

Prayer of Faith

A Glance at the
Seder Hatefillah

Preparation for Krias Shema

Introspection Prior to Krias Shema

Earlier segments addressed the many virtues of the mitzvah of Krias Shema and its unique role in the life of every G-d fearing Jew.

Due to the importance of this mitzvah, Chazal have spoken extensively about the person's obligation to prepare himself well for it, and we have already stated, that some even wrote that the entire objective of the *Birchos Krias Shema* is preparation and introspection before performing this lofty mitzvah (See *Likutei Amarim Tanya* Vol. I 49).

For example, Rabbeinu Akiva Eiger said that the reason that the *brachah* of *Ahavah Rabbah* concludes with the words "*Habochoer b'amo Yisrael b'ahavah*" is in order for us to introspect and plan before the *parashah* of "*V'ahavta*," because how can we be obligated with the mitzvah of loving Hashem? Is it possible to force someone to love another? However, if we introspect properly prior to *Krias Shema* about the love of Hashem to Yisrael, then the mutual love in our hearts will be aroused towards Hashem. (*Milim Chadetim V'Eschanan*)

Haskess – Ushema Yisrael

The *passuk* "*Haskess ushema Yisrael*" (*Devarim* 27:9) is explained by *Onkelos* to mean "*atzis*." In other words: listen and introspect. Similarly, the *Seforno* explains it to mean (*ibid*), "Imagine in your mind." This teaches us the significant obligation of not approaching the mitzvah of *Krias Shema* abruptly, without prior thought. Rather, we must precede it with preparation, thought and action to accept the Yoke of Heaven. That is the meaning of what it says: "*Haskess*." – delve into and imagine in your mind what you are about to do, to crown HaKadosh Baruch Hu as your King, and only then, "*Ushema Yisrael*," recite the *Shema*. (*Divrei Emunah Al haTorah, Likutim, Krias Shema*)

Think About Teshuvah Before Krias Shema

The Chassidic giants (*Igra Dekallah Shoftim*) also write that *Krias Shema* is like testifying about the existence of HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His Oneness. This is alluded to by the letters *ayin* and *dalet* in the first *passuk*, which are in a larger print than the others, as a hint to the word "*eid*", witness. Therefore, it is worthy for a person to think about doing *teshuvah* before reciting *Krias Shema*, because there are a few sins that disqualify him from being an *eid*, and if he does not repent for them, then his mitzvah is invalid, because the *eidus*, the testimony, was given by a disqualified witness.

This is alluded to in the *passuk* (*Devarim* 19:15): "*Loyakum eid echad b'ish lechol avon ulechol chatas*" – there should not be fulfillment in the testimony of a person in *Krias Shema* that Hashem is One, "*lechol avon ulechol chatas*" – as long as he has a sin in his hand.

There are others who explained

the importance of the thoughts about *teshuvah* before *Krias Shema* according to what Chazal wrote that a person must have in mind to give up his soul as a *korban olah* when reciting *Krias Shema*. Because an *olah* that has a blemish is disqualified from being sacrificed, a person must repent before reciting *Krias Shema* so that the blemish of the sin on his soul should not damage the sacrifice. (*Pardes Hamelech, Toldos*, 172)

Reciting Kel Melech Ne'eman

The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 61) writes: "Some have the custom of first saying "*Kel Melech Ne'eman*" and some add, "*Amen Kel Melech Ne'eman*" prior to *Shema*. The reason for this is that *Krias Shema* has 248 words, the same as the number of a person's organs, less four; by reciting these four words, the missing four words are filled in, bringing the total number to 248."

In actuality, our custom of saying these words is only when an individual recites the *Shema*, and not with a *minyan*. That is because one who davens with a *minyan* can fill in the four missing words by saying the word "*Emes*" at the end of *Shema*, and then the repetition of "*Hashem Elokeichem Emes*" by the *shaliach tzibbur*. (*Rema ibid se'if 3; Mishnah Berurah se'if kattan 13*)

Aside for that, these words also indicate the three principles of *emunah* which are: *metzius Hashem*, the existence of Hashem; *His hashgachah*, constant watching over us; and the belief in reward and punishment. "*Kel*" alludes to His Existence, which is firm and all mighty and the power over all powers; "*Melech*" hints to the *hashgachah* on His Creations, like a king over his nation, and "*Ne'eman*" hints to His faithfulness to pay reward to each person based on his actions. (*Anaf Yosef*)

The words "*Kel Melech Ne'eman*" have yet another meaning, which is "*amen*", as explained in the *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 119b): "What is *amen*? *Kel Melech Ne'eman*." Some write that these words serve as the "*amen*" after the *brachah* of "*Habochoer B'Amo Yisrael B'Ahavah*". (*Rema* *ibid*)

Rashi explains on the *Gemara* there that answering *amen* to each and every *brachah* has the significance of accepting the Yoke of Heaven. The *Gemara's* question there of "*Mai Amen? What is *amen*?*" meaning, where is the significance of accepting *Ol Malchus Shamayim* concealed in *amen*, and answers: "*Kel Melech Ne'eman*" – that one who answers *amen* testifies that his Creator is a *Kel Melech Ne'eman*.

