

And All Believe



A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"

PARASHAS VOAYRA

IN THE PATHWAYS OF EMUNIM

From the Sources in the Parasha Concerning 'Amen' and Tefilla

THE PROPER PLACE FOR PRAYER

"And he said to him: When I leave the city, I will spread my hands to Hashem" (Shmos 9:29).

Towards the end of the plague of hail, when Pharaoh asked Moshe Rabbenu to pray for him and his people to remove the harsh affliction which killed many and prevented so many others crocodile leaving their homes, Moshe chose not to pray inside the city but to first leave and then pray, as is quoted above.

The commentators explain this in many different ways. The most prevalent one is presented by Rashi according to the Midrash Shmos Rabba (12:5), that Moshe did not want to pray in Egypt because it was full of idolatry which prevents prayer crocodile rising and being received.

Nevertheless, the commentators were puzzled since with the plague of crocodiles [hereon in: crocodiles] and of wild animals, Moshe did pray to Hashem and we do not find that he left the city. Some explain that during the hail, the city was filled with idolatry even more than usual because it is written that "those who feared the word of Hashem" gathered their livestock -- which was their object of worship - from the fields into their homes (' Panim Yafos').

The Netziv of Volozhin explained that during the plagues of crocodiles and wild animals, when Moshe prayed that these be removed, he went to a special Beis Knesses inside the city, but when he had to pray that the hail be removed, he had to stand outside in order to raise his hands to Heaven, and could not do so in his Beis Knesses (' Netziv's Introduction to Mechilta Bo').

PRAYER IN A PLACE OF IDOLATRY AND HERESY

We find the halachic ruling not to pray in a place of idolatry in the Rema (Orach Chaim 94:9 and Mishne Brura there 29), taken from the writings of 'Trumas Hadeshen' (siman 6) which deals with a traveler who deliberates whether to pray on the roadside where he might be disturbed or interrupted by passersby, or to wait until he enters the next city which is populated mainly by gentiles, and pray at an inn. The ruling is that if he can find a place by the

roadside where he will not be disturbed, it is preferable to praying in an inn which is most likely to have icons, statuettes or religious symbols on the walls since this can impede his prayers from rising and being received. As proof, the 'Trumas Hadeshen' brings the pasuk at the beginning of this essay where Moshe found it necessary to leave the city.

Our Acharonim wrote that one must be careful not to pray in a place that has books of apikorsus or other objectionable books since these thwart prayers from rising ('Kaf Hachaim Orach Chaim' 154; Responsa 'Betzel Hachochma' Part II 84). We also find in 'Derech Pekudecha' by R' Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov (I"t 11) that he has a holy tradition that if there is a heretical book in the house, one is forbidden to pray there or discuss Torah subjects for it is tantamount to idol worship.

TO CONCRETIZE THE EMUNA

"And Hashem said to Moshe: Extend your hand over the heaven" (9:22).

"אל משה נטה" are the initial letters of 'AMeN', to suggest that the ultimate purpose of the plagues was to firmly instill emuna in the hearts of the Jews, as is written at the end of the miracles (Shmos 14:31): "And they believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant"

('Niflaos MiTorasecha' on 'Amen').

A PLACE CONDUCTIVE FOR PRAYER

On the other hand, we find the great advantage and segula of a place which has been sanctified with a special kedusha, as the Rebbe R' Elimelech of Lizensk said: When a person is able to pray from the very depths of his heart and his prayer emerges fluently, he should not pat himself on the back and feel that he is especially worthy, but should rather say: Surely some big tzaddik must have sat here before me who prayed in holiness, and left an impression here. How fortunate am I to be able to pray properly

because of this ('Pninei Yechezkel' p. 493).

It is told of the 'Yismach Moshe' that when he once stayed over in a village and searched for a clean and suitable place to daven, his host led him to the barn next to his house. R' Moshe stood there and prayed with intensity, as he was wont to do, and felt, somehow, that his prayer was more inspired than usual. When he finished, he asked the innkeeper if anyone had prayed there before him.

The man answered that many years before, R' Elimelech of Lizensk had prayed there, upon which R' Moshe exclaimed, "Indeed, I felt a special holiness. That tzaddik left an impression of holiness which lingered on for years to come" ('HaRabbi R' Elimelech' p.67).



