

Vechol Maaminim



A Weekly Leaflet From "Bnei Emunim"

PARASHAS VAYEIRA

IN THE PATHWAYS OF FAITH

Divrei Torah About Amen and Tefillah in the Parashah

Avraham Phrased His Tefillos Wisely

"האף תספה צדיק עם רשע: אולי יש חמשים צדיקים בתוך העיר האף תספה ולא תשא למקום למען חמשים הצדיקים אשר בקרבה" (יח כג-כד)

Why did Avraham Avinu begin with the lesser request, that the *tzaddikim* of Sodom should not perish with its wicked, and only later, increased his request to ask that even the wicked people there should be protected?

The **Ksav Sofer** explained: Avraham Avinu feared that if he would first daven for the wicked to be saved in the merit of the *tzaddikim*, his *tefillah* would only be effective for the *tzaddikim*, because "*tefillah oseh mechetzah, tefillah accomplishes half*" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 10 5). Therefore, he first said: "*ha'af tispeh tzaddik im rasha,*" meaning: I don't have to daven for the *tzaddikim*, and my *tefillah* is intended only for the wicked of Sodom, that they should be saved in the merit of the righteous who live there.

Teshuvah Transforms a "Rasha" to a "Tzaddik"

"ויאמר ה' אם אמצא בסדם חמשים צדיקים בתוך העיר ונשאתי לכל המקום בעבורם" (י חכ)

Why does it say "if I find", in the future tense? Hashem surely knew if there were fifty *tzaddikim* in Sodom or not.

Harav Eizik Ausband, Rosh Yeshivas Telz Cleveland, explained: The *Targum Yonasan* (later in the *parashah*, 19:24) says that before HaKadosh Baruch Hu overturned Sodom and Amorah, He first brought down rains in order to around them to do *teshuvah*, and because they ignored this, He then proceeded with the destruction.

Based on this, we can explain what Hashem told Avraham: Even though there are no *tzaddikim* in Sodom right now, "if I find in Sodom fifty *tzaddikim*" – who will repent because they fear the punishment, that will be enough for Me to save the whole city for their sake.

Lekach Daas

The Tefillah of the Navi Is Not Effective After He Prophesizes

"ועתה השב אשת האישי כי נביא הוא ואם אינך משיב דע כי מות תמות" (ז כ)

Harav Shmuel Feivish Kahana, the grandson

of the Sm"a, explained: In *Maseches Moed Kattan* (21a, beginning with *Dai*) the *Tosafos* writes that once a prophet prophesizes that a person will die, that person is considered dead, because even if afterwards, the Navi davens that he should live, the *tefillah* will not be effective.

Based on this we can explain what Hashem said to Avimelech: "*V'atah*, and now, *hashev eishes ha'ish – ki navi hu*" – and as long as he has not yet prophesized that you will die, he can daven for you to live. Because "if you do not return" – and as a result you will be sentenced to death "know that you will die" and even his *tefillah* will not protect you.

Drush Shmuel

Lot Was Saved In Merit of Having David As a Descendent

"וכל אשר לך בעיר הוצא מן המקום" (יט יב)

"*Hotzei min hamakom*" – the acronym of the final letters of these words is amen. Likewise, the words "*hotzei min*", also contain the word "amen." From here we can learn that Lot was saved in the merit of David Hamelech, who was a descendent of his (as explained in *Rashi, Gittin* 60b, beginning with *kasuv*), and he extensively praised HaKadosh Baruch Hu by replying amen. (See *Tehillim* 41:14; 72:19; 89:53; 106:48)

Vayikach Moshe

A Torah Scholar Does Not Pray for Himself

"כי שמע אלקים אל קול הנער באשר הוא שם" (כא ז)

Rashi says: From here [we learn], that the prayer of a sick person is more effective than the *tefillah* of another for him, and that it is sooner accepted (*Bereishis Rabbah* 53 14).

Harav Eliyahu Mizrachi asks: In *Maseches Brachos* (5 2), the Gemara relates that when Rabi Yochanan became bedridden, Rabi Chanina came to visit him, and when he saw his suffering, he gave him his hand and thus helped him recover from his sickness. The Gemara asks: Why didn't Rabi Yochanan get himself up? And it answers: "A prisoner does not release himself from prison."

The Gemara clearly states that the prayers of others for a sick person are more effective than the person's *tefillah* for himself, so how can the words of the *Midrash* be reconciled with this?

