

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



PARASHAS VAYETZEI

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMBINING A REQUEST WITH THANKS

This time I shall thank Hashem

"This time I shall thank Hashem." Leah Imeinu chose these simple words to immortalize for coming generations her tremendous sense of gratitude to Hashem after the birth of her fourth son. She went even further by naming him Yehuda, a name which epitomizes thanksgiving. Chazal so praised this act to the extent that "R' Yochanan said in the name of R' Shimon bar Yochai: From the day that Hashem created His world [and up to this point], no one thanked Hashem until Leah came along and did so, as it is written, 'This time I shall thank Hashem'" (Berachos 7b).

We cannot help but wonder why she stopped having children after that, as is written, "She conceived again and gave birth to a son and said: This time I will thank Hashem. She therefore called him Yehuda, and she stopped giving birth." We are made to conclude that her stopping to have children is connected to her having thanked Hashem, for if not, why would the Torah have made it consecutive? We do not find this by any of the other Matriarchs. We need to understand if this is the 'reward' for giving thanks...

The Tur explains this in his commentary, 'HaAruch' (as does, similarly, the Ibn Ezra), that her thanks was an acknowledgement that she had already received her allotment of sons and didn't expect to have more. And precisely because she seemed satisfied with her lot and did not couple a request for the future together with her thanks, she was not blessed with more children at this point.

Rachel's approach was different, as we see (30:23, 24) in our parasha. After Yosef's birth, she did not suffice with expressing her thanks, "Hashem has gathered in my shame" but immediately made a request: "And she named him Yosef, saying: May Hashem add another son to me" (see Introduction to 'Oholei Shimon').

This idea is brought in 'Meor Vashemesh' in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin, who embellished it by quoting the story from Maseches Taanis (19a) about Choni Hame'agel. After a difficult drought in Jerusalem, he prayed for rains and was answered generously with a plentiful downpour which filled the dry wells with pure rain water. When the heavy rain persisted, the people of Jerusalem, afraid of floods threatening to destroy the city, came to him and asked him to pray again that the rains stop. Instead of doing so, he suggested that they bring a sacrifice as a sign of thanks for the rains. As soon as a fat ox was brought up, the rains stopped.

The Chozeh explained this according to our previous concept. In offering up this sacrifice without adding a request for the future, the people intended to suggest that they sufficed with the blessing and did not need any more, and therefore, the rains did, indeed, stop because thanks for the past without a request for the future indicates that the blessing was sufficient.

HASHEM BE BLESSED - HASHEM BE MERCIFUL

From this we can learn an important principle regarding prayer: every expression of thanks should be accompanied by a request! This is derived from the words of the Rambam in his 'Sefer Hamitzvos' (Aseh 132) about the mitzvah of thanksgiving when bringing the first Bikurim fruits, "He commanded us to tell of His kindnesses and His salva-

tion... and to praise Him for all this, and to ask Him to continue the blessing onward."

We find a similar Halacha in the words of the Mishna (Berachos 54a) regarding one's entry into the city at the end of a voyage. A person should thank Hashem for the past and at the same time, ask for the future, as the Rambam concluded (Berachos 10 27) from this Halacha: "The general rule is that a person should always cried out with a plea for the future and ask for mercy, while giving thanks for the past, praising to the best of his ability. Whoever is exceedingly thankful to Hashem, praising Him always - is most praiseworthy [himself]."

They tell that a chassid of the Divrei Chaim visited the Rebbe frequently. Each time he would ask the Rebbe to pray for his sick daughter. Time when by and she recovered. The next time he went to the Rebbe, the latter asked him how his daughter was doing. "Baruch Hashem," said the chassid, "she is now well!"

The Rebbe heard this and was displeased. "Why do you say that she is well - and leave it at that! You should have immediately added a wish that Hashem continue to keep her in good health!" ("Mishnas Yehuda" on Avos; comments to letters at end of book).

AMEN IN THE PARASHA

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely," (Hoshea 14:5) is a pasuk in this week's Haftorah. R' Yaakov Abuchatzzeira said that the initial letters of "Meshuvosom Ohaveim Me'od" spells out 'Omen', which hints at what is written in the Zohar (and elsewhere), that answering 'Amen' deflects Divine wrath and causes Hashem to love Israel as before.

("Shaarei Teshuva" Ofen 20)

Hagaon R' Avraham Erlanger shlit" a enumerates several prayers where we couple thanks with a succeeding request: In Hallel, which is completely praise, we interrupt and request, "Ana Hashem hoshia na... Hatzlicha na..." because when one thanks Hashem for the past, he is obligated to stand on guard and not forget to ask for the future, that Hashem continue to send His salvation and success ever after.