THE WEEKLY REMINDER FOR 'AMEN'

The yearzeit of the Maharam Schick falls on Rosh Chodesh Shevat.

He said that answering 'Amen' constitutes a sign of love for Hashem's and love for Yisrael. Love for Hashem we see in the fact that a person thanks Him even though he is not obligated to do so with a blessing, but he thus demonstrates his emuna in Hashem to others; one's love towards his fellow Jew is demonstrated by being happy in another's joy and seeking to complete his blessing. This is why Chazal guaranteed that one who eagerly waits for the opportunity to answer 'Amen' will all his might is promised that the gates of Gan Eden will be opened for him, since one's love for Hashem and his love for a fellow Jew are the very keys to gain entry to Gan Eden

(Maharam Schick al HaTorah' Ki Seitzei and Drush 143-4 on Nitzavim').

MAASE EMUNIM

A WEEKLY STORY ON
'AMEN' AND TEFILLA

THE PRAYER OF THE CHASSIDIM OF TVERYA

R' Nachman of Horodanka, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, was well advanced in age when he and his followers went to live in Eretz Yisrael. They went to Tverya, where they were very warmly received by the community of Sephardim, headed by R' Chaim Aboulafya, who helped them settle in.

Some of the men close to the governor of Tverya, Dahr al Omer, looked askance at the newcomers. They were especially irked by the way they prayed, with such enthusiasm and intensity, and sought ways to expel them from the city.

That year, the entire country was hit by a very severe drought. Cheshvan and Kislev were long behind but the land was still as arid and cracked as a desert, crying out for water with no deliverance in sight. When the water shortage was at the danger level, the governor gathered those close to him in counsel, to find ways to save the city.

His adherents found the situation as a perfect excuse to vent their hatred upon the new residents. They told the governor about the strange ways of the Chassidim and accused them of sorcery, "We are certain that their hatred towards us Arabs prompted them to lay a spell on our city to cause this terrible drought," they said snidely.

The governor took their words to heart and grew incensed. He sent a messenger to R' Nachman, the head of the Chassidim, demanding that the Jews remove the spell over the city of Tverya, threatening that if rains did not fall within that time, he would expel all the Jews from the city.

R' Nachman was not fazed. He reassured the messenger, telling him to convey to the governor that Jews do not dabble in black magic but that he was willing to pray for rain, which everyone needed - Arabs as well as Jews - and that he hoped that Hashem would have compassion and send His deliverance.

As soon as the messenger left, R' Nachman told his shammas to gather his most esteemed adherents and tell them to put on warm winter clothing. Together with them, they left the city in the blazing sun and headed for the burial cave of R' Chiyah and his sons.

The holy group prayed inside the cave for hours on end. Towards evening, when they were about to leave, they saw that the skies were as clear as ever, with no hint of clouds. Undaunted, they began descending the steep mountainside, singing loudly "Becha batchu... In You did our ancestors trust..."

Before they were halfway down the mountain, a strong wind began blowing and soon after, rain poured down on the dry, cracked ground. When they came to the city gates, they found the governor and his entourage waiting very humbly and contritely, begging their forgiveness. They lifted the group unto their shoulders and entered the city with much pomp and ceremony.

From then on, they promised, no one would dare cause any difficulty to the community of Chassidim in Tverya. And this community has grown increasingly to this very day ('Bais Yaakov Journal' #42).

FROM THE TABLE OF EMUNIM

PEARLS FROM TABLES OF GEDOLEI
YISRAEL ON THE IMPORTANCE OF
ANSWERING 'AMEN'

Chazal said (Berachos 53b) "One who answers 'Amen' is greater than the one who says the blessing." The commentators were puzzled: How can this be? To all appearances, the initiator of the 'Amen' is the one who says the bracha itself. Without his utterance, there would be no cause to respond with 'Amen'.

This week, we will quote the Meiri and Rabbenu Bechaye's resolution to this question:

Aside from the fact that answering 'Amen' is as if the person himself said the entire blessing, in many instances the one who bends an ear in order to hear the bracha clearly, is more intent than the one who recites it, so that his listening is considered greater than that the merit of the speaker himself ('Beis Habechira laMeiri Nazir 66b).