The **Chasam Sofer** offers a beautiful explanation: Usually, it is true that the prayer of a sick person for himself is more effective than the *tefillah* of others for him, but it is different with a *talmid chacham*. Because he has no interest in the trivialities of life on this world, then even in his sick state, he does not ask for himself. He asks only for others. Therefore, the Gemara in *Brachos* says specifically: "*Ein chavush matir atzmo*", meaning that specifically a *talmid chacham*, who is "*chovesi*" the benches of the *Bais Medrash* (see *Shabbos* 102a), is the one that does not release himself from his illness and needs the *tefillah* of others.

Chasam Sofer, *Vayigash* (p. 227)

When Is It Permitted to Daven Not to Be Tested?

"ויאמר בני נשבעתי נאם ה' כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא השכת את בנך את יחידך" (כב טז)

What is the need for this oath? He said to him: Promise me that You will not test me again from now on, nor will You test my son Yitzchak." (*Bereishis Rabbah* 56 11)

From this *Midrash* we learn that a person is allowed to daven that he should not encounter a *nisayon*, a test, as we ask each morning in *Birchos Hashachar*: "*V'al teveni...lidei nisayon.*"

But this does not seem to be consistent with the words of the *Mesilas Yesharim* (1) that "The main point of the existence of a person in this world is only to fulfill *mitzvos*... and to withstand *nisayon*."

Harav Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, explains: The words of the *Mesilas Yesharim* relate to the difficulties that a person faces when he wants to fulfill *mitzvos* in which he is obligated by law, about which he has to know that the principle of his existence in this world is in order for him to withstand these tests. But Avraham Avinu's request, and our request in *Birchos Hashachar*, is that we not be tested with special *nisayons* that are sent our way only to evaluate whether we can withstand them. That is permitted for us to ask.

Tipah Min Hayam, Vol. I, p. 148, *Shimah Tefilasi*, p. 46

Is There Anything Beyond Hashem's Ability?

The **Ramban** in this *parashah* (18:15) explains that Sarah Imeinu was criticized for laughing inside when she heard the blessing of the angel that she would give birth, because although she did not know that he was an Angel of Hashem, it behooved her to reply amen to his *brachah*.

Harav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, learned a powerful lesson from this: Every person should answer amen to any *brachah* that is conferred upon him, even if by natural means there is no chance of it coming true.

(*Shu"t Igros Moshe, Volume VIII, Kuntress, Man Malchei Rabbanan*)

Amen. To every *brachah*.



Prayer of Faith

A Glimpse at the
Seder Hatefillah

Krias Shema- Introduction (3)

The Importance of Saying Krias Shema with Kavanah

The *passuk* in *Shir Hashirim* (8:13) says: “*Hayosheves baganim chavirim makshvim lekoleich hashmi'ini*, You, who sit in the gardens the friends hearken to your voice; let me hear [it].” *Chazal* explain in the *Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabbah* (*ibid*): “When Yisrael enter the shuls and recite *Krias Shema* with *kavanah* in one voice and one opinion and with one *ta'am*, HaKadosh Baruch Hu says to them: ‘You who sit in the gardens’ – when you recite, ‘*chavirim*’ the friends – I and My entourage, ‘listen to your voice.’ But when Yisrael recites *Krias Shema* with haste and distractions, one saying it early and one saying it late, without the proper *kavanah*, then the Ruach HaKodesh cries out: “*Berach dodi udemei lecha litzvi*, Flee, my beloved, and liken yourself to a gazelle,” (*ibid* 14) – to the Heavenly Entourage that are similar to Your Honor in one voice and one tune.” (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 8:12)

From these words of the *Midrash* we can learn about the importance of *kavanah* and the punctiliousness that are required for *Krias Shema*. Indeed, more than all other parts of *tefillah*, the mitzvah of *Krias Shema* resonates with solemnity and extra caution. The *Shulchan Aruch* writes (61) at the beginning of the *siman* dedicated to this *halachah*:

“One should recite *Krias Shema* with *kavanah*, awe, fear, trembling and sweating. ‘*Asher Anochi metzavecha hayom*,’ is to say – each day it should be in your eyes like new, and not like someone who has already heard it many times, and it is no longer beloved to him.”

Krias Shema with Kavanah – A Segulah for Refuah

In addition to the halachic obligations to recite *Krias Shema* carefully and with *kavanah*, it is also a special *seugah* for *refuah*, as *Chazal* said: (*Zohar Hachadash Rus*, 30 2):

What is the meaning of the *passuk* (*Mishlei* 3:8): “*Rifus tehi lesharecha veshikui l'atzmosecha*”? The Torah is a healer for the body and for the bones in this world and in the next world. And what is that healing? *Krias Shema* has 248 words, equal to the number of limbs and organs that a person has. When one recites *Krias Shema* properly, then each organ takes its word and is healed by it.

