

And All Believe

A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"



PAR' MIKETZ

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

TRAINING CHILDREN TO RESPOND 'AMEN'

WHEN DOES A CHILD MERIT OLAM HABA?

Chazal stressed the importance of training children to answer 'Amen'. R' Meir, in Sanhedrin 100b, asks: From when does a young child begin earning a portion in Olam Haba? From the time he begins saying 'Amen'. The pasuk follows (Yeshaya 26:2), "Open the gates that the righteous nation [shomer emunim] which keeps faithfulness may enter." Don't read 'shomer emunim' but 'she'omer Amen'.

On the basis of R' Meir's interpretation, the Rema (Orach Chaim 124:7) rules, "And he should teach his young children to answer 'Amen', for as soon as a child answers 'Amen' he earns a portion in Olam Haba." The author of "Avodas David" takes it further (Sanhedrin 111a) and concludes from the words "as soon as" that even if the child doesn't understand what he is saying, he already reserves himself a place in Olam Haba.

The Rambam also attributes great value to this, as Rabbenu Manoach derives from the laws of prayer (15 9), "In a beis knesses where everyone is a kohen, who responds 'Amen' to their blessing? The women and children." From here we learn that every G-d-fearing man should teach his wife and children and other household members to answer 'Amen' after all berachos."

HaRav Yehosef of Kason derives a reference to this from what is written in our parasha (Bereishis 42:20): "And bring your young brother to me and your words will be substantiated [ye'ammu]." It is stating here, in so many words, that one who teaches the young to answer 'Amen' after hearing berachos, also gain eternal life [from the words above] ("Likutei Bnei Shloshim" Miketz).

MORDECHAI TAUGHT ESTHER TO ANSWER 'AMEN'

It is fascinating to discover that Mordechai Hat-zaddik also taught his cousin Esther to answer 'Amen' so as to instill in her emuna in Hashem. We find this in "Yalkut Me'am Loez" (Esther 2:7), "And he raised [omein] Esther." This particular word is used to teach us that this is how he raised her from childhood in the ways of Hashem, for as soon as she began talking, he taught her to answer 'Amen'. This, too, is why the word "omein" is written without a 'vav' so as to read 'amen'.

The Yalkut adds there that every father should do the same with his children and as soon as they mature a little, he should bring them to shul and teach them to answer 'Amen' aloud, so that if, G-d forbid, the child dies, his having answered 'Amen' will enable him to be resurrected in Tchiyas Hameisim.

Tana Dvei Elyahu brings a frightful story (213) of a man who was standing in shul with his son on Succos. While everyone was answering 'Amen' at the right times, the son was babbling foolish words. The congregants rebuked the father, demanding him to correct his son, but the father feigned innocence and replied, "He's only a child. Leave him be."

This continued on throughout Succos, with the child speaking nonsense while everyone was answering 'Amen' in the correct manner and the father refusing to correct the child. In the end, tells Tana Dvei Elyahu, the father was punished severely and within a few years, his wife passed away. Her death was followed by the deaths of his sons and grandsons.

Fifteen people died altogether, leaving only him and two of his sons, one lame and blind and the other a witless and wicked man.

TO IMBUE CHILDREN WITH EMUNA

R' Chaim Zelvinsky zt"l, Rosh Yeshivas Meor HaTalmud, said in a talk to his teaching staff, "Know that the pur-

pose of every Jew on earth is to 'live emuna'. This is not an automatic thing but one that requires much effort if he really aims to build up emuna within his heart."

If we seek to instill our children with emuna, we must begin doing so from early childhood. We can achieve this by training them to say berachos with concentrated effort and also by answering 'Amen' to berachos they hear. This is not only a good practice but actually an explicit Halacha as ruled by the Rema.

R' Chaim explained this, noting that a child is like a blank page, and every imprint and impression made on his soul remains by him for many years. Therefore, if he accustoms himself to accentuate in his child's heart the truth of Hashem's majesty by answering 'Amen' after each beracha, the impression it leaves will surely strike roots and find its way into his soul.

From here we learn the obligation of every father and mother to implant in his children - even the youngest ones - the importance of answering 'Amen'. If they do so, they should know that they have giving their descendants the most precious gift possible, a gift with the power of opening the gates of Gan Eden before them (the words of R' Chaim Zelvinsky, "Kuntres Sichos Chizuk" p. 25).

A LITTLE BOY'S 'AMEN'

We quote R' Meir from Masseches Sanhedrin (110b): "When does a child come into the world? From the time he begins answering 'Amen'." We learn this from the wording of the pasuk (Bereishis 42:20), "And bring your young brother to me." And it continues, "וַיֵּאֱמָנוּ דְבָרֵיכֶם - and your words will be substantiated." This shows that a father should teach his son to answer 'Amen' after every beracha he hears ("Likutei Bnei Shileishim" Parshas Miketz).

