

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



SUCCOS

In the Pathways of Emunim: Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

AMEN WITH EMUNA

The Month of the Mighty Ones

We find ourselves in the middle of the month of Tishrei, the month which is referred to as "Yerach HaEisanim" or the Month of the Mighty Ones (Melachim I 8:2). The Metzudos Dovid explains that 'eisan' means 'strong' or mighty. Tishrei was given this name because it contains those holy days which empower and realign a person towards perfecting himself.

Indeed, in this unique month, everyone feels himself ascending from one level to another, beginning with the holy days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, days of repentance and spiritual growth, and continuing with the days preceding Succos when we exert ourselves with building a succa and purchasing the arbaas haminim. By the time the first night of Succos arrives, we are seated in purity and holiness in our temporary dwelling, in the shade of emuna.

IN THE SHADE OF EMUNA

Our sojourn in the succa is referred to Chazal as "betzilta d'meheimnusa -- in the shade of emuna". The Zohar mentions in several places (Tetzave 186; Emor 131) that every Jew who sits in the succa is sitting in the shadow of emuna, as it were, and during this time, it is as if the Shechinah spreads its wings above him protectively all the while, banishing all prosecutors bent on harming him.

From the words of the Zohar, it appears that the purpose of the succa is to foster faith in Hashem and a sense of being sheltered in His shade. Hagaon R' Dovid Tevil of Minsk writes that a reminder can be found in the fact that Chazal invalidated a succa where the penetration of sunlight is greater than its shade (Succa 2a), since the shining of the sun represents the forces of Nature and the ongoing laws that rule the celestial bodies, while the mitzvah of succa was given to us to engrave upon our hearts that the conduct of the world lies in the hands of the Creator through individual Providence and not through the power of the stars and constellations. Thus, a succa where the sun penetrates most of the area is not considered kosher (Drashos 'Nachalas Dovid' Drush 1).

For He Hides Me in His Succa

David Hamelech requested that Hashem "hide me in His succa on a day of evil, and conceals me in the recesses of His tent." The Ibn Ezra explained that David Hamelech knew and recognized that the only way he could be safe from his enemies was if Hashem hid him in His succa, as it were, and he be protected under His wings.

Why, one can ask, should he feel safe in Hashem's succa? Would it not have been more logical to ask that Hashem hide him in His fortress or in some other stronghold?

The Mashgiach, R' Chaim Friedlander zt"l, said that the truth is that no fortress in the world can begin to compare to the shelter of being in Hashem's succa booth because its very strength lies in its being a place of emuna, and when a person believes and trusts in Hashem with a true and pure belief that He will protect him from all harm, it is as if he is under the fluttering wings of the Shechinah, where nothing can reach him.

If we examine this idea, we will see that it plumbs the depth of the very essence of the mitzvah of succa. On Succos, we enter our booths for an entire week and conduct all of our usual vital activities inside it: eating, drinking, studying, sitting and sleeping in the succa. We thus demonstrate our faith in the Creator that He sustains us and supports us throughout our entire lives; He is our very source of life ('Sfas Chaim' - Moadim I p 333).

And You Shall Remember Hashem Your G-d

An additional insight to this concept is expressed in the commentary of the Rashbam (Vayikra 23:43), explaining why this festival was ordained during the 'harvest of the granary and the winery'. This is a time when the houses, silos etc. are filled with grain, wine and oil, the products of many weeks of hard toil. The Torah knew that precisely at such a time, a man is liable to feel that it was 'his might and the strength of his hand' that produced all the wealth, a thought that borders on heresy.

We are therefore commanded to leave our protective

houses and enter a provisory home to remind us of the days when our ancestors in the desert survived without lands, fields and homes. This is a time for us to remember that just like then it was obvious that Hashem was sustaining them and providing them with all of their needs, so today - it is He Who gives us the strength to succeed in our toil and to deal with all of our needs.

