

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



PAR' VAYESHEV

In the Pathways of Emunim:

Amen and Prayer in this Parsha

"DO NOT BE SILENT TO MY TEARS"

Jews everywhere and throughout the ages have always known that when all hopes are dashed and the situation seems hopeless, there is always one last resort - to pray with tears. This has always been a wonder-solution, effective beyond compare, empowered to perform great things even in the realm of the supernatural.

Chazal say (Bava Metzia 59a): "R' Elazar said: From the day that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the [heavenly] gates of prayer have been locked... but even so, the gates of tears are not

locked, as it says (Tehillim 39:13): 'Hear my prayer, Hashem, and hearken to my outcry; do not be silent to my tears.' Rashi explains that the words 'do not be silent to my tears' is not a request, but a given guarantee that when one prays before Him with tears, Hashem will surely not ignore them.

This has been expanded upon in various works to indicate that a 'locked gate' expresses a barrier standing before a person who is helpless to open it. But just as a locked gate can be opened with the right key, so can tears serve as a key to open all the gates. Chazal said that the gates of tears were not locked in order to indicate that every person has access to the key which can open locked gates so that in effect, no gates are actually sealed before him ("Yesod HaEmuna [Kosov] p 141).

The "Sefer Chassidim" (130) writes: "Some people are not worthy enough to have their prayers accepted by Hashem but if one is persistent and pleads with tears in his eyes, he can overcome any lack of merits and good deeds to his credit so that Hashem will receive his prayer and fulfill his wish, regardless."

YAAKOV'S WEeping

We can find a moving expression highlighting the power of tears from the story of the sale of Yosef in this parasha. R' Avraham Saba zy"o, one of the heads of Spanish Jewry, writes ("Tzror Hamor"), explaining the juxtaposition of the pasuk (37:35), "And his father wept over him" and the following pasuk, "And the Midianites sold him to Egypt," to indicate that the tears of Yaakov Avinu over his son were effective immediately. And instead of the Ishmaelites taking Yosef to a distant land, they sold him to Egypt, which was near the land of Canaan, so that after many years, it was easier for Yaakov to be reunited with him.

That was not the only time that Yaakov shed tears over Yosef. He wept for him continually in his prayers, and those selfsame tears protect us to this very day. Rabbenu Yona in "Shaarei HaAvoda" (Os 11, Bereishis Rabba 75:16) quotes the words of Chazal on the pasuk describing Yaakov Avinu's prayer in Beis El (Bereishis 35:14): "And Yaakov set up a stone pillar and poured a libation over it." This 'libation' really refers to the tears he shed in his prayer which were tantamount to the nissuch hamayim libation [in the Beis Hamikdash].

Chazal added there that just as it is impossible to measure the quantity of the waters of Tverya [the Kinneret], so is it impossible to quantify the tears which Yaakov Avinu shed in his prayers. Only Hashem can count them and set them aside in His treasure vaults for all time.

Leah Imeinu also achieved much through her tears, as Rashi comments on the pasuk (Bereishis 29:17): "And Leah's eyes were weak." They became weak from her excessive weeping and

pleading before Hashem that she not be wed to Eisav. Hashem did, indeed, relate to her tears and arranged for her to marry Yaakov. Thus, she was privileged in having a major share in establishing the Tribes of Hashem.

We need not elaborate on the tears of Rachel Imeinu. We are all very familiar with the pasuk in Yirmeyahu (31:14), "A voice is heard in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel is crying over her children." The Midrash writes about the other Avos (Eicha Rabba Psicha 24) that at the time of the Churban, Hashem said to Yirmeyahu, "I am like a man who had an only son. He made him a wedding canopy but the son died in the midst of the wedding. Now go summon Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Moshe from their graves, for they know how to lament."

A STRUCTURE OF TEARS

In the midst of the terrible Holocaust, when the terrible reports of atrocities in Europe swept throughout Eretz Yisrael, a small ceremony took place in Bnei Brak - the laying of the cornerstone for Yeshivas Ponevitzh. It was brief and did not include speeches or celebration. Rather, it was commenced with bitter tears erupting from the depths of the pure heart of the yeshiva founder and head, Hagaon R' Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman zt"l, being shed all the while that the cornerstone was being laid.

The Chazon Ish stood by the side and when he saw R' Kahaneman's tears, he said,

"When people exult and rejoice aloud at a cornerstone laying, it is no guarantee for success, but when tears are shed amidst prayer, we are promised by David Hamelech that 'those who sow in tears will reap in joy'" ("Pe'er Hador" Vol. II, p 225).

