

Vechol Maaminim

"A Weekly Leaflet From 'Bnei Emunim"



340

PARASHAS MATOS - MASEI

תש"פ

IN THE PATHWAYS OF FAITH

Divrei Torah About Amen and Tefillah in the Parashah

Refraining from Uttering Hashem's Name in Vain

"איש כי ידר נדר לה" (ג)

Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev said that the *Midrash* cited with this *passuk* the words of *Tehillim* (144:4): "Adam lahevel damah yamav ketzel over, man is like a breath; his days are as a fleeting shadow." He then explained the connection between the *pesukim*:

In *Maseches Nedarim* (10b), *Chazal* warn that one who sanctifies an animal as a *korban* for Hashem should not say "L'Hashem *korban*" but rather "*korban l'Hashem*." The **Shelah Hakadosh** explained (*Matzah Ashirah Drush Rishon* 256) that this was thus established for fear that perhaps the one setting aside the *korban* would die after saying the word "l'Hashem" before managing to say "*korban*" and thus he will have uttered Hashem's Name in vain.

That is what the *Midrash* is alluding to: "*Ish ki yidor*" – he must be careful to say it in this order "*neder l'Hashem*" because "*adam l'hevel damah yamav ketzel over*," and if he dies suddenly, after saying "l'Hashem" he may mention the Name of Hashem in vain.

Harav Pinchas Horowitz, the Rav of Frankfurt, added an explanation of the *passuk* in *Tehillim* (146:3-4): "*Al tivtechu benedivim beven adam she'ein lo teshuah*, Do not trust in princes, in the son of man, who has no salvation. His spirit leaves, he returns to his soil; on that day, his thoughts are lost." When you are offered a *korban*, "*al tivtechu*" don't put trust in your lives to say "l'Hashem *korban*" because a person does not have the ability to save himself from the day of death, and he must fear perhaps "*tetzei rucho...*" and he will then utter Hashem's Name in vain.

Kedushas Levi; Panim Yafos

The Regret of Teshuvah Is Like the Regret of a Neder

"לא יחל דברו ככל היצא מפיו יעשה" (ל ג)

From this *passuk*, *Chazal* explain

And Amen Will Not Be Missing

"ולא נפקד ממנו איש" (לא מט)

The *Midrash* (*Tanchuma* 96 7) says; "Rabi Yehudah ben Gadya says: Anyone who answers amen in this world merits to answer amen in the World to Come. As it says (*Tehillim* 41:14): 'Baruch Hashem Elokei Yisrael mei'haolam v'ad ha'olam amen v'amen' – amen in this world and amen in the World to come."

An allusion to this *Midrash* is brought by **Harav Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich**, the Rav of Shamloi, from this *passuk*. The acronym of "ולא נפקד ממנו איש" is ראמן to teach us that one who is careful about answering amen in this world will merit that he will not miss out on answering amen in the World to Come. This is alluded to by the word "ראמן", in the *passuk* "mei'haolam v'ad ha'olam amen v'amen."

Even Shlomo

(*Chagigah* 10a) that only the one making the vow is forbidden to renege on his words, but a wise man is allowed to negate a vow. But the *halachah* is that even a wise man cannot negate a vow unless the one making the vow regrets in hindsight that he made it, not that he regrets it only from this point on. (*Tur Yoreh Deah* 228)

Based on this *halachah*, the Rebbe **Harav Moshe Yechiel of Ozherov** explained the reason why we begin the Yom Kippur davening with *Kol Nidrei*. It is to teach us that regret and repentance for our sins need to be like the regret of a vow. Just like one who regrets his vow needs to regret having made a vow in the first place, so, too, a sinner needs to regret the fact that he committed the sins. As the *Mesilas Yesharim* writes (Chapter 4): "Thus when the penitent man recognizes his sin and admits it, and reflects on his evil, repents of it and completely regrets ever having done it, as he would regret [in annulling] a certain vow, in

which case there is complete regret, and he desires and longs that this deed had never been committed."

Be'er Moshe

Mentioning Shem Shamayim Is a Condition for Success

"ויאמר אליהם משה אם תעשון את הדבר הזה אם תחלצו לפני ה' למלחמה; ואם לא תעשון כן הנה חטאתם לה" (לב כ-כג)

Why did Moshe need to speak so harshly to the children of Gad and Reuven, after they already committed wholeheartedly (32:17): "*V'anachnu nechaletz chushim lifnei Bnei Yisrael*"?

Harav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the Rav of Yerushalayim, explained:

Moshe was strict about the fact that the children of Gad and Reuven did not mention the Name of Hashem when they declared their intentions to come and help Bnei Yisrael. The words "*v'anachnu nechaletz chushim*" smack of the sentiment of "the power of my hand" and therefore Moshe rebuked them, and made it clear to them that their victory was only from Hashem.

