

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



Parshas Masei

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

The Importance of Prayer for Others

He Did Not Ask for Mercy

This parsha speaks about Hashem's commandment to the Jews to establish cities of refuge throughout the borders of Eretz Yisrael. These would serve as a safe haven for those who committed unpremeditated murder (beshogeg) and protect them from the hands of avenging family members. This murderer would remain in that city until the death of the Kohen Gadol, after which he would be permitted to return home.

Chazal tell us in Maseches Makos (11a) that the Kohen Gadol's mother used to stand at the gate of the city of refuge, handing out food and clothing. She was afraid that in their desire for freedom, the people would pray for the death of the Kohen Gadol and their prayers might be answered. Why? Because the murderers might have a claim against him for not having prayed for the safety and lives of the people of his generation. Perhaps his prayer could have prevented the unintentional murder.

The gemara relates that this is what happened to R' Yehoshua ben Levi. One time, a lion attacked and killed a man at a distance of three parsecs from his house. Up until then, R' Yehoshua had been visited by Eliyahu Hanavi, but after this incidence, Eliyahu did not come to him for three years to indicate that while he was not directly guilty for that tragedy, nevertheless, he should have prayed that such a thing should not have happened in his vicinity.

The Source for the Obligation to Pray for Others

Rabbenu Bechaye derives a lesson from the words of Chazal (Bamidbar 16:1) regarding the universal obligation to pray for others, especially important people of Klall Yisrael. Let us examine the roots of this duty and how we are expected to practice it.

The first one to introduce this and practice it was Avraham Avinu, as we find in Medrash Rabba (52:13). It is written, "And Avraham prayed... And Hashem cured Avimelech (Bereishis 20:17). Up until this point in the Torah, we do not find anyone praying for someone else (see Rashi there).

But from then on, we find many examples throughout Tanach of prayer on behalf of someone else. For example: Moshe Rabbenu, our faithful shepherd, prayed continually for the Jewish people. He also prayed for his sister, Miriam, "Hashem, please, heal her quickly." The gemara (Bava Basra 91b) tells us that Elimelech and his sons were punished because they should have prayed for their generation during the famine - but failed to do so.

The Power of Tzaddikim in Praying for their Generation

Aside from the obligation and responsibility of people to pray for the rest of their generation, as we have seen by the Kohen Gadol, there is also a special power, a segula, in the prayer of a sage for his generation. We find this in Bava Basra 16a: "R' Pinchas ben Chama taught: Whoever has a sick person in his home should go to a sage and [have him] pray for mercy, as it says in Mishlei (16:14), "The wrath of a king is as messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it." In `Nimukei Yosef' there (53a) it says that this is what was practiced in France. Whoever had a family member who was ill would go to a Rosh Yeshiva to ask for a blessing for him.

In the introduction to the Maggid of Dubnow's `Sefer Hamiddos', his disciple, R' Avraham Ber Flam, tells of his master's custom, day in and day out, to suddenly rise in the middle of his study, go up to the amud, and recite several chapters of Tehillim amidst moving tears, and then return to his seat. No one understood the reason for this practice during his

lifetime, but after the Maggid passed away, the shamash of the beis medrash revealed that the Maggid had insisted that whenever he heard of any difficulty or sorrow besetting anyone in the town, he should come and tell him so that he could immediately offer up prayers for him. He forbade the shamash to tell anyone.

Sharing a Friend's Burden

The mitzvah of praying for others does not only obligate great Torah leaders but applies to each of us since we are duty bound to wish for the good of our fellow Jew and pray for him. We can find an example from the practice carried out during the times of Chazal (see Shabbos 67a) which states that when a tree used to drop its fruit before they ripened, it was painted red. Thus, passersby would see the sick tree and pray for it.

The Mashgiach of Mir, R' Yerucham Levovitz zt"l said: From here we can see the exalted level of people who lived in ancient times and were concerned over a tree infested by harmful insects. Not necessarily great people at all, these people were distressed and felt compassion for the owner of the tree to the point of praying for it. (Leket Reshimos' Tefilla p 48)

When the only son of the Saba of Kelm once broke his leg, the Saba said, "Every father naturally feels sorrow when his son breaks his leg but this doesn't mean that he actually experiences his son's pain." The Saba sat down and began empathizing with his son. "Ah, it must hurt like this when he stands, and like that when he sits," he imagined to himself. "Oh what pain!" When the Saba finally felt that he truly felt his son's pain, he stood up and began praying for him. (Ibid p. 192)

The sensitivity of commiserating with others is ingrained in our blood and genes as Jews, for are we not a nation with one heart beating together? "All Jews are guarantors for one another." Sometimes, however, it seems that this feeling becomes blunt and desensitized as the generations proceed. The way to recapture a sense of caring is by rousing ourselves to pray for others, as the Chazon Ish wrote in a letter to his student (Compilation of Letters Vol. I 123): "You are lacking the feeling of commiserating with and sharing the pain of others... The way to remedy this is by exerting yourself to benefit another and spare him suffering. Actions affect the heart -- even if one is praying on someone else's behalf but lacking in sincerity where his prayer does not stem from his heart, and even if he is a common, lowly person."

