making a peep. Orders were orders!

Trade began flourishing between the two bordering countries. Whenever the need arose, a group of burly men who were also ac-

tors who knew how to cry, were called upon to escort a new 'corpse' to his final resting place, along with precious goods being smuggled across the border as the funeral proceeded on its way, without any superfluous eulogies, to be welcomed by traders on the other side.

Such a funeral was planned one day. The merchandise was loaded upon the hearse early in the morning and the procession set out. Something went wrong this time, however. Perhaps the border guards smelled something irregular; perhaps the smugglers forgot to be on their guard. At any rate, the funeral this time seemed to lack an air of solemnity and sorrow, rousing the guard's suspicion. The guard would not let the funeral proceed as usual.

"Remove the shrouds from the body!" he barked.

The escorts were shocked. "But this is a funeral!" they protested.

"These are orders!"

"But this is a desecration of the dead! We will complain about this to your superiors!" the smugglers put up a brave front.

"If you don't do it yourselves, I will have to do it," said the official.

Hands trembling, they removed one covering and then another, revealing the trickery. There were bottles of wine, jars of preserves, rounds of cheese and other things which were heavily taxed and prime products on the black market.

The fear in the eyes of the funeral escorts quickly turning into scalding tears and then into vociferous sobs. This time,

their tears were for real, for they knew the high price they would have to pay for smuggling.

They begged and pleaded, attempting to justify themselves or seek leniency, but in vain.

"If only you had cried at the proper time," the official laughed out loud at their pleas, "you wouldn't be crying now!"

Weeping in earnest, they were led into the prison cell. This is a true story, but its lesson is more like a parable with a message. If we learn to cry and pray at the right time, we will be able to spare ourselves many a tear in the future.

(From 'She'al Avicha V'yagedcha' Vol. II p 247).

פדה בשלום נפשי



On the verse "In time of strife in Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves..." (Shoftim 5:2) Chazal commented in Tana Dvei Eliyahu

"In whose merit does Hashem punish the nations for Israel's sake? **Through those who go to batei Knesset and batei midrash morning and evening and answer 'Amen'**"

And bless Hashem with 'Amen', of which it is written (Tehillim 55:19): **"He has delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me For there were many who strove with me"**

Dear Fellow Jew!

Resolve to be strengthened in saying the morning blessings With a partner each morning in shul! Perhaps your Amen will tilt the scale favorably For the sake of the immediate deliverance Of our precious brothers suffering in captivity:

**אייל בן איריס תשורה
גיל-עד מיכאל בן בת גלים
נפתלי בן רחל דבורה**

May it be the Divine will that we be able very soon to declare together with them "Blessed is He Who Releases the Imprisoned – AMEN!"