This is alluded to in the words of the *passuk*: "And Moshe said to them: If you will do this, if you will arm yourselves **before Hashem** for war," – only if you make sure to mention the Name of Hashem before going out to war then the words "*v'avar lachem kol chalutz*, and every armed man will cross the Yarden before Hashem, until He has driven His enemies before Him," will be fulfilled with you. But "if you do not do this" – mentioning Hashem's Name – then "*hinei chatasem l'Hashem*, you will have sinned against Hashem ..."

Indeed, right after Moshe's rebuke we find that they did take care to mention Hashem's Name, as it says (ibid 27): "And your servants will cross over – all those in the army – before Hashem."

Chochmas Chaim

Bal Te'acher - Do Not Be Late

The *Yesod Veshoreh Ha'avodah* wrote (*Shaar Ha'ashmores* end of Chapter 7):

"When it comes time to go to shul to daven, a person should be very careful not to be delayed, and not to speak to anyone – even something necessary – because for a small delay he will lose out on many benefits..."

Bnei Emunim - Rising early for Birchos Hashachar



Birchas HaTorah (1)

Birchas HaTorah - D'Oraisa or D'Rabbanan

In *Birchas HaTorah* we thank HaKadosh Baruch Hu for the lofty mitzvah we have merited, the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, about which we were commanded in the *passuk* (*Devarim* 6:7): “*veshinantam levanecha*” (see *Sefer Hachinuch* Mitzvah 419). In contrast to the rest of the *mitzvos*, where the obligation to make the *brachah* before performing them is *d'Rabbanan* (*Brachos* 13a), the Rishonim dispute if this *brachah* is like the *brachos* of the other *mitzvos*, whose obligation is *d'Rabbanan*, or if perhaps it is *d'Oraisa*:

In *Maseches Brachos* (21a), Chazal derive the obligation of *Birchas HaTorah* from the *passuk* (*Devarim* 8:10): “*Ki Shem Hashem ekra, havu godel l'Elokeinu*.” Rashi explained (*ibid*, beginning with ‘*ki*’): Before Moshe began *Shiras Ha'azinu* he told Am Yisrael: “*Ki Shem Hashem ekra*” – when I make *Birchas HaTorah* before I engage with you in *divrei Torah*, you “*havu godel l'Elokeinu*” – by answering amen after it.

The Rishonim dispute whether the study referred to here is considered absolute studying; it is, the obligation of *Birchas HaTorah* is *d'Oraisa*. Alternatively, the obligation to recite *Birchas HaTorah* may only be *d'Rabbanan*, and Chazal cite this *passuk* as proof. The Ramban (*Shichechas Ha'essin* Mitzvah 15) is of the opinion that *Birchas HaTorah* is a mitzvah from the Torah, and he enumerates it in his list of *mitzvos*. (The opinion of Rishonim and other *poskim* is likewise. See *Mishnah Berurah* beginning of *Siman* 47). However, the Rambam believes that the obligation of *Birchas HaTorah* is *d'Rabbanan* (Ramban *ibid*)

The *Midrash* (*Devarim* Rabbah 8 2), adds a source for the *brachah* from the *passuk* in *Tehillim* (119:12): “*Baruch Atah Hashem lamdeini chukecha*” – first I will bless You with ‘*Baruch Atah...*’ and only after that ‘teach me Your laws.’

Obligation to Be Careful About Birchas HaTorah

The *passuk* (*Yirmiyah* 9:12) says that Eretz Yisrael was lost “because they abandoned My Torah that I gave before them.” Chazal said (*Bava Metzia* 85b) that this does not refer to them not learning Torah, but because “they did not make a *brachah* on the Torah first.” When a person thanks and blesses HaKadosh Baruch Hu for the Torah, then he shows that the Torah is important to him. By being lax in *Birchas HaTorah*, the members of that generation indicated that the Torah is not important to them and therefore they do not make the *brachah* on it and thank Hashem for giving it to them (*Rashi* *ibid* beginning with ‘*shelo*’). In addition, in *Birchas HaTorah*, a person expresses his joy regarding Torah and mitzvos, and by not making the *brachah* on the Torah, the members of the generation of the Churban indicated that the Torah was like an unwanted burden for them. (*Tiferes Yehonasan Eikev*)

The *Shulchan Aruch* has already warned (*Orach Chaim* 47 1): “*Birchas HaTorah* is something one should be very careful about.” Therefore it behooves us to make the *brachah* on the Torah with a lot of joy, because through that we indicate how beloved and important the Torah is in our eyes (*Mishnah Berurah* *ibid* 2). The *Kaf*

Hachaim added (*ibid* 1) that the extra caution we were commanded to have for *Birchas HaTorah* is manifested in the fact that “we need to understand the meaning of the words, and to say them calmly, word by word, so that no word or letter is omitted.” The way we say the *brachah* indicates how much importance we attribute to the Torah and our joy at learning it and upholding its mitzvos.