Harav Shmuel Halevi Wosner, *zt"l*, explained in his *drashah* at the Bnei Emunim gathering in Elul 5770: "The essence of replying *amen* is the testimony of faith, to testify about the Creator that He is a *Kel Melech Ne'eman*. This is meaning of the first *passuk* of *Krias Shema* as well, that we testify to our belief in *Yichud Hashem*, and therefore the words "*Kel Melech Ne'eman*" are added right before it, because that is what one must think about. (*Sefer Bnei Emunim* 115)

A Story of Faith

A Weekly Story About
Amen and Tefillah

Salvation From the Depths of Anguish

We learn in this week's parashah about the power of tefillah that emerges from the depths of the heart to alter the forces of nature. Is such a thing still possible in our time? This true story, which is completely accurate except for the names of the people involved, will prove that it can. Read for yourselves:

The whole country was thunderstruck by the news. The headlines and news stories all described how a group of *yeshivah bachurim* had gone to swim at the beach in Chadera. A sudden whirlpool swept them out to sea; five succeeded in making it back to shore, but two of them were swept too far. One was washed up on the shore a short time later, and the rescue personnel had nothing to do but declare him dead. But the second disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him. His panicked friends hastened to summon help, and a large team was sent to search for him. His family and friends hoped for the best, but tragically, after a day of searching, his body was located under a rock on the sea floor.

As soon as it emerged that the boy had disappeared, his friends quickly updated the parents, who came to the scene fearing the worst. For twenty for hours, they stood on the shoreline, their hearts breaking with terror and worry. There was little anyone could say or do to reassure them in the bleak situation.

Apparently this boy was their only child who had been born seventeen years earlier after thirteen years of waiting, davening and bitter disappointments. Now, they stood on the beach, their hearts thumping with the faintest of hopes. When the divers came back with the terrible news, they almost collapsed with grief.

It's hard to describe the heartrending *levayah* that took place that day. The mother's screams blended with the father's sobs, and together, their tears rose On High, causing tremors in the Upper Worlds.

"*Ribbono shel Olam!*" the mother cried. "You are the Almighty, please let my son live! I cannot bear the pain!"

But the ways of Hashem are not known to us, and it was decreed that this be the outcome; the miracle the parents yearned for was not to be. The bier continued to the cemetery, escorted by hundreds of people; there was not one dry eye as they grieved along with the shattered parents.

The *shivah* passed in one long blur of tears, weeping and anguish. They tried to accept the decree, but no one could fill the terrible void that had been forged in their lives. They had been looking forward to walking their son down to the *chuppah* in just a few short years, and instead, they had to escort him on his final earthly journey.

The *shivah* eventually passed and slowly, the parents began to return to their sad routine. The father returned to work as a manager, and the mother, a teacher for the past thirty years, went back to her job as well. Their pain was immense, and their neighbors, relatives and friends did what they could to ease it a bit. The parents drew some solace from the countless stories that people shared with them about their son's refinement, generosity, and scholarliness.

Some time after the *sheloshim*, a young man knocked at the door of the parent's home and asked to speak to them to provide some encouragement. The three sat in the dimly lit dining room as a cool evening wind blew. The parent's listened attentively, and opened their hearts to hear what the young man had to say.

The consolation that the *avreich* offered penetrated their hearts and gave them strength, but their loss was still so acute that

it seemed to be hanging in the air. Before leaving, the young man felt that he had to add a few words, and he davened in his heart to Hashem to put the right words in his mouth.

When he shook the father's hand in parting, the words emerged, halting and disorganized, but full of *bitachon* and hope:

"Dear parents! David Hamelech says in *Tehillim*: '*Ya'anacha Hashem beyom tzarah...yishlach ezrecha mikodesh...yemarei Hashem kol mishalosecha*.' You should know that specifically at a time of pain, the person is closer to Hashem than ever. Don't give up. Strengthen yourselves in *tefillah* and plead to Hashem, and take upon yourselves to refrain from idle talk in shul. If HaKadosh Baruch Hu remembered Sarah Imeinu at age ninety, can He not do the same for you at the age of fifty?"

With these words, the young man left, having planted some new hope in their hearts. Until now they had not dreamed of asking to merit another child, but now their hope was rekindled, and from that day on, they davened constantly, with all their might, for Heavenly Mercy.

Less than two years later the phone rang in the young man's home. On the line was the excited voice of the father inviting him to...a bris, not of one child, but of two sweet, healthy babies.

At the age of 52, against all odds, the parents were pulled out of their grief by bringing new life into the world—or rather, two new lives.

The *bris* took place in a distant northern town, but the young man, who had difficulty believing the story, made the effort to travel there just to see the miracle with his own eyes. Indeed, when he entered the hall and saw the new father holding one child and the mother holding the other, he could not hold back his tears.

During the *seudah*, the father delivered an emotional speech:

Nineteen years ago, our oldest son was born. It is hard for me to describe the pain and suffering we endured those first thirteen years as we waited to be blessed with a child. For the subsequent seventeen years we invested all our energy in raising him to Torah, and hoped that through him, we would be able to establish a new generation to bear the names of our fathers.

And then, two years ago, our world caved in. Our only son, who wanted just to spend a day of *bein hazmanim* relaxing with friends, drowned in a sudden whirlpool, leaving us shocked and hopeless. At the age of fifty, we were once again decreed to be barren, and unlike the earlier years, this time, there was little hope. We tried to give one another strength that this was the Will of Hashem. We'd merited a gift for seventeen years, and now, Hashem had decreed that we return to our childless state.

About a month after the tragedy, a young man who we did not know came to our house and infused us with renewed hope. Suddenly we realized that HaKadosh Baruch Hu desired our *tefillas*, and wanted us to turn only to Him despite the odds.

Only then did we begin to daven to once again merit the same gift that we had lost. Again, we endured many tribulations, although for a much shorter time, and you see the double *yeshuah* that Hashem has bestowed upon us.

I have no doubt that only our increased intensity in *tefillah* and *emunah* is what helped us bring new life to the world, and to stand in front of you at this most moving moment.

Lehitaden Be'ahavasecha Toldos