The one who says the blessing does, indeed, confirm that Hashem is the source of the blessing, but his testimony is only that of one witness. When the one who answers 'Amen' joins him, the two become a pair of witnesses. And just like a document is only fully valid when there are two signatures, here, too, when one responds with 'Amen' he is corroborating the testimony of the first one and validating it, the one who made the beracha, so he is, in fact, greater than the former ('Rabbenu Bechaye Shmos 14:1).

PEARLS OF 'EMUNIM

FROM THE TREASURIES OF OUR
RABBONIM ON 'AMEN' AND PRAYER

TO PRAY TODAY THAT IT BE REMOVED TOMORROW

"And Moshe said to Pharaoh: For when shall I pray for you [that the plague be removed]... And he said: For tomorrow. And he said: As you say, so that you will know that there is none like Hashem our G-d" (8:5-6).

We cannot help wondering why Pharaoh didn't ask Moshe to pray to have the plague of crocodiles stop today? The Ohr Hachaim explains that Pharaoh wanted to test Hashem, for he believed in the stars that it is impossible to make a prayer request that asks for something to happen after a certain time lapse, and therefore, Moshe answered him: "As you say: **So that you will know that there is none like Hashem our G-d.**"

HALF A PRAYER IS NOT ACCEPTED

"And Moshe cried out to Hashem regarding the crocodiles which He had brought to Pharaoh" (8:8).

Why did Moshe have to 'cry out'? Because in his prayer, he only asked that those crocodiles which did damage in the homes of the Egyptians be removed. He intended that the dead ones throughout the land remain so that their stench fill the land, while those in the Nile remain as well to continue to afflict the Egyptians for generations to come. In general, since a partial prayer is not effective (see Yoma 69b), Moshe had to cry out to Hashem especially so that this time, his partial prayer be accepted nonetheless (Sforno).

HEAVEN GIVES - IT DOES NOT TAKE BACK

"And Moshe left Pharaoh's presence and prayed to Hashem" (8:26).

The word ויעתר, he prayed, says Rashi, teaches that Moshe made a special effort in his prayer regarding the plague of wild animals, similar to what we find later on (10:18), with the plague of locust, where the Torah uses the same word. Why did these two plagues require Moshe to pray exceedingly?

Rabbenu Ovadya MiBartenura explains as follows: In Taanis (25a) Chazal say that one cannot return to Heaven something which it has given. Moshe had to exert himself to pray that the carcasses of the wild animal of the plague of arov and the grasshoppers which the Egyptians had pickled, be removed from Egypt even though were sent by Heaven - all in order that those wicked people not be able to benefit in any way from the plagues which were sent to punish them ('Rabbenu Ovadya MeBartenura al HaTorah').

A SPECIAL PLACE FOR WORSHIP AND MEDITATION

"WHEN I LEAVE THE CITY" (9:29)

Why did Moshe leave the city to pray precisely during the plague of hail? The Abarbanel writes: "The truth is that Moshe Rabbenu had a special house outside of Egypt for prayer and meditation, and this house still stands in Egypt and is considered a holy place. Jews go there from many surrounding countries to celebrate. When Moshe said he was leaving the city, he intended to go there and spread out my hands to Hashem" in prayer."

PRAYER IN A PLACE OF HARDSHIP IS MORE READILY RECEIVED

The Kli Yakar explains that Moshe left the city and went to the open field to pray for the removal of the hail because this plague affected the fields directly, rather than the homes, as is written, "Every man and animal which will be in the field and not be gathered into the home will have the hail descend upon them and they will die." Moshe purposely went out to the field where the plague raged since prayer at the site of affliction is more powerful.

We find this similarly in an account brought in Gemara Chulin (46a): The king's soldiers once visited Pumbedisa to stage a pogrom. When the Amoraim, Rabba and Rav Yosef, realized the danger, they fled. Along the way, they met R' Zeira who rebuked them for deserting the city in its time of trouble and referred to them as bitter olives [an olive representing the tzaddik]. Had they remained in the place of danger, they would have been able to protect the city through their prayers. We see that R' Zeira was convinced that prayer in a place of danger and distress is more readily received (Chasam Sofer, 'Sefer Zikaron' p. 27).