

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



CHAYE SARAH

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

Whoever Extends His 'Amen' Has His Days and Years Extended

The parshiyos in Bereishis open before us new vistas to the amazing lives of our saintly Avos, whose entire lives were devoted to avodas Hashem and a constant spiritual striving. In this way, they succeeded in reaching unbelievable heights of kedusha and closeness to Hashem. As we read how the Torah describes the events, we surely yearn to be able to grasp on to the hems of their holy garments, wishing that "our deeds reach/touch those of our forefathers."

How marvelous it is, then, to see that it is not altogether unreachable to attain at least one of the attributes which they excelled in, and truly, it is within our grasp to seize such opportunities every day.

OLD AND REplete WITH DAYS

The Torah describes Avraham's advanced age in an unusual manner. "And Avraham was old, coming with days" (24:1). Chazal commented (Psikta Zutresa Chaye Sarah I): "Some people are old but don't look it; some look old but are not advanced in age. Avraham was not only old but also advanced in age."

We turn to the Zohar (Vol. I 129a) in order to understand this fully. Avraham's length of days was not expressed only chronologically but also spiritually in that each day in his life was longer than other people's because he utilized every minute in a constant spiritual ascent by increasing more Torah and mitzvos into his treasure stores, far beyond what other people accomplish in the same span of time.

Rashi writes something similar with regards to Sarah Imeinu. The reason why the first pasuk in the parasha (23:1) begins with the words, "And the life of Sarah was..." and ends with the words, "...the years of the life of Sarah" is to teach us that all of her days were equal in quality. We find this expressed in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba Noach) where Chazal quotes the pasuk in Tehillim (37:18): "Hashem knows the days of the pure ones and their portion will be eternal." This means that just like tzaddikim do everything with wholesomeness and perfection, thus are their days and years perfect and unblemished with sin. The Torah wrote "the days of Sarah" twice, to teach us that because tzaddikim fill their days with Torah and good deeds, their lives are favored by Hashem in this world and in the next.

WHOEVER EXTENDS HIS 'AMEN'

One might think that the special advantage of long life is far beyond us, for who can compare our deeds to those of our exalted Avos who knew exactly how to utilize each and every moment of their days in order to perform Hashem's will with their whole soul and might?

If we study the brief words of the Baalei Hatosefos on the parasha, we will see that each and every one of us can merit long life of this kind. They note that the end letters of the words of the pasuk, "And Avraham was old... zakeN ba bayamiM," spell out 'AMeN', which suggests the reward of one who answers 'Amen' as being length of days and years.

It is also written in sefarim that the words "zaken ba bayamim" add up to the same numerical value as

"Kel Melech Ne'eman" which is the significance of the 'Amen' response, as Chazal said, "What is Amen? Kel Melech Ne'eman" ("Tzemach David" Chaye Sarah).

What does this entail?

In Masseches Berachos (47a) the gemara states: "Our Sages taught: One must not say an 'Amen' that is "chatufa, ketufa, yesoma" that is: premature, incomplete or orphaned - untimely -- nor shoot a beracha from one's mouth. Ben Azai says: Whoever answers an 'orphaned', severed or hasty Amen will have his days severed or plucked, while whoever extends his 'Amen' will have his days and years extended." This beraisa is quoted in the Yerushalmi (Berachos 8:8) with a slight addition: "His days and years are extended for the good."

The significance of the word 'extended' regarding the 'Amen' response is explained by the Rishonim, that one should answer 'Amen' patiently for the length of time that it would take to say

"Kel Melech Ne'eman" (which 'Amen' stands for). By saying it slowly, one can concentrate on the significance of the word. Chazal already stressed that one should not extend it too much so as not to ruin the correct pronunciation of the word ("Or Zarua" Part I, Helchos Seuda 193; also Psak in Shulchan Aruch 1248).

R' Chaim Vital, chief disciple of the Arizal, said that the root of all mitzvos is to perform them knowingly and not as if they were a burden to be shaken off quickly or disposed of like an unwanted vessel, as is written (Devarim 28:47): "Instead of your having served Hashem your G-d with joy and goodness of heart..." Rather, one should think as if in performing a particular mitzvah, he will earn thousands of thousands of golden dinarim. Therefore, he should answer an 'Amen' slowly, patiently, deliberately and with deep concentration (Introduction to "Shaar Hamitzvos").

LENGTH OF DAYS AND YEARS

The Ben Ish Chai explains Chazal's guarantee that "his days and years are lengthened" as including two blessings: the first, as having one's days lengthened so that every single day will be longer, enabling him to uplift himself more than usual, as is said of Avraham Avinu that "He came with his days." The second is having "his years extended for the good." Thus he will merit living many years in good health and spirits ("Ben Yehoyada" Berachos 47a). In a light vein, R' Eliezer Zev of Kretchnif zt"l said: "According to Chazal's promise of extended days and years, we can understand the verse in Tehillim, 'He weakened my strength... He shortened my days.' When a person is traveling, his prayers are more concise, as is written in the gemara. If so, he misses out on many 'Amen's which would have served to lengthen his days. The length of his travels, therefore, shortened his day, whereas one who prays in shul, is like... 'Fortunate are the ones who sit in Your house; they shall yet praise You, selah.' In shul he has the opportunity to answer 'Amen' many times, for which he will be enabled to praise Hashem for many years to come ("Olamot shel Abba" p. 437).

How Did He Gain Length of Days?

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

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

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

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"Keren Petachya" (Gefen 43) beautifully explains the connection between answering 'Amen' and length of days according to Chazal's question: "What is Amen? Kel Melech Ne'eman." When one extends his 'Amen', he concentrates upon its meaning and significance as an expression of his acknowledgement of Hashem being the 'A-mighty trustworthy G-d' Whose kindnesses envelop us every single day."

