

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



Parshas devarim

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

The Choice Prayer - Whatever Suits You Best

A Person Doesn't Know What is Best for Him

"אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף בין פארן ובין תפל ולבן וחצרת די זהב" (א:א).

The passuk which opens this week's parsha seems to teach us only the locations where Moshe spoke all of these words to the entire people. But Chazal, quoted by Rashi, indicates that all the places mentioned are actually a reproach to the Jews said indirectly. By mentioning those places, Moshe wished to hint to Bnei Yisrael and remind them of the sins they committed, whereby angering Hashem, while in the desert.

Among those places mentioned is Di Zahav. Rashi says that this suggests the Golden [zahav] Calf, a sin triggered by the wealth of gold which they possessed.

A wealth of gold/money is something that almost everyone wishes for but it seems here that this was the cause of the terrible sin whose consequences we are paying for to this very day, referred to as "the Sin of the Golden Calf".

An average person is incapable of realizing what is truly good for him. This acknowledgement does not only apply to the Generation of the Desert, but to each and every one of us who imagines that he is capable of choosing his fate and deciding upon his priorities. Many times, it turns out that not everything that he believed was for his benefit was really good for him since the only One Who knows what is best for us is Hashem.

How Must We Ask in Our Prayers?

R' Yosef Albo, in his (ספר העיקרים ד כד) , says that a person should not enumerate everything he wishes and wants in his prayers, as if dictating, as it were, to Hashem specific requests, since this appears to be limiting Hashem's capacity to provide exactly what he is asking for. Better to word his request generally, like the short prayer which Chazal (ברכות כט ב) formulated for people going to dangerous places: "Carry out Your will in Heaven Above and bring pleasure to Your pious ones down below and do what is best in Your sight."

In this way, explains R' Albo, every person can rest assured that his request be fulfilled for the best since he is acknowledging the fact that only Hashem truly knows what is good for him. And even if his personal desires are not fulfilled, he will know that it is only because Hashem knows that if a particular wish were to be realized, it wouldn't for his benefit.

What is Unrevealed is Unto Hashem

The מדרש תנחומא, תרומה ט discusses the request of Shlomo Hamelech of Hashem that He answer all the prayers recited before Him in the Beis Hamikdash. Regarding the prayers of gentiles (מלכים א' פס' לט) it is written: "ועשית ככל אשר יקרא אליך הנכרי"; whereas regarding the prayers of Jews, he asked (שם פס' לט): "לכבוני כי אתה ידעת לבדך את לבב כל בני האדם."

Chazal explained that if a Jew asks Hashem to bless him with children, it might be that Hashem knows that any future children would rebel against Him and it were better for the person that his request be rejected. Similarly, if he asks for wealth/property, and Hashem knows that riches will make him go astray, it were better for his wish not to be fulfilled. These words are directed at Jews, whose everlasting welfare Hashem wants. But regarding gentiles who are rewarded or punished in this world, there is no reason not to fulfill their requests even if they are not for their benefit.

The Chofetz Chaim gives a remarkable illustration in the form of a parable: Two neighbors lived in a town;

one sold sweets and the other had a spoiled little child. The boy's father once approached the shopkeeper, asking him that when his son entered the shop and asked for a candy, he should give him only a small sweet - for which he would pay later. The shopkeeper had a different approach: whenever the boy came in and begged for candy, the shopkeeper would fill his pockets, which the boy ate with great appetite. This undermined the child's health and soon he became malnourished and sickly.

A short time after, the shopkeeper assumed an innocent expression and knocked on his neighbor's door, presenting him with a large bill for all the candy his son had eaten. Instead of paying, the father began yelling at him and said, "You're to blame for my son's illness, and you dare ask for payment?" They argued loudly, each one accusing the other until they finally decided to go to a Rav to settle the affair. He heard both sides and ruled in favor of the boy's father. "As a rational person," he said to the shopkeeper, "you should have understood the danger in letting the boy stuff himself up with sweets. This is not what the father wanted from you."

The situation in this world is reflected perfectly by this parable, said the Chofetz Chaim. A person imagines that his happiness depends on the fulfillment of his various wishes, which renew themselves daily. If he does not obtain his desire immediately, he rants and raves against Hashem Who, he feels, is withholding his welfare from him. But when he reaches the World of Truth and sees that the things he wanted so badly would have been detrimental to him, then he may argue that those wishes which were fulfilled and were bad for him should have been withheld. He may say: "Hashem, why did You give me what I asked for? Surely You knew that it was not good for me..." (חפץ חיים, בנותיבות התפילה עמ' קכ).