We can add another reference from the pasuk above, "For when your younger brother comes here" - כְּבֹא אֶחָיִים הַקָּטָן the final letters spell out 'Amen'.

This was the practice of the Shefa Chaim Admor of Sanz zy"o: At shalosh seudos, he would lay out a platter full of fruit and gather all the children of the congregation to him, even toddlers. They would stand in a long line which passed by the Rebbe, who gave each child a fruit and waited to hear a beracha so that he could respond to it.

This practice was so strong that one Shabbos, when he lay on his deathbed, writhing in pain, without an ounce of strength to give out the customary 'shirayim' portions to his Chassidim, he rallied in order to distribute the fruit to the very young children, and summoned all of his strength to sit up in bed, and for a long time, gave out the fruit and waited to answer 'Amen' to each child's beracha ("Darchei Halacha", R' Chaim Shmerler: Bircos Hanehenin 25).

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

There is a famous letter to parents and educators written by HaRav Yaakov Meir Shechter: "Usher in blessing to your tents and accustom your sons and daughters to say their berachos clearly and pleasantly, and train all of the members of your household to answer 'Amen' after them out loud.

You should embrace the practice each morning of having one person in the family recite the morning blessings loudly and slowly and have everyone respond 'Amen' afterwards. Thus will guarantee that blessing maintain a foothold in your homes.

"How good and proper it is for parents and teachers to be a role model for this... and they will thus draw bountiful life and peace within your borders" ("Hamevarech Yisbarach" p. 7).

It is not surprising to hear the answer of a boy whose mother asked him why he said his berachos so quietly: "I want to say them just like the grown-ups do. Only little children say their berachos out loud." This should obligate us to devote special thought to this, and before we introduce any step in educating our children in this mitzvah, we are duty bound to show them a personal example thereof ("Notrei Amen" p 344).

ANSWERING 'AMEN' TO THE BERACHA OF A CHILD

Part of our duty of training our young children to answer 'Amen' is to be careful in answering 'Amen' after their berachos, as is ruled in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 215 3) that as soon as

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)

a child reaches the age of chinuch, if he says a beracha over food etc., one must answer `Amen'.

Some maintain that the time to begin training a child in mitzvos is when he begins talking (Responsa "Evven Yisrael" siman 14). They tell that Maran the Steipler used to answer `Amen' even after the beracha of a one-and-a-half year-old child in order to educate him to the mitzvah of responding `Amen' ("Orchos Rabbenu" Vol. III p. 223).

Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem of yore, R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, wrote that it is surely permissible and proper to answer `Amen' after the youngest of children when he has already been trained to say a beracha over food. This is on the basis of practicing the mitzvah of chinuch which we learn from the pasuk, "And you shall teach them to your sons," for regarding this particular mitzvah, the child is considered to have already reached the age of chinuch (Responsa "Salmas Chaim" siman 194).

We find an awesome tale about the importance of answering `Amen' after the blessing of a child in the work "Derech Moshe" (for the 11th day): R' Mordechai Yaffe, the Baal Halevush, once traveled to Venice to study astronomy under the famous Chacham R' Yitzchak Abouhav. After having stayed in his home for some time, one day the two were discoursing in Torah when the Chacham's young son, who was in the room, made a beracha over a fruit he held. Everyone present immediately responded `Amen' but R' Mordechai, whose thoughts were on their discussion, was not aware and did not respond like the others. The Chacham got angry and immediately put him in cheirem.

A month later, R' Mordechai came, as required, without his shoes, to beg pardon and to be reinstated in the Chacham's favor. R' Abouhav said to him, "I want you to know that I put you in cheirim even though I favor you very much because I knew that because you didn't answer `Amen' to my son's beracha, you were sentenced to death by the Heavenly court. I deflected the sentence and will forgive you on one condition: Promise me that wherever you go, whatever congregation you visit, you are to tell the people how important it is to answer `Amen' and what a terrible

sin it is to refrain from doing so. Publicize it by telling the people the following story which took place in Spain many years ago.

"The King of Spain once issued a decree of expulsion to all the Jews of his land. They were terribly frightened and sent a saintly Jew who was close to the king to beg him to annul the decree. The king received the Jew with a pleasant manner and conversed very amicably with him. After some time, the Cardinal, known for his rabid anti-Semitism, entered the royal reception hall and was received by the king. The Jew took the opportunity of the king's diverted attention to slip off to a far off corner to daven mincha. Meanwhile, the Cardinal greeted the king and invoked a benediction, to which all the courtiers and others present responded with a hearty `Amen'. All except the Jew, who, in the midst of shemone esrei, was oblivious to what was going on.

