

# Ve'chol Maaminim

"A Weekly Leaflet From 'Bnei Emunim"



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PARASHAS VAYECHI

תשפ"א

## IN THE PATHWAYS OF FAITH

## Divrei Torah About Amen and Tefillah in the Parashah

### Birchas Hamazon – Hakaras Hatov

"האלקים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק האלקים הרעה אתי מעודי עד היום הזה" (מז טו)

Based on the *Gemara* (*Eiruvin* 65a), the **Kotzker Rebbe** derives that Am Yisrael has a stronger connection to *Birchas Hamazon* than to *tefillah*. The *Gemara* says that Rabi Elazar ben Azarya said that he could exempt Am Yisrael from the obligation of *tefillah* while they were in *galus*, the same way a *'shikor'*, a drunk person is exempt from davening. This is because the *Navi* calls them (*Yeshayahu* 51:21): "*Ushechura velo miyayin*, drunk but not from wine." However, this claim does not exempt them from *Birchas Hamazon*, because even a drunk is obligated in that (*Yerushalmi Terumos* 1:4; *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 188 4). So we find that while we might be exempt from *tefillah* while in *galus*, we are never exempt from *Birchas Hamazon*. **Harav Mordechai Chevroni**, a *rosh yeshivah* in Chevron, explained the difference between *tefillah* and *Birchas Hamazon* in this context:

The definition of *tefillah* is *'amidah*, standing before the King, and a drunk does not have the level of consciousness to get to this level. In contrast, the definition of *Birchas Hamazon* is *'hakaras hatov'*, recognizing the good, and a drunk is still capable of reaching this level of recognition. (See *Zohar Terumah* 153 2).

This difference is what Yaakov had in mind when he said, in his humility: "*Ha'Elokim asher his'hachu avosai lefanav*" – my forbears were on the level of *'amidah lifnei HaMelech'*, but I did not merit this level. Rather "*Ha'Elokim ha'roeh osi me'odi ad hayom hazeh*" – all my service is from the power of my *hakaras hatov* to Him.

*Sheloshah Sefarim Niftachim* [Rav Y. Mandelkorn] *Yad Josef* 9; *Masas Mordechai*

### The Tefillah of the Tzaddik Is Said in Distress

"המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע" (מז טז)

### The Angels Answer Amen After Our Prayers

"המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ" (מז טז)

At the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* we ask: "*oseh shalom bimromav Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol Yisrael v'imru amen*." Isn't this *tefillah* said quietly? To whom are we turning with the request "*v'imru amen*"?

**Rabi Yehuda Hachassid** explains: In this request we are turning to the two angels that accompany us all the time, to guide over us on our path – and ask that they answer amen after our request.

**Harav Shmuel Hominer** added that the *'amen'* answered by those angels is not only for the request of *'oseh shalom'* but also for all the great and lofty requests that we make in "*Elokai Netzor*."

*Mateh Moshe*, Vol. I, 154; *Eitzah V'sushiah* 23

### Protection and Salvation in the Merit of Amen

"המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ" (מז טז)

The *passuk* (*Tehillim* 34:8) says "*Choneh malach Hashem saviv l'yereiv vayecheletzem*," the angel of Hashem is stationed around those who fear Him, and he saved them.

**Harav Yaakov Abuchatzzeira** explained:

"מלאך" is numerically equivalent to "amen" and the acronym "א-דני סביב ליראי" is also 91, which is amen. This is an allusion that in the merit of answering amen, the holy Shechinah guards over *yirei Hashem* and protects them in this world and the Next World.

*Alef Binah, Tehillim* 34

The **Chasam Sofer** explains:

When he says "*Hagoel osi mikol ra*" Yaakov alluded to the words of *Chazal* (*Taanis* 25b) that it is a praise for a person that HaKadosh Baruch Hu sends him a *tzarah* and does not redeem him from it until the person davens. That fact teaches us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu wants to hear the person's *tefillah*. In contrast, with a sinner, Hashem sometimes sends salvation even before he prays, because He does not want to hear the person's prayers.