It Resulted in Heartache

R' Yaakov Lisa used this thought to explain the words of the gemara (..ברכות לב ב): "כל המאריך בתפילתו ומעייין בה, סופו שבא לידי כאב לב"

He explains that the gemara talks about a person who thinks deeply about what to pray for specifically and what he believes is best for him. Such a person is very likely to develop heartache since only Hashem knows what is best for him and if this does not correspond to what the person is asking for, he will become frustrated.

Therefore, says R' Yaakov of Lisa, a person should only make those requests enumerated in the siddur, according to the text formulated exactly by the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah, and if he does wish to make a personal request in his own words, he should add "but may You do what is best in Your eyes". In this way, he will accept everything that comes to him with understanding and joy, out of the full realization that this is what is good for him, and in this way, he will avoid frustration..." (אמת ליעקב ברכות פרק אין עומדין).

R' Elchanan Heilperin, Av Beis Din of Golders Green, explains the words of the prayer "אנא ככה: שוועתנו קבל ושמע צעקתנו יודע תעלומות" as follows: Even when we cry out and plead for Hashem's salvation out of the conviction and acknowledgement that "He knows what is hidden from us", then even if our request is not fulfilled, at least we will be reassured that since He knows what is concealed from us and knows what is truly good for us and has chosen not to fulfill our wish - it is for our own good ("יפה שיחתך", עמ' קעו) "שיחתך ??? (יפה שיחתך, עמ' קעו) "שיחתך ??? או שיחתך או משהו אחר

Study is Not the Primary Goal - Deeds Are (Avos 1:17) Preach Well and Practice Well (Chagiga 14b)

And when you arise from your study ask yourself how to implement what you learned (Letter of the Rambam)

May We Correctly Voice our Requests for the Good

There is an interesting explanation for the custom of people wishing one another at times especially conducive for prayer and blessing, using the Yiddish expression, "Zolst hoben gepoilt alles gut, -- May you have accomplished (through your prayer/blessing) everything for the good." The Admor ישראל of Alexander said: "We do not ask that our requests be fulfilled for the good, but that our prayers be effective for the good, since we cannot know what is truly good for us, and it may not be advantageous for us to have our requests fulfilled. The appropriate blessing is that we merit directing our actions for the end purpose best suited for our welfare ("חיים שיש בהם" מועדי השנה, עמ' ככו).

It is told that during the Holocaust, many Jews had the feeling that one should pray for the success of the Russian Red Army against the accursed Germans. When the Rav of Brisk heard this, he grew angry and said, "How can we pray for the success of those wicked ones? They have declared that they wish to uproot Torah! And we should pray for them?! What we must pray for is Hashem's salvation, in whatever way He sees fit to bring it!" (טללי אורות" - באור תפילה, ח"ג עמ' שפט").

Nullifying One's Ego as a Condition to Having Prayers Received

On the final day of his life, the Chazon Ish told the Av Beis Din of Komemiyus, R' Binyamin Mendelson zt"l, the following: "It is told that one of R' Chaim of Volozhin grandchildren was involved in a certain shidduch, but for unknown reasons, it was held up time after time and not finalized. One time, R' Chaim turned to his family and said: 'The time has come at last to conclude this affair.' Indeed,

that very day, all of the doubts and questions were resolved and the match was brought to a successful close, to everyone's joy.

"Everyone was very surprised at the sudden outcome and asked R' Chaim: 'Do you have Divine inspiration that you were able to foretell this happy culmination?' He shook his head and said, 'Not at all. The explanation is simple: I have been praying for this match every day, but I kept on feeling that my prayer stemmed from a personal source of what I felt was good. This morning, however, I suddenly felt that my prayers were free of personal interest and stemmed purely from total subjugation before Hashem that He will surely do what is best in His eyes, as Chazal said, 'עשה רצונך כרצונו'. Then I knew clearly that the match would be finalized according to the end of that teaching: 'כדי שיעשה רצון אחרים כרצונך'. And indeed, both sides quickly came to an agreement between themselves for the best (מסוד דיה חסידים' שער שיש')."

'Amen' in our Parsha

A pleasing hint to the words of the Zohar in כל כוחו פותחים לו: "שערי גן עדן ואמר" can be found in the words of Moshe to Bnei Yisrael: "אמרו לא תערכו ולא תיראו"

אמן. The end letters mem, alef, nun (in bold) spell out מות, death. This comes to teach us that whoever is careful about answering 'Amen' properly need not be afraid of the day of death, for he is already promised that the gates of Gan Eden will be opened for him and that he will be in the proximity of tzaddikim (ישע ציון דברים אות' כד).

