

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



BEREISHIS

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

בקול רם אברך שם יי תמיד

A Blessing Recited Out Loud

Aside from the three tefilos which Chazal instituted daily, there are many varied blessings which say throughout the day in giving thanks to Hashem for His great kindness and compassion towards us. Some of them are obligatory and others are voluntary. Chazal covered almost every facet of our physical life and for a good reason: each blessing reflects a kind of payment for the pleasure or benefit which we derive from Hashem. Chazal interpreted (Berachos 3a) the conflicting pesukim, "The earth and its fullness belongs to Hashem" and "He gave the land to mankind" to refer to before the proper blessing and the second, after it. In other words, before we acknowledge that the whole world belongs to Hashem, it is, indeed, His, but after we thank Him, we are permitted to utilize what is in this world.

This being true, it is surely fitting that a blessing be said in the best possible manner. The Shulchan Aruch devotes several paragraphs to the laws of berachos in detail. Many sefarim written over the generations deal only with this topic.

Among the laws is the specific one stating that a blessing must be said aloud and pleasantly. This important law is hinted at in the word which opens our parsha and, in fact, begins the whole Torah: Bereishis. The Chida writes (Nachal Kedumim Bereishis) in the name of the Gurei Arye, "בקול רם אברך שם יי תמיד", that this word spells out the above.

This is very significant and refers to what Chazal said that the world belongs to Hashem, the Creator. And yet, He has given mankind permission to use the world for his needs ('Yismach Yehuda' Bereishis).

Aside from this, there is a special reason why the Torah hinted indirectly to the subject of blessings in the very first word, Bereishis, which is to teach us how important it is that we train our children to say the berachos properly at the very beginning of their path in life, so that they become accustomed to it till the end of their days. 'Bereishis' is the first word they learn when they begin chumash.

The Gerrer Rebbe, the Beis Yisroel, used to instruct the melamdim that one of the first things they teach their young students is to say their berachos out loud ('Yagdil Torah' Bereishis).

Along the same lines, R' Yaakov Weil, Rosh Yeshivas Shaarei Torah, told that at the aufruf before his wedding, which was held in the Beis Medrash of the Gerrer Rebbe, the Beis Yisroel sent a special messenger to remind him that when he was called up to the Torah on the following day, he should recite the blessings loud and clear so that the entire Beis Medrash could hear and answer 'Amen'. The Rebbe explained that he remembered that at R' Yaakov's bar mitzvah, he had said the berachos so softly that hardly anyone could hear them. It had disturbed him so much that years later, he made a point to remind him to raise his voice.

The Blessing is Answered through 'Amen'

There are many advantages to a blessing recited loud and clear. First of all, because that way, everyone can hear and be able to respond with 'Amen'. The Chida stated this after he discussed the hint hidden in the word 'Bereishis'. When the congregation responds with 'Amen', the beracha becomes perfect. We can add, also by way of a hint, that the word following Bereishis is bara, whose letters spell out "בקול רם אמין".

The Zohar says (Vayetzei 160a) on the pasuk "Ki shem Hashem ekra havu godel l'Elokeinu" that herein lies the deep mystic secret that every beracha should include three people: one who recites it and two who respond with 'Amen', so that Hashem's praise rise up 'besod shlosha', triply effective. This is the most exalted and proper form of saying a blessing..."

"Sefer Chassidim" states (428): "Whoever recites the bircas haTorah and other blessings softly is stealing the mitzvah, so to speak... therefore the congregation should say the blessing

ings out loud, as is written, "And the leviim shall answer and say to all of Israel out loud..." (Devarim 27:14). It further states (429): "When they read the Torah, the one who says the blessing over the Torah is called a sinner if he says it in a whisper since he causes the congregation to miss out on 'Baruch Hashem Hamevorach...' and the succeeding 'Amen'.

Do Not Deny Good to Another

The Sefer Chassidim (254) comments on the pasuk in Mishlei (3:26): "Do not deny good to another when you have the opportunity to do so." The author writes: "How careful one must be in saying the berachos out loud. If one knows that there are people who wish to answer 'Amen', he must not deny them, for there is no greater charitable deed than being 'mezake'... and whoever enables his friend to perform a mitzvah is considered by the Torah to have done it himself."

The 'Pele Yoetz' (erech Amen) writes this in the same words, quoting the gemara in Sanhedrin 99b. He adds, "The chazzan has to be very careful not to follow what is practiced in some congregations of reciting the first three blessings aloud and the rest in a whisper, for aside from the deep meaning inherent in all of them which are extremely sublime, he is also preventing many people from answering 'Amen' many times... whereby both the blesser and the responder are denied the goodness of the reward."