The Sin of Not Praying for a Fellow Jew

Aside from a person's duty to pray for his friend, it appears from the words of the gemara that if one refrains from doing so, he is called a sinner. The gemara (Berachos 12b) learns this from the words of Shmuel to the people (Shmuel I 12:23), "Far be it from me... and to sin to Hashem by stopping to pray for your sake." The Meiri comments on the gemara there: "It is a characteristic of the sages and a tactic of theirs not to give up and despair from the needs of his neighbor. Chazal therefore said that whoever is able to pray for mercy for his neighbor and does not do so is called a sinner..."

We similarly find in the Zohar (Vayikra 15a) that the reason that Yeshaya called the Great Flood 'the waters of Noach' is because he was somewhat to blame for it. Had Noach prayed for his generation, perhaps the Flood could have been averted.

The Obligation to Pray for the Spirituality [Ruchniyus] of Others

The gemara in Berachos (10a) tells of hoodlums who lived in the neighborhood of the Tana R' Meir and caused him so much suffering that he prayed to Hashem to kill them. When his wife Bruria heard this, she said: "Why do you want them to die? Does it not say 'May all sins cease from the land and the wicked ones vanish'? It does not say 'sinners' but rather, 'sins'. We can conclude from here that one must not pray for the death of sinners but that they repent, in which case there won't be any more sins!" Upon hearing her wise words, R' Meir prayed for mercy upon those ruffians and indeed, they repented.

The Zohar expresses a similar thought (Vayera 105a), saying that it is a mitzvah to pray that the wicked ones repent and be spared punishment in Gehinnom. This is expressed in Tehillim (35:13): "As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I afflicted my soul with fasting and as for my prayer, may it return to my bosom."

It is written in 'Reishis Chochma' (Shaar Ha'ahava 1041) that a person should be distressed over everything that prevents Hashem's will from being fulfilled. One should even pray for his enemy to repent. The author explains that in some of the blessings of the Shmone Eseret, such as 'Ata chonen - You grant wisdom...', 'Hashiveinu - bring us back to Your Torah' and 'Slach lanu - forgive us', one should not have himself in mind but should direct his prayer for all of Jewry, friends and enemies inclusive. Since these blessings are phrased in the plural, he surely must include the whole body of Jewry beside himself.

The Maharsha poses a question here (Vol. I, Berachos ibid): How is it possible for someone to pray that his neighbor not stumble in sin? This negates the rule that "everything is in the power of Heaven ex-

cept for the fear of Heaven." Such a prayer can help regarding himself, for if he shows through his prayer that he really wants to be G-d-fearing and avoid sin, he will be led along the right path and be assisted therein by Heaven. But how can his prayer that someone else be protected from sinning be effective?

The Maharsha writes that the answer to this question is very simple, but he doesn't explain it. An answer can be found in the 'Ahavas Eisan' commentary on 'Ein Yaakov'. True, fear of G-d in the intellectual sense is dependent upon a person's free choice and we cannot pray for him in this area. But regarding fear of punishment, we can surely pray for someone else's fear to be aroused and that he be prevented from sinning. And this should be our intention and thought in saying those prayers.

Amen in our Parsha

A satisfying hint to the power and advantage of answering 'Amen' was derived by R' Yitzchak Hakohen Huberman, the Tzaddik of Raanana, from the opening verse of this parasha: "These are the travels of the Children of Israel who departed from the land of Egypt."

The acrostic of the Hebrew "Asher Yatz'u Meieretz Mitzrayim" add up to 91, which is the same numerical value as Amen. The last letters of these words add up to the word "tzuram - their strength". This hints at the idea that the mitzvah of answering Amen arouses Heavenly mercy and kindness for us, as explained in the Zohar (Vayelech 285), and this is the source of Am Yisrael's power and might. (Ben L'Ashrei' Masei)

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

Why Was the Rebbe's House Burned

Fiery red flames leaped up to the clear skies. The sound of crackling branches going up quickly in flames were heard all the way till the nearby village and burning sparks began flying in the distance.