That is what Yaakov said: "*Hagoel osi mikol ra*" – HaKadosh Baruch Hu always "*ge'alani*" redeemed me, from the bad that He brought upon me, because He wanted me to daven to Him.

*Chasam Sofer*

### An "Eis Tzarah" – According to the Brisker Rav

"לישוועתך קוית'ה" (מט יח)

When people came to the **Brisker Rav** to seek his advice, he could often be seen murmuring in prayer as he listened and spoke to them. Most often, he could be heard saying the *passuk* "*L'yeshuascha kivisi Hashem*."

**Harav Shimshon Pincus** said of this:

The simple assumption that this practice stemmed from the closeness that the Brisker Rav felt to Hashem is certainly true. But it seems that there was another concept that guided him. The Ramban says (in his comments on *Sefer Hamitzvos*, *Aseh* 5) that when a person is in a time of distress he has an obligation from the Torah to daven. The exact definition of "*eis tzarah*" is not clear, and one can say that the Rav thought that whenever he needed to give advice to another, his tremendous sense of responsibility and fear of not veering from the truth, made it an *'eis tzarah'* for him. Because the Ramban said that this is a time that obligates a person to daven, therefore, the Rav asked "*L'yeshuascha kivisi Hashem*."

*She'arim B'Tefillah* p. 31

## Answering Amen to Every Brachah - An Absolute Obligation

Monday, 20 Teves, marks the *yahrtzeit* of the sage known as *hanesher hagadol*, the great eagle, Harav Moshe ben Maimon, the Rambam. He ruled in his *sefer Mishneh Torah* (*Brachos* 1:13), regarding the obligation of answering amen:

"Anyone who hears someone in Am Yisrael making a *brachah*, from all the *brachos*...even if he is not obligated in that *brachah* – must answer amen."

Bney Emunim, Amen to every brachah.



## Taanah Emunim

Insights into the Virtues of  
Hashkamas Bais Hamedrash

### The Brachah of Oter Yisrael Besifarah

#### Gratitude for the Glory and Importance of the Headcovering

The *brachah* of *Oter Yisrael Besifarah* is brought down in the words of the *Gemara* (*Brachos* 60b): “*Ki paris sudra al reishia*” [when a person puts the *sudar* over his head], he should say “*Oter Yisrael besifarah*.” The words of the *brachah* are based on the *passuk* (*Yeshayah* 62:3): “*Vayhisa ateres tiferes beYad Hashem*.” (*Bais Yosef Orach Chaim* 46)

The *Pri Chadash* (46 1) proves from the words of the *Gemara* that this gratitude was instituted particularly for the donning of the *sudar* [a garment placed on the head that fell onto the shoulders], which in times past, was worn by distinguished personalities. It was a symbol of stature and importance, and it was called a *sudar* because of the words of the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 25:14) “*Sod Hashem l’yereiv*.” (*Shabbos* 77b)

Therefore, the *Shibbolei Haleket* (4) says, Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Natronai Gaon skipped this *brachah*, because in their times, it was no longer customary to wear a *sudar*.

From the words of the *Avudraham* it also appears that this *brachah* was established for some type of special headgear, similar to what was customarily worn in Arab nations. He writes: “And throughout the land of Ishmael, it is customary to say this because they place a type of covering on their heads, but in these lands it is not customarily said because they do not put on a *mitznes* [a type of head covering].” (See *Bais Yosef Orach Chaim* 46 1)

#### Gratitude for the Head Covering

On the other hand, some of the *Rishonim* are of the opinion that this *brachah* was instituted for any head covering, and it makes no difference if it is a symbol of stature (*Tosafos Brachos* 60b, beginning with *ki paris*. The *Pri Chadash* there also derived this from the words of the *Rambam*.) The *Bais Yosef* explains (*Orach Chaim* 46, beginning with *ki paris*), that in their view, this *brachah* was instituted regarding the caution of Am Yisrael not to go with their heads uncovered, so that they should sense the *Yiras Shamayim* over their heads.