At the end of Nishmas, which is the superlative of praise, we say, "Up till now, Your mercy has helped us and Your kindness has not forsaken us." Then we immediately request, "and do not abandon us, Hashem our G-d, forever more." When we make a siyum on a Masechta, we also say, "I thank You Hashem... that just as You helped me complete this Masechta, so may You help me begin other Masechtos and sefarim" ("Bircas Avraham" Bava Metzia, introduction).

The Admor of Sanz ztzvk"l writes in his responsa, "Divrei Netziv" (Likutim 25), an expansion on this important principle applied to the prayer of Modim. At the end we say, "And all the living shall acknowledge You," which is a prayer of sorts. In the Modim d'Rabbanan, we conclude with a wish for the future, "So may You maintain and sustain us..." (see commentary of R' Bar Yakar on "Modim d'Rabbanan" - "May all this be Your will to do for us in reward for this thanks which we hereby offer You").

The "Divrei Yetziv" innovates a marvelous idea which struck him regarding the Bircas Hagomel blessing, which is unusual in the fact that the listeners do not suffice with merely answering 'Amen' but add (see "Aruch Hashulchan" 219 5): "May the One Who granted you all-goodness He grant you all-goodness, Sela." The reason for this is because the one who recites cannot end the beracha with a wish for the future since this is a short blessing confined to the nature which Chazal assigned it. Those who hear the blessing, however, can answer instead of him with the future wish that "the One Who granted you... may He grant...", annexing a request for the future with his thanks for the past.

THE MOMENT OF THANKSGIVING IS AUSPICIOUS (EIS RATZON)

Aside from the above, it seems that the time and occasion of giving thanks is also a favorable time for having one's prayer for the future received. This is explicitly written by R' Yehuda Markir in his work "Seder Hayom" (Bircas `Sim Shalom`): "After having organized praise and appreciation to acknowledge the kindnesses and goodness which He granted us in providing for us through His mercy, [we have generated] an Eis Ratzon, a favorable moment when we pray before Him that He be constant in His love towards us and thus grant peace, goodness and blessing over us and over all of our Jewish brethren."

The "Sefer Hachinuch" (449) discusses the prayer declared upon bringing Bikurim: "And after the praise, he asks of Him to be constant in His blessing over him, **and through the arousal of his soul in praise of Hashem and His goodness, he merits to have his land blessed.** That is why the Creator commanded this of us, for He desires chessed."

R' Chaim Vital wrote about Bircas Hamazon: "After your body and soul have been nourished by eating food... do not be an ingrate to steal from Hashem, but bless Him with Bircas Hamazon with great joy as if you had just received a gift from someone... and in this merit, Hashem will open His treasure store for you and you will be sustained from His generous hand always" ("Shaarei Kedusha" I 306).

The Pele Yoetz writes (Hillul): "And since Hashem's kindnesses and judgments are straightforward and heart-gladdening, when we

bless Him and praise His Name for the goodness He does for us - it is sweet to Him and Hashem credits us with a mitzvah for which we receive reward, to the extent that **whoever is the object of a miracle and sings praise, is rewarded by having another miracle performed for him** as is written, "Whoever offers praise... I will show the salvation of Hashem" (Tehillim 50:23). Therefore, thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness is everlasting."

ONLY HASHEM CAN SAVE US

In conclusion, we would like to present the unique explanation of the Mashgiach R' Chaim Friedlander zt"l on the special segula-power of coupling prayer with a request: In our request for the future immediately following expression of thanks, we do not intend to flatter our benefactor so that he be kind enough to continue his favors. On the contrary, since we truly recognize and feel that everything we have comes only from Hashem, as our thanks for all the good of the past indeed acknowledges, therefore He is the only One from Whom we request help in the future.

A person who approaches prayer with the thought that "my might and the power of my hand produced all this success" is incapable of requesting for the future with his whole heart, that is, from the clear knowledge and recognition that only Hashem can help him. Therefore, his prayer is not pure or perfect. Before making a request for the future, one should give thanks for the past which shows that he is cognizant that only Hashem can help him. In that case, his prayer will be perfect and will be acceptable before Hashem" ("Sfas Emes" - "Rinas Chaim", Bircas Modim d'Rabbanan).

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

THE TEARS OF ABBA

Exam time in the yeshiva where our story takes places was, as in other yeshivos, a tense period. The yeshiva staff worked overtime each day with interviews and entrance exams, the succeeding discussions and innumerable phone calls from pressured and anxious parents and do-gooders calling on their behalf.

One night, after a grueling day of teaching followed by several interviews and entrance exams, the yeshiva staff convened for a routine meeting to discuss a list of twenty prospective students who had been tested that day. Each name had to be dealt with separately to reach a decision as to who would be the fortunate ones to be admitted for the following year.

