

And All Believe



A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"

PARASHAS SHEMOS

IN THE PATHWAYS OF EMUNIM

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

TO TRANSFORM EVERY OUTCRY TO A PRAYER

"And Bnei Yisrael sighed from the work and they cried out, and their outcry rose to Elokim from the work: And Elokim heard their moaning" (Shemos 2:23-24).

Chazal enumerated ten adjectives for prayer in 'Sifri' in Parashas Voe-schanan (Perek 26) which are taken from all over Tanach. One of these is the word 'naaka' - groaning, which is rarely used aside elsewhere and which describes the Jews' prayers, to which Hashem hearkened.

Rashi explains this word as a synonym for outcry. The commentators added that the Torah uses the word 'naaka' to denote a sense of despair, expressed from unbearable pain, a cry which informs the hearer that if help does not materialize very soon - he is doomed. This description very aptly describes the condition of Klall Yisrael at that time which is portrayed in detail by Chazal, like Pharaoh's slaughter of tens of thousands of Jewish babies in order to bathe in their blood and cure his leprosy. Another account tells how the babies were cruelly wedged into the walls of the buildings being erected by the slave labor, among many other examples (see R' Shamshon Rephael Hirsh and Malbim).

MOANING FROM THE DEPTHS OF PAIN

In his marvelous work, "She'arim BiTefilla", R' Shimshon Pincus raises the question on this pasuk that the Torah should have written as follows: "And Bnei Yisrael sighed from the work and they groaned" and only afterwards - "and Elokim heard their groaning." But from the way it is actually stated, it appears that they groaned among themselves, but Hashem, in His infinite mercy, hearkened to their groaning and saved them.

R' Pincus explains that 'groaning' is not ostensibly a form of prayer but a natural expression of pain, an outburst from one who is unable to contain his suffering and instinctively moans and groans even if there is no one to hear him.

And then he goes on to establish a fascinating principle: when Chazal explained the 'groaning' of Bnei Yisrael as being an accepted form of prayer, they sought to teach us that even though groaning is a natural reaction to pain, nevertheless, when it issues spontaneously from a person, he should utilize that instinctive emotion and sublimate it through prayer; he should direct his groaning as an appeal to Hashem, for no

prayer is as effective as an outcry of unbearable pain. Now we can better understand why the Torah doesn't say that He heard their outcry, but that He heard their groaning, because it is this very intense reaction to pain that weighed in the favor of the Jews and hastened their liberation from Egypt.

TO DIRECT THE OUTCRY TO HASHEM

We can see here the extent of Hashem's compassion and loving-kindness, that in His infinite wisdom, He implanted in man the phenomenon that when he is in great pain, he feels the urge to cry out. In this way, he evokes the sympathy of those around him so that they can rush to his aid. If we examine the act of crying in depth, we will understand that every cry in the world actually expresses by its very nature a form of prayer which is in effect directed towards Hashem and not only to those around him. This is an incredible, matchless chessed where every cry expressing pain is immediately transformed into a prayer and a desperate plea for Hashem's mercy, without a person even being aware to Whom his outcry is directed. Chazal came and taught us that man has the power to intensify his cry by consciously directing it to Hashem.

They tell that when R' Baruch Ber Levovitz of Kamenitz was a child, his father hit him for some mischievous behavior. It was so painful that he began to cry. To his father's surprise, in the midst of his tears, the boy went over to the bookcase, took out a siddur, and began davening Mincha.

"Why are you praying now?" his father asked. The young child answered with pure simplicity, "If I am already crying, why shouldn't I use the opportunity to daven through my tears..." ("She'arim BiTefilla" p. 44).

Every person experiences at one time or another in his life moments of intense pain and sorrow which he cannot contain and which cause him to cry out from the depths of his heart. This cry, as we have now learned, is tremendously powerful! If we can seize such an opportunity and use it to its fullest advantage by directing our pain as a prayer to Hashem, He will undoubtedly rush to our aid and bring an end to our suffering.

**RESCUE FROM TROUBLE
IN THE MERIT OF 'AMEN'**

"And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt" (1:1).

