

And All Believe



A Weekly Leaflet from the House of "Bnei Emunim"

PARASHAS YISRO

IN THE PATHWAYS OF EMUNIM

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

"DO NOT FORSAKE THE TEACHINGS OF YOUR MOTHER - אל תישׁוּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ"

"Thus shall you say to the House of Yaakov and declare to Bnei Yisrael" (19:3)

We are all familiar with the Chazal that comments on "Thus shall you say to the House of Yaakov" - that this refers to the women. "And declare to Bnei Yisrael" - refers to the men. Many of the great commentators ponder over this since if the mitzvah of Torah study was given primarily to the menfolk, why were the women mentioned first?

Rabbenu Bechaye addressed this question and said in his unique manner that since it is the mother who takes her son to the Beis Medrash and must cajole him into wanting to learn Torah in such a way that even when he grows old, he will not waver - therefore she received precedence in receiving the Torah.

Also familiar is the Chazal (Berachos 17a) that women gain their portion in Olam Haba by virtue of their enabling their husbands and sons to learn Torah and encouraging them to do so.

AND ENABLE US TO RAISE...

Rabbenu Bechaye relates to the central role which Jewish women play in the Torah study of their sons - the role of prayer - as is written: "Therefore it is fitting for a woman to pray to Hashem at her Shabbos candle lighting - which is primarily her mitzvah - that Hashem grant her sons who will illuminate the world with their Torah, since prayer is better received when one is performing a mitzvah. In the merit of the Shabbos candles, which spread light, she asks that Hashem enable her to raise sons who are learned in Torah, which is also called 'light', as is written (Mishlei 6:23): "For a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light." Chazal commented (Shabbos 23b) that whoever is conscientious with the Shabbos candles merits sons who are Talmidei Chachomim."

The Magen Avraham quotes Rabbenu Bechaye's words as a halachic basis for the custom women have of praying when lighting the candles that her sons succeed in their Torah study. This special prayer has been said with sacred emotion by women throughout the generations, and its words are pure and exalted: "May it be Your will that You grant me and my husband and my sons... and enable me to raise sons and sons of sons, learned and wise, who love Hashem and fear Elokim, men of truth, blessed holy seed, cleaving unto Hashem and illuminating the whole world with their Torah and good deeds and with all their endeavors in Hashem's holy service..."

The "Daas Moshe" brings a fascinating fact (Truma) in the name of his father, the Maggid of Kozhnitz: "When a woman lights the Shabbos candles, she should pray for sons who are tzaddikim and talmidei chachomim. The time is very auspicious for such a prayer. The mother of Hagaon Hakadosh

R' Shmuel Kaidinover, author of "Tiferes Shmuel" on Shas, told me that she was illiterate and did not know the prayers but when she lit the Shabbos candles, she would pray in Russian, in her own words, and say: May it be His will that my son Shmuel become a Talmid Chacham..."

LEAH IMEINU'S PRAYER

In "Moshav Zekeinim" on this parsha, the Baalei Hatosfos ask the same question we posed at the beginning, and said: "It was in Leah's merit that the women were addressed first. She used to embrace a golden plaque to her heart upon which was engraved, 'תּוֹרַה צֵה לִּי מְשֵׁה'. She would stare at it day and night until her eyesight was weakened, as is written, 'And Leah's eyes were weak' - from the golden glow. That is why her descendants merited Torah first."

Leah Imeinu, our Matriarch, the mother of half of the Tribes, used to pray even in her childhood that her children merit a portion in Torah. This is why the Torah addressed the women before the men and why her descendants merited Torah before the others.

The words of the Baalei Tosfos take on a special significance in the light of the words of R' Avraham Saba, one of the heads of the Spanish exile and grandfather of the Beit Yosef. He explains the reason why Leah merited a son like Yissachar, who eventually became the very symbol of Torah scholarship throughout the generations. Limited space allows us only part of his exalted words which appear in "Tzror Hamor" for Parshas Vayetze:

"When she gave birth to Yehuda, who was the king, she was overjoyed since she now had four sons, one of which was blessed with royalty. Then she had second thoughts and saw herself lacking, as if she had not achieved anything at all. Even royalty was diminished in her sight when she learned that the king's salvation reposed in Hashem and his Torah. Thereafter, she redoubled her prayers to beg that Hashem give her a son who would delve in Torah. This is what is meant by the pasuk: 'And Hashem listened to Leah and she conceived and gave

birth to a fifth son to Yaakov' - one who would toil in the **five chumashim of Torah.**"

There is so much to be said about the prayers of worthy Jewish women, who merited, by virtue of their prayers, to establish generations of talmidei chachomim. We cannot end off without bringing Rashi's explanation on why R' Yehoshua's mother brought him as a baby to the Beis Medrash, as Pirkei Avos (2:8) testifies: "Fortunate is the one who bore him." She was instrumental in his becoming learned, for throughout her pregnancy, she would visit the batei medrash in the city every day and say [to the scholars]: Pray for mercy for my unborn child that he become wise."