Walking with one’s head uncovered is a manner of pride and insolence, and a head covering indicates that a person is G-d fearing and accepts upon himself the yoke of Hashem’s *mitzvos* (see *Levush Orach Chaim* 2 6). As the *Gemara* says (*Kiddushin* 31a): “Rav Huna the son of Rav Yehoshua said he would not walk four *amos* without a head covering, and said, ‘the Shechinah is above my head.’”

We can learn from a story in the *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 156b) about the virtue of covering one’s head to bring about *yiras Shamayim*: The stargazers predicted to the mother of one of the *Amoraim* that her son was destined to become a thief when he grew older. So she made sure to constantly remind him, “Cover your head so that you should have *yiras Shamayim* upon you.” The child did not fully understand what his mother meant until one day, he was sitting and learning

**Baruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam Oter Yisrael Besifarah** – for crowning our heads with the head covering that is a glory for our heads, and in whose merit the fear of Heaven rests over our heads.

**Amen** – it is true that we have to thank Hashem for glorifying us with the head covering, which is an honor and crown for us.

under a palm tree, and the head covering suddenly fell off. Immediately, his evil inclination urged him to steal dates from the tree. Lacking the head covering, he did not have the necessary *yiras Shamayim* to overcome his inclination, and he quickly climbed the tree. Having no knife, he pulled at the cluster with his teeth. That was when the boy realized his mother’s words: the head covering had brought him to *yiras Shamayim*, and to be able to overcome his *yetzer*. The moment the covering fell off his head, his *yetzer hara* overpowered him.

#### The Reason “Yisrael” Is in This Brachah

In light of the above, it is understandable why this *brachah* was instituted with the name “Yisrael” in it – because the *mitzvah* of covering one’s head is a special commandment given to Am Yisrael so that they should have *yiras Shamayim*. In contrast to the other nations, whose intention when wearing a head covering is to protect their heads from heat or cold, Am Yisrael only wears it in order to have *yiras Shamayim*. (*Bais Yosef Orach Chaim* 46; *Levush ibid se’if katan* 2)

The *sefer Olas Tamid* (9) adds that one must thank in this *brachah* also for the fact that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is *mis’ater* and *mispal’er* – adorns Himself and is proud of us, Bnei Yisrael, as the *passuk* says (*Yeshayah* 62:3): “*Vehayisa ateres tiferes beYad Hashem utzenif meluchah bekaf Elokecha* - And you shall be a crown of glory in the Hand of Hashem and a kingly diadem in the Hand of your G-d.” Indeed, when saying this *brachah*, a person must think and pledge to improve his deeds so that he should be worthy of being the “crown of glory in the Hand of Hashem.”

#### Gratitude for the Mitzvos of the Torah

The Rosh would put *tefillin* on before this *brachah*, because he thought that this *brachah* was also gratitude for *tefillin*, which are called “*pe’er*”, as it says (*Yechezkel* 24:17) “*Pe’ercha chavosh alecha*.” Therefore, there are those who are careful to touch their *tefillin* when saying this *brachah* (*Shulchan Aruch* 25 3; *Mishnah Berurah* *ibid* 12). The author of *Seder Hayom* added that in this *brachah* we thank Hashem for crowning Am Yisrael with the crown of Torah, which is the glory of the *mitzvos* and the laws that adorn us over all the other nations, as the *passuk* says (*Tehillim* 147 19-20): “*Maggid devarav leYaakov chukav umishpatav l’Yisrael; lo asah kein lechol goy umishpatim bal yeda’um*.”

