

# And All Believe

## A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



PARASHAS TOLDOS

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

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

#### THE VOICE OF YAAKOV

Our Avos were holy men whose amazing lives were suffused with saintliness, as can readily be seen throughout the chapters of Sefer Bereishis. They stand out like lighthouse beacons, especially for us of this generation who are light years away from those human luminaries whom Hashem planted in this world. All we can hope for is "When will my deeds approach those of the Avos - Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?"

Because of their sanctity, every syllable uttered by them was carefully examined and weighed in the delicate scales of Chazal and later, of the Rishonim and Acharonim.

One of the prime examples of this is Chazal's relation to the words Yitzchak said to his son Yaakov when the latter sought to take the blessing which Yitzchak had intended for Eisav. When the blind Yitzchak felt Yaakov's arms and noticed that they were hairy like Eisav's whereas his voice was pleasant, like Yaakov's, he said in surprise, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov but the hands are the hands of Eisav" (27:22).

Chazal (Mechilta Beshalach II; Yalkut Shimon Toldos 115; commented upon by Rashi Bamidbar 20:16) say that these words carry great importance and represent a blessing for the coming generations when "the voice will always be that of Yaakov", meaning that every prayer issuing from the mouths of Yaakov's seed - will be answered!

#### NO PRAYER GOES TO WASTE

One may ask: Do we not offer up prayers every single day regarding so many different things, especially for the geula and yet, we have not merited the arrival of Mashiach whose coming we pray for?

What can we say? Our thoughts are as distant from those of Hashem as heaven is from earth. We cannot possibly understand why these particular prayers of ours are not effective, but neither can we know what our prayers did accomplish or how many troubles they deflected. Nor can we know when these prayers will be fulfilled. There is one thing, however, which we can be certain of - no prayer uttered by a Jew goes down the drain! A prayer which comes from the depths of the heart works wonders in the upper spheres even though their effect is not seen with a fleshly eye.

Chazal said in the Medrash (Devarim Rabba II:12) on the verse in Tehillim (27:14), "Put your trust in Hashem; strengthen and encourage your heart and trust in Hashem." They said that one should pray, and pray again and at some point his wish will be granted. In other words, a person should never become discouraged when he sees that his request is not being accepted because sometimes the prayer needs to be repeated many times in order for it to be effective.

HaRav Chaim Ezra zt"l said: If a person prays and is not answered, it is a sign that he is lacking in trust. His prayer was not pure and complete, and he did not thrust his burden upon Hashem alone but if he prays again and

again, his bitachon will grow together with his confidence in the power of his prayer. When he reaches the point where he trusts purely in Hashem, his salvation will surely come.

We find a similar idea by the wife of Ovadya. The passuk says: "And one of the wives of the Bnei Neviim **cried out** to Elisha" (see Radak, Melachim II 4:1). Chazal say that she uttered two hundred and sixty-five prayers before Elisha, corresponding to the numerical value of `Tzoaka - she cried out'. Only then was her prayer answered (Kuntres `Misped Gadol' p 40).

The Maggid of Dubnow compared this to a young man and an old one, both having come to a tailor to buy a suit. The old man examines the selection carefully to see which one fits him best, which color is to his taste and so on. The young man takes several suits off the rack and pays for them.

What is the difference between the two, asks the Maggid? It lies in their age. The old man knows that the suit he wants to buy is for him alone. At his age, he doesn't think his size will change and he wants something that will serve him for a long time to come.

The young man figures that if a suit will not fit him right away, perhaps in the future it will. And if the suit is too small, he can put it aside and save it for his future children.

This attitude applies to prayer as well. A wise person does not get discouraged if his prayer is not answered right away for he is confident that a prayer has lasting effects, and if it is not accepted now, it will still have weight in the future for other things he might need then. And so, he continues to pray, again and again, his heart confident that he can rely on Hashem to do what is best for him. One whose bitachon is shaky will give up hope quickly and lose out in both this world and the next.