This took place on Isru Chag Succos. A pidyon haben was taking place in the village not far from Vishnitze for the grandson of one of the wealthiest men in the area and as was befitting for his station, he had invited all of his friends and acquaintances from the surrounding area. A distinguished delegation of the dignitaries and trustees of Vishnitze also attended, headed by the Rav at that time, the famed Admor R' Shlomo of Bobov, favored grandson of the Divrei Chaim of Sanz and the founder of his own illustrious dynasty of Bobov.

An unexpected visitor appeared during the course of the meal, dressed shabbily. He rushed over to the head table and approached the Rebbe directly. "Rabbenu, help us! A terrible fire has broken out in our city, in the Jewish quarter, and soon all the houses will burn down!"

The entire hall was in an uproar. People leapt up from their seats and rushed to the porch from which they could see the entire town in its splendor but all eyes were focused on the crowded homes of the Jewish neighborhood. Little effort was required to notice the huge conflagration whose flames were leaping hungrily skyward.

Now the sight was accompanied by the acrid smell of fire and smoke billowed into the room, making it difficult to breathe. The Jews of Vishnitze looked on helplessly as their homes and property went up in flames and the festive meal was forgotten. The joyful atmosphere became one of anxiety; people were afraid to think the worst, which was certain if the fire was not arrested immediately. Everyone offered up prayers that at least his home would be spared...

Suddenly there was a rustling sound from behind. The Rebbe stood up and addressed the gathering in a calm voice. "My dear ones, you can rest assured. Not one of you will lose his home to the ravages of the fire. I can see for sure which house will be destroyed by the flames." He did not specify, just remained silent.

The people rubbed their eyes in disbelief but grasped on to

their faith in their leader. Everyone sat down and quickly finished the meal with bircas hamazon, thanked their host, wished him 'Mazel Tov' and hurried outside to the wagon which would take them home.

The closer they came to their town, the less pronounced was the smell of smoke and fire and they felt reassured that the fire had been extinguished. They couldn't help wondering which was the house that had borne the brunt of the fire and had burned to the ground. When they entered the town, they learned the bitter truth. All of the houses had remained untouched - except for the home of the Rav, which was utterly destroyed.

Nothing remained of all his precious sefarim and religious articles. Fire had consumed everything. It seemed as if this home had been sacrificed so that all the other houses would be spared. To be sure, this became the talk of the town, among Jews and gentiles alike.

When things settled down, the Rav summoned the heads of the community and said to them: "I want you to know that before I came to serve as your rabbi, I went to visit Brigil to pray at the grave of Arye Dvei Ilai. When he was Av Beis Din of Vishnitze, he suffered bitterly from many of the townspeople who slandered him. It became so unbearable that he had to leave the town, but before leaving, he cursed the town that it burn down.

"I went to his grave and prayed for you. I begged him to forgive you for the anguish you had

caused him, but I forgot to pray for myself. So while all of your houses were spared, the house of the Rav, where I live now, was consumed by fire even though I surely was not one of those who tormented him. When you told me that fire had broken out in Vishnitze, I suddenly understood that it must have begun in my house and would be contained there because I knew that I had prayed that all of your homes be spared. Alas, I forgot to pray for my own home..."

'Ari Shebachburah p. 54)

בס"ד
 "אמר ריש לקיש: כל העונה אמן בכל כוחו פותחים לו שערי גן עדן, שנאמר (ישעיהו כ"ב): "פתחו שְעָרִים וְיָבֵא גוֹי צְדִיק שְמֵר אֱמוּנִים" (שבת ק"ט ב)

The Rosh Yeshiva, Hagaon
R' Shmuel Rozovsky zt"l,
 whose yahrzeit falls on Friday of Parshas Masei , the 27th of Tammuz, said:

It seems that Reish Lakish had a special reason for using the plural regarding the gates of Gan Eden even though he is talking about an individual who answers 'Amen'. It comes to teach us that one who is very careful about properly answering 'Amen', not only gains entry through the gates of Gan Eden for himself but enables all of the people of his generation to enter Gan Eden along with him.

Confirmation for this can be learned from the wording of the pasuk from which Reish Lakish derived his words: "וַיָּבֵא גוֹי צְדִיק", for this word denotes 'nation'. We can therefore conclude that the entire Jewish nation has the gates opened for them in the merit of that one person who is careful in answering Amen. (נוטרי אמן' ה"א עמ"ל)