Some have explained that the *brachos* of *Ozer Yisrael Bigevurah* and *Oter Yisrael Besifarah* were instituted to correspond to the 613 *mitzvos* that we received at Sinai. In the *brachah* of *Ozer Yisrael Bigevurah* we thank Hashem for the 365 *mitzvos lo sa’aseh*, as in order to be careful about them we need *gevurah*, strength, to overpower the evil inclination. In *Oter Yisrael Besifarah*, we thank Hashem for the 248 *mitzvos aseh* whose observance is like a crowning glory for us. (*Zichron Moshe* [Rav M. Taraschanski] p. 88)

## Maaseh Emunim

Pearls and Insights  
on Birchas Hamazon

### The Drashah that Opened the Doors of the Shul

This story took place about two hundred and eighty years ago, and it was related by the person it happened to, Harav Mordechai ben Rav Shmuel, the *av bais din* of Vilkatch, in his *sefer, Shaar Hamelech*. Despite the many years that have passed, this story is somewhat applicable to our times as well.

Rav Mordechai had a unique custom. Each year, on Rosh Chodesh Elul, he convened the members of his community and delivered words of piercing *musar* ahead of the *Yamim Noraim*. He became Rav in Vilkatch as a young man, and began this custom not long after. There is a special story behind the practice, which the Rav describes in his *sefer*.

The story happened early in the Rav’s tenure leading the community. One year, a short time before *Shavuos*, without any apparent reason, the evil local bishop decided to impose a harsh decree on the Jews: He ordered every shul in the district under his jurisdiction locked up.

Throughout the summer, the shuls remained locked, by order of the bishop. At first, the Jews had to gather clandestinely, in small groups. Later, when they realized that the largely concealed side door of the ladies’ section of the shul had remained open, they began to daven there, taking care to daven very quietly for fear of having the bishop find out.

As the days went on, habit turned this practice nearly into routine. It seemed that the Jews of Vilkatch had gotten “used” to the unreasonable situation whereby their beautiful, spacious shul was closed, and they had to daven crowded into the ladies’ section, in a near whisper.

There was one man among them who did not wish to reconcile with the situation. That was the young Rav, Rav Mordechai. As the days went on, he realized that if something would not be done, the Jews would be forced to daven in these impossible conditions over the *Yamim Noraim*. He waited for an opportunity to awaken the *tzibbur* from its slumber, and that came on Rosh Chodesh Elul.

On that day, an especially large crowd gathered in the *ezras nashim*, which was bursting at the seams. The crush was intolerable and the Rav realized that this was a very good opportunity to try and effect a change.

Before *Krias HaTorah*, the Rav walked up the stairs that led from the ladies’ section to the roof, and the crowd fell silent. Dozens of surprised pairs of eyes followed him; suddenly, he burst into tears. Sobbing bitterly, the Rav expressed his deep pain at the fact that for months, the shul had been desolate, and no one seemed to care.

“What will we answer to the Yom Hadin?” the Rav cried. “How will we stand before the satan without a suitable place to daven for our souls and to sweeten the judgement? So many days have passed since we have davened in a shul properly, and the Shechinah, which is still there, is crying each day, ‘Where are My beloved children?’ And we are just making peace with this impossible situation and are continuing to daven secretly and quietly without doing anything to change things!”

“I’m afraid,” the Rav continued, “that if we do not do something now to open the doors to the shuls for *Yamim Noraim*, we may *chalilah* be prosecuted [On High] for the fact that the *kavod* of the shul is being desecrated while we dwell in our homes in comfort. That is aside for the fact that our *tefillas*, which are so important on these days, will not be said properly because we lack suitable conditions.”

The Rav continued to speak to his community until they were all moved to tears, and he felt like his words had opened their hearts.

Before the *sefer Torah* was taken out, the *gabbaim* announced the launch of an emergency fund to save the shul. Each one of the *mispallelim* pledged what they could afford towards this fund to save the shul. The *gabbaim* wrote down those sums in a special notebook. The *Rebbeztin*, the Rav’s wife, also worked among the community’s women to raise funds for this cause.