It is told of the famous righteous doctor, Aharon Gardia, an outstanding follower of the Maggid of Mezeritch, that a little girl once burst into his house, shouting hysterically and pleading, "Dr., my father is very, very sick. Please come immediately and save his life!" Contrary to his usual manner, the doctor did not show any haste. He walked over to his closet with slow, measured steps, took out his formal coat and put it on leisurely and very painstakingly. Then he went over to a drawer, took out a brush and began brushing his hat meticulously.

Seeing that the doctor was in no rush to go anywhere, she gave up hope on him. She lifted her eyes to

AMEN IN THE PARASHA

"And Yisrael loved Yosef [more than] all of his sons because he was the son of his old age." The Megaleh Amukos dwelled on the end letters of "בן זקונים" "בן זקונים" as referring to Yosef Hat-zaddik who understood the principle power of Amen. We see later, in connection to Yosef's dream, that the Torah states: "And lo, my sheaf rose and stood erect." The word 'sheaf - alumas' can be derived from the root 'elem - to be dumb', to teach us that the merit of answering 'Amen' is the secret of Yosef's strength which silences the prosecutors and renders them dumb. When Yosef was born, Yaakov Avinu was 91 years old, like the gematria of 'Amen'

("Megaleh Amukos" Bereishis 37:7 Ofen 35).

This idea can be elaborated upon. "Seder Hadoros" (Erech R' Yochanan) teaches that R' Yochanan was very scrupulous in answering 'Amen', and for a good reason. He was descended from Yosef, as he himself testified

("Artzot Hashalom" Berachos 20a).

Heaven and cried, "Master of the World! If the doctor can't help my father, You've got to heal him Yourself!"

As soon as he heard these words, he turned to her and said, "My dear child, you can go home now and rest assured that Hashem will answer your prayer." She ran home and sure enough, her father was already feeling better and within a few days, was completely cured.

Later on, the doctor explained his brusque manner. "I understood from the girl's description that her father was on the brink of death. Since I realized that there was nothing that I could do to save him, I decided to shake her confidence in me so that she would turn to Hashem and cast her burden upon Him. From the moment she realized that I wasn't going to help her, she turned to Hashem and her tears and prayers were heard and answered" ("Nachalas Tzvi" Haazinu).

TEARS OVER THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

If we study the biographies of our great Torah leaders, we cannot help noticing what an important role was played by their prayers and tears over the chinuch of their children. One good example is the advice which the Satmar Rav, R' Yoel Teitelbaum, used to offer to people regarding the upbringing of their children. In order to succeed with your children, he used to say, "You must rise at dawn and shed tears like water over your Tehilim, as our ancestors did. Whenever they saw that a child was not progress-

ing in his studies, they would immediately begin weeping profusely when they came to the `bircas haTorah' and the bracha of `Ahava Rabba'. With a pure, heartfelt prayer, one will surely experience nachas and satisfaction with one's children."

He once added and said, "There is a common saying that one can choose good sons-in-law, whereas one cannot choose good sons. I maintain the opposite. One cannot choose good sons-in-law for a heavenly voice has already decreed who is to marry whom forty days before they even descend to earth. But one can certainly choose good sons by behaving properly oneself and by shedding many tears over their education" ("Chaim Sheyesh Bahem" Moadei Hashana p. 76).

Hagaon R' Refael Halevi, son of the Brisker Rav, zt"l, told that one time when he accompanied his father for a walk, as recommended by the doctor, a Holocaust survivor stopped them and said, "I envy you, Brisker Rav, that all of your children follow in your footsteps with the Torah serving as their guiding light."

The Rav did not respond then but at the end of the walk, before going up to his house, he said to his son, R' Refael, "Do you realize how many tears I shed at the side of the crib of each of my infant sons that they grow in Torah and yiras shomayim? Other people rock the crib and sing nursery rhymes but I said Tehillim with tears!" And then he added, "I testify that I never said a 'dry' Shemone Esrei without tears!" ("Bircas David" Toldos).

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

A MOTHER'S TEARS

This story took place dozens of years ago. A young student entered the study of one of the most esteemed roshai yeshiva of that era, looking very downcast. He was a yeshiva bachur who was extremely diligent in his studies, turning nights into days. His pale, sickly look caused the Rosh Yeshiva concern and he was not surprised to hear that this student had been suffering pain throughout his body for some time.

The Rosh Yeshiva decided to send him to a doctor to undergo a battery of tests which showed that the bachur was suffering from a severe illness of the blood.

Like a devoted father, the Rosh Yeshiva took the news very badly and upon hearing the bitter diagnosis, began taking the beloved student to experts to see what could be done to heal him.