The *Amudei Eish* once came to *Shacharis* with his cheek very swollen. When *Harav Chaim*

Leib of *Stavisk* realized this, he recoiled and asked what it was. The *Amudei Eish* replied: “Regretfully, I was not careful enough with my recital of *Krias Shema* of *Maariv* last night, which caused my teeth to hurt all night, to the point that my cheek has swelled up.”

Wonder of wonders, after the *Amudei Eish* was careful during *Shacharis* to concentrate during *Krias Shema* in an exceptional manner, his cheek went down to its normal size. (*Nitei Eitan*, 7 1)

One Who Recites Shema With Kavanah Is Saved from Sin

The Gemara also explains (*Brachos* 15b) that reciting *Krias Shema* with *kavanah* saves a person from sin: “*Rabi Chama bar Chanina* said: Anyone who recites *Krias Shema* and is careful with its letters then Gehinnom is cooled for him.” The *Bais Yosef* (*Orach Chaim* 62) explains: “Perhaps the reason that Gehinnom is cooled for him is because he became aware on his own, and was motivated by a person’s natural heat to be careful about its letters, and in that merit, a different heat is cooled for him, and that is Gehinnom.”

Rabbeinu Yehudah Hachassid added: There are 248 words in *Krias Shema*, corresponding to the 248 organs of a person. The word *avon* (with *milui osiyos*) is numerically equivalent to 248, to combat the “*avon*” that affects the 248 organs of a person, as it says (*Yechezkel* 32:27): “*Vatehi avonosam al atzmosam*, and their sins were on their bones.” The acceptance of the Yoke of Heaven is done with the person’s 248 organs, as stated in *Tehillim* (35:10) “*Kol atzmosai tomarnah Hashem mi Kamocha*, all my bones will say, Hashem who is like You?” Therefore *Chazal* said that anyone who recites *Krias Shema* with *kavanah* is saved from sin. (*Shibbolei Haleket* 15)

Kavanah in Krias Shema – The Key to Kavanah in All of Tefillah

In addition to the above *segulos*, it appears that *Krias Shema* with *kavanah* has a special *segulah*, whose power can help a person have *kavanah* in all his *tefillah*. The *Pele Yoetz* (*Erech Krias Shema*) writes: “The Mekubalim write that based on the *kavanah* one has in *Krias Shema*, that is how he can have *kavanah* in *tefillah*. That is the meaning of what *Chazal* say (*Brachos* 5a): ‘Anyone who recites *Krias Shema* ...the *mazikin* (harmful powers) are separated from him. The primary *mazikin* are those who confuse him during davening, and when he recites *Krias Shema* properly, then those *mazikin* are separated from him.”

A Story of Faith

A Weekly Story About
Amen and Tefillah

The Brachah that Banished the Thieves

The shul that is the subject of this story is located in the center of Buenos Aires, Argentina. At the lectern is the well known *maggid*, *Harav Meir Michael Greenwald*, *shlita*, delivering another fiery speech on the subject of *tefillah*, *brachos* and *amen*.

It was on one of the many *chizuk* trips that *Rav Greenwald* makes with great *mesirus nefesh* to Jewish communities around the world. This time, he had stopped in Argentina, a stop he had already made several times on his travels. The shul was packed. The audience listened raptly to his words, as he wove a tapestry of words of *Chazal*, quotes from *seforim* and riveting firsthand stories, and their hearts opened with resolve to strengthen themselves in these areas. The women’s section was also silent as the ladies internalized his words.

The *drashah* concluded with a call to all those in attendance to not leave his words hanging in the air, but rather to pledge to “take something home” so to speak. Each one of the listeners tried to resolve to strengthen themselves in something, among them, Mrs. D. *Rav Greenwald*’s words had penetrated her heart and she returned home with a renewed determination to change her ways.

For a long time, she had been bothered by the fact that *brachos* in their home were recited by rote, without too much attention, and she saw the speech as an opportunity to change this.

When she shared her thoughts with her family, they enthusiastically agreed to try and change their approach. Her husband also announced that there would be a contest among the family members, and everyone was excited to join.

Two years later, the *maggid* *Rav Greenwald* visited Argentina once again. His many followers were waiting with great anticipation for his arrival. The announcements about his impending visit drew huge crowds, and this time as well, it was apparent that his fiery speeches were having an effect.

At the end of his lecture, *Rabbi Greenwald* usually lingers a bit, giving time to those people who want to speak to him about the subject matter, or to receive some advice or a *brachah*. The *Rav* listens patiently to the questions and responds accordingly. After his speech in Argentina, the *Rav* noticed, out of the corner of his eye, that a dignified, well dressed man was waiting impatiently to speak to him. *Rabbi Greenwald* quickly made himself available to the man, who said he had a personal story to share. *Rav Greenwald* was used to hearing remarkable stories of *yeshuos* but the story that this man proceeded to tell him far exceeded anything he had ever fathomed.