The Imrei Emes of Ger interpreted the piyut-poem which is said on Succos along these very lines. "Let not the mitzvah of Succos be light in your eyes, for it is as weighty as all of the commandments of our religion and its statutes." Since this mitzvah is a test of our faith in Hashem, it is truly as important as all of the mitzvos together, as Chazal said (Makos 24a), "Chavakuk came along and compacted all of the commandments into one - a tzaddik lives by his faith" ('Imrei Shefer' Tishrei Os 184).

AMEN - EMUNA

The famous R' Yaakov Etlinger zt"l, author of 'Aroch laNer' introduced his work on the laws of succa with the following thought: "May the straightforward rejoice... on this holy festival." Aside from the mitzvah of rejoicing on the festival, which holds true for all of the festivals, that of Succos is specifically known as 'The time of our rejoicing.' The rejoicing is, therefore, double. And just as our happiness is double, so is our holiness twofold, as we see from the gematria of 'succa' which is 91, identical to the sum of the two holy Names of Hashem which are represented in 'Amen', which also equals 91.

He concludes that since this festival is double and its sanctity is double, so must one be very careful in properly fulfilling the mitzvah in the best possible manner, and whoever does so will surely merit, measure for measure, a double reward.

And we also add: Just as the holiness of the succa is double, so is the holiness of 'Amen' double, and just as the succa symbolizes our faith, so, too, does responding 'Amen' show our faith. The gematria of both words equals 91. The end letters of "Kel Melech Ne'eman" add up to the same number as 's'chach' (R' Eliyahu of Viskit zt"l, talmid of the Saraf of Kotzk, in his work 'Eizor Eliyahu' - Succos).

KEL MELECH NE'EMAN

There is no need to go into the connection between 'Amen' and 'emuna'. Aside from the fact that 'Amen' is the root of 'emuna', the very essence of this mitzvah symbolizes faith. As Chazal said (Shabbos 119a): The meaning of the word 'Amen' lies in the expansion of its letters: 'Kel Melech Ne'eman.' Rashi comments there that answering 'Amen' testifies that the Creator is the A-mighty Trustworthy King.

The Maharal explains the words of the gemara ('Nesivos Olam' Nesiv Ho'avoda chap. 11): "The alef of the word 'Amen' hints at the beginning, that is, that Hashem preceded everything in the world and created it. The letter 'mem', which is in the middle of the alphabet, hints at the kingship, malchus, or rule of Hashem over the world. And just as the Mishkan, which was the residence of the King of the World in this physical world, stood in the very midst of the camp of the Jews, so, lehavdil does an earthly king situate his palace in the middle of his kingdom. The final letter, nun, points downward as if it had no end. It hints at the word 'ne'eman' to teach us that Hashem's trustworthiness is infinite and that we believe He will eventually fulfill all of His promises, to resurrect the dead and bring the Ultimate Redemption to the world.

BELIEVE AND RESPOND WITH 'AMEN'

The 'Midrash Tehillim' comments on the pasuk (Tehillim 31:24) "Hashem preserves the faithful" as referring to the tzaddikim or those Jews who declare "...blessed are You Who revives the dead" and then faithfully answer 'Amen'. They believe with all their might that Hashem will resurrect the dead even though that time has not yet come; they declare "Who redeems Israel" even though He has not yet redeemed us; they declare "Who builds Jerusalem" even though it has not yet been built. And Hashem declared: Israel was redeemed temporarily but were enslaved and exiled once more, and yet they still believe that I will redeem them in the future. This is referred to in the pasuk "Emunim notzer Hashem", in other words, these faithful who respond with 'Amen' - are the ones whom Hashem preserves (see Seder Rav Amram' Hilchos Seudah).