We can now better understand why Hashem did not stop Avraham from praying for Sodom even though He had decided for sure that He would destroy it. It was because

"Avraham will yet be a great and mighty nation." At some point in the future, Avraham's children would require his prayers and merits and so, Avraham continues to pray and those prayers are gathered up and preserved for the time of need ("Nefesh Shimon" Tehillim p 25).

#### PRAYER ANSWERED AFTER A CENTURY

The Steipler writes (Chayei Olam chap. 28): "And even if days and years pass by, causing a person to imagine that his prayers were of no value, let him not stop praying. In the end, he will see with his own eyes that his praying was truly effective. As Chazal said (Midrash Shmuel 4), "There are prayers that are answered even after one hundred years..."

It is written in Mishlei (8:34), "Fortunate is the man who listens to Me, watching daily at My gates." The Sefas Emes writes (Ki Savo 641) that this passuk promises us that our prayers will never be in vain, but in order for them to be fulfilled, we must constantly anticipate Hashem's salvation. We must always "stand by the entrance" and not let our minds be

#### AMEN IN THE PARASHA

Yitzchak blessed Yaakov saying:

"... ויתן לך... And Elokim shall give you from the dew of Heaven and the fatness of the earth. Nations shall serve you" (Bereishis 27:28, 29).

The initial letters of `Lecha HaElokim Mital Hashamayim Umishmanei Ha'aretz' add up to the same count as `Amen' to teach us that in the merit of responding with `Amen', bounty descends to a person and his enemies fall before him, as follows, "...nations shall serve you"

(`Kikar Zahav' Maaracha B').

distracted from Hashem for even a moment so that when the moment of salvation does arrive and the gates of Heaven are opened for us, we will be able to immediately receive that bounty being channeled down to us from Above.

In the later years of the Chazon Ish, when the battle was pitched against the decree of women's mobilization, mass prayer rallies were held throughout the country where plentiful tears were shed for the success of the fight. The law was passed, nonetheless, and someone close to the Chazon Ish uttered his surprise and dismay to his master, asking why all the tears and prayers had been rejected. The Chazon Ish replied on the spot and said, "It is written in our holy works that no prayer is ever in vain, and this can surely be applied to our prayers on this issue as well. If they were not answered now, their effect will be felt in the future," (Maase Ish" Part I, p 243).

HaRav Yitzchak Zilberstein told a similar story about the Steipler Rov: "I was near his room one time when a person who was apparently very ill entered and burst into agitated tears while begging for the Steipler to pray for his recovery. His plea was so heartfelt and his suffering so acute that all those present anxiously awaited to hear what the Steipler would say.

"The Steipler lifted tear-filled eyes and said feelingly, 'Chazal determined that the Shechina stands above the head of a sick person and that his prayer for his own recovery is the most effective. I advise you to utilize the very tears you are shedding before me and use them for your own direct prayer. I guarantee that these prayers will not go unanswered. Know,' he added, 'that there is no prayer that does not help, no plea that is altogether ineffective, if not partially, then for a third or fourth part (see Vayikra

Rabba 10). There are times,' he continued, 'when the prayer will help after a week or two, a month or two, a year or two or even after five or ten years.'

"I kept my eye on that man," said Rav Zilberstein, "and saw that from the day that he began to pray for his own recuperation with fervor, believing that his prayers would help in spite of the doctors' prognosis, he began to recover and by the time ten years had elapsed, he was completely well, weaned from medicines and living a regular healthy life" (Aleinu Leshabeiach' Part I, p 327).

### ANSWERING AMEN ASSISTS IN THE PRAYERS' ACCEPTANCE

Every person wants his prayers to be received and answering immediately. In order for this to happen, he must make a special effort. If we study the language of the Zohar Hakadosh (Vayelech 285 2) we will see that there is a simple formula for effecting this.