“You were here two years ago,” the man reminded *Rav Greenwald*, who nodded; he well remembered that trip. “You spoke extensively about *brachos* and *amen*, and we all emerged from that speech stronger on this front. To us, these words were especially relevant, and we resolved after that speech that the whole family would increase their *kavanah* when reciting *brachos* and *amen*.

“Our home has since changed. The blasé atmosphere that had prevailed was replaced by an atmosphere saturated with holiness and *Yiras Shamayim*; the children grew stronger in *brachos* and *amen*, and even improved in school

“So firstly, you deserve a tremendous thank you!

“But the story doesn’t end there. Actually, it has not yet ended to this day, but the surprising continuation happened two weeks ago. I work in precious gems, and the neighborhood where we live is adjacent to a crime ridden neighborhood. That means that anyone who visits our home on a normal day might think he has arrived at a fortress. The house is surrounded by a fence, there is a network of surveillance cameras and we are connected twenty four hours a day to the emergency services.

“But if Hashem does not guard, than all the protective measures in the world are useless. All our fences and cameras could not keep out two determined and sly thieves who were able to deceive all the systems and break inside. It was relatively early in the evening, not a regular hour for such “jobs” to be carried out, and as far as they were concerned, it was an excellent time to surprise us...

“My wife was in the middle of preparing supper, the children were frolicking around, each one trying to catch her attention with their stories. It was quite an exhausting time of day for a mother of young children, to be sure...

“At one point, she felt thirsty, and poured herself a cup of water from our mini-bar that is installed on the countertop. The children were all gathered around her, waiting for the *brachah* that she would say with *kavanah*, so that they could answer *amen*. Suddenly, two masked intruders burst into the kitchen, armed with guns that they held drawn, leaving no time to think.

“As much as one may prepare for such a moment, and in our area, we are all prepared and trained for it, it always takes you by surprise. My wife and children froze in their places and their faces drained of all color.

“The cup of water almost fell out of my wife’s hand, but on the spur of the moment, as if she had received some Divine inspiration, the *brachah* emerged from her mouth. You can imagine how a *brachah* is recited in such a situation. The children cried *amen* like they had never done in their whole lives.

“And that’s when the miracle happened, and I have no way to explain it. I also have no one to ask for an explanation from...because the intruders simply turned on their heels and fled in fear.

“Like I said, I have no way to explain the miracle, but surely the *Rav* has a way to explain it,” the man concluded and then fell silent.

Rav Greenwald realized that as the man recounted his story, a group had gathered around them. He had to respond, and then he remembered the words of the holy *Ohr Hachaim*, which he sometimes shared with his listeners.

The *Ohr Hachaim* writes in *Parashas Bechukosai* (26:8): *Chazal* say (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18 21) that *David Hamelech* established the recital of one hundred *brachos* each day so that the plague that was sowing devastation among the *bachurim* of Yisrael should cease. We can find a beautiful allusion to this from this *passuk*: “*Umeah mikem*” – the one hundred *brachos* that you make each day, “*revavah yirdofu*” – will pursue and prevail over the ten thousand harmful forces that constantly surround a person, as it says (*Tehillim* 91:7): “*Yipol mitzicha elef urevavah miyeminecha eilecha lo yigash*.”

If that is the power of a *brachah*, *Rav Greenwald* concluded, then how much more so is the power of *amen*, because we know that one who answers is greater than the one making the *brachah*. *Rav Greenwald* did not need a better explanation, and neither did the crowd standing around him. They dispersed, all feeling uplifted.

Does anyone know of a better security company than that?!

The story is not yet over:

Some time after that, *Rav Greenwald* visited *Eretz Yisrael*, and was asked to speak at a *chizuk* event that was held in a certain community in memory of one of its members that had been murdered *al Kiddush Hashem*. The story that he had recently heard had left a deep impression on the *rav* and he shared it with his listeners.

In the middle of the speech, *Rav Greenwald* noticed that a *bachur* in the audience seemed very excited by what he was saying. When the speech was over, the *bachur* came over to the *Rav* and said: “I am the son of the person in whose memory this gathering is being held. You should know that since the tragedy, I have not wanted to go out to the street because I am so terrified. And now you have come, like an Angel from Above, with your story...Now I feel that I will be able to walk in the streets without fear. After all, I have the most sophisticated and effective means for self-defense: being scrupulous about *brachos* and *amen*.”

(Held from *Harav Meir Michael Greenwald*)