This introspection is certainly designed to lengthen a person's life span since it is stress and anxiety which wear down a person's spirit and shortens his life, and once a person deeply internalizes the basic knowledge that Hashem is All-Merciful and capable of saving him from any situation, he has removed stress from his life.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE SEGULA-AID OF EXTENDING ONE'S 'AMEN'

In Maseches Berachos, R' Yehuda enumerates three things that extend a person's days and years: Praying unhurriedly, eating unhurriedly and eliminating bodily wastes unhurriedly. The Maharsha wondered (Vol. I ibid) along with other Acharonim (see RA"A Gilyon Hashas ibid) why R' Yehuda did not mention answering 'Amen' unhurriedly as a segula for long life. He explains that this is including in the first category of praying leisurely.

The Maharal's explanation is brought in "Gevuras Yitzchak" that the three things enumerated by R' Yehuda are only effective if practiced all together, whereas answering 'Amen' unhurriedly can stand by itself for lengthening days and years and was therefore not included with the other three.

LENGTH OF DAYS IN OUR TIMES

R' Shlomo Bloch zt"l, disciple of the Chofetz Chaim, used to point out R' Nochumke of Horodna as a living example. In addition to his efforts in self improvement, he also busied himself with charity and chessed. Towards the end of his life, when his strength waned and he could no longer keep up his former pace, he divided up his broad spectrum of chessed involvement and apportioned them to other people ("Hatzaddik R' Shlomo" p 113).

They tell of a worthy Jew, a Satmar chossid named R' Chaim Hersh Goldberg z"l, who was especially active in marking up as many 'Amen's as he could. You could see him each day remaining behind in shul for many hours until the last minyan was over so that he could answer 'Amen' again and again. His ears were always perked so as to hear if someone anywhere in the vicinity was about to make a beracha, in which case he would run over and stand by so that he could answer 'Amen'.

When he passed away in 5730 at the age of ninety-one, an age considered very advanced in those times, not everyone understood the significance of that number until the Admor R' Yoel of Satmar announced in his eulogy: "Know that it was for good reason that R' Chaim Hersh lived so long; it was because he made the utmost effort throughout his life to answer 'Amen', in keeping with what Chazal said that whoever extends his 'Amen' has his days and years extended as well. He reached the exact age of ninety-one, parallel to the gematria of 'Amen' (as heard from R' Yekusiel Yitzchak Brach, principal of Yeitav Lev - Satmar, Bnei Brak).

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

LONG LIFE LIKE THE GEMATRIA OF 'AMEN'

The story we are about to tell took place dozens of years ago and was heard first hand from an American Jew who witnessed it:

In the Lower East Side where I grew up, there was a dear Jew who dedicated his life to promoting the mitzvah of answering 'Amen'. For many years, he was a living role model for this particular mitzvah and the neighborhood kids affectionately called him 'the Amen man'.

In the central shul where he used to daven, his voice would ring out whenever a beracha was said, and despite the undercurrent of noise, it was heard in all the corners of the shul in its full clarity and kavana. He would sweep the other people along with him and the davening was a big Kiddush Hashem.

While he was scrupulous in not missing out on a single 'Amen', he also devoted super-human effort in getting others to answer a full bodied 'Amen' after each beracha, especially children. His pockets always bulged with candies which awarded children for making a beracha, after which he would answer a heartfelt 'Amen'.

When he reached the age of 75, he succumbed to a heart attack. In those days, medicine was not so advanced and with his condition, he was not expected to live much longer. His doctors gave him two choices: to undergo a complicated operation which was a risk, even if it succeeded, or not to undergo surgery at all, in which case his chances for survival were very slim indeed.

He listened to the doctor's prognosis very calmly and when the latter had finished, thanked him and told him in no uncertain words that he would refused to

undergo surgery. Then he turned to leave. His son, who had accompanied him, was very surprised and asked, "Abba, why? How can you take such responsibility upon yourself? This is a matter of life and death. Aren't you going to consult at least one more opinion?"

The father surprised his son by replying, "All my life I have toiled for the sake of 'Amen', a mitzvah for which Chazal promised "length of days and years." The word 'Amen' adds up to ninety-one and I am confident that I will reach at least that age. I am certain that I will live that long," he concluded, "so why should I take a chance and endanger my life with surgery?"

The teller of this story added, "The man recovered from the heart attack and did, in fact, live to a ripe old age. When he reached his ninetieth birthday, his son asked him, "Abba, do you remember that you told me that you would live until at least ninety-one because of your extreme efforts in answering 'Amen'? What will happen next year when you turn ninety-one?"

The father replied in jest that he had been answering 'Amen selah' since a while back. However, several months later, at the age of ninety-one, he returned his soul to his Creator. And it was wondrous in everyone's eyes...

בס"ד
"כִּי אָרְךָ יָמִים וְשָׁנוֹת חַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם יוֹסִיפוּ לָךְ"
(משלי ג ב)

WHO WANTS LIFE ?

Dear Jew!

**If an insurance policy which grants you
A good long life is granted here for free
To whomever asks - would you refuse?**

Chazal promised us in their holy authority that
"Whoever extends his 'Amen'

That is - responds patiently and with conviction
"Has his days and years extended for the good"

(Berachos 47a and the Rishonim there; see also Yerushalmi Berachos 8:8)

**Take care, as well, in answering 'Amen'
Slowly and with kavana
So that you, too, will earn length of days and years
For the good, as Chazal promised, AMEN**