Throughout the rest of the day, the *gabbaim* visited each member of the community and collected their pledges. By the end of the day, they had a generous sum of money, and with

the money in hand, they hurried to the bishop’s house. They knew he was just a money-hungry brute, and they presented him with the generous payoff.

The minute he got the money he forgot all the claims and libels that were the ostensible reasons he had shut down the shuls in the first place. The bribery swayed his heart, and he signed a document allowing all the shuls in Vilkatch to be opened, effective immediately.

On Rosh Hashanah that year, the Jews of Vilkatch merited to daven in their shul, like they always had, in keeping with the words of the *passuk* “*Se’u shearim rosheichem...veyavo Melech HaKavod...*”

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A year later, the story was all but forgotten. The shul became a vibrant hub, as it had been, and the Rav therefore had no intention of giving another *drashah* on Rosh Chodesh Elul.

On the eve of 1 Elul, the Rav went to bed very late. As soon as his eyes closed, he began to dream: a sagely, elderly man appeared, described as a Heavenly Angel, but his face expressed rebuke and annoyance.

After they exchanged greetings, the older man said: “I think that the Rav is usually the *shaliach tzibbur* for *Mussaf* on *Yom Kippur*...” Rav Mordechai replied that indeed, he was, and the older man continued, as though asking:

“Let the Rav tell me: What do you say at the end of the *brachah* of *Kedushas Hayom* of *Mussaf*: ‘*Uma’avir ashmoseinu bechol shanah veshanah*,’ or *Uma’avir ashmoseinu kol shanah veshanah*?”

Reb Mordechai was puzzled by the question and asked in response: “And what is the difference between ‘*kol*’ and ‘*bechol*’?”

“There is a big difference,” the elderly man replied. Instead of an explanation, he cited the parable brought down in the *Midrash* (see *Tanchuma Emor* 22):

There was a king who came to a city to collect the tax that was owed to him. The elders of the city – its leaders – came out to greet him, and he forewent one third of the taxes. Then the middle class went out to greet him, and he gave up another third of the debt. When he entered the gates of the city, and all the rest of the men, women and children came out to greet him, he cancelled the last third of the debt. Likewise, when Elul comes, the *tzaddikim* and *anshei ma’aseh* come out to greet Hashem with their Torah and good deeds, and He writes off one third of Am Yisrael’s sins. On Rosh Hashanah, even the mediocre people do *teshuvah* and daven, and He gives up another third. On *Yom Kippur*, when even the simple people come out, dressed in white and fasting, He erases the final third of their sins.

“So we find,” the elderly man said, “that there are three times for atonement: at the beginning of Elul, on Rosh Hashanah and on *Yom Kippur*. Therefore, we need to say, ‘*Uma’avir ashmoseinu bechol shanah veshanah*’ a few times in the year, and not ‘*kol shanah veshanah*’, which means one time each year.”

The elderly man concluded his words, but Reb Mordechai, who did not fully understand them, pleaded with him to explain what his words were alluding to. The elderly man said: “If the entire month is for atonement, why last year on Rosh Chodesh Elul did you speak on Rosh Chodesh to arouse the community, and why is this Elul different?”

Rav Mordechai tried to explain that last year needed a special awakening to ensure the shuls could be opened, but the elder rejected his words. On the contrary, he said. If last year, when the shuls were locked, the speech was effective, how much more so this year, when the shul is open, certainly it is fitting to arouse the community to *tefillah* and *teshuvah*, and to guide the community on how to act and which path to follow.

Reb Mordechai awoke in the middle of the night after this extraordinary dream, and immediately kindled a light at his table and began to prepare a *drashah* for the next day. From that year on, he did not deviate from this custom even once.

*Sha’ar Hamelech* [Rav Mordechai, Av Bais Din of Vilkatch], *Shaar* 1 Ch. 8