"As soon as the cardinal noted this, he seized the golden opportunity and turned to the king, saying, `Your Majesty, I want you to know that my holy benediction went to waste and will not be realized purely because that Jew refused to reinforce my blessing with the response of `Amen'."

"As soon as the king heard this, he was livid with rage and decreed that the Jew be tortured to death. He also speeded up his expulsion decree for all the Jews to leave his dominion.

"Some time later, the Jew appeared to his friend in a dream and said, `Know that I was very exacting in keeping all the mitzvos throughout my lifetime. But once, when my little boy made a beracha over bread, I didn't respond with `Amen'. Since Hashem is exacting with tzaddikim to a hairsbreadth, He passed a very severe sentence upon me.' The deceased Jew now made his request: `Please make sure to spread this story far and wide for this is the only way I will gain atonement!'"

Let us, therefore, all strengthen ourselves in instructing our children to answer `Amen', which is so important, as gedolei Yisrael have stressed so many times. Thus will we surely merit to derive much Jewish nachas from our descendants and bequeath to them eternal life, in this world and the next.

Tales of Emunim:

A story about Amen and Prayer

THE GRANDFATHER WHO DEMANDED PAYMENT FROM HIS GRANDSON

HaRav Refael Baruch Toledano, an outstanding talmid chacham and tzaddik, served as the rav of Maknes, Morocco for dozens of years, but towards the end of his life, went up to Eretz Yisrael.

While serving as Rav and Av Beis Din, he worked tirelessly to protect his congregation from the ill winds of Haskala that blew into the country from Europe, bent upon uprooting the illustrious Jewish community of North Africa and undermining its religious stronghold. In order to combat this dangerous outside influence, R' Refael Baruch established a broad network of schools which included chadorim, a school and yeshiva. He also founded welfare organizations for all the needs of his community.

He was especially noted for his rare and outstanding love for Torah, as is testified by the famous liturgical poem he wrote, "Ashorer shira lichvod haTorah." Whoever studies these words cannot help but be impressed by the pure heart from which it emerged, a heart steeped in love for Torah. This is what propelled him to work tirelessly among his community to convince its members to send their children to yeshivos. And indeed, he succeeded in saving many precious souls from doom.

He instilled in his descendants his unquenchable, uncompromising love for Torah, selecting the best teachers for them from an early age, and when they grew older, saw to send them to yeshivos in Eretz Yisrael, mainly to the famous Yeshivas Ponevitzh.

One of his grandsons tells: "When I was a youth, I also sought to be accepted into Yeshivas Ponevitzh but when I was interviewed by the Rosh Yeshiva, he told me that they couldn't accept me because as a foreign student, they could not take me into the dormitory, which was already full. Nor could they provide me with meals, so that there was no point in my entering the yeshiva.

"Terribly disappointed, I went to my grandfather, who already lived in Eretz Yisrael, and told him that I had been rejected. As soon as he heard this, he rose to his feet and left the house, heading for the home of the Ponevitzher Rav.

"If the only problem is lack of space and food, I am willing to accept this upon myself," my grandfather said to the Rosh Yeshiva, "my grandson can sleep in my house and eat at my

table, so long as this will enable him to study and grow in the yeshiva."

"My grandfather returned home in a very happy mood, having heard the Rav promise to accept his grandson into the yeshiva so long as his physical needs were taken care of. I returned home to Morocco joyfully. I packed my belongings and traveled back to Bnei Brak. My grandparents were very happy to see me. After greeting me, my grandfather suddenly turned serious and said: `I want you to know that one doesn't get room and board for free in this house. You will have to pay dearly for it.'

"I was shocked but my grandfather hastened to explain: `Your meals here are provided on condition that you are always careful to only make a beracha when someone is present to answer `Amen'. You, too, must take heed to answer `Amen' to every beracha you hear.'

"Relieved, I immediately agreed, very happily so, and from then on, I had the merit of answering `Amen' dozens of times to my grandparents' berachos, and to have my berachos answered, as well."

He adds, "My grandmother, who lived to a blessed old age, was also very punctilious in answering `Amen'. Towards the end of her life, when she was very weak with age, she made sure that several of her grandchildren come to her each day and before going on to yeshiva, should recite the daily morning berachos for her to respond to. She, too, recited her berachos and had them respond.

"During her final days,

when she could barely whisper, she asked her grandchildren to continue being watchful in answering `Amen'. She herself, despite her terrible weakness, made a supreme effort to respond to their berachos, though hardly audibly."

This was the way our great people trained their children in pure emuna. May we, too, continue to follow in their blessed ways.

על הניסים ועל הנפלאות

According to the alef-beis, the letters following
ב נ ס א מ נ Are

To hint to us that responding `Amen' is following by a miracle.

("Ner Yisrael" from the Maggid of Kozhnitz on Chanuka")



And I, too, will see Yeshuos, through answering `AMEN'