If we take the second letters of ואלה שמות בני we find 'AMeN' to teach us that one can be saved from any trouble besetting a person - as denoted in "who came to Egypt", where 'Mitzrayim' signifies a hardship, מצור - in the merit of 'AMeN'. This is explained as well in the Zohar Hakadosh (Vayelech 285b).

(See also: 'Kohen P'er' and 'Ben L'Ashrei' Shmos 24.)

'AMEN' LEISURELY

"And they came to Reuel, their father, and he said: Why have you come so early today" (2:18).

"מהרתן בא היום" The final letters spell out 'Amen', hinting that one must answer 'Amen' slowly and leisurely, just as Chazal said (Berachos 47a), "Whoever extends his 'Amen', has his days and years extended" ('Torah MiSinai' Shmos 2:18).



AMEN – A SEGULA FOR PROTECTION

Sunday, the twentieth of Teves, will mark 135 years since the passing of Maran the Abir Yaakov, R' Yaakov Abouhatzeira. The Abir Yaakov wrote extensively in his many seforim about the importance of answering 'Amen'. This is what he wrote on the pasuk,

"The angel of Hashem camps around the G-d-fearing and rescues them" (Tehillim 34:8). 'Amen' has the same gematriya as 'Malach'. The pasuk is hinting that because the G-d-fearing Jews are careful in answering 'Amen', they are surrounded by the Shechina, which protects them and rescues them from trouble and suffering in this world and the next ("Alef Bina" Tehillim 34:8).

Let us strengthen ourselves in answering 'Amen' and thus gain protection from all suffering.

THE POWER OF TEARS

The Arizal's greatness and holiness was widely acclaimed. With his holy far-seeing vision, he was able to see wayward Jewish souls awaiting their tikkun and redemption, and with his Divine spirit, was able to sense every disaster about to befall his people, to understand the underlying cause for it, and take measures to prevent it.

The Ari was once sitting with his disciples in a field near Tzefas, not far from the grave of the prophet Hoshea ben B'eri, studying the mystic secrets of Torah when suddenly, the tzaddik gave a shudder. He turned to his disciples, his face expressing deep emotion and awe, and said, "We must interrupt our study and make a supreme effort to raise a large sum of money which we must transfer to one of the poor people of Tzefat, R' Yaakov Altrutz, who lives on the outskirts of the city.

"This destitute man," he added, "is now sitting in his home, weeping over his desperate plight. His cries have pierced and shaken the very heavens. Hashem, Who is attuned to the poor, has heard his outcry and is blaming the people of the city for not being aware of his terrible condition.

"I can hear, at this very moment, a heavenly voice announcing that a huge cloud of locust will soon descend upon the city and devour every growing thing, from the wheat in the fields, in the vineyards and the olive groves. We must hurry and deliver a large sum of charity money to the home of R' Yaakov Altrutz and hope that this will succeed in averting the plague."

The disciples roused themselves and went forth eagerly to do his bidding. One of them, R' Yitzchak Hakohen, volunteered to bring the money that was collected to R' Yaakov's home. When he arrived, he found him R' Yaakov standing and weeping bitterly over his lot, just as his master, the Ari, had described.

R' Yitzchak began talking to him and asked him why he was crying so pitifully. R' Yaakov said, "The water barrel I have on my roof suddenly broke and I have no means of buying another one. Without water, my family will surely die. Woe is me! From where will help come?"

R' Yitzchak quickly handed over the money they had collected. R' Yaakov thanked him profusely and after he blessed him joyfully, R' Yitzchak returned to his master.

"Praise be to Hashem," said the Ari. "We have succeeded in averting the punishment and the heavenly decree has been abolished."

The miracle was apparent for all to see. From the heights of the mountain, the disciples were able to see thick clouds of millions of millions of locust which soon filled the entire sky, hiding the sun. But suddenly, they all changed direction and flew to the sea, where they were all drowned. Not a single one remained. ('Kav Hayashar', Chayei Sarah chap. 9).

FROM THE TABLE OF EMUNIM

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

Chazal said (Berachos 53b): The one who answers `Amen' is greater than the one who recites the beracha. The commentators wondered how such a thing could be. Is not the one who recites a blessing the one who actually performs the mitzvah, whereas the other is only responding! Were it not for the blessing, the one who responds would have nothing to respond `Amen' to!