He decided to keep the condition a secret from the student's parents, who lived abroad, knowing that their financial condition would not enable them to come and bear the costs of medical treatment, and he told the young man to do the same. "We will wait until your condition improves," he told him, "so as not to cause them anxiety."

The Rosh Yeshiva spared no effort or money to help the student, providing him with the best medical attention at his personal expense. This went on for an entire year, with the Rosh Yeshiva monitoring the course of the treatment very devotedly. Alas, the heavenly sentence had been sealed and the young gifted student returned his soul to his Maker at a tender age.

Totally devastated, the Rosh Yeshiva had no choice but to send a telegram to the parents informing them of their son's untimely death. They couldn't believe the news. How could this tragedy have fallen upon them so rapidly without their knowing anything? They were totally shocked.

The days of mourning passed, the shiva and the shloshim, and one day, the Rosh Yeshiva receives a registered letter in the mail. It was a formal summons from a Beis Din on behalf of the bereaved mother calling him to task. The Rosh Yeshiva couldn't believe his eyes. What had he done wrong? He had cared for his student like his own son and spent so much money on medical treatment!

The day of the court hearing arrived. Altogether shocked and bowed, the Rosh Yeshiva entered the chamber of the Beis Din, curious to hear the charges against him. The mother de-

manded to know why he had not informed her of her son's illness; she claimed that he was guilty of the boy's death - no more and no less!

"Is this true?" the Av Beis Din asked, turning to the Rosh Yeshiva. Instead of answering, the Rosh Yeshiva opened up his portfolio and took out a thick sheaf of crumpled papers. "These receipts testify to the fact that I spent huge sums for the medical treatment of my student," he said. "They amount to over one hundred thousand shekalim, laid out from my own pocket. How can I be charged with the death of a student whom I loved and cared for like my own son?"

The dayanim could not help but be impressed by his sincere words and turned to the mother, "Don't you see that he is speaking the truth. How can you accuse him of such a terrible thing!"

The mother could no longer control herself and shouted in pain, "Rabbo-sai! Honored judges! Had the Rosh Yeshiva not concealed the knowledge of my son's illness from me, I would have prayed for my son, giving no respite from my tears for a moment. Surely my heartfelt tears would have split the Heavens, aroused heavenly compassion for him and spared him from death."

This harsh accusation, coming from a broken-hearted mother, stunned all those present. The courtroom was plunged in deep silence. What, indeed, could one reply to such an indictment? The dayanim looked at one another helplessly. Never had they witnessed such fervent conviction, such a solid emuna...

They left the room for a brief consultation. When

they returned, the Av Beis Din said, "My fellow dayanim and I cannot help but side with the bereaved mother. Her claim is valid: the Rosh Yeshiva should have informed her of her son's illness for surely, her prayers and tears would have weighed heavily in favor of her son's recovery - much more than the huge sums which the Rosh Yeshiva laid out. Have not Chazal determined that while the gates of Heaven may be sealed, the gate of tears is never locked!"

(Bin'os Deshe' Bereishis p. 186).



THE 'EIN K'ELOKEINU' PRAYER IS ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO THE LETTERS OF 'AMEN': - אין כאלוקינו, מי כאוקינו, נוּדָה לאלוקינו

AND SO ON

THE MIDRASH STATES THAT WHEN THE GREEK NATION SOUGHT TO UPROOT THE MITZVA OF RESPONDING 'AMEN' FROM JEWRY IN ORDER TO UNDERMINE THEIR EMUNA OUR SAGES INSTITUTED 'EIN K'ELOKEINU' TO REINFORCE THE PRINCIPLE OF 'AMEN' WHICH IS EMUNA, AND EVEN THOUGH THIS DECREE WAS ABOLISHED THIS PRAYER REMAINS INTACT

(*MAI CHANUKA* IN THE NAME OF R' YONA, AN ANCIENT YEMENITE SAGE)

DURING THESE DAYS OF CHANUKA WHEN WE EXPERIENCED THE VICTORY OF EMUNA AGAINST HERESY, LET US RESOLVE TO STRENGTHEN OURSELVES ALL THE MORE IN RESPONDING 'AMEN' AFTER EVERY HOLY UTTERANCE ESPECIALLY DURING THE BIRCOS HASHACHAR TO BE SAID IN PARTNERSHIP THUS PUBLICLY DECLARING OUR FIRM FAITH IN THE ONE WHO SPOKE AND THE WORLD CAME INTO BEING

AMEN, BECAUSE I ALSO BELIEVE