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

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

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

Rabbenu Bechaye writes ('Kad Hakemach' erech Emuna) that since one's faith is bound up with responding 'Amen', therefore a person should be careful to answer properly in his prayers and blessings, since that word is derived from the same root as 'Amen'. Whoever stood at Har Sinai together with his ancestors and accepted the Torah which is called 'emuna', and whoever is from the seed of Avraham Avinu who was the progenitor of emuna [monotheism] and of whom the Torah testified (Bereishis 15:6), "and he believed in Hashem", is obligated to direct his heart and thoughts in properly answering 'Amen'. G-d forbid that the shaliach tzibbur recite the blessings so softly that the congregation is unable to hear them, as a deaf person who cannot hear and a dumb person who cannot open his mouth. Neither should a person come to appease his friend loudly as if he was out in the street... for this is a civil crime [as it were], for a servant who hears his master being blessed is obligated by logic to answer 'Amen' -- so be it. All the more so is the obligation upon whoever hears his fellow man blessing the G-d Who sustains every living thing to respond with 'Amen'.

Chazal comment on the verse, "Open the gates and admit goy tzaddik shomer emunim" that one should not read "shomer emunim" but rather "she'omrim Amen" (Shabbos 119b). The 'Megaleh Amukos' (Ha'azinui) writes that in this case, the apparent pronunciation of emunim, that is, the kri, can be interpreted just like its homiletical explanation, the kshiv-ameinim. This is because the core of emuna depends on the response of 'Amen', for one who responds with 'Amen' is binding together the two Names of Hashem - Havayah-Adnus - and is thus strengthening emuna in the world.

The 'Aruch Hashulchan' (Orach Chaim 24:14) writes: The foundation of our emuna actually depends upon 'Amen'; therefore every person should teach his young children to answer 'Amen', for as soon as a child answers 'Amen', he already earns a portion in Olam Haba.

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

WHY THE TZADDIK WAS UNABLE TO SLEEP

The story we are about to tell took place in Bnei Brak not long ago. It was the first night of Succos, very late at night. The 'tzaddik from Petach Tikva', Rabi Zev Velvel Eidelman zt"l, sat in his small succa. The holy ambiance of yiras shomayim resting upon him at all times was all the more pronounced now on his glowing face. Not every day does one have the chance to fulfill the precious mitzvah of sitting in the succa!

The meal was long since over. Hours had passed and the elderly R' Velvel was tired. His bed was laid out and he had already finished his preparations for retiring for the night, but he was trying his best not to fall asleep. He was not yet prepared to fulfill the mitzvah of sleeping in the succa. Every few minutes he would go over to the succa window to scan the empty street outside and would then return to his place, to wait some more.

Finally, at a very late hour, a disciple of his passed by. As soon as he saw him, R' Velvel called to him to enter the succa. The man was very surprised. The elderly R' Velvel should have been asleep long ago! What was keeping him awake so late? What assistance did he require?

The moment he entered, the visitor was all the more surprised. R' Velvel took a small cookie from a plate and recited the two brachos - mezonos and leishev basucca - very intently.

The mystery was immediately solved after the visitor answered 'Amen' to each one and the tzaddik turned to him with an explanation. "I have always been accustomed to recite a 'le-shev basucca' before I go to sleep in the succa, preceded by eating mezonos. But I also embrace the practice of Rabbenu Chaim Volozhin in not saying a brachah unless someone is present to answer 'Amen'. So even though many hours have passed since I have wanted to retire for the night, I waited for someone to pass by so he could respond. You were like an angel sent from Heaven so that I could go to sleep."

Upon that very occasion, R' Velvel told over the open miracle that took place with R' Chaim of Volozhin in the merit of this very practice:

As aforementioned, R' Chaim was always punctilious in having someone present to answer to any blessing he uttered. One time, in the middle of the night, he suddenly felt an overwhelming thirst, but since

there was no one around, he refrained from making the blessing over the glass of water.

Hours passed and the thirst increased, but he stood his ground, determined not to break his practice at all cost.

Then, suddenly, there was a knocking on the door. He opened it to find one of his talmidim from the yeshiva on his threshold, a diligent masmid who had been disturbed by a difficult question on what had been studied that day in yeshiva. "I couldn't shut my eyes before hearing an answer," he said apologetically. "Please forgive me for disturbing the Rosh Yeshiva at such a late hour..."