THEY ANSWERED 'AMEN' AFTER [EACH OF] THE [TEN] COMMANDMENTS

The Name of Hashem, Elokim, is mentioned ten times in Parshas Yisro, which has the gematriya of 91, just like 'Amen'. This upholds the commentaries which say that the Jews answered 'Amen' after each one of the Dibros, in the same way that they answered 'Amen' on Har Grizim and Har Eival after each of the blessings and curses respectively.

("Emunas Yitzchak" Chap. 17)



אז מסיני נצטוו = אמן

("Midrash Hatefillos" by R' Y. Ben Yakar)

Answering 'Amen' is rooted in the mitzvah of emuna which we were commanded at the Giving of the Torah at Sinai - in the Ten Commandments.

Then as today... let us all be vigilant in answering ninety 'Amen's every day, as established by the Zohar (see "Mishne Berura" Vol. VI, 13) and thus may we merit establishing emuna in our hearts forever more.

AMEN - BECAUSE I ALSO BELIEVE...

A Tear-Drenched Tehillim

The regular worshippers attending the Chofetz Chaim's shul were in for a great surprise one day. Their Rav, the pride and glory of the generation, was sitting by his table, weeping bitterly as he leafed through a worn Tehillim, hot tears streaming down his cheeks.

The year was 5684, thirty years after the death of his righteous mother, Dobrusha. R' Mordechai Dov, his sister's son-in-law, had accidentally come upon the ancient Tehillim in his mother-in-law's home and had brought it to his uncle.

It was old and worn. Brown blotches decorated every page, silent witnesses to the tears that had been poured into it over the many years it had been in constant use in the home of the mother of R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen, the giant of Torah and Mussar.

All the members of the household gathered to take in the scene but as soon as the Chofetz Chaim realized what was happening, he closed the Tehillim with a fervent kiss and began explaining to everyone why he had become so emotional.

"This Tehillim belonged to my mother, aleha hashalom," he said. He pointed to the brown blotches which dotted every page like a leopard's skin. "These stains are the silent witnesses of the many tears which my mother shed as she said over the chapters in it.

"I will never forget how, every day, even before daybreak, she was already deep into it, reciting the Tehillim in a moving ancient chant. When she had finished reciting her Tehillim, she would say a special prayer over me, her only son: 'May it be Your will that my son, Yisrael Meir, grow in Torah, that he become an upright Jew and that he find favor in Your eyes and the eyes of all mankind.'

"Now, when I hold this in my hand and see those tears which stained every single line in this Tehillim, how can I hold myself back from crying?"

Upon that very occasion, the Chofetz Chaim's daughter related: 'Towards the end of my grandmother's life, after her son's name was already famous throughout the Jewish world, some of her acquaintances once approached her and asked in what merit she had earned such a great son.

"My grandmother heard the question but was too modest to take any credit and tried to evade the question. 'I don't remember any special thing that I can point to,' she said. They persisted, however. 'It can't be. You must be able to remember something, even a small thing.'

"She finally gave in and said: 'Before my wedding, my mother came to me and said a few short words: 'Listen well, my dear daughter to what I am about to say at this great moment in your life,' she said to me. 'Our task as Jewish mothers is to see that our sons grow to be great in Torah and yiras Shomayim. Here, take this wedding gift, this Tehillim, and pray from it every day that the Creator grant you to raise your sons to Torah and G-d-fear.

"And don't forget,' said the Chofetz Chaim's grandmother to his mother, the kalla, 'to shed tears while you pray,' and she thrust this very Tehillim, new and shiny, into her hands.

"I guarded my mother's word every day of my life. Every free moment I had, after completing my household tasks, or even while waiting for a pot of potatoes to boil, I would take this sacred book which my mother had given me and would pray tearfully that my Yisrael Meir'ke grow up to be a Talmid Chacham and a yerei Shomayim.