In the future parasha sheets we hope IY"H to bring some of the many answers given to this question by the Rishonim and Acharonim, Mussar masters and from Chassidic writings.

The Rosh explained this according to what Chazal say in Midrash Tanchuma, Ekev 7: "R' Yochanan said: Whoever begins a mitzvah [but does not complete it himself] and along comes someone else and completes it, it is credited to his name. In this matter, since responding `Amen' is the completion and perfection of the mitzvah which was begun, the one who responds is considered greater than the one who began this mitzvah.

(Tosfors haRosh" Berachos 53b)

THE PRAYER OF THE MIDWIVES

"And the midwives feared Hashem and did not obey what the king of Egypt commanded them and they sustained the children" (1:18).

Chazal pondered over the term "Vatechayena - they sustained". Why did the Torah have to state this when it already said that they did not do what the king of Egypt had commanded them?

They explained that it is praise within praise. Not only did they defy Pharaoh's command, but even went further to actually sustain the children. How? "Some babies place their mothers in danger at the time of birth, while others are not viable themselves. When faced with such cases, the midwives would stand and pray, saying to Hashem: Ribono shel Olam, let these live, lest the Jews say that we killed them. And Hashem answered their prayers, as is written, "And they sustained - ותחיינה - they made sure that the mothers survived - while את הילדים -- refers to the babies" (Shemos Rabba 1:15).

PRAYER RISING FROM SUFFERING IS HEARD

"And their outcry rose to Hashem from the labor" (2:23).

Why does the Torah repeat the phrase `from the labor'? We already learned that "Bnei Yisrael sighed from the work". The Torah apparently wishes to teach us that the ultimate, most perfect prayer is one rising from the midst of one's troubles and straits. According to this, we can understand the pasuk as follows: "And their cry rose up to Hashem." Why? "From the labor." Because theirs was a prayer uttered from the depths of their pain and suffering (Rabbenu Bechaye).

THE OUTSTANDING PAIN OF BNEI YISRAEL WAS BECAUSE OF THE EXILE OF THE SHECHINA

We can alternately say that the Torah wishes to praise the Jews in Egypt. Even though they were in a terrible situation, nevertheless, they did not dwell on their own suffering but were pained and cried out "to Hashem - over the exile of the Shechina". This can be learned from the words, "And their outcry rose to Elokim" - their prayer was more focused on the suffering, as it were, of Hashem than their cry for their own sake of "the work" (the Rebbe of Nikolsburg, A Collection).

THE POWER OF AN OUTCRY

"And Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael and He knew" (2:25).

The Torah sought to mention many reasons for the redemption of the Jews, as the pasuk itself enumerates: "And Hashem heard their groaning, and Hashem remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak and with Yaakov, and Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael and He knew." More is said in the following pesukim as well to teach us that although they did not have sufficient merit to be redeemed, nevertheless Hashem received their prayer with mercy because of their outcry (Ramban).

PRAYER RECEIVED IS PROOF THAT HASHEM IS IN THE MIDST OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

"And Moshe said to Hashem: Here I will come to the Bnei Yisrael... and they will say to me: What is His name. What shall I say to them? And Hashem said to Moshe: I will be what I will be" (3:13-14).

We must try to understand Moshe's question: "And they will say to me: What is His name?" He intended to ask Hashem in the name of the people that He show them a sign or miracle to let them know that He is in their midst and that He is always watching over them. Hashem replied, "I will be what I will be," meaning: There is no need to prove this for the very fact that in every generation, when they call out to Me from their suffering, I immediately answer them. This is the biggest proof that I am in their midst and that He is very near to us to demonstrate His mercy whenever we call out to him (Ramban).

MOSHE DID NOT PRAY FOR HIS RECOVERY

"And Moshe said to Hashem... I am not a man of words... Even since You spoke to Your servant, for I am slow of speech and of slow tongue. And Hashem said to him: Who gave man a mouth... if not I, Hashem" (4:10-11).

Moshe said to Hashem: If I were worthy for You to send me to Pharaoh, You would have to heal my faulty speech first so that I could talk to him. Hashem's answer was: "Who gave man a mouth... if not I, Hashem." In other words, the reason I did not heal you was because you didn't pray for this, which you should have done... (Ramban).