We should remember that when a blessing is followed by an 'Amen', it fulfills the obligation of the blesser, as explained in the Rema (Orach Chaim 7b): Whoever answers 'Amen' should do so in a loud voice so that the blesser hear it and consider it as his acknowledgment. The Mishne Brura there (18) says that this is because answering 'Amen' completes and perfects the blessing.

Conducive to a Good Memory

An additional advantage in reciting a blessing out loud, says the Pele Yoetz in 'Damesek Eliezer' is to make the person aware that he said it, in case he is in doubt. And if he is still not certain, those around him will remember if he said the blessing or not.

We find in 'Reishis Chochma' (Shaar Hakedusha chap. 15) regarding bircas hamazon: "Saying the blessings out loud is conducive to a good memory; if it is Rosh Chodesh - he will remember to say yaale veyavo and on Shabbos, to say retzei etc., while one who prays in a whisper will forget everything." As Chazal said regarding Torah study that one should pronounce the words, as is written (Mishlei 4:22): "For they are life-giving to those who find them." In Shmuel, as well (II 23:5), on the verse, "Ordered in all things and sure..." Chazal commented (Eiruvim 54a), "If it is ordered in of all your 248 organs, it will be preserved; if not, it won't be."

The Voice Arouses Kavana

The Sefer Chassidim comments on the verse in Tehillim (103:1): "Bless Hashem, my soul, and my innards His holy Name," and says: "When one blesses Hashem, he should do so out loud for when one speaks loudly, his inner organs vibrate along with the voice."

The Shelah Hakadosh writes (Succa Ner Mitzva 6): "In all of the blessings, one should accustom himself to say them aloud for the voice arouses kavana." And elsewhere (Tamid, Ner Mitzva 79): "A man should teach his household to say all their blessings every day out loud, both the bircos hamitzvos and the bircos hanehenin (of pleasure)... for the audible voice leads to kavana."

I am the Servant of Avraham

When Eliezer, servant of Avraham, was served food in the home of Besuel, father of Rivka, he said, "I will not eat before I have said my piece" (Bereishis 24:33). When they said to him:

"Speak", he began, "I am the servant of Avraham." The Baal Haturim comments that Eliezer meant to say that he would not eat before making the berachos over handwashing and bread.

The Imrei Emes explains the rest of the pasuk. Besuel says: "You want to say your blessings? Say them, but hurry it up. Daber!"

Eliezer replies: "I am Avraham's servant - I don't say my blessings with haste, but as befits a servant of Avraham, the very one who taught the entire world to thank Hashem for their food. I make my brachos bekavana. ('Yigdal Torah' Bereishis Chaye Sara).

A Crown of Grass

The "Mateh Moshe" (46) brings a story quoted from the 'Ohr Zarua': "I knew a Jew from Worms named R' Bunim The shammash, a gravedigger, once woke up early and saw a man sitting in front of the shul with a grass laurel on his head. The shammash was sure that he was a demon and asked him, 'Aren't you the man who died yesterday?' He said: 'Yes,' 'And didn't I bury you yesterday?' he asked. 'Yes,' said the man. The shammash questioned him further, 'And how is it there, in the Other World?'

'Fine,' he said. 'How did you merit that? You were a simple fellow.' He replied, 'In the merit of my saying all of my berachos in a pleasant voice in shul. Because of that, I was led directly to Gan Eden and shown much honor. Do you want a sign that I am the man whom you buried? You can see that my garment is ripped. Do you remember that when you put on my shrouds you ripped them?' 'And what is that on your head?' 'These are grasses from Gan Eden. I made a wreath for my head to banish the foul odors of this world...."

In the ancient work, 'Sefer Hagan' (for Day Two), it quotes R' Yehuda Hechassid: "There was once a famous Rav, renowned as a great scholar. In a hurry to finish his prayers each morning so that he could return to his holy books, he used to scold the people who took their time with prayers and brachos. When he reached the World of Truth, a terrible punishment awaited him because of this very sin."

Therefore, writes the author of 'Sefer Hagan', every person should take it to heart and recite his berachos out loud and pleasantly and he will be admitted to Gan Eden. Furthermore, it is also written that whoever raises his voice when saying the berachos, is credited as if he brought all of the sacrifices enumerated in Vayikra. A hidden reference to this is from the fact that there are 110 verses in Vayikra, correlating to the 100 berachos required per day plus the 11 times of 'Baruch' in Baruch She'omar.