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

The Disadvantage Which Led to an Advantage

This true story took place in one of the hundreds of small villages scattered throughout Galicia. Like most of the houses in the village, its shul was also small and unimpressive. The Jewish villagers who toiled for their very bread never had an extra coin to add a bit of honor to their house of prayer. One of the poorest villagers, an elderly bachur, was chosen as shammash and was paid only a few pennies a month, and even this amount had to be scraped together from the worshippers, sufficing him for the very barest necessities.

At one point, there was a sudden change in fortune of the village when a highway was paved nearby, turning it into prize real estate. Now wealthy tradesmen wished to live here. They came, bought land and built spacious mansions, bringing economic prosperity to all of its residents.

The humble shul also gained from this good luck. At first, it was renovated but then the newcomers decided to tear down the building to the ground and build an entire new and beautiful beis knessess to fit the lifestyle of the wealthy inhabitants.

After a while, the new residents decided that the shammash was not respectable enough for them. He had one serious shortcoming which had accompanied him since childhood: he was illiterate, never having learned to read or write. As the shul grew, there was a greater need for someone to properly run things on a bigger scale: books had to be kept about pledges, ali-yos, expenses and so on. Constant complaints against him reached the trustees.

These gabbaim felt sorry for him and decided to give him a six month period during which he would have to master reading and writing if he wished to keep his job. He found it very difficult, especially at his age, and had to accept his dismissal.

He did not fight the decision but decided to leave the village with a sizeable amount of money in his pocket as severance fee. At first, this money tided him over for basic food and other expenses but when it neared the end, he began hiring himself out for odd jobs.

One time, he met up with an elderly lumber merchant and offered his services. The merchant agreed to hire him on a trial basis.

The employer was very pleased with him, even though the worker was illiterate. He was very willing, industrious and very handy. He was even clever in business

matters and soon had expanded his master's affairs to new heights.

He worked for the lumber merchant for several years, learning the trade inside out. When his employer died, he took over the business and began buying up forests from gentile owners who needed cash and then reselling the lands on credit, gaining a handsome profit with each sale. Before long, he became one of the wealthiest merchants in all of Europe.

He opened a bank account and let the clerks take care of all his transactions. One time, the bank manager called him in to his office to sign an important document. The man asked for a stamp pad to affix his thumbprint as signature.

"What!" exclaimed the manager. "How can someone as clever and successful as you have become so wealthy without being able to read or write or even sign his own name?" The merchant smiled in embarrassment and said, "You should know that my illiteracy is the very cause of my success. Had I known how to read and write, I would still be a shammash in a remote little village to this very day..."

From this story we can learn the lesson that a person can never know what is really good for him. It is clear without a doubt that when the shammash heard about his dismissal, he must have felt great despair. How would he be able to survive? What else would he be able to do in life, never having learned a trade? Who knows if he hadn't prayed silently to Hashem that He open his mind to be able to learn to read and write within the six months allotted to him so that he could keep

his job...

And when he saw that it was hopeless, he must have felt broken and abandoned. Little did he know that the very disadvantage would bring him fantastic luck in the future. Indeed, how could he have imagined such a thing? Only the Creator could have designed such a successful turnout, not only in this particular case, but for every single person on earth. Only He knows what is best for each individual.

(הסכת ושמע' - תפלה עמ' מו)

noil a ekil pU esiR

רבנו האר"י ז"ל נוהג היה לשמוע בכל יום את ברכות השחר מפי רבים - לעתים אפילו מאה, על מנת לענות אמן אחר ברכותיהם (שערי תשובה' אור' ח ו ד)

The Beis Aharon wrote about this:
 "Even though the Ari Hakadosh could have encompassed all of the worlds in a moment, he did not hesitate or be lax in listening to the blessing of 'הנותן לשכוי בינה', and all the other blessings..." (סדר היום ואהרות קודש).

In commemoration of the hilula-yahrzeit of Rabbenu the Ari Hakadosh which falls on Friday, the 5th of Av, let us resolve to follow in his footsteps, and may this practice be a guiding light unto our footsteps:

Let us recite the morning blessings each day with a partner, thus providing one another with the merit of answering 'Amen', and merit thus to increase the glory of Heaven in our world.

Dear Jew! Upon reciting the Morning Blessings, see that someone answers Amen

Dear Jew! Upon hearing 'Amen', STOP, LISTEN, and ANSWER Amen Intently

ענינים