The Zohar states: "When Yisrael answers 'Amen' with concentration in this world, several gates of blessing are opened Above and goodness is released in many worlds, gladdening the hosts of Heaven. How is Israel rewarded thereby? In this world: when Israel experiences sorrow and pain and prays before Hashem, a heavenly voice resounds throughout all the spheres and declares: 'Open the gates and admit the righteous nation which guards its loyalty [shomer emunim]. Open the gates, just as Yisrael opened the gates of blessing [by answering 'Amen']; so shall the gates be opened for then now and their prayers be received for salvation from their suffering. And in the World to Come: when a soul ascends, he is preceded by an announcement: Open the gates before this one just as he opened the gates each day when he guarded his loyalty [by answering 'Amen']."

## Tales of Emunim:

### A story about Amen and Prayer

#### AND BLESS ME THAT I RAISE MY SONS

A wonderful story is told with a strong message portraying the power of prayer issuing from the depths of one's heart. There was once a distinguished family in Jerusalem whose sons enhanced the Mizrach wall of many yeshivos and kollelim through their Torah study, diligence, wisdom and the distinction reflected upon their pure countenances.

This family has a tradition dating back several generations which sheds light upon the secret of their success and conscientiousness in Torah:

It took place during the early years of statehood when confusion reigned and special clarity and wisdom was required to differentiate between pure and impure. Many people sank into the mires of uncertainty and became part of the camp of the Zionists.

When the gates of the country were opened, admitting an endless pouring of immigrants, many of them exchanging houses of wealth in their birthplaces for a life of poverty out of love for Eretz Yisrael, regretfully, many innocent and naïve Jews turned to the circles of secularism where everything holy and decent was trampled ignominiously. Many of these Jews abandoned their faith, to the terrible chagrin and pain of their traditional parents.

A lone woman emigrated from Russia who had been severed from any vestige of Judaism during Stalin's rule. She hardly remembered anything about her family roots aside from the fact that she was Jewish. There was one practice she kept - lighting candles on Friday eve, accompanied by a silent prayer for the success of her children.

She was placed in a kibbutz up north and adapted very quickly to life in Israel. There was nothing on this kibbutz to remind her of her Jewish roots, either. She married and raised her family on the kibbutz.

Her home was devoid of all Jewish symbols, aside from that one practice which she held on to.

As her children began growing, she sought a role model for them, and in her naiveté, found no one worthier to adulate than the prime minister, the very person responsible for the forced uprooting of Yiddishkeit from the thousands of immigrants. She mentioned his name in her prayers, pleading to G-d that her children grow up like him.

Then came the awakening. A small announcement in one of the newspapers told of a recent visit of the prime minister in the home of the Chazon Ish.

How could it be - she wondered - that the head of the government himself, her private hero, should pick himself up and go visit an elderly man whom she had never even heard of, and who went by the name of the book he had authored? It must be that the prime minister respected this man deeply, and regarded him even greater than himself.

From that day on, the woman stopped praying by her candles that her children grow up to be like the prime minister, but that they follow in the footsteps of... the Chazon Ish!

Dozens of years later, it became known in public how effective her prayers had been, when some of her offspring became baalei teshuva

and esteemed talmidei chachamim.

This story comes to teach us the tremendous power of a prayer issuing from the depths of a Jewish heart, with purity and faith. A prayer such as this will not go unanswered

(Tiv Hakehilla' Parshas Shoftim).

#### בסדרה של חסידים וחסידות

"The Mashgiach was very scrupulous in reciting berachos. He was especially careful in reciting the Bircos Hashachar out loud and very intently, making equally sure that someone was nearby to answer 'Amen' to each one.

The beracha of "הגומל חסדים טובים" was said loudly and very fervently. When asked one time why he did so, he explained: "This blessing says everything; it is all inclusive!"

(Leket Reshimos B'Inyanei Tefilla' p 205).

The yahrzeit of Mashgiach of Lakewood, **Rav Nossan Meir Wachtfogel zt"l**, falls on the second day of Kislev.



**Let us likewise be meticulous in reciting the Bircos Hashachar in the presence of another person who can respond with 'Amen'. Thus shall we merit thanking Hashem for all the good He bestows upon us - in the most perfect manner.**