Making a Brachah With Great Joy

If we want to make the *brachah* on the Torah with the fitting joy, it's important to reflect back a bit, to those days that preceded *Kabbalas HaTorah*, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu went to all the nations of the world and offered them the Torah. The nations, who are ruled by nature and mazel, refused to accept it, because the *mitzvos* of the Torah contravened their nature and their mazel. But HaKadosh Baruch Hu ‘chose’ Am Yisrael and elevated them above mazel, and that prepared them to receive the Torah. Therefore, they immediately answered ‘*na'aseh venishma*’. (*Yalkut Shimoni Vezos Habrachah* 951; *Ye'aros Devash* Vol. I *Drush* 8)

From that day on, while the non-Jews all continued to decline spiritually, Am Yisrael continued rising level after level. It is therefore no wonder that we can easily understand the endless difference between a person who merited to learn Torah and someone who did not merit to do so. Aside for the actual holiness that envelops those who learn Torah, as they become elevated from it, they also have a special virtue – they merit to have the Torah light the path for them and guide them on the right way. As the *Mishnah* says in *Avos* (6 1): “Rabi Meir says, anyone who engages in Torah *lishmah*, for the sake of learning, merits many things... he is called a *rei'a*, *ahuv*, *ohav es HaMakom*, *ohav es habriyos*, *mesameach es HaMakom*, *mesameach es habriyos*.... *umegadalto umeromamto al kol hama'asim*.”

From here we learn that if while holding in our hands a delectable food, it is clear to us that we have to ‘pay’ for it with a *brachah*, how much more so is that the case when engaging in Torah. The pleasure of learning Torah is not only a momentary physical pleasure. Learning Torah provides us with eternal spiritual pleasure in this world and also brings us to the World to Come. (See *Shichechas Ha'essin* *L'Ramban* *ibid*)

Birchas HaTorah – A Segulah for Memory

Aside from this, reciting *Birchas HaTorah* is a ‘wonderful *segulah*’ that helps a person acquire Torah without forgetting what he learns. In *Maseches Brachos* (35a), Chazal wonder: One *passuk* says (*Tehillim* 24:1): “*L'Hashem ha'aretz umeloah*” and the other *passuk* says (*ibid* 115:16): “*Veha'aretz nasan livnei adam*.” And they answered: Before the *brachah*, the food belongs to Hashem and a person has no part in it, but after the *brachah*, the person receives the food. With regard to Torah we can say as well: Until a person recites *Birchas HaTorah* the Torah is considered ‘*Toras Hashem*’ and he does not have the ability to remember it. But after he makes the *brachah* “*Venasan lanu es Toraso...Nosein HaTorah*” he merits to receive it as a gift, and through that he remembers it.” (*Zelach Brachos* 64a)

A Tefillah That Saved a Life and Changed a Life

“It's hard to describe the feelings I had as a participant in the Siyum HaShas that took place in America this past winter. It's hard to describe that special feeling of dancing together with tens of thousands of Yidden celebrating the seven and a half year cycle, during which they invested endless effort and energy in learning Torah until they completed the entire *Shas*.”

This was the introduction presented by Rabbi Yoel Gold of Los Angeles to this remarkable story that occurred while he attended the Siyum HaShas at MetLife Stadium this past January.

“Among the thousands of celebrants at the event, an elderly Jew who was bent in stature but with a glowing countenance stood out in the crowd. He sat next to me throughout the long hours of the event. From time to time, my eyes rested on him, and towards the end of the event, when the crowd was singing thunderously and dancing enthusiastically in honor of the Torah, I was amazed to see him dancing with the energy of a man much younger. He danced together with his sons, grandsons and great grandchildren – four generations of *ovdei Hashem* who were clearly *bnei Torah*. Their dancing was joined by a young non-Jew, who looked most incongruent in that setting.

“The scene moved me deeply, especially when I saw the ethereal joy on the older man's face. I had to know the story behind this clearly fascinating person. I waited until after they finished dancing, and then approached the older man and asked if I could speak to him for a few moments.

“He replied in the affirmative, and that is how I heard the amazing story of Rabbi Nosson Appelbaum, may he have many more healthy years.”

This is what he related:

My story begins when I was a young boy running around in one of the neighborhoods of Brooklyn. I grew up on a typical Jewish American home, which in America of those days could be defined as a ‘religious’ home. We practiced many Jewish customs, especially on Shabbos and Yom Tov, but we did them without really understanding what we were doing. I learned in public school, and had very little Jewish education. So I grew up knowing very little about my religion.