Like a Servant Before His Master

In 'Ohr Zarua' (Vol. II, Hilchos Shabbos 42) we find the above stories, with the following conclusion: "One's hair can stand on end when we realize how important it is to say the berachos with kavana and pleasantness, for this reflects one's subservient relationship with Hashem, his Master, and if he is instrumental in having others answer 'Amen' to his blessings, he is increasing and sanctifying Hashem's Name."

The author also quotes the Ramban (Shmos 13:16): "The A-mighty does not want anything in this lower world other than Man acknowledging Him as his Creator by raising his voice in prayer, intense, pure prayer... and this is what is meant by Chazal (Yerushalmi Taanis 2a), "And they called out to Hashem with might" (Yona 3:8). From here we learn that prayer requires vocal power."

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

The Holy Light of a Beracha

The unforgettable mashpia, HaRav Eliyahu Roteh, used to tell this story over in the name of Rabbenu Chaim Ben Attar, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh.

The Ohr Hachaim once spent the Seder night with an elderly couple, two simple folk.

During the Seder, the Ohr Hachaim suddenly noticed that the old man's face was flaming with an unearthly light, but which was dim in comparison of the sublime glow on his wife's face. This greatly intrigued him, especially since one did not see such holiness by plain people.

The Ohr Hachaim begged his host to reveal the secret of such holiness. The host shrugged his shoulders, not knowing what to say but the Ohr Hachaim pressed him and asked him to describe his daily schedule. This is what he told him:

In our house, we have always been accustomed to recite berachos out loud, with feeling and gratitude. Our home has always been a peaceful, pleasant place. Financial worries have not made a dent in the atmosphere or upon our children's upbringing and we have been fortunate to see them grow up as fine, G-d-fearing Jews.

Apparently, the Satan was dissatisfied with the harmony in our home and sought to darken our lives. One day, a wealthy looking person knocked on our door. His long white beard and refined manner combined to make a favorable impression.

He became our patron, our savior, showering much goodness upon us. He began by buying us new quality furniture. In the second month, he bought new clothing for the whole family, and slowly, raised our standard of living. Needless to say, we felt deeply indebted to him.

We felt as if this was a special bounty sent from Heaven, until our benefactor began preaching in a way that sounded all wrong. He said that it wasn't polite to recite berachos or to pray out loud. Hashem hears us even if we whisper, he insisted. Day by day he said things that cooled off our enthusiasm in sacred things.

I accepted everything he said because he looked like such a learned man, someone we could rely on. I closed one eye, while the other was blinded by all the good he had showered on us and slowly the nature of our family began changing. The more our material condition improved, the worse was its spiri-

tual level.

While I closed my eyes, my wife was the first to rally. She realized that the children were losing their eagerness to pray and make berachos; they were becoming cold and indifferent as well as insolent and frivolous.

It was clear what, or who, was to blame. Then, one day, my wife turned to me and very adamantly, made me promise not to let the old man cross our threshold ever again.

I was in shock. I couldn't dream of banishing my benefactor but my wife was so insistent and her arguments made so much sense that I, too, arrived at the conclusion that the old man's purpose was to drive us off the pure path. He had chosen the method of cooling us off from saying our berachos aloud because he knew that this was the first real step towards ruining us spiritually. So long as we said them fervently, loud enough for all to hear and respond, he would have no way of influencing us for the bad, since we would be steeped in yiras Shomayim all the time.

I finally realized how right she was and capitulated. On the morrow, when the old man appeared at our doorstep as he did every day, I informed him indisputably, that we no longer wanted him to cross our threshold.

At first he argued, then he threatened, but I stood my ground. In the end, he removed all the things he had given us and slammed the door behind him.

The host concluded: "We

remained poor in possessions but rich in spirit. And from then on, I resolved to be all the stronger in the area of berachos and tefillos recited aloud and fervently. Today, many years later, we reap the rewards of that decision in seeing our children going in the true path of the Torah."

When he had finished his tale, the Ohr Hachaim understood why such a holy light had emanated from this wonderful couple.

(Notrei Beracha' p. 269)

לעת נעשה בחפצו כל
אזי מלך שמו נקרא

(from Adon Olom)

Dear Fellow Jew!

At the beginning of the Torah,
when we read about Creation

Let us remember and internalize to accept
Hashem's sovereignty upon us every day
By responding 'Amen' properly, as Chazal said:
"What is 'Amen'? Kel Melech Ne'eman"



I am also exacting in beginning the day by
saying the bircos hashachar with a partner