R' Chaim smiled and asked him to wait a moment. He took the glass of water and recited the blessing with tremendous kavanah, and the student replied with fervor as well. After R' Chaim had quenched his thirst, he waited to hear the question.

He was able to resolve all the difficulties very quickly and the talmid left, beaming with pleasure and relief. R' Chaim went to bed to gather strength for the coming day.

On the morrow, when he entered the Beis Medrash, he sought out the student who had visited him late the previous night, thanking him for having come. "You were like a Heaven-sent angel," he explained, telling him about his extreme thirst.

The talmid looked perplexed. "What is the Rebbe talking about? I slept soundly in my bed the

whole night and never got up until this morning..."

Only then did R' Chaim understand that his visitor had indeed, been an angel from Heaven in the form of his disciple, sent to save him. Heaven had seen to what lengths R' Chaim was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of 'Amen' and had responded accordingly...

(Notrei Amen' Vol. I, p. 335; 'Rabi Velvel Der Eidelman' p 351)

I SUBMIT MY SOUL

We find an interesting innovation teaching us the sublime holiness of the mitzvah of 'Amen' in the ancient work 'Sefer Hagan' (Yom 11): "And this is the secret of 'Amen', which I write for those who know and understand... According to its simple meaning, 'Amen' is the fulfillment of things, that one's words are carried out and that the blessing be realized. Therefore, each Jew who hears a blessing from another Jew is obligated to respond with 'Amen', even if he hears it from a woman or a child. And if he hears a blessing and does not answer, he is liable the death punishment. The word 'Amen' initial-izes the words, 'Ani moser nafshi - I submit my soul.' From here we learn that every single Jew is obligated to sacrifice his soul in answering 'Amen', since this is a testimony that the blessing is true."

The Maharam Schiff quotes the words of the Zohar that overlooking answering 'Amen' is detrimental to one's emuna, which is proved by the pasuk which states that if one who does respond with 'Amen' is 'shomer emunim - showing his faith', then conversely, one who is not careful in this is detracting from his faith ('Sefer Hapanim' Os 70).

THAT IT BE WHOLE AND COMPLETE

HaRav Hakadosh R' Yehoshua Heshel of Kalish zt"l said: Not in vain do Jews search for a perfect esrog, unblemished from all sides, since the letters initialize the words 'emuna teshuvah refuah geulah - faith, repentance, healing, redemption.' These are the four things for which we pray for completeness: "Ani maamin be'emuna sheleima. Hachaztreinu bisheshuva sheleimah. Refuah sheleimah. Ge'aleinu geulah sheleimah" ('Belabas Eish' Vol. I p. 294).

We can add to this by way of a hint from the order of the letters of esrog. It is as if Hashem were saying to us: If you fulfill My two (the first two - emuna and teshuvah) perfectly, I will give you the other two - refuah and geulah - also perfectly ('Yekarah Mipninin' Emor).

תענה אמונים שופרים לך לברנמים...

On Succos, when we leave our permanent homes to seek protection in the shade of emuna, let us remember and internalize that throughout the year, as well - every day, there are infinite chances of expressing our faith in Hashem

Since emuna is a fundament of the entire Torah, our Sages instituted answering 'Amen' in our prayers and blessings - since it shares the same root as emuna (Rabbenu Bechaye, Shmos 14:11)

Let us then resolve to strengthen ourselves in emuna. Let us begin our day by reciting the morning blessings with a partner, mutually answering 'Amen' after each blessing with kavana

The numerical value of 'succa' is equal to 'Amen'. And the initials of 'Amen' spell out "Kel Melech Ne'eman" and similarly, the end letters - lamed, chof, nun - add up to s'chach or 100, equal to the number of blessings one is obligated to make each day.

The triple strand of all these mitzvot is emuna in the Creator, and one who fortifies himself in these merits residing in the shade of the Shechinah. (See 'Eizor Eliyahu' [R' A. of Viskit] on Succos, Chessed I'Avraham [Radomsk], Likutei Maamorim)

Answering 'Amen' with Kavana - Strengthens our Emuna in the Creator