"Perhaps this is an answer to your question,' my grandmother said to her acquaintances. Her sincere, heartfelt words left no doubt in her listeners that it was the pure truth"

(HeChofetz Chaim, Chayav Ufaalo" Vol. I, p. 26; "Otzros HaTorah" Yisro).

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 explanation of Rabbenu Menachem Rakanati to this question:

"Amen' (inclusive) has the same gematriya as הויה ויהיה אחד. Thus, one who answers `Amen' testifies to the Uniqueness of Hashem, to the renewal of the world, to the ongoing existence of the world and to His presence in it for all times. Therefore one who answers `Amen' is greater than the one who says the blessing, since all the above principles are not included in blessing itself

("Rakanati" Beshalach).

PRAYERS FOR RAIN

"And Hashem said: ...Behold for I shall come to you in the thickness of the cloud" (19:9).

HaRav Hakadosh, R' Yerachmiel of Ostrovitz, said: Out of simplicity and naiveté, a man sometimes finds himself praying for very material things. We would think that such a prayer has no right to be answered. But Hashem promises and says: "Behold, I shall come to you in the thickness of the cloud," that is, even though you ask for things that are thick and obscure like a cloud, I will, nonetheless, descend and listen to it and fulfill your request" ("Imrei Shefer").

`AND THEY... SAID -- `AMEN

"And Hashem spoke all of these things, saying..." (20:1).

Why the repetition of `spoke' and `saying'? Rashi explains: "This teaches that they answered `Yes' when that was appropriate and [similarly] `No' for לאו." The Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni Yirmeyah 266) states that the commandment of "Anochi" and "Lo yihiye" were said as one commandment. According to Rashi, we find a difficulty, for how could their response be both `yes' and `no' as one?

We can understand this by saying that the Jews did not explicitly say `Yes' or `No' respectively after the commandments. Rather, they responded `Amen', which is an expression of agreement to someone's words so that it was as if they answered `Yes' when that was appropriate and `No' when that was appropriate. Thus they answered `Amen' both to the positive commandment of "I am Hashem Your G-d" and `Amen' to "You shall have no other gods..."

Now we can also understand the wording of R' Yehuda Halevi in his poem which is sung as Shabbos zemiros: "And they opened and answered: Hashem is One." Where do we find that they actually said, `Hashem Echad'? This can be understood from their answering `Amen', which also symbolizes Hashem's Unique One-ness since it has the combined gematriya of Hashem's two Names of Havaya and Adnus, that is, 91. That is why their response was as if they had stated `Hashem Echad'" ("Beis Avraham" of Slonim, Michtevi Kodesh 12).

HASHEM ANSWERS EVERY PRAYER

"You shall not have any other gods before Me" (20:3).

Rashi explains the concept of `other gods': "That they are `other' to [they disregard] their worshippers who cry out to them, and do not answer. It is as if they are `other', as if they are unfamiliar with them and never recognize them at all."

The Imrei Emes said: From a negative, one can learn a positive - if the gods of idol worshippers are defined as alien to their followers and do not respond to them, how utterly different by many thousandfold is our G-d Who never hears a prayer offered to Him without responding, as Chazal said (Devarim Rabba 2:12): "Pray and pray again and at some time your prayer will be granted" ("Imrei Emes" Shavuos 676).

SILVER AND GOLD DURING PRAYERS

"You shall not make with Me gods of silver, and gods of gold you shall not make for you" (20:20).

"You shall not make with Me" - when you stand before Me in prayer, don't think about your silver and gold, because if you do so, I will regard it as if you made gods of silver and gods of gold" ("Rabbenu Bechaye").

THE ONE WHO SHORTENS SHALL NOT WIELD OVER THE ONE WHO EXTENDS

"For your sword was wielded over it and you defiled it" (20:22).

Why did the Torah forbid brandishing iron over the mizbaich? Says Rashi: "The mizbaich was created to extend a man's days whereas iron was created to shorten man's days. It is not right that the shortener should be wielded over the lengthener."

The Mashgiach R' Elya Lopian used to say that the same can be said with regards to prayer, which nowadays serves instead of the sacrifices: a mouth which speaks lashon hara and evil gossip is like the iron which shortens the days of man. How can man use such a tool for prayer, which lengthens the days of man? ("Lev Eliyahu" Vol. I, p. 234).