From the very onset of the meeting, one name seemed to generate a great deal of interest. Everyone had been captivated by the character of one particular boy, and praised him as a worthy candidate for the yeshiva. He was refined, scholastically excellent, blessed with a fine and deep grasp and a wide scope of knowledge.

The consensus was unanimous when suddenly, one of the staff asked to speak. "I want to tell you a story," he said to the rest. "It took place when I entered yeshiva gedola together with my peers. My first days were occupied with finding a learning partner who would help me grow in every respect. My attention turned to one of the newcomers who made an excellent impression on me as a yerei Shomayim, a deep scholar and one of pleasant ways. I had already made up my mind to approach him and ask him to be my chavrusa but didn't know how I could convince him to agree.

"I prayed earnestly for the next few days, begging Hashem to help me achieve this wish, and Hashem granted me this desire. I succeeded in engaging him in learning, first as a chavrusa in between the daily study sessions and afterwards, as a steady learning partner. Our affiliation continued for several years until the happy evening when he informed me that he was becoming engaged.

"After his marriage, he moved to a distant neighborhood but in spite of the difficulty, I was determined to keep up our relationship and begged him to study with me at least once a week, on Thursday evening in his new home. He enthusiastically

agreed and I would go to his home every Thursday evening where we spent several hours learning together, hours which were more precious than gold, after which we parted reluctantly until the following week.

"A long period passed and once, when I arrived as usual and knocked on his door, there was no answer. I listened, and heard the sound of weeping. It was my dear friend; I was certain of it, and was very concerned. Afraid that he might need help, I dared open the door a crack and saw him holding an open Tehillim. He was pouring out his heart, sobbing intermittently.

"It took a few moments for him to realize I was there. He rose to his feet and extended his hand to me. 'I have a `Mazel Tov!' he exclaimed emotionally. 'My wife just gave birth to a son!'

"I didn't know how to react and almost shouted, 'Is everything alright? Are your wife and the baby in good health?'

"Yes, Baruch Hashem!' he hastened to reassure me. Now I was able to see the broad, happy smile on his face.

"Mazel Tov!' I exclaimed, and then asked, "So why were you crying so pathetically and praying so earnestly?'

"He seemed surprised at the question. 'What's the problem? Don't you understand? I just became the father of a new baby boy! The first thing I have to do after thanking Hashem is to pray for my son, that he grow to be a ben Torah, a yerei Shomayim and a devot-

ed servant of Hashem!'

"And I want to tell you," concluded the Ra"m, "that this boy, over whom tears and prayers were already shed for his future at his birth, is the very boy who impressed you all so much with his fine character and blessed attributes." And small wonder...

(Ohr Daniel" Parshas Ki Savo)

Berachos in Partnership

כס"ד

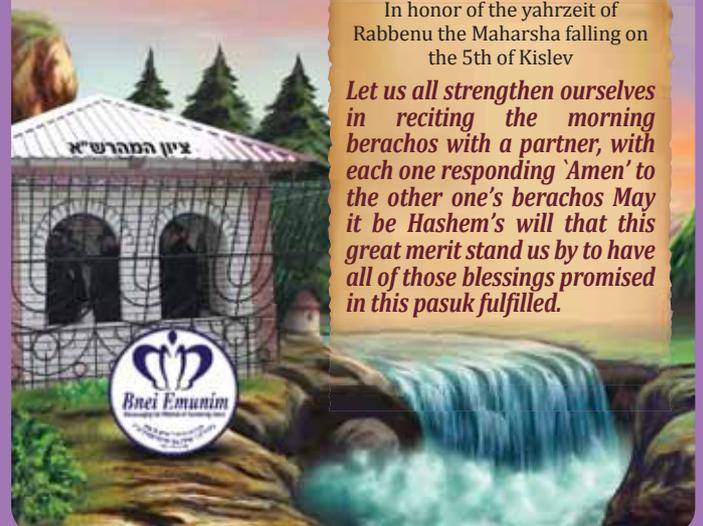
"לוא הקשבת למצותי ויהי כנהר שלומך וצדקתך כגלי הים" (ישעיה מח יח)

In this context, the word 'commandments -- mitzvos' derives from the root 'tzavta', partnership. The pasuk hints at the rule that if a person says his berachos in partnership, answering 'Amen' to his partner's blessings and vice versa, he will merit the marvelous blessings enumerated here: his life will flow like a river on calm waters and Hashem will perform things as great as the waves of the sea

(Maharsha Part I Berachos 6b)

In honor of the yahrzeit of Rabbenu the Maharsha falling on the 5th of Kislev

Let us all strengthen ourselves in reciting the morning berachos with a partner, with each one responding 'Amen' to the other one's berachos May it be Hashem's will that this great merit stand us by to have all of those blessings promised in this pasuk fulfilled.



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

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

bneyemunim