The date 17 Kislev 5702/ December 7, 1941, at the height of World War Two, became the day that will live in infamy, with the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor. Thousands of American soldiers perished and extensive damage was wrought to the American Navy. As a result, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan.

The president issued a massive

call-up of soldiers for the war, and I was in that draft. I was trained as a communications officer and was sent to serve on the island of Guadalcanal, in the Pacific Ocean. The region was the site of extended battles between the soldiers of the American and Japanese armies.

One evening – it had been a relatively calm day – Japanese bombers suddenly appeared on the horizon. It was brief and brutal: they showered their bombs onto the base where I was serving, and then disappeared. Six American soldiers died in that attack; dozens were injured, myself among them.

I lay in the ruins of the building I had been in, seriously injured and only partially conscious. The world around me was burning, and I felt like I was losing the sensation in my hands and legs. It's hard for me to describe what I felt like when I looked in horror at my hands, which were hanging at my sides like two burnt pieces of flesh. It was a sense of mounting dread, a fear for my existence.

I nearly choked on the dust that I inhaled, and coughed incessantly in an effort to gasp a bit of oxygen into my lungs. In the interim, I found myself talking to the Ribbano shel Oalm, for the first time in my life, from the depths of my heart.

I cried tearfully, soundlessly: “Please, Hashem! Give me back my hands! Please...I can't feel my hands, please restore the sensation to my hands!” From the depths of the pain I added, “I promise that after I get out of this inferno, I will dedicate my life to serving You as a loyal servant!”

To this day, I have no logical explanation for the miracle that occurred a few seconds later; after I was sure that even if I would be spared, I'd remain crippled for the rest of my life, I suddenly got back the sensation in my hands and legs.

A few weeks later, after extensive rehabilitation, Rabbi Appelbaum was released to his parents' home. He did not forget his promise...

*When he entered the Young Israel shul in his area for the first time in his life, the first thing he encountered was the bulletin board, which had a sign posted with a list of Torah *shiurim* that were regularly given at the shul. Rabbi Appelbaum decided at that moment to join one of the *shiurim*, and to this day, he has not stopped learning. He adds:*

The first thing I was busy wondering when I began to learn, and realized for the first time in my life how truly divine the light of Torah is, was: Where had I been I until now? How had I allowed myself to forgo such a lofty thing through my years of youth? But I did not delve into these questions for long...I simply

began to learn and learn, and I haven't stopped learning to this day.

Nearly seventy-five years have passed since, and Rabbi Appelbaum is still learning constantly. He currently lives in an assisted living home, where his room is full of *sifrei kodesh* – and it looks more like a *bais medrash*. When the staff enter his room and try to encourage him to come out for ‘activities’ being offered, Rabbi Appelbaum proudly points at his *sefarim* and says, almost apologetically, “I'm so sorry but this is my preferred activity...I ‘speak’ to HaKadosh Baruch Hu all the time through my learning. I'm simply addicted to learning Torah and I can't stop...”

Rabbi Appelbaum's day begins early in the morning, when he awakens with gratitude to Hashem for giving him life. He recites “*Modeh Ani...*” with a special incantation that he and his family have been using for many years.

When Rabbi Appelbaum is asked about the secret of the special *brachah* he has merited – such a long life with good health – he modestly points to a colorful placard hanging over the sink in his room. It bears the words of *Asher Yatzar* in large letters, with beautiful illustrations that depict the remarkable miracles that accompany the proper function of the body, for which we thank Hashem in this *brachah*. He declares:

“In the last fifty years, I have never, even once, made the *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar* by heart – I say it only from the text! I recognize the tremendous miracles Hashem has done for me and my body and I try to thank Him for it at every opportunity, with utmost sincerity.”

Rabbi Appelbaum concludes with a piercing message for the younger generation: “If you connect to Hashem, you have a passport to Gan Eden! You have a passport for life in the World to Come!”

“Before parting from this very special person,” Rabbi Gold relates, “I couldn't help but ask him: ‘Who is the man with the Asian appearance who danced with your children at the Siyum HaShas?’”

“When he heard this, Rabbi Appelbaum smiled and replied: ‘He's my aide!’ Then he explained, “When Mashiach will come, and it will happen soon...the nations of the world will all recognize the eternal truth and will submit themselves to the Kingship of Hashem. When the thousands of people sang, ‘*Vetaher libeinu l'avdecha b'emes*’ I said to myself: Why should we not pretend that Mashiach is here already...? I gave him a hand and called him to come and dance with me. And that's how you saw that strange scene.”